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IS HAPPINESS AN IMPORTANT VALUE FOR POLISH SOCIETY?

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Abstract

In contemporary western culture two basic contrary ideas on happiness coexist. The first one looks at the idea of happiness as a very important cultural value for people. It is based on the assumption that every person has the right to be happy. The second position takes a critical point of view and looks at the concept of happiness as an obligation. In line with this stance, every man has to be happy. If she or he is not satisfied with his or her life, society treats this as deviance.

In this paper I will consider the dominant ideas on happiness as seen in academic and media discourses in contemporary Poland. Some results of sociological research will be reviewed. Then, the findings of qualitative content analysis of the opinion-forming press articles during 2009-2012 will be presented. Basically, happiness is a very complex phenomenon with multiple meanings. I look at happiness both as an emotion and as the idea of a good life.

Key words: happiness, media, society, values, Poland

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of happiness refers to a broad spectrum of different and yet related phenomena, which makes it difficult to grasp in scientific terms. Everybody has their own private definition of happiness. Therefore, discussing happiness, I am referring to a wide range of ideas about happiness common in our culture. Part of these we adopt in the process of socialization, and an important agent of socialization are the mass media. The media may be mainly concerned with misfortune and disaster, but still they also convey ideas about happiness and a “good life”. Especially news and political commentary programs on TV often serve to convey the optimistic outlook on the future as presented by the government as well as the pessimistic visions of the opposition. The media also serve to present the views of experts to the broader public and to popularize science.

This article intends to analyze the concepts of happiness and subjective well-being conveyed by the Polish media (mainly the press). Following other scientific publications, happiness will here be understood as a complex concept combining both emotional and cognitive elements. I will take a look both at scientific research into the subject of happiness and well-being as well as the ideas and models of happiness, subjective well-being and a “good life” selectively fed to the public by the media.

My research is based on a qualitative content analysis. The main subject of the analysis is the opinion-forming press (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Polityka*, *Newsweek*, *Forum*). It covers a selection of topic-related articles from the years 2009-2012. The collected data is then compared to the results of scientific research into the importance of happiness in Polish society.

2. DEFINING HAPPINESS

The eminent Polish philosopher Władysław Tatarkiewicz, author of a classic monograph on the subject of happiness, differentiates four layers of meaning in the term “happiness”. First there is happiness as an emotion – the intense feeling of joy. Secondly, the term is used to refer to a favorable fate or turn of events.⁵ Prosperity and a favorable “outcome of life” are another possible meaning of happiness. And finally, it can mean a general satisfaction with life. But not just any feeling of satisfaction with life is happiness in the understanding of Tatarkiewicz. This satisfaction should be holistic, complete and lasting. “Complete and lasting satisfaction with life as a whole – that is asking a lot of happiness, that is asking for *perfect* happiness.” (Tatarkiewicz, 1979, p. 31). In real life, happiness is anything coming close to this ideal. According to another Polish philosopher, “happiness is the pleasant state of human self-knowledge, man’s satisfaction – to a greater or lesser extent, short-lived or long-lasting – with his lot” (Dębicki, 1885, p. 13). To be happy, according to the author, means to live a moral Christian life. As we can see, from a philosopher’s point of view, happiness is perceived both in categories of satisfaction with life and morality.

Happiness is a relative concept. “By character, some people can only achieve happiness by following all their instincts, while for others happiness means to rein in and control their instincts. Some find happiness in liberty, others in discipline; some find it in solitude, some in and through the company of others; some find it through giving, others by taking; some find it in individuality, others in compliance with social norms. There are also flexible characters, for whom different things can be a source of happiness, whom all sorts of different roads will take to their goal” (Tatarkiewicz, 1979, p. 287). Already in antiquity, scholars differentiated between two types of happiness – the eudaemonic (Aristotle) and the hedonistic (Cyrenaics, Epicurus). According to the hedonistic concept, happiness was measured in pleasure received from life, according to the eudaemonic concept, the source of happiness was a meaningful and moral life – a sense of purpose and righteousness.

In 1992, the Polish psychologist Janusz Czapiński formulated his onion theory of happiness. According to Czapiński “there are three basic layers in the construct of happiness: the deepest layer, the most stable and least affected by the ups and downs of life, is our will-to-live; the intermediate layer is our emotionally experienced or expressed in cognitive judgments general satisfaction with life (general feeling of well-being or happiness); and finally there is the peripheral layer, made up of the sensitive to external reality domain satisfactions – satisfactions received from single aspects of life (work, family, children, recreation, friends, housing conditions, income, city, country, etc.)” (Czapiński, 1992, p. 192). We may assume that the models of happiness presented by the media will affect the peripheral layer of the onion.

From a sociological point of view, happiness can be defined as a value, a mood/emotion, or an idea/concept. Happiness as an idea includes social values and public moods, cognitive and emotional elements. Happiness can be considered from different perspectives: micro (happiness of the individual) or macro (happiness of the nation). Discussing the human condition of modern man, Anna Drabarek (2011, p. 71) differentiates three different strains of happiness in our culture – concerning the fight for survival and the strive for pleasure, the need for self-development and self-fulfillment, and finally the metaphysical and spiritual. When she asked her students what kind of recipes for happiness the media present in our century, they replied that it all boiled down to promoting participation in “the rat race” (ibid., p. 64). Happiness was defined as success. Meanwhile the media present also ideas of happiness and “a good life” other than success. We will have a closer look at these ideas in the following.

⁵ The Polish word for happiness – „*szczęście*” – can also mean „good luck”.

