

## Metacognition, self-criticism as predictors of fear of happiness among college students

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Whether it is a transition from high school to university or the pressure to excel in the college degree, college is one of the stressful and overwhelming phases of a student life. A research study was formulated along the same lines. **Aim:** To investigate the predictive value of Metacognition and Self-criticism on Fear of Happiness among college students. **Methods:** The sample of 80 college students was employed, comprising of 40 male and 40 female students. The Fear of Happiness Scale (Joshnloo, 2013), Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MIA; Schraw & Dennison, 1994), The Forms of Self criticizing/ Attacking & Self- Reassuring Scale (FSCRS; Gilbert et al., 2004) tools were employed. **Results:** The results indicated a significant predictor value of Declarative Knowledge (Metacognition) and Evaluation (Metacognition) on Fear of Happiness.

**Keywords:** Metacognition, Self-criticism, Fear of Happiness

Starting university or excelling at school is not only a period of intense transition, but if not adapted well, can be counterproductive to the mental health of the student. Therefore understanding the underlying structures of maladaptive cognitions in the students can aid the researchers to find a 'solution' for the same.

The term "metacognition" was originally formulated by John Flavell (1976). Flavell described metacognition as "cognition about cognitive phenomenon", or to put it simply it is thinking about thinking. Put differently, metacognition is the awareness of the knowledge one possesses and one's ability to analyse, control and manipulate these cognitive processes (Meichenbaum, 1985). It is the adeptness to mould prior information into functional strategies to learn, solve a problem and/or analyse the results obtained. Within the domain of metacognition, distinction has been established between "Knowledge about Cognition" and "Regulation of Cognition" (Flavell, 1979, 1987; Schraw & Dennison, 1994). Knowledge about Cognition refers to the awareness of individuals about their cognitive processes and how to integrate it into different learning and problem-solving strategies. Regulation of Cognition refers to how the individuals actually apply their cognitive processes to regulate their learning, such as planning, information management strategies, comprehension

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monitoring, de-bugging strategies, and evaluation of progress and goals. Positive or high level of metacognition can lead to happiness and enhancement of positive emotions (Saricam, 2015).

Development and accentuation of positive emotions, such as happiness and personal growth have always been a focus of research in the field of positive psychology. Happiness can be described as “the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one’s life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile.” (Lyubomirsky, 2007). Every human being seeks the experience and fulfilment of this positive emotion. However, due to certain causes individuals develop an aversion or a fear of happiness.

The concept of ‘fear of happiness’ or ‘cherophobia’ was propounded by Joshanloo in 2013. It is a belief that experience of happiness can lead to negative consequences. Therefore, individuals may deliberately avoid events that invoke positive experience of happiness (Joshanloo & Weijers, 2013).

There are four distinct causes as to why happiness may be processed with discretion in some cultures: Believing that being happy will provoke bad things to happen; happiness will make you a worse person; expressing happiness is bad for you and other; and pursuing happiness is bad for you and others (Joshanloo & Weijers, 2013). Fear of happiness among academic students can be an outcome of their self-critic and perfectionist nature. Ambitious students generally tend to set high expectations of themselves in regard to their performance. This can lead to self-criticism if the said bar is not realised. They continually push themselves into a spiral of unhealthy emotions and often associate positive emotions such as happiness with low productivity (Joshanloo & Weijers, 2013). Studies of individuals with high self-criticism acknowledged the existence of fear of happiness (Gilbert et al., 2012).

Self-criticism is a propensity to respond in a hostile manner towards the self due to the occurrence of a perceived variance between the desired and the actual outcome. This internal hostility stems from the intolerance towards attainment of the high standards of performance that he/she has set for themselves (Carver et al., 1989; Carver et al., 1985; Carver, 1998; Shahr, 2015). The self-critical disposition can be said to be rooted in the negative or unhealthy relationship dynamics with the parents or the caregivers. Rejective or restricting parenting can lead to more self-critical sense of self (Koestner, 1991; McCranie & Bass, 1984). In regards to the external stressor, universities and school’s associate success with academic excellence and high competition. These training and environmental contexts may accentuate the self-critical tendencies in a college student (Henning et al., 1998; Parker, 2002). As a consequence, students not only perform poorly but are unable to analyse the cause of their inadequate learning ability (Dunning et al., 2003; Dunning et al., 2004). Such lack of metacognitive ability prevents students from not only succeeding at an academic level, but also hinders the self-regulated learning that is needed to be a lifelong learner capable of adapting to any learning situation. It is essential to understand the constructs of these variables to find out how the causal association of metacognition and self-criticism can effect the fear of happiness in the students.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### *Rationale of The Study*

