Well-Being Science for Teaching and the General Public

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Abstract

Research on well-being has exploded in recent years, with over 50,000 relevant publications each year, making it difficult for psychologists—including key communicators such as textbook authors—to stay current with this field. At the same time, well-being is a daily concern among policymakers and members of the general public. The topic is also extremely relevant to the lives of students—illustrating the diverse methods used in the behavioral sciences, presenting highly-replicated findings, and demonstrating the diversity in individuals and cultures. Therefore, five experts present eight topics meeting the above standards that teachers and authors should seriously consider in their coverage of this field. These topics range from processes such as adaptation, to influences such as income, to the benefits of well-being, to cultural and societal diversity in well-being and its causes. We aim to ensure more complete coverage of this important area in psychology courses, but also serve as a model for coverage in other areas of psychology.

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Well-Being Science for Teaching and the General Public

Subjective well-being or happiness is a topic that is worthy of consideration as a major addition to the canon of content taught in psychology. Indeed, Yale's course on happiness was the highest-enrolled in that institution's three century history (Shimer, 2018), reflecting student appetite for this topic. Similarly, of 15 common topics found in introductory psychology courses, students from regional, community, and technical colleges rated "stress/health psychology" as the second most important topic (McCann, Immel, Kadah-Ammeter, & Adelson, 2016). Perhaps, because of sensitivity to these trends, some publishers have begun including short sections on well-being in textbooks (Myers & DeWall, 2016).

Coverage of well-being science is especially important in the context of the American Psychological Association's (2013) guidelines for learning objectives in the teaching of undergraduate psychology. These include: A) knowledge base, B) scientific inquiry and critical thinking, C) ethical and social responsibility in a diverse world, D) communication, and E) professional development. In a sample of 123 course syllabi from 95 institutions, researchers found that sociocultural awareness, values, and personal development, accounted for 15% or less of the stated course learning objectives, respectively (Homa et al., 2013). Well-being offers a cross-disciplinary opportunity to revisit these objectives and bring them to life with a topic that is relevant, relatable, and engaging.

Well-being is, at its heart, a field that spans psychology. It includes the study of emotion, personality, cognition, development, sociality, and virtually every other area of psychology. As a result, it can be woven into existing course material or treated as a stand-alone topic. It can be used to teach scientific literacy as well as about cultural diversity, and it is deeply relevant to learners regardless of their background. By *learners*, not only are we referring to traditional

university students, but also to members of the general public who are increasingly gaining

access to psychology content through new platforms such as massive open online courses

(MOOCs). For example, approximately 112,000 people from over 200 countries enrolled in a

MOOC on the "Science of Happiness" at UC Berkeley (Clay, 2015). Public understanding of

well-being science is critical for efforts by local and national governments to integrate well-

being indicators into the policymaking process (Dolan & White, 2007; Exton & Shinwell, 2018).

Such measures can help identify groups that require policy intervention and to evaluate the

effectiveness of new and existing policies. However the legitimacy of such policy uses requires

not only a strong scientific foundation, but support from the very people at whom those policies

are directed as well.

Textbook authors and psychology instructors choose what coverage to give topics, but

they typically have neither the time nor the sweep of expertise to critically evaluate what

findings are important in each area. This is certainly true of well-being, with its growth

expanding from fewer than 100 articles annually in the 1980s to extremely large numbers of

publications now. As of June 1, 2020, the terms *happiness* or *subjective well-being* are

mentioned in over 2.6 million publications, with 50,000 annually. These findings are the results

of multiple fronts of inquiry across different areas of psychology and other disciplines from

economics to anthropology. As noted by Kaslow (2015), those who communicate psychology

research to a wider audience are sometimes accused of highlighting findings that are provocative

but not necessarily supported by rigorous research.

Here we present a possible solution for navigating this academic territory: the authors of

this paper are five experts on the topic of well-being who have, collectively, published 600

academic articles, more than a dozen books and have been cited a quarter of a million times. We

describe a list of topics related to well-being that we believe should be considered for coverage in a wide range of psychology courses. We also suggest that this approach to coverage of subjective well-being might be a model for groups of experts to recommend coverage of other fields as well.

