WELL-BEING
in SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Well-Being

• Well-being or Wellbeing?
• Related terms: joy, happiness, quality of life, positive emotions, subjective well-being, satisfaction with life, wellness, … (The opposite: ill-being).
• Definition: An individual’s cognitive and affective evaluation of his or her life. («It does not depend on how you have it, but on how you take it».)
Hedonic vs. eudaimonic well-being

- Hedonic: subjective, emotional well-being; pleasant emotions more common than negative emotions.
- Eudaimonic: successful activity, goal attainments, development of potentials, personal growth. (Similar to self-realization.)
Satisfaction with life scale (swls) (Diener et al. 1985)

1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
3. I am satisfied with my life.
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Scale: (1) Strongly disagree --- (7) Strongly agree.
1. På de fleste måter er livet mitt nær idealet mitt.
2. Mine livsvilkår er utmerkede.
3. Jeg er tilfreds med livet mitt.
4. Så langt har jeg oppnådd de viktige tingene jeg ønsker i livet mitt.
5. Hvis jeg kunne leve livet på nytt, ville jeg nesten ikke ha forandret på noe.
Path diagram

- $\text{Ex}_1 = \text{Personal characteristics}$
- $\text{Ex}_2 = \text{Social environment}$
- $\text{En}_1 = \text{Well-being}$
- $\text{En}_2 = \text{Consequences of well-being}$
- $e = \text{other causes}$
Research model in positive psychology

Person-ality

Institutions

Emotions

Consequences
Consequences of well-being

• Many possible consequences, HOWEVER, they may be more or less directly influenced by the causes of well-being (person characteristics and the social institutions).

• Better cognitive functioning.
• Better mental health.
• Better physical health.
• Organizational citizenship, less absence,
«Broaden and build»

Positive emotions "broaden-and-build" attention, thinking and action alternatives (Barbara Fredrickson, 1998 and later).

Possible positive effects/outcomes of positive emotions: Personal growth and development, better coping, more resilience, better mental health, citizenship, better physical health, more creativity, better performances,
Consequences or causes?

• The consequences of well-being may be causes of well-being. Then they are intervening variables between personal characteristics and well-being, and between social environment and well-being.

• (William James (1884): First you see the bear, then you run, and then you become afraid.)

• (Job satisfaction caused by job performance? (Much discussed.))
Back to the path diagram

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Personal characteristics

- Demographic variables: gender, age, marital status, family size, place of residence, education (number of years), vocation/position, income, socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion.
- Personality - Big five: extraversion, emotional stability, conscientiousness, openness, agreeableness.
- Personality: needs, purpose in life, hope and optimism, self-efficacy,
Social environment

- A class of independent variables.
- Social contact, roles, social support, prosocial behavior, communication, groups, social control, leadership, attitudes, social change, conflict resolution - in various social institutions.
Social institutions

• Social institutions represent norms and conditions which regulate social practice and interpersonal interaction. They take care of socially necessary functions in various areas.

• Institutions and communities constitute environmental resources and social capital which can promote positive development and successful activity, but may also cause problematic challenges.
Important institutions

• Important social institutions are:
  marriage and family
  school, education and culture
  economics and working
  politics (and government)
  religion

• (Each of these institutions are large fields of study:
  family sociology, education, economics, political science,
  religion. All these fields have border areas to
  psychology, i.e. psychology of religion, political
  psychology etc.)
Nations

- Differences in well-being among nations may be caused by differences in the quality of their social institutions.
Perspectives on institutions

• Positions, roles, status; structure.
• Functions.
• Conflicts. /Conflict sociology./
• Social interaction, communication etc.

The action or interaction perspective. The social psychology of institutions. Point of departure may be roles, which are related to the functions.
Positive social psychology prioritize the study of the positive aspects of social contact; good communication, factors of importance for satisfaction and productivity in groups, supportive leadership, social reforms which improve the world, etc., above the study of misconceptions, attributional errors, role conflicts, aggression, bad communication, deindividuation, prejudice, social pathology, genetic determinism etc.
Social positive psychology

- Social positive psychology take a closer look at social aspects of topics in positive psychology. More topics are considered than what are traditionally considered as central topics in social psychology.

