Subjective Well-Being: Are You Busy Enough to be Happy?

This study attempted to determine if a relation exists between happiness and certain lifestyle habits (i.e., life structure) and personality traits (i.e., Type A achievement striving personality). We predicted there would be a positive correlation between (a) happiness and life structure, and (b) happiness and the achievement striving subset of the Type A personality scale. Eighty-six undergraduate student volunteers completed a battery of surveys. The achievement striving subset of the Type A personality scale and 3 measures of happiness were positively correlated. Life structure and positive affect also were positively correlated. These results suggest that achievement striving persons who perceive their life as structured report greater levels of happiness, or subjective well-being.

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According to Fordyce (1988), Aristotle once said “happiness is so important, it transcends all other worldly considerations” (p. 355). For eons, people have looked on happiness as an ultimate goal of life; however, this goal seems to elude many people (Buss, 2000). The question “Who is happy?” has intrigued psychologists for quite some time. Studies reveal that most people are happy, but “some people are happier than others” (Myers & Diener, 1995, p. 17). These types of studies prompt questions concerning the aspects of life that may affect a person’s happiness. Are persons who have more leisure time more or less happy than persons who have less leisure time? Does happiness come with having certain personality traits? These two questions only skim the surface of the unknown aspects of happiness.

The scientific study of subjective well-being (SWB), life satisfaction, and happiness is relatively new; however, theories about these constructs are decades old (Myers & Diener, 1995). According to Diener (as cited in DeNeve & Cooper, 1998), research on SWB focuses primarily on why and how people experience their lives in positive ways. To better understand what constitutes subjective well-being, research has identified two broad aspects: an affective component, which is usually subdivided into positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA), and a cognitive component, which is referred to as life satisfaction (Pavot & Diener, 1993).

Concisely, PA refers to the degree to which a person feels “enthusiastic, active, and alert,” whereas NA refers to a “general dimension of subjective distress and unpleasant engagement that subsumes a variety of aversive mood states” (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988, p. 1063). As for the second aspect of SWB, Diener (1984) refers to life satisfaction as an integrated, global judgment of a person’s entire life. That is, persons evaluate the quality of their life based on their own set of standards and then compare these standards with perceived life circumstances, therefore making life satisfaction a “conscious cognitive judgment” (Pavot & Diener, 1993, p. 164). In addition, Diener (1984) reported happiness as being the influence of positive affect over negative...
affect with attention on the emotional evaluation of one’s situation in life (i.e., an overall affective appraisal).

Although having an idea about what happiness, subjective well-being, and life satisfaction all mean, the task of finding out why and how people experience these constructs at high levels still exists. According to Csikszentmihalyi (as cited in Myers, 2000), understanding what constitutes happiness comes from knowing one’s quality of work and leisure experiences. With this, we speculate that there might be a relation between the amount of life structure and happiness and between the amount of life structure and SWB. In this research, life structure is referred to as having a planned schedule (e.g., for work, school, exercise, etc.) to which one is committed, that is, being involved and remaining active in activities throughout the day that are not considered “leisure” activities or “free time.”

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) reported that elevated positive moods were more frequent when participants were involved in challenging tasks rather than enjoying leisure time. Based on empirical research on the characteristics of happy people, Fordyce (as cited in Williams, Long, Gaynor, & Agesilas, 1987) developed the “14 fundamentals of happiness” which he has developed into a treatment program. It is noteworthy that these fundamentals include the following activity-related items: “(a) keep busy and be more active; (b) get better organized and plan things out; (c) be productive at meaningful work; and (d) develop positive, optimistic thinking” (p. 376). Bradburn (as cited in Emmons & Diener, 1985) extensively researched the area of SWB (more specifically, PA and NA) and found that PA was correlated with higher levels of activity.

