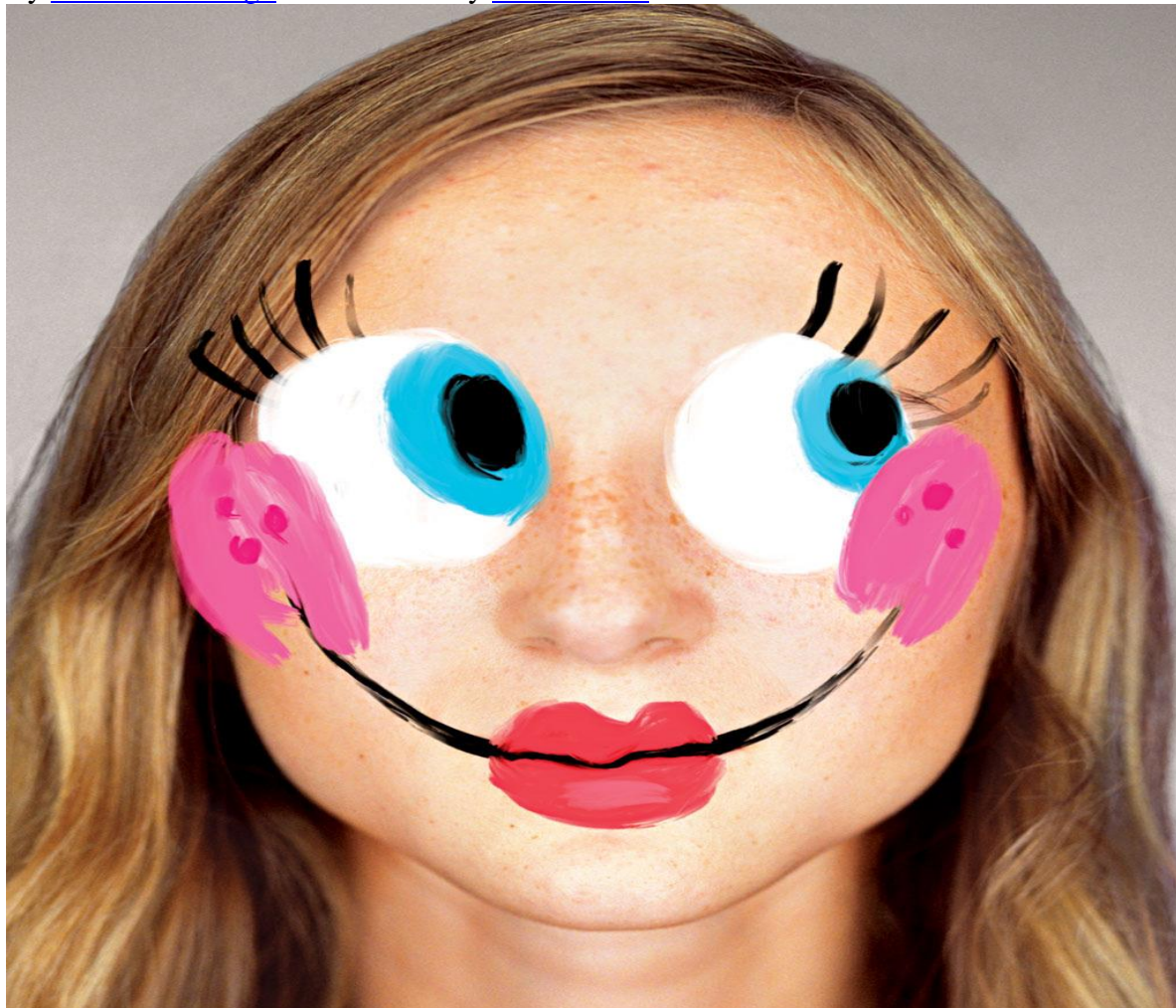




Read This Story and Get Happier

The most popular course at Yale teaches how to be happy. We took it for you.

