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ILLUSTRATION COVER: JEROEN MURRE

13 times science on happiness

P. 21 / SCIENCE DOSSIER

Happiness

"You don't have to be happy." My therapist's words are still ringing in my head. I was in my mid-twenties, and felt stuck in life. Insomnia was the biggest issue. My head seemed to have turned into a factory with assembly lines that never stopped. One of the things that went round and round in my head was: Why aren't I happy? And what should I do to become happy?

With her "you don't have to be happy", my therapist released all the pressure in one go. I'd simply never thought about it that way. I thought happiness was compulsory.

It's been a while now since my mid-twenties. But during the time spent separating my younger me from today's me, our society's focus on happiness has only increased. Everything is supposed to be fun. Everyone is supposed to be successful. Failure is for losers. If you're not happy, it's probably your own fault (you live in a wealthy country, and there's nothing wrong with your brain). For all of you who stumble in their journey towards happiness, I've got two pieces of advice.

Don't believe all those happy people

 they also feel bad and fail at times;
 they're just not talking about it.

 Read this *Vox*.
 Happy 2018!

Annemarie Haverkamp Editor-in-Chief Vox



@voxnieuws





Together with his father, medical student Niels Pesser has developed an anti-hangover pill: Zober! The pill promises to make that horrible morning-after feeling more bearable. You

take one pill for every drink you have in the evening. This will help you sleep better, and feel fresher the next morning, say the producers. Father and son spent four years perfecting their recipe. When the pill was launched on the market in mid-November, the Netherlands massively picked up on the news, and Zober! went completely viral. At its peak, the pill was selling at a rate of one box per minute. "We're quickly running through our stocks," says Pesser, "but with the holidays and Carnival coming up, we will of course increase production."

DULY NOTED

'Men and women experience pain differently and doctors should offer men and women different treatments for pain'

Contrary to what is generally assumed, women turn out to be more sensitive to pain than men, **Monique Steegers** told NU.nl on 30 November. This is one of the conclusions of the National Research Project on Pain conducted by Radboud university medical center.

IN THE NEWS



Thomas van Aquinostraat will soon be cleared out.

TvA The days of Thomas van Aquinostraat are numbered. After the Christmas holidays staff members of the Management Faculty will move to the newly renovated Gymnasion, renamed after American Elinor Ostrom. She was the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Economics and is now the first woman to have a Nijmegen Campus building named after her.

WC Cycling fans will soon be able to indulge to their heart's content once more. Although it's still sometime away, Nijmegen will be hosting the 2020 world championship in student cycling. Student Joost van Wijngaarden wrote the winning bid. It's not particularly surprising that Nijmegen was allocated the event since no other city had applied to the International University Sports Federation (FISU). Nijmegen also hosted the world championship in 2008.

Privacy Many lecturers send students their examination grades in the form of Excel sheets, with grades linked to student ID numbers. This way, students can see whether they passed a subject. But they can also see the grades of other students. In the University email system you can find out a student's name when you enter his or her student ID number. In response to questions from participatory bodies, the Executive Board has announced that it's absolutely forbidden to send grades as Excel sheets.

SRON In late November, Radboud University failed to attract the SRON Netherlands Institute for Space Research. The Nijmegen-Eindhoven joint-venture was one of four contenders for housing this prestigious institute, but we were beaten to it by Leiden-Delft and Amsterdam-Twente, the two remaining contenders. Professor of Astronomy Heino Falcke calls it a missed opportunity. He thinks it would have given the region a huge economic boost and Nijmegen could offer everything the SRON asked for. "It's hard to accept we didn't make it." **Catalogue** Radboud University is no longer the 'best broad, classical university' of the Netherlands. Groningen overtook Nijmegen in the *Higher Education Catalogue* ranking. For the past six years, Radboud University could boast this title, even though last year we had to share first position with Groningen. Nijmegen also lost its leading position in this year's Elsevier Ranking.

Escape room In April, an educational escape room will open its doors in the Erasmus Building cellar. Visitors are invited to assume the identities of Nijmegen students during the Second World War. We'll travel back in time to the spring of 1943, when the University was shut down because of conflicts with the occupying forces. Jozef van Hövell van Wezeveld en Westerflier, former President of Carolus Magnus, plays a key part as leader of the student resistance. Fundraiser Eelco Keij, who came up with the idea in collaboration with Radboud University historians, emphasises that the escape room is much more than a game. "It's a way to shed light on a vital moment in the history of the University."

Rise and shine! Starting next academic year, Radboud University lectures will start 15 minutes earlier, at 8.30 a.m. HAN University of Applied Sciences students, on the other hand, will get to spend 15 minutes longer in bed. Their lectures will begin at 9.00 a.m. The idea behind these changes is to spread the morning peak time more evenly. A big data study concluded that this was the best solution for the early morning rush.



Jozef van Hövell van Wezeveld en Westerflier

POEM

BISSELINK IS THE OFFICIAL CAMPUS POET THIS ACADEMIC YEAR. EACH MONTH HE WRITES A POEM (IN DUTCH) FOR VOX.

SANDER

Kerst in de kroeg

terwijl ik uit bierviltjes sneeuwvlokken knip proost je met de vaste klant aan het einde van de bar, hij is een zuiplap, werk- en vriendenloos maar vanavond niet alleen

normaal gesproken onderbreek ik je zodra je begint over hoe weinig er écht toe doet en hef mijn glas niet mee in de rookverwarmde lucht, iemand heeft bierviltjes op de beslagen ruiten geplakt

ik luister naar je toost, pinda's tussen tanden door bier gestilde handen, vrienden of klanten vier uur en vier liters verder merkt niemand het verschil

één keer in het jaar laten we elkaar uitpraten totdat gezegd is wat toch even gezegd moet worden buiten sneeuwt het dikke vlokken

Best day of 2017

"The day I found **a new place to li**ve. My landlord had unexpectedly kicked me out. Since I was sub-renting, there was nothing I could do about it. It looked like I would have to go back to my parents. Can't say they were particularly happy to hear it, ha ha! Luckily my mother likes to get involved. She called me up to ask whether I was interested in having a look at a house the next day. She'd just arranged it for me! Before I knew it I had a new place to live, only a street away from my old place. Nice and close to the centre."

Sophie Noordegraaf (30), works in the kitchen at the Refter



Welcome To the happiness university

There's no avoiding it this academic year: happiness is a hot topic. The theme pops up left and right all over campus. The question is: Does all this attention help? Can you increase your own happiness? Philosopher Hans Thijssen believes you can. "Happiness is the ultimate goal, it's what life's all about."

Text: Stijn Zunneberg / illustration: emdé

he percentage of happy students at Radboud University is lower than the national average: 72.2% as opposed to 88.7%. This is one of the findings of a study on student welfare conducted earlier this year. The study also shows that 25% of students "experience emptiness" and that one in five "misses having people around". Not to mention that more than half the students report suffering from stress.

The Executive Board is taking these findings seriously. Focus groups have been launched for students to talk about potential causes and solutions to their problems. "In Nijmegen, we don't just do teaching and research, we also care for each other," said Rector Han van Krieken in March. "Caring for each other is in our University's DNA."

Since then, happiness has been high on the University's agenda. It was the theme of the Opening of the Academic Year in September when a Radboud Happiness Platform was launched. Philosopher Hans Thijssen – who had been walking around with this idea for some time – was appointed happiness coordinator and organised a happiness course for students (for study credits). The question is: Is happiness something we can learn? Vox presented Thijssen with five statements.

1. Thinking about happiness doesn't make people happier

"I think learning about happiness does contribute to your

experience of happiness. This was one of the reasons why I organised a course on happiness. In both Eastern and Western wisdom traditions, emotions and desires are seen as the main obstacle to happiness. Both are things you can observe and analyse: find out what makes you angry, or why you desperately want something. Or you can choose not to give it any thought, act impulsively, and believe you'll be happy as soon as you get what you want. The latter approach carries within it the seed

of unhappiness: you don't get everything you want in life, and you do get lots of things you didn't want. So thinking about happiness can help you gain insight into what makes you happy or unhappy.

Our happiness course is not based on any obligations or 'have to's'. Happiness is not a box to tick on your CV or an exam that you can pass or fail. You didn't fail if the course doesn't make you happy immediately. By looking at happiness from a number of academic disciplines, we try to give students starting points for reflecting on happiness. Whether this thought process really leads to more happiness depends on the student."

2. You can control your level of happiness

"Globally, there are three factors that determine happiness: genetic predisposition, circumstances, and personal skills. All three of these can be influenced, but none of them can be fully controlled. Circumstances, such as your home or work situation, are only partially under your

'Extreme freedom of choice makes you doubt'

of media such as Facebook, young people tend to seek ultimate experiences. It's no longer enough to drink a crate of beer. You now have to drink it on top of Mount Everest, and take a picture of yourself doing it. There's nothing wrong with enjoying life, but you shouldn't think pleasure makes you happy. There's a lot of confusion about the distinction between happiness and pleasure. Also, young people are busy making a career and trying to become someone in this world; I was no different at that age. Older people have more life experience, and are therefore less fix-

control. How you deal with these uncontrollable circumstances depends on your personal skills. With mental training you can change your view of the world. However, this is a very long process because you already have a world view, formed by factors such as personal history, culture and upbringing. It takes time to shift this kind of perspective.

Mental training not only increases your personal skills, it also impacts your genetic make-up. We know by now that genetic systems are not static but flexible. Studies have been done on trained meditators, people who have been meditating for twenty years or more, and who attend longer meditation retreats. When you put these people in a brain scanner, different areas and patterns light up than in the brains of ordinary people."

3. Students are more susceptible to unhappiness than older people

"Young people are very different from older people. A lot of negative things are being said about the youth, especially the current Millennium generation. Not all these things are true, of course, but it's true that this generation tends towards a culture of hedonism. Under the influence ated on material belongings, partially because they've already satisfied their needs in this respect, and partially because they've had time to come to the conclusion that human relationships are more important than the car you drive.

At the same time, students these days are very sensitive to larger existential questions and happiness. In the University's welfare survey more than half the students indicate that they experience high work pressure and that they're not really happy. In our day, nobody asked us whether we were happy. It also has to do with choice stress. Extreme freedom of choice makes people doubt and wonder what they want. Will I fail at life if I make the wrong choice?"

4. The University can contribute to the happiness of its students and staff

"The Executive Board is concerned about the survey results. But it will take time for the University to make an active contribution to the happiness of its students and staff. I think we should first analyse why people are unhappy, and whether these are factors the University can control. A person might be very unhappy because of his/



Best day of 2017

"The best day of 2017 was **just a normal Tuesday** in November. I'd dreamed of working in Nijmegen for years, so you'd think my first day at work here would be my happiest day. But my first days were filled with chasing Wi-Fi connections and staplers, and trying to remember my new colleagues' faces. That Tuesday was the first day that felt a bit boring, just sitting at my desk, doing the usual things: preparing a lecture, correcting an article, writing a proposal. I gazed out of my window in the Erasmus building. I had arrived on campus; I was happy."

Marc van Oostendorp, Professor of Dutch and Academic Communication

Does a course do any good?

These two students followed the interdisciplinary course A Happy Life this autumn. Has it made them happier?



RIANNE VAN DEELEN (THIRD-YEAR BIOLOGY STUDENT):

"The course certainly made me happier, especially thanks to the insights about mindfulness. These were things I could apply immediately. It really works to stand back from time to time and try to discover where your emotions are coming from. We learned that urges and desires can form obstacles to happiness. Now that I'm more aware of it, I'm better able to act accordingly, and so I have more control over my own happiness. It pays off to reflect sometimes on your urges."



MARJOLIJN MALTHA (SECOND-YEAR PHILOSOPHY STUDENT):

"It's not necessarily an advantage to know about the various factors that may contribute to happiness. For example, in a number of lectures, the lecturer emphasised that social contacts, even casual conversations, make people happy. Now I can't get rid of this thought, even though it really gets in my way. My parents live in Noord-Holland, so I spend a lot of time on the train. It's great! I can listen to some music, read a book. Now I keep thinking I should be starting a conversation with my fellow travellers. This makes my journey restless. The course has made me so aware of all these missed opportunities for happiness." her home situation, while the work situation is actually very good. In this case, it's less clear how the University can help this person to become happier.

