

Psychocultural Factors of Subjective Well-Being*

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Most research on subjective well-being (SWB) has been devoted to studies of individual differences (for a review, see Diener, 1984; Diener, 1994). For instance, relations between SWB and individual differences in personality (Emmons & Diener, 1985), extraversion and neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1980; Hotard et al., 1989; Pavot et al., 1990), impulsivity and sociability (Emmons & Diener, 1986), memory (Seidlitz & Diener, 1993), patterns of goal striving (Emmons, 1986), emotional intensity (Larsen & Diener, 1987), and self-esteem (Campbell, 1981, Diener & Diener, 1993) have been studied extensively over the past decade of SWB research.

In recent years, however, the field has witnessed a growing interest in a broader research issue: national and cultural differences in SWB. One of the most interesting findings in this area has been the enduring difference of SWB levels across countries (Cantril, 1965; Gallup, 1976; Diener, Diener, & Diener, in press; Balatsky & Diener, 1993; Michalos, 1991; Veenhoven, 1993; Ouweneel & Veenhoven, 1991). According to these studies, Western countries (e.g., the U.S.A., European countries) typically report high levels of happiness. Average SWB reports of East Asian countries (e.g., Japan, Korea, and China), on the other hand, are found to be consistently low. Explanations for such national variations in reported SWB have not been fully explored.

One explanation proposed by Ouweneel and Veenhoven (1991) relies heavily on the role of

objective life circumstances. According to their societal quality theory, consistent national differences in SWB across measures and time can be attributed to tangible differences in objective life conditions provided by each nation. Such national characteristics include; economic prosperity, social security, political freedom, and social equality of each country. This explanation rests on the assumption that 1) societies can be more or less effective in meeting human needs, and that 2) ineffective need-gratification manifests itself in bad health, mental disturbance, and subjective unhappiness (Ouweneel & Veenhoven, 1991).

As Ouweneel and Veenhoven suggest, it is plausible that the capability of a society to satisfy human needs can function as a determining factor in national averages of SWB. More or less, a fundamental assumption inherent in such a societal quality position is that absolute levels of objective conditions are critical determinants of individuals' level of happiness. Surprisingly enough, however, this idea has not been strongly supported by major findings in the literature. In other words, a high correspondence between absolute levels of objective conditions and SWB, as inherently assumed by the societal quality theory, is seldom detected in the SWB literature. For instance, the relation between SWB and objective conditions such as physical and mental health status (Allman, 1991; Okun & George, 1984; Silver, 1982, Delespaul & deVries, 1987), race (Jackson et al.,

1986; Ball & Robbins, 1986), age (Stock et al., 1983), years of education (Campbell, Converse, & Rogers, 1976; Diener, 1984), gender (Braun, 1977), and physical attractiveness (Diener et al., in press) have been found to be minimal or negligible.

Another piece of evidence which is incongruent with the basic assumption of the societal quality hypothesis has been recently obtained from a study done by Diener and Diener (1993). Results analyzed from 31 countries show that the predictive power of national income on SWB drops to zero when the nations' cultural characteristic—degree of individualism—was controlled. In contrast, the predictive power of individualism was found to be still significant when the income level was controlled ($r = .50$ for women; $r = .56$ for men). The implication of this is that previous research in this area may have undermined the possibility that the relation between national levels of SWB and objective social indices could be confounded with important cultural variables. Another concrete example of such possibility is the case of Japan: despite having one of the highest income level in the world, their reported level of happiness is amongst the lowest in national comparison studies.

Thus, a significant implication of the literature is that objective social indicators alone, such as national income, may not provide a complete answer to the question of why national variations of SWB occur. In order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of this issue, it seems imperative to take other important mediating variables into account. As mentioned, researchers in this area seem to have underestimated the potentially diverse impact of culture on national reports of SWB. The prime focus of the present paper, therefore, is to examine the various possible influences of cultural variables on national variance of SWB.

The construct of SWB includes two related but separable elements: an affective component, which is further divided into positive affect and negative affect (Diener, 1984), and a cognitive

referred to as life satisfaction (Andrews & Whitney, 1976). Recent studies in emotion, personality, and social psychology, however, have produced convincing evidence showing that the nature of each individual's affective and cognitive experience can vary as a function of the person's culture (Triandis, 1989; Marsella et al., 1985; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In other words, although the influence of cultural factors on SWB have been a relatively untouched issue, diverse findings from related areas propose that the two components of SWB construct—positive affect and life satisfaction—are both likely to be sensitive to cultural influences.

Studies conducted in the area of emotion have direct relevance to the present concerns. Emotions are found to vary not only in their meaning and experiential quality across cultures (Lutz & White, 1986; Rosaldo, 1984), but also in their norms of expression (Ekman, 1972; Matsumoto, 1990). In their comprehensive study of cultural variations in emotions, Mesquita and Frijda (1992) conclude that the regulation processes of emotion modulate substantively across cultures. Cultures were found to differ in their rules of emotion which applies to the feeling and displaying of "appropriate" emotions in particular situations. Scherer and Wallbott (1994) also provide evidence supporting cultural variations in terms of emotion elicitation, regulation, symbolic representation, and social sharing. As a concrete example, Lutz (1987) reported that the Ifaluk discourage the expression of happiness because it is believed to lead to neglect of duties.

Markus and Kitayama (1991; Kitayama & Markus, 1992) also provided an interesting theoretical framework of how culture can play a central role in shaping emotional experience. According to them, the construal of individual's self is considered to be more interdependent with other people in many Asian cultures, whereas it is more independent in Western cultures. As a result, they argued that highly "ego-focused" emotions, such as happiness, are more likely to be

experienced and expressed by those with "independent" selves because of their need to maintain independence and uniqueness from others. On the other hand, for those with "interdependent" selves (composed more of relationships with others instead of inner attributes), the expression of "self-focused" emotions (e.g., happiness) is more likely to be accepted as a means for maintaining interpersonal harmony than primarily as a manifestation of one's feeling state. A critical implication of their claim is that the function and experiential nature of specific emotions can vary according to the characteristics of the self construct in each culture.

Cultural differences have also been observed in emotional "display rules" (Ekman, 1972). Display rules are learned, culturally determined rules that govern the display of emotion depending on social circumstances. Friesen (1972), in a study that examined the facial reactions of Japanese and Americans as they viewed a stressful film, found that the Japanese subjects tried to mask their negative expressions in the presence of a high status person. Although no study has yet been attempted, it is extremely important to investigate cultural-specific differences in display rules and norms for positive emotions as well, in order to further our understanding of national differences in SWB. A significant portion of the present study is directed towards this issue.