Overview of Eight Well-Being Research Findings

We present eight major findings from the field of subjective well-being, evaluate their level of support, and provide recommendations for where and how these findings can be included in textbooks and taught in a psychology curriculum. We used several criteria to select these topics: A) *Research evidence*: We preference findings that have been replicated across laboratories, methods, and cultures. As much as possible, we rely on meta-analyses, existing reviews, and large-scale international studies to establish the broad support and replicability of a finding; B) *Interest and relevance*: The topics we cover relate in important ways to people's lives; and C) *Deep understanding*: The topics give a broader understanding of human experience and diversity as well as the diverse methods used in the behavioral sciences. The findings we present are:

(1) Well-being involves more than happy feelings

(2) Well-being can be validly measured

(3) Income influences well-being, up to a point

(4) High quality relationships are essential for well-being

(5) Genes and personality influence well-being

(6) People adapt to many circumstances, but it takes time

(7) Culture and society influence well-being

(8) There are important benefits of experiencing well-being beyond feeling good

Our aim is to introduce readers to eight findings about well-being that are important and should be covered in psychology courses. Some instructors might want more nuance and depth than we have provided here, or want to include other findings on well-being. We refer them to the Handbook of Well-Being at Nobascholar.com (Diener, Oishi, & Tay, 2018) and to Diener, Lucas, and Oishi (2018). We also include in our supplementary materials a list of discussion questions and activities that instructors may consider to deepen learners' understanding of these findings.

1. Well-Being Is More Than Feeling Happy

Feeling happy is a basic state that is commonly understood across many languages, cultures, and age groups. Because of this, well-being scholars often find it difficult not to use the term *happiness* when introducing research in this area to a broader audience (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008; Layard, 2005; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Seligman, 2002). Every year, the media follows suit, reporting on the *happiest* countries in the world, thanks in part to the annual *World Happiness Report*. Referring to *well-being* as *happiness* is a powerful communication tool that draws interest from the public, but it also invites a narrow view of how scientists think about and study well-being. People may think of *happiness* primarily as a short-term mood or emotion (e.g., "*Happiness is fleeting*"). However, the scientific concept of well-being is much broader than this.

Feelings are an element of well-being. Researchers are interested in a wide range of pleasant emotions but also in the experience of unpleasant emotions. In daily life, people tend to experience some mixture of positive and negative affect (Tov & Lee, 2016). Large-scale analyses across many countries suggest that pleasant and unpleasant feelings are consistently distinguishable from each other (Busseri, 2018; Fors & Kulin, 2016; Kuppens, Ceulemans,

Timmerman, Diener, & Kim-Prieto, 2006). Moreover, they have distinct correlates. For example, failing to meet basic needs (for food and shelter) strongly correlates with negative but not positive affect in most regions around the world (Tay & Diener, 2011). An important implication is that pleasant and unpleasant feelings capture different aspects of a person's well-being.

Well-being also consists of judgments about how satisfied a person is with their life. Such evaluations are referred to as cognitive well-being because they rely on mental information such as standards for comparison. The closer a person's life is to their ideal, for example, the more likely they are to be satisfied. Though correlated, affect and cognitive evaluations of one's life are distinct (Busseri, 2018; Fors & Kulin, 2016; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996). There is emerging evidence that judgments such as life satisfaction tend to be associated with the broad conditions of one's life, whereas affective well-being tends to be associated with reactions to specific daily events (Eid & Diener, 2004; Luhmann, Hawkley, Eid, & Cacioppo, 2012; Schimmack, Schupp, & Wagner, 2008). Some scholars make a further distinction between hedonic well-being and eudemonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Whereas hedonic well-being comprises pleasure and positive feelings, eudemonic well-being refers to a variety of experiences such as meaning, growth, and authenticity (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Vittersø, 2016). A central theme of eudemonic well-being is the fulfillment of one's potential—which can involve challenging oneself or developing one's talents. The contrast between eudemonic and hedonic well-being highlights the fact that people do not always choose to do what "feels good" in the moment but, instead, sometimes choose worthwhile pursuits such as contributing to society or completing an unpleasant but important task.

Hedonic and eudemonic well-being are strongly correlated with each other (Disabato, Goodman, Kashdan, Short, & Jarden, 2016; Joshanloo, 2016; Linley, Maltby, Wood, Osborne, &

Hurling, 2009; Longo, Coyne, Joseph, & Gustavsson, 2016) and may have a bi-directional causal relationship. Leading a meaningful life, for example, can be a source of positive emotions, but positive emotions can also make life feel more meaningful (King, Heintzelman, & Ward, 2016). In sum, one need not choose between hedonic and eudemonic well-being, and strongly favoring one or the other might be a philosophical rather than empirical matter.

Importance to Learners

Understanding that well-being involves more than feeling happy has important implications for learners. First, because there are different components of well-being, there is not a single resource or activity that makes people "happy" in the broad sense of well-being. Some experiences may enhance enjoying life, while others enhance judgments of life or eudemonic well-being. Second, many people who are satisfied with their lives or experience frequent positive affect may still experience negative affect to varying degrees. Thus, being "happy" does not entail eliminating negative experiences from one's life. There is also an opportunity to build scientific literacy: when the popular media reports on the happiest countries or the latest research on what makes people happy, learners can be more critical of such reports by asking exactly how "happiness" was assessed. Finally, in seeking to understand others, learners can understand that individuals may experience happiness in differing ways.

