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Family Support, Family Income, and Happiness: A 10-Year Perspective

Rebecca J. North and Charles J. Holahan
University of Texas at Austin

Rudolf H. Moos and Ruth C. Cronkite
Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System and Stanford University

This study examined the role of 2 central aspects of family life—income and social support—in predicting concurrent happiness and change in happiness among 274 married adults across a 10-year period. The authors used hierarchical linear modeling to investigate the relationship between family income and happiness. Income had a small, positive impact on happiness, which diminished as income increased. In contrast, family social support, measured by 3 subscales, Cohesion, Expressiveness, and Conflict, showed a substantial, positive association with concurrent happiness, even after controlling for income. Furthermore, family income moderated the association between family social support and concurrent happiness; family social support was more strongly associated with happiness when family income was low than when family income was high. In addition, change in family social support was positively related to change in happiness, whereas change in family income was unrelated to change in happiness. These findings suggest that happiness can change and underscore the importance of exploring more deeply the role that family relationships play in facilitating such change.

Keywords: happiness, family income, family social support, longitudinal analyses, change in happiness

Elinor Dashwood, the more pragmatic of the two sisters in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, intimated to her sister, Marianne, that marrying a wealthy man would bring happiness. When Marianne responded, "What have wealth or grandeur to do with happiness?" Elinor replied, "Grandeur has but little . . . but wealth has much to do with it." Although much has changed since the nineteenth century, many people still believe that wealth brings happiness. Often, this is not an explicitly stated belief but an implicit one that is revealed in how people allocate their time, for example, by spending more time accumulating wealth than building family relationships (Deangelis, 2007). The present study compared the economic with the social context of family life and examined the relative contributions of family income and family social support to happiness among 274 married adults over a 10-year period.

Family income and family social support are commonly thought of as primary sources of happiness (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Income allows people to do and have things they desire; it is associated with status and power. Family social support (hereafter referred to as "family support") meets fundamental needs for acceptance, belonging, and love that are unmet by economic security alone (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). This study pitted family income and family support against each other in predicting happiness. Thus, it mirrored the way that these priorities often duel in family life, so that devoting time and energy to one can take that time and energy away from the other.

Previous research has shown an association between income and happiness. When analyzing cross-sectional data, researchers have found small but consistent positive correlations between income and happiness (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Hagerty, 2000; Hill, 2004). The positive association between money and happiness, however, decreases significantly at higher levels of income. That is, income and happiness are most strongly associated at lower levels of income, and higher income categories are associated with ever-smaller increments in happiness (for a review, see Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002). The decreasing effect of income on happiness is especially apparent once income exceeds the poverty level; after basic needs are met, income, in fact, matters very little (Myers, 2000). Correspondingly, the correlation between income and happiness is stronger in relatively poorer areas (Diener & Biswas-

Rebecca J. North and Charles J. Holahan, Department of Psychology, University of Texas at Austin; Rudolf H. Moos and Ruth C. Cronkite, Center for Health Care Evaluation, Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System, and Stanford University.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Rebecca J. North, Department of Psychology, A8000, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX 78712. E-mail: rebeccajnorth@mail.utexas.edu

Diener, 2002; Suhail & Chaudry, 2004) and is weaker in more affluent ones (Helliwell, 2003; Inglehart, 1990).

The few longitudinal studies available in this area have indicated that the minimal effects of income on happiness are not maintained over time. In fact, there is no significant effect, over time, of rising income on happiness (Easterlin, 2005; Hellevik, 2003; Myers, 2000). This finding parallels those indicating that the relationship between income and happiness is weaker at higher levels of income.

However, a significant weakness in previous research on income and happiness is a scarcity of longitudinal studies (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Moreover, most studies in the relatively small group of longitudinal studies on income and happiness have used aggregate income data, such as gross national product or gross domestic product per capita (Hill, 2004; Inglehart & Klingemann, 2000), rather than individual-level income. In the few studies that have followed the same individuals over time, the time period has rarely exceeded 1–2 years (Easterlin, 2004). After a review of current knowledge on income and happiness, Diener and Biswas-Diener (2002) concluded that longitudinal investigation remains a "research imperative."

