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Ph.D. THESIS SUMMARY

THE ROLE OF ORIENTATIONS TO HAPPINESS IN WELL-BEING AND DISTRESS

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CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Introduction to the Research Topic

1.1.1. Historical and Theoretical Foundations of Happiness

This section examines the evolution of perspectives on happiness, from traditional spiritual conceptions to modern scientific approaches. Throughout history, happiness has been studied from religious, philosophical, and, more recently, psychological perspectives, each contributing to the development of increasingly complex theoretical models. These contributions have ultimately led to the formulation of contemporary frameworks for understanding happiness, such as the orientations to happiness model (David et al., 2012; Kesebir & Diener, 2008; Peterson et al., 2005).

1.1.1.1. Ancient Eastern Perspectives

Ancient Eastern traditions place happiness within the realm of spiritual and moral development. Hinduism introduces the concept of moksha—spiritual liberation through detachment from desires (Flood, 1996; Radhakrishnan, 1953). Buddhism promotes attaining nirvana through cultivating mindfulness, ethics, and an understanding of reality (Gethin, 1998; Harvey, 2013; Rahula, 1959). Confucianism, on the other hand, values fulfilling social duties and living virtuously as sources of happiness (Confucius, 1979/6th century BCE; Ames & Rosemont, 1998).

1.1.1.2. Classical Western Philosophy

Ancient Greek philosophy offers diverse views on happiness (Guthrie & Warren, 2012). Aristotle equates happiness with virtuous living and the realization of human potential (Aristotle, 1985/4th century BCE; Kraut, 2018). Epicurus proposes a moderate form of hedonism, based on the absence of pain (i.e., aponia) and tranquility of the soul (i.e., ataraxia) (Annas, 1993; Epicurus, 1994/3rd century BCE). Stoicism, developed by Zeno and deepened by Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, promotes rational self-control and virtue as means to attain happiness (Hadot, 1997; Aurelius, 2002/2nd century CE; Epictetus, 1983/2nd century CE; Sellars, 2021).

1.1.1.3. Christian and Medieval Views

Christianity brought a major shift, emphasizing spiritual and moral values (Guthrie & Warren, 2012; Wadell, 2024). The concept of agape, or altruistic love, is central to Christian doctrine. Happiness is understood as spiritual beatitude, illustrated in the Sermon on the Mount (New International Version, 2011, Matthew 5–7). Thinkers such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas argued that true happiness (i.e., beatitudo) is achieved through union with God rather than through sensory pleasures (Augustine, 1991/5th century; Aquinas, 1997/13th century).

1.1.1.4. Renaissance and Humanist Perspectives

The Renaissance marked a transition from a focus on transcendent happiness to a view in which fulfillment could be achieved through reason, virtue, and harmony in earthly life (Hankins, 2019; Kristeller, 1961; Schall, 1984). Erasmus of Rotterdam supported the idea that happiness stems from moral living and independent thought (Erasmus, 2023/1501), while Thomas More envisioned an ideal society in *Utopia*, where individual happiness is aligned with the common good (More, 1998/1516). This period revalued human capacity for self-determination (Brotton, 2002).

1.1.1.5. The Enlightenment and the Utilitarian Perspective

During the Enlightenment, happiness took on a secular and rationalist dimension (Schultz, 2017; Wadell, 2024). Bentham and Mill laid the foundation for utilitarianism, according to which ethical actions are those that maximize pleasure for the greatest number of people (Bentham, 1789/1996; Mill, 1863/1998). Hume emphasized the importance of empathy and social harmony, while Kant argued that moral duty must take precedence over personal pleasure (Kant, 1997/1785). These philosophers strengthened the ethical foundations of modern approaches to happiness.

1.1.1.6. The Emergence of Psychological Approaches to Happiness

In the early 20th century, psychology began to study happiness scientifically (Bühler, 1971). William James emphasized the importance of subjective experience (James, 1907), and Gordon Allport explored the role of personality traits in well-being (Allport, 1937). Charlotte Bühler examined positive development and the fulfillment of human potential (Bühler, 1972). Abraham Maslow proposed the hierarchical model of needs, culminating in self-actualization (Maslow, 1968), and Carl Rogers emphasized interpersonal relationships and self-acceptance as key factors for happiness (Rogers, 1995). These contributions laid the foundation for positive psychology (Schneider, 2014; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

1.1.2. Contemporary Models and the Assessment of Happiness

By the end of the 20th century, positive psychology emerged as a transformative direction within the field of psychology, focusing not only on the reduction of suffering but also on the cultivation of traits and values that support human development and well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Emmons & Shelton, 2002; Peterson, 2004). The foundations of this movement are anchored in the idea that psychology should not only address pathology but also explore the factors that lead to the realization of human potential (David et al., 2012; Kesebir & Diener, 2008).

Two philosophical traditions underlie modern conceptualizations of happiness: the hedonic perspective, which seeks to maximize pleasure and minimize suffering (Diener, 1984; Ryan & Deci, 2001), and the eudaimonic perspective, centered on personal growth, virtue, and self-realization (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Waterman, 2008).

1.1.2.1. The Hedonic Perspective: Subjective Well-Being

In contemporary psychology, the hedonic tradition is illustrated through the model of subjective well-being. According to Diener (1984), happiness can be analyzed through the balance between positive and negative emotions and overall life satisfaction (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999). Specifically, happiness is associated with a favorable ratio in which positive emotions are frequent and negative emotions occur rarely. It also involves a positive global evaluation of one's life, reflected in perceived life satisfaction.

These dimensions are often assessed using scales such as the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985), which is recognized for its strong psychometric properties across diverse cultural contexts (Diener et al., 2013; Stevens et al., 2012; Weber et al., 2013). The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988) also measures positive and negative emotions separately and has been extensively validated (Crawford & Henry, 2004; Díaz-García et al., 2020). These instruments provide a solid empirical foundation for investigating hedonic happiness.

1.1.2.2. The Eudaimonic Perspective: Psychological Well-Being

In contrast to the hedonic focus on immediate pleasures, the eudaimonic tradition emphasizes deeper dimensions of well-being: self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, life purpose, and personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 2008). Carol Ryff's model (1989) integrates these six fundamental dimensions, offering a holistic understanding of optimal psychological functioning.

The Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff, 1989), developed to measure these dimensions, has been validated in numerous studies and adapted into various length formats (e.g., van Dierendonck, 2004; Lindfors et al., 2006). Unlike the subjective well-being model, which reflects affective states (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999), Ryff's model captures individual functioning and the complexity of living a fulfilled life (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 2008).

1.1.2.3. Integrative Models: Reconciling Hedonia and Eudaimonia

Recognizing that people pursue both immediate pleasure and deeper meaning, integrative models have been proposed to unite hedonic and eudaimonic traditions (David et al., 2012). Among the most influential is the Authentic Happiness model (Seligman, 2002), which distinguishes between the pleasant life, the engaged life, and the meaningful life. The pleasant life involves maximizing positive emotions, the engaged life reflects immersion in challenging and fulfilling activities (i.e., flow; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), and the meaningful life entails commitment to goals greater than oneself (Seligman, 2002).

The model was later refined into the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011), which adds positive relationships and accomplishments to the initial three dimensions. Relationships contribute to both emotional well-being and the development of resilience and meaning. Accomplishments reflect achieved goals and personal success, combining eudaimonic components (i.e., mastery) with hedonic satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 2008).

The PERMA model is measured using the PERMA-Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016), a validated instrument widely used in applied psychology, education, and organizational contexts (Chue, 2024; Jimenez et al., 2021; Umucu et al., 2020). Such integrative models offer a comprehensive understanding of well-being and a fulfilled life (Seligman, 2002; 2011).

1.1.3. The Orientations to Happiness Model: Different Paths Toward a Fulfilled Life

Most modern models of happiness emphasize the components of happiness rather than the processes by which individuals actively pursue it (Diener, 1989; Ryff, 1989). To address this gap, Peterson, Park, and Seligman (2005) proposed the Orientations to Happiness (OTH) model, which focuses on the cognitive and behavioral styles through which people seek a fulfilled life.

The model is grounded in both hedonic and eudaimonic traditions (Deci & Ryan, 2008) and identifies three complementary orientations—seeking happiness through pleasure, engagement, and meaning (Peterson et al., 2005). Unlike other models that conceptualize happiness as an outcome, OTH emphasizes individuals' tendencies in how they pursue happiness.

The pleasure orientation reflects a hedonic approach, where the person seeks immediate emotional gratification through recreational or social activities (Peterson et al., 2005). The engagement orientation, inspired by the concept of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014), involves full immersion in challenging and meaningful activities, driven by intrinsic motivation. The meaning orientation entails dedication to transcendent goals rooted in moral, spiritual, or social values (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Peterson et al., 2005).

These orientations are distinct but not mutually exclusive. Individuals who score high on all three dimensions report the highest levels of life satisfaction—described as the full life—while low scores across all dimensions characterize the empty life (Peterson et al., 2005).

However, merely identifying with an orientation does not imply active engagement in the associated behaviors. Peterson et al. (2007) emphasize that the OTH model refers to general tendencies, not specific actions. Thus, discrepancies may exist between stated values and lived experiences, highlighting the importance of actual behavior in achieving well-being (Peterson et al., 2005).

1.1.4. Overview of the Orientations to Happiness Scale: Development and Cross-Cultural Adaptations

The Orientations to Happiness Scale (OTH-S), developed by Peterson et al. (2005), is a self-report instrument designed to operationalize happiness-seeking strategies. The scale includes 18 items, with six items for each subscale corresponding to the three orientations. Psychometric analyses indicate acceptable internal consistency (α = .72–.82) and moderate correlations between the dimensions (*rs* = .50–.62), suggesting conceptual overlap as well as distinctiveness.

The scale has been adapted in several cultures—German (Ruch et al., 2010), Chinese (Chan, 2009; Chen, 2009), Hungarian (Szondy & Martos, 2014), Turkish and Russian (Köse, 2014), French (Martin-Krumm et al., 2015), and Ukrainian (Kryvenko & Petryk, 2019). Most adaptations confirmed the three-factor structure,

with some adjustments (Martin-Krumm et al., 2015). It is important to note a relatively consistent pattern across studies regarding the lower internal consistency of the engagement subscale (e.g., Chen et al., 2009; Ruch et al., 2010), highlighting the complexity of the construct and the need for item revision (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021).

For contexts requiring efficiency, Ruch et al. (2014) developed a short version of the scale—the OTH-S 9—in which each orientation is assessed with three items. The results from two studies conducted by the authors support the three-factor structure as well as the acceptable internal consistency.

1.1.5. Understanding the Dynamics Between Orientations to Happiness and Life Satisfaction

The OTH model has often been analyzed in relation to life satisfaction, a core component of happiness (Diener, 1984). Peterson et al. (2005) showed that all three orientations significantly predict life satisfaction, with engagement as the strongest predictor, followed by meaning and then pleasure.

A large-scale study conducted by Park et al. (2009) across 27 countries once again confirmed the superiority of engagement and meaning orientations, while also revealing relevant cultural variations. Other studies have yielded mixed results: for instance, Richter and Hunecke (2021) found that only pleasure and engagement predicted life satisfaction, but not meaning. In another study, Köse (2015) showed that all three orientations predicted life satisfaction in the Turkish sample, but only meaning did so in the Russian sample.

These findings suggest that although there is a consistent association between OTH and life satisfaction, their strength may vary depending on cultural context and sample characteristics. Therefore, a meta-analysis would be necessary to integrate these findings and identify possible moderators.

1.1.6. The Relationship Between Orientations to Happiness and Psychological Distress

Although the OTH model has primarily been examined in relation to positive aspects of well-being, its relationship with negative indicators, such as negative affect or depressive symptoms, has received less attention (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995; Schueller & Seligman, 2010).

Most studies have not found significant associations between the pleasure orientation and negative emotions (Anić & Tončić, 2013; Pollock et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2017). Some exceptions (Swart & Rothmann, 2012; Schueller & Seligman, 2010) indicate a weak negative association, but not strong enough to support a clear protective role.

The engagement orientation shows more consistent associations with reduced negative emotions (Bubić & Erceg, 2018; Chan, 2009; Swart & Rothmann, 2012). Individuals deeply involved in challenging activities tend to experience fewer negative emotions, suggesting a potential protective effect.

The meaning orientation also shows relatively consistent associations with lower levels of negative emotions (Bubić & Erceg, 2018; Chan, 2009; Swart & Rothmann, 2012). Individuals who seek a deeper purpose in life and guide their actions by moral, spiritual, or social values tend to report fewer negative emotions, indicating a possible protective effect on mental health.

Research on other forms of distress is limited. A large study by Schueller & Seligman (2010) found negative correlations between the engagement and meaning orientations and depressive symptoms, while the pleasure orientation had a weaker association. These results suggest that strategies oriented toward meaning and engagement may serve as protective factors against depressive symptoms.

1.1.7. Exploring Potential Mechanisms Linking Orientations to Happiness and Well-Being

Although numerous studies have documented associations between the three orientations and psychological well-being (Park et al., 2009; Schueller & Seligman, 2010), the variables that mediate these associations are unknown. Peterson et al. (2007) emphasized that the OTH reflect cognitive-behavioral tendencies rather than actual behaviors, which may limit its positive effects in the absence of corresponding behavioral implementation.

Regarding the connection between orientations and behaviors, Ruch et al. (2010) investigated this relationship and found that individuals oriented toward pleasure spend more time engaging in recreational activities, those oriented toward engagement immerse themselves in challenging tasks, and those oriented toward meaning participate in prosocial and value-driven activities. Thus, orientations appear to predict behavior patterns consistent with their respective domains.

