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## Strengths of character, orientations to happiness, and life satisfaction

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### Abstract

Why are certain character strengths more associated with life satisfaction than others? A sample of US adults ( $N = 12,439$ ) completed online surveys in English measuring character strengths, orientations to happiness (engagement, pleasure, and meaning), and life satisfaction, and a sample of Swiss adults ( $N = 445$ ) completed paper-and-pencil versions of the same surveys in German. In both samples, the character strengths most highly linked to life satisfaction included love, hope, curiosity, and zest. Gratitude was among the most robust predictors of life satisfaction in the US sample, whereas perseverance was among the most robust predictors in the Swiss sample. In both samples, the strengths of character most associated with life satisfaction were associated with orientations to pleasure, to engagement, and to meaning, implying that the most fulfilling character strengths are those that make possible a full life.

**Keywords:** *Character strengths, engagement, pleasure, meaning, life satisfaction, happiness*

### Introduction

Positive psychology has reclaimed character and virtue as legitimate topics of investigation for social science (McCullough & Snyder, 2000). For the past several years, we have been involved in a project that first identified components of good character and then devised ways to assess these components as individual differences (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Our classification includes 24 ubiquitously-recognized character strengths organized under six broader virtues: (a) wisdom and knowledge (creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, perspective); (b) courage (bravery, honesty, perseverance, zest); (c) humanity (kindness, love, social intelligence); (d) justice (fairness, leadership, teamwork); (e) temperance (forgiveness, modesty, prudence, self-regulation); and (f) transcendence (appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humor, religiousness). This classification provides a starting point for a comparative psychology of character (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004).

Although we regard the enactment of any and all character strengths as fulfilling (Aristotle, trans. 2000), some positive traits more robustly predict happiness and life satisfaction than do others. Specifically, studies have shown that five positive traits (love, hope, gratitude, curiosity, and zest) often

correlate quite highly with well-being measured in various ways (Park & Peterson, 2006a, 2006c; Park et al., 2004). And in a longitudinal study, these strengths foreshadowed life satisfaction measured months later, even when their initial levels were controlled (Park & Peterson, 2006c). Why are these character strengths such strong correlates of well-being, and why are other character strengths less strongly associated with happiness and life satisfaction?

One explanation is that there are different ways to be happy (Guignon, 1999; Peterson, 2006; Russell, 1930; Seligman, 2002). One route to happiness is embodied in the doctrine of hedonism (maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain) articulated thousands of years ago by Aristippus who championed immediate sensory gratification as the chief route to a fulfilling life (Watson, 1895). Hedonism was elaborated by Epicurus into the edict of ethical hedonism, which holds that our fundamental moral obligation is to maximize our experience of pleasure. Later British philosophers like David Hume and Jeremy Bentham used hedonism to lay the foundation for utilitarianism, which was ushered into psychology as the underpinning of psychoanalysis and all but the most radical of the behaviorisms. Hedonism remains alive and well today in the name

of a new field, hedonic psychology (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999).

A second way to be happy entails being highly engaged in what one does and experiencing the state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). During flow, time passes quickly for the individual. Attention is focused on the activity itself. The sense of the self as a social actor is lost. The aftermath of the flow experience is invigorating. Flow is not to be confused with sensual pleasure. Indeed, flow in the moment is arguably nonemotional and indeed nonconscious. People describe flow as highly and intrinsically enjoyable, but this description is an after-the-fact summary judgment, and “joy” is not immediately present during the activity itself.

Yet another route to happiness can be traced to Aristotle’s (trans. 2000) notion of eudaimonia: Being true to one’s inner self (demon). According to this view, true happiness entails identifying one’s virtues, cultivating them, and living in accordance with them. Similar positions were advanced by John Stuart Mill and Bertrand Russell and undergird more modern psychological notions such as Rogers’ (1951) ideal of the fully-functioning person, Maslow’s (1970) concept of self-actualization, Ryff and Singer’s (1996) vision of psychological well-being, and Deci and Ryan’s (2000) self-determination theory. Uniting eudaimonic emphases is the premise that people should develop what is best within themselves and then use these skills and talents in the service of greater goods, including in particular the welfare of other people or humankind writ large. Peterson, Park, and Seligman (2005b) created a self-report questionnaire to measure the endorsement of pleasure (hedonism), engagement (flow), and meaning (eudaimonia) as routes to happiness. Initial research showed that these orientations to happiness are empirically distinguishable yet each associated with life satisfaction.

