

## **Hearing Diverse Voices in Well-Being Research: A Call for Qualitative Methodologies**

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*Research in the field of human well-being currently relies heavily on quantitative methodologies. In comparison, research on resilience has made considerable use of mixed methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative, which has resulted in the complexities and nuances of resilience are better understood. Drawing from this example, I argue that greater use of qualitative methodologies would provide a richer understanding of well-being and the causes of human flourishing. Pilot research using qualitative methodologies provides support for this argument and reveals several aspects of adult well-being which have not been well explored. Additional use of qualitative methods would likely provide a deeper understanding of the context in which well-being factors operate in people's lives. In addition, there is a lack of diversity in the cadre of well-being researchers and research participant pools, leaving segments of the population underserved. As well-being research is increasingly being used by leaders in the business and policy making arenas, several recommendations are made to improve the understanding of the complexities and nuances of well-being and to increase the utility of this research in order to promote public policies of greater benefit to our society and the world.*

*Keywords:* well-being, resilience, qualitative, quantitative, autonomy, self-acceptance

### **INTRODUCTION**

An increasing body of research shows that the ability to thrive and succeed in the various aspects of individuals' lives is directly related a degree of well-being. Well-being reflects an overall

evaluation of the quality of a person's life and the quality of life in a society. Individuals with high well-being have been shown to have benefits such as health, longevity, and social relationships (Diener, 2012), and well-being is a predictor of future health and the quality of people's social lives (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Well-being research seeks to identify those factors which generate and promote human flourishing and shows that the elements of well-being discovered to date can be learned and developed throughout life (Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm, & Sheldon, 2011).

Research has also shown that stressful events can impact individuals' well-being; individuals' capacity to meet the challenges stressful events present with *resilience*, or the process wherein individuals positively adapt to experiences of significant adversity or trauma (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). Resilience can affect individuals' ability to continue with purposeful lives (Southwick & Charney, 2012). Therefore, some of the same factors which contribute to resilience can also enhance well-being. There have been significant recent advances in the study of human resilience and well-being that shed light on the qualities which make individuals resilient (Southwick & Charney, 2012), contribute to overall well-being (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2018) and also reveal how individuals actively take steps to improve well-being and increase resilience (Diener, et al., 2018; Lyubomirsky, et al., 2005; Southwick & Charney, 2012).

Given the growing understanding of resilience and well-being and their relationship to the ability to flourish, I examine how research in these areas has been conducted, identify gaps, examine the role of diversity among both researchers and participants, and make recommendations for future research. Given the relationship between resilience and well-being, I compare research on resilience which has used mixed methodologies with research on well-being which has used primarily quantitative methodologies. I argue that a greater use of qualitative methodologies, an expansion of research participants in terms of age and diversity characteristics and increasing diversity among researchers would provide a richer understanding of human well-being. Informal pilot research conducted to investigate whether well-being research would be enhanced by an increased use of qualitative methodologies is presented.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Well-Being

Much of the research on well-being has focused on subjective well-being (SWB), which is defined as a person's overall evaluation of the quality of their own lives from his or her own perspective (Diener, et al., 2018). SWB consists of the measure of life satisfaction and positive and negative affect (mood and emotion) balance (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The Gallup Organization, which conducts well-being research throughout the world, defines well-being as the combination and interaction of our love for what we do each day (career well-being), the quality of our relationships (social well-being), the security of our finances (financial well-being), the vibrancy of our physical health (physical well-being), and the pride we take in what we have contributed to our communities (community well-being; Rath & Harter, 2014). Well-being is divided into hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. Hedonic well-being refers to a person's well-being derived from pleasure and lowered by pain. Often scholars will include physical pleasures, pleasures of the mind, and emotions (Diener, et al., 2018). In contrast, eudaimonic well-being refers to desirable psychological characteristics such as having meaning and purpose in an individuals' life, positive social relationships, mastery, and autonomy, which can enhance effective functioning (Diener, et al., 2018).

High levels of well-being contribute to human flourishing. Human flourishing is a broad concept, and views of what constitutes flourishing are numerous. However, there is general agreement that flourishing requires doing or being well in the following five domains of human life: happiness and life satisfaction; health, both mental and physical; meaning and purpose; character and virtue; and close social relationships (VanderWeele, 2017). Each of these domains also satisfies the following two criteria: each domain is generally viewed as an end in itself and each domain is nearly universally desired. These five domains, happiness and life satisfaction, physical and mental health, meaning and purpose in life, character and virtue, and close social relationships, are each specific goals which most people seek. Flourishing is not only a momentary state, but also something which is sustained over time. Flourishing is a state in which resources, financial and otherwise, are sufficiently stable so that what is going well in each of the five domains is likely to continue into the future (VanderWeele, 2017).

