Happiness From Treating the Weekend Like a Vacation

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Abstract

Americans are time-poor. They work long hours and leave paid vacation days unused. An analysis of over 200,000 U.S. workers reveals that not prioritizing vacation is linked to lower happiness. Many people, however, do not feel they can take vacation due to financial and temporal constraints. How might people enjoy the emotional benefits of vacation without taking additional time off or spending additional money? Three preregistered experiments tested the effect of simply treating the weekend "like a vacation" (vs. "like a regular weekend") on subsequent happiness—measured as more positive affect, less negative affect, and greater satisfaction when back at work on Monday. Although unable to definitively rule out the role of demand characteristics, the study results suggest that treating the weekend like a vacation can increase happiness, and exploratory analyses show support for the underlying role of increased attention to the present moment.

Keywords

Although one of the wealthiest nations in the world, the United States is temporally impoverished. Americans spend more of their weekly hours at work than people in most other countries (Bick et al., 2019), and they work more on the weekends (Hamermesh & Stancanelli, 2015). The United States is the only industrialized nation without legally mandated vacation, with one out of four workers not getting a single paid day off (Hess, 2013). Even though U.S. employees are allotted fewer paid vacation days than their European counterparts (Alesina et al., 2005), many Americans do not use their apportioned days off because of perceived financial and temporal pressures (Harvard University's T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2016).

Yet decades of correlational research have demonstrated that vacations have immediate benefits—improving health (de Bloom et al., 2010; de Bloom et al., 2009; Eaker et al., 1992; Gump & Matthews, 2000), creativity (de Bloom et al., 2014), job performance (Etzion et al., 1998; Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Kühnel & Sonnentag, 2011; Sonnentag, 2003; Westman & Eden, 1997; Westman & Etzion, 2001), and life satisfaction (de Bloom et al., 2010; de Bloom et al., 2009; Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004; Lounsbury & Hoopes, 1986). Moreover, Americans who prioritize vacation tend to be happier. Our analysis of over 200,000 Americans from the most recent Gallup U.S. Daily Poll (2014–2016) showed that even after controlling for income and weekly hours worked, people who reported making more time for vacations were happier: They exhibited more positive affect, $\beta = .205$, $t(218,155) = 96.20$, $p < .001$, CI(β) [.200, .209], less negative affect, $\beta = -.243$, $t(218,303) = 106.03$, $p < .001$, CI(β) [−.248, −.239], and were more

satisfied with life, $\beta = .257$, $t(218,241) = 134.16$, $p < .001$, CI(β) [.254, .261] (see Supplemental Materials [SM3 and SM4] for complete description and analyses).

What vacations offer is a "break" from the routine of day-to-day life. In the context of ongoing experiences (e.g., listening to a song, getting a massage, watching TV), research has identified inserting a break as an effective way to increase engagement—such that people notice the experience more and extract greater enjoyment from it (Nelson & Meyvis, 2008; Nelson et al., 2009; Ratner et al., 1999). Furthermore, study participants who took a week-long break from consuming chocolate enjoyed a subsequent chocolate more than their last one and more than participants who had continued their chocolate consumption as usual (Quoidbach & Dunn, 2013). Do these benefits of taking a break extend from singular experiences to the larger pattern of people's lives? We examined whether a vacation break leads people to be more engaged during the time off and feel happier upon returning to work.

With weekends, most workers get a 2-day break from work every week. Even though Americans take little time off for vacation, the majority get (and take) weekends off (Hamermesh & Stancanelli, 2015). People enjoy weekends more than

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weekdays, but weekends do not typically produce an increase in happiness at work the following Monday (Helliwell & Wang, 2014). Perhaps the regularity and routine of weekends keep people from attending to or appreciating this time off. Unfortunately, people tend to be inattentive to the present moment in their day-to-day lives, and this undermines happiness (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010; Teper et al., 2013). However, if people were to treat their weekend *like a vacation*, they might pay more attention to this time off, enjoy it more, and feel happier when back at work on Monday.

In three preregistered experiments among fully employed Americans, we tested whether treating a regular weekend like a vacation could increase subsequent happiness, measured as more positive affect, less negative affect, and greater satisfaction (Diener et al., 2017; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). To explore the mechanism, Study 1 measured overall attention to the present moment, and Study 2 measured people's activity-level attention to the present moment as well as how they spent their time and their affective experience during the weekend. Study 3 included a different sample and examined whether the results varied as a function of individual differences in socially desirable responding.

All studies, preregistrations, materials, data, and code are available on Open Science Network: https://osf.io/t9qab/?view_only=8c4425d3a19d4c0086d46b2cbdb57b61.

Study 1

Method

Study 1 was a preregistered experiment conducted among fully employed American adults on Friday and Monday surrounding an ordinary spring weekend. Participants were recruited on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and paid USD 3 for completing both surveys. To participate, individuals had to be fully employed, work for or with at least one other person, typically take weekends off from work, and not work primarily from home (see SM5 for details on preregistered inclusion criteria). A total of 756 people met the inclusion criteria and completed the first survey, and 441 completed the second survey. Therefore, we obtained a final sample of 441 participants (aged 20–72 years, $M_{age} = 34.686$, $SD = 9.953$; 40% women; 44% single, 40% married, 14% living with someone as a couple; 39% have at least one child; median income = $40,000–$49,000 per year; $M_{weekly\ hours\ of\ paid\ work} = 40.573$, $SD = 10.264$). Based on the effect size for vacation on life satisfaction ($d = .24$) identified in the meta-analysis by de Bloom et al. (2009), this sample gave us >99% power to detect our proposed effect (G*Power version 3.1.9.2, linear regression fixed model, single regression coefficient, $f^2 = .12$, two predictors; Faul et al., 2007). A sensitivity power analysis showed that we had 80% power to detect an effect size of $f^2 = .014$.

