



Why World Leaders Should Prioritize the Well-Being of their People

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“Why World Leaders Should Prioritize the Well-Being of their People”
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This preliminary exam has four related sections ([Figure 1](#)), each contributing an essential piece to the conceptual whole of knowledge necessary for understanding national policy change and well-being through a sociological lens. Throughout this paper, I move towards the endpoint of exploring how the measurement of societal functioning through a multidimensional conceptualization of well-being can reorient development policy and make its implementation more effective. Centering national policy on the goals of multidimensional well-being should lead to more sustainability, reduced ecological footprints, moderate economic development, and additional, mutually reinforcing outcomes.

In this paper, I first discuss subjective well-being, which is one key dimension of overall well-being, a necessary but not sufficient indicator to track in a well-being economy. Then I review sociology of mental health literature on well-being, focused on the social stress process. I discuss the most popular global health and well-being surveys of today and critique the most common subjective well-being measures in particular. In the closing section, I describe what a multidimensional well-being economy paradigm might look like, based on some real-world examples, and limited by some principles that tend to explain why the leaders of the world, historically, do not make the best choices, defined as those which would prioritize the well-being of their people. But I ultimately believe a paradigm shift in development is possible, and already beginning, and that it is essential. The reality is that what is required for human flourishing is inherently sustainable and ecological. It is also affordable, and some experts do believe it is possible. We can do this. Will we?

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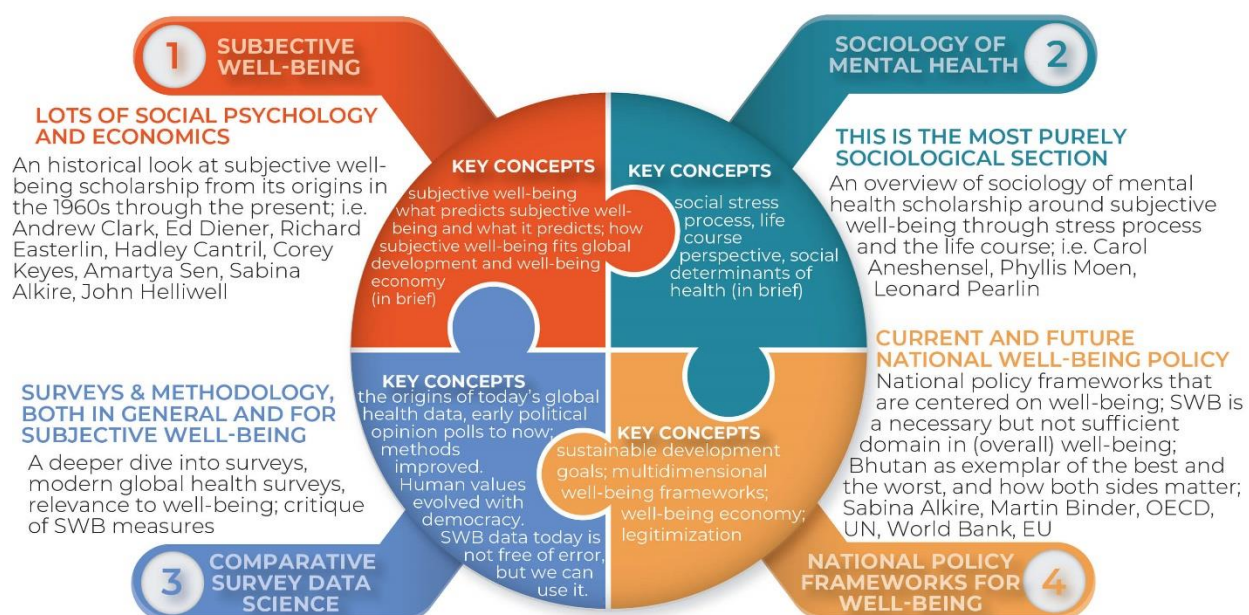
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Figure 1. A Conceptual Model of the Scholarship Covered by this Preliminary Exam



Section 1: Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

1.0 Introduction to the Subjective Well-Being Section

The purpose of these x.0 introductory subsections includes not only giving an overview of the section, but also explaining in advance why certain content is present, like a roadmap. These introductions should read like a preface. Hopefully, they are helpful to the reader in finding that each section is a part of the contiguous whole, and that, when taken collectively, this preface tells one complete story through these four sections ([Figure 1](#)). Thank you, in advance, for your willingness to make time to read my work and contribute your guidance to my scholarship. Section 1 covers the canon of subjective well-being literature.

The reader may want to be aware of the Appendix, a late addition to this document which has allowed me to make it more concise. The Appendix is my “glossary of inconsistently conceptualized things” and because I put my definitions succinctly into that 4-page glossary, where there were previously distinctions between concepts reiterated, you will now find a hyperlink ([see Appendix](#)) to this space-saving internal resource.

I continue to be fascinated by the research silos I’ve discovered since being in sociology for only 2.5 years, after more than 20 years in psychology. I mention that to explain why social psychology and economics, sociology of mental health, and national policy change concepts are in different sections when, in the end, these overlap and come back together in a **well-being economy** ([see Appendix](#)) which I think is ultimately the only sustainable development option.

For a glimpse at the silos, Corey Keyes, a sociologist, has done subjective well-being research with Carol Ryff, a psychologist, (1995). Therein they cite Ed Diener, another psychologist, and sources that Diener also cites (i.e. Bradburn 1969). So, these were adjacent, and somewhat porous silos that housed Ryff, Keyes and Diener, because, at least in earlier years, they interacted. Their literature reviews read like they were talking about similar things. They

were not always in agreement. In 1998, Diener and colleagues published a commentary (Diener, Sapyta and Suh 1998) directly refuting Carol Ryff's take on **well-being** ([see Appendix](#)).

This is not just a battle of semantics or minor priority choices, but what turns out to be very important towards the end of my prelim, when I'm looking at the well-being economy, and the role of subjective well-being within that, as distinct from (overall) well-being. To foreshadow that here, I have come to believe that the subjective well-being measures are truly essential, *necessary but not sufficient* when seeking to measure sustainable societal development. This grouse among scholars in adjacent silos seems almost prescient.

Overall, the psychologists believe that subjective well-being is necessarily social and contextual in its determinants, **objective well-being** ([see Appendix](#)) is very important to understanding **subjective well-being**, but that individual characteristics (i.e. values, and personal characteristics such as resiliency, etc.) are additionally important because they help explain variation among experiences of people in the same social circumstance (Diener et al. 1999).

Sociologists of mental health look at individual characteristics for different reasons. For example, with interest in depression outcomes among African Americans, sociologists used the social stress process model (discussed fully in [Section 2](#)) to better understand differentiated outcomes. Researchers (Miller, Rote and Keith 2013) investigated a mediated moderation in which conditional effects of socioeconomic status were mediated by African Americans having fewer coping resources, which moderated the social stress process, especially respondents' sense of mastery (Pearlin et al. 1981) which moderated the relationship between experienced racial discrimination and depression outcomes.

Therefore Section 1 and Section 2 are separate. Section 1 is the economists and the psychologists, and the canon of subjective well-being literature, and Section 2 is the sociologists

of mental health, and the social stress process model. They approach well-being differently, although elements from each converge in Section 4 when looking at policymaking and the future for a well-being economy agenda oriented towards multidimensional well-being.

Shifting gears, I would like to differentiate that I'm not writing about *psychological* well-being (Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff 2002) anywhere in this paper. Outside of this paragraph, psychological well-being is not my focus. It would be on topics such as "self-actualization" or "full humanness" (Maslow 1962) which Maslow himself emphasized was not the same thing as health or well-being. Psychological well-being also includes things like "individuation" or "the bringing into reality of the whole human being" (Jung 1933). And more recently, psychological well-being is about things like self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, and autonomy (Ryff and Keyes 1995). No. Even when discussing the work of the social psychologists of today, I am talking about **subjective well-being** exclusively, that which was first named in the 1950s as a quality of life indicator (Payne 1951/2014). Those things that I'm not talking about are occasionally studied under the heading of subjective well-being, and sometimes called *eudaimonic well-being*, but that is not a focus of any part of this paper. I leave it here.

For the roadmap through section 1: In subsection 1.1, I work through the key concepts, developers, and scholarship on subjective well-being over time, through the classics. The influential scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s solidified what subjective well-being research was about, through public opinion surveys directly asking people about their own experiences.

An ongoing methodological hurdle in all well-being research is what economists refer to as *the endogeneity problem*, which, simply put, concerns the extent to which we can consider a causal framework around variables that are typically correlated with one another. Traditional "predictors" and expected "outcomes" each get their own subsection here because that's how

they are typically studied to date (in subsections 1.2 and 1.3), even though they are all, to varying extents, correlates of subjective well-being.

In closing with subsection 1.4, I bridge this collective of groundwork on the subjective well-being classics and the traditional predictors and expected outcomes of subjective well-being together into some of the foundational scholarship on a global development framework for well-being, with two anchors: Amartya Sen's capability approach, and a utilitarian or happiness approach to development. I close with introducing the reader to a real-world example where these two seemingly incompatible approaches to global development mesh together. I welcome you to read Section 1 proper and promise subsequent introductions will be much briefer.

1.1 Classic SWB References in Social Psychology and Economics

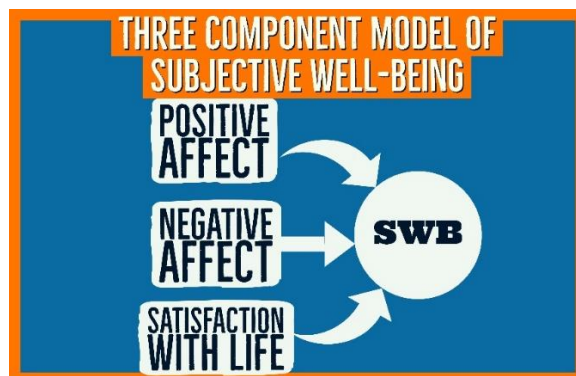
Subjective well-being (SWB) scholarship is largely empirically grounded. Where others may begin scientific inquiry with a theoretical starting point, many of the SWB studies start by examining the data (see, e.g., Watson 1930). I believe this makes sense, particularly among the classics in the literature, given the nature of a measure that is all about what people say about how life is going for them. The research tends to start with listening to those voices. Numerous scales have been developed to facilitate the collection and interpretation of such information.

The Three-Component Model of SWB

In 1974, the journal *Social Indicators Research* was formed, and SWB was already a keyword. In terms of **measures of subjective well-being** (see [Appendix](#)), Diener (1984) points out that SWB research then often emphasized sociodemographic correlates of SWB – in other words, describing the people who were happy. Regarding conceptualization of SWB, Diener (1984) affirms and expands on earlier findings (Andrews and Withey 1974) of there being three independent components within SWB: positive affect, negative affect, and a cognitive appraisal of life satisfaction ([Figure 2](#)). Before this three-component conceptualization, SWB was thought

of as having only two components, the positive and negative affect ones only, and their net difference or **affect balance score** ([see Appendix](#)) was the SWB metric (Bradburn 1969).

Figure 2. The Three Component Model of Subjective Well-Being (Diener 1984)



Within this three-component conceptualization, each component can be measured separately as they are largely independent. Arguments about the component measures of SWB seemed mostly settled after the work of the 1980s. For example, the current guidelines from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2013) reference this same three-component model and Diener’s 1984 articulation of it. The SWB components and their measurement are discussed next.

Affective Well-Being

Positive affect and negative affect are about feelings, and together they comprise **affective well-being** ([see Appendix](#)), and what was historically thought of as happiness. It’s only when considering momentary snapshots that positive affect and negative affect may appear to be inversely related – because, of course, people aren’t super happy and really sad at the same time. When they are considered over time along with their intensity, they are found to be independent (Bradburn 1969; Diener et al. 1985b; Phillips 1967).

Although Bradburn’s classic text was the result of a psychological study funded by National Institute of Mental Health, he did not find value in further investigating individual

differences in happiness data until more interactive and social determinants of happiness could be explored, such as the influences of roles and cross role analysis, or better understanding the correlation between positive affect and socioeconomic status. Of this and a desire to better understand the effects of social change and social trends on people's **well-being** ([see Appendix](#)), he wrote that “until the nature of the forest is fully understood, too much attention to the small variations among the trees may well be less than helpful” (Bradburn 1969:232).

Watson's classic (1930) study on the correlates of happiness was specifically measuring affective well-being. The first question on his survey is shared here as an historical snapshot from almost a century ago ([Figure 3](#)). Among Watson's findings was that “General level of happiness among adults can be measured with adequate reliability by a single check on one graphic scale” (108). I find that interesting because many decades passed before the scientific community would, in general, agree (see, for e.g., OECD 2013:45).

Figure 3. Question 1 from “Happiness Among Adult Students of Education” (Watson 1930)

1. (a) Comparing yourself with other persons of the same age and sex how do you feel you should rate your own general happiness? Place a short vertical mark across the line below to indicate about where you belong. Consider your average state over several months.

_____ |

Most miserable of all	About three-fourths of the population happier than you are	The average person of your own age and sex	Happier, on the whole, than three-fourths of the population of similar age and sex	Happiest of all
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The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) is a simple, combined 10-item measure with high internal consistency, with the positive and negative scales largely uncorrelated and found to be stable over time (Watson, Clark and Tellegen 1988). The PANAS has also continued to be scrutinized over the years and is still in use today. The discriminant validity of this tool was established early on (Lucas, Diener and Suh 1996).

Life Satisfaction

One popular measure of **life satisfaction** ([see Appendix](#)) is the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al. 1985a). The other classic measure of evaluative well-being, also an acceptable measure of SWB as a single item (OECD 2013), is the Cantril Self-Anchoring Striving scale, often referred to as the Cantril Ladder (Cantril 1965). I will discuss this important tool in greater detail in Section 3 and I include it here as it is a classic.

To emphasize how these SWB components of affective well-being and life satisfaction are independent, consider yourself preparing for an important presentation. You may not “feel happy” at any point during that process, but you may “be happy” with both the process and the outcome of constructing a perfect, intricate scientific presentation of your scholarship, accomplishing your goals, earning prestige, etc. *Being happy* is about satisfaction, not an emotional state, and reflects the products of positive life evaluation and favorable social comparisons between oneself and others and/or one’s own past (Shin and Johnson 1978).

Happiness-Income Paradox and Early Happiness Economics

The paradox is included here among the classics because it is both foundational and enduring; income is otherwise discussed as appropriate elsewhere. Through the present day, the well-known *happiness-income paradox*, or the *Easterlin paradox* (Easterlin 1974), remains unsettled, even though many have claimed that it is either resolved and not a real thing, because income does matter, or that it is a permanent paradox (i.e. Easterlin 2021; Easterlin 1995). Although they markedly disagree about how it is so, the majority opinion is that income does influence SWB (Clark, Frijters and Shields 2008).

Easterlin theorized that in cross-sectional data, it will often seem that happiness and income covary together, directly, and that this is true both within a country and between

countries, when data are aggregated at the national level. In other words, at a moment in time, the wealthiest country is the happiest country, and the poorest country is the least happy country. Similarly, within any country, the rich people are happiest, and the poor people are unhappiest. The paradox is that, according to Easterlin, an economist, this entirely degrades when viewing time series data (Easterlin 1974; Easterlin 1995; Easterlin 2015). When viewed over time, Easterlin claims the relationship does not hold up. As a person or country increases income or per capita gross domestic product respectively, they do not become increasingly happy.

His landmark paper (1974) used growth in the U.S. economy post WWII compared to what he describes as stable, unchanging SWB scores over the same decades, using the General Social Survey for SWB. And for Easterlin, there is no substantive relationship between income and happiness. For others who have investigated this (see, e.g., Blanchflower and Oswald 2004; Diener and Biswas-Diener 2002; Ferrer-I-Carbonell and Frijters 2004; Ng and Diener 2019; Veenhoven 1991), there is. I will revisit the predictive role of income on SWB in subsection 1.2.

Continuing with the classics of **happiness economics** ([see Appendix](#)), by the late 1990s, economics shifted to where the happiness scholarship was more centered in the discipline. Empirical studies on the economic and sociodemographic determinants of SWB across nations and years within the economics literature have continued to proliferate through today, and with more sophisticated scholarship underway, there is a renewed interest in a well-being economy.

This paradigm shift within economics (Frank 1997; Ng 1997; Oswald 1997) redefined the value of money. First, the happiness economists said that happiness is the goal of most people, and the real value of money is that it is a means of increasing happiness. Then, they said that sometimes money does not lead to more happiness, which means money is not always important, but happiness always is (Ng 1997:1848-1849). It's remarkable.

The So-Called “Nun Study” and “Happy People Live Longer”

There is one last study to discuss among the classics, and it concerns the outcome of life expectancy. I otherwise discuss SWB *outcomes* in subsection 1.3, but this one study is a classic and thus discussed here. It was known as “the nun study” and it began in the 1980s at the University of Minnesota as a study on aging and later on Alzheimer’s disease (Snowdon et al. 1996). At the suggestion of their Mother Superior, a community of Catholic Sisters of Notre Dame had kept detailed personal journals of their emotions at age 22.

By nature of being members of a religious order, these women lived unusually homogeneous lives, having shared very similar levels of access to healthcare, social interactions, socioeconomic status (equivalent vows of poverty, communal money), and occupation (they were all teachers). None of them consumed alcohol or smoked. All consented to biomarker and other testing. From the happiness as recorded in hundreds of journals written when they were 22 years old, the health and longevity of these octogenarian women was now investigated. The main finding relevant for my paper is that the sisters who expressed more positive affect when they were young lived a lot longer, on average a decade longer (Danner, Snowdon and Friesen 2001).