Reviewing the literature that suggests a person’s activity level has an influence on his or her SWB, namely PA, brought us to speculate that there might be a relation between the achievement striving subset of Type A personality and happiness and between achievement striving and SWB. In the past, Type A behavior has been defined as behavioral and personality characteristics that include, but are not limited to: (a) highly competitive, (b) unable to relax, (c) ambitious in work, (d) perfectionist and demanding, and (e) hostile, aggressive, and angry (Davis & Palladino, 2000; Feldman, 1998; Lahey, 1995). Research indicates that Type A behavior consists of two independent factors, Achievement Striving (AS) and Impatience and Irritability (II; Spence, Helmreich, & Pred, 1987; Spence, Pred, & Helmreich, 1989). However, research on characteristics of the AS subset of the Type A personality is scant.

Nevertheless, Burke and Weir (1980) found those persons with greater Type A behaviors reported experiencing less depression and also reported greater life satisfaction. The data that are currently available on the AS subset of Type A behavior suggest that the “work-oriented achievement strivings measured by the AS scale remain significantly related to students’ high academic performance” (Spence et al., 1989, p. 176). Inferring from these data, persons who exhibit AS behaviors possess the tendency to be goal directed, as seen in high academic achievements. Emmons (as cited in Myers & Diener, 1995) found that “having goals, making progress toward goals, and freedom from conflict among one’s goals were all predictors of SWB” (p. 17). It is also noteworthy that DeNeve and Cooper (1998) conducted a meta-analysis of 137 personality traits and SWB, focusing predominantly on the Big Five personality factors (i.e., Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience). These researchers reported Conscientiousness, which includes goal-directed behavior and control-related traits, “obtained the strongest positive association with life satisfaction” (p. 220).

We conducted the current study on the assumption that there is a moderate relation between happiness and certain lifestyle habits and personality traits. More specifically, we predicted there would be positive correlations between (a) happiness and life structure, and (b) happiness and the Spence et al. (1987) achievement striving subset of the Type A personality test. We obtained our data from undergraduate college students using a battery of surveys to measure happiness and SWB and the achievement striving subset of Type A personality.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants consisted of 86 undergraduate students (18 men and 68 women) enrolled in introductory psychology classes at a medium-size midwestern university. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 37 years ($M = 20.8, SD = 4.16$). Participation partially satisfied a research requirement.

**Materials**

Participants completed a battery of personality surveys. The battery consisted of the Fordyce Happiness Measures (Fordyce, 1988), the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Pavot & Diener 1993), the Positive and Negative Affect Schedules (Watson et al., 1988), an adapted version of the Achievement Strivings scale of the Jenkins Activity Scale (Spence et al., 1987), and a lifestyle log.
**Fordyce Happiness Measures.** The Fordyce Happiness Measures (HM) provides a global measure of happiness; it consists of “two, self-reporting items measuring emotional well-being: an 11-point, happiness/unhappiness scale, and a question asking for the time spent in happy, unhappy, and neutral moods” (Fordyce, 1988, p. 357). The 11-point scale consists of 11 statements that range from extremely happy (10) to extremely unhappy (0). The participant must check the one statement that best describes his or her “average” happiness, which will provide a “measure of intensity or quality of happiness” (Fordyce, 1988, p. 359). The second self-reporting item, in percentage estimates, the amount of time the participant spends in happy, unhappy, and neutral moods, which will provide a “measure of its frequency or quantity” (Fordyce, 1988, p. 359).

The HM has demonstrated strong validity (i.e., convergent, construct, and discriminatory) and strong test–retest reliability, 0.98 (n = 111) for a two-day period, p < 0.001, and 0.67 (n = 27) for a four-month period, p < 0.001 (Fordyce, 1988). The HM has been compared to a wide assortment of other instruments used to measure happiness, well-being, and emotion. According to Fordyce (1988), such instruments include, but are not limited to, the “Affectometer-2 (Kammann & Flett), the Subjective Well-Being Inventory (Nagpal & Sell), the Wessman and Ricks Scale, and a number of simple happiness scales” (p. 363). The latter comparisons found the HM “to be among the strongest in convergent validity of all measures, and the strongest of the single-item measures they compared” (p. 364).