The purpose of the present research was to see whether different strengths of character were related to these orientations to happiness and whether attention to these associations would help to explain which strengths are most satisfying. On the face of it, some strengths seem to be entwined with pleasure (e.g., humor), others with engagement (e.g., creativity), and still others with meaning (e.g., religiousness), but one could also argue that *all* character strengths contribute to engagement (Seligman, 2002), to meaning (Aristotle, trans. 2000), or even to pleasure through their effects on social relationships and the positive emotions that other people enable (Bryant & Veroff, 2006).

The present paper describes an investigation of the links among character strengths, various approaches to happiness, and life satisfaction in two different samples: US adults completing self-report measures

(in English) of these constructs on the Internet and Swiss adults completing paper-and-pencil versions of the same measures (in German). Specifically, the US respondents completed the original English-language versions of the *Values in Action Inventory of Strengths* (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005a), which yields scores for each of the 24 character strengths of interest to us; the *Orientations to Happiness Scale* (Peterson et al., 2005b), which measures the endorsement of pleasure, engagement, and meaning as routes to happiness; and the *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), which assesses overall satisfaction with life as it has been lived. The Swiss sample completed German translations of these questionnaires.

## Method

### *Research participants and procedures*

The US sample consisted of the 12,439 adult respondents from the USA who completed the three measures of interest on the Authentic Happiness website ([www.authentichappiness.com](http://www.authentichappiness.com)) between September 2002 and December 2005. Respondents register on the website and provide demographic information. Then they complete measures of their choosing. They receive immediate feedback about their scores relative to other respondents, and we believe that this feature motivates participants. We presume that respondents come to the website to learn more about positive psychology and themselves. Questionnaires on this website are presented only in English.

Although a self-selected group, respondents are impressively numerous and certainly more diverse than the typical research sample of introductory psychology college students attending one particular college during one particular school term (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004). For the relatively small number (about 5%) of respondents who completed a measure more than once, only the first set of scores was used for the analyses reported here. There were more females than males (71% versus 29%). The typical age of respondents was 40 years of age, with a range across the adult years. The typical level of educational attainment for respondents was a few years of college, ranging from less than high school to post-baccalaureate. Relative to the US population as a whole, our respondents were more highly educated, and many had college degrees (66%).

The Swiss sample consisted of 445 adults recruited in several different ways: through advertisements passed out to individuals in public places ( $N = 182$ ), to undergraduate students in a psychology class

( $N=84$ ), and to members of senior clubs and residence homes ( $N=179$ ). Interested individuals were given questionnaires to complete and return by mail or in person. There were more females than males (61% versus 39%). The typical age of respondents was 50 years of age, with a range across the adult years. Like the US sample, the Swiss sample was more highly educated than the Swiss population as a whole; about 41% of the sample had completed college. As noted, the Swiss sample completed German translations of the questionnaires.

### Measures

*Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS).* The VIA-IS is a face-valid questionnaire that uses 5-point Likert-style items to measure the degree to which respondents endorse items reflecting the 24 strengths of character in our character classification (1 = very much unlike me, 5 = very much like me). There are 10 items per strength (240 total). For example, the character strength of hope is measured with items that include "I know that I will succeed with the goals I set for myself." The strength of gratitude is measured with such items as "At least once a day, I stop and count my blessings." Responses were averaged across the relevant items to provide scores for each of the 24 character strengths.

