

EMOTION RESEARCHER

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IN THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS, PART II

Editor's Column

Christine R. Harris



Happy New Year! This issue of the *Emotion Researcher* carries on with the topic of "In the Pursuit of Happiness". The previous issue grappled with theoretical issues such as whether happiness is elusive when directly pursued, and whether negative emotions must exist in order for happiness to exist. The current issue focuses on some of the specific studies that have been conducted to determine what makes people happier.

It seems that any discussion of happiness would not be complete without at least some consideration of money. Although there has been a fair amount of research suggesting that money does not buy happiness, most of us still would not pass up earning more if we could. As we shall see from Liz Dunn's article what we do with that money may make a difference in how much joy we obtain – research showing that there is merit to the old adage that it is better to give than to receive. Leaving worldly goods behind, Patty Van Cappellen's article focuses on the more spiritual side of positive emotions, and discusses the importance of specific emotions such as awe and admiration. Our third article, by Sheri Johnson, Anda Gershon, and Charles Carver, looks at happiness from a clinical perspective, namely the mania that occurs in bipolar disorder. Perhaps reaching for the sky is not always a good idea. The set of articles end with a piece by Mark Coulson and Rebecca Gould, who discuss the difficulties in pursuing happiness and also lay out

some future directions for research in this area.

The next ER will explore what most of us would consider the most important emotion of all – love. I realize that the ER has tended to focus somewhat more heavily on psychological research than on research from other approaches. My hope is that our special issue on love can feature contributions from a wide range of disciplines in addition to psychology. Given the topic, the most apropos deadline for proposals would seem to be February 14. So please send me a brief description of your proposed article by that date.

Speaking of deadlines, I want to remind everyone that the deadline for submission to the next ISRE conference is fast approaching (January 24). Hope to see you in Japan! (Also, a special thanks to Piotr Winkielman for the cover photo of the Golden Temple in Kyoto.)

President's Column

W. Gerrod Parrott



Let's Educate the General Public about Emotion!

ISRE has developed numerous ways to help emotion researchers communicate with one another. Our biannual meetings, our journal *Emotion Review*, our email listserv *ISRE-L*, our website *isre.org*, this newsletter—all help overcome the boundaries separating disciplines and continents to facilitate communication and collaboration among emotion research-

ers. But what does ISRE do to communicate insights about emotion to the general public? Not so much. In this column I want to propose four ways that ISRE might do more to share its members' knowledge and research more widely; two are ways to publicize the research and ideas of ISRE members; one involves improving information about emotion on the web, and one involves better support for those who teach about emotion in the classroom. I hope to find some ISRE members who want to volunteer to help refine these ideas, think of new ones, and enact them.

One idea is to post summaries of recent publications by ISRE members. Suppose that ISRE members prepared succinct, nontechnical summaries of recent publications, along with a clear headline describing the main point. These would be rather like the press releases supplied by some journals to publicize their recent issues and by some universities to publicize their faculty's accomplishments. The ISRE website may be able to host the research bulletins. The details and expenses would need to be considered by ISRE's Executive Committee, but if there was interest our website might feature a frequently updated list of recent headlines that linked to more detailed summaries. Even such a simple effort at outreach could result in more people learning about the latest in emotion research.

If we can publicize research by posting text summaries, could we also do so by posting *video* summaries? My observations of my students suggest that they use video for many of the purposes that my generation uses text. YouTube turns out not to be just for home videos and pirated video clips—all sorts of information may be found there. Some of it even promotes discussion and debate—there are sites with many subscribers devoted to explication of academic ideas or to theoretical viewpoints, and these

videos stimulate a lot of discussion. People reply both with text comments and with video responses, so there are videos, often no more than a “talking head,” that comment on other videos. It can lead to quite a lively interchange.

