

# **BOOK REVIEW OF *THE HAPPINESS PROJECT***

## **WRITTEN BY GRETCHEN RUBIN**

Mochammad Afrizal Prasetyo & Drs. Siswo Harsono, M. Hum.

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES DIPONEGORO UNIVERSITY  
SEMARANG**

### **ABSTRACT**

This book review analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of Gretchen Rubin's *The Happiness Project*. *The Happiness Project* is a novel about how to pursue happiness in life. The writer's purpose of this review is to explore the strengths and weaknesses through its intrinsic elements, like theme, characters, plot, setting, and point of view so that there are beneficial aspects for readers. The writer uses Carl Gustav Jung's theory to examine the main character of the novel, Rubin. This novel has 12 chapters in which each chapter represents a new month. From this process, we can learn a lot about life that does not always rely on the material and money.

***Keywords : happiness, strength, weakness***

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background of the study**

People live with something called as Life goals. Life goals are specific things, conditions, statuses, and feelings based on their own perspective and standard pursued through their entire life. Although life goals are always different from time to time, it has one thing in common. It's all about "Happiness".

According to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Happiness is the best, noblest, and most pleasant thing in the world for a human being. It means that no matter what statuses people have, and how rich people are, they are still seeking for a higher "Happiness".

*The Happiness Project* is a book written by Gretchen Rubin that tells us how she pursuit happiness in life. Rubin is a writer on the linked subjects of habits, happiness, and human nature. It also discusses on many important issues, like organization, relationships, and play time. All of those aspects makes the writer interested to analyze the novel.

### **1.2 Purpose of the study**

The writer has two purposes, they are analyzing the intrinsic aspect of the novel and exploring strengths and the weaknesses of the novel.

### 1.3 Biography of Gretchen Rubin

Rubin's full name is Gretchen Anne Craft. Gretchen Rubin spends his childhood in Kansas City, Missouri. She graduated from Yale University in law degrees. She was a former editor-in-chief of the Yale Law Journal. She has also been a lecturer at the Yale Law School and the Yale School of Management.

Gretchen Rubin is the author of many books, including the blockbuster New York Times bestsellers *Better Than Before*, *Happier at Home*, and *The Happiness Project*. Her newest book, *Better Than Before: What I Learned About Making and Breaking Habits--to Sleep More, Quit Sugar, Procrastinate Less, and Generally Build a Happier Life* was published in 2015.

Now Rubin lives on the Manhattan's Upper East Side with her husband, Jamie, his father, Robert Rubin, and their daughters, Eliza and Eleanor.

### 1.4 Summary of The Novel

*The Happiness Project* is a novel about how to pursuit happiness in life. One day, Rubin makes up her mind, and ask "What do I want from life, anyway? Well, I want to be happy." But she had never thought about how she might be happier. She begins to make her life happier, thus making a plan called "The Happiness Project". It is basically her chart version from Ben Franklin's method. She puts her plan into a chart, and she divided it into twelve months starting from January.

In January she comes into her "Twelve Commandments". She consults her husband a lot about her project. With "Boost Energy" as the main idea, she also

focuses around sleeping time, exercising, tossing, restoring, organizing, nagging task, and being more energetic.

In February she has “Remember Love”, where she concerns about marriage, and being more romantic. She attempts to do things sincerely. Rubin concerns about her marriage relationship with Jamie, her husband, this month.

March is her time for “Aim Higher”. Happiness really affects work. Happiness can also makes you feeling better whenever you feel blue, as long as you enjoy it.

April is her “Parenthood Time”. She considers that children are a tremendous source of happiness. Even though they are classified as “Fog Happiness”, yet somehow they do bring happiness.

May is “be-serious-about-play” month. Research shows that regularly having fun is a key factor in having a happy life. People who have fun are twenty times happier than normal people do.

In June Rubin focus on “Friendship”. She stated that everyone should agrees that having strong social bonds is the most meaningful contributor to happiness.

She keeps July for “Buy some Happiness”. She thinks a lot in whether money can buy happiness or not. Health and Money comes together in life. Many people take health for granted, but health doesn’t guarantee happiness.

In August she has “Contemplate the Heavens”. After a long time thinking about life and money, she comes to her spiritual time. Stepping out of usual routine would allow her to see more clearly the better values in everyday life.

