

Locus of control, feeling of happiness and self-esteem: interrelation analysis

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Abstract

Recent interest in positive psychology is reflected in a plenty of studies conducted on its basic constructs in interrelation with personality features, social rules, business and technology development. It is recognized that the relationship between self-esteem, happiness, locus of control is complex: internal LOC is contributing to happiness, but it is not directly related to it; self-esteem is a powerful and important psychological factor in mental health and well-being; the feelings of being worthy and empowered are associated with significant achievements and high self-esteem; strong and appropriate self-esteem (when the discrepancy between “ideal” and “real” self is balanced) is correlated with more internal LOC (when the individual tends to believe that personal achievements depend on possessed features, vigor and persistence).

Despite the special attention paid to happiness, locus of control and self-esteem, independently, theoretical and empirical equivocations within each literature foreclose many obvious predictions about the nature of their empirical distinction. In terms of theoretical framework, no model has achieved consensus as an ultimate theoretical background for any of the mentioned constructs.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the mediating role of self-esteem, exploring the relationships between self-esteem and happiness, self-esteem and locus of control (LOC). It hypothesizes that self-esteem may be interpreted as a predictor of happiness and mediator in locus of control establishment. A plenty of various empirical studies results have been analysed in order to collect data for this theoretical study and some of the analysed results can be considered as arguable or incoherent.

Key words: self-esteem, happiness, locus of control, interrelation.

1. Introduction

Positive psychology has demonstrated increasing interest in recent years (Seligman & Csikszentmihaly, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2002). In order to understand the positive aspects of psychological achievements, researchers have explored individual differences analyzing such constructs as self-esteem, happiness, self-efficacy, hope, optimism, life satisfaction, positive affect, etc. Those scientific concepts are examined by researchers independently within specific field, with only occasionally comparative studying the connections between them. That is why there are

assumptions stating these constructs are to some degree truly conceptually and empirically distinct. Some theoretical models and definitions of happiness are definitely different from theoretical models and definitions of self-esteem, and the various models of locus of control are distinct from the various definitions of self-esteem and happiness. However, the fundamental empirical distinctions among the constructs are less clear, what makes it combinative analysis more challenging. For instance, to what level do happiness, locus of control and self-esteem

overlap, related or occurs in cause-effect relationships, and do they have significantly different sets of correlates? The few studies that have examined such overlap clearly demonstrate that many of the constructs within positive psychology are strongly intercorrelated.

The theoretical and empirical studies in the last 20 years have indicated that self-esteem is a significant and powerful psychological factor in the quality of life, health and well-being. It is identified that the feelings of being worthy and empowered are related to strong, high self-esteem which can result in positive changes such as more efforts to gain success, achievements, being hard-working, and tendency to have a better health status (Mann et al., 2004). Howard Mumford Jones once said that “happiness...belongs to that category of words, the meaning of which everybody knows but the definition of which nobody can give” (Freedman, 1978 in Lyubomirsky, 2006).

The main objective of current study is to examine the interrelation between all three concepts (happiness, locus of control and self-esteem) from theoretical and empirical perspectives. In particular, this study addresses the following broad research questions:

- May happiness be possible without a healthy self-esteem?
- To what extent does self-esteem influence on the level of happiness?
- Is self-esteem is a strong predictor of internal locus of control?
- Is high self-esteem related to internal LOC, while low self-esteem to external LOC?

- To what extent LOC and happiness are interrelated?

In order to find the answers for listed above questions, 61 reliable sources have been analysed, results of what are discussed more detailed below.

2. Understanding the Basic Constructs

Positive psychology aimed at examine of causes for human being happiness, exploring within its subject positive emotions, positive traits and positive institutions. Since its establishing, positive psychology collected data from empirical studies in such areas as self-esteem, happiness, optimism, mindfulness, and positive thinking. Gathered information allowed for forming theoretical basis and practical interventions in order to increase well-being and happiness.

Plenty of existing theories and approaches attempt to explore the basic constructs and their relation with personality traits, social context and social change. Presented ideas and empirical data provide the possibilities for defining and understanding of the basic constructs of positive psychology such as self-esteem, happiness and locus of control. To form the theoretical background for present study, the most important constructs are explained in the following paragraphs.

