

Happyology or the dark side of happiness: A critical review of the psychology of wellbeing

Lymarie Rodriguez-Morales

School of Psychology/Ysgol Seicoleg

University of Wales Trinity Saint David





Psychology of Wellbeing

- Well-being of Future Generations Wales Act (2015)
- World Happiness Report (2017)
- Indexes of wellbeing: happiness, quality of life, contentment, self-actualization, life satisfaction.
- Subjective wellbeing (SWB): satisfaction with life + high positive affect + low negative affect
- “But what exactly is happiness and is it really the pursuit of positive psychology?” (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011, p. 45).



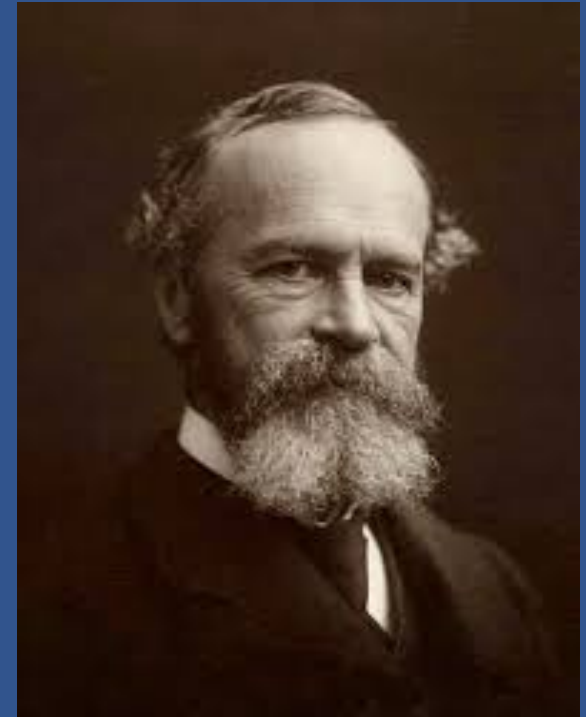


‘What is the ultimate purpose of human existence?’ What is that end or goal for which we should direct all of our activities? Everywhere we see people seeking pleasure, wealth, and a good reputation. But while each of these has some value, none of them can occupy the place of the chief good for which humanity should aim. To be an ultimate end, an act must be self-sufficient and final, ‘that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else and it must be attainable by the person’.

Nicomachean Ethics, 1097a30-34

Happiness

“If we were to ask the question: ‘What is human life’s chief concern?’ one of the answers we should receive would be: ‘It is happiness’. How to gain, how to keep, how to recover happiness, is in fact for most men at all times the secret motive of all they do, and of all they are willing to endure.” (James, 1982/1902, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 78).



Psychology of Happiness

- What is a good life? – Socrates, Plato and Aristotle
- Hedonic and eudaimonic happiness
- The pursuit of happiness (18th century)
- Authentic happiness (Seligman, 2003)



Positive Psychology & Wellbeing

- William James (1842-1910) – focused on subjective experience
- Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) – coined the term “positive psychology”
- Albert Bandura (1925 -) – developed the concept of self-efficacy
- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1934 -) – studied “flow state”
- Martin Seligman (1942 -) – founder of Positive Psychology

