PREDICTING HAPPINESS AND LIFE SATISFACTION FROM INDIVIDUALS' PERCEPTIONS OF LIFE

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Abstract: Perceiving one's life as meaningful may have an impact on individuals' overall happiness. The aim of this investigation was to examine the effect of individuals' perceptions of their lives on subjective happiness and life satisfaction. Also, it explored potential mediators of this relationship. The sample included 200 Indian adults who were selected using convenience sampling and they completed four self-report measures. Variables were purpose in life, positive affect, subjective happiness and life satisfaction. Results revealed that purpose in life significantly predicted one's happiness and life satisfaction. Furthermore, positive affect mediated the relationship between purpose in life and subjective happiness. Results also revealed that the link between purpose in life and life satisfaction was mediated by positive affect. This suggests that individuals who perceive their lives as more meaningful and purposeful seem to experience more positive affect, thereby feeling happy and satisfaction.

Keywords: purpose in life, affect, subjective happiness

Introduction

The concept of well-being comprises biological, social and psychological dimensions of one's life. There are two approaches of well-being: hedonic well-being and eudaimonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Hedonic well-being emphasizes concepts such as happiness, positive and negative affect, and life satisfaction (e.g., Diener, 1984; Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), whereas the concept of eudaimonic well-being focuses on psychological functioning and human development (e.g., Ryff, 1989a; 1989b; Waterman, 1993). In other words, the concept of subjective well-being has been used for hedonic perspective and the construct of psychological well-being has been used for eudaimonic perspective (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; González-Celis, Chávez-Becerra, Maldonado-Saucedo, Vidaña-Gaytán, & Magallanes-Rodríguez, 2016).

One's psychological well-being may depend on the constancy between one's desires of his or her self-perception and the environment, and the ability to manage his or her life circumstances successfully (González-Celis et al., 2016). Carol Ryff (1989) introduced a new model which explains six important factors that contribute to one's psychological well-being. According to Ryff, psychological well-being is an evaluation of important aspects of one's life. This includes feeling of meaning in life, sense of personal growth, positive relationships with others, the capacity to manage effectively one's life and environment, self-acceptance and autonomy. According to this model, viewing one's life as meaningful is an important contributor to individual psychological well-being.

One's belief that life is purposeful has been viewed as a key feature of health and well-being (e.g., Routledge et al., 2011; Ryff, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1998). Individuals, who believe that life has a purpose and a meaning, tend

to have very clear aims and objectives in life. They tend to set goals and work towards them. Additionally, they believe that their past life is meaningful and they consider that there is a meaning to present as well (Ryff, 1995).

Having a purpose in life is important to individuals in different stages in their lives. Researchers have found that young adults have a stronger sense of purpose in life compared to other age groups (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Keyes & Ryff, 1999). Also, the sense of meaning in life is very important for lifelong well-being in elderly (González-Celis et al., 2016). Research finds that purpose in life is a significant predictor of psychological and physical well-being (Reker, Peacock & Wong, 1987). Moreover, having a sense of purpose in life has an impact on individuals' health outcomes (Boyle, Buchman, & Bennett, 2010; Boyle, Buchman, Barnes, & Bennett, 2010; Boyle et al., 2012). For example, a higher sense of purpose in life is associated with maintaining the ability to perform normal daily activities among older adults (Boyle, Buchman, & Bennett, 2010) and it reduces the harmful effects of Alzheimer disease pathologic changes on cognitive functions in older adults (Boyle et al., 2012).

Also, subjective happiness seems to play a role in one's overall well-being (Karakasidou, Pezirkianidis, Stalikas, & Galanakis, 2016). Individuals who have a greater sense of purpose in life tend to work towards their goals. They may experience higher levels of happiness when they achieve these goals. There is also evidence that daily goal achievement is positively associated with daily well-being (Nezlek, 2005; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001). Satisfaction with life, a subjective judgment of one's life as a whole, is also considered as a significant dimension of subjective well-being (Pavot & Diener, 2008). Previous research illustrates that perceiving life as meaningful is related to sense of hope and life satisfaction (e.g., Mascaro & Rosen, 2005; Ryff, 1989; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005). Individuals with a strong sense of purpose in life may experience greater satisfaction by achieving their life goals. Studies have revealed that different orientations related to meaning, pleasure, and engagements are associated with individuals' life satisfaction (e.g., Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005). Accordingly, one's perception of life as meaningful can be a significant predictor of life satisfaction.