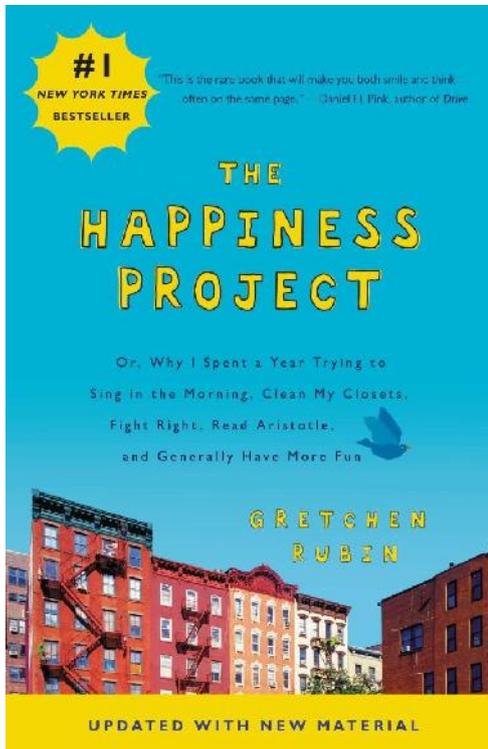
September’s “Pursue a Passion” is coming. After she returned from vacation, Rubin appreciates her beloved library in new way. She begins activity of the month with “write a novel”, followed by “master new technology”, and continue to meditates and stimulates mind.

October’s theme is “Mindfulness”. Rubin starts to learn Buddhism as her friend recommends her. She also tries Yoga as it is very close as meditation. She tries to apply “Examine true rules” to think about her priority more.

November is her time for “Attitude”. “Keep a contented heart”, “laugh out loud” and “use good manners” are Rubin’s home works in this month. Since the last 10 months are more focus on actions, she tries to focus on her attitude this month.

December’s theme is “Happiness”. She wants to try Boot Camp. She tends to take a class, volunteers on in, and joins a group after that. She would like to follow all of her resolutions, and she is expecting the best result in her chart for her last month, although it is not that easy.

## 1.5 Cover of The Happiness Project



This novel was published on November 2009 with 315 total pages. There are many symbols used in the cover of the novel.

First, there is “#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER” in the top, which guaranteed that the novel is worthy as a reading material especially for people that find their own happiness.

Second, it uses Yellow and Blue as the main color. Based on colors meaning, Blue is considered beneficial to the mind and body. It produces a calming effect. Meanwhile, Yellow is the color of sunshine. It's associated with joy, happiness, intellect, and energy.

Third, there is a symbolic side which is a flying bird beside the title. It can be assumed that “Birds fly in the sky freely” as a symbol of freedom.

Fourth, there is a picture of luxury building in the bottom. It represents how happiness are more important than anything else in people's life.

Fifth, it also has a very simple title. It will help people to understand the main idea of the novel easily.

With all factors that have mentioned above, it can be said that *The Happiness Project* has a very good composition for its cover which implied everything about the novel and it may lead to people's interest.

## **2. Analysis**

In this chapter, the writer will explain intrinsic analysis of the novel, namely:

### **2.1. Theme**

Theme is the central insight, the idea controller, the principle of unity of a story. In other words, it is what the story about (Kennedy, 1991:144). The writer finds that the main theme of this novel is based on the author's pursuit of happiness. "By the end of January, I was off to a promising start, but did I feel happier?" (Rubin, 2009 :36). In the beginning of her project, she pursues

### **2.2 Character**

There are three types of character : Protagonist, Antagonist, and Foil Character. Character is presumably an imagined person who inhabits a story (Kennedy, 1991:74). Protagonist is the main character of the story. Antagonist is usually someone which have opposite idea, position or character in the story, while Foil Character is supporting character and usually made to shine the protagonist.

The writer finds that there is Rubin as the main protagonist. By reading the novel, the writer also concludes that she is a diligent person because she keeps

tracking her activities in every month. She is also a hard worker and consistent people.

“Many activities that I consider enjoyable aren’t much fun while they’re happening” (Rubin, 2009 : 91). It takes from Chapter four, where it is her time to focus on her children, but yet the story is all about Rubin.

“So was I arguing that ‘Money can buy happiness’? The answer: no. That was clear. Money alone can’t buy happiness. But, as a follow-up, I asked myself, ‘Can money help buy happiness?’ The answer: yes, used wisely, it can” (Rubin, 2009 : 168).

There is no antagonist in the novel as it tells about the author’s life in the whole story, while there is Jamie as a foil character of the novel. Jamie as a supportive character proved from many parts of the novel. “Nowadays I often managed to pause and change my tone, just a second before I started to rant, or to change my tone in midsentence. I’d even managed to laugh while chiding Jamie” (Rubin, 2009:282).

### **2.3 Plot**

There are four types of plot structure. The four plots are Dramatic or Progressive plot, Episodic plot, Parallel plot, and Flashback.

