

Cultural Specifics of Life Values and Subjective Well – Being

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Abstract

The objectives of the study were to reveal cultural specifics of modern life values and subjective well-being, individual and cultural values interrelations, life values and subjective well-being correlations at Russian residents, belonging to different religions. The main methods were Scales of: Value Orientations Actual Structure (Bubnova), Psychological well-being (Ryff), Life Satisfaction (Neugarten, Havighurst, & Tobin), Subjective Happiness (Lyubomirsky & Lepper), Student's T-test, Spearman's rank correlation. The sample consisted of 330 persons (18-55 years old) of 10 different nations and 5 religions. By the time of the survey all the participants had lived in Russia for some (not less than 3) years. For each studied religious groups their dominant life values were revealed. It was discovered, that people of different cultures associate their well-being and lives satisfaction with different life values. However, in general, life satisfaction correlates with those values, which are less important for certain culture. Perhaps, persons, oriented on traditional and culturally important values are less happy than those, who are oriented for their individual ones. May be in assessing realization of individual values people use their own criteria, which are not as strict as criteria of common cultural values' realization. The results of this study allow us to draw the following conclusions. Significant cross-cultural differences in life-values and subjective well-being have their sources in religious attitudes and settings. People of different cultures associate their well-being and lives satisfaction with different values. Generally, well-being and life satisfaction are directly related to the values, less important in certain culture.

Keywords: Life Values, Subjective Well-being, Cross-Cultural Differences, Life Satisfaction, Religion.

1. Introduction

The last decades' practice of the intense intercultural contacts in different places of the world shows that the different nationalities and religions peaceful coexistence is impossible without understanding and respecting of each other worldviews and values. Ignoring of cross-cultural worldview differences lead to ethnic and religious tension and hostility. It is important in cross-cultural studies to take into account the mutual influence of different cultural factors, such as ethnicity and religion, country of residence and so on. Again, generalization of the studies of social tension, tolerance, social distance, cultural conflicts shows that people feel tension in intercultural contacts when they perceive the situation as threatening their well-being. (Chebotareva, 2014 a-d).

Subjective well-being (SWB) has become one of the most popular subject of psychological research over the past decades (Diener et al, 1999). Currently, it is common to identify two components of subjective well-being: affective and cognitive. The affective component is considered as a hedonic balance (balance of pleasant and unpleasant affects). The cognitive component is understood as a person's evaluations of his or her life according to some standards. Such standards are primarily linked by researchers with the culture in the broadest sense of the notion.

Many researchers proved that both components of SWB are influenced by personality (Diener et al, 1999) and by culture

(Diener & Suh, 1999), but most studies considered personality and culture in isolation, although they often recognize the mutual influence of these two factors. U. Schimmack and others (2002) state that conjoint investigation of personality and cultural SWB determinants has the advantage of identifying possible interactions between personality and cultural variables. For example, in their research they demonstrated that self-esteem was a stronger predictor of life satisfaction in individualistic cultures than in collectivistic cultures because individualistic cultures emphasize a positive self-view; they also showed that the influence of extraversion and neuroticism on life satisfaction was moderated by culture (Schimmack et al, 2002). Oishi, Diener, Lucas, and Suh (1999) found that freedom was a stronger predictor of life satisfaction in individualistic cultures than in collectivistic cultures.

The studies of SWB and culture interaction showed that culture influences SWB directly and indirectly. There are a lot of evidences that people in individualistic, rich, and democratic cultures have higher levels of SWB than in

collectivistic, poor, and totalitarian cultures (Diener & Suh, 1999; Veenhoven, 1993). Besides, culture moderates the relation between hedonic balance (important aspect of SWB) and life satisfaction. For example, it was demonstrated that the relation between hedonic balance and life satisfaction was significantly stronger in individualistic cultures than in collectivistic cultures (Suh et al., 1998). SWB in individualistic and collectivistic cultures is determined by the fact that individualistic cultures emphasize individuals' needs and freedom of choice, whereas collectivistic cultures emphasize others' needs, duties and reliance on one's fate (Triandis, 1995). Luo Lu proved that culture-specific modes of self-construction lead to the diverse meanings people hold for happiness and well-being in different societies. In particular, the author said that subjective well-being for the Chinese was construed around fulfilling one's obligations and maintaining homeostasis (dialectical balance). In contrast, modern Western individual-oriented view of the self was related to understanding happiness as "a prize to be fought over, and entirely one's responsibility to accomplish this ultimate goal of life" (Lu, 2008, 290).