There are also studies showing that the intentional pursuit of happiness through activities aligned with each orientation contributes to increased well-being (Huta & Ryan, 2010; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Rogatko, 2009). For example, Huta and Ryan (2010) found that activities motivated by the pursuit of pleasure lead to increases in positive emotions, supporting the idea that hedonic motivations can enhance pleasant emotional states. Likewise, Rogatko (2009) experimentally demonstrated that activities with flow potential significantly increase positive emotions, supporting the idea that deep engagement contributes to emotional well-being. As for the relationship between behaviors aligned with the meaning orientation and well-being, Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) showed that prosocial actions (i.e., specific to the meaning orientation) lead to increased well-being.

In conclusion, the evidence suggests that the actual enactment of behaviors aligned with personal orientations may be the mediator through which OTH influences well-being. However, further research is needed to confirm this mechanism (Huta & Ryan, 2010; Ruch et al., 2010).

1.2. Relevance of the Research Topic

Well-being is increasingly recognized as a central indicator of mental health (Keyes, 2002), being associated, among others, with higher performance, better physical health, and fulfilling social relationships (Diener et al., 2002; Hertenstein et al., 2009; Kushlev et al., 2020). In this context, the orientations to happiness (OTH) model proposed by Peterson et al. (2005) offers a valuable perspective on the strategies people use to pursue happiness. However, the relationships between OTH and key psychological variables, such as behavioral engagement and relevant indicators of psychological distress, remain insufficiently explored (Bubić & Erceg, 2018; Ruch et al., 2010; Yang et al., 2017).

First, while some studies have found that meaning and engagement are stronger predictors of life satisfaction than pleasure (Park et al., 2009; Peterson et al., 2005), others have not supported this pattern (Köse, 2015; Richter & Hunecke, 2021). These inconsistent findings underscore the need for a meta-analysis to clarify these discrepancies and to explore potential moderators related to culture, methodology, or sample characteristics.

Second, adapting the original scale (Peterson et al., 2005) and the short version (Ruch et al., 2014) for the Romanian population is necessary to ensure conceptual and psychometric equivalence within this specific cultural context (Beaton et al., 2000; Uchida et al., 2004). Validating these instruments can facilitate more rigorous and effective research and also serve as a valuable tool in counseling, education, and organizational development.

Third, it is essential to examine whether engagement in behaviors aligned with each orientation mediates the relationship between OTH and psychological well-being (Peterson et al., 2007). This would help determine whether merely endorsing an orientation is sufficient to positively influence well-being or whether the enactment of specific behaviors is required to translate these values into actual benefits.

Fourth, investigating the links between OTH and psychological distress (i.e., depression, anxiety, and stress) is important in evaluating their potential protective role (Schueller & Seligman, 2010).

CHAPTER II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND OVERALL METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this thesis is to investigate the Orientations to Happiness (OTH) model (Peterson et al., 2005), with a focus on how these orientations contribute both to the promotion of well-being indicators (e.g., life satisfaction, positive emotions; Diener, 1984) and the reduction of psychological distress (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). To achieve this aim, the thesis is organized around four specific objectives.

The **first objective** (**Study 1**) was to synthesize the associations between each orientation and life satisfaction through a meta-analysis. A total of 53 independent studies from 40 peer-reviewed articles were included, using a three-level meta-analytic model to estimate effect sizes and examine potential moderators (e.g., cultural or demographic factors). In addition to the OTH framework (Peterson et al., 2005), studies based on the binary hedonic–eudaimonic motivations model were also included (e.g., Huta & Ryan, 2010). Thus, pleasure was classified as a hedonic strategy, and meaning as a eudaimonic orientation. Engagement was analyzed both as part of the eudaimonic composite and as a separate dimension to capture conceptual variations (Waterman, 2008; Seligman, 2002).

The **second objective** (**Study 2**) consisted of adapting and validating the long and short versions of the Orientations to Happiness Scale in Romanian (Peterson et al., 2005; Ruch et al., 2014). The adaptation process followed international guidelines for the cross-cultural adaptation of psychometric instruments (Beaton et al., 2000; Hambleton, 1994). A total of 510 participants were involved in this study. The factorial structure was examined using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, and the resulting scales were evaluated for internal consistency and criterion validity.

The **third objective (Study 3)** was to explore the behavioral mechanisms through which orientations to happiness influence positive emotions. Specifically, the study investigated whether engagement in activities specific to each orientation mediates the relationship between OTH and positive emotions. Participants (N = 349) completed weekly assessments over three consecutive weeks, although retention decreased over time, with the final sample consisting of 129 participants. Mediation hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM), following methodological recommendations for longitudinal mediation analysis (Maxwell & Cole, 2007; Maxwell et al., 2011).

The **fourth objective** (**Study 4)** was to examine the role of OTH as protective factors against psychological distress (i.e., anxiety, depression, stress). This cross-sectional study involved 476 Romanian adults who completed self-report measures assessing orientations to happiness and psychological distress. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to evaluate the predictive relationships between the three orientations and indicators of distress, thereby contributing to a better understanding of the potential protective function of OTH (Schueller & Seligman, 2010).

Together, the four studies provide a comprehensive investigation of the OTH model by: (a) clarifying its associations with life satisfaction through meta-analysis, (b) validating and adapting the Orientations to Happiness Scales in Romania, (c) exploring the behavioral mechanisms between OTH and positive emotions,

and (d) examining the predictive relationship between OTH and psychological distress. *Figure 1* visually summarizes the structure of the thesis, highlighting how each objective contributes to an integrative and nuanced understanding of the OTH.

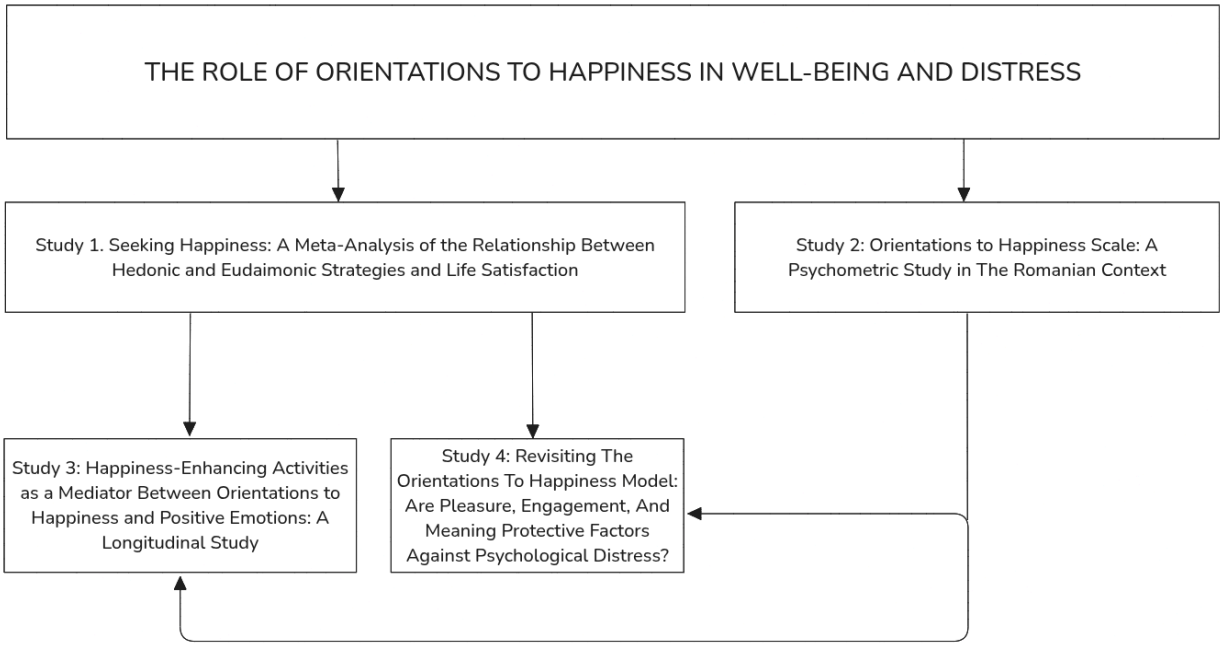

Figure 1. Structure of the doctoral thesis

CHAPTER III. ORIGINAL RESEARCH

3.1. Study 1. The Pursuit of Happiness: A Meta-Analysis of the Relationship Between Hedonic and Eudaimonic Strategies and Life Satisfaction

3.1.1. Introduction

Happiness remains a central topic in psychological research (David et al., 2012), with increasing emphasis in recent years on the psychological strategies through which individuals pursue well-being (Huta & Ryan, 2010; Peterson et al., 2015). Among the existing conceptual models, the orientations to happiness framework (Peterson et al., 2005) and the hedonic and eudaimonic motivation model (Huta & Ryan, 2010) are among the most influential. While the former differentiates between three strategies—pursuing happiness through pleasure, engagement, and meaning—the latter categorizes strategies dichotomously, based on their hedonic (i.e., the pursuit of pleasure and comfort) or eudaimonic nature (i.e., the pursuit of meaning and personal growth).

Although these models differ structurally, they conceptually converge in recognizing two fundamental directions in the pursuit of happiness: one focused on attaining pleasure and comfort, and the other on personal development and meaning. However, the placement of engagement remains ambiguous—interpreted either as part of eudaimonia (Waterman, 2008) or as a distinct dimension (Peterson et al., 2005; Seligman, 2002).

Empirical findings derived from the two models are heterogeneous and often inconsistent. For example, Peterson et al.'s (2005) foundational study showed that all three orientations significantly predict life satisfaction (LS), with engagement being the strongest predictor, followed by meaning and, lastly, pleasure. This hierarchy has been supported by subsequent studies (Peterson et al., 2007), suggesting that engagement and meaning may have a stronger impact on LS than pleasure.

However, not all studies have replicated this hierarchy. For instance, Richter and Hunecke (2021) found that only pleasure and engagement predicted LS, while meaning did not. In another study, Köse (2015) found that all three orientations were significant predictors in the Turkish sample, but only meaning predicted LS in the Russian sample.

These inconsistencies may be attributed to cultural, methodological, or demographic factors (Köse, 2015; Park et al., 2009). For example, in individualistic and indulgent cultures, hedonic and engagement-oriented strategies may be more strongly associated with LS, whereas in collectivist and restrained cultures, meaning-oriented strategies may show a stronger relationship with LS (Hofstede, 2011; Ford et al., 2015; Uchida et al., 2004).

To address the aforementioned inconsistencies (e.g, Anić & Tončić, 2013; Asano al., 2018; Köse, 2015) and clarify the role of cultural and other factors, this meta-analysis has three primary aims: (1) to examine the strength of the associations between each happiness-seeking strategy (HSS) and LS, (2) to compare their relative

contributions to LS, and (3) to explore potential moderators (e.g., cultural and methodological factors) that may influence these relationships.

3.1.2. Method

The selection and synthesis of studies followed the PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009) to ensure transparency and methodological rigor. Studies were included if they measured at least one hedonic or eudaimonic strategy, used a validated LS scale, reported data enabling the calculation of effect sizes, were published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, and included adult participants (i.e., over 18 years old). Studies were excluded if they involved clinical or special populations (e.g., individuals with autism or severe medical conditions), lacked full-text access or an English translation, or were unpublished or not peer-reviewed (e.g., conference papers).

Relevant studies were identified through an extensive search in five major scientific databases: PubMed, Cochrane, Scopus, Web of Science, and PsycInfo. Google Scholar was also used to include grey literature. The search covered studies published between 2005 and 2021 that examined the relationship between HSS and LS. Search terms included "orientations to happiness," "hedonic motives," "eudaimonic motives," "hedonic orientation," "eudaimonic orientation," and "life satisfaction," combined with Boolean operators such as AND and OR. These terms were used in the title, abstract, or keywords of the identified studies.

After duplicates were removed in EndNote, two reviewers independently assessed study eligibility, first based on titles and abstracts, and then through full-text screening. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

For each study, the following data were extracted: identification details (i.e., authors, year), statistics needed for effect size computation (e.g., correlation coefficients, sample sizes, standard deviations), methodological characteristics, and sample features (e.g., age, gender, education, relationship status). Statistical analyses were conducted using Comprehensive Meta-Analysis software and *RStudio* (i.e., the Metafor package, Viechtbauer, 2021).

The analysis distinguished between hedonic and eudaimonic strategies, with engagement analyzed both as part of eudaimonia and as a separate dimension, consistent with the literature (Peterson et al., 2015; Waterman, 2008).

Moderators included: two cultural dimensions (i.e., individualism and indulgence, Hofstede, 2011), demographic variables (i.e., mean age, proportion of women, education level, relationship status, proportion of students and employed individuals), and methodological factors (i.e., sample size, year of publication). Effect sizes were expressed as correlation coefficients (r) with 95% confidence intervals. Heterogeneity was assessed using the I^2 statistic and the Q-test, and outlier studies were identified as those deviating more than ±2 standard errors from the mean. Moderator analyses included meta-regressions, using REML estimation and categorical comparisons. A three-level meta-analytic model (Van Den Noortgate & Onghena, 2003) was necessary for both categorical and continuous moderator analyses.

To assess publication bias, the following were used: visual inspection of the funnel plot, Egger's regression test (Egger et al., 1997), and the Trim-and-Fill procedure (Duval & Tweedie, 2000), which estimates the potential impact of unpublished studies.

3.1.3. Results

3.1.3.1. Study Selection and Eligibility Process

The meta-analysis included a total of 40 articles comprising 53 independent studies, with a cumulative sample size of 95,051 participants. The study selection process is summarized in Figure 1. After removing 204 duplicates, 312 studies remained for title and abstract screening. Of these, 182 articles were excluded, leaving 130 full-text articles for eligibility assessment. A total of 77 studies were further excluded for failing to meet the predefined inclusion criteria, with the most common reasons being insufficient statistical reporting (n = 18), the absence of validated LS measures (n = 12), methodological limitations (n = 5), and a lack of alignment with the constructs under investigation (n = 4).