3. HAPPINESS AS A VALUE

Happiness as an emotion is known to all cultures of the world (Kemper, 1987, Ekman, 1973, Ekman, Friesen, 1971, 1975, quoting from: Turner, Stets, 2009). However, not in all cultures it constitutes a social value, as shown in research by Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener (2010). In Western culture it is deemed natural to pay attention to emotions. The inhabitants of a Kenyan village, however, consider deeds far more important than emotions.

What is happiness as a value? Polish sociologist Jan Szczepański defines values as “(...) any material or immaterial goods, ideas or institutions, existing or imagined, that individuals or groups hold in high esteem, consider an important part of their lives, and feel under pressure to obtain (...)” (Szczepański, 1965, p. 58). Stanisław Ossowski (1967) differentiates between accepted and felt values. The former depend on the cultural context, and it is these values that are propagated in the mass media and handed on in the process of socialization. Accepted values are based on convictions. Some people may experience these different kinds of values as conflicting (e.g. the eudaemonic and hedonistic types of happiness). In terms of autotelic values (having a purpose in and not apart from itself) happiness would be leading a purposeful, good and moral life. Happiness as a desired state of affairs can be counted among values/aims such as love or peace.

Experienced happiness is defined in categories of emotion and satisfaction with life. This is also the way the term is understood in the *European Values Survey* (e.g. Jasinska-Kania, 2004). Worldwide research on values considers happiness as a social value. In Ronald Inglehart's *World Value Survey* the “Survival and Well-Being” scale ranges from “no happiness” to “satisfaction with life”. Lack of happiness (satisfaction with life) is typical for traditional societies, in which the main aim of life is self-preservation. In postindustrial societies well-being and satisfaction with life is considered more important. Inglehart presents a macrosociological concept of happiness reflecting the social changes connected with the move from industrial to postindustrial society. As Inglehart and his team point out, the role of freedom becomes more important as societies advance, becoming an increasingly important determinant of well-being.

Important correlates of happiness on the social plane are the level of democracy, religious and ideological beliefs, and the tolerance of differentness. “It is striking that the post-communist countries are the world region most strongly characterized by the fight for survival” (Boski, 2009, p. 250). The reason for this is seen in the destruction of social confidence and the release of cynicism caused by communism. Looking at Polish society and history, we find the lowest rates of satisfaction with life during the communist era. In those days an important variety of happiness was hope. Leon Dyczewski (2002) used the term *hope in spite of hopelessness* as a value characteristic for Polish culture. The situation changed in the years of transformation, and today much higher rates of satisfaction with life can be measured. As illustrated by the table below, the number of Poles considering themselves happy almost doubled from 1988 to 2011.

Let us have a look at what importance is placed on happiness in Polish value studies. Such studies have been regularly conducted since the 1980s by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) on a representative selection of Poles. The respondents have been asked to point out the importance of different values in their life: good health, happy family life, honesty, the respect of other people, peace and quiet, the welfare of the country, friendships, work, freedom of speech, education, religious faith, participation in the democratic process, participation in cultural life, material wealth, an exciting lifestyle, success/fame. Most Poles consider all or most of these values important. In order to establish the most important values, the respondents were asked to point out the three values they consider most important. The top two turned out to be happy family life (84%) and good health (74%), followed by honesty (23%), peace and quiet (20%), work (18%), religious faith (17%), the respect of other people (13%), education, and friendships (10% each) (CBOS, 2010b, pp. 6-7). The remaining values (the

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welfare of the country, material wealth, freedom of speech, an exciting lifestyle, participation in cultural life, participation in the democratic process, success/fame) were considered most important by less than 10% of respondents. Happy family life had also topped the list in the survey carried out in 2005. More details are presented in table 2.

Table 1. Changes in the happiness of Poles

Do you consider yourself a happy or an unhappy person?	Happy	Neither nor	Unhappy
1988	18%	65%	16%
2009	33%	51%	16%
2011	34%	55%	11%

Source: data collected from CBOS. (2010) *Poles about their Satisfaction with Life*, Warsaw, p. 3; CBOS. (2012) *Satisfaction with Life*, Warsaw, p.1.

Table 2. The hierarchy of values in Polish society (in %)

Values	2005	2010
Happy family life	84	84
Good health	69	74
Honesty	23	23
Peace and quiet	20	20
Work	23	18
Religious faith	19	17
The respect of other people	11	13
Education	13	10
Friendships	7	10
The welfare of the country	8	7
Material wealth	11	5
Freedom of speech	3	4
An exciting lifestyle	3	2
Participation in cultural life	1	1
Participation in the democratic process	1	1
Success/fame	0	1

Source: data collected from CBOS. (2010b) *What is Important? What is Permissible and What Not? – Norms and Values in the Lives of Poles*, Warsaw, p. 7.

Surveys about values generally show that the most important of them are family, work and material wealth (CBOS, 2010a). For the average Poles the most important things giving meaning to life are a happy family life, a job you enjoy, human trust and friendship, love, and a peaceful life without surprises (CBOS, 2009). A happy family life is considered more important among women (44%) than men (35%) (CBOS, 2010a, p. 6), which is probably due to traditional sex roles. Attempts to establish a hierarchy of values through surveys show that prosocial values (e.g. happy family life, honesty, the respect of other people, the welfare of the country) dominate over hedonistic values and self-fulfillment (e.g. material wealth, an exciting lifestyle, success/fame) (CBOS, 2009, p. 2, CBOS, 2010b, p. 15). However, in a critical analysis of each of these values, Ewa Budzyńska comes to the conclusion that "(...) the decisive factor for the survival of any values, even the most noble ones, is their instrumentality towards the goal of a prosperous, healthy and happy life, i.e. our own selfish interests" (Budzyńska, 2008, p. 47).

