Happiness and Culture CFP: Two Important Changes

Discussion published by Vida Penezic on Friday, December 18, 2020

Please note two important changes since our last announcement:

1. Paper proposals are now due January 6, 2021. Most other dates have been adjusted accordingly. (The new dates are given at the end of the CFP.)
2. The conference will have a virtual component. During these COVID times, it is difficult to commit to travel plans months in advance. We hope that the possibility of a virtual participation may facilitate your decision to submit a proposal.

Call for Papers
Special Topic: Happiness and Culture
Popular Culture Association (PCA) National Conference
June 2 - 5, Boston, MA

We are seeking paper proposals for the special topic Happiness and Culture to be presented at the 2021 PCA National Conference in Boston. The proposals should focus on the relationship between happiness (understood as subjective well-being) and popular culture, broadly defined. We are interested in papers that examine the role human desire for happiness plays in cultural products and practices (including the relevant cultural institutions and industries) and vice versa. We are looking for papers that illuminate the impact of cultural products and practices, the values and beliefs they embody, and the economic laws that govern them on popular definitions of happiness and how best to pursue it.

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Philosophers and scholars have long argued that humans seek happiness above all else. There are very few goals more important to us than happiness and very few things that motivate us more strongly to action. You can get us to do, buy, create, accomplish, watch, and attend almost anything if the promised payoff is happiness. In short, the desire for happiness is potentially among the most significant forces in any culture.

While the desire for happiness is universally human, beliefs and attitudes about happiness vary with changing historical periods, cultural values, socioeconomic conditions, political ideologies, religious and philosophical views, geographic locations, and other factors. Individual attitudes and beliefs about happiness (as well as the ability to access it) are partially shaped by the culture/country/time period in which one lives, including by the specific position one occupies in that culture/country, such as one’s gender, ethnicity, class status, sexual orientation, or minority/majority status.

The appreciation of happiness has always been an essential part of American culture. It’s in movie plots, in advertising, in how-to books, in popular music (unless the song laments its loss), in amusement parks, in positive thinking movements, in the way the news shows end on a positive note, in that wide smile flashed during public encounters by...just about everybody. The pursuit of happiness is one of the three American unalienable rights; the right to it is one of the truths considered to be self-evident.

But, what are Americans pursuing with the expectation of finding happiness? Financial success and material possessions? Fame? Stardom? Love? Advantageous marriage? A career? A family? Why pursue that and not something else? Where do the ideas about happiness come from? Do media and popular arts disseminate certain images of happiness? If so, are these portrayals helpful or misleading? Whose interests do they serve? What impact do cultural, social, and economic forces have on what people (are encouraged to)
pursue as happiness? Do different cultures look for happiness in different places? Do they define it differently? Do different groups in a society have different views on happiness? If, as some scientists claim, happiness is partly learned, what role does popular culture play in this process?

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Possible topics include (but are not limited to):
- Portrayals of happiness in popular products and practices, such as books, movies, comic books, songs, advertising, dating apps, sporting events, and holiday celebrations. What definitions of happiness do these portrayals imply? What path to happiness do they propose?
- The happiness-making properties of popular genres and products, such as romantic comedies, sitcoms, video games, and meditation apps. Why do these genres and products make us feel good? What definitions of happiness do they imply? What beliefs and values do they embody?
- Compare/contrast portrayals of happiness in different historical periods. For example: Are the causes of women’s happiness portrayed differently in the movies today than in the 1950s?
- Compare/contrast beliefs about (portrayals of) happiness in different cultures/countries.
- Compare/contrast portrayals of happiness in different popular genres, such as action/adventure, drama, or comedy.
- The relationship between the prevailing ideas about (portrayals of) happiness in a certain culture and the dominant values and beliefs.
- The relationship between socioeconomic class and ideas about (portrayals of) happiness.
- The science of happiness. What does scientific research tell us about happiness? Do scientific findings correlate with cultural beliefs about (popular portrayals of) happiness?
- Compare/contrast famous views on happiness (Buddha, Aristotle, Epicurus, John Locke, Maslow, Seligman) and popular portrayals of happiness.
- The attempts to manipulate human desire for happiness: by using it as a carrot to elicit desirable behaviors, such as compliance, hard work, and purchasing choices; by portraying the oppressed people as happy, often to justify the oppression; or by depicting the misery and tragic endings of characters who failed to make culturally preferred life choices.

For additional paper ideas, please visit www.happinessandculture.com. We especially welcome papers from members of ethnic minorities, the LGBT community, and immigrant communities, as well as from the members of non-mainstream, alternative cultures.

We are considering proposals for individual papers and/or complete panels. Sessions are scheduled in 1.5-hour slots, typically with four papers or speakers per standard session. Individual presentations should not exceed 15 minutes. Please submit a 100–150 word abstract for individual papers and/or a 250–300 word abstract for panels. Please include the title of the paper and/or panel. Working professionals, scholars, educators, and graduate students are all encouraged to submit.

**Paper proposals are due January 6, 2021.** All submissions must be uploaded through the PCA website: [http://www.pcaaca.org](http://www.pcaaca.org). To submit to the conference, individuals must be current, paid members of the PCA.

**NEW 2021 Conference Dates and Deadlines**

We are pleased to announce that our deadlines are extended. Paper proposals are now due no later than **January 6, 2021.**

**However, please note that the last day to submit a travel grant application is December 17, 2020.**

New deadlines are as follows:

- 12-Aug-20 Submission Page Goes Live
- 22-Oct-20 Early Bird Registration Begins
- 17-Dec-20 Deadline for Endowment Grant Applications
- 06-Jan-21 Deadline for Paper and Panel Proposals
01-Feb-21 Early Bird Registration Ends
02-Feb-21 Regular Registration Begins
01-Mar-21 Regular Registration Ends
02-Mar-21 Late Registration Begins
15-Mar-21 Preliminary Schedule Available
31-Mar-21 Presenter Late Registration Ends at 11:59 pm:

**Non-registrants Dropped from Program**
01-April-21 Non-presenter Registration Continues
Through the Conference
June 2-5, 2021 National Conference in Boston

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