



## The Oxford handbook of happiness

Susan A. David, Ilona Boniwell, Amanda Conley Ayers (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2013, ISBN: 978-0-19-955725-7 (cloth), 1097pp

Review by

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### 1. Introduction (Weijers)

*The Oxford Handbook of Happiness* is the most comprehensive single volume on the subject of happiness. This long-anticipated landmark collection, along with the similarly ambitious *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life Research* (A. Michalos, ed. 2013, Springer) shows happiness scholarship coming of age and spreading outward into new themes and disciplines as well as forward into policy and practice. The book takes a broad definition of happiness and its contents span positive psychology and interdisciplinary (but psychology-focused) happiness studies. On the whole, the handbook is a remarkable achievement in that it covers most of the basic contemporary knowledge about happiness as well as giving glimpses of more advanced and specific findings. It is remarkable to attain this level of coverage because about 10,000 publications on happiness are released each year (Diener & Scollon, 2013). This coverage makes the book the perfect resource for any student intent on studying happiness and any experienced researcher who wants to enter the field of happiness studies. Established happiness researchers could also benefit from owning this book because the rapid expansion of research on happiness has made it increasingly difficult for them to keep abreast of the recent research trends and findings in the sub-fields of happiness research that they do not specialize in. Furthermore, readers can use the book as a starting point for their happiness research with a high level of confidence because all the authors are recognized authorities in their respective areas and (perhaps with one or two exceptions) have provided excellent chapters that justify their status as 'authorities'.

Some of the reviewers were particularly impressed with the extent to which the book transcends the traditional limitations of both positive psychology and moral philosophy to include many contributions emphasizing social, ecological, political, and policy dimensions of the study of happiness. Perhaps inevitably though, other reviewers would have appreciated additional sections or chapters. For example, very little attention is given to biological aspects of happiness, such as health, evolutionary considerations, and the neuroscience of happiness. The same might also be said for economic, and possibly ecological, research related to happiness. But, given the book is already over 1,000 pages long, it seems unreasonable to bemoan a lack of depth on possible topics too loudly.

On the whole, the editors should be commended for their choices of contributors and topics, and for their ability to keep the chapters to a length that nearly always manages to maintain a fine balance between depth and readability. Unfortunately, the book is priced at



about GB£115 or US\$180, with second hand versions only marginally cheaper. At this price, many students, and possibly some researchers, will have to rely on their library getting copies. The Oxford University Press (OUP) website claims that an ebook version is available, which, for anyone with a tablet or other ebook-reading device, would certainly be preferable to reading straight from the (enormous and heavy) book. According to an agent of OUP, however, the ebook is available only through institutional suppliers.

The remainder of this review briefly describes and evaluates the sections and chapters of the book. One author (as indicated next to the section title) is responsible for each section review.

## 2. Section I: Psychological approaches to happiness (Chadwick)

The first section of *The Oxford Handbook of Happiness*, 'Psychological Approaches to Happiness,' begins with an introduction by Joar Vittersø (Chapter 2), followed by 8 thematic chapters. This section, like the entire volume, boasts eminent researchers of happiness. Readers familiar with the field will appreciate the authors' concise, up-to-date, and rigorous summaries, and novices can take comfort knowing each chapter provides an authoritative peek into many years of research.

Vittersø delivers what one expects from an introduction. He notes the flow and unique contributions to the section as he provides an articulate synopsis of how each chapter delivers on a psychological approach to happiness, interspersed with salient examples.

The thematic chapters begin with a discussion of positive emotions as a central psychological approach to happiness (Chapter 3; Conway, Tugade, Catalino, and Fredrickson). The chapter outlines the function of positive emotions as *broadening* attention, cognition and social cognition, all of which contribute to *building* wellbeing and resilience.

The presentation of the widely known Broaden and Build theory of positive emotions in Chapter 3 provides a solid transition to Chapter 4 and the Endowment-Contrast Model (E-C Model; Griffin and Gonzalez). The E-C Model describes happiness as bound by cognition and decision-making; it is a more complex and context-rich mode of understanding wellbeing than most extant theories (e.g. the Hedonic Adaptation). Progressively through the chapter, the authors provide a coherent critique of wellbeing indices, while making a strong case for the utility of the E-C Model and its mathematical formulation in wellbeing measurement.

Delle Fave reviews the past and present of flow as well as proposing future directions for flow research in Chapter 5. It is one of two chapters from the section to dedicate a subsection to the discussion of culture. Her interesting critique of the validity of flow across cultures is bound to pique the readers' curiosity and engage their critical thinking.

Returning to emotions as psychological approaches to happiness, in Chapter 6 Crum and Salovey show how emotions are powerful communicators, facilitators and motivators with functional importance. They persuasively call for greater emotional intelligence in relation to all types of emotion, negative and positive, in order to funnel the "weather pattern of emotions" into fulfilling valued goals and living a fulfilling life.

Religion takes center stage in Chapter 7 and the relationship between it and wellbeing is not straightforward, as Myers outlines. Religion is a positive associate of wellbeing when analyses are at the individual level and a negative associate when analyses are conducted at the group-level. Chapter 7 not only questions the role of religion in happiness, but also the methodological approach to its measurement. On the whole, however, and to the potential dismay of atheists, Myers concludes religion is good for happiness.

