

THE NATURE AND DYNAMICS OF HAPPINESS: A PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEW

Dr. Jose Mathews*

Abstract

Happiness is understood from different perspectives including environmental, sociological, economical, political and psychological processes. In this paper an attempt is made to interpret the nature and dynamics of happiness from a psychological perspective. In the bottom-up approach to happiness, the general environmental factors like family, marriage, education and income that contribute to happiness are studied whereas in the top-down approach the intraindividual processes that determine happiness are emphasized. It has been found that the major sources of variance of happiness rest with the intraindividual processes. A model of happiness that underlines the importance of cognitive processes, personality processes, motivation and emotional processes are suggested. Distinctive cognitions, specific personality traits, distinctive motivational processes and emotional paths make the individual happy. Finally the importance of situations is examined

The fundamental striving of human beings appears to be one of seeking happiness in life regardless of his race, religion, language or nationality. Individuals everywhere and every time are moved by this zest for happiness. A person who enjoys full happiness can truly say that he has found meaning in life and that his life is at a pinnacle of achievement, a state of self – transcendence.

However happiness as a psychological process is not well studied. In the recent years there have been many attempts to study the nature and dynamics of happiness from different perspectives. It is also a matter of happiness that many numbers of researches are being done now in the area of happiness. Is happiness a matter? Even though happiness can be objectified,

* Senior Lecturer, Gaeddu College of Business Studies, Royal University of Bhutan

first and foremost happiness is a subjective experience that originates in the psyche of the individual.

In this paper an attempt is made to understand the nature and dynamics of happiness from a purely psychological perspective.

DEFINITION OF HAPPINESS

Happiness can be defined in several ways as the experience changes from person to person and also the same person can be happy for different reasons and at different times for the same reason. Just as different circumstances produce happiness, varying forms of happiness can be experienced by different individuals in the same circumstances. Even though researchers are able to arrive at some uniformity and consistency in the use of the term happiness, in actual life happiness is a malleable process.

There is a general agreement in the definition of happiness as a pleasant affective state. It can be defined in terms of frequent positive affect, high life satisfaction and infrequent negative affect, which for Diener (2000) becomes the components of subjective well being, the scientific term for happiness. The master researcher of happiness Diener (2000) has identified the separable components of subjective well being as life satisfaction (global judgment of one's life) satisfaction with important domains of life (eg. work satisfaction, games and sports, etc), positive affect(experiencing many pleasant emotions and moods and low-levels of negative affect(experiencing few unpleasant emotions and moods).

Kitayama et al (1995) define happiness as a positive emotional state of general nature and not restricted to any specific circumstances. Uchida, et al (2004) consider happiness as an emotional concomitant to an overall cognitive appraisal of the quality of one's life. Accordingly happiness follows the interpretation and evaluation of one's life which means that happiness is an emotional experience largely rooted in the way life is lived. Lu (2001) defines happiness as consisting of (a) mental state of satisfaction and contentment (b) positive feelings/ emotions (c) harmonious homeostasis (d) achievement and hope and (e) freedom from ill-being.

In light of these considerations and varying views of happiness in its origin and experience, it is pertinent to state the three orientations to happiness and life satisfaction as suggested by Peterson, et al (2005) under three forms: the hedonistic view, that is maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain, Aristotle's notion of eudemonia, that is being true to one's inner

self and lastly the pursuit of engagement, that is the aftermath of the flow experience of engagement is happiness.

The point to be noted is that the hedonism view and the pursuit of engagement view suggests the source of happiness outside the individual, that is the experience of happiness is consequent to the use of physical objects or engagement with the world whereas the eudemonia view traces the sources of happiness to inner psychic processes.

Accordingly the state of positive affect (PA) should also differ about which no conclusive results are available. However it can be stated that the quality of the happiness experience differs. The state of happiness experienced can be thus described as object-based happiness and subject-based happiness.

Researchers approach the state of happiness from two different paths, which are classified as bottom-up factors and top-down factors (Diener, et al 1999). Lyumbomirsty and Boehm (2010) have found that satisfaction of fundamental human motives leads to happiness and that favourable circumstances result in the creation of happiness (Diener, 2000). These findings boil down to the fact that the source of happiness can be predominantly internal or external. In other words the nature of happiness can be plotted on a continuum of internality and externality where the influence of internality ranges from maximum influence to zero influence and similarly the influence of externality ranges from zero influence to maximum influence. If we plot these variables on a horizontal and vertical axis, four different forms of happiness can be derived Fig.1.