Such findings on cultural differences of emotional experience and expression have several significant implications for SWB. First, culture-specific norms of emotion may substantively affect the intensity and/or probability of experiencing certain emotions, and may therefore influence the SWB report of the individuals. Secondly, norms for emotional expression and experience may determine the amount and kind of impression management strategy used in the process of SWB report. For instance, in individualistic cultures, where being happy is usually considered to be normatively desirable (Sommers, 1984), subjects have been found to report their SWB more

positively in public than in private situations (Smith, 1979; King & Buchland, 1982; Schwarz & Strack, 1991).

The discussion developed in this study leads to the general possibility that levels of SWB will be high in cultures in which the experience and expression of positive emotions are encouraged and freely communicated. Conversely, SWB levels will be low in cultures in which positive emotions are viewed in a less desirable light and in which its expression is more constrained. For example, the Confucian spirit in East Asian collectivistic cultures stresses the importance of interpersonal harmony and obligations over individuals' emotional feelings. Relentless pursuit of individual happiness, therefore, could be construed as a sign of one's immaturity and selfishness. Along such lines, Asian subjects might be socialized to appear to be average and not to stand out in terms of individual attributes, such as subjective happiness. In other words, collectivistic individuals are likely to feel more at home by feeling similar to than different from others in general. In fact, Kitayama and his colleagues (Kitayama et al., 1990) have found evidence showing that, compared to Western subjects, more of the Asian students judge themselves to be similar to others. Hence, if Asian students are driven by a similar pattern of motivation during their reports of SWB, they might lower their SWB scores by deliberately avoiding extreme responses.

In order to examine the critical issues surrounding emotional norms and the cultural desirability of SWB in more depth, the present study has obtained the following set of data from Korea, China (PRC), and the U.S.A.: 1) desirability ratings of positive emotion traits (e.g., happy, joyful), 2) the ideal level of life satisfaction, and 3) norms for experience/expression of positive emotions in a situation with a friend versus situation with a stranger. These three countries were sampled because they not only differ substantially on levels of SWB levels but also on socio-cultural and economic dimensions. The two

Asian countries (Korea and China) and the U.S.A. are typical examples of collectivistic and individualistic cultures, respectively.

Based on the previous suggestion that group cohesion and harmony may have a priority over individual happiness in Eastern cultures, Koreans and Chinese were expected to think that experiencing and expressing positive emotions is less desirable than the American people. Thus, it was predicted that if the low SWB reports of Asian countries were closely linked to cultural differences in emotional norms, Koreans and Chinese would report significantly lower on both the desirability ratings of positive emotion traits and the ideal level of life satisfaction than the Americans. Similarly, desirability ratings for positive emotional expression and experience will be low in the two Asian groups. In particular, norms for expression are likely to have a strong link with the reporting process of SWB. On the other hand, the individuals' actual experiential level of SWB is likely to be related to the norms for emotional experience. Finally, because collectivists tend to strongly distinguish their overall pattern of relationship between ingroup versus outgroup members (Triandis et al., 1990), the two Asian countries are likely to display two separable patterns of emotion norms, depending on whether the target situation includes a friend or a stranger.

Besides substantive reasons, such as differences in norms which govern one's emotional experience, there are still a number of other cultural factors which may subtly influence individuals' report of SWB. Above all, ratings of life satisfaction and happiness are likely to be vulnerable to the influence of 1) the familiarity with the SWB concept and 2) the value or importance of SWB. Another important factor is the probable existence of a general response set which may distort the report of SWB in various aspects. In particular, what Guilford (1954) termed as a "central tendency error"--the widespread tendency of raters to use middle categories and thereby avoid extreme judgments--

may be partially responsible for low SWB reports in collectivistic cultures where usually "the nail that stands out gets pounded down."

The purpose of measuring the importance of various values, including happiness and life satisfaction, was to determine whether Asians report lower SWB because it is considered less important in their cultural context. Schwartz and Bilsky (1990) have suggested that values can be differentiated according to the interests of two major cultural dimensions: individualism and collectivism. Their multidimensional analysis revealed that the value domain of "enjoyment," in which happiness was included, was one of the three major value domains that served individualistic interests. Triandis (Triandis et al., 1990) also discovered that values that promote individual goals (e.g., enjoyable life, exciting life) were endorsed more by individualists than by collectivists. Similarly, Feather (1986) has shown that happiness was ranked significantly higher in importance by Australian students (individualistic) than mainland Chinese students (collectivistic).

Although such studies suggest that happiness is a more prevalent value in the Western culture, findings by Lau (1988) show that this is not always the case. After measuring the value orientation of 927 Chinese university students in Hong Kong, Lau claimed that happiness is one of the four most important values in the Chinese culture. To examine these controversial findings, subjects in the present study were asked to rate the importance of SWB factors along with other values such as "freedom," "success," and "good family life." It was hypothesized that if Asian respondents report lower SWB because SWB is a less important value, they would rate it lower than other general values compared to American respondents.

Second, the issue of familiarity of SWB concepts was examined by directly asking the respondents how often they have thought about various topics, including life satisfaction and happiness, in their life. Compared to cultures in

which individual happiness is highly emphasized, members of a culture in which individual happiness is regarded as less important are likely to be less familiar with the SWB concepts. Therefore, it was assumed that people who regard SWB as a central goal or value will be more likely to have a stronger opinion about their SWB level because they have thought more often about the matter. Consequently, if they are happy, they are more likely to give confident responses which markedly depart from the neutral point of the SWB scales. On the other hand, people will be more apt to respond in a less polarized manner if they have thought less often about their SWB because of their unfamiliarity with the concept. Thus, if this assumption holds, a significant correlation is expected between the degree of familiarity with SWB and reported levels of SWB. Furthermore, it is possible to presume that if members of a certain culture are less exposed to such concepts, other complementary information, such as the culture's normative value may be recruited in responding to SWB measures.

General response style, which may lower SWB scores, may stem from any of the possibilities raised thus far: display rules, uncertainty of personal opinion, or from a cultural pressure which forces to project a neutral image of oneself. In order to determine whether the low SWB scores of collectivistic individuals were primarily due to an ingrained passive response pattern, respondents were asked to report their highest and lowest moods on average days. The underlying rationale was that if a general response set (neutral response) caused lower SWB in collectivistic countries, the range of the individuals' mood report (highest-lowest) also would be more narrow than that of the American sample.

