

Literature Review Surrounding the Concept of Happiness

Chelsie Ram

Capilano University

### Literature Review Surrounding the Concept of Happiness

In the Spring 2018 semester I plan on pursuing my first tutorial LBST 390 with professor Danielle Labossiere from the Psychology department. The main objective of this tutorial is to gain an understanding of happiness and how to achieve it through a psychological viewpoint. I will be exploring different schools of psychology (e.g. religion and spirituality, developmental, etc.) to understand how various aspects aid in an individual's happiness. I plan on combining the knowledge gained through completion of this tutorial with my next two tutorials in order to create a final graduating project that provides an interdisciplinary definition of happiness and gives readers valuable insight on how to attain happiness themselves.

Resources for this literature review will be five scholarly articles surrounding the concept of happiness that have been specifically selected from the relevant readings done on the topic. The methodology of the tutorial will include reviewing and discussing the assigned readings and progress on the final literature review with Ms. Labossiere during scheduled bi-weekly meetings. Learning will be mostly self-directed and will call for application of quantitative and qualitative reasoning and research methods. Analysis and synthezation of chosen works will be key in communicating findings within the final literature review.

Happiness is an abstract term; the definition varies depending on the individual's interpretation and construction of the concept. Personally, I am inspired to do research on the topic of happiness as I find it important to not only exist, but to enjoy and truly enjoy life. The focus of this literature review will be on the basic foundational research surrounding the concept of happiness and how one may obtain it.

The primary literary piece entails a study done between the 2014-2015 academic year, in the spring semester, at the Adnan Menderes University in Turkey. The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of physical health education on the level of happiness and socialization of university students. The participants included 196 students from the School of Physical Education and Sports, and 229 students from the Faculty of Education. For determining the

happiness level of the students the Oxford Happiness Scale, which had been developed by Hills and Argyle and adapted to Turkish by Doğan and Çötök, was used. In order to determine the socialization level of the students the Socialization Scale developed by Şahan was used (Yildiz & Ekici, 2017). Both scales were implemented by asking participants to personally assess themselves and place themselves on the scale where they seemed fit. The personal assessments were then analysed and interpreted by the research team. The hypothesis was that the results would indicate a higher level of happiness within individuals who belong to the school of Physical Education and Sports (Yildiz & Ekici, 2017).

The hypothesis proved to be correct as the results represented students studying physical education and sports as happier and more social than students enrolled in the Faculty of Education (Yildiz & Ekici, 2017). The results are of interest as they show that sport and physical health education can be used as an effective tool to increase happiness and socialization level of university faculty of education can be physically active or self educated on physical health. It also does not consider that there may be a reason as to why students in the Faculty of Education are less social and less happy that is not due to a lack of sports knowledge. This study identifies a strong correlation but not a causation. The subsequent study aims to identify another connection between sports and happiness with a focus on the emotions involved with merely viewing sporting events.

The following study was published within *The Journal of Sport Management* in 2017. The purpose of this study was to identify a key underlying mechanism of why and when sport spectatorship enhances spectators' happiness. "The study used a 2 (team identification: high vs. low) × 2 (positivity of game outcome: winning vs. losing) between-subjects design....Team identification was a selection variable, while positivity of the game outcome was a manipulated variable" (Wonseok, Yong, Wann & Daehwan, 2017, p.333). 73 participants were placed into the positive outcome group, and 76 were put into the negative outcome group. The U.S. Men's National Soccer team was used as the identified sport team to gather a substantial amount of

participants. Stimuli were constructed around two games: one losing match held in 2014 and one winning match held in 2015 (Wonseok, et. al, 2017). "Team identification, vitality, and happiness were measured with 7-point Likert-type scales, whereas sport involvement was assessed via a 7-point semantic-type scale" (Wonseok et. al, 2017, p.334). Researchers observed participants watching the game and plotted their emotions on the appropriate scale and from there the results were interpreted. The first hypothesis was that in the positive outcome condition, fans with high team identification would report greater levels of happiness than those with low team identification after watching a game. The second hypothesis was that after watching the match with a negative outcome, levels of happiness between the groups with varying team identification would not be significantly different (Wonseok, et. al, 2017). Although both hypotheses predict patterns of fan behavior, they do not provide recommendations for the possible underlying explanations for these effects.

