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Semiotics of Happiness

Rhetorical beginnings of a public problem

Ashley Frawley
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Preface

One of the most intriguing developments in Western societies in the twenty-first century is the growing significance that politicians, policymakers, experts, cultural entrepreneurs and the media attach to the value of happiness. At the turn of the century, it would have been difficult to imagine that political parties and governments would be enthusing about policies promoting happiness as the big idea of our era. Yet, as Dr Ashley Frawley argues in this book, happiness is frequently represented as the truly enlightened alternative to the tired old policies of the twentieth century.

From a historical and sociological perspective, it is truly striking how the concept of happiness is rarely interrogated. Occasionally, one encounters the demand that the concept of happiness be defined or further clarified. Some have called into question the policymakers' contention that happiness can be meaningfully measured. Others have queried its technocratic and instrumental adaptation and use. However, even many of its critics implicitly accept the assumptions that lie behind the promotion of the goal of happiness. Indeed, the moral crusaders who idealize happiness rarely have to account for themselves because of its status as a taken-for-granted concept.

And, yet, as Frawley eloquently outlines, the current problematization of happiness is the outcome of social construction. What is deeply disturbing about the problematization of happiness is that it continually communicates the claim that unless certain policies and therapeutic techniques are adopted most of us are unlikely to be well. It advocates the belief that without political or therapeutic intervention we are doomed to the state of being unhappy. Thus, the sacralization of happiness is paralleled by a tendency to devalue the emotional and intellectual resources of the human subject. In a world where the problems of society are continually recast as that of individual psychological deficits, the goal of happiness acquires a redemptive character. But, redemption can only be realized through the intervention of the Expert.

The transformation of happiness – or its absence – into a social problem serves as a prelude towards promoting policies and techniques that have as their object the management of people's behaviour and emotions. In previous times, moralists of various shades took it upon themselves to teach people
how to be good. In the current era, this objective has been displaced by the objective of making us happy. Most crusades – like that promoted on behalf of happiness – have a tendency to transform themselves into a zealous, even dogmatic movement. Those who want to make all of us happy whether we like it or not believe that they are performing a public duty. But, then, so did the Controller in Huxley's *Brave New World* want us to live on a diet of 'feelies' and 'scent organs'.

The current happiness crusade may well turn out to be a relatively short-lived phenomenon. But, understanding its origins and the cultural resources that it draws on allows us to gain important insights into the nature of human alienation in our times. Through a rigorous and methodical reconstruction of the problematization of happiness, the chapters that follow explain how this new policy fetish provides a medium for evading the social problems of our time.

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In recent years, happiness has seen an exponential growth in interest across a broad range of disciplines, within the media at large, and has become a widely affirmed and oft-stated goal of public policy and state intervention. The shelves of bookshops are stocked with publications with titles such as *The How of Happiness* (Lyubomirsky, 2007), *The Happiness Hypothesis* (Haidt, 2006), *Hardwiring Happiness* (Hanson, 2013) and *The Age of Absurdity: Why Modern Life Makes It Hard to be Happy* (Foley, 2010). Governments around the world are considering measures of 'subjective well-being' as indicators of progress and tools for appraising policy (Stiglitz et al., 2009; Dolan and Metcalfe, 2012; Helliwell et al., 2013; Parliament Office of Science and Technology, 2012; Deeming, 2013). This fascination is fed by a seemingly constant stream of academic publishing on the topic, from the 'economics of happiness' to the sub-discipline of 'positive psychology' announced in 1999, and even the founding of several dedicated journals including the *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *The International Journal of Happiness and Development* and the *Journal of Positive Psychology*.

Although it would seem that the rising interest in happiness represents a shift towards focusing on the 'brighter side' of the human condition, it is clear that these discussions are not simply a celebration of human health and well-being. As early as 2004, newspaper headlines began to proclaim the existence of an 'epidemic of unhappiness' (Ahuja, *The Times*: 2004; Leith, *The Telegraph*: 2004; Laurance, *The Independent*: 2005; Griffiths, *The Sunday Times*: 2007), and that unhappiness is 'Britain's worst social problem' (Laurance, *The Independent*: 2005). It was not long before the speeches of politicians and public figures, like David Cameron, who for example proclaimed that 'we have the unhappiest children in the developed world' (Cameron, 2007), became littered with a new concern for happiness. That such discussions were not a passing fad is evidenced
by the fact that, relatively quickly, policymakers began to not simply affirm, but act upon happiness claims. Some of the more prominent results in the United Kingdom have been the introduction in 2010 of an Office of National Statistics (ONS) initiative to measure and track happiness, or ‘subjective well-being’, and the founding of a Cabinet Office ‘Behavioural Insights Team’ in 2010 heavily influenced by American academics Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, whose influential 2008 publication *Nudge* advocated ‘nudging’ people towards decisions more conducive to ‘health, wealth and happiness’.

Emerging from these developments is the conclusion that happiness has become a serious problem faced by Western societies – indeed, the world – that we would ignore only at our individual and collective peril. People are miserable, stressed, depressed or simply not as happy as they could be. They are amateurs, going about pursuing happiness in all the wrong ways, proponents of ‘happiness science’ proclaim. Even when happiness is not explicitly set forth as a problem, a cursory glance at the news, academic studies and outputs of countless think tanks in recent years would lead anyone to the conclusion that many, if not all, of the world’s problems can be solved by reorienting the beliefs, desires and goals of individuals, even entire nations, to the true meaning of happiness and how best to pursue it. Backed by prolific scientific research, it seems that the key to happiness may finally lie within the grasp of humanity. Richard Layard, a prominent advocate of happiness science, has asserted:

> We want our rulers to make the world better by their actions, and we want to do the same ourselves. [...] So it is time to reassert the noble philosophy of the Enlightenment. In this view, every human being wants to be happy, and everybody counts equally. It follows that progress is measured by the overall scale of human happiness and misery. And the right action is the one that produces the greatest happiness in the world and (especially) the least misery. I can think of no nobler ideal. (Layard, *The Guardian*: 2009)

Amid such inspirational and stirring rhetoric, it is difficult to imagine how or why one might question or oppose activities designed to increase happiness guided by the empirically tested results of happiness research. Indeed, as this study of its usage in public discourses will show, this is part of the reason why it has become so popular.

While the sheer growth in output on the subject seems to speak to an objective need, a ‘thirst for knowledge’ on the part of society as a whole, for new information about happiness, I want to suggest that there are more complex forces at play. Instead of taking for granted the importance of the issue, this book
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asks how and why the semiotics of happiness became an appealing and plausible means of communicating an increasing array of social issues. Its primary focus is not on happiness as an abstract unchanging object that, once discovered, can be revealed for all people and all times, but rather as a set of clearly identifiable and consistently repeated claims about the nature of individuals and the world, and how both should be understood and even fundamentally changed. It is this 'clearly identifiable and consistently repeated set of claims' for which 'happiness' is the dominant (though not only) signifier that forms the focus of the chapters that follow.

Although the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of authors, researchers, journalists and other dedicated proponents of happiness science may believe they are simply propounding evidence-based facts on the nature of happiness and how life ought to be lived, I argue that they are actually holding up a mirror before their own culture. Reflected back are the preoccupations, meanderings and shifting beliefs about the nature of human beings and their relationships to each other and the world particular to a given culture at a given time. A sign, as it goes, is anything that refers to something else. If we peel back the layers of denotation and connotation, I argue that 'happiness' as a public problem is not a signifier of a desire to improve or optimize underlying mental states, nor is it even about these mental states at all. Rather, as I hope to show, it is implicitly a critique of change. It expresses a fear of the future articulated through a series of paradoxes that purport to describe the true nature of happiness and progress, but which really express a deep-seated uncertainty about the future and consequent desire to maintain the present. It should be noted that although the insights generated here may be applicable to many Anglo-American societies, the case described in most detail is the contemporary culture of UK society and the diffusion and development of happiness discourses there.

In order to grasp the significance now accorded to happiness in public debate, it is necessary to step back and critically examine its existence as a social, rather than solely natural or empirical, phenomenon. This book examines how the semiotics of happiness in public discourses have shifted to comprise a distinctly problematized orientation. It offers an alternative account of the rise of happiness to the forefront of public debate through an analysis of the signifying practices of its advocates, or 'claims-makers', an elucidation of the core claims that characterize the issue and the rhetoric used in its promotion. To do so, I take as my starting point discussions about happiness in major UK newspapers, chosen not only for their historical value, but also because they are an institution
of daily life that specializes in ‘orchestrating everyday consciousness’, where social meanings are created and contested, reality is ‘certified’ as reality and where such certifications define and delimit the terms of effective opposition (Gitlin, 2003: 2). Even as these decline, their significance for defining the most serious problems of the day remains, if certainly not for every member of the general public, at least for policymakers. Through a close analysis of the most frequently repeated claims during the most important periods on the path to the institutionalization of the problem, I attempt to show how discourses that speak in the language of universals may be thought of as historically contingent, and more specifically, how an apparently positive focus on human strengths nonetheless affirms a morality of low expectations and implicitly underscores prevailing cultural assumptions of the diminished individual.

Why ‘happiness’?

Given the array of semiotic resources drawn upon in public and academic debates including happiness, well-being, eudaimonia and flourishing, it may be necessary from the outset to stipulate precisely why happiness was chosen as the main focus. First, happiness was the main ‘sign vehicle’ through which claims about the existence of a new social problem initially made their way onto the public stage. To this day, it maintains its popular resonance, even as many advocates attempt to distance themselves from it. Second, there is no consensus or standardized set of signifiers, and although discussions in public arenas do often attempt to fix their meanings in various ways, they continue to be used interchangeably with the same definitions frequently applied to different words. Nor is there any single agreed upon ‘scientific’ definition, but rather certain terminologies and attempts to define are suffused with particular rhetorical offerings as well as their own sets of shortcomings. Finally, although associated signifiers were also investigated, happiness was chosen as the primary keyword to investigate in order to focus the analysis on its development and change over time. While new words appear and reflect shifting emphases and meanings, the core features of the ‘problematization’ described throughout this book are nonetheless retained. For the sake of simplicity, happiness is the predominant term used throughout, but it might be more accurate to consider this work as an examination of the problematization of happiness and its associated vocabularies. These issues and the core features of the problem are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.
Two approaches to social problems

The wealth of literature on happiness produced over the last decade alone reveals that there are many ways that one might go about studying the phenomenon. But, what is of primary interest here is neither happiness in the abstract, nor its deeper, 'true' or philosophical meanings, nor its uses or pursuits in the everyday lives of lay individuals. Rather, the focus is upon the problematization of happiness – that is the rise and subsequent success of claims that have asserted that happiness constitutes a serious problem for society, that individuals and governments have been mistaken in their pursuits either of happiness or other goals and that these and a host of related problems can be ameliorated through harmoniously attuning activities and policies to the findings of happiness science.

Approaching happiness as a social problem can proceed from two perspectives. The first could be considered an 'objectivist' or 'realist' orientation and reflects the vast majority of research and claims about happiness flooding university lecture halls and newspaper column inches. In general, such an approach attempts to describe social problems as objectively troubling conditions and offers explanations for how and why they occur. By contrast, a more 'subjectivist' or 'interpretive' (also called constructionist) approach examines how some conditions come to be conceived of as social problems and accounts for how they are constructed or 'put together'. These approaches are not monolithic and may vary greatly in terms of their levels of analysis and sociological outlook. Constructionist perspectives can differ significantly in terms of their underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions, while realist perspectives range in focus from the individual biological, or even genetic, level, to the micro, meso and macro social levels. An overview of these two perspectives is given below in order to highlight not only the distinct offerings of an interpretivist point of view, but also to give some insight into the underlying assumptions implicit in mainstream discussions of happiness as a social problem towards the present.

The objectivist approach

Superficially, the meaning of the term 'social problem' seems self-evident; they are simply harmful conditions that affect society (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 2009: 150). In everyday life, people are confronted with a wealth of information about new social problems, their causes and potential solutions. Conditions such
as crime, poverty, racism and overpopulation seem to pose serious threats to society, regardless of what people may know or think about them (Best, 2004: 14–15). Such an understanding reflects an objectivist orientation, which has been the historically dominant approach to the study of social problems and which remains among the most popular means of organizing the teaching of social problems in introductory courses and textbooks on the subject (Mauss, 1992: 1916–1921; Best, 2004: 15; Best, 2008: 4). It is also the dominant way with which information is presented in the mass media whose ubiquity provides a potentially endless loop of information about troubling conditions. Taking the existence of the problem as its starting point, objectivist approaches are typically concerned with uncovering, explaining and providing solutions to social problems (Clarke, 2001: 4).

Although this approach takes many forms in practice and encompasses many different and even conflicting theoretical orientations, Loseke (2003a: 164–165) suggests that they share a number of commonalities. In addition to taking the examination of objectively harmful conditions as their starting point, they also tend to hold particular ideas about what sorts of conditions are intolerable and what causes them (Loseke, 2003a: 164). For example, a definition of social problems stemming from a conflict perspective states: 'The distribution of power in society is the key to understanding these social problems. The powerless, because they are dominated by the powerful, are likely to be thwarted in achieving their basic needs (sustenance, security, self-esteem, and productivity). In contrast, the interests of the powerful are served' (Eitzen et al., 2012: 12). Visions of the social world embedded in such views can range from individual biological, psychological or genetic causes of deviance to sources of conflict in micro-social group interactions (peers, family), meso-social subcultures, geographic localities or social institutions and finally, large-scale macro-social causes such as socio-economic divisions, oppression and domination (Clarke, 2001: 5–6). Finally, many people who approach the study of social phenomena as objectively problematic may present themselves as ‘experts’, offering an image of how the world should work and ‘prognostic frames’ for how troublesome conditions and behaviours should be changed (Loseke, 2003a: 165).

**From social pathology to the pathological society**

A sense of continuity among disparate realist approaches to social problems is evident when one considers the historical development of their study. While discovering social problems and campaigning to bring about their solutions may
seem a timeless human pursuit, the idea that some problems are not natural, if unfortunate, parts of life to be endured, but rather problems resolvable through the rational application of human reason, has relatively recent origins.

Impressed by the accomplishments of the Enlightenment, nineteenth-century social reformers sought to apply the scientific approach to the problems of society, modelling the practice of sociology after developments in the natural sciences (Clarke, 2001: 4; Rubington and Weinberg, 2003: 15). Early social theorists rooted their analyses in visions of society as a biological organism, its problems representing impediments to the proper functioning of the whole. Spencer famously ruminated upon the complex structures of the body politic – from the ‘excess of nutrition over waste’ in the circulatory system (profit and commodity circulation) to the ‘balancing’ centre of the brain (parliament) (Spencer, 1891: 290, 303). From this perspective, defective arrangements or individuals were seen as degradations, degenerations or ‘pathologies’ afflicting the otherwise healthy social body. Thus, an early textbook informed students, ‘Defect is an incident of evolution’ and that the ‘biologist prepares part of the data for sociology’ (Henderson, 1901: 12). Later, social pathologists would locate the causes of social problems in incorrect or ineffective socialization and the inculcation of erroneous values. As Rubington and Weinberg (2003: 18) describe, ‘In this perspective’s “tender” mood, the people who contribute to the social problem are viewed as “sick”; in its tough mood, they are viewed as “criminal”’.

Declining as a theoretical approach to social problems towards mid-century, the vestiges of social pathology can nonetheless be discerned in contemporary objectivist accounts of social problems in the mass media and, as Jamrozik and Nocella (1998: 18) assert, in the ‘field[s] of social control’ – public policy, administration and ‘service delivery apparatus’ which maintain a tendency to explain deviance and non-compliance in social psychological, biological and behavioural terms. As we shall see throughout this book, it is conceptualizations such as these that dominate objectivist accounts of happiness as a social problem. However, while the classical notion of society as a healthy organism underlying early objectivist accounts may have fallen out of favour, its underlying assumptions have not so much perished as they have been transformed.

Early treatments of social problems came under criticism for what Mills (1943: 166, 179) characterized as lacking any ‘level of abstraction to knit them together’ and as essentially ‘propaganda for conformity to those norms and traits ideally associated with small–town, middle-class milieux’. Yet, the guiding ideal of such conceptualizations had nonetheless been a progressive notion of society as evolving towards greater rationality and freedom. The Enlightenment had
given the initially religious notion of a linear ascent to a 'utopian endpoint' a finally secular form and 'the ethos of perfectionism became inseparable from the claims of reason' (Alexander, 1990: 16). Theorists saw social problems as obstacles to the 'forward march of progress' (albeit towards what amounted to fairly narrowly defined interests) that could be rationally understood and rooted out (Rubington and Weinberg, 2003: 16–17). However, the twentieth century saw fundamental challenges and ultimately changes to this underlying ethos so that '[t]he very possibility that there is a higher point, an "end" towards which society should strive, has come to be thrown into doubt' (Alexander, 1990: 16, 26). The 1960s' counterculture began to see society itself as 'sick', and analyses of problems began to locate the causes of pathology in society rather than the individual. As Rubington and Weinberg (2003: 19) describe, contemporary approaches are 'indignant about the defects of society and are less optimistic in their prognosis. The most indignant see societal pathology as total, spreading, and likely to dehumanize the entire population'.

Thus, there is a sense of reversal in which problematic conditions and people once thought of as pathological outgrowths of an otherwise healthy social order are now seen as potentially 'infected' by a sick or 'pathological' society. Writing on contemporary health promotion, Lupton (1995: 48) describes how public health debates frequently represent the individual as 'distinct from the social' and society as 'having the potential of intruding into the individual'. Social problems are increasingly expressed through the language of health and illness, with ill-health conceptualized as 'a symptom of the pathology of civilization' and a 'sign that modern life is inherently damaging to health' (Lupton, 1995: 51). Like the approaches of the past which placed a high degree of importance on the individual deviant as bearing responsibility for non-conformity, and in spite of the ostensible indictment of social structures, more recent approaches also tend to place the individual at the heart of discussions of social problems. According to Rubington and Weinberg (2003: 19):

The recent variant [of social pathology], which tends to regard the society rather than its non-conforming members as 'sick', has its roots in the Rousseauean view of human nature. Individuals are good; their institutions, on the other hand, are bad. Yet, even the modern pathologists see the remedy to 'sick' institutions as a change in people's values. Thus, according to this perspective, the only real solution to social problems is moral education.

However, it may be more accurate to say that rather than goodness, the defining characteristic of the human in such conceptualizations has become vulnerability.
Cultural narratives underpinning discussions of social problems towards the present implicitly underscore a notion of the human being as vulnerable to social contagion, both from the pressures and stresses of the external world and from the influences of others, in need of constant therapeutic help and guidance. Gradually, a shift has occurred from earlier narratives which emphasized qualities such as rationality or resilience towards a narrative of vulnerability in the early twenty-first century (Furedi, 2007: 235). As Pupavac (2001: 360) observes, 'The 19th-century archetype of the robust risk-taking, self-made man is the antithesis of the risk-averse 21st century's exemplar of the vulnerable victim whose actions and environment are to be governed by the precautionary principle.'

In a study conducted by Frankenberg et al. (2000), attempting to investigate how childhood illness and injury were experienced and managed by, as the authors initially assumed, the small numbers of children affected by them as compared to unaffected children, the authors quickly learned that such a distinction would not be possible. Rather, not only were all children encountered in their ethnography seen as vulnerable, but also the adults involved appeared to consider themselves and others as vulnerable as well. Yet, for the authors, the notion of vulnerability was difficult to pin down, appearing not as a particular identifiable phenomenon the same in all contexts, nor as an ‘embedded’ or ‘embodied’ characteristic of particular children, but rather as a free floating social category (Frankenberg et al., 2000: 591–592). As the authors put it:

It is social either to the extent that whole categories of particular individuals, such as children, are considered by definition to be self-evident candidates for incorporation into such a status; or it is social to the extent that the degree of vulnerability of individual children is considered to be precipitated by and through the actions of others, usually, adults, whose malevolence, ignorance, or failure to protect and nurture (indeed whose own vulnerability) has brought about the vulnerability of the child. (Frankenberg et al., 2000: 589, emphasis removed)

Thus, the concept of vulnerability works as a cultural metaphor, a resource drawn upon by a range of parties to characterize individuals and groups and to describe an increasingly diverse array of human experience (Furedi, 2005: 77). According to Frankenberg et al., vulnerability connotes:

[...] a lack of realistic agency based on a misunderstanding, or more accurately complete lack of understanding of harmful settings, and situations, that finally appears to demand benevolent others to provide a protective cordon sanitaire within which the damaging effects of the vulnerability can be contained. In brief,
in this framework, vulnerability appears through the demonstration of a lack of worldliness and the possession of an undiscriminating and individual naivété in conducting the tough business of life. (2000: 589)

It is a view of the human condition that emphasizes fragility and 'casts serious doubt about the capacity of the self to manage new challenges and to cope with adversity' (Furedi, 2005: 76). 'As a cultural metaphor, vulnerability is used to highlight the claim that people and their communities lack the emotional and psychological resources necessary to deal with change and make choices' (Furedi, 2005: 76).

It is also a potentially powerful rhetorical weapon in campaigns about new social problems, acting as a 'substantial goad to very particular forms of social and political action' (Frankenberg et al., 2000: 591). Best (1999) describes how since the 1960s there has been an increasing emphasis upon victimization in claims about new social problems. After its introduction in the early 1970s, the 'catchy rhetoric of 'blaming the victim' quickly caught on as a means of characterizing not just the underclass victims of unjust social structures, but an increasingly broad array of people. Through an emphasis upon the suffering of victims – 'vulnerable, respectable innocents, exploited by more powerful, deviant strangers' – concern for new social problems crossed traditional political boundaries (Best, 1999: 98). According to Best (1999: 99): 'Part of its appeal may have been its ambiguity; it let one identify victims without necessarily blaming the villains'.

While characterizing problems in this way may be a successful means of turning the public eye towards any number of claimed injustices, such conceptualizations can have somewhat dubious effects. For instance, Wainwright (2008: 88–89) has observed that the identity of 'work stress victim', though viewed by some as a 'critique of capitalist production relations and an imperative towards job redesign', has in practice produced a 'minimal and therapeutic' response from employers, 'comprising, for example, the introduction of stress management and counselling interventions, rather than radical changes in job control or demands'.

Another upshot of this turn towards focusing on the vulnerability of victims of a pathological society has been a tendency away from viewing human beings as autonomous rational subjects able to overcome problems through the power of reason. As Pupavac (2001: 360) observes, 'The idea of [the] autonomous rational subject is viewed as unrepresentative of the majority of the world's population'. For example, in David Brooks' (2011) bestseller, The Social Animal, the author details the disappointments of the previous century's attempts to deal
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with social problems, from the inability to control the boom and bust cycles of capitalism to educational underachievement, and concludes that the roots of these failures lie in an over-reliance upon human reason. By contrast, Brooks suggests that more emphasis must be placed on integrating knowledge about the power of unconscious drives, how 'genes shape individual lives, how brain chemistry works in particular cases, how family structure and cultural patterns can influence development in specific terms' with the goal of achieving 'human flourishing' and a different sort of 'success story' that emphasizes not material gain, but 'the role of the inner mind' (Brooks, 2011: x–xvi). How problems are conceptualized also influences how their solutions are broached. It is little surprising that in accounts such as this, while singling out social structures as 'villains', proposals for change tend to be disproportionately focused upon the individual life and mind.

The widespread acceptance of a vulnerability model of the human being and a focus on victims are a corollary of the decline of beliefs about the perfectibility of society and the rise of an ethos of 'no alternative'. One of the central arguments of this book is that these general trends in conceptualizations of social ills reverberate throughout realist accounts of happiness as a social problem, focusing upon the vulnerability and susceptibility of individuals and groups to the negative influences of pathological institutions and social structures. Yet, the possibility of one day changing these social structures in real, material ways is subtly dismissed in favour of shifting attention to the behaviours, beliefs and inner subjectivity of individuals in the here and now.

The subjectivist approach

The ideas detailed thus far form the point of departure for the ensuing analysis, with realist accounts of happiness as a social problem considered hereafter as 'claims' made by 'claims-makers' that furnish the data for analysis. In so doing, I take a decidedly more 'subjectivist' orientation to the study of social ills. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with the notion that social problems can be solved through the rational application of human reason, shifting conceptualizations and emphases on particular types of knowledge have tended to produce the opposite effect: a static vision of society and human potential. As the ensuing chapters aim to show, treatments of happiness as an objective phenomenon with objectively identifiable determinants, liable to be fostered or damaged by a range of variables apart from our conceptualizations thereof, are problematic because they threaten to disregard the crucial role of subjectivity
in mediating external reality and physiological response. Moreover, a more subjectivist orientation draws attention to the crucial role of human actors in defining conditions as problematic and bringing these problem claims to the attention of others. The means by which this is done, that it is done at all, and the success of such claims are important indicators of a culture hospitable to framing social problems through the individualized language of emotion.

The subjectivist approach to social problems initially arose out of a dissatisfaction with some of the shortcomings of earlier objectivist accounts. Objectivist understandings faced at least three challenges. First, numerous diverse issues are often grouped together under the label of 'social problems' with little uniting them at the level of theoretical abstraction. Second, ideas of social problems have changed over time and few attempts had been made to account for the fact that conditions deemed acceptable or which went altogether unnoticed in different times and places could become serious issues at others. Finally, while investigations of problematic conditions are seemingly inexhaustible, the concept of the 'social problem' in and of itself had generated little in the way of general theory (Best, 2004: 15–16). Becker's objections in the early 1960s to sociological explanations that define 'deviance as the infraction of some agreed-upon rule' and which proceed to 'ask who breaks the rules, and to search for the factors in their personalities, and life situations that might account for the infractions' (1963: 8) encapsulates many objections raised at the time. As Becker famously claimed, deviance is not universal but subjective: 'The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label' (1963: 9).

This definitional approach to social problems can be traced broadly to the pragmatism of George Herbert Mead and his notion that human reality is the product of social interaction. According to Mead, 'the individual mind can exist only in relation to other minds with shared meanings' (1982: 5). For Herbert Blumer, a student of Mead, one of the central tenets of this, the symbolic interactionist perspective, is that, 'As human beings we act singly, collectively, and societally on the basis of the meanings which things have for us' (1956: 686). Indeed, it was Blumer who first identified the need for a sociological approach to social problems that would not search simply for their causes and solutions in the objective world, but instead 'study the process by which society comes to see, to define, and to handle their social problems' (1971: 300–301).

But, the first systematic articulation of a sociology of social problems did not come until several years later with Malcolm Spector and John I. Kitsuse's ([1977]2001) Constructing Social Problems. For Spector and Kitsuse, social
problems are not necessarily objective phenomena that have become so pressing that society has been forced to respond. Rather, they are fundamentally *activities* forming a process of social interaction. They are the products of the concerted efforts of individuals who actively group together disparate phenomena, characterize them as belonging to a particular type of problem and attempt to bring that problem to the attention of others (Spector and Kitsuse, 2001: 75–78). These activities are what constitute a public problem as a social reality. To say a problem is 'constructed' is therefore to allude to the indispensable role of human interactions in the construction process – a process made visible, and thus amenable to study, through the remnants of communication it leaves behind.

It is clear that social problems, thus conceived, possess considerable semiotic dimensions. They are forms of human expression, representational and meaning-making activities played out in words, images and symbols. As Gusfield’s (1981: 3) semiotic and symbolic analysis of the drink-driving problem contends:

Human problems do not spring up, full-blown and announced, into the consciousness of bystanders. Even to recognize a situation as painful requires a system for categorizing and defining events. All situations that are experienced by people as painful do not become matters of public activity and targets for public action. Neither are they given the same meanings at all times and by all peoples.

Eco’s (1984: 15) remark that 'any natural event can be a sign’ reminds that even the most seemingly straightforward of phenomena, from earthquakes to volcanic eruptions, do not present themselves to human consciousness in pre-packaged form. Whether such events are due to chance, divine retribution or human complicity depends upon the dominant codes existing in a particular interpretive community. ‘The understanding of signs is not a mere matter of recognition (of a stable equivalence); it is a matter of interpretation’ (Eco, 1984: 43).

Moreover, as Gusfield alludes above, the semiotic resources drawn upon to understand and convey social problems vary over time. Not only do their relative prominence in public debate and causal and explanatory power shift over time, but the conventional bonds between signifiers and signifieds shift as well. According to Halliday (1978: 192), semiotic resources have no universal, true meaning, but only a ‘meaning potential’ that is never truly fixed. This semiotic potential is constituted by past and present uses, but there is also latent meaning potential that exists in as yet unrealized form. Aspects of this potential are realized as these resources are drawn into the realm of social communication and pressed into action on the basis of the needs and interests of their users (van
Leeuwen, 2005: 4). However, this does not imply that the meanings attributed to a particular semiotic resource are entirely open. Cultures do not utilize the 'full range of all possible terms in giving meaning to events' (Gusfield, 1989: 16), nor do they employ the full range of potentials imaginable for a given signifier. What is more, in 'social life people constantly try to fix and control the use of semiotic resources' and to 'justify the rules they make up' (van Leeuwen, 2005: 5).

These activities, which, following Kitsuse and Spector's (1975: 593) initial recommendation for the focus of an interpretive sociology of social problems, I refer to as 'claims-making', are integral to understanding the development of new social problems. The success of a social problem greatly depends upon the activities of claims-makers, their roles in society, connections amongst each other, dedication to the issue and familiarity and aptitude with the dominant codes of their respective interpretive communities. This approach, detailed more thoroughly in Chapters 3 and 4, brings forth different questions from those which take the existence of a problem of happiness in society as their starting point and proceed to describe its scope, causes and solutions. Instead, it endeavours to critically examine the activities of others who have already done so with tremendous success in various spheres of public debate. Thus, it asks not why society suddenly became unhappy, but rather why it suddenly became appealing to conceptualize the problems of society in the language of happiness and unhappiness.

The key benefit of a subjectivist orientation to social problems is that it calls into question the inevitability of conceptualizing the world, and by implication human beings, in certain socially prescribed and taken-for-granted ways. As mentioned in the previous section, every social problem construction involves an attendant construction of the human subject. The present emphasis upon the human subject as one that 'characteristically suffers from emotional deficit' and 'possesses a permanent consciousness of vulnerability' (Furedi, 2004: 21) tends to posit a diminished, determined subject. It is a vision of the human whose 'representative anecdote', to use a phrase of Kenneth Burke, is that of a 'passive and predetermined response to stimuli' (Gusfield, 1989: 9). A cursory glance at the happiness indices and research emphases on uncovering the 'social determinants of subjective well-being' reveals a portrayal of human emotions as a series of straightforward, unmediated responses. The idea that emotions can be 'determined', even socially, forgets that between stimulus and response lies the sign. As Burke pointed out, 'stimuli do not possess an absolute meaning. [...] Any given situation derives its character from the entire framework by which we judge it' (Burke, 1984: 35).
An interpretive and semiotic approach opens up for questioning the dominant images, frames and 'common sense' that 'dress up reality' in a guise of naturalness that obscures their historical determination (Barthes, 1980: 11). Rather than seeing society and the individual as separate parts, vulnerable to mutual contagion, I want to remind and imply that it is possible to see human beings in different ways. Part of the struggle to do this is questioning constructions that attempt to limit the possibilities of humanity, to posit the limits of the present as eternal and to imbue this construction with an aura of truth such that it appears beyond question.

To do this, I consider the construction of happiness as a social problem on a number of levels in successive chapters. In Chapter 2, I attempt to elucidate the historical and cultural context of claims made about happiness in the news media with a view to providing the 'frame of reference' necessary to determine 'which meaning structures have been utilised' in the construction of happiness as a particular signifier (Danesi, 2002: 26). It draws out the 'paradox of prosperity' - that people are no happier in spite of increased wealth - as the driving force behind much of the academic and subsequent media interest. Tracing the intellectual lineage of this paradox and of attitudes towards material progress in general, it questions whether or not playing down the former is really as radical or left-wing as it might initially seem. Chapter 3 and 4 bridge this understanding of context with an understanding of the claims-making process and the significance of rhetoric to social problem claims. Together they provide the basis for understanding the theoretical and analytical tools used throughout the chapters that follow, combining insights from social semiotics and constructionist approaches to social problems.

Drawing on an extensive analysis of newspaper archives and tracing themes uncovered through to their expressions in other media and public policy, Chapter 5 offers a diachronic overview of changing uses of happiness in public discussions from the turn of the twentieth century to the first 'discovery of a problem' in the 1990s. A history of happiness is given not as an abstract ideal but as a semiotic resource whose usage in relation to social problem claims has relatively recent origins. Chapter 6 gives an overview of the problematization of happiness leading up to 2010 when the problem received its most high-profile assent and institutionalization in UK social policy. Chapter 7 seeks to identify the most prominent sources of problem claims, their claims-makers and relationships to each other. Chapter 8 considers the role of expertise in the problematization of happiness and its diffusion from the United States. Chapter 9 provides a 'semiotic inventory' of keywords used to characterize the problem and considers them in
the context of rhetoric and competition in claims-making. Finally, Chapter 10 provides an inventory of claims made in newspaper discourses about happiness, using grounds, warrants and conclusions as analytical tools. It gives insight into what the problem of happiness 'is' as a series of claims, a sort of cultural 'myth', whose tendency is to depoliticize issues through modalities that personalize and naturalize (Barthes, 1980: 142–143).
Happiness claims are bound up with historical and cultural discourses that condition their range of meanings. While it has become customary to trace the history of happiness to Ancient Greece or to some universal or eternal human quest, I contend that the current interest has far more recent origins. There are many reasons why happiness became a plausible and appealing description of the problems facing society. However, in what follows I argue that such ideas become powerful in a context of declining beliefs about the perfectibility of society and where the unchallenged ascendancy of the market has left the sphere of the individual and interpersonal among the few sites open to change. These trends have produced a hospitable context for individual and therapeutic conceptions of social ills, to which happiness is only the latest contribution.

Of course, context alone is not enough to explain why happiness became problematized. The theoretical and methodological tools delineated in the next chapter are also integral to understanding the phenomenon. But, these risk losing their explanatory power if not considered in conjunction with broader socio-historical contexts from which claims draw much of their meaning and salience. As Hodge and Kress (1988: 229) point out, 'The structure of signifiers is itself the result of prior social processes of negotiation and contestation, so that the relation of signifiers to signifieds is not arbitrary but signifies the state of social relations at a particular time.' To 'extract meaning' from the news media texts that form the main focus of this study then, 'one must have knowledge of this network and of the meanings that constitute it' (Danesi, 2002: 26).
The 'paradox' of wealth

The problematization of happiness encompasses many themes, but among the most significant of these is a concern with wealth and the potentially deleterious effects of economic growth and prosperity. This is often articulated through the rhetorical trope of a 'paradox of prosperity' – that people are no happier in spite of increased wealth – which has become the driving force behind much of the academic and subsequent media interest. This 'paradox' was the gateway for a profusion of additional claims emerging from the burgeoning new science of happiness. It was repeatedly emphasized in the first claims asserting a problem of happiness and, judging by its constant repetition and reverberation throughout the mass media, what got noticed. Thus, its intellectual foundations bear some review, and given its propensity to transcend political boundaries, some contextual clarity.

The vast majority of academic interest in happiness has emerged from the disciplines of psychology and economics. Following his appointment as President of the American Psychological Association in 1998, the psychologist Martin Seligman outlined his plans for a 'new science of human strengths' that he termed 'positive psychology' (Seligman, 1999: 560). The new sub-discipline would aim to be a 'science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions', seeking to 'improve quality of life and prevent pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless' (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000: 5). Positive psychology would refocus the discipline away from an overwhelming focus upon pathology and a 'model of the human being lacking the positive features that make life worth living' (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000: 5). Around that time, journals such as the multidisciplinary Journal of Happiness Studies were established, bringing together existing literature on happiness including many of the more subjectively oriented concerns gaining prominence within social indicators research. Interest within economics had also been steadily growing, borrowing insights from psychology and sharing a common evidence base relying heavily upon survey and experimental data (Carlisle and Hanlon, 2007: 265).

But, from the first scattered studies emerging at mid-century to the present-day burgeoning interdisciplinary focus, the interest has been inseparable from a central concern with wealth as a measure of progress and source of individual fulfilment. In Seligman's initial announcement of the positive psychology initiative, he begins by stating:
Standing alone on the pinnacle of economic and political leadership, the United States can continue to increase its material wealth while ignoring the human needs of our people and of the people on the rest of the planet. Such a course is likely to lead to increasing selfishness, alienation between the more and the less fortunate, and eventually to chaos and despair. (Seligman, 1999: 560)

In the face of this, Seligman asserts, 'psychology can play an enormously important role' in articulating an empirical vision of 'the good life' (1999: 560). The economic interest shares similar concerns. The authors of a 2007 Handbook on the Economics of Happiness date the 'rediscovery' of happiness in economics to a 1971 paper by two psychologists entitled Hedonic relativism and the planning of the good society (Bruni and Porta, 2007: xiv). According to Bruni and Porta (2007: xiv), this paper, which argues that 'bettering the objective conditions of life (income or wealth) bears no lasting effects on personal well-being', can 'rightly be considered the starting point of the new studies on happiness in relation to the economic domain.' Another text opens with the set of questions: 'Why do economists, financial analysts, politicians and media fixate on growth measures [...] as the key indicator of human progress?' (Anielski, 2007: 1). A review of developments in 'happiness economics' opens similarly: 'Modern economic policy aims at stabilizing a steady economic growth. In contrast, Aristotle defines “happiness” as self-sufficiency. Thus, there is an obvious discrepancy between happiness and what [we're] reaching for today' (Müller, 2009: 1–2, emphasis in original).

Concerns about progress defined in material terms not only form the starting point for much of the economic interest, but, as the ensuing chapters will show, have also become central to contemporary claims about happiness as a social problem. Frequently traced to a 1974 paper by economist, Richard Easterlin, rising wealth, often conceptualized in terms of economic growth or GDP, is forwarded as unrelated, or even detrimental, to happiness. For instance, Richard Layard's (2005b: 3) Happiness: Lessons from a New Science begins by asking, 'What's the problem?' He responds, 'There is a paradox at the heart of our lives. Most people want more and strive for it. Yet as Western societies have got richer, their people have become no happier' (Layard, 2005b: 3). Such claims are often accompanied by a series of graphs, the most ubiquitous being a line graph depicting a 'happiness rate' registering little change plotted against a steadily climbing GDP. David Halpern, current head of the Cabinet Office Behavioural Insights Team, identifies this paradox as 'the biggest puzzle in contemporary economics' (Halpern, 2010: 2).
The 'puzzle' to which Halpern refers is Easterlin's (1974) comparison of life satisfaction data between developed and less developed countries collected since the 1940s, and the conclusion that although wealthier individuals report greater happiness than their less wealthy counterparts, richer nations are not on average significantly happier than poorer, nor do their inhabitants tend to report themselves happier over time. Thus, rising absolute wealth, according to Easterlin, is self-defeating, since recipients will only compare themselves to others and raise their expectations, failing to gain in subjective terms although they have gained in absolute objective terms. In short, happiness is adaptive and relative and relates only transiently to objective conditions. These results were also communicated in the then influential political journal, The Public Interest, adding that the argument points to the 'uncomfortable conclusion' that we are 'trapped in a material rat-race' (Easterlin, 1973: 10).

These arguments would be echoed in numerous publications in the following years, for instance in Scitovsky's The Joyless Economy (1992 [1976]), Hirsch's (1977) notion of 'social limits to growth', and Frank's (1985) Choosing the Right Pond and later Luxury Fever (1999). But over the past decade, this apparent 'paradox of prosperity' has experienced a dramatic take-off, spawning an influx of academic and popular publications that accord it central place in their analyses. The conclusion usually drawn is that if a particular phenomenon cannot be observed to correlate with increased happiness, then its pursuit, or at least emphasis, must be fundamentally questioned.

Yet, significant discussion and debate about Easterlin's conclusions did not emerge until nearly two decades after their initial publication. One of the earliest disputes was raised by Veenhoven (1991) who questioned both the data (stating that income is especially important in poor countries) and the interpretation, quickly gaining currency at the time, that happiness does not rely on objective good, but subjective comparison. He raises concerns about underlying 'ideological implications' including the justification of asceticism, 'no hope for improvement' and casting human rationality into doubt (Veenhoven, 1991: 7–8). Regarding the latter, he points out the issue at stake is nothing less than the Enlightenment belief that 'humans are wise enough to make their own choices' (Veenhoven, 1991: 8). If they are 'made happy by illusion rather than by quality, one can hardly maintain they are rational and able to make their own choices' (Veenhoven, 1991: 8). Nonetheless, the idea continued to gain ground, with Veenhoven emerging as one of the few critics of what he called these 'sensational claims' (Veenhoven, 1991: 2).

Academic debate around the paradox continued into the new millennium (see Easterlin, 1995, 2001; Hagerty and Veenhoven, 2003; Easterlin, 2005; Veenhoven
A Hospitable Context for Claims-Making

and Hagerty, 2006; Easterlin et al., 2010), with Veenhoven eventually gravitating towards a ‘basic needs’ interpretation (Veenhoven, 2009: 59–60), stating, ‘Happiness requires livable conditions, but not Paradise’ (Veenhoven 2003: 1). The data were also re-examined by Stevenson and Wolfers (2008) who found no evidence of a ‘paradox’ and further, no ‘satiation point’ at which happiness ceases to increase with income. Questions have also been raised regarding the measurability of happiness and its comparability with measures of wealth. As Johns and Ormerod (2007: 31) point out, ‘Happiness is often measured in surveys using a three-point scale, where (3) equates to “very happy”. Higher levels cannot be given as an answer. [...] So even if they were actually reaching higher happiness levels, the survey could not track this’, noting that the criticism applies equally to more ‘sophisticated’ surveys using a ten-point scale. In order for happiness levels to increase in step with GDP, 22 per cent of the population would have to achieve ‘a quantum leap in their happiness over a period of only four years’ (Johns and Ormerod, 2007: 32). Others have raised similar concerns regarding the underlying assumptions of the paradox and its usage in public policy (Booth, 2012; Whyte, 2013). Yet, as Ormerod observes, the existence of critique has not slowed the issue’s ascendance: ‘Despite these shaky foundations, the relative income happiness hypothesis […] has nevertheless been seized upon for policy recommendations’ (2007: 46).

It is likely that critique has registered little effect because supporting the use of happiness statistics in pursuit of social change is far more appealing than questioning it. For those wishing to point to any development over the past half century as making people happier, happiness statistics offer little. But, as Snowdon (2012: 98) points out, ‘For those wishing to prove that something has not made us happier […] the relentless straight line [of happiness levels] can embellish almost any narrative.’ Although a trend line depicting little trend at all could be interpreted as not offering much in the way of useful information, in the hands of claims-makers, it becomes a powerful signifier of anything and everything that is wrong. The happiness index becomes an index of all the problems of modern society, a critique of modernity itself.

Wealth and the perfectibility of society

Although the radical credentials of this argument are rarely in doubt, is problematizing the link between wealth and well-being really as radical or leftist as it might initially seem? In order to grasp the transition in thinking
that this problematization reflects, it is necessary for the moment to put these ideas into historical context, particularly as ambivalence towards the benefits of material progress often forms the basis on which is drawn the conclusion that human aspiration is simply a ‘hedonic treadmill’ of constant striving for little gain (Easterlin, 1974; Easterlin, 1995; Diener, 2000; Kahneman et al., 2004; Kahneman and Krueger, 2006), or that economic growth is misleading or even detrimental to individuals and whole societies (Frank, 1999; Layard, 2005b; Simms and Woodward, 2006; James, 2007; van den Bergh, 2007; Simms et al., 2010).

This purported disconnect between economic growth and happiness has gained unprecedented prominence over the past decade. Even those critical of the rising interest in happiness have noted that the idea is appealing as it seems to represent a positive challenge to consumer culture and an ‘individualistic competitive society’ (Shaw and Taplin, 2007: 361). Cromby (2011: 842) notes that in a context ‘dominated by the profit motive, saturated with imperatives to consume’ and ‘increasingly [recognising] the need for economic growth to be sustainable’, the possibility of putting people’s ‘thoughts and feelings’ at the centre of policy is ‘undeniably attractive’. Although there may be disagreements about the form that happiness promotion has taken, the idea of restraining consumption is frequently seen as uncontroversial. Carlisle and Hanlon (2008: 267) defend against the charge that well-being risks becoming another commodity pursued ‘as part of what many uncritically take to be the good life in capitalist society’ by stating: ‘Increasing numbers of people seem aware of the downside of over-consumption’ and points to evidence from social movements of the rise of ‘downshifters’ as showing that happiness can resist neoliberal impulses in ‘pursuit of greater social and global equity’.

Yet, taking a much longer view of the role of material wealth in society, steadily growing affluence has not always been as antithetical to leftist or radical thought as it tends to be perceived today. It is significant to recall that the productive capabilities that began to develop in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were revolutionary for their time. They challenged the centralization of wealth within rigid class structures that had prevailed for centuries and saw the waning of the power of religion to legitimate the existing order. Eighteenth-century revolutions began to demand liberty from arbitrary authority and equality under the law. Ideas about the perfectibility of man began to break with the classical ideal of a bounded perfection attained through a union with God and looked forward instead to ‘an infinitely extensible moral improvement’ (Passmore, 2000: 158). Auguste Comte, for example, considered
that the 'object of Philosophy is to present a systematic view of human life, as a basis for modifying its imperfections' (Comte, 1853: 8). Wealth was seen as an intrinsic part of this process: '[A]ll human progress', Comte wrote, 'is inseparable from material progression' (Comte, 1853: 222). Human rationality and newly discovered abundance would be put in service of ameliorating problems once seen as natural or preordained elements of a divine social order.

Writing in 1920, the Irish historian J. B. Bury considered Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations as the 'greatest work dealing with social problems', being 'much more than a treatise on economic principles; it contains a history of the gradual economic progress of human society, and it suggests the expectation of an indefinite augmentation of wealth and wellbeing' (1920: 55). Such ideas were not simply reflective of a 'free market' eclecticism or apologetics on the part of Smith. Optimism towards wealth and the growth of productive powers animated Enlightenment thinkers of many persuasions. Although their starting point had been a concern with knowledge and society in the broadest terms, 'the fulcrum of their theory of progress was economic arrangements', with progress moving through 'scientific change to economic change to moral change' (Friedman, 2005: 31). It was members of the old ruling class who looked upon the possibility of augmenting the wealth of the lower strata with trepidation. The early anarchist thinker William Godwin saw the potential to eliminate scarcity as being able to free humanity from menial labour and subservience. He remarked that kings 'have sometimes been alarmed with the progress of thinking, and oftener regarded the ease and propensity of their subjects as a source of terror and apprehension' (Godwin, 1798: 28). According to Godwin, far from advocating their enrichment, the elite believed that 'it is necessary to keep the people in a state of poverty and endurance in order to render them submissive' (Godwin, 1798: 28). For Godwin, productivity could be harnessed towards the realization of human freedom if only it could be released from the bondage of capitalist institutions.

