



Bluebird: Women and the New Psychology of Happiness

Ariel Gore

[Download now](#)

[Read Online ➔](#)

Bluebird: Women and the New Psychology of Happiness

Ariel Gore

Bluebird: Women and the New Psychology of Happiness Ariel Gore CAN A WOMAN BE SMART, EMPOWERED, AND HAPPY ?

Happiness has become a serious business. Where twentieth-century psychology focused on depression and illness, in the new millennium scientists have begun focusing on "positive psychology" - the study of happiness. Ariel Gore first became intrigued by this subject when she discovered that Positive Psychology was the most popular course on the Harvard campus. As she read deeper into the topic, she noticed something disturbing: everyone in this happy land was a man. Worse still, some of these new "experts" seemed hell-bent on proving that women with traditional values and breadwinning husbands - those who had made an effort to expect less, according to one sociologist - were more content than women with feminist values. The more she read the more she wondered: Can a woman be smart, empowered, *and* happy? Determined to find out, Gore began her own "study in living" - a journey into the feminine history, science, and experience of happiness. Her results, chronicled with humor and curiosity in *Bluebird*, are by turns fascinating and enriching. A woman's happiness may not come easy, and it may not take the forms prescribed by popular culture. But, as Gore discovers, it is not only possible but necessary. *Bluebird* is a smart, no-nonsense, uplifting study of the *real* secret of joy, and whether it's truly at odds with the goals of modern women.

Bluebird: Women and the New Psychology of Happiness Details

Date : Published January 19th 2010 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux (first published 2010)

ISBN : 9780374114893

Author : Ariel Gore

Format : Hardcover 196 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Psychology, Feminism, Self Help, Womens



[Download Bluebird: Women and the New Psychology of Happiness ...pdf](#)



[Read Online Bluebird: Women and the New Psychology of Happiness ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Bluebird: Women and the New Psychology of Happiness Ariel Gore

From Reader Review Bluebird: Women and the New Psychology of Happiness for online ebook

Jody says

I need this book on my shelf permanently, just so I can reread passages whenever I forget what makes me happy. Empowered books written by smart, intuitive women are what make me happy. Thank you, Ariel Gore.

Jaq says

Chewy without being too dense, but I've read it too closely to another book on parenting to be able to properly separate what I enjoyed most about this one without relying on the other as comparison. I did enjoy all the glimpses into the lives of these women, the author and her circle of experts - I would like to have seen more of that, I think, than the other bits on positive psychology, even if those bits were interesting too.

Kelly says

This book touched on some interesting concepts but ultimately provided no real insights.

jen8998 says

A promising start but ultimately the book proves both tedious and self indulgent.

Christina says

Basically, it was like happiness light. What I liked was when the author shared her own story about her pursuit of happiness. If she had stuck with that approach, the book would have been much more interesting. Basically, she didn't introduce me to anything that I didn't already know. Furthermore, she somehow missed all the yoga-centric or Buddhist views of happiness. So, overall, I was disappointed.

Lauren says

I've been anxious to review this book since I first cracked it open in September. I found the book on Amazon, after a summer of working with a therapist myself trying to sort out my depression, and had the intention of ordering it but in September I decided to get it through interlibrary loan and the day it arrived through interlibrary loan I sat in my room and plowed through sixty-six pages without once glancing up to look at the clock. Why was a book on psychology so engrossing to me?

The answer is quite simple. In *Bluebird: Women and the New Psychology of Happiness*, Ariel Gore says the things that we all know but never say. She examines the dichotomies of womanhood so well and exactly how society infringes on a woman's happiness. What makes this book so relate-able is that is is not a psychologist discussing these issues for other psychologists. Ariel Gore is a writer, mother, and romantic partner who goes through the same stresses that every woman does and she just happens to want to solve this question of happiness. She is writing for women like herself and not for those in the psychology field (though I would at least recommend they read the section about her daughter adjusting to college life).

I could go on to quote many examples of this book but I am going to let her preface say it all for you:

I must have been about nine years old when my paternal grandmother gave me the gift of a small glass bluebird. "It's a symbol of happiness," she told me.

I turned it over in my hand. "Why?" I asked. I'd already learned that the color blue represented sadness.

My grandmother smiled at me and then frowned. "Ariel," she said gravely. "You ask too many questions. A nice young lady doesn't ask so many questions."