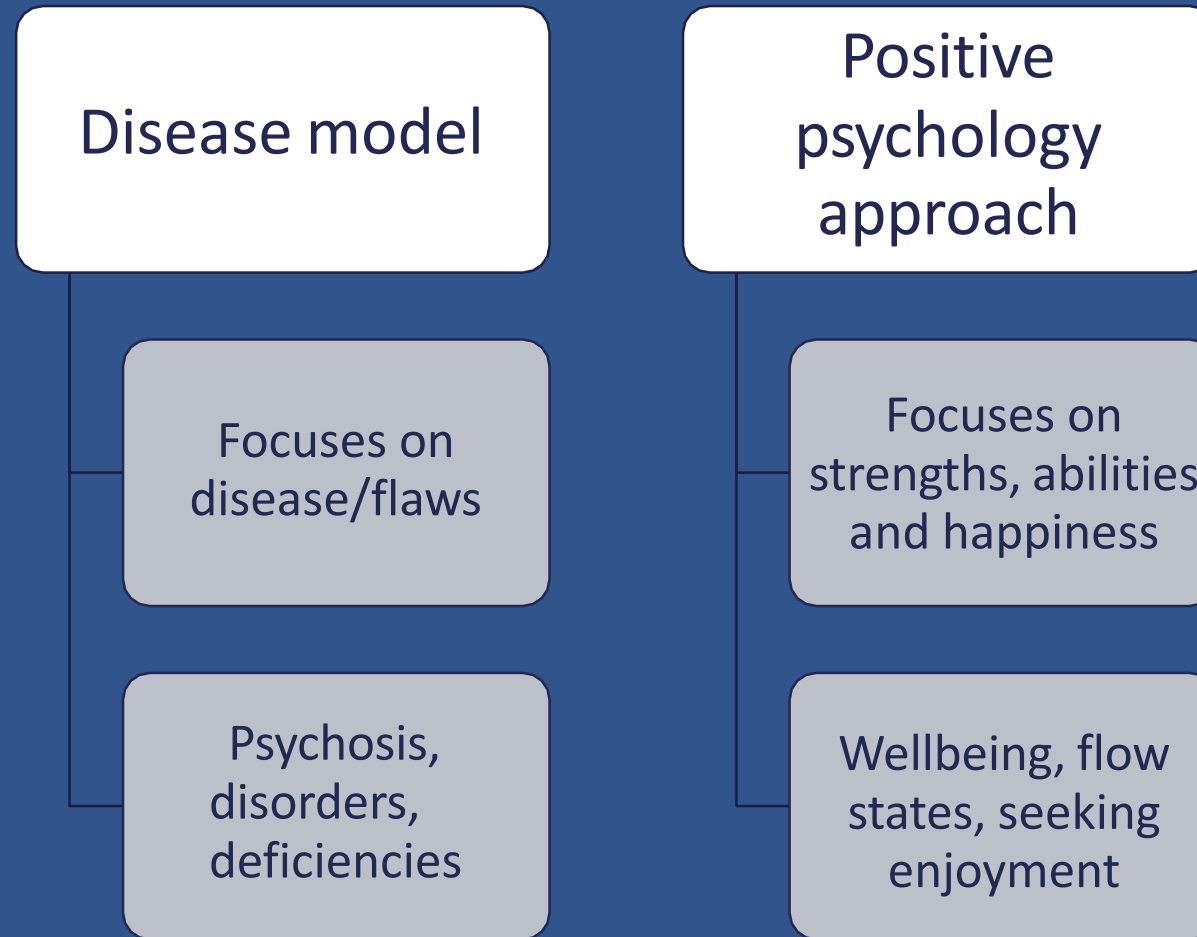


Positive Psychology & Wellbeing

Positive psychology focuses on positive experiences at three time points (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011):

1. The subjective node – positive experiences (e.g. happiness, optimism, wellbeing)
2. The individual node – characteristic of the ‘good person’ (e.g. talent, wisdom, love, courage, creativity)
3. The group node – positive institutions, citizenship and communities (e.g. altruism, tolerance, work ethic)

