

Is happiness having what you want, wanting what you have, or both?

Some argue that happiness is not having what you want, but wanting what you have. This maxim sounds reasonable enough, but can it be tested, and if so, is it true?

It turns out it can be tested. Texas Tech University psychologist Jeff Larsen and Amie McKibban of Wichita State University asked undergraduates to indicate whether they possessed 52 different material items, such as a car, a stereo or a bed.

Their results, which appear in the April issue of the Association for Psychological Science's journal, *Psychological Science*, suggest that people can grow accustomed to their possessions and thereby derive less happiness from them.

They also suggest, however, that people can continue to want the things they have and that those who do so can achieve greater happiness.

"Simply having a bunch of things is not the key to happiness," Larsen said. "Our data show that you also need to appreciate those things you have. It's also important to keep your desire for things you don't own in check."

If the students owned a car, the researchers asked them to rate how much they wanted the car they had. If they didn't have a car, they were asked to rate how much they wanted one.

Larsen and McKibban then calculated the extent to which people want what they have and have what they want. Their findings show that wanting what you have is not the same as having what you want. While people who have what they want tend to desire those items, the correlation between the two was far from perfect.

The researchers found that people who want more of what they have tend to be happier than those who want less of what they have. However, people who have more of what they want tend to be happier than those who have less of what they want.

Source: Association for Psychological Science

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