

Figure 7.2 Measuring Happiness with a Nonverbal Scale

Researchers have used a variety of methods to estimate the distribution of happiness. For example, in one study in the United States, respondents were asked to examine the seven facial expressions shown and select the one that "comes closest to expressing how you feel about your life as a whole." As you can see, the vast majority of participants chose happy faces. (Data adapted from Myers, 1992.)

positive end of the scale, as shown in Figure 7.3 (Veenhoven, 1993). That's not to say that everyone is equally happy. Researchers find substantial and thought-provoking disparities among people in subjective well-being, which we will analyze momentarily, but the overall picture seems rosier than anticipated.

Factors That Do Not Predict Happiness

Let us begin our discussion of individual differences in happiness by highlighting those things that turn out to be relatively unimportant determinants of subjective well-being. Quite a number of factors that you might expect to be influential appear to bear little or no relationship to general happiness.

Money. There is a positive correlation between income and subjective feelings of happiness, but the association is surprisingly weak (Diener & Seligman, 2004). For example, one study found a correlation of just .13 between income and happiness in the United States (Diener et al., 1993). Admittedly, being very poor can make people unhappy, but once people ascend above the poverty level, little relation is seen between income and happiness. On the average, wealthy people are only marginally happier than those in the middle classes. The problem with money is that in this era of voracious consumption, pervasive advertising and rising income fuel escalating material desires (Frey & Stutzer, 2002; Kasser et al., 2004). When these

picture seems rosier A person who looks out of "rose-colored glasses" is an optimist. What does this phrase mean in this sentence?

◆ What pattern of organization is implied throughout this reading selection?

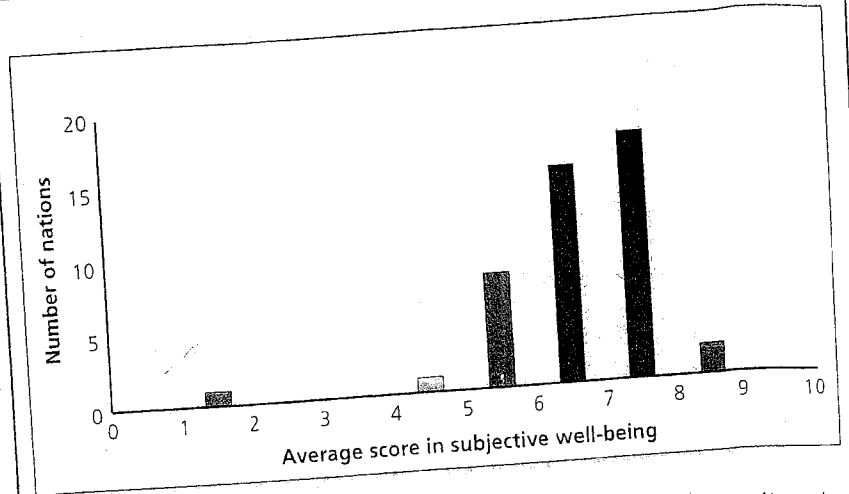
◆ Give examples of what makes people happier and less happy.

ascend Given the immediate context, what does ascend mean?

What is the antonym of ascend?

Figure 7.3 The Subjective Well-Being of Nations

Veenhoven (1993) combined the results of almost 1000 surveys to calculate the average subjective well-being reported by representative samples from 43 nations. The mean happiness scores clearly pile up at the positive end of the distribution, with only two scores falling below the neutral point of 5. (Data adapted from Diener and Diener, 1996)



materialistic Break this word into a root and two suffixes—*material* + *ist* + *ic*. What does it probably mean?

◆ Does age have a big impact on happiness?

◆ Does parenthood have an impact on happiness?

