Anger is not always wrong. Used wisely, it communicates strength and competence (Tiedens, 2001). Anger also motivates people to act courageously and achieve goals (Aarts & Custers, 2012; Halmburger et al., 2015). Controlled expressions of anger are more adaptive than either hostile outbursts or pent-up angry feelings. When angered, people do often react assertively rather than hurtfully (Averill, 1983). Then, to lessen their aggravation, they frequently talk things over with the perpetrator. Civility means not only keeping silent about trivial irritations but also communicating important ones clearly and assertively. A nonaccusing statement of feeling—perhaps letting a roommate know that “I get irritated when I have to clean up your dirty dishes”—can help resolve conflicts. Anger that expresses a grievance in ways that promote reconciliation rather than retaliation can benefit a relationship.

What if someone’s behavior really hurts you, and you cannot resolve the conflict? Research commends the age-old response of forgiveness. Without letting the offender off the hook or inviting further harm—sometimes we need to distance ourselves from an abusive person—forgiveness may release anger and calm the body. In a study of the neural effects of forgiveness, German students had their brain scanned while someone thwarted their opportunity to earn money (Strang et al., 2014). Next, the students were asked whether or not they forgave the wrongdoer. Forgiveness increased blood flow to brain regions that help people understand their own emotions and make socially appropriate decisions.

Anger will never disappear so long as thoughts of resentment are cherished in the mind.” —The Buddha, 500 B.C.E.

RETRIEVAL PRACTICE

**RP-1** Which one of the following is an effective strategy for reducing angry feelings?

- a. Retaliate verbally or physically.
- b. Wait or “simmer down.”
- c. Express anger in action or fantasy.
- d. Review the grievance silently.

*ANSWERS IN APPENDIX E*

**Happiness**

**LOQ 12-12** What is the feel-good, do-good phenomenon, and what is the focus of positive psychology research?

People aspire to, and wish one another, health and happiness. And for good reason. Our state of happiness or unhappiness colors everything. Happy people perceive the world as safer. Their eyes are drawn toward emotionally positive information (Raiia et al., 2015). They are more confident and decisive, and they cooperate more easily. They experience more career success (Walsh et al., 2018). They rate job applicants more favorably, savor their positive past experiences without dwelling on the negative, and are more socially connected. They live healthier and more energized and satisfied lives (Boehm et al., 2015; De Neve et al., 2013; Stellar et al., 2015). And they are more generous (Boenigk & Mayr, 2016).

The simple conclusion: Moods matter. When you are gloomy, life as a whole seems depressing and meaningless—and you think more skeptically and attend more critically to your surroundings. Let your mood brighten and your thinking broaden, becoming more playful and creative (Baas et al., 2008; Forgas, 2008; Fredrickson, 2013).

Young adults’ happiness helps predict their future life course. One study showed that the happiest 20-year-olds were later more likely to marry and less likely to divorce (Stutzer & Frey, 2006). In another study, which surveyed thousands of U.S. college students in 1976 and restudied them at age 37, happy students had gone on to earn significantly more money than their less-happy-than-average peers (Diener et al., 2002). When we are happy, our relationships, self-image, and hopes for the future also seem more promising.

Moreover—and this is one of psychology’s most consistent findings—happiness doesn’t just feel good, it does good. A mood-boosting experience such as recalling a happy event has made people more likely to give money, pick up someone’s dropped papers, volunteer time, and do other good deeds. Psychologists call it the feel-good, do-good phenomenon (Salovey, 1990).
The reverse is also true: Doing good also promotes good feeling. One survey of more than 200,000 people in 136 countries found that, nearly everywhere, people report feeling happier after spending money on others rather than on themselves (Aknin et al., 2015a). Young children also show more positive emotion when they give, rather than receive, gifts (Aknin et al., 2015b). And in one experiment, helping others caused Spanish workers to experience greater well-being. Moreover, the people they helped also became happier and more helpful (Chancellor et al., 2018). Kidney donation hurts, but it leaves donors feeling good (Brethel-Haurwitz & Marsh, 2014). Even convicted criminals feel good when they do good (Hanniball et al., 2019).

Why does doing good feel so good? One reason is that it strengthens our social relationships (Aknin & Human, 2015; Yamaguchi et al., 2015). Some happiness coaches harness this do-good, feel-good phenomenon as they assign people to perform a daily “random act of kindness” and to record the results.

