

Christiarne Carroll

Happiness reflective journal

CST228, “Happiness: investigating its causes and conditions”

Autumn session, 2014

Cultural Studies, University of Wollongong

Subject coordinators: Chris Barker and Brian Martin

Assignment

Choose an activity that research says increases personal happiness, such as expressing gratitude, helping others, being optimistic or practising mindfulness. (See Lyubomirsky for ideas.) Undertake this activity for at least 5 weeks, keeping a personal diary of your observations about your experience, with entries once a week or more. You can keep the diary on a blog or as typed or handwritten notes.

During the time you undertake the activity, you should also read academic writing. In your diary, you can comment on the connection between what researchers say about the activity and your experience of it.

Your submission is in two parts:

1. A 1000-word reflective journal
2. Your diary.

In the reflective journal, you should report on 5 or more pieces of academic research (e.g. journal articles) that recommend your activity as enhancing happiness.

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

Christiarne Carroll's reflective journal starts on the next page.

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

CST228 – Autumn 2014
Happiness: Investigating its causes and conditions

Reflective Journal

Over the past five weeks I have been working towards improving my sleeping habits. I took this activity as an opportunity to not only learn more about increasing happiness but as a chance to make a positive and healthy change in my life. Having now reached the end of this five-week experiment, I have a sense of gratification and fulfillment knowing that I have increased my happiness substantially.

There is a lot of research that highlights the negative effects of sleep deprivation. Studies have shown that people who get fewer than eight hours of sleep per night show pronounced cognitive and physiological deficits, including memory impairments, a reduced ability to make decisions and dramatic lapses in attention (Dinges et al. 1997). According to Rubin (2009) many researchers argue that a lack of sleep not only has a profound effect on your happiness but also has broader health consequences, such as increasing your risk for cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and even obesity, making adequate sleep imperative. From a biological perspective, sleep deprivation leads the body makes more stress hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol, however when you're stressed, you tend to find it harder to sleep properly, therefore creating a vicious cycle of sleeplessness (Science Channel, 2011) and I believe that this was a cycle I had been caught up in.

Lyubomirsky (2008:260-261) refers to prominent sleep researcher William Dement whom argues that one more hour of sleep each night can make you happier and healthier. Also, a key finding from a study conducted by the University of Michigan said that making \$60,000 more in annual income has less of an effect on your daily happiness than getting one extra hour of sleep a night (Rubin, 2009). The *Australian Sleep Health Foundation* suggests that in order to have a better sleep it is important to have a relaxing sleep routine, including a warm bath or shower and a warm (non-caffeinated) drink such as milk or herbal tea. They also emphasize that activities that are stimulating should be avoided in the hour before bed including moderate exercise, computer games, television, movies and important discussions. Brightly lit

environments and the blue light emitted from computer and mobile phone screens can reduce levels of the sleep-promoting hormone, melatonin (Sleep Health Foundation, 2011). Research also suggests that increasing physical activity throughout your day, whether that be incidental or planned exercise will help to improve sleep (Lyubomirsky, 2008:255).

Over the past 2-3 years I have developed terrible sleeping habits. As my routine, or lack there of stood six weeks ago, I would get into bed around 10.30pm on average, I then proceeded to surf the web, read blogs, watch YouTube or watch countless episodes of my favourite TV shows, eventually falling asleep around 12.30am-1am, admittedly sometimes later. In the morning, I would then struggle to wake up with just enough time to get ready for wherever I needed to be, usually 9am on average. However, those days when I didn't have any where to be resulted in me sleeping until 10.30am-11am. Not only was I wasting hours a day being unproductive, I was constantly tired at the most inconvenient times of day and lacking in energy. While initially I wouldn't have associated this with making me 'unhappy', reflection at the beginning of the five-week challenge made realise how much it could be hindering my happiness potential.

In order to achieve my overall goal of developing a healthier sleeping pattern, I set myself a number of smaller goals that the aforementioned research suggests will aid in the process of improving my sleep. These included:

1. Waking up earlier more regularly
2. Increasing physical activity during the day
3. Developing a night time routine to help 'wind down' before sleeping
4. Cutting out the use of electronics before bed.

