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More Than Oneself: Cultural Values as Predictors of Happiness

NICOLAS JAKOWIEC, B. A. & KENNETH M. CRAMER, PH. D.
University of Windsor

The present study analyzed whether cultural values, such as individualism, foster lesser or greater degrees of happiness and to what degree the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita moderated such interaction. Data were compared across 82 nations according to their World Happiness Report scores, GDP per capita, and Hofstede dimensional scores. It was hypothesized (1) that high levels of national individualism would be positively correlated to happiness at a national level, (2) that other cultural dimensions would be relevant in predicting national happiness, (3) and that the association between happiness and cultural factors would be moderated by GDP per capita. Results indicated that individualism is correlated with higher happiness. Additional quantitative analyses showed that happiness was predicted by individualism, indulgence, long-term orientation, and power distance. Implications of these findings and future research directions are outlined.

Keywords: culture, Hofstede, happiness, GDP per capita, individualism

La présente étude a analysé si les valeurs culturelles, telles que l'individualisme, favorisent le bonheur et si le produit intérieur brut (PIB) par habitant modère une telle interaction. Les données ont comparé 82 nations en fonction de leurs scores du Rapport mondial sur le bonheur, du PIB par habitant et des scores de Hofstede. Nous avons émis l'hypothèse (1) que des niveaux élevés d'individualisme national seraient positivement corrélés au bonheur, (2) que d'autres dimensions culturelles seraient pertinentes afin de prédire le bonheur national et (3) que l'association entre le bonheur et les facteurs culturels serait modérée par PIB par habitant. Les résultats ont indiqué que l'individualisme est corrélé à un bonheur plus élevé. Des analyses quantitatives supplémentaires ont montré que le bonheur est prédit par l'individualisme, l'indulgence, l'orientation à long terme et la distance hiérarchique. Les implications de ces résultats et les orientations futures de la recherche sont décrites.

Mot clés : culture, Hofstede, bonheur, PIB par habitant, individualisme

Throughout the past decades, research has examined the cultural value of individualism, which has become increasingly prevalent throughout the world (Santos et al., 2017). Operationally defined as values coinciding with an emphasis on independence, individualism is commonly associated with increased self-centeredness, promotion of individual as opposed to collective success, autonomy, and self-direction. Increasing preferences for living alone and the lack of interdependence required for survival are two of the many reasons researchers believe the shift towards individualism is occurring through many global societies (Santos et al., 2017). Despite a plethora of research pertaining to the topic of individualism, literature has yet to agree on how the endorsement of this value impacts distinct cultures (Fischer & Boer, 2011; Ogihara & Uchida, 2014; Spector et al., 2001; Stolarski et al., 2015). Numerous articles outline the adaptive functioning associated with individualism, whereas many others illustrate a maladaptive function of individualist values (Fischer & Boer, 2011; Ogihara & Uchida, 2014). Although the impact of individualism has not been fully established, an interesting caveat is a simultaneous increase in happiness (or well-being) throughout the world (Cohen, 2018; Diener et al., 1995; Fischer & Boer, 2011; Santos et al., 2017). Defined as cognitive functioning pertaining to positive affect, well-being is better understood as an integration of mental and physical health (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). The increase in individualism and happiness simultaneously occurs; however, their exact interaction in a global context requires further analysis.

Ranging from the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle, to chapters of the Dhammapada in the Buddhist canon, to the teaching of Confucianism, the pursuit of happiness has been of great interest to the human condition (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2011). Not only has happiness been subject to discussion in the metatheoretical realm of philosophical thought and religious dogma, but happiness has also been subject to empirical inquiry

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throughout academia. Various articles sought to understand what impact happiness provides on aspects of human experiences. An article by Veenhoven (2008) addressed how happiness not only aids in longevity of life but also (implicitly) in the protection against illness. More specific works have drawn links between happier nations and lowered levels of hypertension, whereas others have uncovered a significant relation between happiness and reduced activation of neuroendocrine and bodily mechanisms (i.e., inflammation) that hamper individual health (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008; Steptoe & Wardle, 2005). In consideration of the aforementioned research, it is clear why studying happiness remains imperative. Further inquiry into the way humans promote happiness can serve to better understand what citizens can do to maximize such sentiments.

Copious studies have offered evidence towards the understanding that culture itself plays a vital role in creating and fostering varying conceptualizations of happiness distinct to specific cultures (Lu & Gilmour, 2004; Oishi & Gilbert, 2016; Ye et al., 2015). As suggested by Hofstede et al. (2010, p. 4), "ecological, economic, political, military, hygienic, and meteorological developments do not stop at national or regional borders." Therefore, understanding the role cultural factors may have on varying nations worldwide may foster greater global cooperation and understanding. Unfortunately, today's literature that examines happiness and cultural variables lacks certain elements that would expand our understanding of how the two interact. Many studies have either merely retained one dimension, included limitations on their generalizability due to non-representative samples, or simply limited their sample to specific regions on the globe (Bianchi, 2016; Chung & Mallery, 1999; Joshanloo & Jarden, 2016; Muresan et al., 2019). Therefore, the present study aims to address these problems by comparing all six dimensions of Hofstede's cultural variables and utilizing representative samples of a wide array of nations worldwide. Although the research has an initial focus on the relation between individualism and happiness, additional cultural variables were examined to understand their predictive ability on happiness.