Positive Psychology & Wellbeing



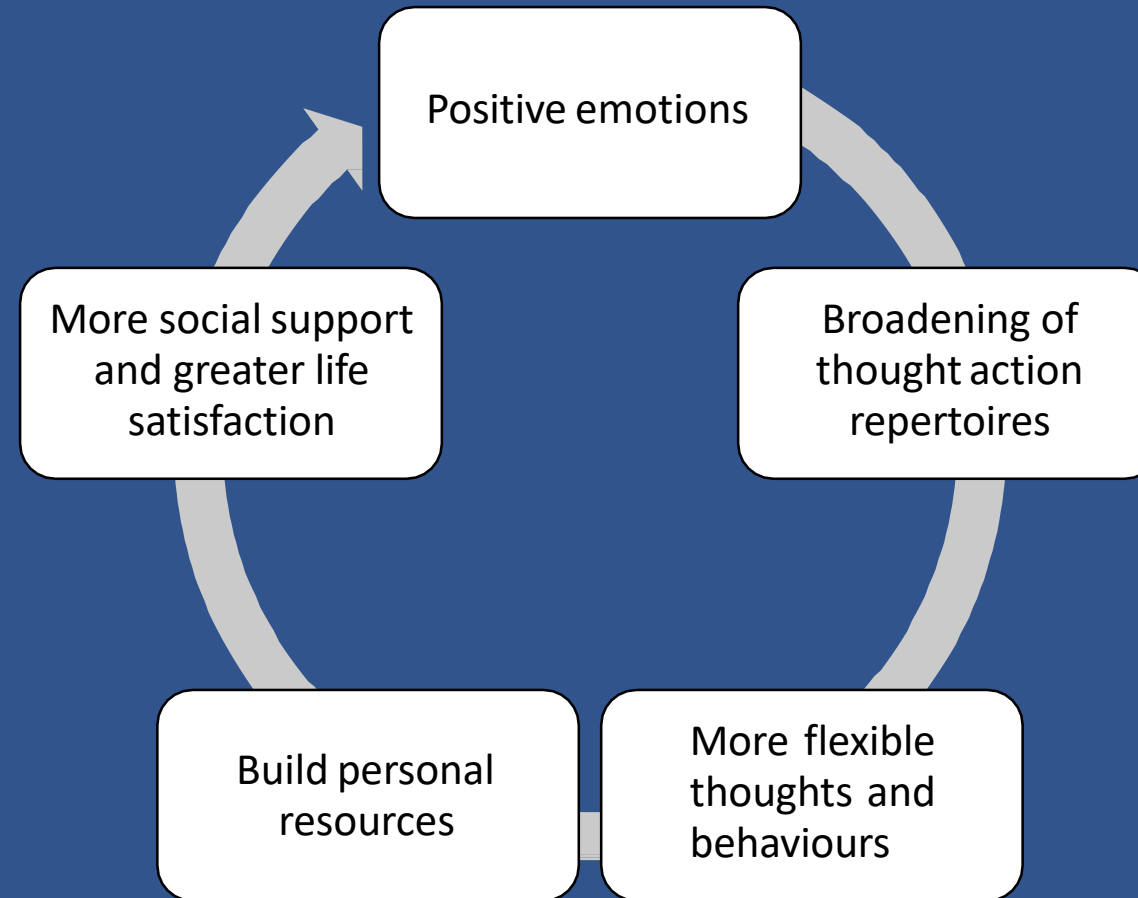
Positive Psychology & Wellbeing

- Traits of happy people (extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness)
- Life circumstances
- Dispositional optimism
- Flow and goal pursuit
- Hope theory (Snyder, 1989)
- Mindfulness and savouring (Brown & Ryan, 2003)
- Love and relationships
- Meaning and purposeful living
- Spirituality

Positive Psychology & Wellbeing

- Gratitude: a feeling of appreciation for something good that another is responsible for bringing about...
- Trait gratitude is a **stronger predictor** of wellbeing and satisfaction with life than any of the Big Five traits (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsand, 2002; Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2008)

Positive Psychology & Wellbeing



Fredrickson video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7dFDHzV36g#action=share>

Positive Psychology & Wellbeing

	Authentic Happiness Theory	Wellbeing Theory
Topic	Happiness	wellbeing
Measure	Life satisfaction	Positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment
Goal	Increase life satisfaction	Increase flourishing by increasing positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment

Applying Positive Psychology (Positive psychology interventions – PPI)

- Mindsets (Dweks et al., 1995)
- Gratitude
- Transtheoretical model (positive change)
- Self-regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2009)
- Mindfulness meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 2004)
- Savouring (Bryant & Veroff, 2007)
- Nature connectedness (Schultz, 2002)

