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Happiness Across Cultures: A Review of Subjective Well-Being in Asian Americans

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Abstract

This review aims to uncover how consistent the finding is that Asian Americans experience lower levels of subjective well-being than European Americans, and why these differences exist. Happiness is desired by many and increases in happiness have positive effects on health and well-being. Perceptions of happiness vary across cultures due to differences in values and cultural structures. Asian American subjective well-being is a particularly interesting area of study due to the finding that Asian Americans have the highest level of education and income compared to other ethnic groups in America, yet they tend to have lower levels of well-being. After totaling scores on the Satisfaction with Life Scale from 33 studies measuring Asian American, European American, and Asian populations, we found that Asian Americans score significantly lower on the Satisfaction with Life Scale than European Americans indicating lower subjective well-being. Asian American scores did not significantly differ from Asian scores on the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Differences in cultural values, acculturation, interpretations of positive and negative events, family dynamics, and discrimination are all contributors to why Asian Americans experience lower subjective well-being and these factors are discussed in depth. Implications, limitations, and future directions are also highlighted.

Happiness Across Cultures: A Review of Subjective Well-being in Asian Americans

Humans around the world yearn for happiness. The idea of pursuing happiness dates back to Aristotle, who believed that happiness was the central purpose and end goal of human life. Once basic survival needs are met, the goal of happiness can emerge. Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests that once physiological needs and safety needs are met, more complex psychological and self-fulfillment needs can be attained. This desire stems from the motivation to not only survive, but thrive (Diener, 2000). Happiness is often considered the final goal toward a good life and it involves not only the absences of negative emotions, but also the presence of positive emotions. Higher levels of happiness have many benefits, including increased longevity, better physical health, and greater levels of productivity and creativity (Diener & Chan, 2011). Since happiness is highly valued and beneficial to our health, understanding its complexities and contributors is crucial for psychological study.

Well-being researchers are especially interested in cultural differences in happiness. Culture greatly influences perceptions, emotions, and values. Because happiness is often viewed as an innate human desire, it is important to assess how cultural differences affect happiness outcomes. A consistent finding in the well-being literature is that Asian Americans score lower on reports of happiness than European Americans. This cultural difference is perplexing due to the consistent finding that a positive correlation exists between high levels of education and income and high levels of happiness (Gerdtham & Johannesson, 2001; Sakamoto, Chiu, Li, & Wang, 2016), and many studies indicate that Asian Americans have the highest level of education and income compared to other ethnic groups in America, yet they report the lowest levels of happiness (Wirtz, Chiu, Diener, & Oishi, 2009). What explains this contradiction? How consistent is the finding that Asian Americans experience the lowest levels of happiness and how large is this cultural difference?

The Scientific Study of Happiness

Happiness is an elusive concept that is desired by many, but measuring happiness, especially across cultures, proves challenging. A perfect measure of happiness does not exist as individuals will always interpret questions regarding happiness and definitions of happiness differently (McMahon, 2018). In fact, the word happiness can mean a lot of different things depending on cultural background. Therefore, researchers prefer to use the more precise term subjective well-being (SWB) which is a specific operationalization of happiness. SWB is defined as an individual's evaluation of their own life. It is comprised of three components - frequent positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and an overall cognitive judgement about one's life or life satisfaction. High levels of SWB are found in those who have many pleasant experiences and few unpleasant experiences, who tend to be engaged in interesting activities, and who ultimately have more positive emotions than negative emotions (Diener, 2000). Because individuals are the best judges of their own happiness, SWB typically relies on self-reports.

SWB and Culture

What is the point of studying the differences in SWB across cultures? Cultural values, traditions, and ideals inevitably influence well-being because they are an important part of many people's lives. Researchers are particularly interested in evaluating differences between collectivist and individualist cultures since these are the two main cultural and societal systems that we see in our world. When the study of SWB and culture first emerged, Diener, Diener, and Diener (1995) found that the degree of collectivism or individualism is a predictive factor of SWB differences across nations. Many Asian countries are collectivist while many Western countries are individualist. People in individualist cultures have an independent construal of the self, meaning they value autonomy and have goals that pertain to the benefit of the individual

(Markus & Kityama, 1991). They also value personal achievement and tend to feel shame when they are too dependent on others (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003). Happiness in individualist cultures is strongly correlated with self-esteem (Uchida & Oishi, 2016). People in collectivist cultures have an interdependent construal of the self (Markus & Kityama, 1991). They value goals that lead to group achievement and are taught to be dependent on others for the common good of the community (Diener et al., 2003). In collectivist cultures, higher levels of happiness are associated with adapting to social norms and fulfilling group obligations (Uchida & Oishi, 2016). Researchers wonder how the dynamics between these two types of cultures affect mean differences in SWB.

