

I Am so Happy ‘Cause My Best Friend Makes Me Feel Unique: Friendship, Personal Sense of Uniqueness and Happiness

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Abstract Decades of empirical research leave no doubt that friendship experiences are consistent correlates of happiness. Yet, little is known about how friendships are related to happiness. The present study examined personal sense of uniqueness as a mediator of the relationship between same-sex best friendship quality and happiness in three samples each employing a different measure of happiness ($n = 2,429$). Results provided support to the mediational model in every sample and showed that it was gender invariant. The findings suggest that one reason why the quality of friendships is related to happiness is because friendship experiences promote individuals’ feelings of uniqueness. The implications of the findings for friendship and happiness research are discussed and directions for future research are outlined.

Keywords Bootstrapping · Happiness · Personal sense of uniqueness · Same-sex best friendship · Structural equation modeling

1 Introduction

Friendships constitute an essential role in the happiness of individuals. This, of course, is not a new idea. It has been proposed and elaborated on since Aristotle (Pangle 2003) and the early empirical work investigating the correlates of happiness (Watson 1930; Wilson 1967). Not surprisingly, decades of theoretical and empirical work in the scientific literature on happiness has consistently highlighted and documented the robust association of positive friendship experiences (friendship support, overall friendship quality) with individual happiness (Demir et al. in press; Diener and Biswas-Diener 2008; Edwards and Klemmack 1973; Lyubomirsky 2007; Reis 2001). Importantly, the friendship-happiness link has been observed across age, ethnic and cultural groups with several methods,

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including observational and longitudinal assessments (see Demir et al. in press, for a review). Considering the well-established associations of friendship experiences with happiness, Demir and his colleagues (Demir et al. in press; Demir and Özdemir 2010; Demir et al. 2011b) suggested that future research should move beyond the mere documentation of the friendship-happiness link and investigate variables that might explain when or how friendship is related to happiness. Investigation of the mediators of the friendship-happiness link is an important empirical endeavor because it has the potential to promote our understanding of the ways between the constructs. The present study gave heed to this call and investigated personal sense of uniqueness (Şimşek and Yalınçetin 2010) as a mediator of the friendship-happiness link. It is proposed that feelings of uniqueness explain why friendship quality is related to individual happiness. In the following sections, we first define the constructs of the present study and their relationships with happiness, and then elucidate on how uniqueness accounts for the association of friendship quality with happiness.

1.1 Happiness

Happiness, or subjective well-being, as it is interchangeably used in the literature, is the cognitive and affective evaluations of one's own life (Diener 1994). Although investigators commonly assess these two dimensions with well-established measures in the research literature (Diener et al. 2002; Lent 2004; Sheldon and Lyubomirsky 2007), there are other approaches to assess happiness as well. For instance, the global assessment of whether one is a happy or unhappy person, defined as subjective happiness (Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999), is becoming a popular approach to measure happiness (e.g., Warner and Vroman 2011). This variety in the assessment of happiness, especially when investigating the friendship-happiness link or testing a mediational model that involves friendship experiences, might raise some concerns to the investigator. For instance, does the association between friendship variables and happiness vary depending on the happiness measure used? Would the proposed models be supported regardless of the way happiness is assessed? Knowing that the measures that are commonly utilized in the empirical literature to assess happiness (cognitive dimension, affective dimension, and subjective happiness) are moderately related to each other (e.g., Howell et al. 2010; Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999; Pavot and Diener 2008) does not necessarily address this concern. This is because of the arguments supported with empirical evidence showing that the associations of close relationships constructs (e.g., intimacy, overall quality) and happiness vary depending on the measure used to assess happiness (Demir 2010; Saphire-Bernstein and Taylor in press; Walen and Lachman 2000).

The present investigation aimed to address the issue raised above by employing three different measures of happiness, assessing different components of and approaches to happiness, when examining the associations between the study variables and testing the proposed model. Specifically, we gathered data from three independent samples each using a different measure to assess happiness. Obtaining similar associations between the study variables and finding support for the model across different measures of happiness has the potential to alleviate the concerns raised above, at least for friendship and the variable investigated in the current study. On the other hand, finding that the associations of the study variables with happiness vary and/or this pattern influences the model tested depending on the measure of happiness would yield support to the arguments calling for a clear distinction between different measures of happiness.

Since the seminal works of Watson (1930), Wilson (1967) and Diener (1994), empirical research on happiness identified numerous correlates, causes, and consequences of happiness (Argyle 2001; Lyubomirsky et al. 2005a, b; Sheldon and Hoon 2007). The present study investigated the relationships of friendship experiences and personal sense of uniqueness with individual happiness. Theoretical and empirical reviews of the associations between these constructs and happiness are presented in the following sections.

1.2 Friendship and Happiness

Friendship is a voluntary interdependence between two individuals that includes the experience and satisfaction of various provisions (e.g., intimacy) to varying degrees (Hays 1988). These provisions include, but are not limited to, companionship, emotional security, help, and self-validation. Although some investigators focus only on intimacy or support when assessing friendship (e.g., Baldassare et al. 1984; Gladow and Ray 1986), it has been argued that the broader overall quality of the friendship should be assessed to have a better sense of the functioning of the friendship (Demir and Weitekamp 2007; Furman 1996). Accordingly, the overall quality of friendship was assessed in the present study. As reviewed by Furman (1996) and abundantly studied in empirical research (Bukowski et al. 1994; Mendelson and About 1999), friendship researchers rely on well-established instruments to assess how frequently these provisions are experienced in friendships. When scholars assess multiple positive friendship features, the sum of these relationship experiences are referred to as friendship quality (e.g., Demir and Weitekamp 2007; Hussong 2000). In the present investigation, we followed this practice and assessed the broader friendship quality that encompasses the theoretically identified provisions.

Empirical research has consistently shown that friendship experiences are reliable and robust correlates of individual happiness. Specifically, several studies employing various methods (e.g., longitudinal) documented that having a friend, satisfaction with the friend, friendship intimacy and support, and overall friendship quality are positively related to individual happiness (Baldassare et al. 1984; Camfield et al. 2009; Chan and Lee 2006; Hussong 2000; Lu 1995; Pinquart and Sorensen 2000; see Demir et al. in press, for a review). Although empirical evidence supporting the friendship-happiness link is plenty, less is known about how friendships contribute to happiness. That is, the empirical knowledge about the specific processes through which friendship quality influences individual happiness is limited.

Our search of the literature identified only two studies that addressed this particular process (Demir and Özdemir 2010; Demir et al. 2011b). Demir and Özdemir (2010) reported that satisfaction of basic psychological needs (e.g., Deci and Ryan 2000) within the friendship mediated the association of best friendship quality with happiness. The study of Demir et al. (2011b) showed that feelings of perceived mattering (e.g., Marshall 2001) to the best friend explained how friendship experiences are related to individual happiness. Demir and his colleagues highlighted the need for empirical research to identify other potential mediators that could explain the relationship between friendship and happiness. Specifically, they proposed that investigation of psychological variables that might explain how friendship is associated with happiness is important because such attempts not only move beyond the mere documentation of the friendship-happiness link but they also have the potential to elucidate the ways that explain how these two constructs are related. The present study addressed this call and investigated personal sense of uniqueness as a mediator of the relationship between friendship quality and happiness.

