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Creating happiness - can you do it alone?

This wiki page will address the social and solitary elements of the pursuit of happiness. Starting with a cultural, philosophical and religious perspective, then narrowing down to selected intervention techniques, and finally accounting for the role of individual differences, we investigate the creation of happiness, alone or with others.



SOLO VS SOCIAL



General Introduction

Happiness research has become increasingly popular within the scientific community with a wealth of research dedicated to studying the phenomenon. There is no clear-cut, definitive agreement among researchers on what happiness actually is, although attempts have been made to articulate an explanation. Many of these studies adopt a definition of happiness which incorporates meaning, self-actualization and personal growth in individual terms, alongside a dedication to goals and values shared at the social level (Fave, Brdar, Freire, Vella-Brodrick & Wissing, 2011). As with the majority of psychological phenomenon, however, there are potentially influential variables to consider. These pertain to differences on both the cultural and individual level.

These differences may influence not only perspectives on pursuing happiness but also the solitary or social nature of the practices adopted in order to enhance well-being. The literature features a wealth of research regarding exercises aimed at increasing positive emotions. It is important to consider the efficacy of these activities as they can have potentially beneficial effects on individuals and could act as a buffer to negative, damaging emotions. In assessing

how efficient happiness enhancing tasks are, it is important to remember that variation can occur at the individual level as well as the cultural. Addressing this aspect is important, as variables within the domain of individual differences have the potential to impact on the outcome of these well-being increasing activities - outcomes may vary significantly from one person to the next. Research into the influence of these variables may help individuals assess the most suitable activity for them to adopt in order to meet their personal needs, as well as the general nature of activities (social or solo) which they will respond to best.

Key Readings:

- **Cultural variation:** **Selin, H., & Davey, G. (Eds.). (2012). *Happiness across cultures*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer (<http://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-94-007-2700-7.pdf>) (downloadable from Springer via the University Library)** - Although longer than a typical journal article, the book covers a diverse array of cultural perspectives and is efficient in highlighting how culture can influence thought and behaviour of individuals. Individual chapters allow for preferential selection of cultures of interest so readers need not read the entire book but rather choose a selection and still come away with a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which culture can influence conceptions of happiness and, where appropriate, subsequent attainment.
- **Interventions:** **Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). *Positive psychology progress: empirical validation of interventions*. *American psychologist*, 60(5), 410 (<http://dev.rickhanson.net/wp-content/files/papers/PosPsyProgress.pdf>)** - A big online study using both the “Gratitude visit” and “Three good things in life”, along with “You at your best”, “Identifying signature strengths, use as often as you can” and “Identifying signature strengths and using them in a new way”.
- **Individual differences:** **Schueller, S. M. (2012). *Personality Fit and Positive Interventions: Extraverted and Introverted Individuals Benefit from Different Happiness Increasing Strategies*. *Psychology*, 3(12A), 1166-1173. (<http://www.scirp.org/journal/PaperDownload.aspx?paperID=26228>)** - This paper examines the efficacy of different positive psychology interventions (PPIs) for extraverted/introverted individuals. Study 1 investigates which of 5 PPIs yield the largest increase in happiness for the different groups, while study 2 explores if the differential benefit of one PPI (the gratitude visit) is related to its mode of delivery (in person, over the phone, or via mail). This is a good read because it covers the efficacy of 5 different PPIs while accounting for individual differences.

Cultural variation

Should Happiness Be Pursued At All?

The majority of Western happiness research makes the assumption that happiness is a valuable goal which individuals wish to actively pursue. However, some individuals hold negative views of happiness and positive emotions, treating them with caution or fear (Joshanloo et al., 2014). This perceived fear of happiness stems from the belief that it can result in negative consequences (Joshanloo, 2013). Hinks and Davies (2012, p.276) found that members of a Malawi community were suspicious of people who had achieved success. The reason for this was found to be down to the cultural belief that success and happiness may have been obtained via unjust means, such as witchcraft. Therefore, **individuals may be discouraged from actively pursuing increased well-being** for fear that they will be attached with such a taboo label, most likely leading to discriminatory treatment as a consequence.

