

Enhancing Happiness and Life Satisfaction

Final Essay Exam

1. Read pages 177-179 in THANKS! You do not need to mention any other research studies except McAdams' study for this question. Please use your own life experiences (or use anonymous experiences from close family members) to illustrate three "redemptive sequences." You may use quotations from THANKS!

The redemptive nature of this topic is quite intriguing to me. My favorite quotation from this section is; "Grateful, redeemed individuals are neither naively optimistic nor are they under some illusion that suffering and pain are not real. If there is redemption there must first be pain. *The redemptive twist does not erase the original pain.*" (Emmons 178-179). This paragraph states that the pain is not taken away by the gratitude. It also explains that if there is redemption, there must first be pain. What the attitude of gratitude does, in my opinion, is alter the state of consciousness in the mind from negative to positive. Therefore, if you are experiencing a sad or negative event it still is painful, but it is easier to overcome the adversity by looking for the hidden blessing within it. This concept is stated more clearly in this quotation, "Notably present in the redemptive sequences generated in those interviewed by McAdams were feelings of thankfulness and appreciation.... It may be that gratitude promotes the construction of redemptive life sequences because individuals who approach life with an attitude that all of life is a gift will be more likely to find the good in bad life circumstances. In fact, they may be more likely to label such an event a gift" (Emmons 178-179).

For example, my cousin lost her husband during this semester. This particular challenge is quite heartbreaking since she was only married to him for 8 months before he died in a tragic avalanche accident. She could have mourned and been so depressed and heartbroken. Instead she used her faith and the gratitude for the time she had with him to help her overcome this adversity. She believes that she will see him again in the world to come after her temporal body dies. This is both healing for her and for me since I believe the same doctrine. She also helped heal others with this message as they were dealing with his untimely death.

Another example; my husband's job is very unrewarding and has not been kind to him in the 4 years he has worked there. Little raises or promotions and company politics has been hard to deal with. We have learned through this adversity that he doesn't want to continue working in healthcare and he has a stronger resolve to go to Law School and become a Patent lawyer. Out of some adversities come goals and direction.

For the final example, my mother and father are divorced and I have had a hard time getting along with either of them since their separation and my father's remarriage. It has been challenging to meet and become friends with my step siblings and my step-mom. I have found in her a more caring mother and friend than my own mother, which has helped to heal that hurt somewhat. I make time for my mother and siblings who reside with her even though I don't particularly like being around them. I am finding my mother to be more amiable and kind than

usual which is nice. And I am able to have relationships with all my family members, regardless of what they think.

2. Explain what happens to a person (emotionally, physically, etc.) when he/she meets difficult times with gratitude or appreciation. Using Emmons' ideas, what are the advantages of being able to "extract blessings from adversity" or find hidden benefits rather than burdens? As a person copes with poverty, becomes a new parent of a disabled infant, or endures a natural disaster like a hurricane or earthquake, explain why gratitude can be a healing response (Emmons 174-175). Discuss recent research that illustrates the physiological effects of appreciation on the heart.

The Section; "Gratitude in Trying Times and the Bounce-Back Factor" in our text struck my heart. Emmons suggests that overcoming adversity by counting our blessings or extracting blessings from adversities can change the physiological make up of our minds and hearts. We become more positive in our thinking, especially when dealing with significant trials and adversities. We remember the joys and blessings we do have and what we have not lost. Example 1- (From the Book) Victims of Hurricane Katrina remembered the attitude of gratitude present in the sufferers of this horrible natural disaster; "Last week was hard... I saw people living a nightmare. Yet what struck me the hardest... was the outpouring of gratitude that those around me shared when they received something ordinary- a hot meal, a chocolate energy drink, a ride, a private place to sleep, a shower, a few words of encouragement. *Deprivation was creating a new perspective for us all. We stopped taking our ordinary lives (and each other) for granted. It is the gift that I take home with me, my reward... Katrina can take my home but not my spirit.*" (Emmons 175-176). Example 2-(From the Book) after the attack on 9/11/2001 American were; "Kinder, more loving, more appreciative of life, and more helpful towards each other after 9/11." (Emmons 173) According to Psychologist Christopher Peterson, who did a Positive Psychology experiment on the victim's during the months before and after the attack, seven strengths increased in the 3 studies done after the terrorist attack. Those strengths were; "Gratitude, hope, kindness, leadership, love, spirituality and teamwork." (Emmons 173). The most listed coping behavior for dealing with; Natural Disasters, loss of a loved one, discovering a child has a disability, or the drastic change in having a child is, as well as dealing with terrorist attacks or other adversity is; "Reminding oneself of things in which to be grateful for" or "telling myself I have things to be thankful for" and "counting my blessings" (Emmons 176).

