

THE HOW
OF
HAPPINESS



A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH
TO GETTING THE LIFE YOU WANT
SONJA LYUBOMIRSKY

The How, What, When, and Why of Happiness

loo-boh-MERE-ski

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225 STUDIES ON THE BENEFITS OF HAPPINESS:

Happy people...

- Are more productive at work and more creative
- Make more money and have superior jobs
- Are better leaders and negotiators
- Are more likely to marry and to have fulfilling marriages, and less likely to divorce
- Have more friends and social support
- Have stronger immune systems, are physically healthier, and even live longer
- Are more helpful and philanthropic
- Cope better with stress and trauma

FROM: Lyubomirsky, S., King, L. A., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, 131, 803-855. © 2008. Sonja Lyubomirsky, Ph.D. All rights reserved.

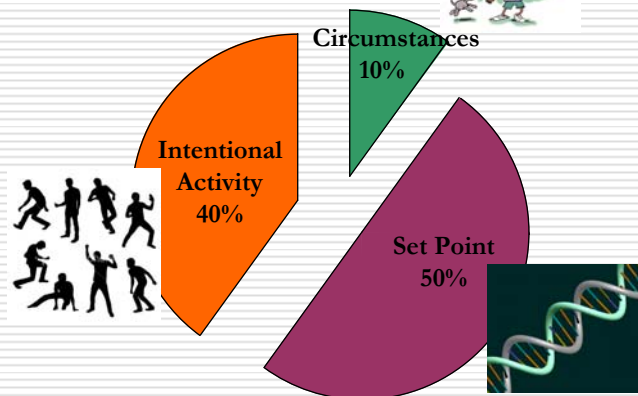


THREE REASONS TO BE PESSIMISTIC

- We're all born with a genetically-determined "set point" for happiness
- Happiness is a life-long trait
- "Hedonic adaptation": We adapt to all things positive

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WHAT DETERMINES HAPPINESS?



FROM: Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology, 9*, 111-131.
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RESEARCH SHOWS THAT HAPPY PEOPLE:

- Nurture and enjoy their social relationships
- Are comfortable expressing gratitude
- Are often the first to help others
- Practice optimism about the future
- Savor pleasures and live in the present moment
- Make physical activity a habit
- Are often spiritual or religious
- Are deeply committed to meaningful goals

FROM: Argyle, (1999); Diener et al. (1999); Diener & Lucas (1999); Lyubomirsky (2001); Myers (2000)

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ADVANTAGES OF ACTIVITY

- **Variety**: You can vary it
- **Timing**: You can time it
- **Surprise**: You can generate surprises
- **Attention**: You can try to hold it in your mind and appreciate it

FROM: Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). Surmounting a critical barrier to becoming happier: Hedonic adaptation to positive experience. To appear in S. Folkman (Ed.), *Handbook on stress, coping, and health*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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HAPPINESS INTERVENTIONS WE HAVE CONDUCTED:

Over the course of 2-3 months, participants are asked to do the following on a regular basis:

- **Commit acts of kindness**
- **Count their blessings**
- **Write gratitude letters**
- **Visualize their best possible future**
- **Savor and replay happy days**

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THREE HAPPINESS INTERVENTIONS

- **Study 1: Committing Acts of Kindness**
- **Study 2: Expressing Gratitude and Optimism**
- **Study 3: Expressing Gratitude and Optimism Across Cultures**

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Kind Acts...