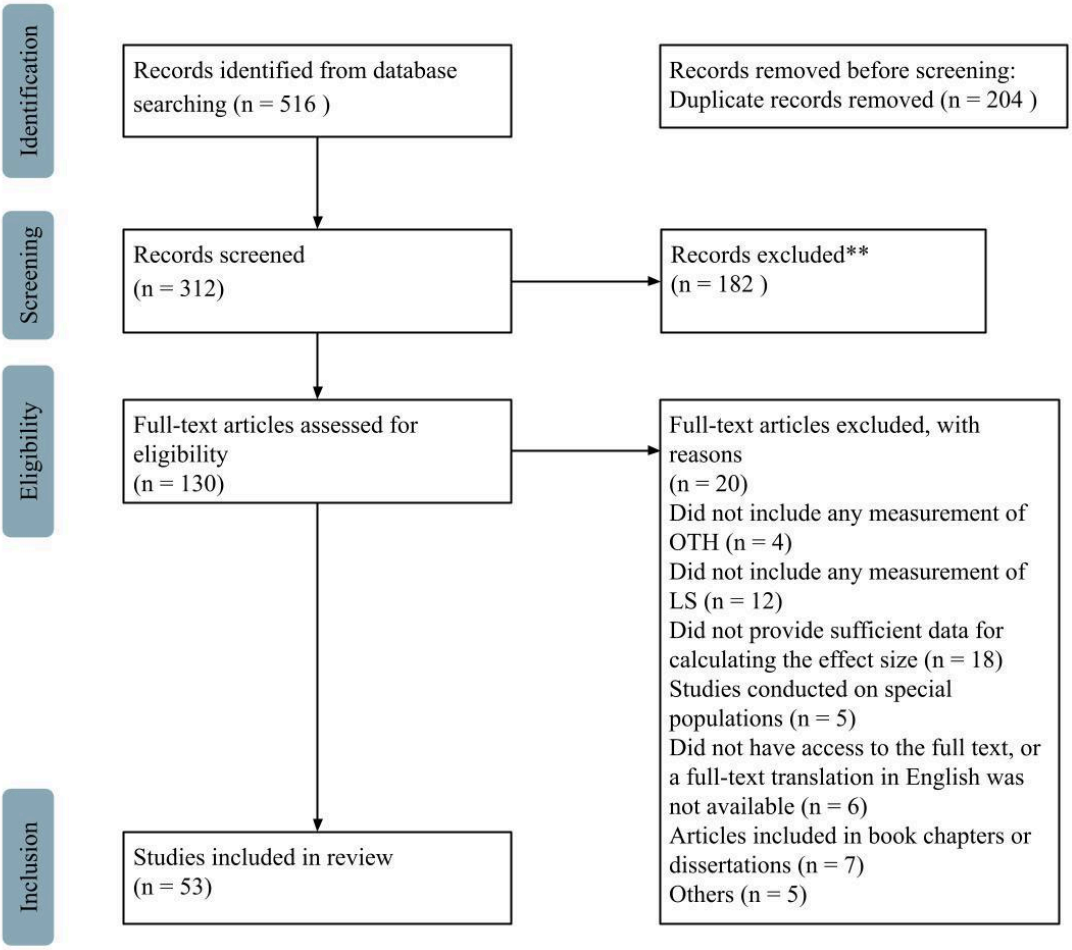

Figure 1. Flow diagram of the study inclusion process

3.1.3.2. Overall Effect Sizes of HSS on LS

The global effect size estimate for HSS, calculated as the weighted average of all individual study effects, was r = .25 (95% CI [0.23, 0.28], p < .001). When analyzed separately, the meaning emerged as the strongest predictor (r = .31, 95% CI [0.28, 0.34], p < .001), followed closely by engagement (r = .29, 95% CI [0.26, 0.32], p < .001). The broader eudaimonic strategy also demonstrated a strong association with LS (r = .30, 95% CI [0.27, 0.32], p < .001). The hedonic strategy showed a smaller but still significant effect (r = .19, 95% CI [0.17, 0.21], p < .001), while the pleasure facet demonstrated a slightly stronger effect on LS (r = .22, 95% CI [0.19, 0.24], p < .001).

3.1.3.3. Meta-regression analyses

Given the substantial heterogeneity observed, a series of moderators were examined to explain variations in effect sizes.

3.1.3.3.1. Categorical Moderators: HSS Type

The first analysis focused on whether the strength of associations differed depending on the type of HSS. These meta-regressions were conducted within a three-level meta-analytic framework to account for the dependency among effect sizes nested within studies (Van Den Noortgate & Onghena, 2003). A categorical moderator analysis comparing the effect of hedonic and eudaimonic strategies on LS indicated no statistically significant difference: $F(1, 52) = 0.464$, $p = .496$. Similarly, a detailed comparison among pleasure, engagement, and meaning and LS revealed no significant differences in effect sizes: $F(2, 36) = 0.124$, $p = .883$.

3.1.3.3.2. Cultural Moderators: Individualism–Collectivism and Indulgence

The second set of analyses focused on whether cultural dimensions, specifically individualism and indulgence, moderated the relationship between hedonic, eudaimonic strategies and LS. The results showed that individualism was not a significant moderator for hedonic strategy (estimate = 0.00, $Q(1) = 0.68$, $p = 1.00$) or for eudaimonic strategy and LS (estimate = -0.00, $Q(1) = 0.78$, $p = 1.00$). Similarly, indulgence did not significantly moderate the associations for either hedonic (estimate = 0.00, $Q(1) = 0.67$, $p = 1.00$) or eudaimonic strategy and LS (estimate = -0.00, $Q(1) = 0.77$, $p = 1.00$).

Additional analyses explored these cultural moderators for each specific subcomponent too. Individualism did not significantly moderate the relationship between pleasure (estimate = 0.00, $Q(1) = 0.53$, $p = 1.00$), engagement (estimate = 0.001, $Q(1) = 0.35$, $p = 1.00$), or meaning and LS (estimate = 0.00, $Q(1) = 0.62$, $p = 1.00$). Likewise, indulgence had no significant moderating effect for the relationship between pleasure (estimate = 0.00, $Q(1) = 0.54$, $p = 1.00$), engagement (estimate = 0.002, $Q(1) = 0.35$, $p = 1.00$), or meaning and LS (estimate = 0.00, $Q(1) = 0.62$, $p = 1.00$).

3.1.3.3.3. Demographic and Methodological Moderators

While individualism and indulgence did not emerge as significant moderators, analyses identified other factors influencing this relationship. The proportion of individuals with higher education significantly weakened

the hedonic strategies-LS relationship: b = -0.0014, $Q(1)$ = 6.08, p = .013. Similarly, the proportion of single individuals in the sample weakened this relationship too : b = -0.0047, $Q(1)$ = 48.33, $p < .001$.

For the eudaimonic strategies-LS link, two significant moderators emerged. A higher percentage of married or cohabiting individuals strengthened the relationship: b = 0.0020, $Q(1)$ = 6.01, p = .014. Likewise, sample size also strengthened this relationship: b = 0.0000, $Q(1)$ = 4.33, p = .037).

To gain a more nuanced understanding of these relationships, we further examined specific subtypes within hedonic and eudaimonic strategies and LS. The following analyses focus on pleasure, engagement, and meaning strategies separately, revealing distinct moderation effects.

For the pleasure strategy-LS relationship, two significant moderators emerged. A higher percentage of individuals with higher education exerted a positive moderating effect on the relationship between this strategy and LS (b = -0.0014, $Q(1)$ = 6.08, p = .013). In contrast, the proportion of single individuals negatively moderated this relationship: (b = -0.0050, $Q(1)$ = 33.89, $p < .001$).

Further analyses of engagement and meaning strategies revealed distinct moderator effects. The relationship between engagement and LS was positively moderated by age (b = 0.0051, $Q(1)$ = 4.76, p = .029), marital status (b = 0.0023, $Q(1)$ = 5.04, p = .024), and sample size (b = 0.0000, $Q(1)$ = 3.99, p = .045), indicating that these factors strengthened the association. Conversely, it was negatively moderated by student percentage (b = -0.0014, $Q(1)$ = 6.64, p = .009).

For the association between meaning strategy and LS, two significant moderators were identified. This relationship was positively moderated by the proportion of individuals with higher education (b = 0.0045, $Q(1)$ = 5.69, p = .017) and by marital status (b = 0.0035, $Q(1)$ = 11.68, $p < .001$).

3.1.3.4. Publication Bias Assessment

To explore the possibility of publication bias, we first conducted a visual inspection using a funnel plot. The plot appeared asymmetrical, with a higher concentration of studies on the left side of the distribution, suggesting a tendency for significant results to be overrepresented. This visual impression was supported by Egger's regression test, which indicated a significant deviation from symmetry (intercept = -1.91, 95% CI [-3.01, -0.79], $p < .001$), implying that smaller-sample studies tended to report stronger effect sizes. Despite these indications, Duval and Tweedie's trim-and-fill method did not detect any potentially missing studies, which reduces concerns about substantial distortion of the overall effect size due to publication bias.

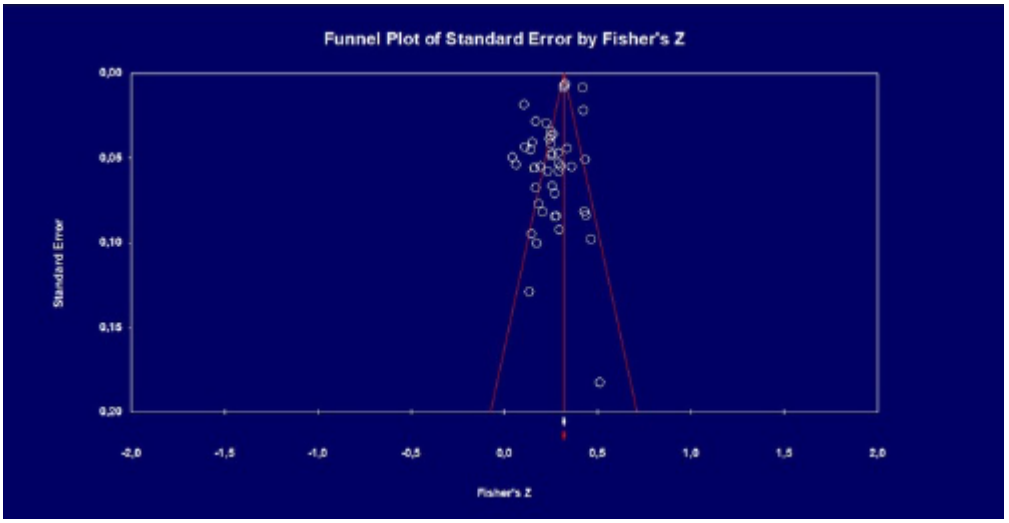

Figure 2. Funnel plot representing publication bias

3.1.4. Discussion

This meta-analysis set out to clarify how distinct HSS—hedonic and eudaimonic—relate to LS. While prior findings have been mixed (e.g., Huta & Ryan, 2010; Köse, 2015; Peterson et al., 2005), our results contribute to a more integrated understanding of these relationships. Drawing on influential theoretical frameworks—such as the OTH model (Peterson et al., 2005) and the Hedonic and Eudaimonic Motives model (Huta & Ryan, 2010)—which differentiate multiple pathways to happiness, this work helps clarify the relative contribution of each strategy to LS and highlights the contextual factors that may shape these associations.

Our findings indicate that all HSS are positively associated with LS, with effect sizes ranging from small to moderate. The hedonic strategy showed a small overall effect, while its subcomponent, pleasure, exhibited a slightly stronger association with LS. In contrast, the eudaimonic strategy—both as a combined construct and when examined separately as engagement and meaning—demonstrated small-to-moderate links with LS.

One reason for the relatively modest effect sizes may be the gap between individuals' tendencies to seek happiness and their actual involvement in well-being-enhancing activities. As noted by Peterson et al. (2007), the OTH framework captures the extent to which individuals report valuing certain strategies for pursuing well-being, rather than their actual behavioral enactment. This distinction may also apply to the hedonic and eudaimonic motives framework proposed by Huta and Ryan (2010), which likewise reflects preferred orientations rather than concrete actions. For example, someone who strongly values hedonic enjoyment may not always have the time, financial resources, or opportunities to engage in pleasurable experiences, while another person who endorses meaning as a path to happiness may struggle to implement purpose-driven activities in their daily life (Peterson et al., 2007).

Secondly, LS is a complex construct influenced by multiple factors beyond happiness strategies, including health, socioeconomic status, relationships, and personality traits (e.g., Behera et al., 2024; Easterlin,

2001; Frey & Stutzer, 2002). Personality traits, in particular, are among the most robust and stable predictors of LS. Traits such as extraversion and neuroticism have consistently shown stronger associations with LS than many demographic or behavioral variables (e.g., Diener & Seligman, 2002; Gale et al., 2013; Palczyńska & Świst, 2018; Steel et al., 2008). Therefore, the modest associations we found between HSS and LS may partly reflect the fact that much of the variance in LS is already accounted for by dispositional factors, leaving less room for motivational constructs to exert a strong effect.

Building on these findings, we further explored whether certain strategies might be relatively more effective than others. Comparisons between eudaimonic and hedonic orientations did not reveal significant differences. Furthermore, when analyzing eudaimonic subcomponents separately—engagement and meaning—no significant differences emerged either. This suggests that no single strategy outweighs the others in its contribution to well-being. Instead, all HSS appear comparably important for fostering LS.

A possible explanation for the lack of significant differences among these strategies is the substantial overlap in their measurement. In this regard, Disabato et al. (2016) provide relevant insight. While they examined hedonic and eudaimonic constructs as components of well-being, they reported a near-perfect latent correlation (i.e., $r = .96$) between them, suggesting that commonly used measures may tap into a broad, unitary happiness factor rather than two fully distinct dimensions. This finding may also apply to the present results: if hedonic and eudaimonic well-being cannot be meaningfully disentangled at the latent level, then the strategies people endorse to pursue them may likewise reflect a shared underlying construct. In this light, the comparable contributions of each HSS to LS may not necessarily reflect equal effectiveness, but rather a lack of discriminant validity in how these strategies are conceptually and empirically separated.

