

Notes from the Science of Happiness course from Greater Good Science Center

Confucius

- Confucian Analects present the concept of “Jen”
- It brings good in others to completion.
- Happiness is very connected to the happiness and well being of others.

Buddhism

- Supports the notion that compassion brings happiness.
- One cultivates a state of peacefulness.
- First Noble Truth is that there is a lot of suffering.
- Buddhism says we suffer because of grasping.
- Nirvana is when we detach and achieve equanimity and calmness. We start to show kind speech and cultivate an outward orientation.

Taoism

Lao Tzu

Meaning unfolds.

Discusses the paradoxical nature of happiness.

Aristotle

Nicomachean Ethics

Aristotle presents the notion that happiness is found at the end of life when you can look back on the many virtuous acts you engaged in when alive.

Presents the Principle of Moderation

Bentham / Locke

Happiness is bringing about the greatest good for as many people as possible.

Positive Emotions, Happiness and Emo-diversity

- There are many misconceptions about happiness.
- Striving and expecting happiness all the time can actually be counterproductive.
- Positive emotions widen the scope of what you see positive emotions open our awareness. You see more.
- They also transform us for the better. They change who we are.
- We can learn to self-generate the feeling of warmth to others and to all living beings eventually.
- Striving for happiness vs. prioritizing positivity are different things.
- Prioritizing positivity engenders optimal mental health
- We can control amygdala positive response.
- Happier people are not necessarily naive or blind to negativity, but rather may respond adaptively to the world, recognizing both good and bad things in life.
- Can we change our happiness?
- We're born with a set point for happiness.
- Happiness is heritable
- Happiness is a trait of our personality and we can't change our personality
- Discusses hedonic adaptation and its effect on happiness. It is so easy to get used to positive changes in our lives and then become immune to what once made us happy.
- Our psychological immune system allows us to recover much more quickly than we might have predicted.
- Experiencing a variety of emotions may be good for our mental and physical health
- Might be better for overall happiness to feel emotions like anger at appropriate times, rather than seeking happiness no matter the situation
- Introduces the concept of “emodiversity”.

Affective Forecasting

We are often poor judges in the present of what will bring us happiness in the future, causing us to look for happiness in the wrong places.

We over-estimate how defeats will affect our happiness.

It is also true that things don't boost our happiness as much as we think they will.

Pro Social Behaviors

- Discusses the influence of prosocial activities on happiness. Social connections are a necessary condition for happiness
- Happiness usually happens when you are around other people.
- Loneliness lights up same parts of brain as pain.
- There is an enduring significance of positive social relationships.

- Happiness is also an ability to deal with difficulties in life, to feel involved in your community, to recognize your own strengths, and to perceive the life you're living as one that's meaningful.
- Social capital is the web of relationships in our life and the benefits we derive from those
 - we need both weak ties and strong ties to be happy
- Chat with the people you encounter in your neighborhood and everyday life - these invisible ties bring psychological rewards
- We should join diverse communities and organizations and deepen new ties.
- Social nature is definitive of how we've evolved - ultra social species

Evolutionary biology and Sociality

Our ultra sociality. We are care taking species, with hypervulnerable offspring. We are an egalitarian species, with a generally flat hierarchy. We are a reconciling species; we have individuals in conflict move towards each other but we can get close to people we've been in conflict with. We are coordinated as a species; we imitate the behaviors of others in our group. We are a mimetic imitative coordinative species; we sync our behavior with others.

We are generally monogamous but we maintain a fragile monogamy.

Secure attachments make shapes your care nurturance circuitry better able to produce and respond to oxytocin.

Types of attachment:

- secure
- anxious
- avoidant

Inducing feelings of attachment security in adults can help overcome some of the negative effects of an insecure attachment history.

Social connection may be our evolved "baseline," that is, human brains assume that regular contact with others is the norm.

The vagus nerve is the care taking nerve. Compassion and vagus nerve response are highly correlated.

Some people are "vagal stars", they just have strong vagus nerves, what might be called a "strong vagal profile". But this can be cultivated by building positive emotion, and positive relationships.