Subjective Wellbeing Dimensions

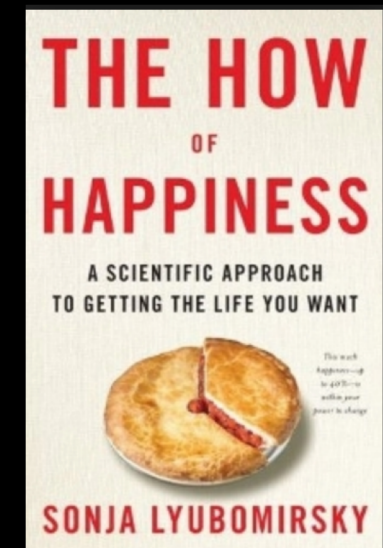
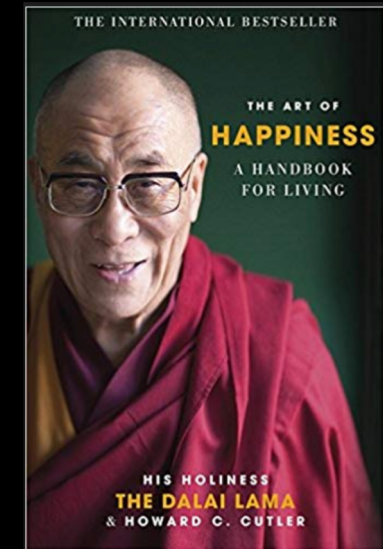
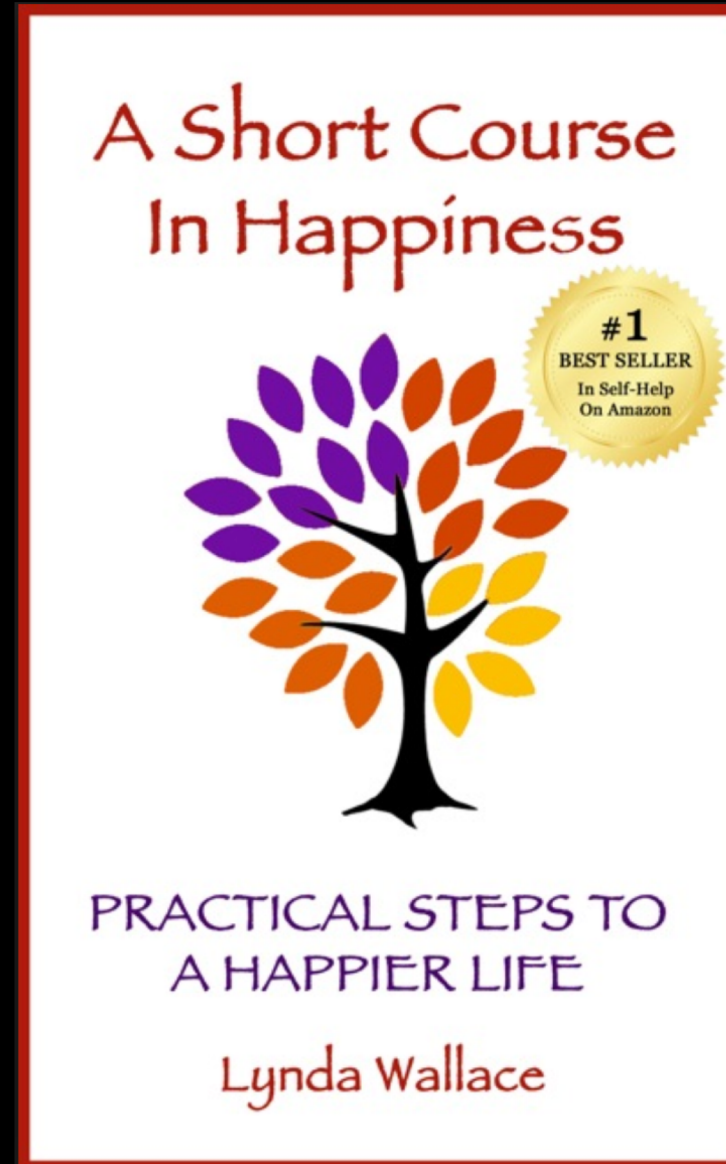
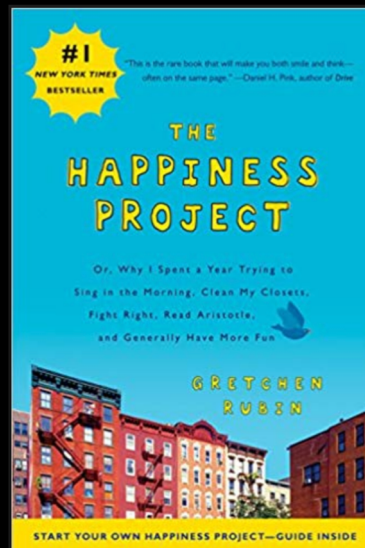
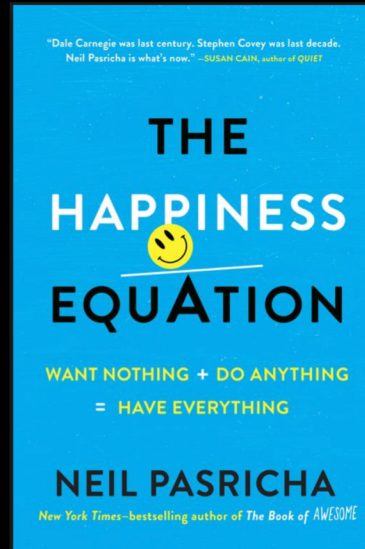
- Career wellbeing
- Financial wellbeing
- Physical wellbeing
- Social wellbeing
- Emotional wellbeing
- Community wellbeing
- Spiritual wellbeing

