

Seeking Understanding on the Issue of Happiness

A Hermeneutic Literature Review

Matthew Petersen

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Supervisor: Joanne Emmens

Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed _____

Date _____

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Abstract

The body of literature relating to human happiness is historically rich and is gaining increasing relevance in the current healthcare environment. Although the term happiness is commonly used in society this dissertation illustrates the complexities of happiness, highlighting its associations with what are understood as desirable states of being, as well as social constructs which appear more related to suffering than well-being. Five key areas are looked at, these are: conceptions of happiness, “unhelpful happiness”, longer term happiness, short term happiness and barriers to happiness. A hermeneutic methodology is adopted providing personal reflections to develop further understanding and provide considerations for psychotherapists.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This aim of this dissertation is to explore the following topic: *Seeking understanding on the issue of happiness and in this what are some considerations for psychotherapists?*

My journey in psychotherapy - as a client and student - has helped develop awareness of my own and others' emotional and psychological difficulties. Within the array of human experiences I observe that joy, intimacy, peace, gratitude, meaningful and creative engagement are important dimensions of well-being. Personally, I have had these experiences while engaged in particular activities, such as sharing a meal, conversation, involvement in meaningful experiences or simply walking along the beach; at other times, I consider that happiness has been experienced in the process of moving towards, not away from emotional pain and anguish - especially a therapeutic "holding environment" (Winnicott, 1953) characterised by empathic mirroring.

As a beginning psychotherapist, at times, I have noticed my clients' energy shift or their eyes "sparkle" as they recalled the experience of a happy or meaningful activity; sometimes the very recollections of this experience appeared to lift the mood of the client and. I consider that these experiences may have had a flow on effect (i.e. increased general well-being, and at times a reduction in the symptoms of a presenting issue (i.e. lessening of anxiety and or psychological isolation)).

Dimensions of the human experience as such, are experiences that I consider important and worthy of attention when considering individuals' health and wellness; however, commentators Akhtar (2010) and Seligman (2002) observe, these features of human experience have had the tendency to sit in the background

in the mental health environment, with psychopathology holding the dominant area of focus. During recent years however, there has been an increasing body of literature in this area (Seligman, 2002, Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2017). A central thesis underpinning research is that direct attention to fostering happiness increases general wellness and improved mental health (Seligman, 2002).

Part of my motivation in exploring the topic of happiness relates to understanding what might be referred to as a false sense of happiness - an issue that resonates with me personally and appears to be intertwined in social and cultural values in Western societies, reinforced through consumerism. This is identified as an issue in respect to happiness (as it relates to well-being) as stated by a number of authors (Seligman, 2011 & Davidson, 2006) and adds a sense of confusion to an already broad topic.

These are some of the thoughts and feelings that I experience as I attempt to grapple the question of happiness in myself and, which I consider, contribute to vague and confused countertransference responses experienced with clients who express they “*just want to be happy*”.

Dissertation Outline

Chapter one, the **introduction** describes my motivations and interests in the topic of happiness. This chapter also introduces and provides some context on issues relating to the difficulties in understanding happiness.

Chapter two, outlines the dissertation **method and methodology** and my rationale for choosing a hermeneutic literature review.

Chapter three, **conceptions of happiness** introduces conceptions of happiness with reference to historical and contemporary literature, with attention given to the definition of happiness and the phenomenon of measuring happiness.

Chapter four, explores and provides consideration of “**unhelpful happiness**”. Here attention to an unhealthy version of happiness seemingly present in Western societies which adds to the mixed messages of happiness and the complexities of this topic.

Chapter five, identifies and provides consideration on a number of identified sources of **longer term happiness**. These are slowing down and cultivating mindfulness, meaning, interpersonal relationships, and eudaimonia.

Chapter six, examines literature associated with **short term experiences of happiness**, with attention being given to activities identified to facilitate an experience of happiness, albeit often temporary in nature.

Chapter seven, consideration is given to **barriers to happiness** identified within the literature. These areas given attention are misunderstanding happiness, hedonic adaptation and the negativity bias of the brain.

Chapter eight, provides **discussion** on the main ideas drawn from previous chapters and provides considerations on clinical implications for psychotherapists on the issue of happiness. This chapter includes reflections on the limitations of study and concluding comments.

Chapter 2 Method and Methodology

Introduction

In the previous chapter I describe my motivations and interests in the topic of happiness. In this chapter I outline the dissertation method and methodology and my rationale for choosing a hermeneutic literature review.

Method

The research method that I have undertaken is qualitative; as McLeod (2011) identifies qualitative research is commonly used in social science and health care research with the objective of developing an understanding of how the complexities of the social, personal and relational world are constructed. This compares with quantitative research methods, which are more logical and data-led which aims to provide research that is measurable from a numerical and statistical perspective.

Methodology

In undertaking a preliminary search of literature related to human happiness, it became apparent that a hermeneutic literature review would work well with my research topic due to the breadth and depth of work in this area. A review of the literature will be more fitting than for instance, a thematic analysis - a method more commonly used for identifying, analysing and reporting themes or patterns within comparatively small data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2005). As Baumeister and

Leary (1997, p.311) identify, literature reviews allow for researchers to provide readers with a “bridge between the vast and scattered assortment of articles on a topic”. In choosing this methodology I hope to serve the field of psychotherapy by providing an accessible review of relevant literature on the broad topic of human happiness.

This dissertation is based on the hermeneutic research method as described by Smythe and Spence (2012) as it allows for the interpretations of the “dynamic and contextual nature of understanding” (p. 13) in a manner congruent to the philosophy and writings of philosopher HansGeorg Gadamer to explain complexities. The hermeneutic social constructionist approach to psychotherapy research is viewed as a research methodology that enriches and extends understanding of the text (McLeod, 2001). In this context, “text” is considered to mean “the primary model for the object of interpretation” (Schwandt, 1999, p.454) and can include anything that is “readable”- for example, research reports, documentaries, social interaction by ways of conversation, social customs by way of stories and poems, social ways by way of commentary.

Cooper (1998) explains that literature reviews attempt to: a) integrate work that others have done, b) criticize other scholarly works, c) build bridges between other related areas of research, and/or d) identify central issues within a field. Also known as unsystematic literature reviews, narrative literature reviews are comprehensive narrative syntheses of previously published information (Green, Johnson, & Adams, 2006). Differing from systematic literature reviews (meta-analysis), narrative literature reviews have a qualitative focus (King & He, 2002). Green, et al. (2006) identify that there is no consensus on a standardised procedure of undertaking a narrative literature review, however, it should do the following: present information that is written using the required elements for a narrative review, be well structured, synthesize the available literature relevant to the topic, and convey a clear message to readers.

The first step in pursuing this topic was to define a research question (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). Thus, my research question; *Seeking understanding on the issue of happiness and in this what are some considerations for psychotherapists?* Defined the appropriate research articles needed for review.

Inclusion criteria in this review are articles and books, broadly speaking, written on the topic of human happiness, including: how happiness is defined, historical and contemporary conceptions; its causes; neuroscience; cultural factors; psychodynamic perspectives; problems with happiness and critiques of approaches that stress happiness, and clinical implications.

In addressing the dissertation question, I have used systematic strategies to do a comprehensive search of the literature using the AUT electronic databases; Proquest 5000 International, PsychINFO, PEP, Medline and PsychEXTRA. In addition I have reviewed works published which have been printed or are accessible online through sources such as Google Scholar and a hand search has also been carried out with respect of relevant information available in books and articles.

Keywords for searches include; happiness, definition, flourishing, eudaimonia, virtue, vitality, contentment, joy, pleasure, hedonism, engagement, meaning, well-being, mental health, psychopathology, positive, negative, polarity, experience, neuroscience, brain, physiology, body, causes, psychology, behaviour, habits, psychotherapy, psychodynamic psychotherapy, psychoanalytic psychotherapy, existential psychotherapy, existential philosophy, death, time, philosophy, problems, issues, short term effects, long term effects, Aotearoa New Zealand, Maori, individualism, culture, enduring, genetic, therapeutic relationship, therapeutic, Christianity, Buddhism, meditation, mindfulness, therapeutic relationship, transference, countertransference, treatment, symptom, objective, subjective, measure.

Summary

In this chapter I have outlined the dissertation method and methodology and my rationale for choosing a hermeneutic literature review to research the broad topic of happiness. In the following chapter attention is given to conceptions of happiness.

Chapter 3 Conceptions of Happiness

Introduction

In this chapter I introduce conceptions of happiness with reference to historical and contemporary literature as well as cultural references to happiness. Attention is given to understanding happiness as it is defined and happiness as a measurable phenomenon.