2. Well-Being Can be Validly Measured

The notion that a person can accurately report their own level of well-being, and that this topic can be understood numerically, may seem doubtful to many. Schwarz and Strack (1999) suggested that judgments of global well-being are largely constructed from information that happens to be on a person's mind and is deemed relevant. If so, how could we trust people's evaluation of their lives when it might fluctuate from one moment to the next?

Subsequent research suggests that self-reports of well-being may not be as fickle as previously argued. For example, life satisfaction judgments have very high test-retest correlations ($r \geq .79$) over short intervals (less than one month; Schimmack & Oishi, 2005). Moreover, although self-reported well-being can be influenced by a person's current mood or other items in a survey, these effects are small and often inconsistent across studies (Eid & Diener, 2004; Schimmack & Oishi, 2005; Yap et al., 2017). Other studies suggest that well-being ratings do, in fact, reflect a person's life circumstances and experiences. For example, the life satisfaction of students is closely related to their satisfaction in important areas such as academics, health, and social relationships (Schimmack & Oishi, 2005). Diener, Inglehart, and Tay (2013) provide a thorough review of the validity of life satisfaction measures.

Scientists have also gone beyond self-report when measuring well-being. For example, informant reports of a person's well-being (made by friends or family members of the participant) correlate significantly with self-reports (Schneider & Schimmack, 2009). The memory of positive experiences (how many are recalled and how interconnected they are) is associated with self-reported well-being (Robinson & Kirkeby, 2005; Sandvik, Diener, & Seidlitz, 1993; Seidlitz & Diener, 1993). Other non-self-report measures show some convergence with self-reports (Scollon, 2018) and this helps us have confidence in the validity of these measures. Thus, although well-being measures are imperfect, they are valid enough to yield useful and consistent information.

Importance to Learners

The question about how to best assess well-being is a potential opportunity to teach learners about research methods and basic psychometrics. They can experience survey research by taking any number of widely available well-being measures (e.g., see eddiener.com). In

addition, learners should be aware of real-world applications of such measures. For example, well-being indicators are collected by governments around the world to inform and evaluate policy (Exton & Shinwell, 2018) . Leaders of organizations can examine well-being at work, as one metric of organizational success and productivity. Awareness of practical applications of well-being measures underscores the importance of scrutinizing their validity.

3. Income Influences Well-Being, but Only Up to a Point

One of the frequent questions people ask about well-being is whether money makes people happy. The question arises because there are contrasting beliefs about this issue, ranging from "money can't buy happiness," to "money is the key to happiness." Although people might prefer a yes-no answer to the question, extensive reviews of this literature suggest that such a simple response is impossible (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Tay, Zyphur, & Batz, 2018).

There is strong evidence that money can boost subjective well-being. Differences in average happiness between rich and poor nations are large (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002) Indeed, Diener, Kahneman, Tov, and Arora (2010) reported that the correlation between per capita income in countries and their average levels of life satisfaction was $r = .83$! Beyond cross-sectional correlations, Stevenson and Wolfers (2008) reported that as nations' incomes increased, their well-being tended to do so as well. At the societal level, richer nations are better able to provide freedom, transparent and non-corrupt services, and relative peace to the citizenry (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2019). At the individual level, these findings may reflect the fact that money helps people obtain things they need, such as food and shelter, but it also can help people cope with problems (Diener, Tay, & Oishi, 2013). For example, Kahneman and Deaton (2010) report in a representative sample of almost ½ million Americans that low income exacerbated the negative effects of misfortunes such as divorce, ill health, and loneliness.

Revealing the causal connection of more money to well-being are large lottery studies showing that lottery winners are happier than similar individuals who bought lottery tickets but did not win (Gardner & Oswald, 2007; Lindqvist, Östling, & Cesarini, 2020; Smith & Razzell, 1975).

