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Emotionally Intelligent Happiness

Chapter for the Oxford Handbook of Happiness

(limit 6,000 words including figures, tables, and references)

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Emotionally Intelligent Happiness

The focus on psychological and philosophical thinking about the pursuit of happiness has been sharp and swift, with over 4,000 books on the topic published in the last year alone. Although reflection on happiness dates back more than 2,500 years to the ideas of Confucius, Buddha, and Aristotle, the recent rise in attention has been notably more systematic and scientific. With antiquity, academia, and popular media on its side it would seem as though happiness would be a safe pursuit. But the truth is, the mere idea of happiness still seems to produce a subtle twinge of unease.

Why is it that we are uncomfortable being happy? Superficially, the pursuit of happiness can seem cliché, even trite. But the discomfort reaches far beneath the skin. There is a lack of clarity surrounding the definition of what real happiness means. We have felt first hand the fleeting nature of happiness and that it often abandons us when we most expect it and somehow appears in moments we do not expect it at all. And despite our strongest wishes to view all things through a rosy lens, in our quietest moments we confront with tentative resolution that there is something noble, even valuable, in the inevitability of challenging times and the inescapability of negative emotions (e.g., Parrott, 1991). Perhaps most discomfiting of all is the thought: Do I really deserve to be happy when there is so much suffering around me?

Just as the positive psychology movement has flourished in the past several years, so too has the scientific understanding of the emotional experience. Whereas emotions historically have been considered aspects of the human condition that prohibit us from

living a reasoned rational and successful life and therefore something to learn to overcome, master, and avoid, recent research has focused primarily on the value of emotions in achieving these goals. Our work on *Emotional Intelligence* (EI) began with the assumption that emotions are psychological resources to help us think clearly and behave appropriately (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

In an attempt to address the hesitation and fragility surrounding happiness, we propose uniting the pursuit of happiness with Emotional Intelligence. We define *emotionally intelligent happiness as having the ability to experience emotion in the service of living vitally, meaningfully, socially and successfully*. In this chapter, we offer theoretical and scientific support for this hypothesis in the pursuit of a “happiness” that is more proactive, integrated, grounded, and sustainable.

Where is Happiness on the Roller Coaster of Emotions?

The emotional experience is often likened to a roller coaster ride: moments of joy, pleasure, and pride can be followed by the experience of anger, pain, and shame. The ride might look something like the following:

Insert Figure 1 about here

Of course, the height of the peaks, the depth of the falls, and the length of time spent within and between them differ among individuals (e.g., Larsen & Diener, 1987). Such baseline differences in emotional tendencies are often referred to as *affective style* (e.g., Davidson, 1992). Happiness, often construed as the tendency to experience more positive than negative emotions, may be seen as the time one spends at the top of the

emotional ride. If the goal is to increase happiness, it seems logical to work to increase and sustain the peaks of the ride and to somehow avoid the inevitable falls. The problem is that, much to our chagrin, even in peak moments of bliss, time cannot be suspended, and the emotional ride must run its course. At best it feels like an exhilarating experience. At worst we feel uncontrollably strapped in, subjected to a random ride of emotional highs and lows. Over time such a ride can be exhausting. Cynical of the emotional experience, afraid or unwilling to experience emotion at all, we seek only one option: to get off the roller coaster.

It's Not Just a Ride: The Functionality of Emotions

The roller coaster metaphor, while perhaps experientially accurate, is limited. It assumes that emotions are merely feelings and that people are by and large hedonistic seeking only to increase positive emotions and to avoid or eliminate negative emotions. This assumption is both wrong and misleading: There is more to emotions than subjective feelings, and there is more to human motivation than hedonism (e.g., Higgins, 1997; Parrott, 1993).

Emotions – both positive and negative - are essential for optimal human functioning (Darwin, 1872/1965; e.g. Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004). Emotions can be thought of as “short-lived, biologically based reactions that reflect our appraisals of ongoing events and manifest themselves in subjective experience, expressive behavior, and physiological responding” (Richards, 2002, p. 308). Specifically, emotions serve three essential roles: first, emotions serve the function of *messengers*, reflecting and relaying information about how one’s body is functioning and the extent to which one is making progress toward goals (e.g., Higgins, 1997). Second, emotions serve as

motivators, energizing one's cognitive and behavioral resources to the goals and projects that most need our attention (e.g., Frijda, 1986). Lastly, emotions are key *facilitators*, stimulating the acquisition of additional resources (social, physical, and mental) that may be necessary to achieve those goals.

