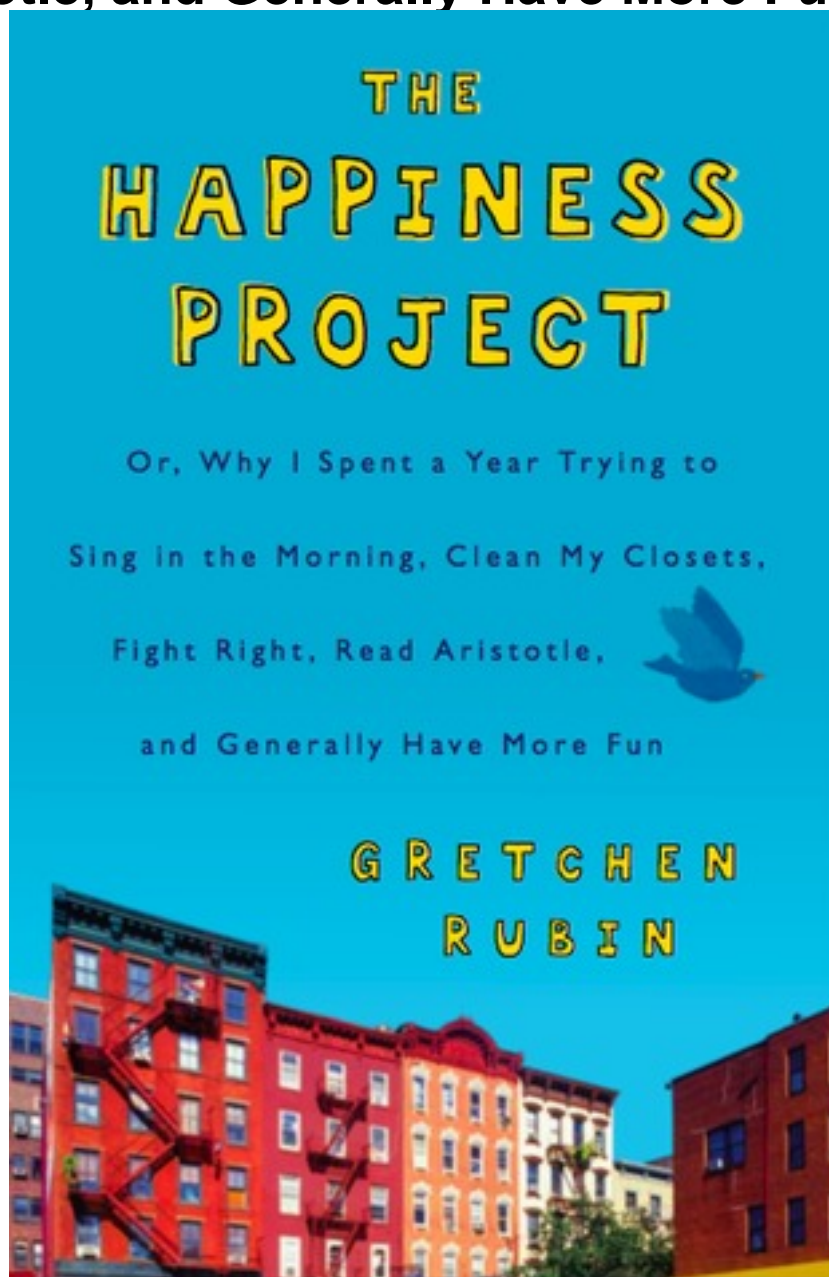


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Gretchen Rubin

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What people Say:

Laura

I don't know which is stranger " that people like this book, or that it was written in the first place. It came into being because Gretchen Rubin, a woman with a bizarrely charmed life, decided to spend a year devoting each month to a "theme" designed to make herself happier and then write a book about it. The whole thing smacks not only of a calculated stunt, but also of the sort of "elitist" approach she used for her breathtakingly trite book on Churchill. Regardless, any reasonable person would

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Even better, every ten sentences or so she inserts " not to be confused with "works in" " a quotation that sounds like the first entry in its category from

. Based on the self-congratulatory tone she doesn't quite have the skill to avoid, I'd guess she's deeply invested in showing she is Educated, and has Done Research. I think you're also supposed to surmise she's really smart, based on the number of references to editing the Yale Law Review or clerking for a Supreme Court Justice. What she never mentions, yet you can also surmise, is the fact that money is no object. Neither is time.

