The Role of Positive Attitudes, Satisfaction and Joy or Living as Elements of Happiness

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Abstract

The difficulty in defining happiness has allowed the identification and study of various elements that try to describe it; among these elements there is satisfaction with life, positive affect, personality traits, expectations, and needs. The purpose of this study is to identify the relationship between four of the variables that have been linked to happiness: satisfaction with life, joy of living, personal fulfillment and positive sense of life, using structural equation models (SEM). The Happiness Scale of Lima was applied to 1083 adults. The results show that only three of the proposed elements are related: positive sense of life, satisfaction with life, and joy of living, whereas personal fulfillment is part of the judgments the participants made about their own lives.

Key Words: Positive sense of life, Satisfaction with life, Joy of living, Latino culture, Structural Equation Models (SEM).

Introduction

Happiness has been defined as an entity that can be described by a specific set of measures (Seligman, 2011; Seligman, Steen, Park and Peterson, 2005), a mental state that people can gain control over in a cognitive way to perceive and conceive both themselves and their world as an experience of joy, satisfaction or positive welfare (Lyubomirsky, 2008). Unfortunately, terms like happiness have been used frequently in daily discourse and may now have vague and somewhat different meanings. The most scientifically useful concepts are those that can be measured, shown, and proven within a theoretical framework. The difficulty of defining happiness has led pioneer psychologists in the study of happiness propose the term subjective well-being (SWB; Diener, 1984). SWB refers to people's evaluations of their own lives and encompasses both cognitive judgments of satisfaction and affective appraisals of moods and emotions. This conceptualization emphasizes the subjective nature of happiness and holds individual human beings to be the best judges of their own happiness (Diener, 2000; Diener, 2009; Diener, Helliwell and Kahneman, 2010).

Satisfaction with life and positive affect are both studied by researchers of subjective well-being. How these two components relate to one another is an empirical question, not one of definition (Diener, 2009). Lucas, Diener and Suh (1996) demonstrated that life satisfaction or subjective judgment on well-being is a different and independent construct from the positive and negative effects.

It is considered that satisfaction is achieved through the accomplishment of certain objectives or of certain needs. By thinking that needs are moderated by learning, by the life cycle or by emotional factors, just to name a few, well-being is then achieved through different objectives through different people, and at different stages of life (Diener and Larsen, 1991; Lyubomirsky, King and Diener, 2005).

The relationship between positive and negative affect has become so controversial for several reasons: first, each type of affect clearly tends to suppress the other, although the mechanism by which this occurs is not yet clearly understood; second, because of the suppressive mechanism, the two types of affect are not independent in terms of their frequency of occurrence; finally, when average levels of positive and negative affect over longer time periods are measured, they show a low correlation with each other because mean levels are a result of both frequency and intensity (Diener, 2009).

There is empirical evidence indicating that well-being is a much broader construct than stability of emotions and subjective judgment about life satisfaction; e.g. situational models consider that the sum of happy moments in life results in the satisfaction of people (Diener, Sandvik and Pavot, 1991), that is, a person exposed to a greater amount of happy events will be more satisfied with his or her life. People briefly react to good and bad events, but in a short time they return to neutrality (Misheva, 2015). Thus, happiness and unhappiness are merely short-lived reactions to changes in people (Veenhoven, 1994) and it depends strongly on intentional activity (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade, 2005; Sheldon and Lyubomirsky, 2006).

Personality is suggested to influence happiness as a result of the popular belief that temperament is more important to subjective well-being than are the number of a person's external facts (Diener and Lucas, 2008; Lucas and Fujita, 2000), although other personality traits such as optimism and self-esteem reflect general positive views about the self and the world (Lucas et al., 1996; Peterson, 2000; Schimmack and Diener, 2003), for example self-determination (Ryan and Deci, 2000) outstanding performance or creativity, and talent (Simonton, 2000, Winner 2000 and Larson, 2000).

It is important to consider that societies derive their happiness from different sources, depending on whether they are more collectivist or individualistic societies. Therefore people living in the first will be happier as far as the group of belonging gets along; while in the most individualistic societies, happiness lies within the individual, it is considered more personal, more intense and more emotionally energetic (Diener, 2009; Diener and Diener, 1995; Diener and Eunkook, 2003; Kitayama, Markus and Kurosawa, 2000).

Research has shown that socio-demographic variables are poor predictors of life satisfaction (Lyubomirsky, 2007). There is also evidence that external conditions such as to earn more money, physical attractiveness or objective health conditions do not explain well-being (e.g., Diener, Lucas and Scollon, 2006). As well, scholars have noticed that happiness is not a single thing, but it can be broken down into its constituent elements. Because of better data now available, certain theories about happiness have been altered.