Another plausible explanation is that differences between strategies may indeed exist but emerge more clearly over time. It is possible that eudaimonic strategies—such as pursuing meaning or deep engagement—have a stronger impact on long-term well-being, while hedonic strategies might offer more immediate but transient benefits. However, the current analyses were based solely on cross-sectional data, which limits our ability to capture temporal dynamics.

Additionally, differences in the effectiveness of hedonic and eudaimonic strategies might be more pronounced when considering other indicators of well-being. The present study focused on LS, a hedonic indicator (Diener, 1984). However, distinctions between strategies could be more salient in relation to eudaimonic indicators of well-being, such as those proposed by Ryff (1989), which include autonomy, personal growth, and purpose in life.

Given both the variability of findings in the existing literature and the heterogeneity identified in our analyses, it was essential to investigate potential moderators that might influence the relationship between HSS and LS.

One such factor was education level. The relationship between hedonic strategies and LS was weaker in samples with higher educational attainment. One possible explanation is that individuals with higher education

may develop a broader range of cognitive and emotional regulation strategies, reducing their reliance on immediate pleasure-seeking for well-being (e.g., Jurado et al., 2021; Vitulić & Prosen, 2016). Additionally, greater emotional stability among highly educated individuals may further reduce dependence on immediate gratifications (e.g., Jaroni et al., 2004; Reimers et al., 2009; Vaculíková, 2024). Collectively, these factors may lead highly educated individuals to derive LS less from hedonic strategies.

This interpretation is further supported by our finding that education strengthens the link between meaning and LS. Higher education may facilitate this connection by enhancing individuals' cognitive abilities and capacity for existential reflection. Educated individuals are more likely to engage in deeper inquiries about life's meaning and to actively seek purpose, reinforcing LS through a meaning-oriented approach. Additionally, access to cultural and philosophical resources—through education, literature, and exposure to diverse perspectives—may further integrate meaning into one's identity and worldview (e.g., Pinquart, 2002; Vötter & Schnell, 2019). Another contributing factor may be the financial security often associated with higher education. Individuals with greater educational attainment tend to have more stable employment and higher incomes, which reduces concerns about basic needs and allows greater psychological freedom to explore existential questions and pursue meaningful goals (e.g., Ng et al., 2005; Solomon et al., 2022; Vötter & Schnell, 2019).

Relationship status and the proportion of single individuals moderated the relationship between HSS and LS. Specifically, an increase in the proportion of single individuals was associated with a weakening of the relationship between hedonic orientation—particularly pleasure—and LS. This effect may be explained by the fact that romantic relationships provide more frequent opportunities for pleasurable and emotionally rewarding experiences, such as shared activities, emotional support, and moments of intimacy, which strengthen the impact of hedonic strategies on well-being (Bazzini et al., 2006; Gable et al., 2018). In contrast, single individuals may have fewer opportunities to experience such emotionally rewarding interactions in their daily lives, which could diminish the effect of pleasure orientation on LS.

The presence of individuals who were married or in cohabiting relationships strengthened the associations between engagement, meaning, and LS. The emotional support and stability provided by such relationships may foster deeper involvement in meaningful activities (Hui et al., 2014; Lin et al., 2013). Moreover, romantic relationships can offer a shared framework of goals and mutual responsibilities, which may enhance the effects of the orientation to meaning (Gold et al., 2024).

In addition to relationship status, both age and student status moderated the relationship between engagement and LS in opposite directions. Regarding age, as the proportion of older individuals increased, the relationship between engagement and LS became stronger. Conversely, as the proportion of students increased, this relationship weakened. This effect may be explained by the presence of long-term commitments in work, hobbies, or personal goals, which become more prominent as individuals consolidate their identity and define their life trajectories (e.g., Carstensen et al., 1999; Marcia, 1966; Meeus et al., 2010).

While age often brings stability and sustained engagement, student life is typically characterized by transience and exploration (Arnett, 2000). Moreover, the academic environment imposes a range of external

constraints that may interfere with autonomous engagement in intrinsically meaningful activities. Structured schedules, mandatory coursework, and high academic demands can limit opportunities for flow experiences and self-directed pursuits (Sheldon & Krieger, 2007). These structural limitations, combined with elevated stress levels and reduced free time, may diminish students' ability to fully benefit from an engagement-oriented approach to well-being (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Contrary to expectations, cultural factors individualism and indulgence did not significantly moderate the relationships between HSS and life satisfaction LS. This finding aligns with the cross-national study by Park et al. (2009), which showed that although mean levels of orientations to happiness varied across countries, their associations with LS remained stable across cultures. One possible explanation is the impact of globalization, which reduces cultural differences and promotes similar well-being strategies (e.g., Appadurai, 1996; Arnett, 2002). Global exposure to shared media content, consumer practices, and lifestyle ideals may foster convergent conceptions of what constitutes a good life.

Appadurai (1996) describes this trend as resulting from the global circulation of images and values, promoting hybrid identities. Similarly, Arnett (2002) highlights that younger generations often develop bicultural identities, integrating both local and global elements. As a result, cultural norms may exert less influence on preferences regarding hedonic and eudaimonic strategies (Uchida et al., 2004), helping to explain the consistent positive associations between OTH and LS across cultural contexts.

Finally, sample size significantly moderated the relationship between eudaimonic orientation and LS, especially regarding engagement. A possible explanation is that the effect of engagement orientation on LS tends to be relatively small or subtle, thus requiring larger samples to achieve sufficient statistical power to reliably detect it (Dixon et al., 2019; Waterman, 2008). In other words, smaller studies may fail to capture this nuanced relationship, leading to inconsistent findings in the literature.

3.1.4.1. Implications

This meta-analysis brings new perspectives to the well-being literature by challenging the notion that meaning- and engagement-focused strategies are superior to pleasure-based ones in enhancing LS. The findings support the idea that both hedonic strategies (i.e., pleasure) and eudaimonic strategies (i.e., engagement and meaning) contribute similarly to well-being and are complementary, thereby highlighting the need for an integrative perspective on HSS.

The study also highlights the importance of demographic and contextual factors, such as education and relationship status, which can influence the strength of the association between HSS and LS. Moreover, the absence of significant cultural influences suggests that the relationship between HSS and LS may be more universally applicable than previously assumed, calling for the adoption of global approaches aligned with contemporary sociocultural contexts.

Methodologically, the use of a three-level meta-analytic approach allows for a systematic and nuanced examination of the conditions under which HSS relate to LS. From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that psychological interventions aimed at enhancing well-being should incorporate elements from all three strategies, rather than favoring eudaimonic ones.

3.1.4.2. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

One of the main limitations of this study lies in the exclusive use of correlational and cross-sectional research, which restricts the ability to draw causal conclusions and to understand how these relationships evolve over time — a limitation stemming from the lack of availability of such studies. Moreover, most of the included studies assessed happiness solely in terms of LS, without considering other relevant dimensions of happiness, such as psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989). Additionally, future research should investigate the relationship between HSS and psychological distress (e.g., depressive or anxiety symptoms), given the potential protective role of these strategies — a promising yet underexplored direction (Schueller & Seligman, 2010).

3.2. Study 2: Orientations to Happiness Scale: A Psychometric Study in The Romanian Context[1]

3.2.1. Introduction

According to the model of orientations to happiness proposed by Peterson, Park, and Seligman (2005), individuals can pursue happiness through three distinct pathways: seeking pleasure, becoming deeply engaged in activities, and finding personal meaning. To efficiently assess these three orientations, the Orientations to Happiness Scale (OTH-S; Peterson et al., 2005) was developed, consisting of eighteen items, with six items assigned to each dimension.

Previous validation studies conducted in other countries (e.g., Ruch et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2009) have confirmed the three-factor structure of the scale and its internal consistency, but also indicated that the engagement subscale tends to show lower reliability (Chen et al., 2009), likely due to its multifaceted and context-dependent nature (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989).

To meet the needs of applied research, which often requires rapid data collection, a shortened version of the scale was also developed (Ruch et al., 2014). This version retains the three dimensions but reduces the number of items to three per orientation. Validation of this short form has shown a stable factor structure and acceptable internal consistency.

To date, the OTH scale has not been adapted for the Romanian population. Thus, the present study aims to culturally adapt and validate both versions of the scale. The objectives include testing the factor structure, evaluating internal consistency, and assessing criterion validity by correlating the subscales with indicators of life satisfaction and psychological distress (e.g., Diener et al., 1985; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

3.2.2. Method

3.2.2.1. Participants

The sample included 510 Romanian adults, with a mean age of 33.58 years. The majority of participants were women (88.13%), and a considerable proportion had higher education degrees (73.96%). Most respondents were unmarried (66.47%) and primarily from urban areas (72.94%), with 81% living in cities.

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[1] This study has been published: Ciupei, A., Florean, I. S., & David, D. (2025). Orientations to Happiness Scale: A Psychometric Study in the Romanian Context. *Journal of Evidence-Based Psychotherapies*, 25(1), 183-199. https://doi.org/10.24193/jebp.2025.1.8
Author contributions: Alina Petruț (Ciupei) and Daniel O. David designed the study. Alina Petruț (Ciupei) performed the data collection. Ionuț Stelian Florean conducted the data analysis. Alina Petruț (Ciupei) and Ionuț Stelian Florean drafted and revised the manuscript. Daniel O. David provided critical feedback and guidance during the writing process.

3.2.2.2. Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from Babeș-Bolyai University. Permission to use and adapt the OTH scale was granted by researcher Park, one of the original co-authors of the scale (Peterson et al., 2005). The adaptation process followed Hambleton's (1996, 2004) guidelines for translation and cross-cultural validation.

Two bilingual experts independently translated the original scale into Romanian. The translations were reviewed, and any discrepancies were resolved to produce a unified version. Two other bilingual experts, who were not familiar with the original scale, conducted a back-translation into English. The back-translated versions were compared with the original scale to assess linguistic equivalence.

For the main study, participants were recruited through a combination of online and offline methods. Online recruitment was carried out primarily via Facebook, where the study announcement was shared in various psychology and personal development groups, as well as in local groups focused on mental health and well-being.

The announcement, designed as an attractive and easy-to-understand poster, described the purpose of the study and the benefits of participation, such as free access to one of three personal development workshops. In addition, students from the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences received a bonus of 10 practice hours for their courses. To increase online visibility and reach a more diverse audience, we also used paid promotion on Facebook. Offline recruitment involved distributing printed questionnaires in public spaces and workplaces to reach individuals who were not active on social media. Completing the questionnaire took approximately 20 minutes, and all participants provided informed consent. Responses were collected anonymously to ensure confidentiality.

3.2.2.3. Measures

3.2.2.3.1. Orientations to Happiness Scale (OTH; Peterson et al., 2005): The OTH scale is a self-report measure consisting of 18 items that are equally distributed across three subscales: pleasure, engagement, and meaning. Every item receives a rating on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (Does not describe me at all) to 5 (Describes me very well). Example items include "In choosing what to do, I always take into account whether it will be pleasurable" (i.e., pleasure), "I seek out situations that challenge my skills and abilities" (i.e., engagement), and "I have a responsibility to make the world a better place" (i.e., meaning). The original scale demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alphas of .82 for pleasure, .72 for engagement, and .82 for meaning.

3.2.2.3.2. Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985): The SWLS is a 5-item scale that measures overall life satisfaction. Participants rate items like "In most ways, my life is close to my ideal" on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). In our study, we translated SWLS into Romanian using the back-translation method. In our sample, the SWLS demonstrated good internal consistency of $\alpha = 0.89$.

3.2.2.3.3. Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS; Lovibond, 1995): The DASS is a self-report instrument consisting of 42 items that assess three dimensions of emotional distress: depression, anxiety, and stress. Each of the three subscales contains 14 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (Did not apply to me at all) to 3 (Applied to me very much, or most of the time). Example items include "I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all" (i.e., depression), "I felt I was close to panic" (i.e., anxiety), and "I found it difficult to relax" (i.e., stress). In our study, internal consistencies were α = .87 for depression, α = .86 for anxiety, and α = .88 for stress, indicating adequate reliability for this sample.

3.2.2.4. Data Analysis

All analyses were conducted in R software using RStudio (Posit team, 2023). The code is available in the online supplementary material. In the first step, data were imported into RStudio and screened. Specifically, we checked whether there were missing data, whether the values were within the acceptable range, and whether the univariate and multivariate assumptions were met. We checked the univariate assumptions by computing the skewness and kurtosis and tested the multivariate assumptions using the Henze-Zirkler test (Henze & Zirkler, 1990).

All structural equation modeling analyses were performed using the R package 'lavaan' (Rosseel et al., 2024). First, we tested the original OTH model using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Kline, 2023). As the model did not fit the data well, we used Exploratory Structural Equation Modeling (ESEM) to assess whether the three-factor model was plausible and identify any items that did not load onto the theoretically proposed factors (Fischer & Karl, 2019). Based on the ESEM insights, we specified the three-factor model and tested it via CFA. Furthermore, the final model was achieved by computing modification indices and allowing some residuals of the items to correlate (Whittaker, 2012). Finally, the factor structure of the OTH short version was also estimated via CFA.

The statistical plausibility of the model was tested using the following classical fit indices: RMSEA, CFI, TLI, and SRMR. Acceptable values for these are RMSEA < .08, CFI and TLI > .90, and SRMR < .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; MacCallum et al., 1996). Only items with loadings of .30 or higher were retained in the model (Hahs-Vaughn, 2016). The estimator used was Diagonally Weighted Least Squares (DWLS), which is appropriate for ordinal data and robust against normality violations (Li, 2016; Mîndrilã, 2010). For each subscale, Cronbach's alpha was computed to explore internal consistency (Peterson, 1994). The construct validity of the scale was tested by computing the correlation coefficients between the scale scores and SWLS and DASS.