Emotions as messengers: Emotional reactions are at their essence a form of evaluation: People's feelings inform them about what they like, want and value and the extent to which they are achieving their goals (Clore & Parrott, 1991; Lazarus, 1991; Scheier & Carver, 1992). The emotional message consists of two components. Emotional *valence* relays information about how good or bad something is. Positive emotions such as happiness, gratitude, pride, love, and hope relay the message that one is meeting one's goals, that a bad event has passed, or that one's relationship with another is secure. Negative emotions such as fear, sadness, shame, anger, guilt, disgust, anxiety, disappointment, embarrassment, envy and hatred relay the message that something is wrong or that no progress toward a goal has been made. The second component of the emotional messenger is *arousal*, which relays information about the importance or urgency of a particular situation. To survive, the human system is forced to process an incredible amount of information: The complexity of evaluating this information is often too great to be held in conscious awareness and thus, we must rely on our emotional feelings which serve as a synthetic analysis of this information.

Emotions as motivators: Beyond relaying important information regarding the valence and urgency of a particular situation, emotions also serve as motivators, literally generating the energy to think and act in ways that correspond to the emotional message (e.g. Frijda, 1986). In general negative emotions motivate avoidance behavior and a

more conservative, methodical, and analytical approach to problem solving, whereas positive emotions motivate approach behavior and are associated with a more holistic, creative, and flexible style of thinking (Fazio, Eiser & Shook, 2004; Isen, 2000). This emotional motivation system, however, is extremely fine-tuned and specific. For example, the emotion of anger, having relayed the information that one is being blocked from a particular goal, also provides the energy and readiness to oppose or attack whatever is getting in the way. Similarly, the emotion of sadness, in providing the information that one has lost something of value, is also associated with reduced energy thereby motivating an individual to give up opposition to a disliked circumstance or abandoning a goal. Anxiety involves a tendency to be vigilant for threats, jealousy involves the tendency to monitor relationships that may have been taken for granted, and shame motivates the tendency to monitor others' opinions in the service of reestablishing reputation. Positive emotions broaden people's ideas about possible actions, opening their awareness to a wider range of thoughts and actions. All of these aspects are specific and functional to each emotion and, fascinatingly, tend to operate with little conscious awareness or intention (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005).

Emotions as facilitators: Often a particular goal cannot be achieved without the acquisition of resources outside those at the immediate disposal of the individual. Emotions serve to facilitate this process. First, the experience of emotion actually builds mental resources by facilitating the process of learning and growth: The contemplative mindset associated with serenity is associated with reflective and integrative thinking from which humans are able to assimilate and learn from their experiences (e.g., Fredrickson, 2003), and negative emotions focus one's attention to an important or salient

problem, helping them methodically and logically to generate accurate solutions. Secondly, the experience of emotions actually builds physical resources. Positive emotions can facilitate a buffering system for the autonomic nervous system which improves health and builds immunity (e.g., Cohen, Doyle, Turner, Alper, & Skoner, 2003), and negative emotions, while often associated with compromised health status (Salovey, Rothman, Detweiler & Steward, 2000), can serve as catalysts for positive physical change in both hormone balance and functional health status (Epel, McEwen, & Ickovics, 1998). Lastly, emotions build social resources via their signaling response to others: One person's anger can induce another's fear, one person's fear can induce calmness and care in another (Dimberg & Öhman, 1996), and the highly attractive and contagious nature of positive emotions builds social resources through forging social alliances which can facilitate helping behavior (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994).

