

Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness



Catherine A. Sanderson

Amherst College

Overview

- Why Do We *Care* About Happiness?
- What Do We *Think* Makes Us Happy (But Really Doesn't)?
- What Actually *Does* Make Us Happy?



- Conclusions ... *and* the Top 10 Strategies to Increase Happiness in Your Own Life!

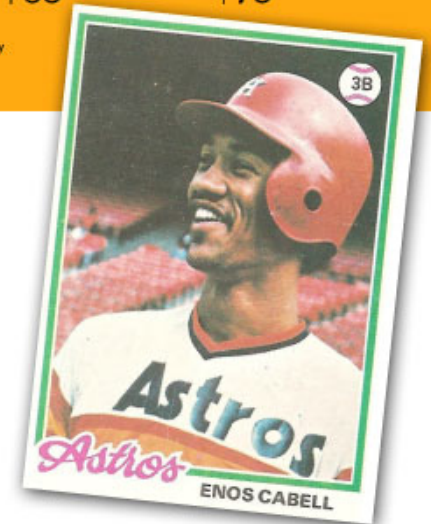
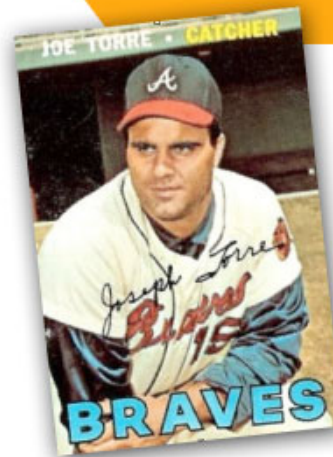
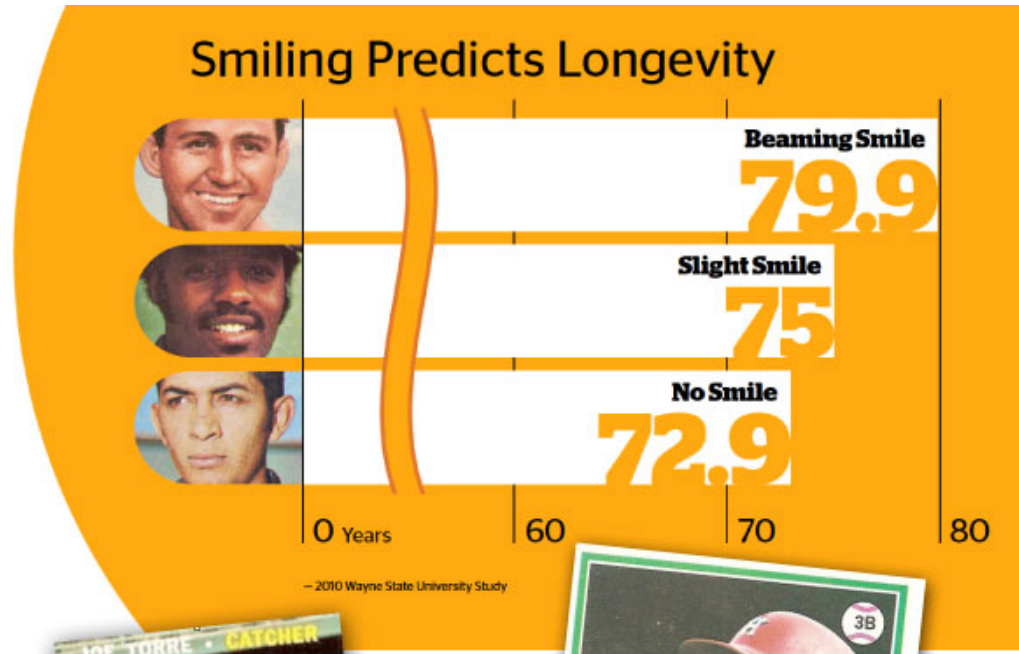
Why Do We *Care* About Happiness?