- Help us see others and our community more charitably
- Prompt us to feel better off by comparison
- Relieve distress or guilt over others' misfortune
- Give us a sense of interdependence and cooperation
- Lead us to see ourselves as generous, and to feel confident, competent, in control, and optimistic about our ability to help
- Lead others to like us more and help us make new friends
- Increase the chance that others will appreciate us and reciprocate in our times of need

“Kindness in words creates confidence. Kindness in thinking creates profundness. Kindness in giving creates love.” --Lao-tzu 老子

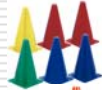
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Study 2: "Acts of Kindness"

- Participants were instructed to do 3 or 9 acts of kindness per week for a period of 10 weeks

- Three groups:



High variety (do any acts out of an original list of 15) ($n = 70$)



Low variety (choose 3 acts out of a list of 15 and do them over and over again) ($n = 23$)



Control (list 3 or 9 events each week) ($n = 94$)



Well-Being Composite

- **Subjective Happiness Scale** (4 items; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999)
- **Global Happiness Item** (1 item; Bradburn, 1969)
- **Delighted-Terrible Scale** (1 item; Andrews & Withey, 1976)
- **Satisfaction With Life Scale** (5 items; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985)
- **PANAS** (20 items; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988)

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Instructions:

We would like you to list 15 acts of kindness that you would like to do more in the future. Acts of kindness are acts or behaviors that are not normally expected of you in your daily life, and involve some sacrifice by you. Only write down acts of kindness that are easily repeatable on a daily basis. For example, if you live with someone, the act of kindness could be doing a chore that you don't usually do. If you go to a coffee shop or stand in a line every day, the act could be letting one person go ahead of you in line. If you drive every day, the act of kindness could be letting a car enter your lane or go ahead of you at a stop sign, etc. After you make your list, we ask you to choose 3 [9] of these acts and do them during the upcoming week.

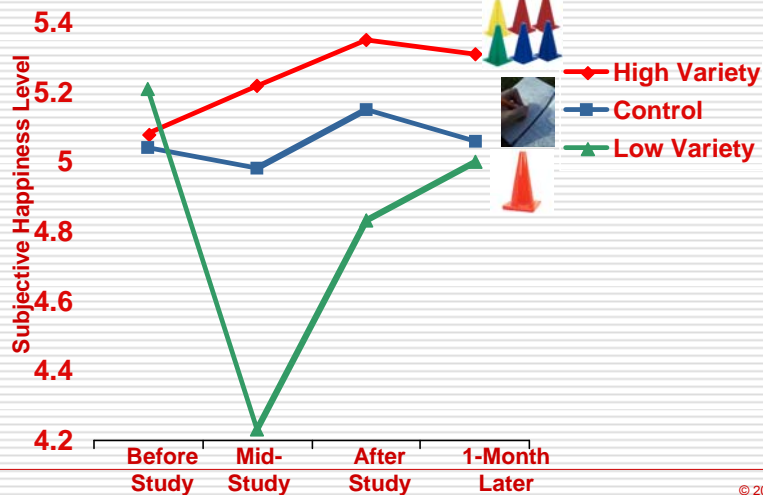
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Changes in Subjective Happiness



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THREE HAPPINESS INTERVENTIONS

- **Study 1: Committing Acts of Kindness**
- **Study 2: Expressing Gratitude and Optimism**
- **Study 3: Expressing Gratitude and Optimism Across Cultures**

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Study 2: "Gratitude and Optimism"

- Participants were instructed to write for 15 min per week over the course of 8 weeks
- Conditions:
 -  **Expressing Optimism:** Write about your best possible future selves ($n = 112$)
 -  **Expressing Gratitude:** Write letters of gratitude ($n = 108$)
 -  **Control:** List what you have done over the past 7 days ($n = 110$)

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OPTIMISM CONDITION Instructions



Please take a moment to think about your romantic life in the future (say in 10 years). Imagine that everything has gone as well as it possibly could for you. You have an amazing partner or wife/husband and everyone is impressed by the relationship you share. Think of this as the realization of all your hopes and expectations regarding a significant other. Now, for the next 15 min, write about what you imagined.

