

Belinda Tinson

Happiness consultancy report

CST228, “Happiness: investigating its causes and conditions”

Autumn session, 2014

Cultural Studies, University of Wollongong

Subject coordinators: Chris Barker and Brian Martin

Assignment

The consultancy is a continuation of your reflective journal.

- You continue with the activity you used for your journal, or a different one, and/or an additional one.
- You recruit two or more individuals — called clients — to undertake an activity known to increase happiness, either the same activity as your own or a different one.
- You introduce your clients to the activity, for example through a presentation, talk, workshop and/or handout.
- You monitor their engagement with the activity on a regular basis (at least weekly) through observations, interviews, survey and/or other means.
- You evaluate the effect of the activity on yourself and your clients using questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and/or other techniques.

For more details see http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/CST_14outline.pdf

Belinda Tinson's consultancy report starts on the next page.

This document is located at <http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/happiness-consultancy-tops/>.

Happiness Consultancy Report

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Intro

Multiple studies indicate that physical activity shares a relationship with happiness (Hills & Argyle, 1998; Stubbe et. al, 2007; Burn, 2010; Gonzalez-Wallace, 2010; Lee & Park, 2010; Rasciute & Downward, 2010; Aubele et. al, 2011; Dickenson, 2011). Hence, individuals who participate in some form of physical activity tend to experience increased personal satisfaction and happiness. In examining this idea, I conducted a study by selecting two clients to carryout the chosen activity of Tennis and evaluated their experiences regarding their involvement with the activity. Both clients' results from their experience with the activity were found to be consistent with the cascade of academic research in the field.

How I chose my activity

I had initially chosen tennis as my happiness activity for my 'investigating happiness' subject at uni. I discovered it to be quiet an enjoyable activity that had many health benefits such as, keeping fit, obtaining pleasurable satisfaction, gaining challenging satisfaction, eradicating boredom, fatigue and stress, and offering me a point of discussion when engaging with new people. In my original study I had decided to incorporate an array of physical activities of which I could flexibly fit in with my uni timetable.

Prior to engaging the clients, I initially engaged in tennis, yoga, and basket ball to try improving my happiness and wellbeing. However, upon engaging the clients, I have decided to alter the activity by limiting it to just one which will be tennis. The reason for this is that I find this activity to have been the most enjoyable physical activity to undertake and I received many benefits from it which will be discussed later in the report. Also, due to the purpose of this assignment I reasoned that it would be simpler for my clients to engage in one activity rather than an array of activities.

How I recruited my clients

I recruited two clients to undertake my chosen activity of playing Tennis. I went about this by talking to a few friends and friends of friends until I found Steve and Amy. They were both keen to implement an activity into their lives, which was going to increase their fitness and energy levels and offer them enjoyment. I told them about my recent tennis playing and how I found it to be a positive contributor to my lifestyle. I suggested they try it out and requested if I could use them in my consultancy study. After both clients had agreed, I got them to sign a consent form of which had been implemented by the University of Wollongong under the direction of Professor Chris Barker and Professor Brian Martin.

How I introduced the activity to both clients

This section will offer a brief background on each client and describe how I selected both clients to undertake my chosen activity of playing tennis.

Steve is a 25 year old male. As an auditor/accountant at Ernst & Young- a major accounting firm in Sydney, he is kept very busy and has very little time for extra curricular activities. He had been previously telling me that he would like to pursue some form of physical activity to get fit and healthy as he was constantly feeling tired and stressed from being overworked and felt he needed a positive outlet to unwind from the week.

Having a distaste for gym workouts, due to their expensive nature and sweaty environment, he did not like the idea of going to one to get fit as he also saw gym workouts as a chore rather than a pleasurable activity. I told him about my tennis activity I was undertaking and how it had increased my energy levels and made me happier. I suggested he try tennis and so he did.

Amy is a 24 year old female. As a casual teacher Amy has a lot of time on her hands and was seeking a hobby to invest herself in during her spare time. She has always been a very active individual whom experiences happiness from pursuing in physical activities that are fun and keep her fit. As Amy had recently graduated from the University of Wollongong and had moved to a new area called Harden – a small country town that is two and half hours from Canberra, she had found herself a little lonely and bored as she did not know anyone other than fellow colleges she had met during her casual teaching. Also, due to most of her colleagues being much older than herself she found she had very little in common with them and hence found it difficult to make new friends.

I advised her of my experience playing tennis and how it had given me a new purpose to leisurely venture in. I asked her if there was a local tennis court in the area she could go to which she informed that there was and that they held weekly competitions. I encouraged her to sign up and join, suggesting that it might be a good way for her to meet some new people so she did.