Therefore, culture serves as a major force determining the way people conceptualize the self, understand happiness, set life-goals and select strategies of the goals achieving. That value orientations can be seen as a mediator between culture and personality, one's outlook and one's life esteem. Value orientations are the results of the social relations reflection and system-forming factor of personality. As the values serve phenomena of reality, significant for an individual, including public relations. Most studies have focused on the question, how subjective well-being and life satisfaction can be modeled by cultural values (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990; Schwartz & Bardi, 2001; Schwartz et al, 2001).

Many researchers to reveal the relations between life values and SWB actively used Schwartz values paradigm (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2000; Hofer et al, 2006; Joshanloo & Ghaedi, 2009; Cohen and Shamai, 2010; Bobowik et al, 2011). L. Sagiv and S. H. Schwartz (2000) showed that SWB was directly related the values of stimulation, self-direction, achievement, benevolence and universalism; and inversely – to the values of conformity, tradition, security and power. M. Bobowik et al. (2011) found in European population direct relationship between SWB individualistic values and inverse relationship between SWB and values of power and conservatism and other more collectivistic values. J. Hofer et al (2006) reported similar results concerning value of benevolence for persons originating from Germany, Costa Rica and Cameroon. A. Cohen and O. Shamai (2010) in Israel also found direct relations between SWB and the values of benevolence, self-direction and achievement; and inverse – between SWB and the values of power and tradition. M. Joshanloo and J. Ghaedi (2009) discovered in Iranian population positive relation of SWB with value achievement, and negative – with value of tradition

A number of empirical studies proved promising approaches to the SWB study in relation with the life values and their cultural specifics (Oishi et al, 1999; Yetim, 2003; Pienaar et al, 2006; Lu, 2006; Vansteenkiste et al, 2007; Georgellis et al, 2009; Welzer & Inglehart, 2010; Joshanloo, 2010; Huta & Ryan, 2010; Yang and Stening, 2012).

S. Oishi and others found that life satisfaction was more strongly related to financial satisfaction to in poorer nations, and – with home life satisfaction in wealthy nations; with esteem needs - in individualist nations, than people in collectivist nations (Oishi et al, 1999).

It was proved, for example, that at Spanish adolescents overall satisfaction with life was positively correlated with non-materialistic values (Casas, et al, 2004). Across countries study by these authors revealed the direct relations between Life satisfaction and values of benevolence and hedonism values, and inverse relations between life satisfaction and values of power and security. But they also discovered the differences in the nature of links between countries with high and low Human Development Index (HDI). In particular, the value of achievement was positively related to life satisfaction in low HDI countries, but negatively in high HDI countries (Casas, et al, 2004).

Therefor compilation of the data from different empirical studies lets us to reveal not only cultural specifics of the nature of SWB and life values interaction. The main conclusion is that the dimension of collectivism - individualism is an important factor defining life satisfaction level and understanding of well-being in different cultures. But by now not enough studies of different cultures have been accumulated in order to be able to deduce some universal laws. Moreover, most cross-cultural studies were conducted with representatives of different countries or with emigrants and locals. We consider it is important to study how the values of the culture of origin correlate with subjective well-being of residents of one country.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The empirical study sample consisted of 330 persons (18-55 years old) of 10 different nations (Russian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Armenian, Georgian, Azerbaijan, Tatar, Uzbek, Tajik and Jew). Among the participants there were

representatives of 5 religions: Orthodox Christians (90 persons), Catholics (44), Muslims (65), Buddhists (71), Jews (60). All the religious groups were aligned by gender and age. The respondents were not very religious, but they were brought up in the spirits of their religions. By the time of the survey all the participants had lived in Russia for some (not less than 3) years.

2.2 Materials

Personal information form consisted of questions about gender, age, profession, country of origin, nationality, religion, period of stay in Russia.

"The Scale of Value Orientations Actual Structure" (Bubnova, 1999) measured the participants' life values. The technique is aimed at studying the implementation of the person's value orientations in real life conditions. It includes 66 closed questions, distributed on 11 scales reflecting the generalized value orientations: pleasant pastime, high material well-being, enjoying beautiful, help and compassion for others, love, cognition of nature and human, high social status, recognition, respect and influence on others, social activity in order to achieve positive changes in society, communication and health.