Although there is evidence that money can raise happiness, there are also data showing that more money does not invariably equal more happiness. An important and replicated finding about the association of income and happiness is that there is what economists call "declining marginal utility." As a person earns higher and higher incomes, it often requires more and more money to impact happiness (Diener, Sandvik, Seidlitz, & Diener, 1993). In Figure 1, we present the declining effects of income on three types of subjective well-being. These data are based on the Gallup representative poll of the USA from 2008 to 2016 of about 1.5 million respondents. Most people seem to be able to achieve happy experiences with a moderate income, and not much improvement is evident after earning about 40,000 dollars a year, although specific income thresholds vary by geography. The incomes shown in the figure do not indicate as much declining marginal utility for life satisfaction; however Jebb and colleagues (2018) show that at some point in many world regions, people do not get a boost in life satisfaction from more income. Indeed, in several regions, income beyond some point is actually related to less well-being.
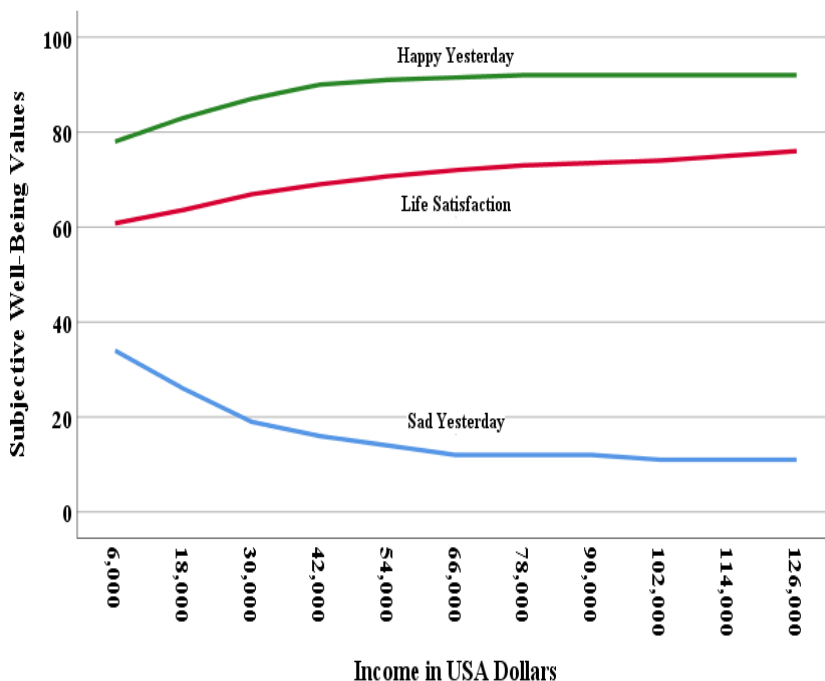
Figure 1. Declining marginal effects of income on subjective well-being.

Aside from the amount of income, how it is spent also influences well-being. Spending money on others can enhance positive affect (Aknin, Dunn, Proulx, Lok, & Norton, in press; Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008) as can spending money on experiences rather than materials (Lee, Hall, & Wood, 2018; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). On the other hand, materialism (placing a higher importance on money than on other values such as relationships) tends to relate to less well-being (Dittmar, Bond, Hurst, & Kasser, 2014).

Importance to Learners

Students are generally fascinated by this topic. Issues such as income, income equality, meaningful work, and how money is spent are all relevant to daily student life. It can be important to remind learners that apart from income, there are certain spending habits that can promote well-being. Learners might also ask themselves whether pursuing a career that will be unpleasant but earn high income is truly the road to happiness. They can also learn that income aspirations can outstrip even rising income, so that people are dissatisfied even though they have more than ever before (Graham & Pettinato, 2006).

4. High Quality Relationships are Essential for Well-Being

If there is a "secret to happiness," some argue that it can be found in social relationships (Argyle, 2001). This is because social relationships have myriad benefits—from producing positive feelings to offering social support in times of need. The desire to socially connect with others may be a basic human need. When this need for relatedness is met, feelings of happiness result (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000). In a study of the happiest and least happy university students, for example, having high-quality relationships appeared to distinguish the

two groups, with nearly all of the high-happiness students reporting better relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners (Diener & Seligman, 2002). Even peers of the students agreed that the very happy group had good relationships, providing convergent support for this conclusion.

Large-scale studies confirm the importance of social relationships for subjective well-being. Around the world, those who report the greatest happiness feel respected by others and that there are people they can count on in times of need (Diener, Seligman, Choi, & Oishi, 2018). Both women and men who reported the highest well-being were also the most likely to be in a stable relationship . Although marriage is only one type of relationship, studies consistently find that those who are married are happier than those who are not (Coombs, 1991; Diener, Gohm, Suh, & Oishi, 2000). The beneficial effect of marriage is apparent at any age throughout people's lives and for people worldwide, as evidenced by a representative global sample (Jebb, Morrison, Tay, & Diener, 2020). It is worth noting, however, that even interactions we have with casual acquaintances and strangers can boost our well-being in the short-term (Epley & Schroeder, 2014; Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014).

