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The Promise of Sustainable Happiness

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Abstract

From ancient history to recent times, philosophers, writers, self-help gurus, and now scientists have taken up the challenge of how to foster greater happiness. This chapter discusses why some people are happier than others, focusing on the distinctive ways that happy and unhappy individuals construe themselves and others, respond to social comparisons, make decisions, and self-reflect. We suggest that, despite several barriers to increased well-being, less happy people can strive successfully to be happier by learning a variety of effortful strategies and practicing them with determination and commitment. The sustainable happiness model (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005) provides a theoretical framework for experimental intervention research on how to increase and maintain happiness. According to this model, three factors contribute to an individual's chronic happiness level: (a) the set point, (b) life circumstances, and (c) intentional activities, or effortful acts that are naturally variable and episodic. Such activities, which include committing acts of kindness, expressing gratitude or optimism, and savoring joyful life events, represent the most promising route to sustaining enhanced happiness. We describe a half-dozen randomized controlled interventions testing the efficacy of each of these activities in raising and maintaining well-being, as well as the mediators and moderators underlying their effects. Future researchers must endeavor not only to learn *which* particular practices make people happier, but *how* and *why* they do so.

Keywords: construal, happiness, intervention, set point, well-being

> How to gain, how to keep, how to recover happiness is in fact for most men at all times the secret motive of all they do, and of all they are willing to endure.
> —*William James*

The quest for ever-greater happiness has existed since antiquity. Interest has not abated in today's society, whose preoccupation with becoming happier is evident in countless books and magazine articles promising the secret to a happy life. Indeed, the pursuit of happiness is not without reward, as empirical support is accumulating for the notion that happiness promotes multiple successful life outcomes (including superior health, higher income, and stronger relationships; see Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005, for a review). Nonetheless, conflicting evidence raises questions about whether it is even possible for people to realize and then sustain meaningful changes in well-being.

In this chapter, we examine several issues with respect to sustainable happiness. To begin, we describe what happy and unhappy people are like, paying particular attention to the strategies that chronically happy people appear to use to foster and preserve their well-being. Next, we address some of the scientific community's reservations and uncertainties with respect to the possibility of

sustainably increasing happiness. Finally, we review evidence suggesting that people can indeed learn strategies to achieve durable increases in well-being.

What Are Happy and Unhappy People Like?

Why are some people happier than others? Is it due to their marital status or the salary they earn? Is it because of the experiences they have or the culture they grow up in? Hundreds of empirical articles to date have examined how these and other so-called "objective" circumstances relate to happiness. Surprising to many laypeople, such objective factors (including marriage, age, sex, culture, income, and life events) explain relatively little variation in people's levels of well-being (see Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999, for a review).

Given that circumstantial factors do not tell a satisfactory story to account for the differences between happy and unhappy people, one must look elsewhere to understand them. We propose that happy and unhappy individuals[1] differ considerably in their *subjective experience and construal* of the world (Lyubomirsky, 2001). In other words, happy people are inclined to perceive and interpret their environment differently from their less happy peers. This construal theory prompts us to explore how an individual's thoughts, behaviors, and motivations can explain her happiness over and above the mere objective circumstances of her life. A growing body of research suggests that happy people successfully enhance and maintain their happiness through the use of multiple adaptive strategies vis-à-vis construal of themselves and others, social comparison, decision making, and self-reflection (Liberman, Boehm, Lyubomirsky, & Ross, 2008; Lyubomirsky, Boehm, Kasri, & Zehm, 2008; Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1997, 1999; Lyubomirsky, Tkach, & DiMatteo, 2006; Lyubomirsky & Tucker, 1998; Lyubomirsky, Tucker, & Kasri, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2002).

