

For the purpose of this assignment, the article I read was: The “You and I” of Happiness: Investigating the Long-Term Impact of Self- and Other-Focused Happiness-Enhancing Activities by Maria Sääksjärvi, Katarina Hellén, and Pieter Desmet. Recognizing that happiness is considered one of the most important goals of human beings and it can be enhanced through happiness activities, the article predicted that other-focused happiness activities are likely to be more effective over the longer term than self-focused activities. By definition, other-focused activities aim to enhance happiness through social interactions with other people, whereas self-focused activities aim to enhance happiness through satisfying one’s needs and wants (Sääksjärvi, et. al., 2017). Some examples of other-focused activities include: expressing gratitude, cultivating optimism, living in the moment, performing acts of kindness, and working on one’s goals (Sääksjärvi, et. al., 2017).

Using the prediction that other-focused happiness activities are likely to be more effective over the longer term than self-focused happiness activities, the researchers conducted a six-week empirical study. Using the general topic of happiness in in-class announcements, flyers, and social media, the study recruited 100 volunteer students enrolled in a major university in the Netherlands to participate. During week one of the study, the participants filled out a pre-study questionnaire. In each of the remaining five weeks, all participants (except those in the control group) performed six randomized tasks, noted as happiness activities, spending as much time on performing the activities as they wished. Alternatively, the participants who were in the control group were asked to reflect on a daily event and write about it in a journal. Throughout the study, the researchers found that other-focused happiness activities generated greater levels of happiness than self-focused activities. However, it was noted that self-focused happiness activities were found to have contributed to participants’ happiness, just to a lesser extent. So, in

broad terms, the research supports the distinction of happiness as self- or other- oriented, which can be achieved by building affect, or meaning (Sääksjärvi, et. al., 2017).

After digesting these findings, I decided to focus on an other-focused activity so my classmates could experience the element of reciprocity that other-focused happiness activities bring. Therefore, I settled on a concept expressed in the article: expressing gratitude. I altered the activity slightly so students would write thank you notes to someone to let that person know why they are appreciated rather than a traditional thank you note written for a material item. Furthermore, knowing this and the sense of happiness I feel when receiving written forms of gratitude, I wanted other students to feel a happiness boost that lasts much longer than the actual experience itself (Sääksjärvi, et. al., 2017). Additionally, instead of simply using a pen to write the thank you notes, students were supplied with colored writing utensils, so they could uniquely decorate the card, making it as colorful as they wished.

When thinking about how the activity went, I was very pleased. I found it incredibly relaxing to take five minutes to thank someone for something they went out of their way to do for me, even as I was “on stage” presenting my activity to the class, which can be an incredibly intimidating experience for some. In planning my presentation, I also made sure to incorporate different forms of participation for the discussion so all students could participate even if they are not usually vocal. For example, my first two questions in the discussion asked students to simply raise their hand if they had either received or written a personalized thank you before. Then, after getting a sense of who had either received or written a personalized thank you, students who felt comfortable to share discussed their experiences regarding how either receiving or writing a personalized thank you made them feel. If I were to do this again, I would be more explicitly clear that the students were to write a thank you note to someone else, not themselves,

as one student was confused by my directions. All in all, I thought it went really well though and I was happy with the class involvement and experience.

#### Works Cited

- Sääksjärvi, M., Hellén, K., & Desmet, P. (2017). The “You and I” of Happiness: Investigating the Long-Term Impact of Self- and Other-Focused Happiness-Enhancing Activities. *Psychology & Marketing*, 34(6), 623–630. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21010>