Historical and contemporary references

History is steeped in significant authors who have sought to understand the nature and meaning of human happiness (McMahon, 2006). In *The Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle (350 B.C./2002) wrote on the concept of eudaimonia (a term now commonly translated as happiness); unlike later conceptions of happiness this had less to do with “feeling good” or “feeling happy” as it is commonly understood and more to do with character development through the expression of virtuous activity (Kraut, 2016). Influenced by Aristotle, the Christian philosopher Thomas Aquinas as cited in (Thomas & Kreeft 1993), saw difficulties in experiencing happiness on earth (due to among other factors the inability for humans to satisfy their will), with perfect happiness (beatitudo) found in the heavenly knowledge of the Christian God. In Bentham’s moral theory that an action is morally right if and only if it is productive of the most utility (happiness, pleasure) for the greatest number of persons (Mill, Bentham, & Ryan, 1987).

Acknowledged by Yalom (1980) as influencing psychoanalytic thinking with references to unconscious drives, Schopenhauer (1969) wrote that any sense of

human happiness would always be defeated by painful human desire caused by the product of a blind and insatiable metaphysical will underlying all behaviour; Schopenhauer considered that striving for happiness was a source of suffering and counselled a renunciation of the will, he writes:

“In the first place, no one is happy, but everyone throughout his life strives for an alleged happiness that is rarely attained, and even then only to disappoint him. As a rule, everyone ultimately reaches port with masts and rigging gone; but then it is immaterial whether he was happy or unhappy in a life which consisted merely of a fleeting vanishing present and is now over and finished” (Schopenhauer, 1851, p.284).

An acknowledged influence in psychoanalytic philosophy is philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (Cybulska, 2015). Nietzsche, initially a fan of Schopenhauer in his early life, rejected Schopenhauer’s aestheticism to view health (and to which references of happiness are made) directly connected with inner dynamics related to his life affirming concept of will to power (Nietzsche, Ansell-Pearson & Large, 2006). As cited in Nietzsche & Large (1998) Nietzsche observes “What is good? Everything that heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself. What is bad? Everything that is born of weakness. What is happiness? The feeling that power is growing, that resistance is overcome” (p.127). Often misunderstood, Nietzsche provides considered thought into human health and he identifies cultural and religious factors which he considered were outside of the majority’s awareness yet significantly impinged upon human health.

Searches of the more traditional psychoanalytic literature provide significant, but not substantial, results. An article by Akhtar (2010) titled *Happiness: Origins, Forms, and Technical Relevance* provides an overview of some of the existing literature and an observation of reasons as to why it has not been a focus for psychoanalysts. Akhtar (2010, p. 216) considers that due to a pessimistic world

view psychoanalysts are “weary” of happiness, tending to approach feelings associated with happiness with trepidation, and furthermore finds literature on the origins, phenomenology and technical issues as “meagre”.

Literature on happiness may be meagre within the psychoanalytic tradition, but is by no means altogether neglected. The term “happiness” can be found 130 times in Freud’s written work (Guttman et al, 1980). Akhtar (2010) notes also that happiness is written on and explored in the work of Helene Deutsch (1927), Bertram Lewin (1950), Melanie Klein (1946), Heinz Kohut (1977), and Michael Thompson (2004). Clinical issues, such as the diagnosis of destructive false happiness and humour is discussed by Lemma (2009); and Fox (1998) writes on the countertransference associated with happiness with consideration offered on how this could be brought into a therapeutic relationship.

Contemporary literature from the field of psychology is noted as gaining momentum in the area of human happiness (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2017). Former president of the American Psychology Society and major proponent of positive psychology Martin Seligman has been instrumental in this work. Seligman (2002) considers that by understanding happiness through a research based lens, happiness can be fostered in the individual and wider community. This body of literature comes from a range of sources and disciplines; including neuroscience (Berridge, & Kringelbach, 2011), formulated global sourced measures of happiness and predictors of happiness (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2017), whilst also drawing on philosophical concepts such as eudaimonia (Aristotle, 350 B.C./2002) and practices of meditation (Hanson, 2014).

Within Western society there is also a plethora of ill-informed information that exists on the topic of happiness (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). The Internet is awash with information on happiness; bookstores hold a large number of books and motivational CDS relating to this subject, and, as observed by Gunnell (2004) the general public are exposed to poor quality, potentially harmful information,

written by misinformed authors and unqualified self-proclaimed “experts” who are motivated more for commercial success than fostering happiness and well-being

Reflections

Literature which refers to happiness comes from well-respected historical authors as well as more recent authors who draw upon contemporary ideas and current research. Conceptions of happiness can also be influenced by pop culture, various types of misinformation propagated by advertising and social and cultural values that are unhelpful or misguided. In relation to the extensive nature of this topic and the mixed messages, my responses to this is mixed, and are characterized by the experience of curiosity (e.g. “happiness is desirable and how can it be increased or attained”) as well being intimidated and put off by the enormity of this topic. I also notice feelings of confusion, repulsion and distrust to this topic. In my desire to help clarify happiness, I sought to define it.

Defining happiness

The word happiness first appeared in Oxford Dictionary in the 16 Century and had a quite different meaning than it commonly does today. As McMahon (2006) identifies, the Old Norse and Old English root of happiness is “hap”, which is cognate with the word luck - that is, happiness was something that happened to people by Gods or good fortune. This understanding is however quite different from the one we have in current society that is associated with a sense of self agency, and societal values in the 18th Century (in 1776 Thomas Jefferson writes in The United States Declaration of Independence that everyone has an unalienable right (created by god) to pursue happiness).

Although happiness is often referred to in western societies, a universal definition of happiness is elusive (Gouthro, 2010). Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006, p.184) define it as “the experience of more frequent positive affective states than negative ones as well as the perception that one is progressing towards important life goals”. Lyubomirsky (2007, p.32) describes happiness as “the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile”. Within the *The World Happiness Report 2017* (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2017) happiness is understood as both an emotional report (that relates to a person's more immediate experiences commonly associated with happiness (i.e. joy, contentment, gladness and pleasure)) and as a type of evaluation of one's life (which is associated with longer term life experiences and character development).

In a review of psychoanalytic literature on happiness Akhtar (2010) considers that psychodynamic writings on happiness yield a view of happiness that is broad, multi layered, complex and often contradictory. Akhtar observes, that like other emotions, the experience of happiness has certain self-evident simplicity about it, yet on further reflection is more defined by “a fine admixture of “merger” and “murder”, that is a libidinal fusion and aggressive takeover of the object and a similar, doubly instinctualized surrender of the self...this is where all genuine happiness resides (Akhtar, 2010, p. 22). He observes that happiness appears to be comprised of four types of experiences: (a) contentment, (b) pleasure, (c) joy and (d) ecstasy, with dialectical tension present in them all. In referring to psychoanalytic references on happiness, Akhtar also considers that psychoanalytic thinking in this area, can, at best, provide a part picture in a much larger body of work and those interested in happiness should draw from more recent studies in this area and philosophy.

Alongside these conceptions of happiness, is also an association with “happiness” which is understood as holding a powerful position in societies, yet relates to a vaguer and potentially unhelpful version of happiness. David (n.d.); conveys a

prevalent understanding of “happiness”, she writes: “the dominant messaging in western societies is: Be happy. Don’t worry. It will be alright. Just reach for happiness. Take your destiny into your own hands. The people close to you, to whom you can tell your worries, they smile and a speech bubble floats from their mouth saying: ‘Think positive!’ Somewhere, a Disney bird is chirping.” (para. 4). This, I believe, is an equally important dimension of happiness, which is commonly used in association with the term happiness (David n.d) and adds to the complexity of this topic

Reflections

In exploring the definition of happiness I identified that there was no clear agreed upon definition. In my own reflections, the observation Akhtar (2010) has that happiness has a self-evident simplicity resonates with me. At times I have “simply” experienced what is understood as happiness (e.g. a sense of peace and appreciation while walking along a beach); These type of experiences, I consider, are often momentary (e.g. as I leave the beach my experience of happiness may give way to a sense of irritation as I drive home through peak hour traffic). Another aspect of happiness that I can relate to in myself is more cognitively orientated relating longer term life evaluations (e.g. if I was asked how I felt while driving through the traffic I could say I experience irritation for being late to a meeting, yet cognitively understand that my overall happiness is not necessarily tied to that moment but with a bigger “picture” of life in general).

Another association of happiness is commonly referred to as “false happiness”. Like the other understandings of happiness mentioned above, this too is a phenomenon I can connect with in myself. When I reflect on my experiences of this I realise I have a range of experiences in relation to this type of happiness: I notice a sense of repulsion - possibly in relation to struggling with both my own sense of fraudulence - as I (consciously and subconsciously) grapple with these

values. Part of this issue, I believe, is a desire to conform and belong to “the group” - with fears that if I don’t conform I may be turned away from, or abandonment, by the group - which is something that I will, through my internal dynamics, seek to defend against. Further attention is given to this in Chapter 4.

