

Happiness



Jesline Maria Martin Mamen*

Assistant Professor in Psychology, Mahatma Gandhi University, India

Submission: April 20, 2017; **Published:** May 05, 2017

***Corresponding author:** Jesline Maria Martin Mamen, Assistant Professor in Psychology, Kuriakose Elias College, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, India, Email: jeslinemamen@gmail.com

Abstract

Happiness is a key ingredient of well-being. Everyone seems to be in pursuit of happiness. This article outlines the concept of happiness and what can be done to lead a happy life. Happiness can be enhanced by intentionally involving in happiness-increasing activities. Happy people achieve better life outcomes. Happiness is healthy and adaptive up to a point, but like all things, it requires balance. Research studies show that even though happiness is beneficial, yet psychologically it can become maladaptive.

Keywords: Happiness; Happiness-enhancing strategies; Upside of happiness; Downside of happiness

Introduction

“Happiness is not out there for us to find. The reason that it’s not out there is that it’s inside us.” - Sonja Lyubomirsky
“Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence.” - Aristotle

Happiness is a crucial ingredient of human well-being and health [1-3,20] and, therefore, people generally value happiness [4,5]. No matter how different people’s lives – whether due to age, gender, culture, or life experience – the desire for happiness is widespread [21]. Regardless of culture, socioeconomic status and geography happiness appears to be universally recognized. Across cultures, the majority of people include happiness as one of their primary goals in life [4], and many seek ways to render themselves happier [6]. Not surprisingly, the secrets of how to become happier and live a more fulfilling life have been topics of philosophical and lay interest for many years [7]. However, the route to happiness may be different for each individual. With recent developments in the field of positive psychology, the question of how to become happier has become a topic of growing scientific interest [8,9], but few have examined how individuals may differ in their pursuit of happiness. People of different walks of life have desired and worked for the attainment of happiness. The happiness of the world relies on the happiness within each one of us and how we act, share and voice the importance of happiness for everyone.

Despite the human pursuit of happiness, it still remains an elusive concept with its factors, determinants and characteristics differing greatly from one individual to the next. While one

person may appear happy even during adversity, another can be lavished in luxuries and still feel unhappy. While some ambiguity and variation exists in regard to definitions, happiness is often described in terms of: high life satisfaction, well-being, frequent positive mood and infrequent negative mood [3]. As stated by Diener [4], happiness is not a destination, it is a process. He claimed that it is better to achieve happiness early in life because it will generate a more beneficial life. According to Seligman [10], happiness consists of three components including: experiencing positive emotion (the pleasant life), being engaged in life activities (the engaged life), and finding a sense of purpose or meaning (the meaningful life). The most satisfied people pursue all three pathways to happiness [9]. Compared with pleasure, engagement and meaning seem to be more important [9]. Lyubomirsky [11] describes happiness as the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one’s life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile. The chief engine of happiness is positive emotions, since happiness is, above all else, a feeling.

How of happiness?

There are many factors which influence an individual’s happiness and ongoing research continues to uncover what makes an individual happiest. Seligman proposes 3 pillars of positive psychology as positive emotion, positive traits, and positive institution (in 2011, it was turned into a PERMA model to better cover all aspects of well-being). Seligman’s theoretical model of happiness (PERMA, 2011) helps us understand the

elements of happiness and what we can do to maximize each element to reach a life full of happiness. The PERMA model was designed with five core elements of psychological well-being and happiness. PERMA model describes five factors that have been shown to be particularly important: Positive Emotions (feeling good), Engagement (finding flow), Relationships (Authentic connections), Meaning (purposeful existence), and Accomplishment (a sense of achievement). Seligman believes that these five elements can help people reach a life of fulfillment, happiness, and meaning.

Happiness can be improved via lifestyle changes [12], by activating positive emotions [13] and by engaging in positive activities [14]. The human brain is wired for happiness and positive connections with others. It is actually possible to experience and learn happiness despite what has been genetically hardwired. In their sustainable happiness model, Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade [8] integrated past research findings to argue that, although more than half of population differences in happiness are due to genetics, personality, and life circumstances, a large portion are likely accounted for by people's intentional activities. That is, how people think (e.g., whether they think positively or gratefully) and what they do (e.g., whether they perform acts of kindness or forgiveness) in their daily lives can play a large role in how happy they are. In sum, the sustainable happiness model suggests that people have a fair amount of control over their happiness. According to Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade [8], approximately 50% of an individual's happiness is predetermined through heredity, 10% is determined by circumstances, and 40% is affected by intentional activity. That means, 40 percent of happiness is within our power to take control by choosing our thoughts, behaviours, and actions.

