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Happiness

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Happiness: Its Antecedents and Consequences

Throughout the ages, many thinkers have regarded happiness as something of supreme value and observed that the pursuit of happiness underlies all sorts of other pursuits. French philosopher Blaise Pascal, for one, believed that happiness is “the motive of every act of every man, including those who go and hang themselves” (1995, p. 45). Darrin McMahon, a historian of happiness, similarly concluded that countless experiments in human engineering with dreadful consequences, from Marxism to Nazism, were all part of a struggle for happiness (2005). The inexhaustible self-help aisles of bookstores and the multibillion dollar industry revolving around psychotropic drugs are no doubt modern manifestations of the same ardent quest.

In this chapter, we aim to shed some light on the all-important question of what makes people happy, relying upon the most recent research on the topic. We wish to focus not only on the question of what causes individuals to differ in their happiness levels, but also on what these differences are able to predict regarding success in various life domains, such as professional achievement, health, and social relationships. However, before delving into the questions of what leads to happiness and what happiness leads to in turn, we will first provide an overview of how the notion of happiness is conceptualized and measured in current social scientific research.

Conceptualizing and Measuring Happiness

As difficult as it would be to find two lay people who agree completely on the definition of happiness, operational definitions are of crucial necessity for science to progress. Social scientists have fortunately come to a consensus regarding the conceptualization of happiness over the years. This conceptualization emphasizes the subjective nature of happiness, holding people to be the final judges of their experience of happiness (Myers & Diener, 1995).

“Subjective well-being” is the term employed by many happiness scholars to capture this

essentially subjective quality and it will be used in this paper interchangeably with happiness. Subjective well-being refers to people's appraisals of their lives, and entails both cognitive judgments of satisfaction and affective evaluations of moods and emotions (Diener, 1984). In the last few decades, researchers have been able to identify the interconnected yet separable components of subjective well-being, which include life satisfaction (global judgments of one's life), satisfaction with important life domains (e.g., marriage or work satisfaction), positive affect (prevalence of positive emotions and moods), and low levels of negative affect (prevalence of unpleasant emotions and moods). In many studies, these dimensions of subjective well-being are studied separately, and the different patterns of the predictors with various forms of subjective well-being are examined.

Prominent conceptualizations of happiness other than subjective well-being include Ryff's (1996) "psychological well-being" and Ryan and Deci's (2000) "self-determination theory." These theories exemplify a less subjective and more prescriptive approach toward happiness in that they stipulate the fulfillment of certain needs (such as autonomy, self-acceptance, or purpose in life) as a prerequisite for well-being. Whereas these theories embody valuable contributions to the definition of the good life, researchers working in the subjective well-being tradition focus their efforts on understanding people's own evaluations of their lives, believing in the meaningfulness and scientific credibility of these evaluations. It is important to emphasize at this point that individuals' appraisals of their own well-being hardly reflect empty-headed cheerfulness or raw hedonism. To the contrary, major constituents of subjective well-being, such as life satisfaction and positive affect, seem to emanate first and foremost from one's goals and values. People are most likely to experience high levels of subjective well-being when they strive for and make progress toward personal goals derived from their hallowed values,

rendering feelings of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment prominent predictors of subjective well-being (Diener & Larsen, 1993).

Subjective well-being is typically assessed through self-report measures, such as Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Pavot & Diener, 1993), Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), or Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Satisfaction with Life Scale, for instance, is a 5-item instrument that measures global cognitive judgments of one's life. The scale includes items such as "in most ways my life is close to my ideal," or "so far I have gotten the important things I want in life." Individuals express the degree to which they agree with these statements using a 7-point Likert scale. PANAS, unlike the Life Satisfaction Scale, is interested in capturing directly the positive and negative affectivity components of subjective well-being. Respondents are given a list of emotion words that sample positive (e.g., interested, excited, proud) as well as negative (e.g., distressed, guilty, scared) affects, and asked to evaluate on a scale from 1 to 5 the extent to which they experience these emotions in general. The directions of PANAS can be rephrased to get at how the respondents have felt during the last week, for example, or how they are feeling at the moment. Subjective Happiness Scale, on the other hand, is an instrument measuring individuals' perceptions of how happy they are. Individuals indicate on a Likert scale from 1 to 7 how happy they consider themselves, or respond to items such as "Some people are generally not very happy. Although they are not depressed, they never seem as happy as they might be. To what extent does this characterization describe you?"

