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Happiness reflective journal

MACS325, “Happiness: investigating its causes and conditions”

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Media and Cultural Studies, University of Wollongong

Subject coordinators: Chris Barker and Brian Martin

Assignment: You should find and report on 3 pieces of academic research (e.g. journal articles) and 3 pieces of popular writing (newspapers, magazines, websites, etc.) that recommend a particular activity as enhancing happiness. You should undertake this activity for 5 weeks and report on your experience. In a reflective journal you aim to search out evidence and analyse it; draw conclusions based on the evidence; and reflect on and evaluate the evidence and experience in order to make a pronouncement about its value (in order to improve our lives).

For more details see http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/MACS325_12outline.pdf

Kylie Edwards's reflective journal starts on the next page.

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

MACS325 – Reflective Journal

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The Joy of Friends

At the end of last year I reached a point where I no longer recognised myself. Happiness no longer seeped from my pores as it had done for as long as I can remember. I recognised that by uprooting my life and moving to an area that I did not know many people, and the isolation of studying by correspondence was having an effect on my happiness. This is my journey of finding happiness again in friendships.

Sonja Lyubomirsky (2007, p.149) in her book ‘The How of Happiness’ argues that friendships don’t just happen, they require effort, so the first thing I did was withdraw from my university subjects during the summer semester. I had to make time to invest in my own happiness. I made an appointment with a counsellor at the local Women’s Centre. I asked why I was so afraid and how I could find the courage to move forward. She simply said “I do not know. You have done it before, you can do it again, now go out and do it!” Somehow this simple piece of advice smacked me in the face like a tonne of bricks and reminded me that life and happiness is a choice – my choice. Stephanie Dowrick (2006, p.42) also states that while others can and do profoundly affect our happiness, we are the only ones responsible for our own happiness – we have to make a choice. I found that simply making this choice and acting on my decision had a very powerful motivating effect. Even though I knew I had it within me – it took someone else to remind me that I could do it.

Knowing that my existing friends, whom I had neglected since moving away, do indeed profoundly affect my level of happiness, I set out to invest more time in them. I stayed a few days at a time with each friend. The affect was amazing. Within a fortnight, like magic, I was

feeling my old self again. The love, admiration and esteem that I freely gave to my friends and their children had returned to me tenfold as Dowrick (2006, p.369) claims. Even more than the love being returned was the effect of belonging, which Baumeister & Leary (1995) argue can be almost as powerful as the need for food. I have always been grateful for the strong bonds I have with my circle of friends. The exercise in re-establishing these bonds made me aware of the negative effects my infrequent interaction had created.

Feeling my happiness and confidence rise, I ventured out even further and applied to volunteer at the Bulli Folk Festival, not because I like folk music but so I could participate in a community event, which Becchetti, Pelloni & Rossetti (2008) argue provides a space that creates a sense of empowerment through the enjoyment of communal participation. What a success! I instantly befriended the woman who had pitched her tent next to mine (Abby) and together we had a fantastic four days, meeting more wonderful people and genuinely having a great time. The communal participation had an amazingly uplifting effect on my confidence and therefore increased my level of happiness through the personal empowerment that it created.

Lyubomirsky (2007, p.149-150) suggests ways for making and strengthening friendships through making time for friends, communicating through self-disclosure, being supportive, and sharing hugs. This process came naturally for Abby and I as we invested time into our new friendship. Within a few weeks Abby came for a visit and spent the weekend with me. However, I am grateful to Abby for being the first brave one to disclose a deeper level of personal information that had a strengthening effect on our friendship, just as Lyubomirsky indicated. This led me to open up and reveal my own personal information which led to the reciprocity of support and lots of hugs and finally leading to each of us freely expressing our affection for each other. I had never really thought about the actual process of making friends

and was fascinated to see that the friendship Abby and I formed intuitively followed this process.

While the feeling of belonging contributes to a greater sense of happiness, social isolation and exclusion on the other hand is the most common cause of anxiety (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). By applying to attend university directly I was attempting to end my social isolation. My initial reaction upon receiving the acceptance letter, was to burst into tears. However I knew I had to push through the fear and accept the offer. Enrolling in a Happiness class seemed very appropriate for my journey and here I got way more than I bargained for with a very different style of teaching. Being involved in a class that is so interactive has been very challenging for me and has forced me to be social, however it has paid off with yet another new friend.

Both research articles (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Becchetti, Pelloni & Rossetti, 2008) and 'The How of Happiness' (Lyubomirsky, 2007), by providing empirical evidence of their arguments, were very thorough in explaining the why's and how's of happiness through social interaction. Stephanie Dowrick (2006) also gave a very detailed description of how we can change our daily habits to create higher levels of happiness by providing examples of daily occurrences and how to deal with them. The newspaper and magazine articles on the other hand were more anecdotal by referring to the author's own life experiences (Clifford, 2000), or the experiences of famous personalities (Brooks, 2010) or simply providing general advice without supporting evidence (Bailly, 2008) in order to make their point on how personal relationships are more beneficial than money and so-called career success in achieving happiness. This anecdotal style of reporting could be due to the fact that people are not only rushed for time when they read the newspaper, they are also fascinated by other

people's lived experiences. Either way it serves the purpose of creating an awareness of how to find happiness in everyday experiences.

Becchetti, Pelloni & Rossetta (2008) conclude that being social has a positive effect on happiness and that greater happiness has a positive effect on being social. This I can vouch for! I honoured myself enough to invest in my own happiness by being more social and was rewarded with greater levels of happiness. Greater levels of happiness, I have found, has led me to be more social. All in all my efforts to create higher levels of happiness through finding joy in friendships has been a successful journey.

Word Count: 1,080

References

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