By [Adam Sternbergh](#) Illustrations by [Zohar Lazar](#)



Professor Laurie Santos didn't set out to create the most popular course in the history of Yale University and the most talked-about college course in America. She just wanted her students to be happy. And they certainly look happy as they file into a church — a literal church, Battell Chapel, that's been converted to a lecture hall — on the Yale campus on a sunny April afternoon, lugging backpacks and chatting before taking their seats in the pews. They've just returned from a two-week spring break. The weather outside is gorgeous. Professor Santos is playing her [pre-class get-pumped playlist](#) featuring the Black-Eyed Peas' "I Gotta Feeling." And, let's not forget, all of these students are currently going to Yale. What's not to be happy about?

Quite a bit, it turns out. The very fact that Santos's new course, PSYC 157: Psychology and the Good Life, is so wildly popular, with over 1,200 enrolled students, suggests that she's on to something when she tells me one day, pre-lecture, "College students are much more overwhelmed, much more stressed, much more anxious, and much more depressed than they've ever been. I think we really have a crisis writ large at colleges in how students are doing in terms of self-care and mental health." Then she adds, "Sadly, I don't think it's just in colleges."

Santos is right on both counts. College students aren't happy, and neither is anyone else. According to a recent survey by the American College Health Association, 52 percent of students reported feeling hopeless, while 39 percent suffered from such severe depression that they had found it difficult to function at some point during the previous year. At the University of Pennsylvania, there's even a slang term for the grim mask of discontent that accompanies this condition: "Penn Face." We could go further and diagnose a national case of "USA Face," given that America recently ranked 18th in the U.N.'s ["World Happiness Report,"](#) trailing such national bastions of well-being as Finland (No. 1), Canada (No. 7), and Australia (No. 10).

Here's the Proof Americans Are Just Not As Happy As They Used to Be

In the face of this epidemic of unhappiness, Santos decided to design a course in "positive psychology" — i.e., the field of study that focuses on well-being, as opposed to psychological dysfunction. Such classes have been around for more than a decade, but they typically served as introductions to the field — sort of Happiness 101. Santos's course aims to do more. "The thing that makes this course different is that we also focus on what I call 'behavior change' — the science of how you move your behavior around," she says. "How do you actually change your habits and use your situation to your advantage?"

In her very first lecture, Santos emphasizes to her class that she wants to teach them not just the science of happiness but the practice of happiness. And happiness, it turns out, does take practice. But first you have to learn what exactly happiness is. If previous courses in this field might have been characterized as "Why Happy People Are Happy," this course could be called "What Is Happiness, Why Aren't You Happy, and What Can You Do to Change That?"

Of course, you don't have four months (or a Yale student ID) to take the entire course. So we've condensed some of the highlights and insights into a mini-course you can take right now. Let's get started: Are you ready for a pop quiz?

- (1) What is happiness?
- (2) Why aren't you happy?
- (3) What can you do to change that?

Class, please open your books to lesson No. 1.



Photo: Zohar Lazar/2014 Robert Nickelsberg

The Happiness Inventory

My finger is hovering over my laptop's mouse, but I'm afraid to click. I'm about to take a survey offered by the University of Pennsylvania titled the "Authentic Happiness Inventory." You can take this quiz too — it's [available for free online](#). It's also a prerequisite for taking Santos's course. Students take the test at the beginning to establish a baseline for their happiness, then check in at the end to see how they've progressed. In part, this is to demonstrate that if you're unhappy, you're not alone. "Being able to see that an entire giant concert hall full of people is struggling alongside you is huge," one student who took the course told the [Yale Daily News](#). "It's easy to think that everyone at Yale is getting 4.0s, loving their extracurriculars, and feeling happier than you are. But 'Psych and the Good Life' proves that is an illusion."

The reason I'm hesitating to take this happiness quiz is, to be honest, I'm a little scared to pop that illusion for myself. How happy am I, anyway? And do I really want to know quantitatively? If you asked me how I'm doing, like many people, I'd answer, "So busy! So crazy!" — the modern-day New Yorker stand-in for "Fine." If you asked me explicitly how happy I am, I'd probably say, "Pretty happy?" But the truth is I'm not sure. And I'm worried that this scientifically formulated, data-driven survey — which asks you to answer multiple-choice questions with responses ranging from "I feel like a failure" to "I feel I am extraordinarily successful" — is going to reveal to me that I am, in fact, a miserable wreck.

