



Happiness: The Science of Subjective Well-Being

Instructor Manual

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The unit of psychological health includes two different aspects of health: Happiness and health psychology. Typically, these topics are given short shrift in introductory psychology textbooks despite the fact that they are popular among students, are backed by research, and represent emerging areas of psychology.

Happiness – The Science of Subjective Well-Being module describes types and antecedents of happiness and subjective well-being, culture differences, adaptation, the benefits of being happy and offers ways to measure happiness.

Learning Objectives

- Relevant APA Learning Objectives (Version 2.0)
 - Describe key concepts, principles, and overarching themes in psychology (1.1)
 - Develop a working knowledge of psychology's content domains(1.2)
 - Describe applications of psychology(1.3)
 - Use scientific reasoning to interpret psychological phenomena (2.1)
 - Demonstrate psychology information literacy (2.2)
 - Build and enhance interpersonal relationships (3.2)
 - Adopt values that build community at local, national, and global levels (3.3)

- Content Specific Learning Objectives: Happiness - The science of subjective well-being
 - Describe three major forms of happiness and a cause of each of them.
 - Be able to list two internal causes of subjective well-being and two external causes of subjective well-being.
 - Describe the types of societies that experience the most and least happiness, and why they do.
 - Describe the typical course of adaptation to events in terms of the time course of SWB.
 - Describe several of the beneficial outcomes of being a happy person.
 - Describe how happiness is typically measured.

Abstract

Subjective well-being (SWB) is the scientific term for happiness and life satisfaction—thinking and feeling that your life is going well, not badly. Scientists rely primarily on self-report surveys to assess the happiness of individuals, but they have validated these scales with other types of measures. People’s levels of subjective well-being are influenced by both internal factors, such as personality and outlook, and external factors, such as the society in which they live. Some of the major determinants of subjective well-being are a person’s inborn temperament, the quality of their social relationships, the societies they live in, and their ability to meet their basic needs. To some degree people adapt to conditions so that over time our circumstances may not influence our happiness as much as one might predict they would. Importantly, researchers have also studied the outcomes of subjective well-being and have found that “happy” people are more likely to be healthier and live longer, to have better social relationships, and to be more productive at work. In other words, people high in subjective well-being seem to be healthier and function more effectively compared to people who are chronically stressed, depressed, or angry. Thus, happiness does not just feel good, but it is good for people and for those around them.

Class Design Recommendations

Thought this looks like a lot to cover in one class, keep in mind that the lecture is extremely straightforward and probably the one of the most comprehensible modules. As such, we think

the students will be able to breeze through the different subtopics. We recommend teaching this module over a single period.

Please also see the Noba PowerPoint slides that compliment this outline.

One class period:

- Conduct class activity: Quiz – How satisfied are you with life?
- Describe happiness, subjective well-being, and the different types
- Explain how scientists measure happiness
- Conduct class activity: What makes us happy?
- Special topic: Money and happiness – Does it matter who you spend your \$\$ on?
- Delve into causes of and societal influences on subjective well-being
- Describe adaptation to circumstances
- Discuss outcomes of high subjective well-being
- Describe what science has discovered so far on how to be happy.

Module Outline

Introduction

Achieving happiness is a universally desired life goal. Happiness or subjective well-being (SWB) is a process that results from internal and external causes. Happiness impacts individual behavior, physiological states, and future success among other things.

Types of Happiness

- Three major types of happiness are high **life satisfaction**, frequent **positive feelings**, and infrequent **negative feelings**. These three types of happiness are collectively labeled as SWB by scientists. Each type of happiness is distinct and has different causes. It is possible for individuals to experience all, none, or some of these forms of happiness. SWB results from

a confluence of several dynamic factors, so there is no magical single cure-all that allows individuals to experience all the forms of SWB. In other words, to be happy, we have to acquire the different elements that constitute SWB.

Causes of Subjective Well-Being

- Subjective well-being is an interplay between external and internal circumstances. People have varying propensities to happiness; personality and outlook also influence how one responds to external circumstances.

