

Subjective Well-Being as a Function of Playfulness and Self-Forgiveness

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ABSTRACT

The present study is based on the theoretical framework of Adaptation and Coping mechanism of Subjective Well Being, where Playfulness is seen as an adaptive mechanism and Self-Forgiveness is seen as a coping mechanism. The study included Indian students aged 18-25 years. Participants (N=256) completed Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) for subjective well-being, Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) for Self-Forgiveness, and Other-directed, Lighthearted, Intellectual, and Whimsical (OLIW) scale for playfulness, administered online. Pearson Correlation was used to analyze the obtained data. The results indicated a significant low positive correlation among playfulness, self – forgiveness and subjective well – being. A non – significant low positive correlation was seen between a type of playfulness and Subjective well – being.

Keywords: *Playfulness, Self - forgiveness, Subjective Well - Being*

In the past few decades, the literature on playfulness in adults as a personality disposition has been on a rise. Barnett (2007) defined playfulness as “the predisposition to frame (or reframe) a situation in such a way as to provide oneself (and possibly others) with amusement, humor, and/or entertainment. Individuals who have such a heightened predisposition are typically funny, humorous, spontaneous, unpredictable, impulsive, active, energetic, adventurous, sociable, outgoing, cheerful, happy and are likely to manifest playful behavior by joking, teasing, clowning and acting silly.”

Based on this definition, Proyer (2015) proposed a revised definition of playfulness as a personality trait in adults stating that “Playfulness is an individual differences variable that

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allows people to frame or reframe everyday situations in a way such that they experience them as entertaining, and/or intellectually stimulating, and/or personally interesting. Those on the high end of this dimension seek and establish situations in which they can interact playfully with others (e.g., playful teasing, shared play activities) and they can use their playfulness even under difficult situations to resolve tension (e.g., in social interactions, or in work-type settings). Playfulness is also associated with a preference for complexity rather than simplicity and a preference for—and liking of—unusual activities, objects and topics, or individuals” (Proyer, 2015; p. 93-94). The current study focuses on Proyer’s definition of playfulness as a personality trait and as an adaptive mechanism.

Over the years forgiveness has been defined as “a reaction given by the individuals when they are hurt or feel violated to an extent, as a result, it has now become an important and vital personality trait” (Eaton et al. 2006; Hannon et al. 2012; McCullough et al. 2013; Menezes Fonseca et al. 2012). Furthermore, the concept of forgiveness has been divided into two types of interpersonal forgiveness (forgiveness towards others) and self-forgiveness (Forgiving oneself) by Mauger et al. (1992). Moreover, it has been reported that the act of forgiveness appears to be beneficial as it does promote personal well-being across multiple domains (Hills et al., 2015,2007; Worthington et al., 2007).

Subjective well – being, a term first introduced by Diener in 1984, aimed at understanding one’s personal evaluation of the quality of life, inclusive of cognitive judgements and affective reactions. Therefore, Subjective Well – Being has been defined as a person’s cognitive and affective evaluations in his/her own life that been known to be influenced by both internal factors (viz temperament, ability to cope with defeats) and external factors (viz, quality of social relationships, ability to meet basic needs etc.) (Diener, 2000).

In a research by M. Staempfli (2007), experiences of normative stress by highly playful adolescents were not different from less playful adolescents however there was a difference between what was perceived to be stressful by the two groups which determined their wellbeing. The engagement of the two groups into different coping mechanisms (active, internal and withdrawal) were very similar therefore playfulness correlated positively with coping styles. In a sample of 255 adults, it was found that adult playfulness demonstrated a strong positive correlation between life satisfaction and preference for enjoyable activities and an active way of life (Proyer, R. T., 2013). Another study that measured playfulness over the lifespan found that numerically strongest correlations between playfulness and happiness were found between the age groups of 18-25, 61 - 65 and those that were 71 years and older (Proyer, R. T., 2014). Various researchers (Proyer,2013, Farley et al,2020) have mentioned the existence a positive relationship between playfulness and other aspects of wellbeing in the available literature like, intrinsic motivation, creativity, spontaneity, positive attitudes towards workplace, job satisfaction, academic achievement, greater quality of life, or pleasurable and engaged life.

The current study is similar to online research done by Farley et al, (2020) who investigated the relationship between playfulness and well – being. The OLIW scale of playfulness and PERMA – profiler was used for administration. The results suggested that certain facets of playfulness made statistically unique contributions to the overall well – being, whereas an absence of a certain element of playfulness as a predictor of overall well-being was found.

