COME ON, GET HAPPY…AND HEALTHY!:
Promoting Healthy Aging Through the Pursuit of Happiness

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Learning Objectives:
- Describe the concept of happiness.
- Explain the relationship between happiness and health, socioeconomic status, quality of life, and wellbeing.
- Examine policies and practices to promote healthy aging through the pursuit of happiness.

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Promoting Healthy Aging through the Pursuit of Happiness

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learning objectives

Engage in practices to support healthy aging by understanding the

- concepts and definitions of happiness across time and cultures
- relationship between happiness and health, socioeconomic status, quality of life, and well-being
- relationship between happiness and healthy aging, and
- practices and policies that promote the pursuit of happiness

why happiness?

- Study of death and dying

- Identification and treatment of depression in a geropsychiatric program

- Resilience of and use of humor by historically oppressed populations (strengths perspective)
concepts: proxies

Used interchangeably:
- happiness
- well-being
- subjective well-being (SWB)
- life satisfaction
- quality of life (QOL)
- healthy aging (aka positive aging)

happiness

\hspace{1em}
\textit{Noun}

1. obsolete: good fortune: prosperity
2. a: a state of well-being and contentment: joy
   b: a pleasurable or satisfying experience
3. felicity (intense happiness)

happiness, life satisfaction, & subjective well-being

Happiness is generally defined as the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect

As in much of the happiness literature, the terms life satisfaction, happiness, and subjective well-being are used interchangeably
Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

- Assumes that an essential ingredient of the good life is that we like our life
- Measures people’s cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives

Components of Subjective Well-Being

- How a person evaluates his/her own life, including
  - emotional experiences of pleasure versus pain in response to specific events and
  - cognitive evaluations of what a person considers a good life
- Importance of adaptation and goals
- Cultural influences on well-being

幸福

Happiness

concepts and definitions across time and cultures

Happiness: Ancient Chinese

- Traced to early days of civilization; core ideas maintained/evolved
- Shang dynasty (17th to 11th Century BC)
  - Shang Shu (Documents of the Elder)
    - longevity,
    - prosperity,
    - health,
    - peace,
    - virtue, and
    - a comfortable death
  - "May the five fus come to your door" (popular Chinese New Year greeting)
three Chinese words for happiness

- **Gaoxìng 高兴**
  - least lasting, a momentary mood, ease of receiving the influence of external things (e.g., pleasant trees)
- **Kuàilè 快乐**
  - extended lasting happiness, used to wish people to be happy in special occasions and festivals
- **Xìngfú 幸福**
  - a long lasting happy feeling, often in family life context

happiness: Japanese conception

happiness: good fortune

**Maneki Neko 招き猫 (beckoning cat)**

- It is believed that having a Maneki Neko sculpture displayed in your storefront, home, or place of business can bring wealth, good fortune, or customers
happiness: Greek philosophers

- Socrates
  - stay interested in the truth
  - make sure your soul is as good as possible through maintaining the four virtues (prudence, temperance, courage, and justice/charity)

- Aristippus of Cyrene
  - first complete philosophy of happiness
  - goal of life is to seek external pleasure (hedonism)

- Antisthenes
  - A life of peace, simplicity, naturalness, modesty, and virtue (mental work) dissolves inner tensions
  - Inner happiness and enlightenment appear; praised pleasures that spring from one’s soul

happiness: Greek philosophers

- Plato
  - Human soul consists of reason, will and desire: happy when all three parts of the soul are balanced

- Epicurus
  - The purpose of philosophy was to attain a happy, tranquil life characterized by peace, freedom from fear, absence of pain, and a self-sufficient existence
  - Live everything in the right degree
  - Constantly train positive thinking through “philosophizing”: think about the meaning of life and continuously reflect to reach positive goals
  - Inner happiness from inner peace; when a person calms down, inner happiness appears

happiness: Greek philosophers

- Aristotle
  - Eudaimonia (translated as happiness, welfare, or human flourishing) is the ultimate aim of human thought and action
  - Some things are only valuable in relation to other things (wealth, intelligence, courage), whereas happiness is the only thing valuable in isolation
  - Virtue is necessary for a person to be happy; without virtue, the most that may be attained is contentment
“pursuit of happiness”

“The necessity of pursuing happiness [is] the foundation of liberty....The stronger ties we have to an unalterable pursuit of happiness in general, which is our greatest good...”

