

# **Yvette Hopper**

## **Happiness consultancy report**

**CST228, “Happiness: investigating its causes and conditions”**

**Autumn session, 2013**

**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\\_13outline.pdf](http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/CST_13outline.pdf)

*Yvette Hopper's* consultancy report starts on the next page.

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

*Healthy Body, Happy Mind*  
**By Yvette Hopper**

## **Introduction:**

The act of pursuing happiness has recently been promoted by Western society, however research indicates that happiness is not something individuals pursue, rather cultivate (Lyubomirsky 2008). Happiness is similar to a physical muscle since everyone possesses it, yet it is stronger in some individuals, than in others (Lyubomirsky 2008). Increasing pressure on individuals and social structures has caused an increase in reported cases of clinical depression, which is detrimental to a person's social development (Lyubomirsky 2008; Cossaboon 2007). Recent research, however, suggests that 40% of a person's happiness level can be controlled by their own behaviour which has promoted further research into what can increase happiness (Lyubomirsky 2008; Cossaboon 2007; Fitday 2011b). While some approaches, such as acquiring wealth, have proved temporarily effective at cultivating happiness, other strategies, such as exercise, appear to positively impact an individual's long-term wellbeing or happiness (Lyubomirsky 2008; Fitday 2011b). Throughout the Autumn Semester of 2013, I executed an ethnographic study in which three individuals sought to cultivate their happiness through regular exercise, so as to determine whether physical activity can significantly influence an individual's level of happiness.

## **Background:**

Existing research conducted into the correlation between happiness and exercise has produced extensive academic and popular literature, much of which support the claim that exercise can positively influence an individual's happiness. While most of the academic literature addresses why physical activity increases happiness, and often provides evidentiary support for the assessment, popular or social literature tends to outline the activity, discuss its benefits, and explain how it can be executed in particular contexts (Fitday 2011c; Lyubomirsky 2008; Spiegelman & Korsmeyer 2012; Cossaboon 2007; Lyubomirsky 2008; Fitday 2011a; Fitday 2011b; Spiegelman & Korsmeyer 2012). The academic literature tends to use language aimed at other academics, while popular literature uses terms most individuals can understand, thus benefitting a wider audience (Lyubomirsky 2008; Fitday 2011a; Fitday 2011b; Fitday 2011c). Despite the differences, both forms of literature reflect extensive research into the connection between exercise and happiness and indicate many benefits can come from implementing an exercise routine (Lyubomirsky 2008; Cossaboon 2007; Legally Blonde 2001; Fitday 2011b).

Research suggests there are physical and social benefits to physical activity which can increase happiness. Exercise can produce muscular toning which can help individuals achieve a body image they are more comfortable with and, in turn, enhance their self-esteem (Lyubomirsky 2008; Fitday 2011b; Fitday 2011c; Kramer 2010; Spiegelman & Korsmeyer 2012; Ruby, Dunn, Perrino, Gillis & Viel 2011). Individuals with a healthy level of self-esteem tend to build and maintain their social networks since they do not experience the same level of inadequacy they may otherwise feel (Kramer 2010; Fitday 2011b; Lyubomirsky 2008; Ruby, Dunn, Perrino, Gillis & Viel 2011). Exercise can be conducted with others in a positive environment which can increase social engagement and forge relationships (Fitday 2011b; Lyubomirsky 2008; Ruby, Dunn, Perrino, Gillis & Viel 2011). As social networks are essential to wellbeing, studies have determined that individuals with strong relationships are less likely to overeat or abuse alcohol and/or drugs which can positively influence their happiness (Blumenthal, Babyak, Moore, Craighead, Herman, Khatri, Waugh, Napolitano, Appelbaum, Doraiswamy & Krishnan 1999; Cossaboon 2007; Stewart 1996; Wedding 1987). Exercise is thus instrumental in establishing and maintaining an individual's level of happiness.