Oxytocin

- Oxytocin is a neuropeptide that moves through brain and bloodstream to affect different organs in your body. It is a neurochemical enabler of trust, devotion and kindness.
- Can produce trust towards strangers
- Tends to increase monogamous tendencies
- Moderates stress hormones
- Quiets the amygdala
- Our neurochemistry transfers to our offspring
- Intranasal administration of oxytocin increases generosity, trust, secure attachment
- There is a gene on 3rd chromosome predicts how sensitive you are, etc.
- Recent research shows that oxytocin not only bonds us to others but also plays a role in excluding others from that bond
- Oxytocin operates in approach-related emotions
- Also in visceral memories
- Affiliative behaviors - makes you more relaxed, generous, cooperative in groups
- Oxytocin also makes us really really like our own groups.

Touch

We are a touch-deprived culture in the west – Research on watching how much friends touch in a café: 0 times England, 2 times in U.S., 180 times in Puerto Rico touch

Touch is one of the greatest mechanisms of social well being. Increases feelings of safety, reciprocity, soothing, cooperation.

We are twice as likely to cooperate (or participate in class) if you get a pat on the back.

We're wired to connect with people on a basic physical level.

As we started to walk erect, evolution of vocal chords and vocalization richness

Hearing

Ears particularly attuned to human communication

Tool of social connection - rich communication of emotion in vocal bursts - rich repertoire of sounds to communicate our feelings to other people

Communicate really important emotions with these vocal bursts

Little sounds that communicate vital social emotions

We are because we belong

Fundamental drive to connect in meaningful, collaborative ways with others

Active Listening - paraphrase what they're saying, ask questions,

John Gottman, Principles for an Effective Marriage

Marriage is threatened by the "four horsemen of the apocalypse":

- contempt
- criticism
- stonewalling
- defensiveness

Can predict divorce when they all happen together in observed conversations between couples

Humor helps deescalates tension

Gratitude

Forgiveness moving on

Long term link between happiness and marriage

Parents are slightly happier than non parents

- **Friends**
- Number of close friends people report having has declined by one-third over the past generation
- Humans have a friendship instinct
- Science of friendship
- social support
- Tight connections to friends are great determinants to happiness and health. You have less stress, live longer
- Building "social capital" the benefits that we get from our web of contacts and friendships, family,
- One should actively engage, it pays to be a giver on social media, not just a lurker or a taker

Cross-group connections

- Cross-group connections play a role in happiness and health, relationships with people different than us.
- It is good for your health to have egalitarian attitudes. Not only is it bad for society but there is a physiological cost to the prejudiced person. Being prejudiced is stressful.
- Intergroup relations are stressful in an of itself.
- When relating to diverse peoples from different cultures and walks of life, after 3rd interaction, people's stress levels began to finally go down - measuring salivary cortisol.
- We should reach out across group boundaries.
- Learn the skills necessary to interact effectively and create new friendships.
- This increases happiness and decreases stress levels.
- Self-perpetuating, friendships develop and prejudices are reduced

Empathy

- Empathy is being moved by the feelings of another.
- It is a physical response.
- Humans have a facility to imitate. We spontaneously mimic facial expressions
- People mimic very slightly emotional expressions
- Mimicry of others helps us learn about what others are doing and feeling
- What are other people doing? Answering this is of great benefit to human evolutionary progress
- Mirror neurons – discovered in primates - promote the ability to simulate other people's states – to physically feel it

- Cognitive empathy is different - understanding what other people are feeling - cerebral cortex -
- Visceral activation - your pain or suffering causes me to be aroused
- Empathy and well-being. Does empathy make you happier?
- Capable of showing joy and experiencing pleasure in a collective way
- Greater activation of dopamine awards when it's with others
- What are the habits of highly empathic people
- Curiosity about strangers
- Listen hard and open up