Another aspect highlighted by Miyamoto and Ma (2011) is that cultural paradigms shape how emotion is regulated and experienced. American participants were found to be more inclined to savour positive emotions than Japanese participants. This difference suggests the **possibility that different cultures may place different levels of value on certain emotions**. Latin-American cultures (e.g. Brazil) place significant value on personal happiness (Selin & Davey, 2012, p.7). The **strength of this value placed on happiness may be a contributing factor in an individual's decision as to whether to pursue happiness at all** and thus may provide at least part of the explanation for this element of cultural variation.

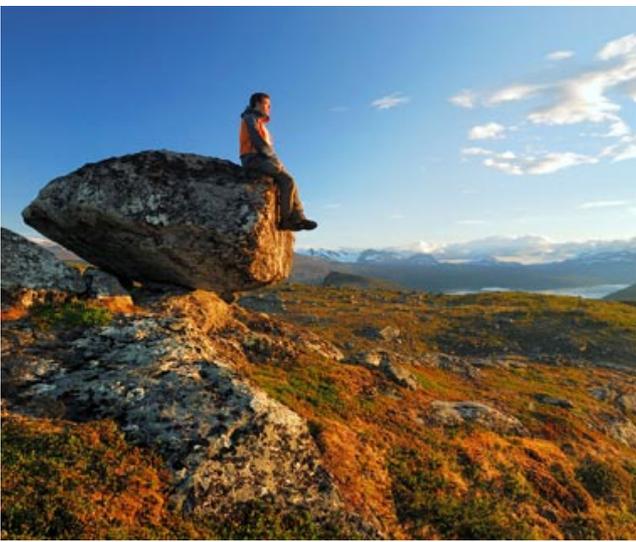
Individualist and Collectivist



The emphasis on the differentiation between Individualist and Collectivist cultures within the field of Psychology is such that it almost becomes second nature to address. As such, it would be redundant to exclude this aspect from the investigation into the nature of the practices individuals adopt in order to increase well-being. **Collectivist** cultures are said to feature **interdependent individuals**, with the concept of the 'self' being part of a wider social relationship and defined in part by that relationship (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Thus, it is expected that individuals within these cultures **may be more inclined to undertake social practices in increasing well-being**, as their very sense of self is so heavily rooted within their wider social environment. Markus and Kitayama (1991) illustrate people within **individualist** cultures as **self-sufficient and self-centred** individuals. As such, individuals within cultures of this nature **may be expected to hold a preference for social practices in happiness-seeking**.

Kurman (2003) found a significant, positive relationship between self-enhancement and self-esteem, alongside subjective well-being (SWB). Interestingly, results indicated that restrictions at a cultural level, rather than a lack of self-enhancement motivation, were responsible for low levels of self-enhancement found in certain collectivist cultures. This suggests that **happiness may still be valued at a personal level but is inhibited by the priority placed on the values of the collective**.

Subsequent research has found that people in **collectivist and harmony-oriented cultures**, such as East Asian, **tend more frequently to suppress expressions of positive emotions than those in individualist cultures** (Matsumoto et al., 2008). Like the research mentioned above, this suggests the possibility that happiness may not be pursued at all within collectivist cultures. However, if they do, it would not be futile to assume that they would **perhaps seek out solo activities rather than social**: this concealment would allow for the pursuit of well-being without the potential negative consequences from being discovered going against cultural norms. Within **Ifaluk culture** (Micronesia), **happiness is discouraged** as it is deemed **too individualistic** for the communal good of the tribe (Lutz, 1987, p.302). This negative component provides support for the idea that if happiness is actively pursued at all, **it may be done as a solo exercise so as to avoid peer judgement**.



What should be noted is that, whilst the assumptions and suggestions above may be made based on the existing empirical research on culture and well-being, there is a significant lack of empirical research to specify the nature of methods actually adopted by individuals relative to various cultures.

Religion

In studying the impact of religion on well-being, it is important to note that assumptions may be made based on research findings but a lack of empirical investigation regarding these assumptions means that scientifically sound conclusions cannot be drawn from them.

