



Harriet Kilpatrick Search for Happiness in Emily Henry in the *Happy Place*

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Abstract. This study entitled Harriet Kilpatrick's Search for Happiness in Emily Henry's *Happy Place* explores the main character's journey personal happiness using a psychological approach, specifically Martin Seligman's PERMA theory. The objective is to examine the causes and effects behind Harriet Kilpatrick's search for happiness. As a perfectionist and aspiring surgeon, Harriet's emotional conflict shaped by her unresolved relationship with Wyn plays a central role in her internal struggle. The problem statements of this study are: (1) What causes Harriet Kilpatrick's search for happiness in *Happy Place*? and (2) What effect of search for happiness Harriet Kilpatrick's? Using a qualitative method, the analysis is presented descriptively to explore Harriet's emotional conflict. The findings reveal that although Harriet initially avoids vulnerability, her journey eventually leads her to fulfill all five elements of happiness within the PERMA model: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. By confronting her past and rebuilding meaningful relationships, Harriet achieves a more authentic and lasting sense of personal happiness.

Keywords: *search for happiness, personal happiness, family pressure, emotional conflict*

INTRODUCTION

Happiness is a subjective emotional state that varies among individuals based on their personal experiences, preferences, and values (Jain, 2022). Happiness is not only limited to feelings of pleasure or momentary pleasure, but also involves the meaning of life, achievement, and emotional balance. To achieve happiness, one needs to struggle and sacrifice because happiness is not something that can be obtained easily. Happiness cannot be bought or simply asked for, but must be fought for with effort and perseverance (Onedani & Wahyono, 2018). Internal factors such as mindset, gratitude, and resilience play a role in happiness, as do external factors such as social relationships, environment, and success in achieving goals. Each individual has a different way of seeking happiness, some find it through personal achievements, relationships with others, or even in simple things like enjoying time alone.

Emily Henry's *Happy Place* (2023) is a romance novel that explores themes of love, self-discovery, and the struggle to meet societal expectations. The story follows Harriet Kilpatrick, a woman who seemingly has it all a successful career as a surgeon, a loving fiancé, and a close-knit group of friends. However, beneath the surface, Harriet struggles with internal conflicts, feeling trapped by the expectations of those around her. The novel begins with Harriet and her longtime fiancé, Wyn Connor, secretly breaking off their engagement.

Despite their separation, they find themselves forced to pretend they are still together during an annual summer trip to Maine with their friends. As the trip unfolds, Harriet grapples with unresolved emotions, the weight of social pressure, and her own definition of happiness. Through a series of flashbacks and heartfelt moments, the novel delves into the reasons behind their breakup, Harriet's ongoing battle with self-doubt, and the challenges of balancing personal fulfillment with external expectations. As Harriet navigates the complexities of love, friendship, and career ambitions, she begins to question whether the life she has built truly brings her joy or if she has simply been following a path dictated by others. *Happy Place* ultimately tells a story about reclaiming one's happiness, learning to embrace vulnerability, and making choices that align with personal fulfillment rather than societal standards.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In analyzing the concept of the search for happiness in the novel *Happy Place* from the perspective of Literary Psychology, there are several studies that are considered relevant to this research. Some previous studies have discussed how the search for happiness is represented through literary works. There have been many studies on the search for happiness in literary works.

One of the relevant studies is research conducted by Onedani & Wahyono, (2018), with the title Santiago's Strife to Find Happiness in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* from the University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia. This research discusses Santiago's journey in finding happiness through his adventures in the novel *The Alchemist*. The results of this study show that happiness in the novel is related to the main character's struggle in following his Personal Legend, which is a life calling that leads him to true happiness. Santiago is portrayed as an individual who must go through various obstacles, encounters with wise figures, and self-reflection before finally achieving his happiness.

The second research by Oktaberliana (2019), with the title Lorrie's Search For Happiness In Fiona Gibson's *The Woman Who Met Her Match* from Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya. It explored how Lorrie's happiness is influenced by her social life, past memories, and second chances in love after losing her life partner. However, this study differs from the present research in several aspects.

The third research was conducted by Ardian et al. (2023) with the title The American Woman Identity as Reflected in *Eat Pray Love* Novel in Her Pursuit of Happiness, from Indragiri Riau Islamic University, Indonesia. In *Eat Pray Love*, Elizabeth Gilbert (Liz) embarks on a journey to Italy, India, and Indonesia in search of

the meaning of life and happiness after a divorce that makes her feel lost. This journey reflects her efforts to rediscover herself and achieve true happiness.