In an approach unique to the section, Ferssizidi, Kashdan, Marquart, and Steger use psychopathology as the launching point into psychological approaches to happiness in Chapter 8. The authors clearly suggest routes to building the evidence base for the relationships between positive emotions and psychopathology within the literature. They also match specific positive interventions to specific disorders based on the current limited state of research.

In Chapter 9 Boa and Lyubomirsky review the evidence that happiness is more than a correlate or end-result, arguing that happiness also causes positive outcomes. This chapter is a concise version of the seminal review by Lyubomirsky, King and Diener (2005), with little new information; however, the value of this research cannot be overstated. Chapter 9 is a must read.

Pavot and Diener conclude the section with an up-to-date review of subjective wellbeing (SWB). They include a contemporary outline of the relationship between heritability and SWB, and articulately examine the complex area of SWB and culture. Chapter 10 would be equally well placed in Section 2, 'Psychological Definitions of Happiness,' and therefore provides a seamless transition to the section. The writing in the 'Psychological Approaches to Happiness' section was highly accessible and simultaneously maintained enough scope and depth for the various interests and specialties of its readers.

### 3. Section II: Psychological definitions of happiness (Angner)

In their introduction to the volume, the three editors note that they "chose to consider happiness in its broadest sense, treating it as an umbrella concept for notions such as well-being, subjective well-being, psychological well-being, hedonism, eudaimonia, health, flourishing, and so on" (p. 3). This makes for an exceptionally broad conception of happiness. It can reasonably be asked whether anything simultaneously non-trivial and true can be said of a construct with such magnificent scope.

Section II, titled 'Psychological Definitions of Happiness,' examines ways in which particular researchers have sharpened their definitions of happiness. The aim of the Section, as Joar Vittersø explains in his introductory Chapter 11, is two-fold: "to explore the many understandings of happiness that exist today and illustrate that without conceptual clarifications, the study of happiness hardly makes sense" (156).

Chapter 13, by Felicity F. Miao, Minkyung Koo, and Shigehiro Oishi, begins by simply stating the definition associated with the work of Ed Diener and co-authors (174). According to this definition, which is widely used, SWB is the sum of an affective and a cognitive component. Having mentioned this, the authors outline the history of happiness research, review measurement issues, summarize current findings, and speculate about future research.

Ruut Veenhoven's Chapter 12, titled 'Notions of the Good Life,' begins by pointing out that "happiness" can be used in a wider sense to denote "the quality of life as a whole," and in a narrower sense to refer to "a moment of bliss" (161). Apparently disagreeing with the volume editors' all-encompassing definition of happiness, he proceeds to argue that "we cannot meaningfully put all the good in one hat." In the interest of clarifying what we are talking about when we talk about happiness, Veenhoven distinguishes "chances," or preconditions, from "outcomes," and "internal qualities" from "external qualities" (161–162). In this way he obtains a 2x2 grid of things that one might legitimately be concerned with when one is concerned with happiness. In addition, he helpfully locates the area of interest of other contributors to the volume within the grid, thereby providing a visual representation of psychological conceptions of happiness.

Chapter 14, 'Measuring Happiness and Subjective Well-Being' by Robert A. Cummins, follows Veenhoven in noting the extraordinary range of constructs referred to by the term

“happiness” (185). Cummins examines a selection of definitions of happiness, focusing especially on definitions that treat happiness as part of SWB. Two approaches are subsequently discussed in some detail: discrepancy theories, which consider SWB to be a function of the discrepancy between achievement and aspiration, and tripartite models, which treat SWB as constituted by three separate components, e.g., positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction. About two-thirds of the Chapter, however, deals with measurement issues in a review of qualitative vs. quantitative approaches and a discussion of the special challenges facing measurement in low-functioning populations and cross-cultural contexts. Cummins finishes with two sections, in one of which he presents a list of scales that he thinks ought to be avoided and in the other a list of scales whose use he recommends.

Veronika Huta’s ‘Eudaimonia’ (Chapter 15) may be the most useful contribution to the section on psychological definitions of happiness. While the chapter ostensibly deals with *eudaimonia*, which in her words concerns “using and developing the best in oneself, in accordance with one’s true self and one’s deeper principles,” she explicitly contrasts it with *hedonia*, which concerns “pleasure and enjoyment.” She traces the differences between the two approaches to ancient Greek philosophy, and in the following pages succeeds in situating a remarkable array of philosophers and psychologists within her philosophical framework. She discusses factor-analytic justifications for the distinction and offers a one-page bullet-point summary of the themes common to eudaimonic approaches. With a concluding discussion about sociological themes and future directions, this chapter should prove very useful indeed.

Chapters 16 and 17 center on two specific approaches to wellbeing in psychological literature. ‘What Makes for a Life Well Lived? Autonomy and its Relation to Full Functioning and Organismic Wellness,’ by Christopher P. Niemiec and Richard M. Ryan, discusses self-determination theory, which is firmly grounded in the eudaimonic tradition and treats human beings as “proactive organisms who seek out opportunities to feel choiceful, effective, and close to important others” (217). The chapter leaves it open whether self-determination theory is best understood as a conception of happiness, as suggested by the earlier section on “philosophical views of ‘the good life’” (215), or as an empirical theory of the antecedents of the good life, as suggested by the defense of self-determination theory in light of its effect on an undefined concept of “wellness” (216, 218). ‘Functional Well-Being: Happiness as Feelings, Evaluations, and Functioning’ argues against the idea that wellbeing can be measured on a one-dimensional scale (238–239). Vittersø reviews evidence to the effect that feelings, emotions, and evaluations have many dimensions; to the extent that wellbeing is about such things, then, it follows that wellbeing must have many dimensions too. He also argues that SWB should be complemented with an account of optimal human functioning, which is partly independent of feelings, emotions, and evaluations, as it relates to autonomy, social relations, meaning and personal growth.

