

Emma French

Happiness reflective journal

CST228, “Happiness: investigating its causes and conditions”

Autumn session, 2015

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_15outline.pdf

Emma French's reflective journal starts on the next page.

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

CST228

Reflective Journal

Activity: Exercise

Student No.: 4267801

Words: 1089

Due: Friday 17 April 2015

Academic evidence

Happiness is seen as something that individuals have a level of control over. There are many ways that are promoted as effective for individuals to increase their happiness and one of these ways is through exercise, which many self-help blogs and health magazines promote as the number one ways to be “happier today” (Cooper 2013; The Pursuit of Happiness 2015). There are also many academic sources to back up this source of happiness.

Exercise has been widely shown not only to benefit physical health, but also mental health (Mutrie & Faulkner 2004). Regular exercise is known for the many physical health benefits, such as reducing the risk of diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and hypertension, but it also promotes psychological well-being and reduces feelings of depression and anxiety (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1996; Bouchard, Shephard & Stephens 1994).

Some other benefits of physical exercise that promote happiness include increased energy levels, release of endorphins, better sleep, better self image and self confidence and more positive, elevated mood, distraction from daily worries, increase opportunities to socialise, and generally increased wellbeing (Beyond Blue 2015).

Mutrie and Faulkner (2004) suggest that there are four functions for physical activity impacting on mental health. Prevention, treatment, improved quality of life and improved psychological well-being. The effects of exercise to treat symptoms of depression and other mental health illnesses as well as promote a more positive well-being have been widely examined showing many cases of reduced anxiety and increased mood-lifting hormones (Bahrke & Morgan 1978).

Harvard University (2009) did a study investigating the impact of exercise and antidepressants on reducing anxiety. The study showed that exercise and antidepressants are both successful in reducing anxiety, although exercise proved to be more effective than drugs as the effects have longer lasting results than those of antidepressants. Similar evidence can be also seen in the SMILE study (Standard Medical Intervention versus Long-term Exercise) where medication was compared

to exercise to treat depression. The participants who engaged in exercise were less likely to relapse in depression than those who took antidepressants. (Hoffman, Babyak & Craighead 2011).

The amount of exercise that an individual should take on to see positive outcomes varies. There is evidence that 20 - 60 minutes of moderate intensity exercise four to five times a week is most effective, but some individuals may require a higher level of intensity (Fox 1999). Although positive outcomes have been also seen in shorter intervals, 10 - 15 minutes, of moderate walking (Ekkekakis, VanLanduyt & Petruzzello 2000; Blumenthal & Hoffman 2012).

My experience

I set myself a goal of doing a bit of moderate exercise each day with a more intense exercise once a week. I thought that moderate exercise each day rather than intense exercise everyday or four times a week would be a more achievable goal for a five week period. I set myself a goal for each day of a walk outside for at least 20 minutes, 100 sit ups, 30 leg raises and 1 minute of hip raising and then a 30 minute jog once a week.

At first it was very hard. Finding time to walk was annoying and although I had time, I never looked forward to walking as I was already tired from working or studying. I often had to make myself go for a walk to the front gate and back, which was about 20 minutes, or park further away from uni so that I would have to walk enough for my daily goal. I found that after the exercise was over I felt better, excepting the first week when my body was in pain from the shock of exercise. By the end I noticed that on the days that I did exercise I felt energised and motivated to do other things compared to the seven days that I did not exercise, when I felt lazy and tired.

I measured my progress by using the Subjective Happiness Scale and the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire as outlined by Sonja Lyubomirsky (2007). I recorded the results of the scales at the beginning and then the end of the five weeks and also recorded in my daily journal how I felt during and after exercise.

My reflections and evaluation

My intension was to increase my happiness using exercise as a key to doing so. I did not expect to any real change in my happiness and so the experience and results surprised me.

I actually kept relatively close to my goal for each day which really surprised me given my past attempts at exercise goals. Although there were seven days were I didn't do any exercise, I think that I accomplished a lot in the last five weeks and I am happy that I had a diary to keep myself accountable. I noticed that on the days that I didn't do any exercise I felt tired and lazy, and on the days I did exercise, energised, even the days that I made myself get out of the house and walk or the days I just ran around the house. The amount of time spent exercising daily similar to the time suggested from the academic sources (Fox 1999; (Ekkekakis, VanLanduyt & Petruzzello 2000; Blumenthal & Hoffman 2012). My research suggested that for exercise to have positive impact on my happiness it only needed to be repeated four to five times a week, so I am not concerned that I was not able to fulfil my goal of exercising every day for the five week period (Fox 1999).

At the beginning and end of my happiness activity, I took the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Lyubomirsky 2007). My original score was 3.7 and my finial score was 4.6. From these results alone I can see that my happiness, although not that noticeable to myself, has increased greatly with my increase in exercise.

As well as these results, I have also noticed a positive change in my sleeping habits, my energy levels and motivation in general. Despite not being depressed myself or being on any medication for my moods, my happiness also reflects the increase in happiness seen in the Harvard University study and SMILE study (Harvard University 2009; Hoffman, Babyak & Craighead 2011).

I feel as though exercising really did help to achieve many of the psychological well-being factors that were suggested in my research, including lifting my mood, improving my sleep, increasing my

energy levels, distracting me from daily worries and also increasing my opportunities to socialised as I started walking with friends (Mutrie & Faulkner 2004).

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