

## Wellbeing Scholarly Roundtable Notes

First Name	Last name	Institution
Noof Mohammed	Al Jenebi	Emirates Center for Happiness Research
Richard	Appiah	College of Health Sciences University of Ghana
Tal	Ben-Shahar	Happiness Studies Academy
Gaël	Brulé	University of Neuchâtel
Dafne	Cataluña	European Institute of Positive Psychology
Andrew	Clark	Paris School of Economics - CNRS.
Maria	Cotofan	Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics and Political Science
Richard	Cowden	Human Flourishing Program, Harvard University
Jan-Emmanuel	De Neve	Wellbeing Research Centre, University of Oxford
Antonella	Delle Fave	Department of Pathophysiology and Transplantation, University of Milano, Italy
Pablo	Diego-Rosell	Gallup
Karen	Guggenheim	WOHASU
Jim	Harter	Gallup
John	Helliwell	The University of British Columbia
Hidefumi	Hitokoto	Kwansei Gakuin University
Byron	Johnson	Baylor University
Mohsen	Joshanloo	Department of Psychology, Keimyung University (South Korea)
Todd	Kashdan	George Mason University
Oscar	Kjell	
Kostadin	Kushlev	Georgetown University

Louise	Lambert	Global Communications Agency Middle East (GCA)
Richard	Layard	London School of Economics
Matthew	Lee	Human Flourishing Program, Harvard University
Tim	Lomas	Harvard University
Claude-Helene	Mayer	Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
Jeanne	Nakamura	Department of Psychology, Claremont Graduate University
Paola	Ochoa	ESPOL ESPAE
Ekatarina	Oparina	London School of Economics
Holli-Anne	Passmore	Nature-Meaning in Life Research Lab
Tayyab	Rashid	University of Toronto Scarborough
Pninit	Russo-Netzer	Achva Academic College
Koichiro	Shiba	Department of Epidemiology, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Human Flourishing Program, Institute for Quantitative Social Science, Harvard University
Mike	Steger	
William	Tov	Singapore Management University Deputy Director of the Centre for Research on Successful Ageing (ROSA)
Yukiko	Uchida	Kokoro Research Center, Kyoto University
Margot	Van der Weijer	Department of Biological Psychology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Tyler	VanderWeele	Harvard University
Paul	Wong	Trent University
Kuang-Hui	Yeh	Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica & Department of Psychology, National Taiwan University
John	Zelensky	Carleton University

## Balance / Harmony

*Module Question: In general, do you feel the various aspects of your life are in balance, or not? Yes; No; Don't Know; Refused*

### Takeaways from the data:

- Balance grows exponentially with age and gender.
- It's important to capture the yin and yang of constructs at the national level (e.g., Canada ranked 31% in pain and high in worry, yet Canada was also ranked as one of the happiest countries)
- Socio-economic conditions may be correlated to having a very high purpose in life (e.g., Kenya, Nepal, India, and Pakistan were very low on most indices)

### Future Directions for Research:

- In connection to the preference between an exciting or calm life, wanting both an exciting and calm life is a type of balance, so frameworks should include both.
- There is enormous potential in the dataset to parse out how dimensions of these neglected aspects of well-being relate to each other, e.g., balance and calm, balance and arousal levels, balance and stress, balance and life satisfaction.
- What are the advantages and positive effects of harmony? What might be the disadvantages of only pursuing one thing like harmony, rather than only pursuing satisfaction with life?
- Is balance a distinct domain of wellbeing? E.g., Malta had high levels of balance, but relatively low levels of life satisfaction while Israel had low levels of balance and a relatively high level of life satisfaction. If balance is a distinct domain of well-being, we might say that while Malta may have low life satisfaction, they're just doing fine because they're high in other domains of wellbeing like balance.
- When thinking about balance, we could specify a construct, and then consider if the construct is in balance or not.
- We need more research about the distribution of wellbeing, not just the average to understand how equitably distributed wellbeing is (E.g., If only a small portion of the population has high level and everyone else is relatively low, can we really say that country is doing well?)
  - o Apply the rich literature on health inequality in public health to study the distribution of wellbeing in the population

## Meaning / Purpose

*Module Question: Which of the following is closest to your MAIN purpose in life? (Read Items)*

- *Being good at what you do in your daily life*
- *Caring for family and close friends*
- *Helping other people who need help*
- *(None of these; I do not know my purpose in life; Don't know; Refused)*

### **Takeaways From the Data:**

- The lack of variation makes it difficult to learn much from these data
- The results are challenging to interpret and could benefit from the insights of other studies
  - e.g., 99.9% of American respondents felt respected all day
  - e.g., China ranked lowest, even below the US and Canada on “people should take care of family members and others”

