

## Secrets of Happiness

**Provides insights on happiness. Evolution of pleasure theory in history; What desires must people fulfill to live a happy life; Kinds of happiness.**

By: Steven Reiss

After psychologist Steven Reiss survived a life-threatening illness, he took a new look at the meaning of life. Now, based on a survey of more than 6,000 people, Reiss offers new insights about what it really takes to be happy.

Sometimes we are so consumed with our daily lives that we forget to look at the larger picture of who we are and what we need to be happy. We work, raise our children, and manage our chores, but it takes an extraordinary event such as a life-threatening illness, or the death of a loved one, to focus our attention on the meaning of our lives.

I faced death for the first time when I was told I needed a liver transplant a few years ago. I thought about the meaning in my life and why I lived the way I did. I started to question the Pleasure Principle, which says that we are motivated to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. When I was ill, I discovered exactly why I wanted to get better and continue living, and it had little to do with pleasure or pain.

Pleasure theory has been around since the days of ancient Greece and is well-represented in modern-day society and academic psychology. Socrates pondered the idea that pleasure is the basis of morality; he wondered if pleasure indicates moral good and pain indicates evil. Epicurus, the greatest of all pleasure theorists, believed that the key to a happy life was to minimize stomach distress, or anxiety, by changing one's attitudes and beliefs. His rational emotive philosophy was popular for 700 years in ancient Greece and Rome.

More recently, Playboy founder Hugh Hefner used pleasure theory to justify the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Psychologist N. M. Bradburn said that the quality of a person's life can be measured by the excess of positive over negative feelings. So is maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain the ultimate key to human happiness? No. When I was in the hospital analyzing what made my life satisfying, I didn't focus on the parties. In fact, pleasure and pain were not even considerations.

If pleasure is not what drives us, what does? What desires must we fulfill to live a happy life? To find out what really drives human behavior, my graduate students and I asked more than 6,000 people from many stations in life which values are most significant in motivating their behavior and in contributing to their sense of happiness. We analyzed the results to learn how different motives are related and what is behind their root meanings.

The results of our research showed that nearly everything we experience as meaningful can be traced to one of 16 basic desires or to some combination of these desires. We developed a standardized psychological test, called the Reiss Profile, to measure the 16 desires. (See "The 16 Keys to Happiness," page 56.)

### Happiness defined

Harvard social psychologist William McDougall wrote that people can be happy while in pain and unhappy while experiencing pleasure; To understand this, two kinds of happiness must be distinguished: feel-good and value-based. Feel-good happiness is sensation-based pleasure. When we joke around or have sex, we experience feel-good happiness. Since feel-good happiness is ruled by the law of diminishing returns, the kicks get harder to come by. This type of happiness rarely lasts longer than a few hours at a time.

Value-based happiness is a sense that our lives have meaning and fulfill some larger purpose. It represents a spiritual source of satisfaction, stemming from our deeper purpose and values. We experience value-based happiness when we satisfy any of the 16 basic desires--the more desires we satisfy, the more value-based happiness we experience. Since this form of happiness is not ruled by the law of diminishing returns, there is no limit to how meaningful our lives can be.

Malcolm X's life is a good example of both feel-good and value-based happiness. When racial discrimination denied him the opportunity to pursue his childhood ambition of becoming a lawyer, he turned to a life of partying, drugs and sex. Yet this pleasure seeking produced little happiness--by the age of 21, he was addicted to cocaine and sent to jail for burglary. He had experienced a lot of pleasure, yet he was unhappy because his life was inconsistent with his own nature and deeper values. He had known feel-good happiness but not value-based happiness.

After reaching rock bottom, he embraced the teachings of the Nation of Islam and committed himself to his most fundamental values. He led his followers toward greater social justice, married, had a family of his own and found happiness. Although he experienced less pleasure and more anxiety as a leader, he was much happier because he lived his life in accordance with his values.