Studies often report that people from individualistic societies experience greater levels of SWB than those from collectivistic societies. In fact, according to the 2019 World Happiness Report by the Happiness Research Institute, the top 10 happiest countries are all individualist societies including Finland, Norway, and Denmark as the top three. There are certainly other factors that contribute to happiness differences between nations, such as economic and environmental conditions, but evaluating the effects of individualism and collectivism provides a crucial point of comparison.

Happiness is defined and achieved differently between the two types of cultures and specifically between European Americans and Asians. European Americans attribute happiness to personal effort whereas many Asian cultures attribute happiness to good luck and fortune (Uchida & Oishi, 2016). The difference in perceptions of happiness between individualist and collectivist cultures affects how positive and negative experiences are viewed. The relationship between positivity and negativity in collectivist cultures are complementary rather than opposing because of the belief that patterns of good luck and bad luck are in fluctuation

(Diener et al., 2016). European Americans believe positivity can be maintained through personal effort, but many Asian cultures believe that positivity is fleeting, and life is a natural cycle of good and bad. Asian cultures do not believe that circumstances are lasting, rather they recognize that people and situations are changeable (Ji, Nisbett, & Su, 2001).

The differences in values, definitions, and attributions of happiness between European Americans and Asian cultures most likely contribute to the observed differences in reports of SWB. Studying happiness cross-culturally allows researchers to uncover the driving forces behind positive emotion and learn how distinct cultural features influence well-being. Understanding these factors will help promote a positive human experience among people from all cultural backgrounds. It is certainly interesting to compare nations that consist of different kinds of societies and evaluate how the degree of collectivism or individualism influences well-being. However, the primary interest here is to gain an understanding of SWB differences between European Americans and Asian Americans – two populations within the same country who come from different cultural backgrounds.

Asian American SWB

Asian Americans are a particularly interesting ethnic group to compare to European Americans due to the findings that they have lower levels of SWB yet higher levels of income and education compared to other minorities in America. Are these findings consistent across studies and what contributes to this effect? One study found that cultural background is a large predictor of SWB regardless of whether the individual lives in a different country than their homeland (Rice & Steele, 2009). This indicates that Asian American SWB may be more like Asian SWB than European American SWB suggesting that one's ethnic culture may be the most influential.

Acculturation

Acculturation is a leading explanation for why we see cultural differences in SWB between Asian Americans and European Americans. Acculturation refers to the process of adopting aspects of another culture and incorporating them into one's own culture (Sakamoto et al., 2016). Many people who immigrate to the United States want to "fit in" with Americans, but they also do not want to lose their cultural identity. This process can be very challenging due to the stark differences between collectivistic and individualistic values. The distinction between foreign-born and U.S.-born Asian Americans or first and second-generation is especially important when considering how acculturation affects SWB.

Generations of Asian Americans born in the U.S. may struggle with their cultural identity because the values they are exposed to at home may contradict what they experience among peers. This is known as "acculturation discrepancy" (Sakamoto et al., 2016). One study found that Asian Americans who had an increased level of acculturation to American culture more strongly associated positive experiences with life satisfaction. This same study found that positive events contributed more to European Americans' evaluation of SWB while negative events contributed to Asian American evaluations of SWB (Choi & Chentsova-Dutton, 2017). This suggests that Western cultures tend to focus on positive events when evaluating life satisfaction while Eastern cultures tend to focus on the reduction of negative events (Wirtz et al., 2009). Achieving happiness may simply be prioritized to a greater extent for European Americans than it is for Asian cultures. Oishi and Diener (2003) found that European Americans were likely to choose a situation or task that increased their enjoyment because they had previously performed well on the task, while Asians were not likely to choose such situations or tasks based on how much they enjoyed the task previously**.** Personal happiness may be valued

more by European Americans because of the teachings of individualism whereas seeking personal happiness may be viewed as selfish to Asian Americans as a result of their collectivist values. Familial pressures and the inability to meet high expectations have also been found to reduce SWB in Asian Americans.