Six-factor Model of Psychological Well-being (Ryff & Singer, 2006)

1. Self-acceptance
2. Personal growth
3. Purpose in life
4. Environmental mastery
5. Autonomy
6. Positive relations with others

Measuring SWB

- Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, 2000)
- Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky, 2008)
- Experience Sampling Method (ESM)
- Diary methods





Info

[Explore this journal >](#)

RESEARCH ARTICLE

"Hammered down on every side" versus "just being positive": A critical discursive approach to health inequality

Emma Anderson , Stephen Gibson

First published: 22 May 2017 [Full publication history](#)

DOI: 10.1002/casp.2315 [View/save citation](#)

Cited by (CrossRef): 0 articles  [Check for updates](#)  [Citation tools](#) ▼



[View issue TOC](#)
Volume 27, Issue 4
July/August 2017
Pages 324-335

Abstract

Socio-economic and health inequality are strongly linked and are increasingly perpetuated by discourses of individual responsibility. However, little research from a critical discursive perspective has addressed how people affected themselves may account for this relationship. This research examined the ways in which people who are in debt, unemployed, or in insecure, minimum-wage employment construct health and negotiate identities around it. Data from semistructured interviews with 6 participants were analysed and 3 main interpretative repertoires were identified: a medical repertoire of health as a lack of illness; health as adopting the "right" behaviours and attitudes; and health as being heavily influenced by external factors, such as income and life circumstances. The analysis focuses on how participants managed the tension between these latter 2 repertoires by adopting various subject positions around health: that it is "slipping" away from them; that it requires motivation; and that it is unattainable. Underpinning this is a "common-sense" idea of health as something that is worked towards through culturally approved actions and attitudes.

Case Study: Men's Experience of Happiness

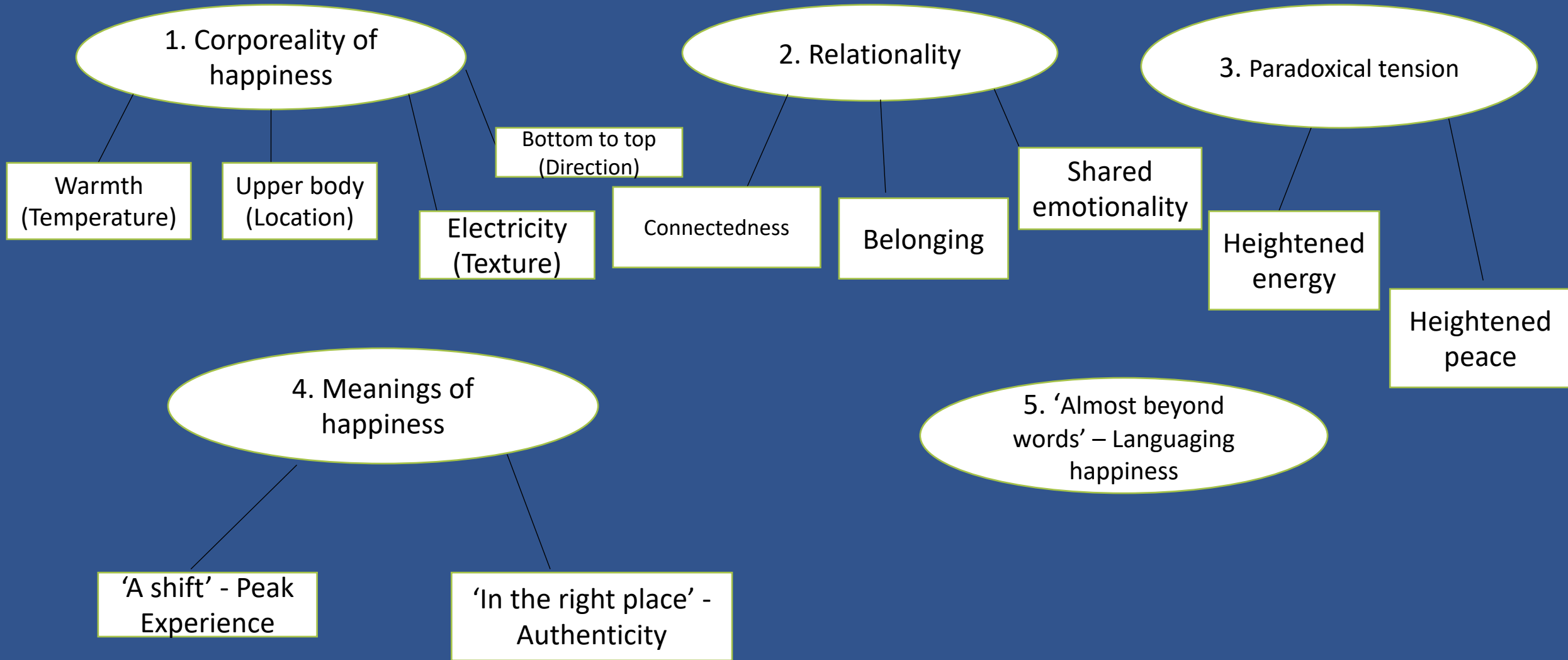
- Phenomenology must investigate human happiness (Hefferman, 2014).
- Absence of a coherent “thick”, qualitative conception of happiness as a phenomenon of human experience distinct from others (DeRobertis, 2016).
- Lack of conceptual unity (e.g. what is being understood under wellbeing).
- “Qualitative approaches can offer intricacy and depth and capture complexity of phenomena. They can be extremely useful in mapping out the field, developing conceptual clarity and formulating an overarching framework...Furthermore, many studies focused on what lay people *believe* make them happy rather than exploring the meanings attributed to happiness” (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011, p. 87).

