

Gratitude, Hope and Humor as Predictors of Happiness

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To be happy is the sole aim of every individual. Besides external situations the inner strengths of a person are found to play a key role for making life constantly happy and fulfilling. In the present study the strengths of gratitude, hope and humor have been studied to find out their role in happiness in the college students of age group 18-24 years. These strengths have been measured by the Value in Action inventory of strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The three happiness orientations i.e meaning, pleasure and engagement have been measured with the help of Orientation to Happiness scale (Peterson, Park & Seligman, 2005). The data have been analyzed by correlation and multiple regression analysis. All the three strengths were found to have significant positive correlation (ranging from .22-.45) with each of the happiness orientation. The regression model indicated that gratitude, hope and humor significantly predict each of the three happiness orientations. Individually, gratitude predicted pleasure and engagement, hope predicted meaning and engagement and humor predicted only pleasure orientation.

Keywords: Gratitude, Hope, Humor, Orientations to Happiness.

Positive psychology focuses on the inner strengths of a person to increase well-being and happiness in life, keeping aside the negative aspects of life. Earlier in psychology the main focus was given on weakness and emphasis was on repairment of what has been broken. The recent researches in positive psychology aim at the scientific study of human strengths and positive experiences. Not all people have the same level of happiness in same situation. Thus, happiness is not only dependent on external situations. Rather, having some traits enables them to create happiness in neutral or challenging life situations. Gratitude, humor and hope are some of these traits that may play a vital role to increase happiness levels in people's life.

Gratitude, hope and humor cover all the three aspects of life i.e. past, present and future. Gratitude is the generalized tendency of a person to perceive the good and be grateful for what has happened in the past or already exist in life. Humor enables a person interact in playful manner in the present and makes it pleasurable. Hope makes a person expecting and desiring positive outcome in future. An individual's tendency to be grateful for the things

received in the past (gratitude); interacting in a playful manner in the present (humor) and to expect positive for the future (hope) increases the happiness in his/her life.

In this study these variables have been studied as strengths of character. The VIA classification is based on three levels of understanding the good character. At the top level lie six virtues. Virtues are the core valued characteristics or "qualities desired of people due to intrinsic worth" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It identifies six such virtues i.e. wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. At the second level lie the twenty-four character strengths, which are the 'psychological components' making up these virtues. Different virtues are made up of different number of character strengths. At the lowest level lie the situational themes or the habits due to which people show a given strength in a given situation (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Hope, humour and gratitude are related to the virtue of transcendence. Therefore, conceptually, they share similar function of connecting one with the larger universe (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Various findings indicate that having these strengths changes the way one perceives the

circumstances, events or actions and increase the positive feelings.

Gratitude

The word Gratitude has its root in the Latin word 'gratia' which symbolises gratefulness. According to the Oxford dictionary gratitude is the quality of being thankful and appreciate. It includes feeling grateful towards people for something good done by them as well as a generalised feeling of thankfulness towards every little thing or situation of life. We often take for granted many good things in our life. Gratitude is about noticing and appreciating them. Gratitude is one of many positive emotions. The feelings of gratitude can be described in a number of words. We might say we feel thankful, lucky, fortunate or blessed.

Gratitude can be studied at trait and state level (Emmons, McCullough & Tsang, 2003). At the state level it is conceptualised as an emotion or affective response which involves feeling thankful and appreciate the benefits received. Bono and McCullough (2006) defined it as "a positive psychological reaction towards an interpersonal benefit received". In addition to this benefit-triggered gratitude another kind is generalized gratitude that is mostly experienced at trait level. At the trait level, it predisposes a person to experience gratitude. It is the quality of noticing and be grateful for all little or big gifts in life such as having the house and meals, the presence of cherished others in one's life etc. The strength of gratitude in the VIA classification is dispositional in nature (Chan, 2010). Feeling grateful on a regular basis can have a big effect on our lives. In studies involving gratitude intervention in the form of counting blessings have found that grateful people are happier than others. In a study, college students were asked to keep a record of their blessings on daily or weekly basis by keeping a gratitude journal. The participants who were maintaining gratitude record reported higher levels of positive states (Galati et al, 2006).

In another study on Chinese school teachers involving eight-week gratitude intervention, the dispositional gratitude of teachers was found positively correlated with meaning orientation to happiness. The more grateful teachers seek meaning oriented happiness more than less grateful teachers. The study

suggested that grateful people focus more on meaning orientation to happiness as compared to pleasure. Due to low magnitude of the correlation scores the study also suggested that the gratitude may not be the good predictor for happiness orientations (Chan, 2010).

