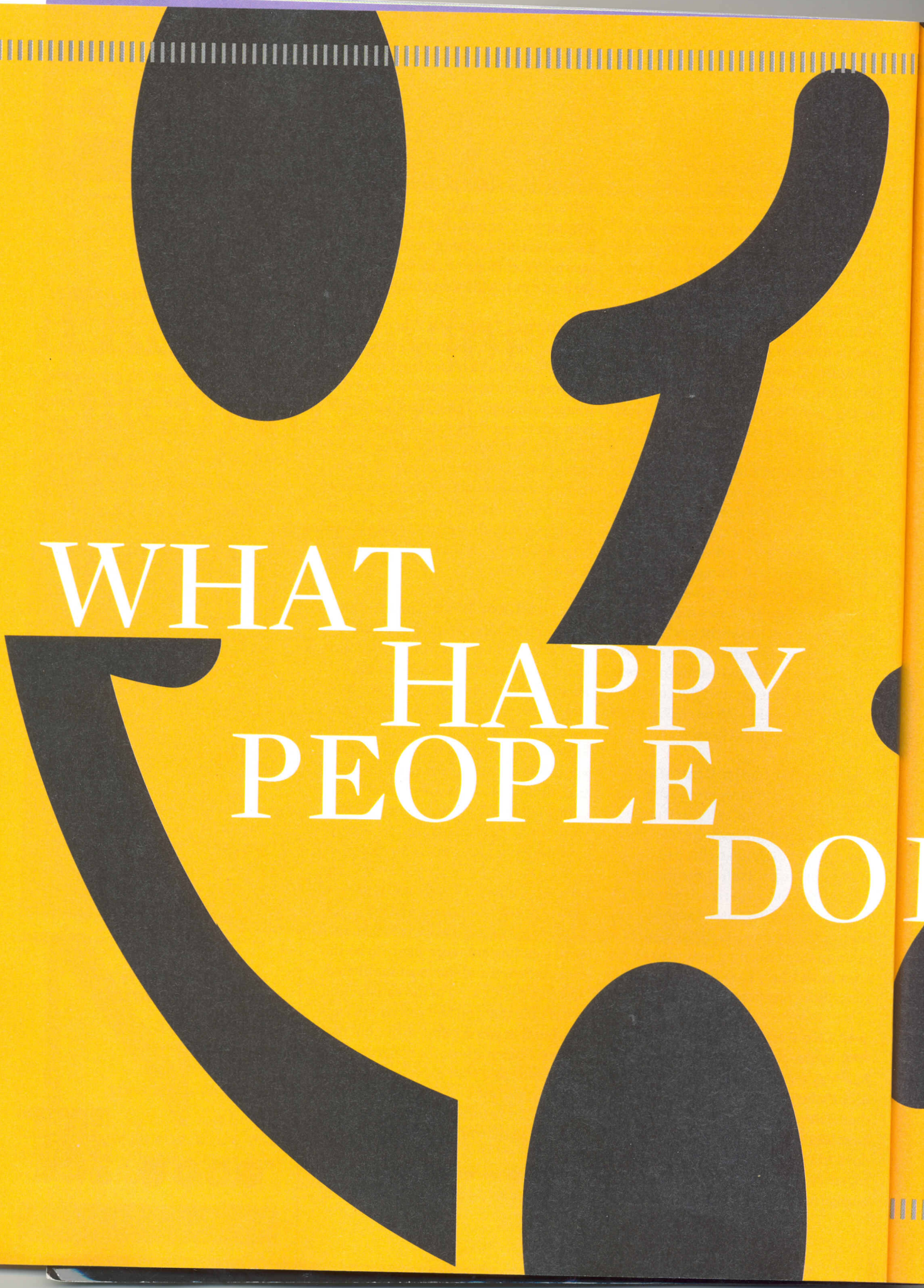
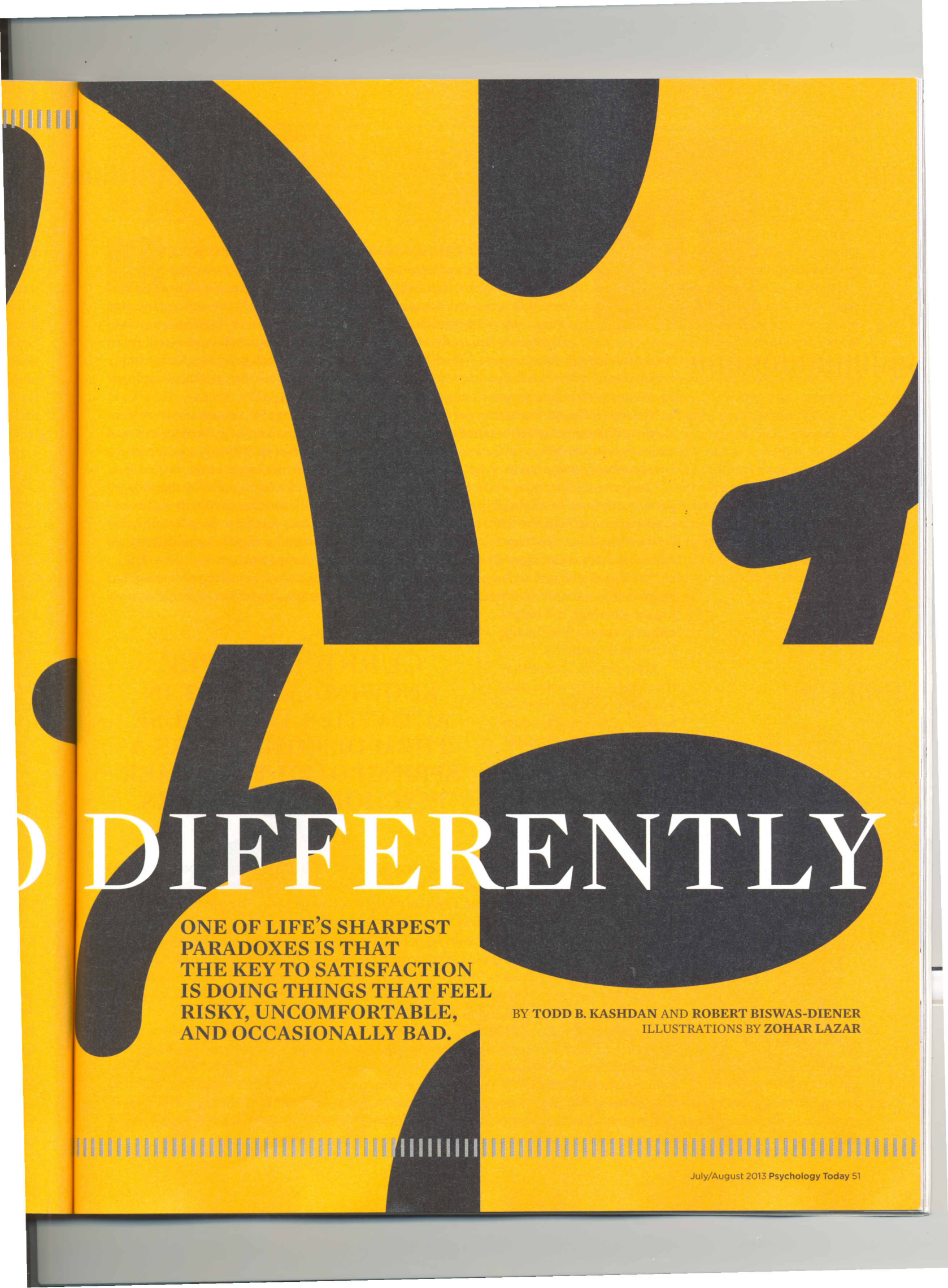


