

Meaningful conversation may be key to happiness

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Outgoing, gregarious people who fill their lives with deep, meaningful conversations may have found at least one key to a happier life, suggests research from Washington University in St. Louis and the University of Arizona.

People who spend less time alone and more time talking to others have a much greater sense of personal well being, suggests the study, which is published in a recent issue of [Psychological Science](#), a journal of the Association for Psychological Science.

“Having more conversation, no matter how trivial, appears to be

associated with a greater sense of [happiness](#) among the people in our study,” suggests study co-author Simine Vazire, PhD, assistant professor of psychology in Arts & Sciences at Washington University.

“The happiest were people who engaged often in more meaningful and substantive discussions, as opposed to those who filled conversations with idle chit-chat and small talk,” she adds.

Based on the conversation patterns of 79 college-aged men and women as tracked over a four-day period, the study was conducted by Vazire and three colleagues in [psychology](#) at the University of Arizona: Matthias R. Mehl, Shannon E. Holleran and C. Shelby Clark.

Using an unobtrusive recording device that participants carried in a pocket or purse, researchers taped 30 seconds of sound every 12.5 minutes, amassing more than 20,000 audio snippets of sound from the daily lives of participants.

Members of the research team listened to the recordings and coded the number of conversations each participant had, and whether each conversation was substantive or small talk. Each participant’s happiness level was scored using standard psychological tools for gauging personality and well being, including self-assessments and reports from friends.

Participants scored as “happiest” in the study spent about 25 percent less time alone and 70 percent more time talking to others, as compared with the unhappiest participants. The happiest participants had twice as many substantive conversations and one third as much small talk as the unhappiest participants.

“Overall, these findings suggest that meaningful interactions with others are important for well-being,” Vazire concludes. “However, our research

cannot determine whether meaningful interactions cause happiness, whether happiness causes people to have more meaningful conversations, or whether there is another explanation. We believe it's likely that both are true -- happiness leads to more meaningful connections with others, which then produce more happiness -- but this remains to be tested in future research."

Provided by Washington University in St. Louis

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