2.1. Understanding the Construct of Self-

Esteem

Self-esteem is often contemplated as self-evaluation, or an evaluation of one's self-worth or self-acceptance (Rosenberg, 1979). It is considered as a set of attitudes and beliefs that individuals express in their relationships with their surroundings (Luszczynska & Schwarzer 2005).

Many studies reported the strong relation between self-esteem and happiness: Campbell (1990) stated self-esteem to be one of the strongest predictors of well-being; while Diener's (1999) review of well-being data of 11 studies proved a positive correlation between self-esteem and well-being. In addition, self-esteem forms during early stage of development, remains rather constant over time, and is relatively resistant to change (Campbell, 1990).

According to the existent definitions, self-esteem is the extent to which a person values his or her ability and importance. Also, it is a personal experience through which relevant indicators can be observed through individual's social and communication resources, and eloquent behaviours (Pope *et al.*, 1988).

Basically, self-esteem is the evaluative aspect of the self-concept that corresponds to an overall view of the self as worthy or unworthy (Baumeister, 1998). The subsistence of a positive self-estimation in individual's performance can increase the level of self-esteem, and in contrast, the existence of a negative self-appraisals can decrease it (Lawrence *et al.*, 2006). It is necessary to mention those studies that have pointed out a positive significant relationship between healthy locus of control and self-esteem (Ozolins & Stenstrom, 2003).

Additionally, Alizadeh (2004) claimed that there is a positive significant correlation between self-esteem and internal locus of control but there is not a significant relationship between self-esteem and external locus of control. Subsequently, individuals with high self-esteem are presumed to be psychologically happy and healthy (Branden,

1994), while individuals with low self-esteem are believed to be psychologically distressed and perhaps even depressed (Tennen & Affleck, 1993).

Furthermore, self-esteem has been defined as a global feeling of adequacy or self-worth as a person, or generalized feelings of self-respect, goodness, and self-acceptance (Coopersmith, 1967; Crocker and Major, 1989; Rosenberg, 1979). This global, personal estimation of worthiness is classified as the evaluative component of the self (Campbell, 1990), and is separate from collective or racial self-esteem (Crocker and Major, 1989). In accordance with Epstein (1973), people have a basic need for self-esteem, and they use numerous strategies to maintain it (Diener and Diener, 1999).

Another way of viewing self-esteem is presented by Coopersmith's (1967), when it is considered as an attitude about the self and is related to personal beliefs about skills, abilities, social relationships, and future outcomes.

In accordance with another way of viewing self-esteem, Leary and Baumeister (2000) define self-esteem as a indicator of the degree to which individual belongs to groups and relationships, while Cast and Burke (2002) argue that self-esteem is intrinsically connected to self-verification within group processes. Despite the lack of assent regarding the self-esteem model, it is usually stated that global self-esteem is an evaluative component of individual's self-concept, which is conceptualized as an extent to which a person accepts or feels satisfied with the self. Furthermore, according to empirical findings, there are at least three main reasons proving that

happiness and self-esteem are difficult to distinguish in the modern literature. First, relatively few studies contain both constructs, and even if both constructs are included, the differences between them is not explored. Second, if studies examine both constructs in terms of correlation between them, it is often strong association (e.g., Furr & Funder, 1998). Third, those constructs seems to demonstrate relatively similar correlates.

In addition, there are many theories attempting to explore the source of self-esteem. For instance, William James (1890 in Heatherton, 1991) stated that self-esteem developed from the accumulation of experiences in which individual's outcomes exceeded their goals on some important dimension. Many of the most known theories of self-esteem are based on Cooley's (1902 in Heatherton, 1991) notion of the looking-glass self, in which self-evaluations are viewed as indissoluble from social environment.

Moreover, the symbolic interactionism (Mead's, 1934 in Heatherton, 1991) delineated a process by which people internalize attitudes and opinions expressed by significant figures in their lives. However, it has to be admit, that consecutive discussions among most contemporary self-esteem researches, as well as thinking by Coopersmith (1967) and Rosenberg (1979), are in compliance with the basic dogmas of mentioned symbolic interactionism. According to this perspective, it is important to estimate how people perceive themselves to be viewed by significant others, such as family members, friends, or classmates.