The results show that spectators with high team identification reported experiencing a greater level of happiness than spectators with low team identification when their team won the match. When the team lost the match, spectators with both levels of team identification maintained almost identical levels of happiness (Wonseok, et. al, 2017). The results offer numerous practical implications. First, it provides implications in the field of public health. Research has revealed that feelings of vitality and happiness are correlated with many positive things. For example, higher levels of vitality are correlated with greater self-control. Second, the results have consequences for brand managers. Pre-existing research has indicated that a feeling of vitality has influence over how individuals evaluate products. For e.g. when individuals have a strong feeling of vitality while shopping they tend to evaluate the products more positively as their vitality is transferred to their perspective on the product. As highly identified fans experience a heightened sense of vitality after a win, brand managers should display their commercials and promote products in the local city where highly identified followers of the team would most likely live in order to increase sales. Finally, the results provide relevant information

for sport managers. Vitality is influenced by the interaction of numerous situational factors. In the context of sport spectatorship, various aspects such as level of broadcaster's enthusiasm may have effect on the quantity of vitality that spectators may achieve throughout the match. Therefore; it would prove beneficial for sport managers to put a portion of resources towards the various situational factors that may enhance the spectator's vitality.

The next study that will be reviewed was conducted online and is titled the "9 Beautiful Things" intervention. The purpose of this study was to discover the effectiveness of the acknowledgment and appreciation of beauty on an individual's happiness. One hundred thirteen adults were randomly assigned to a variable group, or a placebo control group. Once a day for seven days participants in the placebo control group wrote down (a) three beautiful things in human behavior; (b) three things they experienced as beautiful in nature and/or the environment; and (c) three beautiful things they related to beauty in general. The hypothesis was that those in the control group would exhibit an increase in well-being and a decrease in depression both in short term (Proyer, Gander, Wellenzohn & Ruch, 2016).

The results indicated an increase of happiness and a decrease of depressive symptoms throughout the participants in the control group after one week as well as after one month (Proyer et. al, 2016). The results are significant as it provides support for the notion that focussing on daily beauty may be effective in increasing people's well-being -- at least in a short term. Further research is necessary in order to determine if positive long term effects can be achieved.

The "9 beautiful things" intervention can be considered a supplement to the inventory of positive psychology interventions currently in existence. The basic finding of this study provides a strong base for future investigations in this line of research. The effectiveness of this intervention within clinically depressed people needs to be tested in separate studies as this study only included people clinically classified as 'mentally healthy'.

The next literary piece is an article published in the *Harvard Business Review* that looks at happiness within the workplace. It aims to identify why many individuals who shape their own professional lives are unhappy at work. It also provides suggestions as to what people can do in order to be happy within their professional life.

The article first discusses the common destructive work mindsets that people often fall into. These mindsets are referred to as “happiness traps” (McKee, 2017, p. 67) as they lead to individuals feeling unsatisfied and overall less successful. The happiness traps are primarily mindsets associated with (a) excessive ambition that leads to the mentality that winning at any and all costs is vital to success (b) adopting the idea that doing what is expected rather than what is enjoyed is acceptable and (c) believing that overworking is productive and not acknowledging that it may turn destructive if taken to the extreme (McKee, 2017).

The article concludes by stating that finding happiness at work begins with identifying which trap one has fallen into. It then suggests to subsequently strengthen three things that research has shown to increase professional satisfaction: meaningful work, enduring hope, and workplace friendships (McKee, 2017). This piece is essential as it gives a more creative and abstract idea on how to obtain happiness. Happiness is a construct and should maintain not only quantitative but qualitative research. The next article compliments this idea as it is an additional reflective piece that has scholarly insight on happiness but is not a scientific study and does not necessarily quantify happiness; it analyses, interprets and discusses the concept in general.

