

INTRODUCTION: BECOMING HAPPY TOGETHER

Being happy together with your partner or spouse is one of the greatest joys life has to offer. We all want to be happy, of course. And connecting with others is a multiplier of our happiness, making it more frequent, more sustained, and more satisfying. Being happy with others is the easiest and most natural thing in the world.

Until it isn't.

Then, being happy together becomes one of the greatest *challenges* life has to offer. In these times, the “together” part gets in the way, making happiness seem impossible. We are then tempted to think if it weren't for people—or these *particular* people—being in our lives, we could be happy.

And to make things even more complicated, it's often the very same people who make us both happy *and* unhappy.

Although the information and exercises in this book can be applied to any kind of relationship, our focus here is on romantic relationships. The effects of romantic relationships on our happiness are enormous. When they are going well, it's hard to imagine anything making us happier; when they are not going well, it's difficult to see how anything could make us more miserable.

So how about you? How is your romantic relationship going? And why are you interested in a book about being happy together with your partner? Is it because you are currently in a romantic relationship that's going well and you want it to continue to grow? Or are you experiencing the opposite—feeling stuck in a romantic relationship that doesn't feel very romantic anymore and looking for ways of getting your partnership back on track? Perhaps you have turned to this book out of desperation, because you feel like whatever love you find simply doesn't last, with your relationships ending in messy breakups or even divorce. Or maybe it's because you are not in a romantic relationship right now and you want to prepare yourself to be a good partner when you do find a significant other.

These are all great reasons for picking up this book, and we want to assure you that you've come to the right place—not because reading this book will magically and effortlessly create your dream relationship for you. Nothing can do that. But because this book is chock-full of insights and exercises based on decades of scientific research by leading figures in the field of positive psychology.

Although this research has been applied in a wide variety of contexts—from education to coaching, from economics to business, and from medicine to law—this is the first book applying positive psychology to romantic relationships. The two of us have each been working in positive psychology for more than a decade, benefiting from the wide-ranging research on how to live a flourishing life. When we got married, we found that our life together opened up vast new opportunities—and challenges—for applying this research in our lives. Although there were many relevant studies in the field that could be of great help to couples like us, no one had brought them together into an easily accessible format. Suzie began to do just that in her writing, with a cover story on “The Happy Couple” for *Scientific American Mind*.

As we continued to work on applying positive psychology research in our own relationship, Suzie suggested we put together a workshop to see if other couples would find this information valuable, as well. So in 2013 we offered a workshop on “Romance and Research” at the International Positive Psychology Association’s Third World Congress on Positive Psychology. We were shocked at the number of people who packed the room and deeply encouraged by their overwhelmingly positive response to this material. Since then, we have given Romance and Research™ workshops around the world. We are enormously grateful to those who have attended these workshops, as they have helped us learn new insights in the application of positive psychology research to romantic relationships. They have also encouraged us to continue this work and to write about it for a larger audience.

We are now excited to be able to present this work in book format. And we offer it to all those who are—or hope to be—in romantic relationships and want to make them the happiest, healthiest, and most fulfilling they can be. We want to be clear we are not claiming that we as a couple have it all figured out, that our relationship is one blissful moment after another, and that if you follow our instructions, you too will live happily ever after.

(Trust us, it's not sunshine and rainbows all the time for us either!) Instead of fairy-tale endings, we believe in brave beginnings and informed efforts, not so we can magically find the relationship of our dreams but so we can wisely create beautiful relationships in the real world.

Note that this book is not titled *13 Steps to a Blissful Marriage*, *The Complete Guide to Happily Ever After*, or *Everything You Need to Know About Romantic Relationships*. Although such titles seem appealing in the easy promise they offer, we believe they are fundamentally misleading. Marriages are not meat loafs, in which mastering a few steps will yield perfect results every time. Nor are they so simple that anyone can provide a complete guide to them, since each and every marriage or partnership is affected by myriad complications, starting with the two people who are in it. The truth is, real human relationships can be delightful, uplifting, and satisfying, yet are often messy and frustrating—and sometimes heartbreaking. The important thing to keep in mind is that, as with any human endeavor, we can get better at relationships through well-directed effort.

We believe in the importance of working on our relationships just like we work on our bodies at the gym. Fitness doesn't come magically; it's the result of sustained effort. And this effort needs to be directed wisely. This is why we turn to trainers for advice. And any good trainer will tell you how important it is to develop good exercise habits that can make it easier to get to the gym and keep going on our routines. This is true of relationships, as well. Sustained effort and habits are essential. And once we begin to see the fruits of our labor, and enjoy greater understanding and better interactions with our partners, we naturally become motivated to work even harder. Eventually, the hard work doesn't seem to be so "hard" or "work" at all, but rather becomes natural and fun behavior we want to keep doing. To help us direct our efforts wisely in our "relationship gym," we will need to look to leading researchers in the field of positive psychology for their evidence-based advice. Since positive psychology is steeped in a rich philosophical tradition, we will also look to great thinkers such as Aristotle, who extolled the value of "the good life" and expounded on what good relationships look like; and William James, who emphasized the importance of cultivating healthy habits through continual effort and directed attention.

