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**Perception of happiness
Among female adolescents
Graduates of state high schools in Israel**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the current research was to analyze the perception of Happiness of young teenage girls. The definition of happiness and the way it is perceived rely mainly on the starting point from which the researcher generates and the world he represents. These days, it is acceptable to research happiness under the caption of positive psychology, formally established in 1998 by psychologist Martin Seligman.

The common definition of happiness amongst positive psychology researchers is mental well-being. Two leading approaches in the perception of happiness are based on two main traditions, whose roots origin from the ancient history: Eudemonia and Hedonism. These traditions ask questions such as “What is good life” as well as “What is happiness”, and they present two different perspectives on human nature (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Eudemonia is related to psychological mental well-being, whereas Hedonism is related to subjective mental well-being. It is customary to ascribe the Eudemonic point of view – often dealing with the meaning of life and human potential – also to the term “Eudemonic happiness”, and the Hedonic point of view – dealing with human emotions and scales of self-content – is usually attributed to “Hedonic happiness” (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008).

Method:

Review of literature on the subject of perception of happiness shows a vast realm of research dominated mainly by the quantitative paradigm (Kahaneman et al., 2006) and most of the subjects under investigation are elderly (Diener & Seligman, 2008). In recent years, other researchers are citing the need to change the current methods of measurements, by merging and expanding different tools of measurements, changing research paradigms or combining them (Bond & Lang, 2014; Fridman, 2008; Ong, 2009; Tay, Chan, & Diener, 2014).

The starting point of the current research was the need to elaborate on existing data, with regards to the research of perception of happiness within teen-aged girls. This kind of research has not yet been done and, since qualitative inquiry displays a complex holistic approach to the subject in matter – a qualitative paradigm method was chosen. Its purpose was to achieve an elaborated, wide and conclusive description of subjective

process, subjective interpretations, while focusing on a small and selected, invariant sample (Maxwell, 1992).

Nineteen girls aged 17 and 18 were interviewed. All were graduates of formal high school education in central Israel and prior to their military service, had achieved a full matriculation certificate.

In this research, we wanted to examine the perception of happiness among teenage girls, using a semi-structured personal interview. The interview relied on three leading questions, originating from the field of constructive epistemology: “What is knowledge?” – leading from it to the relevant question, what is the accumulated knowledge regarding teen girls’ happiness?; the “What is the source of knowledge?” question – rendering our following question, how did these girls acquire the knowledge of happiness? And the last leading question: “What is the relation between happiness and reality?” rendering the final question for our research: what is the relation between the knowledge perceived by the girls regarding happiness, and its implication within everyday life?

The content analysis was conducted in three stages: at the elementary stage – based on an extended theory – initial categories by ETIC were elicited, followed by sorting and analyzing the contents (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 1995). The second stage contained a prolonged inductive process of sub-categorization by EMIC. Sub-categories emerged by tracing the components or the analysis units which stood out through repetition of the implied contents (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 1995). For this purpose we broadened our research tools with the Gross method of content analysis (Gross, 1995, 2002). The third stage formulated the relations within sub-categories (ibid). For the last stage, we placed the relations between all sub-categories into Belsky’s Model (2004), displaying the personal perception of happiness as an intricacy level of the relation between the developmental/regression route and the quality of experience of the individual (intelligent, emotional and sensory)

Research Findings:

With regards to the question “What is happiness?”, findings show that the category definition of happiness revealed two various distinctions: the first was happiness as an emotional-sensory state; the second was happiness as a cognitive state.

Content analysis displayed happiness as an emotional-sensory state, related to positive feelings such as joy and pleasure out of life experiences. This definition is in line with the definition of Hedonic happiness (Kahaneman, 2005; Deci & Ryan, 2008), which indicates happiness as delightful or joyful sensory pleasures (Zimmerman, 2010). For other portions of the teenage subjects, happiness was perceived as a cognitive state, related to the educated appreciation of life, studying one's content and satisfaction out of life, and an overall feeling of "Being whole with yourself". This sub-category is in line with the cognitive component of Diener's definition of subjective mental well-being, addressing the overall appreciation and satisfaction of life (Diener, 1984). Some of the subjects agreed with one of these two definitions, and some – with both.

In the category causes of happiness we recognized two: causes related to the external environment, and causes related to the internal environment. Some of the subjects addressed only one of these sub-categories, and yet – some referred to both of them. Our research displayed that the external environment that has a greater impact on happiness, is related to close human interactions within family and social circles, and less related to material causes such as money or objects. Furthermore, it was found that sensory experiences and positive feelings are the main internal environment that affects happiness. In the category types of happiness there were five qualities displayed: momentary happiness; prolonged happiness; inner-emotional happiness; inner-conscious happiness and external happiness. There were cross distinctions, such as prolonged happiness with inner-emotional happiness, or prolonged happiness as inner-conscious happiness as well. The category approach to happiness revealed that most subjects believe that the point of reference to happiness as subjective, and the description of happiness as a goal – both of these are considered more dominant than happiness as an objective point of view, or happiness as a process.