Hope

Oxford Dictionary defines hope as "a feeling of expectation along with a desire for a certain thing to happen". As a positive psychological construct, it was developed by Snyder in 1989. Hope is the state of a person that promotes the desire of positive outcomes in different circumstances. It has been defined as "the process of thinking about one's goals, along with the motivation to move towards (i.e. agency) and the ways to achieve these goals (i.e. pathways)" (Snyder, 1995). Thus, hope is a construct closely related to optimism. Dufault and Martocchio (1985) consider hope as "a dynamic life force which involves a certain expectation of achieving something good which is realistic and has personal significance for a person". Hope is strongest when it entails valued goals.

Fredrickson (2009) defines hope as a positive emotional experience. In the VIA classification it has been taken as a character strength related to transcendence virtue (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Accordingly, it is an enduring trait of a person to expect positive outcome in future. It is found in different degrees in different people and predicts the happiness and well-being. Several studies have ascertained that the people who are hopeful tend to be happier than others. In a study by Narula (2017) on females of age group of 18 to 21 years, a significant positive correlation between hope and happiness was found i.e. ($r = 0.721, p \leq 0.01$). It indicated that students high in hope experience more happiness than others.

In another study conducted on young adults the relationship of happiness to character strengths was studied in different samples. Gratitude and hope were among those strengths that showed greater associations with happiness (Shimai et. al, 2006).

Humor

Humor is a universal phenomenon that can be seen in people of all places and ages. According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), it involves creating troubles or contradictions

which doesn't produce anger or terror but are pleasurable. Humor and playfulness are two closely related notions. Martin (2007) defines humor as "a way for people to interact in playful manner". However, there is no full overlap between humor and playfulness. Proyer (2018) studied relation between playfulness and humor and described that while playfulness is necessary for humor, humor is not essential for playfulness. For example, People can be playful without being humorous in doing creative and serious tasks such as analysing data or solving puzzles. Martin (2007) has described four components of humor i.e. cognitive component (involving processing of information and using the words or actions in a funny and creative way); behavioural component (expressed by amusement, laugh and smile); social component (as it mostly occurs in social situations, actual or imagined) and emotional component (a pleasant feeling of cheerfulness and mirth at least to some degree).

Humor has been considered as one of the most controversial strengths (Edwards, 2013). It has been studied as a virtue as well as a vice. The humor in the VIA-inventory has been taken as a strength that adds to the transcendence virtue and accordingly, it is a positive trait expressed in thoughts, feelings and behaviour. It improves the social relationship among people and makes them feel more connected. In this context, an individual with the trait of humor is explained as "one who is skilled at laughing and gentle teasing, at bringing smiles to the faces of others, at seeing the lighter side, and at making (not necessarily telling) jokes" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

However other approaches define humor as a virtue as well as a vice. In the humor styles questionnaire by Martin et al (2003) four different humor styles have been explained. Two of which are positive styles (i.e. self-enhancing and affiliative) and remaining two are negative styles (i.e. aggressive and self-defeating). Affiliative humor enhances relationships by sharing funny and witty comments and jokes. Self-enhancing humor helps in coping with stress and makes one feel lighter. Aggressive humor is used in the form of teasing and making fun of others. Self-defeating humor makes others laugh by disgracing or diminishing one's own self. The previous researches have mostly focused on

the kind of humor used. Affiliative and Self-enhancing humor styles improves well-being whereas aggressive or self-defeating humor styles relate negatively to well being (Ford et al, 2016; Martin, 2007). Thus, the positive uses of humor and relative absence of negative uses can be taken as a strength according to the HSQ approach (Edwards, 2013).

The VIA inventory measures only virtuous humor. It has also been supported by some studies, the findings of Beermann and Ruch (2009) showed that VIA-IS humor scale was one of those scales which were rated by participants as having high degree of virtue.

Humor is a character strength that is found to be most strongly related to the pleasure-orientation to happiness (Peterson et al, 2007). According to Edwards (2013), humor has a more positive relationship with the pleasure orientation because of its playful nature and it is less related to engagement orientation because it distracts from something serious.

Orientations to Happiness

People all over the world want to be happy. Happiness refers to the extent to which people think and feel that their lives are going well (Lucas & Diener, 2008). The hedonic views define happiness as pleasant feelings whereas eudaimonic views believe that it involves doing what is virtuous, morally right, meaningful and growth producing. There are three orientations to happiness i.e. meaning, pleasure and engagement based on strategies that individuals use to promote well-being (Peterson et al., 2005). Pleasure oriented people focus on positive emotions and pleasure to increase their happiness. Happiness is not limited to pleasurable feeling. Sometimes a neutral sort of experience can bring a deep sense of satisfaction. Meaning oriented people find more happiness by doing acts in service of the common good. People who are engagement orientated seek happiness by experiencing flow which is experienced when they are completely absorbed in something, and lose the sense of time, surroundings and bodily sensations (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Past researches have shown that different strengths relate to different happiness orientations. Apter (1991) explained telic and paratelic states of mind. The paratelic state

is a present oriented and playful frame of mind whereas the telic state is goal-directed state involving more seriousness. He further explained that gratitude relates to the telic state and humor relates to the paratelic state which makes gratitude more closely related to meaning orientation and humor to pleasure orientation.