When searching for factors that might contribute more strongly to happiness, researchers have examined social support. Social support has proven to be a robust predictor of happiness (Compton, 2005; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Putnam, 2000). Although social support has been operationalized in different ways, a positive relationship between a variety of measures of social support and happiness has been identified across a number of studies (Isaacowitz, Vaillant, & Seligman, 2003; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Suhail & Chaudry, 2004).

Some studies have shown a positive correlation between number of friends and happiness (Taylor, Chatters, Hardison, & Riley, 2001); others have demonstrated a positive relationship between perceived companionship and happiness (Baldassare, Rosenfield, & Rook, 1984). Similarly, Lu (1999) illustrated a relationship between social support, including both tangible and emotional support, and happiness. In related work, Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004) evinced a strong association between possessing the character strength of love, reflected in having close relationships, and life satisfaction. Diener and Seligman (2002) found that the happiest students among college undergraduates, those in the top 10%, reported the highest ratings for the quality of their relationships. The association between quality of student relationships and student happiness held across both self-report and peer-report ratings of social support.

However, as with research on income and happiness, a major weakness in previous research on social support and happiness is the scarcity of longitudinal studies (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Another limitation in current research on social support and happiness is the paucity of studies that focus specifically on family relationships. Some studies have used composite measures of social support that include family relationships, and others have focused on marital relationships (Adams, 1988; Kirchler, 1989). Caprara and Steca (2006) investigated the association between feelings of efficacy about managing family relationships and well-being, but few studies have specifically considered the quality of family relationships as a determinant of happiness (for a review, see Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

Present Study

The current study, with 274 married adults, examined the role of two central aspects of family life—income and social support—in predicting concurrent happiness and change in happiness across a 10-year period. The study addressed each of the limitations in previous research on happiness discussed above. Our longitudinal analyses used data that span 10 years. In addition, the use of individual-level data permitted analyses that followed individuals across time. Further, a comprehensive measure of the quality of family support tapped cohesion, emotional expressiveness, and low interpersonal conflict.

The present data are part of a multistudy, longitudinal project on an initial group of 424 community residents who were selected as matched controls for a sample of patients entering treatment for unipolar depression. Earlier research on the 10-year follow-up of these samples has examined life context factors in depression remission and relapse (Cronkite, Moos, Twohey, Cohen, & Swindle, 1998; Holahan, Moos, Holahan, & Cronkite, 1999; Moos, Cronkite, & Moos, 1998) and the role of avoidance coping in predicting drinking behavior (Holahan, Moos, Holahan, Cronkite, & Randall). No previous research with this database has examined the time course or determinants of happiness.

On the basis of previous research that showed a small but consistent positive correlation between income and happiness (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Hagerty, 2000; Hill, 2004), it was hypothesized that family income would show a significant but, compared with family support, weak positive relationship with happiness in this largely middle-income sample. Extrapolating from previous research on more general measures of social support and happiness (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Suhail & Chaudry, 2004), we predicted that higher family support would be strongly related to greater happiness, even after controlling for the effects of family income. Further, integrating this research on the importance of social support to happiness with research that showed no significant effect over time of rising income on happiness (Easterlin, 2005; Hellevik, 2003; Myers, 2000), we expected that only family support would be associated with change in happiness over time.

We conducted additional analyses to better understand the relationship between family income and happiness. First, in line with previous evidence (for a review, see Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002), additional analyses examined whether the effect of income on happiness was stronger at lower levels of income. Additional analyses explored a new question involving the potential role of family income in moderating the association between family support and happiness.