Luckily, after taking the quiz, we have Professor Santos's course to look forward to — 21 lectures of up-to-date findings and proven methods to increase your well-being. You can take a version of her course online for free (it's [available at coursera.com](#)). But be prepared: Before we get happiness right, we have to understand why we typically get it so wrong. The first nine (!) lectures on the Yale course syllabus feature titles like "What Doesn't Lead to Happiness I," "What Doesn't Lead to Happiness II," and "Why Your Mind Sucks."

What Santos found this year is that the revelation that many of our priorities around happiness are completely erroneous is, for a lot of students at Yale, almost too much to bear. After all, these kids are, definitionally, likely to (a) have shaped their entire lives around a set of preconceptions that have brought them to one of the premier Ivy League colleges in America and presumably set them up for a lifetime of success and (b) currently feel pretty unhappy. In one lecture, in which Santos talked about evidence that high achievement and good grades don't lead to sustained well-being, she joked that on that basis she was going to give everyone a D. She got so many panicked phone calls and emails from students and parents that she had to issue a clarification — underscoring the very point she was trying to make. "None of these calls were worried about what you were learning in class," she wrote to students in a follow-up email. "They were just really, really worried about the possibility that you might receive a bad grade."

The anxiety level forced Santos to rethink her entire approach. "I originally structured the class by talking first about those misconceptions about happiness and why the mind delivers those misconceptions — why do we think we want salary and more stuff, when ultimately it doesn't matter?" she says. "Then, later in the class, I got to the stuff that really matters. But some of the students were so confused and anxious that I ended up swapping the content. I started talking about what you can do to be happy first, because they couldn't wait for answers."

Lecture No. 1

The G.I. Joe Fallacy



Illustration: Zohar Lazar

As part of the recent anthology [*This Idea Must Die: Scientific Theories That Are Blocking Progress*](#), Santos and Tamar Gendler, a philosophy professor at Yale, submitted an essay titled “Knowing Is Half the Battle.” It discusses a phenomenon they’ve dubbed “the G.I. Joe Fallacy,” after the old *G.I. Joe* cartoon, which used the phrase “Knowing is half the battle” as a kind of tagline. This is a fallacy, they explain, because knowing, it turns out, is not half the battle. It’s not even close. “Recent work in cognitive science has demonstrated that knowing is a shockingly tiny fraction of the battle for most real-world decisions,” they explain. “You may know that \$19.99 is pretty much the same as \$20.00, but the first still feels like a significantly better deal.”

So this is where the course starts: Our minds, it turns out, are very good at persuading us to follow intuitions about happiness that turn out to be entirely wrong. To illustrate, Santos cites a test that often comes up in first-year business school: If a baseball and a bat together cost \$1.10, and the bat costs a dollar more than the ball, how much does the ball cost? For most people, the intuitive answer is ten cents. The real answer is five cents. If our brains can be so easily tricked

about something as simple as arithmetic, imagine how easily we can be tricked about our own well-being.

Now try this: Make a short list of things that you think would make you happier. They can be big things (a raise, moving to a new city, a new partner) or small (whatever looks good right now in the vending machine).

Okay — have you finished your list? Let's have a look. I have my red pen ready.

Wrong. Wrong. Wrong. Wrong. Wrong.

Nearly everything you think will make you happier won't, because nearly everything you're likely to list — assuming, of course, that your basic life needs are taken care of — is some circumstantial change: more money, a different home or job, a long vacation, or even that enticing snack that lies just beyond the vending-machine glass. Your mind is constantly telling you that if you just got those things, you'd finally, truly, unequivocally be happy. But your mind is wrong and science is right. Why? We find that out in lecture No. 2.

