A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF HAPPINESS AS EXPERIENCE BY THE SADHUS

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A DISSERTATION

in

Penn Chief Learning Officer

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Education

2019

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Jagadguru Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Swami Shivendra Puri Ji Maharaj for his unwavering love, guidance, and blessings.

And this is for you mom for your love and instilling values of righteousness and education in the family. You will always be in our memories.

And for my dad as my constant source of inspiration, who always taught us to place faith in the Divine and education as our highest priorities.

To my brother Bhupesh for being a prime motivating force behind this research. This thesis would not have been possible without his immense encouragement and support during the past five years of my doctoral journey.

To my wife Vaishali for her endless patience throughout this course, for managing our business operations by herself and taking care of kids, and for always being available for extensive discussions on “happiness.”

To my daughter Kirti and son Shekhar for their understanding and patience, for being mindful about keeping my study environment noise-free so I could finish this study.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am incredibly grateful to my dissertation committee advisor Dr. Annie McKee. This study would not have been possible without your compassion, ideas, and constant guidance through the entire PennCLO doctoral program. Thank you for believing in me and for devoting countless hours to supervise me at every step of this dissertation.

It was a great honor and a fortune to have Dr. Elizabeth Mackenzie as a member of my dissertation committee. Thank you for recommending excellent books and insightful scholarly articles that increased my understanding of the phenomenon of happiness. Your detailed feedback and ideas helped me during the participant interviews that shaped this dissertation to its present form.

I am immensely thankful to Dr. Kandi Wiens for her sincere support and encouragement through this dissertation journey and being a member of my dissertation committee. Thank you to your remarkable promptness in guiding me in this research. Your detailed feedback and fantastic dissertation served as a guide to structuring all five chapters of this study.

I would like to express gratitude for Karen Kassel Hoffman from Williams Town Communications for doing fantastic work in editing this thesis.

And finally, I am indebted to all 20 sadhus who joyfully took part in this research. Your knowledge and experience about the phenomenon of happiness were beyond my imagination. This dissertation would not have been possible without your willingness and openness to share the truth of happiness.
ABSTRACT

A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF HAPPINESS AS EXPERIENCED BY THE SADHUS

Gopesh Sharma

Annie McKee

Human happiness has been a widely debated topic for the past 2,500 years within the various philosophical and religious traditions. However, happiness itself remained an elusive concept within the context of recent empirical happiness research. This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to understand the phenomenon of happiness from the perspective of sadhus, holy ascetics of India, who renounce all their material possessions and worldly desires for the discovery of true happiness or moksha (Sanskrit: freedom from all sufferings). Using Husserl’s transcendental phenomenological method, the study selected 20 sadhus for in-depth interviews. The sadhus reported their happiness as ananda (Sanskrit: happiness), far higher than normal levels of happiness that ordinary people experience. Inductive thematic data analysis found that happiness is every human being’s most fundamental unchanging true nature, and one must discover it within, not in the external world. According to the sadhus, happiness has an animate nature, meaning it is a living construct with no shape, form, size, or other qualities, but happiness is conscious or “the knower.” The sadhus also described human happiness as infinite, all-pervasive, beyond, and distinct from the human mind. They described happiness as none other than Divine, their source of continuous care and protection. The study found sadhus are very happy people and have no sense of fear. They attributed their happiness to five critical factors: (a) Guru, a spiritual teacher, (b) self-knowledge, (c) serving others, (d)
practicing yoga and meditation, and (e) renunciation and living a simple life. From the perspective of sadhus, this study found everyone has access to immense happiness which can be discovered within through virtuous actions and secular practices like yoga and meditations or mindfulness-based meditations.

*Keywords:* Happiness, Phenomenological, Qualitative, Sadhus, India, Spiritual, Positive Psychology, Religion
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In 2016, during my annual visit to Mumbai, India, I happened to meet a wandering Hindu sadhu (a monk). He was sleeping under the shade on a cement floor after his long foot-walk from his last stop. In his usual orange robes, the middle-aged sadhu had some personal belongings, his hand-carry cloth bag, which he used as a pillow. A few minutes after he woke up, I approached him, bowed, and introduced myself. Then, in my native language, I asked, “If you do not mind, please tell me if you are happy living a renounced life, with no home, family, or material possessions?” He replied, “sadhus do not celebrate happiness. They forever enjoy themselves in ananda (Sanskrit: pure happiness).”

Even though most sadhus keep a reserved demeanor, this sadhu expressed his experience of true happiness. The sadhu described the high levels of joy he experiences and the inner higher powers he enjoys, which he attributed to his daily religious prayers. I had never asked a sadhu a direct question about their happiness in life even though my association with the sadhus is over two decades old. I lived in India for 28 years and was brought up in a religious Hindu middle-class family. While growing up with my two siblings, our parents instilled ethical values in us. They taught us to behave as per the dharma (Sanskrit: morals and ethics) as written in the Vedas—ancient Hindu sacred texts.

In 1994, I met a prominent Hindu Guru, a spiritual teacher who lives in suburban Mumbai, India. Over two decades of my association with him and his ashram (Sanskrit: typically, an abode of a Hindu spiritual teacher or a sadhu, which traditionally is like a school where students of all ages learn Vedic teachings), I took part in many Vedic rituals.
and spiritual discussions. I also met many sadhus from different sects who visit the ashram from faraway places. I lived in the ashram for one and a half years from 2012 to 2014. During those years at the ashram, I often ate food with the visiting sadhus and understood a deeper meaning of many Hindu spiritual concepts and stories.

Sadhus often keep a reserved demeanor. They speak little with ordinary people, like me. Even after having many conversations with the sadhus, I lacked a solid understanding of sadhus’ lives and their psychological well-being. Many questions in my mind remained unanswered. For instance, are all sadhus happy people in a real sense after giving up most of their worldly desires? If sadhus are happy, how contended they are? What does happiness mean to the sadhus? What factors influences sadhus’ satisfaction and psychological well-being?

Although my observations and notions suggested sadhus are happy people, ordinary people know little about the sadhus. Many people believe the sadhus are extreme people, or outliers, whose lives are of little significance to them. I decided to find the truth of happiness from the perspective of sadhus through a phenomenological qualitative investigation.

Before I started my study a question arose, would it be worthwhile to study the outliers? Achor, a Harvard positive psychologist says, “yes.” Achor (2010) says that studies conducted on normal people keep ordinary people at normal level. However, when outliers are examined, the level of the average people are raised to the level of outliers. So, it is significant to study outliers.
Furthermore, other researchers in the past (DeRobertis, 2016; Heffernan, 2014) also called for a phenomenological investigation to understand happiness because most modern studies on happiness mostly adopted a quantitative approach.

Therefore, I conducted a phenomenological study on the sadhus in a unique cultural context. The study produced rich descriptions that revealed the meaning and sources of happiness from the perspective of sadhus, whose only goal in life is the discovery of moksha (Sanskrit: pure happiness or freedom from all suffering).

**Who are Sadhus?**

According to ethnographic research on the lives of sadhus (Hausner, 2007), the sadhus are saffron-robed Hindu ascetics, religious people from India, who live a renounced life of self-discipline and abstention. They are like the monks of the Buddhist tradition, another common religion in India, Bhutan, and Tibet. Apart from India, the sadhus also live in other countries of the Indian subcontinent, including Nepal and Sri Lanka. The sadhus relinquish their material life for the discovery of pure happiness for reaching divinity within themselves.

To become a sadhu, a person must take part in a renunciation ceremony (Hausner, 2007; Levy, 2011), an initiation ritual in which the sadhus must give up their material possessions, family, friends, home, and wealth. They even renounce their family and given names. After their renunciation ceremony and upon their enrollment into sadhu-hood, the sadhus must follow a strict life, as per their monastic order. Per most monastic orders, sadhus are asked not to marry or remain single after the initiation ceremony. They should wear ocher, orange, or white robes and should own only a few material
belongings, just enough to live a basic life. The sadhus must eat a vegetarian diet, follow a strict daily routine, do Vedic rituals, read Vedic texts, and wander from one place to another for as long as their health and age allow. Owning a home, a permanent dwelling place, is not an option for the sadhus, which makes them distinct from the householders. However, senior Guru-level sadhus or older sadhus may stay at their ashrams for as long as they want. Typically, sadhus are often males; however, there is no restriction for females; anyone can become a sadhu.

There are 4 to 5 million sadhus in India alone (Hartsuiker, 2014). Sadhus have been wandering the Indian subcontinent for over 3,000 years (Hausner, 2007). During the 8th century BCE, a noted Indian sadhu-philosopher, Adi Shankaracharya, founded the Advaita Vedanta tradition, the most popular of the six schools of thought of the Indian philosophy: Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiṣesika, Mīmāṁsā, and Vedānta (Nicholson, 2010; Ranganathan, 2016). Shankaracharya referred to the sadhus as sannyasis (Sanskrit: renouncers), thus showing that sadhus existed in India earlier than the 8th century BCE.

There are three main orders of sadhus in India: the Saivas worshipers of the supreme Lord Shiva; the Saktas worshipers of the female energy, Goddess Devi; and the Vaishnavas, worshipers of another supreme Lord Vishnu (Oman, 1905). Lord Shiva is believed as the destroyer of this creation, Lord Vishnu is believed as the preserver of this universe, and Goddess Devi is considered as the Mother Goddess of all energy present in this world. Essentially, all three are considered as different forms of one unifying source Brahman, or OM, the cause and source of this entire creation (Constance & Ryan, 2007). This study will consider the Saivas sadhus, who follow the principles of
Shankaracharya’s Advaita Vedanta. But are sadhus happy people? Some evidence exists in the literature.

**Are Sadhus Happy People?**

Before this study, my personal experiences and long-time association with the sadhus informed me that most sadhus are peaceful and happy people and very satisfied with their lives. However, it was possible that my views were superficial and biased. While the present study results came out consistent with my notions, the empirical evidence confirmed my view. For instance, a quantitative study conducted on a similar population, the Catholic priests (Isacco, Sahker, Krinock, Sim, & Hamilton, 2016; Rossetti, 2011) found priests are very happy people. Likewise, other quantitative research studies on religious people in India (Maheshwari & Singh, 2009; Mohan, Prasad, & Rao, 2004) found that deeply religious people are happy and satisfied with their lives. So, before starting this research, a literature review supplied a piece of evidence suggesting sadhus are happy people.

**Rationale for the Study**

Happiness is paramount for everyone. People seek happiness at every turn (McMahon, 2010). Everyone wants to be happy. Amid today’s turbulent times, the demand for understanding happiness is higher than ever before (Kasser & Sheldon, 2009; King & Napa, 1998). However, happiness has always been an elusive concept when it comes to defining it (Haybron, 2011).

Discussions on human happiness have been going on within various philosophical and religious traditions for over 2,500 years (trans. Aristotle, 2017). In the recent past, the
topic of happiness has gained tremendous popularity as a response to the growing unrest in people’s lives and increased competition in at workplaces. There is an increasing interest in happiness within the scholarly and academic community. This growing interest in happiness is evident with the emergence of positive psychology (Boniwell, 2012; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology is a branch of psychology that only focuses on people’s happiness and well-being.

Although researchers have already done much research on happiness, happiness itself is still an elusive concept. Through recent research efforts has revealed a lot about what makes people happy, but it is not yet clearly know what happiness is. This vague understanding of what is happiness is partly because most earlier studies on happiness adopted a quantitative approach to study happiness. In response, researchers called for a phenomenological inquiry into happiness (DeRobertis, 2016; Heffernan, 2014).

This investigation aimed to explore happiness using a qualitative phenomenological approach to answer two fundamental questions—what happiness is and what makes people happy—from the perspective of sadhus, whose goal in life is the discovery of pure happiness. This research also needed to find out if sadhus themselves are happy people. Therefore, in the wake of growing unrest in people’s lives and organizations (Kasser & Sheldon, 2009), I conducted this study with an increasing demand to understanding happiness.

**Research Questions**

This phenomenological investigation aimed at understanding the construct of happiness from the perspective of sadhus.
It explored questions like what happiness means for the sadhus, do sadhus perceive themselves to be happy people, and what factors influence their happiness. The primary research questions were:

Research question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?

Research question 2: Do sadhus perceive themselves to be happy people?

Research question 3: What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness?

**Significance of the Study**

In this section, I discuss the significance of this study for individuals in three contexts: (a) general population; (b) leaders, managers, and employees in organizations, and; (c) researchers and scholars of positive organizational scholarship (POS).

**General Population**

Happiness in life is paramount for people, but it is still a vague concept. The general population may apply the knowledge from his study to enhance their happiness levels. Deep understanding of happiness generated in this study from the perspective of sadhus would likely help people make educated decisions about what happiness is and what makes them happy.

**Leaders, Managers, and Employees in Organizations**

The ideas presented in this study are especially valuable to leaders, managers, and employees—individuals at all levels in workplaces. While leaders and managers may develop new strategies to increase happiness in employees, crucial for employee's work
engagements, employees in companies can increase their happiness levels, thereby further increasing happiness in workplaces.

**Researchers and Scholars of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS)**

One goal of positive psychology is to create positive institutions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). A response to this vision of positive psychology is positive organizational scholarship (POS) (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). The researchers and scholars of POS get ideas from positive psychology researchers, integrate those ideas, and suggest strategies for building positivity in organizations. The present study is valuable for positive psychologists and the researchers of positive organizational scholarship (POS) because this study not only provides support to some existing ideas to develop positive institutions but also suggests new ideas that could be integrated into their strategies.

Therefore, the present study is valuable to the people in society, leaders, managers, and employees in organizations, and researchers and scholars of positive organizational scholarship.

**Conclusion**

Everyone wants to be happy. In current turbulent times, the demand for understanding happiness is higher than ever before. Although debates on happiness have been going on for the past 2,500 years, a lack of a clear understanding of the phenomenon of happiness motivated this phenomenological research. This study selected a population of sadhus who renounce all their material possessions and worldly desires and dedicate their life for the discovery of true happiness.
A few earlier studies on religious people suggested that sadhus enjoy healthy psychological well-being. However, in the earlier studies, happiness itself stayed an elusive concept. Happiness remained a vague idea partly because earlier studies adopted a quantitative approach to study happiness and partly because the researchers were primarily interested in finding what makes people happy.

From the evidence and for the growing demand to understand happiness, this study aimed to explore happiness by taking a phenomenological qualitative approach to understand what happiness is and what makes individuals happy from the perspective of sadhus. The study answered the following research questions:

1. What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?
2. Do sadhus perceive themselves to be happy people?
3. If so, what do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness?

The study findings are valuable to the general population; leadership, work, and organizations; and researchers of positive organizational scholarship who strive to create positive institutions, which is also one goal of positive psychology.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

As mentioned earlier, research and debates on happiness have been going on for over two millennia, so there is a vast body of literature on happiness. In this chapter, I discuss what the existing literature says about happiness.

What is Happiness?

What exactly is happiness? How do people define it, and what makes people happy? How can one be lastingly happy? These are the questions that the ancient philosophers, medieval and modern thinkers, and the major world religions have tried to answer for over 2,500 years. In the Western world, the discussions on human happiness date to the era of Socrates (469–399 BCE), and in the Eastern world, people discussed happiness even during the time of Buddha (563–483 BCE).

Most people understand what happiness is, but defining happiness becomes a complicated concept. Haybron (2011) says that there are two philosophical literatures on ‘happiness,’ each corresponding to a different sense of the term. One uses happiness as a value term—a life that goes well for the person leading it—like well-being or flourishing. The other body of literature uses happiness as a purely psychological term—a state of mind—like depression or tranquility. For example, when it is said a person “is happy,” it refers to happiness as a psychological term. In contrast, a statement like, “he is leading a happy life,” points to happiness as a value term.

The following section discusses ancient and contemporary philosophical theories and conceptions of happiness and draws heavily from the writings of Vitrano (2014) and Cahn and Vitrano (2008).
Happiness Theories

Philosophers and theorists have always conceptualized happiness in different ways. Some thinkers believe pleasure is the source of happiness, whereas others assert that real happiness lies in virtuous actions. There are theorists who claim happiness comes from human desire satisfaction, but for some, happiness is a feeling that emerges from one’s overall life satisfaction. Researchers who accept happiness originates from pleasures in life support a theory of happiness known as hedonism.

Happiness as pleasure (hedonism). From the philosophical perspective, hedonism is a view that a good life should be a pleasurable life; whereas from psychological standpoint, hedonism is a theory that states that pleasure is the source of happiness (Veenhoven, 2003b). The idea of hedonism was coined in the ancient philosophical era, 4th century BCE. However, a few prominent philosophers during the modern era, which ranges from the 17th century until the current times, also promoted the idea of hedonism (Vitrano, 2014).

Ancient and modern era hedonism. Epicurus (341–271 BCE), an ancient Greek philosopher, promoted hedonism (Haybron, 2011; Vitrano, 2014). Later, in the modern era that spanned from the 17th to the early 20th centuries, other two prominent moral philosophers, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), also encouraged hedonism. Hedonism, as a theory of happiness, states that pleasures lead to one’s happiness and pains distract people from happiness, irrespective of its value (Veenhoven, 2003b). Pleasure is the only thing intrinsically desirable, and it is desirable for its own sake. One should avoid pain as much as possible.
Epicurus’ view of pleasure is different from the modern common-sense notion of hedonism—eat, drink, and be merry (Cahn & Vitrano, 2008; Keefe, 2018; Vitrano, 2014). According to Epicurus, a person can achieve happiness by avoiding unnecessary desires and luxuries in one’s lives, so human beings should enjoy simple pleasures by living a simple life. By simple life, Epicurus meant that one should only satisfy those desires that are most important for one’s living, such as food, water, clothes, and shelter. Epicurus believed that when one removes the pains caused by unnecessary wants and desires, a person experiences tranquility and a life full of health and enjoyment. Although Epicurus’ strategy for a happy life is ascetic in nature, he emphasized the value of friendship to live a calm and tranquil life.

The hedonic views of the modern era moral philosophers, namely Bentham and Mill, emphasized utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is the idea that a moral act is the one that produces the greatest happiness or pleasure for the largest number of people (Crisp, 2007; Vitrano, 2014).

As for Bentham, happiness is having a right mental state, one of pleasure and not of pain, and his formula was the greatest happiness for the greatest number (Burns, 2005; McMahon, 2013). According to Bentham, pleasure was the final motive of every human action, and he related pleasure with sensations (Veenhoven, 2017; Vitrano, 2014). Pleasures are good and have the same quality, irrespective of their source. Pleasures only differ in their quantity. Bentham invented a “hedonic calculus” in that one can quantify pleasures by assigning a numerical value to pleasures, in terms of hedons, that human actions produce (Pawelski & Gupta, 2009, p. 998; Vitrano, 2014, p. 22). Bentham
cautioned that one should choose pleasures that are less intense because they give long-term benefits (Vitrano, 2014). For example, an individual should save money rather than buy lottery tickets.

Mill, another hedonistic utilitarian like Bentham (Pawelski & Gupta, 2009), also associated happiness to pleasures but held that all pleasures are not equal. Mill believed pleasures are intrinsically different. Some pleasures, like doing philosophy, playing a musical instrument, or creating a work of art, are higher pleasures; whereas pleasures, like the ones occurring from bodily sensations, are lower pleasures (Carson, 1978). Mill asserted that only human beings can appreciate higher level pleasures, whereas animals cannot. Therefore, humans should cultivate faculties of mind related to higher pleasures to appreciate the endless world of enjoyments (Mill, 1863).

**Contemporary hedonism.** Although the hedonic view is falling out of favor among many modern happiness thinkers (Vitrano, 2014), Davis (1981), a modern hedonic philosopher, defended the view that happiness and pleasure are identical. He claimed a happy life is one that entails the most pleasant experiences. Davis classified happiness as occurrent or dispositional. Occurrent happiness occurs when an individual experience a happy feeling in the present moment. Dispositional happiness occurs when a person experiences a happy feeling more often in an occurrent sense. Davis said a person with dispositional happiness is living a happy life.

Although the central hedonist thesis is that all pleasures contribute to happiness and all pains distract people from happiness (Carson, 1978), modern theorists (Haybron, 2008; Vitrano, 2014) object to this view. They argued that all pleasures do not lead to
happiness, and neither do all kinds of pain contribute to unhappiness. The ancient and modern-era hedonist philosophers, Epicurus, Bentham, and Mill also showed that even though living a pleasant life is happiness, one should carefully choose the sources of pleasures in life. An individual ought to live a basic and simple life and enjoy less intense but higher-level pleasures. This idea is like the lives of many sadhus who live a basic life without complexities of the material world (Hartsuiker, 2014; Hausner, 2007). One reason hedonism is appealing to people is it links happiness with enjoyment and pleasure, and people understand the concept of pleasure, unlike virtue, which many philosophers believe is also a source of happiness (Vitrano, 2014). Vitrano asserted that unless a person has studied philosophy in a formal setting, it is difficult to develop an idea of virtue or morality. A few prominent ancient Greek philosophers, like Plato, Stoics, and Aristotle, related happiness to virtuous actions.

**Happiness as virtue.** Ancient Greek ethicists and philosophers like Plato, Stoics, and Aristotle asserted that virtue or moral excellence brings happiness (Vitrano, 2014). They held virtuous living in high regard and conceived virtue as a character trait, or a behavior endowed with morals, a good life, and happiness. They believed being virtuous is a necessary condition of a happy life, and this idea is popular even today. Some contemporary thinkers described virtue as something that involves two concepts: first, an ability to reflect in a morally way through reasoning, and second, acting in the right way, in accordance with the morally correct reason (Annas, 2008; Vitrano, 2014).

Plato (428–347 BCE), an Athenian philosopher, in his most significant work, the *Republic*, defended his claim that a morally righteous person—a just man—must have all
good character traits in order to be happy. Therefore, living a life endowed with morals is a necessary condition for happiness (trans. Plato, 2008; Vitrano, 2014). According to Plato, it is always better to be a just person. A just person’s soul is always in order. This order in the soul makes a person gain virtues like courage, wisdom, temperance, and justice. These virtues help a person reach internal harmony and contentment, which implies a just person experiences happiness. An immoral or unjust person would never be happy due to the inner turmoil within the soul. Thus, Plato tried to unite morality and virtue with happiness.

Plato’s ideas are much like the Stoics of the Hellenistic period, the period between the death of Alexander the Great (323 BCE) and the conquest of the last Hellenistic kingdom by Rome (31 BCE), the Lagid kingdom of Egypt (Simonin, 2011). Zeno founded Stoicism (344–262 BCE), although only a few of his, or his immediate predecessors’, works remain. However, the works of three prominent Stoic philosophers, Seneca (4 BCE–AD 65), Epictetus (AD 55–135), and the Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius (AD 121–180), have survived until today.

According to Stoics, happiness is human telos, the highest good for which an individual do everything. Seneca said, “to live happily…is the desire of all men” (Bok, 2010, p. 60). Like Plato, the Stoics believed virtue is necessary to achieve happiness, and both agreed a virtuous person is the one who uses reason and controls emotions, appetites, and desires. The Stoics believed happiness was living in accord with nature. By nature, the Stoics meant the universe, the rationally planned cosmic nature in perfect order. Vitrano (2014) mentioned that the Stoics were causal determinists, indicating they
believed that past events shaped all events that occur in the present moment, and this chain of events goes all the way back to the beginning of time—the perfection of creation.

Stoicism emphasizes that an individual should remain detached from life events and natural occurrences of this world because they are beyond human control. Instead, one should look at these events with a sense of indifference and apathy. Only the aspects of lives within control are worthy of focus (trans. Aurelius, 1997). Stoics asserted there is no good or evil in this world, for all good and evil lives in minds and judgments. Human judgments about the events cause unhappiness, not the events themselves. Events are external to humans and should not be allowed to influence human minds (trans. Epictetus, 2004). Such an attitude, according to the Stoic philosophers, would bring inner harmony, tranquility, and happiness.

It is important to note that the Stoics advocated emotional detachment, which need not mean controlling desires. This contrasts with the sadhus, who control their desires and practice detachment from the material world (Atmapriyananda, 2013). Stoics emphasized a state of detachment such that an individual remain calm and content, regardless of what happens in the external world (Vitrano, 2014).

The Stoics’ emphasis on the brutal control of human emotions has become a source of debate among scholars (Vitrano, 2014; Winter, 2009). For example, Vitrano’s concern (2014) is that Stoicism encouraged an emotional detachment that may alienate people from friends and other people. Emotional detachment could cultivate apathy that would prohibit an individual from experiencing the full range of human happiness.
However, Frede (1986) argued that the Stoics did not advocate dropping all emotions but only irrational ones. Interestingly, Aristotle considered emotions as an essential part of living a happy life (trans. Aristotle, 2017).

Aristotle associated happiness with virtue and emotions. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle mentioned that happiness is the activity of human soul under perfect virtue (trans. Aristotle, 2008). Aristotle also argued happiness as the highest good, human telos, which means happiness is not a subordinate to anything. Happiness is self-sufficient, and humans desire it intrinsically, solely for its own sake.

Like Plato and the Stoics, Aristotle believed a virtuous person is a happy being (trans. Aristotle, 2017). However, he denied that virtue is enough for happiness. According to Aristotle, a virtuous person also needs external goods, like health, wealth, pleasure, good fortune, friends, and family, to live a happy life. One cannot expect a person to do noble acts without proper equipment or external goods. Aristotle also believed moderate emotions are essential to cultivating virtue and living well. Aristotle’s inclusion of emotions for a happy life made him at odds with the Stoics, who claimed people should suppress, or minimize, emotions as much as possible to be happy.

Regarding how people can become virtuous, Aristotle believed virtues are like skills that people learn by doing them (trans. Aristotle, 2017). For example, individuals can become dancers by dancing or pianists by playing the piano. Similarly, a person can become a just person by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, and courageous by doing brave actions. Many social psychological studies have confirmed
Aristotle’s observation: human beings can become just by doing just actions or become self-controlled by exercising self-control (Wilson, 2005).

Considering the views of Plato, Stoics, and Aristotle, Vitrano (2014) believes Aristotle’s view of happiness provided a more accurate picture of human nature. However, Vitrano also questions whether virtue is essential for happiness, for it requires standards that are too high for an ordinary person. If virtue is a necessary condition for happiness, then it implies only a few people would qualify as happy people. Also, some contemporary scholars believe neither pleasure nor virtue is required for happiness. Instead, satisfaction is a necessary condition for happiness.

**Happiness as desire satisfaction.** Some scholars believe that desire satisfaction, getting what one wants, is a necessary condition of happiness (Vitrano, 2014). This view is close to hedonism, discussed earlier, but it is also distinct in a sense because it is closer to the notion of satisfaction. It is important to note both hedonism and desire satisfaction theories are in some sense subjective because they ground well-being in the individual’s subjective states (Haybron, 2011). According to some contemporary theorists (Gauthier, 1967; Jeske, 1996; Matsushita, 1984), only satisfying desires determines people’s happiness, and the number of satisfied desires decides one’s level of happiness. However, some individuals may find that even after satisfying most desires, they still are unhappy.

The desire satisfaction theory applies to the present study in a negative sense. This is because the sadhus abandon their material belongings, desires, and life goals during their renunciation-initiation ceremony (Hausner, 2007). Later, they do not strive to achieve any desire in the material world. Sadhus only aim to satisfy their most basic
needs and focus most of their efforts on the attainment of divinity within, in other words, to discover real happiness. Griffin (1986) also supports this view by asserting that to like what one has is necessary for happiness, rather than to get what one wants. Other normative theorists have rejected that satisfaction of desires leads to happiness. Instead, they tried to identify happiness with the feelings of satisfaction within the psychological, or mental, state of a person (Vitrano, 2014).

**Happiness as feelings of satisfaction, a psychological state (normative view).**

All normative theorists of happiness (Annas, 2008; Hare, 1969; Kekes, 1992; Kraut, 1979; McFall, 1989; Simpson, 1975; Smart, 1973) agree that happiness is a psychological or mental state of an individual irrespective of external factors, for example satisfaction of desires. They denied that satisfaction is just enough for happiness: though happiness always follows satisfaction, happiness can come otherwise, without feeling satisfied. The normative theorists argued that people’s satisfaction must occur first, and this satisfaction should come by meeting certain standards, for instance, the norms of society or personal standards. According to Hare (1969), a person’s self-report of satisfaction with life is not sufficient (or necessary) for happiness. An individual must also consider the cause of satisfaction before one can claim to be happy, for one must undertake the right kinds of activities. For example, if person A asks person B, “Are you happy?” and if person B replies, “Yes, I am happy,” it does not mean that person A should become content with person B’s self-report. Person A must also consider the activities of person B, for it must meet the standards or norms of person A. This is a normative view of happiness:
happiness always happens after satisfaction, and it comes by doing right actions, like following social norms.

Smart (1973) supported Hare’s view and asserted that happiness has two parts—an evaluative part (happy or not) and a descriptive component (why people are happy). To call someone happy is, at least in part, to describe that person’s state of mind besides evaluating if the person is happy or not. Simpson’s (1975) idea, like Hare and Smart, is that if a person is involved in some meaningless task, then that person could not be considered a happy being because it is not a worthy end.

According to McFall (1989), people think if they satisfy their life’s most essential desires, they are happy, but this is not always true. Fulfillment of the most important desires may not make an individual happy. Besides, the desires should be just and meet the requirements of rationality. From the subject’s viewpoint, the desires must be good and true.

One of the less stringent contemporary normative happiness theorists, Kraut (1979), asserted that the subject ought to determine their standards for judging happiness. According to Kraut, there are two conditions for a person to be happy. First, an individual must attain all important and valuable things in life, and second, that individual must make sure that the ‘valuable’ things are rewarding, not the best of the bad range of alternatives. People must justify their happiness standards. Therefore, Kraut would say that the person who does not see the reality of life, who bases their viewpoint on false beliefs, cannot be happy. Likewise, Kekes (1992) also believed that rational and justified satisfaction makes people happy.
According to Annas (2008), the modern concept of happiness is more subjective and flexible. It is the subjectivity of the modern theories of happiness that creates a divide between ancient and modern views. Instead of considering that happiness appears out of virtuous activities that mostly appear in the ancient theories of happiness, the modern notions of happiness allow people much latitude in deciding what makes them happy without considering the cause of their happiness. Annas asserted that happiness is not a matter of being in the right mental state, and satisfaction is not enough for happiness. Instead, happiness comes from the sense of achievement resulting from the activities people perform, a claim Professor Vitrano (2014) rejects, saying that a sense of accomplishment from activities is not the only source of happiness.

Vitrano (2014) also objected to the ideas of all normative theorists that set standards and norms on human happiness. She insisted that an individual should not examine other’s happiness because an examiner can have a biased viewpoint. Normative theorists do not even provide any clear guidance on how to distinguish between many standards. These normative standards make happiness an idiosyncratic concept, telling nothing about the state of the mind of the subject. Happiness judgments become accounts of the speaker’s likes and dislikes and do not reflect the subject’s values. This distorts the common concept of happiness. However, there is yet another theory of happiness that has become popular among philosophers and psychologists—happiness as life satisfaction.

**Happiness as life satisfaction.** Happiness as life satisfaction is a view that, so far, “presents the best account of nature and value of happiness” (Vitrano, 2014, p. 103) in the contemporary literature. According to this view, a satisfied person is a happy person,
irrespective of the cause of satisfaction. Vitrano believes happiness is best characterized as a subject’s mental state, not a subject’s state of affairs, and there is no necessary material condition to be happy. If a subject has a favorable impression of one’s life, then there is no way for an outside observer to dispute that person’s claim.

Vitrano (2014) contends that under any situation, an individual’s sincere report of being happy is sufficient for that person to be happy. The statement that “I am happy” would be false only under two conditions: when an individual is lying, or when a person does not understand the concept of happiness. Under all other circumstances, a person’s true report of happiness is enough. Reports of happiness are like pain reports; one cannot deny if a person claims to be in pain.

Vitrano (2014) asserted that the more favorable an individual’s impression of one’s life, the happier one is, which suggests happiness is a degree concept that refers to feelings ranging from mild contentment to extreme joy. An individual does not have to experience ecstasy to be happy. For some, happiness lies in the experience of simple satisfaction or contentment. It is important to note according to Austin (1968) that all happy people experience positive feelings. Happiness is incompatible with negative emotional states, like anxiety, disappointment, and depression.

However, life satisfaction theories of happiness differ in their description of satisfaction. Some refer to life satisfaction as judging or appraising life circumstances, whereas others talk about life satisfaction more in terms of emotions (Feldman, 2010b). Considering the first case—life satisfaction as a judgment—sometimes people view happiness in their life’s circumstances, but happiness does not live in the circumstances.
Instead, it springs into being from the relationship with life circumstances (Wright, 1963). Sumner (1999) believes happiness includes a positive evaluation of conditions in life, which is also an example of issuing a judgment about life circumstances. In contrast, Telfer (1980) presents a more emotional understanding of life satisfaction, an attitude of mind, which means an individual is pleased with the entire life. According to Telfer, happy people expect nothing major from their lives and remain content with whatever they already have.

According to Barrow (1980), to say “I am happy” does not mean that people have to examine their life circumstances and see if they meet certain criteria; they can be happy by introspecting their minds. While Vitrano (2014) also favors Telfer’s description of life satisfaction in terms of emotions, an important point to note is that all life satisfaction theories accept happiness is a state of satisfaction, and it does not matter how an individual achieves this state.

In summary, various conceptions of happiness—happiness as pleasure (hedonism), as a virtue, as desire satisfaction, as a psychological state (normative theories), and as life satisfaction—show that debates on happiness have been going on since the Socrates era, for the last 2,500 years. After World War II, a new branch of psychology gained popularity, positive psychology, which focuses on the positive aspects of human functioning, happiness, and well-being.

Positive Psychology, The Science of Happiness

Positive psychology is one of the newer branches of mainstream psychology that deals with the positive aspects of human life, happiness, and well-being. It is a scientific
study of what makes life worth living, or what makes a good life (Cherry, 2016b; Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). According to Boniwell (2012), Europe’s leading researcher and thinker in positive psychology, the roots of positive psychology date to ancient Greek philosophers and the Eastern traditions. Eastern religions such as, Hinduism and Buddhism promote emotions like love, compassion, joy, kindness, and mindfulness, or meditation, which are also major areas of research in positive psychology (Boniwell, 2012; Lopez, Pedrotti, & Snyder, 2014).

The predecessor of positive psychology is humanism, a movement that started after World War II (Cherry, 2016a; McLeod, 2015; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). The humanistic psychology movement focused on the growth and positive self of individuals and was a response to more pessimistic pathology-oriented methods popular during that period, including psychoanalysis and behaviorism. The most popular humanistic thinkers were Carl Rogers (1902–1987), who developed the concept of a fully functioning human (Rogers, 1961b), and Abraham Maslow (1908–1970), who introduced the notion of self-actualization, the realization of one’s potentials (Maslow, 1965). Over 50 years ago, Maslow addressed the recent themes of positive psychology (Buhler, 1971; Goud, 2008). However, the contemporary academic community considers Seligman the father of positive psychology (Cherry, 2018). In 1998, the American Psychological Association elected Seligman as the president; since then, positive psychology has become a mainstream movement (Boniwell, 2012). Today, positive psychology has gained much popularity. It is an active movement with its own
national and international conferences, committees, groups and sub-groups, many textbooks, and even its own scientific journal.

Early humanistic thinkers believed that human beings are complex entities to study, so they emphasized qualitative approaches rather than quantitative research methods (McLeod, 2015). In contrast, positive psychology is more grounded in the scientific method (Boniwell, 2012; Lopez et al., 2014; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Therefore, positive psychology differs from humanistic psychology in the choice of methods, but both fields study similar topics (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). There are many topics popular within the tradition of positive psychology, like emotions, emotional intelligence, optimism and hope, flow and peak experiences, subjective and eudaimonic well-being, meaning in life, freedom of choice, the value of human strengths, wisdom, mindfulness, spirituality, gratitude, altruism, love, and positivity in organizations. Out of these topics, emotions and emotional intelligence, optimism and hope, subjective well-being, eudaimonic well-being, flow and peak experiences will be discussed below in the context of positive psychology.

**Emotions and Emotional intelligence**

Psychologists use an umbrella term, affect, to refer to many positive and negative emotions, feelings, and moods. Fredrickson, who dedicated most of her academic career to studying positive emotions, developed a broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Conway, Tugade, Catalino, & Fredrickson, 2013; Fredrickson, 2001, 2009). According to her theory, positive affective experiences lead to a long-lasting effect on people’s personal growth and development. Positive emotions enhance one’s resilience and build
physical, intellectual, social, and psychological resources. She emphasizes that positive emotions are not an end but a means of leading a better life. To enhance positive emotions, she recommended engaging in relaxation practices like yoga, imagery exercises, and meditation to achieve a state of mindfulness. Fredrickson (2009) says that for every three positive emotions, one can have one negative emotion, a positivity ratio of 3:1. However, too much positivity could turn counter-productive, cautions Fredrickson. Experiencing positivity above 8:1 could be dangerous. She emphasized negative emotions are also important, at least if viewed from an evolutionary perspective, for it ensured human ancestors’ survival, for example, a human’s fear-fueled urge to escape (Conway et al., 2013). Negative emotions can bring people closer to their depths and put them in touch with their deeper selves (Boniwell, 2012). An equally important idea is our ability to identify and control our emotions, which is referred to as emotional intelligence.

Daniel Goleman popularized emotional intelligence in 1995 (Goleman, 1995), but John Mayer and Peter Salovey first studied this subject (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Emotional intelligence refers to people’s ability to recognize and manage emotions and the emotions of others. According to the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso model (Salovey, Caruso, & Mayer, 2012), emotional intelligence has four branches: a) perceiving emotions in facial expressions, voice, and in the works of arts; b) using emotions to facilitate reasoning, problem-solving, and creativity; c) understanding emotions, like why people have certain emotions and what causes changes in moods; and d) managing and gaining control over one’s emotions. When an individual develops emotional intelligence,
empathy increases, and one’s chances to reach life goals also increases along with one’s levels of happiness.

