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Crafting a Curriculum to Promote Adolescent Flourishing Through Photography

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Abstract

SeeingHappy, a nonprofit organization that seeks to use photography to enhance happiness and flourishing, tasked a team from the University of Pennsylvania to develop a well-being curriculum targeting adolescents. This curriculum, *Happiness + photography*, is rooted in evidence that suggests engagement in the arts and humanities, specifically photography, contributes to well-being through a variety of mechanisms, namely: creating, connecting, noticing, reframing, and storytelling. In addition to targeting adolescent students, the curriculum is geared toward educators for use in the classroom. Experiential learning and personal reflection are central in each lesson plan. With this curriculum in hand, SeeingHappy is positioned to develop further insights about the connections between photography, happiness, and human flourishing, and to make meaningful contributions to the emerging field of the positive humanities.

Keywords

photography, well-being, positive humanities, flourishing, happiness, experiential learning, curriculum development

Disciplines

Psychology

Crafting a Curriculum to Promote Adolescent Flourishing Through Photography

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Master of Applied Positive Psychology Program, University of Pennsylvania

MAPP 714: Service Learning Project

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SeeingHappy, a nonprofit organization that seeks to use photography to enhance happiness and flourishing, tasked a team from the University of Pennsylvania to develop a well-being curriculum targeting adolescents. This curriculum, *Happiness + photography*, is rooted in evidence that suggests engagement in the arts and humanities, specifically photography, contributes to well-being through a variety of mechanisms, namely: creating, connecting, noticing, reframing, and storytelling. In addition to targeting adolescent students, the curriculum is geared toward educators for use in the classroom. Experiential learning and personal reflection are central in each lesson plan. With this curriculum in hand, SeeingHappy is positioned to develop further insights about the connections between photography, happiness, and human flourishing, and to make meaningful contributions to the emerging field of the positive humanities.

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Introduction

Around the world, the Covid-19 pandemic altered the way we live, work, and play. Physical distancing, self-isolating, and quarantining became norms. And for many, navigating the uncertainties of Covid-19 exacerbated distress and disruption, negatively affecting psychological and overall well-being (McBride et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, with a camera in hand, social developmental psychologist and photographer, Mandy Seligman, sought to cultivate her happiness and stay connected to the people, places, and spaces that bring her joy. In addition to attending to a robust family life, Mandy photographed subjects that reflected the gratitude in her heart and the beauty in the world (M. Seligman, personal communication, January 22, 2022). As a result, she created a photography collection entitled “Touching Happiness,” which helped her realize just how powerful photographs are. As a firm believer in the power of positive psychology and photography, Mandy discovered that her two passions were a dynamic pair. [SeeingHappy](#), a nonprofit born in May 2021 in response to a global pandemic, is the culmination of these passions.

SeeingHappy is promoting well-being throughout its community. But Mandy and her team are not content to stop there. The organization aspires to reach and teach the masses through a curriculum bridging the science of positive psychology with photography. As such, SeeingHappy has partnered with our team, Team Yellow, from the Master of Applied Positive Psychology program at the University of Pennsylvania. Together, we will develop this curriculum and support SeeingHappy in their work to reframe how and why we take and share photos.

Online Photo-Sharing Platforms

Today, more than 90% of photographs are captured by smartphone cameras (Kislinger & Kotrschal, 2021). Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and SnapChat offer ways for individuals to create a personal scrapbook of moments and memories, to share and revisit their own photographs, and to view others' photos as well. The primary reason users report posting photographs on Instagram is to elicit positive responses from other users in the form of "likes" (Budenz et al., 2020). Many acknowledge that posts are mostly about positive characteristics and lived experiences, presenting an intensely curated and filtered highlight reel to others (Faelens et al., 2021). Users' strong need for approval relates to higher levels of untrue or inaccurate self-presentation and an increased likelihood of depression (Mun & Kim, 2021). To remove social pressures, some users created "finsta" (fake Instagram) accounts on which they can be more authentically themselves (Budenz et al., 2020). In many ways, social media has compromised the therapeutic power of photography, and in response, there is a movement to empower individuals through both.

Visual artwork can communicate and offer insight when words cannot. Phototherapy is a creative outlet that allows for self-exploration, increases self-awareness, facilitates coping with stress, and enhances cognitive experiences. As an educational medium, photography teaches problem-solving and decision-making skills and cultivates an appreciation for how other people see the world (Stevens & Spears, 2009). For clinical populations, photography has been used as a therapeutic intervention to improve personal reflection, promote discussion, craft narratives, and identify a sense of purpose (Quaglietti, 2021). Young people navigating factors that put them at risk have successfully used photography to promote well-being through creative self-expression (D'Souza, 2005). And a popular activity on platforms such as Facebook, Flickr, and Blipfoto is

the practice of a photo-a-day, the commitment to take and share one photo online on each of the 365 days of the year. Much like keeping a diary or a journal, the photo-a-day practice is often born out of an attempt to make life changes or develop awareness (Brewster & Cox, 2018). The limitation of one photograph per day forces a deliberate focus on the quality and process of taking the photo. People typically take pictures of positive events or intentionally seek beauty to capture. As such, individuals who engaged in photo-a-day practice report transformations in the way that they see the world, enhanced interest in and enjoyment of old activities, genesis of new interests, and connection to those with whom they shared their photos (Brewster & Cox, 2018). Rather than using photography as a means of careful self-presentation, photography can be used to enhance well-being.

Anecdotally, people have found mental health benefits in mindful photography practices as well. In his books *Zen Camera* and *The Mindful Photographer*, David Ulrich reflects on his own practice and offers insight for those seeking to cultivate mindful awareness and to learn to be more present in the moment. In 2014, *National Geographic* ran an article titled “The Art of Mindful Photography” that explored the ways photography can support awareness of immediate experience and offered practical tips for readers to try (Gottlieb, 2014). Taking photographs in a mindful way with deliberate attention to what is being captured increases appreciation and motivation (Kurtz, 2015).

But only a few companies are using their platforms to teach evidence-based mindful photography. [Look Again](#) is one and SeeingHappy is another. Based in the United Kingdom and founded in 2012, Look Again offers curriculum and training in mindful photography to cultivate individual, community, and organizational well-being and resilience (Look Again, n.d.). Similarly, SeeingHappy considers itself more than just another online photo-sharing platform.

Rooted in positive psychology, SeeingHappy is an educational platform and community that seeks to use photography to enhance well-being. In addition to offering curricula, SeeingHappy aspires to offer a space for like-minded individuals to share with and learn from one another on this journey of mindful photography. And people are responding.

SeeingHappy

A growing community has rallied around Mandy Seligman and responded to her impulse to take and share happiness-inducing pictures. Today—a year after its official launch—SeeingHappy has amassed a global community of over 1,000 subscribers as well as compiled and shared over 4,000 photographs. And yet, the underlying vision—to provide a positive sharing platform to help people mindfully attend to and savor the good in the world—remains (M. Seligman, personal communication, January 24, 2022).