## **Resilience**

Resilience is a complex, multidimensional and dynamic process (Bonanno, 2004). Far more than a simple psychological trait or biological phenomenon, resilience includes human thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are the products of complex genetic, biological, psychological, and social forces (Southwick & Charney, 2012). Resilience can determine an individual's capacity to face safety-threatening events and still perform adequately (Charney, 2004), and it explains how a survivor of violence can deal positively with past traumatic experiences (Lee, Brown, Mitchell, & Schiraldi, 2008).

Resilience has been related to the idea of bouncing back after a trauma or adversity. The American Psychological Association defines it as, "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, and even significant sources of stress" (APA, n.d.). Resilience is a learned response and behavior for which there can be effective interventions (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000), and due to advances in research on resilience, there is now enough information available to allow individuals to take steps to prepare for adversity and mitigate its effects. Therefore, a definition of resilience has become the ability to prepare for, recover from, and adapt in the face of stress, challenge, and adversity. In research conducted by Southwick and Charney (2012), ten facets of resilience were identified that support a healthy response to stress. Individuals must have *physical fitness*, including regular physical exercise, and *brain fitness* by training the brain to learn and process information quickly, find strategies to solve problems, and make wise decisions. Having *cognitive and emotional flexibility* allows individuals to think about challenges and emotional reactions to stress flexibly, and optimism, a future-oriented attitude, brings hope and confidence that things will turn out well. The facets of resilience also include the *ability to face fears*, having role models, and employing a *moral compass* in order to live one's values and ethics and engage in altruistic action. *Having faith* by turning to religion or spirituality as a way to cope with hardship or trauma, and *having social support* through interdependence with others, also contribute to resilience. *Finding meaning and purpose* in adversity and experiencing *personal growth* as a result of hardship is another key element of resilience (Southwick & Charney, 2012).

### **Relationship of Resilience and Well-Being**

Research has revealed several factors which comprise resilience, some of which also contribute to well-being. These factors are generally associated more specifically with

eudaimonic well-being. The relationship between resilience and well-being is complex, with the causal direction going both ways. Resilience has been positively associated with psychological well-being and negatively associated with psychological distress, depression, and anxiety (Haddadi & Besharat, 2010). Positive emotions, important for well-being, have been shown to increase resilience, in part, by helping individuals to reframe crises more positively, thereby eliciting a more resilient response (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003).

Several studies have described the relationship between resilience and the elements of SWB: life satisfaction and positive and negative affect balance. Psychological resilience has been associated with life satisfaction, and positive emotions and resilience have been shown to build on one another in a positive feedback loop. Finding meaning and purpose in traumatic events has also been shown to build resilience and increase life satisfaction (Southwick & Charney, 2012). In one study, positive emotions predicted increases in both resilience and life satisfaction, while negative emotions had weak or null effects. Positive emotions mediated the relation between baseline and final resilience, but life satisfaction did not. In addition, change in resilience mediated the relationship between positive emotions and increased life satisfaction, suggesting that happy people become more satisfied not simply because they feel better, but because they develop resources for living well (Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels, & Conway, 2009). In addition, the study showed that ego resilience, defined as a fairly stable personality trait that reflects an individual's ability to adapt to changing environments, generates positive emotions, suggesting an upward spiral in which ego resilience and positive emotions maintain and build on one another (Cohn et al., 2009).

Individuals who experience more positive emotions also become more resilient to adversity over time, as seen in increases in broad-minded coping. These enhanced coping skills also predict additional increased positive emotions over time. Because broad-minded coping is a form of psychological resilience, momentary experiences of positive emotion can build enduring psychological resources and trigger upward spirals toward enhanced emotional well-being (Fredrickson, 2001). In addition, there is solid prospective evidence that associates resilience to loss with the experience and expression of positive emotion, and data linking positive emotions with resilient functioning in the context of trauma (Bonanno, 2004). For example, after the September 11, 2001 attacks, many Americans felt intense negative emotions such as fear, anger,

and sadness, as well as many positive emotions such as gratitude for their safety and a newfound love for friends and family and the urge to express it. Positive emotions were shown to be critical active ingredients that helped people to be resilient and thrive despite the emotional blows delivered by the attacks (Fredrickson, et al., 2003). Positive emotions have been shown to increase the capacity to take broad perspectives on problems, which in the aftermath of crises enables more effective coping that buffers against depression, builds enduring resources, and fuels thriving. The benefits gained from thriving in the aftermath of trauma can also be applied to new experiences and future events (Fredrickson, et al., 2003). Positive emotions undo the adverse physiological effects of negative emotions and increase the flexibility of individual's cognitive and behavioral coping strategies (Fredrickson, 2000; Kashdan, Uswatte, & Julian, 2006).

