Pursuing Flourishing:
Living a Life of Pleasure, Engagement or Meaning

Zackarias Edwall & Adam Yngve
Örebro University

Abstract

To be happy is an ultimate goal for most people, yet people may be unable to express what happiness really means. This study examined the relationship between three orientations to happiness as predictors of flourishing and affectivity. A convenience sample of Swedish university students (n = 355) answered a cross-sectional survey. The orientations to engagement and meaning were stronger predictors of flourishing than was pleasure, despite that pleasure was the strongest predictor of positive and negative affect. All three orientations are valid pathways, but those who favor engagement and meaning are more likely to flourish. In the pursuit of flourishing, a life of pleasure might be inadequate. Interventions to facilitate flourishing through the orientations to engagement and meaning were discussed.

Keywords. Orientations to Happiness, psychological well-being, happiness, flourishing, hedonia, eudaimonia.
Sammanfattning


Nyckelord: Orientations to Happiness, psykologiskt välbefinnande, lycka, flourishing, hedonism, eudaimonism.

Pursuing Flourishing: Living a Life of Pleasure, Engagement or Meaning

The concept of happiness and how to pursue it is something that preoccupies the minds of most people. If asked what the ultimate purpose of life is, many people would certainly say "To be happy". However, people may not be able to articulate what they really mean by happiness, let alone how they would pursue it in real life. Is happiness a stream of positive emotions or just the absence of negative emotions? There is no predetermined route to happiness that appeals to everyone. Consequently, there may be more than one way to pursue happiness.

The tendency that happiness is difficult to capture in a single definition or construct is also evident in previous research on happiness. The history of ideas about human happiness, however, precedes scientific research on the topic. A dichotomy between two central approaches has emerged as a result of originally philosophical ideas of primarily Aristippus and Aristotle, namely hedonia and eudaimonia (for a review, see Ryan & Deci, 2001). The hedonic approach represents the view that people should pursue happiness in terms of seeking the maximum amount of pleasure and the minimum amount of pain, whereas the eudaimonic perspective emphasizes self-realization and the importance of a virtuous way of living in accordance with personal ideals (Huta, 2013; Niemiec & Ryan, 2013). These two approaches provide two different perspectives on the constituents of a good life and what makes human existence worthwhile.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, this philosophical background, the dichotomy between the two approaches has persisted and somewhat divided psychological research on happiness. For example, eudaimonia is defined as personal expressiveness (Waterman, 1993), gratification (Seligman, 2002) and a virtuous way of living (Wong, 2011). Conversely, hedonia is conceptualized as pleasure (Seligman, 2002), enjoyment (Waterman, 1993) and
emotional well-being (Keyes, 2013). Studies also show that differences between hedonia and eudaimonia can be supported by data. Hedonic activities are associated with forgetting one's problems (Waterman, 1993), carefreeness and positive affect (Huta & Ryan, 2010). A similar pattern between theory and data also appears with regards to eudaimonia. Eudaimonic activities are more associated with challenge (Waterman, 1993) and elevating experience (Huta & Ryan, 2010). However, the philosophical basis of the two approaches is not uncontroversial when put into a scientific context and has been a major topic of debate (e.g., Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & King, 2009; Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008; Keyes & Annas, 2009; Ryan & Huta, 2009; Vittersø & Soholt, 2011; Waterman, 2008). Despite this ongoing debate, the dichotomy is still present in the study of well-being.

The hedonic view incorporates a definition of well-being in subjective terms (Niemiec & Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Subjective well-being concerns cognitive aspects of people's positive evaluations of their current situation, that is feeling satisfied with life and experiencing high presence of positive affect and low levels of negative affect (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2005; Diener, Sapyta, & Suh, 1998; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Accordingly, this is consistent with the conceptual definition of hedonia as a matter of pleasure seeking and pain avoidance. When defined in these subjective terms, individuals become their own judges of well-being without specific general conditions that need to be met. The hedonic approach signifies that people are to identify activities that promote well-being themselves (Kashdan et al., 2008; Niemiec & Ryan, 2013), which means that there is more than one universal pathway to the good life since it allows for individual differences.

The eudaimonic perspective incorporates a more objective view of well-being as a matter of the extent to which people are fully functioning and ascribes certain universal needs that constitute human well-being (Niemiec & Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Although
subjective well-being is important, it appears to be insufficient when the idea of well-being is put into a eudaimonic context. Given that eudaimonia is based on a view of well-being as a state of being fully functioning, the conception of well-being that follows is more general than personal. Therefore, the fully functioning approach that constitutes eudaimonia goes beyond subjective well-being in that it is more based on psychological well-being (Keyes, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2001) and social well-being (Keyes, 2013). Ryff (1989) argues that the dimensions of psychological well-being capture the more challenging strive for self-realization. Indeed, measures of subjective well-being are sometimes criticized as insufficient because these measures do not account for the concrete aspects of positive functioning (Ryff, 1989) and rely on biases of pleasantness (Vittersø, Oelmann, & Wang, 2009). However, this is not to say that life satisfaction, that is the individual's self-perceived quality of life (Shin & Johnson, 1978), or other hedonic measures of subjective well-being are unimportant for positive functioning. Besides psychological and social well-being, Keyes (2002) describes emotional well-being as a third component of mental health that concerns prevalence of positive affect and satisfaction with life. People who meet the criteria of these three pillars of well-being (i.e., psychological, social and emotional well-being) are described as being in a state of flourishing (Keyes & Lopez, 2005). Consequently, the eudaimonic idea of well-being is more multidimensional.