Over the last year, a team of professional photographers, psychologists, and educators have joined Mandy and now comprise the SeeingHappy team. She works most closely on day-to-day site administration with Media Manager, Roger Irwin, and Administrative Assistant, Lauren Pittenger. Volunteer, Xena Wang, handles outreach and brings both enthusiasm and ideas to the team. To conceptualize and execute on ideas, Mandy has turned to close friends, David Evans, Jill Sherman, and Andrew Trousdale, who serve as trustees. And rounding out the team, to which Mandy refers as a cordial family business, are a cadre of volunteer lawyers and accountants (SeeingHappy, n.d.; M. Seligman, personal communication, January 26, 2022).

SeeingHappy is organized around a common belief that seemingly minor things in our lives make them not only worthwhile but may also make the difference between a good life and a great one (SeeingHappy, n.d.). As such, the team is driven by a few guiding objectives:

- To make the world a happier place.

- To promote photography as a means of expression and a vehicle for well-being.
- To help others use photography to increase happiness, hope, and resilience.
- To promote the “art of everyday happiness” (SeeingHappy, n.d.).

Individuals and organizations from around the world comprise the greater SeeingHappy community. Despite its diversity, common themes—including beauty, connection, gratitude, happiness, hope, and humor—emerge in the photos they share (SeeingHappy, n.d.). To join the SeeingHappy community, users over the age of 13 can subscribe on the seeinghappy.org website or follow the nonprofit on Instagram. Although SeeingHappy doesn’t use algorithms or capture users’ demographic information, through community engagement, they have determined that their subscribers include primarily casual photographers.

Each month, SeeingHappy prompts engagement through a monthly “ask” and weekly newsletter in which they share snippets from related positive psychology news, findings, and/or research. For example, in January, subscribers were asked to “pay attention to what makes you think the world is a beautiful and good place” (Seeinghappy, n.d., home page). In a follow-up newsletter, they directed subscribers to an article on primal world beliefs from positive psychology researcher, Jer Clifton. Appositely, the belief that the world is a beautiful place is a likely predictor of well-being (Clifton, 2020).

SeeingHappy brings a number of strengths to its work, community, and industry. Despite a global pandemic and minimal targeted marketing, a one-woman show has grown organically and evolved into a team of like-minded subject matter experts who are differentiating themselves and are well-poised to improve the world. We are living in a moment when people are seeking happiness, connection, engagement, and greater meaning (Hsu, 2021; Schueller & Seligman, 2010), and through its burgeoning community, SeeingHappy is meeting the moment.

As with every organization, however, SeeingHappy also has weaknesses, which if unchecked could pose future threats. The nonprofit has limited awareness of its audience composition and has chosen not to collect user data beyond a name and email addresses. Although this practice has lowered barriers to enter the community, it has also limited the organization's ability to glean demographic insights, target messaging, and tailor content. Additionally, business decisions, audience insights, and curriculum framing are currently based on informed hunches rather than on data (M. Seligman & A. Trousdale, personal communication, January 24, 2022). Lastly, weekly demands for content and correspondence have reached an unsustainable pain point.

To help scale up and reach a larger audience, SeeingHappy aspires to create a research-informed curriculum that leverages photography to promote human flourishing. As an important first step, Mandy, Andrew, and David, conceptualized a framework (see Appendix A) based on the belief that intentional use of photography can meet a host of psychological needs. After considering why people take photographs and how this practice can contribute to well-being, they initially identified six mechanisms—which we subsequently narrowed down to five and hereafter refer to as *pillars*—that they believe promote human flourishing: creating, connecting, noticing, reframing, and storytelling.

Literature Review

Since then, based on their years of experience and practice in both photography and psychology, the team at SeeingHappy has been operating under two primary assumptions: 1) photography can help you to connect, create, notice, reframe and tell stories better and 2) the more we connect, create, notice, reframe, and tell stories, the happier we will be (A. Trousdale, personal communication, February 14, 2022). In our Literature Review we set out to investigate

these hypotheses. We drew from a broad range of positive psychology theories and constructs, including PERMA, subjective well-being, psychological richness, and the positive humanities. To support our work on curriculum development, we believed it was also important to examine the existing literature in positive education, positive interventions, and mindful photography. Finally, considering that SeeingHappy originated out of the Covid-19 pandemic, we also examined the literature on resilience. With our Literature Review, we aimed to canvas the broad scope of theory and research linking happiness with the arts and humanities. Then, we honed in on literature connecting more specifically to photography and the pillars SeeingHappy identified.

Enjoyment and Happiness

People are more likely to pursue and repeat practices they enjoy (Peterson, 2006). So, we believed enjoyment was an important factor to consider in our exploration. Engagement and attention are often at play in positive and enjoyable experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Additionally, novelty, accomplishment, and immersion can heighten this enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Research suggests that increasing one's happiness requires intention, commitment, and effortful strategies that engage cognition and behavior (Lyubomirsky, 2007; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

The Arts & Humanities and Happiness

Increased happiness is one of many potential positive outcomes when we engage with the arts and humanities—through observation, study, and/or practice (Westgate & Oishi, 2022). This is the domain of the positive humanities, a new and emerging field that explores the relationship between the arts and humanities and human flourishing. Research from the field suggests that engagement with the arts and humanities makes our lives not only happier, but also more meaningful and psychologically rich (Westgate & Oishi, 2022). Further, a systematic review of

27 interventions designed to promote flourishing through the arts and humanities in healthy adults linked arts engagement to measures of flourishing, including positive affect and general well-being (Shim et al., 2021).

The arts and humanities can increase well-being in the immediate as well as long-term through direct experiences or indirectly, by bolstering skills that have been shown to promote well-being, such as self-efficacy or interpersonal connection (Westgate & Oishi, 2022). Humanities practices such as photography can facilitate rich and interesting experiences and support the development of some of these indirectly beneficial cognitive skills (Westgate & Oishi, 2022). To enhance the enjoyment of these practices, willingness, motivation, and ability also play a role (Westgate & Oishi, 2022).

Photography as a Happiness Practice

Several small-scale and a few larger scale studies have specifically explored how photography practices can make us happier. In one study, participants who intentionally took smartphone photos intended to induce happiness showed increased positive affect (Chen et al., 2016). Qualitative research from this same small study showed that the intervention group assigned to intentionally take photos meant to boost their affect became more reflective during the process (Chen et al., 2016). Another small-scale study of college students suggests that taking photos in a thoughtful and creative way can boost one's mood and appreciation of everyday life (Kurtz, 2015). And finally, findings across three field and six lab experiments suggest that one's level of engagement in the process of taking photos of their experience can directly increase or decrease one's enjoyment of the experience (Diehl et al., 2016). Across contexts, when the ways we take photos of an experience increase engagement, taking photos intensifies our enjoyment of the experience.

The RAISE Model

Both theory and research suggest that the arts and humanities in general and photography more specifically can contribute to happiness and well-being. But this exploration begs the question of how. Positive humanities scholars have proposed a conceptual model—the RAISE model—meant to address this question (Tay & Pawelski, 2022). The acronym RAISE stands for *reflection*, that is, engaging in arts and humanities processes that influence our behaviors, values, and worldview; *acquisition*, that is, arts engagement (e.g., mastery experiences) that develop our habits, perspectives and skills (e.g., self-efficacy); *immersion*, that is, attentive absorption in one's experience; *socialization*, that is, developing and affirming one's identity and/or how one interacts with others relating to the arts and humanities; and *expression*, that is, the process of creating art (Shim et al., 2019; Tay et al., 2018).