Sometimes these interchanges are actually civil. Other times, alas, they are not—the web is a rough-and-tumble place. I learned this lesson the first time I ever saw a YouTube video. On ISRE-L someone alerted us to a YouTube video showing ISRE member Jaak Panksepp demonstrating that rats appear to enjoy being tickled. The video nicely exhibited Jaak’s kindness and curiosity, so I was especially appalled by the viciousness and vulgarity of some of the comments. As I’ve since learned, such is the web—not just on YouTube but anywhere that comments can be left by members of the general public. Nevertheless, most of the comments on Jaak’s video were appreciative and thoughtful, so clearly video has great potential for making emotion research more widely known.

Would ISRE members be interested in producing short videos that share their knowledge and research on emotion? Just in case they would, I’ve created a YouTube channel called “ISREchannel” that might serve as a repository for them. There’s nothing in it now, but the channel is established. The way these things work is that once we have some content we would try to get establish agreements with other YouTube channels that address similar topics—we’d ask them to publicize our channel and link to it. That would enlarge the number of subscribers to ISREchannel. Because subscribers get notified whenever new videos are uploaded, people interested in emotions would find out about our latest videos. Emotion research would become known to a wider audience. We ourselves might

even appreciate this form of communication. Anyone interested?

In addition to creating new ways of presenting our research to the public, I want to consider where the public already goes on the web to get information about emotion. Increasingly, whether we like it or not, that place is *Wikipedia*. Just try searching the internet for an emotion-related topic—the first page of hits very likely contains one or more from Wikipedia. Experts often dismiss Wikipedia; many newspapers and magazines prohibit reporters from using it as a source; and teachers in universities, secondary schools, and even primary schools often prohibit citations from it in their students’ work. Yet, how many experts, reporters, and teachers surreptitiously turn to Wikipedia themselves? For some topics it is actually superb, although for most it is of mixed quality. More than anything else it is incredibly convenient. It’s surely the convenience that explains why it is so often people’s “first stop” when searching for knowledge.

In writing this column I realized I actually didn’t know how emotion research is represented in Wikipedia. Precisely because Wikipedia serves as the first place to look for information, it is the last place I would go to learn about emotions. So I sampled a few articles, and was struck with the range of quality within a single article. The entry for “shame” is typical. There are brief mentions of Charles Darwin, Helen Block Lewis, Ruth Benedict, and of a couple of psychoanalytic approaches. There is a surprisingly sophisticated paragraph about the debate in moral philosophy concerning whether shame is heteronomous or autonomous. Extremely unsophisticated sections are more common, however. One describes a typology of shame that was unfamiliar to me but appears to be espoused by “author and TV personality John Bradshaw” (a self-help author and motivational

speaker, according to the separate Wikipedia article devoted to him). The article trails off on one of those odd tangents so familiar to readers of Wikipedia, in this case a description of the shame-inducing political tactics employed in the Philippines by the mayor of Manila. The overall impression is of piecemeal composition, and of a vulnerability to self-promotion by publicity seekers drawn to Wikipedia’s trademark open authorship.

The question is what (if anything) to do about it. One strategy would be for ISRE members to try to improve the articles themselves. I admit that I have never contributed to Wikipedia, and I suspect that the same is true for most ISRE members. I’m told it isn’t difficult. Perhaps if we each made some effort to improve a few articles the results would be noticeable. Perhaps we could enlist our students to contribute as well. The American Psychological Association’s Science Directorate recently proposed that academic psychologists should try to improve Wikipedia, and described initiatives at the APA as well as at Wikimedia to encourage researchers and their students so improve Wikipedia articles. Perhaps we could join this effort ourselves.

That strategy requires that we be reasonably hopeful that Wikipedia can actually be fixed. I’m encouraged that some large research organizations believe that it can, but I am aware that some believe it to be hopeless. Being openly editable, there is constant potential for misinformation to be added, for egomaniacs to trumpet their own importance, for improvements to be removed by the stubbornly ignorant, and for quality and focus to be compromised by multitudes determined to draw attention to their pet obsessions. Changing Wikipedia simply takes time and energy, which apparently are not correlated with ability and balanced judgment. But perhaps we should give it a try.