The 16 basic desires make us individuals. Although everybody embraces these desires, individuals prioritize them differently. Al Gore, for example, has a very strong desire for power. This desire makes him happy when he is in a leadership role, when he gives advice to others, or when he shows how competent and smart he is. George W. Bush has a strong desire for social contact. This desire makes him happy when he socializes and unhappy when he spends a lot of time alone. The two politicians place very different values on the basic desires of power and social contact, which is reflected in their personalities--Gore tends to be overbearing and overeager to get ahead, and Bush tends to be a good ol' boy.

Although everybody wants to attain a certain status, individuals differ in how motivated they are to obtain it. Jackie Kennedy Onassis, for example, had a passion for status--she needed to be wealthy to be truly happy. By obtaining wealth, she thought that she could satisfy her deep desire for respect from her upper-class peers. She spent much of her life pursuing wealth by marrying two multimillionaires. In contrast, Howard Hughes did not care much about status--he didn't care about what people thought of him and spent little time trying to earn their respect. While Jackie Kennedy Onassis placed high value on gaining status and the respect of her social peers, Howard Hughes had both but neither made him happy.

Revenge is another goal that motivates people differently. Now that Regis Philbin has hit the big time with his show "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire," why does he keep reminding us of the times he had been passed over earlier in his career? By embarrassing those who lacked faith in him, Philbin is gaining a measure of revenge. In comparison, John F. Kennedy Jr. did not go after people who criticized him or his family. Revenge can be fun, but it is more motivating for some than for others.

#### The 16 basic desires

You cannot find enduring happiness by aiming to have more fun or by seeking pleasure. What you need to do, as the 19th-century philosopher J.S. Mill observed, is to satisfy your basic desires and take happiness in passing. First, use the quiz to figure out who you are (see quiz, page 56). Find out which of the 16 desires provide the most meaning in your life. How strongly are you motivated to obtain a successful marriage, career or family? Do you love a good meal and dining out? Must you be physically fit to be happy? Fortunately, you do not have to satisfy all 16 desires, only the five or six most important to you.

After you identify your most important desires, you need to find effective ways to satisfy them. There is a catch, however. Shortly after you satisfy a desire, it reasserts itself, motivating you to satisfy the desire all over again. After a career success, for example, you feel competent, but only for a period of time. Therefore, you need to satisfy your desires repeatedly.

How can we repeatedly satisfy our most important basic desires and find value-based happiness? Most people turn to relationships, careers, family, leisure and spirituality to satisfy their most important desires.

Since we have the potential to satisfy our basic desires through relationships, we can find greater happiness by finding new relationships or by improving the ones we already have. After looking at the 16 basic desires and estimating the five or six most important to you, do the same for your partner, or have your partner take the quiz. Compare the two lists--the strengths of your relationship are indicated by similar desires, and the weaknesses are indicated by disparate desires.

Shelly and Sam are a good case in point. Before they married, both placed value on romance, fitness and socializing, but they differed on

whether or not they should have children. Shelly secretly thought she could change Sam's mind. When Sam still did not want children after a few years of marriage, Shelly did not take her birth control pills one night and ended up having a baby boy. Sam loved his boy, but he didn't enjoy raising him.

What can Shelly and Sam do to improve their relationship and regain happiness? Counseling is worth a try, but even with the best counselor it will be difficult for them to resolve their differences. Their problem is that they prioritize the basic desire for family differently--one enjoys raising children, the other doesn't. The desire for family, which is not easily changed, has pulled them in different directions, turning a happy marriage into an unhappy one. Their best bet to improve their relationship may be to set aside time for activities that satisfy the desires that bind them. If they set aside time to put the romance back in their lives, maybe the strong points in the relationship will outweigh the weak ones. Ultimately, that is the judgment we all must make, because few relationships are perfect.