Positive psychology has always focused on the understanding and strengthening of positive emotions. But a number of studies have reported that people not only face difficulties in processing negative emotions, as in case of psychopathology, but also positive emotion like

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happiness, compassion, etc. Fear of Happiness is a novel and innovative concept for the accentuation of the field of positive psychology. People might develop this phobia due to several reasons which may or may not fall into the realm of self-awareness. Metacognition thus, is an essential term to explore which is simply our ability to control our own thoughts. Understanding the way, we think, feel and process our external situations, emotions, and thoughts can be helpful in understanding the basic psychology of the individuals. Traumatic event, stress or lack of coping skills might lead to fear of happiness, self-criticism and distorted metacognition. Self criticism is studied as a negative trait of personality. It is related to peoples' negative internal thoughts about one's self or about one's thoughts, behaviours or attributes.

The study on these variables is important not only for the reason that there have not been many researches in these aforementioned variables, but these variables play an important role in the lifespan of an adolescent.

### *Aim*

1. To investigate the relationship between Fear of Happiness and Self-criticism, Metacognition.
2. To assess the predictive power of Metacognition and Self-criticism for Fear of Happiness among college students.

### *Hypotheses*

1. There will be a significant correlation between Fear of Happiness and Self-criticism, Metacognition.
2. Metacognition will significantly predict Fear of Happiness among college students.
3. Self-criticism will significantly predict Fear of Happiness among college students.

### *Sample*

1. The sample constituted of 100 college students from different universities of Jaipur city.
2. The subjects were selected using Convenience Sampling Approach.

**Inclusion criteria:** participants are between the age of 18-24 years; all had a basic understanding of English language; subjects belonged to middle to upper class socio-economic class.

**Exclusion criteria:** participants with physical problems; participants with Hindi educational background; people who are married; participants who are working.

### *Procedure*

*Phase I:* The college authorities were approached and the permission was obtained to collect data. The sample population was selected on the basis of the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Informed consent was obtained from the sample population.

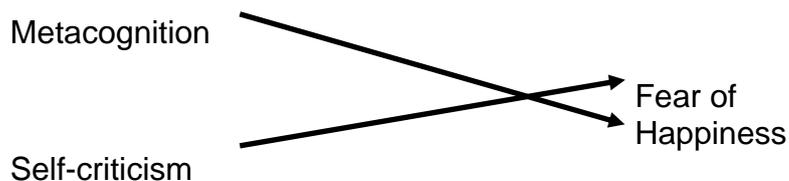
*Phase II:* To test the hypotheses, data was collected with the help of questionnaires which were administered in a random order.

*Phase III:* After the data collection, questionnaires were checked for response biases and only the authentic data was used for data analysis and to draw conclusions of the study.

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### Research Design

To fulfil the above aims Causal Research Design was employed.



### Tools for Measurement Used

- **The Fear of Happiness Scale (Joshanloo, 2013):** A 5-item measure of respondent's fear of happiness. Respondent answer each item using a 7-point likert type scale ranging from 1(Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale is .86 and the test -retest reliability coefficient is between .72 and .79.
- **Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MIA; Schraw & Dennison, 1994):** A 52-item measure of respondent's level of metacognition awareness. Respondent answer each item by ticking True or False depending on how the statement applies to them. The scale is divided into two parts: knowledge about cognition (declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge and conditional knowledge) and regulation of cognition (planning, information management strategies and comprehension monitoring). It internal consistency of .88 for knowledge of cognition scale and .91 for regulation of cognition scale.
- **The Forms of Self criticizing/ Attacking & Self- Reassuring Scale (FSCRS; Gilbert et al., 2004):** This scale was developed by Gilbert, Clarke, Hempel, Miles and Irons (2004). It was developed to measure self-criticism and the ability to self-reassure. It is a 22-item scale, which measures different ways people think and feel about themselves when things go wrong for them. The items make up three components, there are two forms of self-criticalness; inadequate self, which focuses on a sense of personal inadequacy (I am easily disappointed with myself), and hated self, this measures the desire to hurt or persecute the self (I have become so angry with myself that I want to hurt or injury myself), and one form to self-reassure, reassure self (I am able to remind myself of positive things about myself). The responses are given on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 0 = not at all like me, to 4 = extremely like me). Cronbach alphas were 0.90 for inadequate self and 0.86 for hatred self and reassured self respectively.

