**Social connection and Happiness**

**Final Essay (First Draft) (Version 0)**

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**Introduction: The Relationship between Social Connection and Happiness**

In the beginning of the essay, I’m going to define what is social connection and how to judge a social connection is positive or not. Social connection came from the interaction behavior among a group of people. This behavior can be conscious or senseless, and can be happened in the same time. For example, a people is chatting with her friend in a coffee shop. However, she turned down her voice because others in the coffee shop didn’t make noises. The lady is influenced by other people, although she didn’t feel out. And in this time, we can consider the lady has social connection to these people sitting in the coffee shop. The subjective emotion of people can be influenced by social connection. When accompany with a people feeling negative, we are possible to influenced by him and feeling bad. For example, when a friend told you he is hard to done his work on time and he feels anxiety, you will begin to think I should work hard to finish my works. People might simply think a good social connection to him is the one can bring him positive feelings. This is totally inaccurate. In this situation, people just consider themselves, but do not realize there are other members take part in the interaction behavior. Do you think bully is a kind of good social connection? On the basis of the consideration above, bully is a good social connection which can bring happiness to the people who is making the violence. This is ridiculous, so don’t forget social connection has many participators, and a good and healthy social connection can generally bring positive feelings to each member.

In 1938, Harvard begun a famous study, tracking people’s health and the factors are probably influenced their health (Mineo, 2017). The study is still continued nowadays, which held over 80 years. According to Waldinger (2015), who is the fourth foregoer of the study, he mentioned what the study had found so far is social connection is the key factor that influence a people’s health and happiness. They compared the information of their object of study, tried to make connection between their age of 50 and 80, and find out these people who were satisfy to their social connection condition and their marital status live a longer life than the people who was not. Because of lack of companions, people who have poor social connections is hard to reveal his negative emotion, can only stock these feelings into his heart and feels more pain. These pains were amplificated over the time, which had shortened their life finally.

**Part 2: Results of Two Peer-Reviewed Studies on Social Connection and Happiness**

In the year of 2000, Vaillant had written an essay studying adaptive mental mechanism. Adaptive mental mechanism is used to balance negative feelings when facing trouble. As Vaillant (2002, page 89) mentioned, when facing troubles, people can try to handle the trouble, include trying to seek help from others and using strategies to change the situation. If a people have wide and high-quality social connections with other people, he would be easy to ask others to help and get rid of the dilemma as soon as possible. In this view, a wide and high-quality social connection can reduce the time of feeling bad. Other’s support it self also can giving power and hope to people. In the opposite, people with mental illness like depression and delusional disorder are harder to seeking help than health people. One or two months before, when I and my roommate exited from a sky train station, we saw a woman full of dusty. We can easy to think she has mental illness because she looked wacky. She was talking to someone, but there are no other people nearby her, all of the people walked far away from this woman, include me and my roommate. We were rejecting her, to prevent not be harmed by the woman. Everyone is more willing to help these people can maintain a good social connection with themselves, and reject these people who have potential possibility to harm others.

In the study of Santini et al. (page 54), they classify perceive social support and receive social support. For example, Canada government announce they stand by Ukraine, Ukraine is perceiving the support. Some days after, Canada government provide some weapon to Ukraine, and Ukraine is receiving the support. According to their discussion in page 61, perceive can bring more positive feeling than receive. No matter the authenticity of this point, when feeling bad, perceive other’s help can be helpful as well as receive other’s help. So when knowing others in need, people can give them some mental health if they can’t give them some physical help.

Psychological defense mechanism is also a branch of adaptive mental mechanism (Vaillant, 2002, page 89). Psychological defense mechanism generally happened unintentionally. The method that psychological defense mechanism uses to relieve negative feelings are various, some of these are positive while others are negative. Psychological can even raise people’s feeling by distort the reality. In Vaillant’s essay (page 90), he gave an example about the famous musician Beethoven. But here, I want to use another example. We all read *Aesop’s Fables* when we are a child, in the book there was a famous fox, this fox wanted to eat the grapes from a high shelf, but it couldn’t reach the grapes. What the fox do is it told itself the grape was sour (actually it isn’t). This behavior is a kind of psychological defense mechanism, the fox cheated itself to feel not too sad in the reason of not picked the grapes. When psychological defense mechanism works, people may hard to recognize the reality and make the best choice, but with good social connection, other people can alert the people that they are wrong. The greatest weakness of psychological defense mechanism is it can push people to the extreme if it over works. Then there will be a vicious circle: people cheating themselves, they don’t make the best choice that fitted the situation, and the situation go worse. To break this circle, other’s help will be directly and effectively, as I mentioned before, those who have wide and high-quality social connections are easier to get other’s help and break the circle.

