University of Edinburgh  
School of Social & Political Science  
Social Anthropology  
2018-2019  

*Happiness: Cross Cultural Perspectives*  
(PGSP11063)

*[NB: It is also highly recommended that course participants sign up, before the end of week 1 of term, for the free online course led by Neil Thin, on ‘Social Wellbeing’](https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/social-wellbeing/3)*

### Key Information

| **Course Organiser** | Dr Neil Thin  
Email: [n.thin@ed.ac.uk](mailto:n.thin@ed.ac.uk)  
Room 5.27  
Chrystal MacMillan Building, George Square  
Guidance & Feedback Hours: Tuesdays 9.00 – 11.00 and Fridays 11.00 – 12.00 |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| **Location** | Semester 2  
**Full lecture-seminar Mondays, 09.00 – 10.50 Chrystal MacMillan Building, Seminar Room 5**  
Project groups are expected to meet at your own convenience each week between classes, e.g. in CMB Foyer. I will gladly join those meetings when requested |
| **Course Administrator** | Mr Jack Smith  
[PGTaught.sps@ed.ac.uk](mailto:PGTaught.sps@ed.ac.uk)  
Phone: (0131 6)51 1485  
Graduate Office, Room 1.20, Chrystal MacMillan Building |
| **Assessment deadlines** | • Short Essay: 12 noon, Thursday 21\textsuperscript{st} February 2019  
• Long Essay: 12 noon, Tuesday 9\textsuperscript{th} April 2019 |
| **Feedback** | • Short Essay: Thursday 14\textsuperscript{th} March 2019  
• Long Essay: Tuesday 30\textsuperscript{th} April 2019 |
### Happiness: Cross Cultural Perspectives (2019-2018)

**Learning and Teaching Activities**

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<tr>
<td>Lectures</td>
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<td>Programme Level Learning and Teaching Hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Directed and Independent Learning</td>
<td>174</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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**Assessment**

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<th>Assessment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Short Essay ‘course work’</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4000 word Long Essay</td>
<td>70%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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**Aims/learning outcomes**

On completion of this course, you will be able to:

1. show better appreciation of the importance of happiness as a topic in social analysis, social policies, and ethical debate
2. show stronger awareness of the importance of evaluative judgement in social analysis, and of the deficiencies in evaluation that result from (a) inadequate cross-cultural perspectives, and (b) inadequate explicit attention to happiness as a criterion for judging social quality and quality of life
3. show better awareness of the evidence concerning the achievement of happiness in diverse contexts worldwide, and of the gaps in understanding and evidence that that need to be addressed
4. show an enriched understanding of the evolution of the social sciences through appreciating the ways in which happiness has been foregrounded in the past and backgrounded for the past 100 years

**Teaching methods**

The course consists of one weekly two-hour seminar class (weeks 1-10) In addition, you are expected to conduct independent learning both individually and in collaboration with fellow members of your project group. Ideally, this will involve weekly small group meetings which the course organiser can attend as required, which are linked to both group learning projects and to coursework preparation.
Assessment

Students will be assessed by a combination of (i) ‘course work’ (either a short essay of up to 1000 words, or a diagram plus short accompanying text of up to 500 words; and (ii) an assessed essay (maximum 3,000 words) at the end of the Semester. The ‘course work’ carries a weighting of 30% towards the final overall mark for the course as a whole, and the essay carries a weighting of 70%:

For Assessment requirements you should consult the Taught MSc Student Handbook 2018-19. This is available on Learn.

Requirements included are:

- Coursework submissions
- Extension request
- Penalties
- Plagiarism

Deadlines:

- Short Essay: 12 noon, Thursday 21st February 2019
- Long Essay: 12 noon, Tuesday 09th April 2019

Feedback:

- Short Essay: by Thursday 14th March 2019
- Long Essay: by Tuesday 30th April 2019

External Examiner

The External Examiner for this course is Dr Arnar Arnason, The University of Aberdeen

Short coursework – choose ONE of the following:

EITHER: Is happiness promotion unavoidably ‘ethnocentric’? [answer with a short essay of up to 1000 words; for this assignment, the same assessment criteria apply as for normal essays – i.e. you need to formulate an argument, make use of ethnographic evidence and/or relevant theoretical literature (properly cited and referenced), and write clearly with a good structure]

OR: Draw a diagram, with brief accompanying text (max 500 words), that would help towards systematic analysis of how happiness relates to some other cultural values.