While indispensable to the appraisal of something as private and personal as subjective well-being, self-reports of happiness suffer from the same weaknesses associated with other self-report measures; most notably, an oversensitivity to mood and context effects (Schwarz & Strack,

1999). Nevertheless, a great number of studies attest to the adequate validity of self-report subjective well-being measures, by showing that they converge with friend and spousal reports of the individual's well-being (Lyubomirsky et al., 1999), with recall of satisfying as opposed to unsatisfying times in one's life (Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991), with smiling behavior (Harker & Keltner, 2001), and with greater relative left frontal activation in the brain (Tomarken, Davidson, & Henriques, 1990). Similarly, temporal stabilities for self-reports of well-being have been found to be in the range of 0.5 to 0.7 over a period of several years (Diener & Suh, 1997). While multi-method measurements of subjective well-being should be undertaken whenever feasible, accumulated evidence suggests that self-report measures of well-being possess satisfactory validity and reliability to be employed in happiness research.

The Antecedents of Happiness

In this part of the chapter, we will attempt to offer answers to the ever-fascinating question of how to be happy drawing on the extant literature on happiness. A general model specifying the major sources of variation in happiness can be useful at the outset. Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) have proposed that a person's chronic happiness level is determined by three major factors: a genetically determined set point for happiness, circumstantial factors (e.g., gender, education, culture), and the activities and practices that the person engages in. This model is remarkably similar to Seligman's happiness formula, according to which one's enduring level of happiness is the sum of (1) one's set range for happiness, (2) life circumstances, and (3) factors under one's voluntary control (Seligman, 2002). A survey of the literature suggests that whereas the genetically determined set point accounts for about 50% of variation in happiness, life circumstances account for only 10%, and intentional activities are responsible for the remaining 40% (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). In our review of the causes and

correlates of happiness, we will start with the genetic determinants of happiness and move on to circumstantial and demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, intelligence, religion), finally turning to the antecedents of happiness that are relatively more amenable to individual control (e.g., social relationships, goals, leisure). Without a doubt, these three sources of happiness are not fully independent from each other, yet, in our view, they provide a fairly accurate and useful schema for understanding the antecedents of happiness.

Genes & happiness set point. There is virtually no dispute among scholars that genetic inheritance plays a significant role in determining one's chronic happiness level. Studies demonstrating that identical twins are considerably more similar to each other in their happiness levels compared to fraternal twins (Tellegen et al., 1988; Lykken & Tellegen, 1996) testify to the genetically determined part of subjective well-being, as do findings regarding the relative stability of happiness over the years (Costa & McCrae, 1988; Magnus & Diener, 1991). It is widely believed that these genetically determined and relatively immutable differences in responding to people and events set a fixed point for the individual, around which her happiness level fluctuates. According to these set-point theories, major life events such as the birth of a child or the death of a partner have only a temporary effect on the person's happiness level, after which it reverts to the default level determined by genetic traits.

Closely affiliated with set-point theories is the "hedonic treadmill theory," which suggests that our emotional systems adjust to just about anything that happens in our lives, positive or negative, just as our noses quickly adapt to any kind of scent (Brickman & Campbell, 1971). Early studies showing that lottery winners tend to be not much happier and that paraplegics tend to be not much unhappier than a control group following an initial adjustment period (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978) have been broadly cited to illustrate the

powerful role of adaptation in happiness. Set-point theory in conjunction with the hedonic treadmill idea implies that individual and societal attempts at increasing happiness are ultimately doomed to failure. In their paper documenting the high heritability coefficient of happiness, Lykken and Tellegen (1996) have indeed noted that trying to be happier may be “as futile as trying to be taller and therefore is counterproductive” (p. 189).

