

Are We Living in a Post-Happiness World?

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Joy, it seems, is everywhere these days.

It is used to sell [boxes at Ikea](#). It is included in ads for [drinks at McDonald's](#) and as a prescriptive for [female hygiene](#). There are T-shirts that tout joy as “an act of resistance.” There is [the “Chasing Joy” podcast](#). And a number of books are being published this year devoted to joyful living, including [marriage](#), [productivity](#), even how to live more like [Hugh Jackman](#).

But if joy is everywhere, why does happiness feel so elusive? Haven't we learned anything since 2014 when [Marie Kondo](#) taught us that cleaning our closets was a path to bliss? Well, so much has changed since then. Politics in the era of President Trump has divided Americans into two camps: angry and angrier. Our world is threatened by climate change. And the booming United States economy is showing signs of fatigue.

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Michelle Shiota, an associate professor of social psychology at Arizona State University, tried an experiment last January. “I started to do a diary of ‘a moment of joy’ per day,” said Dr. Shiota, who goes by Lani. “I lasted until mid-February. Then I was toast.” Tabulating a daily moment was overwhelming. And joy can be found in quiet, she said. “It shouldn't always mean high arousal.”

Social media, though, has hastened a cultural shift toward instantaneous gratification. “We've moved more to a microview of well-being, having positivity in the minute,” said Dacher Keltner, director of the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley. And that makes him wonder, “Are we just careening from moment to moment?”