**Optimism and Hope**

Positive psychology research has found many advantages of adopting an optimistic viewpoint (Carver, Scheier, & Fulford, 2012; Lopez et al., 2014). Research has found optimists experience less distress than pessimists in distressful life circumstances, thus promoting physical well-being (Scheier & Carver, 1992). They adapt better to negative events and learn lessons from such situations. Optimists exert more effort and do not give up easily. Optimists report more health-promoting behaviors, like eating a healthy diet or having regular medical check-ups. Optimism also protects new mothers against developing depression following the birth of their baby (Carver et al., 2012).

Can one learn optimism? Yes. Although an inherited part of optimism may exist, in his book *Learned Optimism*, Seligman (2006) introduced a disputing strategy. The key to this strategy is watching and recognizing thoughts. After detecting a negative thought, an individual should look for alternative outcomes. However, researchers (Peterson & Park, 2003) cautioned that optimistic thinking may lead one to an underestimation of risks, as some researchers observed that optimists are more likely to take part in high-risk activities. Therefore, individuals should not be too optimistic but should instead consider a mixed approach of optimism and pessimism (Diener, 2003; Peterson & Park, 2003).

Optimism also relates to hope. Past research has shown that hopeful students are likely to achieve their academic success (Snyder, Rand, & Sigmon, 2017). Rick Snyder, a
leading specialist in hope, noted that people have hope when they know what they want (Lopez et al., 2014). They can think of multiple pathways to reach their goal and take suitable action. A single route to goals may not be the best; instead, a pathway thinking of following multiple paths to desired goals is necessary. Hope has many benefits; it buffers against interfering thoughts and negative emotions and is significant for mental health and happiness.

**Happiness and Subjective Well-Being**

Today, people value happiness more than money, morals, or going to heaven (King & Napa, 1998). An increase in the level of affluence in Western countries is likely a reason for a growing interest in happiness because survival is no longer an issue. These days, people value the quality of life more than economic prosperity (Boniwell, 2012). Another reason for an increased curiosity in well-being and happiness is the advancement of valid and reliable measures of happiness and well-being (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). In psychology, there is a debate on objective or subjective measurement of happiness. Some researchers argue that subjective measures of happiness are reliable (Diener, 1984; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), whereas Kahneman, a Nobel Prize winner, emphasized an objective happiness (Feldman, 2010a; Kahneman, 1999). The subjective assessment of happiness still appears to prevail at the moment (Boniwell, 2012).

Within the literature of positive psychology, a substitute for happiness is the notion of subjective well-being. According to Diener (2000), subjective well-being or happiness has two parts. One is satisfaction with life, the cognitive part, and another one is the affective, or the emotional part. Therefore, subjective well-being = satisfaction with
life + affect. However, scholars suggested that although positive affect is important for one’s happiness, intense positive emotional states are unnecessary for well-being (Diener, Sandvik, & Pavot, 2009). After strong positive emotional experiences, periods of low affect likely follow.

From these theories, an important question arises: Can people increase their subjective well-being? Many theorists suggest happiness is not open to change. It becomes fixed, which means people’s happiness reacts to positive and adverse life events and then returns to its baseline shortly afterward (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978; Suh, Diener, & Fujita, 1996; Veenhoven, 1991). Seligman (2004) argued that people have about 40% voluntary control over their happiness. About 50% of happiness is genetic, which stays relatively stable throughout life. The remaining 10% depends on life circumstances.

Earlier research supports a weak relationship between happiness and life circumstances, like money, marriage, staying healthy, getting educated, or moving to a sunnier climate (Boniwell, 2012). People consider life circumstances so valuable that they sacrifice many years of their lives to attain them. However, all life circumstances account for only 10% variance in well-being (Argyle, 2001; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Eudaimonic Well-Being

The word eudaimonia, which is also spelled as eudaemonia or eudemonia is an ancient Greek word that originates from Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics (trans. Aristotle, 2008), his philosophical work on happiness (Irwin, 2012). Eudaimonia means happiness
(Deci & Ryan, 2008; Huta & Waterman, 2014), which has other meanings such as welfare, flourishing, or just well-being (Kraut, 2018).

Early philosophers studied the subject of happiness long before positive psychology existed. However, the contemporary literature on well-being largely ignored the contributions of humanistic and existential thinkers like Maslow, Rogers, Jung, and Allport (McGregor & Little, 1998). Can someone become truly fulfilled without the knowledge of meaning in life or existence? The concepts of self-actualization, personal development, and meaning in life seem missing from the current literature on well-being. The contemporary theories of well-being mostly emphasized hedonism or maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain.

The happiness theories that do not highlight the concept of pleasure fall under eudaimonic well-being, an alternative to hedonic happiness. As said above, Aristotle (trans. Aristotle, 2017) originated the term eudaimonia, and daimon is a Greek word that means one’s true nature. Waterman (1993) referred to daimon as the potentialities of each person, the realization of which leads to the greatest fulfillment; efforts to live according to one’s daimon leads to the experience of eudaimonia. Eudaimonia is an umbrella term for a variety of overlapping theories of well-being. For example, eudaimonia includes Ryff and Keyes’ (1995) psychological well-being model (PWB) and Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory (SDT). It also includes Waterman’s (1993, 2008) concept of eudaimonia or personal expressiveness, Seligman’s (2004, 2012) notion of authentic happiness or well-being—positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishments (PERMA), Vittersø’s (2013) functional well-being model—
happiness as feelings, evaluations, and functioning and Csikszentmihalyi’s (2008) concept of flow and autotelic personalities.

According to Carol Ryff’s model (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) of Psychological Well-Being (PWB), an individual’s well-being has six components, namely self-acceptance (life’s positive evaluation), personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery (capacity to manage life and surrounding environment), and autonomy. Interestingly, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000) also asserts three basic psychological needs that enhance one’s well-being, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Although Self-Determination Theory (SDT) appears similar to Psychological Well-Being (PWB), Ryan and Deci (2015; 2000) noted that the SDT’ concepts of autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster well-being, whereas Ryff & Keyes (1995) used these concepts to define well-being.

Waterman (1993) argued that hedonia relates to eudaimonia, but they are qualitatively distinct conceptions of happiness. He referred to eudemonia as personal expressiveness (Waterman, 1990), an experience gained by engaging in activities that make an individual feel alive, that express who that person is, in which, someone who is intensely involved in and feels accomplished. Such an experience makes an individual complete and fulfilled. Interestingly, Waterman also stated that hedonic enjoyment is a part of personal expressiveness. This statement places Waterman’s theory of personal expressiveness within the hedonic tradition.

Seligman, who began the positive psychology movement, introduced an all-encompassing model of authentic happiness (Seligman, 2004). He distinguished between
three levels of happiness: a pleasant life, a good life, and a meaningful life. A pleasant life is a pursuit of positive emotions, like hedonic well-being. The concept of a good life involves character strengths to engage (complete immersion) in activities. The meaningful life means an individual uses one’s strengths in the service of someone other than self. However, in 2011, Seligman upgraded his model of authentic happiness to a well-being model (Seligman, 2012), to which he added two elements: accomplishment (pursuit of achievement, winning, or success for its own sake) and relationships. He named the new well-being model PERMA: pleasant life, engagement, relationships, meaning in life, and accomplishment.

One of the strongest predictors of happiness is social relationships. One of the past happiness studies on a student population (Diener & Seligman, 2002) found the main difference between extraordinarily happy people and the rest of the participants was that very happy students had a rich and fulfilling social life. Social relationships or relatedness also falls under eudaimonic well-being (Boniwell, 2012).

Finally, Vittersø (2013) proposed a functional well-being model in which eudaimonia means to change, especially by showing growth within challenging environments, whereas hedonia means stability, equilibrium, and a return to the state of homeostasis. Homeostasis is a psychological state with no tension or drive. Thus, the above theories show that eudaimonic happiness is a vague and broad idea that includes theories with components that also fall in the hedonic camp.

Among these theories, Boniwell’s (2012) research suggests two pathways lead to eudaimonic well-being: personal growth and transcendence. Personal growth relates to
striving for change, striving to understand self and the world in a better way and to grow as a better person in one’s domains of life. Boniwell’s idea of eudaimonia is akin to Maslow’s (1965) concept of self-actualization, and it does not always involve pleasant moments. Instead, a person must overcome challenges and barriers, both external and internal for personal development. Carl Rogers (1961a), one of the first eudaimonist thinkers of the 20th century, observed that people who made real progress toward attaining a good life may not always regard themselves as happy and content. Boniwell further suggested that several factors contribute to personal growth: delayed gratification, grit, capacity for sustained effort, and emotional control, or an individual’s ability to manage impulses and emotions, a component of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso model of emotional intelligence (Salovey et al., 2012), as discussed earlier.

Boniwell’s (2012) research also showed that transcendence is another route to the eudaimonic pathway to well-being. Boniwell asserted that transcendence is distinct from personal growth, although the two can coexist. Transcendence relates to one’s commitment to something, or someone, other than self. It is about finding a purpose in life and living according to that purpose, but the purpose must be for the sake of others, something larger than self. For example, transcendence could relate to a mother’s dedication and commitment to her children or a meaningful work that an individual does for a wider community. Many thinkers and positive psychologists like Aristotle (trans. 2017, para. 1101a10), Ryff and Keyes (1995), Seligman (2012), and McKee (2017) underscore the value of finding meaning and purpose in life, or transcending self, for the sake of a greater good, a way to eudaimonic happiness and well-being.
Flow and Peak Experiences

The eudaimonic tradition of happiness also includes Csikszentmihalyi’s (2008) concept of flow or autotelic personalities. Autotelic personalities are those individuals who engage in activities for their own sake rather than for some later external goals. Such autotelic personalities often experience the state of flow.

Sometimes, industrious students get so immersed in their activities that they lose a sense of time, and the rest of the world seems to disappear. Such fully absorbing mental states of a focused mind that does not wander are flow states. Renowned positive psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (2008) popularized the concept of flow and referred to it as an optimal experience, a state of complete immersion in an activity, being completely involved for its own sake. In this mental state, ego falls away, time flies, and every thought and action follows the previous one, like playing jazz (Cherry, 2017; Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Flow experiences can occur to many people, especially those who are engaged in sports activities, like skiing, tennis, soccer, mountain climbing, and dancing. Certain individuals involved in activities like painting, writing, and surgery may experience flow states. They undertake autotelic activities, which people do for their own sake. Such autotelic activities are also personally rewarding to people experiencing flow.

How does flow happen? The state of flow occurs when people face a high-level challenge, and their skills are just enough to meet that challenge, stretching them to the limit (Boniwell, 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Csikszentmihalyi asserted that some characteristics of flow states are clarity of goals with immediate feedback on progress,
akin to a chess game; complete concentration at the present moment; loss of awareness of oneself; and a sense of control with no worries of failure. Seligman (2004) also noted that in a flow state, there is a complete absence of emotions during the actual process, and this may be due to the loss of self-awareness. An individual experience an increase in positive emotions after coming out of the state of flow.

Like flow, there are other kinds of optimal experiences, like self-actualization, peak experiences, and altered states of consciousness. These topics appear in the literature of humanistic and transpersonal psychology (Maslow, 1964; Privette, 1981, 1983). Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) coined the term peak experience to describe an intense state of joy and excitement in individuals (Maslow, 1964; Privette, 1983). In these moments, an individual experiences self as a more integrated whole, self-aware and deeply happy. A person may experience a sense of transcendence, awe, unity, and meaningfulness in life. The moments of love, exposure to art or music, overwhelming beauty of nature, or sometimes tragic incidents often inspire peak experiences. Peak experiences may share many characteristics with the flow states, for instance, self-absorption and losing time; but unlike flow states, peak experiences rarely occur, and an individual experience a presence of self rather than a loss of self. There is a mystical quality in peak experiences (Privette, 1983). According to Boniwell (2012), there is still have a long way to go in learning about these optimal states, and positive psychology might be a way to explore these complexities of human happiness.

Boniwell (2012) also noted, though rarely, peak experiences that follow transcendence related to moments of intense joy, or feelings of oneness with the universe,
are to some extent mystical, or spiritual, in nature. Hausner’s (2007) ethnographic study on sadhus also supported this claim. She mentioned that the sadhus often reported experiences of unity and feelings of oneness with all objects of existence, animate and inanimate. The ideas of transcendence and peak experiences related to the sadhus move this discussion to another tradition of happiness research—the spiritual way to happiness.

In summary, positive psychology, the science of happiness, is a newer branch of psychology that focuses on positive human functioning. Recently, positive psychology has grown in popularity, with much scientific research on multiple aspects of human happiness, like positive emotions, optimism and hope, subjective well-being, eudaimonic well-being, meaning in life, and even flow states and peak experiences. There is another dimension of human happiness, namely spiritual happiness, which I discuss next.

**Spiritual Approach to Happiness**

For the past thousands of years, various practices developed by spiritual traditions have helped people build love, find wisdom, and improve well-being (Henry, 2013). In most countries, spirituality is still an essential part of people’s lives because many people believe in some higher power. For instance, in the USA, over four-fifths of the population believes in some higher power (Gallup, 2008; Pew Research, 2015).

As for the expressions religiosity and spirituality, they are the same but dependent terms (Hill et al., 2000; Schlehofer, Omoto, & Adelman, 2008; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). People associate religion with belief systems that accept some higher power, institutions like the church, and associated rituals, including regular attendance at a place of worship or ceremonies focused toward a higher being. In contrast, people relate to spirituality
with mystical experiences, higher states of consciousness, and practices designed to facilitate these states, like meditation or yoga (Henry, 2013). Therefore, in this thesis, the terms religiosity and spirituality are almost interchangeable.

Next, this chapter discusses the findings of happiness research conducted on deeply religious people. Then, the discussion reviews past research aimed at finding a relationship between ancient spiritual practices from the Eastern contemplative traditions and its influence on positive human functioning, followed by a discussion on the perspective of major world religions on happiness.

**Happiness Research on Religious People**

This section reviews four studies related to religious people and happiness that show sadhus are likely happy people.

In his book, *Why Priests Are Happy*, Rossetti (2011) presented two large-scale statistical studies he conducted on Catholic priests to measure their psychological and spiritual temperature and to find out the factors that accounted for the priests’ health, wellness, and happiness. The first study used a sample population of 1,242 priests, and the second study involved a population of 2,482 priests. These two studies found an extraordinarily high rate of priestly happiness and satisfaction. Rossetti found 14 among 22 factors significantly influenced the priests’ happiness. The top three factors that contributed to priests’ happiness were their sense of inner peace, their strong relationship with God, and their commitment to celibacy. Rossetti mentioned that despite challenges, priests considered their view of celibacy as a calling from God and their source of their personal grace. Rossetti found priests’ bond with their Bishop was a critical source of
their happiness. The priests who reported a good relationship with their Bishop were highly likely to be happy priests.

Another qualitative study (Isacco et al., 2016) on 15 Roman Catholic diocesan priests investigated how priests’ relationship with God and promises of celibacy and obedience influenced their psychological health. The researchers found that the priests’ relationship with God was central to their health and contributed to positive outcomes—decreased stress and improved relationships. This study highlighted the central role that priests’ relationship with God has on positive psychological health.

Likewise, Maheshwari and Singh (2009) conducted a quantitative study on a group of 154 kalpvasis (Sanskrit: pilgrims), or deeply religious Hindu people, to determine the relationship between pilgrimage, religiosity, happiness, and life satisfaction. The researchers examined this connection in a specific cultural context of Ardh-Kumbh Mela in the year 2007 (Maclean, 2009), a religious fair that takes place every six years in Prayagraj, India. Kalpvasis undertake kalpvas, a one-month stay at Sangam during January and February, through the religious fair, Ardh-Kumbh Mela (Eldering & Pandey, 2007; Maclean, 2009). Sangam is the culmination point of three holy rivers: the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical river Saraswati. Sangam is one of the holiest places for the Hindus. In this study, the researchers operationalized happiness as positive experiences in the participants’ daily lives. They measured happiness using Summers and Watson’s Happiness Scale (Summers & Watson, 2006) and measured life satisfaction using the Satisfaction and Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Maheshwari and Singh measured religiosity using the Religiosity Scale (Bhushan,
The results of their study revealed that religiosity significantly correlated with happiness and life satisfaction in the pilgrims. This study also found that religiosity and happiness, taken together as one, plus age were significant predictors of life satisfaction.

In another study on spiritual people in India (Mohan et al., 2004), researchers studied the influence of a spiritual lifestyle change program of Rishi Samskruti Vidhya Kendra in Bangalore on an individual's well-being. The researchers found that active participation in the program brought positive changes in the participant's health and well-being. An overwhelming majority of the participants experienced an increase in their sense of meaning in life and their urge to achieve higher consciousness. The findings of the study (Mohan et al., 2004) were consistent with other research in religiosity (Abdel-Khalek & Naceur, 2007; Francis, Katz, Yablon, & Robbins, 2004; Francis, Yablon, & Robbins, 2014; Francis, Ziebertz, & Lewis, 2003; George, Ellison, & Larson, 2002; Mookerjee & Beron, 2005; Pessi, 2011). However, past studies in religiosity mostly included a sample population of undergraduates and college students. The results of the earlier studies in religiosity showed sadhus, who are deeply religious people, are also likely happy people.

**Ancient Spiritual Contemplative Practices and Happiness Research**

The Hindu and Buddhist sages of the Eastern traditions display high levels of love and compassion toward the world (Sarvapriyananda, 2014) and involve themselves in spiritual practices like yoga and meditation for their spiritual goals and physical and psychological well-being (Buttle, 2015). A growing body of literature shows self-compassion is an important source of happiness and well-being (Baer, Lykins, & Peters,
2012; Neff & Costigan, 2014). Baer et al. (2012) conducted a cross-sectional study on 77 experienced meditators and 75 non-meditators to investigate a relationship between self-reported mindfulness, self-compassion, meditation experience, and psychological well-being. The researchers found mindfulness and self-compassion scores significantly correlated with meditation experience and psychological well-being. Baer et al.’s findings suggested both mindfulness and self-compassion skills play an important role in improved well-being. Mindfulness-based meditations are rooted in ancient Buddhist traditions, and there is a large body of literature that supports the positive influence of mindfulness skills on well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Ricard, 2007, 2014; Ricard, Lutz, & Davidson, 2014; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006; Wallmark, Safarzadeh, Daukantaite, & Maddux, 2013). Ricard (2014), a famous Buddhist monk says there are mental afflictions like hatred and compulsive desires that need to be purged from the mind through mental training (e.g., mindfulness-based meditations) to perceive the true nature of reality. This leads to the attainment of authentic happiness.

In his Wisconsin lab, Davidson and his team (Ricard et al., 2014) studied experienced meditators, compared to a control group, while they performed an advanced form of mindfulness meditation—open presence or pure awareness. In that state, the meditators were calm, not focused on anything specific, and clear from excitation or dullness. The meditators were open to the experience with a non-judgmental attitude. Researchers then gave a pain stimulus to the participants. The researchers found that the meditators’ brain activity in anxiety-related regions—the insular cortex and the amygdala—diminished in the time preceding the painful stimulus. During the pain
stimulus period, the meditators’ minds became accustomed to the stimulus earlier than the control group. While the intensity of pain stimulus was same for both the groups, the pain in meditators bothered them less compared to the members of the control group. The tests showed that meditation training increases an individual's ability to buffer basic psychological responses during stressful times.

However, scientists have shown that being in a mind wandering state—instead of awareness of the present moment or being involved in mindful activities—is not a happy state (Brewer et al., 2011; Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010; Mason et al., 2007).

Killingsworth and Gilbert (2010) used smartphone technology to collect a quarter of a million samples, including self-reports from a broad range of 5,000 people, on their thoughts, feelings, and actions. The researchers found that mind wandering affected people’s unhappiness and concluded that a wandering mind is an unhappy mind. Human beings mostly think about what is not going on around them. This stimulus-independent thought, mind wandering, happens when a person contemplates events in the past, what might happen, or what will never happen at all. Therefore, the stability of mind or equanimity is vital for happiness.

**World Religions and Happiness**

Human happiness is a central theme in all the main world religions. Major world religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Confucianism or Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, consider happiness and suffering as two sides of the same coin, and a man struggles between these two on his path toward happiness, heaven, or salvation. This
section includes the conceptions of human happiness from the perspective of major world religions and cultures.

**Judaism.** According to Rabbi Sacks (2014), there are at least two keywords in Judaism that give a sense of Jewish happiness. The first word is *ashrei* and second is *simchah*. In addition, there is a type of happiness that Jews found amidst the tragedy that gives Jews an ever-renewable promise of hope. Last but not least, gratitude is central to Jewish culture that is strongly linked to happiness (Friedman, Birnbaum, & Gloger, 2014; Sacks, 2014).

In the Hebrew Bible, the word *ashrei*, which means happy or praiseworthy, appears in Psalms and Ecclesiastes (Sacks, 2014). *Ashrei* is a state of a person living a simple life under the will of God, who honors God and his or her fellow creatures, and who is blessed, living among the righteous.

Happy [*Ashrei*] is the one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night. (Psalms 1:1-2, New International Version)

As for *ashrei* (happiness) as living a simple life, in the book of Ecclesiastes, the narrator Kohelet, a rich man of untold wealth and sophistication meditated, “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity,” (Eccles. 1:2, English Standard Version) and found that all his wealth and success was meaningless (Sacks, 2014). Kohelet found happiness in simple living, in love and work, in eating and drinking, in being kind to others, and in acknowledging the eternity of God.

The second keyword in Judaism, *simchah*, is about collective happiness (Sacks, 2014). In Judaism, happiness is not something one finds in solitude, much less in self-
gratification. Happiness is something humans experience together. Simchah is shared joy, elation, or celebration, which Jews found even amidst tragedy, which gave them a promise of hope.

Although the key texts on happiness in Judaism appear in Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Torah, simchah appears seventeen times in Ecclesiastes (Sacks, 2014), one of the 24 books of the Hebrew Bible. According to Rabbi Sacks’ interpretation, simchah is the happiness that a husband creates for his wife, something that people express at festivals, when they invite the vulnerable, lonely, and strangers to festivals, or when Jews bring first fruits to Jerusalem.

Simchah is also covenantal happiness experienced when one becomes part of a covenanted community and when Jews express thanks to God for the harvests, crops, and freedom (Sacks, 2014). This is the happiness of gratitude, hope, and dignity. In Jewish culture, there is a strong link between gratitude and happiness (Friedman et al., 2014).

Judaism emphasizes that humans are social beings, so they must find happiness in society. It is the quality of human relationships where people find happiness, and this quality does not come without efforts that entail righteousness, dignity, and gratitude (Sacks, 2014).
**Christianity.** According to Bishop Schori (2014), Christians recognize happiness in living a spiritual and moral earthly life that prepares them for the ultimate happiness of union with God. Some Christians view happiness only as eternal peace in God’s presence, whereas others expand this belief to include happiness that comes from the pleasures of this world.

The New Testament, the part of the Christian religious scripture that distinguishes it from Judaism, uses the term *makarios*, a Greek word that means happiness, blessedness, or good fortune. In the Gospels, *makarios* means transcendental happiness or happiness that occurs after death or when in communion with the Divine. This conception of happiness is clear in the passage called the “Beatitudes” in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. According to the Holy Bible:

> Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for, in the same way, they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:3–5:12, New International Version)

However, Jesus’ ministry in the Gospels referred to a comprehensive approach to happiness, both spiritual and earthly. This approach to happiness is clear from the public works of Jesus that he undertook. He fed and ate with the unclean, healed the sick on the Sabbath, and taught the people. He considered these “pure” jobs as a blessing (Schori, 2014).

Bishop Schori (2014) says many Christians believe happiness has something to do with the direct experience of God. They also believe happiness lies in the experience of
God’s blessings in goods, like food, drink, clothes, shelter, liberty, peace, meaningful family work, community, and a state of well-being.

It is important to note that the philosophical systems of the Greeks influenced Christian theology (Schori, 2014). According to Bishop Schori, Greeks believed in two types of happiness: eudaimonia, a good spirit or virtue, and hedonia, pleasure or earthly blessings. The Stoics rejected hedonia and believed happiness is only possible through passionless virtue, and happiness is a matter of the will of an individual. Stoics’ ideas influenced the Christian view of God. Some strands of Christian theology believe God is unmoved by suffering, presenting God as apathetic. So, like the Stoics, the wisdom tradition of the Christian tradition always favored eudaimonia and rejected hedonia. For instance, the 13th century theologian Thomas Aquinas said that ultimate Christian happiness consists in the intellectual contemplation of God.

However, this apathetic view of God is not a characteristic of all strands of later Christian theology (Schori, 2014). For example, Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–1166), a great medieval Catholic saint and theologian, accepted Aristotle’s conception of happiness (Schori, 2014). Aristotle believed happiness is theoria and ethics (Roochnik, 2009). Theoria means intellectual efforts, rational contemplation of goods, not physical goods, but human ideals. Ethics relates to virtues in political and social engagements. However, Aristotle did not include God in his conception of happiness. Aelred’s comprehensive approach to happiness included both eternal happiness in the afterlife and earthly happiness (Dickens, 2007; Schori, 2014).
That Aelred places a positive value on earthly or mortal happiness is noteworthy (Dickens, 2007; Schori, 2014). According to Aelred, like other theologians, ultimate human happiness is only in the afterlife. However, there is a type of happiness that exists in this earthly life. Aelred asserted that God created human beings for good. Friendship and equality are human nature. God is the source of human happiness, and therefore the human experience of happiness is God’s gift. Aelred further emphasized happiness is a matter of choice or will. Thus, human beings must take part in God’s work to experience happiness in this life, but it still needs the love and grace of God. Therefore, Aelred’s vision of happiness includes both the happiness of mortal life and beyond it.

The Christian life of happiness is Godward that connects with God (Schori, 2014). Christians often conceive a cosmic relationship with God as love or compassion. In the Christian tradition, there are three loci of love and compassion: self, God, and neighbor. Jesus says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind… You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37, 39, New International Version). These three loci—self, God, and neighbor—lead to happiness. It restores dignity to all creatures—perfection of creation. Jesus says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48 New International Version). This pursuit of perfection is the path to happiness (Schori, 2014).

**Islam.** In Islam, worshiping God is the telos of human life (Joshanloo, 2013). The injunctions and regulations of Islam reinforce that happiness comes from knowing God, and ultimate happiness is only possible after liberation from the flesh (Khademi, 2009; Mattila, 2011; Raftari, 2015). However, Islam also emphasizes that the life of this world
is important, but this worldly life is only a means of attaining life after death, and sincere worship of God can achieve it (Stacey, 2011). Under Islam, kind and virtuous action and giving charity leads to happiness. To find true happiness, an adherent must seek to know God, primarily through his names and attributes.

Islam has various schools of thoughts and sects. However, despite this diversity, there is a general agreement about the basic tenets of Islam and the conceptualization of happiness within the Muslim world. The Quran is the holy book of Muslims that contains the authoritative text, including teachings about life and happiness (Joshanloo, 2013). The Quran is the thread that runs through the lives of all Muslims (Anwar, 2006). All earlier movements in Islam, like Sufism, or the mystical aspect of Islam, have stayed in line with the contents of the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad’s sayings. Muslims believe Shariah, the Divine law, contains the complete embodiment of the Will of God, including how God wants them to act in this life to gain happiness in this world and felicity, or joy, in life after death (Nasr, 2014).

According to Islam, humankind is a product of unification of spirit and body (Joshanloo, 2013). God has breathed the spirit inside the human body, and this spirit needs to be actualized. Purification of the soul can perform this union when follow the ordinances of Islam. The rules of Islam call for mortification, or subduing bodily desires, and self-control. According to Islam, the one who seeks happiness through the pursuits of pleasures will find nothing but anxiety. The more an individual controls lusts and desires, the closer that person is to happiness.
Sufis, Muslim ascetics or mystics, strongly emphasize this aspect of Islam, with their goal to become one with God by letting go of all individual will and ego (Joshanloo & Rastegar, 2013). They believe God is the only reality, and nothing else has any authentic existence. Sufis claim their soul is absorbed in God, and they lose their sense of individuality. Therefore, Islam holds that Muslims should not choose hedonistic pleasures as the primary goal of life; however, positive emotions and pleasures are legitimate in Islam. If one adheres to the Islamic lifestyle, then one will experience positive feelings.

As for the suffering and hardships in life, Muslims believe that illness and recovery are in God’s hands (Rouzati, 2018). God tests the faith of Muslims by giving them suffering. Therefore, one should tolerate hardships in life with patience and should always be grateful to God. Such patience during the trying times converts the suffering into blessings (Watt, 1979). Human suffering is an instrument in the actualization of God’s plan, intertwined with human experiences necessary for man’s spiritual development (Rouzati, 2018).

Muslims believe that faith prevents health issues and helps manage physical and mental illnesses when they occur (Inayat, 2005). Therefore, daily prayer gives spiritual nourishment that harmonizes the mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of the believer. Besides daily prayers, Islam also advocates that God gives a peaceful and contented state of mind to an individual involved in virtuous activities and contributes to society while holding firm to a strong faith in God. Thus, the Islamic concept of happiness is such that it guarantees happiness in the worldly lives of Muslims and in life after death. The key to
achieving this happiness is living an Islamic-based virtuous lifestyle along with a strong faith in God.

Confucianism and Taoism. The 6th century BCE was a period of exciting philosophical growth in China. Confucius (551–472 BCE) founded Confucianism, a social or ethical philosophy, about 600 years before the Christian era, in the East of present-day China (Zhang & Veenhoven, 2008). Lou Tzu, a slightly older contemporary of Confucius, also lived during the same era and founded Taoism, or Daoism, a religious and philosophical system of China. The fundamental difference between Taoistic and Confucian philosophies is that Confucian understanding centers on men, and Taoist thinking revolves around nature (Chi-Chao, 2000). Regardless of the disagreements between Lao Tzu and Confucius, both Taoism and Confucianism have religious overtones and have a profound and enduring influence on the Chinese and other East Asia cultures.

To highlight the conceptions of happiness in the Chinese tradition, Ivanhoe (2013) compared the views of Confucius with Zhuangzi (399–295 BCE), another prominent Daoist philosopher of Lao Tzu’s doctrine. Both Confucius and Zhuangzi had a clear idea about the sources and the nature of happiness. Both claimed happiness lies in following the “Way,” (Dao or Tao), the eternal truth, the principle regulating nature, heaven, and the lives of human beings (Young, Tseng, & Zhou, 2005). Both Confucius and Zhuangzi asserted that a life lived in harmony with the Dao leads to a life free from anxiety, fears, and common human worries. It gives a person a sense of being a part of something grand that is more significant than anything pleasure could give. Both Confucius and Zhuangzi emphasized that to be with Dao, an individual has to lose oneself, which means one must
shed a self-centered conception of self. Those who are in harmony with the Dao experience a profound sense of metaphysical, or spiritual, comfort. They feel secure and at peace, and they experience certain powers that are much greater than anything one can gain otherwise. This idea of metaphysical comfort is like William James’ notion of religious happiness or intimacy (Slater, 2009). The accumulation of these powers opens new and unique sources of satisfaction and a unique sense of joy that connects an adherent to the heavenly world. Confucius and Daoists both claimed a sense of self and the cognitive faculties that were developed by following the “Way” were intimately connected to the common aspects and welfare of the world (Ivanhoe, 2013).

According to Confucius, the joy that one finds by following the “Way,” Dao, is nothing like the pleasures or material well-being that defines happiness, a normative dimension of happiness (Ivanhoe, 2013). Confucius’ sense of joy is a specific emotional state that surfaces when an individual unites with something beyond self. Confucius emphasized being in harmony with Dao as a necessary and sufficient condition for a happy life. He also pointed out that wealth and honor are important, but only when wealth comes after being fully grounded in the Dao. Confucius’ emphasis on external goods for a happy life is more in line with the ideas of Aristotle. In the same vein as Aristotle, Confucianism places a high value on social relationships, especially family relationships (Joshanloo, 2014), because harmony is an important goal of personal and social life in Chinese tradition. Self-cultivation develops harmony, a process that dissolves the boundaries of an individual self to include others, starting with those who are closest, including family members.
Cardinal virtues in Confucianism are social. The most prominent ones are benevolence, love, and compassion for the well-being of others; righteousness; and politeness in interpersonal relationships (Hwang, 2001, 2006; Zhang & Veenhoven, 2008). According to Confucius, non-virtuous people cannot endure hardships in life for a long time and cannot maintain a constant state of mind, even if they have material wealth (Ivanhoe, 2013).

Unlike Confucius, Zhuangzi, the Daoist philosopher of Taoism, did not believe that wealth and power could lead to true contentment and peace (Ivanhoe, 2013). He believed that the followers of Dao should abandon their pointless quest for power, wealth, and prestige and all the goods associated with happiness. Zhuangzi suggested people can do this by fasting and forgetting, in that they will empty their hearts and minds of these seductive but toxic goals. Zhuangzi claimed socialization cuts off and alienates people from the great Dao. According to Zhuangzi, the real purpose of life is to remain committed to Dao and to live a life characterized by free and easy wandering (Zhuangzi, 1964). This allows followers of Dao to lose themselves and remain secure in the comfort of the rhythms of the Dao. He advocated that the core principle of Taoism is non-action, Wu Wei, a principle that asks men to act effortlessly and spontaneously, allowing things to take their own course with little interference (Chan, 1963; Peng, Spencer-Rodgers, & Nian, 2006).

Taoism highly values contentment and peace, achieved by understanding the basic principles of Taoism. This understanding includes the two poles principle, which is the interaction of yin and yang, where yin is negative, passive, and feminine and yang is
positive, active, and masculine. This means that all things exist in polarity, with the two poles complementing and supporting each other (Peng et al., 2006). Under this principle, one should accept both happiness and suffering in life together. The understanding of this principle is the key to happiness.

**Buddhism.** The Buddhist conceptualization of happiness is more inclined toward freedom from suffering in life. Dalai Lama, a famous Tibetan monk, and a Buddhist spiritual leader, said:

The highest happiness is when one reaches the stage of Liberation, at which there is no more suffering. That’s genuine, lasting happiness. True happiness relates more to the mind and heart. Happiness that depends mainly on physical pleasure is unstable; one day it’s there, the next day it may not be. (Lama & Cutler, 1998, p. 33)

Buddhists believe that a sense of a permanent self with well-defined boundaries is an illusion in mind and a cause of suffering (Dambrun & Ricard, 2011; Joshanloo, 2014). The perception of a structured self, which takes the form of a permanent, independent, and solid entity, leads to self-centered psychological functioning, and this seems to be a significant source of both affliction and fluctuating happiness. In Buddhism, self-renunciation leads to limitless love and compassion and destroys negative states of mind like anger and hatred (Mitchell & Wiseman, 2003).

Buddhism holds there is no happiness in material gains, desires, pleasures, and even in interpersonal relationships (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). Happiness is not dependent on any external or internal pleasurable stimuli. From a Buddhist viewpoint, pleasure is temporary because it centers on the self, so it leads to selfish actions and
sometimes conflicts with the well-being of others (Dambrun & Ricard, 2011; Ricard, 2014).

Buddhism bases human well-being on mental balance and contentment (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). Only through spiritual and mental training can people find happiness in their hearts. The final step in the Buddhist path to happiness is to understand that an individual is one with others. Such an understanding brings peace and harmony in life and the lives of others. Dalai Lama said, “… cultivating positive mental states like kindness and compassion definitely leads to better psychological health and happiness” (Lama & Cutler, 1998, p. 41).

**Hinduism.** In Hinduism (or *Sanatan Dharma*), *moksha* (Sanskrit: salvation, absolute peace or freedom, liberation from the world of suffering, endless cycle of rebirths and deaths) or supreme happiness is the goal of life (Guenther, Kim, & Freeman, 1976; Klostermaier, 2008; Salagame, 2013). This pursuit of salvation starts with human efforts to discover true self and ends with freedom from suffering and the cycle of rebirth and death. The actual self of each person is non-material *atman* (Sanskrit: self or true nature), which is the same as *Brahman* (Sanskrit: The Divine within), the ultimate spirit that embraces all existence, the heart of the universe. Brahman is the one supreme, the universal reality that is the ultimate ground of everything (Salagame, 2013; Sarvapriyananda, 2014).

According to Hinduism, even though the *atman* (Sanskrit: self) and *brahman* (Sanskrit: universal self or self) are identical, people are born with a veil of ignorance about their true self being the universal spirit (Aravinda Prabhu & Bhat, 2013; Joshanloo, 2014).
Therefore, salvation is to realize the unity between the *atman* (Sanskrit: self) and the *brahman* (Sanskrit: self or universal self).

On the path to salvation, one must practice self-control through yoga and live an ethical life of *dharma* (Sanskrit: eternal law or moral values or duties as prescribed by Vedas), the cosmic law of right behavior and social order (Atmapriyananda, 2013; Salagame, 2013). An adherent should detach from transient material objects, fame, wealth, ego, and anger, which are vices in Hinduism (Bhawuk, 2010; Salagame, 2013). By avoiding these vices, and by acting as per *dharma* (Sanskrit: morals or ethics), one can liberate from the material self and become one with the *brahman* (Sanskrit: universal self or self) into lasting happiness.

Cardinal virtues of Hinduism include gratitude, non-violence, limitless compassion, and generosity (Joshanloo, 2014). Other virtues include controlling the mind, meditation, and enduring hardships without becoming upset (Paranjpe, 2011). The end state of salvation is an egoless state with a limitless compassion for everyone (Joshanloo, 2014; Salagame, 2013; Sarvapriyananda, 2014). This liberation leads to true joy, or happiness that comes from contentment and peace of mind.

In conclusion, happiness has a spiritual dimension that major world religions and religious traditions have been advocating for the past thousands of years. Scientific studies on religiosity and happiness and studies on spiritual people have found a positive relationship between religiosity and happiness.

The literature review of happiness found gaps in knowledge, the population, and the method used in past research, which I discuss next.
Literature Gap

In this section, I discuss the three gaps I found following the review of the literature on happiness—a knowledge gap, a methodology gap, and a population gap.

