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Uchida, Yukiko; Trommsdorff, Gisela

Research Report

SOEP-IS 2014 - Cross-cultural study of happiness and personality

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SOEP-IS 2014 – Cross-Cultural Study of Happiness and Personality

Yukiko Uchida and Gisela Trommsdorff

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DIW Berlin
German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP)
Mohrenstr. 58
10117 Berlin
Germany

soeppapers@diw.de

SOEP-IS 2014 – Cross-Cultural Study of Happiness and Personality

Module Title in SOEP Documentation: Cross-Cultural Study of Happiness

Yukiko Uchida and Gisela Trommsdorff

December 2013

Proposal for SOEP Innovation Sample

Cross-Cultural Study of Happiness and Personality

Dr. Yukiko Uchida, Kyoto University,
in cooperation with Dr. Gisela Trommsdorff, University of Konstanz

Dr. Yukiko Uchida (Associate Professor)
Kyoto University Kokoro Research Center
46 Yoshida Shimoadachi, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto JAPAN 606-8501
+81-75-753-9679 Email: yukikou@educ.kyoto-u.ac.jp

I. Information on Dr. Yukiko Uchida--CV:

Education

Undergraduate: Kyoto University, 1994-1998 Department of Psychology

Graduate: Kyoto University, 1998-2003 Graduate School of Human and Environmental Studies (Social Psychology) MA, 2000; Ph.D., 2003

Professional Career

2003-2004	Visiting Scholar, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan
2004-2005	Visiting Scholar, Department of Psychology, Stanford University
2005-2007	Assistant Professor, Koshien University, Japan
2008-2011	Assistant Professor, Kyoto University, Japan
April 2011-	Associate Professor, Kyoto University, Japan

Social activities

Commission member of Happiness Research, Cabinet office Government of Japan (2010-2013), Commission member of Safety and Secure Management, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Technology, Government of Japan (2013-), Advisory Board, German Institute for Japanese Studies (2012-)

Main publications

Uchida, Y., Takahashi, Y., & Kawahara, K. (2013). Changes in hedonic and eudaimonic well-being after a severe nationwide disaster: The case of the Great East Japan Earthquake. Journal of Happiness Studies. doi: 10.1007/s10902-013-9463-6

Uchida, Y., & Ogihara, Y. (2012). Personal or interpersonal construal of happiness: A cultural psychological perspective. International Journal of Wellbeing, 2(4), 354-369. doi:10.5502/ijw.v2.i4.5

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Uchida, Y., Townsend, S.S.M., Markus, H. R., & Bergsieker, H. B. (2009). Emotions as within or between people? Cultural variation in lay theories of emotion expression and inference. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin. 35,* 1427-1439.
Uchida, Y., & Kitayama, S. (2009). Happiness and unhappiness in east and west: Themes and variations. *Emotion, 9,* 441-456.
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Markus, H. R., Uchida, Y., Omoregie, H., Townsend, S., & Kitayama, S. (2006). Going for the gold: Sociocultural models of agency in Japanese and American contexts. *Psychological Science*, 17, 103-112.
Uchida, Y., Norasakkunkit, V., & Kitayama, S. (2004). Cultural constructions of happiness: Theory and empirical evidence. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 5,3,* 223-239.

II. Present research related to research plan

The proposed research with SOEP innovation sample will be part of a collaborative research project at the Konstanz University in Germany (Professor Dr. Gisela Trommsdorff) and the Kokoro Research Center, Kyoto University. In this project, we start from the idea that the meaning of happiness is shared within a culture and constructed through socio-cultural experiences (Uchida, Norasakkunkit, & Kitayama, 2004; Uchida & Ogihara, 2012). In particular, previous research suggested that in European-American cultural contexts where individuals tend to emphasize independence, happiness is construed as including experience of a highly desirable and positive emotional state defined in terms of a high arousal state such as excitement and a sense of personal achievement. Moreover, individual happiness is best predicted by personal goal attainment and high self-esteem or self-efficacy. In contrast, in Japanese cultural contexts where individuals tend to emphasize interdependence, happiness is construed as including experience of both positive and negative emotional state and defined in terms of experiencing a low arousal state such as calmness and interpersonal connectedness and harmony. Furthermore, happiness is best predicted by relationship harmony and emotional support from others in Japan. The overarching goal of this research project is to explore how culture-specific predictors and meaning of happiness give rise to cultural differences across cultures (Germany and Japanese) and within cultures (based on socio-economic status and psychological isolation from the mainstream).

III. Aims of the study and hypothesis

The proposed study is a systematic cross-cultural investigation of predictors and meaning of happiness in Germany and Japan. The general hypothesis guiding this study is that there are cultural differences regarding the relations of the predictors (i.e. social relationship) with happiness. These can be understood as part of different cultural patterns and within cultural variations. In the German individualist cultural context, close bonds are negotiated commitments such as based on the autonomy of the partners (Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003). In that case, individual goals and achievement are more likely to be important to feel happiness. In contrast, in Japan, happiness is predicted by the harmonious, interpersonal relationship and perceived social support from significant others (Uchida et al., 2008). In addition, in Japan, where an interdependent orientation is salient, being outstandingly happier than others is perceived as disharmonious within relationships.