However, findings from longitudinal and cross-sectional studies, as well as from intervention research, fail to corroborate such pessimistic conclusions. These findings suggest that time may be ripe for a revision of the hedonic adaptation theories of well-being (Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006; Easterlin, 2006). People do not rapidly and completely adapt to everything life has in store for them, and this fact is powerfully demonstrated by differences in average national happiness levels. Factors such as wealth, human rights, and societal equality significantly predict well-being in a society, which means that people do not automatically adapt to any objective life condition (Diener, Diener, and Diener, 1995). Similarly, Fujita and Diener (2005) have found in a large German sample that over a 17-year period, almost 9% of the sample changed an average of 3 or more points on a 10-point scale from the first 5 to the last 5 years of the study, and that average life satisfaction in the first 5 years correlated only .51 with average life satisfaction during the last 5 years. Other studies investigating the longitudinal effects of unemployment (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2004), marriage (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2003), and even winning the lottery (Gardner & Oswald, 2007) on life satisfaction levels confirm the view that set-point and adaptation theories as they are typically conceived do not resonate with the current empirical findings and need to be modified.

In short, there seems to be a substantial genetic component to subjective well-being, which contributes to the relative stability of subjective well-being over a person’s life span and

makes some people more prone to happiness and others to unhappiness. Even so, only about half of the individual differences in happiness are accounted for by genetic influences, hardly dooming people to miserable lives as the victims of the genetic happiness lottery. Genes affect one's happiness through their expression in dispositional patterns and personality characteristics, which is where we turn to next.

Personality. Among different facets of personality, extraversion and neuroticism are the ones most consistently and strongly related to happiness (Rusting & Larsen, 1997; Diener & Lucas, 1999). As expected, both of these traits are highly heritable, rooted in neurobiology, and exhibit little change over the life span (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). A host of studies show that extraversion predicts positive affect moderately to strongly (e.g., Lucas & Fujita, 2000), whereas neuroticism is an exceptionally strong predictor of negative affect (e.g., Fujita, 1991). The exact processes that underlie the extraversion-happiness and neuroticism-unhappiness links have also been broadly explored. One such process seems to be the differential sensitivity of extraverts and neurotics to rewards and punishments. Specifically, extraverts are more responsive to positive mood inductions, whereas neurotics are more responsive to negative mood inductions (Derryberry & Reed, 1994; Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991). In addition to this direct effect of personality traits on happiness, studies have also uncovered an indirect route, in that extraverted people experience more frequent positive objective life events, and neurotic people experience more frequent negative objective events (Headey & Wearing, 1989; Magnus, Diener, Fujita, & Pavot, 1993).

Other than extraversion and neuroticism, personality traits such as dispositional optimism, trust, agreeableness, desire for control, and hardiness have been found to be positively associated with happiness (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996; Scheier & Carver, 1993;

Watson & Clark, 1992). Another personality trait that is closely related to happiness is self-esteem. Research has consistently revealed moderate to high correlations between self-esteem and happiness (Lyubomirsky, Tkach, Dimatteo, 2006). It is worth noting, however, that these correlations are demonstrated to be significantly stronger in individualist compared to collectivist cultures (Diener & Diener, 1995a). Furthermore, the direction of causality between the two constructs is not entirely understood (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003).

Intimately related to personality characteristics that are correlated with high levels of happiness are what some have called “virtues and character strengths.” Recently, a number of psychologists undertook the massive project of coming up with an exhaustive list of virtues and their efforts culminated in a classification system made up of 24 character strengths, organized under six core virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These six core virtues are *wisdom* (e.g., love of learning, creativity), *courage* (e.g., bravery, persistence), *humanity* (e.g., kindness, social intelligence), *justice* (e.g., fairness), *temperance* (e.g., forgiveness, self-regulation), and finally, *transcendence* (e.g., gratitude, religiousness/spirituality). Research has revealed that the character strengths of hope, zest, gratitude, love, and curiosity are most strongly and robustly linked to life satisfaction. More cerebral virtues such as love of learning, on the other hand, seem to be only weakly associated with happiness (Park, Peterson, Seligman, 2004).