Besides the obvious differences between the contributors, e.g., regarding conceptions of happiness, there are occasional dissonant notes. The authors disagree about the emergence of systematic empirical study of happiness. Vittersø writes that, with the exception of some scattered earlier attempts, “happiness research was not born until the end of the 1950s” (156). Cummins says that “[the] systematic study of SWB is now over 35 years old,” explaining that two publications in 1976 “launched the idea that SWB could be reliably measured” (186). (An early paper in this Journal argued that the modern science of happiness is part of an uninterrupted research stream going back at least to the 1920s and 1930s; Angner, 2011). Meanwhile, Miao, Koo, and Oishi trace the scientific study of wellbeing back to 1899 (174). The authors also disagree about what theories are empirically adequate. Consider set-point theory.

Cummins asserts that people have a “deep and stable positive mood state” that “represents the SWB ‘set-point’ for each person” and which “the homeostatic system seeks to defend” (188), and Vittersø claims that “the function of pleasure is to communicate that the return to the homeostatic set-point has been successful” (230). Yet, Bruce Heady, in Chapter 66, calls set-point theory “of limited scope and stultifying in its implications” and argues that it “cannot be satisfactorily defended” (897–898).

In their Introduction to the Volume, David, Boniwell, and Conley Ayers claim that theirs is the first book worldwide to heed Martin Seligman’s call to unite psychologists, economists, sociologists, policy-makers, philosophers, and others, and that the book was intended as “the definitive text for scholars, researchers, teachers, and practitioners interested and invested in the study and practice of human happiness” (1). “To unite” can be understood in different ways. But the section on psychological definitions of happiness illustrates just how far from unified the science of happiness remains, even when we limit our attention to “psychological” definitions, thereby leaving the philosophical, economic, religious, and spiritual out of the picture. The section clearly illustrates Vittersø’s point that the study of happiness makes little sense in the absence of conceptual clarification.

That said, the section is useful in many ways. In the conclusion to his chapter, Cummins offers the following recommendation: “Future researchers can assist the process of conceptual consolidation by clearly stating why they have selected their scale of choice from the vast array available” (196). This is sound advice, though one might add that future researchers should also state why a concern with happiness in the editors’ broad sense of happiness (or quality of life, or wellbeing) inspired them to focus on one construct rather than another. Just as researchers are expected to be able to defend their choice of statistical methodology, when required, they should also be expected to defend their choice of construct and scale. In reviewing a number of conceptions of happiness that appear (implicitly or explicitly) in the psychology of happiness, along with recommended measurement tools and standard results, the section offers a helpful bird’s-eye view of the current state of the study of happiness, warts and all.

#### **4. Section III: Philosophical approaches to happiness (Weijers)**

The ‘Philosophical Approaches to Happiness’ section is broad in scope but narrow in terms of the take-home messages. Although some of the authors in this section do not reside in philosophy departments, all the eight chapters (including the introduction) demonstrate philosophical methods in their approaches to happiness. On the whole, the chapters are generally accurate, very well written, interesting, and of value to at least philosophers and all social scientists interested in happiness.

The editors should be praised for the impressive scope of the section, which includes discussions of happiness from Eastern, Western, Historical, Contemporary, Analytical, and Continental philosophical perspectives. But, perhaps surprisingly, the main points made in each chapter are remarkably similar. Indeed, readers of this section could be forgiven for thinking that all kinds of philosophers throughout history have nearly all agreed that happiness is not as valuable as it is generally perceived to be and certainly less valuable than other commonly discussed goods (e.g., meaning and virtue).

James O. Pawelski’s introduction (Chapter 18) summarizes the section nicely and provides just enough information on the subsequent chapters to whet the appetite for more detail. I attempt something similar with the chapter summary below.



Darrin M. McMahon's fascinating historical overview of happiness in Western culture (Chapter 19) summarizes some key themes from his monumental book *The Pursuit of Happiness*. McMahon discusses how people related to happiness in Ancient Greece, during the Christianity-dominated Middle Ages, and during the Enlightenment. His message is similar to that of John Stuart Mill and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: pursue something meaningful and happiness will come as by-product.

Providing an interesting counterpart to McMahon's overview of happiness in Western culture, Philip J. Ivanhoe discusses the concept of happiness in the work of two prominent Chinese figures: Kongzi (Confucius) and Zhuangzi (Chapter 20). Although there are differences that Ivanhoe identifies, Kongzi and Zhuangzi both see the happy life as a meaningful one lived in accordance with the Dao (the Way), and not as one that is focused on the self or material things. This chapter might have been more useful if it was more general in its approach, discussing a wider range of Eastern views on happiness.

Emmy van Deurzen provides an overview of the nineteenth and twentieth century Continental philosophy relevant to happiness (Chapter 21). Van Deurzen describes continental philosophy as "deliberately unsettling in nature and challenging to the status quo" (p. 280). True to this 'challenging' description, all of the Continental philosophers discussed by van Deurzen decry the focus on happiness as the greatest value. Indeed, they often deplore the pursuit of happiness because it can obfuscate the truly valuable things in life, such as truth, passion, reason, and meaning.

