

THE COMPONENTS OF HAPPINESS: IMPLICATIONS FOR RETIREMENT COUNSELLING¹

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Abstract

The suggestion is made that retirement be considered the most important criterion dimension of adjustment to retirement. Consequently, the primary function of the retirement counsellor is to promote the happiness of the client. The intention of the present investigation was to assess the relative contributions to the happiness of elderly people of three components of the happiness construct: namely, affect, disposition and the affect x disposition interaction. From this evaluation it was hoped to provide general guidelines for retirement counselling practices. Using scale measures of happiness and its components, three populations of elderly Newfoundland residents and a multiple regression analysis procedure, the relative contributions of the components to happiness were found to rank: affect > interaction > disposition. Implications for counselling practices are discussed.

Résumé

Nous suggérons que le fait de prendre sa retraite soit considéré comme étant le critère le plus important dans l'adaptation à la retraite. Le premier but du conseiller des retraités est de promouvoir le bonheur de ceux-ci. L'intention de cette étude est de déterminer la contribution relative de trois des composants du bonheur, soit l'état affectif, la disposition et l'interaction entre l'état affectif et la disposition. De cette évaluation nous espérons pouvoir donner des principes généraux à utiliser lors de l'orientation des personnes plus âgées. En nous servant de mesures graduées du bonheur et de ses composants, de trois groupes de vieillards de Terre-Neuve, et d'une procédure d'analyse à régressions multiples, nous avons découvert que la contribution relative des composants du bonheur s'établit comme suit: état affectif > interaction > disposition. L'étude discute des implications de ceci en orientation.

The primary function of a counsellor is to provide advice. The pre-retirement or retirement counsellor provides advice intended to facilitate the adjustment of the individual to a new lifestyle and altered circumstances (e.g., lower income). What is the meaning and nature of this adjustment that the counsellor tries to facilitate? According to Friedman and Orbach (1974), the major criteria of adjustment used in retirement research are activities and happiness. The activities criterion may be considered of dubious utility, since elderly individuals display a variety of adaptation styles (Neugarten, 1977, pp. 638-640) and a consensually accepted specification of the activities-adjustment relationship has yet to be described (Kozma & Stones, 1978). Happiness, on the other hand, is a well-established criterion in gerontological research (Stones & Kozma, in press). Few would dispute that an unhappy person is poorly adjusted to current life situation, or that a happy individual is well-adjusted. The adequacy of happiness as a

criterion dimension is illustrated further by the following quote from Bradburn (1969): "the modern concern about mental health is really a concern about a subjective sense of well-being . . . happiness is the name that has been given to it throughout recorded history" (p. 224).

According to the position outlined above, theoretical and practical understandings of the happiness construct comprise essential components of the counsellor's armoury. Practical understanding refers to the knowledge and skills a professional brings to the counselling situation, in order to best manipulate for the actual or potential happiness of the client. Practical understanding follows from theoretical understanding when the former is firmly rooted in an articulated, comprehensive and consistent set of theoretical statements concerning the construct. Although practical abilities may be attained to some degree in the absence of theoretical understanding (e.g., when learned by imitation or grasped intuitively), the role of the counsellor then is reduced to that of technician, rather than innovative professional. Theoretical understanding frees the counsellor from reliance on an established repertoire of

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techniques, by providing the principles necessary for the development of new forms of expertise.

Theoretical understanding of the happiness construct has been of interest to philosophers throughout recorded history. The past few years have seen the development of empirically based formulations of the construct. Important among these is the model of Bradburn (1969). Bradburn's (1969) model proposes that happiness is determined solely by recent affective encounters with the environment. Two classes of affect are recognized (*i.e.*, positive and negative) and level of happiness is suggested to be a function of the balance between the frequencies of affective events falling within the two categories. Bradburn (1969) described a measurement device, the Affect Balance Scale (ABS), that is compatible with his model.

Other models go beyond Bradburn's (1969) adherence to a strictly environmental interpretation of happiness. Brandt (1967) states the philosophical position, by including a dispositional component as well as an affective component. Beiser (1974) provided empirical confirmation of this two component model (*i.e.*, disposition and affect). Stones and Kozma (in press) offered a somewhat different interpretation of the disposition-affect relationship. Whereas Brandt (1967) and Beiser (1974) assume the two components to be relatively independent, Stones and Kozma suggested that they may contribute to happiness in an interactive manner. In this view disposition might, a) affect the probability of one or other type of affective reaction to a designated situation and/or, b) cause the individual to seek out certain kinds of affectively-toned environmental encounters (*i.e.*, disposition-compatible encounters) and to avoid others.