1.3 Personal Sense of Uniqueness and Well-being

Personal uniqueness has been one of the most important constructs in both the humanistic approach and positive psychology. Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow were among many others who stressed the importance of individuals' sense of personal uniqueness in self-actualization and mental health. According to Rogers (1961), acknowledging one's self as a unique individual is a base for developing a self-determined personality, which refers to taking responsibility for one's choices and decisions. For him, it is nearly impossible to actualize one's potential without appreciating one's sense of uniqueness. Maslow (1954), similarly, indicated that the science of psychology should reorient its direction to the unique characteristic of individuals because uniqueness is the only source from which self-actualization could be derived. It is clear that personal uniqueness has been defined as a positive human striving for growth and well-being.

A variety of different approaches to uniqueness have been observed in the empirical literature (Brewer 1991; Elkind 1967; Lapsley 1993; Lapsley and Rice 1988; Maslach et al. 1985; Snyder and Fromkin 1977). Of these, the uniqueness theory of Snyder and Fromkin (1980) and the concept of adolescent uniqueness (Elkind 1967) received the most empirical attention. We start our presentation of the concept of uniqueness with these two popular approaches.

Snyder and Fromkin's (1980) theory on uniqueness is based on the similarity-differentiation continuum. That is, a feeling of uniqueness is thought to be due to one's perception of being different from others in the community or in the reference group. Specifically, they claim that individuals thrive to be moderately distinct from others and are happiest when they achieve this because individuals perceive high levels of similarity or dissimilarity to others as unpleasant. Although theory (Snyder and Fromkin 1980) and empirical research (e.g., Walsh and Smith 2007) highlight a variety of different ways to achieve uniqueness such as through one's attitudes and abilities, an overwhelming majority of the studies examined the need for uniqueness as it relates to consumption behaviors (Burns and Warren 1995; Lynn and Harris 1997; Simonson and Nowlis 2000; Tian and McKenzie 2001). Thus, Snyder and Fromkin's (1980) claim that individuals are happiest when they perceive themselves moderately different relative to others has not been the focus of much empirical research with the exception of initial studies (Fromkin 1972). Yet, one study directly testing this claim showed that uniqueness seeking or moderate sense of uniqueness was not related to psychological well-being (Law 2005). Although uniqueness seeking (need for uniqueness) might be a useful construct to consider in consumer research and psychotherapy (Lynn and Snyder 2002), and might have some societal benefits (Snyder and Feldman 2000), empirical literature does not convincingly suggest that it promotes individual happiness. Perhaps this is because the need for uniqueness construct is based on the similarity-differentiation continuum. Can someone not feel unique because of who s/he is? Also, this construct has been criticized for its emphasis on risky displays of uniqueness (Lynn and Harris 1997), and for being a defense mechanism as opposed to a personal strength as conceptualized within humanistic psychology (Lynn and Snyder 2002).

Another conceptualization of uniqueness that has received considerable empirical attention in the developmental psychology literature is adolescents' personal uniqueness. In this literature, adolescent personal uniqueness refers to feelings of loneliness and alienation (e.g., "No one understands me") and is conceived of as a personal fable associated with perceived invulnerability, which is ultimately linked to risk-taking behaviors (Elkind 1967; Lapsley and Rice 1988; Millstein and Halpern-Felsher 2002). Although

developmental psychologists still debate the reasons for personal uniqueness (see Lapsley and Hill 2010), two things about this construct are clear. First, adolescent uniqueness, like the need for uniqueness, is based on the similarity-differentiation continuum such that it is conceptualized as an inclination to see oneself different from others. Second, empirical evidence consistently documented a positive association between adolescent uniqueness and a variety of negative well-being indices such as depression and suicidal ideation (Aalsma et al. 2006; Greene et al. 2000). Not surprisingly, adolescent uniqueness has been proposed to be a risk factor for internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Aalsma et al. 2006). Overall, the way adolescent uniqueness is conceptualized and its negative role in psychological well-being stands in sharp contrast with how humanistic psychologists conceived uniqueness. As mentioned above, is it not possible to feel unique by appreciating one's being?

Although the concept of uniqueness is considered a personal strength in humanistic psychology, the popular conceptualizations of this construct do not represent this idea. Instead, as it was the case for adolescent uniqueness, it had negative connotations. Also, both approaches (Elkind 1967; Snyder and Fromkin 1980) focus on uniqueness on the basis of similarity-differentiation continuum. In an attempt to address this limitation in the literature, Şimşek and Yalınçetin (2010) introduced a new conceptualization of the construct: the personal sense of uniqueness (hereafter SoU). Taking the humanistic approach to uniqueness as a base, the authors defined SoU as a personal inclination to acknowledge one's self as having distinctive features with the feeling of worthiness. It refers to the feelings of being somehow different and yet worthy just because of being who one is, which can be considered a kind of non-contingent self-worth. Thus, the perception of being unique, according to the authors, might not be equal, or reducible to, simply being different from others as indicated by the concepts of need for uniqueness or adolescent uniqueness. In contrast with these conceptualizations, SoU stresses a personal consideration of one's unique existence, rather than focusing only on the individuals' inclination to feel different from others. This sense of uniqueness represents an unconditional self-worth fostered by important figures in one's life. This idea is consistent with Maslow's (1954) and Rogers' (1961) arguments. Specifically, Maslow (1954) argued that "The love of a person implies, not the possession of that person, but the affirmation of that person. It means granting him, gladly, the full right to his unique manhood." (p. 195). Rogers (1961), consistent with Maslow (1954), suggested that having a relationship partner that provides caring and unconditional positive regard contributes to the self-acceptance of one's unique and idiosyncratic characteristics. Thus, supportive and intimate exchanges in close relationships have the potential to promote one's sense of uniqueness, which represents a kind of non-contingent self-worth.

Consequently, the higher the levels of SoU, the more one experiences feelings of being a valuable individual just because of who one is. Although there seems to be a similarity between SoU and self-esteem, SoU refers to an unconditional self-worth due to being a unique individual rather than any other specific personal features. It is plausible, then, to argue that SoU contributes to one's happiness given that empirical research found self-worth to be one of the strongest predictors of happiness (e.g., Lyubomirsky et al. 2006). Indeed, SoU as representing an unconditional self-worth has been found to be strongly and positively associated with happiness as well as other mental health variables such as resilience, dispositional hope, and basic psychological needs satisfaction while negatively related to anxiety and depression (Şimşek and Yalınçetin 2010). Thus, individuals who accept their special characteristics, fostered by their interactions with significant others, and feel unique are more likely to feel happy in their lives.

