Does Cultural Differences in Emotion Impact how People Rate their Subjective Well-Being?

A Literature Review

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Abstract

Existing research across cultures often demonstrates that subjective well-being (SWB) is influenced by a person's culture. Individualistic and collectivistic cultures vary in how they rate their subjective wellbeing as a result of the different values inherent in each culture. The following paper provides an overview of the many studies that show how the role of culture affects SWB. It will determine whether self-identity or group membership impacts how people rate their life satisfaction. Studies that support the individualistic side and studies that support the collectivistic side will be observed to determine if different cultural values impact how people rate their SWB. This research suggests that subjective well-being is indeed influenced by culture.

Maintaining healthy relationships with others and feeling good about oneself results in living a happier and more satisfied life. More commonly known as "happiness", well-being is what individuals strive for and these good feelings are said to be an important element of personal well-being (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). Well-being is also defined as general satisfaction with life, and is impacted not only by an individual's own emotional experiences but also by how they perceive others would approve and/or value those experiences (Bastian et al., 2014). People who are more satisfied with their lives and who are more "happy" are known to have higher levels of marriage stability, health, wealth, creativity, and success compared to their less "happy" peers (Layous et al., 2013). Subjective well-being (SWB) includes happiness, pleasant emotions, a relative lack of unpleasant moods and life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999). SWB includes one's emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgments of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999). According to Suh and Oishi (2002), SWB is judged by how a person perceives his or her own well-being. They further explain that an individual with a high level of SWB will more frequently experience positive emotions, rarely experience negative emotions, and is typically satisfied with their life (Suh & Oishi, 2002).

Culture is a term used to describe values, beliefs, attitudes and customs that are shared amongst a group (Collier, 1989 as cited in HäRtel & HäRtel, 2005). Similarities shared by different cultures around the world as a result, influence how people interpret and make sense of experiences and events (HäRtel & HäRtel, 2005). People who share a social identity and interact together come to see the world in a similar way and share emotions with others around them (De Leersnyder et al., 2013). This paper seeks to answer the question whether increased well-being is associated with placing value on positive emotions? Do individuals report higher levels of life satisfaction when their culture places higher value on positive emotions or the lack of negative

emotions?

Most people in society wish to be happy and to have high levels of life satisfaction (Suh & Oishi, 2002). How one goes about successfully achieving this ultimate cherished goal, and the degree to which it is valued, can vary according to the culture in which one belongs (Suh & Oishi, 2002). There has been much written about the relationship between culture and well-being and there are many factors that may influence this well-being, like emotion for instance. Humans use different cues such as emotions to share information and to communicate with one another (Sauter et al., 2010). There are six different basic emotions that have been identified and seemingly shared among cultures. These are anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness and surprise (Sauter et al., 2010). There are however several emotions that are not well recognized within cultural groups as some emotions are only known by a particular group or place (Sauter et al., 2010). These emotions differ by how individualistic or how collectivistic a culture is. Emotions such as calmness or elation felt as a result of friendly feelings were reported more frequently in cultures that were group focused whereas cultures that were more focused on individuals felt emotions like pride (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokama, 2010). How often and how intense an emotion is felt will depend on the culture in which a person belongs. Research has shown that culture can affect the way that individuals feel about themselves in both positive and negative ways (Sauter et al., 2010). Feelings and emotions often vary from one culture to another and as such researchers suggest that emotion may be culturally defined. How a person interprets events that occur depends upon that person's culture and the beliefs that are normal in that culture (Urzua et al., 2013). Each culture has its own definition of well-being with the definitions varying depending on cultural specific beliefs, attitudes, and values (Urzua et al., 2013). Views of the self and positive and negative emotions vary greatly as a result and this affects how the

individual views himself in relation to others (Urzua et al., 2013). Although there has been a great deal of research conducted identifying patterns of well-being and whether an individual's culture plays a role, there has also been many different, and sometimes contradictory, conclusions drawn.