SeeingHappy Framework

In our research we discovered parallels between the SeeingHappy framework and the RAISE Model. *Reflection* loosely aligns with *reframing*. *Acquisition* loosely aligns with *creating*. *Immersion* loosely aligns with *noticing*. *Socialization* loosely aligns with *connecting*. And *expression* loosely aligns with *storytelling*. Importantly, however, the SeeingHappy framework is distinctive in its specific relevance to the act of taking pictures. As such, its pillars have guided the remainder of this Literature Review.

Connecting

Ryff (1989) argued that interpersonal relationships are an essential component of well-being. Relationships are one of the five key components of Seligman's (2011) PERMA model of well-being. Additionally, Chris Peterson, an influential founder of positive psychology, is famously quoted as summarizing the field in three words: "Other people matter" (Peterson,

2006). As these three scholars theorized and research confirms, relationships and connection are critical to human flourishing (Ryff, 1989). And when used deliberately, photography has the power to forge connections within the individual, between people, and among communities.

To Self. Engaging with others in meaningful and impactful ways requires self-awareness. Creative Youth Development (CYD) is a community-based art initiative that seeks to develop social, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive skills in youth. They aim to prevent future problematic behaviors such as substance use and school failure and promote self awareness by creating experiences that prime youth to thrive individually and within their communities through engagement with the arts and humanities (O’Neal, 2022). An example of an effective CYD program is the Mosaic Youth Theater in Detroit, Michigan. This organization strategically uses the arts and humanities to help at-risk youth develop socioemotional skills necessary for flourishing. Program alumni describe outcomes including positive identity development and maintenance, as well as personal growth and transformation (O’Neal, 2022). Similarly, the visual arts provide a means of discovering the inner and outer self—playing with past, present, and imagined future selves and exploring ways in which the self operates within the world and functions with others (Darewych, 2022). With a positive sense of self and increased self-confidence, an individual can begin to explore interpersonal connections.

To Others. Photography can offer a way to connect with like-minded individuals whether by sharing an interest in the hobby itself or by connecting over a photograph. For example, participation in CYD programs provides young people with membership in a group that promotes social connectedness and acceptance (O’Neal, 2022). Collaborative arts projects provide an interesting opportunity for people to connect as they use their interpersonal and problem-solving skills to work toward a common goal. Those who work successfully on a

collaborative project develop a sense of hope and feelings of connectedness (Darewych, 2022). In cases such as these, the visual arts become a bonding point and a shared interest over which people can connect.

Photography can also be used as an entry point to dialogue with others. People who share common photography practices such as those who complete the photo-a-day feel connected to others by sharing their photographs, implying that this sharing is akin to conversing with others (Brewster & Cox, 2018). *Imaginarte*, a photograph exhibit created by teenage refugees, afforded people with marginalized identities to publicly express their process of cultural adaptation and identity reinvention during their transition to living in the United States. They shared their photos and stories with nearby college students, and in doing so, bonded over their shared humanity (Loustaunau, 2019). With or without a common language, photography permits people to connect and communicate.

In taking photographs of other people, a photographer must give the subject a voice and present them as fully human, which requires deep knowledge of and/or appreciation for the person and their values (Kay, 2011). *Photo-elicitation*, a practice that uses photographs to trigger discussion particularly about abstract or difficult concepts, and *photo-novella*, which empowers communication through the act of showing a photograph and sharing its significance, are two more examples of how connections can be made through photography (Purcell, 2009).

To Community. Photography can be used as a tool to generate conversations within a community about belonging, identity, and development, as well. PhotoVoice, a charity developed by Wang & Burris (1997), allows individuals to identify, represent, and enhance their community through photography. To identify strengths and stimulate dialogue about potential change, the program provides ordinary people with cameras and asks them to document

everyday life in their community (Wang & Burris, 1997). Street photography, another form of photo documentation, which involves taking pictures of chance events and encounters in public spaces, enhances appreciation for and identification with a community. In Ban Bu, a village near Bangkok, high school students participated in a street-photography project using their personal smartphones to explore the connections between people and place. The practice was effective in deepening students' connection to and value of their community. Some felt as though they saw elements of their own identity reflected in their photographs (Ferguson & Konstanz, 2021).

Creating

One of the defining characteristics of humans is our urge to create—that is, to bring something new into existence (Forgeard & Eichner, 2014). This deeply-rooted creative impulse, enables human adaptation and collective flourishing (Zaidel, 2014). The act of taking a picture is generative in its nature—we make something new. It taps into a myriad of psychological mechanisms that mediate between creating and well-being. Here, we consider several mechanisms at play: self-efficacy, engagement (i.e., flow), and accomplishment (i.e., mastery).

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief that we are capable of doing what a situation requires (Bandura, 1993). Working toward the acquisition of new skills and abilities has been cited as a significant source of self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977). Maddux and Kleiman (2022) suggest that participatory arts experiences in which we are the producers rather than the consumers of art can enhance self-efficacy. It is important to keep in mind that the arts can be intimidating. Some doubt their artistic ability or feel they lack sufficient knowledge to be creators of their own works of art. So, thoughtful interventions must be appropriately scaffolded to enable success one experience at a time (Maddux & Kleiman, 2022).

Engagement. Another underlying mechanism that connects the visual arts with well-being is engagement, or flow—a state of complete absorption when we use all of our cognitive and emotional resources and lose all sense of time (Seligman, 2011). Engagement is another one of the five key elements of well-being that Seligman (2011) identifies in the PERMA model. Seligman’s conceptualization of engagement closely parallels Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) construct of flow—the state of optimal functioning—which he too describes as complete absorption in an activity that is pursued for its own sake. Flow activities provide a sense of discovery and enjoyment through a careful balance of skill and challenge; in other words, tapping into flow states requires activities that are neither too simple nor too difficult (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Scholars also hypothesize that novelty is an important element to achieving flow states, engagement, and more broadly, human flourishing (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Oishi et al., 2020).

Accomplishment. A third mechanism that connects the creative visual arts with well-being is accomplishment, or mastery. According to the PERMA model, accomplishment contributes to flourishing when pursued for its own sake (Seligman, 2011). Like the child who finishes a drawing or completes a puzzle by putting the last piece in its place, the act of accomplishing something can be exhilarating, no matter our age. Similarly, self-determination theory asserts that competency is a basic human need, along with the need for relatedness and the need for autonomy (Ryan and Deci, 2000). As a creative endeavor, photography can serve as a source of accomplishment and mastery, thereby contributing to well-being.

Noticing

Simply carrying a camera around can increase one’s awareness of and attention to things one would normally miss (Gross & Shapiro, 1997). On the other hand, a camera can be a

distraction from positive experiences, where one focuses too much on the technicalities of the camera or the aesthetics of the photo (Gross & Shapiro, 1997; Kurtz, 2015). However, when used intentionally, a camera can serve as a tool to endorse and broaden cognitive skills, to shift attention toward the positive and to promote happiness and well-being (Kurtz & Lyubomirsky, 2013; McKee et al., 2020; Sumner et al., 2019).

To notice and assess the positive elements of daily life, both professional and amateur photographers agree that composing a photograph requires focus and attention (Kurtz, 2015). Research has revealed the emergence of noticing in the psychological concept of *mindfulness*, an attribute of consciousness and practice believed to promote well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Rooted in contemplative traditions, mindfulness is defined as the intentional practice of paying attention in a present, purposeful, and non judgmental manner in which conscious attention and awareness are encouraged (Kabat-Zinn, 2002).