Age. Of the relation between age and happiness, Tatarkiewicz confidently wrote, “[I]t is considered to be an elementary truth that happiness is the privilege of youth” (1976, p. 165). Studies, however, make it plain that while young people are generally happy, happiness is hardly their exclusive privilege. Both longitudinal and cross-sectional data suggest that, of the three components of well-being, positive affect slightly decreases in old age, yet so does negative affect (Charles, Reynolds, & Gatz, 2001; Mroczek & Spiro, 2005). As to life satisfaction,

Mroczek et al. (2005) found that while there were significant individual differences, life satisfaction increased from age 40 to 65, but then declined, particularly with impending death. Though more research on the subject is required, these results alone warn against a view of old age as a wellspring of unhappiness and against oversimplified conclusions about age trends in subjective well-being.

Gender. In his famous essay “On Women,” Schopenhauer (2004) argued that “the keenest sorrows and joys” are not for a woman, that “the current of her life should be more gentle, peaceful and trivial than man’s, without being essentially happier or unhappier” (p. 51). Large-scale surveys dovetail with Schopenhauer’s insight that women are not significantly happier or unhappier than men. When sex differences are observed in studies, it is typically women who report higher happiness levels, yet these differences tend to disappear when other demographic variables are controlled for (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Schopenhauer’s observation that women do not experience the greatest sufferings and the greatest joys, on the other hand, seems to be a poor reflection of reality. Data indicate that, quite to the contrary, women experience both negative and positive emotions more frequently and more intensely than men. In line with this observation, Fujita, Diener, and Sandvik (1991) have demonstrated that whereas gender accounts for less than 1% of the variance in happiness, it accounts for over 13% of the variance in the intensity of emotional experiences. In other words, women and men do not differ in their average happiness levels, though women may be overrepresented among both the extremely happy and the extremely unhappy members of society (Diener et al., 1999).

Intelligence & education. “By all the gods above,” wrote Dutch philosopher Erasmus, “is anyone happier than the sort of men who are usually called fools, dolts, simpletons, nincompoops?” (2003, p. 54). Studies, however, fail to validate this observation and point to a

positive (though weak) correlation between one's level of education and happiness after controlling for other variables, explaining 1% to 3% of variance in happiness (Witter, Okun, Stock, & Haring, 1984). As to the effect of intelligence (as measured by IQ tests) on happiness, it seems to be very weak, if it exists at all. Emotional intelligence, on the other hand, has consistently been linked to happiness (Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, McKenley, & Hollander, 2002; Furnham & Petrides, 2003), most likely because neurotic individuals tend to score low on measures of social and emotional intelligence.

Wealth. All in all, research suggests that money has a positive, yet diminishing, effect on happiness. While increased income contributes significantly to happiness at low levels of development across nations, the strong link between wealth and life satisfaction appears to taper off at higher levels of income (Frey & Stutzer, 2002a). Reflecting this trend, when Diener, Horowitz, and Emmons (1985) asked wealthy people chosen from the *Forbes* list of the wealthiest Americans about their happiness levels, they reported to be only modestly happier than a comparable group, and 37 percent of them turned out to be less happy than the average American. Whereas *having* money is associated with a positive, albeit diminishing, effect on happiness, *wanting* money too much has repeatedly been shown to prove toxic to happiness. People who place a lot of importance on money and on material possessions, particularly to the expense of family and social relationships, tend to feel less satisfied with their lives and experience less positive affect and more negative affect (Kasser & Kanner, 2004).