Lectures Nos. 2 to 5

What Doesn't Make Us Happy

In her second lecture, Santos looks at the work of Sonja Lyubomirsky, a psychologist at the University of California, Riverside, and the author of [*The How of Happiness*](#). Lyubomirsky is well known for her thought experiment about what affects our happiness, which she expresses in a pie chart: She proposes that roughly 50 percent of happiness is determined by genes (i.e., totally out of your control), roughly 10 percent is determined by circumstance (i.e., somewhat out of your control), and the final 40 percent is determined by your thoughts, actions, and attitudes (i.e., entirely within your control). You can see why her book was originally titled *The 40 Percent Solution*.

The takeaway is simply this: We are inclined to assume that circumstances play the biggest role in our happiness, when research suggests they play the smallest role. (Lyubomirsky is quick to point out that this is only true if your most basic needs are met. If you're a Syrian refugee, or stuck in an abusive relationship, then your circumstances obviously play an outsize role in your well-being.) What's more, we grossly underestimate the extent to which changing our behaviors, rather than our circumstances, can significantly increase our well-being. "What we believe would make a huge difference in our lives actually, according to scientific research, makes only a small difference, while we overlook the true sources of personal happiness and well-being," Lyubomirsky writes.

So what are the true sources of personal happiness? The best way psychologists have found to determine what makes people happy is to reverse-engineer happiness by studying the habits of people who already identify as happy. This is an inexact method, for reasons of correlation versus causation: You may be both happy and tall, but that doesn't mean being tall is what makes

you happy. But there are certain habits that have been shown to be consistent among happy people. Happy people devote time to family and friends. They practice gratitude. They practice optimism. [They are physically active.](#) They “savor life’s pleasures and try to live in the present moment,” as Lyubomirsky puts it.

It’s no great shock that being more optimistic, more grateful, and even more physically active can lead to greater happiness. If you enrolled in the most popular course in the history of Yale just to find that out, you might feel a little let down.

But remember: We have an entire semester to go.

Midterm Exam

The Price of Happiness

I know — you’re all for gratitude journals and mindfulness and savoring the moment, but secretly you want to skip ahead to the part of the course where we talk about the question you’re no doubt asking right now: What about money? “Money can’t buy happiness” is an aphorism you learn around the same time you’re old enough to read your first fortune cookie, but ... money *can* buy happiness, right? Otherwise, why are we so obsessed with it? To quote Danny DeVito in the David Mamet film *Heist*: “Everyone needs money. That’s why it’s called money.”

Here’s another finding from Lyubomirsky: When people making \$30,000 a year are asked what kind of annual salary it would take to make them truly happy, the average answer is \$50,000. When you ask the same question of people making \$100,000 a year, you’d expect them to say, “I’m double-happy! I make twice the happiness threshold!” Instead, what they actually say, on average, is that if they made \$250,000 a year, then they’d be truly happy.

You might think that means there is no set monetary amount that brings happiness, but that’s not entirely true, either. There is a set amount, and it’s \$75,000. At least, that’s what the Nobel Prize-winning economists Daniel Kahneman and Angus Deaton found when they studied 1,000 American households. Reported well-being rises with income until you hit \$75,000, at which point it levels off. Beyond that, there’s no observable increase in happiness with higher income.

There’s some debate over that finding, and other economists have found that people’s happiness does rise as their income increases (though that may be because they’ve been conditioned to associate wealth with higher life satisfaction, even as their actual well-being remains static). But the point remains that once our basic needs are met — lodging, food, etc. — the relationship between money and happiness becomes purely theoretical.

For Santos, the goal of such research is to prompt her students to reconsider their own priorities. She notes that in 1967, when incoming freshmen in American colleges were asked what they valued, 87 percent reported that “developing a meaningful philosophy of life” was important to them, while only 42 percent valued being “well-off financially.” By 2005, those numbers had reversed: 71 percent of freshmen valued being well-off, while only 52 percent valued a

meaningful life philosophy. Santos does offer a silver lining for her students, pointing out that the median income level of Yale grads by age 34 is \$76,000 — almost exactly the salary scientifically proven to provide the maximum amount of well-being.

Special Assignment

Time Affluence



Illustration: Zohar Lazar

To understand why we overvalue the role of money in happiness, let's skip ahead to a “special event” scheduled on the syllabus for right after the midterm.