Summarizing his many years of work on happiness, Raymond Angelo Belliotti provides an example of modern philosophizing by thought experiments (Chapter 22). Belliotti provides several examples of happy lives that are nonetheless not particularly desirable because they lack truth, meaning, or moral value. He proposes a distinction between happiness as feeling good and worthwhile happiness as positive emotions that have been earned through our moral actions in the real world. But even worthwhile happiness, Belliotti concludes, is not the greatest good, or even always a great good, because it can interfere with leading a meaningful and virtuous life.

Daniel M. Haybron (Chapter 23) is slightly more sanguine about the importance of happiness, but agrees with Belliotti that being happy is not as important as being virtuous. Haybron provides interesting criticisms of defining and measuring satisfaction with life that psychologists and especially economists should take note of. The most important of these criticisms is that how satisfied someone is with their life depends most importantly on how high their expectations are for their lives—something that does not have a lot to do with wellbeing. Haybron prefers an 'emotional state' definition of happiness that includes feelings of happiness, but is most importantly captured by mentally responding as if things are going well—psychically affirming one's life.

Valerie Tiberius's chapter (Chapter 24) discusses what philosophers do and how that is relevant to the empirical study of happiness. In addition to mentioning philosophers' renowned prowess at conceptual analysis, Tiberius also clearly articulates how philosophers make their arguments and reach their conclusions. Given that her chapter puts the section in context, it might have been better suited placed at the start of the section.

James O. Pawelski's chapter (Chapter 25) on happiness and its opposites is an excellent example of how philosophical analysis can make a seemingly simple question extremely complex and then answer the question elegantly anyway. Pawelski points out that unhappiness is not straightforwardly the opposite of happiness (something psychologists had discovered

empirically), since the absence of unhappiness does not result in happiness, and happiness and unhappiness can coexist.

### 5. Section IV: Spiritual approaches to happiness (Joshanloo)

Existing data indicate that spirituality and religion are central to many people's lives and may come to influence their understanding of what a good life consists in. These spiritual and religious approaches to defining and achieving a good life have been largely neglected in conceptualizing and measuring happiness in Western psychology. Section IV (titled 'Spiritual Approaches to Happiness') was prepared with the aim of providing a summary of the scholarship in this area. Authors in this section approach the concept of happiness from a religious/spiritual vantage point, and review some spiritual methods that are helpful in achieving happiness.

Chapters 27, 28, 29, and 32 largely discuss what an Eastern conceptualization of happiness is like, and highlight major differences in the concept of happiness between Asia and the West. For example, Matthieu Ricard (Chapter 27) points out that while individuals in Western societies emphasize the maximization of pleasure, the Buddhist conceptualization of happiness does not regard pleasure as a major component of happiness. G.T. Maurits Kwee (Chapter 28) underlines the fact that while in Western psychology the self is defined as an independent agent, in Buddhism the self is regarded as a relational being with no clear boundaries with the non-self. Similar views can be found in Hinduism. According to Kiran Kumar Salagame (Chapter 29), the Hindu concept of happiness is not individualistic and pleasure-based. Jane Henry (Chapter 32) points to another cross-cultural difference. That is, whereas high arousal emotions (e.g., euphoria and excitement) are highly valued in the West, low arousal emotions (e.g., contentment and inner peace) are more favored in the East. These authors make it clear that in Eastern traditions (as opposed to in the West) the building blocks of happiness are higher values and virtues (vs. pleasure and positive emotions), living in harmony with our relational self (vs. autonomy and individualization), and experiencing low (vs. high) arousal emotions.

Chapters 30 and 32 review the potential of mindfulness and meditation techniques to facilitate happiness, and provide supporting empirical evidence. Admitting that the existing evidence is still not decisive, Peter Malinowski (Chapter 30) concludes that the evidence does suggest that these techniques can be beneficial for mental health. Finally, Annette Mahoney and colleagues (Chapter 31) discuss the concept of sanctification, "a process by which people appraise an aspect of life as having divine character and significance" (p. 398). The authors provide empirical evidence showing that many aspects of life (e.g., strivings, marriage, parenting, and the human body) can be viewed through a sacred lens across cultures and religious denominations. They also provide empirical evidence showing that sanctification is generally tied to mental health benefits.

The chapters that highlight marked contrasts between Asian and Western conceptualizations of happiness draw attention to alternative views that are generally ignored in Western psychology. This may have significant implications for the application of the assumptions posited by positive psychology in Asian cultures. Therefore, it is expected that readers interested in critical and cultural perspectives on positive psychology will find these chapters insightful. The six chapters (together with the integrative introduction by Jane Henry) successfully convince us that more research attention should be devoted to religious/spiritual aspects of happiness across cultures.

## 6. Section V: Happiness and society (Thin)

Section 5, 'Happiness and Society', comprises an introduction (Sam Thompson) plus six thematic chapters by authors who will already be familiar to happiness scholars and several of whom (Mulgan, Dorling, Marks, and Jackson) are also well known beyond academia for their policy advocacy and public engagement. 'Society' is here loosely interpreted as contextual influences on happiness, including macro-economics, long-term cultural traditions, national and regional patterns of socio-economic inequality, and geographical and environmental factors. For readers already familiar with the authors in this section, there will be few surprises here, as they largely stick to summaries of work they have already published. Readers new to their work will be treated to inspiring introductions to some of the most important themes in happiness scholarship.