### **What Does Purpose Involve?**

- The framing of the question may need to be reviewed: Is “Being good at what you do” a purpose in and of itself?
- Measures of purpose could also include the ideas of contribution, making a difference, loving what one does, self-transcendence, spirituality, community interconnectedness, growth and development, facing adversity, fulfillment, mattering, value, making sense of one’s existence
- People are complex, so how do we examine Purpose? People are individuals with a profile (i.e., combinations of demographic factors; intersectionality), not a one-dimensional person
  - The data show profound differences in terms of income, education, and marital status
  - It would be interesting to know if purpose changes or differs across ages
- Quantitatively:
  - Use Latent Profile Analysis to examine what types of people have different wellbeing profiles
  - Considering race, age, sexual orientation, gender, income, education, etc. in combination is only feasible in large sets of data like this one
- Qualitatively:
  - Letting people speak to their experience and talk through prompts around meaning and purpose
- Mixed methods:
  - Taking a mixed methods approach can help overcome limitations of singular methods

## Relationship to Group

### *Module Question:*

*Do you think people should focus more on taking care of themselves or on taking care of others?*

- *Taking care of themselves*
- *Taking care of others*
- *(Both; Neither; Don't know; Refused)*

### **Takeaways From the Data:**

- It is important to specify the group to which a person relates (e.g., Buddhism had the highest percentage of participants who indicated focusing on themselves)
- “Others” can mean a variety of groups to different people (e.g., is it strictly family members? The broader community?)
- This question includes the “should” obligation base which could cause people to react to what their cultural norm dictates as opposed to what they personally prioritize
- There were reverse trends to what we might expect (e.g., more individualistic nations showed lower level of people choosing that they should focus on themselves)
  - This counterintuitive result may result from every society coping with the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Individualistic societies focusing on the larger group and communal societies focusing on themselves more; people may have been more in-group oriented because of staying home and staying away from strangers)
- European countries were lower on prioritizing themselves. Perhaps knowing that social welfare will take care of them and having greater trust in their government and community, allows those populations to focus less on having to care for themselves

### **Future Directions for Research:**

- What are the effects of country-level underlying structural vulnerabilities on the relationship between coping with the pandemic and peoples’ focus on taking care of themselves vs others?
- It is important to consider the following aspects as they relate to the relationship to the group: social relationships, sense of community, how much relationships really mean, social support structures, cultural norms, trust towards the government, sense of purpose, growth, and resilience
- Improve the phrasing of the question:
  - “Taking care” can imply multiple things
  - Avoiding zero sum questions so people aren’t pigeonholed into answering a certain way
  - Consider how certain words are culturally loaded like “more” or “should” because people may be comparing their current state to the cultural standards

## Peace / Calm

*Module question: Would you rather live an exciting life or a calm life?*

- *An exciting life*
- *A calm life*
- *(Both; Neither; Don't know; Refused)*

### Takeaways From the Data:

- As formulated, this question is more about life as a whole and external factors, than inner peace
- 3/4 of global respondents prefer a calm life to an exciting one
- Income matters: The higher the income, the higher the feeling of peace in life
  - People at the higher end of the income distribution are often able to attain peace/calm better than those at the lower end of the income distribution
- Current state matters: Countries where people already feel they have a peaceful life (e.g., Denmark, Iceland, or Norway) exhibited a higher percentage with preference for an exciting life
- Policy Implications: Since the research shows that most of the world prefers a calm life to an exciting one, our institutions could focus on helping people achieve the calm life they desire

### What Do Peace, Calm, and Excitement Mean?

- The definition of these three concepts is open to interpretation:
  - Inner peace, a peaceful life and a peaceful environment are not synonymous
  - Cultural context is important to consider – does exciting mean partying or chaos?
  - Religious identity may play a role in defining and shaping a peaceful/calm/exciting life
  - People's perception of what they want may vary depending on the moment
- There are many ways of looking at groups and their levels of peace, including: relationship peace (e.g., with a loved one), intra-group peace (e.g., within your family, within your work-team) and inter-group peace (e.g., between countries)
  - Peace, Calm, and Excitement are not opposites, but complements: All may be desirable, but the question forces people to answer one way or another.

### Future Directions for Research:

- How does the desire for peace/calm/excitement connect to eudemonic/hedonic experiences? E.g., to what extent is eudemonia connected to a calm life vs hedonic/pleasure seeking connected to an exciting life
- How does it dovetail with self-constraint? E.g., A calm life may be preferably high across the world, but self-regulation is low across the world
- How does this data dovetail with COVID and what people are really craving in this world? Are people craving calmer lives because of the chaos caused by COVID?

What are key strengths for peace? E.g., Hope, gratitude, forgiveness, and spirituality.