Subjective well-being was estimated by 3 techniques "Scales of psychological well-being" (Ryff, 1989, adapted by Shevelenkova, Fesenko). The inventory consists of 84 statements reflecting the six areas of psychological well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with other, purpose in life and self-acceptance. Indicators of different scales are combined into three integral indicator: affect balance, meaningfulness of life, openness to the world.

"Life Satisfaction Index-A" (LSI-A)" (Neugarten, Havighurst, & Tobin, 1961, adapted by Panina) measures the overall psychological state of the person, which is determined by the personal characteristics, the system of one's relations in various life aspects. It consists of 20 questions; the results of the responses are reduced to 5 scales characterizing different aspects of the person's life satisfaction. These include zest (as opposed to apathy), resolution and fortitude, congruence between desired and achieved goals, positive self-concept and mood tone. The persons showing high scores on the questionnaire, usually take pleasure in their daily activities, find their life meaningful, and have feeling of success in achieving major goals, positive self-images and optimism.

"Subjective Happiness Scale" (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999, adapted by Leontiev, 2000) is the express (4-item) scale, designed to assess the current psychological state of the person. It shows a subjective assessment of whether one is a happy or an unhappy person.

2.3 Procedure

The procedure of the research was approved by the Department of Social and Differential Psychology of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (PFUR). We used snowball sampling method: first members of international research group recruited the subjects from their acquaintances working in different spheres, then these people recruited their acquaintances and so on. The surveys were conducted personally during 2-3 meetings, 30 minutes each. All the participants were informed by the researchers about the aims of the study before the measures were administered. For obtained data analysis we used statistical techniques: Mann — Whitney U-test, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient.

3. Results

3.1 General characteristics of life values and subjective well-being.

Table 1 presents the significance degrees of life values for different cultures representatives.

Table 1. Cross-cultural peculiarities of life values

Life values	Orthodox Christians		Catholics		Muslims		Jews		Buddhists	
	M	St. D.	M	St. D.	M	St. D.	M	St. D.	M	St. D.
Recreation	3,949	1,38	4,750	1,29	3,965	1,45	3,714	1,84	3,676	1,61
Material prosperity	3,318	1,47	3,250	1,96	3,544	1,54	3,643	1,59	3,270	1,82
Enjoying beautiful	3,749	1,54	4,083	1,73	3,491	1,68	3,857	1,41	4,459	1,48
Charity	4,308	1,32	3,750	1,96	4,649	1,38	4,536	1,45	3,946	1,96

Love	3,882	1,46	3,417	1,73	3,719	1,22	4,036	1,57	3,865	1,53
New knowledge	3,492	1,49	3,250	1,76	3,491	1,36	3,464	1,64	4,162	1,34
Social status	3,133	1,47	3,333	1,87	4,000	1,42	3,679	1,63	3,162	1,75
Recognition and respect	3,985	1,37	4,417	1,31	4,509	1,27	3,643	1,36	4,081	1,71
Pro-social activity	3,005	1,56	3,667	1,56	3,368	1,38	3,500	1,47	3,919	1,40
Communication	3,323	1,44	3,083	2,1	3,157	1,37	3,536	1,53	3,568	1,67
Health	3,605	1,43	4,250	1,71	1,45	1,45	3,500	1,62	4,108	1,59

According to the data from the table, we can define dominant life values of each studied religious group. The value of charity is the leading for Jews and Muslims, as well as for Orthodox Christians. For Catholics, the leading values are pleasant pastime and recreation, which take the middle positions for the other cultures. Values of recognition and respect are particularly important for Muslims, while for the other cultures, it take the second - third places. For Buddhists, the value of enjoying beautiful play the leading role.

Table 2. Cross-cultural peculiarities of life satisfaction and SWB.