At this point, it is essential to consider possible cultural differences in uniqueness. Past theoretical empirical work on the cultural construction of self evaluate uniqueness, defined as the need to be different from others, as a fundamental personal experience in individualistic cultures (Kim and Drolet 2003; Kim and Markus 1999; Markus and Kitayama 1991). When defined as a need to be distinct from groups representing the similarity-difference polarity, uniqueness not surprisingly can be considered to be incompatible with collectivistic cultures. Defining uniqueness in this way also is not consistent with the humanistic approach and the way uniqueness is defined in this study. The conceptualization of uniqueness in this study capitalize on the idea that one can develop a sense of uniqueness by appreciating and accepting one's unique existence together with others (Rogers 1961; Şimşek and Yalınçetin 2010). This is theorized to be achieved by establishing and maintaining positive and supportive close relationships (Maslow 1954; Rogers 1961). Defined in this way, uniqueness might be compatible with all cultures. Indeed, the work of Vivian Vignoles on distinctiveness principle (Vignoles 2000; Vignoles et al. 2002, 2004) lends support to this idea such that uniqueness has been proposed to be a fundamental human need that represents a key aspect of self-construal in all cultures. Accordingly, considering the relative of importance of close relationships with significant others in collectivist cultures (Markus and Kitayama 1991), one might expect SoU to be stronger in these cultures compared to individualistic cultures. Yet, it is important to highlight that SoU, as defined in this study, is not favoring one culture over the other by any means. Instead, our approach to uniqueness focuses on the individuals' acceptance of their idiosyncratic characteristics and feelings of being special because of who they are without making comparisons to others.

This new conceptualization of uniqueness inevitably raises some questions about its' difference from similar constructs (e.g., autonomy support, self-esteem) and utility in predicting happiness. Studies addressing this concern have shown that SoU was moderately related to self-esteem (Şimşek and Yalınçetin 2010), had small correlations with autonomy support and needs satisfaction in same-sex best friendships, and explained as high as 10 % of the variance in different indices of happiness (affective component, global happiness) when controlling for the autonomy variables, and personality (Demir and Şimşek 2012; Şimşek and Yalınçetin 2010). All in all, available evidence suggests that SoU is different from similar constructs (e.g., autonomy) and an important construct in predicting happiness.

1.4 Personal Sense of Uniqueness as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Friendship and Happiness

As reviewed above, both friendship experiences and personal sense of uniqueness are associated with happiness to varying degrees. It is proposed in the present study that SoU would mediate the association between friendship quality and happiness. Considering the dynamic interplay between self-attributes and close relationships (Vohs and Finkel 2006), there is no doubt that social interactions play an essential role in the development of SoU as well. Indeed, the relationship between social relationships (e.g., friendships) and uniqueness has been acknowledged by humanistic psychologists (Maslow 1954; Rogers 1995). Although earlier research findings indicated that the need for uniqueness had a negative effect on close relationships (Tesser et al. 1998), the definitional focus was on the extent to which individuals perceived themselves different from others. However, the operational definition of the SoU (Şimşek and Yalınçetin 2010) used in the present research relies on the unique characteristics of individuals which is expected to be promoted in close relationships. Consequently, we believe that various relationship

experiences with a same-sex best friend (hereafter SSBF) have the potential to encourage and support the development of personal SoU. This study not only addresses this theoretically important link between the two constructs but also proposes that SoU explains why friendship quality is associated with individual happiness.

From a theoretical standpoint of view, it is proposed that positive relationship experiences with a SSBF have the potential to contribute the feelings of personal SoU. As explained earlier, individuals seek to satisfy several provisions in their friendships. Once the friendship bond is established, individuals would be comfortably engaging in a variety of interactions addressing various relationship provisions such as spending special time together, disclosing personal information to each other, and providing and receiving emotional support. We believe that it is these various interactions in the friendship that would provide various indicators to the individuals about their uniqueness. In other words, we believe that friendship quality would positively influence the personal SoU of the individuals. This feeling of uniqueness, in turn, would contribute to individual happiness (model 1). Although this model is reasonable and consistent with the theoretical arguments (e.g., Rogers 1961), it is also possible that friendship experiences might mediate the relationship between SoU and happiness (model 2). It could be that individuals with a greater SoU experience positive friendship experiences, which in turn contribute to their happiness. For instance, an individual feeling unique in general might develop a sense of positive friendship by teaching the SSBF something he/she is good at (i.e., how to fish, play poker) or by providing advice about dating based on his/her past romantic relationship experiences. This possible alternative model was taken into account and compared to the proposed model in the current investigation.

1.5 Summary of the Hypotheses

In light of theory (Maslow 1954; Rogers 1995) and recent empirical research (Şimşek and Yalınçetin 2010), it was predicted that friendship quality, SoU and happiness would be positively related to each other. It was also predicted that SoU would mediate the relationship between friendship and happiness. These two hypotheses were tested in three different samples each employing a different measure to assess happiness.

2 Method

Descriptive information for the three samples is provided in Table 1. As seen in the table, between 6 and 7 % of the participants across the samples did not report having a same-sex best friend, a rate consistent with past research (Demir et al. 2011a; Demir and Özdemir 2010; Demir et al. 2007). These participants were excluded from the final samples. Across the samples, the mean age was 18.8 ($SD = 1.9$) years, and on average, 73 % of the respondents were female.

2.1 Procedure

The data in every sample were gathered online. First, the study was announced via the department's online research participation system. Second, students who wanted to participate in the study were provided with a link to the survey after signing up for the study. It is important to note that there was not any connection between the sign-ups for the study and the survey. In other words, respondents remained anonymous. Participants had to agree

Table 1 Descriptive information about the three samples

Sample	Original N	% having a SSBF	Final N	% female	Mean age	Mean relationship length (years)	% ethnic distribution
1	1,314	93	1,228	72	18.8 (2.5) ^a	5.9 (4.3) ^a	71 C, 13 H, 5 NA, 4 A, 3 B, 4 O
2	512	93	477	78	18.9 (1.9)	6.2 (4.5)	66 C, 17 H, 6 NA, 5 A, 3 B, 3 O
3	767	94	724	70	18.7 (1.4)	6.1 (4.5)	73 C, 14 H, 4 NA, 4 A, 2 B, 3 O
Total	2,593	94	2,429	73	18.8 (1.9)	6.1 (4.4)	70 C, 15 H, 5 NA, 4 A, 3 B, 3 O

C Caucasian, H Hispanic, NA Native American, A Asian, B Black, and O Other

^a Numbers presented parenthetically are standard deviations for the respective samples

to an informed consent prior to completing the questionnaires. In the survey, the order of the questionnaires was counterbalanced. Completion of the survey lasted approximately 30 min across the samples and participants received extra credit for their psychology classes. Finally, it is important to note that none of the participants who participated in either one of the studies was a participant in the other study. The online research participation system relied on controls for this potential problem. For instance, a participant who earned credits for participating in the first study (sample 1) was not allowed to sign up for the second or the third study.