## Wellbeing at Work

### Module questions:

- *Do you enjoy the work you do in your job every day, or not? (Interviewer: If the respondent says they don't work every day, ask them to think about the days when they work.) Yes, No, Don't Know, Refused*
- *Do you think the work you do in your job significantly improves the lives of other people outside of your own household, or not? Yes, No, Don't Know, Refused*
- *Do you, personally, have many choices in regard to the type of work you can do in your life? Yes, No, Don't Know, Refused*

### Takeaways From the Data:

- Do you have a choice in the type of work you do?
  - socio-economic status and education: those who are poorer and less educated report to have much fewer options at work
  - Gender: That less than 30% of women feel they have choice in the work they take is very striking and raises alarm bells
- Do you enjoy your work?
  - Just below 50% of people enjoy their work
  - Women enjoy work less than males do across income and education levels
  - Organizations should strive to create work that is more enjoyable for women, provide women with more choices in the workplace, and offer women positions where they can have a larger impact.
  - We can explain very little of the variation in happiness at work using standard indicators because there isn't a huge gradient based on education and income. This suggests there we can better understand these results by looking at non-monetary aspects of work
- Can you improve the lives of others?
  - Less than half of respondents feel their work improves the lives of others which also raises the question of why?
  - Women report lower rates of feeling they can improve the lives of others
  - There is a stronger gradient among higher education and income level with this question than seen for work enjoyment
  - There are different cultural experiences across and within countries which shape the extent to which people care about the impact and meaning of their work

### Future Directions for Research:

- How does wellbeing dovetail with resilience? E.g., How do people think about the next five years in the future and how that might relate to resilience when times are bad? How do economic variables moderate the relationship between perceptions of work and resilience?
- What types of skills are transferable across jobs? E.g., Upskilling.

- The rise in negative emotions (e.g., worry, stress, anger) started a decade ago indicating that it is systemic issue, which has exacerbated since the outbreak of the pandemic
- If men don't see that women are less respected, or that there is a difference, then the disparities we see in work enjoyment and work choice along gender lines also may not change.
  - o Survey results to the question, "Do you think women in your country are treated with respect?" show that men overestimate and report higher ratings than do women. Gender differences around how people feel about dignity and respect for women hold across education, income, employment status, and whether women have children or not.



## 2021 Topics

### Future Measurement Suggestions:

- Improve the ability for the questions to capture nuance by using a scale answer (e.g., 0-10) instead of binary (e.g., there's a meaningful difference between a seven and a nine as opposed to a yes/no; frame questions in a yes/no framework instead of picking between 3 or 2 positive ideas)
- Move away from forced choice elements and towards understanding the different aspects and underlying profiles
- Use constructs that seem universally desired across individuals, sought for their own sake, and that you'd want to score as high as possible (e.g., Having good relationships or a sense of meaning) as opposed to constructs that may not be clearly desirable (e.g., Does everyone want to be maximally enthusiastic?)
- Consider frequency of a construct instead of intensity
- Keep in mind the limitations of translating constructs in different languages (i.e., different connotations based on the language)

### Affect, Cognition, & Behavior:

- The current affective focus may not be the best focus (e.g., all the items begin with "how often do you feel" which is a very effective approach to assessing well-being)
- There's a strong cognitive component that should be considered (e.g., Do you understand what your purpose is in life? Do you understand what gives you meaning in life?)
- Behavioral measures are also important because affect doesn't always represent behavior (E.g., I can feel a lack of motivation, but I can still act. E.g., I can feel envy while acting benevolently). Examples of behavioral measures include measuring morality or prosocial orientation by how much a person volunteers or performs acts of kindness

### Future Directions for Research:

- It is important to include aspects of wellbeing that have been neglected in Western-focused assessments of wellbeing including harmony, peace, vitality, nature, purpose, and balance
- There are many dimensions that should be considered including ecological, moral (e.g., Should I do...), moral autonomy (e.g., I have the freedom to express my idea about what is right and wrong), moral purity, character, physical health, and communal wellbeing
- All these constructs and dimensions are multi-faceted. It is important to evaluate what are the broadest meaningful categories (e.g., Should balance and peace be separate dimensions of wellbeing or is one sufficient?)

## New Topics

### Future Directions for Research:

- As we move forward to measure new topics, we must also improve upon measurements of existing topics. Researchers should examine topics along affect, behavior, and cognition (ABC)
- How much do people value the different domains of their lives? This could be examined using “importance of” questions as seen in the British Household Panel Survey or questions about domains of work like the International Social Survey
- Insecurity – If something were to happen to me, will I have the resources individually or as a society to handle it? (E.g., For those in the USA, could you find \$1K for an emergency medical procedure?)
- Loneliness – As our population ages (i.e., the silver tsunami) greater numbers of elderly people will be living and have little contact with others, yet we lack an internationally comparable way of examining the effects of loneliness during this demographic shift
- The presence of positives is not equal to the absence of negatives. It is vital in a wellbeing survey to include both constructs that seem like opposites because a low score on a negative item (e.g., loneliness) is not the same as a high score on a positive item (e.g., feeling very connected to others)
- Individual-level behaviors to examine include time spent online vs offline, exercise and movement, status, optimism (especially in areas where wellbeing is reportedly low), and prosociality.
- Social context variables are valuable for explaining life evaluations (e.g., trust in the social context in which we live, belonging)
- Some types of data are very difficult to gather but are incredibly valuable (e.g., time use questions of what people do in their day, biomarkers)

### Understanding the Distribution

- When we have non-binary items we’re not only interested in averages, but we’re also interested in their distributions – we want to shift people out of the 2-5 range, not just move people from 8 to 9
- Longer scales are important because they allow you to look at the distribution, not just overall life evaluations but of the factors determining it