Details concerning the reliability and validity of the VIA-IS are presented elsewhere (e.g., Park & Peterson, 2006b; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2003, 2004). Briefly: (a) all scales have acceptable reliabilities ( $\alpha > 0.70$ ); (b) test-retest correlations for all scales over a 4-month period are substantial ( $r_s > 0.70$ ) and in almost all cases approach their internal consistencies; (c) scores are skewed to the right but have coefficients of variation ranging from 0.15 to 0.25, implying acceptable variability; (d) self-nomination of strengths correlate substantially ( $r_s > 0.5$ ) with the matching scale scores; and (e) ratings by friends or family members of a respondent's top strengths correlate moderately ( $r_s \cong 0.3$ ) with the matching scale scores for most of the 24 strengths, implying that the VIA-IS reflects something more than just self-perception.

*Orientations to Happiness Scale.* This 18-item measure consists of six items measuring the degree to which one endorses each of three orientations to happiness: Engagement (e.g., "I am always very absorbed in what I do"); pleasure (e.g., "Life is too short to postpone the pleasures it can provide"); and meaning (e.g., "I have a responsibility to make the world a better place"). Each item required a

respondent to answer on a 5-point scale the degree to which the item applies (1 = very much unlike me, 5 = very much like me). Scores were averaged across the relevant items to yield scores reflecting the endorsement of engagement, pleasure, and meaning as routes to happiness. Peterson et al. (2005b) showed that these three subscales are for the most part reliable ( $\alpha s \cong 0.70$ ) and empirically distinct. Furthermore, each subscale is individually associated with higher life satisfaction, although orientations to engagement and to meaning usually have stronger links to well-being than does an orientation to pleasure.

*Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS).* The SWLS of Diener et al. (1985) consists of 5 items which measure the individual's evaluation of satisfaction with his or her life in general (e.g., "I am satisfied with my life," and "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing"). Respondents select one of seven options (ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree") for each question. Responses were summed to provide a total life satisfaction score. Research has established excellent psychometric properties for the SWLS (Diener, 1994). The measure is highly reliable and has a large network of sensible correlates. SWLS scores are typically skewed toward the right, meaning that most respondents are relatively happy, but in most samples there is nonetheless a range in life satisfaction.

### Results

Table I presents the means, standard deviations, and alphas for the different measures for US and Swiss samples. US versus Swiss means were comparable with three exceptions worth noting. First, Swiss reported higher life satisfaction than did Americans ( $t = 54.8$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cohen's (1988)  $d = 0.59$ ). On the face of it, this difference replicates a familiar finding in cross-national comparisons of life satisfaction, which typically find adults from the Protestant countries of northern Europe to be among the happiest citizens of the world (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995). However, the mean life satisfaction score for US respondents in the present study was several scale points lower than what is usually found for US samples (Veenhoven, 2006), perhaps reflecting the special nature of our Internet sample. Second, the US sample scored higher on religiousness than did the Swiss sample ( $t = 11.0$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.51$ ), again a familiar result (Inglehart & Norris, 2004). Third and most interesting because it is a novel finding, American respondents had higher scores on an orientation to meaning than did Swiss

Table I. Strengths of character, life satisfaction, and orientations to happiness in US ( $N=12,439$ ) and Swiss ( $N=445$ ) samples.