The question of faith may be a personal one for many, yet it has also been argued as highly influenced by culture (Safdar, Lewis, Greenglass & Daneshpour, 2009). Joshanloo (2013) lends further support to this cultural religion argument, highlighting that there are significant similarities, as well as differences, between Western and Islamic understandings of happiness. McCullough & Willoughby (2009) illustrate religion as a phenomenon carrying powerful influence over behaviour, either at the individual or societal level. The claim is that it had the capability to direct human effort and shape subsequent outcomes. Past research has made **positive associations between religion and the subjective sense of well-being of individuals**. For example, Hackney and Saunders (2003) concluded that, on average, people who considered themselves religious reported higher levels of SWB. This was supported by Roemer (2010) in looking at life satisfaction and happiness within a Japanese sample, and further supported by small, positive correlations between religiosity and subjective well-being found among individuals by Diener, Tay & Myers (2011).

Religion as a coping mechanism

Diener, Tay and Myers (2011) concluded that people living in areas with predominantly arduous life circumstances were significantly more likely to be religious, along with the following points:

- In non-religious societies with relatively favourable circumstances, people seem to be more able to freely attain a satisfying life without an accompanying formal religion
- The relationship between religiosity and well-being is mediated by life circumstances (i.e. difficult vs. benign)

Research has also drawn conclusions regarding relationships between **religiosity of society of a given culture, as a whole, and life satisfaction**. Lun & Bond (2013) found religiosity of a society to be a moderating factor in individuals' attitudes towards religion (to what extent God is significant within their own life) and their life satisfaction. They highlight that much of the research within the literature shows a **positive link between religiosity and life satisfaction**, but their findings suggest that the **power of this association varies relative to culture**.

One possible explanation is that religiosity has been associated with social support, respect and purpose in life (Diener, Tay & Myers, 2011). **Religion may then perhaps itself be seen as a social exercise** of some form, just on a more **collective level**. Again, the collectivist/individualist divide may come into play here so **religion as a social**

exercise may be dependent on the cultural context surrounding it.



Religion as a SOCIAL Exercise

Ysseldyk, Matheson & Anisman (2010) offer the proposal that **identifying with a specific faith** (or perhaps even *identifying with the concept of faith in general*) provides a “sacred” worldview for individuals and an “**eternal**” **group membership**, stronger than association with any other social group. Depending on the religion and the practices of worship they adopt (e.g. prayer), the actual **method** itself can be could be characteristically **solo**, the broader action of **following the religion** may be seen as a **social** exercise due to the idea of belonging to a **wider social group**.

Religion as a SOLO exercise

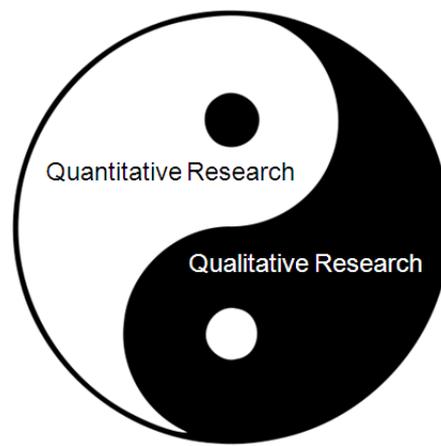
Loewenthal, Cinnirella, Evdoka & Murphy (2001) found that followers of Islam within the UK were more likely than Jewish and Christian respondents to say that they would use religious coping behaviour. It was also found that they were less likely to say that they’d seek social support or professional help for depression. Due to the **proposed lack of support for social expression**, it may be that individuals within the Muslim community would pursue **religious activity as a solo practice rather than social**.

Within Buddhist faith, stress is an example of suffering, something which followers are encouraged to eliminate in order to reach enlightenment (Tyson & Pongruengphant, 2007). One method used to help people do so is **Meditation**. Not only is it believed to act on diminishing stress, it is also thought to buffer against the harmful effects carried by stress. Hence it may be seen as both a **treatment and a preventative measure**. This idea is supported by Wayment, Wiist, Sullivan and Warren (2011), highlighting that individuals who practice meditation regularly are more likely to be able to focus themselves within the moment and approach life without a judgemental attitude.