It was in specific opposition to the optimism of thinkers like Godwin and Marquis de Condorcet that Thomas Malthus wrote his famous Essay on the Principle of Population (1998). Malthus was keen to present the limits of the present as not merely failures of political will or as otherwise socially imposed, but expressions of underlying natural laws that could never be overcome. Where liberal thinkers of many stripes had seen rising wealth as the basis of a new society freed from scarcity and the impediments of the old, Malthus was eager to demonstrate the perpetuity of the social arrangements that prevailed during his time. For Malthus, poverty was an eternal fixture of all human societies, and
no attempt to arrange things differently would escape from prevailing social divisions, with a ‘class of proprietors, and a class of labourers, and with self-love the main-spring of the great machine’ (1998: 65).

Karl Marx, who is popularly known as one of capitalism’s fiercest opponents, did not share Malthus’ dismal view of wealth and progress. In contrast to Malthus, whom he accused of wanting ‘production as long as it is not revolutionary, [...] and merely creates a broader and more comfortable basis for the “old” society’, Marx celebrated the revolutionary nature of capitalist production (Marx, 2000: 447). ‘It has been the first to show what man’s activity can bring about’, accomplishing ‘wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals’ (Marx and Engels, 1948: 11). But the institutions that once fostered these revolutions soon become conservative. For Marx, the problem is not that capitalism produces too much, but that the ‘conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them; which is destroyed or withheld so that the conditions of ‘bourgeois property’ can be maintained (Marx and Engels, 1948: 15). Indeed, the existence of a ‘world of wealth and culture’ was an essential precursor to revolution; vast wealth stood as stark evidence of possibilities withheld workers and provided the foundation for a new society in which want would be abolished and struggles for resources which characterized past societies a distant memory (Marx, 1998: 54). He reserved his greatest vitriol for those like Malthus who posited the limits of the present in natural terms and even defended David Ricardo against his ‘sentimental’ romantic critics who objected that ‘production as such is not the object’ (Marx, 1969: 117–118). Such arguments, Marx wrote, ‘forget that production for its own sake means nothing but the development of human productive forces, in other words, the development of the richness of human nature as an end in itself’ (Marx, 1969: 117–118, emphasis in original).

That it has become difficult to imagine a leftist position that views wealth positively is evidenced by a frequently quoted (indeed quoted by Easterlin [1995: 36]), but less frequently understood, anecdote of Marx: ‘A house may be large or small; as long as the neighbouring houses are likewise small, it satisfies all social requirements for a residence. But let there arise next to the little house a palace, and the little house shrinks to a hut’ (Marx, 1976: 33). Although this has been used to support claims that inequality causes unhappiness (see, for example, Deutsch and Silber, 2011: 1), Marx was not suggesting that workers accept their lot and refrain from envying the ruling class. Since, from a Marxist perspective, workers are not paid the full value of their labour (the remainder being taken by the capitalist), the disparity attests the degree to which they are being swindled.
The harder he works, 'the larger will be the crumbs that fall to him', but the richer will become the capitalist (Marx, 1976: 39). It was this exploitative relationship, not the feelings that arose from it, that was problematized. Dissatisfaction only indicates that for all the claims of class harmony, 'the interests of capital and the interests of wage-labour are diametrically opposed' (Marx, 1976: 39).

While generally optimistic, a number of early political economists had nonetheless considered that growth within capitalism might one day end. While much is made of this in happiness claims (see, for example, Alexander, 2014), far from being an object of political will, it was the product of observations dating back at least to the time of Adam Smith of a tendency for rates of profit—the driving force of capitalist production—to fall over time (Grossman, 1992: 127). The notion that profit rates tend to fall leading towards progressive stagnation and recourse to countervailing tendencies to restore profitability was, in one form or another, widely accepted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Without profit, as Ricardo realized, the 'motive for accumulation will diminish with every diminution of profit and will cease altogether when their profits are so low as not to afford them adequate compensation for their trouble' (Ricardo, 1871: 68). For Ricardo and his followers, this theoretical end point, 'at which the wealth and resources of a country will not admit of increase' (1871: 474), was viewed with trepidation, the 'bourgeois "Twilight of Gods - the Day of Judgment*** in Marx's words (Marx, 1969: 544).

On the other hand, John Stuart Mill attempted to cast these tendencies in a more positive light, as a harmonious 'stationary state' to which capitalism is naturally advancing (2001: 879). But here, Mill seems conveniently to dispense with profit and competition—an oversight that Grossman criticizes for its attempt to 'appease capital with the idea that a stationary state would in no sense jeopardise the general progress of "human improvements"', since no one invests except to receive a return on investment (Grossman, 1992: 73). For Marx, Mill belonged to the school developed after the antagonisms of capitalism had become clear, in which it had become necessary to 'harmonise' the claims of political economy with those of workers and to 'reconcile irreconcilables' (Marx, 1967: 25). While previous economists had attempted to naturalize, harmonize or otherwise portray this tendency as exogenous to the capitalist system, Marx's explanation lay within the system's very functioning, its ironic inability to realize sufficient profit from the material wealth produced. He repeatedly emphasized that these limits are neither natural nor harmonious, acting as underlying drivers towards increasingly destructive crises that see workers thrown out of work, factories left idle, machinery rusting and commodities rotting in warehouses, so that the profit
rate can be restored (Marx, 1969: 495; Marx, 1981). That capitalism produces riches that must be periodically destroyed while the great mass of humanity goes without testifies that these 'barriers are not absolute', that capitalism is 'not an absolute mode of production of wealth but actually comes into conflict at a certain state with [wealth]'s further development' (Marx, 1981: 366, 350). In other words, for Marx, if capitalism undermines its own growth, it does not mean that humanity needs to hold back, but that capitalism is holding humanity back.

More recently, economists accepting Marx's conclusions have warned of increasing levels of destruction potentially required to restore profitability and 'healthy' rates of growth in modern economies, pointing to the 1930s and Second World War as ominous examples of the destruction required in the past (Kliman, 2011: 206–207). One does not need to be a Marxist to realize that capitalism's need to grow seems everywhere coupled with an irresistible tendency towards stagnation. But, impositions of austerity measures and the below subsistence wages inflicted upon Greeks in the present crisis are just a few examples that belie the claim of equilibrium and harmony. Yet, today, there is a tendency in literature questioning GDP as a measure of progress to view growth in psychological terms, as a mere 'addiction' or 'fixation' that societies can simply choose to do without (Smith, 2010). Proponents of this view frequently point to the development of national income measures as producing an 'obsession with economic growth' (Colman, 2001: 3), a 'GDP fixation' (Cobb et al., 1995: 13) or as a 'de facto measure of “success”' when 'there is nothing inevitable about the focus on gross production that is embedded in our national accounting systems' (Michaelson et al., 2009: 11). Simon Kuznets, who developed and standardized measures of GNP for the US government in the 1930s, is also referenced as having expressed 'deep reservations about the national accounts he helped to create' as measures of welfare (Cobb et al., 1995: 12).9

While Kuznets may have cautioned against using GDP as a measure of welfare and preferred the pursuit of growth through 'socially acceptable means' (Kuznets, 1989: 26), the measures he was commissioned to develop were crucially important tools for ascertaining the underlying causes of the 1930s' depression and widespread misery it had spawned. What was needed, and lacking at the time, was a more precise quantitative picture of the workings of the economy. It is a mistake to believe that the significance of growth emerged with the tool by which it could be measured. The Great Depression had starkly revealed the destructive effects of an economy that had failed to grow, and in which moreover, the 'volume of net income paid out to individuals shrank by 40 per cent' (Kuznets, 1934: 3).
Happiness claims-makers tend to present growth as straightforwardly antagonistic to human needs and supporting both it and material progress an unambiguously right wing or elitist endeavour. But, as I have tried to show, radical thinkers had once looked to wealth as providing a foundation for a new and better society and themselves as opposing a ruling class that feared and sought to impose limitations on these aspirations. Indeed, it is largely from elites that ‘growth scepticism’ is likely to flow. For instance, the foreword of Mismeasuring Our Lives: Why GDP Doesn’t Add Up, the non-technical version of the 2008 Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission, is so coloured by radical language of ‘revolution’ and the need to ‘free ourselves from conformism [and] conservatism’ (Sarkozy, 2010: xv) that it is easy to overlook its authorship by then French head of state, Nicolas Sarkozy, leader of the centre-right Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) (Ben-Ami, 2010). Lyubomirsky’s (2013) Myths of Happiness considers the question of whether people can be happy with less ‘even more urgent in light of the world’s economic troubles’ (149). Her response to ‘record unemployment, indebtedness, and bankruptcies’ is for individuals to learn ‘the ancient virtue of thrift’, advocated by those like multi-billionaire Warren Buffet (Lyubomirsky, 2013: 149). With this logic, nineteenth-century factory owners whom Marx criticized for praising their workers’ ability to live on no more ‘than was strictly necessary for them to live for their “masters”’ were radicals well ahead of their time (Marx, 1967: 562). ‘In their upside-down world, ordinary people demanding a more prosperous life are a conservative force, while the romantic demand for restraint is radical’ (Ben-Ami, 2010). Rather than perfecting society, the notion that one should accept the limitations of the present and find happiness in the here and now has come to be construed as ‘radical’.

The rise of cultural pessimism

The analysis in Chapter 5 points to a sense of ambivalence regarding the potential of wealth evident in shifting collocations of ‘happiness’ and ‘prosperity’ in newspaper discourses beginning in the 1980s. However, doubts about the benefits of prosperity are evident among the political classes in the decades before. As Collins (2000: 63) observes, the ‘tension between quantity and quality remained a hallmark of growth liberalism during its ascendancy in the early and mid-1960s’. In the United States, for example, although a commitment to economic growth underpinned many of the social programmes associated with Lyndon B. Johnson’s ‘Great Society’ initiatives, not the least the ‘war on poverty’,
the tension was nonetheless clear. Indeed, the social indicators' movement, in many ways a progenitor of the current interest in subjective social indicators as a counterpoint to a 'preoccupation' with monetary calculations, received a boost under Johnson (Andrews, 1989). These concerns are echoed in Johnson's speeches at the time. Richard N. Goodwin, Johnson's speechwriter and advisor, is quoted in the preface to an influential text on social indicators: 'The Great Society looks beyond the prospects of abundance to the problems of abundance. [...] [It] is concerned not with how much, but how good – not with the quantity of our goods but with the quality of our lives' (Bauer, 1966: xii, emphasis added).

Nonetheless, while numerous works had begun to appear questioning the benefits of wealth as a measure of progress in the 1950s and 1960s, a positive attitude remained the dominant outlook until at least the 1970s when both growth and the rationality of human actors in seeking it began to be questioned in both popular and political thought.12 As Daniel Bell observed:

The liberal answer to social problems such as poverty was that growth would provide the resources to raise the incomes of the poor. [...] And yet, paradoxically, it is the very idea of economic growth that is now coming under attack – and by liberals. Affluence is no longer seen as an answer. (Bell, 1976: 80)13

'The age of abundance has ended', wrote Christopher Lasch (1979: xiv), quoting historian David Donald. 'Such is the view from the top – the despairing view of the future now shared by those who govern society, shape public opinion, and supervise scientific knowledge on which society depends' (Lasch, 1979: xiv). Returning to Easterlin's initial study, what is perhaps most significant are not its conclusions but its attempt to give an empirical basis to a growing sense of cultural pessimism and ambivalence towards the benefits of progress.14

The romantic return

It is difficult to place precisely when the optimistic outlook began to fade. Of course, the romantic critique of capitalism, characterized by a rejection of, among other things, the quantification, mechanization and alienation of the present, has always existed within capitalism. But, in the last decades, it has acquired a renewed salience, becoming what Sayre and Lowy (2005: 433) have analysed as 'one of the main forms of modern culture'. Romantic anti-capitalism essentially represents a 'cultural protest against the modern industrial/capitalist civilization' in favour of pre-capitalist values (Sayre and Lowy, 1984: 46; Sayre and Lowy, 2005: 433). It is an outlook that often rails against industrial society's
sterile quantification and longs for a re-emphasis upon those aspects of life left off the balance sheets, 'qualitative values as opposed to the purely quantitative exchange value that predominates in modernity' (Sayre and Lowy, 1984: 435). As Sayre and Lowy describe:

Many Romantics felt intuitively that all the negative characteristics of modern society – the religion of the god Money (Carlyle called it 'Mammonism'), the decline of all qualitative, social, and religious values, as well as of the imagination and the poetic spirit, the tedious uniformity of life, the purely 'utilitarian' relations of human beings among themselves and with nature – stem from the same source of corruption: market quantification. (Sayre and Lowy, 1984: 437)

Rejecting this, the romantic longs for a return to a time (real or imagined but always idealized) in the pre-capitalist or less developed capitalist past when those aspects of the world deemed lost were still present. Early romantics set 'the idea of an ordered and happier past [...] against the disturbance and disorder of the present' (Williams, 1973: 45). 'An idealisation, based on a temporary situation and on a deep desire for stability, served to cover and to evade the actual and bitter contradictions of the time' (Williams, 1973: 45). The romantic impulse of the present, however, is far less likely to sincerely desire a wholesale return to the past in face of the uncertainties of the present (although this does exist). In a context in which modern society 'has no future', the present gains exponentially in importance (Lasch, 1979: 13). The desire, then, is for stasis. In this 'resigned' or 'reformist' incarnation, while intensely critical of the present, there is nonetheless an acceptance of its inevitability. Instead of fixating on a moment in the past, the contemporary romantic counterpoises values abstracted from history as a critique of the present, without regard for the orders and hierarchies that once underpinned them (Williams, 1973: 36). It is hoped that problems and excesses of the present can be ameliorated through a restoration of values and virtues that are missing. The resigned romantic bears 'a conviction that the old values can be reinstated, but the measures advocated to reach that goal are limited to reforms: legal reforms, the evolution of consciousness and so on' (Sayre and Lowy, 2005: 442). Thus, 'there is often a striking contrast between the radicalism of the critique and the timidity of the solutions imagined' (Sayre and Lowy, 2005: 442). If modern life is the 'disenchantment of the world', romantic anti-capitalism seeks its re-enchantment through imagination (Sayre and Lowy, 1984: 55; Hochuli, 2008).

Happiness discourses echo this critique and reflect its constricted outlook. As the remaining chapters describe, the end result is a problematization of the
present the solution to which is essentially the re-enchantment of modernity through juxtaposition of quantitative and qualitative accounts and widespread re-education in more ‘virtuous’ pre-capitalist ‘truths’ and values about happiness. There is an idealization of the exotic and a conviction that solutions to the problems of today can be sought in lost wisdoms, less developed countries or, in its more ‘radical’ varieties, through returning to a point in the capitalist past when the socio-economic system was less developed. In this, it ironically echoes ‘textbook neoliberalism’ which presents ‘a fictitious capitalism without big corporations (perfect markets) and longs back to a period before the monopolist stage of capitalism’ (Deschacht, 2013: 574). As Deschacht (2013) describes, the 2013 documentary *Happiness Economics* illustrates these trends particularly well, with its romanticism of small producers and glorification of localism in spite of its less idyllic aspects.

This is to be expected. Typically associated with small producers whose precarious position finds them ‘constantly hurled down into the proletariat by the action of competition’, romantic anti-capitalism has historically had an ambivalent relationship to working class movements (Marx and Engels, 1948: 34; Carey, 1992). It is little surprising then that the romantic viewpoint has expanded and generalized in an era characterized by the latter’s decline and in which capitalist relations of production have been depoliticized and naturalized (Pupavac, 2010: 695). As contestation over production that traditionally characterized right- and left-wing politics has waned, political disagreements have been confined to the realm of consumption (Pupavac, 2010: 695). Divorced from the industrial base, modern consumer society finds it difficult ‘to imagine socially organizing, expanding and enhancing industrial productive forces for the benefit of humanity and the environment,’ and has ‘instead been attracted towards anti-industrial, feminized ideals’ (Pupavac, 2010: 695).

However, in its revolutionary aspects, the romantic outlook is able to draw upon past ideals and mobilize the sense of loss towards the goal of transcending the present.15 The strength of romantic anti-capitalism lies in its laying bare the worst elements of capitalistically defined progress. Where non-romantic anti-capitalism has blindly praised the forces of progress, it warns against reproducing capitalism’s worst defects in the way forward (Lowy and Sayre, 2001: 252). But, romantic anti-capitalism’s preoccupation with loss, its passionate rumination upon suffering, ultimately deflects attention from the causes of that suffering and the irrecoverability of the past. When feeling and attention are drawn to ‘the care of paupers, not the creation of pauperism,’ it encourages ‘superficial comparisons’ in place of real ones (Williams, 1973: 94, 54). The preoccupation
with lost values blinds it to the forces of history; failing to penetrate deeper to the underlying facts, it searches for magical solutions to the contradictions of the present. The focus on industrial capitalism as the 'fall', according to Williams (1973: 96), has become a pervasive myth of our times and source of the 'protecting illusion' that 'it is not capitalism which is injuring us, but the more isolable, more evident system of urban industrialism'. In Marxist terms, the intense focus upon subjective alienation leaves the objective sources of that alienation untouched. Although Marx appreciated the romantic critique, and often utilized it himself, he warned of the limitations of 'that kind of criticism which knows how to judge and condemn the present, but not how to comprehend it' (Marx, 1967: 474). While romanticism often represents a healthy critique of the present, the trouble arises when romanticism is all there is.

Yet, as suggested above, romantic anti-capitalism gains salience precisely in a context characterized by a deep disillusionment with metanarratives. These 'big ideas', which once promised to explain society and which could be wielded to radically change them for the better, have become exhausted. Still resonant experiences of the past century, the Great Depression, two world wars, the Holocaust and gulags, have shaken faith in progress. Rigid determinisms and the desire to bend the world to human will are widely seen as the cause of widespread misery and the source of totalitarianisms. The economic analyses of the traditional Left seemed discredited by the prosperity of the post-war boom and Marxism came to be seen as part of the 'problem of modernity', rather than its theoretical solution (Beilharz, 1994: 2). On the other hand, growth liberalism, which sought international security through economic security, following the optimistic example of developed nations, seemed discredited by unequal development and persistent instability. Like the socialism it sought to counter, growth became no longer a solution, but a problem in itself (Furedi, 1997). The New Left abandoned the economic critique in favour of a largely cultural critique of capitalism and began to see the masses not as the way out, but as the cause of problems (Furedi, 2014). At the same time, Ayn Rand complained that the New Left would triumph not because they were right but because there was no one left to defend progress (Rand, 1999).

Already by the end of the 1950s, Daniel Bell was able to declare the end of ideology (Bell, 1962). Propounded by the failure of really existing socialism, the widespread acceptance of Margaret Thatcher's famous 'TINA' – 'there is no alternative' (to capitalism) – has effectively narrowed the scope of the political imagination. As Furedi writes, 'There is no longer room for either the ardent defender of the free market faith, or the robust advocate of revolutionary
transformation' (2004: 53). In their place has stepped the liberal democratic consensus – that market society is the only society feasible, and in which improvements are affected through piecemeal democratic reform. In Popper's (1945: 1, 3, 139) rendering, unlike the 'Utopian social engineering' and 'prophetic wisdom' ostensibly guiding previous political movements towards disaster and totalitarianism, the only 'methodologically sound' pathway to shaping history that avoided such risks would be through piecemeal and rational applications of science to the problems of the 'open society'.

**Therapeutic re-enchantment**

In the absence of meaningful alternatives, politics risks losing its sense of purpose and meaning and thus its ability to seriously engage the passions of the public (Furedi, 2004: 54). Both Bell and later, Francis Fukuyama, whose names have been prominently associated with theses celebrating the triumph of the liberal democratic consensus, nonetheless lamented its implications for political engagement (Bell, 1962: 404; Fukuyama, 1989: 18). Politicians too were acutely aware of the impasse created by the failure of middle-way and 'piecemeal' change to engage the passions of the electorate. The disintegration of old ideologies also fragmented social movements into single-issue campaigns, further intensifying competition to connect with a public with a limited attention span for new social problems. Throughout the Western world, these groups began to look for new forms of public engagement and legitimacy in the face of dwindling identification with old ideological fissures.

Since at least the mid-twentieth century, social theorists had begun to describe a profound shift occurring across English-speaking countries towards an increasing tendency to imbue life with 'therapeutic' explanations (Rieff, 1966; Sennett, 1977; Lasch, 1979; Nolan, 1998; Chriss, 1999; Furedi, 2004; Bellah et al., 2008 [1986]). Psycho-social signifiers such as happiness both draw on and are drawn from a broader signifying order heavily influenced by therapeutic meaning structures. All cultures subscribe to systems of meaning that encompass particular explanatory modes of cause and effect (see Chapter 3). As Furedi (2004: 22) describes, a 'culture becomes therapeutic when' signifiers drawn from client practitioner relationships expand to shape 'public perceptions about a variety of issues'. A seminal work by Bellah et al. (2008: 113) puts it thus:
Today we are likely to see not only our marriages but also our families, work, community, and society in therapeutic terms. Life's joys and deeper meanings, and its difficulties too, are less often attributed to material conditions and interpreted in traditional moral terms than they were even a generation ago.

Now the 'interpersonal' seems to be the key to much of life.

It should be noted that this description of therapy culture is not intended as a representation of the totality of western culture (Furedi, 2004: 22). Hewitt points out that 'culture tends to provide multiple vocabularies of motive rather than a single vocabulary' (1998: 89). Not only are different spheres of activity ruled by different sets of assumptions, but people also selectively engage with various 'cultural competitors', so that, as Swidler (2001: 15) writes, 'our cultural universe is much wider and more diverse than the culture we fully make our own'. Yet, some moral vocabularies undoubtedly exercise a more powerful influence over more domains of life than others at different times. Therapy culture arguably rivals the place older ideologies such as religion once occupied in its ability to mediate people's relationship with the world, offering meanings to attribute to increasingly diverse realms of human experience. According to Furedi, 'It has no monopoly over the way society gains meaning over life, but it is arguably the most important signifier of meaning for the everyday life of the individual' (Furedi, 2004: 22).

Where the vocabulary available to those seeking to engage the public has significantly narrowed, therapeutics offers a morally neutral means of connecting with the broadest possible audience. The turn towards public emotion represents one important way of circumventing public disengagement (Furedi, 2004: 57). Whatever the social or material realities of individuals, the human sciences possess a unique ability to speak to a deeper human essence precluded from other moral vocabularies. Therapeutic knowledge thrives in a context of uncertainty, where the rejection of an all-encompassing universal truth to guide action is celebrated, but which at the same time risks descent into relativism. It offers a means of forging agreement and attributing meaning to action not through one person's ultimately fallible beliefs about right and wrong, but through recourse to knowledge of the 'real' nature of human beings, innocent – and perhaps intensely conscious – of human fallibility. Behaviours are interpreted not on the basis of 'good or bad' but of 'healthiness or sickness' (Nolan, 1998: 9). 'Policies are no longer good – they are “evidence-based”' (Furedi, 2004: 54). The 'genius' of this approach, according to Bellah et al. (2008: 47), 'is that it enables the individual to think of commitments – from marriage and work to political and religious involvement – as enhancements of the sense of individual well-being rather than as moral imperatives'. 
But, the decline of shared moral, spiritual and religious influences, or the 'disenchantment' characteristic of modernity, threatens to deprive life of meaning. As Nolan (1998) observes, '[rationalization] undermined the authority of traditional moralities, preparing the cultural soil for a more widespread concern with emotions.' The romantic privileging of emotion promises to 're-enchant subjective experience' by endowing individual life with special meaning (Furedi, 2004: 90). It is 'salient to contemporary life in that it represents a "high-touch" departure from the "high-tech" harshness of the instrumentally oriented public sphere' (Nolan, 1998). But, its attempt 'to break out of the Weberian "iron cage"' is effected not by actually returning to traditional cultural systems nor breaking with the capitalist order, but rather through encouraging an 'escape from within' using the language of emotions (Nolan, 1998: 6).

If according to Barthes (1980: 143) myth is 'depoliticised speech', then therapy culture is the 'myth' of our times. It both expresses a broader context of depoliticization and is the semiosis through which an increasing variety of issues are depoliticized. Myth, in Barthes' rendering, represents dominant constructions as self-evident truths and sets them apart from political debate. It does not deny the objects of discussion – for example, that capitalism is a destructive system. But, it discusses them in such a way that 'purifies them', 'makes them innocent' and 'gives them a natural and eternal justification' (Barthes, 1980: 143). The tendency to represent the economic context of the present as natural, or at least unchangeable, is evident in the solutions posed to the 'happiness problem' (see Chapter 9), which almost unanimously point to individuals as the site of change. Even in the apparently 'systemic' focus of de-growth or 'steady state' narratives, the inevitability of the market is unquestioned. As the current economic order has been naturalized, it is little surprise that the problems that spring from it gain a naturalized edge. Brooks' (2011) descriptions of the failures of the previous century's attempts to solve social problems referenced in the previous chapter illustrate this well. Instead of viewing the inability to eradicate issues such as unemployment as the limitations of reform in a capitalist society, he turns his eye to humanity's perilous faith in reason over emotion as the necessary culprit.¹⁷ Capitalism becomes a fact of nature and its flaws mere reflections of flawed human nature, of which it is simply an expression. When the economic order is rendered beyond political critique, when we cannot hope to change the world in real material ways, the individual body and mind are all that remain.

The preferential treatment of the internal and interpersonal thus encourages a shift in focus of conceptualizations of social problems from the material conditions of society to a preoccupation with how people think, feel, behave and
their relationships to each other. Fitzpatrick (2001: 89–92) describes how the adoption of the term ‘social exclusion’ by New Labour subtly shifted attention from the perennial questions of capitalist society, from material disadvantage and the distribution of resources, towards primarily ‘cultural and psychological’ explanations and a focus on ‘parity of esteem’ rather than income. Social problems are increasingly represented as health problems that have little connection to society except in so far as the latter has the ‘potential of intruding into the individual’, becoming itself a cause of illness and disease (Lupton, 1995: 48).

Halliday (2004: xvii) observes that ‘the grammar of every language contains a theory of human experience’. The language of therapeutics tends to regard ‘people’s emotional state as peculiarly problematic and at the same time as defining their identity’ (Furedi, 2004: 26). Thus, in spite of Seligman’s hope to create a vision of the human being complete with ‘positive features’, happiness discourses nonetheless reproduce a vision of the vulnerable subject whose proper functioning requires the intervention of therapeutic expertise. Since emotions are seen as the root of individual and collective behaviour, grievances can be transformed ‘into personal problems amenable to therapeutic intervention’ (Lasch, 1979: 13–14). As Wainwright (2008: 83) describes, this cultural climate increasingly encourages thinking about social problems in terms of the ‘individual’s inability to satisfactorily govern his own emotional and mental life’, so that emotional signifiers such as ‘self-esteem’, or indeed happiness, become potent folk-myths which can be ‘invoked to explain virtually all social problems’.

Conclusion

While governments have always been concerned with the management of the public mood, the widespread appeal of the semiotics of emotion only becomes possible long after the passions that once incited people to act have been tamed. As Furedi (2004: 37) writes:

Keeping emotions out of politics was dictated by the recognition that in a polarised environment, anger and resentment could provoke instability and social unrest. Today the political situation is radically different. The political passions that were associated with twentieth-century revolutions and social strife appear exhausted.

Health, well-being and happiness became politicized ‘long after this ‘dramatic transformation’ had taken place, after the unchallenged ascendency of the
market effectively restricted the scope of the political imagination (Fitzpatrick, 2001: viii). Thus, although it appears as though happiness has become politicized in a perhaps hitherto unprecedented way, it actually expresses the depoliticized climate of our times. That is, the semiotics of happiness locates the problems of society in (human) nature where it also looks for solutions; it naturalizes even as it criticizes.

This study attempts to contribute to broader understandings of social problem representations salient in a context of depoliticization. 'Happiness' as a cause of, and solution to, a range of social ills seems to ring true in a cultural context characterized by a loss of faith in progress and in which the only solutions that tend to be imagined are of a romantic, piecemeal and individual character. Having given up on both in-depth 'totalising analysis' and the futures these once promised, the romantic desire for stasis against the unceasing wheel of change can come to be construed as radical.

I have attempted to account for a number of key aspects of the broader historical and cultural context from which happiness claims emerged and within which they are able to achieve salience. Claims about the nature of the world reflect the culture that produced them but they are also constituent elements of that culture. Social actors draw on broader cultural scripts at the same time as they add new lines. Nonetheless, although these trends 'set the stage' for the emergence of the issue, they do not alone account for its rise to the forefront of public debate, which requires the theoretical and methodological tools detailed in the next two chapters.
The Rhetoric of Social Problems

One of the underlying premises of this book is that a greater understanding of the world can be gained not by seeking transcendental truths that underlie it in all places and times but rather by considering the constructs through which people make sense of that world at a given time. The meaning and significance attributed any semiotic resource is never fixed and thus gaining an understanding of its 'semiotic potential' involves studying how it 'has been, is, and can be used for purposes of communication' (van Leeuwen, 2005: 5). But communication is never neutral. In some sense, every sign contains a persuasive or rhetorical element. This chapter describes the role of rhetoric in claims-making about new social problems. In so doing, it attempts to provide some of the basic theoretical tools to account for the rise of the 'happiness problem' at the intersections of context, rhetoric and process. I begin by outlining the basic approach to the construction of social reality that I take in the remainder of the book and move to a discussion of 'claims' about new social problems, their relationships to culture and their rhetorical character.

In many ways, the tension lying at the heart of approaches discussed throughout this chapter is nothing less than the perennial question of the relationship between 'thought' and 'being' that has troubled philosophers since antiquity. But it is the materialist conception of history set forth by Marx and Engels that has perhaps been most influential on the sociology of knowledge. As they famously wrote, 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness' (Marx, 2000: 425). While often misinterpreted as an overly deterministic vision of the human subject, it is better understood as a statement about the power — but also contingency — of human control over the conditions of existence: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not
make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past' (Marx, 1954: 10). Unlike the Kantian dualism or Hegelian idealism that preceded him, Marx's great insight was to perceive the essential unity of thought and being. That is, being is conscious being, thought is social thought. As Jakubowski (1990: 19) concludes, 'knowledge is not purely contemplative but has a transformational function'; knowledge is not outside of history, it is part of history.

The Soviet linguist Valentin Voloshinov drew on this materialist conception of history in his critique, or rather inversion, of Saussurean linguistics. Among the central foci of this critique was Saussure's privileging of langue (signifying system) over parole (speech acts). For Voloshinov, 'The sign may not be divorced from the concrete forms of social intercourse'; it 'is part of organized social intercourse, and cannot exist, as such, outside of it' (Voloshinov, 1973: 21). Thus, in contrast to Saussure's positioning of meaning at the intersections of signs, or 'binary oppositions', Voloshinov located their meaning in 'the social context of [their] use' (Chandler, 2007: 9). Just as language outside of social discourse is an abstraction, so too is synchrony: 'there is no real moment in time when a synchronic system of language could be constructed' (Voloshinov, 1973: 66). In this emphasis upon the historical and materialist basis of language, he echoes Marx's basic understanding that 'man is no abstract being squatting outside the world' (Marx, 2000: 71), and that like production, language existing 'without individuals living together and talking to one another' is an absurdity (Marx 1973: 84). However, although the interdependence of ideas and material context was central for Marx and Engels, Voloshinov aimed to provide what he considered to be the first fully Marxist expounding of language in particular. He rejected previous attempts by Marxists like Georgi Plekhanov to conceptualize the link between the sociopolitical order and ideology in terms of 'social psychology' as idealist (Voloshinov, 1973: 19). Instead, he affirmed the materiality of the sign. That is, ideological phenomena do not exist in the abstract but rather in concrete material utterances. Social psychology has no 'inner' existence but is rather external; it takes form in social interactions conditioned (note: not mechanically caused) by production relations. This is made possible by the ubiquity of language. It permeates social life at every level, from the production floor to the philosopher's chair. The key question for Voloshinov then is 'how actual existence (the basis) determines sign and how sign reflects and refracts existence in its process of generation' (Voloshinov, 1973: 19).

Voloshinov is often pointed to as the precursor or even progenitor of social semiotic approaches to the study of social phenomena (Williams, 1977; Hodge
and Kress, 1988; van Leeuwen, 2005). For social semioticians, the human experience of reality is mediated by signs whose meanings take shape in the process of social intercourse. As Williams (1977: 37) describes, language is not 'a simple "reflection" or "expression" of "material reality"'. Instead, there is 'a grasping of this reality through language, which as practical consciousness is saturated and saturates all social activity, including productive activity. And, since this grasping is social and continuous [...] it occurs within an active and changing society' (Williams, 1977: 37). According to Hodge and Kress (1988: 1), these 'social dimensions of semiotic systems are so intrinsic to their nature and function that the systems cannot be studied in isolation'. The lens is thus focused upon how human experience and activity are transformed into meaning, and how meaning in turn transforms human experience and activity. Key questions concern how particular discursive formations arise and become influential mediators of experience and the consequences these may have for how subjects reflect on experience and act upon the world. This is what I am attempting to illuminate with this study. Note, however, that I cannot say how people actually 'decode' these messages and use them in their daily lives. I can only say how they are being invited to. Claims about happiness function as an invitation to conceive of oneself and the world in particular ways, but at particular places and times, some invitations are likely to be more appealing than others.

Constructing social problems

There are many ways that these insights have been incorporated into the study of social phenomena. My own orientation, following the constructionist approach to social problems, is to view language as a 'claims-making activity' (Spector and Kitsuse, 2001). This approach attempts to understand the rise of social problems not in terms intrinsic to themselves, for example, as a corollary of their objective 'harm', but in their changing social significance. In one of the best known programmatic statements of this paradigm, Spector and Kitsuse defined social problems not as harmful circumstances existing regardless of what we may know or think about them, but as 'the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions' (2001: 75). From this perspective, or more specifically, the subsequently developed 'contextual constructionism', social problems emerge as discursive processes of meaning-making that transpire in concrete arenas

This approach is particularly useful to the present study because it is not simply ‘happiness’ itself that has been reconstituted throughout the ages and which is currently being reconstituted (although this may be the case), but that it has become specifically problematized. It is not simply that an array of books and articles have appeared which promise new ways of understanding and achieving happiness, but what has been posited is a lack of happiness, variably defined or implied, to which this knowledge should be directed. For example, claims-makers draw attention to the ‘happiness levels’ of various groups as requiring intervention, fostering headlines that declare: ‘Children “are growing more miserable”’ (Ward, The Daily Telegraph: 2013) and ‘Happiness of children falls after age 11’ (Gadher, The Sunday Times: 2014). Health sections warn: ‘People who are grumpy in middle age are up to three times more likely to die than those with a happy outlook on life’ (The Telegraph: 2012). But the problem is often more implicit: ‘How happy are you? (And here’s how to be happier)’ suggests one headline (Pitts, The Telegraph: 2014). The article continues, ‘Sometimes, you don’t realise there are problems, or can’t specify what they are, until you sit down and analyse the situation’ (Pitts, The Telegraph: 2014). Whether you realize it or not, according to claims-makers, everyone could use help to be happy. Since this idea that happiness is a problem requiring intervention has not arisen as if from nowhere, it follows that it is the process by which these notions have come to be taken for granted that must be deconstructed. In the sections that follow, I explain the paradigm more fully in relation to some of its key analytical tools. In the next chapter, I discuss ‘claims-makers’ as the necessary complement to these more semiotic considerations.

Claims

It was Spector and Kitsuse’s definition of social problems in terms of claims-making activities that introduced the vocabulary of claims and claims-makers into the constructionist lexicon (Best, 2002: 702). I use the term ‘claim’ to refer to ‘an account or story which is designed to further some practical goal’ (Miller, 2000: 317). Claims are messages; they have directionality, ‘a source and a goal, a social context and a purpose’ (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 5). Put simply, a claim is an argument that a particular troubling condition exists, that it has particular characteristics and that it needs to be addressed (paraphrased from Best, 2008: 338).
In their daily lives, people are regularly subject to a multitude of competing claims about the nature of reality. The interactional and rhetorical – that is, persuasive – nature of construction is a crucial element of the process of making and sharing meanings in social life (Potter, 1996: 13). Perhaps nowhere is this more applicable than in the case of social problems in which it is usually not enough for a claims-maker to name and describe a new issue of concern. Rather, the initial identification is usually followed by the demand that some action be taken, that ‘something must be done’.

Yet, while the list of social problems is potentially endless, the attention that can be accorded them in various arenas of public discourse is finite. Claims about new social problems do not exist in a vacuum and must of necessity compete with a multitude of additional claimants on the ‘scarce resource’ of public attention to win a space among the common-sense perceptions of the most pressing problems of the day (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988: 53). Not all of these claims succeed; indeed, not even a small fraction of them win out in the ‘marketplace of care’. The various public arenas in which claims are enunciated have a limited carrying capacity; there is a limited amount of ‘surplus compassion’ that people are able to muster for causes beyond their immediate concerns; there are limited minutes in a meeting, core messages in a political campaign or inches in a newspaper column (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988: 59–60). According to Hilgartner and Bosk, ‘It is the discrepancy between the number of potential problems and the size of the public space for addressing them that makes competition among problems so crucial and central to the process of collective definition’ (1988: 59–60).

Competition necessitates that claims-makers mobilize persuasive rhetoric, arguments that are likely to persuade their target audiences in order to minimize opposition and mobilize maximum concern (Best, 1987: 103). The subsequent sections detail the rhetorical strategies typically used by claims-makers as they attempt to gain recognition and support for their claims and which provide a framework for their study. However, it is important for the moment to point out precisely why competition raises the importance of rhetoric as a crucial facet of the claims-making process and thus as indispensable to the study of social problems and happiness in particular. The constraints of competition in the mass media, and the news media in particular, shape claims in three important ways: they create a need to appeal to broad audiences, to craft compelling narratives, and insofar as it is possible, to avoid controversy and minimize resistance.

First, claims-makers must be aware of their audiences and which claims are likely to be appealing in various mediums.² Often, the success of a claim
depends not only upon being able to appeal to a niche of dedicated supporters, but also upon successfully gaining a broad base of awareness and support. Thus, a social movement activist giving a speech at a protest rally comprised mainly of supporters will use different rhetoric from an editorial in a major national newspaper catering to a broad demographic. For example, Maurer (2002) has described how animal rights activists seeking to promote vegetarianism typically espouse a moral rationale for their decision not to eat meat. However, when attempting to bring these claims to broader audiences, they adopt a 'slow education process' centred on health benefits and gradually move towards a more overtly ideological stance (Maurer, 2002: 145). Once claims are articulated in a public arena with the aim of convincing and raising awareness and support among a more substantial segment of the population, they are often infused with the need to accommodate and speak convincingly to an accordingly diverse array of viewpoints.

Second, successful claims are often those which have managed to avoid a great deal of opposition. To the degree that a claim is uncontested, it has a greater likelihood of affecting policy. However, this can be especially difficult in practice, and dedicated claims-makers may attempt several different formulations before successfully drawing widespread attention to their claims. If successful however, 'well-crafted claims sometimes create surprising alliances among people who don’t usually agree,' thereby converting potential conflict into consensus (Best, 2008: 43). Several studies have underscored the tendency for claims framed in uncontroversial and highly symbolic terms to achieve widespread support and rapid diffusion through various institutions. For example, in a study of abducted children as a social problem, Gentry (1988: 422) describes how '[g]iven the media attention on abducted children, [...] politicians and public relations personnel were presented a valence issue that would meet with acceptance from peers, constituents, and customers ranging from the far left to the far right'. As a result, claims about the extent and epidemic nature of the problem met with little criticism and gained a rapidly growing basis of outspoken support across policymakers, presenting as they did an opportunity for 'any politician seeking to establish himself/herself as a protector of family members' (Fritz and Altheide, 1987: 477).

This brings forth the importance of 'valence issues' to public debate about new social problems. Borrowed from electoral research, valence issues are crucial to understanding the success of claims evoking happiness. The tendency for claims like those pertaining to 'child abuse', 'peace' or 'national strength' to promote consensus and create alliances across parties not normally in agreement
makes signifiers with such apparently uncontroversial connotations particularly appealing to claims-makers. According to Nelson (1984: 28), valence issues are characterized by their 'lack of specificity and their attempt to reaffirm the ideals of civic life' (emphasis removed). Unlike 'position issues' such as abortion or euthanasia which can evoke a fierce and often polarized debate, an abstract ideal of 'freedom' or 'change' 'elicits a single, strong, fairly uniform emotional response and does not have an adversarial quality' (Nelson, 1984: 27). Claims about 'happiness' therefore share a great deal in common with similar claims about child abuse and 'victims' rights'; it is difficult to imagine how they could be contested or opposed, since few would argue for depression, defend child abusers or 'blame the victim' (Best, 1999: 108). Claims-makers may not agree on all aspects of the problem and may take ownership and/or lend support for very different reasons, but the widespread agreement that such issues provoke often drives their rapid cultural affirmation. As I show later, happiness has permeated the language of an increasingly vast array of social problems and has constructed areas of common ground between surprisingly diverse claims-makers.

Finally, to the degree that secondary claims are constrained by the limitations of space and the needs of a medium, they must be compelling enough to catch the attention of the intended audience. According to Nichols (1997: 325), claims-makers are likely to craft claims 'with two audiences in mind: the general public, and those in positions to formulate and enact policy (e.g. legislatures, regulatory agencies)'. However, claims must not only appear compelling enough to warrant a response from the public and policymakers, but they must also compel coverage on the part of the mass media who frequently stand as gatekeepers to large audiences and a certain degree of legitimacy. Claims that conform to the needs of the intended medium stand a greater chance of attracting the attention of those working within it. In the case of news workers, they are more likely to accord attention to stories perceived as relevant to their readership/viewership, easily comprehensible, novel, emotionally engaging or dramatic (Gans, 2004). In order to attract attention then, 'the construction of putative conditions as problems depends not merely on the creation of typifying images but on their successful use in storytelling' (Nichols, 1997: 325, emphasis removed). Successful claims must seek to tell a 'compelling story' encompassing not only examples and definitions of the problem and how it ought to be conceived, but also compelling reasons for why audiences, variously composed, should care about this particular problem.

In sum, the need to appeal to broad audiences and minimize resistance make framing problems as valence issues a particularly appealing strategy for
claims-makers. The need to craft a compelling narrative means that claims across social problems tend to exhibit common strategies such as alleging a worsening situation and emphasizing the suffering of vulnerable innocents. These aspects of claims are important as they contribute to an understanding of why happiness defined and described in particular ways became an appealing signifier through which to communicate a variety of concerns. As society fragments into greater pluralism of beliefs, an ideology that promises to unite people at the lowest common denominator seems undeniably attractive. For many claims-makers, 'happiness' became a compelling answer to the question, 'why should people care about my problem?' News media discussions of social problems frequently appear as mere reflections of troubling conditions, though of course vulnerable to error, bias or even external pressures and influence (such as that exerted by, for example, the owners of media conglomerates). However, it is important to recognize that our perceptions of the significance and shape of the problems that face us can be shaped by far subtler processes that exert a no less powerful influence. I will return to this in the next chapter.

Rhetoric in claims-making

Claims, therefore, do not just tell us about reality; they must convince us of their reality. Problem claims are thus a form of rhetoric. In order to understand happiness as a social problem, it is crucially important to understand the role that rhetoric and rhetorical choices play in constructing the image of an issue. The importance of rhetoric is evidenced by the fact that it has been the subject of prescriptive, descriptive and interpretive texts throughout the history of western philosophy. For much of that history, its study has been didactic; from Aristotle's three modes of persuasion (pathos, logos and ethos) to Cicero's five canons, the focus was on creating students skilled in the art of producing discourse (van Dijk, 1997). But, it was precisely because they acutely recognized the power of rhetoric and its ability to compel individuals to act or take decisions that classical philosophers developed and evolved rhetoric towards becoming one of the three ancient arts of discourse. Indeed, such an understanding underlies Plato's portrayal of the critique of the Sophists' rhetorical appeals to emotion and flattery, so that 'if a pastry baker and a doctor had to compete in front of children [...] the doctor would die of starvation' (Plato, 1999: 101).

While the creation of discourse remains the domain of contemporary rhetoric, the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy and the social sciences has shifted
artefacts of discourse and rhetoric to the centre of analyses. Although this turn is represented by vast and highly variable bodies of work, its core insight has been an emphasis upon the role of language and linguistic structures in ordering and giving meaning to experience. In addition, it has led to a heightened awareness of the ‘dynamic interaction of a rhetorical text with its context, that is, how a text responds to, reinforces, or alters the understandings of an audience or the social fabric of the community’ (Gill and Whedbee, 1997: 159). At its most extreme, this approach can lead to an overly relativist rendering of society, as a one-sided focus upon language in the analysis of social problems can lead to the apparent denial of the existence of the phenomena they describe. Yet, at its most fruitful, the study of rhetoric in constructionism can draw attention to the role of language in constructing and even constituting our sense of the world around us, bringing forth an awareness of the fact that our descriptions of reality are not innocent but affect how we conceive of both it and ourselves (Lupton and Barclay, 1997: 4). As Fairclough (1992: 41–42) has put it:

This entails that discourse is in an active relation to reality, that language signifies reality in the sense of constructing meanings for it, rather than that discourse is in a passive relation to reality, with language merely referring to objects which are taken to be a given in reality (emphasis added).

While considerably less attended to than in other areas of linguistic study, the study of rhetoric is central to the study of the construction of social problems. For Spector and Kitsuse, definitional activities are not simply important considerations in the quest to understand a social problem, they form its essential composition (Schneider 1985: 211; Spector and Kitsuse, 2001: 75). That is, what a social problem becomes greatly depends upon how it is conceptualized and defined. In their social existence, social problems are a series of claims.

In response to controversies that dominated constructionist thinking about social problems in the 1980s, the role of language in social problems became only further entrenched in the approach (Woolgar and Pawluch, 1985; Ibarra and Kitsuse, 1993). This is perhaps most evident in Ibarra and Kitsuse’s (1993) reformulation of the programmatic statements of the paradigm, replacing Spector and Kitsuse’s original ‘putative conditions’ with ‘condition-categories’ in an attempt to focus the attention of the constructionist researcher more acutely upon ‘society’s classifications of its own contents – used in practical contexts to generate meaningful descriptions and evaluations of social reality’ (Ibarra and Kitsuse, 1993: 30). In doing so, they reaffirmed the centrality of
the symbol- and language-bound character of claims-making, as well as how members’ facility with certain discursive strategies – including rhetorical and reasoning idioms – initiate and constitute the social problems process’ (Ibarra and Kitsuse, 1993: 31). However, the possibility and desirability of a ‘strict’ or fully ‘monist’ constructionism which, as Ibarra and Kitsuse suggested, ‘never leaves language’ (Ibarra and Kitsuse, 1993: 31) has been questioned (Best, 1993; Holstein and Miller, 1993; Best, 1995). Nonetheless, their affirmation of the importance of language emphasizes a core strength drawn intact from its origins in labelling theory. Namely, ‘the independence of meaning from the objects to which it is or may be attached by sentient actors as they create, recreate, and are created by social life’ (Schneider, 1985: 226).