Knowledge Gap

The area related to—what is happiness—remains relatively unexplored. A review of the literature shows that in recent times, some philosophers tried to explore the question, what is happiness (Feldman, 2010b; Haybron, 2011; Lu, 2001; Ryff & Singer, 2008). The researchers concluded that happiness is some psychological state. While trying to know what happiness is, most previous studies ended up discussing what makes people happy and thus successfully produced a large body of authentic literature and happiness theories about well-being or what makes people happy (Argyle, 1999; Csikszentmihalyi, 2008; Deci & Ryan, 2008, 2010; Diener, 1984; Fredrickson, 2003, 2009; Kahneman, 1999; Lyubomirsky, 2008; Malinowski, 2013; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2008; Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Seligman, 2004; Veenhoven, 2003a; Waterman, 1993). Interestingly, one researcher argued that happiness is not well-being (Raibley, 2012). However, the area related to—what is happiness—remains primarily unexplored. This research aimed to find the reality and nature of happiness, to confirm if happiness is a psychological state or not, from the perspective of sadhus.

Methodology Gap

Most earlier studies on happiness did not adopt a qualitative or phenomenological approach to understand happiness. Therefore, a few researchers like DeRobertis (2016)
and Heffernan (2014) made a plea that researchers should explore happiness phenomenologically. DeRobertis noted, “traditional (positivistic) methodologies have proven insufficient in clarifying happiness as a phenomenon of human experience on their own” (DeRobertis, 2016, p. 74). Also, the humanistic movement in the 1950s, the predecessor of the field of positive psychology, also advocated using qualitative methods to study human subjects (McLeod, 2015). Therefore, the present study adopted a phenomenological approach for an in-depth understanding of human happiness from the perspective of sadhus.

**Population Gap**

As for the population gap, the review of the literature suggests that few or no past happiness researchers tried to understand happiness from sadhus, whose lifegoal is the discovery of pure happiness. Previous studies mostly utilized a sample of youth, undergraduates, or college students who have many desires and aspirations in life (Demirbatir et al., 2013; French & Joseph, 1999; Lu, Gilmour, & Kao, 2001; Pandya, 2017; Sahraian, Gholami, Javadpour, & Omidvar, 2013). These desires could intervene when making sense of what happiness *is* or what makes them happy. However, this research could control the desire factor by selecting a population of sadhus who renounce their worldly desires to discover true happiness.

Some scholars also expressed the need for other cultures and ethnicities to inform current Western understanding of positive psychological functioning and happiness (Coan, 1977; Joshanloo, 2014; Lu & Gilmour, 2006; Ryff, 1989). They argued that other cultures may have competing conceptions of well-being and happiness. Insights from
cultures outside of the Euro-American world would enable the discourse on happiness to be more culturally informed.

Similarly, positive psychologists Pargament and Mahoney (2012) mentioned that spirituality influences too many aspects of human functioning. Over four-fifth of Americans believe in some higher power (Gallup, 2008; Pew Research, 2015). However, psychologists seldom discuss concepts like sacred, transcendence, letting go, suffering, faith, sacrifice, and grace. Therefore, it is essential to learn about the worldview, values, and relationships of spiritual people by taking part in and seeing their settings in much greater detail.

Some scholars (Boss, 1966; Murphy & Murphy, 1968) also noted there are some exalted figures, sages, and holy men in the psychological and spiritual traditions in the East. They have recognized an individual’s ability to grow and evolve, providing a sense of unlimited ecstasy, inner peace, joyous freedom, selfless goodness, and calmness within oneself, free from personal strivings. Therefore, it is important to understand the concepts of happiness from spiritual people.

The review of the literature on happiness found three gaps: 1. A knowledge gap about the question—what is happiness. In recent empirical studies on happiness, the researchers primarily focused on well-being or what makes people happy. 2. A methodological gap—earlier researchers on happiness did not use a phenomenological method to explore happiness. Some past researchers (DeRobertis, 2016; Heffernan, 2014) also identified this gap and called for the phenomenological investigation into happiness. 3. A population gap—no researcher approached the sadhus, whose goal in life is the
discovery of pure happiness, to find out about happiness. In a population of sadhus, the researchers could have controlled the desire factor, unlike college students or youth, which the past studies on happiness mostly used. Some earlier researchers also called for reaching out to other cultures and ethnicities to understand the phenomenon of happiness.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed many philosophical and religious conceptualizations of happiness since ancient times: Happiness as pleasure (hedonism), happiness as a virtue, happiness as desire satisfaction, and happiness as life satisfaction. A review of positive psychology highlighted multiple topics, including positive emotions, emotional intelligence, optimism, hope, flow experiences, and subjective and eudaimonic well-being. An examination of past research showed a positive relationship between spirituality and happiness. Analysis of the major world religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Confucianism and Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism—perspectives on happiness informed this research about conceptions of happiness in different cultures. Three gaps—a knowledge gap, a population gap, and a methodological gap—were identified in the literature that motivated and directed this happiness study on sadhus using a phenomenological qualitative approach.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the research questions and presents the rationale for adopting a qualitative and phenomenological approach to study the phenomenon of happiness. I describe the sadhus’ lifestyle followed by subsections on the selection criteria, sample size, the strategy used to locate real sadhus and my experience meeting the sadhus. The discussion’s focus moves to phenomenological data collection methods adopted in this study, followed by data coding and analysis techniques used in this research. The chapter concludes by discussing the validity threats that could have affected the study results.

The literature review found that debates on human happiness have been going on for the past 2,500 years. Recently, the “happiness” topic gained popularity with the emergence and growth of a new branch of psychology, positive psychology, the science of happiness (Seligman et al., 2005). However, the literature review found three gaps.

The first gap was the knowledge gap, in that the past research on happiness did not adequately explore the question—what happiness is? Some researchers who did try to explore the phenomenon of happiness (Feldman, 2010b; Haybron, 2011; Lu, 2001; Ryff & Singer, 2008), concluded that happiness is a psychological state of mind. The present study aimed at confirming if happiness actually is a mental state.

As for the second methodological gap, there is no doubt that the philosophical and theological literature includes many writings on happiness (Aquinas, 1991; Aristotle, 2017). Much research on happiness has already been conducted with remarkable success, however, most research in the past adopted quantitative approaches to study happiness.
For an in depth understanding of happiness, some researchers (DeRobertis, 2016; Heffernan, 2014) called for a phenomenological investigation into happiness.

The third gap in the literature was about the population involved in the earlier investigations on happiness. Little or no evidence existed of any happiness research that included the sadhus, the religious ascetics of India, whose goal of life is the discovery of real happiness.

Besides, the sadhus are also expert meditators, living a self-disciplined life with minimal desires. In a population of sadhus, the desire-factor could be adequately controlled, unlike college students and youth with raging hormones and desires, who formed the population of most previous researches on happiness.

In the same vein, past researchers (Coan, 1977; Joshanloo, 2014; Lu & Gilmour, 2006; Ryff, 1989) expressed a concern that different cultures need to inform happiness research in Western countries. Positive psychologists Pargament and Mahoney (2012) also suggested that it is important to learn about the happiness and well-being from spiritual people.

Having associated with the sadhus for the past 20 years, I observed that sadhus, by virtue of their ascetic life, are peaceful and happy beings, which was in line with writings on sadhus (Hartsuiker, 2014; Hausner, 2007; Levy, 2011). The sadhus appeared happier even after they renounced their homes, material possessions, families, and friends to pursue their spiritual goal of life, to find God within (Atmapriyananda, 2013). However, I lacked a clear understanding of the meaning and the sources of happiness in the sadhus. Some questions remained unanswered, such as, What is the sadhus’ general
state of mind? What is their mental state with only minimal material possessions and desires? What does happiness mean to the sadhus, and how happy are they, if at all?

This phenomenological study produced a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of happiness from the perspective of the sadhus. The present study answered the following research questions:

Question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?
Question 2: Do sadhus perceive themselves to be happy people?
Question 3: What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness?

**Research Methodology**

The present study adopted a qualitative approach and a phenomenological method to answer the above research questions. This section discusses the rationale behind choosing a qualitative approach and a phenomenological method to carry out this investigation. It explains various interpretive approaches in qualitative research and Husserl’s transcendental phenomenological strategy of analysis (Moustakas, 1994) to find the essence and meaning of happiness from the statements of the sadhus.

**The Rationale for Choosing a Qualitative Approach**

I chose a qualitative approach in this research for several reasons. First, I had to explore and describe the happiness phenomenon. Second, happiness is a vague concept with no clear definition. Third, the study participants, the sadhus of India, mostly speak languages other than the English language. Fourth, most sadhus live a basic life and are not familiar with technology as much as the general population. Finally, the sadhus
continuously travel from one place to another and do not stay at one place for a long time. Therefore, after the formal interview, it was potentially tricky to contact sadhus if I had to follow up with them.

This research aimed to explore, understand, and describe the phenomenon of happiness from the perspective of the sadhus. If a research study intends to examine and describe a phenomenon of interest, a qualitative method is a better choice than using a quantitative approach (Sauro, 2015). This investigation was an inductive research study that did not intend to test any hypotheses, another reason it undertook a qualitative approach, in line with Maxwell’s (2013) assertion that inductive studies are primarily qualitative.

To know about happiness from the viewpoint of the sadhus, this research needed to elicit lengthy stories and descriptions of experiences from the sadhus. Seidman (2013) noted that stories are a way of knowing, and stories is a meaning-making process. From sadhus’ stories and reflections, this study gained an understanding of the meaning and sources of their happiness. As the choice of a research method must arise from the goals of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), the present study adopted a qualitative research method involving in-depth interviews with the participants.

Happiness is a complex and vague topic, and no single definition of happiness exists. If a construct is not clear, a qualitative method is helpful to explore the idea (Sauro, 2015). The nebulousness of happiness also became clear from the literature review because different people conceptualize happiness differently. However, compared to quantitative studies, in qualitative research, the “subjects” can think and talk (Bertaux,
If allowed to speak freely, people appear to know a lot more about what is going on, explaining new insights about the phenomenon of interest. Thus, to understand this complicated concept of happiness, the present study adopted a qualitative, interview-based approach.

Another reason to choose a qualitative approach rested in Hindi as the local spoken language of the sadhus, along with my ability to speak Hindi. Most sadhus in India usually interact in languages other than English, like Hindi, Sanskrit, or local regional languages. The sadhus would not have been comfortable filling out survey questionnaires in the English language, an approach more common in quantitative research. It was more workable to conduct this investigation using a qualitative method, involving in-person or telephonic interviews in the participants’ language.

The limited use of technology within the community of the sadhus was another reason to carry out this research as a qualitative study. I have observed a growing trend within the sadhu community in using the Internet, as many sadhus and their ashrams or spiritual residential schools own sophisticated websites and use personal emails to communicate with the general population. However, most sadhus still live a basic life and stay away from the new and shiny computing devices. They do not use the Internet as much as the general population. Many sadhus only use basic mobile or landline phones. Therefore, the choice of taking a quantitative approach in this research by using survey questionnaires, open-ended or otherwise, that needed a high Internet familiarity by the participants did not seem appropriate.
Another reason to choose a qualitative approach was that, per most monastic orders, sadhus must continually wander from one place to another (Hausner, 2007). They cannot stay in one place for a longer time and cannot own permanent homes. They temporarily stay at their ashrams, or monastery-like retreats; *akharas* (Sanskrit: monastic administrative headquarters); temples; or other religious pilgrimages before they resume their journey to their next destination.

Regarding their wandering lifestyle, the sadhus not only travel to various locations within India (Hausner, 2007), but they often travel to other countries, including the USA. This trend has been occurring since at least the late 1800s, when a prominent Indian sadhu, Swami Vivekananda, delivered his message at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago on September 11, 1893 (Vivekananda, 2015). More than a century ago, Oman also supported that sadhus from India often travel to the Western countries when he wrote, “The Yogi, has been accepted in the West as the type or representative of the religious ascetics of India” (Oman, 1905, p. 168). However, depending on their physical fitness or age, the sadhus may stay at one location for a longer time in their ashrams (Hausner, 2007), where ever their ashrams are, in India, the USA, or in any other country.

As for the choice of a qualitative approach in this study, and given sadhus’ wandering lifestyle, to collect data, it was best to find and meet the sadhus in person and conduct personal interviews. Assuming I might not find over one or two sadhus in the United States, I went to India to meet the sadhus and conducted in-person interviews with them. Later, I also found genuine sadhus outside India, in the USA, the UK, and Argentina.
In summary, five factors drove the choice for a qualitative approach in this research. First, unlike in quantitative studies, the happiness phenomenon had to be examined and described qualitatively. Second, happiness, being a vague and complex concept, with no clear definition, had to be understood qualitatively. Third, the sadhus usually spoke in languages other than the English language. The fourth factor was the sadhus’ limited familiarity of the Internet and technology, and fifth, the sadhus’ wandering lifestyle could have been a potential barrier to contact them after the interviews.

**The Rationale for Choosing a Phenomenological Method**

This subsection explains various interpretive approaches in qualitative research, phenomenology, Husserl’s philosophy of phenomenology (Husserl, 2002), and the phenomenological method as advocated by Moustakas (Moustakas, 1994) and provides a rationale for choosing Husserl’s transcendental phenomenological method as a preferred research method for this study. I chose Husserl’s phenomenological method because past researchers called for a phenomenological investigation of happiness (DeRobertis, 2016; Heffeman, 2014). Another reason for using a phenomenological approach was that a phenomenological inquiry was in line with the goal of this research—to explore and describe the phenomenon of happiness.

Within the realm of qualitative research, there are five main interpretive approaches, namely phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and narrative research (Creswell, 2012). This research aimed to explore and describe the meaning of happiness, its essential features, and its essence as perceived by the sadhus.
According to this goal, phenomenology as a qualitative research method seemed to be the most suitable choice for this investigation.

According to Starks and Trinidad (2007) and Creswell (2012), phenomenology, as a European philosophy, believes the reality of a phenomenon lives in the meaning of individual experiences, and every phenomenon has its essential common features. The goal of phenomenology is to describe the meaning of the lived experience of the phenomenon. It answers questions like, what is the lived experience of [the phenomenon of interest]?

A phenomenologist typically adopts one of the three more popular kinds of phenomenological methods of analysis, namely Husserl’s transcendental phenomenological analysis (Moustakas, 1994), Heidegger’s hermeneutical phenomenological strategy (Kafle, 2013), or the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008)

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) conceptualized the philosophy and logic of transcendental phenomenology through Logical Investigations (trans. Husserl, 2001a, trans. 2001b) one of the major works that he published during the early 1900s. Husserl premised transcendental phenomenology on the idea that reality can be discovered by transcending the experience (Moustakas, 1994). While using a transcendental phenomenological method, the researchers has to suspend their personal prejudices to reach the essence of the phenomenon, through their state of pure consciousness. Husserl’s transcendental phenomenological method advocates researchers adopting a
phenomenological attitude (a state of transcendence achieved by suspending personal opinions) over their natural attitude toward the phenomenon.

Hermeneutical phenomenology is a method for doing research based on the writings of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976)—*History of Concept of Time* (trans. Heidegger, 2009) and *Being and Time* (trans. Heidegger, 1962). While using the hermeneutical phenomenological method, the researcher deeply investigates the subjective experiences of participants to find genuine objective nature of the things as experienced by individuals or groups, through their life world stories (Kafle, 2013). Unlike in Husserl’s transcendental phenomenological method, Heidegger’s hermeneutical phenomenological approach rejects the idea of researcher suspending personal opinions and prejudices and advocates an interpretive narration to the description.

The aim of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008) is exploring how participants make sense of their personal and social world. IPA aims to study the meanings of the participants’ experience of the phenomenon or events in their contexts. IPA is an attempt to understand what it is like, from the perspective of the participants, to take their side, instead of making an effort to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself. While the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher using IPA is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

This research adopted Husserl’s phenomenology as a baseline theoretical phenomenological framework (Moustakas, 1994). As mentioned earlier, the research questions of this study, with a goal to find the essence of the phenomenon of happiness as
experienced by the sadhus, guided the choice of Husserl’s phenomenological framework (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). The present study also used Husserl’s transcendental phenomenological analysis strategy, given that the phenomenon of happiness being vague.

Past researchers (DeRobertis, 2016; Heffernan, 2014) called for a phenomenological investigation of happiness to know the essential features of the construct of happiness. Heffernan (2014) and DeRobertis (2016) argued that phenomenology should investigate human happiness. DeRobertis explicitly said, “when it comes to happiness, positive psychology has mostly provided the psychological community with a stream of correlation data based on self-reports and surveys, a host of theoretical assertions, normative ‘facts,’ and proposed causal relationships” (2016, p. 73). DeRobertis (2016) emphasized that what today’s happiness research needs is a description, a phenomenological inquiry, research study that originates in the works of the German mathematician, Edmund Husserl (1859–1938)—Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology (trans. Husserl, 2002).

Husserl’s phenomenology is an eidetic (descriptive) phenomenology aimed to find reality as mediated through individual experiences. Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994) is both a philosophy and a method to find the essence of the phenomenon of interest. Central to the philosophy of Husserl’s phenomenology is the sense of the intentionality of consciousness. Intentionality of consciousness is an idea that people always direct consciousness toward an object. From intentionality, a theme that follows is the refusal of subject-object dichotomy (Creswell,
According to Husserl, the reality of this world is not divided into subjects and objects but into the dual Cartesian nature of both subjects and objects as they appear in consciousness. From this, it follows that the reality of an object or phenomenon is only perceived in mind and lives in the meaning of the lived experienced of an individual (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994).

Husserl’s philosophy is a presupposition-less philosophy, so the researcher should suspend judgments of what is real, which means, researcher’s natural attitude toward the phenomenon of interest is to be suspended (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Husserl called suspension of one’s natural attitude as epoché, or bracketing. Epoché transcends the researcher’s natural attitude to a phenomenological standpoint, thus promoting objectivity (Moustakas, 1994). Epoché prepares the researcher to discover the essence of the observed phenomenon. From these ideas and assumptions in Husserl’s philosophy, Moustakas (1994) advocated a method of inquiry with an increased focus on the psychological perspective.

Moustakas’ method of phenomenological inquiry is an empirical transcendental or psychological phenomenological method. It is distinct from another prominent approach, hermeneutic phenomenology (Kafle, 2013; van Manen, 1990), that involves interpreting the texts of life. Hermeneutics is more common in healthcare literature (Creswell, 2012). Out of these two approaches, the present study adopted Moustakas’ transcendental phenomenological method, that is based off Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology for data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). It is more in line with the phenomenon of happiness and
along the central structure of this investigation to examine the descriptions of the participants.

This qualitative research adopted a phenomenological method because the interview data comprised descriptions from sadhus, as expected out of a phenomenological investigation, that generated rich data and thick descriptions from the participants (Creswell, 2012; Groenewald, 2004; Høffding & Martiny, 2016; Moustakas, 1994; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). As mentioned earlier, in most cases, an analyst using phenomenological method suspends personal views or biases during the investigation—a process known as epoché or bracketing (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994), in line with Husserl’s philosophy behind the method. The researcher then clusters the interview research data into discrete categories that describe the essence of the structures of the experience. The final product of a phenomenological inquiry is a thematic description of the pre-given essences and structures of the lived experience.

The sampling strategy in Husserl’s transcendental phenomenological method is to include participants who have experienced the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). An analyst conducting a phenomenological study observes or interviews the participants in their environment, the context of the occurrence of the phenomenon.

This study reached its goal, generated themes, created meanings, and found the essence or essential features of the happiness of the sadhus. The qualitative phenomenological approach supported the goal of this study, which was to explore and deeply understand the construct of happiness from the perspective of the sadhus in their
natural environment. In the following section, I discuss the study participants, sample size, and how participants were recruited and selected.

In conclusion, this study adopted a qualitative approach and Husserl’s transcendental phenomenological method based on multiple reasons. The qualitative approach was selected because happiness is a vague concept with no clear definition and had to be studied in a qualitative way. The study participants; the sadhus’ lifestyle, such as their usual spoken language being other than the English language; sadhus’ limited abilities to use technology; and their continuous wandering life drove the choice of this study to be qualitative. As for the choice of Husserl’s phenomenological method, the goal of this study, to explore, understand, and describe the concept of happiness, drove the choice of a phenomenological method. Moreover, past researchers also called for phenomenological research to understand happiness.

The Participants of the Study

This section describes the lifestyle and peculiar characteristics of the research participants, the sadhus, who live a renounced religious life. It also explains the participant selection criteria, the sadhus belonging to the Advaita Vedanta school of thought of Indian philosophy. I describe the sampling strategy to find the right participants and the sample size of 20 sadhus, followed by the explanation of the plan adopted to find the right research participants for this study. Finally, I describe the special experience meeting with the sadhus in the context of this research.
The Sadhus

The participants of this study were sadhus, the Hindu religious ascetics, or monks, who renounce the material world for their spiritual life goal—moksha—freedom from suffering from the endless cycle of pains and pleasures, or the attainment of God (Atmapriyananda, 2013; Levy, 2011; Salagame, 2013). This research planned to interview the sadhus from the Advaita Vedanta philosophy school of thought, found by Adi Shankaracharya during the 8th century BCE. Advaita Vedanta is one of the most respected schools of thought of the Hindu philosophy (Ranganathan, 2016).

Per the Sannyasa Upanishad (Atmapriyananda, 2013), the sadhus must lead an ascetic life as per their monastic traditions. The sadhus cannot earn for themselves. They have to stay unmarried, must eat vegetarian food, and wear ocher, orange-colored robes. The sadhus try to achieve their spiritual goal by practicing Vedic rituals, self-control, yoga, meditation, and the study of the scriptures under a Guru (Sanskrit: a spiritual master). Gurus are sadhus of the highest category, and authentic Gurus are always a rare find (Hausner, 2007). Every sadhu has a Guru under whose guidance the sadhus travel on their spiritual path. Per most monastic orders, the sadhus cannot own a home, a permanent dwelling place, which makes them distinct from the householders (Atmapriyananda, 2013; Hausner, 2007). Therefore, they wander from one place to another. According to most monastic orders (Atmapriyananda, 2013), the sadhus should not stay for more than a night in a village, five nights in a town, and seven nights in a holy place. Many sadhus carry a danda, or staff, as an emblem of having entered the monastic calling. Danda is a Sanskrit word that is a symbol of restraint or total self-
control. They must live a simple life and must wish nothing but liberation from the cycle of life and death through the path of yoga (Atmapriyananda, 2013; Hartsuiker, 2014; Hausner, 2007).

**Participant Selection Criteria**

This study used a purposeful sampling strategy to include sadhus that would give the best information for this study as proposed by Patton (2014) and Maxwell (2013). The purposeful sampling strategy for this investigation involved finding and selecting a group of sadhus of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy, who were expected to be knowledgeable or who had experienced the phenomenon of happiness. Through purposeful sampling, this study found participants willing to take part in this study (Creswell & Clark, 2011) and expressive enough to communicate their experiences (Bernard, 2002; Spradley, 1979).

**Participant Sample Size**

Patton (2014) suggested that there are no specific rules about the sample size in qualitative research. In phenomenological study, the unit of analysis is the phenomenon of interest and not the participants (Vagle, 2014). Typical sample size could range from 1 to 10 participants (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The present study chose to interview 20 sadhus to increase the level of validity and trustworthiness of the study.

**Finding the Right Participants**

As mentioned earlier, the sadhus cannot own permanent homes and must wander from one territory to another. However, many sadhus, the senior ones, have permanent
“bases” where they often stay for an extended period (Hausner, 2007). The sadhu’s wandering lifestyle could have posed a problem in connecting with the right participants.

In the present study, in addition to using a purposeful sampling strategy (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2014) to include participants who had the lived experience of the phenomenon, I used another strategy, the snowball sampling technique to expand the sample size to 20 genuine sadhus. Snowballing is a method of growing the sample size by asking for references from one informant for the next participant (Babbie, 1995; Crabtree & Miller, 1992).

First, I contacted a spiritual master, a Guru-level prominent sadhu, a well-educated philosopher of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy, who holds a Ph.D. in the Hindi literature. He gave one reference for a genuine sadhu living in the North East region of the United States, who accepted to take part in this study. As mentioned earlier, many senior and qualified sadhus often visit the USA and countries other than India at different times to attend religious functions or to deliver their spiritual discourses to the public. They stay in the ashrams or at temples. The ashram members of the sadhu from the North East region of the United States gave me references to other qualified sadhus staying in Vedantic ashrams in the North East and Pacific regions of the USA, the UK, and Argentina. Likewise, my dissertation study partner provided me three more references of sadhus staying in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. While I personally knew three sadhus, the snowball sampling strategy of using references to expand the sample size helped me find 17 genuine sadhus. So, I finally reached the pre-determined sample size of 20 sadhus, who willingly took part in this study.
To find real sadhus, I traveled to an ashram in Western India. Within India, earlier, I had plans to go to the northern spiritual plains of India, like Haridwar and Rishikesh, to visit various other ashrams. In northern India, I expected to find many genuine and senior sadhus. I also had plans to visit ashrams or schools of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy where the senior sadhus often teach young renunciates. However, after reaching the very first ashram in India, I was able to find six real sadhus at the same ashram, with whom, I later conducted face-to-face interviews. Therefore, I did not travel much within India, as earlier planned. I approached the sadhus via phone, email, or in person to check for their willingness to take part in this study. After the sadhus’ formal consent and permission, I scheduled meetings and interviewed them.

The Special Experience Meeting with the Sadhus

This subsection describes the behaviors and demographic information of sadhus I met in the field. The sadhus’ normal behavior differed from what I expected before I met them. Their friendly behaviors prevented a few validity threats of qualitative research, which I did not imagine in the field before the data collection. I describe the validity threats in the final section of this chapter.

In this dissertation, meeting and interviewing the saffron-robed sadhus was an atypical experience. Before the data collection, I lived in constant dread of the unknowns that could have happened in the field. Even though I had my long-term associations with many sadhus, I was still unsure if I could find real and qualified sadhus. However, I was lucky. As stated earlier, the snowball participant sampling strategy helped me increase the sample size with the right participants. Using this strategy of references, I found genuine
sadhus, not only in India but excellent ones in the United States, the UK, and Argentina—
8 sadhus in the USA, 10 sadhus in India, 1 in the UK, and 1 in Argentina, in total 20
sadhus.

Apart from references, I knew three fantastic sadhus from my past associations
who took part in this study. For example, I knew a senior saint from the South East region
of the United States who readily agreed to take part in this study and passionately
contributed to this research through his funny and emotional life-stories, and in those
stories, he embedded the truth of happiness.

Not all the sadhus I contacted took part in the interviews. For instance, I reached
one highly revered aged 87-year-old famous sadhu from Florida. He told me he was too
old to give an hour-long interview, but he sent me an article he authored earlier—Where
is happiness? (Jyotirmayananda, 1983). Reading that article helped me with an
understanding of deep notions of happiness from the perspective of sadhus, but I could
not include the article during the coding and analysis phase since he could not take part in
the interview. However, I have included pertinent information about happiness from his
article in Chapter 5.

Out of 20 sadhus who took part in this research, seven sadhus were females, and
they had a vast knowledge of human happiness. Regarding the ethnicity and the culture
of the sadhus, the study’s population was a mix of White Americans or European and
South Asian Indians. Visually, the approximate average age of the sadhus was between 65
and 95 years.
Before the data collection, I had other worrying thoughts that added to my anxiety. For instance, I was concerned about whether I would find even a single sadhu who could express their thoughts in the English language effectively. What would it be like to speak to the ascetics who rarely mingle with worldly people? How well will they receive me, and, even if they do, will they answer the research questions suitably?

Except one, every sadhu I met had some formal education. Two sadhus had Ph.D. degrees in the fields of psychology and literature. Including them, most sadhus had at least a bachelor’s or a master’s degree in varied fields like music, arts, and chemistry. However, their spiritual lived experience and their knowledge of happiness far surpassed their formal education. One female sadhu from the North East region the USA with a Ph.D. in psychology told me she was a professor of psychology and mental health in a reputed university. Destiny pulled her toward India, where she lived for ten years and practiced Advaita Vedanta philosophy under the guidance of her highly revered Guru. Later, she came back to the United States and now offers free meditation classes to people and teaches Advaita Vedanta and Sanskrit language to youngsters and sometimes even to retired elders in her community.

Even more surprising was that the sadhus received me well, which I did not expect earlier. This was the case even when most sadhus with whom I met oversaw their ashrams with a hectic schedule. The sadhus’ apparent politeness and calmness of mind during the interviews were remarkable. All of them were expressive during the meetings, even the sadhu who had no formal education. After my conversation with this wandering monk, I asked him to sign the consent form; he said, “I do not know how to write, I can
give you my thumb impression on the consent form if you like, ” and I agreed. It was astounding to find this sadhu’s breadth of spiritual knowledge even with no formal education.

Not all sadhus who took part in this research permanently stayed in their ashrams. Four sadhus were strictly “wandering monks” with no permanent dwellings. They were younger and more energetic compared to other senior sadhus who primarily lived in their ashrams.

Before the data collection phase, I thought my position as an outsider would be a potential validity threat in this research. However, it did not happen. The sadhus shared with me their knowledge fully, openly, and wholeheartedly with great patience.

The interviews were in-depth phenomenological interviews as per the pre-designed method of this study. The average interview time was over 1 hour. However, a few meetings continued for over 2 hours, in a single session or in parts. After our lengthy talks, some sadhus offered me food to eat and blessed me. Some gifted me books or recommended one for further reading. For instance, one sadhu asked me to read a book—Blessed Simplicity by Panikkar (1982)—for my better understanding of the profoundness of living a simple life of monks. Another woman sadhu gave me a book—Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (Satchidananda, 1987)—to further sharpen my concepts of the Vedic psychology of mind. Sadhus were happy about this type of research being conducted at a reputed university. After their interviews, the sadhus expressed great willingness to answer any follow-up questions.
Twelve out of 20 sadhus gave me interviews in the English language, 2 sadhus spoke in both English and Hindi, and the rest spoke in pure Hindi. To interview the sadhus and conduct these interviews, I traveled to India to a Guru’s ashram in Western India. Fortunately, I did not travel much within India to seek the sadhus, because I found six amazing sadhus visiting the first ashram where I stayed. I interviewed sadhus in the ashram itself, all in the Hindi language. I conducted nine face-to-face interviews, including three in-person meetings in the Mid-Atlantic region of the USA and the rest in India. I conducted other interviews via a video or a phone call, and I recorded the interviews using a digital voice recorder.

As for the use of technology, every study participant had a cell phone, including the wandering monks. They eagerly shared their numbers with me for any future queries. The sadhus who lived in their ashrams were accessible via phones and emails.

Following the interviews, as mentioned earlier in the data collection subsection, I extensively followed up with many sadhus for multiple reasons, sometimes to better understand a concept related to happiness or to ask the meaning of a specific Sanskrit term they used during the interview. In a few other cases, the follow-up queries resulted in a full-length second or even third phone interview.

In local Indian culture, people often refer to a male sadhu as a *sannyasi* (Sanskrit: renunciate or monk). Also, the word *Swami* (Sanskrit: a spiritual master) is a title used for a male sadhu. If a sadhu is a female, then people would likely use the title *Swamini* (Sanskrit: a female spiritual master), but it is not a hard and fast rule to use the title Swamini for a female sadhu. Even the title Swami is used for the female monks because,
in deep Indian ideology, a monk or an ascetic is considered someone who has transcended the physical bodily limitations. Therefore, in a strict sense, people do not identify sadhus with their gender. During their renunciation ceremonies, the sadhus let go of all kinds of identifications in the material world, like their homes, relationships, their given and family names, and material possessions (Hausner, 2007; Levy, 2011). Young sadhus get new names, while their goal is to go beyond all kinds of, in their language, ‘false worldly identifications,’ in search of true happiness.

Likewise, a title Guru (Sanskrit: a highest-level spiritual master) points to the highest category sadhu. However, these days given its status, the word Guru is the most abused title in the Eastern religious traditions. Everyone claims to be a ‘Guru,’ but it is a known fact and not-so-common belief that a real Guru is tough to find, to the point that no one can ‘find’ a Guru. A Guru finds his students. In her ethnographic work on sadhus, Hausner (2007) mentioned it is usually tough to see a real Guru.

In conclusion, the participants of this research were the sadhus, the religious people and renouncers, who live a basic lifestyle, practice self-control, and stay unmarried for life with minimal desires and possessions. The sadhus’ lifestyle involves performing Vedic rituals, practicing yoga and meditation and studying the Hindu religious texts. Per most monastic orders, and depending on their age and physical health, the sadhus do not stay in one place for a long time and keep wandering across different religious destinations in India or even abroad. This study used a purposeful and snowball sampling technique to find and reach a sample size of 20 real and qualified participants who could express themselves well about happiness. Many sadhus spoke in the English
language, which I did not expect before the data collection. The current informants supplied references of other eligible participants. I found the sadhus in diverse locations—India, the USA, the UK, and Argentina—who willingly contributed to this study. The interviews with the sadhus averaged 1 hour. The sadhus’ friendly behaviors and willingness to take part in this study averted a validity threat of my position as an outsider. The next section discusses the process of data coding and analysis adopted in this study that resulted in significant themes and subthemes.

**Data Collection**

For data collection methods, this investigation relied on two sources of data: 1) in-depth interview recordings with the research participants and 2) field notes taken during the interviews. The average interview time was 1 hour, and the interview questions were open-ended, in line with in-depth phenomenological interviews. After the formal meetings, I relied on follow-up calls and electronic communication with the sadhus to clarify confusing concepts of the phenomenon of happiness.

**Participants’ In-Depth Phenomenological Interviews**

Before conducting formal in-depth interviews with the participants, I held two pilot interviews that helped refine the interview protocol. After the interviews, I transcribed the recorded interview data and followed up with the sadhus to clarify complex concepts of happiness.

**Pilot interviews.** The goal of the pilot interviews was to improve the method to interview the sadhus and enhance the interview protocol. I did a pilot run involving two of my deeply religious friends, who helped me refine the interview protocol as outlined in
Appendix A. The pilot interviews supplied me feedback on the right way to ask questions. I learned that the interview questions should be straightforward, and I should not interrupt the interviewees during the interview process. My dissertation study partner, an expert in the art of interviewing, guided me to keep quiet during the interviews but remain alert. He also instructed me that probing questions should originate using the words uttered by the interviewees. Conducting a pilot interview with two friends achieved its purpose. The final interview protocol and method to ask questions to the participants were in line with the style of in-depth phenomenological interviews (Schutz, 1967).

**In-depth phenomenological interviews.** Interviewing the study participants is the primary source of data collection in qualitative research (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). In a phenomenological qualitative study, Bentz and Shapiro (1998) emphasized that the analyst should allow the data to emerge, capturing rich descriptions of the phenomenon and their settings from the participants. Starks and Trinidad (2007) noted that a phenomenological investigation aims to elicit the participants’ story, in that the subjects describe the accounts of their experience of the phenomenon.

During the interviews, I asked the sadhus questions about the deep concepts of the phenomenon of happiness. I asked the participants two kinds of questions: “what” did the participant mean by happiness, and “how” did they experience it. I framed the probing questions using the participant’s words and language, which engaged and encouraged the sadhus to elaborate on happiness concepts.
The interview questions were simple, unstructured, and open-ended and went on for approximately 1 hour per participant. I directed the interview questions toward the sadhus’ lives, experiences, and beliefs while setting aside or suspending my opinions and prior knowledge of happiness. I exercised active listening and worked hard not to interrupt the sadhus during the interviews until they finished answering the current question. I asked the participants the same starting question with little adaptations for each participant, keeping flexibility (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2014), which added trustworthiness to this investigation (Ravitch & Carl, 2015).

In conclusion, I tested and refined the interview protocol as outlined in Appendix A with the help of two close friends and my dissertation study partner. The interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended. The interviews elicited life stories, descriptions, and concepts of human happiness from the sadhus. As per the interview protocol, I asked the same questions to all 20 sadhus with little variations.

**Interview transcriptions.** After the interviews, I transcribed all 20 conversations in their original language, with the sadhus, which was a complex and time-consuming task. Because I recorded the interviews and transcribed them, it added to the factual accuracy of the data, increasing the descriptive validity of this study (Maxwell, 1992; Ravitch & Carl, 2015). Transcribing interviews also preserved the confidentiality of the participants because I did not hand over the interview data to any third-party firm. During the transcription phase, I had to listen to the recordings multiple times, which helped me learn and understand the research data (Ravitch & Carl, 2015), which proved invaluable during the data analysis phase.
To ease the transcriptions, I used Express Scribe transcription software (Express Scribe Pro, 2018), which made it easy to transcribe the recorded conversations, but even with the transcription software, transcribing the interviews was a lengthy task.

**Follow-up interviews and correspondence with the sadhus.** After the formal interviews, I followed up with the sadhus to clarify specific terms and concepts about the phenomenon of happiness. Sadhus used many Sanskrit words, and I contacted them after the interviews to know the meaning of complex words. I also reached out to the sadhus to understand the concepts of happiness, which resulted in a second or even third round of interviews with a few sadhus. Follow-ups with study participants is a standard in qualitative research, known as participant validation or member-checks. The member-checks also serve as a piece of evidence in a qualitative study (Maxwell, 2013). Apart from the interviews, the field notes also served as another source of data.

**Field Notes**

Field notes or memos are another crucial source of data in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Researchers may get involved in the data collection and may not reflect on what is happening. Therefore, a qualitative researcher should use field journals or memos, handwritten or typed, to record what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks during the data collection. Later, a researcher must convert the field notes into expanded memos. Miles et al. (2014) emphasized that researchers should put a date on memos following the interviews so that the memos can be correlated with the interview data during data analysis. I took field notes during the data collection, dated them, and converted them into detailed digital
memos after the interviews with the sadhus. Later, I correlated the information in the memos with the interview data during the data coding and analysis phase. In conclusion, I collected research data by interviewing the sadhus in line with the requirements of a phenomenological investigation. The participant interviews extended for an average of 1 hour and were open-ended. Before the formal meetings with the sadhus, two pilot interviews helped refine the interview protocol and method of asking simple questions without interruption. I transcribed the interviews and followed up with the sadhus to clarify abstract concepts of happiness. I also wrote field notes during the interviews and later correlated them with the interview data during the data coding and analysis phase.

