LAY THEORIES OF HAPPINESS IN THE EAST AND WEST

Adrian FURNHAM, Helen CHENG, and Yasuko SHIRASU

University College London, U.K.

This study examines lay theories and demographic correlates of happiness in Britain, China (Hong Kong) and Japan among comparable groups. 311 young people completed a questionnaire measuring lay theories of happiness (COHQ) and the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI). The British participants reported highest levels of happiness. The 36 causes factored into six internally coherent and interpretable factors. Only one of the six factors significantly correlated ($r = .21$, $p < .05$ to $r = .34$, $p < .01$) with the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) scores. Path analysis, using the OHI as the dependent variable showed that among the lay theory factors, only lay theories about achievement and freedom in life and work was a direct predictor. The role and function of lay theories with respect to happiness are discussed.

Key words: lay theories, east-west comparison, happiness

This study set out to compare lay, as opposed to academic, theories of the causes of happiness in three different cultures. There is an extensive literature on lay theories of psychological phenomena, especially mental illness, but little or nothing on lay theories of the causes of happiness (Furnham, 1988; Furnham & Cheng, 2000a; Myers, 1992). The study also set out to examine the relations between lay beliefs of causes of happiness and the “actual” self-reported happiness in the three cultures.

Researchers have distinguished between three types of theories: *lay* theories which are thought of as personal and idiosyncratic; *folk* theories which are thought to be shared by certain subgroups; and *scientific* theories which are usually thought to be empirically and observationally derived and tested. Furnham (1988) has argued that research questions about lay theories seem to be concerned with six different issues: *Aetiology* (How do these theories develop? What factors seem to lead to the development of particular ideas?); *Structure* (What is the internal structure of these theories? How is the mental architecture arranged?); *Relationships* (How are various theories about different topics grouped or linked? What is the underlying structure of lay theories in different areas health, economics, education?); *Function* (What function do theories hold for the individuals themselves? What are the implications for change?); *Stability* (Do these theories change over time? What sort of things influence them?); *Behavioural Consequences* (How is social behaviour related to these different

Special thanks are due to Dr. D. Shek for data collection in Hong Kong and Koho Amaoka for data collection in Japan.

Reprint requests should be directed to A. Furnham, Department of Psychology, University College London, 26 Bedford Way, London WC1, Great Britain (E-mail: a.furnham@ucl.ac.uk).

theories?).

Myers (1992) has noted that lay theories about happiness are often incorrect and he lists seventeen beliefs that are wrong. It is not always clear how lay theories of happiness are acquired by people living in a culture. Many are shaped by religious beliefs which are often about happiness and contentment. One would therefore expect cultures with different religions to have somewhat different theories as how to be and stay happy. Other sources of lay theories is no doubt the established literature in any culture (i.e. famous writers, poets, philosophies) but also the popular media. Because each of these is unique to a culture it may be predicted that there will be clear cultural differences in lay beliefs about happiness.

Studies on lay theories have tended to concentrate on mental illness, therapy, and psychological problems (Furnham, 1984, 1988, 1989, 1995; Furnham & Bower, 1992; Kuyken, Brewin, Power, & Furnham, 1992). Few studies have appeared to look at lay theories at the opposite extreme to mental illness and distress such as mental well-being or happiness (Furnham & Cheng, 2000a). There is an extensive literature on subjective well-being (Argyle, 1987; Bradburn, 1969; Campbell, 1976, 1981; Chekola, 1975; Clemente & Sauer, 1976; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Costa & McCrae, 1980; Diener, 1984, 1999; Diener & Emmons, 1984; Diener & Oishi, 2000; Easterlin, 1974; Emmons & Diener, 1985; Eysenck, 1990; Myers, 1992; Veenhoven, 1984). Eysenck (1990) argues that many lay theories about happiness are myths. "We have encountered numerous cases in which common-sense views have been disproved by psychological research" (p. 119): "..... our knowledge of happiness has moved well beyond the limited insights of common sense" (p. 125).

Despite these assertions there do not appear to be any studies that have examined lay theories of the causes, or consequences of happiness or indeed how the theories are related to "trait" happiness. That is, no study has examined how a participant's level of happiness influences his or her ideas about the causes of the happiness of others. The exception is a study by Furnham and Cheng (2000a) where 234 young British completed a questionnaire that listed 38 causes of happiness and the Oxford Happiness Inventory. The lay theories factored onto 6 identifiable clusters labelled Mental Strength and Personality Traits, Personal Advantages, Achievement and Freedom in Life and Work, Social Support and Esteem, Security, and Optimism and Contentment. All "theories" were modestly and positively correlated with trait happiness. However the path analysis revealed that self-esteem and personality traits (extraversion and neuroticism) were the direct and significant predictors of trait happiness. The only "theory" that predicted trait happiness was optimism and contentment.

