

Who Is Happy?

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General Article

WHO IS HAPPY?

By David G. Myers¹ and Ed Diener²¹Hope College and ²University of Illinois

A flood of new studies explores people's subjective well-being (SWB). Frequent positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and a global sense of satisfaction with life define high SWB. These studies reveal that happiness and life satisfaction are similarly available to the young and the old, women and men, blacks and whites, the rich and the working-class. Better clues to well-being come from knowing about a person's traits, close relationships, work experiences, culture, and religiosity. We present the elements of an appraisal-based theory of happiness that recognizes the importance of adaptation, cultural worldview, and personal goals.

Books, books, and more books have analyzed human misery. During its first century, psychology focused far more on negative emotions, such as depression and anxiety, than on positive emotions, such as happiness and satisfaction. Even today, our texts say more about suffering than about joy. That is now changing. During the 1980s, the number of *Psychological Abstract* citations of "well-being," "happiness," and "life satisfaction" quintupled, to 780 articles annually. Social scientists, policymakers, and laypeople express increasing interest in the conditions, traits, and attitudes that define quality of life.

Studies (see Diener & Diener, 1994) reveal that happiness is more abundant than believed by writers from Samuel Johnson ("That man is never happy for the present is so true"; Boswell, 1776/1973, Vol. 2, p. 37) to John Powell ("Professionals estimate that only 10 to 15 percent of Americans think of themselves as truly happy"; Powell, 1989, p. 4). Thomas Szasz (quoted by Winokur, 1987) summed up the assumption of many people: "Happiness is an imaginary condition, formerly attributed by the living to the dead, now usually attributed by adults to children, and by children to adults" (p. 133).

Recognizing that most people are reasonably happy, but that some people are happier than others, researchers are offering a fresh perspective on an old puzzle: Who are the happy people? Does happiness favor those of a particular age, sex, or race? Does wealth enhance well-being? Does happiness come with having certain traits? a particular job? close friends? an active faith?

The scientific study of emotional well-being is new,

but theories about happiness are ages old. The philosophers of ancient Greece believed that happiness accompanies a life of intelligent reflection. "There is no fool who is happy, and no wise man who is not," echoed the Roman philosopher Cicero (in *De Finibus*). The Epicurean and Stoic philosophers offered variations on this song of happy wisdom. Aristotle regarded happiness as the *summum bonum*, the supreme good. Virtue, he believed, is synonymous with happiness. In the centuries since, sages have offered contrasting ideas about the roots of happiness. They have told us that happiness comes from knowing the truth, and from preserving healthy illusions; that it comes from restraint, and from purging ourselves of pent-up emotions; that it comes from being with other people, and from living in contemplative solitude. The list goes on, but the implication is clear: Discerning the actual roots of subjective well-being requires rigorous scientific inquiry.

MEASURING SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

Psychological investigations of well-being complement long-standing measures of physical and material well-being with assessments of subjective well-being (SWB). Researchers have, for example, asked people across the industrialized world to reflect on their happiness and life satisfaction. Measures range from multi-item scales to single questions, such as "How satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days? Are you very satisfied? satisfied? not very satisfied? not at all satisfied?"

Self-reports of global well-being have temporal stability in the 0.5 to 0.7 range over periods from 6 months to 6 years (Diener, 1994; Magnus & Diener, 1991). But can we believe people's answers? Or are "happy" people often "in denial" of their actual misery? It is reassuring, first, that response artifacts, such as the effects of social desirability and current mood, do not invalidate the SWB measures (Diener, Sandvik, Pavot, & Gallagher, 1991; Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, in press). For example, social desirability scores do correlate modestly with self-reported SWB scores, but they predict non-self-report SWB measures (such as peer reports) equally well, suggesting that social desirability is a substantive characteristic that enhances well-being.

Second, people's self-reported well-being converges with other measures (e.g., Pavot, Diener, Colvin, &

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Sandvik, 1991; Sandvik, Diener, & Seidlitz, 1993). Those who describe themselves as happy and satisfied with life seem happy to their friends and to their family members. Their daily mood ratings reveal mostly positive emotions. They recall more positive events and fewer negative events (Seidlitz & Diener, 1993). And ratings derived from clinical interviews converge well with their SWB scores.