Socializing with others is among those daily activities that bring people the most positive feelings (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004) —but only up to a point; beyond 3 hours a day of social contact, there are no additional benefits in terms of happiness (Kushlev, Heintzelman, Oishi, & Diener, 2018). Yet, while social relationships can bring people happiness, there is also evidence supporting the opposite causal path—that high-quality relationships may be an outcome of being happy (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). According to this view, happy people are especially likely to form supportive social relationships and networks. We discuss this possibility in our last well-being research finding.

Other people can offer us support in times of need, buffer the adverse effects of negative experiences, and provide social capital (Helliwell, Aknin, Shiplett, Huang, & Wang, 2018). However, the sheer number of other people in one's life is not a precise indicator that one's social needs are met (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Greitemeyer, Mügge, & Bollermann, 2014). Instead, it is the experience of one's relationships that is most predictive of well-being. If a person experiences their relationships as close and supportive, this is much more important than having a large amount of people nearby.

Importance to Learners

This aspect of well-being research will feel very relevant to learners. Everyone has relationships of one type or another and so will have personal experience and insight into the ways that their social ties affect their own happiness. This area of research is a fruitful springboard for discussing loneliness, social networking technologies, bullying, divorce, and other social topics. For example, learners can consider whether interactions on social network sites are similar to or different from those that occur offline, and how this affects their well-being. Learners can also explore the differences in the types and numbers of relationships that fulfill their needs. Another topic for discussion is why it is that many relationships are among the most rewarding aspects of life, but some relationships can be quite aversive. While the conclusion that social relationships enhance well-being may be intuitive, considering the reasons for the reverse direction, in which quality relationships follow from happiness, offers additional grounds for reflection.

5. Genes and Personality Influence Well-Being

Are people simply born happy or unhappy? To what extent do genes influence well-being? One way scientists have attempted to investigate this issue is by comparing identical

twins (who share 100% of their genes) with fraternal twins (who share only about 50%). If there are genetic influences on well-being, identical twins should have more similar levels of well-being than fraternal twins. Early studies provided support for this (Tellegen et al., 1988), even showing that identical twins raised apart were more similar to each other than fraternal twins who were raised together (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996). Recent meta-analyses suggest substantial heritability effects; as much as 30-41% of the variation in well-being are attributable to genetic sources (Bartels, 2015; Nes & Røysamb, 2015). This might suggest that each person has a baseline level of well-being and that daily events influence shifts above and below this baseline. However, this does not imply that a single "happiness gene" confers happiness to those who possess it or that happiness in unchangeable. The extent to which genes influence well-being can depend on life circumstances such as age, finances, or marital status (Bartels, 2015; Røysamb & Nes, 2018).

There is evidence that the genetic components underlying well-being are also linked to personality traits such as extraversion and neuroticism (Hahn, Johnson, & Spinath, 2013; Røysamb, Nes, Czajkowski, & Vassend, 2018; Weiss, Bates, & Luciano, 2008). This may partly account for the robust finding that people who are extraverted and/or low on neuroticism often report higher levels of both affective and cognitive well-being (Anglim, Horwood, Smillie, Marrero, & Wood, 2020; DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Steel, Schmidt, & Shultz, 2008).

Importance to Learners

This topic is important to a general understanding of psychology because it focuses on the fundamental question of personality stability and change. It is a starting point for discussing individual differences in well-being and cultivating an awareness that people can differ in the situations and experiences that make them happy. It is also an opportunity to discuss the relative

influences of genetics, environmental conditions, and personal choices and behaviors as they influence well-being. Concepts such as gene-environment interaction can help students think more critically about genetic influences on well-being and personality more generally.

6. People Adapt to Many Circumstances But It Takes Time

People want a good income, supportive social relationships, health, meaningful work, and enjoyable pastimes. There is a general assumption that having these will yield happiness. One reason to believe that life circumstances may not adequately explain happy lives is a phenomenon known as *adaptation*: although new good things might make us happy, and new bad things might make us unhappy, these immediate reactions wear off rather quickly.

Many longitudinal studies have now followed people's well-being over years and examined their adaptation after good and bad events occur. People usually react more strongly when events first occur, but over time, their well-being returns toward previous levels (Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006; Frederick & Loewenstein, 1999; Lucas, 2007; Luhmann, Hofmann, Eid, & Lucas, 2012; Sheldon & Lucas, 2014). This adaptation appears to be partial in some circumstances and complete in others. For example, when people are fired from their jobs they often have lower life satisfaction for many years to come and even after they obtain another job (Clark, Georgellis, & Sanfey, 2001; Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2004). Similarly, experiencing widowhood, divorce, or a severe disability are often followed by long-term declines in life satisfaction. Nonetheless, in most of these cases people do show resilience – they tend to bounce back toward earlier levels of well-being (Lucas, 2007; Oswald & Powdthavee, 2008). Adaptation also applies to positive events. Married people, for example, show a boost in happiness around the time of their wedding, but then on average return over time to their former levels of well-being (Anusic, Yap, & Lucas, 2014a, 2014b; Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener,

2003; Yap, Anusic, & Lucas, 2012).