On Friday, participants reported their baseline happiness by rating on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*a lot*) scale the extent to which they currently felt positive affect (happiness and enjoyment; $\alpha = .88$), negative affect (stress and worry; $\alpha = .89$), and satisfied.

Participants were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the treatment condition, participants were instructed: "Treat this weekend like a vacation. That is, to the extent possible, think in ways and behave in ways as though you were on vacation." In the control condition, participants were instructed: "Treat this weekend like a regular weekend. That is, to the extent possible, think in ways and behave in ways you normally would on a weekend." Participants were left to interpret the prompt and spend the weekend as they wished.

After the weekend, when back at work on Monday, participants completed a follow-up survey (see SM5 for details on attrition). As the primary dependent variables, participants reported their happiness by rating on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*a lot*) scale the extent to which they currently felt positive affect (happiness and enjoyment; $\alpha = .91$), negative affect (stress and worry; $\alpha = .88$), and satisfaction.

To explore the mechanism, we also asked participants to rate the frequency (1 = *almost never*; 6 = *almost always*) with which they had focused on the present moment over the course of the weekend using 7 items adapted from the present-oriented attention factor of the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003): "I found it difficult to stay focused on what was happening in the present" (R), "I seemed to be 'running on automatic' without much awareness of what I was doing" (R), "I was so focused on the goal I wanted to achieve that I lost touch with what I was doing in the moment," "I found myself preoccupied with the future or the past" (R), "I found it difficult to pay attention to the 'here and now'" (R), "I rushed through activities without really being attentive to them" (R), and "I focused on the present moment" ($\alpha = .85$).

This study design held constant the number of days people were off from work, and we measured how much money participants spent over the weekend to control for financial expenditures.

Preregistered Results

As predicted, treating the weekend "like a vacation" increased people's happiness when they returned to work on Monday. Specifically, controlling for the respective baseline measure, "vacationers" felt more positive affect, less negative affect, and more satisfaction on Monday compared to their counterparts in the control condition (Figure 1 and Tables 1 and 2).

Secondary Preregistered Results

Although vacationers reported spending more money over the course of the weekend, $M_{vacation} = \$131.22$, $SD = \$269.71$; $M_{control} = \$103.84$, $SD = \$118.64$; $\beta = .123$, $t(439) = 2.590$, $p < .010$, 95% CI(β) [.030, .216], the treatment effects on positive affect, negative affect, and satisfaction all held when controlling for amount spent (see SM5 and SM6).

To explore the mechanism, we examined the extent to which participants paid attention to the present moment during the weekend. As predicted, vacationers reported being more attentive to the present ($M = 4.808$, $SD = 0.766$) than those in the control condition ($M = 4.525$, $SD = 0.859$), $\beta = .172$,
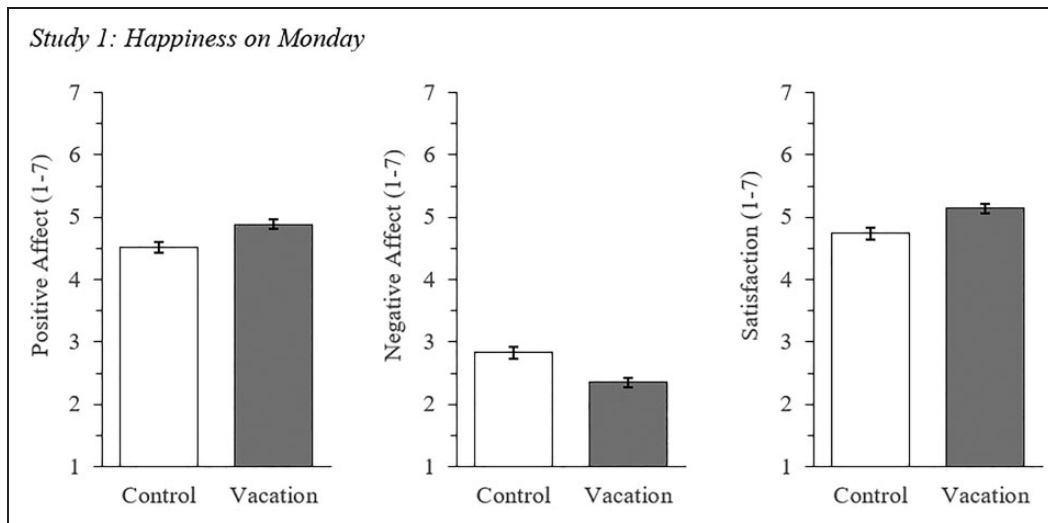
Figure 1. The effect of condition on positive affect, negative affect, and satisfaction on Monday, controlling for the respective baseline dependent measure. Marginal means reported. Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

Table 1. Study 1: Descriptive Statistics.