(Once again: ”What is social psychology?” – Traditionally bacis topics + sociological/anthropologcal topics + topics in general psychology?)
Examples of topics in positive psychology

Altruism, job performance, job satisfaction, Aristotles’ ethics, relaxation, citizenship, virtues, marital happiness, emotional intelligence, entrepreneurship, aesthetic experiences, eudaimonia, ideals (good), joy, the good life, the good society, purpose in life, humanistic psychology, humor, hope and optimism, character strength, good communication,

(cont’d.)
Examples of topics, cont’d.

creativity, leadership (supportive), quality of life, HAPPINESS, mental health, moral reasoning at high level, prosocial behavior, justice, self respect, social support, thankfullness, satisfaction with life/existence, forgiveness and reconciliation, thriving, successful (positive) aging, well-being, friendship, values, wisdom, vocational interests, awe, etc.
Positive psychology

• *Positive psychology* is a chapter heading in Maslows 1954-book. ("It is as if psychology had voluntarily restricted itself to only half of its rightful jurisdiction, and that the darker, meaner half").

• Seligman’s definitions of positive psychology (2002 and other places) usually mention three things: positive emotions, positive individual traits and positive institutions.
Argument for positive psychology

• "We know everything about depression and too little about happiness. Do more research on happiness and what make life worth to live" (Seligman).

• Generalization: We know more than enough about the negative topics in social psychology, and too little about the positive topics. (Do more research on the positive topics, put more emphasis on what is already known about the positive – in teaching, public enlightenment etc.)
Challenges

• The word "positive psychology" is not popular among those who do research on negative topics. (They feel labeled as "negative psychologists"?)

• Positive psychology is an invitation to do more research on the most positive topics (with gliding transition to the moderately positive topics), even if it is goes at the expense of research on negative topics (which we know more than enough about).
Back to the institutions -

- Critique of institutions have been a favored topic through the ages. F. ex. Rousseau, Freud, many fiction writers, feminist activists etc. The institutions are repressive, lack social justice etc.

- Many works to improve the institutions and create the good society. Some have written utopias.
Rousseau and Freud

- Man is naturally good, and it is through the social institutions alone that men become bad (Rousseau, 1749/1750).
- Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains (Rousseau, 1762).
- Freud (1930) said that the social pressure from culture and institutions make us unhappy and neurotic and lead to transferred aggression. (But this social control also give us safety.)
Social justice

Social justice is a property of the institutions (Rawls 1972).

1. Distributional justice.
2. Procedural justice.
3. Interactional justice.
4. Retributive justice.
Common topics

- Many social psychological topics are common to, or get across all institutions, e.g.: social contact and social support, roles, communication, groups, conflicts and conflict resolution, leadership, socialization, attitudes, social change

- We get different examples by referring to the various institutions.
Functions, conflicts, roles

• **Functions:** Aims, purposes, need satisfactions,

• **Conflicts:** Part A perceive that Part B do something which are contrary to the interests of Part A.

• **Roles:** Behavior which is expected of holders of specific positions in social structure and institutions. (Roles have connections to the functions. Role conflicts are not infrequent.)
Family

• **Functions:** Take care of children – give them economic and emotional safety and help them become integrated into society.

• **Conflicts:** Lack of equality, generation contradictions, child custody, inheritance,

• **Positions and roles:** spouse, mother, father, son, daughter, grand parents, aunt, uncle, cousins etc.
School, education

• **Functions:** Transmit culture, prepare for work roles, assess and select competent individuals.

• **Conflicts:** The higher classes have been favored, especially with respect to higher education.

• **Positions and roles:** Rector, teacher, student,
The school in psychiatric perspective

- Einar Kringlen (2005, s. 540):
  - Direct stressful, ruthless pursuit of the best characters, losers, frequent change of teachers, numerous substitutes, mammoth schools where the personal relationship between teacher and student is absent, alienation in large universities.
  - Learning disabilities, disruptive behavior, hyperactivity, shyness, withdrawal, ....
Work and economics

• **Functions:** Production and distribution of consumer goods and services among the members of society.

• **Conflicts:** Capital owners and workers (class struggle), conflicts within and between groups in organizations, wage differences, competition for customers,

• **Positions and roles:** CEO, head of department, various work roles (job descriptions)
Lyckan den bor ej i oxar eller kor, och den kan heller inte köpas för pengar. Men min kärlek gör dig rik, …. 

(Evert Taube: Fritiof och Carmencita, 1936.)