And even if people are unhappy at work, the University still has to identify first the source of these feelings. Beatrice van der Heijden [Professor of Business Administration, eds.] specialises in happiness within organisations. There are lots of factors that contribute to work satisfaction: from friendly or unfriendly colleagues to opportunities for personal development. As a University, you can only change these aspects once you've investigated the situation. The University didn't put happiness on the agenda out of a desire for a quick fix. It was based on the insight – one that may perhaps come more naturally to Catholic universities – that happiness is important in a human life. This is also why the University devotes attention to religion and reflection."

5. Where God disappears, people increasingly long for happiness

"Secularisation certainly plays a role in the attention paid to happiness nowadays. Many people are no longer satisfied with the answers provided by traditional religions. With the exception of Buddhism, all religions claim that happiness can only be found after death and that there is no perfect happiness here on Earth. This is a rather pessimistic view. At the same time, it does create a sense of calm. You know happiness is not possible in this life, but you can get a certain amount of satisfaction from hoping for happiness in the after-life. As a philosopher, I'm in favour of reflection and mental training rather than simply waiting for happiness. What if there is no life after death? I've personally been meditating and studying Eastern philosophy since secondary school. There have been periods when these practices have dropped to the background, but in the last fourteen years, I've meditated on a regular basis. I'm increasingly commit-

ted to this lifestyle. There are still moments when I am unable to regulate my emotions, but at least I can analyse them better. A few years ago, I discovered that I find it much more useful to devote my attention to happiness than to write lots of scholarly articles on other topics. What could be more important than happiness? Many people also want to get rich, but wealth is always only a tool for something else. Happiness is the ultimate goal; it's what life's all about." *****



Text: Eva van Keeken and Martine Zuidweg Photography: Duncan de Fey

Dieuwertje Riezebos is a fourth-year Bachelor's student in Dutch Law "My burn-out began in my second year. Suddenly I couldn't attend class anymore, dropped all activities except studying, and rarely spoke to my friends. I suffered from headaches, dizziness and fainting fits. On a Sunday afternoon in November I was invited to go to someone's birthday party. The idea alone made me panic. Instead of going to the party, I ended up in bed. If even the thought of a birthday party is too much, you know something must be really wrong. And yet I continued to study. I just kept going and going, and then ended up with a 3 in my exam. I found myself in a downward spiral. I wanted to study, but I couldn't, which only made the stress worse. It was exhausting.

As a student there's so much you have to do. It really makes me panic to think about it. My CV is still pretty empty. I sat on the board of a theatre association for six months, but six months is not a year, so is it enough? Plus there's nothing on my CV that would justify a one-year delay in my Bachelors'. You can't put illness on your CV.

Luckily I feel better now. I go to lectures again, and I sometimes get permission to only watch the web lecture.

I enjoy little things again: cooking with my mother, having dinner all together the way we used to. These things make me happy and give me energy. The other thing that makes me happy is the theatre: going to a musical or play, acting in one, observing the technique, anything theatre-related really. It helps me escape from every-day reality."

Dieuwertje RIEZEBOS: TFOUND MYSELF IN A DOWNWARD Vox 3 12/2017

> Noortje Kleine Schaars studied Philosophy for two years, and History for just under a year. Now she's at home.

"I used to think: you study, you get your diploma, and then you get a job. But Philosophy was so incredibly theoretical! I would sit in class and wonder: What could I possibly do with this later? After two years I switched to History. There they told us that we had little chance of finding a job with a Bachelor's diploma alone. That you had to get international experience, sit on a board, and stand out from the crowd. It's really demotivating to hear things like this.

After nine months I became depressed. For two weeks, I just lay in bed. I couldn't take care of myself, couldn't buy groceries, I was simply exhausted. It was really strange, actually. Everything was fine. My studies were going well, I had enough friends, and suddenly everything just felt wrong. The smallest things were too much for me. Going to lectures required a huge effort. It was as if I'd fallen into a hole. I was really scared of having to tell my parents I'd failed again. I took a year off: I worked in a lunchroom, went to see a psychologist. Things got better. I enrolled to study nutrition and diet at a university of applied sciences. But just when I made it through the selection round, I got rheumatoid arthritis, and had to stop again.

I've had to learn from scratch how to manage my energy. I've been to therapy, physiotherapy, and mindfulness courses. And still there're days when I'm trapped in my mind, worrying all the time. Luckily, now I have tools to help me function. What makes me happy are the little things: a good chat with friends, a walk. I don't have any plans to resume my studies anytime soon."

Noortje Kleine schaars: I just spent entire days in bed'

Dinja de Vries (26) is a second year Master's student in Religion and Policy

"In December last year I noticed that I couldn't handle the performance pressure anymore. It began when I cancelled an important meeting for the University Student Council. I simply didn't have the strength for it anymore. And once I start cancelling things, I know I've gone too far. I've been studying for a long time; I've completed two Bachelor's programmes already. And I'm involved in a lot of other activities. I'm a board member for our study association and for the cultural dome here on Campus; I used to chair the AKKUraatd party and sat on two AKKU committees; I also had a job on the side and was a member of the student council. At some point I wasn't enjoying anything anymore. I felt resistance to anything that I "had" to do.

These days, you can't afford to just study. I have the feeling that it's become normal to be busy all the time. It felt as if I just had to keep going. If my diary wasn't full enough, I felt I hadn't done my best. I'm very hard on myself. Because of the combination of fear of failure and perfectionism, I'm quick to feel like I've failed.

Ideally, I'd like to go on holiday for six months, but it's not possible, because I really want to graduate this year. Now the pressure to perform is slightly less. When people ask me how I am, I always say: OK. I'm alive, I have food to eat, and I have enough good friends. I try to be satisfied with that. But I'd like to enjoy life more. I love cooking and hanging out on the couch with friends. So I try to make time for it."

Dinja DE VRIES: 'I'M VERY ARD ON MYSELF'



Imagine you're feeling lonely. Would it help to have a robot to sit with you on the couch? Or even sleep with you?

Text: Tim van Ham / Illustration: JeRoen Murré

14 BACKGROUND

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ieter Wolfert sees it happen at every open day or information activity: adults catch sight of the robot Pepper and immediately start talking to it: "How are you? How nice to see you! Great weather today, isn't it?"

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Master's student in Artificial Intelligence Wolfert works at the University's robot lab. He laughs as he tells VOX about it: "Of course that thing doesn't know what kind of weather it is. Pepper never goes outside and has no access to the weather forecast, so these are completely nonsensical questions. I do understand it though. Pepper looks friendly, and people find him cute. Although on the basis there is, of course, nothing cute about a piece of metal with some programmed software. He doesn't even have a personality, but people invent one for him anyway."

Few people in Nijmegen know how Pepper works better than Wolfert. And yet he also sometimes finds himself talking to the 'piece of metal'. "Yes, I know, it doesn't make sense. But I sometimes do it anyway."

Stuffed animal

Radboud University performs a lot of research on how people respond to robots and their behaviour. So far it's all still relatively simple. Although Pepper is a modern robot, he can't even fry an egg. But technology is growing by leaps and bounds. It's only a question of time before we have a robot that can really help around the house, or read the paper to you as he gets you a beer from the fridge. When that happens, questions concerning the relationship between people and robots will become much more interesting. The most confrontational question is: Can a human be happy with the company of a robot, as a friend or even as a romantic partner?

'You can be absolutely sure that there will soon be sex robots'

The short answer is: Yes. At least, all the signs seem to point that way. In 2004, Paro appeared on the market: with a price tag of approximately €000, he's the most expensive stuffed animal in the world. Paro is a robot in the shape of a seal. He responds to touch by moving his tail and opening and shutting his eyes. He also makes noises like those of a real baby seal. Not a particularly futuristic super-robot. He was placed on the lap of people suffering from dementia, often lonely elderly people in care homes.

"He really seems to cheer people up," says Pim Haselager, who carries out research on robots at Radboud University. "Researchers report that elderly people become more active, that they build a relationship with this little machine, and as a result talk more, also to other people. It would be going too far to call this happiness, but it's certainly considered to improve people's quality of life." There's probably a lot of issues you could raise here (Do the elderly people still find Paro interesting after three months?), but it does show that people can really become attached to robots, no matter how simple these robots are.

Still, the fact that you're attached to something doesn't mean it makes you happy. You can also become attached to a new house plant, but it probably won't make you happier. To what extent can a robot make people truly happy? Won't it always be fake happiness?

Sex robots

Haselager is now working on a paper about sex robots. "The porn industry has always pioneered the use of new technologies. You can be absolutely sure that there will soon be sex robots – there's no way to stop it. This raises all sorts of questions: What kind of intimate relationships can people have with a robot? Are these just super deluxe vibrators or inflatable dolls? And what happens once robots develop a personality? A good robot will adjust to a person's wishes and quickly become a person's ideal partner. What kind of relationship is that? Of course it's not the real thing, but it can be so similar that some people will easily go along with the illusion. And if that makes them happy, then why would you call this fake happiness? Just because it's love for a robot?"

This conclusion in turn leads to other, rather painful questions. If you can be happy with a robot, how real is love between two people? How do I know for sure that my partner loves me, and that he or she is not just pretending, since pretence is apparently enough? And does it matter? In theory, it's all clear: if my partner doesn't really love me, I can't be happy with him or her. But in practice, you could probably also be happy with the pretence of love.

These are the kinds of questions that make new robot research particularly fascinating. "The technology is creating new opportunities to understand ourselves better," says Haselager. "You can fill gaps in your own life with something that isn't real. The question that comes back to you like a boomerang is: How bad is it if things in the real world turn out to be fake? The answer might be very sobering."

And yet, there's a clear line to be drawn here: It's not a good idea to interact only with robots. Haselager: "You also have to consider an individual's healthy social develop-

Best day of 2017

"When a student told me that he was **preparing a marriage proposal**. You should have seen his face. He was all aglow. I was the first person he told about it, which made it even more special. To see another person so intensely happy, that really made me happy. I was on a high for a long time. I still think about it often, for instance when I'm having a hard time. It cheers me up immediately."

Jos Geelen, Student Pastor



AUTISM AND ROBOTS

The use of social and other robots can lead to surprising applications. For example in a psychologist's office. Some children with an autism spectrum disorder find it easier to communicate with robots than with people. A robot responds exactly as expected, it never makes distracting movements or sounds, and it doesn't mind repeating itself endlessly if need be. This is why mental health care professionals sometimes call in the help of robots. As the child 'talks' with his pre-programmed friend, the psychologist has all the time in the world to observe the child and reach the right diagnosis.

ment. If I have a sex robot that always does everything the way I like it, I shouldn't assume this is what sex with a real person is going to be like. If you spend too much time with robots, you may lose certain essential qualities: the ability to deal with disappointment, the ability to resolve conflicts, etc. Robots will always agree with you, if you want them to. People clearly don't. If you only interact with robots, at some point you lose contact with society."

Caricatures

So much for the philosophical perspective. There are also technical questions: What should a robot look like, and what should it be able to do in order to make humans happy? First of all, you've got to take into account the well-known uncanny valley theory. This theory was formulated as early as 1970 by Japanese Robotics Professor 'How bad is it if things in the real world turn out to be fake?'



.ucy's law

Lucienne van der Geld is a lecturer of notarial law and director of Network Notarissen.

Money doesn't make people happy. This isn't just a figure of speech: it's confirmed by scientific research. And yet, many people spend their entire life chasing after it. Money. And once they finally make it big, they still want more and more and more. Money means power and some people believe you can never have enough of either. Many see the Amsterdam's Zuidas as the Dutch centre of money and power. The business district around the World Trade Centre is home to investment banks and accountancy firms, as well as notary and legal firms. Novels such as Zo Zuidas (So Zuidas), De urenfabriek (The Hours Factory) or Het proces van de eeuw (The Process of the Century) take a light-hearted look at the Zuidas corporate world.

The recently published *De groenteboer uit* Den Haag (The Greengrocer from The Hague) by Hubert-Jan van Boxel, strikes a completely different note; he worked as a lecturer and completed his PhD at our Faculty. The subtitle of his novel reveals how he feels about his time as a notary at various prominent legal and notary firms: De littekens van een kwart eeuw juridische bovenwereld (Scars of a Quarter Century in the Legal Thugs' World). The greed for money and power at the large firms he worked for quite literally made him ill. Other people's experiences and scientific research may well point to the fact that money doesn't make you happy, when it comes to happiness, we usually only trust our own experience. I know what makes me happy and it certainly isn't money.