Emotional Intelligence: Facilitating Function

Emotions are intended to help facilitate the achievement of a successful and flourishing life. Yet, our hardwired emotional system is not perfect. The utility of emotional experience in achieving one's highest goals needs to be fine-tuned, guided, and supplemented by higher order awareness, skills, and intentions. Although Emotional Intelligence (E.I.) has been conceptualized in many ways (e.g. specific ability approach, cohesive global ability, and a mixed-model approach; Matthews, Zeidner & Roberts, 2007; Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2000; Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2008; McCrae, 2000) at its most fundamental level, E.I. is a set of abilities including the ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions. As two decades of research suggest, these abilities can help consciously and skillfully exploit the inherent functionality of emotions

thereby achieving a more successful and fulfilling life (reviewed by Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008).

Take the following case into consideration. When Annie started working at her new job over a year ago she was happy and often worked in a joyful and enthusiastic manner. Over the past several weeks however, Annie's mood has become considerably more negative. Most people would assume that this negative mood should be cause for concern and, if the response is prolonged, Annie might conclude that she is no longer happy with work. This judgment may spur a host of behaviors including seeking another job, complaining to colleagues, or buying one of the 4,000 books on happiness to improve her sense of happiness at work. But before jumping to conclusions, it is useful to consider a more emotionally intelligent response.

The first step of this process, long before Annie makes the summary judgment that she is unhappy with her job, is for Annie to *perceive* her emotions accurately. Fortunately, Annie's emotional perception ability is highly tuned and, rather than just feeling a diffuse feeling of negativity or frustration, she recognizes at the most basic level, a feeling of anger. Once Annie accurately perceives herself to be angry she can implement her ability to *understand* emotion. Whereas most people would understand anger to signify the fact that, say, her boss and the people around her are incompetent, Annie is more emotionally intelligent. She realizes that the purpose of anger is really quite simple: It is indicating to her that she is being impeded from achieving a valuable goal.

Because Annie is able to recognize and understand the more basic motivational message of the emotion of anger, she can begin to consider possible goals that she has

construed – either consciously or unconsciously –in the domain of work. She realizes that there are several goals that are currently being impeded, including her goal to make money (she just learned that bonuses would be cut back to 70% this year), and her goal to perform optimally so that she can make a positive impact in the company (the project is delayed, her colleague has been out sick for a week, and she has been unable to schedule a meeting with corporate headquarters). Annie understands that her negative emotion of anger is actually signaling to her that she cares about doing well at her job, not that she dislikes it, and that she is upset with her colleague because the project is not getting done as quickly as she would like making her feel as though she is not performing up to her capability, not because her colleague is inordinately lazy. Emotional knowledge can range from the very basic to the very complex, and fortunately for Annie, her knowledge is strong. Annie not only understands the basic function of anger but she also understands that if she doesn't do something about it, her anger is likely to progress into sadness and frustration, eventually leading her to give up on her goal of performing well at work.

Annie also knows that beyond the informational message is the motivational one, and because she is aware of this she can *use* her emotion in the most adaptive manner possible. Annie does so by taking advantage of the endorphin release from the emotion of anger to fuel her work, and she uses her narrowed attention to help her think more critically about potential problems and possible solutions.

Of course, the more hardwired response to anger might not be the most adaptive approach in the modern workforce and thus, the most emotionally intelligent response also requires Annie to *manage* her emotions. For this, Annie employs several strategies.

First, Annie reassesses her goals. She decides that her goal of being a positive influence at work is indeed something she values, and that she does not want to change or give up this goal. She also realizes that her financial goals might not be feasible and, because this is out of her control, she chooses to release her strong hold on those intentions for the time being. Annie also chooses to reappraise (e.g., Gross, 1998; Lazarus, 1994) her experience not as a threat to her professional career but as a challenge. Because she views it as a challenge, Annie is motivated to improve her ability to work in less than optimal situations and to find creative ways to do well despite the challenging situation, and become a role model in the process. Furthermore, Annie honors the fact that she will still feel frustrated and even angry at times because she does indeed care about the situation, so she works to manage her emotions behaviorally, by employing deep breathing or mindfulness techniques to calm her sympathetic nervous system response (Benson & Klipper, 2000; Davidson et al., 2003) so that she can feel her emotions, but still operate out of purpose and get the job done.