Construct validity for the HM is quite high. According to Fordyce (1988), “the HM has accumulated more validational data than any other well-being measure” (p. 365). This validational data has been gathered through the comparison of the HM to an immense number of well-known tests and inventories. A few of these inventories and tests (as cited in Fordyce, 1988), together with their respective correlations (p < .05 in all cases), include the “Affectometer-2 Happiness score, 0.71, (Kammann & Flett); Beck Depression Inventory, −0.54, (Beck); and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory Depression subscale, −0.38, (Hathaway & McKinley)” (p. 365).

Lastly, the HM should have high discriminative validity, that is, the capability to distinguish between happy and unhappy persons. Fordyce (1988) reported intersocioeconomic studies in which the results corroborate predictions from past research that state persons of higher socioeconomic status score higher on the HM. Also noteworthy, data from other studies reveal “significant differences between HM scores obtained from various troubled populations (e.g., hospitalized depressives, individuals or couples seeking counseling, etc.) and those of more normal samples” (Fordyce, 1988, p. 371).

**Satisfaction With Life Scale.** The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) measures the cognitive component of subjective well-being by using a short five-item instrument (Pavot & Diener, 1993). Rather than measuring satisfaction with particular domains, the items on the SWLS are global (e.g., In most ways my life is close to my ideal). These types of items allow the participants to measure domains in their life using their own standards for happiness or success, therefore “arriving at a global judgment of life satisfaction” (Pavot & Diener, 1993, p. 164). The participants indicate their degree of agreement with each of the five statements using a scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree).

In a number of studies, the SWLS has shown good convergent validity with other types of measures of subjective well-being, including self- and non–self-report measures, such as the Life Satisfaction Index-A (LSI-A), r(36) = .81, p < .01, (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991). In addition, evidence has indicated good discriminative validity with emotional well-being measures (Pavot & Diener, 1993; Pavot et al., 1991). Several studies show significant internal and temporal reliability (Pavot & Diener, 1993; Pavot et al., 1991). More specifically, Pavot et al. (1991) reported a coefficient alpha of .85 and a 2-week test–retest stability coefficient of .83 for the scale.

**Positive and Negative Affect Schedules.** The Positive and Negative Affect Schedules (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988) measure the affective components of subjective well-being. The scales consist of a list of 10 feelings and emotions (e.g., interested, alert, hostile). The participant rates each feeling/emotion using a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely).

Watson et al. (1988) have determined that these 10-item scales “are internally consistent and have excellent convergent [.89 to .95] and discriminant [−.02 to −.18] correlations with lengthier measures of the underlying mood factors” (p. 1069). Watson et al. (1988) indicate that such lengthier measures include the “Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961) and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory State Anxiety Scale (A-State; Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970)” (p. 1068). These researchers also stated that the general ratings may be used as trait measures of affect, as

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1Correlation data from Watson et al., 1988, p. 1066.
supported by high stability coefficients. In particular, the PANAS-PA yielded a stability coefficient of .68, and the PANAS-NA yielded a stability coefficient of .71 ($p < .002$ in both cases).

**Achievement Striving scale.** The adapted Achievement Striving (AS) scale (Spence et al., 1987) consists of 14 items that measured the achievement striving component of Type A behavior (e.g., *I get highly involved in my work*). Research indicates that the Type A pattern consists of “two relatively independent factors labeled Achievement Strivings (AS) and Impatience-Irritability (II)” (Spence et al., 1989, p. 176). The AS scale attempts to measure the activity level of the participants in their work and academics (i.e., their achievement striving behaviors). The participants answered the 14 items on a Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (*very much like me*) to 5 (*not at all like me*). We totaled the scores for the 14 items to produce a single, aggregate achievement striving score for each participant.

