Using the Personal Wellbeing Index to measure subjective wellbeing

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Feelings of ‘subjective wellbeing’ come in two varieties

**Short-term**
An emotional response to something nice

**Long-term**
A mood with a genetic basis

Subjective wellbeing
[Contentment]
Subjective Wellbeing

A positive state of mind that involves the whole life experience

How do we measure it?
In precisely the same way for people who have a disability and for people without a disability.

In my workshop I will discuss some of the technical issues involved in this measurement for people who have a disability.
Most crucially, the levels of SWB judged normal for people who have a disability and for people without a disability are the same.
How satisfied are you with your---?

- Standard of living
- Health
- Achieving in life
- Relationships
- Safety
- Community connectedness
- Future security
- Spirituality/Religion

Subjective Wellbeing

Personal Wellbeing Index
5th Edition
International Wellbeing Group (2013)
Personal Wellbeing Index
5th Edition
International Wellbeing Group (2013)

How satisfied are you with your-----?

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Subjective Wellbeing
The Australian Surveys

Geographically representative samples

N = 2,000

Telephone interview

#1: April 2001

#29: April 2013
We code all data to lie on a range from 0 to 100.
Personal Wellbeing Index
2001 - 2013

Scores above this line are significantly higher than S1

Maximum = 76.3
Current = 76.0
Minimum = 73.2
This represents a 3.0 percentage point variation
Why is subjective wellbeing held so steady?

Homeostasis

Just like we hold body temperature steady

Subjective wellbeing homeostasis
Each person has a set-point for their subjective wellbeing.

SWB set-points lie between 70 and 90.

Set-points are always POSITIVE ie above 50.
We have recently demonstrated the existence of set-points for SWB

Distribution of set-points

Percentage of sample

71-75: 13.5%
76-80: 20.9%
81-85: 19.2%
86-90: 14.7%

0 – 100 point scale of SWB
Distribution of set-points

Can we find the genetic code for set-points?
Set-Point $\rightarrow$ Positive/activated mood $\rightarrow$ Subjective Wellbeing
Set-Point → Positive/activated mood → Very weak influence → Subjective Wellbeing
Set-Point \n\nPositive/activated mood

Very Stressful Challenges

Subjective Wellbeing
What determines whether we can defend our SWB against stressful challenges?

**Resilience**

It is the power to defend wellbeing against sources of threat, such as poverty or ill-health

It is a balance between personal resources and the level of challenge
Which domains are the most powerful predictors?

Multiple regression

- Standard of living
- Health
- Achieving in life
- Relationships
- Safety
- Community
- Future security
- Spirituality/Religion

How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?
Multiple regression

Which domains are the most powerful predictors?

• Standard of living
• Health
• Achieving in life
• Relationships
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How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?

Which domains are the most powerful predictors?
Subjective wellbeing constantly under challenge, but is well protected

External resources eg. Relationships, Money, Achieving in life
Golden Triangle of Happiness

An intimate relationship

Achieving something important each day

Enough money to pay the bills

Each area provides both
(a) resources to avoid homeostatic defeat, and
(b) resources to recover when things go wrong
The most protective External Resources

A close relationship
Relationships yield resilience through social support (protective) and intimate sharing (recovery)
Money is a flexible resource that allows people to purchase both protective and recovery resources.
Income and Mood Happiness

Total N ≈ 40,000

Mood Happiness

Median Household Income ($'000)

- <$15: 71.7
- $15-30: 73.9
- $31-60: 74.9
- $61-90: 76.5
- $91-120: 78.0
- $121-150: 78.3
- $150+: 79.2

Normal Range: 73.0 - 78.0
Achieving in life

Productive activity provides a sense of purpose and structure to life (protective), facilitates connection to similarly oriented people and, if paid, it also provides income (recovery).
Internal resources

Challenges

Subjective wellbeing

External resources (eg. Relationships, Money, Achieving)

Internal resources (eg. Finding meaning)
The use of **internal resources**

We engage **Secondary Control** to protect SWB

[cognitive restructuring]

“I can’t be good at everything,” reasons Todd
Using internal resources to protect wellbeing

Drops coffee: I can’t be good at everything!

Subjective wellbeing

Time
Exactly the same resources are used by disabled and non-disabled people to maintain normal levels of SWB
Homeostasis failure

Strong challenge

Subjective wellbeing

External resources
(eg. relationships, money)

Internal resources
(eg. blaming someone else)

The result of subjective wellbeing loss is depression
Does the presence of a disability automatically mean low SWB?
Because of homeostasis, SWB is insensitive to many disabling conditions.

NB. The medical condition must be consciously experienced as strongly aversive in order to affect subjective wellbeing.
When SWB IS sensitive, what is the relationship between disability/stress and SWB?
The Relationship Between Stress and SWB

Dominant source of control

Homeostasis

DISTRESS

High

SWB

Low

No stress

High stress

Threshold

Stress

Level of challenge

75
Disability caused by body weight

<table>
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<th>BMI</th>
<th>Level of challenge</th>
<th>Normal Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underweight</td>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>75.3 - 76.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>76.1 - 75.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overweight</td>
<td>Severe</td>
<td>75.5 - 73.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obese</td>
<td>Very severe</td>
<td>73.9 - 66.0</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>BMI</th>
<th>Level of challenge</th>
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<td>15-19</td>
<td>76.6</td>
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<td>20-24</td>
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<td>45-49</td>
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Conclusions

*Each person has a set-point for their SWB

*This set-point corresponds to a normally positive mood

*The set-point is defended from emotional challenges by a homeostatic system

*Whether homeostasis can retain control over SWB depends on the balance between the relative strength of the challenge and defensive resources

*This system works in EXACTLY THE SAME WAY for people with and without a disability