John Locke, 1690, Concerning Human Understanding (essay)

“...life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...”

- Thomas Jefferson substituted “property” with “the pursuit of happiness” in the Declaration of Independence
- Invoked Greek and Roman philosophical tradition... happiness is bound up with the civic virtues of courage, moderation, and justice
- Civic virtues harken to the social aspect of eudaimonia
- The pursuit of happiness is not merely a matter of achieving individual pleasure
- Alexander Hamilton and other founders referred to it as “social happiness.”

Hamilton, 2008
Dr. Martin Seligman, 1998, psychologist, newly elected President of the American Psychiatric Association, dedicated his term to the establishment of a new field, “positive psychology”

“...he called on his colleagues to expand the scope of psychology to include the study of positive emotions, human strengths, and ‘what makes life worth living.’”

“...happiness had finally become a legitimate field of scientific inquiry.”

The concept of happiness is an achievable goal, something we can deliberately cultivate through practice and effort...”

The idea of training the mind is a cornerstone of Buddhist practice

Early 1990s, a handful of maverick researchers began studying human happiness and positive emotions
Develop an “understanding of the truest sources of happiness”
- Set priorities to cultivate those sources
- Inner discipline is a gradual process of rooting out destructive mental states and replacing them with positive, constructive states of mind
  - kindness
  - tolerance
  - forgiveness
  - spirituality

Spirituality
- distinguished from religion
  - “…each individual should embark upon a spiritual path that is best suited to his or her mental disposition, natural inclination, temperament, belief, family, and cultural background.”

Happiness
relationship between happiness and health, socioeconomic status, quality of life, and wellbeing
Self-reported happiness is strongly related to health.

- Study examined a cohort of nuns in the U.S. who had written autobiographical sketches when they took holy orders.
- Researchers rated them for how many positive emotions they expressed compared to life expectancies.
- Good natural experiment: similar diets, activity patterns, marital and reproductive histories.

Findings:

- In the ¼ of nuns who expressed the most positive emotions, 90% were still alive at age 85.
- In the ¼ of nuns who expressed the least positive emotion, only 34% were still alive at that age.

Happiness at one stage of life has been shown to be a predictor of:

- Relative health many years later and
- Responses to health shocks, like recovery times.

Studies show that people’s reports of their feelings of well-being relate to:

- Robustness,
- Stress,
- Coping style,
- Social support,
- That in turn relates to how long they are going to live.

While correlation is not causation, and these results don’t prove that happiness per se causes a robustness in response to health challenges, there is a relationship between these factors and longevity.

Happiness self-report measures pass two tests:

- When you measure it repeatedly or using a slightly different technique, you get something close to what you got the first time (reliability).
- The measure you end up with is related to an objective outcome that is actually important (validity).
happiness and physical health
- While happiness doesn’t predict longevity in sick populations, it predicts longevity in healthy populations.
- Happiness doesn’t cure illness, but it does protect against becoming ill.
- The effect of happiness on longevity in healthy populations is remarkably strong.
  - The size of the effect is comparable to that of smoking or not.

happiness and SES
- Happiness-Income Paradox
  - Over the past 50 years, per capita incomes in developed countries have increased several-fold, and the increase in average happiness within these countries has been absolutely zero.
    - Between 1970-1990, average incomes in the U.S. rose by 300% in real terms, but there was no corresponding increase in average well-being.
    - Over the long-term, usually 10 years or more, happiness does not increase as a country’s income rises (Easterlin, et al, 2010).
    - This holds for both developed and developing countries.
    - Happiness tends to fall in economic contractions and rise in expansions.

happiness and income
- An extra $10,000 in income* was associated with only a 2% increased chance of being happy.
  - *In 2009 dollars; $5,000 income in 1984 dollars.
- Having happy friends and relatives is a more effective predictor of happiness than earning more money.
**happiness and autonomy**

- The feeling of **autonomy** is the sense that I am able to choose what happens next in life
- Autonomy is a stronger predictor of happiness than income (it accounts for 20 times more of the variation)
- Autonomy is related to health

**Religion and subjective well-being**

- Involvement in religious services and strength of religious affiliation are positively associated with subjective well-being