Clearly, there can be little doubt that there is a real world of objects ‘out there’ with which human beings undoubtedly interact apart from their idea of it. However, language is the inevitable arbiter of our relationship with that world. Naming reality involves the drawing together of various phenomena under a particular umbrella of meaning. The means by which this is done (and moreover that it is done in relation to certain segments of reality at certain times) has consequences for how that reality is perceived.

The focus upon rhetoric and the language-bound character of claims-making brings forth a further tension that frequently arises within studies adopting a constructionist stance; namely a certain ambivalence that is often displayed towards the role of science and its ability to ‘grasp objective reality more accurately than other belief systems’ (Wainwright, 2008: 13). This ambiguity is particularly evident in the treating of science (as I do here) as ‘socially constructed’ (Best, 2008: 107). That is, as a cultural resource utilized by claims-makers as they construct social problems (Aronson, 1984). Yet, through the arbiter of culture, the role of science need not be so ambiguous. The intention is not to refute that science is a superior mode of enquiry, and that it possesses a unique ability to penetrate through various layers of reality without, to summarize Bhaskar, ever reaching the bottom (Bhaskar, 2002: 52–55), but to point out that culture mediates the transition from enquiry to discourse. Indeed, it conditions the very questions we ask and how we set out to find the answers. This is particularly true when claims-making, especially in terms of mass media claims-making about a new social issue, draws upon science for its rhetorical power.

This understanding becomes all the more significant when we move from the realm of objects and things into the realm of human beings, since, unlike atoms or animals, human beings are not simply there to be described, but are conscious of,
and exist in a dynamic and dialectical relationship with, the categories by which their reality is divided. Yet, there is an increasing tendency towards the present to appeal to 'the evidence base' regarding the effects of various phenomena on the human brain, or to premise proposals with the phrase 'research shows' as though 'science' can remove the need for debate on the conduct of human life or the organization of society (Lee et al., 2014). Naturalistic descriptions hold 'the world still, make it noun-like (stable in time) while observed, experimented with, measured and reasoned about' (Halliday, 2004: 21). While serving the natural sciences well, such portrayals freeze human beings at a particular moment and project that image backwards and forward in time. The present gains a sense of permanence and how human beings react today becomes how they always will. The image of the human follows the animalistic metaphor of mere 'motion', or the 'passive reactor to external conditions' rather than the assessing and reflecting humanity implied by 'action' (Gusfield, 1989: 9). The key difference is: 'Animals respond to stimuli directly; human beings interpret the events' (Gusfield, 1989: 9).

The plethora of studies purporting to measure happiness and its various correlates are not simply 'unreal'. But to draw attention to particular phenomena, to draw them together and/or single them out as meaningful objects of scrutiny and study and to impute them with a hitherto unprecedented significance, is to go some way towards contributing to the creation of new social objects. In addition, the image of the human that underlies and emerges from these descriptions reflects the context within which that description was formed as well as contributes to the ongoing construction of new subjects. As Hacking describes, 'One might have the picture of first there being a kind of human behaviour or condition, and then the knowledge. That is not the case. The kind and the knowledge grow together' (Hacking, 1995: 361).

The words used to conceptualize phenomena function as an invitation for audiences to conceive of reality in particular ways and to emphasize some aspects of their experience over others – in short, to adopt the claims-makers' interpretations themselves. And some invitations are more alluring than others. It is this understanding of the role of language that is most useful for analyses of social problems. That is, how actors at various stages go about building the social world in some ways and not others and the rhetoric that they inevitably must use if they wish to draw attention and converts to their particular interpretation.

While, superficially, portrayals of social problems may not seem important and confront the receiver as a simple description of reality, these activities show
that developing claims is both a dynamic and intensely rhetorical procedure. As Best (1987: 115) characterizes the process:

Claims-making inevitably involves selecting from available arguments, placing the arguments chosen in some sequence, and giving some arguments particular emphasis. These are rhetorical decisions. Moreover, as claims-makers assess the response to their claims, or as they address new audiences, claims may be revised and reconstructed in hopes of making them more effective. In such cases, even the most ingenuous claims-maker must become conscious of doing rhetorical work (emphasis added).

Those claims that gain constant repetition and those that fall away or adapt are impressed with this rhetorical struggle for acceptance. Over time, claims come more and more to reflect cultural values, as claims-makers learn which values to evoke as warranting attention and action and which to avoid.

Cultural resources

Social problems are therefore a kind of social practice, or what Holstein and Miller (1993: 152) refer to as ‘social problems work’. This ‘work’ is embedded in historical, cultural and organizational contexts the understanding of which is indispensable for grasping the trajectory of an issue. By the same token, the development of an issue gives insights into the contexts that fostered its growth and spread when defined and portrayed in particular ways. According to Altheide (2009: 66), the tendency for claims to adopt common rhetorical strategies and coalesce around particular themes provides ‘a window into collective sentiments, preferences, and identity pronouncements about epistemic communities’. Claims-makers draw on existing cultural understandings in the process of formulating claims they hope will be persuasive by members of their respective cultures. Therefore, studying claims that are frequently repeated and affirmed can provide a window into the cultural moment that produced them.

That texts are intended to persuade has been widely examined; whether produced in the natural sciences or printed in the pages of a newsmagazine, these are efforts to convince a particular interpretive community of their contents’ importance and veracity (Latour 1987; Knorr-Cetina, 1999). Yet audiences do not simply believe everything they hear. People evaluate new claims on the basis of criteria that are familiar to them, to their time period and culture – they want to see proof (Best, 2008: 16). At the same time, what constitutes convincing
‘proof’ is not a static consideration. What makes a claim convincing? What sorts of statements are likely to propel a desired audience into action? Why are some conceptualizations of reality readily accepted at one time and place, but not at others?

While, theoretically, a claims-maker can formulate claims in any manner that he or she chooses, every culture and time period presents a repository of images and ideas about how the world works to which a claims-maker must adhere if his or her claims are to become widely accepted. Claims must ‘make sense’ according to the categories with which people are used to conceptualizing their world. Indeed, even when it comes to some of the most seemingly irrational beliefs about the nature of the material world, people can be shown to take a decidedly rational stance according to the forms of knowledge and evidence with which they are familiar. Perhaps nowhere is this tendency better illustrated than in the famous example of Evans-Pritchard’s Azande.

According to Evans-Pritchard, although the Azande’s belief in witchcraft was apparently unhindered by the fact that (in his own terms), ‘as [they] conceive of them, they clearly cannot exist’, their socially proscribed means of explaining the world nonetheless ‘in no way contradicts empirical knowledge of cause and effect’ (1976: 18, 25). Rather, their social categories provide them with a natural philosophy by which the relations between people and the events that befall them can be explained and their means of responding devised. For the Azande, explaining misfortunes via the idiom of witchcraft embraces a system of values that regulates human conduct (Evans-Pritchard, 1976: 18). As he describes in his ethnographic account of the phenomenon:

The world known to the senses is just as real to them as it is to us. […] They are foreshortening the chain of events, and in a particular social situation are selecting the cause that is socially relevant and neglecting the rest. […] Besides, death is not only a natural but also a social fact. It is not simply that the heart ceases to beat and the lungs to pump air in an organism, but it is, also the destruction of a member of a family and kin, of a community and tribe. Death leads to consultation of oracles, magic rites, and revenge. Among the causes of death witchcraft is the only one that has any significance for social behaviour. (Evans-Pritchard, 1976: 25)

And, yet, even those who believe in witches do not do so indiscriminately. Even fantastical concepts have rules that hold them together and lend them coherence and functionality. A person who has lied or committed adultery, for example, cannot evade punishment by claiming that he has been ‘bewitched’: ‘Witchcraft
does not make a person tell lies' (Evans-Pritchard, 1976: 26). Claims couched in a rhetoric of witches and magic, which locate the aetiology of events in a mystical universe of meaning, are therefore more readily accepted by the Azande whose cultural milieu encompasses a complex system in which these categories function and revolve. While these beliefs subsume phenomena that are undoubtedly 'real' in the sense that people really do suffer sickness and death, it is culture that is superimposed over such events and which gives them their social and moral value.

The example of the Azande is not as obscure as it initially might seem. New claims arising in contemporary Western cultures must also resonate with already existing belief systems which render some conceptualizations of reality plausible and others liable to be rejected out of hand. Referring to the rise of PTSD, Kenny (1996: 154) points out that, '[b]oth Zande witchcraft and western traumatic memory therapy deploy a theory of causation within a framework of moral judgements'. Similarly, the medical anthropologist Allan Young has pointed out that contemporary Western methods of categorizing experience with reference to mental disorder and illness, and in the case of his own research, 'traumatic memory', involve a similar means of ordering and reordering experience which confers upon individuals, events and memories a particular moral status and meaning. As Young describes:

> Individuals 'choose' PTSD for this purpose, to reorganize their life-worlds, because it is a widely known and ready-made construct, it is sanctioned by the highest medical authority, it is said to originate in external circumstance rather than personal flaws or weakness, and (in some situations) it earns compensation. (2009: 98)

In order to understand the processes that underlie these differences in belief and the manner by which some interpretations of reality are able to gain resonance in particular places and times, Young draws on the notion of the 'epistemic culture' to describe 'what any group of people know in common' (Young, 2009: 325–326). This term, while first introduced into science studies by Knorr-Cetina (1999), has a number of parallels from Émile Durkheim's 'collective consciousness', to the *denkkollektiv* of Ludwik Fleck, Michel Foucault's *episteme* and Thomas Kuhn's concept of the paradigm. While diverging in their subject matter and focus, the common thread uniting these concepts is an attempt to conceptualize and explain the symbolic categories that a group of people hold in common to varying degrees and through which they may make sense of their world. In Knorr-Cetina's (1999: 1) conceptualization, epistemic cultures are
'those amalgams of arrangements and mechanisms – bonded through affinity, necessity, and historical coincidence – which, in a given field, make up how we know what we know'.

What makes problems of personal and collective 'happiness', PTSD, or further examples such as the 'susto' of Latin America, or the 'Bad Destiny' of northern Nigeria plausible explanations and categorizations of experience within their respective cultures? As Kenny (1996: 156) explains, each has a cultural history and a cultural relevance; they are 'built upon local cultural understandings about the nature of the self or soul that, in an appropriate context, make diagnosis of one or the other reasonable, though not inevitable'.

These variable temporal and cultural understandings mean that the form a claim takes is very much context-dependent. Claims need to be tailored to these broader cultural understandings, but since claims-makers themselves are likely to be members of the same culture as their intended audience, when they devise claims that they themselves find persuasive, they are likely to reflect at least some of the taken-for-granted assumptions of the broader epistemic community (Best, 2008: 30). In his study of the media's influence on perceptions of terrorism post 9/11, Altheide distils the core insight of this approach for claims-making:

Evidence is not objectively given, 'out there,' to be picked up. Evidence is constituted by social definitions and meanings, which in turn are contextualized by culture, history, ideology, and specific expertise. There is a discourse of evidence, which, above all, requires some shared meanings, perspectives, and criteria. The 'reason' that science and religion have trouble 'talking to one another' is that they operate from what Kuhn (1970) called different 'paradigms,' but there is much more to it. Their cosmologies are different, and the bounds of authority differ. It is apparent when one looks at history that which is evidence for one person – or, more correctly, an epistemic community – does not qualify as evidence for another. (2009: 77)

In other words, how advocates describe a new social problem, what constitutes convincing evidence and the words they use to characterize its victims and villains very much depend upon already familiar understandings of the nature of human beings, their relationships with the world around them and their place within it. It is little surprising then that in a culture in which emotional vulnerability has acquired a peculiar explanatory force, explanations of social problems invoking emotional causes and solutions are able to hold unique rhetorical sway.
In this way, it can be said that 'there is no such thing as a new social problem' (Best, 1999: 164). Rather, as Best (1999: 164) describes, 'How advocates describe a new social problem very much depends on how they (and their audiences – the public, the press, and policy-makers) are used to talking about, already familiar problems.' The cultural repertoire of familiar problems reflects successful claims-making in the past, and new claims are likely to draw on these prevailing interpretations of reality. Successful problems – problems that dominate the headlines, which form the focal point of political campaigns and whose core claims come to form the 'canon' of what we know about the proper functioning of the world, the human being and the current (problematic) state of affairs – resonate precisely because they have achieved an effective rhetorical 'fit' with their historical and cultural moment. They also play a reflexive role in shaping that moment as claims-makers and audiences interact with those new claims, adapting old claims, and in many cases, variously reshaping their life-worlds in accordance with them. This can mean implementing new ideas in their personal lives, in their work, organizations or developing new organizations and policies in response to claims as well as in the socialization and education of initiates. In drawing out those claims which have gained constant repetition and affirmation, it is possible to gain insight into the cultural resources on which they have drawn and thus to gain insight into the broader historical and cultural moment that makes some claims plausible and appealing, or even thinkable, 'sayable' and believable.

The claims detailed throughout this book implicitly underscore a particular way of making sense of the world and of the nature of human beings which differs in fundamental ways from those that came before it. They both resonate with and represent new articulations and developments of an overarching system of meaning dominated by therapeutic understandings. It is only into such a cultural climate that claims about happiness, thus conceived, emerge and find fertile ground. However, claims are not disembodied or abstract social processes. As Nichols (1997: 325) notes, 'Narration of new problems [...] is more likely to be effective when there is a symbiotic relationship between different types of claims-makers.' It is to this aspect of the construction of social problems that I turn in the next chapter.
Claims have been described and defined first only insofar as it is necessary to understand what it is that ‘claims-makers’ construct. Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognize that ‘[s]igns are socially produced’ (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 229). They do not exist in the abstract; people must make them. It is important therefore to account for signs ‘as contextualised activities rather than as objects’ (Blommaert, 2005: 3). Indeed, this understanding is also reflected in the order of the chapters that follow in which the examination of the activities of claims-makers precedes the discussion of the claims they construct.

Put simply, ‘claims-makers’ are those individuals or groups seeking to convince others of the existence of a troubling condition that needs to be addressed (Best, 2008: 338). Theoretically, nearly anyone can be a claims-maker; they are those who engage in claims-making activities, ‘demanding services, filling out forms, lodging complaints, filing lawsuits, calling press conferences, writing letters of protest, passing resolutions, publishing exposés, placing ads in newspapers, supporting or opposing some governmental practice or policy, setting up picket lines or boycotts [...]’ (Spector and Kitsuse 2001: 79). In their daily lives, many people forward a number of social problems claims and may actually participate in the claims-making process to varying degrees. They may become ‘claims-makers’ by passing claims on or expressing assent or dissent, without necessarily becoming dedicated to the issue. Yet, without a great deal of effort, it is unlikely that many of these claims will gain salience in the broader culture. It is not enough to simply identify a troubling condition – where, when and by whom claims are made greatly influences whether or not they will gain widespread recognition.¹

A great number of violent incidents, potential health threats and new forms of risk are reported daily, but what distinguishes a short-lived problem such
as the 'freeway violence' of the late 1980s from one that becomes an enduring problem of our times is that while the former might become stale and drift out of public focus, the latter is kept alive via the activities of claims-makers who take the issue on and make it their own (Best, 1999). People need to keep an issue fresh in order to warrant further coverage, they need to make a compelling case for continued attention, for doing something about the problem. Some people are in a better position to do this than others; they may have more financial resources, belong to familiar organizations or possess forms of specialized expertise that lend their claims special status. Whether or not a potential social problem is ignored or institutionalized depends greatly upon the activities of claims-makers, their connections amongst each other, their roles in society and their dedication and ability to keep the problem in the public eye. This process works best when there is a symbiotic relationship between different types of claims-makers. To the degree that this is achieved, a problem has a greater chance of being successful.

It is necessary to stress for the moment that the degree to which these claims are espoused or taken for granted by the general population must not be overstated. This is because the first claims problematizing happiness did not enter into public discourse in a 'bottom up' way (see Chapter 7). As opposed to the typical image one might have of a 'movement', claims about happiness did not initially emerge from disaffected individuals organizing at the grass-roots level, knocking on doors and campaigning to bring about change. Rather, the first claims initially emerged from experts and were taken on by existing groups and think tanks already organized and in possession of varying degrees of influence. Their subsequent spread followed what Strang and Soule (1998: 270) have called a 'broadcast' model of diffusion. That is, rather than spreading via 'contagion' internally within the general population, claims about happiness originated externally and were 'broadcast' into the population largely via non-relational channels, while a more horizontal contagion model operated within networks closely connected to and part of the state apparatus (Strang and Soule, 1998: 270–271; Best, 2001: 11). Key to this diffusion were non-relational channels such as the mass media and the 'change agents' who 'deliberately [sought] to foster diffusion', or what I refer to as 'claims-makers' (Strang and Soule, 1998: 271–272; Best, 2001: 11). That is, although adopting the rhetoric of social movements, the problematization of happiness followed similar trends observed in health promotion whose discourses reside within the state rather than arising in opposition to it (Lupton, 1995: 61).
In the sections that follow, I delineate different types of claims-makers and their roles in the claims-making process, which I use to help make sense of the construction and diffusion of the problem in ensuing chapters.

Types of claims-makers and the claims-making process

Throughout the constructionist literature on social problems, a number of distinctions between types of claims-makers have been variously forwarded. However, the literature lacks a fully developed and generalized typology of claims-makers. Therefore, the terminologies used hereafter must necessarily bring together a number of sources while ignoring others, but it is not meant as an exhaustive typology generalizable to claims-making in all contexts. It is nonetheless useful in clarifying many of the roles that claims-makers play pertinent to the present analysis.

From the types that have been variously proposed and utilized within the literature two bases of definition may be distinguished: claims-makers as they are defined by their roles in facilitating the claims-making process and claims-makers as they are defined by their more broadly recognized social roles (such as professions, organizational relationships, social status) (Table 4.1). This distinction allows for a discussion of claims-makers in terms of both their relationships to each other within the claims-making process and their social position and the accompanying limitations and opportunities provided by that status and/or organization.

Table 4.1 Claims-makers and roles in the claims-making process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles in claims-making process</th>
<th>Claims-makers (examples)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insiders</td>
<td>General public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsiders</td>
<td>Activists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatekeepers</td>
<td>Journalists</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mass media</td>
<td>Celebrities and public figures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Politicians</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Policy experts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Experts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Social movement organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Think tanks</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charitable and other non-governmental organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commercial organizations</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
These two groupings are by no means mutually exclusive. Rather, the 'processual' roles listed on the left may be understood as overarching functions that claims-makers (right) may perform in the process of making or adopting claims. These processual roles highlight the interconnections between individuals and groups and available opportunities for bridging gaps through which access can sometimes be granted to new public arenas and policy domains. The (simplified) diagram in Figure 4.1 illustrates some of these potential relationships and pathways to recognition and institutionalization. Institutionalization refers to the 'official recognition' and endorsement of claims-makers' ideology and terminologies in various realms of public life, and the programmatic and legal changes that occur accordingly (Best, 1999; Weitzer, 2007: 458). Of course, the process is not a linear progression towards a foregone conclusion. At any given time, claims may exist at various stages in the process, with definitions debated in the media, outcomes disputed, policies enacted, halted, new claims continually proposed and revised and so on.

Figure 4.1 Claims-makers in the claims-making process
Insiders and outsiders

The first major distinction shown above is that which exists between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ claims-makers. According to Best (1990), insiders are distinguished by their more direct connections to the media and to policymakers.² Outsiders, by contrast, are characterized by the difficulty they typically have accessing the media and policymakers. Table 4.2 details the key attributes of insider and outsider claims-makers.

The connections available to insider and outsider claims-makers affect the paths that their claims-making activities follow. Insider claims-makers include organized lobbying groups and policy institutes, or part of what has been called the ‘polity’, comprising ‘the set of groups that can routinely influence government decisions and can insure that their interests are normally recognized in the

<table>
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<th>Table 4.2 Insider and outsider claims-makers</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Insider claims-makers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May be part of the ‘polity’ – groups regularly consulted and able to influence government decisions (Useem and Zald, 1982 cited in Best, 1990: 13).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ready access to media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes able to bypass public awareness of claims-making campaigns and attempt to influence policy ‘discreetly’ May have ‘tactical’ reasons for conducting public claims-making campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use media to attract attention, gain public awareness and acceptance of existence of social problem and pressure policymakers to act against it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples include journalists, experts and professionals charged with conducting research and recommending solutions, government officials, various interest groups including policy institutes and organized lobbying groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Best (1990: 13–15).
decision making process' (Useem and Zald, 1982: 144). By contrast, the more indirect connections between outsiders, the media and policymakers means that it can be more difficult for them to gain recognition for their social problem claims. This is especially true for unorganized members of the general public. Della Porta and Diani (2006: 119–121) point out that while recruitment into more radical forms of social action may be better achieved via strong social ties between individuals, gaining widespread support for one's claims often depends on the 'really crucial process of mobilization, namely the transmission of cognitive messages' via non-relational channels such as the mass media which are able to reach far beyond interpersonal connections. However, for both insiders and outsiders alike, the media are an important tool. Gaining widespread recognition and support (or at least passive acceptance) in the mass media can help improve the perception of a problem as a serious issue and can pressure policymakers into taking these claims into consideration.

**Owners**

'Issue ownership' is a crucial element in the successful construction of a social problem. In order for a series of isolated incidents, a disturbing statistic or a short-lived 'crime-wave' to become a full-fledged social problem, someone must take the issue on and 'make it their own'. According to Gusfield (1981: 10):

The concept of 'ownership of social problems' is derived from the recognition that in the arenas of public opinion and debate all groups do not have equal power, influence, and authority to define the reality of the problem. The ability to create and influence the public definition of a problem is what I refer to as 'ownership'. [...] At any time in a historical period there is a recognition that specific public issues are the legitimate province of specific persons, roles and offices that can command public attention, trust, and influence. They have credibility while others who attempt to capture the public attention do not. Owners can make claims and assertions. They are looked at and reported to by others anxious for definitions and solutions to the problem. They possess authority in the field. Even if opposed by other groups, they are among those who can gain the public ear.

Issue ownership is often understood in the sense of several opposing groups or domains seeking to enforce their own definition of a set of conditions and how they ought to be conceived. For instance, Figert (1996) describes how groups with competing interests struggled for dominion over the definition of PMS,
from psychiatrists seeking to assert a medical model to individual women and cultural critics from feminist and gender studies who situated the issue within the realm of stigmatization and social control. However, ownership need not be so contentious nor must it necessarily lie within the clear-cut boundaries of a particular group who become the recognized 'owners' of the issue. As illustrated in Figure 4.1, the category of owners can incorporate several groups with varying interests who emerge as authorities and command varying degrees of attention. The important point is that a claim cannot become an influential cultural message on its own; people must appropriate its language, apply it, refresh old claims or expand its boundaries to include new ones. The crucial aspect of issue ownership is not so much that one group asserts dominance but that claims are pressed into compelling issues by the concerted efforts of at least some groups or individuals.

Many different types of claims-makers operate within the two spheres of insider and outsider claims-making, but not all are in a position to take 'ownership' of a potential new social problem. Individuals in the general public may find it difficult to successfully take ownership of social problems without some degree of affiliation or subsequent organization. They may lack the resources, knowledge of the bureaucratic process, authority and power to make pronouncements on social conditions and how and why they ought to be altered. Randall and Short (1983:410) describe the role of power as 'the ability to modify the attitudes or behavior of another; it requires both access to relevant resources and the ability to use these resources'. The effectiveness of claims depends greatly upon the degree to which the individual or group who takes ownership of the problem is in possession of resources such as money, access to the media, a high level of organization, commitment, a base of support and adherents, status, knowledge, expertise, skill and legitimacy (Randall and Short, 1983: 411).

For instance, using the example the abolition of the short-handled hoe in California farm work, Schneider (1985: 217) describes how '[w]here claims are made, that is, to whom, can constrain the subsequent definitional activities in loosely predictable ways – if one has detailed and current knowledge of the bureaucracy'. In the case of the farm workers, while having succeeded in winning a legal case against farm management, they were not able to draw attention to the hazards of all corporate production and to power differences between workers and management. 'Without the counsel of legal experts', the author concludes, 'claimants usually do not possess this knowledge', and that the enlistment of experts both in terms of subject matter and bureaucratic process can 'control and even change the problem' (Schneider, 1985: 217). Social
movement organizations on the other hand, while the prototypical 'outsider' claims-makers, are often veterans of the claims-making process and may have the resources and dedication necessary to continually reinvent an issue, to keep it in the public eye and to push for change. Claims-makers who vie against existing parties in possession of a particular problem and its definition can push to take ownership and establish their own definitions through organized opposition and recourse to experts who take on the cause. To name another example, in contrast to the farmers' case, the campaign to dis-appropriate homosexuality from the hands of the American Psychiatric Association was propelled forward through controversy by the organized opposition of a diverse array of parties including gay activists, gay psychiatrists who formed a 'Gay Psychiatric Association' and an emergent group of sympathetic experts who appeared in the media, courts and academic publications offering their professional opinions on its deinstitutionalization (Kirk and Kutchins, 2003).

Although the involvement of an influential individual or group can mean the difference between a short-lived potential social problem and one that gains support in various institutional arenas, it does not guarantee success. As with all aspects of the processual roles being discussed at present, to the degree that these functions are taken up by more and more claims-makers in the claims-making process, the claims have an even greater likelihood of gaining widespread and ongoing affirmation.

Gatekeepers

Within the social constructionist literature, the term 'gatekeeper' is often used to describe those who straddle the divide between different realms of communication, particularly those in the mass media who sift through an abundance of primary claims and decide which messages to disseminate to their respective audiences. It was initially used in the study of communications by the psychologist Kurt Lewin who coined the term in order to explain the means of affecting changes in social norms. Lewin described how the movement of goods, ideas and individuals passed through various channels whose entrances were 'guarded' at various points by individuals who applied a set of rules or criteria for allowing or halting their passage (Stacks and Salwen, 2009: 76).

Members of the news media are therefore among the most important gatekeepers, since as Best (1990: 115) describes, 'simply receiving coverage helps validate a claim as worthy of consideration.' Studies of movements such as the
Claims-Makers and the News

anti-war movement, the women's movement and the environmental movement illustrate the struggles through which claims-makers often pass in their efforts to get their claims reported (Best, 1990: 115–116). Claims which take the needs and practices of these (secondary) claims-makers into account are more likely to gain media coverage, and this coverage – that is, the successful passage of claims through these 'gates' – is central to gaining affirmation for a social problem claim.

However, it may be useful to think of gatekeepers not only as public relations firms or members of editorial boards, but also as those who straddle the divide between a number of different institutional and policy domains rather than simply filtering messages between different spheres of communication. In this way, gatekeepers may also act as agents of diffusion who foster the transmission of claims through the various channels at their disposal. Their gatekeeping role may therefore be brief and not necessarily definitive of their role in the process. Rather, such claims-makers may take up the issue with a sort of missionary zeal, becoming owners of the problem and utilizing their access to a number of domains to expand its influence. Although less attended to in the literature, the enlistment or appropriation of an issue by a well-connected and dedicated 'gatekeeper' of this sort can be an especially propulsive force in the history of a social problem, fostering diffusion between a number of domains and thus expanding its potential base of support.

Mass media and the news

Systems of meaning are instantiated in texts. Epistemic cultures are produced, reproduced, affirmed and contested in communicative acts; otherwise they 'would cease to exist' (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 6). Therefore, 'every system of signs is the product of processes of semiosis and documents the history of its own constitution' through texts that 'are both the material realization of systems of signs, and also the site where change continually takes place' (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 6). In seeking texts through which to study development and changing uses of happiness in public discourses over time, I have chosen to focus on print news media texts as the starting point for data collection and analysis for a number of reasons.

First, coverage in the news media is crucial if claims-makers wish to communicate with the 'mass'. According to Best (1990: 18), 'Claimants who hope to attract wide notice – and this is especially important for outsider claims-makers – usually turn to
the media. Their tactics include demonstrations, press releases, press conferences, and other deliberate efforts to draw coverage. In spite of the ongoing fragmentation and proliferation of mass media, their sheer magnitude and potential scope mean that they remain central to the diffusion of problem claims. As Loseke (2003a: 41) describes, the ‘mass’ in mass media ‘continues to signify that many people potentially can see or hear claims made in these sites’, offering claims-makers potential access to the largest possible audiences. While social media have become increasingly important as both generators and disseminators of news content, many ‘citizen journalists’ remain dependent upon traditional media sources for access to large audiences (Watson, 2011, 2012). Indeed, the movement of news online has substantially increased major media viewership and the news media saturation of everyday life (Monck and Hanley, 2008; Rantanen, 2009). Broadcasting to more expansive audiences means that there is a greater chance for previously unknown and unconnected individuals to join the movement or take up the issue (Best, 1990: 14). It can also pressure policymakers, ‘who may feel that they have to respond to media coverage, or who may begin to feel pressed by the movement’s members or the general public’ (Best, 1990: 14).

News media coverage also confers upon claims a certain degree of credibility. As Bignell (2002: 84) describes, ‘There are an infinite number of possible facts about the world which could be reported, but news discourse reports only a selection of the facts. What is reported is the selection of facts assumed to be significant.’ The formal language frequently adopted by the ‘quality press’ also connotes authority and objectivity, making the referent of the news story seem ‘naturally given’ (Bignell, 2002: 90). While audiences may not agree with how claims are presented, coverage in the mainstream news media implies at least a minimum application of journalistic standards and affirms the issue as worthy of reportage.

While the direct experience of many social problems is often confined to a relatively small number of actors, knowledge and concern about them often spread far beyond these boundaries. According to Page and Shapiro (1992: 340), ‘experiences like unemployment, criminal victimization, or being drafted and sent to fight abroad are experienced directly by relatively few’, but they are often given contextual meaning and magnitude through the arbitration of mass media that help connect the individual experience to the broader issues of society. The authors continue:

An individual laid off from his or her job may think it a purely personal mishap, unless there is news of rising unemployment in the nation as a whole. […]
Rising prices are noticed at the gasoline pump or the grocery store, but their nationwide significance may be felt only when the media focus on 'inflation' as a nationwide phenomenon. Thus public opinion often responds not to events or social trends themselves but to reported events. It makes a good deal of difference which events are reported, which are emphasized, and which are ignored. It also matters what sorts of 'facts' are conveyed and how they are interpreted (Page and Shapiro, 1992: 340; emphasis added).

While people are not unthinking passive pawns of media messages, the media nonetheless colour our interpretation of the sort of world we believe surrounds us. As Altheide (2000: 288) puts it, 'it is not coincidental that audiences believe that they are in great danger and that contemporary life is very unsafe, while popular culture and especially network TV newscasts have increased their coverage of crime and danger by more than 600%'. More importantly, evaluations of conditions that represent important problems for society depend more upon coverage of these issues in the news media than personal experience (Lippmann, 1991; McCombs, 2004). Or, as Bernard Cohen famously puts it, the mass media may not be successful in telling people 'what to think', but it is stunningly successful in telling them 'what to think about' (Cohen, 1963: 13).

In early studies of agenda-setting, it was found that coverage in the media greatly influenced whether or not an issue would be adopted in an election campaign (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). According to McCombs (2004: 2), 'While many issues compete for public attention, only a few are successful in doing so, and the news media exert significant influence on our perceptions of what are the most important issues of the day.' Thus, effecting change on behalf of problem claims often requires that claims-makers successfully compete for coverage against other issues if they hope to win a space on the public agenda. There is mixed evidence towards the present to suggest that the agenda-setting influence of the traditional news media is being challenged by the growth of non-traditional media including political blogs such as The Huffington Post, which themselves have developed towards more traditional news media formats (Meraz, 2011). Nonetheless, McCombs' assertions about the significance of traditional news media for agenda-setting hold true for the critical time periods during which concern about happiness initially began to develop and diffuse (McCombs, 2004; Meraz, 2009, 2011). Moreover, the agenda across traditional and non-traditional media continues to exhibit a great deal of homogeneity (Kushin, 2010; McCombs and Funk, 2011).
The reach and potential effectiveness of news media coverage means that innumerable claims-makers compete for access to the ‘largest possible audience’ making the media act as what Hilgartner and Bosk (1988: 57) have called a social problems ‘marketplace’. They thus offer an ideal locale from which to study the interplay of various claims-makers as the issue progresses over time and the accompanying consensuses and controversies that develop. It also offers the opportunity to study the interaction between various claims-makers who may not normally come into contact in their primary claims-making, such as, for instance, a rivalry developing between disparate coteries of experts or organizations regarding how a claim should be addressed. Altheide (2000: 289) writes that ‘the most meaningful communication resonates with deeply held and taken-for-granted meanings and relationships between a symbolic signifier and its referent, or the signified’. Through studying claims that survive, and indeed thrive, in the intense competition of the media marketplace, it is possible to gain a greater understanding of the taken-for-granted meanings and relationships that exist during the historical and cultural moments that produced them.

It should be noted that simply appearing in the news media, even to the point of gaining a great deal of coverage and sensationalism, is not necessarily sufficient to place a potential social problem at the forefront of the public agenda and affect long-term changes. Nelson (1984) modifies Anthony Down’s work on the media’s ‘issue attention cycle’ to understand how a problem with a ‘short-attention-span’ in the nineteenth century such as child abuse had managed to gain a more sustained institutionalized response in the United States over the two decades prior to her writing. She points out that the ‘link between the professional and mass media – where the professional media pump new information to the mass media – helps to explain the mass media’s enduring interest’ (Nelson, 1984: 51). The rapidity with which child abuse found its way onto the public agenda was also facilitated by its positive valence. As Nelson describes, ‘The problem was successfully, packaged, promoted, and ultimately perceived by most members of Congress as completely noncontroversial. [...] It is important, therefore, to examine how the valence character of abuse shaped the agenda-setting process’ (1984: 94). For policymakers, the strongest incentives for involvement with an issue lie with those that are perceived to have high salience with the general public but low levels of group conflict (Nelson, 1984: 94). To the degree that claims-makers are able to construct an issue as uncontroversial, they have a greater chance of affecting the public agenda. With the burgeoning ‘science of happiness’ and apparent positivity of claims framed
using its language, it is easy to see how claims evoking 'happiness' managed to gain a space for the issue on the public agenda.

To summarize, studying the successful problematization of happiness in the news media offers an understanding of the progression of the issue over time, of the use of effective and persuasive rhetoric and how it shapes the problem, and offers a window into the culture in which such claims are embedded. The news media offer a useful starting point since reportage implies both a minimal expectation of journalistic standards and the newsworthiness of the issues described, simply by virtue of their being reported. The news media are the 'marketplace' in which the interests of parties who might not otherwise associate can suddenly collide and through which can be identified the many characterizations of the issue as it pervades a growing array of domains of public concern from how people raise their children to how they relate to their work. Claims-makers who emerge as public authorities on the subject and whose expertise becomes more and more in demand as the issue proliferates can also be identified. Thus, although it is understood that in the age of fragmenting, diminishing and proliferating forms of media technologies, one cannot look only at the print news media in order to understand the construction of a social problem, they nonetheless serve as an important point from which to deduce key claims-makers who have emerged as public authorities on the issue, and from which to gain an understanding of the key features and progression of happiness discourses before moving to an examination of the activities and claims of those claims-makers in other public arenas.
Happiness: From Prehistory to Paradox

It has become difficult to ignore that public discourse about happiness seems to be rising, but it is not clear precisely what, if anything, is distinct about these contemporary discussions. After all, the American Declaration of Independence had famously enshrined the right to pursue happiness well over two centuries ago. Is the newfound interest simply the rediscovery of an age old pursuit? Is it a well-timed refocusing on ‘what really matters’ as the transient character of material wealth is suddenly revealed by an economic crisis? The present chapter begins to shed light on these questions through a diachronic analysis of uses of the keyword ‘happiness’ in print news media discussions from the beginning of the past century to the ‘discovery of a problem’ in the late 1990s and early 2000s. My focus on the keyword ‘happiness’ follows Williams’ (1983: 15) account of words as socio-historical resources, as ‘significant, binding words in certain activities and their interpretation’, and ‘indicative words in certain forms of thought’. Yet, as I hope to show, happiness was not always a ‘binding word’ in claims-making activities. Only recently did it move from being a ‘floating’ or ‘empty signifier’ to become an object of scientistic formal logic, ‘objectified’ as a ‘thing’ the ‘rates’ and ‘levels’ of which can be identified, measured and subject to professional and political interventions.

In the discussion that follows, I divide discourses invoking the keyword happiness into three time periods corresponding to observable shifts in usages of happiness over time. However, these should not be understood as implying any abrupt discontinuity, but rather correspond to three important developments discernible within each time period: a shift from perfunctory uses of happiness as a free floating or empty signifier, decontextualization and the introduction of happiness research (beginning in the 1980s) and the first appearances of problematized discourses in the 1990s. In the next chapter, I explore the period
after 2003 when happiness began to become an influential semiotic resource drawn upon by a growing variety of claims-makers and in the explanations of an increasing array of social problems.¹

Prehistory

That the keyword 'happiness' has come to be more and more prevalent in news media discussions is evidenced by the increase in articles mentioning the term in recent decades. Appearances of the keyword in the Guardian, Times and Independent (and their Sunday editions) had more than doubled from 1073 in 1993 to 2258 at their peak in 2006.² When this search is confined to The Times, one of the most inclusive available (the first year fully indexed being 1986), the trend is even more striking. Whereas only 147 articles in The Times had used the keyword in 1986, that number had climbed to 1177 at its peak in 2012. Yet, increased usage alone does not necessarily imply increased importance. When the contents of these articles are considered, it is clear that the meaning, usage and importance of happiness have not remained constant. Rather, the signifier has evolved to become both a social problem in itself and an increasingly popular resource drawn upon in conceptualizations of other social problems.

Uses of happiness predating the contemporary concern, as they are found in the archives of The Times and The New York Times, reveal that until relatively recently happiness was rarely specifically appealed or referred to directly, but rather stood as a more vague, rhetorical amplifier, a 'floating signifier' with a 'vague, highly variable, unspecifiable or non-existent signified (Chandler, 2007: 78). It was used in discussions of a variety of subjects but rarely appeared as the explicit subject of an article. Instead, it was more often used in passing with little significance attributed the signifier itself. Instead, it gained its meaning and significance from its context while at the same time lending a positive connotation and sense of 'good' to that context in turn. In this way, early usages illustrate Ahmed's (2010) assertion that happiness signifies an 'alignment' or association with the 'good'. In this way, the 'history of happiness can be thought of as a history of associations' (Ahmed, 2010: 2).

It is commonly found, as one might expect, forming parts of well-wishes, hopes for a new year, ventures or as expressions of relief or joy. It is also often found in 'word clusters' along with 'peace', 'justice', 'freedom' and 'prosperity'. This use as part of a group of other positive terms was often articulated in relation to political themes, especially during times of conflict. For example, in a 1916
article in *The Times*, the French Minister of Commerce is quoted as hoping that ‘from the war may spring future generations with more happiness, prosperity, and justice’ (*The Times*, 1916a); a statesman declares that ‘the happiness and peace of the world’ depends on the realization of the common goals of Britain and its allies (*The Times*, 1916b), and an earlier pronouncement affirms (referring to government ministers), ‘they have largely contributed to the material happiness and prosperity of the country and [...] they upheld the interests, prestige, and honour of the Empire’ (*The Times*, 1901). Here, ‘happiness’ was largely peripheral to other concerns, invoked to strengthen the implied or self-evident ‘goodness’ of the referents. This is also evident at mid-century, when it is not uncommon to find happiness connected with words such as ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’. Happiness is invoked as something intrinsic to British society, itself intrinsically good, but threatened by an enemy. The Prime Minister is quoted as saying, with reference to the Soviet Union, ‘Our way of life is in danger, our happiness and the happiness and future of our children are in danger’ (*The Times*, 1951).

It is notable that most of these mentions are peripheral. Beyond the subject matter itself, ‘happiness’ held little significance. To single out a further example, a scheme designed to provide part-time work for pensioners was described as ‘an extremely good investment in public happiness’ (*The Times*, 1957). Yet, it would be absurd to say that ‘public happiness’ represented the accomplishment of a particular subjectively defined goal. Rather, it was evoked to signify the ‘good’ of the proposal and its widespread benefit.

There are nonetheless some attempts to mobilize happiness in support of problem claims. For example, a 1954 article relates the Archbishop of Canterbury’s explanation for a shortage of nurses, teachers and clergy: ‘the reason for the shortage [...] was not that the conditions in those professions were hard – as indeed some of them were – but simply that people had forgotten that it was only in these professions that the real happiness of service could be attained. People were running about seeking happiness and forgetting the conditions that made that happiness’ (*The Times*, 1954). Yet, such attempts to lay claim to a ‘true’ meaning of happiness and to mobilize it in support of particular values have little effect on broader discussions, and these claims are rarely repeated beyond their first articulation.

Turning to American uses as contained in the archive of the *New York Times*, the lack of resonance in the wider culture is particularly palpable in relation to uses of happiness by those associated with American President Lyndon Johnson in the mid- to late 1960s. Towards this time, articles mentioning happiness in the NYT begin to display a sense of disillusionment with the products of prosperity.
For example, one headline refers to a ‘prosperity peril’ and relates the warning of an American poet, ‘Beware making happiness and comfort the sole goal’ (Petersen, *The New York Times*: 1956). A few years later, a report describes a psychologist scorning materialist culture, reminding a group of mothers that ‘It isn’t the things, it’s the people that are the core of good family relationships’ (*The New York Times*, 1960).

In spite of this, the direct appeal to happiness in political discourse appears to have held little sway. That is, while the concern ‘not with how much, but how good – not with the quantity of our goods but with the quality of our lives’ (Goodwin quoted in Bauer, 1966: xii), discussed in Chapter 2, was apparently gaining ground in influential quarters, it appears to have largely failed to gain resonance as a foundation for engagement with the public at the time. A 1965 front page piece on an announcement made by President Lyndon Johnson during the signing of a health bill reports that ‘he would soon form a White House study group to define United States goals in health, education and “happiness”, with happiness thus singled out in quotations marks (Robertson, *The New York Times*: 1965). In the full speech that Johnson made that day, he had read from Barbara Ward’s ‘The Rich Nations and the Poor Nations’ (1962), pointing out that in spite of greater wealth, American society had failed to present an image of the ‘good life’ (see Johnson, 1965). The next day, the columnist Russell Baker derided the president’s remarks in a satirical commentary in his ‘Observer’ column, quoting the news item of the previous day and continuing, ‘The historic Internal happiness Act of 1966, which the President signed today in a joyful setting at Disneyland, will throw the full weight of the Federal Government behind man’s ancient battle against depression, blues, boredom, Sunday-morning letdown, lacklustre marriage and inferiority complex’ (Baker, *The New York Times*: 1965). In declaring his candidacy for President, Johnson’s Vice President and would-be successor Hubert Humphrey made remarks similar to Johnson’s, announcing his intention to pursue a ‘politics of happiness’, a point that did not go unnoticed in the press (Weaver, *The New York Times*: 1968; see also Reeds, *The New York Times*: 1968). He was attacked both in editorials (again by Baker, *The New York Times*:1968) and by political opponents, with Robert Kennedy quoted as retorting, among other criticisms, ‘It is easy to say this is the politics of happiness – but if you see children starving in the Delta of Mississippi and despair on the Indian Reservations then you know that everybody in America is not satisfied’ (Herbers, *The New York Times*: 1968). This latter criticism came in spite of the fact that Kennedy had himself made similar claims just over a month earlier.
In 1969, an article appears reporting on a session sponsored by the Center for the Study of Democratic institutions, a think tank with connections to Johnson's Great Society initiatives, in which the panel participants commented on a 'crisis of affluence': 'the economists made it plain that the notion that wealth would generate public happiness had suffered a rude shock in this country during the past decade' (Raymont, *The New York Times*: 1969). Yet, this article is coloured by a sense of scepticism, with the author pointing out that such statements were uttered before an, 'respectful, obviously prosperous audience' (Raymont, *The New York Times*: 1969). Indeed, following Humphrey's unsuccessful campaign, Kennedy's assassination and the change in administration, the idea of mobilizing happiness in connection with a 'crisis of affluence' as a political project disappears.

While a sense of disillusionment in direct connection with happiness had been mobilized in the United States, however fleetingly, the latter half of the 1960s, in the United Kingdom, happiness seemed to maintain most of its aforementioned qualities throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. Indeed, an archival search through *The Times* between 1960 and 1985 for 'happiness' and 'prosperity' reveals that when the words appear in close proximity they invariably reinforce each other, appearing as a package of terms that are taken as self-evidently good in much the same way as with 'justice' and 'freedom'. To name a few examples: 'I cannot imagine that any Government, whatever its complexion [...] would wish to prevent us carrying on with a job so vital to the happiness and prosperity of the community at large' (*The Times*, 1963), or quoting a French official, 'of course the Government's duty is to think first of France and the French people, their prosperity, their happiness, the greatness and independence of our country' (*The Times*, 1972). However, a similar search performed over the past 15 years yields vastly different results. There is a 'paradox of prosperity': 'creating wealth destroys happiness' (Brayfield, *The Times*: 2000). Commentators warn, 'ensuring that Britain secures its clear potential for prosperity' will not 'guarantee national happiness' (Duncan, *The Times*: 2008), and 'Western society today values economic prosperity and the quest for eternal youth, rather than our intrinsic goodness or happiness' (Howard, *The Times*: 2006). Table 5.1 details the breakdown of articles using the words 'happiness' and 'prosperity' in *The Times* historically and over recent decades. In the 26 years between 1960 and 1985, sixty-seven articles used the terms 'happiness' and 'prosperity' in the same sentence, each time unselfconsciously connected in meaning, reflecting a self-evident good. Over the last 26 years, although a similar number of articles contained the words in the same sentence, over a quarter of those were antithetical usages.
Semiotics of Happiness

Table 5.1 ‘Happiness’ and ‘prosperity’ in The Times 1960–2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antithetical</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutually reinforcing</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Search performed in Times Digital Archive (1960–1985) and Nexis (1985–2009) for The Times (the Sunday Times was not included to maintain comparability) for ‘happiness’ and ‘prosperity’ occurring in the same sentence.

This trend is also evident in a broader consideration of sources in the UK news media. Whereas once the words clustered together, they are now more apt to be mobilized as diametrically opposed, lying at opposite ends of a paradox: ‘the peculiar paradox of the affluent West – psychologists and economists are perplexed by the fact that our sense of wellbeing has not risen in tandem with prosperity’ (Ahuja, The Times: 2004). As one commentator laments:

I do feel people in the west have an advantage: having so much material prosperity, they have already experienced everything our society tells us will bring happiness. They can see, if they have any sense, that at most it gives only short-term pleasure, that genuine happiness must lie elsewhere. Most people in the world haven’t had those things, and still imagine that possessions will deliver the satisfaction their promoters assure us they do. But desire is like salty water. The more you drink, the thirstier you become. (Powell, The Guardian: 2009)

Clearly, something in cultural conceptions regarding the appropriate ‘goods’ to be associated with happiness has changed. These latter examples are part of a trend that has risen up in discussions about happiness, which use it in a distinctly different manner than before and further, which assert that it constitutes a social problem that requires intervention. The beginnings of these shifts are evident in media discourses in the United Kingdom as early as the late 1980s, and while the problematization of happiness is also evident in media discussions in the United States and elsewhere in the world, it is towards an examination of these trends in the UK news media that I now turn.