I put the glass bluebird in my hip pocket.

"Now smile and say 'Thank You,'" my grandmother instructed me.

I smiled and said "Thank you," but I kept on asking too many questions.

This preface so brilliantly explains the point that Ariel is trying to make with her book. Mixed with equal parts: psychology, history, and autobiography this book examines what women need to be happy, why they can't be happy, and why this status is not okay. Through interviews with psychologist, research in psychological studies, and keeping her own happiness journal with a few other women, Ariel Gore paints a picture of the little things in life that can make people happy and how to actively seek happiness.

I cannot express in words how much I love this book. Sure there are plenty of studies on happiness. Plenty of women who write about their own journey and trying to find happiness, but I think that Ariel provides a good mix of advice and anecdote in simple everyday terms. She looks back on her life, her current status, and takes her own steps to increase her own happiness in doing her research, while at the same time edifying readers with landmark psychological studies and point out their downfalls.

About halfway through this book I told my mother that I was considering buying my own copy to have on the bookshelf. She seemed eager to read it so I picked up a copy on my next trip to The Strand in New York City. Now having reached the end of this book I still maintain that every woman should read this book and then give it to the men in their lives to read. It's a book that will open your eyes and change your outlook on life. Not in the preachy steps to happiness way that only gives the reader one path to follow, but in the form of an ideology that gives women room to "write their own script" as Gore calls it.

Having reached the end of this book I am sorry to have to return it to the library but I have also located some of the texts she references. Texts such as *Eat, Pray Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert and Victor E. Frankl's *Man Searching for Meaning*. I look forward to exploring some of the ideas that Gore discussed and seeing how

her own research can help me improve upon my own life.

FINAL GRADE: A+ (I'd give it a higher one if one existed.)

Rachel says

I just finished the book *Bluebird: Women and the New Psychology of Happiness* by Ariel Gore. Overall, I liked it. I think there are bits and pieces that are problematic, and some parts that really resonated with me, so overall, I'd say it was good.

The take-away message that I really liked was that we live in a culture where being unhappy is seen as a problem that needs to be fixed. Yet, the unhappiness is the way for us to see, feel and recognize the happiness. Gore talked about this in the framework of motherhood (how women aren't supposed to complain about how hard it is, but the lows and the highs are what make it truly the experience it is.) Other "keys" to happiness are gratitude, self care, and "flow" - getting lost in something that you enjoy, feeling productive and forgetting the world around you. I've experienced this in some ways, but it's been awhile.

The big point that I agreed with is control/self determination. Part of it comes from mindset, to say "Ok, this is the thing I am going to do now, this is why I am doing it, and this is why it is worthwhile." She talked about this with reference to Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Harriet Beecher Stowe guide to being the perfect hausfrau - essentially being told you have to do housework, and that it is your destiny and you have no choice but to serve and provide for others will make you miserable. But if you go into it and say "I'm doing laundry right now, because the house is quiet, I've got the time, I can use it to think about things, and it can become a meditative activity" then it doesn't have the oppression that the "demands of housework" typically have.

I've experienced that level of "meditative domesticity" but I think it's rather an unfair comparison, since I don't have kids to clean up after, the laundry doesn't get entirely out of hand, and the bathrooms stay relatively clean. I think there is definitely a societal pressure to the way women are supposed to approach happiness and "being" - and it does get divided up into class and race distinctions, some of which is addressed by Gore in the book.

Part memoir, part academic research, part social commentary, it's a little bit of everything, but does nothing in an outstanding way, but I'd still recommend it. 3.5 out of 5 stars.

Lasara Allen says

I am reading Ariel Gore's "Bluebird: Women and the New Psychology of Happiness" for the first time. The fact that it's taken me this long to get to it is a bit of an embarrassment, as Ariel is both a friend, a peer, and she mentioned me in the book itself!

Another reason it's ridiculous it's take me this long to get to it is that Ariel is, I believe, one of the great writers of our generation. Utterly and easily readable, she makes a topic that could be stilted and distant deeply and personally accessible to her readers.

Employing her trademarks of personal revelation, inclusivity, and dry wit, Ariel takes the reader on an engaging and thorough journey through the history and application of the technologies and application of inspiring hope and joy in our lives, all the while gently dispelling the notion that we can easily "create our own realities".