* There have been lots of studies on happiness, including one conducted in 2016 by the London School of Economics and entitled Origins of Happiness. This study shows that health and having a partner and friends has more impact on a person's happiness and well-being than income.

'A robot should not look too much like a human'



Masahiro Mori. The more a robot looks like a human, the more people tend to trust it. People feel less warmth for a robot that puts together car tires in a Volkswagen factory than for a machine with human traits such as legs, arms, and a face. But the robot should also not look too much like a human. Because a robot with skin, hair and a 'human' face looks scary: the uncanny valley effect.

The creations of Japanese robot guru Hiroshi Ishiguro are probably the best example of this. He makes humanoid robots, which are so like humans that they look like a kind of animated Madame Tussauds wax doll. A YouTube video of one of these things really gives you the creeps, and it's unlikely the effect will diminish when it sits in your living-room. This is also why more regular robots - like Pepper - are made to look like caricatures: with big eyes and cartoon-like heads.

To the question of what qualities robots should possess to make people happy, there is a short answer: the more, the better. It's great if they can recognise emotions, have a meaningful conversation, and display a certain degree of empathy. But the more we want, the more difficult it becomes to build them.

Luckily, this is where robot builders get some help from the human mind. "People tend to assign a personality to things that don't have a personality at all," says Haselager. "And this is something you can use to your advantage. If you don't have the technology yet, it's handy that people attribute to a robot qualities it doesn't yet have. And some people are so lonely that even the simplest robot cheers them up." *

18 Vox 3 12/2017



Omar (25), Irak

Omar wilde als kind al chirurg worden, maar door zijn vlucht uit Irak werd alles anders. Met ondersteuning van het UAF bouwt hij als geneeskundestudent aan een nieuwe toekomst.

UAF Het UAF ondersteunt vluchtelingen bij studie en werk.

www.uaf.nl/omar

NEWS FROM THE OR AND THE USR www.radboudnet.nl/medezeggenschap www.numedezeggenschap.nl

POINT TAKEN!

University Student Council

Hello Nijmegen students!

The University Student Council (USR) has now been at work for three months. As promised in the previous edition, we've spent these months enthusiastically working towards improving the lot of Nijmegen students. You're bound to have noticed some of the themes we've invested our efforts in. Think of the plans for a renewed Radboud Honours Academy, the Flexible Learning Pilot, the introduction week festival, or the University's Long-term Investment Prognosis. First of all, we took part in lots of talks on how to renew the Radboud Honours Academy. The Academy is shifting its focus from excellence education to talent development. This means students will no longer need an average grade of 7.5 to qualify for an Honours programme. Also, there may be changes to the length of Honours programmes. We were under the impression that the USR only had right of consent in the plans submitted to the Joint Assembly on 4 December. We weren't particularly happy with the proposed changes, as we felt that they failed to represent a long-term vision. In the Assembly, it turned out to our surprise that the USR has right of vote on the long-term vision to be formulated later on this year. We're extremely pleased with this development and look forward to the items to be discussed in 2018.

The most recent issue we have focussed on is the University's Long-Term Investment Prognosis (MIP). We decided to refrain from voting on the MIP until it became clear why the Study Centre of the Medical Faculty was not being renewed as planned. The past few weeks have been tense as a number of parties involved worked hard to achieve a satisfactory compromise. In the Joint Assembly of 4 December, the discussion was concluded to our satisfaction with the announcement that the Medical Faculty will be renovated as planned.

Check this page on a regular basis to stay informed of the ins and outs of the USR. If you have any questions or remarks, feel welcome to drop by our room in TvA 3, while you still can! In the spring of 2018, we'll be moving to a new room in the Thomas van Aquinostraat.

You can also always email us at usr@ru.nl.

Works Council

Audit and committee

The Executive Board has requested an audit of all support units. An audit committee was set up, consisting of Works Council (OR) and University Student Council (USR) members, with the support of members of the relevant programme committees. The audit committee held a number of meetings with the project leader (Gerard van Assem) and the head of the Human Resources Department (Anneriek de Heer). The first unit to undergo the audit was educational support. Based on the audit, a number of suggestions were put forward and compiled into an agenda for improvement. This agenda and the audit committee's report were discussed in the Joint Assembly.

Committee's response

The committee was enthusiastic about the amount of information produced by the audit. The audit was performed bottom-up, mostly in the form of workshops, which produced a lot of useful information. A point for improvement for the upcoming audit (P&O) is to make sure the workshops attract a more representative selection of staff members – this time around the higher echelons were often overrepresented.

The committee also concluded that although the audit used a survey questionnaire, it did not incorporate existing evaluations (such as annual reports and course evaluations). This raises the question of how the results of the survey and workshops compare to these existing data. Furthermore, the committee became involved in the process at a relatively late stage. As a result, even though there was enough information available and sufficient room to ask questions, the committee had very little opportunity to suggest a different approach. It was agreed with the Executive Board that the committee will in future become involved at an earlier stage.

Finally, the committee appreciates the audit's ambitious goal – to achieve nothing short of a cultural shift. To this end it's important to create enough commitment and a strong base of support among the staff for implementing the agenda for improvement. In the coming months, the committee will therefore focus on coordinating the implementation of the agenda for improvement.



SCIENCE DOSSIER

vths and

happiness

act.

Should we all move to Bhutan? No, actually, better move to Ede (that's where the really happy people are). Does a singing bird feel cheerful? Do big gifts help? Are women happier than men? Researchers leave no stone unturned in their search for the secret to happiness. Luckily for us, they're more than willing to share their discoveries. Read and learn!

It's not that much fun up in the Himalayas p. 22 Should we all do drugs? p. 24

Share your failures p. 28

WHY BHUTAN IS **LESS HAPPY** THAN IT SEEMS

Impoverished Bhutan, at the heart of the Himalayas, claims to be one of the happiest countries on Earth. Instead of gross national product, the country uses gross national happiness as its indicator. A shining example for the rest of the world?

Text: Gijs Swennen Photo: Timothy Neesam (Creative Commons) In 1979, Jigme Singye Wangchuk, the King of Bhutan, caused a sensation by saying in an interview: "We no longer believe in gross national product. Gross national happiness is far more important." Since then the GNH has been included in the Bhutanese constitution as a central tenet of governmental policy. The rest of the world was impressed with Bhutan's philosophy of happiness: the United Nations signed a resolution in which the international community set itself the task to formulate other indicators for welfare and happiness than the GNP.

Nobel Prize Winner Joseph Stiglitz for one is of the opinion that many countries suffer from 'GNP fetishism'. According to the economist we cannot solve current problems such as climate change by only looking at the short term. Our measures of social welfare have to include the consequences for the environment and future generations.

But there are also critical voices. Nijmegen Professor of Sociology Gerbert Kraaykamp, for example. "I think it's complete nonsense to say that Bhutan is so happy. The country is actually doing very poorly in many areas – including education, health care and economy. The gross national happiness indicator is primarily used for internal politics: it's a reframing that suddenly makes it look as if the country is doing really well."

Unclear

If you want to find out which country is happiest, you'll soon be redirected to the UN's *World Happiness Report*, which ranks countries on the basis of happiness. For this report, respondents were asked one simple question: How happy are you right now on a scale of 1 to 10? Based on this report, Denmark has for many years been the happiest country in the world. Until this year, that is, when it was finally dethroned by Norway. The Netherlands also scores high, in 6th position. The Oh-so-happy Bhutan appears in 97th position, which seems to indicate that criticism of gross national happiness as a measure may not be entirely unfounded. Here's another lesson to be learned: a higher income per capita does not in itself guarantee greater happiness. For example, Qatar has the second highest GNP per capita, but only scores 35th on the happiness report.

There are many difficulties involved in measuring happiness. For one thing, it's unclear whether happiness is the best indicator of a country's welfare. For example: it's difficult for a country like Norway, which scores 7.5 on the UN's happiness ladder, to score higher. Happiness cannot easily be measured on a scale of 1 to 10: a person can always become even happier. The same is true of wealth, but that doesn't pose any difficulties when measuring the GNP.

Then there is the fact that happiness is largely subjective. Kraaykamp explains that survey questions tend to centre on one of two aspects: what people do and what they think. "The first question is objective, for example when we ask about someone's level of education. Happiness is measured on the basis of the second question, and is by definition subjective." To compare countries based on happiness is therefore difficult. "Is a Dutch person who scores himself as 8 as happy as a Chinese person who scores himself as 8 on the happiness scale?"

Because of the difficulties involved in measuring happiness, Economics Professor Esther-Mirjam Sent advocates the Human Development Index (HDI). "The main difference between the HDI and measures such as the GNP is that the HDI is based on the capability approach of Nobel Prize Winner Amartya Sen." This approach asks: Do people have the necessary tools to do what they want to do in life? From this perspective, you don't investigate happiness, but the opportunities for happiness. With this different approach, countries end up with a different score. For example, on the HDI, Denmark appears not in second, but in 14th position.

Rigid systems

Dutch policy tends to focus more on economic growth than on happiness. Prime Minister Rutte was quoted saying: "The Netherlands is not a happiness machine. The government should remain small and give people space to make something extraordinary out of their life." But Esther-Mirjam Sent thinks you need more than that. "Economic growth is not a goal, it's a tool. The same is true of a government budget." The forecasts of the Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis play a key role in this context. "Actually, we should make more room



for the Social and Cultural Planning Agency and the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency. In this way we develop a broader concept of welfare, one that includes not only income, but also education, health and the environment."

Even if politicians start devoting more attention to matters that cannot be expressed in financial terms, we shouldn't expect our happiness to grow by leaps and bounds, says Kraaykamp. "The happiness of a country is the sum total of the happiness of its entire people. The factors that predict happiness tend to be individual, and a country's factors have little effect on them. Matters that the government can impact – such as economic welfare, health care and social networks – are often anchored in rigid systems. We cannot improve our entire health system in one year by making one big step."

Nevertheless Kraaykamp believes that we can set an example for the rest of the world. "If for years now Northern Europe consistently scores high on the happiness index, it means we're doing something right. The structure of our democracy and economy makes our citizens happy. It's something the rest of the world can probably learn from."

Is happiness hereditary?

Yes, at least partially. Meike Bartels, Professor in Biological Psychology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam discovered last year that there's a link between people's DNA and their reported level of happiness. Differences in how happy people feel are determined 40% by

hereditary factors and 60% by influences from the environment, says Bartels. In her research she used data from the Netherlands Twin Register. This register contains data from more than 180,000 persons from families with multiples. On a regular basis participants are asked to complete questionnaires that include questions about happiness. Based on data from this register researchers had previously discovered that identical twins have very similar experiences of happiness. Since identical twins share the same DNA, there has to be a link between genes and happiness. The next step is to find out which genes play a key role in happiness.

HOW ABOUT JUST POPPING A PILL?

You can waste a lot of precious time chasing happiness. Isn't it much easier to just pop a pill?

Text: Steven Huls en Martine Zuidweg / Illustration: Roel Venderbosch

Google terms such as 'happiness hormone' or 'happiness chemical' and you'll soon be swimming in hormones and neurotransmitters. Endorphins, serotonin, dopamine, oxytocin, adrenalin. There are at least seven chemicals that are closely linked to positive moods. Endorphins, one of the better known happiness messengers, is an opium-like substance – similar to morphine and heroin – that is produced entirely by our own body. No need for poppies.

Strangely enough endocrinologists – hormone specialists – devote little attention to this internal opiate. To illustrate this fact Peter Klaren, Zoophysiologist and lecturer in Endocrinology, reaches for the text book *Harrison's Endocrinology*. "Look, there are only seven references to endorphins in six hundred pages. And

one of them is to a kind of table of contents."

And that while the substance has been around for millions of years. "We share a distant common ancestor with the first vertebrate animals, namely fish. The hormones in our bodies were already present in fish. We know that fish can have personalities and that they can experience stress and pain. Fish also have brains and endorphins. So if we're going to call endorphins a happiness chemical, then it's likely that fish can be happy too."

But fish don't have alcohol and drugs to

get their hormones rolling: substances like LSD, cannabis or XTC. Professor of Clinical Pharmacology Kees Kramers thinks these types of mind-altering substances are most effective in generating euphoric feelings. The active substance in XTC is 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (abbreviated to MDMA). As soon as MDMA reaches the brain, it causes the nerves to release serotonin. This first creates a feeling of love and connection with the environment. Later there is the speed-like effect that allows you to dance all night without getting tired.