Finally, variables related to individual differences were examined. Individuals' amount of ambivalence over emotional expressiveness was assessed by using the AEQ questionnaire (King & Emmons, 1990). The AEQ measure, which has been developed from the assumption

emotional inexpressiveness results from personal goal conflicts, was expected to provide important leads for future SWB studies. The correlation between emotional ambivalence (AEQ) and SWB level within countries can be taken as an indirect indicator for examining whether one's inner experience has an important weight in determining one's SWB level. For instance, AEQ scores have been found to correlate significantly with SWB in American samples (King & Emmons, 1990). One implication of such a result may be that, to a certain extent, individual's intrapsychic experience and SWB are strongly interrelated in the American culture. Whether this pattern will replicate in collectivistic cultures, in which presumably subjective feelings are considered less important, is an intriguing question which will open interesting avenues for future cross-cultural studies of SWB.

To recapitulate, the major aim of the present study was to investigate various possible effects of culture on SWB. Among the potentially numerous cultural factors, the issues examined in this study converge into 4 topics; 1) emotional norms which relate to SWB, 2) familiarity of the SWB construct, 3) importance of SWB, and 4) general response style. The overall dependent variable, SWB, was measured by multiple measures.

Method

Participants

A total of 217 university students from Korea, China (PRC), and the U.S.A. participated in this study. In Korea, 96 students from Yonsei University (Seoul) volunteered to complete the questionnaire package during regular class hours (65 females, 30 males, and one person who did not indicate sex). The age of the Korean participants ranged from 19 to 25, with a mean of 21.4. Participants for the Chinese (PRC) study came from Hangzhou University and Zhejiang Institute of Technology. The age of the 59 PRC subjects

ranged from 19 to 23 (mean 21.2) and 11 were females and 48 were males. In the U.S.A., 53 participants (33 females, 19 males, and one nonresponder) were from the California State University in Fresno and from the University of Illinois. The U.S.A. participants' ages ranged from 19 to 55, with a mean of 26.5. Although the U.S.A. subjects were slightly older than the two Asian groups, this difference was expected to have minimal effect on the general results because the mean difference was caused by two aged persons in the group.

Measures

Subjective Well-Being Measures. SWB was assessed by multiple measures. First, participants' self-report of global life satisfaction was measured by the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Pavot & Diener, 1993). The Collectivistic Life Satisfaction Scale (CLSS), a revised version of the SWLS, was measured to assess the degree to which the respondents believed themselves to be living successfully to the expectations of significant others. For example, the item "If I could live my life over again, I would change almost nothing" in the SWLS was rephrased to "If I lived my life over, my family would want me to change many things" in the CLSS measure. Both scales were computed by summing the ratings for the five 7-point items, thus producing a possible range from 5 to 35. Also, in order to assess whether different scores in either SWLS or CLSS were related to cultural expectations, the ideal level of each scale was measured in Korea and the U.S.A. Data on this ideal level, however, were unavailable from the PRC.

Second, an Affect Balance Score (ABS) was obtained by asking the subjects how frequently they experienced several specific positive and negative emotions during the past month on a scale which ranged from 1 ("never felt that way") to 7 ("always felt that way"). Positive emotions included joy, happiness, satisfaction, and

friendliness. Negative emotions included sadness, fear, shame, unhappiness, and guilt. Each group of positive and negative emotions was averaged to yield a mean score for the experience of positive affect and negative affect. The ABS score, which was calculated by subtracting the mean of negative affect from the positive affect, could range from -6 to +6.

The third measure of SWB was life domain satisfaction. Respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction of 27 specific domains of life on a 7-point scale where 1 was "extremely dissatisfied" and 7 was "extremely satisfied". Except for the neutral point (4), other points between 1 and 7 were not described verbally in order to avoid connotational weight differences between languages. The 27 domains covered social, educational, material, recreational, and psychological aspects of life. The degree of specificity and amount of personal responsibility, however, varied among the domains. For example, an item such as "satisfaction with your grades" was more specific and high in terms of personal responsibility than an item such as "satisfaction with people in general." The purpose of varying the items in terms of specificity and personal responsibility was to minimize the impact of general response patterns. The assumption was that judgments based on concrete objects or issues, such as "television programs," will be less influenced by inferential processes than judgments of more global categories such as "recreation" (Schwarz & Strack, 1991). Also, the degree of personal responsibility was varied in order to assess the effects of humility (responding lower) on self-responsible domains in comparison to nonself-responsible domains in Korea and China.

Finally, subjects were also asked to recall as many of their positive and negative life events as possible from the past three years in a timed period of three minutes each. The number of positive minus negative life events recalled was employed, as a SWB memory score (Seidlitz & Diener, 1993).

Social Desirability (Norms) of Positive Emotions Two measures of social desirability were obtained. As a general measure of social desirability, participants were asked to rate how desirable or undesirable it is to express 57 personality characteristics in an average situation. Some of the traits were emotional ones (e.g., fearful, joyful) whereas others were not (e.g., lazy, clever). The traits were roughly divided in half into positive ones (e.g., thoughtful, polite) and negative ones (e.g., hopeless, dishonest). Each trait was rated on a 7-point scale where 1 indicated "extremely undesirable" and 7 stood for "extremely desirable." The social desirability of positive emotional traits was constructed by averaging the ratings of six positive emotion traits: affectionate, content, friendly, loving, joyful, and pleased.

A second measure of emotion norms was obtained by asking the respondents to indicate how appropriate or desirable it is to experience or to express certain positive and negative emotions when she/he is with a stranger or a friend. The desirability judgments were made on a scale ranging from 1 ("extremely desirable and appropriate") to 7 ("extremely undesirable and inappropriate"), and the order of the judgments was counterbalanced. The group of positive emotions were: joy, happiness, friendliness, and satisfaction. The category of negative emotions consisted of sadness, shame, and guilt. An overall index of positive emotion desirability and negative emotion desirability was obtained, respectively, by averaging the ratings of the four positive emotions and the three negative emotions.

Importance of SWB Subjects were asked to indicate how important it was for them to possess a number of values. Each value was rated on a scale where 1 was "of no importance of whatsoever, irrelevant" and 7 was "extraordinarily important" Items such as "success," "good family life," and "respect of others" were included in the total list of 17. Among them, the mean of the "happiness" and "satisfaction" rating was used as

the importance rating of SWB.

Familiarity of SWB Various topics were presented to the participants and asked how often they thought about each of them. Each of the topics was rated on a scale which ranged from 1 ("I have never thought about this before") to 7 ("very much, several times a day or more"). Among the various topics (e.g., "how much your parents approve of your life"), the average of two SWB topics was calculated to obtain a familiarity of SWB score: "how satisfied you are with your life?" and "how happy you are?" This measure was obtained based on the assumption that people who were less familiar with concepts of SWB would have thought about them less often, whereas it would have been considered more frequently by people who were more familiar with them.