With regards to the question "how do we acquire the knowledge regarding happiness?" two categories were found: external and internal. The external sources category, which included school circle, books, lectures, etc., did not contribute significantly to the "promotion" of knowledge, although an indirect external source contributed more than the others. Most of the subjects related their "knowledge" of happiness from internal sources, a product of their own thoughts, feelings and experiences.

With regards to the question "What is the relation between existing knowledge and its implication in real life?" two categories were identified: the personal definition of happiness, and promoting the level of personal happiness. Content analysis revealed that the personal definition of happiness by the teenage girls is dependent on interpersonal interactions as well as the personal characterizations of thoughts, experiences and positive feelings. The reliance on interpersonal relations is an observation in line with other research conclusions, claiming that the main, most significant variable in the perception of happiness lies within deep social interactions, and the variant expression of "me" throughout meaningful and intimate relationships (Ben Shahr, 2008; Dreikurs, 2000; Seligman, 2005; Reimer, 2002). The component of interpersonal relationships is a leitmotif throughout all the findings, as is the component of personal characterizations. The category promoting the level of personal happiness is attributed to subjects that take an active position, as opposed to ones taking a passive position. Some of the subjects displayed an active position both in thoughts and in actions, and they presented a significant ambition for happiness, compared with the ones who demonstrated a passive approach. Evans (2013) claimed that you can specify the two philosophies of happiness and mental well-being, into an active philosophy and a passive philosophy. The difference between them lies in action; a person with an active approach to happiness will take action in order to promote and produce his own happiness. A person holding a passive approach to happiness will not invest any efforts or will for that same purpose. In fact, Evans' division of the two philosophies is equivalent to the Eudemonic philosophy and the Hedonic philosophy, respectively: the active approach refers to the Eudemonic philosophy, whereas the passive approach refers to the Hedonic philosophy.

Discussion, Summary & Conclusions:

Based on the literature review and the research findings, we can conclude that for the epistemology aspect, the subjects' "knowledge" was perceived as intuitive, dynamic, variable and indecisive; "knowledge" which relies on constructive processes, internally originated and consisting of different intricacies and connections. According to their interviews, the subjects testified to neither a formal nor an informal system, in which they can learn about happiness, and for that reason it seems that the construction of knowledge regarding happiness derives from each person's personal interpretation. In

the theoretical aspect, learned that the girls' knowledge of happiness coincides with the knowledge existing in the research literature, that is, their answers display the characters of two acceptable approaches to happiness: the Hedonic approach, attributed to subjective mental well-being, and the Eudaimonic approach – attributed to psychological mental well-being. The findings of this research are in line with former conclusions (Azulay, 2014; Gilbert, 2013; King, 2008; Ong, 2014) which considered these two to be two complementary approaches, not contradicting as much as they are integrated. Within the methodological aspect the qualitative method of research enables the exposure of explicit knowledge and implicit knowledge (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 1995; Shkedi, 2003). The implied level of knowledge was revealed through Gross' content analysis method (Gross, 1995, 2002), through which we have found connections between sub-categories, leading us to the implication of the knowledge within Belsky's Model (Belsky, 2004). This model presents the perception of happiness as a level of intricacy between the way a person chooses to advance (development vs. regression) and the quality of experience one chooses (sensory, emotional or conscious). According to Belsky, the way to achieve happiness lies within a developmental character. If one chooses to advance by development, he will further the skills that enable him to unite as an independent being, equally standing along other human beings, forming loving and supportive relationship and thus having a clear sense of himself and his route in life. Belsky's model does not presume to offer an accurate quantitative method, but a general tuning for the personal perception of happiness. According to Belsky's model, we have concluded that the subjects' perception of happiness is one where all sensory experiences, feelings and consciousness are within the framework of development, an approach associated with their choice of personal interactions

The main conclusion of the current research is that the development of a long-term curriculum on happiness and its implications, will contribute to the promotion of teen happiness. The main purpose of this kind of curriculum will be providing the teenagers with the framework, the answers – both from the theoretical approach and the practical one. In the theoretical approach, transferring of knowledge through external sources is recommended (as in any other academic realm, such as history or civic studies). This will elaborate on different definitions of happiness, the philosophies behind these and their history. The practical approach will demand actions, for the purpose of exercise and improvement of different variable components that are related to happiness, such as

motivation, awareness, optimism, gratitude and self-appreciation for life (Lyubomirsky, 2008; Seligman, 2005).

The accumulating influence of long-term exposure to the perception of teenagers in general, and girls in particular, can manifest drastic changes in the way they are conducting themselves, choosing one action over the other and displaying high-risk behavior – whether as a critical short-term effect or as a long-term influence on finding one’s meaning of life, employment potential and the varieties of leisure in life.

Further research might add to the results of this research, whether by enhancing the results, focusing on some or classifying them. Each of these can be carried out by changing the chosen samples of subjects and comparing between them. Future research can study the perception of happiness within teenage girls of different sectors in the population (Jews, Christians, Druse or Ethiopian), based on their geographic residence (center or periphery) as well as their personal profile in various high-risk social groups. Other future research can map the criteria (sensory experiences, emotional experiences, conscious experiences), subjected to level of development/regression (the scope of inter-personal interactions) and how these come across over different samples. This research can be the basis for further comparison for all of these, and that is its contribution as well.