Adaptation is an important factor in understanding subjective well-being, because when it comes to one's well-being it is the recent events which has a greater impact as compared to

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the events from the past (Suh, Diener and Fujita, 1996). In a cross - sectional study by Magnuson and Barnett (2013) playfulness served as a strong adaptive function with the university students, providing them with specific cognitive resources that can be used in manifesting effective coping behaviors using stressor – focused coping strategies.

Self-forgiveness in relation with subjective well-being has been studied longitudinally suggesting that the changes in forgiveness are positively associated with the adjustment and changes in one's subjective well-being at significant level (McCullough, & Root, 2008; Orth, Berking, Walker, Meier, & Znoj, 2008). Cug (2015) has also reported that higher scores on the self-forgiveness scale indicates higher levels of subjective well-being. Facilitation of self-forgiveness can help individuals to cope with difficult emotions and challenging circumstances as it can be used as the coping strategy to reduce stress, anxiety and increase one's well-being (Lin, Mack, Enright, Krahn, & Baskin, 2004; Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington, 2014).

Adverse situations are inevitable in life. The period of 18 to 25 year involves transition through several life events, each involving varying roles to be played and accompanying responsibilities. Some transitions may be successful, while others may not. In the case of the latter, individuals need to take responsibility for and bear the consequences of their actions, re-evaluate their choices and reflect on their setbacks. Taking these aspects into consideration, both self-forgiveness and playfulness have a vital role to play in fostering effective coping with life's setbacks, playing a role in one's subjective well-being. The current study proposes that there is a connection between the aforementioned variables.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample comprised of 256 persons. The participants for this study were Indian college students and the age range was 18 to 25 years old. In total 180 females responded (70%), 75 males responded (29%) and 1 person preferred not to comment on this (1%).

Instruments

Three measures were used in this study.

1. Heartland Forgiveness scale (HFS): It is an 18-item self-reported questionnaire that measures dispositional forgiveness. The scale consists of three subscales which is of six items each:

- a) Items 1 to 6 indicates an individual's forgiveness of self and a sample item is, "With time, I am understanding of myself for mistakes I've made".
- b) Items 7 through 12 indicates an individual's forgiveness of others and a sample item is, "If others mistreat me, I continue to think badly of them".
- c) Items 13 through 18 indicates an individual's forgiveness of situations and a sample item is, "When things go wrong for reasons that can't be controlled, I get stuck in negative thoughts about it".

A seven-point Likert scale (1 = almost always false for me, to 7= almost always true for me) is used, wherein higher score indicated an individual is more willing to forgive others, himself/ herself, and/or situations, and low scores indicated that an individual has less willingness to forgive others, himself/herself, and/or situations. 10 items of the scale were scored reversely (2,4,6,7,9,11,13,15,17).

2. OLIW Scale of Playfulness: It is a 28-item scale developed by Proyer (2017) and it consists of four facets of Playfulness, which are:

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- a) Other-directed - It measures an individual's ability to enjoy in playing with others. Lighthearted - It measures an individual's ability to see life as a game and not to worry too much about future consequences of his or her behavior.
 - b) Intellectual - It measures an individual's ability to like to play with ideas as well as thoughts.
 - c) Whimsical - It measures an individual's ability to find amusement in grotesque and strange situations.
- There are seven items on each facet and it is on a 7-point scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"). Range of scores on OLIW scale is from 28 to 196 and items, 2,5,13,15,21 and 27 are reverse scored.

3. Satisfaction with life scale: It is a 5-item scale which is used to measure global life satisfaction. It consists of 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Each item is scored from 1 to 7 and the range of scores on scale is from 5 (low satisfaction) to 35 (high satisfaction).

Procedure

Convenience sampling technique was used to send google forms to college students in India, who were within the age group of 18 to 25 years and who were currently enrolled in a course at the undergraduate or postgraduate level. Students who had any major illness and/or experienced any major life event in recent past were excluded from the current study. English versions of the scales, consisting of measures of playfulness, self-forgiveness and subjective well-being were used in the current study. Permission to use the scales online was obtained from their respective authors. Participants were provided with a Google-form link via WhatsApp and Instagram and those who consented to the informed consent, were asked to fill in the demographic details and self-report questionnaires. The debrief was also mentioned at the end of the google form (refer to appendix). Participants were not financially compensated but upon request, individual scores were sent to participants after the completion of the study.