Considering this information, Alarcón (2006) proposes to study happiness as a multidimensional construct which converges satisfaction of what has been achieved, positive attitudes toward life, (experiences that reflect positive feelings concerning one's self and life) personal fulfillment, and joy of living. The author considers the semantic aspects given by Latino culture in the conceptualization of happiness.

Happiness: a multidimensional construct

Alarcón (2006) proposes that happiness is a state of complete emotional satisfaction that is subjectively experienced by the individual in possession of a desired good. This definition involves the following indicators: a) feelings of satisfaction experienced subjectively by the person b) the consideration that a behavioral state refers to the temporary nature of it, c) the fact that happiness means possession of a good and d) the conception that the asset or assets that generate happiness are of varied nature (material, ethical, aesthetic, psychological, religious, social, etc.)

The Happiness Scale of Lima (HSL, Alarcón, 2006), reported high internal consistency ($\alpha = .92$); this scale has four factors: 1. Positive meaning of life: the absence of depression, pessimism and existential emptiness. 2. Satisfaction with life: subjective states of satisfaction by possessing the desired goods. 3. Personal fulfillment: full happiness and self-sufficiency. 4. Joy of life: it tells how wonderful life is by means of positive experiences and an overall feeling of well-being. Studies which have used the SHL are promising. An example is the study conducted by Álvarez in Colombian adults (2012), where he recognizes that happiness is a multidimensional construct and not a unidimensional one, noting that happiness is diverse, heterogeneous and a multiple representation of emotions, sensations, feelings, attitudes, values, motivations and experiences that intertwine biopsychosocioculturally. Meanwhile, Caycho (2010) used the SHL in marginal peri-urban and urban centers of Lima, reporting an internal consistency of .91. Árraga and Sánchez (2010) validated the SHL in elderly Venezuelans, reporting a high internal consistency of .84. However, for the construct validity, they modified the original structure of the scale. In México, Toribio, González-Arratia, Valdez, González and Van Baneveld (2012) validated this scale in adolescent high school students, reporting an internal consistency of .90; and confirming the structure of the size scale and number of items.

The purpose of this work is to identify causal relationships between positive sense, satisfaction with life, self-fulfillment and joy of living by means of the structural equation modeling (SEM).

Method

Participants and Measures

This study involved 1083 adult inhabitants of the State of Mexico, with ages ranging from 18 to 50 years ($M = 28.99$, $SD = 9.08$). Data collection was performed in public places; the surveys were taken face-to-face. Participants received detailed information about the study and their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any point. Written informed consent was obtained from each of them.

The Happiness Scale of Lima (HSL, Alarcón, 2006), contains 27 items and requires participants to read a series of statements and pick the one that best describes them. Response choices range from 1(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Analysis

Descriptive statistics, correlations and reliabilities are presented in Table 1. Structural Equation Models (SEM) with AMOS 18 was used, with the robust maximum likelihood estimation considering the intervalar nature of the variables. A X2-test CFI, RMSEA, and SRMR were obtained with the respective cut-off values as presented by Schweizer (2010).

Descriptives show the univariate normality of the data, validated throughout the study and analysis of kurtosis and skewness (Curran, West and Finch, 1996). The data shows that all variables have a skewness value of less than 2 and a kurtosis value of less than 7. The reliability for the total scale is very high ($\alpha = .91$).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics, correlations and data reliability

	Positive sense of life	Satisfaction with life	Personal fulfillment	Joy of living	Total scale	*M*	*SD*
Positive Sense	(.878)					3.84	.76
Satisfaction with life	.417**	(.816)				3.76	.65
Personal fulfillment	.422**	.661**	(.734)			3.50	.69
Joy of living	.532**	.531**	.557	(.788)		3.91	.75
Total scale	.755**	.801**	.816**	.828**	(.913)	3.75	.57

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01

Initially, the four-factor model was tested (Alarcón 2006), which does not present a good fit (see table 2), but it has room for improvement.

Table 2: Indices and goodness-of-fit statistics			
Index	Model 4 Factors	Model 3 Factors 27 items	Model 3 Factors 24 items
X^2	1629.68	2646.42	1607.31
Gl	318	321	227
X^2/gl	5.12	8.24	7.08
NFI	.335	.785	.844
CFI	.375	.806	.863
RMSEA	.062	.082	.075
AGFI	.867	.807	.851
RMR	.119	.079	.060