Positive Psychology

William James was writing about the importance of happiness (“the secret motive for all [we do]”) as early as 1902. By the 1960s, the humanistic psychologists were interested in advancing human fulfillment. In the twenty-first century, under the leadership of American Psychological Association past-president Martin Seligman, positive psychology is using scientific methods to study human flourishing. This young subfield includes studies of subjective well-being—our feelings of happiness (sometimes defined as a high ratio of positive to negative feelings) or our sense of satisfaction with life.

Taken together, satisfaction with the past, happiness with the present, and optimism about the future define the positive psychology movement’s first pillar: positive well-being.

Positive psychology is about building not just a pleasant life, says Seligman, but also a good life that engages one’s skills, and a meaningful life that points beyond oneself. Thus, the second pillar, positive traits, focuses on exploring and enhancing creativity, courage, compassion, integrity, self-control, leadership, wisdom, and spirituality. Happiness is a by-product of a pleasant, engaged, and meaningful life.

The third pillar, positive groups, communities, and cultures, seeks to foster a positive social ecology. This includes healthy families, communal neighborhoods, effective schools, socially responsible media, and civil dialogue.

“Positive psychology,” Seligman and colleagues have said (2005), “is an umbrella term for the study of positive emotions, positive character traits, and enabling institutions.” Its focus differs from psychology’s traditional interests in understanding and alleviating negative states—abuse and anxiety, depression and disease, prejudice and poverty. (Psychology articles published since 1887 mentioning “depression” have outnumbered those mentioning “happiness” by 17 to 1.)

In ages past, times of relative peace and prosperity have enabled cultures to turn their attention from repairing weakness and damage to promoting what Seligman (2002) has called “the highest qualities of life.” Prosperous fifth-century Athens nurtured philosophy and democracy. Flourishing fifteenth-century Florence nurtured great art. Victorian England, flush with the bounty of the British Empire, nurtured honor, discipline, and duty. In this millennium, Seligman believes, thriving Western cultures have a parallel opportunity to create, as a “humane, scientific monument,” a more positive psychology, concerned not only with weakness and damage but also with strength and virtue. Thanks to his leadership, and to more than $200 million in funding, the movement has gained strength, with supporters in 77 countries (IPPA, 2017; Seligman, 2016).

The Short Life of Emotional Ups and Downs

LOQ 12-13 How do time, wealth, adaptation, and comparison affect our happiness levels?

Are some days of the week happier than others? In what may be psychology’s biggest-ever data sample, social psychologist Adam Kramer (at my [DM’s] request and in cooperation with Facebook) did a naturalistic observation of emotion words in billions of
status updates. After eliminating exceptional days, such as holidays, he tracked the frequency of positive and negative emotion words by day of the week. The days with the most positive moods? Friday and Saturday (FIGURE 12.12). Similar analyses of questionnaire responses and 59 million Twitter messages found Friday to Sunday the week’s happiest days (Golder & Macy, 2011; Helliwell & Wang, 2015; Young & Lim, 2014). For you, too?

Over the long run, our emotional ups and downs tend to balance out, even over the course of the day. Positive emotion rises over the early to middle part of most days and then drops off (Kahneman et al., 2004; Watson, 2000). A stressful event—an argument, a sick child, a car problem—can trigger a bad mood. No surprise there. But by the next day, the gloom nearly always lifts (Affleck et al., 1994; Bolger et al., 1989; Stone & Neale, 1984). Our overall judgments of our lives often show lingering effects of good or bad events, but our daily moods typically rebound (Luhmann et al., 2012). If anything, people tend to bounce back from a bad day to a better-than-usual good mood the following day.

Worse events—the loss of a spouse or a job—can drag us down for longer periods (Infurna & Luthar, 2016). But eventually, most bad moods end. A romantic breakup feels devastating, but in time the wound heals. In one study, faculty members up for tenure expected their lives would be deflated by a negative decision. Actually, 5 to 10 years later, their happiness level was about the same as for those who received tenure (Gilbert et al., 1998).

Grief over the loss of a loved one or anxiety after severe trauma (such as child abuse, rape, or the terrors of war) can linger. But usually, even tragedy is not permanently depressing. People who become blind or paralyzed may not completely recover their previous well-being, but those with an agreeable personality usually recover near-normal levels of day-to-day happiness (Boyce & Wood, 2011; Hall et al., 1999). Even if you become paralyzed, explained psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2005), “you will gradually start thinking of other things, and the more time you spend thinking of other things the less miserable you are going to be.”