There are various academic theories as to the causes of happiness that may be contrasted with lay theories (Diener, 1984; Fordyce, 1977; 1983). *Telic theories* maintain happiness is gained when some state, goal or need is fulfilled. *Activity theories* stress that happiness may be achieved through social interaction, leisure or other specific activities. *Social comparison theories* postulate that happiness results from a comparison between some standard and an actual condition. Various attempts have

been made to test these theories (Argyle, 1987; Argyle & Crossland, 1987; Argyle & Furnham, 1983; Argyle & Lu, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Eysenck, 1990) but this study focuses not on academic, but on lay theories.

There are consistent national differences in SWB. Inglehart (1990) reported an extensive study with representative samples of 170,000 people in sixteen nations. Results indicated that first, there are genuine national differences. For example, the Danes, Swiss, Irish, and Dutch felt happier and more satisfied with life than do French, Greeks, Italians, and West Germans. Secondly, the nations' well-being differences correlate modestly with national affluence, but the link between national affluence and well-being is not consistent. In fact there is no clear statistical relationship or trend. For instance, for French, the average income was almost doubled the Irish, but the Irish were happier.

However, there are more than one fact which makes the nations differ in SWB. For instance, the most prosperous nations have enjoyed stable democratic governments, and there is a strong link between a history of democracy and national well-being. Moreover, countries that have both democracy and a free press also tend to have happier people. Further the freedom in choosing type of jobs, the working place and one's own life style which are associated with democracy may also be the contributors of individual SWB (subjective well-being).

From another point of view, within any country are the richest the happiest? Some surveys have shown that here again, there is a modest link between SWB and financially being well-off. Those who live in affluent countries yet have low incomes, clearly live with less joy and more stress than do those who live with the comfort and security of higher incomes (Easterlin, 1974).

In a cross-cultural study, Diener and Suh (1999) surveyed 41 nations and found that there are substantial differences between nations in reported subjective well-being. People in wealthy nations tend to report greater SWB than people in poor nations. However the causal factors relating wealth to well-being are not yet understood. The wealth of nations strongly correlates with human rights, equality between people, the fulfilment of basic biological needs, and individualism. Another variable that also correlated with higher SWB in nations is political stability and a related variable, interpersonal trust. Unfortunately, because of the high intercorrelations of predictor variables and the relatively small sample sizes of nations, the various potential national factors that cause SWB could not be disentangled. For example, Diener, Diener, and Diener (1995) reported that income correlated with human rights and with the equality within nations .80 and .84, respectively. Besides, individualism is a cultural variable that correlates across nations with both higher reported SWB and higher suicide rates. With sample sizes of nations that rarely exceed forty in number, the effects of such overlapping variables can not be statistically disentangled and larger samples and longitudinal designs are needed to ascertain the causal influence on SWB of the variables that tend to occur together with the national affluence (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995).

This study will look at theories of happiness in three countries: two Asian

collective countries (China and Japan) and one European individualistic culture (Britain). Eysenck (1990) used various data sources to speculate about national differences in happiness. He concludes "..... the country with the happiest population is the United States of America, followed in order by Sweden, the United Kingdom and Ireland. However, the precise way in which happiness is achieved varies from country to country The most morose or unhappy countries are those which have the unfortunate combination of introversion (which produces low positive affect) and high neuroticism, or anxiety (which produces high negative affect). The Japanese emerge from this analysis as the clear winners in the unhappiness stakes, followed in the rank order by France, Italy and West Germany. The Japanese were the only nation to show very high introversion and very high neuroticism or anxiety, with the other unhappy countries falling into that category primarily because of high neuroticism or anxiety rather than high introversion".

This study has three aims: first to look at the range and endorsement of beliefs about the causes of happiness in people of three country samples (Britain, China, and Japan); second, through factor analysis, to look at the structure of these beliefs and third, to examine the relationship between lay theories and "trait" happiness measured by psychometric valid measures of happiness.

METHOD

Participants:

In total, 311 people participated in this study, of which 100 were from China (5 males and 95 females), 128 from Japan (58 males and 70 females), and 83 from the UK (18 males and 65 females). They ranged in age from 16 to 35. The mean age in the Chinese sample was 22.17 ($SD = 1.10$), in the Japanese sample 17.29 ($SD = 0.62$), and in the British sample 21.33 ($SD = 6.07$). There were both sex ($F(2,309) = 32.31$, $p < .001$) and age ($F(2,309) = 89.13$, $p < .001$) differences hence these variables were co-varied out of all further analyses. The sample was drawn from undergraduate students in Hong Kong and the UK, and pupils of a professional school in Japan.