Decontextualized happiness (late 1980s to 1992)

Although at this early stage, most uses of happiness continue to be in passing, marginal narratives begin to appear in which happiness moves away from its
dependence on its associated context and begins to be considered more as an object to be pursued as part of a project of self-realization, or conversely, whose pursuit is criticized. More importantly, in terms of the later development of the issue, the first claims appear forwarding happiness as an object that can be measured and described and which legitimately falls into the domain of psychological expertise.

The beginnings of a change in the way that happiness is conceptualized as compared with earlier usages is evident in a number of articles appearing towards the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s, which discuss happiness as a goal in itself and as something whose pursuit is the objective of an individual quest or personal project in self-realization. Some advocate travel, non-Western cultures or Eastern philosophy as paths to a more balanced or 'true' sense of happiness than is currently on offer. One article describes Buddhism as requiring the cultivation of attributes such as 'calmness, insight, generosity, patience' so that 'true happiness can be achieved' (Erricker, The Guardian: 1992). Where happiness once clustered with 'success' and 'prosperity', gradually these can no longer be trusted to coexist and may even threaten a happiness that is itself the greater end. An interview with Prince Charles describes the incongruity of the 'public "Action Man"' with the 'private, introspective man' trying to reconcile an outer life of 'material success' with 'inner peace', and how 'that outer life was not enough for happiness' (Stephen, The Sunday Times: 1985). The author explains that the 'implication of what he was saying was clear: that materially affluent conditions by no means necessarily provided happiness' (Stephen, The Sunday Times: 1985).

A divide begins to be drawn between pleasure and 'true' happiness, in which 'pleasure' becomes implicated in a rejection of materialism and is implicitly associated with amorality and self-indulgence. The headline of another piece asserts: 'Everyone wants to be happy: it is a psychological impossibility to seek otherwise.' The author, a philosopher, continues:

Some people certainly pursue happiness through what many would call selfish activities: the love of money and material possession, unbridled ambition, the exploitation of other people; self-indulgence in what are generally termed and frequently condemned as the pleasures of the flesh. Whether these bring true happiness, only those who pursue them can tell; it is they, after all, who have to live with themselves. But others seem to find happiness by less obviously grasping means - through devotion to their fellows or to a cause, through self-control and conscientious living, even if this calls for a sacrifice of personal desires (Billington, The Guardian: 1989).
While this author advocates self-sacrifice, many are concerned that happiness be distinguished from reliance on others. One journalist writes that it is only through being alone that 'we find out who we really are' and 'come to realise the important lesson that other people simply do not have the power to bestow or remove happiness. We can also learn that the more we pin our hopes for happiness on others, the more miserable we are likely to be' (Hodgkinson, *The Guardian*: 1990).

Individual quests often seek happiness outside of Western culture, defined more and more as inhospitable to human happiness. In a series of columns devoted to raising awareness of happiness research and to his own observations of what constitutes happiness and mental health, the family therapist Robin Skynner often brings up the example of Ladakh, a remote region of northern India bordering Tibet, which he describes as 'an unusually healthy society' (Skynner, *The Guardian*: 1992). According to Skynner, the Ladakhis appeared so happy partly because their family structures are more conducive to happiness and the people are less 'possessive', 'needy' and 'emotionally dependent than we are in industrial society' (Skynner, *The Guardian*: 1992). Even the memory of a journey to a distant culture can serve as a 'consolation' to the monotony of one's everyday life, as one travel writer describes of Tibet: 'Such magnificence is an inexhaustible source of future daydreams. Not easily erased by the attrition of the workaday world, it remains in the memory, a constant source of happiness and consolation' (Powell, *The Guardian*: 1992).

Some commentators criticize the pursuit of happiness and self-fulfilment as a reflection of an excessively individualist culture. For example, Lynette Burrows argues in 1988 that 'divorce is not about ensuring that children get better parents, but about the parents' right to happiness and self-fulfilment' (Rodwell, *The Times*: 1988). In a similar vein, the columnist Melanie Phillips writes in 1993 that 'Family breakdown is the outcome of the great shift towards individualism and higher personal expectations of individual happiness and self-fulfilment. [...] We feel entitled to demand personal happiness because the culture tells us misleadingly that it is there for the taking' (Phillips, *The Observer*: 1993). Happiness, or at least what these critics see as a modern and decidedly misguided conception thereof, is equated with social and cultural deterioration.

In spite of the apparent implication of happiness in problem claims, it remains largely peripheral to these commentators' broader concerns. Nonetheless, the ambivalence to prosperity, wealth and success and the complicity of Western culture in producing discontentment discernible here remain enduring themes. However, the present tendency to accord happiness a centralized role is perhaps
more the product of emergent scientific discourses on the subject, the first claims from which begin to appear here.

The introduction of happiness research

Throughout the 1980s, the results of polls and surveys are sporadically reported. These variously claim that, for example, according to a Gallup Poll, Britain is ‘one of the happiest nations in the world’ (thanks to the ‘[home] video revolution’) (*The Times*, 1985), or that an unattributed ‘Happiness Index’ reveals that, ‘nine out of ten Britons are content with their lives […]. Despite their worries about money, housing, unemployment, law and order and sex and violence, the British are still, by and large, a happy lot, and the richer they are, the happier they feel’ (*The Guardian*, 1987). Another claims that according to ‘the research’, only 3 per cent of people in the United Kingdom are ‘very unhappy’ (Clancy, *The Times*:1991).

What is perhaps most interesting about this early reportage is that it conspicuously lacks the framing typical of those widely reported upon towards the present. Rather than nine out of ten children being happy with their lives, a 2012 report released by the Children’s Society warned that one in ten children had ‘low subjective well-being’ (Guldberg, 2012). The 1991 article reporting that ‘only 3 per cent’ are ‘very unhappy’ compares these results with a Mori poll conducted a decade earlier, noting that the results had not changed much. At present, it is precisely this lack of change that has now become the focus of problematization. ‘Over the past 50 years, western standards of living have soared, yet survey after survey shows that Britons and Americans are no happier now than they were half a century ago’ (Chakrabortty, *The Guardian*: 2009). Although the results are the same, the interpretations have changed.

Initially, studies that did draw conclusions from the results of happiness studies were met with scepticism. In 1988, the results of a transatlantic survey purporting to measure happiness and create league tables of comparison between nations, careers and other variables were dismissed with the blasé response of one commentator (regarding the authors of the research), ‘How Messrs Inglehart and Rabier reached their conclusions is beyond me’ (Stanhope, *The Times*: 1988). Another commentator, concluding a review of a sociological study by Jean Collard and Penny Mansfield on marital happiness, remarks: ‘Happiness, particularly shared happiness, is notoriously elusive to language; when that language is further weighed down by the heavy armour of sociology, it is hardly surprising that happiness should remain as a speck in the distance’ (Brown, *The Sunday Times*: 1988).
However, claims emphasizing the scientific nature of happiness seem to have been considered more novel and newsworthy and many are repeated several times across various publications. Journalists reporting on new findings of happiness research also tend to approach the subject in a straightforward way, simply translating the specialist jargon for the everyday reader, as they might do for a new finding in physics or biological science. For example, an article by a science writer in *The Times* begins: 'Advertisers may have been proclaiming confidently what “happiness is”, but scientists have, for rather different reasons, been working out a way to measure it' (Wright, *The Times*: 1988). It continues:

Clinical psychologists find an increasing need for measuring happiness. Such a measure is necessary to check the effectiveness of the new psychological therapies being devised as alternatives to treatment for the types of depression for which drugs are prescribed based on benzodiazepines, a cause of anxiety because they are addictive. The new happiness index has been devised by a team working with Professor Michael Argyle, of Oxford University. It has been designed as a substitute for a long-standing technique of psychologists for testing subjects, called the Beck Depression Inventory. (Wright, *The Times*: 1988)

Another article mentioning Argyle's 'Oxford Happiness Inventory' reads: 'Questionnaires based on the Oxford Happiness Inventory and the University of Otago affectometer – accepted psychological tools for assessing state of mind – confirmed that Caroline Ponting was a deeply unhappy woman' (Hunt, *The Independent*: 1996). Argyle would become one of the first experts frequently cited on the topic in the UK news media, and specific mentions of his inventory appear several times since its initial reportage along with his commentary on the nature of happiness (see Table 5.2), whereas Collard and Mansfield's less apparently scientific qualitative study of marital happiness receives the critical appraisal mentioned above and is never again mentioned in connection with happiness.

Another similarly treated and oft-repeated notion that emerges at this time is the American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow'. The lead of a 1991 article in the 'Living' pages of *The Independent* reads, 'Mark Honigsbaum investigates an American professor's claims to have discovered the secret of achieving human happiness' and describes Csikszentmihalyi's book, *Flow*, then a bestseller in the United States. According to the article, 'flow' is 'a state of deep concentration' comparable to 'the sense of transcendence experienced by Eastern mystics', whose 'levels' can be measured and identified through the 'electronic
beeper method' (Honigsbaum, *The Independent*: 1991). The author mentions that, 'In some ways it could be argued that Flow is the ultimate American self-help success book', but is careful to distance Csikszentmihalyi from any such characterization, warning readers that 'Csikszentmihalyi does not pretend to offer any easy 10-step guide to Nirvana' and goes on to describe how the book was rejected by British publishers for being 'either too academic or too "American" for the general reader' (Honigsbaum, *The Independent*: 1991).

Another article describes a 'genetic breakthrough' by the American behavioural geneticist and Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry David T. Lykken, concerning the personalities of twins including a predisposition towards happiness, which concluded that happiness levels correspond more frequently between identical twins than non-identical. The author describes Lykken's work in similarly scientific terms, 'Yet the traits must be in part genetically determined or the separated identical twins would not show any similarity. Lykken suggests that the genes determining happiness do not simply add or subtract, as is the case with height. In technical terms, they interact with one another' (Sutherland, *The Observer*: 1993).

These scientific claims to the nature of happiness as an objective reality whose study falls under the proper domain of scientific expertise are reported largely unquestioned and become oft-repeated features of happiness discourses. Table 5.2 illustrates these three examples and the inclusion of supportive/neural or critical viewpoints. Three out of the five articles classified as 'critical' were not critical of the idea of a happiness science but were rather counterclaims from other happiness experts regarding particular facets of the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and theory</th>
<th>Supportive/ Neutral</th>
<th>Critical</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi – <em>Flow</em></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Argyle – Oxford Happiness Inventory</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Lykken – Genetic basis for happiness</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals:</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Searches were conducted in the Nexis archive for all UK national newspapers for all available time periods. The keywords for each search were 'Csikszentmihalyi' and 'flow', 'Argyle' and 'Oxford Happiness Inventory', and 'Lykken' and 'happiness', respectively. The latter of these is broader since Lykken's genetic studies have been discussed in relation to several different theories and keywords (including 'set point' theories and genetics in general).
Claims such as these form the groundwork for a proliferating body of evidence for the objective reality of happiness as a distinct entity, a psychological fact whose rates and levels can be measured and fine-tuned. However, these early expert claims do not advance happiness as a problem but are rather more focused upon happiness as, 'far more stable, understandable and universal than most people have ever suspected,' in the words of the psychologist Michael Fordyce quoted in an article describing 'a PC programme with automatic scoring and interpretation for therapists and counsellors to assess their clients' happiness' (Albery, *The Guardian*: 1988). Furthermore, as the decade progresses, it is not only 'advances' in happiness research that receive attention, but also diverse claims-makers begin to emerge who use this information in support of social problem claims.


Beginning in 1993, a number of claims appear which use the results of various researches to bolster arguments about social problems. Earlier uses had suggested that the research could or should be, in the words of Skynner, utilized 'to bring about change' (Skynner, *The Guardian*: 1990), or, according to Argyle, in the creation of programmes and training centres. Yet, they failed to develop a concerted effort to press these claims into reality. They also fell short of the claim that there is a specific lack of happiness to which this knowledge should be focused. In fact, initially, psychologists like Michael Eysenck emerged with claims that, for example, Australia is among the 'happiest nations' (Hanks, *The Independent*: 1990), and Argyle even travelled to Australia presenting a similar thesis that 'Australians ranked high in the happiness stakes' while at the same time describing his collaboration with Melbourne psychologists in the development of 'happiness training courses' and divulging advice on how to be happy (Hobart Mercury [Australia]: 1988). After 1993, advocates begin to forward the idea that not only should the happiness research be used to affect change, but specifically, they propose a problem to which that change should be directed.

The 'paradox' of happiness

From the perspective that begins to emerge during this period, happiness is a serious problem facing modern societies. Society is pursuing happiness in all the wrong ways. Individuals are not as happy as they could be.
One of the key ways through which this problematization is accomplished is through the construction of contradiction between happiness data and other variables to create a 'paradox'. If happiness signifies through alignment with the good, it also possesses the semiotic potential to signify what is not good. The 'paradox' represents a 'discovery' of this potential through the construction of opposition between happiness and those aspects of the world a claims-maker wishes to problematize. It aligns social goods and maligns social wrongs. Moreover, by drawing upon 'science' as a cultural resource, it 'redescribes what is already evaluated as being good as good' (Ahmed, 2010: 6) in a way that appears beyond debate.

It is this paradox of happiness, making its first appearance in major UK newspapers in the 1990s, which becomes ubiquitous in claims-making towards the present and which was instrumental on its path to institutionalization. It has been foregrounded repeatedly by key claims-makers, including Richard Layard, the London School of Economics (LSE) economist who is frequently referred to in the media as a 'happiness guru' or Britain's 'happiness tsar'. Chapter 1 excerpted Layard's claims about a 'paradox at the heart of our lives'; he goes on to say:

[… ] aren't our lives infinitely more comfortable? Indeed we have more food, more clothes, more cars, bigger houses, more central heating, more foreign holidays, a shorter working week, nicer work and, above all, better health. Yet we are not happier. Despite all the efforts of governments, teachers, doctors and businessmen, human happiness has not improved (Layard, 2005b: 3–4).

Table 5.3 Growth in articles asserting a paradox in connection with happiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of articles asserting a paradox in connection with happiness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>1995</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first appearances of this paradox in UK news media discussions occur in 1993, emerging from claims-makers closely associated with UK policy institutes including the New Labour think-tank Demos and the Social Affairs Unit (see Chapter 7). Table 5.3 contains the results of a keyword search for happiness in the Nexis archive in which the first 200 most relevant articles (sorted by Nexis) each year were sampled. It illustrates the growth in articles asserting a paradox between prosperity and happiness after its initial introduction in 1993.

While later on the paradox becomes more standardized, in these early claims, the condition of the modern world implicated as failing to increase happiness takes various forms. Depending upon the point of view of the advocate and the nature of the discussion, it is variously cast as economic growth, increases in personal wealth, increases in individual freedoms or the consumption of resources. Representatives of 'unhappiness' are similarly flexible, with the results of happiness research often being supplemented or even replaced altogether by additional reference to statistics such as crime rates or mental illness.

The earliest claims that problematize happiness – or more accurately, that problematize various phenomena in relation to happiness – do so in connection with economic growth and environmental concerns. For example, a claims-maker describing the objectives of the New Economics Foundation (NEF) relates the organization's view that,

by focusing on GNP some factors are just not accounted for. Health, individual well-being and collective security are ignored by conventional economic statistics. By using an Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW) the NEF believes it has a pragmatic way of measuring quality of life. [...] In the latest NEF survey, gains in personal income are alleged to have been cancelled out by increasing levels of social and environmental damage. (Cusick, The Independent: 1995)

The article concludes with a quotation from the organization's head of social indicators, Alex MacGillivray, who would later write a chapter on the subject in a Demos produced pamphlet in 1998, expressing the aspiration that 'It may be that in 2020 we will hear news readers leading programmes with government statistics on happiness and satisfaction. The first step has now been taken' (Cusick, The Independent: 1995). Another article, by Jonathan Dimbleby, then president of the Council for the Protection of Rural England, explains:

Statistics tell us that since the war the great majority of the population in Britain and in Europe have been getting better off despite recession. By what measure: car ownership, home ownership, inside lavatories, baths, central heating, double-glazing, holidays abroad? The statistics tell us that, regardless of which
party has been in power, most of the people have had a rising standard of living. Measured, that is, in monetary and material terms. So we should now all be very much happier. We have better health, longer lives, and greater prosperity. And yet self-evidently we are very far from happy. Something seems to be missing. Instead of contentment there is anxiety, frustration, irritation. People are out of sorts, out of balance, out of harmony. They feel cheated. When the ecological constraints on growth are at last being recognised, is it gradually dawning on us that there is no causal relationship whatever between material prosperity and human happiness. (Dimbleby, *The Guardian*: 1993)

James Le Fanu (a medical GP), who in the same year produced a pamphlet in association with the Social Affairs Unit, a right-leaning UK think tank, claims that, ‘Nothing can disguise the gradual slide in the happiness of nations in the West over the past decade. Despite dramatic increases in real wealth, data from the United States show no increase in “happiness”’ (Le Fanu, *The Times*: 1993). Le Fanu goes on to describe:

The decline of those two institutions, marriage and the church, are probably significant. Religious faith and religious traditionalism relate positively to SWB, and a British study from 1979 confirmed that marriage was the strongest predictor of SWB even when education, income and occupation were accounted for. The increase in numbers going into higher education does not seem to improve matters nor, paradoxically, does greater racial equality. Data from America shows that despite the great political advances made by blacks since the war, the elite the more educated with higher status have become less happy. (Le Fanu, *The Times*: 1993)

These early uses illustrate the appeal that the semiotics of happiness has for claims-makers of a variety of backgrounds and interests. Interestingly, Le Fanu’s comparison of happiness data to improved racial equality and other more uncontroversial historical developments is something that does not figure prominently in later claims-making efforts. To reiterate a point made earlier, for anyone wishing to claim that a development has made us happier, happiness surveys are not very useful. But, for those wishing to problematize those developments, happiness rates are alluring statistics.

**Expanding domains**

The ease with which happiness could be attached to a variety of causes was demonstrated early on. Already by the mid-1990s, intrepid claims-makers were incorporating happiness claims into their repertoire. ‘The consumer society and
too much exposure to market relations, it seems, are part of the process of losing
us friendships, weakening bonds of kinship and bringing less happiness, writes
Will Hutton (The Guardian: 1994). The domain of those afflicted by nearly any
problem can be expanded by boiling it down to a concern for happiness. ‘There
is only one indicator that matters,’ writes Polly Toynbee ‘are people happier?’
(The Guardian: 1998). Ironically, happiness could also be used to contribute to
imagery of societal deterioration and decline:

Measured by annual growth in per capita incomes, the West is much, much
richer than it was 50 or even 20 years ago. But in the US, reported happiness
has gone up only fractionally over the post-war period and in Europe reported
levels of ‘satisfaction with life’ are only slightly higher than in the mid-seventies.
In some countries, including Britain, they are actually lower. Nor, according
to economist Andrew Oswald of Warwick University, is this the end of matter.
Rich countries tend to have higher levels of suicide and in the past 20 years the
number of male suicides has gone up. (Elliott, The Guardian: 1997)

Claims-makers also began to attempt an expansion of domains of psychological
expertise to include happiness as a legitimate focus. Linking happiness to
areas already enjoying legitimacy, they drew attention to areas of life they
assumed audiences would find unproblematic and made a case for therapeutic
intervention. One neuropsychiatrist argues:

One in 10 people will suffer some mental illness at some time in their lives.
The other 90 per cent are, medically speaking, mentally healthy. Yet in practical
terms, the fact that these people are not actually mentally ill tells us nothing
much about how well they are. It gives no indication of how fulfilling they find
their lives, or how successfully they run them. [...] There are plenty of people
who tolerate chronic, low-grade unhappiness in their jobs or relationships
for years. Few of these people are ever likely to come to the attention of a
psychiatrist, but their mental health is well below par. But is there an equivalent
of a healthy eating and exercise regime for the body to improve our mental state?
I believe there is. We now know enough about how the mind works to make any
necessary changes in our lives and in our thinking to achieve a sustained state of

In describing developing happiness research, Le Fanu points to evidence
indicating the centrality of happiness to the quality of people’s lives. ‘Yet it can
be surprisingly elusive’ (Le Fanu, The Sunday Telegraph: 2001). ‘All the more
reason, then, that we should have sympathy for, and seek to help, those who lack
this capacity for happiness – a condition known as anhedonia [...]’ (Le Fanu,
The Sunday Telegraph: 2001). While the attempt to problematize happiness through the signifier ‘anhedonia’ was probably one problematization too far, the notion that everyday people require guidance in the pursuit of happiness has remained.

Indeed, this claim to specialized expertise is frequently supported by the portrayal of happiness as something inherently incomprehensible to the average individual without recourse to this knowledge. It is alleged that ‘people are not good at explaining why they feel good or bad’ (Lane, The Guardian: 1993). ‘What if individuals do not possess the mental equipment to be rational about why and what they choose? Maybe economists have to wonder what it is that makes us happy after all’ (Hutton, The Guardian: 1993). If correlates of happiness are in decline, then people are following a path that, unbeknownst to them, will not lead them to happiness. According to Le Fanu, ‘as soon as we turn to those factors that determine happiness as revealed in the burgeoning psychological literature [...], the trends are almost all in the wrong direction, suggesting that the malaise in the British psyche can only get worse’ (Le Fanu, The Times: 1993). Since the average person is ‘consistently wrong’ in their appraisals of those things that will or will not bring them happiness (MacLeod, The Independent: 2005), it follows that, in the words of another advocate, ‘If we know quite a lot about what makes people happy, surely it is both legitimate and possible to nudge society in a direction that will enable more people to do so’ (McRae, The Independent: 1994).

A haplessness or disorientation in relation to happiness is constructed as the normal response to modern life. Many claims-makers do not find it difficult to assume the absence of happiness in the modern world. Even a criticism of the ability of indices to accurately rate happiness levels takes this as self-evident:

The Fabians cite the rather dodgy ‘Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare’ as an indication that our national sense of wellbeing has stagnated since the 1970s, in spite of generally rising prosperity. I do not really see how you can measure a country’s feelgood factor – or, in this case, feelglum factor – in such an objective way. But our own subjective observations suggest that, although nearly all of us are far better off than our grandparents were, few of us seem content with our lot. How could we be? (Morrison, The Times: 2003)

‘Stagnant’ happiness rates easily slip into claims about growing unhappiness. According to the psychologist Oliver James, ‘we are massively unhappy today compared with 1950’ (Chittenden, The Sunday Times: 1997). Towards the
present period, the notion that society is increasingly unhappy and that the 'true' pursuit of happiness is endangered has become oft-repeated claims. Yet, during this period, these claims remained relatively marginal. It was not until after 2003 that the issue began to secure its place on the public agenda. It is to a description of that period that I turn in the next chapter.
The Problem Lies Within

The impact and influence of the claims described thus far must not be overstated. Prior to 2003, most of these, while gaining influence, were relatively marginal. The present chapter provides an overview of the time period beginning in 2003 which I argue is the most crucial for the development of the issue towards institutionalization. It is a critical time not so much due to the character of claims, as they differ from those emerging beforehand largely in terms of frequency and refinement, but because it was in 2003 that claims-makers began to take ownership and dedicate themselves to placing the issue on the political agenda. I focus particularly on the years leading up to 2010, when the UK government launched the National Wellbeing Programme, including a National Wellbeing Index, in the works for some time. Although happiness had been institutionalized in various forms before this and continues to be towards the present, with this development, it had officially become a political agenda. Like many successful problems before it, there are now policies in effect and records being kept (Best, 1990: 63). To paraphrase Best (1990: 63), regardless of whether the media continues to focus on the issue, it has made a crucial transition; it is now an object of social policy. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the period leading up to these developments before exploring it in depth in relation to process and rhetoric in the remainder of the book.

Into the 2000s, the idea of happiness as a social problem becomes not only more and more prevalent, but the notion that it should be the focus of public policy also becomes more and more accepted. In addition, happiness becomes an increasingly adopted signifier through which to problematize variety of conditions claims-makers wish to forward as requiring intervention. As it becomes implicated in broader problem narratives, themes of social and environmental degradation dominate. At the same time, the language
of happiness begins to transform, incorporating a moral counterclaim for happiness not just as an individual emotion but as a statement about 'well-being' and 'well-doing'. Although policy proposals had been made to varying extents in the past, happiness as a goal of policy begins to gain in both importance and urgency after 2003. A number of counterclaims are raised concerning micro-issues within the discourse but more fundamental criticisms prove to hold little sway.

Adapting the new discovery

Over the past decade, the trend towards expanding the domains of familiar problems continues and intensifies. As a semiotic resource, happiness is easily adapted to support a variety of causes, even as they promote apparently contradictory aims. Armed with the new science of happiness, it is possible extol the benefits of institutions such as marriage, religion and spending time with one's family not on moral terms, but as derived from an evidence base concerning the truth about the correct conduct of life. Articles offer prescriptions for happiness including 'get married' (Henderson, *The Times*: 2003) and 'cultivate good family relationships' (Kelly, *The Sunday Times*: 2009). Family and marriage are presented as more important than money (Mills, *The Guardian*: 2003). An American author, Gregg Easterbrook, quoted on his recently published, *The Progress Paradox*, explains: 'A fundamental reason that acquiring money does not sync with acquiring happiness might be stated in cool economic terms. Most of what people really want in life – love, friendship, respect, family, standing, fun – is not priced and does not pass through the market' (Sieghart, *The Times*: 2005).

At the same time, other announcements and discussions are ambivalent about family relationships. One article proclaims, 'Married life is the key to happiness but having children can ruin it all, a psychologist claims' (Devlin, *The Daily Telegraph*: 2008). Others point to new studies that find 'no conclusive evidence that having children or being well educated increases happiness' (Elliott, *The Sunday Times*: 2007a) or that, 'If you thought that the joys of watching your young ones grow up was one of life's simple pleasures, think again. Parenthood is actually bad for your mental health, according to the latest research' (Nikkah, *The Sunday Telegraph*: 2007). An article quotes a British medical doctor describing, 'why parents can't “create” contented children,' and looks to classrooms as sites for providing contentment (Brennan, *The Sunday Times*: 2006). Another explains the results of an oft-quoted UNICEF study
claiming that British children are the unhappiest in twenty-one developed nations as the outcome of broken homes and poor parenting (Goodwin, *The Sunday Times*: 2009).

The list of things that audiences are told will or will not bring them happiness seems endless. Typical examples include winning the lottery: 'Forget the Lottery – People who had won between $50,000 and $1 million in the past year scored only 4 on a five-point happiness scale. Others were 3.8 on average' (Marshall, *The Times*: 2006); or becoming suddenly disabled, ‘several studies have conclusively observed that within one year of an individual being rendered para or quadriplegic by an accident, those same individuals rated themselves almost as happy as they were before’ (Baylis, *The Times*: 2003); having too much or too little money, ‘new research confirms that money does indeed buy happiness, provided you’re not too rich already’ (Palmer, *The Sunday Telegraph*: 2002), ‘Studies show that once basic needs are met, happiness does not increase’ (Woods, *The Sunday Times*: 2006); and ‘keeping up with the Joneses’: ‘For individuals in middle and higher-income groups, other factors, such as comparisons with others, are likely to be just as important as absolute levels of income in determining happiness’ (Kelly, *The Sunday Times*: 2009). With the results of happiness research continually reported, made ‘newsworthy’ by its claims to support or confirm this or that alleged cultural prejudice, it is little surprising that claims-makers are able to find something in happiness research to suit almost any problem claim.

Happiness research becomes particularly implicated in debates regarding the nature of work as both contributing to and detracting from happiness. When it comes to unemployment, ‘research shows the fact of being out of work affects an individual’s wellbeing more than actual loss of income or too much work’ (Hogan, *The Observer*: 2007), and a ‘clear finding from research on happiness is that unemployment is hugely damaging, outweighed in its effect only by major life events such as a death in the family’ (Richards, *The Guardian*: 2005). Yet, family life is where happiness is portrayed as most meaningful, and this is threatened by the encroachment of work and ambition. ‘Work-life balance’ and ‘sustainability’ are referred to as ‘trampled over’ by ‘the relentless search for a rise in GDP’ (Stratton, *The Guardian*: 2010a). Drawing metaphors from familiar problems, Layard compares work to smoking, advocating taxation to ‘prevent people from working in a way that is self-defeating’ (Layard, *The Independent*: 2003a). According to Guardian columnist, Polly Toynbee, Layard's 'hedonic treadmill' is 'a phrase that resonates with most of us' (Toynbee, *The Guardian*: 2003). The ‘pursuit of money’ is not on the list of 'seven key factors now scientifically established to affect happiness' and only leads to 'more stress,
harder work, greater fear of insecurity, chasing elusive gains' (Toynbee, *The Guardian*: 2003). Not only does wealth fail to produce happiness, but extra income is also depicted as actually 'polluting' the experience of others since it causes people to 'make huge sacrifices in our private lives in pursuit of higher income' (Layard, *The Independent on Sunday*: 2003a).

As described in the previous chapter, happiness claims are adapted early on to support existing concerns about the environment and sustainability. Pleasure is subordinated to 'sustainable', morally oriented, happiness. A headline declares, 'Do you sincerely want to be happy? Then stop all this pleasure-seeking' (Schoch, *The Independent on Sunday*: 2006a). An article describing happiness as an alternative indicator to GDP points out that 'conventional national accounting doesn't allow for the heavy costs of economic progress, in terms of pollution, depletion of natural resources and so on' (Stewart, *The Observer*: 2009). The announcement that the French government would develop subjective indicators of progress is described by its developers as necessary in order to measure 'wellbeing and environmental sustainability' (Waterfield, *The Daily Telegraph*: 2009). In promoting an attempt to persuade parliament to act faster on climate change, the Bishop of London asserts: 'This is an opportunity for people to get off something of a treadmill, to recover a bit of balance' (Smyth, *The Times*: 2009). He argues for a way of life 'that promises to make “sustainable” not just our energy consumption, but also our wellbeing' (Smyth, *The Times*: 2009).

Even as the onset of financial crisis threatened to make some of the core claims about happiness and wealth ring hollow, claims-makers were able to adjust accordingly. One article asks why the government ought to be concerned about happiness, given the 'current job losses, financial hardship and local Government cuts' (Clinton, *The Sunday Express*: 2011). The article quotes the response, 'it is the perfect climate for such an assessment. People know exactly what really matters because much of what they value is about to be taken away from them' (Clinton, *The Sunday Express*: 2011). Indeed, Layard argues that greater attention to happiness would have averted the economic crisis altogether. As he writes on the *Action for Happiness* website:

One reason for the crisis is the mistaken priorities of the past. [...] If instead we had looked at what really matters to people we would have seen that economic stability is very important and long-term economic growth much less so. (Layard, n.d.)

The economist Joseph Stiglitz sees the crisis as an endorsement of the need to measure progress in different ways: 'The crisis gives salience to the work [...]. By
looking at GDP, you didn’t know whether what was going on was sustainable — and it obviously wasn’t’ (Stewart, *The Observer*: 2009). ‘The crisis of the past two years has already overturned great swathes of economic doctrine,’ the article concludes, ‘many, including Stiglitz and Oswald, believe the time may finally be ripe for the dismal science to let in a bit of happiness’ (Stewart, *The Observer*: 2009).

The problem lies ‘within’

Whereas ‘happiness’ may have once signified good, fortuitous or otherwise agreeable circumstances or turns of events (Duncan, 2007), the signified has been relocated firmly within the individual mind. Although happiness is often forwarded as connected with ‘moral’ behaviours and activities, the rewards for these deeds lie within. Indeed, the more one learns to be happy *in spite of* one’s circumstances, the truer and more valuable happiness is said to be. The story of the ‘deeply unhappy woman’ as confirmed by neurological tests excerpted in the previous chapter concludes her ‘success story’ with the quote, ‘Nothing in my life has really changed … so the happiness I feel must be coming from within’ (Hunt, *The Independent*: 1996). The cultural historian Richard Schoch, often quoted as providing a philosophical counterpoint to the dominance of psychologically oriented understandings of happiness, is similar in his privileging of the inner world of the individual over the outer world of circumstance:

[H]appiness is something you have to work at through life. But working at happiness does not mean you have to transform your circumstances, make a fortune or be a saint. […] ‘Such efforts are wasteful because they squander the opportunity that is always before us: to become, not someone else, but a better version of the person we are.’ We are always in the right place, though we do our best to forget it. This theme of accepting our ordinariness appears in many versions of happiness. (Woods, *The Sunday Times*: 2006)

This is echoed in claims drawing on happiness science:

[...] there is a growing body of scientific research suggesting that happiness is, quite literally, a state of mind. [...] Rather than happiness being something we earn through circumstances, it seems we can work at it in the same way we work our bodies at the gym, reaching beyond our ‘genetic set point’, the predisposition to happiness (or unhappiness) we were born with. (Hardy, *The Guardian*: 2007)
Another asks, 'So what determines whether an individual is likely to be happy? Research at the University of Minnesota showed that identical twins raised apart shared the same happiness level, no matter what their circumstances' (Lantin, *The Daily Telegraph*: 2003).

These inward-oriented significeds are particularly clear in the relationships drawn between happiness and material wealth and progress. If happiness signifies through an alignment with the good, wealth is unambiguously identified by claims-makers as that which is not good. 'More information, more money and more prestige will not make our society happier. [...] For sustained happiness, we need to change the way we perceive the world; the internal, our psychology, matters at least as much as our external circumstances' (Ben-Shahar, *The Guardian*: 2006).

As Chapter 10 will explore in greater detail, while claims-makers mobilize anti-consumerist or anti-capitalist rhetoric, even evoking Marx to state, for example, 'There is something in Marx's belief that capitalism would be brought down by its own contradictions' (Elliott, *The Guardian*: 1997), these problems, and consequently, their solutions, are also to be found within. Oliver James argues that 'the government has ignored another crucial fact: not only are we no happier, we are actually far more prone to mental illness. That advanced capitalism, especially the US variety, is making us ill is not something New Labour wants to think about' (James, *The Guardian*: 2003). Another advocate argues that the market has 'a free rein to describe happiness - the new car, new sofa, new holiday - and to manipulate our insecurities around status' (Bunting, *The Guardian*:2005). 'Leave things as they are,' she warns, 'and the state will increasingly have to pick up the bill for how consumer capitalism effectively produces emotional ill-health - depression, stress, anxiety' and 'governments can and should intervene' (Bunting, *The Guardian*: 2005).

A pathological society is portrayed as polluting the individual, vulnerable and powerless in the face of its pressures. 'It's the entire conspicuous-consumption, celebrity lifestyle ethos that drives the most profitable swaths of our consumer economy. Vast disparities in income, of the kind that free-market capitalism promotes, cause people to be far less satisfied with their lot than they might otherwise be' (Orr, *The Independent*: 2006). According to this claims-maker, the solution is 'compulsory classes in happiness aiming to teach pupils to become 'fulfilled' human beings (Orr, *The Independent*: 2006). Another headline asks, 'Money does not bring contentment. So how do you forge a politics where happiness is the priority?' and responds, 'Mori says its research should give the government a reason to dampen down “the pressures of consumerism and work and promote education that gives a more rounded view of happiness” (Toynbee,
The public is depicted as falling victim to the trappings of modern society, as slaves to consumerism and 'keeping up with the Joneses', having too high expectations, and working too hard out of 'greed' and mistaken beliefs about the true sources of happiness. One article reports, 'According to Andrew Oswald, an economist at Warwick University, one explanation is that under capitalism we spend too much time looking over our shoulders at the Joneses' (Honigsbaum, *The Observer*: 2004). Another explains:

Much of the prosperity created since 1930 we have spent on useless status-oriented luxuries, bought only to keep up with the Joneses. We have chained ourselves to what psychologists call the 'hedonistic treadmill' — working obsessively, borrowing heavily and neglecting our families. Little wonder then that since 1950, the proportion of those living in Western countries who are 'happy' has, at best, been constant – and in the US has actually fallen – despite large income rises. (Halligan, *The Sunday Telegraph*: 2004)

Aspirations are given a problematized orientation:

American students were asked what major consumer items they considered essential to the good life [...]. Then, 16 years later, they were asked again. The number of items they actually owned had gone up in that time (from 3.1 to 5.6) but so had their aspirations [...]. They were still two items short. (Bedell, *The Observer*: 2006)

According to another advocate, unhappiness is caused by 'another kind of status anxiety: greed, or a kind of acquisitiveness propelled by envy' (Carpenter, *The Observer*: 2006). Lowering one's expectations is portrayed as a virtuous path to happiness. 'Happiness is not getting what you want; it's wanting what you have' (Roberts, *The Observer*: 2006). Associating happiness with the material world of things is 'toxic', 'pollutes' and is an 'addiction':

[...] we quickly become addicted to our new possessions. We ratchet up our expectations. [...] Studies show that whether we are happy with our income depends not on how much it is, but on how it compares with that of friends, neighbours or colleagues. The secret of happiness, as I once wrote when I was examining Conrad Black's insatiable greed, is to compare yourself not with those who are more successful than you, but with those who are less. (Sieghart, *The Times*: 2005)

An early claim by Oliver James summarizes many of these now pervasive themes:

We have become a wannabe nation, we want what we haven't got — we expect more and feel entitled to it. This is a consequence of advanced capitalism — economic
growth means everybody being dissatisfied with what they've got [...]. Therapy can be very useful, it's definitely an anti-capitalist device. The net result of it is to be clearer about how you, with your own personal history, fit in and can best take advantage of the wonderful opportunities that new technology gives. (Lacey, The Independent: 1998)

Sustainable happiness

This type of criticism and the interventions it invites lend itself to an implicit critique of change. As one advocate puts it, 'Rising mental illness seems an inescapable consequence of the kind of rapid, disruptive change driven by market capitalism. It's not that people have gone soft so much as that they are profoundly disorientated by the ceaseless discontinuity of change' (Bunting, The Guardian: 2004). Calls for 'sustainable' happiness also reinforce the sense of disillusionment with prosperity and the offerings of modern life, with many advocates expressing a romantic desire to 'go back' to a 'simpler' time. This desire is often connoted in prescriptions to 'simplify your life' as well as by holding up non-Western cultures and less developed countries as examples to be followed.

This is evident in earlier periods as well, but by drawing on the rhetoric of science, these discussions gain a sense of validation that goes far deeper than the romantic accounts of travel-writers. Widely repeated in the press were the results of various worldwide happiness surveys and indices purporting to show that countries such as Nigeria (Norton, The Independent: 2000), Costa Rica (Seager, The Guardian: 2009) or Vanuatu are among the happiest nations in the world (Thornton, The Independent: 2006). In 2006 a wave of articles appeared regarding a 'Happy Planet Index' which placed the island nation of Vanuatu at the top of a list of 'happiest' countries. A piece in The Guardian declares, 'The most deservedly happy place on the planet is the South Pacific island nation of Vanuatu, according to a radical new index published today. The United Kingdom does not even make it into the top 100' (Campbell, The Guardian: 2006). In addition to reporting the result, many articles contributed additional rationales:

If they'd only asked me, I could have given them a thousand reasons why this Melanesian nation of 83 islands and 120 different tribal languages easily qualifies for the top gong. Proud, colourful, cheerful and, above all, untouched by and indifferent to the troubles of the world around them, the ni-Vanuatu, as the islanders are known, enjoy a way of life that has barely changed for 4,000 years. (Shears, The Daily Mail: 2006)
This author goes on to detail the indicators which allowed Vanuatu, with its 'relatively primitive lifestyle' to far outrank Britain in the happiness stakes:

First, life expectancy. Despite the islanders’ poverty, many live to 90 and beyond. [...] Second, wellbeing. In Vanuatu this is a state of mind inspired by self-satisfaction, pride and a continuation of centuries-old cultures that have no room for one of the greatest ills of the Western world – greed. Quite simply, no one bothers keeping up with the Jones's in Vanuatu. Uniquely, they just seem to accept that what you’ve got is what you’ve got – and that’s all there is to it. Finally, there’s no pollution to speak of (Shears, The Daily Mail: 2006).

This index would be repeated in mostly uncritical and even celebratory terms twenty-six times in UK national newspapers. One commentator remarks, “‘Poor but happy’ is a cliché that has served colonial powers well, but here it seems to be true” (Patterson, The Independent: 2007). A reader attests to Vanuatu as a ‘Pacific paradise’ having lived there as an aid worker. However, he warns that it is ‘not the most innocent’ and wonders if ‘the Happy Planet Index surveyed women as well as men’ noting problems with gender discrimination and domestic violence (Morris, The Guardian: 2006). In fact, no one in Vanuatu was surveyed at all, a point of which none of the early reports took notice when relating that ‘life satisfaction’ or ‘human well-being’ were being accounted for. The only serious criticism came a year later, after the index had been repeated unquestioned over twenty times, pointing out that,

In a press release announcing that Vanuatu had come top of the Happy Planet Index, the NEF declared that the results of its survey were ‘surprising, even shocking [...]’. Yes, it would be ‘surprising, even shocking’, but only if the New Economics Foundation’s Happiness Index had not been deliberately skewed in favour of countries with low carbon footprints. In that respect, what the survey measures is nothing more than the good opinions of the people paying for it. [...] All its ‘satisfaction’ scores were bought in from the World Values Survey, an earlier piece of research. The people from the World Values Survey never got round to visiting Vanuatu – and a telephone poll was hardly an option. So presumably the friends of the Friends of the Earth have done what statisticians term ‘extrapolation’ and what the rest of us call ‘making it all up’. (Lawson, The Independent; 2007)

Yet, in spite of this, the notion of a primitive society, ‘spurning the cash economy and instead reviving traditional forms of exchangeable wealth such as pigs, woven grass mats and shell necklaces’ while the rest of the world ‘indulges
in a frenzy of Christmas consumerism' (Squires, *The Daily Telegraph*: 2007) continued to be repeated, even without reference to the initial study (a point to which we will return in Chapter 8).\(^1\)

In 2009, then French president Nicolas Sarkozy called for a new indicator that 'would look at issues such as environmental protection and work/life balance as well as economic output to rate a country's ability to maintain the "sustainable" happiness of its inhabitants' (Davies, *The Guardian*: 2009). An article whose headline reads, 'Sarkozy's happiness index is worth taking seriously' goes on to detail Sarkozy's fight against the 'dogma' of economic growth, which is described as '[no] longer sustainable. It has to be broadened into a new measure of political success and national achievement that takes account of the quality of ordinary lives and our professed desire to save the planet from environmental disaster' (Lichfield, *The Independent on Sunday*: 2009).

The privileging of sustainability over movement is also reflected in a tendency to privilege 'sustainable' happiness over happiness that is quick and fleeting. Ephemeral happiness is frequently linked to destructive pleasures. One psychiatrist distinguishes 'hedonistic "instant-hit"' happiness that one might get from a 'nice glass of wine' from the more 'intellectually based' 'sustainable happiness' that one should be searching for (Clark, *The Sunday Times*: 2005). Another claims-maker warns that, 'riches, success, love, status, fame - we seek because we believe (often wrongly) that they will make us happy', but 'the effect wears off quickly' (Sieghart, *The Times*: 2005). Instead, the author argues, citing a behavioural psychiatrist, 'love and friendship, or “connectedness” [...] is the most important determinant of happiness. Unlike money, its effect is lasting' (Sieghart, *The Times*: 2005).

The dramatization of happiness

As I argue in the next chapter, the problematization of happiness was greatly facilitated by influential advocates who took the issue on and made it their own. Layard's uptake of the issue in 2003 represented not only the most dedicated ownership, but also its most effective dramatization. Linking the issue to mental illness as one of the greatest causes of 'misery', Layard warns that one in four people will have a 'serious mental illness' in their lifetimes (Layard, *The Independent on Sunday*: 2003a). A column supporting Layard's claims adds that 'unhappiness is an expensive business': 'Mental ill-health is the biggest single cause of incapacity and costs the country an estimated £9bn in lost productivity
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and benefits' (Bunting, *The Guardian*: 2005). Essentially, if you're not unhappy, you may be paying for someone who is.

Claims were also made newsworthy by their apparently contradictory origins. From early on, economists advocating the application of happiness research to policymaking were described as representing, for example, a 'radical rethink' 'bubbling away beneath these shibboleths of the political establishment' (Bunting, *The Guardian*: 2001). Layard was presented as a rebel, challenging the 'fundamental principles of his own discipline, including the centrality of GDP' (*The Guardian*: 2003), and 'quietly effecting a revolution in this miserable, materialistic, overworked country' (Jeffries, *The Guardian*: 2008). Layard himself is quoted as saying nothing short of 'a revolution is needed' (Laurance, *The Independent*: 2005).


Others dramatized the issue by linking it with already accepted social problems: 'binge drinking, mental health problems, [and] adolescent suicide' reveal that 'Britain is, at the moment, doing badly in terms of helping its young to achieve wellbeing' (Evans, *The Times*: 2008). '[B]y measures such as depression, crime, obesity and alcoholism, we have got very much unhappier' (Bunting, *The Guardian*: 2005). Cast in such broad and dramatic terms, it is not surprising that proposals for intervention were seldom opposed. Many prescriptions suggested individual lifestyle changes and checklist-type activities but these quickly moved to more far-reaching proposals. 'If the debate is getting more urgent, it is also getting more pragmatic. This is happiness not just as a state of mind, but as a policy for government' (Walter, *The Guardian*: 2005). A response to a speech by Layard presses:

What would generate more happiness? Less unemployment; safer communities; more harmonious relationships; and, importantly, much more widely available mental health treatment. Lord Layard rightly emphasised this last in his lectures: an illness which accounts for 50% of all measured disability, but which only receives 12% of NHS funds. The case is made; now for some action. (The Guardian: 2003)
Criticisms and counterclaims

Very few criticisms deny the importance of focusing on happiness or question the underlying logic of declining or absent happiness. While happiness claims themselves are frequently referred to as 'controversial', most criticisms tend to operate within the logic of the problem, taking its existence and import for granted, but differing in their emphases and proposals for amelioration. The very fact that the issue arose seemed to speak to its inevitability. For example, minute differences between Layard and Anthony Seldon, headmaster of Wellington College, who have long collaborated, are characterized in one article as a 'pluralism of views' that 'needs to be displayed, not hidden away' as young people are given guidance on 'tried and tested ways of thinking and living' (Evans, *The Times*: 2008). A disagreement on whether the problem is best alleviated through CBT or another more effective therapy is characterized as an 'ideological struggle' (Hodson, *The Times*: 2006). Another headline reads, 'Happiness is always a delusion' and contains an interview with a psychoanalyst who criticizes the wealth of happiness books as being, 'the problem rather than the solution' (Jeffries, *The Guardian*: 2006). However, he leaves little doubt that happiness is a serious problem: 'It's become a preoccupation because there's so much unhappiness. The idea that if you just reiterate the word enough and we'll all cheer up is preposterous' (Jeffries, *The Guardian*: 2006).