Factor loadings range from .45 and .75 for the factor of positive sense, between .55 and .80 for satisfaction with life, between .45 and .66 for personal fulfillment, and between .64 and .79 for joy of living (see figure 1). Additionally, a high value of correlation is observed between satisfaction with life and personal fulfillment (Kline, 2005). Given that, a three-factor model was tested: positive sense, satisfaction /realization, and joy of living. As shown in Table 2, and following the criteria of practical comparison, the three-factor model showed a better fit than the four-factor model.
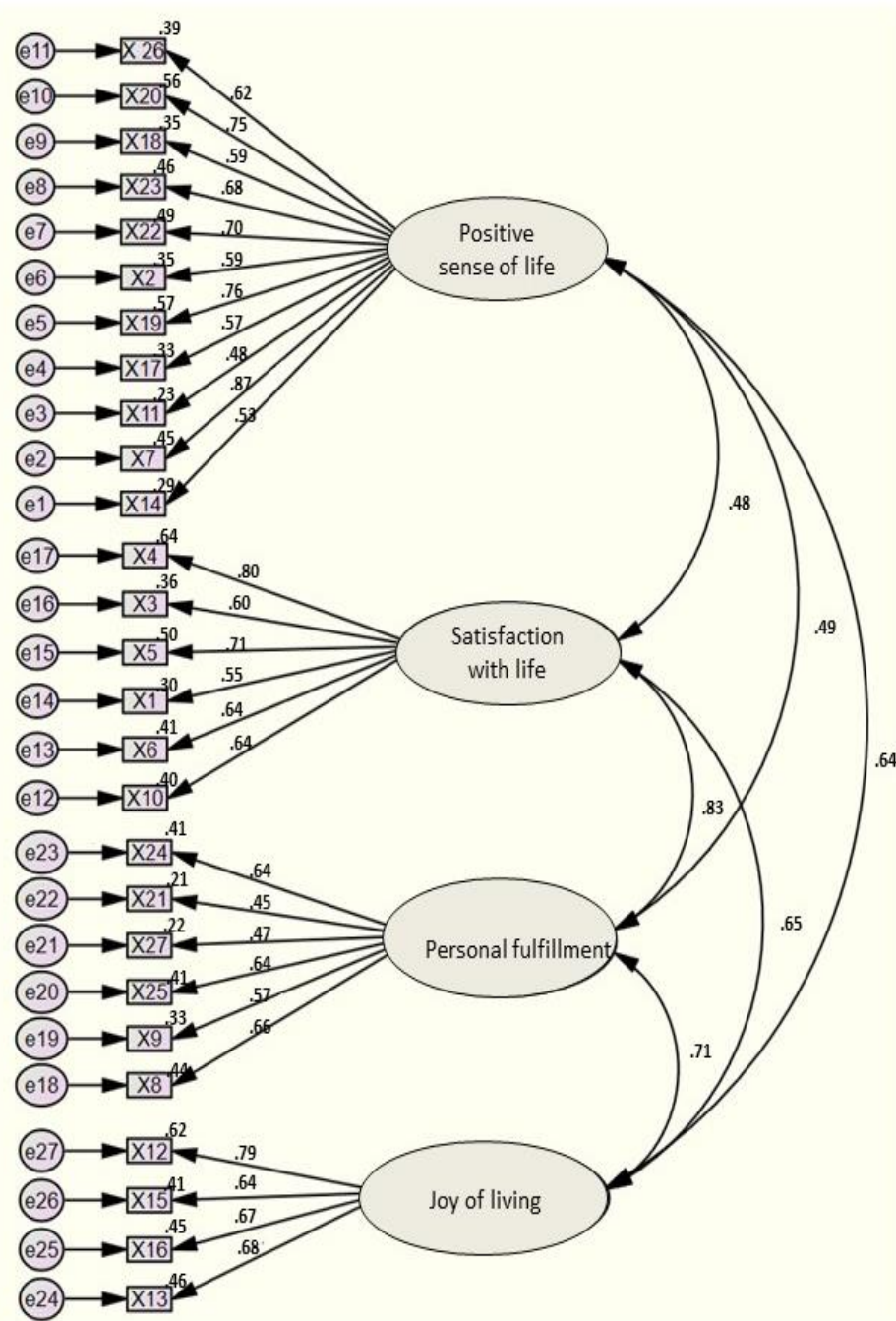
Fig. 1 Four-factor model, estimated parameters of the HSL The values that appear next to the arrows going from the constructs to measure variables indicate the factor loading of indicator variables. At the top of the rectangles representing the indicator variables is the value of the variance explained by the variable R^2 construct, which can be understood as the reliability of the measure. Correlations between constructs are represented by bidirectional arrows.

