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# Hope, Life Satisfaction, and Motivation

Haley K. McConnell
*Anderson University*, hmcconne@umich.edu

Laura G. Stull
*Anderson University*, lgstull@anderson.edu

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Abstract

This study examined three types of motivation—autonomous, controlled and impersonal (Deci & Ryan, 1985)—in relation to life satisfaction and hope in a sample of persons living in transitional housing in central Indiana. It was hypothesized that life satisfaction and hope would be positively related to autonomous motivation and negatively related to impersonal motivation. Further, the relationship between life satisfaction, hope, and controlled motivation was explored. Data were analyzed using multiple regression analyses. While hypotheses were not supported, other important relationships were found in the data, such as interesting directional differences and correlations. How these findings may be particularly relevant to the homeless population are discussed.

*Keywords*: motivation, self-determination theory, homelessness, hope, life satisfaction

Hope, Life Satisfaction, and Motivation

Many individuals study psychology to attempt to understand why people do what they do. They are often asking the broader question, "What motivates people?" Motivational orientation is key in determining many different aspects and outcomes of life, for example vocational satisfaction (Fernet, Austin, & Vallerand, 2012). Understanding different motivational types and characteristics that are related to those different motivational types is important in attempting to alter human behavior for positive reasons, for example, in attempting to create a higher level of life satisfaction. The purpose of our project is to understand the relationship between life satisfaction, hope, and motivation, with motivation as the main focus of our research. Motivation matters because it relates to other issues such as level of satisfaction with life and hope, which are important and related to many other facets of life and well-being.

**Motivation**

Key motivational researchers (Deci & Ryan, 1985), identified three types of motivational orientations. Autonomy orientation refers to how much an individual is geared toward factors that stimulate intrinsic motivation. A person who is highly autonomously oriented may display a high degree of self-initiation and seek challenges more readily. Controlled orientation reflects a motivation inspired by deadlines, rewards, expectations, and directives of others. Persons displaying a high control orientation are more dependent on external stimuli, such as what others want for them rather than what they want for themselves. Finally, impersonal orientation describes the motivation of persons who believe that obtaining a desired outcome is beyond their realm of control or influence. They may believe that their lives are left up to luck or fate. This type of motivation often leaves people feeling ineffective.

One study in particular on motivation related to our research. Weinstein and Ryan (2010) studied autonomous and controlled motivational types as related to helper and recipient benefits. Using university aged students they set up several scenarios under which the helpers had either a choice to help or were told to help in various ways. The findings supported the idea that autonomous motivation provided greater benefits for both the helper and the recipient. Specifically, they found that, "autonomous helpers experienced more positive affect, greater vitality, and more self-esteem than did nonhelpers or controlled helpers after the helping task" (p. 222). This study illustrates several areas where the importance of embracing autonomous motivation versus controlled motivation is clearly beneficial.

**Motivation and Life Satisfaction**

Research has frequently indicated that an important correlate of motivation is a person's satisfaction with life. Nix and colleagues (1999) performed a study looking at the effects of differing motivational types on happiness and vitality, two characteristics strongly related to life satisfaction. Importantly, their findings suggested a positive relationship between autonomous motivation and vitality.

A number of studies on motivation and life satisfaction seem to include a physical activity component. In particular, Steinkamp and Kelly (1985) studied these three variables in older adults. They found that retired persons who were high challenge seeking (closest to autonomously motivated) were no more or less satisfied with life. Their findings conflict with other research; however they had a potential explanation for the variance. High challenge-seeking persons may feel a sense of uselessness surrounding retirement that could negatively impact the results. Martin-Albo and colleagues (2012) also conducted a study measuring motivation, life satisfaction and physical activity. They included a fourth variable, self-concept.

Their finding most pertaining to our study was that there was a significant relationship between the direct effects of intrinsic motivation on physical self-concept and of self-concept on life satisfaction. They suggest that intrinsic motivation has an indirect effect on level of satisfaction with life.

