A Holistic Approach to Happiness

AUTHOR
Leonardo Lightbourne

ABSTRACT
In the United States and Great Britain, happiness has declined during the last quarter of the century. This suggests that individual and societal happiness might not be attributable to material well-being and might be affected by other factors. Previous studies have failed to adopt a holistic approach towards happiness that incorporates material, physical, social and psychological factors, and the spiritual or transpersonal dimension of being. This study aims to explore happiness in a holistic way by including measures of well-being, spiritual well-being, personality, self-actualization, self-esteem and the experiencing of weird coincidences. 126 participants completed a survey online via Survey Monkey. Well-being (PERMA) and self-actualization were significantly positively related with overall happiness. Based on these findings, personal happiness may not be attributable to material well-being and might be affected by factors such as meaning and self-esteem. Future research might look at whether seeking meaning or having found meaning or both are associated with self-actualization.

Correspondence Address
Leonardo Lightbourne, BSc Student, University of Buckingham. Email: llightbourne@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION
Happiness is defined as an experience that elicits a series of positive emotions such as joy, life satisfaction, pleasure and pride. The pursuit of happiness is often referred to as ‘the ultimate goal’ in life in western civilization. Popular pop culture phrases like “YOLO” meaning “you only live once”, encourages individuals to take risks (i.e. financially, physically and career-directed) on opportunities, and chances that will bring happiness to their lives. Numerous studies have shown people who are happy tend to excel at their jobs, are more pleasant socially and encounter fewer problems, especially with the law. These might be the reasons why happiness is highly sought after.

Despite happiness being an ultimate objective for many people, it seems to be declining globally in industrialised societies; for example, in the United States and Great Britain happiness has declined during the last quarter of the century. Notably, in China happiness is declining in spite of a period of great economic growth and poverty reduction. This suggests that individual and societal happiness may not be attributable to material well-being and may be affected by other factors which influence the quality of life such as sufficient rest and leisure.

According to Seligman, authentic happiness involves three factors. Firstly, is Positive Emotion, which is feeling emotions such as pleasure, ecstasy, warmth, and comfort as well as being optimistic. Secondly, Engagement is taking part in activities that allow us to experience flow. Flow occurs when we lose our self-consciousness during an activity, feel at one with the activity and have a sense that time has slowed down. Athletes refer to this as “being in the zone”. Thirdly, Seligman suggests that authentic happiness involves Meaning and it is through meaning in existence that human beings feel a sense of belonging. Here, happiness is achieved through the choices an individual makes and happiness maximizes how they feel about life.

Many studies have reported a link between Seligman's three-factor approach to authentic happiness and life satisfaction. Peterson et al’s internet survey of adults, reported people who live a full life are the happiest, they value intrinsic life goals and have good self-control, low life satisfaction. This supports Seligman's model in that happiness maximizes the way people feel about life. Most recently, Lee investigated the relationship between engagement in meaningful activities and happiness amongst young adults ages. A total of 338 undergraduate completed a
questionnaire measuring Engagement using the Meaningful Activity Survey (EMAS) and the Authentic Happiness Inventory and results showed a significant relationship between happiness and meaningful activities. Taken together, these findings suggest that happiness is experienced across the adult life-span. However, Seligman's approach does come under some criticism; it does not take into consideration how much people engage with the people they love and how much they are committed to their work. Previous studies have demonstrated that people who are happy are highly social with strong romantic and family relationships when compared to less happy people.

A past study conducted by Headey and Veenhoven analysed 649 Australian participants over a 7-year period and found happier people to be more satisfied with their jobs and achievements. Seligman failed to assess the things that influence people’s choices like their relationships, social groups, jobs, and accomplishments and their link to positive emotions and meaning – for example, engagement with loved ones can create positive emotions and also a sense of meaning – similarly people often find meaning in their lives from the work they choose to do.

These limitations led Seligman to create a new construct called Well-being. His old construct “Authentic Happiness” defined happiness by the choices an individual made to maximize how they felt about life, whereas, “Well-being” defined happiness as a combination of how an individual felt, a sense of meaning, good relationships, and accomplishment. Seligman developed the five-factor PERMA model and added two more factors: Relationships and Accomplishments. Seligman argued that if evolution relied solely on his old construct “Authentic Happiness”, the human race would have died out a long time ago because his new construct rationalized the purpose for couples who choose to have children - it creates more meaningful relationships and is also considered an evolutionary accomplishment. Seligman stated well-being was not a unitary phenomenon or experience but rather combinations of feeling good, living meaningfully, establishing supportive and friendly relationships, accomplishing goals, and being fully engaged with life. If individuals wanted to increase their well-being, they could do so by being aware of the changes they can make to experience satisfaction within each PERMA domain and improve their overall well-being.

