

# Intellectual Self-care, Education, Happiness, and Life Satisfaction Among Employed Individuals

Meiqing Xiong, Jennifer L. Hughes, and Chanice T. Alexander  
Agnes Scott College

Intellectual self-care is one of the domains under self-care that involves activities engaging in critical and creative thinking, expanding current knowledge, and stimulating the mind (Worell & Goodheart, 2005). This concept is seldom defined and investigated through research; thus, the purpose of this study was to garner an understanding of intellectual self-care among employed individuals in relation to other variables like education, happiness, and life satisfaction. With the help from 12 research assistants with recruiting participants through email and social media, the study included 165 employed men and employed 498 women (7 participants had missing data on biological sex) living in the United States. The survey was completed online via SurveyMonkey. Pearson correlations and one-way ANOVAs with post hoc tests were used for testing the five hypotheses. The results revealed that the importance that individuals associate with intellectual self-care and their actual engagement in intellectual self-care activities were significantly correlated. The second hypothesis was not supported, which suggests higher educational background was not significantly correlated with engagement in more intellectual self-care. The third hypothesis was confirmed; employed individuals with higher levels of education needed greater intellectual self-care. The last two hypotheses were substantiated by our data, and they supported the positive correlation between intellectual self-care and happiness, as well as life satisfaction. This study suggested the possible benefit of informing employed people of the importance of intellectual self-care, implied the intellectual values in higher education, and provided insights on engaging in more intellectual self-care activities to improve personal well-being.

**S**elf-care is a concept that aims to enhance quality of life and achieve a sense of fulfillment, and it involves multiple components (Worell & Goodheart, 2005). The topic of self-care is gaining popularity within the literature (Worell & Goodheart, 2005), whereas a key component, intellectual self-care, is seldom defined and explored through research. Intellectual self-care is crucial to individuals' well-being, as it "involves regular opportunities to engage in critical thinking and inquiry to expand knowledge and stimulate the mind" (Worell & Goodheart, 2005, p. 186).

However, there is a deficiency of research that focuses on intellectual self-care in relation to the well-being of the general

population, as current studies are mostly concerned with the self-care for people with intellectual disabilities. There are also divergent views on the significance of intellectual self-care as a type of self-care. For instance, Worell and Goodheart (2005) point out that self-care incorporates physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, social, safety, and security areas of function. The intellectual domain, however, is missing in the definition by Charlescraft, Tartaglia, Dodd-McCue, and Barker (2010); self-care addresses the elements of life that allow one to be well in a variety of ways physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally—for renewal and personal growth (as cited in Tan & Castillo, 2014). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the significance of

intellectual self-care in today's society, where critical thinking and creativity are encouraged and valued. Intellectual self-care, as well as its connection with other aspects of individual's lives, such as education, happiness, and life satisfaction, is worthy of research.

### **Intellectual Self-care**

While there is no concrete definition for the term intellectual self-care, Worell and Goodheart (2005) contend that this domain of self-care involves activities engaging in critical thinking, expanding the current knowledge, and stimulating the mind. They also point out that an enduring interest in ideas, thinking, learning, and creativity is crucial for this kind of self-care. Given the lack of research directly on intellectual self-care, it is constructive to review the existing literature according to its various components: critical thinking, creativity, and intellectual stimuli.

A crucial component of intellectual self-care, critical thinking is defined by extensive literature to incorporate: (a) attitudes of inquiry that leads to the recognition of existence of problems; (b) realization of the valid evidence needed to support an argument around the problem; (c) knowledge of generalizations, abstractions, and valid inferences to logically determine the accuracy and weight of evidence; and (d) skills in applying the above attitudes and knowledge (Watson & Glaser, 1994, as cited in Loo & Thorpe, 2005). Loo and Thorpe (2005) found in their exploratory study critical thinking skills were positively related to attitudes toward women: Those with greater critical thinking skills have more liberal attitudes toward women's roles in society. This conclusion indicated that by stimulating critical thinking skills it may be possible to promote more liberal attitudes toward women's roles in society.

