Positive psychology and happiness

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Agenda

Happiness trap: Income and Happiness

1. The Economics of Happiness
2. Positive Psychology
   - What is Happiness?
     - The Happiness Hypothesis
3. Assignment: Your “Happiness Hypothesis”
Income and happiness

![Graph showing the relationship between average income and happiness over time in the United States, 1957-2002.](image-url)

Source: Myers

Figure 8-1. Average Income and Happiness in the United States, 1957–2002
Satisfaction

• More is not better!

• Mass affluence has led to “Affluenzia”:
  – Children: highest levels of anxiety
  – Increases in rates of crime and divorce
  – Rates of alcoholism, suicide, and depression have risen dramatically

- Once basic needs are met - money cannot buy additional happiness.
- Replace welfare (GDP) with Life Quality?
What leads to happiness?

INCOME → HAPPINESS

HAPPINESS → INCOME

? → HAPPINESS
The Economics of Happiness (Frey, Easterlin)

1) **New measures.** Experienced utility can be measured as subjective well-being. Can analyze errors in decision making.

2) **New insights beyond economics.** Include non-material values of autonomy and social relations. Human beings value social conditions. This has effects on unemployment, the value of income, etc.

3) **Policy consequences.** The goals of increasing income/growth in GNP is not an effective route to increasing utility in a sustainable way. Individuals adapt to higher income and compare themselves with others.
“O.K., if you can’t see your way to giving me a pay raise, how about giving Parkerson a pay cut?”
Bhutan
Gross National Happiness (GNH): Bhutan as an example

- Happiness = Wealth/desire

- GNH’s four pillars:
  1. Promotion of sustainable development,
  2. Preservation and promotion of cultural values,
  3. Conservation of the natural environment, and
  4. Establishment of good governance.
UK - 2011

• Office for National Statistics (200,000 questionnaires)
  1. Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
  2. Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
  3. Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?
  4. Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

• Happiness can be measured using the day reconstruction method, which consists in recollecting memories of the previous working day by writing a short diary (Daniel Kahneman)
Positive Psychology

- Martin Seligman
- Mihály Csikszentmihályi

- From the disease model to flourishing.
  - From focusing exclusively on the miserable/weaknesses to including how to build human strengths

- What is happiness?
- PERMA (Positive emotions, human relationship, meaning and accomplishment)
  1) The Pleasureable life
  2) The Good life
  3) The Meaningful life
What is Happiness?

• Enduring states vs momentary happiness

• The function of positive emotions;
  – A purpose in evolution – lives longer and healthier (ex; beginning nuns/novices), lower blood pressures, better immune systems than less happy people
  – Broading up intellectual, physical and social resources, building up reserves to meet future challenges. People became more creative, tolerant, constructive, and generous
  – Depressive people are more accurate judges (depressive realism).
What is Happiness?

• The function of positive emotions
  – More productive

  – When we are happy we are less self-focused, when “down” we are distrustful, turn inward, and focus on our own needs.

  – Lasting Love; Apply the principle “Hold on to your illusions”. Positive illusions are self-fulfilling because the idealized partner attempts to live up to them. Learned optimism

  – Positive emotions lead to win-win encounter. We are activating a creative and positive mindset that maximizes the social, intellectual and physical benefit that will come.

  – Negative emotions tell that you are in a win-lose encounter and alarms you that a potential win-lose is at hand.
What is Happiness?

• Enduring states vs momentary happiness

• Happiness and well-being is the goal of the Positive Psychology; includes positive feelings and activities that have no feeling (like flow-activities),

• Positive emotions (past); satisfaction, contentment, pride and serenity.

• Positive emotions (future); optimism, hope, confidence, trust, and faith.
What is Happiness?

• Positive emotions (present) divide into
  1. Bodily pleasures which are momentary (coming through senses; tastes, delightful signs and sounds) and higher pleasures which are also momentary, set off by more complicated and learned than sensory feelings; bliss, glee and comfort).

• Pleasant life: a life that successfully pursues the positive emotions about the present, past and future.

2. Gratifications (are not feelings but activities we like doing; reading, dancing, dialoguing, playing). These activites engage us fully and create flow. They block felt feelings except in retrospect.
What is Happiness?

• Positive emotions (present) are gratification activities but cannot be obtained without developing personal strength and virtues.

• Happiness is not only about momentary subjective states. We need **authenticity**; the act of deriving gratification and positive emotions from the exercise of one’s *signature strengths*, which are the lasting route to gratification, and ultimately to the good life.

• **The Good life**: using your signature strengths to obtain (abundant) gratification in the main domains of your life.

• Many routes to Happiness. A happy person need not experience all the positive emotions and gratifications.
What is Happiness?