An alternative strategy would be to create a separate web-based source of information about emotion. This could be a collection of articles by individual authors, as is the case with the excellent online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/>), or it could be a wiki in which authorship is restricted to members of ISRE. Either way, this strategy would require more effort and resources than would be the case if we simply set out to improve Wikipedia. But it is a possibility. One reason I am working to obtain tax-exempt status for ISRE is that it would increase our options for obtaining funding for such activities. For now, I'm just floating the idea to see what ISRE members believe is worth pursuing.

To the above three suggestions for informing the general public about emotions, I would add a fourth idea, directed not at the general public but at the students that many of us teach. For a long time there has been a section of the ISRE web site called Teaching Resources, but it not very extensive nor is it very active. There is a collection of course syllabi; there is information about a number of graduate programs; and there is provision for posting teaching materials that section has never been used. Surely we could do more to share ideas and resources to benefit our teaching! I would be interested in identifying ISRE members who are interested in working on that.

So here are the four ideas:

- Post summaries of recent research
- Sponsor a YouTube channel devoted to videos about emotion
- Improve Wikipedia's articles about emotion, or produce an alternative
- Find new ways to support the classroom teaching of ISRE members

I would like to hear back from ISRE members about these or other

ideas. Please send me email at parrott.georgetown@gmail.com. I look forward to hearing your thoughts and to finding some colleagues to work with on these initiatives.

Articles: In the Pursuit of Happiness

Elizabeth W. Dunn



How Money Aids —and Impedes— the Pursuit of Happiness

On the last day of school each year, I ask my students to close their eyes and imagine their ideal life ten years in the future. Most of them enjoy this daydream and readily acknowledge that they would expect to be happier given this ideal future than they are in the present. Many of them also admit that this ideal future is furnished with the trappings of material wealth—big houses, fancy cars, exotic travel, and high incomes. As these daydreams indicate, money is often seen as an important aid in the pursuit of happiness. Indeed, money can provide an array of benefits, including enhancing control over life, improving standards of living, and reducing vulnerability to the unexpected shocks of daily life (Diener, Ng, Harter, & Aroora, 2010; Johnson & Krueger, 2006).

And yet, the relationship between income and happiness is weaker than most people typically assume (Aknin, Norton, & Dunn, 2009). When we

asked a nationally representative sample of Americans to predict how happy they would be given various levels of income—ranging from \$5,000 to one million dollars a year—they envisioned a fairly strong relationship between income and happiness. In this same sample, however, the relationship between participants' own income and their actual happiness was much weaker.

The weakness of the relationship between money and happiness suggests that the obvious benefits of money may be offset by hidden costs. In particular, by promising access to the best life has to offer, wealth may undermine our capacity to savor life's everyday joys (Gilbert, 2006; Parducci, 1995). Studying a sample of almost 400 employees at a Belgian university, we found that wealthier individuals exhibited lower savoring ability (Quoidbach, Dunn, Petrides, & Mikolajczak, 2010). Because savoring was positively associated with happiness, wealth had an indirect negative effect on happiness via its detrimental impact on savoring. Thus, while the relationship between wealth and happiness was weakly positive (consistent with previous research), this relationship became significantly stronger when we controlled for savoring.

In a second study with Canadian university students, we examined whether a simple reminder of wealth could produce observable differences in savoring ability (Quoidbach et al, 2010). We exposed our participants to a neutral photograph (control group) or a photograph of a big stack of money (priming the construct of wealth; Vohs, Mead, & Goode, 2006), and then gave participants a piece of chocolate to eat. Compared to controls, participants who were primed with wealth spent less time eating the chocolate and displayed significantly less enjoyment of it, as rated by observers. Taken together, then, our research provides initial evidence that

even as money aids the pursuit of happiness, it can also get in the way by undermining our capacity to appreciate the small pleasures of daily life, from starry nights to chocolate bars.