Religion. A number of studies point to a positive yet modest effect of religion on happiness. More specifically, participation in religious services, strength of religious affiliation, relationship with God, and prayer have all been associated with greater happiness levels (e.g., Ferriss, 2002; Poloma & Pendleton, 1990; Witter, Stock, Okun, & Haring, 1985). Higher levels

of religiosity have also been linked to higher life satisfaction and lower rates of suicide across nations (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Helliwell, 2007). It is believed that the beneficial effects of religion on happiness stem largely from the sense of meaning and purpose religious beliefs provide to the individual, as well as from the social support networks associated with organized religion (e.g., churches). Importantly, it is an intrinsic as opposed to extrinsic orientation toward religion that seems to be associated positively with subjective well-being (Ardelt, 2003; Ardel & Koenig, 2007). It is also worth noting that the positive link between religion and happiness is stronger for women, African-Americans, elderly people, and for Americans compared to Europeans (Argyle, 1999). Religious people in certain countries (e.g., Lithuania, Slovakia) have even reported lower levels of life satisfaction, which highlights the need for further research in order to understand the exact nature of the relationship between happiness and religion. The link of spirituality—as a concept distinct from religiousness—to subjective well-being is a similarly unstudied topic.

Societal conditions & culture. International surveys of happiness reveal significant mean differences across societies (Diener & Suh, 2000). These differences are substantially explained by the level of economic development in a country: Some of the unhappiest nations tend also to be among the poorest. National wealth is also highly correlated with various social indicators, such as democratic governance, human rights, and longevity (Diener & Diener, 1995b), which may partly account for its association with subjective well-being. Societies also have differing norms regarding the desirability of happiness and the appropriate expression of positive and negative emotions, which contribute to cross-cultural subjective well-being differences beyond the effect of economic development. For example, relative to other cultures, Confucian cultures (such as China) regard the ideal level of life satisfaction as one of neutrality, and display higher

acceptance of negative emotions and lower acceptance of positive emotions. Extant norms regarding life satisfaction in a society are apparently mirrored in actual levels of life satisfaction in that society, as confirmed by the finding that the mean ideal level for life satisfaction correlates .73 with mean reported life satisfaction across nations (Diener & Suh, 1999). The variables that most influence subjective well-being are also moderated by culture. For example, as mentioned earlier, self-esteem is a stronger predictor of subjective well-being in individualistic cultures than in collectivistic cultures. In line with this finding, people in individualistic cultures tend to base their life satisfaction judgments on personal emotional experiences, whereas people from collectivistic cultures emphasize the appraisals of others (Suh, Diener, Oishi, Triandis, 1998).

Health. Physical health inarguably affects well-being, as is evinced by the considerably lowered happiness levels of individuals who suffer life-threatening illnesses or illnesses that interfere with their daily life and cause pain. Given this fact, it is intriguing that researchers have reported weak and sometimes nonexistent correlations between happiness and objective health as assessed by medical personnel. Whereas associations between objective health and happiness are often weak, research documents that associations between happiness and subjective health—as it is reported by the individual—are consistently strong (Okun, Stock, Haring, & Witter, 1984). This curious phenomenon seems to be the consequence of (1) clinical error, meaning that objective health measures are sometimes not as objective as one would hope, and (2) the notion that subjective reports of health reflect emotional adjustments on the part of the individual, thus inflating the correlation between self-reported health and happiness.

Social relationships & friends. Having close friends and a network of social support has a distinct positive effect on happiness, to such a degree that some scholars have suggested that this

could be the single most important source of happiness (Reis & Gable, 2003). Corroborating this view, Diener and Seligman (2002) found in their study of very happy people that every single one of them had excellent social relationships. Other studies document that those who enjoy close relationships are better at coping with major life stresses such as bereavement, rape, unemployment, and illness (Myers, 1999), and perceived loneliness is robustly linked to depression (Anderson & Arnoult, 1985). It is not to be forgotten, though, that happiness itself may lead to better relationships. As we will see later, happy people tend to be more outgoing, empathic, and trusting than unhappy people, presumably resulting in enhanced quantity and quality of social relationships (Veenhoven, 1988).