The purpose of the following paper is to review the research on the role that culture plays on an individual's SWB. Early research on SWB focused on the difference between individuals with regard to SWB however, more recent work also examines the differences between countries (Diener et al., 1995). The primary focus of this paper is to determine whether or not culture plays a role in SWB. Specifically, I am examining whether SWB is different across cultures varying in levels of individualism and collectivism, or independence and interdependence. In the sections that follow, I will discuss the differences (different affects) in individualism and collectivism. Each side will be examined and studies that support the individualistic side and studies that support the collectivistic side will be observed to determine whether different cultural values and self-identity or group membership impacts how people rate their SWB. Next, I describe the three main components of SWB with the intention of showing how different individualistic and collectivistic cultures form SWB. Here it is important to note that SWB is described as one's evaluative reactions to his or her life and is explained in terms of cognitive evaluations and life satisfaction or ongoing emotional reactions and affects (Diener & Diener, 1995). This includes life satisfaction and how satisfied we are with our lives, the presence of positive emotional experience and the absence of negative emotional experience (Suh & Oishi., 2002). Many of the studies presented hypothesized that life satisfaction and emotional happiness would be larger in individualistic cultures. In this paper each side will be looked at to see if self-identity or group membership impacts how people rate their life satisfaction. I also draw focus on the pathways to

a satisfying and healthy life. Recent research has shown the SWB is higher in Western

individuals than East Asian and has suggested that there are two potential pathways to SWB,

self-related and other-related. Self-related pathways include independent self-construal and

personal expressions of emotions whereas other-related includes interdependent self-construal

and the giving of social support to others (Novin et al., 2013). This section will determine

whether SWB is affected by independent and interdependent self-construal. How individuals

view themselves is referred to as self-construal and individual differences in how people view

themselves differ between individualistic and collectivistic cultural groups. Finally, I discuss

main conclusions and findings that can be drawn, as well as provide a summary of limitations

and possible future research questions.

Individualism and Collectivism Defined

A person's subjective well-being is influenced by the culture and the relationships that

one holds. Individualism and collectivism, or independence and interdependence as they are also

often called, broadly influence SWB (Diener et al., 1995). Individualistic and collectivistic

cultures vary in how they rate their SWB as a result of the different values of each culture. In

individualistic societies, the individual is the basic unit and is only concerned with his or her own

personal goals and desires while in collectivistic societies the individual views the group as the

most important entity and strives to reach group goals (Diener et al., 1995). In cultures that are

highly individualistic the person is self-sufficient, his or her goal is focused on becoming

independent of others. Internal features of the self such as emotions, attitudes and beliefs are

believed to be the determinants of that person's behavior, as individuals are expected to act on

these beliefs (Sul et al., 1998). In collectivistic cultures, such internal features of the self are

seldom regarded as legitimate reasons for one's actions; individuals are expected to subordinate their own goals to those of their family or to the group in which they belong and are often deemed selfish if they do not (Sul et al., 1998). To further explain, in highly individualistic cultures, the beliefs, feelings, rights and freedoms of the individual take precedence over the needs or expectations of the in-group or family whereas in a collectivistic culture the goals and needs of that in-group takes priority over the individual's values or preferences (Suh & Oishi, 2002). However, there are costs that come with the benefits of personal freedom; an individualistic culture member that experiences high freedom of choice chooses their own values and lifestyle but without strong social supports may face negative consequences in times of adverse life events (Suh & Oishi, 2002). On the other hand a member of a collectivistic culture may experience strong support in time of stress however there is much less freedom to pursue their own personal goals (Suh & Oishi, 2002). Collectivists make up approximately two thirds of the world's population and on average form a tighter culture than individualistic societies (Suh et al., 1998). As such, the price an individual pays for departing from the ways of the group is higher (Suh et al., 1998). Cultures such as the United States or the regions of Western and Northern Europe are considered highly individualistic while most East Asian and Central and South American cultures are considered more collectivistic (Suh & Oishi, 2002). It is important to note however that even though a culture may be defined as individualistic and collectivistic, beliefs and attitudes can vary within regions and between people (Fiske, 2002).

