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### Life Satisfaction: Testing a Structural Equation Model Based on Authenticity and Subjective Happiness

**Abstract:** The aim of this research is to examine the relationships between authenticity, subjective happiness, and life satisfaction. The participants were 347 university students. In this study, the Authenticity Scale, the Subjective Happiness Scale, and Satisfaction with Life Scale were used. The relationships between authenticity, subjective happiness and life satisfaction were examined using correlation analysis and Structural Equation Model (SEM). In correlation analysis, authentic living was found positively related to subjective happiness. On the other hand, self-alienation, accepting external influence was found negatively correlated to subjective happiness. Besides subjective happiness and life satisfaction have positive relation. Structural Equation Model showed that self-alienation, accepting external influence results in a decrease subjective happiness on life satisfaction whereas rise in authentic living lead to subjective happiness, so subjective happiness also brings life satisfaction. According to standardized beta coefficients ( $\beta = -.49$ ), the most significant predictor of subjective happiness was self-alienation. Results were discussed in the light of the related literature.

**Key words:** happiness, authenticity, life satisfaction

#### Introduction

Traditionally in psychology, the focus has been on identifying and treating abnormal structures such as depression, anxiety, stress and etc. This is critically important for those facing mental problems however; it provides an incomplete picture of mental health (Snyder, & Lopez, 2007). Within the field of Positive Psychology, the early definitions made by Diener (1984; 2000), describe happiness as having positive affect and life satisfaction over experiencing less negative effect. In other words, positive psychology focuses on well-being, happiness, flow, personal strengths, wisdom, creativity, imagination and characteristics of positive experiences (Seligman, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005). What about positive experiences? Myers (2000) focused on happiness in order to explain positive experimentations. Looking at the etymology of the word could make a useful starting point: Happiness as an English word came from the noun "hap": "what just happens, chance, luck-good or bad" so happiness means to have good hap. Today, it refers to both one's situation ("one is fortunate") and one's state of mind ("one is glad, content"). Happiness consists of two components. First

one, "Hedonic level" is called to an affective component is defined as "the degree to which the various affects a person experience are pleasant". The second one, its' cognitive component is referred to "contentment" is defined as "the degree to which an individual perceives his aspiration to be met" (Bruni, 2004; Brülde, 2007; Campbell, 1981; Chekola, 2007; Haybron, 2000, 2003; Kashdan, 2004; Sirgy et al., 2006; Veenhoven, 2003). Indeed, happiness depends on both cognitive and emotional components. In this respect, it could be argued that happiness presents the individual as a whole. Due to these two dimensions of happiness, Haybron (2000) defines happiness as having two parts: Psychological happiness focusing on state of mind; prudential happiness focusing on well-being.

Happiness identified as "a state of well-being and contentment" or "a pleasurable or satisfying experience". Happiness is often used in place of subjective well-being term in the psychology (Lyubomirsky, 2013; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2004; Sagiv, Roccas, & Hazan, 2004). Put another way, happiness is an emotion combined with other positive emotions, resulting in subjective well-being. Diener (2000) identifies subjective well-being as being positive emotions of person

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are much more than negative emotions and life satisfaction. Similarly, Myers (2013) focused on subjective well-being, self-perceive happiness or satisfaction with life. Used along with measures of objective well-being (for example, physical and economic indicators) to evaluate people's quality of life.

### **Life satisfaction**

Life satisfaction is a component of the concept of Quality-of-life which includes the concepts of subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2003). Quality-of-life has objective and subjective dimensions. The amounts of friendship, income, networks, access to various services are in the objective dimension (Valois, Paxton, Zullig & Huebner, 2006). Judgments related to overall life satisfaction or satisfaction from specific life domains like friends, family, work, school, etc. are in the subjective dimension (Oishi, Diener, Lucas & Suh, 1999). On the other hand, life satisfaction, which is the cognitive component of subjective well-being, can be examined both by assessing its pursuits (health, wealth, marriage, relationship, job, etc) and by assessing life as a whole (global life satisfaction) (Pavot, Diener, Colvin & Sandvik 1991).