Pop quiz: If you suddenly found you had an extra \$100, what would you do with it?

Now: What would you do if you suddenly found you had an extra hour?

With the money, chances are you'd be inclined to use it on a treat — to buy something you did not budget for otherwise, rather than paying off an existing debt. With time, it's the opposite: There's a good chance you'd use that hour to catch up on work, rather than go for a walk or visit a museum you'd otherwise not have time to do.

As a time-starved New Yorker, I found this reversal particularly intriguing. Sixty percent of working parents report feeling “always” rushed, and 80 percent of working adults, with or without children, would like to have more time to spend with loved ones. In psychology, this

sense of not having enough time is known as “time famine.” The sense of having plenty of time is called “time affluence.”

Affluence is a fitting analogy, as time and money are both commodities. We see them as literally equivalent: “Time is money.” We think of both as scarce and therefore valuable: We “spend” and “waste” and “save” them both. Yet it turns out we do a terrible job of valuing time and money correctly — in part because we don’t understand the kind of commodities they really are.

Here, Santos draws on the work of Ashley Whillans, an assistant professor at Harvard Business School, and Elizabeth Dunn, a professor at the University of British Columbia, who have studied how we value time versus money and how our attitudes affect our well-being. First, we have to understand a crucial difference between them: As a personal commodity, money is extremely elastic, in that you can theoretically accumulate an infinite amount of it, and your income fluctuates at different points in your life. Time, by contrast, is intrinsically inelastic: You cannot accumulate more of it, and you’ve never had any less of it. You get the same amount of minutes and hours in every day of your life.

By that reasoning, an hour should be much more valuable than a dollar — yet we consistently behave as if the opposite were true. For example: Would you accept a new job with a 20 percent higher salary if it meant a 25 percent longer workweek or a 50 percent longer commute? If so, you are valuing your monetary affluence over your time affluence. You are what Whillans and Dunn would call a “Morgan” — in their studies, they use the figures of “Taylor” (who values time) and “Morgan” (who values money) and ask respondents to identify with one or the other. Interestingly, people are reliably split evenly on whom they identify with. Yet the Taylors of the world report a much higher level of overall happiness in other areas of life.

Another illogical way in which we value these two commodities: An abundance of money is considered a status symbol, while an abundance of time is considered shameful. That’s why, in America, there’s a premium on busyness — on having a deficit of time. (According to research, this does not hold true in many other cultures, where there is no stigma to an abundance of time.)

In another study, Whillans and Dunn engineered an experiment in which participants were offered \$40 and required to spend it on a time-saving purchase of their own devising. Some ordered takeout; some used the money on a house cleaner; some employed a neighborhood kid to finish up that lingering yard work. Later, the same participants were offered another \$40, this time with the instruction that they had to spend it on a material good, like a book or an item of clothing. The test subjects were reliably happier when they spent the money to buy time — and they reported that their happiness was directly associated with that alleviation of time pressure. (Let’s overlook, for the moment, the fact that this means you can, indeed, buy happiness — by purchasing time from other, less affluent people.)

As for Santos, she came up with a straightforward way of communicating the concept of time affluence to her students. After the midterm, when they arrived on the day of the “special event,” Santos and her teaching assistants handed out flyers at the door of the lecture hall that read “Class is canceled. Go practice time affluence. You have one free hour.” The only proviso was that they were not allowed to fill that hour with work. They had to do something unexpected:

Read for pleasure. Take a hike. Meet a friend for coffee. One student was so grateful for this one-hour reprieve in her overpacked schedule that, at news of this gift, she started to cry.

Lectures Nos. 13 to 20



Photo: Zohar Lazar

Synthetic Happiness

If Santos originally front-loaded her course with information debunking our notions of happiness, the back end is packed with scientifically tested methods to actively improve your well-being — ways to “rewire” your brain toward happiness. She calls these “course rewirements,” a pun so egregious that she acknowledges it in the syllabus with a self-conscious groan. Throughout the class, students use a ReWi app specially developed for the course to alter their behavior and enhance their well-being. They aren’t tests per se but exercises designed for self-betterment: Keep a daily gratitude journal for seven days; take a survey to determine your signature strengths; get at least seven hours of sleep for three days in a row.