Third, SWB measures exhibit construct validity. They are responsive to recent good and bad events and to therapy (e.g., Headey & Wearing, 1992; Sandvik et al., 1993). They correlate inversely with feeling ill (Sandvik et al., 1993). And they predict other indicators of psychological well-being. Compared with depressed people, happy people are less self-focused, less hostile and abusive, and less vulnerable to disease. They also are more loving, forgiving, trusting, energetic, decisive, creative, helpful, and sociable (Myers, 1993a; Veenhoven, 1988).

Finally, the research concerns *subjective* well-being, for which the final judge is whoever lives inside a person's skin. For all these reasons, researchers take seriously people's reports of their subjective unhappiness (or happiness), especially when supported by converging reports from informants and by observations of accompanying dysfunction (or social competence).

THE COMPONENTS OF WELL-BEING

High SWB reflects a preponderance of positive thoughts and feelings about one's life. At the cognitive level, SWB includes a global sense of satisfaction with life, fed by specific satisfactions with one's work, marriage, and other domains. At the affective level, people with high SWB feel primarily pleasant emotions, thanks largely to their positive appraisal of ongoing events. People with low SWB appraise their life circumstances and events as undesirable, and therefore feel unpleasant emotions such as anxiety, depression, and anger.

Surprisingly, positive and negative emotions correlate with different predictor variables (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1980; Magnus & Diener, 1991). Moreover, positive and negative emotions are only weakly correlated with each other (Bradburn, 1969; Diener & Emmons, 1985). Knowing the global amount of good feeling a person experiences over time does not indicate the global amount of bad feeling the person experiences. How could this be? If good feelings exclude bad feelings at the same moment in time, then the more time one spends up the less time one can spend down. Thus, the frequencies of good and bad moods are inversely related. People who experience their good moods intensely, however, tend similarly to experience intense bad moods. For some people, high highs alternate with low lows. Others are characteristically happy, or melancholy, or unemotional.

Thus, positive and negative affect seem not to be bipolar opposites. Positive well-being is not just the absence of negative emotions. Rather, SWB is defined by three correlated but distinct factors: the relative presence of positive affect, absence of negative affect, and satisfaction with life.

MYTHS OF HAPPINESS

So, who are the happy people? By identifying predictors of happiness and life satisfaction, psychologists and sociologists have exploded some myths.

Is Happiness Being Young? Middle-Aged? Newly Retired?

Many people believe there are notably unhappy times of life—typically the stress-filled teen years, the “midlife crisis” years, or the declining years of old age. But interviews with representative samples of people of all ages reveal that no time of life is notably happier or unhappier than others (Latten, 1989; Stock, Okun, Haring, & Witter, 1983). This conclusion is reinforced by a 1980s survey of 169,776 people representatively sampled in 16 nations (Inglehart, 1990; see Fig. 1). The predictors of happiness do change with age (e.g., satisfaction with social relations and health become more important in later life; Herzog, Rogers, & Woodworth, 1982). And the emotional terrain varies with age (teens, unlike adults, usually come up from gloom or down from elation within an hour's time; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984). Yet knowing someone's age gives no clue to the person's average sense of well-being.

Nor does one find in rates of depression, suicide, ca-

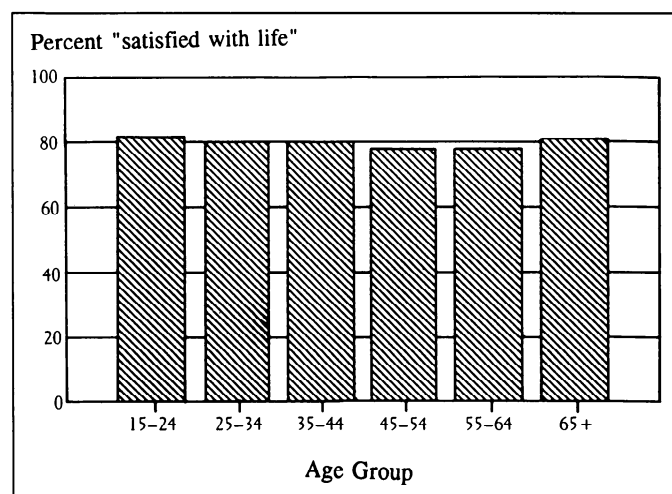


Fig. 1. Age and well-being in 16 nations. Data from 169,776 people, representatively sampled from 1980 to 1986, and reported by Inglehart (1990).

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reer change, or divorce any evidence of increased personal upheaval during the supposed early 40s "midlife crisis" years. People do face crisis times, but not at any predictable age (Hunter & Sundel, 1989; McCrae & Costa, 1990). The "empty nest syndrome"—a sense of despondency and lost meaning when children leave home—also turns out to be rare (Adelmann, Antonucci, Crohan, & Coleman, 1989; Glenn, 1975). For most couples, the empty nest is a happy place—often a place where marital happiness rebounds after the stresses of child rearing.

