

Learning Happiness

TABITHA KIRKLAND, PH.D.

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

slides: <http://osf.io/c28nb/>



Key Concepts

Mental Habits

Social Connections

The Greater Good



Mental Habits

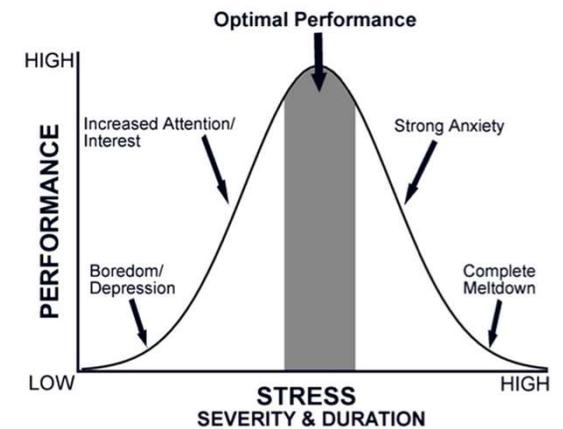
Psychological *stressors* are things we interpret negatively

- Acute vs. chronic stress

Stress as a signal

We feel ill-equipped to handle *stressors* when:

- Skills < challenge
- Low degree of control
- Past negative experience with stressor (can become a self-fulfilling prophecy)



Happiness Activity: write down one thing that is stressing you out right now.

Mental Habits

The way we *respond* to information in our world depends on the way we *interpret* it.

- Threat vs. opportunity

Threat and opportunity are not inherent properties of objects. They are qualities of our mind.



Mental Habits

PROBLEM-FOCUSED COPING

Used for controllable stressors

Practical solutions: tackle source of stress directly

EMOTION-FOCUSED COPING

Used for uncontrollable stressors

Change response to stressor (emotion regulation)

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, And wisdom to know the difference.” -Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971)

Emotional intelligence involves understanding when to use problem-focused coping and when to use emotion-focused coping.

Happiness Activity: pick one of these coping strategies for your stressor.

Mental Habits: Emotional Intelligence Tools

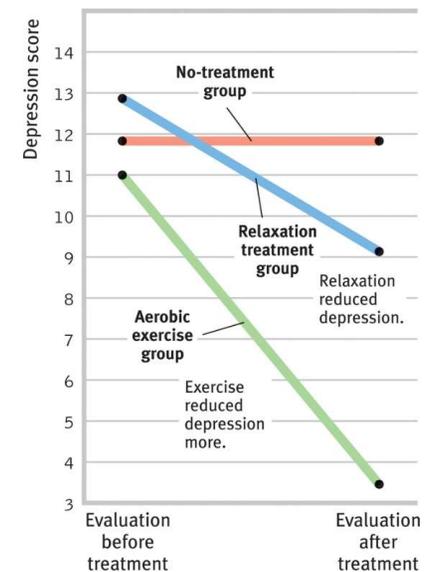
Mindfulness: awareness of one's thoughts and attention to the present moment

- Cultivating non-judgment and non-reactivity
- Perceiving oneself as separate from one's thoughts

Self-compassion: showing kindness to the self when making mistakes; recognizing common humanity

Exercise can boost endorphins and serotonin, lower cortisol levels, and improve mental health.

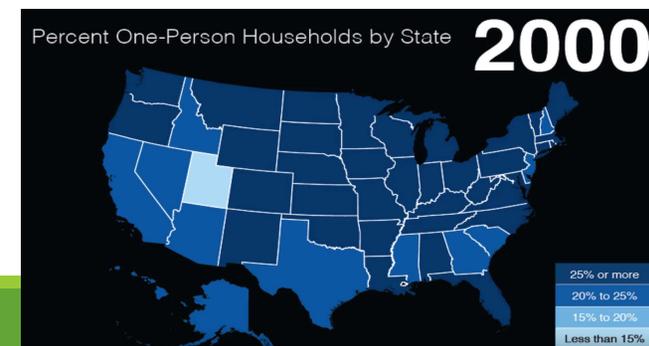
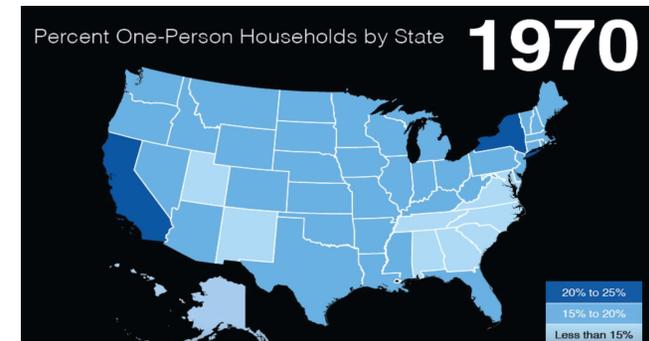
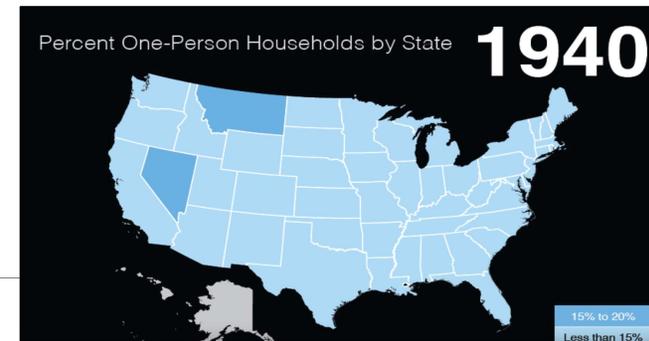
Happiness Activity: mindfulness