Measures:

Each participant was assured of the confidentiality of the investigation and subsequently received a booklet containing the following questionnaires which they were asked to complete:

1. *The Causes of Happiness Questionnaire*: this questionnaire was designed to reflect on lay beliefs of the causes of happiness. It was headed "causes of happiness" consisted of thirty eight statements to be responded to on a seven point scale from 7 = important to 1 = unimportant. The items were derived from the literature (Argyle, 1987; Eysenck, 1990; Freedman, 1978; Maslow, 1954; Myers, 1992; Veenhoven, 1984) and from interviews with lay people about the causes of happiness. It followed essentially the methodology of the other papers on lay theories (Furnham, 1984, 1989, 1995).
2. *The Oxford Happiness Inventory*: this inventory was designed by Argyle, Martin & Crossland (1989) and is a 29 item questionnaire, based on a seven point rating scale from (7) agree through to (1) disagree. It has a test-retest reliability of 0.78 and a Cronbach coefficient of between 0.64 and 0.87. Some of the items almost identical to the Beck Depression Inventory but reversed on content and it has sub-categories of personal achievement, enjoyment and fun in life, and vigour and good health, according to Furnham & Brewin (1990). It has a reported validity of 0.43 with friends ratings of happiness on a 10-point scale. It also correlates with positive affect, life satisfaction, and depression at 0.40–0.60. Nearly a dozen studies used it as a trait measure of happiness over the past decade (e.g. Brebner, Donaldson, Kirby, & Ward, 1995; Furnham & Cheng, 1997; 1999).

In addition, participants were requested to fill out a demographic section which include sex, age,

employment of parents, parental divorce, number of siblings etc.

Procedure:

Questionnaires were translated from English into Chinese and Japanese by fully bilingual, trained, simultaneous translators. The translations were back-translated by bilingual academics in their country of origin. After various minor changes had been made, all parties were satisfied that the translated questionnaires were good equivalents. Participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire in their school environment whilst waiting for an interview. The confidentiality of the questionnaire was stressed and the booklet took about half-an-hour to complete. The response rate was 100%.

RESULTS

1. *The General Responses of The Causes of Happiness Questionnaire(COHQ)*

From 38 items that make up the questionnaire, the mean scores between 4.50 and 5.50 were viewed as *Agree*; over 5.50 *Strongly Agree* while those between 3.5 and 2.5 were regarded as *Disagree* and mean scores between 3.50 and 4.50 were considered *undecided* or "*Neutral*"

Table 1 shows that the participants disagreed with almost none of the thirty-eight items. Whilst there were clear differences between the three groups, it was also apparent that they all agreed strongly on certain items like items 10. "They have close friends/confidants"; 12. "They have many friends that they like"; 13. "They are loved and accepted by other people"; 15. "They have married those they love"; 26. "They are doing the work (job) they like". It was also noticeable that some items showed considerable variability like items 5. "They are financially well-off"; 16. "They have healthy, clever and pretty children"; 17. "They have high self-esteem"; 34. "They are mentally mature"; 35. "They are more spiritual than material in their values"; and 36. "They have a brighter outlook on life". The three items that got the lowest ratings indicating that they were believed not to relate to happiness were items 1. "They are born with 'happy genes'"; 6. "They have a good housing"; 11. "They have more dates with partners"; 14. "They have higher education"; and 29. "They are more intelligent than average".

2. *The Structure and Determinants of the Lay Theories of Causes of Happiness*

A Varimax Rotated Factor Analysis was performed to reveal orthogonal factor structure that underlies the responses. Four factor analyses were initially performed: one for each sample and one on the totalled sample. The results of all four were very similar but the participant to item ratio in the smallest sample (Great Britain) meant the factor solutions were liable to being somehow unstable. Further, it is not possible to compare samples unless they all had a similar structure. Thus only the combined sample factor analysis was reported. To prevent the correlation matrix suffering from multicollinearity, 2 items (numbers 6 and 23) were omitted because of the high intercorrelations with other items (greater than .65). Table 2 shows the results. Items loaded .45 and above were included in each factor. The Scree Test used to determine which factors were to be retained and seven factors emerged with Eigenvalues > 1 and accounted for 61.9% of the variance but only the first six were

Table 1. Item, Mean and SD on the Beliefs of Causes of Happiness from Three Different Country Samples