According to Gross and Shapiro (1997), the facilitation of mindfulness happens in two ways: 1) engaging in an activity that encourages awareness, or 2) reducing the habit of unawareness. A photographic practice can do both. Gross and Shapiro (1997) characterize this approach to photography as conscious camera work, a method of taking photographs where the photographer is mentally present, receptive, and completely aware of their surroundings. Contemporary literature refers to this as mindful photography, where taking photographs is viewed as a life practice that leads to increased happiness (Kurtz & Lyubomirsky, 2013; Schueller & Parks, 2014; Sumner et al., 2019). Collectively, the evidence above suggests that mindfully and deliberately engaging in a photographic practice helps us to notice and appreciate the everyday beauty that surrounds us.

Reframing

Broadly, engagement in the arts and humanities has the potential to change people's view of the world and their place in it through novel and psychologically rich experiences (Oishi et al., 2020). In particular, visual arts can effectively help bring about a change of perspective by "making what is familiar unfamiliar and making what is unfamiliar familiar" (Westgate & Oishi, 2022, p. 7). These changes in perspective may prompt emotional shifts and enrich our daily lived experience (Westgate & Oishi, 2022). Being able to shift our perspective is a sign of flexibility and also fosters resilience in the face of adversity (Southwick & Charney, 2018). The ability to positively reframe challenges also contributes to stress resilience (Southwick & Charney, 2018).

Similarly, Tay et al. (2018) propose that reflection is one of the mechanisms through which the arts and humanities enhance well-being. Reflectiveness can promote perspective taking and critical thinking (Tay et al., 2018). Reflective arts-based interventions are used in clinical settings to encourage reframing as a pathway to psychological well-being (Darewych, 2022). Art therapists working with veterans in recovery employ photography as a therapeutic tool for creating a hope narrative (Quaglietti, 2021). Photography has also been used as a therapeutic tool to foster hope in people living with schizophrenia (Miller & Happell, 2006). Hope is an important target in well-being interventions because it is an active ingredient in psychological change (Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2015). In mainstream educational settings, photography can cultivate an appreciation for how others see the world (Stevens & Spears, 2009). One-photo-a-day digital practices also build in programmatic components to foster reflection, for example, adding a text annotation to photographs (Brewster & Cox, 2018).

Storytelling

Photography can be used as a means of self-exploration and self-expression of the things that are important or give meaning to an individual; it holds great promise as a method for helping people see through the eyes of another (Sonn et al., 2014; Steger et al., 2013). Storytelling offers the potential to impact an individual's well-being through the exploration of self-expression, identity, meaning, and memories. Photography is also more than just utilizing the camera as a tool to take photographs, but it is viewed as a practice through which people can construct (and share) meaning about their identities, their environments, and their lived experiences (Sonn et al., 2014; Everett, 2015). Taking pictures can be used as a form of recovery or healing and a source of empowerment. In a study conducted by Moore (2017), photography is used as a method called narrative storytelling. This form of storytelling provides individuals a safe environment for recounting painful memories and experiences. In addition to sharing stories, Steger et al. (2014) developed an intervention called auto-photography, a visual research method aimed to help individuals explore meaning in their lives by photographing things that are meaningful to them. Meaning, defined as the reason for an individual's existence and greater purpose they seek in life, is an indicator of psychological well-being and associated with happiness and life satisfaction (Steger et al., 2013). Previous research on meaning has relied on verbal or written expression of the phenomena (Steger et al., 2013). However, photography can also be an effective method for revealing and understanding the sources of meaning in people's lives.

Experiential Learning Through Positive Interventions

Positive interventions are intentional activities that cultivate positive emotions, cognitions, and behaviors to increase well-being (Lyubomirsky & Sin, 2009). Positive

interventions can be understood as experiential learning, defined by Kolb (1984) as a learning process in which knowledge is gleaned from an experience. This theory of learning draws on works of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, William James, and Carl Rogers among many others to present a holistic model of learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). Experiential learning is a philosophical approach to education rooted in the belief that an individual's life experience plays a critical role in learning and understanding (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). This method of instruction is used to support personalized learning in a variety of contexts.

The cycle of experiential learning typically consists of four stages: 1) concrete experience, 2) reflective observation, 3) abstract conceptualization, and 4) active experimentation. Effective learning occurs when a person has a new experience, is able to reflect on that experience, successfully analyzes that experience to make conclusions, and then tests and applies their learning in future situations (Kolb, 1984). Learning becomes iterative in this cycle as theory and practice are intimately intertwined to deepen understanding and increase engagement. The active participation of the learner is crucial to experiential learning, and learners are encouraged to self-evaluate their progress (Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

To be considered a positive intervention, an activity must aim to either increase well-being by cultivating the preferred (e.g., positive affect) or diminish the dispreferred through practice coping with the problems and challenges that inevitably arise in life (Pawelski, 2016). Pawelski's (2020) Elements Model posits that each positive intervention consists of five components: the *activity*, the *active ingredient*, the *target change*, the *target system*, and the *desired outcome*. The desired outcome, or the intended effect, pinpoints a target system, or the domain in which the target change must occur. An active ingredient is chosen as the way to cause the target change, and a simple and measurable activity outlines the necessary actions to

trigger the active ingredient (Pawelski, 2020). The active ingredients—the start of a chain reaction creating a desired outcome—are the engine of positive interventions.

SeeingHappy believes that individuals can use photography as an arts-based intervention to enhance happiness and flourishing. Photography, therefore, is the activity, and the desired outcomes are happiness and enhanced well-being. The curriculum pillars—connecting, creating, noticing, reframing, and storytelling—represent the active ingredients that are hypothesized to mediate the effects of photography on well-being.

Application Plan

With a firm basis in the extant literature, together with SeeingHappy, we planned to create photographic activities that serve as arts-based positive interventions. Our Literature Review underscores the importance of developing activities that enable experimentation, self-evaluation, and reflection. Thus, our approach to designing the curriculum reflects these findings. Additionally, choice is an important consideration in well-constructed positive interventions, and it further enables student-directed learning (Knowles, 1975; Locke, 1996). As such, we designed the curriculum to offer multiple entry points for students to explore the connection between photography and well-being. In the plan that follows, we have detailed this and other important considerations and limitations and have provided an overview of the SeeingHappy curriculum.

In creating the application material—the SeeingHappy curriculum—for this service-learning project, we considered the three distinct audiences affected by its creation and implementation. The first audience is the SeeingHappy organization. The SeeingHappy team, which again is comprised of positive psychologists, photographers, and educators, is already familiar with the research related to well-being and flourishing. So, our goal was to collaborate

with them as we integrated this research and to lean into their photography expertise as we developed their curriculum.

SeeingHappy intends to pilot this curriculum in schools, so a second target audience is educators. These educators may or may not have experience with photography and will likely be unfamiliar with the tenets of positive psychology. The final target audience of the curriculum is the adolescents who will review its contents and complete its lessons. Much like the educators, these students come from diverse backgrounds. So, we concluded that the curriculum must be accessible across a wide range of people. And to ensure that the educators who use it have a clear vision of what to do, why they will do it, and how they will implement it, we knew the curriculum needed to be straightforward and concise.

