



**BOOK REVIEW OF *THE HAPPINESS PROJECT*  
WRITTEN BY GRETCHEN RUBIN**

**A FINAL PROJECT**

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## **PRONOUNCEMENT**

I states truthfully that this project is compiled by me without taking the results from other research in any university, in S-1, S-2, and S-3 degree and diploma. In addition, I ascertain that I do not take the material from other publications or someone's work except for the references mentioned in the bibliography.

Semarang, 12 February 2016

Mochammad Afrizal Prasetyo

## **MOTTO AND DEDICATION**

*The only way to do great work is to love what you do. (Steve Jobs)*

*A Person who never made a mistake never tried anything new. (Albert Einstein)*

*F.E.A.R has two meanings: 'Forget Everything and Run' or 'Face Everything and Rise.' The choice is yours. (Anonymous)*

*This final project is dedicated to my family and best friends*

*for their support, motivation, and love.*

## **APPROVAL**

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The writer realizes that this final project is still far from perfect. The writer, therefore will be glad to receive any constructive criticism and recommendation to make this final project better.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This book review analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of Gretchen Rubin's *The Happiness Project*. *The Happiness Project* is a novel about how to pursue happiness in life. The writer's purpose of this review is to explore the strengths and weaknesses through its intrinsic elements, like theme, characters, plot, setting, and point of view so that there are beneficial aspects for readers. The writer uses Carl Gustav Jung's theory to examine the main character of the novel, Rubin. This novel has 12 chapters in which each chapter representing a new month. From this process, we can learn a lot about life that does not always rely on the material and money.

***Keywords : happiness, strength, weakness,***



## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background of the study**

People live with something called as Life goals. Life goals are specific things, conditions, statuses, and feelings based on their own perspective and standard pursued through their entire life. Although life goals are always different from time to time, it has one thing in common. It's all about "Happiness".

According to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Happiness is the best, noblest, and most pleasant thing in the world for a human being. It means that no matter what statuses people have, and how rich people are, they are still seeking for a higher "Happiness".

*The Happiness Project* is a book written by Gretchen Rubin that tells us how she pursuit happiness in life. Rubin is a writer on the linked subjects of habits, happiness, and human nature. It also discuss on many important issues, like organization, relationships, and play time. In the end, Rubin concludes that challenge in itself can be a powerful source of happiness, and most importantly, that the tiniest of changes can sometimes lead to the biggest differences. All of those aspects makes the writer interested to analyze the novel.

### **1.2 Purpose of the study**

The writer has two purposes, they are analyzing the intrinsic aspect of the novel and exploring strengths and the weaknesses of the novel.

### 1.3 Biography of Gretchen Rubin

Rubin's full name is Gretchen Anne Craft, Gretchen Rubin spends his childhood in Kansas City, Missouri. She graduated from Yale University in law degrees. She was a former editor-in-chief of the Yale Law Journal. She has also been a lecturer at the Yale Law School and the Yale School of Management.

Gretchen Rubin is a writer on the linked subjects of habits, happiness, and human nature. She's the author of many books, including the blockbuster New York Times bestsellers *Better Than Before*, *Happier at Home*, and *The Happiness Project*. Her newest book, *Better Than Before: What I Learned About Making and Breaking Habits--to Sleep More, Quit Sugar, Procrastinate Less, and Generally Build a Happier Life* was published in 2015.

Now Rubin lives on the Manhattan's Upper East Side with her husband, Jamie, his father, Robert Rubin, and their daughters, Eliza and Eleanor.

### 1.4 Summary of The Novel

*The Happiness Project* is a novel about how to pursuit happiness in life. One day, Rubin makes up her mind, and ask "What do I want from life, anyway? Well, I want to be happy." But she had never thought about what made her happy or how she might be happier. She has Jamie, her handsome husband, Eliza and Eleanor, their two delightful young daughters, and she was a writer herself.

She begins to make her life happier, thus making a plan called "The Happiness Project". It is basically her chart version from Ben Franklin's method.

She puts her plan into a chart, and she divided it into twelve months starting from January.

In January she comes into her “Twelve Commandments”. She consults her husband a lot about her project. With “Boost Energy” as the main idea, she also focuses around sleeping time, exercising, tossing, restoring, organizing, nagging task, and being more energetic.

In February she has “Remember Love”, where she concerns about marriage, and being more romantic. She attempts to do things sincerely. Rubin concerns about her marriage relationship with Jamie, her husband, this month. She realizes that when you give up expecting a spouse to change, you lessen your anger and that creates a more loving atmosphere.

March is her time for “Aim Higher”. Happiness really affects work. Happiness can also makes you feeling better whenever you feel blue, as long as you enjoy it. Passion becomes a critical factor in professional career too. It is better for someone to pursue a profession that they love, because that’s would indirectly lead to an advantage.