People tend to be happy if	China (<i>n</i> =100)		Japan (<i>n</i> =128)		Britain (<i>n</i> =83)	
	$\bar{X}$	<i>SD</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>SD</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>SD</i>
1. They are born with "happy genes"	3.72	1.68	4.55	1.93	3.06	1.45
2. They enjoy a good quality of life	4.08	1.40	4.92	1.51	5.48	1.32
3. They are in general healthier than other people	5.17	1.12	5.84	1.37	4.82	1.26
4. They live in a safe area	5.29	1.08	5.10	1.61	4.65	1.35
5. They are financially well-off	4.99	1.16	5.00	1.55	3.99	1.60
6. They live in good housing	3.82	1.42	4.66	1.52	4.31	1.50
7. They have more luxurious leisure activities	4.46	1.36	3.69	1.78	3.76	1.50
8. They are physically more attractive	4.10	1.48	4.51	1.61	3.93	1.57
9. They have loving parents	5.84	0.95	5.88	1.56	5.54	1.53
10. They have close friends/confidants	6.00	1.02	6.41	1.07	6.03	1.05
11. They have more dates with partners	4.07	1.29	4.63	1.78	4.07	1.36
12. They have many friends they like	5.97	0.95	6.16	1.14	5.91	1.24
13. They are loved and accepted by other people	6.05	1.04	5.76	1.41	6.09	1.09
14. They have higher education (college or higher)	4.27	1.30	3.68	1.79	3.25	1.27
15. They have married those they love	6.16	0.90	6.04	1.59	5.56	1.33
16. They have healthy, clever and pretty children	6.06	0.95	4.99	1.74	4.07	1.42
17. They have high self-esteem	6.07	1.05	4.22	1.57	5.60	1.38
18. They are free to travel	4.72	1.44	4.24	1.71	3.97	1.34
19. They have achieved in life what they desired	5.72	1.13	5.63	1.58	5.57	1.29
20. They are well respected by others	5.61	1.04	4.95	1.58	5.27	1.12
21. They are free to choose their career or job	5.39	1.19	5.29	1.66	5.01	1.19
22. They have fully developed their potential	5.88	0.89	5.73	1.52	5.36	1.23
23. They are free to choose their own life style	5.96	0.97	4.96	1.62	5.68	1.16
24. They are free to live their own life as they wish	5.97	0.93	5.67	1.44	5.76	1.22
25. They have strong self-control	5.28	1.09	4.87	1.46	4.54	1.42
26. They are doing the work (job) they like	6.03	0.95	5.71	1.52	5.63	1.17
27. They are extraverts (sociable, outgoing people)	5.06	1.27	5.19	1.39	4.03	1.52
28. They find their work allows their talents to be used	5.61	1.04	5.56	1.53	5.40	1.14
29. They are more intelligent than average	4.57	1.38	4.15	1.75	3.26	1.43
30. They are emotionally more stable than the average	5.49	1.10	4.60	1.59	4.73	1.25
31. They have good social skills	5.23	1.25	5.09	1.37	5.22	1.14
32. They have strong willpower (inner strength)	5.69	0.92	5.15	1.54	4.87	1.33
33. They have a pleasant personality	5.80	1.09	5.34	1.42	5.49	1.24
34. They are mentally mature	5.09	1.31	4.86	1.38	4.12	1.52
35. They are more spiritual rather than material in their values	5.73	1.14	4.83	1.48	4.62	1.60
36. They have a brighter outlook towards life	6.31	0.79	4.73	1.51	5.82	1.09
37. They are more independent	4.98	1.29	4.65	1.51	4.52	1.24
38. They take life as it is and are content with what they have	6.39	0.74	5.32	1.53	5.85	1.28

Table 2. Factor Analysis (Varimax) for the Lay Beliefs on the Causes of Happiness

Factor	Item	Loading	Eigenvalue	Variance
Mental Strength and Personality Traits $\bar{X} = 40.15$ $SD = 7.84$ $\alpha = 0.85$	34. They are mentally mature	0.76	11.43	31.7
	35. They are more spiritual in their values	0.69		
	33. They have a pleasant personality	0.67		
	32. They have strong willpower	0.63		
	37. They are more independent	0.60		
	27. They are extraverts	0.59		
	31. They have good social skills	0.58		
Achievement and Freedom in Life & Work $\bar{X} = 39.20$ $SD = 7.08$ $\alpha = 0.87$	30. They are emotionally more stable	0.54	2.93	8.2
	26. They are doing the work (job) they like	0.73		
	19. They have achieved what they desired	0.72		
	22. They have fully developed their potential	0.58		
	15. They have married those they love	0.56		
	21. They are free to choose their own career and job	0.54		
	28. They find their work allows their talent to be used	0.51		
Social Support and Esteem $\bar{X} = 23.98$ $SD = 3.99$ $\alpha = 0.83$	20. They are well respected by others	0.47	2.52	7.0
	12. They have many friends they like	0.79		
	10. They have close friends/confidants	0.78		
	13. They are loved and accepted by other people	0.75		
	9. They have loving parents	0.58		
Personal Advantages $\bar{X} = 33.51$ $SD = 8.44$ $\alpha = 0.80$	14. They have higher education	0.70	1.81	5.0
	7. They have luxurious leisure activities	0.65		
	8. They are physically more attractive	0.58		
	18. They are free to travel	0.57		
	29. They are more intelligent	0.56		
	1. They are born with "happy genes"	0.50		
	16. They have healthy, clever and pretty children	0.50		
Optimism and Contentment $\bar{X} = 16.56$ $SD = 3.54$ $\alpha = 0.73$	11. They have more dates with partners	0.45	1.38	3.8
	17. They have high self-esteem	0.77		
	36. They have a brighter outlook towards life	0.73		
Security $\bar{X} = 19.82$ $SD = 4.24$ $\alpha = 0.72$	38. They are content with what they have	0.46	1.12	3.1
	2. They enjoy a good quality of life	0.71		
	3. They are healthier than others	0.71		
	4. They live in a safe area	0.55		
	5. They are financially well off	0.55		

interpretable. Further, the alpha co-efficients were calculated for each factor and these showed all the six were above the usual cut-off point of 0.70.