◆ Do intelligence and attractiveness have an impact on happiness?

growing material desires outstrip what people can afford, dissatisfaction is likely (Solberg et al., 2002). Thus, complaints about not having enough money are routine even among people who earn hefty six-figure incomes. Interestingly, there is some evidence that people who place an especially strong emphasis on the pursuit of wealth and materialistic goals tend to be somewhat less happy than others (Kasser, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2001), perhaps in large part because they are so focused on financial success that they don't derive much satisfaction from their family life (Nickerson et al, 2003).

6 **Age.** Age and happiness are consistently found to be unrelated. Age accounts for less than 1 percent of the variation in people's happiness (Inglehart, 1990; Myers & Diener, 1997). The key factors influencing subjective well-being may shift some as people grow older—work becomes less important, health more so—but people's average level of happiness tends to remain remarkably stable over the life span.

7 **Parenthood.** Children can be a tremendous source of joy and fulfillment, but they can also be a tremendous source of headaches and hassles. Compared to childless couples, parents worry more and experience more marital problems (Argyle, 1987). Apparently, the good and bad aspects of parenthood balance each other out, because the evidence indicates that people who have children are neither more nor less happy than people without children (Argyle, 2001).

8 **Intelligence and Attractiveness.** Intelligence and physical attractiveness are highly valued traits in modern society, but researchers have not found an association between either characteristic and happiness (Diener, 1984; Diener, Wolsic, & Fujita, 1995).

Moderately Good Predictors of Happiness

9 Research has identified three facets of life that appear to have a moderate association with subjective well-being: health, social activity, and religious belief.

10 **Health.** Good physical health would seem to be an essential requirement for happiness, but people adapt to health problems. Research reveals that individuals who develop serious, disabling health conditions aren't as unhappy as one might guess (Myers, 1992; Riis et al., 2005). Good health may not, by itself, produce happiness, because people tend to take good health for granted. Considerations such as these may help explain why researchers find only a moderate positive correlation (average = .32) between health status and subjective well-being (Argyle, 1999).

11 **Social Activity.** Humans are social animals, and interpersonal relations do appear to contribute to people's happiness. Those who are satisfied with their social support and friendship networks and those who are socially active report above-average levels of happiness (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Myers, 1999). Furthermore, people who are exceptionally happy tend to report greater satisfaction with their social relations than those who are average or low in subjective well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2002).

12 **Religion.** The link between religiosity and subjective well-being is modest, but a number of large-scale surveys suggest that people with heartfelt religious convictions are more likely to be happy than people who characterize themselves as nonreligious (Argyle, 1999; Ferriss, 2002). Researchers aren't sure how religious faith fosters happiness, but Myers (1992) offers some interesting conjectures. Among other things, he discusses how religion can give people a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives, help them accept their setbacks gracefully, connect them to a caring, supportive community, and comfort them by putting their ultimate mortality in perspective.

Strong Predictors of Happiness

13 The list of factors that turn out to have fairly strong associations with happiness is surprisingly short. The key ingredients of happiness appear to involve love, work, and personality.

14 **Love and Marriage.** Romantic relationships can be stressful, but people consistently rate being in love as one of the most critical ingredients of happiness (Myers, 1999). Furthermore, although people complain a lot about their marriages, the evidence indicates

◆ Does this paragraph include a thesis statement?

◆ Are the next three predictors stronger or weaker than the ones discussed in the previous section?

interpersonal Break this word into a prefix, a root, and a suffix—*inter* + *person* + *al*. Based on the meaning of these words—*international*, *interweave*, *interoffice*—what does *inter* mean?

What does *interpersonal* mean?

◆ When people are isolated, are they less happy than others?

◆ How many possible reasons does Myers give for how having heartfelt religious convictions makes people somewhat happier?

conjectures Based on the meaning of the sentence it is in, what does *conjectures* mean?

