

The Habits of Happiness – Dr Arch. Hart

Notes¹ [SL] from seminar – St Peter's Anglican church, Vera St., South Tamworth
Saturday, May 12, 2007

Prof of Psychol & Dean Emeritus at Fuller Seminary etc
A South African-American (in the US for almost 40 years, previously a civil engineer)

Website: <http://www.hartinstitute.com>

- The book of his which Hart considers the best: “The 15 principles... achieving happiness’
- One sentence to remember: “ The best protection against depression you will ever find is to develop habits of happiness’
- Depression is epidemic in the western world today
- Within 10 years, every teenager in the US will need to be on antidepressants as a prophylactic
- ADD is over diagnosed; often the learning difficulties are due to depression not ADD as such
- Main cause of depression today: stress; living outside the box of our design
- Stress: mainly from increased pace of life. Increased stimulation, and decreased recovery time. Not just the unpleasant stressors in our lives. Modern communications include the internet can be part of the problem. (Gave example of a granddaughter multitasking: working on a split screen on the computer – essay on one side, chat screen on the other; one ear plugged into iPod, other ear plugged into bluetooth for cell phone).
- ~ 1 in 5 women and 1 in 6 men have clinical depression. (Hart never really gave a clear cut case definition of clinical depression... perhaps he did indirectly at various points)
- Depression robs us of happiness
- Happiness is a buffer against depression.

Martin Seligman (‘Positive Psychology’)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Seligman

- Revolution ~ 8-9 years ago in psychology
- Martin Seligman (‘s ideas) now dominates psychology in the USA
- He did research into ‘learned helplessness’ – believing you can do nothing to change your circumstances. E g the battered wife keeps returning to her marital situation.
- Seligman had an epiphany while gardening with his 5 year old child. Seligman, task-oriented, was annoyed with his daughter who had a playful attitude to the gardening/weeding they were doing together. His daughter’s retort: ‘You know how I learned not to be whiney by the time I turned 5? ...well, why can’t you learn not to be grumpy?’ This story was part of Seligman’s presidential address (American Psychol Association) and put Seligman onto the path of positive psychology, learning to be happy.

¹ CDs (mp3 (\$10 posted) or ‘audio’ (\$12 posted) format) available from the seminar. Anglican church Armidale diocese.

- Seligman – ‘we have done nothing to protect from mental illness’ ‘Low self-esteem – for example – is not a cause but a result of mental illness’
- Seligman challenges the notion that all bad things stem from childhood, or that they make a significant difference to outcomes in dealing with mental illness in adult life.
- **Seligman proposed 10 buffers** (later added three more) to protect from emotional/mental disorders:
 1. **Courage**
 2. **Future mindedness**
 3. **Optimism**
 4. **Interpersonal skills** (teenagers today are lacking in this area with modern comms/tech)
 5. **Faith.** (A turnaround from Freud who regarded faith / religion as a neurosis). Seligman opined that studies showed that the happiest people are conservative Christians. (Psychologists now considered negligent if they didn’t do a spiritual inventory on patients).
 6. **Work ethic.** Having meaningful work. Consider work useful/meaningful
 7. **Hope** (Hope is seeing beyond your circumstances whereas optimism is seeing good things in your circumstances)
 8. **Honesty.** Being honest about your situation/ yourself
 9. **Perseverance**
 10. **Capacity for insight.**
 11. **Forgiveness.** (eg see Hart’s book ‘Unlocking the mystery of your emotions’). Forgiveness: surrendering the right to hurt someone back...(incl criticising them etc). Instant forgiveness...example of his dog when Arch treads on his foot: dog responds angrily at first...but snarl quickly turns to a ‘smile’ (instant forgiveness)
 12. **Resilience.** Deciding to bounce back from adversity rather than give in
 13. **Happiness**
- We often confuse happiness with pleasure
- Happiness is a tripod – 3 linked facets
 - Satisfaction/contentment (the Bible says a lot about contentment “I have learned to be content whatever my circumstances ‘ – Paul)
 - Joyfulness/glee (some people equate joyfulness with happiness)
 - Pleasure. (a symptom of depression is anhedonia – inability to feel pleasure)
- Paradox: if I pursue pleasure too much, I become unhappy (over stimulation of the pleasure centre), BUT, I need to find pleasure in the things I do.
- Some things that don’t make you happy (or happier)...(results of research):
 - wealth (once your basic needs are met)
 - good education
 - high IQ
 - youth
 - marriage (Married people may be slight more happy than singles...but this is variable/ confounding variables)
 - sunny days
- Some things that make you happy
 1. Religious faith –consistently the top winner in studies