The present study aims to contribute to the understanding of how cultural values are associated with happiness in various nations. An examination of 102 nations included a range of variables to predict national happiness. The study aims to address the accuracy of happiness and cultural values (i.e., individualism) as correlated variables, and the degree to which this relation is moderated by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, which is the sum of the value of goods, services, and taxes provided by a nation's economy minus product subsidies not added to the value of products divided by the population of such nation (The World Bank, n.d.-a).

Individualism and Happiness

A rich literature has outlined the promotion of adaptive functioning through well-being (happiness) in regions corresponding to higher individualist values. For example, Diener et al. (1995) analyzed the relation between well-being and individualism. The data were collected from a national subjective well-being sample of 55 nations and a national college subjective well-being sample from 40 nations, encompassing a representative sample of individuals from 75% of the world's population. The authors aimed to understand how different components of an individual's life mediated their personal well-being. Results showed that high income, individualism levels, human rights afforded to the respective citizens, and equality among the society contributed significantly to higher reports of personal well-being. However, individualism was the only variable that consistently predicted well-being when other variables were controlled. The study offers supportive evidence of the relation between individualism and well-being while chiefly highlighting the greater importance of individualism in comparison to other factors in predicting well-being (i.e., high income).

The academic work examining the link between well-being and individualism resides in a vast interdisciplinary field. As shown by Krys et al. (2019), the conceptualization of well-being throughout the globe is inconsistently defined. They offer an extensive review of the measurement of well-being throughout global societies. Whereas the current metric for well-being is life satisfaction, a potential bias was identified. That is, the measurement of life satisfaction seeks to answer how a person views their individualized pursuit of life satisfaction, but disregards aspects such as interdependent happiness and family satisfaction that may have gravely contributed to an individual's overall well-being if they were holding collectivist values. This bias in measurement of collectivist forms of well-being consequently skews the results of well-being assessment toward the support of more individualist societies being happier. If researchers aimed simply to measure values that individualist societies hold in high regard when reporting their happiness, then collectivist individuals and their reported happiness would struggle to be adequately understood. Krys et al. (2019) postulate that if psychometrically sound measures of well-being contained facets relevant to collectivist individuals, results may no longer be indicative of individualist nations being happier. Cultural differences are also relevant, as illustrated by Ogihara and Uchida (2014), who conversely identified

among their Japanese participants a decrease in well-being while in the presence of individualism. The illustration of global differences as it pertains to happiness and cultural variables aids in portraying the importance of utilizing comprehensive measures of well-being that encompasses as many cultural components as possible. However, other researchers have concluded that a host of terms such as happiness, well-being, life satisfaction, and positive affect tend to be interchangeable due to the extensive overlap of their constructs (Medvedev & Landhuis, 2018).

Throughout the literature, GDP is a relatively established measure in understanding an important amount of well-being within a nation (Cohen, 2018). Despite its inability to be an utterly robust measure, Cohen equates higher levels of GDP as coinciding with increasing levels of well-being. These increases were identified in areas such as healthcare, directly affecting those within the population that may manifest lower degrees of well-being due to perplexing problems within such societal systems. Although GDP may be essential, Fischer and Boer (2011) investigated whether the money an individual possesses was more predictive to their well-being than their individualism level. The conceptualization of well-being was based upon the absence of maladaptive psychopathology (i.e., stress, anxiety, poor psychological health) based on a meta-analysis of 420 000 respondents from 63 nations. Results indicated that although wealth may contribute to providing individuals with a greater sense of autonomy to expel their individualist values, it was not a sole factor in improving well-being. In addition, the results also illustrated that people with individualist values, such as autonomy, tended to have a strong relation to increased well-being which was more consistent throughout time. Fischer and Boer's (2011) study provides evidence to the importance of individualism on well-being while also contributing to support of the proverb "money does not bring happiness". However, the study identified several limitations, not the least of which was operationally defining well-being as an absence of maladaptive psychopathology.

The link between well-being and individualism does not stem exclusively from large-scale individualist values being granted from the governing body in the form of personal autonomy. As illustrated by Chung and Mallery (1999), individualist citizens also interact with their environment in a unique way compared to collectivist citizens. The researchers examined the different ways that individualist and collectivist persons compared themselves by comparing 235 students from the United States and China. Students completed a social comparison measure; it was predicted that collectivist (Chinese) students would be more likely than individualist (American) students to engage in upward comparisons (i.e., comparing themselves to others they deem intrinsically better than them). Additionally, the Individualism-Collectivism Scale (INDCOL) was used to measure the two constructs. In conjunction with the prediction, results exemplified that individuals with higher collectivist scores were more likely to conduct comparisons than individualistic individuals. The analysis revealed that collectivist individuals may be more prone to engage in actions such as self-deprecation, consequently potentially decreasing their well-being. It is worth noting that this research is similar to that of Joshanloo and Jarden (2016). Although the researchers separately established that hedonistic acts such as pleasure enhance well-being within individualist cultures, in conjunction with Chung and Mallery (1999), both studies display how happiness is promoted in culturally individualist societies. However, the two studies presented several limitations and consequently their generalizability was compromised. Both studies were limited due to their analysis of a singular cultural dimension (individualism-collectivism) and failed to sample from a wider selection of the world's nations.