The Fruits of Emotional Intelligence

As the example above illustrates, emotions are inherently designed to help us achieve our goals and Emotional Intelligence is a set of abilities which can help facilitate this. Not surprisingly, EI is linked with a variety of positive outcomes that can facilitate the process of living socially, successfully, and vitally.

Living Socially. The ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions has obvious associations with living socially and connecting meaningfully with others (e.g. Casey, Garrett, Brackett & Rivers, 2007; Lopes, Salovey, Côté, Beers, & Petty, 2005). Emotional Intelligence consistently predicts positive social outcomes in both

children and adults: emotional knowledge among five year-olds positively predicted their social skills in the third grade (Izard et al., 2001). Individuals with higher EI scores tend to have more friends and better relationships with those friends and family members (Lopes et al., 2005). People have more positive perceptions of emotionally intelligent individuals than individuals who lack these skills (Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006). Furthermore, Emotional Intelligence relates to the ability to be sensitive to and willing to help others, encouraging mutually fulfilling relationships: Couples with high levels of emotional intelligence experience less conflict, fewer destructive responses to conflict, and better relationship quality overall (Brackett et al., 2006; Brackett, Warner & Bosco, 2005).

Living Successfully. Emotional Intelligence plays a significant role in increasing performance and achievement in both academics and at work. EI influences the ability to interact and communicate effectively with others as well as the ability to manage conflict, handle stress, and perform under pressure. Emotional perception is associated with successful problem analyses (Matsumoto, 2006) and better negotiation skills (Elfenbein, Foo, White, Tan, & Aik, 2007; Mueller & Curhan, 2006). Lopes and colleagues (2006) found that, in a population of 44 financial workers, total EI correlated with higher company rank, merit increases, peer and supervisor rated sociability and leadership potential. Other studies have found that the ability to perceive emotions related to enhanced performance and workplace effectiveness of physicians, human service workers, school teachers and principals and business managers (Elfenbein et al., 2007). With few exceptions, these associations remain significant after controlling for other predictors such as age, gender, education, IQ, and personality traits.

Living Vially. An inherent component of emotions is their physiological manifestation in both the cardiovascular and immune systems. Whereas in general, positive emotions are said to produce positive physiological outcomes and negative emotions are said to be associated with compromised health status, greater emotional intelligence can produce a more vital state of being, regardless of the emotions one experiences. Emotions have both a direct effect on health (via cardiovascular and immune systems) as well as a negative effect on health (via health behaviors such as drinking, eating, smoking, and exercise) (Ng & Jeffery, 2003; Trinidad & Johnson, 2002). Thus, emotional intelligence can buffer the effect of stress and negative emotion on HPA and SNS and indirectly by decreasing the likelihood of unhealthy behaviors, which are more likely during times of stress or negative emotion (e.g., Mikolajczak, Roy, Luminet, Fillée, & de Timary, 2007; Salovey & Grewal, 2005). A meta-analytic investigation looking at the relationship between EI and health found that this is indeed the case. Specifically, EI correlates with physical health moderately degree, and EI has been associated with better physical health in a variety of contexts, including fewer self-reported physiological symptoms and illnesses, better recovery following surgery, and increased longevity (e.g., Peterson, Seligman & Vaillant, 1988; Salovey et al., 2000; Scheier & Carver, 1985; Scheier et al., 1989).

A Change in Metaphors: Emotionally Intelligent Happiness

It is logical to assume that because EI is highly associated with improved social occupational and physiological functioning, the achievement of these states will, in turn, bring about happiness and satisfaction. The research supports this reasoning at least to some degree and suggests that EI correlates with psychological well-being and life

satisfaction (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Brackett et al., 2006; Ciarrochi, Chan, & Caputi, 2000).