Compton (2005) stated life satisfaction that is an overall cognitive evaluation of one's life. Life satisfaction is clarified one of the pointers of "apparent" quality of life which points out how well people succeed with the pointers of mental and physical health by Veenhoven (1996). Another explanation that is recommended by Veenhoven (1996) is that "life-satisfaction is the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of her/his life as-a-whole.

Emotional intelligence, self-esteem (Rey, Extremera, & Pena), optimism and frequent positive emotional experiences (Diener, 1996; Lucas, Diener & Suh, 1996) are associated with life satisfaction, whereas perfectionism (Eraslan Çapan, 2010), depression (Serin, Serin, & Özbaş, 2010) are related to life satisfaction negatively.

### **Authenticity**

Authenticity is an important phenomenon in human life. Wiktionary Dictionary defines authenticity as "the quality of being genuine or not corrupted from the original" (2013). Its second meaning, "concerns the truthfulness of origins, attributions, commitments, sincerity, devotion, and intentions". Starting point for conceptions of authenticity in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy was framed in the advice 'being oneself'. Bialystok (2009) declared that "care of the self" is necessary for 'being oneself'. The goal of this care for the self was not only to improve oneself in general terms but also to attend to one's individual qualities, establishing a rich relationship to oneself. He further announced that the ancient view of the self did not consider it valuable to simply be who one is for its own sake; "care of the self" or "self-awareness" means rather to make oneself into who one wants to be, as informed by

certain aesthetic and moral ideals. Namely, self-awareness is about understanding yourself in a way that allows you to understand who you really are and why you do things in the way that you do (Duval & Wicklund, 1972). According to these statements self-awareness is prior condition for "being oneself" or "authenticity". Kernis and Goldman (2005) proposed that authenticity can be characterized as reflecting the clear operation of one's true, or core, self in one's daily enterprise and he defined authenticity as having four components: action, awareness, unbiased processing, and relational orientation. Authenticity was defined as being emotionally sincere, having self-awareness, and psychological depth by Sheldon (2009). Harter (2002) explained that being authentic is living with one's whole being in the moment, behaving candidly and without hidden intentions. Barret-Lennard (1998) argued that authenticity had three constructs which are: "(a) persons' primary experience, (b) their symbolized awareness, and (c) their outward behavior and communication" (p. 82). Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliouis, and Joseph (2008) reported mutual effects among these three components that when people's primary experience and their symbolized awareness do not match each other, self-alienation may occur; when there is consistency, authentic living arises. This process also is influenced by accepting external influence. In brief, they formed authenticity with three components.

In the last 50 years, authenticity has been emphasized by psychologists with different perspectives. In developmental psychology, authenticity as an important characteristic of identity achievement (Erikson, 1968). According to self psychologists, authenticity is associated with the Big Five personality characteristic (Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997). For example, Fleeson and Wilt (2010) found that people who behave authentically tend to score higher on extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness, and low on neuroticism. In humanistic psychotherapy, Brown (2010) quoted that authenticity, which Rogers was first to acknowledge as an important variable, is equally core to multicultural competence, especially the aspect of authenticity that emerges when a psychotherapist is willing to admit what she or he does not know, inviting the client to be the expert and authority. Authenticity is also essential to overcoming aversive bias. From the existential perspective, Yalom (1980) and May (1981) focused particularly on self-alienation, again viewing this as the core of authenticity and the cause of mental distress. In other words, authenticity is a key for well-being.

### **The present study**

For comprehending well-being and relief from psychological problems, individual diversities in authenticity have also been thought as an important construct (May, 1981). As mentioned above, authenticity is considered as one of variables that affect human behavior. Subjective happiness has been examined as one of life satisfaction indicators that could explain well-being. Lopez and Rice (2006) investigated correlations