The effect of XTC is gone in one day, but morphine is something you could take for a week or so, says Kramers. "Why not? There are so many people who take drugs every day." Take anti-depressants: according to the Dutch Foundation for Pharmaceutical Statistics (Stichting Farmaceutische Kengetallen, SFK), anti-depressants are used by 1.1 million people in the Netherlands. Nearly all anti-depressants slow down serotonin uptake in the brain. The effect is that the hormone spends more time circling around the brain, and this in turn impacts well-being. "Apparently this affects people's mood. Although I've never yet heard anyone say it made them happier."

Polar bear

According to users, drugs that create a feeling of euphoria, such as XTC or cannabis, do create feelings of happiness. The disadvantage is that you feel worse once you stop using them. And even if you were to use them every day, over time most drugs stop

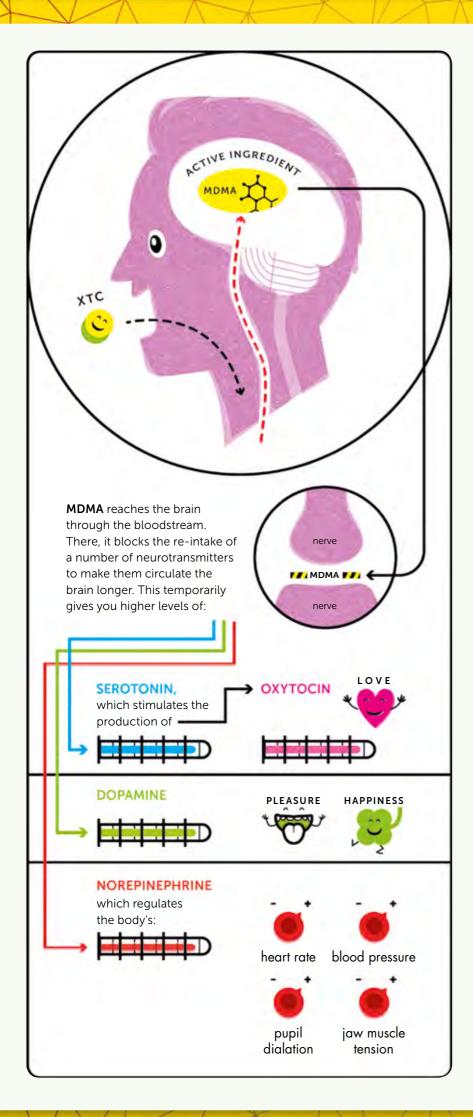
'To achieve true happiness you first need to work your way through unhappiness' generating the same feelings of happiness, says Kramers. "I had a patient who had to use heroin every day for years, just to be able to function. He hadn't gotten high on it for a long time."

Kramers does think it's a nice idea: a pill for long-term happiness. But he doesn't believe it will ever happen. "You can try and imitate happiness with a pill, but I doubt this will make you happy. I think to achieve true happiness you first need to work your way through a chunk of unhappiness."

Klaren agrees that an organism needs

to be jolted from time to time. "For example, polar bears in captivity still need to search for their food. Sometimes the fish can be eaten right away, other times it's still frozen. A small amount of stress every day is good, it keeps you alert. It also contributes to how good you feel later on."

He thinks a pill for long-term happiness is unrealistic. How would you determine the effect of such a pill? "If the level of endorphins in the blood is how you measure happiness, then does it mean you're unhappy when your value drops below the norm? And how would you determine such a norm?" And then there's a very practical matter too, says Klaren. "Imagine a pill appears on the market that makes you happy, day in day out. Surely at some point, you won't be able to tell the difference?"



Don't buy big gifts

This Christmas try and refrain from purchasing big gifts. They won't make your other half happy, says Professor of Economics Esther-Mirjam Sent. "A big gift has the same effect on the brain as drugs: it only creates a temporary feeling of happiness." But what about a super-duper big gift like an iPhone X? Isn't that something you can enjoy every day? That's not how it works, explains Sent. "The problem with material gifts is that you get used to them. Every holiday is different, but your iPhone X looks the same every day." On the other hand, it's true that people

feel happier when they get a slightly bigger gift than other people, says Sent. "We tend to be very focused on our relative position." In other words: we like to have more than our neighbours. But this effect is also temporary. So what's the solution? Happiness lies in experiences, says Sent, not in material gifts. You're better off surprising your loved one with a weekend break away.

BECOME A PESSIMIST

Swedish philosopher Ida Hallgren pleads for more pessimism. It's the only way to bring happiness within our reach.

Text: Thijs van Beusekom

"An optimist is a poorly informed pessimist," stand-up comedian Theo Maassen once said in one of his shows. This quote might just as easily have come from Swede Ida Hallgren. The PhD student in Philosophy at the University of Gothenburg investigates the role of negative emotions in daily life. Playing the devil's advocate, she denounces boundless positivity and pleads for more pessimism. "Pessimists are often dismissed as bad people. But pessimism is actually pretty vital. It teaches you to deal with potential setbacks."



Ida Hallgren

for example, they tend to suppress their negative thoughts. This leads to problems. So actually, optimism often makes people less happy."

Mindfulness

This brings us to mindfulness, which many students reach for in stressful times. According to Hallgren, mindfulness has become a kind of quick fix. "The idea is that you should let go of all negativity. But the Buddhist ideal that underlies this method of relaxation emphasises that you can only relieve suffering by facing it." And this is a very useful idea, says the philosopher. "Instead of focusing on 'living in the present'

and 'being happy', you're better off discovering what you can learn from negative emotions."

It goes without saying that Hallgren also wants people to be happier. But the way we're going about it now, she says, simply doesn't work. She co-created a course on pessimism which is in high demand. As opposed to Zen and mindfulness, this course doesn't teach participants to 'be happy in the now', but to deal with negative emotions. "By assuming the worst case scenario you prepare yourself for any eventuality. You won't be disappointed, and you save yourself a lot of stress. This is how pessimism can help you to move forward."

Egocentric

Expecting the worst, taking into account that things might go wrong, these are things we don't do enough, according to Hallgren. We raise our children on the idea that anything is possible, if they want it badly enough. This is a lie, she says. "It's all about your own happiness, and the sky's the limit." She finds it egocentric. "And unrealistic!"

According to Hallgren our search for happiness is highly counterproductive. "People think that if only you keep thinking positive thoughts, you'll automatically become happy. But it's not true. All this optimism has made us forget how to handle certain negative emotions. When people suffer from burn-out or depression,



Happy pensionados

The Dutch are happiest in old age, as apparent from figures by Statistics Netherlands. Of all age groups, Dutch citizens aged 65 to 75 are the happiest. More than 90% of people in this age category report being happy. They're satisfied with various aspects of their life, explains Statistics Netherlands researcher Maarten Bloem. "This group is on the whole still fairly healthy. They're usually satisfied with their finances, their social contacts and their living environment. And they have lots of free time to enjoy all these things. Once you've got all your ducks in a row, life is apparently really good."

Incidentally, all age groups are relatively satisfied with their life. The differences are small. In all age groups the majority of respondents report being happy. The least satisfied group are the elderly: people aged 75 and older. Only 84% of people in this group report being happy. Physical decline may play a role in this age group, as respondents report less satisfaction with their health.

The group that's most satisfied with its health are young people. They're also happy about the free time they still have. Aspects this group tends to experience as problematic include money and living environment.













If you enjoy being among happy people, your best bet is to move to Ede. Nine out of ten Ede inhabitants are happy, reports the *Atlas voor gemeenten*, an annual comparison on various aspects between fifty Dutch municipalities. Life is not quite so good in Nijmegen: only 84% of our inhabitants are happy. This has to do with the relatively high number of people who suffer from occupational disability or are unemployed, migrants, Muslims or single parents. Rotterdam inhabitants are least happy of all: nearly 20% are dissatisfied with life.

DETEO

Lucky to be a man?

No. There's no significant difference between men and women when it comes to happiness. 88.1% of men report being happy, versus 88.5% of women. Men and women give their life the exact same score: 7.7. These are 2016 figures by Statistics Netherlands.

PHOTO'S: GETTY IMAGES

A CV FULL OF FAILURES

Researchers have to rely on grants and publications. Still, there are enough times when they miss the boat by a hair's breadth. To give a realistic idea of an academic career, the latest trend is to share your failures too. If nothing else, it might cheer up your potentially jealous colleagues.

Text: Stan van Pelt / Photo: Getty Images

'2005: VENI grant. 2009-2011: VIDI grant, Humboldt grand and DFG grant.' Stefan Maubach's online CV certainly sounds impressive. Until you realise these are the research grants he didn't get: you're looking at Maubach's 'failures CV'. Maubach is lecturer in Mathematics at Radboud University. He thinks it's important to counterbalance the seemingly endless success stories of researchers.

Maubach is not alone. An increasing number of researchers are open about the grants and jobs they *didn't* get. Johannes Haushofer, researcher in Psychology at Princeton University, is promoting the trend, inspired by a 2010 Nature article by Melanie Stefan. In this article, the English researcher suggested researchers should be more transparent about their rejections and set-backs. This shows young researchers that celebrated researchers are just normal people.

Law of the jungle

Maubach was immediately inspired. "The academic world is such a jungle. Researchers tend to only talk about their successes." With his CV he wants to show that an academic career includes lots of set-backs and side-tracks. "I just describe what actually happened."

He also shares how things can sometimes go wrong in teaching. "I once lectured a group of students on a topic I didn't know enough about. I thought I could get away with it. It turned out some of the students had taken part in a Mathematics Olympiad. I really made a fool of myself that time."

Maubach is convinced that being open about your mistakes makes you a happier person. "Society puts so much pressure on people to be cool and to perform. It's hardly surprising so many students have a burn-out. I want to show that making yourself vulnerable is a strength that will serve you much better in the long run." Mistakes and setbacks are not a sign of weakness. "You have to make mistakes in order to learn."

He's also somewhat critical of 'failure CVs' by successful established researchers. "They've got nothing to lose. I think it's more powerful to show your mistakes as a researcher on a temporary contract."

Despair

Teun Bousema, malaria researcher at Radboud university medical center, agrees with this criticism. On his website he also 'The academic world is such a jungle' devotes attention to his failures. "Failure CVs tend to be kind of *effort* CVs," he explains. "Researchers want to show how hard they work. For eight rejected grant applications there are three grants you did get. This means you worked really hard writing all those research proposals. Can you still say that these are failures?"

Bousema finds it especially important to show young researchers that successful researchers are also continuously facing setbacks. "For example, one of my articles was recently rejected because the editor found my data meaningless. We're talking about three years of fieldwork in Africa!" This kind of merciless review still gets to him. He empathises with the feeling of despair PhD students experience when something like this happens to them. "The difference is that now I'm confident enough to conclude that the editor has got the wrong end of the stick."

Bousema also wants to emphasise that in science, success and failure are closely related. "We once submitted an article on a study I was extremely enthusiastic about to a highly renowned journal. It was rejected a few times, until even the least respected journal in my field was highly critical of it." In the end, after much revision, the article was accepted, and it's still cited on a regular basis.

Bousema tries to show his students and PhD students that failure is part of the game. "It's OK if things go wrong from time to time; I've made enough mistakes myself." Like the time he gave a guest lecture for an international course on malaria at Harvard University. "They'd flown me in for this, even though the topic was far out of my comfort zone. A well-known member of the audience began an aggressive and heated discussion and completely outclassed me. It's still painful when I think about it."

Or the time he gave a keynote lecture in Basel when he wasn't feeling well. "I took a painkiller half-an-hour before the lecture. Or so I thought. Turns out it was a sleeping pill!"



Does a singing bird feel cheerful?

People sing when they feel happy, but is this also true of birds? Apparently not. Even when birds have all the reason in the world to be unhappy, they still sing. In birdsong competitions in the Southern Netherlands and Belgium, finch owners used to make gruesome misuse of this fact. They scorched the birds' eyelids shut so the finches wouldn't get distracted. This was apparently the way to get the birds to sing the most. Which was the whole idea, since the owner of the finch who sang most songs would win the competition. Professor by special appointment and bird researcher Ruud Foppen remembers stories about practices from his youth. "Luckily this kind of mutilation is forbidden now."

