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The Rewards of Happiness

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Abstract and Keywords

Success is assumed to bring people happiness, but happiness may also bring success. The authors review longitudinal and experimental studies examining this causal link from happiness to success in a variety of domains, including social relationships, work, and health. The empirical evidence suggests that happiness plays a causal role in the attainment of success, as well as in the practice of behaviors related to success. This occurs through the frequent experience of positive affect. Positive affect may increase the likelihood of successful outcomes by rendering individuals more likely to approach people and situations, signaling that things are going well, and helping to build people's intellectual, social, physical, and psychological resources and skills.

Keywords: happiness, well-being, positive affect, success, social relationships, work, health

SUCCESS—or the attainment of rewards valued in one's culture—is assumed to foster happiness. Many people believe that securing a promotion, getting married, or recovering from a chronic illness will make them happier, and they are right to think so. Happiness is indeed correlated with numerous positive characteristics, resources, and outcomes (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), and enjoying them undoubtedly contributes to overall well-being. However, the finding that happiness and success are correlated means that the opposite causal direction may also hold. Being happy in the first place could cause people to be more successful in a variety of domains. In other words, happiness may lead people to accrue a great many rewards in life. In this chapter, we argue on behalf of this causal pathway, and present evidence in its support (see Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener (2005) for a more in-depth review).

Early Research and Theoretical Background

The study of happiness is a relatively new research area. Its roots can be traced back to humanistic psychology, which arose as an alternative to behaviorist and clinical approaches (e.g., Rogers, 1961). Humanistic psychology shone a light on the positive aspects of human beings and their behavior, focusing on constructs such as health (as opposed to illness), self-actualization (the realization of one's true potential), and creativity (Aanstoos, Serlin, & Greening, 2000). More recently, psychologists have begun to emphasize the study of people's strengths (as opposed to their weaknesses and pathologies) and the prevention of mental disorders, rather than only their treatment (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This new focus has encouraged the growth of research on happiness and positive emotions, which characterizes present-day positive psychology.

(p. 120) What, then, is happiness? For the purposes of this chapter, we define happiness as the frequent experience of positive emotions (Diener, Sandvick, & Pavot, 1991). Accordingly, we use terms such as positive affect, pleasant mood, and high well-being to refer to individuals who often experience positive emotions. Happiness is generally measured using self-report questionnaires, such as the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Although these scales are not tapping into the exact same construct, they do distinguish between people who frequently experience positive emotions and those who do not.

Our central thesis is that being a happy person raises the likelihood of accruing rewards in all the important life domains, such as relationships, work, and health. How does happiness engender success? We argue that the key underlying mechanism, or ingredient, is *positive affect*. Happy people frequently experience positive emotions (Diener et al., 1991), and positive emotions are associated with active, approach-oriented behavior. Accordingly, those who experience positive emotions are more likely to go out and meet new people, enter novel situations, and pursue important goals (Carver, 2003; Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Lyubomirsky, 2001). According to the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), positive emotions also broaden people's "thought-action repertoires" (e.g., prompting them to generate more ideas and instigate new actions) and allow them to build physical, social, intellectual, and psychological resources. Thus, people who experience frequent positive moods can presumably develop skills and relationships that help them to succeed in a variety of domains.

Furthermore, positive affect acts as a signal that things are going well—a situation that grants individuals the opportunity and freedom to be active and sociable, to help others, to be flexible and productive, and to engage in healthy behaviors and effective coping (Hill & Buss, 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). We argue that these very characteristics help people to succeed at culturally-valued goals. This is in part because people are more

likely to actively work toward new goals while experiencing positive moods (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Equally important is that those who habitually experience positive emotions are likely to have accumulated skills and resources during their positive experiences. Consequently, such individuals are both more likely to take steps in order to pursue their goals and to succeed in attaining them.

In this chapter, our aim is to provide a brief review, with some key examples, of the literature on the relationship between happiness and success, as well as to update the most recent published comprehensive review (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Readers are additionally advised to consult analyses of more specific literatures, including those regarding health (Pressman & Cohen, 2005), mortality (Chida & Steptoe, 2008), creativity (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005; Baas, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008), and job performance (Kaplan, Bradley, Luchman, & Haynes, 2009).