Unlike previous studies, this research will focus on the search for happiness in Emily Henry's *Happy Place*, specifically through the character of Harriet Kilpatrick. Although there have been studies that discuss happiness in other novels, including *The Alchemist*, no one has specifically analyzed how the causes and effects of the search for happiness depicted in *Happy Place*. Therefore, this study aims to fill the research gap by analyzing how Harriet Kilpatrick struggles to find their happiness amidst personal conflicts.

METHOD

This study will use qualitative research and a descriptive method to simplify the research process. According to Creswell (2009, pp. 3–4), a research design refers to a comprehensive framework that outlines the strategies and steps in a study, ranging from overarching philosophical assumptions to specific techniques for data collection and analysis. Another according Oranga & Matere (2023), the aim qualitative research is to explore and provide deeper, comprehensive, and detailed description of phenomena. This research approach focus on the psychological aspects on literature, as Holland said (in Nurhadi, 2019) then, this research employs descriptive qualitative techniques to explain and provide interpretations of the subject matter of the study, especially in psychological phenomena.

Data Collection Procedure includes the following steps:

1. Reading and understanding the novel *Happy Place* by Emily Henry.
2. Selecting data that are related to the research problem
3. Highlighting relevant quotations from the narration or dialogue in the novel.

Data analysis techniques used in this qualitative research involve three mains steps:

1. Analyzing and interpreting the data.
2. Applying the theory used in the research in analyzing the collective data
3. Drawing the conclusion based on the results of the analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This discussion contains the analysis of Harriet Kilpatrick's search for happiness in Emily Henry's in the *Happy Place*. The discussion is divided into two subchapters. The first subchapter disscusses the cause of Harriet Kilpatrick's search for happiness in Emily Henry's the *Happy Place*, and the second is the effect of Harriet Kilpatrick search for happiness in Emily Henry's the *Happy Place*.

1. Cause of Harriet Kilpatrick's Search for Happiness

a. Family Pressure

Harriet Kilpatrick is a high achieving woman who appears to have it all together on the outside, but is actually struggling with deep internal conflicts rooted in her upbringing. She experiences especially high expectations from her mother, who has a clear vision for her future. She felt that her life path was determined by her parents, without consideration for her own desires. She became a surgical resident not because of her personal passion, but to fulfill her family's expectations.

“Both my parents had to work a lot, and they were always stressed out about money, but they were also good about making sure my sister and I had everything we needed. There wasn’t a ton I could do to help, except cleaning. And I like how it’s so measurable, like you immediately see that what you’re doing is making a difference.” (Henry, 2023: 66).

This quotation shows how Harriet Kilpatrick experienced pressure from a young age due to her family’s financial situation. She grew up in a home where she had to become a full-time parent, which shaped her perception of what it means to be a woman. She carried the emotional weight of her parents’ sacrifices into her own life decisions. She developed a belief that personal desires should be set aside for the household where both parents worked hard and stress was a daily reality. She felt the need to be useful even as a child. She found comfort in cleaning because it gave her a sense of control and visible impact. She learned early on that doing something helpful could ease the tension at home. She associated her worth with being responsible and doing things that made others' lives easier. She was emotionally affected by her parents’ stress and felt indirectly responsible for lightening their burden. She carried this mindset into adulthood, often choosing what pleases others over what she truly wants. She became someone who tied value to action and achievement. This shows how her upbringing shaped her into a person who responds to pressure with performance and self-sacrifice.

“They barely knew each other when they got married. They were in college still, and my mom got pregnant with my older sister. Mom was supposed to go to medical school, and Dad was supposed to go to grad school for astrophysics—but they needed money, so she dropped out to raise Eloise, and he got a job substitute teaching.” (Henry, 2023: 67).

This quotation above the foundational sacrifice in Harriet Kilpatrick’s family. She grew up knowing that her parents abandoned their dreams due to unexpected responsibilities. She became aware that her very existence was tied to lost opportunities and unfulfilled ambitions. She internalized the idea that dreams were secondary to duty. She witnessed how her mother gave up a medical career to greater good. She later applied this belief by pursuing a career path that pleased her parents more than herself. She learned to value stability over passion, and obligation over freedom. This shows how deeply her identity and choices were influenced by her family’s history of sacrifice and unmet aspirations.

b. Kilpatrick’s Self Identity Struggles

Since childhood, she has been accustomed to living up to the expectations of others, especially her family, who demanded her to become an ideal version based on their standards. She inner conflict is further complicated by the constant fear of disappointing those closest to her. She feels responsible for others' happiness, often at the expense of her own desires. This leads her to suppress her personal needs and prioritize external validation. Eventually, she realizes that her journey toward happiness must begin by discovering her true self.