SWB & Life-satisfaction indicators	Orthodox Christians		Catholics		Muslims		Jews		Buddhists	
	M	St. D.	M	St. D.	M	St. D.	M	St. D.	M	St. D.
Life Satisfaction Index										
Zest	5,25	1,58	5,83	1,40	5,22	1,74	5,71	1,27	5,40	1,46
Resolution and fortitude	5,95	1,79	5,75	1,66	6,17	1,72	6,50	1,83	5,86	1,84
Congruence between desired and achieved goals	5,35	1,84	5,75	2,26	5,36	2,00	6,17	1,74	5,35	2,04
Positive self-concept	5,22	1,69	6,00	2,30	5,89	1,58	6,60	1,42	5,75	1,69
Mood tone	5,45	1,70	5,33	2,19	5,56	1,99	5,92	1,76	5,67	1,84
Overall level	27,20	5,68	28,41	5,85	28,29	6,44	30,92	5,12	27,973	5,45
Subjective Happiness	19,19	4,17	19,2	4,35	21,19	3,63	21,17	4,29	21,1	4,85
Psychological well-being										
Positive relations with other	59,50	12,83	63,50	13,25	62,28	14,23	64,60	15,30	68,59	12,79
Autonomy	61,23	13,58	56,08	14,00	62,71	13,30	67,14	16,73	67,432	16,77
Environmental mastery	59,80	13,53	58,16	13,98	62,82	15,03	67,32	17,98	68,51	16,19
Personal growth	64,00	12,12	60,66	13,29	66,00	11,89	66,53	15,97	67,83	13,73
Purpose in life	63,82	14,26	65,66	13,75	67,14	15,08	69,25	14,51	72,568	12,94
Self-acceptance	59,99	13,633	56,16	15,01	64,00	11,97	67,92	17,11	68,243	13,71
Affect balance	90,73	22,86	100,417	28,68	86,80	23,34	85,60	22,40	89,973	19,95
Meaningfulness of life	92,00	17,71	81,16	21,53	93,77	22,86	94,35	19,14	96,59	20,37
Openness to the world	64,19	11,80	58,66	14,65	66,73	10,68	65,14	12,85	66,16	14,87
Overall level	539,256	124,7777	545,917	95,51	540,684	134,63	570,429	160,24	544,946	163,81

We can see from the table that people, belonging to Judaism, have slightly better results on all the scales of "Life Satisfaction Index" as well as on overall level of life satisfaction. Orthodox Christians showed the lowest result on overall level of life satisfaction and on scale of positive self-concept. Muslims responded the lowest level of zest for life, Catholics - the lowest level on the scale of resolution and fortitude, Buddhists showed lowest results on the scale of congruence between desired and achieved goals.

The data on the Subjective Happiness Scale show the higher level of it at Muslims and the lowest – at Orthodox Christians.

The data of Psychological Well-being Scale show that overall level of SWB again is the highest at Jews, and the lowest at Orthodox Christians. However, in separate scales we can see a bit different results: in most scales of the test, Buddhists responded the highest results, and Catholics – the lowest results. Only on the scale of the balance of affect, Catholics have best results, and Jews – the lowest one.

3.2 Cultural differences in life values and subjective well-being.

To assess statistical significance of identified cross-cultural differences between analyzed groups, pairwise comparisons were performed using Mann — Whitney U-test.

Significant differences of life values between Orthodox Christians and Catholics, and Orthodox and Jews were not

revealed. In addition, differences between Catholics on one hand and Muslims and Jews on another hand were not found.

In comparison with Buddhists, for Orthodox values of enjoying beautiful ($p=0,01$), new knowledge ($p=0,01$) and pro-social activity ($p=0,001$) are less important. For Muslims in comparison with Orthodox Christians the values of social status ($p=0,0001$), recognition and respect ($p=0,01$) are more important. Muslims also exceed Jews in importance of value recognition and respect ($p=0,005$).

Differences in life values between Buddhists and Jews were not discovered. For Buddhists, in comparison with Catholics, the value of recreation is less important ($0,04$); in comparison with Buddhists, the values of enjoying beautiful ($p=0,005$) and new knowledge ($p=0,02$) are more important; values of charity ($p=0,04$) and social status ($p=0,13$) are less important.

Pairwise comparison of indicators of life satisfaction and subjective well-being gave us the next results.

Only one statistically significant difference were revealed between Orthodox Christians and Catholics - on the indicator of meaningfulness of life ($p=0,04$). The indicator is higher at Orthodox.

Not much significant differences were found in SWB of Orthodox Christians and Muslims. Muslims reported higher results in subjective happiness level ($p=0,001$), in positive self-concept ($0,008$) and in self-acceptance ($p=0,05$) than Orthodox.