Main components of SWB

SWB can be broken down into three main components: life satisfaction, the presence of positive emotional experience and the absence of negative emotional experience (Suh and Oishi,

2002). This presence or absence of emotional experience is also known as affect balance. Life satisfaction or one's quality of life is considered a cognitive global judgment of that person's life (Suh et al., 1998). It is an appraisal of that life as a whole whereas emotional or affect balance refers to the quality and amount of pleasant compared with unpleasant emotional experiences (Suh et al., 1998). Although rare, it is entirely possible that a person who does not experience many emotions can be satisfied with his or her life and also for that person who experiences many pleasant emotions to conversely feel unsatisfied with his or her life (Suh et al., 1998).

Life satisfaction

The World Health Organization defines quality of life as being the way an individual perceives his or her own position in life to be in context with culture and value systems and in relation to expectations, goals standards and concerns (Urzua et al., 2012). How do you define a good life across cultures? It is possible that life satisfaction is based primarily on internal experiences in some cultures whereas in others they are based on social elements (Suh et al., 1998). In individualistic cultures the self is autonomous and self sufficient with a goal to become independent from others by cultivating private qualities and attributes (Suh et al., 1998). As such that person acts and thinks on the basis of these internal features of the self (Suh et al., 1998). Collectivistic cultures are tighter knit than individualistic cultures; beliefs of the family or in-group are the priority (Suh et al., 1998). It is important to have behavior deemed appropriate as there is a price to be paid for deviating from the norm (Suh et al., 1998). Individual's follow the views of the in-group because if they do not it is possible that they can be ostracized or shunned as a result. It has been hypothesized that the correlation of life satisfaction and emotional happiness is smaller within collectivistic cultures and larger in individualistic cultures (Suh et al.,

1998). In this study, the researchers completed a World Values survey through interviews on representative national samples. The responses of 55,666 participants supported this hypothesis and overall results suggested that emotional feelings play a much larger role in the judgment of overall life satisfaction of people in individualistic cultures than in collectivistic cultures (Suh et al., 1998). The higher the culture was individualized, the higher the life satisfaction judgments scored in correlation to internal emotions. When evaluating life satisfaction, collectivists pay more focus on social cues (i.e., approval of the in-group) in addition to emotions (Suh et al., 1998). A limitation to this research was recognized by the authors. With such a large number of nations involved, only the Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish participated in studies that were provided in their own language. The studies for the remainder of the nations were translated from English to the participants in their native languages by bilingual collaborators who were also psychologists. It is possible that information could have been lost in translation and therefore affected the interpretation of the results.

Well-being and life satisfaction tends to be associated with independence and interpersonal disengagement or interdependence and interpersonal engagement (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). Depending on the culture, one may associate good feelings with satisfying the self internally while another culture may associate good feelings with maintaining healthy relationships with others. This theory has been measured globally and similar findings have been found in Japan, the United States, Belgium, Korea, Chile and Cuba to name a few. It has also been suggested in many studies that feeling good about oneself and having healthy internal and external relationships will result in living a happier, more satisfied life which has been purported to lead to life longevity. Cultural differences in emotion and well-being are also said to be linked to cultural fit and are predictors of life satisfaction (De Leersynder et al., 2013).

How we pattern our emotions with regards to various situations reflect the view that people share on the world (De Leersynder et al., 2013). Emotional fit is how we experience those similar patterns of emotion within ones cultures (De Leerynder et al., 2013). Individuals who fit in with their culture have the tendency to record higher levels of life satisfaction (De Leersynder et al., 2013).