Data Coding and Analysis

It took 5 months to find and interview 20 genuine sadhus and transcribe their recorded interviews. This section describes how I conducted the data coding and analysis in this research. Data coding and analysis was an extensive non-linear and iterative process that required extensive reading and re-reading of the interview data. I read the entire interview data set multiple times, leading to data familiarization (Ravitch & Carl, 2015), and highlighted the significant quotes in the interviews that provided an understanding of how the participants experienced happiness. Phenomenologists call this highlighting of relevant expressions in the data, *horizontalization* (Moustakas, 1994). For data coding and analysis, I used a qualitative data analysis software application, Nvivo 12 (*Nvivo*, 2018), and an online mind-mapping tool, MindMup (*MindMup Gold*, 2018).
Data Coding

A data code in a qualitative inquiry is most often a word or a short phrase that stands for a summary, is essence-capturing, and is an evocative attribute for the part of data (Saldaña, 2009). A code represents and captures a datum’s essence. Some researchers consider data coding as the primary data analysis process, but the primary function of coding is to break the data into meaningful chunks (Hycner, 1985; Ravitch & Carl, 2015; Saldaña, 2009). Coding involves reading, interpretation, and organization of data (Ravitch & Carl, 2015).

In this research, I used a descriptive coding method to code the data in the transcripts and field notes (Saldaña, 2009). Descriptive coding summarizes the primary topic of the excerpt and reduces the data as needed in a phenomenological study (Saldaña, 2009; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). First, I highlighted significant information in the transcripts, in original language. Usually, after highlighting important statements, a researcher develops the clusters of meanings or codes, which often involves the removal of repetitive information in the data. However, the researcher should take great care when removing data to prevent unintentional removal of significant information from the data (Hycner, 1985). In this study, I did not remove texts from the transcripts and used a strict coding approach (Ravitch & Carl, 2015) to capture every empirical and conceptual occurrence in every line. Apart from relevant sentences, I also captured entire paragraphs and groups of sentences in the transcripts and field notes and assigned them to the respective codes and mapped codes to research questions.
I adopted an inductive coding approach, having no pre-defined set of codes, and remained close to the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). I labeled each code with one word, wrote precise definitions of each code (Saldaña, 2009), and accurately applied the statements of sadhus to different codes. Later, I created categories or clusters of the codes. Miles et al. (2014) call this process of forming clusters of codes as axial coding, thematic clustering coding, or pattern coding. During the coding process, I also created links and connections between codes and code sets. I used the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo 12 (Nvivo, 2018) to organize the data, labeled and defined the codes, clustered the codes into code-sets, set up code relationships, and generated 400+ codes from 20 interview transcripts and field notes. A thematic analysis phase followed the coding process, in which major themes and subthemes emerged.

**Data Analysis**

In most qualitative research, the researcher conducts data analysis by assembling words, sub-clustering, comparing, and contrasting (Miles et al., 2014). Qualitative researchers use thematic analysis of data in a phenomenological investigation to extract the essences and essentials of participants’ meanings (Boyatzis, 1998; Creswell, 2012; Miles et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1994) with the aim to produce a description of a phenomenon of lived experiences, to understand its essential structure. If the appearance of essential structures can be described, then it is possible to arrive at certainty or ultimate truth (Solomon & Higgins, 1996). Specifically, Husserl’s phenomenology is an eidetic (descriptive) phenomenology aimed to determine the form and nature of the reality as mediated through individual experiences (Priest, 2013).
Data analysis in this study was an iterative process. I organized and re-organized data using Nvivo 12 (Nvivo, 2018) and immersed myself in the data. I read the data multiple times, which was an immersive engagement (Ravitch & Carl, 2015), reduced the data, and identified significant patterns in the data (Patton, 2014).

A critical strategy I used in this study was to read the data all at once during coding to help elicit patterns without interruptions (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). Mind maps helped me look at the codes holistically and make connections and cluster the categories of codes into the major themes and findings (Maxwell, 2008; Miles et al., 2014). I wrote memos throughout the process alongside both the data coding and analysis phases and regularly followed up with sadhus to clarify concepts of happiness. I was transparent throughout the study and specifically during the data analysis phase, a critical strategy for increasing validity in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). I constructed analytical themes and converted the themes into findings that helped answer the research questions.

In conclusion, after the data collection and transcriptions, I organized the interview data and field notes using a qualitative data and analysis software tool. I read the data multiple times and highlighted significant information in the transcripts and field notes and assigned the sadhus’ statements to correct codes using an inductive coding method. I constructed code clusters, code relationships, and categories of codes and mapped the codes and groups to the research questions. Mind maps facilitated data analysis that led to the emergence of significant themes and subthemes and research findings.
Validity Threats

In qualitative research, validity threats may appear from specific events and processes that lead to invalid conclusions. Maxwell (2013) noted that a researcher’s own biases and reactivity and the researcher’s influence on the participants are the two most common validity threats in qualitative research.

This study found four validity threats that could have emerged during the investigation. The first validity threat was about interview translations from the Hindi language to the English language. The second validity threat could have arisen out of incorrect identification of the study participants, like non-genuine sadhus. The third validity threat could have originated from personal biases, and the fourth validity threat could have resulted from my position as an “outsider” within the context of sadhus. I took measures to avert these validity issues.

As for the validity threat related to Hindi to English translations, while my skill in the Hindi language was a strength in this study, sometimes linguistic differences can pose a validity threat in qualitative research. Linguistic discrepancies may arise with non-English speaking researchers during translating interviews into English (Vygotsky, 1987). However, in this study, many sadhu participants spoke English, and for those who spoke in the Hindi language, their Hindi to English translations was simple. The simplicity of interview translations from Hindi texts to the English language averted this validity threat.

For the second validity threat about finding the wrong participants, the strategy to find real sadhus using references—the snowballing method—proved helpful. During the
data collection phase, I relied on the recommendations from the current informants to find the next genuine sadhus.

To manage the third validity threat arising out of personal biases, I took part in reflective exercises before interviewing each participant to realize and suspend my biases, values, beliefs, presuppositions, knowledge, and assumptions of human happiness. With reflexivity or epoché (Creswell, 2012; Maxwell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Ravitch & Carl, 2015), I became more aware before the next interview and found myself in a better position to take a fresh look at the phenomenon of happiness with increased objectivity. Besides self-reflection, to gain greater objectivity, I had serious discussions with my dissertation study partner and family members about my preconceived notions, experiences, values, and beliefs. To reduce personal biases, I wrote memos during and after the data collection and mentioned my background in introducing this thesis for the readers.

The last validity threat could have arisen out of my position as an “outsider,” wherein the sadhus would not have openly shared their experiences with me. To manage this potential issue, after the first contact with each sadhu, I tried to build a rapport with them by introducing myself to them and explaining to the sadhus the purpose of this research before the interviews began (Maxwell, 2013). To enhance rapport building, I communicated with the sadhus via phone and emails many times before the interviews, visited at their ashrams, ate food with some sadhus, and greeted them with reverence. As for the interviews conducted in India, I met the sadhus at the ashram where I stayed. For
face-to-face interviews in the USA, I visited the same ashram three times to do three interviews.

In conclusion, the present study identified four potential validity threats during the investigation. The first validity threat pertained to language translations because the sadhus usually speak in a language other than the English language. This threat was prevented because many sadhus spoke in the English language, and non-English speaking sadhus’ Hindi language was simple to translate. The second validity threat was about finding non-genuine sadhus, which the snowball sampling strategy managed. The third validity threat was about my biases, and I managed it using extensive self-reflection and discussions with friends and my study partner about my values and opinions about happiness. The final validity threat was about my position as an outsider in the community of sadhus who interact little with ordinary people. Rapport building with the sadhus before and after their formal meetings managed this validity threat.

**Conclusion**

In this research, I chose a qualitative, phenomenological approach for multiple reasons: (a) the goal of this study was to explore and describe the phenomenon of happiness; (b) happiness is a vague concept with no clear definition; (c) the sadhus usually speak in languages other than the English language; (d) the sadhu’s limited familiarity with technology; (e) the sadhus continuously travel from one place to another; and (e) past researchers called for a phenomenological investigation into happiness.

The participants of this study were the sadhus, the religious ascetics of India. They live a basic renounced life and practice self-control through yoga, meditation, and
studying religious texts. I used a purposeful sampling strategy as a participant selection criterion to ensure the sadhus belonged to the Advaita Vedanta philosophy of India. I used a snowball sampling strategy of using references to expand the sample size to 20 sadhus who took part in this research. Regarding the data collection methods, after a short pilot run, I conducted lengthy in-depth interviews with a diverse group of sadhus and took field notes in line with the requirements of phenomenological research.

After the data collection, I transcribed the interviews and later used software tools to organize and code the data. Mind maps and qualitative data analysis software aided the data analysis. I followed up with the study participants to clarify complex concepts of happiness that helped build significant themes and findings for this research. As for managing validity threats in this research, I used different measures to control them—a snowball sampling strategy, self-reflection, and rapport building with the sadhus.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In Chapter 3, I described the research methodology used in this research. In this chapter, I present the major themes and subthemes that emerged after inductive thematic analysis of the research data from the recorded interviews and field notes. In this study, 12 significant themes and six subthemes emerged. I have grouped these themes and subthemes in relationship to three research questions this study aimed to answer:

Research Question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?

Research Question 2: Do sadhus perceive themselves to be happy people?

Research Question 3: What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness?

I explore the first six major themes (1 through 6) and all six subthemes (2.1, 2.2, 6.1 through 6.4) in the following six major sections that answered the first research question. I dedicate the next section to Theme 7 that answered the second research question. I describe the last five major themes (8 through 12) in the following five major sections that answered the third research question. See Table 1 that displays a summary and organization of major themes and subthemes in this chapter with corresponding quotes.

In this study, the study participants were the sadhus who used many Sanskrit terms in their interviews. Therefore, I present Table 2, which is a glossary of key Sanskrit terms that play an important role in explaining the results in this chapter.
## Summary of All Themes and Subthemes

### Table 1. 12 Major Themes, Six Subthemes, and Corresponding Quotes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes and Subthemes</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question 1:</strong> What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 1:</strong> Everyone is oriented toward happiness.</td>
<td>Happiness is the quest of all living beings—everyone wants happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 2:</strong> Happiness is our true nature.</td>
<td>Happiness—you really are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtheme 2.1:</strong> Happiness is to be discovered within.</td>
<td>It is not a matter of gaining happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtheme 2.2:</strong> Happiness as ananda (Sanskrit: happiness).</td>
<td>Ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) is far beyond typical emotions of the mental level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 3:</strong> Everything in this world is temporary except happiness.</td>
<td>There is nothing outside of you that can make you happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 4:</strong> Happiness is everlasting and unchanging.</td>
<td>Happiness is continuous and constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 5:</strong> Ignorance of our true nature is the cause of all unhappiness in the world.</td>
<td>We are all ignorant about who we are, and knowledge is going to solve that problem. Joy and happiness are the same thing. Because they are...they are really that aspect of the Divine presence within you. That consciousness is always happy, joyful...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 6:</strong> Animate nature of happiness.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtheme 6.1:</strong> Happiness is pure consciousness beyond mind.</td>
<td>Self, as the knower of all known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtheme 6.2:</strong> Happiness is infinite.</td>
<td>Ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) is limitless, ananda has no boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtheme 6.3:</strong> Happiness is God.</td>
<td>Ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) is an experience of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtheme 6.4:</strong> Happiness and sadhus’ sense of fearlessness and Divine protection.</td>
<td>[happiness is the] experience of the unity that frees us from all fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question 2:</strong> Do sadhus perceive themselves to be happy people?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 7:</strong> Sadhus are very happy people.</td>
<td>A sadhu is forever happy in the thoughts of atman (Sanskrit: self)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question 3:</strong> What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 8:</strong> Guru, a spiritual teacher.</td>
<td>You need a Guru, who knows those things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 9:</strong> Self-knowledge.</td>
<td>But the experience or knowledge of the self or the atman is the number one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 10:</strong> Serving others.</td>
<td>Therefore, live only to serve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes and Subthemes</td>
<td>Quote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 11</strong>: Yoga and meditation.</td>
<td><em>You can have a calm mind</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 12</strong>: Renunciation and living a simple life.</td>
<td><em>Renunciation itself means happiness</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Glossary

Table 2. Glossary of Key Sanskrit Terms with Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aapaar:</td>
<td>Infinite, with no boundaries, unlimited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abhinivesha:</td>
<td>Fear of death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abhya:</td>
<td>No fear, state of fearlessness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abhyam:</td>
<td>Fearlessness or no-fear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advaita Vedanta:</td>
<td>Non-dual school of thought of Indian Philosophy. Adi Shankaracharya founded this philosophy in 8th century BCE. Vedanta philosophy is about knowledge of the self (true nature) that pertains to the end part of the Vedas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahamkara:</td>
<td>Ego, sense of I-ness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahimsa:</td>
<td>The prime moral law of the Vedas that states one should not hurt others. This law includes all other ethical and moral values like non-stealing, non-killing, always speaking the truth, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aluptadṛk:</td>
<td>The ever-present perceiver, the witness of all, the knower, consciousness, or atman, spirit, soul.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ananda:</td>
<td>Ananda simply means happiness or pure happiness. Ananda is a bigger concept, and English words like bliss, love, joy, pleasure, delight, euphoria, and ecstasy all originate from ananda. In ordinary language, people use the word bliss to describe ananda, but an English expression that is closest to ananda is cosmic consciousness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anandamaya Kosha:</td>
<td>In Advaita Vedanta, the anandamaya kosha is the innermost of the five koshas or &quot;sheaths&quot; that veil the Atman or Supreme Self. Unlike the next three more outer koshas, it forms the karana sarira or causal body. It is associated with the state of dreamless sleep and samadhi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anant:</td>
<td>Infinite, unlimited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anirvachniye:</td>
<td>Inexplicable, that cannot be described or expressed easily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthakarna:</td>
<td>Mind, an internal mental state of a person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artha:</td>
<td>Money, material wealth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asrama:</td>
<td>One of the 4 stages of life: student, householder, retired, and renunciate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atman:</td>
<td>Self, soul, spirit, or true nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avastha Traya Sakshit:</td>
<td>Avastha means a state, Traya means three, and Sakshit means witness. The one who is a witness of all three states of consciousness at the same time—wakeful, dream, and dreamless state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avidhya:</td>
<td>Ignorance, usually innate ignorance of a person’s true self or true nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhagwaan:</td>
<td>God, higher power, or the creator of the known world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahamnishta:</td>
<td>A title for an enlightened sadhu firmly situated in the one true nature and having Vedic sacred texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahman:</td>
<td>God, higher power, or the creator of the known world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhi:</td>
<td>Intellect or intelligence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charan:</td>
<td>Foot or feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chit:</td>
<td>Consciousness, awareness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chitta:</td>
<td>Per yoga psychology, chitta is a part of the mind that has all mental impressions or memories. It allows for emotional reactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danda:</td>
<td>A stick or staff that a sadhu carries with him. It symbolizes self-control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dharma Anustanam:</td>
<td>Moral actions and practice of rituals as prescribed in the Vedas and other sacred texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dharma Rakshati</strong></td>
<td>The one who protects the moral law, the moral law protects that person. In the context of this research, the moral law also points to human’s true nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rakshithah:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dharma:</strong></td>
<td>Moral laws or duties as written in the Vedas and sacred texts. A known Hindu religious text <em>Mahabharata</em> is an epic based on moral laws one should follow. In the context of this thesis, Dharma also points to human’s true nature, as deep inside most people ‘naturally’ know what is right and wrong. The prime moral law in the Vedas is Ahimsa, which means do not hurt others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drishti:</strong></td>
<td>To see, an act of seeing, or vision of the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dukkha:</strong></td>
<td>Unhappiness or pains in life. It is usually a property of mind-body-sense complex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dwesha:</strong></td>
<td>Dislikes. Also see Raga, opposite of dwesha, which means likes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guru:</strong></td>
<td>A sadhu or a monk of the highest category, highest level spiritual teacher. Highest level enlightened senior sadhu or monk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gyan yoga:</strong></td>
<td>Methodology of self-knowledge, yoga of knowledge of self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gyan or Gyanam:</strong></td>
<td>Gyan refers to knowledge. But it mostly refers to self-knowledge or knowledge of human’s true nature. Gyan is also referred to as Gyanam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gyani:</strong></td>
<td>A spiritually enlightened person who has the clear knowledge of self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homa:</strong></td>
<td>Fire sacrifice, Vedic ritual in which an oblation is made into the fire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ishwara:</strong></td>
<td>God, higher power, or the creator of the known world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalesa:</td>
<td>Mental afflictions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kama:</td>
<td>Worldly desires.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karma:</td>
<td>Human actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahavakya:</td>
<td>A profound saying, an essence of each Veda or Upanishads. There are four Vedas in <em>Sanatan Dharma</em> (Sanskrit: eternal law) or Hinduism. Each Veda has one profound saying or mahavakya. First mahavakya is <em>prajñaam brahma</em>, meaning Consciousness is Brahman or Divine, from Rig Veda. The second mahavakya is <em>ayam ātmā brahma</em>, meaning This Self (<em>atman</em> or true nature) is Brahman, from Atharva Veda. The third mahavakya is <em>tat tvam asi</em>, meaning Thou art That, or You are that (you are that happiness you are seeking). The fourth mahavakya is <em>aham brahmāsmi</em>, meaning I am Brahman, or I am Divine, from Yajur Veda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manas:</td>
<td>Per yoga psychology, manas is a part of the mind that controls human senses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya:</td>
<td>The illusionary or temporary nature of the world. The ignorance of true self originates under the veil of maya.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moksha:</td>
<td>Pure happiness or absolute freedom from the cycle of rebirth and death, pains and pleasures. Moksha is the freedom from <em>samsara</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mumukshu:</td>
<td>The keen seeker of God or higher power, a person who wants to attain <em>moksha</em> or absolute freedom from the suffering of this world. A person who is determined to discover pure happiness within.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prajana:</td>
<td>Deep sleep state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pramana:</td>
<td>Evidence. Vedanta are considered as <em>pramana</em> of true self. It provides an evidence, an image of true nature of self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parampara:</td>
<td>Tradition, Guru's lineage or teaching tradition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prarabdha karma:</td>
<td>Effect of actions or karma. This pertains to karmic law. Prarabdha means destiny. Prarabdha karma means those actions in the past that decide one’s destiny.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pratibimb:</td>
<td>A reflection of image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purusha:</td>
<td>Higher power, God, ‘a male.’ Purusha is the animate consciousness, true nature of every human being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purushartha:</td>
<td>Goal of life, purpose of life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raga:</td>
<td>Personal likes. Also see Dwesha, which means dislikes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rakshnam:</td>
<td>Protection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadhya:</td>
<td>End, goal of an activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadhana or Sadhnam:</td>
<td>Practice, specifically a spiritual practice, method, or means to a spiritual end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampradaya:</td>
<td>A spiritual teaching tradition, lineage of Guru or spiritual teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsara:</td>
<td>Endless cycle of pains and pleasure, rebirth and death. Samsara points to the illusionary world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanatan Dharma:</td>
<td>Original name of Hinduism. Sanatan means eternal, Dharma means ethics, or moral law or duty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sannyasa:</td>
<td>Renunciation. To renounce the material world. Sannyasa is one of the four asrama(s) or stages of life: <em>Brahmacharya</em> (student life), <em>Grihastha</em> (householder life), <em>Vanaprastha</em> (retired life), <em>Sannyasa</em> (renounced life).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sant:</td>
<td>A holy man, a sadhu, saint, or a monk. But it also means an ethical person, a good person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sannyasi</strong></td>
<td>A holy person who has renounced the world. A renouncer, monk, ascetic, sadhu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satchitananda</strong></td>
<td>A Sanskrit word Sat-Chit-Ananda defines God, some higher power, or pure happiness and includes three words: Sat, Chit, and Ananda. Sat implies truth, Chit indicates consciousness, and Ananda means happiness. All three words define pure happiness or God, and these three words are not three properties of God, but three words defining one infinite, part-less, all-pervasive conscious Divine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satsang</strong></td>
<td>Religious discourse or meeting. It refers to a group when people get together and listen to spiritual lectures or discuss religious matters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shakti</strong></td>
<td>Energy or power. Shakti refers to the female Goddess of Energy, also called Goddess Devi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shardha</strong></td>
<td>Devotion, deep trust, or faith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shastra</strong></td>
<td>Hindu sacred texts or scriptures, for example Upanishads, Vedas, Mahabharata, Gita, Ramayana.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shastram</strong></td>
<td>Vedic scriptures. See Shastra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shishya</strong></td>
<td>Student or disciple of Guru or spiritual teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sukkah</strong></td>
<td>A feeling of contentment or pleasure. Sukkah differs from ananda. Ananda is pure consciousness, awareness, which is beyond mind, body, and senses. Sukkah is an emotional state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Swami</strong></td>
<td>A title used for a spiritual master, spiritual teacher, usually a male sadhu, male renunciate or sadhu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Swamini</strong></td>
<td>A title used for a female spiritual teacher, renunciate. A female renunciate is not always addressed with the title Swamini in Eastern religious traditions. People use the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male title</td>
<td>Swami even for a female sadhu, because a renouncer whether male or female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is not</td>
<td>identified with body limitations like gender. It is assumed that a renouncer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identified</td>
<td>is someone who has transcended all bodily limitations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swaroopa:</td>
<td>Fundamental nature of a being, core of a being, true nature of humans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taijasa:</td>
<td>Dream state of being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tantric:</td>
<td>A spiritual practice about Energy Goddess, methods of invoking powers of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Energy Goddess or Devi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tat Tvam Asi:</td>
<td>I am happiness or Thou art that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titiksha:</td>
<td>To practice endurance toward suffering, to become mentally strong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tripura:</td>
<td>The fourth state of being or consciousness. Normally people are aware of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>three states: wakeful state or dream state or dreamless state. But one can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>be aware of one state at a moment. Turiya is also the fourth state, in which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a person is aware of all the three states or higher states.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tvam:</td>
<td>You</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turiya:</td>
<td>The fourth state of being or consciousness. Normally people are aware of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>three states: wakeful state or dream state or dreamless state. But one can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>be aware of one state at a moment. Turiya is the fourth state, in which a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>person is aware of all the three states at the same time. This is a state a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yogi tries to achieve. There are other higher states of consciousness, but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>it is beyond the scope of this thesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upanishads:</td>
<td>Ancient texts of the Vedas. There are over 200 Upanishads but 14 are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>important: Isa, Kena, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chandogya,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

102
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upnī</td>
<td>close. Upānīshad also means the knowledge that a student or disciple attains while sitting close to Guru or spiritual teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vaisvanara:</strong></td>
<td>Wakeful state of consciousness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Varna:</strong></td>
<td>Caste. There are 4 main castes in India, namely Brahmins (scholars), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (traders), and Shudra (laborers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vedanta:</strong></td>
<td>End part or section of the Vedas. This part includes knowledge of self or true human nature or reality. The Vedas are divided into three sections. The first section is about Vedic rituals and worships. This is 80% of the Vedas. The second section includes practices of yoga, meditation, and devotion and makes up 16% of the Vedas. The end section is Vedanta, the last 4%, and includes forms of self-knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vedas:</strong></td>
<td>Vedas are the oldest religious texts of Sanatan Dharma or Hinduism. There are four Vedas: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yoga:</strong></td>
<td>Yoga means union. It is the union of individual self with universal self that leads to moksha or absolute freedom from the cycle of birth and death, pains, and pleasures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of Themes 1 to 6 and Subthemes

The significant themes 1 through 6 and subthemes 2.1, 2.2, and 6.1 through 6.4 answered the first research question—What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? The first research question aimed to find out the reality of happiness from the viewpoint of sadhus, whose goal in life is the discovery of lasting happiness or moksha (Sanskrit: absolute freedom from all sufferings). The thematic analysis of the interview data and field notes resulted in six themes and six subthemes that describe the reality of happiness from the perspective of sadhus. Table 3 summarizes the results of themes and subthemes that answered the first research question.

Table 3. First Research Question and Related Group of Six Major Themes and Six Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th># of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Everyone is oriented toward happiness.</td>
<td>12 (60%)</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: Happiness is our true nature.</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 2.1: Happiness is to be discovered within.</td>
<td>16 (80%)</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 2.2: Happiness as Ananda (Sanskrit: happiness).</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3: Everything in this world is temporary except happiness.</td>
<td>18 (90%)</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4: Happiness is everlasting and unchanging.</td>
<td>13 (65%)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 5: Ignorance of our true nature causes all unhappiness in the world.</td>
<td>12 (60%)</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 6: Animate nature of happiness.</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 6.1: Happiness is pure consciousness beyond mind.</td>
<td>14 (70%)</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 6.2: Happiness is infinite.</td>
<td>10 (50%)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 6.3: Happiness is God.</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 6.4: Happiness and sadhus’ sense of fearlessness and Divine protection.</td>
<td>12 (60%)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 1: Everyone is Oriented Toward Happiness

“Happiness is … common, human ultimate choice-less goal for everybody.” — Swamini Ananadmayi¹ (personal communication, April 2, 2018).

Theme 1 is associated with the first research question—What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? Twelve out of 20 sadhus expressed that all human beings want happiness through all performed actions; thus, the discovery of happiness is the aim of human life. See Table 4 for the summary of Theme 1.

Table 4. Theme 1 Summary: Everyone is Oriented Toward Happiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone is oriented toward happiness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Quote:**
Happiness is… common, human ultimate choice-less goal for everybody — Swamini Ananadmayi (personal communication, April 2, 2018).

**Definition**
Sadhus reported in the end, every human being wants happiness through all their actions, so happiness is an end in itself. The sadhus mentioned discovery of happiness is the aim of human life.

Rishikesh is one of the holiest cities in India that lies on the banks of the river Ganges where many sadhus live. I interviewed a highly revered sadhu from Rishikesh—Swami Akhandananda. When the interview started, I asked—what is the happiness of

¹ All names are pseudonyms
sadhus? With whatever command he had over the English language, he enthusiastically expressed this concept that every human being is trying to find happiness. He said:

You know, happiness is the ultimate aim and ambition of the human life, [and] you are a human being. You know that everyone of us, directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, more or less, you know, right from birth till death, every one of us, we keep on frantically … in search of [happiness] … they make an attempt to experience what is called real uninterrupted happiness. (personal communication, April 6, 2018)

Similarly, Swamini Nirmalananda, a White American female monk who at the time of the writing of this thesis was serving as the president of the board of a beautiful and large yoga ashram located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, and who had over 40 years of experience in all aspects of yoga, said:

Okay, I am going to approach it from a little different perspective. Okay? I would say, the topic of your thesis sort of hits the primary quest of all creation. Everyone!! Wants to be happy. If ask any parent, what you want your child in life? Invariably, they will say, I just want them to be happy. I want her to be happy. … I like them to be a doctor, but more important, he is happy, then I am happy. It’s the eternal quest, and we search for that happiness in so many ways, through possessions. (personal communication, April 3, 2018)

Another female sadhu of the South Indian origin, Swamini Ananadmayi, an expert of Advaita Vedanta philosophy, developed this idea when she said, “happiness is the choice-less end goal of all humanity” (personal communication, April 2, 2018). What she meant was that happiness automatically draws human beings toward itself through all their performed actions, with happiness as the final goal. She meant that happiness is human telos, to speak in Aristotle’s language. She emphasized that happiness is an inherent ultimate goal of all people, across all cultures, across the globe. She asserted that while people do not have a choice in the performance of their actions, people do have a
choice over the type of activities they undertake because only human beings can make such a choice, which she explained later. In her words:

Therefore, *moksha* (Sanskrit: absolute freedom from suffering), happiness is the ultimate choice-less, common, human ultimate choice less goal, for everybody. But whoever has discovered this fact, whoever has understood this fact, that *moksha* is my ultimate end, that happiness is my ultimate end, whosoever has discovered that person is said to be a person of definiteness about his ultimate goal. (personal communication, April 2, 2018)

Later, Swamini Ananadmayi defined happiness; she explained why she said happiness is a common goal of everyone. In her words:

… so, whether a sadhu or householder, or a student, or another, people of any *asrama* (Sanskrit: any of the 4 stages of life as a student, householder, retired, and renunciate), people of any *varna* (Sanskrit: caste) all people in the world, all of us are … that’s why I say, happiness is common, human, universal end, absolute end. (personal communication, April 2, 2018)

Swamini Ananadmayi elaborated on the idea of “happiness as a choice-less end” (personal communication, April 2, 2018) and asserted people must accomplish (discover) happiness at all costs. It is not people’s choice not to search for happiness. Everyone is pursuing happiness automatically through all actions, and unless a person directly discovers pure happiness within, search for happiness will continue. She asserted that people must first understand the value of pure happiness and then discover that immense happiness within. Otherwise, the search for happiness will continue endlessly, through the never-ending cycles of births and deaths, pains, and pleasures. In her words:

… choice-less end, it is very important. Choice-less end. Choice-less means, it has to be accomplished. Unless and until you accomplish your search will be continuous. Endless search. Which means, there is no way or relaxing. You will be slogging. You can’t help slogging unless and until you discover it. The goal itself is not very clear. You will be searching for happiness, not knowing where should you search for, what are you searching for? It is endless, which means, there is no way or relaxing. (personal communication, May 8, 2018)
Theme Conclusion

From sadhus’ statements, this study found from the perspective of sadhus that every human being is automatically and choice-lessly drawn toward happiness through all performed actions—happiness being the final and often hidden end behind all human activities. Every human being wants happiness directly or indirectly, but where is happiness? The sadhus said happiness lives within every human being as one’s true nature, the next theme.

Theme 2: Happiness is Our True Nature


Theme 2 answered the first research question—What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of Sadhus? All 20 out of 20 sadhus reported happiness is every human being’s true nature, and happiness lies within everyone. See Table 5 for a summary of Theme 2.

Table 5. Theme 2 Summary. Happiness is Our True Nature

| Research Question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| **Theme**                     | **Number of Participants**     | **Number of References** |
| Happiness is our true nature. | 20 (100%)                      | 143                |

**Quote:**
Our true nature, supremely peaceful, supremely happy — Swamini Nirmalananda (personal communication, April 3, 2018).

**Definition**
According to sadhus, happiness is everyone’s true nature, and it exists within.
Swamini Nirmalananda reported that happiness is human being’s true nature, and it is deep within people. She said, “… the English word God is similar. G.O.D what it means is Gooo Deeeep. Go deep. So that happiness, that supreme peace and joy is our true nature” (personal communication, April 3, 2018).

Later during the interview, she emphasized that happiness is distinct from the mind when she said, “… it’s not that I am mind, but I have a mind. I have a body. I have a mind. But I am not the body. I am not the mind. I am the spirit that dwells within them” (personal communication, April 3, 2018).

Likewise, Swami Akhandananda, the senior sadhu from Rishikesh, used his best words in the English language to express that happiness is human being’s essential nature, the consciousness within everyone. He meant that every human being is fundamentally a happy being when he said, “… you know … that is because happiness is one of the essential natures of, we all” (personal communication, April 6, 2018).

Later, he pointed out that humans are “originally” happiness, and it is happiness that makes an individual dynamic or conscious beings when he said, “… you are originally … [you] come from the divinity, that is called Divine. And then Divine actually, that spirit is there, that is what makes you and me all like dynamic” (personal communication, April 6, 2018). Swami Akhandananda emphasized that happiness is human being’s fundamental nature. He also said these words in a very loving tone:

… that [happiness] is the real essential nature of we all. So, it depends, it is a vast subject Ram Ji (Hindi: a loving way to address someone and here he addressed me). I am so happy to hear of you that you are writing your thesis on happiness. But as I told you, this happiness is the essential … you know … nature of we all. (personal communication, April 6, 2018)
Another senior sadhu of the South Indian origin from the South East region of the United States, Swami Muktananda, explained that the source of happiness is within, and it is human being’s nature, when he said:

… so, where do I get ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) from? I get ananda from myself, and [I am] not dependent on something that makes me have the feeling of bliss … but somewhere in that, I have forgotten that—that is my nature. (personal communication, Jan 6, 2018)

Swami Muktananda again expressed the same idea—happiness is human being’s essential nature—when he uttered these words:

Okay now, live in such a way that you express it that you can manifest that in your life. And that is what brings you the happiness, because that you’re expressing that you’re connected to the Divine in your, to your essential nature—which is happiness itself. (personal communication, Jan 16, 2018)

Likewise, Swamini Pranavananda, a female monk from the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, also meant happiness lives within when she said these words while narrating her life story:

And that’s what I learned through yoga is what Gurudev (Sanskrit: another way to refer to Guru) taught me is that there is nothing outside of you that can make you happy. Not a profession, not a spouse, not God himself, if anything comes to give you happiness, then that means that it could come and take it away. And, happiness will not come from outside. It only comes from within. (personal communication, Jan 27, 2018)

**Theme Conclusion**

From the sadhus’ statements, this study found that happiness is human being’s most fundamental nature. Therefore, the source of happiness is within each person. The sadhus also said that because people already have happiness inside, they should try to discover it, not attain it through worldly desires and material possessions. Because many
sadhus supported the discovery of happiness within, a subtheme emerged, happiness is to be directly discovered within.

**Subtheme 2.1: Happiness is to be Discovered Within**

“It is not a matter of gaining happiness.” — Swamini Brahmananda (personal communication, January 8, 2018).

I associate Subtheme 2.1 with the first research question—What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? This subtheme inherits the properties of Theme 2—Happiness is true nature, and it is within. Sixteen out of 20 sadhus asserted that people should try to “discover” happiness which they already possess within. See Table 6 for the summary.

**Table 6. Subtheme 2.1 Summary. Happiness is to be Discovered Within**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happiness is to be discovered within.</td>
<td>16 (80%)</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quote:</strong></td>
<td>It is not a matter of gaining happiness — Swamini Brahmananda (personal communication, January 8, 2018).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
<td>The sadhus reported that happiness is every human’s most fundamental nature; therefore, one needs to discover happiness within. They held that real happiness cannot be attained through material possessions or satisfaction of worldly desires.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sadhus held that because happiness is one’s fundamental nature, it means human beings already have it; therefore, an individual need not reach it through external worldly things and desires. They emphasized that one must discover it within.
Swami Nigamananda, a White American sadhu from the Pacific region of the United States, who had a solid command on the Sanskrit language, said, “That happiness is not something to be acquired, but it’s something to be understood, as your very swaroopa (Sanskrit: fundamental nature or core of every being), as the very source of your being” (personal communication, January 31, 2018).

Similarly, the female sadhu of Indian descent, Swamini Ananadmayi, also expressed the same idea—why do human beings need to find something at some other place if they already have it. In her words:

Therefore, if a person, whoever it is, has this end… is very clear I am living this life, ultimately for happiness. And if he is given to the study of the scripture — Vedanta Shastram (Sanskrit: scriptures at the end of the Vedas) — definitely he will have this understanding of the fact revealed by the Shastram (Sanskrit: Vedic texts), that happiness is not to be attained, not to be accomplished, which is already there. (personal communication, April 2, 2018)

Supporting the above theme, a White European female sadhu from Argentina, Swamini Abhayananda said, “Well, I think it [happiness] is something that you discover as a child, isn’t it?” (personal communication, May 5, 2018). Similarly, Swamini Brahmananda, a female Vedic sadhu and a former psychology professor from the North East region of the United States, said:

…but, your true nature, not the physical you, who you think you are, or anyone does not you … in the world, is that—that the true nature with conscious principle, is happiness. It is not a matter of gaining happiness. You are talking the world or something, and you don’t … you don’t get happiness anyway from the world. It just taps into the happiness you really are. (personal communication, February 7, 2018)
Swamini Brahmananda meant that happiness is everyone’s true nature which is within. Therefore, there is no reason to seek happiness through any other means in the world.

**Subtheme conclusion.** According to sadhus, humans should discover happiness within because it is everyone’s most fundamental nature. They held that one should not expect real and lasting happiness from the satisfaction of worldly pursuits. The sadhus referred to real happiness as *ananda* (Sanskrit: happiness), which is the topic of the next subtheme.

**Subtheme 2.2: Happiness as Ananda (Sanskrit: Happiness)**

“*Ananda is far beyond typical emotions of the mental level.*” — Swami Janakananda (personal communication, January 15, 2018).

Subtheme 2.2 answers the first research question—What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? This subtheme also inherits the properties of parent Theme 2—Happiness is our true nature. All 20 out of 20 sadhus referred to happiness as *ananda* (Sanskrit: happiness) across all interviews. See Table 7 for a summary of Subtheme 2.2.

**Table 7. Subtheme 2.2 Summary. Happiness as Ananda (Sanskrit: happiness)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?</th>
<th>Parent Theme 2: Happiness is our true nature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
<td><strong>Number of Participants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness as <em>ananda</em> (Sanskrit: happiness).</td>
<td>N=20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote:</td>
<td><em>Ananda is far beyond typical emotions of the mental level</em> — Swami Janakananda (personal communication, January 15, 2018).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?

| Definition              | The sadhus referred to real and lasting happiness as ananda, a Sanskrit term that means happiness or pure happiness. |

Ananda is a Sanskrit term that means happiness. Ananda refers to the ‘real’ or ‘pure’ happiness that sadhus mentioned. This study found that ananda is a bigger concept, and all other experiences like bliss, love, joy, euphoria, ecstasy, pleasure, contentment, and delight originate from ananda. Because of the limitations of language and differences between the Sanskrit and English languages, the sadhus who spoke from the Western perspective used the word ‘bliss’ to signify ananda. Therefore, the word bliss may be used interchangeably with ananda in this thesis on occasions. However, the closest equivalent of the Sanskrit word ananda in the English language is the expression—cosmic consciousness2 (Bucke, 2015; Rama, Ballentine, & Ajaya, 2014). One of the sadhus, Swamini Amritananada, also uttered “cosmic consciousness” during her interview (personal communication, January 20, 2018). Other sadhus also used the word consciousness to describe ananda (see Subtheme 6.1).