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 Assessment of Best Friendships

In an attempt to prevent any potential ambiguities in the meaning of friendship (Demir et al. in press; Reisman 1981), the following definition of friendship was provided to the participants in each sample: “A friend is someone who you enjoy doing things together with, count on to support you when you need it, provide support when he/she needs it, talk about your everyday life, problems, concerns, ideas, and intimate thoughts” (Demir and Weitekamp 2007, p.195). Following the definition, participants were asked to indicate whether they had a SSBF. They were cautioned not to consider their romantic partner as a friend or to include any close friend they had any type of sexual involvement with or romantic interest in. As explained above, between 6 and 7 % of the samples did not report having a SSBF. The average length of the SSBFs across the samples was 6 years. The length of the friendship was not related to friendship quality, SoU or happiness across the samples (Sample 1: r_s .01, .02, .04; Sample 2: r_s .02, -.03, .04; Sample 3: r_s .01, -.01, .02, respectively).

2.2.2 Best friendship quality

McGill Friendship Questionnaire-Friend Functions (MFQ-FF; Mendelson and Aboud 1999) was used to assess the quality of same-sex best friendships across the samples. The MFQ-FF assesses six theoretically identified features (i.e., stimulating companionship, help, intimacy, reliable alliance, emotional security, and self-validation) and is specifically

designed for use with young adults. Each feature is assessed with five items. Items (e.g., “my best friend compliments me when I do something well”) were rated on a 9-point scale (0–8) on which five of the points are labeled (0 = never, 2 = rarely, 4 = once in a while, 6 = fairly often, and 8 = always).

Mendelson and Aboud (1999) reported that the MFQ-FF was sensitive to sex differences (women scoring higher than men) and degree of closeness (score for best friends were higher compared to casual friends); and was positively related to well-being (e.g., self-esteem). Past research has shown that the scale was positively associated with happiness (Demir and Weitekamp 2007). Research showed good to moderate reliabilities for the subscales and excellent internal consistency for the overall scale (Demir and Özdemir 2010; Demir and Weitekamp 2007; Mendelson and Aboud 1999). The internal consistencies of the subscales in the present study across the three samples ranged from .89 to .95.

2.2.3 Uniqueness

The Personal Sense of Uniqueness Scale (PSU, Şimşek and Yalinçetin 2010) was used to assess feelings of uniqueness. PSU consists of five items (e.g., “As people get to know me more, they begin to recognize my special features”) rated on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Şimşek and Yalinçetin (2010), across five studies, provided evidence that the scale had acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .81$). The authors also reported that the scale was positively associated with various indices of happiness (e.g., life-satisfaction) and negatively related to anxiety and depression. In the present study, the internal consistency of the scale across the three samples was acceptable (Sample 1: .77; Sample 2: .75; Sample 3: .77).

2.2.4 Happiness

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Watson et al. 1988) was used to measure the affective component of happiness in the first sample. The PANAS consists of 10 mood states for positive affect (PA) (e.g., attentive) and 10 for negative affect (NA) (e.g., hostile). Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they feel each mood in general on a 5-point scale from very slightly or not all (1) to extremely (5).

PANAS is a well-known and commonly used instrument to assess the affective component of happiness with good internal consistency (e.g., Demir and Özdemir 2010; Sheldon et al. 2005). The positive and negative affect scales are related to other scales measuring different components of happiness in the expected directions (e.g., Howell et al. 2010; Mattei and Schaefer 2004; Sing and Jha 2008; Swami et al. 2009; Watson et al. 1988). For instance, Watson et al. (1988) reported that negative affect was positively correlated with the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), whereas positive affect schedule was negatively related to BDI.

Composite positive and negative affect scores were computed by taking the mean of the respective items. The internal consistencies of the scales in the present study were satisfactory ($\alpha = .87$ for PA; $\alpha = .84$ for NA). Following the theoretical arguments about the predominance of positive affect over negative affect in defining happiness (e.g., Diener 1994) and empirical examples in the literature (e.g., Demir and Orthel 2011), an affect balance score was created by subtracting the standardized negative affect composite scores from positive affect.

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al. 1985) was used to assess the cognitive component of happiness in Sample 2. The scale consists of five items and respondents are asked to rate their agreement with the items on a 7-point scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*. Sample items include, “So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.” SWLS is a reliable (e.g., Vassar 2008) and valid (e.g., Pavot and Diener 2008) instrument commonly used in the literature to measure the cognitive aspect of happiness (Demir and Weitekamp 2007; Linley et al. 2009). SWLS is also moderately related to other measures of happiness (affective component, global happiness) (Lyke 2009; Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999). The internal consistency of the scale in the present study was .92.

The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999) was used to measure happiness in the final sample. SHS follows a subjectivist approach to the assessment of happiness and measures the subjective assessment of the individual’s global happiness with four items (e.g., “In general, I consider myself”: 1 = *not a very happy person*, 7 = *a very happy person*). Past empirical research has shown that SHS is positively associated with commonly used measures of happiness (e.g., SWLS) and psychosocial well-being (e.g., self efficacy) (Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999; Segrin and Taylor 2007; Swami et al. 2009). The scale also has high internal consistency (Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999). In the current investigation, the Cronbach alpha was .86.

2.3 Data Analysis Strategy

The proposed and alternative models were tested in structural equation modeling (SEM) by using path analysis in LISREL 8.51 (Joreskog and Sorbom 1993). Accordingly, the variables depicted in these models were constructed as latent variables. One advantage of SEM, namely, the examination of the causal relationships among variables without measurement error comes from the use latent constructs, or latent variables, in models in which measured variables are defined as indicators of these latent constructs. In the present study three latent variables were used: friendship quality, SoU, and happiness (please note that three different latent variables of happiness were employed representing three different measures of happiness). It is important at this point to highlight that the happiness construct in the first sample had only one indicator (PA–NA). Although this might raise convergence issues, it is recommended that an observed variable may be included in a model along with latent constructs as long as the measured variable is reliable (Kline 2005). In the present study, the subscales of PANAS had alpha coefficients at or above .84. Thus, using one indicator for happiness would not pose convergence problems or raise any concerns for the reliability of the model estimates.

In addition to such powerful estimates of parameters in the model, SEM provides several goodness-of-fit-statistics by which one can understand which competing model is supported with empirical data (Kline 2005). The present study relied on the most commonly used indices of goodness of fit statistics: the goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). The values of 0.90 or greater for the GFI, AGFI, and CFI indices indicate good fit of the model. As for SRMR and RMSEA, values of 0.08 or less indicate good fit (Hu and Bentler 1999; Kline 2005; Steiger 2007; Tabachnick and Fidell 2001; Thompson 2000).