In previous research, we have found that an index of well-being such as satisfaction with life scale (Diener et al., 1985) does not fully capture interdependently oriented types of happiness (which are prominent in Japan). Our "Interdependent Happiness Scale" (Hitokoto & Uchida, 2013) that includes the questions such as happiness achieved with others (Hitokoto & Uchida, 2012) has proven useful. That scale is found to be valid in Germany, US, Japan, and Korea for adults.

Furthermore, cultural psychological research results imply that people in Japanese cultural contexts evaluate their current state of happiness by taking ups and downs in life as a whole into account. Therefore, if people recognize that their current state is not good enough, but expecting to be improved in the future, their current "unhappiness" is not very negative (Uchida & Kitayama, 2009). To reflect upon this point, Japanese well-being indicators (Government commission research in 2011 and 2012) included questions on "future level of happiness," "ideal level of happiness". This large happiness study (N = around 10,000) conducted by the Japanese Government (Economic and Social Research Institute) (data from 2011 and 2013) (representative sample of adults, both gender) could be comparable with SOEP data (entire SOEP-IS). (It may be possible that they are interested to participate in the comparative study). The Japanese data set does not provide open access but Dr. Uchida is eligible to use the data. In addition Uchida and her colleagues in Japan have conducted large sample study on happiness for local community people in 2013 (N =8000) between 35 and 75 years old; 70% males, which also could be used for comparisons between German and Japanese samples. As for the within cultural differences, we plan to focus on regional context, socio-economic status and several psychological variables, including self-efficacy, future orientation (optimism/pessimism), control orientation, and

personality variables (Big Five).

Recently Uchida and Norasakkunkit (2011) have worked on the project of the "social withdrawal" syndrome in Japan paying attention to those who are not engaged in mainstream cultural practices. Socio-economic status is an important factor to identify these persons` demographic position; further, psychological factors such as social isolation and detachment from the normative life-style and from the cultural mainstream should be considered. Thus we propose to use "Social withdrawal risk factor scale" (Norasakkunkit & Uchida, 2011) in this study. The scale is valid across cultures (US and Japan) and correlated with demographic socio-economic status and psychological factors (i.e., loneliness, self-esteem, perceived social support). Our hypothesis is that social withdrawal tendencies predict low levels of happiness in both cultures. However, this kind of social isolation has a different meaning and function in Japan where a strong pressure of joining the majority of the society valuing interdependence prevails.

We expect systematic cultural differences in the predictors of current happiness and in the relationships between these predictors and happiness, namely, correlates among current happiness, interdependent happiness, ideal happiness, and future prospect of happiness. More specifically, current happiness is expected to be more strongly correlated with interdependent happiness in Japan than Germany. The mean score of current happiness would be lower in Japan than in Germany while the ideal level of happiness would also be lower in Japan. Thus the gap between ideal and real happiness would be equivalent across cultures. Throughout the analysis, we will examine cultural differences regarding the relations between happiness and predictor variables such as social relations (Germany vs. Japan) while also considering regional differences in each country, (rural areas vs. big cities in Japan; East vs. West Germany).

IV. Contents of the instruments: (part of them have been translated into German)

<Interdependent Happiness—9 items>

1) I believe that I and those around me are happy

2) I feel that I am being positively evaluated by others around me

3) I make significant others happy

Ich mache diejenigen, die mir am wichtigsten sind, glücklich.

4) Although it is quite average, I live a stable life

Auch wenn es recht durchschnittlich ist, ist mein Leben doch stabil.

5) I do not have any major concerns or anxieties

Ich habe keine großen Sorgen oder Ängste.

6) I can do what I want without causing problems for other people

7) I believe that my life is just as happy as that of others around me

Mein Leben ist genauso glücklich wie das der Menschen um mich herum.

8) I believe I have achieved the same standard of living as those around me

Ich denke, dass ich den gleichen Lebensstandard erreicht habe wie die Menschen um mich herum.

9) I generally believe that things are going well for me in its own way as they are for others around me

Ich denke im Allgemeinen, dass die Dinge für mich genauso gut laufen wie für andere.

<Current happiness, Ideal happiness, and future happiness>

1) Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are? Please mark a 10 on a scale if you are very happy and 0 if you are very unhappy.

2) How would you rate the ideal condition of happiness for yourself on 0-10 scale? If you chose 10, it would mean that your ideal condition is "a state in which you feel only happiness," a score of 5 would mean that your ideal condition is "the situation where happiness is 50% and unhappiness is 50%", and a score of 0 would mean that your ideal condition is "a state is “only when you feel unhappy "Please rate yourself on a 0-10 scale.

3) Taking all things together, how happy would you say you will be in the future, say about <u>**five years**</u> from now? (+5 means much happier than now, 0 means same as now, -5 means much unhappier than now)

<Social Withdrawal selected items> (note: *at least the marked items should be included*)

1) <u>I want to prioritize my own preferred lifestyle, it would be better to lead a part time freelance lifestyle.</u>

2) I think that a person who does not work upon graduating will become lazy

3) I cannot find meaning in working

4) My social skills are low, and I am not good at relating to others.

5) When I have some trouble to deal with, I have someone I can talk to.

6) <u>There are times when I think that I am not needed by society.</u>

7) I don’t quite know what I want to do in the future

8) <u>I feel like I don’t have a clear future prospect.</u>

9) My nights and days are reversed cycled; I stay up all night, wake up in the afternoons, and eat irregularly