This rewirement, though, involves a fundamental reassessment of what happiness is and how it works — not just how to achieve it but whether it’s something that we even “achieve.” Because there’s excellent evidence that it is not.

At a certain point, you might ask: How realistic are these “rewirements” for the rest of us who aren’t going to Yale? It’s all well and good to tell people to value time over money, or to practice mindfulness, but if you’re holding down three part-time jobs and barely making rent, are these

tips really applicable to your life? If your life is objectively stressful, is there any hope for you to be happy?

Let's take that question even further. Ask yourself this: If you were hit by a car today and paralyzed from the neck down, do you think you'd be happier in five years than you are right now? Or less so?

Answer: Neither. You'd be about the same.

This is the surprising finding of Harvard psychologist Dan Gilbert, the author of [*Stumbling on Happiness*](#) and a proponent of the concept of “synthetic happiness.” Gilbert makes the somewhat radical claim that happiness isn't something we chase or achieve but rather something we manufacture. In other words, you don't find happiness — you make it.

Gilbert cites a famous study in which people who recently won the lottery or suffered permanent paralysis were asked to rate their own happiness, and then compared to a control group. The lottery winners, on average, were slightly happier than the control group, and the recently disabled were slightly less happy — but neither group diverged from the norm as drastically as would be expected. In fact, according to Gilbert, most of the test subjects returned to their baseline levels of happiness after three months, whether they had hit the jackpot or ended up in a wheelchair for life. The reason, he argues, is the existence of a “psychological immune system” that prevents our happiness level from being spiked by external circumstances, good or bad. Much like our physical immune system, which should neither be hypoactive (failing to attack enemy viruses) nor hyperactive (overzealously attacking our own cells), a healthy psychological immune system allows us to recognize setbacks (“I've been laid off”) without collapsing into despondency (“I am a total disaster with no prospects”).

What's more, Gilbert's research into what he calls “prospection” — basically, thinking about the future, a trait that humans alone exhibit — shows that we are very bad at guessing our reactions to both advantageous and adverse events. Things that seem terrible when they're looming in the future (“I'm going to be fired!” “My partner is going to dump me!”) are actually not that bad in the rearview mirror (“I got fired and ended up pursuing my dream of being a sculptor!” “My boyfriend was a loser anyway, and I'm glad to be rid of him!”).

Happiness, in the end, is a mind-set to be cultivated, not a condition to be imposed. By the time students complete the course, Santos hopes that they'll not just be happier but also have a variety of tools that enable them to take control of their happiness. This, above all, is what she imagines motivated so many students to enroll in her course in the first place. “Honestly, my sense is that students don't like the culture here — they don't like a culture where everybody is overwhelmed and feeling stressed but too scared to admit it,” she says. “They saw this course as something that might allow for the cultural change they're seeking — or at least start a conversation about it.”

Final Exam

How Happy Can You Be?

At the beginning of the class, Santos made an admission to her students. She decided to develop this class in part because she felt her students needed it, in part because she felt the world needed it, and in part because she felt she needed it. She, too, had taken the Authentic Happiness Inventory — the one I was so hesitant to get started on — and found she was less happy than she'd hoped. She didn't just want to introduce these tools to her students — she wanted to apply them to herself.

Like her students, she took the survey again when the course concluded. She found that her happiness, as measured on a scale of one to five, had increased over the year by a full point. Her students experienced a similar benefit. "I didn't realize how challenging it would be to better myself," one says. "I'm glad the class was difficult — it made me work harder to get more sleep, meditate, and practice gratitude more."

I recalled this outcome when I came to the end of my own Authentic Happiness Inventory. As I worked my way through question after intimidating question, I realized that the survey itself had pulled off a sneaky trick: Like the course, the survey got me thinking about happiness in a new way. So when it asked me to choose on a spectrum from "I have sorrow in my life" to "My life is filled with joy," I had to admit that, despite some recent sorrowful events, including a death in the family, my life feels suffused with joy. When facing the survey's final question — a choice ranging from "My life is a bad one" to "My life is a wonderful one" — the very act of having taken the time to reflect on what I have to be grateful for, how happy I am, and what happiness really means, left me thinking that, yeah, my life is a good one, all in all.