Pro social behavior and Benefits of Compassion

- Helping others brings the same pleasure we get from the gratification of personal desire.
- Heart rate goes down from baseline levels, which prepares them not to fight or flee, but to approach and soothe.
- This suggests compassion may be self-perpetuating: Being compassionate causes a chemical reaction in the body that motivates us to be even more compassionate.
- Researchers found that eliciting feelings of compassion always increased Vagal tone
- Kindness is good for you, better health, life expectancy
- 30% of Americans do volunteer activity
- Basic benefit to giving - happier when you give than when you get

Evolutionary Role of Kindness

- Kindness plays a role in sexual selection
- Kindness increases reciprocal altruism
- Increases the survival of offspring
- Kindness is attractive / sexy
- Kindness develops early in children
- Giving support is fundamentally rewarding
- Random acts of kindness
- Happiness practice
- War on Compassion
- There is, of course, much skepticism towards compassion. We're descended from a long line of murders. Empathy is declining at broader cultural level.
- Darwin was one of the first to articulate that we are a compassionate and empathic species
- We walk upright - pelvis narrowed - birth canal narrowed - we are born in state of dependence
- so we need kindness and compassion - take care or die -

Social barriers to compassion

- Being busy 6x decrease in kindness
- Tend to be kinder towards people like ourselves so work on that us-them dichotomy
- Feel like we don't really have the capacity to help - cultivate feelings of efficacy
- Compassion collapse - you regulate your emotions, particularly in the face of more people suffering because you think you can't make an impact and there would be too great a cost

Cooperation and Forgiveness

- The Prisoner's Dilemma Chart
- The Evolution of Cooperation, by David Axelrod
- Tit for tat strategy is most effective for both
- Being cooperative is the best strategy.
- Cooperation is one of the most important and beneficial behaviors on Earth, right down to the cellular level.
- There is a strong tendency to cooperate in the animal kingdom and competing takes a lot more work
- Many animal species and biological organisms use cooperation - it is a principle of biology
- Reward activation is greater when there is mutual cooperation
- Unreciprocated cooperation decreases activation in reward center
- Brains are attuned to liking opportunities to cooperate
- Cooperation is inherently pleasurable
- Punishing people who are non cooperators also stimulates reward activation in the brain

Conflict and Peacemaking

- Sibling relationships are defined by conflict. Romantic relationships too.
- Frans de Waal - Lorenz - primates engage in peacemaking rather than disperse in cases where there is conflict
- Embarrassment is shown when one averts the gaze of another, head is turned down, there is an awkward smile, touch their faces, send signal of apology

- Embarrassed smile to trigger forgiveness around them
- Get punished less
- Triggers prosocial tendencies
- Peacemaking built into our basic signaling behavior
- Signs of embarrassment serve as acknowledgement of broken social contract and serve as a means of preventing conflict
- Sign of respect for others
- Our very sociality requires a mechanism to bring individuals together in the midst of conflict and aggression.
- Embarrassment is a display that reconciles. We re-establish cooperative bonds.
- The unspoken ethic of modesty

Fear of the Stranger

- When subjects are presented with a face of someone from a different race, the amygdala gets metabolically active—aroused, alert, ready for action.
- Humans are wired for xenophobia
- But the amygdala doesn't budget for people who have lots of experience with people of different races

Apology

- Aaron Lazare - On Apology
- Statistically significant positive relationship between apology and positive emotions, both for the person receiving the apology and the apologizer
- Apologizing also has correlation to negative emotion - apology is hard

Components of an Effective Apology:

1. remorse, shame or humility
2. acknowledge the responsibility
3. offer empathy
4. reparation or compensation
5. low likelihood of recurrence

effective apology:

(Not every apology requires all four parts.)

- acknowledgment of the offense;
- explanation;
- expressions of remorse, shame, and humility;
- reparation.