Mood Measure Participants were asked to rate their highest and lowest moods on their average day. The scale ranged from 1 ("extraordinarily unhappy"; ecstatic, joyous, fantastic) to 9 ("extraordinarily unhappy"; utterly depressed, completely down). The purpose of the measurement was to examine whether a general difference of emotional suppression exists across countries. In other words, it could be the case that people in collectivistic cultures are socialized to control intense emotional experience by dampening the intensity of their emotional experience towards a neutral point. Thus, the range between the highest and lowest mood average of the Asian subjects may be narrower than the American group. Confirmation of this prediction would raise the possibility that Asian respondents may similarly lower their scores on SWB scales by avoiding intense positive responses to them.

AEQ Participants were asked to complete the Ambivalence Over Emotional Expressiveness Questionnaire (AEQ, King & Emmons, 1990) which measures conflict and/or ambivalence over emotional expression. The prime concern of the AEQ is not on emotional inexpressiveness per se but rather on the psychological goal conflict which

underlie emotional inexpressiveness (i.e., inhibition). The AEQ consists of 28 items which address ambivalent emotional conditions such as "I want to express my emotions honestly but I am afraid that it may cause me embarrassment or hurt." Each item was answered on a 7-point scale where 1 was "never feel that way" and 7 was "always feel that way." The overall mean of 28 items was used as the AEQ score: a higher score indicating a higher degree of ambivalence.

Procedure

All participants in the study were classroom volunteers except for the 15 U.S.A. students from the University of Illinois who were paid six dollars for their participation. Due to obvious carelessness in responding or misunderstandings of the instructions, four Korean subjects were dropped from the analysis. Data obtained from six subjects from the U.S.A. were also excluded from the study because of their foreign nationality.

The Korean and Chinese versions of the questionnaire was each double translated, from English to Korean/Chinese and back to English, by native speakers. Except for the most extreme and neutral points, other numbers in the response scale were not specified because of the difficulty of finding terms which carried precisely equal connotational weight across the Korean, Chinese, and English language. All the questionnaires were anonymously conducted in large groups in a single session except for the California sample who provided their social security numbers in order to receive extra credit. All participants were given a verbal debriefing before being dismissed.

Results

One-way ANOVAs and Tukey's HSD pairwise comparisons (otherwise noted) were conducted for the analyses of the SWB scores obtained from the 3 countries. For the various means and analyses reported, the number of subjects differed slightly because of missing data. Also,

correlational analyses between SWB measures and major cultural variables were conducted. Gender differences were observed in a few measures. However, because the pattern of gender differences was inconsistent and appeared to be theoretically irrelevant to the questions raised in the paper, further analyses were not conducted. As mentioned previously, measures on the ideal level of SWLS and CLSS were not obtained from China. Thus, the results of only the U.S.A. and the Korean group were analyzed on this measure.

Levels of SWB

Means and the statistical results of the SWB measures are summarized in Table 1. As found in earlier studies (Shao, 1993), the U.S.A. group showed a significantly higher level of satisfaction than the two Asian groups on the SWLS scale, $F(2, 203) = 20.49, p < .0001$. In contrast, significant differences were not found among the 3 groups on the Collectivistic Life Satisfaction Scale (CLSS), $F(2, 205) = 2.91, ns$. Thus, when the person was asked to evaluate his or her life with a set of collectivistic standards (perspective of others), group difference between the cultures disappeared.

It was assumed earlier that low SWB reports of Asian countries might be due to normative expectations of their culture. If this was true to a certain extent, report on the ideal level of SWLS was predicted to be lower in the Korean sample. Results of the SWLS and CLSS ideal score supported this hypothesis. As expected, the ideal level for SWLS in Korea ($M = 25.54$) was lower than the U.S.A. ($M = 28.65$), $t(145) = 3.28, p < .001$. Thus, although the U.S.A. group reported higher scores on the actual SWLS than the Korean group, no significant group difference was found in the amount of discrepancy between the actual and ideal score of the SWLS (Table 1). In addition, unlike the ideal level of the SWLS, the ideal score for the CLSS was similar between the U.S.A. ($M = 25.98$) and the Korean ($M = 25.55$) group, $t(145) = .41, ns$.

In terms of emotional experience, the U.S.A. sample reported significantly more frequent experiences of positive emotions (happiness, joy, satisfaction, and friendliness) than the two Asian groups during an one month time period, $F(2, 203) = 9.76, p < 001$. Negative emotions (sadness, fear, unhappiness, guilt, and shame), on the other hand, were experienced most frequently by the Korean sample, $F(2, 203) = 32.90, p < 0001$. Although the Chinese students were significantly lower in terms of positive affect, their affect balance score (ABS) did not differ from the American group because of their low reports on negative affect.

The SWB memory score revealed a similar pattern of findings. The U.S.A. sample recalled significantly more positive events ($M = 9.62$) than either the Chinese ($M = 7.40$) or the Korean ($M = 7.17$) sample, $F(2, 205) = 10.03, p < 0001$. Once again, because of the significantly fewer reports of negative events, the event recall balance score of the Chinese sample was not different from the U.S.A. students. Koreans, however, were significantly lower than both the Chinese and Americans on the event recall balance score, $F(2, 203) = 8.47, p < 0003$.

Finally, Table 2 summarizes the results of the 27 domain satisfaction ratings. Overall, the total mean satisfaction was significantly lower in the two Asian groups (China = 3.96; Korea = 3.99; U.S.A. = 4.72), $F(2, 204) = 28.01, p < .0001$. It was assumed earlier that if a culturally determined general response pattern was responsible for the lower ratings of the Asian groups, ratings made by the Asian students on domains which were high in terms of self-responsibility or vagueness would be comparably lower than the domains which did not have such characteristics.

Mean comparisons of each area indicated that Asians were just as dissatisfied with specific domains (e.g., their grades) as with more global domains (e.g., their education). Similarly, a distinctive pattern was not observed between areas of direct personal responsibility (e.g., grades) and areas in which the subject would have minimal

personal responsibility (e.g., people in general). At least in the ratings of domain satisfaction, the results seem to disconfirm the idea that the significantly lower satisfaction ratings of Asian students are primarily due to cultural demands, namely, to be humble and self-effacing.