Studying cultural differences between populations in America is important because it gives recognition to the fact that although we live in the same country we come from vastly different backgrounds. Understanding the differences and similarities between Asians, Asian Americans, and European Americans will give us insight into how culture affects well-being and highlight the considerations that need to be taken when assessing well-being.

Purpose and Goals of this Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to systematically compare the SWB of Asian Americans to the SWB of European Americans and Asian-born Asians and then to summarize explanations for Asian American SWB. The goals are to find out the number of studies that report Asian American Satisfaction with Life Scale scores and determine if the finding that Asian Americans have lower SWB remains consistent when combining the results of multiple studies. In these studies, we see a wide variety of Asian American populations including Chinese Americans, Korean Americans, and Indian Americans which offers representation of multiple groups and cultures that reside within the broad spectrum of Asian Americans. Diving into these studies will not only allow us to see how scores of SWB differ between Asian Americans, European Americans, and Asians but also how researchers have applied theories and reasoning to their findings, giving us insight into why these differences exist.

Method

Measures

Measures of subjective well-being are used as a universal way of determining overall life satisfaction that can be standardized across cultures. Measuring SWB has limitations because it is, well, subjective. It is dependent on how the individual views their own well-being, without having any point of comparison. Despite its subjective nature, SWB is recognized as the best way to measure happiness, especially in a cross-cultural context. Researchers measure subjective well-being in a variety of ways. Assessments of SWB can measure happiness in a specific moment or measure happiness as an overall evaluation of one's life. Researchers are most interested in evaluating overall happiness because measures of SWB are generally concerned with long-term happiness.

Of the SWB evaluations that measure overall life satisfaction, one of the most popular is the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larson, & Griffin, 1985). The SWLS is a five-item scale that asks people to rate their overall life satisfaction. An example of an item is "in most ways my life is close to my ideal". The focus of this scale is on the cognitive component of well-being. Other studies make use of a single item or the subjective happiness scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) to measure cognitive well-being. Measuring emotional well-being involves considering positive and negative affect about one's immediate experience. An example of this is the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). PANAS asks participants to rate the degree to which they feel certain emotions. Some emotions are positive, and some are negative, for example "excited" and "ashamed". Another test, Experience Sampling Methodology (ESM), evaluates an individual's well-being in the moment by having participants report, at random intervals throughout the day, their current emotions and experiences. This method helps researchers determine how positive and negative events affect well-being. For the purpose of this review, only data from the Satisfaction with Life

Scale is evaluated because it is a common measure that addresses cognitive and long-term well-being.

Data Collection

The studies included in this literature review were drawn from the PsycInfo database. In the initial search the keywords “Asian American*” and “subjective well-being” OR “life satisfaction” OR “happiness” were used. Additional searches were done to include specific Asian American populations. These included "Indian American*" AND ("life satisfaction" or "happiness" or "subjective well-being"), "Korean American*" AND ("life satisfaction" or "happiness" or "subjective well-being"), "Chinese American*" AND ("life satisfaction" or "happiness" or "subjective well-being"), "Japanese American*" AND ("life satisfaction" or "happiness" or "subjective well-being"), "Vietnamese American*" AND ("life satisfaction" or "happiness" or "subjective well-being"). The total number of articles from the searches was 197. The primary interest here is positive well-being which is why depression and anxiety were not included as search terms.

The studies had to meet certain criteria to be included in the review. They had to include an Asian American population and report means and standard deviations for the SWLS. They also had to include a baseline measurement of SWB, rather than measuring SWB after an experimental manipulation. After removing articles that did not meet these criteria, 92 articles remained. Any duplicate studies from the searches were also removed leaving 72 studies. And finally, there were studies that we could not gain access to, leaving a total of 33 studies for the final calculation. If a study included a specific demographic population of Asian Americans, for example Asian American women, or elders, it was still included. The studies did not have to measure European American SWB to be included, but European American data are included in

the analysis for comparison. Similarly, the study did not have to measure Asian SWB, but these data are included as well. Studies that analyzed additional populations, for example African Americans, were included but these populations will not be discussed in the review. There were also not any time constraints on when the study had to be conducted and only peer reviewed and studies available in English were included. Means and standard deviations of the Satisfaction with Life Scale were drawn from each study and totaled for analysis. This was done for each population - Asian Americans, Asians, and European Americans.