Does Happiness Have a Favorite Sex?

There are striking gender gaps in misery: Women are twice as vulnerable as men to disabling depression and anxiety, and men are five times as vulnerable as women to alcoholism and antisocial personality disorder (Robins & Regier, 1991). Women's more intense sadness, given bad circumstances, must be considered in light of their greater capacity for joy under good circumstances (Diener, Sandvik, & Larsen, 1985; Fujita, Diener, & Sandvik, 1991). Although women report slightly greater happiness than men when only positive emotions are assessed (Wood, Rhodes, & Whelan, 1989), the net result is roughly equal hedonic balance for women and men. In a meta-analysis of 146 studies, gender therefore accounted for less than 1% of people's global well-being (Haring, Stock, & Okun, 1984). The finding generalizes worldwide. In the 1980s collaborative survey of 16 nations, 80% of men and 80% of women said that they were at least "fairly satisfied" with life (Inglehart, 1990; see Fig. 2). A similar result appeared in a study of 18,032 university students surveyed in 39 countries (Michalos, 1991).

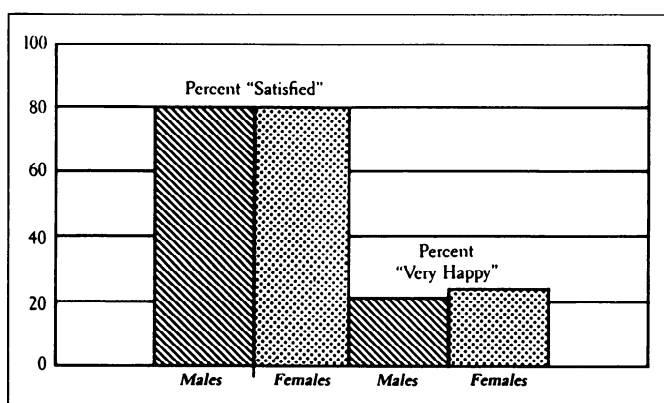


Fig. 2. Gender and well-being in 16 nations. Data from 169,776 people, representatively sampled from 1980 to 1986, and reported by Inglehart (1990).

Does Happiness Vary by Race?

Knowing someone's race or ethnic group also gives little clue to the person's psychological well-being. African-Americans, for example, report nearly as much happiness as European-Americans and are actually slightly less vulnerable to depression (Diener, Sandvik, Seidlitz, & Diener, 1993; Robins & Regier, 1991; Stock, Okun, Haring, & Witter, 1985). Blacks and whites, like women and men, and people with and without disabilities, also score similarly on tests of self-esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989). Despite discrimination, noted Crocker and Major, people in disadvantaged groups maintain self-esteem by valuing the things at which they excel, by making comparisons within their own groups, and by attributing problems to external sources such as prejudice.

Does Happiness Vary by Culture?

Interestingly, nations differ strikingly in happiness, ranging from Portugal, where about 10% of people say they are very happy, to the Netherlands, where about 40% of people say the same (Inglehart, 1990). Nations differ markedly in happiness even when income differences are controlled for (Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1994). Although national levels of SWB covary with whether basic physical needs are met, countries such as Japan have much lower SWB than one would expect based only on material considerations. In general, collectivist cultures report lower SWB than do individualistic cultures, where norms more strongly support experiencing and expressing positive emotions (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, in press).

National differences appear not to reflect mere differences in the connotations of the translated questions. For example, regardless of whether they are German-, French-, or Italian-speaking, the Swiss rank high on self-reported life satisfaction—significantly higher than their German, French, and Italian neighbors (Inglehart, 1990).

Does Money Buy Happiness?

The American dream seems to have become life, liberty, and the purchase of happiness. In 1993, 75% of America's entering collegians declared that an "essential" or "very important" life goal was "being very well off financially"—nearly double the 39% who said the same in 1970 (Astin, Green, & Korn, 1987; Astin, Korn, & Riggs, 1993). This goal topped a list of 19 possible life objectives, exceeding the rated importance even of "raising a family" and "helping others in difficulty." Most adults share this materialism, believing that increased income would make them happier (Strumpel, 1976). Few

agree that money can buy happiness, but many agree that a little more money would make them a little happier.