Happiness and Multiple Predictive Variables

The extent to which multiple variables (such as individualism, power distance, and psychopathological symptoms) can predict happiness has been well established in the literature (Garaigordobil, 2015; Ye et al., 2015). On the surface, a headline such as: "you would be happier if you ate less" reads like a valid recipe for achieving happiness (Wadyka, 2016). Nevertheless, such statements in many instances may prove misleading: wherein an individual could see that multiple factors relate to happiness, conclusions as to what causes happiness in a specific individual are not clearly defined (Frey & Stutzer, 2000; Garaigordobil, 2015; Hofstede et al., 2010; Inglehart et al., 2008; Muresan et al., 2019; Verme, 2009; Ye et al., 2015). In many instances, predictors of happiness may go beyond cultural variables. A study by Garaigordobil (2015) examined interpersonal variables that predict happiness among adolescents. Their multiple regression analyses identified higher self-concept, fewer symptoms of depression, various cooperative behaviours, higher self-esteem, and lower psychoticism as salient predictors of happiness. Whereas the study was limited in its exclusive analysis of adolescents, it did successfully illustrate the need to examine a host of variables, beyond just culture, to adequately and comprehensively predict individual happiness.

Individualism and GDP

An array of literature has revealed a link between individualist values and economic growth (Bianchi, 2016; Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2011; Tang & Koveos, 2008). Whether it be the emphasis on achieving personal satisfaction through the mediation of either increasing societal status or the recognition of accomplishments, it could be argued that citizens in individualist societies seek to engage in money-generating actions such as innovation (Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2011). The facilitation of economic development in countries does not come without intrinsic changes within a nation's cultural fabric. Ball (2001) explains that as societies become more economically developed, they soon witness a shift towards more individualist values driven chiefly by personal rights and freedoms. According to Ball, whether it be property rights or aspects related to wages, the development of a nation's economy grants individuals the ability to rely less on family.

Bianchi (2016) conducted six different studies to determine whether individualism is affected by changes in economic development. Study 1 examined millions of American birth names given from 1948 to 2014; this would quantify the uniqueness of names given during various periods of economic growth. Bianchi hypothesized that more unique names would be given during economic prosperity. Study 2 similarly examined autonomy levels using the *General Social Survey* from 1986 to 2014, hypothesizing that self-focused values would augment during times of economic growth. Using the DDB *Worldwide Communications Lifestyle Survey*, study 3 compared ratings of individualism in times of prosperity among almost 100 000 adults from 1975 to 2006; it was hypothesized that individualism would wain during an economic downturn. Study 4 analyzed the linguistic content of songs from 1980 to 2014, expected more self-focused lyrics during an economic boom. With measures of perceived uncertainty obtained from almost 800 000 Americans sampled from 2006 to 2013, Study 5 hypothesized greater uncertainty under recessive conditions. Finally, study 6 mirrored the previous study in an analysis of the uncertainty of 100 respondents recruited through "Amazon's Mechanical Turk". Across all six studies, Bianchi concluded that individualism was more pronounced during periods of economic growth and prosperity but faltered during economic hardship. However, the study was not without limitations; even Bianchi acknowledged exclusive American sampling for 5 of the 6 studies plus an overabundance (88%) of white participants in the only global sample.

Despite monetary capital potentially confounding the relation between individualism and happiness, understanding the limits in how monetary metrics relate to happiness is integral. The assertion that money can buy happiness was addressed in the research of Muresan et al. (2019), who sought to understand to what degree money contributes to an individual's happiness. Their European sample was drawn from 2008-2016 across 26 nations. The independent variables consisted of income and the six cultural variables derived from Hofstede, whereas the control variables consisted of income disparity, health, unemployment, social status, and education. Using ordinary least squares regression analysis, the Hausman-Taylor Estimator, and the generalized method of moments method, the researchers concluded (1) that income and happiness both increase until around $35,000 USD; (2) that cultural factors play a role in the happiness of such nations; and (3) that in countries of low power distance, high individualism, low uncertainty avoidance, and high indulgence—the levels of happiness were maximized. The study was limited in its generalizability in a global context as the research solely focused on European countries.