Marriage & children. Empirical research regarding the relationship between happiness and marriage in the last few decades has yielded the robust finding that married individuals tend to be happier than unmarried or divorced ones (e.g., Gove & Shin, 1989; White, 1992). We should again be cautioned that the arrow of causality may point both ways: A number of studies have revealed that individuals who are likely to get married and to stay married are happier long before the marriage compared to individuals who remain single (Lucas et al., 2003).

Investigations about the effects of having children on one's happiness have been rarer, yet available data do not unequivocally support the conventional view that children are "the joy of life." In a well-controlled study, Kohler, Behrman, and Skytthe (2004) documented that first-born children significantly increase the happiness of their parents, whereas additional children reduce the happiness of their mothers and leave the happiness of their fathers unchanged.

Another remarkable finding from their study was that having had children at one point in their lives did not have any effect on the happiness level of men and women at ages 50–70.

Goals & sense of meaning. Research findings unambiguously illustrate that striving for and making progress toward meaningful, enjoyable, moderately challenging goals is an important source of happiness (Emmons, 1986; Little, 1989; Brunstein, 1993). As Myers and Diener (1995) have suggested, happiness seems to grow “less from the passive experience of desirable circumstances than from involvement in valued activities and progress toward one’s goals” (p. 17). Individuals who have goals that they deem important tend to be more energetic, experience more positive affect, and feel that life is meaningful (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002). Interestingly, positive affect in itself has been found to predispose people to feel that life is meaningful (King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006).

Leisure. George Bernard Shaw once observed that the only way to avoid being miserable is not to have enough leisure time to wonder whether you’re happy or not. A host of studies nonetheless document that leisure activities such as music, exercise, and reading significantly contribute to happiness (Argyle, 2002). Balatsky and Diener (1993) even reported that, among Russian students, leisure satisfaction was the single best predictor of happiness. On a related note, people who work fewer hours have been demonstrated to have higher life satisfaction (Alesina, Glaeser, & Sacerdote, 2006).

The Consequences of Happiness

In the previous section, we attempted to paint a rough picture of what causes happiness. Our assumption throughout was that happiness is something highly valuable, notwithstanding the aforementioned cultural differences in the perception of its desirability. Indeed, in a recent study conducted in 48 nations, Diener and Oishi (2006) established that respondents rated the importance of happiness 8.03 on a 9-point scale, higher than the importance of any of the other 11 attributes included in the survey, such as success, intelligence/knowledge, or material wealth.

Others have found that, in America, happiness is rated as more relevant to the judgment of a good life compared to wealth or moral goodness, and happy people are deemed to be more likely to go to heaven (King & Napa, 1998).

Happiness indisputably feels good and people value it greatly, yet the question that remains to be answered is whether happiness is as justifiable as it is desirable. The answer, according to happiness research, seems to be emphatically positive. A fascinating discovery made recently by happiness scholars is that happiness is not only an epiphenomenon, but it also plays a causal role in bringing about a plethora of individually and socially beneficial outcomes. In the next section, we will provide a review of how happiness cultivates better health and achievement outcomes, better social relationships, and elevated degrees of prosocial behavior. For a more comprehensive review, the reader is advised to refer to Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener (2005).

Benefits of happiness for achievement outcomes. Whereas many romanticizers of unhappiness disparage happiness for dumbing people down and praise misery for its role in sharpening one's mental faculties, the picture emerging from available data is that it is rather happiness (and not unhappiness) that leads to the development and better use of intellectual skills. Barbara Fredrickson's "broaden-and-build theory" provides a valuable framework to make sense of this phenomenon. According to this theory (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001), positive emotions allow individuals to broaden their thought-action repertoires and build their intellectual, psychological, social, and physical resources over time. Whereas negative emotions, such as fear or anger, appropriately cause the individual to focus on the immediate threat or problem, positive emotions and general well-being produce a readiness to explore the environment and approach new goals, thereby building enduring personal resources.