Happiness always includes several other values. Every type of happiness takes reference to a different set of values. For eudaemonists values like honesty and family values are important. Hedonists in turn prize pleasure, money, freedom, liberty, intoxicants. In the *Social Diagnosis* Poles mainly declare eudaemonic values. However, we need to remember that common belief not always differentiates between pleasant and good. As noticed by many researchers, elements of hedonism and eudaemonism often overlap (Waterman, Schwartz, Conti, Bauer, McAdams, Pals, quoting from Deci, Ryan, 2008, p.3). In practical terms, whenever you achieve an important goal, whatever altruistic, you may experience a feeling of joy, i.e. pleasure for yourself.

According to CBOS research, the satisfaction with life in Polish society is gradually rising ever since 1993, rendering the stereotype of the "ever-complaining" Pole obsolete (CBOS, 2008). However, the likeliness of a respondent declaring himself a happy person clearly depends on his social status. Factors that appear to promote happiness are higher education (69% of university degree holders consider themselves happy), a good job (62% of management staff and over 50% of lower rank white collar workers), an average income of over 1200 PLN per household member, young age (age-group 25-34), material wealth, and big city life (CBOS, 2008). According to the *Social Diagnosis* the most important factors of well-being are social relations (marriage, friendships) and age (with older people generally in a worse psychological state) (Czapiński, 2009).

Ideas of happiness less accepted in philosophical and sociological literature are mainly those associated with the hedonistic model, such as excessive consumption, the rejection of spirituality and morality (e.g. Bauman, 2009). His book *The Art of Life* starts out from the philosophical question what is wrong with happiness, put forward by Michel Rustin. His answer boils down to the demonstration that affluent societies do not always boast more happy people than poorer countries. As Bauman points out, "in consumer society we are happy as long as we do not lose hope of achieving happiness; as long as we have hope we do not fall into depression" (Bauman, 2009, p. 32). He appears very convincing in his diagnosis that "(...) we all suffer from a painful lack of solid and suitable points of reference as well as reliable and credible leaders" (ibid., p. 154). Maybe not all of us, but many of us.

4. CONCEPTS OF HAPPINESS IN THE MEDIA

4.1. Outline

Scientists working in the field of communication have been conducting research on the impact of the mass media for years (McQuail, 2007). Among these there have been analyses carried out on the influence of watching TV on subjective well-being and our assessment of the quality of our lives (e.g. Morgan, 1984). Earlier research has to my knowledge focused mainly on the presentation of social problems (e.g. poverty, unemployment) in the media. Apart from the field of advertising (e.g. Belk

and Pollay, 1985), no analyses have been done on the concepts of happiness and social well-being presented in the media. The aim of this article is to give an overview of how these concepts are presented in analytic articles and texts popularizing science in the opinion-forming press.

The method chosen for my research was qualitative content analysis. Subjects of my analysis have been articles dealing with the concept of happiness from national opinion-forming newspapers and magazines. Among others, my sources were *Gazeta Wyborcza* (a daily newspaper with one of the highest circulations in Poland) and the popular magazines *Polityka*, *Newsweek*, and *Forum*. The latter is of particular interest, as it is a magazine publishing reprinting the most interesting articles from the world press. The concepts of happiness presented there are rooted in different cultures and thus constitute a point of reference for the analysis of articles dealing with Polish society. A special issue of the magazine *Polityka* completely dedicated to the topic of happiness and subjective well-being has been considered separately. Another source was the popular science psychological magazine *Charaktery*. The characteristics of all publications selected for this study have been summarized in table 3.

Tabela 3. Characteristics of the analyzed publications

	<i>Gazeta Wyborcza</i>	<i>Polityka</i>	<i>Newsweek</i>	<i>Forum</i>	<i>Charaktery</i>	The Art of Good Living (Psychological supplement to <i>Polityka</i>)
Published since	1989	1957	2001	1965	2001	
Years of publication of the selected articles	2011	2009-2011	2009-2011	2010-January 2012	2011	May 2010
Number of articles analyzed	11	4	13	9	23	27

The study covers the years 2009-2012 and focuses on contemporary concepts of happiness. The questions raised are the following: What is the role of the media in creating our ideas of happiness? How is happiness presented in the media (what is written about and how, what kind of data and authorities are quoted)? Is happiness something we want to or have to achieve? What equivalents of happiness are there? Does happiness constitute an important concept in the Polish media? What correlations exist between scientific research on happiness and subjective well-being and the way these concepts are presented in the media?

4.2. The Role of the Media in Creating Our Ideas of Happiness

The role of the mass media in creating our ideas of happiness is complex, among others due to the great variety of media, differing both in form and in profile. Happiness is a classic theme of literature, art, and film. And though this article is focusing on the printed press, we should also bear in mind the new media, allowing everybody to voice their views and opinions in public (e.g. the internet). On one hand, the internet allows us to publicly comment on any kind of event or social topic. On the other hand, it allows for the creation of social groups around common interests. On the topic of happiness

interesting texts can be found on themed blogs. To get the broadest possible picture of different ideas of happiness, however, it is still worthwhile to focus on the press. Analyzing the socio-political press we get a picture of how the concept of happiness functions in different social contexts, beyond the life of the individual. The psychological press in turn concentrates on satisfaction with life in the dimension of the individual.