Method

Sample Selection and Characteristics

The sampling procedure involved a random selection of persons in the San Francisco Bay area (for more detail about

the overall sample selection procedure, see Cronkite et al., 1998; Moos et al., 1998). Surveys were conducted at four points in time over a 10-year period (i.e., baseline and 1-year, 4-year, and 10-year follow-ups) between 1981 and 1991. The study was approved by the Stanford University Panel on Human Subjects; after the project was fully explained, participants provided written signed consent. Participants were initially contacted by telephone and were followed systematically by mail and telephone contact. Of those contacted at baseline, 87% agreed to participate and 84% of these ($N = 424$) provided data. We minimized dropouts over the 10 years by rigorously maintaining contact information; systematically following participants through mail, telephone, and personal contacts; and paying participants for completing each survey. The participation rate for surviving respondents averaged 95% at each of the three follow-up assessments.

Among the married individuals studied, the number of participants who provided sufficient data for the present analyses was 274. At baseline, the present sample comprised 131 women (48%) and 143 men (52%), and the mean age of respondents was 37 years ($SD = 13.39$, range = 18–82 years). Median educational level was 3 years of college, with a range from eighth grade to postgraduate studies. A total of 77% of respondents was employed full or part time. The sample was primarily Caucasian (89%).

Measures

The following measures were collected at each time point: (a) total family income, (b) family support, and (c) happiness. The measures were administered by mail, in most cases. In a few instances (e.g., when there were language or reading difficulties), in-person or telephone interviews were conducted. Additional descriptive and background information on the measures used here is available in the Health and Daily Living Form (HDL; Moos, Cronkite, & Finney, 1992). The HDL includes the family income and happiness measures, and the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1994) includes the family support measure. Information on the broad set of measures in the overall project is available in the HDL. For examples of studies that use the family support measure in the context of stress and coping research, see Cronkite et al. (1998), Holahan and Moos (1990), Holahan et al. (1999), and Moos et al. (1998).

Family support. Family support was measured by the Family Relationships Index, that is, the three subscales that comprise the relationship domain of the Family Environment Scale. These subscales are Cohesion, the degree to which family members are helpful and supportive of each other; Expressiveness, the extent to which family members are encouraged to act openly and express their feelings directly; and Conflict, the extent to which the expression of anger and conflict-laden interactions are characteristic of the family (reverse scored to index low conflict). Each of these subscales consists of 9 true–false items. The subscale scores are the sums of items marked in the designated direction; the family support measure is the average of the three subscale scores. The Family Relationships Index has good internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$). Research on the Family Environment Scale (for an overview, see Moos & Moos, 1994) has found that the subscales comprised by the Family Relationships Index have good 2-month test–retest reliability (average $r = .81$) and good construct validity. For example, these subscales are positively associated with established measures of social support among families and couples and with established measures of marital and parental satisfaction.

Family income. We asked respondents to report their "total annual family income before taxes (your earnings plus those of others living with you)" on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (*less than $5,000*) to 11 (*$60,000 or more*).[1] These values represent current dollars at the time of assessment; to remove the effect of inflation, we adjusted family income at each wave to 2006 dollars (see Sahr, 2007) in all analyses in this study. At each wave, the family income distribution encompassed all levels on the income scale. Looking across all four waves, income levels between individuals varied from less than $4,000 to more than $100,000 (adjusted to 2006 dollars). The median income levels in the present sample across the four waves of data collection are consistent with those reported in the U.S. Census for the San Francisco Bay area (Association of Bay Area Governments, 2003) and for the United States overall (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007) during the study period.

Happiness. We asked respondents to rate how accurately the adjective *happy* described them on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*not at all accurately*) to 4 (*quite accurately*). Single-item measures have commonly been used in happiness research (for an overview, see Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), such as the National Opinion Research Center's General Social Survey (Tourangeau, Rasinski, & Bradburn, 1991). Recent evidence with a comparable single-item measure of happiness (Abdel-Khalek, 2006) has indicated that such measures show good 1-week test–retest reliability ($r = .86$) and good construct validity ($r = .69$ with the Oxford Happiness Inventory; $r = .52$ with optimism).

Results

Table 1 shows means and standard deviations on the family predictors and happiness across the four assessments.

