

# The Moderating Role of Authenticity in the Relationship Between Valued Living and Life Satisfaction in Undergraduate Students

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze the moderating role of authentic behavior on valued living and life satisfaction. The study group consisted of a total of 328 university students (249 female, 79 male) between 18-32 years old. The average age of the students in the study group was 20.3 and the standard deviation was 1.65. Participants of the study were selected through convenient sampling methods (Fraenkel et al., 2011). The data of this study was obtained by applying the Valued Living Scale (Wilson & Groom, 2002), The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) and the Authenticity Scale (Wood et al., 2008). Hierarchical regression analysis was applied to test the moderating effect of authentic behavior on the relationship between valued living and life satisfaction. SPSS 20 package program (IBM, 2011) was used in the data analysis step. In this study, two models were created with hierarchical regression analysis and these two models were tested. In the first model, the individual effect of valued living on life satisfaction and in the second model, the moderating role of authentic behavior on this relationship was analyzed. Based on the obtained results, it was determined that valued living has positive and significant relationships with life satisfaction; as well authentic behavior increased the predictive power of the relationship between valued living and life satisfaction and moderated this relationship in a positive significant direction. Obtained results were considered under related information in the literature and recommendations were provided for future studies.

**Keywords:** valued living, life satisfaction, authentic behavior, moderating effects, university students

## 1. Introduction

Life satisfaction is described as a judgmental process in which people assess the quality of their whole life according to their own unique set of criteria (Shin & Johnson, 1978). It is concluded that there is a correspondence between one's perception of his/her own life and the set of standards which was formed previously. If a person agrees that his/her life conditions and his/her perceptions about the life presumably match, it is said that his/her life satisfaction level is high. Hence, life satisfaction is a conscious cognitive judgment about the established criteria for one's life (Pavot & Diener, 2009). In the literature, life satisfaction is assumed to have relations to such processes as happiness in daily life, attributing meaning to the life, consistence of reaching to the goals, positive personal identity, physical and mental health, doing sports, freedom, being open-minded and active, feeling in control about the life, being married, having a good relationship with family and friends, having broad social connections, economic conditions, feelings over security and etc. (Schmitter, 2003; Khakoo, 2004; Dockery, 2004). According to Appleton and Song (2008), the following are six main components that affect individuals' life satisfaction; income level, social and vocational status, opportunities and having an active social life, conditions of welfare, government policy, the quality of social relationships and the structure of family and the environment. In spite of these factors, Diener (1984) claimed that life satisfaction has a dynamic structure that can change according to the individual's current living conditions and personal standards. From this perspective, life satisfaction is accepted as a general evaluation about the whole life in which individuals especially focus on the congruence with their wishes /wants and possessions.

### *Life Satisfaction and Valued Living*

The concept of life satisfaction is defined as a sub-component of the concept of "happiness" in the field of positive psychology. Life satisfaction is an event or result based on comparing what an individual wants (expectations) and what that individual has (currently what s/he has) (Neugarten et al., 1961; Diener, 2000; Gilman et al., 2013). When related literature is reviewed, there are differences in terms of the conceptualization of life satisfaction. Accordingly, while

some researchers use life satisfaction and well-being synonymously, some claim that these two concepts are different. However, most of the researchers tend to accept that life satisfaction is mostly based on well-being (Duarte, 2014). Accordingly, Diener (1984) who defined the concept of subjective well-being for the first time stated that subjective well-being consists of two dimensions, mainly affective well-being and life-satisfaction. In this sense, if an individual experiences high levels of nice and positive emotions, that individual would have high levels of subjective well-being and hence high life satisfaction levels (Diener et al., 2009).

According to Roccas and Sagiv (2013), since the major focus is in answering the question of “what makes an individual happy”, there are multi-dimensional relationships between values, well-being and life satisfaction. As stated in this approach, another important variable that affects life satisfaction is “having a life based on values”. The valued living concept, first defined in the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) known as the third wave therapy in Positive Psychology and Behavioral Therapies expresses “at what level does an individual lives his/her life based on values” (Roccas&Sagiv, 2013; Hayes et al., 2006; Strosahl et al., 2004). In fact values are closely related with well-being of individuals in different dimensions. For example, since values and fighting for values will meet the need for self-actualization within the existence of an individual, achieving well-being will be easier. Based on the studies of Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz and Knafo (2002) on this subject, it is revealed that there is a positive relationship between positive affection, self-guidance, excitation and universality and there is a negative correlation with power and value coherence. Additionally, especially when life is lived coherently with values, it is seen that individuals are guided positively to well-being and therefore, have a tendency for increased life satisfaction. Supporting these assumptions, Haslam, Whelan and Bastian (2009) pointed to a complete mediating effects between values and well-being.

