

Lay Conceptions of Well-Being Among Undergraduate Students from the United States and South Korea: Culture-Level Differences and Correlates

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Abstract The current research provides a descriptive and comparative assessment of lay conceptions of well-being in undergraduate student samples from South Korea and the United States. The objectives of the current research were (1) to examine potential cross-cultural variability in the degree to which the experience of pleasure, avoidance of negative experience, self-development, and contribution are emphasized in the lay conceptions of well-being espoused by undergraduate students in South Korea and the United States, and (2) to investigate potential cross-cultural variability in associations between each of the above dimensions and multiple indicators of experienced well-being. To address these objectives, samples were drawn from universities in the United States and South Korea, and self-report instruments measuring the constructs of interest were administered. Results indicated that the South Korean sample emphasized the experience of pleasure and avoidance of negative experience to a greater degree than the United States sample, whereas the United States sample emphasized contribution to others to a greater degree than the South Korean sample. Despite these differences, associations between lay conception of well-being dimensions and experienced well-being were largely similar across cultural groups.

Keywords Culture · Lay conceptions · Well-being · Happiness · Hedonics · Eudaimonia

1 Introduction

People hold a multitude of fundamental beliefs about human nature, the physical world, and their social environments that collectively form a worldview (Koltko-Rivera 2004). By

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providing a relatively stable cognitive framework for the interpretation of everyday experience, these beliefs exert a pervasive impact on cognitive processing, behavior, and psychosocial functioning. Of these fundamental beliefs, beliefs about the nature and experience of well-being, referred to here as conceptions of well-being, would seem to be particularly influential, and previous research suggests that how one conceptualizes well-being may impact positive psychological functioning (e.g., McMahan and Estes 2011a; McMahan et al. 2012; Wong et al. 2011). A limitation of previous research on lay conceptions of well-being is that it has been conducted primarily within Western cultures. Culture is a powerful authority and source for beliefs about happiness and well-being (Oishi 2010; Uchida et al. 2004), and the nature of what it means to be well or experience well-being is suggested to be culture-specific (Shweder 1998). Findings generated from research examining lay conceptions of well-being in Western cultures are thus unlikely to generalize to non-Western cultural contexts. To address this limitation in previous research, the current research provides a descriptive and comparative assessment of lay conceptions of well-being in undergraduate students from South Korea and United States.

2 Defining Lay Conceptions of Well-Being

Lay conceptions of well-being are stable multidimensional cognitive representations of the nature and experience of well-being that can be described generally by the degree to which hedonic (i.e., pleasure-focused) and eudaimonic (i.e., virtue- and meaning-focused) dimensions are emphasized (McMahan et al. 2012). Although numerous independent studies have identified many potential components of this construct (see Lu and Gilmour 2004; Pflug 2009), recent research using factor analytic approaches has identified four primary and theoretically-meaningful dimensions of lay conceptions of well-being: (1) the experience of pleasure, (2) avoidance of negative experience, (3) self-development, and (4) contribution (McMahan and Estes 2011a). The experience of pleasure and avoidance of negative experience represent hedonic aspects of well-being, whereas self-development and contribution represent eudaimonic aspects of well-being. Across several studies, findings support the validity of this model of lay conceptions of well-being (McMahan and Estes 2011a, 2012). However, the model was informed primarily by Western intellectual traditions, and empirical research supporting the validity of this model has been conducted solely within the United States. In result, the degree to which the experience of pleasure, avoidance of negative experience, self-development, and contribution are indicative of well-being within non-Western cultural contexts is questionable.

3 Culture and Conceptions of Well-Being

Individuals in all cultures are likely to value and thus attempt to achieve a state of well-being. However, an important question concerns whether well-being holds the same meaning to individuals within different cultures. Although previous research on conceptions of well-being has been conducted primarily within Western cultures, the above-listed components of lay conceptions of well-being refer to general hedonic states (e.g., the experience of pleasure) and behaviors (e.g., self-development) that are recognized in most, if not all, cultures. In particular, many East Asian intellectual traditions similarly identify the above components as indicative of well-being and living “the good life”. For example, Confucian traditions explicitly emphasize the importance of self-cultivation, humanity, and

duty to others (Yao 2000), suggesting that self-development and contribution are integral to well-being. In addition, many Buddhist traditions incorporate concepts related to self-cultivation, generosity, and positive emotion (Lopez 2002), suggesting that self-development, contribution, and the experience of pleasure are integral to well-being. Indeed, a central tenet of Buddhism is that nirvana is reached through the cessation of dukkha (a term roughly translated as suffering, pain, or dissatisfaction), suggesting that a lack of negative or painful experiences may be essential to and indicative of optimal human functioning within many East Asian cultures.