In past research self-esteem has been shown to be a strong predictor of life satisfaction (Diener & Diener, 1995). Diener and Diener (1995) predicted that the importance of the self to life satisfaction would vary across cultures with self-esteem valuing higher in individualistic cultures. They also predicted that satisfaction with ones family would be higher in collectivistic cultures where life satisfaction is derived from an individual's in-group (family, friends and coworkers). In this study, data was collected from 13,118 college students from 49 universities in 31 countries. Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction on 12 domains of life (e.g., family, friends, and finances). Results suggested that satisfaction, in the four life domains (satisfaction with self, family, friends and finances), are high predicators of life satisfaction amongst all participants in all nations (Diener & Diener, 1995). Results for life satisfaction were shown to be low in two nations that also had low self-esteem, and also low in several very poor countries, such as Bangladesh and Cameroon (Diener & Diener, 1995). Results of this study also indicated that individualism within societies correlates with the relationship between friendship and life satisfaction, therefore leading to the belief that friend satisfaction was a weaker component of life satisfaction in collectivistic cultures (Diener & Diener, 1995). This is contrary to expectations that collectivistic societies hold stronger ties between family satisfaction and life satisfaction. As well unexpected findings in this study present opportunities for further research. The relation between life satisfaction and family satisfaction was not moderated in collectivistic

societies. Also the stronger relationship between life satisfaction and friendship satisfaction in

individualistic societies was not expected. As an explanation the authors suggest that it is

possible that in individualistic societies, friends become more important as they are chosen rather

than forced (Diener & Diener, 1995). The findings of this study support the beliefs that further

studies are required in cross-cultural replications of these findings. It is suggested that many

more diverse cultures need to be studied before these findings are accepted as universal (Diener

& Diener, 1995). For example, research was gathered from 821 participants recruited from

different health institutions of Chile, Spain and Cuba, to compare findings from culturally

different populations within a common language (Urzua, Castillo, & Urizar, 2013). Authors

hypothesized that a relationship existed between a person's cultural values and quality of life, or

life satisfaction. Using a scale for measuring this quality of life, the authors measured cultural

values that were considered to be individualistic (i.e., power, achievement, hedonism,

stimulation and self-direction) with collectivistic values (i.e., benevolence, tradition and

conformity). It was found that only hedonism was associated with quality of life in Spain and

Chile thus lending to the belief that pleasurable activities are important for life satisfaction

(Urzua et al., 2013). This may be explained by the fact that these countries, although

collectivistic in nature, are undergoing individualistic development change and as such are facing

upheaval. Importantly, the values serving individualistic interests were the primary ones relating

to quality of life (Urzua et al., 2013). The authors suggest that even though there is factors in

each culture that influence well-being, there are other variables like cultural specific values that

need to be considered as well (Urzua et al., 2013). Future research should examine other possible

factors such as age, as this may have an influence on how a person rates their SWB.

Presence of Positive and Negative Emotional Experience (Affect Balance)

Researchers have studied the short and long term consequences of positive and negative emotions (affect) on individuals and have found that the physiological changes that occur as a result of change of mood are in fact related to health changes (Diener and Chan, 2011). Negative affect results in a greater likelihood of health problems and positive affects are associated with psychosocial and behavioral factors (Diener and Chan, 2011). For example, stress and anxiety are associated with negative changes in the cardiovascular system while positive affect could lead to a greater social connectedness, perceived social support and optimal health such as lower blood pressure (Diener and Chan, 2011). Emotions are experienced differently across cultures and this can have an effect on the way that we feel about the self (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa). Cultural differences, such as the norms that govern emotional experience are often overlooked as a cause for the differences often observed in SWB (Diener et al., 1995). This possibility manifests in the diversity across nations regarding self-reporting measures. Some cultures may devalue individual expression and as such the general positive or negative response style may explain the differences reported (Diener et al., 1995). In some nations the norm for humility is, for example, valued by that culture more than in others and now and then it may actually seem arrogant in that culture to report that one is happy (Diener et al., 1995).

