New Findings On Subjective Well-Being

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Five Findings

1. SWB is beneficial to health and fertility. Thus, it is not surprising that most people are happy.
2. There are universal and culture-specific predictors (e.g., religiosity) of SWB
3. Meaning/purpose and need fulfillment both contribute substantially to life satisfaction beyond pleasure
4. People do not need to fulfill Maslow’s needs in order to gain benefits
5. There has been progress on national accounts of well-being
Happy People Have It All!

On Average:

• Better health
• Longer lives
• Greater fertility
• More and healthier babies
• More stable two-parent families
• More resources such as nutrition for children

-- Strong evolutionary selective advantages

Diener and Oishi, 2011
Health Benefits: Diener & Chan (2011)

High Subjective Well-Being CAUSES Health and Longevity -- over 150 studies reviewed

- Animal experiments
- Experimental
- Longitudinal
- Natural experiments
- Experience-sampling
If SWB is So Advantageous, Why Isn’t Everyone Happy?
Most People Are Happy!  
-- Most Students Happy  
More than Half the Time
Most People Around the World Are Happy!

• In 125 of 128 nations, a majority of people felt positive “much of yesterday”
Even in Relatively Bad Circumstances
(People who have gone hungry, been assaulted, AND not enough money for food and housing)

57% enjoyed most of yesterday
62% smiled and laughed a lot
Implications

• People are resilient, and usually bounce back to some extent

• Chronic unhappiness is harmful and not “normal”
Beyond GDP

GDP and income are important to SWB, but more than money matters!
Universal Predictors –
All Cultures of the World

• Social support
• Social trust
• Mastery (learning, using abilities)
• Control of one’s own life

• These all predict enjoyment of life more than income!
More Than Money Matters: Tale of Two Nations, and the Dangers of Unmitigated Economic Growth
# Psychosocial “Wealth”

--- Percent of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>South Korea</th>
<th>Costa Rica</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Am Not Respected</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Social Support</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Satisfied St. Living</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Satisfied Job</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
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## Subjective Well-Being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>South Korea</th>
<th>Costa Rica</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>7.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Feelings</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Feelings</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP/Person</td>
<td>46,500</td>
<td>12,800</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
South Korea: High Income, BUT --

- Constant competition
- Constant social comparison
- Concern about appearance and luxury goods
- Materialism
“Asian Tiger” of economic growth – $ not sufficient to produce high SWB
Un-Maslow Finding on Hierarchy: Economics Not Only Priority

• Fulfilling needs out of order still rewarding
Monoj: A Happy Man
Besides Universals, There Are Culture-Specific Causes of SWB
Religion and SWB

Positive Feelings

High Individual Religiosity
Low Individual Religiosity

High: Top 25%
Low: Bottom 25%

p < .001

Country Religiosity
To Advance Positive Psychology Institute National Accounts of Well-Being!
The UK’s Well-Being Index

How satisfied are you with your life nowadays?’

How happy did you feel yesterday?

How anxious did you feel yesterday?

To what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
Meaning and Purpose
Predict
Life Satisfaction
Life satisfaction is not just pleasure. It reflects people’s goals, need fulfillment, and values too.
Some Conclusions:

• SWB provides a natural selective advantage, and therefore evolution has created most people to be moderately happy
• Meaning/purpose and satisfaction of needs raise life satisfaction
• Religion’s effects depend on one’s culture
• We are making progress on national accounts of SWB
If you would like a copy of the talk, please give me your business card or email me:
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Thank You!
Some References

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