- Happy people are
 - More helpful (and less hostile)
 - More productive



Experience better health

- Fight off colds
- Recover from surgery
- Live longer



What Do We *Think* Makes Us Happy (But Really Doesn't)?

Money



“Money has never made man happy, nor will it, there is nothing in its nature to produce happiness. The more of it one has the more one wants.” by Benjamin Franklin

□ Climate

□ Life events

□ Minor

□ Major

□ Marriage



Children



“Having a baby is like suddenly getting the world's worst roommate.” by Anne Lamott

What *Does* Make Us Happy?

▣ Behaviors

▣ Eating

▣ Exercising

▣ Sex

▣ Shopping

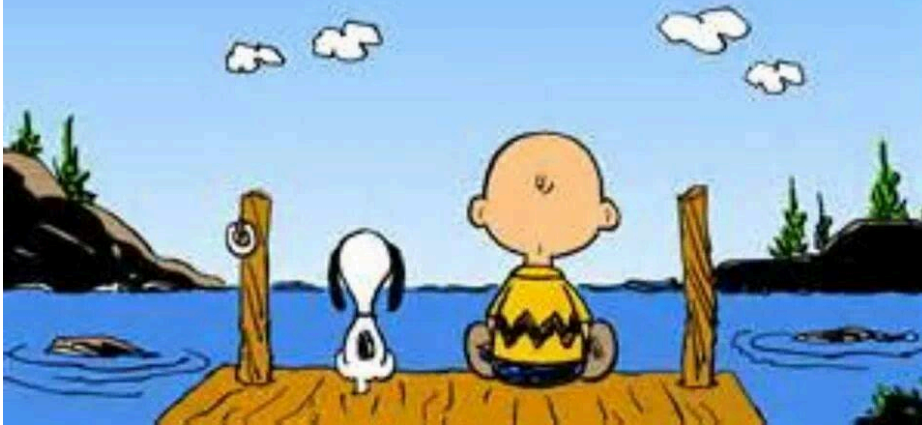


□ Religion

□ Age

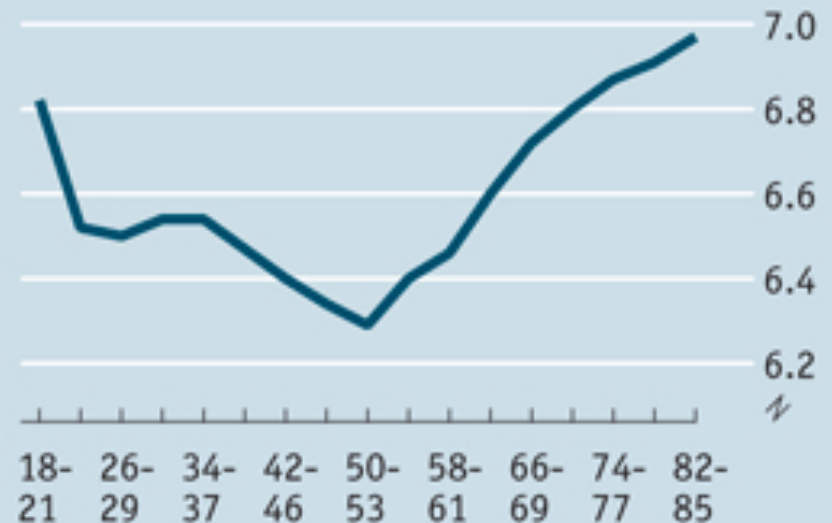
As we grow up, we realize it is less important to have lots of friends and more important to have real ones