A large, stylized smiley face graphic is centered on the page. The face is composed of thick black outlines for the eyes and mouth, set against a bright yellow background. The eyes are at the top, and the mouth is at the bottom, forming a classic 'D' shape. The text is overlaid on the face.

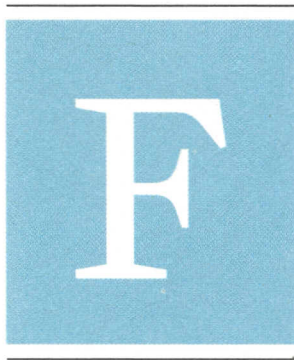
WHAT
HAPPY
PEOPLE
DO



DIFFERENTLY

ONE OF LIFE'S SHARPEST
PARADOXES IS THAT
THE KEY TO SATISFACTION
IS DOING THINGS THAT FEEL
RISKY, UNCOMFORTABLE,
AND OCCASIONALLY BAD.

BY TODD B. KASHDAN AND ROBERT BISWAS-DIENER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ZOHAR LAZAR



OR PSYCHOLOGISTS WHO FREQUENTLY FLY CROSS-COUNTRY, how we describe our career to seatmates—mentioning for example, that we are psychologists—determines whether we get five hours of airborne intrigue or inside access to a decaying marriage or more detail than you can imagine about an inability to resist maple-glazed Krispy Kremes. Even wearing oversized headphones often fails to dissuade the passenger hell-bent on telling her

story of childhood abandonment (which is why it is handy for research psychologists to simply say we study “judgments”). For those of us who risk the truth and admit that we study happiness, there’s one practically guaranteed response: *What can I do to be happy?*

The secret of happiness is a concern of growing importance in the modern era, as increased financial security has given many the time to focus on self-growth. No longer hunter-gatherers concerned with where to find the next kill, we worry instead about how to live our best lives. Happiness books have become a cottage industry; personal-development trainings are a bigger business than ever.

The pursuit of happiness is not uniquely American either—in a study of more than 10,000 participants from 48 countries, psychologists Ed Diener of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Shigehiro Oishi of the University of Virginia discovered that people from every corner of the globe rated happiness as being more important than other highly desirable personal outcomes, such as having meaning in life, becoming rich, and getting into heaven.

The fever for happiness is spurred on, in part, by a growing body of research suggesting that happiness does not just feel good but is good for you—it’s been linked to all sorts of benefits, from higher earnings and better immune-system functioning to boosts in creativity.