"I'm a mystery to me too," I say. "I didn't realize how little I understood myself until I met Cleo and Sabrina. They're both so sure of how they feel about things." (Henry, 2023: 134)

This quotation illustrates Harriet Kilpatrick's sense of alienation from her own identity. She acknowledges that she does not fully understand herself, especially when compared to her friends Cleo and Sabrina, who are confident in their emotions and desires. This shows that Harriet has spent much of her life conforming to others' expectations, which caused her to lose touch with her own wants and needs.

My life has been on one set of rails since I decided to go into medicine. It's been easy to make decisions with that as the governing force. Outside of that, I've rarely had to. (Henry, 2023: 188)

This quote illustrates how Harriet Kilpatrick's life was shaped by the expectations of her environment, especially her family. She describes her journey as being on a set of rails, implying that her choices were limited and predetermined. She admits that becoming a doctor was not a result of personal exploration, but rather a decision influenced by what she perceived to be the right path. This shows that she rarely had the freedom to make decisions based on her true desires. She followed the path that was set for her, which made decision-making seem easy not because she was confident, but because there were no real alternatives. This highlights how she prioritized the approval of others over personal fulfillment. In other words, she lived a life that appeared structured and successful on the outside, but lacked self-discovery.

c. Kilpatrick's Social Relationship

Harriet has a very close relationship with her best friends, Sabrina, Cleo, Parth, and Kimmy. Their friendship is not only about spending time together, but also serves as an emotional refuge where Harriet feels truly accepted. She finds comfort in their presence, using their friendship as a way to escape from the pressures imposed by her family and the struggles she faces with her own identity. She often hides her true feelings to avoid conflict and maintain harmony within the group. She still sees them as the emotional anchor in her life. This shows that despite her internal conflicts, she relies heavily on her friends as a source of emotional safety and belonging, even if it means sacrificing full emotional honesty.

"My best friends taught me a new kind of quiet, the peaceful stillness of knowing one another so well you don't need to fill the space. And a new kind of

loud: noise as a celebration, as the overflow of joy at being alive, here, now.” (Henry, 2023: 10)

The above statement illustrates the depth of Harriet's relationship with her friends. For Harriet, their friendship is not just about doing things together, but also about finding peace in each other's presence, without the pressure to be perfect. This quote shows that with her best friends, Harriet feels safe to be herself, without having to try to meet anyone's expectations. In this space of friendship, she doesn't have to pretend or hide her feelings. Their presence gave her space to breathe, love and celebrate life, which was a contrast to the pressure and control she often felt in other aspects of her life, such as from family or professional demands.

OKAY, SO HE'S not my fiancé anymore, but (1) our friends don't know that yet and (2) when you're engaged to a person as long as I was to Wyn Connor, you don't stop accidentally thinking of him as your fiancé overnight.” (Henry, 2023: 21)

This quotation illustrates how she chooses to maintain the illusion of her relationship with Wyn in order to preserve the emotional balance within her friendship circle. She finds it difficult to emotionally detach from the role of being his fiancée, not only because of unresolved feelings but also due to the fear of disrupting the group dynamic. She continues to refer to Wyn as her fiancé, which indicates that she has not fully processed the separation and still clings to the identity tied to that relationship. She prioritizes the comfort and harmony of her friends over her own emotional truth, which reflects a recurring pattern in her social interactions. She tends to suppress her personal struggles in order to meet the expectations of others, revealing how deeply her sense of belonging is linked to maintaining peace within the group. This behavior highlights the emotional strain she experiences in navigating her relationships and demonstrates how her pursuit of happiness is often compromised by the pressure to appear emotionally stable in front of others.