Further illuminating the costs of money, other research has shown that reminders of money lead people to seek solitary activities and eschew helping others (Vohs et al, 2006; Vohs, Meade, & Goode, 2008). Ironically, then, just thinking about money may lead people away from the kinds of prosocial activities that might actually enhance their happiness. This suggests that people may often make suboptimal spending choices, electing to spend money on themselves rather than others. Indeed, when we asked people whether they would rather spend a small windfall on someone else or on themselves, a significant majority reported that they would be happier spending the money on themselves (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008). When we actually gave participants \$5 or \$20, however, they felt happier at the end of the day if they were randomly assigned to spend this money on others rather than on themselves. Similarly, surveying a nationally representative sample of Americans, we found that individuals who devoted more money to *prosocial spending* (i.e., gifts for others and donations to charity) were happier, even controlling for income.

Does prosocial spending produce hedonic benefits only in places where people have plenty of disposable income, or would similar effects emerge even in poor countries? To find out, we examined data from over 100 countries included in the Gallup World Poll (Aknin et al, 2010). We found that donating to charity was consistently associated with greater happiness (even after controlling for income) for individuals around the world, and this effect appeared in poor and rich countries alike. Because

this study necessarily relied on correlational methodology, we next used experimental methodology within two countries — Canada and Uganda — that differed greatly on our key dimension of income. We randomly assigned students in Canada and Uganda to reflect on a time they had spent money on others or on themselves. Although respondents in the two countries described purchasing very different things, we found a remarkably consistent effect whereby participants in both countries felt significantly happier when they looked back on a time when they had spent money on others rather than on themselves. Thus, we have uncovered initial evidence for a new psychological universal: Human beings everywhere may experience hedonic benefits from using their money to help others.

Taken together, then, our research suggests that money can act as both a stepping stone and a stumbling block on the path to happiness. The relationship between money and happiness is weaker than most people assume, in part because money carries hidden costs, as well as obvious benefits. Money promises abundance and self-sufficiency, which can undermine our proclivity to savor everyday pleasures and to seek the companionship of others. Through better spending choices, however, money can potentially provide the antidote to the very problems it creates. Whereas thinking about money can pull us away from other people, using money to help others and strengthen social relationships may provide a fundamental—and even universal—route to enhancing happiness.

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Patty Van Cappellen



Positive Emotions and Their Impact on Spirituality and Basic Beliefs.

In the past decade, positive emotions have become increasingly important in emotion research. Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory (1998) has played a role in this revival. Data consistent with both broaden and build components are emerging. For example, studies have demonstrated that positive emotions broaden people's attention and thinking by promoting creative, integrative thoughts, receptivity to new information, and global visual attention, but also feelings of oneness and trust in others. As a consequence, positive emotions set people on trajectories of growth that build personal resources. They enhance life satisfaction and reduce depressive symptoms for example (e.g., Fredrickson, Cohn, Cofeey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008).

The properties of positive emotions underlined by the broaden-and-build theory remind us of and echo spirituality. Spirituality is defined by Piedmont (1999) as the tendency to orient oneself toward a larger transcendent reality which binds all things into a unified harmony. Up to now, research has investigated spirituality as a predictor of well being. Spirituality has been consistently associated with physical and mental health outcomes and with positive emotions (Paloutzian and Park, 2005).

At the same time, spirituality has been predominantly studied as increased by negative experiences. For example, the death of a loved one or other negative life events increases the interest or the involvement in spirituality (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003). Triggered by negative

experiences and being a provider of positive outcomes, researchers have thought and showed that spirituality could be an effective coping strategy in response to distress (Pargament, 1997). Now, does spirituality only arises in response to coping with negative events? Or are positive emotions also likely to increase spirituality in a trajectory of self-growth? The definition of spirituality provided by Piedmont (1999) could well fit in the broaden-and-build model. By bringing meaning in people's life, spirituality could be a kind of personal consequential resource as such, a resource which can be caused not only by negative emotions but also by positive emotions. That is the assumption we attempted to test.