It is worth noting that there are some kinds of psychological defense mechanism that can transfer negative feelings to power, like *sublimation* and *altruism* (Vaillant, page 91). *Altruism* can be understood as a people provide support to other people have the same painful experience like him because he knows what the painful is and hope others won’t suffer it like him. He will notice himself not be the inflictor as well. For example, I spent a childhood in not seeing my father most of the time. He always busy and didn’t come home. What I want to do is to be a good father and husband, spend enough time accompanying with my wife and children, not like my father. I just don’t want my wife and my child go through ten or twenty years in the same experience like me. Not only *altruism* can give people power, it is beneficial to other people who are helped and can build a good social connection to these people.

**Part 3: My Personal ‘Happiness Experiment’ on the Effect of Meditation on my Happiness**

In the following of my essay, I’m want to share how to hold well and high-quality social connections and make our life better. The sociability of people is different. To those people who are not good in social, they can still make their effort to improve their social connection. Before we start, identification is required to prevent us join a group we don’t want to. There is a Chinese students group developed by one of my classmates, the members are flatulent in my view, they taking alcohol together, going disco dancing and pretend learning. I won’t join them because I regard this is a kind of low quantity social connection. To identify the quality of a social connection, self-awareness can be really helpful, if we know what we actually desire we can make the right choice. In the past ten days, I reflect the social connections I keep so far, discover that I often acting with a friend but I didn’t really appreciate this friend and his behavior. What I did is I reduce the frequency of going out with him. Don’t afraid being repulsed by these people, they can’t enhance the quality of our social connection and probably decrease it.

Then, we can improve the quality of social connections we have. If we want being cared by other people, try to care others first. For instance, if I know my friends staying up too late, I will remind them sleeping on time. What I can do more is asking why they staying up late, do they need any help, or just chatting what happened these days. Listening to others experience is also the way to improve ourselves, if one day we are in the same experience as our friends, we can remember what suggestions I gave to my friends and get rid of the situation. I know this looks simply, but is hard for someone that afraid to talk to others. They are nervous to begin a topic. But remember: everyone is willing to have social connection with someone else. In the last year, I paid a visit to a girl who is suffered slight social phobia. She didn’t confirm by official, but she is more unwilling to communicate with others. Most of her time is spending on herself, like playing video game or drawing on her iPad. We had a talk for one hour in a coffee shop near her school, but actually we had a really nice conversation and she shared a lot of experiences from her. After that, I will chat with her regularly, asking how’s her life goes and share some of my life. We playing a same video game, when I couldn’t find a topic, I just talk this video game with her.

What we could do more is we can try to build new social connections. After school, many boys like to playing basketball with his friends to release their stress and gain happiness. Basketball is a sport contains social connection, while some exercises like fitness or swimming can be a one-person sport. According to the statistics of Ortiz (2020), in the most ten popular sports of American high school, 7 of them are team-working, include football, basketball, baseball and volleyball. To a great extent, these sports are popular because these sports can bring more fun to people. With practice our physical body, we can strengthen our social connection with other members playing together. We can also do volunteering. Magnani and Zhu had a studied to volunteering and happiness in 2018, volunteering can bring some happiness to people, especially to who just begin within a year. Join some groups we are interested is also a good choice to make good and high-quality social connection and take happiness. We can make like-minded friends in these group, and we can make social connection with them when the group is holding an activity.

Social connection takes an important role to our subjective emotion. Many studies have showed poor social connection can lead to depression, anxiety and other mental illness (Santini et al, page 54). Thanks to their work, mental illness becomes more and more valued by people, and due to their work, we have some way to deal with mental illness and increase people’s happiness.

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