The positive physical and social consequences have contributed to exercise being increasingly used in psychological therapy for individuals with depression to increase their mental health and stability (Ruby, Dunn, Perrino, Gillis & Viel 2011; Spiegelman & Korsmeyer 2012; Ramesh 2010; Lyubomirsky 2008; Cossaboon 2007; Fitday 2011b; Widrich 2012). The well-known social phrase "healthy body, healthy mind", can be understood as "healthy body, happy mind" since exercise releases 'happy' endorphins (Ramesh 2010 p1; Legally Blonde 2001; Fitday 2011a; Widrich 2012; Kramer 2010). Endorphins, chemicals produced in the brain which connect to neuro-receptors to give relief from pain, enhance the immune system and reduce stress (Spiegelman & Korsmeyer 2012; Kramer 2010; Cossaboon 2007; Ramesh 2010; Fitday 2011a; Ruby, Dunn, Perrino, Gillis & Viel 2011; Legally Blonde 2001; Fitday 2011c; Widrich 2012). This causes "moments of bliss" for the individual, which increases happiness (Cossaboon 2007; Fitday 2011a; Widrich 2012; Spiegelman & Korsmeyer 2012). Research suggests the physical, social and mindful benefits of exercise can have long term effects which can improve socialisation and wellbeing (Lyubomirsky 2008; Kramer 2010; Ruby, Dunn, Perrino, Gillis & Viel 2011).

## **Method:**

This study, which aimed to determine the correlation between exercise and wellbeing, was conducted over a period of three weeks. The subjects, Peter Hagedoorn, Samantha Wakefield and Tim Evans are university students, who implemented an exercise routine to increase their happiness. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of April each participant received an 'information package' which contained a consent form<sup>1</sup>, pre-survey<sup>2</sup> and handout<sup>3</sup>. These documents provided extensive details about the study, its aim, and the participant's rights and responsibilities. The pre-survey was designed to assist me, as the researcher, in establishing the recruits' happiness level prior to commencing the exercise routine. Their results could then be analysed and compared to the findings in their reflective journals submitted at the conclusion of the study. As research indicates that three thirty-five minute intensive sessions per week is most beneficial, the participants were given suggestions on activities they could undertake. Options included gym workouts, team sports and/or individual physical exercise (Lyubomirsky 2008; Ramesh 2010; Blumenthal, Babyak, Moore, Craighead, Herman, Khatri, Waugh, Napolitano, Appelbaum, Doraiswamy & Krishnan 1999; Wing, Phelan & Tate 2002). Peter and Tim chose to undertake Taekwondo, while Samantha chose Taekwondo and basketball.

Their taekwondo routine was carried out on Tuesday night from six o'clock to six thirty, Wednesday from ten thirty to eleven o'clock, and Friday from six to six thirty. Taekwondo can be implemented individually, partnered or as a group activity, so the participants chose to accomplish the exercise routine together. Peter, Tim and Samantha would, initially, conduct an individual warm-up session, for about ten minutes, which consisted of basic techniques designed to relax the arms and legs. Repetition of basic motions and choreographed sequenced movements can assist an individual to develop technical proficiency and improve overall fitness (Fong & Ng 2011). Although this aspect was individualistic it would be followed by a group session in which the participants would execute a group activity for about fifteen minutes. Group activities allow the individuals to practise their techniques and provide constructive feedback to others (Fong & Ng 2011). Towards the end of a session Peter, Tim and Samantha would 'cool-down' by

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 3

stretching their bodies so as to reduce the likelihood of injury (Hagedoorn 2013; Wakefield 2013; Evans 2013; Fong & Ng 2011).

In addition to taekwondo, Samantha implemented basketball as another form of physical activity. She would go to the basketball court and “shoot hoops” for approximately ten minutes (Wakefield 2013). She would then join up with other associates and friends with whom she would play a game of basketball with for approximately half an hour. This routine was executed once a week.

The research was conducted using a mixed methods approach in which individuals were observed, interviewed, participated in focus groups and maintained reflective journals of their experience. Sessions which were observed allowed me to examine the participants’ routines and monitor their activities. As the reflective journals recorded the individual feelings and observations of the participant, they proved instrumental in determining how exercise affected their happiness<sup>4</sup>. These journals were used to analyse whether a ‘healthy body’ can constitute a ‘happy mind’. Interviews and focus groups were held with the participants, either individually or collectively, to discuss their experience (Murray 2003; Munyua & Stilwell 2010). The one-on-one interviews proved effective at distinguishing the personal journey, while the group interviews opened up intensive discussion and helped to discern common experiences and observations (Murray 2003; Munyua & Stilwell 2010). A mixed methods approach significantly assisted me to determine whether exercise is effective at increasing happiness.

