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Brief Report

Is valuing happiness associated with lower well-being? A factor-level analysis using the Valuing Happiness Scale ☆

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies suggest that valuing happiness is negatively associated with well-being. Most of these studies used the Valuing Happiness Scale (Mauss, Tamir, Anderson, & Savino, 2011). In the present paper, we examined the factor structure of this scale using data pooled from six independent samples (N_{total} = 938). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis showed that the Valuing Happiness Scale is not unidimensional and that only one of its three factors correlates negatively with various indicators of well-being, whereas non-significant or positive correlations were found for the other factors. These findings indicate that valuing happiness may not necessarily be bad for one's well-being, and call for a better definition, theoretical foundation, and operationalization of this construct.

1. Introduction

Most people want to be happy (Diener, 2000) and view happiness as a central ingredient to the good life (King & Napa, 1998). However, while it is generally accepted that *being* happy is adaptive (Diener, Kanazawa, Suh, & Oishi, 2014; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005), the consequences of *valuing* happiness, that is, endorsing the goal of being happy (Ford & Mauss, 2014), are less clear.

On the one hand, happiness can be improved intentionally through a number of well-evaluated interventions (for a meta-analysis, see Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009), especially if the participants actually want to become happier and are therefore committed to following the prescribed strategies (Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm, & Sheldon, 2011). Additionally, several studies found that valuing happiness is positively correlated with experienced well-being. For instance, Peterson, Park, and Seligman (2005) reported a weak positive correlation between the extent to which people value pleasure (measured by items such as "the good life is the pleasurable life") and life satisfaction. Similarly, Catalino, Algoe, and Fredrickson (2014) reported a positive correlation between prioritizing positivity in daily life (measured by items such as "A priority for me is experiencing happiness in everyday life") and well-being. Using cross-cultural data, Bastian, Kuppens, De Roover, and Diener (2014) found that the average level of life satisfaction is higher in countries where positive emotions are more valued than in countries where positive emotions are less valued. In sum, these studies indicate that valuing happiness is, as one might naively expect, positively associated with experienced happiness.

On the other hand, several studies suggest that valuing happiness is negatively associated with experienced well-being. In experiments supporting this hypothesis, well-being is typically measured in terms of momentary mood experienced during a task (e.g., listening to music or watching a film clip) (Mauss, Tamir, Anderson, & Savino, 2011; Schooler, Ariely, & Loewenstein, 2003). Correlational studies seem to suggest that these experimental findings generalize beyond momentary mood effects produced in laboratory settings to more stable individual differences in valuing happiness and well-being. In the cross-cultural study by Bastian et al. (2014) mentioned above, the negative association between the experience of negative emotions and life satisfaction was particularly strong in countries where positive emotions are highly valued. Similarly, the experience of negative emotions is shaped by social expectancies such that people experience more negative emotions and lower levels of well-being in social contexts where it is expected to not feel negative emotions (Bastian et al., 2012).

☆ Author note: The data and R scripts for this study are publicly available on Open Science Framework (osf.io/uwbk5).

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This effect did not apply to personal expectancies about negative emotions, however. Others measured the personal value of happiness rather than social expectations and found that valuing happiness was associated with lower well-being (Mauss, Tamir, et al., 2011), higher levels of loneliness (Mauss, Savino, et al., 2012), and depressive symptoms (Ford, Shallcross, Mauss, Floerke, & Gruber, 2014), and with more frequent diagnoses of bipolar disorder (Ford, Mauss, & Gruber, 2015).

In sum, the empirical evidence on whether valuing happiness is associated with higher or lower well-being is mixed. Reviewing the correlational studies, it is striking that most studies that found negative associations between the personal value of happiness and experienced well-being used the Valuing Happiness Scale (Mauss, Tamir, et al., 2011). Understanding what this scale measures is the key to reconciling the divergent findings on the association between valuing happiness and well-being.