There is far more sound psychological and philosophical advice on how to be happy together than we could

possibly include in a single volume, so we have tried to select some of the best advice and put it together in a way that is clear and immediately applicable. We encourage you to go through this book with your significant other, if possible, since working together through this material can help you learn about each other and bond as a couple. If that is not possible—if you're not in a relationship right now, or if your partner would rather not accompany you for any reason—never fear. You can still benefit tremendously from this material.

As you read this book, please do make time to do the exercises in each chapter. Going to the gym doesn't help you unless you actually work out while you're there. And while you can learn a lot of facts and gain some intellectual insights from just reading this book, it is in actually putting this material into practice in your life that you stand to benefit most from it. You can complete the exercises with your significant other, with a friend or family member, or on your own. But please do complete them!

Whether you are newlyweds or newly single, whether you have been married for fifty years or have not yet been in a romantic relationship, we invite you to think of this book as an invitation to the relationship gym, where we can all benefit from the advice of psychologists and philosophers to help us actively build love that lasts.

Chapter 1

Is Love Really All You Need?

January 16, 2010, was an unusually sunny and balmy Saturday for the dead of winter in Philadelphia. I began that day like any other, with an outdoor run, this time in workout tights and a lightweight T-shirt rather than my heavy fleece and usual winter running attire. The mild weather was a welcome respite from the typical frigid temperatures this time of year, not only because it came after one of the biggest snowstorms in the city's recent history but also because it was the perfect start to an extraordinary day I'll never forget—a day I had dreamt about all my life. My wedding day. As I ran through the familiar winding roads of my childhood hometown with the sun's golden rays warming my face, I thought to myself that the glorious sunshine boded well for a lifetime of happiness. I mounted the final hill, feeling triumphant.

Six hours later, clad in an exquisite Vienna ball gown, I stood at the altar of the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul, the largest Catholic church in Pennsylvania. I was beaming from having just wed James, the handsome and brilliant man who had captured my heart, dazzling me with his witty charm, sensitive soul, and elegant mind. "We have a promising and happy future ahead," I thought to myself. As we stepped off the altar hand in hand, I smiled at our loved ones who had come out to witness and share in our celebration of love. The notes of Beethoven's symphonic "Ode to Joy," performed by the trumpeter and organist we'd hired for this special day, floated around us as we walked slowly down the aisle.

James joined right in, intoning the lyrics in his powerful baritone voice—and in German! "Why am I

not surprised?” I laughed to myself, watching him joyfully singing along to the music.

I was suddenly catapulted back to another time when James surprised me with his knowledge. A month or two before our first kiss, we happened to be lingering on the steps of this very cathedral. I showed him a book I was reading, The Confessions of Saint Augustine, and we discussed our mutual admiration for this classic. After a while, James asked me what time it was, and wanting to impress him I responded cheekily, “What then is time?” Without missing a beat, he launched into Augustine’s original question in Latin, “Quid est ergo tempus?” Then he continued to quote Augustine in English, “If no one asks me, I know. If I wish to explain it to him who asks, I do not know.”ⁱ I was floored. My intention had been to impress him, but now it was I who was impressed! The butterflies that always fluttered in my stomach when I was in his presence now broke into full choreographic celebration.

Like on that first day standing on the cathedral steps together discussing Augustine, I couldn’t but feel happy! It was like my past and present had merged together, and time stood still. (What then is time, indeed!) Now, once again we stood on the same church steps together, but instead of James reciting Augustine’s famous passage on time, he—my modern-day philosopher-poet husband—was soulfully singing the lyrics to “Ode to Joy.” Written by yet another genius philosopher, the German poet Friedrich Schiller, the lyrics address another universal topic: the value of an enduring relationship.

Whoever has created an abiding friendship,

Or has won a true and loving wife,

All who can call at least one soul theirs,

Join in our song of praise. . . .ⁱⁱ

I felt full of vitality and positive emotions. It was the perfect day to begin our lives together. A natural-born optimist, I was certain that this loving feeling would last forever.

Sitting on the balcony of our high-rise condominium in Philadelphia, I gaze into the distance at the

midnight blue Delaware River. The sun warming my shoulders on this unusually mild winter afternoon takes me back to another unseasonably warm day. My wedding day.

All you need is love, love. Love is all you need. The Beatles' legendary lyrics play in my head.

I can remember thinking that day that the warm positive feeling of love coursing through James and me would be enough to carry us through our life together, be it the good times or the bad. I assumed a happy, long-lasting marriage was as simple as coasting along side by side on those loving feelings. *We have plenty of love to carry us through anything*, I remember thinking on that sunny January day.

Now, after years of marriage, I'm sitting here pondering whether love really *is* all you need. If so, what about those inevitable times when you are not feeling so loving toward your partner or spouse? When, to quote the Righteous Brothers' famous lyrics, "You've lost that lovin' feelin'?" because despite your repeated requests, your spouse continually forgets—or even worse, ignores!—your pleas to exercise, be on time, clean up the home office, or [insert your own favorite irritation here]. Then what?

Do we have to *feel* loving all the time to *be* loving?

If so, then James and I are in serious trouble. But then so are every other couple I know. So if it's not mere feelings that do it, what, then, does make a couple happy together over the long term? What is the key to building love that lasts?

So How Do You Get to Happily Ever After?

Chapter 1

ⁱ Augustine (1960). *The confessions of Saint Augustine*. J. K. Ryan, ed. New York: Doubleday.

ⁱⁱ Schiller, F. (1785). *Ode to joy (An die Freude)*.