In a study conducted by Diener et al (1995) the variance in mean levels of SWB between nations has been explained as being a result of the difference in norms regulating the momentary experience of emotion. Some cultures reward the experience of certain emotions while other emotions are denigrated (Diener et al., 1995). The cultures that view pleasant emotions as positive might tend to be happier while other cultures that view unpleasant emotions as desirable may have a lower SWB (Diener et al., 1995). The frequency that people think of their SWB may

also be influenced by the norms. A culture that values happiness and satisfaction may consider

norms to be very important, therefore these particular values are thought about frequently; this in

turn may give an individual the confidence to answer survey questions in a firmer, more positive

view (Diener et al., 1995) Another reason that SWB is reported differently across cultures is that

there are differences in social desirability. This could be attributed to the fact that in some

cultures, saying or admitting that you are happy is a desirable trait while in others it is not. There

could also be differences in SWB between nations because of acquiescence or compliance

differences (Diener et al., 1995). Individualists who reside in collectivistic cultures are more

conforming and want to be viewed positively by the group that is completing the research

whereas individualists in individualistic cultures may not have as great of a desire to report

socially desirable responses (Diener et al., 1995). Nations may also differ in SWB because of the

poor living conditions in those nations or the perception thereof (Diener et al., 1995).

Differences in the reporting of SWB were compared between the Pacific Rim nations, a

collectivistic culture, to the United States of America, an individualistic culture. In this study,

thirty-eight countries were examined to see if the relationship between life satisfaction and

happiness ratings per capita wealth of a nation correlated by visiting a global student data survey

(Diener et al., 1995). South Korea and Japan were found to be below average compared to other

countries in both their happiness and life satisfaction rating. As well the USA scored higher than

average in absolute terms and when income was controlled (Diener et al., 1995). It was

suggested that this may be true as a result of humility, the desire of Pacific Rim students to look

average. This hypothesis was also supported in many other national samples. Diener, Diener and

Deiner (1995) compiled results from national surveys of 55 different nations and found that the

only culture that correlated with SWB was an individualistic one.

The differences in SWB between nations were also attributed to the fact that there is a general positive or negative response bias in some of these nations (Diener, Diener, & Deiner, 1995). Close examination of data revealed that expression of negative affect or emotions is forbidden in the presence of strangers in the Pacific Rim nations (Diener, Diener, & Deiner, 1995). In a second similar study between China and America the Chinese report that it is least desirable to experience negative emotions and think about failure less while the Americans report the highest desirability ratings for feeling positive emotions and recall the most positive memories (Diener et al., 1995). Lastly, the Koreans report the lowest norm for affect balance, (the desirability for feeling more positive than negative emotions), they report the lowest scores for memory tests and the lowest experience of affect or emotional balance scores (Diener et al., 1995). The authors draw several conclusions from these studies, one of which is that Pacific Rim students live in objectively worse conditions than the others, which could account for their lower SWB. On the other hand the authors purport that the expectations of these students were so high that they were bound to be disappointed by those circumstances. Another supplied explanation for low Asian SWB rests on the assumption hypothesized that in collectivist cultures, individuals are not supposed to stand out and therefore are less likely to report intense feelings (Diener et al., 1995). Another explanation is that the high economic growth rates and expectation to excel may cause stress and pressure to achieve (Diener et al., 1995). This should be explored further in future studies. Another possibility for future research is that the surveyors could include a broader base of samples from which to draw responses from since college students were the only participants that these assessments were conducted on. Examining the influence of norms in a much larger base of culture would be beneficial, and as such questions can be answered as to whether norms develop first and influence the experience of emotions, or whether norms reflect

the emotions which people feel in a culture (Diener et al., 1995).