2. The present paper

In the present research, we analyzed the factor structure of the Valuing Happiness Scale (Mauss, Tamir, et al., 2011) and reexamined the correlations between this scale and four indicators of well-being (life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect, loneliness) on the factor level. As this study is of exploratory nature, we need to note what we did *not* try to accomplish. To the best of our knowledge, the Valuing Happiness Scale was constructed as a unidimensional scale and has been used as such in previous research. Accordingly, we do not claim that this scale and its factors provide a complete measurement of all the different ways of valuing happiness that could be derived from theories on motivation and well-being. In addition, we did not intend to provide a validation of this scale such that the factors detected with our analyses can be used as reliable indicators of the underlying constructs. Rather, we intend to assess whether the Valuing Happiness Scale is multidimensional and, if so, whether the paradoxical effects of valuing happiness on well-being that had been established with this scale are driven by a few specific items that load on specific factors.

3. Methods

3.1. Samples

All data used in this study were collected for primary purposes not related to the goals of the present research, but have not yet been analyzed with respect to valuing happiness. Samples 1 through 4 consisted of participants from the United States recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Sample 5 was a sample of Germans who participated in a larger study where they were asked to play a social online game (Luhmann, Schönbrodt, Hawkley, & Cacioppo, 2014). Sample 6 was a sample of undergraduate students at an American university who were recruited for a four-week loneliness intervention study. Only the pretest data were used for the present analyses. The total sample size was $N = 938$ (for demographic characteristics, see Table S1). Data and R scripts for the following analyses are available on Open Science Framework (Luhmann & Schönbrodt, 2015).

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Valuing happiness

Valuing happiness was measured using the seven items developed by Mauss, Tamir, et al. (2011). For Sample 5, this scale was translated to German (see Appendix A). Responses were given on a scale from 1 (*do not at all agree*) to 7 (*agree completely*). Based on its wording, we were concerned that Item 4 ("I would like to be happier than I generally am") measures experienced unhappiness rather than valuing happiness. Preliminary analyses confirmed that this item (but not the other six items) was more frequently endorsed by individuals with low life satisfaction, low positive affect, and high negative affect (see Figs. S1–S3 in Supplemental material). Since one aim of this study was to examine the relation between valuing happiness and experienced well-being, it was important to take care that the correlations among these constructs are not inflated due to overlaps in item wording. We therefore excluded Item 4 for the present analyses. The remaining items are listed and enumerated in Table 1.

3.2.2. Well-being

Life satisfaction was measured in all samples with the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Positive and negative affect were measured with a 6-item version of the Scale of Positive and Negative Experiences (SPANE; Diener et al., 2010) in Samples 1 and 2 and with the full 12-item version of the SPANE in Sample 3. The Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) and the Positive Affect Negative Affect Valence (PANAVA) scale (Schallberger, 2005) were used in Samples 4 and 5, respectively. Finally, loneliness was measured with a 9-item version of the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996; Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980) in Samples 4 and 6 and with the 20-item German version of the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Döring & Bortz, 1993) in Sample 5. For all measures, the responses were averaged to yield summary scores where higher scores reflect higher levels of life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect, and loneliness, respectively (for details on which measures were used in which sample, sample-specific response formats, and descriptive statistics, see Table S2).

Table 1
Standardized factor loadings and factor intercorrelations in the exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis.

No.	Item wording	Exploratory factor analysis			Confirmatory factor analysis for Model 1 (Model 2)		
		Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1	How happy I am at any given moment says a lot about how worthwhile my life is	1.00			0.65 (0.60)		
2	If I don't feel happy, maybe there is something wrong with me			0.42			0.61 (0.61)
3	I value things in life only to the extent that they influence my personal happiness	0.25		0.38	0.50 (0.72)		0.23
5	Feeling happy is extremely important to me		0.77			0.70 (0.69)	
6	I am concerned about my happiness even when I feel happy			0.54			0.60 (0.60)
7	To have a meaningful life, I need to feel happy most of the time		0.65	0.28		0.81 (0.85)	0.04
	Correlation with Factor 2	.46			.71 (.74)		
	Correlation with Factor 3	.32	.57		.71 (.80)	.68 (.70)	

Notes. For the exploratory factor analysis, factor loadings <.20 are not printed. For the confirmatory factor analysis, factor loadings and correlations estimated in Model 1 are printed without parentheses and factor loadings and correlations in Model 2 are printed with parentheses.