Overview of Data Analyses

Data analyses used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, & Congdon, 2001). HLM investigates the hierarchical structure of nested data, as when change processes and time-varying covariates are nested within respondents who differ on individual characteristics. At Level 1, coefficients (B, unstandardized) were derived for each respondent; they

[1] The highest income category was increased during the course of the study. At baseline and the 1-year follow-up, the highest income code was "$30,000 or more"; at the 4-year follow-up, the highest income code was "$50,000 or more."

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations (in Parentheses) on Family Predictors and Happiness Across the Four Assessments

Variable	Assessment			
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 4
Family income	63,017 (18,961)	60,481 (18,631)	75,406 (29,113)	77,864 (22,536)
Family social support	6.64 (1.50)	6.81 (1.28)	6.75 (1.47)	6.78 (1.36)
Happiness	2.99 (0.88)	2.98 (0.83)	2.95 (0.85)	2.86 (0.90)

Note. Family income at each wave is shown in adjusted to 2006 dollars. Family support ranged from 0 to 9, and happiness ranged from 0 to 4.

indicated (a) that individual's mean happiness (intercept); (b) how much that individual's happiness changed each year (slope); and (c) within-individual factors that covaried with happiness over time (time-varying covariates). At Level 2, coefficients (*G*, unstandardized) were derived; they indicated how strongly between-individual factors were associated with these within-individual parameters. The HLM analyses included participants who provided data on all Level 2 measures, as well as on all Level 1 measures across at least one predictive interval; the *n* was specified for each set of analyses.

Descriptive Analyses

Within individuals (Level 1), descriptive analyses ($n = 274$) examined the relationship between time course and happiness across the 10-year interval. The individual time slopes were regarded as a sample drawn from a population of slopes, and the mean of this population of slopes was tested against a value of zero using a *t* ratio. There was a slight but statistically significant decrease in happiness, $B = -0.02$, $t(273) = -2.86$, $p < .01$, across the 10 years, with time explaining 16% of the within-individual variance in happiness.

To examine the potential moderating roles of age and gender on the mean and time course of happiness, we introduced age and gender as Level 2 predictors of the individual intercepts and time slopes, which from that point functioned as outcome variables. We derived coefficients, which indicated how strongly age and gender were associated with the happiness mean and time slope; whether these coefficients differed from 0 was tested by a *t* ratio. The happiness mean and time slope did not vary by age or gender ($p > .05$).[2]

Predictive Analyses

The next set of analyses examined predictors of happiness. Within individuals (Level 1), both family income and family support were examined as time-varying covariates of happiness over repeated observations. The happiness intercept (mean) varied significantly ($p < .01$) across individuals and was examined as a randomly varying coefficient. As the slopes for the associations of family income and family support to happiness did not vary significantly ($p > .05$) across individuals, they were examined as fixed (nonvarying) coefficients. These were standard decisions that accounted for necessary random effects in the estimation of the fixed effects of interest.

All analyses controlled for year of assessment at Level 1; this method controls for temporal effects and for the potential effect of unequal intervals between assessments. In each set of analyses, the effect for family income was examined first. Next, the effect for family support was examined, controlling for family income.

Concurrent associations. Initially, the concurrent associations of family income and family support with happiness were examined across the four observations, controlling for time. Within individuals, family income was significantly related to happiness, and family support made a significant, unique contribution to happiness, when analyses controlled for family income (see Figure 1). Across the range of the predictive factors, the association between family income and happiness was small. The association between family support and happiness was substantial, with the level of happiness almost doubling, even after analyses controlled for family income (see Figure 2). The association between the family predictive factors and happiness did not vary by age or gender ($p > .05$).[3]

Change in happiness. The associations between the family predictors and change in happiness were examined in two ways. First, the moderating roles of change in family income and family support on the time course of happiness were investigated. This analysis examined concomitant change in the family predictors and happiness. For these analyses, change in both family income and family support was indexed from baseline to the latest point of data collection for each individual. These two change scores were introduced as Level 2 predictors of the individual time slopes in happiness from Level 1, controlling for age and

[2] In predicting the happiness mean, for gender, $G = 0.09$, $t(271) = 1.05$, $p = .30$; for age, $G = -0.003$, $t(271) = -0.76$, $p = .46$. In predicting the happiness time slope, for gender, $G = 0.006$, $t(271) = .49$, $p = .63$; for age, $G = -0.001$, $t(271) = -1.45$, $p = .15$.