Many significant differences in SWB were found between Orthodox Christians and Buddhists. Buddhists responded better results on subjective happiness ($p=0,01$) and on many scales of SWB: positive relations with other ($p=0,0001$), autonomy ($0,01$), environmental mastery ($p=0,0006$), purpose in life ($p=0,0006$) and self-acceptance ($p=0,0008$).

Similar results were obtained in comparison of Orthodox Christians and Jews. Overall life satisfaction of Jews is much higher, than of Orthodox Christians ($p=0,001$), as well as congruence between desired and achieved goals ($p=0,03$) and positive self-concept ($p=0,00005$). Jews' data were also significantly higher than the data of Orthodox on scales of autonomy ($p=0,04$), environmental mastery ($p=0,009$) and self-acceptance ($p=0,006$).

Catholics significantly exceed Buddhists in autonomy ($p=0,04$), self-acceptance ($p=0,01$) and meaningfulness of life ($p=0,03$).

Only one significant difference exists in SWB of Catholics and Muslims – Catholics are more open to world than Muslims ($p=0,03$). And one difference was found in SWB of Catholics and Jews – Catholics' self-acceptance was higher than Muslims ($p=0,05$).

Buddhists responded higher scores on the scale of positive relations with other ($p=0,03$) than Muslims; and lower overall level of life satisfaction ($p=0,02$) and positive self-concept ($p=0,02$) than Jews. Muslims also reported lower level of positive self-concept ($p=0,05$) than Jews.

3.3 Correlations of subjective well-being and life values

Correlation analysis conducted on the total sample revealed multiple statistically significant correlations between indicators of SWB and life satisfaction with life values. Values of social status, pro-social activity, communication and health are more closely related to overall levels of SWB and life satisfaction and to separate scales of the test. The values of recognition and respect and material prosperity have less significant correlations with different scales. The value of enjoying beautiful significantly correlates only with life satisfaction and happiness, but not with SWB scales. The value of charity positively correlates only with overall level of life satisfaction and with the scales of resolution and fortitude and congruence between desired and achieved goals of the test of Life satisfaction. The value of new knowledge relates only to zest. The value of recreation doesn't have significant correlations with life satisfaction and SWB.

Correlation analysis conducted in each religious subgroup indicated different correlations of life values and life satisfaction and SWB. In particular, for Orthodox Christians, well-being and life satisfaction are related mostly to the value of pro-social activity, which is less important for this group, and they are also related to the values of communication, health and social status, which are on middle positions in this group.

For Buddhists, life satisfaction is directly related to the values of material prosperity, social activity for positive change in society and social status, which are not so popular in this culture.

For Catholics, life satisfaction is related to the values of social status and charity. For Muslims it is associated with values of communication and respect, for the Jews – with the values of enjoying beautiful and new knowledge.

4. Discussion

Most received data on life values and SWB and life satisfaction are consistent with other empirical studies results and with basic principles of considered religions. According to our data, people belonging to the Jewish religion, are significantly more satisfied with their lives than all the others. People brought up in the Orthodox Christian culture, are the least satisfied with their lives. In many subjective well-being indicators, representatives of the Buddhist and Muslim cultures show quite good results

Each cultural group has specific structure of subjective well-being indicators and specific correlations of subjective well-being with their live values. The results of the study may be used in developing culturally sensitive methods of psychological support and psychotherapy.

People of different cultures associate their well-being and lives satisfaction with different life values. However, in general, life satisfaction correlates with those values, which are less important for certain culture. Perhaps, persons, oriented on traditional and culturally important values are less happy than those, who are oriented for their individual ones. May be in assessing realization of individual values people use their own criteria, which are not as strict as criteria of common cultural values' realization. These results may also be due to the erosion of traditional cultures in most modern societies, the desire of individuals to the maximum realization of their individuality.

These ideas are supported by the data of many empirical studies, mentioned above, that proved closer connections of subjective well-being and life satisfaction with individual values than with collectivistic values.

5. Conclusions

There are significant cross-cultural differences in life values and subjective well-being among residents of one country, belonging to different cultures. These differences have their sources in religious attitudes and settings. People of different cultures associate their well-being and life satisfaction with different values. Generally, well-being and life satisfaction are directly related to the values, less popular in certain culture.

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