This now-classic (2001) study is oft pointed to when one is claiming that *happy people live longer*, because so many confounds were naturally removed from the analysis. I include it because it is a popular classic, the original co-PIs were at the University of Minnesota, and one of my dear friends, Sister Claudia, is an 83-year-old Sister of Notre Dame –and I remember their contributions to science here to honor the friends of my friend.

1.2 What leads to SWB? (SWB as an outcome of interest)

What do we usually expect to predict subjective well-being? What explains who has high SWB in general? If we zoom in microscopically close, it could be that people who have “the transcriptionally more efficient version of the serotonin transporter gene” in their brains have

higher SWB, since that was found in a nationally representative sample of U.S. study participants (De Neve 2011:456). I know that sort of thing makes sociologists cringe, so let's zoom way out too. It could be that climate, specifically demanding climates (defined as temperatures outside the range of temperate), is an important factor in lowering SWB, or at least the interaction between climate and wealth using nation-level means (Fischer and Van De Vliert 2011). According to their study of climate variables and SWB in 58 countries, Fischer and Van De Vliert found that both climate change and poverty were important predictors of SWB. I appreciate their suggestion that adding ecological variables into a model of SWB could help in understanding cultural processes involved as well (Fischer and Van De Vliert 2011:1040).

Now with the zooming in and out drama out of the way, I'd like to look at the popular, generally agreed upon predictors of SWB next. The scientists behind the World Happiness Report analyzed this question about determinants for the entire world using cross sectional, annual data comprised of nationally representative samples representing 98% of the world's noninstitutionalized adult population. In 2020, they figured that "six key variables contribute to explaining the full sample of national annual average scores over the whole period 2005-2019. These variables are GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom, generosity, and absence of corruption" (Helliwell et al. 2020b:14). They also looked at how much each of these six variables contributed to variation in life satisfaction scores. They determined, for the world as a whole, that "the largest single part (33%) comes from social support, followed by GDP per capita (25%) and healthy life expectancy (20%), and then freedom (13%), generosity (5%), and corruption (4%)" (Helliwell et al. 2020b:18).

That is nice and tidy but, of course, by aggregating respondent-level data across more than 150 nations, extremes will tend to cancel one another out, and nuance will necessarily get

lost in order for broad patterns to emerge. That nuance that is masked includes inequalities, which national means do not reveal as that requires examining the shape of a distribution. I discuss this further in Section 3 and mention it here for clarity. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the team of scientists who work with the complete data set of the Gallup World Poll (Gallup 2021) consistently arrive at the same predictors of SWB, and that social support is always on top.

Regardless of discipline, the literature is clear that SWB is shaped by inequality (Clark, Frijters and Shields 2008; Iceland and Ludwig-Dehm 2019), and so SWB is valuable as an outcome of interest that captures that inequality as well. Often, we look at income and wealth inequality, but subjective well-being inequality is another measure that exposes something specific. Social inequality is revealed in subjective well-being inequality in part because many of the SWB determinants are shaped by social inequality too.

Because SWB is shaped by inequality, all SWB research raises important methodological questions about how researchers may potentially control for some factors outside of those in which they have interest, and thereby risk an inadequate look at situations of inequality. For example, in looking at SWB and age, it is suggested that if controlling for things like the presence of children, health, disability, and marital status, we would end up with the very dull conclusion that older people would probably be happier if they had their youthful health back, and their deceased loved ones returned (Deaton 2018:5). As another example, what often emerges as a main explanation for racial well-being variance is marital status (married people have higher SWB), which varies by race in the United States and explained up to two-thirds of the well-being gap in one study (Iceland and Ludwig-Dehm 2019:25). Another explanation for racial well-being inequality is income inequality, which was found to have explained 15-20% of the well-being gap (Iceland and Ludwig-Dehm 2019:25).

Those results are based on analyzing U.S. data from the General Social Survey through a modified Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition analysis, over all available GSS survey year waves, and would differ in other national contexts. But in the decomposition analysis, researchers controlled for factors that result in these oversimplified conclusions because, obviously, the situation of racial inequality is more complex than suggesting that if Black people got married more, they'd be happier. Yet such a false conclusion is a risk when researchers control for variables outside those in which they have interest. I have that risk in mind as I proceed through this subsection.

I'm also familiar with literature on SWB from the *Journal of Black Psychology*, which tends to be based on national cross section studies of the adult U.S. Black population, and they also find a high predictive value for marital status on SWB for Black Americans (for a review, see Taylor et al. 2001). That same study also found social support is the primary predictor of SWB, and that informal social support and social participation (i.e. fictive kin, neighboring, church participation) seem much more important for SWB among Black American women than the general American population, and more than for Black American men, for whom they find no relationship between social participation and SWB (Taylor et al. 2001:444).

Acknowledging that social variables never have their effects in isolation and apart from considerations of context (i.e., of time and place and race and gender and cohort), I will briefly discuss each of the established SWB predictors on their own. For each of the following predictors, I could expand for volumes to discuss these predictors in context. For brevity, I do not do so but for clarity, I specify this. After the six most interrogated predictors, I will discuss lesser emphasized determinants, and summarize some key complexities.

Social Support as a Predictor

Social support is a strong positive predictor of SWB, especially of life satisfaction and positive affect (Ryan and Deci 2001). Social support and feelings of belonging predict SWB over other covariates (Helliwell et al. 2020b; King and Hicks 2021; Taylor et al. 2001). The nature of the social ties between people and groups is commonly understood as being an important well-being determinant (i.e. Durkheim 2005; Granovetter 1973; Turner 1978).

Social participation seems to have a direct effect on one's **affect balance score** ([see Appendix](#)) through positive affect (Phillips 1967). What constitutes social support varies quite a bit across studies and disciplines, to include social support resources (relationships, generally measured through social network or participation), social support behaviors (actions and dynamics, also measured through social network and reciprocity), and subjective judgments of the quality and quantity of one's social support (survey items) (Vaux 1985:91-92).

GDP Per Capita as a Predictor

Regarding GDP per capita, the relationship between economic growth and well-being is not linear, nor is it simple, and the relationship is not universally agreed-upon to even exist. And although findings vary about the typical shape of the potential relationship between economic growth and SWB over time, continued economic increases do not generally correspond to continued increases in SWB (Clark, Frijters and Shields 2008; Easterlin 1974; Lakshmanasamy and Maya 2021). For those who find that some economic increases do coincide with some SWB increases, these relationships are often found in situations of dire poverty or to a certain threshold of meeting basic needs. A customary explanation of such a threshold is *adaptation* or **adaptive preferences** ([see Appendix](#)).

The Easterlin paradox (Easterlin 1974) is relevant here and Easterlin has remained firm that SWB and economic growth are not related, the paradox is permanent, and there is no threshold or other quasi-relationship of which to speak (Easterlin 2015). Easterlin also refutes claims of the diminishing marginal utility of income that is corrected for graphically by plotting SWB against log-transformed household income or GDP values in cross-sectional data. Describing this as “the classic trick of scales” (Veenhoven, cited in Easterlin 2015:283), he goes on to repudiate others’ claims by conducting time series studies of happiness and economic growth, and repeatedly finding that “for rich, developing, and transition countries, whether pooled or analyzed separately, there is no time series evidence that a higher economic growth rate increases the rate of improvement in life satisfaction” (Easterlin 2015:286).

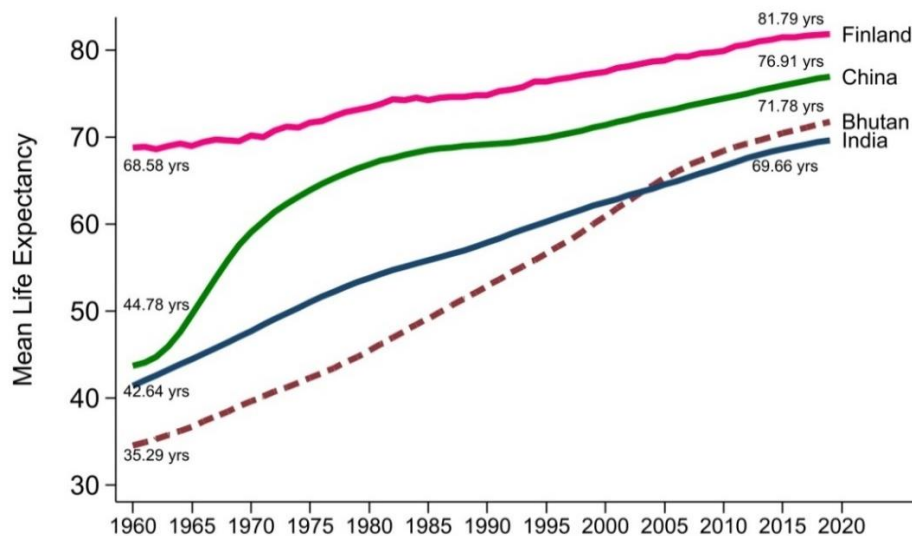
An additional distinction is possible in that *income inequality* within a country may be related. Some research has found that income inequality in a country moderates the effects of low income (Ng and Diener 2019). Even if one is assuming that income and SWB are related, broadly increasing income is unlikely to broadly increase SWB (Easterlin 1974; Rojas 2019).

Healthy Life Expectancy as a Predictor

Healthy life expectancy is a generally accepted positive determinant of SWB. The World Happiness Report’s statistical appendix details how they use the life expectancy from the World Health Organization’s data repository (Helliwell et al. 2020a) employing interpolation and extrapolation of less frequent life expectancy data with annual SWB data with. While life expectancy has risen from 1960 to the present in most countries ([Figure 4](#)), SWB has remained relatively stable in most countries. There is more support for a causal relationship of SWB → longevity (i.e. “happy people live longer”) than there is of life expectancy → SWB. We can also note that when a mean “remains constant” that does not, necessarily suggest that the same people

remain at the same levels. Groups of people can change relative positions and still result in the same overall mean, making something look like there is no change when there is plenty.

Figure 4. Mean Life Expectancy for a Sample of Countries Over Time



Note. Source is World Bank data. 2019 is the most recent available year. Countries plotted here are often investigated for their SWB metrics. World Bank indicators are available at data.worldbank.org/indicator. You can find a tutorial on how to graph World Bank indicators using Stata at geterika.com/stats.

Personal Freedom as a Predictor

Personal freedom is most often measured in global health surveys as *perceived* personal freedom. The freedom to make life choices has long been known to contribute to well-being. Aristotle linked leisure time with well-being specifically because leisure involved time in which one could freely choose one's actions (Aristotle, as cited in Lambert et al. 2020).

In the modern era, at least since the seminal work of Amartya Sen (1999/2014), *freedom* can also be understood as an ends unto itself, rather than as only a means to an end. Such a **capability approach** ([see Appendix](#)) as context for freedom also highlights the importance of how different types of personal freedom, such as political or economic freedom, are mutually reinforcing in a way that freedom begets more freedom.

Generosity as a Predictor

Generosity and civic engagement, sometimes conceptualized as prosocial behavior, include things like volunteering one's time, donating money, and helping someone in need. There is much research to support claims of a positive relationship between these prosocial behaviors and SWB, and growing support that is suggestive of the direction of influence being that generosity contributes to SWB. These studies use panel data over time, allowing for control both of covariates and of previous SWB levels in which, for example, SWB can be measured before and after a person begins volunteering (Lawton et al. 2021).

It is generally assumed that in the case of generosity, both directions of influence are often true although the mechanisms that may lead happy people to opt-in to increase volunteering, for example, are less understood. Even in studies that find SWB in position to be causing the generosity, such as the finding that happiness drives donating money to charity, the effect goes both ways (Boenigk and Mayr 2016).

Corruption as a Predictor

Corruption and SWB are consistently found to be related (Li and An 2020; Sulemana, Iddrisu and Kyoore 2017; Tavits 2008; Welsch 2008), and perceived corruption varies by national culture (Achim 2016). The extent to which a society legitimizes corruption in government and business seems to mitigate the negative effect corruption may have on SWB, with countries that have the highest corruption having a lessened negative effect on SWB as a result (Tay, Herian and Diener 2014). Income also mediates the effect of perceived corruption on SWB, with the mediating effect being greater in countries with higher overall corruption (Tay, Herian and Diener 2014). To put that differently, in countries where bribes and other indicators of corruption are more commonplace, not having money to engage in the corruption has negative effects on SWB beyond the main effects of having low income or experiencing high corruption.

Age is an Understudied Key Predictor

The most popularly interrogated determinants of SWB are the previous six, but that overview omits a key predictor of SWB. Age is a determinant of SWB, although researchers across the disciplines do not agree on how age functions as a determinant. This is likely due to the interactive nature of social variables. For example, in my analysis of SWB data in India using the Gallup World Poll, I found that an interaction between age and disability explained variation in the SWB of Indians today ([Figure 5](#)). This was further explained by the importance of social support. I found no direct, main effect for age, but older, disabled Indians were suffering, and those older, disabled Indians who had social support suffered a lot less.

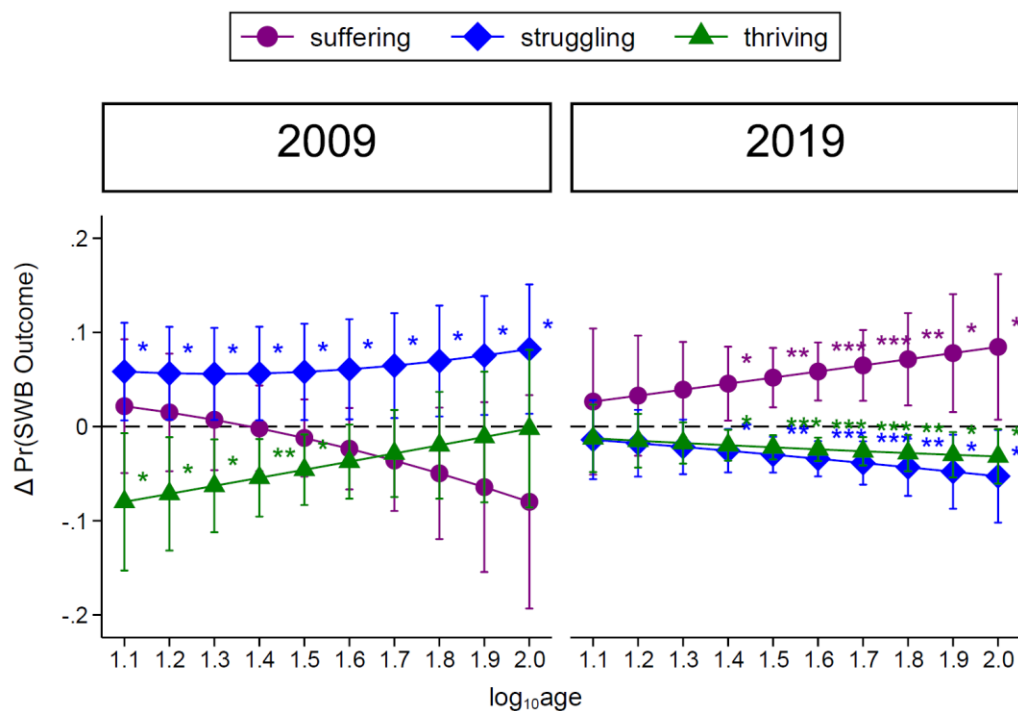
And this may sound like a finding more centered on social support, but the reality is that social support didn't make as big of a difference to the predicted probabilities of SWB outcomes in younger disabled Indians. This is a finding of age as a predictor of SWB, through its relationships with disability and social support. And social support made more of a difference for disabled Indians with low incomes at any age, because abject poverty and social support for disabled Indians seem to determine well-being across the life course for Indians today.

Scholars who write about the so-called "U-shaped curve" of happiness or SWB by age are typically economists (Blanchflower and Graham 2020). Psychologists tend to suggest that any hint of a midlife dip in SWB is either a cohort effect or measurement error. Ed Diener, influential social psychologist (1999) notes that it is hard to tease out age effects from cohort effects using cross sectional population health survey data. Ron Inglehart, political scientist and former director of the World Values Survey (1990) reports that "within given countries, subjective well-being shows little variation by age" (p. 224). I personally don't see how we could say, because too many other factors would be in play. For example, if I'm in Honduras and need

to pick coffee to make money, but they won't let me do it after a certain age, then my overall well-being is going to be affected by age there, because of the context of resources.

Andrew Clark (2019), an economist, investigated the age-SWB relationship exploiting methods of modeling individual fixed effects in order to tease out whether the observed U-shape of SWB by age, the midlife dip, might be a cohort effect – that is, something particular to, say, the people born in the 1950s who were then in their 40s when data were collected in the 1990s. Clark concluded that there may have been a slight cohort effect but there was a greater fixed effect, a SWB dip at midlife that is not fully explained by cohort effects. Overall, there is less consensus about age than any other predictor of SWB, despite its importance.

Figure 5. Average Marginal Effects (AMEs) of Disability by Age on Subjective Well-Being (SWB) Outcome Probabilities in India 2009 vs. 2019



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

Notes. Source is Gallup World Poll data ($n = 8,047$). AMEs from the main partial proportional odds model of SWB. Capped lines represent 95% CIs. NB that all AMEs in this set of plots are significant except in probability of suffering in 2009.

