Psychology 987i: The Science of Happiness  
Spring, 2003  Thursdays 1-3PM  
MBB 42 Church St Room 227

Instructor: Dr. Nancy Etcoff (Harvard Medical School)  
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Required Texts:


Supplementary Reading Packet – Individual Articles are listed below. You will Receive these readings at the second class.

Course Requirements:

Each student will be required to make one class presentation and write a 10-15 page paper. The presentation will be a 30 minute talk summarizing the readings of the week and the questions and issues they raise. The presenter will then co-lead a discussion. The paper must be on a subject 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 (40%), class participation (20%), and the paper (40%). The paper will be due on May 12.
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 30**
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?*

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

**February 6**
Compared to what? How to measure happiness
Reading: Chapter 1 Myers
Chapters 1,3,4 Kahneman, Diener, Schwartz
Chapter 1 Seligman.

**February 13**
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
Chapters 11, 12 Seligman

Supplemental Reading:

**February 20**
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 27**
The Brain’s Reward Pathways. Or why you can’t get no satisfaction
Readings: Chapters 25, 26, 27 Kahneman, Diener, Schwartz

**March 6**
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*.

Supplemental Readings:
Sadie Plant. Chapters 2,3,4 *Artificial Paradises, Unconscious, White lines*.
*Writing on Drugs*, 2000.

**March 13**
Contagious Happiness: Smiles and Laughter

Supplemental Readings:

**March 20**
1. Happiness and Culture: In which we will ponder whether or not the East and West have alternate notions of happiness, and whether politics effects happiness..

Readings: Chapters 7,8,9 Stutzer and Frey
Supplemental Reading:
Daniel Goleman Chapter 10 (The Influence of Culture) *Destructive Emotions*, 2003

2. 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: Chapter 4, Myers
   Chapter 17, Kahneman, Diener, and Schwartz

April 3
Consuming happiness II: Wealth, employment and the general issue of whether money can buy happiness
Readings: Chapters 4, 5, 6, 10 Stutzer and Frey
   Chapter 2 Myers
   Chapter 10 Seligman

April 10
Pleasures of the Body: where we consider the relation of pleasure to happiness, and why sex is fun and chocolate tastes good.

Readings: Chapter 6 Kahneman, Diener, and Schwartz
   Chapter 7 Seligman
Supplemental Readings:

April 17
Pleasures of the Mind: where we consider curiosity, creativity, and contemplation.
Readings: Chapter 7, Myers
   Chapters 7 Kahneman, Diener, and Myers

April 24
Pleasures of the Heart and Soul: where we consider awe, transcendence, aesthetic bliss, gratitude, and compassion.
**Guest Speaker: Dr. Daniel Goleman**

Readings: Chapter 10, Myers
Supplemental Reading:
Daniel Goleman, Chapter 14 *Destructive Emotions* 2003

May 1 FINAL CLASS
In which we re-examine the questions we raised in January and consider signature strengths and virtues

Readings: Chapters 8, 9 Seligman