Most people accept that true happiness is more than a jumble of intensely positive feelings—it’s probably better described as a sense of “peace” or “contentedness.” Regardless of how it’s defined, happiness is partly emotional—and therefore tethered to the truth that each individual’s feelings have a natural set point, like a

thermostat, which genetic baggage and personality play a role in establishing. Yes, positive events give you a boost, but before long you swing back toward your natural set point.

True happiness lasts longer than a burst of dopamine, however, so it’s important to think of it as something more than just emotion. Your sense of happiness also includes cognitive reflections, such as when you give a mental thumbs-up or thumbs-down to your best friend’s sense of humor, the shape of your nose, or the quality of your marriage. Only a bit of this sense has to do with how you feel; the rest is the product of mental arithmetic, when you compute your expectations, your ideals, your acceptance of what you can’t change—and countless other factors. That is, happiness is a state of mind, and as such, can be intentional and strategic.

Regardless of your emotional set point, your everyday habits and choices—from the way you operate in a friendship to how you reflect on your life decisions—can push the needle on your well-being. Recent scholarship documenting the unique habits of those who are happiest in life even provides something of an instruction manual for emulating them. It turns out that activities that lead us to feel uncertainty, discomfort, and even a dash of guilt are associated with some of the most memorable and enjoyable experiences of people’s lives. Happy people, it seems, engage in a wide range of counterintuitive habits that seem, well, downright *unhappy*.

CURIOUS PEOPLE KNOWINGLY INVEST IN ACTIVITIES THAT CAUSE THEM DISCOMFORT AS A SPRINGBOARD TO HIGHER PSYCHOLOGICAL PEAKS.

THE REAL REWARDS OF RISK

When anxiety is an optimal state

IT'S A FRIDAY NIGHT and you're planning on meeting friends for dinner. If you want to ensure that you'll go home full, you grab pizza or burgers. If you instead pick a cuisine you've never tried before (Ethiopian—sure, why not?) you run the risk that you won't like your *injera* and *wat* that much—but you might also uncover a surprising delight.

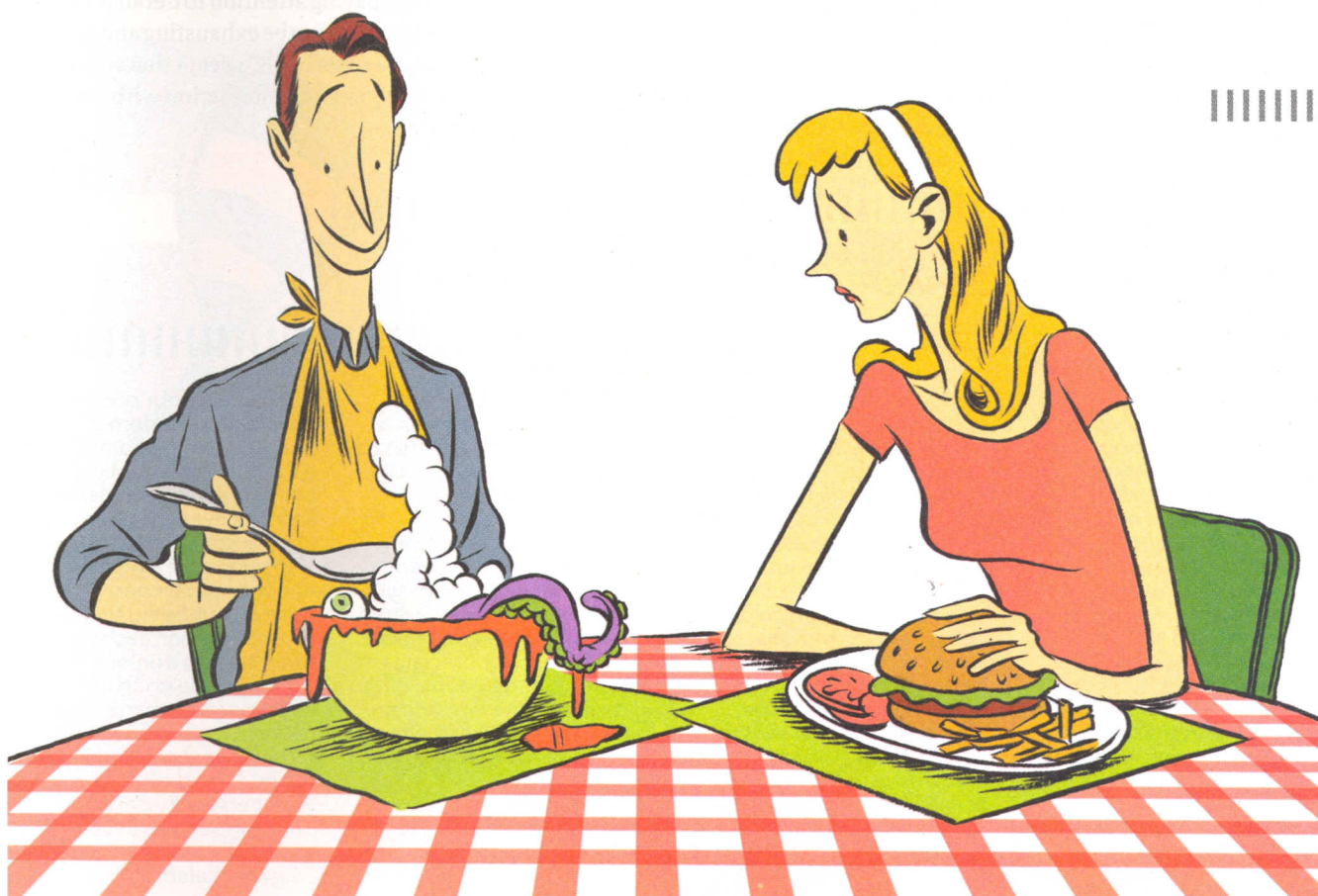
Truly happy people seem to have an intuitive grasp of the fact that sustained happiness is not just about doing things that you like. It also requires growth and adventuring beyond the boundaries of your comfort zone. Happy people, are, simply put, curious. In a 2007 study, Todd Kashdan and Colorado State psychologist Michael Steger found that when participants monitored their own daily activities, as well as how they felt, over the course of 21 days, those who frequently felt curious on a given day also experienced the most satisfaction with their life—and engaged in the highest number of happiness-inducing activities, such as expressing gratitude to a colleague or volunteering to help others.