From a first overview of the material we can conclude, that articles on the subject of happiness and well-being usually make references to scientific research, and thus contribute to the popularization of science. A popular subject are surveys about satisfaction from life and happiness, such as for instance rankings of countries according to the level of well-being. The authors also draw from the works of leading philosophers and psychologists. Their texts are usually illustrated with big color photographs of mainly esthetic value.

The issue of happiness is taken up by the media on different occasions. In several cases it even became the lead topic of whole magazine issues under headlines such as “Where to find happiness?” (*Newsweek*, 26 Dec. 2010), “Unbelievable! Poles are Happy!” (*Polityka*, 13-19 July 2011), “Feet Firm on the Ground, Head up in the Clouds” (*Polityka*, 23 April 2011) or “The Art of Good Living” (Psychological supplement to *Polityka*, May 2010). In the case of the first magazine, the context for the topic were the upcoming holidays of Christmas and New Year. In the second case the topic was initiated by the publication of the results of the *Social Diagnosis* project (a Polish survey on living standards and quality of life in Poland carried out by Janusz Czapiński). In the third case in turn the inspiration for the lead topic was the Easter holidays. We can conclude that reflections on the topic of happiness in the media are triggered either by religious holidays or new results of scientific research.

As socio-political and psychological magazines belong to different genres of the media, we will consider them separately. We will first have a look at the concepts of happiness found in socio-political magazines, and then proceed to the analysis of those in psychological magazines.

4.3. The Concept of Happiness in Socio-Political Magazines

4.3.1. The „Tyranny of Happiness”

Public discourse in the Polish media has recently brought forward the idea of a “compulsion to be happy”. It was discussed in a lecture of Zbigniew Mikołajko in the TV documentary series “What do You Know about Philosophy?” produced in 2012 by *TVP Kultura* in cooperation with the National Cultural Center. Mikołajko claims that we live in a “tyranny of happiness” dominated by a new species he calls *homo ludens* or “fun man”. Two articles in *Forum* (“Condemned to Joy”, 16-22 Jan. 2012) and *Gazeta Wyborcza* (“Happiness is Hell”, 2 May 2011) present similar views in their discussion of excessive optimism and “the hell of happiness”. In both cases we are dealing with reprints of articles by the French writer, essayist and philosopher Pascal Bruckner from the magazine *City Journal*.

What is it that constitutes the “tyranny of happiness”? It is the duty, rather than the right, to be happy, the norm of consumption, rather than thriftiness, and constant extension of our needs, rather than their restriction, the idea of self-realization and our individual responsibility for it (“if I don’t feel happy, I can blame no one but myself.”), the obsession with health and longevity, and last but not least, the ideology of going after your goals whatever the price. As Bruckner puts it, “sadness is the disease of a society of obligatory well-being that penalizes those who do not attain it. Happiness is no longer a matter of chance or a heavenly gift, an amazing grace that blesses our monotonous days. We now owe it to ourselves to be happy, and we are expected to display our happiness far and wide” (“Happiness is Hell”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2 May 2011). Bruckner’s ideas are basically a criticism of the hedonistic concept of happiness, as the “tyranny of happiness” is concerned mainly with the sphere of pleasure. Bruckner calls for a “renewed humility”, based on the acceptance of human finitude. As he

points out: “We are not the masters of the sources of happiness; they ever elude the appointments we make with them (...)” (“Condemned to Joy”, *Forum*, 16-22 Jan. 2012, p. 24).

Gazeta Wyborcza later published a reader’s letter replying to its article “Happiness is Hell”, titled “Alternatives for Happiness – A Letter” (*Gazeta wyborza*, 27 May 2011), by Eugeniusz Suchorypa. He begins his letter stating that “happiness without doubt is the one value our modern world is much in need of” (ibid.) As he writes, “Not only Bruckner’s essay, but also the beatification of John Paul II, the joyful anniversary of the Constitution of May 3rd, and simply spring time inspire reflection on the rat race for happiness” (ibid.). The author agrees with Bruckner’s idea of a “tyranny of happiness”. To maintain our social position, we have to be happy. “And thus we stand in the antechambers of hell – a hell called ‘happiness’. You have to, you must, you are obliged to be happy. The unhappy man is a lesser species, an outcast, a loser” (ibid.). The concept of the compulsion to be happy is contrasted with traditional Polish pessimism: “We never used to be those who knew to be happy. We used to specialize in messianism, self-sacrifice, suffering for the sake of the masses... This post-divisional, post-romantic, post-communist ideology of martyrdom suited us for many decades. And it still has a powerful grip on many of us, as can be observed in our political landscape – I have in mind our anti-Russian and anti-German sentiments frequently surfacing in the political ideas of the Law and Justice Party” (ibid.). Suchorypa points out that in contrast to traditional pessimism modern Poland shows quite a different face: “We now want to show the world our happy face, our joy and feeling of fulfillment. Our times are the heyday of self-creation and self-presentation” (ibid.). The source of the compulsion to be happy is seen in the axionormative dimension: “How is the ‘hell of happiness’ created? Where does the compulsion to be happy come from? It is the result of the collapse of ideals and values, the result of secularization and the experience that ‘Earthly paradise is here where I am’” (ibid.). The solution to the problem – just as its source – lies in the sphere of norms and social values: “What I have in mind is that the pursuit of happiness should be mainly a search for spiritual enrichment, inner beauty and harmony with the world, driven by the need to understand the people among whom we live” (ibid.).