The final piece of literature that will be reviewed discusses how to overcome challenges, embrace change and ultimately acquire happiness. The article first discusses what happiness is. It classifies happiness as a feeling of peace and contentedness that is deeply satisfying and can carry you through life’s challenges. It further goes on to explain how constantly focussing on obtaining happiness may not result in achieving it as a single-minded focus on positivity may leave individuals at a disadvantage when setbacks and heartbreak arise. To avoid that

disadvantage they suggest allowing happiness to arise inherently by engaging in activities that are in line with one's values (Graves, 2017).

Material items have not been shown to raise happiness levels long term. Joy comes from doing more of what one values—and noticing the small pleasures already in one's days. In order to identify activities that are parallel to one's values is vital to pursue meaning, not happiness (Graves, 2017). Self-Reflection assists in making decisions that permeate one's life with meaning. The article suggests making one's "brain a sunnier place" (Graves, 2017, p. 101). This can be done by incorporating small amounts of gratitude into the day which strengthens the neural structure in the brain that is linked to positivity.

Another point of discussion is the importance of staying rooted in the present moment. Both anxiety and depression are correlated with permitting one's mind to deviate from the present. "Depression is brooding about the past, and anxiety is worrying about the future, says Dr. Lustig" (Graves, 2017, p. 103). Therefore, existing within the moment can be one of the most important things one can do to achieve mental health and happiness. It concludes by recognizing that even sadness and adversity can be viewed as a positive. "Without them, we wouldn't appreciate—or even recognize—what "happy" feels like" (Graves, 2017, p. 103).

The key finding within this literature review is that maintaining a grateful mindset filled with an appreciation of beauty is key to obtaining a level of happiness. It is important to keep in mind that each study has its limitations. Self-assessment is a tool that is often used but is not always reliable; happiness is difficult to accurately measure. It is also vital to recognize that most of the studies were conducted in the United States. If attempting to obtain an understanding on the concept of happiness from elsewhere it is important to take context into consideration. The research done within this literature review provides me with an understanding of what research currently exists on the topic of happiness. Through completion of this paper I have constructed a solid foundation on which further research surrounding the concept of happiness within my future tutorials and grad project can be built upon.

## Running head : LITERATURE REVIEW SURROUNDING THE CONCEPT OF HAPPINESS

As outlined previously I plan on completing my first tutorial with Professor Danielle Laboissiere from the department of Psychology in the Spring 2018 semester. Researching the concept of happiness through a psychological viewpoint will allow me to gain an understanding on the general thought processes that aid in one's happiness. Within this tutorial I will be completing another literature review on the concept of happiness, this time with a predominantly psychological focus. For my LBST 391 tutorial I plan to work with a faculty from the Sociology department. By doing so I hope to gain information on how social structures and the environment play a role in wellbeing. In my first tutorial research into the mental processes of happiness will be examined, in LBST 391 the surroundings and situations that influence these mental processes will be looked at. In LBST 392 I hope to work with a faculty member of the Biology department. The focus of this tutorial will be to gain an understanding of the biological processes that occur when an individual experiences various types of emotions. A faculty from the biology department will be beneficial to me as they will be able to point me towards relevant information and research conducted in the field as I have very little knowledge on biological processes and the pre-existing research in the area. Each tutorial will play an important role in shaping my final graduation project which I plan on slowly constructing throughout the next year and a half.



References

- Graves, G. (2017). Find a Deeper Happiness. *Health*, 31(5), 100-103.
- McKee, A. (2017). Happiness Traps: How we Sabatoge Ourselves at Work. *Harvard Business Review*, 95(5), 66-73.
- Proyer, R. T., Gander, F., Wellenzohn, S., & Ruch, W. (2016). Nine beautiful things: A self-administered online positive psychology intervention on the beauty in nature, arts, and behaviors increases happiness and ameliorates depressive symptoms. *Personality And Individual Differences*, 94189-193. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2016.01.028
- Wonseok, J., Yong Jae, K., Wann, D. L., & Daehwan, K. (2017). Does Spectatorship Increase Happiness? The Energy Perspective. *Journal Of Sport Management*, 31(4), 333-344.
- Yildiz, Y., & Ekici, S. (2017). Investigation of the Effect of Sports on the Level of Happiness and Socialization of University Students. *Journal Of Physical Education & Sports Science / Beden Egitimi Ve Spor Bilimleri Dergisi*, 11(2), 181-187.