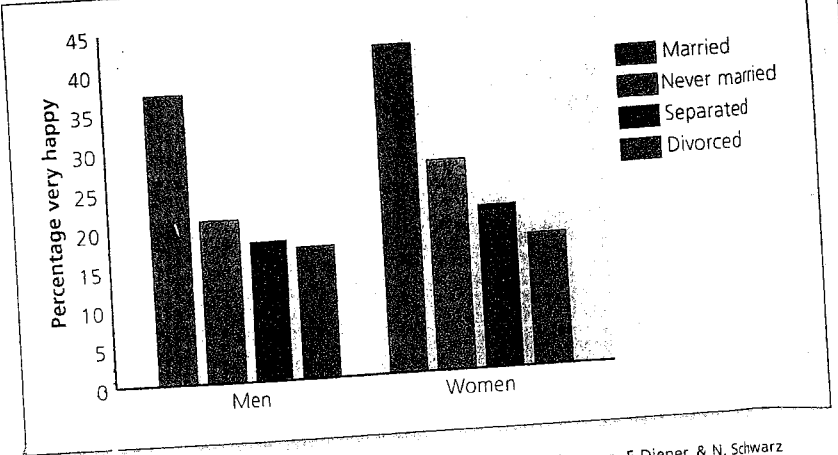
mortality Although this word consists of more than two word parts, consider it as *mortal* + *ity*. What does *mortal* mean?

What do you guess is the purpose for the *-ity* ending?

◆ Does this paragraph include a topic sentence?

Figure 7.4 Happiness and Marital Status

This graph shows the percentage of adults characterizing themselves as "very happy" as a function of marital status (Myers, 1999). Among both women and men, happiness shows up more in those who are married as opposed to those who are separated, are divorced, or have never married. These data and many others suggest that marital satisfaction is a key ingredient of happiness.



Source: Myers, O. C. (1999). Close relationships and quality of life. In O. Kahneman, F. Diener, & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. Copyright © 1999. Reprinted by permission of the Russell Sage Foundation.

◆ What are two important points in this paragraph?

◆ Do unemployed people typically have a strong sense of well-being?

◆ Are external or internal factors more important in whether a person is happy?

that marital status is a key correlate of happiness. Among both men and women, married people are happier than people who are single or divorced (see Figure 7.4; Myers & Diener, 1995), and this relationship holds around the world in widely different cultures (Diener et al., 2000). However, the causal relations underlying this correlation are unclear. It may be that happiness causes marital satisfaction more than marital satisfaction promotes happiness. Perhaps people who are happy tend to have better intimate relationships and more stable marriages, while people who are unhappy have more difficulty finding and keeping mates.

15 Work. Given the way people often complain about their jobs, one might not expect work to be a key source of happiness, but it is. Although less critical than love and marriage, job satisfaction has a substantial association with general happiness (Warr, 1999). Studies also show that unemployment has strong negative effects on subjective well-being (Lucas et al., 2004). It is difficult to sort out whether job satisfaction causes happiness or vice versa, but evidence suggests that causation flows both ways (Argyle, 2001).

16 Personality. The best predictor of individuals' future happiness is their past happiness (Diener & Lucas, 1999). Some people seem destined to be happy and others unhappy, regardless of their triumphs or setbacks. The limited influence of life events was apparent in a stunning study that found only marginal differences in overall happiness between recent lottery winners and recent accident victims who became quadriplegics (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman,

1978). Investigators were amazed that such extremely fortuitous and horrible events didn't have a dramatic impact on happiness. Several lines of evidence suggest that happiness does not depend on external circumstances—buying a nice house, getting promoted—so much as internal factors, such as one's outlook on life (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996). With this fact in mind, researchers have begun to look for links between personality and subjective well-being, and they have found some intriguing correlations. For example, extraversion is one of the better predictors of happiness. People who are outgoing, upbeat, and sociable tend to be happier than others (Fleeson, Malanos, & Achille, 2002). Additional positive correlates of happiness include self-esteem and optimism (Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996).