### **Results:**

At the commencement of the study each individual was asked to complete a survey so as to determine their general happiness. Seven questions from the survey, which I view as extremely important and insightful in assessing the participants’ happiness prior to the activity, were:

1. “I don’t feel particularly pleased with the way I am”
2. “I rarely wake up feeling rested”
3. “I am always committed and involved”
4. “Life is good”
5. “I laugh a lot”

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 4

6. "I am well satisfied about everything in my life"
7. "I feel that I am not especially in control of my life"

Although the participants' responses to most of the questions in the survey were similar, their answers to these particular questions differed. Their responses are illustrated below:

Question	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
I don't feel particularly pleased with the way I am	Tim & Peter	Samantha	
I rarely wake up feeling rested	Samantha & Tim		Peter
I am always committed and involved		Samantha	Tim & Peter
Life is good			Tim, Samantha & Peter
I laugh a lot			Samantha, Tim & Peter
I am well satisfied about everything in my life		Samantha & Peter	Tim
I feel that I am not especially in control of my life		Tim & Peter	Samantha

**Survey results for Tim, Peter and Samantha**

These results are indicative of their happiness level prior to implementing their exercise routine. Samantha appears less satisfied with her overall image than Pete and Tim, which could significantly influence her self-esteem, and, in turn, social interactions (ref). As Samantha also appears to struggle with commitment to activities, her social engagement could also be affected which may contribute to further issues in the future. She also feels she has less control over her life. In contrast to Peter and Tim, however, Samantha appears to regularly "wake up feeling rested". Both Peter and Samantha feel they could be doing more with their lives which suggests their motivation to immerse themselves in social interactions and events may be limited. While it may be assumed from their answers that all three individuals are relatively optimistic, and enjoy a good joke, it is important to note that they appear not to be fully satisfied with their level of happiness.

The parameters of the study were thus established. Exercise which significantly influenced an individuals' level of happiness needed to:

- ❖ Improve the individual's sense of control
- ❖ Improve the individual's sleep
- ❖ Improve overall satisfaction
- ❖ Improve self-esteem
- ❖ Improve commitment since individuals who are happier are more likely to be committed to events and social networks

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2013 I received the reflective journals from each participant which I was then able to analyse. I initially examined the entries to determine whether any of the information contained in the journals reflected the parameters of the study, and sought to establish whether their general happiness had improved. Upon analysis, I found all three participants felt an increase in their sense of control with regard to their university studies (Wakefield 2013; Hagedoorn 2013; Evans 2013). It appears the exercise routine assisted the subjects cope and deal with stressful situations which improved their overall outlook and "...stopped [them] from feeling overwhelmed by [their] university commitments" (Evans 2013). Tim recognised the influence of exercise in his ability to cope with stressful situations as he noted, "I seem to be more positive when it comes to possibly stressful situations then I was before I started the program" (Evans 2013). As all three participants did not regularly exercise prior to this study it can be assumed that exercise significantly contributed to their improved outlook(s).

A common theme throughout the reflective journals was the improved quality of sleep, noted by all three participants. The subjects observed not only that the amount of sleep they received had increased, but that the quality had improved since when they woke up they felt much more rested, than in the previous weeks. Peter, who had previously commented on his lack of sufficient and satisfactory sleep, remarked in his journal that within two weeks he had "...noticed that I'm sleeping better than I was before I started this study" (Hagedoorn 2013). As prior to this study Peter explained his mind was "too busy" to allow him to sleep properly, his observation demonstrates that the introduction of physical activity into his general routine had a significant impact on his psychological state (Hagedoorn 2013; ref). Regular exercise can, evidently, calm the mind which can have other individual and social positive consequences.

The subject's overall satisfaction and self esteem also improved since throughout the course of the study the individuals forged a closer social network and experienced



physical changes in their appearance. Most of the exercise implemented by the subjects was conducted in group settings which allowed individuals to form relationships and strengthen social bonds. Although Tim, Samantha and Peter were acquaintances beforehand, exercise proved an effective way of establishing and maintaining a stronger social connection. As a result of the increased time together Samantha and Peter began dating. In a one-on-one interview, Samantha confided that she would not have pursued the relationship had she not felt “more comfortable with herself” (Wakefield 2013). Increase self-esteem, combined with a social environment can increase social networks, strengthen social bonds which can improve an individual’s level of happiness.