The process of adaptation presents two challenges: how to speed adjustment to bad events and how to slow or stop adaptation to good events. According to a new perspective with growing empirical support, people may be able to overcome their predispositions, combat adaptation, and become happier through intentional behavior—how people choose to spend their time and resources each day (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013; White, Uttl, & Holder, 2019). Three meta-analyses with thousands of participants across dozens of interventions have concluded that people's well-being can be raised through the practice of positive activities, though effect sizes vary (Bolier et al., 2013; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; White et al., 2019).

Importance to Learners

The natural process of adaptation can help learners understand reactions to many daily life events. Adaptation is what allows us to take risks such as getting a job, moving across the country, or moving in with a romantic partner. Because of adaptation to good events, we never have maximum happiness for a long time, and new events and undertakings can thus boost our current happiness. Adaptation is also the psychological mechanism that helps us bounce back from tough times. Despite the helpfulness of adaptation for effective functioning, it also limits the amount of happiness we will obtain simply by obtaining the life circumstances that we desire. This topic is a natural point of entry to discuss happiness interventions, folk theories of happiness, and aspirations and expectations for the future.

7. Culture and Society Influence Well-Being

Countries differ substantially in their levels of well-being (Geerling & Diener, 2018). This is due both to objective living conditions and to cultural values and practices. As mentioned previously, income can exert a strong influence on well-being, especially as nations move out of

poverty. However, other factors such as corruption and freedom also have an influence

(Helliwell et al., 2019; Inglehart, Foa, Peterson, & Welzel, 2008). Impressive evidence that

national conditions affect well-being is the finding that immigrants to Canada and the UK from

nations with very low well-being attain similar (higher) levels of life satisfaction as those in their

new countries of residences (Helliwell, Huang, Wang, & Shiplett, 2018).

Cultural norms are an important influence on well-being. Culture can affect overall levels

of happiness, how it is defined and experienced, and the factors that shape it. One cultural

dimension that has been commonly studied is individualism-collectivism (Hofstede, 2001;

Triandis, 1995). Individualist societies (e.g., Canada, Australia, Germany) tend to value

independence and personal freedom. Collectivist societies (e.g., Japan, Taiwan, Colombia) tend

to value conformity and obligation to others. On average, individualist societies report higher

levels of national well-being than collectivist societies (Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1995; Fischer

& Boer, 2011; Steel, Taras, Uggerslev, & Bosco, 2018). These effects are independent of

economic development, suggesting a unique role of cultural values and beliefs in shaping well-

being.

The specific correlates of well-being vary by culture. For example, self-esteem tends to

be more predictive of well-being in individualist than in collectivist cultures (Diener & Diener,

1995; Kang, Shaver, Sue, Min, & Jing, 2003; Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997; Park & Huebner,

2005). Another variable that shows distinct cultural patterns is self-consistency. In individualist

cultures, self-consistency is valued as a sign that one is authentic (Church et al., 2014; English &

Chen, 2011; Suh, 2002). By contrast, collectivist cultures emphasize a self that is defined by

relationships; a person's feelings and behaviors are expected to shift based on the social context

(Tsai, Miao, Seppala, Fung, & Yeung, 2007). Thus, self-*inconsistency* is less of a threat to well-

being in collectivist cultures.

The importance of social context for collectivists means that they are more likely to use cultural norms when determining their own well-being, asking, in essence, "should I feel happy given my current situation?" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Tsai, 2007). Individualists, by contrast, are more likely to pay attention to their feelings and to weight these in their satisfaction judgments (Kuppens, Realo, & Diener, 2008; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). Moreover, people who endorse individualistic values are more likely to also value high arousal positive emotions such as joy, pride, and enthusiasm (Tamir et al., 2016; Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006). These emotions tend to be emphasized on commonly-used measures of affective well-being (e.g., Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) and so researchers must be careful that non-Western norms for emotions such as feeling calm and at peace are also measured.

A close fit between one's personality and one's social environment is associated with greater well-being (Assouline & Meir, 1987). Imagine an extravert living in an "introverted country"—where her compatriots are generally perceived to be low on extraversion. Such a person might find it difficult to socialize when others are less receptive to his or her behavior. In two cross-national data sets, Fulmer and her colleagues (2010) found that extraverts living in extraverted countries reported higher levels of life satisfaction and positive emotion than those living in less extraverted countries. Similarly, religious people tend to be happier in religious societies, but this advantage is not apparent in more secular societies (Diener, Tay, & Myers, 2011). Thus, fitting in with one's culture can be helpful to a person's well-being.