	Mean (SD) [ $\alpha$ ]		$\rho$ with life satisfaction		$\rho$ with pleasure		$\rho$ with engagement		$\rho$ with meaning	
	US	Swiss	US	Swiss	US	Swiss	US	Swiss	US	Swiss
Zest	3.58 (0.71) [0.85]	3.59 (0.50) [0.74]	0.54*	0.44*	0.31*	0.38*	0.53*	0.50*	0.47*	0.25*
Hope	3.61 (0.72) [0.85]	3.53 (0.52) [0.77]	0.54*	0.49*	0.29*	0.31*	0.47*	0.40*	0.48*	0.25*
Love	3.93 (0.62) [0.80]	3.84 (0.48) [0.73]	0.47*	0.40*	0.27*	0.22*	0.29*	0.23*	0.43*	0.24*
Gratitude	3.97 (0.63) [0.86]	3.78 (0.52) [0.80]	0.45*	0.29*	0.26*	0.27*	0.33*	0.29*	0.52*	0.29*
Curiosity	4.04 (0.59) [0.84]	3.98 (0.48) [0.78]	0.39*	0.35*	0.25*	0.27*	0.49*	0.40*	0.46*	0.26*
Perspective	3.83 (0.55) [0.81]	3.42 (0.48) [0.77]	0.37*	0.35*	0.22*	0.21*	0.41*	0.29*	0.46*	0.24*
Perseverance	3.64 (0.68) [0.88]	3.48 (0.57) [0.83]	0.32*	0.42*	0.09*	0.21*	0.43*	0.42*	0.28*	0.21*
Religiousness	3.60 (0.89) [0.90]	3.16 (0.85) [0.90]	0.32*	0.14	0.10*	0.06	0.29*	0.23*	0.63*	0.54*
Self-regulation	3.27 (0.65) [0.76]	3.37 (0.54) [0.73]	0.31*	0.30*	0.06*	0.06	0.33*	0.26*	0.24*	0.11
Humor	3.81 (0.64) [0.87]	3.60 (0.56) [0.85]	0.28*	0.29*	0.36*	0.38*	0.27*	0.29*	0.27*	0.21*
Social intelligence	3.76 (0.58) [0.80]	3.60 (0.44) [0.74]	0.28*	0.35*	0.29*	0.27*	0.31*	0.26*	0.37*	0.28*
Forgiveness	3.72 (0.67) [0.86]	3.56 (0.46) [0.72]	0.27*	0.17	0.08*	0.11	0.24*	0.18	0.35*	0.15
Teamwork	3.66 (0.57) [0.78]	3.60 (0.46) [0.74]	0.26*	0.26*	0.14*	0.09	0.21*	0.19*	0.33*	0.19*
Bravery	3.64 (0.62) [0.83]	3.52 (0.51) [0.77]	0.25*	0.34*	0.22*	0.27*	0.40*	0.34*	0.40*	0.22*
Honesty	3.99 (0.49) [0.77]	3.79 (0.43) [0.72]	0.25*	0.30*	0.11*	0.18	0.30*	0.23*	0.32*	0.14
Leadership	3.74 (0.55) [0.80]	3.54 (0.49) [0.78]	0.25*	0.32*	0.19*	0.21*	0.30*	0.31*	0.40*	0.30*
Kindness	3.97 (0.53) [0.80]	3.90 (0.44) [0.72]	0.22*	0.23*	0.20*	0.20*	0.24*	0.25*	0.39*	0.25*
Prudence	3.51 (0.57) [0.77]	3.39 (0.55) [0.76]	0.19*	0.27*	-0.06*	0.12	0.15*	0.23*	0.20*	0.11
Fairness	4.03 (0.49) [0.81]	3.91 (0.45) [0.77]	0.17*	0.21*	0.09*	0.20*	0.24*	0.20*	0.36*	0.18
Judgment	4.04 (0.81) [0.82]	3.71 (0.47) [0.80]	0.15*	0.22*	0.06*	0.18*	0.28*	0.30*	0.29*	0.17
Learning	3.97 (0.63) [0.85]	3.61 (0.60) [0.83]	0.13*	0.16	0.11*	0.18	0.34*	0.38*	0.31*	0.24*
Beauty	3.87 (0.67) [0.85]	3.60 (0.53) [0.75]	0.12*	0.10	0.27*	0.21*	0.26*	0.24*	0.36*	0.27*
Creativity	3.83 (0.70) [0.89]	3.32 (0.60) [0.86]	0.12*	0.19*	0.23*	0.32*	0.39*	0.39*	0.31*	0.35*
Modesty	3.39 (0.64) [0.82]	3.42 (0.53) [0.76]	0.06*	0.07	-0.09*	0.04	0.04*	0.10	0.10*	0.05
Life satisfaction	21.80 (7.50) [0.88]	25.70 (4.80) [0.84]	-	-	0.20*	0.21*	0.35*	0.32*	0.37*	0.22*
Pleasure	3.11 (0.74) [0.80]	3.12 (0.71) [0.77]			-	-	0.32*	0.49*	0.17*	0.29*
Engagement	3.13 (0.74) [0.70]	3.06 (0.62) [0.66]					-	-	0.44*	0.42*
Meaning	3.58 (0.93) [0.83]	2.99 (0.76) [0.76]							-	-

Notes: Partial correlations control for age, gender, and education.  
\* $p < 0.001$ .

respondents ( $t = 43.4$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.69$ ), although orientations to engagement and pleasure were essentially identical.

