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Asian American Happiness: A Preliminary Analysis

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Background

Asian Americans have unique cultural and personal experiences that contribute to their overall happiness. However, current trends in subjective well-being do not completely explain the levels of happiness experienced by this group. Research on Asian Americans is limited, but some studies have demonstrated that this group typically experiences lower mean levels of happiness and subjective well-being (Sakamoto, Chiu, Li, & Wang 2016; Scollon, Diener, Oishi, & Biswas-Diener 2004; Weaver 2003).

Studies have shown that high levels of subjective well-being can cause better health and longevity (Diener & Chan, 2011), and is related to higher income, better job performance (DeNeve, Diener, Tay, & Xuereb, 2013), and more creativity and stronger cognitive functions (Subramaniam & Vinogradov 2013).

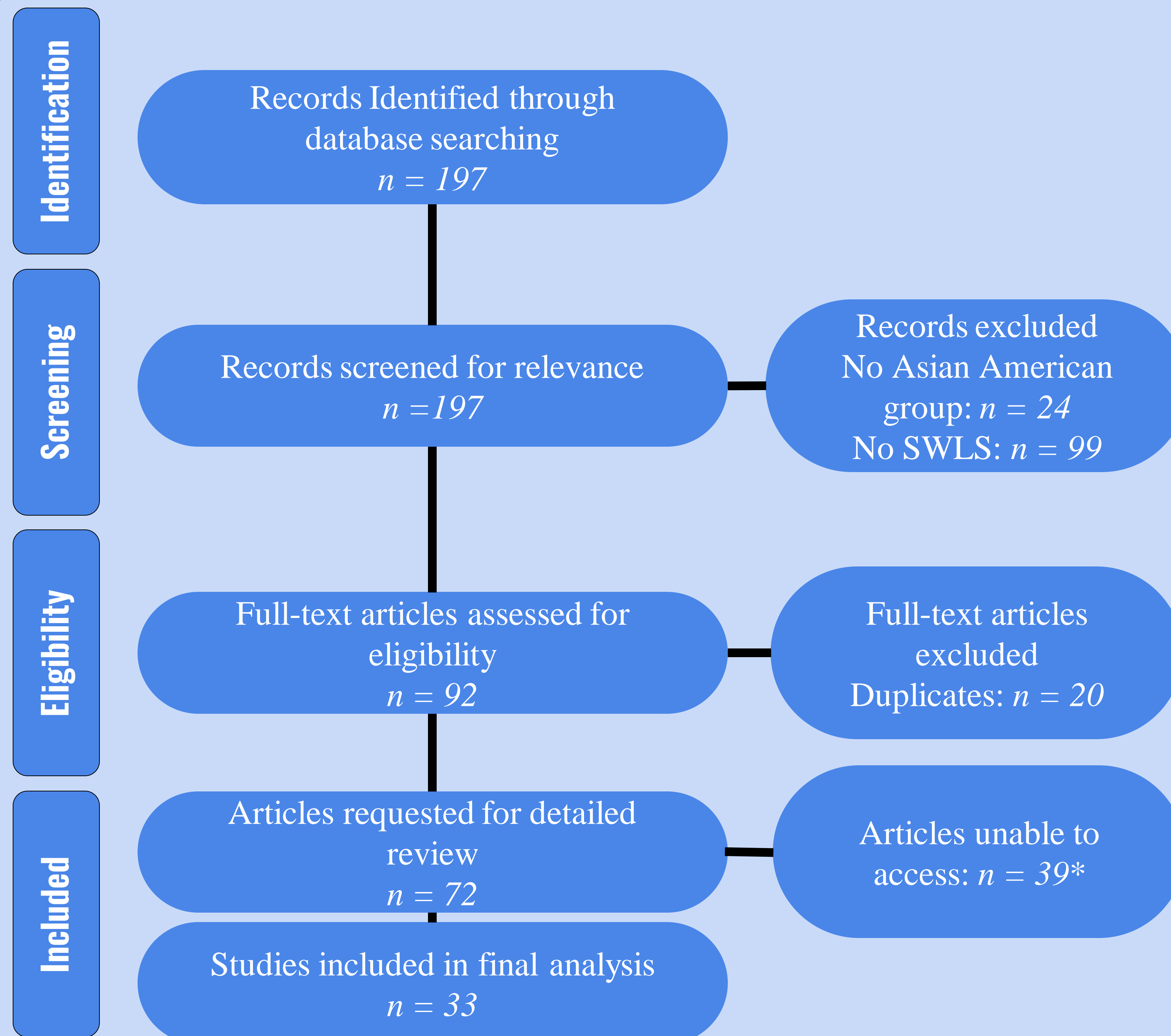
As happiness can be quite an elusive topic, researchers have a number of ways of conceptualizing and measuring happiness. Happiness has become associated with psychological well-being (Ryff 1989), eudaimonic well-being (Ryan & Deci 2001), and subjective well-being (Diener 1984). There are also a number of scales used to measure happiness, including the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin 1985) and the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen 1988). For the purposes of this review, we chose to focus on subjective well-being (SWB) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS).