Importance to Learners

Culture-level effects suggest that well-being judgments are not strictly personal but are influenced by shared norms. This is an opportunity for learners to develop increased cultural

literacy and to discuss issues of cultural sensitivity, diversity, and inclusivity. This topic has the unique potential to be applied to cultural aspects of clinical psychology and to cultural issues as they relate to measurement and research methods. An interesting topic for discussion is what universals there might be in the causes of happiness versus culture-specific causes. Another topic relevant to current political debates is the amount of immigration that is desirable, in light of the fact that immigrants can become happier if they move to a happier society.

8. There are Important Benefits to Experiencing Well-Being

A growing body of research now shows that being happy not only feels good, but that it helps produce beneficial outcomes such as health and longevity (Diener, Pressman, Hunter, & Delgadillo-Chase, 2017), work engagement and career success (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Walsh, Boehm, & Lyubomirsky, 2018), and supportive social relationships (Kansky & Diener, 2017). This is one of the most unexpected findings in the field – that well-being is beneficial. We summarize three distinct areas of benefit.

Physical Health

Well-being is associated—often causally—with better health (Boehm, 2018; Diener, Pressman, et al., 2017). In one study, participants were exposed to a virus and those with a more positive emotional style were half as likely to develop cold or flu symptoms (Cohen, Alper, Doyle, Treanor, & Turner, 2006). Beyond short-term immune function, meta-analyses of longitudinal studies suggest that well-being predicts long-term cardiovascular health (Howell, Kern, & Lyubomirsky, 2007) and even longevity (Chida & Steptoe, 2008). Indeed, well-being influences health through multiple mechanisms—from the more proximal, physiological mechanisms, such as immune, endocrine, and cardiovascular function, to more distal, behavioral mechanisms, such as exercise and nutrition (Diener, Heintzelman, et al., 2017). Experimental

evidence from randomized controlled trials suggest that treatment for depression modestly

improved self-rated physical health (O'Neil, Sanderson, Oldenburg, & Taylor, 2011). Another

source of evidence suggestive of a long-term causal effect of well-being on health comes from

prospective longitudinal studies (Diener & Chan, 2011). In the famous nun study (Danner,

Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001), for example, nuns who expressed the most positive emotions in

essays written when they were in their early 20s had half the rate of mortality of the unhappiest

nuns at age 85.

Work Success

Although it makes intuitive sense that happiness might follow work success, it is less

obvious that happiness can cause work success. In one longitudinal study, people who were more

cheerful at the beginning of college earned more money 19 years later than did their less cheerful

counterparts (Diener, Nickerson, Lucas, & Sandvik, 2002). These findings have been replicated

several times (e.g., Graham, Eggers, & Sukhtankar, 2004; Marks & Fleming, 1999). One reason

happy people might be better poised for career success is that they work harder (Krekel et al.,

2019; Oswald, Proto, & Sgroi, 2015). Happier people also receive higher customer and

supervisor evaluations, take fewer sick days, and are more likely to engage in positive

organizational citizenship behaviors (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). An intervention raising

subjective well-being has been shown to reduce sick days (Kushlev, Heintzelman, et al., 2020).

Supportive Social Relationships

Moore, Diener, and Tan (2018) review longitudinal, experimental, experience-sampling,

cross-cultural, and other types of evidence that suggest that not only do good relationships

produce positive affect but that positive affect leads to better relationships. In one longitudinal

study, positive affect at age 14 predicted lower conflict with one's romantic partner a decade

later—as reported by the participants and their partners alike (Kansky, Allen, & Diener, 2016). A

person's life satisfaction while still single predicts how likely they are to get married (Lucas et

al., 2003) and how likely they are to become divorced (Luhmann & Eid, 2009). In an experience

sampling study following 30,000 participants over a month, feeling happy predicted investing

time in social interactions (Quoidbach, Taquet, Desseilles, de Montjoye, & Gross, 2019).

In addition to the beneficial outcomes of well-being described above, there is also

evidence for other desirable effects such as resilience (bouncing back from stress and bad events;

Ong, Bergeman, Bisconti, & Wallace, 2006; Shen, Arkes, & Lester, 2017; Tugade &

Fredrickson, 2004) and citizenship (Kushlev, Drummond, Heintzelman, & Diener, 2020).

Most People Are Happy

If happiness is beneficial to effective functioning, learners might ask why people aren't

happy? Despite portrayals in the popular media, most people are in fact above neutral in

emotional well-being – they tend to experience more positive than negative affect (Diener &

Diener, 1996). Researchers have extended these findings to other populations. For example,

Biswas-Diener, Vittersø, and Diener (2005) found that the American Amish, the Kenyan Masai,

and the Greenlandic Inuit were all above neutral in their levels of subjective well-being.