Construal

Indeed, research suggests that happy individuals tend to view the world relatively more positively and in a happiness-promoting way. For example, when

[1] In the majority of the studies reported here, happy and unhappy people were identified using a median or quartile split on the widely used four-item Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). In other words, those scoring in the top half (or quarter) of the happiness distribution were classified as chronically happy, whereas those in the bottom half (or quarter) were classified as chronically unhappy.

describing their previous life experiences, self-nominated happy people retrospectively evaluated the experiences as more pleasant at both the time of occurrence and when recalling them (study 1, Lyubomirsky & Tucker, 1998; cf. Seidlitz, Wyer, & Diener, 1997). Unhappy people, however, evaluated their past life events relatively unfavorably at both time points. Interestingly, objective judges did not rate the events described by happy people as inherently more positive than those described by unhappy people, suggesting that happy and unhappy people experience similar events but interpret them differently. Further supporting this finding, when participants were asked to evaluate hypothetical situations, dispositionally happy people rated the situations more positively compared with their less happy peers, even after current mood was controlled (study 2, Lyubomirsky & Tucker, 1998).

Self-nominated chronically happy people also have been found to use a positive perspective when evaluating themselves and others. For example, in one study, students interacted with a female stranger in the laboratory and were then asked to evaluate her personality. Happy students rated the stranger more positively, and expressed a stronger interest in becoming friends with her, compared with unhappy students (study 3, Lyubomirsky & Tucker, 1998; see also Berry & Hansen, 1996; Judge & Higgins, 1998). Furthermore, happy people tend to judge almost everything about themselves and their lives favorably, including their friendships, recreation, self-esteem, energy levels, and purpose in life (Lyubomirsky, Tkach, et al., 2006; see also Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996; Ryff, 1989).

Social Comparison

At its most basic level, the general finding from the social comparison domain is that happy people are less sensitive to feedback about other people's performances, even when that feedback is unfavorable. An illustrative study from our laboratory involved participants solving anagrams in the presence of a confederate who was performing the same task either much quicker or much slower (study 1, Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1997). When exposed to a slower confederate, all participants (regardless of how happy they were) reacted the same way to the experience—that is, performing the task bolstered confidence in their skills. In the presence of a faster confederate, however, happy students did not change their judgments of how good they were at the task, but unhappy participants derogated their own skills. This finding supports the argument that

the self-perceptions of happy individuals are relatively invulnerable to social comparisons.

In another study, students were asked to "teach" a lesson about conflict resolution to a hypothetical audience of children while presumably being evaluated by experts (study 2, Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1997). After this teaching task, participants were supplied with an expert evaluation of their own—and a peer's—teaching performance. The results showed that happy people responded to the situation in a predictable and adaptive manner—they reported more positive emotions when told that their performance was excellent (even when a peer had done even better) than when told that their performance was poor (even when a peer had done even worse). Unhappy people's reactions, by contrast, were surprising and even dysfunctional. They reported more positive emotions after receiving a *negative* expert evaluation (accompanied by news that a peer had done even worse) than after receiving a positive expert evaluation (accompanied by news that a peer had done even better). Again, this suggests that happy people's emotions and self-regard are much less impacted by comparisons with others than those of their unhappy peers.

Happy individuals' inclinations to deemphasize social comparison feedback have been observed in a group context as well (Lyubomirsky et al., 2001). For example, in one study, students competed in four-person groups (or "teams") in a relay race involving word puzzles. The announcement of the winning team—or their individual rank on their team—did not influence happy participants' moods. In contrast, unhappy participants showed depressed moods after their team supposedly lost, and bolstered moods after learning that they had individually placed first on their losing team. The results of this study suggest that unhappy students are more responsive to both group and individual information, particularly in "failure" situations. Whereas unhappy people use individual ranking information (i.e., first place on their team) to buffer against unfavorable group comparisons (i.e., their team's underperformance), happy people do not appear to need such a buffer (see also Ahrens, 1991; Swallow & Kuiper, 1992; Wheeler & Miyake, 1992).