The specific notion of flourishing is essential when well-being is defined as positive functioning. The term flourishing signifies the state during which people are feeling well and functioning well in psychological as well as social terms (Crum & Salovey, 2013; Keyes, 2003), when they have achieved an optimal way of living as good and resilient individuals (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005) and are transcending themselves towards self-realization (David, Boniwell, & Conley Ayers, 2013). Naturally, people in a state of flourishing are more
creative, healthy and prosocial (Huppert, 2009). In this respect, eudaimonia appears to be more consistent with flourishing than hedonia is. On the other hand, hedonia and eudaimonia should not be mistaken for two distinct forms of well-being. Again, they represent different pursuits in life in that they emphasize different goals in life (Ryan & Deci, 2001), which in turn makes it possible to think of them as predictors of aspects of well-being and then compare if certain of those aspects are more closely associated with one or the other (Huta, 2013). In the present study, we approached hedonia and eudaimonia in these terms as predictors of well-being by investigating them as pursuits.

This idea of different pursuits is the central line of thought behind the Orientations to Happiness (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005). Drawing on the distinction between hedonia and eudaimonia, three ways to pursue happiness are operationalized. The first orientation is a life of pleasure and concerns, in accordance with hedonia, the pursuit of the maximum amount of pleasurable feelings and the minimum amount of pain (Peterson et al., 2005; Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2005). This orientation represents “the pleasant life” (Seligman, 2002, p. 262), meaning that it entails a pursuit of positive feelings about the past such as satisfaction, but also about the future in terms of optimism and the present moment such as pleasure. Pleasure is an elementary way to find happiness because it allows people to take shortcuts to immediate forms of satisfaction through simple activities like massage (Seligman et al., 2005). Indeed, pleasure is strongly associated with humor (Peterson, Ruch, Beerman, Park, & Seligman, 2007). The orientation to pleasure is also associated with lower age and lower education (Peterson et al., 2005). Thus, this description implies that a life of pleasure requires little effort in that it is predominantly hedonic.

The second orientation is a life of engagement. This orientation includes acts that make people feel absorbed in what they do and provide a sense of personal gratification
Pursuing flourishing (Peterson et al., 2005; Seligman et al., 2005). Gratification cannot be achieved by taking shortcuts. It requires actions to develop character strengths, for example creativity, and efforts to live a virtuous life (Seligman, 2002; Seligman et al., 2005). This orientation represents “the good life” (Seligman, 2002, p. 262) in the sense that it is based on the notion that people ought to use their personal strengths in order to achieve gratification in key areas of life. Hence, a life of engagement represents an addition to hedonia and eudaimonia (Peterson et al., 2005). The unique feature of the orientation to engagement is that it draws on experiences of flow (Peterson et al., 2005; Seligman et al., 2005). In the same vein as Seligman (2002), Csikszentmihalyi (2002) describes pleasure as an important yet not sufficient pathway to happiness because it does not promote psychological development. Rather, the good life is about transcending oneself through meaningful activities (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005). This is the central feature of the flow state. Flow arises during activities that challenge people’s skills without causing frustration and the sense of self disintegrates as the activity fully absorbs the person (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005). Such activities seem to be distinct from simple pleasures since they are based on personal skills and abilities, which might explain why engagement is mostly associated with perseverance (Peterson et al., 2007). As a result, a life of engagement appears to have more personal ties than a life of pleasure.

The third orientation is a life of meaning. The pursuit of meaning is based on the practice of character strengths in favor of something above and beyond the individual self through knowledge, by being a just and good person, starting a family or engaging in a spiritual purpose (Seligman et al., 2005). Hence, meaning is strongly associated with religiosity (Peterson et al., 2007). In contrast to the second orientation to engagement and the good life, a life of meaning concerns the use of one's strengths for more than personal benefit.
This orientation represents "the meaningful life" (Seligman, 2002, p. 263), which is the equivalent of eudaimonia (Peterson et al., 2005). Similarly, the orientation appears to capture a fundamental principle of positive psychology that people have an innate desire for meaning and fulfillment (Positive Psychology Center, 2007). The emphasis on transcending oneself and devotion to a cause seems to capture the prosocial element that personal well-being also depends on the well-being of others.

Further research supports that the orientations to pleasure, engagement and meaning are three separate yet related predictors of how satisfied people are with their lives above and beyond demographics such as age or education (Peterson et al., 2005; Peterson et al., 2007; Schueller & Seligman, 2010; Vella-Brodrick, Park, & Peterson, 2009). However, these results show that engagement and meaning are stronger predictors of life satisfaction compared to pleasure. All three orientations are also significant predictors of positive and negative affect (Schueller & Seligman, 2010). Contrary to what might be expected from the description of the orientation to pleasure, it is still a weaker predictor of positive affect compared to engagement and meaning (Schueller & Seligman, 2010; Vella-Brodrick et al., 2009). This indicates that happiness is more than just positive affect and requires multiple sources. Indeed, the orientations are interrelated and not mutually exclusive (Peterson et al., 2005), which makes it possible to endorse all three simultaneously.