Although the SeeingHappy team has extensive knowledge and expertise of photography, it is likely that the educators implementing the curriculum and the adolescents partaking in the experience will have limited photography knowledge beyond using a smartphone camera. To aid in the curriculum's accessibility to each of our target audiences, we intentionally chose language free of technical jargon and wrote the objective, context, prompts, and reflection questions with lay photographers in mind. Finally, throughout our curriculum planning process and creative decision-making, we prioritized cultural relevance and potential for adolescent engagement.

Typically, adolescents' motivation in school and learning decreases over time (Lam et al., 2016; Raufelder & Kulakow, 2021), however the quality and type of learning a student experiences can diminish this common decline. Student-directed learning (SDL) provides students with choice and flexibility in their experience while a teacher serves as the facilitator (Knowles, 1975). SDL, when contrasted with teacher-directed learning (TDL), puts the student in control of their own learning, thus increasing their engagement, motivation, autonomy,

mastery, and self-efficacy (Schweder & Raufelder, 2021). Similarly, in learner-centered teaching (LCT), teachers provide resources and engaging activities to give students more control over the process of learning skills rather than memorizing content (Weimer, 2002). LCT creates learners with self direction who are invested in their own learning (Hanewicz et al., 2017).

We considered these findings and techniques throughout curriculum development. We intended to incorporate experiential learning, a great example of both LCT and SDL, which leverages student interests to create flexible learning conditions geared toward learning objectives (Benita et al., 2014). To ensure that adolescents can meaningfully engage with the photography experience that the SeeingHappy curriculum provides, it puts students at the center of their learning experience and positions educators as guides and facilitators of this experience.

Curriculum Overview

Per above, we organized the SeeingHappy curriculum into five pillar-aligned modules written and designed to promote adolescent happiness and well-being through photography in five slightly different ways. Each module consists of six core elements: 1) the module objective, 2) 4–5 photography prompts designed to meet both the curriculum and module objectives, 3) 4–5 reflection questions crafted to elicit experiential insights and to determine if the module meets its objective, 4) an explanation of the psychology behind each module, 5) a pro skill, and 6) links to resources for continued engagement. In the brief overview below, we've sampled select curriculum content: each module's objective and the research-informed "why" behind it. Also detailed below is an overview of the deliverable design and outline. To preview the final SeeingHappy curriculum in its entirety, see Appendix B.

Creating Module

Objective: To learn new skills, create new things, and see that you're improving.

We're wired to create, and when we take photographs, we make new things that didn't exist before. This module emphasizes the creative aspect of taking pictures and developing new skills that can help to foster *self-efficacy*, that is, the belief that we have the power to influence what happens in our lives. One photo at a time, we develop a sense of accomplishment—perhaps even mastery or flow, an optimal experience that can come in the sweet spot between challenge and skill.

Connecting Module

Objective: To connect more deeply with others and promote values of friendship and shared humanity.

Positive psychology pioneer, Chris Peterson, summed up the good life in three words: “Other people matter.” From birth, we're evolutionarily wired to rely on others. And as we age, our relationships make life meaningful and worthwhile. We share our positive emotions and experiences with others. And we grow and develop self-awareness through experiences of kindness, love, belonging, and vulnerability. Photography can provide an entry point to conversations and pathways for positive connections and experiences.

Noticing Module

Objective: To become more aware and feel more appreciative of the beauty and goodness in the world around you.

Photography requires that we focus and pay attention. It teaches us to notice details we might otherwise miss. Mindfulness can shift or heighten our attention, and when we use our cameras mindfully, we become more aware of the everyday beauty around us. Photography is a life practice that cultivates qualities within us that can increase our happiness and well-being. As

we practice noticing the good, the interesting, and the beautiful with our cameras, we begin to notice it in our lives as well.

Reframing Module

Objective: To reframe the way you see and respond to the world and your experiences.

Photography offers practical and concrete ways to reframe our perspectives, which can improve mindsets and promote resilience, hope and optimism. In this module, we're shifting our relationships with the everyday objects in our lives. These perspective changes can enrich our experiences and help us reframe challenges. Each time we consider what to include in a camera frame, we're making deliberate choices about what to focus on and how to see it. This practice has real-life parallels in the pursuit of happiness and well-being.

Storytelling Module

Objective: To use photography to tell your story or to help someone else tell their story.

Through photography, we can express our stories, recount memories, and explore what matters most to us. *Meaning*, which is our interpretation of our lived experiences or the greater purposes we seek in life, is linked to our psychological well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction. Photography coupled with storytelling can help us construct and share meaning about ourselves and our environments. It's a means by which we can tell and share our stories and encourage others to do the same.

Curriculum Deliverable

Since this is a photography curriculum for adolescents, we believed it was important to create a visual deliverable that features photographs throughout. We also believed it was important for kids to relate to and see themselves and their experience reflected not only in the content of the curriculum but also in its images and aesthetics. Research from psychology and

education supports these beliefs and underscores the importance of the *picture-superiority effect*, which suggests that pictures are more likely to be remembered than words (Stenberg, 2006). Further, images and visuals can help to improve learning, memory, and recall (Endestad et al., 2003; McBride & Doshier, 2002). Additionally, research from digital marketing suggests that photos of faces tend to evoke far more engagement than photos without (Bakhshi et al., 2014). As such, we opted to create an image-heavy curriculum with limited text, that features pillar-aligned photos as well as images of adolescents and their faces. Lastly, we're cognizant that color can be a useful tool to evoke emotions (Valdez & Mehrabian, 1994), so we leveraged the SeeingHappy color palette and insights from color psychology to design the final deliverable and to select its photos.

We created an 11-page deliverable in a PDF playbook format featuring spreads with both images and text. In addition to the pages for each module, the curriculum includes a cover page, an introduction page, a table of contents, a references page, and a back cover, which points users interested in more prompts (see Appendix C) back to the SeeingHappy website. The bulk of the curriculum content is targeted to adolescents; however, the introduction is specifically written to educators in language accessible to adolescents. The introduction features a brief overview of positive psychology and photography as a practice for increasing happiness and flourishing. It also details the intervention's chief objective: to leverage photography-based experiential learning to increase student well-being.

Measurement

Ultimately, SeeingHappy needs to convert their research-informed hunches into empirically based findings. To establish that photography can increase happiness and flourishing, we recommend that SeeingHappy collaborate directly with one of their educational partners to

conduct an empirical study. To conduct a quantitative data analysis, we recommend that SeeingHappy administer a pre- and post-test of study participants using two well-validated and reliable measurement scales: 1) The EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-Being, which parallels Martin Seligman's (2011) PERMA model of well-being but is specifically targeted to adolescents. The EPOCH scale assesses the positive psychological characteristics of engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness (Kern, et al., 2016). 2) The PANAS Scale is a mood scale that measures positive and negative affect (Watson, et al., 1988). These two measures can be combined into a single survey. In order to protect the privacy of participants, we offer two suggestions: Students in the study can utilize the last three digits of their school identification number as a tracking mechanism; or, teachers can assign students a study ID number that remains confidential between teachers and SeeingHappy.

