



The Social Function of Interdependent Happiness in a Time of Pandemic

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1. Pandemic and Happiness

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic has extended to the social life of individuals and to the social economy that underpins it. In particular, a number of socio-behavioral patterns such as social distancing, the stay home lifestyle, and shortened business hours, widely practiced as countermeasures against the pandemic, are widely accepted as coping behaviors that rely on people's close relationships. As of 2021, they have now become established behavior in people's social lives.

In such a social situation, it is especially required for people to have good relationships with family members and to lower the risk of ill-health. Even before a pandemic, happiness, which is at the core of well-being, has been pointed out to mean a psychological sense of quiescence and harmony in social relationships across cultures (Delle Fave et al., 2016). Hence, the pandemic can be seen as a threat to well-being itself.

2. Measurement of Happiness and Culture

Psychology has emphasized a personal agency or self-actualization, such as ideal fulfillment, achievement, and a sense of control, in measuring happiness. However, these aspects are only one way of pursuing happiness, and we cannot ignore the sense of quiescence and relational harmony as factors that support the pursuit of happiness across various cultures. In fact, conventional happiness scales that include the former as personal happiness items show higher scores in more individualistic cultures, such as those in the Western world (Myers and Diener, 1995). Alternatively, research using the "interdependent happiness" scale, a standardized psychometric measure that includes the latter—sense of quiescence and interpersonal harmony, shows scores are higher in collectivist cultures such as South America and East Asia (Hitokoto and Takahashi, 2021). This suggests that there is cultural diversity in the connotations of happiness, and, at the same time, that it is important to understand different types of happiness and their characteristics. For example, Hitokoto and Takahashi (2021) found that, unlike in the Netherlands, interdependent happiness was stronger among the elderly in Japan and Costa Rica, suggesting that there may be cultural differences in the ways in which a sense of quiescence and interpersonal harmony, are cultivated or achieved. If familiar and supportive

relationships are more fulfilling for the elderly, and if such perceptions vary across cultures, then there may be country-specific applications for the lifelong availability of so-called social capital.

3. Cooperative Well-being and Health in a Time of Pandemic

Previous studies have shown that the interdependent happiness scale is positively correlated with a variety of health indicators. For example, an epidemiological survey study of Japanese students showed that interdependent happiness was correlated with students' healthy lifestyle habits—less absenteeism and internet addiction, and “sleep quality” (Kitazawa et al., 2019). Sleep quality is also known to worsen with higher levels of loneliness, a process that is fundamental for social animals (Cacioppo et al., 2006). For example, lonely primates exhibit a “conserved transcriptional response to adversity (CTRA),” in which gene expression for inflammatory responses is promoted and that for antiviral activity is suppressed. Measuring loneliness, psychological sense of quiescence and relational harmony could provide empirical insight into the health of people that is fundamentally sustained by their sociality.

Interestingly, interdependent happiness is associated with fewer symptoms of coronavirus infections in both East and West (Hitokoto and Adeclas, under review). It is not clear whether this is mediated by the physiological mechanisms described above, but, at least, partial mediation of loneliness has been proven. In view of the social and health properties of interdependent happiness, individuals with high levels of this type of happiness are likely to have positive characteristics for pandemic coping through family relationships. In fact, in East Asia, where pandemic control has been relatively successful, not only is interdependent happiness negatively correlated with symptoms of coronavirus infections, there is also a behavioral pattern of maintaining relationships through telecommunication with family and friends, even in situations where there is physical distance (e.g., living away from family for employment). Loneliness is a subjective feeling, and even without physical distance, the feeling can be worsened through rejection by others (Cacioppo et al., 2006). If the psychological effects of telecommunication include mitigation of loneliness, especially in pandemic situations where physical closeness to others carries a risk of infection, the patterns of behavior using information and communication technologies by individuals with a strong interdependent happiness may provide clues to healthy living in the age of “With Corona.”

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