

Science of happiness

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Does a psychiatrist qualify to speak on happiness?



The goal of psychiatry

- to bring patients from a negative, ailing state to a neutral normal,
- "from a minus five to a zero."

Seligman 1998,

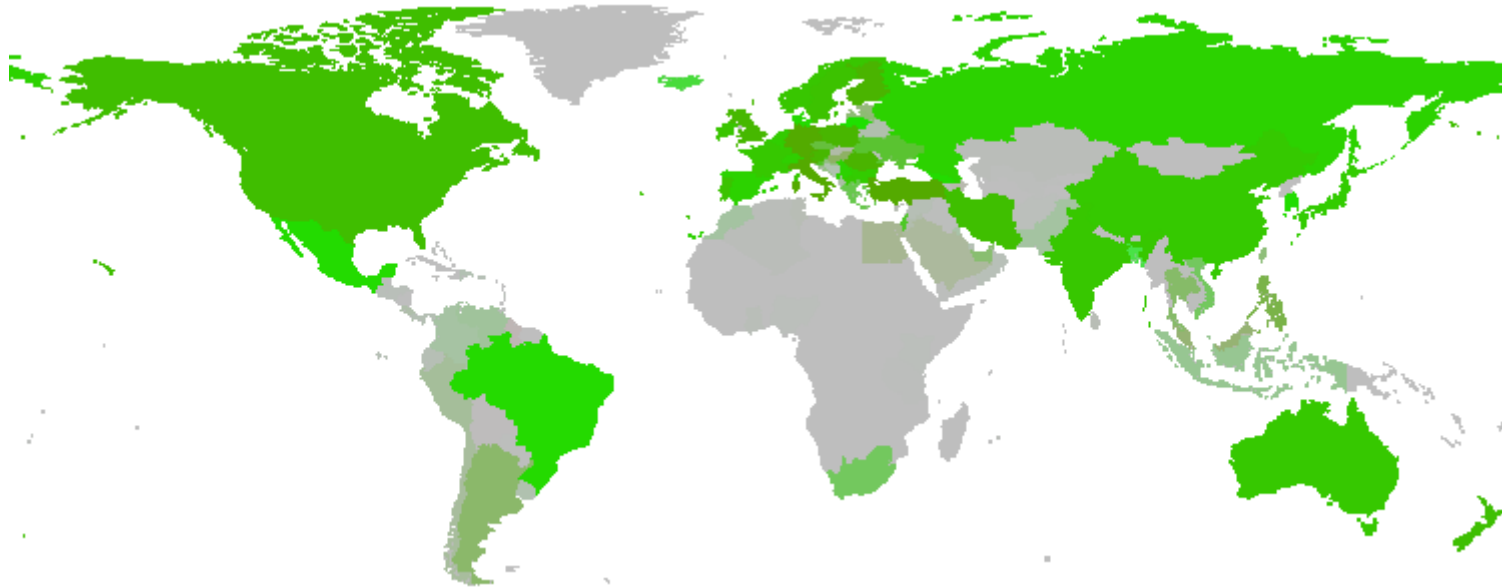
And forensic psychiatry

- Care of those with serious mental illness who have committed a serious crime
- I live at the bottom of human misery!
- The lesson I learn from my patients

The World we live in: Richer but not happier

- Wealth has increased our levels of happiness have not in the last 50 years .
- Richer countries do tend to be happier than poor ones, but once you have a home, food and clothes, then extra money does not seem to make people much happier.
- Happiness levels after average incomes in a country reaches about £10,000 a year.
- we adapt to pleasure-it wears off, rather quickly.
- we tend to see our life as judged against other people.

Global happiness



Happy Planet Index (n=178)

- HPI: ecological efficiency with which human well-being is delivered around the world. Combines environmental impact with well-being to measure the environmental efficiency with which people live long and happy lives.
- Doesn't reveal the 'happiest' country in the world- relative efficiency with which nations convert the planet's natural resources into long and happy lives for their citizens.
- high levels of resource consumption do not reliably produce high levels of happiness
- high levels of well-being without excessive resource consumption.
- **Western model** = widespread longevity and variable life satisfaction, only at a vast and ultimately counter-productive cost
- All nations could do better.

Global Happiness

- Declining from 1960s
- Many serious illnesses controlled
- Little correlation between improvements in the objective conditions of social welfare and average levels of subjective well being

Does better equals more?

- Modern economic theory developed in a time of scarcity
- Wealthiest are happier, wealth is a self evident good, increasing choice and permit people to maximise their utility
- “What we have been doing to increase general happiness is no longer working, and there is no consensus about what we should try next” -Nesse 2005

The day to day reality for most of us

- Emphasis on acquisition
- Intolerance for silence
- Loss of social capital
- Pseudo-communities



Defining happiness

- **Affective**: Elation, joy or contentment, belief in competence and self efficacy
- **Behavioural**: smiling
- **Temperaments**: carefree, impulsive, unpredictable, interpersonal contacts, pro-social actions

What makes us happy?