**Lifestyle structure log.** A lifestyle structure log, designed for this study, was included in the battery. This log consisted of a 24-hr, 7-day table on which the participants indicated the times they are committed (work, class, meetings, etc.), not time that they perceive as “free time.” These data were scored by adding the total number of hours the participant marked as being committed.

**Lifestyle structure scale.** The battery also included a 5-point Likert-type scale question, designed for this study, to measure perceived lifestyle structure. Using a 5-point scale (5 = *very structured*, 1 = *no structure*), the participants indicated which option most accurately described their entire week (i.e., weekdays and weekend). Participants completed this log to indicate how structured they perceived their life to be. We used the data to determine if a relation exists between life structure and happiness.

**Procedure**

The experimenter read directions explaining the consent form and the battery of surveys. Once the participants read, signed, and returned the consent form, they completed the personality measures. All testing took place in a classroom setting. Although no time limit was imposed, all participants completed the surveys within 20 min. Participants completed the lifestyle structure log after they completed the battery of personality surveys. All participants completed the log within 5 min.

**Results**

We calculated Pearson product-moment correlations to determine the relations between the various scales ($\alpha = .05$). These correlations are shown in Table 1.

As can be seen in Table 1, the analyses yielded several significant correlations. As expected, participants who scored high on the Fordyce HM also reported high scores on the SWLS and the PANAS-PA.

<p>| TABLE 1 | Correlations Between Scales of Measurement and Life Structure Instruments ($N = 86$) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fordyce Happiness Measures</th>
<th>Satisfaction With Life Scale</th>
<th>PANAS PA</th>
<th>PANAS NA</th>
<th>Type A Achievement Striving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fordyce Happiness Measures</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction With Life Scale</td>
<td>0.584***</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PANAS PA</td>
<td>0.637***</td>
<td>0.497***</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PANAS NA</td>
<td>−0.363***</td>
<td>−0.469***</td>
<td>−0.409***</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type A Achievement Striving</td>
<td>0.437***</td>
<td>0.319**</td>
<td>0.585***</td>
<td>−0.220*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle structure log</td>
<td>0.206</td>
<td>0.209</td>
<td>0.294**</td>
<td>−0.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived structure of life</td>
<td>0.209</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>0.338**</td>
<td>−0.143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
Also, those participants who scored high on the SWLS reported higher scores on both dimensions of the PANAS. Participants with high scores on the AS scale tended to report high scores on both the Fordyce HM and the PANAS-PA, and moderately high scores on the SWLS. Participants who perceived their life as structured also scored high on the AS scale. Lastly, those participants who scored high on the lifestyle structure log also reported high scores on the PANAS-PA.

It is noteworthy that the analyses yielded a significant correlation between the lifestyle structure log and the question measuring perceived structure of life, $r(84) = .275$, $p < .05$. These data also produced an unexpected negative correlation relating age and the PANAS-NA, $r(84) = –.263$, $p < .001$.

**Discussion**

As expected, the three happiness measures (i.e., Fordyce HM, SWLS, and PANAS-PA and NA) were significantly related. The correlations between the SWLS and PANAS-PA and NA corroborate Smed (as cited in Pavot & Diener, 1993), showing a significant positive correlation between the SWLS and the PANAS-PA and a significant negative correlation between the SWLS and the PANAS-NA. The negative correlation between PA and NA has also been supported by prior research (Watson et al., 1988). These findings could be used to further validate the measures of happiness and subjective well-being used in this study.

Because the participants who perceived their lives as structured, and involved themselves in committed activities (e.g., work, school, meetings, exercise, etc.) rather than leisure time, reported a higher level of PA, the results of this study are consistent with previous research (Emmons & Diener, 1985). Specifically, the results of this study found that scores on the PANAS-PA were positively correlated with scores on the lifestyle structure log and the perceived structure of life question. That is, participants who perceived their life as being structured, and their time structured with events to which they were committed, showed higher states of PA, which are states of “high energy, full concentration, and pleasurable engagement” (Watson et al., 1988, p. 1063).