**Hope**

Several studies of importance have been done surrounding the issue of hope. This characteristic is part of the larger process in dealing with motivation. For the purpose of the current study, hope is defined as the wish and possibility of attaining a goal rather than the expectation of attaining a goal (Erikson, Post, & Paige, 1975). Namely, on the subject of hope, Erikson, Post, and Paige (1975) performed a study that measured hope as an expectation of goal attainment. One of their findings was that effective treatment increases the perceived probability of goal attainment, suggesting that perhaps we can influence the amount of hope a person holds. In other words, improving a person's understanding of the probability of attaining a specific goal will change his or her perspective, which will positively influence their level of hope. Furthermore, Miceli and Castelfranchi (2010) suggested that hope is not based on expectation of attaining a goal so much as wish and possibility of attaining a goal, yet also argue the potential of influencing a person's level of hope. Additionally, Kortte and colleagues (2012) conducted a study involving 174 participants, all patients in inpatient acute rehabilitation programs having had some sort of motor impairment. The purpose was to see if facilitating psychological variables would impact outcomes of the patients' rehabilitations. Their findings suggested that using interventions that enhance the patients' sense of hope may be useful in improving participation outcomes following acute medical rehabilitation. This study demonstrated how

hope can potentially be a motivating factor, and prompts the question of whether hope and autonomous motivation are positively related.

**Motivation, Life Satisfaction, and Hope**

Some literature provides a picture of how motivation, life satisfaction, and hope may interact. O'Sullivan (2010) looked at many different aspects of how self-efficacy (closely related to autonomous motivation), hope, eustress, and life satisfaction were related. O'Sullivan studied these variables among a convenience sample of 118 undergraduate students. A major finding of this study was that hope and self-efficacy were positively correlated with life satisfaction. Furthermore, the results indicated that hope is the best predictor of life satisfaction. While the current study is attempting to discern if life satisfaction and hope are indicators of motivation, the findings of this study are of importance because it demonstrates a relationship between these three variables.

**Conclusion**

Given the literature surrounding motivation, life satisfaction, and hope, we have three hypotheses. First, autonomous motivation will be positively associated with both life satisfaction and hope. Second, impersonal motivation will be negatively associated with hope and life satisfaction. The third hypothesis on controlled orientation is exploratory because there is little evidence supporting a hypothesis in the research. We are interested in exploring the relationship between controlled orientation, life satisfaction, and hope.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were persons living in transitional housing. They included volunteers from a homeless shelter in central Indiana. We recruited only adults, ages 18 and older. Each participant was asked to complete all portions of the study.

**Measures**

Three measures were used in our study, the first of which measured motivation. We chose the General Causality Orientation Scale (GCOS) (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This measure is comprised of 12 vignettes, each of which gives a situation and asks three questions about what one would do in the given situation.  For example, one question states, "You have been offered a new position in a company where you have worked for some time. The first question that is likely to come to mind is:" and is followed by three questions, for example, "What if I can't live up to the new responsibility?" Each of the questions is rated on a Likert-type scale from one (very unlikely) to seven (very likely). The scores of the questions corresponding to each of the three subscales are added together to produce for each participant a rating on each of three types of motivation (autonomy, controlled, impersonal), and therefore uses interval scaling. The scale is used to assess the strengths of three different motivational orientations within individuals. It has been used in many other noteworthy studies and has a high level of validity (e.g., Koestner & Zuckerman, 1994; Lin & Chiu, 2007; Liu, Chen, & Yao, 2010).

The second measure is the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). This scale includes five statements, each of which the participant rates from one to seven with one being strongly disagree and seven being strongly agree. The scale is scored by adding each of the five scores given by the participant. This measure has been used in many key studies and also has a high level of reliability and validity (e.g., Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991). This measure has no subscales.

The third and final measure is the Adult State Hope Scale (ASHS) (Snyder et al., 1996). This measure is similar to the SWLS in that it is comprised of statements which the participant rates. The ASHS gives six statements and the participant will rate each statement from one to eight, one being definitely false to eight being definitely true. The scale asks participants to answer as they are feeling at the current moment. Scoring this measure is done by adding the ratings of each statement. Higher scores indicate higher levels of hope. This measure has two subscales—Pathways and Agency. For the purpose of our study we only included the total score in analyses. This scale has a high level of both reliability and validity and has been used by many key studies in hope (e.g., Snyder et al., 1996).

