

People mean most for our collective happiness

October 7 2013, by Krister Svahn

Swedish soccer star Zlatan is associated with happiness, but not iPhones. A new study at the Sahlgrenska Academy and Lund University suggests that our collective picture of what makes us happy is more about relationships, and less about things.

News articles published online by Swedish dailies during 2010 were analyzed in the study. By analyzing which words most often occurred in the same articles as the Swedish word for happiness, the researchers could pinpoint our collective happiness.

"It's relationships that are most important, not material things, and this is in line with other findings in happiness research," says Danilo Garcia, researcher in psychology at the Sahlgrenska Academy's Centre for Ethics, Law and Mental Health.

One and a half million words

The article analysis, which embraces more than one and a half million words, shows that [words](#) like "Prince Daniel", "Zlatan", "grandmother" and personal pronouns (such as you/me, us/them) often appear with the Swedish word for happiness. Words like "iPhone", "millions" and "Google" on the other hand, almost never appear with the word for happiness.

"This doesn't mean that material things make you unhappy, just that they don't seem to come up in the same context as the word for happiness,"

says Danilo Garcia.

Larger research project

The study is a part of a larger research project on how people describe both positive and negative events in their lives. The researchers believe that the word analysis reflects a collective perception among the members of our society as to what should make us happy.

"Just as the Beatles sang, most people understand that money can't buy you happiness or love," says Danilo Garcia. "But even if we as individuals can understand the importance of close and warm relationships on a social level, it isn't certain that everyone is aware that such relationships are actually necessary for our own personal [happiness](#)."

The study: "A Collective Theory of Happiness: Words Related to the Word 'Happiness' in Swedish Online Newspapers" was published in the scientific periodical *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*.

More information: [online.liebertpub.com/doi/pdf/...
1089/cyber.2012.0535](http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/pdf/1089/cyber.2012.0535)

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