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## „To Experience Happiness Is at 50 Percent a Matter of Genes“

Researcher on happiness Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: Motivation for creativity and working

*By Eva Stanzl*

**STANDARD:** *According to your „Flow“ theory man is happy when he is so absorbed by what he is doing that he forgets about his ego. Do the transmitting agents in our brains have the same effect, whether we are climbing or praying?*

Csikszentmihalyi: Nobody knows for sure. And it is not established either at what particular point of releasing transmitting agents does the feeling of happiness develop. Neurological tests suggest that the neurotransmitters always do the same. When we are climbing our goal is to concentrate strength, when we are praying we want to connect feelings with believing. The feeling of unity which unfolds then is the same, the only question is how we interpret it. At any rate, being happy is not only a physical feeling because certain chemicals decide which neurotransmitters start off.

**STANDARD:** *What is the difference between the happiness that comes from within and the one caused outside?*

Csikszentmihalyi: Happiness that originates outside is more transitory. You have to be able to attribute significance to a present in order to deem it lucky. For example, the Swiss started to appreciate their mountains only when Britons from Manchester looked for recuperation from the strain of the industrial revolution--and thus made money on tourism.

**STANDARD:** *Why are some people grumpy while others have a more cheerful disposition?*

Csikszentmihalyi: At 50% this is a matter of genes. Identical twins who grow up in different families will always resemble one another in this respect. Some people have a better capability to relate to information from the environment, whereas others have a nature of reacting defensively; and childhood, for that matter, causes the genetic basis to become stronger or weaker.

**STANDARD:** *Is the experience of happiness the meaning of life or the motivation?*

Csikszentmihalyi: Sigmund Freud committed an error when he thought that evolution programmed happiness in reproduction only. For wanting to be happy is a basic motivation. We have learned to enjoy many things that are vital for survival, e.g. sex, food and drink. But constructiveness, aesthetics, and creativity make us happy as well. You have to be able to get lost in what you are doing, without being conscious of it. After you have written a good story you feel happy. But while you are writing you only think of the story--a feeling of happiness would distract you. The happiness you experience afterwards motivates you to continue doing something you enjoy.

**PROFILE:**

*Hungarian born American researcher on happiness Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is professor of psychology at the University of Chicago and discovered the „Flow“ effect. He was among the speakers of the Waldzell Meeting this weekend in Melk.*