Research has shown that the association between resilience and life satisfaction is fully mediated by positive affect. A study by Liu, Wang, & Li (2012) highlighted how positive affect mediated the relationships between neuroticism resilience and life satisfaction. The correlational findings of the study indicate that life satisfaction has an inverse relationship with neuroticism and negative affect, and a positive relationship with resilience and positive affect. This study also showed that the influence of resilience on life satisfaction was completely mediated by positive affect; that is, resilience increased positive affect, which in turn increased life satisfaction (Liu, Wang, & Li, 2012). A neuroimaging study investigating the neural basis of individual differences in psychological resilience and its association with life satisfaction showed that the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex (dACC) of the brain links psychological resilience and life satisfaction, demonstrating that psychological resilience is significantly correlated with life satisfaction (Kong, Wang, Hu, & Liu, 2015).

### **Resilience Research Methodologies**

Resilience research has made active use of quantitative methods, exemplified by the existence of several resilience scales, such as the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RSC), the Wagnild and Young Resilience Scale (RS), Friborg's Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA), and others (Windle, Bennett, Noyles, 2011). These self-report scales measure aspects of resilience such as psychological hardiness, coping ability, tolerance to stress, ability to accept change, secure relationships, spiritual influences, and personal competence.

In addition to quantitative methodologies, resilience research also relies on qualitative methodologies. Narrative inquiry, an approach which studies life experiences through the stories and descriptions of events (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014) was used by Southwick and Charney (2012) in conducting interviews of individuals who had suffered significant trauma or adversity, obtaining the personal stories of how these individuals survived hardship. They then extrapolated several themes from these interviews which were formulated into a resilience framework. These themes emerged organically from the interviews and helped the researchers discover new information about resilience which was rich and nuanced, enhancing existing resilience research which had used quantitative methodologies (Southwick & Charney, 2012). Other resilience research has also used narrative inquiry to reveal a specific form of resilient adaptation of women living in Palestinian refugee camps from their accounts of the dynamics of religion, culture, gender, connection to the land, collective knowledge and identity, resistance to occupation, and ability to share stories (Darychuk & Jackson, 2015). In addition, phenomenology, an approach which focuses on the meaning of an experience for the people who lived it (Jones, et al., 2014) was used to identify the factors contributing to the resilience of Bosnian refugee women during face-to-face interviews in which the refugee women described their lives before and during the war, as well as their challenges with resettlement; these facets of resilience included self-determination, optimism, inner strength, and hope, as well as environmental factors, such as community and social support services (Sossou, Craig, Ogren, & Schnak, 2008).

These studies using qualitative methodologies demonstrate the subtlety and complexity of those factors which contribute to resilience by acquiring stories of the lived experience of those who have overcome adversity. The result of combining the qualitative and quantitative methodologies when examining resilience has allowed for a rich, diverse, and credible body of knowledge to emerge. This depth and breadth of understanding about resilience is of great utility to resilience practitioners, who can draw on a robust research to create flexible and meaningful programs to assist individuals in building their resilience.

### **Well-Being Research Methodologies**

While the study of well-being is relatively new, the body of research is now fairly extensive but relies primarily on quantitative methodologies. Quantitative research, whether on

well-being or other topics, is intended to produce results that may be generalized to a larger population (Jones, et al., 2014). Measurements such as the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) and other life satisfaction scales focus on reliability, validity, and sensitivity to changes in people's lives (Diener, Inglehart, & Tay, 2013). The vast majority of well-being research uses these and other scales to study well-being and factors that influence it. Some examples of well-being research that relies on quantitative methodologies are studies of the role of positive emotions on well-being (Cohn, et al., 2009; Fredrickson, 2001); gratitude and well-being (Kashdan, et al., 2006; Emmons & McCullough, 2003); goal attainment and well-being (Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, Schulz, & Carver, 2003), need fulfillment (Tay & Diener, 2011); meaning and purpose (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009; Steger, 2009); and cultural impacts on well-being (Fulmer, Gelfand, Kruglanski, Kim-Prieto, Diener, Pierro, & Higgins, 2010; Schimmack, Oishi, Radhakrishnan, Dzokoto, & Ahadi, 2002).