1.3 What is the impact of SWB? (SWB as an explanatory variable of interest)

Happiness or SWB can be an end goal unto itself, and a **happiness approach** ([see Appendix](#)) to development is based on that. Alas, to urge national policy change, one needs to also make a case for SWB through highlighting that SWB is not just the result of some economic things but the cause of some other things that are of interest. In fact, it is the assumption of a reciprocity between happiness and national economic prosperity that undergirds the leading understanding of **well-being economy** ([see Appendix](#)). It starts with SWB being the goal of government, and the impact of SWB is expected to include not only indicators of **objective well-being** ([see Appendix](#)) but also economic growth (Llena-Nozal, Martin and Murin 2019). I will discuss well-being economy in subsection 1.4 and later in Section 4. In this subsection, I will mostly focus on the objective well-being outcomes of SWB.

The very experience of happiness or SWB does something to inspire and/or encourage people to make certain choices and pursue certain goals, which is at least partly why it makes sense to prioritize SWB, because it yields benefits across domains. The objective well-being outcomes of SWB categorically include (i) benefits to people's health and longevity; and (ii) healthy behaviors, both individual and social/communal behaviors, in addition to the economic outcomes such as increased productivity and income (De Neve et al. 2013:2), and people with high SWB are generally better citizens (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2019). These results are consistent, which is why happiness economics is so prolific. And what nation would not want a healthier, stronger, more productive, generous and kind, civically engaged populace?

Micro Level Outcomes of SWB

I have collected the individual-level outcomes here. These are the benefits that people with high SWB seem to experience. By aggregating and analyzing these, we can understand

social inequalities and lots of more broad considerations but, for the non-clinical reader, I recognize this lens may feel myopic, and I will thus strive for brevity.

With interests in how the emotional health status of children might relate to inflammation in their bodies in adulthood, researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health used longitudinal data from a prenatal study that began in the 1950s by interviewing pregnant women (Appleton et al. 2011). For this aspect of the study, they interviewed the adults born from those pregnancies. From assessing C-reactive protein levels, which indicate general inflammation, findings suggest that children who had greater emotional well-being at age 7 had lower general inflammation at age 42, suggestive of a possible protective factor against inflammation. A main reason that inflammation matters is for cardiovascular health. Boehm and Kubzansky (2012) found that even after controlling for all the traditional risk factors for stroke, patients who had high SWB had a 26% less risk of stroke six years later (Boehm and Kubzansky 2012:670).

That makes sense when taking into account they also found that higher SWB was more likely to be found along with restorative health behaviors such as exercise. And happier people eat a more heart healthy diet, more fruits and vegetables, even after controlling for other factors (Blanchflower, Oswald and Stewart-Brown 2013). And considering cross-sectional, nationally-representative samples, SWB and hypertension are inversely related across nations (Blanchflower and Oswald 2008). And happy people live longer, even after controlling relevant factors (Danner, Snowdon and Friesen 2001; Diener and Chan 2011). With much caution around the causal language of these claims, there are at least eight types of evidence suggesting a causal link in the direction going from SWB → health → longevity (Diener and Chan 2011).

As the economists like productivity, they have conducted experiments with inducing participants into a happy mood – by showing a comedy video or giving chocolates and other

treats (Oswald, Proto and Sgroi 2015). Measures of participants' mood confirmed that they were happy, and then they were to complete a simple piece-count task. Those who were made happier (suggestive of employees) were consistently more productive. Time is spent watching the comedy and eating the chocolates, and money is spent purchasing things, but findings suggest that employees made happier are then more productive. We also know that emotional contagion is real, which tends to improve small group processes and cooperation (Barsade 2002:644).

Macro Level Outcomes of SWB

Another use for SWB as an outcome pertains to broader concepts of **objective well-being** ([see Appendix](#)). Various indicators have been developed to represent expected years of living free from suffering. They all begin with life expectancy, because SWB measures alone do not quantify duration of life, only **quality of life**. Onto that, various measures of objective well-being are attached to produce indicators. One illustration of this usage is the WELLBY approach, developed by the research team of the World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al. 2021:193-201). The WELLBY resembles the Quality-Adjusted Life Years (QALY) approach, which is particular to health-related quality adjustments to longevity. Another indicator is called years of good life (YoGL), which also begins with life expectancy and attaches both objective well-being and SWB measures (Lutz et al. 2021). The main purpose of these indicators is to be able to track changes over time within a country, to give empirically based values for **well-being** changes.

Even though higher SWB does tend to help people live better lives across domains, it is no panacea. Happy people get sick. Friends disappoint us. We all eventually will die. When I was in the military, my happiest shipmate was definitely the least productive worker. "Happiness is like any other factor that aids health and functioning: with all other things being equal, it is

likely (but not guaranteed) to help” (De Neve et al. 2013:2). Happiness matters either because it is an inherently worthy goal or because it leads to or reveals valuable things, or it does both.

1.4 Global Development and SWB

Whenever we’re talking about people’s well-being we are talking about their welfare (Grimes 2021:268). In moving “Beyond GDP” as an indicator of societal progress, what must come next, they said, is something that reflects social and ecological well-being, inequality, and sustainability (EU Commission 2009). Beyond GDP has become institutionalized in several countries and commitments to multidimensional well-being measurements are growing (Adler and Fluerbaey 2016:615; Alkire 2016).

An early “Beyond GDP” initiative, which began in 2011, is the OECD Well-Being Framework (Llena-Nozal, Martin and Murin 2019), which maintains a dashboard of 80 indicators at present. Measures of “current well-being” have 11 dimensions, and measures of “future well-being” have four dimensions (OECD 2020:21). One of the current well-being dimensions is subjective well-being, and it’s made up of **life satisfaction**, and something that resembles **affect balance score** ([see Appendix](#)), along with well-being inequality. The resources for future well-being are about sustainability, what it should take to ensure tomorrow’s well-being. Results of this multidimensional framework are statistically analyzed, summarized and shared to inform policy in 41 OECD-affiliated countries (OECD 2020).

Most mainstream conceptualizations of sustainable development under the heading of **well-being economy** grow from one of two philosophical pedigrees: a **utilitarian approach** (which includes **happiness approach**) or a **capability approach**.

The **utilitarian approach** ([see Appendix](#)) upholds happiness as a worthy end, along with the ethic that government should actively seek the **happiness** of people. It is a consequential

consideration in that decisions, actions, and behaviors should all be judged by their results, or by what they cause, in the utility metric of happiness (Sen 1999/2014:82). This idea for the role of national government is not new. Around 500 BCE, the Chinese philosopher Confucius wrote that “there is good government when those who are near are made happy, and when those who are afar are attracted” (Stark 2004:287).

The **capability approach** ([see Appendix](#)) is based on the work of Amartya Sen (Sen 1987; Sen 1999), and suggests that people must be free to achieve well-being, with a focus on people’s capability to do so. “The well-being of a person can be seen in terms of the quality ... of the person's being. Living may be seen as consisting of a set of interrelated 'functionings', consisting of beings and doings” (Sen 1992:39). And what is valued is people’s freedom to be and to do the things that they “have reason to value” (Sen 1992:81). Development, then, is all about expanding capabilities—development as freedom (Sen 1999/2014)—just as poverty and suffering is understood in terms of deprivations of capability.

Capability Approach to Global Development Today

Capability reflects our freedom *to be and to do* what we value. Sen emphasizes how crucial it is that we are not tied to specific measures of achievements, but to the “real opportunities” whether the achievements happen or not. The illustration that Sen often employs of the difference between achievement and real opportunity is that of the religious devotee who fasts to an extreme of malnutrition. If the metric is achievement-based, the religious devotee who is fasting has the same nutrition outcome (achievement) as the person experiencing extreme malnutrition because their family has no food. The religious devotee, however, has made a choice, one that reflects their freedom to do so, from among options, and therein has greater

capability (Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi 2009:151). Their well-being is higher because they have greater capability, even though they have the same low achievement in this instance.

Proponents of the capability approach tend to argue against SWB measures, but they do so to varying extents, from excluding all subjective measures to seeing value in SWB as a necessary dimension of well-being as long as other dimensions are there too. The main argument against subjective measures is the potential for **adaptive preferences** ([see Appendix](#)). More recently, capability approach theorists and methodologists have come to appreciate that happiness has an evaluative space within the capability approach (Alkire 2016:623). As Sen concedes, “happiness is not all that matters, but first of all, it does matter (and that is important), and second, it can often provide useful evidence on whether or not we are achieving our objectives in general” (Sen 2008:27). This is how happiness is valuable for what it can explain.

In addition to Beyond GDP, another big push toward well-being economy was the Final Report of the Stiglitz Sen Fitoussi Commission (Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi 2009) which has spurred a great deal of additional interest around the world in more sophisticated, noneconomic measures of sustainable development and societal progress. Global development meets capability approach at its best with measurement. And this meet-up is necessarily a precursor to policy change, because “what we measure shapes what we collectively strive to pursue – and what we pursue determines what we measure” (Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi 2009:9).

I would like to retell, through story, an illustration the commission used in their Final Report to highlight the inadequacy of GDP as an indicator. It is a story about traffic jams that illustrates how GDP sometimes does not even capture important *economic* factors.

I invite the reader to imagine a country with a newfound abundance of traffic jams – they’re everywhere now. The roadways incur more damage and require renovations sooner. The

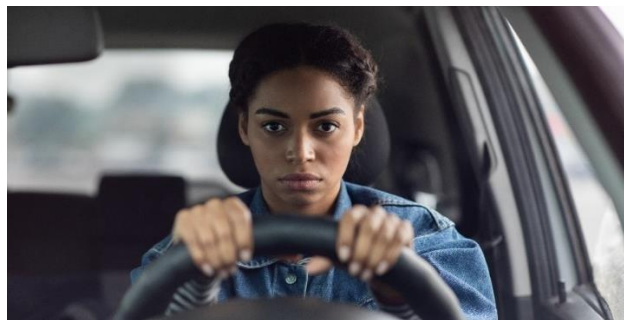
planet receives more CO₂ emissions from all the idling vehicles, damaging our atmosphere.

Commuters become frustrated from the added stress of being in traffic jams ([Figure 6](#)).

Employers may experience a loss of productivity among workers, due to the stress and/or being late. Noise pollution from the traffic jams can even cause health and sleeping disturbances.

There might be higher employee turnover as folks decide they no longer want to sit in traffic jams, breathing in automotive exhaust and spending more money on fuel just to get to work. You might think that a societal change that negatively impacts individuals, families, employers, and the planet itself, would be captured in a measure of economic progress as something negative. But despite how out-of-control traffic jams are harmful to people and to the planet, and to employer and household budgets in several ways, traffic jams make for an increased use of gasoline, and are thus associated with an increase in GDP. Clearly, GDP as a measure of social and economic progress does not capture some key phenomena.

Figure 6. Photo of an Unhappy Driver Probably in a Traffic Jam



Obviously, the commission was not the first to criticize the widespread reliance upon GDP as a measure of social or economic progress, but they did elevate the argument and expand on it. They also charge readers to shift policy emphasis away from production and toward sustainable development through a capability framework (Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi 2009:10). Their main critique of the utilitarian approach to development is what Sen refers to “adaptation and mental conditioning” (Sen 1985; Sen 1999/2014:84) which is **adaptive preference** ([see](#)

[Appendix](#)). Another critique proponents of the capability approach have of the utilitarian approach is an overreliance on national means, which overlooks the shapes of distributions, and thus masks inequality, which Sen calls “distributional indifference” (Sen 1999/2014:83).

A pure capability approach seems conflicting with happiness measures. Yet after discussing a utilitarian approach, I will point to development metrics with and without SWB dimensions, and then close with a possibility of a sort of SWB-capability approach merger piloted in the real world by Sabina Alkire (2016).

Utilitarian Approach to Global Development Today

Today, a utilitarian approach to development is about setting policies that improve people’s SWB, and addressing well-being inequality is considered essential (Layard 2016) despite Sen’s concern that this approach does not consider inequality. Global development in a utilitarian approach today involves policies that address both well-being inequality and the constraints to people’s happiness – for example, needs for education, human rights, and personal freedoms – because addressing those constraints leads to greater happiness (Grimes 2021:270).

When SWB Does Not Inform Global Development Metrics (i.e. HDI)

Capability approach directly informs the UN’s Human Development Index (HDI, Anand and Sen 1994). Today the HDI, a global development metric, assesses **objective well-being** ([see Appendix](#)) through compositing three indicators: life expectancy, educational attainment, and per capita GNI, PPP, ln-transformed. When the HDI was first introduced, it was a welcomed shift away from solely using national income toward measuring progress via some social goals as well. The HDI is the most popular indicator of development in use today (Hickel 2020).

Despite its widespread acceptance, the HDI is frustratingly disappointing, because those three indicators on which the HDI is based are highly correlated. As such, one gains little new

information by using the HDI versus simply using GDP. For all the capability approach, Amartya Sen, *Beyond GDP*, and, separately, those who work in **happiness economics** have done to emphasize the inadequacy of GDP as a measure of societal functioning, the capability approach seems to have resulted in an index that moves with GDP anyway.

Also, by weighting 1/3 of the HDI on economic growth, to have a high HDI requires continued economic growth, which leads to pushing biocapacity and furthering ecological distress. Such dangerous growth, without regard for the health of the planet, is not sustainable development, by definition. Ecological sustainability is among the UN's **Sustainable Development Goals** ([see Appendix](#)), which makes its absence in the UN's HDI perplexing.

In 2020, the Human Development Report (UNDP 2020) opened with some strong words for the world, considering not only the pandemic, but also the social inequalities and ecological destruction that have worsened in very recent years. Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator writes, paraphrasing the Stiglitz Sen Fitoussi report (2009) that “Climate change, rupturing inequalities, record numbers of people forced from their homes by conflict and crisis — these are the results of societies that *value what they measure instead of measuring what they value*” (UNDP 2020:iii). If UNDP believes the collective crises of today are due to societies not measuring what people value, then I am curious why they do not measure what they value. What seems clear is that we do need to measure what people value, which implies that we need to ask them about it.

When SWB Does Inform Global Development Metrics (i.e. SDI, HPI)

The Sustainable Development Index measures the ecological efficiency of development (Hickel 2020). It's a repudiation of the HDI, a result of frustration with the fact that nations are singly encouraged to increase HDI rankings, which incites unchecked economic growth without regard for the related ecological consequences, and to directly invest in education and healthcare

without sustainability considerations. Whereas the HDI rankings show the poorest countries on the bottom, the Sustainable Development Index (SDI) rankings are more complex. The bottom of the SDI rankings shows some poor countries, yes, but they are next to some wealthy countries who, for example, have high, unchecked CO₂ emissions and growing ecological material footprints, which measure impact in per capita consumption (Global Footprint Network 2020).

The SDI includes five indicators: education index, life expectancy (years), GNI per capita (PPP), CO₂ emissions (tns/cap) and material footprint (tns/cap) (Hickel 2020). Based on these indicators, the SDI does not result in ranking the so-called WEIRD countries at the top (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic; Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan 2010) because of the weighting of consumption. Therefore, the SDI conceptually challenges the legitimizing of the “methods by which nations at the core of the world system have sabotaged the periphery for the sake of their own development” (Hickel 2020). The number one nation currently on top of the SDI is not Denmark, the U.S., or Finland, but Costa Rica (Hickel 2020).

The Happy Planet Index (HPI) is more established than SDI and aims to measure sustainable well-being through a happiness approach to development (SWB X life expectancy ÷ ecological footprint). “The Happy Planet Index is not an indicator of the happiest country on the planet, or the best place to live. Nor does it indicate the most developed country in the traditional sense, or the most environmentally friendly. Instead, the HPI combines these ideas, offering a method of comparing countries’ progress towards the goal of providing long-term well-being for all, without exceeding the limits of the planet’s resources” (HPI 2022).

The present state of SWB is sitting within a global development context with well-being economy momentum that says in order to make economic progress, a society must make sustainable social and ecological progress, and that these matters are cyclical and inextricably

related (Adler and Fluerbaey 2016; Llana-Nozal, Martin and Murtin 2019; OECD 2020). SWB has a necessary place in development, in the measurement of well-being, so that there are indicators to guide policy initiatives, in explaining relevant factors, as a valid end unto itself, and as the cause of other outcomes of interest, even economic prosperity, according to OECD.

There is a way to use the capability approach as a framework for well-being economy metrics that are sustainable and include SWB (Alkire 2016:624-25). The Stiglitz Sen Fitoussi Final Report (2009) laid out three overarching issues for quality of life measurement: inequality, linking across the various dimensions, and aggregation, and national means obscure inequality. A comprehensive approach to measuring inequality includes "looking at differences in quality of life across people, groups and generations" (Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi 2009:55).

Linking across dimensions is necessary to capture the cumulative effects of multiple deprivations, key to a capability approach to well-being measurement. This is consistent with a sociology of mental health understanding of the *social stress process* as well, which I discuss next (Section 2), in which a whole *constellation of stressors* is a part of the analytic field (Pearlin 1989). And for aggregation, the implication is for "constructing measures that reflect the joint distribution of achievements or deprivations" (Alkire 2016:625).

Any measure of well-being is likely to be as complex as the concept itself, requiring "a plurality of indicators... (and yet) there are strong demands to develop a single scalar measure" (Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi 2009:59). In reality, it has been done, in the Kingdom of Bhutan, with their Gross National Happiness Index (Burger Araujo Santos and Dorji 2021) also based on a capability approach framework but including SWB as a dimension, along with ecological footprint and other indicators of sustainability, discussed in detail later in this paper (Section 4).

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Section 2: Sociology of Mental Health

2.0 Introduction to the Sociology of Mental Health Section

One could teach an entire Intro Sociology course using one paper (Pearlin 1989). An outcome of my work for this section is a proposal for the American Psychological Association (APA) 2022 Conference ([Figure 7](#)). It's a result of my coming to better understand the sociology of mental health scholarship and, to be clear, sociology itself. I hope they choose it.