	Friday M (SD)	Monday M (SD)	Intercorrelation
Positive affect			
Control condition	4.59 (1.35)	4.54 (1.49)	.634
Vacation treatment	4.53 (1.42)	4.87 (1.36)	.523
Negative affect			
Control condition	3.07 (1.62)	2.82 (1.55)	.578
Vacation treatment	3.11 (1.75)	2.36 (1.38)	.483
Satisfaction			
Control condition	4.76 (1.37)	4.77 (1.56)	.488
Vacation treatment	4.64 (1.49)	5.12 (1.39)	.467

Note. Means, standard deviations (SDs), and intercorrelations for positive affect, negative affect, and satisfaction on Friday (baseline) and on Monday (dependent variable).

Table 2. Study 1: Effect of Vacation Treatment on Happiness on Monday.

	B	SE	β	t	p
Model 1: Positive affect					
Baseline positive affect	.583	.040	.567	14.536	<.001
Vacation treatment	.370	.112	.129	3.296	.001
Model 2: Negative affect					
Baseline negative affect	.450	.035	.517	12.841	<.001
Vacation treatment	−.482	.119	−.162	−4.034	<.001
Model 3: Satisfaction					
Baseline satisfaction	.485	.043	.471	11.261	<.001
Vacation treatment	.402	.125	.135	3.227	.001

Note. Reporting unstandardized regression coefficients, standard errors (SEs), standardized regression coefficients, t values, and p values for each dependent measure (positive affect, negative affect, and satisfaction) on Monday, controlling for the respective baseline measure on Friday.

Table 3. Study 1: Mediating Effect of Attention to the Present Moment.

Dependent Measure	Indirect Effect	95% CI
(1) Positive affect	.029**	[.012, .056]
(2) Negative affect	−.062***	[−.101, −.032]
(3) Satisfaction	.048***	[.023, .083]

Note. $N = 441$. Reporting standardized coefficients for the indirect effect through attention to the present moment of the vacation treatment on positive affect, negative affect, and satisfaction on Monday using 5,000 bootstrapped samples. The respective baseline measure is controlled for in each mediation analysis. p Values were calculated using a Sobel test. CI = confidence interval. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

$t(439) = 3.651$, $p < .001$, 95% CI(β) [.079, .264]. Moreover, attention to the present moment mediated the effect of the vacation treatment on each subcomponent of happiness, controlling for the respective baseline measure (Table 3).

The results of Study 1 provided initial evidence suggesting that even though people do not typically experience an emotional boost following the weekend (Helliwell & Wang, 2014), they can enjoy greater happiness when back at work on Monday simply by having treated their weekend like a vacation. By mentally approaching this regular time off like a vacation, people became more attentive to the present moment, which was associated with greater subsequent happiness.

Study 2

Study 2 sought to both replicate these effects and further explore the underlying mechanism by implementing a modified version of the Day Reconstruction Method (DRM; Anusic et al., 2017; Kahneman et al., 2004a; Knabe et al., 2017): a time-diary instrument that guides participants to systematically reconstruct their activities and affect for the preceding day (which we modified

to cover the 2 days of the weekend). Episodic reports of experience, such as those captured in the DRM, are less susceptible to concerns of social desirability (Schwarz et al., 2009). Furthermore, the DRM has been shown to elicit reliable estimates of affect intensity and variation over the course of a day that align with readings obtained through real-time experience sampling methods (Kahneman et al., 2004b; Lucas et al., 2019). Implementing this modified DRM allowed us to assess at a more granular level people's attention to the present as well as their time-use and affective state during the weekend.

Method

Following the same experimental paradigm as Study 1, Study 2 was conducted among fully employed American adults over an ordinary weekend in the winter. Participants were recruited on Amazon's MTurk and paid USD 4 for completing both surveys. A total of 677 people met the inclusion criteria and completed the first survey, and 561 completed the second survey. An additional 25 people were excluded because they did not meet the preregistered inclusion criteria for the follow-up survey on Monday (see SM7 for details). Therefore, we obtained a final sample of 536 participants (aged 19–76 years, $M_{age} = 35.810$, $SD = 9.941$; 49% women; 36% single, 47% married, 16% living with someone as a couple; 51% have at least one child; median income = $40,000–$49,000 per year). A sample of 536 participants and an expected effect size of $d = .31$ (which was the smallest effect observed in Study 1) yields >97% power to detect a treatment effect (G*Power version 3.1.9.2, linear regression fixed model, single regression coefficient, $f^2 = .024$, two predictors). A sensitivity power analysis shows that we had 80% power to detect an effect size of $f^2 = .012$.

On Friday, after reporting their baseline positive affect ($\alpha = .90$), negative affect ($\alpha = .86$), and satisfaction, participants were randomly assigned to either treat their weekend like a vacation or "like a regular weekend."

After the weekend, when back at work on Monday, participants completed the follow-up survey (see SM7 for details on attrition). Participants reported their current happiness by rating on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*a lot*) scale the extent to which they felt positive affect (happiness and enjoyment; $\alpha = .90$), negative affect (stress and worry; $\alpha = .88$), and satisfaction. Participants then completed the modified DRM. This required participants to reconstruct both days of the weekend, delineating up to 18 "episodes" (participants determined the start and end of each episode, defined by moving to a new location, switching activities, or changing the person with whom they were interacting). For each episode, participants indicated the activity that best characterized what they were doing (e.g., eating, watching TV, preparing food, housework, etc.), and they rated their happiness, enjoyment, stress, worry, and satisfaction on a 6-point scale (0 = *not at all*; 6 = *very much*), as well as their attention to the present moment ("I focused on the present moment," "I found it difficult to stay focused on the 'here and now'" (R); 1 = *almost never*; 6 = *almost always*; $\alpha = .87$). To capture participants' experience during the weekend, for each

Table 4. Study 2: Descriptive Statistics.