Much of what Seligman talks about in the PERMA model (i.e. Engagement, Relationships and Meaning) of achieving happiness has similarities to Maslow’s theory of self-actualization, which is an individual’s innate tendency towards personal growth, healing and realizing their human potential. Maslow believed people were driven by five motivational needs unrelated to rewards and developed a pyramidal model to depict the path towards self-actualization. At the bottom of the model are basic or deficiency needs (e.g. physiological, safety, love, and esteem) and at the top are the growth needs (e.g. self-actualization). Maslow believed everyone is capable of self-actualizing once all their basic needs are met. Some of Seligman’s PERMA model factors are implicit in Maslow’s pyramidal model – for example, at the basic needs level, Relationships fit into the love and belonging stage and Positive Emotions are associated with self-esteem. It might be expected that those who experience themselves as more fully self-actualized, experience higher well-being and are happier than those who are less self-actualized but the relationship between these constructs is unclear. For example, Viterø investigated the difference between subjective well-being and self-actualization and found Openness to experience was a predictor of self-actualization but did not predict subjective well-being. This study investigates the relationships between happiness, well-being and self-actualization using Seligman’s Well-being construct and PERMA measure as well as measures of happiness and self-actualization.

Seligman’s PERMA model includes Engagement and Meaning, which are associated with the personality trait openness to experience. Therefore, another question is the extent to which happiness, well-being, and self-actualization are influenced by personality and which traits are associated with these constructs. Personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, and conscientiousness have been linked to self-actualization and happiness. Extraversion and conscientiousness were found to be positively correlated with well-being, whereas, neuroticism, was negatively associated with well-being. Chan and Joseph investigated personality, domains of aspiration, and happiness in 176 participants who completed the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, the Aspiration Index as well as measures of happiness, self-actualization, and self-esteem. They found extraversion was linked
to higher scores on happiness, self-actualization, and self-esteem.

High self-esteem has been shown in studies to have a strong relation to happiness, although no causal relationship has been established. People with high self-esteem have a tendency to exaggerate their success and good traits, which often results in them being referred to as narcissistic and conceited individuals by their peers. Egan et al., in the study on the dark triad, found that narcissism was associated with higher extraversion. Extraversion has been linked to self-actualization in previous studies. This study aims to explore which traits are associated with self-esteem, happiness, well-being, and self-actualization and whether the same or different traits are associated with each construct. Previous studies have linked happiness to material possessions, finding true love and high social economic status. These studies have failed to adopt a holistic approach towards happiness that incorporates not simply material, physical, social and psychological factors that might underpin our sense of well-being but also includes attention to the spiritual transpersonal dimension of being.

Although China presented an ideal environment for a happy life, the people were still unhappy. Even Seligman’s five-factor PERMA Model leaves a gap in the understanding of what makes an individual truly happy, given that it neglects explicit inclusion of this dimension.

Spiritual well-being is defined as an individual’s ability to experience their spiritual essence by exploring their purpose, meaning and interconnection with the self (e.g. mind, body and soul) and the physical world around them. Notably, spiritual well-being has not been explicitly excluded in both Maslow’s and Seligman’s models despite studies linking religious beliefs and spiritual well-being to higher life satisfaction, happiness, and positive affect. Luttmann found when controlling for demographic variables such as age, income, and marital status, that individuals displayed positive correlations between well-being and religious beliefs and activities. Snoep investigated the link between religiousness and happiness in the USA, the Netherlands and Denmark in 2000 using the World Values Survey (WVS). They found positive correlations – the USA produced the strongest, then the Netherlands and Denmark. These studies suggest that spiritual well-being plays a role in happiness and well-being and might be the final piece of the puzzle missing in both Seligman’s PERMA model and Maslow’s self-actualization. Maslow’s states that only one in a hundred people fully self-actualize, however, when religious studies control for Maslow’s basic needs (e.g. social capital, and marital status) happiness is still achieved. This suggests that people high on spiritual well-being can transcend past the basic levels of Maslow’s pyramidal model and self-actualize. The current study aims to investigate the link.

With respect to the transpersonal, this study explores the notion that experience of synchronicity in our lives might also influence happiness, well-being, and self-actualization. Synchronicity is experienced when we make meaningful connections between inner events such as thoughts, dreams and visions and external events occurring simultaneously or at a future point in time. Some may describe this as experiencing a “Weird Coincidence”. Beitman defined weird coincidences as experiences ranging from having dreams come true to thinking about something or someone and soon after it/they appear. For example, a person may have a dream about a unique symbol and read a post on Facebook the next morning with the same symbol. The symbol may be a reminder or a sign pointing that person in a specific direction.

The coincidence is the appearance of the symbol in the dream and then in physical reality. Meaning is derived from the feelings, thoughts, and actions it inspires. Coincidence in action is synchronicity. Many people use these meaningful coincidences to guide their decision making and to feel more connected to other people. Further, there is the possibility that people who are self-actualizing may have encounters with synchronous events because self-actualizers are people who are searching for meaning and purpose – meaningful coincidence may act as a pathway to self-actualization.

Personality traits such as neuroticism and extraversion have been found to be positively correlated with the experiencing of weird coincidences, whereas agreeableness has been found to be negatively correlated with this. High negative affect (e.g. sadness, anger, and anxiety), optimism, enthusiasm, intuition, and meaning-seeking are associated with people who are coincidence prone. Meaning-seeking is also an implicit part of Seligman’s PERMA model alone and there may be a potential link between experiencing weird coincidences and well-being. Research has also found people who view themselves as spiritual experience more events of synchronicity than those who describe themselves
as non-spiritual. People who experience synchronicity may have a higher state of well-being as they feel their internal world is aligning with their external world: their pursuit of happiness may be attracting happiness into their lives. There is limited research on the phenomenon of synchronicity, hence, this study brings the field of psychology one step closer to understanding the psychological influence of the experience of synchronicity on self-esteem, happiness, well-being and self-actualization and those factors that might mediate it (e.g. personality traits).