Swamini Pranavananda, a female sadhu from the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, used the word bliss and associated with the experience of true self (happiness) while explaining about the power of yoga practice. In her words:

2 As for the term consciousness, differences exist between its Western and Eastern conceptualizations. As per Western psychology, ego is in the center and consciousness is the property of ego. While in the Eastern traditions, consciousness exists at multiple levels, ego-level being only one of those levels (Rama et al., 2014). The mystics (sadhus) are known for experiencing higher levels of consciousness beyond the ego-level.
… [practice yoga] if you were trying to re-establish the equilibrium in your mind, and your body, to purify the body and the mind, and get to that point where you can actually go beyond that and experience that true self, the peace and joy, and bliss… (personal communication, Jan 27, 2018)

Similarly, Swami Muktananda, the South Indian male sadhu from the South East region of the United States, also referred to ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) as bliss when he said:

… I tell people, the word in Sanskrit is ananda, bliss, you know? So, where do I get ananda from? I get ananda from myself, and not dependent on, something that makes me have the feeling of bliss, and there are other Sanskrit words … sukkah is a word I talk about of often now, and sukkah does not have any actual English word that we can translate, this is sukkah. You know? So, the word, I often use is contentment, because sukkah means, I am feeling content. (personal communication, January 17, 2018)

Interestingly, two sadhus directly stated that ananda is distinct from bliss. After my interview with Swami Janakananda, a White American male sadhu, I followed up and asked if ananda, the happiness of sadhus, is the fourth state of consciousness (Goleman & Davidson, 2017) (wakeful state, dream state, deep sleep state, and the 4th). In his reply, the sadhu confirmed ananda is indeed the fourth state of consciousness. But in his reply, he also stated bliss is an emotional state of mind (a mental state), distinct from ananda. He replied:

Yes, another traditional phrase is satchitananda (Sanskrit: existence, consciousness, bliss), often translated as existence, consciousness, and bliss. Ananda is far beyond typical emotions of the mental level. At that emotional level, we may often use the word bliss, but that is not ananda; it is a substitute, or a shallow glimpse. But, in the sense of my understanding of your focus on happiness, I think it is a fair “target” for people, this turiya (Sanskrit: the fourth state of consciousness). Aim for the highest and feel joy in the glimpses that come. If you can aim directors toward that, that is a tremendous accomplishment. I personally think it is a reasonable goal that you are aiming at for them. (personal communication, Sep 1, 2018)
Likewise, another White American male sadhu, Swami Nigamananda, an expert in the Sanskrit language, further clarified that any experience that comes and goes is not ananda. Ananda is one’s stable true self. Bliss, being an emotional state, differs from ananda (Sanskrit: happiness), human’s true nature. In his words:

... unfortunately, many times, people translate the word ananda as bliss. So, the atma swaroop (Sanskrit: our true nature), the very nature of the self, is sat-chit-ananda (Sanskrit: truth-consciousness-bliss)—existence, awareness, and ananda. But if you translate ananda as bliss, then you are in the world of hurt. You are down the wrong path. Because bliss or happiness, as an emotional state, by definition, comes and goes. The mind is meant to change. The heart is meant to change. Any “blissful” quote-unquote experience you have because it is the state of anthakarna (Sanskrit: mind), a state of mind, is going to go. So, it seems like happiness comes and goes. But you who are ananda swaroop (Sanskrit: true nature is happiness) don’t come and go. You are the only stable thing as existence, self-evident, self-shining, self-luminous, aware full being, you are the only constant in any experience, every experience, whether that experience is sukkah (Sanskrit: pleasure; contentment) or dukkha (Sanskrit: pain). (personal communication, Jan 31, 2018)

Swami Nigamananda further explained that love and bliss are dynamic expressions of ananda (Sanskrit: happiness), see Figure 1. In his words:

The scripture uses the word ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) to describe the limitlessness of the atma (self). This limitlessness, completeness, wholeness expresses itself as various degrees of sukkah—happiness, from the simple joy of smelling a fragrant flower to great sukkah that we call bliss. Love is a dynamic expression of ananda (Sanskrit: happiness). Any experience of any degree of sukkah (Sanskrit: bliss, contentment) is necessarily changing and therefore temporary. But ananda, that is your very being, atma (Sanskrit: true self) is unchanging. Atma (Sanskrit: true self or self) is the content of the contentment of the contented. (personal communication, April 22, 2019)
Figure 1. Ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) is a bigger concept closest to cosmic consciousness. All other English words like bliss, love, joy, etc. originate from ananda.

Subtheme conclusion. Happiness means ananda (Sanskrit: happiness). From the sadhus’ perspective, real happiness is ananda, human beings’ true nature, and also consciousness, as described in Subtheme 6.1. Ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) is a bigger concept from which originates all other experiences like bliss, love, contentment, peacefulness, joy, ecstasy, and euphoria. However, though, when the sadhus spoke from the Western perspective, they used the word ‘bliss’ to express ananda. Therefore, the word bliss, on occasion, will be used interchangeably with ananda even when a few sadhus directly emphasized that bliss is distinct from ananda because the experience of
bliss comes and goes, whereas ananda is stable, everlasting, and does not change, as explored in Theme 4.

**Theme 3: Everything in This World is Temporary Except Happiness**

“There is nothing outside of you that can make you happy.”—Swamini Keshwananda (personal communication, May 1, 2018).

Theme 3 answered the first research question—What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? Eighteen sadhus out of 20 talked about the always changing nature of the material world. This theme is more focused on the temporary view of the material world, whereas I explore the permanent nature of happiness in greater detail in the next significant Theme 4. See Table 8 for a summary of Theme 3.

Table 8. **Theme 3 Summary. Everything in this World is Temporary Except Happiness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything in this world is temporary except happiness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Quote:** There is nothing outside of you that can make you happy—Swamini Keshwananda (personal communication, May 1, 2018).

**Definition**
The sadhus reported that everything in the material world is temporary in nature but happiness.

For the material world, the sadhus pointed to the stars, planets, sun, moon, earth, air, fire, water, plants, and behold, human bodies, mind, thoughts, and all emotions and experiences—but not happiness. The sadhus emphasized that change is an inherent characteristic of the physical world. Everything but happiness is temporary.
A White American female sadhu from the North East region of the United States, Swamini Brahmananda, suggested people should keep a check on their constant wants for newer shiny gadgets. In her words:

… as I said, trying not to want all these kinds of things, and seeing that they are so temporary … You get a new something or other, how long are you happy with that new car or computer before the next one comes out, or this one breaks? (personal communication, Feb 7, 2018)

She meant the material world is ever impermanent, nothing will last forever, not even the thrill that comes with possession of material things. Swami Nigamananda asserted that an unhappy person, after a few joyful moments gained from the attainment of material desires, would again become unhappy, back to one’s original unhappy temperament. His exact words:

Because, an inherently unhappy person, for some momentary experience of happiness, momentary object … acquisition of an object, you know … a relationship, no value that you can put into ‘x’ will solve that equation. Because of… a dukkhi (Sanskrit: an unhappy person), for a temporary sukkah (Sanskrit: mind’s sense of pleasure), is … still leaves you with a dukkhi (Sanskrit: an unhappy person). Right? (personal communication, Jan 31, 2018)

Likewise, Swamini Nirmalananda, a White American sadhu from the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, mentioned that fulfillment of worldly desires could not give lasting satisfaction because change is the nature of this material world. She said:

For me though, all you have to do is analyze for a moment, and it becomes very clear if you seek permanent happiness through external attainments, you will never be satisfied. Because everything external is part of nature, and the salient characteristic of nature—it is always changing. (personal communication, April 3, 2018)

Whereas a few sadhus emphasized human’s essential self, which is none other than happiness, is permanent. Swamini Amritananda, a highly revered White American
female sadhu from the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, reported that happiness is the quality of God that does not change. In her exact words:

… it [happiness] does not change. Happiness is always there it’s either covered up, or is allowed to express itself, or it’s fully open. Yeah, it does not change. It does not change. We change by either putting one curtain in front, two, or three, or four, and block it. And then you would say well, how is it possible to … to be a happy person? And you would say “Well! Live a little bit.” (personal communication, Jan 20, 2018)

She meant that although human’s essential nature is unchanging and immense happiness, people do not experience it because multiple layers in their mind block all inherent happiness. Similarly, Swami Swarupananda, a senior male sadhu from India, said this in Hindi that ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) never goes up and down, and it never dies. His exact words:

Anand hai, us anand me bhi yeh hai, kabhi aabhav ho jaaye, yaida ho jaaye, nahi. Usme yeh hai ki, yeh chit maan chetan rahega. Anand kabhi marne vala nahi hai. Hamesha amar rehta hai. Yeh jeevan ka anand hai jo hamesha amar rehta hai. Kabhi marne vala nahi hai aatmanand. [Ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) never becomes less or more. This ananda is always conscious and alive. It never dies. It is immortal. The happiness of our lives is immortal, it will never vanish. They call it ananda—the happiness of our true self.] (personal communication, Feb 27, 2018)

**Theme Conclusion**

According to the sadhus, it is fruitless to expect permanent happiness from the satisfaction of worldly desires. From the perspective of sadhus, the external material world that people perceive is always in a state of change, except happiness, which is their true nature.
Theme 4: Happiness is Everlasting and Unchanging

“Happiness is continuous and constant.” — Bhoomananda Swami (personal communication, March 2, 2018).

Theme 4 answered the first research question—What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? Thirteen out of 20 sadhus talked about the permanent or enduring nature of happiness. See Table 9 for a summary of Theme 4.

Table 9. Theme 4 Summary. Happiness is Everlasting and Unchanging

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?</th>
<th>Number of Participants N=20</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happiness is everlasting and unchanging.</td>
<td>13 (65%)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Quote:** Happiness is continuous and constant — Bhoomananda Swami (personal communication, March 2, 2018).

**Definition** The sadhus spoke about the permanent or enduring nature of happiness. They mentioned that while most people experience discontinuous happiness, their happiness was perpetual and did not depend on external worldly objects.

The sadhus reported that while most people experience discontinuous happiness, their happiness was perpetual and did not depend on external worldly objects.

Swamini Nirmalananda attributed the ordinary experience of discontinuous happiness to human desires. During her interview, she explained the concept of fluctuating human happiness. To explain the concept of fluctuating happiness, she drew a diagram on a piece of paper (see Figure 2) to describe how human desires prevent people from experiencing continuous happiness. In her words:
This can’t be recorded, but let me show you something, because it is very interesting. It’s the psychology that underlies desire … Okay, here! This [A] represents the nature of the mind. If left alone, the mind would be peaceful, okay? at ease. This [B] is what it looks like when a desire falls into the mind. Here is the desire, falling into the mind. It’s like a stone falling into the body of the water. When a stone falls into a body of water, the first thing you hear is splash! In that splash, a depression is made in the water. We become depressed. I want a slice of chocolate cake. That desire and that feeling of lack and need gives rise to efforts to fulfill the depression. When we have depression, then we have waves. Then, we get what we desire. We put in all these efforts, we get it, and we get back to our original condition [A]. We made the depression by our desire, we made the agitation, we fulfilled the desire, we get back to where we started [A]. But this is the problem. Psychologically, what we think has happened, we think by fulfilling the desire we experienced something super-special [C], and that’s what we try to recreate, again and again, not realizing the problem is, having the desire in the first place. We are not getting back to this [A]. We are getting back to that [C]. Is that clear? (personal communication, April 3, 2018)

![Figure 2. Nature of mind. Desires cause fluctuations in mind, leading to broken happiness.](image-url)
Swamini Nirmalananda further clarified, “… so, there is a whole lot of activity, a lot of different emotions, and there is some little bit of pleasure. There is a little bit of happiness, but the problem is, it’s not enduring” (personal communication, April 3, 2018).

Another female sadhu from a yoga ashram in the South East region of the United States, Swamini Keshwananda, supported the above idea when she mentioned that ordinary people rarely experience ananda (Sanskrit: happiness), or continuous happiness. In her words,

I would say, the happiness of lay people is that temporary satisfaction that is found when the desires are momentarily satisfied, and the mind stops for little bit. So, kind of touches on ananda (Sanskrit: happiness), but it is still focused on temporary things, so we experience is as temporary. Where, when we have those moments, more of more to anandas, it is that like I said when those moments when we have forgotten ourselves, as individuals altogether. (personal communication, May 1, 2018)

Regarding the enduring nature of happiness, a senior Guru level sadhu, Bhoomananda Swami from India, said, “… it is continuous, haan (Hindi: yes), it is irrespective of any situation” (personal communication, March 2, 2018). He described the hidden and enduring nature of happiness, which is often different from how people usually experience it.

Likewise, Swami Krishnananda, a wandering young monk from India, also reiterated the same idea in the Hindi language that sadhus’ happiness is everlasting, “humari khushi to itni anant hai, sanatan tak humare saath khushi rahegi” [our happiness is so infinite and eternal it will always remain with us, forever] (personal communication, Feb 10, 2018).
Theme Conclusion

From the perspective of sadhus, this study found that the nature of happiness is enduring, perpetual, and everlasting. If the nature of happiness is everlasting, what causes all the unhappiness in this world? The next theme answers this question.

**Theme 5: Ignorance of Our True Nature Causes All Unhappiness in the World**

“We are all ignorant about who we are, and knowledge is going to solve that problem.” — Swamini Brahmananda (personal communication, February 7, 2018).

Theme 5 answered the first research question—What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? Twelve out of 20 sages explicitly emphasized ignorance about human true nature as the root of all unhappiness in this world. See Table 10 for the summary of Theme 5.

Table 10. *Theme 5 Summary: Ignorance of Our True Nature Causes All Unhappiness in the World*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignorance of our true nature causes all unhappiness in the world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Quote:** We are all ignorant about who we are, and knowledge is going to solve that problem — Swamini Brahmananda (personal communication, February 7, 2018).

**Definition**

The sadhus emphasized that ignorance of our true nature causes all the unhappiness and grief in this world. Self-knowledge dispels this inherent ignorance.

Theme 5 is about the most fundamental reason for all unhappiness in this world from the perspective of sadhus. Theme 5 overlaps with Theme 2, which says happiness is
human being’s true nature. The sadhus revealed that the root cause of unhappiness in this world is only one thing: Humans do not know who they are. They do not know the reality of themselves. People are born with an unawareness of their essential nature. What then is human beings’ real nature? The sadhus answered that human beings’ real self is happiness—Theme 2. According to sadhus, it is people’s ignorance about the truth of their self, which is the reason for all the unhappiness there is, and self-knowledge is the solution.

Swamini Brahmananda, a White American female sadhu from the North East region of the United States suggested that self-knowledge dispels the inherent ignorance of people’s true nature when she said, “So, the knowledge of the self, solves the problem” (personal communication, Jan 8, 2018). As for the knowledge of the world (non-self—worldly knowledge), Swamini Brahmananda asserted that it is only a diversion from self-knowledge. The knowledge of the world is only important to meet basic human needs; beyond that, human beings’ focus should be on self-knowledge to know the reality of their true self to experience real happiness. In her words,

… it’s [knowledge of the world] a diversion, it never relaxes your mind … Now knowledge of the world, oh! That’s interesting! Oh, I know how they … make a spaceship to work, or I am an astronomer, or a mathematician, or a psychologist, whatever, and you have that knowledge. But you know, it’s never enough to … because the more we know, the more we know [that] we don’t know about something. So, how much we know about the brain? I mean, not we ourselves [not self-knowledge], I am talking about neuro … neurologists or the brain people who just study the brain. And yet they know, there is so much more to be known. (personal communication, February 7, 2018)

Similarly, Swamini Ananadmayi, a female sadhu from the UK, also supported the statements of Swamini Brahmananda when she said, “… so the answer will be, the
ignorance of happiness [our true nature or self] is—is the cause of unhappiness”
(personal communication, April 2, 2018). Swamini Nirmalananda, a senior White
American sadhu also said that people’s ignorance of their self, causes unhappiness. She
said the root cause of unhappiness is people’s ignorance about their fundamental nature,
which is an innately human mental affliction. In her words,

… because, if you know the Raja yoga at all, they speak of the kalesas (Sanskrit: mind’s afflictions), the basic afflictions of the mind. The first kalesa (Sanskrit: mind’s affliction)—avidya (Sanskrit: ignorance of self)—ignorance. What are we ignorant of? Our true nature. What all saints and sages tell us, our true nature [is] supremely peaceful, supremely happy. The Christian tradition, they will say, the image of God is within you. It is different languaging, [but] pointing towards the same truth. (personal communication, April 3, 2018)

Swamini Amritananda, another profound senior female sadhu from the Mid-
Atlantic region of the United States, mentioned that most people do not introspect and try
to know their true nature. She said,

… and so those beautiful qualities in you! They are there, but it is like the sun is shining brightly, but the clouds are covering everything. So, know everybody is in darkness. That doesn’t mean the sun isn’t shining. And if a person is living a life that is very disagreeable to themselves and everybody else, it doesn’t mean that they don’t have those beautiful qualities. It just means that they are thinking and living on different levels. And those people do not experience happiness. Do you see? (personal communication, January 20, 2018)

Theme Conclusion

The sadhus’ statements revealed that the cause of all unhappiness is human
being’s ignorance of self. Therefore, self-knowledge can dispel that innate self-ignorance
and help people discover the ultimate happiness as their true nature.

Although a few sadhus explained that the reason for all unhappiness is the
ignorance of one’s true self, all the sadhus personified happiness as something alive,
infinitely powerful, and conscious, like a living person. The sadhus asserted that happiness has an animate nature—the topic of Theme 6 and an inherent property of the following four subthemes.

**Theme 6: Animate Nature of Happiness**

“Joy and happiness are the same things. Because they are … they are really that aspect of the Divine presence within you. That consciousness is always happy, joyful…” — Swamini Amritananda (personal communication, January 20, 2018).

Theme 6 answered the first research question—What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? All 20 out of 20 sadhus described the animate nature of happiness. See Table 11 for the summary of Theme 6.

Table 11. *Theme 6 Summary. Animate Nature of Happiness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Participants N=20</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animate nature of happiness.</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
<td>361</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quote:</strong> Joy and happiness are the same thing. Because they are … they are really that aspect of the Divine presence within you. That consciousness is always happy, joyful … — Swamini Amritananda (personal communication, January 20, 2018).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
<td>The sadhus described happiness has an animate nature.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the interviews, it was difficult for the sadhus to describe happiness. Two sadhus directly stated it was not possible to describe happiness. However, when they tried to describe happiness, they used different expressions to express the animate nature of happiness. Some sadhus equated happiness to “consciousness (the knower)” (Swamini
Keshwananda, personal communication, May 1, 2018). Other sadhus used expressions like happiness is the “quality of God” (Swamini Amritananda, personal communication, January 20, 2018), and “[happiness] reveals itself to us” (Swami Swarupananda, personal communication, February 27, 2018). The sadhus also used an expression “Satchidananda” (Sanskrit: sat meaning truth or existence, chit meaning consciousness, and ananda meaning happiness) (Swami Nigamananda, personal communication, January 31, 2018) to define happiness, showing happiness is conscious or consciousness itself. All these expressions of sadhus revealed that happiness has an animate nature. Theme 6 and its four subthemes are about the animate nature of happiness.

As for the indescribable happiness, a Guru-level sadhu, Swami Bhoomananda in India, using both Hindi and English language, said, “That is, anirvachniye, jisko bole, indescribable, main bhi tumhein describe kar sakta hoon” [Happiness is indescribable, which cannot be described, even I cannot describe it to you] (personal communication, March 2, 2018). Another male sadhu from India, Swami Swarupananda, said in the Hindi language, “jab vo mil jata hai, vo anand hai, vo sab uski vyakhaya nahi kar saktein hain,” [when one discovers it, that is ananda (Sanskrit: happiness), even those who discover it cannot describe it] (personal communication, Feb 27, 2018). Even though the sadhus directly said it was difficult to describe happiness, the sadhus tried to explain the animate nature of happiness using different expressions.

Swamini Keshwananda referred to happiness as “… the knower of all our actions and inspirer and the carer, nurturer, full of mercy” (personal communication, May 1,
2018). She meant happiness is God, which is within, who is the knower of all actions, inspirer of actions, protector, and full of mercy.

Likewise, Swami Swarupananda from India said in the Hindi language, “vo [anand] svyam anubhuti karata hai …” [that ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) reveals itself to us …] (personal communication, February 7, 2018). Swami Swarupananda meant that when a sadhu practices hard to discover happiness, happiness, like a living person, reveals itself to the sadhu.

Swami Janakananda, a senior White American sadhu, referred to happiness as “Purusha (Sanskrit: a man or male)” (personal communication, January 15, 2018). He meant, happiness is like a human, personified as a male, a living person within—supporting the theme that happiness has an animate nature.

**Theme Conclusion**

From the sadhus’ description, this study found that happiness has an animate nature. Although it was difficult for the sadhus to describe happiness, they used different expressions to describe the real animate nature of happiness. The sadhus uttered different words and phrases to describe happiness: Happiness is the witness of human actions, the “consciousness or knower” (Swamini Keshwananda, personal communication, May 1, 2018), “happiness reveals itself to us” (Swami Swarupananda, personal communication, February 7, 2018), “it inspires … takes care of us” (Swamini Keshwananda, personal communication, May 1, 2018), “it is existence” (Swami Nigamananda, personal communication, January 31 2018), “Purusha (Sanskrit: a male)” (Swami Janakananda,
personal communication, January 15, 2018). Such sadhus’ expressions made up the following four subthemes that I describe below.

**Subtheme 6.1: Happiness is Pure Consciousness Beyond Mind**

“Self, as the knower of all known …” — Swamini Brahmananda (personal communication, February 7, 2018).

Subtheme 6.1 answered the first research question—What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? Subtheme 6.1 also inherits the properties of Theme 6—Animate nature of happiness. Fourteen out of 20 sadhus spoke about the conscious nature of happiness. The sadhus mentioned that happiness is consciousness and beyond human mind, thoughts, and emotions. The sadhus meant that the human mind is unconscious, but not happiness. See Table 12 for a summary of Subtheme 6.1.

Table 12. **Subtheme 6.1 Summary: Happiness is Pure Consciousness Beyond Mind**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Theme 6: Animate nature of happiness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness is pure consciousness beyond mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quote:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Swamini Brahmananda, a female sadhu from the North East region of the United States, said, “… I am not the body; this world is not ultimately real, it is relatively real, that’s not who I am …” (personal communication, April 3, 2018), asserting sadhus realize their true nature is not the body or mind. Here, while using the word body, Swamini Brahmananda pointed to the human mind-body-sense complex, not merely physical human body.

On this topic of happiness as consciousness beyond the mind, a White American female sadhu from the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, Swamini Nirmalananda, stated happiness is the spirit that dwells within, that defines human beings, who they truly are, and not the mind, what people usually think they are. In her words,

It’s not that I am mind, but I have a mind. I have a body. I have a mind. But I am not the body. I am not the mind. I am the spirit that dwells within them … It is the spirit within you. The spirit, the Divine essence is happiness personified. It is happiness; it is pure happiness, pure peace, pure joy. (personal communication, April 3, 2018)

Swamini Nirmalananda used an expression, “happiness personified,” that suggested the animate nature of happiness. Likewise, another male White American sadhu from the Pacific region of the United States, Swami Nigamananda, used two languages, Sanskrit and English, and said, “… the avastha traya sakshit (Sanskrit: avastha means a state, traya means three, and sakshit means witness) form the recognition that I am the sakshit (Sanskrit: witness) to all states of experience” (personal communication, Jan 31, 2018). Swami Nigamananda used the texts of the Upanishads to explain true human nature, which is happiness, is alive and continuously witnesses to all
three conscious states of a human being: the wakeful state, the dream state, and the deep-sleep state.

Similarly, Swamini Abhayananda from Argentina also mentioned that people’s true nature or happiness is consciousness. She said, “… because the self does not have any divisions. There is no division; there is no dividing line, for consciousness. It is limitless consciousness …” (personal communication, May 5, 2018).

Also, Swamini Ananadmaya, the female sadhu from the UK, equated happiness to knower (someone who knows). According to her, there is no difference between knower and knowledge. Knowledge is only a label for the knower. Therefore, she equated knowledge with happiness. It is like saying—when I discover real happiness, I experience I am none other than knowledge or just a knower. Therefore, according to her, knowledge is not merely a means to an end (the end being happiness or freedom), but knowledge is identical with the end, showing happiness is none other than knowledge or knower. In her words,

… happiness is only in discovering the truth. That’s why even though we say, knowledge of the truth is the means, and the moksha (Sanskrit: absolute freedom from all suffering or real happiness) is the end, sadhnam (Sanskrit: means) and sadhya (Sanskrit: end), we say, initially, but actually speaking the knowledge of the truth itself is moksha (Sanskrit: happiness or freedom from suffering). They are identical. The means and the end are identical. So, we say only when the person is clear about this end, thereby he is committed—he or she is committed to this pursuit of knowledge of the truth, which itself is moksha (Sanskrit: absolute freedom from suffering or happiness). It is not that you attain gyanam (Sanskrit: knowledge) first and then you attain moksha (Sanskrit: real happiness or absolute freedom from all suffering). No! Knowledge itself is freedom. And that is the ultimate goal. Therefore, knowledge of the truth becomes that ultimate goal. (personal communication, April 2, 2018)
**Subtheme conclusion.** The sadhus’ descriptions emphasized that happiness has an animate nature because it is consciousness itself, or conscious of all three states of human being. In other words, happiness is a witness of three states of human beings—the wakeful, dream, and deep sleep states. The sadhus also mentioned happiness is beyond mind, watching over the functions of mind, and all experiences of the mind-body-sense complex. It is the Divine spirit, the knower, inside each person that keeps people alive. More on the animate nature of happiness, a few sadhus asserted that happiness is limitless, all-pervasive, and changeless, the topic of Subtheme 6.2.

**Subtheme 6.2: Happiness is Infinite**

“*Aanand to aapaar hai, aanand kee koee seema nahin hai*” [ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) is limitless, ananda has no boundaries] — Swami Shivananda (personal communication, February 10, 2018).

Subtheme 6.2 answered the first research question—What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? Subtheme 6.2 also inherited the properties of Theme 6—Animate nature of happiness. Ten out of 20 sadhus directly spoke about the infinite nature of happiness. To express infinite happiness, the sadhus used these words—infinitely, endless, unlimited, limitless, all-pervasive, omnipresent, and everywhere—interchangeably, *anant* (Sanskrit: infinite). See Table 13 for the summary of Subtheme 6.2.

**Table 13. Subtheme 6.2 Summary. Happiness is Infinite**

<p>| Research Question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? |
| Parent Theme 6: Animate nature of happiness |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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Research Question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happiness is infinite.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Quote:** *Ananda* (Sanskrit: happiness) is limitless, ananda has no boundaries — Swami Shivananda (personal communication, February 10, 2018).

**Definition** The sadhus revealed that happiness is infinite. Happiness has no boundaries and it is everywhere, it is omnipresent.

During the interviews, no sooner had I uttered the word happiness than it tempted a few sadhus to say that happiness is a limiting word, maybe because of the limitations of the English language. Instead, the sadhus preferred to use the phrase *ananda* (Sanskrit: happiness) to describe the infinite and all-pervasive nature of happiness.

Moments after I started my interview with Swami Muktananda, a male South Indian sadhu from the South East region of the United States, he said:

*First of all, I got that the word happiness is a limiting word … You know? Because whenever in the material world, we think of happiness is dependent on acquiring something … You know? So, I am happy when I have, and the opposite is when I am sad when I lose it. So, from talks, I tell people, the word in Sanskrit is *ananda*, bliss … you know? … Because, I believe that happiness talks about all, at least to me happiness is about something acquiring in life. If I acquire something, I am happy and as long as that object or person or whatever is around my life, I am fine. But its loss makes the individual sad or angry … You know? So, therefore … That’s why I think happiness is a limiting word (personal communication, January 16, 2018)*

According to the sadhus, happiness, as most people usually experience, understand, and describe it, is a limited expression of happiness. Happiness is far bigger than most people think. For example, many people say, I feel happy being with friends, or I feel happy because I bought a new home. Such a description is a limited version of happiness. From the perspective of sadhus, the true nature or experience of happiness is
far greater than what people typically experience. The sadhus described happiness using a Sanskrit word, *ananda* (Sanskrit: pure happiness or happiness), which signifies real happiness as infinite, unlimited, all-pervasive, and unchanging, that dwells within and beyond.

Swami Muktananda said that happiness is better described in terms of its limitless nature (personal communication, January 16, 2018). Similarly, Swami Nigamananda, the male White American sadhu from the Pacific region of the United States, also tried to explain the infinite nature of happiness in terms of truly fundamental human nature, as indicated from Theme 2. In his own words,

… but it’s often clearer to talk about *ananda* (Sanskrit: happiness) as *ananth tvam* (Sanskrit: infinite self or you are infinite) as limitlessness, because we all have very limited notions of what consciousness is, and what existence is, so when you remove the limiting constructs, and conclusions you have about what awareness is, meaning, who am I, remove the variables from self-identity, I begin to understand the truth of the *swaroopa* (Sanskrit: my true nature), and I am *ananda swaroopa* (Sanskrit: my true nature is pure happiness). (personal communication, January 31, 2018)

By infinite happiness, the sadhus meant that unhappiness originates from the mind, whereas happiness does not. Happiness and unhappiness are not two equal and opposite entities living in the mind, sharing equal but opposite status. Swamini Anandmayi explained that happiness is everywhere, therefore it is also available to everyone for recognition in their minds, but it is still separate from the mind. She said, “… so, it is available only for recognition only in one’s own mind, which means in one’s own mind, what does it mean? As the truth of very ‘I’” (personal communication, April 2, 2018). She meant, happiness is the reality of every being, which is the truth of what most
people refer to as I. For example, if a person says, “I am John Smith,” then the letter “I” within the statement, in reality, from the sadhus’ perspective, is infinite happiness.

Likewise, Swamini Abhayananda, the White European female sadhu from Argentina, also spoke about the limitless and all-pervasive nature of happiness. She said, “… it [happiness] does not have a location; it is universal. Because it is the truth. It is also called the wholeness, ananda (Sanskrit: happiness). Ananda means fullness, limitlessness, wholeness …” (personal communication, May 5, 2018).

**Subtheme conclusion.** From the sadhus’ perspective, this study found that happiness is infinite. It is everywhere and available for recognition in human minds; however, happiness is separate from the mind. Furthermore, all sadhus personified happiness as God, the topic of Subtheme 6.3.

**Subtheme: 6.3: Happiness is God**

“Ananda ek ishwar ki anubhuti hoti hai.” [ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) is an experience of God.] —Swami Krishnananda (personal communication, February 10, 2018).

Subtheme 6.3 answers the first research question—What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? Subtheme 6.3 inherits the properties of Theme 6—Animate nature of happiness. All 20 out of 20 sadhus referred to happiness as God. The goal of a sadhu is the discovery of happiness or the attainment of God. They personified real happiness or ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) as God, thereby highlighting its animate nature. See Table 14 for the summary of Subtheme 6.3.
A Guru-level senior sadhu, Bhoomananda Swami, equated happiness to God when he described *ananda* (Sanskrit: happiness) in both Hindi and English languages. He said:

> But, ananda apne jo scriptures se bhi vo batata hai, ek pehla sutra hai, anando Brahma, tu ananda ka jo concern hai, ya link hai, it is with Brahman [But, happiness, as per our scriptures, also the first verse, Anando Brahma (Sanskrit: Ananda is Divine), so happiness is concerned with, or linked with God]. (personal communication, March 2, 2018)

Similarly, Swamini Amritananda said, “Happiness is a quality of the God in you” (personal communication, January 20, 2018). Later again, Swamini Amritananda said, “Happiness is the part of God’s presence within you. It’s that consciousness” (personal communication, January 20, 2018).

Likewise, while clarifying happiness concepts during the participant validation, Swami Nigamananda equated happiness to *atman* (Sanskrit: God) when he wrote, “The scripture uses the word ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) to describe the limitlessness of the atma (Sanskrit: God) …” (personal communication, April 22, 2018).
Subtheme conclusion. The statements of the sadhus indicated happiness, human beings’ true nature, is none other than Divine inside everyone. Many sadhus supported this finding by saying that their happiness is the all-powerful God who guides and protects them constantly.

Subtheme 6.4: Happiness and Sadhus’ Sense of Fearlessness and Divine Protection

“[Happiness is the] experience of the unity that frees us from all fear” — Swamini Keshwananda (personal communication, May 1, 2018).

Subtheme 6.4 answered the first research question—What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? Subtheme 6.4 inherits the properties of its parent Theme 6—Happiness has an animate nature. Twelve out of 20 sadhus reported fearlessness—a sense of loss of fear in their lives. The sadhus also said that happiness personified as God always protecting them during their difficult times. See Table 15 for the summary of Subtheme 6.4.

Table 15. Subtheme 6.4 Summary. Happiness and Sadhus’ Sense of Fearlessness and Divine Protection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Theme 6: Animate nature of happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness and sadhus’ sense of fearlessness and Divine protection.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Quote:**

[Happiness is the] experience of the unity that frees us from all fear — Swamini Keshwananda (personal communication, May 1, 2018).

**Definition**

Sadhus reported happiness as God giving them a sense of complete fearlessness and Divine protection in their difficult times. The sadhus attributed fearlessness to self-knowledge and non-duality.
The sadhus mentioned that discovering *ananda* (Sanskrit: happiness) as one’s true self is the elimination of duality and elimination of fear.

As for fear in sadhus, I asked the sadhus a general question—Do you fear anything? While answering this question, Swami Nigamananda, the White American male sadhu from the Pacific region of the United States, asserted that duality causes fear. In his words,

The *Upanishad* (Sanskrit: ancient texts of the Vedas) says that fear is caused by duality. And so if you see nothing other than yourself, the vision of a *Gyani* (Sanskrit: a spiritually enlightened person), there is nothing here but *Ishwara* (Sanskrit: God), same as saying that there is nothing here but *Brahma* (Sanskrit: God or the creator of this known world), the same as saying that there is nothing here but me, and so, would you have no other, where is the fear? (personal communication, January 31, 2018)

On fear, Swami Nigamananda also mentioned during the sadhus’ renunciation ceremony the sadhus are required to take many vows, and one of the main vows is about fear or *abhyam* (Sanskrit: no fear)—that may I fear no one, and no one fears me. In his words,

… that the main vow that the *sannyasi* (Sanskrit: renunciate) takes is *abhyam* (Sanskrit: fearlessness). There are other vows too, but it is *abhya* (Sanskrit: fearlessness)—it’s bidirectional. May I have no fear and may no one fear me. So, no one fears me, may my words and actions all be *Dharma* (Sanskrit: moral and ethical actions). (personal communication, January 31, 2018)

On the questions about fear, Swamini Nirmalananda, a White American female sadhu from the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, said the experience of true happiness or self ends fear. She also said duality causes fear. She said,

[discovering true self or non-duality] … diminish and ultimately eliminate [fear]. Because fear is based on the consciousness of duality. As long as I feel I am a
separate entity, as long as I feel this body and mind is who I am, fear will be there. As I said, abhinivesha (Sanskrit: fear of death), fear of losing this body. Because, this is who I am. Fear of not getting what I need to survive. Fear that someone else may hurt me. Fear that someone else may take from me something that I wish to have. As long as there is duality, there is an open doorway for fear. But! Here is the good news. When you realize, experience, your true nature, that Divine presence within you. That is the unity that pervades the entire creation. Because that spirit within me is exactly the same as the spirit within you. It’s the same as the spirit within this desk, within that plant. Beyond all the changes, there is the unchanging one, which we call God. Permanent, perfect, pure, the stable support of the entire universe, and the essence of each and every one of us. When we have that consciousness, that vision, then there is no more fear. (personal communication, April 3, 2018)

When discussing fearlessness in sadhus, a female South Indian sadhu, Swamini Ananadmayi, attributed fearlessness to self-knowledge and real happiness or moksha (Sanskrit: freedom from the bondage) of samsara (Sanskrit: the world of the endless cycle of pain and pleasures, death, and rebirth). In her words,

There is a fear of death that is why moksha (Sanskrit: absolute freedom from all suffering, pure happiness). Also, happiness implies knowledge of the truth, also implies freedom from the very phenomenon called ‘fear.’ Because knowledge of the truth helps you resolve the freedom from the very phenomenon called fear. (personal communication, April 2, 2018)

Likewise, the Guru-level sadhu Bhoomananda Swami from India also said, “But you feel contentment and fearlessness. Nirbhayata and Nishchinta, samajh gaye meri baat ko?” [But you feel contentment and fearlessness. Fearlessness and relaxed, did you understand me?] (personal communication, March 2, 2018).

The wandering monks also showed no sense of fear at all. For example, one of the senior wandering sadhus, Swami Niranjanananda, who rarely stayed at one place for more than a few days, mentioned that his time spent in the jungles was the most peaceful, and he felt utterly fearless. He attributed his fearlessness, sense of protection, and
happiness to living a life of a yogi in devotion of God. When I asked him— Did you not
have any fear of wild animals in the forests? He showed no sign of fear. In his words:

_kuch nahi, kya karega? Khayega, ab khayega to khayega, uski iccha ho apni, agar
apna deh uske sharir me jana hi hai tu hum city mein bhi raho aur kahin bhi
rahein vo tu us samay khana hi hai usne. Jab meri maut abhi likhi hai yahan to
mein yahan se kya, udhar jaane ke baad meri maut bachani to hai nahi. Honi hai,
samay hai, vakt hai, jab us -- main tu kai baar jungle main aise jaanvaroon ke
saath me, saamne se gaye, jaanwar baithie hain ... darr nahi lagta_ [Not at all,
what can an animal do? Eat me? If it has to eat, then it will eat me anyway. It
depends on its will. If my body has to go inside the animal’s body, then it does not
matter if I am in a jungle or in a city. If my time of death has come, then it does
not matter where I am, here or there. It is one’s fate. It is one’s time when it will
come. In the jungles I encountered many such animals (man-eaters) sitting … I do
not fear. (personal communication, February 10, 2018)]

Whereas Swami Niranjanananda reported no sense of fear, other sadhus reported
they perceived Divine protection from happiness, personified as God. To this end, I asked
a few sadhus this question: If you say happiness within you has an animate nature, a ‘live
being,’ and happiness is the goal of your life, for which you have sacrificed all your
material possessions and the sources of your income, did ‘happiness as God’ help you
during your difficult times? In simple language, this question was— Did happiness,
personified as God, give you protection during difficult times?