Further elaborating upon the nature of happiness, researchers are confused with regard to the static and dynamic quality of happiness. In the flow state view, happiness is experienced as a continuous stream of uninterrupted state whereas in the categorical view, happiness is a transient state that appears and disappears in an interrupted manner. In the former happiness is experienced as an unbounded state and in the latter happiness is a bounded state with limitations and which is mostly dependent on external circumstances. The unbounded state of happiness is characterized by transcendental features of divine consciousness, the permeation

HIGH	Sensory Happiness	Stable Happiness
	Transcient Happiness	Transcendental Happiness
LOW	Influence of Internal Factors	
	LOW	HIGH

Fig.1. Different Forms of Happiness

of spiritual energy/ spiritual power and the divine experience of God in life. The bounded happiness on the other hand does not drastically differ much when compared to the unbounded except the duration and the ineffable quality. The unbounded happiness is more tilted towards the realm of supernatural level whereas bounded happiness is at the realm of engagement with the world.

Thus it can be concluded that happiness can be defined in continuous and discontinuous forms. In the continuous form of definition, happiness as a positive affect is experienced in a boundless stream at the deeper psycho-spiritual realm and that is less dependent upon external factors. In the discontinuous form happiness as a positive affect is experienced in a time-bound, externally dependent way.

Considering the distinctions made, researchers on happiness use the four different forms of happiness in different research situations. Researchers on transient happiness, stable happiness, transcendental happiness and sensory happiness can be found in the literature. In this investigation the focus is more on the stable form of happiness where the influence of internal and external factors is found to be high. In other words the person- environment interaction is at a higher form and in an intensive manner. The stable form of happiness is produced when a rich

environment interacts with an individual endowed with active and unique psychological processes of cognition, motivation, emotion and personality.

These considerations take us to the view that happiness is a multi-dimensional construct rather than a simple positive –pleasant affective state. Even though PA state is an aftermath experience, this emotional experience is to be linked to the antecedent conditions in such a way that happiness has a composite character and that it has the constituents of emotional experiences, motivational states, cognitive processes and personality processes. The state of happiness now has a wholistic character that has the inputs from different and related psychological processes. That is happiness acquires the stature of a pan-emotional state. Happiness= Emotion+Cognition+Motivation+Personality. In this composite character, the popular term happiness must give way to other terms like subjective well-being, self-actualized state, fully functioning person (Peterson ,et al 2005) and transcendent state.

A HAPPINESS MODEL

The model given represents the psychological processes that directly contribute to the state of happiness Fig.2. The psychological state and the psychological processes leading to the experience of happiness as it is generally understood in psychology is consequent to the genetic processes and the environmental conditions. The inherited genetic components exercise a major influence on the psychological systems of the individual. Genetics largely determine the entire psychological processes including the cognitions, emotions, motivations and personality. Genetic predisposition to happiness varies from individual to individual and in the near future scientists may identify a happiness gene that has different degrees of influence in our lives. Tellegen et.al (1988) have shown that about 40% of the variance in positive emotionality is due to the action of genes, whereas Lyken and Tellegen have shown that the heritability of happiness may be as high as 80%.

Personality and Happiness

As personality researchers study consistent factors in personality research, the happiness researchers must obviously search for the specific personality influences that lead to happiness. Stable personality factors are found to be exerting a long-term influence on happiness (Diener, et.al 1999) and close relation between happiness and personality characteristics exist (Holder and

Klassen, 2010). In contrast to the minimum influence that external factors exert on happiness, personality traits, stable factors and processes play an important role in happiness (Lucas, 2007).