Our basic desires can also be satisfied through work. Steven Spielberg, for example, honored his Jewish heritage when he made the movie *Schindler's List*, the Academy award-winning film about the Holocaust. When Spielberg thinks about this accomplishment, he feels a sense of loyalty to his Jewish heritage, an intrinsically valued feeling that satisfies the desire for honor.

Rocky Graziano also found valued-based happiness through his career. Graziano was a fighter--that was who he was and who he wanted to be. He was an unhappy juvenile delinquent who got himself into fistfights. But when he became a boxer--rising to the rank of middleweight champion--he finally found work that provided a socially acceptable means for him to satisfy his passion for vengeance. Fighting had gone from a source of displeasure to a source of happiness in his life.

One way to become happier is to find a job or career that is more fulfilling than the one you have now. To do this, you need to analyze how you can use work to better satisfy your five or six most important basic desires. If you have a high desire for acceptance, for example, you need work that exposes you to little evaluation and potential criticism. If you have a high desire for order, you need work that involves minimal ambiguity and exposes you to few changes. If you are a curious person, you need a job that makes you think.

Our basic desires can also be satisfied through leisure activities. Watching sports, for example, provides us with opportunities to repeatedly experience the intrinsically valued feelings of competition, loyalty, power and revenge. When Brandi Chastain kicked the winning field goal and the United States won the 1999 World Cup in women's soccer, a surge of power went through the nation like a bolt of lightning--the crowd roared and people thrust their fists powerfully into the air. Sports produces more or less the same range of intrinsically valued feelings in fans as they do in players, which is why so many people watch.

One of the deepest ways to satisfy our desires is through spirituality. We can satisfy the desire for honor by embracing the religious denomination of our parents. A psychologically important attribute of religion is the emphasis given to the desire for unity, or to open one's heart to God. At least for some, faith is a path toward greater value-based happiness.

Value-based happiness is the great equalizer in life. You can find value-based happiness if you are rich or poor, smart or mentally challenged, athletic or clumsy, popular or socially awkward. Wealthy people are not necessarily happy, and poor people are not necessarily unhappy. Values, not pleasure, are what bring true happiness, and everybody has the potential to live in accordance with their values.

#### READ MORE ABOUT IT

Who Am I: The 16 Basic Desires That Motivate Out Happiness and Define Our Personalities, Steven Reiss, Ph.D. (Tarcher/Putnam, 2000)

The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler, M.D. (Riverhead Books, 1998)

the 16 keys to happiness

To increase your value-based happiness, first read the following statements and mark whether they describe you strongly (+), somewhat

(0), or very little (-). The ones that describes you strongly show the keys to your happiness-you should aim to satisfy these to increase your happiness. Some tips to help you do this can be found in the main article, and more can be found in author's book, *Who Am I: The 16 Basic Desires That Motivate Our Happiness and Define Our Personalities*.

Legend for Chart:

A - DESIRE

B - STATEMENT

C - SELF-RATING

A B C

CURIOSITY I have a thirst for knowledge. -----

ACCEPTANCE I have a hard time coping with  
criticism. -----

ORDER It upsets me when things are out  
of place. -----

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY Physical fitness is very Important  
to me. -----

HONOR I am a highly principled and loyal  
person. -----

POWER I often seek leadership roles. -----

INDEPENDENCE Self-reliance is essential to my  
happiness. -----

SOCIAL CONTACT I am known as a fun-loving person. -----

FAMILY My children come first. -----

STATUS I am impressed by people who own  
expensive things. -----

IDEALISM Compared with most people, I am very  
concerned with social causes. -----

VENGEANCE It is very important to me to get

even with those who insult or offend

me. -----

ROMANCE Compared with my peers, I spend much

more time pursuing or having sex. -----

EATING I love to eat and often fantasize

about food. -----

SAVING I hate throwing things away. -----

TRANQUILITY It scares me when my heart beats

rapidly. -----

ILLUSTRATIONS (COLOR)

Adapted by Ph.D.

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