Yet curiosity—that pulsing, eager state of not knowing—is fundamentally an anxious state. When, for instance, psychologist Paul Silvia showed research participants a variety of paint-

ings, calming images by Claude Monet and Claude Lorrain evoked happy feelings, whereas the mysterious, unsettling works by Egon Schiele and Francisco Goya evoked curiosity.

Curiosity, it seems, is largely about exploration—often at the price of momentary happiness. Curious people generally accept the notion that while being uncomfortable and vulnerable is not an easy path, it is the most direct route to becoming stronger and wiser. In fact, a closer look at the study by Kashdan and Steger suggests that curious people invest in activities that cause them discomfort as a springboard to higher psychological peaks.

Of course, there are plenty of instances in life where the best way to increase your satisfaction is to simply do what you know feels good, whether it's putting your favorite song on the jukebox or making plans to see your best friend. But from time to time, it's worth seeking out an experience that is novel, complicated, uncertain, or even upsetting—whether that means finally taking the leap and doing karaoke for the first time or hosting a screening of your college friend's art-house film. The happiest people opt for both so that they can benefit, at various times, from each.



A BLIND EYE TO LIFE'S VICISSITUDES

The benefit of seeing the forest but not the trees

A STANDARD CRITICISM OF happy people is that they're not realistic—they sail through life blissfully unaware of the world's ills and problems. Satisfied people are less likely to be analytical and detail-oriented. A study led by University of New South Wales psychologist Joseph Forgas found that dispositionally happy people—those who have a general leaning toward the positive—are less skeptical than others. They tend to be uncritically open toward strangers and thus can be particularly gullible to lies and deceit. Think of the happy granny who is overcharged at the car dealership by the smiling salesperson compared with more discerning, slightly less upbeat consumers.

Certainly having an eye for the finer points can be helpful when navigating the complicated social world of colleagues, acquaintances, and dates—and it's something the less sunny among us bring to bear. In fact, Virginia Commonwealth University psychologist Paul Andrews has argued that depression is actually adaptive. Depressed people, the logic goes, are more likely than others to reflect on and process their experiences—and thereby gain insight into themselves or the human condition—albeit at an emotional price. A little attention to detail helps with a more realistic evaluation of the social world.

Yet too much attention to detail can interfere with basic day-to-day functioning, as evidenced by research from Queen's University psychologist Kate Harkness, who found that people in a depressed mood were more likely to notice

minute changes in facial expressions. Meanwhile, happy people tend to overlook such second-to-second alterations—a flash of annoyance, a sarcastic grin. You probably recognize this phenomenon from interactions you've had with your partner. While in a bad mood we tend to notice the tiniest shifts and often can't seem to disengage from a fight (“I saw you roll your eyes at me! Why did you do that!?”), whereas when we're in a good mood, we tend to brush off tiny sleights (“You tease me, but I know you love being around me”). The happiest people have a natural emotional protection against getting sucked in by the intense gravitational pull of little details.

Similarly, the happiest people possess a devil-may-care attitude about performance. In a review of the research literature by Oishi and his colleagues, the happiest people—those who scored a 9 or 10 out of 10 on measures of life satisfaction—tended to perform less well than moderately happy people in accomplishments such as grades, class attendance, or work salaries. In short, they were less conscientious about their performance; to them, sacrificing some degree of achievement seems to be a small price to pay for not having to sweat the small stuff.

This is not to say that we should take a laissez-faire attitude to all our responsibilities; paying attention to detail is helpful. But too much focus on minutiae can be exhausting and paralyzing. The happiest among us (cheerfully) accept that striving for perfection—and a perfectly smooth interaction with everyone at all times—is a loser's bet.

THERE'S MORE TO LIFE THAN BEING HAPPY

NOBEL LAUREATE Albert Schweitzer once quipped that “happiness is nothing more than good health and a bad memory.” Despite the apparent luster of achieving a predominantly positive state of mind, critics argue that the pursuit of happiness is a misguided goal—it's fleeting, superficial, and hedonistic.