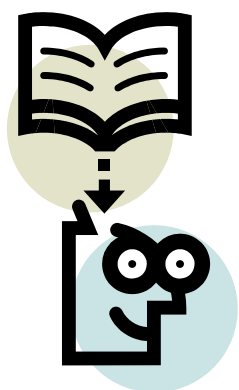
The primary observation which resounded through the reflective journals was the impact exercise has on relieving stress which, in turn, increases the individuals’ happiness. All three participants observed a decline in their stress levels which allowed them to focus on other aspects of their lives, such as their studies and/or work commitments. This improved their happiness and increased their sense of accomplishment. Samantha remarked during one of the focus group sessions that she had noticed an improvement in her ability to focus on university work, and apply herself to her commitments and goals (Wakefield 2013). As a result, she felt happier than she did prior to implementing the exercise routine (Wakefield 2013). As the endorphins released during physical activity reduce stress and can have lasting effects, it can become easier for an individual to overcome challenges, thrive in his/her commitments and deal with the “inevitable curve balls that life” can throw (Cossaboon 2007; Blumenthal, Babyak, Moore, Craighead, Herman, Khatri, Waugh, Napolitano, Appelbaum, Doraiswamy & Krishnan 1999; Fitday 2011a; Wing, Phelan & Tate 2002; Fitday 2011b; Lyubomirsky 2008; Widrich 2012).

### **Summary of Results & Conclusion:**

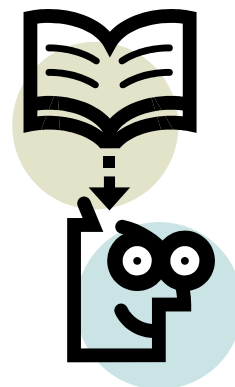
The above results provide evidentiary support for the claim that a “healthy body” can equal a “happy mind” since all three participants noted a significant improvement in their level of happiness. The interviews, focus groups and reflective journals reveal a noticeable improvement in each subject’s outlook. Samantha acknowledged this in her reflective journal when she wrote that her “...overall happiness has continued to improve and I believe that this is due to the stress relief that exercise seems to provide for me” (Wakefield 2013). The results of the physical activity have been noted by friends and

family of the participants since Tim explained that his “mental and emotional condition has improved dramatically to the point that other people have started to notice the improvement” (Evans 2013).

The physical, emotional and mental effects of exercise produce significant benefits and can increase an individual’s happiness level (Ruby, Dunn, Perrino, Gillis & Viel 2011; Lyubomirsky 2008; Fitday 2011a; Fitday 2011c; Spiegelman & Korsmeyer 2012). Exercise produces endorphins which “make you happy” as they are released into the body to give it a natural boost (Legally Blonde 2001). Since exercise can be a social event, networks can be developed which is vital to improving happiness (Lyubomirsky 2008; Spiegelman & Korsmeyer 2012; Ruby, Dunn, Perrino, Gillis & Viel 2011). As individuals achieve a body image they are more comfortable with, their social interactions, confidence and experiences may change, also contributing to their happiness (Lyubomirsky 2008; Fitday 2011b; Ruby, Dunn, Perrino, Gillis & Viel 2011). The experiences of the participants in this research project testifies to the literature published, about the correlation between exercise and happiness, since all participants considered exercise to be an invaluable way of improving their happiness (Ruby, Dunn, Perrino, Gillis & Viel 2011; Fitday 2011a; Blumenthal, Babyak, Moore, Craighead, Herman, Khatri, Waugh, Napolitano, Appelbaum, Doraiswamy & Krishnan 1999). Although exercise is not a cure for depression, as Elle Woods, a fictional character from the movie *Legally Blonde* noted, it “...gives you endorphins. Endorphins make you happy” (Legally Blonde 2001). Its positive impact can help individuals prepare for, deal with and recover from the difficult times they may experience (Ruby, Dunn, Perrino, Gillis & Viel 2011; Fitday 2011a). All three participants plan on continuing their exercise routine so as to maintain and continue to cultivate their happiness.



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