While being rich and leisured doesn't disqualify her from having wisdom, it does place her situation in context. She's not struggling to find happiness amidst real trials " illness, poverty, loneliness, relatives who drive you bonkers " she just wants to be "happier." What's amazing is that with all her research, she doesn't come up with anything profound. At best, her

paper-thin "œinsights" are merely summaries of other people's research. And yet, inexplicably, a couple of women in my book group actually liked it! These women don't sit around wondering if they're happy enough " they probably wonder if they're faithful enough and doing enough good in the world. So what did they find valuable?? A couple of them said that the organization chapter prompted them to clean out closets, which is always good, but there are at least a hundred books on de-cluttering that were written by people who were already aware of file boxes. (I know this because my sister has bought all those books and occasionally gives them away as presents, unless you're really lucky and she just throws your stuff out without being asked.) So the organization chapter struck me as a bit silly. But not as silly as turning to Nietzsche for tips on happiness. And I think that indicates the biggest flaw " her approach is entirely secular. Joy and fulfillment (a bit deeper and more lasting than "happiness") come through doing good and, eventually, becoming good. Every now and then she stumbles as if by accident upon versions of the Golden Rule Lite, but, naturally, in her eyes the point of being nice to others is to make herself happier.

*Father-in-law is Robert Rubin, Clinton's Assistant to the President for Economic Policy. He later served on Citigroup's board as Senior Counselor. During his eight years at Citigroup, shareholders suffered losses of more than 70%; Rubin earned over \$126 million.

Michele Chapman

I couldn't finish it. In fact, I couldn't get past page 49, and that really hurt, because I BOUGHT this book in HARDBACK. Sigh. And I wanted to like it, I swear, but it just wasn't happening for me.

I picked this book up because I have an interest in how others achieve happiness, enjoy getting a glimpse into how others conduct their lives on a daily basis (I even find grocery selections interesting, and what goes into them), and have gotten a kick out of several stunt journalism projects. Rubin's

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I picked this book up because I have an interest in how others achieve happiness, enjoy getting a glimpse into how others conduct their lives on a daily basis (I even find grocery selections interesting, and what goes into them), and have gotten a kick out of several stunt journalism projects. Rubin's research and methodical attempts at achieving her elusive gold star happiness appealed to me. However, the persona Rubin projects on paper didn't appeal to me. Perhaps in real life she is a fantastic person to hang out with, but if this book was her resume, I would have to pass on an invitation to grab coffee.

I find it interesting that early on in the book she recounts a conversation she had with someone at a party in regards to her happiness project, and this individual pointed out that she probably would not have a wide appeal, stating that her upper East Side apartment, law degree, and seemingly charmed life would alienate her to many readers. As I went on with the book, I found myself agreeing more and more with that nameless individual.

While I do not think the book is bad, it just isn't a book that speaks to me.

Books Ring Mah Bell

Author Gretchen Rubin dives into the stunt genre (where the author does something for a year and then writes a clever book about it) with a project on living happy for a year. Sitting on the bus one day, she realizes her life is zipping along and wonders if she can't make her days happier, and write a book about it and make some money. She devises a plan for happiness, reading all sorts of books on happiness, from a wide variety of authors.

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I would have liked to have been more enthusiastic about the book, but it seems we have the same tired themes (simplify! find joy!) regurgitated into the tired stunt genre form.

In January, she focuses on simplifying and organizing, because hey, we are all a lot happier when we are not throwing a tantrum looking for keys or the remote. I will admit that after reading the chapter, I cleaned out my closets.

The second month, she focuses on her marriage. It is in this chapter that I decide I simply can't STAND the author. I'm really happy I'm not married to her. NAG NAG NAG NAG NAG! Suddenly all those crabby wife jokes* make perfect sense. (She admits that she nags and is often argumentative, so I will grudgingly give her points for honesty.)