Results

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of the total means and standard deviations from the Asian American, European American, and Asian populations from the 33 studies. A one-way ANOVA indicated a significant difference between the three comparison groups, $F(2, 52) = 6.20$, $MSE = 7.67$, $p = .004$. Further post hoc analysis using Tukey HSD showed a significant difference between Asian American SWLS scores ($M = 20.47$, $SD = 3.01$) and European American SWLS scores ($M = 23.61$, $SD = 2.37$). There was not a significant difference between Asian SWLS scores ($M = 21.16$, $SD = 1.25$) and either of the two other groups.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Satisfaction with Life Scale

Group	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Asian Americans	5378	20.47	3.01
European Americans	3358	23.61	2.37
Asians	196	21.16	1.25

Discussion

Asian Americans had the lowest mean SWLS score compared to European Americans and Asians, indicating the lowest level of SWB. Asian Americans had a significantly lower score than European Americans but did not show a significant difference in SWLS scores from Asian participants. There are many factors that may be predictive of lower SWB in Asian Americans compared to European Americans.

Cultural Values

Individualist and collectivist cultures vary in the amount of value and prioritization they place on different aspects of life. Benet-Martínez and Karakitapoğlu-Aygün (2003) examined the role of valued personality traits as a mediator for SWB. They identified that individualist cultures value agentic aspects of personality, including extraversion, openness, neuroticism, and conscientiousness, which contribute to greater self-esteem and more friend satisfaction. Collectivist cultures value more agreeable and relational aspects of personality, such as being accommodating, cooperative, and trusting, which primarily affect friend and family satisfaction. The distinction between these two expressions of personality traits contribute to higher levels of SWB for both groups that is manifested in different ways. Whereas European Americans express personality traits in line with individualistic values that increase their self-esteem, Asian Americans value collectivistic personality traits that increase positive relationships. The valued personality traits in each culture correspond with the valued outcome that leads to happiness – high self-esteem in individualism and positive relationships in collectivism. However, Asian Americans also value self-esteem to an extent, indicating that they have adopted American cultural norms while still holding onto collectivist values which could lead to a conflicting sense of belonging and thus lower SWB (Benet-Martínez & Karakitapoğlu-Aygün, 2003).

Not only are there differences in valued personality traits between individualist and collectivist cultures, but emotions are presented differently as well. One study found that European Americans are more inclined to express their own feelings (emotional expression), while Asians are more inclined to be sensitive to other people's feelings (emotional differentiation). Most notably, researchers found that Asian Americans benefit from both emotion expression and differentiation because they contribute to good interpersonal relationships. Again, they experience a combination of both individual and collective values (Kang, Shaver, Sue, Min, & Jing, 2003). The difference in interpretations of emotions between these two cultures may contribute to the difference in SWB between European Americans and Asian Americans, especially because Asian Americans may experience acculturative stress due to differences in expressing emotions with family and with peers.

Relationship dynamics vary across cultures as well. Maintaining strong interpersonal relationships is a predictor of high SWB in collectivist cultures (Kang et al., 2003). Purpose also largely derives from fulfilling familial responsibilities. This is demonstrated in a study by Kiang (2011) who found that Asian American youth are more likely to feel greater purpose and thus experience higher SWB if they have an active role in providing for their family. This finding was only consistent with first-generation Asian Americans, suggesting that second-generations may be more removed from traditional collectivist values and therefore place less emphasis on familial obligations. Other findings indicate that Korean immigrants who held onto independent values and felt control over their own life reported increased psychological well-being (Hyun, 2000). This suggests that immigrants who grasp onto American ideals of independence may experience greater SWB. Collectivist cultures also tend to devalue social support to avoid burdening friends and family which could explain why Korean immigrants valued independence

(Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008). It may be that this contradiction of wanting to fulfill one's role in the family, while also wanting to have independent control over one's own life and not seek social support, leads to conflict and challenge which may negatively affect well-being. This brings us back to the idea of acculturation.