	Friday M (SD)	Monday M (SD)	Intercorrelation
Positive affect			
Control condition	4.64 (1.44)	4.52 (1.39)	.669
Vacation treatment	4.78 (1.49)	4.99 (1.48)	.678
Negative affect			
Control condition	2.73 (1.47)	2.59 (1.57)	.549
Vacation treatment	2.78 (1.63)	2.28 (1.45)	.616
Satisfaction			
Control condition	4.84 (1.41)	4.73 (1.45)	.541
Vacation treatment	4.92 (1.54)	5.19 (1.48)	.591

Note. Means, standard deviations (SDs), and intercorrelations for positive affect, negative affect, and satisfaction on Friday (baseline) and on Monday (dependent variable).

Table 5. Study 2: Effect of Vacation Treatment on Happiness on Monday.

	B	SE	β	t	p
Model 1: Positive affect					
Baseline positive affect	.659	.031	.665	21.029	<.001
Vacation treatment	.389	.092	.134	4.240	<.001
Model 2: Negative affect					
Baseline negative affect	.565	.034	.577	16.418	<.001
Vacation treatment	−.330	.107	−.109	−3.094	.002
Model 3: Satisfaction					
Baseline satisfaction	.563	.035	.560	15.880	<.001
Vacation treatment	.421	.105	.142	4.028	<.001

Note. Reporting unstandardized coefficients, standard errors (SEs), standardized coefficients, t values, and p values for each dependent measure (positive affect, negative affect, and satisfaction) on Monday, controlling for the respective baseline measure on Friday.

individual, we calculated (a) a time-weighted measure of attention to the present (see SM10 and SM11), (b) the percentage of time spent on each activity (see SM11), and (c) net affect (a time-weighted measure of happiness calculated by taking the difference between positive affect and negative affect experienced episode-by-episode; Kahneman et al., 2004b; see SM9 and SM10).

Preregistered Results

Replicating the results of Study 1, controlling for the respective baseline measure, those who treated their weekend like a vacation felt happier on Monday compared to those in the control condition (Tables 4 and 5).

Secondary Preregistered Results

In this sample, there was no significant difference between conditions in the amount of money participants spent, $M_{vacation} = 141.31, $SD = 146.96; $M_{control} = 127.31, $SD = 123.48; $\beta = .001$, $t(534) = 0.017$, $p = .986$, 95% CI(β) [−.084,

.086], and all of the treatment effects held controlling for amount spent (see SM8).

To examine the effect of the vacation treatment on happiness during the weekend, we preregistered several secondary analyses utilizing data from the modified DRM. We found that those who treated their weekend like a vacation experienced greater happiness during the weekend, measured by net affect: $M_{vacation} = 4.109$, $SD = 1.779$; $M_{control} = 3.439$, $SD = 1.683$; $\beta = .194$, $t(514) = 4.476$, $p < .001$, 95% CI(β) [.109, .279]. These results replicated using alternative measures of happiness during the weekend (i.e., U-index and episode satisfaction; see SM10).

A series of mediation analyses suggests that controlling for the respective baseline measure, greater happiness during the weekend carried over to influence happiness on Monday (Table 6). These results testing net affect as a mediator replicate when using either the U-index or episode satisfaction as the measure of happiness during the weekend (see SM10).

Table 6. Study 2: Mediating Effect of Net Affect.

Dependent Measure	Indirect Effect	95% CI
(1) Positive affect	.058***	[.033, .091]
(2) Negative affect	−.061***	[−.095, −.034]
(3) Satisfaction	.059***	[.032, .095]

Note. $N = 516$. Reporting standardized coefficients for the indirect effect through net affect of the vacation treatment on positive affect, negative affect, and satisfaction on Monday using 5,000 bootstrapped samples. The respective baseline measure is controlled for in each mediation analysis. *p* Values were calculated using a Sobel test. CI = confidence interval.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Exploratory Results

To explore potential mechanisms for the vacationers boost in happiness on Monday, we conducted several exploratory analyses using episode-level attention to the present moment during the weekend. We found that those who treated their weekend like a vacation paid more attention to the present moment ($M = 5.150$, $SD = 0.798$) than those in the control condition ($M = 4.898$, $SD = 0.835$); $\beta = .152$, $t(514) = 3.496$, $p = .001$, 95% CI(β) [.067, .238]. A series of mediation analyses suggests that controlling for the respective baseline measure, attention to the present moment during the weekend mediated the effect of the vacation treatment on happiness on Monday (Table 7).

Furthermore, we conducted a serial mediation analysis examining the relationship between the vacation treatment, attention to the present moment during the weekend, net affect, and subsequent happiness on Monday (Figure 2). Although we cannot make causal claims because the mediating and dependent variables were measured at the same time, these results support our theory that treating a regular weekend like a vacation made people more attentive to the present moment, increasing their happiness during this time and their subsequent happiness when back at work (indirect effect = 0.029, 95% CI [0.014, 0.051]). This

Table 7. Study 2: Mediating Effect of Attention to the Present Moment During the Weekend.