Evidence in support of the concept of sustainable happiness comes from interventions to increase happiness [9,15,16]. The happiness strategies are composed of activities and mindfulness actions that can help individuals to reach a happier life. According to Lyubomirsky [11], the 12 Happiness Enhancing Strategies are: Counting your blessings, Cultivating optimism, Avoiding over-thinking and social comparison, Practicing acts of kindness, Nurturing Relationships, Doing more activities that truly engage you, Replaying and savouring life's joys, Committing to your goals, Developing strategies for coping, Learning to forgive, Practicing religion and spirituality, Taking care of your body.

Upside of happiness

In recent years, the field of positive psychology has concerned to bring awareness to the role of psychology in making life more fulfilling, enhancing human functioning, and increasing happiness. Though many strive to obtain material wealth in order to be happy, thinking that if they can have all of the things that they want, happiness will surely follow. As it turns out, money only predicts happiness up to a finite point,

and giving to others actually provides a lot more gratification than spending money on one's self. When it comes to the pursuit of success and happiness, most people assume the formula: if you work hard, you will become successful, and once you become successful, then you'll be happy. More than a decade of groundbreaking research in the fields of positive psychology and neuroscience has proven that this formula is backwards. Happiness is the precursor to success. Happiness actually fuels success and performance. Positive brains make people more motivated, efficient, resilient, creative and productive, which drive performance upward [17].

A large empirical literature shows that people who are happier achieve better life outcomes, including financial success, supportive relationships, mental health, effective coping, superior work performance, physical health and long life [3]. It has been found that the brains of happy individuals function differently. Their brains are open to the world around them rather than focusing on potential threats. Years of medical research have shown that happy people are healthier and suffer less from depression or stress-related ailments than their unhappy counterparts [18]. Happiness actually regulates the heart's rhythm and puts the body into a synchronized state that optimizes the functions of the entire body. Happiness is a big contributor to high personal performance. Happy people cultivate certain habits and practices that help them lead happy lives at work and at home-and often despite the trials and tribulations of their lives. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in research on happiness, which may provide an avenue to enhance the general health and well-being of people.

Happiness is generally considered a source of good outcomes. Although, the research has highlighted the ways in which happiness facilitates the pursuit of important goals, contributes to vital social bonds, broadens people's scope of attention, and increases well-being and psychological health. A thorough look into recent literature has revealed that, the pursuit and experience of happiness might sometimes lead to negative outcomes. Although happiness is often highly beneficial, it may not be beneficial at every level, in every context, for every reason, and in every variety [19].

Downside of happiness

Extreme levels of positive emotions come with the downsides of restricted creativity and a more rigid behaviour repertoire. In manic amounts, happiness is also linked with increases in risk-taking behaviours such as gambling, substance use, unprotected sex, and physical stunts. Without negative emotions to balance the positive ones, individuals are ill-equipped to recognize threats and danger. Just as extreme anger or sadness can overpower the goodness in life, happiness as an absence of negative emotions can be quite detrimental at extreme levels. Happiness is healthy and adaptive up to a point, but, like all things, it requires balance. The researchers found that happiness could be maladaptive in

the wrong contexts. For example, an unsafe environments, when it would be more functional to feel emotions such as fear or anger. The contrast of negative emotions is vital to maintaining internal stability. In extreme amounts, happiness can entirely obscure concerns for one's self and others. The psychological states of mania and psychopathy demonstrate how too much of a good feeling can result in some very bad feelings indeed.

Gruber, Mauss and Tamir [19] addressed this aspect of positive emotions and found that, whereas moderate levels of happiness led to positive psychological benefits, excessive levels of happiness did not. The major results of this study are:

- i. Too much happiness can make an individual less creative-and less safe - As already mentioned, extreme levels of happiness can lead to negative outcomes such as an increase in risky behaviours.
- ii. Happiness is not suited to every situation - Happiness could be maladaptive in the wrong contexts – for example, an unsafe environment, when it would be more functional to feel emotions such as fear or anger.
- iii. Pursuing happiness may actually make an individual unhappy- Pursuing happiness as a goal unto itself paradoxically leads to an overall diminishing of happiness.
- iv. Not all types of happiness are good for an individual - Certain “types” of happiness can be contextually inappropriate in terms of the cultural values of society.