How I monitored their involvement with the activity

As Steve lived close-by to me I was able to catch up with him on weekends when he went to play at the local tennis court. As such, I decided to carry out my investigation in an observant manner. This was monitored in the following way: while Steve played tennis, I would watch and record my observations in a note diary; post game, I would gather additional information with a follow-up questionnaire I had designed.

As Amy lived further away it was difficult to monitor her through observational means. In response, I decided to monitor her progress by phone. To gather information I decided to conduct a phone interview which was done on a weekly basis. The phone interview would consist of several questions I would ask her, whilst recording her answers on a questionnaire I

had created to collate my information. In addition to the questionnaire, both clients were also asked to keep a weekly record of their experiences over the six weeks of the intended study.

The questionnaire that I implemented for both clients consisted of ten open ended questions, which enabled me to gather a greater insight into how both clients felt before the game, while playing the game, and post game.

Each client was instructed to fill out the questionnaire each weekend for six consecutive weeks. I collated the questionnaires filled-out by Steve at the tennis court post game. In collating the questionnaires from Amy, I did this by engaging in weekly phone calls and recording her verbal responses down on the questionnaire I had designed. By providing both clients with weekly questionnaires I was able to monitor their current progress, change in attitude, and mental wellbeing. In addition, both clients had reported to me that they had found the weekly questionnaires to be beneficial in offering them awareness of their mental and physical progress that playing tennis provided for them. Hence, this method of monitoring was found to be most successful for not only myself as the researcher but also for my clients.

How I evaluated my experience and both clients (Amy and Steve)

When undergoing the activity myself for the previous assessment I found that I experienced an array of positive outcomes such as, an increase in energy, heightened motivation, reduced stress due to being more relaxed, and increased social engagement. Overall, these factors led to me being happier with my life. I have since then, and will continue to involve myself in tennis. I used a weekly diary to record my experiences and help track my progress. I have found this tool to be most useful.

Three methods were used in evaluating both clients' involvements with the activity 'tennis'. Firstly, I started by analysing their weekly experiences and progress that had been recorded in

the weekly questionnaires that I had provided them. Secondly, I analysed the notes I had made from my weekly observations with Steve and with my weekly phone calls with Amy. Thirdly, in week six I received a copy of a typed record which each client was initially asked at the beginning of the study to write on a weekly basis in order to track their own thoughts and feelings about the activity.

Regarding the implementation of tennis to their lives, it was found that both clients did experience a boost in their happiness and wellbeing. Steve found that tennis offered him a way to unwind from his busy working week, alleviate some of his back pain, provide him with leisurely enjoyment as well as the mental and physical challenge the game provided, and helped him to relax. Amy found that participating in tennis at her local tennis court allowed her to meet and engage with new people which resulted in her making new friends. She also found that the activity boosted her fitness which increased her energy levels.

My first client, Steve, was asked by myself to provide a weekly account of his experience of partaking in the activity of tennis. The same was done for my second client Amy. Both client accounts will be presented in the subsequent section.

Steve's Experience

***Week 1:** As this was my first game of Tennis this weekend, I was excited and motivated to play. I initially found it difficult to get used to holding the tennis racquet correctly as I had previously been a squash player and I was use to holding and swinging the racquet a certain way. After a while I got the hang of it and found it easier. After playing the game it left me feeling energised and happy as I felt excited from the physical and mental challenge it gave me.*

***Week 2:** This weekend I decided to focus on improving my serve. I was determined to learn how to correctly serve the ball as I had identified it as a weakness and I wanted to turn this into strength.*

***Week 3:** I kept working on practicing the correct serving technique for serving the ball. I felt good when I was practicing, as I noticed that I was improving on my technique and this made me feel happy.*

Week 4: *This morning, I woke up feeling excited as I was looking forward to playing a game of Tennis. I have really been enjoying it as I find it fun. I have always enjoyed playing racquet sports and have found them to be challenging and pleasurable. Playing Tennis reminded me of when I use to play Squash which I thoroughly enjoyed. Before I started playing Tennis, I would go out regularly on a Friday night and get drunk with friends to unwind from work. Since playing tennis I have found myself drinking less so that I am not hung-over the next day as I look forward to waking up and playing tennis.*

Week 5: *I initially felt excited to play tennis this morning however I felt that the game today was disappointing as I felt that my partner was slacking off and this slowed the game down for me. I felt unchallenged and frustrated with their attitude today. I am thinking of finding a new partner to play against.*

Week 6: *I have quite enjoyed playing Tennis each weekend and although this is the last designated week of Belinda's assignment of which I am to play. I have decided that I will continue to play the game each weekend as I have found that it provided me with a stress outlet and I always feel energised and happier after playing the game. It also has given me something to look forward to at the end of a busy week and has helped me stretch out my back as I suffer from chronic back pain caused by a previous squash injury.*

Amy's Experience

Week 1: *It was my first game and I found it a bit hard to aim the ball. I hit the ball hard and it went out a lot. This made me determined to improve on my hitting technique.*