- **Mental resilience**
- **Healthy relationships**
- **Finding meaning in life**

What makes us happy?

- **Money:** once basic needs are met, additional income does little to raise sense of satisfaction with life (Diener)
- **Education:** No association with education or IQ
- **Age:** Older people are more satisfied, less prone to dark moods: people ages 20 to 24 are sad for an average of 3.4 days a month, as opposed to 2.3 days for ages 65 -74.
- **Marriage:** married people are generally happier. Were they happier to begin with?



What makes us happy?

- **Weather:** Who knows?
- **Religious faith:** is it God or the community?
- **Friends:** strong ties to friends and family and commitment to spending time with them. (Diener and Seligman 2002)“
- *work on social skills, close interpersonal ties and social support in order to be happy*



What makes us happy?

- Genetics: 50%
- Circumstantial: 8%
- Potential for improving well being may lie within activities to which we do not readily adapt



Quantifying happiness: the day-reconstruction method

- Participants completed diary detailing everything they did on the previous day, rated a range of feelings during each episode (happy, impatient, depressed, worried, tired, etc.) on a 7-point scale
- N= 900 women in Texas
- **most positive activities were**
 1. sex
 2. socializing
 3. relaxing
 4. praying or meditating
 5. eating.
- **Other activities:**
 - Exercising
 - Watching TV
 - cooking
 - *taking care of my children*
 - housework.
- Highlights the difference between happiness and pleasure.

“Big Seven”: Happiness not pleasure

1. Family relationships
2. Financial freedom
3. Work
4. Community and friends
5. Health
6. Personal Freedom
7. Personal Values

Three components of happiness

- Pleasure: Transient, subjective, measurable
- Engagement: involvement with one's family, work, romance and hobbies.
- Meaning (using personal strengths to serve some larger end). Evaluative judgement about the balance of our feelings over time. Balance over time

In one word!

optimism, a trait shown to be associated with good physical health, less depression and mental illness, longer life and, yes, greater happiness

Falling below happiness set points

- Humans living in high income countries are stone agers in the fast lane (Nesse 2005)
- We are designed to pursue social goals not conducive to our long term well being
- Inability to disengage from major unreachable life goal = depression
- 2 life events : loss of a spouse, of a job.

Burnout and Job satisfaction

- We spend 70% of our time at work and yet find sustenance from family
- Demoralisation of work force is an increasing problem

How can we reverse the effects?

- Gratitude exercises: they improve physical health, raise energy levels and, for patients with neuromuscular disease, relieve pain and fatigue.
- acts of altruism or kindness--visiting a nursing home, helping a friend's child with homework, mowing a neighbour's lawn, writing a letter to a grandparent

On gratitude



On living mindfully



Achieving life long happiness

- Adjust your goals to what is possible, be satisfied with who you are and what you have, and happiness will probably follow

- Hanlon and Carlisle 2008

- Cultivate hope, love, gratitude and zest

Seligman 2005

- Endure adversities and develop resilience

- Layard 2006

What do Guru's say

- figure out your strengths and find new ways to deploy them-generosity, humor, gratitude and zest
- Martin Seligman reflectivehappiness.com

But is happiness a panacea?

- Is personality flexible?
- Should we change coping styles that work for us?
- Can well being exercises keep psychiatrists away?
- Is Global happiness an artefact due to correlations?
- What about tools?

Happiness rankings

1. Vanuatu
2. Colombia
3. Costa Rica
4. Dominica
5. Panama
6. Cuba
7. Honduras
8. Guatamala
9. El Salvador
10. St Vincent- Marks 06

1. Denmark
2. Switzerland
3. Austria
4. Iceland
5. The Bahamas
6. Finland
7. Sweden
8. Bhutan
9. Brunei
10. Canada- White 2007

The politics of happiness

- Who decides full and worthwhile life?
- Can individual happiness be transferred to public policy?
- Implications for restricting social mobility and earning capacity?



Ethical issues

- Does one have to be happy?
- Are we preparing a breeding ground for unhappiness?
- Is a therapy culture emerging that is beyond the scope of psychiatry?



For those who are keen

- Online course: University of Pennsylvania's College of Liberal and Professional Studies (LPS).
- “ examine the history and scientific underpinnings of this intriguing field and show you how its principles have been used to enhance work and home life”
- Weekly video lectures
- Class assignments
- and online interaction
- <https://regstg.com/Registration/Registration.aspx?rid.>
- Cost US\$895

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<http://www.calm.auckland.ac.nz/>