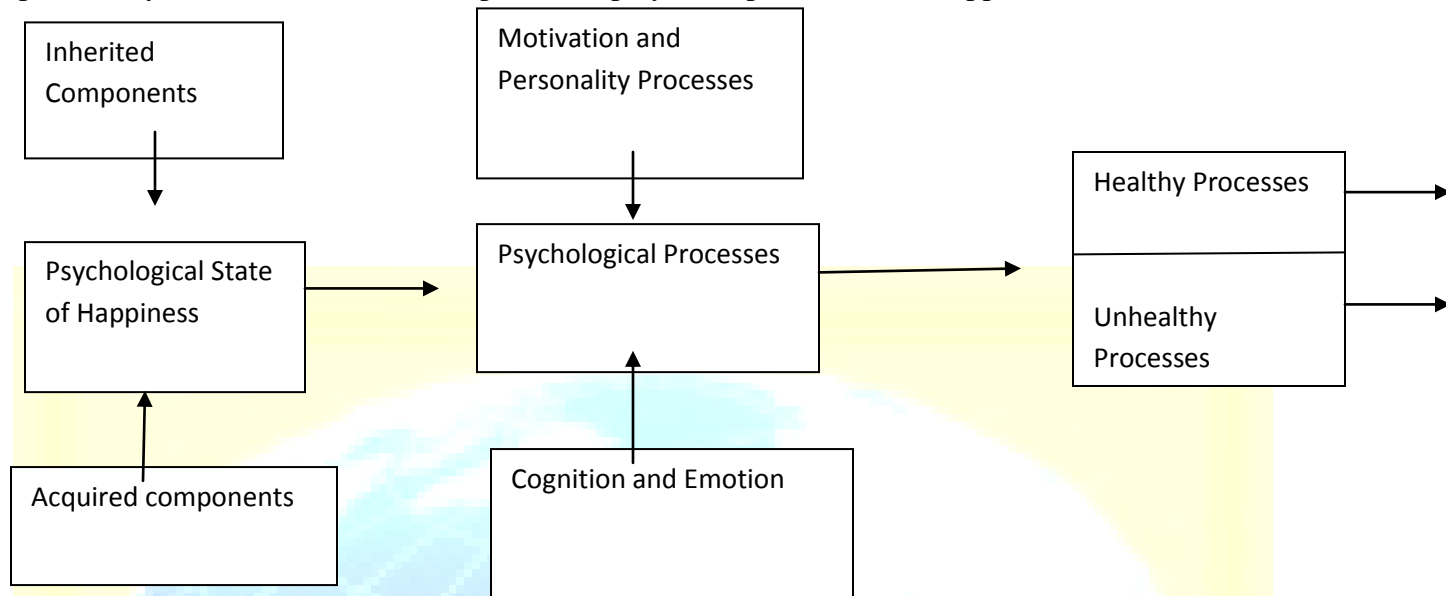


Fig.2. A General Model of Happiness

Extraversion breeds happiness (Cheng and Furnham 2003) whereas introversion brings in misery. Fujita (1991) found that extraversion is correlated with pleasant affect as extraverted individuals indulge in more and more social activities. In their outward social orientation they seek out more and more interpersonal and social activities that are of the enjoyable nature.

Emotional stability (Hills and Argyle, 2001a) and emotional maturity prevents wide fluctuations in moods and emotions meaning that individuals always maintain equilibrium in their experience. The absence of wide swings in emotions lends stability to emotional experience. The maturity attained in the expression and experience of emotions means that there are no irrational emotions in the emotional repository. Individuals seldom show irrationally conditioned emotions and individuals have control over conditioned emotional reactions (CER).

Emotional stability and emotional maturity predisposes the individual to happiness or rather it results in happiness.

Self-esteem as the individual's evaluation about himself/herself tends to permeate the entire functioning of the individual. Self-esteem is an individual's own judgments on the "suitability" of the self in different situations and more importantly it is an evaluative reaction – an emotional experience that makes the person feel good or bad. High self-esteem indicates a

positive evaluation about oneself and a low self-esteem indicates a negative evaluation. Individuals with low self-esteem tend to show more negative affect (Orth, et al 2008). What researchers call global self-esteem implies the inner most evaluation of the self and it influences all behaviors. A negative self-esteem cycle once it gets started is impervious to change and changing this at the root becomes the greatest challenge (Osborne, 1996). High self-esteem that affects the entire functioning results in happiness that is a positive evaluation leads to the build up of the state of happiness.

Lefcourt (2000) has differentiated individuals on the basis of being influenced by two differentiated generalized expectancies of external control and internal control. The generalized expectancy of external control means that the locus of control of behavior is external to the individual and it is controlled by environmental contingencies. And the generalized expectancy of internal control individuals place the locus of control of behavior within themselves, their thoughts, will and effort. De Neve and Cooper (1998) have found that the relationship between locus of control and happiness. Individuals with internal locus of control are happier than individuals with external locus of control. The changing environmental contingencies are a source of unhappiness as many of the behaviors of the individual are constantly misaligned whereas an internal orientation results in the stability of behaviors.

Another personality construct that is predicated with happiness is self-efficacy. Bandura (Hall and Lindzey, 1998) defined self-efficacy as an expectation that one can by personal effort master a situation and bring about a desired outcome. Bandura himself differentiated between an efficacy expectation and an outcome expectation. An efficacy expectation leads the individual to the enactment of behaviors or the individual himself has the conviction that he himself can produce certain pattern of behaviors. An outcome expectation, a person's belief that a particular behavior will result in a particular outcome, can also be a basis of efficacy expectation. High self-efficacy connotes greater behavioral flexibility and easiness of performance and low self-efficacy results in behavioral inhibition thereby closing the doors to the avenues of happiness and enjoyment. The absence of behavioral freedom can play havoc with happiness as happiness is consequent to the engagement with activities or the pursuit of a variety of activities. Perceived self-efficacy enhances and enriches performance attainments (Bandura Locke, 2003).