Previous studies have failed to adopt a holistic approach towards happiness that incorporates material, physical, social and psychological factors, and the spiritual or transpersonal dimension of being. This study aims to explore happiness in a more holistic way by including measures of happiness, well-being, spiritual well-being, personality, self-actualization, self-esteem and the experiencing of weird coincidences. Based on the theoretical framework, and the purpose of this study, the following hypotheses were suggested:

- It is expected that Well-being (PERMA) and Self-Actualization will significantly be positively related with Overall Happiness.
- It is expected that Openness to Experience will significantly be positively related with Self Actualization and not significantly related to Well-being.
- It is expected that Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness will significantly be positively related with Self-actualization and Well-being.
- It is expected that Spiritual Well-being will significantly be positively related with Well-Being and Self-Actualization.
- It is expected that the experiencing of Weird Coincidences will significantly be positively related with Well-being and Self-Actualization.
- It is expected that Self-Esteem will significantly be positively related with Self-Actualization and Well-being.
- It is expected that Self-Esteem, Self-Actualization, Spiritual Well-being, Weird Coincidence, Well-being (PERMA) and Personality will significantly be positively related with Happiness.

**METHOD**

**Design**

Participants were recruited using a survey design via SurveyMonkey. The survey remained live for a month. The overall survey comprised of The Weird Coincidence Scale (WCS) 36, Self-Actualisation Scale, 36 Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI), 37 Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, 38 the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, 39 Spiritual Health and Life-Orientation (SHALOM) 40 and PERMA-Profiler Scale 41 along with the Information Sheet, Consent and Debrief Form.

**Participants**

197 participants took part in the survey and 126 participants ($M = 31.88, SD = 13.08$, age range = 18 and older) completed the survey online via Survey Monkey. 30 males ($M = 31.70, SD = 13.26$), 92 females ($M = 31.91, SD = 13.11$) and 4 unknown. Participants were recruited via links posted into three Facebook groups: Synchronicity Group (https://www.facebook.com/groups/2208493210/), Social Science Research Group (https://www.facebook.com/groups/1515339105420191/) and Survey Exchange Group (https://www.facebook.com/groups/students.survey.exchange/). Links were also sent to students and staff at the University of Buckingham via email.

Power analysis identified a minimum of 97 participants was required for this study (Linear regression medium effect size $F(2) = 0.15$, power 0.8, $N = 97$).

**Materials**

**WSC** – This scale assessed how often participants experience meaningful coincidences (synchronicity). It consists of 12 items grouped into two subscales: interpersonal and agentic subscale. The interpersonal scale involves coincidences about oneself and relation to other – for example thinking about a person or idea and seeing it manifested externally. The agentic scale involves coincidences that revolves around actions and personal accomplishment. The interpersonal subscale consisted of 7 items (e.g. "I
think of calling someone only to have that person unexpectedly call me”), and the agentic subscale consists of 5 items (e.g. “I advance in my work/education through being at the right place-right time”). Coefficient alpha reliability was 0.76 for the agentic subscale and 0.77 for the interpersonal subscale. Participants were asked to rate how much or little they experience weird coincidence on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = never and 5 = very frequently. These items comprise the “Total WCS” score.

**Self-Actualisation** – This scale is the most widely used short form to measure self-actualization. The index consists of 15 items (e.g. “It is always necessary that others approve of what I do”) that were modified from the Personal Orientation Inventory with a significant correlation of r = .67, p < .001. Jones & Crandall reported adequate test-retest reliability. Each of the 15 item lists is scored on a 1-6 scale, where 6 = strongly agree and 1 = strongly disagree to measure people’s self-actualization.

**TIPI** – A very brief measure of the Big-Five personality dimensions composing of ten items (e.g. “I see myself as extraverted, enthusiastic”). Each item is rated on a 7-point scale that ranges from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly). The scale demonstrates adequate test-retest reliability and convergence. Test-retest correlations were strong (at least .60) and are significant on a p = .001 level and below.

**Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale** - A 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. All items (e.g. “I feel that I have a number of good qualities”) are answered using a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The scale has a high reliability with test-retest correlations ranging from .82 to .88.

**The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire** – The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) was developed by Hills and Argyle to provide a less time-consuming measure of the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI). The OHQ presented each statement of the OHI endorsed on a uniform six-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). It comprises of 29 items that measure subjective wellbeing - for example, “I am intensely interested in other people”. The scale measured reliability with test-retest correlations 0.78 (P<0.001). Cronbach's Alpha of the questionnaire's test and retest stages were 0.84 and 0.87 respectively.

**SHALOM** - SHALOM comprises 20 items with five items measuring the quality of relationships of each person with in different domains: Personal (relationship with the self), Communal (relationship with other people), Environment (relationship with the environment) and Transcendental (relationship with God). The acronym SHALOM has components – Spiritual Health measure (SHM) And Life-Orientation Measure (LOM). SHM is a retrospective measure of a participant’s reflection on lived experience/how they feel each item reflects their personal experience most of the time. The LOM assessed the ideals participants have for their spiritual health within the four domains of spiritual well-being. The 5 items in each of four domains of SH were scored using Likert scale responses from 1= very low to 5= very high. The scale demonstrated high consistency with Cronbach’s alpha values for personal, transcendental, environmental, and communal domains were 0.89, 0.86, 0.76, and 0.79, respectively, and this was 0.92 for all items together.

