The Science of Happiness

Emiliana Simon-Thomas, PhD
What is Happiness?

How we feel

How we think

My life is good
Where Does Happiness Come From?

Luck?

Virtue?

Pleasure?

Connection?
Where Does Happiness Come From?

(Figure 1) Summary of factors contributing to happiness.

(Steptoe, 2019)
Population Variance in Happiness

(Lyubormirsky, 2007)
Happiness Defined

“...the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one’s life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile.”

(Lyubomirsky, 2007)

“Subjective well-being: frequent positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and cognitive evaluations such as life satisfaction.”

(Diener, 1999)
Measuring Happiness

- Psychological Well-Being: “I am a good person and live a good life.”  
  (Ryff)

- Life Satisfaction: “In most ways, my life is close to my ideal.”  
  (Diener)

- Happiness: “In general, I consider myself: 1 = not a very happy person to 7 = a very happy person.”  
  (Lyubomirsky)

(Killingsworth)

Greater Good Science Center

Berkeley UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Key Finding

People feel better, no matter what they’re doing, when they are paying attention to what they are doing.

(Killingsworth, 2010)
Key Findings

“Social relationships ... do not guarantee high happiness, but it does not appear to occur without them.”

(Deiner & Seligman, 2002)

“Social relationships, or the relative lack thereof, constitute a major risk factor for health—rivaling the effect of well established health risk factors such as cigarette smoking, blood pressure, blood lipids, obesity and physical activity”

—House, Landis, and Umberson; Science 1988 [1]
Key Findings

Peer Rated Relationship Quality Predicts Greater Well-Being (fall 2015, n=2.2K)

Peer Rated Relationship Quality Predicts Greater Well-Being (fall 2016, n=1K)
Key Findings

Students Rated as Pro-Social are Most Likely to be in Exceptional Relationships (Fall 2015, n=2K)

Students Rated as Pro-Social are Most Likely to be in Exceptional Relationships (Fall 2016, n=1K)
Measuring Happiness

Expressive behavior

Activation of neural reward pathways
Key Finding

Coronary heart disease rates are lower in happier people (22% lower per one point increase in happiness)

(Davidson, 2010)

Figure 1 Cubic spline analysis of the incidence rate ratio comparing each level of positive affect to a score of 1. Solid line indicates point estimate and dashed lines indicate 95% confidence interval. Dotted line indicates no association.
Key Finding

Greater happiness is associated with enhanced response to vaccination

(Ayling, 2018)
Children smile most robustly when they are giving from their own reserves.

(Aknin, 2012)
Key Finding

“...being kind to others registers in the brain as more like eating chocolate than like fulfilling an obligation to do what’s right.”

(Hubbard, 2016)
Key Finding

(Aknin & Dunn et. al., 2013, 2015)
Summary of Advantages of Happiness

• Better physical health, longer life
• More satisfying relationships, engagement & sense of belonging
• More likable, and willingly helped by others
• More professional productivity and career advancement

(Clark, 1991)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Communal</th>
<th>Exchange</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
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<td>33.7\textsuperscript{e}</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>29.7\textsuperscript{c,d}</td>
<td>24.7\textsuperscript{a,g}</td>
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<td>Irritable</td>
<td>25.9\textsuperscript{b,g}</td>
<td>22.1\textsuperscript{a}</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Emotion</td>
<td>28.4\textsuperscript{b,c}</td>
<td>28.5\textsuperscript{b,c}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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In fact...

“Happiness is increasingly considered the proper measure of social progress and the goal of public policy.”

(Helliwell, 2017)
Boosting Happiness

I. Find Contentment
- Awareness
  - Breath practices, mindfulness
- Optimism
  - Self-compassion, satisficing, levity, awe
- Resilience
  - Labelling, disclosing, and self-distancing emotions, challenge mindset

II. Strengthen Social Connections
- Trust/Psychological Safety
  - Common humanity, small talk, gratitude
- Social Support
  - Empathy, compassion, help-seeking, reconciliation
- Generosity
  - Kindness
You Can Boost Happiness

Quantity of Active Listening practice predicts self-rated increases in empathy and happiness

Average Self-Rating of perceived change, (1= decrease, 4= no change, 7= increase)

- Feelings of connection and empathy
- Overall happiness

Yes, once - Yes, twice - Yes, three times - Yes, four times - Yes, five or more times

4 - 5 - 6 - 7

Quantity of Active Listening practice predicts self-rated improvements in key aspects of well-being

Average Self-Rating of perceived impact, (1= worsened, 4= no change, 7= improved)

- Close relationships
- Social interactions
- Work/School satisfaction
- Effectiveness of helping
- Physical feeling

Yes, once - Yes, twice - Yes, three times - Yes, four times - Yes, five or more times

3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7
“If I wanted to predict your happiness, and I could know only one thing about you, I wouldn’t want to know your gender, religion, health, or income. I’d want to know about your social network – about your friends and family and the strength of the bonds with them.”

(Dan Gilbert)
FREE Resources

Web links
1. greatergood.berkeley.edu
2. ggsc.berkeley.edu
3. ggia.berkeley.edu
4. thnx4.org

Online Courses on edX.org:
1. The Science of Happiness
2. Foundations of Happiness at Work
3. Mindfulness and Resilience to Stress at Work
4. Empathy and Emotional Intelligence at Work
THANK YOU!