Happiness as a measurable phenomenon

Over the last 30 years, methods of measuring of happiness have developed significantly. Self-administered questionnaires are often utilised in measuring the happiness of individuals and rely on self-evaluations of subjective experiences. These questionnaires now tend to be classed into three main areas, namely: life evaluations (self-evaluations of meaning and purpose), positive emotional experiences (self-evaluations of positive affect,) such as joy and pride, and negative emotional experiences (self-evaluations of negative affect) including pain, anger, and anxiety and worry (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs (2017). It is understood that through individuals evaluating these different areas of their lives, an overall measure of happiness can be established.

Scales commonly used to measure life satisfaction and happiness include: the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985); the PANAS scales (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988); the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999); and the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002). These reports are used in a variety of contexts; at a global level this happiness collective data is used to inform public policy; from tracking progress of individuals as they attempt to increase their level of happiness or tracking happiness more broadly where collected data is used in the development of national public policies (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2017).

A range of factors are considered in the *World Happiness Report* - an annual report, first published in 2012 that attempts to measure the happiness of countries throughout the world (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2017). The measures used in

this report illustrate that happiness is connected to broad issues, namely: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity, and freedom from corruption. Countries, including New Zealand, differ in these variables, with some showing stronger evaluations than others (i.e. USA is high in GDP, but low in trust). According to the latest report published in 2017, all of top 10 countries are western industrialised countries. Norway is currently identified as the country with the highest national average of happiness. New Zealand ranks relatively high at number 8, with The Republic of Africa with their citizens reporting the lowest level of happiness in the world. In respect of differences between male and female sexes, men and women report feeling happy in almost equal proportions, with women measuring slightly (0.5%) more happy than men in general.

Considerations on measuring happiness

Many proponents of happiness measurement tools claim these tools capture the quality of life of an individual or nation and use this data in their policy making decision process (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2017), however there are some significant issues with measuring happiness which should not be overlooked (White, 2013). Happiness, as illustrated, is a complex and vague term that has been written on, and debated, by philosophers for over 2000 years; it has changed in meaning over time (i.e. from a sense of something that happened to people in the form of good fortune to now a great sense of self agency where people have the right to happiness); and there is no general consensus with respect of how it is defined. Not only is happiness vague and so therefore difficult to measure, studies have shown that how people feel at the moment in which they attempt to measure their happiness affects their overall evaluation of happiness.

Considerations on measuring happiness cross culturally have also been raised. Proponents of happiness measurement scales Ruut Veenhoven (2005),

emphasizes that happiness is a state of mind and therefore it can reliably be measured across nations - however this view is questioned by a number of authors. New Zealand author, Duncan (2005), identifies that cultural and linguistic factors cannot be overlooked in terms of interpreting the meaning and concept of happiness. The outcomes of questionnaires which attempt to measure happiness, may be shaped by linguistic and cultural norms that do not truly reflect the experience of people from non-western backgrounds. Individualistic and collectivist differences are identified as a point of consideration on this (Duncan, 2005). Similarly, Uchida, Norasakkunkit & Kitayama, (2004) consider that although happiness may be a universal experience, what it means to experience happiness varies cross culturally - the meanings of happiness embedded in cultural contexts and inherited “ways of life”. An American-European understanding of happiness, is associated more with an individualistic conception of happiness whereas East Asian cultural values are largely connected with a sense of community and connectedness, where the boundary between self and others is more blurry.

Grieves (2007) and Taylor (2007) emphasise that the best people to provide information on Maori happiness are Maori themselves (as cited in de Thierry, 2012). In consultation with Maori academics and leaders Statistics New Zealand (2002) defined Maori happiness as the “capability of Maori individuals and collectives to live the kind of life that they want to live” (p. 5). This definition is understood as being pluralistic in nature, recognizing cultural diversity and the interconnectedness of individual and collective happiness (de Thierry, 2012). Maori happiness de Thierry notes is shaped by themes of; whanau and relationships, a sense of belonging, spirituality, success and achievement, and a sense of freedom. These themes are interrelated as they are underpinned by Maori collectivist values specific to Maori paradigms, which are tied with ancestral lines, customs and beliefs. Maori frameworks such as Te Whare Tapa Wha created by Mason Durie (1998) and the Maori Statistics Framework (2002) have been used to facilitate this due to credibility and simplicity (de Thierry, 2012)

Reflections

I have mixed responses to the idea that happiness can be measured. Happiness, as identified, is broad, multidimensional and appears difficult to accurately classify and measure. In the process of attempting to measure my own happiness through happiness questionnaires I have identified at least two difficulties with attempting to measure my own happiness; The first is that when I consider my level of happiness I notice that it brings up conflicting responses (influenced by happiness being associated with an unhelpful social construct and happiness as it relates more to well-being); the second issue I identified in my own process of trying to measure my happiness is my feelings and perspective on my life changes depending on what I have been doing; for instance, directly after cycling I notice that I generally have a more positive outlook on life; similarly, after a poor night's sleep I may experience the world in a more negative light.

Indeed, due consideration needs to be given when reflecting on measures of happiness and should not necessarily be taken at face value. An aspect of this noted above which I consider is of particular importance in the field of psychotherapy is in relation to the subconscious biases spilling out into the therapeutic relationship. I consider that as a male pakeha living in Aotearoa New Zealand where "white privilege" has served me in ways I could not even truly comprehend, unconscious assumptions about happiness could possibly negatively affect my process when working with Maori, another assumption I am conscious of is that I may interpret happiness in more individualistic terms and thereby overlook more collectivist worldviews existing in East Asia (Uchida, Norasakkunkit & Kitayama, 2004), and the collectivist views of Maori, which, as

Durie (1998) emphasis are inextricably tied with whanau, hapu and iwi relationships as well as ties with whenua.

Summary

In this chapter I have brought together and reflected on a number of conceptions of happiness identified in the literature. This includes historical and contemporary understandings of happiness and attempts to define and measure happiness. These attempts have yet to provide a universally agreeable understanding of happiness, with efforts to measure happiness universally identified as being culturally inappropriate. Through examining attempts to define, categorise or simplify happiness, the complexity of has been illustrated. In the following chapter I provide further consideration on what is sometimes referred to as “false happiness”.

Chapter 4 “Unhelpful Happiness”

Introduction

In this chapter I explore and provide considerations on an understanding of happiness which appears uncondusive to health and well-being yet holds a powerful position in Western societies. In facilitating understanding on this subject I identify issues which may be problematic for individuals.

Conflicting responses to happiness

In the process of undertaking this research, time and time again I have found myself struggling to understand happiness - at times I think I have a sense of what it is and then realise that I do not. On many occasions when I reflect on the question of what is happiness? Contradictory thoughts and feelings define my experience. At times happiness seems to be something healthy and nourishing which I feel drawn to; at other times it appears superficial and I feel repulsed by it. This conflict has added a difficulty that I had certainly not anticipated to the degree this would be my experience when I initially planned to study this topic.

Part of my process in coming up against the difficulty of holding both the desirable and undesirable parts of happiness in mind was to throw out the term happiness altogether and change the topic of study to “well-being” or “flourishing” (as I considered they were more in line with my initial intention to research happiness as it directly relates to health and well-being). However, reflections in supervision led me to “sit with my unease” and I consequently decided to “not throw the baby out with the bathwater” and stay in relationship

with happiness. Further along in this process I felt drawn to create a distinction between what has been referred to as “true happiness” and “false happiness”. This option has been particularly tempting as it would help my own difficulties in dealing with my ambivalence towards “happiness”, however I saw this too was a way of conveniently distancing myself from this understanding of happiness that I believe is not false, but all too real. Consequently I have referred to this happiness as unhelpful happiness, which I acknowledge is a somewhat makeshift term. However I adopted it to identify a form of happiness that has a *real* presence in society, yet is seemingly different from the happiness which relates to well-being.

I have come to see that I am not alone in considering the contradictory nature of happiness. Numerous authors have written on the healthy and unhealthy associations of the term happiness. One definition of happiness is connected with psychological and emotional well-being (Layard & Sachs, 2017 & Seligman 2002), and yet another definition of happiness is characterised by superficiality, hedonistic pleasure, instant gratification, the accumulation of capital and material possessions and being pollyannish in nature (David 2016).

Psychiatrist and psychotherapist Neel Burton (2013) provides a somewhat humorous characterisation of an unhealthy version of happiness present in western societies, he writes:

“If I am to believe everything that I see in the media, happiness is to be six foot tall or more and to have bleached teeth and a firm abdomen, all the latest clothes, accessories, and electronics, a picture-perfect partner of the opposite sex who is both a great lover and a terrific friend, an assortment of healthy and happy children, a pet that is neither a stray nor a mongrel, a large house in the right sort of neighbourhood, a second property in an idyllic holiday location, a top-of-the-range car to shuttle back and forth from the one to the other, a clique of ‘friends’ with whom

to have fabulous dinner parties, three or four foreign holidays a year, and a high-impact job that does not distract from any of the above” (para. 3).