Social Connections

"Man is by nature a social animal." -Aristotle

Loneliness is increasingly common

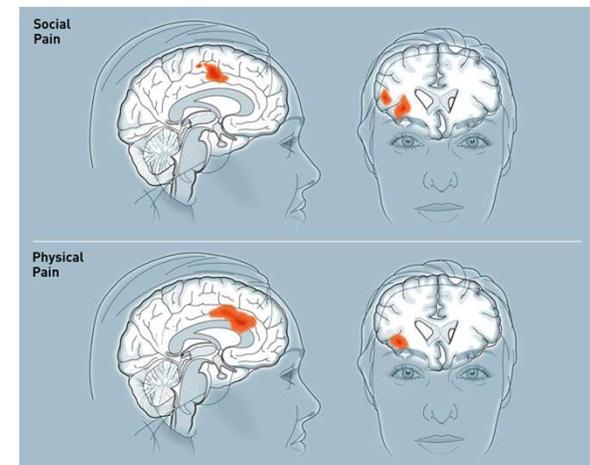


Social Connections

“Man is by nature a social animal.” -Aristotle

Loneliness is increasingly common and dangerous for our health

- Social pain (loneliness, rejection, etc.) is a warning signal about our social health.
- Loneliness increases vigilance for threat, causing us to be defensive and even interpret benign remarks as hostile.
- Aspects of modern life increase the likelihood of loneliness.



Social Connections

Moments of connection with others can improve mental and physical health

- Sharing positive emotions
- Biological & behavioral synchrony
- Mutual care for each other's well-being



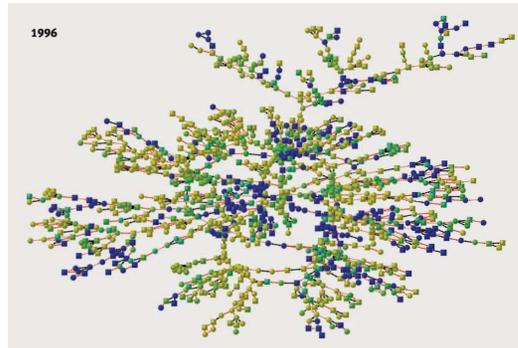
Happiness Activity: introduce yourself to someone sitting near you.

Social Connections

Emotional contagion: we “catch” the emotions of people around us

- Three degrees of separation

Body position and movement influences the emotions we feel (“fake it ‘til you make it”)



Happiness Activity: emotional contagion

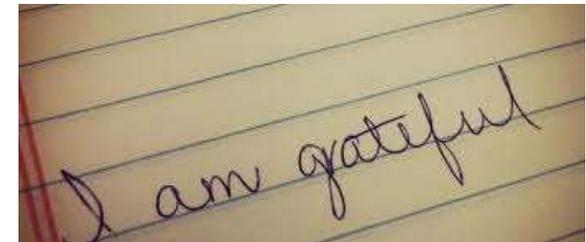
Social Connections

Gratitude for the positive things we have in life

Savoring and appreciating the things (and people) we may sometimes take for granted

- More positive evaluations of life as a whole and expectations about the coming week
- Spend more time exercising
- Better sleep, more energy, fewer health problems
- Increases likability, social capital; helps us support others

*Happiness Activity: write one thing you are grateful for right now.
Nothing is too small or too big to be appreciated.*



The Greater Good

Turning our attention to something bigger than ourselves

Awe: feeling of being diminished in the presence of something greater than the self

- Found in religion/spirituality, nature, art, music
- Shifts focus from self to group
- Increases motivation to be good to others
- Enables collaboration & collective action

Happiness Thought Question: in what ways can you nurture more awe in your life?



The Greater Good

Happier spending:

1. Buy experiences, not items
2. Buy several small pleasures rather than a single big one
3. Spend on others rather than on yourself



Happiness Strategies to Carry With You

1. Think about the stressors that are weighing most heavily on your mind these days. Notice with the curiosity of an impartial observer the thoughts that come to your mind and the way your body feels when you consider these stressors. Practice showing yourself some kindness through self-compassion.
2. Smile at passing strangers, and show gratitude to your acquaintances, coworkers, and friends. Surprise someone by thanking them for something they don't usually get thanked for. At the end of the day, write down three things you were grateful for. Review this gratitude journal weekly.
3. Take a walk around campus to boost your endorphins & lower stress. During your walk, look around for awe-inspiring views. Appreciate the small things you notice during this mindful walk. Savor this good feeling as you head to a coffee shop and buy a coffee for a stranger.

Thank you

RESOURCES: <http://osf.io/c28nb/>

EMAIL: tabithak@uw.edu