Hofstede Dimensions of Culture

Hofstede offers an index of cultural dimensions compiled from data across 102 nations (Hofstede et al., 2010). Scores within each cultural value have been occasionally updated since their first collection in 1967 through replications and extensions of the surveys by associated researchers (Hofstede Insights, n.d.-a). Whereas it was argued that changes in culture would be a gradual and slow-moving process, all nations' values are considered current (Hofstede Insights, n.d.-a). In part, Hofstede's research and the preliminary surveys led him to develop the six cultural dimensions as an explanation for the variation in cultural groups' behaviour (Hofstede et al., 2010). The *Hofstede Index* includes the individualism (versus collectivism) dimension, a preference for individual autonomy and smaller-knit social frameworks; indulgence (versus restraint dimension), a societal acceptance of free-gratification; long-term orientation (versus short-term normative orientation), a cultural perspective towards fostering future rewards; masculinity (versus femininity), a preference of achievement, success, and competitive environments; power distance, the acceptance of the inequality in power distribution; and uncertainty avoidance, a preference for avoiding unpredictable or uncontrollable events (Hofstede Insights, n.d.-b). Validity studies have criticized the indices for a lack of construct and face validity (Blodgett et al., 2008). Contrary to this, Hofstede et al. (2010) discuss how over 400 correlations had been observed between the indices and other research. Such correlations illustrate the external validity of the *Hofstede Index* and provide a basis to how the framework is appropriate under certain circumstances. Hofstede acknowledges that the

utilization of his work is suitable for highlighting similarities cross-culturally (Eckhardt, 2002). In weighing the arguments for or against the utilization of the *Hofstede Index*, the conclusion was reached that due to its relevancy, established nature, and ability to be utilized to highlight patterns cross-culturally, that it would be a suitable measure for the present research.

Present Study and Hypotheses

The present study has evaluated whether cultural values, such as individualism, were associated with citizens' overall happiness. GDP per capita and Hofstede variables were included to determine their relative moderation or predictive ability concerning happiness. Based on Fischer and Boer (2011), whose multi-national analysis observed increased individualism linked to increased well-being, it was hypothesized (1) that high national levels of individualism would be positively correlated to happiness. In line with research postulating happiness has many predictors (Frey & Stutzer, 2000; Garaigordobil, 2015; Hofstede et al., 2010; Inglehart et al., 2008; Muresan et al., 2019; Verme, 2009; Ye et al., 2015), it was also hypothesized (2) that additional cultural values found within the Hofstede model would be relevant in predicting national happiness. Lastly, based on a multitude of work that has outlined how monetary variables are associated with happiness (Dipietro & Anoruo, 2006; Hagerty & Veenhoven, 2003; Senik, 2014), it was hypothesized (3) that the association between happiness and cultural factors would be moderated by GDP per capita.

Method

Data and Measures

This research joined data from various sources in order to analyze how varying cultural values and happiness relate without common limitations in the field of research on cultural values and happiness (i.e., non-representative sample). Data from both the World Happiness Report and The World Bank were used to amass an aggregated construct of happiness scores and GDP per capita of nations within the sample. A measure of cultural values for the respective nations was drawn from the *Hofstede Index*. The World Happiness Report is an annual publication conducted in coordination with the *Gallup World Poll* which evaluates the happiness of world citizens (Helliwell et al., 2020). The World Bank is a financial institution that hosts a website containing financial information for an array of countries internationally (The World Bank, n.d.-c). Lastly, the Hofstede Index indexes cultural values for international societies through the use of Hofstede's original work with supplementary data from associated researchers (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Happiness. Data pertaining to happiness were taken from the World Happiness Report. The measure is an annually conducted publication overseen by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, a subsidy of the United Nations started in 2012. The annual report ranks 156 countries concerning how happy their citizens are by utilizing the cornerstone life evaluation measure on the *Gallup World Poll*, dubbed the Cantril Ladder (Helliwell et al., 2020). The Cantril Ladder asks participants to quantify their current happiness on a scale (ladder), where 0 is the lowest and 10 the highest. Approximately 1000 respondents from each country are surveyed every year, and this report contains representative samples of the 156 countries through the years 2016-2018 aged 15 and older (Gallup, 2019). The report's prime goal is to provide a ranked list of happiness scores to the 156 participating countries. Among the 156 nations, scores ranged from Afghanistan's 2.567 to Finland's 7.809.

GDP per capita. To quantify the distribution of national wealth, the GDP per capita was derived from The World Bank database (The World Bank, n.d.-b). GDP per capita was calculated by dividing the specified GDP (USD) of a nation by its population (the most recent year of datum were 2019). GDP per capita scores ranged from $114 685 in Luxembourg to $787 in Burkina Faso. An outlier identified as Luxembourg ($114 685) within the data set was excluded.