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GRATITUDE CONDITION Instructions



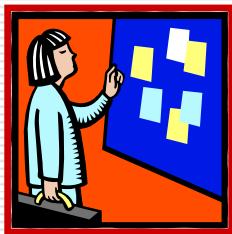
Please take moment to think back over the past several years of your life and remember an instance when someone did something for you for which you are extremely grateful. For example, think of the people – parents, relatives, friends, teachers, coaches, teammates, employers, and so on – who have been especially kind to you but have never heard you express your gratitude. Although you should try to write your letter of gratitude to a new person each week; if you prefer, you can write another letter to the same person you wrote to previously. Now for the next 15 min, write a letter to one of these individuals.

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Testing the Role of Motivation

- Participants recruited into a “high motivation” vs. “low motivation” group



“Do you want to become happier? Sign up here to learn more...”

“This study is about practicing cognitive exercises. Sign up here to learn more...”

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2X3 Design



Optimism



Gratitude



Control



Motivated



Non-Motivated

	<i>n</i> = 79	<i>n</i> = 77	<i>n</i> = 75
	<i>n</i> = 33	<i>n</i> = 31	<i>n</i> = 35

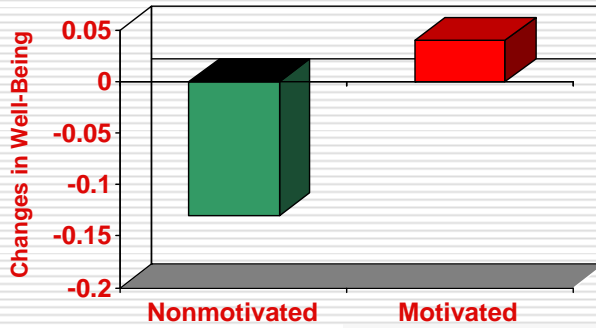
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**Changes in Well-Being
Immediately After the Intervention**



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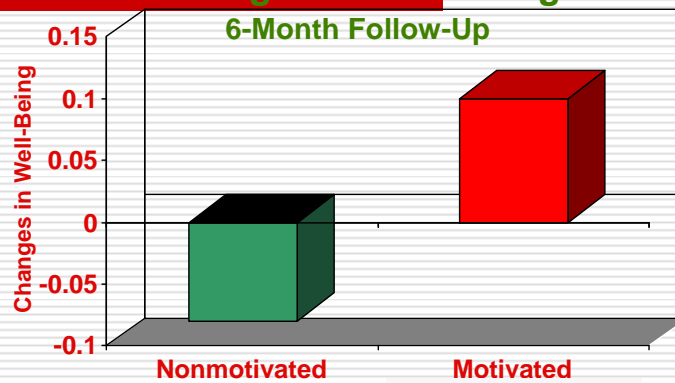
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Changes in Well-Being

6-Month Follow-Up



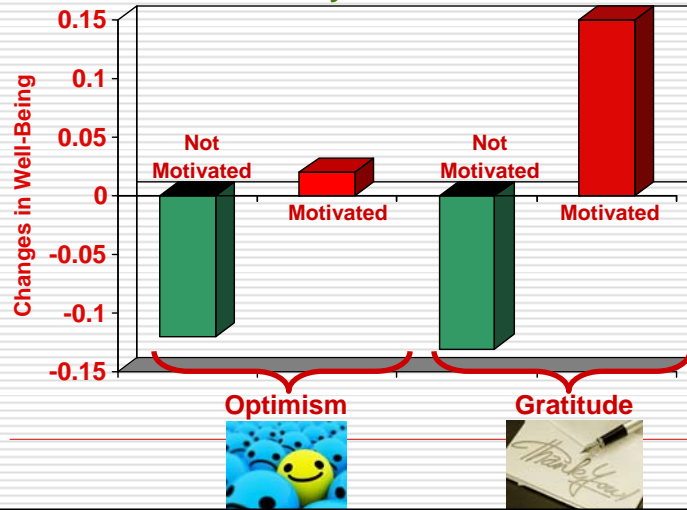
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**Changes in Well-Being
Immediately After the Intervention**