Lee et al (2015) investigated different hypotheses to investigate the relationships among strengths of character, happiness orientations, life satisfaction and purpose for adults. Along with some other strengths, they found gratitude to be significantly associated with life of meaning and humor associated most with life of pleasure.

A study investigated the relationship between gratitude and hope and its contribution to happiness. The results indicated a positive correlation between hope and gratitude; happiness and gratitude; and hope and happiness (Meherunissa, 2016)

Rationale of the present study:

Young adults are those who have achieved sexual maturity but whose personality is still developing as they gain further experience. Till the end of adolescence, the child has learned the basic skills which are necessary for playing the future role of a responsible adult. Psychologically, the period of young adulthood is marked by taking responsibility for oneself and making independent decisions. In this period, they have a predetermined vision and direction to move forward. Happy adults have been found to be more physically active, have higher self-esteem, better in interpersonal relationships, perform better in academic achievement and work life, are less prone to counter-productive behaviour such as alcoholism, substance abuse and criminal acts. In the midst of multiple challenges related to the academic, work or personal life the role of strengths such as gratitude, humor and hope becomes more crucial. The present study is aimed at finding out how these strengths contribute to the happiness in a student's life.

Objective

The objective of this study is to find the relationship of gratitude, hope and humor with happiness.

Hypothesis

There is a significant positive relationship between gratitude, hope, humor and happiness.

Method

Participants.

The participants in this study are the young adults of age group 18-24 years. The sample size is 120 (60 male and 60 female). The sample has been drawn from the urban areas only.

Inclusion criteria.

College and university students from urban areas only with the age range of 18-24 years.

Exclusion criteria.

Young Adults suffering from incurable diseases/Drug abused/Delinquents etc.

Measures

1) *Value in Action Inventory of Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)*. It is a 120 items self-report inventory that measures character strengths of adults of age 18 and above. It uses 5-point likert-scale to measure the degree to which respondents endorse strength-relevant statements about themselves (1 = very much unlike me through 5 = very much like me). This assessment was derived by Dr. Robert McGrath from the original VIA-240 (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005) by taking the 5 items for each scale with the highest corrected item-total correlations. Average internal consistency reliability is .79. The internal consistency reliability for gratitude, hope and humor is .87, .79 and .75 respectively. Initial validity coefficients are between .39 and .50 and are slightly lower than for the VIA-IS.

2) *Orientations to Happiness scale (Peterson, Park & Seligman, 2005)*. It is an 18-item measure used to know the use of three approaches to happiness: meaning, pleasure and engagement. There are six items for each subscale. Participants respond using a 5-point scale (ranging from 1 = 'very much unlike me' to 5 = 'very much like me'). Scores can be obtained for all the three orientations. The reliabilities of each subscale have been found $\alpha = 0.84$ for meaning, $\alpha = 0.81$ for pleasure and $\alpha = 0.74$ for engagement. Items for this measure were contributed by independent experts showing its face validity and high correlations

with other measures of meaning, pleasure and engagement have been found (Peterson et al., 2005).

Procedure

The sample was finalised using stratified random sampling. After finalising the sample, the data was collected as per the convenience of the participants. The tests were administered individually as well as in groups after taking informed consent. The data was analysed with the help of correlation and multiple regression to study the three strengths as predictor of the happiness orientations.

Results

The results have been shown in table 1, 2 and 3. Table 1 shows the descriptives. The correlation coefficients between each of the studied strength and each happiness orientation were calculated for the sample. Table 2 shows that all the three strengths had a significant positive correlation with each of the happiness orientation i.e. meaning, pleasure and engagement, with the correlation coefficients

ranging from .22-.45.

Table 1. Descriptives (N=120)

	Mini- mum	Maxi- mum	Mean(SD)
Gratitude	11	25	19.11 (2.930)
Hope	10	25	20.03 (3.054)
Humor	11	25	19.44 (3.116)
Meaning	14	29	22.39 (3.237)
Pleasure	14	30	24.52 (3.021)
Engagement	13	29	22.78 (2.926)

Multiple regression analysis was then performed to analyse the overall model as predictor of different happiness orientations. It was also examined which of these strengths individually, are the best predictors of a particular happiness orientation. Table 3 shows the regression coefficients.