#### *The Moderating Role of Authenticity*

In this study, the moderating effect of authentic behavior between life satisfaction and valued living was tested. Authenticity is known as the true-self defined as successfully being oneself in different life conditions, and the initiative to reach this state by sustaining this process (Waterman, 1992, 2004). According to another definition, the concept of authenticity is “being sincere and unique in terms of emotions and being deep in psychological sense with self-adaptation (Sheldon, 2013). Authenticity was also highlighted in different theories including psychodynamic theories (Horney, 1951; Winnicott, 1965), humanist theories (Rogers, 1961), existential psychotherapy (May, 1981; Yalom, 1980) and Positive Psychology (Linley, Joseph, Harrington & Wood, 2006).

According to Rogers (1961), the founder of humanism based psychological counselling/psychotherapy, authenticity is synonymous with the congruence concept. Within this scope, authenticity is “accessing to the emotions experienced, reaching self-awareness and experiencing all these emotions, being in these emotions at that moment and communicating with these emotions in an appropriate manner”. According to Rogers, authenticity is hard because authenticity has a difficult structure to grasp and since people are generally tightly connected with their self-image, they find it hard to be authentic. Self-perception formed by an individual at a cognitive level consciously makes them blind and move them away from being authentic. Additionally, according to Rogers, deficiencies and insufficiencies in the social environment and the attitudes during raising the child, move individuals away from authenticity and therefore, lead individuals to form a fake or non-authentic self. Authentic life is only possible without fake behaviors and without any hidden agenda (Sheldon, 2013). In this sense, it is possible to say that individuals who live their life in valued ways are guided towards an authentic existence.

In terms of authenticity, Kernis and Goldman (2006) are inspired from the humanistic theory of Rogers (1980) and the Self-Determination Theory (Deci&Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan&Deci, 2000) and expressed four elements for authenticity. These elements are *awareness, neutrality and processing, behavior* and *relational orientation*. *Awareness* is self-actualization of motives. *Neutrality and processing* is not being defensive in a relationship with the self and at the same time, awareness for the process and guiding. *Behavior* is having coherent and compliant behaviors with values, preferences and needs. *Relational orientation* is honesty and trueness in an interpersonal relationship. Although others see the negative sides of an individual, it is about shaping the interpersonal relationship based on honesty and openness to experience values (Sheldon, 2013).

According to Wood et al. (2008), authenticity consists of three dimensions namely *self-alienation, authentic living* and *accepting external influence*. *Self-alienation* is the correspondence between awareness of conscious living of the individual and the real life (true self). This is the integration between awareness felt at a level of consciousness (physiological emotions and deep level cognition) and what happens in reality. If an individual’s awareness fails to match reality, it is possible to talk about psychopathology. *Authentic life* is living the true self based on the values and beliefs of an individual. *Accepting external influence* is accepting the influence of other people and beliefs of individuals about fitting to the expectations of others. Wood et al. (2008) assumed that if self-alienation and accepting the external influence dimensions are at extreme levels, inauthenticity will happen and conversely if there is an

exploration to the self by living coherent with values, “authenticity” will occur.

Sheldon (2013) claimed that individuals can create self-congruent goals and hence coherence with personal properties and supporting personality can be achieved. On the contrary, since non-self-congruent goals are created based on the self-premises or beliefs and when individuals try to realize these goals, their chance of success is low. Based on the self-concordance model, authenticity is realized by creating and chasing long-term life goals and objectives with the self-belief and enjoyment (Sheldon, 2013). As suggested by the self-concordance model, for an individual to chase real life goals, that individual needs to create and manage certain values or a value-based life. Roccas and Sagiv (2013) stated that values believed by individuals are turned into principles that govern their life and this effects life perceptions as well as priorities, selections, affections and actions.

Based on all, the purpose of this study is to analyze the moderating role of authentic behavior on valued living and life satisfaction. This study is based on testing the moderating effects of authentic behavior towards valued living and life satisfaction. It is believed that this study is important as it is one of the first studies that analyzes life satisfaction based on valued living and authenticity model. The results obtained from this study may likely contribute to understand the individual variables that effect life satisfaction, uncover positive properties of a related sample, and develop theoretical and practical approaches for competence and strength resources.