Conclusions about Subjective Well-Being

- 17 We must be cautious in drawing inferences about the causes of happiness, because the available data are correlational (see Figure 7.5). Nonetheless, the empirical evidence suggests that many popular beliefs about the sources of happiness are unfounded. The data also demonstrate that happiness is shaped by a complex constellation of variables. In spite of this complexity, however, a number of worthwhile insights about the ingredients of happiness can be gleaned from the recent flurry of research.
- 18 First, research on happiness demonstrates that the determinants of subjective well-being are precisely that: subjective. Objective realities are not as important as subjective feelings. In other words, your

◆ Does this paragraph include a topic sentence?

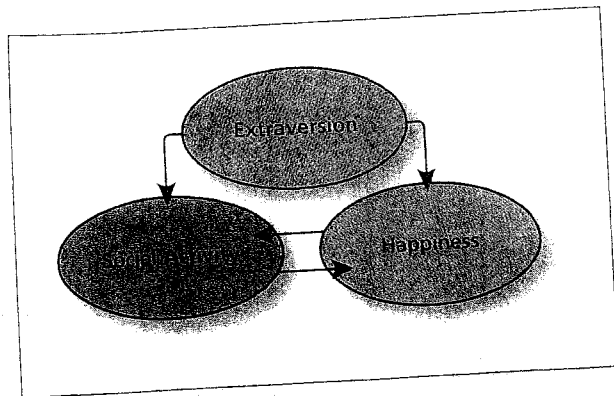


Figure 7.5 Possible Causal Relations Among the Correlates of Happiness
 Although we have considerable data on the correlates of happiness, it is difficult to untangle the possible causal relationships. For example, we know that a moderate positive correlation exists between social activity and happiness, but we can't say for sure whether high social activity causes happiness or whether happiness causes people to be more socially active. Moreover, in light of the research showing that a third variable—extraversion—correlates with both variables, we have to consider the possibility that extraversion causes both greater social activity and greater happiness.

◆ What is the main idea of this paragraph?

◆ How do people decide if they have enough?

◆ What is the main message of this paragraph?

health, your wealth, and your job are not as influential as how you feel about your health, wealth, and job (Schwarz & Strack, 1999). These feelings are likely to be influenced by what your expectations were. Research suggests that bad outcomes feel worse when unexpected than when expected and good outcomes feel better when unexpected than when expected (Shepperd & McNulty, 2002). Thus, the same objective event, such as a pay raise of \$2000 annually, may generate positive feelings in someone who wasn't expecting a raise and negative feelings in someone expecting a much larger increase in salary.

19 Second, when it comes to happiness, everything is relative (Argyle, 1999; Hagerty, 2000). In other words, you evaluate what you have relative to what the people around you have. Generally, we compare ourselves with others who are similar to us. Thus, people who are wealthy assess what they have by comparing themselves with their wealthy friends and neighbors. This is one reason for the low correlation between wealth and happiness. You might have a lovely home, but if it sits next door to a neighbor's palatial mansion, it might be a source of more dissatisfaction than happiness.

20 Third, research on subjective well-being indicates that people often adapt to their circumstances. This adaptation effect is one reason that increases in income don't necessarily bring increases in happiness. Thus hedonic adaptation occurs when the mental scale that people use to judge the pleasantness/unpleasantness of their experiences shifts so that their neutral point, or baseline for comparison, changes. Unfortunately, when people's experiences improve; hedonic adaptation may sometimes put them on a hedonic treadmill—their neutral point moves upward, so that the improvements yield no real benefits (Kahneman, 1999). However, when people have to grapple with major setbacks, hedonic adaptation probably helps protect their mental and physical health. For example, people who are sent to prison and people who develop debilitating diseases are not as unhappy as one might assume, because they adapt to their changed situations and evaluate events from a new perspective (Frederick & Loewenstein, 1999). That's not to say that hedonic adaptation in the face of life's difficulties is inevitable or complete (Lucas et al., 2003). People who suffer major setbacks, such as the death of a spouse or serious illness, often are not as happy as they were before the setback, but generally they are not nearly as unhappy as they or others would have predicted.