Forgiveness and Revenge

- Forgiveness is a deep process of the heart. It doesn't necessarily mean you have to talk to the person that betrayed you. It can take a long time. It is not condoning or a papering over. Forgiveness and revenge are standard issue social instincts.
- Revenge is normal - every neurologically intact person has it.
- Blood feuds and capital punishment are a feature of 57/60 societies. Could it be that blood feuds are part of what it means to be human?
- Revenge can be seen as a sign of strength in early primates - showing that others can't take advantage of you.
- A victim will retaliate stronger if an audience has witnessed the provocation. If they think that bystanders will think less of them, they become more vengeful .
- In primate research, moving away wasn't always a good option. Deal with bullies in your midst in a different way. Using revenge as a means of ensuring the person doesn't offend you in that way again.
- Revenge has an adaptive function.
- Capacity for forgiveness is every bit as authentic as our capacity for revenge.
- Friendly contact (Frans de Waal) is frequently more common after conflict
- Many primates reconcile and humans are among those that use this for evolutionary advantage
- Here's the evolutionary advantage: you reconcile in order to gain the benefits of cooperation.

The Forgiveness Instinct by Michael E. McCullough

Don't suppress negative emotions - happiness really means how we respond to and recover from negative experiences

Rumination and holding on to grudges brings negative effects

Forgiveness does not mean forgetting; it doesn't necessarily even mean reconciling with the person who hurt you. Instead, it means changing your own attitude toward this original hurt so that it doesn't continue to wound you. You strive for reduced urge to punish, blame, or take revenge and reduced avoidance.

Physiological health benefits of forgiveness

The big transgressions are not necessarily "unforgivable" because they are big. Instead, big transgressions are often the ones that, if they are ever to be surmounted, must be forgiven.

The sharp corners of our personalities irritate and scuff against those with whom we interact on a daily basis.

Forgiveness is the open heartedness of moving forward

Can I forgive my unskillful responses that made it last too long?

It means letting go of your hurt and anger, and not making someone endlessly responsible for your emotional well-being.

Practice forgiving smaller grievances and we'll be ready when a bigger insult comes.

Forgiveness is a way to release the distress that results from the original incident

Forgiveness exercises:

1. make a list
2. consider one offense and what harm that caused to you, how has it changed your views and trust
3. decide to forgive and if you're ready to offer kindness, respect, and generosity

Eight Steps to Forgiveness - Luskin

TRUST

Trust is on the decline.

How do we cultivate an ethic of trust?

Politeness is a way of building trust

Compassion and cooperation build trust

Physical touch - practice the right kind of touch cultivates trust and cooperative behavior

Touch elevates students' participation. Studied basketball teams - coded touch and amount of touch predicted how well the team was doing at end of season

One should be really sensitive to the language you use and try as best as one can to use nonviolent communication
nonviolent communication

the element of trust present in all human interactions

trust is a cognitive process, yes, but it is also a complex biological process

trust is the # 949 most used of all words
most used words

dependability is not enough

John Gottman on trust

Awareness of your partner's emotion;

Turning toward the emotion;

Tolerance of two different viewpoints;

trying to **U**nderstand your partner;

Non-defensive responses to your partner;

and responding with **E**mpathy.

when you or your relationship faces difficulties, you may wonder whether your partner will be responsive and caring enough.

Mindfulness & Happiness

- Matt Killingsworth Wandering Mind
- We are happier when focused on the present, less happy when their minds are wandering from what is happening in the present
- people's minds wander a lot. Forty-seven percent of the time, people are thinking about something other than what they're currently doing.
- people are substantially less happy when their minds are wandering than when they're not, which is unfortunate considering we do it so often.
- mind-wandering seems likely to be a cause, and not merely a consequence, of unhappiness.
- If we learn to **fully engage in the present**, we may be able to cope more effectively with the bad moments and draw even more enjoyment from the good ones.
- Mindfulness, voluntarily directing your attention to the present moment non-judgmentally
- intentionally paying attention in an open kind and discerning way, forcing ourselves not to mind wander
- mindfulness = flow state = total concentration
- mindfulness can be cultivated
- attentive to breathing
- mindful of body
- direct kind thoughts to people you know
- cultivate warm feelings in the chest
- build a circle of care
- benefits of yoga
- jon kabal zinn - MBSR – Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction
- body scan
- raisin meditation
- thoughts tune into what we're sensing in the present moment rather than rehashing the past or imagining the future
- mindfulness makes people more focused on present
- it makes one more optimistic, generous, kindness
- neuroplasticity and grey matter and mindfulness
- what are the things you can do to shape your brain
- happiness can be practiced
- mindfulness increases CONCENTRATION AND FOCUS
- daniel goldman attention skills mean more success in the workplace
- interoception knowing the state of your body and deep feelings
- training the mind

orient the mind toward experience promotes happiness

Self-Compassion

- maximizers always looking for something better - satisficing
- optimism
- benefits
- higher vagal tone
- self-compassion - being hard on yourself
- it's ok to be average
- try new things at which you'll be average
- self-compassion quieting the inner critic
- Kristin Neff
- self-compassionate people are better able to accept who they are regardless of the degree of praise they receive from others

