Examining the Progression in Happiness Research: A Comprehensive Review of Theoretical and Empirical Discoveries

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ABSTRACT: Extensive research has been conducted on the complex and multidimensional nature of happiness across various fields of study, employing different theoretical and empirical approaches. This comprehensive review aims to integrate findings on the definition and measurement of happiness, focusing on hedonic subjective experience versus eudaimonic self-actualization, as well as global versus domain-specific assessments. In this review, influential theories are explored, including set point genetics, adaptation contrast, positive emotions, motivation needs, goal self-concordance, homeostasis regulation capabilities opportunity and social connection. Additionally, discussed are individual predictors such as personality traits (e.g., extraversion and neuroticism), a wide range of emotions from joy to sadness, values related to self-transcendence versus self-enhancement religious faith and spirituality beliefs family dynamics social relationships income health environmental factors cultural dimensions reflecting individualism-collectivism masculinity-femininity. The implications for policy practice education are also addressed in this discussion. It emphasizes the importance of incorporating indicators that measure well-being into policies practices educational systems implementing interventions aimed at fostering positive experiences integrating happiness-related content into curricula. Future research could involve the creation of more refined and reliable measures, carrying out thorough comparative experiments on various theories, analyzing complex relationships between multiple predictors, developing participatory applications that are customized for specific local contexts, and conducting comprehensive assessments to determine the impacts and outcomes of interventions. By adopting an interdisciplinary and culturally sensitive approach based on evidence, we can continue to advance the field of happiness science and promote greater human well-being.

KEYWORDS: Happiness; Well-being; Theories; Predictors; Measurement; Interventions

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of happiness is a core aspect of human existence and an important indicator of overall well-being, quality of life, and physical health. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes that health encompasses more than just the absence of disease; it includes the presence of positive emotions and happiness (WHO, 1948). However, defining and measuring happiness proves to be a challenging task. Multiple disciplines such as psychology, economics, neuroscience, sociology, and philosophy have approached the study of happiness from different perspectives based on their own unique ways of understanding knowledge. For example, psychology tends to focus on individual subjective experiences and thoughts while economics emphasizes maximizing utility. Sociology examines how social connections contribute to happiness while philosophy explores values related to what constitutes a good life. Moreover, happiness is not easily reducible to a single dimension or concept; it is complex and multidimensional in nature. It encompasses subjective feelings as well as psychological states influenced by one's environment. Social factors also play an important role in shaping our levels of satisfaction with life while objective material conditions can impact our overall sense of well-being. In general, happiness is not easily defined or measured due its multifaceted nature encompassing various aspects including individual experiences, cognitive processes, social relationships, and even material possessions required for basic needs met. Apparently, it requires interdisciplinary approaches drawing insights from multiple fields in order fully understand this complex phenomenon.

As such, the objective of this review is to present a comprehensive overview of the significant progress made in happiness research across different disciplines. It consolidates key discoveries regarding how happiness has been defined, assessed, theoretically explained, predicted based on various factors, and utilized in policy-making, practical applications, and education. The review also addresses the limitations of current knowledge while offering suggestions for future research directions that can enhance the rigor, depth of understanding inclusivity and relevance within this field. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach

that embraces diverse cultural perspectives and relies on evidence-based methodologies; we can further advance our comprehension and promotion of happiness as a scientific pursuit with practical implications for all humanity.

DEFINING AND ASSESSING HAPPINESS AND WELL-BEING

Defining and measuring happiness and well-being in a valid and reliable manner is a significant challenge in the field of happiness research. There is no unanimous agreement on a single definition or understanding of these concepts, as different disciplines and perspectives tend to emphasize various aspects or dimensions of the phenomenon. However, there are common themes and distinctions that can be identified within the existing literature.

One widely used distinction is between hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives on happiness and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The hedonic perspective focuses on an individual's subjective experience of pleasure and satisfaction. It defines happiness and well-being as the balance between positive emotions, negative emotions, overall life satisfaction, as well as their ratio. On the other hand, the eudaimonic perspective places emphasis on actualizing one's human potential by living according to personal values. It defines happiness and well-being as expressing one's true self while pursuing meaning and purpose in life. Both perspectives have their strengths and limitations; hence some researchers propose models that integrate elements from both viewpoints (e.g., Huppert & So, 2013; Keyes, 2002; Seligman, 2011).