The notion that happy moods render the world an easier and safer place for people to deal with is evinced, for example, by Proffitt's (2006) finding that participants who were put in a bad mood estimate the slope of a hill dropping down in front of them to be much steeper, compared to when they are put in a good mood. Individuals are hence expected to generally perform better when they are in a good mood. In one test of the "sadder-but-wiser vs. happier-and-smarter" hypotheses, Staw and Barsade (1993) assessed the positive affect levels of first-year M.B.A. students and found that positive affect significantly predicted decision-making accuracy, mastery of information, leadership, and ratings of managerial performance, after controlling for the effects of GMAT, age, gender, and years of experience. These findings are further supported by data showing that individuals experimentally put in a pleasant mood outperform others in various tasks, including efficient decision-making (Forgas, 1989) or anagram solving (Erez & Isen, 2002), and they also persist longer at tasks that require perseverance (Kavanagh, 1987).

At the same time, there are some studies showing that those experiencing elevated moods have an increased tendency to rely on heuristics. Heuristics are learned answers, or mental habits that help people effortlessly answer problems that are frequently faced in life. When they are used in an appropriate context, they can efficiently yield accurate answers. However, high levels of positive affect might lead to inappropriate use of heuristics, possibly because good moods serve as a cue that everything is going well and there is no need for the expenditure of extra mental energy (Schwarz, Bless, Wänke, & Winkielman, 2003). In harmony with such an interpretation, studies show that people who are in a good mood perform as well as those who are not, when they are reminded that the task is important or complicated (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005).

Happiness has also been linked to higher achievement in professional life. It has been documented, for instance, that happier individuals are more likely to graduate from college, more likely to secure a job, more likely to have more prestigious jobs, more likely to receive favorable evaluations from their supervisors, more likely to find their jobs more meaningful, less likely to lose their jobs, quicker to be re-employed if they do, more likely to exhibit organizational citizenship behaviors, and finally more likely to earn higher incomes (e.g., Borman, Penner, Allen, & Motowildo, 2001; Cropanzano & Wright, 1999; Diener, Nickerson, Lucas, & Sandvic, 2002; Marks & Fleming, 1999; Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2003; Verkley & Stolk, 1989). On the whole, available data strongly suggest that happiness is not only a product of achievement, but at the same time a producer of it. Research has yet to unveil all the mechanisms through which these effects are obtained.

Benefits of happiness for social relationships and prosocial behavior. Whereas some have argued that only a self-centered person blind to the overwhelming suffering permeating the world could ever be happy, research fails to justify the cynicism in these beliefs. Quite to the contrary, what studies reveal is that happiness tends to bring out the best in humans, rendering them more social, cooperative, and even ethical. People with chronically high or experimentally increased positive affect have been observed to judge persons they have recently met in a more positive light, to become more interested in social interaction and also more prone to self-disclosure (Berry & Hansen, 1996; Cunningham, 1988; Mayer, Mamberg, & Volanth, 1988). Experimentally induced positive affect also increases trust in others (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005), which may partly help to explain the classic finding that positive moods increase helping behavior (Isen & Levin, 1972). In a similar vein, those who report higher life satisfaction exhibit

more generalized trust in others (Brehm & Rahn, 1997), which in turn predicts not only individual but also societal well-being.

The view that there exists a virtuous cycle between happiness and a myriad of socially desirable outcomes is further substantiated by the finding that not only does volunteering increase well-being, but at the same time happier people are more likely to be community volunteers and to invest more hours in volunteer work (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). Of great significance is the fact that happiness has also been shown to increase ethical judgments: When James and Chymis (2004) analyzed how justifiable respondents found various ethical scenarios—such as cheating on taxes if you have a chance or avoiding a fare on public transport—those with higher happiness levels responded in more ethical ways. This led the authors to conclude that improving subjective well-being may play a significant role in reducing improbity of all kinds (e.g., corruption, criminality) nationally and worldwide. Inglehart and Klingemann's (2000) similar argument that general well-being is a harbinger of democratic governance is corroborated by Tov and Diener's (2008) finding that on a national level, happier countries tend to be higher on generalized trust, volunteerism, and democratic attitudes. These findings sharply contradict a view of happiness as self-indulgent hedonism and attest to the intimate connection between a moral life and a happy life defended by many a philosopher throughout the ages.