Scheier and Carver's (1985) theory of dispositional optimism qualifies happiness with optimism which is defined as a generalized tendency to expect favorable outcomes in one's life.

Optimism as a dispositional trait is underlined in the perceptions and thoughts of the individual and in the interactional pattern of thoughts and environment, the optimistic thoughts and expectations lead the individual to favorable circumstances that ultimately results in the creation of favorable outcomes. An optimist perceives the world in a positive and favorable manner and this bring about a positive framework. This positive action framework yields greater rewards.

A Need-Hierarchy Model of Happiness

Motivation is generally understood as an inner urge, need, drive or psychological desire to make an effort (Mitchell and Daniels, 2003). Psychological motives create deprivation or tension or drive in order to meet those motives with relevant stimuli. Motivation is generally associated with three psychological processes of an arousal component, a directional component and an intensity component (Mitchell and Daniels, 2003).

Motivational factors/processes are linked to happiness (Lyubomirsky, et.al 2005) and that both lower order and higher order motives move individuals to seek happiness. The activation arousal , directionality and intensity of motives are overlapped with happiness which means that all human motives have the fundamental goal of seeking different forms of happiness through different and specific motivational mechanisms. Lyubomirsky and Boehm (2010) observe that individual will feel happy after realizing fundamental human motives. The view that all motives are interspersed with seeking happiness is supported by the general understanding of happiness stated earlier. In line with this a motivation-happiness cycle may be drawn Fig.3.