Decision Making

Besides using different strategies in the social comparison domain, happy and unhappy people also respond distinctively when making decisions. For example, empirical evidence suggests that happy and unhappy individuals show divergent responses to

both inconsequential decisions (e.g., selecting a dessert) and momentous ones (e.g., selecting a college; Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1999). Happy people tend to be more satisfied with all of their available options (including the option they eventually choose) and only express dissatisfaction in situations when their sense of self is threatened. For example, when self-reported happy students were asked to rate the attractiveness of several desserts before and after learning which dessert they would get to keep, they increased their liking for the dessert they got and didn't change their liking for the dessert they couldn't get. This seems to be an adaptive strategy. In contrast, unhappy students found the option they were given to be minimally acceptable (derogating that dessert after learning they could keep it), and the forgone options to be even worse (study 2, Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1999; see also Steele, Spencer, & Lynch, 1993).

Similar patterns have been observed for happy and unhappy people facing a more significant decision-making situation—namely, the choice of a university (study 1, Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1999). After being accepted by individual colleges, self-described happy students boosted their liking and judgments of those colleges. To protect themselves, however, these happy students decreased their overall ratings of the colleges that had rejected them. This dissonance reduction presumably allowed the happy participants to maintain positive feelings and self-regard. By contrast, unhappy participants did not use the same strategy to maintain positivity; instead, they (maladaptively) maintained their liking for the colleges that had rejected them.

Happy and unhappy people also differ in how they make decisions in the face of many options. Research suggests that happy individuals are relatively more likely to "satisfice"—namely, to be satisfied with an option that is merely "good enough," without concern for alternative, potentially better options (Schwartz et al., 2002). Unhappy individuals, by contrast, are more likely to "maximize" their options—that is, they seek to make the absolute best choice. Although maximizers' decisions may ultimately produce objectively superior results (e.g., a more lucrative job), maximizers experience greater regret and diminished well-being relative to satisficers (Iyengar, Wells, & Schwartz, 2006). The maximizing tendencies of unhappy individuals may thus serve to reinforce their unhappiness.

Intrusive Dwelling

Happy people are much less likely than their unhappier peers to excessively self-reflect and dwell

upon themselves. For example, in several studies, unhappy students led to believe that they had failed at a verbal task experienced negative affect and intrusive negative thoughts, which interfered with their concentration and impaired their performance on a subsequent intellectually demanding test (Lyubomirsky et al., 2008). These findings suggest that unhappy people engage in negative (and maladaptive) dwelling more so than do happy people, and their excessive dwelling not only makes them feel bad, but brings about significant detrimental outcomes (see also Lyubomirsky & Kasri, 2006). Notably, another study revealed that manipulating a person's focus of attention (i.e., reflecting vs. distracting) could eliminate the differences between the cognitive strategies and processes shown by happy and unhappy individuals (study 3, Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1999). This finding hints at a critical mechanism underlying differences between happy and unhappy people— namely, that one could "turn" a happy person into an unhappy one by instructing her to ruminate about herself. Conversely, one could make an unhappy person "look like" a happy person by directing his attention away from himself.

The way that people consider their past life events also may differentially impact happiness. A recent set of studies in the United States and Israel examined the relationship between well-being and two different thought perspectives that can be used to consider autobiographical experiences—namely, "endowing" (or reflecting on) life events versus "contrasting" them with the present (Liberman et al., 2008; cf. Tversky & Griffin, 1991). Happy people are relatively more likely to report endowing (or savoring) past positive life experiences and contrasting negative life experiences (i.e., considering how much better off they are today), whereas unhappy people are relatively more likely to report endowing (or ruminating about) negative experiences and contrasting positive experiences (i.e., considering how much worse off they are today). This evidence suggests that happy people's strategies of processing life events serve to prolong and preserve positive emotions, whereas the strategies of unhappy individuals serve to dampen the inherent positivity associated with positive events and to enhance the negative affect associated with negative events.

Can Less Happy People Learn Strategies to Achieve Sustainable Happiness?

Our current understanding of the differences between chronically happy and unhappy people suggests that happy people think and behave in ways

that reinforce their happiness. Given these findings, is it possible for unhappy people to learn deliberate strategies to achieve ever-greater well-being? Evidence suggests that in naturalistic settings people do try to become happier. For example, college students report a variety of strategies that they use to increase happiness, including social affiliation, pursuing goals, engaging in leisure activities, participating in religion, and "direct" attempts (e.g., act happy, smile; Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006). Although some of these techniques— especially social affiliation and direct attempts—are positively correlated with happiness, it is unclear whether such strategies *cause* increases in happiness or whether already happy people are simply more likely to practice them.