RESULTS

In this study, we hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between the subscales of playfulness (other-directed, light-hearted, intellectual, whimsical) and subjective well-being and a positive correlation between self-forgiveness and subjective well-being.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation)

N=256	Playfulness				Self-Forgiveness	Subjective wellbeing
	Other-directed	Lighthearted	Intellectual	Whimsical		
Mean	38.24	32.43	30.87	30.44	27.94	21.35
SD	5.60	6.53	5.23	5.72	5.80	6.75

Table 1 represents the mean and standard deviation values for playfulness which were as follows: other-directed (M = 38.24, SD= 5.60), lighthearted (M = 32.43, SD = 6.53), intellectual (M= 30.87, SD= 5.24), whimsical (M = 30.44, SD = 5.73), for self-forgiveness (M= 27.94, SD= 5.80) and for subjective well-being (M= 21.35, SD = 6.75). Outliers were dealt with by calculating the mean scores of all the three scales and winsorization i.e., a way to minimize the influence of outliers in the data either by assigning the outlier a lower

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weight or changing the value so that it is close to the other values in the set. However, winsorizing could be used only for three data points per scale and therefore the remaining outliers were discarded from the study. A scatter plot was used to represent the correlation between the subscales of playfulness (other-directed, lighthearted, intellectual, whimsical) and subjective well-being and for self-forgiveness and subjective well-being.

Figures 1-5 (Appendix C) represent the scatterplots of other-directed playfulness and subjective wellbeing, lighthearted playfulness and subjective well-being, intellectual playfulness and subjective well-being, whimsical playfulness and subjective well-being and also self-forgiveness and subjective wellbeing.

The null hypotheses stated that there is no significant positive correlation between the subscales of playfulness i.e., other-directed playfulness and subjective wellbeing, lighthearted playfulness and subjective well-being, intellectual playfulness and subjective well-being, whimsical playfulness and subjective well-being and also between self-forgiveness and subjective well-being.

Table 2. Correlation values and p-values.

N=256	Playfulness				Self-Forgiveness
	Other-directed	Light-hearted	Intellectual	Whimsical	
Correlation coefficient	0.146**	0.130*	0.183**	0.099	0.314**
Significance	0.010	0.018	0.002	0.056	< 0.001

The data were analyzed using Pearson's r correlation with N= 256 and df = 255. Table 2 represents the obtained correlational values and the p-values. Results showed that there was a low positive correlation between other-directed playfulness and subjective well-being (r= 0.146), lighthearted playfulness and subjective well-being (r= 0.130), intellectual playfulness and subjective well-being (r= 0.183), whimsical and subjective well-being (r= 0.099). There was also a low correlation between self-forgiveness and subjective well-being (r= 0.314).

According to Pearson's correlation table with alpha value 0.05, there exists a significant low positive correlation between other-directed playfulness and subjective well-being [r (255) = .146, p = .010], lighthearted playfulness and subjective well-being [r (255) = .130, p = .018], intellectual playfulness and subjective well-being [r (255) = .183, p = .002]. A low positive correlation was found between whimsical and subjective well-being [r (255) = .099, p = .056], which was almost near to significance. A significant positive moderate correlation was found between self-forgiveness and subjective well-being [r (255) = .314, p = < .001]. Thus, the null hypotheses were rejected for playfulness (other-directed, lighthearted and intellectual) and subjective well-being, self-forgiveness and subjective well-being but not for whimsical playfulness and subjective well-being.

DISCUSSION

The current study showed a positive correlation between other-directed playfulness and subjective wellbeing, lighthearted playfulness and subjective well-being, intellectual playfulness and subjective well-being, and whimsical playfulness and subjective wellbeing and also between self-forgiveness and subjective well-being. Similar results were found in a study by Farley. A et al. (2020), where a sample of 175 Australian adults were investigated

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for the relationship between playfulness and well-being, using the OLIW scale of playfulness and PERMA – profiler. The results suggested that other directed and intellectual playfulness made statistically unique contributions to the overall well – being, whereas, there was an absence of the whimsical element of playfulness, as a predictor of overall well-being.

Certain reasons for a low correlation could be that a few respondent's data were scattered farther away from the line of best-fit (as can be seen in figures 1-5) because of which the data were deflated and resulted in a low correlation. The homogeneity of the sample could also have resulted in a low correlation since 86% of the respondents were from Mumbai. The age range of the sample was restricted to 18- 20 years and only 7 respondents were of 24 years. Thus, an increased age range would have resulted in a better correlation. The sample was not equally distributed i.e., there were 75 males and 180 females, which might have affected the entire correlation.