Key questions to ask of the theoretical literature concern the relative contributions to happiness of the components identified above. Do affective environmental encounters contribute more to happiness than personality dispositions? Do the components contribute more substantially in independent or interactive manners? Although unanswered by the current literature, these questions are neither theoretically nor practically trivial. The theoretical importance of the questions is self-evident. Practically, the answers obtained might well influence the kind of counselling offered to the client. If happiness were of largely environmental origin, successful counselling could require lifestyle re-arrangement so as to maximize the ratio of positive to negative encounters. However, this strategy might produce only marginal therapeutic benefit if happiness were largely dispositional. Here the counsellor must decide on the feasibility of therapeutic interven-

tion aimed at changing the personality of an elderly client.

The present empirical investigation attempted to assess the relative contributions to happiness of affect and disposition, taken independently and interactively. Since elderly populations were examined, the answers obtained should prove of theoretical value and, in a general sense, of practical interest to the retirement counsellor. Specifically, two types of avowed happiness-rating provided measures of happiness. They were AHN, which appraised happiness "at this instant in time" and AH30, which tapped happiness "over the past month." Also administered was a measure of affect (*i.e.*, Bradburn's ABS) and two scales that might be considered primarily as measures of the dispositional component of happiness. These scales were the Life Satisfaction Index — Z (LSI-Z) (Wood, Wylie & Sheafer, 1969) and the Philadelphia Geriatric Centre Morale Scale (PGC) (Lawton, 1975).

The data was analyzed by computing a series of multiple regression equations, each containing an avowed happiness rating as the predicted variable and the affect measure and one of the dispositional measures as the two predictor variables. By further breaking down the multiple regression equation, it was possible to tease out the independent contributions to happiness of the two predictor measures, as well as their interactive contribution.

METHOD

Subjects

Three subject populations (*i.e.*, urban, rural and institutional) were sampled according to carefully devised randomization procedures, so as to be representative of cognitively able elderly from the island portion of the Province of Newfoundland. The urban sample contained 103 subjects (43% males) with medium age 72 years. The rural sample contained 100 subjects (46% males) with medium age 65 years. The institution sample contained 97 residents of the larger residential homes for senior citizens and possessed a median age of 81 years. Over all three samples combined, ages ranged from 60-95 years and 19% of subjects admitted to some ill-health on an open ended question.

Materials

Both the happiness ratings, AHN and AH30 utilized 7-point scales with the participants indicating level of happiness in terms of position on a 7-rung ladder. The ABS, LSI-2 and PGC all were administered orally.

Procedure

All interviews were conducted at the subject's home locations. Order of presentation was such that happiness ratings always preceded the PGC and LSI-Z questionnaires. Within this basic pattern, order of presentation was varied randomly.

RESULTS

Twelve multiple regression equations were computed in total, four from each sample. Within each sample, two equations were computed with AHN as the predicted variable and two with AH30 as the predicted variable. The sets of predictor variables alternately were ABS and LSI-Z and ABS and PGC.

Within each multiple regression, the variance accounted for in the predicted variable can be broken-down into three additive components. First and second, the independent contributions of each predictor is given the squares of the respective beta (β) weights. Third, the contributions of the two predictors in interaction is given by the expression, $2 \cdot \beta_1 \cdot \beta_2 \cdot r12$, where β_1 and β_2 are the respective beta weights and $r12$ is the correlation between the two predictors (Ferguson, 1971, p. 402).

Over the twelve equations, the mean contribution values were 13.8% for the affect measure, 10.2% for the affect x disposition interaction and 8.0% for the disposition measure. The frequencies of this trend (*i.e.* affect > interaction > disposition) and all other possible trends over the twelve equations are presented in Table 1. It may be seen that the frequency of the affect > interaction > disposition trend (*i.e.*, seven occurrences) was the only value to exceed the chance probability of two. If each equation is considered an independent observation, the probability of any one of the six possible trends being present on seven or more occasions is $p < .01$.

