

Happy Trails To You

A Review of Subjective Well-Being in Ageing

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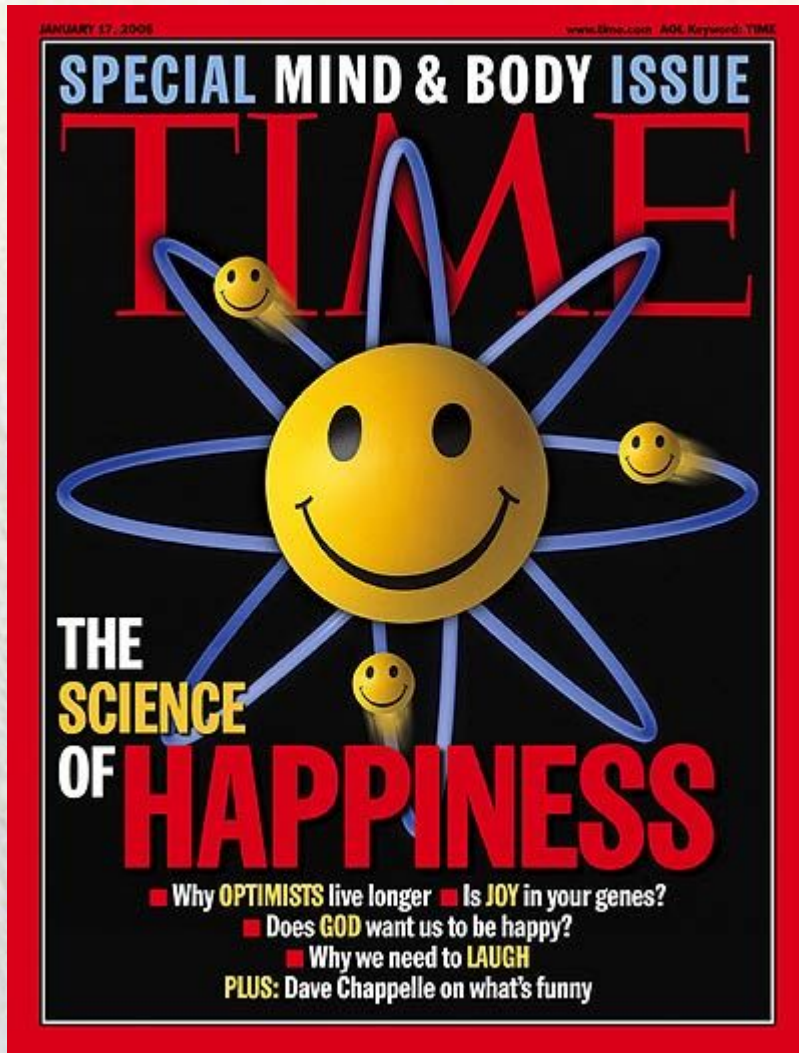
A Shift in Perspective



**“the healthy
personality is a
topic
approaching
which the expert
becomes a fearful
angel”**

Erik Erikson (1950)