Sources of Pessimism Regarding Happiness Change

Doubts about the possibility of increasing and maintaining happiness have dominated the area of well-being and personality.

To begin with, twin and adoption studies suggest that genetics account for approximately 50% of the variation present in well-being (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996). For example, Tellegen and colleagues (1988) investigated the well-being of identical and fraternal twins who had been raised together or apart. The happiness levels of the identical twin pairs were strongly correlated, and this correlation was equally high regardless of whether such twins had grown up under the same roof ($r = .58$) or miles apart ($r = .48$). Pairs of fraternal twins, however, showed much smaller correlations between their levels of well-being, even when they shared the same upbringing and household ($r = .23$ vs. $r = .18$). Longitudinal studies of changes in well-being over time bolster these data even further. For example, although positive and negative life experiences have been shown to increase or decrease happiness in the short term, people apparently rapidly return to their happiness baselines (Headey & Wearing, 1989; Suh, Diener, & Fujita, 1996). These lines of evidence indicate that each person may have a unique set point for happiness that is genetically determined and immune to influence.

Another concern regarding sustainable changes in well-being is rooted in the concept of hedonic adaptation. Brickman and Campbell (1971) argued that after positive or negative life experiences, people quickly become accustomed to their new conditions and eventually return to their baseline happiness. This notion of a "hedonic treadmill" suggests that people

adapt to circumstantial changes, especially positive ones. Many people still believe, however, that an incredibly exciting experience or major positive life change, such as winning a lottery, would make them considerably happier. In fact, a study comparing lottery winners and people who experienced no sudden windfall demonstrated that the lottery winners were no happier—and even appeared to obtain less pleasure from daily activities—than did nonwinners (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978). This suggests that hedonic adaptation is another potent barrier to sustainably increasing well-being (cf. Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006; Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2003; see Lyubomirsky, in press, for a review).

A final source of pessimism about the possibility of real change in happiness is the strong association between happiness and personality (Diener & Lucas, 1999). Personality traits are characterized by their relatively fixed nature and lack of variation across time (McCrae & Costa, 1994). Thus, some researchers conceptualize happiness as part of a person's stable personality and, by extension, as a construct that is unlikely to undergo meaningful change (Costa, McCrae, & Zonderman, 1987).

The Sustainable Happiness Model

In their model of the primary determinants of happiness, Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al. (2005) challenge these reservations and offer an optimistic perspective regarding the possibility of creating sustainable increases in happiness. According to their model, chronic happiness, or the happiness one shows during a specific period in life, is influenced by three factors—one's set point, one's life circumstances, and the intentional activities in which one engages (see Figure 63.1). As mentioned, the set point is thought to account for
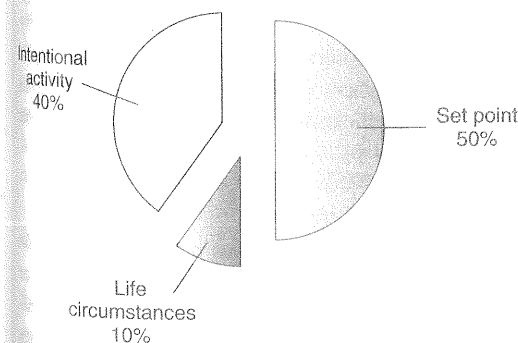

Fig. 63.1 The three factors that influence chronic happiness (adapted from Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al., 2005).

approximately 50% of the variance in individual differences in chronic happiness. Unfortunately, however, because the set point is "set" or fixed, it is resistant to change. Given its relative inflexibility, the set point is unlikely to be a fruitful direction to pursue increases in happiness.