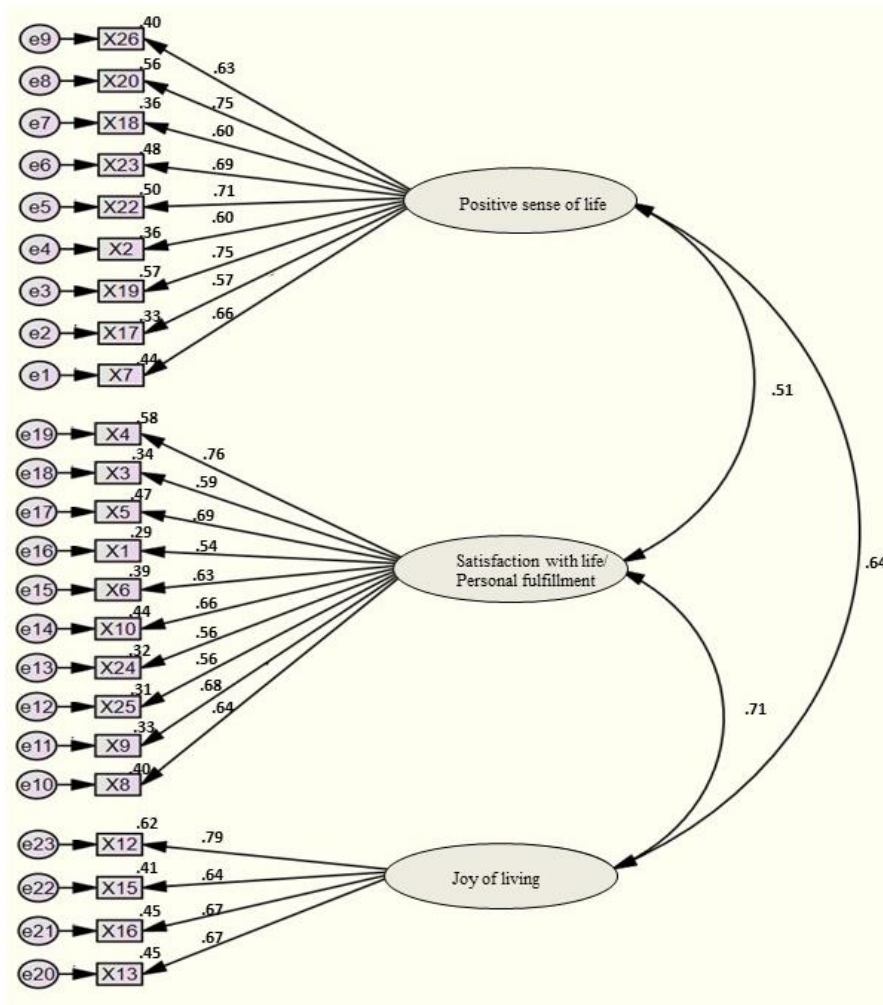Fig. 2: Three-factor model, estimated parameters of the HSL The values that appear next to the arrows going from the constructs to measure variables indicate the factor loading of indicator variables. At the top of the rectangles representing the indicator variables is the value of the variance explained by the variable R^2 construct, which can be understood as the reliability of the measure. Correlations between constructs are represented by bidirectional arrows.

Considering the data presented, it can be observed that the three-factor model has room for improvement, so the following modification is suggested: to discard the variables X11, X14, X21 and X27 because of their low explanatory power in the variance of their constructs associated. The correction and improvement of the model, as can be seen in figure 2. The corrected version of the model is eligible for internal consistency ($\alpha = .93$).

Discussion

The results allow us to make several inferences. Primarily, for the participants in this study, satisfaction with life (Lucas, Diener & Suh, 1996) and personal fulfillment go hand in hand since subjective judgments about the living conditions and self-sufficiency include placidity (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Simonton, 2000);

The results also emphasize the subjective nature of happiness, and holds individual human beings to be the best judges of their own happiness (Diener, 2000; Diener, 2009; Diener, Helliwell and Kahneman, 2010).

Satisfaction is achieved by accomplishing certain objectives or needs. Since needs are moderated by learning, by life circumstances, and by emotional factors, it can be expressed that well-being is achieved by meeting different objectives and at different stages of life (Diener and Larsen, 1991; Lyubomirsky, King and Diener, 2005).

It can also be observed that in Mexican participants, the positive sense of life responds to a collectivist nature of the group (Diener, 2009; Diener and Diener, 1995; Diener and Eunkook, 2003; Kitayama, Markus and Kurosawa, 2000). In this factor, happiness means being free from deep depression and having deep positive feelings toward one's self and life, according to a scale of degrees of happiness that reflects positive attitudes towards life. It is an attitude which involves affects, cognitions and behaviors, originated in predispositions socially learned to have an adaptive function. Therefore, happiness depends largely on intentional activity (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon and Schkade, 2005; Sheldon and Lyubomirsky, 2006) and on feeling happy, and thinking happily.

The joy of living talks about how wonderful life is, positive experiences and an overall feeling of well-being. This factor is clearly identified despite the controversy previous studies found. Finally, we can say that the model proposed by Alarcón (2006) has room for improvement; however, it provides empirical evidence indicating that happiness is a construct much broader than stability of emotions and subjective judgment about well-being (Diener, Sandvik and Pavot, 1991). Happiness should also consider the role of attitudes toward life.

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