Benefits of happiness for health. Accumulating evidence suggests that subjective well-being affects physical health and longevity, endorsing the biblical notion that “a merry heart does good like a medicine” (Pressman & Cohen, 2005). While it had long been established that high levels of negative emotion (e.g., stress, anger) are associated with lowered immune functioning and coronary heart disease, less was known until recently about the powerful protective influence

that positive emotions exert. In a remarkable study revealing this influence, Danner, Snowdon and Friesen (2001) established that positive emotional content in handwritten autobiographies of Catholic sisters, composed when they were at the mean age of 22 years, predicted their longevity six decades later. In this study, the nuns in the highest quartile regarding the number of positive emotion words (e.g., happy, good, fun) lived on average 9.4 years longer compared to the nuns in the lowest quartile. In another study, participants were experimentally infected with a cold virus and then monitored daily in quarantine. As anticipated, individuals who reported experiencing high levels of positive emotions (i.e., those that were happy, pleased, relaxed) turned out to be much less vulnerable to the common cold (Cohen, Doyle, Turner, Alper, & Skoner, 2003) than those who reported experiencing low levels of positive emotions. Marsland, Cohen, Rabin, and Manuck (2006) interestingly found that positive affect was a stronger predictor of immune strength than negative affect, and its predictive power persisted when demographics and body mass were controlled. Studies showing that people put into a pleasant mood exhibit greater pain tolerance compared to control subjects also provide evidence for the favorable impact of positive affect on health outcomes (Zelman, Howland, Nichols, & Cleeland, 1991).

Conclusion

In this chapter we aimed to shed some light on what influences happiness and what in turn is influenced by it, based on four decades of research. These decades of accumulated research have revealed that happiness is not only universally desired, but justifiably so. We have learned that happiness is a worthwhile pursuit, because it functions as a resource that people unwittingly draw from in their endeavors toward higher levels of success, kindness, and health. Therefore, attempts at increasing happiness take on an increased importance, not only for individuals, but also for societies. Fortunately, the science of happiness has shown us, and

continues to show us, the empirically validated ways to increase happiness. We know that while some part of our capacity for happiness is inherited and simply not amenable to change, we can still choose to do certain things that will make us lastingly happier, such as counting our blessings (Emmons & McCullough, 2003), or stopping to smell the roses (Bryant & Veroff, 2006).

Our review of the literature suggests that happiness not only is a reward in itself, but at the same time brings about a myriad of individually and socially desirable outcomes. Given that happiness is functional, the optimal level of happiness becomes an essential matter for individual and societal reasons. If an extreme lack of negative emotions can be highly dangerous, as exemplified by psychopaths, could an excessive amount of positive affect also result in suboptimal outcomes? We know, for example, that people in a good mood tend to rely more on heuristics than people in a bad or neutral mood, which also explains their more frequent use of stereotypes in person-perception tasks (Bodenhausen, Kramer, & Süsser, 1994). Intrigued by the notion of optimal happiness, Oishi, Diener, and Lucas (2007) put to test the idea that once people are moderately happy, the most effective level of happiness may depend on the life domain under question. They found those who experience the highest levels of happiness to be more successful in the domain of close relationships and volunteering. People who reported slightly lower levels of happiness, on the other hand, were the most successful ones in terms of income, education, and political participation. These findings imply that, whereas happy people in general fare much better than unhappy people, the level of most desirable happiness depends on an individual's value priorities.

As scholars of happiness, we are tremendously delighted that various knowledge disciplines, from philosophy (Haybron, 2007) to economics (Frey & Stutzer, 2002b) to

neuroscience (Klein, 2006), have recently started to exhibit a serious interest in this once marginalized subject. We cannot wait to see the future of happiness studies shaped by this multidisciplinary effort, and we continue to hope for a tomorrow where people will be optimally happy.

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