/Happiness is not in bulls or cows, nor can it be bought with money. But my love make you rich, …./
Income and well-being

• Much studied. Both nations and individuals as sample units.

• Income increase contribute little to increased well-being. Explanation: We expect income increase (level of aspiration); income increase in accordance with expected increase have no or little effect on well-being.
Politics and government

• **Functions:** Give laws, solve conflicts in society, protect society against external (and internal) threats.

• **Conflicts:** Conflict and competition within parties about positions; political parties represent interest groups in conflict with each other, conflicts between nations about territories, ocean resources, and more,

• **Positions and roles:** Roles in governmental bodies and within parties.
Religion

• **Functions**: Support existing social structure, socialization of children, give relief in difficult life situations.

• **Conflicts**: Opinions about hell, female priests, free abortion, homosexuality, and more. Church–state conflicts.

• **Positions and roles**: bishop, priest, verger, parish clerk, chairman of parish council,
Connections

- Politics concerning work, education, families.
- Work in relation to school and family.
- Relationship between school and family.
Physical environment

Institutions also have physical environments:
The home and its surroundings.
Physical environments in schools.
Work environment, physical context of jobs, working hours.
Religious buildings and architecture.
COMMUNITITES (1)

• **Places of residence** which are geographically bounded. Types: rural communities, suburbs, urban communities. Open systems.

• **Nature, and areas** for housing, industry, trade, recreation etc.

• **History:** Some communities have a long history as place of residence, while others (some suburbs) have a short history.
Communities (2)

- **Planning** of use of areas. (May easily become a conflict theme.)
- **Production of art and entertainment.** Contribute positively to quality of life. Beautiful homes, decorative arts, handicraft, textile art, paintings, song and music, public feasts, varieties, dance and sport.
Communities (3)

- Most social contact among those who live close together. Like a feather flock together. Helpfulness among relatives and others.
- Associations, clubs, groups.
- Social control. "Bygdedyret"/Jante law (Tor Jonsson).
- Communities as environments for growing up. Socialization. Identity. Learn attitudes.
- Social change.
Communities (4)

- Conflicts.
- Migration and emigration; short distance and long distance.
- Social structure. Various social categories.
- Community culture.
- Institutions and various services.
Positive community

• Providing diverse, interesting and stimulating experiences.
• People are free to be themselves.
• One feels accepted as a significant member.
• Give possibility for optimal functioning.
Methods

• Research methods in the study of social institutions and communities are adaptations of observation and interview, experiments, survey research, public statistics, historical sources, life histories and comparison of institutions in various societies.

• Research methods in positive psychology are usually measurement of variables by means of indexes and computation of correlations among them. (Typical for applied psychology in general.)
Further research (1)

- More research on how positive experiences and emotions in social contexts may be promoted, in various demographic categories, etc.
- Use of positive experiences and emotions as independent variables for personal growth and development, coping, resilience, mental health, good behavior (citizenship), physical health, creativity, performances etc.
- Samples of disadvantaged persons.
- Consider the possibility of including objective data.
Further research (2)

- Effects of practical interventions may be studied by considering the interventions as experiments.
- Longitudinal (prospective) designs, to find duration of effects.
- Improvement of measurement of variables and statistical analyzes.
- Generate new theory based on new empirical results.
Applied social positive psychology (1)

Applied social positive psychology may give input to change/improvement of institutions and communities, and philosophy of life and well-being for everybody.

Examples:

Residential surveys on satisfaction and preferences provide feedback and correctives to planners.
Applied social positive psychology (2)

• Teaching/dissemination of positive psychology to various audiences: coaches, advisors, students, teachers, therapists, employers,

• Tests on "how are you", and various exercises that makes one come to feel better and flourish.

• Techniques for learning social skills.
Literature


Literature (3)


Summary. Conclusions on social causes of well-being (1)

- Social relations and networks are important (in that they give social support).
- Married people are happier than the widowed, divorced, or separated.
- Education adds slightly to well-being.
- Job prestige and relatively good economy add slightly to well-being.
Summary. Conclusions on social causes of well-being (2)

- Political democracy, peace, not ethnical conflicts, may be important.
- Religious people tend to report greater happiness than nonreligious people.
- Communities should provide diverse, interesting and stimulating experiences, let people be free to be themselves, accept members as significant members, and give possibility for optimal functioning.
Thank You for Your Attention