[3] In additional HLM analyses (controlling for family income and time) of the separate subscales that measured family support, all three subscales related significantly ($p < .01$) to more concurrent happiness. In addition, all three subscales made significant, unique contributions to prediction of more concurrent happiness, when controlling for one another: for cohesion, $B = 0.11$, $t(835) = 5.88$, $p < .01$; for expressiveness, $B = 0.04$, $t(835) = 2.26$, $p < .05$; for low conflict, $B = 0.05$, $t(835) = 3.18$, $p < .01$.

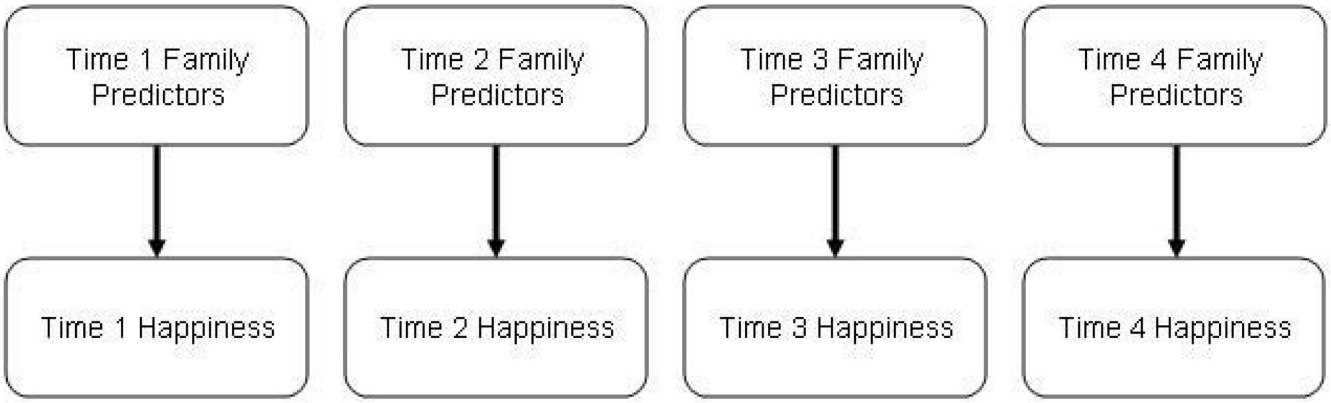

Figure 1. Cross-sectional model of the relationships between family predictive factors and happiness across 10 years. Family income, $B = 0.03$, $t(837) = 2.05$, $p < .05$. Family support (controlling for family income), $B = 0.20$, $t(836) = 8.50$, $p < .01$.

gender at Level 2. Change in family income was unrelated to the happiness time slope, $B = 0.004$, $t(196) = 1.34$, $p = .19$. In contrast, change in family support was significantly positively associated with the happiness time slope, $B = 0.02$, $t(195) = 2.80$, $p < .01$, when analyses controlled for change in family income. Change in family support explained 18% of the variance in the happiness time slope.

Next, following Singer and Willett (2003), we examined family income and family support as time-varying predictors of happiness in prospective analyses. In these analyses, family predictors at time x were examined as predictors of happiness at time $x + 1$, controlling for baseline happiness. This analysis examined the prospective association between the family predictors and residualized change in the happiness outcome. Although family income was unrelated to subsequent happiness, more family support predicted significantly more subsequent happiness, when analyses controlled for both family income and baseline happiness (see Figure 3).[4] The association between family support and happiness did not vary by age or gender ($p > .05$).[5]