3.2.3. Results

There were no missing data, and all variables had values within the acceptable range. Univariate normality assumptions were supported (unstandardized skewness varied between -0.93 and 0.44, and unstandardized kurtosis ranged from -0.88 to 0.48), whereas multivariate assumptions were not (Henze-Zirkler test = 1.07, $p < .001$).

3.2.3.1. OTH-S 18: long version

The original OTH-S 18 model did not receive support from the data, as indicated by SEA = 0.106, CFI = 0.915, TLI = 0.901, and SRMR = 0.091. Thus, the ESEM was used to test the plausibility of the three-factor model. When done so, the fit indices for the three-factor model were good: RMSEA = 0.069, CFI = 0.960, TLI = 0.958, and SRMR = 0.067. The loadings and cross-loadings are listed in Table 1. The majority of items were loaded on the expected factor as per the original model. However, a few items, namely items 1, 4, 8, and 17, were not correctly loaded. These items were either loaded on an incorrect factor or had loadings lower than .30.

Therefore, these items were excluded when re-estimating the model via CFA. Upon re-estimation, the loading of item 10 was below .30 and was discarded from the model. Finally, based on the modification indices, the final model was estimated, allowing the residuals of items 3 and 15 and items 2 and 12 to correlate. As a result, the final model had acceptable fit indices: RMSEA = 0.076, CFI = 0.970, TLI = 0.961, and SRMR = 0.067. The strongest correlation was between Or meaning and Or engagement (r = .59), while the weakest correlation was between Or meaning and Or pleasure (r = .39). Standardized loadings were .54 or higher (see Fig. 1) .

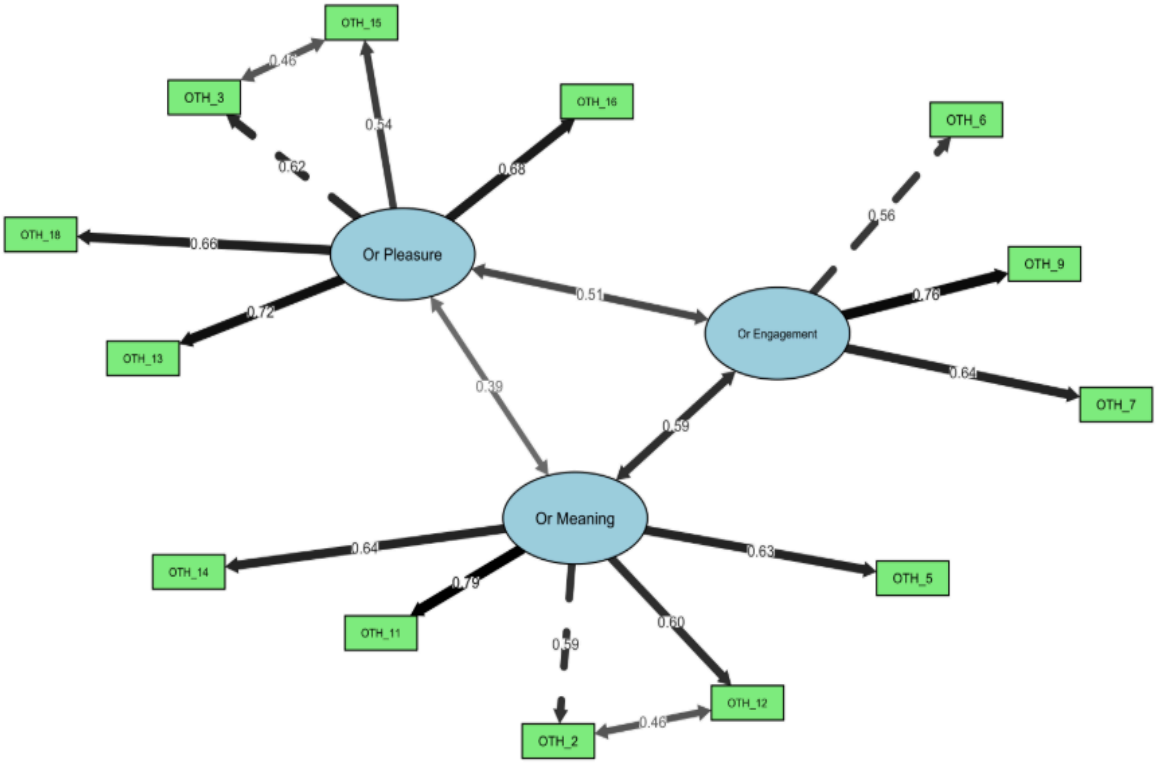

Figure 1. Diagram of the factor structure of the scale

The internal consistency of the scales was acceptable, according to Cronbach's alpha: α = .76 (Or meaning), α = .76 (Or pleasure), and α = .65 (Or engagement). Regarding validity, Or was significantly correlated with the DASS scores for depression (r = -.13) and SWLS (r = .29). Or pleasure was positively correlated with DASS anxiety (r = .19) and DASS stress (r = .15). Finally, Or engagement was positively correlated with DASS anxiety (r = .11) and SWLS (r = .20). The remaining correlation coefficients were not significant (p > .05).

3.2.3.2. OTH-S 9: short version

Based on the CFA analysis, the OTH-9 model had acceptable fit indices: RMSEA = 0.063, CFI = 0.980, TLI = 0.970, and SRMR = 0.053. The strongest correlation was between Or meaning and Or engagement (r = .53), while the weakest correlation was between Or meaning and Or pleasure (r = .39). The factor loadings varied between .48 (HOS 10) and .81 (HOS 3) (see Fig. 2).

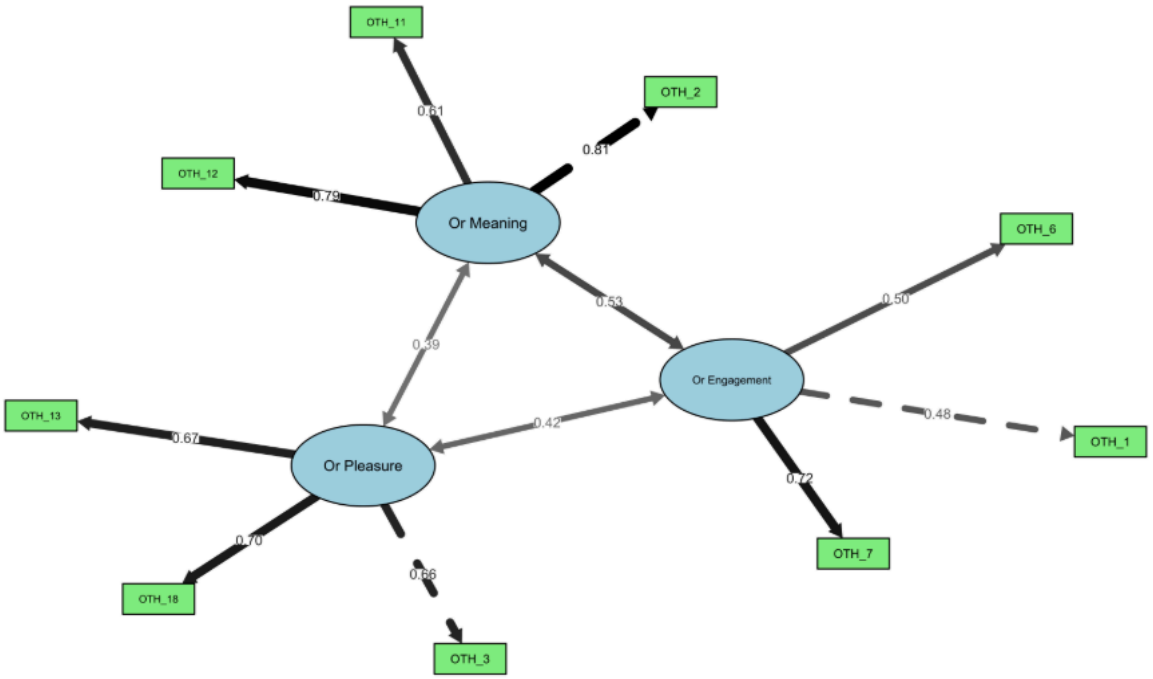

Figure 2. Diagram of the factor structure of the scale

Internal consistency was acceptable for Or pleasure (α = .66) and Or meaning (α = .72), whereas Or engagement had poor internal consistency (α = .52). Regarding validity, Or engagement was correlated with DASS scores for anxiety (r = .12, p < .05) and SWLS (r = .15, p < .05). Or pleasure was correlated with DASS anxiety (r = .17, p < .05) and DASS stress (r = .16, p < .05). Or meaning correlated with DASS scores for depression (r = -.20) and SWLS (r = .33). The remaining correlation coefficients were not significant (p > .05).

3.2.4. Discussion

The study aimed to adapt and validate the Orientations to Happiness Scale for the Romanian population (Peterson et al., 2005). The full version, OTH-S 18, initially did not exhibit an adequate factorial structure; several items (i.e., 1, 4, 8, 10, 17) showed low or unexpected loadings, which required the use of ESEM. After adjustments (i.e., allowing residual correlations), the final model achieved acceptable fit indices (RMSEA = .076; CFI = .970). These results highlight the need for further refinement of the scale but support the original three-factor structure in the Romanian context.

The pleasure and meaning subscales demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (α = .76 for both), whereas the engagement subscale showed lower internal consistency (α = .65), consistent with other international adaptations (e.g., Chen et al., 2009; Ruch et al., 2010). This trend suggests that engagement is a more complex and context-dependent construct.

Regarding criterion validity, the meaning subscale was positively associated with life satisfaction (r = .29), while the orientation toward pleasure was positively correlated with anxiety (r = .19) and stress (r = .15), an atypical association compared to previous literature, possibly explained by maladaptive coping strategies (e.g., Chen & Zeng, 2023; Yang et al., 2017).

The short version, OTH-S 9, demonstrated good factorial fit and subscale correlations comparable to the long version. Internal consistency was acceptable for pleasure (α = .66) and meaning (α = .72), but problematic for engagement (α = .52). Despite this limitation, we recommend the use of the short version in applied research, particularly within the structural modeling framework, while avoiding the use of raw engagement scores.

The limitations of the study include a gender imbalance (88% women), the low reliability of the engagement subscale, and the exploratory nature of the final model. Future studies should test the replicability of the proposed structure on more diverse samples to strengthen the validity of the scale in the Romanian context.

3.3. Study 3: Happiness-Enhancing Activities as a Mediator Between Orientations to Happiness and Positive Emotions: A Longitudinal Study[2]

3.3.1. Introduction

Although OTH are conceptualized as cognitive and motivational tendencies (Peterson et al., 2007), the literature suggests that they predispose individuals to plan and prefer behaviors that align with their dominant orientation (Ruch et al., 2010; Huta & Ryan, 2010). At the same time, other studies show that these behaviors—whether hedonic, flow-related, or prosocial in nature—are associated with positive emotions (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Rogatko, 2009).

However, to date, these findings have not been empirically integrated. Thus, the present study seeks to integrate these results by directly testing the idea that the positive emotional effects of OTH are mediated by behaviors congruent with each orientation. Using a three-week longitudinal design, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested: (H1) pleasure-oriented activities will mediate the relationship between the pleasure orientation and positive emotions; (H2) engagement-oriented activities will mediate the relationship between the engagement orientation and positive emotions; and (H3) meaning-oriented activities will mediate the relationship between the meaning orientation and positive emotions.

3.3.2. Method

3.3.2.1. Participants

A total of 349 participants (N = 349) were recruited at the initial time point (T0; mean age = 32.03 years, SD = 10.33). The sample was predominantly female (93.1%), with 70.5% of participants being unmarried. Additionally, 76.2% had higher education degrees, and 84.2% lived in urban areas.

3.3.2.2. Procedure

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Babeş-Bolyai University. All participants provided informed consent. Recruitment was conducted through Facebook, using paid advertisements to expand the reach. Participants were offered free access to one of three personal development workshops, and students from the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences received course credit as a reward.

The study was conducted online over a period of three weeks using Google Forms. Initially, participants completed a questionnaire assessing orientations to happiness (T0), and subsequently, at weekly intervals (T1, T2, T3), they completed questionnaires on happiness-enhancing activities and positive emotions. To encourage participation, reminder messages were sent via email and SMS at each measurement point.

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[2]This study has been accepted for publication in *Acta Marisiensis – Seria Medica*.
Author contributions: Alina Petruț (Ciupei) designed the study, collected the data, and wrote the initial draft. Ionuț Stelian Florean performed the data analysis and revised the manuscript. Paula Stroian contributed to the methodology and provided feedback on the manuscript.

3.3.2.3. Measures

3.3.2.3.1. Orientations to Happiness Scale (OTH-S; Peterson et al., 2005): is an 18-item self-report measure assessing three orientations to happiness—pleasure, engagement, and meaning—each represented by a six-item subscale. Participants rate statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *does not describe me at all*; 5 = *describes me very well*). Sample items include: "Life is too short to postpone the pleasures it can provide" (pleasure), "In choosing what to do, I always take into account whether I can lose myself in it" (engagement), and "I have spent a lot of time thinking about what life means and how I fit into its big picture" (meaning). In our sample, the Cronbach's alpha values indicated acceptable internal consistency for the pleasure (.76) and meaning (.77) subscales, but poor internal consistency for the engagement subscale (.51). The lower reliability of the engagement dimension aligns with previous findings, which consistently show weaker internal consistency for this dimension (Chen et al., 2009).