Acculturation

Many studies show that level of acculturation significantly predicts reports of Asian American's SWB. Acculturation, in this context, refers to the extent that Asian Americans are incorporated into mainstream American culture. One study separated Asian American participants into three groups, all at varying levels of acculturation. One group primarily identified as Asian, another group identified as primarily Western, and the third group identified as bicultural, meaning they have a mix of both Asian and Western values. The bicultural group experienced greater psychological benefits because they had the ability to navigate between Asian and Western contexts. Lower levels of well-being in Asian identifying participants is most likely a result of the struggle to adjust to U.S. culture, while lower levels of well-being in Western identifying participants may stem from conflict between less acculturated family members (Baker, Soto, Perez, & Lee, 2012). This indicates that finding a maintainable balance between Asian and Western culture, rather than excluding either culture, may contribute to higher levels of well-being for Asian Americans, thus reducing the acculturation discrepancy. It also demonstrates why Asian Americans experience lower SWB compared to European Americans because most European Americans do not need to navigate two opposing cultures.

First-generation Asian American youth are especially vulnerable to acculturative stress. In a study comparing first and second generation Asian American adolescents, the first-generation participants experienced a stronger level of family stress as well as school and peer

stress. Foreign participants were also likely to experience stress caused by school (Kiang & Buchanan, 2014). First-generation and foreign-born Asian American youth may struggle to feel a sense of belonging in school due to cultural differences with their peers, which second generation Asian American youth may not be as prone to. The contradiction between the two cultures that first-generation and foreign-born Asian American youth must navigate can cause confusion which may contribute to decreased well-being (Bradley & Corwyn, 2004). In general, U.S.-born Asian Americans identify more biculturally and thus experience less psychological dysfunction due to the likelihood that they speak English fluently and they feel more comfortable fitting in with American culture (Ying, 1992).

Another population vulnerable to lower SWB due to acculturation is adult immigrants. Again, there is stress and conflict originating from the discrepancy between traditional values and mainstream American culture. The language barrier is a huge roadblock in one's ability to find a job, provide shelter, and adapt to a new environment (Napholz & Mo, 2010). The struggle to communicate with one's community also contributes to the reduced ability to feel a sense of home which can greatly inhibit positive emotion (Zhan, Wang, Fawcett, Li, & Fan 2017). Not only that, but immigrants may experience additional sadness from missing their home country, family, and friends (Napholz & Mo, 2010).

It is important to consider how Asian American subgroups may differ on the effects of acculturation and ethnic identity. Chae and Foley (2010) compared psychological well-being between Chinese Americans, Korean Americans, and Japanese Americans. They found that in general, ethnic identity is a strong predictor of positive well-being which indicates that maintaining ties to one's ethnic background, stabilizes a sense of connection with their community and increases life satisfaction. However, there were differences in the response to

acculturation. They found that high acculturation is associated with lower levels of well-being for Korean Americans, while acculturation for Japanese Americans did not contribute significantly to psychological well-being. Japanese Americans with a more evolved ethnic identity were more likely to experience higher levels of SWB (Chae & Foley, 2010).

Asian Americans are encouraged by clinicians to feel culturally competent with both their family's culture and American culture, so that they can easily navigate between both cultural values and structures. Doing this may help bridge the gap between the opposing cultures that Asian Americans experience thus increasing well-being (Yoon, Hacker, Hewitt, Abrams, & Cleary, 2012).

Positive and Negative Events

The amount of value placed towards positive and negative emotions influences how an individual interprets an event and therefore how well-being is affected. Different cultures hold varying levels of significance to positive and negative events and how they affect emotion. European Americans tend to emphasize positive emotions and attribute these emotions to greater well-being. European Americans were more likely to show a greater correlation between positive emotions and positive well-being while Asian Americans did not present this finding (Choi & Chentsova-Dutton 2017). Eastern cultures tend to deemphasize positive emotions and are more focused on the reduction of negative events. For example, one study showed that Japanese participants were more likely to believe that failures would lower their self-esteem more than they thought that success would raise their self-esteem (Wirtz et. al, 2009). Asian Americans are also more likely to dwell on past negative events and let it influence current perceptions of well-being. European Americans on the other hand, tend to disconnect from the past self and, if anything, pull from positive past experiences to evaluate current SWB (Kim et al. 2012).

Another study found that European Americans relied on more positive events to mitigate the effects of negative events than Asian Americans, Koreans, and Japanese. This may indicate that European Americans place more weight than Asian Americans on positive events to increase well-being. The study also suggested that in general, positive events are beneficial to overall life satisfaction but it could lessen the impact of each positive event on daily happiness (Oishi, Diener, Choi, Kim-Prieto, & Choi, 2009).The amount of emphasis on positive emotions can certainly contribute to the difference seen in SWB between these two cultures. In fact, Asian Americans who are more acculturated to American culture, are more likely to attribute increased well-being to positive emotions as do European Americans, and thus experience greater life satisfaction (Choi & Chentsova-Dutton 2017).