Because the proposed and the alternative model were not nested models, a direct test of model comparison could be achieved by testing the Chi-square values of these models: the lower the Chi-square value the better the model’s fit to the data. Moreover, scholars

suggest using Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) and Expected Cross-Validation Index (ECVI) values when making comparisons among different models (e.g., Rigdon 1999). The model with smaller values of AIC and ECVI has been suggested to have a better fit to data.

The mediation test was carried out using bootstrapping procedure suggested by Shrout and Bolger (2002). The bootstrapping method has been shown to be the best way of testing mediation out of 14 different methods/procedures (MacKinnon et al. 2002). This method is based on testing the significance of the indirect paths from the independent variable (friendship uniqueness) to mediator (sense of uniqueness) and from the mediator to dependent variable (happiness). Bootstrapping produces a large number of samples from the dataset and uses them to obtain estimates of the standard errors. The interval confidence of these standard errors is considered when testing the significance of indirect effects. An indirect effect is statistically significant if the 95 % confidence interval does not contain zero.

Finally, multigroup analyses were conducted to examine whether the model fits males and females equally well. For this purpose, we first tested the measurement model in both sexes followed by multigroup confirmatory factor analysis. Next, the structural model was tested on males and females separately and with parameters unconstrained to be equal across the two samples. Finally, the model was tested on males and females with parameters constrained across samples. These two models were compared (constrained and unconstrained) to infer gender invariance of the proposed model.

3 Results

The analyses are presented in four sections. Each section reports the findings across the samples. First, the results of the measurement model are reported. Second, the analyses testing the proposed and alternative models are presented. Third, the results of the mediation analyses relying on bootstrapping procedure are reported. Finally, the findings of the multigroup analyses testing the generalizability of the model for both males and females are presented.

3.1 Measurement Model

The means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for the measured variables across the three samples are displayed in Table 2. A measurement model was relied on to determine whether the indicators are reliably predicted by their latent constructs. This also allowed us to examine the relationships between the latent variables (e.g., friendship quality and SoU).

An initial test of the measurement model in the first sample resulted in a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(52, N = 1,228) = 316.97, p < .05$; GFI = 0.96; CFI = 0.98; SRMR = 0.036; RMSEA = 0.064 (90 % confidence interval for RMSEA = 0.058–0.071). An inspection of the modification indices, however, suggested correlating the error variances of two of the PSU items ('I think that the characteristics that make me up are different from others', 'I feel that some of my characteristics are completely unique to me'). These items' errors were correlated and the final measurement model produced better goodness of fit statistics: $\chi^2(51, N = 1,228) = 222.32, p < .05$; GFI = 0.97; CFI = 0.99; SRMR = 0.032; RMSEA = 0.052 (90 % confidence interval for RMSEA = 0.045–0.059). The Chi-square difference test indicated that this modification significantly improved the fit of the model,

Table 2 Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the measured variables across the samples

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
<i>Sample 1</i>																		
1. SCO	6.93	1.08	-															
2. HEL	6.66	1.32	.69	-														
3. INT	6.97	1.33	.65	.65	-													
4. REA	7.39	.95	.66	.61	.69	-												
5. SVA	6.64	1.38	.67	.68	.64	.61	-											
6. EMS	6.81	1.36	.69	.67	.73	.67	.76	-										
7. U1	4.12	.83	.25	.25	.22	.27	.26	.24	-									
8. U2	3.99	.94	.22	.17	.19	.19	.26	.22	.54	-								
9. U3	3.72	1.09	.12	.09	.12	.10	.12	.12	.19	.39	-							
10. U4	3.81	.94	.17	.14	.13	.16	.21	.19	.35	.53	.26	-						
11. U5	3.85	1.00	.18	.19	.17	.18	.21	.20	.39	.54	.28	.59	-					
12. HAP	1.68	1.03	.27	.24	.21	.28	.28	.24	.27	.34	.28	.27	.29	-				
<i>Sample 2</i>																		
1. SCO	32.88	3.39	-															
2. HEL	40.02	5.20	.60	-														
3. INT	41.78	4.63	.44	.63	-													
4. REA	42.59	3.86	.43	.46	.59	-												
5. SVA	40.40	5.04	.54	.62	.56	.47	-											
6. EMS	40.88	4.88	.52	.60	.62	.50	.63	-										
7. U1	6.30	.88	.30	.23	.20	.23	.20	.19	-									
8. U2	5.87	1.20	.21	.19	.17	.15	.24	.21	.53	-								
9. U3	3.17	1.87	-.17	-.08	-.06	-.14	-.13	-.14	-.04	-.23	-							
10. U4	5.61	1.30	.28	.18	.13	.13	.20	.15	.35	.54	-.12	-						
11. U5	5.61	1.40	.21	.18	.17	.12	.25	.21	.34	.61	-.19	.66	-					
12. SWLS1	5.25	1.48	.21	.20	.14	.11	.21	.16	.25	.31	-.15	.29	.23	-				

Table 2 continued

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
13. SWLS2	5.39	1.49	.20	.17	.09	.09	.19	.13	.19	.28	-.17	.26	.20	.80	-	-	-	-
14. SWLS3	5.45	1.52	.21	.20	.13	.11	.21	.17	.23	.30	-.15	.24	.20	.81	.81	-	-	-
15. SWLS4	5.31	1.62	.20	.20	.17	.11	.21	.18	.15	.22	-.15	.20	.18	.70	.66	.77	-	-
16. SWLS5	4.89	1.91	.21	.23	.20	.15	.27	.23	.18	.26	-.13	.17	.15	.57	.55	.61	.58	-
<i>Sample 3</i>																		
M	6.90	1.18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SD	6.90	1.18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1. SCO	6.90	1.18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. HEL	6.64	1.40	.74	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. INT	6.92	1.44	.72	.70	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. REA	7.34	1.08	.71	.65	.69	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. SVA	6.67	1.42	.73	.76	.70	.65	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6. EMS	6.76	1.51	.76	.74	.78	.70	.81	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7. U1	4.16	.82	.26	.22	.20	.23	.21	.22	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8. U2	4.04	.92	.20	.16	.14	.14	.20	.20	.53	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9. U3	3.76	1.09	.11	.10	.09	.09	.11	.11	.21	.40	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
10. U4	3.82	.95	.20	.17	.17	.19	.22	.20	.33	.53	.27	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
11. U5	3.88	.99	.19	.17	.16	.19	.19	.19	.40	.55	.28	.60	-	-	-	-	-	-
12. SHS1	5.77	1.19	.18	.19	.17	.16	.18	.16	.16	.23	.14	.16	.18	-	-	-	-	-
13. SHS2	5.32	1.41	.15	.18	.14	.09	.16	.14	.14	.27	.20	.17	.20	.78	-	-	-	-
14. SHS3	5.32	1.35	.22	.22	.20	.18	.22	.22	.22	.27	.20	.21	.20	.73	.70	-	-	-
15. SHS4	2.75	1.67	-.16	-.16	-.15	-.12	-.15	-.16	-.16	-.14	-.17	-.18	-.11	-.44	-.42	-.43	-	-

SCO Stimulating companionship, HEL help, INT intimacy, REA reliable alliance, SVA self-validation, EMS emotional security; U1-U5 items of the SoU Scale, HAP happiness, SHS Subjective Happiness Scale items, SWLS satisfaction with Life Scale items

$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 94.65, p < .01$. All of the loadings of the measured variables on the latent variables were large and statistically significant (standardized values ranged from 0.47 to 0.87, $p < .001$, see Table 3).