Upon hearing this question, the sadhus became quite emotional and indicated that
happiness personified as God always protected and helped them, all the time, and often in
some miraculous ways. For instance, I asked Swamini Nirmalananda, a female sadhu
from the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, about whether the ‘living’ happiness
ever helped her. In her reply, she used the word “many” a minimum of 10 times and said,
“many, many, many … many times” (personal communication, April 3, 2018). For the
same question, another male sadhu, Swami Gorakhnath from Haridwar in India, eagerly and emotionally responded in the Hindi language, and said:

*bilkul bilkul veh tu pal pal, pal, pal rakhsha kartein hain, jaise maa apne bacche ki rakhsha karti hai* [Absolutely! Absolutely! He (happiness as Divine) protects us moment to moment, moment by moment, like a mother who protects her child]. (personal communication, February 20, 2018)

**Subtheme conclusion.** From the descriptions of sadhus, this study found sadhus had almost no sense of fear. They attributed fearlessness to God, or *ananda* (Sanskrit: happiness) and non-duality. The sadhus also considered happiness as Divine who provides them continuous protection in difficult times.

In the next major section that follows, I explore Theme 7 that answered the second research question—Do sadhus perceive themselves to be happy people?

**Theme 7: Sadhus are Very Happy People**

"A sadhu is forever happy in the thoughts of *atman* (Sanskrit: Self)." — Swami Shivananda (personal communication, February 10, 2018).

Theme 7 answered the second research question—Do sadhus perceive themselves to be happy people? Nineteen out of 20 sadhus’ descriptions answered this research question. After inductive thematic analysis of the interview data, this study found that sadhus are very happy people. Table 16 summarizes the results of Theme 7.

Table 16. Theme 7 Summary. Sadhus are Very Happy People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 2: Do sadhus perceive themselves to be happy people?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadhus are very happy people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 2: Do sadhus perceive themselves to be happy people?

**Quote:** A sadhu is forever happy in the thoughts of *atman* (Sanskrit: Self) — Swami Shivananda (personal communication, February 10, 2018).

**Definition:** From the descriptions of sadhus, this study found that sadhus are very happy people.

During the interviews, the sadhus’ verbal statements and nonverbal clues indicated that sadhus are very happy people. As described in subsection The Special Experience Meeting with the Sadhus in Chapter 3, during the interviews, I noticed the sadhus expressed no negative emotions across all interviews. No sadhu complained or expressed anger toward anything. All sadhus remained calm and happy during lengthy conversations and answered the questions with great enthusiasm, laughing and sharing their stories and explaining the concepts of the vast and nebulous idea of human happiness.

Many sadhus reported they have no desires and no worries in life, suggesting sadhus are happy people. Swami Krishnananda, a wandering sadhu in India, said in the Hindi language, “... *nahi* ... *humari icchaon ka tu anth ho chuka hai. Humari koi iccha nahi hai*” [ ... no ... all my desires have been eliminated. I have no desires] (personal communication, February 10, 2018).

Likewise, another senior sadhu in India, Swami Swarupananda, reported he has no thoughts of any sorrow or greed, and external conditions do not bother him anymore. In his words,

*Aaj jis avastha mein baithi hain, humko koi anubhav hi nahi ho raha ab. Bhaan nahi nahi ho raha hai. kyon? ki hum vo seedi chadke aa gaye, tu hume uska koi dukh nahi hai. Na aisi lalsa aati hai, na vichaar aatein hain. Tu hum is side pe aa gaye* [Today, in whatever state I am sitting, I am not sensing anything, no
perception. Why? Because I have climbed the ladder and have reached a level in which I have no sorrow, neither do I have any greed, and nor do I have such kinds of thoughts. I have crossed and come to the other side. (personal communication, Feb 27, 2018)

Another middle-aged female White American sadhu, Swamini Keshwananda from the South East region of the United States, spoke about her happiness living in the present moment, seeing the world clearly, not getting distracted by external things, and being constantly involved in the thoughts of the Divine. She said:

It is a nice question. I don’t think I can speak on behalf of all sadhus, but from my perspective, happiness for sadhu is seeing things as they are so that we are not distracted from our thoughts of God or the Self. So, constant remembrance of the Self is happiness for Sadhus. Not getting distracted by the things of the world or caught up in our feelings of relationship to our work, or to our world, or to our bodies … things like this. (personal communication, May 1, 2018)

Swamini Keshwananda also reported her happiness as “losing herself in blissful moments,” in completely forgetting her personality. In her words,

… yes, I would say I have. I have touched down some moments of ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) that … yes, I think so … so, it is for me … but in that when the most kind of blissful moments happen where I lose myself. At that point I feel happy or blissful, you know, or ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) … it’s in completely forgetting the personality. (personal communication, May 1, 2018)

As for living in the present moment with no worries, Swami Gopalananda, a senior male sadhu from India, explained how his training as a sannyasi (Sanskrit: renunciate) helped develop a detached mind, suggesting sadhus are happy beings living in the present moment. In his words,

We as I said … therefore the sanyasis (Sanskrit: renunciate) are taught to be [a] witness of all the events happening in their surroundings. Be it happiness, be it sadness … anything. So, just to detach … detach! One has to do honest duties, whatever the circumstance is, or whatever he is opted for, he has to do it very sincerely. But detachment … Detachment is needed, for the happiness, so that you can see when we have the distance with some issue, we can find better ways to
resolve that issue or to cope with the situation. If we are mingled with that, the situation, then we will cry. (personal communication, May 9, 2018)

During the interviews, a few sadhus also gave emotional accounts of their renunciation (initiation) ceremonies\(^3\), the day of entering into monkhood as new renunciates. They reported immense happiness experienced during and after the initiation ceremony. Swamini Amritananda, a female sadhu from the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, became emotional while narrating her experience about her initiation ceremony. In her words:

… but I tell you as beautiful as the final vows ceremony is in the religious life, this homa (Sanskrit: fire ritual). There is nothing … there’s nothing like it … nothing like it. You … you honestly feel like … like … like you’re 50 pounds less, and there’s just a skeleton, walking dead, whatever you consider it is “you,” no longer belongs to you. It really wipes you out and during that time it’s like that … a bath that makes you pure. You know, you it’s like, starting all over. (personal communication, January 20, 2018)

**Theme Conclusion**

From the sadhus’ descriptions, the present study found that sadhus are very happy people. During the interviews, the sadhus attributed their happiness to many factors, and the inductive thematic analysis of the interview data identified five significant factors that

\(^3\) Sadhus have most of their anxieties, worries, and pains taken away by the very nature of being initiated on the path of renunciation. On the day of renunciation (initiation), the *sannyasis* (Sanskrit: renunciates) are asked to leave their homes, jobs, and material possessions (Hausner, 2007; Levy, 2011). They take a vow to leave their lives in their hands of the invisible Divine. The sadhus are left with no possessions, no expectations, no goals, and no worries that occupy the minds of most ordinary people. Just by being initiated on the path of *sannyasa* (Sanskrit: renunciation) alone, sadhus become much happier in the commonly understood ways of being happy. Later, sadhus who are sincere in their mental and physical practices, under a guiding teacher, slowly remove their sense of ego with the physical body. Once they completely achieve it, they reach the state of *Satchitananda* (Sanskrit: existence, consciousness, bliss).
sadhus believed influenced their happiness. I discuss each factor in the next five major sections.

Summary of Themes 8 to 12

In the following five major sections, I explore Themes 8 through 12 that answered the third research question—What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness? The goal of the third research question was to find out the factors sadhus believed influenced their happiness. Table 17 summarizes Themes 8 through 12, related to the third research question.

Table 17. Research Question #3 and Related Group of Five Major Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th># of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 8: Guru, a spiritual teacher.</strong></td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 9: Self-knowledge.</strong></td>
<td>12 (60%)</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 10: Serving others.</strong></td>
<td>13 (65%)</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 11: Yoga and meditation.</strong></td>
<td>14 (70%)</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 12: Renunciation and living a simple life.</strong></td>
<td>17 (85%)</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 8: Guru, A Spiritual Teacher**

“…You need a Guru⁴, who knows those things.” — Swamini Brahmananda

(personal communication, February 7, 2018).

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⁴ A Guru and disciple (or spiritual teacher and student) relationship found a place in every spiritual tradition in the world. There have been enlightened teachers or Gurus since the dawn of time: Hasidic Rabbis of Judaism, Sufi Masters of Islam, Lord Jesus and the long line of mystics and saints in the Christian tradition, Lord Buddha and all the succeeding Masters and Roshis in Buddhism—these are all examples of this respected and still living tradition (Miller, 1977; Satchidananda, 1976).
Theme 8 answered the third research question—What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness? All 20 out of 20 sadhus referred to their Guru, with 223 references during the interviews that made ‘Guru’ the third most uttered essential word after ‘happiness’ and ‘mind.’ See Table 18 for a summary of Theme 8.

Table 18. Theme 8 Summary: Guru, a Spiritual Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guru, a spiritual teacher.</td>
<td>N=20 (100%)</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote:</td>
<td>... You need a Guru, who knows those things — Swamini Brahmananda (personal communication, February 7, 2018).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>The sadhus reported their Guru, spiritual teacher, played a critical role in their spiritual journey.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sadhus who I interviewed had a deep respect for their Guru. They considered their Guru’s self as Divine. Every sadhu had a Guru who belonged to a specific sampradaya (Sanskrit: teaching tradition). The sadhus regarded their Guru as someone who guided them on their spiritual path and served as an essential first step on their spiritual journey.

Guru has himself or herself) gone beyond the limitations of the mind and has overcome his physical ego and therefore knows the path since he has traversed it. Due to the subtlety of his mind, a Guru quickly understands the mind of the student, including his or her errors and strengths. Powered by this understanding, the Guru guides the student to overcome his mind’s limitations, incorporating direct and indirect instructions. A Guru represents purity (lack of vices) and wisdom and draws out these qualities in the student. These vices of the mind are extremely difficult for the student to identify and correct by him or herself.
During her interview, Swamini Amritananda expressed deep regard and a trusting relationship with her Guru. She said,

I tell you; it is all God’s grace. I marvel at it because I see people that are living a life similar … (pause) … I can’t explain it. It is just that we honestly let the Guru … (pause) … take charge. And you really take refuge at his feet … and that … that inward God’s presence, within you, has always been my awareness that God dwells in me, not that sometimes, and sometimes not … Do you see? Because the Guru and God are same. You understand! What the Guru is telling me so that I can hear him completely. (personal communication, January 20, 2018)

Swamini Brahmananda, a White American sadhu from the North East region of the United States, also emphasized the role of a Guru in a sadhu’s spiritual journey. In her words,

You need a teacher who knows Vedanta. You can read the scriptures, but they are very tough — a lot of them … you know … speak over your head in a way. You know … you need a Guru who knows those things. (personal communication, February 7, 2018)

Swami Akhandananda, a senior male sadhu from India, emphasized a strong bond between a Guru and the student. He said,

… that is called the relationship between master and disciple. That they should accept each other, holistically … accept someone each other holistically (wholly), and they should really be in a frame of body and mind to listen to their heart. The heart will tell you, here is the person, hear is the place, here is the time, that he should accept someone as your master (personal communication, April 6, 2018)

Another female sadhu, Swamini Keshwananda from the South East region of the United States, supported the idea that a disciple’s trust in Guru’s lineage is an important factor in one’s spiritual path when she said,

… at least kind of, in the back of your mind, I would say the body, your mind, all this belong to God, and so I can trust in that. So, let’s put some faith and trust the feeling of being supported by the lineage, in the whole Guru parampara (Sanskrit: here Guru’s lineage, teaching tradition), and whole universe, in that sense … (personal communication, May 1, 2018)
Swami Nigamananda, the White American sadhu from the Pacific region of the United States, asserted that true happiness is achieved when the student’s vision becomes one with Guru’s vision, which is an outcome of a student’s deep faith in Guru. In his words,

Guru dristhi (Sanskrit: vision) becomes the shishya (Sanskrit: student) drishti (Sanskrit: vision). Right? Becomes the vision of the teacher. But student’s vision of one’s self-reality, or oneself becomes identical with that of the teacher. It takes shardha (Sanskrit: deep trust), it takes a trust, but it is not a belief. (personal communication, January 31, 2018)

**Theme Conclusion**

This study found the role of a real Guru, a spiritual teacher, is critical for one’s pursuit of lasting happiness. A Guru should belong to an established teaching tradition or lineage and should know how to unfold the words of the sacred texts and communicate knowledge to the students. The sadhus asserted real happiness would only come as a grace from one’s Guru through a deeply trusting relationship between the student and the Guru.

From the sadhus’ perspective, while Guru, a spiritual teacher, played an important role in their spiritual journey, they also spoke about self-knowledge as another factor that influenced their happiness—the topic of Theme 9.

**Theme 9: Self-Knowledge**

“… but the experience or knowledge of the self or the atman (Sanskrit: true self) is the number one.” — Swami Muktananda (personal communication, January 17, 2018).

Theme 9 answered the third research question—What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness? Twelve out of 20 sadhus reported that self-
knowledge influenced their happiness. The sadhus emphasized ignorance of true human nature is the cause of all unhappiness—Theme 5. Therefore, self-knowledge is the way to dispel ignorance about one’s true nature. Self-knowledge emerged as one of the significant factors related to the sadhus’ lifestyle that influenced their happiness. See Table 19 for the summary of the results of Theme 9.

Table 19. Theme 9 Summary. Self-Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-knowledge.</td>
<td>12 (60%)</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote:</td>
<td>But the experience or knowledge of the self or the atman (Sanskrit: true self) is the number one — Swami Muktananda (personal communication, January 17, 2018).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>From the sadhus’ perspective, the knowledge of self, an inquiry into finding their true nature, was a significant factor that influenced their happiness.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sadhus live their entire lives as a sannyasi (Sanskrit: renunciate) studying the Vedic scriptures. It is an essential part of their daily practice (Atmapriyananda, 2013; Hausner, 2007; Levy, 2011). Swamini Ananadmayi, an Indian Vedic female sadhu from the UK, supported the idea of self-knowledge and said, “... the means and the end are identical ... knowledge itself is freedom” (personal communication, April 2, 2018).

When she uttered the word freedom, she referred to moksha (Sanskrit: absolute freedom) or total freedom from all sufferings and freedom from the endless cycle of rebirth and death. She made an assertion that a spiritual seeker of moksha (Sanskrit: absolute freedom from all sufferings) must systematically and regularly study the Vedic...
texts on self-knowledge or *Vedanta* (Sanskrit: end part of the Vedas). In her words, “This [Vedic scriptures] is a systematic study. One has to study systematically, step-by-step and consistently, regularly” (personal communication, April 2, 2018).

Swami Nigamananda, a White American male sadhu from the Pacific region of the United States, supported that self-knowledge is essential for removal of ignorance about one’s true self. He said:

… one who wants *moksha* (Sanskrit: total freedom from suffering) must necessarily be transformed into one who wants knowledge, based on his or her understanding of the nature of the problem. The nature of the problem is ignorance. How do you solve that? You remove ignorance. How you remove ignorance? Through *gyanam* (Sanskrit: self-knowledge). Who gives you that *gyanam* (Sanskrit: self-knowledge)? The Guru … (personal communication, January 31, 2018)

Likewise, about self-knowledge, Swami Muktananda from the South East region of the United States said, “… but the experience or knowledge of the self or the *atman* (Sanskrit: self) is the number one. And that adds values to all the zeros after” (personal communication, January 16, 2018).

Swamini Brahmananda, the White American female sadhu from the North East region of the United States, mentioned that people don’t inquire about themselves and try to find the truth of their fundamental nature. They mostly involve themselves in worldly things, but an inquiry into one’s essential nature will eliminate the unhappiness problem. In her words,

… but again, it is all the worldly stuff again. People would never (pause) they don’t inquire into themselves … Who am I? I think I am this body … in *Vedanta* (Sanskrit: end section of the Vedas), we are all ignorant about who we are, and knowledge is going to solve that problem. So, the knowledge of the self solves the problem. (personal communication, February 7, 2018)
Theme Conclusion

From the sadhus’ perspective, this study that found self-knowledge can help people get closer to *ananda* (Sanskrit: happiness) or lasting happiness. They emphasized the study and the practice of *Vedantic* (Sanskrit: end section of the Vedas) texts about the truth of our most fundamental nature or true self.

Along with self-knowledge, the sadhus mentioned compassion and serving others helped them experience happiness. Serving others is a part of living a life of *dharma* (Sanskrit: moral laws as prescribed in the Vedas). This is the topic of Theme 10—serving others.

**Theme 10: Serving Others**

“… Therefore, live only to serve.” —Swamini Nirmalananda (personal communication, April 3, 2018).

Theme 10 answered the third research question—What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness? Thirteen out of 20 sadhus spoke about serving others as one of their central practices, and thus, Theme 10 emerged—serving others, a factor that influences sadhus’ happiness. See Table 20 for the summary of the results of Theme 10.

Table 20. *Theme 10 Summary: Serving Others*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 3: What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness?</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Serving others</td>
<td>13 (65%)</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quote:</strong></td>
<td>… Therefore, live only to serve — Swamini Nirmalananda (personal communication, April 3, 2018).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 3: What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness?

**Definition**

Serving others was found to be a significant part of the sadhus' lifestyle that influenced their happiness.

This study found that as renunciates, many sadhus spend much time serving other people, offering large-scale feasts for ordinary people and sadhus alike, and helping people with their difficulties. Serving others is a significant part of the sadhus’ lifestyle, living a life in conformity with dharma (Sanskrit: moral and ethical values written in the Vedas).

Swamini Ananadmaya emphasized that before one can assimilate self-knowledge, one must calm (tame) the restless mind by living a conscious life of *dharma* (Sanskrit: moral and ethical life) that includes the practice of Vedic rituals, charity, and serving other people, plus practicing yoga and meditation. She asserted that living an ethical life makes an individual more mindful, aware, mentally subtle. According to her, mental subtleness, which is attained by preparing the mind by living an ethical life in accordance with *dharma* (Sanskrit: eternal ethical laws), is a prerequisite to assimilate self-knowledge. In her words,

… to become mentally subtle. So mental subtleness, intellectual sharpness, emotional stability, definitely dependent on living a conscious life. So, living one’s life consciously, with alertness, means living a life of dharma. Therefore, dharma—you cannot live separately. When you pursue, whatever you do, to pursue *artha* (Sanskrit: money), *kama* (Sanskrit: worldly desires), you see that your actions are governed by *dharma* (Sanskrit: eternal law of Vedas). Therefore, we say, *artha* (Sanskrit: earning money) and *kama* (Sanskrit: the pursuit of worldly desires) must be pursued in conformity with *dharma* (Sanskrit: ethical life as specified in Vedas), for living his life, whereby to prepare to one’s mind. For what? To prepare the mind for knowledge, and which is the ultimate goal … ultimately for moksha. (personal communication, April 2, 2018)
As for serving others, Swamini Brahmananda, the White American female sadhu from the North East region of the United States, mentioned that when she was in India, she would take part in many *bhandaras* (Hindi: large-scale feasts offered to other sadhus and public). When she came back to the USA, she started offering free Sanskrit language lessons to children and older adults in her community.

Swami Muktananda, a male sadhu of Indian descent from the South East region of the United States, said sadhus continue to live only for the well-being of the society. He said, “… Guru calls you back—come back, we want you, we want you to do something good for society, live for the people and so all of that” (personal communication, January 16, 2018).

During her interview, Swamini Nirmalananda, the White American female sadhu from the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, asserted that happiness is in living for others. In her words,

> You do everything with full concentration, full-heartedness, full care, as an offering to the Divine, as an offering to the Divine in the form of the entire creation. What is the entire creation? The entire creation is the person sitting right next to you. It’s the plants that you take care of; it’s your pet dog, it’s your children, it’s your spouse. You do your duty, given your capacity. We all have certain duties based on our capacities, our beliefs, our temperament, our society, our age, and certain duties match where we are on life’s journey. If we simply do that, with the love and devotion and focus of the totality of who we are, to the best of our ability, mistakes and all … everyone makes mistakes, but we are doing our best … that is the pathway to the highest realization. (personal communication, April 3, 2018)

Similarly, Swami Krishnananda, a wandering sadhu from India, mentioned in the Hindi language that real happiness lies in living for others. In his words,

> ... dusaroon ke liye jeene mein to param sukkah hai, us mein. Kehte hai na ki manushya agar apne liye jiye to kya jiya? Magar agar dooare ke liye jeeta hai, to
ati uttam. Usko har janam mein sukkah milta hai. Hai na? Aur agar us yug main agar koi us ke upar daridrata hai vo bhi door ho jaati hai. Hai na? […] ultimate happiness is living for others. It is said if a person only lived for himself, then what type of living is that? However, the one who lives for others, it is the best type of living. That person gets happiness in every birth. Isn’t it? Moreover, in this age and era, if a person is in poverty, his insufficiency also vanishes if one lives for others. Isn’t it?] (personal communication, Feb 10, 2018)

Swamini Ananadmayi also mentioned that compassion and accommodation of everyone happens only in absolute independence. By absolute independence, she meant a state of freedom that the real sadhus experience. She said,

So, I don’t need to depend; there is neither passion nor aversion towards anything. No raga (Sanskrit: likes), no dwesha (Sanskrit: dislikes), no hatred, no like or dislike. But still, I relate to the people, I live in the world, I interact with the people, and then there is … because I see that every life is as significant as my life, from compassionate—I become kind, I can accommodate. Sometimes, even non-accommodating—very difficult. There is again the more I can see, understand the person’s background, the more can be magnanimous, I can accommodate any non-sense. That is what is … that is an expression of fullness again. It’s happiness, isn’t it? See, only in independence, I can be accommodative. (personal communication, April 2, 2018)

Theme Conclusion

According to the sadhus, this study found that serving and living for others was a significant factor for the sadhus’ happiness. The present study also found that serving others, or living an ethical, moral life, is a critical step to stabilize the mind before one can assimilate the knowledge of the self. Another factor that emerged as a theme that influenced the sadhus’ happiness was the practice of yoga and meditation—the topic of Theme 11.

Theme 11: Yoga and Meditation

“You can have a calm mind.” — Swamini Brahmananda (personal communication, January 8, 2018).
Theme 11 answered the third research question—What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness? Fourteen out of 20 sadhus referred to yoga and meditation as a factor that influenced their happiness. This study found the practice of yoga and meditation, as a part of the sadhus’ lifestyle, is a significant factor that influences sadhus’ happiness. See Table 21 for the summary of the results of Theme 11.

Table 21. Theme 11 Summary. Yoga and Meditation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yoga and meditation</td>
<td>14 (70%)</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quote: You can have a calm mind — Swamini Brahmananda (personal communication, January 8, 2018).

Definition: The sadhus reported their practice of yoga and meditation was a significant factor that influenced their happiness.

In the West, people generally consider yoga somewhat of a physical exercise. For the sadhus, it was both a physical and mental discipline, and they also referred to it as meditation. Swamini Brahmananda, the White American female sadhu from the North East region of the United States, reported yoga and meditation calm human mind and helps to manage variations in life. She said, “… but if you do meditation, and maybe pranayama (Sanskrit: Yogic breathing practice), some breathing exercises, maybe you can be calm and be more focused and just handle … what your karma is throwing at you” (personal communication, February 7, 2018). Swamini Brahmananda also emphasized that instead of always being busy with material possessions, one should spend time on yoga and meditation, which would bring more meaning and purpose in life. In her words,
I mean, a one-year-old has an iPhone or iPod or something. You know, [they] have some kind of tablet. I mean it’s … anyways, we can’t solve that. It’s just being relatively happier, that said, taking care of yourself, have a purposeful life, have some meditation, breathing exercises and yoga, and trying to keep the body and mind fit. And then you handle most things that come to you. (personal communication, February 7, 2018)

Likewise, Swamini Nirmalananda, the female White American sadhu from the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, also asserted that yoga helps find happiness, the truth of one’s most fundamental nature. She said,

… yeah! And the different yogic paths, different faith traditions, have different practices to help you align with … and ultimately experience oneness with that consciousness within. Some people are more devotional, some are more analytical, some are more service oriented … bhakti yoga, karma yoga, raja yoga, gyana yoga, so there is a path for everyone. So, the universe is so generous in bestowing this knowledge and these pathways to the truth. (personal communication, April 3, 2018)

Swamini Ananadmayi, the female Indian sadhu from the UK, emphasized that yoga and meditation prepare one’s mind for self-knowledge that ultimately leads to the experience of lasting happiness. In her words,

… see the word yoga is also used to mean knowledge sometimes, but here, generally, the word yoga means anything and everything you do … it contributes for preparing your mind for knowledge. It serves as a preparatory discipline—we call it yoga … otherwise, the human mind would be restless then. The restlessness … no [physical] yoga can help you. Yoga [meditation] will help you manage restlessness. (personal communication, April 2, 2018)

Swamini Ananadmayi also asserted that meditation is a meditation only when the object of concentration is Divine. In her words,

… but meditation means only Bhagwaan (Sanskrit: Divine) must be the object of your focus. Then it is called meditation. Object of focus is anything other than Bhagwaan (Sanskrit: Divine), you can call it concentration or thinking, can’t call it meditation, because meditation is a mental activity. Thinking is a mental activity. Concentration is a mental activity. Contemplation is also mental activity. In mental activity, physical, oral activities are not included. Therefore, when can
you call a mental activity … placing one’s attention [on Divine] is called meditation. When can you call … placing attention a meditation? Only when the object of your focus, Bhagwaan (Sanskrit: Divine or God), is called meditation. Otherwise, it is simple concentration or simple thinking, isn’t it? (personal communication, May 8, 2018)

**Theme Conclusion**

This study found the sadhus practice self-control through yoga and meditation to calm their minds. Yoga prepares their minds, makes it subtle and more aware, for the assimilation of self-knowledge or discovering the truth about their true nature or real happiness. When the sadhus meditate, God is the object of their meditation. Therefore, meditation on the Divine brings in the element of devotion and faith in the lives of sadhus. Also, the present study found renunciation and living a simple life is another major factor that influenced the sadhus’ happiness, which is the topic of Theme 12.

**Theme 12: Renunciation and Living a Simple Life**


Theme 12 answered the third research question—What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness? Seventeen out of 20 sadhus spoke about their happiness in renunciation and simple living. Renunciation and living a simple living form a core lifelong practice every sadhu follows. See Table 22 for the summary of the results of Theme 12.

**Table 22. Theme 12 Summary: Renunciation and Living a Simple Life**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 3: What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness?</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Participants N=20</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

158
Research Question 3: What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Renunciation and living a simple life.</th>
<th>17 (85%)</th>
<th>185</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Quote:** Renunciation itself means happiness — Swami Gopalananda (personal communication, May 9, 2018).

**Definition** From the perspective of the sadhus, their renunciation of material possessions and worldly pursuits form a significant factor that influences their happiness.

According to Panikkar in his book *Blessed Simplicity*, the monk or nun is “that person who aspires to reach the ultimate goal of life with all his being by renouncing all that is not necessary to it” (Panikkar, 1982, p. 10).

Swami Muktananda, the male sadhu of the South Indian origin from the South East region of the United States, spoke highly about the profound happiness experienced in a renounced life and basic living. He shared a story of his life. Swami Muktananda knew a very wealthy businessperson in the city of Karnal in the northern parts of India. At 70, the rich man renounced all his material wealth and became a sadhu. After that, he lived a simple life in a tiny home where he involved himself in devotional practices. A few years later, Swami Muktananda went to see him. When he entered the monk’s room, he saw that the monk had only four sets of orange robes in his cupboard. During his conversation with Swami Muktananda, the monk confided to him he considered keeping even four pairs of robes as burdensome. However, Swami Muktananda explained to him he should have at least four robes to live comfortably, in case one gets spoiled, he would have some choice to change to a cleaner one. “I realized how simple actually life can be,” said Swami Muktananda later in the interview (personal communication, January 16, 2018).
Other sadhus who took part in this research expressed the same idea of renunciation and basic living in different contexts. Swami Niranjanananda, a wandering sadhu in India, told me he found immense happiness in living a simple and renounced life. He said:

... anand aata hai kab, jab jungle, yeh sab chod ke jungle mein ek saath anand le lo, jo saamne hai, vohi apna hai ... tu vo sabse bada sannyas ka anand hota hai [...] I feel ananda (Sanskrit: happiness), when? When I leave all this and go live in jungles, I become all happy, all at once. In forests, all belong to me … that is the greatest happiness of renunciation]. (personal communication, February 10, 2018)

Likewise, Swamini Brahmananda, the White American female sadhu from the North East region of the USA who lived in India for 10 years, also attributed happiness to a simple life when she told me to just ‘enjoy’ the oil lamp while camping, but she emphasized that one must develop endurance or titiksha (Sanskrit: stamina toward suffering) so that one becomes comfortable with such simple living. In her words,

Titiksha is a Sanskrit word, meaning, you know … having, like you doing without … you are able to deal with some … when you are deprived of things sometimes, you know. India is a good place to learn that discipline in a way because as I said, you get on the bus … a village bus to go into Coimbatore town took about an hour. And you know we have like a two-seater with four people sitting on them … you know … or if you are sitting on the end and somebody came in there, standing up, and they cluster (laugh) they are used to living like that … having this endurance with things … just make your best of whatever is happening. (personal communication, February 7, 2018)

Likewise, Swamini Keshwananda, the White American female sadhu from the South East region of the United States, suggested renunciation and simple living means happiness when she said, “… so, it is kind of removing everything between us and God—is happiness” (personal communication, May 1, 2018).
Theme Conclusion

Per the descriptions of the sadhus on renunciation and a simple life, this research found that a simple lifestyle of renunciation is an essential and critical factor that influences the happiness of sadhus. While renunciation of the material world makes sadhus an extreme population, distinct from householders, it seems the practice of renouncing the material world is a significant part of their simplification of their lives.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to find the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus, whose goal in life is moksha (Sanskrit: absolute freedom from all sufferings, to break from the endless cycle of rebirth and death). The sadhus held that every human being is seeking happiness behind all their actions. They asserted that happiness is the most fundamental true nature of every human being; therefore, the discovery of happiness is the goal of every human life. The sadhus also referred to their happiness as ananda (Sanskrit: happiness), everlasting, unchanging, and their happiness is far beyond normal levels of happiness that ordinary people experience. The study participants suggested it is impossible to find real and lasting happiness in material possessions and satisfaction of desires because of the temporary nature of the material world. They claimed the source of all unhappiness is our innate ignorance of one true self, so knowledge of the self solves the unhappiness problem.

The sadhus also said happiness has an animate nature. Happiness is ‘the knower,’ pure consciousness, all-pervasive, and beyond the human mind. They held that real
happiness is none other than Divine, the source of their protection. Many sadhus in this study showed no sense of fear.

The present study found that sadhus are happy people, and they attributed their happiness to five critical factors: 1) Guru, a spiritual teacher; 2) knowledge of self; 3) serving others; 4) the practice of yoga and meditation; and 5) renunciation and living a simple life.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, first, I explain the universal and secular aspect of this study, in that I explain that the sadhus’ views about happiness are more universal and secular than most people believe. I include some vital lessons from the sadhus that everyone can apply to their own happiness irrespective of any culture. More so, any organization could apply these learnings from the sadhus in their workplaces to promote happiness in their employees. I also briefly draw some linkages between the Vedic spiritual traditions and ancient Greek philosophies. The following section summarizes this study, which includes the research questions, the method adopted in this investigation, the data collection, and the data analysis procedure used in this research. Then, I dedicate the rest of the chapter to explaining the three main findings of this study and their implications on future research and practice.

A Universal and Secular Nature of the Study

An overarching goal of this research was a deep understanding of the phenomenon of happiness from the perspective of sadhus, the mystics of India, who, unlike ordinary people, renounce their material world to discover pure happiness. Therefore, the knowledge about happiness that emerged from the lived experiences of sadhus could universally and secularly be applied to people and in organizations. The sadhus, whose goal of life is moksha (Sanskrit: absolute peace, freedom from all sufferings), reported their experience of immense joy is possible for and available to every individual on this planet (Theme 2).
Moksha is a Sanskrit term, which means complete freedom from human suffering, to break out from the endless cycle of rebirths and deaths. According to the sadhus, moksha means a sense of eternal and enduring happiness or ananda (Sanskrit: real happiness). Although the term moksha (Sanskrit: salvation or absolute freedom) is closest to the English phrase cosmic consciousness (Bucke, 2015; Rama et al., 2014), the sadhus emphasized that moksha is possible for every human being that desires to pursue it.

To reach moksha, one practice the sadhus follow, which most ordinary people consider an extreme approach, is renunciation. The sadhus ceremoniously abandon things (and relationships), which many people believe bring them happiness. As renunciates, the sadhus also perform many rituals prescribed in the Vedas (Sanskrit: sacred Hindu texts). Here, I may note, it is not the purpose of this study to promote such practices. The goal of this exploratory research was to understand the reality of happiness from the perspective of sadhus to answer the question—what is happiness? The other purpose of this study was to find if sadhus are happy people, and if so, what do the sadhus believe makes them happy?

It was while trying to find the answers to the second and third questions, among other factors, that this study found that renunciation and living a simple life are significant predictors of sadhus’ happiness (Theme 12). However, it seems renunciation for most ordinary people does not seem like a practical way to be very happy. However, other aspects of the sadhus’ lifestyle teach essential lessons that may be helpful to ordinary people and even employees in organizations to become enduringly happy.
The first lesson to reach more enduring happiness is virtuous actions or serving humanity (Theme 10), which is supported by a large body of academic literature (Cameron & Caza, 2013; Cassell, 2017; Emmons, 1999; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 1999; Peterson & Bossio, 1991; Seligman, 2004; Snyder et al., 2017; Sternberg, 2003). The second lesson for finding happiness is mindfulness-based practices or simply practicing meditation (Theme 11), which is also supported by a growing body of academic literature (Achor, 2010; Baer et al., 2012; Campos et al., 2016; Hsu & Langer, 2013; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Malinowski, 2013; Mandal, Arya, & Pandey, 2011; Ramasubramanian, 2016; Teeter, 2016; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). This study found that if these two practices, performing virtuous actions and practicing mindfulness-based meditations (a secular practice), are sincerely and regularly followed by ordinary people in their daily lives and in organizations, over an unspecified period, they may organically or naturally lead people toward much higher levels of happiness, or self-transcendence (Dambrun et al., 2012; Frankl, 2006; Maslow, 1971).

Maslow, in his later writings, said that there is a higher level of development—what he referred to as self-transcendence—that people achieve by actions beyond the self, like altruism and spirituality. In Maslow’s words,

Transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos (Maslow, 1971, p. 269)

Self-transcendence means a sense of oneness with everyone … akin to a quote by Nisargadatta Maharaj, “All separation, every kind of estrangement and alienation is false. All is One—this is the ultimate solution for every conflict” (Silver, 2016, p. 10).
Parallels between Eastern and Western Spiritual Traditions

Virtuous actions and meditation prepare sadhus’ minds to attain self-knowledge that further helps sadhus know their true nature, which is pure happiness (Theme 2). This higher level of awareness about oneself or heightened consciousness also seems to be equivalent to a quote “Know Thyself” inscribed on the temple of Apollo at Delphi (Norton, 1976, p. 16). Norton associated “Know Thyself” to eudaimonism, an ethical doctrine in that people are obliged to know and live in truth to their daimon (a spirit within each person). From the perspective of sadhus, it seems the inscription “Know Thyself” is very similar to the question, who am I? within the Vedantic tradition. According to the present study, to know the reality of self is the discovery of pure happiness within (Theme 2) or self-realization. Happiness enjoyed through self-realization is boundless and cannot be compared to any form of happiness seen in the relative world (Jyotirmayananda, 1983).

Summary of the Study Design

In this study, I adopted a purposeful sampling approach along with a snowball sampling strategy of using references to expand the sample size. The 20 real sadhus who took part in this research were from diverse locations across the globe—the USA, India, the UK, and Argentina. I conducted in-depth, face-to-face, video, and telephonic phenomenological interviews with the sadhus. This study aimed to answer three research questions:

Research Question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?
Research Question 2: Do sadhus perceive themselves to be happy people?

Research Question 3: What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness?

The data coding followed by inductive thematic data analysis answered the above research questions and resulted in 12 significant themes and six subthemes, which I presented in Chapter 4. At this point, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggests good qualitative research is not generated by rigorous data alone but by going beyond the data to develop ideas. These ideas are the three findings of this study that I now present in this chapter.

First, I simply present a summary of three significant findings of the study. Next, I dedicate an entire section discussing my interpretation of the three findings, in three separate subsections, in the context of the existing literature—ancient philosophy, Western psychology, and positive psychology. Finally, in the following two sections, I present the study’s implications for further research and implications for practice.

**Findings**

After I synthesized and analyzed the results in Chapter 4, three finding emerged from the data. The first two findings are related to the first research question—what is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? Therefore, the first two findings are about the reality or the nature of happiness.

The third finding is associated with the second and third research questions—Do sadhus perceive themselves to be happy people? If so, what do the sadhus perceive to be
the factors that influence their happiness? Therefore, the third finding gives insights into how an enduring happiness is possible irrespective of external circumstances.

**Finding #1: Everyone's True Nature is Infinite Happiness to be Discovered Within**

Finding #1—everyone’s true nature is infinite happiness to be discovered within—moves the focus on happiness from the external world to the inner subjective world of people. Finding #1 is associated with the first research question—what is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? This finding is derived from the following four themes and two subthemes:

- **Theme 1:** Everyone is oriented toward happiness.
- **Theme 2:** Happiness is our true nature.
- **Subtheme 2.1:** Happiness is to be discovered within.
- **Theme 4:** Happiness is everlasting and unchanging.
- **Theme 5:** Ignorance of our true nature causes all unhappiness in the world.
- **Subtheme 6.2:** Happiness is infinite.

**Finding #2: Happiness has an Animate Nature. Happiness is Identical with Consciousness but Distinct from the Human Mind**

Finding #2 states that happiness has an animate nature, which is human consciousness that is distinct from the human mind, body, and senses. This finding shifts most people’s natural attitude toward happiness to its essential animate nature. Finding #2 means that happiness is human consciousness and is separate from human mind (including all thoughts, emotional states, and experiences), body, senses, and all physical matter. Like Finding #1, Finding #2 is also associated with the first research question,
what is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? Therefore, Finding #1 and Finding #2 are related because both findings explain what happiness is, the essential features of happiness, within the limitations of human language. The following theme and subtheme helped in the composition of finding #2:

Theme 6: Animate nature of happiness.

Subtheme 6.1: Happiness is pure consciousness beyond mind.