The factors were labelled individually according to their loadings. The first factor was labelled as *Mental Strength & Personality Traits* because it was concerned with being mentally mature, more independent, and having strong willpower, whilst also possessing personality traits such as extraversion and being emotionally more stable. This accounted for nearly a third of the variance. The second descriptive factor was labelled *Achievement & Freedom in Life and Work* because it was concerned with an individual's freedom of choice within their lives. It accounted for nearly 10% of the variance. The third factor was labelled including having close friends in whom you can trust and esteem (self respect and respect from others) and was labelled as *Social Support & Esteem*. The fourth factor *Personal Advantages*, because the items were primarily concerned with being physical advantageous and having a higher education. The fifth factor was *Optimism & Contentment* with adopting a bright outlook and taking life as it is. Finally, the sixth descriptive factor identified was revealed as an individual having *Security* in terms of finance and housing. The six factors were almost identical to the ones found in Furnham and Cheng's (2000a) study thus replicated the structures of the COHQ.

3. Country Differences

Four of the six ANCOVAs showed significant differences. They showed the Chinese believed more that *Mental Strength and Personality Traits* leads to happiness than did the British and Japanese. Next, the two Asian groups (Chinese and Japanese) believed *Personal Advantages* were more important in predicting happiness than did the British participants. The Chinese tended to rate *Optimism and Contentment* higher than the British who, in turn, rated it higher than the Japanese as a cause of happiness. Finally the British rated the factor *Security* less than the Japanese as a potential cause of happiness.

Table 3 shows that there were cultural differences in "actual" happiness with British participants having higher scores than the other two groups.

4. Sex Differences

Table 4 shows that there were very few (16.6%: 3 out of 18) significant sex differences on lay theories of happiness. British males were happier than British females. British females believed more than British males that happiness was caused by *Mental Strength and Personality Traits* (factor 1) and *Achievement and Freedom in Life and Work* (factor 2). Japanese females believed more than Japanese males that happiness was caused by *Social Support and Self-esteem* (factor 3).

5. Correlations Between the Lay Theory Factors and Personality Traits, Positive and Negative Self-esteem, Happiness, and Demographic Variable

The six original, first order lay theory factors were correlated with happiness in the three country samples. Table 5 shows the results. Just under half of the

correlations (8 out of 18) were significant and positive. Four of six correlations were significant for the Japanese, three for the Chinese, but only one for the British samples. The "theory" that correlated with happiness in all three samples was Achievement and Freedom in Life and Work.

6. *Predicting Happiness (OHI) from Lay Beliefs (COHQ) Factors and Demographic Variables*

A series of within country regressions were then completed which regressed the six lay theories onto the trait happiness (OHI) score. Results were consistent across the three cultural groups. In each case only one theory, namely "Achievement and Freedom in Life and Work" predicted the OHI scores. The amount of variance accounted for varied from 3 to 11 per cent. Table 6 shows the results.

Table 3. ANCOVA[†] of Lay Beliefs (COHQ) and Happiness (OHI) from Three Different Country Samples with Demographic Variables Co-Varied Out

Measures	China (<i>n</i> = 100)		Japan (<i>n</i> = 128)		Britain (<i>n</i> = 83)		<i>F</i>
	$\bar{X}$	<i>SD</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>SD</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>SD</i>	
Lay Beliefs							
Mental Strength & Personality Traits (Factor 1)	5.26	6.75 (a)	4.95	8.22 (b)	4.64	6.96 (b)	11.00***
Achievement & Freedom in Life & Work (Factor 2)	5.77	5.44	5.61	8.22	5.39	6.33	2.33
Social Support & Esteem (Factor 3)	5.97	3.74	6.05	3.98	5.89	4.36	.62
Personal Advantages (Factor 4)	4.50	7.00 (a)	4.32	9.20 (a)	3.67	6.82 (b)	15.84***
Optimism & Contentment (Factor 5)	6.13	1.99 (a)	4.75	3.34 (c)	5.76	3.07 (b)	40.68***
Security (Factor 6)	4.88	3.94 (ab)	5.22	4.43 (a)	4.67	4.04 (b)	5.24**
Oxford Happiness Inventory	4.54	20.28 (a)	4.72	23.09 (a)	5.38	20.35 (b)	24.14***

Note: Males coded as "1", females as "2".