Finally, we asked demographic questions of gender and age.

**Procedures**

Before handing out the surveys we explained to the participants the purpose and intent of our research and had them read and sign a consent form. Each participant was then handed a packet of the surveys all stapled together. The instruction given to the participants was to complete the surveys in the given order. The university Institutional Review Board approved the study procedures.

The instruments were presented with the GCOS always being first, the ASHS and SWLS counterbalanced, and with a demographics questionnaire attached to the back of each packet. This ordering was intended to control for order effects such as differing lengths of the surveys and the content of an earlier presented variable affecting the answers to another variable.

**Results**

The sample was taken from a homeless shelter in central Indiana. Participants included adult residents ($n = 36$), with a mean age of 41.15 years (SD= 12.10).

Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1. Multiple regressions were performed to examine potential predictors of the three types of Motivation (i.e. subscales from the 12 item vignette version of the General Causality Orientation Scale). For all regressions, demographics including age and gender were entered in the first step. In the second step, Life Satisfaction (i.e. responses from the Satisfaction with Life Scale) and Hope (i.e. responses from the Adult State Hope Scale) were entered simultaneously.

Table 1

*Descriptive statistics for autonomous, controlled, and impersonal motivation, satisfaction with life, and hope.*

| Variable | $n$ | range | $\bar{x}$ (sd) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Impersonal Motivation | 36 | 1.00-7.00 | 3.64 (1.02) |
| Controlled Motivation | 36 | 1.00-7.00 | 4.30 (1.05) |
| Autonomous Motivation | 36 | 1.00-7.00 | 5.30 (1.09) |
| Life Satisfaction | 36 | 1.00-7.00 | 3.42 (1.76) |
| Hope | 35 | 1.00-8.00 | 5.58 (1.69) |

The demographic variables were not significant predictors of autonomous, controlled, or impersonal motivation. The first regression revealed that life satisfaction and hope together did not explain a significant portion of the variance in autonomous motivation, $\Delta R^2 = 0.12$, $F(2, 29) = 2.05$, $p = 0.15$. Due to the medium effect sizes, life satisfaction and hope were assessed as individual predictors of autonomous motivation. Hope was a marginally significant individual predictor of autonomous motivation, $\beta = 0.46$, $p = 0.057$. Life satisfaction was not a significant individual predictor of autonomous motivation, $\beta = -0.37$, $p = 0.12$. In the second regression, life satisfaction and hope together did not explain a significant amount of the variance of impersonal motivation, $\Delta R^2 = 0.04$, $F(2, 29) = 0.60$, $p = 0.55$. Life satisfaction was not a significant individual predictor of impersonal motivation, $\beta = 0.12$, $p = 0.61$. Hope was also not a significant individual predictor of impersonal motivation, $\beta = -0.25$, $p = 0.29$. A third regression analysis

found that life satisfaction and hope did not explain a significant amount of the variance of controlled motivation, $\Delta R^2 = 0.03$, $F(2, 29) = 0.41$, $p = 0.67$. Life satisfaction was not a significant individual predictor of controlled motivation, ($\beta = -0.15$, $p = 0.54$), nor was hope a significant individual predictor of controlled motivation ($\beta = 0.21$, $p = 0.38$).