The *Hofstede Index*. This index was used to derive the cultural values of the constituent countries. All indices within the Hofstede Index range from 0 to 100. As per Hofstede, all cultural values can be understood through the critical analysis of traits pertaining to such cultural values (Hofstede et al., 2010). Accordingly, in the individualism index, higher values denote a greater prevalence of self-centered traits. Scores on the higher end are countries such as the United States (91), and a nation on the lower end (implying greater prevalence of collectivistic traits such as conformity) is that such as Guatemala (6). In the power distance index, higher values denote greater acceptance of the inequality in the distribution of power. The highest index scores were shared by Slovakia and Malaysia (100), and the lowest score (implying resistance to the inequality of power and aim to regulate greater equality within the society) was from Austria (11). In the masculinity index, higher values denote greater acceptance of masculine traits such as assertiveness and heroism. Slovakia again has the highest value (100), whereas Sweden has the lowest value (5) (implying more feminine traits such as care for the weak and cooperation). The uncertainty avoidance index, where high values are related to heightened feelings of uncertainty, shows

Greece as the most uncertain nation (100) and Singapore as the most certain nation (implying a more relaxed demeanour) (8). Long-term orientation, where higher scores denote a greater desire to plan and work towards virtuous acts for the future, has South Korea as the longest term-orientated (100) and Puerto Rico (0) as the shortest term-orientated (implying more thought into the present and past as opposed to the future). Lastly, the indulgence dimension, where high values denote a greater allowance of free gratification within a society, has Venezuela (100) as the most indulgent and Pakistan (0) as the least indulgent (implying a tendency to conceal and curb gratification). The final sample included 90 scores for the individualism versus collectivism dimension, power distance index, masculinity versus femininity dimension, and uncertainty dimension. However, datum for the long-term orientation dimension was only available for 84 nations, whereas only 83 nations were available for the indulgence dimension. All included nations within the final sample had no more than 2 missing values on the Hofstede Index (Hofstede, 2015).

Results

All data were analyzed using SPSS (version 26) with a significance level set at .05. Whereas the full dataset included 102 nations, 11 nations (Arab World, Dutch Belgium, East Africa, French Belgium, French Canada, French Switzerland, German Switzerland, Puerto Rico, Suriname, Taiwan, and West Africa) had missing values for a combination of power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, happiness, or GDP per capita. Long-term orientation values were missing for 17 nations (Costa Rica, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Jamaica, and Panama), and indulgence scores were missing for 18 nations (Armenia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Israel, Jamaica, and Panama). A singular outlier (Luxembourg) was identified for GDP per capita and was excluded from the sample. The final sample included 82 nations which had scores for all variables. Overall, the sample of nations tended to be more collectivist (M = 39.81, midpoint of 50, SD = 22.62), and they tended to be reasonably happy (M = 5.90, midpoint of 5, SD = 0.98). The average GDP per capita was 20.79k (SD = 21.10k). All predictors were screened for outliers, and masculinity was transformed into ranks to correct for non-normality.

Table 1 outlines the variable means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the variables. In support of the first hypothesis—that individualism is correlated with happiness—the Pearson product moment correlation was significant, r (90) = 0.57, p < .001. Moreover, happiness was positively correlated to both indulgence and GDP per capita; and negatively correlated to power distance. That is, as a society a) allows greater self-gratification and b) achieves higher GDP per capita, they tend to exhibit higher scores of happiness. Alternatively, the more a nations' powerless citizens believe that the distribution of power is unequally distributed, the less happy those citizens tends to be.

To test the second hypothesis, that additional cultural variables would predict national happiness levels, a stepwise regression analysis (excluding GDP per capita) was conducted with happiness as a criterion, and power distance, individualism, indulgence, long term orientation, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance as predictors. The rationale behind a stepwise regression analysis was to determine what cultural variables adds explanatory power in predicting happiness scores. As outlined in Table 2, the final model explained 59% of the variance, and included power distance (β = -.29), individualism (β = .27), indulgence (β = .44), and long -term orientation (β = .32).

To test the third hypothesis—that GDP per capita would act as a moderator between happiness and the cultural predictors, countries were trichotomized based on their relative distribution of GDP per capita: lower (M = \$3.7k, SD = \$1.7k), middle (M = \$12.6k, SD = \$4.2k), and higher (M = \$46.5k, SD = \$17.1k). The stepwise multiple regression was repeated for the three sets of nations, as outlined in Table 3. When GDP per capita was low (n = 27), the final model F (1, 25) = 4.62, p = .041 explained 16% of the variance in happiness scores and included only individualism (β = -.39); in short, national happiness was higher when self-propelled motivations were lower. Whereas none of the predictors were selected among mid-wealth nations (p > .05), a unique set of predictors F (2, 26) = 39.70, p < .001 was identified for high-range GDP per capita nations, accounting for 75% of the variance, and included both indulgence (β = .59) and power distance (β = -.40); in short, national happiness was greater when a nation could be described as higher in their demand for equality and more indulgent to their citizens.

