About as Happy as We Ought to Be: An Evolutionary Perspective on the Pursuit of Happiness

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While the topic of happiness has been debated for centuries by everyone from philosophers to farmers, the systematic study of happiness is quite a recent phenomenon. Empirical analyses began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s with the work of Wilson (1967), Bradburn (1969), and Fordyce (1977), and accelerated in the 1980s with the ground-breaking efforts of Ed Diener, who has since published more than 200 articles on the topic (Eid & Larsen, 2008). In the late 1990s, the study of happiness, or subjective well-being as it is referred to in the psychological literature, became the centerpiece of a new discipline of psychology called positive psychology—the scientific study of what makes life most worth living, namely the uncovering, understanding, and promoting of human strengths and virtues that foster healthier, happier, more productive lives (Peterson, 2006; Snyder & Lopez, 2007). As one point of departure for this new initiative in psychology, early research focused on illuminating the causes and correlates of the happy, satisfied life. Not surprisingly, happy people tended to be physically healthy, employed, and married with many deep, satisfying friendships and a more extraverted personality type (Argyle, 1999; Wilson, 1967). More recently, in addition to delineating the qualities of happy people, researchers have begun to map the neural correlates of happiness (Urry et al., 2004), identify and test strategies for increasing one's happiness (Lyubomirsky, 2008), and determine the proportion of happiness that is influenced by one's genetic heritage (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996).

To date, the study of subjective well-being has been almost exclusively devoted to delineating the components of happiness and how these components work. However, notably absent from this impressive body of work have been efforts to address ultimate explanations for happiness—the question of why happiness exists in the first place. In recent years, this gap in the research is beginning to be addressed by a relatively new field known as *evolutionary psychology*, which studies the mind and human behavior as a complex assembly of adaptations that evolved as solutions to specific problems repeatedly encountered by our ancestors in the distant past (Confer et al., 2010). Synthesizing the logic and methods of modern evolutionary biology and modern psychology (Buss, 2008; Pinker, 2009), this approach has been utilized to examine the nature and function of happiness, identify domains of critical importance to happiness, and generate novel hypotheses about happiness not produced by other psychological perspectives (Hill & Buss, 2008). The purpose of this paper is to briefly review the literature on subjective well-being from an evolutionary psychological point of view and highlight some of the unique contributions of this approach to the topic.

The Concept of Subjective Well-being

To better appreciate what evolutionary psychology has to say about happiness, it is critical to understand how subjective well-being is defined and measured in the empirical literature. Psychologists generally conceive of subjective well-being as having two components: an affective (or emotional) component and a cognitive (or evaluative) component (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Within the affective component, emotional experiences are divided into those that feel pleasant when they occur (positive affect) and those that feel unpleasant when they occur (negative affect). Thus, for the affective component of subjective well-being, a person who is deemed to be very happy is generally found to experience many pleasant emotions, such as interest, enthusiasm, and contentment (high positive affect) and few unpleasant emotions, such as hostility, guilt, and fear (low negative affect) (Diener, & Biswas-Diener, 2008). To measure these emotions, research participants are typically provided with a list of emotion words (e.g. interested, guilty, proud) and asked to indicate on a five-point scale (ranging from "not at all" to "extremely") the extent to which they have felt each emotion over a given period of time (Watson, Clark, & Tellegan, 1988). For the cognitive component of subjective well-being, research participants are commonly asked how much they tend to agree with statements expressing global judgments about their lives, such as “In most ways my life is close to my ideal” and “I am satisfied with my life” (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). When answering this type of evaluative question, one is generally reflecting on the balance of positive and negative experiences in one’s life and comparing the results with one’s unique personal values and expectations (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Nettle, 2005). Consequently, based upon these self-report measures, a person is said to have high subjective well-being, or happiness, when he or she is experiencing a high ratio of positive affect to negative affect and appraises his or her life as highly satisfying. Overall, this method of defining and measuring subjective well-being does not see happiness as a mere fleeting feeling but as an enduring state of mind evaluated from one’s particular point of view. Put succinctly, it clearly recognizes that “the final judge of someone’s subjective well-being is whomever lives inside that person’s skin” (Myers, 2000, p. 57).