Are wealth and well-being indeed connected? We can make the question more specific: First, are people in rich countries more satisfied than those in not-so-rich countries? As Figure 3 illustrates, the correlation between national wealth and well-being is positive (+.67, despite curious reversals, such as the Irish reporting greater life satisfaction than the wealthier West Germans). But national wealth is confounded with other variables, such as number of continuous years of democracy, which correlates +.85 with average life satisfaction (Inglehart, 1990).

Second, within any country, are rich individuals happiest? Having food, shelter, and safety is basic to well-being. Thus, in poor countries, such as Bangladesh and India, satisfaction with finances is a moderate predictor of SWB (Diener & Diener, in press). But once people are able to afford life's necessities, increasing levels of affluence matter surprisingly little. Although the correlation between income and happiness is not negative, it is modest. In the United States, one study (Diener et al., 1993) found a mere +.12 correlation between income and happiness; increases or decreases in income had no long-term influence on SWB. And Inglehart (1990) noted that in Europe, income "has a surprisingly weak (indeed, virtually negligible) effect on happiness" (p. 242). Although satisfaction with income predicts SWB better than actual income, there is only a slight tendency for people who

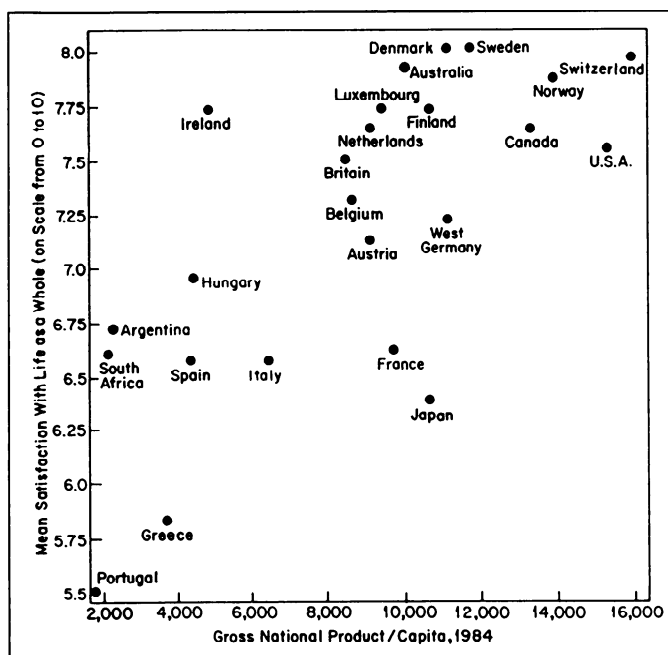


Fig. 3. National wealth and well-being in a 24-nation collaborative survey. Euro-Barometer and World Values Survey data reported by Inglehart (1990).

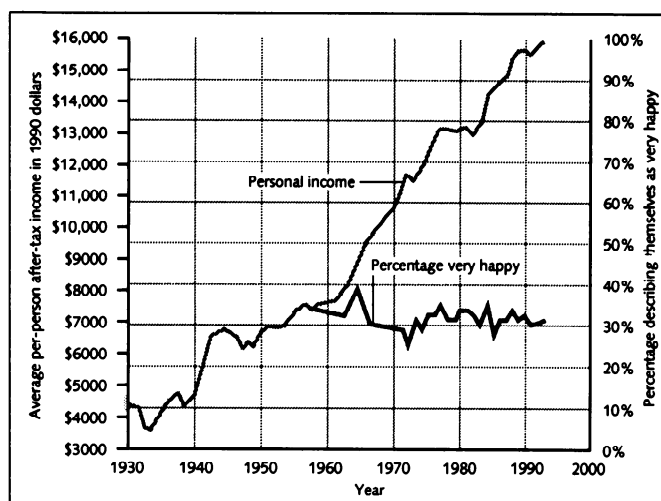


Fig. 4. Inflation-adjusted income and happiness in the United States. National Opinion Research Center happiness data from Niemi, Mueller, and Smith (1989) and T. Smith (personal communication, November 1993). Income data from Bureau of the Census (1975) and *Economic Indicators*.

make a great deal of money to be more satisfied with what they make (Campbell, 1981).

Wealth, it seems, is like health: Its absence can breed misery, yet having it is no guarantee of happiness. In one survey, people on *Forbes*'s list of wealthiest Americans reported only slightly greater happiness than other Americans; 37% were less happy than the average American (Diener, Horwitz, & Emmons, 1985). Even lottery winners gain only a temporary jolt of joy (Argyle, 1986; Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978). The emotional effects of some tragedies are likewise temporary: After a period of adaptation, people with disabilities usually report a near-normal level of well-being (Diener, 1994). Thus, concluded Kammann (1983), "Objective life circumstances have a negligible role to play in a theory of happiness" (p. 18). Satisfaction is less a matter of getting what you want than wanting what you have.