Research backs up some of these claims. Studies by psychologist Ed Diener show that people actually pay an emotional price for intensely positive events because later ones—even moderately pleasant ones—seem less shiny by contrast. (Sure, getting a raise feels terrific, but

it might mean you fail to fully appreciate your son's performance in the school play that afternoon.)

Perhaps more damning is a series of studies led by University of California, Berkeley psychologist Iris Mauss, which revealed that people who place a premium on being happy report feeling more lonely. Yes, being happy might be healthy—but craving happiness is a slippery slope.

As well-being researchers, we don't deny the importance of happiness—but we've also concluded that a well-lived life is more than just one in which you feel “up.” The good life is best construed as a

matrix that includes happiness, occasional sadness, a sense of purpose, playfulness, and psychological flexibility, as well as autonomy, mastery, and belonging.

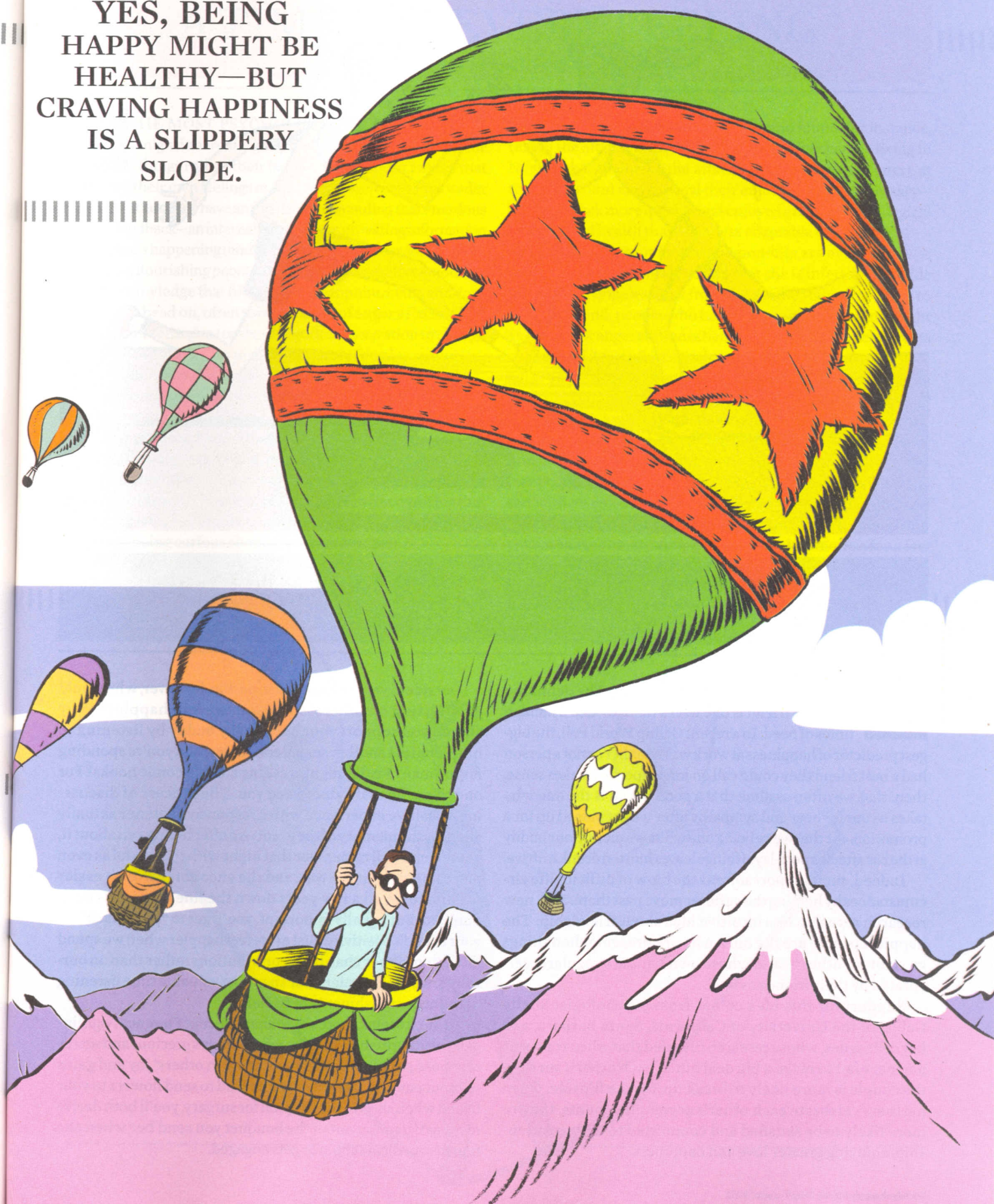
While some people will rank high in happiness and social belonging, others will find they've attained a sense of mastery and achievement. This approach appreciates that not only do people differ in their happiness matrices—but they can shift in their own respective matrices from moment to moment.