between authenticity and relationship satisfaction, even after controlling for gender, self-esteem, commitment level, avoidance, and anxiety. Bettencourt and Sheldon (2001) also found that greater feelings of authenticity were negatively correlated with anxiety, stress, and depression, and positively correlated with self-esteem, and this partially mediated the relationship between role variability and well-being. Relationships between authenticity and other constructs such as anxiety, depression have been widely examined. However, less research has focused on directly its relationship with positive variables such as happiness and life satisfaction. Almost all studies remarked that well-being was evaluated by means of lower self esteem, depressive symptoms or high anxiety levels. Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) suggested that well-being could lead to people having the courage to be authentic, or the two could operate in a spiral in a broaden-and-build fashion. Neff and Suizzo (2006) also suggested that authenticity should be remembered that subjective experience is itself changed as the self interacts with others in particular contexts such as subjective happiness. Therefore, it would be useful not only to investigate its relationships with subjective happiness but also to understand their effect on life satisfaction better. The purpose of this study was to examine the dimensions of authenticity as related to subjective happiness and their effect on life satisfaction. For this aim, I suggested three hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 1.* Self-alienation and accepting external influence will be negatively associated with subjective happiness.

*Hypothesis 2.* Authentic living will be positively associated with subjective happiness.

*Hypothesis 3.* Authentic living will increase subjective happiness and this relation will affect positively on life satisfaction.

## Method

### Participants

The present research was carried out with a sample of 347 university students 180 of whom (52%) were females, 167 (48%) were male students from different grade levels enrolled in different departments of Education Faculty in Dumlupinar University, Turkey. The departments of these students were early childhood education ( $n=120$ ), social sciences education ( $n=51$ ), primary education ( $n=128$ ), and Turkish literature ( $n=48$ ), Their ages ranged from 18 to 26 years and their mean age was 21.07 years.

### Instruments

*Subjective Happiness Scale:* Happiness was measured by using Subjective Happiness Scale- (Lyubomirsky & Lepper 1999). Doğan and Totan (2013) had done Turkish adaptation of this scale. The scale consists of four items (e.g., I think I am a happy person), and each item was presented on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = very unhappy, 7 = very happy). The total scores ranged from 4 to 28, with a higher score indicating higher subjective happiness. The goodness of fit index values of the Turkish university students group model were ( $NFI=.92$ ,  $CFI=$

$.93$ ,  $IFI=.93$ ;  $GFI=.96$ ,  $RMSEA=.019$ ,  $RMR=.066$ ). The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach alpha) for the Turkish SHS was .65 for university students and .70 for community sample.

*Authenticity Scale* (Wood et al., 2008). The Authenticity Scale contains 12 items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = does not describe me at all to 7 = describes me very well). The scale has three sub-dimensions: accepting external influence (*AEI*, four items, e.g., "Other people influence me greatly"), self-alienating (*S-E*, four items, e.g., "I don't know how I really feel inside"), and authentic living (*AL*, four items, e.g., "I live in accordance with my values and beliefs"). A Turkish adaptation study was carried out by İlhan and Özdemir (2013). According to their findings, the goodness of fit index values of the model were [ $\chi^2/df=1.49$ ,  $RMSEA=.05$ ,  $CFI=.95$ ,  $IFI=.95$ ,  $GFI=.92$ ]. The subscales had internal consistency of .79 for Self-Alienation .67, for Accepting External Influence, and .62 for Authentic Living. Each subscale was significantly related to subjective well-being (*SWB*) and need satisfaction (i.e. autonomy).

*The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS):* SWLS developed by Diener et al. (1985) and adapted to Turkish by Köker (1991; quoted by Bugay, 2007) was used. The SWLS measures global life satisfaction and consists of 5 items of which the values are evaluated according to 7 scores (1 = strongly disagree, 7 =strongly agree). According to the results of the reliability study of the scale, the test retest reliability was ( $r=.85$ ) and item total correlations varied between .71 and .80. Higher scores of the scale indicate higher life satisfaction (Köker, 1991).