Three problems with this version of happiness are identified by Burton (2013). First; it is unattainable so therefore an important factor that can decrease happiness; second; it presents an ideal situated in the future, rather than the imperfect but actual present; and third; it has been defined by commercial success and has nothing to do with real happiness.

Why are people drawn to this type of happiness if it is unattainable, decreases happiness and has nothing to do with well-being? Held (2002) considers that people are indoctrinated to “be happy” through a growing source of mediums (i.e. internet, music, advertising, iconography, and self-help books). This, she observes, has led to these conceptions becoming intertwined with the social fabric of Western Societies and these ideas are accepted with little thought. Thin (2012) sees that since childhood happiness has been infused with consumerism with the role of happiness playing a role in effective marketing strategies. It is not difficult to find examples of this in popular culture (e.g. McDonalds “Happy Meal” and Coca Cola’s “Open Happiness” an international campaign first launched on “reality” television in 2009).

David (2016) considers these issues as a significant problem for both adults and children in Western Societies and refers to it as “the cult of positivity”, characterised by a “don’t worry be happy” approach to life which undermines the full range of human experiences and consequently diminishes well-being. In her experience, as a psychologist and psychotherapist at Harvard University, David (2016) observes this is contributing to a number of psychological and emotional difficulties, including: causing people to suppress emotions and feel guilty for experiencing emotions outside what is considered “positive” which can have negative flow on effects into relationships through people being restricted in their emotional intelligence and their ability to relate to one another.

Reflections

When I initially read Burton's characterisation of happiness noted earlier, I considered that it was helpful that he highlights a social phenomenon that is not overly difficult to find in society and therefore less challenging to understand in myself. I think, however, that I was naive in my initial understandings of this phenomenon - this type of happiness Thin (2012) identifies is both insidious and obscured in society (i.e. it is so close to us we cannot see it). When I reflect on my own experiences of this type of happiness I consider that there are conspicuous and inconspicuous aspects of this. There have been countless times where I have intentionally suppressed or masked my emotions, presenting myself as someone "upbeat" and "happy" so as to "fit in" with the norm of the group. This, I consider, is the more conspicuous nature of my relationship with this type of happiness. The other, potentially more concerning nature is my relationship with happiness that is outside of my awareness. As mentioned, Held (2002) identifies that individuals are bombarded with a messages to be happy from various mediums from childhood to adult life. I consider that growing up in New Zealand I have been exposed to (and internalised) a range of unhealthy messages about happiness through various mediums for all of my life and it is highly likely that I will continue to be influenced by societal values in ways which are outside of my awareness. I also consider that others in society will continue to be influenced by these messages and that this could reinforce a dangerous "groupthink" (Irving, 1972).

Reflections on the divisive nature of happiness has led me to wonder what it would be like if this happiness continued to develop and authentic experiences slowly decayed. Indeed I am not alone in considering the "progression" of society and future versions of happiness. The proliferation of psychoactive pharmaceuticals, cultural pressure to "be happy" and increasingly individualistic,

self-centred and “feel good” technology and mass consumerism has led social commentators such as Atwood (2017) to find parallels in Aldous Huxley’s 1932 *Brave New World* (2007) and the direction of contemporary Western societies illustrates a dystopian society where, via state orchestration, citizens are artificially content and happy through brainwashing and widespread use of the drug “soma”; and although humans in this society live pleasant “happy”, yet empty, lives that lack any real human connection.

Winnicott’s notion of true self false self

I consider that reflections on Winnicott’s (1960) notion of “true self” and “false self” provides considerations on happiness, especially as it relates to developmental issues. Winnicott (1953) considers that a “facilitating environment” is required for the infant’s development of a “true self”. This process is facilitated by a “good enough” mother who responds to, mirrors, and empathises with their baby. Developmental issues can arise during this period and into later life, particularly through inadequate mothering; where through a lack of empathy and responsiveness to the infant’s spontaneous gestures and impulses of the “true self” are not adequately met by a mother. In circumstances where the mother is not “good enough” and consequently the infant is unable to develop their “true self” the infant is protected by a compliant “false self”. Developmental issues as follow into later life, where in the absence of a developed “true self” the “false self” can become overly identified with itself and with none or little “true self” to form the basis of realness, other people’s expectations can be of overriding importance. Conversely, for individuals with a developed “true self” experience a sense of realness and spontaneity missing in those who have become identified with their “false self”. As the individual with a “true self” navigates society “false self” is however still present and plays a vital role in protecting and nursing the “true self” through complying with social conventions.

Reflections

I consider that as the “false self” is associated with compliance and conforming that people who have an impoverished sense of a “true self” may be at greater risk of becoming overly identified with the false version of happiness presented in this chapter; conversely those in a position of health with a well-developed sense of their true self would be in a stronger position to retain the experience of realness of the true self whilst the false self helped facilitate this. I do however consider that the daily challenges of residing in a society in which unhealthy values are commonplace, putting pressure on people’s sense of “realness”. This I consider is a particular relevant as the world societies makes rapid technological advances such as augmented reality and possibly is disconnected with what has been traditionally accepted as real or meaningful. However, I consider that psychotherapy may offer a refuge and be of value through offering a space for possible growth, particularly through providing a “holding environment” (Winnicott, 1953) characterised by empathic mirroring, empathy patience it may support the development of the “true self” and capacity to have a healthier relationship with the “false self”.

As I have drawn my attention to the ideas of happiness in the literature, I have become increasingly aware of the extent that these dynamics are present in my life. I recognise my own developmental issues and have raised my own questions with respect to my facilitating environment in connection to early experiences of empathic failure. As mentioned in earlier reflections, I consider that at times I project to others that I am “happy”, but behind my facade or “false self” (Winnicott, 1960) is not always an experience of “realness” as it would relate to my “true self”, but one of confusion and loss possibly indicating an over identification with a compliant “false self”. From my early twenties onwards however, I have slowly made healthy changes in my life and I believe my “false

self”, increasingly has a space to be thought about and understood, and for my true self to be found and seek expression. A vital part of my process has been the experience of a reparative therapeutic relationship in which unmet developmental needs and maladaptive defences have been respectfully explored. So to was becoming a parent four years ago - whether I am up for it or not, play, creativity and spontaneity have been part of life on a daily basis.

Considerations on “defensive happiness”

An issue identified in the literature is the defensive use of a false sense of happiness. McWilliams (2011) considers people may outwardly appear happy, but are in fact masking difficulties. Two areas for therapists to be aware of is pathological humour and individuals hypomanic personalities. Individuals with hypomanic personality can present in therapy with characteristics of someone who, from initial appearances, outwardly appears “happy” (i.e. be overtly cheerful, highly social); however, on further reflections may covertly experience guilt about feelings of aggression towards others, be incapable of being alone and have difficulties in empathy and an inability to love; similarly humour can be used defensively, from the more benign, to masking internal rage.

McWilliams (2011) encourages therapists to explore their own countertransference responses when a client presents to therapy with a facade of good psychological health and well-being. One dangerous and somewhat common countertransference for therapists is the sense that the client is psychologically healthier than what they are. Lemma (2009) also suggests that therapists explore their responses with respect to humour. She observes that it is critical that therapists guard against humour that serves their own defensive needs of warding off a client's threatening material. Crucially, it is important to give considered thought to the nature of client's underlying identifications. In the

context of therapy the invitation to be humorous can be understood as an invitation to explore something unique to each client.

Reflections

The metaphor of separating wheat from chaff has been used to reflect on different dimension of “happiness” referred to in this chapter. Initially the metaphor was understood as a means of understanding that which is valuable (wheat) with that which is not (chaff). This metaphor has however taken on a different meaning over time. Chaff has value, not necessarily in terms of encouraging it, but in understanding and addressing it. Particularly in the field of psychotherapy, there seems to be value in working through issues associated with a version of “happiness” which may detract rather than contribute to someone's sense of health and well-being.

A key consideration is that how a client presents themselves in the therapeutic space is not necessarily congruent with the internal dynamics of the client's experience. Utilising psychoanalytic interventions of understanding and exploring a client's defence mechanisms and their underlying identifications are two areas of interest. Reflections on the countertransference experienced by the therapist is also considered helpful in addressing these issues.

Summary

In this chapter I explore and provide considerations on an understanding of happiness which appears uncondusive to health and well-being yet holds a powerful position in Western societies. This version of happiness has been identified as causing difficulties through providing an unattainable ideal that

people may strive for and through contributing to a cultural value that encourages the suppression of emotions outside of this ideal.

