

The pursuit of happiness can end up leading to depression—if you're from the UK or USA

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Focusing too much on the need to enjoy experiences may be contributing to depressive symptoms according to a new study.

The paper, published in the *Journal of Happiness Studies* suggests that placing too much value in feeling happy has the effect of reducing the ability to enjoy experiences. The team from the University of Reading and De Montfort University found that this reduction in savoring positive experiences was linked to [depressive symptoms](#).

However, the study also suggests that the relationship is significantly shaped by what culture people are from. The study took two groups of participants from a UK university to assess whether the link between valuing happiness and depressive symptoms was similar in a UK context to previous studies conducted in the US. The team found that while there was a strong association among UK-based participants, EU and international participants didn't display the same association.

Dr. Julia Vogt, a psychologist from the University of Reading said: "This is the first time as far as we're aware that the UK experience of valuing happiness has been looked at. We observed that the inability of participants to focus attention while feeling a range of emotions was a major factor in this idea of not being able to savor a positive experience.

"One of the most interesting things we found was how specific this was to UK participants who took part. The study sought to replicate a similar test based in the US and we recruited young people from the UK, but we also had participants taking part that lived in the UK but were from other parts of Europe and the rest of the world.

"The relationship between valuing happiness and depressive symptoms was seen far more significantly in UK participants than those from other nationalities or dual citizens. We don't go so far as to test what those differences are, but there seems to be a significant divide between English-speaking [western cultures](#) and other cultures when it comes to how our internal value of experiencing [happiness](#) shapes our experiences and mood."

More information: Bahram Mahmoodi Kahriz et al. Wanting to Be Happy but Not Knowing How: Poor Attentional Control and Emotion-Regulation Abilities Mediate the Association Between Valuing Happiness and Depression, *Journal of Happiness Studies* (2019). [DOI: 10.1007/s10902-019-00193-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-019-00193-9)

Provided by University of Reading

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