Similarly, the recent theories of self-esteem have underlined the norms and values of the cultures and societies in which people are raised. For instance, Crocker and her colleagues have claimed that some people may experience collective self-esteem because they are tended to establish their self-esteem on their social identities (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Leary, Tambor, Terdal, and Downs (1995) have proposed a novel and significant social aspect of self-esteem. Sociometer theory starts with the assumption that humans have a fundamental need to belong to some social group, what is derived from the evolutionary antecedents (Leary & Baumeister, 2000).

2.1.1. Dimensions of Self-Esteem

Discussing the dimensions of self-esteem, it has to be underlined, that self-esteem can refer to the global self or to some particular aspects of the self. According to the overall approach, self-esteem is considered a global self-attitude that enters all aspects of human being's lives. Accordingly, Robins, Hendin, and Trzesniewski (2001) developed a single-item measure of global self-esteem, where some single item is associated to a similar extent. That scale is the most widely used one with a variety of measures, including personality factors, domain-specific evaluations, and psychological well-being. Furthermore, self-esteem also can be characterized as a hierarchical construct, which can be divided into three major components: social self-esteem, performance self-esteem, and physical self-esteem (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). Admittedly, William James (1892 in Heatherton, 1991) proposed that global self-esteem was the combination of specific

components of self-esteem, each of which is assessed by its importance to the self-concept. Consequently, another significant issue in characterizing and measurement of self-esteem is whether it has to be considered as a stable personality trait or conceptualized as a context-specific state. In accordance with consecutive views, self-esteem can be viewed both as a “state” and as a trait as well (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). From the stable trait theories perspective, self-esteem is stable because it slowly establishes over time through personal experiences, such as frequently succeeding at various tasks or repeatedly being appreciated by significant others. Although, a number of studies imply self-esteem occurs as the dependent variable rather than the independent or classification one (Wells & Marwell, 1976). Consequently, these studies assume that self-esteem can be temporarily affected. As a result, fluctuations in state self-esteem are related to reliance on social judgments, increased sensitivity and concern about how others view the self, and even hostility and anger (Kernis, 1993). In the main, those with a weak sense of self-esteem respond extremely favorably to positive feedback, while extremely protective to negative feedback. Nonetheless, self-esteem is a widely defined as a personality variable with reference to the level to which an individual accepts and values oneself. Thus, the most repeatedly cited definition of self-esteem within psychology is Rosenberg’s (1979), who conceptualized it as a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the self (Gray-Little, Williams, Hancock, 1997). Thereby, low self-esteem has been correlated with a string of

negative life outcomes, including delinquency, substance abuse, unhappiness and depression. Low self-esteem is also associated with superior amounts of experienced daily chronic stressors and hassles, even after adjustment of environmental factors. On the contrary, high self-esteem has been related to positive aspects, such as strong coping skills, initiative, and persistence in achieving goals, happiness, and longevity (Halama, 2008).

2.2. Understanding the Construct of Happiness

Relatively recently psychologists focused at the definitions, predictors and correlates of happiness, analyzing it as psychological well-being, subjective well-being or mental well-being) (Argyle, 1987; Eysenck, 1990). Furthermore, happiness has been conceptualized both as a cognition and an effect. The first model refers to individual’s current state of mood which tends to be less stable and quicker, while the following model refers to an overall satisfaction and tends to be more stable and long lasting. Argyle et al. (1989) construed happiness as the average level of satisfaction during a particular period; the degree and frequency of positive affect; and the relative absence of negative affect.

The most widely recognized definition of happiness has been provided by Diener and his colleagues, who suggested to use the concept of subjective well-being, defining it as a consolidation of the balance of the prevalence of positive and negative affect (i.e., hedonic tone) and life satisfaction (a cognitive judgment) (Diener et al., 1999).