It has been suggested that feeling good about the self tends to be associated with independence and interpersonal disengagement in the United States, whereas feeling good about the self in Japan is said to be associated with interdependence and interpersonal engagement (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). In support of this theory, emotions and life satisfaction correlate much more strongly in individualistic cultures, while norms and emotions are equally strong predictors of life satisfaction in collectivistic cultures (Suh et al., 1998). Introductory psychology students from both American and Japanese colleges were surveyed and the frequency of using positive and negative emotions were measured to see how feeling good is reflected by an individual's culture. The social function and the interactions of these two culture groups and the studies of their shared views of self and of their positive and negative emotions varied whether they were considered independent or interdependent (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). The authors hypothesized that one's well-being is associated with interdependence and interpersonal engagement of the self in Japan but with independence and interpersonal disengagement of the self in the United States and this theory was supported. In the United States it is believed that the self has purpose (i.e., goals, desires, and rights) when the self is satisfied internally (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). Experiencing and expressing these emotions tend to highlight these positive internal attributes and allow the self to feel this way (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). The independent person has the tendency to display disengaging behaviors such as asserting and protecting oneself thereby allowing the self to feel satisfied (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). In the Japanese culture, individuals believe in connectedness and relying on relationships with others. The Japanese tend to engage behaviors and act on the expectations of others (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). It is

shown that positive emotions such as pride more typically result from feelings of satisfaction with one's internal attributes and confirm the self through independence and disengagement from individuals such as what is seen in this study with the United States (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). In opposition, positive emotions such as the feeling of respect or harmony in a relationship are felt within interdependent relationships (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). Cultural differences in emotion as seen with the Japanese and US culture show how well-being and life satisfaction is influenced by culture.

Findings from an International College Student Data study in which 6,780 students from 40 countries were surveyed to understand issues relating to national and cultural difference in SWB. It was determined that cultures are more different in how much they regulate negative emotions than to the degree which they treasure positive emotions (Suh et al., 1998). The authors suggest that life satisfaction judgment differs greatly across cultures. A dramatically different pattern was observed in that 76% of an individualists' judgment of life satisfaction was due to private feelings and 12% to the perceived norms that they should be satisfied while collectivists' culture attribute 39 % to emotions and 40% to the norms (Suh et al., 1998). This may have broad implications in understanding the role of emotions in interpersonal dynamics seen across cultures (Suh et al., 1998). In an individualistic culture, private feelings seem to be more important than cultural norms when making life satisfaction judgments while in collectivist cultures, individuals take the normative value of life satisfaction as seriously as they do their private feelings (Suh et al., 1998).

The relationship between emotional experiences and SWB is shaped by cultural values on certain emotional states (Bastin et al., 2014). It is recognized that the cultural level effects of placing social value on positive emotion were seldom considered in past research (Bastin et al.,

2014). The authors drew on data from a large multination survey of over 9000 college students from across 47 countries. They determined that people report higher levels of life satisfaction in countries where positive emotions are highly valued. They also determined that increased life satisfaction in countries that value positive emotion is less evident for those individuals who experience positive emotion less or negative emotion more (Bastian et al., 2014). The self-reported frequency of emotional experiences and their perceived social value as well as life satisfaction judgments were taken from the International College Survey, 2001 (Bastian et al., 2014). Results suggested that individuals from all around the world judged life satisfaction in relation to the social value placed on positive emotions where they lived (Bastian et al., 2014). Findings also revealed that although life satisfaction is higher in cultures that value positive emotions, life satisfaction judgments are lower for those who frequently experience negative emotions indicating that individuals who experience this are less advantaged than those from other cultures (Bastian et al., 2014). These results correspond with beliefs once again that at the individual level emotions were far superior predictors of life satisfaction than are norms or social approval as shown in the study completed by Suh et al (1998) as previously discussed. The authors recognize that their study did however have limitations. Firstly, that the measures of the positive emotional experiences and social value were based on high social emotions and secondly, that there was only one measure of social evaluation relied upon for each emotion. They acknowledge that future research could extend the findings and a more balanced list of emotional states should be used. There is strong evidence to suggest that increased well-being is associated with placing value on positive emotion. Individuals experience and report higher levels of life satisfaction when their culture places a value on positive emotions or the lack of negative emotions (Bastian et al., 2014).