Familial Pressure

The effect of parental pressure and family conflict can be a significant contributor to the reduced level of SWB in Asian Americans. Familial relationships are a significant part of many people's live and therefore are influential in evaluations of life satisfaction. In Asian American adolescents, parental support may be associated with a feeling of personal control which is found to increase happiness, while parental strictness is associated with lower levels of happiness (Bradley & Corwyn, 2004). One study examined the difference between Eastern and Western cultures in perceptions of fulfilling parental expectations. The researchers found that Japanese participants and Asian American participants believed they had fulfilled their parent's expectations to a lesser degree than European American participants. These findings were associated with lower levels of SWB for both Japanese and Asian Americans, indicating that perceived parental expectations mediated the cultural difference in SWB (Oishi & Sullivan, 2005). The perceived inability to meet family standards leads to increased family shame and

psychological distress (Wang, Wong, & Chung, 2018). Another study found that Vietnamese American adolescents felt an obligation to meet their parents' expectations in exchange for what they had done for them (Phinney & Ong, 2002). High parental expectations may lead to increased pressure to succeed and therefore dissatisfaction when accomplishments are not met.

Increased family conflict is also a predictive factor of lower SWB in Asian Americans. Bahrassa, Syed, Su, and Lee (2011) found that family conflict is associated with psychological distress in Asian Americans. Family conflict particularly arises when there is a discrepancy between ethnic belongingness. For example, Phinney and Ong (2002) found a significant negative correlation between adolescent-parent discrepancies and life satisfaction for U.S. born Vietnamese adolescents but not for foreign-born Vietnamese adolescents or European Americans. U.S.-born Vietnamese Americans are likely to adhere more to American culture which indicates that a greater cultural discrepancy between parent and child can lead to the child experiencing lower life satisfaction. Another study found that Asian American adults who perceived their mothers to strongly support traditional Asian values, experienced decreased family conflict if they too clung to Asian cultural values. Similarly, Asian Americans who perceived their mothers as followers of European American culture, experienced reduced conflict if they are also involved in American behaviors (Shin, Wong, & Maffini, 2016). This has to do with acculturation and the extent in which Asian Americans are more acculturated to American culture than their parents. Differences in cultural values due to acculturation leads to increased family conflict and reduced SWB.

Discrimination and the "Model Minority"

Stereotyping of Asian Americans relates to discrimination and can negatively impact SWB. There is a notion that Asian Americans are the "model minority". This stems from the

stereotype that Asian Americans have greater success compared to other minority groups due to their strong work ethic and the notion that they do not face racial barriers from discrimination. Daga and Raval (2018) found that South Asian Americans internalized the model minority myth and believed the stereotyping to be unfair. However, they did feel that they or someone they knew fit the description. Even though the "model minority" consists of positive stereotypes, it is still damaging to Asian Americans who may feel pressure to fit this role or who do not want to have prior assumptions made about them. Decreases in Asian American SWB may be due to a feeling of failure if they cannot live up to high expectations, or pressure from others who deem them falling short of where they should be (Daga & Raval, 2018).

The concept that Asian Americans are the "model minority" can lead to discriminatory behavior from other ethnic groups because it places a stereotype on Asian Americans that people may expect them to convey. Although it is a positive stereotype, it can be harmful both if they meet this expectation because then that provides more support for the stereotype, and if they do not meet the expectation because they may be discriminated against since they are not living up to who society tells them to be. This idea is supported by the findings that for Chinese and Indian Americans, perceiving greater discrimination is correlated with a greater perception that being a member of their ethnic group is detrimental to their societal functioning thus decreasing life satisfaction (Tran & Sangalang, 2016). Armenta et al. (2016) also found that Asian Americans who experience greater discrimination feel less connected to mainstream society which mediated an effect of lower well-being.