What should be noted about much of the research regarding religion and well-being is that much of the evidence and subsequent conclusions are based purely on correlational findings. Therefore, little in the way of definitive causal links has been established and causal conclusions drawn from such may not necessarily be entirely valid. The need for further empirical research is required in order to validate these relationships appropriately, factoring in relevant contributory variables to account for significant differentiation, with particular reference to culture.

One final note comes courtesy of Roemer (2010), who noted that a relatively recent growth in publications pertaining to subjective well-being is indicative of an increased acknowledgement that **research on this subject needs to incorporate personal accounts alongside subjective measures**. Individuals are exactly that, so experience is completely subjective. Perhaps an increase in research taking a qualitative approach would aid in preventing individuals from simply becoming a number when it comes to well-being research.





Conclusion

Research suggests that cultural variations exist relative to the value placed on certain emotions and perceptions of the pursuit of happiness. Within the cultural context, evidence supports the idea that religion and well-being are connected by a positive relationship. Further, it may be argued that religion constitutes a social exercise with positive effects on well-being, whilst the practices adopted under that religion are solo in nature. Further research is required to ascertain whether intuitive assumptions regarding the potential influence of culture and religion on the nature of well-being practices adopted (Social or Solo) are supported empirically.

Interventions

This segment follows on the solo vs. social theme, but narrows it down to the solitary and social components of a selected set of interventions used to promote well-being within positive psychology. These nuances are uncovered, compared and contrasted in the context of expressing gratitude, exploring your strengths and promoting optimism, in an attempt to identify if the solo or social direction is more effective.

All interventions mentioned are available at the following web-page, if you would like to try one!

<http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/Default.aspx>
(<http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/Default.aspx>)

Gratitude interventions: towards other people, nature or God

Gratitude and wellbeing

The connection between gratitude and increase in wellbeing is quite well-established, as gratitude has been connected to **higher levels of pro-social behaviour, a greater sense of coherence, lower symptoms in PTSD sufferers, decreased materialism, lower depression, higher positive regard, more communal strengths and stronger social bonds** (as summarised in Lambert & Fincham, 2009).

The two components of Gratitude: beneficiary and generalised

Gratefulness is often treated as one phenomenon, when in fact it consists of **two distinct components**. The **social aspect** gratitude, where the **beneficiary** feels positively towards the **benefactor** due to a **benefit** (Roberts, 2004), is the kind of gratitude most commonly mentioned in a lay persons definition of gratitude. However, a significant majority also mention a **generalised gratitude**, wherein a person is grateful for **life** and **nature** and circumstances that **no one person** was cause of (Lambert & Fincham, 2009).

The two types of gratitude are also labelled **interpersonal** and **transpersonal** (Steindl-Rast, 2004). Important components in both are that the generous act or circumstance must be **recognised intellectually, acknowledged willingly and appreciated emotionally**.

Two may be one

However, in a definition by Adler and Fagely (2005), the two may come together. The definition that gratitude is acknowledging the meaning of something, an **event, object, person** or **behaviour**, that has been **received**, from a **person, deity, or any material or spiritual entity**. The important thing is that it is something **outside ourselves**, not if it is a person or not.

It is possible that being grateful for a sunny day would be generalised gratefulness to some, but to others be a social beneficiary appreciation, under the belief that **God** cares about each individual human and has the power to make it sunny. Indeed, Sansone and Sansone (2010) include both versions in their definition of gratitude, using them as **two expressions of the same phenomenon**.

Interventions: beneficiary versus generalised gratitude

In terms of **Psychological interventions**, gratitude interventions include **counting your blessings, letter writing** and the **related gratitude visits**. Counting your blessings exercises tend to become generalised gratitude, while letter writing and gratitude visits are inherently beneficiary, as they are aimed at a particular person.

In terms of lay people's **perception** of gratitude, the **beneficiary scenarios** were rated **higher** in gratitude and more fitting with the gratitude concept than the generalised scenarios in the Lambert & Fincham study (2009). In terms of **post-intervention efficiency**, **both** gratitude letters and counting you blessings have been found to increase various aspects of wellbeing, as follows:

Studies: Beneficiary Gratitude

Toepfer & Walker (2009): Short "**Letters of gratitude**" intervention improved overall gratitude and happiness, but not life satisfaction.