In order to then achieve these smaller goals, I created a weekly outline:

Day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Wake up	6am	7am	6am	7am	6am	7-8am	7-8am
Exercise	6.30am Gym 6.30pm Yoga	 5.35pm Body Balance	6.30am Gym	 6.30pm Dancing	6.30am Gym	10.35am Body Balance	REST
Sleep	10.30-11pm	10.30pm	10.30-11pm	10.30pm	10.30-11pm	10.30-11pm	10.30-11pm

My progress over the past five weeks has been documented in detail on my blog (links below), including daily wake up and sleep times, daily exercise and daily mood reflections as well as overall weekly reflections about my progress and my thoughts.

Going into this experiment, the hypothesis was that improving my sleeping patterns and getting a better quality of sleep would improve my wellbeing and increase my happiness. Working towards this has been an ambitious and difficult activity, but I can say for certain that while I've still had quite a few late nights, on average I am falling asleep before midnight (compared to 1am as I used too), I am also managing to fall asleep a lot faster, which is something I have previously struggled with. Nearly every morning I am feeling far more rested, and am naturally waking up earlier, not dragging myself out of bed at ridiculously late hours of the morning as I used too.

Week four of this activity was a very insightful week, as my daily routine was effected by a shoulder and neck injury that prevent me from doing quite a few of my morning gym sessions. The whole week was met with an extremely low mood and I lacked motivation in quite a few aspects of my life including getting university work done, making healthy food choices and staying organised and on top of things I needed to do. My low mood and lack of motivation correlated with this decrease in exercise, however I was still maintaining most of the sleep specific progress I had made. This got me thinking about exercise and happiness.

According to Lyubomirsky (2008:256) exercise makes you feel in control of your body and healthy, providing a sense of agency and self worth, which makes people happier. Research also shows that exercise increases the brains release of happiness improving chemicals including norepinephrine, dopamine and serotonin. Dunavold's (2007) study suggests that aerobic exercise can stimulate the output of norepinephrine by as much as four times compared to inactivity. Lastly, people who exercise in the morning are more likely to stay committed to their routine compared to people who exercise in the afternoon or evening, as they have time to come up with excuses why they can't exercise that day (Rubin, 2009).

In light of this information, I believe that increasing and maintaining my exercise routine in the morning has had a direct causal effect on improving my happiness levels over the past five weeks. I can also conclude that improving my sleeping habits was beneficial to my health and happiness, although I will continue to work towards this goal as there is still room for much improvement. Overall, the five weeks were very successful in terms of insight into what can help me improve my happiness, both exercise and quality sleep.

(Word count: 1122)

My reflective journal can be found out *Adventures of a Twenty Something Girl* via the following links:

Introduction:

<http://adventuresofatwentsomethinggirl.wordpress.com/2014/03/17/happiness-the-sleep-experiment/>

Week 1 Reflection:

<http://adventuresofatwentsomethinggirl.wordpress.com/2014/03/27/week-one-the-sleep-experiment/>

Week 2 Reflection:

<http://adventuresofatwentsomethinggirl.wordpress.com/2014/04/01/week-two-the-sleep-experiment/>

Week 3 Reflection:

<http://adventuresofatwentsomethinggirl.wordpress.com/2014/04/07/week-three-the-sleep-experiment/>

Week 4 Reflection:

<http://adventuresofatwentsomethinggirl.wordpress.com/2014/04/15/week-four-the-sleep-experiment/>

References:

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Dinges, D. F., Pack, F., Williams, K., Gillen, K. A., Powell, J. W., Ott, G. E., Aptowicz, C., & Pack, A. I. (1997) 'Cumulative sleepiness, mood disturbance and psychomotor vigilance performance decrements during a week of sleep restricted to 4-5 hours per night', *Sleep: Journal of Sleep Research & Sleep Medicine*, 20, 267-277

Dunavold, P. (2007) 'Happiness, Hope and Optimism', *California State University Northridge*, viewed 17 April 2014
<<http://www.csun.edu/~vcpsy00h/students/happy.htm>>

Lyubomirsky, S. (2008) *The how of happiness: a new approach to getting the life you want*, Penguin, New York.

Rubin, G. (2009) 'The Happiness Project: A Fundamental Secret to Happiness? Get Enough Sleep', November 4, *Psychology Today*, viewed 16 April 2014
<<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-happiness-project/200911/fundamental-secret-happiness-get-enough-sleep>>

Science Channel (2011) 'Emotions: Is there a connection between sleep and happiness?', *Curiosity.com from Discovery*, viewed 16 April 2014
<<http://curiosity.discovery.com/question/can-sleep-make-me-happy>>

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<<http://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/fact-sheets-a-z/187-good-sleep-habits.html>>