Fascinatingly, however, the causal direction in these studies is ambiguous. One of the most important findings in the literature on happiness and positive affect in the last decade has been the consistent conclusion that positive emotions are not merely a consequence of achievement of success, physical health, and meaningful relationships, but are also a cause (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). People assume that a particular relationship will bring them happiness and fail to see that being happy in the first place is one of the most attractive qualities. People assume that the promotion they receive at work will bring positive emotion and neglect the fact that positive emotion is essential for productivity. And they believe that achieving good health will help them feel good, when simply deciding to feel good is one of the best things you can do for your health. In one study, Diener and colleagues found that people who are happier at one point in time are more likely to achieve a positive outcome at a later time – such as a call-back for a job, a healthy marriage, and fewer illnesses and disease (Diener, Nickerson, Lucas & Sandvik, 2002). Furthermore, college freshmen who reported higher levels of cheerfulness also reported higher income and job-satisfaction and less frequent unemployment than their less cheerful peers 19 years later (Diener et al., 2002).

Unfortunately, the self-perpetuating spiral of positive emotions and positive outcomes does not always operate in this ideal form. First, positive emotion does not invariably produce positive outcomes. In experimental research, induced positive affect decreases accuracy when engaging highly detailed tasks that require more thorough analytic cognitions, which may in turn lead to poor decision making (Parrott, 1993).

Extremely high levels of positive affect can decrease the motivation to change or improve life circumstances (evidenced by the finding that those at the highest levels of happiness are less financially successful than those at moderate levels (Oishi, Diener, & Lucas, 2007). Perhaps more problematically, positive outcomes do not invariably produce positive emotion and happiness. Achievement and wealth are not always associated with happiness. Above a certain threshold, income level (enough to meet the basic needs of food, shelter, and security), the correlation between wealth and happiness is surprisingly weak (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Other studies on the relative happiness of lottery winners, and on 49 of the wealthiest people of the United States (according to the list published annually in Forbes Magazine) confirm that wealth does not guarantee happiness (Brickman, Coates & Janoff-Bulman, 1978; Diener, Horwitz, & Emmons, 1985).

One potential confound with this understanding is the fact that happiness and positive affect are often used interchangeably and that they are often intertwined with more functional assessments of living such as well being and life satisfaction. For example, well-being may consist of four components: life satisfaction (global judgments of one's life), satisfaction with important domains (e.g. work satisfaction), positive affect (experiencing many pleasant emotions and moods), and low levels of negative affect (experiencing few unpleasant emotions and moods) (Diener, Napa-Scollon, Oishi, Dzokoto & Suh, 2000). In this light, positive emotions are assumed to promote well-being and negative emotions are assumed to reverse it. This view may be problematic. Negative emotions and difficult situations can be both functional and useful in propelling an individual to higher levels of well being. Furthermore, life is tough! On a small scale

there are the everyday pressures, disappointments, conflicts and stressors. Then there are the larger ones: there is injustice, sickness, even death. Things happen which are too egregious to think about, not to mention discuss in a book on happiness. Unfortunately, the occurrences are a fact of life and denying them is futile if not also detrimental. It is only when we can have the strength to face them that we have the power to transform their significance into something more meaningful.

In recognition of this, researchers in the field of positive psychology have proposed several types of happiness and well-being. For example, Ryan and Deci (2001) proposed a distinction between eudaimonic and hedonic well being. The hedonic perspective views well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance. Hedonic well-being is most commonly assessed by measurements of subjective well-being (SWB), a person's cognitive and affective evaluation of their life. The eudaimonic perspective goes beyond the assessment of simple pleasure and pain and views well being as the extent to which a person is fully functioning, living a life of meaning and self-realization. From the eudaimonic perspective, feeling a complete range of emotional experiences is seen as a positive characteristic of a fully functioning individual. More recently, the term *flourishing* has been proposed to mean both feeling well and functioning well. And, as research on this topic suggests, functioning well requires a certain degree of struggle (e.g., Keyes, 2007; Røysamb, Vittersø, Søholt, Hetland, & Thoresen, 2009). Traditional Eastern thought takes a similar perspective. Rather than viewing happiness as a momentary or fleeting emotion aroused by sensory or conceptual stimuli, Buddhists view happiness, or *suhka*, as an "enduring trait that arises from a mind in a state of equilibrium and entails a conceptually unstructured and unfiltered awareness

of the true nature of reality” (Ekman, Davidson, Ricard, Wallace et al, 2005, p. 60). Buddhists view its opposite, *duhkha*, as not simply an unpleasant feeling, but more generally, a “basic vulnerability to suffering and pain due to misapprehending the nature of reality” (Ekman et al., 2005 p. 60). To achieve *suhka*, Buddhists and other Eastern philosophies believe that the radical transformation of consciousness is necessary.