Some of the most prominently featured counterclaims criticize happiness advocates for promoting a fleeting mental state, promoting individualism or being excessively reliant upon psychology. One article cites psychologist Raj Persaud as arguing that there must be a distinction between pleasure and 'lasting' happiness. He continues, 'Where I think Layard and I concur is that it's interesting that emotional wellbeing isn't discussed. Sustained wellbeing is not on the national agenda and it should be' (Clark, *The Sunday Times*: 2005). According to Schoch, 'the problem is that the state misunderstands what happiness is' adding, 'when it comes to happiness, all the Government can do is measure levels of comfort and feelings of contentment' (Schoch, *The Independent on Sunday*: 2006a). In its place, he forwards a claim for sustainable happiness, warning that pleasures are a 'dangerously unreliable basis for happiness' because, 'by their nature they are ephemeral. [...] Surely we want our happiness to be made of sterner stuff' (Schoch, 2006a).

Schoch's criticism of the decision by Anthony Seldon, headmaster of Wellington College, to introduce 'happiness classes' is similar: 'The problem is that Wellington is opting to teach happiness through positive psychology which,
in my view, can amount to little more than self-help with a veneer of academic respectability' (Schoch, *The Daily Telegraph*: 2006b). He counters that 'there is a morality of happiness' that is more likely to be found by 'recovering the great philosophical and religious traditions of happiness' and '[putting] them to work in our lives today' (Schoch, *The Daily Telegraph*: 2006b). Yet, Seldon's claims reflect similar concerns, pointing out the dangers of ephemeral pleasures such as 'celebrity, money and possessions' (Robinson, *The Daily Telegraph*: 2006) and emphasizing instead the need 'to equip teenagers with an understanding of what makes lives flourish' (Ward, *The Guardian*: 2006).

Claims emphasizing the 'moral' or 'philosophical' basis of claims display a penchant for Aristotle's 'eudaimonia', often translated as 'flourishing', which claims-makers urge should not be confused with modern happiness: 'it means something more subtle. A more literal translation would be something like "feelings accompanying behaviour consistent with your daimon, or true self"' (*The Sunday Times*: 2005). According to AC Grayling, 'Our modern idea of happiness is rather thin. For Aristotle, happiness meant well-doing and wellbeing, flourishing, satisfaction and achievement. It was a very rich notion. Today people think about winning the lottery and sitting on a beach all day' (Hoggard, *The Independent*: 2005).

These criticisms reflect and affirm key facets of the broader narrative they are claimed to oppose. As Ahmed (2010: 12) describes, 'Critiques of the happiness industry that call for a return to classical concepts of virtue not only sustain the association between happiness and the good but also suggest that some forms of happiness are better than others'. Moreover, the attempt to distinguish between 'strong' and 'weak' conceptions implies a moral decision to privilege 'some forms of happiness [...] as worth more than other forms of happiness, because they require more time, thought, and labor' (Ahmed, 2010: 12). In this way, it is recognizably 'bourgeois' and requires that one deflect attention from the political economy that makes such a life of 'contemplative speculation' possible (Ahmed, 2010: 12). Indeed, as Chapters 9 and 10 detail, the incorporation of this philosophical counterclaim is central to the problematization of happiness.

The most scathing critiques tend to be found in editorial pieces. The UNICEF report purporting to show that Britain is home to the unhappiest children in the world was repeated widely in the British press following its release in 2007, with various commentators mobilizing it in support of their claims. One of the only items to take a more critical stance came from David Aaronovitch. He reiterates some of the reception the report received, quoting the Archbishop of Canterbury's attribution of the results to a 'culture of material competitiveness', and asks, 'But
is this what the studies tell us?’ (Aaronovitch, The Times: 2009). Looking deeper, he discovers that most of the indicators of well-being used in the study, such as duel parent families, are not value-free. Most statistics purporting to measure well-being, he concludes, are ‘manipulated toward a predetermined conclusion’ (Aaronovitch, The Times: 2009). Another piece criticizes Oliver James’ assertion that in spite of great comparative wealth, ‘26.4 per cent [of Americans] have suffered mental illness in the past 12 months, six times the prevalence in either Shanghai or Nigeria’, pointing out his failure to take into account growing numbers of mental health professionals and expanding diagnoses, as well as the ‘somewhat unkind observation that with a life expectancy of 47 years Nigerians could be too busy dying to get depressed’ (Worstall, The Times: 2007).

An article by the economist Paul Ormerod criticizing the prosperity paradox points out that, for all the furore made of stagnant happiness levels in spite of economic growth, nothing seems to change happiness levels at all:

Public expenditure, leisure time, crime, gender inequality, income inequality, depression – none of these is correlated with measures of happiness over time. [...] The alternative, of course, is that these data are not telling us anything of any value. At their most basic, recorded levels of happiness cannot change much over time because of how the data are constructed. People are typically asked to rate their happiness on a scale of 1 to 3, with 3 being ‘very happy’. So even if you are ecstatically happy, it is not possible to register a higher level. (Ormerod, The Sunday Times: 2007)

Yet, these concerns largely failed to make a significant impact on the growth and spread of happiness claims. The majority of criticism during crucial phases of the problem’s ascent took the form of light-hearted dismissals or ‘one-off’ counterclaims from undedicated critics.

By the time the nationwide ONS initiative to gauge the public’s ‘well-being’ was announced in November of 2010, a political focus on happiness, particularly based upon the prominent claim that money cannot buy it, risked an icy reception. Student riots had gripped Westminster only days before and the country was in the depths of a recession, reeling from a series of deep cuts to government spending. While the Guardian reports the announcement noting ‘nervousness in Downing Street’ and stressing it as the implementation of a ‘long-stated ambition’ (Stratton, The Guardian: 2010b), tabloid headlines read ‘if you’re happy & you’re loaded, clap your hands’ and wonder: ‘More to life than money? [...] that’s easy to say when you’ve got buckets of the stuff’ (Leckie, The Sun: 2010). To some observers, Cameron’s interest in happiness was just a cynical
cover for the cuts. Len McCluskey, Unite general secretary, characterized the initiative as 'another attempt by the coalition to pull the wool over peoples' eyes' (Mulholland, The Guardian: 2010). 'That we became concerned with emotional prosperity just as the reality of economic austerity became apparent is surely not coincidental,' observes another commentator (Moore, The Guardian: 2012).

Guardian columnist Madeleine Bunting warns that the apparent contradiction between government cuts and a concern with happiness may actually be startlingly consistent: 'The coincidence of Cameron's thoughts on happiness with welfare cuts is all of a piece. "Benthamite" did not become a descriptive term for harsh welfare by accident' (Bunting, The Guardian: 2010). However, the majority of commentary defends the importance of happiness to political debate, even while deriding its source. Polly Toynbee writes sharply, 'David Cameron did not invent happiness,' lauding the efforts of many who 'recognised the need to develop a more comprehensive view, rather than focusing solely on GDP' long before the coalition came to power. 'The Cameron talk and walk diverged some time ago,' she adds, 'the ONS measurements will chart the unhappiness path he chose' (Toynbee, The Guardian: 2010).

Yet, far from being an idea that arose from the recession, receptiveness among policymakers to happiness claims was clearly demonstrated quite early on. Then Prime Minister, Tony Blair's Cabinet Office Strategy Unit had produced a paper on 'life satisfaction' as early as 2002; in 2006, David Cameron, then only five months into his term as Conservative leader, affirmed well-being as a central political issue, while a host of happiness-based proposals were already coming to fruition under Gordon Brown. That one of the more high-profile initiatives emerged during the depths of a recession was something of an unfortunate coincidence. Even Layard, vociferous advocate of the disconnect between GDP and happiness, called the announcement 'brave' (Toynbee, The Guardian: 2010).

In spite of the apparent unease with the idea of happiness as a public issue, few appear to have been willing to take ownership as critical opponents. Instead, critical perspectives are more apt to emphasize different aspects of its potential to signify their own counterclaims for ultimate goods. Its positive connotations and relative permissiveness make it a far more appealing banner to rally behind than against, leaving claims-makers little vulnerable to serious opposition. Dedicated opposition offers little to critics, since few would advocate depression, celebrate 'conspicuous consumption' or argue that GDP is the most important thing in life. As a semiotic resource, happiness lends a sense of good to the subject matter to which it refers. But, the highly rationalized and decontextualized nature of the sign towards the present lends this strategy even greater potential salience.
‘Confirmed’ by both science and history, it accords those goods advocated by claims-makers a sense of certainty as well as offering a seemingly complex, though enticingly simple, answer to a wide range of questions. In laying claim to happiness, advocates are not merely forwarding knowledge on the nature of happiness, why it is missing, and how it can be found. Rather, they are drawing on its narrative power to evoke a sense of uncontroversial absolutes, imbuing their view of the world with an ultimate sense of goodness and purpose that is otherwise difficult to find.
Over the past two decades, happiness has shifted from an indistinct, 'free floating' signifier towards a sign whose referent is increasingly objectified - having a material existence that can be objectively verified, measured and fine-tuned. It has also become a key semiotic resource on which many claims-makers draw in their problematizations of reality. This process of meaning-making is embedded in and inseparable from claims-making activities. In this chapter and the one that follows, I begin to shed light on these processes by exploring the activities of frequently appearing claims-makers during the most crucial period of its problematization. They draw on a sample of 306 newspaper articles extracted from Nexis holdings for The Times, The Independent, The Telegraph, the Guardian and their Sunday editions from 2003 to 2009. I begin by describing the general characteristics of individuals and groups identified in the sample and move to a summary of conclusions regarding the affirmation and diffusion of the problem. In the next chapter, I discuss the roles of prominent and less prominent categories of claims-maker including experts, policymakers and members of the general public.

In the sample of 306 articles, 340 individuals and eighty-nine organizations were sourced or referred to in relation to happiness. Many individuals and organizations from diverse backgrounds comment on the issue or refer to happiness claims, but very few of these can be said to be claims-makers in the more significant sense of being integral to the construction of the problem. Fewer still are consistently appearing claims-makers who emerge and are referred to as prominent authorities. Moreover, while evidence emerging from the various fields of happiness expertise figures prominently in these discourses, it is largely not from these experts themselves that problem claims come. Rather,
the most significant commentary emerges from those types of claims-makers associated with the 'insider' sector of claims-making.

Regarding the first of these observations, even in this relatively small sample, perhaps the most significant characteristic is the diversity of claims-makers that appear. Claims-makers emerge from a varied milieu, literally from advice columnists to a zoologist. Figure 7.1 shows the types of claims-makers identified and the corresponding proportions by which they make up the total population of claims-makers identified in the sample.

It is clear that the most frequently appearing type of claims-maker is the 'expert', followed by journalists (an artefact of the data being studied) and members of the private sector. In addition to individuals as sources of information, claims also emerged in connection with organizations. The types of organizations appearing in the sample and the corresponding number of organizations belonging to each category are illustrated in Figure 7.2.

Where possible the manner by which the individual or organization primarily acted in the sample is the category in which the claims-maker was placed. For instance, a policy adviser who was frequently referenced on the basis of the authority he/she possessed by virtue of expertise in economics would be classified as an 'expert: economist'. It must be stressed, however, that attempting to 'pigeonhole' particular actors within particular categories is ultimately of limited
utility and meaningfulness. The purpose of categorization is simply to gain some grasp of the sources of happiness discourses and the range of commentary that has emerged. Prominent categories may point to a reliance upon a particular type of commentary, but it is in the interpretation of the contents of these categories, of the activities and histories of particular individuals and groups and their relationships to each other, that the more fruitful analysis is to be found. Indeed, the most prominent claims-makers are characterized by a plurality of roles, a positioning that facilitates diverse connections and diffusion between public arenas.

While experts and commercial organizations represent the most common sources of information, these are not the areas from which the most sustained interest has emerged, producing few groups or individuals who might be termed ‘owners’ of the issue. For instance, of the twenty-four organizations identified in the sample, only one appeared more than once. The majority of claims stemming from these categories are not those of initial problematizers but emerge after the problem has become institutionalized into company policy and practice. For instance, McDonald's and Disney are cited as examples of companies which have brought in positive psychologists to ‘coach’ their employees, because as one representative claims, ‘the message works’ (Reid, The Times: 2008). The CEO of Keen Media is quoted as attributing the ability of his company to stay competitively priced by maintaining wage rates for its ‘creative
staff in Bangkok' at 'one-fifth of London levels' by operating on the 'Bhutanese concept of Gross National Happiness' (Sumner-Smith, *The Daily Telegraph*: 2009). Others are life coaching or private consultancy firms which have sprung up around the concept including Happy at Work, The Laughter Network and iOpener, 'a consultancy that specialises in improving performance by making people happier' (Chynoweth, *The Sunday Times*: 2009). Others are more overtly opportunistic in taking hold of the concept as a marketing tool including various happiness polls and a booklet given away by Jacob's cream cracker company on how to increase happiness levels and improve well-being (McCade, *The Sunday Times*: 2007). On the other hand, while only three educational institutions appeared as sources of claims, one of these, Wellington College, appears twenty times.

A large chasm exists between the most frequently appearing claims-makers and other commentators. While a large number of individuals and organizations comment on the issue, many contributing to and affirming its importance, few have embarked on a dedicated campaign, taking it up and making it their own. Only 71 of the total 340 individual claims-makers appear three or more times in the sample: 41 twice and 228 only once. The prominence of experts illustrates not an expert-led problematization, but a tendency to draw on happiness science as a cultural resource. However, this should not be taken to mean that experts have been passive in this process. Rather, as the next chapter details, the dissemination and expanding influence of happiness expertise was a conscious project on the part of its founders. But, this project might not have been so successful without the development of a symbiotic relationship between the ongoing creation of happiness knowledge and the activities of claims-makers who took ownership of this information and pressed it in service of problem claims. Viewed this way, a very small number of claims-makers appear to have made a disproportionate impact on achieving recognition and institutionalization of the problem.

**Insiders and issue ownership**

While most claims-makers belong to the 'expert' category, prominent authorities, who take ownership of this information, refashion it in service of problem claims, and who bring it to the attention of the media tend to emerge from other areas. Many of the most frequently occurring expert claims-makers are actually referenced second hand. It was not experts then who took ownership of the issue in the public sphere. Rather, throughout the life course of the problem, those
who championed the idea of affecting change on the basis of happiness research have tended to belong predominantly to the insider 'polity' stream described in Chapter 4. This is particularly clear in an examination of the earliest claims problematizing happiness and their relationships to those forwarded after 2003. In both cases, insiders take ownership, but only in the latter does this ownership take the form of a focused campaign. While it has always been knowledge derived from the disciplines of psychology, economics and to a lesser extent, philosophy that has provided the building blocks with which the problem has been constructed, it is largely not the producers of this knowledge – that is the people involved in collecting data and carrying out research – who have been its most vocal proponents.


Recall from Chapter 5 that the initial 'discovery of a problem' occurred in the early 1990s when insiders closely connected with policy first attempted to politicize the results of then-nascent happiness research. While prior to the mid-1990s the results of studies had variously appeared in national news publications and had to some extent been appropriated by those with ready access to the media like the psychologist Robin Skynner in his Guardian column, these activities largely had little effect on wider discussions, much less policy change. The initial discovery of a problem to which this new knowledge was to be directed, however, can be attributed to claims-makers with closer links to the policy realm – namely interest groups and think tanks falling within the 'polity' category of insider described in Chapter 4. For instance, the first mention of a paradox in association with happiness in national UK newspapers came not from the expert from whom the results were borrowed (and indeed the insight is credited simply to 'one sociologist' [Le Fanu, The Times: 1993]), but rather from the physician James Le Fanu, a frequent social commentator who had recently produced a pamphlet for the UK think tank the Social Affairs Unit. Table 7.1 shows the claims-makers behind the first ten social problem claims about happiness in UK national newspapers, their position in the claims-making process as either insider or outsider (or gatekeeper, in the case of journalists) according to the characteristics listed in on page sixty-four and the sources of information on which they draw.

The first claims-makers for happiness as a social problem were not necessarily the experts who are so frequently cited on the subject. Indeed, it is often the case that the science by which these claims are meant to be underpinned is entirely
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author of article and description</th>
<th>Insider or outsider</th>
<th>Claim</th>
<th>Source of information</th>
<th>Own research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James Le Fanu – Physician and frequent social commentator – has done work for the right-leaning UK think tank, the Social Affairs Unit</td>
<td>Insider</td>
<td>Nothing can disguise the gradual slide in the happiness of nations in the West over the past decade. Despite dramatic increases in real wealth, data from the United States show no increase in 'happiness'; according to one sociologist, the average American has become less happy since the war. (Le Fanu, The Times: 1993)</td>
<td>American 'data'; unnamed sociologist</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Lane (1) – American political scientist</td>
<td>Outsider¹</td>
<td>Studies in advanced economies show, as one would expect, that for every thousand pounds increase in income there is, indeed, an increased sense of well-being – but only for the poorest fifth of the population. Beyond that, there is almost no increase in people’s satisfaction with their lives as income levels increase. (Lane, The Guardian: 1993)</td>
<td>'Studies in advanced economies'</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Dimbleby² – Political Commentator</td>
<td>Insider</td>
<td>So we should now all be very much happier. We have better health, longer lives, and greater prosperity. And yet self-evidently we are very far from happy. (Dimbleby, The Guardian: 1993)</td>
<td>Personal observations</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will Hutton (1) – Policy Expert/ Adviser</td>
<td>Insider</td>
<td>Choosing has not led to either happiness or economic welfare, and the more reflective economists have begun to wonder whether economics' famous dodge works. What if individuals do not possess the mental equipment to be rational about why and what they choose? (Hutton, The Guardian: 1993)</td>
<td>Recent Happiness Conference at LSE</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author of article and description</td>
<td>Insider or outsider</td>
<td>Claim</td>
<td>Source of information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hamish McRae (1) – Journalist (also member of LSE Policy Committee)</td>
<td>Gatekeeper</td>
<td>In the past 20 years there has been no reported increase in happiness in either Europe or the US. This seems a little odd because this seems to conflict with the general principle that if people get richer, they also tend to become happier or – to employ a more specific title – experience higher social well-being, or SWB. (McRae, <em>The Independent</em>: 1994)</td>
<td>'Wealth of work' accumulated over 30 years; Centre for Economic Performance at LSE</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will Hutton (2) – Policy Expert/Adviser</td>
<td>Insider</td>
<td>[...] lifting consumption, either through raising the growth rate or lowering personal income taxes – the economistic response of pundits and rightwing Tory backbenchers – will not improve well-being. [...] one index of well-being ranks the principal source of satisfaction as family (especially for men). Financial security follows, and then 'having fun'. Acquisition of goods and services ranks below even one's chance of getting a good job. (Hutton, <em>The Guardian</em>: 1994)</td>
<td>Robert Lane (2)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geoff Mulgan – Policy Expert/Adviser</td>
<td>Insider</td>
<td>Since then, however, the link between growth and happiness has been broken. In the UK and the United States, while GDP has doubled over the past 30 years, people's reported happiness levels have remained roughly constant. In some European countries they have fallen, sharply in the cases of Belgium and Ireland. (Mulgan, <em>The Independent</em>: 1995)</td>
<td>Economists James Tobin, William Nordhaus, World Bank's Herman Daly</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Cusick³ – Journalist</td>
<td>Gatekeeper</td>
<td>The head of the NEF's indicators programme, Alex MacGillivray, said: 'Now that tranquillity has been given a value, maybe happiness is next.' The NEF argues that with concern over the quality of life, the old-style gross national product measurement of monetary flow is misleading and offers no guide to the state of the environment. (Cusick, <em>The Independent</em>: 1995)</td>
<td>UK Department of Transport (DoT); NEF's Alex MacGillivray</td>
<td>Author: No NEF and DoT: Unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author of article and description</td>
<td>Insider or outsider</td>
<td>Claim</td>
<td>Source of information</td>
<td>Own research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hamish McRae (2) – Journalist (also member of LSE Policy Committee)</td>
<td>Gatekeeper</td>
<td>This LSE work has unearthed some wonderful nuggets of information, such as the fact that there has been little or no rise in reported happiness in Europe or the US during the past 20 years […]. <em>(McRae, The Independent: 1995)</em></td>
<td>LSE economists working in area of happiness</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polly Toynbee – Journalist and frequent social commentator</td>
<td>Insider/Gatekeeper</td>
<td>Running faster up the down escalator, all we get is a more miserable, overworked, sick and anxious workforce. Along with the monthly economic indicators, there should a contentment indicator, reminding us what the money is for. Professor Robert Lane, of Yale, studying quality of life surveys, concludes that apart from among the very poor, there is no correlation between happiness and income. <em>(Toynbee, The Independent: 1995)</em></td>
<td>Robert Lane (3)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1Lane is listed as an 'outsider' because his links to policy are unclear. In 1991, he published *The Market Experience* in which he argues 'goods and services – and the income that purchases them – are only intermediate goods, whereas satisfaction or happiness and human development are final goods' *(Lane, 1993: 3)*. This has been followed by several publications in a similar vein including the 2001 *Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies*. In the early 1990s, he had been frequently cited by claims-makers closely connected with policy, particularly by Will Hutton, and is listed in the acknowledgements of various publications produced by think tanks including the NEF and Demos, but direct connections are difficult to ascertain.

2Dimbleby is also a television and radio presenter and has membership or leadership positions in various environmental lobbying groups including the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) in which capacity the article excerpted above was written.

3In this case, the author of the article is a journalist who is merely reporting on the claims of others and is thus not a claims-maker himself. This differs from the case of Hamish McRae who compiles the primary claims of unnamed economists into a secondary claim for the existence of a problem.
Owning Happiness

unattributed. It is also not the case that the first claims emerged from a dedicated sector of the general public urging for change, but rather from the 'insider' sector of the claims-making process. Although insiders, by definition, have easier access to the mass media, the history of many social problems (for instance the civil rights movement) has been characterized by grass-roots groups using whatever means possible to gain access to the mass media in order to direct public consciousness to their cause. Therefore, it is unlikely that the ownership of the issue observed as stemming from the insider category is merely an artefact of the type of data collected.

**Insiders as owners (2003–2009)**

Not everyone who has taken up the problem has been an 'insider', but the prime movers in each phase have been overwhelmingly of this type. While many of the early claims-makers described in Table 7.1 would go on to use happiness claims in their activities in other areas, they failed to remain dedicated owners of the issue in this public arena, and public claims-making about happiness registered little effect throughout the remainder of the decade.

However, by the 1990s, subjective indicators were becoming influential in other arenas, particularly in relation to international development policy. At the same time as the NEF's above endorsement of the DoT's use of the subjective indicator of 'tranquillity', the think tank was also involved in developing and promoting alternative indicators including the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW), a UK application of the American index created by the World Bank economist Herman Daly and the theologian John Cobb (see Daly and Cobb, 1994 [1989]). The UK ISEW was developed and applied by Tim Jackson and Nic Marks in association with the NEF and the Centre for Environmental Strategy at the University of Surrey and was later incorporated and modified by the environmental group Friends of the Earth (FoE) (see Jackson and Marks, 1994). As Pupavac (2006: 262) observes, central to this concept and others already institutionalized by the early 1990s and exported from the United States, including the Human Development Index (HDI), is the decoupling of material from social progress. Yet, this decoupling, in spite of its influence and early institutionalization in these arenas, did not at that time become a problem with the sort of social recognition it has achieved today. The interest remained largely confined to less public arenas and thus failed to gain recognition as a social problem with a high standing on the public agenda. Among those who maintained an interest was Geoff Mulgan, who as director of the New Labour
think-tank Demos produced a publication in 1998 entitled *The Good Life*, which brought together not only a great deal of claims about happiness, but also featured many of the early claims-makers (several of whom appear in Table 7.1) including Will Hutton, Alex MacGillivray, the psychologist Michael Argyle, Tim Jackson and Nic Marks (who applied Daly’s World Bank index to the United Kingdom).

Yet, media claims-making tapers off until a rash of articles appears in early 2003 describing a December research report on ‘Life Satisfaction’ produced by the Cabinet Office’s Strategy Unit, headed by the then recently appointed director, Geoff Mulgan. The report, authored by Nick Donovan and David Halpern, summarizes what it deems ‘the state of knowledge and implications for government’ of life-satisfaction research including many of the ideas that had been prominent in the earlier Demos publication including the familiar paradox, that ‘despite large increases in national income (and expenditure) over the last 30 years, levels of life satisfaction have not increased commensurately’ (Donovan and Halpern, 2002: 2). At the same time, a report entitled ‘UK Real National Income, 1950–1998: Some Grounds for Optimism’ was published by the National Institute for Economic and Social Research and authored by the (then) LSE economist Nick Crafts. In spite of the uplifting title, Crafts’ optimistic reassessment of the findings of several indices of economic welfare merely provided fuel for a similar claim about a paradox between prosperity and happiness. In a lecture delivered at the Royal Economic Society in London which coincided with the publication of the report, Crafts asserted, ‘conventional measures of economic growth understate improvements in average living standards’ but, ‘[d]espite the improvements, recent surveys have shown that we are no happier than our grandparents or great-grandparents’ (Hazlewood, *Belfast News Letter*: 2002).

Two months later, another LSE economist (and Labour peer), Richard Layard, kicked off what would be the most concerted, dedicated and ultimately successful claims-making effort with a series of lectures given at LSE. Accompanying the series was a lengthy article in the *New Statesmen* in which Layard sets out his claim for the existence of the problem and what should be done about it. Clearly intending to make an impact, Layard begins dramatically, asserting: ‘There is a paradox at the heart of our civilization’ and detailing how the latest scientific developments not only point to a dire state of affairs, but also how this new ‘happiness research’ had made it ‘entirely practicable to make happiness our goal’ (Layard, *New Statesman*: 2003b). The memorable phrasing seemed to prove successful, as an influx of publications soon appeared
repeating Layard's slogans: 'People are no happier than 50 years ago in spite of being much better off' (Young, *The Times*: 2003), and that 'keeping up with the Joneses' was to blame (Naish, *The Times*: 2003). Headlines repeated, 'We can't get no satisfaction: Despite the massive rise in wealth, self-reported happiness has not increased in Britain' (Dean, *The Guardian*: 2003), and 'Money might make the world go round, but earning it is making us increasingly miserable' (Hutton, *The Observer*: 2003).

Through Layard, claims become increasingly streamlined, with the attention grabbing paradox placed front and centre: 'We make more money, but we're more depressed than ever' (Layard, *The Independent on Sunday*: 2003a). Implications and demands are laid out in a plain and easily repeatable format, including 'More spending on psychiatry' (Young, *The Times*: 2003) and 'a shorter working week' (*The Times*, 2003). In 2004, Layard retreats somewhat from the media but re-emerges as the author of *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*, an extensive literature review of happiness research from evolutionary psychology to neuroscience. Upon the book's publication in 2005, Layard's promotion of both it and the ideas it espoused became even more fervent. In the media, he was described as a radical, challenging mainstream economic orthodoxy. Yet, in spite of the ostensibly subversive nature of his stance, his claims-making was met with swift affirmation. David Cameron, then shadow education secretary, cited Layard as an influence while describing the Conservative Party's education policy (Clark, *The Sunday Times*: 2005) and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) launched a document on sustainable development which, after citing Layard, affirms well-being as lying 'at the heart of sustainable development' (HM Government, 2005: 23). Announcements were made that happiness would appear in the educational curriculum (Seldon, *The Independent*: 2006), and Ed Balls, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, affirmed that 'teaching happiness, wellbeing and good manners to secondary school pupils can be done', before announcing the introduction and expansion of the SEAL programme (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) across England and Wales (Linklater, *The Times*: 2007). In the health sector, the Secretary of State for Health thanked Layard for 'raising awareness nationally, in parliament and within the Department of Health about the importance of psychological therapies and mental health' before announcing a shift in focus towards talking therapies and delivering more 'focused outcomes' in health and well-being (Hewitt, 2007).

In spite of the fact that a great deal had been going on behind the scenes in terms of a diverse array of groups taking on the idea and developing indicators
long before Layard's public campaigning, it was Layard's lobbying that was noticed. A number of commentators pointed out that his book seemed to have a profound effect on political discussions (for example Rentoul, *The Independent*: 2006; Jeffries, *The Guardian*: 2008). It was Layard's alarmist claims that 'Unhappiness is “Britain's worst social problem”' (Laurance, *The Independent*: 2005) that made headline news, and through whom the existence of an epidemic of unhappiness became a taken-for-granted truth – the only question was how far the interventions would go.

Layard's mission was to place the issue at the centre of political debate, and it is likely through his influence and missionary stance towards the problem that it saw its most successful incarnation and widespread institutionalization over the past decade. Figure 7.3 shows the ten most frequently appearing claims-makers in the NVivo database of relevant articles and illustrates Layard's prominence. Table 7.2 gives additional details of each claims-maker.

Reflecting on the move of 'subjective well-being' from the 'fringe towards the mainstream', Halpern (2010: 8) cites Layard as also being a central figure in raising its profile in the academic community. Indeed, as founder and director of the Centre for Economic Performance at LSE, he was ideally placed to raise its profile in the discipline of economics and had been drawing partnerships with other universities in an attempt to 'link economists with psychologists' on projects dealing with happiness since at least the mid-1990s (McRae, *The Independent*: 1994).6

But, Layard was not simply an economist drawing the public's attention to a problem he has independently discovered. Like the claims-makers of the early 1990s, the paradox is central to Layard's claims, but it is an idea with which he had been acquainted since at least the early 1980s when he drew on Easterlin

![Figure 7.3 Most frequently appearing individual claims-makers](image-url)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of articles (n = 765)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard Layard</td>
<td>Economist at LSE's Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) since 1990</td>
<td>Expert – Economist</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Happiness economist’ and co-founder of ‘Action for Happiness’ Policy adviser</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick Baylis</td>
<td>Positive Psychologist at Cambridge Column in <em>The Times</em> on Happiness as ‘Dr Feelgood’</td>
<td>Expert – Psychologist</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Oswald</td>
<td>Economist at University of Warwick Began research on happiness in 1990s while Senior Research Fellow at LSE's CEP Has contributed over 200 articles to popular media outlets in addition to broadcast media interviews</td>
<td>Expert – Economist</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Seligman</td>
<td>American Psychologist, former head of American Psychological Association Former key critic of ‘self-esteem’</td>
<td>Expert – Psychologist</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Seldon</td>
<td>Headmaster of Wellington College Co-founder of ‘Action for Happiness’ Social and political commentator</td>
<td>Educator</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver James</td>
<td>Psychologist Journalist; author of popular psychology books Frequent social commentator</td>
<td>Expert – Psychologist</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alain de Botton</td>
<td>Pop-Philosopher, author Founder of ‘The School of Life’ (London)</td>
<td>Expert – Philosopher</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver Burkeman</td>
<td>Journalist Writer of <em>Guardian</em> column on psychology Author of <em>Help!: How to Become Slightly Happier and Get A Bit More Done</em> (2011) and <em>The Antidote: Happiness for People Who Can't Stand Positive Thinking</em> (2012)</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalai Lama</td>
<td>Religious Leader Author of <em>The Art of Happiness</em> (1998) and <em>The Art of Happiness at Work</em> (2003) Frequently quoted by others and used as an example of a happy person/happy way of life</td>
<td>Religious Individuals &amp; Authorities</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1According to a short bio produced for press release (University of Warwick, 2011).
in a 1980 paper in the *Economic Journal*. But, more crucially, and also like the claims-makers of the 1990s, Layard has close ties with public policy and has been moving between various insider organizations since the beginning of his career. He has been particularly influential on New Labour, acting as an adviser to Number 10 in the 1990s and was one of the main architects of the party’s unemployment policy when it came to power in 1997. When Layard first began his claims-making for happiness as a social problem, he was, among other positions, not only director of the LSE’s Centre for Economic Performance, but also a consultant for the Prime Minister’s Forward Strategy Unit and a member of the House of Lord’s Select Committee on Economic Affairs. Therefore, not only was he well placed to raise the subject’s profile and credibility within the discipline of economics, drawing alliances between economists and psychologists, but he was also particularly well placed to diffuse the idea between a number of spheres of public discourse, standing as he did with one foot in the door of several arenas. Moreover, where previous attention to the issue had been sporadic, Layard was one of the first to take up a concerted campaign to place the issue on the political agenda.

**Affirmation and diffusion**

From these observations, it is possible to draw a number of conclusions regarding the affirmation and diffusion of the problem. The broad appeal of claims evoking happiness is illustrated by the tendency for the signifier to be evoked and affirmed by a wide variety of individuals and organizations. The potential of happiness to align social goods and imbue these alignments with a sense of finality likely contributes to this appeal. However, while attempts are sometimes made to ‘pin down’ its referents, few actually seek to define happiness, and there is certainly no one agreed upon definition. Thus, it has a perhaps unique ability to simultaneously act as, at first glance, a free-floating signifier, meaning many things to many people, while at the same time accomplishing its normative alignment. I will revisit this possibility in Chapter 9.

More simply, its widespread use reflects that almost any concern can be reduced to a core concern with individual happiness. It can be attached to a wide variety of concerns from depression, mental illness and suicide, to family breakdown, poverty and crime. This common ground also offers claims-makers the opportunity to construct areas of consensus and thus foster the likelihood of a convergence of interests across claims-makers, even those who
might not normally find themselves in agreement. Exploitation might be a tricky, even 'essentially contested', territory, but unhappiness at work is easily remediatable through hiring a 'chief happiness advisor' or contracting a happiness consultancy. Locating the problems of society within individuals also sidesteps the need to single out guilty parties. Claims-makers can name themselves radicals questioning orthodoxy without singling out a concrete opposition against which they rebel. 'Capitalism', 'economic growth' and 'competition' become just some of many risks from which to protect the vulnerable individual. In naming only victims, happiness claims evoke a rhetoric of vulnerability in which the vulnerable suffer from a harm for which the responsibility is unclear, and thus there can be condemnation without offence (Furedi, 2008).

Much of the affirmation of the problem then can be attributed to its valence character. As I described in Chapter 3, claims framed in abstract terms such as 'equality' and 'safety' are appealing for their uncontroversial character and tendency to foster consensus. Though the controversial nature of happiness claims is frequently emphasized (see Chapter 10), the issue shares a great deal more in common with 'child abuse' or 'victims' rights' than position issues such as abortion of euthanasia. While the latter evoke fierce and often polarized debate, it is difficult to imagine how the former could be opposed without appearing to 'blame the victim' or defend child abusers. Advocates may not agree on particular aspects of the problem, but the necessity of intervening on its behalf is likely to receive widespread affirmation.

Establishment networks

A final conclusion to be drawn regards the manner by which the problem was diffused. The most influential and dedicated claims-makers emerged primarily from the insider domain of the claims-making process. While expertise is indeed prominent, this knowledge has been used to underpin a problematization of happiness that did not initially emerge from the experts themselves. Just as was observed in previous phases of the problem, the people who have taken hold of this knowledge and attempted to problematize it have been insiders with already close links to policymaking. In this way, there appear to be two forms of diffusion at work: a broadcast model through which claims originating outside of the general population are broadcast into it via the mass media and a contagion model operating within interpersonal and professional networks.

With regard to the latter, given that the core claim of each of the initial claims-makers is essentially the same, it is unlikely that the sudden appearance in the
UK news media in the 1990s of a problematization of happiness can be attributed to a simple case of simultaneous discovery by each party. While the exact locus at which each may have initially learned of the idea is difficult to ascertain, the diffusion of ideas was likely facilitated at least in part by the fact that many of these claims-makers belong to what might be termed 'policy communities' constituted by both formal and informal networks of social ties. Similar to the notion of the 'polity', the idea of a policy community incorporates what some researchers within the social problems constructionist paradigm have highlighted as the importance of 'interpersonal relationships and communications' in the process of claims diffusion (Sacco and Ismaili, 2001: 31). Sacco and Ismaili point to the importance of the 'policy community' described initially by Pross (1986) as including 'all actors or potential actors with a direct interest in the particular policy field, along with those who attempt to influence it – government agencies, pressure groups, media people, and individuals, including academics, consultants and other “experts”' (2001: 30). The connections between individuals within these communities may be confined to a single nation or transcend national boundaries, as 'physicians, therapists, policymakers, and members of policing and social service systems in the two nations are linked by a variety of personal associations that emerge from workshops and conferences, service on association committees, and various collaborative undertakings' (Sacco and Ismaili, 2001: 32).

Within such communities, actors may share numerous connections and linkages of varying closeness and formality, with some even approaching a degree of recognizable group identity, although they may share no official organization or common manifesto and, indeed, may even regard each other as adversaries. Such establishment networks are typical of the insider claims-making process and have even been described as a 'form of action' characteristic of the insider brand of pressure group (albeit not necessarily a concerted one) (Connolly and Smith, 2003). In Connolly and Smith's typology, 'informal contact and influence' are listed as one of the primary means of gaining support for claims employed by insiders, in which individuals move back and forth between ministerial and civil servant positions to membership and/or leadership in various related organizations (2003: 95).

In other words, since the inception of the problem the major claims-makers have operated within an interconnected area of society, in which individuals move between governmental and non-governmental organizations, attend the same workshops and generally 'cross each other's paths' on a regular basis. The significance of these ties has also been demonstrated in similar cases of social
problems construction. For instance, in describing the case of the diffusion of claims about Satanism from the United States to the United Kingdom, Best (2001: 6) describes how '[m]ost of the major players in the construction of American social problems – social movement activists, government officials, the reporters, editors, and producers of mass media, and the various academic and professional experts – not only had counterparts in Britain, but they were in contact with those counterparts. For example, 'several American advocates visited Britain and, in workshops, press interviews, and other venues, outlined how the problem was being constructed in the United States' (Best, 2001: 6).

The problematization of happiness is therefore similar to many social problems (including its American origins, as I discuss in the next chapter), since in many ways its history is bound up with the people who possess these ideas moving from group to group, taking on new interests and subordinating this one and rehashing the claim in new and more favourable conditions.

Contagion within networks allowed for the spread of the idea between people with close ties to, and an interest in, public policy. It was also broadcast into the population in a 'top-down' manner – that is it did not come from ordinary people who identified and used the terminology of 'happiness' or 'well-being' to describe a troubling condition discovered in the course of their daily lives. Rather, it emerged from individuals and groups in the upper echelons of society with a great deal of resources at their disposal including access to and familiarity with the media, a high level of organization, status and influence.

However, these points cannot be understood without considering additional categories of claims-maker identified, the symbiotic relationships between which have fostered the success of claims about happiness. These include the expertise that has existed as the backdrop to problem claims and whose proliferation and concerted dissemination fuels and provides constant renewal, the politicians who affirm it and take on its significance as central to their activities, and members of the general public. These are the subject of the next chapter.
Insider ownership of happiness expertise played a crucial role in the successful institutionalization of happiness claims. Claims-makers who dedicated themselves to the issue had ready access to the media and their paths towards affecting policy, unlike outsider claims-makers, were relatively direct. But their ability to keep the issue interesting, alive and newsworthy was greatly facilitated by the constant flow of new scientific claims about the nature of happiness. Moreover, once experts and issue owners made these claims culturally available, they rapidly diffused, being drawn upon by a diversity of claims-makers in support of almost any cause. Over time, much of this expertise loses its connections to the primary claims-makers and evolves to become the ‘truth’ about happiness and how best to pursue it. Of course, none of these developments would have been possible outside of a context in which the intervention of expertise into hitherto mundane aspects of life has already been accepted and in which emotion is ascribed a special aetiology. Claims-makers draw on familiar scripts that place the individual emotional life at the heart of causal stories. I begin by exploring the role of expertise in the construction of the problem before moving to the roles played by other claims-makers in its continued diffusion and affirmation.

Expertise as a cultural resource

The rise and growing deference to expertise in modern societies can be understood in the context of a number of broad historical shifts which have leant professional knowledge considerable purchase in contemporary culture. Numerous theorists have examined the way that therapeutic knowledge in particular has thrived in the climate of uncertainty fostered by post-industrial
societies and the ongoing erosion of communal bonds and traditional ways of knowing (Rieff, 1966; Sennett, 1977; Lasch, 1979; Nolan, 1998; Chriss, 1999; Furedi, 2004). Drawing on Durkheim's description of the shift from mechanical to organic solidarity, Chriss (1999: 4) describes how the social solidarity once ensured by face-to-face interaction is threatened 'as the urban metropolis becomes characterised by anonymity, heterogeneity, and temporal and spatial distancing between members'. In her writings on the crisis of authority, Hannah Arendt observed that, historically, ruling systems had sought their legitimation in 'something outside the range of human deeds', be it the law of nature, the command of God or 'ancient customs sanctified by tradition' (Arendt, 1958: 83). The decline of such belief systems can be experienced as a destabilizing effect. Berger (1966) identified the decline of group solidarity and increasing plurality of beliefs as a threat to the stability of old ideologies such as religion to legitimate existing social structures by locating 'human phenomena within a cosmic frame of reference', thus confronting individuals with the threat of anomie (Berger, 1966: 35).

As ties to the past and with others become increasingly tenuous, traditional forms of authority begin to offer little to the individual in terms of legitimating existing social structures, much less guidance in the conduct of everyday life. In Furedi's (2009: 14) words, 'Uncertainty about the world encouraged the birth of the social sciences, leading to the expansion of the empire of the expert. In such circumstances, a society that was all too conscious of the limits of lay knowledge was more than ready to defer to the claims of expertise'. According to Chriss (1999: 5), it was this 'perception of a lack of guidance and insight among the average citizen' that set the stage for the 'encroachment of “experts” into virtually all walks of life'. An ideology, he continues, 'that serves the economic interests of therapists and others in the helping professions especially well' (Chriss, 1999: 5).

In other words, expertise has become a cultural resource with considerable purchase. It is fertile ground for the rise of what Berger and Berger (1983: 38) have called the 'knowledge class' who mobilize 'bodies of symbolic knowledge [...] to indoctrinate (“educate”), inspire (“help”), and plan for other people' (Berger and Berger, 1983: 38). Members of the knowledge class typically believe that they have access to special understandings that are beyond the grasp of everyday people and that this knowledge should be used to educate and assist those who do not possess it (Loseke and Cahill, 1984: 296). Further, this knowledge is in some ways a literal commodity, marketed and sold to a broad range of interested sectors of society.
The value of such expertise in this climate is attested to by the prominence it is increasingly accorded in contemporary claims-making activities. A wide range of claims-makers, from grass-roots activists to policy insiders, increasingly rely on expertise to frame their claims (Best, 2008). For example, Lee (2001) describes how debates such as abortion, which had been previously grounded in a moral framework, have begun to shift towards a reliance upon medical language and psychiatric categories buttressed by the accounts of experts who lay claim to specialized knowledge of women's psychological responses to abortion. Religious groups have found it easier to adopt a therapeutic dialogue with potential converts, so that pamphlets distributed on a University campus prominently feature phrases such as 'Do you seek happiness?' A fact which the former Archbishop of Canterbury once acknowledged with his observation that 'Christ the Saviour' was becoming 'Christ the Counsellor' (Gledhill, *The Times*: 2000).

As Bauman (1997: 178) describes, this is the age of 'experts in “identity problems,” or personality healers, of marriage guides, of writers of “how to assert yourself” books; it is the era of the counselling boom.' But what is interesting about the materialization of these trends in happiness discourses is that claims-makers are nearly as likely as Bauman to dismiss the early 1990s’ self-help boom as mere ‘fluff’. While such therapeutic expertise is indeed central to claims about happiness, the claim to a firmer grounding in hard science,
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biology and mathematical calculation is one that is self-consciously asserted and reasserted to an extent perhaps not seen in the therapeutic discourses of the past. Economists and psychologists alike avow the problem's grounding in numbers and neuroscience, and even philosophers and philosophy are drawn upon not simply for uplifting sound bites but rather to lay claim to a sophisticated theoretical framework, for a grounding not in 'spouting off' one person's ideas, as the psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky scoffed in an interview, but in Utilitarianism or Aristotelian ethics.²

Figure 8.1 illustrates the types and relative proportions of expert claim-makers identified in the 306-article sample described in the preceding chapter.

The role of expertise in happiness claims

As I described in the previous chapter, it is to the category of 'expert' that the majority of claims-makers identified in the sample belong. However, only 38 of 151 experts appeared three or more times: 20 appeared twice and 93 only once. Many of these claims were referenced second-hand. While a large number of studies are reported, the results of which are often repeated in other articles, there are a small number of experts who emerge as recognizable authorities 'looked at and reported to by others anxious for definitions and solutions to the problem' (Gusfield, 1981:10).

Happiness expertise rarely receives critical examination, and through constant repetition, many claims lose their connection to research and evolve to become 'facts' about what is known about the problem, according to claim-makers. For instance, the NEF's claim that Vanuatu is the 'happiest place on earth' that I discussed earlier was repeated numerous times, gradually losing its connection to the index itself. In fact, so far had the claim travelled that it was even referenced by one of the participants of a Channel 4 reality television show entitled, Meet the Natives, in which several indigenous people of Vanuatu travelled to the United Kingdom in order to educate Britons about the 'simple life'. The 'tribesman', clad in a grass skirt, informed audiences on several occasions throughout the show that Vanuatu is the 'happiest place on earth' followed by 'it's a fact' and 'it's been proven' (Meet the Natives, 2007).

A more widely cited example is a York University study which purported to show that 'British children are among the unhappiest and unhealthiest in Europe' (Clark, The Daily Mail: 2006). As the previous chapter pointed out, it is a claim whose foregone conclusion, apparent in its equal weighting of factors
such as having eaten a 'poor breakfast' and 'child abuse,' was only remarked on once in an editorial (Aaronovitch, *The Times*: 2009). UNICEF widely publicized the findings, an effort whose success is attested to by the fact that by 2010, it had become so frequently cited that its truth became a self-evident point to be called upon by a range of interested parties. It was frequently cited in the Children's Society's 2007 Good Childhood Inquiry and has been influential in claims regarding the need for interventions from children's playgrounds to educational policy. In the words of one commentator, 'all recent studies show that Britain's children are the unhappiest and poorest in Europe' (Deech, *The Observer*: 2009), and another, after claiming that public places had become 'hostile' and 'left free for bullies and gangs,' points out that the resultant 'anxiety had contributed to making Britain's children the unhappiest in Europe' (Marrin, *The Sunday Times*: 2010). It was echoed in a speech by David Cameron (Cameron, 2007) and rehashed in an article by deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, where recalling the 2007 headlines, he reminds readers that Britain has 'some of the unhappiest and unhealthiest children in the developed world' (Clegg, *The Daily Mail*: 2010).

Through the association of one's claims with science, one is evoking an aura of scientism, 'prestige but also that of expert authority' (Freidson, 1970: 5). Claims are frequently prefaced by phrases such as 'we have proof,' 'we now know,' 'study after study' and 'research shows'. Claims-makers are at great pains to locate happiness claims in the realm of 'serious' and 'hard' science. 'Levels of [happiness] can be measured, charted and compared' and emphasizes that its source of expertise, who it describes as a 'leading light in the happiness industry,* is 'no pop psychologist,* but a 'credible academic and writer' (Smith, *The Times*: 2006).