Research Methods

A variety of research methods have been used to study the relationship between happiness and success. Cross-sectional studies allow us to observe whether an association exists (p. 121) between two variables (e.g., happiness and health), but cannot tell us the direction of the relationship (e.g., whether happiness leads to good health or good health leads to happiness). Thus, from these studies, we can determine that happiness is related to success, but we do not know if happiness causes success or if success causes happiness or if some third factor altogether causes both success and happiness. Accordingly, correlational studies can only answer questions like “Are happy people successful people?” and “Are long-term happiness and short-term positive affect associated with adaptive skills and characteristics?” Because cross-sectional studies are the least informative as to the causal nature of the relationship, we will not review such studies in this chapter (however, see Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) for a comprehensive review of cross-sectional research in this area).

Longitudinal studies are more informative than cross-sectional ones because they examine whether happiness precedes success during the course of time (e.g., happiness assessed at age 40 and health assessed at age 50). Thus, longitudinal studies can answer questions such as, “Does happiness precede success?” and “Do happiness and positive affect pave the way for behaviors paralleling success?” (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). However, longitudinal studies still cannot establish a causal relationship between happiness and success, because, like cross-sectional studies, longitudinal investigations are subject to the “third-variable” problem. In other words, because such studies do not take place in a controlled environment, where only positive affect is manipulated, there may be other variables (e.g., personality, biological, or family characteristics) that account for the relationship between happiness and success. Thus, we cannot conclude that happiness causes success from longitudinal studies.

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Fortunately, experimental studies, which typically induce people to experience positive emotions and then assess the consequences, do allow us to establish the direction of causality. Although experiments are not perfect either—for example, the laboratory typically lacks what researchers call “ecological validity” and is sometimes problematic to generalize to real-world naturalistic settings—they can answer questions like “Does positive affect lead to behaviors paralleling success?” (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). For example, if we make someone happy temporarily, will he or she show signs of a momentarily strengthened immune system?

The ideal method, however, for answering our causal question involves an “experimental longitudinal” design. These types of studies—also called randomized controlled interventions—aim to increase long-term happiness and follow people over time in the “real world” to measure how they and their lives have changed as a result. Accordingly, such investigations are able to test for a long-term causal relationship, answering questions like, “Does induced happiness lead to behaviors paralleling success several weeks, months, or years from now?”

The small but growing area of happiness intervention research provides indirect evidence for a link between happiness and success. If such interventions increase happiness, then it is reasonable to conclude that they should also bolster the rewards of happiness—for example, stronger interpersonal relationships, superior physical health, or more helping behavior. As just one example, studies have shown that practicing gratitude boosts happiness (e.g., Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). At the same time, gratitude predicts more prosocial behavior (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larsen, 2001), lower depression (Woodward, Moua, & Watkins, 1998), fewer post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms (Masingale et al., 2001), and stronger social bonds (Emmons & Shelton, (p. 122) 2002; McCullough et al., 2001; McCullough & Tsang, 2004; see Lambert, Graham, and Fincham (2009) for a review). However, it is important to show that gratitude has these benefits via its effects on happiness. In one study with suggestive findings in this respect, life satisfaction was found to mediate—or underlie—the relationship between gratitude and materialism (Lambert, Fincham, Stillman, & Dean, 2009). Thus, expressing gratitude both increased people's life satisfaction and lowered their materialism, and life satisfaction was found to be responsible for the gratitude-materialism link.

Another long-term intervention found that people randomly assigned to practice loving-kindness meditation for 9 weeks experienced more positive emotions over time (Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels, & Conway, 2009). These positive emotions further produced increases in personal resources, such as greater social support and diminished illness symptoms, which predicted increased life satisfaction. In other words, individuals who were experimentally induced to be happier were able to “build” their psychological and social resources, which in turn led to increases in life satisfaction. Although still largely indirect, such research is beginning to suggest that boosting long-term happiness may have positive effects on other important aspects of people's lives.

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In the following sections, we review some of the more direct longitudinal and experimental studies that provide support for the hypothesis that happiness causes successful outcomes and behaviors.