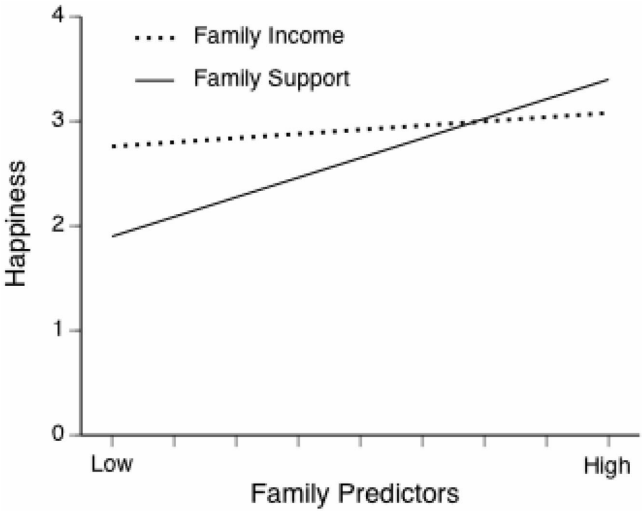

Figure 2. Cross-sectional relationships between family predictive factors and happiness across the four observations for the average participant. The slope for family support controls for family income.

Additional Analyses

We conducted several additional analyses to better understand the relationship between family income and happiness. First, on the basis of evidence that the effect of income on happiness may be stronger at lower levels of income (for a review, see Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002), we repeated the analysis of the concurrent association between family income and happiness across the four observations, including an additional quadratic term (income squared) for income. The income and income-squared terms represented the linear and quadratic components of the overall main effect of income. Examined together, these terms tested for a nonlinear association between family income and happiness. Within individuals, the linear component of family income was significantly positively related to happiness, $B = 0.16$, $t(836) = 2.61$, $p < .01$, and the quadratic component of family income was significantly negatively related to happiness, $B = -0.01$, $t(836) = -2.27$, $p < .05$. These results indicate a diminishing impact of income on happiness as income increases.

An additional analysis examined the potential role of

[4] The reverse association did not occur; happiness did not predict more subsequent family support, when analyses controlled for baseline support, $B = 0.09$, $t(563) = 1.56$, $p = .12$.

[5] In additional prospective HLM analyses (controlling for baseline happiness as well as family income and time) of the separate subscales that measured family support, only cohesion related significantly to more subsequent happiness: for cohesion, $B = 0.05$, $t(590) = 2.31$, $p < .05$; for expressiveness, $B = 0.03$, $t(590) = 1.50$, $p > .05$; for low conflict, $B = 0.01$, $t(590) = 0.68$, $p > .05$.