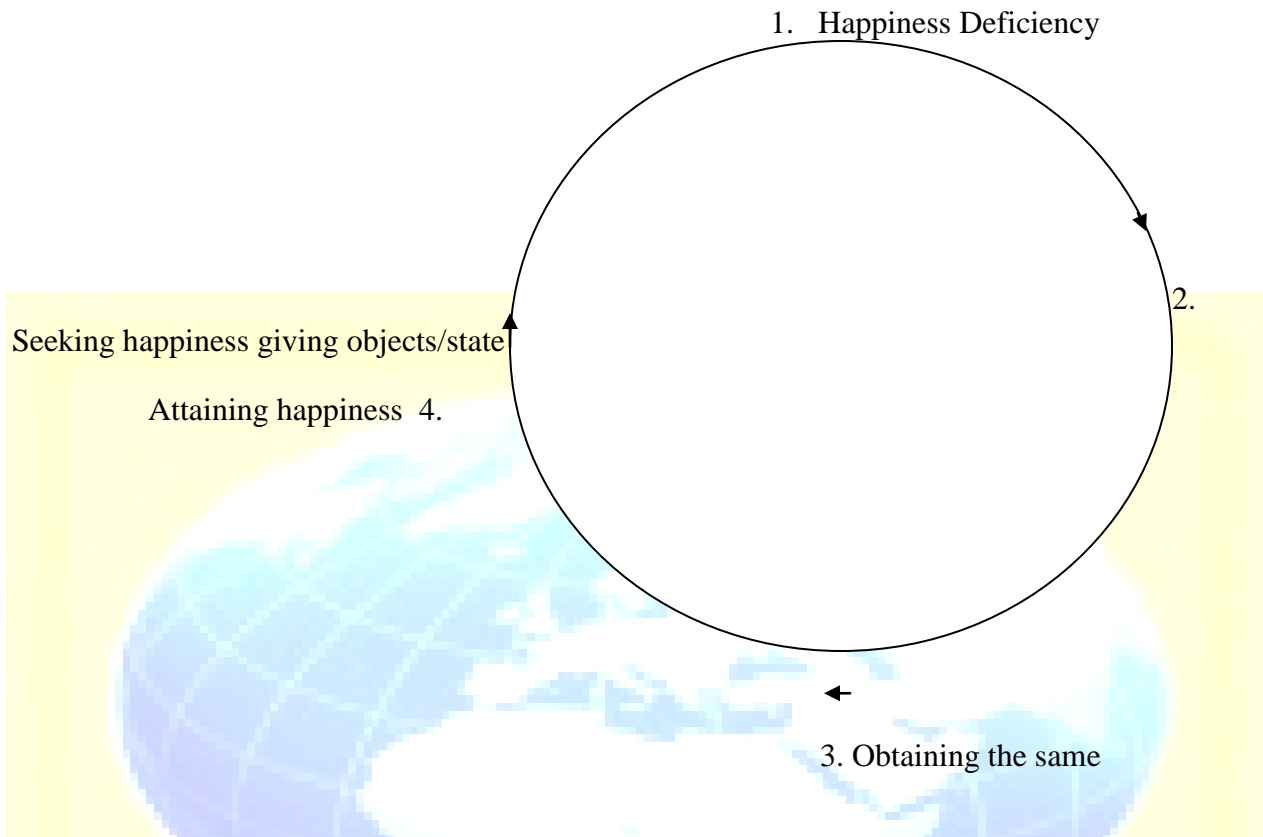


Fig.3. A Happiness- Motivational Cycle

As it can be seen this cycle closely parallels the motivational cycle. The deficiency of happiness or lack of contentment stirs up the individual to engage in relevant activities that will reduce unhappiness and create happiness in the psycho- physiological system. Seligman's (2002) orientation to happiness is very much evident here as individuals pursue engagement with activities in order to attain happiness. Further, Kitayama and his colleagues (1995) make distinctions in the nature of engagement with activities. That is, individuals experience interpersonally engaging positive emotions of intimacy, belongingness, gregariousness, "company", friendship and related positive emotions. A second form of pursuit is through interpersonal disengagement –emotions/positive affect from engagement with self-enhancing or achievement oriented activities.

Thus in the motivational analysis of happiness, it is observed that happiness deprived individuals seek /engage in happiness-giving activities so as to become a fully functioning or contented individual- a state of meta happiness.

Following Maslow's model of motivation, where needs are arranged in a hierarchy , starting from basic physiological needs and going through safety and security, love and belongingness, self-esteem and finally self-actualization needs. Needs are arranged in a hierarchy because the activation of needs take place in the order and only when a lower-level need is satisfied, individuals can move upward.

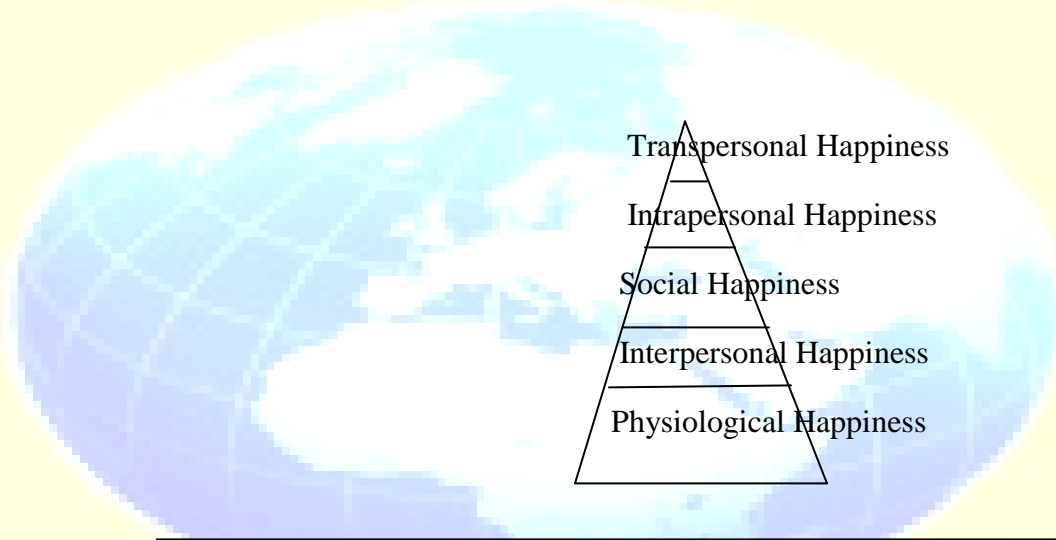


Fig.4. A Need-Hierarchy Model of Happiness

As the figure, Fig.4, indicates needs are arranged in a hierarchical order starting with lower-level physiological needs and culminating in transpersonal needs. The activation of needs and the pursuit of engagement results in the experience of happiness.

The nature of needs can be interpreted with the source of happiness that is internal and/or external. Sensory happiness comes first in the order of hierarchy that is happiness experienced through the use of sense modalities. The pleasure theory of happiness becomes relevant here, that is, individuals who can satisfy the hunger, thirst, sex, comfort motives are generally happy. According to the hedonism view, indulgence in sensory pleasures is the route to general happiness. Individuals who are able to satisfy their basic needs need no other activity to be happy at the sensory level.