Unlike resilience research, most of the subjective well-being research being conducted primarily utilizes university students as research participants. Some SWB research has been conducted on the population over age 60 (Diener, et al., 2018; Diener & Chan, 2011; Steptoe, Oliveira, Demakakos, & Zaninotto, 2014), but there is comparatively little research on the age group in between (*ca.* ages 30-60). Because well-being research is focused heavily on quantitative studies conducted on university-aged participants, it is unclear how generalizable this research would be to populations of older adults and whether the factors identified to cause well-being in university students are the same for other populations. However, the Gallup Organization, which continually conducts research in over 150 countries representing more than 98% of the world's adult population is an exception. While Gallup's global polling on well-being is quantitative in nature, qualitative methodologies were used to inform the development of survey questions. Gallup's five elements of well-being were developed through conversations with thousands of people across cultures, demographics, age and gender (Rath & Harter, 2014). Gallup considers traditional measures of well-being such as income, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), life expectancy, and poverty rates, but also measures SWB, which is divided into *evaluative* well-being (how one rates his or her life) and *experienced* well-being (what one experiences in daily life). As Rath and Harter (2014) describe, evaluative and experienced well-being generally correspond to life satisfaction and positive and negative affect balance,



respectively, and the Gallup model is informed by the work of Diener, et al. (1985) and Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone (2004).

### **Well-Being Research in Minority Communities**

More research on well-being in minority racial and ethnic communities in the United States is needed, as well as more well-being researchers from these communities, as well-being in these communities is currently not well understood. Just as expanding the participant pool from university students to a wider age range of adults would likely expand our knowledge of well-being, greater racial and ethnic diversity among the research participants and focus on the well-being of minority communities would likely reveal information of great value.

There are indicators that expanding research of minority communities would yield new information about well-being. For example, the Christian religion is integral to the maintenance of the African American helping tradition which has been and continues to be instrumental to the survival and advancement of the African-American community. African-American religious institutions developed within a racially hostile American context, resulting in these institutions responding to challenges that threaten African-Americans' well-being, in part by instilling in their members an enduring commitment to benevolent and just action. One study showed that organizational religiosity, in the form of service attendance, positively predicted engagement in the African-American helping tradition through informal community helping (Grayman-Simpson & Mattis, 2013). Another study using qualitative methods and an age diverse participant pool revealed that black community involvement persists because it continues to fulfill basic group and individual social, psychological, emotional, and spiritual well-being needs (Grayman-Simpson, 2012). In addition, established quantitative well-being measurement scales would benefit from revision in order to make them more appropriate for investigations into well-being in black communities (Grayman-Simpson & Mattis, 2017). These types of findings have not appeared in the substantial research on the role of social support, altruism and religiosity in well-being (Diener, et al., 2018) conducted on a general pool of university student participants.

### **International Well-Being Research**

Most studies of SWB have been conducted in Western nations, and outside of Gallup's polling data, there is a shortage of research on well-being in non-Western countries. The limited

research that does exist indicates that information collected from participants in the West cannot be assumed to apply to non-Western populations. There are some universals or near universals in the causes of well-being, but there are also influences that appear to be specific to different cultures (Diener, 2009). Some research has been conducted in Asia, which shows that there are differences between that which generates well-being in Western individualistic societies and what creates well-being in Asian collectivist societies (Diener, 2012). Some cultures appear to be happier than others even when the research controls for conditions which have been shown to impact well-being (Diener, 2012). Self-esteem was found to be a much stronger correlate of life satisfaction in individualistic than collectivist cultures (Diener & Diener, 1995); the difference in well-being between extraverts and introverts is amplified in extraverted societies (Fulmer, et al., 2010); people in individualistic societies seem to weight emotions more when making life satisfaction judgments (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998); and Asians experienced fewer positive events, but weighted them more heavily in daily satisfaction judgments compared to European Americans (Oishi, Diener, Choi, Kim-Prieto, & Choi, 2007).