The idea of a compulsion to be happy is likewise taken up in the article “Counting over Our Happiness We Lose Our Happiness” (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2 May 2011) by Jarosław Makowski. He defines the “tyranny of happiness” as the compulsion to make the most of our time – along the lines of the motto “time is money”. Happiness defined as the aim in a race for profit and efficiency is the child of “fast-track capitalism” (Ben Agger). The author argues that the “cult of activism” is not really the road to happiness. He refers to essays by the American philosopher Henry David Thoreau, according to whom happiness is achieved through wisdom, a “cult of thought”, and not work, money, profit and economic growth measured in GNP.

We can conclude that the concept of a “tyranny of happiness” reveals hedonistic happiness and haste as anti-values, as opposed to eudaemonic happiness and reflection.

4.3.2. Advice Books’ Illusions of Happiness

Related to the concept of the compulsion to be happy is the concept of false happiness, i.e. literary illusions of happiness. In Poland, just like in the West, there is a great market for advice books addressed to women, handing out recipes for a happy and fulfilled life. Justyna Sobolewska discusses them in her article “Recipes for Happiness in Literature and Film” (*Polityka*, 2 Oct. 2010), summing them up as follows in her opening paragraph: “Bestseller lists are becoming crowded with books giving simple recipes for happiness – happiness that takes no effort to achieve. It is good to have some money, but if you don’t, you just have to forgive yourself” (ibid.). Elizabeth Gilbert’s book *Eat, Pray, Love* gained great popularity in Poland. Sobolewska, however, does not count it in as an advice book, considering it just an interesting, humorous story of an independent modern woman who is looking for happiness in different places and different spheres of life. Gilbert’s second book, *Committed*, however,

is just like a handbook for happy marital life. According to Sobolewska, books like this are written from the perspective of the enlightened master. Another novelist she counts into the category of advice book writers is the Brazilian author Paulo Coelho. As Sobolewska notes, "(...) according to Coelho happiness does not require any efforts or complicated and arduous practices. Spiritual life is as easy to get by as a meal from McDonalds" (ibid.) The Polish recipe for happiness presented in women's literature (like the books of Małgorzata Kalicińska or Katarzyna Grochola) is not a trip around the world but the escape from the big city to the countryside – building a house in some nice place like the Mazurian lake district, cultivating Polish traditions and family values. Generally, recipes for happiness from women's literature are full of easy solutions and shortcuts to happiness that just not everybody can take. The popularity of these books is not founded in the practicality of their advice but in the pleasure of reading, giving us a chance to relax in the world of dreams and fantasy.

Leszek Bugajski discusses the worldwide fashion for books about idyllic places and renovating old houses in the Provence or Tuscany in his article "Under the Sun of Paradise" (*Newsweek*, 26 July 2009). As he claims, the power of these books lies in their simplicity, being basically "joyful stories about an outsider becoming part of the community. They are just a modern version of the most basic, elementary story ever told" (ibid., p. 77).

4.3.3. *The Culture of Complaining and Optimism*

The socio-political press eagerly takes up discussions on how happy Poles are compared to the rest of the world. Depending on the methods of measuring well-being, Poland scores differently in different rankings (Marcin Jankowski, "Happiness in Times of Crisis", *Newsweek*, 22 March 2009), but in general Poles come out as a people of "average satisfaction" with life.

On a national scale, journalists from *Gazeta Wyborcza* used data from the *Social Diagnosis* in a series of articles searching to establish the happiest and the unhappiest city in Poland. One of the articles, titled "Proud Herrings" (Magdalena Grzebałkowska, Dorota Karaś, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 5 Nov. 2011), reported from the port city of Gdynia, where 41% of the population declared to like their city and enjoy living there. Another article, "Radom – A City in Depression" by Sywlia Szwed and Agnieszka Wójcińska (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 29 Oct. 2011), was centered on the city at the other end of the scale, where only 1% of inhabitants is very satisfied with life in their city. The journalists, however, did not take into consideration intermediate answers like "satisfied" (43%) or "quite satisfied" (35%). The article sparked protests from internet users who disagreed with the thesis of Radom being a city of unhappy people. The journalists themselves concluded their article with a small counter-survey: "We talked to 25 people. 20 of them claimed to be happy in Radom, 2 declared to be unhappy, and 3 that they accustomed themselves" (ibid.). Unfortunately both articles considerably simplify the results of the scientific research presented in the *Social Diagnosis*, concentrating on selected cities only and ignoring the data from other towns and cities. The authors also avoid the subject of happiness being less dependent on where you live than who you are.

Some of the articles present a very positive picture of Poland as compared to other countries. "As an EU member Poland has speeded up the process of recovery from its communist past and is clearly benefiting a lot. The country comes first among the countries with higher than average incomes (...)" (Rana Foroohar, "The Best Place Under the Sun", *Newsweek*, 29 Aug. 2010, p. 54). A similar conclusion is found in yet another article: "Almost two thirds of Poles are satisfied with their lives. That is the best result in Europe. Such were the results of the unpublished *Philips Index 2010* survey carried out in 23 countries" (Marcin Marczak, "Happy as a Pole", *Newsweek*, 28 Nov. 2010, p. 6). The greatest source of satisfaction is, according to the data, family life. The Poles rank high in this ranking, because, as sociologist Jacek Wasilewski sees it, "the younger generations get their voice – those 40 years old or younger, who do not suffer from complexes, find work abroad, and fulfill their ambitions" (ibid.). Apart from that "Poles have a different point of reference, as they remember the joyless reality