Longitudinal Research

Social relationships

To begin, happiness has been found to predict success in a variety of social settings. As one important example shows, how happy a person is raises the probability that he or she will eventually marry. In a 15-year Australian study, unmarried participants whose happiness levels were one standard deviation above the mean were 1.5 times more likely to be married at a later point in time than those whose happiness levels were at the mean (Marks & Fleming, 1999). Those who were two standard deviations above the mean were twice as likely to be married later. In a 16-year German study, people who reported high life satisfaction were more likely to be married 4 or more years later than those who reported lower life satisfaction (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2003). Another study with a similar design measured subjective well-being in young single individuals. Those who eventually married had higher subjective well-being as young adults than those who remained single (Stutzer & Frey, 2006). Taken together, the evidence suggests that happy single people are more likely to eventually find marriage partners than their less happy single peers.

Being happy apparently predicts not only the likelihood of getting married but having a strong marriage. A 6-year-long Australian investigation found that respondents' happiness early in the study was associated with higher marital satisfaction later (Headey & Veenhoven, 1989). In an intriguing study with a US sample, Harker and Keltner (2001) examined displays of positive affect in female college senior yearbook photos. They found that women who expressed sincere positive affect (i.e., "Duchenne" smiles) at age 21 were more likely to be married 6 years later and less likely to be single 22 years later. The expression of genuine (p. 123) positive affect in the photos also predicted marital satisfaction 31 years later. However, a recent study that used high school yearbook photos with respondents in their 50s was unable to replicate these results (Freese, Meland, & Irwin, 2007).

Happiness is also related to higher levels of activity and social interaction. In a sample of older adults, those who were happier at one point in time were more likely to participate in activities 18 months later (Kozma & Stones, 1983; Stones & Kozma, 1986). Similarly, in another study, positive affect measured at the start predicted the amount of time people participated in recreational and social activities later in the study, even after taking into account their initial activity levels (Lucas, 2001). And, in a 4-week study of nursing home residents, positive affect (specifically, interest rather than pleasure) was related to activity levels (Meeks, Young, & Looney, 2007). So, people who are happy and experience frequent good moods tend to be more active in social and recreational activities, even when the activities are assessed much later.

Work life

A number of studies have also longitudinally examined the relationships between happiness, positive emotions, and employment outcomes. Roberts, Caspi, and Moffitt (2003) found that positive affect measured at age 18 predicted several work-related outcomes, such as obtaining a job, having high job satisfaction, and feeling financially independent, at age 26. These positive job outcomes also triggered increases in positive affect, so the relationship was apparently bidirectional. High positive affect has also been shown to predict less absenteeism from the job 5 months later (Pelled & Xin, 1999) and better supervisor evaluations 1.5 years later (Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1995). Furthermore, a study that tracked participants over the course of 2 months found that positive affect predicted self-rated work productivity over this period (Zelenski, Murphy, & Jenkins, 2008). Taken together, this research shows that workers who are high in positive affect experience more success in the workplace and display more behaviors that promote success.

One such success-promoting behavior is creative thinking. Good moods have been found to prospectively predict creativity, especially in the workplace. In one study, positive affect expressed by employees at work predicted their creativity levels, as rated by their supervisors, 1.5 years later (Staw et al., 1995). In another investigation of employee creativity, Amabile and colleagues (2005) followed employees from seven companies for an average of 19 weeks. Self-reported positive affect preceded creative thought by up to 2 days, but creative thought did not predict later positive affect. So it appears that positive moods lead to creativity, but creativity may not lead to positive moods.

A similar relationship has been established between happiness and income. In a 15-year Australian panel study, self-reported happiness predicted increases in income during later periods (Marks & Fleming, 1999). Replicating and extending this finding, a Russian panel study found that people's happiness in the first year of the study was associated with higher income and lower unemployment 5 years later (Graham, Eggers, & Sukhtankar, 2004). Researchers have also found that higher levels of cheerfulness, measured during the first year of college, predict greater income 16 years later, even after controlling for parental income (Diener, Nickerson, Lucas, & Sandvik, 2002). This evidence leads us to conclude that being a happy person is associated with earning a higher income many years later.