The unified presence of pleasure, engagement and meaning combined constitutes what is referred to as the "full life" (Seligman, 2002, p. 263). The combination means that the full life is based on the accumulation of positive emotions from experiences of pleasure, gratification from one’s character strengths and the practice of these strengths in favor of something above and beyond oneself to find meaning (Seligman, 2002). On a continuum between the full life and the opposite "empty life" (Peterson et al. 2005, p. 35), those who
lead the full life report the very highest levels of life satisfaction whereas those who lead the
empty life report the very lowest levels of life satisfaction. The concept of the full life
demonstrates that the pursuit of happiness can be approached in different ways and draws on
multiple sources. In turn, these approaches can have different outcomes depending on which
path people choose to follow.

Despite these results, previous research appears to be unilateral in two specific ways.
Firstly, previous research on the orientations to pleasure, engagement and meaning has
primarily focused on defining their outcomes in hedonic terms by using measures of
subjective well-being (Peterson et al., 2005; Peterson et al., 2007; Schueller & Seligman,
2010; Vella-Brodrick et al., 2009). Contrary to this, psychological well-being and other
psychologically beneficial elements such as progressing towards one’s goals and perfection
of skills should be considered outcomes of particularly eudaimonic pursuits (Huta, 2013).
Furthermore, Wong (2011) makes the argument that eudaimonia is about maintaining a
virtuous way of living that entails an integrative approach to both positive and negative
experiences in life that is crucial in order to empower people to truly flourish. The
eudaimonic orientation to meaning should therefore be a significant pathway to human
flourishing and not just mere satisfaction with life or positive emotions, e.g., joy and
contentment (Diener et al., 1999). Also, since personal growth and fulfillment are key to
eudaimonia, measures of subjective well-being may be inadequate in order to capture the
dimensions of complete well-being. In light of the previous description of the different
operational terms of well-being, flourishing should be a more appropriate assessment of well-
being when addressing the orientations to pleasure, engagement and meaning. Subjective
well-being is a too narrow definition to fully capture the constituents of well-being, especially
from a eudaimonic perspective. Flourishing signifies a more specific and multidimensional
measurement of well-being in that it emphasizes human functioning (Diener et al., 2010). By measuring the outcomes of the orientations in this unique way, it is possible to test whether the orientations are likely to make people fully functioning in multiple areas of well-being rather than just generally satisfied with their lives in contrast to the focus of previous studies.

Secondly, another limitation of previous research concerns the measurement of positive and negative affect. The emotional aspects of the orientations to pleasure, engagement and meaning have primarily been studied on the basis of the intensity of emotional experiences (Schueller & Seligman, 2010; Vella-Brodrick et al., 2009). Recently, researchers have pointed out that an appropriate measurement of emotions has to be based on how frequently people experience specific emotions rather than the intensity of those emotions (Diener, Sandvik, & Pavot, 2009; Diener et al., 2010). Given that intense emotional experiences rarely occur, frequency is described as the better indicator of well-being because it is more related to long-term emotional well-being (Diener et al., 2009). Since the hedonic orientation to pleasure has showed the weakest association with positive affect, Schueller and Seligman (2010) indeed argue that long-term focus is required in order to measure the emotional associations more accurately. To address this issue of how affectivity has been measured in previous research, we therefore investigated affectivity in terms of frequency of positive and negative affect in order to maintain the necessary long-term perspective and approach the emotional aspects of the orientations on a new basis.

Furthermore, the question if predominance of positive affect and flourishing are likely to increase as a person gets closer to the full life has not been addressed. Consistent with the increase in life satisfaction displayed by the continuum between the empty life and the full life (Peterson et al., 2005), a similar pattern in flourishing and positive affect should emerge. We replicated this model to investigate this particular question descriptively.
The purpose of the present study was to put the orientations to pleasure, engagement and meaning into the context of flourishing in order to test the extent to which the orientations are likely to predict more than just positive feelings or life satisfaction. The intent in this respect was to widen the previous outcomes of the orientations by assessing well-being in terms of what is likely to make people flourish. Furthermore, we investigated whether the orientations predict positive and negative affect by shifting the focus to frequency instead of intensity. Hence, we posed the following questions: How do the full life and the empty life relate to flourishing and the balance between positive and negative affect? Do the orientations to pleasure, engagement and meaning individually predict flourishing? Do the orientations to pleasure, engagement and meaning individually predict positive and negative affect? Firstly, we expected to see an increasing pattern in flourishing and positive affect as a result of high endorsement of the three orientations. Secondly, we hypothesized that all three orientations would individually predict flourishing. Specifically, we expected the orientation to engagement and the orientation to meaning to be stronger predictors of flourishing than the orientation to pleasure. Thirdly, we hypothesized that all three orientations would individually predict positive and negative affect.

**Method**

**Participants**

The study included 355 students from a Swedish university. 257 of the participants (72.4%) were female, 93 of the participants (26.2%) were male and 5 of the participants (1.4%) chose not to report gender. Participants who did not identify themselves as either male or female were free not to specify gender. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 51 years ($M = 23.65, SD = 4.19$). All participants were recruited through convenience sampling from the university. Only students at the university were asked to participate according to the
inclusion criterion of the study. No compensation for participation was given.

**Measurements**

In order to operationalize the constructs and answer the research questions, we constructed a cross-sectional survey consisting of three different scales.