OR: Draw a diagram, with brief accompanying text (max 500 words), that conveys the core arguments of any ONE article or book from the course reading list.
In the diagram exercises, the assessment of your diagram will focus mainly on its clarity, persuasiveness, and ingenuity. Minor untidiness of presentation is unlikely to affect your mark, but please note that simpler diagrams are often the most effective, so don’t try to cram too much information into it. Your accompanying text should complement the diagram by providing further explanations of its analytical usefulness. It should also show how the diagram relates to themes addressed on the course. Citation of relevant literature is not needed in this short piece, but if you choose to cite, e.g. if your diagram is based on a text or adapted from someone else’s diagram, you must provide references. Although you can probably design a good diagram without seeking specialist advice on diagrams, if you do want to improve your abilities in this extremely important way, you may want to spend some time using Google images or Slideshare to explore other people’s diagrams on key happiness-related and/or culture-related themes.

Small group learning projects leading towards presentations and essays

Start-up reading lists for each group are available on the course web site, and you will be required to sign up for one of these groups by week 2 at the latest.

These group learning projects will run from week 2 to week 9. Their main purpose is to complement the main seminars (which will be rather general and abstract) by addressing more specific themes and readings that you opt for. By the end of the project, you should feel confident that your group has produced a uniquely interesting synthesis of cross-cultural research relating to happiness, and that you personally have played a key role in making this happen. The lessons from your group work should in some significant ways be instructive in relation to the following questions:

- How can happiness research produce knowledge that would be useful for living better and for planning better societies?
- What are the distinct contributions of ethnography to happiness research?
- How might a ‘happiness lens’ enrich anthropology?

Do read widely, and try to strike a good balance between rapid skim-reading of lots of texts, and more intense and careful engagement with a very few selected key texts. Make sure that your discussions and your essays pay substantial attention to academic anthropological texts (and more generally to cross-cultural and ethnographic work whether or not the authors self-identify as ‘anthropologists’), but do also at least skim-read beyond anthropology and beyond academic writing so as to appreciate some of the diversity of approaches to your topic.

The main outputs will be a short group presentation, plus your individual coursework and essay. Group learning should be intrinsically rewarding, but should also give you plenty of opportunity to work together with other people towards your course assessments. In addition, group projects should provide you with important life skills in collaborative learning and in preparation of a joint presentation.

We will allocate some of the main class time each week to group project discussions, to ensure that everyone is making links between their thematic group work and the broader cross-cutting weekly course themes. Group work will also require further meetings and co-ordination which we will negotiate after the groups are established. It will be up to you how you organize tasks and meetings, how you communicate, and how often you meet.

You may like to set up a Facebook page for the group, but if so this should complement but not replace face-to-face discussions. Each group will start by discussing one of the very general themes below. Each individual will agree to read and summarise for the
group one key ethnographic reading relating to this theme in a particular cultural context. Groups will agree further learning tasks as they work towards generating specific sharable lessons from their studies, and towards a presentation.