Table I also shows the correlations in the two samples between the 24 character strengths and life satisfaction. Age, gender, and education were controlled to remove these minor sources of variance within samples, although doing so did not alter the findings. As can be seen, these data largely replicate previous findings about the strengths most highly associated with life satisfaction. In the US sample, the strengths most strongly correlated with life satisfaction were zest, hope, love, gratitude, and curiosity, and in the Swiss sample, the strengths most strongly correlated with life satisfaction were zest, hope, love, curiosity, and perseverance.

Also shown are the correlations between the three orientations to happiness and life satisfaction, which again replicate previous findings. In both samples, each of the orientations was associated with life satisfaction, although the correlation between life satisfaction and meaning was stronger in the US sample than in the Swiss sample ( $r = 3.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Finally, Table I shows the correlations

between each strength of character and each orientation to happiness. Almost all of the correlations were positive, and the strengths most strongly linked to life satisfaction (Table I, top) appeared to be strongly linked to the various orientations to happiness.

To describe more precisely the overall pattern of these associations, we rank-ordered the correlations in each column of Table I and computed Spearman correlations between columns of ranks, separately, for the US and Swiss samples. The resulting Spearman coefficients index the degree of convergence between two sets of partial correlations. The most fulfilling character strengths were also the ones most linked to an orientation to pleasure (US sample  $\rho = 0.46$ ,  $p < 0.03$ ; Swiss sample  $\rho = 0.70$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), to engagement (US sample  $\rho = 0.67$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; Swiss sample  $\rho = 0.44$ ,  $p < 0.04$ ), and to meaning (US sample  $\rho = 0.57$ ,  $p < 0.004$ ; Swiss sample  $\rho = 0.54$ ,  $p < 0.006$ ). Said another way, character strengths are fulfilling to the degree that they are multiply linked to the orientations to happiness that we measured, what we have elsewhere called the full life (Peterson et al., 2005b).

We also identified the particular strengths associated with each endorsed orientation to happiness. The character strength most evident in a life of pleasure (identifiable by the largest partial correlations for both samples, see Table I) was humor. The strengths strongly linked to a life of engagement pleasure included zest, curiosity, and perseverance. A life of meaning was robustly associated with religiousness. In the very large US sample, we also undertook exploratory causal modeling using path analysis to look at the simultaneous and independent paths from all 24 character strengths to the three orientations to happiness and in turn to life satisfaction. With ordinary linear regression, we predicted satisfaction by entering demographics in the first block, all 24 character strengths in the second block, and orientations to happiness in the third block. The overall regression was significant ( $R^2 = 0.44$ ,  $F = 329$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Then we predicted each of the three orientations by entering demographics in first block and all 24 character strengths in the second block. Each of these regressions was significant: For pleasure ( $R^2 = 0.26$ ,  $F = 164$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); for engagement ( $R^2 = 0.39$ ,  $F = 295$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); and for meaning ( $R^2 = 0.52$ ,  $F = 492$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Figure 1 depicts the most robust paths, and these were consistent with the simpler results already presented. All three orientations to happiness

positively predicted life satisfaction, although the paths entailing engagement and meaning were stronger than the path entailing pleasure (Peterson et al., 2005b). Second, various character strengths were associated with life satisfaction through positive effects on all three orientations. Third, different strengths were more versus less associated with particular orientations, much in keeping with the partial correlations shown in Table I.

One additional finding from the exploratory modeling should be underscored. As Figure 1 shows, the “direct” effects of character strengths (especially love and gratitude) on life satisfaction were stronger than the mediating paths involving any of the three orientations to happiness. This finding implies that the three routes to happiness, at least as measured in the present research, hardly exhaust the explanation of why character strengths are associated with life satisfaction.