All chapters in this section provide some degree of cultural analysis, exploring ideas and values rather than just the factitious information drawn from surveys. The first three chapters are, however, written mainly from within the survey-based quantitative tradition that remains so dominant in the public image of happiness scholarship. Frey and Stutzer (Chapter 34) provide a wonderfully clear overview of survey-based research on associations between happiness and income, employment, consumption, and the political implications of the valuation of goods. Tov and Au (Chapter 35) offer a careful discussion of the need to relate these findings to cultural traditions and values, showing how important it is to pay attention to the kinds of questions asked in surveys when developing generalized international comparisons of happiness or life satisfaction. Ballas and Dorling (Chapter 36) offer a 'geographical' account that actually focuses mainly on socio-economic inequalities and on cultural history, rather than on features of the physical environment.

A more analytical approach is taken by Ahuvia and Izbert-Bilgin (Chapter 37) who give an enlightening introduction to consumer culture theory as well as a nicely balanced review of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to understanding relations between culture, consumption, and 'materialism'—basically, love of money and of the consumer goods. They carefully avoid the common pitfall of linking happiness research naively with puritanical anti-consumerism. Though recognizing the strong positive associations between happiness and consumerist capitalism, they also recognize the many ways in which consumerism at personal and collective levels can cause unhappiness. This theme is taken up more emphatically in Thompson, Marks, and Jackson's chapter (Chapter 38) exploring possible synergies between wellbeing and the promotion of sustainable development, posing the question of whether policies might be devised which help us to 'deliver well-being without materialism'. In the final chapter of the section (Chapter 39), Mulgan (one of the UK's most prominent policy analysts) takes up the theme of the translation from wellbeing research into public policy arenas such as family policy, health, work, and education.

While the quality and variety of these chapters is excellent, it is disappointing that the editors seem to have made little or no attempt to find contributors from those disciplines most experienced in theorizing about society and culture, namely sociology, socio-cultural anthropology, and cultural studies. True, these disciplines have been rather slow to take happiness seriously as a systematic research theme, but their participation in the future could help happiness scholarship avoid psychologism, ethnocentrism, and the reductionism of survey-based studies. As a result of this deficit, the section offers no kind of analytical model for considering carefully the interactions between happiness and society or culture.



## 7. Section VI: Positive education (Jarden)

The ‘positive education’ section is a collection of nine chapters on the topic of happiness in education. These chapters are written by scholars of, and practitioners in, education. The introduction to this section describes the purpose of focusing on positive education—to increase children’s wellbeing—and defines ‘positive education’ as education aiming to “develop the skills of well-being, flourishing, and optimal functioning in children, teenagers, and students, as well as parents and educational intuitions” (p. 536).

The chapters in this section take a range of approaches, from broad and theoretical to specific examples of the application of wellbeing-related practices in schools. Starting with chapters by J. White (Chapter 41) and then Popivic (Chapter 42), the reader is introduced to many of the questions about the philosophical underpinnings of and rationales for positive education. For example, to what extent should schools, rather than parents or society, contribute to a ‘flourishing life’? If schools should contribute, how should they go beyond academic tasks (which largely focus on knowledge transmission)? How exactly should schools educate for personal wellbeing? As Popivic mentions:

There is a striking imbalance in present education between the amount of time, resources, and attention dedicated to the study of the world on the one hand, and to the areas that constitute personal life and experience on the other. Young people have opportunities to learn about mathematics, literature, geography, physics, etc., but little chance to learn about themselves and the ways they can experience and relate to their environment (p. 552).

Popivic then advocates that a whole-school approach, a cross-curricular approach, and individual happiness lessons are all needed for optimal positive-education experiences. Noble and McGrath (Chapter 43) go further to provide additional historical context to wellbeing education. These first three chapters provide an excellent introduction to the context in which positive education is currently developing, although other chapter authors also provide various additional insights.

The chapter by Fox Eades, Proctor, and Ashley (Chapter 44) reviews a number of current school-wide wellbeing-focused educational initiatives (e.g., the Celebrating Strengths Framework and the Strengths Gym) as well as the importance of focusing on teacher wellbeing, which is a nice addition. The chapter by McNerney (Chapter 45) stands out as an excellent example of how one can use research, principles and techniques practically to enhance student wellbeing. Her focus is specifically on applying knowledge to the learning environment, and also cautions about the risks in teaching happiness. Gillham and colleagues (Chapter 46) outline the benefits of resilience in education and the relatively well-known Penn Resilience Program, and the less well-known High School Positive Psychology Program. A strong case for teaching resilience is made, and the empirical evidence presented is compelling (e.g., 19 controlled studies over the last 16 years). Stenberg’s chapter (Chapter 47) on teaching wisdom is another stand out chapter—although not as directly related to wellbeing as other chapters are. The last two chapters by Morris (Chapter 48) and M. White (Chapter 49) describe how positive education has been implemented in their schools (Wellington College in the UK, & Geelong Grammar in Australia). These case studies provide rich descriptions of their focus and curriculum; and both have the aim of developing practical skills for living well.

All in all, this section is ideal both for individuals unfamiliar with the topic of positive education and as a reminder for those who are familiar with it, as the chapters are packed with many novel and practical examples of positive education in practice. Both well-known (e.g., resilience) and novel (e.g., wisdom) topics are covered. Over such an eclectic range of topics,

positive education is explained and discussed, the benefits and risks are outlined, and a blueprint for positive education emerges. When taken together, these chapters traverse the scope, use and practice of positive education. However, as the section organizer, Boniwell, concludes, although “happiness education is set for a positive future... it is important to recognize that we are still at the very beginning of the journey” (p. 538).

