

# The Social Psychology of Health and Well-Being

**Fall 2021**

**Location:** To be announced

**Time:** To be announced

**Instructor:** Hellen Vergoossen

## Course description

Psychological well-being among undergraduate students is a growing research topic among scientific psychologists. Stress and anxiety about friendship, love, financial security, pandemics, and the future of the planet occupy the minds of many university students (and others). Such is the focus of this course.

We will examine the research in social psychology which analyzes current societal conditions in many western societies which are creating an increase in stress and anxiety among young people. In addition, we will examine psychological coping strategies and address the research on what makes most people content or happy, and thus, promotes mental health and general well-being. Health and wellness issues will be examined in relation to different gender and ethnic identities, as well as in the context of cultural notions of success and failure, in school, work, leisure, and in personal relationships. Attention will also be given to how the use of social media – from Instagram to dating apps- among young people can psychologically affect ones sense of personal identity. Our comparative lens will be on the empirical research in social psychology which examines the mental health and well-being among college-aged populations in the U.S. and Sweden, underscoring both differences and similarities in mental health indicators. Pre-requisites: one course in psychology. This course is typically given credit by Psychology Departments.

## Course requirements and examinations

**In-class quizzes:** At the beginning of each lecture (except the introduction), there will be a short in-class quiz (15 minutes) based on the reading for the lecture. You will be answering two to three questions that cover the readings main content. Each quiz will be followed by a discussion on the correct answers and the reading more generally. The goal of the quizzes is helping you better and consistently learn the material, but it also has the consequence of helping you monitor and improve your grade. There will be 10 quizzes in total, but only the 8 best quizzes grades will count towards your final grade! Even if you have a valid excuse, there will be no make-up quizzes (since there is no fair way to give a make-up quiz using different questions). If you miss a quiz for any reason, that quiz will need to be one of the two quizzes you drop.

**Active participation:** This course takes an interactive approach that requires engaged participation from all members of the class. Students' presence is essential to the liveliness of the course; therefore, regular attendance is expected and considered mandatory. One absence is permitted; each subsequent unexcused absence will lower the overall participation grade by one step (A → A-).

Everybody should behave respectfully in the classroom. This includes coming to class on time, giving speakers undivided attention, addressing classmates and the instructor with respect, and refraining from academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, taking credit for the work of others, etc.).

**Student presentation:** In small groups of 2 to 3 students, you will prepare a presentation and lead a discussion on one of the lecture's main topics. In the presentation, you will be expected to present scientific literature that goes beyond the mandatory reading. Here, you are free to choose your own focus of interest (within the lecture's main topic!). The presentation should not exceed 30 minutes and engage your fellow students. Feel free to include interactive elements, such as small in-class survey's, exercises, role play, etc. More details will be provided later.

**Final paper (10 pages):** The final exam is as thorough examination of a phenomenon related to the classes topic that you find especially interesting. The paper includes a literature review and a proposal for a study design that could be used to study the phenomenon further. More details on the final paper will be provided later. Not turning in the final paper in time will lead to the lowering of the final paper grade by one step for each day of delay (1 day delay: A → A-, 2 days delay: A→B).

**Final paper proposal (1 page):** To make sure you are on the right track, you will submit a final paper proposal that outlines the topic and approach of your final paper. More details will be provided later. Not turning in the final paper proposal in time will lead to the lowering of the final paper proposal grade by one step for each day of delay (1 day delay: A → A-, 2 days delay: A→B).

### Calculation of the final grade

In-class quizzes (the best 8 of 10 count)	20 %
Active participation	20%
Student presentation (group assignment)	20%
Final paper (10 page)	30%
Final paper proposal (1 page)	10%

## Required readings

We will not follow a textbook during this course. Instead, we will read relevant publications, mostly from scientific journals, that review topics of our interest and present important studies. The readings are diverse, but they are always related to the theme of the seminar, i.e., they address different mental health issues and challenges to well-being that young adults may face, as well as articles about environment and individual factors that promote mental health and well-being. Some articles were chosen to address mental health and well-being issues affecting youth in Sweden and the US. The selected materials will be distributed on the web-page for the course.