**PERMA - Profiler Scale** - This scale was created as a brief measurement of Seligman’s PERMA model. The PERMA-Profiler Scale derived from three different studies that complied hundreds of theoretical relevant items was used. It was reduced, tested and refined to just 15 questions. These questions were directed at the PERMA model (three items per PERMA domain). 8 filler items were added, which assessed overall wellbeing, negative emotion, loneliness, and physical health, resulting in a final 23-item measure. An item such as “How often do you become absorbed in what you are doing?” is rated on a scale of 1 (never) to 10 (always). Eight additional studies assessed the psychometrics of the measure. The measure’s reliability has been established by its application to approximately 12,000 participants worldwide.

**Procedures**

Upon clicking on the link, participants were instructed to read the information sheet detailing the purpose of the study and their right to withdrawal. Participants were also instructed to give consent. Prior to starting the questionnaires participants were asked to provide brief demographic details such as gender and age. The questionnaires were completed in the following order: The WSC, Self-Actualisation Scale, TIPI, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Oxford
Happiness Questionnaire, SHALOM and PERMA-Profiler Scale. The participants took sixteen minutes on average to complete the questionnaires. Upon the completion of the last questionnaire, participants were taken to a debrief page and were instructed to click done; failure to do so, resulted in an incomplete questionnaire. The data of each participant was then collected by researchers via Survey Monkey.

RESULTS

Only 113 cases were used in the analysis as outliers were removed. Data was transformed using z scores due to it not being normally distributed. A stepwise multiple regression analysis was used because it removes the weakest related variable through multiple regression, leaving the variables that explain the distribution best at the end.

Table 1 shows participants in this study were not fully happy but moderately happy people ($M = 4.30$). Participants recorded average overall well-being scores; Positive Emotion ($M = 6.90$), Engagement ($M = 7.51$), Relationship ($M = 7.02$), Meaning ($M = 7.02$), Accomplishments ($M = 7.19$) and Overall-Well-being ($M = 7.21$). In regards to personality traits, participants scored higher on Emotional Stability ($M = 4.55$), Openness to Experience ($M = 5.51$) and Conscientiousness ($M = 5.30$).

### Table 1 Presenting Descriptive Statistics for the different variables used in the analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Names</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happiness Total Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotion Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>7.51</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>7.02</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>7.02</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishments Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>7.19</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Well-being Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>7.21</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Emotions Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Health Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>6.72</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness Score</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem Total</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>19.68</td>
<td>5.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Stability Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to Experience Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-actualization Total</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>63.30</td>
<td>8.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCS Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCS-Interpersonal Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCS-Agentic Mean</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Mean Feel</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal Mean Feel</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment Mean Feel</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendental Mean Feel</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Linear Regression for Total Happiness as predicted by PERMA**

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine which of the PERMA Model factors - Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishments were the best predictors of Total Happiness. A significant two variable model was identified ($R^2 = .64, F(2, 110) = 98, p < .001$) in which Positive Emotion was found to have a $B$ weight of .62, $t(112) = 8.36, SE = .07$ p < .001, 95% CI [.47, .76] and Meaning was found to have a $B$ weight of .25, $t(112) = 3.4, SE = .07$ p < .001, 95% CI [.11, .40]. Positive emotion was entered first and explained about 60% of the variance (adjusted $R^2 = .60$) in Total Happiness. Meaning was entered second and explained a further 4% of the variance (adjusted $R^2 = .64$) in Total Happiness. Total Happiness was significantly predicted by both Positive Emotion and Meaning.

**Linear Regression for Total Happiness as predicted by Overall Well-being**

A multiple regression analysis was to determine if Overall Well-being is a predictor of Total Happiness. A significant model was identified ($R^2 = .58, F(1, 111) = 155, p < .001$) in which Overall Well-being was found to have a $B$ weight of .76, $t(112) = 12.45, SE = .06, p < .001, 95% CI [.64, .89]. Total Happiness was significantly predicted by Overall Well-being.
Linear Regression for Total Happiness as predicted by Self-Actualization

A multiple regression analysis was to determine if Self-Actualization is a predictor of Total Happiness. A significant model was identified (R² = .59, F(1, 111) = 161, p < .001) in which Self-Actualization was found to have a B weight of .77, t(112) = 12.69, SE = .06, p < .001, 95% CI [.65, .89]. Total Happiness was significantly predicted by Self-Actualization.

Linear Regression for Overall Well-being as predicted by Self-Actualization

A multiple regression analysis was to determine if Self-Actualization is a predictor of Overall Well-being. A significant model was identified (R² = .33, F(1, 111) = 36.95, p < .001) in which Self-Actualization was found to have a B weight of .57, t(112) = 7.39, SE = .08, p < .001, 95% CI [.42, .73]. Overall Well-being was significantly predicted by Self-Actualization.

