



MASSACHUSETTS
GENERAL HOSPITAL

HARVARD
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Social Connection and Flourishing Throughout Life

Studying Wellbeing Across 85 Years

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Measuring World Happiness



- GDP Per Capita
- Social Support
- Healthy Life Expectancy
- Freedom to Make Life Choices
- ▶ Generosity
- Trust (absence of corruption)



The World Happiness Report



The good life
gets defined for
us, not by us



**We are always
comparing our
insides to other
people's outsides**









Gender Balance





What's Been Studied?

- ▶ Mental Health
- ▶ Physical Health
- ▶ WW II Experiences
- ▶ Work
- ▶ Relationships
- ▶ Aging & Retirement







Social connectedness and health



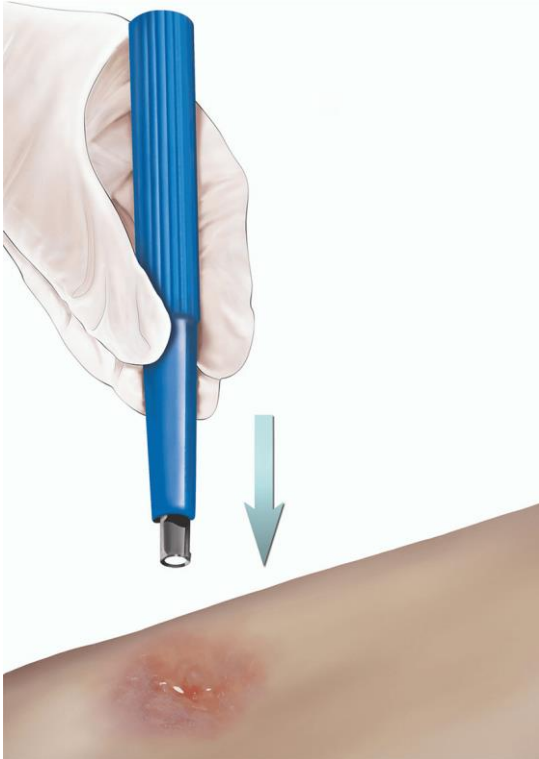
- ▶ Loneliness as powerful as cigarette smoking (1/2 ppd), high blood pressure, and obesity
- ▶ Intimacy keeps us alive:
 - ▶ Married men live 7-17 years longer
 - ▶ Married women live 5-12 year longer
- ▶ Broader social networks and more social activity
 - later onset and slower rates of cognitive decline

Searching for mechanisms



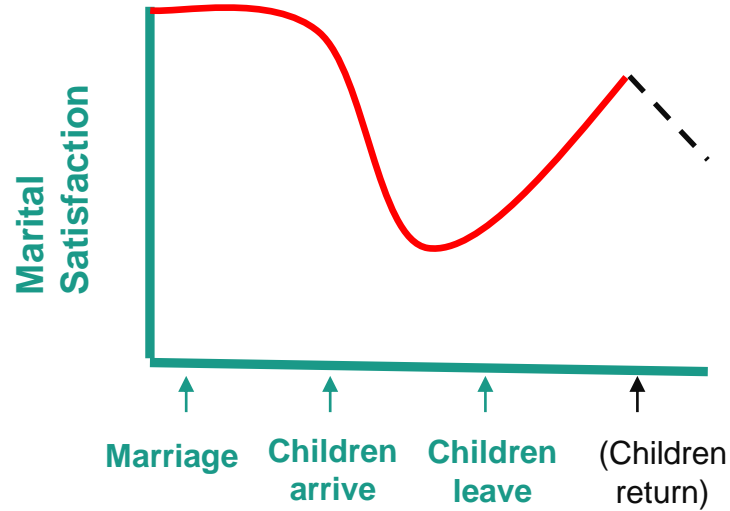
- **Stress and loneliness → health decline**
 - heightened cardiovascular reactivity (Kiecolt-Glaser and Newton 2001; Holt-Lunstad & Smith, 2016)
 - decreased immune function (Graham, Christian et al. 2006)
 - chronic inflammation (McDade, Hawkey et al. 2006)

Stress and Isolation Slow Wound Healing



- Kiecolt-Glaser JK, et al. (1995) "Slowing of Wound Healing by Psychological Stress." *Lancet* :346, 1194-6.

Relationships are not static



... and relationships don't have to be entirely smooth



“The best things in life aren’t things.”





Loneliness is epidemic

17% of adults (=44M) in the US in Feb 2023 said they were lonely “a lot of the day yesterday.” -- Gallup

Loneliest groups:

- Adults under 30 (30%)
- Low-income households <\$24K (27%)



Loneliness at Work

- Gallup poll of 15,000,000 workers globally
“Do you have a best friend at work?”
- Those with a best friend at work are:
 - better at engaging customers
 - produce higher quality work
 - have greater well-being
 - are less likely to get injured on the job
- Only 30% of employees have a best friend at work
- **No best friend at work: only 1 in 12 engaged in their jobs**
- Half of CEOs report feeling lonely





Leaning in to relationships

“**Attention** is the most basic form of love.”

—John Tarrant

Preventive medicine



Road Maps for Life Transitions

MODULE 1

Life Stages Perspective

5 Small Group Meetings to Explore ...



Take Home Messages

- Human connection is a major source of happiness and health
- Technology has the power to isolate or connect
- Lives at home and at work can be structured to combat isolation



Thank you.

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