2. Relationships/friendships
3. Good social skills

Happiness boosters

1. Intentionally **do something selfless** for another each day
2. **Allow yourself to make mistakes**
3. **Give up expecting others to be perfect**
4. When offended/wronged, **forgive** the offender asap (‘instant forgiveness’)
5. Try to **simplify your life**
6. **Get enough sleep**. Minimum sleep need for a healthy adult is 9 hours/day (this evoked a big response in the audience). Doesn’t have to be in one block, but sleep is made up of 1.5 hour cycles, with dream (restorative) sleep at the end of each cycle). One of the major causes of stress (excess adrenaline/cortisol) is insufficient sleep. Adrenaline and stress... less than 6 hours sleep increase risk of cardiovascular disease; higher cortisol levels leads to more depression) (Hart jokingly said alarm clocks are demon-possessed; also dislikes phones, email etc)
7. **Spend as much time as you can with loved ones** (work/life balance)
8. Spend 20 mins per day –eg early morning - in **quiet reflection/meditation**
9. Before going to sleep at night, **make a list of things on your mind** (to get it out of your head and allow good sleep)
10. Before sleep, do **the ‘gratitude game’**. List five things you are grateful for. (At this point, Hart, Steve Williams and audience broke into singing ‘Count Your Blessings’)
11. **Creative tasks**. No matter how small, regularly complete a creative task
12. **Don’t put off getting a life**. (eg as opposed to storing everything up for retirement or the annual holiday)

Depression: the consequence of not knowing how to be happy; the robber of happiness (Hart later distinguished between different types of mood disorders... reactive vs biological depression, bipolar disorder etc).

- Primary cause of modern depression: **stress**.
- Hart had clinical depression from 12-17 years of age. Not severe. Parents divorced when he was 12, and family life unpleasant before then. Good times were visits to grandparents’ 100mi away.
- As a psychologist, Hart used to look for family history/genetic links, but now spends less time on this as stress eclipses genetic predisposition usually
- Stress or genetic, the treatment is the same
- ‘It feels good, it can’t be stress’ – that’s the lie
- ‘Starbucks is the modern day opium den’ – caffeine has powerful effects -> adrenaline
- It’s all about adrenaline overdrive
- Cortisol: adrenaline’s cousin. Both go up together. Mobilising you for about 10 minutes of fight or flight. Cortisol kicks in about 10 mins after adrenaline (syn ‘epinephrine’). To reduce inflammation (joints, muscles etc) from sustained fight or flight, and to mobilise glucose from fat reserves etc. Cortisol can act in this way for up to 2 weeks (increasing ability to cope), but then begins to have different effects so as to prevent you from damaging yourself. So, cortisol then targets three areas in the brain:
 1. Blocks brain’s pain killers, the endorphins (to prevent self destruction)

2. Blocks brain's natural tranquillisers. Leading to increased anxiety
3. Blocks the 3 types of neurotransmitters (dopamine, serotonin, norepinephrine (syn noradrenaline), which leads to depression

Increased pain, anxiety, depression: all 3 are designed to pull you out of the situation. A 4th effect is immunosuppression.

- Caffeine exacerbates stress etc
(not much discussion re acceptable doses of caffeine)
- Serotonin deficit leads to depression
- Bipolar disorder – not cortisol based. Genetic basis, a recessive gene (I wonder if the genetics is more complicated than this ie polygenic...but Hart made it sound like a single gene effect. SL). Easier to treat than depression
- Stress does increase risk of clinical expression of bipolar disorder
- Age of onset of depression used to be ~ 40 (was more genetic based); now it is ~ 14 yo (more stress-based)
- Schizophrenia- genetic based; an excess of neurotransmitter(s)

Treatment of depression

- Some, including some Christians, are anti-medication
- This is not justified with respect to antidepressants correctly managed.
- Hart is, however, anti-sleeping pills
- Antidepressants are very safe if managed correctly

Biological depression: ‘stress robbing us of neurotransmitters.