Eastern and Western conceptions of well-being thus likely share many of the same characteristics. However, East Asian and North American cultures differ in several important respects, and these differences may influence the degree to which certain factors are believed to constitute well-being (see Ng et al. 2003). Previous empirical research seemingly supports this notion and suggests cultural variation in lay conceptions of well-being (e.g., Lu and Gilmour 2004; Pflug 2009). This research is limited, however, and has primarily used qualitative research strategies that preclude quantification and statistical comparisons of conceptions of well-being across different cultural contexts. An additional problem with this methodological approach is that it has contributed to an excess of identified conception of well-being dimensions and there is little overlap in the dimensions measured across independent studies. In result, this lack of consistency obviates the identification of common themes, findings, and conclusions regarding cultural differences in conceptions of well-being. To address these issues, the primary objective of the current research was to examine cultural variability in the degree to which the experience of pleasure, avoidance of negative experience, self-development, and contribution are emphasized as indicative of well-being in samples from South Korea and the United States. The current research thus represents the first empirical effort to quantitatively investigate potential cross-cultural variation in the above conception dimensions across East Asian and North American cultures.

4 Conceptions of Well-Being and Experienced Well-Being

Individual conceptions of well-being function much like a lay theory (see Hong et al. 2001), are developed through experience within a given sociocultural environment, and are used to interpret events and conditions within that environment as relevant to well-being. In result, conceptions of well-being are predicted to exert a pervasive impact on cognition, behavior, and psychosocial functioning (McMahan et al. 2012; Ryan and Deci 2001). Empirical research is consistent with this prediction and indicates that conception dimensions are associated with multiple indicators of experienced well-being (e.g., McMahan and Estes 2011a; Wong et al. 2011). However, previous research has hitherto focused on associations between conceptions of well-being and positive psychological functioning in samples from a single culture or nation, typically the United States, and no existing research has addressed cross-cultural variation in associations between lay conceptions of well-being and experienced well-being.

Eudaimonic theoretical approaches posit that eudaimonic behavior satisfies universal psychological needs (e.g., Ryan and Deci 2001) and is by definition beneficial for psychosocial functioning. Accordingly, emphasizing self-development and contribution as indicative of well-being should be positively associated with experienced well-being regardless of the surrounding cultural context. Existing theory and research is somewhat equivocal concerning associations between hedonic approaches and experienced well-

being, with some research indicating positive associations (e.g., Peterson et al. 2005), other research indicating no association (e.g., McMahan and Estes 2011b), and yet other research indicating negative associations (Mauss et al. 2011). It is thus not clear whether emphasizing the experience of pleasure or avoidance of negative experience may be more or less beneficial within different cultural contexts. Given a lack of previous research addressing this topic, an additional objective of the current research was to examine potential cross-cultural variation in associations between lay conceptions of well-being and experienced well-being across South Korean and United States samples.

5 Overview of the Current Research

The current research examined lay conceptions of well-being in undergraduate student samples from South Korea and the United States. This study was designed to be exploratory and descriptive in nature and was guided by two general research questions based on the above-mentioned objectives of the current research. Our primary research questions were as follows:

1. Are there culture-level differences in the degree to which undergraduate students from the United States and South Korea emphasize the (a) experience of pleasure, (b) avoidance of negative experience, (c) self-development, and (d) contribution in their conceptions of well-being?
2. Are there culture-level differences in the degree to which lay conception of well-being dimensions are associated with indicators of experienced well-being in samples from South Korea and the United States?

To address these research questions, self-report instruments measuring conceptions of well-being and multiple facets of experienced well-being (e.g., life satisfaction, positive affect, meaning in life) were administered to samples of undergraduate students from each nation.

We first assessed the measurement invariance of a quantitative self-report instrument of lay conceptions of well-being across South Korean and United States samples using multigroup confirmatory factor analysis to insure that scores on this instrument could be meaningfully compared across samples. Second, culture-level differences in the degree to which the experience of pleasure, avoidance of negative experience, self-development, and contribution to others are emphasized in lay conceptions of well-being were then addressed by comparing responses to this instrument across South Korean and United States samples using latent mean analyses. Finally, hierarchical linear regression analyses were used to address whether each of the above conception of well-being dimensions were differentially associated with indicators of self-reported well-being across South Korean and United States samples. Experienced well-being was operationalized using a number of different outcome measures to tap several aspects of this construct. This was done for two reasons. First, well-being is a multifaceted construct (Deci and Ryan 2008; Ryff and Singer 2008) and is not likely captured by a single instrument measuring only one aspect of positive psychological functioning. Second, the experience of well-being may be different for individuals in different cultural contexts (Ng et al. 2003; Ryff 1989), and measuring only a few aspects of well-being may provide incomplete or misleading information regarding differences and similarities in the experience of well-being among individuals from South Korea and the United States.

Given that research examining cross-cultural variation in lay conceptions of well-being is in its infancy, we chose to use undergraduate student samples in this initial research for convenience purposes. However, there exists additional theoretical rationale for using student samples composed of late adolescents and young adults in the current research. Specifically, a large body of research suggests that late adolescence and early adulthood are particularly important developmental periods for the formation of worldview beliefs and values (Erikson 1968; Inglehart 1997, 2008; Rokeach 1968), and these constructs seem to be relatively more sensitive to environmental inputs during late adolescence and early adulthood when compared to later developmental periods (Bardi and Schwartz 1996; Daniel et al. 2013). In result, adolescents' and young adults' fundamental beliefs and values tend to be heavily influenced by current sociocultural and economic conditions (see Inglehart 2008), and any culture-related variability in lay conceptions of well-being found in the current study can thus potentially be explained with reference to currently existing sociocultural and economic differences between the United States and South Korea.