The non-significant relationship between whimsical playfulness and subjective well-being, can be explained by the aversive nature of reactions caused by people, to those who display whimsical playfulness. It has also been identified as a silly variable of playfulness. *Katagelasticism* i.e., the tendency to enjoy laughing at others is rather aversive in nature and can be interpreted as a bullying-type of behavior while also being related to psychopathic traits. The definition of whimsical does mention that these individuals are able to find amusement in grotesque and strange situations. Thus, displaying whimsical playfulness at an exceeding level could elicit negative reactions from those around the individual, possibly leading to lowered subjective well-being (Proyer, 2013).

The low correlation between self-forgiveness and subjective well-being can also be explained by the relationship shared between self-forgiveness and guilt (Strelan,2007). As individuals have a higher sense of autonomy in this particular age-group, the increased risks taken and consequences are borne by that same individual. Thus, any mistakes or mishaps caused are most likely due to the actions of the individual himself and thus, he may have to atone for his own errors. Thus, a sense of guilt may be elicited in the individual which could lead to the lowered tendency to forgive oneself.

The low correlation between lighthearted playfulness and subjective well-being can be explained by a study which indicated negative relationships with certain health habits, such as security orientation, drug use, and grooming which was associated with certain lighthearted attitudes (Proyer 2017, 2018). A low correlation was also found in a study conducted by Farley. A et al. in 2020 between lighthearted playfulness and wellbeing.

Though correlations have been found, there were possible confounds that could have affected the results. This could include the sustained interest of the participant in the study- loss of interest during filling the questionnaires could lead to less accurate responses or even fatigue experienced during the course of the study and distractions in the environment. Online survey research, though useful and convenient, has certain drawbacks such as respondents being less likely to stay focused for more than 8-10 minutes than with other research methods and respondents not feeling the need to be accurate and honest with their responses. Even though anonymity was maintained, respondents might give socially desirable responses as all the questionnaires were self- report measures. It is also possible that the participant had gone through a certain history i.e., any recent event in his/ her personal life that led to a change in his/ her current behavior or attitude and the answers

might not reflect the subject's true sentiments leading to results that would indicate a low correlation among the variables. Subject's misinterpretation of any question could lead the participant to give a random response due to lack of clarity combined with the unavailability of the administrator to solve doubts related to the questions due to this being an online study. Due to the same reason, there are chances of sample biases occurring along with response rate bias and selection bias. The latter could occur due to the current sampling being a convenience sample i.e., only those respondents who had access to an internet connection could participate in the online study. Thus, these could be all the possible confounds in the current study.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