Self-related and Other-related Pathways

People of different cultures may have a lower SWB than other cultures even though the factors that predict this well-being may be in fact similar (Novin et al., 2013). Subjective well-being is rated lower among East Asians than Western individuals. In this study, the authors demonstrated two potential pathways to this well-being, self-related and other-related (Novin et al., 2013). Self-related included such pathways as independent self-construal; (personal expression of emotions), and other-related included interdependent self construal; (giving social support to others) (Novin et al., 2013). In this study researchers drew from the second wave of the National Survey of Midlife Development (MIDUS II) completed in the US between 2004-2006 and a Japanese survey from a parallel data set. Authors examined the differences between American and Japanese with regards to SWB, self-construal, emotional expression and the provision of social support. It was found that older adults who are American report higher levels of SWB, emotional expression, and are given more social support than their Japanese counterparts, and that there are similar influences of both self and other-related pathways (Novin et al., 2013). Interdependent self-construal also has a positive effect on a persons well being as it has both a positive effect through the giving of support to others and a negative effect as there are less emotional expressions (Novin et al., 2013). These findings were nearly identical across cultures, except that Americans showed a stronger positive relationship between independent self-construal and emotional expression, and Japanese showed a stronger positive relation between independence and giving social support (Novin et al., 2013). Again, this study supports the ideas found in that life satisfaction tends to be associated with independence and interpersonal disengagement in the United States whereas interdependence and interpersonal engagement is seen in the Japanese culture. Authors recognize a limitation to their studies, and

suggest that behavioral measures should be recommended. In this particular cultural group the

reliability and measurement scale is actually different as data collected for this survey relies on

self-reporting conditions. The emotion and expression scale reliability was not as strong for the

Japanese sample as it was for the American sample.

        It is suggested that the act of fitting in with ones culture may have an affect on how

individuals rate their SWB (De Leersynder et al., 2013). People share similar views on the world

and given that this is the case, may experience similarities in emotion (De Leersynder et al.,

2013). In this study three different cultures were examined. The authors hypothesized that

people's cultural fit of emotions is associated with their well-being and secondly that the link

between emotional fit and relational well-being is stronger when emotional fit is measured for

situations that are about relationships. How people actually feel in situations that are about

relationships are more consequential to others than how they feel about situations that are

considered self-focused (De Leersynder et al., 2013). This study consisted of 31 European

Americans from a community sample, 267 Belgian psychology freshmen students and 75

Koreans. In order to measure cultural fit the Emotional Patterns Questionnaire (EPQ) was used.

Participants were presented with prompts defined by positive or negative emotions, relationship

focus and social context (family, work, friends). Participants then described a situation and rated

the intensity of their emotions on a scale. Relational well-being was then measured by having

participants complete one of two versions of the World Health Organization's Quality of Life

Questionnaire (WHOQOL). This study supported the hypothesis that that there is a link between

individual's relational well-being and their cultural fit in situations that are all about relationships

(De Leersynder et al., 2013). Contrary to expectations, relational well-being was not associated

with emotional fit in situations that were self-focused (De Leersynder et al., 2013). Results also

support the hypothesis that situations that were relationship focused would be more strongly

associated with relational well-being than other areas of well-being (De Leersynder et al., 2013).

This disagrees with a study by Novin et al (2013) that shows that the giving of social support to

others is shown to have a positive effect on interdependent self-construal. In the Korean sample a

positive relationship was found between cultural fit in relationship-focused situations and several

other areas of well-being. Also there was a wider range of well-being measures in Korea

compared to the other two samples (Novin et al., 2013). Relationship satisfaction plays a bigger

role in interdependent cultures compared to independent cultures and so emotional fit in Korea

may play a role in overall general well-being (De Leersynder et al., 2013). This goes to support

the hypothesis that an individual's culture does in fact affect their SWB.

Limitations and Future Studies

Even though numerous studies have been completed on how cultures affect an

individual's SWB or happiness, there are many more details that still need to be assessed in order

to draw a more thorough and accurate conclusion from results. How a culture values emotions

requires exact comparison with another culture. When analyzing studies such as whether culture

is a predictor of life satisfaction and happiness, there are many things that should be considered.