Norms for Positive Emotions

It was hypothesized that the reporting process of SWB and actual levels of affective experience will be influenced, respectively, by norms for positive emotional expression and experience. Results shown in Figure 1 indicate that in the two Asian countries, the mean desirability level of expressing positive affect was significantly lower than in the U.S.A., $F(2, 197) = 12.95, p < 0001$. Significant group differences were also found regarding norms for positive emotional experience, $F(2, 198) = 23.21, p < 0001$. In fact, the norm difference between the Asian nations and the U.S.A. was even larger for the experience than the expression of positive emotions. A crucial implication of this is that the norms for positive emotions in the two Asian countries may not only affect the individuals' report of happiness (expression), but also their actual phenomenological level of subjective well-being (experience) to a significant degree.

Another hypothesis was that, compared to the individualists, the two collectivistic Asian groups might apply a relatively distinctive pattern of emotional regulation norms as a function of interpersonal context. Data illustrated in Figure 2 confirm this idea. Desirability ratings of the U.S.A. sample were essentially indifferent to whether the situation involved an ingroup (friend) or an outgroup (stranger) member. In contrast, the interpersonal situation was taken into account by the collectivistic respondents. Both the expression and experience of positive emotions were considered to be significantly more desirable ($p < 001$) when the target situation included a friend than a stranger (respectively, 5.6 versus 4.7 in Korea; 5.8 versus 5.0 in China).

Also important is the finding that the norm difference between the two cultures was greater within the "with stranger" than the "with friend" situation. This suggests that, as far as SWB researchers are perceived as a "stranger" to a subject, the set of norms employed by collectivist individuals might possibly inflate actual SWB differences between cultures. Finally, it is also worth noting that the combined mean of stranger and friend situations in China ($M = 5.43$) and Korea ($M = 5.15$) was found to be lower than the U.S.A. ($M = 6.12$), $F(2, 198) = 27.47$, $p < 0.001$.

Mean desirability ratings of the six positive emotion traits yielded similar results. The American respondents ($M = 6.03$) considered the six traits to be culturally more desirable than the two Asian groups, $F(2, 203) = 3.83$, $p < 0.05$. Tukey results ($p < 0.05$), however, showed no significant difference between the Korean ($M = 5.87$) and the Chinese ($M = 5.70$) respondents ($p < 0.05$).

Importance Rating

Planned mean comparisons indicate that, compared to the Americans and Koreans, the two important SWB constructs (life satisfaction and happiness) are significantly less important to the Chinese people. The importance assigned to life satisfaction between the American and Chinese respondents was not only different in terms of mean ratings (6.7 and 5.6, respectively), $t(110) = 6.42$, $g < 0.001$, but also in comparison to other values (Table 3). In the case of Koreans and Americans, life satisfaction was respectively the third and second important value among the 17 domains, whereas it was ranked 10th by the Chinese.

Similar results were found for happiness. Happiness was reported as one of the most important values by both the Koreans ($M = 6.6$) and the Americans ($M = 6.7$). Within the domains, both the Korean and the American respondents considered happiness to be the second most important value. In comparison, happiness was ranked 6th among the 17 domains by the Chinese.

It was hypothesized that if the low SWB reports were due to value differences, importance ratings of SWB would be lower in Asian countries. Only the results of the Chinese data seem to support this hypothesis. The Korean respondents, on the other hand, seem to regard satisfaction and happiness equally as important as the Americans did. Correlational analysis, however, indicates that the importance of SWB is unrelated with SWB levels in all three countries (Table 4). Thus, evidence fails to support the idea that respondents in Asia respond lower to SWB scales because SWB is less important to them.

Familiarity of SWB Concept

The results of the SWB familiarity measure suggests that Koreans ($M = 5.12$) and Americans ($M = 5.00$) think significantly more often about happiness and life satisfaction than the Chinese ($M = 3.91$), $F(2, 205) = 29.30$, $p < 0.001$. It was predicted earlier that individuals' unfamiliarity of SWB construct may lower SWB scores in some countries. Thus, a positive correlational pattern was expected between the measure of familiarity and SWB. Evidence for such a prediction, however, was only found from the Chinese respondents (Table 4). In the case of the Chinese sample, the SWB familiarity score correlated positively with all four SWB measures: SWLS, $r = .33$, $p < 0.05$; CLSS, $r = .45$, $p < 0.001$; total mean of domain satisfactions, $r = .22$, $g = .10$; and the ABS, $r = .29$, $B < 0.05$.

Interestingly, however, the relation between the familiarity measure and SWB was inversely correlated in both the Korean and American samples. In other words, in these two countries, individuals who thought about SWB more often were those who were less happy. How can this contradictory pattern of finding between China versus the U.S.A. and Korea be reconciled? One possible explanation is that there is a certain "threshold" effect in the relation between familiarity and SWB. As predicted, in a culture where the SWB is a quite foreign concept (as in

China), familiarity may make a difference on the person's confidence level in making a SWB judgment. Thus, people who are more familiar with the concept will be more willing to depart from a neutral point on their SWB report. On the other hand, once members of a given culture become sufficiently aware of the notion of happiness, it is plausible that people who feel unhappy are more likely to ruminate about the matter. Or, paradoxically, individuals may feel more unhappy when they tend to think about the issue exceedingly, and thus compare their present state with an ideal level too often. Results of the correlational findings, combined with mean data, seem to support this explanation.

Another hypothesis concerning the familiarity issue was that if members of a certain culture are less accustomed to the SWB construct, they might utilize external references (e.g., others' opinion, norm) to aid their judgment of SWB. More concretely, it may be possible that when a culture is less familiar with the concept of SWB, individual opinions about SWB might correlate with their general opinion about norms for positive emotions. The overall correlational pattern between SWB measures and emotion norms supported this idea (Table 4). As expected, the correlation between norms and SWB was found to be significant only in the Chinese sample.

Mood Intensity

Subjects were asked to report their highest and lowest mood on their average day to examine, besides other things, whether collectivistic individuals try to project a more neutral image of themselves in general. As described earlier, the neutral point was "5" in this mood measure which ranged from "1" to "9." Results show that the average high mood of the Chinese ($M = 7.02$) and Korean ($M = 7.25$) groups were as high as the American subjects ($M = 7.17$), $F < 1$. In fact, the Asian students gave even more extreme responses than the Americans on their daily low mood report. As a result, the range between the highest

and lowest average mood of the Chinese ($M = 4.21$) and Korean ($M = 4.93$) subjects was greater than that of the American group ($M = 3.69$), $F(2,198) = 11.67$, $p < 0.001$. Thus, once again, the present data failed to support the idea that collectivistic respondents would lower their scores on SWB measures by deliberately responding in a neutral fashion.

