



# Humanities: Happiness

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Happiness

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## What Happiness Means to Others

My first interview is with Dalia Stoffer. My relationship with her is that she is my girlfriend. I have known her for almost a decade now. I met her online, and after a few years we ended up (happily) together. Dalia is currently a full time college student, working her way to becoming a registered nurse. She was able to interview with me and give me her answers on happiness.

My second interviewee is a person I hardly know, John Land. He is one of the employees where I am employed; John works in the financial aid department. He was able to meet with me after I told him I was working on a project for school, and he said he wouldn't mind participating.

### **Interview with Dalia Stoffer**

Question: What made you happy as a child, can you remember?

Answer: I like playing soccer; yeah I did it all the time.

Question: What about happiness as a teenager?

Answer: I have to say something appropriate? I use to tear through romance novels.

Question: Now that you're an adult, what makes you happy? How do you reduce stress?

Answer: Reduced stress level. I like listening to music and chatting online with my friends.

Question: How do you think the people in other countries like China or India would define happiness?

Answer: Uh, I don't know, I would say having peace.

Question: Do you think that if we brought people from China or India to America would they be happy?

Answer: I think it would depend on their economic situation. If they came here poor, they would not like it.

Question: Do you think money makes people happy?

Answer: I think money makes people happy in America.

Question: If you could name one thing that makes you unhappy, what would that be?

Answer: Not being able to help my mother financially.

Question: What is the happiest memory you can remember?

Answer: When I got the keys to my house.

### **Interview with John Land**

Question: What made you happy as a child?

Answer: I was happy playing outside in the yard.

Question: What about happiness as a teenager?

Answer: I really liked hanging out with my friends and playing basketball.

Question: Now that you're an adult, what makes you happy?

Answer: After a long day's work, I come home, grab a beer, and relax.

Question: How do you think the people in other countries like China or India would define happiness?

Answer: I think they would be happy with food, clothing and shelter. Their idea of what is a good life is a lot different than ours. I think Americans are spoiled.

Question: Do you think that if we brought people from China or India to America would they be happy?

Answer: I think they would be overwhelmed with our culture. They would not like it at all.

Question: Do you think money makes people happy?

Answer: Money can buy you things that can make you happy, but that's not real happiness. Real happiness comes from family and friends. It comes from people not things.

Question: If you could name one thing that makes you unhappy, what would that be?

Answer: Overdue bills. I get really stressed when I can't pay bills on time.

Question: What is the happiest memory you can remember?

Answer: The day my first child was born. I can remember it like it was yesterday. It was just being there witnessing the miracle of life.

References:

(Dalia Stoffer, personal communication, September 19, 2011).

(John Land, personal communication, September 16, 2011).

## What Happiness Means to Others

In the beginning there was happiness, and God saw that it was good. Every man and every woman was to be blessed with happiness for their entire lives. Only if happiness was really like that auspicious statement! Most of us are searching for some form of happiness or another. Some of us find it, and some of us do not. But what is happiness really? Is it the same for everyone? I had the opportunity of being permitted to interview two people, one that I knew very well, Dalia Stoffer (my girlfriend) and one that I did not know, John Land (an employee where I work). I interviewed them to gain a better understanding of what happiness meant to them. I was definitely surprised to see that the responses were different in some ways, and similar in other ways. This essay is a review of the interview along with my own assessment of what happiness means to me and to some of the people around the world.

Our first question that we will review is “Now that you’re an adult, what makes you happy?” Dalia’s and John’s answers were similar in respects to stress and relaxation. Dalia said “reduced stress” and “listening to music” is what made her happy, and John said “After a long day’s work, I come home, grab a beer, and relax.” I think that there is a common denominator here (stress), and their remedies are listening to music or chilling with their favorite beverage; slightly hedonistic, though not entirely. Hedonism (from the Greek for “delight”) is the name given to the philosophy that happiness is equivalent to physical pleasure and to the possession of things that provide us with pleasure (Janaro, R. P., & Altshuler, pg. 212). Hedonism can start quite early in our lives; we can see it in our second question, “What made you happy as a child, can you remember?” Dalia’s said “playing soccer” is what made her happy. John’s response was, “I was happy playing outside in the yard.”

So we can definitely see common (hedonistic) elements that made them both happy; they liked doing things that brought them pleasure, even at an early age.

But what does happiness mean to people around the world? Does happiness mean the same thing to everyone? I would say it is not definitive. That there is a form of existentialism, meaning life means something different to each of us. In our next question you can see what the interviewee's responses were to happiness outside of America, "How do you think the people in other countries like China or India would define happiness?" Dalia's response was "I would say having peace." John stated, "I think they would be happy with food, clothing and shelter. Their idea of what is a good life is a lot different than ours. I think Americans are spoiled." Two very interesting comments I would say. The basic theme here is that people outside America would be happier with less than the average American. It makes me wonder, is there a different path that other people from other countries take to find happiness? It was Gandhi who wanted to save the world by persuading all those who would listen that a serene and therefore happy existence could come about only through non-violence and love (Janaro, R. P., & Altshuler, pg. 233). So this leads me to believe that perhaps other countries seek peace, and peace can be happiness to them.

There are a few important concepts I would like to briefly discuss, even though the interview questions are not specifically connected to them. One is Epicureanism. The basic idea of Epicureanism is that happiness is avoiding pain. A good example is from our textbook, "The sudden cessation of a toothache is not directly pleasurable in itself, but it *brings* happiness, according to that philosophy: the happiness of not being in pain." (Janaro, R. P., & Altshuler, pg. 233). I like this notion that sometimes you have to struggle or labor a little to achieve the state of happiness. The second term is stoicism. "It operates under even fewer illusions about life than epicureanism. It tells us neither to plan ahead for a lifetime of unlimited pleasure nor to expect to

avoid pain through discipline and moderation.” (Janaro, R. P., & Altshuler, pg. 221). I find this idea very interesting in the fact it is basically telling you to stop worrying about everything. I tend to agree that people worry way too much, sometimes to the extent of falling into depression; stoicism says nothing is under our control.

So in the end, what is happiness? Are we as humans governed by theory or philosophy about happiness? I would like to believe we are more complex than any single theory and that happiness has an ever-evolving ideology for each of us. I wanted to see what ultimate happiness meant to my interviewees, Dalia and John, so I asked them the big question, “What is the happiest memory you can remember?” Dalia responded by saying “When I got the keys to my house.” Her happiest day is when she got a place to call home; a very important form of happiness. John gave me a great answer, saying “The day my first child was born. I can remember it like it was yesterday. It was just being there witnessing the miracle of life.” So in the end, there is no single definition of happiness. Whether you live in America, or perhaps even another country, happiness is part of your own journey. We are all left up to find out what makes us happy and then strive to get there. I say good luck on your journey!

References:

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