Dependent Measure	Indirect Effect	95% CI
(1) Positive affect	.015***	[.004, .034]
(2) Negative affect	−.039***	[−.068, −.017]
(3) Satisfaction	.025***	[.008, .049]

Note. $N = 516$. Attention to the present moment during the weekend was calculated as the average of the two attention items captured for each episode, summed across all reported episodes, and weighted by the fraction of time spent on each episode (See Supplementary Materials 10 and 11 for details). Reporting standardized coefficients for the indirect effect through attention to the present moment of the vacation treatment on positive affect, negative affect, and satisfaction on Monday using 5,000 bootstrapped samples. The respective baseline measure is controlled for in each mediation analysis. *p* Values were calculated using a Sobel Test. CI = confidence interval.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

exploratory analysis uses a composite measure of happiness as the primary dependent variable (combined positive affect, reversed negative affect, and satisfaction).

Exploring the effect of the vacation treatment on how participants spent their time during the weekend, we observed some differences in activities between conditions (Table 8). None of these differences in time-use, however, individually mediated the effect of the vacation treatment on happiness on Monday (see SM12), nor did the total percentage of time spent on positive activities or negative activities (see SM12–14).

These results show that the psychological benefits of treating a regular weekend like a vacation are robust. The modified DRM provided insight into the effect by exploring the roles of attention to the present moment, time-use, and happiness during the weekend. Although treating the weekend like a vacation did shift how participants spent their time, differences in time-use did not mediate the effect on Monday's happiness, whereas attention to the present moment did.

Study 3

It is possible that our observed effect of treating the weekend like a vacation on happiness was driven by experimental demand. These concerns are minimized by features of the study design: Participants report their current and remembered affect rather than their predicted affect (Areni, 2008; Stone et al., 1985), and contact between researchers and participants was remote (Mummolo & Peterson, 2018). Yet it is still possible that MTurk participants were not sufficiently engaged to implement the study instructions or that those in the treatment condition reported increased happiness on Monday to appease the experimenters.

To investigate these concerns, Study 3 included an engaged sample of fully employed MBA students and measured individual differences in social desirability. Like prior experimental research that tested for the role of social desirability (Barkan et al., 2012; Flett et al., 1988; Linden et al., 1986; Steenkamp et al., 2010), we administered the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR; Paulhus, 1991; Paulhus & Reid, 1991; Stöber et al., 2002).
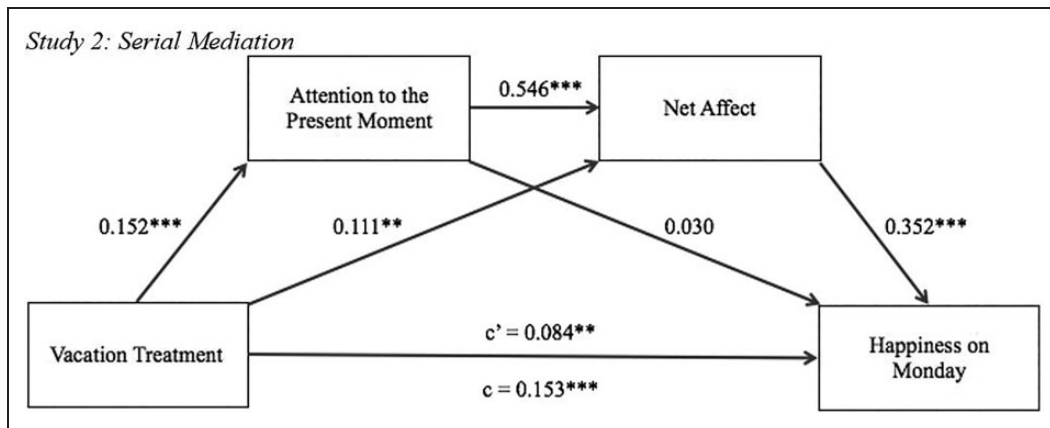
Figure 2. Reporting standardized coefficients, controlling for baseline happiness. Attention to the present moment and net affect are time-weighted measures aggregated across all reported weekend episodes in the Day Reconstruction Method for each individual ($N = 516$). The direct effect of the vacation treatment on happiness on Monday, controlling for baseline happiness, is reported as *c*. The effect of the vacation treatment on happiness on Monday, controlling for attention to the present moment, net affect, and baseline happiness, is reported as *c′*. *$p <$ .05. **$p <$ .01. ***$p <$ .001.

Table 8. Study 2: Mean Fraction of Time Spent on Activities That Differed Between Conditions.

DRM Reported Activity	Control (%)	Vacation Treatment (%)	ANOVA (p Value)
Housework	7.0	4.5	.001
Working	5.5	3.2	.009
Taking care of children	4.9	3.3	.049
Praying or meditating	2.1	1.1	.029
Eating	11.5	13.7	.032
Intimate relations	0.5	1.0	.027

Note. $N = 516$. Reporting mean time spent on activities as a percentage of total reported time during the weekend. Only reporting activities for which we observed a difference between conditions. We observed no differences for the following activities: commuting, shopping, preparing food, on the phone, watching TV, napping or resting, computer, relaxing, socializing, or exercise. *p* Values from one-way ANOVA models for each activity. ANOVA = analysis of variance; DRM = Day Reconstruction Method.