AEQ

Tukey results ($p < .05$) of the AEQ measure indicated that both the Koreans ($M = 4.13$) and the Chinese ($M = 3.84$) were more ambivalent in terms of emotional expression than the Americans ($M = 3.36$). As previously mentioned, the AEQ does not measure the inexpressiveness of emotion per se, but rather, the ambivalence between expression and inhibition which is most likely to result from conflicts with social norms or other goals. The long-term effect of such an ambivalent state has been found to be detrimental to one's SWB (King & Emmons, 1990).

This negative relation between happiness level and amount of emotional ambivalence was replicated in the present study by the Koreans and the Americans. The AEQ and the SWLS correlated significantly negatively in the U.S.A. ($r = -.37$, $p = .007$) and in Korea ($r = -.20$, $p = .05$). In China, however, individuals' level of emotional ambivalence was found to be irrelevant to the SWLS ($r = .00$, $p = .97$), even though the mean was significantly higher than the U.S.A. group.

Results from the present data cannot explain why the experience of emotional ambivalence does not relate strongly with life satisfaction in China. One possibility, however, might be that the notion of individual satisfaction itself may be conceptualized somewhat differently in China--as the previous results of the familiarity and value measures of SWB suggest. For instance, the Chinese might assign less importance to one's inner experiences as a prime source of individual happiness. Instead, the locus of one's happiness might be on external, relational aspects of one's life

(e.g., harmony within the family, other's respect). If so, inner experiences, such as emotional ambivalence, may not be regarded as particularly diagnostic information of one's level of happiness. Although this possibility has not been fully tested in the present study, it seems to be an interesting issue to investigate in future cross-cultural studies of SWB.

Discussion

The major purpose of the present study was to suggest that explanations for national differences in SWB should be derived from a more comprehensive perspective than those taken in previous research. In addition to substantive social conditions, it was argued that a number of culturally related factors may play a mediating role in national reports of SWB. Findings from the present study yield several conclusions; 1) norms related to SWB are less positive in Korea and China than in the U.S.A., 2) the value/importance of SWB is comparably lower in China, 3) SWB is less often thought about in China, 4) passive response style is unlikely to be the major reason for low SWB reports in either Korea or China, and 5) a unique pattern of relationship between SWB and psychocultural factors exists within the three countries. Overall, the nature of cultural influences on SWB seems to be more substantive (e.g., normative beliefs, culturally unique concepts of SWB) than artifactual (e.g., response styles, impression management).

In general, compared to the U.S.A. sample, students in Korea and China showed significantly lower reports on life satisfaction and affective levels of SWB. The two Asian countries were particularly low in life satisfaction measured by the SWLS and on most of the life domains which included various aspects of everyday life. Also, Chinese and Korean students were significantly lower on the frequency of positive emotion reports, which is a key factor in gauging individuals' affective happiness. However,

considering that the reports of Korea and U S A in terms of the CLSS and the discrepancy between actual and ideal level of SWLS were not different, it seems somewhat premature to claim conclusively that Asians are less satisfied with their life than Western individuals in general. Because the concept of SWB as well as its instruments are essentially a Western product, direct comparability of obtained scores across cultures remains an open question.

Above all, findings on measurements of emotion norms and ideal levels of life satisfaction have several significant implications and raise further questions for future research. First, the Asian countries' low reports on both of these normative measures suggest that, to a certain extent, low levels of SWB found in many Asian countries might be a result of individuals' compliance to normative expectations regarding individual happiness.

However, the finding that both the norms for expression and experience for positive emotions were 1) strongly correlated within each country and 2) significantly lower in Korea and China, raises the possibility that cultural norms may be influencing not only the reporting of well-being per se, but also the actual experience of happiness in Asian countries.

Because the chief purpose of the present study was to gain preliminary insights into the general issue of cultural factors on SWB reports, a challenging question has been left for future research: To what extent does the culture, with its feeling and display rules, influence the SWB experiences of each individual? Pieces of this complicated puzzle will hopefully be provided by upcoming cross-cultural research, such as, longitudinal studies on socialization processes of positive emotions. Also, more insight will be gained on this general issue by understanding the common motivational basis of individuals in each culture when they comply to a shared set of norms, and the social consequences on norm deviant attitudes and behaviors. Another extremely important question in this context is to determine

the causal direction between norms and SWB--whether the culture-specific expectations determine the individual's level of SWB, or follow from them.

Another interesting finding was that, unlike the Americans, both the Korean and Chinese respondents were found to appraise the expression and experience of positive emotions in a significantly more favorable light when the target situation included a friend than a stranger. This pattern of results, which is theoretically supported by cross-cultural intergroup studies, emphasizes the need to be aware of the possibility that the respondents' perception of the situation may contaminate SWB reports when it is assessed in highly collectivistic countries. Comparison of SWB reports obtained from anonymous versus private interview conditions may provide important clues concerning this issue. Furthermore, in order to minimize such group discrimination effects in SWB studies conducted in Eastern cultures, it becomes imperative to develop innovative SWB measures which are relatively immune to the respondents' perceived social distance between the researcher and the self.

It was also hypothesized that the reports of Asians on SWB may be spuriously low because of their artifactual response style, namely, their general tendency to respond in a neutral fashion. Because the two Asian groups in the present study were found to mark more extreme responses than the Americans on numerous occasions (e.g., mood reports, importance ratings), it seems unlikely that such a habitual passive response style is the chief reason for their low SWB reports.

Goldberg (1981), however, recently argued that the subjects' "middle" response can be interpreted in several different ways; 1) it could result from the subjects' situational attribution (e.g., "my behavior depends on the situation"), 2) an expression of uncertainty (e.g., "I am not sure of that aspect of myself well enough"), or 3) due to the ambiguity of the item (e.g., "I am not sure what this item means"). Based on the findings of

the SWB familiarity measure, the reports of the Chinese SWB level may be linked with both the "uncertainty" and "ambiguity" explanation, which more or less derives from a substantive cultural difference rather than an artifactual reason.