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of communist days” (ibid.). Similar opinions are voiced in the article “You’re Better off Smiling”, an interview of Dariusz Wilczak with psychologist Krystyna Skarzyńska (*Newsweek*, 26 July 2009). In Skarzyńska’s opinion, “we stop feeling like helpless victims, we start to notice and appreciate our own strength and competence” (ibid, p. 40). The feeling of individual resourcefulness is on the rise. „Research reveals that ever more people are satisfied with themselves, and readily show off their satisfaction. It is not that long ago that we were afraid to admit we were happy” (ibid., p. 42). Janusz Czapiński points out that “never since the beginning of these surveys have Poles been as happy, as satisfied with their lives” (Renata Grochal, “Poles are Satisfied in spite of the Crisis”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 14 July 2011). “Most Poles are satisfied with their lives, though we still have a long way to go to catch up with the living standards of Western Europe. We are among the greatest optimists among the post-communist countries – according to research carried out by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the World Bank” (Leszek Baj, “Most Poles are Satisfied with their Lives”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2 July 2011). In another article, the same news is reported in a more skeptical tone: “It is a miracle – according to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Poles are the happiest and most optimistic people in Europe. We have least suffered from the crisis and see the brightest future for our children” (Seweryn Blumsztajn, “Exchanging a Tent for the Presidency”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 1 July 2011).

Poles see themselves as happy people in the private sphere, but complain about the public sphere (e.g. about politics or health care). It has frequently been reported, if often with disbelief, that we are “a bit happier recently” (an improvement in well-being among Poles has been evident in nationwide surveys ever since 1989) or that we “ceased to be a nation of complainers”, and that satisfaction with life is much more common than the media would make us believe.

An investigation into consumer behavior carried out by the company Henkel in 10 European countries found that Poles in comparison to other nations are “carefree consumers” and that they “display extreme reactions to the state of the economy – either falling into depression or getting carried away by hooray-optimism” (Joanna Solska, “Poles are Sort of Different”, *Polityka*, 19-25 Oct. 2011). The reasons for these strong reactions of Polish consumers as compared to other Europeans is seen in the therapeutic function of shopping and distrust in psychotherapists. Fast economic growth is often accompanied by stress, which does not show in the GNP. To replace the dominant role of the GNP with another index, e.g. the level of satisfaction with life, we would have to learn to be happy without money. “So far we are not getting there”, concludes the author, Joanna Solska.

The theme of Polish materialism is also discussed in the interview of Jacek Żakowski with Janusz Czapiński “Life is Good” (*Polityka*, 19-25 Oct. 2011). According to Czapiński “our living standard is still the decisive factor in our satisfaction with life. We are still radical materialists. (...) In this model of self-fulfillment there will always be too little money. This makes us different from most developed countries and is something we have in common with poor societies. Our material ambitions are still much greater than our possibilities” (ibid., p. 19).

The picture we get of the happiness of Poles is distorted by media and politicians alike (politicians from both the opposition and the ruling party). This claim is put forward in Mariusz Janicki and Wiesław Władyk’s article “The Worse, the Better” (*Polityka*, 3-9 August 2011) in the magazine’s issue titled “The Pessimists’ Club – Why Politicians and Media Make Us Loathe Reality”. “The satisfied part of society – that majority of happy Poles revealed by Czapiński’s survey – does not have a political party to represent them, a party which could channel their optimism into civil mechanisms, a new social force. The vitality of whole social groups is banned to the private sphere so as not to disturb the ‘good unhappy citizens’” (ibid., p. 17).

In spite of favorable surveys that point towards the creation of a culture of success in Poland and optimistic declarations of Polish experts, the stereotype of the ever-complaining Pole is still alive

abroad. As an example we may quote from an article by Gerhard Gnauck in the newspaper *Die Welt* (reprint in *Forum* under the title “Success – It Gets You Worried”, 11-17 July, p. 4-5). The inspiration for the article was the Polish EU presidency, and its first sentence went: “Poland is a terrible country. At least that is what the Poles say.” (p. 4). Poles complain about bureaucracy, the state railway system, prices like in the West, and the inefficient healthcare system. “Reasons for complaint are also given by politicians, idiots, loutish behavior in public places, and road hogs – with or without cars” (ibid.). One paragraph further we read: “Everybody is complaining, wringing their hands or shrugging their shoulders in resignation” (ibid.). Many opt for emigration (e.g. thousands of young people have left for the British Isles). But just a few lines on, the author reminds us of the words of the Polish writer Andrzej Stasiuk, who said that the purpose of the Polish language was to paint the world blacker than it actually is. He also points out that all over the world Poland is generally regarded as an example for a successful transformation. Meanwhile “the inhabitants of the country between Oder and Bug, Baltic Sea and Tatra Mountains stare at you in disbelief when you tell them of their country’s great potential” (p. 5). Comparing this text to the remaining articles analyzed, we have to find that Gnauck ignores the changes in the way Poles think and feel about their country documented in scientific research clearly pointing towards a rise in optimism and satisfaction with life.

4.3.4. *The Art of Good Living – Personal Happiness as a Value*

The concept of happiness in the eudaemonic sense is closely related to the idea of a sense of life. The question of a sense of life was the theme of the Easter edition of *Polityka*, headlining “Feet Firm on the Ground, Head up in the Clouds”, featuring among others an interview with the philosopher Tadeusz Gadacz outlining his thoughts on the subject. He states that “throughout life we have to learn life” (p.16). We have to learn the skills that allow us to give our life a meaning. Life becomes meaningful if we set ourselves goals to achieve. Among these we can count things like being a good person, living “for somebody” and not “for something”. He warns the readers not to “waste their whole life on furnishing their life” (p. 19). He says that everybody has to find his own way to self-fulfillment.