Societal Influences on Happiness

- Society influences happiness. Poorer war torn countries tend to be less happy than developed economically secure countries. Societies that foster trusting relationships report increased levels of happiness. Most areas of North America and Europe experience high levels of life satisfaction. Africa, on the other hand, is low on life satisfaction.

Money and Happiness

- Money can improve life satisfaction but after a certain point money has diminishing returns on people's level of happiness. Positive relationships tend to contribute more to happiness, particularly once an individual has achieved a certain base level of wealth. High levels of materialism are linked to low levels of life satisfaction.

Adaptation to Circumstances

- When good or bad events happen, people often react strongly at first, and eventually return to their baseline levels of happiness. People, however, vary in their ability to adapt. The ability to bounce back quickly from a bad event, or the process of **adaptation**, is an important factor in happiness.

Outcomes of Subjective Well-Being

- Happy people are healthier, more productive, and more sociable than their counterparts. A central inquiry is whether one is satisfied with his/her level of happiness. While occasional levels of discomfort and worry are appropriate, chronic levels of unhappiness are

unhealthy.

Measuring Happiness

- **Self-report** scales are used to measure happiness. People respond to numerical surveys and indicate their levels of satisfaction, positive feelings, and lack of negative feelings. Self-reports have proven to be valid despite self-report bias. Scientists also use biological measures and reports from family and friends.

Some Ways to Be Happier

- Recommendations on happiness require an individual centered approach. A general strategy, however, is to change the things in your life that make you unhappy and are within your control, find ways to have a more positive outlook, foster encouraging relationships, and contribute meaningfully to other people's lives.

Difficult Terms

Adaptation

Happiness

Life satisfaction

Negative feelings

Positive feelings

Self-report

Subjective well-being

Lecture Frameworks

Overview

This is a relatively simple yet important module to teach as it focuses factors that can promote well-being. Most of the psychological and mental health research thus far has focused on understanding and reducing negative outcomes. That's quite understandable given the

motivation to understand people who are in need of help. The movement of positive psychology, though relatively young compared to other research areas, also calls for devoting attention to *what goes right with people*. What kinds of factors encourage well-being? We recommend maintaining a balance between these two themes in order to provide students with an even-keeled account of happiness and subjective well-being. Ending the lecture with findings on how to be happy is a great way to do that.

One Class Period:

- Activity: How Satisfied Are You With Life?
- Start the class with administering the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1986; see Activities and Demonstrations).
- Doing this quick 7-10 minute activity will provide a segue into how life satisfaction is related subjective well-being/happiness.
- Lecture – Refer to slides for the following:
 - To define subjective well-being and happiness as well as the different types of subjective well-being.
 - To talk about how scientists assess happiness. When talking about self-report measures, refer back to the activity at the beginning of the class as an example.
- Lecture—What makes us happy?
 - To discuss causes of subjective well-being. Some of them will have been mentioned during the activity and discussion above, so don't spend too long on this part of the lecture.
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- Discussion: Ask the students what makes them feel happy or good about themselves? What tends to cheer them up when things aren't looking so good? Some of them are likely to mention external factors, such as shopping. Once the students have generated some answers, conduct the class activity below.
- Activity: What Makes Us Happy?
 - This activity/class experiment should take about 15-20 minutes (including the discussion/special topic below). Do not inform students of the purpose activity until after they have completed the activity. Once you have tallied the results, move onto the related special topic and discussion. See Activities and Demonstrations section for detailed information on how to conduct the activity.
- Lecture—Causes of happiness continued (focus on material/money)

- Special Topic: Money and Happiness – Does it Matter Who You Spend Your \$\$ on?
- Scientists have always been interested the relationship between money and happiness. Generally, one's income has been shown to have a small, but significant relationship with happiness – that is up until a certain point. However, scientists have recently shown that spending money on others (i.e., prosocial spending) has a more positive effect on our happiness than spending the same amount of money on ourselves (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008; see Evidence-Based Teaching section). The classroom activity above is a class experiment to see if your results will replicate the finding that prosocial spending has a stronger relationship with happiness than personal spending.
- Lecture – Refer to slides for the following:
 - To talk about social influences on happiness, and describe how we adapt to both positive and negative situations.
 - To explain the process of adaptation. It is important to recognize here that happiness is a process and adaptation is an important mechanism in that process.
 - To delve into outcomes of subjective well-being.
 - To end the lecture by providing some tips on how to be happier according to scientific research.