Finding #3: Happiness is Possible Without an External Quest for MaterialPossessions or Satisfaction of Desires

Finding #3—happiness is possible without an external quest for material possessions or satisfaction of desires—asserts that it possible to be happy irrespective of any external factors. Finding #3 is associated to the second and third research questions, respectively, do sadhus perceive themselves to be happy people? And if so, what do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness? The following two findings and four themes led to the formulation of Finding #3.

Finding #1: Everyone’s true nature is infinite happiness to be discovered within

Finding #2: Happiness has an animate nature. Happiness is identical with consciousness but distinct from the human mind.

Theme 2: Happiness is our true nature.

Theme 3: Everything in this world is temporary except happiness.

Theme 7: Sadhus are very happy people.

Theme 12: Renunciation and living a simple life.
Detailed Interpretations of Findings

In the following subsections, I discuss detailed interpretations of each finding in the context of existing literature of happiness: its connection to philosophical literature on happiness, Western psychological traditions, and the field of positive psychology.

**Finding #1: Everyone’s True Nature is Infinite Happiness to be Discovered Within**

Finding #1 asserts that everyone’s true nature is infinite happiness to be discovered within. The sadhus explained the real nature of happiness. The sadhus said that all human beings on this planet are oriented toward happiness through all their actions, and this orientation is because happiness is their own nature. However, they said, ordinary people do not know that happiness only lies within them as their very own true nature, and it is due to their innate ignorance about the reality of their self. Due to this primordial ignorance, most people wrongly believe happiness depends on external factors and thus constantly remain involved in the possession of material objects or the satisfaction they get after fulfillment of desires. But ultimately, they are only seeking happiness behind all their actions, which most people don’t know, lies within themselves.

The sadhus said something more about happiness. They said that real happiness, which is everyone’s most basic nature, is profound. It is unlimited, infinite, and never changes. It is like a treasure house, which if a person discovers it, never loses it. Moreover, the sadhus emphasized that all human beings have access to this treasure

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5 I note here, happiness, which is most fundamental human nature, is not an object of knowledge. Happiness is ‘the knower’ and all objects of knowledge are the manifestation of ‘the knower.’ This is the reason: happiness is a very elusive concept because it cannot be known, but it can be ‘discovered’ as everyone’s most fundamental nature.
house. They said that everyone is born with this boundless happiness. People just have to discover it. Happiness is every person’s essence—human beings’ most fundamental true nature.

While asserting that most people try to ‘attain’ happiness in the outside material world, and enduring happiness lies hidden within every human being, the sadhus said that people ought to ‘discover’ happiness to become free from all suffering. An enlightened bard once sang,

O you foolish musk deer, you sought for the fragrance everywhere but in your own body. That is why you did not find it. If you only had touched your nostrils to your own navel, you would have found the cherished musk and would have saved yourself from suicide on the rocks below (Yogananda, 1956, p. 50)

In his article—Where is Happiness? that appeared in his book, Integral Yoga Today—Swami Jyotirmayananda tried to express, what is it like to ‘discover’ happiness, when he wrote,

In science, when Archimedes discovered the law of buoyancy, he got up from his bathtub and shouted, “Eureka, Eureka! I found it! I found it!” Whenever you discover something hidden, it is a thrilling experience. When a sage of the Upanishads discovered the bliss of the heart [pure happiness], he uttered in ecstasy, “Haavu, haavu, haavu; ahamannam, ahamannam, ahamannam” — “What a wonder, what a wonder, what a wonder! I am this material world. I am the matter, and I am the eater of matter. I am the spirit that feeds on the matter. My glory lies on the mountaintop, beyond all human imaginations” (Jyotirmayananda, 1983, p. 9)

Therefore, the sadhus emphasized that immense happiness is available for recognition in everybody’s mind, but people have to discover it within.

I note here that according to the sadhus, happiness is not a personal quality, property of mind, an individual trait, or an emotional state of mind, or even thoughts. However, happiness is available for recognition in everyone’s mind, but happiness is
distinct from the mind. How much happiness a person experiences depends on the quality or ‘stability’ of one’s mind. I will expand this idea of equanimous mind under Finding #2.

**Finding #1 in the context of Eastern Vedic texts and ancient Western philosophical literature on happiness.** Finding #1 aligns with Eastern Vedic texts and ancient Western philosophical texts on happiness in the sense that happiness is within us. Also, Finding #1 has contributed knowledge to the Western eudaimonic tradition of happiness about what happiness is.

The central idea of Finding #1 is that happiness is within. Originating from the experiences and interviews of sadhus, Finding #1 aligns with the Eastern concept of ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) that is explained in many Eastern Vedic texts, specifically Brahmananda Valli, the second chapter of Taittiriya Upanishad, and The Bhagavad Gita. These Eastern texts talk about happiness as supreme bliss and every human being’s most fundamental nature.

With subtle differences, Finding #1 also aligns with and has contributed to the Western philosophical literature on happiness, specifically, Aristotle’s concept of eudaimonic happiness (trans. Aristotle, 2017). About 2,300 years back, living on the other side of the world, Aristotle reached similar conclusions about happiness as the study’s participants. Aristotle (trans. 2017), in *Nicomachean Ethics*, stated that happiness is human telos. All goods are a means of getting happiness, whereas happiness is always an end in itself. Aristotle’s conception of happiness, ‘as an end in itself,’ is similar to the words of one of the study’s participants, Swamini Ananadmaya. While explaining the nature of happiness, she said, “happiness is … common, human ultimate choice-less goal.
for everybody” (personal communication, April 2, 2018). Like Aristotle, she also emphasized happiness is human telos, an end in itself.

Aligned with the essence of Finding #1—happiness is within—Aristotle coined a concept of eudaimonic happiness that also has an inward focus. The eudaimonic tradition of happiness focuses on internal drivers of happiness like meaning in life and self-realization and defines well-being in terms of how much a person is fully functioning (trans. Aristotle, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Waterman, 1993). Within his eudaimonic tradition of happiness, Aristotle (trans. 2003) asserted that happiness depends on ourselves. Aristotle’s assertion, which resonates with the ideas of other Greek philosophers like Plato and the Stoics, essentially links happiness with virtue (Vitrano, 2014), which is a personal quality or a trait—such as self-control, courage, equanimity (good temper), altruism, compassion, or forgiveness—implying happiness is within.

Therefore, Aristotle’s idea that happiness depends on ourselves and Finding #1—everyone’s true nature is infinite happiness to be discovered within—are similar in the sense that both imply happiness is inside of each person and depends on the person, not on external factors. However, this study’s Finding #1 goes a step further and says that not only does happiness depend on the person, but happiness is essentially our being.
human’s most fundamental true nature. The difference is that whereas Aristotle’s idea describes what makes people happy (virtuous actions), Finding #1 describes what is happiness. Thus, this study has contributed new knowledge of what happiness is to the ancient Western philosophical literature on eudaimonic tradition of happiness.

Finding #1 contributes to the idea of meaning in life and differs from existentialism, nihilism, and absurdism. The most fundamental philosophical question is: what is the meaning of existence? Finding #1 says everyone’s true nature is infinite happiness to be discovered within, and it also asserts that discovery of happiness is the purpose of every life.

Finding #1, with the support of Theme 1—everyone is oriented toward happiness—emphasizes happiness is something toward which everyone is oriented at all times through all their actions. Therefore, happiness should be discovered within to become free from all suffering. A few sadhus directly said that discovery of happiness is the purpose of every human life; unless an individual discovers happiness, that person will continue to struggle through cycles of rebirths and deaths. In the words of Swamini Ananadmayi,

… it has to be accomplished. Unless and until you accomplish, your search will be continuous. Endless search. Which means, there is no way or relaxing. You will be slogging. You can’t help slogging unless and until you discover it. (personal communication, April 2, 2018)

Finding #1, which emphasizes happiness is inside every human being, does not contradict with Theme 6.2 that implies happiness is infinite, has no boundaries, and is all-pervasive. Happiness is inside an individual does not mean that happiness is bounded by body limitations. Happiness is all-pervasive and is also available for recognition in every human mind, yet it is separate from the mind. This concept is better understood in conjunction with Finding #2, which implies that happiness exists independently, separate from all physical matter, minds, and bodies.
Her words suggest this existence has an intrinsic meaning for humans to discover permanent happiness and be free from all sufferings. For a long time, many philosophers believed there is no real intrinsic meaning in the universe's existence. After the Holocaust, during World War II, many people lost all hope, which further bolstered the idea that this existence is a random creation of God or some higher power, and there is no intrinsic meaning in the universe. Finding #1 differs from the philosophical ideas like existentialism (Crowell, 2017; trans. Sartre, 1973), nihilism (trans. Nietzsche, 2018), and absurdism (Camus, 1991; Pölzler, 2018), all of which assume there is no real intrinsic meaning in the universe.

Existentialism (trans. Sartre, 1973) is the belief that by free will, choice, and responsibility, one can construct their own meaning within a world, but the world has no intrinsic meaning of its own. Similarly, nihilism (trans. Nietzsche, 2018) is the idea that not only is there no intrinsic meaning in the universe, but it is meaningless even to try to construct meaning in life as an alternative. Absurdism (Camus, 1991) is a belief that a search for meaning is inherently in conflict with absence of meaning in the universe; therefore, one should accept both and rebel against it by embracing what life presents to us.

However, according to the sadhus, the purpose of life has always been in front of everyone, in the past and the present, as all people are oriented toward happiness at all times. They said one must discover the true happiness within as the primary goal of human life. They meant the sadhus need things for a living; they don’t live for things. The sadhus live for the discovery of happiness.
**Finding #1 considering modern happiness research.** Below, I discuss the similarities and differences of Finding #1 in the context of modern-day literature on happiness and psychological well-being, including Dambrun and Ricard’s (2011) proposal on psychological well-being and Achor’s research (2010).

**Finding #1 and Dambrun and Ricard’s proposal.** Finding #1, which states happiness is fundamental human nature, aligns with Dambrun and Ricard’s proposal in which they stated, “we propose that attaining authentic happiness is linked to the way we relate to the notion of a self, and more particularly to its nature” (Dambrun & Ricard, 2011, p. 138)

Authors Dambrun and Ricard (2011) presented a theoretical model that emerged from various disciplines: Western psychology, social and cognitive psychology, intercultural psychology, developmental psychology, philosophy, and Eastern contemplative traditions like attention-vigilance. Their model indicates the attainment of happiness is linked to the self and more particularly to the structure of the self. The perception of the self as a permanent, independent and solid entity leads to self-centered psychological functioning and it is a significant source of affliction and fluctuating happiness. However, when people perceive themselves of having a flexible self, it generates authentic-durable happiness. The authors (Dambrun & Ricard, 2011) claim authentic happiness is not dependent on the variability of outer conditions, which aligns with this study’s Theme 3 and Theme 4. Authentic happiness is lasting therefore, Dambrun and Ricard (2011) referred to it as authentic-durable happiness, marked by complete contentment, peace of mind, and bliss.

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Happiness precedes everything. Finding #1 states that from the perspective of sadhus, happiness is human beings’ true nature and everyone is born with it, which implies that happiness precedes ‘everything.’ This means everything is a consequence of happiness, and happiness comes first. Below, I discuss this assertion that ‘happiness precedes everything’ in the context of modern happiness research.

Recently, there have been many studies that aimed to find out what comes before: happiness or career success, happiness or employee engagement, psychological well-being or employee productivity levels, and likewise. After knowing the reality of happiness from the sadhus, Finding #1 asserts that happiness precedes everything. Finding #1 aligns with Achor’s (2010) research, which concluded that happiness comes before success. According to Achor, people become more successful when they are happier and more positive, not the other way around. Finding #1 is consistent with Achor’s theory of happiness to the point that happiness ‘precedes,’ but it cannot confirm if happiness is a predictor of ‘success.’ Achor’s theory nonetheless proves that happy people are more successful (Achor, 2010). Worldly success (pains and pleasures) depends on many factors, the explanation of which lies beyond this research. However, still I note here that the sadhus mentioned they deal with worldly pains and pleasures happily with equanimity (stability) of mind (see Theme 7) and remain happy, always. For more details, please refer to sub-subheading—An equanimous mind experiences the bliss of consciousness (or pure happiness)—under Finding #2.

Likewise, the Finding #1-based inference that happiness precedes ‘everything’ aligns well with Robertson, Birch, and Cooper’s (2012) study on over 9,000 employees
across 12 organizations intending to test the hypothesis that a combination of positive job and work attitudes (employee engagement) and psychological well-being are better predictors of productivity levels of employees than positive job and work attitude alone. The researchers found that psychological well-being has incremental value over and above positive job and work attitudes in predicting self-reported levels of performance, supporting that happiness is human’s most fundamental nature from which originates everything.

Similarly, Walsh, Boehm, and Lyubomirsky (2018) tried to determine if happiness precedes career success. Finding #1 again aligns well with researchers’ conclusion that happiness precedes career success.

*Happiness is a broader concept.* From the perspective of sadhus, happiness, it seems is a more significant and bigger concept compared to well-being, considering our usual sense of the terms.

During the 1990s, when the field of positive psychology started to gain popularity, the original goal of positive psychology was happiness in terms of life satisfaction, to increase people's life satisfaction (Seligman, 2011). However, in the year 2002, the goal of positive psychology was expanded to human flourishing operating under the well-being theory (Seligman, 2012). The way happiness is typically understood, it is considered only a small component of well-being which is related to positive emotions or a state of mind, while well-being includes positive emotions and other four components: engagement, relationships, meaning in life, and accomplishment, according to the well-being theory (Seligman, 2012).
This study found, from the perspective of sadhus, happiness is our most fundamental nature (Theme 2 and Finding #1); it is everlasting and unchanging (Theme 4), and sadhus referred to happiness as all-pervasive and infinite (Subtheme 6.2). So, from the perspective of sadhus' happiness is a broader concept compared to well-being.

**Finding #1 questions the happiness set-point theory.** Finding #1 of the present study differs from the set-point theory of happiness, which forms a dominant, paradigm theory in subjective well-being (SWB) research that developed cumulatively over the last thirty years (Headey, Schupp, Tucci, & Wagner, 2010). Brickman et al.’s (1978) research showed that after the initial euphoria of lottery winners died down, they were no happier than people with spinal cord injuries. They coined a ‘set point’ theory of happiness and well-being that assumes people have a fixed ‘average’ level of happiness around which their day-to-day and moment-to-moment happiness varies.

There are a few variants of the set-point theory that holds people are programmed to experience a certain degree of happiness, irrespective of how well they are doing (Veenhoven, 2009). According to these variants of set-point theory, long term SWB of adult individuals is stable because it depends on their personality traits and other stable genetic factors (Headey et al., 2010). A variant of the set-point theory of happiness holds that happiness cannot be raised lastingly because people are mentally programmed for a certain degree of happiness, thereby focusing on personality traits that maintain this attitude (Headey & Wearing, 1992). Another genetic-based variant of the set-point theory says that an innate disposition largely determines happiness of people, which is heritable, and account for nearly 80% of happiness (Lykken, 1999).
However, in the past, some theorists have rejected set-point-based theories of happiness. The researchers believe many unfortunate individuals who experience these radical changes in life circumstances do not come back to their pre-incidence levels of happiness (Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2009). Therefore, the researchers believe the idea a set-point may not be considered fixed. Similarly, Veenhoven (2009) mentioned set-point theory implies that there is little value in happiness and that there are fewer chances of increasing happiness levels enduringly and this goes against the utilitarian tenet that people should aim at greater happiness for a greater number. Likewise, Finding #1 of the present study also seems to differ from the happiness set-point theory or its variants, but for different reasons. Finding #1, with the support of Subtheme 6.2 and Theme 4 states, from the perspective of sadhus, happiness is infinite that does not change, suggesting that there are no average levels of real happiness that lies within. Happiness is everyone’s constant, eternal, and unchanging true nature.

Finding #1 is also related to Finding #2 because both are associated with the first research question—what is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?

Finding #2: Happiness has an Animate Nature. Happiness is Identical with Consciousness but Distinct from the Human Mind

Under this heading, within the limits of human language, I explain my interpretation of Finding #2 that says happiness has an animate nature, and happiness is identical with human consciousness, but separate from mind (by extension human bodies, senses, and the universe).
This section has three sections. In the first section, I present a detailed interpretation of Finding #2—the animate nature of happiness and its relation to human consciousness and mind. In the second section, I explain three ideas that are essential for the understanding of contributions of Finding #2 to Western psychology and the literature on happiness. In this second section, first, I briefly compare the Eastern and Western psychologies. Then I describe the human mind as a reflective body part from the perspective of sadhus. Finally, I explain, again from the standpoint of sadhus, how an equanimous mind experiences the bliss of consciousness. Finally, under this heading, I present Finding #2’s contribution to the Western psychological literature and state its differences with modern psychological happiness theories.

**Interpretation of Finding #2.** The crux of Finding #2 is that happiness (or pure consciousness) is distinct from the human mind. There are two ideas under Finding #2. First, happiness has an animate nature (Theme 6). Second, the “animate” happiness is identical to pure consciousness but distinct from the mind (Subtheme 6.1). Below, in two separate subheadings, I describe the above two ideas.

**Happiness has an animate nature.** The present study revealed that happiness has an animate nature (Theme 6). Owing to its animated nature, some sadhus referred to happiness as “the knower of all known” (Swamini Brahmananda, personal communication, January 1, 2018). Another sadhu said, “the knower of all our actions and inspirer and the carer, nurturer, full of mercy” (Swamini Keshwananda, personal communication, May 1, 2018). Therefore, the words of sadhus show that happiness is “the knower,” therefore it has an animate nature.
Consciousness (or happiness) and mind are distinct. Because happiness is “the knower,” also means happiness is “conscious.” Therefore, happiness is identical with consciousness. However, happiness (or consciousness) is distinct from the mind (Subtheme 6.1). Happiness is “the knower” means that happiness is human awareness or consciousness within which individual thoughts arise. According to the sadhus, happiness is the witness of human thoughts and emotions.

Many people believe the mind and the brain are distinct, are of different nature (Sage, 2011). The mind is a living thing, and the brain is a non-living thing, to say, the mind is ‘conscious,’ and the brain is ‘unconscious.’ However, from the perspective of the sadhus, the present study revealed that mind and brain are not distinct. Both mind and brain are of the same nature, i.e., both are body parts. However, it is consciousness (or happiness) that is rather distinct from both mind and brain (Subtheme 6.1). I will discuss this idea further under Finding #3. See Figure 3.

![Diagram](image-url)

**Figure 3.** Happiness is “the knower,” thus it has an animate nature. Happiness is identical with consciousness but distinct from the human mind and brain.

I will try to explain in another way that consciousness is separate from the mind (Subtheme 6.1). Most people are aware of three states of consciousness: the wakeful
state, the dream state, and the deep sleep (dreamless) state. In the deep sleep state, the mind disappears (no thoughts), but the consciousness stays present because that consciousness perceives the ‘darkness’ or ‘nothingness’ of the deep sleep state.

The following texts from the Vedantic literature support the above idea that consciousness is present in deep sleep, even when the mind is not present, showing that consciousness is separate from the mind. “But Advaita holds that pure consciousness persists in deep sleep too. Pure consciousness is unchanging, eternal, different from the body-organ-mind (and by extension the entire external universe), unlimited by time and space.” (Sarvapriyananda, 2017, p. 8). Likewise, in his article on Vedantic literature, Burch (2018) also mentioned that consciousness is the unchanging bliss and present even in a deep sleep state of being:

Normal experience, however, has indications which point to the same truths taught by scripture. A careful study of normal experience, in its three states of waking, dream, and dreamless sleep, will lead us to the scriptural truth that self is the only reality, “un-differenced consciousness and bliss.” (Burch, 2018, p. 82)

Therefore, whereas consciousness is pure happiness, changeless, enduring, division-less, property-less, and all-pervasive (Subtheme 2.2, Theme 4, and Subtheme 6.2), human mind is continuously changing—in it lives all raging desires, memories, emotions, and thoughts. When mind relaxes, an individual experience happiness. When most people fulfill their desires, they experience more happiness, but it is short-lived. Soon, their mind generates more cravings, and their thoughts become unstable. When the mind is stable (an equanimous mind), a person experiences pure happiness because the true nature of consciousness shines through it. It is like the sun while being reflected in water; when the water is still, the pure sun shines.
Human mind from the perspective of sadhus (Eastern view)—some background knowledge. To understand Finding #2’s contributions and relation with Western psychological literature and happiness theories, some background information about the human mind from the Eastern perspective is essential. Therefore, first I briefly compare Eastern and Western psychologies to understand how both cultures conceptualize consciousness. Then I discuss how the Eastern psychological traditions view the mind as a reflective body part. Finally, I explain how an equanimous (an objective and stable) mind experiences the bliss of consciousness (or pure happiness), before turning the focus of discussion to the contributions of Finding #2 to Western psychology and explain the differences of Finding #2 with modern happiness literature.

A brief comparison of Eastern and Western psychologies. I am presenting this comparison of Eastern and Western psychologies as a piece of background knowledge to understand how Eastern and Western psychological traditions conceptualize mind and consciousness. At the outset, I note that during participant validation, a study participant, Swami Janakananda, mentioned that Eastern and Western psychologies have been unifying in recent decades. In his words,

We could also note that there has been such a blending in the recent decades that the idea of Eastern and Western psychology is not so strong as it has been historically, although still quite a valuable distinction [that I explain below]. Freud was very Western. Jung extensively studied the Eastern and integrated it into what he was doing. (personal communication, April 12, 2019)

In the Eastern traditions, there are two major systems of self-mastery. First is Vedanta, or Jnana yoga (Sanskrit: knowledge path) outlined by Shankracharya (Menon, 2017). The second system is Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (Satchidananda, 1987) or Raja
yoga (Sanskrit: the royal path) (Rama et al., 2014). Both paths are not contradictory, whereas, Vedanta is more abstract and theoretical, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali is more applied and experimental.

According to Vedantic tradition (Rama et al., 2014), mind is classified as having four functions: manas (Sanskrit: sense controls) or the lower mind, buddhi (Sanskrit: discriminative power, decision making or intellect), chitta (Sanskrit: reservoir of past impressions and memory), and ahankara (Sanskrit: sense of I-ness or ego). The self of an individual is pure consciousness (or pure happiness) beyond the mental realm, see Figure 4.

![Four mental functions of mind as per Eastern Vedantic tradition.](image)

_Figure 4._ Four mental functions of mind as per Eastern Vedantic tradition.

Freud (1856–1939), who founded psychoanalysis, a method for treating mental illness, mostly influenced early Western psychology (McLeod, 2018). According to Freud, the mind has at least three levels: 1. the conscious mind, 2. the subconscious mind, and 3. the unconsciousness mind (trans. Freud, 2005; Rama et al., 2014). Freud, conceptualized mind as an iceberg, in that the conscious mind is like the tip of an iceberg,
represents a small amount of mental activity an individual is aware of (McLeod, 2018). The subconscious is the memory area that a person could become conscious of by recalling stored information. According to Freud (trans. Freud, 2005; McLeod, 2018), the most significant and most substantial portion of mind is the unconscious, that people are not aware of, that mostly governs people’s behavior. See Figure 5.

\[ \text{Conscious} \]
\[ \text{Subconscious} \]
\[ \text{Unconscious} \]

*Figure 5.* Freud's model of mind. Mind is like an iceberg with at least three levels: conscious, subconscious, and unconscious.

Comparing the Eastern and Western psychology, *Ahamkara* (Sanskrit: sense of I-ness) is a broader concept than ego. *Ahamkara* (Sanskrit: ego) spans the entire spectrum of I-ness, from lowest animal’s efforts to maintain its integrity, through normal ego development, and beyond (Rama et al., 2014). However, in Vedantic philosophy of mind, *ahamkara* is more restrictive in its function, compared to the ego concept in the Western psychology. *Ahamkara* is just a boundary that separate I from not-I. *Ahamkara* is not an active decision-making and thought producing agent like the Western psychology’s ego.
In yoga psychology (Rama et al., 2014), it is *manas* (Sanskrit: lower mind that interact with sense organs) which produces thoughts, and it is *buddhi* (Sanskrit: function of mind to reason, decision making, intellect, or ability to discriminate) that makes the decisions, however, in the Western psychology all these functions are included under ego.

Another difference between Western and Eastern psychologies is that Western psychology studies the mind from the outside, through observing one’s behavior or personality, whereas the yoga methods of the East let the experts directly experience the vast realms of consciousness (Rama et al., 2014). In the West, psychologists use various methods to study the human mind, including Freud’s (1856–1939) method of psychotherapy or Assagioli’s (1888–1974) psychosynthesis7, whereas in the East, the yoga masters teach meditation and yoga (Rama et al., 2014).

Next, I explain how both cultures view human consciousness. Differences exist between the Eastern and Western conceptualizations of consciousness. As mentioned in Chapter 4, in Western psychology, the ego is in the center, and consciousness is the property of ego (Rama et al., 2014). In contrast, in the Eastern yoga psychological literature, consciousness exists at many levels, ego being only one level. However, even Freud (1856–1939) and Jung (1875–1961) indicated there are vast realms of awareness (mind) of which ordinary human beings are not aware, but the contents of those unknown

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7 Psychosynthesis is an approach to therapy emphasizing synthesis. Compared to pathological approaches that has higher emphasis on lower aspects of human nature, psychosynthesis emphasizes other important realities like intuition, creativity, the will, and the very core of human psyche—the self (Lombard, 2017; Rama et al., 2014).
parts of the mind interfere with human behavior (Rama et al., 2014). Further comparisons of mind from the Eastern and Western perspectives are beyond this study.

Now, I discuss what the sadhus said about the human mind during their interviews. They explained that mind is a reflective body part, like a mirror, and when people stabilize their minds (develop an equanimous mind) using various yoga methods, they experience the bliss of consciousness or unchanging boundless happiness.

The mind is a unique body part with a reflective property. The sadhus revealed that the mind is a special body part that has a reflective property. Consciousness reflects through human mind (thereby indicating consciousness is separate from the mind, the theme of Finding #2). It is like when the moon reflects sunlight; one may say it is the moon’s light, but in reality, moon borrows light from the sun and reflects it. Likewise, the mind reflects the “light” of consciousness and illumines the world. During her interview, Swamini Nirmalananda explained that on human mind, falls the reflection of true self or consciousness. In her words,

… so, this is how it is explained. Who you are, is supremely happy, always! It’s like your face. But to see your face, you need a mirror. Similarly, we have an inner mirror—our mind. If the mind is calm and clean, you see an accurate reflection. You look, and you say; I am gorgeous!! Because you see the divinity within you. But if that mind is colored, curved, bent, cracked in any way, even though your face is beautiful, you will see a distorted reflection. (personal communication, April 3, 2018)

Similarly, Swami Nigamananda tried to explain how an image of pure happiness (or consciousness) falls on the mind. In his words,

… in Vivekachudamani (a Vedic book) when Shankra talks about anandamaya kosha (Sanskrit: innermost body sheath), he said … he says the same terminology. He says … in the anandamaya kosha (Sanskrit: innermost body sheath), there is the anand pratibimb (Sanskrit: image or reflection of pure happiness or true
nature), there is the reflection of *anand* (Sanskrit: pure happiness) in the mind. And that happens when the mind relaxes. Right? (personal communication, January 31, 2018)

Next, I explain, from the perspective of the sadhus, how meditators experience the bliss of consciousness (or pure happiness) when they stabilize their mind.

*An equanimous mind experiences the bliss of consciousness (or pure happiness).* During the interviews, the sadhus mentioned that yoga and meditation was one of the key factors that influenced their happiness (Theme 11). While speaking about meditation, a few sadhus also explained the idea of an equanimous mind. They mentioned that the bliss of pure consciousness is experienced when a person has a calm and stable mind—an equanimous mind. This idea was apparent in the description of Swamini Nirmalananda, when she said, “If the mind is calm and clean, you see an accurate reflection [of consciousness]” (personal communication, April 3, 2018). Similarly, Swamini Amritananda said that the mind must be calm to experience the bliss of pure consciousness. In her words:

… all part of the human mind manifests itself like that … but the Divine presence within you is always peaceful, calm, contented, happy, joyful, radiant because if it [mind] is calm, it reflects. And, that light within you shines out, if you have that kind of contentment. (personal communication, January 20, 2018)

Thus, the above statements of sadhus show that an individual may experience immense happiness when an individual develops an equanimous mind. Among the Eastern psychological texts, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Satchidananda, 1987) specifically is all about how to develop an equanimous mind.
After presenting some background knowledge about the mind from the perspective of the sadhus, next, I discuss the contributions of Finding #2 to Western psychology and its differences with contemporary happiness theories.

**Contributions of Finding #2 to Western psychology and its differences with modern happiness theories.** Theme 6 and Subtheme 6.1 gave rise to Finding #2—Happiness has an animate nature. Happiness is identical with consciousness but distinct from the human mind. Next, I discuss the contributions of Finding #2 to Western psychological literature. Finding #2 questions René Descartes’ conception of mind and body, and it seems, it has resolved the famous mind-body problem. From the perspective of sadhus, like Finding #1 (see above, Finding #1 questions the happiness set-point theory), Finding #2 also seems to differ from the set-point theories of happiness that say happiness is a mental state or is coded in human genes.

**Finding #2 considering René Descartes’ conception of mind and the famous mind-body problem.** This study’s Finding #2, which says happiness is the consciousness beyond the human mind, has informed the Western psychological literature specifically concerning the famous mind–body problem originating out of Rene’ Descartes’ (1596–1650) conception of mind and body. In the early 1600s, a famous French philosopher, René Descartes, wrote in his thesis, now known as mind–body dualism, that the mind and body are distinct (Skirry, 2018). Descartes concluded that the mind is entirely different from the body. He said the mind is a thinking thing, and the body is a non-thinking thing, and they are entirely separate, and it is possible for one to exist without the other. This conclusion gave rise to the famous mind–body problem, a matter of debate until today.
The problem is, how does human mind trigger some of human bodily functions, for example, grabbing a pen with hand for writing; and how can body’s sense organs like eyes cause sensations in the mind when the bright light falls into eyes if the mind and body are entirely different? How do the mind and the body interact, if they are altogether separate?

The descriptions of the sadhus and Finding #2 lend credence to the idea that both mind and body are connected and of the same nature (see Figure 3 above). In contrast, it is human consciousness (or pure happiness as fundamental human nature) that is separate from both the mind and body. If both mind and body are of the same kind, and different from consciousness, then it seems the question arising out of Descartes’ mind–body dualism—how do mind and body interact if they are of separate natures?—does not occur. See Figure 6.

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**Finding #2 differs from modern theories of happiness.** Finding #2 questions the modern theories of happiness that define happiness as psychological or coded in our
genes or DNA. One of the main contributions of Finding #2 is in clearing up the confusion about two questions: What is happiness? And what causes happiness? Finding #2 has drawn a fine line between what happiness is and what makes people happy. Many people are often confused when answering these two questions. Often when we ask people—what is happiness? They start to explain in terms of what makes them happy. For instance, if we ask someone, "what in your opinion is happiness?" They would often reply, "In my opinion, true happiness is being with my friends," thereby answering the question, what makes them happy. This confusion applies even to some happiness researchers. For example, if a sociologist finds out that chatting with friends on the weekends makes people very happy, the researcher would likely conclude that social relationships precede happiness.

The present study suggests there is only one source of happiness—human beings’ true nature\(^8\) (Finding #1) that does not interfere with their mental realm (Finding #2). That one source of happiness is separate from their mind and body (including their mental experiences, emotions, thoughts, even virtuous actions, and the objective universe). As for what makes people happy, the present study indicates that as mind relaxes, an individual experiences more and more happiness, originating from that single source of infinite happiness (Themes 9 through 12). Accordingly, like Finding #1 (see above—Finding #1 questions the happiness set-point theory), Finding #2 also seems to question happy theories that claim happiness is coded in human genes or DNA (Brickman

\(^8\) Our true nature is not merely subjective; it is identical with everyone's true nature. Please refer to Subtheme 6.2—happiness is all-pervasive and infinite.

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et al., 1978). Likewise, Finding #2 also seems to question happiness theories that assume happiness is an emotional, psychological state of mind (Annas, 2011; Hare, 1969; Kekes, 1992; McFall, 1989; Simpson, 1975; Smart, 1973).

However, the present study's Finding #3 (in the next section) is about what makes people happy. Finding #3 indicates that happiness does not depend on external factors. People do not always have to seek external sources of happiness to be profoundly happy. According to the sadhus, one can discover boundless joy by moving inward toward that single source of happiness—which is none other than most fundamental human nature.

In conclusion, from the perspective of sadhus, Finding #2 indicates that happiness has an animate nature, and it is identical to human consciousness but distinct from the human mind. The inferences made from Finding #2 questions René Descartes’ conception of mind and seems to resolve the famous mind–body problem. Finding #2 also questions the modern happiness theories that claim happiness is coded in human genes or is a mental state of being.

From Finding #1 and Finding #2, it seems the field of consciousness studies and the field of happiness studies, positive psychology per se, are possibly studying an identical phenomenon. Also, from Finding #1 and Finding #2 originated another significant finding—Finding #3, which says people do not have to depend on external worldly success to be happy. I discuss this finding next.
Finding #3: Happiness is Possible Without an External Quest for Material Possessions or Satisfaction of Desires

Finding #3 states that happiness is possible without an external quest for material possessions or satisfaction of desires. Finding #3 is associated with the second and third research questions: Are sadhus happy people, and if so, what factors do sadhus believe influence their happiness? Finding #1 says happiness is everyone’s true nature, and Finding #2 says happiness exists alone and has nothing to do with external factors. This leads to Finding #3, which states happiness is possible without an external quest for material possessions or satisfaction of desires.

Themes 7 and 12 confirm Finding #3 because sadhus are very happy people irrespective of their external conditions, while living the most basic life. Sadhus’ lives show that when people remove the “extras” from life, their mind relaxes⁹, and they start experiencing the pure happiness of their own true nature—more and more.

During the interviews, not only did the sadhus report experiencing profound and unbroken happiness, no sadhu expressed any negative emotions or complained or showed anger. Instead, the sadhus joyfully and enthusiastically took part in the discussions and supported the follow-up calls after the interviews. It is interesting to note that even though sadhus live a simple and basic life and have renounced all their material possessions, relationships, jobs, and desires (Theme 12), sadhus were still found to be

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⁹ Besides living a simple life with less desires, in Eastern traditions there are other ways to relax the mind, like yoga and meditation techniques, devotion toward the Divine or some higher power, living for others, development of virtues, studying the knowledge of self—Vedanta (wisdom). Please refer to study results Theme 9 through Theme 12 in Chapter 4.
very happy (Theme 7). During the interviews, 90% of the sadhus mentioned that external conditions are temporary and do not make a person happy or unhappy (Theme 3) because happiness lies within (Theme 2 and Finding #1). At the same time, Finding #2 says happiness is indeed separate from people’s external experiences (world). Thus, Finding #1 and Finding #2 led to the formulation of Finding #3, and Themes 7 and 12 (along with Themes 2 and 3) supply evidence for and confirm Finding #3—happiness is possible without an external quest for material possessions or satisfaction of desires. See Figure 7.

Figure 7. Pure happiness is separate from mind, which implies happiness is possible without an external quest for material possessions and satisfaction of desires.
**Finding #3 supports the research showing a weak relationship between life circumstances and well-being.** Finding #3 aligns with research and theories showing a weak relationship between life circumstances and well-being. Past studies showed an average 10% variance in people’s well-being due to their life circumstances (Argyle, 2001; Boniwell, 2012; Diener et al., 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

In the earlier studies, the researchers were disappointed by small effect sizes for the external, objective variables that influenced people’s subjective well-being (SWB). Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976) found that demographic factors like age, sex, income, race, education, and marital status accounted for less than 20% of the variance in SWB. A study by Andrews and Withey (1976) could only account for only 8% by using these variables. Moreover, Argyle (1999) suggested that external circumstances account for about 15% of the variance in SWB reports. These statistics are in line with Finding #3, which suggests happiness is independent of the external conditions.

**Finding #3 questions the hedonism theory of happiness.** Finding #3, which asserts that happiness is not dependent on external factors, questions the hedonism theory of happiness (Gauthier, 1967; Heathwood, 2008; Jeske, 1996; Matsushita, 1984; Veenhoven, 2003b; Weijers, 2016). Built on the works of an ancient Greek philosopher, Epicurus (341–271 BCE), and two famous modern era philosophers, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), hedonism is the theory of happiness. It states that pleasure and pain are the only two things of ultimate importance that motivate human beings (Weijers, 2016). Hedonism upholds that pleasure is the only thing intrinsically valuable that leads to happiness. Pain distracts people from happiness.
(Vitrano, 2014). Thus, hedonists advocate that life’s goal is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

However, the sadhus indicated happiness is independent of external factors. Happiness is human beings’ true nature (Theme 2) and is separate from people’s outside world (Subtheme 6.1), including their mind-body-sense complex. Supporting this view, Swamini Keshwananda said, “there is nothing outside of you that can make you happy” (personal communication, May 1, 2018), and other sadhus also repeatedly mentioned that fulfillment of worldly desires brings happiness, but it is too short-lived. Thus, Finding #3 differs from the hedonism theory of happiness.

Finding #3’s general contribution to society. Finding #3’s statement that happiness is possible without an external quest for material success may bring a sense of relief to many struggling people who are trying to be successful in the world to be happy. Finding #3 may make people feel independent and free, in the sense that they do not have to depend on other people or things to be happy and satisfied.

Finding #3 in the context of the three pillars of positive psychology. Finding #3’s assertion that happiness does not depend on external factors has informed all “three pillars” of positive psychology. A new branch of psychology, the field of positive psychology that flourished two decades ago, primarily focused on happiness and positive human functioning. Positive psychology has three levels or pillars (Boniwell, 2012; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000): 1) positive subjective experiences; 2) positive individual traits like courage, compassion, integrity, spirituality, and wisdom; and 3)
creation and functioning of positive institutions. Below, I discuss contributions of Finding #3 to each of the three pillars of positive psychology.

Finding #3’s contributions to the first pillar of positive psychology: People’s positive subjective experiences. Finding #3 has supplied knowledge to the first pillar of positive psychology in terms of people’s present moment experiences, which can be developed via meditation or developing virtue of solitude that sadhus regularly practice (Theme 11).