**Discussion**

Here follows what we learned from our cross-national investigation of character strengths, orientations to happiness, and life satisfaction. First, those strengths of character most associated with life satisfaction were also associated with all three orientations to happiness: Pleasure, engagement,

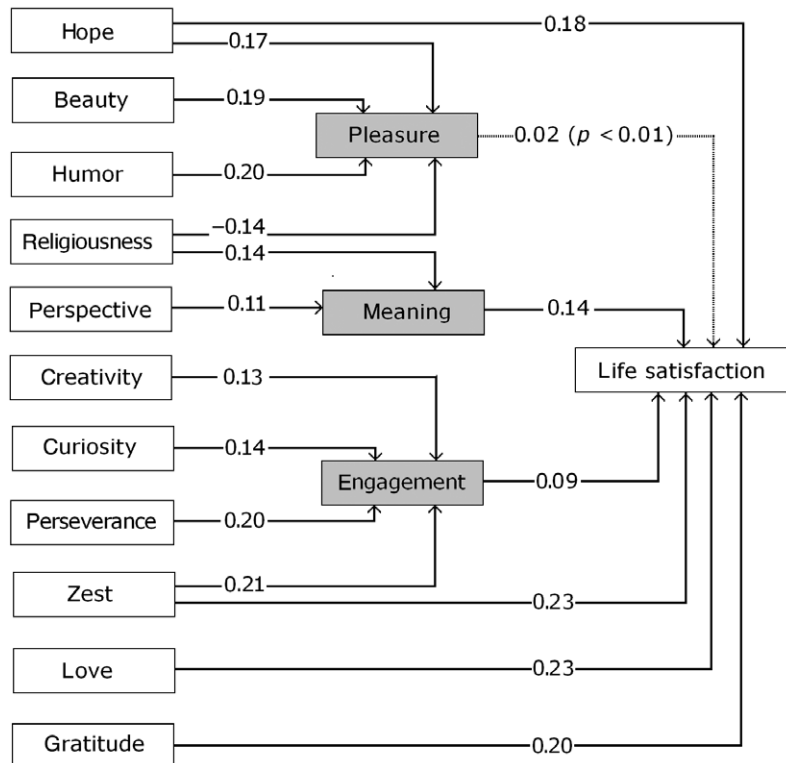


Figure 1. Path diagram. Figures in the diagram are standardized beta coefficients ( $p < 0.001$  except where noted). Paths involving demographic variables are omitted, and only paths entailing character strengths with standardized beta coefficients  $> 0.10$  are shown.

and meaning (Seligman, 2002). The happiest people were those with the fullest lives, and the most satisfying character strengths seemed to be those that made possible a full life (Peterson et al., 2005b). As the attention of positive psychology turns to interventions that build enduring happiness, a full life and its accompanying strengths of character would be worthy targets (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

Second, although the orientations to happiness that we measured partly mediated the associations between strengths of character and life satisfaction, they did not fully explain them. We therefore need additional explanations for why good character is satisfying: What might these be? Aristotle (trans. 2000) argued that happiness is not simply a consequence of virtuous action but also an inherent aspect of such action. When we do a favor for someone, our act does not cause us to be satisfied with ourselves at some later point in time. Being satisfied is an inherent aspect of being helpful, just as grace is a property of a dance done well, not an outcome or effect of the dance. Perhaps life satisfaction is an intrinsic property of living in accordance with certain strengths of character.

We also suspect that virtue can at times be more than its own reward (Peterson & Park, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). People who are loving reap all manner of social benefits. Those who are hopeful and persistent are successful at various pursuits and resilient in the face of setbacks. Zest and curiosity preclude boredom and anxiety. Gratitude promotes savoring. Future studies with longitudinal designs and high-resolution measures are needed to investigate these possible mechanisms.

Another point to consider is that the Orientations to Happiness Scale we used measures the endorsement of different ways to be happy and not necessarily the enactment of these values in everyday life. We can imagine someone who supports the notion of hedonism, for example, but for whatever reason experiences few pleasures. If the Orientations to Happiness Scale were supplemented with measures of the degree to which pleasure, engagement, and meaning were actually experienced, perhaps the character strengths → orientations → life satisfaction paths would be more robust.