According to Simonton (2000a, as cited in Simonton, 2012), creativity involves the psychological phenomenon that involves generating an idea or product that is novel and useful simultaneously. Researchers found that both sides of the brain become involved while one engages in creative activities, activating and energizing the mind (Perrin, 2001, as cited in Caddy, Crawford, & Page, 2012). With well-recognized therapeutic value, creative activity can be even used by mental health practitioners such as counselors, mental health nurses, art therapists, and occupational therapists when they work with people with mental health problems (Caddy et al., 2012). In addition to the significance of creativity at the individual level, the business environment also values creativity as leaders and managers recognize the importance to nurture and facilitate creativity, which is crucial for invention and innovation (Mueller, Melwani & Goncalo 2012, as cited in Caniëls & Rietzschel, 2013).

Seeking to explore the mediating role of mental workloads at work between cognitive decline and educational level, Bosma, van Boxtel, Ponds, Houx, and Jolles (2003) found the significance of mental and intellectual stimuli in their study. They concluded that a substantial part of the association between accelerated cognitive decline and low educational level is mediated by the lack of mental demands at work, which is more common among the poorly educated participants.

### **Education**

Level of education, assessed based on the years of formal education completed, is one variable in the study by Green and Elliott (2009), and their results suggested that having a higher level of education is significantly associated with greater happiness. Therefore, educational level is influential on people's well-being. When it comes to the workplace, education level,

which refers to the academic degrees or credentials an individual has obtained, reflects education attainment that is found to be associated with positive career outcomes (Ng & Feldman, 2009). In their study, Ng and Feldman (2009) found that highly educated workers, compared to less educated workers, tend to display greater creativity and demonstrate more citizenship behaviors. The results indicated that greater cognitive ability, as a positive outcome of education, is likely to improve job performance especially for jobs of high complexity that require high intellectual capacity.

Although educational achievement may facilitate one's acquisition of creative jobs or excellence in job performance, Spreitzer and Snyder (1987) point out that the incongruence between job and education might negatively influence one's job satisfaction and job performance as a result. Even though their results only showed a relatively weak relationship between perceived educational-occupational fit and job satisfaction, they suggest that individual adaptation to work environments is helpful for improving job satisfaction in the face of perceived underemployment (Spreitzer & Snyder, 1987). Interested in the impact that education has on domestic environment, Jackson (1993) found that single Black mothers with lower education or training backgrounds experience higher role strain. In addition, higher education attainment moderates the depressive symptomatology among single Black mothers, which underscores the need for policies that increase the accessibility of education beyond high school for those single women in poor households (Jackson, 1993).

### **Happiness**

As mentioned above, intellectual self-care is associated with psychological well-being. A crucial measure of mental well-being, happiness refers to a global and

subjective judgment that one is experiencing relatively little negative emotion and a good deal of positive emotion (Cropanzano & Wright 2001). Haller and Hadler (2004) found in their study that individual happiness depends on the degree of freedom as well as choice individuals feel they have in their lives, and that one will feel happier if he or she lives in the environment where more of such freedom is provided. From a sociological perspective, Haller and Hadler's study in 2006 explored the micro and macro social antecedents of happiness. It was found that persons engaging in close interpersonal relationships and actively participating in social and religious activities are significantly happier, compared to those who find themselves outside of such interpersonal or social relations (Haller & Hadler, 2006). Unemployment was found to be a state constituting a sense of loss and therefore a decreased level of happiness. In this sense, there might be a difference of happiness level among employed and unemployed individuals, so it is important to target different groups in separate studies in order to draw accurate conclusions. This study, therefore, only focuses on employed individuals to examine multiple variables including happiness.

### **Life Satisfaction**

It is hard to separate happiness and life satisfaction. In fact, Argyle (2001) suggests that life satisfaction, optimism, self-esteem, and control are four characteristics that are so highly correlated with happiness that they are often considered components of happiness (Pannells & Claxton, 2008). Diener and Biswas (2008) also incorporate life satisfaction into the definition of happiness, stating that happiness consists of positive emotions and satisfaction with one's life, and these two components are inextricably linked. However, differences between these two concepts were also found in past

research. Haller and Hadler (2006) found that life satisfaction is more the result of an evaluation of the objective situation that is related to objective socioeconomic conditions, whereas positive and close social relations influence happiness. From this finding, life satisfaction is more clearly affected by macrosocial institutional conditions (e.g., welfare state, political freedom) than happiness.

### Hypotheses

Given the void of research on intellectual self-care in the existing literature, as well as the significance of related variables like educational level, happiness, and life satisfaction for employed individuals, we proposed five hypotheses:

(a) Employed individuals who place more importance on intellectual self-care will engage more in intellectual self-care.

(b) Employed individuals with higher levels of education will engage more in intellectual self-care.