Counter to many lay notions of well-being, a person's circumstances generally account for only about 10% of individual differences in chronic happiness (Diener et al., 1999). Life circumstances include such factors as a person's national or cultural region, demographics (e.g., gender and ethnicity), personal experiences (e.g., past traumas and triumphs), and life status variables (e.g., marital status, education level, health, and income). Given that such circumstances are relatively constant, they are more susceptible to adaptation and, hence, have comparatively little impact on happiness. Thus, circumstantial factors also do not appear to be a promising route through which to achieve sustainable well-being.

Interestingly, however, although the average person easily adapts to positive changes in her life, like getting married, winning the lottery, or acquiring sharper vision, individual differences have been found in degrees of adaptation. For example, in a study of reactions to marriage, some newlyweds reported substantial boosts in life satisfaction after the wedding and remained very satisfied even years later, while others rapidly returned to their baseline happiness and others still actually became less happy and stayed relatively unhappy (Lucas et al., 2003). These findings suggest that people vary in how they *intentionally behave* in response to changing circumstances—for example, the extent to which they might express gratitude to their marriage partner, put effort into cultivating their relationship, or savor positive experiences together.

The most promising factor for affecting change in chronic happiness, then, is the approximately 40% portion represented by intentional activity (see Figure 63.1; cf. Lyubomirsky, 2008). Characterized by committed and effortful acts in which people choose to engage, intentional activities can be behavioral (e.g., practicing random acts of kindness), cognitive (e.g., expressing gratitude), or motivational (e.g., pursuing intrinsic significant life goals). The benefits of intentional activities are that they are naturally variable and tend to have beginning and ending points (i.e., they are episodic). These two characteristics alone have the potential to work against adaptation. That is, it is much more difficult to adapt to something that is continuously changing (i.e., the

activities that one pursues) than to something that is relatively constant (i.e., one's circumstances and situations).

Supporting this argument, when people were asked to rate various aspects of recent positive changes in their activities (e.g., starting a new fitness program) versus positive changes in their circumstances (e.g., moving to a nicer apartment), they described their activity-based changes as more "variable" and less prone to adaptation (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006a). Furthermore, activity-based changes predicted well-being both 6 and 12 weeks after the start of the study, whereas circumstance-based changes predicted well-being only at the 6th week. It appears that by the 12th week of the study, students had already adapted to their circumstantial changes, but not to their intentional activities.

Using Intentional Activities as the Basis of Happiness Interventions

Preliminary evidence suggests that happiness interventions involving intentional activities can be effective in increasing and sustaining happiness. One of the first researchers to teach volitional strategies to increase happiness was Fordyce (1977, 1983). Fordyce taught his "14 fundamentals" of happiness (e.g., socializing, practicing optimism, being present oriented, reducing negativity, and not worrying) to different classrooms of students. Across seven studies, students who were taught the happiness-increasing strategies demonstrated increases in happiness compared with students who received no training.

Fordyce's pioneering studies provide preliminary evidence that people have the potential to increase their short-term happiness through "training" programs. Extending this work, we have examined in depth several intentional happiness-enhancing activities in the laboratory and have sought to identify significant moderators and mediators of their effectiveness.

Committing Acts of Kindness

A randomized controlled intervention from our laboratory involved a behavioral intentional activity—in a 10-week experiment, participants were invited to regularly practice random acts of kindness (Boehm, Lyubomirsky, & Sheldon, 2008). Engaging in kind acts (e.g., holding the door open for a stranger or doing a roommate's dishes) was thought to impact happiness for a variety of reasons, including bolstered self-regard, positive social interactions, and

charitable feelings toward others and the community at large. In this study, happiness was measured at baseline, mid-intervention, immediately post-intervention, and 1 month later. Additionally, two variables were manipulated: (a) the frequency with which participants practiced acts of kindness (either three or nine times each week) and (b) the variety with which participants practiced acts of kindness (either varying their kind acts or repeating the same acts weekly). Finally, a control group merely listed events from the past week.

Interestingly, the frequency with which kind acts were performed had no bearing on subsequent well-being. The variety of the kind acts, however, influenced the extent to which participants became happier. Those who were asked to perform a wide variety of kind acts revealed an upward trajectory for happiness, even through the 1-month follow-up. By contrast, the control group showed no changes in their happiness throughout the 14 weeks of the study, and those not given the opportunity to vary their kind acts actually became less happy midway through the intervention, before eventually rebounding to their baseline happiness level at the follow-up assessment.