Figure 7. Part of my 90-Minute Session Proposal for APA 2022

General statement:	<p>Having taught the undergraduate Community Psychology course sixty times over the course of nearly two decades, I have always emphasized that community psychology is a field defined by its core values. And while I have not previously been in a position to shape those values, I certainly do have considerable experience clarifying and conveying them, and helping other community psychologists to do likewise through my online resources and videos, such as my animated video explainer that many division members are using in their teaching as well.</p> <p>And now I'm completing a Sociology PhD degree program at an R-1 institution. And while I would never want community psychologists to become sociologists, as such a move would be a loss of our essential perspective, I have uncovered some points of incongruity among our core values that I did not see before, despite having studied, analyzed and taught them for the past 20 years. In this session, I invite other community psychologists to join me in rethinking our core values in order to recenter ourselves, and perhaps to do better.</p> <p>On the one hand, I hold up Barbara Dohrenwend's "Social Stress and Community Psychology (1978), which not only provides a conceptual model for the social stress process, but grounds community psychology's identity in relation to the social stress process as well. On the other hand, I hold up Leonard Pearlin's "The Stress Process" (1981) and "The Sociological Study of Stress" (1989), which provide a similar conceptual model for the social stress process, and ground sociology's identity in relation to the social stress process. Through a close analysis of this pairing, followed by a reflection on certain core values of community psychology, I believe attendees will agree that a bit of sociology would not only make community psychology better, but it would make community psychology more true to itself.</p>
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I mentioned Leonard Pearlin and Barbara Dohrenwend ([Figure 7](#)), who give overlapping lenses through which one can understand the social stress process and its relationship to SWB. Also, as far as research silos go, Pearlin and the Dohrenwends knew one other. Bruce and Barbara Dohrenwend wrote a book about social status and psychological disorder in 1969. Earlier, Bruce published in *American Sociological Review* no less, as a psychologist, that "the most consistent demographic finding reported in social psychiatric field studies is an inverse relation between social class and psychological disorder" (Dohrenwend 1966:14).

The social stress process comprises most of this section; I then move into a life course perspective, and end with social determinants of mental health, as they relate to SWB.

2.1 Social Stress Process Model

Durkheim and Merton and Anomie

Social stress in a sociology of mental health framing is not about unusual mental quandaries nor the colloquial understanding of “stress” but, rather, the common outcomes of life. This is essentially consistent with earlier sociologists who wrote of *anomie*. Émile Durkheim thought suicide more likely among individuals with anomie, or weak cohesion people can have among the collective of society. Society’s construction of deviance, through the socialization of shared norms and values through which most people find value consensus, serves as a protective mechanism that prevents anomie (Durkheim 2005). Consensus is reinforced through formal and informal social control, such as through laws and interpersonal shunning. Collective participation in these processes of socialization, the construction of deviance and even the shunning, reinforces norms and strengthens our solidarity, which further prevents anomie.

Robert Merton thought of anomie as the cause of deviance and the result of the distance between socialized hopes and dreams on the one hand, and access to *opportunity structures* on the other (Merton 1967). These theories should probably be considered separately because they seem mutually exclusive, given that Durkheim posits that society’s construction of deviance *prevents* anomie, and Merton posits that anomie *causes* deviance. As one critic wrote, “Combining these two, we get: anomie prevents anomie” (Hilbert 1989:242). To dig further into this would take me off track from the scope of this paper, but I note that both theorists take up the cause of well-being in some way, emphasizing the central importance of our social attachments, using similar nomenclature even if passing through discordant theories.

Dohrenwend and Pearlin and the Model

The social stress process can be complex, but it is not complicated ([Figure 8](#)).

Figure 8. The Social Stress Process (Dohrenwend 1978; Pearlin 1989)



That simple-looking conditional statement, based on the work of Leonard Pearlin in sociology, remains the conceptual base for the sociological study of how social factors and mental health and well-being are related today (George 2014:251). It has also been the basis of considerable scholarship on related sociology of mental health topics, such as understanding the links between education and health (Ross and Wu 1995), or a better understanding of minority stress and mental health in gay men (Meyer 1995), for example. More recently, sociologists and others have used the social stress process model to better understand the mental health consequences of isolation during Covid-19 lockdowns for older people in France, Italy, and Spain (Arpino et al. 2021). The policy implications of their findings include suggesting ways for older people to “keep social closeness, while being physically distant.” (Arpino et al. 2021:178). I will use examples from that Covid lockdown study as contemporary illustrations of some specific aspects of the social stress process model in my discussion that follows.

A sociologist of mental health looks at the whole stress process ([Figure 8](#)), but they are mostly working on the left side of the model where the exogenous variables are and where the stressors form a multidimensional array.

Stressors (Strains, Events, Stress Proliferation, Constellation of Stressors)

Stressors are what some think of as “problems” or all that is experienced by people encountering stress. Stressors are categorically comprised of *life events* and *strains*: status

strains, role strains, and ambient strains. The *status strains* are due to people's social and economic statuses, things like age, gender, race. People have many statuses, and they have master statuses, which are overarching, such as the everyday stress of being Black in the U.S.

There are many types of *role strains* too, which translates to there being a lot of problems experienced because of difficulties in the important formal or institutional roles in life, such as parent, spouse, or teacher, and in the informal roles, such as neighbor. By looking at all the potential role strains we can see a web of relatedness that surrounds a person's life, the myriad connections between contexts, and interpersonal relationships, and these are all the places where role strains are felt. One example of a type of role strain is *role overload*, which is basically burnout because someone just does not have enough energy to fully do all they are supposed to do for that role. And someone might be more likely to experience a role strain because of status strains, which have additionally burdened them. This is an obvious point reflecting social inequality, because even the same role strain may be a different stressor to different people based on status strains they also experience. This is true because nobody is a robot experiencing a stressor in isolation from our racialized, stratified social world, and social and economic status characteristics influence every aspect of the stress process, certainly around the stressors, which include all these strains, as they evolve over time, as well as the life events as they happen.

The third type of strain is comprised of the *ambient strains*, qualities of the physical environment, generally the neighborhood – i.e. noise, crime, threats of violence, a lack of safe and affordable housing, food deserts, accessible transportation to healthcare, shopping, employment opportunities, perpetual community spread of a virus, etc. These have the most influence on folks who cannot freely come and go, such as children or older residents (Pearlin

1999:400) and today, people with immune compromise. And all strains are naturally interactive, together with life events, comprising the beginning or left side of the model.

Regarding life events, there needs to be caution when thinking of something as a so-called stressful life event. Pearlin calls the array of stressors a *constellation*, which I appreciate because if identifying something as a stressful life event changes how it's analyzed, recorded, or understood, then that analysis risks overemphasizing the weight of that event in causing the outcome, and underemphasizing the weight of everything in the dense cloud of stressors that led up to it, followed it, and cooccurred with it. As Pearlin often uses as a teaching example, considering a home mortgage foreclosure as a stressful life event negates a lot of things that came before it, and cooccurred with it, and it further risks attributing all that follows it to the foreclosure event itself, instead of to that *constellation of stressors* that brought one to that moment. By labeling the foreclosure as “the stressful life event” we are using, as Pearlin calls it, “a proxy indicator of chronic hardship” (1989:245) which is one of my new favorite phrases.

Even though eventful stressors are always experienced within the constellation, sometimes a stressful life event is significant above and beyond status and roles. The Covid-19 pandemic is such an event, generating eventful stressors in the form of “negative discrete events” such as untimely death of a loved one, or sudden loss of a business (Arpino et al. 2021:177). Because of *stress proliferation* (Pearlin et al. 2005), Covid-19 likely amplifies chronic stressors too. And because poor health clusters in the general population (Mikolai, Keenan and Kulu 2020), Covid-19 vulnerabilities, including the added effects of social isolation, were expected to be heterogeneous in the population as well (Arpino et al. 2021:178), and it is logical that Covid-19 has indeed exacerbated existing social inequalities (Nieuwenhuis and Yerkes 2021).

The Covid-19 lockdown stress model study looked at the effects for older people losing social contact, environmental restrictions which became new ambient stressors. That social isolation also equates to a loss of *coping resources* or *mediators* (Arpino et al. 2021:178). Whether it's the effects of social isolation for people in prison, or older people in Covid-19 lockdown, or whether it's a matter of looking into foreclosures, what Pearlin does with the false dichotomy of events-vs-chronic-strains is elegant, and his scholarship highlights that sorting stressors in such a binary way is a fallacy in which we miss capturing the ways in which chronic stressors and stressful events converge, together, in reality. I believe this is very important.

It's also important to note that multiple status strains often coexist, in the intersectional reality that is our lives, and at a social level in terms of historical generations and cohorts, and what they accumulate over time that helps or impedes their potential ability to apply resources to stressors. The Covid-19 pandemic is a chronic stressor that affects everyone, but not equally, and it touches all major domains of life, not only health. This is true for the generation who, for example, graduated from high school via video conference from their bedrooms in 2020, and then "went off to college" in that same bedroom without going anywhere. They will have different vulnerability to stressors and access to coping resources, social supports and other mediators, all of which interact with the constellation of stressors based on status, role, and the ambient stressors in place prior to the pandemic. For those high school graduates who were laid off or not hired due to the pandemic, the economic outcomes might shift their entire future work lives, which adds to disadvantage in other areas and can circle back to poorer health outcomes (Settersten et al. 2020:3). In short, this pandemic changes everything for everyone, to varying extents, with far-reaching effects that go beyond health and beyond the short term.

Strains and events may together provide the necessary context for understanding each other – all the types of strains, with all the various life events, understood in context of one another, and always under the umbrella of social and economic statuses, mindful of the profiles of cohorts and the timing of transitions therein within the life course. And what's supposed to be a stressor for one person is often also a stressor for other people who share overlapping role sets, and the same is true for coping. When my wife finally got her cardiac pacemaker implanted, I'm pretty sure that intervention improved my well-being as much as it improved hers, even though that was clearly designed to improve hers, because we share role sets and my concern for her heart beating enough times per minute was very real. Also, any one of these stressors is no more a stand-alone event either, nor can any of them be uniformly characterized.

So why does this highly interactive social stress process matter? After understanding that constellation of stressors, what matters is understanding how the social organization of people's lives changes within the stress process. We need to do this so that we can identify why people have different outcomes to what appears to be similar exposures to a stressor. Those explanations for differing outcomes may be somewhere in the constellation of stressors, or they may be in the values that assign meaning to things, making some people's exposure to what looks like the same stressor different for them. During the Covid-19 lockdowns, older people who were able to increase intergenerational contacts (i.e. phone calls, video calls) were less likely to experience more depression if they did not live alone (Arpino et al. 2021:182). Sometimes the reasons for differing outcomes may be found only through a life course perspective that considers the temporal dynamics on which the entire process operates.

Mediators (Coping, Social Support, Self-Concept)

If different outcomes to similar-looking stressors are not adequately explained by different constellations of stressors or value sets, or a life course perspective, then differences in mediators are probably present. Recalling the base stress process (stressors → mediators → outcomes), mediators include coping, social support, and self-concept – and the latter especially includes mastery (Pearlin 1999:405). Coping is another array, like stressors are an array, and here coping is the collection of all the actions people take while trying to lessen the impact of the stressors. Coping is how we fight the things that are working against us, applying the resources to which we have access, access which can vary considerably according to status thus forming a coping array. And mediators are also influenced by stressors, and the time variables defined by the life course. For example, self-concept is altered by life effects and transitions, ambient stressors and the array of stressors, and both the presence and the absence of other potential mediators. In a sociological framing, outcomes are the manifestations of this dynamic stress process. And all of this happens while time passes, and cohort biographies are written while resources and stressors are differentially accumulated in complex summations that make well-being more or less likely for individuals, generations, and societies.

The Great Resignation, Agency, Shifting Pathways to Retirement

When I think of well-being today in the U.S. and E.U. anyway, one social stressor that comes to mind is the so-called “Great Resignation” that began in 2021 (Sheather and Slattery 2021). I was once a high school math teacher, and several of my former colleagues have taken early retirement since the beginning of the pandemic. Knowing the social and economic characteristics of who is leaving, and through what pathways in The Great Resignation could display the links between the status placement of employees in the larger structures of today’s U.S. society, and their well-being. A friend on social media posted on January 8 that after

teaching at his university for 55 years, one of his spring courses was closed for low enrollment. What did he do? He decided this is a nice time to fully retire, and he will be fine. This is not true of many who have recently left their work. This type of analysis also lends itself well to analyzing other contemporary topics, such as understanding differential outcomes across life domains from the Covid-19 pandemic more broadly (Settersten et al. 2020) or the various pathways to exiting the workforce.

A major consideration in such sociological analyses is *agency*, which is about options, and which can also vary differentially according to the intersectionality of social locations (by race, class, gender, and age). When my grandmother exited the workforce, she did so when she turned 65, and I believe simply because she turned 65. She was born in 1917 and had worked initially as “a mill girl” and later as a special education teacher. Her husband also retired at 65 from his job at the local bank where he had worked his whole adult life. After 25 years there, they gave him a gold watch, symbolic of the social contract that assured him that his years of dedication to his employer would be reciprocated by assurance of his continued employment. After they retired, they took in a couple of grandkids who needed somewhere to live, and they gave a lot more volunteer time to their church. They stretched their paltry retirement checks enough to pay their bills, drove an old car that ran well enough, and bought low-cost groceries. From what I can tell, except for my grandmother’s full-time work as a female member of the so-called Greatest Generation, the rest of what they did for work, through when and how they exited it, followed very predictable patterns.

That is no longer how the *later work course* (Moen, Flood and Wang 2021) goes. Pathways are now much less predictable and far more complicated by the specified interactions of race/ethnicity, age, gender, and class, up until people are in their 70s, when all of the divergent

pathways essentially converge due to retirement over age 70 being “structurally incentivized” (Moen, Flood and Wang 2021:3) by such factors as mandatory disability or retirement disbursements. Before that convergence, from studying the pathways of people in their 50s-70s, Moen et al. (2021) found that multiple varied trajectories are apparent. For example, college-educated White men are the most likely group to be working 50+ hour work weeks at age 50 and on through age 64 actually, while Black and Asian/PI men in their early 50s are twice as likely to be unemployed as White men are at the same age (p.5). This matches what I see among my contemporaries today, which was affirming in that my friends are apparently typical.

White educated men are also more likely than other men to be on a part-time work pathway around age 65 (p.5) which suggests that as they have the most advantage, they also have the most freedom to choose from among the options, since many workforce exits are not voluntary (p.2) but due to being laid off, disabled, or needing to care for a loved one, situational determinants that disproportionately disadvantage women and constrain their choices (p.3). Hispanic and Asian/PI women have a predicted probability of .7 for the unemployed pathway due to caring for a loved one (p.5), which makes them the most likely group to be exiting the later work force for caregiving. And college-educated men of color do not equally benefit from either their gender or their education (p.7), which highlights the relative importance of race in determining this pathway. All findings from this study underscore how important it is to conduct intersectional life course analyses to appreciate differentiated experiences across groups.

Life Course Perspective and Age-Period-Cohort Analysis

Later developments to the stress process model include this strong *life course perspective* (Aneshensel 2015; Falkingham, Evandrou and Vlachantoni 2020; George 2013; George 2014; Pearlin and Skaff 1996). Holding the sort of “original” stress process model up to a life course

lens adds meaningful dimensions of time (including length of exposure to stressors, duration dependence, critical periods, and milestones) and “the intersections of life domains that are typically studied separately” (George 2014:252). Of course, a life course perspective is more than just these time dimensions. It’s the overarching idea that events have different connotations, depending on when they occur in a person’s life course, which gets into *age-period-cohort analysis*. As my advisor said recently, “getting a PhD is a very different thing when you are in your 50s versus your 20s—preparation, goals, status implications, how you deal with the hidden curriculum, etc.” (personal communication).

An age-period-cohort analysis, popular in public health and epidemiology, is often used when applying a life course perspective or approach. Age-period-cohort (APC) analysis considers well-being at the population level, and the goal for sociologists is to disentangle the respective effects of age, period, and cohort. Because these are three *time-defined* things, it can be hard to separate their effects. *Age effects* should be independent of both cohort and time period, so they should be able to generalize across time and place. For example, people in their 40s everywhere for the past 120 years or so have kept optometrists in business, because that decade of life generally sees the most frequent changes in vision. That’s an age effect. It is what it is.

Period effects are patterns that affect all cohorts and all ages in a specific time period or year, and these result from external factors. For example, the Great Recession of 2008 created period effects for everyone alive in 2008. If your immediate thought here is that not everyone had the same effect, I agree with you. I will circle back. I remember getting a letter. I knew better, but for some reason I lazily went with a variable rate mortgage on my second home, and then got mail telling me that in 30 days, my monthly payments were going to go up almost \$800.

I worked full time and had perfect credit. I had savings. I had no debt other than that mortgage, and yet one piece of mail said I'd have to fork over \$800 more a month, beginning the following month. My solution was to refinance into a traditional loan, which I could do because my credit score was truly 850 and that affords one some perks. But should I have needed that to not lose my home, or to avoid having to pay an additional \$10k/year for the same debt?

The ways that the Great Recession affected people comprised a period effect. The varied outcomes reflect cohort effects and social location because as I think my story also illustrates through my privilege, the Great Recession was not experienced equally by all. Nothing is. Things are experienced differently by different cohorts and people at different ages too, which is what complicates teasing apart the effects in an APC analysis, because there were so many *cohort effects* related to the Great Recession – i.e. for the cohort of college grads in 2008 looking for their first real jobs, they experienced lasting effects from this on their employment. And the older Boomers? Perhaps they were considering retirement or reducing work obligations in 2008, as they watched their home values and retirement account principles plummeting, causing lots of “pivots” for Boomers, back before we all became sick of that word. Those are cohort effects.