Linear Regression for Self-Actualization as predicted by Personality

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine which of the Personality factors - Extraversion, Emotional Stability, Agreeableness, Openness to Experience and Conscientiousness, were the best predictors of Self-Actualization. A significant four variable model was identified (R² = .28, F(4, 108) = 10.35, p < .001) in which Emotional Stability was found to have a B weight of .27, t(112) = 3.02, SE = .09, p < .001, 95% CI [.09, .44]. Openness to Experience was found to have a B weight of .19, t(112) = 2.21, SE = .09, p < .001, 95% CI [.02, .36]. Extraversion was found to have a B weight of .21, t(112) = 2.38, SE = .09, p < .001, 95% CI [.04, .39], and Agreeableness was found to have a B weight of .18, t(112) = 2.18, SE = .08, p < .001, 95% CI [.02, .35]. Emotional Stability was entered first and explained about 15% of the variance (adjusted R² = .15) in Self-Actualization. Openness to Experience entered second and explained a further 5% of the variance (adjusted R² = .20) in Self-Actualization. Agreeableness entered third and explained a further 2% of the variance (adjusted R² = .22) in Self-Actualization. Extraversion entered fourth and explained a further 3% of the variance (adjusted R² = .25) in Self-Actualization. Overall Well-being was significantly predicted by Emotional Stability, Agreeableness, Openness to Experience and Extraversion.

Linear Regression for Overall Well-being as predicted by Personality

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine which of the Personality factors - Extraversion, Emotional Stability, Agreeableness, Openness to Experience and Conscientiousness, were the best predictors of Overall Well-being. A significant three variable model was identified (R² = .21, F(3, 109) = 9.44, p < .001) in which Emotional Stability was found to have a B weight of .30, t(112) = 3.47, SE = .09, p < .001, 95% CI [.13, .48]. Extraversion was found to have a B weight of .21, t(112) = 2.48, SE = .09, p < .001, 95% CI [.04, .38], and Conscientiousness was found to have a B weight of .19, t(112) = 2.20, SE = .09, p < .001, 95% CI [.01, .36]. Emotional Stability was entered first and explained about 12% of the variance (adjusted R² = .12) in Overall Well-being. Extraversion entered second and explained a further 4% of the variance (adjusted R² = .16) in Overall Well-being. Conscientiousness entered third and explained a further 2% of the variance (adjusted R² = .18) in Overall Well-being. Overall Well-being was significantly predicted by Emotional Stability, Extraversion and Conscientiousness.

Linear Regression for Total Happiness as predicted by Personality

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine which of the Personality factors - Extraversion, Emotional Stability, Agreeableness, Openness to Experience and Conscientiousness, were the best predictors of Total Happiness. A significant four variable model was identified (R² = .42, F(4, 108) = 19.55, p < .001) in which Emotional Stability was found to have a B weight of .37, t(112) = 4.92, SE = .08, p < .001, 95% CI [.22, .52], Extraversion was found to have a B weight of .30, t(112) = 4.02, SE = .08, p < .001, 95% CI [.15, .45], Openness to Experience was found to have a B weight of .21, t(112) = 2.79, SE = .08, p < .001, 95% CI [.06, .36], and Conscientiousness was found to have a B weight of .21, t(112) = 2.79, SE = .07, p < .001, 95% CI [.06, .35]. Emotional Stability was entered first and explained about 23% of the variance (adjusted R² = .23) in Total Happiness. Extraversion entered second and explained a further 9% of the variance (adjusted R² = .32) in Total Happiness. Openness to Experience entered third and explained a further 4% of the variance (adjusted R² = .36) in Total Happiness. Conscientiousness entered fourth and
explained a further 4% of the variance (adjusted R² = .40) in Total Happiness. Overall Well-being was significantly predicted by Emotional Stability and Conscientiousness.

**Linear Regression for Overall Well-being as predicted by Spiritual Well-being**

A multiple regression analysis was to determine if Spiritual Well-being is a predictor of Overall Well-being. A significant model was identified (R² = .15, F(1, 111) = 19.18, p < .001) in which Spiritual Well-being was found to have a B weight of .38, t(112) = 4.38, SE = .09 p < .001, 95% CI [.21, .55]. Overall Well-being was significantly predicted by Spiritual Well-being.

**Linear Regression for Overall Well-being as predicted by factors of Spiritual Well-being**

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine which factors of Spiritual Well-being - Personal, Communal, Transcendental and Environment were the best predictors of Overall Well-being. A significant two variable model was identified (R² = .32, F(2, 110) = 18.01, p < .001) in which Personal was found to have a B weight of .35, t(112) = 3.26, SE = .11 p < .001, 95% CI [.14, .56], and Communal was found to have a B weight of .27, t(112) = 2.53, SE = .11 p < .001, 95% CI [.06, .48]. Personal was entered first and explained about 28% of the variance (adjusted R² = .28) in Overall Well-being. Communal was entered second and explained a further 3% of the variance (adjusted R² = .31) in Overall Well-being. Overall Well-being was significantly predicted by both Personal and Communal.

**Linear Regression for Self-Actualization as predicted by factors of Spiritual Well-being**

A multiple regression analysis was to determine if Spiritual Well-being is a predictor of Self-Actualization. A significant model was identified (R² = .12, F(1, 111) = 13.13, p < .001) in which Spiritual Well-being was found to have a B weight of .34, t(112) = 3.84, SE = .09 p < .001, 95% CI [.17, .52]. Self-Actualization was significantly predicted by Spiritual Well-being.