Emotional intelligence, too, can add greater clarity and specificity to the definition and understanding of happiness and well-being. In order to more accurately reflect the emotional experience in this relationship however, a more constructive metaphor is needed. Rather than viewing the emotional experience as a roller coaster ride, the emotional experience might be better likened to a weather pattern. This metaphorical representation is distinct in several ways. First, it more accurately reflects the functionality of the emotional experience: days of rain are not only inevitable, but are necessary. Second, it underscores a fundamental point of distinction between emotional experience and the functioning lifestyle: It invites us to experience our emotions fully, but still operate out of purpose and intention. Rather than having to exit the ride to accomplish a set of goals, living vitally, socially, and successfully can occur in the midst, in spite of, or even because of the weather: If the wind picks up, we just zip up our jackets. Finally, in this metaphor, happiness is no longer a static point or line of positive emotion but the entirety of the emotional experience, with its seasonal and diurnal – even hourly - changes in weather.

Emotionally intelligent individuals in this metaphorical representation are highly in tune with the weather pattern of their own dispositions. They more accurately perceive subtle changes in temperature, and they understand the causes and consequences of those

changes. They also acknowledge how the weather of their emotions influences their thinking and behaving. While they are aware of the general tendency to be cautious and stay inside when the weather is gloomy and to explore and be creative when the clouds are clear, they also recognize that they need not be victimized by these motivational pulls and that they can show up for work even if it means driving through the sleet and snow. When the leaves change or the clouds come, they can appreciate the colors rather than cursing them, understanding that there is a time and reason for these changes. They know that that the sun is always there behind the clouds and that sometimes it is okay to dance in the rain. Emotionally intelligent happiness is the peace of mind that comes from knowing that one is capable of handling any situation that arises – no matter how painful or how challenging it can be - and having the ability to experience emotion in the service of living vitally, meaningfully, socially and successfully.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Cultivating Emotionally Intelligent Happiness

People are highly motivated to achieve happiness, yet their efforts are often futile. Despite the fact that the United States has seen huge increases in national wealth, income, and affluence over the past half century (from 1957 to the late 1990s, after-tax income, in constant 1995 dollars, has more than doubled), Myers (2000) reports that the percentage of Americans who describe themselves as happy has remained remarkably constant at about 30 percent. Research on affective forecasting further substantiates the fact that the pursuit of happiness via material or circumstantial gain is illusive at best and

counteractive at worst (Gilbert & Ebert, 2002). In the search for a more sustainable happiness, the emotional intelligent perspective suggests that a fundamental shift must be made away from a focus on achieving a particular circumstance to a focus on cultivating a higher state of awareness regarding one's emotions and their relationship to one's desired values and goals. This shift can be accomplished by a subtle change in mindset and a gradual accumulation of emotionally intelligent skills.

The cultivation of sustainable happiness first requires a change in mindset. The typical approach to happiness often leaves people on a "hedonic treadmill," in which they undergo momentary phases of increased positive affect (e.g. winning the lottery, attaining tenure etc.), but quickly return to baseline levels of happiness. (Bar-Anan, Wilson & Gilbert, 2009). The emotional intelligence perspective offers a simple solution to this unsatisfying pattern: to make a conscious mindset change that focuses upon experiencing all emotions in the service of valued actions, rather than focusing on increasing positive emotion and reducing negative emotion through the achievement of particular outcomes. This distinction may be subtle, but it is fundamental. Take Annie's case for example. When Annie's moods take a sudden downturn, instead of focusing her attention and resources on how to change her circumstances so that she can feel happier, the emotionally intelligent approach would be for Annie to focus her attention first on feeling, identifying and learning from her emotions. In this mindset, Annie will not become subjected to acting reactively out of her emotions (as in the case of the emotional roller coaster) but will instead be able to proactively utilize the full spectrum (or weather pattern) of her emotions in a way that best facilitates the achievement of her goals while maintaining her health and social relationships.