Research has found that a stronger sense of meaning in life is correlated with increased positive affect and decreased negative affect (Melton & Schulenberg, 2008; Scannell, Allen, & Burton, 2002; Steger & Frazier, 2005). The sense of purpose in life can be maintained by achieving one's life goals (Chamberlain & Zika, 1988). Individuals tend to consider their lives as meaningful and purposeful when they move forward in the direction of their goals (Little, 1998). This will help them feel good about themselves and their lives. As a result of goal achievement and fulfillment, they may experience higher levels of positive affect. Research finds that achievement of goals is significantly related to daily well-being (Nezlek, 2005; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001). This further suggests that having a purpose in life and working towards goals may increase positive affect. Research has demonstrated that the sense of meaning of life is a predictor of positive affect, particularly in acculturation (Pan, Fu Keung Wong, Chan, & Joubert, 2008). Moreover, one's ability to find meaning and direction in life seems to be an important contributor of future health (Schaefer et al. 2013). All the evidence suggests that purpose in life can have a significant influence on individual happiness and well-being.

The present study examined the effect of purpose in life on individual happiness and life satisfaction. In addition, we investigated the potential role of positive affect as a mediator of the relationship between purpose in life and subjective happiness and the relationship between purpose in life and life satisfaction.

Method

Participants

A total of 200 participants took part in this study, all of whom were native Indians. A convenient sampling method was utilized in this study. 62% of the participants were males and the other 38% were females. The

participants were aged between 18 and 28 ($M_{age} = 23$ years, $SD = 1.60$). Their participation was voluntary. The informed consent was obtained from them prior to data collection.

Materials

Purpose in life. Individuals' perception of meaning in life was assessed with the 14-item Purpose in Life Scale of Ryff's psychological well-being scales (PWB) (Ryff, 1989). Items such as "I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality", "I am an active person in carrying out the plans I set for myself" were rated using a 6-point scale varying from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Reliability in this study was $\alpha = .86$.

Subjective Happiness. Four-item Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky, & Lepper, 1999) was used to assess individuals' happiness. Item one was rated using a scale ranging from 1 "not a very happy person" to 7 "a very happy person" and the item two was rated using a scale ranging from 1 "less happy" to 7 "more happy". Items 3 and 4 were rated on a scale ranging from 1 "not at all" to 7 "great deal". Cronbach's alpha in this study was $\alpha = .63$.

Life satisfaction. Individuals' life satisfaction was measured with the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The scale consists of five items about overall life satisfaction of an individual. Participants rated the statements using a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Previous research has shown reliability for this scale ranged from .85 to .92 (Kang et al. 2003). Reliability in this study was $\alpha = .70$.

Positive affect. Positive affect was assessed with the Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988). Participants were asked to rate these items on a 1-5 Likert- scale (1 = *very slightly or not at all* and 5 = *extremely*). In previous studies, internal consistency for positive affect was $\alpha = .85$ (Ostir, Smith, Smith, & Ottenbacher, 2005). Internal reliability in this study for the Positive Affect Scale was $\alpha = .71$.

In addition, participants completed a sociodemographic questions that included items regarding age, gender, marital status, religion, ethnicity, education, employment, living area.

Results

First, correlational analyses were used to examine the relationships among four variables; purpose in life, subjective happiness, life satisfaction, and positive affect. Inter-correlations among four variables were significant for all. Purpose in life was significantly correlated with subjective happiness and life satisfaction. Also, purpose in life was significantly associated with positive affect. Positive affect was significantly correlated with subjective happiness as well as life satisfaction (See Table 1).

Table 1: Inter-correlations among positive affect, purpose in life, subjective happiness and life satisfaction

	Positive affect	Life satisfaction	Purpose in life
Life satisfaction	.32**		
Purpose in life	.31**	.41**	
Subjective happiness	.33**	.53**	.59**

The Relationship between Purpose in Life and Subjective Happiness and the Mediating Effect of Positive Affect

This study explored the effect of purpose in life on subjective happiness and life satisfaction. Also, it examined the potential mediators of the relationship between the purpose in life and subjective happiness as well as the link between purpose in life and life satisfaction. Analyses were conducted to determine the effect of purpose in life on subjective happiness. Next, we tested whether the link between purpose in life and subjective happiness is mediated by positive affect using the steps introduced by Baron and Kenny (1986). A correlational analysis was used to examine the relationships among purpose in life (IV), subjective happiness (DV), and positive affect (mediating variable). All three variables were significantly correlated with each other (see Table 1).

A hierarchical regression was conducted with purpose in life entered into the first step predicting subjective happiness. Purpose in life was a significant predictor of subjective happiness indicating that individuals who rated high on purpose in life had higher levels of subjective happiness (see Table 2). Second, purpose in life was entered into the regression equation predicting positive affect (mediating variable). Results indicated that purpose in life was a significant predictor of positive affect. Third, both purpose in life and positive affect (mediating variable) were entered into the equation predicting subjective happiness. When adding positive affect (mediating variable) in the third step, the relationship between purpose in life and subjective happiness was reduced ($r = .75$). Hence, positive affect partially mediated the link between purpose in life and subjective happiness (see Table 2).

A commonality analysis was used to determine the amount of predicted variance that was shared among purpose in life and positive affect (mediating variable), and that was unique to these two variables. Results of a commonality analysis indicated that two variables (purpose in life and positive affect) shared 9% of the variance in subjective happiness. Purpose in life uniquely explained 26% of the variance and positive affect explained 2% of the variance.