Another concept that is related to discrimination is foreigner objectification. Asian Americans have had a presence in the United States for centuries, yet they are still perceived and treated as foreigners. This is known as foreigner objectification which only recently has emerged

as an area of study in psychology (Wu, Pituc, Kim, & Lee, 2020). Foreigner objectification is especially distressing to Asian Americans who feel particularly connected to American culture, because their American identity is denied. This idea is supported in a study that found that perceived foreigner objectification was significantly associated with less self-esteem and life satisfaction for U.S.-born Asian Americans but not for foreign-born Asian Americans. U.S.-born Asian Americans may feel more connected to American culture and therefore may find judgments of foreigner objectification unfair, which can have detrimental effects on identity. On the other hand, foreign-born Asian Americans identity may not be questioned by foreigner objectification if they themselves identify as a foreigner also (Armenta et al, 2016). Overall foreigner objectification can lead to Asian Americans feeling excluded from society which can certainly have negative effects on well-being (Wu et al., 2020).

Implications

The factors that contribute to decreased life satisfaction in Asian Americans have implications on mental health. The most common finding is that Asian Americans who experience lower SWB are likely to have depressive symptoms (Kuroki, & Tilley, 2012; Lam, Pacala, & Smith, 1997; Tsai, Chang, Sanna, & Herringshaw, 2011). Tsai et al. (2011) found that unhappy Asian Americans are likely to experience more depression and rumination symptoms, while unhappy European Americans experience more symptoms of anxiety. This indicates that Asian Americans may be more prone to depression because of the factors that contribute to lower SWB. In one study, researchers found that family conflict and higher levels of experienced discrimination were the biggest predictors of suicidal ideation after depression and anxiety. They also found that acculturation stress was a weak predictor of suicidal ideation, indicating discrimination and family conflict may be more damaging (Kuroki, & Tilley, 2012). However,

another study found that lower levels of acculturation were associated with higher levels of depression (Lam et al., 1997).

Although Asian Americans may experience higher levels of depression due to factors that reduce well-being, it is challenging for them to feel comfortable seeking mental health services because there is a heightened stigma surrounding mental illness in many Asian cultures. One study found that Asian Americans reported significantly greater stigma towards people with depression than European Americans did (Cheng, 2014). There is one notion that psychological illness places a burden on the family, thus increasing family conflict (Kuroki, & Tilley, 2012). Tsai, Teng, and Sue (1981) found that all American families are affected by a member experiencing mental illness, but there is more of a negative stigma attached to this problem in Chinese American families. Familial pressure to be successful and the stereotype that Asian Americans are the "model minority" may contribute to a feeling of shame if they experience mental health issues. Asian immigrants may also experience difficulties seeking mental health services due to economic barriers, language barriers, and cultural differences between the provider and client (Napholz & Mo, 2010).

The differences between Asian American and European Americans' level of well-being and the stigma surrounding Asian Americans seeking mental health services, indicates that counselors need to adapt their methods depending on the client's culture. Knowledge of the client's immigration background, experience of discrimination and level of acculturation is important to gain an understanding of where the client is coming from. It may also be useful to learn about indigenous forms of therapy that may feel more culturally appropriate for the client especially if they have a lower level of acculturation (Lam et al., 1997).

Limitations and Future Directions

There were limitations to the data collection of this review. We were not able to access many studies due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so the total SWLS scores are not completely representative of the entirety of the literature that examines SWB with SWLS. There are also many other measures of SWB that this review did not account for when comparing total scores across Asian Americans, European Americans, and Asians. Future analyses could assess scores from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, Subjective Happiness Scales, experience sampling methodology and more. Most importantly, Asian Americans and Asians encompass broad populations. For the purpose of this review, Asian Americans included first and second-generation, immigrants, and U.S. born individuals as well as representatives from multiple Asian countries including China, Japan, India, Korea, and Vietnam. Of course, there are cultural differences among Asian Americans who come from different nations and future studies should certainly assess SWB differences in subgroup populations. It is also important to note that factors contributing to SWB differences are generalizations and every individual is going to vary.

Conclusion

After totaling the findings of 33 studies, Asian Americans scored significantly lower on the SWLS than European Americans, indicating reduced SWB for Asian Americans. Asian American SWLS scores do not significantly differ from Asian SWLS scores. The lower levels of SWB in Asian Americans may be a result of differences in cultural values leading to reduced acculturation, differences in interpretations of positive and negative events, family pressure and conflict, and discrimination. This indicates that increasing acculturation and the influence of positive events while decreasing family conflict can have positive effects on Asian American SWB. The findings also show the importance of Americans reducing discriminatory behavior and diminishing the model minority stereotype and foreigner objectification. Also adapting

counseling techniques to fit the individual client based on level of acculturation and immigration background is crucial to provide the most appropriate mental health care.

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