Culture-Specific Patterns in the Prediction of Life Satisfaction:
Roles of Emotion, Relationship Quality, and Self-Esteem

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Method

Participants and Procedure

One hundred seventy Euro-American students (129 women) and 149 Asian-American students (114 women) at the University of California, Davis, participated for extra credit. A packet of questionnaires was completed in small group sessions. In addition, 179 students (100 women) at Seoul National University and Joong-Moon Medical School in Korea and 141 students (71 women) at Sun Yet-Sen University in China filled out a questionnaire packet either in class or as a take-home assignment. All participants ranged in age from 17 to 43, with a mean of 20.33 years (SD = 2.50), and there were no significant differences in age across the four groups.

Asian-American students consisted of 77 Chinese, 24 Vietnamese, 23 Filipinos, 8 Hmongs, 8 Koreans, 6 Japanese, and 3 with mixed Asian background. Although 69 Asian-Americans (46%) were not born in the US, 52% of them came to live in the US at or before age 8 (M = 8.16, SD = 5.11). Seventy-seven percent of Asian-American students reported that they were raised only or mainly in the US. This profile of the Asian-American group suggested that they were more closely identified with American culture than with their Asian cultural background.

Materials

Life satisfaction. This was measured by the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), which contains five items that are rated on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Sample items are “I am satisfied with my life” and “In most ways, my life is close to my ideal.”
**Self-esteem.** The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) is a 10-item measure based on a 7-point rating scale. It is a measure of global self-esteem, and half of the items are reverse-keyed. Sample items are “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself” and “I certainly feel useless at times” (reversed).

**Relationship quality.** The 6-item Interpersonal Relationship Quality scale (IRQ; Kang & Shaver, 2004) was used to assess quality of interpersonal relationships. Rather than assessing the satisfaction with specific relationships, the focus of this questionnaire is on maintaining good interpersonal relationships with others in general. The items of this scale were developed to describe possible characteristics of people who maintain warm and comfortable relationships with others (see Appendix A): They tend to keep in touch with old friends and neighbors (“I enjoy visiting old friends and neighbors in my hometown”), tend to be sensitive to others’ needs around them (“I am highly receptive to the needs of those around me”), often hear compliments from their friends and family (“My friends would describe me as kind and affectionate” and “Family members often say that I am good-natured and have a heart for helping others”), feel good about their relationships with others in general (“I feel that my relationships with others are friendly and comforting”), and tend to have a broad social network (“I am like a spider web, with connections to many different people”). The internal consistency reliability reported in Kang and Shaver (2004) was .80 ($n = 100$) and the test-retest reliability over a 6-week interval was .78 ($n = 93$). Kang and Shaver (2004) also validated this scale by obtaining peer ratings. A copy of the IRQ, altered so that it could be used to describe another person, was mailed to peers named by 94 participants. The total number of peers responding was 347 (the number per subject ranged from 2 to 5,
with $M = 3.69$, $SD = .98$). The self-peer agreement coefficient was quite high ($r = .56$), implying that individuals who score high on the scale are perceived by others as people who maintain good interpersonal relationships (refer to the Method section of Study 2 in Kang & Shaver, 2004, for more details).

**Emotional expression.** This was assessed by the 16-item Emotional Expressiveness Questionnaire (EEQ; King & Emmons, 1990), which measures self-reported emotional expressiveness on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (“not at all characteristic”) to 7 (“extremely characteristic”). Sample items are “When I am angry, people around me usually know” and “I laugh a lot.”

**Emotion differentiation.** The 7-item Emotion Differentiation Scale (EDS) was selected to assess emotion differentiation. This is one of the subscales of the Range and Differentiation of Emotional Experience Scale (Kang & Shaver, 2004), which was developed to tap individual differences in having varied and well-differentiated emotional experiences. Items of the EDS are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (“does not describe me at all”) to 7 (“describes me extremely well”). This scale is displayed in Appendix B. Kang and Shaver (2004) reported that the internal consistency of the EDS was .79 with a 5-point rating scale ($n = 629$) and .83 with a 7-point rating scale ($n = 100$). Its test-retest reliability was .71 over a 6-week interval ($n = 93$).

**Positive affect and negative affect.** The Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) was selected to measure Trait PA and NA. Ten positive adjectives (e.g., “excited”) and ten negative adjectives (e.g., “distressed”) were rated on a 5-point scale to indicate the extent to which participants feel this way in general.
Internal consistencies of these scales can be found in Table 1 for each of the four cultural groups. All questionnaires were originally developed in English and translated into Korean and Chinese by native speakers of each language. To ensure equivalence between the original scales and the translated ones, bilingual undergraduate and graduate students back-translated the Korean and Chinese scales into English and thoroughly checked any discrepancies between the original and the translated versions of the scales.
References


Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations of Variables, Along with Scale Properties*

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<th>SE</th>
<th>RQ</th>
<th>PA</th>
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<td>(.97)</td>
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|                |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Number of Items | 5   | 9<sup>d</sup> | 6   | 10  | 10  | 12<sup>d</sup> | 7 |

|                |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Euro-American  | .88 | .88 | .82 | .82 | .83 | .83 | .86 |
| Asian-American | .92 | .91 | .81 | .83 | .87 | .78 | .82 |
| Korean         | .89 | .92 | .72 | .79 | .83 | .80 | .92 |
| Chinese        | .85 | .89 | .75 | .80 | .84 | .82 | .91 |

*Note. N = 164 (Euro-American), 148 (Asian-American), 175 (Korean), 139 (Chinese). Means within columns that do not share a common subscript differ at \( p < .05 \). LS = Life Satisfaction; SE = Self-Esteem; RQ = Relationship Quality; PA = Positive Affect; NA = Negative Affect; EE = Emotional Expressiveness Questionnaire; ED = Emotion Differentiation; \( \alpha \) = Internal consistency.*
Table 2 (continued)

d One item form the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale and four items from the Emotional Expressiveness Questionnaire were eliminated due to their negative loadings on the first unrotated factor (see Footnote 1 for more details).
APPENDIX A

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

Using the seven-point scale provided below, please indicate the extent to which you believe that the statement describes you, placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in responding.

This statement describes me…

1--------------2-----------------3----------------4----------------5----------------6----------------7
not at all       slightly         somewhat      moderately     pretty well      very well
extremely well

____ 1. I enjoy visiting old friends and neighbors in my hometown.
____ 2. My friends would describe me as kind and affectionate.
____ 3. Family members often say that I am good-natured and have a heart for helping people.
____ 4. I am highly receptive to the needs of those around me.
____ 5. I feel that my relationships with others are friendly and comforting.
____ 6. I am like a spider web, with connections to many different people.
APPENDIX B

EMOTION DIFFERENTIATION SCALE

Using the seven-point scale provided below, please indicate the extent to which you believe that the statement describes you, placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in responding.

This statement describes me…

1---------------2-----------------3-----------------4-----------------5-----------------6------------------7
not at all       slightly         somewhat      moderately     pretty well      very well
extremely well

____ 1. I tend to draw fine distinctions between similar feelings (e.g., depressed and blue; annoyed and irritated).
____ 2. I am aware that each emotion has a completely different meaning.
____ 3. I think that each emotion has a very distinct and unique meaning to me.
____ 4. I am aware of the different nuances or subtleties of a given emotion (e.g., depressed and blue; annoyed and irritated).
____ 5. I am good at distinguishing subtle differences in the meaning of closely related emotion words.
____ 6. If emotions are viewed as colors, I can notice even small variations within one kind of color (emotion).
____ 7. I am aware of the subtleties between feelings I have.