Finding #3 suggests that without seeking external sources of happiness, one can be happier. People can be happier without engaging themselves too much in worldly success if they are trained to live more in the present moment. Living in the present moment can increase their subjective well-being (Rosini, Nelson, Sledjeski, & Dinzeo, 2017). Subjective well-being (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2012; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005) is an idea related to the first pillar of positive psychology.

At this level, the focus of positive psychology is on people’s experiences—what makes one moment better than the next (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This pillar of positive psychology deals with valued past subjective experiences of contentment and well-being, present experiences of happiness and pleasures, and future experiences of optimism and hope.

The present study’s results that promote mediation (or similar mindfulness-based meditation practices) (Theme 11) and Finding #3 bolster the notion of present moment happiness because in the present moment, only consciousness (or happiness) exists; the influence of mind is not there. During his interview, a sadhu, Swami Gopalananda, said:
Swami Gopalananda’s statement is consistent with Figure 5 (above), which implies that people’s mental field does not interfere with pure happiness.

The present moment experiences of people are a part of people’s subjective well-being, measured with this formula: subjective well-being = overall life satisfaction + affect (Diener, 2000). Diener says ‘affect’ is an essential part of people’s subjective well-being, which means their positive or negative feelings, which relates to their present moment experiences.

As for happiness in the present moment, during his interview, Swami Gopalananda also said, “in nutshell … to be happy, one has to stay in the present. The mind travels into the future, or into the past” (personal communication, May 9, 2018). So, by using techniques of being happy in the present moment, like mindfulness-based practices or developing the virtue of solitude, people can be happy without a quest for external success or fulfillment of desires.

Finding #3 is in line with a large body of literature suggesting a positive relationship between mindfulness-based practices and psychological well-being or happiness (Baer et al., 2012; Campos et al., 2016; Hsu & Langer, 2013; Malinowski, 2013; Mandal et al., 2011; Ramasubramanian, 2016; Teeter, 2016; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). For example, Baer, Lykins, and Peters (2012) conducted a study on 77 participants engaged in a regular practice of meditation, and 75 demographically matched adults who never meditated regularly. Researchers found most mindfulness and self-compassion scores correlated
significantly with participant’s meditation experience and their psychological well-being. Also, a significant relationship between was found between meditation experience and well-being, by a combination of mindfulness and self-compassion scores. The findings suggested both mindfulness and self-compassion may play a crucial role in people’s well-being. This study suggests that happiness is within and people do not have to depend on external factors for their happiness.

So, the Finding #3-based idea—it is possible to be happy without seeking external sources of happiness, like worldly success, by living more in the present moment, by practicing meditation or solitude—has provided knowledge and support to the first pillar of positive psychology that is concerned with increasing people’s positive subjective experiences.

Also, researchers found that mindfulness training increases compassion toward self and others (Campos et al., 2016). Compassion is a virtue that one can develop with practices such as loving-kindness meditation (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008). Loving-kindness meditation is derived from ancient Tibetan Buddhist meditation practices, namely metta (Pali: benevolence or loving kindness. Pali is the sacred language of Theravada Buddhism) or maitri (Sanskrit: too much affection or friendliness) (Chödrön, 2017). The development of virtues and individual traits is associated with the second pillar of positive psychology, a topic I discuss next in the context of Finding #3.

**Finding #3’s contributions to the second pillar of positive psychology:**

**Individual traits, qualities, and positive personality.** Finding #3 claims it is possible to be happy without seeking external sources of happiness in the world. This is possible by
developing virtues. Development of virtues does not require a person to be super successful in the external world, but the person can still be happy. Ancient Greek philosophers like Plato, the Stoics, and Aristotle all said a virtuous person is a happy person (Vitrano, 2014). The sadhus are highly virtuous and very happy people (Subtheme 6.4, Theme 7, 9, 10, 11, and 12). Also, a study participant, Swamini Ananadmayi, explained human beings’ subtle calls for virtuous actions like non-hurting and helping other people are in line with, and originate from, their true nature. This is the reason that when people do virtuous actions, they feel intrinsically happy, because their true nature is happiness. Therefore, the present study and specifically Finding #3 have supplied evidence and support to the vision of the second pillar of positive psychology that focuses on improving individual qualities and virtues.

The second pillar of positive psychology is about positive personality (Boniwell, 2012; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). At this level, positive psychology aims to develop personal traits in people for them to live a good life. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi wrote, “At the individual level, it [positive psychology] is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5).

Given that the above traits are reflected in individual virtuous behaviors (Jayawickreme, Meindl, Helzer, Furr, & Fleeson, 2014), the present research and Finding #3 aligns with an increasing body of psychological literature dealing with the manifestation and consequences of virtues including spirituality, hope, gratitude, wisdom,
forgiveness, and compassion (Emmons, 1999; Harker & Keltner, 2001; McCullough et al., 1999; Peterson & Bossio, 1991; Seligman, 2004; Snyder et al., 2017; Sternberg, 2003). The present study’s results and Finding #3 has supplied evidence that virtues like wisdom, courage, kindness, altruistic pro-social behaviors, and religiosity can make people happy without seeking happiness in the external world, because sadhus are virtuous and very happy people (Themes 7, 9, 10, 11 and Subtheme 6.4).

Next, I explain some virtues that sadhus have or develop in their lives that account for their happiness (Theme 7), from the perspective of sadhus who took part in this study, and I relate them with some studies conducted previously.

Wisdom and courage (Theme 9). Historically, wisdom has always been considered a pinnacle of human development (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). The present study results (Theme 7, 9) and Finding #3 align with the literature that supports a positive relationship between wisdom and happiness (Bergsma & Ardelt, 2012). Whereas Bergsma and Ardelt found a moderate positive correlation between wisdom and happiness in their quantitative study on 7,037 participants, this research indicates that wisdom, specifically relating to the knowledge of self, Vedanta (Sanskrit: end of Vedas), is a significant factor that influences sadhus’ happiness (Theme 7, 9).

Additionally, the sadhus also linked wisdom to their sense of fearlessness or courage (Subtheme 6.4), an interesting fact because wisdom and courage are often studied together (Lopez et al., 2014). During her interview, Swamini Amritananda related wisdom to courage (fearlessness). In her words,

Fear … that kind of fear is a manifestation of wisdom. You already have the wisdom. When you are foolishly afraid, you are not in touch with your own
wisdom. If you would see a rope that is coiled up outside of the house and it’s almost dark … but … you see this, and you are screaming … it’s a snake; it’s a snake [crying gesture]. And everybody comes running … what’s the matter? Why are you yelling? Because there is a big snake there. They say, Oh! Come on. Somebody in the house goes back, gets a flashlight, comes out … Oh! I was watering the flowers and rolled up the hose and didn’t put it away. It’s my hose! (personal communication, January 20, 2018)

Whereas Swamini Amritananda emphasized that wisdom leads to courage, researchers also link courage to altruistic actions (Fagin-Jones & Midlarsky, 2007; Pury & Lopez, 2012) in the realm of positive psychology.

*Altruistic behaviors (Theme 10).* By developing altruistic pro-social behaviors like selflessly serving humanity (includes related constructs like love, empathy, compassion, and kindness), it is possible to be happy without a quest to reach success in the external world (Finding #3). The study results found that sadhus were very happy by their act of compassionately and selflessly serving others (Themes 7, 10). Finding #3 is consistent with the literature that supports a positive link between altruistic behaviors and happiness (Cassell, 2017; Dambrun & Ricard, 2011; Neff & Costigan, 2014; Pessi, 2011; Post, 2005) and thus has added support and evidence to the second pillar of positive psychology.

*Spirituality or religiosity*\(^{10}\) (Theme 11). The claim that Finding #3 made that happiness is possible without a quest in the external world is also possible by developing

\(^{10}\) Even though some differences exist, this study assumes spirituality and religiosity are similar terms (Hill et al., 2000; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). The two terms are used interchangeably in this thesis.
the virtue of spirituality, an essential virtue that positive psychology strives to improve in people.

The study results (Theme 11) and Finding #3 support a significant relationship between religiosity and happiness. For the sadhus, yoga and meditation are a part of religiosity because sadhus meditate on God or some higher power. This study has confirmed a positive relationship between religiosity and happiness and aligns with past research between religiosity and psychological well-being or happiness (Abdel-Khalek & Naceur, 2007; Francis et al., 2004, 2014; George et al., 2002; Isacco et al., 2016; Maheshwari & Singh, 2009; Mohan et al., 2004; Mookerjee & Beron, 2005; Pessi, 2011; Rossetti, 2011). For example, while investigating a link between religiosity and altruism (Pessi, 2011), the phenomenological analysis of the interview data revealed religiosity and altruism together were pivotal for people’s happiness. Likewise, Theme 11 of this study also suggests a strong religious orientation accounted for high levels of sadhus’ happiness (Theme 7).

Virtue of simplicity (Theme 12). Although the present study aligns with a vast body of literature that links happiness and virtues like wisdom, compassion, kindness, and spirituality, the present study has supplied evidence to positive psychology relating happiness with a less known virtue, namely simplicity (Theme 12). I will discuss the topic simplicity in the section about implications for further research.

Therefore, Finding #3’s suggestion that happiness is separate from people’s outer life circumstances, therefore it is possible to be happy without much success in the worldly affairs, has provided support to the second pillar of positive psychology that
strives to instill positive virtues in people for their higher well-being. Moreover, not only can people develop their virtues, there is also a concept of virtuous organizations, which I discuss next.

Finding #3’s contributions to the third pillar of positive psychology: Creation and functioning of positive institutions. The third pillar of positive psychology is about the creation and functioning of positive organizations (Caza & Cameron, 2013; Neubert, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It seems the idea of the virtuous human system is gaining momentum. Neubert argued social sciences is taking a positive turn which indicates the emergence of “virtue-based management and organizational theory” (Neubert, 2011, p. 228). Supporting this growing trend, the Finding #3 of this study claim that happiness does not depend on external conditions, therefore it is possible to be very happy without much efforts for success in the outside world through developing virtuousness in organizations. The study results indicate sadhus are very happy people (Theme 7) and serving humanity (Theme 10) is a significant predictor of their happiness. Likewise, it seems cultivation of virtuousness in organizations may also lead to employees’ happiness. Therefore, Finding #3 has provided a piece of evidence and knowledge to the third pillar of positive psychology that focuses on promoting positivity in workplaces.

The happiness of employees is critical in many organizations (McKee, 2017). Promoting virtuousness in organizations may lead to an increase in the eudaimonic happiness of employees. This notion is supported by the fact that sadhus are highly virtuous and very happy people (Themes 7, 9, 10, 11, 12), and ancient Greek
philosophers like Plato, the Stoics, and Aristotle also emphasized that virtuous people are happy people (Vitrano, 2014).

Eudaimonic happiness means engaging in right or virtuous actions and pursuing meaningful, enduring, growth-producing goals (Seligman, 2004; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Warr, 2011). Virtuousness is a concept defined as goodness for its own sake (trans. Aristotle, 2017; Chapman & Galston, 1992; Comte-Sponville, 2002). Therefore, an essential element of virtuousness is that it is not a means to obtain another end but is an end in itself\(^{11}\), a personal and social betterment (Bright, Cameron, & Caza, 2006; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007).

The present study results show that sadhus engage themselves in many pro-social activities (Theme 10) and are very happy people (Theme 7). For instance, they selflessly take part in helping other people and believe that serving humanity is a significant factor that influences their happiness (Themes 7, 10). The present study’s results and Finding #3 are therefore in line with and have added evidence to a growing body of literature that emphasizes virtuousness in organizations that fosters eudaimonic happiness and positivity (Baer & Lykins, 2011; McKee, 2017; O’Donohoe & Turley, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Rego, Ribeiro, Cunha, & Jesuino, 2011). Thus, Finding #3 has contributed to the third pillar of positive psychology by supplying evidence and

\(^{11}\) It is interesting to note, the characteristic of virtuousness is pursued as an end in itself the same way that happiness is pursued as an end in itself. Swamini Atmaprakasananda, a study participant, also explained that human beings’ subtle calls for doing virtuous actions (moral and pro-social behaviors) originate from their true nature—which is happiness.
knowledge to the body of literature that shows virtuousness in organizations can increase workers’ eudaimonic happiness.

In conclusion, after further analysis of the study’s results, three significant findings became clear. Finding #1 is that everyone’s true nature is infinite happiness to be discovered within. Finding #2 is that happiness has an animate nature. Happiness is identical with human consciousness but distinct from the human mind. Finding #3 is that happiness is possible without an external quest for material possessions or satisfaction of desires. While all three findings align with the Vedic texts of Eastern religious and psychological traditions, the three findings also align well with Aristotle’s eudaimonic tradition of happiness (trans. Aristotle, 2017), with subtle differences. However, the study findings question the hedonism theory of happiness, René Descartes’ conception of mind and body, and happiness theories that assume happiness is an emotional state of mind or coded in human genes. The study’s findings have added support and supplied evidence to all three pillars of positive psychology that aim to improve people’s positive subjective experiences, develop virtuous traits in people, and create positive organizations.

In the next two major sections, I discuss the implications of this study on further research and practice.

**Implications for Further Research**

In this section, I present the implications of this study on future research in the field of positive organizational scholarship (POS), field of consciousness research, spirituality in organizations, and simplification of business processes in organizations.
This study found, discovering pure happiness within is the most important purpose of sadhus’ life. The sadhus’ goal of life connotes with Aristotle’s conceptualization of happiness, as he too believed happiness is human *telos* (Vitrano, 2014), an end in itself, and all other goods are a means toward obtaining happiness (Aristotle, 2017). As for ordinary people, happiness is a primary goal for many individuals. This means that happiness is also a primary goal for many employees in the context of organizations. During their interviews, the sadhus reported ordinary people, quite subconsciously, eventually pursue happiness through different motivations like health, family, social relationships, career, money, homes, or cars. Therefore, people are generally oriented toward happiness through their actions. Given the value of happiness in human life, I next discuss the implications of this study for further research.

**Implications for Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS)**

Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) is a crucial field of research in positive psychology, and POS is a response to the third pillar of positive psychology (Cameron et al., 2003). The scholars of POS integrate ideas from positive psychology researchers and deliver strategies to build positivity in institutions. These scholars premised POS on the assumption that individuals and organizations are inherently eudaimonic and seek goodness for their intrinsic value (Caza & Cameron, 2013; Dutton & Sonenshein, 2009). Sometimes people naturally love to do virtuous actions for their own sake, not for the sake of anything else. As per sadhus, the motivation to do right and virtuous actions originate from basic human nature (which, as per sadhus, is none other than boundless happiness—Theme 2). For example, when people want to help their neighbor, they
normally do not do it for the sake of money or anything else; they naturally want to help. This urge to help others originates from human beings’ most fundamental nature, but most people are not aware that the origin of their motivations to conduct right actions is their essential nature.

In the past, criticism about POS suggests that it has a positive bias and does not consider the realities and issues in the organizations (Caza & Carroll, 2011), and some researchers even questioned the need for adopting an explicitly “positive” focus (Fineman, 2006; Hackman, 2009). From the study results (Theme 2 and Finding #1), I suggest that the scholars and researchers of POS may consider continuing forward with their explicit “positive” focus on happiness with an assumption that happiness is within and is most important for individuals including employees in organizations.

**Implications for the Field of Consciousness Studies**

The researchers in consciousness research assume consciousness is subjective, characterized by privileged first-person access (Overgaard, 2017). From Subthemes 6.1 and 6.2, Finding #1, and Finding #2, this study finds that happiness is identical to consciousness. From the perspective of sadhus, consciousness is not just subjective. The present research indicates there is one universal consciousness that has no material qualities, and is constant, enduring, all-pervasive, and identical to happiness (Subthemes 6.1, 6.2, Findings #1, #2).

One of the most foundational questions in Western philosophy and Eastern cultures, and now prevalent in the field of consciousness research, is who am I? What is the self? (Schaefer & Northoff, 2017; Seth, 2012). Consciousness research strives to
know who humans are essentially, and what is the non-physical and multidimensional reality of humans. The present study suggests that humans are essentially “happiness,” because happiness is their most fundamental nature (Theme 2 and Finding #1). Finding #2 also suggests that happiness and consciousness are identical. From these results and findings, it seems the field of happiness research (positive psychology) and the field of consciousness research are studying the same phenomenon, so they might eventually merge.

**Spirituality in Organizations**

The present study’s results and findings suggest that the development of spirituality in organizations is possibly important for the happiness of employees. At the outset, I note here that the implementation of workplace spirituality is challenging. The realization of spirituality in organizations is nevertheless important for employees to be happy. Happiness of employees is possible in ethical work cultures, and ethics is closely associated to spirituality. This study found sadhus are both highly spiritual and ethical people (Themes 10 and 11) and very happy people (Theme 7).

The sadhus are spiritual and choice-lessly ethical people. The data analysis in this study found that the sadhus who are spiritual and virtuous people (Themes 9 through 12), and also very happy (Theme 7), are also ethical beings. While living a spiritual life, sadhus completely dedicate themselves to the practice of dharma (Sanskrit: ethics, moral duties written in the Vedas). By strictly adhering to dharma (Sanskrit: an ethical life), they practice ahimsa (Sanskrit: non-hurting) throughout their lives. Ahimsa (Sanskrit: non-hurting) is the primary moral code in the Vedas, which includes all other moral
duties and actions like non-lying, non-stealing, and non-killing. During her interview, while pointing to the sadhus, Swamini Ananadmayi explained in detail how a committed spiritual person is undoubtedly an ethical person, quite choice-lessly. In her words,

... so, spiritual person who has _purusharth nischaya_ (Sanskrit: strong determination to seek self-knowledge or liberation as a goal of life), who is committed to the pursuit, he, who is called spiritual person ... and spiritual person is definitely religious as well as ethical. Because see, he is prayerful and worshipful, and he is also ethical. Why ethical? A spiritual person is helplessly ethical, choice-lessly ethical. Because as spiritual person ... you know ... _purushartha_ (Sanskrit: purpose of life) is _moksha_ (Sanskrit: liberation). Pursuit is _moksha_ (Sanskrit: liberation) and it is choice-less. And for which what you need is knowledge. And for knowledge, mind must be prepared. Without mental preparation, how much that you study, assimilation will not be possible. Without assimilation, knowledge is of no use. So, knowledge becomes ‘effective knowledge’ only when assimilated. For assimilation, one must have the prepared mind. So, to have the prepared mind, one has to choice-lessly live a life of _dharma_ (Sanskrit: moral life). (personal communication, April 2, 2018)

Therefore, Swamini Ananadmayi’s statement suggests that a committed spiritual person is very likely an ethical person—and likely a happy individual (Theme 7).

Recently, after a series of corporate scandals and unethical practices that dominated the news, such as Enron, Arthur Andersen, AIG, and Tyco, an increasing number of business schools started teaching workplace spirituality (Rhodes, 2006) because ethics is the essence of spirituality (Reave, 2005). Spirituality in organizations is a movement that has recently gained tremendous momentum. In the USA, there is a “spiritual awakening” happening in organizations (Garcia-Zamor, 2003, p. 593), so one cannot ignore the theme of organizational spirituality (Tecchio, Cunha, & Santos, 2016). Also, over four-fifths of Americans believe in some higher power (Gallup, 2008; Pew Research, 2015). A review of literature on workplace spirituality found research on spirituality in organizations has grown exponentially from 1 publication in the year 1986
to 72 publications in the year 2013, as indexed in the Scopus database (Tecchio et al., 2016).

Although the concept of spirituality in organizations is a complex phenomenon (Tecchio et al., 2016), a demand for incorporating spirituality in organizations is originating from the workers to top executives (Burack, 1999). Organizations are still trying to develop spirituality in organizations while setting the ‘religion’ element aside\(^{12}\) (Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Hassan, Bin Nadeem, & Akhter, 2016; Milliman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2003; Rhodes, 2006; Tecchio et al., 2016).

Many scholars have tried to conceptualize spirituality in organizations in different ways; however, there is a common thread of ‘inner spirit’ that runs through all conceptualizations. For instance, Ashmos and Duchon (2000) conceptualized spirituality in organizations as a recognition that employees have an inner life that nurtures and is nurtured by significant work that takes place within a community context. Likewise, Pawar (2008) conceptualized spirituality in organizations as employee experiences of self-transcendence, meaning in life, and community in the workplace, and Pawar also acknowledges that these experiences could come from various mechanisms, including organizational ones.

Spirituality in organizations serves many benefits, including meaning in life for employees (Karakas, 2010), trust among coworkers (Hassan et al., 2016), and above all increased happiness of employees (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Garcia-Zamor, 2003). The

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\(^{12}\) However, this study assumes spirituality and religiosity are almost similar terms.
present study results support and have supplied evidence to this emerging body of literature on workplace spirituality (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; de Klerk & van der Walt, 2015; Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Gull & Doh, 2004; Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2004; Lee & Zemke, 1993; Leigh, 1997; Milliman et al., 2003; Mirvis, 1997; Sanders, Hopkins, & Geroy, 2003). Garcia-Zamor (2003) asserted many firms are encouraging spirituality in workplaces because they believe that humanistic work environment creates a win-win situation for both employees and organizations. Moreover, it is not enough that workers feel productive and effective, because many employees want to find meaning in their work, as most traditionally run corporations have ignored the basic fact of human nature. This study found sadhus are highly spiritual (Theme 8, 9, and 11) and very happy people (Theme 7).

This study suggests that organizations may initiate further research on ways to promote spirituality within workplaces. Such kinds of studies might lead to practices that could increase the eudaimonic happiness of employees.

Simplification in Organizations

“He that walks simply, walks confidently.” (Proverbs 10:9)

The sadhus showed that simplicity is a significant factor that influenced their happiness (Theme 12). Simplicity is a virtue that has not been explored much, much less in organizations. Simplicity is a virtue because it furthers human flourishing, both individual and social, and sustains nature’s ecological flourishing (Gambrel & Cafaro, 2010). Yogananda said, “Simplicity is not grinding poverty: It is not the polar opposite of
wealth. To live simply is to pursue a quiet path of moderation. In a life of balance between opposite extremes lies inner happiness” (Yogananda, 2006, p. 75)

Simplification of business processes in organizations, particularly in manufacturing units, may lead to the happiness of employees. During PennCLO’s tour to GE Management Development Institute at Crotonville, New York, it was observed GE was majorly involved in simplification of its business processes. When a GE manager was questioned, why simplification? The manager replied simplification of GE’s business processes let them compete in the market, helps them roll out their products in the market faster compared to their competitors (personal communication, October 6, 2015). So, although simplification may help companies stay ahead in the competition, “it is not a polar opposite of wealth” (Yogananda, 2006, p. 75).

Workplace complexity has been identified as a key business challenge through findings from CEO surveys conducted by IBM and KPMG (Ashkenas & Bodell, 2013), which negatively impacts workers’ productivity and workplace morale. Ashkenas and Bodell (2013) argued that managers are aware of this issue, but they are too over-worked to do anything about it. They suggested a few strategies to reduce workplace complexity, for example, a) setting up minimal management levels for faster decisions, b) to find out what is important and what is not so important, by continuous reassessment of priorities, c) having employees speak up about poor practices as senior people in organizations may unintentionally cause complexity, and d) to remove extra steps in core business processes that may introduce unwanted complexity in workplaces. So, simplification in workplaces is essential to reduce workplace complexity that would likely make employees happier.
This is because the present study indicates (Theme 12) the sadhus are very happy people living a simple life. However, further research is needed to show a positive relationship between simplicity in organizations and happiness of employees.

So, the present study has implications for POS in that POS may consider continuing to keep an explicitly “positive” focus with an assumption that happiness is within and is most essential for human beings, which is in sync with Finding #1. As for the implications of this research on the field of consciousness research, the present study shows that human consciousness and happiness are identical, and consciousness is not just subjective, but there is one enduring and all-pervasive consciousness. Therefore, both fields are likely studying an identical phenomenon. The present study also calls for further research to implement spirituality in organizations. Implementation of spirituality in organizations could be a complicated task. However, this study shows a spiritual orientation can likely make people very happy. Academic literature on spirituality in organizations is multiplying rapidly. Finally, this research also suggests more research on the simplification of business processes at the workplace. This is because living a simple life is a significant predictor of a sadhu’s happiness (Theme 12).

**Implications for Practice**

In this section, I present the implications of this study on practice concerning four areas for increasing eudaimonic happiness of employees: (a) cultivation of relaxed work environment in organizations; (b) suggestions for self-control training of the mind for leaders for developing ethical work cultures and increasing happiness of employees; (c)
suggestions for incorporating more secular mindfulness-based practices in organizations; and (d) development of virtuousness in organizations.

This research indicates happiness is within (Finding #1). This concept could be understood by reflecting on the idea of human being vs. human doing. According to sadhus, a boundless happiness is human’s essential being, which is different from human’s mental realm. To tap into inner happiness, people have to do specific actions. The doing part belongs to people’s mental field and their physical world. Doing specific activities makes people experience more or less happiness, arising out of a single source, which is human beings’ true nature. According to the sadhus, doing virtuous actions (Theme 10) and practicing yoga and meditation (Theme 11) may help people experience enduring happiness.

The present study found virtuous actions (Theme 10) and regular practice of yoga and meditation (Theme 11) (similar to mindfulness-based meditations) are two of the five factors that influence sadhus’ happiness. These two factors could more practically be applied in organizations. Other factors, like living a simple life (Theme 12) and spirituality (Themes 8, 9 and 11), are still relatively hard to implement concepts in workplace settings.

The study’s results have implications for all levels in organizations—employees, managers, and leaders. Below, I present ways organizations may use the knowledge generated from this research to make their employees happier.
**Relaxed Work Environments**

A common notion in organizations is that external rewards would make people happier. This philosophy needs to be challenged. The present study’s results suggest such awards would only make people happy for a short time (Theme 5). After receiving external rewards like wage increments, bonuses, or promotions, employees may experience elation, but it is too short-lived. After some time, when the external situations change, people generate new desires that would put them back to their normal happiness levels.

Based on the study’s result (Theme 2) that states that happiness is within, instead of relying on external rewards for employees’ happiness, organizations can create relaxed environments for their employees in which the workers can naturally be happy. Companies may develop more comfortable work environments by building work areas with reduced noise, providing clean and organized workspaces with a pleasant smell in the work settings, placing more plants on desks, allowing more natural light in offices, playing light calming music, and even creating dedicated rooms to let employees take a short nap or meditate. Furthermore, management that values fun at work (McKee, 2017) that can quickly adapt to changes may add to creating more relaxed work environments.

So, from this study’s results, organizations and leaders may create work environments in which employees’ minds become more relaxed. Organizations may use various other methods (some mentioned above) with an assumption that happiness is inside, and not in external rewards, to build more calm and relaxed work areas for the
workers. Organizations may have to create environments in which employees are naturally turned ‘inward’ toward their essential self.

**Self-Control Training of the Mind for Leaders**

The present study's results (Theme 11) suggest providing self-control training to leaders to increase happiness at workplaces because leaders' behaviors are contagious. Such self-control trainings could also help cultivate ethical work cultures in organizations.

During the interviews, the sadhus mentioned that one must practice self-control of mind to be happy (Theme 11). They reported that happiness lies in mind and sense control. They meant developing a more stable or equanimous mind, which helps the sadhus deal with anxieties in their lives (Theme 7).

The sadhus strive to tame their minds using different practices, including yoga and meditation. A few sadhus reported thoughts like unnecessary desires, anger, greed, jealousy, and delusion destabilize human minds, and this idea is consistent with and appears in the yoga philosophy of Patanjali (Satchidananda, 1987). This study suggests it is vital to give some form of self-control training of mind to corporate leaders, like mindfulness-based exercises (Kabat-Zinn, 2013), which could potentially increase the happiness of leaders and followers and also promote ethical work cultures.

**Leaders' minds influence followers' emotions.** Leaders' emotions are considered contagious (Johnson, 2008). Scholars indicated that leaders' emotions positively influence the moods of their followers (Cherulnik, Donley, Wiewel, & Miller, 2001; Lewis, 2000; Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005). This emotional contagion possibly
occurs because often leaders, especially charismatic and transformational leaders, build an emotional connection with their followers (Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1994; Gardner & Avolio, 1998; House, 1976; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Therefore, it is crucial to train the leaders' minds through self-control training of mind through secular practices like mindfulness-based meditations (Boyatzis & Yeganeh, 2012; Capa, 2014; Eisenbeiss & van Knippenberg, 2014; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Ling & Chin, 2012; Love & Maloney, 2009; Swierczek & Jousse, 2014) because leaders could likely affect the psychological well-being of their followers.

Promotion of ethical work cultures. Leaders' self-control of the mind is also essential for promoting ethical work cultures. Past research indicates most unethical conduct in organizations happens in unawareness (Jones, 1991; Rest, 1986). Leadership’s ethical decisions are critical in any organization because of their far-reaching consequences for employees and their families. Therefore, it is important to train leaders' minds so that they promote ethical work cultures in organizations by controlling their thoughts of excessive desires, jealousy, greed, and even anger. The study results (Theme 11) suggest one of the possible ways in which leaders could increase their awareness (or higher mindfulness) is through the practice of mindfulness-based meditations or some variant of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Past empirical research suggests people with higher levels of mindfulness are more likely to make ethical decisions (Ruedy & Schweitzer, 2010).

Therefore, if organizations train leaders to control their senses and thoughts using effective mindfulness-based practices (Theme 11), it will not only improve their own
psychological well-being but also the happiness of their followers, and it would also help in cultivating ethical work cultures.

**Mindfulness-Based Practices in Organizations**

As mentioned above, the study results indicated that yoga and meditation were significant factors that sadhus believed influenced their happiness (Theme 11). This theme is associated with meditation and mindfulness-based practices in organizations.

This study result (Theme 11) aligns with a considerable body of literature linking happiness with mindfulness-based practices. For more details, please refer to the sections above—Finding #3’s contributions to the first and second pillars of positive psychology.

Organizations can quickly implement mindfulness-based practices like Loving-Kindness Meditation (LKM) to increase self-compassion and awareness in employees (Chödrön, 2017; Fredrickson et al., 2008). Companies may promote practices like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) (Kabat-Zinn, 2013), or other mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) to increase present moment awareness of employees, managers, and leaders alike (Cullen, 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Roche, Haar, & Luthans, 2014). These mindfulness-based practices are secular practices, scientifically proven, cost-effective, and easy to implement in organizations that bring along with them a plethora of benefits for organizations, including happier employees.

An idea close to promoting mindfulness-based practices is the promotion of virtuousness in organizations, which I discuss next in detail.
Virtuousness in Organizations

While the development of virtues at the individual and organizational level is the vision of positive psychology, the study result (Theme 10) and specifically Finding #3 suggests that the development of virtuousness in organizations can make employees enduringly happy. Organizations may set up work cultures in which virtuous actions like kindness, compassion, altruistic works, courageous actions, or selfless pro-social behaviors are valued and encouraged. Organizations should create more opportunities for their employees to demonstrate generous and virtuous acts. For example, organizations may indirectly "remind" employees to write more gratitude emails to other staff members (Achor, 2010).

The present study found virtuous actions are intrinsically motivated and originate from people’s true nature (Theme 10). Therefore, people naturally want to do virtuous activities and help others. Specifically concerning moral or altruistic behaviors in organizations, companies should avoid setting any rewards or financial incentives for employees who display altruistic behaviors. This is because research indicates that financial incentives threaten the motivation of employees for doing the right actions (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006).

This research found that happiness, in essence, is “spiritual” in nature. Happiness is animate (Theme 6), and sadhus refer to happiness as God or some higher power (Subtheme 6.3). The sadhus referred to happiness as “the knower of all known,” “the carer,” “the nurturer,” and their “protector.” Therefore, I suggest organizations and individuals may try to change their natural attitude toward happiness from an emotional
or psychological state of mind to what happiness essentially is. It is akin to looking at the
sun, not as a bundle of energy, but personifying sun as someone who selflessly supplies
power to everyone—the source of all energy on this planet. Therefore, people may
express their gratitude toward the sun. Such an attitude will bring people closer to their
true nature, which, as per this study, is none other than pure and boundless happiness.

**Conclusion**

The goal of this study was to find the essential features (nature) of happiness from
the perspective of sadhus using a phenomenological method of inquiry. The research
answered the following questions: 1) What is the meaning of happiness from the
perspective of sadhus? 2) Do sadhus perceive themselves to be happy people? 3) What do
the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness? Twenty sadhus took
part in extended phenomenological in-depth interviews. Chapter 4 outlines 12 significant
themes and six subthemes that emerged after the inductive data analysis of the interviews.

The present study resulted in three significant findings: 1) Everyone’s true nature
is infinite happiness to be discovered within. 2) Happiness has an animate nature.
Happiness is identical with consciousness but distinct from the human mind. 3) Happiness is possible without an external quest for material possessions or satisfaction of
desires. The three findings align with Eastern religious texts and ancient Western
eudaimonic happiness literature with subtle differences. However, these findings question
the hedonic tradition of happiness and René Descartes’ concept of mind-body dualism in
Western psychological literature. This study has added evidence and support to all of the
“three pillars” (goals) of positive psychology—to improve people’s positive subjective experiences, to develop positive personalities, and to create positive organizations.

The study’s findings have implications for further research about positive organizational scholarship (POS), to keep a positive bias because the happiness of employees is paramount. Regarding the field of consciousness research, this research suggests to appreciate that the field of consciousness research and positive psychology are studying the same phenomenon. This study also calls for further research to implement spirituality in workplaces and promote simplification of business processes to increase eudaimonic happiness of employees.

As for the implications on practice, the present study’s findings suggest that organizations may use the primary finding the present study found that happiness is within. Accordingly, for the happiness of employees, the present research urges organizations to create relaxed work environments and to provide self-control training of mind, like mindfulness-based meditations, to their leaders for employees’ happiness and for the prevention of unethical practices within organizations. Secular practices like mindfulness-based meditations are essential for all levels of the workforce. This study advocates valuing and promoting virtuousness in organizations. Such measures will indeed make the American workforce happier.
Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Research Questions

The following are the research questions this study aimed to answer:

Research Question 1: What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus?

Research Question 2: Do sadhus perceive themselves to be happy people?

Research Question 3: What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness?

General Introduction and Relationship Building

I aimed to build a solid rapport with the sadhus before the interviews. Building rapport with the study participants is a key strategy of a qualitative research so the participants openly shared their knowledge (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). The interview questions were in sync with the phenomenological method to ask questions—in-depth and open-ended (Creswell, 2012).

Introduction

- Hello / Namaste / Om Namo Narayana Swami Ji (a usual way to greet a sadhu or monk in India), my name is Gopesh Sharma. I am a researcher, a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania, USA. Swami Ji X (referee), referred your name. I am researching on happiness in the lives of sadhus. This research requires me to interview and speak to the sadhus at length to find the truth about happiness as experienced by the sadhus. You have all the information from the Study Information Sheet. Do you have questions for me?
• Swami Ji, would you mind if I record this interview? I will keep the data collected from this interview and would later use it for this study’s findings (now I turn on the recorder).

• Do you mind reconfirming your willingness to take part in this study?

• In this study, I will ask you interview questions. It may last for at least 60 minutes, and I will keep my eye on the time and make sure we do not run over.

• I will ask you some questions, but the conversation is relatively open-ended. This means you do not have to stay within the questions. Is that okay with you?

• Please let me know if you have questions for me before we get started.

**Interview Questions: Part 1**

The purpose of part 1 of the interview questions was to know what, in the sadhu’s opinion, is the meaning of happiness. I designed the research questions to elicit the answer to the first research question—What is the meaning of happiness from the perspective of sadhus? The opening question was simple, straightforward, and open-ended.

The second purpose of the interview questions — part 1 was to re-create life histories of the participants, to put their life experience into context in the light of the research topic, happiness.

I asked the same interview questions to the sadhus with little variations. As for the sadhus who spoke in the Hindi language, I replaced the word happiness with the word
ananda (Sanskrit: happiness). Regarding probes, I formed the probing questions from the sadhu’s exact words and descriptions. I also asked questions about unhappiness and fear—the other end of the spectrum of happiness.

Questions

- What, in your opinion, is the happiness of sadhus? In this interview, you may tell me any stories about your life you would like to share. The question is fairly open-ended.
- What in your opinion, is ananda (Sanskrit: happiness) of sadhus? You may share any stories of your life in explaining about ananda. Please feel free to share any stories of your life.
- Concerning the other end of happiness (unhappiness), what is the reason for unhappiness?

Probes

- Please tell me more.
- Tell me more about the feeling of happiness of XYZ you just described.
- Can you give me an example or a story when you felt such a bliss or ananda? I used sadhus' own words.
- Please tell me a time in your life, a story for example, after you became a sadhu when you felt genuinely happy.
- Do you fear anything?
Interview Questions: Part 2

The purpose of interview questions – part 2 was to elicit the answer to research question 2—Do sadhus perceive themselves to be happy people?

Questions

- Do you think all sadhus are happy people?

Probes

- Please tell me more.

Interview Questions: Part 3

The purpose of the interview questions – part 3 was to reconstruct the participant’s concrete lived experience in the present moment and to elicit the answer to the third research question—What do the sadhus perceive to be the factors that influence their happiness?

Questions

- What is your typical day like? What kinds of activities do you do that give you the most happiness?

- Please tell me about your daily routine activities, a typical day in your life. What type of daily activities do you involve yourself in?

- How can people be happy?

- What message about happiness would you like to give to the general population?

- What do you think are the factors responsible for the feelings or experience of happiness you described?
How can the American working population be helped with your life experiences?

Probes

- Please tell me more.
- Please tell me more about XYZ you described.

Closing

The closing focused on obtaining permission to contact the participant again for follow up and clarifications. Another purpose of closing statements was to implement the snowballing sampling strategy of using references to approach the next real sadhus (Babbie, 1995; Crabtree & Miller, 1992).

Statements

- That concludes the interview. After listening to your interview through this voice recorder and translating it later, I may approach you to confirm with you that what you said today is the same as how I understood it. Is that okay with you?
- How should I contact you again? Please tell me the best time when I can contact you?
- Do you know any other sadhu who I should interview?

Expressing Thanks to the participant

- Thank you for taking part in this is research. It was a great pleasure meeting you, and I appreciate your willingness to share with me your life stories and the happiness you enjoy in your life.
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