This claim to science is one that is self-consciously disassociated from the self-help genre of the past. One claims-maker speaks disparagingly of self-help books stating, 'Some self-help books are simply practitioner-led. [...] A practitioner tells you "I think it would be good if you did this or that" and if there's evidence to back it up that's fine, but other times they're just saying it off the top of their heads' (Marsh, *The Times*: 2009). By contrast, the author's own book (although sold in the same 'Mind, Body, Spirit' section of bookstores), 'is based solely on empirical studies' (Marsh, *The Times*: 2009). Similarly, the US release of Lyubomirsky's (2007) *The How of Happiness* was subtitled 'A scientific approach to getting the life you want,' while others are entitled *The Happiness Hypothesis* (Haidt, 2006) and *Happiness: The Science Behind Your Smile* (Nettle, 2005).
The prominence of science in claims about happiness is also noted in the American context by Barbara Ehrenreich, who observes that 'Positive psychologists are usually careful to distance themselves from pop versions of positive thinking' (Ehrenreich, 2009: 148). According to Ehrenreich, unlike the colleagues they disavow, they do not promise riches and actually have a 'contempt for wealth' (Ehrenreich, 2009: 148). Nonetheless, as she astutely points out, they are 'quick to borrow from the playbook of their cousins in the coaching and motivation businesses' publishing mass-market books with 'you' and 'your' in the title, 'a tell-tale sign of the self-help genre', going into life-coaching businesses and selling their speaking services for exorbitant fees (Ehrenreich, 2009: 148–149).

The controversy surrounding the psychologist Barbara Fredrickson's alleged 'positivity ratios' illustrates the degree of appeal that the scientization of 'human flourishing' held out for positive psychology. Fredrickson and Losada (2005) had used a complex system of differential equations to calculate the exact ratio – 2.9013 – of positive to negative feelings required for human flourishing. 'Mathematically', they asserted, 'a positivity ratio of about 2.9 bifurcates the complex dynamics of flourishing from the limit cycle of languishing' (Fredrickson and Losada, 2005: 683). By the time Brown et al. (2013) published an article pointing out that the maths used in the paper were essentially meaningless, it had been cited over 300 times. What is more, it had become part of an industry, popularized in books and used in life coaching and business schools (Anthony, The Observer: 2014). And, yet, almost no one in the intervening years had paused to check if the maths added up. Further, its enthusiastic embrace was apparently untroubled by just how remarkable the discovery of such a 'magic ratio' would be. As Brown et al. (2013: 4) describe, 'the idea that any aspect of human behavior or experience should be universally and reproducibly constant to five significant digits would, if proven, constitute a unique moment in the history of the social sciences'. Arguably, the preferred reading of the equations and accompanying graphs pictured throughout Fredrickson and Losada's paper was not to actually decode them in mathematical terms, but rather in symbolic terms – as signifying 'science' and thus 'truth'. Ironically, it took an oppositional reading – actually understanding the maths – to question this association. What made these images appealing was arguably not their accuracy, but rather their appeal to an authority beyond human experience and opinion. It was not enough to simply claim that 'balance' in life was important, it had to be stripped of mere human opinion; it had to be proven.
Expertise as a commodity

Although most experts who appear in the sample are not dedicated campaigners, some experts do take on the issue in a more dedicated way. Issue ownership offers many benefits to claims-makers including 'a fresh, neglected topic for study, opportunities to receive research funding and publish results, the chance to exhibit one's knowledge regarding a visible issue' (Best, 1999: 68). As the profile of the issue rises, they find their expertise increasingly in demand. For many experts, issue ownership means that they are able to trade on their expertise in a more literal sense, founding commercial enterprises, becoming motivational speakers and authoring popular books. These activities are not only of monetary benefit, but they also provide additional platforms through which to spread the message and develop and maintain networks of other claims-makers dedicated to the issue.

For example, one of the most frequently occurring expert claims-makers in the sample was the psychologist Nick Baylis and his weekly column in The Times as 'Dr Feelgood on the Science of Happiness'. There he reported on new research carried out in the field of positive emotion and appealed for personal and social change on its basis. In addition to this 'broadcast' mode of diffusion, he also sought to spread its influence through relational network channels. In 2003, he and neuropsychologist Felicia Huppert organized a two-day conference at the Royal Society arguing for the necessity of a science of well-being that would integrate psychology, neurobiology and social science and have far-reaching implications in terms of social change (Huppert and Baylis, 2004). Their express purpose was not only to attract the interest of UK researchers to what had, until then, been a predominantly American focus, but also that of 'society's scientists, educators, citizens and leaders [who] would all benefit greatly from knowing how individuals and communities can thrive and flourish' (Huppert et al. 2004: 1331). He would later co-found (again with Huppert) the Cambridge Well-Being Institute (WBI), whose goals were to 'promote the highest quality research in the science of well-being and to integrate this research into evidence-based practice' (Huppert, 2006–2008).

As the problem began to gain acceptance, Baylis' expertise came to be more in demand. Much of the (often American) research that appeared in his Dr Feelgood column would eventually make its way into the curriculum of Wellington College, one of the first educational institutions to adopt 'happiness classes', which he was invited to design in 2006. Through his website he offered a range of lectures and skills training for businesses, professionals, laypeople and
parents. Towards the present, he continues to offer his expertise in the form of training days, 'one-to-one' meetings, speaking engagements, e-books and audio books (Baylis, 2014).

Another expert claims-maker appearing frequently in the sample, Alain de Botton, was a founding member of the London-based School of Life in 2008, offering a 'variety of programmes and services concerned with how to live wisely and well' to businesses and the general public (School of Life, 2014). Via day and weekend workshops, corporate events, 'sermons' and even a 'bibliotherapy' service, the School of Life is another example of an initiative providing both an income and an outlet for the dissemination of claims. It is also a potential hub at which claims-makers sharing similar concerns are able to maintain contact and build additional networks, share ideas and new ways to frame or develop the problem.

Similarly, Ehrenreich (2009: 149) observes that in addition to authoring a number of popular books, Martin Seligman offers life coaching, founded a for-profit website offering monthly exercises with a 'money back guarantee' and 'coaching by conference call to hundreds of people at a time for $2000 each'. Happiness, in spite of its 'contempt for wealth', is a lucrative business (Ehrenreich, 2009: 148).

The activities of prominent claims-makers are only a small slice of the ongoing diffusion of the problem as it permeates institutions and as increasing numbers of initiates trade on their access to specialized knowledge on how to be happy. The newly trained sell life coaching, training and workshops, motivational speaking and business management courses. A former computer programmer, Alexander Kjerulf, describes himself on his personal website as 'one of the world's leading experts on happiness at work' and offers speaking and consulting services to companies such as Daimler Chrysler and Statoil (Kjerulf, 2014). The website of UC Berkeley sociologist and 'happiness expert', Christine Carter, promises 'science-based tips for productivity, success and happiness' through happiness classes, coaching and her most recent book on the subject (Carter, 2014). A 'Laughter Network' offers corporate events, happiness workshops, regular 'laughter yoga' sessions and training in areas such as 'laughing facilitation skills' and 'advanced laughter' (Laughter Network, 2014).

Not only does this type of claims-making foster diffusion among the audiences that participate in them, but it also reveals a degree of personal investment in the issue's success. Should the interest in happiness and well-being become 'old news', the demand for the services and expertise of these individuals would similarly decline. Moreover, the ongoing training of new therapists, life
coaches and counsellors in the new science of happiness ensures the ongoing institutionalization of claims as certified students spread the message to the institutions with which they subsequently become involved. The manufacture of specialist knowledge creates new areas for individuals to trade in expertise, as graduates can enter into life coaching, begin their own businesses, author popular books and deliver commercial seminars and workshops. For instance, according to the University of Pennsylvania, graduates of its Masters in Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) – the first of its kind – are drawn from a variety of fields of employment (being a programme composed of an unusually high number of mature students) and have gone on to apply their knowledge in institutions such as elementary and secondary schools, or to change professions and become ‘consultants, coaches, and motivational speakers’ (Feldman, The Pennsylvania Gazette: 2010). Still others ‘are working to incorporate the principles of positive psychology into law, business, education, medicine, politics, engineering, the arts, even the military’ (Feldman, The Pennsylvania Gazette: 2010).

Such activities further contribute to the creation of a new ‘knowledge class’ springing up around happiness, whose members believe they have special access to knowledge not available to others and whose goal it is to assist and educate. Nonetheless, just as it is important to understand that expertise is not simply a passive project seized upon by opportunistic claims-makers in other spheres, it is also not simply a cynical money-making scheme. Undoubtedly, many claims-makers see themselves as making a positive contribution to society. Moreover, affecting policy has become increasingly central to the expert project as academics and organizations must continually demonstrate the relevance and impact of their activities. The ability to be seen to be making a positive difference means that happiness plays an increasingly prominent role in the activities of many individuals and organizations for whom claims-making becomes ‘just another day at the office’ (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988: 57).

**Diffusion as project: Akumal and the positive psychology network**

Many commentators have speculated that the rise in interest in happiness reflects a demand for this expertise on the part of society. However, it is important to understand that the diffusion of positive psychology was a project consciously promoted by the discipline's founders. Following his election as president of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1998, the American psychologist Martin Seligman began formulating the concept of a ‘Positive Psychology
Network whose success would be measured by the expansiveness and diversity of the sub-discipline's diffusion (Seligman, 1999). From its inception, positive psychology was not simply a disinterested scientific pursuit but aimed to press claims into the service of affecting change in a multiplicity of arenas of modern life, from the founding of undergraduate and graduate programmes at major universities to the managing of individual lives and the steering of public policy.

In a 1999 review, detailing the proceedings and future prospects of the field, Seligman identifies the areas of intended influence as comprising three 'nodes': 'Positive Subjective Experience, The Positive Individual, and the Positive Community' (Seligman, 1998). Associated task forces would be involved not only in isolating key questions for research and securing funding, but also in the 'dissemination of such knowledge' in order to affect a 'major contribution to human well-being' on par with the success of modern medicine in its 'advocacy of healthy physical conditions' (Seligman, 1998). It would also aim to 'produce and organize research findings that would help parents, teachers, reporters, and leaders create and participate in effective and healthy schools, families, workplaces, neighborhoods, and even perhaps nations' (Seligman, 1998). Meetings would be organized around task forces and individuals would be responsible for seeking out and entering into areas that could benefit from interventions on the basis of positive psychology including 'education, social policy, urban planning, and law' (Seligman, 1998).

Achieving Seligman's vision involved the creation of a 'formal network' which also included the enlistment of 'Junior Scientists' from across the world. Early in 1998, a request was sent to 'fifty of the individuals we consider the leaders of world social science' for nominations of 'young, rising academics' with 'leadership qualities (future department chairs)' (Seligman, 1998). The resultant group of nominees was invited to Akumal, Mexico, to meet with the senior scholars including Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi and Raymond Fowler (then CEO of the American Psychological Association) to 'brainstorm about the major intellectual issues' in positive psychology and 'become the nucleus of its future' (Seligman, 1998).

Among those 'young, rising academics' enlisted to the cause was Nick Baylis, whose PhD examiner had been George Vaillant, a member of the network's Steering Committee. According to an interview with Baylis in *The Observer*, Vaillant had subsequently become his 'mentor' and catalyst for involvement in the Positive Psychology Network (Hogan, *The Observer*, 2007). Baylis would become a regular attendee at the Mexico meetings after 2001, which would heavily inform the early development of the discipline and which helped solidify
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the ties between experts in the area, with the network itself eventually forming
the basis of the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania
(Linley et al, 2006: 4). Recurring annually for several years following, the
meetings and associated summits would host young academics, researchers,
doctoral students and even high-school teachers not just from the United States,
but in later years, from across the world including the United States, Canada,
Britain, France, Germany and Japan. Many of these young academics would
found the first degree programmes and positive psychology centres abroad.

The majority of attendees of Akumal I-IV (1999-2002) were based in
the United States, except for Baylis who was drawn in from Britain via his
connection to the American Vaillant. Of seventy-two attendees, the names of
twenty-two have since appeared in major national newspapers in the United
Kingdom, and half of these appearances were in Baylis' Dr Feelgood column.
Baylis and Felicia Huppert were co-ordinators of a plan, outlined for the Positive
Psychology Network in 2001, to raise the profile of positive psychology in the
United Kingdom entitled 'the UK Initiative for Positive Lives' (University of
Pennsylvania, 2007). Seligman himself was present at the aforementioned Royal
Society conference in 2003 organized by Baylis and Huppert, as were Richard
Layard and Barbara Fredrickson among other British and American advocates.

These are just a few examples of contacts and relationships forged between
American advocates of the issue and their counterparts in the United Kingdom.
In the intervening years, Seligman has been directly involved with a number
of UK initiatives. In 2010, Anthony Seldon describes Seligman as having
visited top-level officials in the new UK coalition government and expresses
hope Prime Minister David Cameron would extend his Big Society initiatives
to include 'positive health,' 'positive education,' 'positive policing' and 'positive
employment' (Seldon, The Independent: 2010).

Thus, expertise is a cultural resource that is continuously called upon by
claims-makers from a variety of arenas of public life, a point which will become
clearer with the relationship of policymakers to claims-making below. It is also
a resource in a more literal sense in that many experts gain a great deal from
championing the problem and providing the means by which it can be remedied.
They find themselves courted by the press, by social movements and consulted
and supported by governments. Over time, they become increasingly important
as they affirm and reaffirm the problem, 'track progress toward controlling it,
and offer more refined ways to think about [it]' (Best, 1999: 68). But, they also
give reason for their existence. It is important to understand that much of the
scientific evidence that has formed the foundation on which the problem has
been built was self-consciously promoted by the experts who were dedicated to expanding the recognition and influence of their new discipline. In this way, they reflect what Lasch (1979) has observed of the new professionals, who did not emerge, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in response to clearly defined social needs. Instead, the new professions themselves invented many of the needs they claimed to satisfy. They played on public fears of disorder and disease, adopted a deliberately mystifying jargon, ridiculed popular traditions of self-help as backward and unscientific, and in this way created or intensified [...] a demand for their own services. (Lasch, 1979: 228)

**Politicization of expertise**

Policymakers have, consciously or unconsciously, increasingly appealed to experts for answers to questions that may have once been consigned to the realm of ideology or political debate. As Hilgartner (2000: 146) writes, 'governments find expert advice to be an indispensable resource for formulating and justifying policy and, more subtly, for removing some issues from the political domain by transforming them into technical questions'. As the ability of political ideologies of the past to solve our problems has been increasingly called into question, contemporary political life has been characterized more and more by the ongoing consignment of moral and political questions to the domain of expertise (Lasch, 1979: 79; Furedi, 2009). This is particularly true in the case of the contemporary promotion of the ideal of 'health', since in the absence of old legitimisers and unifying ideologies, the body emerges as the lowest common denominator through which to connect with the public. As Fitzpatrick (2001: viii) observes:

To an unprecedented degree, health became politicised at a time when the world of politics was itself undergoing a dramatic transformation. The end of the Cold War marked an end to the polarisations between East and West, labour and capital, left and right, that had dominated society for 150 years. The unchallenged ascendancy of the market meant that the scope for politics was increasingly restricted. Collective solutions to social problems had been discredited and there was a general disillusionment with 'grand narratives'.

Thus, the project of expertise finds fertile ground in the political arena. Indeed, much of the prominence of policymakers in happiness discourses is derived from their being targeted by claims-makers and from the widespread commentary and
scrutiny that their responses to claims evoke. For this reason, when a potential social problem is on the ascent, the reactions of policymakers can mean the difference between a short-lived problem and one of a more enduring quality (Best, 1999). For instance, in the early days of the MMR controversy, then Prime Minister Tony Blair’s refusal to acknowledge whether or not his infant son had been vaccinated fuelled suspicions that the vaccine may have been unsafe (Leach and Fairhead, 2007). Increasingly, and especially with regard to health risks, the reactions of policymakers have been in the affirmative. While policymakers often frame their stances towards particular health issues in terms that imply a great deal of controversy and conflict, claims revolving around health promotion can sometimes offer policymakers the opportunity to appear to adopt a strong stance on an issue without arousing a great deal of opposition (Burgess, 2009).

In a climate increasingly receptive to claims about health risks (but perhaps wary of scaremongering) and health promotion, a valence issue such as ‘happiness’ presents policymakers with an appealing signifier with which to be associated. As early as the 1990s, Csikszentmihalyi’s ideas on ‘flow’ were described as having been taken up by New Labour as well as having been adopted abroad by policymakers in the United States, Austria and Sweden (Chittenden, The Sunday Times: 1997). However, at that early stage, claims-making lacked both an orientation towards more clear-cut policy proposals and a firm base of dedicated proponents. By contrast, the response to the more dedicated claims-making post-2003 was one of swift uptake and promotion across the political divide in spite of claims to controversy espoused by both sides.

Although, as will be shown below, happiness claims were already being institutionalized across numerous government departments, David Cameron was resolute in his vocalization of support. In a speech given at a Google Zeitgeist conference in 2006, he ‘urged the government to focus on happiness’, saying, ‘We have to remember what makes people happy, as well as what makes stock markets rise’ (Burkeman, The Guardian: 2006). In a speech in 2007, Blair appeared to challenge Cameron’s happiness proposals, saying, ‘It’s a lot easier to say happiness is more important than money if money is not a problem’ (Brown, The Independent: 2007). However, the reporting journalist observed that the pair seemed nonetheless to be reading from the same script, with Blair claiming, ‘People want to be in control, in their time spent in leisure, in their family time, and in their work. A job is not enough,’ seeming to echo Cameron’s, ‘It’s time we admitted that there’s more to life than money’ (Brown, The Independent: 2007).

In spite of the apparent agreement, the controversial nature of the idea was continually underscored. One commentator asks, ‘Why has Labour at the
highest level said so little about [happiness]? [...] Yet they must. The real danger David Cameron poses to a Labour party grown grey in government is not youth, but optimism* (Ashley, The Guardian: 2006). Another accuses government leaders of paying lip-service to the issue but, 'denying the hard policies it implies' (Toynbee, The Guardian: 2006).

From the outset, the issue has been closely associated with policymakers. While David Cameron’s announcement in November 2010 of the National Wellbeing Programme was the first explicit policy to institutionalize happiness claims, since the early 2000s, the UK government has been keen to incorporate happiness claims. Blair’s Strategy Unit had produced the previously mentioned report on life satisfaction in 2002 with the Conservatives following suit, producing a paper soon after which considered following Bhutan’s lead in promoting ‘Gross National Happiness’ over wealth (Halpern, 2010: 8). But, even before these steps had been taken, happiness rhetoric had already shown a demonstrable effect on policymakers; hinting at the future primacy of the issue, Blair wrote in the introduction of the Government’s Sustainable Development Strategy, published in 1999: ‘Money isn’t everything. But in the past, governments have seemed to forget this. Success has been measured by economic growth – GDP – alone. Delivering the best quality of life for us all means more than concentrating on economic growth’ (Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 1999).

Since then, happiness rhetoric has permeated the language of, and provided supporting evidence for, a host of policy initiatives. For example, in 2005, New Labour oversaw the introduction and later expansion of therapeutic curriculum incorporating happiness claims, aiming to promote the ‘emotional health and well-being of all who learn and work in schools’ (Department for Education and Skills, 2007: 4). In 2008, the government commissioned a Foresight Report on ‘Mental Capital and Wellbeing’ that summarized the latest findings from ‘neuroscience, psychology and psychiatry, economics, genetics, social sciences, learning, development and systems analysis’ and proposed targeted interventions to promote the ‘positive mental health and wellbeing’ and ‘flourishing’ of children, workers, older people and ‘key front-line professions’ including teachers and doctors (Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project, 2008: 4, 23). An employment White Paper produced in 2009 by the Department for Work and Pensions justifies its commitment to ‘increasing the number of people in work’ on the grounds that ‘[w]ork improves the physical and mental health and well-being of individuals and their families’, and later, ‘we know that work is generally good for people whether they are disabled or not. Work promotes
better physical and mental health, increases happiness and life satisfaction, and improves financial security" (Department for Work and Pensions, 2009: 52, 68). Similarly, a 2010 green paper jointly produced by the Department of Health, the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit begins, 'Everyone's health, happiness and achievements in life will depend heavily on their experience before birth and during their first years,' and later reasons, 'So, for both the baby's happiness and wellbeing, and in terms of the broader economy, it makes sense to invest in the earliest years of life' (Department of Health, 2010: 6, 12). Moreover, according to one report, it was New Labour that set the ball rolling for the national well-being index in 2009 when Layard was contracted by the Office for National Statistics to develop it (Toynbee, *The Guardian*: 2010).

Given that the problem was initially 'discovered' within groups closely connected with policy and transmitted in a relational and top-down way from within these networks, it is little surprising that many claims met with near immediate institutionalization, even before happiness itself had become a widely recognized issue on the public agenda. In the present political climate, politicians bereft of political ideology have increasingly turned to the sphere of health as platforms for debate. When big ideas are viewed with suspicion, science becomes the default position for authoritative statements and 'evidence-based' policies (as opposed to ideologically based) have become increasingly in demand. As a source for Downing Street remarked following the announcement of the new well-being index, 'Next time we have a comprehensive spending review, let's not just guess what effect various policies will have on people's wellbeing. Let's actually know' (Hutchison, *The Daily Telegraph*: 2010). Policymakers were quick to affirm the existence of happiness as a social problem and to publically introduce initiatives on its behalf. True to the nature of valence issues, the ability of happiness to cross the party divide, minimize controversy and promote consensus drove its rapid affirmation.

The hapless public

That happiness has been an expert-fed and insider-led phenomenon is also evidenced by the role that the general public have played in the construction of the issue. When they have entered into claims-making about happiness, it is predominately as the subject of claims rather than the source. The public are referred to en masse and as the victims of the new problem, as being unaware
or unable to find, increase or maximize their happiness. Since the problem first appeared in the United Kingdom, claims and questions have been posed such as 'What if individuals do not possess the mental equipment to be rational about why and what they choose?' (Hutton, The Guardian: 1993). It is claimed that 'we' are 'not very good at determining just what experience will actually increase our happiness', and that we've 'got it all wrong' (Clark, The Sunday Times: 2005).

According to claims-makers, although '[e]veryone wants to be happy' most of us simply 'don't know how to do it' (O'Connor, The Daily Telegraph: 2009). People are described as amateurs when it comes to happiness, as 'hamsters on a treadmill' (Clark, The Sunday Times: 2005), thinking it 'can be achieved by buying more' (Jonze, The Guardian: 2008). 'You have to decide to be happy [...]. Barring seriously depressed people, most westerners have plenty to be happy about, but they choose to focus on things they haven't got,' says Paul Jenner, author of a book entitled Teach Yourself Happiness (Hardy, The Guardian: 2007). By constructing the 'hapless' subject, claims-makers created a need that expertise could fill. That so few questioned this haplessness, and indeed many widely repeated it, speaks to a receptivity to claims that draw on the vulnerable subject as the source of social ills.

Although no single unaffiliated member of the general public appears in the sample more than once, 21 of the 306 articles sampled included commentary from the general public. The majority of these were the result of journalists asking people what made them happy and contained reflections on the simple joys in life. Although responses varied greatly, a common theme is a rejection of materialism as a basis for happiness. A Guardian column in which people from various walks of life were asked to comment included statements such as 'My wise grandfather said the secret to happiness is not to do what you like but to like what you do. I like what I do' (Taylor, The Guardian: 2007), and 'I am the happiest person I know, mostly because of where I live [Covent Garden]' (Taylor, The Guardian: 2006). One respondent, a climate change campaigner, is obviously familiar with the 'correct' answer: 'Happiness doesn't seem to be related to the GDP or to consuming more. People living simpler lives get on with it. It's less complicated' (Taylor, The Guardian: 2008).

Yet, missing from happiness discourses, particularly early on, is a more significant contingent of activists and forms of grass-roots campaigning. While it might be argued that this is simply an artefact of the type of data collected, gaining access to the media has been increasingly central to activists' projects for recognition. While the environmental groups FoE and the NEF (the latter of which was described as a 'fringe economic organization' in 1995 [Cusick,
The Independent: 1995]) do appear in claims-making on the topic, the history of these groups has been characterized by the move from outsider activism to insider lobbying (Connolly and Smith, 2003). In 2011, a ‘movement’ called ‘Action for Happiness’ was launched in the United Kingdom, whose rhetoric and mode of organization mimics grass-roots campaigning. The group’s website described its mission as ‘bringing together people from all walks of life who want to play a part in creating a happier society for everyone’ and invited viewers to ‘Join the movement. Be the change’ (Layard n.d.). In spite of the rhetoric, the ‘movement’ was founded by Richard Layard, Anthony Seldon and Geoff Mulgan, three claims-makers who have been integral to the construction of the problem from within insider circles. This attempt to take on the shape of a ‘movement’ might be seen as a kind of ritual, a stylized language and behaviour intended to engage the public and gain assent long after the political agenda had already been set. The same ritual was arguably played out with the national well-being consultation in 2010–2011. The consultation asked the public ‘what matters to you?’ and a ‘national debate’ was performed in spite of the fact that measures of subjective well-being for use in data collection had long been in development by experts.

When outsider claims-makers do take ownership, it seems to be via the entrepreneurial stream. For instance, people have founded websites including thankgodi.com (geared around gratitude) and ‘The Bank of Happiness’, the latter of which is based in Estonia and was founded by a communications director who had become ‘disillusioned’ with her job and began work with NGOs (Ahuja, The Times: 2009). Another entrepreneur is described as having ‘realised just how unhappy she was in her job’, which she quit to study psychology, going on to found iOpener, the previously mentioned ‘consultancy that specialises in improving performance by making people happier’ (Chynoweth, The Sunday Times: 2009).

It is clear that, at least initially, happiness was not a term that people were using at the grass-roots level to characterize their situations and campaigns for social change. Instead, the issue represents a reversal of what might be assumed to be the typical path followed by campaigns around new social problems, moving instead from the top of society and seeking to enlist the recognition and involvement of everyday people.
In previous chapters, I have outlined how and by whom claims about happiness are forwarded in the news media. The next two chapters look more closely at the rhetoric of these claims. As described in Chapter 3, descriptions of claims are not simply one-to-one reflections of problematic conditions presented to human consciousness in a straightforward way. Mediating the divide between claims-makers and the reality they problematize are cultural beliefs about what is acceptable and what is not, where aetiologies of problems are located and what are and are not (though the latter is often unspoken) acceptable solutions. Intense competition for attention to new social problems in the news media marketplace also constrains and shapes claims in powerful ways. In a manner similar to inventorizing the affordances of a semiotic resource (van Leeuwen, 2005: 4), hereafter I attempt to inventorize claims articulated through the semiotics of happiness in major UK newspapers during the key period leading up to its institutionalization.

Taking as my starting point claims identified in a sample of 100 articles from 2003–2010,1 I attempt to describe key aspects of the problem as a series of rhetorical messages about how the world should be understood and changed. ‘The importance of words, for historical semiotics, is that the messages contained implicitly in words were repeated many times, and assigned a high validity’ (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 187). Successful claims are continuously repeated and come to form the truth about what happiness – and by extension the world – is and ought to be according to claims-makers.

I begin with a discussion of grounds, warrants and conclusions – analytical tools drawn from the study of rhetoric and utilized to understand the forms claims often take as they seek to convince audiences of their veracity, severity and need for change on their behalf. A tendency towards implicit problematization is
then discussed before moving to those 'grounds' or 'statements about the nature of the problem' (Best, 2008: 33) implicit in various signifiers and the rhetorical offerings of communicating claims through one rather than another.

Grounds, warrants and conclusions

In Chapters 3 and 4, I described how claims adapt to competition, drawing on the cultural resources particular to their corresponding epistemic communities in order to achieve salience, plausibility and affirmation. Seasoned claims-makers quickly learn ways to capture attention and mobilize popular support and sympathy, resulting in increasingly polished claims that tend to coalesce around particular themes (Best, 1987: 115). As claims-making is rhetorical (Best, 1987), rhetoric or that branch of semiotics that studies 'the structure of language and argument that mediate[s] between communicators and audiences' (Craig, 1999: 137) can be used in their analysis. This approach is useful in that, rather than launching into a critique of any one aspect of the discourse, it allows one first to 'see it as having the form it does have with its particular kind of beginning, middle, and end' (Burke, 2003: 374). This 'beginning, middle and end' is well captured by viewing claims as elements of persuasive argument.

Extending the work of Gusfield (1981) on social problems as forms of rhetoric and ritual, Best (1987) applies tools of logical theory to the analysis of claims about social problems using Toulmin's (2003[1958]) account of the basic structures of argument. Best's conceptualization centres on what he terms grounds, warrants and conclusions. Grounds are 'statements about the nature of the problem,' which can take many forms, although patterns recur across many problems (Best, 1987, 2008: 31). Commonly used examples include giving the problem a new and often 'catchy' name, estimating its scope and alleging a 'worsening situation,' statements about the kinds of people affected and connecting the issue to other familiar problems. Warrants attempt to justify taking action on the basis of the grounds, often drawing on cultural resources to implore audiences to act. They frequently imply incongruity between conditions and values that claims-makers hope audiences will cherish. Examples include emphasizing the innocence and blamelessness of children, rising medical costs, health benefits or evoking abstract ideals such as freedom or equality. Conclusions are statements about what should be done and can range from vague endorsements of 'change' to detailed policy proposals. Like grounds and warrants, conclusions are also affected by their socio-historical context. Certain
proposals and endorsements for change will be acceptable in some places and times but not others.

It should be noted that this tendency for social problem narratives to form coherent causal chains masks 'an ideologically loaded progression - from an initial state of equilibrium, through complication and disturbance, to crisis and resolution, leading to a new equilibrium' (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 230). There is no room for insoluble problems. Narrative performs a naturalizing function in which it is acknowledged that 'the state of affairs can be disturbed and unsettled, but it promises that they will return to a state of equilibrium which is prior and natural and therefore inevitable' (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 230). It transforms flux into stability, insoluble problems into solutions (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 230). As the next two chapters describe, problem narratives evoking happiness, and particularly those asserting a 'paradox' between happiness and modernity, tend to affirm an imagined equilibrium from which the modern world has deviated and to which it would naturally return if only human beings could be made to conform to an acceptable emotional script. It is imagined that by abstracting values from the past to re-enchant the present, the destructive movement of history can be halted and the fabled equilibrium at last realized. Thus, the most 'radical' vision of the future in happiness claims is one in which there would be no forward movement, only a reproduction of the present.

Explicit and implicit problematization

There is a tendency within happiness claims-making to problematize in both explicit and implicit ways. Happiness and its satellite terminologies are often explicitly forwarded as problems. People are not happy, have become unhappier or are not happy enough. Even if they do not realize they have a problem, surely everyone, it is claimed, could use guidance on how to be happier. Through positing incongruities with happiness, an abstractly invoked ideal that claims-makers hope audiences will value changes in other social or economic conditions are themselves problematized. It is claimed that individuals or society at large are mistaken in pursuits that reveal such misalignment. Happiness ought to be pursued differently or replace other aims as the ultimate goal of activity and doing so will remedy many seemingly insoluble problems of the present. Thus, incorrect understandings and misplaced priorities constitute a social problem solvable through the pursuit of various evidence-based paths to happiness.
Thus, happiness is often invoked without necessarily positing a deficit to which interventions should be directed. It is often taken for granted that human beings are, by default, in need of guidance on the pursuit of happiness and conduct of life. While the distinction reflects more of a continuum than a clear-cut division, it nonetheless highlights that while claims-making about happiness frequently appears positive, there is often an implied deficit that 'lurks' beneath. For example, a report jointly commissioned by the Local Government Improvement and Development body and the National Mental Health Development Unit, written by the NEF, states that ‘Wellbeing and health mean more than the absence of problems or illness', and that a 'shift in focus from what can go wrong in people’s lives to what makes them go well' is needed (Aked et al., 2010: 10). Expertise, it is implied, is needed not only when things go wrong, but also to ensure things go right. This is also evident in Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi’s (2000: 5) introduction to positive psychology:

[Psychology] concentrates on repairing damage within a disease model of human functioning. This almost exclusive attention to pathology neglects the fulfilled individual and the thriving community. The aim of positive psychology is to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities.

Although couched in positive rhetoric, the implied deficit is clear. The ‘fulfilled individual’ and ‘thriving community’ presumably do not need the ‘attention of psychology’. What is implied is that functioning requires intervention. Areas of expertise wishing to gain a share of the recognition and novelty (and funding) accorded happiness research often make similar implicit problematizations. It has become customary for those arguing to turn the attention of their discipline towards happiness to lament the traditional focus upon pathology. For instance, Thin (2005, 2012, 2014) claims that the emphasis on problems (and indeed the tendency for happiness studies to unwittingly problematize) has blinded sociologists and anthropologists from considering the myriad ways in which people are happy and ‘flourish’. In reviewing this pathological focus, he notes that happiness has been ‘implicitly assumed to exist in the absence of the various problems […] and the work of promoting mental health is implicitly assumed to be the work of preventing, alleviating and curing mental illness’ (Thin, 2005: 13). Where psychology and economics have monopolized the happiness industry, he argues other social sciences must ‘develop their own ways of paying “positive” attention to the social facilitation of wellbeing’ (Thin, 2014). But if happiness and well-being are not a problem, one wonders why they need to be ‘promoted’
or ‘facilitated’ in this way. The traditional emphasis upon the removal of barriers implies the belief that doing so will allow people to ‘get on with things’, whereas arguing that experts must also focus upon the facilitation of happiness betrays a doubt that left to their own devices, they actually can.

Alleging a dire state of affairs and warning that worsening conditions necessitate immediate action has long been a strategy utilized by claims-makers to attract attention to their claims. However, one need only open a newspaper or flick to a newscast to reveal that these strategies can produce an excessively apocalyptic vision of the world. The ostensibly positive focus of happiness promotion furnishes claims-makers with a novel strategy in their quest for recognition. Like uses of the apparently positive signifier ‘self-esteem’ (Furedi, 2004: 4), the concern with happiness is implicitly a concern with its deficit and need for facilitation. Whether implicitly or explicitly stated as a problem, the image that emerges is the same. Through the rhetoric of happiness, the need for intervention is democratized. The latent message is that the default for humanity is unhappiness and disorientation. Everyone is vulnerable and the need for expert guidance is universal, regardless of the presence or absence of illness or infirmity.

Grounds: Naming the problem

Merging putative conditions under the umbrella of a new and ‘catchy’ label can represent a turning point in the development of a new social problem. Rhetorical choices are significant; they can make or break a fledgling movement and offer existing claims-makers new ways to frame problems. At the same time, naming is not the same as defining (Best, 2008: 32), and indeed many claims-makers avoid specific definitions. Defining closes off potential meanings, but the evocation of an empty or ‘floating signifier’, ‘a symbol or concept loose enough to mean many things to many people, yet specific enough to galvanize action in a particular direction’, can be a serious catalyst for a movement (Smucker et al., 2012: 234). Maintaining a degree of ambiguity means that ‘observers can pour almost any meaning or desire’ into the signifier (Smucker et al., 2012: 234). In this way, the enlistment of a ‘well-crafted floating signifier can be a powerful tool for catalysing broad-based action’, transforming potential conflict into agreement and ‘[h]itherto disparate groups [...] into a powerful aligned force’ (Smucker et al., 2012: 234–235).

But even floating signifiers are not entirely open. Cultures do not make use of the full range of meaning potentials (Gusfield, 1989: 16). Each signifier is
embedded in a cultural rhetoric and entails a 'moral vocabulary' that 'furnishes participants with value-laden themes and narrative formulae capable of endowing claims with memorably expressed significance' (Ibarra and Kitsuse, 2003: 27). Particular signifiers encourage particular emphases, constructions along some lines and not others. Every portrayal (including my own) involves, in Burke's terms, a series of 'reflection[s]', 'selection[s]' and ultimately 'deflection[s]' of certain segments of reality (Burke, 1989: 115). At a cultural level, once this 'particular recipe of overstressings and understressings' becomes dominant, 'the tendency of the culture will be to see everything in [its] terms' (Burke, 1989: 173). The evocation of happiness places problems in a particular moral universe, a familiar universe in which emotions are located at the heart of social problems, imbued with unique explanatory power (Furedi, 2004: 24–25). These deflections and emphases, as I attempt to show in this and the subsequent chapter, can have consequences for how problems and their solutions are conceptualized, since how one defines a problem influences, and indeed often contains the seeds of, its solution.

The 'sign vehicle' through which nonetheless similar claims are articulated has not received unanimous agreement. As the problem traversed the path to institutionalization, a number of signifiers were utilized. Half of the articles sampled also used the term 'well-being'.2 Less commonly but nonetheless complementarily evoked signifiers include flourishing, eudaimonia (or eudemonia), hedonics, life satisfaction and quality of life. Different signifiers have a capacity to evoke aspects of a particular moral universe more than others, entailing their own 'recipe of emphases' and connotations. What makes signifiers and attendant rhetorical idioms distinctive is 'their capacity to clarify and evoke the ethos implicit in the claim' (Ibarra and Kitsuse, 2003: 27). 'They are not mainly concerned [...] with documenting the existence or magnitude of the condition-categories. Instead, their domain is that of moral reasoning' (Ibarra and Kitsuse, 2003: 27 emphasis removed). That is, the importance of a signifier is not its concrete signified but what it has the capacity to imply.

The rhetoric of happiness

While 'well-being' has been used throughout claims-making, it was 'happiness' behind which dedicated claims-makers initially rallied. Martin Seligman and Richard Layard titled their initial books on the subject Authentic Happiness and Happiness: Lessons from a New Science, respectively. Layard's (2003b) Lionel
Robbins Memorial lectures prominently featured happiness as did the title of his lengthy essay in the *New Statesman* published at the same time. *Amazon* lists a mere 266 books with happiness in the title published in the year 2000; by 2010 that number had reached 2000. By comparison, only 133 books contained well-being in the title in 2000, increasing modestly to 289 by 2010. Happiness has also appeared in large bolded letters on the covers of *Time* (2006, 2013), the *New Scientist* (2011a; 2011b) and *The Economist* (2006), among others. Its prominence attests to its rhetorical advantages including a broad appeal, historical, radical and utopian connotations and capacity to depoliticize. But, it is also plagued by shortcomings which have been targeted by critics as well as claims-makers themselves.

The first of these offerings is the most obvious. Happiness shares a rhetorical advantage with other floating signifiers such as ‘hope’ or ‘freedom*: their positive valence promotes acceptance and affirmation even if people may not necessarily agree on their contents. Happiness evokes an ultimate, if vague, sense of ‘good* and benefits from intuitive familiarity. Introducing Layard’s claims on the topic, one advocate writes, ‘It is so obvious that happiness is what we want that very few people bother to say it’ (Hutton, *The Observer*: 2003). Seligman claims that the book title *Authentic Happiness* was at the behest of a publisher who thought ‘happiness* would resonate more than ‘positive psychology* (Seligman, 2011). Indeed, in spite of efforts to shift to different signifiers, its emphasis continues in media discussions. One article begins by proclaiming that ‘Happiness (or in academic-speak, “subjective wellbeing”) matters’ (Le Fanu, *The Sunday Telegraph*: 2011). Journalists even sometimes override claims-makers’ attempts to use different signifiers. For instance, one journalist, interviewing economist Alan Krueger during which ‘He preferred to speak about “subjective wellbeing” [...] because “happiness sounds a bit frivolous”*, concludes, ‘Oh for goodness’ sake, Professor, cheer up’ (Harford, *The Sunday Times*: 2009).

Resonance is essential if claims-makers wish to gain acceptance or at least avoid resistance for their claims. Indeed, this ‘well-crafted* floating signifier and perhaps equally agreeable attendant idiom that ‘money can’t buy happiness* has been so successful in fostering consensus that they have produced some unintentional convergences. It is not only Conservative leader David Cameron who states that ‘so much of our modern globalised consumer culture ultimately seems unsatisfying* and that it is time we focused on ‘what makes people happy* (Kettle and Wintour, *The Guardian*: 2006). Similar claims have been forwarded on the far left. The headline of an article by the Marxist thinker Nina Power reads, ‘Happiness has been consumed by capitalism* followed by the lead: ‘We
have been coerced into thinking about quality of life in terms of possessions — it’s time to rediscover those things we value’ (Power, The Guardian Unlimited: 2011). Indeed, even banking slogans and anarchist graffiti have unintentionally echoed one another. In 2005, Citibank Greece published a press release declaring, ‘Η ευτυχία γράφεται με E όχι με €’ (‘Happiness is written with an E not €’), citing research carried out by the company showing that people valued more highly their quality of life and preferred to focus on the people and things that made them happy (Citibank, 2005). Several years later, and apparently innocent of its usage in the banking sector, the same slogan would be scrawled across walls in central Athens as the country spiralled into financial crisis.

This broad appeal means that happiness is not only the name of a problem which represents the exclusive focus of claims-makers, but is also a rhetorical warrant for a range of other issues. That is, for many claims-makers, happiness answers the question, 'Why should people care about my problem?' In promoting a focus on happiness, Layard puts it tellingly: 'Everyone is concerned with avoiding poverty, ill health, conflict and enslavement. But these things are nothing but versions of unhappiness. So what we're all really concerned with, although we might be afraid of the simplicity of the term, is happiness' (Simons, The Times: 2010). Like the rhetoric of rights (Best, 2008: 36), happiness is a value most can endorse, even where there might otherwise be opposition. Couched in scientific rhetoric, it becomes a warrant for action with which it is difficult to disagree.

Second, happiness has perhaps unique rhetorical offerings not possessed by signifiers of more recent coinage such as 'subjective well-being' in that it evokes a sense of utopia and history. Indeed, many claims-makers embrace the label of utopianism, seeing happiness as providing the 'grand vision' that politics had been lacking. Layard evokes the 'noble philosophy of the Enlightenment' and forwards a grand sounding vision in which 'every human being wants to be happy, and everybody counts equally' (Layard, The Guardian: 2009). Similarly, an editorial asks:

But what better time to resurrect important utilitarian principles in an age in which retribution retains a higher priority than rehabilitation in penal affairs, in which fundamental liberties have rarely been so severely curtailed, and in which modern neuroscience can demonstrate that Bentham was right? (The Guardian: 2003)

Another article describes a two-day forum on happiness held in France in which proceedings opened with a talk by an environmentalist and a historian on the topic of utopia. 'The big problem in our societies is that the spirit of
Utopia is diminishing*, one speaker laments (Sage, *The Times*: 2010). For another commentator, happiness offers a grand vision for society in place of ‘the Gradgrind managerialism and target-toting* of previous political projects (Bunting, *The Guardian*: 2007). Another reasons:

Why do those nice things keep slipping through our fingers, despite the affluence and freedom of our societies? As old narratives about class, or religion or race subside, this narrative about happiness as the ultimate goal for our society gains in clarity. (Walter, *The Guardian*: 2005)

The quotable phrases of the American Declaration of Independence act as a potent reminder that happiness once played a significant role in rhetoric of revolutions past. The rhetoric of happiness thus allows claims-makers to evoke a revolutionary spirit and sense of bringing purpose and meaning to political questions that might otherwise seem dry and ‘out of touch’ with everyday experience. The centralization and personalization of the concept reduces issues to the lowest common denominator, connecting with people at the level of the individual body and mind. Yet, it does so while painting a picture of large-scale social change. This personalization of utopia resonates with the prevalent rejection of totalizing narratives and a time when social change is more comfortably seen as a corollary of personal change. It echoes the 'be the change' mentality heard everywhere from American President Barack Obama to refrigerator magnets distributed by Oxfam and placards at protest marches. Since market society is the only society possible, radical claims frequently amount to insulating individuals from its ostensibly polluting effects. The previously excerpted quote from Oliver James also illustrates this easy movement from macro-level structural critique to changes at the individual level:

> We have become a wannabe nation, we want what we haven't got – we expect more and feel entitled to it. This is a consequence of advanced capitalism – economic growth means everybody being dissatisfied with what they've got. [...] Therapy can be very useful, it's definitely an anti-capitalist device. The net result of it is to be clearer about how you, with your own personal history, fit in and can best take advantage of the wonderful opportunities that new technology gives. (Lacey, *The Independent*: 1998)

Finally, happiness also has the key advantage of subtly depoliticizing issues communicated through its rhetoric. In a broader context of depoliticization, myth, or ‘depoliticised speech’ (Barthes, 1980), flourishes. Both drawn from and adding to a therapeutic system of meaning, happiness reinvigorates extant cultural myths which posit the present as the outcome of our (static) human
nature. According to Barthes (1980: 142), ‘Myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal’. Therapeutic knowledge often utilizes a scientistic or ‘nominalizing grammar’ (Halliday, 2004: viii) to describe the ‘true’ nature of human beings. In doing so, it transforms dynamic subjects into static objects, holding the world ‘still’ while ‘it is observed, experimented with, measured and reasoned about’ (Halliday, 2004: 21). While this approach has served the natural sciences well, when applied to human beings, it has the effect of negating the motion of history and human affairs. Such discourse ‘sets itself apart as a discourse of the expert, readily becoming a language of power and technocratic control’ (Halliday, 2004: 95). In this way, the happiness myth transforms political questions into mere technocratic issues requiring expert solutions. Social issues are rendered beyond the scope of political debate. If their solutions are to be found in nature, there is no room for debate and no sense in opposition, and this is simply ‘the way we are’.

As political ideologies of the past have waned and the vocabulary available to those seeking to engage the public has narrowed, therapeutic knowledge offers a morally neutral means of engaging with the broadest possible audience. “This is the age of “micropolitics”. Politics has adopted the language of technocracy and presents itself through a depoliticised language of managerialism’ (Furedi, 2004: 54). It is not about what is good or bad; it is about what the ‘evidence’ says. Happiness rhetoric offers the ability to reach beyond mere ideology and belief, providing a depoliticized and scientistic means of pointing to the ‘good’.

Its inherent agreeability also performs a depoliticizing function, reducing potentially complicated phenomena to a ‘core’ essence of ‘mutual understanding’ in a way that makes it difficult to conceive of how issues might be debated (Zizek, 2010: 6). Yet, it is in precisely what is backgrounded, rendered ‘unspeakable’ and therefore ‘untouchable’, where the potentially polarizing phenomena at the heart of traditional divisive politics were once located. As Sotirakopoulos and Rootes (2014) describe with reference to the London Occupy movement, commonly upheld values of ‘equality’ and ‘democracy’ were successful in uniting a disparate population, but so vague that they failed to produce a common project. ‘Equality and democracy were principles to which no one could easily object. Yet it remains unclear what exactly equality meant. In what form, for whom and in what terms: economic, legislative, social? Who would deliver this equality?’ (Sotirakopoulos and Rootes, 2014: 173). In spite of the use of positive signifiers, what the protestors held in common was a ‘negative consensus’ in that they opposed a common enemy (largely government officials and the ‘troika’); ‘democracy’ and ‘equality’ remained for the most part unelaborated goals.
While not denying the possibility of mediation between groups, the emphasis upon broad agreeability, the desire to develop a discourse suitable to the undifferentiated 'mass' obscures difference and potential clashes within and between interests. "[H]ow much space for consensus exists between a proletariat youth and a petite bourgeoisie whose relative prosperity needs the exploitation of labour?" (Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulos, 2013: 452–453). Similarly, few would accept stagnating growth if it means stagnating wages or difficulty finding a job, but at a higher level of abstraction, surely everyone would agree that 'money can't buy happiness', or that 'economic growth' seems a more banal goal for humanity than 'happiness'. But, the 'background noise', taken for granted and obscured by such rhetoric, are the market relations that sustain such ideals. For Zizek, this is the dog that did not bark in the night, conspicuous by its absence. It is the unspoken 'violence which sustains the public face of law and order' (Zizek, 2010: 5). The glossing over of this complexity and potential disagreeability, according to Zizek (2010: 5), is the 'very core of utopian dreaming'.