Brief and Basic Ideas of Evolutionary Psychology

In addition to understanding the basic conception of subjective well-being, it is also essential to be familiar with the fundamental logic underlying evolutionary psychology. (For thorough and accessible discussions of the logic, methods, controversies, and limitations of evolutionary psychology, see Buss (2008) and Confer et al. (2010)). The following brief discussion merely presents the essential tenets of this complex topic based upon these two sources, but it should provide the general reader with enough background to begin to appreciate the evolutionary point of view.

As mentioned earlier, evolutionary psychology sees our mind and behaviors as complex assemblies of adaptations formed by the process of natural selection. To clarify the important terms within this definition, *adaptations* can be thought of as the “best practices” of our ancestors, and *natural selection* can be thought of as the filter that allows these best practices to continue to exist and be refined over the generations (Dawkins, 2006). The following is a simple form of the logic of evolutionary psychology:

1) Throughout evolutionary time, there have been many ways to address life's challenges and opportunities, but the methods that have endured to this day are the "best practices" or adaptations, those that on average worked best to help our ancestors solve problems related to survival and reproduction, thus maximizing their reproductive success.

2) These adaptations were worked out slowly over millions of years to deal with specific problems that occurred over and over again in the environments of our ancestors (referred to as the *environment of evolutionary adaptedness*, or EEA).

3) These evolved adaptations are efficient, economic, reliable, and flexible. In other words, our ancestors' best practices, the same ones that we are endowed with today, generally involve simple rules that promote quick, decisive action over and over again in response to both threats and opportunities.

4) Although these adaptations make perfect sense for the environments in which they evolved, they often do not make nearly as much sense for dealing with our current environment.

A classic example can help illustrate all four of these points (based on Sapolsky, 1999, 2004). Imagine that you are alone on a camping trip deep in the woods and you hear branches rustling in the bushes behind you along with the deep growl of a large animal, probably a bear. Instantly, you feel fear—an emotion that has evolved to help protect you from danger—and the entire "best practices of fear" are set into motion. These best practices can be thought of as one unit, or a "program" that is executed in life-threatening situations, such as an imminent bear attack. In short, your senses become more acute, blood rushes from your extremities to the large muscle groups used for running and fighting, bodily processes related to reproduction, digestion, and the immune system are turned off, and you are poised to decide to either flee or fight. All of these things make perfect sense if your life is in danger, and those who lived long ago and had defective or sub-optimal fear programs were likely to be found on the menu back at the bear cave. Obviously, these people were not around long enough to pass on their genes, or if they were, their progeny were likely to perform poorly in the human vs. bear contest, so the sub-optimal fear programs were gradually filtered out by natural selection. Fortunately for our ancestors, the fear program is executed in the blink of an eye in response to threats, and the program wisely turns off energetically expensive long-term projects like reproduction. In other words, the fear program says, "Ovulate some other day. Now is not a good time. Your body needs energy for more important endeavors right now, like saving your skin." The psychological and physiological cascade induced by the fear program (that persists within our bodies to this day) helped our ancestors to navigate and survive the challenging environments of long ago, and did so on average better than any other variant of the fear program that was available in the past (Dawkins, 2006).

Notably, for our ancestors the psychological and physiological changes of the fear program only lasted for as long as the threat was present and were turned off automatically by the body when the threat was absent, facilitating a return to a normal, fear-free state. However, our ancestors did not have income taxes, mortgage payments, and Christmas presents on lay-away to worry about. Today, rather than just turning on the fear program in response to a physical threat, we turn it on for purely psychological reasons and leave it on for extended periods of time, which is detrimental to our health and happiness (Sapolsky, 1999, 2004). The best practice that saved our ancestors from being the main course at the bear family dinner table is now activated in response to our modern perceived psychological threats and has become a contributor to stress-related diseases and enduring negative emotions. Nevertheless, notice how the fear program is efficient (e.g. it acts in the blink of an eye), economic (e.g. it stops bodily processes that are unnecessary at the moment to conserve and mobilize energy), reliable (e.g. the cascade of events happens every time we are threatened), and flexible (e.g. the fear program generalizes from a bear to a snake to a spider to a threat produced purely by our own imaginations).