6 Method

6.1 Participants

The United States participants were 179 students sampled from the undergraduate population of a medium-sized university in the western United States (115 female, $M_{\text{age}} = 19.56$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.67$).¹ This group of participants was remunerated with partial course credit. The South Korean participants were 189 students sampled from the undergraduate population of a large university in Seoul, South Korea (112 female). All South Korean participants were college-aged (i.e., 18–23). Due to an oversight during the data collection process, age of individual participants was not collected. This group of participants was remunerated with \$5 USD.

6.2 Materials and Procedure

All participants completed a single multi-section questionnaire individually. Participants could respond to the questionnaire at their own pace. Included in the questionnaire was a brief demographics survey, a self-report measure of individual conceptions of well-being, and multiple indices of experienced well-being.

6.2.1 Conceptions of Well-Being

Conceptions of well-being were measured using the Beliefs about Well-Being Scale (BWBS; McMahan and Estes 2011a). The BWBS is a 16-item instrument that asks participants to rate the degree to which (1) the experience of pleasure (e.g., 'A great amount of pleasure'), (2) avoidance of negative experience (e.g., 'Not experiencing negative emotions'), (3) self-development (e.g., 'The identification and cultivation of one's strengths'), and (4) contribution (e.g., 'Making the world a better place') are a necessary component of

¹ Seven participants were excluded from the final United States sample because they were exchange students and not from the United States. The sample information reported in this section describes the sample following this exclusion. All participants in the South Korean sample were of South Korean nationality.

well-being. Responses are recorded using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* through 7 = *strongly agree*). To adapt this measure for use with Korean populations, translation and back-translation procedures (see Brislin 1970) were used to insure a Korean translation that is consistent with existing English versions of the BWBS. This instrument has previously shown evidence of adequate reliability and validity (see McMahan and Estes 2011a).²

6.2.2 Self-reported Well-Being

The first self-report measure of experienced well-being was the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al. 1985), a 5-item instrument measuring participants' cognitive assessments of general satisfaction with life (e.g., 'The conditions of my life are excellent'). Participants respond on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* through 7 = *strongly agree*), where higher scores reflect greater satisfaction with life. This measure has previously demonstrated excellent psychometric properties (see Diener et al. 1999; Lucas et al. 2003).

The Positive and Negative Affective Schedule (Watson et al. 1988) was used to measure the affective component of well-being. This 20-item scale asks participants to report the degree to which they are experiencing both positive (e.g., interested, proud, alert) and negative (e.g., disinterested, upset, irritable) emotions on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *very slightly or not at all* through 5 = *extremely*), with higher scores reflecting greater emotional experience. This is one of the most widely used measures of positive and negative affect and has previously demonstrated strong evidence of validity (Crawford and Henry 2004; Lucas et al. 2003).

The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999) was used to measure participants' level of happiness. This 4-item scale involves a global, subjective assessment of whether or not one believes they are a happy or unhappy person. Two items measure participants' relative level of happiness in comparison to their peers. The other two items measure participant's relative level of happiness in comparison to prototypically happy and unhappy individuals. Participants respond on a 7-point Likert-type scale, where higher scores reflect higher subjective ratings of happiness. This scale has also been shown to exhibit good psychometric properties (see Lyubomirsky 2001; Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999).

The Subjective Vitality Scale (SVS; Ryan and Frederick 1997) is a 7-item measure of mental and physical vitality, aliveness, and vigor (e.g., 'I nearly always feel awake and alert'). Participants respond on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Not at all* through 7 = *Very true*), where higher scores indicate greater feelings of vitality. This scale has also been found to display good psychometric properties (see Ryan and Frederick 1997).

The Meaning in Life Questionnaire-Presence Subscale (MLQ-P; Steger et al. 2006) is a 5-item face-valid instrument measuring participants' appraisals that life is purposeful and meaningful (e.g., 'I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful'). Participants respond on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *absolutely untrue* through 7 = *absolutely true*), where higher scores reflect greater presence of meaning in life. The psychometric properties of this scale have been shown to be acceptable (see Steger et al. 2006).

² The psychometric properties of the Korean version of the BWBS were examined in a large South Korean sample during a pilot study conducted prior to the current investigation. The results of this pilot study indicated that the Korean BWBS displayed acceptable structural validity, internal consistency, and predictive validity. This data is available upon request.

7 Results

Descriptive statistics for all variables measured in the current research are presented in Table 1.