Interpersonal happiness is embedded at the interpersonal relations that start with parental interactions and extends to neighborhood, school and closely-knit communities where the individual has an identity and recognition. Friendly and intimate relations provide the individual with an experience of happiness. The need to affiliate and belong to worthy and identifiable groups is a human motive and it finds its expression in interactions with primary and secondary groups.

Social happiness finds its expression as the individual moves out of primary and secondary groups and starts holding leadership and other positions in which he comes into contact with larger social settings. An employee as part of an organization too derives social happiness as he has an identity in larger social context. The happiness becomes real and authentic when the individual is able to hold on to his individuality and uniqueness.

Intrapersonal happiness becomes predominant and active in the individual when there is the expression of intrapersonal needs like autonomy, personal growth, creativity, uniqueness, self-expression, self-regard, self-discovery and self-exploration. In this level, individual starts fathoming his own inner psychological processes and tries to express it in inimitable ways. The deeper and underlying psychological potentialities are brought forward and the individual starts finding deeper meanings of life, especially one's own life.

Transpersonal happiness has its roots in at the spiritual and supernatural realm. Few minds are elevated to this exalted and ineffable state of happiness. It is the unleashing of the divine energy within the individual that is the base of happiness. It is really the realm where the individual encounters the Divine and the individual transcends the mundane. The transcendental state of happiness is the zenith of happiness for a mortal.

The need-hierarchy model follows the principles given:

1. The simultaneous activation of two or more levels of needs happen in the lives of individuals.
2. The ordering of the needs is important as far as the levels signify growth correspondence which means that biological and social growth activates the need.
3. The ordering of needs does not change drastically as it is growth dependent.
4. The experience of happiness is embedded with all the pursuits of engagement.
5. The principle of adaptation is operative here which means that individual (quickly) loses out happiness to the existing state of engagement and they are motivated to seek the next level of engagement.

Emotional Processes and Happiness

In a system perspective emotionality represents the amalgamation of external/internal stimuli, cognitive appraisals, conscious and unconscious processes, physiological changes and interaction with the environment. It means that emotional experience is not as simple as it is “felt” or thought. Emotion is a complex state and researchers have made much progress in the study of its processes and dynamics. A modified form of the emotional dynamics as explained by Horung, (2006) is given in Fig.5

Emotions enter into consciousness as affectively interpreted (Fernandez-Dols and Russell, 2003). Emotional experiences follow two paths – an affective interpretation of the external world of objects, events and persons and affective interpretations of the internal world of cognitions and bodily states.

With regard to the organization of emotions, researchers take a categorical approach and a dimensional approach (Averill, 1997). In the categorical approach emotions can be arranged into relatively homogeneous categories and in the dimensional approach emotions are not discrete categories but “shade imperceptibly” into one another. Using the dimensional approach the two dimensions of positive and negative affect result in the emotional states of joy, peace, love, calm and distress, disquiet, hatred, disturbed.

In the appraisal theories of emotion, it is the cognitive evaluation of the stimulus event that patterns the type of emotion that is experienced. The way the appraisal, evaluation or interpretation is made determines the nature of emotion. Accordingly appraisal determines which situations elicit which emotions and further appraisal shows individual differences in the stimulus-response link