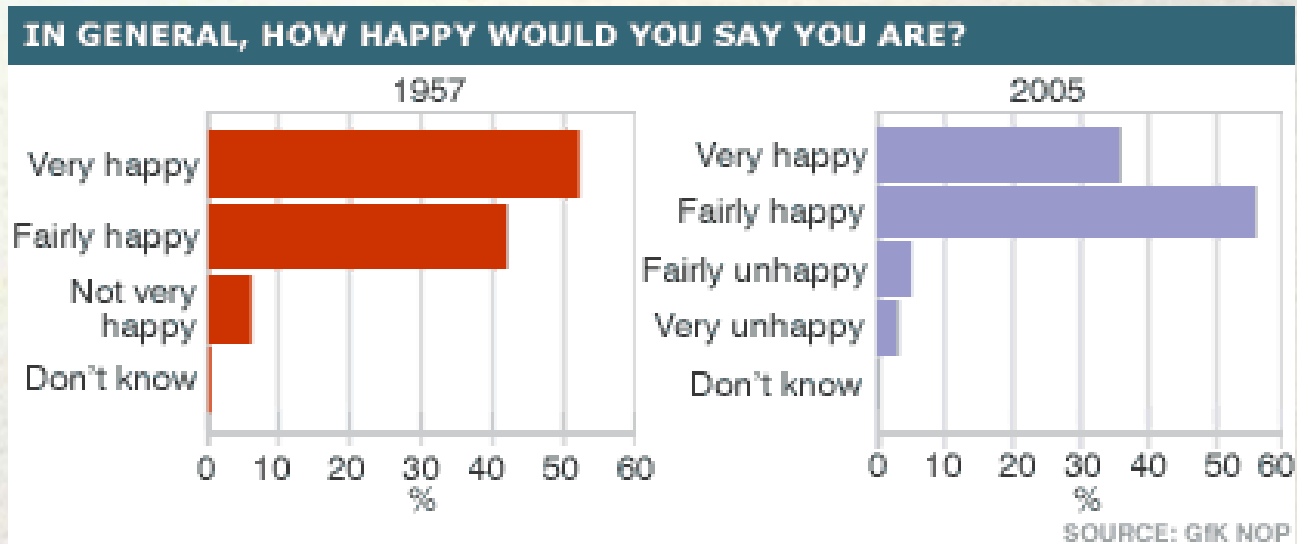
Happiness is Hot at the Moment



Over the last few years:

- ~3,000 papers published
- Journal of Happiness Studies
- World Database of Happiness
- Centre for Confidence and Well-Being (Glasgow)
- The Well-Being Institute (Univ of Cambridge)

Trends in Happiness



- Trend for **↑** wealth but **↓** happiness since the 1950s

Happiness and Ageing

- By 2011, the first of the baby boomers will reach the age of 65
- Increasing emphasis on models of successful ageing
- What is the place of happiness in these models?