In considering this issue, we felt the need to study discrete positive emotions instead of more general positive affect. Importantly, we did not expect all positive emotions to open us to something larger than ourselves. Inspired by Haidt's theory (2003), we tease apart two types of positive emotions: the self-transcendent positive emotions (e.g., awe, admiration, elevation, gratitude) and the non self-transcendent positive emotions (e.g., humor, joy, pride). In our view, only the self-transcendent positive emotions, which are more focused on the stimulus rather than on the self, should make people more spiritual.

In our lab, Saroglou, Buxant, and Tilquin (2008) have already shown that after inducing self-transcendent positive emotions (awe of nature and awe at childbirth), people report to be more spiritual than after a non self-transcendent positive emotion (amusement) or a neutral state induction. More recently, we have shown that those specific emotions of awe made spiritual people feel closer to other people and act according to their beliefs whereas humor, pride or a neutral state did not (manuscript in preparation). Based on those encour-

aging findings, we conducted another experiment to test other positive emotions and explore underlying mechanisms. We wondered if the effect of positive emotions on spirituality could be explained by changes in basic beliefs (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). In four conditions, created using four videos, we induced elevation, admiration, humor and no emotion in particular (control condition). Then we administered measures of basic beliefs (benevolence of the world, meaningfulness of the world, and self-worth) and of spirituality. Results showed that the two self-transcendent conditions (elevation and admiration) increased spirituality compared to the humor and control conditions. Moreover, mediational analyses revealed that a change in the content of basic beliefs explained the effect of self-transcendent positive videos on spirituality. Following exposure to the elevation and admiration videos, participants saw the world and other people as more benevolent. Finally, self-transcendent positive emotions, which participants had rated for the purpose of manipulation check, also mediated the effect of self-transcendent videos on spirituality. This suggested that our effects were not a mere result of the videos' content. Taken together, these results support our hypothesis by showing that self-transcendent positive emotions (such as awe, elevation, and admiration) increase spirituality whereas non self-transcendent positive emotions (humor) do not.

To conclude, we would like to put a renewed emphasis on the power of positive emotions. Positive emotions can shape our basic secular beliefs as well as our spirituality. Interestingly, not all positive emotions hold that power. Only the self-transcendent ones do. Our two-group classification is speculative and although the data supported it, more empirical research is needed. What do self-transcendent positive emotions share that non self-

transcendent positive emotions do not?

Our hypotheses could also be extended to religiosity, a construct close to spirituality and this assumption is currently under investigation. We view these questions as worthwhile in particular because they reverse the traditional causality, i.e. spirituality makes people feel more positive emotions. It also allows us to go beyond approaches conceptualizing spirituality as caused by negative life events. Our conclusion is that spirituality is also a matter of self-growth.

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Sheri L. Johnson



Anda Gershon



Charles S. Carver



When Happiness Is Too Much

As one of our clients once said, bipolar disorder may be the only condition where one has to be afraid of happiness. Here, we focus on the question of whether there can be too much of a good thing—when is happiness excessive?

Bipolar Disorder (BD) is a severe disorder defined by symptoms of mania. Mania consists of a distinct period of abnormally elevated or irritable mood, accompanied by symptoms such as excessive goal-directed activity and pursuit of rewarding but dangerous activities.

What dimensions of emotion are disrupted in bipolar disorder? Although people with bipolar disorder do report heightened positive affectivity during well periods (cf. Rihmer, Akiskal, Rihmer, & Akiskal, 2010), manic episodes are defined by either

elation or irritability. It may be that bipolar disorder is related to excessive approach motivation. Persons highly motivated to achieve goals might experience more joy when things go well, but anger and irritability when thwarted (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009). Most studies of self-reported reward responsivity have found that people with remitted bipolar disorder (Meyer, Johnson, & Winters, 2001; Salavert et al., 2007) endorse higher reward responsivity compared to healthy controls. Those with high reward responsivity might respond more strongly to life events involving rewards or goals. Indeed, among people diagnosed with bipolar disorder, life events involving goal attainment have been found to trigger manic symptoms (cf. Johnson, Cuellar et al., 2008).

These findings have fueled laboratory studies of emotional reactivity. Most studies, though, have failed to identify elevated emotional reactivity to laboratory stimuli. People diagnosed with bipolar disorder do not demonstrate a greater shift in happiness (or psychophysiological arousal) than do healthy controls after happy film clips or success (cf. Gruber et al., 2008; Farmer et al., 2006). It doesn't seem that people with bipolar disorder are simply happier in response to a positive stimulus. Rather, more refined models are needed.

Theorists have hypothesized that the greater reward responsivity in bipolar disorder is due to the sensitivity of dopaminergic reward pathways (Depue, Collins, & Luciana, 1996). Recent models suggest that dopamine does not encode the hedonic value of a stimulus, but rather, guides the amount of energy that an organism will expend to obtain rewards (Salamone, 2006). This model suggests the need to consider effort rather than simply happiness.

Studies are consistent with this idea of increased effort expenditure in

bipolar disorder. For example, Harmon-Jones and colleagues (2008) suggested that high approach motivation leads people with bipolar disorder to sustain effort and remain engaged as tasks became more difficult during reward pursuit. They used left frontal cortical activation (as measured by EEG) to index task engagement. When presented with a chance to win or lose money (reward or punishment) for solving anagrams of varying difficulty levels, people with bipolar disorder showed greater relative left frontal cortical activation in response to difficult reward trials, but not difficult punishment trials. In a daily monitoring study, people with bipolar disorder demonstrated more energy and activation after goal progress than did healthy controls (Fulford, Johnson, Carver, & Llabre, 2010). Hence, people with bipolar disorder demonstrate greater effort towards reward pursuit and more activation after goal progress, rather than simply greater happiness.

Beyond greater energy and effort, happiness might last longer in bipolar disorder. Farmer and colleagues (2006) found that people with bipolar disorder demonstrated an immediate boost in mood after false success feedback that was similar to healthy controls, but the happiness was sustained for several more minutes. Other research suggests even longer-lasting effects. In one study, participants arrived at the laboratory two hours before their typical bedtime, completed a happiness induction involving imagery and music, and then went to bed. After the happy mood induction, people with bipolar disorder took about 30 minutes longer to fall asleep than did the controls (Talbot et al., 2009). These findings suggest that happiness lasts longer for people with bipolar disorder than it does for controls.

What would sustain happy moods? Drawing on Teasdale's (1988)

work in major depressive disorder, it may be that once manic, the thinking of people with bipolar disorder changes. It appears that people with bipolar disorder become overly positive in their self-evaluations during good moods. For example, people diagnosed with bipolar disorder endorse having surges of confidence when happy (Mansell & Jones, 2006). In studies of a positive mood induction, people with bipolar disorder are unwilling to take advice compared to healthy controls (Mansell & Lam, 2006) and pay more attention to positive words (Roiser et al., 2009). Hence happiness may lead to overly positive thoughts and confidence for people with bipolar disorder.

In sum, despite support for a reward sensitivity model, laboratory evidence does not support the idea that people with bipolar disorder become excessively happy when exposed to a positive stimulus. Rather, happiness relates to more effort towards goals, lasts longer, and is accompanied by greater surges of confidence for people with bipolar disorder.

Most readers will likely think they could use a dose of these effects. At what point are these processes maladaptive? Sustained positive moods may interfere with sleep. As diminished sleep is a robust predictor of manic symptom onset in experimental studies (Colombo et al., 1999), longer lasting moods may induce symptoms. Beyond this, greater effort and energy towards difficult goals could have both beneficial and maladaptive effects. Greater energy expenditure could help explain the high rates of creative accomplishment among people with bipolar disorder (Johnson, 2005). However, the overly ambitious life goals endorsed by people with bipolar disorder, such as becoming multimillionaires or highly famous (Eisner, Johnson, & Carver, 2009) may

come with the cost of repeated frustrations and disappointments.

How should someone with bipolar disorder cope with their happiness? Most people don't have to consider how to regulate their joy. When directed to do so, recent evidence suggests that people with bipolar disorder can effectively distance themselves from positive emotion (Gruber, Johnson, & Harvey, 2009). More research is needed, though, to understand when happiness is maladaptive for people with bipolar disorder and how to regulate that process.

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Mark Coulson

Rebecca Gould



Happiness is a problematic concept. Recent researchers have attempted to describe the various forms it takes, or have claimed it is too open to interference from current emotional and cognitive influences to be accurately assessed, while others have abandoned the concept altogether, viewing it as too culturally loaded to be of any scientific value. Historically the concept has proved no less ambiguous, and authorities have queued up to provide answers. We are told that happiness arises from the maximisation of pleasure and the minimisation of pain, the maintenance of an ideal ratio between positive and negative experiences, and from the denial of worldly attachments and emotions. Happiness depends upon being a good citizen, or following one's 'inner daemon' and becoming all one is capable of becoming. It comes from engaging in self-directed and intrinsically-motivated activities, or being used, perhaps even used up, for a purpose greater than oneself. In short, happiness can be found more or less everywhere, and the pursuit of happiness is not a pursuit as such, but a question of which way to turn. Indeed, answering the question of what does *not* make us happy (or, at least, what has not been proposed as something which *might* make us happy) might well be a simpler task. If there

was ever a subject in dire need of scientific investigation, happiness is it.

Positive psychology, 'the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions' (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 103), attempts to provide a pan-cultural and atemporal account of happiness, and examines the evidence for techniques designed or purported to enhance happiness. As such, it explicitly shifts the study of happiness into the realm of scientific investigation, and while not necessarily generating any great surprises (although see Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 9, for some counterexamples), has generated a great deal of interest and a mounting body of evidence which suggests people can enhance their happiness by using a variety of techniques (see, e.g. Seligman, et al, 2005). In addition to empirical research, positive psychology seeks to provide definitions of happiness designed to capture the rich variety of feelings, attitudes, and behaviours associated with the term, and places these within a framework which recognises the importance of individual and cultural differences. As such, happiness is seen as arising from three main sources: pleasure, engagement in meaningful activities, and being part of something(s) greater than oneself. Each of these is differentially preferred by individuals and, to a lesser extent, cultures (Park, Peterson & Ruch, 2009), and each makes an independent contribution to one's overall happiness or life satisfaction.

As an example of how recent research has begun to reveal techniques which make people happier, evidence suggests that writing a heartfelt letter of gratitude to someone one has never properly thanked, and delivering it to them, enhances happiness levels (as assessed through self report) for between one and three months (Seligman et al, 2005). While this is an im-

portant finding, we know little about the actual mechanism by which this occurs (i.e. the mechanism of change). It may be that simply reflecting on the fact that someone has done something nice for us is enough to enhance happiness, it may be that actually writing a letter is important, or perhaps the critical activity is delivering the letter, whether remotely through the post or face to face in person. What is more, although this activity makes people happier than baseline scores on average, we can be reasonably confident that it works better for some people than others, and for some perhaps not at all. What are the mediating variables (such as dispositional gratitude) which may be important?

In our lab we try to tease apart the mechanisms of change of happiness-enhancing interventions in an attempt to identify what is actually making the difference. Our approach is straightforward; take an intervention which has been shown to enhance happiness and, using randomised clinical trial (RCT) methods, present participants with one from a series of variants on the basic technique (with a placebo condition thrown in). Using the gratitude letter outlined above as an example, some participants are asked to simply think about what has been done for them by the other person, others write a letter but do not deliver it, and others deliver the letter either at a distance (post or email), or face to face. By including additional measures such as dispositional gratitude, we hope to begin to understand how

this simple technique makes people happier.¹

We wish to conclude by making two points. First, the difficulties of defining happiness are serious and important, but this does not constitute a reason why the subject is not worthy of scientific investigation. Quite the contrary. We note that the membership of this society has embraced the definitional challenges of emotions, and if we accept that terms such as fear and anger might mean different things to different people, but continue to stress the importance of clear operationalisation, we see no special challenges for the study of happiness. Second, the pursuit of happiness has, to our minds, already been mapped out. There is no shortage of ideas and suggestions, as our greatest thinkers have diligently applied themselves to questions about the what and where of happiness. The challenge now is to map out the how and why, and to sift the empirically supported wheat from the philosophical, literary, theological, and kitchen-garden chaff.

Gable, S. L. and Heidt, J. (2005). What (and why) is positive psychology? *Review of General Psychology*, 9(2), 103-110.

Park, N., Peterson, C. and Ruch, W. (2009). Orientations to happiness and life satisfaction in twenty-seven nations. *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 4(4): 273-279.

Peterson, C. and Seligman, M.E.P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N. and Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress – Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60, 410-421.

¹ *Incidentally, all this requires large numbers of participants. We would be extremely happy to hear from any ISRE members with an interest in this research, but especially those who have access to participant panels!*

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ISRE Meeting July 26-29 Kyoto, Japan



Submissions

Submissions for symposia (of up to 5 papers), individual oral presentations and posters from scholars in all disciplines (including psychology, philosophy, sociology, linguistics, computer science, history and anthropology) working on topics relating to emotion are welcome. The program committee encourages symposia including contributions from more than one of the above disciplines to facilitate cross-disciplinary dialogue, in addition to single-discipline symposia.

Deadline for submission is **January 24, 2011**



Travel Grants for Students

ISRE will be able to fund a number of travel grants for students who will present a paper or poster at this summer's biannual meeting in Kyoto. We can fund up to five grants of up to US\$500 each. The grants are intended only for students who have no other source of financial support for travel to Kyoto. Travel grants will be awarded by the Program Committee based on the quality of the abstract and the degree of financial hardship. A form to be used for applying for a travel grant will be posted at a later date.

The conference web-site at <http://isre2011.com/>

Other News

Conferences that may be of interest:

- MORAL EMOTIONS AND INTUITIONS
May 25-27, 2011, The Hague
http://www.ethicsandtechnology.eu/subsite/conference_moral_emotions_and_intuitions/
Queries about the conference, should be sent to: MEI@tudelft.nl
Submissions due by **February 1, 2011**
- ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF MOTIVATION (SSM)
May 26, 2011, Washington, DC, USA.
www.thessm.org/conference2011.php
Submissions due by **March 1, 2011**.
- EMOTIONS IN THE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN WORLD
June 8-11, 2011. The University of Western Australia, Perth.
<http://www.mems.arts.uwa.edu.au/>
Proposals due by **March 1, 2011**, (earlier submission is encouraged).

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Full members must have attained the highest degree in their field and have completed their professional training. To apply for full membership, applicants must submit an application (which can be found on the ISRE website) along with a brief description of research and publications.

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Associate membership is for less-established emotion researchers who have not yet obtained the terminal degree in their field or are engaged in postgraduate training. Associate Members are typically advanced graduate students or postdoctoral students. Associate Membership is limited to a single four-year term. Associate mem-

bers may then apply for full membership status (see above). There is no guarantee of full membership, however.

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