In another kindness intervention from our laboratory, students were asked to perform five acts of kindness per week over the course of 6 weeks, and those five acts had to be done either within a single day (e.g., all on Monday), or across the week (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon et al., 2005). In this study, happiness levels increased for students performing acts of kindness, but only for those who performed all of their kind acts in a single day. Perhaps, when kind acts were spread throughout the week, the effect of each kind act was dispersed, such that participants did not differentiate between their normal (and presumably habitually kind) behavior and the kindnesses prompted by this intervention. Taken together, our two kindness interventions suggest not only that happiness can be boosted by behavioral intentional activities, but that both the timing and variety of performing such intentional activities significantly moderate their impact on well-being.

Expressing Gratitude

Another intervention from our laboratory—one examining the effect of expressing gratitude (or "counting one's blessings") on changes in well-being—conceptually replicated the kindness studies (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon et al., 2005). Being grateful was predicted to bolster happiness because it

promotes the savoring of positive events and situations, and may counteract hedonic adaptation by allowing people to see the good in their life rather than taking it for granted. In this study, which was modeled after Emmons and McCullough (2003), participants were asked to keep gratitude journals once a week, three times a week, or not at all (a no-treatment control). In their journals, participants wrote down up to five things for which they were grateful in the past week. The "blessings" recounted included relatively significant things (e.g., health or parents), as well as more trivial ones (e.g., AOL instant messenger).

Well-being was measured both before and after the gratitude manipulation. Corroborating the results of our 6-week kindness study, the role of optimal timing again proved decisive. Accordingly, increases in well-being were observed only in participants who counted their blessings once a week rather than three times a week. This finding provides further evidence supporting the argument that not only an intentional activity can successfully increase happiness, but also the way that activity is implemented is critical.

Visualizing Best Possible Selves

Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006b) investigated yet another intentional activity that might be effective at elevating happiness—namely, the practice of visualizing and writing about one's best possible selves (BPSs; Markus & Nurius, 1986). This 4-week intervention also included a gratitude condition (in which participants counted their blessings) and a control condition (in which they recalled daily events). In the BPS condition, participants were encouraged to consider desired future images of themselves. King (2001) had previously demonstrated that writing about one's best future selves—a process that presumably enhances optimism and helps integrate one's priorities and life goals—is related to boosts in well-being. Results of our 4-week intervention indicated that participants in both experimental conditions reported increased positive feelings immediately after the intervention; however, these increases were statistically significant only among those who visualized BPSs.

Processing Happy Life Experiences

Another series of happiness intervention studies focused on the way that people consider positive life experiences (Lyubomirsky, Sousa, & Dickerhoof, 2006). We hypothesized that systematically analyzing and structuring one's thoughts and feelings

associated with the happiest moments in life would reduce some of the inherent joy associated with such experiences. In contrast, reexperiencing or savoring such moments (without attempting to find meaning or organization in them) was expected to preserve positive emotions and generally increase happiness. Two experiments tested these ideas using Pennebaker's (1997) expressive writing paradigm. In the first study, participants were asked to write about their life experiences (vs. talk into a tape recorder or think privately about them) for 15 min on each of 3 days. The findings revealed that those who thought about their happiest event reported higher life satisfaction relative to those who talked or wrote about it.

In the second study, participants wrote or thought about their happiest day by either systematically analyzing or repetitively replaying it. The combination of writing and analysis was expected to be the most detrimental to well-being, whereas thinking and replaying was expected to be the most beneficial to well-being. Indeed, those participants who repetitively replayed their happiest day while thinking about it showed increases in positive emotions 4 weeks after the study was over, when compared with the other groups. In sum, the evidence suggests that, when considering the happiest moments in one's life, strategies that involve systematic, planful integration and structuring (e.g., the processes naturally engendered by writing or talking) may diminish the accompanying positive emotions. A successful happiness-increasing strategy, by contrast, involves replaying or reliving positive life events as though rewinding a videotape.