## **2. Method**

This study is a descriptive-correlational study based on the quantitative research methods to test the moderating effect of authenticity on the relationship between valued life and life satisfaction.

### *2.1 Participants*

Sample of this study consisted of a total of 328 (249 female, 79 male) undergraduate students between 18-32 years old studying in different departments of Istanbul Medipol University. The age average of the students in the sample group was 20.3 (SD=1.65). Participants of this study were selected with the convenient sampling methods (Fraenkel, Wallen&Hyun, 2011).

### *2.2 Data Collection Tools*

“Valued Living Questionnaire (VLQ), Life Satisfaction Scale and Authenticity Scale were used to collect the data.

#### *2.2.1 Valued Living Questionnaire (VLQ)*

The scale that was developed by Wilson and Groom (2002) and adapted to Turkish by Çekici et al. (2018) is a self-statement scale measuring valued life in 10 main life areas. The theory of VLQ is based on the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. In VLQ, individuals are asked to evaluate their daily lives and whether they live a value directed life. The scale consisted of two different dimensions which were “Importance” and “Coherence”. In the “Importance” dimension, individuals score the importance of each value in their life based on a 10-point Likert type scale while in the “Coherence” dimension, individuals score at what level are their behaviors coherent with their values in the past week. In both dimensions, among 10 categories 1st is family (root family), 2nd is marriage/couples/close relationships, 3rd is parenting, 4th is friends/social environment, 5th is job (work), 6th is education/learning, 7th is leisure/entertainment, 8th is spirituality/meaning and purpose in life, 9th is citizenship/social life, and 10th is physical self-care (eating/exercise/motion/resting/sleep). When answering this scale, 10-point Likert type scoring (1-not important - 10-extremely important) is used. In the second part of the scale, the self-review questions ask about whether there is a concordance between valued life behavior patterns and real-life activities/actions of individual/clients. While scoring this scale, the “valued composite (composition)” was formed by combining “importance” and “coherence” sub-scales and was calculated to determine at what level do individuals live their life in a valued manner. For this purpose, scores from each section were added to obtain the total score and high scores indicate a valued living. Cronbach Alpha values of the Turkish form of this scale were calculated as .90 for the whole scale, .85 for importance sub-scale and .83 for coherence sub-scale.

#### *2.2.2 The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)*

SWLS was developed by Diner, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985) and adapted to Turkish by Dağlı and Baysal (2016), The scale is a self-report scale consisting of a single dimension with five items. Original scale is scored with 7-point scoring (1: Completely Disagree - 7: Completely Agree). Turkish adaptation used 5-point Likert type scale. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient under the reliability analysis was found .88 and test re-test reliability was found .97. Factor analysis results showed that this scale has a single factor structure and consisted of 5 items as in the original form. Based on the validity and reliability analysis, it can be seen that the scale is a valid and reliable scale to be used in Turkish sample.

### 2.2.3 Authenticity Scale (AS)

The Authenticity Scale, based on the humanistic approach, developed by Wood et al. (2008) and adapted to Turkish by İlhan and Özdemir (2013). The scale measures three different constructs, namely “Self-Alienation, Accepting External Influence and Authentic Life.” AS is consisted of a total of 12 items and this scale is in a 7-point Likert type. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficients of the Turkish form of this scale were .79 for Self-Alienation, .67 for Accepting External Influence, and .62 for Authenticity Life sub-dimensions.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

At the first stage of the data analysis, data was prepared with the SPSS 20 package program (IBM, 2011). In the following stages, the same program was used for analyzing the moderating role of authentic behavior on the relationship between valued living and life satisfaction with hierarchical regression analysis.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Descriptive Analysis

The Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was adopted to determine the relationship between valued living, life satisfaction and authentic behavior and the correlation values are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlation Coefficient Between Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Valued living	-		
2. Authentic behavior	.17**	-	
3. Life satisfaction	.28***	.36***	-

$N = 328$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

As seen from Table 1, significant relationships exist between all of the study variables. Independent variable, valued living has a positive and significant relationship with authenticity ( $r = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and life satisfaction ( $r = .28$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Additionally, the authentic behavior has a positive and significant relationship with life satisfaction ( $r = .36$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### 3.2. Results for Hierarchical Regression Analysis

The moderating effects of authentic behavior on the relationship between life satisfaction and valued living was analyzed with hierarchical regression analysis. The proposed model was statistically significant ( $R^2 = .17$ ,  $F(1, 325) = 38.21$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Model fit values (F ratio) and changes, effect size,  $R^2$  change, standard and non-standard regression coefficients for the model are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Results of Hierarchical Regression for The Proposed Model of Life Satisfaction

Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	$\Delta R^2$	$R^2$	$\Delta F$
Model 1					.08	.08	28.18***
1. Valued living	.05	.01	.28	5.31***			
Model 2					.18	.17	38.21***
1. Valued living	.04	.01	.23	4.46***			
2. Authentic behavior	.12	.02	.32	6.18***			

$N = 328$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

As seen from Table 2, the first model in hierarchical regression tested the effects of valued living on life satisfaction. Based on this model, valued living significantly explains the variance in the life satisfaction scores ( $R^2 = .08$ ,  $F(1, 326) = 28.18$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Additionally, the valued living has a positive and significant effect on life satisfaction ( $b = 0.28$ ,  $t(326) = 5.31$ ,  $p = .000$ ). In the second block of regression analysis, in addition to the valued living, authentic behavior was added to the model and the model explains life satisfaction at a significant level ( $\Delta R^2 = .10$ ,  $F(1, 325) = 38.21$ ,  $p = .000$ ). In the second model, when predictive effects of both variables were analyzed, it was found that authentic behavior ( $b = 0.32$ ,  $t(326) = 6.18$ ,  $p = .000$ ) has a higher predictive effect than valued living ( $b = 0.23$ ,  $t(326) = 4.46$ ,  $p = .000$ ) on life satisfaction.

#### 4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the moderating role of authentic behavior on valued living and life satisfaction. For this purpose, a hierarchical regression analysis was used for testing the effects of two models on life satisfaction. In the first model, the individual effect of valued life on life satisfaction was examined; then the moderating effect of authentic behavior on this relationship was tested. The results showed that valued life has positive and significant effects on life satisfaction. Additionally, it was found that authentic behavior increased the predictive relationship between valued life and life satisfaction in a positive and significant direction.

The first regression model under the scope of this study analyzed the effect of valued living on life satisfaction and a positive significant effect was identified. When the literature was reviewed, there are various studies supporting these findings. Roccas et al. (2002) showed that when individuals lived a coherent life with their values, these individuals tend to show positive well-being and their life satisfaction increases. Haslam, Whelan and Bastian (2009) determined a complete mediator effect between values and well-being. Sheldon (2013) suggested that when individuals relate to behaviors or objectives they want to realize, they show more interest and passion, achieve more positive results compared to those objectives with stress and guilt and at the same time, these individuals have higher psychological well-being. In this sense, based on the information that life satisfaction is a concept related to psychological well-being in the literature (Duarte, 2014), it is possible to say that increased well-being of individuals who can live a life based on values and who are tightly connected with values will create a positive change on their satisfaction with their lives.

In the second model proposed in this study, the moderating role of authenticity on the relationship between life satisfaction and valued living was tested and compared to the effect of valued living as examined in the first model. The results showed that authentic behavior has a high and significant predictive power in this relationship. When related literature was reviewed, there are certain studies supporting this finding. According to some studies, as authenticity level increases, self-respect, positive emotion and life satisfaction levels (Goldman&Kernis,2002), and subjective well-being increase (Ryan et al., 2005) but on the contrary, non-authenticity causes more anxiety, stress (Wood et al., 2008), somatic complaints and depression (Theran, 2011; Ryan et al., 2005), low self-respect and a high level of depression (Neff&Harter, 2002; Lopez & Rice, 2006), a high level of anxiety and a low level of life satisfaction (Lopez & Rice, 2006). Kernis & Goldman (2006) defined the "behavioral dimension" of authenticity as having coherent and concordant behaviors with the values, choices and needs where Wood et al. (2008) defined "authenticity life dimension" as living the true self based on the values and beliefs of individuals. In this sense, this finding explains that authentic behavior forms a strong structure for a value dominated life. In other words, combined with authentic behavior, the effects of valued living on satisfaction with the life strengthens.

This study analyzed the moderating role of authentic behavior on valued living and life satisfaction. Results of the study showed that authentic behavior has positive and significant moderating effect on the relationship between valued life and life satisfaction. However, this study has certain limitations. In this study, the data was obtained from university students by using convenient sampling methods. Future studies may adopt a random sampling method to work on different sample groups along with similar models. Additionally, in this study, the moderating role of authentic behavior on valued living and life satisfaction was analyzed. Future studies may also form more comprehensive models that include the moderating roles of other inter/intrapersonal variables in addition to the authentic behavior in the relationships between values, valued living and life satisfaction.

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