Group work should be enjoyable, participatory, and exploratory, selecting readings from various disciplines and with a strong emphasis on ethnography and cross-cultural comparison. To ensure a consistently robust approach that promotes the intended learning outcomes, please bear in mind the following considerations:

**Teamwork:** this is not just an exercise in individual learning, it must involve a lot of sharing ideas and information, with good co-ordination to ensure you meet regularly and share responsibilities for reading up on specific themes and for preparing specific aspects of a presentation. It may help to use the metaphor of the jigsaw puzzle as your guide for effective team-based learning: your group must agree on a puzzle you want to work on, but you must spread the learning roles so that you each comes back with different pieces of information offering distinct contributions towards the group’s collective answer to the puzzle. This jigsaw principle can apply not only to the diversity of thematic content in your readings, but also to the diversity of contributions to learning and communication (e.g. some team members may have more aptitude for philosophical analysis, while others’ strengths may lie in practical application, in drawing diagrams, or in putting together a persuasive presentation). [And by the way, if you’re interested in research on happiness in teamwork, see Thomas, Marie D., & Barbara J. McPherson (2011) ‘Teaching positive psychology using team-based learning.’ *Journal of Positive Psychology* 6,6:487-491; and/or Fredrickson, Barbara L., and Marcial F. Losada (2005) ‘Positive affect and the complex dynamics of human flourishing’ *American Psychologist* 60,7:678-686].

**Focusing on a specific challenge:** Perhaps the most difficult task is focusing in on a theme that is specific enough to make good presentation, yet broad enough to allow wide and varied reading. Key questions that should help you focus are: *What is it about this theme that is most interesting, controversial, and in need of clearer understanding? How can anthropology help with this challenge? Where in the world can you find good ethnographic case study material?*

**Close connection to course themes:** do explore beyond course readings and look beyond anthropology at relevant readings from e.g. Psychology (especially Social Psychology and Cultural Psychology), Sociology, Economics, Moral Philosophy, and popular media. But remember to keep a strong focus on anthropology and on cross-cultural approaches to happiness based on ethnographic research. As we discuss cross-cutting themes in the main classes, do try to mention relevant things you’ve learned in your group project work.

**Presentations and other outputs:** the main output will be a ten-minute group presentation in week 7, 8, or 9, plus the accompanying individual explanatory texts submitted for coursework assessment. Before presenting, each group should nominate one person to finalise a set of powerpoint slides and email these to me so I can put them on the course web site. Presentations will be strictly time-limited to ensure that we all discuss common themes that emerge. Group work should also, hopefully, help in preparation of the essays to be submitted after the course, and perhaps also lead to follow-up work e.g. dissertations.

1. Frugalism

Can contemporary frugalist movements help in the promotion of sustainable routes to happiness?
Happiness: Cross Cultural Perspectives (2019-2018)

OR: What can the global cultural history of ascetic traditions teach us about the pursuit of happiness?

2. Fun and anti-fun

Is there a global trend towards enhanced respect for the virtues of enjoyment?
OR: Does fun require cultural endorsement and social support in order for it to make people’s lives go well?

3. Self-help, mindfulness, and psychotherapies

What can contemporary western self-help movements learn from nonwestern cultural traditions of mindfulness and mental repair?
OR: Are self-help ideologies and practices guided by implicitly individualistic models of the mind?

4. Religion, cultural performance, and self-transcendence

Consider evidence from AT LEAST TWO contrasted cultural contexts on the effects on happiness of various aspects of religion, including: regular collective worship; faith in God; belief in afterlife rewards and punishments.
OR: How can anthropological research on collective ritualized performance help us appreciate the cultural facilitation of happiness?

5. Leisure, play, and boredom

How important is play for happiness?
OR: Is ‘serious leisure’ becoming more crucial for the pursuit of happiness worldwide?

6. Environment and human nature

Can people’s interactions with their environments be deliberately arranged so as to promote happiness?
Compare and contrast the contributions of socio-cultural anthropology and evolutionary psychology towards understanding how happiness happens.

7. Smiling and emotional self-expression

What does research on smiling tell us about cross-cultural differences in happiness?
OR: Should anthropologists try to analyse people’s emotional experiences?

8. Life course

How does the cultural salience of happiness vary through the life course, and how does this interact with people’s hopes, priorities, expectations, and experiences?
OR: Does a person’s life story have some value that transcends the sum of their experiences?

9. Social media and cyberhappiness

Have recent developments in cyberculture and online relationships been good for happiness?
OR: Do qualitative research methods have distinct contributions to understanding the pursuit of happiness online?