Present Study

The present systematic review aims to discover the true mean level of happiness of Asian Americans. It looks to explore the relationship between Asian Americans' unique ethnic identity and their overall level of life satisfaction. It also collates and systematizes the various theories as to why and how Asian Americans' experience affects their subjective well-being. We hope that in the final stages of this project, we will have gained a stronger understanding of Asian American happiness, as well as a more universal understanding of global models of SWB.

All eligible articles were required to contain the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) measure, which indicates a subject's overall life satisfaction. Articles were identified using pre-established search terms related to Asian American happiness, such as "Asian American life satisfaction". PsycINFO was utilized to acquire empirical, English language articles. The complete process of article identification and selection can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Diagram of the Study Selection Process



*Note. Due to the current state of the pandemic, many articles were currently unavailable to access or request. These articles will be added and analyzed at a later date

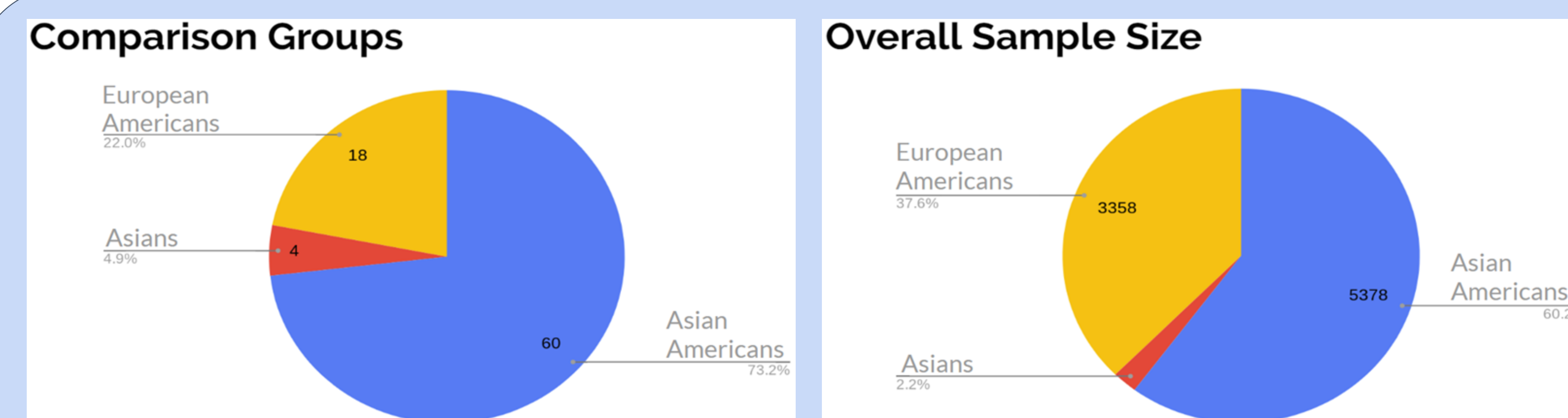


Figure 2: Study breakdown of sample groups

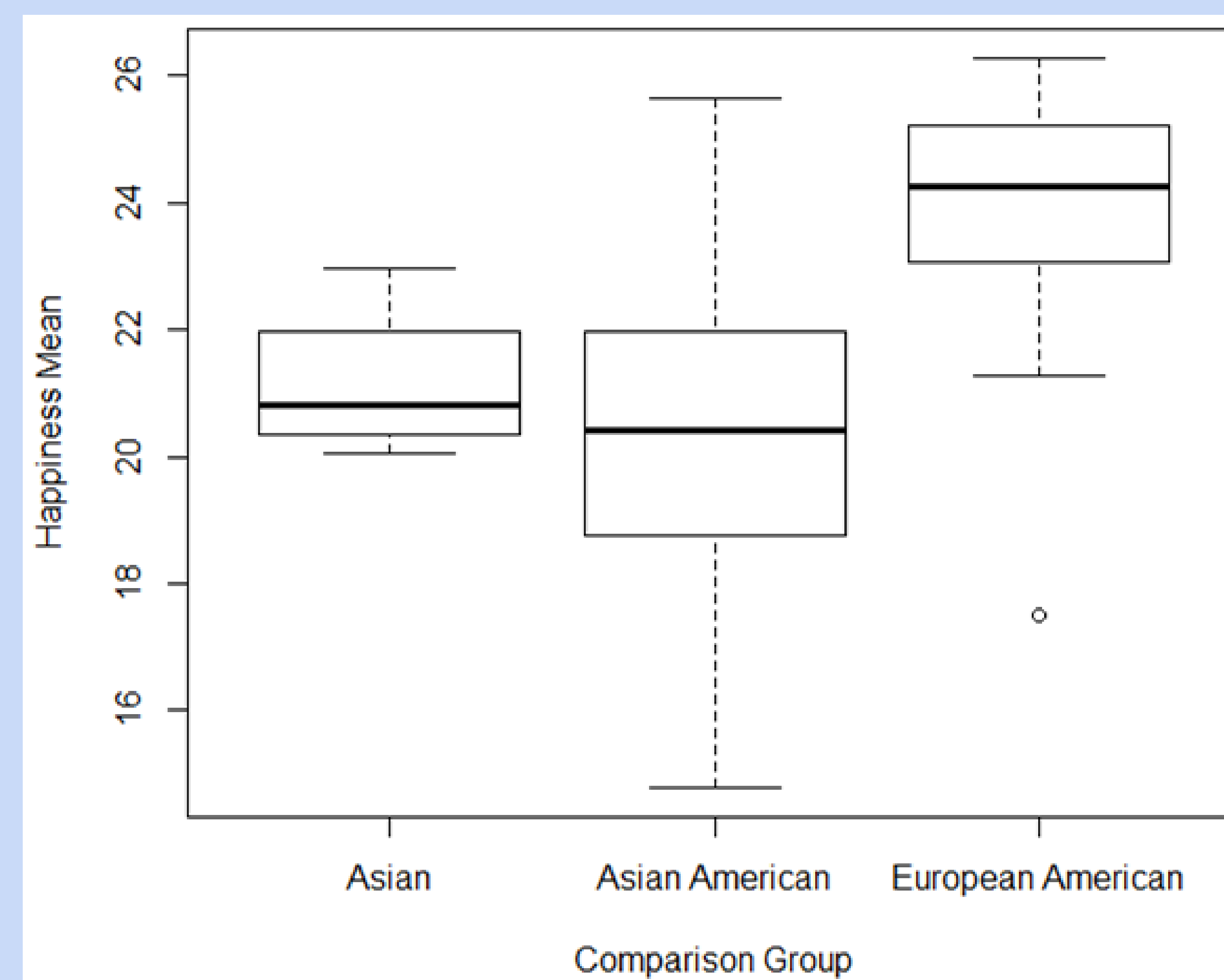


Figure 3: Comparisons of Group SWLS Means

Satisfaction with Life Measure, sample items. Items were rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), resulting in a range of scores 5 to 35