I've already lost the person I expected to marry. I've already moved across the country from all my best friends. And now this house—our house, this pocket universe where we always belong, where no matter what else is happening, we're safe and happy—that's going away too. (Henry, 2023: 25)

This quotation illustrates how Harriet Kilpatrick experiences a deep sense of loss not only of her romantic relationship but also of emotional closeness with her friends and the symbolic comfort of the house that once brought them together. She views the lake house as a representation of their unity and shared happiness, a place where she could momentarily escape personal struggles. The announcement of its sale triggers a fear of disconnection and pushes her to maintain the illusion that everything is still intact within the group. She chooses to hide her emotional pain and continues to pretend that she is fine, believing that expressing the truth would ruin the limited time they have left together. She internalizes the belief that preserving group harmony is more important than her individual well-being.

d. Kilpatrick's Relationship with Her Ex-fiancé

Harriet and Wyn Connor were once engaged, sharing eight years of deep emotional connection and memories. However, their relationship ended abruptly through a brief phone call from Wyn, leaving Harriet with unresolved emotions and a lingering sense of confusion. Despite the breakup, Harriet agrees to pretend they are still together during their annual vacation with their close friends. She does this to maintain group harmony and avoid emotional tension within the circle. Although she is heartbroken, she hides her pain behind a composed façade, choosing peace over confrontation. She still cares about Wyn, but suppresses her emotions in order to preserve the stability of the group dynamic. This demonstrates how Harriet consistently prioritizes others' comfort over her own emotional needs.

“Go to your happy place, Harriet, I think desperately, only to realize I’m literally in my happy place, and he. Is. Here.” “The very last person I expected to see.”

“The very last person I want to see. Wyn Connor. My fiancé.” (Henry, 2023: 20)

This quotation shows that Harriet experiences an intense emotional conflict upon encountering Wyn, her ex-fiancé, in a place she once considered her safe and joyful space *Happy Place*. She is shocked and internally panicked by his unexpected presence. This shows that although she is physically present in a place associated with comfort, emotionally, she is unsettled and disturbed. She feels conflicted because seeing Wyn brings unresolved emotions to the surface. She is the type of person who usually suppresses her own discomfort for the sake of maintaining peace around her. She begins to realize that avoiding conflict does not mean her feelings disappear.

Oh god. He’s not supposed to be here!

The next time I saw him, I was supposed to be in a sexy Reformation dress with a hot new boyfriend and a full face of makeup. (Henry, 2023: 24)

This quotation shows that Harriet realizes she is not emotionally ready to meet Wyn again. She imagines an ideal scenario where their reunion happens when she is completely healed wearing a beautiful dress, having a new boyfriend, and looking her best. This shows that she still clings to the hope of appearing unaffected, even though deep down, she has not truly moved on. She is still emotionally attached to her past, which becomes a major obstacle in her search for happiness. She is trapped between wanting to appear strong and the reality of her unresolved feelings. This indicates that she carries emotional wounds that influence her present choices and prevent her from opening herself to new possibilities.

“What should I have done, Harriet?” Found an excuse. Simply told her no. Not have broken my heart like it was a last-minute dinner plan. Not have made me love you in the first place. (Henry, 2023: 41)

This quotation shows how Harriet feels deeply hurt and abandoned by Wyn. She expresses that their relationship was dismissed casually, as if it meant very little. She compares the end of their relationship to canceling a dinner plan, highlighting how lightly Wyn seemed to take it. This shows that she expected Wyn to fight for their love, not to walk away easily. She feels that Wyn gave up without effort and did not value the emotional connection they shared. She feels as though her heart was broken without

warning or reason. This illustrates how she internalizes the breakup as a sign that she was not worthy of being loved deeply or defended.

2. Effect of Search for Happiness Harriet Kilpatrick's in *Happy Place*

a. Kilpatrick's Life Choice

She eventually realized that she had been living a life shaped by the expectations of others rather than her own true desires. She decided to pursue a medical career not out of genuine interest, but because she believed it was what her parents wanted. She also stayed in her relationship with Wyn out of fear of disappointing others. She often suppressed her opinions within her circle of friends to avoid conflict. She gradually felt emotionally drained and directionless. She acknowledged these patterns and took the first step toward reclaiming her autonomy and prioritizing her own happiness.

"I used to make these bargains with the universe," I say, smiling a little at the ridiculousness of it. "Like if I got straight As, then everything would be okay. Or if I won the science fair a second time. Or if I was never late to school, or if I always did the dishes before Mom got home from work, or I got her the perfect birthday gift, or whatever. And I know my parents love me. I've always known that," I say tightly. "But the truth is . . ."