The recipe for happiness outlined on the cover of supplement to *Polityka* “The Art of Good Living” reads: “Look for Happiness within yourself, find it in everyday life, love, work, build with foresight, see and create beauty!”

Both poverty and excessive wealth are dangers to happiness. “The worst advice you can get from life is from poverty or from great prosperity, when you make money just for the sake of money. The best situation in life is when there is still something to look forward to, at least some degree of non-fulfillment” (Prof. Roman Kubicki, “Non-Fulfillment”, an interview by Łukasz Długowski, “The Art of Good Living”, p. 106). The strategy of maximization – aiming at possessing the best of everything – does not take us to happiness at all.

Positive psychology is a strong worldwide current in psychology underlining the possibility of teaching yourself optimism and developing your character strength. Its critics among others denounce it for “ripping away the very secret of what it means to be human” (Stanisław Porczyk in “The Art of Good Living”, p. 15).

Sometimes love is considered more important than happiness. In his article “Gross National Happiness”, Krzysztof Szymborski writes: “Should therefore happiness be our ultimate aim in life? The Indian guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar gives quite a reasonable answer, insisting that love is more important than happiness” (*Polityka*, 24 January 2009). The article criticizes the GNP and other methods of measuring prosperity and social progress for all being restricted to certain aspects and really saying little about the individual’s quality of life.

All in all socio-political magazines discuss different ideas of happiness, covering both the hedonism (usually in a more critical tone) and eudaemonism, the happiness of the nation and the individual. The press draws inspiration from scientific research and lends space to the opinions of psychologists, philosophers and sociologists. Readers' opinions appear only as reactions to published articles. Research on happiness is given much importance.

4.4. Concepts of a Happy Life and Human Happiness in the Magazine Charaktery

4.4.1. Well-Being Takes both Joy and Sadness

The idea of the importance of happiness takes reference to its function. As the inventor of the concept of flow, Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, writes, "understanding the sources of human happiness, hope, and energy has become very important in our times. Technological progress is rapidly changing the environment in which people slowly evolved throughout the history of their species. Now that our actions may easily destroy life on Earth, the understanding of what motivates us to act and what holds us back becomes indispensable" ("Flow and Smile", *Charaktery*, 2011, 9, p. 48).

From a psychological point of view, a value more important than happiness is health, and a healthy person will naturally be happy at times, and sad at others. You have to find happiness within yourself. The psychological magazine is promoting the idea of learning to cultivate positive emotions even in difficult times of your life. In the magazine's readers' mail we can find examples for this, like the story of the bereaved mother recovering from mourning her daughter, told in a letter entitled "Happiness in Spite of All".

An interesting observation is, that the magazine even takes the classic autumn theme of sadness and depression as an inspiration for reflections about happiness. The November issue of *Charaktery* headlined "Sometimes Sadness Suits You Well". The issue turns an appreciative eye on various emotions, including both sadness and joy. "When we are suffering the blues, we should always remember, that without sadness there would be no joy. We would not be able to appreciate anything good or pleasant" (Agnieszka Chrzanowska, "Emotions in the Colors of Autumn", *Charaktery*, 2001, 11, p. 25). A similar view is taken in the article "And Anne's Always Smiling..." by Adriana Klos: "All emotions are necessary and valuable. It is natural that at times we are sad, we have a bad day, something does not work out, or somebody makes us angry. We do not have to hide our needs and our feelings to please others" (*Charaktery*, 2011, 12, p. 78-80). We find information about the usefulness of sadness, which is not the same as depression, and how to live a long and happy life. To achieve happiness we have to appreciate different positive emotions (some spontaneous, some born from reflection). That is the conclusion the Polish psychologists Maria Jarymowicz and Dorota Jasielska find in their article "Perfect Bliss" (*Charaktery*, 2011, 11, p. 74).

A characteristic feature of the analyzed magazine are its references to individual experiences of its readers. For instance, the editors asked their readers to send them a list of 15 things which help them to quickly improve their mood. These lists would usually included the readers' favorite activities as well as their favorite foods.

4.4.2. Correlates of Happiness

Happiness is conceived both as an emotion and as a component of the meaning of life. As the French writer and philosopher Jean D'Ormesson puts it: "We are in the world to love, to be happy, to swim in the sea, to take a walk in the forest. Maybe we are also here to achieve great things or to enjoy beauty. Maybe. But the main goal of our lives is to die" ("That Crazy Thing Called Hope", fragment from the book *C'est une chose étrange à la fin que le monde*, in *Charaktery*, 2011, 11, p. 121). He sees hope in religious faith. "Everybody lives as they please. But I do hope after death there is something of which I do not know. I hope that beyond time there exists a force that for lack of other names and for

simplicity's sake we may call God" (ibid.). A different article presents the conclusion of an American survey carried out by David Myers, according to whom "religiously active people are happier than non-religious people" (*The Religion Paradox*, p. 45).

Happy people tend to appreciate their own lives without comparing themselves to others. As the American researchers Diener and Diener put it, "If you want to make choices that lead you to happiness, just follow your heart, do not try to establish each time the best of all choices by analyzing them all, consider each choice for itself and not by comparison to other possible choices. Find a good parking space and take it – do not waste your life driving around the car park looking for the best parking space ever" (Ed Diener, Robert Biswas-Diener, "Happiness by Mere Chance", *Charaktery*, 2011, 2, p. 56). Happiness is caused by positive changes to which we pay great attention, which we appreciate, and which involve our engagement. Thus for example we can find happiness through "a new car, a new wife, a new sport" (Kennon M. Sheldon, "When Your New Wife Makes You Happy", *Charaktery*, 2011, 2, p. 55).