___ I am satisfied with my life.

___ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.

___ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Figure 4: Excerpt from SWLS

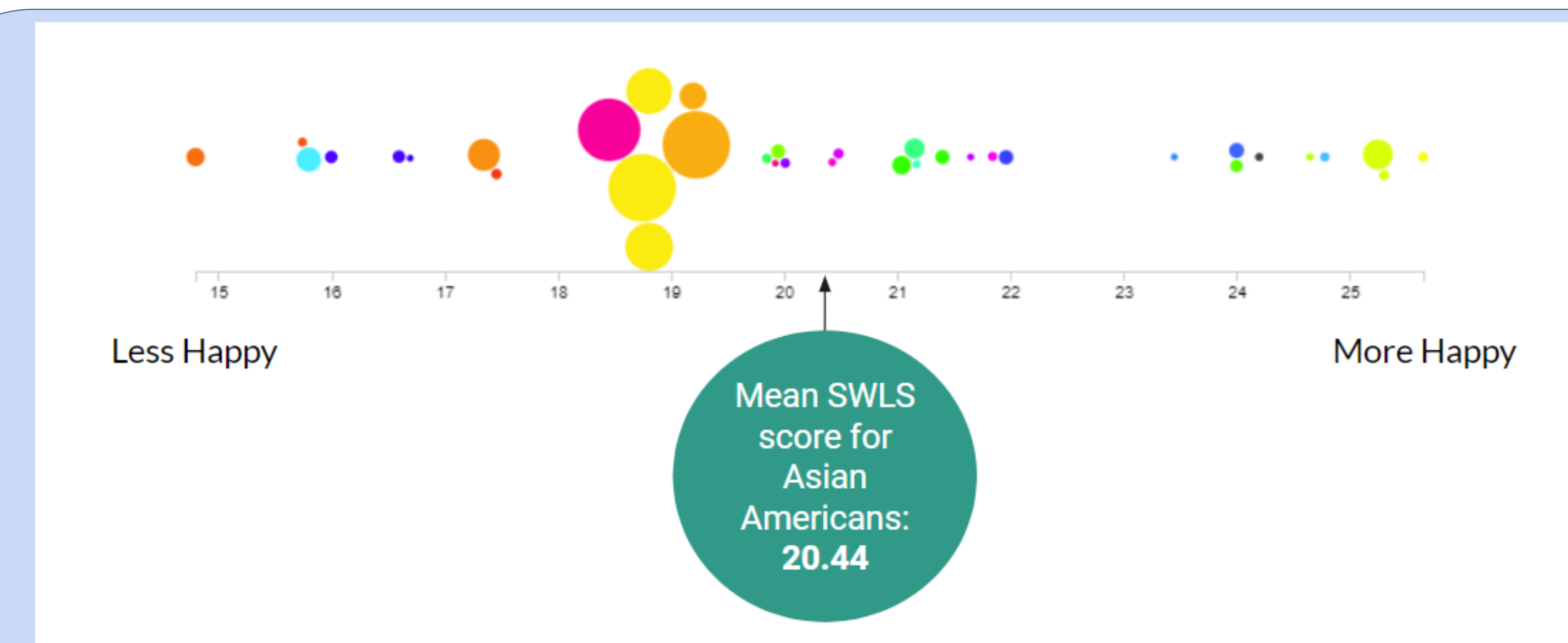


Figure 5: Distribution of Asian American SWLS scores

Results

A total of thirty-three eligible articles were identified through the study selection process. A one-way ANOVA was conducted, and showed a significant difference between the groups compared, $F(2, 52) = 6.20$, $MSE = 7.67$, $p = .004$. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Asian Americans SWLS score ($M = 20.47$, $SD = 3.01$) was significantly different than the European Americans SWLS score of ($M = 23.61$, $SD = 2.37$). However, the Asian SWLS score ($M = 21.16$, $SD = 1.25$) did not significantly differ from either comparison group.

Discussion

This preliminary review revealed that Asian Americans demonstrate significantly lower levels of subjective well-being compared to European Americans, but do not significantly differ in happiness from their Asian counterparts.

There are a number of potential theories as to why Asian Americans experience lower subjective well-being and happiness. The findings from this literature review indicate that factors such as hedonic adaptation, acculturation, assimilation, and individualism vs. collectivism level, may affect Asian American life satisfaction. Future analysis will look to examine the specific mechanisms that contribute to the Asian American experience, to gain a stronger understanding of both Asian American happiness and global models of SWB.