

# L

## Lyubomirsky, Sonja



Sonja Lyubomirsky  
Department of Psychology, University of  
California, Riverside, Riverside, CA, USA

### Early Life and Educational Background

Sonja Lyubomirsky was born on December 14, 1966 in Moscow, USSR. At age 9, she immigrated to the USA with her parents and younger brother, living first in Brookline, MA, and then settling in Bethesda, MD. With the help of generous financial aid, she attended the Maret School in Washington D.C. from fifth to twelfth grade and then Harvard University, where she received her A.B., *summa cum laude*, in Psychology in 1989. At Harvard, she worked with Paul Andreassen and completed a Thomas Hoopes Prize-winning Honors Thesis exploring causal syllogisms.

Sonja Lyubomirsky's Ph.D. in social psychology was completed at Stanford University under the supervision of two fantastic mentors, Lee Ross and Susan Nolen-Hoeksema. Lee encouraged her to explore why some people are happier than others – specifically, the cognitive, affective, and motivational processes that distinguish happy and unhappy individuals. Her dissertation studies showed that happy people are less sensitive to social comparisons than their less happy peers. With Susan, she undertook the study of how people respond to the experience of dysphoria,

focusing in particular on the adverse consequences of self-focused rumination.

### Professional Career

In 1994, upon completing her doctorate, Sonja Lyubomirsky was hired as an assistant professor at the Department of Psychology at the University of California, Riverside, where she has remained for her entire career. She served as Graduate Advisor for 13 years and Associate Editor of the *Journal of Positive Psychology* for 4 years. She is currently Full Professor and Vice Chair of her department. Her teaching and mentoring of students have been recognized with two Faculty of the Year awards and a Faculty Mentor of the Year award. At this writing, Lyubomirsky's research has been cited more than 36,000 times, with her 2005 *Psychological Bulletin* paper on the benefits of happiness (with Laura King and Ed Diener) cited over 5,600 times. She has been honored with the Carol and Ed Diener Award for Outstanding Mid-Career Contributions in Personality Psychology, the UC Riverside Distinguished Research Lecturer Award, a Templeton Positive Psychology Prize, and multiple grants, including from the John Templeton Foundation and the National Institute of Mental Health.

Lyubomirsky has sought to disseminate her work in two trade books, which have been published in 34 countries. The best-selling *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to*

*Getting the Life You Want* (2008, Penguin Press) describes twelve empirically supported strategies to improve happiness. Her second book, *The Myths of Happiness: What Should Make You Happy, But Doesn't, What Shouldn't Make You Happy, But Does* (2013, Penguin Press), debunks common misconceptions about which life changes (such as getting married or getting older) will make us truly miserable or truly happy. Her work regularly appears in the national and international media, and she lectures frequently and widely around the world. She lives in Santa Monica, CA, with her husband, a federal attorney, and four kids.

## Research Interests

Sonja Lyubomirsky's research is in the area of well-being science, a field focused on studying the factors that lead people to flourish. She has spent her career developing a theoretically rich and empirically rigorous science of happiness. Her research addresses several interrelated questions: (1) What are the determinants and benefits of happiness?; (2) How does adaptation to positive experiences serve as an obstacle to happiness?; (3) How is the pursuit of happiness impacted by factors like parenthood, culture, clinical status, and age?; and (4) How can people become happier? To address the last question, her laboratory is currently testing predictions from her positive activity model, which describes how and why simple positive activities like expressing gratitude and doing acts of kindness are able to boost (and sometimes undermine) well-being. She is also exploring the effects of restricting digital media use on well-being and the mechanisms by which social and prosocial interactions can foster connections that improve happiness and health.

## Selected Bibliography

- Boehm, J. K., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). Does happiness lead to career success. *Journal of Career Assessment, 16*, 101–116.
- Layous, K., Nelson, S. K., Oberle, E., Schonert-Reichl, K., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2012). Kindness counts: Prompting prosocial behavior in preadolescents boosts peer acceptance and well-being. *PLoS One, 7*, e51380.
- Layous, K., Sweeny, K., Armenta, C. N., Na, S., Choi, I., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2017). The proximal experience of gratitude. *PLoS One, 12*(7), e0179123.
- Lyubomirsky, S. (2001). Why are some people happier than others?: The role of cognitive and motivational processes in well-being. *American Psychologist, 56*, 239–249.
- Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Lyubomirsky, S. (2011). Hedonic adaptation to positive and negative experiences. In S. Folkman (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of stress, health, and coping* (pp. 200–224). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lyubomirsky, S., & Layous, K. (2013). How do simple positive activities increase well-being? *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 22*, 57–62.
- Lyubomirsky, S., & Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (1995). Effects of self-focused rumination on negative thinking and interpersonal problem solving. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*, 176–190.
- Lyubomirsky, S., King, L. A., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin, 131*, 803–855.
- Nelson, S. K., Kushlev, K., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2014). The pains and pleasures of parenting: When, why, and how is parenthood associated with more or less well-being? *Psychological Bulletin, 140*, 846–895.
- Nelson-Coffey, S. K., Fritz, M. M., Lyubomirsky, S., & Cole, S. (2017). Kindness in the blood: A randomized controlled trial of the gene regulatory impact of prosocial behavior. *Psychoneuroendocrinology, 81*, 8–13.
- Nolen-Hoeksema, S., Wisco, B. E., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). Rethinking rumination. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 3*, 400–424.
- Sin, N. L., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2009). Enhancing well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms with positive psychology interventions: A practice-friendly meta-analysis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology: In Session, 65*, 467–487.