According to the article "How to Live a Long and Happy Life" (Howard S. Friedman, Leslie R. Martin, *Charaktery*, 2001, 11, p. 56-59) based on the research of *The Longevity Project*, started in 1921 and still running, the clue to happiness is in an intense, meaningful and engaged life, good relations with your fellow human beings, an engaged professional career, and a loving family. It points out that "happiness, health and longevity usually go together" (Leslie Martin, ibid., p. 58). Thoroughness is a character trait that helps you live longer.

Lovers tend to be happy. A happy relationship, as experts point out, can involve conflicts – the trick is to dissolve them adeptly. Happy couples are formed by people who are involved in their relationship, able to control their emotions, show empathy, know how to see the world through their partners' eyes (Katarzyna Growiec, "Together for Good", 2011, 11, p. 30-33). On one hand, people in a stable relationship are happy. On the other hand, when the relationship falls apart, it turns out, that happiness lies in a person's character and not in the relationship (from readers' letters, "Catch Every Moment" and "Look for Happiness within Yourself", *Charaktery*, 2011, 7, p. 7 and 6, p. 97).

On the national level, happiness is discussed in the light of the findings of CBOS surveys and the *Social Diagnosis*, in articles like "We Complain Ever Less" (*Charaktery*, 2001, 5, p. 9), "Poles are Satisfied even in Times of Crisis" (*Charaktery*, 2011, 8, p. 11). As opposed to the socio-political press, the authors of *Charaktery* understand happiness as a correlate of personality rather than place of residence ("In the Land of Happiness", *Charaktery*, 2011, 6, p. 13).

4.4.3. Illusions of Happiness

Happiness in the sense of psychical well-being is very important. However, at times people are lead astray by illusions of happiness. Living in an "illusion of paradise", some people concentrate too much on everything positive, and become unable to realize any negative aspects of things. Others in turn suffer from an "illusion of hopelessness", seeing only the negative aspects of their situation (Diener, Biswas-Diener). Another make-believe is "selling smiles" as a strategy to manipulate the emotions of others (Tomasz Maruszewski, "Selling Smiles", *Charaktery*, 2011, 10, p. 75). There is some research pointing to a negative effect of a positive mood on decision making. "As shown by Alice Isen and her team's research, we process information more superficially when we are in a positive mood, do not take into account negative consequences of our decisions, and tend to take greater risks" (ibid.).

In the analyzed texts we also find the idea of an illusion of happiness created by the media. They make us believe, for example, that we have to be slim in order to be happy and to advance in society. Losing weight, however, does not solve your problems, as the author of an article on obesity observes (Dorota Krzemionka, "Have Courage To Live", *Charaktery*, 2011, 6, p. 23).

As opposed to the socio-political magazines, the analyzed articles from *Charaktery* largely avoid topics like the culture of complaining, national optimism, rankings of countries where “life is good”, the idea of a “tyranny of happiness” or the criticism of advice books. Happiness and positive emotions are seen as something worth learning, but it is pointed out that sadness is a necessary emotion as well. We are told to look for happiness within ourselves and not in the outside world. An important ability is to enjoy life and be able to retrieve that joy even in difficult life situations.

5. CONCLUSION

Due to the complex and relative nature of happiness, it is difficult to give a straightforward answer to the question if happiness constitutes an important value for Polish society. From the analysis of articles from newspapers and magazines ensues that the answer depends on the concept of happiness we have in mind. Generally we can find the following kinds of advice: we need to/it is good to be happy, therefore we ought to do this or that; be optimistic, but moderately so; you cannot force your way to happiness. Hedonistic happiness frequently overlaps with eudaemonic happiness, as do material and spiritual values. Both academics and the press agree that interpersonal relations are an important source of happiness. Happiness can be found in love and in family life. Also altruistic values are important – to make others happy and share your happiness with them.

While in the West there are strong voices both in the press and in academic circles advocating the concept of a “tyranny of happiness” and warning of the consequences of excessive optimism, these ideas are given less attention in the Polish media. Polish society is still hungry for advice on how to be happy, as shown by the high demand for advice books and publications on positive psychology. Apart from that, as Janusz Mariański and Leon Smyczek point out, “changes in moral values and norms are shifting the focus from what we ought to do (duty) to self-development (self-realization) and often individualism. (...) Many Poles discard traditional ethics with universal criteria for good and evil, and embrace new ethics centered on the individual conscience or situational ethics” (Mariański, Smyczek, 2008, p. 7).

Another form of “tyranny of happiness”, in the sense of forcing emotions upon us, is hardly ever mentioned in the media, but easily observable in everyday life. In many spheres of life we are assessed not only by our skills demanded in the context, but also by our emotional skills. These assessments tend to be categorical – like or dislike, as promoted by the culture of social networking websites. People rarely ask themselves what is really important.

Happiness is treated as an important emotion, but equal to others, both positive and negative, in psychological magazines. In socio-political magazines, the topic of happiness is taken up occasionally. Both the questions of benefits as of dangers resulting from happiness are discussed.

In the analyzed texts, happiness and well-being are mainly discussed from the points of view of experts, doing research in the field, journalists, and writers. The readers’ points of view is less frequently taken into consideration.

The concepts of happiness presented by the media are often based on an incomplete and random presentation of scientific research, and centered on exterior conditions of happiness (e.g. looking for the “happiest place to live”) rather than inner dispositions (the character traits of an optimistic person).

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