Third, over time, as cultures become more affluent, do their people become happier? In 1957, as economist John Galbraith was about to describe America as *The Affluent Society*, Americans' per person income, expressed in today's dollars, was less than \$8,000. Today it is more than \$16,000, making America "the doubly affluent society"—with double what money buys. Compared with 1957, Americans have twice as many cars per person—plus microwave ovens, color TVs, VCRs, air conditioners, answering machines, and \$12 billion worth of new brand-name athletic shoes a year.

So, are Americans happier than they were in 1957? They are not (see Fig. 4). In 1957, 35% told the National Opinion Research Center that they were "very happy." In 1993, with doubled affluence, 32% said the same (Smith, 1979, and personal communication, November

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1993). To judge by soaring rates of depression (Cross-National Collaborative Group, 1992), a quintupled rate of reported violent crime since 1960, a doubled divorce rate, a slight decline in marital happiness among the marital survivors (Glenn, 1990), and a tripled teen suicide rate, Americans are richer and no happier. Easterlin (in press) has reported the same for European countries and Japan. Thus, although policymakers and economists are wedded to the assumption that SWB rises with income (Easterlin, in press), the data indicate that economic growth in affluent countries gives little boost to human morale.

HAPPY PEOPLE

If happiness is similarly available to people of any age, sex, or race, and to those of most income levels, who is happiest? Through life's ups and downs, some people's capacity for joy persists undiminished. In one National Institute of Aging study of 5,000 adults, the happiest of people in 1973 were still relatively happy a decade later, despite changes in their work, their residence, and their family status (Costa, McCrae, & Zonderman, 1987). Who are these chronically happy people?

The Traits of Happy People

In study after study, four inner traits mark happy people: self-esteem, a sense of personal control, optimism, and extraversion.

First, happy people like themselves (Campbell, 1981). On tests of self-esteem, they agree with such statements as "I'm a lot of fun to be with" and "I have good ideas." Indeed, happy people often exhibit a self-serving bias by believing themselves more ethical, more intelligent, less prejudiced, better able to get along with others, and healthier than average (Janoff & Bulman, 1989; Myers, 1993b; Taylor & Brown, 1988). (The findings bring to mind Freud's joke about the man who said to his wife, "If one of us should die, I think I would go live in Paris.") Most people do express positive self-esteem. This helps explain why, contrary to those who would have us believe that happy people are rare, 9 in 10 North Americans describe themselves as at least "pretty happy." The strong link between self-esteem and SWB so often found in individualistic Western cultures is, however, weaker in collectivist cultures, where the group is given priority over the self (Diener & Diener, in press).

Second, happy people typically feel personal control (Campbell, 1981; Larson, 1989). Those who feel empowered rather than helpless typically do better in school, cope better with stress, and live more happily. When deprived of control over their own lives—an experience studied in prisoners, nursing home patients, and people living under totalitarian regimes—people suffer lower

morale and worse health. Severe poverty demoralizes when it erodes people's sense of control over their life circumstances (Dumont, 1989).

Third, happy people are usually optimistic. Optimists—those who agree, for example, that "when I undertake something new, I expect to succeed"—tend to be more successful, healthier, and happier than are pessimists (Dember & Brooks, 1989; Seligman, 1991).

Fourth, happy people tend to be extraverted (Costa & McCrae, 1980; Diener, Sandvik, Pavot, & Fujita, 1992; Emmons & Diener, 1986a, 1986b; Headey & Wearing, 1992). Compared with introverts, extraverts are happier both when alone and with other people (Pavot, Diener, & Fujita, 1990), whether they live alone or with others, whether they live in rural or metropolitan areas, and whether they work in solitary or social occupations (Diener et al., 1992).

Reasons for the trait-happiness correlations are not yet fully understood. The causal arrow may go from traits to SWB, or the reverse. Extraversion, for example, may predispose happiness, perhaps because of the social contacts extraversion entails. Or happiness may produce outgoing behavior. Outgoing people, for example, usually appear temperamentally high-spirited and relaxed about reaching out to others, which may explain why they marry sooner, get better jobs, and make more friends (Magnus & Diener, 1991). Twin studies indicate genetic influences on SWB (Tellegen et al., 1988).