**Orientations to happiness.** We operationalized the three pathways to happiness through the use of the Orientations to Happiness (OTH; Peterson et al., 2005). The scale measures three different orientations to happiness: *life of pleasure*, *life of meaning* and *life of engagement*. Each orientation is operationalized by a separate subscale. Answers are reported on a 5-point likert scale from 1 (*very much unlike me*) to 5 (*very much like me*). The scale contains eighteen items in total with six items for each subscale. The total score ranges from 6 to 30 for each subscale. The total score of the entire scale ranges from 18 to 90. Subscale scores are computed by averaging the respective items for each orientation. For example, subscale items include "For me, the good life is the pleasurable life" (*life of pleasure*), "I am always very absorbed in what I do" (*life of engagement*) and "My life serves a higher purpose" (*life of meaning*). Cronbach’s alpha has previously showed alpha coefficients of .82 for pleasure, .72 for engagement and .82 for meaning (Peterson et al., 2005). In the present study, all items were translated into Swedish in order to adapt the scale to the target population (see Appendix). Therefore, we administered the translated version of the scale to a focus group to discuss the face validity of the translation prior to the data collection process. The focus group (*n* = 11) consisted of 9 female and 2 male psychology students between the ages of 20 and 25 years (*M* = 22.55, *SD* = 1.63). A principal axis factor analysis was then conducted to explore the factorial structure, using Varimax as rotation method (*χ^2^* = 1757.93, *df* = 153, *p* < .001, KMO = .82). Four factors with eigenvalues above 1 were identified. In contrast to the three factors of the original version (Peterson et al., 2005), two items on the
subscale for meaning (see item 2 and item 12 in Appendix) also loaded on the fourth factor beyond the intended factor. Based on the scree plot and previous research (Peterson et al., 2005), we still proceeded with the three-factor solution accounting for 46.69% of the total variance. All items tapping pleasure loaded on a single factor. However, one item tapping engagement (see item 4 in Appendix) loaded more on the factor for meaning. The item was still included in the analyses for the sake of internal consistency. Cronbach’s alpha for the translated version of the subscales showed acceptable internal consistency with alpha coefficients of .81 for pleasure, .63 for engagement and .77 for meaning.

**Flourishing.** We operationalized flourishing through the use of the Flourishing Scale (FS; Diener et al., 2010). The scale measures psychological well-being by integrating self-perceived success in important areas of well-being such as optimism, relationships, self-esteem, being respected by others and competency. This provides an overall assessment of the degree to which the person in question is functioning. Answers are reported on a 7-point likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The scale contains eight items and provides a single score for global psychological well-being. The total score ranges from 8 to 56. Items include for example ”People respect me” and ”My social relationships are supportive and rewarding”. In the present study, we used a validated Swedish translation of the scale (Kormi-Nouri, Farahani, & Trost, 2013). The previously reported Cronbach’s alpha for the Swedish version of the scale is .87 (Kormi-Nouri et al., 2013). In our case, Cronbach’s alpha showed an alpha coefficient of .90.

**Positive and negative affect.** To operationalize positive and negative affect, we used the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE; Diener et al., 2010). Answers are based on how much of a set of specific feelings the participant has experienced over the past month on a 5-point likert scale from 1 (*very rarely or never*) to 5 (*very often or always*). The
phrasing reflects the frequency of the emotions in question (Diener et al., 2010). The scale measures positive affect with six items and negative affect with six items, respectively. The total score for each subscale ranges from 6 to 30. Items tapping positive affect include for example ”Happy” and ”Contented”, while items for negative affect include for example ”Angry” and ”Sad”. The items are phrased to capture the full range of emotional arousal, including states such as flow, as opposed to the intense emotions of the PANAS scale (Diener et al., 2010; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). In addition, a balance score can be computed by subtracting the total score for negative affect from the total score for positive affect. The balance score ranges from –24 to 24. A negative balance score indicates predominantly negative affect while a positive balance score indicates predominantly positive affect. To fit the Swedish population, we used a validated Swedish translation of the items (Kormi-Nouri et al., 2013). The previously reported Cronbach’s alpha for the Swedish version of the scale showed alpha coefficients of .84 for negative affect, .82 for positive affect and .86 for balance affect (Kormi-Nouri et al., 2013). In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha showed alpha coefficients of .84 for negative affect, .91 for positive affect and .91 for balance affect.

Procedure

We posted a complete web based version of the cross-sectional survey online in a local social media network for students under supervision of the university. To further increase the sample size, we also put up links to the survey on bulletin boards on campus. All participants were duly informed that participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous through a covering letter. The criterion that only students were valid participants was also stated. After completing the survey, the participants automatically received confirmation that the answers had been registered successfully.

Analyses
First, we computed Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient between the variables into a correlation matrix. In order to investigate how the full life and the empty life relate to flourishing and the balance between positive and negative affect, we created two descriptive models. Similar to the method used by Peterson et al. (2005), we divided the participants into deciles based on the total score of the Orientations to Happiness. The deciles were then compared along the continuum between the full life and the empty life against the balance score of the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience and the means of the Flourishing Scale. Then we proceeded with our inferential questions. To answer the question if the orientations to pleasure, meaning and engagement individually predict flourishing, we computed a hierarchical multiple regression analysis. The predictors were entered hierarchically according to the steps performed by Vella-Brodrick et al. (2009). To answer the question if the three orientations to pleasure, engagement and meaning individually predict positive and negative affect, we computed two additional hierarchical multiple regression analyses (i.e., one for each outcome variable) based on the same steps as the first analysis. Multicollinearity statistics were well within conventional margins for all three regression analyses.