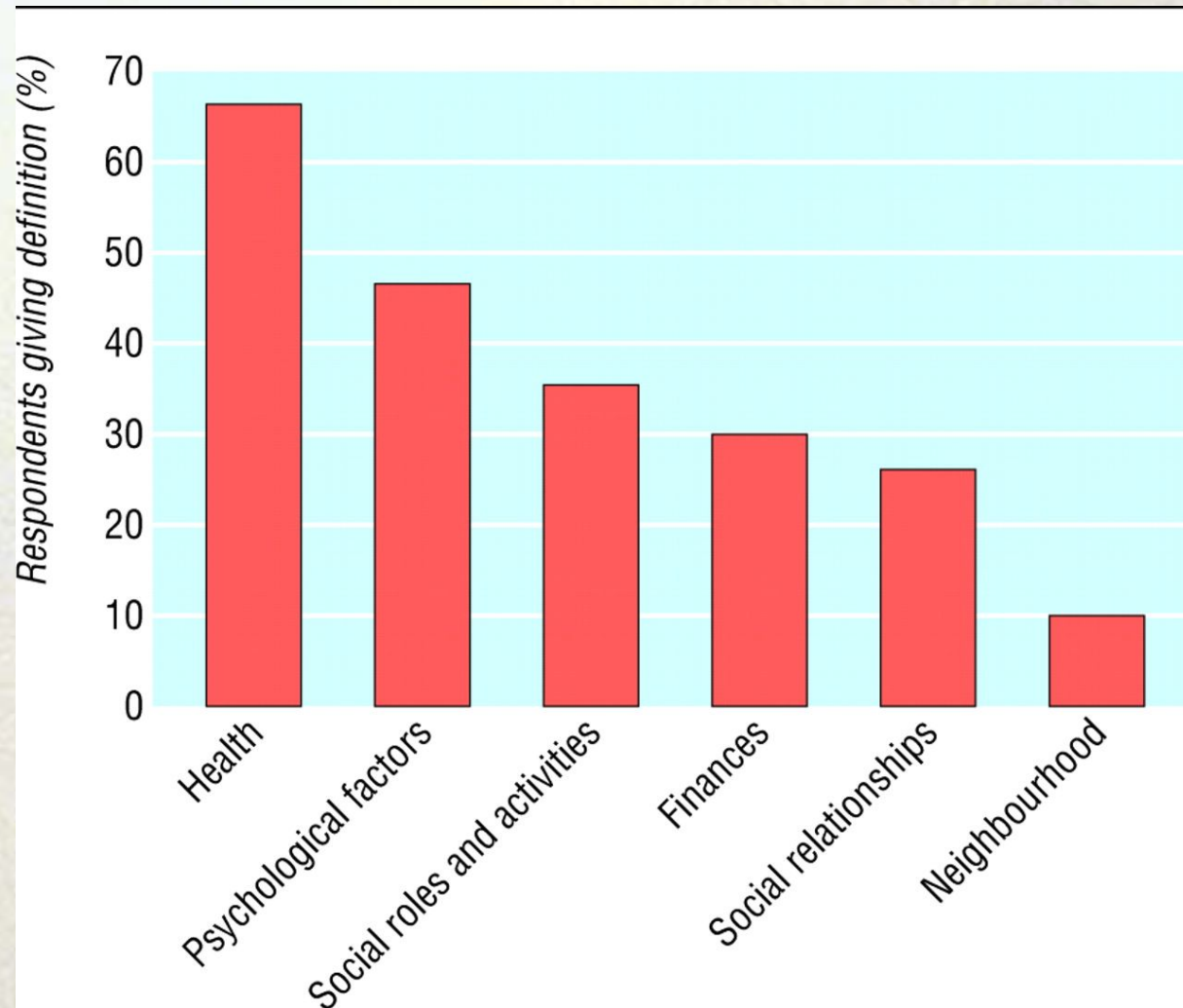


Definitions of Successful Ageing

- **Rowe & Kahn (1987, 1995) – low risk of disease and disease-related disability, high mental and physical functions, and active engagement with life**
- **Baltes & Baltes (1990) - subjective well-being, positive emotions, and absence of feelings of loneliness¹**

¹Freund & Baltes (1998)

Most common definitions of successful ageing given by 854 people aged ≥ 50 in Britain



Bowling, A. et al. *BMJ* 2005;331:1548-1551

Palmore (1995)

- **A comprehensive definition of successful aging "would combine**
 - **survival (longevity),**
 - **health (lack of disability), and**
 - **life satisfaction (happiness)."**

Positive vs Negative Affect

- **Bradburn & Caplovitz (1965)**
 - ➔ **independence of PA & NA**
 - e.g., high correlation amongst pos items & amongst neg items
 - Also correlated with diff external factors
- **Now widely replicated**