Cohort effects are structural factors that result from the accumulation of stressors and resources experienced by the birth cohort across the time of their existence. All aspects of the APC analysis, which accompanies a life course perspective of analyzing the stress process, add nuance and detail to the picture of the overall situation of the interactive processes being studied, with an emphasis on these meaningful time-related factors.

The life course perspective also sheds light on social concerns, such as Covid-19 outcomes. At a basic and individual level, the strains and life events (stressors) that predictably occur in the life course have shifted, due not only to the direct effects of Covid on health but to

the indirect effects on other domains of life as well (Settersten et al. 2020). As much as structural mediators play a role in differentiating outcomes to the stress process, and social support is among the key mediators, *human agency* influences outcomes as well. Agency considerations must be a part of analyzing life courses because people make behavioral and attitudinal choices, as individuals thinking about themselves and sometimes collectively as groups with an eye toward future benefits for their group, all of which influence outcomes (Settersten et al. 2020:2).

Social Determinants of Mental Health and Disability

While we attend to human agency and freedom, or to a social group's differentiated options and stratified resource arrays and stressors, there are also structural determinants of health itself that influence the social stress process and, hence, well-being outcomes (the right side of the model). At some point in the past, epidemiology shifted its focus away from social causes of disease, labeling social causes as distal, and shifting focus instead to the individual level, onto the potentially controllable and more "proximate" risk factors (Link and Phelan 1995:80). Link and Phelan make a case for social conditions as root causes of disease, and they highlight the importance of making this shift in perspective, because otherwise we risk falling into the modern, Western trap of seeing everything as being something an individual can personally fix and control, and, of course, be blamed for when things go wrong.

Take, for example, the problem of homelessness in the U.S. Why is someone homeless? The main explanation is a lack of affordable housing in an area, and this factor interacts importantly with other components in the stress process and the changing arrays of stressors and resources that surround people as they age. And yet social programs to address homelessness target presumed shortcomings of homeless people (job skills, résumé help, financial gifts for first month's rent deposits). Taking such an individualistic perspective is popular because it can be

protective, because if it is the fault of homeless people that they are homeless, then I do not have to contemplate other explanations, doing anything different, or consider the possibility that such a situation could ever actually happen to me (Rappaport et al. 1975; Ryan 1976). To avoid considering our interdependence, one can stick with proximate risk factors, but doing that will never result in there being enough affordable housing, more fair lending practices, equitable healthcare access, or sustainable well-being for all. Whether it is rapid Covid tests, PPE, or any other resource, certain groups will have more access every time. **This always matters.**

I am presenting a 90-minute session at the joint national [2022 Conference](#) for the Association of Professional Chaplains and the Association of ACPE (Chaplain Educators) in May. I want to close this section with an excerpt from my accepted conference proposal, because it was partially a result of my reading for this section (i.e. Pearlin et al. 2005):

As burdens are not equally shared in our society, so too disability is a justice issue across contexts, disproportionately impacting people based on other social characteristics and further marginalizing some. In this workshop, we will be starting from a social conceptualization of disability which, briefly, assumes that while individuals may have various functional impairments, it is the interaction with the social world that produces disability. After all, in a world full of ramps, a person who uses a wheelchair is not disabled, and it is only in a speaking-only setting that a Deaf person is disabled...

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Section 3: Comparative Survey Data Science

3.0 Introduction to the Comparative Survey Data Science Section

Subsection 3.1 takes the reader from the origins of surveys in the U.S. that had no methodological rigor through today's elaborate, global transnational surveys that are differently limited, including comparative surveys, with an emphasis on surveys with modern SWB measures and/or potential use within a multidimensional well-being development agenda. Ultimately, **well-being** ([see Appendix](#)) needs to be measured over several domains, although a single SWB measure (such as a life satisfaction survey item) represents one important domain. To jump ahead to an example of a multidimensional well-being index, see [Table 1](#).

As framed in the OECD guidelines, with SWB “it is people’s own views that are the subject of interest” (OECD 2013:10). Thus, in subsection 3.2, I focus on SWB measurement. I discuss pros and cons of the SWB measures in general and specific ways, and then conclude with how they fit into a multidimensional well-being framework.

3.1 Methodology and History of National Surveys

The First Hundred Fifty Years (1824-1970s)

It seems that the political science concept of there being *waves of democratization* temporally corresponds to when public opinion surveys were first used, and when they became more popular around the world. I suppose that before there was any democracy anywhere, nobody really cared what people in general were thinking or feeling about anything. But then came the “first long wave of democratization” in the world, which began in the 1820s (Huntington 1991:12). As more democratic governments settled in, political leaders found they had a desire to know the will of their people after all (Rhodes 2018). The very first known public opinion polls in the world then took place, in the U.S., concerning the 1824 U.S. presidential

election. These early straw polls of convenience samples obtained opinion data from White, male property-owners (Rhodes 2018) because both public and government interest was in knowing what voters thought about things, not what everybody thought or felt about things.

That desire for data on public sentiment preceded the development of any real methodological rigor or thoughtful strategy for obtaining it. There was not a lot of advancement in survey methodology for about a century. They continued without attention to question wording or order, survey timing, non-representativeness, or any other matter. Eventually, as surveys evolved, they got better. By the 1930s, Hadley Cantril and George Gallup were impressively designing strategic methods for obtaining nationally representative cross-sectional samples, in order to have more reliable and valid measurements.

The American Institute of Public Opinion, founded by George Gallup in 1935, was a commercial research organization that is essentially Gallup Inc. today (although it was sold). Their early Gallup Polls sampled using the Gallup Method and revolutionized early survey data science (Chaffee 1999). Just prior to WWII, Gallup formed overseas partnerships to establish national polls in England, Canada, Australia and Sweden, where nationally representative opinion surveys began simultaneously.

Hadley Cantril and Mildred Strunk published a nearly 1200 page tome entitled “Public Opinion 1935-1946” (Cantril and Strunk 1951), compiling the nationally representative public opinion polls from 23 participating organizations in 16 countries. A book review in *American Sociological Review* noted this was “the most massive collection of opinion data available for any period of recorded history” (Lerner 1951:402) and I think it held the title until the World Fertility Survey became “the largest international social science research project ever undertaken” in 1972 (Ravenholt 1984:2).

Basic Methodological Concerns (representativeness, translations, culture, question wording)

While within-country national surveys need to meet standards for things like representative sampling, and bias free question wording, international surveys inherit those concerns and have some additional concerns of their own. Additional concerns exist for a survey that's translated into many languages, and then administered by different teams in different places and social contexts if even at roughly the same time, etc. (Ervin and Bower 1952).

Social context can influence meaning of survey items as well. Ed Diener often tells a story about a woman he met in India while doing transnational SWB research. When he asked her how satisfied she was with her life, she told him to ask her husband (Diener, Kahneman and Helliwell 2010:36). Obviously, comparing results across time and/or place requires additional considerations of context.

The first international public opinion survey proper was commissioned by a branch of the United Nations after the end of WWII, as delegates were afraid that "science" was going to lead to the end of the human race, through the weapons of war. (Carney 1947:9). Therefore they set out to try to determine what the people of the world thought about war, about peace, and about their neighboring countries. (Buchanan and Cantril 1953/1972).

As rudimentary as this world peace study may seem to us today, the greatest methodological obstacles for that first international survey are mostly still our greatest obstacles today, even though we don't necessarily give them enough attention. Addressing what is arguably the most important aspect of survey design then and now, Stanley Payne elevated the quality of all survey research when he published "The Art of Asking Questions" (Payne 1951/2014). I sincerely believe we should be including this as required reading in our research methods courses, even at the undergraduate level. We fuss over matters of statistical power and

sample size. We fret about the various imputation methods and their errors. We worry about very small differences in probabilities from differences in sample design. Yet using a different word in a survey item can make results vary by up to 20 percent, which is more than double what most any other methodological consideration may produce (Gallup, cited in Payne 1951/2014:viii).

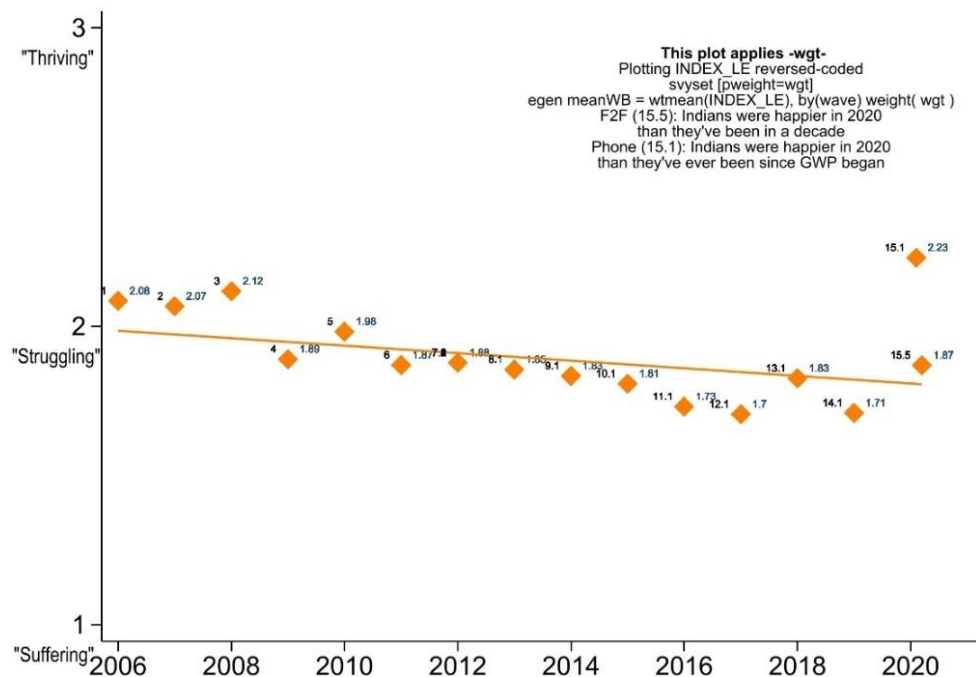
Other basic methodological issues that tend to get lesser attention include things like balancing research budget with ensuring the best response rates from typically underrepresented subgroups of the population, and being concerned about measurement errors when data are collected through inconsistent means. For example, since landline phones cannot be assumed, and cell phones may not ring in the area we intend to sample based on area code, it might be hard to randomly sample for a phone survey today with neither the ability to use random digit dialing to potentially reach anybody nor the existence of trustworthy phonebooks that once served as household-level directories of cities and towns. Today, phone samples are problematic.

A frequent workaround for this is to conduct face to face interviews at households selected through some tested randomizing method. Gallup conducts face to face interviews in any country that has less than 80% landline phone penetration. The Covid-19 pandemic may have additionally influenced a lot of samples in 2020 and 2021, introducing substantial survey error because of necessarily falling back to phone survey methods in geographic regions and countries without the higher phone penetration rates. Such samples are decidedly non-random, and in my recent example ([Figure 9](#)) it is easy to see evidence of this systematic error.

For illustration concerning that sort of measurement error and phone penetration, I had an apparently futile exchange with a Gallup rep mid-fall 2021 about this concern. Due to the global pandemic, many countries that were conducting face-to-face interviews for Gallup World Poll shifted to phone interviews in 2020. And while the rep agreed that “you will see a mode change

effect occur in the data results that would not be able to be corrected using weights” (personal communication) he again directed me to the Gallup methodology docs, which claim that the probability weights compensate for the mode change.

Figure 9. Scatter Plot Depicting Wholly Unreasonable SWB Data for India in GWP 2020



As you can see in this scatter plot ([Figure 9](#)) of Gallup World Poll data for India over the years, noting especially 2020's two waves during the Covid-19 pandemic, we have two ridiculously non-representative samples, biased (at minimum) because the Indian population does not all have access to phones. Before the pandemic, Gallup World Poll in India was carried out entirely face to face. Thus, an exclusively phone interview sample in 2020 in India during a pandemic is (obviously) mostly polling an elite, wealthy subgroup of the intended universe.

I know this because the 2020 face to face sample's mean household income is about four times what it should be. And their SWB scores suggest that in 2020, while being devastated by Covid surges, Indians' life satisfaction was higher than it has been in a decade. Such results are too absurd to even discuss beyond using them to illustrate the cost (in *total survey error*) of not

taking the fundamentals of research design more seriously. This sample is too biased to correct with a probability weight. I can only use this as an illustration when I next teach research methods.

Covert Covid Crisis?

Face to face interviewing is the gold standard for global health surveys. The need to shift survey mode due to Covid is understandable but unfortunate for data in the short term. Just before the pandemic, researchers conducted a study in Nigeria, in search of the optimal mode for mobile phone surveys in developing countries (Lau et al. 2019). The authors acknowledge that mobile phone surveys, before the pandemic, were increasingly prevalent in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) with little research on their implementation. There are several modes: computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), interactive voice response (IVR), and short message service (SMS, regular texting), and all were compared to face to face (FTF) surveys.

Among their findings are response rates: FTF response rate was highest (99%), followed by CATI (15%), IVR (3%) and SMS (0.2%) (Lau et al. 2019:305). They also found significant deficiencies with representativeness: all mobile phone modes under-surveyed women and older people everywhere, as well as those with lower education, and folks in rural areas, with little difference among modes (they were all really bad). These mobile phone modes led to biased estimates, and bias was not reduced from weighting by demographics (Lau et al. 2019:315).

Given findings like these, and my individual experience with the Gallup World Poll, I am surprised that more researchers have not excluded such 2020 and 2021 samples from their work. From what I've read so far, those who rely on the Gallup data are acting as if the 2020 and 2021 surveys are valid. I've seen online discussions of the Gallup World Poll's 2020 and 2021 SWB data, in which people hypothesize about things like the world's remarkable resiliency and other

possible explanations for how the people of the world could have been so happy even while five million people were dying from a pandemic.

The 2021 World Happiness Report pontificates about this at length (Helliwell et al. 2021). The Happy Planet Index (HPI 2022) does as well. These involve really smart people. I followed my scatterplot ([Figure 9](#)) with a plot of weighted household incomes for the same sample within a minute of seeing this graph. Do all of these scientists also think the average Indian household quadrupled their household income in 2020 too, or no? I give space to this here because I'm not sure it's an exception but, rather, a really gigantic red flag on global survey data for 2020 and 2021 at least, for any surveys that had to shift mode from FTF to any version of phone survey, and I'm not sure why nobody is talking about it.

International Survey Research on Well-Being Today

Moving on, what I'd like to do now is to go through some of the bigger, international population health, values and opinion surveys that are collecting relevant data today. This is far from an exhaustive list. I'm omitting many great surveys because either they have no SWB measures, or because they are based on data from WEIRD countries that are too often prioritized or considered universally representative (Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan 2010). I include only the biggest of the surveys based in WEIRD countries, as methodological exemplars.

The growing interest in subjective measures broadly related to quality of life was boosted by the previously discussed Final Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi 2009). For the well-being economy of the future that the UN and so many others suggest as the only sustainable way forward, we need to understand that well-being itself is multidimensional (Alkire 2016), and we need a really good way of measuring it (Casacci and Pareto 2018). Constructing such a well-being measure

includes capturing the range of domains of well-being, as can be discerned from surveys of values and culture. I discuss the most relevant of them next.

Modern Survey #1: Eurobarometer

The Eurobarometer (EB) is a series of many public opinion surveys, carried out 1-2 times per year with nationally representative samples in each European state. The EB launched in 1973 and is overseen by the European Commission. It is the original “barometer” survey, having served as a model for the World Values Survey and some other cross-national surveys, all of whom drew from the EB for numerous key survey items (Inglehart 2018:xvii). The Global Barometer Surveys (GBS) is a collective, modeled after the original Eurobarometer, and it has harmonized modules from EB and many other regional barometer surveys.

For SWB, the EB measures **life satisfaction** ([see Appendix](#)) in a four-level ordinal item: “On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the life you lead?” (European Commission 2018). The EB is also useful as a survey of national sentiment that can reflect what people in a country value, and how priorities of a nation’s people may be shifting over time (trends). Such information is key for construction of a measure that is grounded in the experienced realities of the people (OECD 2020).

Modern Survey #2: World Values Survey (WVS)

Two giants in the world of SWB scholarship died in 2021. I previously acknowledged the loss of Ed Diener. And later in 2021, the world lost Ron Inglehart, founder of the World Values Survey. With an interest in the social, political, and economic development of societies, the World Values Survey (WVS) “has sampled 90% of the world’s adult population since 1981” (Inglehart et al. 2020), which means that of the universe comprised of the world’s adult population, 90% of adults living in the world could have potentially been selected for this study.

The focus of WVS is on values and beliefs and the trends among them, which give insight into some of the complexities of the relationships among democratization, economic development, and gender equality, and which reveal broad patterns of cross-cultural variation.

Overall social trends including a shift toward increasing democracy, social tolerance, and economic development which together, in terms of values, lead to people valuing and feeling that they have greater personal freedom, which positively predicts SWB, and reflects greater capability within a **capability approach** framework ([see Appendix](#)).

Discovering and then mapping cultural variations according to two dimensions is among Inglehart's many substantial works. The two dimensions are (1) traditional values vs. secular-rational values, and (2) survival values vs. self-expression values (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). The *theory of persistence of culture* suggests that economic development will yield shifting culture, not its persistence (Inglehart and Baker 2000:19), which makes it important to survey cultural values amidst development initiatives. Overall, the traditional values are things like "God is very important in the respondent's life... abortion is never justifiable... (and) the respondent has a strong sense of national pride." Secular-rational values are the opposites (Inglehart and Welzel 2005:49). Along the other dimension, survival values are things like the "respondent gives priority to economic and physical security over self-expression and quality of life... respondent would not ever sign a petition... (and) respondent would say people should be very careful about trusting others." Self-expression values are the opposite on this dimension, and prioritize things like the environment, diversity, and "participating in the decision-making processes of economic life" (Inglehart and Welzel 2005:49).