**Results**

Descriptive statistics and two-tailed bivariate correlations are presented in Table 1. On average, the most commonly endorsed orientation was a life of meaning ($M = 20.21, SD = 5.07$) followed by a life of pleasure ($M = 19.40, SD = 4.83$) and a life of engagement ($M = 16.92, SD = 3.89$). The positive balance score between positive and negative affect indicated predominance of positive affect among the participants ($M = 5.38, SD = 7.37$). The correlations showed weak to moderate associations between the three orientations, indicating that all are interrelated. Endorsement of one orientation did not exclude endorsement of
another. Engagement and meaning were more closely associated, \( r_{(353)} = .45, p < .001 \), suggesting a greater similarity between these two orientations. All three were also significantly associated with flourishing as well as positive and negative affect. Specifically, the orientation to pleasure tended to explain variation in positive affect, \( r_{(353)} = .43, p < .001 \), and negative affect, \( r_{(353)} = -.25, p < .001 \), to a greater extent than engagement and meaning. In spite of these different associations, the orientations to engagement, \( r_{(353)} = .50, p < .001 \), and meaning, \( r_{(353)} = .63, p < .001 \), seemingly accounted for more of the variation in flourishing than did pleasure, \( r_{(353)} = .29, p < .001 \).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pleasure</td>
<td></td>
<td>.29***</td>
<td>.22***</td>
<td>.43***</td>
<td>-.25***</td>
<td>.38***</td>
<td>.29***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.45***</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>-.14**</td>
<td>.26***</td>
<td>.50***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Meaning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>.26***</td>
<td>.63***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Positive affect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.56***</td>
<td>.88***</td>
<td>.64***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Negative affect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.88***</td>
<td>-.40***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Balance affect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.58***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Flourishing</td>
<td>19.40</td>
<td>16.92</td>
<td>20.21</td>
<td>21.61</td>
<td>16.23</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>43.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( M )</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>7.37</td>
<td>8.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * \( p < .05 \); ** \( p < .01 \); *** \( p < .001 \). (\( N = 355 \)).

How do the full life and the empty life relate to flourishing and the balance between positive and negative affect?

Given that the three orientations were interrelated and not mutually exclusive (see Table 1), it was possible to contrast those who were closer to the empty life with those who were closer to the full life (Peterson et al., 2005). To investigate this question, we summed the total score of pleasure, engagement and meaning into a single value representing the total score of all three orientations (\( M = 56.53, SD = 10.18 \)). The higher total score, the closer people are to the full life. The participants were then divided into deciles (Decile 1 = Bottom 10%, and so forth). We expected those within the upper deciles to report the highest levels of flourishing and predominantly positive affect. As displayed in Figure 1 and Figure 2, flourishing and
positive affect increase from the lower to the upper deciles in the distribution on average. People within the lower deciles (i.e., closer to the empty life) reported lower levels of flourishing and positive affect whereas those within the upper deciles (i.e., closer to the full life) reported higher levels of flourishing and predominantly positive affect. Thus, the figures were consistent with our expectations that flourishing would increase and that the balance between positive and negative affect would be predominantly positive as a person gets closer to the full life. The figures provide a descriptive overview of the differences in flourishing and affectivity between those who have multiple orientations and those who have none or only few. Those who highly endorsed all three are able to benefit from pleasure, engagement and meaning combined and seem in turn more prone to flourish and experience positive affect, whereas those who have none or very few of the sources of these orientations seem less so.
Do the orientations to pleasure, engagement and meaning individually predict flourishing?

In order to investigate if the orientations to pleasure, engagement and meaning all are likely to enable people to flourish, we made three specific predictions. We hypothesized that all three would individually predict flourishing. Specifically, we expected the orientations to engagement and meaning to be stronger predictors of flourishing than pleasure. The results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis of flourishing and the three orientations are summarized in Table 2. As displayed, people who endorsed either pleasure, engagement or meaning were to varying degrees all likely to flourish. The results showed that 8% of the variance in flourishing was significantly explained by the orientation to pleasure, $F_{(1, 353)} = 32.03, p < .001$. Moreover, engagement significantly explained an additional 19% of the variance in flourishing, $F_{\text{change} (1, 352)} = 89.25, p < .001$. Furthermore, meaning explained an additional 19% of the variance in flourishing, $F_{\text{change} (1, 351)} = 125.07, p < .001$. The overall
hierarchical multiple regression with all three predictors thus explained 46% of the total variance in flourishing, $F_{(3, 351)} = 99.98, p < .001$. Specifically, endorsement of the orientations to pleasure ($\beta = .11, p = .007$), engagement ($\beta = .24, p < .001$) and meaning ($\beta = .49, p < .001$) all positively predicted flourishing. The final beta weights supported that engagement and meaning remained the stronger predictors of flourishing. Those who particularly favored a life of engagement or meaning seemed, consistent with the primary hypothesis, more likely to flourish than those who preferred to live a life of pleasure. As a result, all three orientations do predict flourishing.

Table 2
Summary of hierarchical multiple regression analysis of OTH and flourishing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
<th>$\Delta F$</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>32.03***</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>9.45</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>89.25***</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>11.18</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 3</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>125.07***</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>11.18</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>11.18</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total $R^2$ = .46

Note. *** $p < .001$.