For instance, your sense of autonomy might spike dramatically when, as a college freshman, you shift from

living under your parents' rules to the freedom of dorm life—and then plummet a decade later when you become a parent and must sacrifice even the ability to choose your hours of sleep. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that coeds have greater well-being than new parents. Rather, each group is experiencing a unique flavor.

Parsing the good life into a matrix is more than linguistic trickery; shifting toward a mixed-bag view of well-being opens more paths to achieving a personally desirable life. Enjoying success in even one area of the matrix can be a cause for celebration.

**YES, BEING
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SLOPE.**





THE UNJEALOUS FRIEND

We're buoyed by others' good fortune

YOU'VE HEARD IT a million times: The definition of a good friend is one who's there to lend a hand in times of need. In a recent Gallup World Poll, the biggest predictor of happiness at work was whether or not a person had a best friend they could call on for support. It makes sense, then, that we often assume that a good friend is the one who takes us out for beer and sympathy after we get passed up for a promotion—or that we're being one when we pick up our buddy at the bar after his post-layoff binge leaves him too drunk to drive.

Indeed, such support softens the blow of difficult life circumstances by helping the sufferer move past them. Still, new research reveals a less intuitive idea about friendship: The happiest people are the ones who are present when things go right for others—and whose own wins are regularly celebrated by their friends as well.

Support for this idea comes from psychologist Shelly Gable, of the University of California, Santa Barbara, and her colleagues, whose research revealed that when romantic partners fail to make a big deal out of each other's success, the couple is more likely to break up. On the flipside, when partners celebrate each other's accomplishments, they're more likely to be satisfied and committed to their relationship, enjoying greater love and happiness.

Outside of your primary relationship, however, why would capitalizing on others' success make you happier? Why should you support your born-lucky buddy by listening to him detail yet another sexual conquest when you're spending far too many Friday nights reading zombie comic books? For one thing, he really does need you. The process of discussing a positive experience with a responsive listener actually changes the memory of the event—so after telling you about it, your friend will remember that night with the model as even more positive than it was, and the encounter will be easier for him to recall a few years down the line when he's been dumped. But equally important, you'll get to "piggyback" on your friend's positivity. Just as we feel happier when we spend money on gifts or charitable contributions rather than on ourselves, we feel happier after spending valuable time listening to the accomplishments of friends.

In life, it seems, there are an abundance of Florence Nightingales waiting to show their heroism. What's precious and scarce are those people who can truly share in others' joy and gains without envy. So while it might be kind to send flowers to your friend when she's in the hospital for surgery, you'll both derive more satisfaction out of the bouquet you send her when she finishes medical school or gets engaged.

A TIME FOR EVERY FEELING

The upside of negative emotions

THE MOST PSYCHOLOGICALLY healthy people might inherently grasp the importance of letting some things roll off their backs, yet that doesn't mean that they deny their own feelings or routinely sweep problems under the rug. Rather, they have an innate understanding that emotions serve as feedback—an internal radar system providing information about what's happening (and about to happen) in our social world.

Happy, flourishing people don't hide from negative emotions. They acknowledge that life is full of disappointments and confront them head on, often using feelings of anger effectively to stick up for themselves or those of guilt as motivation to change their own behavior. This nimble mental shifting between pleasure and pain, the ability to modify behavior to match a situation's demands, is known as psychological flexibility.