Communications and Feedback

You are strongly encouraged to use email for routine communication with lecturers. We shall also use email to communicate with you, e.g., to assign readings for the second hour of each class. All students are provided with email addresses on the university system, if you are not sure of your address, which is based on your matric number, check your EUCLID database entry using the Student Portal.

This is the ONLY email address we shall use to communicate with you. Please note that we will NOT use ‘private’ email addresses such as yahoo or hotmail; it is therefore essential that you check your university email regularly, preferably each day.
**Lecture Summary**

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Lecture</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.1.2019</td>
<td>Introduction: concepts, theories, and debates about human flourishing</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>21.1.2019</td>
<td>Anthropology, other disciplines, and happiness: on the cultural traditions of academic disciplines</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>28.1.2019</td>
<td>Culture and well-being: universals and cultural influences</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4.2.2019</td>
<td>Selves, self-making, and the meaningful life</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.2.2019</td>
<td>Self-disclosure and empathy: communicating, hiding, and recognizing happiness</td>
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Festival of Creative Learning

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Lecture</th>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>25.2.2019</td>
<td>Emotional experience</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>04.3.2019</td>
<td>Assessing and comparing happiness – numerical, narrative, and visual cultures</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.3.2019</td>
<td>Redemption: positive lessons from suffering</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>18.3.2019</td>
<td>A ‘happiness lens’ in guide policy and practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>25.3.2019</td>
<td>Conclusions, review and essay planning</td>
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**Reading Lists**

This is a very long list, mainly consisting of further references rather than required readings. Do not feel obliged to read more than ONE key reading per week in preparation for the main seminar class, but do read at least one substantial text each week for your group learning project. Beyond that, dip into Further Optional Readings as you like, but most of your wider reading should ideally relate to your group learning project. Please note that although this course is rooted in social anthropology, it is a general social science course based on the rapidly growing integrative science of happiness and wellbeing. So a lot of these readings are by academics working from other disciplines such as social psychology, cultural psychology, evolutionary psychology, sociology, philosophy, human geography, political science, and economics.

**Suggested time allocation**

During the 10 teaching weeks of the course, you are expected to allocate roughly one-third of a normal working week - i.e. about 12 hours per week - to this course (plus a further 80 hours before and after the 10-week period, to make a total of 200 hours). Of these, 2 hours are taken up with the main seminar, and normally at least one hour with your learning group, meeting as necessary by mutual arrangement. That leaves roughly 9 hours per week. It is up to you how you spend this time, but for most it will probably
Course Lectures and Readings

Week 1: Introduction: concepts, theories, and debates about human flourishing

Although no serious social scientist would deny the importance of happiness in their research, remarkably few 20th-century social scientists paid systematic attention to happiness in their work. To understand the meaning and importance of the modern post-Enlightenment concept of happiness we need to explore its evolution from earlier philosophical debates about pleasure, virtue, meaning, and flourishing. Anthropologists who want to engage in happiness studies also need to be aware of the current diversity of views and empirical research on happiness from various cultures and various disciplines.

Key Reading


Haybron, Dan, ‘Happiness’. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/happiness/ [also see SEP articles on ‘wellbeing’ and ‘the meaning of life’]
Further Optional Reading

http://nobaproject.com/modules/culture


Class discussion exercises for week 1:

A. Cantril’s ‘ladder’ metaphor is commonly used when inviting people to rate their life satisfaction on a scale from 0 (worst possible life) to 10 (best possible life). Very briefly describe the life of someone you would expect to report a ‘5’ on this scale.

