

The Truth of Happiness

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Gazing upon a stunning sunset. Acing a test. Coming home to pet your dog after a long day. Getting a hug from your grandma. Scoring the winning goal in the championship game. All of these have one thing in common, the feeling of happiness. We turn to many things to make us happy, such as the newest iPhone, boatloads of money, a hard-earned promotion, or even changing our appearance. I can see how these seem like they would lead to true happiness, but in reality, these things leave you far from the feeling of happiness. In truth, money doesn't provide true happiness, changing your appearance leads to body image issues, electronics leave you feeling empty, and being motivated by a promotion or raise will never leave you feeling happy enough. I believe that there is more to happiness than what is displayed in the media. Happiness is something we all can obtain if we make a few changes within ourselves.

This may seem like a simple question, but what really is happiness? You might think it's a feeling or an experience. To better understand the topic of happiness, it's important to know the research behind happiness. Happiness described by Britannica (2023) refers to, "a state of emotional well-being that a person experiences either in a narrow sense, when good things happen in a specific moment, or more broadly, as a positive evaluation of one's life and accomplishments overall—that is, subjective well-being." In other words, happiness is a good feeling due to the result of a positive experience. Happiness can be found in a single moment of your life or in the overall course. Typically, the feeling of happiness is something that we strive for. For example, the Declaration of Independence writes, "the pursuit of happiness." The framework of our nation found it important enough that happiness is a goal that we look forward to achieving. Emory University (2018) makes a good point when referring to this part of the Declaration, "Remember that the pursuit of happiness [...] but "an unalienable right." Everyone

has the right to actually be happy.” If everyone has the right to be happy, then how can we achieve happiness?

One common misconception about happiness is that “money can buy you happiness.” While money is necessary to survive in our society, excessive amounts of money are not needed. Although it seems great to have boatloads of money sitting around; having money does not automatically give you happiness. A stable income is all that is needed to maintain conditions where happiness can thrive. In a study of the relationship between happiness and income, Rhia Catapano (2023), University of Toronto Assistant Professor of Marketing, finds, “Our analysis revealed that the degree of convergence between meaning and happiness depended on income level. We find a significant interaction between income level and meaning on happiness, [...] such that meaning is a stronger predictor of happiness for individuals in lower income brackets.” In other words, this study found that there is a correlation between money and happiness, but not necessarily what you would expect. Catapano (2023) found that those with a lower income found more purpose and happiness than those with higher incomes. However, there is a minimum amount of money necessary to feel comfortable throughout life. An article from CNBC written by Trina Paul (2023) talks about how much money is needed to be happy. In the article, there is a quote from Jon Jachimowicz, a Business Administrator Professor at Harvard. I believe Jon says it best, “The primary benefit of making more money is that it serves as a buffer when negative events in life happen... Money is not just a way that people can buy themselves happy moments; it is also a crucial tool for safety, security, and stability.” The amount of money needed to be stable may vary from place to place. Money does not provide happiness; it is more so just a tool to make you feel at ease.

In addition to the desire for money, we all have things that we wish we could change about ourselves physically. Some people turn to plastic surgery in hopes of “fixing” their body,

while others go on an unhealthy diet to change the look of their body. While you may think that these changes will make you happier and pleased, they really lead to a negative body image and searching to “fix” more things. In “How Does Positive Visualization Affect People’s Level of Happiness and Perception of their Physical Body Image?” Anita Sheerha (2018), from the Department of Psychology, states, “Your happiness is a function of how far your body type is from your ideal body type.” Sheerha (2018) then goes on to talk about two ways to improve your happiness surrounding body image. One is to change your body with a change of diet and physical activity; however, this can be bad because it is too difficult to achieve the perfect body. The second way is to switch what you view as an ideal body. If you make it more realistic and like your own body, then you will feel more satisfied with the results. Happiness will never be found when you are trying to achieve the “perfect” body. There will always be something that you could change. Instead of nitpicking the little things that make you different, we should look at the things that make you feel good. Like Sheerha (2018) said, “switch what you view as an ideal body.” If we can change our mindset on how we look at ourselves, we can change how happy we are with ourselves.

While the casual reader may get sucked into body image issues, they may also find themselves scrolling endlessly on their phone. Though this may feel good in the moment, it will end up leaving you feeling empty. Happiness can be found in so many other things, other than your phone. In “WHAT IS THE TRUE MEANING OF HAPPINESS?” Stephanie Booth (2019), writes, “The stuff we think gives us "happiness" right now—such as scrolling through social media—activates the brain's ancient motivation-and-reward system, and only gives us momentary pleasure.” Each time we scroll on our phone, there is a feeling of temporary happiness. We turn to our phone when we feel stressed, tired, uncomfortable, etc. Often it feels like our phone is the only thing that can provide happiness in those moments. Although it may

seem like the best option, it leads us to even worse than when we started out. An article from CNBC written by Zameena Mejia (2018) writes about a study done by University of East London psychology senior lecturer Jolanta Burke and Hughes. The study revolved around the use of phones in bedrooms. Mejia (2018) writes, “The study concluded that those who didn’t use their phones in their bedrooms showed a statistically significant increase in happiness and overall quality of life.” When people break a cycle of bad habits, there are significant changes. Instead of falling asleep and waking up right next to your phone, consider trying this experiment and it might just show you that happiness does not come from your phone. If anything, your phone just takes away your happiness.

Another struggle in our society is the difficulty when finding a job that you truly love. Many people dread going to work; the only thing they look forward to is a promotion or raise. While it may seem that a promotion is your only source of happiness at work, happiness is something you can find in every situation. In “Motivating job characteristics and happiness at work: A multilevel perspective.” Wido Oerlemans (2018), Eindhoven University of Technology assistant professor, states:

“This study expands Job Characteristics Theory (JCT) by using a multilevel approach to predict how variations in motivating job characteristics relate to employee happiness during daily work activities. Based on adaptation level theory and the affective-reactivity hypothesis, we predicted that the positive relationship between perceived motivating job characteristics and happiness during work activities is moderated by motivating job characteristics at the job level and individual differences in trait positive affect.”

This study shows that the happiness you experience in a day at work can be in your control. According to Oerlemans (2018), happiness is increased when you spend time doing the “5

motivating job characteristics; Skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback.” Practicing these characteristics can lead to a job that feels more purposeful and happier. So, the next time you dread going to work because you have a strict boss or annoying coworker, try and focus on these key characteristics and hopefully you will see an increase in your happiness at work.

To sum it all up, happiness is an achievable goal that can be found by making slight changes to our daily routine. Rather than waiting for money to buy happiness, make the best out of what you already have. Rather than trying to change our looks to become perfect, change what you view as perfect. Rather than endlessly scrolling on your phone in hopes of fulfillment, find a hobby that makes you feel accomplished. Lastly, rather than waiting for your job to change, make a change in your mindset at work. These slight changes can make a world of differences if you are willing to try it out. While working on this essay, I have found that it is so important to find the good in all situations. We all know we are going to have highs and lows, but it is what we do with those moments that matters the most. I encourage you to do the same and see what a difference it will make when you look for the good in things. No matter where or how you find happiness, always search for it.

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