Toepfer, Cichy & Peters (2012): Same intervention also decreased depressive symptoms.

Seligman (2005): **Gratitude visit** was superior to all other interventions in the short term, but did not last for 6 months.

Sheldon & Lyubomirsky (2006): **Letters of gratitude** compared to writing about the best possible version of yourself produced increased good mood and positive affect to the same level.

Studies: Generalised gratitude

Emmons & McCullough (2003): **Counting your blessings** for 13 days lead to a higher increase in positive affect than counting your burdens. They were also more likely to report having helped someone with a personal problem or offered emotional support to another, suggesting prosocial motivation as a consequence of the gratitude induction.

Lambert, Fincham, Stillman & Dean (2009): **Recounting "what you have been given in life"** lead to mostly generalised responses, and was shown to lessen materialism and increase appreciation and life satisfaction.

Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson (2005): in an **online** study using both the "**Gratitude visit**" and "**Three good things in life**", along with "You at your best", "Identifying signature strengths, use as often as you can" and "Identifying signature strengths and using them in a new way", all interventions induced immediate improvement, but only the "Gratitude visit" and "Three good things on life" conditions were **still at a higher level 6 months** from the intervention.



Strengths: self- or other-evaluation

A common intervention used to increase self-esteem and consequently well-being involves identifying your strengths using **positively angled personality tests**.

Study: wellbeing and identifying your strengths

In the online study by Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson (2005), **identifying and using your strengths in a new way** lead to slightly more improvement than just identifying them and using them. This may be due to the fact that coming up with a new way to use a strength required more thought and reflection on said strength.

Study: Strengths identified by others

In a review by Roberts, Spreitzer, Dutton, Quinn, Heaphy, and Barker (2005) a route to discovering your strengths through **using people around you** is described. Within the context of finding your strengths in order to advance in the workplace, **wildly different results** were found in **self-evaluations** of strengths and **evaluations by other people**. The process of collection feedback from others is far more **demanding** than doing it yourself, but it may be worth it. In asking several individuals who know you well across different settings to report on your strengths, trends can be found, and though they may be similar to those found in the self-evaluation, they are likely to have **more weight** and **be more credible** to the individual. Several **additional positive effects** of this is mentioned, and claims are made that being positively evaluated by others in terms of your strengths is **more beneficial than evaluating yourself**.

Can we identify our own strengths? A speculative critique.

Becoming aware of your strengths has been shown to be beneficial. However, using self-evaluation to find your strengths is a rather **circular process**, as it can be quite straight forward what the questionnaires are trying to get at. **You will by definition not know anything you did not already know**, as all the test does is **repackage information** you already had. Further, the tests may even end up providing information that is **not true**, as they assume a high level of insightful self-knowledge. You may think you **incredibly humble**, while your friends know that you **brag about everything**. In addition, you may think that *any decent person* would come to the **aid of a friend**, while in fact you are especially helpful and **most people** would leave them to **fend for themselves**.

A study that compares the increase in well-being between information about strengths gathered from oneself and information gathered from others would inform this issue further. As would further investigation of the degree to which self-evaluated and other-evaluated strengths correlate.



Optimism

Optimism and well-being

Optimistic individuals, that is those with high trait optimism, have **higher positive affect, better well-being, more resilience, better health, and even recover from surgery faster**. It can be argued that these are things that would contribute to **happiness**. **Dispositional** optimism, differs from **manipulated** optimism. Dispositional optimism is