In the end, I scored a 3.79 out of 5. That puts me in the 80th percentile of happiness for people of my gender, age, and Zip Code. There's room for improvement, and, thanks to this course and the research it draws on, I have lots of ideas of how to go about it. (This afternoon, for example, I'm going to cancel an appointment and do something pointless for an hour.) The first lesson of Psychology and the Good Life is that happiness is something worth working at. The final lesson is that the class never truly ends. But for now, as scores go, I'm pretty happy with it.

How Happy Are You?

Choose the description that best applies to you:

1

- (a) I feel like a failure.
- (b) I do not feel like a winner.
- (c) I feel like I have succeeded more than most people.
- (d) As I look back on my life, all I see are victories.
- (e) I feel I am extraordinarily successful.

2

- (a) My life does not have any purpose or meaning.
- (b) I do not know my purpose or meaning in life.
- (c) I have a hint about the purpose of my life.
- (d) I have a pretty good idea about the purpose or meaning of my life.
- (e) I have a very clear idea about the purpose or meaning of my life.

3

- (a) I am usually in a bad mood.
- (b) I am usually in a neutral mood.
- (c) I am usually in a good mood.
- (d) I am usually in a great mood.
- (e) I am usually in an unbelievably great mood.

To determine your own happiness rating, complete the Authentic Happiness Inventory [here](#).

Listen and Learn

Professor Santos's highly unscientific happiness playlist.

Guest Lecture

Keep It Down



“A lot of people think of happiness as a very, very exciting emotion. They expect it to be this constant state of ecstasy — as opposed to equanimity, which is a more sustainable and attainable form of happiness, almost like a quiet joy. It doesn’t look like winning the lottery. It looks much more like sitting quietly and noticing that your life is actually wonderful.” —**Hedy Kober**, Yale University

Think Small



“One thing people get wrong about happiness is they focus on the extraordinary instead of the ordinary. We think that happiness comes from big or transformative experiences, but we neglect how we can spend moments in happier ways on a daily basis. All my research says that the best way people can be happier is to spend \$40 on a time-saving service. Instead of fighting with your spouse over who should do the laundry, hire a laundry service. Forgo that time fighting to make a meal together or go for a walk with the person you love.” —**Ashley Whillans**, Harvard Business School

Can Money Buy Happiness?



“The biggest misconception is that more will be better. We did a survey of millionaires and asked, ‘How much more money would you need to be a perfect ten in happiness?’ People with \$1 million said, ‘Three times as much.’ But people with \$3 million also said, ‘Three times as much.’ All the way up. Money doesn’t make people *unhappy*. It’s just not the only currency that’s important.” —**Michael Norton**, Harvard Business School

Interviews by Katie Heaney

Extra Credit

Keep a Daily Gratitude Journal



For the next week, write down at least five things for which you’re grateful every day. These can be big things (your kids) or small things (the Twizzlers you bought at the corner deli didn’t taste like they’d been there for eight months). One study found that, in **severely depressed patients, taking the time to record just three things daily over 15 days led to a reported increase in well-being** in 94 percent of respondents.

Leave Your Phone in Your Pocket



As Charles Duhigg explains in [*The Power of Habit*](#), MIT researchers discovered a behavioral “loop” at the core of our habits. The loop is cue, routine, reward. The cue might be “hunger,” the routine might be “go to the vending machine,” and the reward might be “Doritos.” One of today’s most common loops goes like this: cue = boredom, routine = pull out smartphone, reward = a few moments of empty stimulation. So try this: Next time you feel the boredom cue, **leave your phone where it is and consciously choose a reward that contributes to well-being.** Two of the best rewards, happiness-wise: starting a conversation with a stranger or being more present in the moment.