Current and Future Directions

An important caveat to the happiness intervention research conducted to this date is that participants practicing a particular happiness-enhancing activity have not yet been followed in the long term. To be sure, a complete investigation of the sustainable impact of activity-based interventions on happiness must use a longitudinal perspective (i.e., assessing well-being many months and even years post intervention). Although some studies have measured happiness 6 months (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), 9 months (study 1, Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm, & Sheldon, 2008), and even 18 months later (Fordyce, 1983), it is unclear whether participants were still engaging in their assigned exercises for that period of time. Indeed, after the prescribed intervention period—when researchers are not encouraging, let alone

enforcing, participants to practice their happiness-inducing activity—participants may or may not continue with the activity on their own accord. The committed effort shown by those who use happiness-enhancing strategies should be systematically measured and tested for the extent to which it moderates the effectiveness of strategy enactment.

Empirical evidence suggests, for example, that the participants likely to show long-term benefits of a happiness intervention are those who continue to implement and integrate the intervention activity into their lives, even after the active intervention period has ended (Seligman et al., 2005). For example, in our study that asked students to either express gratitude or visualize their best futures, positive affect was predicted 4 weeks later by continued performance of the intervention activity (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006b). Furthermore, those students who found the happiness-enhancing activity rewarding were the most likely to practice it. Similarly, a recent intervention study from our laboratory revealed that the well-being benefits of engaging in a happiness-inducing exercise (either gratitude or optimism) accrued only to those participants who were motivated to become happier (study 1, Lyubomirsky et al., 2008), and this effect was in evidence 6 months later. More to the point, after completing our intervention, participants who were still practicing their previously assigned exercise reported greater increases in well-being relative to others.

Future researchers also might find it valuable to investigate a variety of specific intentional activities that serve to enhance and sustain well-being. Fordyce (1977, 1983) proposed as many as 14 different strategies to increase happiness, and dozens of other candidates undoubtedly exist. Thus far, only a subset of strategies have been tested experimentally (e.g., expressing gratitude, imagining BPSs, practicing kind acts, and adjusting cognitive perspective). Although additional happiness exercises have been examined in Web-based interventions (e.g., applying personal strengths or thinking positively; Seligman et al., 2005), the investigation of specific intervention strategies in a controlled laboratory setting is critical, as it allows the testing of theory-based hypotheses about how and why a particular strategy "works."

The variety of questions that controlled laboratory studies can address include the role of variables that potentially moderate the effectiveness of any particular happiness-enhancing strategy. Exploring such moderators may be crucial to understanding the relationship between intentional activities and subsequent well-being. Several moderators, described briefly here, already have begun to be examined (e.g., timing, variety, and effort), but many others are untested or unknown. For example, one important moderator to consider in future studies is the "fit" between a person and an appropriate intentional activity—that is, the notion that not every activity is likely to benefit every person (Lyubomirsky, 2008; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al., 2005). Supporting the critical role of fit, preliminary findings reveal that individuals who report a relatively high degree of fit with the activity they practice (i.e., performing it for self-determined reasons) report bigger gains in happiness (study 1, Lyubomirsky et al., 2008).

Happiness interventions also may be more effective when the participant has the support of close others. When training for a marathon, runners who are part of a "team" have others to provide encouragement and to share both the challenges and rewards of their endeavor. As a result, runners with emotional and tangible support are likely to be more successful than those training alone. Likewise, people practicing strategies to enhance well-being are also likely to benefit from social support.

Another important moderator to consider is culture. The individualist notion of personal happiness distinctive to North America and Europe actually may run counter to the values and prescriptives of collectivist nations. Indeed, the pursuit of happiness in general—or specific strategies in particular—may not be as accepted or well-supported in non-Western cultures (Lyubomirsky, 2001). Thus, cultural differences are critical to recognize when evaluating the effectiveness of well-being interventions (see also Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). Indeed, the results of a recent study support the intriguing idea that foreign-born Asian Americans may benefit less—and differently—from practicing grateful and optimistic thinking than their Anglo-American peers (study 2, Lyubomirsky et al., 2008).