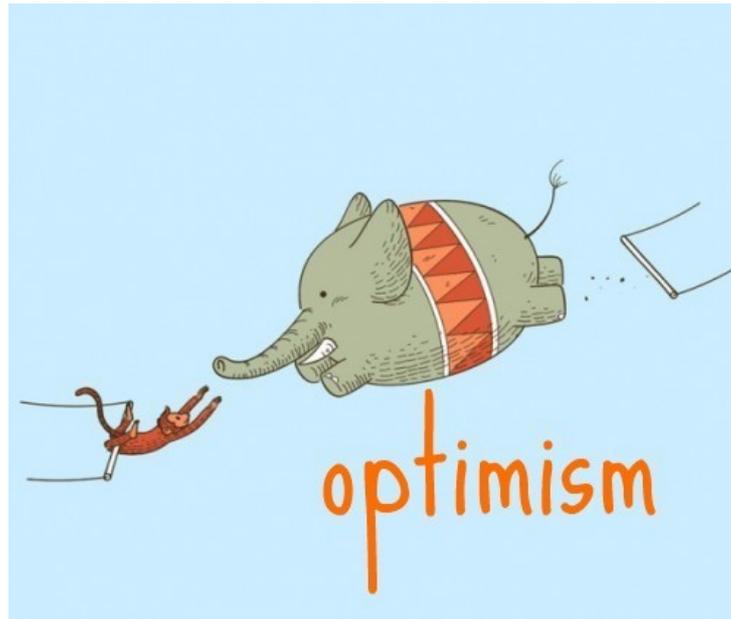
negatively correlated with neuroticism and positively with extroversion.(Peters, Flink, Boersma & Linton, 2010).

Optimism interventions

A common optimism intervention is to **write about your ideal self**, the best future version you can think of. This has been shown to also **change scores neuroticism and extroversion** according to their correlations with optimism, indicating that the intervention is a true optimism manipulator, not just a mood increaser.(Peters, Flink, Boersma & Linton, 2010)

Optimistic interaction: active-constructive responses

In addition to being positively set in your own mind research has shown that **sharing** a positive event **amplifies** the effects of it and **increases individual well-being**. On an interpersonal level, sharing good news increases **positive interaction** and **relationship satisfaction**. This is further amplified through **active-constructive responses**, a way of responding to positive news that includes happiness and questioning, inducing a kind of **positive rumination**. Doing this both **reinforces the memory** of the event and **increases how positively we evaluate it** later, turning a good memory into a great one (Gable, Reis, Impett & Asher, 2004).



Conclusion

In conclusion, it seems that **both** the solitary and the social components of happiness interventions are effective. In terms of **gratitude**, it is not entirely clear that there is a division, and both beneficiary and generalised expressions of gratitude increase well-being. The beneficiary type gratitude visit may have an edge over the others, possibly due to the emotional intensity of the experience. Finding your own **strengths** increases well-being, though seemingly not as much as having others find them for you. Though the social option is more demanding in terms of time and effort, it is more likely to reflect the individual's strengths in his or her social reality. **Optimism** as a personality-like property that can be changed through personal interventions, but optimism can also work in a social setting through active-constructive communication.

The fact that some of these sets are social and some individual does not make them mutually exclusive in any way. In answer to the title question: Creating happiness - can you do it alone?, the answer is probably yes. However, you will probably do better if you engage in both solitary and social type interventions. Which is best for any one person may depend on individual differences, something that will be dealt with next.

Individual differences

Several studies, a few of which will be discussed below, have found support for the effect of individual differences on happiness enhancing strategies. As with most everyday activities, personality plays an important role in the enjoyment and success gained from different positive psychology interventions (PPIs). If considering Costa and McCrae's (1992)

Big Five personality traits, one which would seem highly involved in preferences of social versus solo PPIs is **extraversion** (Schueller, 2012). The influence of this personality trait on PPI success has been widely investigated and will be discussed below. Other traits have also been investigated regarding their 'fit' with different PPIs, including **connectedness** (Shapira & Mongrain, 2010), **self-criticism** (Sergeant & Mongrain, 2011), **neediness** (Sergeant & Mongrain, 2011), and **anxious attachment style** (Mongrain et al., 2010). Outwith specific personality traits, proneness to **social anxiety** and **autistic traits** will also be discussed in relation to PPI fit.

Extraversion

Extraversion includes a number of characteristics, most of which refer to **sociability**. Specifically, social recognition, social closeness, social dominance, agreeableness, talkativeness, and exhibitionism are characteristics commonly identified throughout the extraversion literature (Depue & Collins, 1999). Individuals low in extraversion are referred to as introverts.