The sort of logic and analyses just followed for the negative emotion of fear is paralleled in evolutionary analyses of other negative emotions such as jealousy and envy (Buss, 2000; Hill & Buss, 2008). However, it should be made clear that negative emotions are not deemed as "bad" and positive emotions are not deemed as "good" in any moral judgmental sense. Rather, these categories describe how the emotion feels to the person experiencing it, and merely indicates that either something good or something bad has happened (Nettle, 2005). Therefore, from the evolutionary point of view, a basic general analysis of positive and negative emotions says that both categories evolved in order to indicate that a change has occurred in our environment and to help us regulate three basic tasks: (1) exerting the proper amount of energy to the task at hand, (2) knowing when to stop what we are currently doing and switch to a more important activity, and (3) choosing among alternative activities to find the one that would most enhance our success at survival and reproduction (Nesse, 2005). With this background in place, the remainder of this paper will focus on what evolutionary psychology has to say about the positive emotional aspect of subjective well-being as well as how we might go about increasing the happiness in our lives.

The Evolutionary Perspective on Positive Emotions

Throughout the history of emotion research, positive emotions have been relatively ignored in comparison with negative ones. This fact makes good sense, since our evolved psychological mechanisms have been designed such that certain aspects of our environment demand our attention more urgently than others. For instance, emotions such as fear, jealousy, envy, and anger can easily overcome us, while happy moments are often less intense by comparison, and far more fleeting in nature (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). Although such a design seems contrary to the happy life, without such biases we would not have survived the unforgiving environments of our evolutionary past by avoiding predators and successfully competing for mates so that our genes could be propagated (Buss, 2000; Hill & Buss, 2008). While a particular negative emotion seems to be more well-defined in the way it tends to narrow our perspective down to a distinct set of behavioral tendencies or urges, researchers have typically seen the positive emotions as less differentiated. Traditionally, positive emotions have been lumped together, with research demonstrating that they have the general functions of (1) prompting the individual to engage in activities and (2) motivating the individual to continue to perform the current activity (Fredrickson, 2006). Notably, both of these functions are seen as evolutionarily adaptive and help explain why most people report being somewhat happy most of the time (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008). Without such a bias toward a positive state, our ancestors may have been less motivated to explore their environments and persist at important tasks.

While both of these functions are clearly essential to success in ancestral environments, recent work from an evolutionary perspective suggests that positive emotions can be considered in a more differentiated and useful framework. In the late 1990s, Fredrickson (2006) proposed the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, which states that unlike negative emotions, which tend to narrow our perspectives, the experience of positive emotions tends to open us up to a wider spectrum of thoughts and actions, broadening the range of possibilities available to us. A body of research is accumulating in support of this hypothesis (see Fredrickson, 2006 and 2009, for reviews). For example, when research participants are induced to feel positive, neutral, and negative emotions, those in a positive-emotion condition create longer lists of things they would like to do at the moment than those in negative or neutral emotion conditions (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). However, this is not all that the broaden-and-build theory predicts. It also proposes that positive emotions help build personal resources, and from an evolutionary viewpoint, one's resources are critical to survival and reproductive success. Here again, evidence is accumulating in support of the building function of positive emotions. For instance, research has demonstrated that happier people are more successful in critical domains of life such as marriage, friendship, income, and work performance (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008). Although successes in these life domains obviously contribute to making people happier, evidence is mounting that how happy one is to begin with may actually *cause* these successes to accumulate (Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). In addition, positive emotions have been shown to undo the lingering effects of negative emotions and fuel psychological resiliency (Fredrickson, 2006). When taken together, these pieces of evidence, derived from an evolutionary perspective, provide a compelling case for why happier people tend to be healthier and live longer, more productive lives (Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001).