Reactive depression. Eg bereavement. Loss. Not the same as biological, Nothing is broken, so medication not indicated. A grieving/ discovery process (discovering what the loss means) Death, loss of job, divorce etc. Essentially requires a good counsellor. Good listening a powerful healing force.

Biological depression

- 56% success rate with medication or therapy (eg cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)).
- 30% success with placebo. (~ 30% of population is placebo-susceptible)
- 86-90% success with combined medication and CBT. (due to better compliance and lowered stress)
- **Unresolved reactive depression** – can become biological depression (‘double depression’?)

Male vs female depression

- Realisation ~ 5 years ago that depression under-diagnosed in men because classic symptomatology based very much on female cases.
- Men mask their depression. Mainly anger, hostility, withdrawal.
- Women – more feelings oriented...crying, verbalisation etc

Signs of depression

- Anhedonia – inability to feel pleasure
- Loss of energy
- Feelings of sadness (or anger/hostility)
- Additional factor in women of childbearing age: the ‘**oestrogen-serotonin dance**’. When oestrogen declines (eg at menses, post-partum, and menopause), so too does serotonin.
- Women in childbearing years have ~ 4 x risk of depression. Problem: oestrogen-serotonin dance **with added effects of stress**.

Antidepressants

- Effects not directly on brain but mediated via liver. Metabolite produced by liver from antidepressant causes brain to increase numbers of serotonin receptors (takes 1-2 weeks), which then in turn stimulates brain to increase serotonin production
- Antidepressant can take 4-6 weeks usually to work
- If medication is ceased, depression returns in 4-6 weeks
- Note: risk of suicide e with all depressions
- Energy is the first to come back, before mood elevation, of risk of suicide can be higher at this point (more energy to carry things out, but while mood is still depressed). Patients need to be educated about this
- Antidepressants are not addictive, but some people can become dependant on them
- The sooner depression is treated, the better. The brain is constantly making connections (**neuroplasticity**). So, if treatment is delayed, the constantly re-shaping brain can reinforce the depression. And lead to chronic depression. (~ 14% of depression is refractory to treatment).
- [Some discussion of down-regulation of brain function/neurotransmitters by thoughts/thoughts patterns/habits]
- Antidepressants are sparingly used pre-puberty, but may be used in severe cases.
- Male depression-Hart tends to prescribe antidepressants that target all 3 neurotransmitters (dopamine, serotonin, norepinephrine).
- Female depression: tend to prescribe SSRIs (selective serotonin release inhibitors). However, some men only respond to SSRIs.
- Depression often accompanied by anxiety and/or obsessiveness. Therefore sometimes prescribe tranquillisers also.
- Generally prescribe antidepressant for 6 months, then, if it works, continue for a year (enough time to make lifestyle changes etc) (The assumption here seems to be that antidepressants are a stop-gap measure hopefully, to allow time to make life style changes that will eventually allow cessation of medication. However there was also discussion of cases with need for life long antidepressants, and a strong opinion that life was too short to suffer needlessly. (ie medicate appropriately rather than suffer needlessly). Some discussion also on how brain may become refractory to effects of some antidepressants)

Question time

- Various questions answered.
- On the matter of natural antidepressants. Eg St Johns Wort, Hart was not overly enthusiastic:

- Quality, safety, efficacy of product is not assured
 - Natural products often not cost-effective
 - ‘Naturally’ occurring products themselves are ‘chemicals’ eg principles in St Johns Wort (hypericin), lithium etc (all ‘natural’ but still potentially toxic)
 - ‘Gave a warning re liver function and antidepressants, especially in those with high alcohol intakes.
 - (I was tempted to ask about the omega 3 story, but we were already getting side-tracked and out of time)
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A man in a black hole...

A poignant poem, about a man in a hole. ‘Read out on Sat 12 May at the ‘Hart meeting’ by **Peter Brain**. It’s in his book: [‘Going the distance...’](#) (Matthias Media)

(The value of good friends, listening, compassion – for those who are depressed)

Comment from **Maureen Heap** am 13 May: her notes were similar to mine, except she feels I de-emphasised the negative references to **caffeine**. ☺