The Relationships of Happy People

One could easily imagine why close relationships might exacerbate illness and misery. Close relationships are fraught with stress. "Hell is other people," mused Jean-Paul Sartre (1944/1973, p. 47). Fortunately, the benefits of close relationships with friends and family usually outweigh the strains. People who can name several intimate friends with whom they share their intimate concerns freely are healthier, less likely to die prematurely, and happier than people who have few or no such friends (Burt, 1986; Cohen, 1988; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). People report higher positive affect when they are with others (Pavot et al., 1990). In experiments, people relax as they confide painful experiences. In one study, 33 Holocaust survivors spent 2 hr recalling their experiences, often revealing intimate details never before disclosed. Fourteen months later, those who were most self-disclosing had the most improved health (Pennebaker, 1990).

Seligman (1991) contended that today's epidemic levels of depression stem partly from impoverished social connections in increasingly individualistic Western societies. Individualistic societies offer personal control, harmony between the inner and outer person, and opportu-

nity to express one's feelings and talents, though with the risks of a less embedded, more detached self. Today, 25% of Americans live alone, up from 8% half a century ago.

For more than 9 in 10 people, the most significant alternative to aloneness is marriage. As with other close social bonds, broken marital relationships are a source of much self-reported unhappiness, whereas a supportive, intimate relationship is among life's greatest joys (Glenn, 1990). To paraphrase Henry Ward Beecher, "Well-married a person is winged; ill-matched, shackled." Three out of 4 married people say that their spouse is their best friend, and 4 out of 5 say they would marry the same person again (Greeley, 1991). Such feelings help explain why over the 1970s and 1980s, 24% of never-married adults, but 39% of married adults, told the National Opinion Research Center that they were "very happy" (Lee, Secombe, & Shehan, 1991; see Fig. 5). The traffic between marriage and happiness, however, appears to be two-way: Happy people are more appealing as potential marriage partners and more likely to marry (Mastekaasa, 1992; Scott, 1992).

Is marriage, as is so often supposed, more strongly associated with men's happiness than women's? The happiness gap between married and never-married people (Fig. 5) was slightly greater among men (37.7% vs. 20.1%, for a 17.6% difference) than women (41.6% vs. 25.7%, for a 15.9% difference). In European surveys, and in a meta-analysis of 93 other studies, the happiness gap between the married and never-married was virtually identical for men and women (Inglehart, 1990; Wood et al., 1989). Although a bad marriage may indeed be more depressing to a woman than a man, the myth that "single

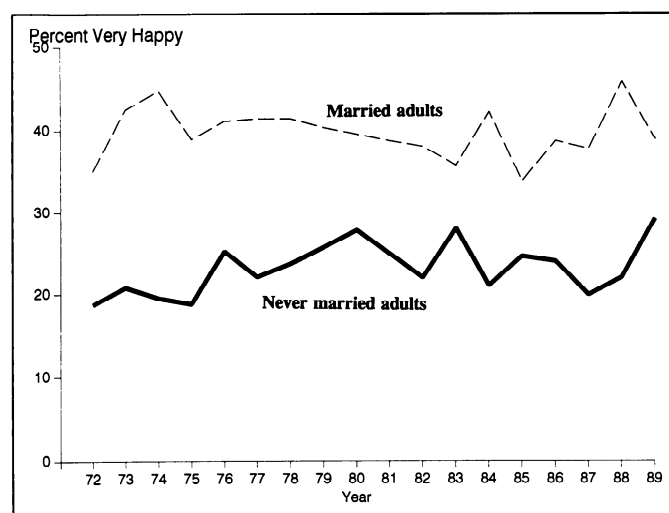


Fig. 5. Percentage of people who reported they were "very happy" among married and never-married U.S. adults. Derived from National Opinion Research Center data reported by Lee, Secombe, and Shehan (1991).

women report greater life satisfaction than married women" can be laid to rest. Throughout the Western world, married people of both sexes report more happiness than those never married, divorced, or separated.

The "Flow" of Happy People

Turn-of-the-century Russian writer Maksim Gorky anticipated recent studies of work satisfaction: "When work is a pleasure, life is a joy! When work is a duty, life is slavery." Work satisfaction affects life satisfaction (Crohan, Antonucci, Adelman, & Coleman, 1989; Freedman, 1978; Michalos, 1986). Why? And why are out-of-work people less likely to feel satisfied with life than those productively engaged?