7.1 Measurement Invariance

Before addressing the primary research questions of the current study, multigroup confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to establish measurement invariance of the BWBS in the United States and South Korean samples. Model fit was assessed using the Chi square statistic, the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), the incremental fit index (IFI), and the comparative fit index (CFI). An adequate fit to the proposed model is indicated by a nonsignificant Chi square, values less than .08 for the RMSEA, and values greater than .90 for the TLI, IFI, and CFI (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1993). Measurement invariance is demonstrated by achieving an acceptable model fit in models that sequentially constrain more parameters. Measurement invariance is further demonstrated by a change in the CFI of .01 or less across successive models (Cheung and Rensvold 2002). To insure that latent factor means could be meaningfully compared between groups in subsequent analyses, criteria for strong factorial invariance were used (Sass 2011). Accordingly, the configural invariance of the predicted four-factor oblique model was first addressed by estimating the same model in both groups simultaneously without any parameter constraints. Second, the metric invariance of the BWBS was addressed by estimating the same model with unstandardized factor loadings constrained to be equal across groups. Finally, the scalar invariance of the BWBS was addressed by estimating the model with unstandardized intercepts constrained across groups.

Table 2 reports the fit indices for the three tested models. For each model, the Chi square statistic indicated a lack of fit. However, the Chi square statistic is sensitive to

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and internal consistency of BWBS subscales and each well-being indicator in United States ($n = 179$) and South Korean ($n = 189$) samples

Measure	United States			South Korea		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
1. BWBS-EP	5.23	1.05	.85	5.84	.67	.74
2. BWBS-AN	3.82	1.19	.80	4.55	1.44	.90
3. BWBS-SD	5.74	.88	.79	5.73	.83	.76
4. BWBS-CO	5.63	.89	.74	5.23	1.00	.88
5. SWLS	4.82	1.20	.86	4.23	1.04	.85
6. PA	5.17	.94	.82	4.13	.99	.85
7. NA	3.52	1.01	.83	3.28	1.07	.86
8. SHS	5.12	1.15	.86	4.88	1.09	.87
9. SVS	4.89	.97	.84	4.49	.98	.84
10. MLQ-P	5.06	1.30	.92	4.29	1.17	.89

BWBS-EP = BWBS experience of pleasure subscale. BWBS-AN = BWBS avoidance of negative experience subscale. BWBS-SD = BWBS self-development subscale. BWBS-CO = BWBS contribution subscale. SWLS = life satisfaction. PA = positive affect. NA = negative affect. SHS = happiness. SVS = vitality. MLQ-P = meaning in life

sample size and likely to overestimate lack of fit in larger samples (Bollen 1989). The configural model (Model A) was a good fit to the data, as indicated by the RMSEA, TLI, IFI, and CFI. The invariance of the BWBS was then tested across successively constrained models (Models B and C). In general, all models fit well, and there were no significant deteriorations in fit (i.e., the CFI did not decrease by more than .01 in successive models). The configural model with standardized parameter estimates is displayed in Fig. 1. The BWBS thus met the criteria for strong factorial invariance across United States and South Korean samples. Accordingly, any observed group-level latent mean differences using the BWBS can be attributed to actual differences in the degree to which participants from the United States and South Korea conceptualize well-being.

7.2 Latent Mean Differences

Given support for the measurement invariance of the BWBS across the United States and South Korean samples, we then turned to the first of our primary research questions by respecifying the multigroup model to conduct latent mean analyses addressing whether latent factor means on the experience of pleasure, avoidance of negative experience, self-development, and contribution subscales of the BWBS differed between the two samples. In latent mean analysis, the means of a latent variable are not directly estimated. Rather, the difference between means of a latent variable across groups is estimated by fixing mean scores and standard errors to 0 in the reference group while freely estimating the mean scores for the latent factor in the focus group (Hancock 1997). In the current study, the United States sample served as the reference group, and the latent factor means for this group were fixed at 0. Results from this set of analyses thus focus on the degree to which scores in the South Korean sample (i.e., the focus group) differ from that in the United States sample (i.e., the reference group). Significant latent mean differences are indicated by the corresponding z value, with values greater than 1.96 being significant at $p < .05$. Using the guidelines provided by Hancock (2001), effect sizes (d) for latent mean differences were also calculated. The magnitude of these effect sizes can be interpreted as similar to that of Cohen's d (i.e., $<.50$ = small, $>.50$ = moderate, $>.80$ = large).

The results of these analyses are presented in Table 3. As shown, scores on the experience of pleasure and avoidance of negative experience subscales were higher in the South Korean sample when compared to the United States sample. Scores on the self-development subscale were not significantly different across groups. Finally, scores on the

Table 2 Fit indices from multigroup confirmatory factor analysis of the BWBS in United States ($n = 179$) and South Korean ($n = 189$) samples

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	TLI	IFI	CFI	ΔCFI
A	348.62***	196	1.78	.05	.92	.94	.94	–
B	366.19***	208	1.76	.05	.92	.94	.94	.00
C	412.11***	224	1.84	.05	.90	.93	.93	.01

Model A = unconstrained simultaneous modeling of BWBS structure. Model B = same model as A with factor loadings fixed across samples. Model C = same model as B with measurement intercepts fixed across samples

RMSEA root mean square error of approximation, TLI Tucker-Lewis index, IFI incremental fit index, CFI comparative fit index, ΔCFI change in comparative fit index