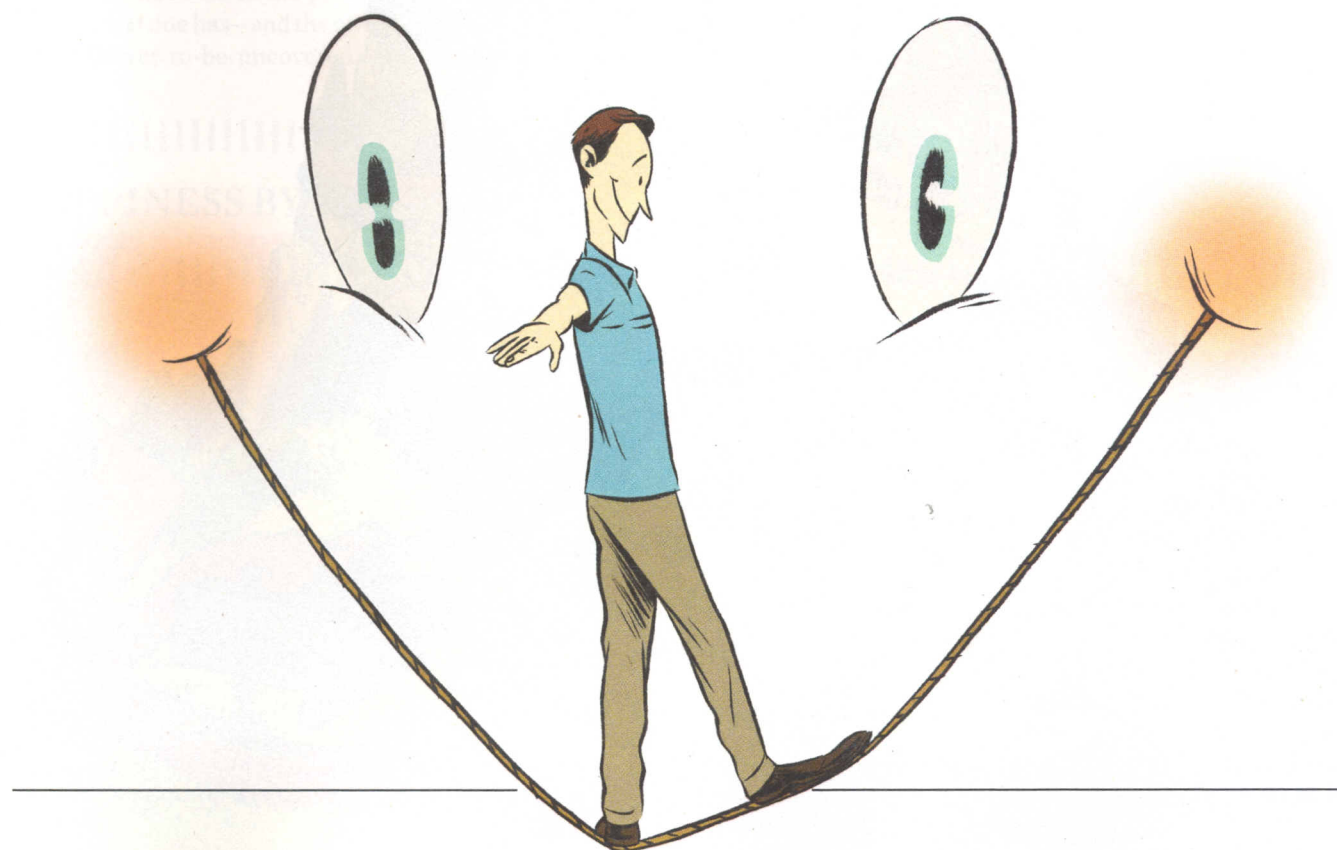
For example, instead of letting quietly simmering jealousy over your girlfriend's new buddy erode your satisfaction with your relationship, accept your feelings as a signal, which allows you to employ other strategies of reacting that are likely to offer greater dividends. These include compassion (recognizing that your girlfriend has unmet needs to be validated) and mindful listening (being curious about what interests her).

The ability to shift mental states as circumstances demand turns out to be a fundamental aspect of well-being. Columbia

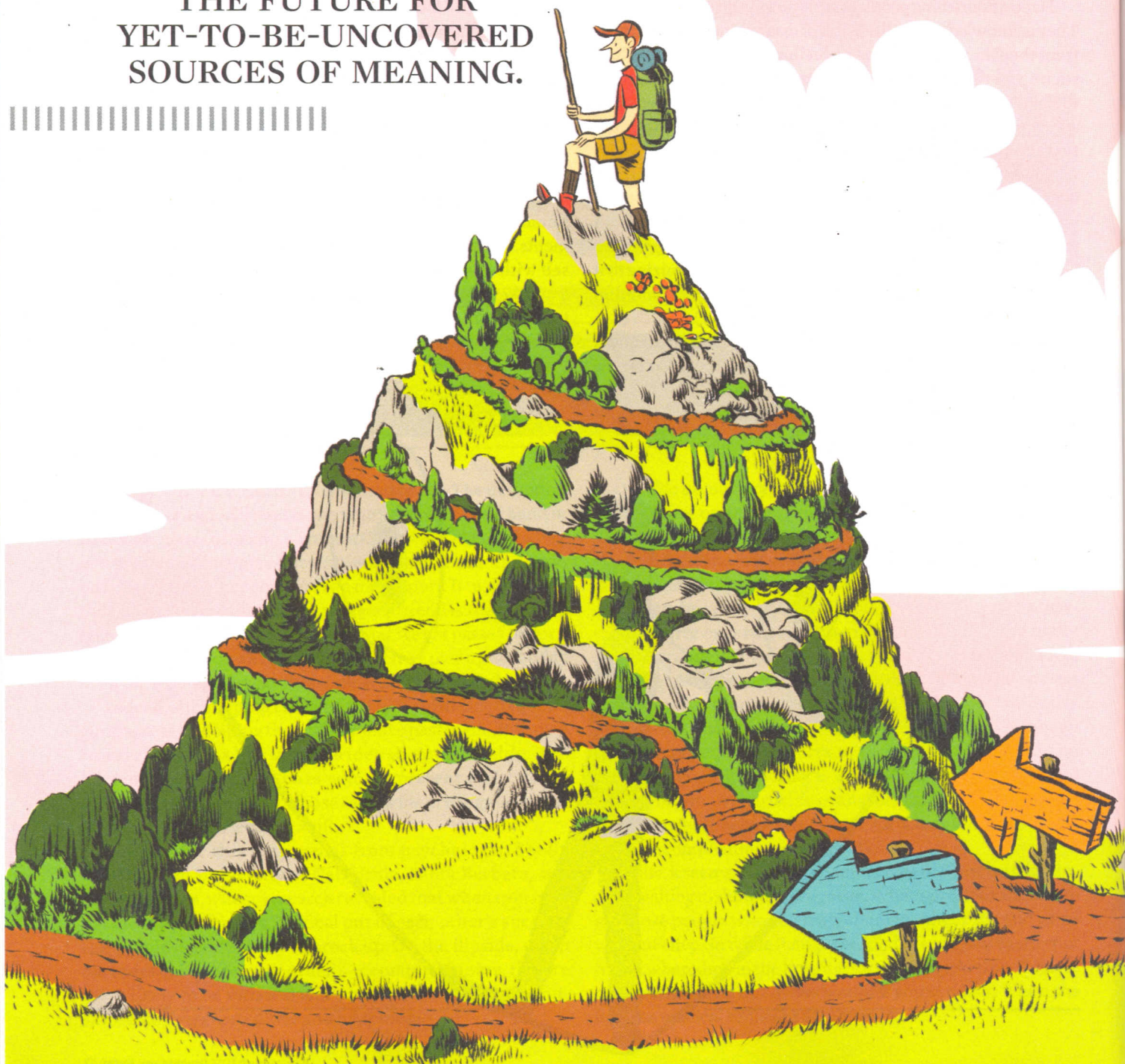
University psychologist George Bonanno found, for instance, that in the aftermath of 9/11, the most flexible people living in New York City during the attacks—those who were angry at times but could also conceal their emotions when necessary—bounced back more quickly and enjoyed greater psychological and physical health than their less adaptable counterparts.