April is her “Parenthood Time”. She considers that children are a tremendous source of happiness. Even though they are classified as “Fog Happiness”, yet somehow they do bring happiness. Rubin aims to become more tender and playful with her two daughters. She managed to prepare the April Fool’s joke for Eliza, and it works. She applied “How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk”.

May is “Be-serious-about-play” month.. Research shows that regularly having fun is a key factor in having a happy life. People who have fun are twenty times happier than normal people do. Rubin also tries to push herself to encounter unexpected thought, unfamiliar scenes, that she believed are key sources of creative energy and happiness.

In June Rubin focus on “Friendship”. She stated that everyone should agrees that having strong social bonds is the most meaningful contributor to happiness. Thus, she tries to remember her friend’s birthday by sending out birthday e-mails. Another important thing is to make new friends, so she tries to smile more and acted more friendly among the parents of Eliza’s class.

She keeps July for “Buy some Happiness”. She thinks a lot in whether money can buy happiness or not. Health and Money comes together in life. Many people take health for granted, but at the same time, health doesn’t guarantee happiness. Another task to do for her in this month are : buy only needful things, don’t overbuy, spend out, and give something up.

In August she has “Contemplate the Heavens”. After a long time thinking about life and money, she comes to her spiritual time. Stepping out of usual routine would allow her to see more clearly the better values in everyday life. This idea lead her to read memoirs of catastrophe. Reading gave her intense appreciation for an obedient body. She also notes to keep a gratitude notebook. It is important since she felt lack of gratitude on something.

September's "Pursue a Passion" is coming. After she returned from vacation, Rubin appreciates her beloved library in new way. She begins with 'write a novel', followed by 'master new technology', and continue with meditates and stimulates mind.

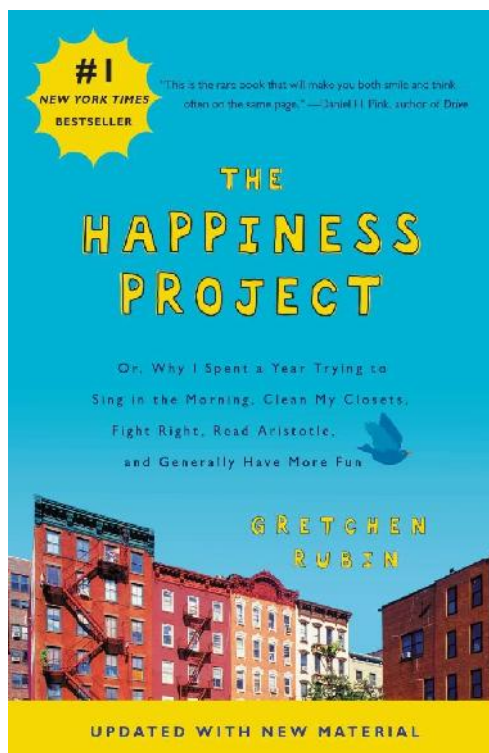
October's theme is "Mindfulness". Rubin starts to learn Buddhism as her friend recommends her. She also tries Yoga as it is very close as meditation. She tries to applied "Examine true rules" to think about her priority more.

November is her time for "Attitude". "Keep a contented heart", "laugh out loud" and "use good manners" are Rubin's home works in this month. Since the last 10 months are more focus on actions, she tries to focus on her attitude this month. Besides humorous attitude, she wants to be kinder. Laughter is more than just a pleasant activity. It can boost immunity and lower blood pressure. People tend to talk more and to make eye contact more when laughing together.

December's theme is "Happiness". She wants to try Boot Camp. She tends to take a class, volunteers on in, and joins a group after that. She would like to follow all of her resolutions, and she is expecting the best result in her chart for her last month, although it is not that easy. It makes Rubin nervous as it took a huge amount of mental discipline and self-control to follow her own resolution charts. She tidied, cleared, organized, turned off the light, sang in the morning, laughed out loud, acknowledge people's feeling, left things unsaid, blogged, showed up, went-off the path, everything. It made her very happy to think that her

blog contributes to the happiness of people she'd never even met. By the end of the year, she conceded that she is happier, by simply feeling happier.

### 1.5 Cover of The Happiness Project



This novel was published on November 2009 with 315 total pages. There are many symbols used in the cover of the novel.

First, there is “#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER” in the top, which guaranteed that the novel is worthy as a reading material especially for people that find their own happiness.

Second, it uses Yellow and Blue as the main color. Based on colors meaning, Blue is considered beneficial to the mind and body. It produces a calming effect. Meanwhile, Yellow is the color of sunshine. It's associated with joy, happiness, intellect, and energy.

