

# Positive psychology as per gruber, mauss, and tamir's findings

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The concept of well-being in the context of positive psychology can be broadly split into two domains – Subjective Well Being (SWB) and Psychological Well Being (PWB). SWB adopts the hedonic approach in defining happiness as an psychological construct and can be defined as the subjective experience of happiness that is based largely on affect (Lopez, 2011). On the other hand, PWB adopts the eudaimonic approach in defining happiness as an psychological construct and emphasizes on promoting adaptive functioning in humans through setting purposeful life goals (Lopez, 2011) . In this paper, the findings presented by Gruber, Mauss and Tamir (2011) would be evaluated taking into consideration the following themes: The amount of happiness, the time for happiness and the way to pursue happiness. In particular this paper will focus on three domains often discussed within the field of positive psychology: Money and Happiness, Optimism and Altruism.

One of the key findings highlighted in Gruber (2011) paper was that the relationship between the amount of happiness and favourable well-being outcomes was found to be non-linear. In addition, studies had found that the pursuit of happiness does confer benefits but only up to a certain point. These two findings are congruent with the various theories on happiness found within the positive psychology literature. One such theory is the hedonic treadmill theory, which proposes that when an individual experiences an significant life event such as winning the lottery, the levels of associated emotions will rise significantly for a short while before one eventually learns to habituate or adapt to those emotions and over time

desire for greater returns in the hope of boosting their positive emotions even further (Brickman & Campbell, 1971).

Other studies that examined the link between income levels and happiness also had found substantial support for the finding presented in Gruber (2011) paper. In an study that tracked the income levels and the extent of happiness of respondents over a 40 year period, it was found that while real personal income levels had increased dramatically over the period of the study, the proportion of respondents who reported being “ very happy” remains relatively unchanged over time (Myers, 2000). Another finding mentioned in the paper was that the pursuit of happiness towards the extreme end is associated with psychological cost. In addition, persons with disproportionate level of positive emotions with respect to negative emotions were found to exhibit dysfunctional psychological traits such as psychopathy. These findings are further strengthened by existing research on pathological altruism and psychopathy. Pathological helping is often associated with helping behaviours with the intention to reduce guilt on the part of the helper (Pelligra, 2011) or out of motives other than those that are pro-social in nature (Oakley, Knafo, Madhavan, & Wilson, 2011). One of the paradoxical consequences of engaging in the act of pathological altruism for the helper is that the act might induce psychopathy, which can be defined as a perpetual lack of concern for others plus emotional detachment from the helper’s environment (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Such traits are more commonly seen in persons with compassion fatigue, a syndrome that is most prevalent amongst professionals in the helping sector such as doctors and nurses and even caregivers of elderly parents (Figley, 1995).

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The context in which happiness occur, in particular relating to the time dimension was also discussed within Gruber (2011) paper. In the paper, researchers found that positive and negative emotions have a function of building resources (Fredrickson, 1998) and defending and protecting an individual from an impending threat respectively (Frijda, 1986). From an cognitive point of view, positive emotions serves to direct an individual towards seeking potential rewards, while negative emotions serves to enable an individual to avoid an impending threat. Finally, from a social dimension, one is more likely to elicit positive emotion when one feels safe and secure, and one is likely to elicit negative emotions in instances where one requires assistance from others (Keltner & Haidt, 1999). Fredrickson's Broaden and Build theory, the theory of Unrealistic Optimism and Sociometer Theory serves as a theoretical basis for explaining time as a key driver in the pursuit of happiness respectively. According to Fredrickson's Broaden and Build theory, positive emotions precedes the broadening of momentary thoughts and actions, which in turn enables the individual to leverage on their own resources to resolve the current obstacles and challenges, thereby triggering an upward spiral of positive emotions, thoughts and actions leading to positive psychological outcome (Fredrickson, 1998). This is in line with the finding in the given paper that the purpose of positive emotions is to build resources. The theory of unrealistic optimism posits that optimism that is not grounded in reality of the current situation tends to be dysfunctional in nature as they encourage the individual to take unnecessary risks at the expense of physical and psychological well-being (Puri & Robinson, 2007), and is in line with the finding that positive emotions primes an individual to

seek out potential rewards. The Sociometer theory states that humans depend on levels self-esteem to gauge if they are socially included or excluded. This theory provides support for the finding in the given paper that positive emotions are usually expressions in instances where an individual feels safe and secure (Leary, 2005).

Numerous studies have found support for the studies cited in Gruber (2011) paper on the time as a key factor in the appropriate expression of happiness across various context. The notion that positive emotions build resources and negative emotions conserve resources to ward off a perceived threat was widely researched by motivational sciences researchers (e. g., Gable, 2006). There was also empirical evidence that negative emotions may have an adaptive function as well. In a cross sectional study done on adolescents and older adults, it was found that adolescents tend to express more negative emotions as a means of coping with the uncertainties and changes at their current life stage (Riediger, Schmiedek, Wagner, & Lindenberger, 2009). Gruber (2011) also discussed studies that explored how the way to pursue happiness could improve or undermine well-being. From a theoretical perspective, the theory of hedonic treadmill and Self Determination Theory (SDT) provides a basis for explaining the findings highlighted in the given paper. As discussed in the earlier part of this paper, the theory of hedonic treadmill suggests that the hedonic pursuit of happiness is a never ending loop as the individual adapts and adjusts towards pursuing an even bigger and better object of desire over time. According to SDT, there are three universal psychological needs (the need for autonomy, competence and relatedness) that all humans being require as psychological nutrients to

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allow them to flourish as individuals. needed> Several studies supported the view that the method in which happiness is pursued would affect one's well-being. Studies have found that the extent to which one attributes their happiness to external sources acts as a mediating variable for the levels of well-being experienced by the person when engaging in helping behaviours (e. g., Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). In addition, studies based on the Self Determination Theory also found that the lesser the amount of autonomy (personal control) that a person has, the less satisfied they are with their levels of well-being (Pavey, Greitemeyer, & Sparks, 2011). To conclude, the findings presented in Gruber (2011) paper can be substantiated with the relevant theories and models found within positive psychology. In addition, studies in the current positive psychology literature suggest that there is a considerable body of evidence that suggest that happiness can be maladaptive is carried to the extreme. In the final analysis, moderation is key even in the experience of positive psychological states like happiness.