Activities & Demonstrations

How Satisfied Are You With Life?: In-Class Activity

Time: 7-10 minutes

Materials: You will need copies of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985). (Alternatively, you can also administer the quiz by asking your students to use their clickers.)

Directions:

- Administer the Satisfaction with Life Scale.
- Allow students a few minutes to complete it.
- Provide students instructions to tally results

- Add the total from their responses together to come up with their score. A score of 20 represents a neutral level of satisfaction where one is equally satisfied and dissatisfied with life.
- See handout on next page

This activity was adapted from <http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/teachinghighschool.ht...>

Satisfaction with Life Scale

Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larson, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49, 71-75

Directions: Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your response.

Scale 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Slightly Disagree 4 = Neither Agree or Nor Disagree

5 = Slightly Agree 6 = Agree 7 = Strongly Agree

___ 1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

___ 2. The conditions of my life are excellent.

___ 3. I am satisfied with life. ___ 4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.

___ 5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

What Makes Us Happy? In-Class Activity

Scientists have always been interested the relationship between money and happiness. Generally, money has been shown to have a small, but significant relationship with happiness. However, scientists have recently shown that spending money on others (i.e., prosocial spending) has a more positive effect on our happiness than spending the same amount of money on ourselves. This classroom activity gives students the opportunity to discover the potency of “me spending” vs. prosocial spending and see if these results can be replicated with the students in your class as participants.

Time: 15-20 minutes; 10 minutes to complete experiment, 5-10 minutes for discussion

Materials: You will need copies of the two recall questionnaires: prosocial and personal. *Make sure the two types of questionnaires are printed on different colored paper.* You will also need three 8.5x11 sheets with the following numbers on them (words in brackets not necessary). The first sheet will be labeled 1-3 (low happiness scores); the second will be labeled 4-6 (mid-range happiness scores); and the third will be labeled 7-9 (high happiness scores). Write the numbers big and with a dark marker and spread these three different sheets across the front of the classroom. These 8.5x11 sheets will serve as targets, so make sure they are not close to each other!

Directions:

- Each student will receive one of the two recall questionnaires. In other words, half your class should complete the prosocial questionnaire and the other half should complete the personal questionnaire.
- Mix up the two different colored sheets of the questionnaires so that when you hand them out, it serves as random assignment.
- Once an equal number of prosocial and personal questionnaires have been handed out, inform students they will have 5-7 minutes to complete the recollection questionnaire and rate how happy they feel on a scale of 1 (not happy at all) to 9 (very happy). See handouts for example.
- In order to prevent students from being identified or feeling embarrassed, ask them to crumple up their recall questionnaire and throw their paper towards the front of the room at the target that represents their happiness score.
- Then compare whether there are more prosocial or personal recall questionnaires at the higher range of happiness target. If there are more prosocial recall questionnaires, then the activity will have supported previous research. Keep in mind that you will be able to identify the questionnaires because they will be on different colored paper.
- Adaptation for large classes: If you have a really large class and the throwing-at-targets idea would not be practical, you can conduct the activity with clickers. Alternatively, you can also ask students to complete the exercise at home and email you their responses. Average rates of happiness for the prosocial and personal recall questionnaires and present the results to your students in the next class.

Discussion prompts post-activity:

- To generate discussion, read out some of the answers filled out in the recall questionnaires.
- Ask the students:
- Were the students who recalled spending money on others happier? If yes, then why might this be?
- If the demonstration did not work, why might this be? Were there any confounding factors in the study design? For example, could it be that memories of prosocial spending generated high happiness scores because people recalled spending time with others rather than spending money on others? Does recalling a spending experience accurately reflect how people feel immediately after they engage in these spending behaviors?
- What implications does this research have for society?
- Handouts of two recall questionnaires on next two pages.