The regression model studied gratitude, hope and humor as predictors of the three orientations to happiness. Table 3 shows the

Table 2. Correlations (N = 120)

	Gratitude	Hope	Humor	Meaning	Pleasure	Engagement
Gratitude	-					
Hope	.452**	-				
Humor	.334**	.266**	-			
Meaning	.310**	.395**	.264**	-		
Pleasure	.444**	.371**	.449**	.360**	-	
Engagement	.331**	.337**	.219*	.413**	.415**	-

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 3. Summary of Regression analysis with meaning, pleasure and engagement as dependent variables(N=120)

	Meaning					Pleasure					Engagement				
	B	SE	β	t	p	B	SE	β	t	p	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	10.48	2.32	—	4.51	<.001	10.06	1.99	—	5.05	<.001	12.99	2.14	—	6.06	<.001
Gratitude	.14	.11	.13	1.32	.190	.27	.09	.26	2.95	.004	.199	.098	.199	2.03	.045
Hope	.32	.10	.30	3.18	.002	.17	.09	.17	1.94	.055	.21	.09	.22	2.31	.023
Humor	.15	.09	.14	1.59	.114	.31	.08	.32	3.86	<.001	.09	.09	.09	1.03	.307
F	9.38					<.001					7.45				
R ²	.19					.32					.16				

Unstandardized Regression Coefficient (B), its Standard Error(SE), Standardized Coefficient (β), t-value and significance level (p) for each of the three happiness orientations.

The overall regression model predicting the meaning was found significant $F(3, 116) = 9.382$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .195$. The significant positive correlations were also found between gratitude and meaning $r(118) = .31$, $P < .01$; Hope and meaning $r(118) = .39$, $P < .01$; Humor and meaning $r(118) = .26$, $P < .01$ (see Table 2). The effect size for meaning i.e. $R^2 = .195$ indicated that overall 19.5% variance in meaning was caused by these three predictors. Individually only hope was found significant predictor of meaning ($p < .05$).

In case of pleasure also the overall regression model was found significant $F(3, 116) = 18.232$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .32$. Correlations were significantly positive between gratitude and pleasure $r(118) = .44$, $P < .01$; Hope and pleasure $r(118) = .37$, $P < .01$; and Humor and pleasure $r(118) = .45$, $P < .01$ (see Table 2). Individually only gratitude and humor were significant predictors of pleasure ($p < .05$) whereas hope didn't significantly predict pleasure orientation. Overall 32% variance in pleasure was caused by these predictors.

The regression model predicting the engagement orientation to happiness was also found significant $F(3, 116) = 7.453$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .162$. Positive correlations were also found between gratitude and engagement $r(118) = .33$, $P < .01$; Hope and engagement $r(118) = .34$, $P < .01$; and Humor and engagement $r(118) = .22$, $P < .05$ (see Table 2). The overall variance in engagement caused by these three predictors was 16.2%. Individually only gratitude and hope were found significant predictors of engagement ($p < .05$) and humor alone was not significant predictor of engagement orientation.

Discussion

The largest amount of variance caused by the predictor strengths was in the pleasure orientation to happiness followed by meaning and engagement. Individually, gratitude predicted pleasure and engagement, hope predicted meaning and engagement and humor predicted only pleasure orientation. The results are in line with the previous researches showing gratitude, hope and humor as positive predictors of happiness and well-being (Maiolino & Kuipera,

2014; Meherunissa, 2016).

The students who have the tendency to be grateful for what they have or for what others have done for them are happier. It may be because gratitude feeling adds positivity to their experiences and brings trust and companionship. Students who are more hopeful have more of engagement orientation to happiness. This may be because of 'I can do this' approach which makes them put more effort in achieving their goals. It brings inner strength and self-confidence which increase pleasurable feeling. Humor as a strength enhances the relationship by making one feel more connected with others. It leads to pleasure-oriented happiness. This is also in line with most of the previous researches (Peterson et al, 2007; Lee et al 2015 etc).

Conclusion

The study revealed that hope, humor and gratitude play significant role in enhancing the happiness level of a person. Thus, the interventions to increase the strengths of gratitude, hope and humor can be developed and incorporated in educational settings to enhance the happiness level in students. Training programmes to inculcate these strengths in the students can be designed.

There are some limitations of the present study such as small sample, age wise and area wise generalizability concern etc. Also, there may be gender differences with respect to the relative importance of a particular strength for male or female. Gender differences may be included in future studies. Further a broad range of strengths that relate to the happiness of a person such as courage, persistence, kindness, forgiveness etc can be included in future studies.

Acknowledgement

No conflict of interest has been acknowledged by the authors.

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