(p. 124) Health

Happiness has also been shown to predict people's physical health; in other words, people who are happier at a particular point in time have been found to be healthier months or years down the road. For instance, in a Finnish twin study, higher life satisfaction predicted a lower risk of suicide 20 years later, even after controlling for other risk factors, (Koivumaa-Honkanen, Honkanen, Koskenvuo, Viinamaeki, & Kaprio,

2001). Also, happier people have been found to have better self-reported health, to miss fewer days at work due to sickness, and to have fewer hospital visits 5 years later than their less happy peers (Graham et al., 2004). Positive mood has been shown to predict a lower incidence of stroke 6 years later (especially for men; Ostir, Markides, Peek, & Goodwin, 2000), and, in another study, individuals with higher life satisfaction and more positive perceptions of future happiness (and no mobility limitations) reported relatively fewer mobility limitations 8 years later (Collins, Goldman, & Rodriguez, 2008). In a diabetic sample, higher levels of positive affect were found to predict lower levels of glycosylated hemoglobin, an indicator of how well one's diabetes is under control (Tsenkova, Love, Singer, & Ryff, 2008). In addition, positive affect in this study was found to be the key ingredient responsible for the relationship between effective coping and chemical indicators of well-controlled diabetes. As a final example of research in this area, in a diary investigation of patients with sickle cell disease, positive affect during Day 1 was associated with lower self-reported pain during Day 3 (Gil et al., 2004). All of these studies support the idea that happiness at Time 1 is associated with superior physical health outcomes at Time 2.

Perhaps most impressive is research showing that we can predict how long a person will live from how happy he or she currently is. Unhappiness has been found to be associated with higher mortality rates in studies of healthy individuals, those who suffer from medical conditions, and even those who have experienced sudden accidents. For example, low subjective well-being was revealed to be associated with more automobile fatalities (Kirkcaldy & Furnham, 2000), and low satisfaction with life predicted both unintentional and intentional injuries over a 19-year period (Koivumaa-Honkanen, Honkanen, Koskenvuo, Viinamaeki, & Kaprio, 2002). In an oft-cited study of nuns, those who expressed more positive affect in autobiographies written as young adults had a 2.5 times lower risk of mortality when they were in their 80s and 90s (Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001). So relative happiness in one's youth is related to longevity.

Happiness has also been found to be associated with reduced mortality in people suffering from various illnesses, such as end-stage renal disease (Devins, Mann, Mandin, & Leonard, 1990), breast cancer (Levy, Lee, Bagley, & Lippman, 1988), spinal cord injuries (Krause, Sternberg, Lottes, & Maides, 1997), diabetes (Moskowitz, Epel, & Acree, 2008), and HIV (Ickovics et al., 2006). A recent meta-analytic review found that happiness was associated with reduced mortality in both sick and healthy populations (Chida & Steptoe, 2008).

One of the likely reasons—or “mechanisms”—that happiness fosters longevity and health is by bolstering an individual's immune function. For example, an oft-cited study found that healthy volunteers with a positive emotional style were relatively less likely to develop a cold after exposure to a cold virus—an effect that interestingly was independent of negative emotional style, or other health-related variables like age, sex, and body mass (Cohen, Doyle, Turner, Alper, & Skoner, 2003). Other research showed that positive affect and other psychological resources were negatively related to declines

in T-cell counts, indicating (p. 125) stronger immunity, in people with HIV (Ickovics et al., 2006). Thus, happiness appears to predict stronger immune function, which is associated with a lower risk of becoming ill.

Another relevant line of research addresses the question of whether happiness measured at one point in time is related to how well a person copes with problems in his or her life at a later point. In this way, superior coping skills could also explain why happier people are healthier. For example, in women who were getting a biopsy for potential breast cancer, positive mood predicted so-called “engaged” coping (Chen et al., 1996). In another longitudinal investigation, positive affect, measured weekly, was associated with an effective type of coping called “active” coping in a sample of women with rheumatoid arthritis (Hamilton, Zautra, & Reich, 2005). Several studies have even found evidence for an “upward spiral” effect involving positive emotion and coping. Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) found that positive affect assessed at the outset of the study predicted effective coping and even more positive experiences later in the study. Corroborating these results, positive affect and positive coping were found to build on each other over the course of 2 months (Burns et al., 2008). Another study measured people's resilience over a 1-month period (Cohn et al., 2009). Positive emotions were found to predict increases in resilience and to mediate (i.e., explain) the relationship between initial and final resilience. Such studies provide evidence for an upward spiral, in which positive affect leads to effective coping, and coping helps bring about later positive experiences.

