

The Happiness Racket: When the Pressure to Be Happy Makes You Miserable

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Ever have that feeling, like last time you checked your Facebook, that everyone else is happy except you?

And that there must be something wrong with you for not being happy?

The pressure to be happy sometimes feels as American as your citizenship. From the chirpy “how are you?” to the beloved Pharrell Williams “Happy” song to the pervasive mindfulness movement, happiness is a cultural trend – and a Constitutional right.

But does the pressure to conform to happiness actually do more harm than good? “It’s like the coach of a losing team giving a pep talk,” says Corey Kimer, a 20-year-old student at St. John’s College in Annapolis, Maryland.

Kimer, who attended a happiness workshop last weekend in the District of Columbia, suspects that in other cultures, it’s easier and more acceptable to be unhappy. The range of answers to the “how are you?” question in Latin cultures, for example, is much more widely expressed: “Así, así” in Spanish means so-so, and is a perfectly acceptable answer, Kimer says. And in Italian, a frequent reply to someone who shares a not-so-great life circumstance is “Così è la vita.” That’s life. But not, Kimer adds, as in, “That’s life, so get over it and what’s wrong with you if you don’t,” but rather, “That’s life, and we’re all in this together.”

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One of the biggest mistakes in American culture, says Todd Kashdan, a psychology professor at George Mason University in Virginia, is that, “People are incredibly susceptible to the persuasiveness that being happy will capture all of your problems.” People have what Kashdan calls a “comfort addiction” – from bigger shower heads to scientifically-precise coffee makers to thermostats on our phone. All these things have made us less resilient than our ancestors at coping with reality. At the same time, Kashdan says, “We still have the vestiges of the 1970s self-esteem movement” that says everyone is a winner.

Read the whole story: [*U.S. News & World Report*](#)