*** $p < .001$

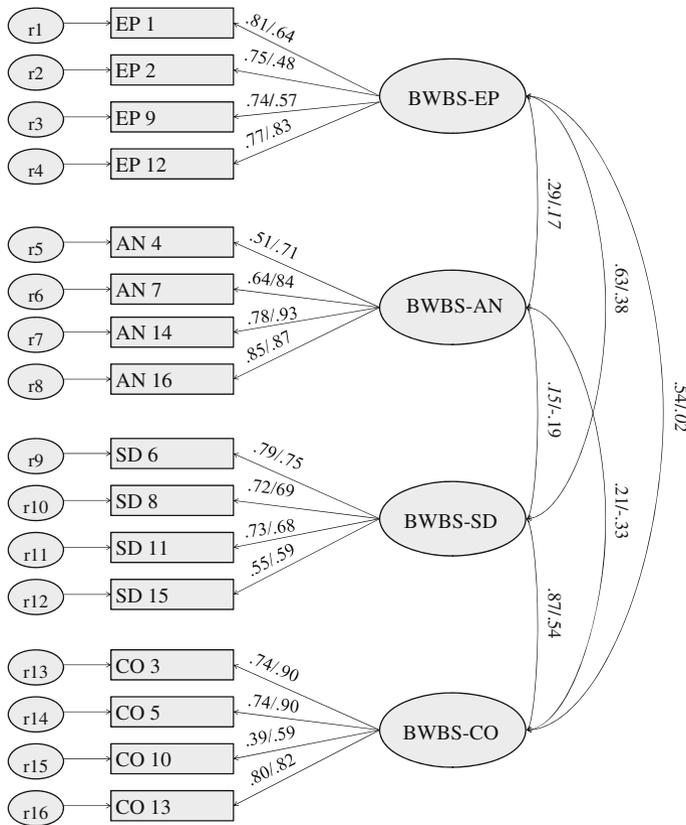


Fig. 1 The measurement model of the BWBS in United States ($n = 179$) and South Korean ($n = 189$) samples with standardized parameter estimates resulting from configural invariance. BWBS-EP = BWBS experience of pleasure subscale. BWBS-AN = BWBS avoidance of negative experience subscale. BWBS-SD = BWBS self-development subscale. BWBS-CO = BWBS contribution subscale. The first coefficient represents the United States sample, and the second coefficient represents the South Korean sample. Nonsignificant paths are in italics

contribution subscale were lower in the South Korean sample when compared to the United States sample. The above-listed effects were found to be moderate to large in magnitude. In addition, it is not likely that these effects are due to a culture-related response bias, given the differing effect directions for the experience of pleasure and avoidance of negative experience dimensions versus the contribution dimension. These findings thus indicate substantial cross-cultural variation in lay conceptions of well-being in South Korea and the United States.

7.3 Associations Between Lay Conceptions of Well-Being and Experienced Well-Being

The second research question guiding the current investigation concerned whether associations between conception of well-being dimensions and experienced well-being differ between South Korean and United States samples. To address this question, we first

Table 3 Latent mean differences in BWBS subscales for United States ($n = 179$) and South Korean ($n = 189$) samples

Factor	United States	South Korea	z	d
BWBS-EP	.00 (.00)	.59 (.09)	6.42***	1.02
BWBS-AN	.00 (.00)	.62 (.12)	5.18***	.59
BWBS-SD	.00 (.00)	-.06 (.10)	-.68	-
BWBS-CO	.00 (.00)	-.47 (.10)	-4.52***	.57

BWBS-EP = BWBS experience of pleasure subscale. BWBS-AN = BWBS avoidance of negative experience subscale. BWBS-SD = BWBS self-development subscale. BWBS-CO = BWBS contribution subscale. Values in parentheses are standard errors. Positive z values indicate higher South Korean scores

*** $p < .001$

calculated bivariate correlations between each BWBS subscale and measure of well-being within South Korean and United States samples separately (see Table 4). Interestingly, associations between each of BWBS subscales were noticeably different across the samples. However, the pattern of correlations between the BWBS subscales and each measure of well-being was largely similar among both samples, suggesting that conception of well-being dimensions may be similarly related to experienced well-being in South Korea and the United States.

To more directly examine whether associations between conception of well-being dimensions and experienced well-being differed between cultural groups, several hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted. Separate models were specified for each of the BWBS subscales, and separate analyses were conducted for each measure of well-being. In all models, cultural group (coded: United State = 1, South Korea = 2) and BWBS subscale score were the predictor variables of interest, and a product term representing the interaction of cultural group and BWBS subscale score was entered in the final step. All noncategorical variables were standardized to insure normality (see Aiken and West 1991). The presence of a significant interaction between cultural group and BWBS subscale score on experienced well-being addresses the main objective of this set of analyses by indicating conception well-being dimensions to be differentially associated with experienced well-being in United States and South Korean samples.