—Amanda McRae



The U-bend

Self-reported well-being, on a scale of 1-10



□ Nature

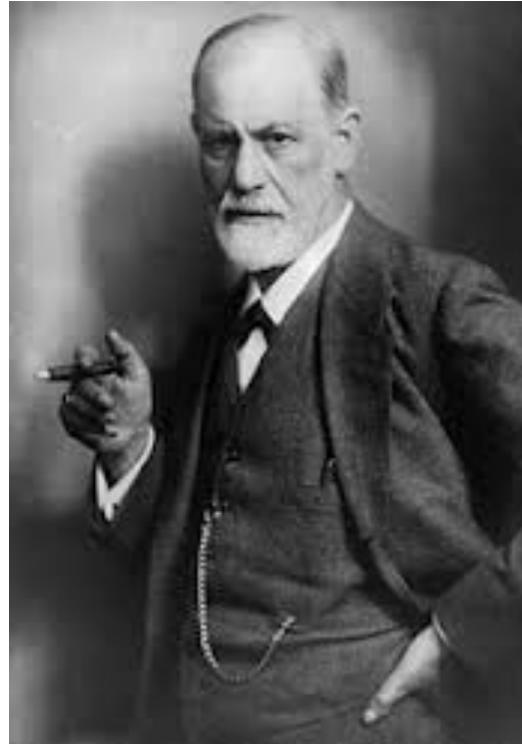


- Personality
 - Extraversion
 - High self-esteem



“I am still determined to be cheerful and happy, in whatever situation I may be; for I have also learned from experience that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our dispositions, and not upon our circumstances.” by Martha Washington

- Personality
 - Optimism

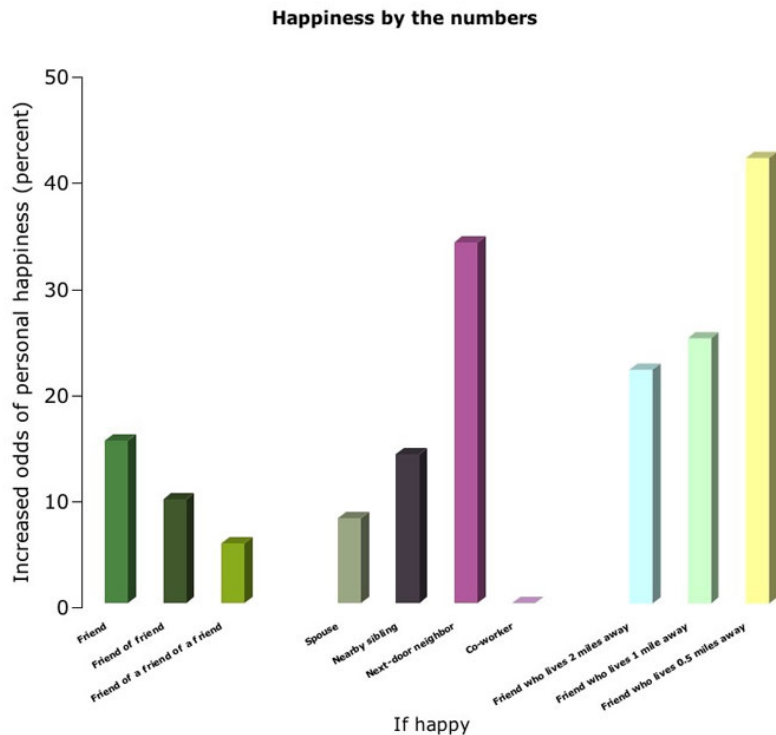


u15011396 [RF] © www.visualphotos.com

“I am fundamentally an optimist. Whether that comes from nature or nurture, I cannot say. Part of being optimistic is keeping one's head pointed toward the sun, one's feet moving forward. There were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair. That way lays defeat and death.” By Nelson Mandela

Relationships

- Being around happy people
- Having close friends & family
- Having meaningful conversations



“Affection is responsible for nine-tenths of whatever solid and durable happiness there is in our lives.” by C.S. Lewis

Conclusions: The 3 Components of Happiness

- ❑ Pleasure (but least important)
- ❑ Engagement (and anticipation)
- ❑ Meaning



'Well,' said Pooh, 'what I like best,' and then he had to stop and think. Because although Eating Honey was a very good thing to do, there was a moment just before you began to eat it which was better than when you were, but he didn't know what it was called.' By A.A. Milne

"Are you bored with life? Then throw yourself into some work you believe in with all your heart, live for it, die for it, and you will find happiness that you had thought could never be yours." By Dale Carnegie



Conclusions: What We Know Impacts Happiness

- ▣ The power of genetics (explains about 50% of happiness)
- ▣ The power of our capacity to adapt
 - ▣ To good events



"I could cry when I think of the years I wasted accumulating money, only to learn that my cheerful disposition is genetic."