Pearson correlations revealed notable, but not significant, directional differences in the association between hope and the three types of motivation. The relationship between hope and impersonal motivation was negative as hypothesized ($r = -0.19$, $p = 0.46$), while the relationships with between hope and autonomous motivation was positive as hypothesized ($r = 0.19$, $p = 0.27$). The relationship between hope and controlled motivation was also positive ($r = -0.13$, $p = 0.27$). There was also a positive correlation between controlled and impersonal motivation ($r = 0.70$, $p < 0.01$), and between controlled and autonomous motivation ($r = 0.57$, $p < .01$). Conversely, there was a weak relationship between autonomous and impersonal motivation ($r = 0.23$, $p = 0.18$). A final correlation worth noting is the positive relationship between hope and life satisfaction ($r = 0.61$, $p < .01$). Other correlations are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Pearson correlations for all variables*

|  | **1.** | **2.** | **3.** | **4.** | **5.** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Impersonal Motivation** | - | | | | |
| **2. Controlled Motivation** | 0.65** | - | | | |
| **3. Autonomous Motivation** | 0.07 | 0.44** | - | | |
| **4. Life Satisfaction** | -0.04 | -0.06 | -0.12 | - | |
| **5. Hope** | -0.22 | 0.11 | 0.13 | 0.62** | - |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

**Discussion**

Our first hypothesis, that hope and life satisfaction would be positive predictors of autonomous motivation was partially supported. Hope was marginally significant in predicting autonomous motivation, while life satisfaction did not significantly predict autonomous motivation. Contrary to predictions, data did not support our second hypothesis, that life satisfaction and hope would be negative predictors of impersonal motivation. In regards to our third, exploratory hypothesis, life satisfaction and hope were not significant predictors of controlled motivation.

The finding of hope as a marginally significant predictor of autonomous motivation is consistent with past findings. Given a larger sample size, it is likely that there would have been enough power to detect a difference. This is consistent with findings of Kortte and colleagues (2012) who said that hope is a motivating factor. Our research suggests that hope is important because it may have the potential to aid a person in being autonomously motivated. In other words, it may be possible to autonomously motivate individuals toward their goals by first increasing hope that their goals are *possible*. Because past research has found that there are many positive outcomes of autonomous motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Silva, et al., 2010; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010), understanding that hope may have the power to increase autonomous motivation is a powerful conclusion. Additionally, there was a moderate effect in predicting impersonal motivation with hope. Given a larger sample size, it is likely that we would have been able to detect a significant association between these two variables. More research needs to be done to further explore the relationship between hope and impersonal motivation.

Other findings of the current study were largely inconsistent with the literature. A study done by Weinstein and Ryan (2010) found that persons who were autonomously motivated

experienced many benefits, such as positive affect, greater vitality, and more self-esteem.

Furthermore, Nix and colleagues (1999) found a significant positive relationship between

autonomous motivation and both happiness and vitality, two variables strongly related to life

satisfaction. Data from the current study did not reveal a significant relationship similar to these.

The inconsistency in findings between past research and the current study may be a result a

variety of factors. First, there may be a difference between the homeless sample surveyed in the

current study and populations surveyed in past research. For example, it may be that individuals

within the homeless population have been hopeful in the past, and have not experienced the

result they were hoping for, which may negatively influence their impersonal or controlled

motivation differently that in a more general population. Second, it may be that there is a

relationship between these variables, and we did not have enough participants—and therefore

enough power—to detect the relationships.

The current study revealed some interesting relationships on which there were no

hypotheses. For example, hope and life satisfaction were significantly related. This finding is

consistent with work by O'Sullivan (2011) who indicated that of the variables included in their

study, hope was the best predictor of life satisfaction. Furthermore, it could be that life

satisfaction does not directly influence motivation, but may work through hope to either increase

or decrease motivation types. Further research needs to explore the possible mediated

relationship between these variables.

Notably, although hope was not significantly related to any of the motivation types, there

was a directional difference in the correlations.  As previously stated, it is likely that the small

sample size reduced the ability to detect significant relationships, particularly with the Pearson

Correlations which are sensitive to sample size.  Hope was positively related to autonomous

motivation but negatively related to impersonal motivation. This directional difference may be important in regard to the control a person feels over a given situation. For example, the positive relationship between hope and autonomous motivation may indicate that as people feel more hopeful they are potentially more likely to feel motivated autonomously and may feel as if they have some control over a given situation. This is dissimilar to impersonal motivation where individuals feel they have little to no control over circumstances. It is unclear whether or how empowerment or control affects the relationship between hope and different types of motivation. Further research is needed to explore this possibility.

