

What is happiness? Happiness is love!

Written by Darren D. Moore, Ph.D., LMFT
Tuesday, 26 March 2013 11:53

What is happiness?

A question that may appear to be very simplistic is actually one of the most difficult questions to answer in the world. Last week, as I was sitting in my clinical practicum class, this question emerged and proved to be quite daunting. As a matter of clinical supervision, each week four of my graduate students and I meet to consult about therapy clients they see at our campus-based family therapy center or at one of their numerous community placement sites. Clients that are typically seen by my students present with a variety of complex clinical issues, some of which may include substance abuse, depression, infidelity, sexual addiction, parent-child conflict, grief, marital discord, childhood trauma, sexual abuse, domestic violence, eating disorders, among many, many, others.

During our last supervision, I instructed one of my students to ask a client of hers, "What is happiness?"

This question was asked in order to get an idea of possible goals that could be worked on during the therapeutic process. During therapy, we often ask our clients what is happiness? What does it mean to be happy? How would you know if you were happy? What would have to change in your life in order for you to be happy?

As we consulted about my student's case, I thought to myself, "What is happiness?" How would I answer this question myself? To elaborate on my internal thoughts, I decided to bring the question up for discussion to the class. As part of my teaching style, I am often open with students regarding my thoughts (within reason) and generally have no qualms about disclosing my personal perspectives about a particular phenomenon. I soon realized this is a hard question to answer. I do not know exactly how I would answer this very question if someone posed it to me. As a way to further explore this very question, I asked my students how they would define happiness. I had each of my students go around the room and share with the class how they would answer the question, what is happiness.

When asked the question, one of my students, Tierra Hollaway, responded, "It is having genuine joy and peace that no one can take away from you."

Another one of my students, Lakea Burrison, stated, "My definition of happiness involves inner peace and a state of knowing of all is well. My happiness comes from my higher power, God, which gives me a feeling of joy. Happiness involves being able to look past all difficulties and have hope and a sense of faith to know that it will not always be this way."

A third student, Sophia Crawford, suggested that, "Happiness is the ability to be at peace and content with the end result of all your efforts at the end of the day."

When my fourth student, Amanda Nicholson, was asked the question, she replied, "Happiness to me involves more eustress than distress and being able to find the positives in negative situations – having a way to find your own center through, rough times."

Of course, as the instructor I have the power and authority to choose not to answer the question

What is happiness? Happiness is love!

Written by Darren D. Moore, Ph.D., LMFT
Tuesday, 26 March 2013 11:53

myself, but then that would go against my teaching philosophy. I believe in transparency. As a matter of fact, it is my willingness to share personal thoughts and my willingness to travel beyond the pages of a textbook or scholarly journal article, that makes me such a dynamic professor (so I am told). Therefore, I decided to take a stab at the question. Instead of trying to gather my thoughts collectively and instead of focusing on what I thought my students wanted to hear, I decided to simply tell them the truth, as I saw it. During class, I stated, "What is happiness to me; unhappiness to me (*long pause, for the dramatic effect*)? Well to me, happiness is *love.*"

What was particularly so interesting about this statement was not just my declaration about what is happiness, but was an observation that a student (Burrison) made about my statement. Burrison, who is obviously wise beyond her years and is growing and developing to be a wonderful therapist, said, "Dr. Moore, I knew you were going to say that." She further mentioned that when I said the words, "Happiness is Love," she noticed that I grabbed my engagement ring (my fiancé and I both wear rings) and started fidgeting with it as I was speaking (unbeknownst to me). My student picked up on not only what I said, but also my non-verbal communication, which is a skill that proves to be advantageous when engaged in the art and science of conducting therapy. My student apparently has a spirit of discernment. To be able to pick up on something that is so subtle, but yet so true, is amazing. Yes she is right. Dr. Moore is in love. So, what is happiness to me? Happiness is *love*.

Enough about me; what is happiness to you?

Have you ever thought about this question? To some, happiness may be having fame and fortune. To others, happiness may be being able to grow old with a loved one. While for some, happiness may simply lie in a parent's ability to provide for his or her child or children. As you go about your week and interact with others, I want you to take a second out of your day to reflect on the very question, what is happiness? Do not just think about it, write it down on a piece of paper, hang it on your refrigerator, put it in your wallet (or purse), post it on your Facebook page, carry it with you, share it with your loved ones, read it at night before you go to bed, and then in the morning before you leave for work. Let's focus on creating our own happiness. Once you focus on defining happiness (whatever it means to you), then write down five goals that you can work towards that will help to you achieve this happiness.

And another thing ... I want you to know, that happiness can be anything you want it to be. It can be a feeling, a thought, a mindset, an emotion, a state of being, an experience – and most of all – it can be a reality. Believe it or not, you have the *right* to be happy, and you have the *ability*

and the

power

to create your own happiness. It is true; you make the decision to be happy, to obtain happiness, and to not let others take away your happiness. Therefore, instead of doubting yourself, dwelling on the past, hating someone, being jealous of someone because they have something that you do not have,

choose

to be happy. I know I will, because to me, happiness is

What is happiness? Happiness is love!

Written by Darren D. Moore, Ph.D., LMFT
Tuesday, 26 March 2013 11:53

love

."

Darren D. Moore, Ph.D., LMFT, is a licensed marriage and family therapist and an assistant professor in marriage and family therapy at a University in Georgia. He works with individuals, couples, and families regarding mental health and relationship concerns. His research, teaching and clinical interests include general mental health, obesity, weight loss, eating disorders and addictions, within couple and family relationships, with an emphasis in working with men, African-American families, and marginalized populations. Moore is a north Minneapolis native and obtained his bachelor's degree in African American Studies from the University of Minnesota, his master's degree in marriage and family therapy from Valdosta State University, and his Ph.D. in marriage and family therapy from Virginia Tech. Dr. Darren D Moore can be reached by email at ddmoore@vt.edu or (612) 296-3758.