(c) Employed individuals with higher levels of education will express a greater need to engage in more intellectual self-care.

(d) Employed individuals who engage in more frequent intellectual self-care will report greater happiness.

(e) Employed individuals who engage in more frequent intellectual self-care will report greater life satisfaction.

### Method

#### Participants

Six hundred and seventy employed participants completed the survey. The sample consisted of 165 men, 498 women, and 7 participants with missing data indicating their biological sex. There was a wide range of ages within the sample, and the emerging adults aged 18 to 25 accounted for the largest group of the participants (37.5%). The rest of the age distribution information was: 26.9% for ages 26–35, 16.3% for ages

36–45, 13.1% for ages 46–55, 5.1% for ages 56–65, and 1.2% for age over 66. Despite the missing data on racial identification from 6 participants, 64.5% of our respondents reported their ethnicity as White, 18.4% as African American, 6.7% as Asian, 5.8% as biracial, 2.5% as Hispanic, < 1% Indian, < 1% Native American, and < 1% other. Out of the 670 participants, 669 indicated that they currently have a paid job. All the participants lived in the United States.

### Measures

**Educational level.** A demographic question about education was used to measure the participants' educational level. In response to the question, "What is your highest level of education?" participants chose from the following items: high school degree, some college, BA/BS degree, MS or equivalent degree, and PhD or equivalent degree.

**Happiness.** A single self-rating scale developed by Abdel-Khalek (2006) was used to measure happiness, "Do you feel happy in general?" The Likert scale used ranged from 1 to 10, *minimum happiness* to *maximum happiness*. The research participants were instructed to "[i]magine their global estimation and general feelings, taking note that 0 is the minimum and 10 is the maximum score, and to select the number which best describes their feelings."

**Intellectual self-care.** Four items about intellectual self-care were written by the authors. Specifically, questions about critical thinking, creative activities, knowledge accumulation, and mind-stimulating activities, respectively, were asked. An example item is "During the past seven days did you: engage in activities that allowed you to critically think about ideas?" Using the options ranging from *not at all* to *multiple times during each day*, the participants selected the frequency they had engaged in each specific intellectual self-care activity.

Higher frequencies for each item indicate greater engagement in intellectual self-care activities. For this study a .89 alpha reliability coefficient was found. The authors also found that intellectual self-care was related to perceived importance of intellectual self-care, which establishes some evidence for the construct validity of the scale.

**Intellectual self-care importance.** One question written by the authors was used to measure self-care importance. The question asked, “Do you feel it is important for you to engage in intellectual self-care?” The participants rated the item using a Likert scale, which ranged from 1 to 5, *not important* to *very important*, respectively. Higher scores indicate a higher perception of the importance of intellectual self-care.

**Need for intellectual self-care.** An item written by the authors measured the need for intellectual self-care improvement. The scale asked, “Based on the past 7 days, do you feel you would like to devote more attention to intellectual self-care?” The Likert scale used ranged from 1 to 5, *no attention needed* to *a lot of attention needed*. High scores indicate the respondents felt a strong need for more improvement in intellectual self-care.

## Procedures

Twelve research assistants utilized e-mail, flyers, and social media to recruit participants who were employed (i.e., in any type of job, full or part-time) and 18 years old or older. All respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary. Participants completed the surveys online using SurveyMonkey. Six \$50 Amazon gift card prizes were used to encourage participation.

## Results

A Person correlation was used to test the first hypothesis, which proposed that there would be a positive correlation between the

importance employed people place on intellectual self-care and their actual engagement in intellectual self-care. As expected, the results revealed that the importance that individuals associate with intellectual self-care ( $M = 4.41, SD = .79$ ) and their actual engagement in intellectual self-care activities ( $M = 18.39, SD = 5.24$ ) were significantly correlated,  $r(627) = .32, p < .001$ .

One-Way ANOVAs with post hoc tests were conducted for the following two hypotheses. The results showed that the difference between engagement in intellectual self-care among individuals with a high school degree, a BA/BS degree, some college, a MS or equivalent degree, and a PhD or equivalent degree was not statistically significant,  $F(4,634) = 2.21, p = .07$ . Therefore, the second hypothesis, which stated that employed individuals with higher educational background engage in more intellectual self-care, was not supported.