Probably more interesting is Goldberg's first argument that subjects' neutral reactions may be a result of their situational attribution of the trait in question. Inferring from other findings which suggest that Eastern individuals are generally more inclined than Westerners to make situational attributions in judgments including the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and have a more elaborate contextual knowledge system (Kitayama et al., 1991), it seems possible that Asians respond around the middle of SWB scales because their notion of SWB is more situationally bound. The discrepant pattern of emotion norms in the stranger versus friend situation found in the Korean and Chinese respondents support this idea that the display of positive emotions is more context-dependent in collectivistic cultures than in the U.S.A. Thus, the role of respondents' attributional pattern on self-descriptive reports seems to be an extremely interesting research topic for future SWB research, as well as for other areas in personality. As for national differences, contrary to expectations, the general pattern of results from Korea resembled more to the U.S.A. than to China. The overall impression was that, in China, the construct of SWB is probably much more foreign and is not considered as central to life as it is either in Korea or in the U.S.A. A dramatic illustration of this point was that nearly 10 percent of the Chinese college students in the present study said that they had never before thought about how happy they were with their life. In contrast, none of the American and Korean students gave such a response. Possibly in part due to their unfamiliarity with the general idea of SWB, the Chinese students yielded several other unique results which were not observed in the Korean sample; 1) frequency of thinking about SWB correlated strongly with SWB level, 2)

individuals' opinion on the desirability of positive emotions was significantly related with reported levels of SWB, and 3) the amount of emotional ambivalence was not related with happiness level.

Hence, although the general SWB level of Korea and China were both lower than the U.S.A., findings from this study raise the possibility that the reasons for such lower rating might be somewhat different in each country. One possible explanation for the discrepant pattern of findings in Korea and China is that the velocity of change in the social structure of the two nation has been different. In China, which has just recently opened its doors to the Western world, the majority of the people may still strongly identify with their traditional collectivistic value structure. A large part of the low SWB reports in China thus might be due to cultural reasons, such as the unfamiliarity with the notion of individual happiness.

On the other hand, the rapid economic development during the past few decades in Korea has entailed drastic changes in its traditional value structure. Today's Korean college students are in some ways a "transitory" generation, inculcated with traditional collectivistic values on one hand, but also increasingly aware of individualistic notions such as SWB on the other. As a consequence, they are confronted with enervating demands which frequently arise from the clash between the traditional and new value systems. In terms of the present data, Korean students were experiencing the most amount of emotional ambivalence among the three nations and within the sample, those who reported higher levels of ambivalence were also the ones who were less happy.

Limits of the present study also need to be discussed. First, due to practical reasons, the sample for all three countries in this study consisted of college students. Considering the possibility that college students may not be the most representative group of the general population in certain countries, samples in future

studies should include subjects from a broader range of the population in order to increase the generalizability of the obtained data.

Another potential weakness of the present study was that, except for the event memory scores, all the data were obtained through self-report measures. Although the SWB self-report measures employed in this study have been found to have adequate psychometric properties (Pavot et al., 1991, Sandvik et al., 1993; Fordyce, 1988), batteries other than self-reports, such as daily experience sampling methods, anonymous versus face-to-face interviews, and peer reports may have been able to provide additional information which self-report instruments were unable to capture.

In conclusion, two important points should be addressed. First, although the major interest of this paper has been on examining the possible influences of cultural factors on SWB reports, it should be remembered that due to common categories of human experience, such as goals, values and biological reasons, some universally shared attributes of happiness certainly exist. In order to determine the universal components of psychological well-being, however, an important initial task seemd to be to correctly identify the amount of variance in present SWB measures which could possibly be attributed to cultural sources.

Finally, any attempts to explain national differences of SWB by either a handful of social parameters or through unique cultural characteristics seem to be analogous to the endless controversies that surround the area of emotion research: whether emotion is a basic biological process which is geographically and historically invariant (universahsm) or whether it is a social/cultural construct which is only comprehensible from an emic perspective (differentialism). Interesting as it may be, researchers conducting future cross-national studies on SWB should foresee the inherent limits of such debates. A more productive approach may be to address the question of how and to what

extent the common conditions of SWB interplay with socio-cultural factors in determining the experiential quality and the expressional channels of human happiness.

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Table 1

Mean Comparisons of SWB Measures

<u>SWB Measures</u>	<u>China</u>	<u>Korea</u>	<u>U.S.A.</u>
SWLS	17.75 _a	20.33 _b	23.89 _c
SWLS Ideal	.	25.54	28.65
Difference	.	5.21	4.76
CLSS	22.71 _a	24.69 _a	24.51 _b
CLSS Ideal	.	25.55	25.98
Difference	.	.76	1.47
Frequency of PE	4.32 _a	4.24 _a	5.00 _b
Frequency of NE	2.26 _a	3.48 _b	2.54 _a
ABS (Freq. PE-NE)	2.06 _a	.76 _b	2.47 _a
Event Recall: Positive	7.40 _a	7.17 _a	9.62 _b
Event Recall: Negative	4.73 _a	6.36 _b	7.21 _b
SWB Memory Score	2.66 _a	.80 _b	2.40 _a
Total Mean of Domain Satisfactions	3.96 _a	3.99 _a	4.72 _b

Note. Means that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

SWLS : Satisfaction With Life Scale

CLSS : Collectivistic Life Satisfaction Scale

ABS : Affect Balance Scale

Table 2

Domain Satisfaction Means

<u>Domains</u>	<u>China</u>	<u>Korea</u>	<u>U.S.A.</u>	<u>t-value</u>	
				<u>C vs U</u>	<u>K vs U</u>
<u>Social</u>					
Family	5.21	5.03	5.11	0.09	0.66
Friendships	5.11	4.46	5.40	1.32	4.18***
Living Partner	4.97	4.77	5.23	0.98	1.48
People(General)	3.98	3.80	4.70	3.55**	4.30***
<u>Educational</u>					
Education	4.26	4.20	5.15	3.42**	4.24**
Grades	3.95	3.74	5.13	4.03***	0.06***
Lecture	3.86	3.28	4.73	3.46**	6.71***
Textbooks	3.81	3.29	4.12	1.42	4.54***
<u>Material</u>					
Finances	3.74	3.70	3.56	0.59	0.55
Food	3.58	4.22	4.77	4.29***	2.57*
Housing	3.60	4.45	4.85	3.93***	1.57
Paid Employment	2.15	3.75	4.14	5.29***	1.26
Bedroom	3.11	4.25	5.08	7.00***	3.34**
Transportation	2.52	3.26	4.96	10.40***	6.25***
<u>Psychological</u>					
All of life	5.53	4.60	5.32	3.38**	2.91**
Self	4.32	4.21	5.32	4.44***	4.77***
Stress	3.75	3.24	3.32	1.65	0.37
Religion	3.17	4.34	4.63	3.93***	0.82
<u>Recreational</u>					
Recreation	3.81	3.62	4.90	4.77***	6.50***
Cultural Life	3.67	3.89	4.46	3.04**	2.74**
Movies	4.04	4.57	4.73	3.24**	0.84
TV Programs	3.82	3.65	3.98	0.60	1.44
Travel	3.30	3.95	5.16	6.38***	4.66***
Sports-play	5.00	3.80	4.70	1.17	3.47**
Sports-watch	3.68	4.15	4.68	3.35**	1.97
<u>Others</u>					
Health	4.72	4.43	5.36	2.27	3.79***
The World	3.90	3.01	4.04	0.66	5.32***
<u>TOTAL MEAN</u>	3.96	3.99	4.72	6.19***	6.84***

Note. C = China; K = Korea; U = U.S.A.