**Linear Regression for Self-Actualization as predicted by factors of Spiritual Well-being**

A multiple regression analysis was used to determine which factors of Spiritual Well-being - Personal, Communal, Transcendental and Environment were the best predictors of Self-Actualization. A significant model was identified (R² = .12, F(1, 111) = 13.13, p < .001) in which Personal was found to have a B weight of .45, t(112) = 5.35, SE = .09 p < .001, 95% CI [.29, .62]. Self-Actualization was significantly predicted by Personal.

**Linear Regression for Overall Well-being as predicted by Weird Coincidence (Agentic & Interpersonal)**

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine which factors of Weird Coincidence - Agentic and Interpersonal were the best predictors of Overall Well-being. A significant model was identified (R² = .04, F(1, 111) = 5.03, p < .001) in which Agentic was found to have a B weight of .21 t(112) = 2.24, SE = .09 p < .001, 95% CI [.02, .39]. Overall Well-being was significantly predicted by Agentic.

**Linear Regression for Self-Actualization as predicted by Weird Coincidence (Agentic & Interpersonal)**

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine which factors of Weird Coincidence - Agentic and Interpersonal were the best predictors of Self-Actualization. A significant model was identified (R² = .03, F(1, 111) = 3.96, p < .001) in which Agentic was found to have a B weight of .19 t(112) = 1.99, SE = .09 p < .001, 95% CI [.0, .37]. Self-Actualization was significantly predicted by Agentic.

**Linear Regression for Self-Actualization as predicted by Self Esteem**

A multiple regression analysis was to determine if Self-Esteem is a predictor of Self-Actualization. A significant model was identified (R² = .53, F(1, 111) = 126.1, p < .001) in which Self-Esteem was found to have a B weight of -.73, t(112) = -11.23, SE = .07 p < .001, 95% CI [-.86, -.60]. Self-Actualization was significantly predicted by Self-Esteem.

**Linear Regression for Overall Well-being as predicted by Self Esteem**

A multiple regression analysis was to determine if Self-Esteem is a predictor of Overall Well-being. A significant model was identified (R² = .42, F(1, 111) = 78.65, p < .001) in which Self-Esteem was found to have a B weight of -.64, t(112) = -8.87, p < .001, SE = .07 95% CI [-.79, -.50]. Overall Well-being was significantly predicted by Self-Esteem.
Linear Regression for Meaning as predicted by Personality

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine which of the Personality factors - Extraversion, Emotional Stability, Conscientiousness, Openness to Experience and Conscientiousness, were the best predictors of Meaning. A significant two variable model was identified (R^2 = .15, F(2, 110) = 15.07, p < .001) in which Emotional Stability was found to have a B weight of .31, t(112) = 3.49, SE = .09 p < .001, 95% CI [.14, .49], and Openness to Experience was found to have a B weight of .18, t(112) = 1.99, SE = .09 p < .001, 95% CI [.0 .36]. Emotional Stability was entered first and explained about 11% of the variance (adjusted R^2 = .11) in Meaning. Openness to experience entered second and explained a further 3% of the variance (adjusted R^2 = .14) in Meaning. Meaning was significantly predicted by Emotional Stability and Openness to Experience.

Linear Regression for Self-Esteem as predicted by PERMA

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine which of the following factors were the best predictors of Total Happiness - Self-Esteem, Self-Actualization, Spiritual Well-being, Weird Coincidence (Agentic and Interpersonal), Well-being (PERMA) and Personality. A significant six variable model was identified (R^2 = .85, F(6, 106) = 100.03, p < .001) in which Self-Esteem was found to have a B weight of -.28, t(112) = -4.52, SE = .06 p < .001, 95% CI [-.41, -.16], Positive Emotion was found to have a B weight of .32, t(112) = 5.74, SE = .06 p < .001, 95% CI [.21, .42], Self-Actualization was found to have a B weight of .29, t(112) = 5.28, SE = .06 p < .001, 95% CI [.18, .41], Extraversion was found to have a B weight of .14, t(112) = 3.49, SE = .04 p < .001, 95% CI [.06, .22], Communal was found to have a B weight of .13, t(112) = 2.74, SE = .05 p = .007, 95% CI [.03, .22] and Conscientiousness was found to have a B weight of .1, t(112) = 2.31, SE = .04 p = .023, 95% CI [.01, .17]. Self-Esteem was entered first and explained about 66% of the variance (adjusted R^2 = .66) in Total Happiness. Positive Emotion was entered second and explained about 11% of the variance (adjusted R^2 = .77) in Total Happiness. Self-Actualization was entered third and explained about 4% of the variance (adjusted R^2 = .81) in Total Happiness. Extraversion was entered fourth and explained about 1% of the variance (adjusted R^2 = .82) in Total Happiness. Communal was entered fifth and explained about 1% of the variance (adjusted R^2 = .83) in Total Happiness. Conscientiousness was entered sixth and explained about 1% of the variance (adjusted R^2 = .84) in Total Happiness. Total Happiness was significantly predicted by Self-Esteem, Positive Emotion, Self-Actualization, Extraversion, Communal, and Conscientiousness.

DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of what factors contribute to happiness and explore the relationship between self-esteem, well-being, spiritual well-being, overall happiness, and self-actualization. It was hypothesized that well-being (PERMA) and self-actualization would significantly be positively related with overall happiness; this was supported. Two PERMA factors, Positive Emotion, and Meaning, were predictors of self-actualization and
overall happiness. It was hypothesized that openness to experience would significantly be positively related with self-actualization and not significantly related to well-being; this was supported. It was hypothesized that extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness would significantly be positively related with self-actualization and Well-being; this was partially supported – extraversion significantly predicted self-actualization and well-being. Agreeableness only predicted self-actualization whereas conscientiousness only predicted well-being. It was hypothesized that spiritual well-being would significantly be positively related with Well-Being and Self-Actualization; this was supported. Two factors of the SHALOM, Personal and Communal emerged as predictors – Personal and Communal predicted well-being whereas, only Personal predicted self-actualization. It was hypothesized that self-esteem would significantly be positively related with self-actualization and well-being; this was supported. It was hypothesized self-esteem, self-actualization, spiritual well-being, weird coincidence, well-being (PERMA) and personality would significantly be positively related with happiness; this was partially supported. Weird Coincidence was not a predictor of Happiness. Lastly, it was hypothesized that the experiencing of weird coincidences would significantly be positively related to well-being and self-actualization; this was also supported in that the agentic subscale was a predictor of self-actualization and well-being. The findings of this study are broadly congruent with those of previous studies that investigated happiness and its relationship with factors such as personality, self-actualization, self-esteem, spiritual well-being and well-being (PERMA). These findings will now be explored more thoroughly, and their implications discussed.

Much of what Seligman talks about in the PERMA model, has similarities to Maslow’s theory of self-actualization – for example, at the basic needs level, Relationships fit into the love and belonging stage, Positive Emotions are associated with self-esteem (Vittersø, 2004). The findings revealed both well-being (PERMA) and self-actualization were significantly related with overall happiness. Seligman stated that well-being was not a unitary phenomenon or experience but rather a combination of feeling good, living meaningfully, establishing supportive and friendly relationships, accomplishing goals, and being fully engaged with life. In this study, Positive Emotion and Meaning were found to be significant predictors of Overall Happiness – these findings are consistent with Seligman’s first construct of Authentic Happiness, which included Positive Emotion, Engagement, and Meaning. Further, the author suggests that happiness and well-being are related but not identical constructs. Happiness, based on our findings, is associated with positive feelings such as pleasure, ecstasy, warmth and comfort and living a life of meaning and purpose whereas well-being is associated with other additional dimensions of experience. This lends support for Seligman’s conceptual development of the PERMA model.

Findings also showed that Positive Emotion and Meaning were significant predictors of Self-Actualization. According to Maslow people achieve “Meaning” by their unselfish acts of love that are based upon their personal growth rather than economic deficiencies (e.g. money, cars, clothes) – Seligman’s “Meaning” may be associated with self-actualization because by this point on the pyramidal path to self-actualization, individuals are more concerned with creative self-growth, fulfilment of their potential and seeking meaning in life than with having their basic physical and love needs met. Maslow argued that people had needs for self-esteem, self-respect, and “positive emotions” and when these needs were met, they self-actualized. The findings of this study support previous research findings that argue for a link between Self-Actualization and Well-being.

Previous studies found personality factors such as extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, and conscientiousness to be linked to self-actualization and happiness. In this study, emotional stability, extraversion, openness to experience and agreeableness were found to be significant predictors of self-actualization, whereas emotional stability, extraversion, and conscientiousness were found to be significant predictors of Well-being. Conscientiousness has been shown to be associated with the fear of failure because its achievement is a more central life goal –this fear of failure inhibits self-actualization, as individuals are more content with who they are, with their lives. Similar to previous findings, openness to experience was a predictor of self-actualization but did not predict subjective well-being. Openness to experience maintains a high sense of curiosity for life, which is important for self-actualization but can be a distraction from well-being as individuals are often seeking the next best thing which can deprive them of experiencing well-being.
Although there was no relationship between overall well-being and openness to experience, when the various factors of PERMA were analyzed, openness to experience and emotional stability were found to be predictors of Seligman’s Meaning factor. Meaning comes from serving a cause bigger than ourselves; an individual self-actualizes when they find meaning and are happier as a result. These findings suggest that the link between self-actualization and well-being may be mediated by meaning. Future research might look at whether seeking meaning or having found meaning or both are associated with self-actualization. In other words, they should explore Seligman’s Meaning dimension or factor and its relationship with self-actualization in greater detail and depth.

Spiritual well-being was not explicitly included in both Maslow’s and Seligman’s models, despite previous findings linking spiritual well-being to happiness and life satisfaction. The results of this study show that how people feel about their relationships is important to their spiritual health and to their experiencing of self-actualization and well-being. The Personal and Communal domains were significant predictors of well-being, whereas only the Personal domain significantly predicted self-actualization. Fisher states that people who score high in the Personal domain have a high sense of self-awareness. He describes self-awareness as being the driving force of the human spirit in the search for identity and self-worth. It is proposed that people who are self-actualized and happy have a profound understanding of who they are and their meaning, purpose, and values in life. This close relationship with the self might be an important mediator of self-actualization and this might explain why the Personal but not the Communal was a predictor given that self-actualization is associated with personal growth and healing at the very essence of an individuals’ inner self. In Maslow’s pyramidal model to self-actualization, self-esteem is the final stage an individual achieves before he/she self-actualizes which is consistent with this explanation of the Personal domain (i.e. high self-awareness) as the only significant predictor of self-actualization.