Caged birds also sing. This is because for birds singing is simply a communication tool to chase away other males or attract females. "Birds are so incredibly focused on the sounds emitted by their own kind that you can easily lure them with birdsong. For instance, during the migration season, if you play recorded bird sounds in the middle of the night, you'll be surprised at how fast this will attract birds of the same species. They'll simply break off their journey and fly down from incredible heights just to check what's going on." There are indications that birdsong changes as the bird's health declines, says Foppen. "Research among cuckoos in Chernobyl shows that they have a lower call frequency. In other words they don't produce their 'Cuckoo!' call so often. We know from other studies that the more often a male sings, the more attractive he is to females."

GETTY IMAGES

ARE BUDDHISTS HAPPIER THAN CHRISTIANS?

Buddhists invented Zen and mindfulness, methods that teach us to accept all of life with a smile. Surely, this means that Buddhists go through life floating on a cloud of bliss. And that they are therefore happier than Christians or Muslims. Right?

Text: Martine Zuidweg / Photo: Getty Images

'If a Buddhist was to say: "I'm perfectly happy", he wouldn't be a good Buddhist'

Of course not, says Professor of Asian Religions Paul van der Velde. The fact that we increasingly associate happiness with Buddhism says more about us than about Asia. "People in Buddhist countries such as Sri Lanka, Japan, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia are not happier than people in Western countries. This image we've created of happy Buddhists is nothing but wishful thinking on our part. We want to believe that there's a place on Earth where life is perfect. It gives people hope."

It's true that Buddhism teaches its followers how to deal with unhappiness. But there's nothing unique about that, says Van der Velde. "Every religion teaches that there is unhappiness in life, and how to deal with it. The Buddha was also deeply unhappy at first. He was lonely and trapped in his golden cage. It was only later that he found

> balance in his life." But did he achieve perfect happiness? No. "If a Buddhist was to say: 'I'm perfectly happy', he wouldn't be a good Buddhist. How can you be happy when so many others are suffering? If you have real compassion, as befits a true Buddhist, you take the suffering of others to heart."

> In Asia, Buddhism has little to do with meditation, says Van der Velde. "Buddhism is a lifestyle that centres on many rituals. People don't meditate much; in any case much less than we imagine." Nevertheless, with Zen and mindfulness, this Eastern religion

has developed attractive methods for relieving stress. "Meditation suits our Western individualistic lifestyle. It helps us to handle pain and stress."

But these methods are not unique to Buddhism, says the Professor. "They also exist in Christianity. The monastic orders had their own meditation techniques. They're just not practised much anymore."

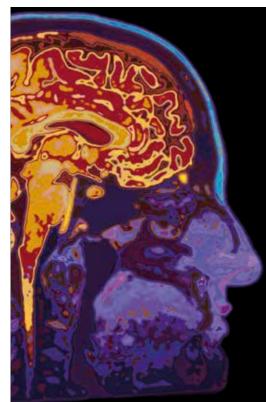
Are you better off being stupid?

You might think that people with a lower IQ don't spend so much time worrying about things. That they don't ponder on difficult existential questions. And that this in turn means they're happier than clever clogs. Retired Erasmus University Rotterdam Professor Ruut Veenhoven - also known as the Rotterdam Happiness Professor - compared the results of 23 studies from the World Database of Happiness. And what did he discover? There's no correlation whatsoever between intelligence and happiness. Dumb people are neither happier nor less happy than intelligent people. The few weak correlations observed turned out to result from random deviations in the sample. Veenhoven's conclusion: "If there's no link between happiness and IQ it means that intelligence tests measure a limited range of skills, which are apparently not particularly relevant in real life. This is in

line with my impression that IQ tests primarily test 'school intelligence' and fail as indicators of broader wisdom, creativity and social intelligence."

Last year, US-based researcher Boris Nikolaev discovered a weak positive correlation between verbal intelligence and happiness. But he also pointed out that this may well be a reverse correlation: happy people have more social contacts and therefore get more opportunity to practise their verbal skills. Veenhoven also investigated the relationship between intelligence and happiness at national level. He did find one correlation there: the higher the average intelligence in a country, the happier its people. In other words: the average citizen is less happy in a country full of dumb people. The happiest countries turned out to be highly developed. "One possible explanation is that it's not the

intelligence level of a country that contributes to its citizens' happiness, but that there is a third factor involved in the correlation: the country's economic development," explains Veenhoven. Better material facilities, better food and more free time simply make life more worth living.

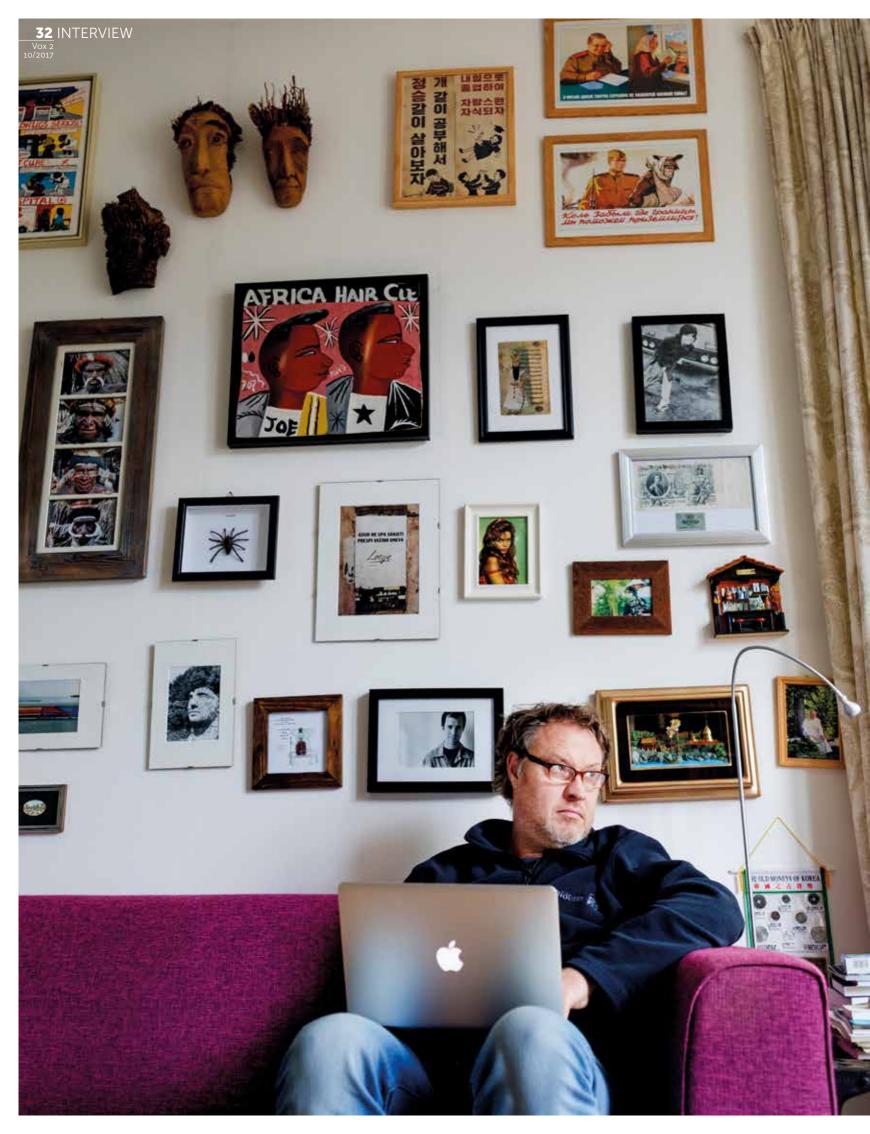


Searching the brain

Can you see from someone's brain whether they're happy? Absolutely, concluded Japanese brain scientists at Kyoto University two years ago. In an article in Scientific Reports they claimed to have discovered the physical location of happiness. The researchers placed test subjects in an MRI scanner, and asked them to complete a questionnaire on how happy they were with their life. Participants who scored high in the survey turned out to have more grey matter in the precuneus, a brain area at the back of the head. This then is the locus of happiness. <u>Or not really?</u>

Brain scientist Erno Hermans from the Nijmegen Donders Institute thinks this is quite an interesting finding. But he also has his doubts. "What they found is a statistical correlation, but that doesn't mean there's a causal relation. It might be that happy people simply use certain brain functions more, which in turn makes these areas more active."

If you'd asked Hermans which brain areas play a role in happiness, he would have put his money on other candidates: for instance brain areas involved in releasing dopamine, known as the reward circuits. "But the question is whether you can actually measure happiness in the brain in the first place. I think it's too simplistic to try and locate an abstract concept like happiness in the human brain. This is about an individual's general sense of well-being; it involves so many different aspects. No matter how useful happiness is in our daily lives, I don't think we'll ever find it in a single location."



'Our obsession with rules gets in the way of happiness'

Ap Dijksterhuis studies happiness as a scientific phenomenon. This has led him to formulating rational rules for more happiness. But also: let people decide for themselves; autonomy contributes to happiness. "The first step is simple: get rid of unnecessary rules."

Text: Marc Janssen / Photo's: Duncan de Fey (p.36) Kees Rutten (p.38)

n a dark rainy Monday Professor of Social Psychology Ap Dijksterhuis sips vending machine coffee from a mug he brought along from home. He sits down at his desk in an office on the ninth floor of the Spinoza building. The potential view is hidden by the mist.

How would you score today?

"O, I don't do that so often anymore. I did it for a while, give each day a score. But I'm very happy, so after a while it gets a bit boring, giving yourself a 9 every day. And rain and mist don't really bother me."

In his book, *Op naar geluk (On To Happiness)*, published in 2015, Dijksterhuis offers tips for a happier life. For example: give each day a score, describe three things every day that went well, don't let your inner muppet take over, and choose an active and serious hobby instead of aimlessly loafing around. It's not just another self-help book, it goes a lot deeper. "My idea was to only write about what has been scientifically proven. And to combine Eastern and Western traditions. There are lots of Buddhism-inspired books, as well as books based on Western science, but very few books that combine the two. So that's what I did."

The current book Top 10 is full of books about happiness. Do you read them all?

"Not any more. Before I wrote Op naar geluk, I read dozens of these books. Now I only read scientific articles

on happiness. If I had to make two recommendations, I'd go for *The Happiness Hypothesis* by Jonathan Haidt and Stumbling on Happiness by Daniel Gilbert. Both were published more than ten years ago, so technically speaking they're outdated, but still very good."

In your book you say very little about level of education. But some statistics seem to indicate it does contribute a little to happiness.

"These are correlations, and correlations with happiness are actually never really strong. The number of friends you have has more impact on your happiness than your education. Educational level does correlate with happiness, but so does intelligence, and these two in turn correlate with one another."

But a one-on-one correlation, as in 'the more intelligent, the happier', that doesn't apply. Is that what you're saying?

"Exactly. Although you can't turn it around and say: education is not important, so let's not bother. We have to keep educating people, and this is certainly one way we can contribute to overall happiness."

Do you think the science of happiness should be taught as a subject in schools?

"Yes! Scientists know what makes people happy or unhappy, or in any case they know a little bit about it. The educational system doesn't do much with this knowledge.

'Psychology doesn't get any attention in secondary schools'

The topic is increasingly gaining attention, but not enough in my opinion. Why wouldn't you tell people how to be happy? When organised education first appeared 2500 years ago in Greece, this is exactly what it was about: How to live as happy a life as possible? Now we teach people mathematics and languages, which is important too. But you could also teach them how to be happy: in secondary schools, at universities of applied sciences, at research universities, maybe even in primary schools."

What does the science of happiness look like as a subject?

"It's a combination of philosophy, psychology, sociology, economics, and neuropsychology. It's about background: what makes people happy? And about history: What did the Ancient Greeks think about it? What about the Buddha? And what happened after that? But it's also very practical: What do you do with money you have left over? Well, that may be less relevant for students. But what do you do with your time? How can you organise it to be happier? We now teach this course to about one hundred students, but ideally it should be available to everyone."

Is this kind of course also relevant for mathematics students?

"Of course. It can be taught at all levels and to nearly all age groups. Why would you not be allowed to learn that experiences have more impact on your happiness than material things? In the course we also devote attention to practical aspects such as mindfulness: how do you calm your mind when you feel stressed?"

Mindfulness seems to help against stress. Do the students of today experience more stress?