Ironically, it is precisely those things that give happiness its appeal that also contain some of its crucial disadvantages. For all the attempts to place happiness in a moral and communal universe (see next chapter), it is clear early on that it tends to evoke a sense of individualism that claims-makers attempt to criticize. For instance, one argues:

Positive emotions rarely survive the events that prompted them; nor do we want to feel good all the time. A life of unremitting cheerfulness is one of delusion, for it refuses to acknowledge normal ups and downs. By emphasising pleasure, the psychologists turn happiness into something self-regarding: mere accumulation of pleasure and avoidance of pain. (Schoch, The Daily Telegraph: 2006b)

Yet, a great deal of effort is actually expended in setting happiness apart from connotations of hedonism and mere 'pleasure seeking'. One claims-maker attempts to dispel such 'misconceptions' about positive psychology stating:

In the US, perhaps, there is still a greater emphasis on individual growth – qualities such as optimism or personal success. […] But in the UK, the focus is really on the social context. There's a far greater interest in wellbeing and communities. (Wilson, The Observer: 2010)

Happiness conjures forth images of momentary pleasures, which for many claims-makers is not enough.

Moreover, the common sense nature of happiness means not only that everyone can agree, but also that many have their own ideas about its meaning and importance. This gives rise to a degree of unease about professional and
political pronouncements on such intimate aspects of life. Although much of the claim to expertise is affirmed, one type of criticism observed in the sample was not a fully articulated critique but rather uncertainty about these boundaries. "I'm from the Government and I'm here to make you happy." Now that is scary, one commentator writes (Whyte, *The Times*: 2006). However, once 'happiness' gained a foothold, using signifiers more removed from everyday usage allowed many claims-makers to circumvent this problem.

Like many successful social problems, happiness began to fall victim to its popularity. As media attention began to increase, there is an observable backlash. An author laments, 'The idea that if you just reiterate the word enough and we'll all cheer up is preposterous' (Jeffries, *The Guardian*: 2006). 'Happiness: Enough Already' a headline in *Newsweek* reads (Begley, *Newsweek*: 2008). Best (1999: 45) observes that 'Every news story runs its course; [...] interest in the topic seems to die down; what once seemed novel becomes "old news", boring; and coverage shifts to a different topic'. However, a crucial advantage of issue ownership is that claims-makers can refresh claims, reinvigorate them by presenting new angles, expand the domain of the issue or link it to current events and greatly increase the likelihood not only that the problem will be recognized, but that solutions will be enacted. Recourse to different signifiers is one way of achieving many of these aims.

The rhetoric of well-being, flourishing and eudaimonia

Where happiness falls short, claims-makers draw on additional semiotic resources including well-being, eudaimonia and flourishing. Many who had formerly championed happiness even begin to expressly reject it in favour of one or a selection of these, most commonly well-being. Well-being offers many of the same advantages but moves beyond happiness on a number of fronts. Most notably, it expands the domain of influence to encompass more extensive spheres of human experience, and where happiness can seem personal and frivolous, well-being seems more successful in entrenching its signifieds as an expert domain. Increased usage is evident in sampled articles beginning in 2006 and 2007, when over half contained the keyword (50 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively). Indeed, it was the National *Well-being* Programme that institutionalized claims as key objectives of public policy. Unsurprisingly, in 2010, 72 per cent of articles sampled contained the term 'well-being'. Yet, while appearances of the keyword well-being increased from an average of 0.86 per
article in 2003 to 1.62 in 2010, happiness still appeared an average of 6.75 times per article in 2010.

Most of these uses are complementary or even interchangeable, often reflecting an attempt to avoid repetition. This is also true when considering general uses in the Nexis database not included among social problem claims copied to the NVivo research database. For instance, one author, reflecting on her daughter, asks, 'Who else could love her so unfailingly, or be as devoted to her wellbeing and happiness?' (Fine, *The Daily Telegraph*: 2001).

In problematized discourses, the vast majority uses happiness and well-being in the same mutually reinforcing manner. An article from 2001 explains that economists are finally able to talk about 'happiness' because 'they now have reliable data on people's sense of well-being and life satisfaction going back 30 years' (Bunting, *The Guardian*: 2001). Another describes a study in which 'Members of the group, who meditated for 14 hours over an eight-week period, exhibited a dramatic increase in levels of activity in the prefrontal cortex, the region of the brain that is most commonly associated with wellbeing and happiness' (Marsh, *The Times*: 2004). Well-being is often used to refer to something broader than happiness, but it is also used in a mutually reinforcing manner, both symbolically reflecting the 'good'.

Where the signifier happiness tends to connote a narrow concern with individual 'good feeling', well-being intervenes to bridge the divide. Like happiness, it also acts to align with the 'good', but its additional inclusion of 'being' and 'wellness' offers referents that are potentially far more variable than what happiness has etymologically become and seems to allow. One can speak of the economic well-being of society, but less of economic 'happiness'.

It becomes possible to claim that one should not simply be happy, but that happiness comes from 'being good'. Well-being is frequently forwarded as a more robust concept, but it supersedes happiness in its ability to 'float' above a greater diversity of phenomena. It more comfortably accommodates issues from macro concerns of national or community well-being to individual attitudes and behaviours.

Including greater expanses of phenomena under the umbrella of the problem allows claims-makers to continually assert their claims' importance, maximizing those affected and potential bases of support and interest. Whereas many claims using happiness indices are confined to statements about 'stagnant' rates of happiness, using well-being allows for a sense of decline and deterioration. As one article claims, 'young people's wellbeing has declined over time, reflected in an increase in mental health problems, drug use and suicide' (Ward, *The Guardian*: 2007). A worsening situation warrants swift action. In this way, new
terms maintain an interest in the problem, overcoming the propensity for claims to seem ‘stale’ and boring over time.

Flourishing and eudaimonia offer further opportunities for expanding and renewing claims. Flourishing materializes early on in the UK sample. At first, it emphasizes the capabilities happiness is claimed to unlock and is often used without further elaboration. One article explains, ‘happiness is a powerful ally in the prevention and remedy of physical and psychological problems, as well as better enabling us to thrive and flourish on all major fronts’ (The Times, 2003). Another describing positive psychology states: ‘It turned the traditional discipline on its head by focusing on how people flourish rather than how they become depressed’ (Hoggard, The Independent on Sunday: 2005). Over time, however, they are increasingly used to claim for a ‘deeper’ conceptualization of happiness and superficiality of current understandings. For instance, a British ‘management thinker’ explains his preference for Aristotle’s ‘eudaimonia’: ‘It is usually translated as happiness, but that is a bad translation. It is not a state of mind or being, it is an activity. It is better translated as flourishing – doing your best with what you are best at’ (Lewis, The Times: 2006). ‘Our modern idea of happiness is rather thin, says another claims-maker also drawing on Aristotle; happiness is about ‘well-doing and wellbeing, flourishing, satisfaction and achievement’ (Hoggard, The Independent on Sunday: 2005).

Although not all claims-makers specifically point to Aristotle, the origins of these terms and affinity to each other are nonetheless clear. While the conventional translation of the Greek eudaimonia used by Aristotle in his Nichomachean Ethics had been ‘happiness’, by the late nineteenth century English writers had begun to argue that contemporary meanings attached to ‘happiness’ would not do justice to Aristotle’s conceptualization. Hence, the moral philosopher Henry Sidgwick charged other English writers of his time with misleading readers by translating eudaimonia into a concept ‘consisting of mere “Pleasures” or “Enjoyments”’ (Sidgwick, 1981: 92). Another translator, W. D. Ross, observes that ‘happiness’ is an unsuitable translation, pointing to Aristotle’s insistence that ‘eudaimonia is a kind of activity’ and suggesting ‘well-being’ as a ‘more non-committal translation’ (Ross, 1959: 186). Cooper (1975: 85) substituted ‘flourishing’ for ‘happiness’ in his translation, arguing that ‘flourishing implies the possession and use of one’s mature powers over […] a considerable period of time, during which, moreover, the future looks bright’ and is a term ‘fit to bear the weight of Aristotle’s treatment of eudaimonia as the fulfilment of the natural capacities of the human species’.

In a 2001 review of the already burgeoning literature on well-being, Ryan and Deci distinguish between two discernible strands of research, the first
pertaining to what they call 'hedonism', or the 'view that wellbeing consists of pleasure or happiness', and a second pertaining to 'eudaimonism' or the 'view that wellbeing consists of more than just happiness', expanding to include 'fulfilling or realizing one's daimon or true nature' (2001: 143). Seven years later, the _Journal of Happiness Studies_ produced a special issue on the two approaches introduced by Deci and Ryan (2008) who argue that the hedonic version of wellbeing had been receiving undue attention. According to the authors, the hedonic perspective's emphasis upon 'subjective well-being' as discerned from self-report studies leaves open the possibility that although people may report being happy or 'positively affected and satisfied', it 'does not necessarily mean that they are psychologically well' (Deci and Ryan, 2008: 2). By contrast, the eudaimonic perspective moves beyond 'just' happiness to subsume a wider range of human affect and activity into a broadened understanding of 'well-being and human flourishing' (Deci and Ryan, 2008: 2, 9).

Following this special issue, Oprah Winfrey's magazine 'O' carried an article which asked readers to '[p]icture happiness' before going on to point out that the 'peaceful soul sitting in a field of daisies' they might have envisioned may be less significant than what 'researchers now believe' to be more important – namely 'eudaimonic well-being' or 'striving toward excellence based on one's unique talents and potential', which 'Aristotle considered [...] to be the noblest goal in life' (LeBlanc, 2008). A psychologist interviewed for the article, Richard J. Davidson, further elaborated that eudaimonic well-being is 'more robust and satisfying than hedonic happiness' adding that it 'engages different parts of the brain' (LeBlanc, 2008).

With their claim to ancient roots and potential signifieds spreading beyond affect to more encompassing notions of the 'good life', eudaimonia and flourishing expand the domain of claims and offer a greater sense of moral and conceptual depth. Their advantage lies precisely in their ability to reach beyond what Ryan and Deci felt the need to repeat in both reviews, 'just happiness' (Ryan and Deci, 2001: 143; Deci and Ryan, 2008: 2, emphasis added). Concepts such as 'eudaimonic well-being' more easily accommodate bodily health, behaviours, interpersonal relationships, beliefs and activities. Indeed, contributors to the aforementioned special edition operationalized the concept as: personal growth, autonomy, self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery and positive relationships (Ryff and Singer, 2008: 20–23); '[pursuing] intrinsic goals and values for their own sake including personal growth, relationships, community, and health, rather than extrinsic goals and values, such as wealth, fame, image, and power', behaving autonomously, being mindful, and 'behaving in ways that
satisfy basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan et al., 2008: 139). Martin Seligman chose to name his latest book on the topic *Flourish* (2011), expressing 'detest' for the word happiness 'which is so overused as to be almost meaningless' (Seligman, 2011: 9). Where Seligman's previous 'Authentic Happiness Theory' (by his own description) measured and aimed to increase 'life satisfaction', his new 'Well-Being Theory' includes 'positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment' (Seligman, 2011: 12). Claims thus expand beyond psychological feelings of wellness to encompass more and more aspects of individual and social life. It becomes not enough to feel good (or to think one feels good) as this does not necessarily mean that one is mentally or morally well.

These signifiers also overcome the tendency for happiness claims to seem to overstep boundaries by furnishing claims-makers with terms more removed from common parlance. Figure 9.1 shows common modifiers of well-being identified in the sample. Once identified, searches were carried out in the broader research database, with results also shown.

The most common of these, general well-being (or 'GWB'), quickly spread after its usage by David Cameron at a Google Zeitgeist conference in 2006. In the since oft-quoted speech, Cameron states: 'It's time we admitted that there's more to life than money, and it's time we focused not just on GDP, but on GWB – general well-being' (*The Guardian*, 2006). Aside from representing a crucial turning point for the problem and its position on the political agenda, Cameron's comparison of GDP to GWB gives the latter a technical character at the same time as it speaks to values with which most people can agree. GDP can seem

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**Figure 9.1** Modifiers of well-being in research database

![Diagram of well-being modifiers](image-url)
The Rhetoric of Happiness

impersonal and cold, but, as Cameron puts it, ‘Well-being can’t be measured by money or traded in markets. [...] It’s about the beauty of our surroundings, the quality of our culture, and above all the strength of our relationships’ (The Guardian, 2006). GWB, if not measurable in money, ostensibly nonetheless measurable in its own terms, seems more personal and connects with people’s everyday sensibilities about the important things in life. At the same time, it gives a technical flavour to what might otherwise seem a trespassing, particularly by a Conservative minister, into the personal lives of the electorate.

Claims-makers seem well aware that ‘happiness’ is vulnerable to the charge of being ‘gimmicky’, shallow and devoid of content. Indeed, many criticisms have not been detailed attacks, but somewhat flippant rejections, for instance referring to ‘happiness classes’ as ‘Labour’s latest gimmick’ (Griffiths, The Sunday Times: 2007), or describing a ‘Shangri-La primary school report’ from the ‘Office for Happiness in Education (OfHed)’ which concludes by formally subjecting the school to a ‘Notice to Cheer Up’ (Harcombe, The Guardian: 2008). The use of less ‘frivolous’ sounding signifiers lends the crusade a scientific veneer. As rallying cries for a movement, these signifiers fall flat. But that is not their role. They function to evoke an implicit ethos – that this is something that matters, but also something that requires know-how and technical expertise.

Decoupling wealth from well-being

Although most claims use happiness and well-being interchangeably, where a splitting between well-being and happiness does occur is in positing a contradiction between material well-being and happiness. Increasingly, objective material well-being is downplayed in favour of an essentially inward-oriented conceptualization. For example, in 2002, an accountant and writer is quoted as advising, ‘If you can keep people at a point of reasonable satisfaction, there isn’t a lot of evidence to suggest that material wellbeing adds to happiness’ (MacErlean, The Observer: 2002). Another states that the ‘fundamental disappointment of modern life’ is ‘the discovery that satisfaction of our desires for comfort, safety and material well-being do not reliably lead to personal well-being’ (Connor, The Independent: 2003). Like happiness, well-being is increasingly isolated from and even posited as antithetical to material signifieds. Eudaimonia and flourishing play a similar role in this decoupling but have deeper roots, not, for the present purposes, in Greek philosophy, but in rising doubts about the possibilities of wealth and progress.

To begin with, it is notable that claims-makers should express a preference for Aristotle’s eudaimonia, a conceptualization of perfection, a ‘natural end’ that,
while one may progress towards it, is essentially the realization of a fixed or stationary ideal (Passmore, 2000: 9). For Aristotle, anything that is in the process of ‘perfecting’ cannot be perfect; that which is perfect is ‘complete’ (Tatarkiewicz, 1979: 7). Both Aristotle and later Thomas Aquinas saw ‘becoming perfect’ as the realization of the inherent potentiality of a thing, the actualization of a ‘perfect’ condition ‘in which it can rest’ (Passmore, 2000: 11). Yet, part of the progressive force of modernity, or at least reflective of it, was the gradual movement away from perfection as an absolute ideal towards an incremental and unlimited ‘perfectibility’ (Passmore, 2000: 241). Hence, William Godwin was able to write that ‘perfectible’ meant not ‘capable of being brought to perfection’, but ‘being continually made better and receiving perpetual improvement’ (Passmore, 2000: 241). Something that is ‘perfect’ would cease to improve; thus, the ‘paradox’ that ‘the greatest perfection is imperfection’ (Tatarkiewicz, 1980: 77). True perfection, philosophers began to reason, is ‘ceaseless’ and depends upon progress (Tatarkiewicz, 1980: 77). ‘If the world were so perfect that it did not leave room for new things, it would lack the greatest perfection: thus, if it were perfect, it would not be perfect’ (Tatarkiewicz, 1980: 77).

As H. G. Wells pointed out in 1905, utopias of his time were no longer the ‘perfect static states’ of classical antiquity, but ‘kinetic’, taking shape ‘as a hopeful stage leading to a long ascent of stages’ (Passmore, 2000: 260). But, the later twentieth century would see dystopias flourish as never before (Passmore, 2000: 421). Enlightenment ideals of rationality and progress enjoy far less validation than previous centuries; today, the Enlightenment belief in inevitable and unending improvement is likely to be deemed naïve, misguided or even dangerous by the liberally minded (Furedi, 2014: 3). Where, for example, the Young or ‘Left’ Hegelians (and later ‘scientific socialists’) had excitedly cultivated the revolutionary seed of Hegel’s contrast between the ‘endless reproduction’ of nature and the progressiveness of mankind in its search for ‘perfectibility’ (Meikle, 1985: 33–34), as well as his notion of the world ‘as a complex of processes’ (Engels, 1941: 44), of endless ‘becoming’, today there is a pervasive desire to halt this ceaseless movement. The yearning for ‘eudaimonia’ is a yearning for a return to happiness, not in what will be or is ‘becoming’, but in simply ‘being’. And not, of course, without good reason. If the First World War was enough to shake ‘the faith in men and, more particularly, in intellectuals’ (Passmore, 2000: 419), then the ensuing decades were sufficient to deal the ‘perfectibilist’ imagination its fatal blows. Thus, for anyone wishing to reinstate the ‘spirit of utopia’, it must be done in imagination, an ideal smoothing out of contradictions that cannot be worked out in reality.
A century of war and boom and bust seems to give rise to a sense of exhaustion, a sense that progress is unpredictable and destabilizing, and a desire to ‘rest’. As a 2003 column concludes: ‘Economies grow, GDP swells, but once above abject poverty, it makes no difference to citizens’ well-being. What is all this extra money for if it is now proved beyond doubt not to deliver greater happiness, nationally or individually?’ (Toynbee, 2003). The hypocrisy of Thailand’s King Bhumibok Adulej, ‘one of the world’s richest royals’, in advocating a ‘Sufficiency Economy’ and a ‘careful step backwards’ for his people, in spite of his own considerable wealth, is pardoned by Thin (2012: 136) on the basis that he truly ‘wants his citizens to be economic downshifters and eudaimonic upshifters’. In this view, the idea that the poor should ever desire to be kings is apparently not a ‘reasonable’ aspiration to be ‘cultivated’; such aspirations must be ‘managed’ by advocating spiritual fulfilment instead of material fulfilment (Thin, 2012: 135). To contemporary ears, these ideas may seem leftist. Yet, they are precisely contrary to the aspirations once espoused by radicals: ‘[T]o recommend thrift to the poor is both grotesque and insulting. It is like advising a man who is starving to eat less,’ wrote Oscar Wilde in his famous essay *The Soul of Man under Socialism*. ‘Why should they be grateful for the crumbs that fall from the rich man’s table? They should be seated at the board, and are beginning to know it’ (Wilde, 2007: 1043). No longer is the battle cry ‘more than all the people can consume’ as suffragette and socialist Sylvia Pankhurst wrote in 1923,10 but ‘Enough!'; development and progress have come to be defined in subjective terms, not as ‘satisfaction’ of expanding needs, but ‘satisficing’ with what is.

Indeed, the affinity of Aristotle’s conceptualization of eudaimonia with these cultural preoccupations is also evident in the oft-repeated claim that he rejected wealth as an aim of the ‘good life’. The exaltation of eudaimonia as a ‘higher’ form of happiness is thus, as Ahmed (2010: 12) also points out, recognizably ‘bourgeois’ (Ahmed, 2010: 12). She continues:

We could even say that expressions of horror about contemporary cultures of happiness involve a class horror that happiness is too easy, too accessible, and too fast. We just have to remember that the model of the good life within classical Greek philosophy was based on an exclusive concept of life: only some had the life that enabled one to achieve a good life, a life that involved self-ownership, material security, and leisure time. […] The classical concept of the good life relied on a political economy: some people have to work to give others the time to pursue the good life, the time, as it were, to flourish. Arguably, such a political economy is essential rather than incidental to the actualization of the possibility of living a virtuous life. (Ahmed, 2010: 12–13)
According to Furedi (2014: 2), ‘Today, hostility to materialism or consumer culture or rationalism is stridently communicated by post-modernist intellectuals, consumer rights campaigners, anti-capitalists, environmentalists or conservative activists’. No longer the sole preserve of the environmentalist lobby, the destructiveness of ‘so-called’ progress has become a widely held belief; progress has come to be conceptualized as damaging to the planet and to the human soul.

Eudaimonia, well-being and flourishing have been enlisted as sign-vehicles for this subtle redefinition for a long time. Prior to their materialization in UK public debate, they had been influential in international development policy, most notably through the influence of Nobel Prize winning economist Amartya Sen. Sen’s approach questions ‘GNP or technical progress or industrialisation’ as the ‘defining characteristics of development’ advocating instead the development of human capabilities and ‘well-being’, the conceptualization of which is partly influenced by Martha Nussbaum’s discussion of ‘the Aristotelian account of the human good’ and human ‘flourishing’ (Sen, 2001: 285, 73, 24). The first United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report published in 1990, on which Sen worked, draws on Aristotle while discussing the inadequacy of ‘GNP’ as the sole measure of wealth and goes on to say that ‘Aristotle argued for seeing “the difference between a good political arrangement and a bad one” in terms of its successes and failures in facilitating people’s ability to lead “flourishing lives”’ (UNDP, 1990: 9). The twentieth anniversary edition of the Report, published in 2010, which acknowledges a debt to Sen for providing concepts that would inform 20 years of reports, defines well-being as ‘flourishing’ and stresses income as ‘an inadequate measure of the full array of human flourishing’ (UNDP, 2010: iv, 22, 23).

The rise of these signifiers parallels a shift in development goals away from expansion and generalization of wealth towards sustainability and ‘human security’ (Pender, 2001, 2002; Pupavac, 2010, 2013). Over the past two decades, therapeutic well-being has begun to displace universal prosperity as the goal of international development policy (Pupavac, 2008). That the usage of these signifiers often goes hand in hand with a subtle decoupling of wealth from well-being is evidenced in their adoption by the World Bank, most notably in their Voices of the Poor report (Narayan et al., 2000). As Pupavac (2008: 185) observes, although the report conceptualizes well-being as ‘material well-being, physical well-being, social well-being, security, and freedom of choice and action’, the contribution of these to ‘states of mind as well as body, in personal psychological experiences of well-being’ is foregrounded. Indeed, it ‘champions the idea that
the goal of development should not be wealth but well-being, and repeatedly downplays the significance of material prosperity in favour of 'non-material aspects of well-being' (Pupavac, 2008: 185).

The World Bank was particularly open to emphasizing well-being over wealth after a decade of failure and facing deep challenges to its legitimacy from both inside and out (Pender, 2001). Early international health policy had taken the relationship between development and attendant improvements in health and other areas for granted. Development, conceived of as modernization, was also desirable in face of fears about alignment with the Soviet Union and the growth of the non-aligned movement. However, rapid industrialization in Asia had occurred largely contra World Bank policies and countries that had followed its advice in exchange for aid had failed to see sustained levels of growth and in many places had actually regressed (Pender, 2001: 402). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and failing pro-growth policies, today the desire to downplay the benefits of growth and economic progress is rational. The World Bank has since moved away from its widely criticized 'structural adjustments' to an official focus on poverty reduction, coinciding with the broader movement away from the goal of development and universal prosperity to basic needs approaches (Pupavac, 2008).

The mobilization of well-being in service of this shift was a key part of its legitimization. Subjective indicators are frequently promoted as a grass-roots-led, bottom-up approach. For example, Thin (2012) emphasizes 'the importance of understanding progress by looking at subjective experiences and listening to subjective evaluations rather than relying mainly on expert-driven "objective" measures like money, physical resources, and bodily health.' However, as would later transpire in the United Kingdom, the shift towards well-being had occurred long before advocates sought to enlist the support and approval of the public. For instance, *The Voices of the Poor* report claimed that the poor were calling for a reconceptualization of development to focus on well-being. It repeatedly highlighted low expectations and celebrated the modest aspirations of poor interviewees. Yet, as Pender (2002: 104) describes:

> [...] the research agenda was not set by the participants. Rather, it was predetermined by World Bank staff and the study researchers. For example, the theme of well-being was one of four predetermined aspects of inquiry. The researchers had decided to explore the theme of well-being by asking the participants for their ideas about security, risk, vulnerability, opportunities, social exclusion, crime and conflict. Researchers noted the difficulty of adequately conveying terms such as these to people who were not fully conversant with the
latest Western intellectual buzzwords. The participants were not even directly asked whether they regarded more income as integral to determining their well-being.

It should be little surprising that many of these claims achieved salience in quarters closely connected to the material base of society, amongst economists whose job it is to attempt to understand the broader workings of the capitalist economy. While the ability to expand and generalize wealth was once one of capitalism's key claims to legitimacy, in the face of stagnation and little challenge from economic alternatives, their receptiveness to this decoupling was sensible. As discussed in Chapter 4, insider claims-makers can go directly to affecting policy, but they can launch secondary media campaigns for political reasons. Since the problematization of wealth through the rhetoric of well-being was discovered by insiders, they did not have to campaign those in power to take their claims on. Rather, it happened in the opposite way, the shift away from universal prosperity to basic needs approaches was already underway; legitimacy was sought from the 'bottom-up' after the fact.

Although it may be possible to search out grass-roots meanings for particular signifiers already politicized, this should not be taken to mean that politicization itself is bottom-up. As Million (2013) describes in a study of discourses of 'trauma' amongst First Nations peoples, in spite of continuous invitations for indigenous peoples to 'speak their truths' about past suffering and injustice, 'trauma' was not a signifier chosen by indigenous peoples to characterize their experiences and demands. Indeed, the trauma frame, 'disbursed at local levels [...] can foreclose other kinds of storytelling, other tropes, other kinds of knowledge the community can and wishes to produce' (Million, 2013: 76-77). The strategy of imputing insider agendas with outsider legitimacy gives the misleading impression that claims have originated from affected groups themselves, when they may even be contrary to that group's interests. Indeed, as Million (2013) points out, narratives of victimhood and vulnerability, while successful in gaining a hearing on national and international stages for indigenous issues, actually served to undermine long-standing claims to self-determination, inviting greater surveillance of victims, not perpetrators.

While people may experience traumas, happiness or a sense of well-being, it does not follow that these are the narratives they might have chosen to articulate their demands. But, positioning these as the common ground on which to proceed makes it difficult for those who might have otherwise opposed the aims of claims-makers to conceive of ways to articulate their own goals. And therein
lies much of their rhetorical appeal. Placing agreeable signifiers at the forefront of communications deflects attention from areas of potential disagreement. Ultimately, the contemporary outlook, as Pupavac observes, 'essentially seeks to improve people's sense of well-being in the absence of material transformation by reforming the subjectivity of populations' (Pupavac, 2005: 163). The end result of the promotion of 'romantic ideals of spiritual well-being against material affluence' is to legitimize and naturalize the status quo (Pupavac, 2013: 141).
Two important questions guiding this study concern what precisely is claimed about happiness and how these claims come to prevail. Recall that successful claims are those that tend to be repeated again and again and come to form the truth about what happiness is or ought to be and form the basis of claims for how people, and even the world, ought to be changed on behalf of this knowledge. In this chapter, I attempt to give an 'inventory' of the most frequently repeated claims identified in the sample described in the previous chapter. I have sorted these claims according to their construction of the 'grounds' or identification of problematic conditions, 'warrants' for taking action and 'conclusions' for what should be done. The claims delineated here represent the most common claims repeated leading up to the institutionalization of the problem. Their ultimate success is in many ways indicative of a familiarity and comfort with conceiving of social problems, and the human beings affected by them, in these particular ways.

Grounds: The search for the signified

In the previous chapter, I discussed the signifiers claims-makers use to characterize and name the problem and the rhetorical offerings of communicating claims through the rhetoric of one signifier rather than another. As is the case across many social problems, happiness claims-makers typically avoid precise definitions, preferring 'floating' signifiers that have the potential to connect with the broadest possible audience and avoid delimiting the scope of the problem. However, for claims-makers, polysemy is dangerous – there is always the possibility that people will get it wrong. And indeed, this claim, that people have got the meanings behind happiness wrong, is one of the main grounds for the
problematization of happiness. Paradoxically, happiness is allowed to 'float', to appear 'empty' so as to connect with audiences' own visceral response or personal meanings, when its contents are actually foreclosed. Surely, 'everyone wants to be happy', but this claim is often followed with: 'most of us just don't know how to do it' (O'Connor, The Daily Telegraph: 2009). Hence, one commentator astutely warns, 'most of the happiness gurus don't mean what you mean by happiness at all. They want you to be the right sort of happy' (Finkelstein, The Times: 2009).

As with the polysemous rhetoric of images, the 'floating chain of signifieds' invoked by the rhetoric of happiness must be fixed; it has to be pinned down by expert knowledge to counter the 'terror of uncertain signs' (Barthes, 1977: 39). Every culture has its own ways of fixing meanings. In happiness discourses, this is accomplished by positing happiness as something different from everyday understandings (whatever these are claimed to be on the part of claims-makers) and difficult to acquire. In this way, apparently value-free 'facts' about happiness implicitly problematize lay understandings, knowledge and existing ways of functioning. This is commonly accomplished by positing the signified as both an exclusive, expert domain and a 'moral' set of activities.

The expert signified

While not positing precisely what happiness 'is', these claims attempt to create boundaries around the signified, setting it apart as an expert domain and above allegedly erroneous lay understandings. Where the use of particular signifiers discussed in the previous chapter simply connotes authority, these claims are their denotative counterpart. They explicitly state that happiness is not something everyday people understand. Indeed, their failure to do so is alleged to lie at the heart of many contemporary social problems. Table 10.1 shows the five most common claims denoting happiness as an expert domain.

As with moral claims, many of these imply the existence of a problem in the ostensible divergence between everyday understandings of happiness and those 'discovered' to be true by science. People expect that they will be happy when they get married and have children, for example, but actually, claims-makers allege, it is 'U-shaped' and they will be happier when they are old. That happiness is not something everyday people understand was a claim explicitly stated in nearly one out of every five articles sampled. This claim, that people are mistaken when it comes to what will or will not make them happy, forms the foundations on which conclusions for intervention are based. It becomes a gateway into the lives of those who are not ill and who might not otherwise see
Table 10.1 Claims for happiness as an expert domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim</th>
<th>Articles n = 100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happiness is not something everyday people understand/People</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frequently wrong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness can be measured</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterclaim – Happiness cannot be measured</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness is ‘U-shaped’ (life course)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness can/must be taught</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variation – Happiness is a skill</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterclaim – Happiness cannot be taught</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterclaim – Teaching happiness detracts from experience of happiness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness is not the absence of sadness</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

themselves as in need of the help of a professional. Humanity's default position is an inability to correctly understand and pursue its own happiness.

The measurability of happiness is set forth in many grounds as the basis for a claim to its existence as a scientific object. Claims-makers stress that happiness is a science because it can be reliably measured. One commentator alleges, 'It's easy to define sadness. But happiness is also measurable, not only by neuroscience, but by asking people how they feel' (Riddell, *The Observer*: 2006). Of course, measurability also allows claims-makers to assert the existence of a paradox of prosperity, since 'rates' of happiness can be aggregated and compared across time. Layard insists that 'not only can happiness be defined and measured scientifically, but that fairly precise fluctuations can be observed in happiness relative to income' (Aaronovitch, *The Times*: 2009). Yet, given its necessity as the basis of many problem claims, it is interesting how little measurability is explicitly insisted upon. Almost as many times as the explicit claim is forwarded, commentators express reservations. One responds to the claim that happiness can be 'objectively quantified by measuring electrical activity in the brain', by saying: 'This is without a doubt the scariest idea I have read for many years. If Cameron is going to carry on talking of gross domestic happiness, he would be well advised to distance himself from this horrifying vision of a Happy New World' (Marrin, *The Sunday Times*: 2006). Rather than explicitly forwarding this claim, many claims-makers simply take measurability for granted. Few claims-makers encounter opposition when forwarding variations of the paradox of prosperity (see next section), which nonetheless rely on the possibility of measuring happiness.
These claims are often delineated as part of a list of ‘facts’ about what scientists now know about happiness. Setting happiness apart as a scientific object is an important ground; it gives claims-makers license to make normative statements about the activities that have been, in a sense, ‘clinically proven’ to induce happiness. They are often followed by conclusions advocating particular evidence-based paths to happiness that individuals and governments should follow. In this way, happiness is posited as something that requires specialized knowledge and a specialized skill set. The result is an ‘iatrogenic’ unhappiness in which ‘the science of happiness solves problems created by the science of happiness itself’ (Perez-Alvarez, 2013: 223).

The moral signified

As I have previously noted, claims-makers are keen to avoid charges their claims are shallow, ‘gimmicky’ or devoid of content. While moral definitions are often framed as criticisms of the happiness crusade, few definitions and descriptions forwarded by claims-makers actually define it purely in terms of pleasure. Although it is true that many of the prescriptions for how to be happier do seem to ultimately aim at making people feel good, when claims-makers are conscious of the meanings of their signifiers, definitions almost universally draw on moral themes. These claims also tend to draw less counterclaims and criticism. Table 10.2 shows five of the most common claims evoking a ‘moral’ signified.

As the overlap between examples demonstrates, all of these claims are variations on a core theme: Happiness is not about pleasure; it is about what people do. One cannot be happy while engaging in ‘deviant’ behaviours, even if they may feel pleasurable. Although I have labelled this a ‘moral’ theme, these claims are primarily concerned with the management of behaviour through the inculcation of correct values. Consumerism, for example, is frequently cast as a weakness of moral character and the solution to both it and broader economic problems is predictably the management of behaviour. Further, the meaningful life for which one is supposed to quest is not open to debate or for individuals to discover for themselves, but rather one aimed at a foregone conclusion. People cannot be allowed to pursue the lives they (erroneously) believe will lead them to happiness as this has apparently led to our contemporary unhappy circumstance. One textbook well illustrates this underlying outlook, describing itself as giving consideration to ‘what makes people happy, and how we can potentially nudge them to be happier’ (Cartwright, 2011).
Table 10.2 Moral signifieds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People confuse happiness with pleasure¹</td>
<td>A woman may define happiness as the right to buy more handbags and shoes than could contain the Third World debt, then look in the mirror and wonder why her frown lines are deepening. Success, affluence and retail therapy may offer the brief buzz of apparent happiness but there is a vast gulf between the moment of feeling happy and being happy – or living happily – for a lifetime. (Mooney, <em>The Times</em>: 2006)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness is moral; doing and being good</td>
<td>Dr Seligman, at the heart of his philosophy, identifies three ways in which people try to pursue happiness. The first is the Pleasant Life, which centres on the pursuit of sensual pleasures from good food to wild partying and is considered shallow and destructive. The second is the Good life, which focuses on commitment to work and family and trying to be responsible in life. This self-evidently, is far preferable to the first, but still is susceptible to being subsumed by the demands of work in the manner that so dogged twentieth-century middle-class family life. The third is the Meaningful Life, which focuses on altruism and good works – doing things selflessly for others. This is the way to true fulfilment, says Dr Seligman. (Orr, <em>The Independent</em>: 2006)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness is not a feeling</td>
<td>…as moral beings, our happiness is not just about ‘feeling good but being good’. What is required, says Schoch, is ‘big fish thinking’ about the quality of our lives as a whole. (Botros, <em>The Guardian</em>: 2006)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness is not a goal but a by-product</td>
<td>On average, people are happier the more they care about other people’s happiness and the less they care about their own. In this sense, happiness is a by-product of focusing on the happiness of others. Relationships are central to this in our increasingly atomised society. But we also need to exercise our bodies: we were not constructed simply to sit around. Attending to the world about us means savouring whatever comes our way and living more in the present than the future or the past. (Layard, <em>The Sunday Times</em>: 2010)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness is about meaning</td>
<td>‘Having a sense of meaning and purpose in life, which most religions promote, very much enhances your emotional wellbeing,’ said Professor Leslie Francis, a specialist in the psychology of religion, at the University of Warwick. ‘Just being out there to make money is not a sense of purpose.’ (Devlin, <em>The Times</em>: 2010)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Although this is similar to the claim that ‘happiness is not about pleasure’ below, claims coded here were specifically framed as being counter to what claims-makers describe as the dominant beliefs in society.
In this way, as Ahmed (2010: 2) describes, ‘Happiness is used to redescribe social norms as social goods’. The alleged ‘unhappiness of the deviant’ acts as a powerful and ‘perverse promise’ that ‘if you do this, you will get that!’ but it is simultaneously a threat: if you do not align with this script, you will be unhappy (Ahmed, 2010: 91). ‘Good subjects will not experience pleasure from the wrong objects (they will be hurt by them or indifferent to them)’ (Ahmed, 2010: 37). Moreover, the encroachment of expert claims into the realm of morality is little surprising and has become increasingly significant towards the present. For those seeking to gain attention and change on behalf of their claims, legitimacy is less likely sought in God or tradition, but rather in science (Sugarman, 2007). Miller (2008: 592) argues that when ‘old beliefs rooted in common social structures, culture and religion have atrophied (at least in the West) […] it is to evolutionary science and psychology that we must now look for the answers’ (Miller, 2008: 592). As Nolan (1998:) writes, ‘The concern about whether one is happy and healthy now challenges in importance whether one is good or bad or even right or wrong’.

Grounds: Defining the problem

Mobilizing particular terminologies and subtly redefining their contents implicitly problematizes happiness by setting it forth as an elusive state and object of specialized knowledge. However, the construction of the problem by no means ends here. These signifiers and their carefully cordoned off signifieds form the foundations on which are often built more explicit problem claims.

A successful ‘rhetorical recipe’

Unlike many new social problems, happiness is not straightforwardly problematic. The relatively ‘un-newsworthy’ experience of individual contentment does not seem to lend itself easily to a broader problem of unhappiness in society. What happiness offers is an easily manipulable index of decline. Happiness indicators and their stubborn refusal to show much change in any direction present claims-makers with a template which can be drawn upon to frame a range of existing concerns. This ‘rhetorical recipe’ consists of alleging a paradox between happiness and another variable a claims-maker wishes to problematize. The divergence between the two indicators is then described as being contrary to expectations, that happiness and the chosen indicator should have increased in step. In many
claims, this paradox is enhanced with reference to large, often frightening statistics about other social problems painting a picture of generalized social decline. This strategy can be summarized as follows:

1. A statement about social/economic data
2. A statement about declining, or more often, 'stagnant' happiness figures
3. Reference to other social problems; dramatization and imagery of decline

Richard Layard is perhaps the most voracious adopter of this strategy, repeating it several times in interviews and authored pieces. 'Here's a shocking fact,' he begins one such piece, 'Despite our huge increase in affluence, people in the West have grown no happier in the past 50 years. This should make us rethink everything – our work-life balance, our attitudes to tax, our priorities for health, our whole moral philosophy' (Layard, The Independent on Sunday: 2003a). In this article, he repeats this 'paradox' four times in the opening paragraphs alone.

Of twenty-nine articles in the sample also employing this strategy, eight placed it in the headline or lead, and a further five within the first three paragraphs. The apparent positivity of communicating problem claims through the rhetoric of happiness allows claims-makers to adopt a novel, positive outlook on social issues, even as these are implicitly problematized. That is, rather than claiming a particular condition has caused unhappiness, positing a contradictory relationship between a particular condition and happiness allows one to maintain the positive connotations of the signifier.

It is significant that the problem identified by claims-makers is precisely that nothing has changed. In spite of the additional statistics which support a sense of generalized social decay, the core claim about happiness is a problematization not of sudden dramatic falls in happiness rates, but of continuity across time. By definition then, it is not a problem that had become so pressing that professional and political powers were forced into action. Happiness researchers, in the creation of the raw data on which much of subsequent claims-making is based, had to actively seek out populations, ask them to focus upon their emotions and transform them into numerical estimates, which could then be compared across populations and generations. In problematizing these results, decisions are made about which phenomena to draw out for comparison – most often economic growth, consumerism or increases in personal income. In doing so, they also avoided comparisons with other factors, since presumably every social change or government intervention, for better or worse, from the time that chronological comparisons of happiness rates begin, must also have failed to affect happiness levels as well.
The problem of wealth

By far, the variables most frequently chosen to problematize in relation to happiness are those usually associated with wealth and prosperity. 56 per cent of articles sampled problematized wealth in relation to happiness taking the form of twenty-three claims. Table 10.3 shows five of the most common of these.

The problematization of phenomena such as wealth, development and income effectively amounts to a problematization of any material basis to prosperity and its subtle redefinition to represent a static, subjective valuation. Its rhetorical 'fit' with contemporary cultural prejudice is evidenced by the fact that, once this claim became culturally available, claims-makers not only repeated it, but adapted the successful formulation to suit their aims. It was seldom questioned, and the criticism that there did not, in fact, appear to be a correlation between happiness and anything – not just wealth – was seldom reflected upon or repeated once it was. It seemed intuitively correct that 'so-called progress' should be revealed to be self-defeating and pointless, even as it demonstrably led to improvements in a wide variety of non-subjective indicators. There is more than an echo of an 'end of history' ethos in this immediate palatability of a 'paradox of prosperity' since neither claims-makers nor the respondents to myriad surveys are likely (though for different reasons) to reflect upon the possibilities of the future in rating present quality of life. That is, I have no idea what the future holds or what problems I accept today that might one day seem intolerable. In the same way, someone, in 1800, handed a 'happiness survey' would not have rated themselves less happy in expectation of future access to electricity. Each generation adapts, 'finds

Table 10.3 Grounds problematizing wealth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim</th>
<th># Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paradox</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variation – 'Richer ... but not happier'</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variation – In spite of income increases and happiness</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variation – Between wealth and mental illness rates</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterclaim – No correlation between happiness and anything</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money/wealth does not buy happiness</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterclaim – Money does buy happiness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materialism/commodity acquisition does not produce happiness</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No increase in happiness beyond certain income/level of development</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income growth does not make people happy/happier</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
happiness', in accordance with the world they take for granted. As a measure of 'progress' then, happiness defaults to the present as the best of all possible worlds.

It is interesting to note that many of these assertions echo a similar statement made by Émile Durkheim in 1893: 'But, in fact, is it true that the happiness of the individual increases as man advances? Nothing is more doubtful' (Durkheim, 1984: 186). However, Durkheim, like Marx, has been frequently half-quoted and half-understood in this respect. It is doubtful not because progress is futile, but because unlike production, which can theoretically increase indefinitely, happiness has a finite upper limit. More importantly, since social change often spans generations, not everyone who plays a part in these changes lives to share in their benefits, if there are any to be had. Thus, he reasons that, 'it is not the expectation of a greater happiness which drags them into such enterprises' – a point against any utilitarian approach to human progress (Durkheim, 1984: 186). According to Durkheim, if it were the case that the 'division of labour' existed merely to increase happiness:

[... ] it would have arrived at its extreme limit long ago, just as would have the civilisation that has arisen from it, and both would have come to a halt. [ ... ] A moderate development would have been sufficient to assure individuals the sum-total of pleasures of which they were capable. Humanity would have rapidly come to a state from which it would not have emerged. (Durkheim, 1984: 186)

In short, if it is not happiness that drives humanity forward, it must be something else. This plea for a deeper understanding of the forces that underlie history is likely to fall on deaf ears towards the present when material, structural explanations for human problems have fallen out of favour. Instead, the problems of the present are more likely to be understood in individual, biological and neurological terms. Happiness claims draw attention to human nature, innate desires and misguided quests for happiness as ultimately to blame for the problems of the present. There is little appreciation for the processes of history or structures of society that precede individual lives and which will likely endure after they are gone, regardless of whether or not they made the people bound up with them miserable, or indeed, happy.

Threats to happiness

Finally, some claims-makers identify various threats to happiness, positioning them as antithetical and therefore in need of regulation and change. Table 10.4 lists the five most common of these.
Table 10.4 Threats to happiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim</th>
<th>Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social comparison or ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ cause of unhappiness</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising and television make people unhappy</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations and aspirations are cause of unhappiness</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variation – Striving to succeed cause of unhappiness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Hedonic treadmill’ cause of unhappiness/People stuck in a ‘rat race’</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalism and/or consumerism cause of unhappiness</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, for many claims-makers, ‘capitalist culture’ and the ‘pressures of consumerism’ are a major threat to happiness. However, the focus is not on these broader structures, but rather the subjective experience of the individual victim. ‘Vast disparities in income, of the kind that free-market capitalism promotes, cause people to be far less satisfied with their lot than they might otherwise be’ (Orr, *The Independent*: 2006), writes one claims-maker. Rather than being a critique of institutional arrangements, it is essentially a critique of the individual. As one claims-maker puts it, ‘we’ are the problem:

At the heart of our non-stop, acquisitive, greedy capitalist culture is the message: consume, consume, consume. We judge people by what they have, rather than what we [sic] are, and we allow ourselves to define our own sense of self by the amount of money we earn, the power we might have in our jobs and the level of materialism we surround ourselves with. It is no longer I think, therefore I am: now it is I have, and that's what I am. (Boycott, *The Sunday Times*: 2009)

Although inequality is singled out, it is viewed as essentially a problem of expectations. As one article describes, ‘Mori confirms that it is how people feel about the pecking-order that affects their happiness. Overestimating how much happiness more money will buy, people climb on a hedonic treadmill going nowhere’ (Toynbee, *The Guardian*: 2004). Another explains that people in rich countries are not happier than poorer ones because ‘They are trying to keep up with the Joneses. [...] The effort devoted to it is a total waste in terms of the satisfaction generated’ (Layard, *The Times*: 2005a). Inequality is condemned primarily on the grounds that it makes those who have less covetous and unhappy. A desire for attainment beyond ‘basic needs’ is positioned as a threat to
happiness. Human aspiration becomes a 'hedonic treadmill' of increasing wants that trap victims in a perpetual 'rat race'.

Grounds: Victims

Claims-makers not only construct conditions, they also construct people. Loseke (2003b: 120) observes that claims constructing harmful condition-categories 'often simultaneously construct the types of *people* who inhabit those categories' (emphasis in original). Just as people do not directly experience every social problem of which they are aware, they do not know, and indeed cannot know, even a small fraction of the people who are meant to be affected by them. This means that there is also a 'social problems claims-making process of rhetorically producing people-type categories' (Loseke, 2003b: 121). This exercise in 'people production' often takes the form of a melodrama of 'victims and villains' (Best, 1995). The 'villains' implicated in the problematization of happiness tend to be indistinct: they are our neighbours (the 'Joneses'), abstract forces such as 'society' and 'the pressures of consumerism' — and they are also 'us'. Nonetheless, claims tend to display a disproportionate emphasis on the unhappiness or threatened potential happiness of victims. Broad undifferentiated categories such as children, or indeed 'everyone', are assumed to be, by definition, vulnerable.