For many people, work provides personal identity: It helps people define who they are. Work also adds to a sense of community: It offers people a network of supportive relationships and a "we feeling." This sense of pride and belonging to a group helps people construct their social identity. And work can add focus and purpose—a sense that one's life matters. Studs Terkel (1972) described "the Chicago piano tuner, who seeks and finds the sound that delights; the bookbinder, who saves a piece of history; the Brooklyn fireman, who saves a piece of life. . . . There is a common attribute here: a meaning to their work well over and beyond the reward of the paycheck" (p. xi).

Work is, however, sometimes unsatisfying, for two reasons. We can be overwhelmed: When challenges exceed our available time and skills, we feel anxious, stressed. Or we can be underwhelmed: When challenges do not engage our time and skills, we feel bored. Between anxiety and boredom lies a middle ground where challenges engage and match skills. In this zone, we enter an optimal state that Csikszentmihalyi (1990) termed "flow" (Fig. 6).

To be in flow is to be un-self-consciously absorbed. In such times, one gets so caught up in an activity that the mind does not wander, one becomes oblivious to surroundings, and time flies. Csikszentmihalyi formulated the flow concept after studying artists who would spend hour after hour painting or sculpting with enormous concentration. Immersed in a project, they worked as if nothing else mattered. The artists seemed driven less by the external rewards of doing art—money, praise, promotion—than by the intrinsic rewards of creating the work.

Csikszentmihalyi conducted studies in which people reported on their activities and feelings when paged with electronic beepers. He discovered that happiness comes not from mindless passivity but from engagement in mindful challenge. Whether at work or at leisure, people enjoyed themselves more when absorbed in the flow of an activity than when doing nothing meaningful. Thus,

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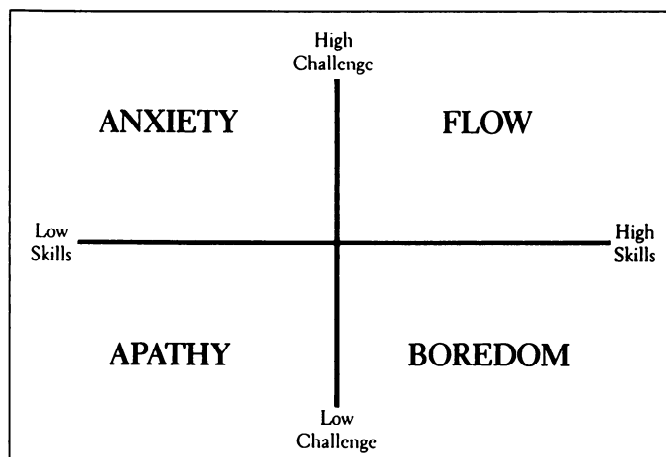


Fig. 6. The flow model. When a challenge engages skills, people often become so absorbed in the flow of an activity that they lose consciousness of self and time. Adapted from Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi (1988, p. 251).

involvement in interesting activities, including engaging work, is a major source of well-being. As playwright Noel Coward observed, interesting work "is more fun than fun."

The Faith of Happy People

The links between religion and mental health are impressive. Religious people (often defined as those who attend church regularly) are much less likely than irreligious people to become delinquent, to abuse drugs and alcohol, to divorce or be unhappily married, and to commit suicide (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993; Colasanto & Shriver, 1989). Religiously active people even tend to be physically healthier and to live longer, in part because of their healthier smoking, eating, and drinking habits (Koenig, Smiley, & Gonzales, 1988; Levin & Schiller, 1987; McIntosh & Spilka, 1990).

Across North America and Europe, religious people also report higher levels of happiness and satisfaction with life (e.g., Poloma & Pendleton, 1990). Religious people are slightly less vulnerable to depression (Brown, 1993; Gartner, Larson, Allen, & Gartner, 1991). The most striking finding, however, comes from the Gallup Organization (Gallup, 1984), which compared people low in "spiritual commitment" with highly spiritual people (who consistently agree with statements such as "My religious faith is the most important influence in my life."). The highly spiritual were twice as likely to say they were "very happy." Other surveys, in the United States and across 14 Western nations, found that happiness and life satisfaction rise with strength of religious affiliation and frequency of worship attendance (Inglehart, 1990; Witter, Stock, Okun, & Haring, 1985). One

meta-analysis among the elderly revealed that the two best predictors of well-being among older persons were health and religiousness (Okun & Stock, 1987).