**happiness and social networks**

- Researchers in a broad range of fields (*medicine, economics, psychology, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology*) have identified a range of stimuli for happiness
- The key determinant: **the happiness of others**
- Happiness can spread through social networks from person to person

(Christakis & Fowler, 2009, p. 50)
happiness and social networks

- Node color indicates how happy each person is:
  - blue = least happy
  - yellow = most happy
  - green = intermediate

- Unhappy and happy people tend to cluster in separate groups

- Unhappy people are more likely to be at the periphery of the network

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happiness and social networks

The Three Degrees of Influence Rule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree(s) of Separation</th>
<th>Likelihood to be Happy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One degree</td>
<td>15% more likely to be happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two degrees</td>
<td>10% more likely to be happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three degrees</td>
<td>6% more likely to be happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four degrees</td>
<td>Effect not measurable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Christakis & Fowler, 2009, p. 51)

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Happiness is having what you want, & wanting what you have.
- J.D. Rollins

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**Relationship between happiness and healthy aging**

Life satisfaction is a subjective expression of well-being and successful or healthy aging.

Subjective well-being is a major determinant of health outcomes in older people.

Successful or healthy aging was defined as survival to age 75 with:
- good health and
- happiness

The best predictors of healthy aging were initial health and happiness (74% prediction).

Strongest explanatory factors:
- secondary group activities
- physical activities

(Palmore, 1979)
A model of aging emerged when older adults were asked what constituted health and contributed to their health (grounded theory).

**Health** meant *going and doing something meaningful*

Four Components:
- something worthwhile to do
- balance between abilities and challenges
- appropriate external resources
- personal attitudinal characteristics (positive attitude vs. poor me)

(Reprinted from Bryant, Corbett, & Kutner, 2001, pp. 927-941)

Reframing healthy aging in older people’s own terms encourages interdisciplinary support of their desired goals and outcomes rather than medical model approaches to deficits and challenges.

(Reprinted from Bryant, Corbett, & Kutner, 2001, pp. 927-941)

Behavioral recommendations for middle age individuals that are likely to prevent disease-related disability, cognitive impairment, and late life depression:
- physical exercise
- engaging in cognitively stimulating activities
- maintaining an optimistic mental outlook, and
- finding meaning in life

There is increasing evidence that our behavior at age 50 will impact our health and happiness at age 80.

(Reprinted from Hartman-Stein & Potkinowicz, 2003)
Healthy aging is reflected in well-being, participation, playfulness, and cognitive-emotional functioning.


Practices that promote the pursuit of happiness

Altruism is the basis for the formation and operation of social networks. Pay-it-forward properties of altruism

Altruistic emotions and compassionate behaviors are associated with greater well-being, happiness, health, and longevity...as long as we are not overwhelmed by helping tasks.

Post, 2005
happiness and volunteering

- People who belong to community organizations, do volunteer work, and have rich social connections
- ...are healthier and happier than those who do not

happiness and social networks: transmission of emotions among teams

- Positive mood is associated with a range of team-performance-enhancing changes:
  - greater altruistic behavior
  - increased creativity
  - more efficient decision-making
- Strong association between a team member’s own happiness and the happiness of teammates*
- When a player’s teammates were happier, the team’s performance improved
- **Implications for interprofessional teams!**

[Christakis & Fowler, 2009, p. 49]

happiness & reminiscence

- Reviewing one’s life retrospectively promotes well-being among older adults
- Helps establish and maintain personal identity
- Source of positive experience, either by bolstering self-esteem or by generating pleasure and enjoyment for its own sake
- Mechanism for coping with negative experience; provides comfort and can foster a sense of closure in relation to painful unresolved events before one’s life ends

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Engaging in reminiscence with another person

An effective emotion regulation strategy in enhancing positive emotions

The experience of positive emotion in response to reminiscing about positive events appeared to increase with age

Older adults are more capable of extracting powerful positive feelings from mutual reminiscence than younger adults, but mainly in regards to positive rather than negative events

(Pasupathi & Cartensen, 2003)

Frequency of positive reminiscing predicted perceived ability to enjoy life

Both the use of cognitive imagery and memorabilia resulted in greater increase in the percent of time subjects felt happy over the past week than the control group