By this theory, each positive emotion can also serve a somewhat distinct broadening function, complementary to the narrowing function of each negative emotion. For instance, the theory proposes that the emotion of contentment will induce people to seek familiar places and "…creates the urge to sit back and savor current life circumstances and to integrate these circumstances into new views of self and the world," the emotion of interest "…creates the urge to explore, take in new information and experiences, and expand the self in the process," and the emotion of joy "…creates the urge to play, push the limits and be creative" (Fredrickson, 2006, p. 89). An interesting example supporting the different influences of unique positive emotions on judgment and behavior was provided by Griskevicius, Shiota, and Nowlis (2010). Taking an evolutionary approach, these researchers tested how the positive emotions of pride and contentment differentially influenced product desirability. When feelings of pride were induced, an emotion felt after an important achievement that motivates public displays and drawing attention to oneself for social gain, research participants desired products that helped achieve this goal, namely products seen as status symbols such as Bulgari watches and Nordstrom shoes. Equally important, the pride condition did not enhance the attractiveness of products used in the home, such as beds, dishwashers, and vacuum cleaners. Quite the opposite was true for contentment. Participants induced to feel content preferred the home products over the public display products. The authors noted that traditional approaches to positive emotion would have predicted that all products would be more attractive no matter which positive emotion was induced. However, by utilizing an evolutionary perspective, this study was able to demonstrate that different positive emotions can have unique functions.

Happiness-Increasing Strategies from the Evolutionary Perspective

Moving away from the particulars of positive emotions, the evolutionary approach also has some specific suggestions for how we might increase our subjective well-being. Note that there are three basic routes to increased happiness based on the definition of happiness provided earlier. One can (1) increase the frequency of positive emotions in one's life, (2) decrease negative emotions, or (3) develop more positive evaluations of one's life as a whole. I will present a bit of evolutionary-informed research that touches each of these three areas. However, there will obviously be some overlap, since emotional experiences affect judgments of life satisfaction (Nettle, 2005). These examples will revolve around one unifying theme in the evolutionary psychological literature on the topic of subjective well-being: we will likely be happier if we develop a deeper understanding of our evolved psychologies and we come to appreciate that our present way of living is not the same as it was in the environment in which our psychological adaptations evolved (Buss, 2000; Grinde, 2002; Hill & Buss, 2008; Nesse, 2005; Nettle, 2005; Pinker, 2009; Wright, 1994).

Increasing Positive Emotions and Reducing Negative Emotions in One's Life

Research has demonstrated that the *frequency* of positive emotions compared to negative emotions is critical for subjective well-being, while the *intensity* of emotional experiences is far less important (Larsen, Deiner, & Emmons, 1985). That being the case, the question is how we might use our knowledge of evolutionary psychology to have more positive emotional experiences and fewer negative ones. Evolutionary psychologists have several suggestions in this regard, and here are two of them:

Spend more time in nature or exposed to natural environments.

Archeological evidence suggests that our ancestors were hunter-gatherers for most of our evolutionary history (Hill & Buss, 2008). Frumkin

(2001) summarizes this timeline with an effective analogy: “If the last two million years of our species history were scaled down to a single human lifetime of 70 years, then the first humans would not have begun settling into villages until 8 months after the 69th birthday… [hence] for the great majority of human existence, human biology has been embedded in the natural environment” (p.235). Even from birth we seem to have an affiliation for certain types of natural environments. For instance, when children are shown slides of landscapes, including rainforests, deserts, and savannas, most prefer savannas, which are grasslands with occasional groupings of trees, “even though they have never been to one” (Pinker, 2009, p. 376). Researchers generally agree that most of human evolution took place in this type of environment on the savannas of Africa (Buss, 2008; Pinker, 2009).

Thus, humans have participated in the natural world of plants and animals for millennia. Plants were critical for survival “…as a food source, for shelter, and as an indicator of water” (Grinde & Patil, 2009, p. 2333). Likewise, animals have been a source of food, wonder, and companionship throughout the ages (Buss, 2008). Nevertheless, today we live in cities made of concrete and steel, practically devoid of natural surroundings, and most of us spend over 90 percent of our lives indoors (Woodcock & Custovic, 1998). However, in detailed reviews of the literature concerning our interaction with the natural world, researchers have concluded that having contact with nature has definite physical and psychological benefits (Frumkin, 2001; Grinde & Patil, 2009). Many studies have examined our relationship with nature through such things as having pets, having physical contact with outdoor environments such as parks and gardens, adding natural elements such as plants to our indoor surroundings, and merely having a view of nature through a window or a piece of art. Some of the benefits include reduced stress, decreased fear and anger, better self-reported health, increased pain tolerance, improved mood, improved memory, shorter hospital stays, and even increased longevity (Frumkin, 2001; Grinde & Patil, 2009; Keller et al., 2005). Unfortunately, exactly why contact with plants and animals confers these benefits remains a mystery. For instance, it has been suggested that plants and natural environments may affect us through fragrance, improving acoustics, improving humidity and air quality, or by influencing subconscious parts of our brain when we view them (Grinde & Patil, 2009). Regardless of this ambiguity, experiencing nature more often, as our ancestors did, may be a simple route to increasing our happiness.