Certain other features of the data are worthy of mention, if not detailed consideration. First, all

twelve multiple correlation coefficients achieved significance at $p < .001$. Second, all multiple correlations with AH30 as predicted variable achieved higher values than the comparable correlations with AHN as the predicted variable. Third, no systematic trends were observed in the data obtained from the two sets of predictor variables. Fourth, no systematic differences were present across the three samples.

DISCUSSION

As indicated in the preceding section, the predominant trend obtained from the investigation was for affect to provide the greatest contribution to happiness and disposition the least, with the affect x disposition interaction occupying an intermediate position. Since the instruments and methodology employed can be regarded as appropriate for the purpose in hand, this finding is both original and important.

In considering the instruments, attention should be drawn to a fundamental fact about happiness: happiness is a subjective condition. Being subjective in itself, measurement of happiness necessarily must be indirect. Of the three tradition-honoured types of objective personality measurement in the psychological literature (*i.e.*, self-ratings, ratings by expert judges and behavioural assessment), only self-ratings capitalize on the subject's unique knowledge of his or her own inner state. In the present investigation, two forms of self-rating were included so as to permit a check on the reliability of measurement, as well as to sample the phenomenological domain more broadly. The results indicated both similarities and differences between the AHN and AH30. The compatibility of the two measures was evidenced by the high correlations between them (ranging from 0.71 to 0.73 over the three samples; all values significant at $p < .01$). On the other hand, differences were obtained in the extent to which they were predicted by the predictor measures.

Of the predictor instruments, the ABS was designed specifically as a measure of affect and its

TABLE 1
Frequencies of ordinal rankings of predictor variable contributions to avowed happiness

Rankings					
Affect>	Affect>	Disposition>	Disposition>	Interaction>	Interaction>
Disposition>	Interaction>	Affect>	Interaction>	Affect>	Disposition>
<u>Interaction</u>	<u>Disposition</u>	<u>Interaction</u>	<u>Affect</u>	<u>Disposition</u>	<u>Affect</u>
1	7	0	1	2	1

utility with elderly populations is well-attested (Kozma & Stones, 1978). Each of the ten items inquires as to the recent occurrence or non-occurrence of a particular affective state. Two attributes of a disposition are temporal stability and cross-situational generality. Consequently, measures of disposition should sample both these content areas. Of the thirteen items on the LSI-Z, nine make reference to a large segment of the temporal dimension (in the context of the general emotive condition), while the remaining four pertain to current general feeling state. For the PGC, seven items make widespread temporal reference and eight relate to the general emotive state at the current time. The two remaining PGC items pertain to particular affective states that may be experienced, rather than general emotive tone. Consequently, all of the LSI-Z items and fifteen of the seventeen PGC items can be considered to sample content relevant to disposition. On the other hand, all of the ABS items and two of the PGC items sample content relevant to particular affective states currently experienced (or not experienced). The predictor scales therefore may be considered as appropriate measures of the designated components. Multiple regression analysis provides an excellent tool for separating the independent and interactive contributions of these components.

Aside from the theoretical understanding gained, what relevance does the main experimental finding possess for the retirement counsellor, or any counsellor working with elderly individuals experiencing unhappiness? First, the major contribution of affect to happiness suggests that the counsellor would be well-advised to concentrate initially on restoring the affective balance to more favourable proportions. The customary balance between positive and negative experiences almost certainly will be upset by a radical lifestyle change, such as retirement. In order to redress any unfavourable imbalance, the counsellor should seek to identify not only current sources of positive and negative affective experience, but also those sources that have been lost or gained through retirement and those that potentially could become incorporated into the post-retirement lifestyle. The counsellor then would be in a position to advise the client on lifestyle alterations that might facilitate a more favourable affective balance.

The procedure followed by the pre-retirement counsellor should be similar to that described, but

with emphasis on anticipated changes to the affective balance rather than actual changes.

The second point of practical relevance concerns the affect x disposition interaction. In assessing the nature of this interaction, the counsellor should seek to elucidate, a) how the client's dispositional biases influence affective reactions to environmental encounters and, b) whether disposition causes the client to enter into certain kinds of emotively-toned situations. With a background in behaviour modification, the counsellor might attempt to modify situation-specific affective reactions or alter the frequency of entering into certain situations.

Finally, the predominant experimental trend would suggest that the counsellor not attempt to work on the dispositional component alone. Aside from considerations of practical feasibility, disposition was found to contribute the least to happiness of any of the three components.

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