Keys to Enduring Happiness – Dr Arch Hart

AM service, Sunday 13 May 07, St Marks, UNE

- This talk largely continues from talks yesterday at Tamworth (CDs for that are available through Diocesan office, Armidale)
- Happiness – one of Hart’s favourite topics; why has psychology, until recently, paid so little attention to happiness
- Text: John 15.11 (TNIV) **I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.**
- ...not half or $\frac{3}{4}$ joy, but complete/full joy.
- One hears very few sermons on joy
- Hart’s book ‘15 Principles for Achieving Happiness’ – based on research, ~ 15 years ago.
- Happiness was/is an unpopular topic: ‘too subjective to research!’
- Bertrand Russell “The Conquest of Happiness’. An important book for Hart. A very smart book though BR was an atheist
 - At age 5, BR figured out life was not worth living, and only offered the prospect of unhappiness
 - At age 16, BR, receiving no help from philosophers, gained insights from talking to his gardener, and decided it *was* possible to be happy.
- The mental health field has been resistant to ‘happiness’, but a revolution in psychology (Seligman et al) has led to much research on happiness. *(Aside: discussing this with my wife Joy: someone well-versed in the Scriptures would have gleaned many of these truths!! ☺)*

- Results of research: enduring or authentic² happiness is possible, as a set-point (to which a resiliently happy person returns or bounces back to after blows and set backs)
- Happiness is a rare commodity today
- Parents need to shape in their children resilience and a ‘happiness set point’. (analogous to the physiological set point relating to bodyweight).
- Many joy busters in life, the biggest is depression
- One in 4 teenagers in the US are clinically depressed. Reason: stress is out of control. (Neuro-biologically: chronic excess of stress hormones)
- Another joy buster: breakdown of family, incl the extended family.
- Another problem: over pursuit of pleasure. (Pleasure does not equal happiness)

Five Principles (from Hart’s book) on building a happiness set point:

1. Happiness is a ‘transplant’ or ‘graft on job’

- God gives us joy in Christ, through relationship with him. Transplanted into your soul, Another analogy: joy flows from being engrafted to Christ
- At 17, Hart became a Christian. He had been going to Sunday School since 3. His childhood was unhappy. Becoming a Christian for him was like the lights being turned on: joy flowed in.

2. Don’t compare yourself with others

- American psychologist Alex Parducci (??): ‘happiness not determined by wealth, education etc....but by whether we compare ourselves with others’
- Envy, comparing with others destroys happiness
- Don’t be covetous (Biblical injunction)

3. Learn to value the little things in life

- Story of the little African boy he gave some money. Very happy at the prospect of a full belly that day
- Reference to new book coming out in September, “Thrilled to Death”
- Prov 15.16 (TNIV): **Better a little with the fear of the LORD than great wealth with turmoil.**

4. Happiness is relative

- Happiness depends only partly on circumstances, but largely on attitude/perspective. (See illustrative ‘Doran story’ below)

5. ‘Lord, thy will be done

- This fifth point (the 15th in his book) is the hardest
- The first 14 points in his book are based on psychological research; Hart added this point himself.
- Can only be happy in this world if you are able to pray this prayer “ Lord, they will be done’
- Life will always leave you short. Trust in God

² Authentic – coming from the right sources, as opposed to various addictions, work-aholism, drugs etc

- This is a hard and scary prayer; a prayer rooted in hope, hope/belief/trust that one day God will make it all right.

[Aside: in conversation with Peter Brain: PB - Never say to a depressed person, 'Call me when you need me/I can be of help'. They will never call; you call them ""]

Doran story: the Optimist and the Pessimist

Howard, a born optimist, told my wife Joy this story after the service this morning.

There were two children in a family: one was an optimist, the other a pessimist.

One Christmas, the parents decided to try to even things up by being somewhat disproportionate in their gift giving.

In one room, they piled up all sorts of wonderful presents for the pessimist, more than a child could hope to get.

In the other room, the room for the optimist's present(s), they arranged for a truckload of horse manure to be delivered.

On Christmas morning, the children were allowed to go to their respective rooms where their presents were.

From the pessimist's room came loud wailing and woeful crying: "Look at all these toys! I will never have enough time to play with all these...!! (sob)"

From the optimist's room came the sounds of laughter and shovelling. On opening the door, the parents saw the optimist, shovelling manure out of the window and gleefully saying, "With all this horse manure, there must be a horse under here somewhere!!"

(But, what I want to know from Howard is: "What happened to the optimist when he got to the bottom of the pile?")

e&oe³.

*Stephen Love
13 May 07*

³ Errors and omissions excepted. ☺