Pursue meaningful goals that are related to the adaptive problems of our ancestors.

A body of research has established that the perception that one is making progress toward one's goals is an important contributor to one's subjective well-being (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Pinker (2009) sums this idea up succinctly: "…improvement is happiness, loss is misery" (p. 391). However, goal pursuits can be parsed in many different ways, and research has shown that the type of goal that one chooses can also be important for happiness. For example, intrinsic goals are more essential to one's happiness than extrinsic goals, and approach-oriented goals are more important to happiness than goals directed at avoiding undesirable outcomes (Lyubomirsky, 2008). However, evolutionary psychologists point out that what can be problematic to modern humans is the size and duration of our goal pursuits (Nesse, 2005). In the not too distant past, our goals were mainly short term in nature, such as gathering food and caring for relatives. However, today we pursue Ph.D.'s into our forties. Nesse (2005) noted that, "Our brain regulation systems were never designed to cope with efforts so long in duration, towards goals so large, with all-or-none outcomes that offer few alternatives" (p. 24). This observation implies that smaller, more immediate goals may be more important for our subjective well-being.

Recent research appears to support Nesse's evolutionary perspective on goal pursuits. For instance, it has been demonstrated that pursuing emotion-focused goals—those goals that are directed at feeling states and often involve social relationships—has a greater impact on one's happiness than goals that are directed at gathering information and knowledge (Carstensen, 2006). Emotion-focused goals are the type that we tend to naturally pursue when we consider time to be finite. In other words, when we believe that we have a lot of time to do things, as when we are young, our goals tend to be directed at longer term projects that require gathering knowledge and may involve delaying some positive emotional events and experiencing some negative affect along the way. However, as our time horizons contract, as when we are older and nearer to our inevitable demise, our goals tend to be directed more toward short-term tasks that have a positive effect on our emotional well-being (Carstensen, 2006; Carstensen, & Mikels, 2005). Thus, the goal orientations of those far along in years would seem to mirror those that likely dominated the everyday lives of our ancestors, namely short-term goals whose success or failure could immediately be assessed. Emotion-focused goals seem to relate directly to solving the evolutionary problems of survival and reproduction since successfully addressing both of these evolutionary challenges is intimately related to the care and maintenance of social relationships.

Increasing One's Satisfaction with Life

Our judgments of life satisfaction are often strongly linked to how we compare ourselves with our peers (Nettle, 2005). From an evolutionary perspective, this makes sense since the resources one attained were a reflection of one's skill and abilities and thus likely affected success in attracting the best mates. If our ancestors noticed others acquiring more resources, they would be inspired to achieve similar results in order to compete effectively. The psychological term for judging ourselves in relation to others is called social comparison, and comparing ourselves with individuals who earn more income, have more education, or are more attractive than us can lower our self-esteem and arouse the negative emotion of envy, both of which are detrimental to subjective well-being (Hill & Buss, 2008).

Notably, in our evolutionary past, our peer group was likely quite small, probably consisting of between 50 and 200 people in a hunter-gatherer society (Dunbar, 1993). However today, with the advent of technological advances in communication and global media coverage, our peer group has become the entire planet. This means that rather than having a pretty good chance of being the best at something in a small group, we are constantly exposed to an almost unimaginable number of people who are better than us in every aspect of our lives (Buss, 2000; Grinde, 2002; Hill & Buss, 2008; Nesse, 2005; Nettle, 2005; Pinker, 2009). The effects of an increase in comparison group size has been the subject of empirical study, and it has been shown that when comparison group size is larger our life satisfaction decreases (Fujita, 2008).