Discussion

Based on the analysis of data from 82 nations, the present study has addressed to what extent national cultural values were associated with happiness. The interest was in addressing questions such as whether nations described as more individualist (e.g., United States) report greater happiness than nations described as more collectivist (e.g., China), and would this relation be qualified by the distribution of national wealth among its citizens while addressing common limitations in past research. Three hypotheses were

advanced: (1) that high levels of national individualism would be positively correlated to happiness at a national level, (2) that other cultural dimensions would be relevant in predicting national happiness, and (3) that the association between happiness and cultural factors would be moderated by GDP per capita. Addressing such questions should allow communities, organizations, and policymakers to better generate social structures and frameworks to either augment or maintain happiness among their citizens.

The first hypothesis—of a significant correlation between individualism and happiness—was supported. These results build on existing literature on the correlation between higher levels of individualism and higher levels of happiness (Diener et al., 1995; Fischer & Boer, 2011; Joshanloo & Jarden, 2016). With a more careful examination of the five countries with the greatest happiness (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland), readers can observe that their citizens reported an average individualism score (out of 100) of 67, whereas the five least happy countries (Egypt, India, Tanzania, Ukraine, and Zambia) reported an average individualism score of 32. Since many confounding variables remained uncontrolled, the reader should be cautioned herein regarding any causal connections. These results run contrary to the Ogihara and Uchida (2014) study, which illustrated a negative effect of individualism. However, the support of this hypothesis was based on the columniation of results from 90 nations, whereas Ogihara and Uchida referred to the negative effect of individualism as it pertained to only Japan. Such aspects as correlated explanatory factors may contribute to an increased happiness level through a domino effect in the sample. To specify, trust in institutions may lead to greater expansion of welfare programs, thereby increasing equality among the disadvantaged and increasing happiness (Macchia & Plagnol, 2019). For the research, this suggests a plausible way that individualism may lead to greater happiness in a global context. The correlation between individualism and happiness may also be indicative of a positive feedback loop. It is possible that happiness can be expected to increase as citizens take more responsibility for their general well-being. Since individualism is predicated on self-centred directives, when individuals take on more directives like pursuing their dream career, they may trigger increases in happiness. Nonetheless, by pursuing such self-centred actions, one may be able to seek happiness in areas they believe will provide them with happiness. In a more collectivist nation, individuals may not pursue their longed-for career due to their social obligations to their family (Mok et al., 2020; Woodhams et al., 2015; Wu, 2014). In being provided with the opportunity to pursue one's self-centred desire, an individual may be able to find happiness that they would not have been able to obtain through group conformity. Despite the statistically significant correlation between individualism and happiness, it should not be overlooked that other variables had a statistically significant correlation with happiness, such as power distance index, indulgence, and GDP per capita. Such results provide a glimpse into how happiness is associated with a variety of differing variables.

One explanation for this apparent contradiction could be the social undesirability of most forms of bias. Because most types of bias are considered socially undesirable, people may attempt to maintain a positive self-image by consciously rejecting the possibility that they are biased against someone. A conscious rejection of bias has been supported by research on other marginalized groups. Research on women and people of color has found that people often are not consciously aware of being biased. Instead, they justify potentially discriminatory actions as being based on something other than bias (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986).

The second hypothesis—that additional cultural variables would predict national happiness levels—was also supported. The final model illustrated that power distance, individualism, indulgence, and long-term orientation were significant in predicting a nation's happiness. This overall model highlights the positive association of individualism as secondary to the preliminary negative association of power distance but ahead of the positive association of indulgence and long-term orientation. Specifically, nations were happier when pursuing equality, holding self-centred values, indulging as they pleased, and maintaining long-term orientations. As the preceding order of values implies, the degree to which nations tended to believe that inequalities amongst their citizens were acceptable seemed to be the most significant factor, with nations seeking to foster equality over inequality tending to be happier. That is, as the acceptance of inequality grows, happiness tends to decrease. The degree to which it predicts close to one-third of the variance in happiness is also indicative of the negative relation between happiness and power distance, as observed in previous research (Oishi et al., 2011; Simson & Savage, 2020; Stuntz, 2008; Ye et al., 2015). Furthermore, observing individualism as a secondary variable of importance within the model allowed us to interpret that it was not the most influential factor in predicting happiness. As mentioned earlier, the positive relation of individualism was consistent with previous research (Diener et al., 1995; Fischer & Boer, 2011; Joshanloo & Jarden, 2016). Additionally, the positive relation of indulgence and long-term orientation illustrated that as

people have greater opportunities to indulge in self-gratifying aspects and plan for the future, they tend to be happier. These results are similar to that of Schnizel (2013), however the results may be more complex than illustrated. Specifically, as mentioned by Gaygisiz (2013), higher levels of indulgence and long-term orientation can also be indicative of moderating aspects related to governance quality and human development, which coincidently can predict happiness (Ott, 2010). In observing the overall model, examples such as Switzerland (3rd happiest nation) and Sweden (7th happiest nation) tended to meet all the criteria of the model that would relate to enhanced levels of happiness. Not only were both nations relatively high (as compared to the mean) in individualism, long-term orientation, and indulgence, but they were also low in power distance. Being some of the happiest nations within the sample, readers are provided with a glimpse into how a model nation would be depicted. Conclusively, a point of interest is the inclusion of long-term orientation within the final model. Despite long-term orientation not being correlated with happiness, its inclusion in the final regression model suggests that it has a suppressive effect on another variable. For context, a suppressive effect constitutes the way an independent variable strengthens the effect of another independent variable on the dependent variable. Within the data, this suggests that long-term orientation may strengthen the effect of another independent variable on happiness. The results are consistent with previous research that have similarly identified multiple determinants of happiness (Garaigordobil, 2015; Jo et al., 2020; Kumari & Duhan, 2019; Mehrdadi et al., 2016).