As for the third hypothesis, it was revealed that the difference between the need for engagement in intellectual self-care between the group of high school degree ( $N = 22, M = 2.95, SD = 1.13$ ), the group of BA/BS degree ( $N = 138, M = 3.14, SD = 1.17$ ), the group of some college ( $N = 259, M = 3.09, SD = 1.11$ ), the group of MS or equivalent degree ( $N = 162, M = 2.87, SD = 1.15$ ), and the group of PhD or equivalent degree ( $N = 58, M = 2.71, SD = 1.16$ ) was statistically significant,  $F(4,634) = 2.44, p = .05, \eta^2 = .02$ . The higher level of education an employed individual had, the greater intellectual self-care he or she needed.

Pearson correlations were performed for the subsequent hypotheses. When assessing the relationship between the engagement in intellectual self-care and individuals' well-being, the last two hypotheses were supported: Happiness and life satisfaction were both found to be positively correlated with engagement in intellectual self-care.

Employed people's engagement in intellectual self-care activities ( $M = 18.39$ ,  $SD = 5.24$ ) and their happiness ( $M = 7.98$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) were significantly correlated,  $r(625) = .19$ ,  $p < .001$ . The last hypothesis was also supported: Employed people's engagement in intellectual self-care activities ( $M = 18.39$ ,  $SD = 5.24$ ) and their life satisfaction ( $M = 23.43$ ,  $SD = 6.70$ ) were significantly correlated,  $r(623) = .25$ ,  $p < .001$ .

### Discussion

In this study, it was first hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between the importance employed individuals place on intellectual self-care and their engagement with intellectual self-care. Also interested in education level as a variable, we proposed that employed individuals with higher levels of education would engage in greater intellectual self-care and that they would have more need to engage in intellectual self-care. Lastly, we postulated that engagement in intellectual self-care activities is positively related to happiness as well as life satisfaction, which are two important components of individual well-being.

Four of the five hypotheses were confirmed by our data analyses. The first hypothesis, which stated that people placing more importance on intellectual self-care would engage more in intellectual self-care, was supported. The results did not show a statistically significant difference between engagement in intellectual self-care among individuals with different educational levels, which was proposed by the second hypothesis. It was revealed that employed individuals with higher levels of education needed greater intellectual self-care. Therefore, the third hypothesis was confirmed. As for the last two hypotheses concerning the relationship between intellectual self-care and well-being, both were supported: Happiness was found to be

positively correlated with engagement in intellectual self-care; employed individuals' life satisfaction and their engagement in intellectual self-care were also significantly and positively correlated.

This result showing the significant positive correlation between educational level and need for intellectual self-care is compatible with Ng and Feldman's (2009) study, in which they found that highly educated workers, compared to less educated workers, tend to display greater creativity and to demonstrate more citizenship behaviors. It is likely that individuals with higher educational levels get the jobs that engage in activities involving more creative processes, because the work tasks require more creative ideas. Ng and Feldman (2009) also point out that when greater cognitive ability is a positive outcome of education, it is likely to improve job performance especially for jobs of high complexity that require high intellectual capacity. Therefore, in addition to the influence on employment types on individuals' need for intellectual self-care, it is also possible that the higher education that people receive at school increases their internal need to fulfill intellectual curiosities and achievements.

Donovan and Halpern (2002, as cited in Pasupuleti, Allen, Lambert, & Cluse-Tolar, 2009) point out that people tend to become more open-minded and creative in their thinking when they are happier. This finding might explain the positive correlation between engagement in intellectual self-care activities and happiness that we found. If a person maintains a healthy and positive mood or attitude, he or she might be more willing to engage in intellectually challenging activities. On the other hand, it is also possible that accomplishing tasks involving intellectual challenges in turn adds to the happiness one feels. Additionally, increased mental health might be the mediating variable in the positive correlation between

intellectual self-care engagement and happiness. The results in Caddy, Crawford, and Page's (2012) study suggested statistically significant improvements in mental health outcomes for the inpatients participating in art- and craft-based creative therapies for over a 5-year period, and Green and Elliott (2010) in their study found that happiness is highly correlated with overall mental health. It might be interesting to explore whether mental health had mediating effect in this positive correlation between intellectual self-care and happiness. Future studies are needed to directly explain the positive relationship between happiness and engagement in intellectual self-care activities.