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

[†] Scheffe Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons.

COHQ = Causes Of Happiness Questionnaire.

OHI = Oxford Happiness Inventory.

DISCUSSION

This study showed six underlying factors which lay people believed the causes of happiness in self and others which covered various aspects including *Mental Strength & Personality Traits*, *Achievement & Freedom in Life and Work*, *Social Support & Esteem*, *Personal Advantages*, *Optimism & Contentment*, and *Security*. These results replicated Furnham and Cheng's (2000a) findings on the structure of the lay beliefs of causes of happiness

Table 4. Mean and SD of the Total Measures from Different Samples by Sex

Measures	Country	α	Male		Female		F
			$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	
Age	China		21.33	0.58	21.15	1.11	0.08
	Japan		17.22	0.59	17.34	0.63	1.18
	UK		21.53	7.03	21.28	5.85	0.02
OHI	China	0.94	140.67	28.18	131.04	20.12	0.65
	Japan	0.86	137.85	20.90	136.43	24.78	0.10
	UK	0.94	158.56	19.27	155.70	20.72	6.25*
Cause 1	China	0.86	50.33	4.73	42.85	6.72	3.65
	Japan	0.85	39.24	7.99	39.81	8.45	0.15
	UK	0.80	33.54	9.57	38.04	5.88	4.57*
Cause 2	China	0.88	41.67	8.08	40.46	5.38	0.14
	Japan	0.88	38.69	7.43	39.67	8.79	0.42
	UK	0.87	34.40	9.99	38.69	4.46	5.70*
Cause 3	China	0.90	26.33	2.08	23.82	3.48	1.53
	Japan	0.78	23.11	3.90	25.10	3.84	8.36**
	UK	0.91	22.13	6.25	23.98	3.61	2.13
Cause 4	China	0.80	40.00	11.53	35.92	6.91	0.98
	Japan	0.81	35.47	9.80	33.89	8.73	0.90
	UK	0.75	29.80	8.50	29.26	6.36	0.07
Cause 5	China	0.68	19.33	1.15	18.77	1.20	0.23
	Japan	0.56	14.19	3.12	14.31	3.52	0.04
	UK	0.76	16.60	4.61	17.46	2.48	0.92
Cause 6	China	0.85	21.67	1.15	19.47	3.97	0.90
	Japan	0.72	20.57	4.92	21.10	3.99	0.45
	UK	0.71	19.29	5.55	18.81	3.60	0.15

Note: * $p < .05$.

Cause 1 = Mental Strength & Personality Traits;

Cause 2 = Achievement and Freedom in Life & Work;

Cause 3 = Social Support & Esteem;

Cause 4 = Personal Advantages;

Cause 5 = Optimism & Contentment;

Cause 6 = Security.

OHI = Oxford Happiness Inventory.

Table 5. Partial Correlations Between Lay Beliefs (COHQ) and Happiness (OHI), Controlling for Sex and Age from Different Country Samples

Measures	Country	Happiness
Mental Strength & Personality Traits (Factor 1)	China	0.09
	Japan	0.21*
	UK	0.05
Achievement & Freedom in Life & Work (Factor 2)	China	0.21*
	Japan	0.32**
	UK	0.34**
Social Support & Esteem (Factor 3)	China	0.12
	Japan	0.31**
	UK	0.23
Personal Advantages (Factor 4)	China	-0.06
	Japan	0.21*
	UK	0.00
Optimism & Contentment (Factor 5)	China	0.21*
	Japan	0.29**
	UK	0.07
Security (Factor 6)	China	0.03
	Japan	0.18
	UK	0.10

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

COHQ = Causes Of Happiness Questionnaire.

OHI = Oxford Happiness Inventory.

Table 6. Predicting Happiness (OHI) from Lay Beliefs (COHQ) and Demographic Variables

Measures	China		Happiness Japan		UK	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
Sex	-0.08	1.05	-0.08	0.85	-0.14	1.11
Age	-0.10	-0.76	0.05	0.52	0.18	1.50
Achievement & Freedom in Life & Work	0.20	1.98*	0.32	1.29***	0.34	2.78**
Variance explained	R^2 0.03 $F(3,89) = 1.80$		R^2 0.08 $F(3,102) = 4.15**$		R^2 0.11 $F(3,60) = 3.54*$	

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

Male coded as "1"; female as "2".

COHQ = Causes Of Happiness Questionnaire.

OHI = Oxford Happiness Inventory.

(COHQ) as well as supporting much of the extant literature on the causes of happiness (Myers, 1992). It seems that what lay people believed the causes of happiness are much the same as the empirical evidence, though there are notable exceptions.