Chapter 5 Sources of Longer Term Happiness

‘The goals of psychodynamic psychotherapy should include, but extend beyond, symptom remission. Successful treatment should not only relieve symptoms (i.e., get rid of something) but also foster the positive presence of psychological capacities and resources’ (Shedler, 2010, p.11).

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore and reflect on literature that identifies areas that are said to contribute to longer term happiness. The areas explored in this chapter are: slowing down and cultivating mindfulness; meaning; relationships and eudaimonia with emphasis given, not to the brief experiences of happiness, but to longer term happiness.

Slowing down and cultivating mindfulness

“When life becomes too complicated and we feel overwhelmed, it’s often useful just to stand back and remind ourselves of our overall purpose, our overall goal. When faced with a feeling of stagnation and confusion, it may be helpful to take an hour, an afternoon, or even several days to simply reflect on what it is that will truly bring us happiness, and then reset our priorities on the basis of that. This can put our life back in proper context, allow a fresh perspective, and enable us to see which direction to take.” (Bstan-dzin-rgya-mtsho & Cutler, 1998, p.61).

The act of slowing down and stepping back from normal routines is noted by a number of authors in respect of happiness (Hanson, 2014, Seligman, 2011). A key issue noted by Hanson (2014) is the business of modern life can remove us from what contributes to our well-being - this may be in the form of losing connections with our emotional experiences or losing sight of what is important in life. It is vital, therefore, to stand back, observe and evaluate what it is we are doing and whether it serves us.

The practice of meditation has gained increasing attention in contemporary literature on happiness and well-being (Davidson, 2010). As historically rich practice meditation comes in many forms and is found in Eastern and Western traditions (Hanson, 2014). Mindfulness is one particular meditation practice which has gained significant attention by researchers in scientific communities (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2017). Defined simply as the practice of paying attention non judgmentally, mindfulness has been shown to help facilitate happiness through a number of functions, including; developing the capacity for self-awareness, compassion and a sense of calm; as well as reducing stress and helping people to not be caught up in irrelevant distractions (Brown and Ryan, 2003 & Leary and Dockray, 2015, Anderson et al, 2011).

As mindfulness practices have demonstrated, when we attempt to avoid reality or our feelings we create our own internal suffering moment - this happens moment by moment on a daily basis (Fredrickson, 2013). He considers that therapy can be considered as a form of guided meditation, with therapists helping clients pay attention to their experience in the moment. Each time a client ignores their inner life by using a defence, the therapist can help a client understand their defence mechanisms and return to their feelings. Fredrickson observes that as clients let go of their defences which cause suffering, they become less avoidant and more in touch with themselves and consequently more present in themselves and their lives.

Reflections

Mindfulness meditation is a practice that I have dabbled with for a number of years and have found it helpful, among other experiences, to connect with myself and settle my mind. In my experience this is however easier said than done. On a number of occasions when I have attempted this, I have experienced the difficulties and sometimes distress of coming into contact with an unsettled mind and emotional state which I had been attempting to keep at bay through distraction or other defensive measures. This has especially been my experience when in an unstructured context. Considerations on facilitating mindfulness within a therapeutic relationship resonate with me, and I have experienced that the therapeutic space has been helpful in facilitating mindfulness (e.g. self-awareness and self-acceptance) in the “holding environment” of a therapeutic relationship (Winnicott, 1953).

Meaning

The thesis that living a meaningful life contributes to human happiness is well documented in historic and contemporary literature (Aristotle, 350 B.C./2002, Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs 2017, Seligman, 2002) and has been identified to reduce psychological issues (Steger et al., 2009; Dunn & O’Brien, 2009). Metz (2015) identifies that when there is no general consensus to what living a meaningful life entails; factors such as culture, ideology, social norms and beliefs relating to existence, all come into play when thinking about what it means for someone to live a meaningful life.

Seligman (2002) characterises the meaningful life as one where a person identifies and develops personal strengths and virtues in the service of something much larger than one’s self; for example if a person identified that they possessed

a love of learning - which has been rated very highly in terms of life satisfaction - then it may contribute to their sense of living a meaningful life to be involved in something where this strength can be exercised; examples of this in modern western society are the occupations of teaching or research, but this is one example - generally people have a range of character strengths which are exercised in a variety of contexts, including family and love, work, religion, and various personal projects.

The question of whether religion helps contribute to happiness is highlighted by a number of literature sources (Ellison, Gay, & Glass 1989, Lyubomirsky, 2008, Krause 2003). Lim and Putnam (2010) identify that many, but not all of the studies indicate that generally those with a religious conviction report greater levels of happiness than those that do not have a religious conviction. Two considerations put forward by Lyubomirsky (2008) as to why this is are: 1) that people gain comfort in God during times of difficulty, and 2) that God provides purpose in life and meaning can be derived from ordinary life events. However research by Lim & Putnam (2010) into the mechanism of what increases life satisfaction for religious people identifies that it was the social networks and support which have resulted from belonging to a group which increased happiness of participants in their study.

Reflections

The issue of meaning in life as it relates to “bigger” existential questions that have been with me for many years. Underpinned in this is my chronic existential angst - with my fear of death ebbing and flowing into my consciousness - since the death of my father when I was a child. My experience has, at times, felt crippling and led me to question my existence when, I consider, there is no metaphysical meaning to life. More often, however, it has led me to consider, what actually is meaningful in life and what is important. These experiences I believe brought me

to study philosophy and then psychotherapy and probably underpinned my desire to think further about the question of happiness.

In the movie *Yalom's Cure: A Guide to Happiness* (Yalom & Gisiger, 2016) Yalom observes that existential angst is not an uncommon experience for children who lose a parent - Yalom states "when parents die, we always feel vulnerable. Because we're dealing not only with loss, but also with confronting your own death...there is no parent between us and the grave". In *Existential Psychotherapy* Yalom (1980) identifies and explores the four existential concerns - death, freedom, existential isolation, and meaninglessness - which he believes causes much, conscious and unconscious angst and underlie many issues that humans wrestle with in their daily lives. Religion, Yalom notes, is one way in which existential angst may be reduced, yet this comes at a cost - through focusing on otherworldly ideas such as heaven and hell, fullness of life here on earth may be reduced.

People may however enrich their lives through embracing their existential angst in a way which contributes to living a meaningful life, with one key area being the development of nurturing and lasting relationships. Yalom (Yalom & Gisiger, 2016) notes existential issues are present for all of us, many individuals have immediate pressing issues that deal with relationships and many are unable to develop rich, nurturing, enduring emotional bonds necessary for full lives. What facilitates healing, Yalom observes, is ultimately the therapeutic relationship characterised by compassion and empathy, a deep connection with patients.

Interpersonal relationships and happiness

A key predictor of happiness is the presence of healthy and authentic social relationships (Diener and Seligman, 2002 and Yalom & Gisiger, 2016); Healthy relationships are understood to support human happiness in a number of ways, including: companionship and intimacy and helping facilitate healthy choices (Seligman, 2002); contributing to a person's sense of living a meaningful life (Lim and Putnum, 2010); strengthening resiliency, support and reducing psychological and emotional isolation (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2017). Relationships can also increase positive experiences; Akinin, et al, 2002 identifies that enjoyable experiences such as enjoying a delicious meal or watching the sunset, can be felt more intensely when carried out with others than when alone; The benefits of healthy and authentic relationships is understood to the functioning of healthy societies (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs (2017), with research indicating the benefits are consistent for adults and children across cultures. Relationships are, of course, complex, and are comprised of a range of experiences conducive to happiness as well as those which are not (Seligman, 2002). Two dimensions that support happiness in respect to helping facilitate healthy relationships are empathy and compassion.

Empathy

The role empathy has on the development of social relationships that are conducive to happiness is emphasised by a number of prominent authors (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2017. Seligman, 2003). Multidimensional in nature; Rogers defines empathy as: “[the perception of] the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the "as if" condition” (Rogers, 1959, p. 210-211). Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs (2017) define empathy as the ability for a person to share and recognise the emotions of others. Watt and Panksepp (2016) see it as a central component of lasting healthy human

relationships, yet have found that, on examination, empathy is complex and multidimensional in nature.

Most contemporary models of empathy consider that empathy is activated and developed in response to caregivers as well as social bonds outside of the more immediate circle (Hrdy 2009). In adult life, empathy is understood to be improved upon in a number of ways, including: Self-awareness (McWilliams, 2011); Specific forms of meditation (Leiberg et al, 2011); psychoeducational training (Leiberg et al, 2011) as well as the addressing of issues that may inhibit empathy, such as difficulties in paying attention, “busyness”, and self-absorption. While for the most part empathy may be increased in adult populations, it should be noted that smaller portions of adult populations are said to lack empathy or have significant difficulties in developing empathy, for instance, individuals with Asperger's syndrome and Autism (Watt and Panksepp, 2016) and individuals with psychopathic personality structures (McWilliams, 2004). These features may be identified through the assessment process, through the therapist exploring a client's presenting issues, their history and considering the characterological structure and dynamics existing between therapist and client.