The measurement model tested in the second and the third samples yielded a good fit to the data ($\chi^2(101, N = 477) = 243.45, p < .05$; GFI = 0.94; CFI = 0.98; SRMR = 0.047; RMSEA = 0.054 (90 % confidence interval for RMSEA = 0.046–0.063; and $\chi^2(87, N = 724) = 238.18, p < .05$; GFI = 0.96; CFI = 0.99; SRMR = 0.036; RMSEA = 0.049 (90 % confidence interval for RMSEA = 0.042–0.057), respectively). In contrast to the first sample, the modification indices across the two samples did not suggest any changes to the model. All of the loadings of the measured variables on the latent variables were moderate to large and statistically significant ($p < .001$, see Table 3) in both samples (standardized values ranged from .28 to .93 in Sample 2 and 0.47 to 0.89 in Sample 3).

Table 3 Factor loadings, standard errors, and t-values for the measurement model across the three samples

Measure and variable	Unstandardized factor loading			SE			t			Standardized factor loading		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
<i>Friendship quality</i>												
SCO	0.87	2.50	0.96	.026	0.14	.036	33.31	18.11	26.62	0.80	0.74	0.82
HEL	1.08	4.26	1.19	.032	0.20	.042	34.33	21.12	28.17	0.82	0.82	0.85
INT	1.10	3.55	1.20	.032	0.19	.044	34.75	19.20	27.45	0.82	0.77	0.84
REA	0.73	2.58	0.82	.024	0.16	.034	30.82	15.84	24.09	0.76	0.67	0.77
SVA	1.18	4.16	1.27	.032	0.19	.042	36.92	21.35	30.41	0.86	0.82	0.89
EMS	1.19	3.97	1.35	.031	0.19	.044	38.06	20.91	30.52	0.87	0.81	0.89
<i>Sense of uniqueness</i>												
U1	0.51	0.49	0.48	.024	.040	.030	21.85	12.25	15.76	0.62	0.56	0.58
U2	0.80	0.95	0.73	.025	.049	.031	32.06	19.21	23.10	0.85	0.79	0.79
U3	0.52	0.52	0.51	.032	.091	.042	15.95	5.78	12.23	0.47	0.28	0.47
U4	0.60	1.02	0.69	.027	.054	.033	22.33	18.97	20.68	0.64	0.78	0.72
U5	0.64	1.13	0.73	.029	.057	.034	22.55	19.65	21.29	0.64	0.80	0.74
<i>Happiness</i>												
PA–NA	1.00			–			–			1.00		
SWLS1		1.32			.054			24.44			0.89	
SWLS2		1.29			.055			23.44			0.87	
SWLS3		1.42			.053			26.55			0.93	
SWLS4		1.31			.062			21.14			0.81	
SWLS5		1.28			.079			16.25			0.67	
SHS1			1.06			.036			29.17			0.89
SHS2			1.19			.044			26.93			0.84
SHS3			1.11			.043			26.03			0.82
SHS4			0.88			.060			14.55			0.53

SCO Stimulating companionship, HEL help, INT intimacy, REA reliable alliance, SVA self-validation, EMS emotional security, U1–U5 items of the SoU Scale, PA positive affect sub-scale of the PANAS, NA negative affect sub-scale of the PANAS, SHS Subjective Happiness Scale items, SWLS Satisfaction with Life Scale items

Analyses across the three samples, as predicted, revealed that all three latent variables were positively intercorrelated ($p < .001$). Specifically, friendship quality was positively associated with both SoU ($r = .35, .34, \text{ and } .38$, respectively) and happiness ($r = .32, .29, \text{ and } .30$, respectively). Also, SoU and happiness were positively correlated across the three samples ($r = .44, .37, \text{ and } .40$, respectively). Overall, these findings are consistent with the first hypothesis. It is important to note the significant and consistent associations of friendship quality and SoU with three different measures of happiness.

3.2 Testing the Proposed and Alternative Structural Models

The model fit indices for the proposed (SoU as the mediator; Friendship quality \rightarrow Uniqueness \rightarrow Happiness) and the alternative (friendship quality as the mediator; Uniqueness \rightarrow Friendship quality \rightarrow Happiness) models across the samples are presented in Table 4. As seen in the table, the proposed model across the samples yielded better fit indices compared to the alternative model; and accounted for 15, 13, and 16 % of the variance in SoU across the samples, respectively. More importantly, the conceptual model explained more variance in happiness when compared to the alternative model across the three samples (Sample 1: 21 vs. 11 %; Sample 2: 17 vs. 10 %; and Sample 3: 14 vs. 9 %). Moreover, AIC and ECVI values for the proposed model were smaller than those of the alternative model across the three samples (Table 4). Overall, the results suggest that the proposed model (SoU as the mediator) fits the data better than the alternative model in every sample.

3.3 Bootstrapping

We used a bootstrapping procedure (MacKinnon et al. 2002; Shrout and Bolger 2002) to test the indirect pathway from friendship quality to sense of uniqueness to happiness. The bootstrapping procedure tests whether or not this indirect pathway is significantly different from zero. As explained before, significant mediation is indicated when the upper and lower limits of the 95 % confidence interval (CI) do not include zero. We found this to be the case in every sample (Sample 1: 95 % CI = .122 to .193, $p < .01$; Sample 2: 95 % CI (0.87–0.20, $p < .01$; Sample 3: 95 % CI = .055 to .140, $p < .01$), thus indicating the

Table 4 Model fit indices and information criteria values for the models across the samples

	Sample 1		Sample 2		Sample 3	
	Conceptual model	Alternative model	Conceptual model	Alternative model	Conceptual model	Alternative model
χ^2 (df)	260.22 (52)	354.22 (52)	257.18 (88)	283.43 (88)	255.60 (102)	280.95 (102)
GFI	.97	.95	.95	.95	.94	.93
CFI	.98	.98	.98	.98	.98	.98
SRMR	.05	.06	.06	.07	.06	.09
AIC	312.22	406.22	.321.18	.347.43	323.60	348.95
ECVI	.25	.33	.44	.48	.68	.73
RMSEA	.06	.07	.05	.06	.06	.06
90 % CI for RMSEA	.050–.064	.062–.076	.044–.063	.048–.063	.048–.065	.052–.069