Example 3- My husband and I lived in a tiny apartment for about 2 and half years. It was a 2 bedroom apartment near the University of Utah and his work. The lighting was low and I was often sad especially during the winter months. This was after the birth of our son. I learned to be thankful for what we had, we were lucky to have shelter from the elements and have a very healthy son to take care of. I also learned that being in the company of others is healing and finding and cultivating friendships helps alleviate stress and depression. I took my son on more play-dates and church activities with other moms and learned to come out of myself more. I became more thankful for my circumstances and my blessings in adversity, which helped my attitude and friendships improve. I found a home where we now live in a more open and sunny neighborhood and with more space to enjoy life in now, and we have a park nearby to play in. Therefore, I learned what I like in a neighborhood and was able to find it eventually, but I learned when dealing with hard circumstances that finding the positives in what I do have

helps improve my attitude and the quality of my life.

3. Extra Credit Essay- Define ingratitude (see the chart in Emmons 141) and discuss “deeper underlying motives” (Emmons 147) and the research about one reason for ingratitude (Emmons 137-148) below:

As the chart shows on page 141 Ingratitude is more than forgetfulness or a lack of gratitude. We find fault with the benefit, instead of recognizing a gift. We think the giver has an ulterior motive other than to be kind, and do not acknowledge receiving of the gift. Instead of returning a good deed we want to return evil for good. (Paraphrased Emmons 141). “When a person is ungrateful they respond with hostility, resentment, or in some other way choose to willfully disparage the gift and the giver.” (Emmons 142). The author in the book gives a hypothetical example of ingratitude as; when he was given a sweater and saying how awful it looks or how horrible it is in front of the giver of the gift. This is not only rude; it also hurts the giver’s feelings and insults them. “Whether we are personally involved or not, we expect people to acknowledge the good that has been done for them; ingratitude is the refusal to acknowledge this good. Why is ingratitude such a profound moral failure? The principal of reciprocity, upon which all human societies are based, states that one has an obligation to help others who have helped us. Directing ingratitude towards our benefactor is a way of inflicting harm upon that person” (Emmons 144) The author goes on to explain that when we are not reciprocating a gift for a gift or a kind word for a kind deed, and want to repay kindness with evil we are violating the law of human reciprocity and making a moral claim of “moral disgust” against the giver of the gift. When a person habitually repays kindness and positive gifts for, “indifference, resentment or ingratitude, this is a violent resentment of natural law.” (Emmons 144)

The following are possible reasons why people are ungrateful. In the reading the one that stood out to me was the presence of pride and self-centeredness in the receiver of the gift. If the person thinks that all good things are only done and received by oneself, than that person would not recognize the benefit and positivity of a gift from someone else. They would likely think either it was a negative thing or not acknowledge the gift because they don’t want to have to reciprocate it to the person giving it. Also in the reading, the essence of superiority stuck out to me. If the person receiving the gift has a sense of entitlement and thinks that; “You owe me so much, this is only a drop in the hat.” “In this case the amount owed to him his so large it can never be repaid.” (Emmons Pg 147). The reverse is true if one has very low self esteem and self worth they would likely associate the giver of the gift as trying to bring forth his weaknesses or flaws, and would not want to associate or reciprocate the good for the good for fear of being not good enough or of being mocked.

Deeper motives for ingratitude-1. “The thought that attitudes of gratitude are aggressive attempts covering up feelings of inferiority or inadequacy. Being provided a benefit provides us to be in a position where we are reliant on the giver, some people don’t like to be in that circumstance. 2. The giving of a gift can be seen as a small repayment on an old debt, which cannot be repaid because the receiver of the gift thinks you owe them an infinite amount of gifts; this is common in Borderline Personality Disorder and Narcissistic Personality Disorder sufferers. 3. By doing a good deed, the benefactor may be seen as weak in the neurotic mind of

the beneficiary. 4. Beneficiaries may misjudge the motives of benefactors; if I was an ungrateful recipient I might assume that a person was kind in order to feel better about themselves or to not feel humiliated.”(Emmons 147)

New research suggests that the busyness of life and the improvements in technology take away from the expression of gratitude by letters, phone calls or visits to a friend. In one of the studies cited in the book passersby of a Homicide stepped over a victim not noticing the person lying there in blood, just listening to their iPods without realizing what had happened. One person said, “People were just walking by with their iPod headsets on, that was tripping me out.”(Emmons 139) “Gratitude requires taking time out of your day to reflect on one’s blessings.”(Emmons 139) This gets hard to do when we are in a virtual reality like (facebook, twitter, myspace) or are not able to disconnect ourselves from electronic devices like iPods long enough to realize our surroundings and count our blessings.