The surprising reality: We overestimate the duration of our emotions and underestimate our resiliency and capacity to adapt. (As one who inherited hearing loss with a trajectory toward that of my mother, who spent the last 13 years of her life completely deaf, I [DM] take heart from these findings.)

### Can Money Buy Happiness?

Would you be happier if you made more money? How important is “being very well off financially”? “Very important” or “essential,” say 82 percent of entering U.S. college students (Eagan et al., 2016). But can money truly buy happiness?

#### EFFECTS OF INCOME AND INEQUALITY

**National wealth matters.** People in countries where most people have a secure livelihood tend to be happier than those in poor countries (Diener & Tay, 2015).

**Personal income (up to a satiation point) predicts happiness.** Having enough money to eat, to feel control over your life, and to occasionally treat yourself to something special predicts greater happiness (Fischer & Boer, 2011; Ruberton et al., 2016). As Australian data confirm, the power of more money to increase happiness is strongest at low incomes (Cummins, 2006). A $10,000 wage increase does more for someone making $10,000 annually than for someone making $100,000.

Once we have enough money for comfort and security, we reach an “income satiation” point, beyond which piling up more and more matters less and less (Donnelly et al., 2018; Jebb et al., 2018). Experiencing luxury diminishes our savoring of life’s simpler pleasures (Cooney et al., 2014; Quoidbach et al., 2010). If you ski the Alps once, your neighborhood sledding hill pales. If you ski the Alps every winter, it becomes an ordinary part of life rather than an experience to treasure (Quoidbach et al., 2015).
Over time, a rising economic tide has not produced increased happiness or decreased depression. Consider: Since the late 1950s, the average U.S. citizen’s buying power almost tripled—enabling larger homes and twice as many cars per person, not to mention tablets and smartphones. Did it also buy more happiness? As Figure 12.13 shows, Americans have become no happier. In 1957, some 35 percent said they were “very happy,” as did slightly fewer—33 percent—in 2014. Much the same has been true of Europe, Canada, Australia, and Japan, where increasing real incomes have not produced increasing happiness (Australian Unity, 2008; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008; Di Tella & MacCulloch, 2010; Zuzanek, 2013). Ditto China, where living standards have risen but happiness and life satisfaction have not (Davey & Rato, 2012; Graham et al., 2018). These findings lob a bombshell at modern materialism: Economic growth in affluent countries has provided no apparent boost to people’s morale or social well-being.

Extreme inequality is socially toxic. Why has economic growth not made us happier? Economic growth has been accompanied by rising inequality, which, across times and places, predicts unhappiness (Cheung & Lucas, 2016; Graafland & Lous, 2019). In countries such as the United States, China, and India, the rising economic tide has lifted the yachts faster than the rowboats (Hasell, 2018). In countries and states with greater inequality, lower income people tend to experience more ill health, social problems, and mental disorders (Payne, 2017; Sommet et al., 2018; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2017a,b). Across the world, we seem to understand this. Regardless of their political party, most people say they would prefer smaller pay gaps between the rich and the poor (Arsenio, 2018; Kiatpongsan & Norton, 2014).

Ironically, in every culture, those who strive hardest for wealth have tended to live with lower well-being, especially when they seek money to prove themselves, gain power, or show off rather than support their families (Donnelly et al., 2016; Niemiec et al., 2009; Srivastava et al., 2001). Those who instead strive for intimacy, personal growth, and community contribution experience a higher quality of life (Kasser, 2018).

Happiness Is Relative: Adaptation and Comparison

Two other psychological principles explain why more money does not, except when scarce, buy more happiness. In its own way, each principle suggests that happiness is relative.
Happiness is relative to our own experience. The adaptation-level phenomenon describes our tendency to judge various stimuli in comparison with our past experiences. As psychologist Harry Helson (1898–1977) explained, we adjust our neutral levels—the points at which sounds seem neither loud nor soft, temperatures neither hot nor cold, events neither pleasant nor unpleasant—based on our experience. We then notice and react to variations up or down from these levels. Have you noticed how the first chilly fall day feels colder than the same temperature mid-winter?