This activity was taken from:

Aknin, L. B., & Dunn, E. W. (2013). Wealth and subjective well-being spending money on others leads to higher happiness than spending on yourself. In J. J. Froh and A. C. Parks, *Activities for teaching positive psychology: A guide for instructors* [Kindle version]. Retrieved from www.amazon.com

Outside Resources

Web: Barbara Fredrickson's website on positive emotions

<http://www.unc.edu/peplab/news.html>

Web: Ed Diener's website

<http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/>

Web: International Positive Psychology Association

<http://www.ippanetwork.org/>

Web: Positive Acorn Positive Psychology website

<http://positiveacorn.com/>

Web: Sonja Lyubomirsky's website on happiness

Handout 1

Please take 5 minutes to describe the last time you spent approximately \$20 on yourself. While describing this spending event, you should re-experience the event as vividly as possible. In doing so, please think about how you felt at the time the event occurred and what led to those feelings.

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dashed lines, typical of primary school writing paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the entire width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.

How happy are you feeling right now? Please circle a number.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not happy at all								Very Happy

<http://sonjalyubomirsky.com/>

Web: University of Pennsylvania Positive Psychology Center website

<http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/>

Web: World Database on Happiness

<http://www1.eur.nl/fsw/happiness/>

Evidence-Based Teaching

Dunn, E. W., Aknin, L. B., & Norton, M. I. (2008). Spending money on others promotes happiness. *Science*, 319(5870), 1687–1688.

Previous research has established there is a small positive association between income and happiness. This article examines how people spend their money. Dun and colleagues hypothesized that spending money on others will have a more positive effect on happiness as compared to spending money on oneself. The results supported the hypothesis, which was corroborated both cross-sectionally, longitudinally, and in an experimental manipulation.

Carter, T. J., & Gilovich, T. (2010). The relative relativity of material and experiential purchases. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 98(1), 146–159

Previous research suggests that when people spend money on experiential rather than material purchases (i.e., going ziplining vs. buying an expensive watch), they are happier. Carter and Gilovich's article focuses on the mechanisms behind that relationship. They suggested that material purchases tend to involve more comparisons with others than experiential ones, which is why the former is associated with less satisfaction. The authors provided evidence for this hypothesis across eight studies. Taken together, the results of the various studies suggest that experiential purchase decisions are easier to make and more conducive to well-being because they involve less rumination and comparison to other people's purchases.

Aknin, L. B., Anderson, B., Bryant, F. B., Christens, B. D., Damon, W., Davis, D. E.,...Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2013). In J. J. Froh and A. C. Parks, (Eds.), *Activities for teaching positive psychology: A guide for instructors* [Kindle version]. Retrieved from www.amazon.com

This useful book offers a variety of activities and experiments for an instructor teaching topics

related to positive psychology and well-being. Topics include positive emotion, positive health, wealth and subjective well-being, culture and subjective well-being, empathy, mindfulness, and many others.

Gable, S. L., Reis, H. T., Impett, E. A., & Asher, E. R. (2004). What do you do when things go right? The Intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits of sharing positive events. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87(2), 228–245.

Gable and colleagues conducted a series of studies to examine what people do when positive things happen to them. Two studies demonstrated that when an individual shares positive experiences with others, his or her positive affect and well-being increase above and beyond what is accounted for by the event itself. Furthermore, when others provide active and constructive responses to an individual's attempts to share, he or she experiences even greater benefits. The findings of the other two studies indicated that when a loved one's response to hearing good news is enthusiastic, the individual and relationship well-being increase. These results shed light on the benefits of sharing positive events with close family and friends.

Suggestions from the Society for Teaching's Introductory Psychology Primer

Bequette, A. W. (2013). Health psychology, emotion and motivation. In S.E. Afful, J. J. Good, J. Keeley, S. Leder, & J. J. Stiegler-Balfour (Eds.). *Introductory Psychology teaching primer: A guide for new teachers of Psych 101*. Retrieved from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology web site: <http://teachpsych.org/ebooks/intro2013/index.php>

POSSIBLE ASSESSMENTS (Out of Class)

Suicide Video: Students can watch a video, called A Cry for Help, available on PBS about two suicide prevention programs that have been implemented in two high schools. They can submit a reflection paper discussing the programs, the pros and cons of the programs, and what they would implement. This film can be found at www.pbs.org/wnet/cryforhelp/.