The development of empathy in the context of psychotherapy is highlighted in psychodynamic literature. McWilliams (2011) highlights empathy may be developed in the context of therapeutic relationship. Key to this is the client's experience of being empathised with - a process offering great therapeutic value, yet with its own challenges - this may be through the client uncovering parts of themselves that the therapist has not yet uncovered or processed in themselves (Bollas, 1987). As McWilliams (2011) notes, the capacity to empathise and convey this experience to clients in a way that is useful rests largely upon a therapist's emotional and intuitive abilities and this means looking inwards to one's own internal processes . As Bollas (1987) eloquently writes “in order to find the patient, we must first look for him within ourselves” (p.202).

Compassion

The thesis that compassion plays a central role in happiness is highlighted by a number of authors (Bstan-dzin-rgya-mtsho & Cutler (1998), Kemeny, et al, 2012 & Leiberger et al (2011). Compassion is said to differ from empathy, with compassion understood as more of a response to suffering whereas empathy is associated with sharing and recognising others' feelings (including feelings of happiness); Frie (2010) views compassion as an intention towards the other, characterised by a suffering with or an attitude which demonstrates an awareness of and attunement to, and our fundamental situatedness with others.

It is noted by Orange (2006) that compassion is largely overlooked in psychodynamic psychotherapy, however, psychotherapist Young-Esiendrath (2001) sees the client's development of compassion as intrinsic to therapy and believes that increasing compassion for self and others is considered a treatment goal which is of equivalent value to the alleviation of suffering. McWilliams (2004) also writes on the benefits of compassion; she observes that compassion towards ourselves and others is tied to our capacity to self-comfort and regard our problems with less self-criticism. This may be helped through a therapist's facilitating an environment conducive of self-acceptance, and forgiveness towards self and others and through understanding and gaining acceptance of a client's limitations.

Literature highlights that there are a number of practices for cultivating compassion these include: regularly and intentionally practicing compassion in day to day living, meditating on the suffering of others, actively practising kindness towards self and others (Bstan-dzin-rgya-mtsho and Cutler, 1998); as well as involvement in more structured learning environments. A study by Leiberger et al (2011) found that after one day of training in compassion in a group setting, participants demonstrated greater compassion towards others; and after

an eight week training in compassion and empathy (and mindfulness) participants had developed greater ability to recognise others' emotions and reported lower levels of negative emotion and higher levels of positive emotion when compared to a wait-list control group.

Reflections

McWilliams (2004) observes "as we develop more acceptance of ourselves and others and our shortcomings, we also find ourselves more able to be more compassionate toward others" (p.259). I believe that this thesis is congruent with my experience. Through developing awareness and acceptance of my own psychopathology and suffering and an appreciation of others' experiences, I believe I have a greater capacity for compassion and empathy; conversely if I had little appreciation of suffering I believe I would have little compassion and empathy for others. My own development in this area is however a work in progress; I am no stranger to self-criticism and internalised anger and indeed transference issues can "spill out" into my relationships with others in a less than compassionate manner.

Other areas said to support healthy relationships

The two areas which I have focused on here identified to improve relationships are empathy and compassion. Other activities also illustrated in the literature to actively focus on happiness in relationships, include: kindness to self and others (Della Porta, Jacobs Bao, & Lyubomirsky, 2012); active listening (Nichols, M, 2009); self-awareness of ways of relating (Seligman, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000); volunteering has predicted happiness among older Maori and non-Maori (Dulin et al 2012) and donating to others (Moll, et al, 2006) - indeed research into giving has shown that parts of the brain (ventral tegmental area and dorsal and ventral

striatum) are more active when donating money to others than when receiving money.

Reflections

A number of activities have been identified in the literature as facilitating happiness; this does not mean however that these activities should necessarily be carried out without some level of consideration. For instance, it seems questionable whether someone ought to donate money to others when their own family is financially impoverished; it may also be unhelpful for a victim of abuse to focus on practicing kindness towards their victimizer when unprocessed emotions of anger define their own experience - an individual's circumstances and emotional state seem to play a vital role in whether an act (or activity) is connected with happiness or not. I consider that psychotherapy has much to offer in this respect. For instance, authors such as Telzer et al (2014) highlight that donating is helpful in facilitating happiness, yet when the act of donating is looked at without due consideration of a person's inner emotional and psychological state of being something vital, I believe, is missed.

A number of authors highlight that supposedly "good acts" cannot be judged without also giving due attention to the person's inner world. In *On Genealogy of Morality*, for instance, Nietzsche as cited in (Nietzsche, Ansell-Pearson, & Diethe, 2007) questioned the motivations of common morals existing in society and accepted by the majority, he viewed that altruism, for instance, was not born from health, but rather an expression of self-loathing and resentment. Similarly, McWilliams (1984) gives attention to the inner experience of altruism, identifying the motivations of individual involved in altruistic activities of unconscious guilt or shame about hostility and greed with defenses that included compulsivity, identification with the victim, and reversal. In *The Nichomachean Ethics* Aristotle (350 B.C./2002) emphasises understanding the relationship

between the act and the internal disposition of the individuals in his conception of eudaimonia.

Eudaimonia

Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia has gained attention in more contemporary literature on happiness (Seligman, 2003 & Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2017). Commonly translated as happiness or flourishing, eudaimonia is synonymous with virtuous activity (Adler, 1978). In order to possess eudaimonia, a person must live and act in harmony with their soul, that is to say, someone who possesses eudaimonia is emotionally, psychologically and spiritually congruent with their behaviour. Central to this thesis is that eudaimonia is not a passive state, but inextricably linked to exercising virtues - for instance only thinking just thoughts or experiencing just feelings is not enough, one must also act justly to truly exercise the virtue of justice.

Aristotle (350 B.C./2002) reflections on the actions and internal experiences of individuals highlights the value placed on congruence with how one acts and how one thinks and feels. As noted, eudaimonia refers to happiness where the individual exercises virtues in accordance with their internal states. Two other levels of this are; *enkrateia* (translated as "continence"; literally "mastery"); and, *akrasia* (meaning "incontinence and "lack of mastery"). An *enkratic* person experiences a pathos ("emotion" "feeling") which is contrary to reason but still acts with reason (i.e. they are not ruled by their feelings) an *akratic* person however goes against reason in response to a feeling (i.e. they are ruled by feelings or weak of will). Aristotle ranks someone with the internal composition of *enkrateia* more highly than *akrasia*; both states however, fall short of someone said to possess eudaimonia or happiness, where a person exercises virtuous in harmony with their soul.

Reflections

I consider that Aristotle's conception sets a high bar for happiness - happiness is not found in instant gratification or simply "feeling good" but through the experience of emotional, psychological and spiritual congruence whilst acting in accordance with virtuous activity (Kraut, 2016). Factors such as social standing, luck, intelligence and upbringing all play a part in contributing to or detracting from an individual's capacity for happiness. Aristotle (350 B.C./2002) considers that happiness is something only a small section of society are capable of. Change however is possible; in the same way a clumsy archer can improve with practice, individuals too may improve their disposition and consequently their capacity for happiness.

Summary

In this chapter, literature relating to longer term experiences of happiness was identified and reflected on. The areas of focus were slowing down and cultivating mindfulness; meaning; relationships and eudaimonia. All of these areas emphasise the value of relationships, with empathy and compassion shown to help facilitate interpersonal relationships conducive of happiness.

Chapter 6 Short Term Experiences of Happiness

Introduction

In this chapter I explore short term experiences of happiness. These experiences are different from the longer term experiences of happiness noted in the previous chapter in that they are more related to feeling states and may be experienced in one moment and gone in the next.

Activities identified to facilitate the experience of short term happiness

Within the literature, a number of references are made to short term experiences of happiness. These experiences of happiness are defined by the brevity in which they are experienced and include such experiences as the momentary sense of appreciation while watching a sunset, the contentment of seeing one's children enjoying themselves and the pleasure of a fine meal when hungry. Unlike longer term conceptions of happiness illustrated in the previous chapter, these experiences may be gained and lost within hours or minutes. A distinction between short and long term happiness has been created to help facilitate understanding, but no definite distinction exists. At times, short term moments of happiness appear to be only connected with the moment in which they are experienced (e.g. taking pleasure in enjoying a delectable meal), these experiences have been demonstrated to have a healthy "flow on" or "downstream" effect and be connected with an overall picture of happiness with life (Diener, Kesebir, & Lucas, 2008).