## 8. Section VII: Happiness and organizations (Tarragona)

Section VII of *The Oxford Handbook of Happiness* provides an excellent overview of state of the art research about happiness and organizations. Like those portraits that are made up of many small pictures, each of these eight chapters depicts a specific aspect of wellbeing in the workplace, and, together, they create a mosaic that shows us the big picture of what we know about wellbeing and organizations today.

In the introduction to the section, Caza and Cameron remind us that one of the three pillars of positive psychology is the study of positive institutions, and they define the domain of Positive Organizational Scholarship, which studies positive outcomes and processes in organizations. In Chapter 51, the same authors discuss virtuous practices in work settings, such as caring, compassionate support, forgiveness, inspiration, meaning and respect, and how these are related to workers’ happiness and a variety of performance outcomes, such as client satisfaction.

Barker, Caza and Wrzesniewski (Chapter 52) present data about the benefits of seeing one’s work as a calling vs. a career or a job. They present recent findings about family-work enrichment that challenge the idea of work-life balance (which usually implies that one area always “takes away” from the other) and suggest that work and family life may actually enhance each other.

In their chapter on work design and happiness, Searle and Parker (Chapter 53) emphasize how workers are not passive recipients of the characteristics of their jobs, but that they actively modify their work environment and their tasks. Warr (Chapter 54) makes a similar point as he describes how jobs and job-holders influence and shape each other. Warr presents 12 characteristics that are associated with worker’s happiness/unhappiness and offers a wonderful “vitamin analogy”: a vitamin deficit may have terrible consequences for one’s health, but after reaching a satisfactory level in our system, more of that vitamin may have no further benefits and, in some cases, may even be detrimental. The same goes for job characteristics and their effect on happiness. For example, having a variety of tasks contributes to wellbeing, but an overload of tasks decreases happiness at work.

Youssef and Luthans (Chapter 55) give us the acronym HERO (hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism) to summarize some of the aspects of psychological capital that can be developed and that positively impact performance at work.

Laura Morgan Roberts’ chapter (Chapter 56) on reflected best self (RBS) starts with an evocative question: “*Did you bring your best self to work today?*” RBS is based on our experience of being at our best and of the feedback that other people give us when we are in that mode. We can activate our RBS by having purposeful engagement, using our strengths, being aligned with our values and having affirming relationships at work.

Chapter 57, by Thomas A. Wright, presents numerous significant associations between employee wellbeing and job performance and retention, as well as new evidence for the surprising relationship between employees’ psychological wellbeing and cardiovascular health.

Chapter 58, by Campbell Quick and Quick, focuses on executive wellbeing and the five pathways that lead to it: strength of character, self-awareness, socialized power motivation,

self-reliance and diverse professional support. The data they report about the asymmetry between executive men and women is striking: men are much more likely to be married than women and while many female executives regret not having had children, practically all males who wanted to have children became fathers.

Some of the common threads that run through the section include that there is ample evidence about the influence of work on wellbeing and about the benefits of workers' happiness for organizations; that the relationships between different aspects of work and wellbeing can be non-linear and may change across the lifetime, so we need to develop more complex models and research designs to better understand these complex relationships; and that people and their tasks mutually transform each other.

### 9. Section VIII: Relationships and happiness (Burns)

Relationships and happiness have long been associated in our thinking, in our literature, and in our cultural values. Fairytales have taught us from childhood that you get married and live happily ever after. Most of us have discovered that relationships can drive us to the depths of despair, provide us with some of our greatest ecstasy and/or enhance our experience of enduring happiness. But do relationships enhance an individual's happiness? Or can individual happiness improve the quality of a relationship? What does the evidence show us? And how can this evidence improve our relationships or enhance the provision of relationship psychotherapy and counselling? These were some of the questions I had in mind as I approached this section.

In his introduction to the section, Meliksah Demir says, "Indeed, decades of theoretical and empirical work highlight that being in a close relationship, the number of close relationships one has, and the quality of relationship experiences in general, are robust and consistent correlates of happiness" (p. 817).

Chapter 60 (Saphire-Bernstein & Taylor) explores the effects of gender ("... relationships are more important determinants of happiness for women than is true for men." p. 827), age (relationships vary over a person's life span), and culture (marital status and subjective wellbeing are largely the same across cultures).

Outlining attachment theory and exploring its connection with positive emotions in close relationships, Mikulincer & Shaver (Chapter 61) offer the hope that even insecure adults who have a secure relationship partner, in either marriage or psychotherapy, can become more secure.

In Chapter 62, Lakey highlights the difference between objective and perceived social support in determining happiness, with perception of support being the winner: people with high perceived social support are happier than those with low perceived social support, regardless of the objective strength of that support. Lakey is the only contributor in this section to raise the implications of this research for intervention – even though it occupies but half a paragraph. He makes the interesting point that most social support interventions have been based on objective support whereas the literature affirms they should be based more on perceived support by carefully matching specific providers with specific recipients (p. 855).

The final chapter (Demir, Orthel & Andelin) asks, 'Do friendship experiences matter for happiness?' It concludes that while friendship is unlikely to be the greatest or only source of happiness, it is one of the most robust and frequent correlates with this outcome (p. 865).