A crucial distinction can be made between global and domain-specific indicators of happiness and well-being (Diener, 1984). Global measures evaluate the overall or general level of happiness and well-being, usually through a single or few questions that ask individuals to rate their life as a whole or in general. On the other hand, domain-specific measures assess happiness and well-being in specific areas or domains such as health, work, family, leisure activities, etc. Each type of measure has its own strengths and weaknesses. Combining both types of measures has been suggested by some researchers to obtain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of happiness and well-being (e.g., Diener et al., 2010; Veenhoven, 1996).

In addition to these distinctions, several researchers have put forward alternative dimensions or indicators of happiness and well-being. These include positive functioning, flourishing, resilience, vitality, engagement, flow, and more (Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Ryff 1989; Waterman 1993). These concepts represent different aspects or components of happiness and well-being. They may be linked to or derived from the hedonic or eudaimonic perspectives but also have their own theoretical and empirical foundations. Furthermore, they may capture unique or specific characteristics of happiness and well-being that are not encompassed by more general measures commonly used in research.

Based on the distinctions and dimensions, Various scales and tools have been created and verified to assess happiness and well-being in different populations, contexts, and cultures based on these differences and aspects. Some of the most commonly utilized measures that hold significant influence include:

- The assessment known as the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) evaluates how often and how strongly individuals experience positive and negative emotions within a particular timeframe (Watson et al., 1988);
- The measurement of overall cognitive evaluation of life satisfaction is done by the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener et al. (1985);
- The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) is a tool used to evaluate an individual's overall subjective perception of their happiness;
- The Psychological Well-Being Scales (PWBS) (Ryff, 1989) are designed to measure six dimensions of eudaimonic well-being: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relations with others;
- The Personal Well-Being Index (PWI) (Cummins et al., 2003) assesses an individual's satisfaction with seven domains of life: standard of living, health, achievements, relationships, safety, community, and future security;
- The Flourishing Scale (FS) (Diener et al., 2010) is a tool used to assess individuals' self-perceived success in various important aspects of life, including relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism;
- The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) (Diener et al., 2010) is a measurement that examines the balance between positive and negative emotions experienced within a specific timeframe;
- The Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF) (Keyes, 2002) is designed to evaluate the presence of positive mental health or flourishing. It defines flourishing as an amalgamation of emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being;
- The PERMA-Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016), inspired by Seligman's five elements of well-being proposed in 2011 - positive emotions, engagement, relationships meaning, and accomplishment - assesses these components for overall well-being.

These measures have been extensively utilized and tested in various research studies and settings, demonstrating strong psychometric properties and cross-cultural validity. However, they are not exhaustive or definitive, leaving room for the development or adaptation of new or alternative measures to cater to different purposes or populations. Furthermore, certain scholars argue that happiness and well-being encompass not only subjective or psychological aspects but also objective or

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material elements such as income, education, health, democracy, human rights, etc. (e.g., Diener & Seligman 2004; Nussbaum 2011; Sen 1999). Consequently, some indicators or indices of happiness and well-being may incorporate these objective or external factors like the Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP 2020), the Gross National Happiness (GNH) (Ura et al. 2012), and the World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al. 2020). It is worth noting that while these measures have been widely used with positive results across different contexts and cultures in previous studies conducted by numerous researchers globally, they still possess limitations inherent to their design which should be taken into account when utilizing them.

Theoretical Models and Frameworks of Happiness and Well-Being

One of the primary obstacles in studying happiness is understanding the factors that contribute to it and how it impacts individuals. Additionally, researchers aim to uncover the underlying mechanisms and processes behind happiness. To tackle this challenge, numerous theoretical models and frameworks have been developed and examined within various fields of study. These models integrate diverse perspectives, offering valuable insights into happiness research. Some notable examples include:

• The theory of happiness known as the set-point theory (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996) suggests that genetic factors and personality traits play a significant role in determining one's overall happiness and well-being. According to this theory, these factors tend to remain stable over time, regardless of any external circumstances or life events;

• Another perspective on happiness is provided by the adaptation-level theory (Helson, 1964), which proposes that an individual's happiness is influenced by how their current situation compares to their past experiences or expectations. This theory suggests that people have a tendency to adapt or adjust to changing conditions, leading to what is referred to as a hedonic treadmill effect;

• The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998) offers insights into the benefits and functions of positive emotions. According to this theory, experiencing positive emotions can broaden our attention and cognition. Additionally, they can help us build personal and social resources while enhancing our resilience and overall well-being;

