

# **Yasmine Robinson**

## **Happiness reflective journal**

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

**Autumn session, 2013**

**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 and popular writing (such as news stories) about it. In your diary, you can comment on the connection between what researchers and popular writers 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 3 or more pieces of academic research (e.g. journal articles) and 3 or more pieces of popular writing (newspapers, magazines, websites, etc.) that recommend your activity as enhancing happiness.

For more details see [http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/CST\\_13outline.pdf](http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/CST_13outline.pdf)

*Yasmine Robinson's* reflective journal starts on the next page.

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

# CST228 – Reflective Journal

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I started with savouring life's little joys; noticing something beautiful or a display of good fortune and focusing on it. After three weeks, I wasn't noticing any difference. However, I became extremely unhappy and buckled under the pressure and stress of university. I changed activity because I wanted to earnestly experiment, hoping it works, knowing that my mental state was teetering between stability and instability.

I began practicing Lyubomirsky's "Happiness Activity No. 12 – Taking Care of Your Body (Acting Like a Happy Person)"<sup>1</sup>. My methods of implementation were:

1. Smiling at myself in the mirror whilst brushing my teeth, morning and night;
2. Consciously appearing positively and happy towards strangers in everyday encounters; and
3. Better presenting myself through application of light make-up.

These acts allowed me to focus on positivity at different points throughout the day, and kept the manifestation of negative emotions like anger, sadness and anxiety at bay. Smiling in the mirror had unexpected success. By smiling at myself, toothpaste dripping from my mouth, it reminded me to not take myself too seriously. Most importantly, it engaged the muscles required to smile. In the mornings it felt like a warm-up for my smiling muscles, setting the day's mood. At night, I felt more relaxed, confident and ready to confront tomorrow. Lyubomirsky's research proves that physical manifestations of happiness correlate to feeling it,<sup>2</sup> and my success with facial feedback technique supports this.

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<sup>1</sup> Sonja Lyubomirsky, *The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want*, Penguin Books, New York, 2008, pp. 250 – 254.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p. 251

Consciously smiling at strangers was also successful. Others responded positively to my happy face, smiling at me in return. Seeing this visual cue made me feel better. This cause-and-effect chain is supported by Weist's article that happiness is a choice, and that your conscious intent to be happy flows on to those around you.<sup>3</sup> Academics unanimously agree, Myers saying "going through the motions can trigger the emotions"<sup>4</sup> and Lyubomirsky affirms "if you smile, the world smiles with you".<sup>5</sup>

I do not usually wear make-up, and if I do, I keep it to a minimum. For this experiment, I applied make-up daily; under-eye concealer that disguised my exhaustion, mascara that highlighted my eyes, and a brow pencil that emphasised my eyebrow shape, making me more aware of the shape they formed when I frowned or smiled. I was expecting this to have minimal effect on my mood; however this was the most successful of my methods. I found that I was projecting a more confident self, that I held myself higher and felt higher levels of self-esteem. This was unexpected because outward physical appearance is such a superficial thing. Success of the *Look Good... Feel Better* program for cancer patients is a testament to the positive correlation between appearance and mood. It has gone from 121 participants in 1990 to over 10,000 in 2012<sup>6</sup>. The organisational vision is to "improve wellbeing and confidence"<sup>7</sup>, and although I am not a cancer patient, my experience shows that make-up application works in boosting both.

Reporting about acting like a happy person is divided. A fake smile or "surface acting" proved to deteriorate moods and cause withdrawal from the workplace in one study I researched.<sup>8</sup> Possibly, this was contributed to by suppressing negative thoughts. My experience contradicts this because I didn't attempt to suppress negative thoughts. I

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<sup>3</sup> Brianna Weist, 'Happiness is a Choice', *Thought Catalog*, 20 Mar 2013, <http://thoughtcatalog.com/2013/happiness-is-a-choice/> [date of visit 6 Apr 13]

<sup>4</sup> David G. Myers, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Discovering the Pathway to Fulfilment, Well-being, and Enduring Personal Joy*, Avon Books, New York, 1992, p. 125.

<sup>5</sup> Lyubomirsky, *The How of Happiness*, p. 253.

<sup>6</sup> 'History', *Look Good...Feel Better*, [http://lgfb.org.au/lgfb\\_wp/about-us/history/](http://lgfb.org.au/lgfb_wp/about-us/history/) [date of visit 6 Apr 13]

<sup>7</sup> 'Vision and values', *Look Good...Feel Better*, [http://lgfb.org.au/lgfb\\_wp/about-us/vision-mission-values/](http://lgfb.org.au/lgfb_wp/about-us/vision-mission-values/) [date of visit 6 Apr 13]

<sup>8</sup> Anahad O'Connor, 'A Fake Smile Can be Bad for Your Health', *The New York Times*, 21 Feb 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/22/health/22really.html?ref=health&r=2&> [date of visit 6 Apr 13]

personally acknowledged that I'm struggling to cope and often expressed negativity to close allies like my mother and friends, to vent and seek advice. My practice of fake smiling was only intended to be surface-deep and a method of coping getting through the day, which it contributed to. As other social commentators argue, hiding your emotions and containing negativity within isn't brave or courageous,<sup>9</sup> and I concur with this.

Happiness is a choice.<sup>10</sup> I used to not believe this. But my experiences along with academic reading reinforce this idea. It's a conscientious decision to behave happily outwardly, even if this doesn't reflect inward truths. Myers' directs "Fake it. Pretend self-esteem. Feign optimism. Simulate outgoingness."<sup>11</sup> The proven benefits of this are enormous. At the least, there'll be a mood boost.<sup>12</sup> The goofiness of smiling at myself certainly provided an immediate lift. The known insincerity of acting happily instigates action instantly, not waiting until you "feel like it" to act.<sup>13</sup> This then sparks a proactivity which leads to lasting happiness<sup>14</sup> is what *Psychology Today* argues, and I agree. Lyubomirsky is supportive, describing effects as a "powerful upward spiral of consequences."<sup>15</sup> These methods stopped my self-pity and wallowing in sadness and began productivity again. I had the revelation that happiness isn't a destination made arduous by life, but the journey *through* life and it's my reaction to events that's vital. To pick myself up and keep going forward, even when I don't feel like it, is key to ensuring I'm back on the journey.

Word count: 995

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<sup>9</sup> Reya Yu, 'Why Pretending To Be Okay Never Works', *Thought Catalog*, 06 May 2011, <http://thoughtcatalog.com/2011/why-pretending-to-be-okay-never-works/> [date of visit 14 Apr 13]

<sup>10</sup> Weist, 'Happiness is a Choice'

<sup>11</sup> Myers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, p. 124.

<sup>12</sup> Rachel Grumman, 'Tricks for Getting Happier', *New Woman*, Vol. 27, No. 12, December 1997, p. 75 (via Proquest 8 Apr 13)

<sup>13</sup> 'The Secrets of Happiness', *Psychology Today*, Volume 25, No. 2, July 1992, pp. 38-45 (via Proquest, 8 Apr 13)

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

<sup>15</sup> Lyubomirsky, *The How of Happiness*, p. 254.

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