In sum, these chapters are well researched and densely referenced. They take you through the history of research into relationships and wellbeing, they provide the current state of evidence, and they raise potential directions for future research. However, as a clinical

psychologist and therapist practitioner I felt I reached the end of this section extremely well informed but no better equipped as to how to translate this important knowledge into useful therapeutic strategies. I would like to have seen at least one chapter, or a section in each chapter, on *how* the findings on relationships and happiness can be applied in areas such as couples, family and relationship therapies.

## 10. Section IX: Development, stability and change of happiness (Jose)

All six chapters in this section examine various and related questions concerning the stability and changeability of happiness. Researchers and theorists in the field of positive psychology seek to understand and to predict fluctuations in happiness; thus, the key theme of this section is timely and important.

The first chapter, entitled ‘An evolutionary psychological perspective on happiness’, written by Hill, DelPriore, and Major (Chapter 65), argues that the entire landscape of emotional experiences, from despair to joy, is rooted in an adaptational system that serves to enhance our evolutionary fitness. Negatively valenced emotions such as anger serve to motivate us to acquire greater resources, and positively valenced emotions such as gratitude result from the achievement of fitness goals. Humans like the hedonic feel of positive valence emotions and we seek to maximize the experience of those emotions, and conversely we do not like the feel of negative valence emotions and we seek to avoid those experiences. By doing so, we tend to act in ways that enhance our evolutionary fitness. As the authors put it, “happiness is hypothesized to serve as a psychological reward” (p. 879). Individuals who satisfy adaptational goals are happier, according to this view. In conclusion, the authors suggest that evolutionary theory might function as a “meta-theory” concerning questions as to how we can enhance hedonic outcomes. Thus, they seem to suggest that our genes significantly constrain and organize how humans strive for happiness, and resultantly, environmental fitness.

The next chapter, ‘Set-point theory may now need replacing: Death of a paradigm?’, by Headey (Chapter 66), neatly picks up the gauntlet laid down by the first chapter in that it addresses the issue of stability of happiness. Headey describes “adaptation theory”, also known as the “set-point theory”, which argues that, in congruence with evolutionary theory, individuals strive for adaptation in their environments. Humans endeavor to achieve homeostatic balance with their environment; thus, we seek positive experiences and emotions but we also readily adapt to these new circumstances so it is difficult to permanently maintain an elevated level of happiness (a frustrating process known as the “hedonic treadmill”). Headey relates the findings of recent research which cast doubt on this thesis—for example, research that shows that extraverted individuals gain significantly in life satisfaction over time whereas neurotic individuals show a strong decline in life satisfaction. He ends his chapter by making the bold statement that “if set-point theory was a sinking tanker, its crew . . . would be abandoning ship” (p. 897), although it could be said that more needs to be known about this process before we totally abandon this ship.

The third chapter in this section is entitled ‘Variety is the spice of happiness: The hedonic adaptation prevention model,’ and is authored by Sheldon, Boehm, and Lyubomirsky (Chapter 67). These authors ask a question in the vein described by Headey concerning hedonic adaptation: how do we create circumstances that will sustain elevated happiness? In this chapter they propose a new version of their ‘hedonic adaptation prevention’ (HAP) model, in which they map out several pathways that they argue lead to a “sustained well-being boost”. As the title of their chapter suggests, surprise and variety are proposed to significantly enhance the process of positive events leading to enduring positive emotional responses. They go on to



report findings from two previously unpublished longitudinal studies that suggest that variety predicts maintenance of wellbeing. Much more evidence needs to be applied to the job of verifying the HAP model, but early evidence supports the major tenets of this provocative theory.

Keyes, in the next chapter (Chapter 68), ‘Promotion and protection of positive mental health: Towards complete mental health in human development,’ describes the ‘dual continua model’ of psychological functioning, namely that mental health and mental illness are separable but (negatively) related domains. ‘Promotion’ refers to efforts to promote greater mental health, which in turn is likely to lead to less mental illness, and ‘protection’ refers to efforts to prevent the onset of mental illness, which in turn is likely to allow mental health to continue (and possibly flourish). Keyes reports empirical findings that support both the promotion and protection dynamics proposed by this dual continua model, and argues for an increased appreciation of how these two domains affect each other over time.

Joseph and Hefferon (Chapter 69), in their chapter titled ‘Post-traumatic growth: Eudaimonic happiness in the aftermath of adversity,’ take up the intriguing notion of “positive changes in the aftermath of adversity” (p. 926), as they put it. They state that between 30-70% of people tend to report some benefit following an adverse experience. The chapter includes a copy of their Psychological Well-Being—Post-traumatic Changes Questionnaire, which is commonly used to assess empirically the degree of improved wellbeing in various domains (i.e., perceived changes in self; more developed purpose in life; improved personal relationships; increase in sense of mastery; and greater personal growth). The authors note several new research areas on the topic of post-traumatic growth (e.g., using illness as a ‘window of opportunity’ to encourage self-regulation of behavior), and they end the chapter by noting that facilitating post-traumatic growth is a delicate process that is not entirely understood.