"I've spent my whole life trying to make it up to them." (Henry, 2023: 211-212)

This quotation shows how Harriet feels responsible for maintaining her family's emotional stability through her own performance and behavior. She believes that love from her parents must be earned through constant achievement. She convinces herself that being perfect whether in academics, behavior, or gestures will ensure peace at home. She constructs her identity around being the good daughter who never causes trouble. She learns to associate love with approval and accomplishment. She suppresses her own emotions to keep others comfortable. She avoids conflict and strives to be the emotional glue in her family. She grows up unable to distinguish her genuine desires from the expectations placed upon her. She ends up sacrificing her own happiness in exchange for validation from others.

"It's not selfish to want to be happy, Harriet"

"Your Job doesn't have to your identity. It can just be a place you go, that doesn't define you or make you miserable. You deserve to be happy, Harriet" (Henry, 2023: 299)

This quotation shows how the conversation between Wyn and Harriet becomes a turning point in Harriet's understanding of happiness and identity. She listens to Wyn reminding her that wanting to be happy is not selfish, something she has long denied herself. She has been conditioned to believe that her job and achievements define her worth, which makes her feel trapped in a life that does not fulfill her emotionally. She hears Wyn's words as both comforting and eye opening, revealing how deeply she has neglected her own desires. She begins to confront the pressure she has placed on herself to be useful and successful at the cost of her mental well-being. She is finally

encouraged to consider that her identity can exist beyond her career and expectations placed on her.

b. Kilpatrick's Setting Boundaries

Harriet Kilpatrick's emotional journey in *Happy Place* shows a turning point where she begins to understand the importance of protecting her personal space. She realizes that living to please others has only led her to neglect her own needs. She acknowledges that true happiness cannot exist without the courage to say no. She starts to recognize the weight of expectations that she has been carrying for so long. She sees that setting boundaries is not selfish, but necessary for her well-being. She finally chooses to prioritize what she truly wants rather than constantly fulfilling what others expect of her.

And I don't feel young. I feel alive. Jolted awake. My skin, muscles, organs, bones, all somehow more concrete here. Wyn's face and eyelashes glisten, his shirt plastered to him. His fingers are gentle on my jaw, his thumb tracing over my bottom lip as his eyes watch it drop open, as if to breathe him into me. Our lungs expand, pushing into each other, and his gaze lifts to mine, and here, with everyone to see it, where the rule I set won't be broken—where I can act like it's an act—I tip my mouth up under his. (Henry, 2023: 182-183)

The quotation shows how Harriet Kilpatrick attempts to balance her emotional vulnerability with her need for control by setting boundaries. She engages in a moment of physical closeness with Wyn but allows it only when it happens publicly, so she can frame the kiss as performative rather than personal. She maintains emotional distance by doing this, protecting herself from fully confronting her true feelings. She feels a strong sense of aliveness and connection in that moment, but she disguises it under the logic of the rule she set. She creates this boundary as a way to avoid emotional risk, yet as a result, she is unable to experience the relationship and happiness fully. She tries to shield herself from pain, but this self-protection ends up preventing her from truly healing and being happy.

It's not that I think what happened downstairs was an act. But it was part of an agreement.

This isn't. And neither of us seems to have decided what happens next. My body has one idea. My brain isn't a fan of the plan.

You've spent months trying to forget what you're missing, I tell myself. How will you survive being reminded? Living the loss of it all over again?" (Henry, 2023: 185-186)

This quotation shows how Harriet starts setting emotional boundaries as a way to protect herself from deeper heartbreak. She acknowledges the confusion between physical longing and emotional uncertainty. She tries to separate what was once an agreement from what now feels uncertain and vulnerable. She becomes aware of the internal conflict between what her body wants and what her mind warns against. She reminds herself of the pain she has spent months trying to forget. She fears being pulled

back into a cycle of love and loss. She distances herself emotionally, not out of coldness, but out of self-preservation. She begins to understand that guarding her feelings is necessary to avoid repeating the emotional wounds of the past.

c. Kilpatrick's Personal Joys

She began to find clarity in her quest for happiness. She started to pursue the little things that brought her joy. She realized that happiness did not always have to come from major achievements such as a successful career or a romantic relationship. She discovered that simple moments could also be a meaningful source of happiness. She learned to appreciate the small, everyday experiences that made her feel alive and content.

“My heart stutters at the image on-screen. The website I had Wyn type in for me last night is still pulled up. An oak table in a field of yellow green, wildflowers snaking up its legs, and a jagged range of purple mountains behind it.