The third hypothesis—that the association between happiness and cultural factors would be moderated by GDP per capita—was also supported. The inclusion of GDP per capita was based on the well-documented finding that monetary variables are associated with happiness (Dipietro & Anoruo, 2006; Hagerty & Veenhoven, 2003; Senik, 2014). After trichotomizing the data into high, medium, and low GDP per capita, unique cultural predictors of a nation's happiness were observed. That is, as individualism increases, nations in the low GDP per capita category tends to become less happy. These results build upon the existing evidence between individualism, lower economic status, and happiness (Borrero et al., 2013; Veenhoven, 1991). However, an interesting caveat within the analysis is that no cultural variables had a statistically significant impact on happiness scores within the middle GDP per capita category. Hypothetically, although the middle GDP per capita category nations may desire to live individualistically, such factors as their lack of established wealth may hinder acting upon such desire. In higher GDP per capita category nations, there may be a greater ability to pursue desires due to the security of wealth and benefits that come with higher GDP per capita (i.e., greater government spending on social programs as compared to lower GDP per capita nations). The benefits of such aspects as social spending include reducing poverty, increasing happiness, and improving life satisfaction (Easterlin, 2013; Kenworthy, 1999; O'Connor, 2017; Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2016). Moreover, the same could be said about other variables. For example, expressed opposition of the inequality of power, as postulated by the power distance index, may not be deemed acceptable in countries where such expression could be seen as anti-government. Therefore, it is our understanding that the complexity and central stance that the middle GDP per capita category nations would take is indicative of the lack of predictive power of cultural variables. Lastly, concerning the high GDP per capita nations, it was evident that happiness correlated positively to indulgence but negatively to power distance. It should be noted that among high GDP per capita nations, individualism was not included. This runs contrary to the initial assumption of the present research that individualism would lead to greater happiness within the high GDP per capita category. This assumption was predicated on the overlap of traits associated with those within higher socioeconomic classes and individualism. Persons with individualist values tend to exhibit independence, self-centeredness, focus on individual as opposed to collective success, autonomy, and self-direction (Santos et al., 2017). Many of those same values are exhibited within high socioeconomic classes (Piff & Moskowitz, 2018). Based on the overlap of traits as evident within previous research, it was not expected to have any significant interactions between individualism and happiness in the high GDP per capita category. However, one possible explanation for this could be in relation to other values. Although there may be overlap, higher socioeconomic classes may hold indulgence and the acceptance of inequality as more important factors in predicting their happiness. As someone becomes wealthier, they are allowed to become more indulgent and not restrain their desires and impulses as a means of saving money. On the other hand, the negative relation between power distance and happiness in the high GDP per capita category could possibly be explained by previous research which established that inequality tends to negatively impact economic growth (Bagchi & Svejnar, 2015; Brueckner & Lederman, 2018; Ncube et al., 2014). Therefore, since power distance is the cultural value denoting the acceptance of inequality, the economic growth that created the denotation as a high GDP per capita nation may not have been possible with high power distance scores (Hofstede et al., 2010). With such logic, it would be plausible that countries with higher GDP per

capita would be less willing to accept inequalities within their societies. Additional evidence of this possible reasoning was also supported by the negative relation between power distance scores and GDP per capita illustrated within the correlation matrix of the present study. As mentioned earlier, for its relation to the consistency in being represented as one of the happiest nations, the Nordic nation of Sweden is a good example of this model. Being in the high GDP per capita category, Sweden showcased a high degree of indulgence, low degree of power-distance, and placed 7th in the sample's top 10 happiest countries. The inclusion of GDP per capita within the regression provided a unique facet, wherein upon its incorporation, the predictive power of certain values on happiness was altered. This was exemplified in how high GDP per capita illustrated the statistically significant predictive power of only power distance and indulgence. Whereas those in the low GDP per capita only illustrated a statistically significant predictive power for individualism, and no statistically significant predictive ability was shown for any cultural value in the middle GDP per capita category.

Future Research & Limitations

As with all research, the present study does include some limitations. One of the first limitations of the data is the use of *World Happiness Report* scores as the single measure of happiness. Despite suggesting efficacy in measuring happiness, it does present an issue regarding its utilization, interpretation, and meaning within a larger context. With respect to utilization, the results can only be used with relevance to happiness as it is measured and defined by the *World Happiness Report*. Future studies might aim to break down happiness into specific components such as life satisfaction, perceived health, relationships, and many other components to gain a more in-depth understanding of how more specified components relate to similar analyzes. Such studies can be conducted by utilizing various happiness measures such as the *Oxford Happiness Questionnaire*, *Subjective Happiness Scale*, and *Satisfaction With Life Scale*, to name a few (Diener et al., 1985; Hills & Argyle, 2002; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999).