Table 2: Hierarchical Regression for the mediation

Subjective Happiness			
	B	SE	β
Predictors			
Step 1			
Purpose in Life	.82	.08	.59***
Positive Affect			
Step 2			
Purpose in Life	.20	.05	.31***
Subjective Happiness			
Step 3			
Purpose in Life	.75	.08	.54***
Positive Affect	.35	.12	.17**

$R^2 = .35$ for step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .37$ for step 3

** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

The Relationship between Purpose in Life and Life Satisfaction and the Mediating Effect of Positive affect

Analyses were conducted to examine the effect of purpose in life on life satisfaction and to test whether the relationship between purpose in life and life satisfaction would be mediated by positive affect. A correlational analysis revealed that three variables: purpose in life, life satisfaction and positive affect (mediating variable), were significantly correlated with each other (see Table 1). Therefore, a hierarchical regression was conducted to determine the effect of purpose in life on life satisfaction. Results revealed that purpose in life significantly predicted life satisfaction. Also, purpose in life was a significant predictor of positive affect (mediating variable). When both variables: purpose in life and positive affect, entered into the equation predicting life satisfaction, the relationship between purpose in life and life satisfaction was reduced ($r = .48$). Accordingly, the link between purpose in life and life satisfaction was partially mediated by positive affect (see Table 3).

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression for the mediation

Life Satisfaction			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Predictors			
Step 1			
Purpose in Life	.57	.09	.41***
Positive Affect			
Step 2			
Purpose in Life	.20	.05	.31***
Life Satisfaction			
Step 3			
Purpose in Life	.48	.09	.35***
Positive Affect	.45	.14	.22**

$R^2 = .17$ for step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .21$ for step 3

** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

In order to determine the variance accounted for by respective predictor variables, a commonality analysis was conducted. Results revealed that both purpose in life and positive affect shared 7% of the variance in life satisfaction. Further, the analysis indicated that purpose in life uniquely explained 10% of the variance and positive affect explained 4% of the variance.

Discussion

The perception that one's life is meaningful and purposeful is thought to be important for psychological well-being (Ryff, 1995). This study showed that one's ability to find purpose and direction in life significantly influences his or her happiness and life satisfaction. The sense of purpose in life seems to have positive benefits on one's well-being. Individuals who have a greater sense of purpose in life are more likely to have life goals and work towards achieving them. Also, they believe that there is a meaning to present life (Ryff, 1995). Results

of this study revealed that purpose in life significantly predicts subjective happiness. Prior research has shown that the sense of purpose in life has an effect on global happiness and psychological well-being (Debats, van deLubbe, & Wezeman, 1993; Park, Park, & Peterson, 2010; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Reker, Peacock & Wong, 1987). Findings of this study suggest that persons with higher levels of purpose in life experience greater levels of happiness.

Life satisfaction, the overall appraisal of various aspects of life domains, is a key component of subjective well-being and mental health (Suh, Diener, & Oishi, 1998; Pavot & Diener, 2008). The current findings showed that purpose in life is uniquely important for one's life satisfaction. The presence of purpose gives individuals direction to their lives. It may provide them with unique motivation to do the activities that are salient to them and to reach their respective goals. Having a purpose in life has been identified as a significant dimension that enables people to experience greater satisfaction. Previous research has also illustrated that purpose in life significantly associated with life satisfaction (e.g., Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005; Chamberlain & Zika, 1988; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Our findings also demonstrate that purpose in life is a significant predictor of satisfaction with life.

Further, the present research investigated whether positive affect would act as a possible mediator in the relationships between above variables. Results showed that positive affect partially mediated the effect of purpose in life on subjective happiness and life satisfaction. In previous work, researchers have found a significant relationship between the sense of purpose in life and positive affect (Melton & Schulenberg, 2008; Pan, Fu Keung Wong, Chan, & Joubert, 2008; Scannell et al., 2002; Steger & Frazier, 2005). Feeling that one's life is meaningless may increase stress level. A sense of purpose in life may help reduce stress and develop a long-lasting stream of positive feelings and thoughts. Research has also found that the experience of more positive affect leads individuals to perceive life as good (Singh & Jha, 2008; Lucas & Diener, 2008). Findings from this current investigation suggest that greater sense of purpose in life and higher levels of positive affect contribute to the feeling of satisfaction.

To conclude, this study adds to a considerable body of evidence that suggests the effect of purpose in life on life satisfaction and well-being. Purpose in life has its major impact on one's happiness and life satisfaction. Having a purpose is a powerful source in life which drives people forward and which enables them to experience higher level of satisfaction with their lives. Results also confirmed that positive affect partially explains why the sense of purpose in life is beneficial for subjective happiness and life satisfaction. Finally, the outcomes of this study suggest that purposeful life experiences have a lasting effect on subjective well-being.

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