There were a few significant sex differences in British samples in that females tended to rate *Mental Strength and Personality Traits* higher than males but only in British sample. Indeed extensively replicated research has shown that personality traits — particularly extraversion and neuroticism — are powerful and consistent predictors of happiness (Furnham & Brewin, 1990; Furnham & Cheng, 1997, 1999, 2000b). The results also showed that British males in this sample tended to report slightly greater happiness than British females which is not in line with the previous findings which have shown that although females are more prone to depression than males, there appears to be no significant differences between males and females on self-reported happiness (Argyle, 1987; Diener, 1984, 1999; Eysenck, 1990; Myers, 1992). However the analysis of sex differences across all three samples showed relatively few significant differences which indicated that lay theories about happiness are not particularly gender specific.

The structure, revealed through factor analysis, of the “lay theories” of happiness proved to be robust and interpretable. However what was most interesting was the cultural differences in these factors. Four theories (four out of six) indeed revealed significant differences. In one of the four the Chinese rated the factors higher, significantly more than the Japanese and British: Factor 1 which was about *Mental Strength* (independence, maturity, willpower) and *Personality Traits* (extraversion, stability, social skills). These ideas maybe informed by philosophical beliefs (Taoism, Zen, Buddhism) suggesting that internal strength is an important path to happiness. Chinese and Japanese religions (Buddhism, Shinto, Zen) are linked to each other more than to Christianity. Further they place more emphasis on inner peace, strength and will-power as a major source of happiness than Christianity.

The other factor which showed a difference between the three groups was not very different and concerned being content with ones lot, optimism and self-esteem. The (Hong Kong) Chinese rated this most important than the British, who in turn, rated them significantly more than the Japanese. In this sense it seems the Chinese tend to believe more than the Japanese and British that contentment comes from material culture.

In two of the other factors that proved significant there seemed to be an East-West difference: the Asians rated *Personal Advantages* (education, intelligence, attractiveness, money, good children) more important than the Europeans. This also proved to be true of *Security*. Thus it is not a case of internal vs. external causes of happiness as the Chinese rated both more important than the British. However there were individual causes that *all* participants rated as highly important (10. “They have close friends/confidants”; 13. “They are loved and accepted by other people”; 15. “They have married those they love”). Equally there were various causes that *all* participants rated as less important in achieving happiness such as 1. “They are born with ‘happy genes’”; 6. “They live in good housing”; and 7. “They are free to travel”.

Table 3 shows that for the Chinese and the British two theories — *Optimism and Contentment* and *Social Support and Esteem* were rated highest. The Japanese however rated *Security* significantly higher than the British and also higher (*ns*) than the Chinese. It seems that for the Japanese, security (health and financially well off) is believed to be particularly important in achieving individuals' happiness, which is in accordance with their cultural beliefs. It was particularly interesting to note that the only theory to predict "actual" happiness was *Achievement and Freedom in Life and Work*. It seems from the terms that this theory represents the Maslowian idea of self-actualization. The results showed that those who were most *happy* believed self-actualization was the main cause. This was true of all samples.

It was important to note that only one of the six theories actually statistically predicted self-rated happiness. Further this was consistent across all three cultures though it did not account for a great deal of the variance. The factor that predicted "actual" self-reported happiness (Achievement & Freedom in Life and Work) emphasised self-actualization variables in that happiness is a consequence of achieving one's potential — a finding that in line with Maslow's theory on human needs almost half-century ago. The idea is that happiness is under one's control and a function of finding and exploiting individual talents. Clearly many factors predict actually (self-reported) happiness including personality, health, financial situation etc. It would be naive to believe that lay theories are the only or even a major factor but this study clearly showed they do play a small and interpretable part.

Certainly studies in the neglected area of cross-cultural differences in perceived and self-reported happiness have been neglected. It is hoped that this modest study will encourage further work in the field. Understanding lay theories is of theoretical and practical importance. All researchers in this field particularly Eysenck (1990) and Myers (1992) have emphasised the problem of the many myths surrounding the causes of happiness. Indeed they have been provoked to write popular books in an attempt to "correct" lay theories. If people have theories about the causes of happiness which are wrong but which they not only believe but use to inform their behaviour to actually achieve happiness it is important they are changed so that they can achieve happiness in the long term.

REFERENCES

- Argyle, M. 1987. *The Psychology of Happiness*. London: Routledge.
- Argyle, M., & Crossland, J. 1987. The dimensions of positive emotions. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 26, 127-137.
- Argyle, M., & Furnham, A. 1983. Sources of satisfaction and conflict in lay-term relationships. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 45, 481-493.
- Argyle, M., & Lu, L. 1990. The happiness of extroverts. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 11, 1011-1017.
- Argyle, M., Martin, M., & Crossland, J. 1989. Happiness as a function of personality and social encounters. In J. P. Forgas & J. M. Innes (Eds.), *Recent advances in social psychology: An international perspective*. North Holland: Elsevier.
- Bradburn, N. M. 1969. *The structure of psychological well-being*. Chicago: Aldine.