• The self-determination theory of motivation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000) argues that satisfaction in life comes from fulfilling three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This theory suggests that intrinsic or extrinsic motivation greatly influences an individual's level of happiness and well-being;

• The theory of happiness known as the hedonic treadmill (Brickman & Campbell, 1971) suggests that one's level of happiness and well-being is influenced by the comparison between their current and past levels of satisfaction. According to this theory, individuals tend to return to a baseline or set-point level of happiness after experiencing positive or negative changes or events;

• Another theory, called the cognitive evaluation theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), proposes that happiness and well-being are affected by how individuals perceive the causes behind their actions and their perceived competence in those actions. This theory suggests that intrinsic motivation and autonomy support can enhance happiness and well-being, whereas extrinsic motivation and external control can diminish them;

• The self-concordance theory (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999) focuses on goal pursuit and its impact on well-being. According to this theory, achieving goals that align with an individual's true self and values leads to greater happiness. This process is mediated by the degree of need satisfaction experienced during goal pursuit as well as autonomous motivation;

• According to Cummins (2010), the theory of subjective well-being homeostasis suggests that happiness and overall well-being are regulated by a system that maintains a stable and optimal level of subjective well-being. It also proposes that this regulation is influenced by the balance between an individual's set-point, personal resources, and the challenges or opportunities present in their environment;

• Seligman (2011) introduced the PERMA model of well-being, which identifies five elements that contribute to overall well-being: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. These elements are interconnected and have a mutually reinforcing effect on each other. The model emphasizes the importance of measuring and enhancing these aspects to promote greater levels of well-being;

• According to Headey (2010), the dynamic equilibrium model challenges the idea that happiness is predetermined or fixed. Instead, it proposes that happiness can change and improve over time based on personal and social resources as well as major life events. This model contrasts with the set-point theory and the adaptation-level theory;

• Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011) introduce the capability approach to well-being, which states that happiness and well-being are not solely subjective or objective concepts but also normative and ethical ones. It emphasizes that individuals' freedom and opportunities play a crucial role in achieving valued functionings and capabilities.

The various models and frameworks available have their own unique strengths and weaknesses, often complementing or contradicting each other. Some are more focused on describing or explaining concepts, while others offer guidance or intervention. There are those that provide broad, universal principles, while others are more specific to certain contexts. Additionally, some models emphasize empirical evidence and testability, whereas others take a more theoretical or philosophical

approach. It is important to note that these models are not mutually exclusive nor exhaustive; they can be integrated or modified depending on the intended purpose or target population. Furthermore, researchers have proposed that happiness and well-being extend beyond individual psychology and encompass social and relational aspects as well. The quality and quantity of one's social connections, interactions, and networks play a significant role in influencing happiness (Diener & Biswas-Diener 2008; Helliwell & Putnam 2004; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Therefore, certain models or frameworks of happiness may include these social factors within their scope. Examples of such perspectives include the social capital theory (Putnam 2000), the social convoy model (Kahn & Antonucci 1980), or the social cure perspective (Jetten et al., 2012). Integrating these elements allows for a comprehensive understanding of happiness and well-being in different societal contexts.

Individual, Social, and Cultural Factors Influencing Happiness and Well-Being

In the field of happiness research, one major obstacle is to recognize and comprehend the personal, communal, and cultural elements that impact happiness and overall well-being. Additionally, there is a need to investigate the mechanisms and procedures that either mediate or moderate these influences. To tackle this challenge, multiple studies and experiments have been carried out and documented in various publications. These studies employ diverse methodologies and criteria while involving distinct samples of individuals across different environments. Several noteworthy factors emerge from these investigations as particularly important in understanding happiness:

• Personality: Personality plays a significant role in determining happiness and overall well-being, with approximately 40% of the variation in subjective well-being being attributed to personality traits (Steel et al., 2008). Among the Big Five personality traits, extraversion and neuroticism have the most pronounced and contrasting impacts on happiness and well-being. Following these are agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). Additionally, other factors like self-esteem, optimism, locus of control, and self-efficacy have also been found to be positively linked to happiness and well-being (Diener & Lucas ,1999);