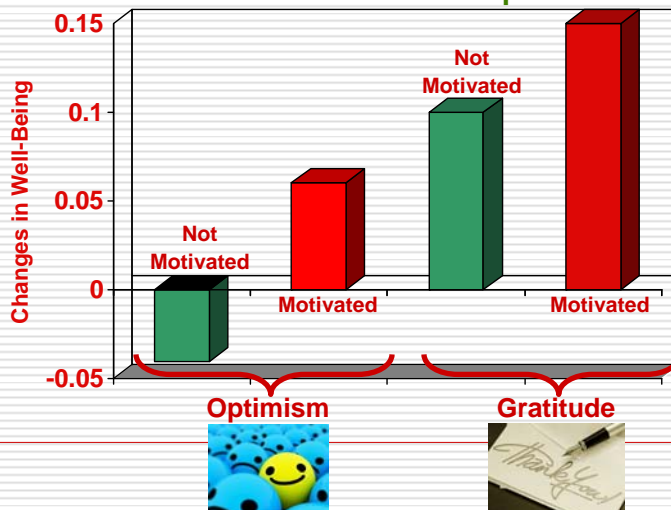
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**Changes in Well-Being
6-Month Follow-Up**



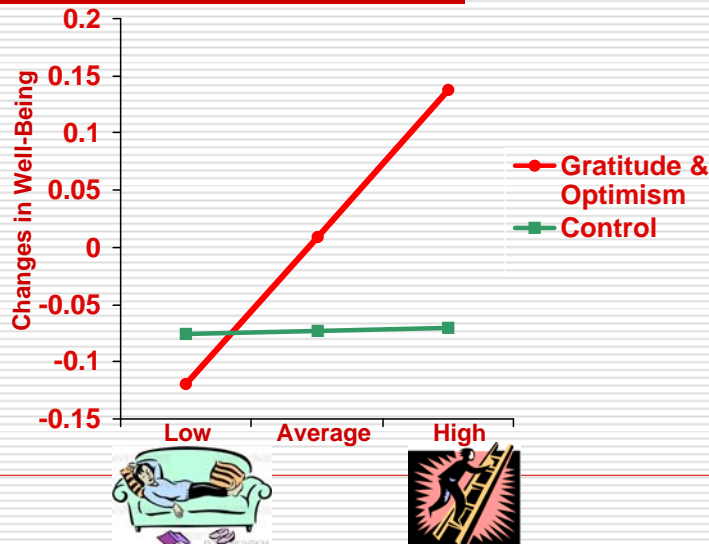
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Effort as Moderator



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THREE HAPPINESS-ENHANCING INTERVENTIONS

- **Study 1: Committing Acts of Kindness**
- **Study 2: Practicing Gratitude and Optimism**
- **Study 3: Practicing Gratitude and Optimism Across Cultures**

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Study 3: "Gratitude and Optimism Across Cultures"

- Participants were instructed to write for 10 min per week over the course of 6 weeks
- Conditions:
 -  **Expressing Optimism:** Write about your best possible future selves ($n = 78$)
 -  **Expressing Gratitude:** Write letters of gratitude ($n = 80$)
 -  **Control:** List what you have done over the past 7 days ($n = 81$)

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Again a 2 X 3 Design



Optimism



Gratitude



Control



Anglo-
Americans

$n = 35$

$n = 41$

$n = 40$



Asian-
Americans

$n = 42$

$n = 39$

$n = 41$

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Demographics of Our Community Sample

% Female	52%
Age Range	20 to 71
Mean Age	35.2
% Married	48%
% College	56%

**81% Asian-Americans
foreign born:**

China	42%
Vietnam	14%
Taiwan	14%
S. Korea	11%
Other	19%

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Changes in Well-Being 1-Month Follow-Up