Children were explicitly singled out as potential victims in 34 per cent of articles sampled. The most common explicit problem claims included alleged rises in mental illness (13 per cent), the potentially pernicious influence of parenting and parenting styles (8 per cent) and the effects of childhood experience on future happiness (7 per cent). Claims are often dramatized with reference to other social problems such as teenage pregnancy and alcohol consumption. It was explicitly claimed that 'Affluent, child-centred Britain is rearing the unhappiest generation in modern history' (Riddell, *The Observer*: 2006).

But childhood was also implicitly problematized. In claims-making about happiness, children were considered as 'by definition [...] self-evident candidates' for 'vulnerable' status (Frankenberg et al., 2000: 589). It is assumed that happiness is not a default state, but requires bolstering, intervention and special know-how. This is too important to be left to parents. 'Schools should be helping children to develop skills and techniques for dealing with the world and increasing their own wellbeing,' one claims-maker is quoted as saying (Baker, *The Independent*: 2006). According to Layard, 'Learning hard things takes an enormous amount of practise. [...] How can we expect people to learn to be
happy without massive amounts of practice and repetition? I believe that it can only be done by the schools' (McCartney, *The Sunday Telegraph*: 2007).

Claims construct ways to "think" and to "feel" about people-categories' (Loseke, 2003b: 125). Claims draw on existing ideas of children as by definition vulnerable while at the same time connecting to the ease with which contemporary audiences connect to claims about child victims (Best, 1990). It is little surprising then that happiness claims focusing on children were some of the first to be institutionalized, being drawn in to existing curriculum geared towards the education of the emotions (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009).

Besides children, the frequent use of the collective pronoun 'we' signifies not only that claims apply to everyone, but that everyone is a potential victim. At the same time, 'we' are the problem – for lacking the moral fortitude to avoid social comparison, for desiring too much. The vast majority of articles in the sample conceptualized the problem in these inclusive terms, referring to the fact that 'we are no happier in spite of increases in wealth' and that 'our happiness' depends on various phenomena. Part of the function of this sort of signification is, as Hall (2009: 123) observes, to 'translate a discourse whose subject is "workers versus employers" into a discourse whose subject is the collective "we the people"'. Moreover, as Gusfield (1996) describes in his study of rhetoric in the construction of alcohol problems, in seeking consensus, problems can be framed not as political issues reflecting differing interests and points of view, but rather as social problems with a "united societal consensus" that affirms them (Gusfield, 1996: 25). "There is no room for a diversity of views; no contest of meanings. In the sense used in literary criticism, the "voice" of the writer is that of the abstract authoritative "society"" (Gusfield, 1996: 25).

Through the use of the 'regal or editorial "we"' (Gusfield, 1976: 21), advocates also claim to stand on equal footing with their audiences. Having established their competence to report on reality through appeals to scientific expertise, claims-makers turn to relating the facts in a manner that avoids claims to superior judgment. They are simply relating knowledge about everyone – about human beings in general – themselves included. Although morality is frequently evoked, such pronouncements are made not on the basis of judgements or opinion, but on the 'true' nature of human beings, verified in the abstract.

Like children, people are defined by their *de facto* vulnerability and propensity to succumb to threats to emotional health. Without the intervention of enlightened parties to, for example, 'dampen down the pressures of consumption' (Toynbee, *The Guardian*: 2004) people are portrayed as vulnerable to fall ill to contaminating social forces. Although, the villains may be social structures and
institutions, these are vague and impersonal, and the focus remains on victims. Problems are reduced to individual bad lifestyle choices; people want too much, have the wrong ideas about happiness and are seeking it in the wrong ways. Vulnerability underpins this view of subjectivity. Only a certain type of person, or 'people-type category', is liable to be harmed by the pursuit of wealth, the weight of expectations and the pace of change. It is a view that considers people more liable to be damaged than do damage when confronted with adversity.

Warrants and rhetorical strategies

Warrants are ways of promoting claims. They justify drawing conclusions from the grounds. All claims implicitly evoke the values of the broader culture, but it is in the warrants that 'values most often come into play' (Best, 1987: 109). Of course, happiness itself is a warrant, a value drawn upon by many claims-makers to promote a variety of social issues. But when claims-makers attempt to draw attention specifically to the need to intervene on behalf of happiness, claims follow a number of identifiable rhetorical strategies including drawing attention to 'associated evils', emphasizing costs and benefits, drawing on the authority of science and emphasizing claims as a 'revolutionary break' from the present, but also a harmonious return to past ideals.

Associated evils, costs and benefits

These warrants are frequently observed across many social problems and relate to the need to catch attention in the competitive arena of the social problem 'market place'. The most common strategy is to attach the new problem to a host of already accepted social ills. If people already care about one social problem, they are more likely to affirm the significance of a new one that is merely its logical extension. The capacity of happiness to act as warrant in claims-making about a variety of issues makes it difficult to decipher exactly which issue is 'piggybacking' on the other. However, the important point is that through the language of happiness, a host of extant social ills are promised to be remedied. Social problems referenced in the sample include depression and other mental illnesses (26 per cent), stress (14 per cent), work–life balance (10 per cent), self-esteem (7 per cent), bullying (5 per cent) and the recession (5 per cent). The frequent connections made between happiness and these accepted problems reflect both connecting the new problem to old concerns and the tendency for
existing advocates to ‘ride the wave’ of the new interest in hopes of getting their own claims noticed.

Warrants also stress the health (13 per cent of sample) and economic (7 per cent) benefits of happiness. Somewhat paradoxically given the tendency to disparage GDP, it is often argued that countries will be more economically competitive and workers more productive if nations and firms take on the conclusions of happiness research. While seemingly contradictory, these claims can be understood as attempting to ‘cast a broad net’, connecting to the widest possible audience of potentially interested parties. To those for whom economic growth is an alien and abstract concept, a promise to prioritize personal values and emotions might seem appealing. At the same time, through a promise to raise productivity, claims can be made appealing to those who realize maintaining growth and competitiveness are a fact of life and necessity for survival.

Happiness lends itself easily to ‘piggybacking’ between social issues, since nearly any issue seems reducible to this lowest common denominator. Moreover, existing concerns can be mobilized towards a common goal. By conceptualizing a range of issues as essentially problems of happiness, claims-makers are able to unite on common ground, speak to audiences on a personal level and offer enticingly simple solutions to almost any problem.

Scientism

The claim that science has finally discovered the path to happiness for an undifferentiated humanity is self-consciously affirmed and reaffirmed through a variety of strategies. A further rhetorical strategy is to draw heavily on the authority of science as warrants for the acceptance of happiness claims. Their scientific nature was emphasized in 41 per cent of articles sampled. The academic credentials of claims-makers were continually underscored as was the seriousness of their claims. Claims-makers sometimes used deliberately obscure language to emphasize their scientific basis (Table 10.5).

Typically, clarity and the ability to cast difficult ideas in a language anyone can understand are assets to claims-makers seeking to gain popular support. However, as McCloskey (1998) describes in her study of the rhetoric of economics, once an idea gains currency, obscurity is actually an asset. But it is a matter of style over substance. The above excerpt from an interview with Layard illustrates this well (Jeffries, *The Guardian*: 2008). Although the interviewer asks him to define happiness, he gives a jargon-laden response which actually refers to a paradox of happiness and does not answer the question at all.
Table 10.5 The rhetoric of science

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keywords and phrases</th>
<th>Academic credentials</th>
<th>Weight of evidence</th>
<th>Scientific language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'Eminent'</td>
<td>'Serious science'</td>
<td>'Hedonic calculus'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Leading'</td>
<td>'Hard scientific evidence'</td>
<td>'Hedonics'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'World's best respected'</td>
<td>'New science'</td>
<td>'Psychological well-being'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Renowned'</td>
<td>'Groundbreaking'</td>
<td>'Subjective well-being'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Leading expert on happiness'</td>
<td>'Science as hard as rocks'</td>
<td>'Eudaimonic well-being'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Leading happiness economist'</td>
<td>'Serious scientific research'</td>
<td>'Eudaimonia'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Leading neuroscientist'</td>
<td>'Science of happiness'</td>
<td>'General well-being'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Wizards of economics'</td>
<td>'New scientific movement'</td>
<td>'Thalamus and medial prefrontal cortex' (Brodman's area 9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Prestigious scientific institution'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'World's top psychologist'</td>
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</table>

Example

The Royal Society, arguably Britain's pre-eminent body of scientists, will host in November its first-ever meeting on The Science of Well-Being - bringing together an international array of Nobel Laureates and other distinguished researchers to pool their understanding of 'lives going well' (*The Times*: 2003).

'Theoretical claims are often disputed; but there's a good deal of academic debate,' she says. 'It's important to distinguish between positive psychology as a rigorous scientific discipline and self-help materials which serve a different purpose' (*Wilson, The Observer*: 2010).

But what is this thing called happiness? [...] 'Happiness is inversely related to income at higher levels of income because of the declining marginal utility of getting richer', says Layard. 'Let me show you.' He draws a graph: on the X axis is income per head, on the Y axis is average happiness. A curve ascends boldly and then tails off ignominiously (*Jeffries, The Guardian*: 2008).

Part of the newsworthiness of happiness claims is the novelty of happiness being a science at all. Indeed, this is underscored by happiness experts who are at great pains to differentiate their work from 'self-help gurus' and other more overtly opinionated forms of advice. This is not simply someone's opinion which one can choose to follow or not; 'the science' compels assent. This convergence of interests on the part of both the news media and claims-makers tends to be underscored in the imagery that often accompanies claims about happiness. When happiness initially appeared on the covers of *Time*, the *New Scientist* and *The Economist*,
cover art unanimously blended symbols of frivolity with those of hard science – a smiley face atom, a human face surrounded by molecular imagery, a man in a suit jumping for joy with the text: ‘Happiness (and how to measure it)’ (The Economist, 2006; Time Magazine, 2006; New Scientist, 2011). Newspaper articles feature the ubiquitous yellow smiley face and stock photos of smiling people. These symbols create the illusion of denotation – we all know what happiness is, it is laughter, a smile from a loved one, sitting in a ‘field full of daisies’. These images invite the reader to share in common sense knowledge of happiness’ universal importance, but the novelty of the accompanying text is that, actually, these smiling faces are something that readers do not quite understand. Something apparently simple is not so simple at all and, indeed, requires an ‘international array of Nobel laureates’ (The Times: 2003) to figure out just how it is to be done.

Many have pointed out that the science that underpins happiness claims is more rhetorical than real. Yen (2010: 70) describes how positive psychologists use familiar narrative styles that secure resonance and legitimacy: balancing scientific jargon with popular discourse, positioning the discipline as ‘rooted in ancient philosophical sensibilities yet eminently relevant to contemporary concerns’ and constructing it as simultaneously revolutionary but moderate and scientifically conservative. For Lears (2013), the ‘current spate of happiness manuals embody the conventional wisdom of our time’ – scientism. Scientism, in his rendering, ‘is a revival of the nineteenth-century positivist faith that a reified “science” has discovered (or is about to discover) all the important truths about human life’ (Lears, 2013). Quoting Philip Rieff, he argues the contemporary zeal for a science of happiness ‘epitomizes the “triumph of the therapeutic” […]: the creation of a world where all overarching structures of meaning have collapsed and there is “nothing at stake beyond a manipulatable sense of well-being”’ (Lears, 2013). Although a broader, cultural ambivalence towards science is evident in increasing alarms about natural disasters (Kim, 2006: 233) and calls for adherence to the ‘precautionary principle’, the science of happiness is portrayed as ‘safe’, natural and humanized. People are not being modified, but rather encouraged to return to their natural dispositions, to realize a potential for happiness that has always existed and which science has simply discovered, but from which humanity has become alienated by the distorting effects of civilization.

Revolutionary break, romantic return

The most frequently observed warrants-invoking values can be conceptualized as falling into an overarching theme emphasizing happiness as a ‘revolutionary
Table 10.6 Revolutionary break/romantic return

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revolutionary break</th>
<th>Romantic return</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promotes happiness as a radical break from previous practices/beliefs/values</td>
<td>• Appeals to non-Western cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rhetoric of radicalism; anti-capitalist or anti-consumerist themes dominate</td>
<td>• Draws on values of the past as opposed to ‘degraded’ contemporary notions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classical Greece, Declaration of Independence, earlier phases of (capitalist) society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• total rethink of society’s goals</td>
<td>• Aristotle talked about ‘eudaimonia’—happiness as human flourishing and purpose to life—rather than the modern hedonistic concept (Stratton, The Guardian: 2010a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(James, The Guardian: 2003).</td>
<td>• We need to restate the point of politics—which is to make people happy (Owen, The Times: 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There is nothing more radical than trying to be happy</td>
<td>• Bloated by the luxuries of living in a rich democracy, we have lost sight of the small things that are the root of happiness, and the truth that happiness is rooted within us, not in objects (Frostrup, The Observer: 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Hutton, The Observer: 2003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Placing happiness as the focus of our attentions turns the world on its head</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Hutton, The Observer: 2003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Layard is quietly effecting a revolution in this miserable, materialistic, overworked country (Jeffries, The Guardian: 2008).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• At the heart of our non-stop, acquisitive, greedy capitalist culture is the message: consume, consume, consume (Boycott, The Sunday Times: 2009)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

break', as well as a 'romantic return' (Table 10.6). That is, claims-makers paradoxically evoke a rhetoric of radicalism coupled with an affirmation of values (real or imagined) drawn from the past.

It is claimed that the science of happiness has revealed the current direction of society as ill-conceived and promoting happiness is represented as a radical break with this orientation. At the same time, happiness is articulated as a return to a previous era viewed as less degraded, more virtuous and pure. As with the use of flourishing and eudaimonia discussed in the previous chapter, ancient Greece is frequently evoked, but so too are non-Western cultures, which are seen as living time capsules for pre-capitalist values.4

The 2011 documentary *The Economics of Happiness* I mentioned in Chapter 2 showcases many of these claims. Featuring the northern Indian region of Ladakh as a way of life formerly untrammeled by the problems of civilization, it explores the economic crisis and current economic system’s apparent failure to produce happiness. As Deschacht (2013) describes, proponents of happiness featured in
the documentary adopted a localist discourse, directing their critique not at the capitalist mode of production, but rather at 'corporate capitalism – the capitalism of big business' (574). Indeed, proponents seemed to welcome more capitalism of the 'textbook neoliberal' variety, presenting a 'fictitious capitalism without big corporations' and 'perfect markets', longing back to its pre-monopolist forms (Deschacht, 2013: 574). Moreover, the treatment of the past takes on an ahistorical, nostalgic form that disregards the realities of Ladhak's former system of 'compulsory unpaid labor in agriculture (the begar system, which was a local form of feudalism), poverty, excessive debt and high taxes charged by the state, land owners and Buddhist monasteries' (Deschacht, 2013: 570). A similar critique is made of other aspects of the happiness movement by Ben-Ami (2012) and Pupavac (2010) who also point out a tendency to downplay the benefits of material wealth in favour of a romantic critique of capitalism that nonetheless underscores many of its core values including the centrality and inevitability of the market. Indeed, as the conclusions of such claims reveal below, the 'revolution' that claims-makers evoke is a modest and ultimately conservative one.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, social problem narratives tend to present an ideology of harmony through which a natural equilibrium is disturbed but to which we would return if only the correct path were followed. The happiness problem, and in particular the peculiar economics of happiness that tends to be presented, is no different. The economic crisis, for instance, was presented as the result of an immense accumulation of individual failures and poor choices, very much in keeping with the ideology of equilibrium and harmony that mainstream economics has inherited in which it is impossible to have an economic crisis that results from capitalism itself, but rather from various externally introduced distortions (Freeman, 2010). In the end, everything would harmonize if only people could be made to behave correctly. The idea that the system itself can tend towards destructiveness eludes claims-makers even as they claim to be critiquing capitalism. Thus, this critique of capitalism is actually a critique of people. It is the imposition of human will, human desire running rampant, that is blamed for thwarting the natural equilibrium.

More to the point, the widespread use of this rhetorical warrant as support for happiness claims, with its seemingly contradictory tendency to combine both a revolutionary vision with a longing for the past, reveals an underlying conservative, or perhaps more precisely 'presentist' romanticism. As Lasch (1979: 7) observes, the therapeutic climate desires not 'salvation' or 'the restoration of a golden age', but rather 'the feeling, the momentary illusion of personal well-being, health, and psychic security'. The revolutionary vision
articulated is not a future-oriented one, but an attempt to sustain the present moment by drawing on the values of the past. Its claim to radicalism is precisely its ‘reaction’ to change and attempt to push back against historical movement. This is reflected in the tendency for happiness to be promoted as a necessarily ‘sustainable’ and enduring state, with advancement denigrated as ‘fleeting’ and progress futile. Movement is perceived as damaging to the fragile psyche of the individual and cast as a ‘hedonic treadmill’ and relentless ‘rat race’. The impulse to sustain the present is evidenced by the usage of the past not as an analytical tool oriented towards the future, but as a place to turn for predetermined answers for society’s problems (Furedi, 1992: 202–203). As Mannheim (1993: 296–297) writes:

For progressive thought, everything derives its meaning in the last analysis from something either above or beyond itself, from a future utopia or from its relation to a transcendent norm. The conservative, however, sees all the significance of a thing in what lies behind it, either its temporal past or its evolutionary germ. Where the progressive uses the future to interpret things, the conservative uses the past [...].

Thus, the romantic return recounted by claims-makers is not a simple product of historical observation. ‘In myth, the context and history of the signs are narrowed down and contained so that only a few features of their context and history have a signifying function’ (Bignell, 2002: 22). The unspoken violence that sustains the idyllic peasant life, the slavery that upheld the life of eudaimonic contemplation, is conveniently left out of the equation. Although happiness is presented as a radical challenge to the ideology of capitalism, conceptualized simply as ‘consumerism’, as I attempted to show in Chapter 2, this belief is of relatively recent vintage. However, the point is not that ‘what is wrong with capitalism is [...] an alleged psychological and cultural suffering caused by consumption and “having”’ but the exploitation on which the system is premised (Varul, 2013). Having abandoned the realm of production to focus on consumption, critiques of capitalism are confined to substituting ostensibly moral forms of consumption that leave the deeper mechanisms of capitalism untouched. That is, since it is not possible to not consume, the answer becomes to impute consumption with meaning. So, one must consume for experiences, for eudaimonia, not for material objects. Ironically, this echoes a long-held class critique of the consumption habits of the lower orders and suspicions that pleasures are coming too quick and too easy. For Marx, this romanticism was the ironic driver of capitalism, since the rejection of mass consumption
ironically fuelled the appetite for new experiences and new things (Pupavac, 2010). Romantic anti-capitalism has been so widely embraced, has become so much the prevailing ideology of the left in decline, that it is not surprising and rather characteristic that we find the issue of happiness producing such strange bedfellows as alleged Marxists and conservative politicians.

Through recourse to claims problematizing progress as deviating from a natural and unchanging set-point of human happiness, the future to which humanity ought to aspire looks very much like the present. Ironically, 'the basic idea of a perfectible mobile world, produces the inverted image of an unchanging humanity, characterized by an indefinite repetition of its identity' (Barthes, 1980: 142). The self-legitimizing appeal to historical and natural law ends up denying the possibility of change.

Conclusions

Recall that conclusions are claims offering solutions to the problems they propose. According to Best (2008: 39):

The nature of the conclusions is shaped by the grounds and warrants. If a claim's grounds have depicted a condition that causes terrible suffering, and the warrants speak to humanitarian concerns about the need to alleviate suffering, then the conclusions are likely to focus on ways to help the afflicted.

It should not be surprising then that problems characterized in subjective terms invite subjective conclusions. Conclusions in the sample (Figure 10.1) were observed to fall into five main categories: policy interventions (38 per cent),

![Figure 10.1 Focus of rhetorical conclusions](image_url)
individual lifestyle changes (35 per cent), education (27 per cent), work and work environments (16 per cent) and parenting and family life (15 per cent).

Within each category, conclusions tend to coalesce around changes at the individual level. Table 10.7 shows the five most common claims identified within each type of conclusion.

Proposals for change sought in happiness claims focus predominantly on changing beliefs and behaviours. If the problems of capitalism are primarily subjective, then the solutions are equally subjective. Indeed, anything more would be overkill. Objective conditions of the social world are often singled out as villains in the grounds and warrants, but the focus of conclusions is on victims,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy interventions</th>
<th>Individual lifestyle changes</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Work and work environments</th>
<th>Parenting and family life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happiness should be the goal of policy</td>
<td>Re-examine negative thoughts and beliefs</td>
<td>Education should teach happiness skills</td>
<td>More attention and resources to improving work–life balance</td>
<td>Change parenting styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness indicators should complement economic indicators</td>
<td>Take care of physical body</td>
<td>Educate to insulate against bad effects of advertising and television</td>
<td>Employers should seek to promote happiness</td>
<td>Encourage marriage/discourage divorce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift focus away from economic growth and monetary indicators</td>
<td>Shift focus to experiences (rather than material acquisition)</td>
<td>Happiness should be an indicator of educational success</td>
<td>People should learn to enjoy their work</td>
<td>Parenting classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More attention and spending on mental health and illness</td>
<td>Shift focus to non-material values</td>
<td>People (in general) should be taught happiness</td>
<td>Seek more leisure and less work</td>
<td>Spend more time with family (instead of work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limits or bans on advertising</td>
<td>Lower expectations</td>
<td>Education should teach correct views of happiness/happiness inducing ideologies</td>
<td>Companies should offer employees non-monetary incentives</td>
<td>Lower expectations of children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
on subjective change, shifting attention, and changing thought patterns and beliefs. Although communal and structural themes are expressed, the focus is primarily on individual subjectivity and lifestyle, with the 'moral' basis of claims, emphasized in the grounds, surfacing in conclusions as prescriptions for how people should think and behave, stipulating behaviours such as volunteering and maintaining a healthy body. While much is made of the deleterious effects of wealth and economic growth, none of the conclusions advocate putting an end to the latter. Rather, conclusions focus almost exclusively on shifting attention away from economic and other objective indicators towards subjective conceptualizations of prosperity. This ironic affirmation of growth can be read in many ways, one of which might be an implicit recognition that in a democratic society, such an imposition of stasis is untenable. It is clear, however, that at least during this early stage of the construction of the problem, the most radical conclusion (though radically conservative) to halt growth or even to de-growth (see for example Jackson, 2009) was simply one step too far.

Grounds characterize many problems as being caused by wanting 'too much'. Conclusions thus advocate lowering expectations as a path to happiness. Audiences are told that happiness adapts, and they will not be any happier if they acquire the objects of their desires. Conclusions therefore focus heavily on shifting from objective material values to subjective values. The path to happiness is said to lie not in increased material acquisition, but in harmoniously attenuating oneself to what one already has.

**Symbolic politics**

As Gusfield (1986: 2) describes, consensus regarding the fundamentals will allow almost any political issue to emerge and find expression. In an era in which class politics and their instrumental goals of affecting material gain and the structures of society have waned, expressive and symbolic politics have ascended to the forefront of political debate. In recent years, political movements have more often sought expressive goals than strictly instrumental. Expressive movements, in Gusfield's analysis, 'are marked by goalless behavior or by pursuit of goals which are unrelated to the discontents from which the movement had its source' (1986: 22). Resultant actions and behaviours are largely ritualistic; the outcome is reached in the behaviour itself, 'rather than in any state which it brings about' (Gusfield, 1986: 21). Issues that lack a clear instrumental outcome, or 'which seem foolish or impractical items are often important for what they symbolize
about the style or culture which is being recognised or derogated' (Gusfield, 1986: 11). Claims that associate or dissociate various beliefs and behaviours with happiness act as a symbolic affirmation of the values and ideals of those who advocate them. As Ahmed (2010: 13) writes, 'Where we find happiness teaches us what we value rather than simply what is of value.' Thus, far from radically overturning contemporary cultural beliefs or presenting a radical alternative to the contemporary capitalist ethos, the widespread avowal of happiness claims, and their rapid political institutionalization in particular, signifies the hegemony of the conservative and romantic ideals it affirms.

Although the happiness movement lacks the sort of instrumental changes typical of class politics, this does not mean that it has no effects. Happiness science offers a new means of securing legitimacy that is doubly difficult to contest since doing so risks the unsavoury position of being 'against happiness.' Duncan (2014: 79) argues that citing research 'measuring' happiness can have a 'conversation-stopping effect'; if happiness is a universal self-evident goal, 'whatever makes people happier must be worthwhile.' Questions of what human beings should believe and how they should behave are not open to debate, but rather technical questions that can be outsourced to experts. In a critique of behaviour change policies, Whitehead et al. (2011: 2834) argue positing phenomena as 'anathema to human health, wealth, and happiness, enables policy makers (and an emerging cartel of psychocrats) to foreclose discussions of what the values associated with "good behaviour" should be' (emphasis removed). Therein lies the allure of 'happiness science': in an age of uncertainty, it offers a seemingly scientific, and thus incontrovertible, means of pointing to the 'good'.

Summary and conclusions

Numerous constraints lead claims-makers to structure and promote their claims in the ways described here. Advocates believe that their problem is pressing, more pressing than others, and wish to keep it in the spotlight. Politicians must 'explain and justify their actions; that is, they must convince others that their policies are wise and appropriate' (Best, 2008: 212). It helps to conceive of issues in simplistic and melodramatic terms, as problems of vague and impersonal villains and victims who suffer or struggle to cope. But, in a depoliticized climate, emotional signifiers such as happiness possess a unique rhetorical sway. Through a language that focuses on individual bodies and minds and through recourse to knowledge of the true nature of human beings, it bypasses areas of potential
divisiveness and fosters consensus amongst parties who might not otherwise agree. The 'finger of blame', pointed in vague directions, thus avoids offending any particular constituency, but it also turns back upon 'us' – the collective, undifferentiated whole of 'society' – as being to blame for social ills. Just as the language of social exclusion turned the focus away from heavily politicized questions regarding material resources and how society should be run towards a focus on 'a parity of esteem' (Fitzpatrick, 2001), happiness turns attention towards subjective equality and affirms lowering expectations as a radical alternative to quests for material advancement. These ideas are communicated in universal terms and affirmed across the political spectrum. Questions about the larger purposes towards which society should be directed are cast not as falling within the realm of ideology or debate, but as technical questions requiring technical solutions. Reduced to the lowest common denominator, almost any issue can be said to be remediable through changes at the level of individual, thought, behaviour and lifestyle, and through the inculcation of the correct values and beliefs about what happiness ought to be.
Notes

Chapter 1

1 Most modern introductory textbooks to the Sociology of social problems do of course draw attention to different and conflicting perspectives, including subjectivist approaches, but remain organized around chapters dealing with prominent social issues at the time of publication. For instance, a recent textbook by Mooney et al. (2011: 2–3) indicates the complexity of defining social problems and settles on a combined subjectivist and objectivist definition: 'A social problem is a social condition that a segment of society views as harmful to members of society and in need of remedy' and is organized around well-being, inequality and globalization.

Chapter 2

1 Research on social indicators is in many ways a precursor to contemporary happiness studies (see Andrews, 1989 for a review of the movement). According to Rapley (2003: 11), the tendency to privilege the 'eye of the beholder', or subjective indicators, became increasingly central to its conceptualizations of quality of life over time.

2 It should be noted that scholarly interest in the topic dates back at least to the 1960s. While these findings provide much of the expert knowledge with which the problem is constructed in the public sphere, research on happiness and wealth has been a significant driver of the construction of happiness as a social problem. Therefore, this debate, frequently traced to Easterlin (1974), forms the focus of this chapter.

3 A 'rediscovery' because they trace its origins to Aristotle (Bruni and Porta, 2007: xiii–xiv).


5 Easterlin et al. (2010) have challenged these data, defending their initial conclusions.

6 See, for example, Knight (1849: 595). Marx even went so far as to say that the contradiction between a rising mass of wealth and a declining rate of profit 'forms
the mystery around whose solution the whole of political economy since Adam Smith revolves' (Marx, 1981: 319).

7 Grossman (1992: 73) continues that regardless of whether capitalists value these things personally, as far as their survival as capitalists is concerned, they 'have not the least interest in human improvements; they are interested only in the level of profitability'.

8 See the famous chapter 13 of Capital Volume 3 (Marx, 1981) and chapter 25 of Capital Volume 1 (Marx, 1967).

9 Further examples include Colman (2001: 1), Michaelson et al. (2009: 11–12) and Forgeard et al. (2011: 79).

10 The overarching tendency is not to be 'anti-growth' but rather 'growth sceptic' (see Ben-Ami, 2012: xiii). Nonetheless, many ecological economists advocate slow growth, 'zero growth', or 'steady state' economies including Simms et al. (2010), Boyle and Simms (2009), Jackson (2009), Daly (1973, 1996) and the New Economics Foundation (NEF) in general.

11 One might also add that de-emphasizing growth at a time when economies are experiencing clear difficulties growing hardly represents a campaign for radical change.

12 See Ben-Ami (2012) for analysis of key exemplars of this rising mode of thought.

13 Significantly, while supportive of the notion of limitations, Bell hints at the vacuum left behind by 'economic growth as a positive goal for [...] society', wondering, 'without a commitment to economic growth, what is the raison d'être of capitalism?' (1976: 80).

14 An underlying questioning of the benefits of material gain and the rationality of human actors in seeking it is evident in the study's intellectual lineage. In 1920, Pigou had distinguished economic welfare from the broader 'total welfare' of the population but defended the study of the former as the subject of welfare economics citing little reason to believe that, 'since economic welfare is only a part of welfare as a whole, welfare will often change while economic welfare remains the same' (Pigou, 2002: 12). However, by 1951, he considers that there may be some 'illusion' about the pursuit of wealth, adding, 'From a long-run standpoint [...] after incomes in excess of a certain moderate level have been attained, further increases in it may well not be significant for economic welfare' (Pigou, 1951: 294). Drawing on Pigou, Abramovitz (1959) questions welfare economics' underlying assumptions about rational actors when it is 'difficult to speak of the welfare significance of income for people whose personalities are, to a greater or lesser extent, the compound of repressions, addictions, compulsions, and obsessions' (Abramovitz, 1959: 15). According to Abramovitz, increased wealth fosters the 'competitive, self-defeating, and irrational elements in consumption'; so long as 'consumption levels are barely sufficient to provide for survival and minimum comfort, the competitive and irrational drives of individuals are held in check, at least to a greater extent
than they are when food, clothing and shelter are more abundant' (Abramovitz, 1959: 15). Easterlin saw himself as answering Abramovitz's 'little-heeded call' for empirical data to support these assertions (Easterlin, 1974: 89).

15 Lowy and Sayre (2001) points to Raymond Williams and E. P. Thomson as exemplars of this 'revolutionary' romanticism.

16 That is, alienation between the worker and the product of his/her labour.

17 Collins (2011) makes a similar point.

18 However, its existence as a widespread folk myth, at least at the present time, remains open to debate. At least for an increasing number of social problem advocates, the explanatory power and problematic nature of happiness are taken for granted. Yet, Sointu's (2012) study of consumers of complementary and alternative medicine in search of well-being suggests an active and selective engagement with well-being discourses among the general public.

Chapter 3

1 According to Hilgartner and Bosk (1988: 70), 'The success (or size, or scope) of a social problem is measured by the amount of attention devoted to it in these [public] arenas'. Spector and Kitsuse's definition of successful problems relies upon their 'institutionalization as official categories' (2001: 72). A 'successful' social problem is therefore one that makes its way onto the public agenda, whose name and associated terminology become familiar terms and become the subject of research and public debate, of interventions and so on.

2 Nichols (2003) reminds that audiences are not passive recipients of messages, and successful claims-makers must be sensitive to their reactions. In this way, construction can be seen to be 'dialogical' as audiences (composed not only of the general public but possibly of other interested parties with claims and counterclaims of their own) respond positively or negatively and claims are revised accordingly.

3 This strategy, it should be noted, produced somewhat dubious results for the movement. Maurer points out that in compromising the moral message in favour of a more broadly agreeable claim based on individual health, claims-makers were less able to recruit dedicated activists in support of the more drastic measures they desired (for example the whole scale decommissioning of slaughterhouses) (2002: 143).

4 Further, drawing these new phenomena (statistics, studies, new labels) together under a particular label and campaigning for their acceptance as a significant problem to which society should attend is not an inevitable accomplishment, but rather a historically and culturally specific event. Although it is true that we
cannot escape construction, we can deconstruct and, in so doing, offer alternate constructions which render the inevitability and pure descriptiveness of the former problematic.

5 It should be understood that while the example of the Azande is related in the ‘ethnographic present’, Evans-Pritchard was writing about research conducted in the late 1920s.

6 Altheide (2009: 73) uses the concept to explain: ‘What people regard as evidence is contingent on symbolic processes and meanings that shape, guide, deflect, and construct boundaries. He suggests that ‘documents (i.e. anything that can be retrieved or recorded for subsequent analysis about social meanings) provide a window into collective sentiments, preferences, and identity pronouncements about epistemic communities’ (Altheide, 2009: 66). This is the conceptualization that forms one of the methodological starting points for this study. To the degree that claims-makers are able to successfully draw on cultural resources, they are more likely to be successful. Epistemic cultures/communities point to the variability of evidence and also allude to the fact that some explanations of the world actually mirror the existing structures they are meant to explain.

Chapter 4

1 Although the timing of social problems claims is an issue not dealt with in detail in the present chapter, it should be noted that, as Ungar (1992: 484) points out, ‘Recognition in public arenas, which is a sine qua non of successful social problems, cannot be reduced to claims-making activities, but depends on a conjunction of these and audience receptiveness. Claims-making, after all, can fall on deaf ears or meet bad timing’. Kingdon (2003: 181, 44) describes how many claims-makers ‘lie in wait’ for an opportunity to push their claims, be it a related event, the receptiveness of a particular administration or the prevailing ‘mood’ in political quarters.

2 ‘Policymakers’ should be understood as those in a position to affect the desired institutional changes for which claims-makers often campaign. While the most frequent targets for action tend to be policymakers in legislative and other governmental bodies, policymaking occurs in a number of institutional settings including public schools, businesses and other non-governmental organizations. Policymakers can also act as claims-makers when they attempt to garner support for an adopted policy or course of action.

3 This study does not focus on how happiness discourses have been received, affirmed or contested in social media, although this remains a potentially compelling area of future research. This is because the key periods described in
the next chapter during which claims about happiness as a social problem were developed and disseminated largely predate widespread use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter. The focus of the present study is on the rhetorical beginnings of the problem on its path to institutionalization. Nonetheless, the social media reception, dissemination or addition of new happiness claims to broader discourses remains an important question for further research.

Chapter 5

1 The discussion to follow draws on data from The Times Digital Archive and The New York Times (for historical data) as well as the Nexis (news) portion of the LexisNexis database for four major UK newspapers: The Times, The Independent, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph and their Sunday editions. These particular sources were chosen as they are considered the ‘quality press’ and thus carry with them a minimal expectation of reportage on major social issues, as well as representing a spread of right- to left-wing viewpoints. Where particular themes were discerned as relevant, additional keyword searches were performed across the Nexis database and the results also examined.

2 1993 is the first full year at which three of the four newspapers included in this study were indexed by Nexis. The Daily Telegraph and The Sunday Telegraph are included in the Nexis archive from November 2000. This comparison includes only the former three.

3 The outcome of Humphrey’s ‘politics of happiness’ was disastrous; one biographer attempted to explain away his remarks as mere reflections of his ‘bubbly, extemporaneous’ personality (Solberg, 1984: 332–333).

4 According to Solberg (1984), this critical reception was widespread in the American press.

5 Kennedy proclaimed to a student audience at the University of Kansas that ‘the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play’ (Kennedy, 1968).

6 Even following Easterlin’s 1974 paper, often credited with being among the most important early works on happiness (at least within economics), which he included in not just a volume directed at economists but about which he also wrote for a ‘wider audience’ in the Public Interest (Easterlin, 1973: 4), the idea held little sway and was rarely mentioned in the media in the intervening years (that is between the 1970s and the early to mid-1990s when the idea began to gain ground in public discourse).

7 Skynner, however, might be considered one of the first, or perhaps the first claims-maker for happiness as a problem whose solution could be broached through
recourse to happiness research. In a 1990 column, he describes how 'Over the past year I have been outlining some recent research into what makes for happiness and mental health in families. The findings are both interesting and useful, and many people will be as puzzled as I was as to why the media and my own profession have neglected this knowledge. Why don't we use this information to bring about change?' (Skynner, The Guardian: 1990). However, his interests are more narrowly focused upon the issues of family and marital happiness rather than society as a whole.

8 Nexis determines relevance by the number of times the keywords appear in the headline and/or full-text of the article, in addition to the number of times they appear and their proximity to one another (in the case of multiple keyword searches).

9 This search was performed across The Times, The Guardian, The Independent and their Sunday editions. Nexis does not have holdings for The Daily Telegraph and The Sunday Telegraph until 2000. In order to maintain comparable numbers after 2000, it was excluded from searches for those time periods.

Chapter 6

1 By establishing claims-makers' values as causes of happiness, the 'Happy Planet Index' represents an effective claims-making tool. In a clever tautology, the organization can establish their values as indicators of happiness and then proclaim a loss or threat to happiness if these values diminish, without having to consult the populations in question. A 2004 report on an International Labour Office (ILO) index describes the organization's assertion that 'the most important determinant of happiness within countries is not income levels – although there is a link – but income security, measured in terms of income protection and a low level of inequality in pay levels' (Seager, The Guardian: 2004). Indicators used to rank the happiest workforces included union representation, safety at work, income, health care and social security. Having assessed the policies of countries in these areas, the organization warns that 'governments need to change course to ensure a more secure, happier workforce' (Seager, The Guardian: 2004).

2 Even this criticism falls short of questioning the importance of the problem of happiness in its entirety. Ormerod suggests that attention should instead be turned towards a more 'serious strand' of happiness research, which points instead to policy conclusions such as 'increased support for marriage, reductions in incentives to single parents, and the promotion of religious faith' (Elliott, The Guardian: 2007b).
Chapter 7

1 Articles were sorted by relevance in Nexis (by frequency and proximity to headline of keywords), and the first 200 results for each year screened for applicability to the study. Articles deemed relevant to the present discussion were imported into NVivo, creating a database of 765 articles spanning 2003 and 2009. In order to be manageable by a single researcher, a sample of 40 per cent of these relevant articles, stratified by year and in order of relevance defined by Nexis, was selected producing 306 results. NVivo, Nexis and other databases were explored as emergent themes were identified in the sample.

2 The company appearing more than once was Hewlett-Packard; in 2007, it reported a ‘40 per cent increase in sales’ after sending its employees on a ‘laughter programme’ (Frame, The Daily Telegraph: 2007) and in 2008 was reported as having appointed a ‘chief happiness officer’ (Corrigan, The Daily Telegraph: 2008).

3 Interestingly, many of these claims are treated with light-hearted scepticism by reporting journalists. For instance, one journalist describes a poll claiming that the “greatest concentration of very happy people” is in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly and asks, ‘Is this astonishing when the poll was commissioned for Cornwall Enterprise, a regional development agency?’ (Barker, The Independent on Sunday: 2006). Of the collaboration between a cracker company and a behavioural expert the reporting journalist observes wryly, ‘if you’re unhappy, don’t worry. Help is on its way. […] James suggests that there are five steps to improving our happiness levels. One is to daydream regularly – perhaps about cream crackers’ (McCade, The Sunday Times: 2007).

4 This article is also the first time that the American positive psychologist Ed Diener, now a familiar name in happiness discourses, is mentioned in UK newspapers.

5 While Le Fanu is a medical practitioner and thus an ‘expert’ in some respects, the research which he references is not his own. Moreover, he appears to take a brief interest in happiness research, only using it here to bolster an argument about the general deterioration of British society on a number of fronts.

6 These activities have been reported by the financial journalist Hamish McRae, who sits on the CEP’s policy committee, since 1994 (his articles about the centre’s activities are among the first problematizations of the issue listed in Table 7.1).

7 In that article, he wrote ‘people in the West are not becoming happier, despite economic growth’ (Layard, 1980: 737).

8 ‘Happiness’ is usually used unselfconsciously with the expectation that people will intuitively grasp its meaning and importance. However, definitions and redefinitions are frequently forwarded as claims, particularly as discourses progress towards the present. This is examined in Chapter 9.
Sometimes, these issues are even included all in the same breath, as one article questioning the link between happiness and GDP illustrates, 'Yet public policy across the west remains committed to increasing incomes. Emulating the American model is what it's all supposed to be about, even though America's 30% lead over Europe in GDP per head comes at a price – a longer working year, more double jobbing, higher levels of crime and family breakdown' (Elliott, The Guardian: 2005).

While the authors are primarily concerned with the issue of diffusion between the United States and Canada, they note that the sharing of a common language can make the 'interpersonal dimensions of the diffusion process particularly significant' as English speaking academics tend to draw on much of the same academic literature and the population at large, to a certain degree, shares much of the same mass media (Sacco and Ismaili, 2001: 31).

Chapter 8

1 From a poster/pamphlet distributed by The City Church Canterbury, based in Canterbury, Kent in 2009.

2 Quoted by Ehrenreich (2009: 148) from an interview in Elle magazine.

3 The Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania maintains a place at the nucleus of the diffusion project, with projects spanning the globe including developing secondary school curriculum in Australia (Geelong Grammar School), providing resilience training to US soldiers and offering the first Applied Masters in Positive Psychology, in which students 'learn to apply the principles and tools of positive psychology to any professional domain (including psychology, education, life coaching, research, health, and business' (Penn LPS, 2012). It continues to maintain an email listserv whose recipients are in the thousands.

4 This initiative was outlined by Baylis and Huppert in 2001 and included proposals to begin a nationwide longitudinal study of young people leading 'exceptionally positive lives' and the creation of a weekly magazine which would, 'convey in an accessible and attractive way the best peer-reviewed evidence on High-Achievement and Well-Being from around the world' in order to 'inform and inspire a broad range of young adults and educators comprising a target weekly readership of over 500,000 from Britain alone' (University of Pennsylvania, 2007).

Chapter 9

1 The database for 2003–2010 contained 903 articles. A small sample of 100 lengthier and more focused on happiness articles was selected to analyse in detail. I selected
cases with the following attributes: >300 words; happiness or problem claim in headline; more than half commentary on happiness. To extract a sample analysable in detail by a single researcher in the time available, the resultant 506 articles were stratified by year and 20 per cent of each year's results were sampled using an electronic list randomizer. The resultant 100-article sample was analysed line by line and claims about happiness coded as 'nodes' with a sentence encapsulating each claim. Subsequent claims matching these were also coded under these nodes. Derivatives and variations were coded separately under the 'parent' nodes. Subsequently, nodes were grouped together according to their representation of 'grounds' about the nature of the problem, 'warrants' for action and 'conclusions' for what should be done. Articles not sampled remained in the database where additional searches were carried out to confirm and compare findings, as was the wider Nexis database and other materials including News magazines, books and websites.

2 All searches included hyphenated and unhyphenated variations.

3 The term well-being has not appeared on the covers of these magazines, although other claims have, including 'progress and its perils' (The Economist, 2009) and the 'joy of growing old' on happiness throughout the life course (The Economist, 2010).

4 In the body of the article, Power rejects Cameron's use of the word, which she assumes is associated with consumerism. But, actually, both Cameron's speech and Power's column forward the claim that money and wealth do not produce happiness.

5 At one time, it was possible to use happiness in such a manner. Recall that, happiness and prosperity did not used to be so opposed. Duncan (2007: 87) has also pointed this out, noting that 'This etymological background helps to explain how T. R. Malthus, writing in the 1790s, was able to describe a nation as “happy” at those times when it is able to feed its whole populace.'

6 There is moreover, a conscious drive to differentiate eudaimonia from happiness in claims-making which uses the term. Six out of eight articles in the NVivo research database using the term eudaimonia claim happiness is a poor translation, differentiating it from, for example, our 'modern hedonistic concept' (Stratton, 2010a). The very first article 'stub' in Wikipedia for 'eudaimonia' began in February 2003 contained only one line which pointed out that many prefer 'spiritual well-being' as opposed to happiness as a translation.

7 It also, of course, represents a 'catchy' play on words, in much the same way that 'Gross National Happiness', although making little logical sense, represents a memorable way of communicating the need for governments to track happiness (Bates, 2009).

8 Whereas Aristotle had seen the realization of this perfection as 'eudaimonia', Aquinas saw it as a union with God (Passmore, 2000: 11).

9 For Nietzsche, this emphasis Greek philosophy had placed upon 'being' (with the exception of Heraclitus), masked the chaos and negation of the processes
of ‘becoming’ through which ostensibly eternal and universal concepts such as ‘goodness’ could be sustained (Nietzsche, 2005: 110, 168, 146). The rejection of becoming and desire to return to ‘being’ implicit in the exaltation of Greek philosophy represents in some ways a rejection of what Nietzsche recognized as the radical kernel in Hegel’s conservatism: his emphasis on becoming introduced ‘development’ into science, casting doubt on the definitiveness and finality of human logic and reason (Houlgate, 1986: 34).

10 The full text of this quote reads: ‘Socialism means plenty for all. We do not preach a gospel of want and scarcity, but of abundance. Our desire is not to make poor those who today are rich, in order to put the poor in the place where the rich now are. Our desire is not to pull down the present rulers to put other rulers in their places. We wish to abolish poverty and to provide abundance for all. We do not call for limitation of births, for penurious thrift, and self-denial. We call for a great production that will supply all, and more than all the people can consume’ (see https://www.marxists.org/archive/pankhurst-sylvia/1923/socialism.htm).

11 As Pender (2002: 105) describes, it is unclear how many of the problems communicated by the poor to World Bank investigators, including ‘absence of bread’, relatives dying in hospital ‘because they could not buy the required medicine in time’, children having ‘forgotten the taste of sugar and meat’, could be solved by a ‘better sense of well-being’.

Chapter 10

1 Recall that claims about happiness were coded as ‘nodes’ with a sentence encapsulating each claim. Subsequent claims matching these were also coded under these nodes. Derivatives and variations were coded separately under these ‘parent’ nodes as ‘variations’ and ‘counterclaims’. The resultant ‘catalogue’ of claims was subsequently sorted according to claims’ representation of ‘grounds’ about the nature of the problem, ‘warrants’ for action and ‘conclusions’ for what should be done.

2 See also Yen (2010) and Simmons (2012) on positive psychology’s ‘boundary work’ to foster its legitimacy as a scientific movement.

3 This argument, articulated by Helen Johns and Paul Ormerod, appears once in the sample and in only four articles in the NVivo database.

4 I have already discussed the example of Vanuatu, but Bhutan also serves as a commonly upheld example of a pre-capitalist Buddhist ‘utopia’. Stories about its entry into modernity are lamented upon. For instance, a 2009 headline reads: ‘How the happy kingdom in the clouds lost its smile; Bhutan has made its people’s happiness a national priority. But a spate of suicides suggests it is struggling to cope with the modern world’ (Buncombe, The Independent: 2009).
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