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Redefining Happiness:

Is the Happiness Pie Literature Missing Some Slices?

Megan Morgan, Matt Webb, Justin Stephens, Julia Turner, Laura Frazee, Elizabeth Whittaker, John Martin, Brittany Zaremba, Brittany Newsome, Anna Bokman, Brooke Baker, and Robin M. Kowalski

INTRODUCTION

Positive affect and subjective well-being are often used as measures of happiness.²

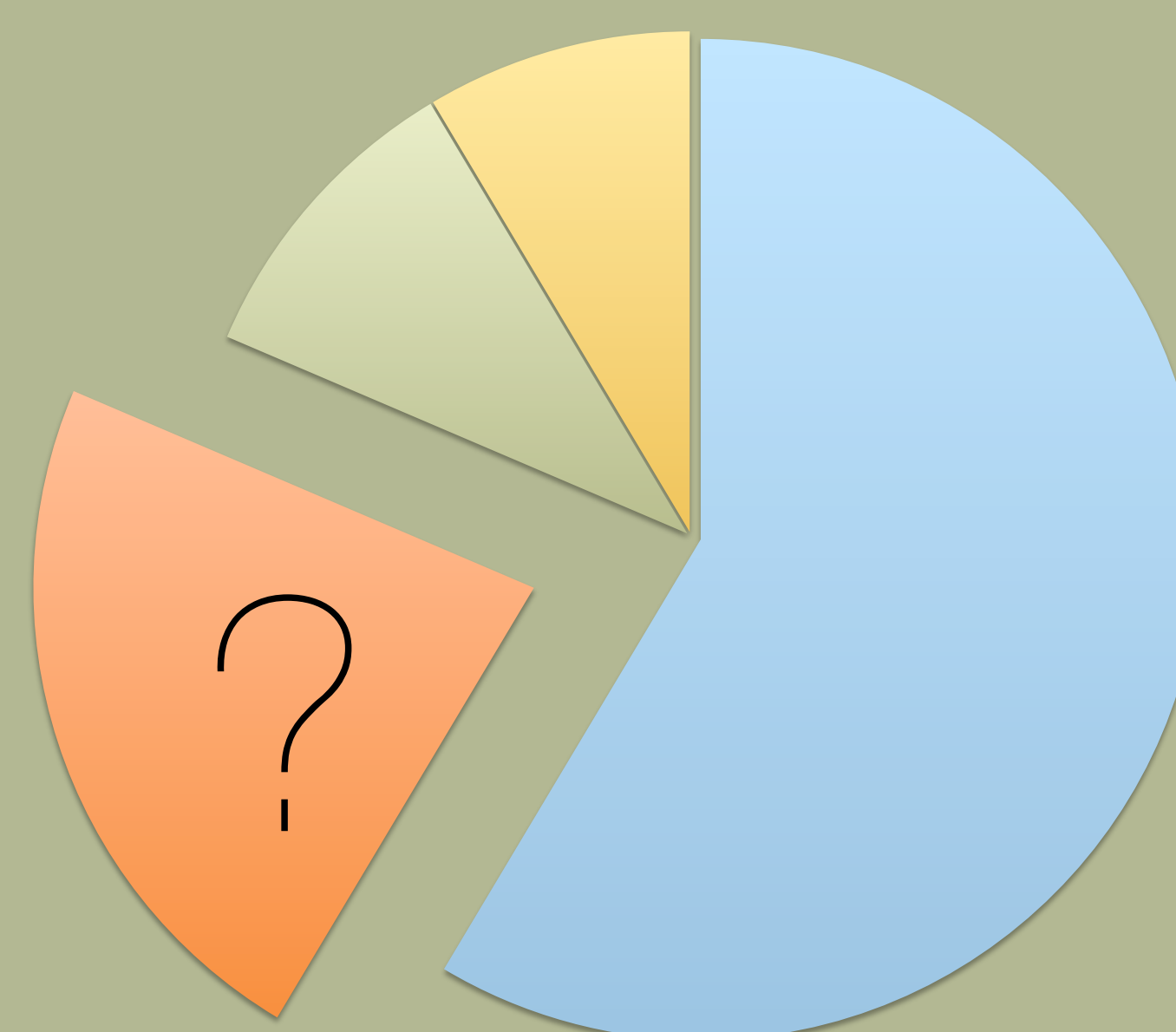
However, research suggests that happiness may be a multi-dimensional construct, including constructs such as contentment¹ and self-compassion.⁴

Research also suggests that happiness may spring from three sources (e.g., an individual's personality, environment, and voluntary behavior).³

Thus, the current study's purpose was two-fold:

- (1) To examine the network of constructs that may explain (or not explain) happiness
- (2) To examine sources of individual happiness

RESEARCH QUESTIONS: What is happiness and where does it come from?



METHOD

Three hundred and forty-seven undergraduate students (69.4% female; 84.6% Caucasian) participated in this study

- Participants completed measures of happiness, positive affect, subjective well-being, contentment, and self-compassion
- Measures for individual differences thought to be related to happiness based on previous research (e.g., depression, neuroticism, mindfulness, and openness to experience) were also included
- Participants also reported the percentage of their happiness that they believed could be attributed to three categories, namely: personality, the situation, and voluntary behaviors

RESULTS

Correlational analyses indicated that many of the constructs shared moderately strong relationships with happiness:

- Positive affect ($r = .48, p < .01$)
- Subjective well-being ($r = .51, p < .01$)
- Self-compassion ($r = .59, p < .01$)
- Depression ($r = -.43, p < .01$)
- Neuroticism ($r = -.51, p < .01$)

Strong relationships between contentment and happiness ($r = .76, p < .01$), as well as between happiness and subjective well-being, were found ($r = .601, p < .01$).

There appeared to be a link between personality and trait happiness, suggested by the relations between extraversion and happiness ($r = .44, p < .01$), agreeableness and positive affect ($r = .30, p < .01$), and conscientiousness and negative affect ($r = -.11, p < .05$).

Different individual difference measures predicted the percentage of happiness due to personality, the situation, and voluntary behaviors (see Table 1).

Table 1A. Stepwise regression analysis (N = 347)			
Percent due to Personality			
Variables entered	R ²	ΔR ²	F-Change
Extraversion	0.03	0.03	9.58**
Depression	0.05	0.02	7.80**
Enduring Happiness	0.07	0.02	6.19*

Note. * $p < .05$ (two-tailed); ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Table 1B. Stepwise regression analysis (N = 347)			
Percent due to Situation			
Variables entered	R ²	ΔR ²	F-Change
Enduring Happiness	0.04	0.04	14.24**
Openness to Experience	0.06	0.02	8.20**

Note. * $p < .05$ (two-tailed); ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Table 1C. Stepwise regression analysis (N = 347)			
Percent due to Voluntary Behavior			
Variables entered	R ²	ΔR ²	F-Change
Neuroticism	0.03	0.03	9.21**

Note. * $p < .05$ (two-tailed); ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

DISCUSSION

Results corroborate evidence for a happiness construct that is multi-dimensional in nature, as contentment, subjective well-being, and happiness were found to be highly related.

In spite of research showing that almost half of our happiness is determined by voluntary actions³, participants in the present study felt that, on average, their happiness was due to their:

- Personalities (30.36%)
- Situations (36.88%)
- Voluntary actions (32.70%)

Future research should continue to approach happiness holistically and set out to better define a higher-ordered factor model (via Confirmatory Factor Analysis) that encompasses various clusters (e.g., subjective well-being, positive affect, contentment) thought to be a part of a larger happiness construct. More longitudinal research is also encouraged.

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