Taking the blame off women for our conditioning to please, Ariel gives us the long-needed permission to access the full range of our emotions. I say long-needed because part of getting to true joy is the recognition of true pain, and true dissatisfaction.

Ariel's tone and flowing, conversational style make this book read like a conversation with a dear friend, yet is peppered with astute critical analysis on everything from the concept of, "you create your own reality", to the often subtle cultural indoctrination of girls and women to create a "pleasant" environment, instead of creating waves.

Ariel's strength and vulnerability offer a thread of personalized tenderness that allows us to experience our own rage, and recognize our own joy, through her stories and the stories of other women.

As a teacher, activist, and "living out loud" feminist, I find in the pages of Bluebird an opportunity to inquire more deeply into the areas where I give over my voice, shy away from my own strength in order to make those around me more "comfortable", and allow myself to fall into patterns of care-taking, when taking care of myself would be a better choice.

Thank you, Ariel, for writing yet another world-changing book. You are a beacon of cultural change, and I deeply love and respect you for it.

Elevate Difference says

This short but meaningful book is a smart combination of self-help, memoir, and academic study. Gore does not surmise a remedy for the blues, she does not use her life as an anecdote to overcome defeat or as a guiding light toward beatitude, nor does she use statistics and theory to expose her education. Instead, Bluebird: Women and the New Psychology of Happiness is a collection of wise womanhood, the crannies of optimism that are too often ignored.

With eloquent emotional pacing, Gore forms a convincing argument that happiness, particularly among women, has been historically understudied and oversimplified in her academic field. She asks, "How is it that psychology—once envisioned as a great healing art—has gotten to this place where our neuroses are considered so much more valid than our resiliences?" Gore bravely takes on the secret of joy by combining her personal memoirs with history, science, and first person accounts of real women experiencing real happiness. Her words have the contagious effect of positivism without the obnoxious, evangelistic ethos found so often in the self-help aisle. As Gore says herself, "I don't like to think I'm uncomfortable around cheerful people, but there's something of a missionary vibe here that seems odd..."

Perhaps there are so many of these self-help books because their authors know it's not just the ideas, but the time spent thinking about and interpreting those ideas that can actually improve lives. Just like thinking about food can make you hungrier, thinking about happiness can make you happier. If an author can induce self-reflection, they have done their part. Certainly Gore has, as she encourages us individually to use our hearts and minds to actualize a new psychology of happiness.

Using what she calls a "liberation psychology forum," hundreds of women give verbal and written feedback on issues raised by Gore. Combined, these issues allude to the macro question left open throughout the pages: whether we, at this moment, are living our lives. If our answer is no, this book proposes joy as the powerful tool that can give us "the courage to make the universe we dream."

What Gore does is play hostess at a dinner party with a dozen fascinating women. She introduces us, and in brief encounters we are told stories of happiness, unhappiness, success and defeat. Before you know it the party is over. You drive yourself home without turning on the radio, just thinking, and you lie awake at night because you feel joy—you feel alive.

Review by Katy Pine

Kate Elliott says

Don't let the chintzy cover fool you. This is a great companion piece to the works of Gilligan, Gilbert, Gubar, and Brown. Also provides much needed critique of some of the blind spots of positive psychology-- gender, class, cross-cultural differences. Functions both as an academic exercise and Gore's own personal journey in a seamless fashion.

Ciara says

i feel so weird & conflicted about this book! i guess i feel weird & conflicted about ariel gore's work in general. in the abstract, i feel like i enjoy her writing, but when i'm actually reading it, it doesn't seem to go anywhere & i'm not really into it. that's exactly how i feel about this book: i enjoyed the process of reading it (which took all of two & a half hours--i couldn't believe what a quick read it was) & i feel like there were even some insights, but it's all just a mishmash of fleeting nothingness in my head now. & i just read it two days ago!