The articles are listed in the syllabus but may be subject to change (especially articles about the Corona pandemic).

## Lectures

Total time for each lecture is expected to be 3 hours including breaks.

### 1. Introduction: Decreasing well-being among young Americans and Swedes

Denizet-Lewis, B. (2017). Why are more American teenagers than ever suffering from severe anxiety? *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/11/magazine/why-are-more-american-teenagers-than-ever-suffering-from-severe-anxiety.html>

Savage, M. (2019). Burnout is rising in the land of work-life balance. *BBC*, <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20190719-why-is-burnout-rising-in-the-land-of-work-life-balance>

Ortiz-Ospina, E. & Roser, M. (2017). Happiness and life satisfaction. *Our World in Data*, <https://ourworldindata.org/happiness-and-life-satisfaction>

### 2. The well-being of international students

Hendrickson, B., Rosen, D., & Kelly Aune, R. (2010). An analysis of friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness, and satisfaction levels of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(3), 281-295. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.08.001>

Szabo, A., Ward, C., & Jose, P. E. (2015). Uprooting stress, coping, and anxiety: A longitudinal study of international students. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 23(2), 190–208. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0039771>

Edunation (2020). Adjusting to a new life – Challenges faced by international students, *Edunation*, <https://www.edunation.co/studyinfinland/blog/adjusting-new-life-challenges-faced-international-students/>

### **3. Happiness in Sweden and the USA**

Martela, F., Greve, B., Rothstein, B., & Saari, J. (2020). The Nordic exceptionalism: What explains why the Nordic countries are constantly among the happiest in the world? *World Happiness Report*, Chapter 7.

Fors Connolly, F., & Johansson Sevä, I., (2018). Social status and life satisfaction in context: A comparison between Sweden and the USA. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 8(2), 110-134. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v8i2.710>

### **4. Gender and well-being**

Hilding, C, Luepke, R. V., Baigi, A., & Lidell, E. (2006). Stress, health complaints and self-confidence: A comparison between young adult women in Sweden and USA. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Science*, 20(4), 202–208. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6712.2006.00395.x>.

Wong, Y. J., Ho, M.-H. R., Wang, S.-Y., & Miller, I. S. K. (2017). Meta-analyses of the relationship between conformity to masculine norms and mental health-related outcomes. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 64(1), 80 –93. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000176>

### **5. Race/ ethnicity and well-being**

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2019). *Being Black in the EU. Second European Union minorities and discrimination survey – Summary*. <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2019/being-black-eu-summary>

Bor, J., Venkataramani, A. S., Williams, D. R., & Tsai, R. C. (2018). Police killings and their spillover effects on the mental health of black Americans: A population-based, quasi-experimental study. *Lancet*, 392, 302–310. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)31130-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31130-9).

Pieterse, A. L., Todd, N. R., Neville, H. A., & Carter, R. T. (2012). Perceived racism and mental health among Black American adults: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 59(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026208>

### **6. Individual challenges to well-being: Perfectionism**

Levine, S. L., Milyavskaya, M., & Zuroff, D. C. (2020). Perfectionism in the transition to university: Comparing diathesis-stress and downward spiral models of depressive symptoms. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 8(1), 52–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702619865966>

Wei, M., Heppner, P. P., Mallen, M. J., Ku, T.-Y., Liao, K. Y.-H., & Wu, T.-F. (2007). Acculturative stress, perfectionism, years in the United States, and depression among Chinese international students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *54*(4), 385–394. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.54.4.385>

Ferrari M, Yap K, Scott N, Einstein DA, Ciarrochi J (2018) Self-compassion moderates the perfectionism and depression link in both adolescence and adulthood. *PLoS ONE* *13*(2), e0192022. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0192022>