"We don't know that. The University only recently began measuring it. What we see is that many students experience pressure and stress, that they're less happy than we'd like them to be. But we haven't measured happiness and



IN SHORT

Ap Dijksterhuis (1968) is a Professor of Social Psychology, entrepreneur, speaker and author. He studied Psychology in Nijmegen, where he completed his PhD in 1996. For a while, his research focused on 'the unconscious' and he wrote the popular scientific book Het slimme onbewuste (The Clever Subconscious) on this topic. The book sold over 100.000 copies. For the past seven years he has focused on studying happiness, resulting in the 2015 bestseller Op naar geluk (On To Happiness). He also authored Wie (niet) reist, is gek (You're Crazy If You Don't Travel. And Also If You Do), Tussen je oren (Between Your Ears) (for children) and De merkwaardige psychologie van een wijndrinker (The Peculiar Psychology of a Wine Drinker). Dijksterhuis is head of the Social Psychology Department, owner of the Karakter brewery, and founding partner of consultancy agency D&B.

stress for very long, so we don't know yet whether things are getting worse. When I think back to my student days, I think: we weren't so stressed. But memories from 25 years ago don't mean very much. I do know that people feel they have much less choice than they used to; they have less autonomy. This is true not only of students, but also of staff members. You see it everywhere in organisations with more bureaucracy, such as education and healthcare."

The question is whether you can be happy in a bureaucratic environment. Dijksterhuis is convinced that things can and should be improved. "Organisations in government, the healthcare sector and education have to understand that limiting people's autonomy only increases the risk of burn-out and other problems. You also end up losing people who are a great asset. The people with the greatest need for autonomy tend also to be the most creative people. At some point you simply lose these people. They don't want to carry on anymore. That's a serious problem."

Personally, Dijksterhuis works as consultant for companies and organisations in their search for more autonomy and therefore more happiness. "There's a lot you can do," he says. "The first step is simply to eliminate unnecessary rules, cancel meetings, and give people space to plan their own working hours and holidays. Our obsession with rules is the biggest problem."

Back to the students now. In your book you mention the example of study choice. That you shouldn't be led by money considerations or what your parents want.

"That's right. Choose what you like. It also helps to think about what you might want to do later. Try to imagine what your day as a doctor would look like. But the most important question is: Do you enjoy this subject?"

That's hard to know when you're seventeen. Especially if it's a subject you weren't taught in secondary school, like psychology.

"That's true, and it's the reason Madelijn Strick and I wrote a book on psychology for children aged 10 to 11. It's called *Tussen je oren (Between Your Ears)*. Psychology is now the largest academic discipline in the Netherlands, even bigger than Law, but it doesn't get any attention in secondary schools. Kind of strange, when you think about it."

J heard your own choice of study was not a particularly conscious process. Something about throwing a die?

"Yes, with a friend of mine. If I had thrown a 3, I would have studied Economics. But it was a 6, so I ended up in Psychology. Luckily, very quickly I started to enjoy it. If I'd ended up with something really horrible, I would have thrown again. I think." *****

De-stress with the help of a

Happiness and pleasure are closely related. 'Jaxx' primarily delivers the latter. But does this gigolo also contribute to his clients' happiness?

Text: Mathijs Noij / Photo: Getty Images

n his work as a gigolo, he's known as Jaxx. He'd rather not make his name public: his parents, for example, don't know that he goes to bed with women for money. "The only people who know about it are two good friends of mine. And my wife of course." This is actually the reason he's giving this interview. "I want to break the taboo. It's quite acceptable for men to hire prostitutes. It's a very different thing when a woman hires a gigolo."

In the Utrecht Central Station hall, Jaxx speaks freely about his work and the double life he leads: he is a primary school teacher with two children. He looks casual enough: jeans, black T-shirt. He's 39, fairly short, with dark hair. On his Twitter profile he writes that he often gets compliments about his bum and penis – but we don't get to see these today.

What was your first paid job like?

"I was following the academic teacher training programme in Nijmegen. I went to a lot of parties. One night I was talking to an older woman, who fancied me and wanted me to go home with her. 'I don't mind paying you for it' she said. As a student, I didn't have much money, so I thought: why not? It was fun, so after that I signed up for an escort service. Nowadays I work for myself and I'm registered with Gentleman's Company, an agency that also has a Nijmegen branch."

BACKGROUND

What kind of clients do you get?

"Usually women aged 25 to 40. But I sometimes get hired by older women. And yes, sometimes by students too."

Why would a young woman hire a gigolo? It can't be that hard to find a man willing to have sex.

"I sometimes ask my clients this very question. The most important reason they give is that women don't just want sex, they want attention. A date with me usually involves mostly sex, but there's also cuddling, a massage, and good conversation. Men who roll out of the pub in a drunken daze just want to fuck. My work is about much more than sex alone. For example, I always take them out to dinner first."

Do you sometimes turn a client down?

"I don't turn down women aged 18 and older. Every woman is attractive in her own way. I do find it important that a woman looks well-groomed."

Do you enjoy your dates with students?

"Of course it's fun to date young women. But the nicest age group is 25 to 40. These are women who know what they want and who have quite a bit of life experience. That's not the case with young students. Also, students usually don't have much money, so they can only hire me for an hour."

'Women don't just want sex, they want attention'

Do you often visit student houses?

"Students usually rent a room in a cheap hotel. I do remember one date that took place in a student house – that was very funny. It was a big house and her housemates were all home. It all had to be very hush-hush. This student hired me because she had never given anyone a blow job, and her boyfriend really wanted her to give him one. Luckily, I'm not only a gigolo, but also a teacher, so my didactic skills really came in useful, ha-ha."

Are students nowadays different from twenty years ago, when you were a student?

"These days, students tend to take off their clothes more easily; they are less prudish. But in terms of sex, it used to be better: before, when students did take off their clothes,



they were really open to adventure. Now they want all sorts of things, but when it comes to it, they get shy."

Why do you think that is?

"Probably because of apps like Tinder. Nowadays people tend to go for quick dates. Students are not used to getting so much attention anymore, and as a result, they don't want to make themselves vulnerable. Once you really get to know each other, you become more daring. Sometimes a student wants a kind of 50 Shades of Grey date. That really opens up a whole new world for them."

Do you talk to your clients about their personal problems, such as stress?

"It's usually the 30-plus women who talk a lot about why they hired me. Often they have problems with their partners; they feel abandoned, or lonely. At times like this, I'm also just someone to talk to. But it's up to them to start talking about these things – I don't initiate this kind of conversation. Students don't talk much about personal problems. They're mostly just curious about my work and what I do. This is what they ask about."

Do you contribute to your clients' happiness?

"For some clients, I certainly play an important role, especially if they feel lonely. I also have a fixed client whose husband can't have sex with her anymore because of his physical condition. He doesn't think this should stop his wife from enjoying herself. So not all my clients hire me in secret, without their partners knowing."

Does going on dates contribute to your happiness?

"I can certainly enjoy a good date with a client, but it's nothing compared to how I feel with my own partner. When I'm at work I completely switch off any feelings of love."

Is there no room for your own needs and feelings on a date?

"Of course I enjoy it when a client gives me a massage. And it's nice when the sex comes easily. Which is not always the case. Sometimes I can't get a hard-on. Especially if a client wants to have sex for a long time, I sometimes pop a pill. People pay a lot of money for a date with me [basic rate €100 per hour, students get a discount, MN] so I've got to perform. I put my own feelings on the back burner. In fact, I can just flip a mental switch to make sure I don't orgasm. How do I do it? Practice, I guess." ★

The (s)expert 'HIRING A GIGOLO IS NEARLY ALWAYS A DESPERATE ACT'

Does sex make people happy? And if it does, why don't we all hire gigolos and prostitutes? Clinical psychologist Jelto Drenth on taboos, needs and the nonsense of a lot of research on sex.

A 2015 Canadian study shows that couples are happiest if they have sex once a week. More often is OK, but it won't increase your happiness. The Groningen sexologist Jelto Drenth, affiliated to the Netherlands Association for Sexology, is not keen on these kinds of studies. "Research that focuses solely on frequency, and not on quality of sex just makes no sense. Not to mention the fact that these studies usually only talk about duo-sex. What about solo sex? Does it also count within a relationship?" Jelto Drenth has a deep dislike of magazines such as Men's Health. "The primitivism with which these men's magazines portray sexuality is completely outdated. They give

men tips on how to convince their partners to sleep with them every day. As if all men want to have sex every day." In decades of helping men (and women) get their sex life back on track, Drenth has developed a different perspective on male sexuality. He wrote a book about it, tellingly entitled *De man is geen jager (Men are Not Hunters)*.

In our 'sexualised society', there is incredible pressure on men to behave in a sexual manner. This is apparent from the movies we watch, the conversations we have, and the advertisements we see. "If a man is unable or unwilling to comply with this image, he's considered abnormal and has a problem. This results in deep feelings of shame." In the olden days, couples usually ended up seeing a therapist because the woman didn't want to have sex - nowadays it's often the other way around. A woman not wanting sex, says Drenth, is viewed as a relatively normal problem,

one that's met with some tolerance and a bit of humour. But the reverse situation is much more loaded. Because a man who doesn't want sex violates the stereotype.

Hobbyhorse

Yes, Drenth has seen many men and women who were unhappy with their sex life. But frequent sex is not a precondition for a happy life. Few things are as personal as sex. "One person may feel the need for sex every day, while another may live long and happy without any sex at all (yes, there is such a thing as a happy priest). So there's no simple answer to the question 'Does sex make people happy?"" The sexologist - who retired a few years ago has a hobbyhorse, as he calls it. "For a happy sex life the partners should understand each other's feelings and needs, and dare to discuss them openly and nakedly. If these needs don't match, solo sex can provide a solution." And it doesn't have to be secret,

either, says Drenth. "It can be very cosy to lie in bed together while one of you is enjoying his or her arousal. Luckily, masturbation is increasingly less of a taboo in the Netherlands, but it's probably still very different in places like America."

Drenth believes the best thing is for couples to 'figure it out together'. Hiring a prostitute or a gigolo is nearly always a desperate act, he says. "Some couples want more adventure, and they might consider a swingers club. When people who are in a relationship hire prostitutes, it usually means they've given up on improving their sex life. They're stagnating in their sexual development. It would be a better idea to go and see a sexologist."

It's different for singles, of course. "Hiring a prostitute is certainly something singles might enjoy, especially if they're not frustrated about not having a partner. Although they might not always be happy with the services offered."



Best day of 2017

"My **thesis deadline** was approaching fast and I still had a lot of work to do. To motivate myself, I booked a flight to Croatia for the day after my deadline. A friend of mine lives there and I'd told him I'd come and visit him sometime. Luckily I made the deadline and was able to go. The ultimate happy moment came later. As I stepped off the plane, an email from Osiris popped up on my screen. My thesis grade. I'd passed!"

David van Groeninghen (21), Biology student

OR YOU GO FOR POLYAMONY

Simone van Saarloos enjoys stepping off the beaten path. Especially when it comes to love. 'Even as a young child I would look at all these monogamous heterosexual relationships, and think: this isn't what I want.'

Text: Lara Maarssen / Photo: Fred van Diem



Simone van Saarloos with author Niña Weijers, with whom she hosted a talkshow.

hich of you here has ever had a polyamorous relationship?" In the LUX hall, where the theme for tonight (14 November) is a Radboud Reflects event on polyamory, more than half the audience raise their hand. Among the other half, a large majority says they're interested in such a relationship. If you're assuming the audience is full of hippies, you've got another thing coming. This is a very diverse audience, both in type and in age: students, people in their 30s, people in their 50s, men and women.

The audience's response suggests that polyamory – having multiple relationships – is on the rise. Of course, this audience is somewhat biased: a lecture on polyamory is likely to attract a lot of people who are interested in such relationships. But still: the event more than sold out.

Tonight in LUX the honour of speaking to us about polyamory falls to philosopher Simone van Saarloos. Two years ago she wrote a book entitled *Het monogame drama* (*The Monogamous Drama*). Monogamous relationships

'J have a monogamous partner'

are not in themselves a problem, she argues. But the fact that we seem to need them to lead to a successful and happy life is. "What we see now, I think, is that people want long-term, monogamous relationships because they seek comfort and safety in an increasingly individualised world. The outside world seems so frightening that we need relationships to experience safety and familiarity. But I wonder: if the distance between a safe private life and an unsafe outside world is so great, isn't that what we should work on changing?"