▣ To bad events



▣ The power of effort

“Happiness is the consequence of personal effort. You fight for it, strive for it, insist upon it, and sometimes even travel around the world looking for it. You have to participate relentlessly in the manifestations of your own blessings. And once you have achieved a state of happiness, you must never become lax about maintaining it. You must make a mighty effort to keep swimming upward into that happiness forever, to stay afloat on top of it.” by Elizabeth Gilbert

Top Ten Strategies for Increasing Happiness

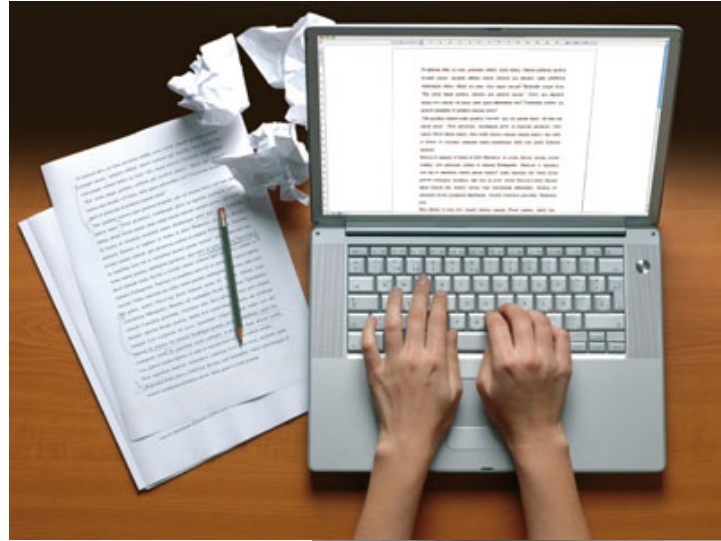
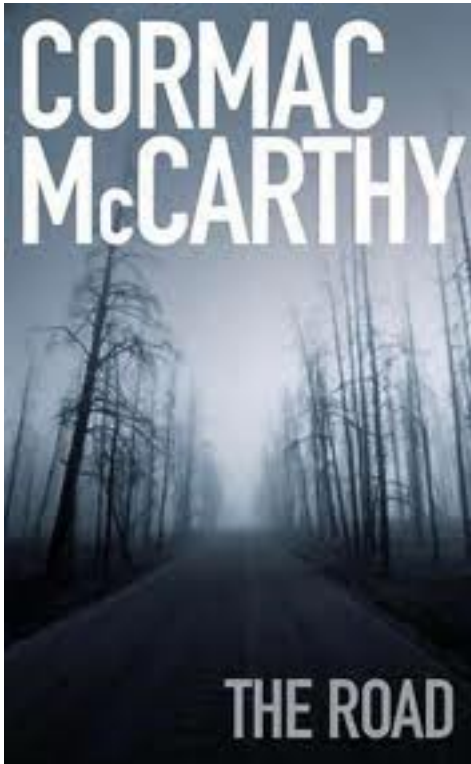
- ▣ 1. Keep a “gratitude journal”
- ▣ 2. Make a “gratitude visit”