Similar to hope, life satisfaction and autonomous motivation were non-significantly but negatively related and life satisfaction and impersonal motivation were non-significantly but positively related. This finding is inconsistent with our hypothesized direction for these variables. In other words, as life satisfaction increased, autonomous motivation decreased. Dissimilarly, as life satisfaction increased, impersonal motivation also increased. An explanation for this is unclear as past research has demonstrated the opposite effects (Martín-Albo, Núñez, Domínguez, León & Tomás, 2012). There is an exception which may be helpful in interpreting this information. One study found no significant association between high challenge-seeking women (close to autonomous motivation) and life satisfaction (Steinkamp & Kelly, 1985). They explained these findings by suggesting that high-challenge seeking women at retirement age do engage in more exercise, but more for the sake of having something to do, and less because it fills a need to demonstrate competence. They also noted that many of these high-challenge seeking women retire before they wish to, and adjust poorly to retirement, resulting in feeling a loss of purpose. Similarly, in the homeless population from which we sampled, those who are autonomously motivated may feel dissatisfied in their failed efforts to obtain and hold a job,

housing, etc. despite their *willingness* to do so. On the contrary, those who are impersonally

motivated may not feel dissatisfaction in their present circumstance, as it is (from this

framework) not attributed to their actions but rather to fate, divine workings, etc. More research

should examine potential mediators between types of motivation and a resulting satisfaction with

life.

Finally, the relationships between the motivation types deserve further attention. Both

impersonal motivation and autonomous motivation were significantly correlated with controlled

motivation, but impersonal and autonomous motivations were not significantly correlated. This

suggests that aspects of controlled motivation may be integral to both autonomous motivation

and impersonal motivation, but that autonomous motivation and impersonal motivation do not

overlap much if at all in their defining characteristics.

There were a few limitations in our research. As mentioned earlier, the sample size was

smaller than the desired amount for adequate power. Had the sample been larger, it would have

improved the ability to detect statistical significance. Additionally, the General Causality

Orientation Scale was lengthy and perhaps formatted in a way that was confusing to participants.

It was also written at a reading level above eighth grade, which may have posed problems with

comprehension. There was also potentially a response bias within the measures. Many of the

surveys that were filled out had the same number circled for the answer to every question,

suggesting that some participants may not have answered questions in line with their actual

thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes. This alone could have skewed results. Finally, many participants

had questions regarding the General Causality Orientation Scale, suggesting that it may have

been worded in a confusing way.

While our sample was small, it is critical to research the homeless population in order to learn how to increase their motivation. Based on previous research, it seems as though hope and life satisfaction are motivating factors, and we wanted to test these same hypotheses with our population of interest. Although the sample was too small to find significance, it remains valuable data as it presents some relationships and trends that are helpful in working to motivate the homeless population and attempt to improve their quality of life and self-sustainability.

Recommended future research could go many directions. It would be interesting to take the same variables to a different population, either to understand a specific population or to compare with the homeless data collected here. A future study on motivation would perhaps benefit from using a different, less lengthy and extensive measure than the GCOS. Some demographic pieces of information would be worthwhile to add, including marital status and parental status (whether participants have children or not). There may be something to say about differing family dynamics on the three variables studied, particularly motivation and life satisfaction. Finally, adding resilience as a variable to a study similar to this one may be an intriguing addition. Specifically, the relationships between hope and resilience and autonomous motivation and resilience would be particularly interesting. The interest in resilience is especially present when thinking about the homeless population because many individuals in such a situation have dealt with varying levels of trauma and hardship; some would say it is an integral part of their self-identity. It would be interesting to see what role resilience, the ability to recover from change or misfortune, has on motivation and hopefulness within this population.

To summarize, each of our three hypotheses were not supported, but there were important relationships among some of our variables and other interesting trends to note that are of value. More research needs to be conducted on motivation, life satisfaction, and hope among the

homeless population in order to uncover what best motivates them. This research is critical in

order to reduce homelessness and improve the individual's quality of life.

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