this is kind of like the gateway book between barabra ehrenreich's bright sided on the disappointing side, & gretchen rubin's the happiness project on the unexpectedly good side. ariel is not exactly inventing fire here concept-wise, but she did manage to cover a lot of similar ground with her own unique perspective. she examines a lot of the same "positive psychology" literature that so repulsed ehrenreich, & even attended the exact same positive psychology national conference, but rather than picking apart the discipline to shore up her belief in its utter ueslessness, she adopted a rubin-esque attitude, & tried to understand how she could make certain appealing aspects of positive psychology work for her on an individual basis. & she did it all with a very conscious grounding in feminism, seeking to unpack the ways in which women are trained to believe that pursuing their own happiness is selfish, or that they can best find happiness by making the people around them feel comfortable & nurtured. she also examined the fact that depression most commonly affects women, & delves into the history of depression as an official psychological diagnosis & the first anti-depressants ever developed to discover that the "cure" for depression was discovered before depression was a diagnosis, & most of the people who have been studied to develop the diagnosis have been women. she speculates that the gendered manner in which women reported their symptoms in the 60s, 70s, & 80s has influenced the diagnostic criteria so that more women are diagnosed with depression now. i found all of this very interesting.

& call me a hippie, but i was pretty into a lot of what ariel wrote about keeping a gratitude journal, trying to write down happy moments, understanding what truly makes you feel happy as opposed to what you think should make you happy, etc. maybe i am having a third-life crisis or something, but i have been thinking a lot about happiness & its elusiveness in my life, & i am into trying to keep a gratitude journal & record happy moments as they occur if it might help me hang on to happiness better. i even took the weird quiz ariel took at the positive psychology conference & discovered that although, by objective criteria, i have all the makings of a slightly happier life than the average comfortable westerner, i subjectively report that i am far less happy than the average comfortable westerner. if there is a way i can train myself to appreciate what i have, i want to try it. i was also into the stuff about developing a five-year plan & all the life coach stuff...yeah, i know. i'm into that stuff, okay? i think i could possibly be an awesome life coach. (just not for myself, apparently.)

my critiques: for all its good qualities, the book was ultimately pretty skimpy on delivering significant satisfaction. it just didn't feel weighty in some weird way. i don't know if it was the structure (which kind of oscillates between personal narrative & dry research without establishing a comfortable continuity in the voices) or what. & although i am really interested in how women are possibly socialized to not value themselves, the entire question of "women & happiness" sets up a weird essentialist gender category that i was not 100% on board with. in general though...i was into it, more or less.

Josie Cook M.A. says

Amazing journey inside these pages! A must-read for writers and mothers.

I will be referring back to this book in the future, too.

Gore never lets her readers down with her wit and her insight combined to bring forth wisdom on various topics. She always has this amazing female voice that makes an individual want to keep reading her words until one is finished. Then, the reader wants more of her talent to embrace and seeks another volume of inspiring wisdom by this author to appease the inner craving and unresting soul. And, to keep the brain waves engaged with another wonderful adventure from Gore!

Deb says

Positive psychology for the rest of us,

This book made me happy. So happy that I read it twice.

A (wo)manifesto for happiness, Bluebird tailors the newly emerging field of positive psychology to fit the rest of us--i.e., females. As Ariel herself explains: "This is a book about shaping our own realities--about better understanding our emotional lives so we might become more active players in their creation--so I think it's important to consider in what ways we create our realities. Because as it turns out, women's notions about personal happiness are all tangled up with our ideas about privilege, selfishness, and social responsibility."

And, Ariel's book helps us untangle ourselves from those ingrained societal ideas and scripts about

happiness.

Sure--as the prolific research flying off the presses of positive psychology is showing--ingredients such as kindness, gratitude, meditation, relationships, inspiration, accomplishments, and metaphysical worthiness are essential for our happiness. But, as Ariel uncovers, even more crucial is being able to rejoice in the midst of suffering. In her own brilliantly illuminating words, Ariel concludes that:

"There is no 'happily ever after.' There is only meditation, action, change, friendship, idea, inspiration, creation.

We spin this light out of darkness."

Other crucial factors of happiness she discovers include having the courage to question the "scripts for happiness" and being able to cultivate a "a childlike curiosity coupled with a very grown-up understanding of self-respect and self-protection."

In contrast to other books on happiness, this one does not offer a one-size-fits-all script. Instead, it teaches us how to lose the societal scripts and create our own beautifully improvised life performances by tuning in to our innate preferences for joy.

Happiness is in the heart of the beholder.

Cherie says

B-Normally I wouldn't have read a book on happiness, but Ariel Gore is one of my fave writers. An interesting look at happiness, what makes happiness, why women aren't experts on happiness, why women seem more often unhappy...when things get tough, I practice tonglen and have started doing it in stressful work and subway situations, and it really helps. But what makes you happy? What makes me happy? Running, my love, my kitty, writing, dancing, pretty places, hiking, nature, the ocean...I need to indulge in more of that.