Additionally, although the data provided valuable results regarding the observation of a nation's level of happiness and cultural variables (i.e., individualism), individual as opposed to aggregate level data would provide a different perspective to the analysis. In the observance of individual levels of data, age differences could be examined. Such research would be conducted by replacing the countries with participants, using surveys instead of archival data, and gauging in-group differences. This would grant researchers an ability to understand the cultural values held by differing ages and understand whether age-related differences are evident in such relation. Methodology for such studies can be based around measurement tools such as Triandis and Gelfand's (1998) *Culture Orientation Scale*. Through the utilization of methods similar to the Culture Orientation Scale, researchers may be granted a more descriptive understanding of how individualist persons think and how such thought processes contribute to happiness. The generalizability of the results is also limited by the national level of data that was utilized. Future studies may aim to utilize individual-level data obtained through measures such as the *World Values Survey* in order to quantify group differences (i.e., demographics) on the interaction of cultural variables and happiness (World Value Survey Association, n.d.).

Additional limitations are also present within the study concerning the difficulty with cultural constructs. In regard to the cultural values such as individualism and collectivism used within the research, the complexity of their multi-level application brings up an issue of application as it relates to the results. More specifically, cultural values can generally describe both nations, as done within the study, and individuals as proposed through the suggestions for future research. Therein lies the problem as although cultural terms can be applied at both levels, how the values are applied is not exactly isomorphic. Cultural values represent two anchors of a unidimensional scale at the national level, whereas such values tend to be orthogonal on the individual level. Researchers such as Oyserman (2006) and Vignoles et al. (2016) suggest utilizing more adept models of analyzing cultural values to provide greater generalizability of the results.

Conclusion

The present research aimed to identify whether cultural values could be useful and salient as predictors of happiness. It was hypothesized that (1) high levels of national individualism would be positively correlated to happiness at a national level, (2) that other cultural dimensions would be relevant in predicting national happiness, and (3) that the association between happiness and cultural values would be moderated by GDP per capita.

All in all, the results of the present study illustrate that individualism does seem to be correlated with higher degrees of happiness. This lends itself to the general implication that more individualist cultures tend to exhibit higher degrees of happiness. However, based on additional quantitative analysis, happiness seems to be predicted by multiple variables that were moderated by GDP per capita. Due to generalizability limitations, researchers should aim to use more

individualized measures of cultural values and happiness in future studies. Additionally, due to differences in the conceptualization of happiness throughout global societies, subsequent studies must address this issue by using similar methodologies combined with a diverse array of happiness measures.

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Appendix A

Table 1

Correlation Matrix of Hofstede Index, World Bank Data, & World Happiness Report

	Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.	Power-Distance Index (PDI)	90	63.81	21.89	---							
2.	Individualism (IDV)	90	39.81	22.62	-.68**	---						
3.	Masculinity (MAS)	90	46.53	26.97	.04	.10	---					
4.	Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)	90	68.42	22.11	.32**	-.26*	-.17	---				
5.	Long-Term Orientation (LTO)	84	46.71	23.22	.10	.10	-.08	.12	---			
6.	Indulgence (IVR)	83	44.47	22.69	-.38**	.24*	.15	-.20	-.48**	---		
7.	World Happiness Report	90	5.90	.98	-.60**	.57**	-.07	-.08	.10	.46**	---	
8.	GDP Per Capita	90	$20.79K	$21.10K	-.67**	.68**	.02	-.33**	.15	.37**	.77**	---

*$p < .05$
**$p < .01$

Table 2

Stepwise Regression Analysis of Hofstede Index & World Happiness Report

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Power Distance Index	-.03	.004	-.63**	-.02	.005	-.37**	-.01	.005	-.26*	-.01	.005	-.30**
Individualism				.02	.005	.36**	.02	.005	.37**	.01	.005	.27**
Indulgence							.01	.004	.28**	.02	.004	.44**
Long Term Orientation										.01	.004	.32**
R^2		.39			.46			.52			.59	
F For Change In R^2		51.21**			9.30**			10.83**			13.64**	

*$p < .05$
**$p < .01$

Table 3

Stepwise Regression Analysis of Hofstede Index, World Happiness Report, and GDP Per Capita

GDP Per Capita	Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
		B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Lower							
	Individualism	-.02	.011	-.40*			
	R^2		.16				
	F For Change In R^2		4.62*				
Middle							
Higher							
	Indulgence	.03	.004	.80**	.02	.004	.59**
	Power Distance				-.01	.004	-.40**
	R^2		.64			.75	
	F For Change In R^2		47.18**			12.36**	

Note: No statistically significant interactions for 'Middle' GDP per capita.
*$p < .05$
**$p < .01$