This is why she calls herself "a permanent single in contact". According to her, this term does more justice to reality. Because in principle, we're all alone, vulnerable, and looking for contact with others. "I'm not advocating some kind of hedonistic shopping around, with a new partner every week," explains Van Saarloos later that week on the phone. "On the contrary, for me it's all about connection and contact. But why can't you have this kind of contact with more than one person?"

Dead white men

Van Saarloos doesn't give away much about her personal life. Here's what we do know about her: she's always busy, has published three books, spends half her time in the Netherlands, and the other half in the US, studied Literary Studies and Philosophy, but now hates "reading only books by dead white men". She has multiple relationships, with men and women. She's recently taken to writing her name as Simon(e) – with brackets around the 'e' – to emphasize the effect of gender in her name. And in the last elections she appeared on the list for BIJ1, Sylvana Simons' political party that nearly made it to the Dutch Parliament.

One thing is clear: Van Saarloos is not into pigeonholing and "doing things according to the book". Especially not when it comes to love. "Even as a young child, I would look at all these monogamous heterosexual relationships, and think: this isn't what I want. Gradually, by reading a lot, and thinking and experimenting, I discovered that polyamory suits me much better."

Her main goal is not happiness, says Van Saarloos. "The thing is, we tend to say: 'Just be yourself, then you'll be happy.' But for many people this 'being yourself' is not that self-evident. A white monogamous heterosexual man still has an easier time of it than a black lesbian polyamorous woman. It doesn't work to say to this kind of person 'just be yourself'. For that to be possible we first have to change something in our society."

Family gathering

So she leaves the monogamous beaten path – and stimulates others to follow suit. Including students. "Students are also encouraged to either have a long-term relationship or to jump into bed with a new person every night. On the one hand, you've got the old aunt grilling you at every family gathering on whether you already have a boyfriend or girlfriend. On the other hand, you have a student culture of scoring and one-night stands." But according to Van Saarloos, you don't have to let yourself be pushed into either of these corners. You can also remain open to multiple relationships.

Society benefits from the idea that we all just keep doings things the way we've always done them. It's nice and tidy. But as a result we run the risk of forgetting that monogamy is just a game we invented: there are other ways of living. "Look at Facebook. It gives you three options: you're in a relationship, you're single, or 'it's complicated'. I'd like to tell people: it's always complicated."

Doesn't she run into problems? "Of course I do. I get jealous sometimes. But the point is: all relationships run into problems at times. If you follow the beaten path, it's a bit less noticeable. You can read about it in women's magazines: Has the spark gone out of your relationship? In polyamorous relationships, you have different problems. But if you dare to look at them, they turn out to be quite manageable."

"I have a monogamous partner who doesn't mind me having other relationships. But do you know what does bother her? All these people telling her: 'You know, I saw Simone yesterday with someone else. Doesn't that make you jealous?' She's OK with it, but the stigma – that's what really gets in the way." *****

IN SHORT



Simone van Saarloos (1990) is a writer, columnist and politician. She studied Philosophy and Literary Studies at the University of Amsterdam and The New School in New York. In 2015 she published Het monogame drama (The Monogamous Drama), in which she advocates polyamory. In 2013, together with Niña Weijers, she presented The Sexist Talk Show, which featured only female guests. Van Saarloos writes columns for *nrc.next* and in the last elections she appeared on the candidate list of Sylvana Simons' party.

HAPPY WITH fatty fish

It's become a tradition: in every Vox Christmas edition Chef Emile van der Staak of restaurant De Nieuwe Winkel presents a dish to match our theme. This year, mackerel is on the menu. Text: Annemarie Haverkamp / Photo's: Duncan de Fey

hy mackerel? Because of the Omega 3 fatty acids. There's so much nonsense going around about eating food that makes you happy, explains Emile van der Staak. "But it's been scientifically proven that Omega 3 fatty acids help prevent depression." These acids are found in fish, in particular in mackerel. Van der Staak serves it with walnut miso, because walnuts also contain Omega 3s.

"But", he says, "I'm afraid if you want food to make you happy you'll have to create a nice atmosphere first." In other words: good company and a pleasant location. This probably has more impact on your psyche than the chemicals in your food, suspects Van der Staak.



The mackerel served at De Nieuwe Winkel is caught in the North Sea. By a small-scale fishing company. This is something that makes the chef happy. He's an idealist. "What I enjoy most is creating vegetable dishes. Ultimately, this is the way to save the world. But for that you have to make it taste good."

De Nieuwe Winkel serves very little meat and fish. Van der Staak is euphoric when a new dish, preferably one consisting solely of vegetables, is a hit.

If you don't feel like cooking, you can enjoy Van der Staak's creations on the Hertogstraat. In December, the restaurant is serving an eleven-course menu without meat or fish. *****

Mackerel

4 mackerel filets 290 ml water 60 ml sherry vinegar 40 ml red wine vinegar Salt

• Sprinkle the mackerel filets with salt (skin-side down).

• Leave them to rest uncovered in the fridge for 1 hour.

• Make brine by heating the remaining ingredients in a container up to 38°C. Take the mackerel out of the fridge, and turn the filets over. • Pour the warm brine over the fish fillets. Make sure they're completely covered.

• Put them back in the fridge, and leave to rest for 1 hour.

• Remove the fillets from the brine and place them skin-side down on baking paper.

• Put the fish back in the fridge and allow the skin to dry for 1 hour.

• The fillets are now ready for use. Cover them with cling film to avoid them drying out further.

Cream of Cauliflower

250 g cauliflower florets 200 ml single cream 40 ml milk 40 g crème fraiche Salt and pepper

• Put all the ingredients except the crème fraiche in a pan and bring to the boil.

As soon as the cauliflower is soft, take the mixture off the heat and pour it into a blender.
Blend until smooth and add crème fraiche to taste.

Add salt and pepper to taste.

Walnut miso

60 g dried broad beans 80 g fresh walnuts 130 g koji 110 ml water 80 g salt

Soak the broad beans overnight in lots of water.
Cook the beans for 20 minutes, and then drain them, saving the cooking water.

Mix the koji with the broad beans and the salt.
Use a masher and add some cooking water until you obtain a mass the consistency of mashed potatoes.

• Leave it to stand in a dark place for 6 months, under pressure in a closed container with a water seal.

To serve

Cut the mackerel fillets in half lengthwise. Cut the pieces lengthwise again, and remove the backbone. Arrange the fillets on a plate and add some cream of cauliflower and some oxalis. Serve the walnut miso separately.

Pickled mackerel with cream of cauliflower, oxalis and walnut miso

Chef's tip

Buy your mackerel fresh from Wilma Graat's fish stall on the Grote Markt. You can make the walnut miso yourself (it takes six months). You can also buy miso from the Asian store and stir in some walnuts.

INSTEAD OF HAPPINESS

y parents always did their best to keep my little brother within the boundaries of normality. He didn't do well at school, and got kicked out of class pretty much every day. He was a small angry boy, my little brother. Had trouble concentrating, and difficulties reading and writing. He was particularly restless in groups. The school advised enrolling him for group therapy, together with other children just like himself. At home he threw a tantrum.

"I'm not going! I'm not going!"

He wriggled frenetically on the kitchen floor while my parents took turns trying to calm him down. In the end we all went with him to his therapy session, only to discover that all the other children had dragged their parents along too. Steaming coffee pots were waiting for us. Throughout the various exercises, my brother acted shy and followed the instructions impeccably. I was squeezed into a small chair among the adults.

At home everything had to be clear and structured. Meals were served at set times. In the evenings it was quiet. I was assigned chores. After school I had to help mamma in the house. I was responsible for washing dishes. I cooked while my little brother went to his tutor. He was the restless focal point around which the entire family cautiously revolved. Each time he managed to bring home a passing grade, even if it was only a bare pass, there was a celebration with cake. Mamma called the entire family together, the cake was cut into four pieces, and everyone blew out a candle.

I wasn't such a problematic case. My report cards were full of passes. As a reward, mamma would sometimes slip some change into my pocket.

"We didn't expect anything else from you."

This is how it was at our house. If I ever complained about it, mamma would quickly shush me, as if even talking about it was a problem.

"You've got nothing to be jealous of," she would whisper to me.

One day I was cycling home alone, when something went wrong. I was supposed to cook that night. In my mind I was already cutting vegetables when suddenly a black car came at me from the right. With its headlights it looked like an angry wild beast.

Next thing I knew I was in my parents' car, driving on the motorway. For the first time in my life I was allowed to sit in the front, and even though our car was just a small two-door affair, we even overtook motorcycles.

I woke up in hospital. Something was wrapped tight around my head and my right arm was dark yellow. My parents shuffled silently and discreetly into my room. At first they just stared at me, without saying anything. My father's hands shifted restlessly in and out of his trouser pockets.

"H-hi. H-How are you? You sure scared us there. All right."

He seemed to stumble over every word.

"Look what the doctor's done," mamma began smiling. "He painted your arm yellow!" I knew it was iodine, but she was trying so hard I didn't dare contradict her.

"Yellow, yes," I played along. "How silly!"

Behind them stood my little brother. He was clasping my mother's leg and didn't dare say anything.

I had to stay in bed for three weeks, with the curtains shut. For the first time, there was no slamming of doors. There was still occasional screaming downstairs, but when someone came stomping up the stairs, the sound would quickly die down, and by the time they reached my room they'd be whispering. My parents tapped gently on my door to ask whether I needed anything. They brought me biscuits and soup, and I learned to drink tea.

Later on, my father dragged our television into the room. He put the bulky contraption on a small pink stool and connected the cables.

In the mornings, my little brother would lie next to me and we'd watch TV together. "What's on now?"

"Spy Girls."

"Bah!" he sighed, and pulled the woollen blanket over his cold body. He didn't once ask me to change the channel.

Despite my parents' objections I helped him with his school work from my bed. He didn't always manage to whisper; some of the things that happened at school clearly required shouting. He would sit up in bed and tell me a lively story of empty ink cartridges as my mother rushed into the room to take him away.

"You know she needs her rest!" she whispered as loudly as she could. My door closed softly. I was alone once again. Through the walls I could hear my little brother still complaining.

After three weeks, the TV was put back in the living room and I was allowed to go back to school. At home, mamma started to wash the dishes that had piled up. "Look at that," she sighed as I walked into the kitchen. That was all.

I waited until I was alone. The sink was overflowing with dirty plates. I let the water run until it was so hot it almost burned.



Max Hermens (1991) is a writer and a man of letters. His work appeared in *Das Magazin, Neophilologus* and *Op Ruwe Planken*. He has read from his work at De Oversteek Festival and the Wintertuin Festival. He is involved in a talent development project organised by De Nieuwe Oost Productions (formerly Wintertuin).

Happy New Year.

Deciding what to do on New Year's Eve is always tricky. The one night that's supposed to be more fun than all other nights combined. Where do you go, and how do you avoid the wretched queuing? Thijs van Beusekom, former student and editor-in-chief of Nijmegen Cultuurstad, offers some tips.

Text: Thijs van Beusekom **Photo:** Gerard Verschooten

esperate looks. A queue, best described as a funeral procession, has formed on the stairs to the front door of the student house. "What horrible weather," whispers a friend. He sighs. We didn't get to see any fireworks: it was too misty. Unless you count the neighbours' firecrackers. The drizzle runs steadily down the windows. We probably won't get cold any time soon – we've had too much to drink for that – but we're certainly getting wet. Why did we decide to go into town again? It was so nice at home, and we still had plenty of beer left. But we bought the tickets for this party more than a month ago, and it's already half past two. We were soaked by the time we got to town. Having waited fifteen minutes in the queue, we look at each other. All right, let's do it! We throw our tickets in the bin and walk into the first bar we see, only to emerge at dawn and stumble home, drunk on happiness.

It's been a few years since that funeral procession on the stairs, because for the last few years, we've always spent New Year's Eve at home. Last year, we ended up in a student room, talking until 6 a.m. with a group of friends about football and friendship, with one friend treating us to his famous imitation of Frank de Boer. And yet, there's always the nagging doubt: shouldn't we be at some hip party? 'Shouldn't' is the key word here, because going out on New Year's Eve certainly feels like an obligation. The night of 31 December to 1 January, the one night that should make all other 364 nights out pale by comparison. It's stupid really – everyone knows spontaneous parties are the best.