It knocks the breath out of me. Not the image itself but the longing, the need it shoots out from my core. That, I think. That is what I want.

A zing of adrenaline goes down my spine.

My pulse speeds. Shivers spread, wildfire fast, across my skin. I stand, almost laughing from the blunt force of the realization.” (Henry, 2023: 318)

This quotation shows how Harriet Kilpatrick experiences a sudden emotional clarity when she sees an image that stirs something deep within her. She feels her heart stutter at the sight of the picture—a wooden oak table in a field of yellow-green, surrounded by wildflowers, with purple mountains in the distance. She is not overwhelmed by the beauty of the image alone, but by the longing it awakens in her. She realizes that this simple, peaceful setting represents the kind of life she truly wants. She feels a rush of adrenaline and shivers across her skin, as if her body is reacting before her mind can fully process it. She stands up, almost laughing, because the realization hits her so powerfully. She recognizes that this quiet, natural scene is everything she desires—a life far from the chaos and pressure she usually faces. She longs for peace, freedom, and authenticity, and this moment becomes a symbol of her deeper emotional needs.

I don't want to live my life like it's a triathlon and all that matters is getting to some imaginary ribbon. I want my life to be like—like making pottery. I want to enjoy it while it's happening, not just for where it might get me eventually.” (Henry, 2023: 321)

This quotation shows how Harriet Kilpatrick begins to reject the constant pressure to chase achievements and meet expectations. She compares her life to a triathlon, where she always feels like she's racing toward an invisible finish line. She expresses exhaustion from living that way, where only the end result seems to matter. She now wants her life to feel more like making pottery something slow, intentional, and fulfilling in the moment. She desires to find meaning in the process, not just the outcome. She begins to understand that happiness isn't about always pushing forward,

but about being present and content with where she is. She longs for a quieter, more mindful way of living that allows her to truly enjoy each moment.

In Harriet's journey to find the meaning of happiness for herself, Harriet experiences some important elements of happiness according to the PERMA model.

1. Positive Emotion

Positive emotions are pleasant feelings that support one's psychological well-being. These emotions include various forms of positive feelings such as happiness, calmness, gratitude, love, hope, satisfaction, and laughter. In Emily Henry's *Happy Place*, Harriet's character is described as a surgeon who has long been accustomed to living under pressure and high professional demands. In her quest to become a dedicated doctor, Harriett often puts aside her personal needs, including the need for rest, happiness, and emotional connection with others. The stressful routine and lack of space for herself made happiness feel foreign and out of reach. This shows how the absence of positive emotions in daily life can affect one's psychological well-being.

There are a handful of places, of memories, that I always come back to when I need to calm myself, but this place tops the charts. It's psychosomatic, I'm sure, but suddenly I can smell it. I hear the echoey call of the circling gulls and feel the breeze ruffle my hair. I taste ice-cold beer, ripe blueberries. In mere minutes, after the longest year of my life, I'll be reunited with my favorite people in the world, in our favorite place in the world. (Henry, 2023: 11)

This quotation shows how Harriet Kilpatrick finds deep emotional comfort in returning to the holiday home she shares with her closest friends. She describes it not just as a physical place, but as a personal refuge that holds powerful, soothing memories. She feels the familiar sensations like the smell of the sea, the sound of gulls, the taste of blueberries and beer washing over her, bringing a sense of peace. She uses this place as a mental escape whenever life feels overwhelming. She feels genuinely happy knowing she will soon reunite with the people she loves most in a space that represents safety and belonging. She momentarily lets go of the demands of her profession as a surgeon and allows herself to reconnect with joy, simplicity, and emotional ease. She reveals that this place is more than nostalgia it is where she feels free to be herself without judgment or pressure.

2. Relationship

Relationship is one of the important pillars in the PERMA theory developed by Martin Seligman, where warm, supportive, and meaningful relationships contribute greatly to happiness. In the novel *Happy Place*, Harriet Kilpatrick slowly begins to realize the importance of emotional connections in the search for true happiness. So far, she has kept her distance from those closest to her, including her ex-fiancé, Wyn Connor, as a form of self-protection. This realization is Harriet's first step to reopening meaningful relationships and strengthening her happiness.