The WVS data are used to construct a global map of cross-cultural variation reflecting the cross-national polarization between these two dimensions of culture. Factor analysis produces

variables that analysts can use with WVS data to analyze these dimensions at both the individual level and the national level, and to conduct trend analyses because measures are comparable across waves. The longitudinal, time series nature of this data makes it very useful in a multidimensional well-being economy framework for development, because trend analyses can reflect potential outcomes of policy initiatives.

More recently, Inglehart updated these dimensions because the WVS data revealed that people's motivations had been changing across the world. When the WVS began in 1981 there was rising prosperity and security, increasing environmentalism, and democracy was spreading. But there have been shifts in trends, and more recently inequality is at its highest points, economic security is unstable, and as the WVS looks at what people value, the data show that people no longer take survival for granted, which is something that they may have only briefly done, given the full span of human history.

For most of time, "survival has been precarious" and so people's values and subsequent behaviors were determined by survival values (Inglehart 2018:1). Now after a brief period of self-expression values (which prioritize care for the environment, diversity, etc.) it seems we have trended back toward the survival values, which "triggers an authoritarian reflex" as Inglehart calls it, according to an analysis of the full datasets of both the WVS and the European Values Survey (2018:5), a cultural evolution that Inglehart writes about and points to things like the National Front in France, Brexit and the election of Trump as evidence of this trend away from self-expression values and back toward survival values.

WVS also has SWB measures. For **affective well-being**, the question is "How happy are you?" and the four possible responses range from "very happy" to "very unhappy." For **life satisfaction** ([see Appendix](#)) the question is "All things considered, how satisfied are you with

your life as a whole these days? Using this card on which 1 means you are “completely dissatisfied” and 10 means you are “completely satisfied” where would you put your satisfaction with your life as a whole? ___” (Inglehart et al. 2020).

Modern Survey #3: International Social Survey Program (ISSP)

In the United States, the first General Social Survey was in 1972, which coincides temporally with democratization, taking place just before Revolução dos Cravos, the Portuguese Revolution in 1974, which began the third wave of democracy. The General Social Survey (GSS) is a key resource for sociologists and others interested in the characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, and thoughts of U.S. adults, in order to better understand things like stratification, to monitor religious and social trends, and to measure health and well-being. The GSS has a SWB item for life satisfaction that almost combines the affective and life satisfaction items from the WVS, and has only three outcome levels. The GSS asks, “Taken all together, how would you say things are these days—would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?”

One of many useful features of the GSS is that it allows for international comparisons, by including a mutually agreed-upon set of survey items that all members of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) administer. The ISSP formed in 1984, and it was founded by the respective national survey administrators of: the US, UK, Australia, and Germany. This is what allows researchers to use the GSS in order to analyze the U.S. data in a global context, and to make cross-national comparisons (Marsden, Smith and Hout 2020). The GSS isn’t a transnational comparative survey on its own, but as a part of the ISSP which the administrators of the GSS cofounded, it certainly is.

The GSS is a repeated-measures, cross-sectional survey. This means that even though respondents are only measured once, assessing aggregated changes over time is possible, as the

sample is a repeated measure (a nationally representative sample is drawn every round) even though new respondents comprise it. Today the ISSP, the comparative entity to which the GSS contributes, has the data of 42 nations in it.

Modern Survey #4: Demographic and Health Survey (DHS)

The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) is vast, spanning over 90 countries through 400 surveys on broad topics of population, health, and nutrition. It is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and it is administered by a large consulting firm called ICF. I really appreciate their stated purpose in that the DHS Program “believes that the ultimate purpose of collecting data is its use in policy formation, program planning, and monitoring and evaluation” (USAID 2021). And they seem to value data quality, regularly publishing a series of methodological reports to be routinely assessing methodology, survey collection procedures, and analytic approaches (Schoumaker 2014:ix). This is hopeful.

I respect this attention to data quality. The value of the DHS for well-being research would be through linking aggregated measures from the DHS to individuals who have answered SWB questions, using geography. This is facilitated because the DHS has an IPUMS version, IPUMS-DHS, making additional comparative studies possible, as well as trend analyses on thousands of measures of objective well-being, at the individual, household, and community levels, with surveys in 41 LMICs currently. More recently, IPUMS-DHS has added a volume of “contextual variables” (Boyle et al. 2020) which are qualities of the environment, agriculture, and the economy, exposure to war and battles and lots of valuable information, and it’s all representative of a geographic point near the respondent’s household, intentionally anonymized by 5-10km but representing reasonable approximations of these data for the respective

geographic localities. This data is valuable for understanding both SWB and (overall) well-being, as I later ponder in considering seemingly erratic life satisfaction in Honduras in subsection 3.2.

Modern Survey #5: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) was developed and is maintained by UNICEF. MICS has surveyed 116 countries although not all countries have been surveyed in all rounds. The most recent round (six) represented 70 countries, and MICS is one of the larger household surveys intentionally focused on women and children. Given the key objective of MICS is to study women and children, the survey topics include fertility, family planning use, female genital mutilation, child growth, development and nutrition, and other things. Although the surveys are cross-sectional, multistage probability sampling ensures representative samples at national and subnational levels (Khan and Hancioglu 2019:279). The data are open access, and with few exceptions are appropriate for comparisons across waves and across countries, allowing trend analyses.

MICS-6 has three SWB items, which are #4-6 under **measures of subjective well-being** ([see Appendix](#)). In order, they measure **affective well-being** then two items for life satisfaction, the latter being the so-called Cantril ladder question, complete with image of said ladder. Someday I'm going to do a study using the OG real deal Cantril Self Anchoring Striving Scale, somewhere that I can access a representative sample and then compare results to what this modern iteration of "Cantril ladder" produces. I see no research justifying the omission of all the meaningful aspects of Cantril's scale, only that the modern, abbreviated version is "reliable" which, frankly, is not enough information to justify substantially modifying a valid instrument. I realize my readers may find my annoyance at this to be off topic, but I believe it is important. I discuss my critique of modern "Cantril ladder" items in more detail in subsection 3.2.

Both MICS and the DHS together are the main two datasets that are used to construct the Multidimensional Poverty Index (OPHI and UNDP 2021). Like DHS already has, MICS will soon also have an IPUMS component, expected by mid-2022, which will expand the ways researchers can use MICS data to answer contextual questions about environment and health.

Modern Survey #6: The Pew Global Attitudes Survey

The Pew Global Attitudes Survey is now in a total 54 countries, involving international comparative surveys with between six and 44 participating countries. They include nationally representative samples of the noninstitutionalized adult 18+ population. Their first report in 2002 was in 44 countries. They include a life satisfaction measure for SWB, which I assume they consider a Cantril ladder question (Pew Research Center 2021):

“Here is the 'ladder of life.' Let's suppose the top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you; and the bottom, the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder do you feel you stand at the present time?”

Modern Survey #7: Gallup World Poll (GWP)

Gallup World Poll (GWP) began in 2006 and collects data in annual waves, claiming to represent 98% of the world's noninstitutionalized population age 15+. GWP also claims that samples are nationally representative and corrected via survey weights when necessary to maintain those claims. Generally, samples are 1000-3000 respondents per wave per country. Probability based samples are drawn by first identifying primary sampling units (PSUs), then stratifying within each PSU according to population characteristics that are known, creating essentially cluster samples. Households are selected within PSUs by the field teams following random route procedures, for face-to-face samples, and random digit dialing for phone samples, and then household respondents are selected via various randomizing procedures as well.

GWP has by far the most expansive data on measures of SWB and a long list of index variables constructed on additional, related subjective measures, such as perceived corruption

and sense of personal freedom. Gallup sees this emphasis on SWB data as being directly related to development (Gallup 2019). I will critique some of their methodology in subsection 3.2.

Modern Survey #8: IPUMS International

IPUMS-International harmonizes and disseminates censuses globally. This maintains an historical record of consistently coded variables from everywhere (102 countries), and for many countries across multiple years as well (Ruggles et al. 2003). IPUMS-International is also the biggest compilation of person-level population data in the world, with more than a billion records (Sobek 2016:157). And since the data are so nicely harmonized by the IPUMS team, it is ready for comparative investigations of well-being and related indicators. Because these are census surveys, the data are objective indicators, but they are relevant to multidimensional well-being.

A useful feature of IPUMS-International is data about present and previous residence, which allows construction of variables that reflect migration. Another useful feature is that the samples are much larger than in the other surveys (which are not census surveys); IPUMS-International surveys often comprise 5-10% of a country's population (Sobek 2016), and this allows investigation of some categorical variables that cannot be analyzed in many data sets due to small sample sizes per cell. For example, in my research on SWB in India, using Gallup data I could not meaningfully analyze religion because the samples had too small a number of respondents in categories other than the majority religion of Hindu.

3.2 Subjective Well-Being Measures and their Shortcomings

To summarize what's so great about **measures of subjective well-being** ([see Appendix](#)): they are easy to include in existing surveys; politicians seem to be comfortable with the data (Frijters et al. 2020); SWB is a key domain of multidimensional well-being, which reflects more

aspects of societal well-being and progress than GDP; there is an obscene amount of research on SWB predictors and outcomes and related inequalities; and using SWB measures honors an assumption of human agency by saying that how people evaluate their own lives adds something valuable onto anything researchers can obtain through observation or other means alone.

Those who would say that a unidimensional measure of SWB, such as a life satisfaction item, can on its own *fully* represent societal progress and human development are proponents of the **happiness approach** ([see Appendix](#)), such as economist Richard Layard (2005), and they build on the fundamental axiom of utilitarianism, the “greatest happiness principle” as articulated by Jeremy Bentham, that is “the want of a representative democracy, in place of a more or less mitigated despotism: the want of the only form of government in which the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the end in view.” (Bentham, as cited in Stark 2004:287).

To summarize the main shortcomings of SWB measures: like any subjective tool, they are bound by respondents’ level of honesty (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2001); the SWB measures do not use equal interval data, which should raise concerns about averaging; and aggregated SWB data represent but one essential domain of well-being. Regarding scales, most SWB measures are “assumed to be ordinal, rather than cardinal ... (yet) treating them as if they were cardinal” is common, and studies seem to find that doing so somehow does not lead to a lot of bias (OECD 2013:189-90). Hence, it is customary to do math as if the scales were linear. In the next subsection, I critique the most popular unidimensional SWB measures presently used.

Critique of the Life Satisfaction Measurements

Unidimensional **measures of subjective well-being** ([see Appendix](#)) either capture affective well-being or life satisfaction, and some surveys use items that get at both SWB components (i.e. MICS-6). The most common way to operationalize SWB today is through a

measure of **life satisfaction** ([see Appendix](#)), and those questions ask the respondent how satisfied they are with their life as a whole. One of the most investigated critiques of unidimensional SWB measures is that they are potentially vulnerable to **adaptive preferences** ([see Appendix](#)), which I do not see as a problem because, like the bioethicists (Stramondo 2021) I appreciate people's right to be the authority in reporting their own self evaluations. If someone twists my arm and coerces me into reporting that I am extremely satisfied with my own life, I'll do it, because I'm too old for whatever game that might be.

But then what would that mean for the validity of the measure? There are a lot of things that make someone say they are living their best life right now. Maybe someone's literally twisting their arm, maybe they're fooling themselves into some false sense of security, as they tell themselves that life is grand even while we might consider their life horrible. It's a subjective measure. It doesn't assert the reasons behind the life satisfaction. These life satisfaction measures report something like this: "For my own personal reasons, which are obviously influenced by age, time period, cohort, cultural context, community safety, my health, marital status, employment, education, levels of corruption in my government and local business experience, exposure to war and violence, and more, THIS is how satisfied I will say that I am with my life as a whole right now." Thus, even if someone is twisting my arm, or I'm in denial about my own desperate situation, or something else, it all helps explain my life satisfaction score because, again, the measure is not purported to be suggestive of a rationale. It literally is what it is.

I recently texted a friend and I asked, "How are you?" They replied, "I am LOL. You?" The conversation went on in a way that explained that they were nearly deliriously overwhelmed with life, to the point of laughter at even the thought of one more stressor arising within their array. My question was a SWB question, and they answered essentially favorably even though

they're miserable, which reminded me anew that these are subjective measures. Sometimes people laugh as they quit their job, divorce their spouse, or hear very bad news.

And the cornucopia of research on that which predicts SWB, and the things that are correlated with it, seems reliable. But are these things valid? Construct validity, after all, depends on the conceptualization of what is being measured. Take, for example, the Cantril ladder survey item used by GWP, MICS and others, supposedly but not in fact resembling the Self Anchoring Striving Scale developed by Hadley Cantril (1965). I've become very familiar with this item, from interrogating Gallup's methodology, and the current implementation of the question anywhere I've read about it differs markedly from the rather elegant, five-part, open ended question series that Cantril developed as the Self Anchoring Striving Scale. In short, modern implementations have omitted several key components of the scale, the parts that make it self-anchoring and thereby reduce measurement error. People can now understand "the best possible life for you" differently across different cultures and within cultures, perhaps systematically so, making any comparisons potentially invalid, something the original measure accounted for by having respondents define the scale's endpoints in the context of their own story. But OECD (2013:256) and others find that this survey item, as currently used, has high reliability.

And that's great, but there are implications of using a reliable yet invalid measure. My former undergraduate statistics students could have this conversation with Gallup, UNICEF, and OECD if they'd like. Angus Deaton at Princeton recently investigated the validity of life satisfaction data using Cantril ladder (as it is called today, not as Cantril designed it), in the Gallup World Poll. Indeed, as a model-loving economist looking at the so-called Cantril ladder data as a measure of utility, he found concerns. Among them he writes, "I find a worldwide

optimism about the future; in spite of repeated evidence to the contrary, people consistently but irrationally predict they will be better off five years from now” (Deaton 2018:18).

Another concern with SWB measures is that most of these data come from annual, nationally representative surveys. Even though we all tend to average the scores and consider them to be “annual means” they are not annual means, because the sample is measured one time. At what point in the year the measurement occurs could significantly influence SWB scores, especially in countries with a large agricultural component to the economy. When folks in Las Vegas, Honduras, in the region of Santa Barbara are surveyed on SWB, I would expect that scores would markedly vary based on *when* they are asked in terms of the coffee season.

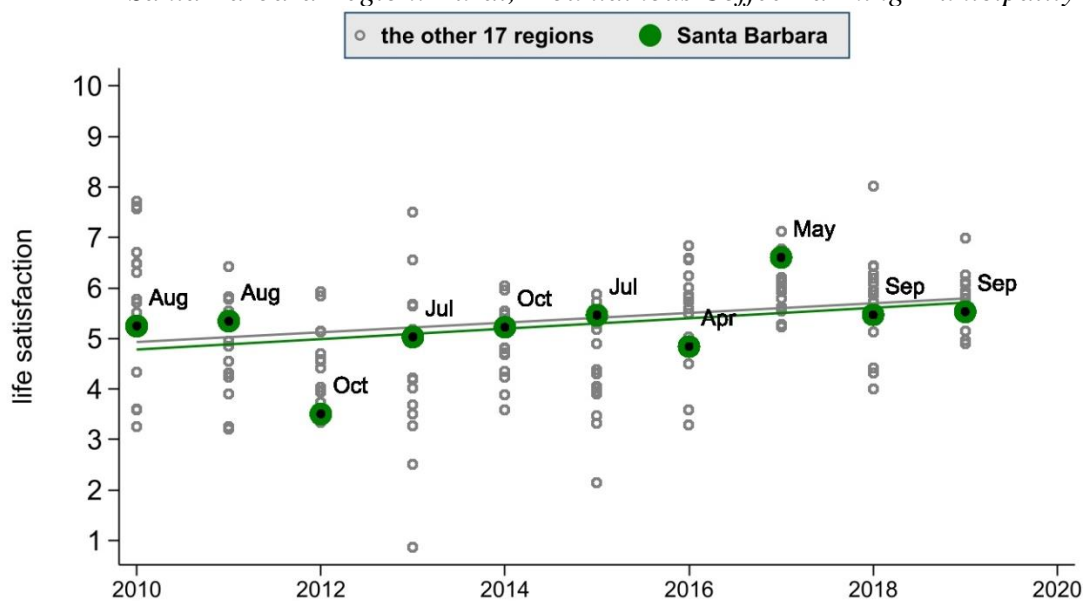
Thinking of sociology of mental health, the constellation of stressors that everyone is experiencing has shifted wider and longer since March 2020, in ways that are not yet fully understood, but we can assume the usual social gradients in the experiences of life will further disadvantage members of social groups already disproportionately burdened.

Life satisfaction data is not usually linked to agricultural variables but perhaps it should be, based on a country’s economy and priorities. I also think we should reconsider thinking of these aggregated descriptive statistics as “annual means” which falsely suggests an average over a period of a year. To illustrate this meta problem with a specific case, I pulled data from the Gallup World Poll for life satisfaction (using their iteration of “Cantril ladder”) for Honduras ([Figure 10](#)), applied probability weights, and computed means by region for each year’s survey and then reviewed the past decade.