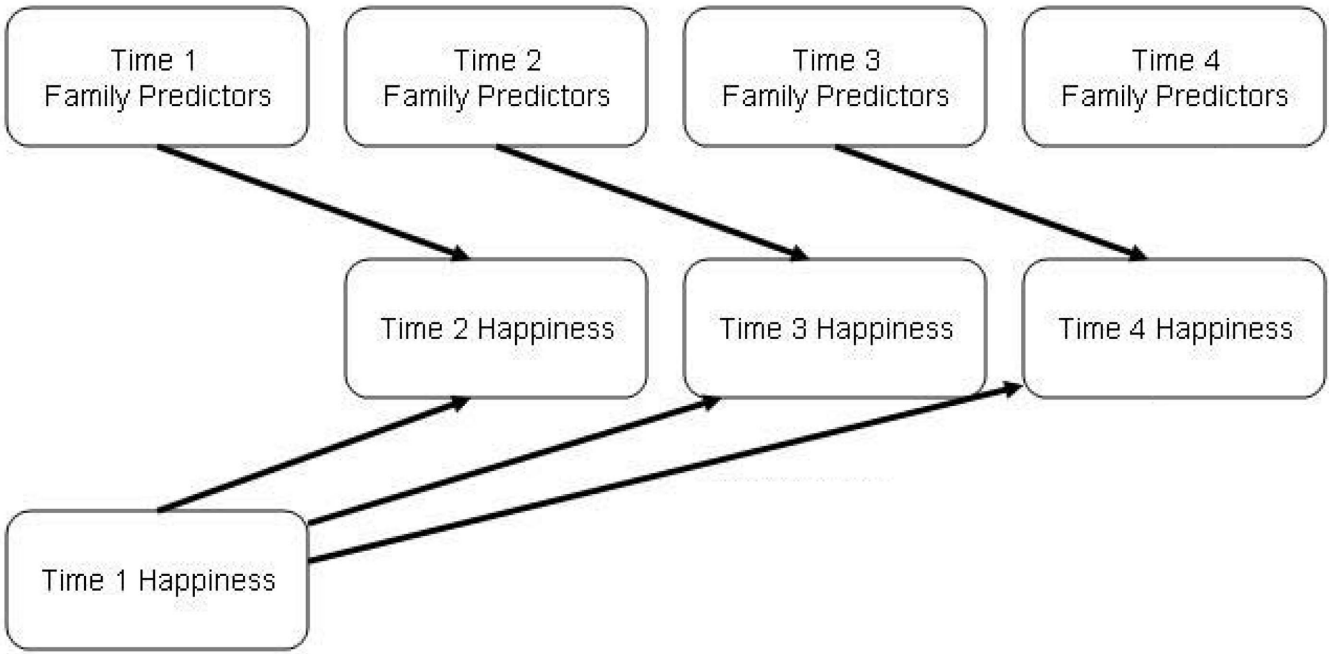

Figure 3. Prospective model of the relationships between family predictive factors and happiness across 10 years. Family income, $B = 0.01$, $t(591) = .40$, $p = .69$. Family support (controlling for family income), $B = 0.05$, $t(590) = 2.11$, $p < .05$.

family income in moderating the association between family support and happiness. The analysis of the concurrent association between family support and happiness across the four observations was repeated, with family income as a time-varying covariate removed from the Level 1 model and with mean family income across the study period introduced as a time-invariant factor at Level 2. This analysis also controlled for age and gender at Level 2. Mean family income significantly reduced the association between family support and happiness, $B = -0.03$, $t(828) = -2.22$, $p < .05$. These results indicate that family support was more strongly associated with happiness when family income was low than when family income was high.

Discussion

The present study examined the relative contributions of family income and family support—two factors that often compete in family life—to happiness in a sample of 274 married adults. Findings generally supported hypotheses. Family income showed a small, positive association with concurrent happiness, whereas family support showed a substantial, positive association with concurrent happiness. In addition, change in family support was positively related to change in happiness, and change in family income was unrelated to change in happiness. These findings extend previous research on happiness in several ways. Our longitudinal analyses took advantage of individual-level data that spanned 10 years. In addition, use of a comprehensive measure of the quality of family relationships extended previous work on happiness to the understanding of well-being in the family context.

Consistent with previous research showing a small but consistent positive correlation between income and happiness (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Hagerty, 2000; Hill, 2004), family income was significantly, though only weakly, associated with concurrent happiness in this largely middle-income sample. In addition, consistent with evidence that the effect of income on happiness may be stronger at lower levels of income (for a review, see Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002), income had a diminishing impact on happiness as income increased. These findings are consistent with evidence that the effect of income is stronger at lower levels of income (Suhail & Chaudry, 2004) and are consistent with research that found "virtually negligible" effects of income on happiness in higher income samples (Inglehart, 1990).

The transition from poverty to a moderate income is essential to a family's meeting its basic needs: suitable housing in a safe neighborhood, sufficient nutrition, and adequate health care (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002). After basic needs are met, additional income no longer meets most people's deeper needs in an enduring way, at least when it is directed toward acquiring more material goods. However, the way in which additional income is spent after basic needs are met may be important to a fuller understanding of the role of income in happiness. Additional income may meet deeper human needs and may promote more happiness when it is used for nonmaterial purposes, such as personal development, family or social activities, or chari-

table giving. Another reason income may be associated with happiness is that happy people may earn more money (see Graham, Eggers, & Sukhtankar, 2004; Marks & Fleming, 1999).