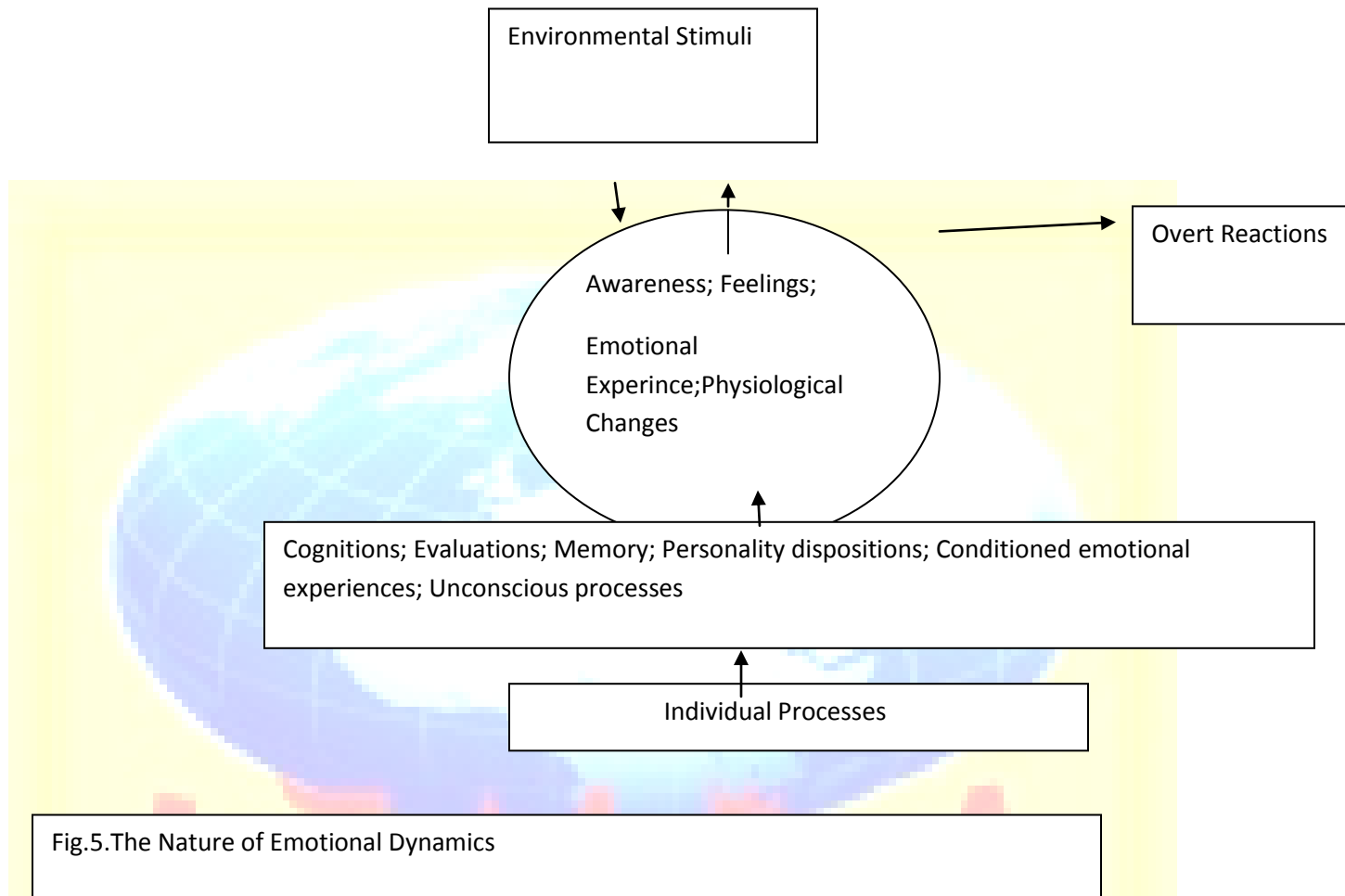


Fig.5.The Nature of Emotional Dynamics

(Fernandez-Dols and Russell, 2003). Individual differences largely account for the experience of emotion. In the same situation two may come to experience two different emotions of happiness and unhappiness. In other words, what matters here, according to appraisal theory is the individual's own distinctive processes. The appraisal mechanisms are influenced by personality dispositions, cognitive processes and the learning history of the individual. As such individuals can be differentiated on this construct of appraisal style. Individuals are understood to be having either a positive appraisal style or a negative appraisal style. Happiness differs accordingly. Happiness measure in individuals differs. Further it is to be pointed out that the situational quality also differs, that is individuals come across situations with explicit favorableness and

unfavourableness and implicit favourableness and unfavourableness. The way the appraisal style and situational favorableness interacts leading to different degrees of happiness can be understood from the figure Fig.6

Situational Favourableness					
		FAVOURABLE		UNFAVOURABLE	
		Explicit .	Implicit	Explicit	Implicit
Positive APPRAISAL	GH #	H	NH	LH	
STYLE Negative	LH	NH	GU	U	

GH-Greater Happiness, H –Happiness, NH-Not Happy, LH-Lesser Happy, GU-Greater Unhappiness U-Unhappiness

Fig.6 Appraisal Style and Situational Interaction of Happiness

A Cognitive Explanation of Happiness

As happiness is linked to the cognitive evaluations made by the individual (Diener, et.al, 1999), the way cognitive processes take place within the individual is to be understood. Cognitive psychology studies the cognitive or mental processes involved in the acquisition, storage and

transformation/utilization of knowledge and the important cognitive processes are memory, problem solving, decision-making, reasoning, thinking and related processes.

Cognition is a complex mental act and as such understanding and explaining the cognitive processes that result in happiness/unhappiness is a difficult task.