Meg says

One of the best books I've read in a while. Ariel Gore takes a critical look at the positive psychology movement. However, unlike Barbara Ehrenreich's book on the same topic (which came out around the same time), this book offers a more nuanced and complex analysis of happiness, specifically around the question of what happiness means for women and how this relates to positive psychology approaches. The book is a nicely-done interweaving of memoir/ personal account with intellectual analysis and discussion of research. A few points I particularly appreciated:

- Gore's open-minded stance (not being attached to "positive psychology is good for women" or "it's bad for women")
- Her unapologetic and joyous feminism
- Her honoring of choice (happiness might mean having children or not having children; working outside the home or not; being conventional or not)

A quote I really enjoyed:

"Each time we learn something new about human nature or invent a new way of thinking about it, we have to ask: Will this information be used for liberation or exploitation? Will it be used to heal us or to make us feel crazy and alone? Will it be used to empower us or to keep us in our places?

"Why aren't psychology students given textbooks full of all the ways in which people can be healthy, soulful, and ever evolving?... Why isn't there a giant required textbook that expands on each of these various kinds of happiness? Instead of narcissistic and antisocial, we could diagnose ourselves and each other as 'tactile and fun' or 'predominantly inspired by art and humor.'"

My only tiny criticism: I really enjoyed the parts where she describes her own foray into different prescriptions for happiness (e.g. a gratitude journal) and reflects on them. At a few points, though she mentions having tried some methods which she doesn't really describe in detail in the book (like yoga), and I really wanted to hear more of her experiences with these.

katykins says

This short but meaningful book is a smart combination of self-help, memoir, and academic study. Gore does not surmise a remedy for the blues, she does not use her life as an anecdote to overcome defeat or as a guiding light toward beatitude, nor does she use statistics and theory to expose her education. Instead, *Bluebird: Women and the New Psychology of Happiness* is a collection of wise womanhood, the crannies of optimism that are too often ignored.

With eloquent emotional pacing, Gore forms a convincing argument that happiness, particularly among women, has been historically understudied and oversimplified in her academic field. She asks, "How is it that psychology—once envisioned as a great healing art—has gotten to this place where our neuroses are considered so much more valid than our resiliences?" Gore bravely takes on the secret of joy by combining her personal memoirs with history, science, and first person accounts of real women experiencing real happiness. Her words have the contagious effect of positivism without the obnoxious, evangelistic ethos found so often in the self-help aisle. As Gore says herself, "I don't like to think I'm uncomfortable around cheerful people, but there's something of a missionary vibe here that seems odd..."

Perhaps there are so many of these self-help books because their authors know it's not just the ideas, but the time spent thinking about and interpreting those ideas that can actually improve lives. Just like thinking about food can make you hungrier, thinking about happiness can make you happier. If an author can induce self-reflection, they have done their part. Certainly Gore has, as she encourages us individually to use our hearts and minds to actualize a new psychology of happiness.

Using what she calls a "liberation psychology forum," hundreds of women give verbal and written feedback on issues raised by Gore. Combined, these issues allude to the macro question left open throughout the pages: whether we, at this moment, are living our lives. If our answer is no, this book proposes joy as the powerful tool that can give us "the courage to make the universe we dream."

What Gore does is play hostess at a dinner party with a dozen fascinating women. She introduces us, and in brief encounters we are told stories of happiness, unhappiness, success and defeat. Before you know it the party is over. You drive yourself home without turning on the radio, just thinking, and you lie awake at night because you feel joy—you feel alive.

Elena says

"The manufacture of happiness actually leads to emotional burnout. There's an ironic correlation between forced cheerfulness and depression. And when Cheerfulness is considered the rule, even ordinary sadness or frustration----feelings that would be considered normal in many other cultures and at many other times in history --- can easily be interpreted as illness." p 53