Develop of a Health Implementation: Students can use what they have learned throughout the module to develop an implementation. This is appropriate at the end of the semester, because students can apply information from various areas of psychology. One suggestion

is have students choose an health area of personal interest and make recommendation for how a program could increase or decrease behaviors in that area. For example, if a student is interested in nutrition, they could develop a potential intervention (using that could increase this behavior).

ACTIVITIES & TECHNIQUES (In Class)

Assessing Current Prevention Programs – Students can take part in a classroom discussion about a current prevention program. The following paper is a program evaluation of the D.A.R.E. Program. This is a good program to review, because most students have participated in D.A.R.E. or at least familiar with the program.

Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence. (2010). CSPV Position Summary D.A.R.E. Program. Boulder, CO.

RELEVANT TOP ARTICLES (Annotated Bibliography)

Renner, M. & Mackin, R.S. (1998). A life stress instrument for classroom use. *Teaching of Psychology*, 25(1), 46-48.

This article discusses a life stress instrument that is appropriate for undergraduate college students. Students can take this instrument and discuss their results in class. This can propel a discussion about the negative effects of stress on physical and mental health.

Sumner, K. (2003). Constructing a family health history to facilitate learning in a health psychology seminar. *Teaching of Psychology*, 30(3), 230-232.

This article describes a project for a health seminar. Students are asked to profile 15 family members and identify patterns related to health and illness in their families. This is a good example to discuss with students, because this project would be difficult to assign as part of an introductory course. However, the project could be abbreviated for a homework assignment.

Trift, D.G. (1993). Teaching an undergraduate lecture/research course in health psychology. *Teaching of Psychology*, 20(1), 21-28.

This article discusses an upper level undergraduate course in health psychology. While these examples are an upper level course, there are good assignment and lecture examples that could be incorporated into a health section of an introductory course.

Links to ToPIX Materials

Activities, demonstrations, handouts, etc.:

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/19981000/Health%20in%20the%20Classroom>

Current events/news:

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/49255327/Health%20in%20the%20News>

Video/audio:

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/19980999/Health%20Videos>

Teaching Topics

Teaching The Most Important Course

http://nobaproject.com/documents/1_Teaching_The_Most_Important_Course.pdf

Content Coverage

http://nobaproject.com/documents/2_Content_Coverage.pdf

Motivating Students

http://nobaproject.com/documents/3_Motivating_Students_Tips.pdf

Engaging Large Classes

http://nobaproject.com/documents/4_Engaging_Large_Classes.pdf

Assessment Learning

http://nobaproject.com/documents/5_Assessment_Learning.pdf

Teaching Biological Psychology

http://nobaproject.com/documents/6_Teaching_Bio_Psych.pdf

PowerPoint Presentation

This module has an associated PowerPoint presentation. Download it at http://nobaproject.com//images/shared/supplement_editions/000/000/135/Happiness:%20The%20Science%20of%20Subjective%20Well-Being.ppt?1416598881.

About Noba

The Diener Education Fund (DEF) is a non-profit organization founded with the mission of re-inventing higher education to serve the changing needs of students and professors. The initial focus of the DEF is on making information, especially of the type found in textbooks, widely available to people of all backgrounds. This mission is embodied in the Noba project.

Noba is an open and free online platform that provides high-quality, flexibly structured textbooks and educational materials. The goals of Noba are three-fold:

- To reduce financial burden on students by providing access to free educational content
- To provide instructors with a platform to customize educational content to better suit their curriculum
- To present material written by a collection of experts and authorities in the field

The Diener Education Fund is co-founded by Drs. Ed and Carol Diener. Ed is the Joseph Smiley Distinguished Professor of Psychology (Emeritus) at the University of Illinois. Carol Diener is the former director of the Mental Health Worker and the Juvenile Justice Programs at the University of Illinois. Both Ed and Carol are award-winning university teachers.

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