A substantial source of differentiation between the PPIs discussed in this Wiki is the presence or absence of a **social/interactive component**. Because of this, it makes sense to suspect that certain PPIs will work better for extraverts, i.e. those who thrive on social interaction, than for introverts, and vice versa.

Schueller (2012) investigated the relative effectiveness of a range of PPIs on introverted and extraverted individuals. Specifically, the selected PPIs were **3 good things, active-constructive responding, gratitude visit, signature strength, and savouring**. It was predicted that introverts would benefit less from PPIs with a **social component**, in this case gratitude visit and active-constructive responding. Although not significant, trends ($p = 0.056$) supporting these predictions were found. In the second part of this study, the delivery of the gratitude visit was modified so that participants either delivered it in person, over the phone, or via mail (standard or electronic), to see if introverts would benefit more from this exercise if no face-to-face component was required. These results were not significant, suggesting that, no matter how a PPI with a social component is delivered, **extraverts will always benefit more than introverts from social PPIs**.

Baseline measures from Schueller's (2012) study were consistent with the common finding that **extraversion in itself is a strong predictor of well-being and happiness**. This has led researchers to investigate the value of **introverts acting extraverted**, as a means of increasing their own happiness. Fleeson et al. (2002) investigated this claim over 3 studies, and indeed did find that acting extraverted increased well-being as reported daily, weekly, and within a fixed situation. So why do introverts not simply act extraverted? According to Zelenski et al. (2013), introverts make an affective forecasting error when imagining to act extraverted versus introverted across a range on situations. An affective forecasting error means that introverts **underestimate the potential enjoyment** gained by acting extraverted, and **overestimate the negative affect and self-consciousness** associated with such behaviour, and therefore tend to stick with their natural behaviour of acting introverted.



Other personality traits

As mentioned above, other personality traits outwith the Big Five have also been linked to differences in effectiveness of different PPIs. Specifically, Shapira & Mongrain (2010) reported that those high in **connectedness** (i.e. mature levels of dependence, not needy, often with an inordinate need to please others) received larger boosts in well-being than those low in connectedness (i.e. dependent and needy) when **writing a letter** to soothe and comfort oneself, (i.e. a PPI **without a social component**). This was attributed to connected individuals' skills in soothing others, a skill which they could then apply to themselves. This study also indicated that those high in **self-criticism** benefited more from both **self-compassion** and **optimism** PPIs compared to those low in self-criticism, but these results were not replicated across analyses.

Sergeant & Mongrain (2011) further investigated **self-criticism** and **neediness** in relation to **gratitude** and **music** PPIs. They found that gratitude was effective for self-critics, but that this PPI was ineffective and even **detrimental** to the self-esteem of needy individuals. Contrary to expectations, the PPI involving uplifting music did not prove to be a good fit for needy individuals. The detrimental effect of gratitude PPIs on needy individuals highlights the importance of taking individual differences into account before recommending certain PPIs.

Further, Mongrain et al. (2010) found that individuals with an anxious attachment style benefited from a PPI designed to increase compassionate actions towards other.



Social anxiety

While academic searches provided little information on happiness and PPIs in socially anxious individuals, it seems intuitive that PPIs with social components would be less effective for these individuals than solo PPIs. However, this seems to be a highly under-researched area which would benefit from further study.



Autistic traits

One of the defining characteristics of individuals on the autism spectrum is their qualitative **impairment in reciprocal social development** (Kuusikko et al., 2008). Similar social impairments have been found in individuals in the general population with higher levels of autistic traits (Constantino & Todd, 2003). This might suggest that social PPIs would work less well for individuals with ASD and typical individuals high in autistic traits, just as for introverted typical individuals and individuals with social anxiety. Kuusikko et al. (2008) highlight the fact that the symptoms of social impairment evident in ASD overlap with symptoms of social anxiety, such as **social withdrawal, preference for being alone, and not speaking in social situations**.