Talking about depression: "Melancholia" descriptions could be found in Greek medical texts, the Bible and Chinese mythology. "But depression as we now know it...was born just a few generations ago. The year was 1952.....nearly a hundred tuberculosis patients received an experimental drug treatment called Marsilid. The new medication was a derivative of hydrazine, a chemical the Germans had used at the end of World War II to power their V-2 rockers. Boom! The experiment was a smashing success. The drug not only cleared up the TB patients' lung problems, but it had the amazing and unexpected side effect of inducing euphoria...What if there was an actual illness we could treat with this rocket fuel? A 1957 ad for Marsilid would promise near universal success rates in treating schizophrenia, personality disorders, and manic depression but these major psychiatric illnesses were rare in the general population. What scientists & drugmakers needed was something commonplace....something epidemic. When they found that Marsilid prevented the brain from breaking down serotonin.....they had it. Depression wasn't some psychological or existential mood, they decided, it was a bona fide brain disease caused by serotonin deficiency". Most diseases are observed and defined before doctors start looking for a cure. Not so with "serotonin deficiency" . The introduction of Marsilid and other medications that would come to be known as antidepressants actually resulted in the concept of depression as a specific disease." p. 62-3.

Re happiness: "Hedonic adaptation theory ...reminds us that we respond to not so much to permanent conditions as to change.... When something amazing happens to us, we don't cheer up for good. Instead we cheer up, get used to it, and then return to our previous set level of happiness."

Tape this to the cover of your gratitude journal "I can take care of myself AND I can rely on others."

The opposite of happiness is fear and obedience.

6 month evaluations (Evaluate in December and June). I have specific topics, and I write under each topic. Then I put it away. I open journal 6 months later, I write first and then I read back through the old entries. It helps me to discover patterns and see where I am, where I was, and where I want to be. Topics lately have been work, money, learning, family, relatives, love, health, spirituality, living situation, and an overview of my intentions.

Candace Walsh says

Wise, trenchant, engaging.

Leah says

I love this book. It was inspiring and comforting, taking true-to-life accounts from real women about their sources of happiness.

Favorite quotes:

Page 32

We create our own reality thusly.

Without denial or narcissism, we muster the courage to face the world as it is, and we begin to take an active role in its transformation. We muster the courage to face our own lives just as they are and, even in the midst of suffering, rejoice.

Page 38

As women... we were supposed to concern ourselves with whether or not everyone else felt at ease.

Page 39 (about mothers with schizophrenic children)

This laid a pretty heavy burden squarely at a woman's feet for failing to exhibit the right emotions at precisely the right times.

Page 41

...when I'm pushed toward conflict, something inside of me shifts. I have an almost childish phobia of confrontation. I don't want people to be made at me. I don't want to be accused of trying to dominate anyone with rage or force. Before I know it, my authentic emotional offering has morphed into full-on passive aggression.

Page 42

A generation of nontraditional gender talk and the fact that I didn't need my boyfriend in order to survive hadn't changed my basic belief that love, and my earnest emotional work, would have the power to change everything. *Maybe my boyfriend was violent because he didn't feel good about himself. Surely I could make him feel better. Perhaps if I could just be more pleasant--if I could make him feel at ease--things would be all right.*

...our role is to affirm, enhance, and celebrate the well-being and status of pretty much everyone but ourselves.

Page 53

But here's the trouble: the manufacture of happiness actually leads to emotional burnout. There's an ironic correlation between forced cheerfulness and depression. And when cheerfulness is considered the rule, even ordinary sadness or frustration--feelings that would be considered normal in many other cultures and at many other times in history--can easily be interpreted as illness.

(Arlie Russell Hochschild) "And so in the country that most publicly celebrates the individual, more people privately wonder, without tracing the question to its deepest social root: What do I really feel?"

Page 54

Our attainment of happiness has been used to measure our success and personal worth. As women, we've been conditioned to see it as our job to set the emotional tone in our families, our relationships, our

workplaces, and our sporting events. We've been told by a thousand doctors, psychologists, advertisers, and career coaches what we should do if we want to be happy. Failing that, we've learned how to *look* happy.

Page 61 (on why depression affects more women than men)

The most popular explanations pointed to hormones, societal inequalities, and a feminine tendency to silence ourselves in relationships... If our trouble was rooted in the way we've been conditioned to surrender our will in relationships, the answer might lie in personal empowerment.

Page 64-65

A woman's role as the cheerful "sunshine of the circle around her" had by now become deeply rooted in American culture. Any failure to emanate that sunshine had come to be seen as abnormal--even disturbed. Consciously or unconsciously, researchers may have been more likely to see a woman's melancholy as cause for concern. Maybe it was clear that women would be more likely to seek psychiatric treatment not only for immobilizing depression but also for ordinary lack of cheerfulness.

