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Redefining Happiness:
Is the Happiness Pie Literature Missing Some Slices?

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Creative Inquiry — CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

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 contentment[1] 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?
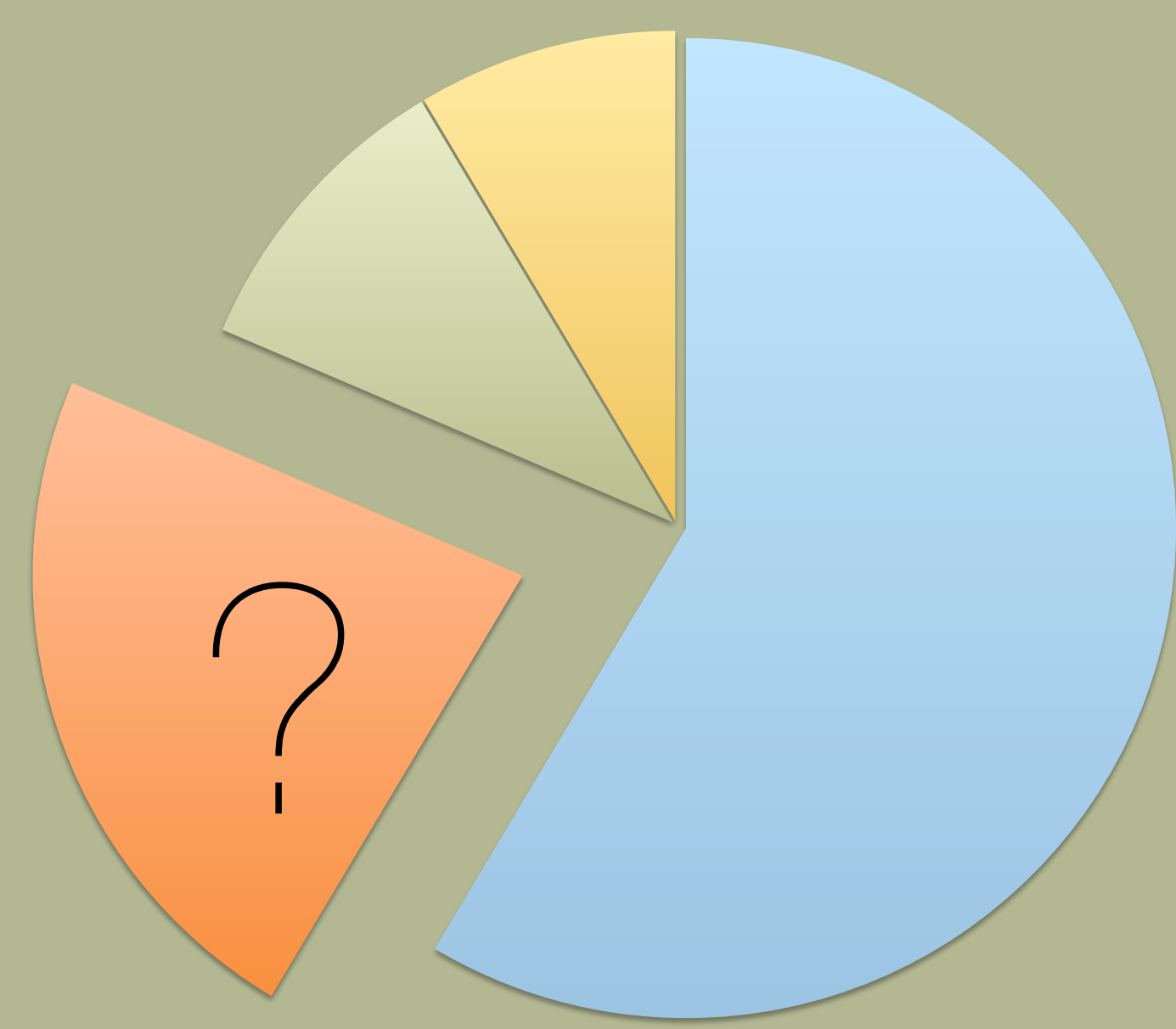
METHOD

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 actions[3], 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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[1]Carson, T. L. (1981). Happiness, contentment and the good life. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly, 62*, 378-392.
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