This study also found a positive relation between AS scores and scores on the lifestyle structure log and the perceived structure of life question. Thus, persons who stay active, remain productive, and engage in minimal leisure activities also have high achievement striving behaviors. Inferring from these data, one might conclude that persons with achievement striving behaviors possess characteristics such as staying active, being productive, setting goals, and minimizing leisure time. This pattern can be seen in several of the characteristics listed in many definitions of a person who exhibits Type A behaviors, such as works hurriedly, ambitious in work, achievement driven, and tends to be a workaholic (Lahey, 1995).

We found that AS scores correlated positively with scores on all three happiness measures, (Fordyce HM, SWLS, and PANAS-PA). That is, participants who possess achievement striving behaviors report higher states of happiness and SWB, as measured by the three happiness scales. These findings corroborate Burke and Weir (1980), who report that Type A individuals report less depression and greater satisfaction with life. The paucity of data in this area suggests that this finding deserves increased research attention and replication.

As stated earlier, the negative correlation between age and the PANAS-NA was unexpected. However, Watson et al. (1988) indicated that negative affect is “a general dimension of subjective distress and unpleasant engagement that subsumes a variety of aversive mood states” (p. 1063). These researchers also described a low state of negative affect “being a state of calmness and serenity” (p. 1063). These descriptions help make sense of our significant correlation. Inferring from these data, as one grows older, feelings of subjective distress and unpleasant engagements decrease. As these reactions decrease, there is an increase in the feeling of calmness and serenity. This finding could be used as a stepping-stone to further investigate changes in affective states as persons become older.

Also noteworthy of discussion is the positive relation found between the lifestyle structure log and the question measuring perceived structure of life. Speculating from these data, the hours in a week that the participants indicated they were committed to coincide with the overall feeling of life structure as indicated by the 5-point Likert-type scale question. This relation prompts the inference that the lifestyle structure log measured what we intended it to measure. Nonetheless, further research needs to be conducted to develop a reliable and valid measure of lifestyle structure.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that achievement striving persons who perceive their life as structured relate greater levels of happiness, or life satisfaction. These results support our hypothesis that if persons possess achievement striving behaviors, then they tend to report a greater satisfaction with life. However, our prediction concerning the positive relation between happiness and/or SWB and life structure was not fully supported by the data. We did find that if persons lead a structured lifestyle then
they tend to report higher levels of “high energy, full concentration, and pleasurable engagement” (Watson et al., 1988, p. 1063), more commonly referred to as positive affect.

As reflected in the literature from the past decade, researchers have attempted to determine why and how persons experience their lives in a positive manner. This study contributes to that ongoing task. However, certain aspects of this study need further investigation. As mentioned earlier, data to support the relation between the achievement striving subset of Type A behavior patterns and happiness were not readily available in the literature. This deficit points to the need for studies to investigate (a) characteristics of persons who report high levels of the achievement striving subset of the Type A personality and (b) the relation between those characteristics and happiness and/or SWB. Likewise, further research into measuring lifestyle structure, and what constitutes this structure, is needed.

Other limitations in the present study that are worthy of further investigation are the high percentage of women (76%) and the large number of participants between the ages of 18 and 23 (88%) in the present sample. These percentages limit generalization to other populations, specifically adults over the age of 23 and men. Also, the predominance of women in the sample might have led to higher, or lower, scores on the scales of happiness and other measurements used in this study.

Research on happiness and SWB complements the “times” our society currently experiences. Specifically, it is becoming more obvious that our culture has turned to exterior possessions in an attempt to increase the feeling of happiness. However, William Cowper (as cited in Myers, 2000) seemed to be correct when he stated “Happiness depends, as Nature shows, less on exterior things than most suppose” (p. 65). In order to achieve the scientific pursuit of happiness, researchers must continue to investigate the many personality and lifestyle facets that can influence the construct of happiness and SWB.

References