An important caveat in the emotionally intelligent approach to sustainable happiness is that in order to feel, identify, and learn from their emotions, people may have to endure a period of frustration or negative emotion. One potential barrier in achieving this shift in mindset is that people mistakenly believe that “bad” emotions should be suppressed, managed and avoided. Interestingly, research on such emotion regulation has demonstrated that while emotion regulation may be an important aspect of human functioning, an unwillingness to experience emotions (i.e., experiential avoidance) can actually be a major cause of psychopathology (e.g., Blackledge & Hayes, 2001). One reason for this is that conscious attempts to suppress or regulate emotions sometimes backfire and are associated with increased physiological activity and corresponding health issues (e.g., Gross, 2002). Furthermore, the act of regulating emotions depletes mental resources needed to perform successfully on other tasks (e.g., Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998) and the tendency to make emotion regulation a priority often results in the sacrifice of long-term pursuits (e.g., weight loss) for short-term hedonic behavior (e.g., eating cake) (e.g., Vohs & Heatherton, 2000). In this light, if one tries to regulate one’s emotions by altering one’s perception or experience of them, one runs the risk of missing out on the greater possibility or significance of them. If one can increase acceptance of and openness to the experience of emotion, one will likely be better able to perceive and understand the actual significance of that emotion in the context of “what is” (i.e., emotional clarity). Furthermore, if individuals can orient themselves to the possibility of their emotions without having to avoid them, they can more effectively use their energy typically given over to

resignation, avoidance, or control of these emotions and choose to act in a way that is congruent with their highest values and goals (e.g., Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 1999).

The development and application of emotional skills can help facilitate the shift in mindset necessary for enduring negative emotions and achieving sustainable happiness. Felicitously, the research suggests that Emotional Intelligence is a set of labile skills that can be improved through training - similar to music, mathematics, or sports. In-depth and comprehensive programs have been developed to increase EI abilities and can be found in the workplace and in school systems, and recent longitudinal studies support efficacy and impact of these programs (e.g., Brackett et al., 2008). And both lab and applied studies suggest that training in skills like meditation might actually be able to neurologically remove us from the rollercoaster of emotions and into a more spacious and aware field of consciousness in which one's dispositional response to emotions is more naturally adaptive.

Conclusion

Although the pursuit of happiness may be an inalienable right, it seems as though the achievement of happiness is not so fundamental. The mindsets we adopt, the myths we perpetuate, and the metaphors we hold can keep us stuck in a perilous place. As with any valuable goal, the achievement of happiness takes design and work: it requires the application a finely cultivated set of skills toward a carefully constructed intention. In this view, happiness is a dynamic state marked by a set of attainable abilities as opposed to a static state of random ups and downs. Not only are negative emotions and challenging emotions embraced, but they are honored and put to work in the fulfillment of reaching valued goals. Although the care and cultivation of the weather pattern of

emotions may require donning a raincoat from time to time, there is beauty in the storm, sustainability in the acceptance, and strength in the confidence that we can live fully with or without perpetual warmth and sunshine.

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Figures

Figure 1. Emotions Experienced as a Roller Coaster Ride: Happiness is Experienced Passively and Unsustainably

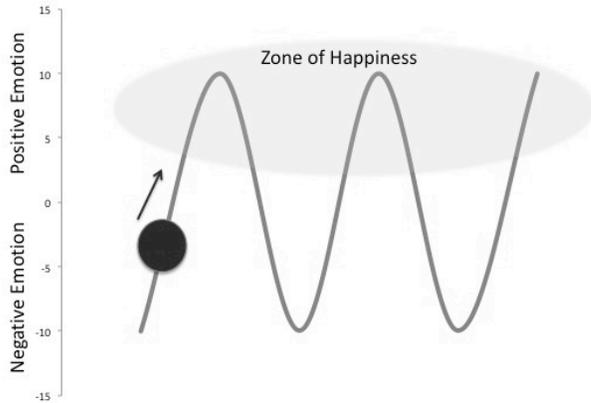


Figure 2: Emotionally Intelligent Happiness: Emotions Experienced as a Weather Pattern In the Service of Living Vitably, Meaningfully, Socially, and Successfully