To counter these negative effects upon our life satisfaction, evolutionary psychologists have suggested that we might concentrate our attention on domains where the phenomena of social comparison seem to be irrelevant, such as in the area of "maintaining a harmonious marital life" (Hill & Buss, 2008, p. 72). Moreover, we can "… take control of our comparison groups … by taking a temporary or long term 'media fast'" (Hill & Buss, 2008, p. 73), meaning that we can choose to stop reading fashion magazines and watching television programs that highlight domains where the phenomenon of social comparison is rampant, such as those concerning wealth and attractiveness.

Conclusion: We Are About as Happy as We Ought to Be

What seems apparent from scanning the list of recommendations above (i.e. increase your exposure to the natural world, pursue particular types of goals, and limit your comparison groups) is that evolutionary psychologists seem to have modest expectations for the prospect of increasing happiness. In addition to what has been discussed so far, there are several other good reasons for this cautionary approach that were not detailed in this brief paper, such as how quickly we adapt to positive experiences (Campbell, 1975), how stable measures of an individual's subjective well-being tend to be over time (Nettle, 2005), and how a high proportion of our happiness is influenced by our genetic heritage and personality predispositions (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996; Nesse, 2005; Nettle, 2005; Pinker, 2009). Even more telling are the quotes that one finds sprinkled throughout the evolutionary psychological literature:

> *"Natural selection does not give a fig for our happiness."* Nesse (1999)

"We are built to be effective animals, not happy ones." Wright, (1994)

"We were not designed for happiness." Nesse (2005)

"We are designed not for happiness or unhappiness, but to strive for the goals that evolution has built into us." Nettle (2005)

"Natural selection doesn't really 'care' about our happiness in the end and will readily countenance our suffering if that will get our genes into the next generation." Wright (1994)

It seems apparent then that from an evolutionary perspective, "The foremost reason that happiness is so hard to achieve is that the universe was not designed with the comfort of human beings in mind" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 8). Over the course of millennia, our ancestors had to struggle to meet the multitude of challenges that the environment brought forth, and we are their descendents, left with the adaptive mechanisms that led to their success (Buss, 2000). Dawkins (2006) sums these ideas up nicely: "… although evolution may seem, in some vague sense, a 'good thing,' especially since we are the product of it, nothing actually 'wants' to evolve. Evolution is something that [just] happens" (p. 18).

In addition, our general baseline mood, one of being somewhat happy most of the time (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008), has been worked out over deep time. This fact supports the argument that merely being somewhat happy is precisely what we are supposed to be, since it has contributed to success in life throughout the ages. Reinforcing this idea is the research that demonstrates that extremes of happiness (mania) and unhappiness (depression) are maladaptive in that they influence poor decision-making and lead to shorter, less productive lives (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008; Nesse, 2005). Consequently, in the view of evolutionary psychology, we are probably just about as happy as we ought to be.

However, there is also hope stirring within many of the conclusions of evolutionary psychology. Since the human species developed in the challenging environments of our evolutionary past, we may be naturally inclined to thrive "…in modern society with its complexities, competition, and choices" (Veenhoven, 2005, p. 341). Recent research seems to support this contention. A review that considered cross-sectional data from 90 nations, national trends in happiness over the last 30 years, and findings from historical and comparative anthropology suggest that we live longer and are healthier and happier than ever before in human history (Veenhoven, 2005). Such encouraging findings are strengthened by one critical fact: we have developed magnificent brains that provide us with the power to choose when and when not to follow the urges of our evolutionary inheritance. Likewise, our newfound ability to understand our evolved psychologies gives us the power to harness them in ways unimaginable to our ancestors in the distant past. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) summed up our prospects for happiness in this way: "People who learn to control their inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy" (p.2). As this quotation implies, we have the ability to choose to invest our energies in those evolutionarily relevant goals that modern psychological science has shown us are critical to the happy, satisfied life, namely the pursuits of health, meaningful work, and deep, satisfying relationships (Argyle, 1999; Wilson, 1967). We also have the choice to change our sterile unnatural environments and avoid unrealistic comparison groups. All of these choices are within our reach, if only we will put forth the effort. Moreover, research has demonstrated that simply making progress toward these worthy goals may be all that we need to do to become happier, more fulfilled human beings.

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