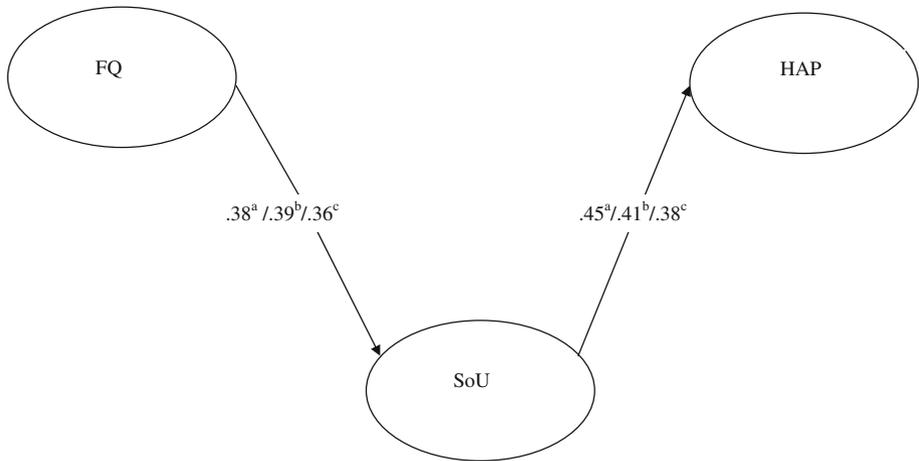


Fig. 1 Standardized parameter estimates for the proposed model. *Note:* *FQ* Friendship quality, *SoU* sense of uniqueness, *HAP* happiness. All path coefficients are significant at $p = .01$. Observed variables were not shown in the model. ^aThe PANAS (PA–NA) as happiness measure ($n = 1,228$), ^bthe SWLS as happiness measure ($n = 477$), ^cthe SHS as happiness measure ($n = 724$)

significance of the indirect effect proposed by the model. The final model with standardized estimates across the samples is shown in Fig. 1. Overall, the findings from the structural comparisons and bootstrapping procedures support our second hypothesis such that SoU mediates the relationship between friendship quality and happiness. Once again, it is critical to highlight that the proposed model was supported in every sample regardless of the measure used to assess happiness.

3.4 Multigroup Analyses

A multiple group path analysis was conducted to test for overall gender differences. For this aim, first, the measurement model was tested both in males and females and results indicated that the model fit to the data for both males and females equally well across the three samples¹. Multigroup confirmatory factor analysis showed that the error variances of two indicators of friendship quality (intimacy and self-validation) are different in the groups only in Sample 1. The error variances of intimacy and self-validation were larger in among males (.54 and .45 respectively) when compared to females (.29 and .23 respectively). The unconstrained model fitted to the data better [$\Delta\chi^2(2) = 114.26, p < .01$] and resulted in the following goodness of fit statistics: $\chi^2(52, N = 1228) = 354.22, p < .05$; GFI = 0.96; CFI = 0.97; SRMR = 0.056; RMSEA = 0.071 (90 % confidence interval for RMSEA = 0.064–0.077). Finally, the multiple group path analyses showed that unconstrained model which indicates the paths in the structural model to be different for both groups did not significantly improve the fit of the model [$\Delta\chi^2(2) = 0.7, p > .01$].

The multigroup confirmatory factor analysis did not reveal any problems for the second and the third samples. The multigroup analyses in these samples showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the constrained and unconstrained models ($[\Delta\chi^2(2) = 0.27, p > .01]$, and $[\Delta\chi^2(2) = 0.88, p > .01]$, and respectively). Overall, the multigroup analyses suggest that the model supported in the combined samples applies equally well for both males and females in every sample.

4 Discussion

The present investigation examined the relationships between SoU, SSBF quality and happiness and tested SoU as the mediator of the association between friendship and happiness. This model was compared to an alternative model suggesting friendship quality as the mediator. Findings revealed support to the proposed model in three samples across three different measures of happiness. Furthermore, this model was supported for both men and women. The implications of these findings for empirical research on friendship and happiness and for uniqueness theory are elaborated on detail next.

As explained earlier, the way uniqueness was defined and studied in the literature was not consistent with the humanistic approach, feeling unique because of who one is (e.g., Rogers 1961), such that personal uniqueness was not conceived of as a personal strength which is likely to be bolstered by significant others in one's life. Instead, past theoretical and empirical work approached uniqueness as reflecting one's distinctiveness from others (Lapsley and Rice 1988; Lynn and Snyder 2002) and reported that this might represent a risk factor for the psychosocial well-being of the individual (Aalsma et al. 2006; Tesser et al. 1998). As a result, the ideas of Maslow (1954) and Rogers (1961) about uniqueness and arguments that one's positive interpersonal relationship experiences promote one's sense of uniqueness were not appropriately tested.

The conceptualization of uniqueness in the present study was consistent with the humanistic approach (Şimşek and Yalınçetin 2010) and provided an excellent opportunity to empirically test the arguments of humanistic psychologists. When defined as a personal tendency to recognize one's being as having distinctive features with the feeling of worthiness referring to one's unique existence together with others, not pursuing differentness from others, SoU were found to be positively related to friendship quality and happiness. As for the positive association between friendship and uniqueness, this is the first empirical study to report such a relationship between these two constructs. Consistent with the arguments of humanistic psychologists (Maslow 1954; Rogers 1961), the present study, across three samples, has shown that friendship experiences are positively associated with SoU.

Although the importance of friendship experiences in individual happiness has been recognized and established in the empirical literature since the 1930s, less is known about the processes accounting for the friendship-happiness link. Only recently empirical research started addressing this important issue (e.g., Demir and Özdemir 2010). The present study addressed this gap in the literature by investigating personal SoU as a mediator of the relationship between friendship and happiness. Findings showed that personal SoU explained how friendship quality was related to happiness in every sample. Confidence in the proposed model was bolstered by the findings that the alternative model, in which friendship quality was tested as a mediator, had worse fit indices and explained lower levels of variance in happiness (regardless of the way it was measured) compared to the original model. Confirming our predictions and consistent with theoretical arguments (e.g., Maslow 1954), these findings suggest that positive friendship experiences create several indicators to the individual that promotes the self acceptance of one's uniqueness, which in turn contribute to individual happiness. As explained earlier, friendship entails various relationship experiences ranging from spending time on numerous different activities, sharing secrets, seeking the help and advice of each other to receiving confirmation about one's goals and celebrating minor or major accomplishments. We believe that it is through these interactions that individuals realize their special attributes and develop a SoU. This personal SoU, in turn, promotes individual happiness. Importantly,

this model was supported for both men and women across the samples. This suggests that the ideas proposed about how positive friendship experiences could promote uniqueness applies equally well to both sexes. Overall, this study adds to the growing literature investigating the mediators of the friendship-happiness link by showing that part of the reason how friendships are related to happiness is because of feelings of personal SoU.

