

PERCEIVED HAPPINESS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS MEASURED BY MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS¹

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Summary.—Broad categories have been suggested for the events which contribute to happiness. In 1943 Maslow might have argued that people are happy when they meet or continue to meet their basic needs in his hierarchy of needs. A survey was given to 150 college students to assess which of Maslow's levels of need is perceived to be most important to happiness. Falling or staying in love was chosen significantly more often than the other choices by undergraduates of both genders. These results suggest that love is considered to be an extremely important contributor to the feeling of happiness among college students.

Happiness is often defined as a state of psychological well-being or contentment. For instance, Aron and Aron (1987) argued that happiness is the normal human condition and, when people relax and examine themselves, a state of happiness often occurs. Myers and Diener (1995) reviewed research on happiness and subjective well-being and concluded that age, race, gender, or economic status do not predict happiness. Instead, they found that happy people tend to be optimistic, have high self-esteem, have a sense of personal control, be involved in meaningful close relationships (marriage), and hold a strong religious faith.

Although people find happiness in innumerable ways, it is possible to organize the contributors to happiness into basic categories. Argyle (1987) suggested one distinction can be made between physical pleasures (such as enjoying food or sex) and pleasures based on learned drives such as esteem or cultural activities. Along similar lines, Wilson (1967) proposed that prompt satisfaction of needs causes happiness, while the continuation of unfulfilled needs causes unhappiness. Wilson suggested three kinds of needs important in determining happiness: physiological needs (food and shelter), pleasure-seeking needs (stimulation and action), and acquired secondary needs (affection, acceptance, status, achievement, and self-actualization). Diener (1984) found variables important in promoting happiness were love, marriage, sex, children, exercise, health, friends, education, work, income, rec-

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ognition, success, independence, personal values, and community involvement.

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of basic needs includes the levels of physiological needs and needs for safety, love, and esteem. According to this approach, after fulfilling these needs, or continuing to do so, happiness would be achieved. Maslow's hierarchy of needs includes many potential sources of happiness. In this study we examined representative examples from Maslow's four basic need levels to assess which need level is perceived by college students to lead to the greatest happiness.

METHOD

Scale

A survey was created in order to identify which level of Maslow's need hierarchy is perceived to make people most happy. The survey asked subjects "What would make you happy?" and directed them to rank the order of four types of needs. Representative examples of these four levels of need were presented as: "Winning millions in the lottery" (a representative example of security or Safety needs), "Falling (or staying) in love with your ideal mate" (Love needs), "Achieving fame/prestige in your career" (Esteem needs), and "Enjoying physical pleasures (sex, food, drink)" (Physiological needs). Only quoted material was presented to students.

Participants and Procedure

The participants were college students from both introductory and advanced psychology classes and ranged from first-quarter freshmen to graduating seniors. There were 150 participants, 61 men and 89 women. The mean over-all age was 22.0 yr., of men 21.6 yr., and of women 22.3 yr. Students were asked to take a few minutes at the end of a class to complete the survey. They were assured that their responses would be treated anonymously and that participation was not mandatory.

RESULTS

A Friedman two-way analysis of variance by ranks showed over-all significant differences ($F_{\beta} = 155.16$, $p < .01$). In subsequent tests for multiple comparisons, the Love needs item was ranked significantly higher than the other choices ($p < .001$), but there were no significant differences among the other choices. The responses of each gender were also analyzed separately. For the men, there was a significant difference ($F_{\beta} = 37.62$, $p < .01$) as the Love needs item was ranked significantly higher than the other choices ($p < .001$). The significant difference for women ($F_{\beta} = 124.01$, $p < .01$) indicated the Love needs item was ranked significantly higher than the other choices ($p < .001$).

As shown in Table 1, 88% of the women ranked the Love needs item

as the top need that would make them happy, as did 64% of the men. A one-way chi-squared test of independence was calculated for the first-ranked choices of subjects over-all, as well as separately for men and women. The participants' first-ranked need choices showed significant differences ($\chi_3^2 = 226.37, p < .001$). The first-ranked need choices of the men were significant ($\chi_3^2 = 49.89, p < .001$) as were those of the women ($\chi_3^2 = 187.36, p < .001$).

TABLE 1
FIRST-RANKED CHOICES OF NEED BY 150 PARTICIPANTS

Survey Item	Over-all		Men		Women	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
"Enjoying physical pleasures (sex, food, drink)" (Physiological needs)	3.3	5	8.2	5	0.0	0
"Winning millions in the lottery" (Safety needs)	10.7	16	14.8	9	7.9	7
"Falling (or staying) in love with your ideal mate" (Love needs)	78.0	117	63.9	39	87.6	78
"Achieving fame/prestige in your career" (Esteem needs)	8.0	12	13.1	8	4.5	4

DISCUSSION

Although Maslow's hierarchy might be a useful framework in which to examine categories of needs, relatively little has been done. There have been some attempts to examine the relevance of Maslow's levels of needs to social relationships. For example, Poduska (1992) found that couples in a marriage use money to meet survival needs, provide security, express love, and encourage self-esteem. Other research (Wood, Rhodes, & Whelan, 1989) indicated that both married men and women are happier than those who do not marry.

The most interesting finding of our current survey was that love needs were perceived by college students to be important to their happiness. More women chose the Love needs item as their first choice than did men (88% versus 64%). There were also differences among other choices. Nearly three times more men selected the Esteem needs items as number one than did women (13% versus 4%) and almost twice as many men ranked the Safety needs item first than did women (15% versus 8%). It was also interesting that none of the women ranked the Physiological needs item as their first choice whereas 8% of the men did.

Love has been described as an intense and important emotion people are motivated to obtain and maintain (Sternberg, 1988). The current research supports this view as the Love needs were chosen overwhelmingly by the participants as contributing to happiness. Other research has also indicated the importance of love in happiness. For example, Aron and Henke-

meyer (1995) found passionate love to be important in marital happiness. Researchers might explore the specific aspects of love that promote happiness.

Our study provided one representative activity from each of Maslow's first four need levels for college students to rank. It is important not to overgeneralize these results, for Maslow included a variety of factors at each level. However, our results agree with other studies, indicating that close social relationships are extremely important in happiness.

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