However, Diener, Diener, Choi and Oishi (2018) found, with a large sample from 166 nations,

that for people who had multiple difficult conditions in their lives—for example, having recently

been assaulted or having gone hungry—most were not happy. Thus, people do tend to be at least

mildly happy unless something clearly negative is happening in their lives.

Importance to Learners

Teaching about the benefits of happiness is sure to disabuse learners of misconceptions of

happiness as a self-centered and selfish pursuit. Learners may be surprised to discover that in

most jobs that they will end up having, their well-being can make the organization more

productive and profitable (Krekel et al., 2019). Learners can thus benefit from realizing that

happiness can be beneficial to themselves and to others. It is important for learners to understand

that a life that is generally high in well-being can also be one that helps them achieve their goals.

General Discussion

We described eight findings that we believe are important and replicable enough to

warrant coverage in introductory and other psychology textbooks. In order to determine whether

current textbooks cover these topics already, we made a casual inspection of five introductory

psychology texts. On average, they covered about three of our topics. However, two of the texts

covered six topics and another covered only one. Thus, textbooks writers differ greatly in the

amount of coverage they devote to well-being. Furthermore, agreement between the textbooks on

which topics were covered averaged virtually zero (Cohen's kappa = -.01). One topic–societal

and cultural differences in well-being – was not covered in any of the books. Yet, the topic of

culture and well-being (either happiness, positive affect, or subjective well-being) has been

included in over 2 million publications, and touches on diversity issues that have become

pivotal! Thus, current coverage appears to be uneven and ignore important topics.

Are there additional topics that textbook writers and professors should cover? We

debated several topics, and also found other topics in textbooks we perused, that might be

covered, although we decided not to include them in our list for a variety of reasons. These

topics include: optimal levels of well-being and ill-being for effective functioning; interventions

to increase well-being; spirituality, religion, and well-being; affective forecasting; age, gender,

ethnicity, and well-being; children and well-being; sleep, exercise, and well-being; leisure and

well-being; and helping others and well-being. The evidence on some of these topics is mixed or

preliminary, but professors might choose some of them for coverage and are referred to Nobascholar.com for chapters on these and other well-being topics.

The psychological study of happiness and well-being has emerged as a vibrant and rapidly expanding area of psychological inquiry. With its quickly accumulating findings come the challenge of whether—and how—to feature its findings within psychology textbooks and to teach its findings in psychology curricula. On the former question, "Should we teach well-being findings?" we believe the answer is an enthusiastic *yes*. First, the study of well-being is grounded in sophisticated, methodologically sound research. In the present article, we have identified findings supported by large and representative samples, by experimental and longitudinal data, and through meta-analyses. Second, the study of well-being informs our understanding of human thought and behavior. Well-being transcends areas such as personality, social, cognitive and developmental psychology, and provides a potential narrative through line for linking these topics. Third, well-being findings are of interest and relevance to students. Happiness and well-being are overwhelmingly a goal that people seek, and students are no exception. Beyond this point, we note that concern for the well-being of students has become a priority at colleges and universities, and the psychological science of well-being has much to contribute to our understanding of student well-being.

We have argued that the task of textbook writers and teachers in broad, introductory-level survey courses in psychology is particularly challenging. Underscoring this challenge is the goal of summarizing the entire field of psychology—raising questions of what to include, in what depth, and how to organize many seemingly disparate findings at biological, psychological and social levels of analysis. Our goal—as researchers and teachers of well-being—was to outline well-supported, major findings from the study of happiness and well-being, to facilitate their

integration into foundational psychology texts and courses. The teaching of disordered states, as well as therapeutic approaches to alleviating maladaptive, personally distressful thoughts and behavior, receive significant attention within the teaching of psychology—as we believe they should. Yet, as the study of human thought and behavior, psychology naturally also includes within its scope the study of happiness and well-being, of flourishing and optimal functioning.

A few limitations of these findings and our suggested approach are worth considering. An important point in the teaching of well-being is to recognize that the science of well-being is excellent at identifying *average* results and that these will not apply to every individual. Further, although many of the findings we report are supported by a wide range of evidence, it remains important to note that long-term investigation of the causes and consequences of well-being are relatively few in number—and more are needed. And, finally, the present article aims to facilitate the inclusion of well-being findings throughout psychology texts and curricula by presenting a broad synopsis of major findings. There are more nuanced aspects of many of the findings we present here and we encourage instructors to think critically and to access reputable research databases on well-being, such as Noba Scholar, for a more sophisticated review.

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