In accordance with a model proposed by Diener and his colleagues, subjective well-being consists

of overall satisfaction with life, positive affect, and negative affect (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Myers & Diener, 1995). However, circumlocutions from this perspective often occur to align happiness with subjective well-being (Diener et al, 1999; Myers & Diener, 1995), this approach also arises to sporadically define happiness as an affective subelement of the more expansive construct of subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1999). Admittedly, within this model, self-esteem might be conceptualized as a component of overall satisfaction with life, and thus as a sub-sub-component of subjective well-being. Regardless of the wide impact of this model, it has to be considered as the only model of well-being or happiness (Hermans, 1992). For instance, Ryff and her colleagues (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; Ryff, 1989) distinguished six aspects of psychological well-being, including self-acceptance. Ryff and her colleagues propound that happiness is a related construct, but is conceptually apparent from psychological well-being. Correspondingly, the Oxford Happiness Inventory contains personal efficacy, satisfaction with life, sociability/empathy, physical well-being, positive outlook, cheerfulness, and self-esteem as "the major dimensions of well-being" (Hills & Argyle, 2001, p. 159).

A conducted review of the current literature on happiness pointed out a general consensus of a functional definition that contained three basic components: an ongoing average level of personal satisfaction, a relatively stable feeling of positive affect, and the absence of negative affect (Ben-

Zur, 2003; Lu, 1999; Mahon, Yarcheski, & Yarcheski, 2005).

Furthermore, Argyle (2001) and Myers (2002) have propounded that traits such as self-esteem, personal control, optimism, life-satisfaction, and extraversion, were associated with happiness. Argyle prompted that optimism, self-esteem, control, and life-satisfaction are four features that are so highly correlated with happiness that they are frequently considered elements of happiness.

Based on the assumption that majority of people are able to recognize whether they are happy, a plenty of studies applied self-monitoring, when the individuals were measured to define happiness for themselves (Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999). The majority of people are able to identify and report on their overall happiness, and their estimation is not necessarily comparable to a simple accumulation of some recent scores of life satisfaction and levels of affect.

2.3. Understanding the Construct of Locus of control

The construct of locus of control was initially derived from Rotter's social learning theory, which refers to learning based on previous reinforcements through which individuals form their specific and general expectations. Basically, the individual assumes that external (powerful others, luck, chance) and/or internal (own personality, knowledge, attitude, status) determinants are responsible for what has happened, achieved or failed in his or her life.

Consequently, locus of control and self-esteem are contemplated as socially learned and self-developed life attitudes. Subsequently, internal locus of control is characterized as a belief that

events are dependent on one's own permanent traits or behavior, while external locus of control is defined as a belief that outcomes are the result of luck, fate, chance, or control of powerful others or are unpredictable due to the complexity of situations (Rotter, 1990). Moreover, individuals with an internal locus of control consistently engage in adaptive and proactive behaviors (Rothbaum, Weisz, Snyder, 1982).

In addition, Rotter (1990) advocated that this perception of personal control could be best conceptualized as the extent to which an individual develops the expectancy that one's behavior is associated with either external or internal reinforcements. Consequently, he argued that individuals with an internal locus of control were more likely to believe that they had control in most situations or influence on their own behavioral outcomes. On a contrary, Rotter advocated that individuals who are possessing an external locus of control tended to believe that situations were controlled by external factors.

Contrariwise, high self-esteem demonstrates strong association with internal locus of control, or in other words, the highly confident individual perceives that own outcomes are determined by own actions (Whisman, Kwon, 1993). Additionally, person with high confidence level and control over own life is associated with the ability to adjust to repeated psychosocial stress, while individuals with low confidence and external locus of control create a relationship with continuous high cortisol stress responses (Kirschbaum, Bartussek, Strasburger, 1992).

3. Relation between the Basic Constructs

In many empirical studies researchers from different fields were working on examining the relation between various variables significant for positive psychology, including self-esteem, well-being, feeling of control, need for achievement, personality, social support, personal experience etc. The majority of studies were searching or correlation between mentioned variables. Collected data in this matter provided possibilities to create many assumption related to the connection between self-esteem, happiness, optimism, mindfulness, locus of control, etc. However, many studies provided controversial results, what makes difficult generalizing the relation between those variables and creates many research questions for further studies.