3.3.2.3.2. Pleasant Activities List (PAL; Roozen et al., 2008) is a 139-item questionnaire assessing the frequency and enjoyment of activities over the past 30 days. In this study, we reclassified PAL activities into three OTH-aligned categories: Pleasure-, Engagement-, and Meaning-Enhancing Activities. Two independent raters categorized the items, with an initial moderate agreement (Cohen's k = 0.53). Discrepancies were reviewed and resolved by consensus, discarding unclear items. The final set included 53 Pleasure-, 50 Engagement-, and 9 Meaning-Enhancing Activities items. While PAL assesses both enjoyment and frequency, we measured only frequency, focusing on activity engagement during the administration week. Reliability was assessed via Cronbach's alpha at each time point. At T1, internal consistency was good for Pleasure-Enhancing (α = .88) and Engagement-Enhancing (α = .89), but questionable for Meaning-Enhancing Activities (α = .66). These values remained stable at T2 (Pleasure-Enhancing: α = .88, Engagement-Enhancing: α = .88, Meaning-Enhancing: α = .68) and T3 (Pleasure-Enhancing: α = .89, Engagement-Enhancing: α = .88, Meaning-Enhancing Activities: α = .68). A full description of the procedure can be found at: https://osf.io/as4ef/?view_only=460940c0446340119192889cf3c33aef

3.3.2.3.3. Profile of Emotional Distress (PED; Opriş & Macavei, 2007): is a self-report instrument designed to assess the intensity of positive and negative emotions. The scale consists of 39 items describing various emotional states, with participants rating their experiences on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Very much). Example items include "Tense" and "Worried" for negative emotions, as well as "Optimistic" and "Content" for positive emotions. Initial validation studies showed that the scale had adequate internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .75 to .94, reflecting good reliability for a self-report measure. In the current study, we only used items assessing positive emotions, with the subscale exhibiting excellent reliability at T1 (α = .95), a high level of consistency maintained at both T2 (α = .96) and T3 (α = .96).

3.3.2.4. Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using RStudio (Posit Team, 2023). Initially, the dataset was examined to determine the percentage of missing values and to test assumptions of normality. Hypotheses were tested using multilevel structural equation modeling (ML-SEM) in a type 2-1-1 mediation model (Preacher et.

al., 2010). As only the mediator and criterion variables were measured at three different time points, the mediation analysis was conducted at the between-subject level to assess differences between participants while accounting for intra-subject variability (Preacher et al., 2010). Additionally, the within-subject relationship was assessed exclusively between mediator and criterion to examine how within-person changes correlated across time (Preacher et al., 2010). Missing data were handled using Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML), and the model was estimated using the Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimator (Enders, 2010). Model fit indices were not evaluated, as the resulting model was saturated with zero degrees of freedom.

3.3.3. Results

Normality assumptions were assessed using skewness and kurtosis across all variables and time points. Skewness ranged from -0.55 to 1.62, and kurtosis from -0.64 to 3.67, falling within commonly accepted thresholds (West et al., 1995). The Henze-Zirkler test was significant ($H\text{-}Z$ = 1812, $p < .001$), suggesting a deviation from multivariate normality. However, given its sensitivity in large samples (Field, 2018), results should be interpreted with caution, considering additional indicators like skewness and kurtosis.

Participant attrition was observed across measurement waves. From an initial N = 349 at baseline (T0), 52.44% dropped out by T1 (N = 166). Attrition was minimal between T1 and T2 (1.20%), with N = 164 completing T2. However, an additional 21.34% dropout occurred before T3, leaving a final sample of N = 129. Overall, 63.04% of the original sample did not complete the final measurement.

At the within-subjects level, higher engagement in pleasure-enhancing activities was linked to greater positive emotions (β = 0.29, $p < .001$, R^2 = 0.08). The multilevel mediation analysis (between-subjects level) showed that pleasure orientation predicted engagement in pleasure-enhancing activities (β = 0.26, $p < .01$, R^2 = 0.07), which, in turn, was associated with positive emotions (β = 0.29, $p < .01$). Beyond this, pleasure orientation directly predicted positive emotions (β = 0.19, $p < .05$), indicating an effect beyond activity engagement. The indirect effect was significant (β = 0.08, $p < .05$), supporting partial mediation. The model explained 15.2% of the variance in positive emotions (R^2 = 0.15).

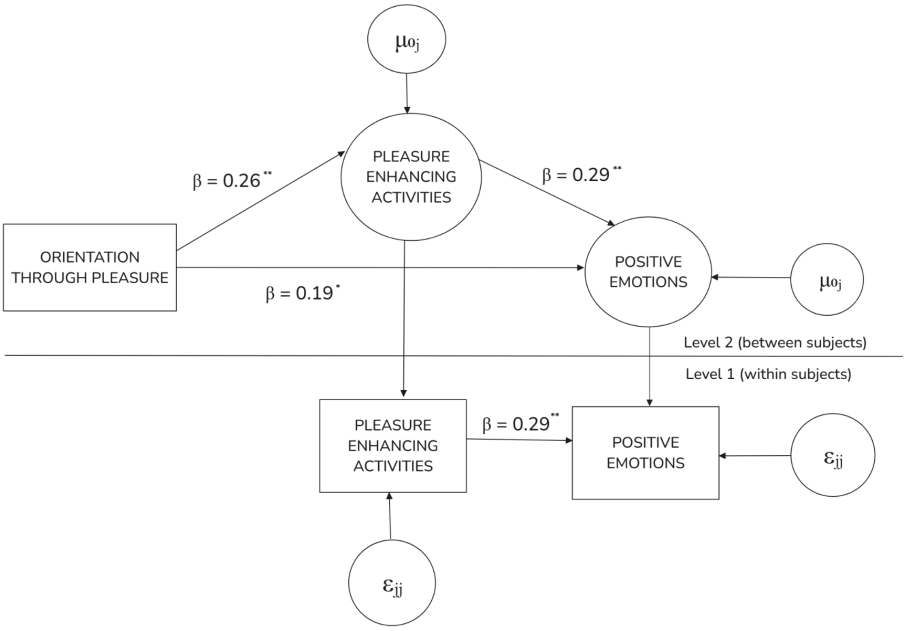

Figure 1. Multilevel mediation model examining the relationship between pleasure orientation, pleasure-enhancing activities, and positive emotions.

Note: Standardized beta coefficients (β) are reported. $p < .05$ (*), $p < .01$ (**).

Similarly, at the within-person level, greater engagement in engagement-enhancing activities was linked to higher positive emotions ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < .05$), though the effect was weaker ($R^2 = 0.02$). A multilevel mediation analysis showed that engagement orientation predicted engagement in these activities ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = 0.05$), which, in turn, was associated with positive emotions ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < .001$). The direct effect of engagement orientation on positive emotions was non-significant ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = .155$), indicating its influence operates primarily through activity engagement. The indirect effect was significant ($\beta = 0.08$, $p < .05$), supporting full mediation. The model explained 15.0% of the variance in positive emotions ($R^2 = 0.15$).

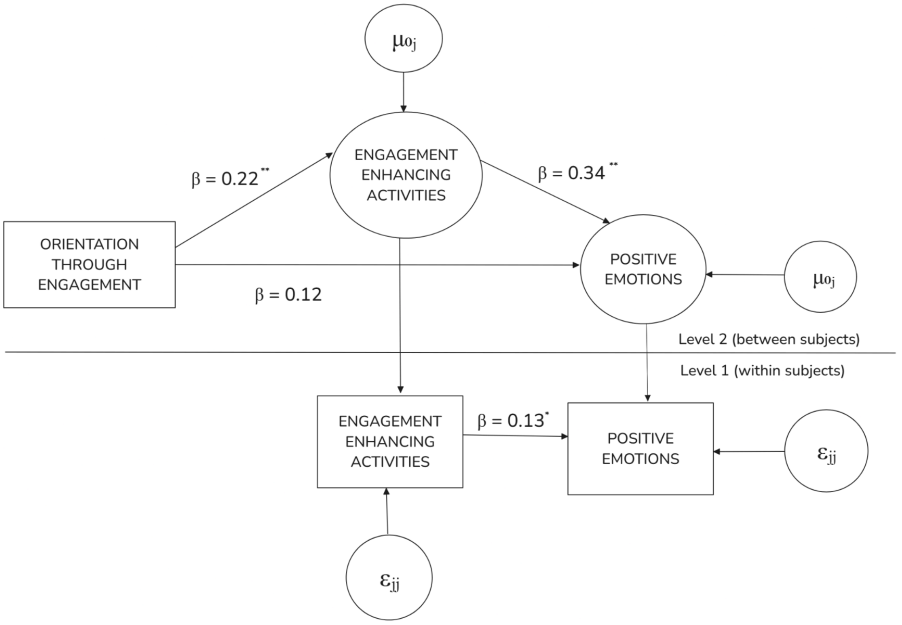

Figure 2. Multilevel mediation model examining the relationship between engagement orientation, engagement-enhancing activities, and positive emotions.
Note: Standardized beta coefficients (β) are reported. $p < .05$ (*), $p < .01$ (**), $p < .001$.

The final analysis examined the link between meaning-enhancing activities and positive emotions. At the within-person level, meaning-enhancing activities were not significantly associated with positive emotions (β = 0.12, p = .089, R^2 = 0.01), suggesting minimal daily impact. A multilevel mediation analysis showed that meaning orientation predicted engagement in these activities (β = 0.21, $p < .05$, R^2 = 0.05), which, in turn, was associated with positive emotions (β = 0.33, $p < .001$). Beyond this, meaning orientation directly predicted positive emotions (β = 0.24, $p < .01$), indicating an effect beyond activity engagement. The indirect effect was marginally significant (β = 0.07, p = .050), supporting weak partial mediation. The model explained 19.6% of the variance (R^2 = 0.20).

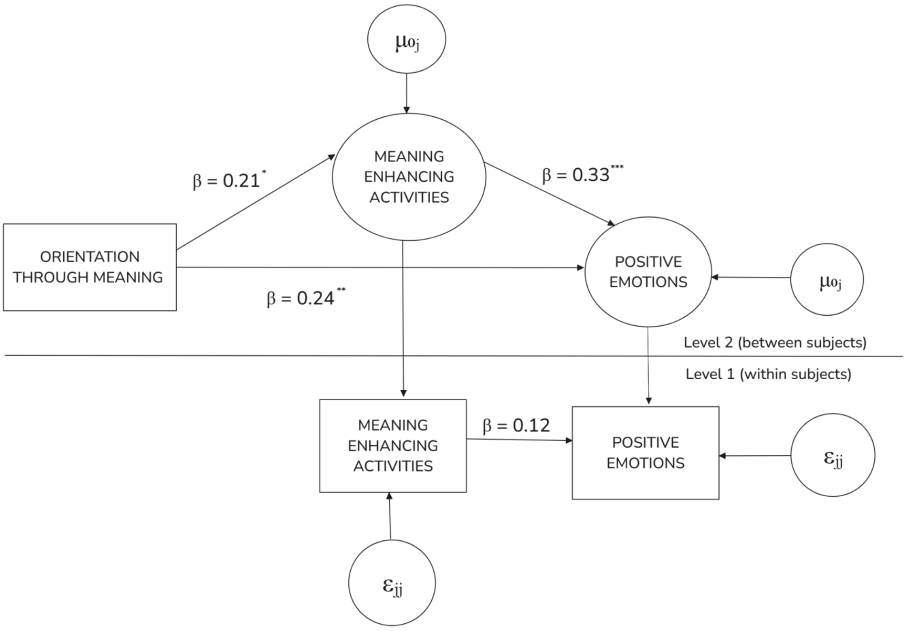

Figure 3. Multilevel mediation model examining the relationship between meaning orientation, meaning-enhancing activities, and positive emotions.
Note: Standardized beta coefficients (β) are reported. $p < .05$ (*), $p < .01$ (**), $p < .001$ (***).

3.3.4. Discussion

This study examined whether engagement in happiness-enhancing activities will mediate the relationship between orientations to happiness and positive emotions. According to the existing literature, individuals tend to choose and engage in activities that align with their dominant orientation (Ruch et al., 2010; Huta & Ryan, 2010), and these activities (i.e., hedonic, engaging, or prosocial) are associated with positive emotions (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Rogatko, 2009). The current study integrates these perspectives and, for the first time, tests the mediation relationships using a longitudinal design.

The results largely supported the proposed hypotheses. Pleasure-enhancing activities were significantly associated with positive emotions at the intraindividual level and partially mediated the relationship between the pleasure orientation and positive emotions at the interindividual level. This partial mediation suggests that engaging in hedonic behaviors is one of the mechanisms through which the pleasure orientation contributes to positive emotional experiences. However, the persistence of the direct effect indicates that actual engagement in hedonic behaviors is not always necessary for emotional benefits. For example, simply anticipating or reminiscing about enjoyable experiences may elicit emotions comparable to those experienced during the activity itself (Bryant & Veroff, 2007; Quoidbach et al., 2010).

In the case of engagement-enhancing activities, intraindividual analysis revealed a positive association with positive emotions, although the effect was limited. The diversity of activities included in the

study—ranging from creative to physical tasks—may explain the reduced explained variance, as some activities require considerable effort and produce delayed emotional rewards (Rheinberg & Engeser, 2018). In contrast, at the interindividual level, these activities fully mediated the relationship between engagement orientation and positive emotions. This result suggests that, unlike the pleasure orientation, the emotional benefits of engagement are highly dependent on active participation, in line with the original conceptualization of the construct (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Meaning-enhancing activities were not significantly associated with positive emotions at the intraindividual level, a finding that contrasts with the results of Lyubomirsky et al. (2005). A plausible explanation may lie in the nature of the activities analyzed in the current study (e.g., volunteering or organizing charitable events), which were more structured and long-term, potentially producing emotional benefits gradually rather than immediately. At the interindividual level, meaning-enhancing activities partially mediated the relationship between meaning orientation and positive emotions, although the magnitude of the indirect effect was modest. Thus, individuals with a strong meaning orientation may also experience positive emotions through additional cognitive mechanisms, such as positive reappraisal of challenging experiences as opportunities for growth (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

These findings contribute to the existing literature by suggesting that orientations to happiness influence emotional well-being primarily through behavioral mechanisms specific to each orientation. In the case of pleasure and meaning orientations, the results indicate the potential involvement of additional cognitive mechanisms, which warrant further investigation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Quoidbach et al., 2010). Moreover, the use of a longitudinal design provided a clearer perspective on the temporal sequence of the relationships between variables. From an applied perspective, the results support the potential of personalized interventions that employ behavioral techniques tailored to individuals' dominant orientations to promote emotional well-being.