A number of activities that may contribute to experiences of happiness are highlighted in the literature; these include; writing a gratitude list (Boehm,

Lyubomirsky, & Sheldon, 2011), performing acts of kindness (Della Porta, Jacobs Bao, & Lyubomirsky, 2012), using one's strengths in a new way (Seligman et al., 2005), affirming one's most important values (Nelson & Lyubomirsky, 2012), donating (Telzer, et al, 2014), meditating on positive feelings towards self and others (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008); thinking about or writing about happy moments in life and writing or speaking about difficult moments (Lyubomirsky, Sousa, & Dickerhoof, 2006); and good nutrition and regular exercise (Seligman, 2011). Research by McIntyre, Watson, Clark and Cross (1991) identify that feelings of happiness are often intensified when engaging in specific activities with others instead of doing these same activities alone. Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener (2005), point out that happiness is largely understood as the amount of time that people experience a positive effect and not necessarily the intensity of that effect.

Intentional activities as such are identified as contributing to happiness, research is also attempting to understand how day to day activities affect human happiness (Bryson & MacKerron, 2017). A large scale study with currently 66,603 participants is currently underway in the United Kingdom. Aptly named Mappiness (i.e. mapping happiness), the study utilises a smartphone application to regularly and randomly ask participants to evaluate how happy they feel and what they are doing at that time. In doing this, the researchers have been able to gain understanding of how contexts, experiences and activities affect happiness. A claimed strength of this approach is that participants are not given time to reflect on how they rate their experiences (i.e. put on rose tinted glasses), but give immediate real time self-evaluations of their experiences. The study is still underway, however their findings have identified a number of activities where people rate their happiness as higher and a number of activities where people rate their happiness as lower.

Mappiness research findings

Activities where people report higher levels of happiness	Activities where people report lower levels of happiness
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Intimacy, making love2. Theatre, dance, concert3. Exhibition, museum, library4. Sports, running, exercise5. Gardening, allotment6. Singing, performing7. Talking, chatting, socialising8. Nature watching9. Walking, hiking	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Travelling, commuting2. In a meeting, seminar, class3. Admin, finances, organising4. Waiting, queueing5. Care or help for adults6. Working, studying7. Sick in bed

Increasing feelings of happiness

It is postulated by Aknin, et al (2011) that behaviours which directly result in increased feelings of happiness may create a feedback loop scenario where individuals engage in activities to increase feelings of happiness and that happiness acts as a catalyst to be involved in more activities that lead to happiness. This type of feedback loop was identified in relation to giving; in a study by Aknin et al (2011) it was found that individuals reported feeling happier and a greater desire to provide a gift to a person directly after recalling the memory of purchasing something for another person, the authors note that although this study focused on giving, it is considered that this feedback loop as such be applicable in a range of activities.

Neuroscientist and mindfulness practitioner Hanson (2014) notes that such experiences can be overlooked because our minds can be preoccupied with other things and because benign feelings are less attention grabbing for the brain than more “weighty” subjects (i.e. people are more drawn to watch bad news rather good news); similarly bad memories are more lasting than good memories - one negative experience with a dog can trump a thousand positive experiences of dogs. Research into this area has shown that memories need to be held in awareness for 5 - 10 - 20 seconds for them to become registered as an emotional memory. Consciously keeping good memories in awareness (“savouring” these experiences) has been shown to help store these experiences in the implicit memory and increase our level of happiness.

Berridge, & Kringelbach (2011) studies have shown the connection between these experiences with longer term experiences of happiness, identifying that many of the brain mechanisms activated in the short term hedonic experience connected to sensory pleasure are also operating in the more altruistic and higher order experiences connected with longer term experiences of happiness. The region of the brain most activated by hedonic pleasure is the region directly above the eyeballs (the ventral prefrontal cortex) and in ventral striatum, with sustained activation of these areas has been shown to predict sustained longer term psychological happiness and well-being. Davidson & McEwen (2012) note that the areas related to happiness all exhibit plasticity - the ability for the brain to change and grow - throughout all stages of the human life cycle.

Reflections

Certainly in my training as a psychotherapist much attention was given to difficult subject matter as it relates to psychopathology and difficult, however, the more

benign dimensions of the human experience were not overlooked. On a number of occasions supervision has provided a space to reflect on the activities which could play a role in increasing the well-being of a client (S. Appel, personal communication, August 29, 2012). Such activities included when a client would talk of enjoyable activity (e.g. walking their dog, having a meaningful conversation with a friend or involvement in a creative activity that was uplifting and an important part of self-care). It seemed that these experiences offered a short term feeling associated with happiness that were often reflected on as valuable part of the client's week.

Further consideration is helpful as it appears that evaluating an activity only on how it could make someone feel at the time in which it was carried out is but one part of the picture. For instance, an activity may rate high at the time in which it is carried out but, but may have negative consequences later; and conversely activities that yield a lower rating at the time in which they are carried out (e.g. study, work and caring for adults) yet may increase a person's overall sense of happiness in their life. Indeed, this has been my experience in life and in particular with therapy, addressing parts of myself that I struggle to accept has been difficult and painful, yet has nonetheless been conducive to my overall sense of wellbeing and experiences associated with happiness.

Summary

The experience of positive emotions over the short term are a dimension of happiness and are characterised by the brevity of in which they are experienced. These experiences are not the same as the longer term experiences of happiness, an individual may experience happiness in one moment may be lacking in lacking in life meaning. Short term happiness can however be associated with longer term happiness and is noted as a valuable dimension of happiness.

Chapter 7 Barriers to Happiness

Introduction

In the previous two chapters attention has been given to identifying that which may help facilitate happiness, in this chapter consideration is given to factors which have been identified as acting as a barrier to happiness. The areas of focus are misunderstanding happiness, hedonic adaptation, mind wandering and the negativity bias of the brain.

Misunderstanding happiness

Kahneman, (1999) indicates that people are generally poor predictors of their own future happiness, finding that individuals will often inaccurately predict the emotional impact of specific events and consequently make decisions based on mistaken calculations of what will bring the greatest happiness. Bstan-dzin-rgyatsho & Cutler (1998) consider that people can be misguided in their attempts to find happiness to confusions about the sources that will bring them true happiness. Similarly, Hanson (2014) observes that people can be blinded to what may contribute to happiness; and Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, (2005) note that individuals may attempt to develop happiness using techniques that are ineffective and with no results this futile pursuit can result in disappointment.

A common assumption is that valuing happiness will generally increase happiness. However, a study by Mauss, Tamir, Anderson, & Savino (2011) supports the hypotheses that valuing happiness may in fact reduce happiness, which has been referred to as the happiness paradox. Research by Maus et al

(2011d) identifies that individuals who highly value happiness and set high standards for themselves can result in feeling disappointed and discontented - and interestingly the feelings of disappointment increase the more happiness is sought. Also, the more people value happiness, the less happy they are in situations where they believe they should feel happy - with the understanding being that people who expect to feel happy are disappointed at their feelings not measuring up to how they think they should feel in that situation.

This research provides interesting considerations for those actively pursuing happiness: when individuals adopt a mindset to increase their happiness - as some “self-help” books and mentors encourage people to do - it may result in feelings of disappointment and discontentment; also when individuals place expectations on themselves to “feel happy” in a given situation (e.g. a birthday, holiday, Christmas) they can be disappointed at themselves for not feeling happy. These are relevant points, however, I consider that this is a somewhat limited view of happiness - one that focuses on “happy” feelings. However - as highlighted in earlier chapters happiness - is conceived of as not only a feeling state, but associated with factors that do not necessarily relate to desirable feeling states (as illustrated in earlier in Chapter 4), but to the cultivation of longer term conceptions of mindfulness, healthy interpersonal relationships, meaning and eudaimonia.

Social and cultural values appear to support this misunderstanding. In Chapter 4 issues related to unhelpful aspects of social and cultural aspects of “happiness” were raised. David (2016) writes on the “cult of positivity” present in Western Societies and its emphasis on “being positive” with little acknowledgement of the full human experience and similarly, Held (2002) raises concerns with the constant reinforcement of these values in various mediums. Saul (1995) considers that the current association with pursuit of material items, pleasure and mindless contentment traced to the 18th century when happiness came to include material comforts and the pursuit of pleasure. Seligman (2011) notes that the strong

association between pleasure and happiness has become a significant problem for societies such as the United States where he observes that the majority of people see happiness as pleasure.