B. Can you identify important differences and clusters of meaning among the following terms, all of which are in some sense synonyms for ‘happiness’: pleasure, well-being, subjective well-being, quality of life, fulfilment, flourishing, fun, self-actualization, thriving, joy, fun, enjoyment, bliss, ecstasy, nirvana, life satisfaction, contentment, fortune, self-esteem, balance, harmony, mindfulness, flow, savouring; living well. [If facilities allow, we’ll do this exercise with large post-its on the wall]

Week 2: Anthropology, other disciplines, and happiness: on the cultural traditions of academic disciplines

Happiness was a core topic in philosophy and social science until the start of the 20th century. This class explores some of the reasons why social science in general, and social anthropology in particular, cold-shouldered the topic of happiness throughout the 20th century. We will also begin discussing whether or not this is problematic, and if so what the prospects are for a new anthropology of well-being to emerge.

We will discuss distinctively anthropological approaches to happiness, including: a strong emphasis on the way it is socially structured and learned through cultural traditions and
practices; assessed and understood using ethnographic research methods and ethnographic writing; and compared crossculturally.

Today and throughout the course, please remember that ‘culture’ pertains not just to ethnic groups and countries, but to other entities including age groups, social networks, workplaces, and professional networks including academic disciplines and their associated traditions and attitudes.

Key Reading

Further Optional Reading
Bartram, David (2012) 'Elements of a sociological contribution to happiness studies: social context, unintended consequences, and discourses.' Social Compass 6,8:644-656

Class discussion exercise for week 2:
Separate groups will discuss:
1. reasons for anthropology's limited engagement with happiness studies;
2. Priority areas of anthropology most in need of addressing 'happiness' themes;
3. most promising areas for engagement between anthropology and happiness studies

**Class discussion exercises from week 2 onwards:**
Sort into groups working in and out of class on specific themes (see list above, plus further guidance on course web site). Class discussion time will be used for organising the work of the groups, updating on progress, and drawing out links between specific themes and the cross-cutting themes addressed in each class. Group presentations will be in weeks 8, 9, and 10. Once the groups are running, we will discuss options for timing and structuring these, but they will not be formally assessed.

**Week 3: Culture and well-being: universals and cultural influences**
A basic requirement of any cross-cultural enquiry into well-being or more specific aspects of it is an appreciation of how universal tendencies coexist with cultural diversity in happiness concepts, their expression, evaluation, and use in everyday life. Two important starting-points are to look at language (do people talk about happiness in similar ways?) and at the self (how universal is the idea of a single coherent self, and the accompanying capacity for self-reflection?).

**Key Reading**
Veenhoven, Ruut (2012) 'Does happiness differ across cultures?' In H.Selin and G.Davey (Eds.), Happiness Across Cultures: Views of Happiness and Quality of Life in Non-Western Cultures. Dordrecht: Springer, pp.451-472

**Further Optional Reading**
Lee, Dong-Jin, Grace B. Yu and Joseph Sirgy (2017) ‘Culture and well-being: a research agenda designed to improve cross-cultural research involving the life satisfaction construct’ In G.Brulé and F. Maggino [eds], Metrics of Subjective Well-Being: Limits and Improvements. Cham: Springer, pp.203-220


http://www2.bc.edu/~heinrics/ps657&658/First%20Semester%20Readings/Back_to_Basics.pdf


Tsai, Jeanne (2014) ‘Culture and emotion.’ Milwaukie, OR: Noba Project

http://nobaproject.com/modules/culture-and-emotion


**Week 4: Selves, self-construal, self-making, and the meaningful life**

We all know that wants and aspirations are culturally informed. But how far and in what ways is this true of ultimate moral projects as opposed to intermediate aspirations and desires? Is there less aspiration for happiness in some cultural contexts than in others? If so, what can replace happiness as the ultimate value? If not, is the ultimate value of happiness subject to diverse emphases (e.g. individual or collective, short-term pleasure or culturally authenticated happiness, this-worldly or other-worldly happiness?)

**Key Reading**


**Further Optional Reading**


Happiness: Cross Cultural Perspectives (2019-2018)


Week 5: Self-disclosure and empathy: communicating, hiding, and recognizing happiness

This class explores the epistemological question of how we can know about people’s emotions, given the strong cultural influences that regulate the ways in which people manage and show their emotions and notice the emotions of others. More ambitiously, it is worth considering the limits of self-empathy: given that emotional experience is inevitably not only elusive and ephemeral, but also strongly culturally inflected and influenced by social interactions, can we understand our own emotions in any confident sense? Can we really consider ‘interior’ emotional experience as private and ‘authentic’, in contrast to so-called ‘expressions’ of emotion which are partial and potentially censored and inauthentic?