• A meaningful life – using your signature strengths and virtues in the service of something larger than you are.

• A full life is experiencing positive emotions about the past and future, savoring positive feelings from pleasures, and deriving gratifications from signature strengths - using these virtues in the service of something larger to obtain meaning.
Happiness hypothesis

• The Positive Psychology Hypothesis:

  - $H \ (\text{Happiness}) = S \ (\text{biological set point}) \ plus \ C \ (\text{conditions}) \ plus \ V \ (\text{voluntary activities}), \ plus \ VE \ (\text{vital engagement})$

  - $H = S + C + V + VE$

  - C assumes people are ultrasocial creatures (needs friends, strong connections and dependable relationship, and love and work are for people analogues to water and sunshine for a plant)

  - V involves finding “flow” (activities/tasks you are immersed into)

  - Vital Engagement (a relationship to the world characterized by experiences of flow and meaning (subjective significance) – a felt connection between self and objects

  - You cannot reach happiness directly, it only comes as a byproduct.

The Ubiquity of Six Virtues (Seligman 2002)

• Wisdom and knowledge
• Courage
• Love and humanity
• Justice
• Temperance
• Spirituality and transcedence
More of the Six Virtues; Your Signature Strengths

• Signature Strength:
  – Strength of character that a person self-consciously owns, celebrates and exercises every day in work, love, and play.

• Strengths (integrity, originality, and kindness) are moral traits as opposed to talents (excellent memory), which are non-moral

• Wisdom and knowledge
• Courage: acts done in the face of strong adversity.
• Humanity and love
  – Other related – taking the interest of anothers as seriosly as your own (kindness and generosisty, empathy and sympathie
More of the Six Virtues; Your Signature Strength

• Justice: civic activities (citizenship/duty/teamwork/loyalty)
  – Fairness and equity (practicing higher moral principles in your daily life?)
  – Similar cases treated similarly
  – Leadership: Handle intergroup relations “with malice toward none, charity toward all, and with firmness in the right”.

Temperance The appropriate and moderate expression of appetites and wants. Exhibited in self-control, prudence/discretion/caution and Humility and Modesty
More of the Six Virtues; Your Signature Strength

- Transcendence ("spirituality") Emotional strengths that connect you to something larger and more permanent (to other people, to evolution, to the divine)
  - Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence
  - Gratitude; as an emotion it is a sense of thankfulness to personal, impersonal and nonhuman sources
  - Hope/Optimism/Future-Mindedness
  - Spirituality/Sense of Purpose/Faith/Religiousness
  - Playfulness and Humor
  - Zest/Passion/Enthusiasm
Pleasure vs Gratification

- **Pleasures**: delights that have clear sensory and strong emotional components (food, sex etc),
- Must be “spaced” and varied; overdoses can lead to disgust.

- **GRATIFICATION**: activities that engage fully, can lead to flow,
  - are self-transendence/transformational; “The feeling wells up inside until it spills over”
  - Gratitude is **acknowledging** of goodness in one’s life and **Recognizing** the source(s) of this goodness – the object is other-directed (Heidegger: “Denken ist Danken”)
  - Implies humility
  - The capacity for joy can and must be trained
    - E.g. keep a Gratitude Journal, spend more time with grateful persons, watch your language!!, smiling itself produces feelings of happiness.
FLOW: BEYOND BOREDOM AND ANXIETY

CHALLENGES

› ANXIETY

› FLOW

› BOREDOM

› SKILLS/CAPABILITIES
The pursuit of happiness

• The progress principle:
  – “Things won are done; joy’s soul lies in the doing” (Shakespeare)
  – Pleasure: making progress toward goals vs. achieving goals.

• The adaptation principle:
  – The mind is more sensitive to changes than to absolute levels.
    • Nerve cells respond vigourously to new stimuli, but gradually they “habituate”.
  – Lottery winners adapt soon to the new baseline of daily life.
  – We are stuck on the “hedonic treadmill” (A. Smith in 1759).
  – We accumulate riches in life - raise our expectations, and continue to strive
Barry Schwartz – The Paradox of Choice

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VO6XEQIsCoM
Challenging the norm of self-interest
Peter Singer “The life you can save” (Picador, 2009)

• Create a new culture of giving: “To give is incredibly gratifying" (p 71)
  – How do we understand our own interests? Narrowly? Broadly?

• Money alienates/separates us (p. 57)
Individual assignment

• Design your own happiness hypothesis that may be in conflict with, or complementary to, different hypotheses assumed in the lecture

• What leads to your happiness?

• The happiness hypothesis:
  \[ H = S + C + V + VE \]

• Your happiness hypothesis: 
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