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**CULTURE AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING:
Introduction to the Special Issue**

Culture, the study of positive experience, and neuroscience, according to a recent textbook (Pervin, 2003), are three research areas that will profoundly shape the future of personality psychology. We share this sentiment, only wishing to add that the influence will very likely go beyond the province of personality. This special issue of the *Journal of Happiness Studies* brings together two of these topics – Culture and Subjective Well-Being – that will draw enormous research attention for years. Slightly different agendas and perspectives are brought to the table by the four articles of this special issue, but they all have their sights on one common belief: The universal strive for a positive life, indisputably, takes place within the specifics of the person's cultural environment.

Culture and Subjective Well-Being have been discussed together in a recent volume edited by Diener and Suh (2000). In that volume, prominent researchers proposed conceptual and empirical bridges (e.g., democratic values, income, personal goals, self) that may prove most helpful for connecting the two vast territories of culture and human well-being. Although a landmark effort, one notable weakness of the book was the lack of diversity in perspectives. For instance, many of the chapters were based on quantitative analyses of massive international data sets.

The current articles showcase the latest developments that complement the previous effort, and at the same time, expose several pockets of the field that needs more nourishment in the upcoming years. The papers point to several specific directions. First, conceptual and theoretical developments should keep pace with the rapid accumulation of empirical findings (Tiberius, 2004). Second, the field needs to diversify its sampling of cultures (Kim-Prieto and Eid, 2004). Compared to the findings from East Asian and Western Europe/North America, the field knows very



little about other cultures (e.g., Africa, Arab countries). Third, qualitative data can reveal culture-specific connotations of well-being that are difficult to capture through standard questionnaires (Lu, 2004). Finally, using elaborate study designs, research questions should begin to tackle underlying psychological processes in a more systematic and rigorous manner (Yukiko et al., 2004). This would allow the field to move beyond descriptive reports and speak to the important questions of why and how.

Contributors to the present issue have diverse training backgrounds and theoretical orientations. Yukiko Uchida, Vinai Norasakkunkit and Shinobu Kitayama are cultural psychologists with backgrounds in social psychology. The paper offers an excellent overview of the latest actions taking place in the area of culture and subjective well-being. The major thesis of the paper is that the definition and experience of well-being are different between North America and East Asia because of the “divergent cultural modes of the self.” Happiness in North America is essentially attained via personal achievement and self-esteem, whereas happiness in East Asia is attained via supportive social relationships. They also point out that life satisfaction measures are often culturally biased and therefore researchers should use emotion measures.

Kim-Prieto and Eid apply multigroup latent class analysis to study the emotion norms of several African nations. Kim-Prieto is a Korean American personality-social psychologist, and Michael Eid is a well-known quantitative psychologist in Germany. Their article is a welcome addition to the literature that has been somewhat fixated on East Asian and European cultures. The sophisticated statistical technique used by Kim-Prieto and Eid allowed them to simultaneously investigate within-culture heterogeneity and between-culture differences. Even among African nations, they found that there are important national differences in the desirability of specific emotions. Furthermore, their analyses revealed substantial within-nation variation. For instance, roughly half of the Nigerian sample viewed joy, affection, pride, and contentment as being very desirable; 46% of the remaining Nigerians in the sample, on the other hand, thought pride was an undesirable feeling to possess.

Liu Lu and Robin Gilmour are social psychologists trained in England. Using a qualitative approach, they compare the lay conceptions of well-being between Chinese and Americans. One major difference was that many Americans indicated that happiness is an intense feeling, whereas many Chinese stressed the notion of equilibrium in their conceptualizations of happiness.

Finally, Valerie Tiberius is a moral philosopher interested in the concept of well-being. Her article reviews recent philosophical theories about the concept of well-being, and argues that any cross-cultural investigation of well-being must assume the universal definition of well-being, at least in abstract. A normative analysis of well-being is often missing from sociological and psychological research. Tiberius' article makes an invaluable contribution and lays some conceptual ground for future inquiries.

The field of culture and subjective well-being did not exist a decade ago. This is no longer true. A sharp increase of papers on this topic is seen in top journals, and the most recent *Annual Review of Psychology* devoted a chapter on this specific topic (Diener et al., 2003). In spite of the several key methodological and conceptual hurdles that confront this young field, we are optimistic that the field will only prosper. How happiness unfolds through the subtleties of culture is an intrinsically fascinating question, and in a remarkably short period, it has captured the attention of the many able researchers in psychology. With excitement, we already look forward to the next future issue on Culture and Subjective Well-Being (and Neuroscience?)!

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