

## Cognitive Correlates of Subjective Well-Being: The Processing of Valenced Life Events by Happy and Unhappy Persons

Larry Seidnitz

*University of Rochester Medical Center*

and

Robert S. Wyer, Jr. and Ed Diener

*University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

In a two-phase study, we examined the relations of subjective well-being with the cognitive processing of affectively valenced life events. In Phase 1, both more intense and more enduring reactions to positive life events than negative ones were associated with higher well-being, and for intensity of reactions, this relation was stronger for those events that were subsequently recalled. When equal numbers of positive and negative life events were eligible for recall, well-being was unrelated to the relative likelihood of recalling the two types of events. Phase 2 suggested that life events are organized in memory according to the domain in which they occur but not according to their valence. However, neither the organization nor the retrieval of life events correlated with well-being. In combination, these findings suggest that cognitive processes associated with the encoding of life events, but neither the organization nor the retrieval of these events, are associated with subjective well-being. © 1997 Academic Press

A major focus of attention in personality and clinical psychology has been on the determinants and consequences of subjective well-being (Costa & McCrae, 1980; Diener, 1984; Emmons & Diener, 1986; Headey & Wearing, 1990). Subjective well-being or happiness appears to be a fairly stable personality characteristic (Costa & McCrae, 1980, 1984; Sandvik, Diener, &

This research was performed as part of a doctoral dissertation by the first author under direction of the second author and with additional guidance and resources provided by the third author. The authors are indebted to Frank Fujita and the University of Illinois Social Cognition Group for helpful comments on the conceptualization of the study and interpretation of the results. We also thank Diana Carroll for providing assistance supported by PHS Grant 5K07-MH01135. Support also was provided by PHS Grant T32-MH18911.

Address correspondence and reprint requests to Larry Seidnitz, Department of Psychiatry, University of Rochester Medical Center, 300 Crittenden Boulevard, Rochester, NY 14642.

Seidlitz, 1993), despite transitory effects of life events (Headey & Wearing, 1990; Reich & Zautra, 1983) and situationally-induced mood (e.g., Schwarz & Clore, 1982). This raises the question as to how subjective well-being is in fact maintained over time. To understand this question, it is necessary to understand the cognitive processes that underlie people's reactions to positive and negative life experiences and how these experiences are related to well-being.

The need to attain this understanding was made salient by a recent study conducted by Seidlitz and Diener (1993) in which happy participants recalled a greater number of positive life events, and fewer negative events, than did unhappy participants. Seidlitz and Diener's results suggested that this recall difference was due to two factors: (a) happy participants objectively experienced more positive versus negative events than unhappy participants (see also Headey & Wearing, 1990), and (b) happy participants interpreted their life circumstances more positively than unhappy participants (see also Forgas & Moylan, 1988; Mayer, Gaschke, Braverman, & Evans, 1992). This recall difference, however, might also have occurred because (c) happy participants paid more attention to positive versus negative experiences at the time they occurred than unhappy participants and therefore were more likely to encode them into memory; (d) life events are organized in memory according to their valence, and this organization facilitated recall of positive events in happy participants more than in unhappy ones; and (e) happy participants, relative to unhappy ones, employed strategies of retrieving events from memory that favored the recall of positive versus negative events. Although the effects of differences in subjective well-being on the cognitive processing of life experiences have not been firmly established, there is evidence that transitory differences in affect can influence the selective encoding of information (Bower, Gilligan, & Monteiro, 1981), the interpretation of this information (Forgas & Moylan, 1988; Mayer et al., 1992) and the selective retrieval of information from memory (Riskind, 1983; but see Wyer & Srull, 1989, for an alternative view). Chronic differences in affective states might have analogous effects.

In the present investigation, we examined whether subjective well-being was related to (a) the attention paid to positive versus negative life events, (b) the organization of events in memory according to whether they were positive or negative, and (c) the selective retrieval of positive versus negative events. The data we collected were obtained from a single group of participants who were enrolled in a subjective well-being research course and were administered a number of different measures over the course of the semester. We have divided the report of the investigation into two phases because the hypotheses, methods, and the number of participants who completed the measures pertinent to the two phases differed substantially.

In Phase 1, the amount of attention paid to positive and negative events

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات