A Dark Side of Happiness? How, When, and Why Happiness Is Not Always Good

June Gruber[1], Iris B. Mauss[2], and Maya Tamir[3,4]
[1]Yale University, Department of Psychology, New Haven, CT; [2]Department of Psychology, University of Denver, CO; [3]Department of Psychology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel; and [4]Department of Psychology, Boston College, MA

Abstract

Happiness is generally considered a source of good outcomes. Research has highlighted the ways in which happiness facilitates the pursuit of important goals, contributes to vital social bonds, broadens people's scope of attention, and increases well-being and psychological health. However, is happiness always a good thing? This review suggests that the pursuit and experience of happiness might sometimes lead to negative outcomes. We focus on four questions regarding this purported "dark side" of happiness. First, is there a wrong degree of happiness? Second, is there a wrong time for happiness? Third, are there wrong ways to pursue happiness? Fourth, are there wrong types of happiness? Cumulatively, these lines of research suggest that although happiness is often highly beneficial, it may not be beneficial at every level, in every context, for every reason, and in every variety.

Keywords

happiness, emotion, well-being, mania

Getting angry... is easy and everyone can do it; but doing it... in the *right amount*, at the *right time*, and for the *right end*, and in the *right way* is no longer easy, nor can everyone do it.
                —Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (II.9, 1109a27)

The idea that unhappiness can be dysfunctional is widely acknowledged and as old as the study of psychology itself. However, might happiness also be dysfunctional at times? As suggested by the opening quote, even emotions that are typically assumed to be undesirable, such as anger, may not be inherently dysfunctional. Rather, their adaptive value depends on whether they are experienced in the right degree, at the right time, and in the right way. Building on this notion, we examine the boundary conditions that determine whether and when happiness might be maladaptive. Specifically, we explore whether happiness can be a source of dysfunction if it is experienced in the wrong amount, at the wrong time, or in the wrong way.

Might happiness be dysfunctional at times? At first glance, the answer to this question would appear to be "no." Indeed, there is a strong popular and scientific emphasis on happiness as a source of beneficial outcomes, as evidenced by the increasing demand for motivational speakers, life coaches, and self-help books with the primary function of increasing happiness. Recent research in affective science and positive psychology follows suit of this zeitgeist for happiness (for reviews, see Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Shiota, Keltner, & John, 2006). This body of research highlights that happiness is critical to human flourishing. At the same time, psychological research has, to date, neglected another important possibility regarding happiness—that it may, under certain conditions, be maladaptive. We propose that the field is now ripe to consider the costs, and not just the benefits, of happiness. This idea is not entirely new. Several researchers (Grant & Schwartz, 2011; Nesse, 2004; Oishi, Diener, & Lucas, 2006) have noted that the emphasis on the benefits of positive experiences, like happiness, has left the discussion of the potential disadvantages relatively untouched. These ideas, however, are yet to be explored in a more comprehensive manner that considers multiple components of happiness.

This article provides the first review of emerging research in affective, clinical, and social science examining

Corresponding Author:
June Gruber, Department of Psychology, Yale University, P.O. Box 208205, New Haven, CT 06520.
E-mail: june.gruber@yale.edu

the potential maladaptive aspects of happiness. We begin by briefly reviewing the robust line of empirical research on the benefits of happiness. Although these findings are important, we stress that it is paramount to broaden our understanding of happiness by also considering its potential maladaptive consequences. We address this central thesis along four thematic questions, which echo Aristotle's prescient observations at the opening of this article. Specifically, we focus on four questions that reveal critical boundary conditions to the benefits of happiness, as follows: Is there a wrong degree of happiness? Is there a wrong time for happiness? Are there wrong ways to pursue happiness? Are there wrong types of happiness? We conclude by suggesting that happiness and its implications for psychological health can be understood more fully by considering its potential dark side.

Happiness is generally considered to include at least three components: more positive affect, less negative affect, and life satisfaction (e.g., Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2003; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Each of the three components represents an important building block of happiness. The first two components are considered emotional and reflect more affective, or hedonic, aspects of happiness, whereas the third is primarily cognitive and based on evaluations of one's current and past life circumstances.

The hedonic components of happiness are consistently conceptualized in terms of increased positive emotion (also referred to as positive affect or pleasure) and decreased negative emotion (also referred to as negative affect or displeasure). By contrast, there is relative heterogeneity in the conceptualization of the cognitive component of happiness, with an emphasis on life satisfaction, meaning in life (e.g., Ryff, 1989), and goal attainment (e.g., Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001).

Because there is clearer consensus on the nature of the hedonic components of happiness and because the hedonic and cognitive components of happiness may engage distinct processes (e.g., Zajonc, 1980), as a first step toward identifying maladaptive aspects of happiness, in this endeavor we focus on the hedonic components of happiness—namely, increased positive emotion and decreased negative emotion. Thus, the term *happiness* hereafter refers to an experience that involves the presence of pleasure or positive emotion and the absence of displeasure or negative emotion (e.g., Kahneman, 1999).

Benefits of Happiness

A robust line of research highlights several key benefits of happiness (e.g., Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Ample research has highlighted the benefits of positive emotions and the costs of negative emotions, and we briefly summarize these findings. Several lines of converging evidence suggest important benefits of increased positive emotion. First, positive emotion facilitates the broadening of thought–action repertoires and builds vital social, physical, and cognitive resources (e.g., Fredrickson, 1998). For instance, positive emotion facilitates global visual processing

and counters the outgroup homogeneity effect (Fredrickson, 2001; K.L. Johnson & Fredrickson, 2005). Second, increased positive emotion leads to more prosocial outcomes and enhances affiliation (Isen, 2000). Third, positive emotion facilitates cognitive flexibility by allowing people to shift attention to novel stimuli (Carver, 2003) and to direct selective attention to rewards in the environment (Tamir & Robinson, 2007). Finally, positive emotion is associated with improved physical health and physical-health correlates (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Tugade, Fredrickson, & Barrett, 2004; Veenhoven, 2008) as well as improved mental health (Bonanno & Keltner, 1997; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Fredrickson, 2001; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). In addition, evidence has suggested that increased positive emotion causally contributes to positive health outcomes (Fredrickson, 1998; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). For example, one study demonstrated that, over time, meditation aimed at enhancing happiness led to improved psychological health (i.e., reductions in depression symptoms) when compared with the results from a control group (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008).

A converging line of work further reveals important benefits of decreased negative emotion. For example, lower levels of negative emotion are associated with reduced risk of various psychological disorders, ranging from anxiety and depression to borderline personality disorder (for a review, see Kring, 2008). Moreover, lower levels of negative emotions are associated with decreased risk of serious health conditions, such as coronary heart disease (Kubzansky & Kawachi, 2000; Kubzansky et al., 1997).

Studies that measured positive and negative emotion concurrently are less common. Nonetheless, such studies provide additional evidence documenting the adaptive consequences of happiness. For example, Fredrickson and Losada (2005) demonstrated that individuals with a high positive-to-negative emotion ratio (e.g., ≥ 2.9) are far more likely to flourish.

There is no doubt that happiness is often beneficial. Indeed, on the basis of the robust benefits of happiness, it is tempting to conclude that happiness is always beneficial and that people should aim to enhance their happiness in any way possible. As these ideas gain momentum, we must explore potential boundary conditions to these general claims about happiness. In the sections that follow, we explore whether there might be a "dark side" to happiness, by examining how much, when, why, and what kinds of happiness may be more or less adaptive.

Question 1: Is There a Wrong Degree of Happiness?

Can happiness lead to negative outcomes when it is experienced too intensely? Given that prior work has focused mainly on the adaptive consequences of happiness, the assumption appears to be that the greater one's degree of happiness is, the better off psychologically one is (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). However, others have argued that excessive levels of any mental state or experience—including happiness—can be

undesirable and unhealthy. For example, Grant and Schwartz (2011) have built on Aristotelian definitions of emotional health and argued that happiness has benefits up to a moderate degree but costs when experienced at an extreme degree. Other researchers concur with the idea that at an extreme level of intensity happiness may not convey additional benefits or may even lead to negative outcomes (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2009; Oishi et al., 2006).

More recent empirical studies in healthy populations have garnered support for these claims. Meta-analytic data suggest that at a very high intensity of happiness, people experience no psychological or health gains and sometimes they experience costs. For instance, whereas moderate levels of positive emotions engender more creativity, high levels of positive emotions do not (Davis, 2008). Furthermore, people with extremely high positive-to-negative emotion ratios (i.e., >5:1) exhibit more rigid behavioral repertoires (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). With respect to physical health, a high degree of parent- and teacher-rated "cheerfulness" is prospectively associated with a greater mortality risk (Friedman et al., 1993). Furthermore, when experiencing very high degrees of positive emotion, some individuals are inclined to engage in riskier behaviors, such as alcohol consumption, binge eating, and drug use (Cyders & Smith, 2008; L.R. Martin et al., 2002). Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, and Vohs (2001) noted that individuals with high positive emotion levels may tend to neglect important threats and dangers. These studies, along with prior conceptual work (Grant & Schwartz, 2011; Oishi et al., 2006), converge on the conclusion that the association between happiness and beneficial outcomes is nonlinear; a higher degree of happiness is not always better and may actually be associated with undesirable and unintended outcomes when it exceeds a certain threshold.

The position that a greater degree of happiness (i.e., high positive and low negative emotion) can constitute a source of dysfunction also finds support in the clinical domain. Here we highlight recent work suggesting that an extreme degree of the two emotional subcomponents of happiness—heightened positive emotion and a relative absence of negative emotion—may serve as a marker of psychopathology (Bentall, 1992; Gruber, Johnson, Oveis, & Keltner, 2008).

The costs associated with positive emotion that is too intense can be inferred from examining individuals with a clinical history of mania. Mania is characterized by a persistently elevated or increased degree of positive mood (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Recent work suggests that extreme levels of positive emotion are a marker of emotion dysfunction in individuals with a history of mania (Gruber, in press). There are two possible ways in which an extreme degree of happiness manifested via increased positive emotion may be associated with dysfunction in mania. First, extreme positive emotion in mania may undermine the ability to experience negative emotions. In mania, individuals are in happiness "overdrive," characterized by an inability to downshift happiness (Gruber, in press). In turn, this happiness overdrive may lead to deleterious outcomes, such as with risk-taking behaviors and neglect of threats. Indeed, mania is associated

with profound occupational, functional, and social impairment (Coryell et al., 1993). In line with this idea, Nesse (2004) noted, "One manic may give away his life's savings on a whim, while another joyfully drives 100 m.p.h. to a sexual liaison with a potentially dangerous stranger" (p. 1341). Heightened positive emotion may thus interfere with the ability to inhibit risk-taking behaviors (i.e., sexual activity with a stranger) and attention to threats (e.g., driving at a high speed). Second, extremely intense positive emotion is associated with a more severe illness course in mania. For example, increased positive emotion reactivity predicts greater mood relapse over time (S.L. Johnson, 2005; Meyer, Johnson, & Winters, 2001), and greater degrees of self-reported positive emotions like joy predict increased manic symptom severity (Gruber et al., 2009). Collectively, these studies suggest that the highly intense positive emotion that is part of mania is associated with dysfunctional behaviors and predicts poorer clinical functioning. We note, however, that future research is warranted to disentangle whether mania is indeed at the upper end on the happiness continuum.

The costs associated with negative emotion that is not intense enough can be inferred from examining individuals with psychopathy. Psychopathy is a form of antisocial personality disorder characterized by a pervasive pattern of disregard for the welfare of others combined with an emotional detachment from one's environment (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Psychopathy is characterized by a primary deficit in negative emotions, primarily anxiety and fear (Fowles, 1980). For example, individuals with psychopathy exhibit reduced negative emotional responses, including reduced electrodermal responding (Hare, 1978), an attenuated startle reflex response (Patrick, 1994), and decreased facial expressions of negative emotion (Herpertz et al., 2001) in response to a variety of negative emotional stimuli. This absence of negative emotions in the face of aversive situations has been suggested to be a primary maintaining factor for a host of antisocial behaviors and practices (e.g., inflicting physical pain toward others) in psychopathy (e.g., Fowles, 1980). We note that the absence of negative emotion reactivity has also been associated with worse outcomes in other disorders such as depression (Rottenberg, Kasch, Gross, & Gotlib, 2002).

In summary, an excessive degree of happiness—manifested as a heightened degree of positive emotion and/or relative absence of negative emotion—can lead to undesirable outcomes in healthy populations and is also associated with psychological dysfunction in clinical populations. These observations are consistent with early philosophical notions that extreme levels of any mental experience can lead to undesirable outcomes, and happiness is no exception.

Question 2: Is There a Wrong Time for Happiness?

In the previous section, we suggested that happiness might not be adaptive at every level of intensity. In this section, we suggest that happiness may not be adaptive when experienced in every context. To the extent that emotions have particular

cognitive, motivational, and behavioral correlates, they should be adaptive only in contexts in which the implications they give rise to are desirable; this is equally true of positive and negative emotions. Therefore, there might be wrong times to feel positive emotions and right times to feel negative emotions. In what follows, we first set the stage for these ideas by reviewing functional approaches to emotion and findings on the instrumental use of emotions. We then explain why emotions might be better when experienced in some contexts than others, by highlighting physiological, cognitive, and social psychological perspectives.

Emotions are responses to particular sets of circumstances. People feel joy in response to goal attainment, fear in response to a threat, and anger in response to an unfair offense (e.g., Lazarus, 1991). Functional theories of emotion posit that emotions are adaptive (e.g., Levenson, 1994). For instance, positive emotions may prepare the individual to build resources (e.g., Fredrickson, 1998), whereas anger may prepare the individual to fight off an offender (e.g., Frijda, 1986). Readiness to build resources, however, is likely to be adaptive when the environment is safe, but not necessarily when it is threatening. Similarly, readiness to fight could be adaptive when confronting enemies, but not when surrounded by supportive friends.

Evidence now suggests that people regulate their emotions in ways that allow them to capitalize on their unique implications in specific contexts. According to the instrumental approach to emotion regulation (e.g., Tamir, 2009), people can be motivated to experience both positive and negative emotions in contexts in which they expect such emotions to be useful. Consistent with these ideas, participants were motivated to increase their experience of anger when they expected to complete tasks that required active confrontation, but not those that required collaboration (Tamir & Ford, 2011; Tamir, Mitchell, & Gross, 2008). Note that participants who were happy performed worse on such tasks than those who were angry, regardless of how they wanted to feel (Tamir et al., 2008; Tamir & Ford, 2010). Such studies demonstrate that in certain contexts positive emotions may not be advantageous, whereas negative ones may be so.

There are several reasons why emotions may be beneficial under some circumstances and not others. Such reasons span multiple levels of analysis, including physiological, cognitive, and social. From a physiological perspective, emotions involve changes that prepare the body for context-relevant action (Ekman, 1992; Levenson, 2003; Plutchik, 1980). For instance, in negative emotional states (e.g., anger or fear) blood pressure and heart rate increase when blood is pumped to large skeletal muscles at a faster rate than during positive emotional states (for a review, see Cacioppo, Berntson, Larsen, Poehlmann, & Ito, 1993). These physiological mechanisms support vigorous and active responses to environmental challenges, such as fight or flight. Thus, when facing an enemy, for example, people who lack fear or anger may be at a disadvantage, because their bodies are not as well prepared to fight.

From a cognitive perspective, emotions influence the way people process information in several important ways. First, emotions orient people to goal-related features in the environment. Excitement, for instance, may bias one's attention toward potential rewards, so that the person can build resources (Tamir & Robinson, 2007). In contrast, fear biases one's attention toward potential threats, so that the person can deal with them as soon as they arise (e.g., Williams, Watts, MacLeod, & Mathews, 1997). These concepts imply that a cheerful person may be slower than a fearful person to detect a potential threat in the environment (e.g., Ford et al., 2010; Mogg & Bradley, 1999). When a person is confronted with serious threat that requires very fast responses, such a delayed detection could be crucial. For instance, a person who is quick to detect a vehicle running out of control on the road and veering at high speed in his or her direction is more likely to avoid an accident when driving. In this context, feeling no fear is likely to be harmful.

Furthermore, emotions influence not only what people attend to but also how they process the attended information. Emotional states exert significant effects on memory, judgment, decision making, and creativity (for reviews, see Dalgleish & Power, 1999; Forgas, 2001; L.L. Martin & Clore, 2001). Some studies suggest that certain positive emotions lead people to rely more on highly accessible cognitions, such as beliefs, expectations, and stereotypes (e.g., Forgas & Fiedler, 1996; Mackie, Queller, Stroessner, & Hamilton, 1996). For instance, participants who underwent a positive mood induction were more likely than others to judge a member of a stereotyped social group, but not other suspects, as guilty of a crime (Bodenhausen, Kramer, & Susser, 1994). By contrast, some data suggest that negative emotions tend to lead to more systematic processing. For example, participants in a positive mood produced significantly less persuasive arguments, whereas those in a negative mood produced significantly more persuasive arguments, compared with those in a neutral mood condition (Forgas, 2007). This finding may be, in part, because positive emotions arise in a safe environment where resources can be devoted to new ventures, whereas negative emotions arise in an environment where resources must be devoted to dealing with existing problems (Bless, Clore, Gosilano, Rabel, & Schwarz, 1996; Schwarz, 1990). Consistent with these ideas, there are times when happiness can increase creativity (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987) but also the likelihood of making the fundamental attribution error (Forgas, 1998). Happiness can also make people more gullible (Forgas & East, 2008). Of course, people who believe everything they hear can be in serious danger when in a hostile environment. Such processing tendencies, therefore, may be harmless under circumstances that call for heuristic processing (e.g., choosing a seat on a bus) but quite detrimental in circumstances that call for analytic processing (e.g., detecting unidentified objects on a radar). Positive and negative emotions may not always lead to heuristic and systematic processing, respectively (e.g., L.L. Martin, Ward, Achee, & Wyer, 1993). Nonetheless, as the studies reviewed indicate, they tend to influence information processing in distinct and sometimes opposite ways. Thus, there are likely

circumstances in which the cognitive correlates of positive emotions could lead to detriments, whereas those of negative emotions could lead to benefits.

At a social level of analysis, emotions have important interpersonal consequences (e.g., Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Levenson, 1994; Manstead, 1991). Expressions of anger, for instance, signal to others that the person perceives the environment as unfair and someone else is to blame. Expressions of positive emotions signal to others that the person perceives the environment and other people in it as safe and favorable. Given the information they provide, emotions instigate specific reactions from others and can set the course of social interactions. Research on emotions in negotiations, for example, has shown that emotional expressions can change negotiation outcomes (e.g., Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004). In particular, when the negotiating person is of high status, expressing anger leads to greater concessions from others, whereas expressions of positive emotions do not (Van Kleef, De Dreu, Pietroni, & Manstead, 2006). Thus, when they are in a position of power and seek to confront rather than to collaborate with others, negotiators who experience more positive and less negative emotions may be less successful in the negotiation, in part, because they are happy. Another example is the expression of sadness. Expressions of sadness signal to others that the person is in need of assistance (e.g., Smith & Lazarus, 1993). Therefore, when people experience a loss they may benefit from expressing sadness because it could facilitate getting help from others. Expressions of positive emotions, on the other hand, signal to others that all is well. These expressions may not be useful if they lead others to offer less help (see Hackenbracht & Tamir, in press).

Whether because of their physiological, cognitive, or social implications, the presence of positive emotions and the absence of negative emotions can be beneficial in some circumstances, but not in others. When things are going well, the experience of positive emotions can help people maintain and increase resources and form or strengthen social bonds. However, when problems arise, the experience of negative emotions, such as fear, anger, and sadness, may offer important benefits that positive emotions do not. This idea may be particularly true when positive emotions are experienced at extreme levels of intensity (Oishi et al., 2006), but we suggest that the ideas presented in this section also apply to emotional experiences in low and moderate levels of intensity when they occur in the wrong contexts.

Question 3: Are There Wrong Ways to Pursue Happiness?

Although the majority of people report feeling fairly happy (Diener & Diener, 1996), many people report wanting to be happier than they already are (Mauss, Tamir, Anderson, & Savino, in press). One corollary of the happiness zeitgeist is that people should strive for happiness whenever and however possible. However, should people really strive for happiness (i.e., try to maximize positive feelings and minimize negative feelings) in any way possible or might there be wrong ways to pursue it?

Philosophers and researchers have observed that the pursuit of happiness does not always appear to lead to desired outcomes. In fact, at times, the more people pursue happiness, the less they seem to be able to obtain it (Kesebir & Diener, 2008; also see review chapter by Schooler, Ariely, & Loewenstein, 2003). A particular feature of human goal pursuit might help explain this peculiar paradox. The goals people value determine not only what people want to achieve but also the standards against which they evaluate their achievements (Carver & Scheier, 1981). For instance, people who highly value academic achievement will be disappointed when they fall short of their high standards. In the case of academic achievement, this feature may not matter for achieving the goal at hand because disappointment does not interfere with the pursuit of academic goals.

However, in the case of happiness, this feature of goal pursuit may lead to paradoxical effects, because the outcome of one's evaluation (i.e., disappointment and discontent) is incompatible with achieving one's goal (i.e., happiness). This reasoning leads to the prediction that the more people strive for happiness, the more likely it is that they will become disappointed about how they feel, paradoxically decreasing their happiness the more they want it. Disappointment at one's achievements should be most likely in situations that are perceived as conducive to high achievement (Wiese, 2007). Thus, people who value academic achievement are more likely to feel disappointed if they get a low grade in an easy class compared with a hard one, because in this situation the goal seems easily obtainable. Analogously, the paradoxical effect of valuing happiness is likely to depend on the emotional context at hand. In relatively negative situations people can attribute their unhappiness to their circumstances (McFarland & Ross, 1982). For instance, people are unlikely to be disappointed if they are not happy after hearing that a close friend was involved in a car accident. In contrast, in relatively positive situations, people have every reason to feel happy and are likely to feel disappointed when they do not. For instance, people who are unhappy at their birthday party are likely to be disappointed about not enjoying themselves more. In summary, the more people value—and pursue—happiness, the less likely they may be to obtain it, especially when happiness appears to be within reach.

Little empirical research to date has directly tested these ideas. In one study, Schooler and colleagues (2003) found that participants who were told to "try to make yourself feel as happy as possible" while they listened to a piece of hedonically ambiguous music, reported feeling less positive mood compared with a no-instruction control group. Two recent studies provide more direct support for the idea that valuing happiness can lead to paradoxical negative effects. In one study, the more people valued happiness (as indicated by self-report), the less well-being and the more mental health difficulties, including depression, they reported (Mauss et al., in press). Importantly, this association was found only during times of low life stress,

when people presumably could not attribute their failure to be happy to external circumstances. This finding suggests that valuing happiness may be associated with less happiness, just when happiness is most obtainable (during times of low stress).

A second, experimental study examined whether valuing happiness causes less happiness (Mauss et al., in press). Participants were presented with a faux newspaper article, which either extolled the advantages of happiness or did not mention happiness. After this manipulation, participants watched either a happy or a sad film clip. Results indicated that participants who were induced to value happiness felt worse, but only in the context of the happy film, presumably because participants could not attribute their relative lack of happiness to external circumstances. It is important to note that feelings of disappointment mediated the effects of valuing happiness on feeling unhappy. These findings suggest that the pursuit of happiness may lead to maladaptive outcomes because it sets people up for disappointment.

These findings demonstrate that the pursuit of happiness can have negative effects on individual well-being. Two recent studies demonstrated that the pursuit of happiness may also have negative interpersonal effects (Mauss et al., 2011). One study found that the more people value happiness, the lonelier they feel on a daily basis (assessed with daily diaries over 2 weeks). The second study demonstrated that leading people to value happiness more resulted in greater loneliness and social disconnect, as measured by self-reports and a hormonal index (decreased progesterone). These findings suggest that wanting to be happy can not only decrease people's well-being but also make them lonely. One explanation for this finding might be that striving for personal gains (including happiness) may damage connections with others and thus make people lonely.

The findings just described suggest that trying to enhance positive emotions might lead to decreased well-being. If that is the case, might the converse mindset—namely, accepting or not trying to decrease negative feelings—lead to increased well-being? Theories of mindfulness and acceptance-based therapy make this prediction, arguing that when people accept negative feelings, those experiences draw less attention and less negative meta-emotional evaluation (Hayes, Strohsahl, & Wilson, 1999), which in turn leads to greater well-being. This prediction has been borne out in experimental studies of short-term emotional responses (Campbell-Sills, Barlow, Brown, & Hofmann, 2006; Hofmann, Heering, Sawyer, & Asnaani, 2009). For example, Levitt, Brown, Orsillo, and Barlow (2004) randomly assigned participants with panic disorder to one of three instruction conditions (acceptance, suppression, or control) and then gave them a carbon dioxide challenge, which can trigger panic. Acceptance participants, compared with participants in the other groups, reported feeling less anxious during the challenge. Other studies suggest that acceptance of negative emotions may also have longer term positive well-being correlates, in that people who tend to accept (versus avoid) negative emotions exhibit lower levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms (Kashdan, Morina, & Priebe, 2009; Orcutt, Pickett, & Pope, 2005; Roemer, Salters, Raffa,

& Orsillo, 2005; Tull, Gratz, Salters, & Roemer, 2004). A recent study extended these findings by examining whether acceptance has prospective effects on well-being (Shallcross, Troy, Boland, & Mauss, 2010). The study examined participants' levels of acceptance and, 3 months later, their level of depressive symptoms. A greater tendency to accept negative feelings predicted lower levels of depressive symptoms, controlling for initial depressive symptoms. Thus, accepting negative feelings—rather than actively trying to make them disappear—may have beneficial outcomes.

Together, the research reviewed in this section suggests that trying to increase positive emotion can lead to detrimental outcomes, whereas accepting negative emotion can lead to salutary outcomes. More research is needed to better understand these intriguing effects. For instance, more work needs to be done to understand the mechanisms that link the pursuit of happiness and the avoidance of negative states to deleterious outcomes. We have shown that disappointment about one's affective state mediates the negative effects of pursuing happiness such that pursuing happiness is associated with elevated happiness standards, which sets people up for disappointment (Mauss et al., in press). Additional mediators that may also contribute to the deleterious effects of pursuing happiness include increased self-monitoring, increased self-focus, decreased social engagement, and decreased rumination (cf. Keltner, 2009; Schooler et al., 2003). These are important areas for future research, which will further our understanding of the intriguing conclusion that the direct pursuit of happiness can be a source of dysfunction.

Of course, pursuing happiness (i.e., trying to increase positive feelings and decrease negative ones) is not always self-defeating. Pursuing happiness may lead to positive outcomes if people are given the right tools to do so. Tools that may lead to lasting increases in happiness and well-being include flexible and adaptive emotion regulatory abilities (Gross & John, 2003; Troy, Shallcross, Wilhelm, & Mauss, 2010), greater awareness of what will make oneself happy (e.g., Wilson & Gilbert, 2005), and engagement in happiness-enhancing activities rather than directly pursuing happiness (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). These successful paths to increasing happiness have one thing in common: They avoid the direct pursuit of happiness and instead lead people to make changes in their emotion-regulatory habits or in their activities. This analysis fits well with the concept of flow and with self-determination theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Deci & Ryan, 2000), which hold that activities lead to greater happiness and well-being if they are engaged in for their own sake rather than for a reason extrinsic to the activity, even if this reason is as seemingly benevolent as gaining happiness.

Question 4: Are There Wrong Types of Happiness?

According to our definition of happiness, people are happy when positive emotions are present and negative emotions are absent. However, there are various types of positive as well as

negative emotions. For instance, emotions can vary on the dimensions of arousal (e.g., excitement vs. calm), approach motivation (e.g., fear vs. anger), and social engagement (e.g., compassion vs. pride). Thus, happiness comes in different flavors, depending on which emotions are represented (e.g., Barrett & Russell, 2009; Shiota et al., 2006). Despite these differences, various types of happiness share a common core of present positivity and absent negativity (Haybron, 2005; Kesebir & Diener, 2008; Sumner, 1999). One might thus argue that they all have similar, and positive, effects on human well-being and functioning. However, a more nuanced analysis may yield that not all types of happiness have adaptive effects on human functioning and that some types of happiness may even be a source of dysfunction.

Relatively little research has systematically examined the differential effects of various types of happiness (cf. Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Griskevicius, Shiota, & Neufeld, 2010; Shiota et al., 2006; Tiedens & Linton, 2001). We suggest that two groups of happiness may have no positive or even negative effects on a person's well-being. First, some types of happiness appear to impair social functioning, thereby leading to decreased well-being. Second, types of happiness that are not aligned with a culture's definition of appropriate happiness may be associated with negative outcomes for the individual. Thus, states that impair social functioning or that are incongruent with a culture's values may have negative outcomes, regardless of their valence (cf. Parrott, 2002). We next review research on each of these two categories of types of happiness.

First, types of happiness that have no positive—or even negative—effects on social processes, such as liking, social connectedness, and the formation of long-term, mutually satisfying relationships, may have maladaptive outcomes for the individual (Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003; Borkenau & Liebler, 1992; Fredrickson, 1998; Garland et al., in press; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Reis & Patrick, 1996). One such positive state is hubristic pride, or pride that is experienced in the absence of adequate merits (Tracy & Robins, 2007). Several studies suggest that hubristic pride is associated with negative social consequences, such as aggressiveness toward others and antisocial behavior (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; Tracy, Cheng, Robins, & Trzesniewski, 2009). These negative social effects, in turn, can have deleterious effects on the individual (Cacioppo, Hughes, Waite, Hawkley, & Thisted, 2006; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). Thus, hubristic pride—despite being a positive emotion—may engender negative outcomes. Future research is needed, however, to understand the potentially negative affective correlates and consequences of hubristic pride.

Could the absence of some negative states also impair social functioning? Research suggests this may be the case for embarrassment and guilt, negative emotions that serve important social functions such as appeasement, cooperation, and prosocial behavior (Fessler, 2007; Keltner & Anderson, 2000). Guilt, for instance, benefits relationships by leading to reparative actions in relationships and enhancing empathic concern for others (Tangney, 1991; for a review, see Tangney, 1995).

Negative social outcomes associated with the absence of embarrassment or guilt (e.g., impaired social connection), in turn, are robust predictors of decreased well-being (Cacioppo et al., 2006; Uchino et al., 1996). Thus, just like the presence of some positive states, the absence of negative states that impair social functions can be damaging.

A second group of types of happiness that may have no positive or even negative outcomes may be those that are not aligned with cultural values (Eid & Diener, 2001; Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000; Oishi & Diener, 2001; Wiese, 2007). Three dimensions of cultural values appear to moderate the effects of happiness on individuals' well-being: arousal, social engagement, and emphasis on personal hedonic experience. Note that these dimensions are independent of valence.

First, cultures vary with regard to how much they value high-arousal versus low-arousal positive states. For example, Tsai, Knutson, and Fung (2006) demonstrated that in Chinese and Chinese–American compared with European–American culture, low-arousal positive states (e.g., contentment) are more highly valued than high-arousal positive states (e.g., excitement). In turn, discrepancies between ideal and actual levels of low-arousal positive states, but not high-arousal positive states, are associated with undesirable mental-health outcomes, such as depressive symptoms, among participants of Chinese cultural backgrounds, whereas the opposite is true for participants of European–American backgrounds.

A second relevant dimension along which cultures vary is social engagement. For instance, Japanese culture tends to more highly value socially engaged emotions, such as friendly feelings or guilt, whereas U.S. American culture tends to more highly value socially disengaged emotions, such as pride or anger (Eid & Diener, 2001; Kitayama et al., 2000; Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006). In turn, in Japanese participants, socially engaged emotions predict well-being more strongly than they do in U.S. American participants, whereas the converse is true for socially disengaged emotions (Kitayama et al., 2000, 2006). Although valence plays a role in these associations, it is not the only factor that matters, suggesting that not every type of happiness is equally adaptive.

A third important dimension along which cultures vary is personal hedonic experience (Eid & Diener, 2001; Scollon, Diener, Oishi, & Biswas-Diener, 2004). For example, work by Uchida and colleagues (Uchida & Kitayama, 2009; Uchida, Norasakkunkit, & Kitayama, 2004) found that in North American cultural contexts, happiness tends to be defined in terms of personal hedonic experience and personal achievement, whereas in East Asian contexts happiness tends to be defined in terms of social harmony. On the basis of these findings, one would predict that in North American contexts hedonic experiences that are contingent on personal achievement (e.g., high self-esteem, absence of shame) are linked to better outcomes, whereas in East Asian contexts the reverse should be true. Indeed, although shame has maladaptive effects and is associated with a number of psychopathologies in North American contexts (Tangney, 1991, 1995), shame is more culturally appropriate and adaptive in East Asian cultural contexts

(e.g., Cho, 2000; Li, Wang, & Fischer, 2004; Bedford & Hwang, 2003; Menon & Shweder, 1994; Russell & Yik, 1996). Furthermore, Kuppens, Realo, and Diener (2008) have argued that some cultural contexts (including relatively collectivistic and relatively survival-oriented ones) do not define happiness in personal hedonic terms. Accordingly, in these contexts, personal and hedonic aspects of happiness (either presence of positive or absence of negative states) predict well-being outcomes to a much weaker degree or not at all (Kuppens et al., 2008). Along similar lines, Fulmer and colleagues (2011) found that extraversion (a personality trait characterized by a high degree of positive emotion) is associated with greater well-being in countries whose culture values positive emotionality, but not in others. Together, these studies suggest that alignment with a culture's values along the dimensions of arousal, social engagement, and focus on personal hedonic experiences plays a crucial role in the effects of happiness on outcomes.

Clearly, these ideas are relatively new, and much research remains to systematically categorize types of happiness and further clarify which types of happiness may have no positive or even negative outcomes and what the mechanisms for such effects may be (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Shiota et al., 2006). In summary, however, the research we reviewed in this section suggests that whether happiness has good outcomes can depend on the type of happiness at hand. Types of happiness that engender negative social consequences or that are in conflict with a culture's norms do not appear to have exclusively positive long-term effects and may even have negative effects.

Concluding Remarks

Humans have a strong desire to achieve and experience happiness. Indeed, the pursuit and experience of happiness is often seen as a hallmark of psychological health (Fredrickson, 1998). Happiness facilitates the pursuit of important goals, contributes to vital social bonds, and broadens our scope of attention to enable processing of new ideas and stimuli in the environment. Given that there is a general broad understanding and acknowledgment of the benefits of happiness, the field may now be ripe to explore additional facets of happiness, including the potential disadvantages of happiness.

Indeed, science reveals that some things are good for our health and well-being. A prime example is food—we need food for our bodies to thrive. Yet, although food is generally good for us, it is not always good and can even be harmful. For instance, eating too much can lead to obesity, eating right after exercising or after taking certain medication can be dangerous, eating to improve mood is not always helpful, and eating certain kinds of foods rather than others may be harmful. Similar to the way food allows us to thrive physically, happiness seems to allow us to thrive psychologically. Just like food, however, we propose that happiness is not always good. It is possible to have too much happiness, to experience happiness in the wrong time, to pursue happiness in the wrong ways, and to experience the wrong types of happiness. In such cases, happiness may not be adaptive and might even lead to harmful consequences. Our hope is that these claims will spur further research and that a deeper understanding of when and how happiness is functional and dysfunctional will allow us to better harvest its nourishing outcomes while avoiding its downsides.

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