Consistent with previous research relying on more general measures of social support and happiness (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Suhail & Chaudry, 2004), family support was strongly related to concurrent happiness. Moreover, the significant association between family support and happiness held after controlling for family income. Neither age nor gender was significantly associated with the relationship between family support and happiness in any analyses, a fact that underscores the broad generality of these findings.

The substantial link between family support and happiness in the present study may be a function of several factors. Family support meets a fundamental need for acceptance and belonging that is unmet by economic security alone or by wealth or status. Additionally, our measure of family support assesses deeper aspects of family relationships—the strength of the bonds between family members and the depth of emotional openness and sharing—that are central to many individuals' sense of purpose in life (Holahan & Moos, 1983). Moreover, our family index taps low interpersonal conflict in a family's day-to-day interactions, and interpersonal conflicts have been found to be the most powerful daily stressors in predicting an individual's mood (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). More broadly, Reis and Gable (2003) argued that "social relations figure prominently and indispensably in phenomena such as emotion regulation, coping with stress, self-perception and identity formation, uncertainty reduction, collective task performance, and the fulfillment of personal aspirations" (p. 131). In the context of family life, these outgrowths of supportive relationships may provide an essential foundation for life satisfaction.

In an interesting finding, family income attenuated the association between family support and concurrent happiness. Family support was more strongly associated with happiness when family income was low than when family income was high. This pattern of findings suggests that, in terms of happiness, high family support can compensate for deficiencies in family income.

The importance of family support to happiness was further reinforced in analyses of change in family income and family support on the time course of happiness. Overall, there was a small but statistically significant decrease in happiness across the 10 years. Congruent with previous results that rising income is unrelated to happiness (Easterlin, 2005; Hellevik, 2003; Myers, 2000), change in family income was unrelated to change in happiness. In contrast, change in family support was significantly, positively related to change in happiness. Moreover, in prospective analyses, although family income was unrelated to subsequent happiness, more family support predicted significantly more subsequent happiness, when analyses controlled for both family income and baseline happiness. Although all three components of family support—cohesion, expressiveness, and low conflict—related to more concurrent happiness, only cohesion prospectively predicted more subsequent happiness.

Counter to early assumptions that happiness may be resistant to change (Brickman & Campbell, 1971), these analyses of change between family support and happiness suggest that family support is linked to enduring changes in happiness. The present findings strengthen the emerging theoretical view that "happiness can and does change" (Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006, p. 309; Lucas, 2007).

Some limitations should be noted in interpreting these results. Self-report measures are subject to social desirability and common method variance. In addition, these are post hoc analyses based on a database not originally intended to answer these specific questions. Further, use of a single item to measure happiness may not reflect this construct as fully as would use of a multi-item index. At the same time, single-item measures have commonly been used in happiness research (for overviews, see Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Tourangeau et al., 1991), and recent evidence has indicated that such measures show good reliability and good concurrent, convergent, and divergent validity in community surveys (Abdel-Khalek, 2006). Also, these limitations tend to reduce statistical power and would be of greater concern in the context of a failure to replicate earlier findings. Despite these mitigating factors, single-item measures of happiness are problematic by contemporary standards, and future research should replicate our findings with a more comprehensive measure of happiness. Finally, the present database underrepresents minority group members and individuals of lower socioeconomic status, and future research should extend our findings to more ethnically and economically diverse samples.

The present findings suggest that happiness can change and underscore the importance of exploring more deeply the role that family relationships play in facilitating such change. At a broader level, this study merges aspects of positive psychology (Seligman, 2002) with the investigation of family life. Furthermore, the results of this study, along with the emerging body of research on well-being, have implications for public policy (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004). Implicit in conventional policy making is an assumption that a strong economy can be equated with a society's well-being. Our findings underscore the importance of additional policy indicators (see Diener & Seligman, 2004) that can tap the well-being of individuals and families at the psychosocial level to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a nation's well-being.

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