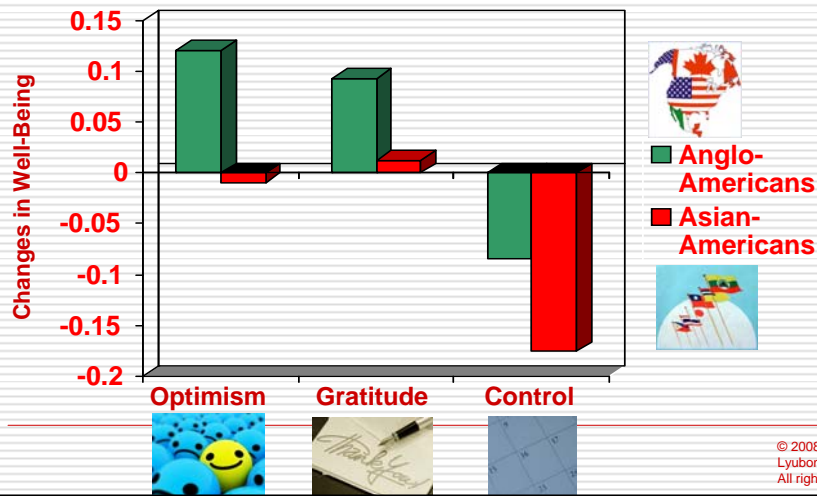
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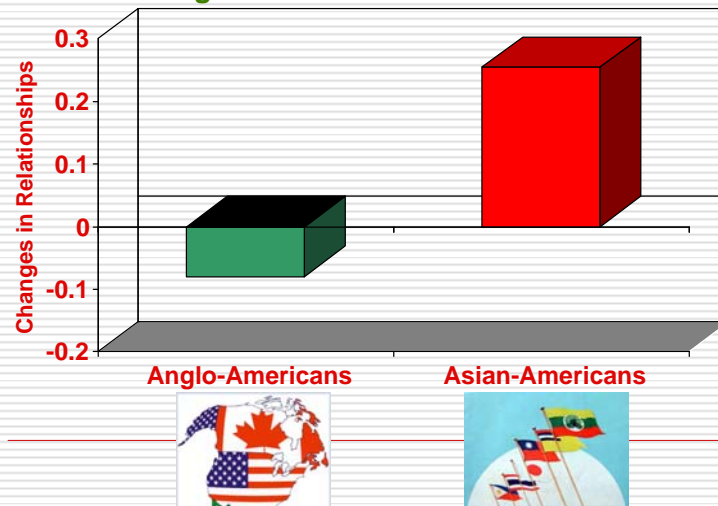
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**Changes in Relationships
During the Second Half of the Intervention**

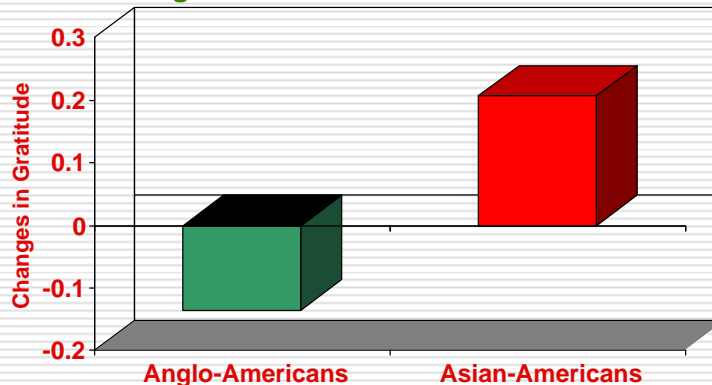


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Changes in Gratitude

During the Second Half of the Intervention



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FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

- **More happiness interventions**
 - Do expectations matter?
 - Do fit, timing, and variety matter?
 - Does social support matter?
 - Do habits matter?
 - *Why do the strategies work?*
- **Can we alleviate depressive symptoms?**

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.....
*This much
happiness
—up to 40%—
is within
your power
to change*
.....



Sonja Lyubomirsky

"A guide to sustaining your newfound contentment."—PSYCHOLOGY TODAY

**“Happiness
depends upon
ourselves.”
— Aristotle**

Website:

www.thehowofhappiness.com

Blog:

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