Research on the usage and effectiveness of PPIs by people both on the autism spectrum and with higher levels of autistic traits is thus far **very limited**, with most studies focusing on the happiness of families and people living with individuals with ASD. This gap in the literature is well-worth highlighting, as research suggests that both depression (Attwood, 2007), anxiety (Gilliot et al., 2001), and low self-esteem (Tantam, 2000) is commonly **co-morbid** with ASD, which suggests specific PPI recommendations to increase happiness in this population would be useful.

Nonetheless, a few studies on interventions for ASD have included measures relevant to the happiness literature, such as **self-esteem, positive and negative affect, and reduced anxiety**. Two of these studies will be discussed below.

O'Haire et al (2013) investigated the effect of the **presence of animals** (two guinea pigs) versus toys on social behaviours, including **positive and negative affect**, in children with ASD. Children with and without ASD were left to play freely while video-recorded, either in the presence of the guinea pigs or toys, and their behaviour was subsequently rated by blinded observers. Results indicated that the presence of animals contributed to **increased positive affect**, i.e. smiling and laughing, and **less negative affect**, i.e. frowning, crying, and whining, in autistic children. This suggests that the presence of animals can increase positive affect in autistic children, which could be interpreted as an increase in overall momentary happiness.

A study by Hillier et al. (2012) investigated the effect of a music intervention on **self-esteem** and **anxiety** in adolescents and young adults with ASD. During a number of sessions, participants engaged in **a range of music-making activities**, such as listening to different kinds of music and considering the various techniques used in musical pieces, using various musical instruments to play and explore sounds, and composing and improvising music. Self-reports indicated an **increase in self-esteem**, and a **decrease in anxiety** following the music intervention. This suggests that music PPIs might be suitable for individuals with ASD, and that such studies ought to be conducted.



**** Wild uncritical claim ****

Extraverts are happier than introverts because they are more social (see e.g. Costa et al., 1981).

Throughout the literature researched for this Wiki, authors commonly cite extraversion as a strong predictor of happiness and well-being, indicating that the frequent engagement in social activities shown by extraverts make them happier than introverts. While Hills and Argyle (2001) agree that extraversion is indeed strongly linked to happiness, they also highlight that this **might not be for social reasons**. Indeed, in their study they found that, while extraversion correlates strongly with happiness, closely related factors such as **affiliative tendencies and preference for solitude did not correlate with happiness**. That is, those who were more social were not necessarily any happier than those who preferred to spend their time alone. Additionally, the strongest correlates of happiness (e.g. life regard and self-esteem) did **not necessarily possess a dominant social element**. Also, despite significant differences in preference for solitude and affiliative tendency, **both introverts and extraverts can achieve high levels of happiness**, and those who are the happiest show **little if any difference in social behaviour**. Therefore, it is worth noting that it might not be the preference or frequency of social interaction that makes extraverts happier than introverts, but rather other factors. For example, there might be **more opportunities** for extraverts to attain happiness in a highly social modern world, where introversion is commonly **frowned upon and discouraged**. This would naturally cause lowered levels of happiness in introverted individuals, not because of their personality per se, but because they fall outside the societal frameworks of normality and desirability.

Conclusion

Individual differences, mainly personality traits, but also social anxiety and autistic traits, need to be taken into consideration when selecting or recommending different positive psychology interventions (PPIs). Not only have certain PPIs been shown to be more effective for different types of people, but it has also been suggested that certain PPIs are completely ineffective and even detrimental to certain individuals. In order to maximise happiness through PPI efficiency, a good fit between method and person must be established.

General conclusion

Conclusively, the pursuit of social and solo positive psychology interventions (PPIs), aiming to increase happiness and well-being, appears to differ between cultures. Religion, which is often intertwined with culture, appears to have a positive connection with well-being, and both social and solo exercises are utilised by most religions. The focus of this Wiki was, however, on interventions used in the Western world, and a number of these have been discussed. In gratitude, strengths, and optimism PPIs alike, both social and solo PPIs seem effective in increasing happiness.

However, individual differences in PPI–person fit have been identified and appear to have an influence over the effectiveness of a certain PPI for a certain person. Overall, a wide range of different PPIs are available for those looking to increase their well-being, regardless of culture, religion, personality, and preference for acting social or solo.

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