If SeeingHappy finds evidence to support their overarching hypothesis that photography improves happiness and well-being, then a phase-two level of quantitative study might examine whether the specific curriculum module (i.e., creating, connecting, noticing, reframing, and storytelling) activates specific psychological aspects of well-being (e.g., belonging, engagement, mindfulness, meaning, and hope). Since it is beyond the scope of our Application Plan, we will not make recommendations for specific measurement tools for phase two.

Qualitative research can be equally useful in validating SeeingHappy's hunches. The inclusion of reflection questions in the curriculum provides an opportunity for qualitative analysis. However, coding of data is time consuming (Basit, 2003), and it requires people resources that may be beyond SeeingHappy's capabilities. The collection of user-experience excerpts (i.e., from reflection responses) as anecdotal evidence, however, may help inform future measurements within each pillar. Another form of qualitative research that may be of interest is

the exemplar methodology in which semi-structured interviews are conducted with select subjects who demonstrate the construct being studied in a highly developed manner (Bronk, et al., 2013). Thus, SeeingHappy could collect and synthesize responses to the reflection questions along with findings from the quantitative study to identify a small group of subjects who demonstrate significant changes in levels of happiness and flourishing as a result of the curriculum. With these exemplar subjects, SeeingHappy would then conduct semi-structured interviews to glean insights that may inform *how* the specific photography activities influence happiness. This measurement approach is not without obstacles: Time, people resources, and the need for permission all pose potential limitations to our measurement recommendations.

Setting SeeingHappy Up for Success

To test their hypothesis that photography does in fact increase happiness, it will be important for the curriculum to include a pre-and post-measurement of those variables. If SeeingHappy does find well-being benefits resulting from engagement with photography activities, the structure of the curriculum offers opportunities for exploring their proposed pillars in more depth. As our task was first to generate the curriculum, our focus was on providing materials that could be used for future randomized-control experiments or for quasi-experimental designs to explore the relationship between photography and flourishing. Since the benefits of completing a positive intervention are not exempt from *hedonic adaptation*, the tendency for people to return to baseline happiness levels, the duration of each module and recommended time spent on each prompt will be important factors for SeeingHappy to consider when exploring the effectiveness of their curriculum.

Currently, the SeeingHappy team devotes substantial time and energy to engage with and respond to individual users and to address inquiries and requests from institutions and

organizations that use the SeeingHappy website. Viewed as a resource they can provide to educators and from which they can leverage content for their website, the curriculum can minimize the response time for and between those requests. It can help to minimize time-consuming communication between SeeingHappy and its users without compromising the impact and quality of their content. Ideally, it will afford more time to efficiently and effectively accommodate increased demands. Additionally, offering a curriculum and related content can enable the organization to scale and appeal to a wider audience.

SeeingHappy intends to roll out and test this curriculum with a few pilot schools as soon as it's available. They plan to leverage feedback from early users to assess its effectiveness and continually refine it. So, our intention was to provide the curriculum in a format that will enable the SeeingHappy team to implement it from day one and to easily gain user insights. We elected to deliver the curriculum in both PDF and source-file formats. As such the SeeingHappy team can easily share it, modify it, access content from it, or gate it on their website for educator access.

Presently, SeeingHappy primarily communicates and delivers content to users via their website and social media platforms. To expand their reach, the organization has recently developed and released a mobile application, or app. The team has expressed interest in eventually embedding QR codes in the mobile app for users to gain access to the curriculum. Although this is beyond the scope of the current project, leveraging technology to share curriculum content is an important consideration for future exploration. Lauren, the web designer and developer on the SeeingHappy team, will be an important resource in this exploration and in finding ways to optimize the uses of a digital curriculum. However at this stage, we anticipate that the technological implementation demands on Lauren will be minimal.

The entire SeeingHappy team is well-informed and knowledgeable about photography and positive psychology, so we are confident they can continue to improve and iterate on the curriculum we provided. Leveraging their collective strengths and expertise, they can ensure that further curriculum development aligns with the organization's goals and objectives.

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Appendix A

SeeingHappy + SLP – Designing a Photography Wellbeing Curriculum

Background context: a framework for understanding the relationship between photography and flourishing

While the act of taking a photograph is very simple, there are many reasons one might do it. In fact, the act of photography fulfills a variety of psychological purposes. As a result, photography promotes flourishing in a variety of ways. Below, we identify six ways of framing the act of photography, each of which corresponds to particular psychological functions, mechanisms and benefits:

1. **Creating** – Photography is a creative act.
Key related psychology concepts: *creativity, flow, purpose, imagination, craft, achievement, self-efficacy, learning...*
2. **Storytelling** – Photography lets us tell stories about things that matter to us.
Key related psychology concepts: *meaning, home, nostalgia, self-expression, heritage, tradition, documentation, memory...*
3. **Noticing** – Photography forces us to pay closer attention to the world.
Key related psychology concepts: *observation, awareness, attention, presence, mindfulness, curiosity, awe, wonder, patience...*
4. **Enjoying** – Photography is a fun thing to do.
Key related psychology concepts: *happiness, joy, play, passion, engagement, positive emotion, relaxation, pleasure, recreation...*
5. **Connecting** – Photography is a means of socializing with others.
Key related psychology concepts: *love, kindness, connection, friendship, humanity, humor, belonging, community, family, reciprocity, respect, recognition...*
6. **Reframing** – Photography is an exercise in reframing how we see things.
Key related psychology concepts: *gratitude, perspective, wisdom, appreciation of beauty and goodness, hope, optimism, resilience...*

Our (loose) vision for the curriculum

Our goal with this Service Learning Project is to develop a six-part curriculum modeled on these six dimensions of photography: creating, storytelling, noticing, enjoying, connecting and reframing.

We feel that each of these dimensions of photography provides a vehicle to promote particular wellbeing benefits. We want to create a standardized curriculum that we can hand off to the institutions/schools/organizations/classes and so forth, so that they can understand the

relationship between photography and wellbeing, and so that they can develop a photographic practice that improves wellbeing in clear, intentional ways.

Together with you, we hope to create a six-part curriculum designed around the six distinct dimensions of photography that we identify above. In order for the curriculum to be successful, we believe each section must include the following elements:

1. **Introduction**
 - a. Clearly explains how/why photography fulfills a particular psychological function (creating/storytelling/noticing/enjoying/connecting/reframing).
 - b. *For example, in the “noticing” section, how would you clearly explain that photography is an exercise in observing details in the world more closely?*
2. **Integration of Research**
 - a. Shares relevant research connecting that particular psychological function with wellbeing.
 - b. *For example, in the “creating” section, what research supports the notion that creative activities promote flow, engagement, self-efficacy and so on?
3. **Positive Photography Interventions**
 - a. Offers instruction, guidance and section-specific activities for individuals to complete. This should include section-specific photographic positive interventions, designed by integrating photography with studied / established positive interventions.
 - b. *For example, in the “reframing” section, can “active-constructive responding” be adapted to leverage photography, or might there be a photographic version of a gratitude journal?
4. **Measurement**
 - a. Provides methods for measuring the effectiveness of the activities and interventions put forth in #3.
 - b. *For example, participants might take a SWB or PANAS survey before and after completing the “enjoying” section of the curriculum.*

A note on the process


We have outlined the above in order to help scope this project and make the objective clear. We define the six themes based on our experience with photography and our understanding of its underlying psychology.