The results of this series of analyses are displayed in Table 5. As shown, cultural group was negatively associated with each measure of well-being, indicating generally lower well-being scores in the South Korean sample when compared to the United States sample. The experience of pleasure subscale of the BWBS was positively associated with life satisfaction, positive affect, happiness, and vitality, and negatively associated with negative affect. No significant interactions of cultural group and the experience of pleasure subscale were observed, indicating that associations between this subscale and each measure of well-being were similar for both cultural groups. Avoidance of negative experience was largely unrelated to each measure of well-being. However, a significant interaction of cultural group and avoidance of negative experience on vitality was found. Simple slopes analyses indicated a nonsignificant association between avoidance of negative experience and vitality in the United States sample ($\beta = .07$, $SE = .08$, $t = .77$, $p = .44$), but a significant negative association was found in the South Korean sample ($\beta = -.15$, $SE = .07$, $t = -2.20$, $p = .03$). The self-development subscale of the BWBS was positively associated with life satisfaction, positive affect, happiness, vitality, and meaning in life. No significant interactions of cultural group and self-development were

Table 4 Bivariate correlations among BWBS subscales and well-being indices for United States (n = 179) and South Korean (n = 189) samples

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>United States</i>										
1. BWBS-EP	1									
2. BWBS-AN	.23**	1								
3. BWBS-SD	.51***	.12	1							
4. BWBS-CO	.44***	.13	.70***	1						
5. SWLS	.20**	-.04	.26***	.26***	1					
6. PA	.34***	-.01	.29***	.25**	.48***	1				
7. NA	-.09	-.04	-.16*	-.17*	-.40***	-.35***	1			
8. SHS	.23**	.01	.19**	.21**	.37***	.63***	-.47***	1		
9. SVS	.33***	.06	.33***	.29***	.44***	.66***	-.38***	.73***	1	
10. MLQ-P	.09	-.03	.23**	.30***	.48***	.55***	-.45***	.54***	.56***	1
<i>South Korea</i>										
1. BWBS-EP	1									
2. BWBS-AN	.15*	1								
3. BWBS-SD	.24**	-.19*	1							
4. BWBS-CO	-.01	-.32***	.43***	1						
5. SWLS	.16*	-.12	.13	.18*	1					
6. PA	.19**	-.11	.23**	.22**	.45***	1				
7. NA	-.16*	-.10	-.03	-.17*	-.43***	-.28***	1			
8. SHS	.31***	-.16*	.17*	.26***	.69***	.53***	-.46***	1		
9. SVS	.23**	-.16*	.36***	.25**	.41***	.58***	-.33***	.60***	1	
10. MLQ-P	.09	-.12	.32***	.26**	.37***	.43***	-.23**	.41***	.52***	1

BWBS-EP = BWBS experience of pleasure subscale, BWBS-AN = BWBS avoidance of negative experience subscale, BWBS-SD = BWBS self-development subscale, BWBS-CO = BWBS contribution subscale, SWLS = life satisfaction, PA = positive affect, NA = negative affect, SHS = happiness, SVS = vitality, MLQ-P = meaning in life

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

observed, indicating that associations between this subscale and each measure of well-being were similar for both cultural groups. The contribution subscale of the BWBS was positively associated with life satisfaction, positive affect, happiness, vitality, and meaning in life, as well as negatively associated with negative affect. No significant interactions of cultural group and contribution were observed, again indicating that associations between this subscale and each measure of well-being were similar for both cultural groups. In general, associations between conception of well-being dimensions and experienced well-being were largely consistent across South Korean and United States samples.

8 Discussion

Numerous psychologists have suggested that culture exerts a pervasive impact on how individuals conceptualize well-being (Markus and Kitayama 1991, Kitayama and Markus 1994; Ng et al. 2003; Oishi 2010; Uchida et al. 2004), yet previous research addressing this topic is limited. The overarching aim of the current research was to address this limitation and to provide initial empirical evidence of cross-cultural variability in conceptions of well-being across East Asian and North American cultural contexts using samples of undergraduate students from South Korea and the United States. As addressed in detail below, several important findings emerged from this investigation.

8.1 Findings and Implications

The current research indicated substantial cross-cultural variation in lay conceptions of well-being across South Korean and United States samples. Specifically, the South Korean sample emphasized the experience of pleasure and avoidance of negative experience to a greater degree than the United States sample, suggesting that South Koreans have a relatively more hedonically-oriented conception of well-being. This finding is particularly interesting in light of recent research indicating lower positive affect and higher negative affect in South Korea when compared to the United States (e.g., Diener et al. 2010) and suggests that culture-level differences in hedonic components of lay conceptions of well-being do not necessarily mirror culture-level differences in hedonic indicators of experienced well-being. No significant differences were observed in the degree to which South Koreans and those from the United States emphasized self-development as indicative of well-being, suggesting that cultivation of personal strengths and development are important components of lay conceptions of well-being in both cultures. Lastly, the United States sample emphasized contribution as indicative of well-being to a greater degree than the South Korean sample. This finding may seem counter to intuition, given that South Korea is characterized as more collectivistic than the United States (Hofstede 2001). However, recent research indicates that contribution to community and society is a relatively low priority within South Korea (Park 2009), and South Koreans tend to engage in less volunteering and community service than individuals in the United States (OECD 2011).