Third, there is a symbolic side which is a flying bird beside the title. It can be assumed that as Birds fly in the sky freely and could do anything they want, people should do too.

Fourth, there is a picture of luxury building in the bottom. It represents how happiness are more important than anything else in people's life.

Fifth, it also has a very simple title. It will help people to understand the main idea of the novel easily.

With all factors that have mentioned above, it can be said that *The Happiness Project* has a very good composition for its cover which implied everything about the novel and it may lead to people's interest.

## **2. Analysis**

### **2.1 Intrinsic Aspect of The Happiness Project**

The analysis would be discussed in this chapter namely:

#### **2.1.1 Theme**

Theme is the central insight, the idea controller, the principle of unity of a story. In other words, it is what the story about (Kennedy, 1991:144). The writer finds that the main theme of this novel is based on the author's pursuit of happiness. Happiness is a mental or emotional state of well-being defined by positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy. The novel presents the idea of pursuing happiness through its different chapter. "By the end of January, I was off to a promising start, but did I feel happier?" (Rubin, 2009 :36). In the beginning of her project, she pursues happiness.

"I'd wondered whether my happiness project was selfish, because it seemed self-indulgent to concentrate on my own happiness" (Rubin, 2009:54). That expresses by Rubin in February, where she tries to more romantic to her husband, Jamie, but she still thinking about her own happiness. "But perhaps the

most acute source of happiness from writing was the happiness of expressing a very complicated idea” (Rubin, 2009:225).

“My biggest happiness boosts had come from eliminating the bad feelings generated by my snapping, nagging, gossiping, being surrounded by clutter, eating fake food, drinking, and all the rest. In particular, it made me happier to be in better control of my sharp tongue. ” (Rubin, 2009:282).

### **2.1.2 Character**

There are three types of character : Protagonist, Antagonist, and Foil Character. Character is presumably an imagined person who inhabits a story (Kennedy, 1991:74). Protagonist is the main character of the story. This is the central figure with whom we usually sympathize or identify. Antagonist is usually someone which have opposite idea, position or character in the story. While Foil Character is the figure whose personality traits are the opposite of the main character’s. This is a supporting character and usually made to shine the protagonist.

The writer finds that there is Rubin as the protagonist. There is no antagonist in the novel as it tells about the author’s life in the whole story, while there is Jamie as foil character of the novel.

“Many activities that I consider enjoyable aren’t much fun while they’re happening” (Rubin, 2009 : 91). It takes from Chapter four, where it is her time to focus on her children, but yet the story is all about Rubin. She thinks about “fog happiness”, and other internal thought that passed her mind. “I looked for ways to



connect people. I helped organize a reunion of the Supreme Court clerks who clerked the same year that I did”(Rubin, 2009:148). Again, in June’s “Friendship” the novel goes around Rubin’s thought.

“So was I arguing that ‘Money can buy happiness’? The answer: no. That was clear. Money alone can’t buy happiness. But, as a follow-up, I asked myself, ‘Can money help buy happiness?’ The answer: yes, used wisely, it can” (Rubin, 2009 : 168).

Jamie as a supportive person could be proven from many parts of the novel. “Nowadays I often managed to pause and change my tone, just a second before I started to rant, or to change my tone in midsentence. I’d even managed to laugh while chiding Jamie” (Rubin, 2009:282).

“One thing I knew: Jamie wouldn’t be very happy if I pestered him to provide a comprehensive analysis of his emotional state. Even so, one night I couldn’t resist asking him, ‘Do you think my happiness project has made you happier? Do you think you’ve changed at all?’ ‘Nope,’ he answered. But he had changed. Without any nagging on my part, he was taking on tasks that he’d never done before” (Rubin, 2009:283).

### **2.1.3 Plot**

There are four types of plot structure. The four plots are Dramatic or Progressive plot, Episodic plot, Parallel plot, and Flashback.

The writer finds that the author uses Episodic plot in this novel, as it fits the novel best with the definition of Episodic plot. According to Russel, Episodic plot is a chronological structure, but it consists of a series of loosely related incidents, usually of chapter length, tied together by a common theme and/or characters. Episodic plots work best when the writer wishes to explore the personalities of the characters, the nature of their existence, and the flavor of an era. "I wanted to focus on a different subject each month, and twelve months in the year gave me twelve slots to fill" (Rubin, 2009:9).

#### **2.1.4 Setting**

Setting is environment; and environments, especially domestic interiors, may be viewed as metonymic, or metaphoric, expressions of character (Warren, 1942:229). The setting refers to the time, the geographical locations, and the general environment and circumstances that prevail in a narrative. The setting helps to establish the mood of a story.

There are two types of setting: Integral Setting and Backdrop Setting. Integral Setting is a setting that is fully described in both time and place, usually found in historical fiction. Backdrop Setting is a setting that is vague and general, which helps to convey a universal, timeless tale.