Because cultures change so rapidly it is often hard to recognize that these changes also occur

cross culturally. Translation is also a key issue whenever cultures that speak different languages

are included in a study. Finding words to describe emotions that have comparable definitions in

other languages can be very challenging although many studies do have an interpreter to explain

the information in a way that the specific culture will understand. In saying this, an interpreter

may have his or her own language barriers as well. The interpreter may be more familiar with

one language than the other and therefore this will have an influence on the study. There may

also be different variations in meanings and expressions that have been studied across these

different cultures. For example the term shame may be viewed differently in one culture than

another and it may mean more in one culture than the other. Because of this variation, results

may be misconstrued (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). Different terms relating to the

emotions studied could also be interpreted differently depending on the culture studied. In one

study for example, it was suggested that the Japanese and US culture had language differences

(Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). Because of this, results might not be as accurate

because the interpretations of meanings from Japan and the US may differ. The specific results

obtained in each study may therefore not be accurate nor be conclusive. This also supports the

limitations with cross-cultural studies as discussed earlier in this paper. The language used and

the nature of these generalized feelings varies within the different cultures and as a result cross-

cultural variations in the exact meanings or understanding may exist and result in results that are

incorrect (Suh et al., 1998). It is important to examine these limitations to the studies in order to

determine how culture plays a role in SWB.

Novin, Tso and Konrath (2013) also agree that pathways should be investigated within

cross-cultural research and agree that simple group comparisons should be added to understand

mental well-being across cultural groups. When conducting research, researchers need to be

careful as cross-national comparisons can be exposed to biases in culture and language which

may affect SWB ratings (Novin, Tso, & Konrath, 2013). There is a need to develop additional

methods to handle this distortion that may result, as cross country comparisons of SWB has been

found in the past to be insignificant in comparison to cultural differences (Diener et al., 1995).

To ensure a clear interpretation of the results of a survey a cross panel of participants should be

assessed. An equal amount of participants from all ages and all education levels need to be

surveyed throughout these studies to have a broader base from which to interpret results. The

majority of the studies discussed in this paper surveyed participants of college age who are more

educated than others. People who are older tend to have a more positive consideration of well-

being than students who are poorer and who have less disposable income (Bonn & Tafarodi,

2013). It has been suggested that beliefs about life satisfaction would have a greater separation

for those who are less educated than those with a higher education (Bonn & Tafarodi, 2013).

There are differences in generations that should also be considered. This was supported by a

study conducted by Hofer, Chasiotis and Campos (2006), where they investigated the interaction

of one's values, motives and relationship to cognitive evaluations of life satisfaction. This article

is not compared in this review however it is important to note that a positive association was

shown between participant's age and their level of life satisfaction as this life satisfaction data

was assessed to be higher in older adults than of those who participated in the study (Hofer,

Chasiotis, & Campos, 2006). As well, most of the studies are based on industrialized countries,

as data has been available there for some time, but future studies should consider the new

developing countries, as there is still very little known about them. Even though these limitations

exist, research strongly suggests that individualistic and collectivistic culture affects SWB.

Increasing the well-being of individuals in both the individualistic and collectivistic

nations around the world is a worthy pursuit as life satisfaction not only feels good but also

offers positive benefits to both the individual, his or her family, the workplace and the

community in which he or she resides. The majority of research shows that the more that a

family or a culture endorses the individual's pursuit of happiness through the acceptance of his

or her values, the more that he or she will express life satisfaction (Lyubomirsky & Layous,

2013). Self-identity or group membership impacts how people rate their life satisfaction. The culture in which one resides and the values that are inherent within that culture impacts how people rate their SWB.

Increased measures in life satisfaction are associated with placing value on positive emotions. Individuals are happier when cultures place value on positive emotions and on the lack of negative emotions. The pathways to a satisfying and healthy life do not necessarily differ across cultures but depend more upon how an individual views him or her self in relation to others. The factors that predict SWB are similar but have differences dependent upon ones culture. Emotions that enhance the self are more meaningful for SWB measures in collectivistic cultures compared to individualistic cultures.

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