Given the descriptive nature of the current investigation, the factors that may account for the above findings are as-of-yet unclear. Despite this, we offer two potential explanations of the observed differences in lay conceptions of well-being, while also stressing that these explanations are tentative and in need of empirical testing. First, the observed culture-level differences in lay conceptions of well-being may reflect differences in the degree to which individuals from South Korea and the United States endorse materialist

Table 5 Regression coefficients for cultural group, BWBS subscales, and well-being indices (n = 368)

Model	SWLS (β)	PA (β)	NA (β)	SHS (β)	SVS (β)	MLQ-P (β)
<i>All models</i>						
Step 1						
Culture (US vs. SK)	-.32*** R ² = .07***	-.47*** R ² = .22***	-.11* R ² = .01*	-.11* R ² = .01*	-.20*** R ² = .04***	-.30*** R ² = .09***
<i>Model A (BWBS-EP)</i>						
Step 2						
BWBS-EP	.19*** $\Delta R^2 = .03$ ***	.25*** $\Delta R^2 = .06$ ***	-.12* $\Delta R^2 = .01$ *	.27*** $\Delta R^2 = .06$ ***	.29*** $\Delta R^2 = .08$ ***	.09 $\Delta R^2 = .01$
Step 3						
Culture \times BWBS-EP	.02 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	-.02 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	-.21 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	.29 $\Delta R^2 = .01$	.04 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	.05 $\Delta R^2 = .00$
<i>Model B (BWBS-AN)</i>						
Step 2						
BWBS-AN	-.08 $\Delta R^2 = .01$	-.06 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	.04 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	-.08 $\Delta R^2 = .01$	-.07 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	-.08 $\Delta R^2 = .01$
Step 3						
Culture \times BWBS-AN	-.11 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	-.15 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	.22 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	-.25 $\Delta R^2 = .01$	-.36* $\Delta R^2 = .01$ *	-.11 $\Delta R^2 = .00$
<i>Model C (BWBS-SD)</i>						
Step 2						
BWBS-SD	.20*** $\Delta R^2 = .04$ ***	.23*** $\Delta R^2 = .05$ ***	-.10 $\Delta R^2 = .01$	.18*** $\Delta R^2 = .03$ ***	.34*** $\Delta R^2 = .12$ ***	.26*** $\Delta R^2 = .07$ ***
Step 3						
Culture \times BWBS-SD	-.23 $\Delta R^2 = .01$	-.03 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	.18 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	-.03 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	.08 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	.11 $\Delta R^2 = .00$

Table 5 continued

Model	SWLS (β)	PA (β)	NA (β)	SHS (β)	SVS (β)	MLQ-P (β)
<i>Model 1 (BWBS-CO)</i>						
Step 2						
BWBS-CO	.21*** $\Delta R^2 = .04***$	.21*** $\Delta R^2 = .04***$	-.17** $\Delta R^2 = .03**$	.24*** $\Delta R^2 = .06***$	.26*** $\Delta R^2 = .07***$	.27*** $\Delta R^2 = .07***$
Step 3						
Culture \times BWBS-CO	-.22 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	-.07 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	.02 $\Delta R^2 = .03$	.02 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	-.12 $\Delta R^2 = .00$	-.16 $\Delta R^2 = .00$

BWBS-EP = BWBS experience of pleasure subscale. BWBS-AN = BWBS avoidance of negative experience subscale. BWBS-SD = BWBS self-development subscale. BWBS-CO = BWBS contribution subscale. SWLS = life satisfaction. PA = positive affect. NA = negative affect. SHS = happiness. SVS = vitality. MLQ-P = meaning in life

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

versus post-materialist values. According to Inglehart (1977, 2008), materialist values that emphasize economic and physical security predominate in nations with a developing economy, such as South Korea (see also Park 2009). In contrast, post-materialist values that emphasize autonomy, self-expression, and general quality of life predominate in nations that have remained economically developed for prolonged periods of time, such as the United States. Greater endorsement of hedonic components of well-being among South Koreans may reflect the prioritization of materialist values within that nation because hedonic states (e.g., positive and negative emotions) often provide direct and salient information regarding one's level of security and safety (Keltner and Gross 1999). In addition, nation-level differences in materialist and post-materialist values may account for the relatively lower endorsement of contribution as indicative of well-being among South Korean participants, as one may be less likely to prioritize contributing to others' welfare when personal economic and physical security are of particular concern and highly valued. In the United States, where materialist values have become less common due to extended periods of relative economic security (Inglehart 2008), hedonic components of well-being may in result take on less importance while contribution takes on more importance.

Second, research concerning cultural differences in beliefs about the malleability of the external environment may also provide insight into the current study's findings. Regarding this research, individuals from European American cultures have been found to endorse beliefs stressing the malleability of the external social world (Su et al. 1999), whereas individuals from East Asian cultures are more likely to believe that the external social world, while dynamic and changing, is impervious to individual efforts to alter external conditions (Chiu et al. 1997). In result, outwardly-focused attempts to positively influence existing social realities (e.g., contribution) may be more indicative of well-being within European American populations because individuals from this group are more likely to believe that they can efficaciously change their environment. In contrast, inwardly-focused maintenance of optimal psychological states may be more indicative of well-being among East Asians who stress the inefficacy of individual attempts to alter immutable external conditions. The current findings are consistent with this interpretation. However, the current research did not directly measure beliefs about the malleability of the environment, nor their association with lay conceptions of well-being, and additional research will need to empirically investigate the validity of the above interpretation.