Writer finds that the author uses backdrop setting, as the novel's setting is always vague and general. It is very rare to find Rubin shows exact time in the novel about occurrence of events, or how long does it take. "Another day, I went with a friend down to the Flower District" (Rubin, 2009:131). "One afternoon I

picked up Eleanor the wrong way as I learned over her crib, and the next morning, I woke up with agonizing back pain” (Rubin, 2009:169).

“The end of February brought me another important realization as well. For a long time, I’d been puzzling to come up with an overall theory of happiness, and one afternoon, after many false starts, I arrived at my earth-shattering happiness formula” (Rubin, 2009:65).

### **2.1.5 Point of View**

Point of view is the position in which the narrator stands in relation to the story; the standpoint from which events are narrated (Hicks and Hutching, 1989: 113). There are three types of point of view, they are : Internal Narrator, Omniscient Narrator, and Limited Narrator.

Writer finds that the author uses Internal Narrator, because the author always uses “I” to refer herself in the novel. Internal Narrator is First-person Narrator point of view. It fits perfectly with Rubin’s Individualist character, as she barely uses ‘we’ in the novel.

“ ...if I want to be happier I need to look at my life and think about feeling good, feeling bad, feeling right, in an atmosphere of growth. I’d worked on all these elements, and it had made an enormous difference.” (Rubin, 2009:282)

“I’d become firmly convinced that money could help buy happiness. First, however I had to figure out exactly what I wanted to achieve in my contemplation of eternity.” (Rubin, 2009:194)

### **3. Strength and Weakness**

#### **3.1 The Strength of The Novel**

The writer have mentioned five intrinsic aspects of the novel, and among those, the strongest strength of the novel is it’s theme. The main theme of the novel is pursuing happiness, and it is really strong. The novel also has twelve sub-themes as a good background support in each chapter.

Another strength point of the novel is it’s character. The main character, Rubin, proves that being an individualist that pursuing a happiness is not a bad thing, and it can change people mind about how individual people think. By examining this with Carl Gustav Jung’s theory about personality, the writer can assumes that Rubin has an introvert personality with strong ego on it’s consciousness level.

In the first chapter, Rubin mentions “Secret of Adulthood” and “Twelve Commandment”. The writer finds similarity of concept between the author’s “Twelve Commandment” with “Ten Commandment” in bible as the author might gets her inspiration from it. Both Commandment guides people to have a better life. This factor would be interesting for reader, especially for those who have the same belief as the author. Meanwhile “Secret of Adulthood” can be very

beneficial for the reader as Rubin not only explains about how she pursuit happiness in life, but also she gives the reader what she founds in her process finding happiness. “Be polite and be fair. Do what ought to be done” (Rubin, 2009:10). “You can choose what you do, but you can’t choose what you like to do. You don’t have to be good at everything” (Rubin, 2009: 11). Those are two examples of each “Twelve Commandment” and “Secret of Adulthood” that writer finds will be very useful for the reader.

There is also something called “Splendid Truth” in the novel. The writer finds that it is spread in different chapter that is not summed up by it’s author. “The First Splendid Truth: To be happy, I need to think about feeling good, feeling bad, and feeling right, in an atmosphere of growth” (Rubin, 2009:67). “This was my Third Splendid Truth: The days are long, but the years are short” (Rubin, 2009:199). The writer assumes that if the reader read those lines carefully, it can be very beneficial for life, because it is meaningful and easy to remember.

### **3.2The Weakness of The Novel**

The writer finds that there is nothing that can be considered as weakness in the novel. On it’s setting, the author rarely shows the exact time when she does something, or how long does an event occurs. However, it is not considered as a weakness, because it is more like a personal preference style that the author uses for her work.

## 4. Conclusion

The Happiness Project is Rubin's personal research that has many strengths such as 'pursuing happiness' as main theme and twelve sub-themes (vitality, marriage, work, parenthood, leisure, friendship, money, eternity, book, mindfulness, attitude, happiness) as support in each chapter. It has Internal narrator point of view which also stick up with Rubin's introvert and individualist character, thus become another strength of this novel. The way She always uses 'I' in the novel can be assumed that she is also a strong subjective person. On the other hand, in it's setting, Rubin uses backdrop setting as she infrequently uses exact time, or date, even hour to give more detail in the novel. Rubin has "Twelve Commandment", "Secret of Adulthood" and "Splendid Truth" in addition to her research on happiness that could be very beneficial for life. This makes The Happiness Project is a worth a try for reading material. It turn out that The Happiness Project for every people could be different. In fact, there is nothing in the world that born "perfect", so does Rubin. That is why people need each other to complete the imperfection.

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