A final possibility is suggested by the finding that love and gratitude had strong “direct” effects on life satisfaction. Perhaps these strengths reflect a way to be happy above and beyond pleasure, engagement, or meaning. That other people matter mightily in a satisfied life is one of the well-established findings in positive psychology (Peterson, 2006). A case could be made that good relationships with others are part of a meaningful life, but the data imply that they may represent a distinct orientation to happiness.

Third, our main results held across samples, languages, and research strategies (Internet versus paper-and-pencil surveys), adding to the generality of the conclusions. We acknowledge that both the US and Swiss respondents were non-representative convenience samples and that further research is needed to replicate our findings, especially those concerning national differences, to which we now turn.

Given the differences between the samples, not just in terms of national origins but also in terms of languages and methods of recruitment, the following ideas are tentative. The reader will recall that US respondents reported more religiousness and greater endorsement of meaning than did Swiss respondents. At the same time, the Swiss had higher life satisfaction, a finding that may reflect a bias introduced by the self-selection of US respondents. Perhaps some of the people who complete positive psychology surveys on an Internet site are less than content with their lives and are seeking a different direction.<sup>1</sup> Regardless, in most of our previous research, we found strong cultural and national similarities in the prevalence and correlates of character strengths (Matthews, Eid, Kelly, Bailey, & Peterson, 2006; Park et al., 2006; Shimai, Otake, Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006), so the present results if valid are potentially intriguing.

The Swiss results seem to reflect what Inglehart and Norris (2004) described as post-modern values: Secular and liberal emphases on autonomy and self-expression. Post-modern values characterize industrialized nations, with the USA as a striking exception to this generalization (Inglehart, 1990, 1993; Inglehart & Klingemann, 2000). Religion is much more important in the USA than in any other industrialized nation, perhaps because the USA was settled by so many religious refugees. In any event, the greater religiousness of the US respondents does not translate itself into higher life satisfaction, nor does their greater endorsement of meaning. Why this is the case will require further comparative study that addresses as well the finding that *within* both samples, religiousness and meaning were positively associated with life satisfaction.

We also note that gratitude was among the most robust predictors of life satisfaction in the US sample, whereas perseverance was among the most robust predictors in the Swiss sample. These findings seem congruent with national stereotypes and suggest a hypothesis for future investigation: Life satisfaction in a given nation entails living in accordance with the strengths especially valued in that nation. Our classification of character strengths deliberately included widely recognized strengths of character (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), but this is not to say that all strengths are equally

desired by all people in all places. For example, among young Americans, we have rarely encountered any who celebrate strengths of temperance such as prudence, even if they possess them in abundance and even if they know that they are beneficial (Steen, Kachorek, & Peterson, 2003).

Limitations of the present research should be acknowledged. We have already mentioned the use of convenience samples and, in the case of the US respondents, the potential bias introduced by relying on self-selected individuals who chose to complete Internet surveys. All of our measures relied on self-report, and the design was cross-sectional. As positive psychology research evolves, more ambitious methods are needed: Multimethod assessment of constructs and prospective designs (Park & Peterson, 2006).

In sum, strengths of character are associated with a satisfied life to the degree that they are linked to engagement, to pleasure, and to meaning, in other words, to a full life (Peterson et al., 2005b). Questions remain about the mechanisms linking character and well-being and how they may vary across cultural contexts, but the present results support the premise of positive psychology that attention to good character can shed light on what makes life worth living (McCullough & Snyder, 2000; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). As Aristotle (trans. 2000) proposed long ago, happiness is the purpose of life, and living in accordance with one's virtues is how to achieve happiness.

## Note

1. Available were life satisfaction scores from 52 Swiss adults who completed the SWLS in English on the [www.authentic happiness.com](http://www.authentic happiness.com) website. Their average score (24.3,  $SD = 6.4$ ) was lower than scores for the Swiss sample in the present study (25.7,  $t = 2.50$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = 0.40$ ) but higher than scores for the US sample (21.9,  $t = 2.81$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = 0.36$ ), implying that Internet respondents are tilted toward dissatisfaction but not enough to account fully for the US–Swiss differences found in the present study.

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