Self-esteem has been shown in studies to have a strong relationship with happiness and is also a part of Maslow’s theory of self-actualization. 

This study produces similar findings. Baumeister found people with high self-esteem to be highly conceited, exaggerating their success and good traits. Positive Emotion and Meaning were significant predictors of Self-Esteem but not Accomplishments and Engagement. The belief people with high self-esteem hold about themselves as being the main contributors to their own happiness may indicate why they self-actualize and are happy. As mentioned previously with respect to Fisher, personal domain remains important, creating this high sense of self-awareness allows an individual to find their identity and self-worth, which provides a purpose and meaning in their lives. Therefore, self-awareness seems to be an important factor for a person to consider when seeking self-actualization and happiness.

It was expected that people who experience synchronicity might have a higher state of well-being as their internal world is aligning with their external world – the findings only showed the agentic subscale to be a significant predictor of self-actualization and well-being. The agentic subscale is associated with a person’s belief in their actions bringing them meaningful experiences (e.g. when they need something, and the need is met without them having to do anything). Again, it might be that self-awareness mediates this relationship with well-being and self-actualization. Although there was no significant relationship found between self-esteem and the experiencing of weird coincidences, the agentic subscale accounts for actions associated with self-esteem (e.g. self-affirmations). Cohen and Sherman stated that people use self-affirmations to build and maintain a positive perception of self and a global sense of personal adequacy. In other words, by reciting self-affirmations one is able to increase their self-esteem. Thus, it is proposed through the use of self-affirmations, a person can achieve well-being and self-actualization, an area for future studies to explore.

Previous studies have failed to adopt a holistic approach towards happiness that incorporates material, physical, social and psychological factors, the spiritual or transpersonal dimension of being. When these factors were analysed in relation to happiness, self-esteem, positive emotion, self-actualization, extraversion, communal feel and conscientiousness were significant predictors of happiness. Seligman stated well-being was not a unitary phenomenon or experience, but rather combinations of feeling good, living meaningfully, establishing supportive and friendly relationships, accomplishing goals, and being fully engaged with life. The same can be said about happiness today. Happiness, based
on our findings, is a combination of a high sense of self-awareness in one’s self and abilities (self-esteem), having a tendency seek out the company and stimulation of other people (extraversion), having a high level of self-discipline (conscientiousness), having a desire for self-fulfillment (self-actualization), having emotions such as joy, excitement, pleasure and pride (positive emotions) and valuing relationships with others (communal feel). Happiness, today, seems to place more emphasis on the self and other people and opposes the findings of recent studies that have linked happiness to material possessions, finding true love, social economic status and life comparison with others. This provides a reasonable explanation for the global decline in happiness as industrialised societies like the United States and Great Britain tend to associate happiness with material gain and economic status. China saw happiness declining, in spite of a period of great economic growth and poverty reduction. This suggests that the view of individual and societal happiness is evolving. Based on the findings of this study, happiness is shifting from extrinsic to intrinsic attributes such as self-awareness, which allows individuals to find their identity and self-worth creating a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives and positive emotions such as optimism and pride.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

The following limitations should be considered in the present study. Firstly, the sample was predominately female participants accounting for 66 percent of our participants. Future research should aim for a more balanced sample. Secondly, as personality was a variable used in this study, there was a potential sampling bias as studies have found extraversion, emotional stability and openness to experience are associated with users of social applications on the Internet and this study was distributed using social media. Nevertheless, the findings reported here are broadly consistent with previous research. Although it is impossible to control for personality factors, a suggestion of a multiple methods approach to data collection to eliminate this bias for future research could be made. Thirdly, prior to the administering the weird coincidence scale, Beitman used a prototypical coincidence scenario to prompt their participant’s understanding of coincidence. That was not done in this study which may offer one explanation for the lack of significant findings for this factor. Future research might consider exploring whether self-esteem and/or personality traits moderates or mediates happiness, well-being, spiritual well-being, and self-actualization.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the similarities and differences between Self-Actualization and Well-being in order to gain a holistic understanding of their relationship and a theoretical approach to happiness. Based on the findings personal happiness may not be attributable to material well-being and may be affected by factors such as meaning and self-esteem. The self-worth or self-esteem is where the individuals acquire profound understanding of who they are, and understanding their meaning, purpose, and values in life, hence, the link between self-esteem and self-actualization. Happiness was also associated with openness to experience, which clearly captures something that relates to self-actualization and well-being, although well-being is not associated with openness to experience. The analytical process in this study was complex as multiple variables (e.g. weird coincidence, self-esteem, and personality) were found to be associated with happiness, well-being, spiritual-well-being and self-actualization. Clearly, there are interrelationships between these variables. This may be in part attributable to how concepts like happiness and well-being are detailed in psychological measures. This needs to be further investigated, perhaps using a factor analytic approach.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