But while I was shaking my head at her bitchiness toward her husband, I had an epiphany of sorts. While I'm not a nagger, I realize I can be a pouter and that I don't do nearly enough to ensure my husband is happy. Really happy. I take it for granted that he's there, and I shouldn't. Making him happier will make me happier. I can work with that.

One month focuses on friendships. She encourages us to make time for friends and to be there. All those events you don't like? (Tupperware sales party!) Suck it up and BE THERE. It means a lot. Another thing Rubin suggests is to reach out and make three new friends. I have to admit that's a tough one for me, I can't keep up with the good pals I have now. Plus, as I get older and social anxiety creeps up like a cheap pair of underwear, the friend making thing takes much more effort.

Another month is about leisure and play. In this chapter she talks about starting a collection. People really do get some pleasure out of searching for treasures and seeing them accumulate. (anyone remember Stimpy and his magic nose goblins?) And this is a part of happiness that I can't work with. I like simplicity. The one thing I struggle with collecting - books. I love to have them, but on the other hand, I don't want to be tied to all sorts of stuff. Rest assured, Goodreaders, you will NEVER see me on an episode of

.

Kate

Wow, when did I become so cynical and not even realize it?

Just like Julia from

I too am in danger of becoming nothing but a secretary on a road to nowhere, drifting toward

frosted hair and menthol addiction.

However, this book helped me get out of my funk and become more creative. I didn't want to review this book until I tried my own "happiness project" because to be honest I was very sceptical about the results.

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So, my personal journey to getting back on track to being happier started in the LGA airport in the Hudson News Bookstore. I was traveling back to Chicago after visiting family in Long Island and Connecticut for Easter. My plane was delayed and I had finished my other book I had brought with. So, being bored and knowing I was going to sit there for a while, I purused the books at Hudson News. This is the one that spoke to me and I started reading it in the airport.

Katie

Let me preface this review by saying, I really tried to like this book. I found it at Sam's Club for \$7 when I was on my monthly TP run. The cover looked fun. The concept up lifting. I went into reading it with high hopes. I didn't look at any previous review (I should have). So, here goes... This book should be re-titled "The Year I Spent Trying To Be Less of an Entitled B*tch (And Failed!)".

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The author is a rich white lady living in the upper east side of manhattan with her two healthy little

girls and her (as she described) gorgeous rich husband. He's rich, like, stupid rich. Research his family. Your jaw will drop that she had enough time between swimming through piles of money to write this self indulgent crap. Her project includes all the things you would expect: appreciate family more, be happy with the here and now, etc. These simple steps could be very enlightening if done by someone anyone but an upper east side yuppie could relate to. Side note: the author does reference several great books and quotes of OTHER people that would be much more interesting to check out, IMO.

I got through the cleaning out closets chapter fine. It's when the author had to start interacting with other people that it went quickly downhill. One particular story had me gobsmacked. It was her mother in law's birthday party. The point of the exercise was that she was supposed to do "proofs of love." If you've read "The Five Languages of Love" she's talking about Acts of Service. So, she starts planning this shindig, whilst farming out tasks to everyone else so don't think this was a monumental accomplishment. The entire time she's describing all the emails she had to send for this great act of love, she's passive aggressively telling the reader about how *normally* she'd be so resentful about having to do all of this. Can you feel the love?

Fast forward to the day of the party. Everything is going swimmingly. MIL looooves her party. She loves the food cooked by her son who is a private chef. Loved her presents. Love, love, love. So, the night went well? Love was proven, right? Not so fast. The author was feeling like her efforts weren't being recognized enough. Even though her MIL had a fantastic night no one stopped the party to golf clap her organizational skills. That is until her well trained husband, in the middle of gift opening, pulls out a gift for the author. AT.HER.MILs.BIRTHDAY.PARTY. Suddenly, all is well! The author stops pouting because finally it's back to being about her! Order is restored. How her MIL didn't side eye her and mouth "WTF" is a testament to how classy MIL is.

So, all in all I just can't with this book. I'll take Eat, Pray, Love or a Year Living Biblically if I need my year doing stuff fix. But this one is getting tossed.