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Appendix B

Figure 1: Other-directed and subjective well-being

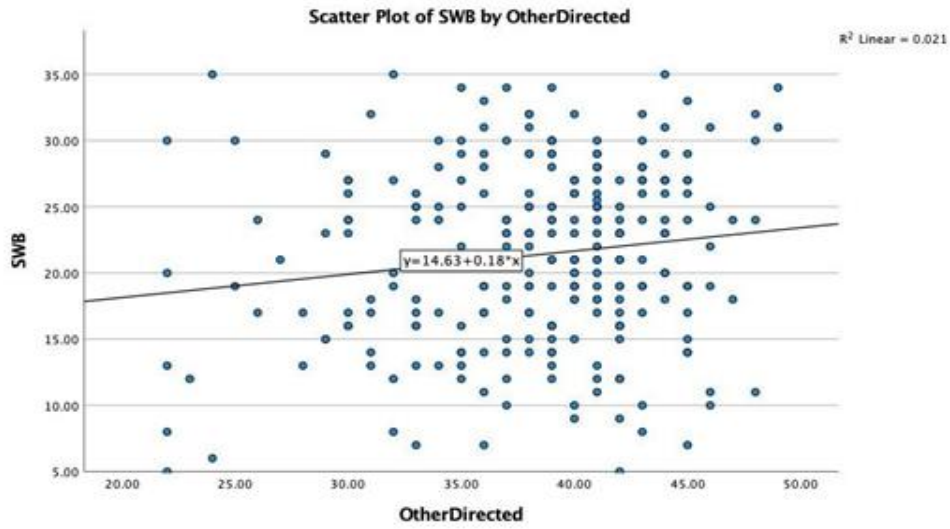


Figure 2: light-hearted and subjective well-being

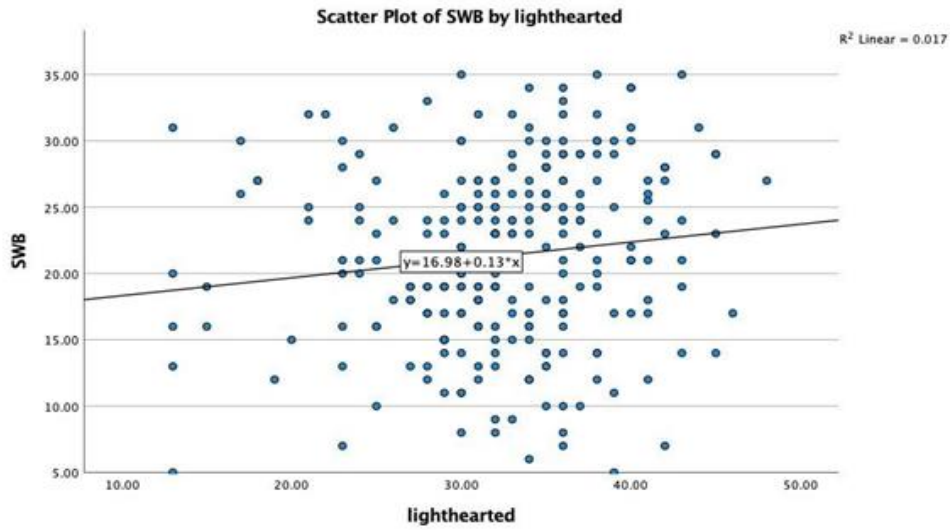
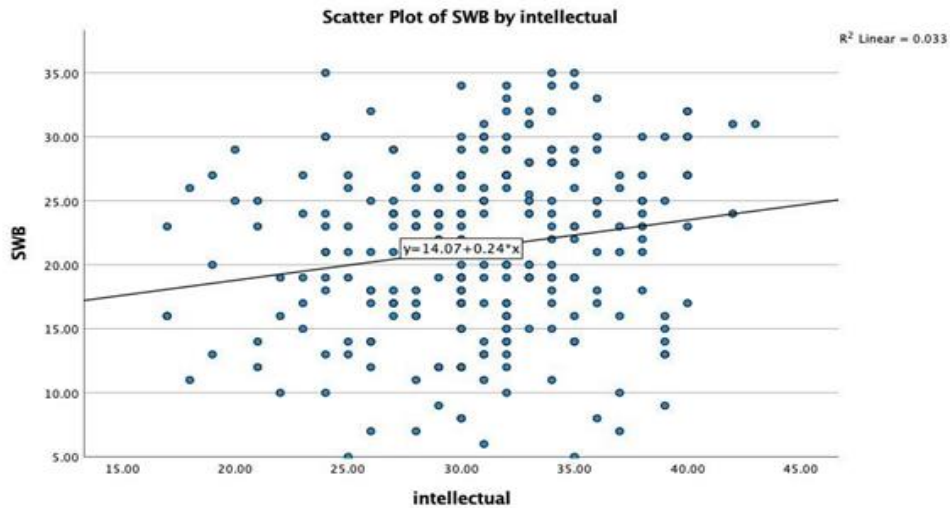


Figure 3: Intellectual and subjective well-being



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Figure 4: whimsical and subjective well-being

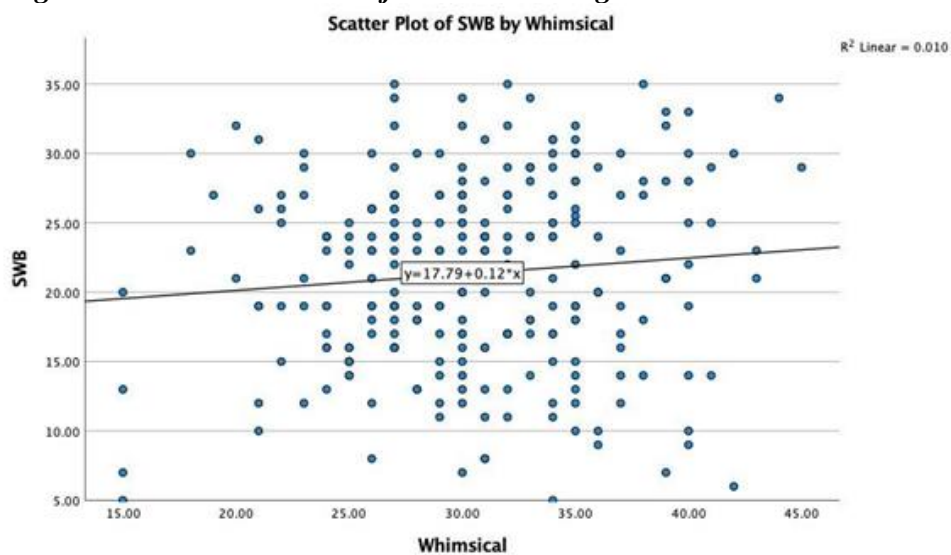


Figure 5: Self-forgiveness and Subjective well-being