• Emotions: Happiness and overall well-being are closely tied to our emotions, which form the affective aspect of subjective well-being. The presence of positive emotions like joy, love, gratitude, and pride can have a significant impact on our happiness and well-being. Conversely, negative emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, and guilt can have detrimental effects on our happiness and overall sense of well-being (Diener et al., 1999). However, it's worth noting that the influence of emotions goes beyond direct effects. Emotions also have indirect effects by influencing other factors like cognition, motivation, behavior, and even health. These factors then play a role in shaping our levels of happiness and overall well-being (Fredrickson,2001);

• Values: Guiding principles and standards, known as values, play a crucial role in shaping an individual's goals, preferences, and actions. They represent the cognitive aspect of subjective well-being. Values can impact happiness and overall well-being by influencing the alignment or discrepancy between one's ideals and reality. Additionally, they can affect how satisfied or frustrated a person feels with their needs and desires (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). In Schwartz's framework of ten basic values (1992), self-transcendence values like benevolence and universalism have positive effects on happiness and well-being. Conversely, self-enhancement values such as power and achievement have negative effects on happiness and well-being (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000);

• Beliefs: One's beliefs are the deeply held convictions and assumptions about oneself, others, and the world. These beliefs reflect the cognitive aspect of subjective well-being. By influencing how one interprets and evaluates experiences and situations, beliefs can have an impact on happiness and well-being. Additionally, they can affect one's ability to cope with challenges and adapt to opportunities. A study conducted by Seligman et al. (2005) suggests that religious beliefs, such as faith, spirituality, and religiosity, have a positive association with happiness and well-being. This is especially true during times of stress or adversity (Diener et al., 2011);

• Relationships: Connections and interactions with others, known as relationships, are an essential part of subjective well-being. These relationships can have a significant impact on happiness and overall well-being by providing support, companionship, intimacy, and a sense of belonging. Additionally, they fulfill the inherent human needs for relatedness, attachment, and affiliation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Among various relationship types, family relationships - such as marital status, parenthood, and kinship - have been found to positively influence happiness and well-being. However, the effects may differ depending on the quality and context of these relationships (Diener & Seligman, 2004);

• Environment: The environment encompasses both the physical and social aspects of one's living conditions, which contribute to an individual's subjective well-being. It plays a significant role in shaping happiness and overall well-being by providing various resources, opportunities, limitations, and threats. Additionally, the environment influences an individual's need for security, comfort, and stimulation (Diener et al., 1999). Various factors within the environment such as income levels, education access, healthcare provisions, and democratic systems have been identified to positively impact happiness and well-being. However these effects may not always be straightforward or linear; they can be influenced by other factors or exhibit diminishing returns (Diener et al., 2010);

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•   Culture: Culture refers to the shared system of values, beliefs, norms, and practices that define a particular group or society. It is an expression of the collective aspect of subjective well-being. Culture plays a role in shaping happiness and well-being by influencing our expectations, standards, and goals. Additionally, it impacts how we express, perceive, and communicate our feelings of happiness and well-being (Diener et al., 2003). Several dimensions of culture have been identified as having significant effects on happiness and well-being. These include individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity (Oishi 2012). However, it is important to note that these effects may be intricate or influenced by other factors. By understanding the impact of cultural factors on happiness and well-being, we can gain insights into how different societies approach these concepts. This knowledge can contribute to building more inclusive communities where individuals feel valued and supported in their pursuit of a fulfilling life.

These factors are not comprehensive or exclusive, and they have the potential to interact or intersect with each other in different ways. Additionally, they can have varying impacts on different aspects or measures of happiness and well-being, including emotional, cognitive, purpose-driven, or social well-being. As a result, these factors may not be separate or cumulative but rather interconnected and amplifying in nature. To fully grasp their influence on happiness and well-being, it may be necessary to conduct a thorough analysis that considers multiple levels and integrates various perspectives.