Do the orientations to pleasure, engagement and meaning individually predict positive and negative affect?

This question concerned the emotional aspects of the orientations to pleasure, engagement and meaning, with particular emphasis on the frequency of emotional experiences. The survey requested reports based on the past month. We hypothesized that all three orientations would individually predict positive and negative affect. The results of the first hierarchical multiple regression analysis of positive affect and the three orientations are summarized in Table 3. As hypothesized, people who favored either a life of pleasure,
engagement or meaning were to varying degrees all likely to experience positive affect. The results showed that 18% of the variance in positive affect was significantly explained by the orientation to pleasure, $F_{(1, 353)} = 78.81, \ p < .001$. Moreover, engagement significantly explained an additional 4% of the variance in positive affect, $F_{\text{change}(1, 352)} = 17.07, \ p < .001$. In the third step, meaning significantly explained an additional 3% of the total variance in positive affect, $F_{\text{change}(1, 351)} = 14.08, \ p < .001$. The overall hierarchical multiple regression analysis with all three predictors thus explained a total 25% of the variance in positive affect, $F_{(3, 351)} = 39.08, \ p < .001$. Specifically, pleasure ($\beta = .35, \ p < .001$), engagement ($\beta = .12, \ p = .024$) and meaning ($\beta = .20, \ p < .001$) all positively predicted positive affect. Consistent with the explained variance, the final beta weights indicated that the orientation to pleasure remained the strongest predictor of positive affect. More pertinently, people with a primary orientation to pleasure were more likely to experience positive affect. As a result, all three orientations do predict positive affect.

The results of the second hierarchical multiple regression analysis of negative affect and the orientations are summarized in Table 4. The results showed that 6% of the variance in negative affect was significantly explained by the orientation to pleasure, $F_{(1, 353)} = 23.55, \ p < .
001. Although engagement explained an additional 1% of the variance, the change in the variance was not statistically significant. Meaning did not significantly explain any proportion of the total variance in negative affect. The overall hierarchical multiple regression analysis with all three predictors thus explained 7% of the total variance in negative affect, \( F(3, 351) = 8.99, p < .001 \). Specifically, pleasure negatively predicted negative affect (\( \beta = –.22, p < .001 \)). The orientation to pleasure did, as hypothesized, significantly predict low negative affect. However, this relationship was not as clear for people with an orientation to engagement or meaning. Although engagement, \( r_{(353)} = –.14, p = .007 \), and meaning, \( r_{(353)} = –.14, p = .011 \), both were negatively associated with negative affect (see Table 1), neither predicted negative affect. Compared to the orientation to pleasure, the decrease in negative affect was not statistically significant. Accordingly, while a person who lives a life of pleasure is less likely to experience negative affect, those with an orientation to engagement or meaning are not.

**Discussion**

On the topic of happiness and the constituents of a happy life, we examined three different orientations to happiness and their relationship with flourishing and affectivity. In
accordance with our expectations, the descriptive models of the full life and the empty life indicated that those in the upper deciles who highly endorsed all three orientations reported the highest levels of flourishing and predominantly positive affect on average. Furthermore, the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis showed that people with an orientation to either pleasure, engagement or meaning all were likely to flourish. Consistent with our primary hypothesis, those with an orientation to engagement or meaning were more likely to flourish than those who preferred a life of pleasure. As hypothesized, all three orientations did also positively predict positive affect, suggesting that all three are likely to raise positive affect. Pleasure, however, was the strongest predictor of positive affect of the three and explained the largest proportion of the total variance. In addition, pleasure negatively predicted negative affect while engagement and meaning did not. These results indicate that a life of engagement or meaning is more likely to make people flourish, even though those who favor these two orientations may not be as likely to experience positive affect and avoid negative affect.

The results that the orientations did not seem to contribute equally to people’s potential to flourish can be explained on the basis of the relationship with hedonia and eudaimonia. Given that pleasure is related to the hedonic approach to well-being while meaning and engagement are more related to the eudaimonic approach, the results imply that people with an orientation to pleasure are less inclined towards a strive for self-realization than others. These people do not have a very stable source of happiness other than mere pleasure. Accordingly, the results seem consistent with the theoretical idea of immediate shortcuts to pleasure while engagement and meaning require more effort (Seligman et al., 2005). Regardless that their orientation to pleasure may be more likely to raise experiences of positive affect, these people are still not as likely to flourish. This might be due to that they
rely more on pure positive affect in itself rather than their own character strengths in contrast to those with an orientation to engagement or meaning.