So, could we ever create a permanent social paradise? Probably not (Campbell, 1975; Di Tella et al., 2010). People who have experienced a recent windfall—from a lottery, an inheritance, or a surging economy—typically feel elated (Diener & Oishi, 2000; Gardner & Oswald, 2007). So would you, if you woke up tomorrow to your utopia—perhaps a world with no bills, no ills, and perfect grades. But eventually, you would adapt to this new normal. Before long, you would again sometimes feel gratified (when events exceed your expectations) and sometimes feel deprived (when they fall below). The point to remember: Feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, success and failure are judgments we make based partly on expectations formed by our recent experience (Rutledge et al., 2014).

Happiness is relative to others’ success. We are always comparing ourselves with others. And whether we feel good or bad depends on who those others are (Lyubomirsky, 2001). Believing that others have more friends or are more socially successful makes us feel worse (Whillans et al., 2017; Zell et al., 2018). This sensation—that we are worse off than others with whom we compare ourselves—is called relative deprivation (Smith et al., 2018).

When expectations soar above attainments, we feel disappointed. Worldwide, life satisfaction suffers when people with low incomes compare themselves to those with higher incomes (Macchia et al., 2019). As people climb the ladder of success, they mostly compare themselves with local peers who are at or above their current level (Gruder, 1977; Suls & Tesch, 1978; Zell & Alicke, 2010). As British philosopher Bertrand Russell (1930/1985, pp. 68–69) noted, “Napoleon envied Caesar, Caesar envied Alexander, and Alexander, I daresay, envied Hercules, who never existed. You cannot, therefore, get away from envy by means of success alone, for there will always be in history or legend some person even more successful than you are.”

Just as comparing ourselves with those who are better off creates envy, so counting our blessings as we compare ourselves with those worse off boosts our contentment. In one study, university women considered others’ deprivation and suffering (Dermer et al., 2017). They viewed vivid depictions of grim city life in 1900. They imagined and then wrote about various personal tragedies, such as being burned and disfigured. Later, the women expressed greater satisfaction with their own lives. Similarly, when mildly depressed people have read about someone who was even more depressed, they felt somewhat better (Gibbons, 1986). “I cried because I had no shoes,” states a Persian saying, “until I met a man who had no feet.”

What Predicts Our Happiness Levels?

What predicts happiness, and how can we be happier?

Happy people share many characteristics (Table 12.2). But why are some people normally so joyful and others so somber? Here, as in so many other areas, the answer is found in the interplay between nature and nurture.

Genes matter. In one analysis of over 55,000 identical and fraternal twins, 36 percent of the differences among people’s happiness ratings was heritable—attributable to genes (Bartels, 2015). Even identical twins raised apart are often similarly happy. The quest for specific genes that influence happiness confirms a familiar lesson: Human traits are influenced by many genes having small effects (Røysamb & Nes, 2019).

But our personal history and our culture matter, too. On the personal level, as we have seen, our emotions tend to balance around a level defined by our experience. On the cultural level, groups vary in the traits they value. Self-esteem and achievement matter...
more in Western cultures, which value individualism. Social acceptance and harmony matter more in communal cultures such as Japan, which stress family and community (Diener et al., 2003; Fulmer et al., 2010; Uchida & Kitayama, 2009).

Depending on our genes, our outlook, and our recent experiences, our happiness seems to fluctuate around a “happiness set point,” which disposes some people to be ever upbeat and others more negative. Even so, after following thousands of lives over two decades, researchers have determined that our satisfaction with life can change (Lucas & Donnellan, 2007). Happiness rises and falls, and can be influenced by factors that are under our control (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2014; Nes, 2010). See Table 12.3 for research-based suggestions for improving your mood and increasing your satisfaction with life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 12.2 Happiness Is . . .</th>
<th>However, Happiness Seems Not Much Related to Other Factors, Such as</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researchers Have Found That Happy People Tend to</td>
<td>Age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have high self-esteem (in individualist countries).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be optimistic, outgoing, agreeable, and humorous.</td>
<td>Gender (women are more often depressed, but also more often joyful).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have close, positive, and lasting relationships.</td>
<td>Physical attractiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have work and leisure that engage their skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have an active religious faith (especially in more religious cultures).</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep well and exercise.</td>
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Information from Batz-Bararich et al., 2018; De Neve & Cooper, 1998; Diener et al., 2003, 2011; Headey et al., 2010; Lucas et al., 2004; Myers, 1993, 2000; Myers & Diener, 1995, 1996; Steel et al., 2008; Veenhoven, 2014, 2015 offers a database of 13,000+ correlates of happiness at WorldDatabaseofHappiness.eur.nl.