We hope that by defining these areas of overlap between photography and psychology, we provide you with sufficient context to begin researching the topics on your own and developing your own ideas for how photography can benefit psychology in each of these six respects. There is tremendous room for you to be creative within these headline section categories, and we cannot wait to see what ideas, research associations and interventions you are able to come up with.

Rest assured, our team of photographers will be alongside you all the way, particularly as we collaborate to design photographic activities and prompts that function as positive interventions.

Appendix B
SeeingHappy Curriculum





Introduction

At SeeingHappy, we believe photography can make our lives happier and more meaningful. When we take pictures deliberately, we shift our perspectives and can learn to notice the good around us. As such, we believe that teaching young people how to take pictures more intentionally is teaching them a practice in well-being. This practice can help to promote the art of everyday happiness and improve the quality of their lives and their experiences.


The primary purpose of this curriculum is to promote happiness and well-being in adolescents. But what is well-being? We believe it must be about more than minimizing negativity or the things that can go wrong in their lives. Well-being is also about elevating and celebrating what can go right. This research-informed curriculum is largely based in positive psychology—the science of well-being. It's designed to cultivate experiences that promote happiness and flourishing.

We created this curriculum to help educators facilitate photography-based experiential learning—both inside and outside of the classroom. To make the most of it, here are a few recommendations:

- Invite students to create a document or bring a notebook where they can record their reflections.
- Encourage students to use their camera of choice—phones work too.
- Allow time for both exercises and reflections. We encourage you to complete them along with your students.
- If your learning environment is conducive, get your students outdoors!
- Model meaningful engagement and allow time for small-group and/or larger-class discussions and reflections.

Wishing you a wonderful experience!

The SeeingHappy team



Thanks for choosing the SeeingHappy curriculum to promote happiness and well-being in your students through photography.

This curriculum is organized into five modules aligned to our five core pillars: **creating, connecting, noticing, reframing, and storytelling.**

Each module includes six components: the module objective, a series of photography prompts, reflection questions, an explanation of the psychology behind the module design, a pro skill, and links to resources for continued engagement. We've noted potential take-home activities with an asterisk (*).

To learn more about our non-profit or to join our community, visit SeeingHappy.org

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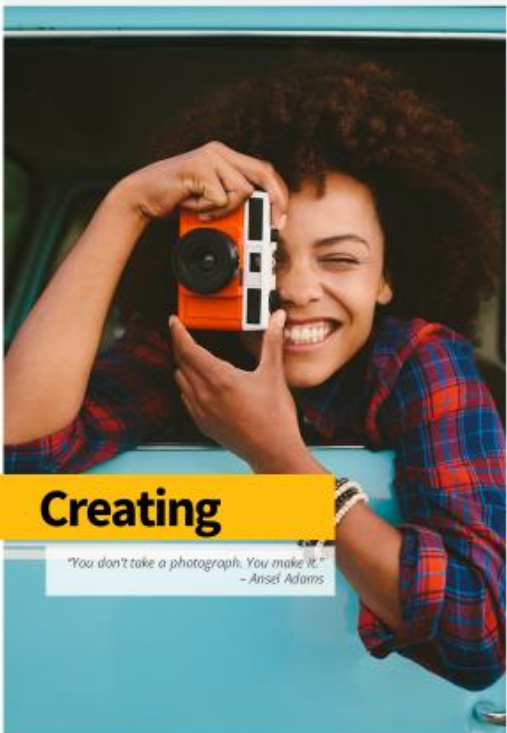
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Creating

*"You don't take a photograph. You make it."
—Ansel Adams*

Objective | To learn new skills, create new things, and see we're improving.

Photography prompts

- One shot** | You have one shot—deliberately choose and orchestrate the photo you want to capture, then take it only once.
- Paper art** | Take a sheet of paper and fold, bend, and position it however you like. Then, take 8 different photos of your paper art. Use your camera to explore shape, line, darkness, and light.
- Instagram vs. reality** | Take two versions of the same photo. In the first, feel free to crop and use your filters to create the best version that you can. Then take the same photo again with the intention to create the best raw and unfiltered second version.
- Do over** | Remember your one shot? Take it again.

Reflection questions

- Which prompt did you enjoy most and why? Which was most challenging?
- What skills did you learn, and how did you feel learning them?
- Pick your favorite photo. How do you feel when you look at it?
- How might you improve your favorite photo?
- Did you learn new skills or notice you're improving? If so, in what ways?

Photography + creating

We're wired to create, and when we take photographs, we make new things that didn't exist before. This module emphasizes the creative aspect of taking pictures and developing new skills that can help to foster self-efficacy, that is, the belief that we have the power to influence what happens in our lives. One photo at a time, we develop a sense of accomplishment—perhaps even mastery or flow, an optimal experience that can come in the sweet spot between challenge and skill.

Pro skill

Pay attention to the colors in your environment. Explore your camera settings to intensify colors by adding warm or cool tones.

For more information:

- [Photography builds well-being](#)
- [Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive development and functioning](#)
- [Flow](#)

4



Connecting

"When someone special walks into your life and is able to change things for the better, don't let them walk away." —Wiz Khalifa

Objective | To connect more deeply with others and promote values of friendship and shared humanity.

Photography prompts

- Meet someone new** | Take 10 photos of a stranger. Shoot some from a distance, then be brave, introduce yourself, and ask permission to photograph the stranger up close.
- Photo date*** | Invite someone to join you for a photo date. The only requirement is that you each use your camera or phone to document the experience. At the end of your date, share your photos with each other.
- Candid observations*** | Go out to a busy area and find a place to sit. Patiently observe and capture candid photos of the people around you.
- Friend to friend** | Take 10 photos of a friend, then let them do the same. Each of you choose your favorite and share why you chose it.

Reflection questions

- Which prompt did you enjoy most and why? Which was most challenging?
- Pick your favorite photo. How do you feel when you look at it?
- What did you learn about yourself through this module?
- In what ways did this module affect your relationships?
- Did this module help you to connect more deeply with others and/or promote values of friendship and shared humanity? If so, in what ways?

Photography + connecting

Positive psychology pioneer, Chris Peterson, summed up the good life in three words: "Other people matter." From birth, we're evolutionarily wired to rely on others. And as we age, our relationships make life meaningful and worthwhile. We share our positive emotions and experiences with others. And we grow and develop self-awareness through experiences of kindness, love, belonging, and vulnerability. Photography can provide an entry point to conversations and pathways for positive connections and experiences.

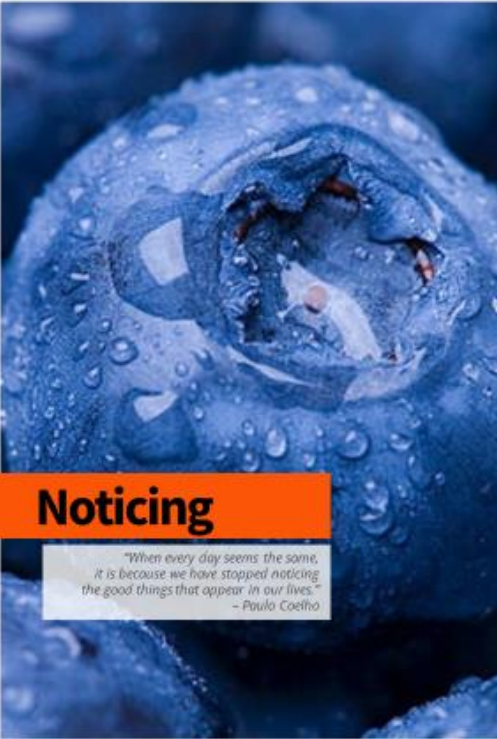
Pro skill

When taking a portrait, organize your shot with your subject's actions + environment in mind. What else can they tell us?