I asked my friend Miguel, a retired teacher, to help me make sense of the data based on his region. What I learned from Miguel is that coffee picking season runs December through February. The coffee *farmers* are the wealthy elite, and the coffee *cutters* or *pickers* are

everybody else. Those three months are when coffee farmers and coffee pickers make most of their annual income, as differentiated as it is. Coffee pickers can then buy clothes and more food during these months. Children do not attend school for these three months because they are also picking coffee, and then they use the earnings to help buy their books and supplies. Picking season has a higher potential for interpersonal violence, in Miguel's experience, but it is also when people have some money and express enjoyment in life. He said that outside of this period, there is no particularly low point, except perhaps when people's corn runs out and the new crop has just been planted, which is usually around June but that can vary a bit.

Figure 10. Mean Cantril Ladder Scores in Honduras by Region - Gallup (n=10,002)
Santa Barbara Region: Rural, Mountainous Coffee Farming Municipality



Note. The month indicates when the survey was administered in Honduras that year.

If I were to accept this data at face value, it seems odd and erratic. Countries in general tend to either remain relatively constant in life satisfaction, or they trend upwards, or downwards. But when I overlaid the months of survey administration, I realized these are not comparable annual samples. Surveying an agricultural population on their life satisfaction at different times of year is not repeating the same measure nor sampling the same population. And

although Miguel's explanations don't entirely add explain these results, what jumps out at me is that no surveys have been conducted in the December-February months when, as Miguel describes it, folks are decidedly experiencing their best lives each year, by far. And in no matter which month surveying took place, it would have to be in the same month each year for comparability. This is just one example, detailed to illustrate that these measures and the broader surveys must be held to the highest methodological standards, from survey design and question wording, through data collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination. Life satisfaction *is* meaningful information if we can do an adequate job obtaining it.

Critique of SWB Measures from the Capability Approach

Arguments against the normative use of subjective well-being measures in general are not uncommon. A critique is that subjective measures do not consider a person's "real opportunities" (Binder 2014:1198). Also, with the normative use of SWB measures there is a potential to underrepresent *deprivation* – it is thought that a person may judge their own well-being relative to what they think they can expect, which may lead someone with profound deprivations to survive by passing as "happy" and proponents of the **capability approach** believe such accounts are invalid (Sen 1987:45-46), along the lines of **adaptive preferences** ([see Appendix](#)).

Because SWB is a holistic construct, something that makes it a valuable indicator, it also has a weakness because it is not easily shifted by life circumstances. What is referred to as *set point theory* explains that, whether someone has just won a million dollars or lost a limb, their SWB will probably soon return to a baseline or set point (Diener et al. 1999; Shinn 2015). That notion of winning a million dollars was tested actually, and supports a theory of *response shift bias*, akin to the bias we're supposed to attenuate in pretest-posttest designs. Response shift in well-being research is possible when people seek to accommodate to their new circumstance, whether that is being a millionaire or missing a foot. Especially when the new circumstance is a bad one, an adaptation

process becomes necessary, and entails a protective return to baseline happiness as a means of survival. This is the “happy beggar” often spoken of as well.

Nobody is suggesting we just take subjective data at face value, on its own, but this category of concerns highlights why SWB is probably not a sufficient whole pie but a good piece of it. After describing how SWB does reflect a broad range of people’s experience, “subjective well-being should be placed alongside measures of non-subjective outcomes, such as income, health, knowledge and skills, safety, environmental quality and social connections” (OECD 2013:29).

Others of great respect in the field adamantly refute the set point limitation on SWB data altogether. Inglehart published several pieces and built theories based on empirical analysis of World Values Survey and European Values Survey data acknowledging that some researchers had suspected a set point, and used such a theory to explain some findings, but his observations in the data repudiate those explanations, in favor of there being no set point (Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Inglehart 2018).

The question of what constitutes a good life, one’s satisfaction with it, happiness, or quality of life, varies across people and groups, and within the same individual person or group in time series considerations (Sprangers and Schwartz 1999), as I might expect if we were to measure SWB in Honduras every month for a year to note within-group variation over time. All of this variation complicates comparative data analyses in the harmonization process.

Taking action based solely on subjective survey data also can risk paternalism in the policy implementation phase, if policy-makers do not account for diversity within the life domains of determinants (Binder 2014:1201). Ideally, all considered, with all the known benefits along with the limitations as discussed in this section, measures of subjective well-being may be best considered a necessary but not sufficient part of any record of development, as long as multidimensional well-being is prioritized. That is exactly how these measures fit into an agenda for a well-being economy policy, which is the content of Section 4 next.

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Section 4: National Policy Frameworks Centered on Well-Being

4.0 Introduction to the National Policy Frameworks Centered on Well-Being Section

Imagine parents who have six children, limited resources, and a desire to give all their children the best possible life, one in which they will be free to be and to do all that they have reason to value. To accomplish that, due to limited resources coupled with some fears, they decide to shoot their oldest child in the head. Then they give the other five truly exceptional opportunities; they live legitimately good lives. Parents everywhere are duly impressed with their innovative parenting strategies and how these parents have been able to do so much for their (five remaining) children, notwithstanding such meager resources. Their stories are compelling, and we all could learn from how they've done all they have done. I'm just not sure we should go ahead evaluating their parenting apart from the shooting the eldest in the head bit.

I'm going to circle back to that. Now I want to tell the reader about a little landlocked country between India and Tibet/China called *Druk Yul*, which means "Land of the Thunder Dragon" and *Bhutan* in English, whose name from Sanskrit means "end of Tibet" – *Bhoṭa* (Tibet) + *anta* (end). This tiny nation is most well-known for doing something special, and, in many ways, for leading the world in reprioritizing well-being throughout their country, at all levels of business and government, grounded in the values and culture that is unique to them. They reoriented their country's purpose, and explicitly the goals of government, around supporting the well-being of their people and the gentle preservation of the planet.

The Gross National Happiness Index is their most well-known exportation and Shangri-La their most popular nickname. Everyone, from the United Nations (UNDP 2021a), the World Bank (World Bank 2021), and numerous other countries and entities have cited Bhutan for their leadership in centering a well-being economy as the optimal pathway towards meeting **sustainable development goals (SDGs)** ([see Appendix](#)) and really centering human and

ecological well-being rather than economic development. And they have made truly impressive gains on many fronts, including the SDGs and the economy, amidst their unwavering commitment to human and ecological well-being, grounded in the multidimensional well-being framework devised according to their values. Although I will more briefly discuss some other countries' well-being policies in subsection 4.1 too, none even come close to the comprehensive approach of Bhutan and the Gross National Happiness Framework.

In subsection 4.2, I take some sociological criticism and apply it to my understanding of my starting questions about why world leaders do not presently make better choices, ones that would prioritize the well-being of their people. In section 4.2, I also look at the considerably lesser well-known and darker side of Bhutan's actions. The purpose of section 4.2 is seeking generalizable explanations about why policies fail, or which policies succeed. In numerous ways, this little Buddhist Kingdom exemplifies the very best of what a nation can do, and the very worst that a nation can do. I think that further study is warranted of Bhutan. The world could benefit from learning more about the good work of Bhutan as well as ways to avoid complicity in the violence and destruction of minoritized people perceived as a threat by the majority in times of struggle.

It may seem that Section 4 spends too much time on Bhutan. It was only after learning such detail about several countries that I came back to this realization that Bhutan represents both the best and the worst of development. Ultimately, I do believe there is hope, all considered, and there are many countries beginning a reorientation towards multidimensional well-being, with momentum that seems highly legitimizing of this approach.

4.1 Current National Well-Being Policies

A handful of countries now emphasize multidimensional well-being or happiness as something important in their national decision-making and development, but only Bhutan has a comprehensive multidimensional well-being framework that includes regularly measuring that well-being across the country, codifying well-being goals and requirements into law, and really drawing well-being into all aspects of development. The Bhutanese happiness framework is a living alternative perspective on both guiding and measuring sustainable development as equitable, holistic well-being.

Bhutan, The Development Success Story

Hence, I first give thee the Kingdom of Bhutan, the little nation geographically about as big as Switzerland with a population about that of South Dakota. Bhutan invented the Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index in 1972, and if anyone can bring intellectual respect to the word *happiness*, I think it could be Bhutan, because they don't mean anything trite when they say "happiness." They were also the first carbon *negative* country on the planet (Burger Araujo Santos and Dorji 2021:162). Unique to their context, Bhutan operationalizes happiness as being a multidimensional construct of nine dimensions which form the basis of their GNH Index, a multidimensional well-being measure of sustainable development, which they strategically link through a framework into specific sets of national policy screening tools that connect at each moment in the policy cycle. Administering the GNH Index survey takes about three hours per respondent, and the government compensates participants with a day's pay for the respondent burden of that time (McCarthy 2018).

Since happiness is not an individualistic experience in Bhutan, even though it can be deeply felt personally, it is measured as a collective. The GNH Index "can either increase

percentage of people who are happy or decrease the insufficient conditions of people who are not-yet-happy” (Ura, Alkire and Zangmo 2012:1), and “there is a greater incentive for the government and others to decrease the insufficiencies of the not-yet-happy ... (who, in rural Bhutan) tend to be those who attain less in education, living standards and balanced use of time... (and in urban Bhutan) are insufficient in non-material domains such as community vitality and culture and psychological well-being” (Ura, Alkire and Zangmo 2012:1).

Table 1. Composition of the Multidimensional GNH Index in Bhutan (Yangka et al. 2018:7)

Pillars	Nine (Equally Weighted) Domains	33 Indicators
Preservation of Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • psychological well-being • time use • community vitality • cultural diversity and resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life satisfaction, positive emotions, negative emotions, spirituality • Work, sleep • Donations (time and money), safety, community relationship, family • Artistic skills, cultural participation, speak native language, The Way of Harmony
Conservation of Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ecological diversity and resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responsibility towards environment, ecological issues, wildlife damage, urban issues
Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • living standards • health • education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • per capita income, assets, housing • self-reported health, healthy days, disability, mental health • knowledge, literacy, schooling, values
Good Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fundamental rights, governance performance, political participation, services

The GNH Index is a work of art, with nine equally weighted domains comprised of 33 clustered indicators ([Table 1](#)) which hold a total of 124 variables, which are not equally weighted at the variable level. Bhutan does not think that everybody must be completely happy and positive on all measures. Those 124 variables span a range of freedoms, because a fulfilling life can be had through different pathways. For example, the domain of *time use* includes indicators

of sleep and work, and time use is all about having balance in life, so for this domain a balance between work time and leisure time is optimal. Less complex frameworks may simply use “paid work hours” as an indicator for time use in well-being, suggesting that working too many hours is bad for well-being. Bhutan has found that sometimes it’s bad for well-being, but if balanced by rest time, it’s not. And the GNH Index allows disaggregation so that inequalities by gender and/or age, for example, can be further discerned and addressed in future policy changes.

That’s why the variables are clustered into indicators, to appreciate that there are different pathways of getting to the same outcomes. This would vary in other contexts because the GNH Index is personalized to the culture, norms, and values of the people of Bhutan, where time use and well-being are understood as a matter of balance, grounded in their Buddhist culture.

After the GNH Index is computed, outcomes are analyzed. The methodology team who designed the index (Ura, Alkire and Zangmo 2012) in collaboration with the government of Bhutan decided on cut-points that produce four levels for the outcome: unhappy, narrowly happy, extensively happy, and deeply happy. This multidimensional well-being index reflects a much more robust sense of well-being than what is SWB alone, which is focused on life satisfaction and affective well-being. It is more than poverty alone, which is focused on survival, etc. To score above the threshold for happiness in this framework requires “a diverse set of conditions and states... (that) must be simultaneously prevalent for a person to be robustly happy” (Ura, Alkire and Zangmo 2012:2).

The GNH Index reflects where there is deprivation. The nine domains are designed to fit with the UN’s sustainable development goals. The data used to construct the GNH Index are gathered from representative samples in such a way, using a counting methodology that allows strategic disaggregation (Alkire and Foster 2011) so that we can know who has more *cumulative*

deprivations, a highlight of any approach grounded in a capability framework, representing any person who is “not-yet-happy” in order to optimally inform both citizens and government of the complete data story in focused ways. Everything is structured to encourage improving conditions of the not-yet-happy people directly or indirectly.

For example, lead Bhutanese development researchers (Verma and Ura 2022) were recently able to exploit the GNH data through disaggregation to analyze gender inequality. Their study has numerous findings which feed back into the Bhutanese government that requested the study to inform where there is need for changes to address gender inequalities. Findings include that men are overall happier than women, with men scoring better in domains of education, SWB, and time use; they found women better in climate adaptation, and women were disadvantaged in decision-making and status (Verma and Ura 2022). One area where evidence of gender equality is strong in Bhutan is in assets and land tenure (2022:13) which suggests that policies for reducing gender inequalities around those issues are working.

By many accounts, Bhutan is “a development success story” (UNDP 2021a; World Bank 2021). Like all countries, it lost revenue during the pandemic, but Bhutan has impressively minimized community spread of Covid and deaths. The World Bank describes Bhutan as having “a stable political and economic environment. It has made tremendous progress in reducing extreme poverty and promoting gender equality, with continuing efforts to address social inequality issues and regional disparities” (World Bank 2021). Others assess that along with development aiming to fulfill “basic human needs across the world, there has been a transition in the public discourse of how to increase life satisfaction, while also addressing the challenge of sustainability and environmental protection (and Bhutan has) revised the concept of development accordingly” (Burger Araujo Santos and Dorji 2021:161).

Broadly, Bhutan has improved on mostly everything (Yangka et al. 2018): GDP has steadily increased at an average annual growth rate of 7.6%, which is a lot of steady growth and has repositioned Bhutan up into the range of being a lower-middle income country (World Bank 2021); the Gini coefficient decreased from .468 in 2003 to .387 in 2012. Economic sectors shifted so that agriculture went from 56% to 16.5% share 1980 to 2016, and energy, construction and manufacturing went from 11% to 41%; these are both modern structural shifts. GDP is projected to continue 7% growth to the year 2030 as predicted by Asian Development Bank models. As for carbon neutral development, it has achieved it and then some, and needs to only maintain their *carbon negative* footprint. GNH went up from 2010 to 2015 by 1.8%. The next official national GNH survey should be soon and was delayed due to the pandemic. Life expectancy increased from 47.4 years in 1984 to 68 years in 2013. Although I don't see the distribution of that data, I suspect it reflects a reduction in infant and child mortality. It's positive change. They also have had substantial gains in improved drinking water and sanitation facilities.

They have a long way to go on several **sustainable development goals** ([see Appendix](#)), and for gender equity, and inflation is expected to remain high in the short term, (World Bank 2021) but their development seems to be generally favorable. They also have free healthcare and free education through college for everyone (Burger Araujo Santos and Dorji 2021:163).

National Well-Being Frameworks Elsewhere (OECD, NZ, UAE, IT)

The OECD has been a guiding reference for standardizing the measurement of SWB, and the OECD remains a key source of guidance when it comes to measuring what counts for measuring "How's Life?" in nations today (OECD 2020), the latest report of which includes data on well-being in 37 OECD countries and 4 affiliates, through 80 well-being indicators – two of them are SWB measures (affect balance score and life satisfaction). Other objective well-being

indicators include things like homicide rate, hours in paid work, voter turnout, and air pollution. Additional subjective indicators are things like satisfaction with time use and personal relationships. And all 80 indicators for all the countries are available through the new OECD Well-Being Dashboard, the result of the OECD Well-Being Framework, newly online at <http://stats.oecd.org/wbos/default.aspx?datasetcode=HSL>. The OECD Well-Being Framework is multidimensional, and includes 11 dimensions of what they consider “current well-being” and four categories of systemic resources necessary for well-being to be sustainable over time (OECD 2020:3).

This very “Beyond GDP” approach has increasing momentum for the use of multidimensional well-being indicators in national policy. How so? What differs when national policy is approached through a multidimensional well-being framework? According to OECD, well-being indicators can be used in each stage of policy cycle, “from identifying priorities for action, to assessing the pros and cons of different strategies to achieve policy goals, to allocate the resources (budgetary, human, political) needed to implement the selected strategy, to monitor interventions in real time as they are implemented, and to assess the results achieved and make decisions on how to change policies in the future” (Stiglitz, Fitoussi and Durand 2018:103).

It’s important to have a framework implanting the influential role of metrics into each stage of the policy cycle (setting the agenda, policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluating). If the well-being indicators are not informing decision-makers at all stages, the fancy new indicators risk becoming just another report, some additional reading material that changes nothing. Bhutan has the most comprehensive framework to date. One can satisfy the domains of the GNH Index through numerous pathways, which is why so many variables are

involved, as indicators of well-being, and ultimately what makes the GNH Index particularly robust among well-being frameworks.

The well-being policy framework in New Zealand (NZ) began in 2011 and is called Living Standards Framework (LSF), a way to think about economic policy, ecological policy, and social policy, together (Au and Karacaoglu 2015:27). The LSF uses the language of the capability approach in saying that it is in place so “people have great opportunities, capabilities, and incentives to live a life they value, and that they face fewer obstacles in achieving their goals” (Au and Karacaoglu 2015:27). The NZ Treasury uses the LSF as “a practical guide for thinking about good economic, environmental and social policy in an integrated way” (Au and Karacaoglu 2015:28), which is moving through a framework from intentions through enactment and implementation in the policy cycle.

