

Beware of Joy

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The New York Times:

If you're a defensive pessimist (or even just a regular pessimist), you may already be familiar with the phenomenon known as "fear of happiness."

If you're not, Bettina Chang of Pacific Standard offers a baseball-related example:

"Give me a game where my team is winning in the final seconds, and I'll enumerate the ways to lose the lead before it's over. It's come to the point where I get more anxious when my team is winning than when it is losing. I would rather root for them to pull off a stunning comeback than deal with the psychological torture of a premature celebration or a last-minute defeat."

Fear of happiness is that creeping feeling that you shouldn't get too comfortable, because something bad is bound to happen. Ms. Chang reports that the postdoctoral researcher Mohsen Joshanloo, of Chungbuk National University in South Korea, has studied this feeling across a variety of cultures, asking people how much they agreed with statements like "I prefer not to be too joyful, because usually joy is followed by sadness," and "Something might happen at any time and we could easily lose our happiness." He found fear of happiness more common in less-developed countries, where, he told Ms. Chang, "the conditions of life are more uncertain and changing."

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As Ms. Chang points out, Mr. Joshanloo is not alone in questioning the value of trying to feel great all the time. She cites the psychologist Julie Norem, who studies defensive pessimism, and a group of happiness skeptics who call themselves the "Negateers." Their attitudes, she writes, "aren't welcome among some psychologists, who tend to stress optimism and gratitude as the best ways to deal with hard times. The positive psychology movement has had such success that some proprietors aren't willing to entertain the idea that negative thinking could have benefits."

Read the whole story: [*The New York Times*](#)