This year we fell for it again. Despite our firm belief that it was best to stay at home, curiosity won over reason. Some parties attracted our attention. We opted for a structural approach. We created a Top 3, as diverse as possible, so there'd be something for everyone. For each party we listed a number of plus points. We ignored the minuses; after all it was supposed to be an attractive selection. Since we were late getting organised, as always, we had to take into account that some parties might be sold out. Nothing spontaneous, but still, we were happy with our work. We still don't know which party we're going to. But to save VOX readers the trouble of doing all the groundwork, I proudly present our list of last-minute New Year's Eve plans. Happy New Year! *

THE LIST



Orift New Year's Eve Dance Party

Drift's techno heroes definitely deserve to be on our list, so this was a logical choice. + Fantastic party location: De Vereeniging! + Drift = guaranteed high-quality parties (source: experts by experience) + Techno + Lasts until 7 a.m., so plenty of time to get there



Brebl has started its count-down to the demolition ball. Bring something to share.

+ Brebl (need we say more?)

+ Live music: Terra Volta + Only four years to go until the demolition ball, so grab your chance while you can! + Entrance only € 10



Subcultuur + Lindenberg = Party! 'Fissa Foyer' will be there. Need we say more? + De Lindenberg + Three rooms, so always something fun + 21+ + Description: 'Come to dance, get carnal, or chat!'

After-party Tip: Frietje Stooffeest

Zusje van Debbie is once again organising a Frietje Stooffeest in STOOM. Starting at 4 p.m., you can eat as much greasy food as you want and wash down your hang-over. Doesn't that sound like just the ticket?



A bus roundtrip Nijmegen-Antwerp costs only € 10. And a weekend of specialty beers and Flemish fries in Antwerp never disappoints!

TIPS

Of course you can scour all the broadsheets and websites for information or subscribe to some spam-like newsletter to find out what's happening in Nijmegen in the field of arts & culture next month. But it may be easier to take the advice of the trusty Vox tipsters.

LISTEN

TED VAN AANHOLT (22) IS A BACHELOR'S STUDENT IN PHILOSOPHY, CRITIC AT 3VOOR12 GELDERLAND, AND CONCERT PHOTOGRAPHER

LUWTEN



21 December, Merleyn

For four nights in a row she was the special guest of the Nijmegen Heroes of the State. Her debut album was received with great acclaim. Beautiful, dreamy pop in Merleyn's cosy setting. 10.00 p.m., $\in 9$

NIJMEGEN POP QUIZ 30 December, LUX

Come and join us, not to listen, but to put your listening experience to good use! At the Nijmegen Pop Quiz, you get to show off as the biggest pop music expert in town. Always fun and a great way to end the musical year! $10.00 \text{ p.m.}, \notin 9.50$

INTERGALACTIC LOVERS 12 January, Doornroosje

Unadulterated pop, with an original twist, the way only Belgian bands can do it. Invocatory and enchanting, but be warned: you won't be able to get the songs out of your head for days afterwards.

8.00 p.m., € 16.50

WATCH

12/2017

LEONIE SMIT (21) IS HEAD OF THE CULTURE ON CAMPUS FILM COMMITTEE AND RESPONSIBLE FOR ONLINE PR

THE DISASTER ARTIST

Premiere, 21 December, LUX

This film follows Tommy Wiseau (aka James Franco), famous for being the creator of the worst film ever. The cast also includes wellknown faces such as Dave Franco, Seth Rogan and Allison Brie.

7.30 p.m. (with a preliminary talk, student rate \notin 6.50)

BILLY

5 January, LUX

If you've always been curious about what a Theo Maassen film looks like, come and see Billy, his directing debut. In the film we follow ventriloquist doll Bill as he completely takes over the life of his ventriloquist Gerard. After the film, you get a chance to chat with Theo Maassen himself.

7.30 p.m., student rate \in 6.50

WORLD PRESS PHOTO 2017



Until 4 March 2018, Africa Museum Until early March you can still admire the World Press Photo exhibition. The most impressive press photographs of 2017 (including winning photographs) hang next to images we all know and love.

Student rate € 6, normal rate € 14

READ

JORDI LAMMERS (21) STUDIES DUTCH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE AND IS A FORMER RADBOUD UNIVERSITY CAMPUS POET

BOOK PRESENTATION OF HUMANS OF HEUMENSOORD



15 December, Villa Klein Heumen

How did the Heumensoord refugees experience their time in Nijmegen? During the book presentation of Humans of Heumensoord we'll remember stories and interview former inhabitants. A festive evening with music and readings. Come and join us!

6.00-9.00 p.m., free entrance

DIMITRI VERHULST & CORRIE VAN BINSBERGEN

17 December, LUX

Is it possible to represent the entire history of humanity in one show? Dimitri Verhulst and Corrie van Binsbergen manage to do just that in their play Godverdomse Dagen op een Godverdomse Bol (God-damned Days in a God-Damned World), an evening introduced by our very own Dutch Thinker Laureate, René ten Bos.

4.00 p.m., € 21

GERJON GIJSBERS

Scheuren in het canvas (Rips in the canvas)

Do you enjoy books with dry abrasive humour? Then you'll love the novel debut of Nijmegen author Gerjon Gijsbers, Scheuren in het canvas. It centres on Luctor, a man who can worry for days about a missing shower curtain. Doesn't that sound great?

€ 17.50, to be ordered from Uitgeverij Fargus

GO

THIJS VAN BEUSEKOM (24) IS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF NIJMEGEN CULTURE CITY AND FREELANCE JOURNALIST FOR VOX

INDIE DISCO

26 December, Merleyn

For all fans of Tame Impala, Radiohead, Caribou, and The Smiths. An evening full of Rock, Punk and of course Indie. New tracks mixed in with golden oldies. 11.00 p.m., free entrance

CHOCOLADE

26 January, Doornroosje

Who hasn't heard of The Party Squad? These living legends are the guests of honour at the jubilee edition of Chocolade. For the past five years, this party has delivered a by now familiar and successful mix of Dance Hall, Urban, R&B, classics and hip-hop. 23.00 p.m., \notin 15.50

HAPPY FEELINGS



9 February, Waalhalla

The organisers promise us lots of balloons, confetti and CO2! Dance the night away to 1990s and 2000s hits, lots of guilty pleasures and true classics. 11.00 p.m., \in 15.91



Best day of 2017

"The Summer day began with a mental breakdown. I just wrote a horrific (and unfortunately also very important) exam and was convinced that my life had just fallen apart. But before I could lie in bed the entire day and cry my heart out, I was rescued. In the form of my boyfriend and my friend Janina who both decided that developmental psychology sucks anyways and we are going to have a **Waal beach day**. And, after that, by my best friend who picked me up for dinner. I had a lot of less complicated days in 2017, but to not be alone with the complicated ones is eventually one of the happiest things I could think of."

Antonia Leise, psychology student from Germany

AGENDA MESSAGES FOR VOX CAMPUS CAN BE SENT TO: VOXCAMPUS@VOX.RU.NL

GENERAL www.ru.nl/studentenkerk

17 DECEMBER, 7.30 p.m.: Festival of Lessons and Carols. According to tradition, in preparation for Christmas, we repeat the nine lessons on mortal sin, the Messiah's promise and the birth of Jesus Christ, accompanied by music and songs. Location: Student Chaplaincy

24 DECEMBER, 7.00 p.m.: Children's Christmas Celebration at the Student Chaplaincy. All children aged 4 to 12 are welcome to the Student Chaplaincy to take part in a nativity play. Afterwards there'll be hot chocolate, lemonade, coffee and tea. Location: Student Chaplaincy.

24 DECEMBER, 9.30 p.m.: Christmas Celebration. Join us on Christmas Eve for a Dutch Ecumenical Christian celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Everyone's welcome! Location: Student Chaplaincy.

STAFF ASSOCIATION www.ru.nl/pv

19 DECEMBER, 7.30 p.m.: Staff Association Workshop on Flower Arrange-

ments. Do you enjoy crafting and do you love flowers and plants? The Staff Association is organising a Flower Arrangement workshop, to help you prepare your house or garden for Christmas. Location: Villa Oud-Heyendael.

CULTURE ON CAMPUS www.ru.nl/cultuuropdecampus

19 DECEMBER, 4.00 p.m.: Photography Contest Award. Who's the best photographer on campus? Students were invited to send in their best photographs around the theme of 'activism'. Join us and discover which six submissions won a prize. Location: Cultural Café.

20 DECEMBER, 7.30 p.m.: Screening of Stories We Tell, a Canadian documentary in which a daughter investigates her complex relationship with her family. She's searching for the truth, but how to find it when everyone tells a different story? Location: Lecture Hall Complex.

10 JANUARY, 7.30 p.m.: Screening of *Interstellar*. Where will humanity go if the Earth perishes? In this science-fiction film by Christopher Nolan, based on the physics theories of Kip Thorne, a father embarks on an expedition to a new planet behind the stars. Location: Cultuurzaal C.

16 JANUARY, 8.00 p.m.: Finals of Nootuitgang, the singer-songwriter competition for Nijmegen students. Come and listen to the finalists and find out who'll be awarded the honour of singer-songwriter of the year. Location: Skylounge (Erasmus Building).

22 JANUARY, 8.00 p.m.: Closer to the Poets. An evening full of poetry, this time with poet Maarten van der Graaff, who will read from his own work and be interviewed on the role of the poet in society. The Campus Poets of the last three years will be there too. Location: Cultuurzaal C.

24 JANUARY, 7.30 p.m.: Screening of Hidden Figures. Did you know that three Afro-American women played an important role in the space race? This film tells their story. Thanks to their calculations, in 1962 astronaut John Glenn succeeded in orbiting around the Earth. Location: Cultuurzaal C.

31 JANUARY, 7.30 p.m.: Cabaret Night with De Blonde Jongens en Tim. They won the 2014 Groningen Student Cabaret Festival. Dressed in denim hot pants, they are now bringing their first evening-length show to Nijmegen. Location: Cultuurzaal C.

Radboud Reflects www.ru.nl/radboudreflects

8 JANUARY, 8.00 p.m.: The Soul in Eastern and Western Traditions. Lectures by Philosophers Hein van Dongen, Laurens Landeweerd and Angela Roothaan. On animism, the idea that everything has a soul, and differences in this respect between Eastern and Western traditions. What can we learn from a spirited perspective on life? Location: LUX.

11 JANUARY, 7.30 p.m.: Lecture with Dutch Philosopher of Technology Peter-Paul Verbeek and Don Ihde, the godfather of American philosophy of technology. According to these experts, technology doesn't just provide us with new opportunities; it also changes our relationship with the world. Location: Cultuurzaal C.

16 JANUARY (subject to change), 7.30 p.m.: Digital Detox. The struggles of the smartphone generation. Lecture and talk with Philosopher Hans Schnitzler, who subjected his students to a digital detox. You can read about the results in his book.

Do a one-week detox of your own, and share your discoveries with the audience. Location: to be announced.

17 JANUARY, 7.30 p.m.: Instructions on How to Have the Blues. Philosophy workshop with Philosopher Roy Dings. January and February are ideal months for 'the blues', but is this really a bad thing? Let's talk about it in the light of Heidegger's philosophy. Location: Thiemeloods.

23 JANUARY, 7.30 p.m.: The Invisible Ecological Crisis. Double lecture by futurist Sietske Veenman and Plant Ecologist Hans de Kroon. Did you notice that your windshield is no longer soiled in summer, or that there're fewer insects around? Probably not. The ecologic crisis is unfolding right before our eyes, yet it remains an invisible, elusive and complex problem. Location: to be announced.

24 JANUARY, 7.30 p.m.: What's true? Debate with Theologians Daniela Müller and Hans Schilderman. Is it important to always speak the truth? Or is lying making a comeback? Come and listen to this debate and decide with the judge who's right. Location: to be announced.

6 FEBRUARY, 7.30 p.m.: The Violence of Money. Lecture by Philosopher Antoon Vandenvelde. *Money makes the world go round*. But how do you make sure the world in question is a happy one? Come and listen to Vandevelde's vision on a healthy relationship with money. Location: Lecture Hall Complex.

15 FEBRUARY, time to be announced: Love. How Do You Do It? Philosophy workshop with Philosopher Annemarie van Steen. How do you love, and what's important in love? Philosophise together and find out what love means to you. Location: to be announced.

22 FEBRUARY, time to be announced: Empathy in Excess. Lecture by Philosopher Ignaas Devisch. Is empathy always a good thing? On the personal interaction level, it's definitely desirable, but empathy is not some kind of panacea that can solve all social problems. Location: to be announced.

COLOPHON

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