As for the assessment of the emotional aspects of the orientations in this respect, the present study measured positive and negative affect on the basis of how frequently people had these experiences rather than how intensely. By changing the emphasis in this unique way, our results provided several new insights into the emotional aspects of the orientations. For example, the results now showed that those with an orientation to pleasure were the most likely to have experiences of positive affect. Given that pleasure in turn negatively predicted negative affect, the results tend to concur with the previous theoretical assumptions that people who favor a life of pleasure really may be more likely to maximize positive feelings and avoid pain (Seligman et al., 2005). This relationship has not been empirically demonstrated before, possibly due to the measurement of emotional intensity. Although there was a negative relationship between engagement and meaning and negative affect, the subsequent decrease in negative affect was unexpectedly not statistically significant. Those who favored these two orientations may have a different approach to their negative emotions in that they do not seem to be as likely to minimize them, perhaps due to the idea that congruence between positive and negative emotions is an asset in order for people to be fully functioning from a eudaimonic perspective (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Adversities in life should not always be avoided. Likewise, this tends to illustrate the integrative approach to positive and negative experiences that characterizes eudaimonia (Wong, 2011). In spite of the results that engagement and meaning were weaker predictors of positive affect and that these two orientations did not negatively predict negative affect, people who favored these two orientations were more likely to flourish. As a result, flourishing does seem to be more of a matter of functioning well than merely feeling well (Keyes, 2003). Again, these results also
demonstrate the distinction between hedonia and eudaimonia. Maximizing hedonic pleasures
does not seem very plausible to truly make people flourish even though it raises positive
affect. By virtue of the practice of character strengths, a eudaimonic pursuit of engagement
and meaning is more likely to yield flourishing even though these pursuits may be more
associated with negative affect along the way.

Considering that people also may want to lead full lives rather than rely on one
exclusive orientation, we also compared those who had all three orientations and those who
had none. As expected, the models of the full life and the empty life indicated that those who
highly endorsed all three orientations were also those who reported the highest levels of
predominantly positive affect and the highest levels of flourishing (see Figure 1 and Figure
2). This highlights that just as an orientation to either pleasure, engagement or meaning all
are valid ways to flourish separately, a unified combination of the three may also be a valid
approach. The more absence of these three endeavors, the emptier life might become.
However, the descriptive approach to this question only provides an average overview of
these relationships and such interpretations are therefore to be made on a speculative basis.

Overall, the results of our study also provide new knowledge about the orientations
within a sample of Swedish university students. A life of meaning was the most commonly
endorsed orientation in our sample. The results may thereby extend the previous cross-
national research on the orientations (Park, Peterson, & Ruch, 2009; Vella-Brodrick et al.,
2009). Although the orientation to meaning was the most common orientation in the sample,
our results indicate that a Swedish population seems to endorse meaning and engagement to a
lower degree and pleasure to a higher degree compared to a US sample (Vella-Brodrick et al.,
2009, p. 170). This deserves further research on a grander scale in order to investigate
whether there is such a thing as a generic Swedish inclination in this respect.
Even though the present study offers new insights into the three orientations and their emotional aspects, there are important limitations to consider when interpreting the results. Firstly, the figures displaying the full life and the empty life are primarily descriptive and not inferential. Interpretations should therefore be made accordingly, that is to say without inferential pretenses. However, the patterns in Figure 1 and Figure 2 were in line with our expectations that flourishing and predominance of positive affect would increase as people approached the full life. We encourage further replication in this respect. Secondly, our Swedish translation of Orientations to Happiness has not been used in research prior to the present study and requires further validation. For example, Cronbach's alpha for the subscale tapping engagement ($\alpha = .63$) was below the conventional cut-off alpha of .70. Consequently, the internal consistency is not completely satisfactory. Although this might be acceptable in early stages of test development, the results with regards to this specific subscale have to be interpreted cautiously. The factor analysis also revealed that one of the items tapping engagement (i.e., item 4) loaded more on the factor for meaning. Engagement and meaning thus appear to have some overlapping features. Since we still decided to keep the item, this calls for additional caution when interpreting the results regarding the subscale for engagement. Moreover, two of the items tapping meaning (i.e., item 2 and item 12) loaded on a fourth factor beyond the designated factor. This might be due to that these items could be interpreted in a religious manner, which was pointed out by the focus group. More generally, all these ambiguities could also have to do with the vast difference in sample size compared to the validation of the original version (Peterson et al., 2005). We leave it to future research to strengthen the properties of our translation furtherly. Thirdly, the cross-sectional design of the present study means that causal inferences about the relationship between the orientations and actual well-being among people may not be made on the basis of our results.
Longitudinal data is required in order to study the orientations repeatedly over time. This would be an appropriate extension of the results in future research. Similarly, the results of the study do not offer any explanatory basis for antecedents of the orientations. Although research on potential causes of why some are more prone to hedonic or eudaimonic pursuits than others is beginning to emerge (Huta, 2012), more longitudinal research is necessary in order to make causal inferences about these relationships. Qualitative methods could also be a significant contribution so as to deepen the subjective understanding of why people pursue happiness differently. Lastly, the sample consisted of considerably more females than males (72.4% females, 26.2% males). Yet, the majority of females does reflect the target population of the present study. 61% of Swedish students are female and 39% are male (Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2014). In spite of the convenience sampling method, the results might at least have some external validity and provide minor basis for generalizable conclusions. For example, our relatively large sample included a wide age span and the gender distribution fairly reflected an average Swedish student population. By recruiting participants through social media as well as through bulletin boards on campus, students who were not members of the social media network were also reached. Still, the sample may not be representative of the entire target population. Accordingly, we encourage further research and replication in other Swedish student populations in order to strengthen the generalizability of the current findings.