However, this study has several important limitations. The relatively short duration of three weeks may not have been sufficient to capture long-term effects, and the low internal consistency of the engagement subscale suggests potential measurement errors. Additionally, the post-hoc adaptation of the PAL scale, in the absence of a validated instrument, limits the robustness of the conclusions. Moreover, the marginal effect observed in the final mediation model may reflect limited statistical power, and the use of self-report instruments may have introduced recall bias. Therefore, future studies should employ larger samples, objective measurement methods, and purpose-built instruments to assess activities that enhance pleasure, engagement, and meaning.

3.4. Study 4: Revisiting The Orientations To Happiness Model: Are Pleasure, Engagement, And Meaning Protective Factors Against Psychological Distress?[3]

3.4.1. Introduction

One of the central topics in positive psychology is the identification of factors that contribute to psychological well-being (David et al., 2012). An influential model in this regard is the orientations to happiness (OTH) model proposed by Peterson, Park, and Seligman (2005), which describes three strategies through which individuals can pursue happiness: pleasure (i.e., immediate hedonic joys), engagement (i.e., deep involvement in challenging activities), and meaning (i.e., living a life oriented toward purpose and contributing to the well-being of others).

These orientations have been extensively studied in relation to positive indicators of well-being, such as life satisfaction and positive emotions (Park et al., 2009). More recently, researchers have begun to investigate the relationship between these orientations and negative emotions as well.

In general, the orientation through pleasure does not appear to be negatively associated with negative emotions, although there are a few exceptions (Schueller & Seligman, 2010; Swart & Rothmann, 2012). In contrast, the engagement orientation has often been found to be negatively associated with negative emotions, suggesting that deep involvement in activities may serve as an emotional protective factor (Chan, 2009; Swart & Rothmann, 2012). Similarly, the orientation through meaning tends to correlate negatively with negative emotions, indicating that seeking happiness through meaning-related strategies may also act as a protective factor (Pollock et al., 2015; Park, 2005).

However, studies directly investigating the predictive relationships between these orientations and other indicators of psychological distress—such as depression, anxiety, and stress—are still limited (Schueller & Seligman, 2010). Therefore, this study aims to examine the extent to which engagement and meaning orientations negatively predict symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Accordingly, we formulated the following hypotheses: H1: Engagement orientation will negatively predict psychological distress—specifically, depression (H1a), anxiety (H1b), and stress (H1c); H2: Meaning orientation will negatively predict psychological distress—specifically, depression (H2a), anxiety (H2b), and stress (H2c). Given the contradictory findings regarding the pleasure orientation in the existing literature, an exploratory approach was adopted for this dimension, without formulating a directional hypothesis.

3.4.2. Method

3.4.2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 476 Romanian adults, with an average age of 32.85 years (*SD* = 11.87). Most participants were female (94.5%), held higher education degrees (77.9%), were unmarried (70.4%), and resided in urban areas (87.2%).

[3] This study has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Psychology*.

3.4.2.2. Procedure

The study received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Babeș-Bolyai University. Participants were recruited online via Facebook announcements, posted on groups and shared through personal networks. Data were collected via Google Forms. Respondents provided informed consent before participation, ensuring anonymity and the right to withdraw. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete and included the Orientations to Happiness Scale (Peterson *et al.,* 2005) followed by the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). For their participation, participants were compensated with either personal development workshops or course credit, the latter being available to students from the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at Babeș-Bolyai University.

3.4.2.3. Measures

3.4.2.3.1. The Orientations to Happiness Scale (OTH; Peterson et al., 2005): this self-report scale assesses three ways of pursuing happiness: pleasure, engagement, and meaning. It consists of 18 items (i.e., 6 per dimension), rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = does not describe me at all; 5 = describes me very well). Sample items include: “For me, the good life is the pleasurable life” (Pleasure), “No matter what I do, time passes very quickly” (Engagement), “What I do matters to society” (Meaning). The original scale demonstrated good internal consistency (α between .72 and .82). In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha was .78 for Pleasure, .74 for Meaning, and .62 for Engagement—an acceptable value given the small number of items (Kline, 2000; Nunnally, 1978), and consistent with previous findings (Ruch et al., 2010).

3.4.2.3.2. Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995): each of the three dimensions of the scale—symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress—is assessed through 7 items. The items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale (0 = did not apply to me at all; 3 = applied to me very much or most of the time). The Depression subscale reflects experiences of deep sadness and hopelessness (e.g., “I felt that life was meaningless”). The Anxiety subscale captures symptoms of nervousness and physiological arousal (e.g., “I was aware of the beating of my heart in the absence of physical exertion”), while the Stress subscale measures psychological tension and difficulties in relaxing (e.g., “I found it hard to wind down”). In the present study, the scale demonstrated good internal consistency: α = .87 for Depression, α = .86 for Anxiety, and α = .88 for Stress.

3.4.3. Results

To assess univariate normality, skewness and kurtosis values were examined across all measured variables. Skewness ranged from -0.34 (i.e., meaning orientation) to 1.04 (i.e., depressive symptoms), while kurtosis ranged from -0.77 (i.e., stress) to 0.39 (i.e., depressive symptoms), suggesting minor deviations from normality. Given that both skewness and kurtosis values fall within the commonly accepted range of ±2 for skewness and ±7 for kurtosis (e.g., West *et al*., 1995), the data can be considered approximately normally distributed at the univariate level. Additionally, Henze-Zirkler’s multivariate normality test yielded a statistically significant result (HZ = 1.029, $p < .001$), suggesting that the data did not meet the assumption of multivariate normality.

The mean scores for the orientations to happiness (OTH) indicated that participants reported the highest levels for meaning orientation (M = 21.68, SD = 4.39), followed by pleasure orientation (M = 20.04, SD = 4.68) and engagement orientation (M = 16.18, SD = 3.36). The average scores for distress indicators were 5.39 (SD = 5.10) for depressive symptoms, 5.56 (SD = 5.06) for anxiety, and 7.93 (SD = 5.51) for stress. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the associations between OTH and distress indicators. Pleasure orientation was positively associated with anxiety (r = .19, p < .01) and stress (r = .15, p < .05). Meaning orientation was negatively correlated with depressive symptoms (r = -.13, p < .01). Engagement orientation showed small but significant positive correlations with anxiety (r = .15, p < .01) and stress (r = .10, p < .05). The three subscales of DASS-21 were strongly intercorrelated (r = .63 to .70, all ps < .01).

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted to examine the predictive role of the three OTH on distress, as measured by the DASS-21. The first model predicting depressive symptoms explained 2.9% of the variance (R^2 = .029). As shown in Figure 1, pleasure orientation emerged as a significant positive predictor (β = .12, p = .039); meaning orientation was a significant negative predictor (β = -.17, p = .002); engagement orientation did not significantly predict depressive symptoms (β = .01, p = .894).

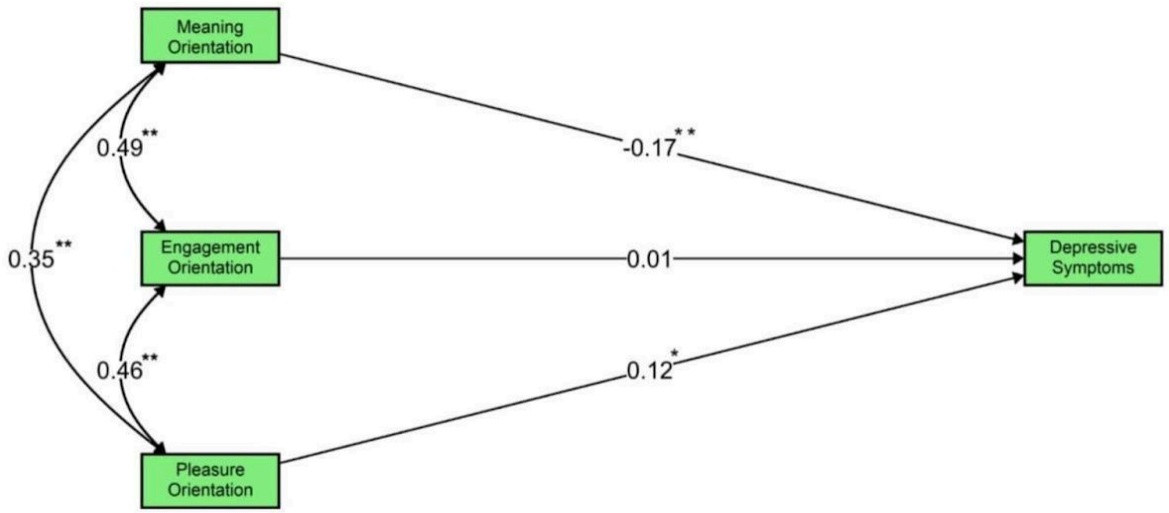

Figure 1. Structural Equation Model Examining the Relationship Between Orientations to Happiness and Depressive Symptoms

Note: Standardized regression coefficients (β) are displayed on the paths. Correlation coefficients are shown between the predictor variables. *p < .05; **p < .01 (two-tailed).

For anxiety symptoms, the second model explained 4.3% of the variance (R^2 = .043). Pleasure orientation was a significant positive predictor (β = .17, p = .002); engagement orientation did not significantly predict anxiety (β = .10, p = .098), nor did meaning orientation (β = -.06, p = .274).

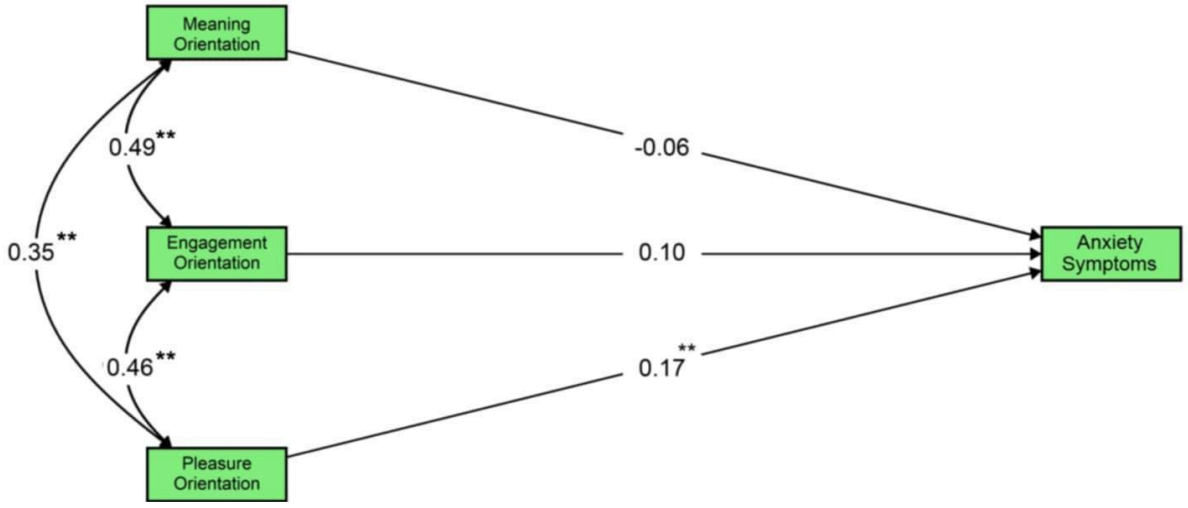

Figure 2. Structural Equation Model Examining the Relationship Between Orientations to Happiness and Anxiety Symptoms

Note: Standardized regression coefficients (β) are displayed on the paths. Correlation coefficients are shown between the predictor variables. *p < .05; **p < .01 (two-tailed).

The third model explained 3.3% of the variance in stress (R^2 = .033); pleasure orientation positively predicted stress (β = .15, p = .002), meaning orientation negatively predicted stress (β = –.11, p = .039), and engagement orientation was not a significant predictor (β = .08, p = .158).

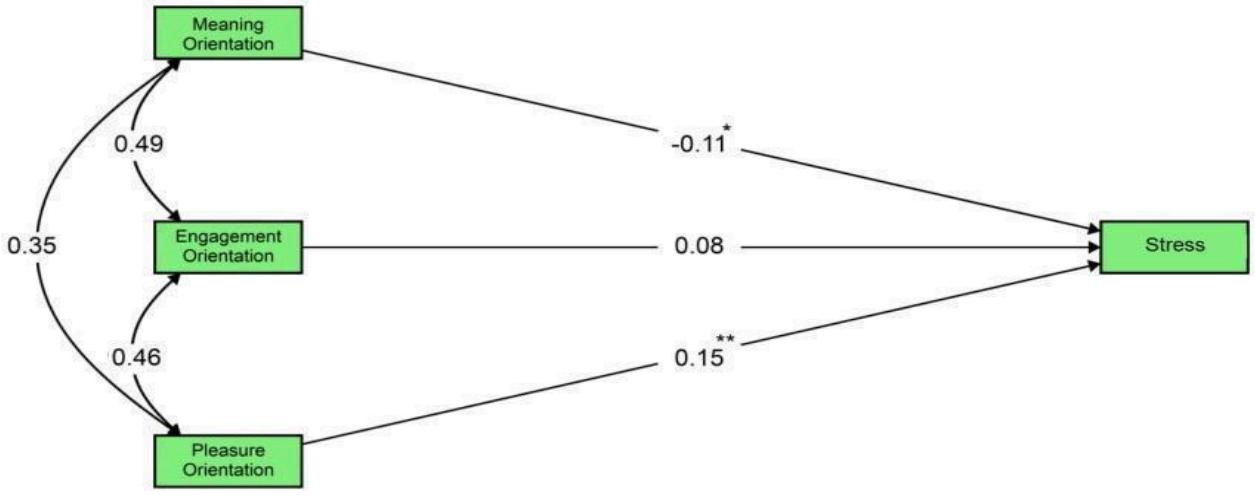

Figure 3. Structural Equation Model Examining the Relationship Between Orientations to Happiness and Stress.