The cognitive processes analyses and evaluates environmental stimuli-physical, social, cultural, interpersonal and organizational for their emotional significance and it results in the experience of an emotion. And emotions typically have high cognitive involvement and loading. The cognitive involvement implies the use of stored data for interpreting stimulus that have emotional significance. Cognitions are found to be critical and it has the role of mediation between the onset of a stimulus event and the experience of emotion (Teachman and Saporito, 2009).

Emotional experiences are mediated through cognitive structures which are composed of a system of values on different dimensions (Ortony, et.al 1988). It means that the two types of cognition that are significant to emotion are knowledge structures and appraisal systems (Lazarus and Smith, 1988). In other words, the colouring of the knowledge structures means the emotional experience for the person. Some of the commonly used cognitive dimensions in the experience of emotions are given in Fig.7

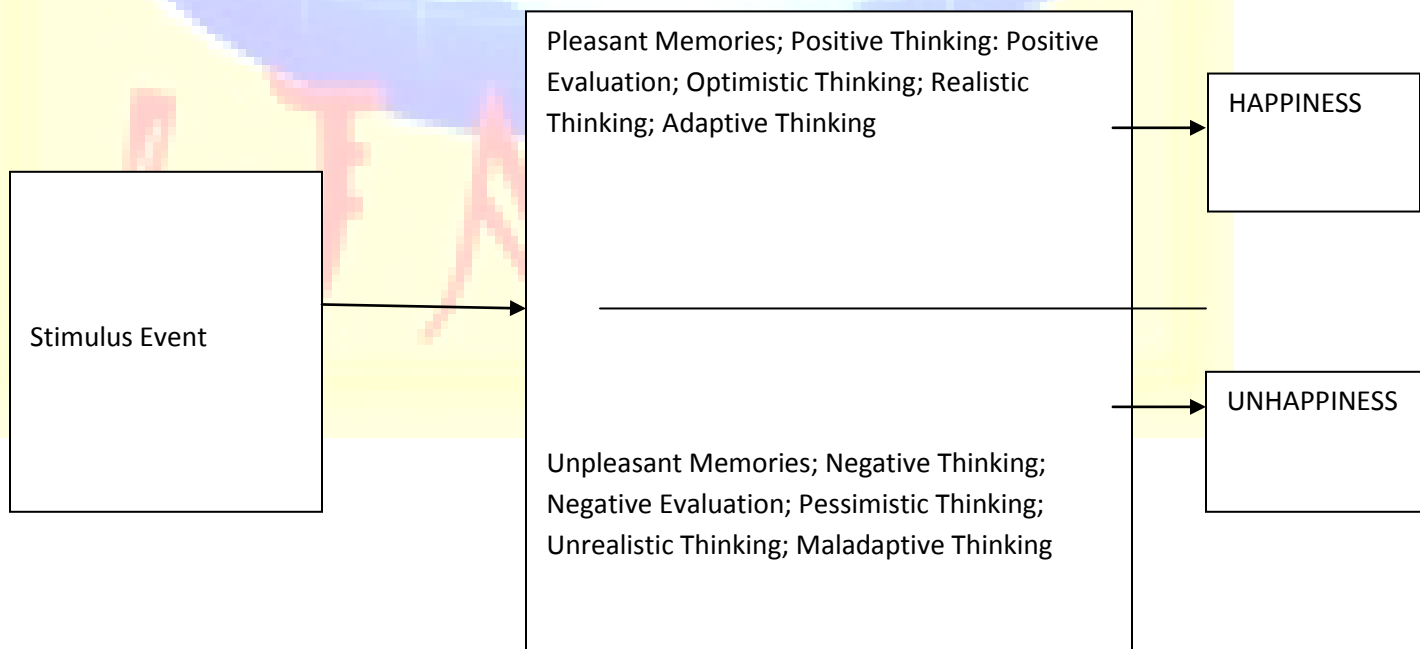


Fig.7.Cognitive Dimensions of Happiness and Unhappiness

Individuals differ in the presence and use of cognitive dimensions. These dimensions contain both knowledge and appraisal or value components and emotional experience turns out to be based on the combined effect of the use of knowledge stored and value-based judgments.

CONCLUSIONS

Happiness is experienced at the psychological processes of emotion, personality, motivation and cognition. Happiness is not a simple emotional experience as emotional dynamics of individuals differ vastly. The personality components show greater variability among happy and unhappy individuals. Researchers have identified an array of personality constructs that differentially affect happiness. Motivation as an internal process has its roots in psycho-physiological mechanisms. Individuals are found to be seeking happiness in different situations that have different motivational relevance and significance. The relation between cognition and emotion is well established and as such the nature of cognitive processes affects happiness in different and predictable ways.

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