Method

This study followed the same experimental paradigm as the previous studies, but it was conducted on a fall weekend and recruited from two different populations: MTurk participants for USD 3 compensation and fully employed MBA students invited via email through the business school's listserv offering a USD 5 Amazon gift certificate as compensation. In order to participate, individuals had to be currently employed in a job that earns income and have that weekend mostly off from work, which yielded 681 participants from MTurk and 132 MBAs. To be included in the final sample, participants had to complete both surveys and spend a minimum of 2 minutes on the second survey. These preregistered inclusion criteria resulted in a final sample of 437 MTurkers and 97 MBAs—both of which were below our preregistered target samples of 560 MTurkers and 100 MBAs (see SM15 for details on attrition). The lower than expected completion rate may have been due to the particular

weekend of the study, which was right before Thanksgiving. Since our preregistered hypotheses involved combining the data from both samples, we analyzed the pooled data despite each sample being below our preregistered target sample size ($N = 534$). With the unbalanced distribution of respondents, we used weighted effects coding in our analysis of sample and condition assignment in order to provide more accurate estimates of the true effect and its interactions. The sample of 534 provides >97% power to detect treatment effects (G*Power version 3.1.9.2, linear regression fixed model, single regression coefficient, $f^2 = .024$, three predictors). A sensitivity power analysis shows that we had 80% power to detect an effect size of $f^2 = .012$.

Compared to the MTurk sample (aged 18–80 years, $M_{age} = 37.977$, $SD = 11.767$; 55% women; 47% college graduate, 15% postgraduate), the MBA sample was slightly younger, included more men, and was more educated (aged 24–48 years, $M_{age} = 30.835$, $SD = 3.851$; 42% women; 52% college graduate, 49% postgraduate).

On Friday, after reporting their baseline positive affect ($\alpha = .90$), negative affect ($\alpha = .88$), and satisfaction, all participants were randomly assigned to either treat their weekend like a vacation or like a regular weekend. On Monday, participants reported their current happiness (positive affect, $\alpha = .89$; negative affect, $\alpha = .90$; and satisfaction). Finally, participants completed the 40-item BIDR Scale (Paulhus, 1991), which measures individuals' socially desirable responding across two dimensions: self-deceptive enhancement (SDE, $\alpha = .74$) and impression management (IM, $\alpha = .73$; see SM16 and SM17).

Preregistered Results

Although in the predicted directions (Tables 9 and 10), controlling for the respective baseline measure, the effect of treating the weekend like a vacation only reached statistical significance for satisfaction on Monday (Table 11, Models 5 and

Table 9. Study 3: Descriptive Statistics.

	Friday M (SD)	Monday M (SD)	Intercorrelation
Positive affect			
Control condition	4.59 (1.45)	4.66 (1.48)	.700
Vacation treatment	4.77 (1.44)	4.93 (1.37)	.690
Negative affect			
Control condition	3.60 (1.74)	3.31 (1.73)	.677
Vacation treatment	3.43 (1.68)	3.03 (1.72)	.598
Satisfaction			
Control condition	4.69 (1.54)	4.74 (1.53)	.665
Vacation treatment	4.91 (1.54)	5.10 (1.45)	.555

Note. Means, standard deviations (*SD*s), and intercorrelations for positive affect, negative affect, and satisfaction on Friday (baseline) and on Monday (dependent variable).

6). Post hoc, we speculate that the more mixed set of results in this study may be due to its timing. With Thanksgiving the following Thursday, participants may have treated that full week and preceding weekend like a vacation, regardless of condition. This would have suppressed the effect of instructing participants to treat the weekend like a vacation.

Secondary Preregistered Results

There was no significant difference between conditions in the amount of money participants spent, $M_{vacation} = \$155.07$, $SD = \$304.99$; $M_{control} = \$142.56$, $SD = \$338.05$; $\beta = .058$, $t(524) = 1.333$, $p = .183$, 95% CI(β) $[-.028, .144]$, and the significance of the treatment effects was substantively unchanged after controlling for amount spent (see SM15 and SM16).

When we controlled for sample and the interaction between treatment and sample, the effect on positive affect reached statistical significance (Table 12, Model 1), but the effect on satisfaction dropped below $p = .05$ (Table 12, Model 7). However, the overall absence of significant interaction terms is consistent with the effect of the manipulation operating similarly across the two samples. While we did not preregister within a Bayesian framework, we conducted a Bayesian linear regression

to evaluate the strength of evidence for an interaction between the vacation treatment and sample with respect to effects on satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect on Monday. A Bayes factor analysis, using a default Jeffreys–Zellner–Siow mixture of *g*-priors with an *r*-scale of 0.354 (Liang et al., 2008) and with reference to a null model with three covariates, indicates evidence for a lack of an interaction effect between treatment and sample on satisfaction ($BF_{01} = 7.966$), positive affect ($BF_{01} = 4.748$), and negative affect ($BF_{01} = 9.787$; see SM17 and SM18 for full details on Bayesian analyses).

Testing for the role of socially desirable responding, we found no substantive differences in the treatment effects when including SDE and IM as controls. We also did not observe any significant interactions between the vacation treatment and either SDE or IM with respect to effects on the dependent measures (Table 12, Models 3 and 9). A Bayes factor analysis indicates evidence for a lack of an interaction effect between the vacation treatment and SDE (interaction effect on satisfaction, $BF_{01} = 7.688$; on positive affect, $BF_{01} = 5.307$; and on negative affect $BF_{01} = 3.587$) and a lack of an interaction between the vacation treatment and IM (interaction effect on satisfaction, $BF_{01} = 4.182$; on positive affect, $BF_{01} = 9.956$; and on negative affect, $BF_{01} = 6.465$; see SM18 and SM19 for full details). The mixed results of this experiment make them difficult to interpret. However, to the extent that we did observe differences between conditions, these effects did not appear to be driven either by individual differences in socially desirable responding or by how these individual differences interacted with the manipulation.

