The Science of Happiness

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Disclosure Information

- Gillian Mandich, PhD
  - No Disclosures
Today's Conversation

• The Science of Happiness
• Rethinking Happiness
• Tools and Strategies
  ○ Hedonic Adaptation
There is no secret to happiness, but there is a science to it.
Number of Scientific Publications on Happiness by 5-Year Periods

(Myers & Diener, 2018)
Randomized Controlled Trials on Positive Psychology Interventions Through Time

(Hendriks, Warren, Schotanus-Dijkstra, Hassankhan, Graafsma, Bohlmeijer & de Jong, 2018)
The Science of Happiness
Happy people are healthier

- Better self-reported health
- Less illness and disease (mental and physical)
- Slower disease progression
- Increased lifespan (in both healthy and ill samples)
- Increased healthspan
Happy people are healthier

- Engage in healthier behaviours
  - More physically active
  - Slower declines in fruit and vegetable consumption over time
  - Better sleep (duration and quality)
  - More frequent seatbelt use
  - Avoid risky behaviours (e.g., not using sun protection)
Happy people are healthier

- Less self-reported illness symptoms and self-reported pain
- Reduced risk for arthritis, diabetes, hypertension, and stroke

(Boehm, Vie, & Kubzansky, 2012; Celano, Beale, Moore, Wexler, & Huffman, 2013; Okely, Cooper, & Gale, 2016; Ostir, Markides, Peek, Goodwin, 2001; Trudel-Fitzgerald, Boehm, Kivimaki, & Kubzansky, 2014; Willroth, Ong, Graham, & Mroczek, 2020)
Happy people have stronger immune systems

- Administered rhinovirus (via nasal drops)
- Quarantined for 5 days, then monitored for 1 month
- Results: Happier participants were less likely to develop a cold

(Cohen, Doyle, Turner, Alper, & Skoner, 2003; Marsland, Cohen, Rabin, & Manuck, 2006)
Happy people perform better at work
“People who experience greater positive affect enjoy better outcomes in the workplace than their less happy peers.”

(Walsh, Boehm, & Lyubomirsky, 2018)
Happiness is correlated with job performance ratings, even after controlling for:

- employee age
- tenure with the organization
- education level.

(Walsh, Boehm, & Lyubomirsky, 2018)
Higher income
Enhanced productivity
Increased job satisfaction
Better leaders and negotiators
Receive better customer and supervisor evaluations at work
Promoted more often by bosses

(Chan & Lee, 2006; Diener, Pressman, Hunter, & Delgadillo-Chase, 2017; Fritz, Walsh, & Lyubomirsky, 2017; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Schiffrin & Nelson, 2010; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2007; Walsh, Boehm, & Lyubomirsky, 2018)

Happy people perform better at work
Fewer safety incidents
Lower employee turnover
Decreased number of sick leaves
Less health-related costs

Happy people perform better at work

Happy people have more fulfilled lives

- More likely to marry and less likely to divorce
- Happier marriages
- More friends and social support
- Stronger interpersonal relationship satisfaction
- Less conflict
Happy people have more fulfilled lives

- Greater prosocial behaviour
- More generous, helpful, and philanthropic
- More intrinsic motivation
- Enhanced creativity
- More resilience to stress and trauma
"the relationship between people’s happiness extends up to three degrees of separation"
CAN WE INCREASE OUR HAPPINESS?
“I’m just not a very happy person.”
The very good news is there is quite a number of internal circumstances . . . under your voluntary control. If you decide to change them (none of these changes come without real effort), your level of happiness is likely to increase lastingly.

~Martin Seligman, PhD
Director, The Positive Psychology Center, The University of Pennsylvania
Mean long-term happiness can change (Fujita & Diener, 2005).

• 24% of participants experienced a significant change to their happiness level.

• 9% of participants changed by two standard deviations or more.
Research shows that happiness skills can be learned.
The empirical evidence available to date suggests happiness can be increased via:

- Interventions
- Intentional activities
(Sin and Lyubomirsky, 2009)

(Bolier et al., 2013)
average effect size: .18 to .51
(Bolier, Haverman, Westerhof, Riper, Smit, & Bohlmeijer, 2013; Fritz, Walsh, & Lyubomirsky, 2017; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005)
Authentic Happiness Inventory Mean Scores

(Mandich & Miller, 2019)
Rethinking Happiness
I will be happy when ________________
Work hard, become successful, and then you will be happy.
Happiness is NOT something that you find.
Happiness is not an end point or a destination.
A happy life means practicing happiness regularly.
When you are having a bad or off day, how do you stay positive?
When you are having a bad or off day, how do you stay positive?

YOU DON'T.
Happy all the time = not the goal
The Dark Side of Happiness (Gruber, Mauss, & Tamir, 2011; Mauss, Savino, Anderson, Weisbuch, Tamir, & Laudenslager, 2012; Mauss, Tamir, Anderson, & Savino, 2011)
2 Questions
How happy are you right now?
If you won $10,000 today, would you be happiest if:

A. You spent it on home renovation or new wardrobe
B. You spent it on a trip (when you feel comfortable to travel)
C. You budgeted yourself ~$200/week for a year for self-care (movies, concerts, massages, dinner)
D. You donated all your winnings to your favourite charity
We are pretty good at assessing HOW happy we are …but we are not as good at is determining WHAT makes us happy.
“Small” bursts of happy moments add up

(Diener, 1994; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2012)
Transient bursts of happiness create upward spirals of positive emotion.

(Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018)
Tools & Strategies
Y-O-U
Healthcare workers experience high rates of:

- burnout
- stress
- depression due to workplace conditions (including excessive workloads, workplace violence and bullying)
- negative effects on patients

(Gray, Senabe, Naicker, Kgalamono, Yassi, Spiegel, 2019)
The costs to the physician and to the health care system can be enormous.
Increased rates of:

- depression
- alcohol and drug abuse
- difficult relationships with coworkers
- divorce
- suicide
- medical errors
- patient dissatisfaction
- physician attrition.
There is a growing call for the ‘triple aim’ of healthcare delivery (improving patient experience, outcomes, and reducing costs) to include a **fourth aim:** improving the health of staff.
Physician wellness might not only benefit the individual physician, it could also be vital to the delivery of high-quality health care.

(Wallace, Lemaire, & Ghali, 2009)
1. The Foundational Three:

- Nutrition
- Physical Activity
- Sleep
Exercise may very well be the most effective instant happiness booster of all activities.

(Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade 2005)
"As little as 10 minutes physical activity may greatly increase the odds of being happy."

(Zhang & Chen, 2018)
Gratitude
Mindfulness
Nature
Stress Management
Awe
Social Connection
Forgivness
Savour
Volunteer
Delete
HEDONIC

"The process by which people get used to events or stimuli that elicit emotional responses."

(Armenta, Bao, Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, 2014)
"I can't get no satisfaction"
"Individuals who wish to mitigate the speed and extent of adaptation can do so by incorporating intentional, effortful, positive activities into their daily lives."
1. VARIETY
VARIETY

• Engaging in not only a greater number of activities, but in a greater variety of activities is predictive of larger mood improvements.
• People adapt most easily to constant stimuli (vs changing, unpredictable stimuli).
• Variety in what people do as they strive to become happier is efficacious and moderates hedonic adaptation.

(Armenta, Bao, Lyubomirsky, & Sheldon, 2014; Berlyne, 1970; Lyubomirsky, 2011; Okabe-Miyamoto, Margolis, & Lyubomirsky, 2021; Pronin & Jacobs, 2008; Sheldon, & Lyubomirsky, 2012; Wilson & Gilbert, 2008)
Variety increases the complexity of a situation, thereby making it more interesting and allowing individuals to maintain their curiosity and awareness.

(Berlyne & Boudewijns, 1971; Okabe-Miyamoto, Margolis, & Lyubomirsky, 2021)
Increased variety = larger + longer happiness boost
The secret of happiness is variety, but the secret of variety, like the secret of all spices, is knowing when to use it.

~Dan Gilbert, PhD
Edgar Pierce Professor of Psychology, Harvard University
Mix it up!

• Type of activity

(Parks, Della Porta, Pierce, Zilca, & Lyubomirsky, 2012)
Rotate your pleasures so they feel new or fresh.
Mix it up!

• Type of activity
• Ways of completing the same activity

(Parks, Della Porta, Pierce, Zilca, & Lyubomirsky, 2012)
1. Restricted Access Condition
   (give up chocolate for a week)

2. Abundant Access Condition
   (abundant supply of chocolate for a week)

3. Control Condition
   (maintain usual chocolate consumption)

(Quoidbach & Dunn, 2013)
• **Restricted Access Condition:** savored chocolate significantly more and derived more positive affect from eating it.

• **Abundant access condition:** a significant drop in positive affect after eating chocolate in the lab from 1 week to the next.
2. SURPRISE

Surprise is similar to variety, but it is distinguished by its unpredictability. Where variety can be planned and prepared for, surprise is unforeseen and inconsistent.
Incorporating surprise into the events surrounding a positive change can help thwart adaptation. (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2012)
Surprise keeps things exciting and fresh

- those who could not be certain of why they received the money experienced a greater increase in positive mood

- those who received surprising personal feedback continued to increase in well-being even after the study was over

(Armenta, Jacobs Bao, Lyubomirsky, & Sheldon, 2014; Jacobs Bao, Boehm, & Lyubomirsky, 2013; Wilson, Centerbar, Kermer, & Gilbert, 2005)
Individuals cannot purposefully plan more surprises into their lives (as this would remove the crucial characteristic of unpredictability) but they can plan to engage in adventures and experiences that may naturally hold surprises.
3.
"Appreciation is the psychological opposite of adaptation."

(Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2012)
• Effortfully directing attention toward appreciation of a positive life change can increase and prolong hedonic experiences.

• People who experience higher levels of appreciation toward a positive life change adapt more slowly.
Inducing gratitude and appreciation for things, events, or people can:

- counteract materialism
- boost happiness and well-being
- increase life satisfaction
- reduce stress

Continued appreciation of a positive change can inhibit rising aspirations and thus thwart adaptation.
Gratitude-based activities slow adaptation by extending the boost in well-being that events, circumstances, or experiences provide.

(Bao & Lyubomirsky, 2014)
Gratitude-based activities:

- Counting one’s blessings
- 3 good things
- Gratitude journal
- Gratitude jar
- Gratitude walk
- Thank you letter/card
- "What went well" exercise

(Bao & Lyubomirsky, 2014; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Norrish & Vella-Brodrick, 2008)
Summary

1. Happy Foundation
   - Nutrition
   - Physical Activity
   - Sleep
   - Connection

2. Variety

3. Surprise

4. Appreciation
“If more information was the answer, we’d all be billionaires with perfect abs.”

~Derek Sivers
Thank you!

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