In 2019, NZ drew up a “well-being first” budget with NZ\$26 billion dedicated for well-being activities over the next four years. (Anderson and Mossialos 2019:e320). Their plan was to measure the success of this well-being first budget by using the LSF, which has indicators within the domains of health, environment, cultural identity, social connections, and SWB. Their plan ties those data to policy decisions on the national budget which, NZ believes, will allow them to make policy and budget decisions that will not only improve well-being but prioritize social determinants of health as well (Anderson and Mossialos 2019:e321). I suspect NZ well-being measurement has been delayed due to the pandemic.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has a Minister of Happiness, and came up with what they call the “ABCDE Model for the Needs of Happiness” which is Affective, Basic, Cognitive, Enabling, and Deeper or Eudaimonic needs (Al-Azzawi 2019:200). It’s not a well-being framework as in NZ or BT, but more of a measurement tool with unclear application. The UAE

also supports judicial murder for queer UAE citizens (Al-Azzawi 2019), so it does not seem that well-being is institutionalized in the UAE at the time of this writing.

Italian well-being policy harkens back to 1990 when the United Nations launched the first Human Development Report. Italy frames well-being as necessary for sustainable development. The name for the Italians' initiative is "Benessere equo e sostenibile (Bes)" (Bacchini et al. 2021:318) which translates to fair and sustainable well-being. Like NZ, Italy is also happy to say they are "the first country" (Bacchini et al. 2021:319) to include well-being as a measurable outcome of interest for national economic and social policy. The Bes framework is multidimensional, with 12 domains of well-being: health, education, work and life balance, economic well-being, social relationship, safety, landscape and cultural heritage, environment, subjective well-being, politics and institutions, research and innovation, and quality of services. Italy identified 134 well-being indicators, and surveyed and released their first well-being report in 2013 (ISTAT 2017), and nothing since that I can locate publicly.

Of the extant well-being frameworks and well-being economy agendas, Bhutan's illustrates what is good, what is possible, how to legitimately reach toward the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and how to devise a well-being economy grounded in a multidimensional framework consistent with OECD Well-Being guidelines for the optimal pathway towards enhancing and maintaining human and ecological well-being. It makes sense.

4.2 Sociological Explanations for Why They Might Fail

Why don't national leaders make decisions and policies that truly prioritize the well-being of their people, in a sustainable way? When I asked that question at the beginning, I was naïvely and incorrectly assuming that national leaders would tend to act rationally, which I guess they don't, exactly. Instead there are these myths in society, *rationalized institutional structures*,

which are built into rationalized institutional elements (practices, procedures) which lead to rules (Meyer and Rowan 1977:345). And if we do think of the nation-state as a rational actor (Scott 2017:863), nations are going to incorporate selective elements and promote whatever policies imbue them with legitimacy, because survival and legitimacy are sought, not efficiency (Meyer and Rowan 1977) nor ecology, sustainability or well-being, by extension. Make it make sense.

The “Paradox of Empty Promises”

“Human rights” was institutionalized, as above, in the latter decades of the previous century. Did it lead to a proliferation of international human rights policies and treaties? Yes, it did. What did that accomplish? Researchers who investigated it came up with the “paradox of empty promises” (Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2005) to describe what they ultimately discerned was a context of nation-states “ratifying human rights treaties as a matter of window dressing, radically decoupling policy from practice (when some bad human rights practices were even made worse under the cover of these treaties), but the emergent global legitimacy of human rights (led to) independent global civil society effects that (tended to improve) states’ actual human rights practices (in spite of it all)” (p.1373).

In other words, the nation-states signed treaties as window dressing, which sometimes gave concealment for continued violations and sometimes for things to get worse, but despite that, the paradox is that the proliferation of all of this window dressing led, separately, to international civil society acting as agents who pressured governments to make changes for human rights, which they could now do by using the legitimated norms of human rights as codified in those treaties. It’s a cool paradox, and thus even if all these well-being economy policies are also window dressing, every aspect of the above could be repeated with well-being economy agendas, because we have a lot of civil society agents eager to use such legitimacy.

Bhutan, Cause of the Largest per Capita Refugee Crisis Ever

It has inexplicably received a dearth of attention in the arena of public discourse that Bhutan led an ethnic cleaning initiative mostly in the 1990s that turned approximately one-sixth of their own people into expelled refugees. Bhutan is consequently the greatest per capita producer of refugees ever, with evidence of appalling human rights violations (Saul 2000).

The Bhutanese people of Nepalese origin, popularly known as *Lhotsampas* (“people of the south”) had been in Bhutan for centuries, invited through previously open borders, at times recruited for their skillful labor of clearing jungle lands for cultivation. They paid taxes (Pulla 2016) on their incomes earned mostly from working the land. Things changed first in 1958, then again with greater force in 1985 when citizenship laws deemed many of the Hindu Lhotsampas “illegal immigrants” amidst the sweeping movements for “One Nation One People” which were intended to preserve Drukpa culture, Mahayana Buddhism, and the Dzongkha language, and to strictly forbid expressions of Lhotsampa culture, Hinduism, and the Nepali language (Pulla 2016:6-7).

By the 1980s, the Lhotsampas were increasing in numbers, and they had attempted a few political protests demanding democracy in Bhutan, protests which the government did not allow (Costello, Foster and McAdam 2021:421). From interviewing refugees and investigating primary sources, Venkat Pulla documented prolonged brutalities endured by the Lhotsampa people, generally focused on assaulting expressions of their culture – rituals, clothing, written and spoken language – and including seizure and destruction of their private property (Pulla 2016).

Since the 1990s, more than 113,500 Bhutanese refugees fled to Nepal as refugees, with the last remaining refugees resettled into third countries “due to a lack of voluntary repatriation”

as late as 2021 (UNHCR 2021). The former Bhutanese camps in Nepal have now been repurposed for other refugee sheltering services.

I think it's no coincidence that Bhutan is so often referred to as Shangri-La, a mythical utopia that cannot possibly exist as it is described in fiction. Considerations of the Bhutanese refugee situation must be instructive, even if the World Bank, United Nations, and seemingly all other nations largely ignore what Bhutan did while touting Bhutan as "a development success story," because Bhutan really is both the success story and the atrocity, at the same time. For Bhutan, I see no window dressing. They just shot their first born in the head, so to speak, and I have a hard time ignoring that even as it is so curiously seldom brought up.

The international community of scholars and researchers and NPOs, the UN, the World Bank, OECD, these entities have worked hard for the legitimacy of well-being and happiness as a goal of government. Bhutan's bad actions are inexcusable and don't fit, and I can only speculate whether it's the collective action of them all that has worked to bury this entire story.

4.3 Future Possibilities for Well-Being Policy – Is This Going to Happen?

Every time it snows in Minnesota, I am reminded how New Englanders differ in their tolerance for snow accumulation on roadways. Here in MN, it could be days before all roads and lanes are plowed, something that would never happen in New England. Thus, in New England, where there is more snow than in Minnesota coupled with an expectation that government will clear roadways almost instantly, including during all blizzards, such cultural norms determine city budgets for snow removal, which of course are a greater expense in Massachusetts because of that culture. The policies, and the expenditures, reflect what people value and a cost-benefit analysis by policymakers determines priorities.

No country other than Bhutan should take the GNH Framework, exactly as it is, and use it, exactly like Bhutan does. No other country is a Buddhist Kingdom in the Himalayas afraid of losing their identity while still trying to promote peace through their understanding of their core cultural values. But what Bhutan continues to do models for all nations what is possible. The OECD Well-Being Framework, and the varied and valuable global health data sources that continue to be improved, are there too. We can do this.

If we check in with the EU today, the well-being economy agenda is global and unstoppable, and it has certainly become central strategy in the EU in everything from the European Green New Deal to the Coronavirus Recovery Plan (Čavoški 2020). European Union member states have adopted a policy orientation that is based on the well-being economy as outlined by the OECD Well-Being Framework (OECD 2020), and in tandem with the UN's Agenda 2030 (UNDP 2021b). This adoption represents by far the biggest stride to date towards well-being economy orientation for development. And it is a viable policy orientation for all countries, not just those that are WEIRD, and many other entities agree (i.e. Finland 2021; UNDP 2021c; Wellbeing Economy Alliance 2021a; Wellbeing Economy Alliance 2021b; Wellbeing Economy Alliance 2021c).

It seems that global development in 2022 and onward is going to require alignment with the well-being economy agenda that recognizes that a multidimensional well-being framework to guide national policy is necessary, expanding the focus and purpose of government to include factors such as social inequality and ecological concerns. Hand in hand with economic progress is social progress and environmental progress. They are inextricably linked, and a well-being framework for development captures that.

As the Nordic Council of Ministers acknowledges, “the Wellbeing Economy still lacks a common language” (Birkjær, Gamerdinger and El-Abd 2021:6). I suspect we will see more emergent methodologies, and I believe this issue of finding the right common currency is still undecided, but perhaps we do not need a common currency, since nations are so different from one another. Their policy agendas should necessarily reflect their own unique history, values, struggles, and goals as best as possible. Whenever the goal is to reduce inequality and improve well-being, it’s the within-groups comparisons that are more meaningful anyway, or within-nation data, in this case, to note trends and shifts to determine needed changes.

There is a collective known as The Wellbeing Economy Alliance (Wellbeing Economy Alliance 2021b). Its members include dedicated individuals and nonprofit organizations who share a common goal: “promoting the well-being economy as the goal that all different initiatives are working toward” (Wellbeing Economy Alliance 2021a). Yes, its members are absolutely the tree-huggers, not the regular people. Their Executive Director came out of retirement to work unpaid, and his previous work was as Oxfam International Director. But they are informed people and NPOs who think this is possible. They are “international civil society” (Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2005), there to capitalize on the legitimacy of well-being policies propagating around the globe, to create the paradox as needed.

Why am I even interested in any of this? I think it is in my nature. It is in our nature, to try. We reach, we seek justice, we pursue happiness and life satisfaction, and we believe positive change is possible to some extent, because like Bhutan our entire social world is both beautiful and terrible, but things are not static, so I hope for change in the desired direction. I usually find hope at this point in my life in the trying. It sustains me and motivates me to figure some things out, which I hope to do somehow with my dissertation, a conversation for another day.

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Appendix—Glossary of Key Terms

Note. These are my own working definitions for these terms, in support of my scholarship, here to help the reader know what I mean when referring to inconsistently conceptualized things.

adaptive preferences – belief that people adapt to their social location and that this adaptation leads to altered perceptions and inherently renders *measures of subjective well-being* invalid; a common example is to suggest that members of an oppressed social group, after enduring long-term subjugation, may adapt in order to survive, leading to them reporting that they are “satisfied” or feel “happy” despite their situation. Bioethicists and others disagree that *adaptive preferences* is a limitation, even if true, because bioethicists prioritize autonomy and people’s rights to speak for themselves (Stramondo 2021). In support of the latter, we are referring to subjective measures. Adaptation also may happen in favorable circumstances, in which people may raise their own expectations due to social comparison such that what might have once made them happy, is no longer enough to do so; a common example is the unhappy lottery winner.

affect balance score – the net balance of favorable versus unfavorable emotions; the overall difference between *positive affect* and *negative affect*; this is often called *affective well-being* and occasionally *hedonic well-being*, and it comprises part of a complete *subjective well-being* measure. *Affect balance score* reflects transient emotional states determined by recent experiences, can vary day to day for a person, and an aggregated mean can vary day to day for a country. This is measured in survey items that ask about mood and feelings. As a social indicator, this is about “feeling happy”.

affective well-being – see *affect balance score*.

capability approach – a conceptual framework for evaluative exercises such as assessing people’s “achieved well-being and well-being freedom,” evaluating social arrangements or institutions, and “the design of policies and other forms of social change in society” (Robeyns 2017:24). *Capability approach* is a perspective on global development; its core is people’s freedom to be and to do the things they have reason to value (Sen 1999). *Capability approach* is the conceptual base of several *objective well-being* metrics, including the United Nations’ Human Development Index, and the University of Oxford and United Nations’ Global Multidimensional Poverty Index. Initially conceptualized by Amartya Sen, who received the 1998 Nobel prize in economics. Governments should aim to maximize people’s freedoms/capabilities to be and do well.

economy of well-being – see *well-being economy*.

evaluative well-being – see *life satisfaction*.

happiness – 1. synonym for *affective well-being*.

2. synonym for *subjective well-being*; most national and global research today on *happiness* is on *subjective well-being*.

happiness approach – modern iteration of the *utilitarian approach* sometimes called *subjective well-being approach*, considers *well-being* to be fully constituted by the subjective experiences of people; governments should aim to maximize one dimension of well-being: *happiness*. Proponents of the *capability approach* believe that a *happiness approach* is susceptible to *adaptive preferences*. Proponents of the *happiness approach* don’t like that measures based on the *capability approach* depend on resources like income. Proponents of the *resource-based*

approach don't believe that *measures of subjective well-being* can be taken as seriously as measures of *objective well-being*.

happiness economics – a sub-discipline within economics (see, for e.g., Frey and Stutzer 2002) that considers happiness as a measure of utility; topics include micro and macro-economic effects on *happiness* (income, employment, inflation) and political effects on *happiness*; proponents argue that individual *happiness* is substantially determined by social factors (i.e. democracy, racism) and that *happiness* is what gives money its value, so *measures of happiness* are economic indicators. *Happiness economics* scholars study determinants of *happiness* to understand how situations can be improved for people.

hedonic well-being – see *affective well-being*.

life satisfaction – as a social indicator this is about “being happy” (McCall 1975) and favorable social comparisons (Shin and Johnson 1978); a self-evaluation of how content someone is with their life; this is sometimes called *evaluative well-being* and comprises part of an overall *subjective well-being measure*; this reflects what is thought of as an overall sense of one's cognitive appraisal of being content with one's life as a whole and is not expected to vary day to day. Proponents of the *capability approach* believe this is susceptible to *adaptive preferences*. Guidelines (OECD 2013) state that measuring *life satisfaction* alone is sufficient and valid for measuring *subjective well-being*. This is commonly referred to as *happiness* in the literature, a frequent cause of confusion.

measures of happiness – see *measures of subjective well-being*.

measures of subjective well-being – global and population health surveys and research today use one or more of a handful of *measures of subjective well-being*, or *measures of happiness*. These depict all the different survey items that I know about. Only items (1) and (4) measure *affective well-being*; the others measure *evaluative well-being*.

- (1) “Taking all things together, would you say you are (i) Very happy, (ii) Rather happy, (iii) Not very happy, (iv) Not at all happy, (v) Don't know?” (Inglehart et al. 2020)
- (2) “Here is the 'ladder of life' (show picture). Let's suppose the top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you; and the bottom, the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder do you feel you stand at the present time?” (Pew Research Center 2021)
- (3) “Please imagine a ladder, with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?” (Gallup 2021; Helliwell et al. 2021)
- (4) “First, taking all things together, would you say you are very happy, somewhat happy, neither happy nor unhappy, somewhat unhappy or very unhappy?” (UNICEF 2019)
- (5) “Compared to this time last year, would you say that your life has improved, stayed more or less the same, or worsened, overall?” (UNICEF 2019)
- (6) “Now, look at this ladder (show picture) with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top. Suppose we say that the top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder do you feel you stand at this time?” (UNICEF 2019)
- (7) “All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days? Using this card on which 1 means you are “completely dissatisfied” and 10 means you are “completely satisfied” where would you put your satisfaction with your life as a whole? __” (Inglehart et al. 2020).

negative affect – one's negative emotional states.

objective well-being – this is not actually a term that anyone uses, but I am using it to refer to the collection of social indicators of *quality of life* that come from statistics or external observers, rather than from surveys designed to collect people’s perceptions, evaluations, and feelings. Examples include life expectancy, educational attainment, and access to clean water.

positive affect – one’s positive emotional states.

resource-based approach – a traditional framework for informing and assessing policy; this approach is concerned with income or commodities - money and things that money can buy; nonfinancial resources include access to clean water or electricity, food, etc.; resources are inherently valuable. Proponents of a *capability approach* critique this by pointing out that not everyone has equal ability to convert resources into things that have intrinsic value—new shoes are much less valuable to someone who uses a wheelchair, another critique is that just throwing money at people does not necessarily improve their *well-being*. Proponents of a *happiness approach* argue that money does not buy happiness, and economic measures of progress are much too narrow.

quality of life – 1. see *well-being*. 2. World Health Organization defines *quality of life* as “an individual’s perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns” (WHO 2012:11). The WHO definition more closely resembles *subjective well-being* although most speakers use *quality of life* as a synonym for *well-being*.

subjective well-being – one key dimension of *well-being* (which is multidimensional), it includes the three components of *positive affect*, *negative affect*, and *life satisfaction*; most often, in practice it is measured only through *life satisfaction*; often referred to as *happiness*.

Sustainable Development Goals – (SDGs) began in 2015 as a “call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity,” striving for substantial gains in *objective well-being* across 17 broad goals. Nations try to make progress towards the SDGs and report annually. Each goal includes about 8-12 targets, and each target includes 1-4 objective indicators. For example, SDG #3 is “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.” Target 3.4 is “By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being.” And indicator 3.4.2 is “Suicide mortality rate.” (UNDP 2021)

utilitarian approach –initially conceptualized by Jeremy Bentham, utilitarianism is concerned with producing the greatest good for the greatest number; a modern pioneer is Daniel Kahneman, who received the 2002 Nobel prize in economics; see also *happiness approach*.

well-being – 1. an overall, multidimensional notion of favorable options and functioning in society; welfare; well-being includes both *objective well-being* and *subjective well-being*;
2. human and ecological longevity plus health and happiness for humans and the planet

well-being economy – People’s *well-being* should guide national policymaking and spending; OECD’s rationale is a belief that people’s *well-being* drives economic prosperity and vice versa (Llena-Nozal, Martin and Murtin 2019). Most implementations of *well-being economy* still include GDP to some extent, along with measures of both *objective well-being* and *subjective well-being* (Birkjær, Gamedinger and El-Abd 2021). Others are more concerned about encouraging untamed economic growth because it leads to ecological destruction and is thus not sustainable.

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