Experimental Research

Social relationships

Corroborating and extending the longitudinal data, experimental studies provide evidence for a causal relationship between happy mood and a variety of positive resources and outcomes. For example, in the domain of interpersonal relationships, people induced to feel happy tend to recall positive information about another person and are more apt to report having positive feelings toward a stranger than those induced to feel sad (Baron, 1987, 1993; Griffitt, 1970). People made to feel happy are also more outgoing and active. Participants induced into a positive mood have been found to be more sociable and to self-disclose more to strangers (Cunningham, 1988b; Isen, 1970). Also, when people are induced to feel happy, they report more interest in leisure activities (Cunningham, 1988a), and are more likely to acknowledge enjoying a boring task (Hirt, Melton, McDonald, Harackiewicz, 1996). Overall, people put in a good mood have more positive perceptions of others, are more sociable and active, and are more likely to enjoy their activities than those not in a good mood.

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Positive mood also appears to be beneficial for negotiation and conflict resolution—behaviors that are critical for the maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Studies have shown that people who are induced to experience positive affect prefer to resolve conflicts through collaboration rather than avoidance (Baron, Fortin, Frei, Hauver, & Shack, 1990), to make relatively more concessions during negotiations (Baron, 1990), and to be relatively more cooperative and less competitive in bargaining tasks (Forgas, 1998). Furthermore, when put in a positive mood, both individuals and groups have been found to be relatively (p. 126) more likely to reach the most optimal agreements and less likely to stop negotiation and use more aggressive strategies (Carnevale & Isen, 1986; Carnevale, 2008). Thus, research suggests that the experience of positive affect stimulates people to be relatively better able to resolve problems and to cooperate with their peers.

Prosocial behavior

People who are induced into positive moods are more likely to contribute to charity (Cunningham, Steinberg, & Grev, 1980; Isen, 1970) and to needy children (Rosenhan, Underwood, & Moore, 1974), and to give significantly more money when they do contribute, than those induced into negative moods (Isen, 1970). In general, a wealth of experimental research shows that those put in a happy mood are relatively more likely to engage in all kinds of helpful behaviors, such as donating blood (O'Malley & Andrews, 1983) and helping an experimenter with a boring task (Berkowitz, 1987). Indeed, an event as trivial as finding a dime can boost people's moods and stimulate them to assist a stranger who has dropped some papers (Cunningham et al., 1980). For example, in one study, researchers found that individuals induced into a positive mood were not only more likely to help, but also to help for a longer period of time, than a control group (Baron & Bronfen, 1994). Thus, good moods galvanize people to engage in relatively more prosocial behavior.

Creativity

Although longitudinal evidence is lacking in this area, experiments show that happy people tend to be relatively more creative. When laboratory participants are induced into a happy mood, they receive relatively higher scores on originality and flexibility (see Isen (1993) for a review). For example, people put in a good mood scored relatively higher on a creativity measure (Estrada, Isen, & Young, 1994) and showed relatively more variety-seeking behavior (Kahn & Isen, 1993). This may be because positive affect leads people to feel secure and thus to seek novel experiences and variety (Isen, 1993; cf. Hill & Buss, 2008). Dreisbach and Goschke (2004) found that participants put in a positive mood, rather than a negative or neutral mood, had greater cognitive flexibility, but also had increased distractibility. A review of creativity experiments concluded that induced

positive affect produces more creativity than neutral affect, but, interestingly, not more than negative affect (Baas, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008).

Health

Experimental studies also reveal that being in a positive mood—even temporarily—has health benefits. For example, individuals induced into a happy mood have relatively higher pain thresholds (Alden, Dale, & DeGood, 2001; Cogan, Cogan, Waltz, & McCue, 1987) and lower blood pressure reactivity in response to stress (Smith, Ruiz, & Uchino, 2004). In another study, participants were asked to imagine that they had kidney cancer and then were induced into a positive or negative mood. Relative to those in negative moods, those in positive moods reported greater optimism about their prognosis and ability to deal with the disease, as well as a stronger intent to overcome the illness and follow the treatment protocol (p. 127) (Schuettler & Kiviniemi, 2006). Another study found that, among participants low in trait seriousness, those induced into a positive mood felt less stressed, reported better physical health, and had lower blood pressure than those who had not received the intervention (Papousek & Schultze, 2008). Thus, being happy appears not only to make people feel healthier, but prompts them to react to stress in more adaptive ways.