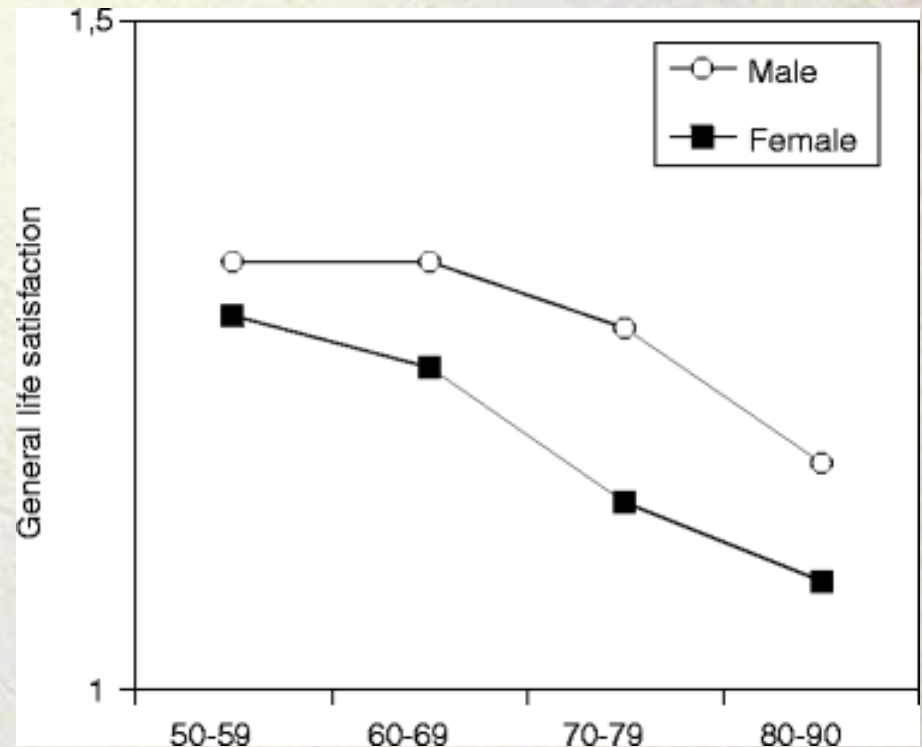
How Happy Are Older People?

- **Meta-analyses** ➔ little difference bw younger and older age grps wrt life satisfaction¹ (smile-shaped).
- **“Satisfaction paradox”** ➔ use of adaptive processes in old age that allow subjective well-being to be regulated^{2,3}.

¹ Pinquart (1998); ²Filipp & Ferring (1992); ³Staudinger (2000)

How Happy Are Older People?

- **European Study on Adult Wellbeing¹**
- **6 countries; N=12478; 50-90 yrs.**
- **“Life Satisfaction Index”²**



¹Ferring et al (2004); ²Neugarten et al (1962)

Predictors of Happiness

- **Meta-analysis of 286 studies ➔ quantity & quality of contacts with friends were stronger predictors of SWB than contact with family members¹**
- **Income also better predictor than education¹**



¹Pinquart & Sorensen (2000)

Happy People are....

- **More likely to be married rather than single, divorced or widowed^{1,2}**
- **More likely to participate in a variety of social & physical activities^{3,4}**
- **More likely to have better self-, not objective, ratings of health²**

Other Associations

- Task-oriented and avoidance-oriented coping strategies¹
- Higher current cog function but not IQ¹
- Sense of meaning derived from religion²
- Better housing quality e.g., in good repair, amenities, etc³



¹Jones et al (2003); ²Krause, 2003; ³Evans et al, 2002

Happiness as Protective

- N=1558; age 65-94 yrs.
- 7-yr f/up of people not initially “frail”.
- CES-D scale ➡ PA & NA.
- Each unit ↑ in PA was assoc with a 3% ↓ risk of frailty after adjusting for age, gender, marital status, medical conditions & yrs educ.

Happiness as Protective

- N=937; mean age 72.8 (6.3) yrs.
- Dx of arthritis & no ADL limitation at B/L.
- High PA = ↓ risk of ADL disability 2 yrs later, controlling for demog, medical cond'n & NA (OR=0.46, 95%CI 0.22-0.94).
- Interaction bw PA and gender ➡ larger effect in men.

Happiness & Mortality

- **Nun Study¹.**
- **In 1930, the Mother Superior requested that each sister write a brief autobiography e.g., background and influences that led to religious life.**
- **N=180. Mean age 22yrs.**
- **Scored for emotional content & related to survival 75-95 yrs**



¹Danner et al (2001)

The Nun Study

- Strong inverse r'ship b/w amount of positive content & mortality risk ($p < 0.001$)
- 2.5 fold diff b/w lowest & highest quartiles (equiv 7 yrs)



Methodological Issues

- Inconsistent definition of constructs.
- Many cross-sectional studies but few longitudinal ones.
 - Lyubomirsky et al (2005) – PA precedes successful outcomes
- Are happy people biased?