**Key Reading**

Yang, Jie (2013) "Fake happiness": counseling, potentiality, and psycho-politics in China.’ Ethos 41 3 292-312

**Further Optional Reading**

Linger, Daniel T. (2010) 'What is it like to be someone else?' Ethos 38,2:205-229

**Week 6: Emotional experience**

Here we explore the challenges of observing, interpreting and representing emotional experience, looking at the interplay between cultural norms and individual experiences, and between bodily feelings and the ways they are made meaningful.

**Key Reading**


**Further Optional Reading**

Biehl, João, Byron Good, and Arthur Kleinman [eds] (2007) Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations. Berkeley: University of California Press [but note: these anthropologists are notoriously drawn to pathological forms of subjectivity, and have almost nothing to say about happiness] 

**Week 7: Assessing and comparing happiness – numerical, narrative, and visual cultures**

We turn here to epistemological and practical questions. Noting the rapid rise of public and governmental interest in positivist studies of happiness based largely on
questionnaires, we will explore the potential ways in which anthropology could engage with and complement those processes.

**Key Reading**


**Further Optional Reading**


Clark, Andrew E., and Claudia Senik (2011) 'Is happiness different from flourishing? Cross-country evidence from the ESS.' Revue d'Economie Politique 121: 17-34


Week 8: Redemption and contrast: positive lessons from suffering
We will explore the extensive anthropology of suffering, discuss what we can learn about the good life by detour of miseries and ill-treatments, and consider the potential for more balanced and evaluative anthropology.

Key Reading
Davies, James (2011) ‘Positive and negative models of suffering: an anthropology of our shifting cultural consciousness of emotional discontent.’ Anthropology of Consciousness 22.2:188 - 208

Further Optional Reading
Grinde, Bjørn (2015) ‘Why negative feelings are important when assessing well-being.’ Journal of Happiness Studies [online first]
Week 9: Using happiness research to guide policy and practice

The systematic study of deliberate happiness promotion is rapidly gaining ground, but it is still in its infancy. Search engines show that academic or nonacademic on happiness ‘happiness promotion’ are outnumbered by ‘health promotion’ by a factor of several thousand to one. In many happiness-relevant professional domains, ‘policy and practice’ are by default assumed to be either remedial (as in medicine, psychotherapy, and social policy) or aimed at the production of specific goods whose value can’t be assumed to translate into happiness (as in education, public services and industry).

Applied happiness research is therefore about radically transforming policies and practices to make them more inclusive and more aspirational. Anthropological approaches can contribute to this process in two main ways: using ethnography to enhance understanding of how happiness happens; and providing ethnographic meta-studies of global trends towards more explicit attention to happiness or wellbeing in many domains of policy and practice.

Key Reading


Further Optional Reading


Week 10. Conclusions, review and essay planning
No further required reading, but do come prepared to discuss any particularly interesting or problematic readings, thoughts arising from the group presentations, and your approaches to the essays.

n.b. There will be a link to a short course evaluation form on LEARN. It will be extremely helpful in planning future instances of the course if you take a few moments to fill this in.

Journals and web sites
Journal of Happiness Studies
International Journal of Wellbeing
Ethos [not much explicitly about happiness, but it's the key journal for psychological anthropology]
Journal of Positive Psychology
Social Indicators
Psychology of Well-being
Emotion
World Database of Happiness
http://www1.eur.nl/fsw/happiness/

Further general reading suggestions on culture, happiness, and anthropology of emotion


Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, and Isabella S. Csikszentmihalyi [eds] (2006) A Life Worth Living: Contributions to Positive Psychology. OUP USA


http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/hottopics_well-being.aspx