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Trends. Psychology and False Consciousness: 2001 Update

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A recent study in the prestigious *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* reports that what makes people happy is not money, luxury, influence, or popularity. Instead, feelings of autonomy, competence, closeness to others, and self-esteem are the primary happiness pathways. Although one might applaud findings that suggest that material well-being is not a stairway to heaven, there is much in these findings that maintain exploitive relations in various social contexts.

First of all, the findings are based on verbal self-report. People were asked what made them happy. For researchers to baldly assume that verbal self-report presents the appropriate looking glass or epistemological crucible for phenomenology, let alone causal relationships among psychosocial variables, is, frankly, hubris and deprivileges said phenomenology. Second, subjects in the research were college students in the United States. Some of these students were from South Korea. It is not only hubris, but also demeaning to a majority of other people throughout the world, to assume or suggest that the results can be generalized. The very introduction of the data in the context of musings about people in general forces this assumption or suggestion. Third, the findings are made to order for those in political control with significant material resources and with the trappings of popularity to more easily guard their status. The findings exemplify an opiate of the masses, an ideology that can be introjected and identified with to engender its own self-exploitive intrapsychic and behavioral mechanisms in the service of political and social exploiters. One can feel autonomous, competent, and close to others without functionally being anything of the sort in the sociopolitical context. One can bear the highest self-esteem with having nothing to feel esteemed about save one's self regardless of intrapsychic and behavioral phenomena--the height of narcissism and even solipsism. For example, the notion of perseverating that "I am somebody" is the ultimate whistling in the dark.

It is not surprising, perhaps, that scientific psychology in the social psychological sphere generates results that in one sense frees people from the material chains of exploitation, even as in another they bind them ever closer to this exploitation. This is because universities and academics are dependent on market forces for tuition; grants; loans; and favorable governmental policies, laws, and programs. And this market orientation necessarily shapes a market in ideas, one that may shape happiness in exploiters and the exploited alike. (See Diener, E., Napa Scollon, C. K., Oishi, S., Dzokoto, V., & Suh, E. Mark. (2000). Positivity and the construction of life satisfaction judgments: Global happiness is not the sum of its parts. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 1, 159-176; Furnham, A., & Cheng, H. (2000). Lay theories of happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 1, 227-246; King, L.A. (2001). The hard road to the good life: The happy, mature person. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 41, 51-72; Philipp, S. (2000). Race and the pursuit of happiness. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 32, 121-124; Sheldon, K.M., Elliot, A.J., Kim, Y., & Kasser, T. (2001). What is satisfying about satisfying events? Testing 10 candidate psychological needs. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 325-339.) (Keywords: Exploitation, Happiness, Scientific Psychology, Social Psychology.)