Hedonic adaptation

Studies on hedonic adaptation (or hedonic treadmill) indicate that significant changes in life circumstances do not, for the most part, result in sustained shifts in well-being - that is, people may receive an emotional boost from improving circumstances (e.g. a new job) or from gaining a desired material object (e.g. a new car) - however the research shows that people generally return to a baseline level of happiness (even after winning a major lotto prize (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978). That pleasure is temporary is not such an issue in itself (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006), however problems can arise when people become “stuck” on the hedonic treadmill (Seligman, 2002). That is, people continually seek to change their circumstances to improve their level of happiness yet never really cultivate that which facilitates an enduring sense of happiness. This can give rise to a range of issues - from a sense of futility and despondency through to problems with addiction, as individuals need more and more of an experience to gain the same short-lived feeling of pleasure

From a Buddhist understanding of human nature an association has been made between hedonic adaptation and the suffering caused by human desire. Wallace & Shapiro (2006) write that, from a Buddhist perspective, the pleasure derived from attempts to satisfy desire as such is generally short lived and ultimately leads back to desire. Similarly, Tsong-kha-pa (2000) understands that clinging to such stimuli as the source of happiness may give rise to intermittent, if not long lasting, anxiety as one faces the likelihood, or certainty that the stimuli will not last.

Reflections on money and desire

The issue of money and hedonic adaptation has been noted in the literature. A study outlined by Csikszentmihalyi (1999) revealed that for people in the United States who earned less than \$30,000 per year, they believed \$50,000 would be satisfying, while those who earned over \$100,000 per year wanted to earn \$250,000 and so on. Happiness as it relates to money is however, a complex issue when living in capitalist society. As Akhtar (2010) points out, money affords people time, allows for more opportunities and can help facilitate meaningful experiences; indeed a study by Nobel Peace prize winner Daniel Kahneman and Angus Deaton (2010) found that a certain level of money (i.e. enough to live comfortably) without significant financial uncertainty) can increase happiness, but additional money over certain threshold generally does little to increase personal happiness.

On reflection, many of my difficulties start from yearning for a possession, or status or “thing” outside of myself that will bring me happiness (and are often connected with money) - associated with my fantasies are often desirable feelings - associated with identity, power and pleasure. The outcome of the new phone etc., is however, quite different from my fantasy - not long after gaining the “thing” which had held the promise of happiness the illusion is broken and I am left with myself, and although I am able to recognise this is a phenomenon which I have experienced time and time again in myself, I find myself still being seduced by the promise of “happiness”.

Mind wandering and the negativity bias of the brain

Research has established a relationship between mind wandering and decreased levels of happiness. Through using a specifically designed smartphone

application, Killingsworth & Gilbert (2010) were able to gain information on the experience of more than 2000 individuals' day to day activities. The research focused on identifying the time taken up by mind wandering or focusing on the activity in which participants were engaged. At the same time these participants were also asked to rate the level in which they were happy or unhappy. The study indicated that, on average, participants reported that their minds were wandering 47% of the time and that when participants identified that their minds were wandering, they also reported higher levels of unhappiness than when focusing on their task.

Research by Hanson (2014) considers that the human brain has a negativity bias which causes it to focus on negativity as a default state. Hanson (2014) highlights that this is a process which over hundreds of millions of years of evolutionary development the human brain has been wired to focus on negative rather positive experiences, as judging and learning from negative experiences and situations has improved chances of survival. Hanson (2014, p.27) notes the human brain is now "like Velcro for negative experiences but Teflon for positive ones" - consequently our brains are wired to focus on the negative. Happy experiences, can be overlooked and underappreciated while negative experiences are given prime position in the mind. In terms of our evolution this has been crucial, helping the species evolve and survive. However, for the most part humans' brains are now more hardwired to focus on the negative than necessary - and consequently experiences of happiness are diminished. As a neuroscientist, Hanson (2014) emphasises the plasticity of the brain and believes that the brain can be retrained to focus more on what contributes to human happiness.

Summary

Barriers to happiness identified in this chapter are misunderstanding happiness, hedonic adaptation, issues with money, mind wandering and the negativity bias

of the brain. These have been illustrated as reducing or impinging upon personal happiness.

Chapter 8 Discussion and implications for practice

Introduction

In this final chapter I draw from the main ideas drawn from previous chapters and provide considerations on clinical implications for psychotherapists on the issue of happiness. This chapter includes reflections on the limitations of this study and concluding comments.

Discussion and implications for clinical practice

Happiness has been shown to be a broad topic with multiple meanings associated with it. In order to help facilitate understanding in this area, I developed awareness of ideas on happiness presented in a growing body of literature on happiness. The field of psychology identified a number of long term and short term sources of happiness. In Chapter 5, slowing down and cultivating mindfulness, meaning, interpersonal relationships, and eudaimonia were identified as longer term sources of happiness. In Chapter 6, a number of sources of happiness in terms of shorter term (or momentary) experiences of happiness were illustrated and reflected on.

In the process of exploring what some sources of happiness are I realised that while psychology research is very helpful in finding measures, descriptions and advice on what one might do to be happier, it appeared there was an absence of articulation on how one might go about developing a capacity to make use of this 'advice'. For example, it has been found that having good relationships is

conducive of happiness. However, if a person suffers from an inability to form relationships, an implication is that may need to be attended to first. Anna Freud (cited in Alvarez, 1992, p. 113), noted in relation to the developing self that “if you haven’t yet built the house, you can’t throw somebody out of it,” Sandler adds, ‘nor keep him locked in the basement’”. Perhaps then it is in psychotherapy that attention is given to the development of self (which would arguably make the capacity for happiness possible) and what potentially gets in the way of this development throughout our life spans.

In Chapter 4 I explore and provide consideration of an “unhelpful” type of happiness present in Western societies and reinforced through factors such as advertising. David (2016) observes that this is a significant issue in her practice as a psychotherapist, particularly something that influences individuals to suppress their emotions and consequently reduces a person’s capacity for resiliency and negatively affects relationships. If happiness was clearly defined then we could more clearly consider what contributes or detracts from human happiness, whereas as it stands we are potentially more vulnerable to ideal being hijacked and used in a way that does not serve us. I speculate that corporate interests may have hijacked happiness with developmental traumas, societal stressors and pressures contributing to its powerful position in society.

I believe it is the specific holding environment (Winnicott, 1953) offered in psychotherapy that may provide space for empathic attunement and mirroring that allows the false self to be understood and for the true self to be met and developed. The unstructured and open nature of this relationship I consider, provides an opportunity to explore and make meaning of vague and potentially unmetabolized experiences. It is a space potentially conducive for the ‘mending’ of the ‘irksome’ problems that Winnicott noted patients present with in psychotherapy; however unlike the quick fix approaches and ideas of instant happiness, this process takes time. Winnicott (1969) observes “if only we can wait, the patient arrives at understanding creatively and with immense joy, and I

now enjoy this joy more than I used to enjoy the sense of having been clever...the principle is that it is the patient and only the patient who has the answers” (p.711). An implication may be that therapists have to understand and work through a client's unhelpful “happiness” connected with a strong false self as longer term developmental issues are attended to.

Limitations of study this study and opportunities for further research

The first limitation quite literally the defined word limit of this dissertation. Happiness is a broad topic with an enormous amount of text available from a variety of sources. Researching this topic has illustrated the complexity of happiness and its influence in Western societies. In attempting to address the research topic *Seeking understanding on the issue of happiness and in this what are some considerations for psychotherapists?* I intentionally brought together a wide range of information to locate my considerations for psychotherapy in the context of the current climate of “happiness”. Adopting a hermeneutic methodology allowed for personal reflections which for me personally provides the most difficult, yet richest experience of this process. Although this study has cast light onto this topic, the complexities of happiness are however a bigger issue than what I could manage here. One area of further research on this topic which may be of value to psychotherapy is considering the experience of “happiness” in relation to notion of “true self” and “false self” (Winnicott, 1953) in an increasing technological world where virtual identities play an increasingly common role in human relationships.

Concluding thoughts

In exploring the issue of happiness, I have come to see it as a particularly complex topic. In involving myself in this research through the hermeneutic methodology

I have had a unique opportunity, I believe, to draw attention to complexities of this topic in relation to myself, as someone living in a Western capitalist society and as someone reflecting on happiness as it relates to psychotherapy. As I have worked my way through this study I have developed an increasing appreciation of psychotherapy as a means to facilitate happiness. Exploring literature outside of psychotherapy has helped in identifying sources of happiness and potential issues, however it is psychotherapy which I consider has much to offer. These offerings however are not simply about a *quick fix* noted in Chapter 4, but rather understanding in deep and meaningful way what it means to facilitate happiness.

Summary

In this final chapter I draw from the main ideas from previous chapters to provide considerations for psychotherapists on the issue of happiness. Exploring outside of psychoanalytic literature, a number of issues and sources of happiness have been identified. Implications for psychotherapists involve addressing these issues as it relates to the person, with emphasis given to developmental issues and appreciation of a client's processes.

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