Page 68

Depression is the summary of the way women have described feeling when we hit a particularly dark and immobilizing emotional knot.

Page 71

"If we go into a darkened room and turn on the light, it doesn't matter if the room has been dark for a day, a week, or ten thousand years--we turn on the light and it is illuminated. Once we control our capacity for love and happiness, the light has been turned on." --Sharon Salzberg

Page 75

We all fantasize that some life change will cheer us up--permanently. We'll get rich, get skinny, get some new and improved gadget in the office, or we'll get swept off our glass-slipped feet and get married.

Some people will never be particularly happy. Each of us has a set point--contented or grumpy.

Page 76

What does all this say about those of us who actively seek happiness? And what does it say about our prospects? Are we doomed to spend our lives pining away in vain after the love we hear about in pop songs, the wealth of bronzed celebrities, or the enlightened bliss of Buddhist nuns? Would none of these things make the least bit of difference? Are we wasting our time in all this pursuit?

Page 78

So it is that women have a harder time adapting to the end of a marriage, and men take it harder when they find themselves out of work. It's not the relationship or the job itself so much as the loss of something we've invested our egos in.

Page 80 (scientific theory)

...fully 40 percent of our happiness is under our control and depends on "intentional activities"--mental and behavioral strategies we can use to counteract adaptation's downward pull.

Page 85

...positive emotions *do* inspire necessary action. Joy sparks our urge to play, interest and curiosity lead us to explore, contentment relaxes us enough to savor and integrate our experiences, love inspires us to nurture and protect each other. We invent, construct, cozy up, and survive.

Page 87

Positive emotions--and the focus on positive emotions--teach us to thrive.

Page 89 (according to Barbara Frederickson's "undo hypothesis")

...happiness works its magic by producing a quick unwinding of pent-up tension, restoring the cardiovascular system to normal. We bounce back from stress. Some people seem to be naturally good at this recovery. The rest of us... can deliberately harness the positive and calming emotions we need.

The lingering effects of the stress were undone by good humor. Negative emotions narrow our focus--or what Frederickson calls our "momentary thought-action repertoire"--and positive emotions broaden this same focus or repertoire.

... "broadening at the cognitive level mediates undoing at the cardiovascular level." In other words, we open our minds to steady our hearts.

Page 92-93

Students don't come to my workshops for therapy, but by telling their stories, they begin to see their experiences--especially their negative experiences--as part of a longer life narrative. When we can see the big picture, and begin to understand some part of the vast context in which things happen, that seeing eases the resonance of whatever it is that haunts us.

We can put the undo effect to use by meeting our experiences with good humor, by actively seeking positive emotional experiences on the heels of our stress-fests, or, at the very least, by allowing ourselves time to relax and imagine how our crappy days might fit into a larger, less crappy context.

Page 105 (Tal Ben-Shahar, *The Question of Happiness*

He brings up the concept of "metaphysical worthiness" as a prerequisite for a happy life. How can we enjoy ourselves if we don't think we deserve to enjoy ourselves? How happy can we be if we feel as if we have to apologize for the fact that we're even here?

...women often have an even harder time when it comes to remembering our intrinsic worth. Our inner nurturers might be beautifully developed, but that development doesn't always include the sense that we, too, deserve to be taken care of--that we have a right and a responsibility to take care of ourselves. "I think we are intrinsically maternal beings," Calliope said at our liberation psychology forum. "And we like to be mothered. I think we like caring for and being cared for. Happiness comes when we are balanced in both roles." We can only find that balance when we feel equally worthy of each.

Rebekah Gordon says

I mostly really liked this -- it was a thoughtful, personal take on the "positive psychology" trend and how/if women's experience with and expectations for happiness are different from those of the men who make up most of the "experts" and study participants. I loved the idea of a "panel of experts" comprised of regular women, and the excerpts from their journals were all fantastic. It didn't 100% come together in the end --

because, obviously, there is no one answer to "what does happiness mean for women," but I liked the sort of new-agey theory of happiness she came up with. Did *not* love that she seems to think anti-depressants (and the whole field of psychology, maybe?) are basically a scam invented to keep women docile. She didn't completely come out and say this, but it was heavily implied more than once.