Happiness in the Spotlight

This review of the sustainable well-being literature illustrates positive psychology's increasing focus on the causes, correlates, variations, and consequences of happiness. Why has happiness rapidly emerged into the scientific spotlight? Throughout the history of Western individualist societies, both laypeople and intellectuals alike have been preoccupied with attaining greater well-being. Indeed, people in a wide array of cultures report the pursuit of happiness as one of their most meaningful, desirable, and significant life goals (Diener & Oishi, 2000; Diener,

Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995; Triandis, Bontempo, Leung, & Hui, 1990). It is not surprising then that happiness should become a topic of tremendous research interest. Furthermore, whereas earlier thinkers, lacking in the proper scientific tools, could only philosophize about the nature and roots of happiness, advances in assessment and methodology have enabled current researchers to investigate subjective well-being with greater confidence and increased precision (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002). Finally, as ever more people around the globe, and especially in the West, have their basic needs met, they have begun to enjoy the "luxury" of focusing on psychological fulfillment—that is, on psychological well-being rather than only on material well-being. And, for those with nonessential wealth, there may be a dawning recognition that material consumption—possessing the latest gadget or living in the grandest house—is not rewarding in and of itself (Diener et al., 2002).

Are there any costs to devoting energy and resources to the scientific study of well-being? We believe the costs are avoidable and few. Certainly, a single-minded obsession with the pursuit of happiness may obscure or preclude other important goals or activities for the individual—activities that may be "right," virtuous, or moral, but not happiness inducing. Furthermore, although many characteristics of happy individuals help them achieve success in many areas of life, some of their characteristics (e.g., reliance on heuristics or diminished attention to the self) may be detrimental in certain contexts (Lyubomirsky, King, et al., 2005). In sum, happiness may be a necessary condition of the good life—a healthy, well-lived life—but it is not a sufficient condition. Other concerns should motivate people too, like cultivating self-acceptance and nourishing strong social relationships (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Then again, it is notable that many, if not most, important, worthy, and socially desirable life activities, which sometimes appear to be incongruent with the pursuit of happiness—like caring for a sick family member, cramming for the MCATs, or turning the other cheek—can all be used as strategies to ultimately enhance well-being (Lyubomirsky, 2008).

Concluding Remarks

Man is the artificer of his own happiness.
—*Henry David Thoreau*

We have reviewed a number of cognitive, judgmental, and behavioral strategies that happy people use to maintain their high levels of well-being and have suggested that less happy people can strive

successfully to be happier by learning a variety of effortful, happiness-enhancing strategies and implementing them with determination and commitment. Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al.'s (2005) model of the determinants of happiness suggests that, despite historical sources of pessimism regarding change in well-being, people *can* become sustainably happier by practicing intentional activities—but only with concerted effort and under optimal conditions. We believe that hedonic adaptation to positive changes in people's lives is one of the most significant barriers to happiness. The intentional activities described here, and likely many others, can work to inhibit, counteract, or slow down the adaptation process.

Although empirical validation of our model is in the preliminary stage, increasing evidence suggests that engaging in purposeful activities leads to meaningful changes in well-being. Future researchers would do well to consider not only what strategies may successfully enhance happiness, but also under what conditions intentional activities are most effective.

Future Questions

1. Besides happiness, what other outcomes related to the "good life" might be affected by the practice of intentional activities?

2. Which additional intentional activities might serve to enhance happiness?

3. Would certain strategies to increase happiness be more effective in a collectivist versus an individualist culture?

4. Although the variable and episodic nature of intentional activities may serve to counteract adaptation, could people grow accustomed to a certain level of positivity in their lives and hence need more positive experiences just to maintain the same level of well-being?

5. Are activities to increase happiness more effective for happy people (who presumably already implement similar strategies in their daily lives) or for unhappy people (who presumably have more to gain in happiness)? Are some strategies a better fit for one group versus the other?

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