

Psychology 987i: The Science of Happiness
Spring, 2002 Thursdays 1-3PM
MBB 42 Church St Room 227

Instructor: Dr. Nancy Etcoff (Harvard Medical School)
Telephone: 617-726-5574
Email:Etcoff@mediaone.net

Office Hour: Thursdays 3-4:30 pm *at 42 Church St*; other times by
Appointment.

Office: MGH East, Room 9121
Building 149 – 13th Street
Charlestown MA 02129

Required Texts:

Daniel Kahneman, Ed Diener, Norbert Schwartz, Eds. **Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology**. Russell Sage Foundation, 1998

David G Myers. **The Pursuit of Happiness**. Avon Books, 1993

Ed Diener and Eunkook M. Suh **Culture and Subjective Well-Being**. MIT Press, 2000.

Supplementary Reading Packet – Individual Articles are listed below.

Course Requirements:

Each student will be required to make a 30 minute class presentation, and write a 20-30 page paper. The topic of the paper must be approved by the instructor. The paper may be in one of two formats, either a critical review of a topic within the science of happiness or a detailed proposal for original research on a specific hypothesis within the science of happiness. The latter would include a detailed background, proposed methods and statistics and a discussion of possible findings. Grading will be based on the class presentation (25%), class participation (15%), and the paper (60%).

A significant portion of the grade depends on oral participation. If a student wishes to take this course but finds oral participation difficult, he or she must come to see me after the first class to discuss an alternate arrangement for grading.

Course Description

This course focuses on the science of happiness, integrating findings from positive psychology, psychiatry, behavioral genetics, neuroscience and behavioral economics. Over the course of the semester, we will consider the genetics of happiness, including the notion of a biologically determined hedonic set point, the brain's pleasure circuitry, and the mind's power to frame events positively, a tool used with great success in cognitive therapies. We will question an idea that has gained prevalence since the Enlightenment: that pleasure and happiness are our purpose.

Schedule of Classes

January 31

Introduction:

Among the questions considered:

How do we define happiness?

Is happiness what matters most?

Why study happiness; isn't suffering more important?

Does greater happiness come from pleasure or from acts of kindness?

Handouts:

Robert Nozick from **Anarchy, State, and Utopia**, 1974 (pp 42-43)

Martin Seligman. Building human strength: Psychology's forgotten mission.

APA monitor, January 1998.

February 7

Compared to what? How to measure happiness

Reading: Chapter 1 Myers

Chapters 1,3,4 Kahneman, Diener, Schwartz

February 14

Love and Happiness: In which we consider why people are so ecstatic when they fall in love, whether marriage makes men and women equally happy, and the pleasures of solitude.

Reading: Chapters 8,9 Myers

Chapters 18,19 Kahneman, Diener, Schwartz

Supplemental Reading:

Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation, *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 1995, 497-529

February 21

Genes and Personality Traits: Is happiness hard won or heritable?

Reading: Chapter 6 Myers

Chapters 11, 15 Kahneman, Diener, Schwartz

Supplemental Reading:

David Lykken and Auke Tellegen: Happiness is a stochastic phenomenon
Psychological Science, 7, 1996, 186-189

February 28

The Brain's Reward Pathways. Or why you can't get no satisfaction

Readings: Chapters 25, 26, 27 Kahneman, Diener, Schwartz

March 7

Consuming Happiness I: Drugs. In which we consider why people all through recorded history want to get high, and whether you can get "better than well" by prescription.

GUEST SPEAKER Dr. David Lenson, Professor of Comparative Literature,
University of Massachusetts, Amherst, author of **On Drugs**.

Readings: Supplemental

David Lenson. Pharmaka and Pharmakos. Chapter 1. **On Drugs**, 1995.

Peter D. Kramer, The valorization of sadness: alienation and the melancholic temperament. *The Hastings Center Report*. March/April 2000.

Sadie Plant. Chapters 2,3,4 Artificial Paradises, Unconscious, White lines.

Writing on Drugs, 2000.

March 14

Contagious Happiness: Smiles and Laughter

Readings:

Supplemental

Charles Darwin, Chapter 8 (Joy, High, Spirits, Love, Tender Feelings, Devotion)

The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals (edited by Paul Ekman), 1998.

Robert Provine, Chapters 2,3, 9 in **Laughter: A Scientific Investigation**, 2000.

Paul Ekman, Wallace Friesen and Maureen O'Sullivan. Smiles when lying. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54, 1988, 414-420.

March 21

Happiness and Culture: In which we will ponder whether or not the East and West have alternate notions of happiness, and why people in Iceland are so happy.

Readings: Diener and Suh, Chapters 2, 4,5, 6, 10

April 4

1. Age and Gender and Happiness: Women are much more likely than men to suffer from depression. Does that mean that men are happier? Are we generally happier when young or old? And why are teenagers so miserable?

Readings: Myers, Chapter 4

Diener and Suh, chapter 11
Kahneman, Diener, and Schwartz, chapter 17

2. Consuming happiness II: Wealth, employment and the general issue of whether money can buy happiness

Readings: Diener and Suh Chapter 8

Myers, Chapter 2

Review Chapter 18 in Kahneman, Diener, and Schwartz

Supplemental:

Philip Brickman, Dan Coates, Ronnie Janoff-Bulman Lottery Winners and Accident Victims: is Happiness Relative? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36, 1978, 917-27.

April 11

Pleasures of the Body: where we consider the relation of pleasure to happiness, and why sex is fun and chocolate tastes good.

Readings: Kahneman, Diener, and Schwartz Chapter 6

Supplemental:

Shigehiro Oishi, Ulrich Schimmack and Ed Diener, Pleasures and Subjective Well-Being, *European Journal of Personality*, 15, 2001, 153-167.

Ruut Veenhoven Hedonism and Happiness. Paper presented at ARISE conference, October 2001, Nice, France.

April 18

Pleasures of the Mind: where we consider curiosity, creativity, and contemplation .

Readings: Chapter 7, Myers

Chapters 7 Kahneman, Diener, and Myers

April 25

Pleasures of the Heart and Soul: where we consider awe, transcendence, aesthetic bliss, gratitude, and compassion.

Readings: Chapter 10, Myers

Supplemental Reading: Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt. Approaching Awe, a moral, spiritual and aesthetic emotion. In press.

Michael E McCullough, Shelley D. Kilpatrick, Robert A. Emmons, David B Larson. Is gratitude a moral affect? *Psychological Bulletin*, 127, 2001, 249-266.

The Dalai Lama: The Value and benefits of compassion. Chapter 7. **The Art of Happiness**. 1998

May 2 FINAL CLASS

In which we re-examine the questions we raised in January.