Those who reminisced using cognitive imagery reported a greater ability to savor positive events than those who reminisced using memorabilia

(Bryant, Smart, & King, 2005, pp. 227-260)

Evidence of a positive effect of meditation on subjective well-being

Regular meditators have reduced levels of negative emotion

A course of mindfulness meditation was shown to reduce stress, increase well-being, and improve immune responses
Cognitive Behavior Therapy
- Emphasis on changing and combating negative thoughts

Mindfulness-Based CBT
- Emphasis on simply becoming aware of the contents of consciousness
- Observe thoughts non-judgmentally
- Achieve detachment from negative thoughts
- Negative thoughts may be bothersome, but are transitory and not an integral part of the person experiencing them

Writing regularly about one’s experiences has beneficial effects on
- well-being,
- health, and
- immune function

Writing has a healing effect whether writing about positive or negative experiences
- It’s not simply a matter of venting
- Writing may be another form of mindful practice, allowing us to be mindful of our thoughts while creating distance from negative thoughts

Music has effects on our wellbeing and hence on our happiness.
- It can have an impact on many parts of our brain (even on more parts than language), which in turn releases hormones that have positive effects on our mood, happiness, and on our bodies
- Listening to music is not absolutely necessary...imagining music or rhythm can lead to comparable effects.

(Biset-Berchdou, et al, 2013, p. 13)
Grief and Loss

幸福

One happiness scatters a thousand sorrows.

Happiness

Forgiveness

Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light.

Forgiveness

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Subjective Well-Being & Retirement

- A study of the subjective well-being of two groups of retirees
  - one individuals facing formal retirement at age 65 or later and
  - the other individuals facing earlier retirement
  - removed selection bias (those who choose retirement)
- Suggests a multi-stage adjustment to retirement
  - Differences level out by age 70
- POLICY IMPLICATION: Suggests that raising the formal retirement age is relatively neutral with regard to subjective well-being

Happiness and Public Policy

- “Public health can...be promoted by policies that aim at greater happiness of a greater number.”
- That can be done by
  - strengthening individual life-abilities and
  - by improving the livability of the social environment.

(Veerhoven, 2008, p. 449)
### Happiness and Quality of Life (QOL)
- A number of governments and public policy institutes have developed Quality of Life Indexes
- Statistics attempt to measure the quality of life for entire states or regions
- Study reviewed 22 of the most-used QOL indexes from around the world using 14 criteria
- Many indexes are reliable and can be disaggregated (unpacked) to study subpopulations
- Conclude that many are potentially useful for public policy.

### Happy Planet Index (HPI)
- Introduced 2006 by the New Economics Foundation (NEF)
  - Index of human wellbeing and environmental impact
  - Weighted to give progressively higher scores to nations with lower ecological footprints
  - Designed to challenge well-established indices of countries’ development (i.e., Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Human Development Index (HDI))
  - Assumes that the ultimate aim of most people is to be happy and healthy, not rich
- 178 countries (best scores: Costa Rica, Vietnam, Colombia, and Belize)

### Gross National Happiness (GNH)
- Bhutan’s GNH (2012): a measure linked with a set of policy and program screening tools
- Happiness is
  - multidimensional
  - not measured only by subjective well-being
  - not focused narrowly on happiness that begins and ends with oneself and is concerned for and with oneself.
- “The pursuit of happiness is collective, though it can be experienced deeply personally.”
  - Ura, Alkire, Zangmo, & Wangdi, 2012, United Nations Development Programme, Bhutan, p. 1
Nine (9) Domains and 33 Indicators:
1. Psychological Wellbeing
2. Health
3. Education
4. Culture
5. Time Use
6. Good Governance
7. Community Vitality
8. Ecological Diversity and Resilience
9. Living Standards

Ura, Alkire, Zangmo, & Wangdi, 2012, United Nations Development Programme, Bhutan

To be happier, you have to think about feeling good, feeling bad, and feeling right, in an atmosphere of growth

One of the best ways to make yourself happy is to make other people happy;
One of the best ways to make other people happy is to be happy yourself

The days are long, but the years are short

You’re not happy unless you think you’re happy

I can build a happy life only on the foundation of my own nature

The only person I can change is myself

Happy people make people happy, but I can’t make someone be happy, and No one else can make me happy

Now is now