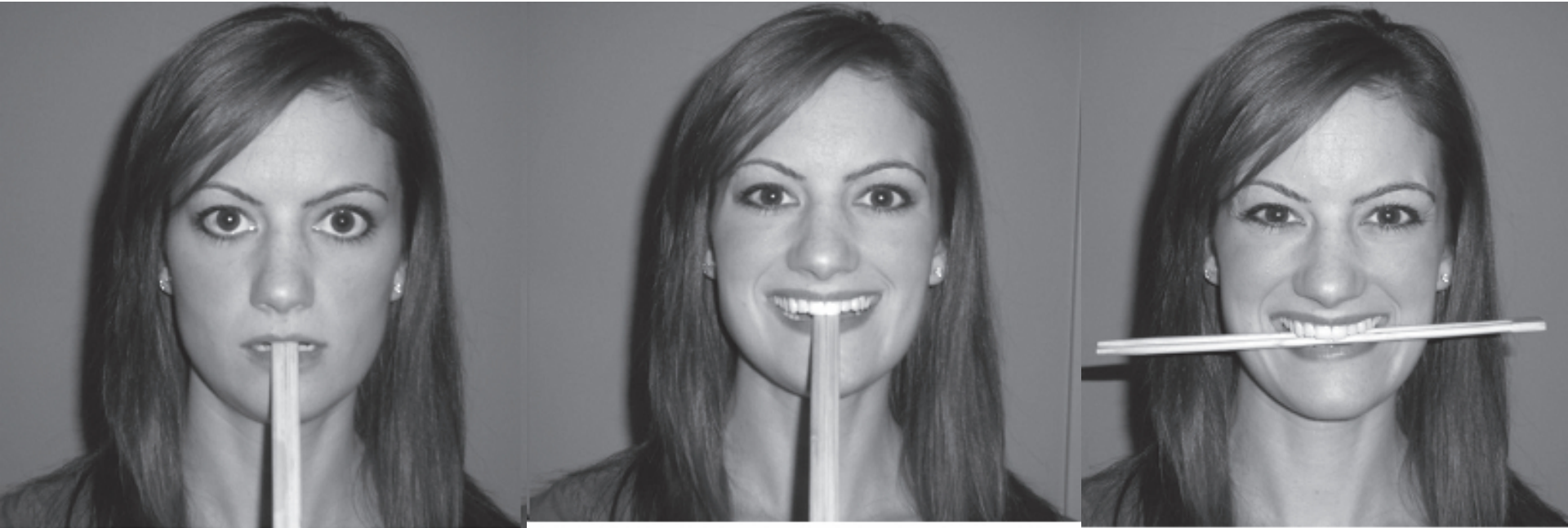
“One of the most tragic things I know about human nature is that all of us tend to put off living. We are all dreaming of some magical rose garden over the horizon instead of enjoying the roses that are blooming outside our windows today.” by Dale Carnegie

3. Figure out your strengths and find ways to use them

4. Read a book you love



▣ 5. Smile (even when you aren't happy)



“Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.” by Thích Nhất Hạnh

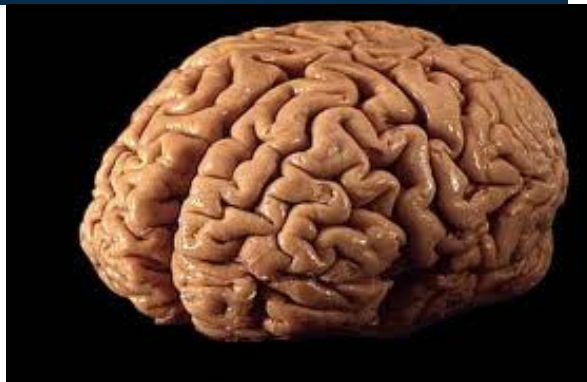
❑ 6. Change your behavior

- ❑ Get enough sleep
- ❑ Exercise
- ❑ Spend time outside

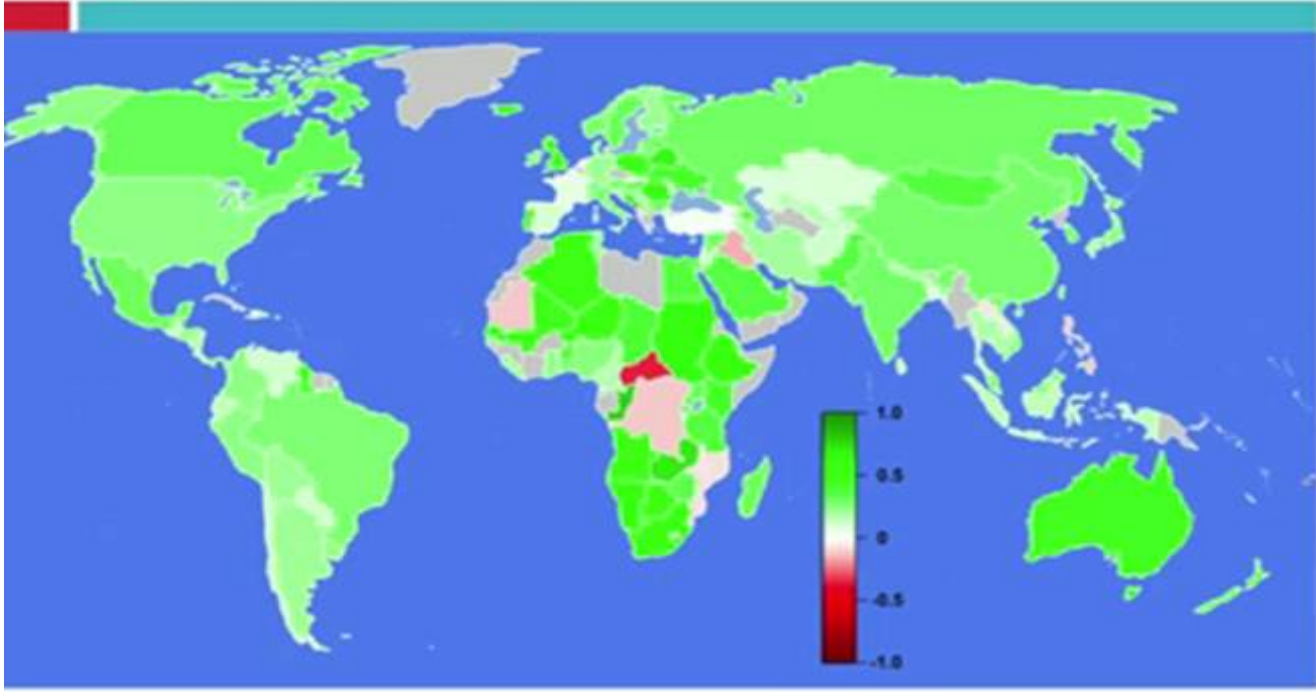


7. Perform random acts of kindness

- Volunteer
- Donate to charity
- Give a gift to a friend



In 136 countries





- 8. Spend money on the *right* things
 - Yes on experiences
 - No on belongings



"I should have bought more crap."

"Trying to be happy by accumulating possessions is like trying to satisfy hunger by taping sandwiches all over your body." by George Carlin

9. Avoid comparisons



"I do count my blessings, but then I end up counting those of others who have more and better blessings, and that pisses me off."



fakebook®

"Comparison is the thief of joy."
by Teddy Roosevelt

▣ 10. Build & maintain close relationships (takes time, energy & effort - but worth it)

“But on entering upon family life he saw at every step that it was utterly different from what he had imagined. At every step he experienced what a man would experience who, after admiring the smooth, happy course of a little boat on a lake, should get himself into that little boat. He saw that it was not all sitting still, floating smoothly; that one had to think too, not for an instant to Forget where one was floating; and that there was water under one, and that one must row; and that his unaccustomed hands would be sore; and that it was only to look at it that was easy; but that doing it, though very delightful, was very difficult.”

By Leo Tolstoy



Thoughts/questions?

Want a copy of my presentation?

□ Email: casanderson@amherst.edu

□ Phone: 413-542-2438

□ *Thanks for listening!*