The writer finds that the author uses Episodic plot in this novel, as it fits the novel best with the definition of Episodic plot. According to Russel, Episodic plot is a chronological structure, but it consists of a series of loosely related incidents, usually of chapter length, tied together by a common theme and/or

characters. I wanted to focus on a different subject each month, and twelve months in the year gave me twelve slots to fill” (Rubin, 2009:9).

## **2.4 Setting**

Setting is environment; and environments, especially domestic interiors, may be viewed as metonymic, or metaphoric, expressions of character (Warren, 1942:229).

There are two types of setting: Integral Setting and Backdrop Setting. Writer finds that the author uses backdrop setting, as the novel’s setting is always vague and general. It is very rare to find Rubin shows exact time in the novel about occurrence of events, or how long does it takes. “Another day, I went with a friend down to the Flower District” (Rubin, 2009:131). “One afternoon I picked up Eleanor the wrong way as I learned over her crib, and the next morning, I woke up with agonizing back pain” (Rubin, 2009:169).

## **2.5 Point of View**

Point of view is the position in which the narrator stands in relation to the story; the standpoint from which events are narrated (Hicks and Hutching, 1989: 113). There are three types of point of view, they are : Internal Narrator, Omniscient Narrator, and Limited Narrator.

Writer finds that the author uses Internal Narrator, because the author always uses “I” to refer herself in the novel. Internal Narrator is First-person Narrator point of view. It fits perfectly with Rubin’s Individualist character,

as she barely uses 'we' in the novel. "I'd become firmly convinced that money could help buy happiness. First, however I had to figure out exactly what I wanted to achieve in my contemplation of eternity." (Rubin, 2009:194)

### **3. Strength and Weakness**

#### **3.1 The Strength of the Novel**

The writer have mentioned five intrinsic aspects of the novel, and among those, the strongest strength of the novel is it's theme. The main theme of the novel is pursuing happiness, and it is really strong.

Another strength point of the novel is it's character. The main character, Rubin, proves that being an individualist that pursuing a happiness is not a bad thing, and it can change people mind about how individual people think. By examining this with Carl Gustav Jung's theory about personality, the writer can assumes that Rubin has an introvert personality with strong ego on it's consciousness level.

#### **3.2 The Weakness of the Novel**

The writer finds that there is nothing that can be considered as weakness in the novel. On it's setting, the author rarely shows the exact time but it is not considered as a weakness, because it is based on personal preference from the author for her work.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The Happiness Project is Rubin's personal research that has many strengths such as 'pursuing happiness' as main theme and twelve sub-themes (vitality, marriage, work, parenthood, leisure, friendship, money, eternity, book, mindfulness, attitude, happiness) as support in each chapter. It has Internal narrator point of view which also stick up with Rubin's introvert and individualist character, thus become another strength of this novel. The way she always uses 'I' in the novel can be assumed that she is also a strong subjective person. On the other hand, in it's setting, Rubin uses backdrop setting as she infrequently uses exact time, or date, even hour to give more detail in the novel. This makes The Happiness Project is a worth a try for reading material. It turn out that The Happiness Project for every people could be different. In fact, there is nothing in the world that born "perfect", so does Rubin. That is why people need each other to complete the imperfection.

## REFERENCES

Guerin, Wilfred L, et al. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1992.

Rubin, Gretchen. *The Happiness Project*. New York: Harper Collins. 2009.

Hicks, Malcolm and Hutching. *Literary Criticism: A Practical Guide for Students*. United State: Edward Arnold. 1989.

Naisaban, Ladislaus. *Psikologi Jung: Tipe Kepribadian Manusia dan Rahasia Sukses Dalam Hidup*. Jakarta: PT Gramedia. 2003.

Wellek, Rene and Austin Warren. *Theory of Literature*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. 1994.

“Ten Commandments”. Passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy. (17 March 2016)

<[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten\\_Commandments](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten_Commandments)>.

Russell, David L. (2009). *Literature for Children : A Short Introduction on Children's Literature*. 17 March 2016

<[http://www2.nkfust.edu.tw/~emchen/CLit/study\\_elements.htm](http://www2.nkfust.edu.tw/~emchen/CLit/study_elements.htm)>.

“Introduction : Aristotle's definition of happiness”. Nicomacheans Ethic. 2014 ( 12 February 2015)

<<http://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/history-of-happiness/aristotle>>.

“Color Meaning”. Color Wheel Pro – See Color Theory in Action. 2015. (11 May 2016) <<http://www.color-wheel-pro.com/color-meaning.html>>.