In the following paragraphs the most significant data attempting describe the relation between happiness and self-esteem, happiness and locus of control, happiness and self-esteem and locus of control are discussed. One of the milestone issues is the role of self-esteem in human being's life.

3.1. Relation between happiness and self-esteem

Intuitively researchers associated happiness and self-esteem, considering them as inextricably linked through the life experience, personal achievements or failures, social support etc. In everyday experience, happy individuals tend to consider themselves as a worth empowered people, while people who experience deficit of self-respect or self-worth consider themselves as unhappy. This assumption was proved in many empirical studies, revealing moderate to high correlations between measures of happiness and self-esteem (Campbell, 1990; Diener and Diener, 1999; Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999;

Schimmack et al., 2004). Whereas few researchers would state that happiness and self-esteem should be considered as synonymous, self-esteem is often used as an indicator of psychological well-being or global happiness (Ryff, 1989).

Nonetheless, happiness and self-esteem are so intimately related that it is extremely difficult to disconnect them conceptually. Actually, happiness may not be recognized or achieved without an high but appropriate level of self-acceptance and self-confidence. Furthermore, Ryff (1989) deduced that the most iterative criteria for positive well-being is the individual's feeling of self-esteem or self-acceptance (Myers, 2002; Diener, 1999).

On a contrary, happiness and self-esteem are considered as discriminable and distinct constructs. Albeit, some models conceptualized self-esteem as adaptive and crucial construct for happiness, they do not provide a congruent characterization of happiness and may be dissimilar to many of individual's happy or unhappy experiences (Parducci, 1995). However, such indicators as a high income, a prestigious job, or a good marriage does not guarantee happiness (Diener et al., 1999), as well as high self-esteem is not a adequate condition for happiness. Consecutively, this approach may help justify why the relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction (as a happiness index) fluctuates in collectivist versus individualist cultures (Diener and Diener, 1999). Additionally, Lucas and his colleagues (1996) conducted a complex study aiming systematical analysis of the association between self-esteem and psychological well-being, applying multitrait-

multimethod matrix analyses to demonstrate that life satisfaction is empirically recognizable from self-esteem (Diener and Diener, 1999).

Discussing the differentiation between happiness and self-esteem, a study by Hermans (1992) has to be analyzed. Hermans provides some insight into the nature of the distinction between the two constructs, underlining that, although self-esteem and happiness are positively correlated with each other, the correlation is not perfect. That is why some individuals have relatively low levels of happiness but relatively high levels of self-esteem (and vice versa).

Hermans's (1992) findings suggest that the difference between happiness and self-esteem might be related to the two fundamental interpersonal dimensions of agency and communion (Wiggins & Trapnell, 1996). Agency refers to individuation, with one end of the dimension representing submissiveness, and the other end reflecting dominance and ambition. Communion refers to the affiliative nature of individual's behavioral patterns and motivations, where one end of the dimension represents a tendency to be hostile, aloof, and cold, while the other end reflects an orientation towards social acceptance and warmth (Wolfe, Lennox, & Cutler, 1986). Furthermore, these two core dimensions have consistently appeared in gender comparative research, including studies of gender differences in happiness, well-being, and self-esteem. Admittedly, Hermans' findings imply that self-esteem is aligned with agency while happiness is aligned with communion.

Despite of special attention paid to happiness and self-esteem among modern studies, there is only a

few include analysis of self-esteem as a significant mediator in relation to happiness. In this terms, extremely interesting was discover in study by Baron and Kenny (1986), in which self-esteem and self-criticism are examined as mediator variables between parenting style and happiness. Unfortunately, in a currant literature review not too many studies.

3.2. Relation between happiness and locus of control

It is indicated that individuals with internal locus of control are more likely demonstrate higher result on diverse attributes related to happiness. In view of this, Argyle (2001) and Myers (2001) found a direct relationship between internal locus of control and perceiving of happiness. Additionally, other studies have implied that age or life experiences may differentiate the relationship between locus of control and happiness. Moreover, a longitudinal study conducted by Lu (1999) indicated a significant correlation between internal locus of control and happiness, which was discovered to increase over time. Further, Cummins and Nistico (2002) also proved a correlation between internal locus of control and happiness that strengthened over time. It is recognized that locus of control occurs in strength relation with employee well-being, demonstrating association between not only perceptions of control in work environment, but also individual's general believe about control (Spector et al., 2002). Furthermore, some studies discovered that internal control beliefs are significant component of emotional adjustment and ability to cope with stress in individual's life and at work (Spector et al., 2002). It is possible to

predict that locus of control in the work place can be associated with employee well-being (Spector et al., 2002).