Another key finding of the current research was that associations between lay conception of well-being dimensions and experienced well-being were remarkably similar across the South Korean and United States samples, with the experience of pleasure, self-development, and contribution indicating positive associations with measures of experienced well-being and avoidance of negative experience being largely unrelated to well-being. Given these findings, it would thus seem that while cultures may differ in terms of the degree to which certain factors are considered indicative of well-being, the various cognitive and behavioral manifestations of conceptions of well-being may similarly influence actual positive psychological functioning across cultural contexts. However, an intriguing question concerns whether prevailing cultural views on the nature of well-being moderate the degree to which certain experiences influence self-reported well-being (see Oishi et al. 1999). For example, pleasurable experiences may be differentially more predictive of self-reported well-being within cultural contexts that emphasize pleasure as indicative of well-being (e.g., South Korea). Similarly, contributing to the welfare of others and society may more robustly predict self-reported well-being in cultures that emphasize contribution (e.g., the United States). Future research should address these possibilities.

Although not a primary focus of the current research, it is notable that associations between each of the BWBS subscales themselves were appreciably different across cultural groups despite the similarity in associations between these subscales and self-reported well-being. This suggests that relationships among conception of well-being dimensions may differ in South Korea and the United States. In particular, the experience of pleasure was more robustly associated with self-development and contribution in the United States sample. Additionally, avoidance of negative experience was positively associated, although not significantly, with self-development and contribution in the United States sample, whereas significant negative relationships among these subscales were observed in the South Korean sample. Taken together, these results provocatively suggest that South Koreans distinguish between hedonic and eudaimonic components of well-being to a greater degree than individuals from the United States. Findings such as these would thus seem to be of critical import to recent debates regarding the appropriateness of empirically and conceptually separating hedonic and eudaimonic facets of well-being in positive psychological research (e.g., Kashdan et al. 2008; Waterman 2008) by addressing the degree to which laypeople in different cultures make similar distinctions. A full explication of this topic is beyond the scope of the current research, however, and future research will need to address these issues.

8.2 Limitations and Future Directions

In general, the findings of the current investigation suggest substantial cross-cultural variability in lay conceptions of well-being, as well as notable cross-cultural similarity in associations between lay conceptions of well-being and experienced well-being. However, these findings should be interpreted with the following limitations in mind. Our samples consisted entirely of undergraduate students, and it would seem that the nature of what it means to be well would differ among younger and older adults both within cultures (e.g., McMahan and Estes 2012) and across cultures. As stated previously, worldview beliefs and values are particularly sensitive to external sociocultural conditions during late adolescence and early adulthood and are less sensitive to external conditions during later developmental periods (Bardi and Schwartz 1996; Daniel et al. 2013; Erikson 1968; Inglehart 1997; Rokeach 1968). Given a dynamic and ever-changing sociocultural landscape, intergenerational differences in fundamental beliefs and values are likely because younger generations are developing their worldview within current sociocultural conditions, while older generations' worldviews in large part reflect the sociocultural conditions present during their own adolescence and early adulthood (see Inglehart 2008; Norasakkunkit and Uchida 2012). An advantage of studying culture-related variability in adolescents' and young adults' worldviews is that culture-level differences, should they emerge, can potentially be explained with reference to existing sociocultural conditions. However, future research will need to investigate cross-generational differences in conceptions of well-being within many nations to develop a more comprehensive understanding of cultural variability in lay conceptions of well-being.

Participants' lay conceptions of well-being were measured using a single self-report survey that assesses only four dimensions of individuals' conceptions of well-being. A benefit of using this instrument is that it allows for the quantification and statistical comparison of this construct across groups, as was required for the current research. However, conceptions of well-being are complex and likely include several dimensions that are not assessed by this instrument. Accordingly, future research should attempt to measure conceptions of well-being using a diversity of methodological approaches that

may potentially allow for more comprehensive assessments of this construct. It should also be noted that this study was descriptive and correlational in nature, and conclusions regarding causal associations between conceptions of well-being and experienced well-being are tentative and need to be addressed in future research using experimental methods.

A high degree of cultural heterogeneity exists within East Asian and North American populations, and it is unlikely that the current findings generalize to cultural groups outside of those assessed in this study. Accordingly, additional research should examine lay conceptions of well-being among other cultural groups both within and outside of East Asian and North American populations. In a related vein, the current research focused on variability in lay conceptions of well-being at the cultural level, but examining intra-cultural variation in lay conceptions of well-being may provide insight into the specific factors that influence both the structure and function of lay conceptions of well-being in distinct cultures. Addressing these issues and the above-listed limitations will likely be a fruitful focus of future inquiry.

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