- Brebner, J., Donaldson, J., Kirby, N., & Ward, L. 1995. Relationships between happiness and personality. *Personality and Individual Differences*, **19**, 251-258.
- Campbell, A. 1976. Subjective measures of well-being. *American Psychologist*, **31**, 117-124.
- Campbell, A. 1981. *The sense of well-being in America: Recent patterns and trends*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Chekola, M. G. 1975. The concept of happiness. Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1974. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, **35**, 4609A. (University Microfilms No. 75-655).
- Clemente, F., & Sauer, W. J. 1976. Life satisfaction in the United States. *Social Forces*, **54**, 621-631.
- Costa, P. T., Jr., & McCrae, R. 1980. Influence of Extroversion and Neuroticism on Subjective Well-Being: Happy and Unhappy People. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **38**, 668-678.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. 1975. *Beyond boredom and anxiety*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. 1999. If we are so rich, why aren't we happy. *American Psychologist*, **54**, 821-827.
- Diener, E. 1984. Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin*, **95**, 542-575.
- Diener, E. 1999. Subjective well-being: Three decades of progress. *Psychological Bulletin*, **125**, 276-302.
- Diener, E., Diener, M., & Diener, C. 1995. Factors predicting the subjective well-being of nations. *Personality and Social Psychology*, **69**, 851-869.
- Diener, E., & Emmons, R. A. 1984. The independence of positive and negative affect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **38**, 668-678.
- Diener, E., & Oishi, S. 2000. Money and happiness: Income and subjective well-being across nations. *Culture and subjective well-being* (pp. 185-218). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Diener, E., & Suh, E. M. 1999. National differences in subjective well-being. In D. Kahneman & E. Diener (Eds.), *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology* (pp. 434-450). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Diener, E., Suh, E., Smith, H., & Shao, L. 1995. National differences in reported subjective well-being: Why do they occur? *Social Indicators Research*, **34**, 7-32.
- Easterlin, R. A. 1974. Does economic growth improve the human lot? Some empirical evidence. In P. A. David & M. W. Reder (Eds.), *Nations and households in economic growth* (pp. 89-125). New York: Academic Press.
- Emmons, R. A., & Diener, E. 1985. Personality correlates of subjective well-being. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, **11**, 89-97.
- Eysenck, M. 1990. *Happiness, facts and myths*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Fordyce, M. W. 1977. Development of a programme to increase personal happiness. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, **24**, 511-521.
- Fordyce, M. W. 1983. A programme to increase happiness: Further studies. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, **30**, 483-498.
- Freedman, J. 1978. *Happy people: What happiness is, who has it and why*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanich.
- Furnham, A. 1984. Lay conceptions of neuroticism. *Personality and Individual Differences*, **5**, 95-103.
- Furnham, A. 1988. *Lay Theories*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Furnham, A. 1989. Overcoming "psychosomatic" illness: Lay attributions of cure for five possible psychosomatic illness. *Social Science and Medicine*, **29**, 61-67.
- Furnham, A. 1995. Overcoming neuroses: Lay attributions of cure for five specific neurotic disorders. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, **51**, 518-525.
- Furnham, A., & Bower, P. 1992. A comparison of academic and lay theories of schizophrenia. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, **161**, 201-220.
- Furnham, A., & Brewin, C. J. 1990. Personality and happiness. *Personality and Individual Differences*, **11**, 1093-1096.
- Furnham, A., & Cheng, H. 1997. Personality and happiness. *Psychological Reports*, **80**, 761-762.
- Furnham, A., & Cheng, H. 1999. Personality as predictors of mental health and happiness in the East and West. *Personality and Individual Differences*, **27**, 395-403.
- Furnham, A., & Cheng, H. 2000a. Lay theories of happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, **1**, 227-246.
- Furnham, A., & Cheng, H. 2000b. Perceived parental behaviour, self-esteem, and happiness. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, **35**, 463-470.
- Inglehart, R. 1990. *Culture shift in advanced industrial society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kuyken, W., Brewin, C., Power, M., & Furnham, A. 1992. Causal beliefs about depression in depressed patients, clinical psychologists and lay persons. *British Journal of Medical psychology*, **65**, 257-268.

- Maslow, A. 1954. *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Myers, D. 1992. *The pursuit of happiness*. New York: Avon Books.
- Sigelman, L. 1981. Is ignorance bliss? A reconsideration of the folk wisdom. *Human Relations*, **34**, 965–974.
- Veenhoven, R. 1984 *Conditions of happiness*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company.

(Manuscript received January 29, 2001; Revision accepted July 23, 2001)