Week 2: *I tried to hit the ball flat and not as hard so it didn't go out as much. Sometimes swinging and missing the ball. I also met two nice blokes and a girl today.*

Week 3: *Working on backhand. Finding it very hard to aim my backhand and seems to hit the net a lot. I find it very rewarding when I get complimented on a good shot. This has helped me increase my confidence while playing.*

Week 4: *Learning to serve. Serving percentage seems to be at about 50%. My serve is very weak and aiming is hard. Now that I have gotton to know some of the tennis locals, I feel a lot more comfortable and have started looking forward to my weekly games.*

Week5: *Improving aim and power with my shots. I am currently working on volleying at the net. Although learning the correct technique has been difficult I am finding it mentally rewarding each time I improve and this offers me enjoyment with the game. I find it very satisfying when I score a point.*

Week 6: *Forehand and backhand are improving due to correct footwork. Serving is becoming stronger now that I have learnt the correct swing technique. There is a tennis comp coming up and one of my new friends will be in it, they convinced me to sign up for it so I have decided to enter it just for fun as I feel I have improved a fair bit since starting. I feel a lot more confident since playing tennis.*

How my experience and their experiences relate to academic research about activity and happiness

There is a large body of research which suggests that partaking in some form of physical activity increases happiness and wellbeing (Maddux, 1997; Stubbe et.al., 2007; Rasciute, 2010; Okonski, 2003; Hills & Argyle, 1998; Dickenson, 2011). These studies have shown that participating in physical activity can lead to many positive health benefits such as a reduction in stress and depression, increased vigour and happier mood, social engagement and also in alleviating pain (Gonzalez-Wallace, 2010).

Aubelem et.al. (2011) suggest that learning a new skill boosts happiness even when the process is challenging. This was experienced by both clients whilst playing tennis as they focused on perfecting aspects of their game (i.e. aim, serve and backhand). These findings support the positive results that both clients experienced. Further, Hills & Argyle (1998) have found that participating in exercise on a regular basis can reduce and in some cases eradicate depression. This offers support for both clients, as although Steve was not depressed he found that partaking in tennis allowed him to de-stress. Similarly, Amy was not stressed or depressed but her mood was low as she was lonely and foreign in her new town.

On the theme of sociality, Lyubomirsky (2007) claims, that investing in social relationships can increase happiness. Amy was able to experience this by partaking in tennis as it allowed her to meet new people and increase her confidence. The following section will explore in further detail these findings.

Benefits and disadvantages of playing Tennis

Steve

After consulting with Steve he claimed that there were several benefits he experienced whilst playing the game of Tennis. Firstly, he experienced enjoyment from playing the game and

found that it provided him with a way to test his abilities; secondly, it provided him with a outlet from his busy working life, thus a reduction in stress and an increase in vigour; thirdly, he found it helped improve his back pain; fourthly, he experienced an elevation in mood; fifth he found that the game offered him a competitive edge in which he could feel both mentally and physically stimulated; sixth, he enjoyed being outside in the fresh air and sunlight; and finally, he noticed a reduction in drinking and staying out late on Friday nights.

At times, Steve suggested he would feel frustrated as his tennis partner did not always put their efforts into playing the game. They would give up or play half heartily. This left him feeling unchallenged and disappointed. This was seen as a slight disadvantage of the activity.

Overall, Steve felt that playing the game had a profoundly positive impact on his lifestyle and thus had decided to continue on with the tennis activity even after the study was complete.

Amy

My second client, Amy, also experienced several benefits whilst playing Tennis over the period of six weeks. Firstly, she found that it increased her fitness immensely by providing her with a whole body workout; secondly, she enjoyed playing the game and stated that it was fun; thirdly, she received pleasure in the fact that it allowed her to be outdoors and get a dose of vitamin D from the sun; finally, she found that playing tennis provided her with a way to socially meet people which was a great result as initially this was one of the goals Amy was seeking to achieve.

A disadvantage which was considered was that during the first couple of weeks Amy had initially found that her muscles were sore post game. However, she found that after a few weeks her body became used to the physical workout it had undergone whilst playing tennis and as a result the pain post game was reduced as her experienced increased.

Recommendations for helping people to continue with tennis or if a better activity are to be chosen.

With a significant amount of academic research in this field, and after seeing the positive results of how both client's happiness and wellbeing levels were significantly boosted by the addition of physical activity, in this case tennis, it would be wise to recommend to others that not only playing tennis but the incorporation of any physical activity into ones lifestyle can have bolstering affects on an individual's happiness and wellbeing (Dickenson, 2011; Hills & Argyle, 1998; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Maddux, 1997; Okonski, 2003; Rasciute & Downward, 2010; Stubbe et.al., 2007; Burns, 2010; Lee, et.al. 2010).

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