Method

Participants: Six adult men (aged 26-59)

Data collection: Guided Focusing interview

Data analysis: Thematic analysis with an experiential (phenomenological) approach.



Corporeality of happiness

Temperature

...a warm kind of pressure from within (pointing chest area) – John

There was a warmth which I suppose is to do with how one feels with an expanded heart, the energy of one's heart centre. - Peter

Direction

I suppose for me spreads up my spine and then into my shoulders and head so spreading up and then out. - Ben

Relationality

...the habit of sharing an experience with somebody else that made us both happy. – John

What I meant when the connectedness I don't know someone just looked at me and it was that they sensed that I maybe wanted to play and they put the bongo near me. –Keith

...we were both happy we were both sharing each other's emotions and I felt wow this is a great moment....emotions just came tumbling down like a wall so it was like that and there's nothing between us now, there's no barrier. - Matthew

Paradoxical tension

Heightened energy

....a released tension...quite a nice feeling then phew. Very relaxed and just very content. – Ben

...it was exciting but a bit nervous exhilarating. – Matthew

Heightened peace

I associated grey with peacefulness and contentment. - Josh

Meanings of Happiness

‘A shift’ – A peak experience

A bit more of a smile a bit more spring in your step you know that kind it's like a reset button. – Ben

...a kind of a joyful moment to suddenly be in a different world which suddenly jumped from childhood to adolescence for the first time. - Matthew

‘In the right place’ – Authenticity

...being able to easily express myself what I feel is true. – Keith

...so really affirming that the music we're making was good. – John

...as things should be. - Josh

'Almost beyond words' – Linguaging happiness

I've just had such an ecstatic experience that words are almost meaningless...it's more when I reflect back. – Keith

...it's quite hard to verbalize it's quite a hard thing to put into words and quite often you don't exactly think about it, it's a feeling you can feel and you know it well...but to verbalize it when you sit down and think about it it's quite tricky to get those feelings into something to actually put into words something that makes sense because I suppose quite often you don't decipher your feelings, [you] experience them. - Ben

Discussion

- Embodied meaning – our situations are embodied situations (Johnson, 2007)
- The paradoxical quality of happiness as an emotional experience
- Knowing the feeling (and its meaning) vs expressing it (Colombetti, Gendlin, Petitmengin)
- The role of memory (“happy memory” selection)
- Practical implications?