“His shoulders are relaxed, his face totally calm, like being in the same room as me is not the worst thing that could have possibly happened to either of us.” (Henry, 2023: 20)

This quotation shows how Harriet Kilpatrick feels emotionally unsettled when she observes Wyn’s calm and relaxed demeanor. She sees that his shoulders are at ease and his face shows no tension, as if being around her no longer affects him. She feels alienated by his apparent indifference, especially because she is still carrying unresolved emotions and emotional wounds from their past. She struggles with the contrast between her own inner turmoil and Wyn’s seemingly composed state. She feels confused and uncertain, questioning how he can appear so unaffected while she is still trying to process everything. She realizes that this emotional gap highlights her ongoing inner conflict—she is still healing, while he seems to have already moved on.

3. Meaning

Meaning in Martin Seligman’s PERMA theory highlights the importance of purpose. In *Happy Place*, Harriet realizes that true meaning isn’t found in career success, but in living authentically. She lets go of others’ expectations and starts choosing what brings her peace. She finds purpose in simple joys, relationships, and the freedom to be herself.

“I’ve spent too long following everyone else’s lead, placing everyone else’s judgment above my own. But now I see it.”

“All my life, I’ve let other voices creep in, and they’ve drowned out my own.”

“Now my mind is strangely quiet. For the first time in so long, I hear myself clearly.” (Henry, 2023: 318)

This quotation shows how Harriet Kilpatrick reaches a turning point in her emotional journey as she becomes fully aware of how much she has allowed others to dictate her life. She admits that she has spent too long prioritizing other people’s opinions and letting their judgments override her own voice. She realizes that throughout her life, she has been guided by external expectations those of her family, her partner, and the world around her—while silencing her own needs and desires. She finally experiences a moment of clarity where her mind feels quiet, and for the first time in a long while, she can truly hear herself. She begins to reclaim her autonomy and embrace a life that feels honest and true to who she is. She shows the courage to step away from the pressure of pleasing others and toward a more authentic, self-directed path.

4. Accomplishments

Harriet as a figure who is successful from the outside as a brilliant surgeon. However, one of her greatest achievements is the courage to admit that she is not happy with the path her life is on. Harriet managed to get out of the pressure and start making decisions about what she wants, not just meeting other people's expectations.

Your job doesn’t have to be your identity. It can just be a place you go, that doesn’t define you or make you miserable. You deserve to be happy, Harriet.”

He brushes a strand of hair away from the curve of my jaw. “Everything’s better when you’re happy.” (Henry, 2023:299)

This quotation shows how Harriet begins to realize that her job does not have to define her entire identity. She starts to understand that work can simply be a part of her life—not something that consumes her or determines her worth. She recognizes the importance of separating her professional role from her personal values and emotional well-being. She learns that happiness is not something to be sacrificed for the sake of career or external expectations, but a fundamental right she deserves. She begins to embrace the idea that she is allowed to pursue a life where joy, peace, and self-fulfillment come first.

CONCLUSION

Emily Henry presents a compelling portrayal of a woman who appears to have it all but quietly struggles with emotional dissatisfaction. Her life as a successful surgeon, paired with long-standing friendships and a seemingly stable relationship, fails to bring the sense of happiness she longs for. Her tendency to suppress emotions and maintain appearances reflects how societal and familial expectations can cause individuals to neglect their authentic selves in favor of meeting others’ standards.

One of the causes behind this emotional conflict lies in her unclear sense of identity. From childhood, she internalized the belief that love and acceptance are earned through perfection, resulting in years of performing for others rather than living for herself. This habit of self-sacrifice, though noble on the surface, becomes damaging over time, as it prevents her from accessing her own desires. Personal growth begins only when she acknowledges that constantly seeking external validation has distanced her from true happiness. The effect of this unclear identity is a persistent feeling of emotional exhaustion and disconnection from her true self. Her lifelong habit of seeking validation through perfection leads her to suppress her own desires in favor of meeting others’ expectations, causing her to feel unfulfilled despite outward success. This emotional conflict not only drains her mentally but also prevents her from establishing healthy boundaries and making choices that align with her authentic values.

Only when she begins to recognize how deeply this pattern has shaped her life does she start to reclaim her autonomy and move toward a more meaningful and self-directed pursuit of happiness. Her emotional growth is also framed through Martin Seligman’s PERMA model, which includes Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment as essential elements of well-being. In her case, each of these aspects contributes to her healing process. She rediscovers joy in present moments, becomes more emotionally engaged with those around her, redefines what success means, and chooses a path aligned with personal values rather than public approval. Rather than measuring success through professional achievements, she begins to see value in emotional breakthroughs such as being honest with her parents, stepping away from a career.

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