One distinct aspect of the model tested in the present investigation deserves attention. Finding support for the proposed model with three different conceptualizations and measurements of happiness is noteworthy and theoretically important. Specifically, the associations of friendship quality and SoU with happiness were similar across the three samples each employing a different measure of happiness. Findings not only strengthen the confidence in the proposed model but also highlight that different assessments of happiness are similarly related to friendship and SoU. This suggests that concerns and arguments about the differential relationships of different dimensions of happiness with close relationships (Demir 2010; Saphire-Bernstein and Taylor in press) are not warranted, at least in research on SSBFs. This argument should be interpreted with caution since it is based on findings obtained in three studies. Thus, more research is needed before concluding that friendship experiences are differentially associated with different components or assessments of happiness.

The findings obtained in the present study represent the first empirical step in understanding the importance of uniqueness, from a humanistic perspective, in the psychological well-being of individuals. As such, we believe that there is more to learn about the association of uniqueness with psychosocial well-being and present three important directions for future research.

According to Demir et al. (in press), there is less empirical research investigating the role of cross-sex friendships in individual happiness. This is troubling because young adults, especially in college, develop and maintain cross-sex friendships (Monsour 2002). We predict that the model would be generalizable to the cross-sex friendships of the individual as well. Individuals could recognize and accept their unique and idiosyncratic characteristics rather strongly in their cross-sex as opposed to SSBFs. This is because (different from same-sex friendships), cross-sex friendships provide both parties an 'insider perspective' (Monsour 1997, 2002; Swain 1992), defined as learning about how the other sex thinks, feels, and behaves (Monsour 2002). Cross-sex friendships might also help individuals to develop a greater understanding of the cross-sex such as differences in communication styles (Swain 1992). Individuals who develop a better sense of opposite-sex members through their relationship experiences might feel unique (e.g., I feel unique because I know much about how to properly communicate with the members of the opposite-sex). This SoU, as shown in the present study, might promote happiness.

Future research could also test whether the proposed model is generalizable to the other close friends of the individuals. It is well-established that individuals have several friends in their social networks and they differentiate the degree of closeness among them (e.g., best, close, and casual friendships) (Antonucci 2001; Demir et al. 2007; Hays 1988). Would personal SoU mediate the associations of the quality of close friendships and happiness? We predict that the model would be only supported for the (same-sex) best friend of the individual and not supported among the other close friends of the individual. In other words, we believe that only the quality of the best friendship would significantly contribute to the individual SoU. First, as might be expected, best friends hold a special place in the hierarchy of one's friendship network (Demir and Weitekamp 2007; Richey and Richey 1980). Second, related to the first point, individuals not only spend more time with their best friends but also experience various relationship provisions rather strongly in

their best friendships when compared to less close friendships (e.g., Wright 1985). Accordingly, only the relationship experiences with the best friends might make significant contributions to an individual's SoU. Future research has the potential to investigate the generalizability of the model to the less close friendships of the individuals.

Finally, future research could examine potential cultural differences between the friendship- SoU link; compare the roles of other close relationships of the individual as they relate to SoU; and the generalizability of the model supported in the present study among American college students to other cultures. As explained earlier, the way uniqueness is defined in this study suggests that it might be compatible with all cultures. Yet, given that collectivist cultures emphasizes the importance of the relationships with significant others (Markus and Kitayama 1991), the association of friendship quality with personal SoU might be much stronger in these cultures compared to individualistic cultures. This is a reasonable argument since the importance of friendships and their role in the well-being of individuals across cultures is well-established (Argyle 2001; Demir et al. 2012; Requena 1995). A key issue to consider is the possibility that SoU might be fostered in different ways in different cultures (Vignoles 2000) such that one's place within a social context and multiple relationships in a collectivist culture might differentially influence SoU. Hence, it would be interesting to examine and compare one's relationships with parents, romantic partners, members of the extended family and friends as they relate to one's SoU across cultures. Such studies have the potential to identify the collective and particular roles of the key figures in one's life that makes the biggest contribution to one's SoU across cultures. Among single individuals, we would predict that friendship experiences would emerge as the major predictor of SoU, at least among college students in individualist cultures (e.g., Demir 2010). Among individuals involved in a romantic relationship (dating or married), considering the arguments that this is the most significant bond in one's life across cultures (e.g., Reis et al. 2000) and supportive past empirical research (Okun and Keith 1998; Walen and Lachman 2000; Whisman et al. 2000), we would predict that the quality of the romantic relationship and/or parental experiences would be more important than friendships in promoting a SoU. Lastly, future research should investigate whether the model supported across three samples regardless of the happiness measure used among American college students is applicable to those in other cultures. Considering the well-established findings that friendship is an important correlate of happiness across cultures (e.g., Argyle 2001; Demir et al. in press) and the findings obtained in this study when uniqueness is conceptualized from a humanistic perspective considered to be applicable to all human beings, we predict that the proposed would be supported across cultures. Although the mean levels of friendship quality, SoU, and happiness might be different across cultures (e.g., Diener et al. 1999; French et al. 2006), we believe that the model (friendship → uniqueness → happiness) would be supported in collectivistic cultures. It remains to be seen whether culture influences the relationship between friendship quality and personal SoU and the way these experiences and feelings relate to happiness.

4.1 Limitations

The limitations of the present studies should be acknowledged. First, the investigation relied on convenience samples. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to young adults who are not in college or other age groups. This could be because the overall experience and meaning of friendships might be different across the life-span (Wright 1989). It is the task of future research to investigate whether the proposed model can be

supported in different age groups. Second, there were more women than men in our samples. Although this can be considered inevitable in studies sampling college students, it is important to highlight the fact that the gender ratios across the studies were consistent with the demographics of the students taking psychology courses where the samples were drawn and that men, compared to women, are less willing to participate in research on friendship (Lewis et al. 1989). Also, multigroup analyses revealed that the proposed model was gender invariant. Finally, despite our reliance on path analysis the cross-sectional nature of the study prevents one from making causal arguments. As it is the case in this line of research (e.g., Lucas and Dyrenforth 2006), friendship and uniqueness were treated as predictors of happiness, whereas it could be that being happy influences the friendship experiences of the individuals (Fowler and Christakis 2008; Lyubomirsky et al. 2005a, b). Nevertheless, the findings obtained were in line with theory and extant empirical research. Future research has the potential to establish causal conclusions regarding the associations between the study variables by conducting experiments (Ling et al. 2005). For instance, SoU can be manipulated by providing positive feedback to the participants after they talk about their hobbies, plans for the future, and social relationships by capitalizing on the distinctiveness of their activities and social experiences. Compared to a no feedback condition, those in the uniqueness condition would report higher levels of happiness after the manipulation. Although the findings reported in the present study are useful in describing general trends, experiments might not only eliminate alternative explanations but also illuminate causal mechanisms.

5 Conclusion

The present investigation examined the mediating role of SoU in the friendship-happiness link. Findings revealed that part of the reason how friendship experiences contribute to individual happiness is because of SoU. This model was supported in three samples each employing a different measure of happiness and was equally applicable to both men and women. Implications of the findings for theory are reviewed and suggestions for future research are provided.

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