General Discussion

This research examines the consequences of prioritizing time outside of work and how to optimize that time for happiness. Across three preregistered experiments, we tested whether people can make more of their time off simply by treating their weekend like a vacation. Although the results of our final study were mixed, we found evidence suggesting a boost in people's happiness when back at work on Monday.

Table 10. Study 3: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Sample (1 = MBA)	0.18	0.39	—								
2. Condition (1 = vacation)	0.46	0.50	−.04	—							
3. Positive affect (T1)	4.68	1.45	.02	.06	—						
4. Negative affect (T1)	3.53	1.71	.19**	−.05	−.28**	—					
5. Satisfaction (T1)	4.79	1.54	−.06	.07	.79**	−.41**	—				
6. Positive affect (T2)	4.78	1.44	.03	.09*	.70**	−.20**	.62**	—			
7. Negative affect (T2)	3.18	1.73	.16**	−.08	−.21**	.64**	−.31**	−.29**	—		
8. Satisfaction (T2)	4.90	1.51	.04	.12**	.62**	−.29**	.62**	.79**	−.39**	—	
9. SDE (T2)	9.33	3.95	−.03	.05	.30**	−.33**	.30**	.28**	−.38**	.30**	—
10. IM (T2)	8.64	4.06	−.11**	−.01	.14**	−.18**	.17**	.14**	−.21**	.16**	.45**

Note. Reporting means, standard deviations (*SD*s), and intercorrelations. BIDR = Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding; SDE = self-deceptive enhancement factor of BIDR; IM = impression management factor of BIDR.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 11. Study 3: Effect of Vacation Treatment on Happiness on Monday, Controlling for Sample.

Variables	Positive Affect		Negative Affect		Satisfaction	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Baseline measure	0.689*** (0.031) $p < .001$	0.688*** (0.031) $p < .001$	0.646*** (0.034) $p < .001$	0.640*** (0.034) $p < .001$	0.598*** (0.033) $p < .001$	0.603*** (0.033) $p < .001$
Vacation treatment	0.146 (0.090) $p = .106$	0.148 (0.090) $p = .101$	−0.172 (0.115) $p = .136$	−0.168 (0.115) $p = .145$	0.228* (0.103) $p = .026$	0.239* (0.102) $p = .020$
Sample		0.062 (0.116) $p = .595$		0.143 (0.152) $p = .345$		0.332* (0.132) $p = .012$
Observations	534	534	534	534	534	534

Note. Reporting unstandardized coefficients, standard errors, and p values. In order to account for the imbalance in size between the MTurk and MBA samples, we used weighted effect coding for both dichotomous indicator variables: condition and sample (vacation treatment = 0.459, control condition = −0.541; FE_{MBA} sample = 0.182, MTurk sample = −0.818). FE = fully employed.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 12. Regression Results of Study 3: Treatment Effects on Happiness on Monday, Controlling for Sample and Social Desirability.

Variables	Positive Affect			Negative Affect			Satisfaction		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
Baseline measure	0.690*** (0.031) $p < .001$	0.666*** (0.032) $p < .001$	0.664** (0.032)* $p < .001$	0.640*** (0.034) $p< .001$	0.576*** (0.035) $p < .001$	0.576*** (0.035) $p < .001$	0.604*** (0.033) $p < .001$	0.568*** (0.034) $p < .001$	0.567*** (0.034) $p< .001$
Vacation treatment	0.360* (0.175) $p = .041$	0.365* (0.175) $p = .037$	0.383* (0.175) $p = .030$	−0.068 (0.225) $p = .764$	−0.082 (0.219) $p = .708$	−0.103 (0.220) $p = .640$	0.373 (0.199) $p = .062$	0.381 (0.197) $p = .054$	0.413* (0.198) $p = .038$
Sample	0.122 (0.119) $p = .398$	0.119 (0.120) $p = .319$	0.122 (0.120) $p = .308$	0.162 (0.156) $p = .299$	0.179 (0.153) $p = .241$	0.177 (0.153) $p = .248$	0.357** (0.136) $p = .009$	0.373** (0.135) $p = .006$	0.381** (0.135) $p = .005$
Vacation × Sample	0.331 (0.235) $p = .159$	0.349 (0.234) $p = .137$	0.371 (0.236) $p = .116$	0.157 (0.302) $p = .603$	0.100 (0.294) $p = .734$	0.074 (0.295) $p = .803$	0.210 (0.267) $p = .433$	0.237 (0.265) $p = .371$	0.280 (0.266) $p = .294$
SDE		0.027 (0.013) $p = .042$	0.020 (0.014) $p = .147$		−0.080*** (0.017) $p < .001$	−0.070*** (0.017) $p < .001$		0.043** (0.015) $p = .004$	0.035* (0.015) $p = .023$
IM		0.007 (0.012) $p = .594$	0.013 (0.013) $p = .322$		−0.009 (0.016) $p = .582$	−0.017 (0.016) $p = .294$		0.008 (0.014) $p = .547$	0.017 (0.015) $p = .260$
Vacation × SDE			−0.044 (0.026) $p = .095$			0.064 (0.033) $p = .051$			−0.042 (0.029) $p = .151$
Vacation × IM			0.030 (0.025) $p = .237$			−0.039 (0.032) $p = .224$			0.047 (0.029) $p = .103$
Observations	534	534	534	534	534	534	534	534	534

Note. Reporting unstandardized coefficients, standard errors, and p values. Weighted effect coding was used for the vacation treatment and sample predictor variables (vacation treatment = 0.459, control condition = −0.541; FE_{MBA} sample = 0.182, MTurk sample = −0.818). Baseline measure, SDE, and IM were centered. FE = fully employed; SDE = self-deceptive enhancement; IM = impression management.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

When people treated the weekend like a vacation, they spent less time on such unenjoyable activities as housework, they paid more attention to the present moment, and they reported more happiness throughout the weekend. Although we cannot make strong claims about the direction of causality across these measured variables, our results suggest that directing attention to the present was most important for reaping emotional benefits from time off. Even after accounting for differences in time-use, attention to the present moment during the weekend was associated with vacationers increased happiness on Monday.