Despite the necessary consideration of these limitations, the study provides strong contributions to existent theory and research. By assessing well-being in terms of what is likely to make people fully functioning, the measurement of flourishing as an outcome of the three orientations strengthened the dichotomy between eudaimonia and hedonia. Due to the more eudaimonic measurement in our study, engagement and meaning accounted for
considerably larger proportions of the variance in well-being than did pleasure. These results indicate that complete well-being goes beyond subjective experiences of positive affect and absence of negative affect, suggesting that subjective well-being may very well be an inadequate measure of well-being because it excludes significant aspects of positive functioning (Ryff, 1989). In light of the results, a multidimensional approach to the study of well-being is recommended with respect to future research. Moreover, we were able to demonstrate the relationship between hedonia (i.e., the orientation to pleasure) and pleasure seeking. By maintaining a unique long-term focus on the frequency of emotional experiences, our results supported the a priori relationship between the hedonic pursuit of happiness and the subsequent maximizing of positive emotions and avoidance of pain. Thus, the results strengthen the notion of the almost negligible bearing that hedonic pleasures actually may have on the fulfillment of people's potential to flourish. Given that frequency and intensity both are relevant dimensions of affectivity and that they seem to yield different results, we suggest integration of both in future research. This integrative approach has also been proposed by Diener et al. (2009). By doing so, the conception and measurement of affectivity in research will be more holistic.

Finally, we were able to put the orientations to pleasure, engagement and meaning into the unique context of flourishing and widen their scope with new outcomes. Previous studies have demonstrated differences in flourishing across nations. Only 20% of Americans (Keyes, 2005, 2007), 24% of Swedes (Huppert & So, 2013) compared to as many as 41% of Danes (Huppert & So, 2013) can be described as being in state of flourishing. Yet, methods to increase flourishing in the population are still scarce (Malinowski, 2013). The results from our Swedish sample may function as an initial step towards further research on methods to increase flourishing. For example, our results demonstrate the importance of how people
approach their way of living given that the orientations seemed unlikely to contribute equally to flourishing. In light of the results that engagement and meaning seem to be essential components of flourishing, we encourage psychologists in the field of applied positive psychology to investigate how to promote meaningful activities and facilitate people's strengths in order to increase flourishing. According to Huppert (2009), an increase in flourishing at a universal level might enhance the lives for those who suffer pathology as well as for those who do not. A universal increase in flourishing could therefore enhance the lives even for those who were closer to the empty life in our distribution. Intervention programs aimed towards increasing flourishing might enable reduction of the total prevalence of mental disorders in the population (Huppert, 2009). Such interventions could perhaps be implemented in schools and workplaces. Again, since positive psychology is a relatively new field there is still a lack of especially longitudinal data. More such data is required to enable investigation of potential health interventions with the aim of increasing flourishing.

The present study offers an insight into the profound question of what makes for a happy life. The way in which people pursue happiness does matter for how well they turn out in the end. Our results show that happiness is more than just positive feelings and absence of negative emotions. In order to flourish, people may have to struggle to find their inner strengths and learn how to use them to benefit themselves and others. The ultimate goal of happiness can be attained in several ways, but happiness does not equal pleasure. A happy life is more than a life of pleasure.
References


negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research, 97*(2), 143-156. doi:10.1007/s11205-009-9493-y


Malinowski, P. (2013). Flourishing through meditation and mindfulness. In S. A. David, I. Boniwell & A. Conley Ayers (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of happiness* (pp. 384-


Ryan, R. M., & Huta, V. (2009). Wellness as healthy functioning or wellness as happiness: The importance of eudaimonic thinking (response to the Kashdan et al. and Waterman...


Vittersø, J., Oelmann, H. I., & Wang, A. L. (2009). Life satisfaction is not a balanced estimator of the good life: Evidence from reaction time measures and self-reported
emotions. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 10*, 1-17. doi:10.1007/s10902-007-9058-1

doi:10.1080/17439760.2011.584548


Skriftliga instruktioner: "På en skala 1-5, hur väl beskriver följande påståenden dig?"

Svar graderas på en skala från 1 (Inte alls som jag) till 5 (Precis som jag).

Siffrorna betecknar frågeordningen i formuläret.

**Life of meaning**

- 2: Mitt liv tjänar ett högre syfte
- 5: När jag väljer vad jag ska göra, så tar jag alltid hänsyn till om det kommer gynna andra människor
- 11: Jag har ett ansvar för att göra världen till en bättre plats
- 12: Mitt liv har en bestående mening
- 14: Vad jag gör har betydelse för samhället
- 17: Jag har spenderat mycket tid på att tänka över vad livet betyder och hur jag passar in i det hela

**Life of pleasure**

- 3: Livet är för kort för att skjuta upp de nöjen som erbjuds
- 8: Jag gör allt för att känna mig euforisk
- 13: När jag väljer vad jag ska göra, så tar jag alltid hänsyn till om det kommer vara nöjesfyllt
- 15: Jag instämmer med följande påstående: "Livet är kort – ät efterrätten först"
- 16: Jag älskar att göra spännande saker som stimulerar mina sinnen
- 18: För mig är det goda livet det nöjesfyllda livet

**Life of engagement**

- 1: Oavsett vad jag gör, så går tiden väldigt fort
• 4: Jag söker upp situationer som utmanar mina färdigheter och förmågor

• 6: Oavsett om jag jobbar eller roar mig så är jag vanligtvis "i zonen", där jag inte är medveten om mig själv

• 7: Jag är alltid väldigt uppslutad i vad jag gör

• 9: När jag väljer vad jag ska göra, så tar jag alltid hänsyn till om jag kan förlora mig själv i det

• 10: Jag är sällan distraherad av vad som pågår runt omkring mig