For more information:

- [Connections photo collection](#)
- [Building resilience through connections and ACEs](#)
- [Ubuntu | On humanity and well-being](#)

* At-home. 5



Noticing

"When every day seems the same, it is because we have stopped noticing the good things that appear in our lives."
— Paulo Coelho

Objective | To become more aware and appreciative of the beauty and goodness in the world around us.

Photography prompts

1. **Something funny** | Look for something that makes you laugh and take a picture of it.
2. **Up close and personal** | Put your phone in portrait mode. Then, take a series of up-close photos of something you might not ordinarily notice such as tree bark or the intricacies of a spider web.
3. **In living color** | Photograph just one color everywhere you see it.
4. **Lost and found** | Find and capture something around you that looks lost or out of place.
5. **New and different** | Select an object you find interesting. For the next five days, take a picture of that same thing in new and different ways.

Reflection questions

1. Which prompt did you enjoy most and why? Which was most challenging?
2. Pick your favorite photo. How do you feel when you look at it?
3. After this experience, what are a few new things you're grateful for?
4. What did you notice that you might have otherwise missed?
5. Did this module help you to become more aware and appreciative of the beauty and goodness in the world around you? If so, in what ways?

Photography + noticing

Photography requires that we focus and pay attention. It teaches us to notice details we might otherwise miss. Mindfulness can shift or heighten our attention, and when we use our cameras mindfully, we become more aware of the everyday beauty around us. Photography is a life practice that cultivates qualities within us that can increase our happiness and well-being. As we practice noticing the good, the interesting, and the beautiful with our cameras, we begin to notice it in our lives as well.

Pro skill


Experiment with your phone or camera's optical zoom feature. Toggle between wide and close-up angles to create the photo you want.



For more information:

1. [Beauty photo collection](#)
2. [Cultivating a sense of awe](#)
3. [It's a beautiful world](#)

6



Reframing

"Our key to transforming anything lies in our ability to reframe it." — Marianne Williamson

Objective | To reframe the way we see and respond to the world and our experiences.

Photography prompts

1. **Find the light** | Find an object that inspires you. Move around it to capture it in different light—side lighting, backlighting, and direct lighting.
2. **Beholder's eye** | Look for something rarely considered beautiful and see if you can capture its beauty in your photo.
3. **Perspective taking** | Explore your subject from different angles. Sit down low and take your photo from the ground. Then, climb up high and take a photo of the subject from above.
4. **Ordinary to extraordinary** | Find something ordinary and photograph it in as many ways as you can think of. Try different angles, zoom in and out, adjust the lighting . . .

Reflection questions


1. Which prompt did you enjoy most and why? Which was most challenging?
2. Pick your favorite photo. How do you feel when you look at it?
3. Describe how physically changing your perspective improved one of your photos. How did this module shift your perspective?
4. Did this module help you to reframe the way you see and respond to the world and your experiences? If so, in what ways?

Photography + reframing

Photography offers practical and concrete ways to reframe our perspectives, which can improve mindsets and promote resilience, hope and optimism. In this module, we're shifting our relationships with the everyday objects in our lives. These perspective changes can enrich our experiences and help us reframe challenges. Each time we consider what to include in a camera frame, we're making deliberate choices about what to focus on and how to see it. This practice has real-life parallels in the pursuit of happiness and well-being.

Pro skill

To experiment with light exposure, adjust your camera's shutter speed or aperture. On an iPhone, tap the screen and drag the sun icon.



For more information:

1. [Seeing the world in a new light](#)
2. [Echoes of New York](#)
3. [Project | Creating happy moments](#)

7



Storytelling

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story within you." - Maya Angelou

Objective | To use photography to tell your story or to help someone else tell their story.

Photography prompts

- Subject matter** | Take 7 pictures of something that matters to you.
- Selfie** | Take a selfie or self-portrait. Change your position, the lighting, your color or contrast settings . . . What changes can you make (or unmake) to capture a photo that really looks like you?
- Storyteller** | For this exercise, you'll need your phone, but you won't be taking pictures. Instead, scroll through your camera roll. What do you notice? Choose one photo and spend a few minutes really looking at it.
- One-a-day*** | Capture one photo each day for the next week to tell your story or someone else's story.
- In the neighborhood*** | Use your camera to explore your neighborhood.

Reflection questions

- Which prompt did you enjoy most and why? Which was most challenging?
- Pick your favorite photo. How do you feel when you look at it?
- What did you learn about yourself through this module?
- What matters to you most, and how did this module connect you to it?
- Did this module help you to use photography to tell your story or to help someone else tell their story? In what ways?

Photography + storytelling

Through photography, we can express our stories, recount memories, and explore what matters most to us. Meaning, which is our interpretation of our lived experiences, or the greater purposes we seek in life, is linked to our psychological well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction. Photography coupled with storytelling can help us construct and share meaning about ourselves and our environments. It's a means by which we can tell and share our stories and encourage others to do the same.

Pro skill

Imagine your frame is divided evenly into thirds. Experiment with different versions of your photo by placing your subject in the left third, center, or right.



For more information:

- [Which objects hold meaning for you?](#)
- [Family photos and meaning](#)
- [Pictures, stories, and emotions.](#)

* At-home. 8

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9



*"It's not what you look at that matters,
it's what you see."*

- Henry David Thoreau

Interested in more photo prompts?

Visit SeeingHappy.org/curriculum-prompts

Appendix C

Additional Prompts

Creating

- **Let there be** | Usually a photographer likes to have the light source at 95 degrees to have side light, try taking a photo with the sun behind your subject to get a backlit photo or a shadow portrait. Try taking photos of light shining through an object.
- **Reflections** | Photograph into water for reflections—a puddle will do
- **Blurred lines** | Move your camera up, down, or sideways as you photograph to create an intentional blur.
- **Elements** | Take a photo through sunshine/snow/rain/fog...

Connecting

- **People watching** | Take a photo of people connecting.
- **Connections** | Take portraits of others, whether your loved ones, friends or strangers.,in order to affirm and deepen your connection with them.

Noticing

- **Wide Angle** | Put your phone into wide-angle mode and start snapping.What do you like? Look up.What do you notice? Try walking into a subject and keep snapping.Where is the point you like the image best? Notice the perspective changing as you close in.
- **Appreciation of Beauty** | Use your camera to focus in on beautiful details in your momentary surroundings. It doesn't not have to be extraordinary.The idea is to find beauty in the simple and ordinary.
- **Curiosity and Awe** |Find something that inspires you, something extraordinary, and photograph it.

Reframing

- **Industry** | Take an industrial photo—something that looks ordinary but can be made interesting when taken from a different angle.Can you make it look interesting?

Storytelling

- **Meaning** | Take photographs highlighting the things that matter most to you. It can be objects that remind you of home, places where you have important memories, or people that you care about.