The last chapter is written by Steger, Beeby, Garrett, and Kashdan (Chapter 70), and continues with the topic of eudaimonic meaning-making described in the previous chapter. For these authors, meaning in life refers to “liv[ing] a coherent life that links the present to the past, and projects our longings and aspirations into the future” (p. 942). Further, they make important distinctions among three related aspects of meaning in one’s life; 1) *comprehension* of meaning in one’s life; 2) having *purpose* in one’s life; and 3) and *searching for meaning* in one’s life. The focus of the chapter is the description of their model for ‘lifelong meaning’. They propose that achievements of identity and connections to others, developed in childhood, foster a future orientation, solidified in adolescence, which in turn leads to purposeful and meaningful engagement with the world during adulthood. They would predict, therefore, that seeking purpose in life peaks in adolescence and gradually declines over time, having purpose in life builds through adolescence and early adulthood and peaks in late adulthood, and comprehension steadily builds through one’s life and peaks before death. Research on meaning of life is “accelerating in breadth and sophistication” (p. 951), as they say, and their model of lifelong meaning can arguably be useful in guiding further research on this topic.

These six chapters captured much of what is provocative and interesting in the study of happiness: Can we defeat the hedonic treadmill? How do negative events lead to eudaimonic growth? What are the lifespan trajectories of meaning in life? How is mental health related to mental illness? Are we genetically constrained to feel certain amounts of happiness? Tentative answers to these perplexing questions are posed here, and the interested reader will benefit greatly from reading this material.



## 11. Section X: Happiness interventions (Jarden)

The ‘positive interventions’ section is a collection of seven chapters on the topic of happiness interventions. The introduction by Spence and Green (Chapter 71) outlines this section’s focus: “put simply, this section is about different ways people can be assisted to enhance the quality of their life experience” (p. 958). They also point out that although “fortunately the scientific study of happiness is well established and much research has been done to guide our understanding of those strategies, practices, and methods that can reliably and lastingly enhance human happiness and well-being” (p. 958), this progress is against a backdrop of a burgeoning commercial market for happiness and wellbeing which is also difficult for consumers to navigate. There is at times a simplification of empirical research which may be leading to flawed attempts to translate research into effective practice. This in turn may be making people unhappier and thus safeguards are needed.

The section organizers describe the sections in this constellation as focusing on four distinctly different aspects – 1) happiness strategies and practices, 2) alternative perspectives on change, 3) happiness amongst older adults, and 4) treatment and recovery models for enduring mental illness.

The first chapter by Parks and colleagues (Chapter 72) is perhaps the most seminal in this collection. They define ‘positive interventions’ as “cognitive or behavioural strategies that attempt to build well-being through psychological processes” (p. 964), and outline the empirical evidence for various techniques; e.g., savoring, loving-kindness meditation, gratitude, strengths use, active-constructive responding, flow, expressive writing, reminiscing. They conclude with the view that there is now enough rigorous evidence to support Empirically Supported Self-Help (ESS-H) interventions, and also provide cautionary notes on ‘person-activity fit’ which are valuable.

The second chapter, by Rashid (Chapter 73), locates positive interventions within psychotherapy, outlining a 14-session Positive Psychotherapy (PPT) model which demonstrates how happiness-enhancing practices can be structured into a coherent therapeutic model. Rashid defines Positive Psychotherapy as an “empirically validated psychotherapy that directly builds positive emotions, character strengths, and meaning with the aims of undoing psychopathology and promoting happiness” (p. 978). Positive Psychotherapy is summed up as a ‘build what’s strong’ to supplement the traditional ‘fix what’s wrong’ approach.

The next chapter, by Hayes (Chapter 74), introduces Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) as an alternative approach to behavior change. ACT does not specifically advocate enhancing happiness *per se*, but rather that acceptance and a commitment to a values-driven life improves life experience. ACT is, in a sense, another alternative to the disease model. Readers will find it interesting to learn the role that ‘psychological flexibility’ plays in contributing towards good life outcomes.

The fourth chapter, by Spence and Grant (Chapter 75), focuses on coaching psychology and how coaching improves wellbeing and human functioning. They define coaching as “an action-oriented, collaborative, process that seeks to facilitate goal attainment, self-directed learning, and/or enhance performance in the coachee’s personal or professional life” (p. 1009-1010). They then outline the evidence in areas such as workplace/executive coaching, life coaching, health coaching, and educational coaching, and focus on Self-Determination Theory and a useful guide in coaching for wellbeing.

The short chapter by Hsu and Langer (Chapter 76) outlines how mindfulness is important for cultivating happiness in later life, and that various social psychological studies point to this conclusion.

Fava and Ruini (Chapter 77) outline Wellbeing Therapy, which is a psychotherapeutic intervention aimed at eliminating psychological distress. Wellbeing Therapy does this by focusing on wellbeing, targeting aspects that interrupt wellbeing, and the supports needed to achieve wellbeing. Outcomes are based on and assessed with Ryff's six-dimensional model of psychological wellbeing.

Rounding out the section, the last chapter, by Oades and colleagues (Chapter 78), covers the Collaborative Recover Model (CRM), which is a framework designed to guide interventions in the provision of intervention services. The tools central to the CRM are outlined, and examples are given.

Like most psychological interventions, which are designed for individuals, this collection includes little mention of the extent to which these interventions can be applied to groups and organizations. Nonetheless, these chapters provide the current state of evidence for a range of positive interventions, give recommendations for implementing them, and conclude that positive interventions are enabling because they give people options about how they can direct the course of their own lives.

## **12. Conclusion** (Weijers)

All things considered, *The Oxford Handbook of Happiness* is a wonderfully broad and rich resource for educated readers with an interest in happiness; well worth the shelf space for those who can afford it.

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