TABLE 12.3 Evidence-Based Suggestions for a Happier Life

- **Take control of your time.** Happy people feel in control of their lives and less time-stressed (Whillans, 2019). Too little time is stressful, too much is boring. So, set goals and divide them into manageable daily aims. We all tend to overestimate how much we will accomplish in any given day, but the good news is that we generally underestimate how much we can accomplish in a year, given just a little daily progress.

- **Act happy.** Research shows that people who are manipulated into a smiling expression feel better. So put on a happy face. Talk as if you feel positive self-esteem, are optimistic, and are outgoing. We can often act our way into a happier state of mind.

- **Seek work and leisure that engage your skills.** Happy people often are in a zone called flow—absorbed in tasks that challenge but don’t overwhelm them. Passive forms of leisure (streaming movies and television shows) often provide less flow experience than exercising, socializing, or expressing artistic interests.

- **Buy experiences rather than things.** For those who are not struggling financially, money buys more happiness when spent on experiences, especially socially shared experiences, that you look forward to, enjoy, remember, and talk about (Caprariello & Reis, 2013; Kumar & Gilovich, 2013, 2015; Lee et al., 2018). As pundit Art Buchwald said, “The best things in life aren’t things.”

- **Join the “movement” movement.** Aerobic exercise not only promotes health and energy, it also helps prevent or relieve depression (Willis et al., 2018). Sound minds often reside in sound bodies.

- **Give your body the sleep it wants.** Happy people live active lives yet reserve time for renewing, refreshing sleep. Sleep debt results in fatigue, diminished alertness, and gloomy moods. If you sleep now, you’ll smile later.

- **Give priority to close relationships.** Compared with unhappy people, happy people engage in more meaningful conversations (Milek et al., 2018). Resolve to nurture your closest relationships by not taking your loved ones for granted: Give them the sort of kindness and affirmation you give others. Relationships matter.

- **Focus and find meaning beyond self.** Reach out to those in need. Perform acts of kindness. Happiness increases helpfulness, but doing good also fills us with happiness, meaning, and purpose. And meaning matters mightily: A meaningful life is often a long, active, and healthy life (Alimujiang et al., 2019; Hooker & Masters, 2018).

- **Challenge your negative thinking.** Reframe “I failed” to “I can learn from this.” Remind yourself that stuff happens, and that in a month or a year, this bad experience may not seem like that big a deal.

- **Count your blessings and record your gratitude.** Keeping a gratitude journal heightens well-being (Davis et al., 2016). Take time to savor positive experiences and achievements, and to appreciate why they occurred (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2012). Express your gratitude to another and prepare to be surprised at how positively you both feel (Dickens, 2017; Kumar & Epley, 2018).

- **Nurture your spiritual self.** Meditation helps us stay steady, emotionally. And for many people, faith provides a support community, a reason to focus beyond self, and a sense of purpose and hope. That helps explain why, worldwide, people active in faith communities report greater-than-average happiness and often cope well with crises (Pew, 2019).
If we can enhance our happiness on an individual level, could we use happiness research to refocus our national priorities more on the pursuit of happiness? Many psychologists believe we could. Happy societies are not only prosperous, but also places where people trust one another, feel free, and enjoy close relationships (Helliwell et al., 2013; Oishi & Schimmack, 2010). Thus, in debates about the minimum wage, economic inequality, tax rates, divorce laws, health care, and city planning, people's psychological well-being can be a consideration. Many political leaders agree: 43 nations have begun measuring their citizens' well-being, and many have undertaken interventions to boost national well-being (Diener et al., 2015, 2019). Britain’s Annual Population Survey, for example, asks its citizens how satisfied they are with their lives, how worthwhile they judge their lives, and how happy and how anxious they felt yesterday (ONS, 2018).

Are you surprised by any of the findings related to happiness? What things might you change in your life to increase your happiness?

Which of the following factors does NOT predict self-reported happiness?

- a. Age
- b. Personality traits
- c. Sleep and exercise
- d. Active religious faith

Answers in Appendix E