



centrefor**future**studies

Happiness & Self Fulfillment

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2. Key Deductions

Happiness

Most people consider themselves reasonably happy. The idea that our society is a sink of unhappiness seems totally wrong. (Professor Ed Diener, a leading psychologist based at the University of Illinois). Regardless of age, common themes emerged among the population that describe the reasons for their happiness and self-fulfilment:

- Self assurance, being confident and adopting a positive attitude
- Spending time with family & friends
- Having the time to do the things they enjoy
- Being in control, by having a balanced home and working life
- Being healthy and being active
- Having a life plan
- Having financial security
- Being able to travel
- Having an enjoyable and satisfying job

A shift towards post materialism

The findings of the research suggest that the basic value priorities of our society are shifting away from a materialist emphasis toward a post materialist one; from giving top priority to material possession toward a heavier emphasis on belonging, self-expression and quality of life. Post-materialism is closely aligned with environmentalism, feminism, self-indulgence and self-fulfilment.

However, the research findings also show that post-materialism does not imply a total abdication of materialistic values. It is the relative importance of values to the individual that is critical to an understanding of the human condition. A post-materialist places higher priorities on post-materialistic values, not necessarily negative values on material goals.

Excessive consumerism, far from being unstoppable, may be running out of steam, with "post-materialist" values in the ascendancy. This is not to say that we are witnessing the dawning of the Age of Aquarius. But the research points to shifts in priorities which could bring about significant cultural changes.



If this is indeed the case, then rampant materialism may turn out to be a historical blip, a nasty by-product of social evolution. Acquiring as much material wealth as possible may no longer be a social necessity in the future.

Individualism

The research reveals a significant desire to take charge of our own lives and be in control of our own destiny. We have entered an epoch of individualism. Economic prosperity, education and the welfare state have freed us from externally imposed constraints and traditional customs. The social structures of class, gender, religion and family are changing. People no longer have pre-given life trajectories but are instead seeking to make their own choices and create their own biographies. Taking a more positive perspective on life and not following the crowd are the two changes most people have made. "I am in control of my destiny and I make the choices that are right for me rather than those that others think are right for me".

Self fulfilment

Self-fulfilment is an important aspiration for individuals. This translates into spending behaviour in which people are spending more on experiences that enrich their lives than on material possession. This indicates that the 'experience economy' is set to grow and organisations in this sector (travel & tourism; entertainment; sports, hobbies and outdoor activities) will benefit from increasing demand.

The importance of family & friends

The research also points to the importance of close, confirming relationships with friends and family. People value connection and commitment to others. Commitment may no longer take traditional forms as in marriage and what matters within families and across generations may have changed (attentiveness to needs rather than duty, for example). But, a wider and committed 'family' remains central in people's lives and determines their level of happiness.



Women happier in later life than men

The research confirms that women are happier in later life than men. This could be the consequence of the different values between the genders. Achievement used to be defined by a traditional male standard - rising up the corporate ladder, with the rewards of money and status. But, women define achievement by a more feminine standard: satisfaction, fulfilment, making a difference - and that can come in many forms. Achievement to women means having choices and control over their own lives. In latter life, women freed from their domestic and family responsibilities then have the opportunity to gain happiness through self expression, whereas men's perceived status is in decline.

Work life balance

For the majority, achieving a better balance between family and work is a crucial happiness factor. The priorities include: flexible working time, providing support to make sure child care and work are genuinely rather than theoretically compatible and recognising the importance of personal fulfillment across a number of fronts to achieve happiness and well-being. Employers who are failing to recognise this are in danger of losing valuable staff.

Life planning

Our research confirms that life planning is a major factor in determining a sense of accomplishment and happiness; it is the overall blueprint for life goals. People who do not have a life plan are far less happy than those who do.

Life planning is an individual process people undertake to:

- Focus on their true values and motivations
- Determine their goals and objectives as they see their lives develop
- Provide a framework for making choices and decisions in life that have financial and non-financial implications or consequences

In response, financial planning is moving from a pure financial calculation to a more personal and holistic focus that considers both the individual's financial and non-financial needs and goals.



Money does buy happiness

One of the major controversial issues in social science is whether money makes people happy. The research supports the view that there is a strong link between financial security and a perceived improvement in the average person's happiness and psychological health. A lack of financial security and insufficient money are seen as obstacles to happiness.

Confidence in the future

Despite all the doom and gloom mongering, the majority of people are confident they will achieve their happiness goals. As a society, we appear to be more confident than is imagined.

Spirituality

Organised religion is in decline in Britain and the proportion of people who believe in God is declining faster than church attendance, indicating that as a society, we appear to be at an advanced stage of secularisation.

Nonetheless and contrary to this evidence, all age groups felt that pop veteran Cliff Richard, the best-known living Christian, was the happiest and most fulfilled celebrity, followed by the Dalai Lama and Terry Wogan. Cliff Richard is reported as saying: "There is no room in my life for drugs, fights, divorce, adultery, sadism, unnecessary fuss and sex". (*The Times 2001*).

The spiritual platform is perceived to provide happiness more than the empty celebrity. Chantelle Houghton, Jade Goody and Paris Hilton were seen as the most unhappy and unfulfilled.

This finding echoes the post materialistic values the research has revealed and suggests that 'meaning in life' is directly related to notions of happiness and contentment. It could be society is less secular and more spiritual than is currently believed.