The ultimate point of this research suggests that happiness arises as a natural by-product of living well, fully, and meaningfully. No one action, item, or relationship can translate directly to happiness; happiness comes as a result of interacting meaningfully with the things, people, and opportunities in our lives. In fact, a bit of storm and stress is a prerequisite for certain types of personal development.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, to attain a healthy dose of happiness, first, it is important to experience happiness in the right amount. Too little happiness is just as problematic as too much. Second, happiness has a time and a place, and one must be mindful about the context or situation in which one experiences happiness [19]. Third, it is important to strike an emotional balance. One cannot experience happiness at the cost or expense of negative emotions, such as sadness or anger or guilt. These are all part of a complex recipe for emotional health and help individuals to attain a more grounded perspective. Emotional balance is crucial. Finally, it is important to pursue and experience happiness for the right reasons. Too much focus on striving for happiness as an end in itself can actually be self-defeating. Rather than trying to zealously find happiness, people should work to build acceptance of their current emotional state, whatever it may be.

References

1. Duckworth AL, Steen TA, Seligman ME (2005) Positive psychology in clinical practice. *Annu Rev Clin Psychol* 1: 629-651.
2. Fredrickson BL (1998) What good are positive emotions? *Rev Gen Psychol* 2(3): 300-319.
3. Lyubomirsky S, King L, Diener E (2005) The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychol Bull* 131(6): 803-855.
4. Diener E (2000) Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. *Am Psychol* 55(1): 34-43.
5. Myers DG (2005) The funds, friends, and faith of happy people. *Am Psychol* 55(1): 56-67.
6. Bergsma A (2008) Do self-help books help? *Journal of Happiness Studies* 9(3): 341-360.
7. Kesebir P, Diener E (2008) In pursuit of happiness: empirical answers to philosophical questions. *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3: 117-125.
8. Lyubomirsky S, Sheldon K, Schkade D (2005) Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology* 9: 111-131.
9. Seligman ME, Steen TA, Park N, Peterson C (2005) Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *Am Psychol* 60(5): 410-421.
10. Seligman ME (2002) *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. Free Press, New York, USA.
11. Lyubomirsky S (2007) *The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want*. Penguin Press, New York, USA.
12. Walsh R (2011) Lifestyle and mental health. *Am Psychol* 66(7): 579-592.
13. Seligman ME (2011) *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*. Free Press, New York, USA.
14. Sin NL, Lyubomirsky S (2009) Enhancing well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms with positive psychology interventions: A practice-friendly meta-analysis. *J Clin Psychol* 65(5): 467-487.
15. Sheldon KM, Lyubomirsky S (2006a) Achieving sustainable increases in happiness: Change your actions, not your circumstances. *Journal of Happiness Studies* 7(1): 55-86.
16. Sheldon KM, Lyubomirsky S (2006b) How to increase and sustain positive emotion: The effects of expressing gratitude and visualizing best possible selves. *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 1(2): 73-82.
17. Achor S (2010) *The Happiness Advantage: The Seven Principles of Positive Psychology That Fuel Success and Performance at Work*. Crown, New York, USA.
18. Greenberg CL, Avigdor BS (2011) *Happiness leads to high performance*. Pearson Education, Inc, New Jersey, USA.
19. Gruber J, Mauss I, Tamir M (2011) A dark side of happiness? How, when, and why happiness is not always good. *Perspect Psychol Sci* 6(3): 222-233.
20. Mauss IB, Tamir M, Anderson CL, Savino NS (2011) Can seeking happiness make people unhappy? Paradoxical effects of valuing happiness. *Emotion* 11(4): 807-815.
21. Nelson SK, Lyubomirsky S (2014) *Finding happiness: Tailoring positive activities for optimal well-being benefits*. Guilford, New York, USA.



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License
DOI: [10.19080/PBSIJ.2017.03.555625](https://doi.org/10.19080/PBSIJ.2017.03.555625)

**Your next submission with Juniper Publishers
will reach you the below assets**

- Quality Editorial service
- Swift Peer Review
- Reprints availability
- E-prints Service
- Manuscript Podcast for convenient understanding
- Global attainment for your research
- Manuscript accessibility in different formats
(Pdf, E-pub, Full Text, Audio)
- Unceasing customer service

Track the below URL for one-step submission

<https://juniperpublishers.com/online-submission.php>