Implications and Applications of Happiness Research for Policy, Practice, and Education
One of the key difficulties in studying happiness is how to use the results and knowledge gained from happiness research to influence policy, practice, and education. Additionally, it is important to assess the effectiveness and impact of interventions and programs on overall well-being. To tackle this challenge, multiple initiatives and experiments have been conducted and documented in various works using diverse approaches and metrics. These efforts involve different individuals or groups with a vested interest in the outcomes. Several notable implications and applications have emerged as a result of these endeavors:

• Policy: Government or other authoritative bodies implement policy, which consists of decisions and actions, to achieve specific objectives like economic growth, social welfare, and environmental protection. The allocation and distribution of resources, opportunities, and rights are influenced by policy. It also regulates and coordinates behaviors and activities (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Consequently, there have been suggestions from certain policymakers and researchers to incorporate happiness indicators into policy-making processes. These indicators include the Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2020), Gross National Happiness (GNH) (Ura et al., 2012), or the World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al., 2020). Furthermore, policymakers and researchers have put forth various policies and interventions aimed at enhancing happiness at different societal levels. Examples include the Happiness Agenda in Dubai (Dubai Government, 2016), the Well-being Budget in New Zealand (New Zealand Government ,2019), or the Happiness Alliance in the United States (Happiness Alliance ,2020);

• Practice: The act of practicing involves putting knowledge and skills into action in order to achieve specific outcomes or goals, such as improving health, excelling at work, or enjoying leisure activities. The way we practice can have an impact on our happiness and overall well-being. It can influence the quality and quantity of our experiences and activities, as well as our level of satisfaction and fulfillment with our needs and desires (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). To promote happiness and well-being, various practices and interventions have been developed by practitioners and researchers at different levels - individual, group, and organizational. Examples include the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania (Positive Psychology Center, 2020), the Action for Happiness movement in the United Kingdom (Action for Happiness, 2020), or the Happiness Research Institute in Denmark (Happiness Research Institute ,2020). These organizations aim to enhance happiness through their respective initiatives. Furthermore, specific practices that have been tested to increase happiness include gratitude exercises, acts of kindness towards others, optimism building exercises, mindfulness techniques, and goal setting strategies (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005);

• Education: The process of acquiring and transmitting knowledge and skills to improve one's abilities and potentials, including cognitive, emotional, and social competencies, is known as education. The development and expression of talents and values, as well as the achievement and recognition of goals and aspirations (Seligman et al., 2009), may be influenced by education. As a result, some educators and researchers have advocated for the integration of happiness and well-being education into both formal curricula in schools or colleges along with informal pedagogy methods like the Positive Education Network (IPEN, 2020), the Happiness Curriculum in Delhi (Delhi Government, 2018), or the Well-being for Learning Life Framework in Victoria (Victoria State Government, 2018). Furthermore, certain educational programs have been designed by educators/researchers to enhance happiness & well-being among students/teachers/parents such as Penn Resiliency Program (PRP) (Seligman et al., 2009), RULER Approach (Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence ,2020) or MindUP Program (The Goldie Hawn Foundation ,2020).
  The potential outcomes and uses are not complete or conclusive, and they can differ or adjust to various situations and societies. Furthermore, they can have diverse influences on various aspects or measures of contentment and welfare, like pleasure-based, purpose-based, or social well-being. Consequently, they may not be universally applicable or transportable but instead

contextualized or personalized. They may also necessitate a thorough or methodical assessment to determine their practicality, efficacy, and influence on happiness and well-being.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, this review has incorporated important research progress that showcases happiness as a multifaceted and intricate phenomenon, which requires additional interdisciplinary exploration. Noteworthy accomplishments in this area consist of the creation of verified assessments, the establishment of influential theories, the identification of personal, social, and cultural factors that contribute to happiness, and encouraging developments in policy-making, practical applications, and educational initiatives. However, there are still limitations that persist in the field of happiness research. These include biases in cultural measurements, uncertainties in models, inconsistencies in contextual predictions, and challenges when it comes to implementing and assessing interventions effectively across different settings. To address these gaps, several suggestions have been made. One suggestion is to create more nuanced measures of happiness dimensions that have been validated. This would allow for a better understanding of the various aspects of happiness. Additionally, conducting rigorous experiments that compare conflicting theories could help shed light on which approaches are most effective. Another suggestion is to model the multivariate relationships between predictors at multiple levels. By doing so, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how different factors contribute to overall happiness. Implementing participatory applications tailored to local contexts is also recommended. This approach recognizes the importance of considering cultural differences and individual circumstances when designing interventions. Lastly, it is crucial to evaluate intervention outcomes using both quantitative and qualitative data. This comprehensive evaluation will provide a holistic view of the impact these interventions have on individuals and communities. By taking an integrative approach that considers diverse cultures and evidence-based practices, we can advance our understanding and application of happiness science. As people around the world continue to seek wellbeing during challenging times, further research can help identify sustainable paths rooted in empirical evidence while honouring local wisdom and universal humanity.

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