Other studies have probed the connection between faith and coping with a crisis. Compared with religiously inactive widows, recently widowed women who worshipped regularly reported more joy in their lives (Harvey, Barnes, & Greenwood, 1987; McGloshen & O'Bryant, 1988; Siegel & Kuykendall, 1990). Among mothers of disabled children, those with a deep religious faith were less vulnerable to depression than were those who were irreligious (Friedrich, Cohen, & Wiltner, 1988). People with a strong faith also retained greater happiness after suffering divorce, unemployment, serious illness, or bereavement (Ellison, 1991; McIntosh, Silver, & Wortman, 1993).

What explains these positive links between faith and well-being? Is it the supportive close relationships often enjoyed by people who are active in local congregations (of which there are 258,000 in the United States)? Is it the sense of meaning and purpose that many people derive from their faith? Is it a religious worldview that offers answers to life's deepest questions and an optimistic appraisal of life events? Is it the hope that faith affords when people suffer or face what social psychologists Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski (1991) called "the terror resulting from our awareness of vulnerability and death" (p. 97)? Such proposed explanations await more rigorous exploration.

Elements of a Theory of Happiness

A viable theory of happiness must, first, recognize the importance of adaptation. Over time, the immediate affective response to significant life events inevitably fades. Thus, variables such as income (Diener et al., 1993), physical attractiveness (Diener, Wolsic, & Fujita, in press), and health (Okun & George, 1984) have minimal long-term influence on SWB despite having powerful effects on people's lives. Although lottery winners are initially elated, their euphoria soon wanes. "Continued pleasures wear off," noted Frijda (1988, p. 353). "Pleasure is always contingent upon change and disappears with continuous satisfaction."

Likewise, the agony of most bad events gradually subsides. Even the initial psychological trauma of paralyzing car accidents typically gives way to a return of normal happiness (Wortman & Silver, 1987). Reflecting on the successes and mental health of American Jews who survived horrific Holocaust experiences, Helmreich (1992) noted that "the story of the survivors is one of courage and strength, of people who are living proof of the indomitable will of human beings to survive and of their tremendous capacity for hope. It is not a story of remark-

able people. It is a story of just how remarkable people can be" (p. 276).

In a recent longitudinal study, only life events within the last 3 months influenced SWB (Suh, Diener, & Fujita, in press). The more recent an event, the greater its emotional effect. Studies of daily moods (e.g., Clark & Watson, 1988; Stone & Neale, 1984) confirm Benjamin Franklin's surmise that happiness "is produced not so much by great pieces of good fortune that seldom happen as by little advantages that occur every day." Thanks to our human capacity for adaptation, the affect system is most attuned to the information value of new events.

In addition to adaptation, a second component of a theory of happiness is cultural worldview. Some cultures construe the world as benevolent and controllable. Other cultures emphasize the normality of negative emotions, such as anxiety, anger, and guilt (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, in press). Cultural templates for interpreting life events predispose varying SWB in the absence of differing objective life circumstances. Likewise, some individuals appear habitually to interpret many of life's events negatively, whereas others tend to interpret events positively.

A third component of a theory of happiness is values and goals. Emmons (1986) found that having goals, making progress toward goals, and freedom from conflict among one's goals were all predictors of SWB. Diener and Fujita (in press) discovered that resources such as money, social skills, and intelligence were predictive of SWB only if they were relevant to a person's goals. This finding helps explain why income predicts SWB in very poor nations and why self-esteem predicts SWB in wealthy, individualistic nations. Happiness grows less from the passive experience of desirable circumstances than from involvement in valued activities and progress toward one's goals (Diener & Larsen, 1993).

CONCLUSION

Who is happy? Knowing a person's age, sex, race, and income (assuming the person has enough to afford life's necessities) hardly gives a clue. Better clues come from knowing a person's traits, whether the person enjoys a supportive network of close relationships, whether the person's culture offers positive interpretations for most daily events, whether the person is engaged by work and leisure, and whether the person has a faith that entails social support, purpose, and hope.

This new research on psychological well-being is a welcome complement to long-standing studies of depression and anxiety, and of physical and material well-being. By asking who is happy, and why, we can help people rethink their priorities and better understand how to build a world that enhances human well-being.

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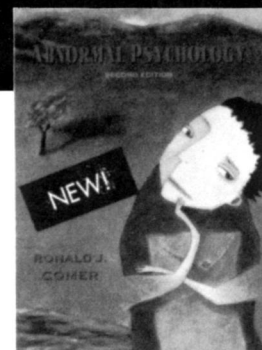
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