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table 3

Importance Ratings: Mean and Rank within Country

<u>Domains</u>	<u>China</u>	<u>Mean(Rank)</u>	
		<u>Korea</u>	<u>U.S.A.</u>
↗ Life Satisfaction	5.57(10)	6.50(3)	6.70(2)
↘ Happiness	6.17(6)	6.59(2)	6.70(2)
Achievement	5.24(12)	6.25(8)	6.39(8)
Approval of Family	5.28(11)	5.52(11)	4.96(16)
Close Friends	6.31(3)	6.60(1)	6.55(4)
↗ Contentment	5.24(12)	6.39(6)	6.25(9)
↘ Contribution	4.51(16)	5.27(12)	5.34(14)
↘ Exciting Life	3.63(17)	5.28(13)	5.42(13)
↘ Freedom	6.16(7)	6.47(4)	6.43(7)
↘ Good Family Life	6.28(4)	6.32(7)	6.51(5)
↘ Health	6.52(1)	6.45(5)	6.75(1)
↘ Joy	6.10(8)	6.28(9)	6.46(6)
↘ Material Comforts	5.24(12)	5.14(15)	4.85(17)
↘ Money	5.24(12)	4.92(17)	5.13(15)
↘ Respect of Others	5.79(9)	5.23(14)	5.92(11)
↘ Spirituality	6.37(2)	4.99(16)	5.49(12)
↘ Success	6.24(5)	5.60(10)	5.94(10)

Note. 1 = Of no importance whatsoever; Irrelevant
7 = Extraordinarily important and valuable

Table 4

Correlations Between Major Variables

<u>SWB Measures</u>	<u>Country</u> Major Variables			
	Value	Familiarity	Norm(A/B)	AEQ
<u>China</u>				
SWLS	-.02	.33	.36**/.37**	.00
CLSS	.24	.45***	.30* / .42**	-.04
Domain Sat.	.02	.22	.32* / .41**	-.06
ABS	.16	.29*	.24 / .41**	-.17
<u>Korea</u>				
	Value	Familiarity	Norm(A/B)	AEQ
SWLS	.09	-.17	.10 / .05	-.20
CLSS	.00	-.01	.02 / .10	-.26*
Domain Sat.	.08	-.08	.11 / -.05	-.28**
ABS	.07	-.24*	.03 / .13	-.34**
<u>U.S.A.</u>				
	Value	Familiarity	Norm(A/B)	AEQ
SWLS	.00	-.27*	.23 / .07	-.37**
CLSS	-.06	-.17	.12 / .28*	-.26
Domain Sat.	-.06	-.14	.27 / .07	-.22
ABS	-.02	.03	.15 / .08	-.05

Note. $p^* < .05$; $p^{**} < .01$; $p^{***} < .001$.

SWLS: Satisfaction With Life Scale

CLSS: Collectivistic Life Satisfaction Scale

Domain Sat.: Total Mean of Domain Satisfaction

ABS: Affect Balance Scale

Value: Importance of Happiness/Life Satisfaction

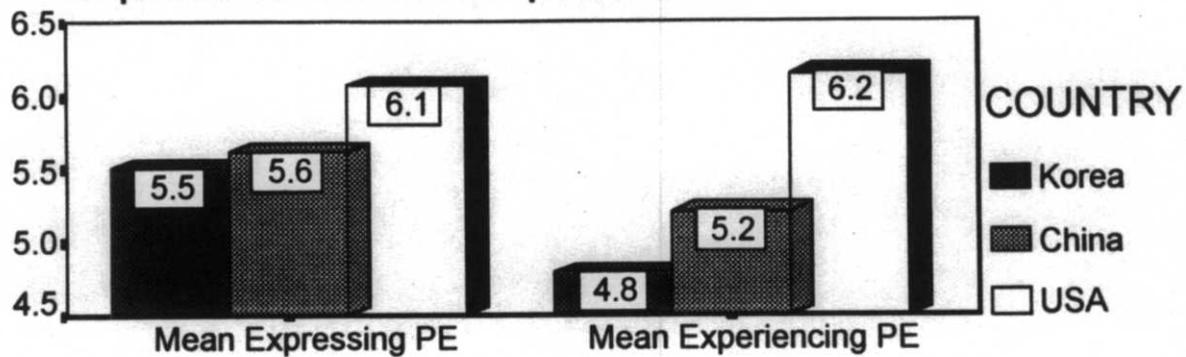
Familiarity: How often thought about SWB

Norm A: Expressing/Experiencing Positive Emotions

Norm B: Desirability of Positive Emotion Traits

AEQ: Ambivalence Over Emotional Expression Questionnaire

Figure 1
Norms for Positive Emotions
Expression versus Experience

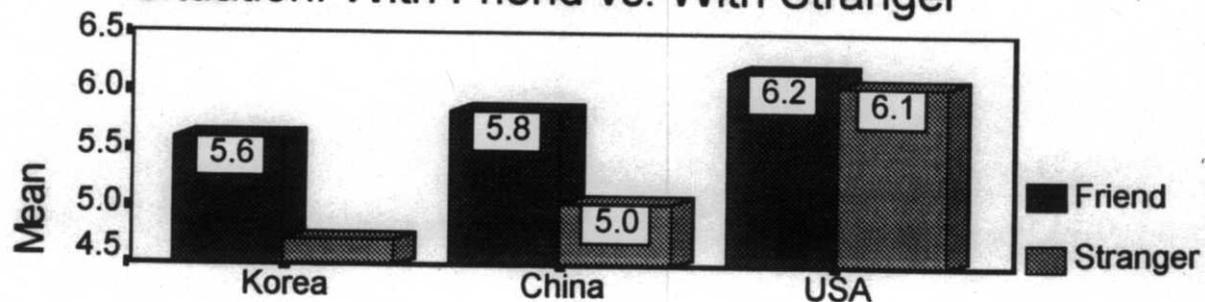


1 = Extremely Undesirable

7 = Extremely Desirable

Figure 2**Norms for Positive Emotions**

Situation: With Friend vs. With Stranger

**COUNTRY**

1 = Extremely Undesirable

7 = Extremely Desirable