

# Insights

## The Joy of Happiness

by Bert Kauffman

I have known two people who seemed to exude warmth, gentleness, kindness, and who were completely at ease within themselves. They had the joy of happiness. They happened to be Mennonites. However, I believe that that description is not limited to some Mennonites but is characteristic of human potential. I will explore what I call the Happiness Potential and why it appears so rarely.

Happy and happiness are often used interchangeably. Actually, they are quite different and the difference is important. Happy is an emotion that is elicited by doing pleasant things. Happiness is a state of being, a quality or a personality trait. How that personality trait develops is a long and complex story.

Happiness is not acquired by pursuit, by being rich, by being famous, or any such activity. It grows inherently from the way life is lived. As with so many things I have believed and written about, the early stages of life form the basis for what kind of person will emerge.

I would like to begin my analysis with a look at what it would take for an adult to find happiness as described above and to contrast that with a child's route to happiness. The adult would have to work very hard to develop most of the constituents of happiness. The adult-child

contrast shows that the child's route to happiness is part of a developmental process while that of the adult is a matter of changing behavioral patterns from long ago. Change in life processes involves an attempt to overcome well entrenched behaviors. That task is nearly insurmountable and accounts for the difficulty that adults encounter when searching for greater happiness. Still, some adults meet the challenge. My guess is that they were lightly damaged in childhood.

Happiness is a complex phenomenon and has been studied since the time of Aristotle. My views are my own and stem from a psychological perspective.

Here is a brief compilation of some of the facets of happiness. The list contrasts child experience with that of adults.

It is possible for adults to learn that chronic fear precludes happiness and that they can work to avoid fear that has no cause in reality. Chronic fear arises when there have been long term experiences of danger that are unfiltered by some modifier, e.g. love. Love consistency is required in childhood for happiness to grow.

An unconscious feeling of safety can be learned by adults. It takes many years of living life "in the now." A child will effortlessly develop a sense of safety if he lives in a secure home. His parents must allow some dangers to occur but must modulate them with consistent love and support. It is necessary for the parents to be free of chronic fear on their own part. Chronic fear in parents transfers easily to children.

Self-confidence or self-esteem fosters happiness. An adult can learn to do things that conform to his values thereby beginning to feel authenticity. Children who are

rewarded appropriately for their achievements naturally trust themselves.

Regular exposure to nature and other pleasurable venues is an important part of creating happiness. The best way for an adult to experience pleasure is in the company of family or friends. That is the "easiest" way to get on the road to happiness. Some adults can find happiness if they have not been deeply damaged in childhood.

No one escapes childhood unscathed. Even with the most loving and sensitive parents in the most stable homes, stuff happens that disturb development. No one, happiness notwithstanding, is assured a life without pain. The best hope possible is that happiness dilutes the pain. Finding happiness as an adult is so difficult because at every point in growing up, trauma always leaves residues that prevent change.

With child-rearing that promotes warmth, gentleness, kindness and a complete ease within oneself, happiness is likely to develop. Likely—not assured. Tragedy is non-selective. Parents may develop cancer and die. A sibling may be born with a chronic disability. There is no end to possibilities that derail the train to happiness. Happiness remains rare in childhood as well as in adults.

Problems abound but optimism is a major characteristic of happiness. There are other ways of improving life if happiness remains out of reach. Practice some of the elements of happiness: generosity, gratitude, kindness, empathy, forgiveness and goodwill toward all.

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## There's No Turning Back the Clock on Reproductive Rights

by Barb Howe

For years anti-abortion groups could depend on two things: that their supporters would definitely get out to vote and that the other side may or may not. Some are wondering if that may change in the 2020 election cycle where for the first time ever the debate over access to abortion may finally motivate Democrats as much as it has Republicans.

Nine states have passed "early abortion bans" forbidding the procedure after a certain point early in pregnancy, some as early as six weeks, before many women realize they are pregnant. Alabama has banned it entirely even for victims of rape or incest. The only exception is where the woman's life is at risk. With the addition of two more conservative pro-life judges to the U.S. Supreme Court, Roe v. Wade looks more precarious than ever. If complacency is the reason Democrats don't get to vote as enthusiastically as Republicans do, this assault on women's reproductive rights should be checked in 2020.

But Democrats are rarely single-issue voters and when they are, that single issue is as likely to be gun control or climate change as it is reproductive rights. Nonetheless the above reality packs a big punch. For the first time ever there will be a state in which there is no legal place to get an abortion if the state health department doesn't renew Planned Parenthood's license to operate in Missouri. Never be-

fore has the possibility of life without Roe v. Wade felt so real or so close to those coming of age after 1973.

In the past, the issue was not as clearly partisan as it is today. Republicans could see government restrictions on the procedure as an intrusion of the state on the rights of an individual and some moderate Democrats, worried about alienating religious voters, cited reasons for opposing it "personally" while refusing to make that choice for others by legislating it. Joe Biden's support for the 1976 Hyde Amendment banning federal funds (e.g. Medicaid) for abortion dates from this time. But the #MeToo movement is resonating with women around the world and making it harder for men to be wishy-washy about women's rights. Biden recently reversed his position.

For many on the left, especially women, it comes down to basic human rights: How could I possibly vote for someone who doesn't think I have the right to make my own medical decisions? It's bound up with seeing our very humanity, our right to control our own bodies.

A June poll by USA Today shows most people disapprove of the recent heartbeat bills to ban abortion at six to eight weeks. And it is still true that about two thirds of the country overall support access to safe, legal abortion. Nearly 70% of Americans do not think Roe v. Wade should be over-

turned. Many Americans are old enough to remember when women died from illegal unregulated and unsafe back-alley abortions and they are torn over the morality of the issue, not wanting to go back to that but also not wanting full unrestricted access or taxpayer support for the procedure either.

In the past we have tended to view abortion through a moralistic lens guided by our personal religious beliefs, but in a multicultural society this approach will always leave us stuck trying to decide whose morality wins out and becomes the law of the land. Even countries that are less diverse and multi-cultural are no longer restricting women's reproductive choices in this way.

For example Ireland, where nearly 80% of the population is Catholic, just ended the prohibition on abortion last year. Why? Because Ireland's government has a strong public health approach to social problems and restricting medical procedures is incompatible with that.

We need a coherent public policy on abortion that keeps people safe. Women died or suffered serious health consequences when abortion was illegal and unregulated. There is no way around that reality. From a public health perspective access to safe legal abortion will always be necessary.

Recently there's been a shift in public

perception of drug addiction as people increasingly understand addiction not as a moral failing that deserves prison but as a health issue that deserves treatment. This is good news that will lead to better health outcomes and it's likely happening with the abortion issue as well.

Despite the recent wave of attempts by state legislatures to ban the procedure, it is unlikely that attempts to regulate women's bodies and limit their health choices in the #MeToo era will ultimately be successful. Republicans efforts to push radical anti-abortion laws will probably backfire on them in the 2020 elections. As we saw in the 2018 midterms when Republicans alienate even a small part of their diminishing demographic they become vulnerable to challenges from centrist Democrats and/or more moderate Republicans who support reproductive rights.

No matter how much they might want to, there's no turning back the clock on reproductive rights.

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