

Chapter 2: Birth of a New Science.

The birth of a new field of exploration, the Science of Happiness was triggered by the work of at least three pioneers, Abraham Maslow, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Martin Seligman, who turned modern psychology upside down, or, perhaps we should say, the right way up. Instead of asking the question, what makes depressed people depressed, which was the main focus of psychology for than a century. They posed a new question.

What makes happy people happy?

In the 1950s, the American psychologist, Abraham Maslow, asked the million-dollar question.

Do we only want to get from depressed to neutral, don't we want to be happy to reach our full potential as human beings?

That's why Maslow is famous for his hierarchy of needs, which is easily illustrated by a pyramid. You can see that there are five levels of human needs, the bottom of level of the pyramid represents the physiological needs. These are really basic needs, such as food and water, only when we satisfy those needs can we begin to think about the second level, which are safety needs, including physical safety, as well as things like job security. For example, if you haven't had a meal in three days you can get so hungry that you don't even think about your own safety!

Once we take care of our physical and safety needs, we are free to think about the next level, to love and be loved, to have satisfying relationships. And next is the need to love ourselves, or in other words, self-esteem. These four stages of what Maslow calls deficiency needs, like vitamin deficiencies; if we don't satisfy these needs, our emotional growth becomes stunted. In 1950, Maslow took a giant step forward and introduced a new kind of psychology, which he called positive psychology, by asking the question.

Don't we want to climb behind neutral and become the happiest people we can be?

He called this the need for self-actualization and it was a growth need. Once we've taken care of our deficiency needs, we need to grow. So you could say, Maslow pioneered the topic of happiness, if not the Science of Happiness, because his hierarchy was more like a road map than a specific discovery based on experimental data. It was Csikszentmihalyi, a Hungarian-American psychologist, and his colleague Reed Larson, who discovered a new scientific method to find out what makes happy people happy at that moment. Through it, Csikszentmihalyi discovered a different dimension of happiness, which he called Flow. People experience Flow through creative, challenging activities, playing piano, or basketball. Flow is closely related to what Maslow described as peak experiences, reported by people who reach the top of his pyramid and achieve self-actualization.

The third psychologist who launched the Science of Happiness, is Martin Seligman, who builds on the insights of Maslow and Csikszentmihalyi and provides a sweeping vision of how people can find greater well-being. Though it was Maslow who coined the word, positive psychology, it was Seligman who kicked positive psychology into high gear as a major field of inquiry. When he was president of the American Psychological Association in 1999, Seligman posed a famous question.

“What makes happy people happy?”

In his groundbreaking book called, *Authentic Happiness*, he describes three kinds of happiness. The first kind is called the pleasant life, we enjoy the pleasant life when we are focused on the present moment, and we're able to control our negative emotions. The secret of the next stage, the engaged life, is about how to discover our unique strengths and use them to enrich our lives. In the next stage, the meaningful life, we go one step beyond that, we still use our strengths to enrich our own lives, but we experience an even greater sense of fulfillment by using our same strengths to bring happiness to others as well as ourselves. In conclusion, Seligman's positive psychology put happiness on the map as a new field of psychology based on the power of positive emotions, on what he calls signature strengths.

So what's the difference, between positive psychology and the Science of Happiness?

The best way to describe this is through concentric circles, the inner circle is positive psychology, which explores happiness from the point of view of social science, and the broader circle is the Science of Happiness, which extends to the natural sciences including nutrition, exercise, and new fields of discovery such as the micro-biome. What makes this course a little bit different is, firstly, that we've followed the Science of Happiness as it unfolds instead of following a specific school of thought. Secondly, we try to keep up to date by exploring recent discoveries about happiness beyond the realm of psychology.

The Science of Happiness doesn't sit still, it is accelerating, and we can closely track it in real time through huge internet databases! Over the last five years, we've seen a flood of new studies on wellbeing, including exciting new areas such as personal autonomy, as well as, food, and mood. We also have much more evidence on more familiar areas, such as exercise and close relationships. The bad news is that scientists are not paid for their communication skills. Their precious discoveries are often lost in technical language and, on top of that, that technical language is buried within growing mountains of information. Tracking the unfolding science of wellbeing is like mining for gold, we need to carefully sift through the information and discover the nuggets. And we need to translate the results into normal English and produce actionable guidelines, in other words, how do we implement the groundbreaking discoveries in our daily lives? And that's the purpose of this course.

Let's illustrate this process through one more pyramid. The bottom step is to find and collect studies related to life-skills and wellbeing in the natural and social sciences. The next step is to pick the most scientifically, rigorous studies, these are usually controlled randomized studies. The third step of the pyramid is to analyze and review the more scientific evidence, systematic reviews are especially valuable since as they complete the second step for us by eliminating weaker studies and systematically analyzing the strongest ones, in order to answer specific questions. Such as, for example, do fermented foods improve our mood? Now for the top step of our pyramid, we take the conclusions of the reviews and turn them into actionable guidelines. In conclusion, we try to follow these same steps for each area of life-skills or what we call the habits of happy people so that we can provide you with a clear road map to well-being.