## **7. Global challenges to well-being: The Corona pandemic**

Dubey, S. et al. (2020). Psychosocial impact of COVID-19. *Diabetes & Metabolic Syndrome: Clinical Research & Reviews*, *14*, 779-788, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dsx.2020.05.035>

Nikunen, M., & Korvajärvi, P. (2020). Being positive, being hopeful, being happy: Young adults reflecting on their future in times of austerity. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Online first, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549420935901>

Movk, J. (2020). Psychological Trauma Is the Next Crisis for Coronavirus Health Workers. Hero worship alone doesn't protect frontline clinicians from distress. *Scientific America*, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/psychological-trauma-is-the-next-crisis-for-coronavirus-health-workers>

## **8. Global challenges to well-being: Climate change**

Taylor, M., & Murray, J. (2020). ‘Overwhelming and terrifying’: The rise of climate anxiety. Experts concerned young people’s mental health particularly hit by reality of the climate crisis. *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/10/overwhelming-and-terrifying-impact-of-climate-crisis-on-mental-health>

Doherty, T. J., & Clayton, S. (2011). The psychological impacts of global climate change. *American Psychologist*, *66*(4), 265–276. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023141>

Krekel, C., & MacKerron, G. (2020). How environmental quality affects our happiness. *World Happiness Report*, Chapter 5.

## **9. Excursion: Nordiska Museet**

Visit the Exhibition “The Arctic - While the ice is melting”

“Experience an Exhibition About Life in a Changing World: Nordiska museet’s Great Hall has been given over to the life and changing conditions of the Arctic region. In The Arctic – While

the Ice Is Melting, you encounter the history and the future of the ice, and above all the people who live in the Arctic today – through objects, photos, design, artwork, films and projections.”

**For more information:** <https://www.nordiskamuseet.se/en/exhibitions/arctic-while-the-ice-is-melting>

## **10. Cure or curse? Social media and well-being**

Kross, E., Verduyn, P., Demiralp, E., Park, J., Lee, D. S., Lin, N., Shablack, H., Jonides, J., & Ybarra, O. (2013). Facebook use predicts declines in subjective well-being in young adults. *PLoS ONE*, 8(8), Article e69841. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0069841>

Verduyn, P., Ybarra, O., Résibois, M., Jonides, J., & Kross, E. (2017). Do social network sites enhance or undermine subjective well-being? A critical review. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 11(1), 274–302. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12033>

Ho, Y.-C., & Timmermans, E. (2020). Tinder blue, mental flu? Exploring the associations between Tinder use and well-being. *Information Communication and Society*, Online first, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1764606>

## **11. Promoting well-being: Friendship & Community**

Deci, E. L., La Guardia, J. G., Moller, A. C., Scheiner, M. J., & Ryan, R. M. (2006). On the benefits of giving as well as receiving autonomy support: Mutuality in close friendships. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, 32(3), 313-327. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167205282148>

Dunn, E. W., Gilbert, D. T., & Wilson, T. D. (2011). If money doesn't make you happy, then you probably aren't spending it right. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 21(2), 115-125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2011.02.002>

Helliwell, J. F., Huang, H., Wang, S., & Norton, M. (2020). Social environments for world happiness. *World Happiness Report*, Chapter 2.

## **12. Promoting well-being: Healthy behaviors**

Chekroud, S. R., Gueorguieva, R., Zheutlin, A. B., Paulus, M., Krumholz, H. M., Krystal, J. H., & Chekroud, A. M. (2018). Association between physical exercise and mental health in 1,2 million individuals in the USA between 2011 and 2015: A cross-sectional study. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 5(9), 739-746. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(18\)30227-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(18)30227-X)

Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present: mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(4), 822-848. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.4.822>

Lalji, C., & Pakrashi, D. (2020). Sleeping patterns and psychological wellbeing: Evidence from young adults in the United States, *GLO Discussion Paper, 550*, Global Labor Organization (GLO): Essen.