Opportunities for flexible responding are everywhere: A newlywed who has just learned that she is infertile may hide her sense of hopelessness from her mother but come clean to her best friend; people who have experienced a trauma might express their anger around others who share similar sentiments but conceal it from friends who abide by an attitude of forgiveness. The ability to tolerate the discomfort that comes from switching mind-sets depending on whom we're with and what we're doing allows us to get optimal results in every situation.

Similar to training for a triathlon, learning the skill of emotional discomfort is a task best taken on in increasing increments. For example, instead of immediately distracting yourself with an episode of *The Walking Dead* or pouring yourself a whiskey the next time you have a heated disagreement with your teenage son, try simply tolerating the emotion for a few minutes. Over time, your ability to withstand day-to-day negative emotions will expand.



IF YOU WANT TO
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THE WELL-BEING BALANCING ACT

Pleasure and purpose work together

EVEN THE MOST ardent strivers will agree that a life of purpose that is devoid of pleasures is, frankly, no fun. Happy people know that allowing yourself to enjoy easy momentary indulgences that are personally rewarding—taking a long, leisurely bath, vegging out with your daughter's copy of *The Hunger Games*, or occasionally skipping your Saturday workout in favor of catching the soccer match on TV—is a crucial aspect of living a satisfying life. Still, if you're primarily focused on activities that feel good in the moment, you may miss out on the benefits of developing a clear purpose. Purpose is what drives us to take risks and make changes—even in the face of hardship and when sacrificing short-term happiness.

Working to uncover how happy people balance pleasure and purpose, Colorado State's Steger and his colleagues have shown that the act of trying to comprehend and navigate our world generally causes us to deviate from happiness. After all, this mission is fraught with tension, uncertainty, complexity, short bursts of intrigue and excitement, and conflicts between the desire to feel good and the desire to make progress toward what we care about most. Yet overall, people who are the happiest tend to be superior at sacrificing short-term pleasures when there is a good opportunity to make progress toward what they aspire to become in life.

If you want to envision a happy person's stance, imagine one foot rooted in the present with mindful appreciation of what one has—and the other foot reaching toward the future for yet-to-be-uncovered sources of meaning. Indeed,

research by neuroscientist Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin at Madison has revealed that making advances toward achievement of our goals not only causes us to feel more engaged, it actually helps us tolerate any negative feelings that arise during the journey.

Nobody would pretend that finding purpose is easy or that it can be done in a simple exercise, but thinking about which activities you found most rewarding and meaningful in the past week, what you're good at and often recognized for, what experiences you'd be unwilling to give up, and which ones you crave more time for can help. Also, notice whether your answers reflect something you feel that you ought to say as opposed to what you truly love. For example, being a parent doesn't necessarily mean that spending time with your children is the most energizing, meaningful part of your life—and it's important to accept that. Lying to yourself is one of the biggest barriers to creating purpose. The happiest people have a knack for being honest about what does and does not energize them—and in addition to building in time for sensory pleasures each day, they are able to integrate the activities they most care about into a life of purpose and satisfaction. **PT**

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ROBERT BISWAS-DIENER is the author of *The Courage Quotient*. Together they are coauthoring a book on a new approach to well-being in the business world.

HAPPINESS BY THE NUMBERS

.62

Distance from home, in miles, at which point people's tweets begin declining in expressed happiness (about the distance expected for a short work commute).

40

The percentage of our capacity for happiness that is within our power to change, according to University of California, Riverside researcher Sonja Lyubomirsky.

85

Number of residents out of every 100 who report feeling positive emotions in Panama and Paraguay, the most positive countries in the world.

20

The percentage of the U.S. population wealthy enough that their feelings of happiness are not affected by fluctuations in Americans' income equality.

Sources: The University of Vermont, *The How of Happiness*, Gallup, *Psychological Science*

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