### Procedure

Students voluntarily participated in research, completion of the scales was anonymous and there was a guarantee of confidentiality. The scales were administered to the students in groups in the classrooms. The measures were fulfilled by administration. Prior to administration of scales, all participants were told about purposes of the study. Relationships between three variables (Subjective happiness, life satisfaction and authenticity) and their sub-dimensions were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at .01 probability level. Moreover, data were analyzed by means of structural equation modelling (*SEM*). *SEM* is a statistical methodology that takes a confirmatory approach to the analysis (Byrne 2010). In this approach a hypothesized model of relations between variables is tested statistically to determine the extent to which it is consistent with the data, which is referred to as the goodness of fit. If the goodness of fit is adequate it supports the plausibility of the relations among the variables. To assess model fit, we used well-established indices such as *GFI*, *AGFI*, *CFI*, *NFI*, *RFI*, *IFI*, *SRMR* and *RMSEA* as well as the chi-square test statistics. For the *GFI*, *AGFI*, *CFI*, *NFI*, *RFI*, and *IFI* indices, values greater than .90 are typically considered acceptable and values greater than .95 indicate good fit to the data (Byrne 2010; Hu & Bentler 1999). For well specified models, SRMR and RMSEA of .06 or less reflects a good fit (Hu & Bentler 1999). For the analysis of data SPSS 17 and LISREL 9.1 were utilized.



## Results

### Inter-correlations and Descriptive Data

Table 1 shows the inter-correlations of the variables, means, standard deviations, and internal consistency coefficients of the variables used.

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that there are significant correlations between dimensions of authenticity and subjective happiness. Authentic living ( $r=.51, p<.01$ ) related positively to happiness. In contrary, accepting external influence ( $r=-.27, p<.01$ ), self-alienating ( $r=-.60, p<.01$ ) were found negatively associated with happiness. There were also significant correlations between dimensions of authenticity and life satisfaction. Moreover, subjective happiness has positive relation with life satisfaction ( $r=.64$ ).

### Structural Equation Modeling

Hypothesized model was examined via structural equation modeling (SEM). According to this model, subjective happiness is predicted by accepting external influence, self-alienating, and authentic living. Figure 1 presents the results of SEM analysis, using maximum likelihood estimations. The model demonstrated excellent fit ( $\chi^2/df = 1,71, GFI = .95, AGFI = .96, CFI = .96, NFI = .96, RFI = .95, IFI = .95, SRMR = .038$  and  $RMSEA = .044$ ) and also accounted for 48% of the subjective happiness variances.