## RESULTS

**Table 1. Mean, SDs and Correlation between Metacognition, Self-Criticism and Fear of Happiness among college students**

Variables			Mean	Sd	Fear of Happiness
Meta-Cognition	Knowledge about Cognition	Declarative Knowledge	6.113	1.9936	-.229*
		Procedural Knowledge	3.538	1.1017	
		Conditional Knowledge	4.188	1.1594	

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Variables			Mean	Sd	Fear of Happiness
Regulation of Cognition	Planning		5.550	1.6604	1.6604
	Information Management		7.975	1.8070	0.001
	Comprehension Monitoring		5.438	1.5082	-0.144
	Debugging Strategies		4.538	1.2623	-0.130
	Evaluation		4.600	1.7401	-.241*
Total		41.938	7.8633	-0.215	
Self-Criticism	Inadequate Self		15.638	5.3468	0.193
	Reassured Self		20.500	6.0776	-0.070
	Hatred Self		5.225	3.5613	0.195
Fear of Happiness		11.925	5.3220	1	

\* correlation at .05 level of significance

\*\* correlation at .01 level of significance

**Table 2. Summary of Linear Regression for Evaluation predicting Fear of Happiness (N= 100)**

MODEL	UNSTANDARDISED COEFFICIENTS			STANDARDISED COEFFICIENTS		R <sup>2</sup> (Change)	F	t
		B	Standard Error	Beta (β)	R <sup>2</sup>			
1	(Constant)	15.317	1.652		0.058	0.058	4.815	9.274
	Evaluation	-0.737	0.336	-0.241				-2.194

a. Predictors: (Constant), EVALUATION

b. Dependent Variable: FEAR OF HAPPINESS

Table 2 depicts 5.8% variance in Fear of Happiness as explained by Evaluation.

**Table 3. Summary of Linear Regression for Declarative Knowledge predicting Fear of Happiness (N= 100)**

MODEL	UNSTANDARDISED COEFFICIENTS			STANDARDISED COEFFICIENTS		R <sup>2</sup> (Change)	F	t
		B	Standard Error	Beta (β)	R <sup>2</sup>			
1	(Constant)	15.669	1.890		0.053	0.041	4.335	8.289
	Declarative Knowledge	-0.613	0.294	-0.229				-2.082

a. Predictors: (Constant), DECLARATIVE KNOWLEDGE

b. Dependent Variable: FEAR OF HAPPINESS

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Table 3 depicts 4.1% variance in Fear of Happiness as explained by Declarative Knowledge.

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to predict the Fear of Happiness from Metacognition and Self-criticism among college students.

Since there exists a significant negative correlation between Fear of Happiness and Declarative Knowledge, the more the learner becomes aware of himself/herself as a learner, develops strategies to enhance learning outcomes, the fear of happiness in the individual will decline significantly.

Additionally, negative relationship has been observed between Fear of Happiness and Evaluation. When an individual does not critically evaluate the intrinsic and extrinsic factors occurring before, during and after a performance, this lack of complete knowledge and control over the events creates fear of happiness. Low level or negative metacognition can increase fear of happiness (Saricam, 2015).

Culture determines the individuals' attitude towards positive emotions and experiences, including whether they seek to avoid or diminish them (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). It was observed that fear of happiness beliefs are more strongly endorsed in non-Western cultures (Lyubomirsky, 2000).

#### *Limitations*

1. A larger data sample could have been collected.
2. The research can be conducted on working population and other populations as well.
3. Data could have been collected from different private and government universities and compared.
4. No Indian tests were used.

#### *Implications*

1. Since few researches have been conducted on these variables, it should be more explored.
2. People should be made aware of new concepts in the field of psychology as there are some variables that may be subconsciously understood, but needs to be made aware of consciously so it can be used in a more efficient way.
3. Happiness and well-being have mostly been talked about in the field of psychology, talking and creating awareness about fear of happiness is also of utmost importance.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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