We found a significant and positive correlation between the importance that employed individuals place on intellectual self-care and their actual engagement with intellectual self-care activities, which was compatible with our expectation that higher awareness would motivate people to increase intellectual self-care activities. This finding suggests the possible benefit of informing employed people of the importance of intellectual self-care, which tends to be ignored or perceived in a less positive way. Social media can be very powerful in promoting the significance of intellectual self-care. In addition, information sessions and programs in the workplace may also incorporate the content related to intellectual self-care that emphasizes its importance.

Before raising people's awareness of the importance of intellectual self-care, however, more studies are needed to provide statistical evidence of the positive consequences of intellectual self-care. Our last two confirmed hypotheses supported the positive correlation between intellectual self-care and happiness as well as life satisfaction, therefore providing new insights on increasing individuals' well-being through engaging in more intellectual self-care.

It is also interesting that our findings showed that employed individuals with higher levels of education reported greater need for intellectual self-care. This might suggest that individuals with higher educational background tend to have jobs that involve more intellectually challenging tasks, which is why there is great need within this group. A future study that compares employed individuals and unemployed individuals would be helpful to figure out if this connection with educational levels is associated with employment or not.

One of the positive aspects of this study is that, in addition to focusing on the understudied topic of intellectual self-care, it targeted the employed population. By collecting and analyzing data from employed individuals in the sample, we eliminated any confounds regarding intellectual self-care in the overall population.

Our study had a very large sample size, which made it easier to assess the representativeness of the sample and to generalize the results. It also contributes to the study because a large sample size is necessary to produce results among variables that are significantly different.

In addition, we used a single self-rating scale measuring happiness (Abdel-Khalek, 2006), a previously used scale with established reliability and validity. Happiness is a well-researched topic, so there exists a reliable and valid measurement instrument that we were able to use to improve the accuracy of interpreting the data.

However, it was also noted that our sample was not very diverse in regards to gender, age and race. Within the 663 participants who indicated their biological sex out of the 667 that completed the survey, 75.1% of them were female. The participants aged 18 to 25 accounted for the largest group of the participants (37.5%), followed by the group aged 26 to 35 (26.9%); the relatively younger generations constituted the majority

of the sample. As for race, despite the missing data on racial identification from 6 participants, 64.5% of our respondents were self-reported as White, but other racial groups were underrepresented.

Another potential limitation in our study is that we used an online survey. It is possible that we lost potential participants because of their unavailability to access Internet or their unfamiliarity with using computer (i.e., especially for the elder generations). Online surveys, however, are more budget friendly, easier for assessing and analyzing data, and more environmentally friendly than paper surveys.

The third limitation to this study is that there were no specifications on critical thinking, creative activities, knowledge accumulation, and mind-stimulating activities. The results coming from self-report data could be unreliable and inaccurate at times if the participants found it hard to answer those questions where no operational definitions were provided. For instance, when providing information on engagement in intellectual self-care activities, the respondents might be confused about what activities are related to which specific type of intellectual self-care. If there is an activity involving an overlap between the types of intellectual self-care, the way the participants came to their answers might negatively influence the accuracy of data.

For future studies, it would be interesting to investigate the relationship between specific types of jobs and intellectual self-care. It might be possible that individuals with managerial positions are in need of intellectual self-care more than those with clerical jobs. It is also possible that individuals working in art-related industries engage in more intellectual self-care activities, compared to those construction workers performing less intellectually active tasks at work. For instance, researchers Schell and Loeb (1986) point out that among

Canadian university professors, the positive feeling about life seems to be reflected in how they see themselves (i.e., as fulfilled and as self-actualized) and their jobs (i.e., as rewarding and as challenging). Intellectual self-care activities that these professors engage in on a daily basis might be a factor of their well-being at work, but more research is needed to compare this particular occupation with others.

Researchers may want to explore the topic of intellectual self-care in a wider scope outside of employed individuals. Gender could be a possible focus of study, and researchers could investigate if men are different from women in terms of the actual engagement with self-care activities, need for intellectual self-care, and the importance they place on intellectual self-care. There could even be a comparative study that investigates the difference in engagement with intellectual self-care activities between employed individuals and unemployed individuals.

Given the multiple dimensions of self-care, additional studies could be conducted on the connection between intellectual self-care and other domains of self-care, such as emotional self-care and physical self-care. Worell and Goodheart (2005) point out that the seemingly distinct domains of self-care are in fact not mutually exclusive; one activity might involve a number of self-care categories. It would be helpful to know the interconnections among the various areas of self-care, so that people could improve their self-care in more than one domain through a single activity, achieving a more efficient self-care practice.

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