Positive mood is also related to healthy behavior, although few studies have been conducted to examine this relationship. Tice and colleagues, for example, have discovered the role of positive emotion in counteracting so-called ego depletion, which occurs when people experience a loss of cognitive (i.e., thinking) capacity when trying to control their behavior (Tice, Baumeister, Schmeichel, & Muraven, 2007). For example, turning down an appetizing snack becomes more difficult the longer one is exposed to it and the more one is distracted by a demanding task. However, when participants are induced into a positive mood after an ego depletion task, they perform as well as non-depleted participants and significantly better than those who do not receive the positive mood induction (Tice et al., 2007; Tice & Wallace, 2000). So, positive affect may boost our cognitive resources after they have been depleted, which increases our capacity to resist behaviors that hold immediate gratification but long-term health costs, like excessive eating, drinking, and smoking.

Finally, research shows that immune functioning can be improved by positive mood. For example, a small sample of actors was instructed to reflect on certain scenarios, in order to induce different emotions. Those put in a good mood showed stronger immune function than those in a neutral mood (Futterman, Kemeny, Shapiro, & Fahey, 1994). Also, participants who watched an amusing video had increased immune function afterward (Dillon, Minchoff, & Baker, 1985; Lefcourt, Davidson-Katz, & Kueneman, 1990; McClelland & Cherriff, 1997; however, see Martin (2002) for a critique of these data). In other words, a good mood strengthens people's immune systems—at least temporarily—which is associated with better health.

Conclusions

Taken together, the empirical evidence suggests that happiness plays a causal role in the attainment of success, as well as in the practice of behaviors related to success. This occurs, we argue, through the frequent experience of positive affect, which makes happy individuals more likely to approach people and situations, and helps build their intellectual, social, physical, and psychological resources and skills (Carver, 2003; Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Fredrickson, 2001; Lyubomirsky, 2001). Positive emotions also signal that things are going well, which allows people to feel more safe and secure as they approach others and novel situations, thus affording them the opportunity to be more creative, productive, sociable, and active, as well as to engage in prosocial and healthful behaviors.

The evidence reviewed in this chapter may easily give rise to the conclusion that the happier a person is, the better. However, we would caution readers not to draw such a broad generalization. Indeed, Oishi, Diener, and Lucas (2007) suggest that the optimal level of well-being depends on the domain. Their findings reveal that it is moderately happy people—not extremely happy ones—who have the highest levels of income, education, and political participation. A possible explanation is that the happiest individuals have less (p. 128) motivation than moderately happy ones to improve their current standing in those domains. However, Oishi and colleagues also find that when it comes to relationships, it is best to be in the happiest group (i.e., a 9 or 10 on a 10-point scale). If a person is not completely satisfied with a relationship, he or she might try to change something, perhaps by seeking other partners or ending the relationship, which would obviously harm it. If a person is very highly satisfied, in contrast, he or she might idealize their partner in ways that could trigger self-fulfilling prophecies and upward spirals (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). Thus, happiness, in general, appears to be valuable for achieving a range of successful outcomes, but the optimal level of happiness may depend on the particular domain.

Our analysis further calls into question whether there exist any situations in which it might be beneficial to be unhappy or to experience particular negative emotions. For example, the experience of mild discontent may serve a critical function for activists who are protesting against the status quo. When it comes to short-term outcomes, negative emotions may also be valuable for specific circumstances. In certain social situations, such as a funeral or a vigil, or when a colleague has received news of loss or failure, displays of positive affect may be judged negatively by others. Thus, we are certainly not suggesting that only happy people can be successful. In fact, we would argue that chronic, or inflexible, happiness is not ideal. There is value to negative emotions (Clore, 1994), and happy, well-adjusted people tend to experience a mix of both positive and negative affect (Diener & Seligman, 2002). In sum, any particular emotion may be beneficial in a narrow set of circumstances, but, as we have shown here, positive emotions appear to be beneficial in a wide variety of circumstances and life domains.

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