Flow

This balance between challenge and skill is integral to flow, and it may help to explain why people are more likely to report experiencing flow when working than during leisure

intense engagement with daily activities

Daniel Coleman - "frazzle" relationship between performance and focus

high stress low performance - neurobiology of frazzle -

Setting Goals and Promoting Happiness

There are intrinsic goals associated with greater happiness

Maximizers: A term popularized by psychologist Barry Schwartz of Swarthmore College to refer to people who try to squeeze the greatest amount of benefit and pleasure out of every choice or opportunity.

Satisficers, by contrast, feel content with choices as long as they pass a basic threshold of acceptability. Schwartz and colleagues have **found** that maximizers report low happiness and optimism and higher levels of depression than people who have a greater tendency to satisfice.

gratitude is payoff for giving and helping others - sense that other people are giving to you

Enlightenment - gratitude is cardinal moral emotion that promotes cooperative behavior between individuals

Gratitude

- adam smith - gratitude is the glue that ties people together
- something good that happens in your life that is due to the actions of others
- benefit from someone else's actions that are costly, intentional, and voluntary
- I get it - gratitude is the social glue
- grateful disposition predicts happiness, health, etc.
- less anxious and depressed
- relationship satisfaction, cooperation,
- gratitude has the power to heal, energize, and change lives
- represents a turning of the mind
- affirmation of goodness
- make an attribution or causal origin - recognize sources of goodness outside of ourselves
- Gratitude implies humility—a recognition that we could not be who we are or where we are in life without the contributions of others. How many family members, friends, strangers, and all those who have come before us have made our daily lives easier and our existence freer, more comfortable, and even possible? It is mind boggling to consider.
- Participants in the gratitude condition also reported getting more hours of sleep each night, spending less time awake before falling asleep, and feeling more refreshed upon awakening.
- According to their friends, grateful people engaged in more supportive, kind, and helpful behaviors
- First, gratitude strengthens social ties. It cultivates an individual's sense of interconnectedness.
- Write a gratitude letter, what in specific they did, why you're grateful and how it impacted your life, how to deliver the letter
- shows you recognize how others have taken care of you
- mental habits - gratitude as a disposition and as a practice
- gratitude counteracts adaptation/habituation
- lybomirsky - people who counted gratitude once a week were happier than those that did the exercise 3 times a week
- 40 percent of our happiness might stem from intentional activities in which we choose to engage.
- remember the bad.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "Gratitude changes the pangs of memory into a tranquil joy."
- Gratitude amplifies the good
- train mental habits and interpretations
- moral motivator
- social benefits
- grateful people are happier, like able, and more likely to help
- people like you when you're grateful
- enhances our ability to affiliate with others
- enhances communal orientation towards others and our tendency to include others
- it just makes you nicer.
- successful relationship doesn't just depend on how partners divide labor, but on how they each express gratitude for the labor the other one contributes.
- materialism, narcissism, over scheduling damage ability to feel gratitude
- gratitude is just good manners, too self-effacing, inappropriate in the midst of suffering

Awe and Laughter & Play

- Science of Narrative – interesting field of study
- Discusses the benefits of green
- Key Lessons –
 - Human beings are biologically endowed to be kind, compassionate, cooperative.
 - life has negative experiences but ability to rebound is key
 - distraction hurts chances for happiness
 - you can fortify happiness with purposive behavior
 - Mindfulness - nonjudgmental state - tuned in to the now - rather than with regret or anticipation
 - It is beneficial to control Mind Wandering