3.3. Relation between happiness, locus of control and self-esteem

Judge and his colleagues (2001, 2002) investigated the empirical overlap among self-esteem, locus of control, self-efficacy, and emotional stability, and they conclude that "these traits are indistinct measures of the same core trait," which they refer to as core self-evaluations (Judge & Bono, 2001; p. 108; Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoreson, 2002). Similarly, Furr and Funder (1998) proved that measures of happiness, life satisfaction, depression, and self-esteem are significantly correlated with each other and laden on a single factor.

Consequently, acknowledging the significance of empirical overlap among the miscellaneous constructs related to positive psychology, researchers have recently admitted the need to explore the differences among those constructs. Subsequently, in a theoretical review of individual differences in happiness, Lyubomirsky (2001) declared that an important question for researchers to consider is whether the empirical findings in the happiness literature "reflect the role of chronic happiness, rather than that of self-esteem, optimism, extraversion, feeling of control, sensitivity to reward, or other individual difference constructs related to happiness" (p. 244).

Despite the recent attention paid to self-esteem, locus of control and happiness, independently, both empirical and theoretical equivocations within each resource makes impossible many

clear predictions about the nature of their empirical distinction. Furthermore, in terms of theoretical framework, no model has reached consensus as a definitive theoretical approach for either locus of control, happiness or self-esteem.

4. Conclusion

This study was an attempt to examine the most wide spread currently research areas – happiness research, self-esteem research and locus of control research – and to find the possible answer to the question of the mediation or determination of self-esteem in relation with happiness and locus of control. It was expected that there is a strong correlation between all three analyzed concepts with attributing a special mediating role to self-esteem.

Regardless the lack of consensus agreement in general model of happiness, it is commonly conceptualized in terms of pleasant affective experience that can appear as a relatively stable individual difference or as an emotional state. Similarly, no single model of self-esteem has been accepted, and none occurs to integrate self-esteem with happiness. For instance, according to hierarchical model (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976), the global self-esteem is defined as a function of elements such as social self-esteem, moral self-esteem and physical self-esteem.

It is recognized that the relationships between locus of control, happiness and self-esteem is complex. There is plenty of researches conducted on each of those variables separately but in relation with some other variables like personality, job satisfaction, creativity, mental health etc., which provided a background for the basic

hypothesis of this study: self-esteem performs as a mediator in relation with happiness and locus of control. Analyzed data allowed to find answers for the research question.

Examined findings indicated that there is different relationships between mentioned constructs, among which the most significant are listed below:

- self-esteem can be defined as an attitude or belief about own abilities and importance, as a global feeling of self-worth, as an indicator of involvement into significant groups and relationships, as indicator of psychological well-being or global happiness
- self-esteem can be measured in few dimensions: global, social, performance, and physical; personality and context,
- self-esteem is considered as most iterative criteria for positive well-being, performing as adaptive and crucial construct for happiness, however, high self-esteem is not a adequate condition for happiness,
- self-esteem and happiness are positively correlated with each other, but that correlation is not perfect, meaning in reality some individuals have relatively high self-esteem but relatively low level of happiness,
- the difference between happiness and self-esteem might be related to the two fundamental interpersonal dimensions of communion and agency respectively,

- self-esteem demonstrates strong association with internal locus of control,
- significant correlation between internal locus of control and happiness, which was discovered to increase over time
- locus of control is correlated with employee well-being, emotional adjustment and ability to cope with stress. gender demonstrates significant differences in well-being, happiness, and self-esteem,
- self-esteem and self-criticism are examined as mediator variables between parenting style and happiness.

To be able to state more precisely about mediating role of self-esteem, the further studies has to be conducted in a way that results will be applicable in a larger social practice.

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