Insights

Be a Slow Samaritan



Research shows that helping others makes us happy. But what prevents us from helping others? Researchers at Princeton studied three groups of seminary students on their way to a meeting who passed a needy person on the sidewalk. The first group had plenty of time, the second had a little time, and the third was in a rush. The finding: Seminarians in the unrushed group were far more likely to stop and help than the ones pressed for time. So next time you’re headed for the subway, leave ten minutes early.

Meditate

Researchers have conclusively linked increased happiness with a meditation practice of even as little as ten minutes per day.

Be Responsible



Having responsibility over something else — a kid, a pet, a garden — makes you happier. In one study, residents of a nursing home were given plants. Half were charged with caring for the plant themselves; half were told that a staff member would do it for them. **After six months, 30 percent of those who outsourced their plant care had died** — twice the rate of those who cared for the plants themselves.

Sleep = Happiness

Stanford researchers found that resolving insomnia in depressed patients doubled the success rate of treating their depression.

Key Terms

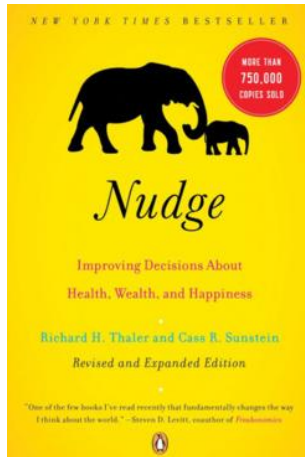
What Is WOOP?

In studying people's good intentions, psychology professor Gabriele Oettingen of NYU discovered something unexpected: Positive thinking can actually impede the likelihood of attaining our goals. That's because we focus on [our ideal outcome](#) (I want to lose weight) rather than the obstacles we'll face to get there (pizza is delicious). So Oettingen developed a tactic called WOOP to overcome hurdles.

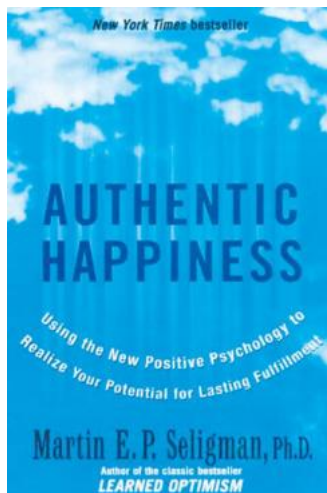
First you identify your **wish** (losing weight) and imagine the **outcome** (having lost weight). Then you think about a likely **obstacle** (I love pizza) and make a concrete **plan** to get around it (avoid all pizzerias). WOOP!

Required Reading

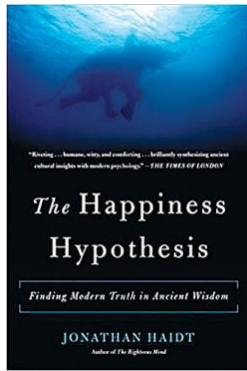
Five must-reads from the PSYC 157 syllabus.



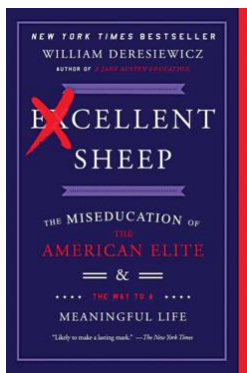
☛ [*Nudge*](#), by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein. Why we make bad decisions and how to make better ones; may be most-cited book on the syllabus.



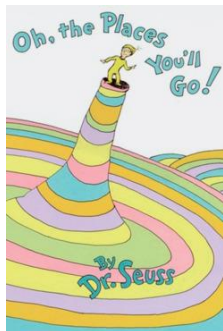
☛ [*Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*](#), by Martin Seligman. A primer from the pioneer of positive psychology.



👉 [*The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*](#), by Jonathan Haidt. An ethics professor from NYU explores how recent research intersects with religious traditions.



👉 [*Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*](#), by William Deresiewicz. Argues that Ivy League schools instill the wrong values in students.



👉 [*Oh, the Places You'll Go!*](#), by Dr. Seuss. Children's classic about boundless horizons; on the reading list for the final class.

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