Note: Standardized regression coefficients (β) are displayed on the paths. Correlation coefficients are shown between the predictor variables. *p < .05; **p < .01 (two-tailed).

3.4.4. Discussion

The present research examined the predictive value of three happiness orientations in relation to psychological distress. Results showed that pleasure orientation positively predicted all dimensions of distress - depression, anxiety and stress - suggesting that pursuing pleasurable experiences may represent a maladaptive emotional avoidance strategy or may reduce investment in meaningful relationships and purposeful activities, both of which are associated with lower levels of psychological distress (e.g., Wolgast & Lundh, 2017).

Contrary to initial expectations, engagement orientation did not significantly predict any dimension of distress, thereby contradicting Hypothesis 1, which proposed a negative relationship between engagement and symptoms of depression (H1a), anxiety (H1b), and stress (H1c). This lack of a significant relationship may be explained by limitations in how engagement orientation was measured, as the Orientations to Happiness Scale (Peterson et al., 2005) does not distinguish between adaptive absorption (i.e., positive flow associated with meaningful and enjoyable activities) and maladaptive absorption or dark flow, which can involve compulsive or obsessive activities with potentially negative effects on mental health (Dixon et al., 2019; Partington et al., 2009).

Meaning orientation negatively predicted depressive and stress symptoms, partially supporting Hypothesis 2: the negative relationship between meaning orientation and depression (H2a) and between meaning orientation and stress (H2c) was confirmed, while the hypothesized negative relationship with anxiety (H2b) was not supported. While the pursuit of happiness through meaning may offer protection against depression and stress by fostering a sense of coherence and purpose in life, it does not appear to effectively regulate the cognitive processes underlying anxiety—such as intolerance of uncertainty and perceived lack of control (e.g., Barlow, 2004; Beck & Clark, 1997).

These findings have important theoretical, methodological, and practical implications. Theoretically, they suggest that orientations to happiness are not equivalent in their relationship with psychological distress: pursuing meaning appears to function as a protective factor against depression and stress, whereas pursuing pleasure may have a maladaptive effect, possibly through avoidance mechanisms (e.g., Wolgast & Lundh, 2017). The lack of association between engagement orientation and distress points to the need for a more refined conceptualization that distinguishes between adaptive and maladaptive forms of absorption in activities (Dixon et al., 2019; Partington et al., 2009). Methodologically, the results highlight limitations of the current OTH-S scale (Peterson et al., 2005) in capturing both adaptive and maladaptive expressions of pleasure and engagement orientations. At the same time, psychological interventions should consider the possibility that certain orientations may also manifest in maladaptive forms, although further studies are needed to substantiate this recommendation.

Finally, several limitations of the study should be noted, including its cross-sectional design, the homogeneity of the sample, and the exclusive use of self-report measures. These aspects highlight the need for

future longitudinal research and improved assessment tools capable of capturing the nuanced nature of the relationships under investigation.

CHAPTER IV. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

4.1. General Conclusions

The main objective of this thesis was to investigate the orientations to happiness (OTH) model (Peterson et al., 2005), which proposes three distinct pathways to achieving happiness: pleasure, engagement, and meaning. The research focused on the relationship between these orientations and both positive indicators of subjective well-being (i.e., life satisfaction and positive emotions) and indicators of psychological distress (i.e., depression, anxiety, and stress).

The first study was a meta-analysis that integrated the inconsistent findings of previous studies regarding the relationship between happiness-seeking strategies and life satisfaction (e.g., Kose, 2015; Peterson et al., 2005; Richter & Hunecke, 2021). The results showed that all strategies were positively associated with life satisfaction, with no significant differences between them. However, demographic factors, such as marital status and educational level, moderated these relationships, while cultural dimensions (i.e., individualism and indulgence) did not play a significant role.

The second study focused on the cultural adaptation and validation of the Orientations to Happiness Scale for the Romanian population, including both the original 18-item version and the shortened 9-item version (Peterson et al., 2005; Ruch et al., 2010). Both versions confirmed the three-factor structure (i.e., pleasure, engagement, meaning) and demonstrated adequate psychometric properties. However, the engagement subscale showed lower internal consistency, especially in the short version—an issue also observed in other international adaptations (Chan et al., 2009; Ruch et al., 2010). To address this limitation, it is recommended to use Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) when employing the short version of the scale.

The third study explored the psychological mechanisms that explain the link between the orientations to happiness and positive emotions. The results showed that behavioral engagement in activities congruent with each orientation partially accounted for the positive emotions experienced. Full mediation was observed for engagement, while for pleasure and meaning, mediation was only partial, suggesting the existence of additional cognitive mechanisms (e.g., Quoidbach et al., 2010; Steger, 2012).

The fourth study extended the analysis of the OTH model to its relationship with psychological distress. The orientation to meaning negatively predicted symptoms of depression and stress, suggesting that this orientation plays a protective role in relation to distress. In contrast, the orientation toward pleasure positively predicted all three forms of distress, suggesting that excessive focus on immediate gratification may be a psychological vulnerability factor. The orientation toward engagement was not significantly related to distress, indicating that its role in distress reduction may be limited (Rogatko, 2009).

4.2. Theoretical and Conceptual Implications

First, this thesis questions the presumed superiority of eudaimonic seeking strategies in enhancing life satisfaction (e.g., Peterson et al., 2005), as our findings indicate that each orientation provides similar benefits. By synthesizing a fragmented and often inconsistent body of research (e.g., Huta & Ryan, 2010; Köse, 2015; Peterson et al., 2005), the current meta-analysis offers a more balanced perspective, suggesting that hedonic and eudaimonic orientations may be equally valuable pathways to well-being.

Another major theoretical contribution lies in the identification of demographic and contextual moderators—such as marital status or educational level—that may strengthen or weaken the relationship between each strategy and life satisfaction. This finding highlights that the effects of orientations to happiness are not universal but may vary depending on individual characteristics or contextual factors.

Moreover, the results of the meta-analysis reveal a remarkable cross-cultural consistency in the relationships between orientations to happiness and life satisfaction. Although previous literature has emphasized cultural differences in the way happiness is experienced (Uchida et al., 2004), the present findings suggest that pleasure, engagement, and meaning contribute similarly to life satisfaction across various cultural contexts. One possible explanation lies in the process of globalization, which promotes the adoption of shared values and lifestyles at a global level (Appadurai, 1996; Arnett, 2002).

The findings from the third study offer important theoretical contributions by clarifying the behavioral mechanisms that link orientations to happiness and positive emotions. By identifying involvement in happiness-enhancing activities as a key process, the study enhances our understanding of how different orientations translate into positive emotional experiences (Peterson et al., 2007).

By extending the investigation of orientations to happiness to psychological distress, this thesis challenges the assumption that all three orientations are inherently beneficial. The findings reveal distinct emotional consequences: while the orientation toward meaning may serve as a protective factor against distress, the orientation toward pleasure may increase emotional vulnerability. These results highlight the need for theoretical models to consider both positive and negative outcomes when evaluating the impact of different orientations.

4.3. Practical Implications

This thesis provides several valuable contributions from an applied perspective. A first important contribution is the adaptation and validation of both the long and short forms of the Orientations to Happiness Scale in the Romanian context, thus offering practitioners a valid and culturally adapted instrument for assessing individuals' orientation profiles (Peterson et al., 2005; Ruch et al., 2014).

Alongside this measurement advancement, the broader findings of the thesis also suggest valuable directions for the development of future psychological interventions aimed at enhancing well-being. First, given

the equivalent relationship of both hedonic (i.e., pleasure-oriented) and eudaimonic (i.e., engagement- and meaning-oriented) strategies with life satisfaction, interventions should integrate both approaches rather than prioritizing eudaimonic strategies alone. Programs that incorporate both immediate hedonic gratifications and longer-term eudaimonic pursuits may provide a more holistic pathway to well-being.

Second, the results underscore the importance of engaging in orientation-consistent behaviors as a key mechanism for enhancing positive affect. Consequently, future interventions might consider behavioral activation techniques—such as activity scheduling, guided behavioral experiments, or tailored behavioral goals—to help individuals translate their orientations into corresponding actions and thereby obtain the associated emotional benefits (Kanter et al., 2009).

Third, the findings highlight the dual nature of orientations to happiness in relation to psychological distress: pleasure orientation emerged as a risk factor for depressive and stress symptoms, whereas meaning orientation offered a protective effect. These findings suggest that not all orientations are purely beneficial. In particular, pleasure orientation, while often linked to happiness, may also heighten distress if pursued excessively or as a means of avoidance (Waugh et al., 2010; Yang et al., 2017). Although the current study did not directly investigate this potential distraction or avoidance mechanism, its plausibility calls for caution in both practice and future research. If future studies confirm that such a mechanism is indeed operative, practitioners and intervention developers might consider assessing whether clients rely heavily on hedonic pursuits to cope with negative affect and, where necessary, integrate strategies that encourage more adaptive coping approaches (Waugh et al., 2010).

Conversely, meaning orientation demonstrated a protective role, predicting lower levels of depressive symptoms and stress. While we did not directly examine the mechanisms behind this protective effect, existing theories suggest that a sense of purpose and coherence may foster resilience by guiding more adaptive cognitive appraisals or meaning-focused coping strategies (Park & Folkman, 1997; Steger, 2012). Therefore, interventions promoting purpose and existential clarity—such as meaning-centered therapies—could offer an important buffer against distress, although further research is needed to fully delineate how this process unfolds.

4.4. Methodological Innovations

This research brings several methodological innovations. In Study 1, multilevel statistical techniques were employed to synthesize correlational data from diverse samples and to account for variation across studies. The use of this multilevel approach also enabled the testing of moderators of these relationships, allowing us to examine how the associations between the happiness-seeking strategies and life satisfaction varied depending on study-level and sample-level characteristics (Van Den Noortgate & Onghena, 2003). This methodological strategy offered a richer and more differentiated understanding of the conditions under which each orientation may have a stronger or weaker impact on life satisfaction.

In Study 2, a rigorous psychometric validation of the Orientations to Happiness Scale (Peterson et al., 2005) was conducted for the Romanian population. Both the full version and the short version (Ruch et al.,

2014) were adapted and validated, resulting in a flexible and culturally relevant instrument, suitable for use in both research and applied practice. Confirmatory factor analyses supported the original three-factor structure—pleasure, engagement, and meaning—demonstrating good structural validity across both versions. Methodologically, this study represents a key contribution by providing Romanian versions of the OTH-S 18 and OTH-S 9 scales, making them suitable for both comprehensive assessments and large-scale studies, where brevity is essential.

Study 3 introduced a novel empirical focus by examining behavioral engagement as a key mechanism through which happiness orientations influence positive emotions. Based on the existing literature, this appears to be the first study to test this specific mediating process. Employing a rigorous longitudinal and multilevel design, we were able to explore not only the mediating role of behavioral enactment, but also the temporal dynamics of these relationships within individuals. By distinguishing between attitudinal endorsement and actual behavior, this approach offered a more ecologically valid understanding of how orientations translate into emotional experiences.

Finally, Study 4 represents, to our knowledge, the first investigation of the predictive role of all three happiness orientations in relation to multiple indicators of psychological distress. This comprehensive predictive model allowed for a nuanced analysis of how different orientations may function as either protective or risk-enhancing factors for mental health.

4.5. Limitations and Future Directions

While the current studies advances our understanding of how happiness orientations relate to various aspects of well-being, several limitations highlight avenues for future research.

The measurement of pleasure and engagement did not differentiate between adaptive and maladaptive forms (Peterson et al., 2005), limiting the understanding of how these orientations relate to well-being. Future research should develop tools that distinguish between beneficial and potentially harmful aspects of these orientations (Dixon et al., 2019; Partington et al., 2009; Wolgast & Lundh, 2017).

The engagement subscale showed lower internal consistency in both the full (α = .65) and short (α = .52) versions, reflecting challenges in capturing the complex and context-dependent nature of engagement. Revising the items and clarifying the subscale's structure would strengthen its reliability.

Furthermore, although behaviors associated with each orientation were measured using an adapted version of the Pleasant Activities List (PAL; Roozen et al., 2008), the absence of a fully validated, orientation-specific behavioral scale limited the precision of the behavioral mediation analyses. Future studies should focus on refining and validating such tools to better capture how orientations translate into action.

Moreover, the fact that three out of four studies employed cross-sectional designs limits the ability to draw causal inferences. Future longitudinal or experimental research is needed to better capture the dynamic relationships between orientations to happiness, well-being indicators and distress outcomes.

Additionally, the studies included in this thesis focused primarily on hedonic indicators of happiness, such as life satisfaction and positive emotions (e.g., Diener, 1984). An open question remains as to the extent to which the current findings generalize to other dimensions of well-being, such as the eudaimonic constructs proposed by Ryff (1989), including personal growth, autonomy, and purpose in life. Future studies could extend the analysis to these forms of well-being to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of different orientations.

Finally, the sample consisted mostly of educated urban women, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Replication studies involving more diverse populations are essential to confirm the robustness and applicability of the results.

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