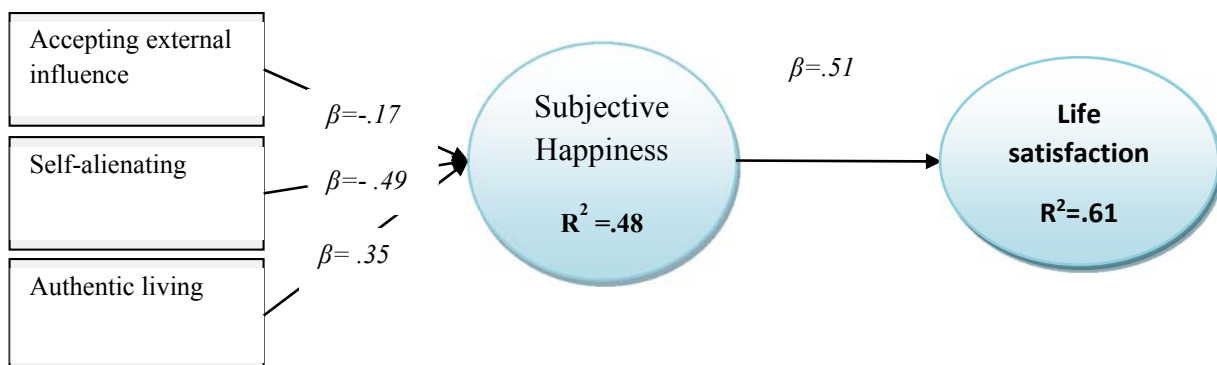
## Discussion

According to the results of the study, there is a statistically significant relationship between authenticity, happiness and life satisfaction. Besides, the authenticity plays a role as predictive factor of happiness; subjective happiness effect on life satisfaction in the Turkish university students. As we mentioned before, previous research findings emphasized that high scores of authentic living is positively related to well-being (Kernis; 2003; Neff & Suizzo, 2006; Roberts & Donahue, 1994), high self-esteem (Neff & Harter, 2002), life satisfaction (Lopez & Rice, 2006) as well as negatively related to anxiety and stress (Sheldon et al., 1997), depression (Lopez & Rice, 2006), psychological vulnerability (Satici, Kayiş, & Akın, 2013), and also our study results are supported by all these findings. The current study conducted with the Turkish culture also supporting the previous studies. Studies have shown that subjective happiness is associated with self-perceptions of well-being (Ryan, & Deci, 2001), satisfaction with life (Diener, 2000; Suh, Diener, Oishi S, et al. 1998), life orientation (Doğan & Akinci Çötök, 2011), subjective vitality (Akın, 2012), satisfying relationships, positive emotions (Diener & Seligman, 2002), and self-enhancing bias (Lee & Im, 2007) positively. However, it has negative correlations with Internet addiction (Akın, 2012), depression (Doğan & Akinci Çötök, 2011; Joseph, Linley, Harwood, Lewis, & McCollam, 2005), low self-esteem (Diener, & Seligman, 2002; Ryan, & Deci, 2001) and stress (Argyle, Martin, & Lu, 1995). The current findings

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics, alphas, and inter correlations of the variables**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Accepting external influence	1				
2. Self-alienating	.54**	1			
3. Authentic living	-.51**	-.58**	1		
4. Happiness	-.27**	-.60**	.51**	1	
5. Life satisfaction	-.22**	-.48**	.50**	.64**	1
Mean	14.61	12.23	22.88	23.01	29.51
Standard deviation	5.65	5.17	3.89	10.08	11.23
Alpha	.79	.78	.83	.88	.86

**Figure 1: Path analysis between authenticity, subjective happiness and life satisfaction**



Chi-square=10.26, df=6, p=0.1527, RMSEA=0,044

generally support the assumption that there are adaptive relations between subjective happiness, authentic living and also maladaptive relations with self-alienation and accepting external influence. Briefly, as expected, correlational results of the study showed that subjective happiness had a positive relationship with authentic living. The implication is that tendency to accept self-alienation and accepting external influence may indicate a risk for subjective happiness (Neff & Suizzo, 2006). Rogers (1959) pointed that people were naturally authentic at an early age but that this authenticity decreased later in life due to the imposition of conditions of worth. Similarly, Harter et al. (1996) and Neff and Harter (2002) found that people were more authentic when their self was being accepted by other people. In this context, people who are more authentic have good relationships with others (Wang & Graddy, 2008), and this situation causes greater happiness (Anik, Akin, Norton, & Dunn, 2009; Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003).

The third hypothesis of this study, if authentic living increase, subjective happiness will increase; based on this relation life satisfaction will rise. This study demonstrates that the relation of authenticity subjective happiness has positive affect on life satisfaction. Also this investigation is the first to explore the relationships between three variables (authenticity, subjective happiness and life satisfaction). This research suggests that the encouragement of authentic living could be highly beneficial for rising subjective happiness and life satisfaction. Happiness, stemming from hedonic and eudemonic well-being, is defined as the combination of emotions and cognition which correlates with having relatively more positive affect than negative affect and living an overall sense of life satisfaction, respectively (Ryan & Deci, 2001). In other words, authenticity could pioneer to subjective happiness as Rogers (1959) has recommended, well-being could lead to people having the grit to be authentic. Consequently, this research shows that authenticity has a direct impact on the subjective happiness and indirect effect on life satisfaction. People high in self-alienation and accepting external influence are more likely to be unhappy and unsatisfied than those low in authentic living. In positive psychology, authenticity is a key for well-being and happiness like as life satisfaction (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Hills & Argyle, 2001; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

This study has some limitations. First of all, the sample presented here is limited to pre-service teachers in Education Faculty. For that reason, it is questionable whether the findings can be generalized to different departments and age groups. Second as correlational statistics were utilized, no definitive statements can be made about causality. Finally, this research was limited by the use of self-report scales and did not use a qualitative measure of authenticity and subjective happiness. Despite these limitations the finding that really stands out in this study is the importance of the subjective happiness in relation to authenticity.

In conclusion, this research reports that self-alienation, accepting external influence results in a decrease subjective happiness on life satisfaction whereas rise in authentic living lead to subjective happiness, so subjective happiness also brings life satisfaction. Students high in

authentic living are more likely to experience subjective happiness and life satisfaction. For this reason, current study would further our understanding of the significant predictors of life satisfaction, without forgetting that more research is needed to examine the antecedents of the life satisfaction.

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