Interventions to Promote Happiness

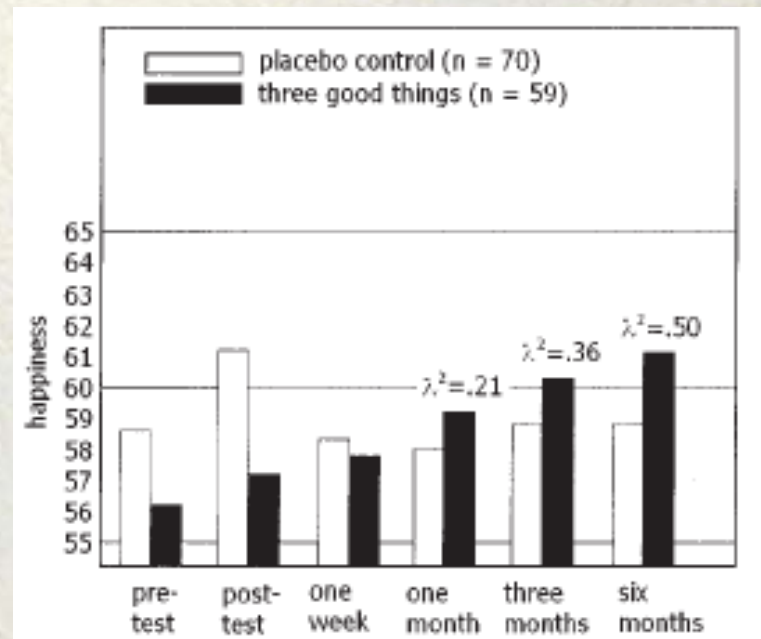
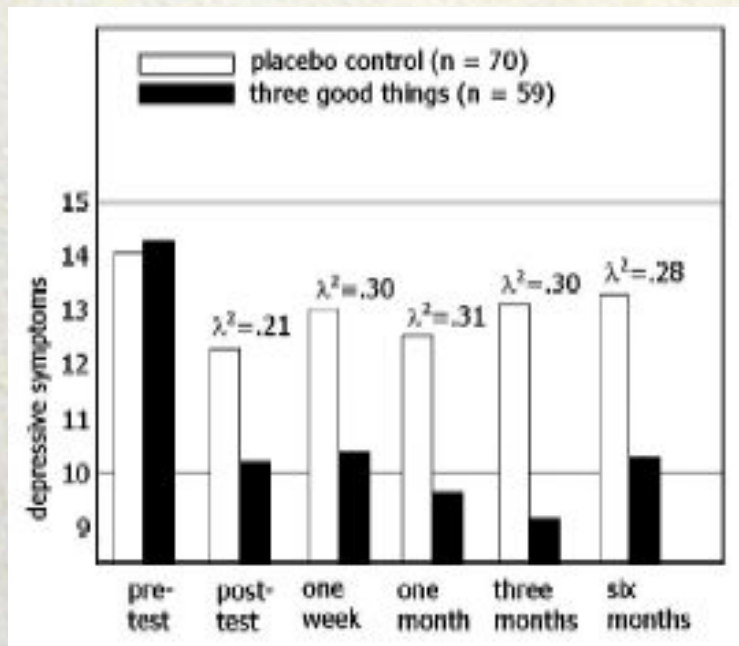
- Absence of role identity in later life. Volunteering found to ↑PA & buffer against this¹.
- “Groningen Intervention Programme” (GRIP) – home-based self-management. 6 tasks e.g., ↑self-efficacy. 2 RCTs – some benefit².



¹Greenfield & Marks (2004); ²Schuurmans, 2004.

Three Good Things

- Write down 3 things daily that went well & provide causal explanation for each.
- RCT, 1-wk internet-based therapy.



Is Happiness the Ultimate Panacea?



- Perhaps....
- More research required
- But it is relatively easy to increase a person's positive affect and it certainly cannot hurt.

Questions?