This underlying link between attention to the present moment and happiness is consistent with a growing body of literature revealing the emotional benefits of mindfulness, for which present-oriented attention is a primary factor (Brown & Ryan 2003). While cultivating mindfulness involves immersive training (Baer, 2003; Chiesa et al., 2011; Jha et al., 2010; Langer, 1989; Mrazek et al., 2013), the current experiments identify an easy way, which is readily accessible to anyone, for individuals to tap into these benefits. The simple six-word prompt to "treat the weekend like a vacation" led people to engage more with the present moment over subsequent days without explicit instructions or training.

Vacations are important. They serve as a principle benefit that employers offer to recruit and retain talent, and they support an industry that accounts for 10% of the world's combined Gross Domestric Product (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2018, p. 3). Yet there is surprisingly little empirical work on the psychological benefits (de Bloom, 2015; de Bloom et al., 2010; de Bloom et al., 2009). Through a novel approach, our research contributes by experimentally testing for the emotional benefits of reframing one's regular time off as a vacation. Our three preregistered experiments showed the strongest and most consistent effects on satisfaction (Study 1: $d = .307$; Study 2: $d = .352$; and Study 3: $d = .191$). These positive effects are comparable to those observed in the field examining the influence of actual vacations on life satisfaction ($d = .24$; de Bloom et al., 2009, p. 16). This is striking because our manipulation did not require individuals to take additional days off or spend additional money—the two primary barriers that prevent people from taking vacations (Harvard University's T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2016). Additionally, Study 2 showed that treating the weekend like a vacation also boosts enjoyment *during* the weekend, which is notable because weekends are already the most enjoyable part of the week (Helliwell & Wang, 2014).

While we strongly caution readers against using this intervention as a substitute for actually taking vacation (which has a range of benefits), these results offer initial clues into *how* vacations improve emotional well-being and identify a way for people to make more of the time off they already have.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

It remains unclear how this manipulation would affect happiness if people treated every weekend like a vacation. Would neglected housework pile up and become a stress? Furthermore, we theorized that applying a vacation mindset to a regular weekend makes people treat it like a true break—nudging them out of their routine so that they are more mentally engaged and derive more enjoyment from their time off. If this intervention itself became a routine, we may not continue to observe the positive effects. Notably, we observed the smallest effects on happiness in Study 3, which was conducted on the weekend prior to a major holiday (Thanksgiving). It may have been that in anticipation of the upcoming holiday, all participants—regardless of exposure to the vacation treatment—were already out of their life's routine. Future research should explore the optimal frequency and timing of approaching ordinary time off like a vacation.

Future research should also test the effect of this intervention across a variety of populations. The majority of our participants, all of whom were fully employed, were recruited through Amazon's MTurk. Our final study sought to test whether MTurk participants (who participate in numerous academic studies) differed from other participants (MBAs who were specifically recruited for this one study through their class listserv). We did not observe any reliable differences in how these two populations responded to the vacation treatment. Still, future research should test the generalizability of these findings across different samples to further observe whether there is meaningful heterogeneity in terms of how people respond to the treatment.

Another key limitation is the degree to which demand characteristics or socially desirable responding may have contributed to the observed effects. In Study 3, we directly measured individual differences in socially desirable responding and found that these differences did not explain any of the variation attributed to our manipulation. Even though several features of our experimental design help to minimize these concerns, we cannot completely rule out demand effects as a possible alternative explanation for our findings. Future research should employ other control conditions, experience sampling techniques, and outcome measures that are immune to demand characteristics (e.g., objective performance and physiological measures) to more fully address this alternative explanation.

Finally, it is important to comment on the construct validity of our measures. To remain consistent with our analysis of archival Gallup data, our experimental studies included 5 affect items both before and after the treatment in order to evaluate changes in participants' happiness in the moment. While these items have high face validity with regard to changes in state emotional well-being, future research should also use validated scales that are high on reliability and clearly distinct in their measurement of the constructs (Flake et al., 2017). Study 1 drew 7 items from the validated present-oriented attention factor of the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale to measure attention to the present moment (Brown & Ryan, 2003), but Study 2 participants only responded to 2 of these items for each episode in the modified DRM. Although these measures showed consistent effects, future research should further validate attention to the present moment as a distinct construct and identify related constructs (e.g., attentional restoration; R. Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; S. Kaplan, 1995). Moreover, since we measured attention to the present moment immediately

after our dependent variables, we cannot speak directly to their causal relationship. Future research should either directly manipulate the mechanism or utilize temporal separation of measurement such as with an experience sampling methodology conducted during the weekend.

Despite their limitations, these three studies provide initial evidence suggesting that people readily associate "vacation" with an enhanced attention to the present moment, which can be activated to increase enjoyment of a regular weekend and ultimately carry over to greater happiness at the start of the workweek.

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Supplemental Material

The Supplemental material is available in the online version of the article.

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