Cross-cultural studies have shown that resilience is a process highly influenced by cultural values (Masten & Wright, 2010). Considering that there is a close relationship between resilience and well-being, it is likely that well-being is also highly influenced by cultural values. More research is needed on the factors which create SWB in Africa, the Middle East, South America, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe (Oishi & Gilbert, 2016), and as with research on minority communities, the greater use of qualitative methodologies would likely highlight the cultural influences on well-being and variations with other cultures.

In addition, international well-being research would likely benefit from an increase in numbers and diversity of researchers from non-Western countries to expand knowledge of well-being outside of the West. Research by Asian researchers comparing well-being in Western and Asian countries has revealed important information about a number of cultural factors which influence well-being. It would be useful to validate more well-being scales across cultures; this validation has been limited to date (Oishi & Gilbert, 2016).

### **Research Questions**

Due to personality, cultural values, and other factors, people place different importance on various aspects of life, and this affects what is included in their life satisfaction judgments.

People's values and life strategies change as they move to higher levels of economic and physical security. Survival tends to be the dominant goal for individuals within economically disadvantaged contexts, and well-being is closely linked with whether one has enough of life's basic necessities. As people attain higher levels of economic and physical security, they attach greater importance to having free choice in how to live their lives. This manifests in increasing emphasis on gender equality, freedom from discrimination, self-expression, and greater democratization (Diener, et al., 2013).

This paper posits that as one moves through the various stages of adult life, from dependence on one's family for sustenance to self-sufficiency and responsibility for self and possibly others, what one considers to be important for well-being changes and becomes more expansive, nuanced, and complex. Therefore, the research question asks, as one matures, do the factors which are seen as being important for one's own well-being change, and if so, how?

In addition, well-being research would benefit from a greater examination of people's lived experience over time. While there are longitudinal studies which contain information at points in time at the beginning and the end of the study, because the field is still very new, most of these longitudinal studies capture information over weeks or months rather than years. Most importantly, while these studies have helped develop a greater understanding of *what* causes well-being, more research is needed to explain *why* these factors contribute to well-being. In order to identify and understand the factors which contribute to adult well-being in a fuller way, the research question asks can the use of more qualitative methods in research uncover a deeper and richer understanding of adult well-being than that which has been identified using quantitative methods, similar to what is being done in resilience research?

## METHODS

This initial research was a pilot study of a small group of adults designed to identify whether the quantitative research being conducted on university students could be missing important information about well-being in adults, and if further studies using qualitative methodologies would be warranted. Exploration of reasons for the paucity of well-being research in minority communities in the U.S. and non-Western nations was beyond the scope of this pilot study.

A convenience sample of six adults was selected, ranging in age from early 30's to mid-50's. The group consisted of five females and one male, and five Caucasians and one African-American. Participants were American college-educated middle-class working professionals located in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. Informal personal interviews were conducted using a narrative inquiry methodology of qualitative research. Narrative inquiry was chosen as it relies on “life experiences as narrative by those who live them” (Chase, 2011, p. 422). This methodology was chosen as the research question focuses on whether a richer understanding of adult well-being can be achieved through research which explores the lived experiences of individuals, in a manner which provides them with the opportunity to convey their thoughts from their own perspectives in a narrative format. In addition, this approach was utilized to detect whether qualitative methodologies have the potential to reveal information about well-being in adults which quantitative methods to date have not. Therefore, open-ended questions on well-being were asked of the participants during the interviews. These questions were based on topics discussed in current well-being literature but put forth in a format designed to not only discover the factors which contributed to the participants' well-being, but also to elicit why those factors were important and meaningful to the individual participant. Interviews took place in May 2017, and each interview lasted approximately one hour. All questions were asked of each participant, and interviews were conducted in the participants' native language, English.

## FINDINGS

Several common themes emerged from the interviews about factors which contribute to the well-being of this participant group. Some of these elements have been identified in the existing well-being literature, such as the role of family and other relationships, the feeling of mastery and skill in various endeavors, physical health, and religious engagement. However, this qualitative approach revealed other factors not frequently seen in the well-being literature and provided a richer understanding of these factors. New facets identified as being important to adult well-being and highly desired by the participants were:

***Inner Peace:*** Respondents expressed a desire for and appreciation of feelings of inner peace. This was not described as being associated with any religious context, but rather a

general overall feeling of peacefulness. Inner peace was described as contentment, harmony, and an underlying calm and serenity in the face of life's adversities.

***Self-acceptance:*** Self-acceptance was also a prominent aspect of well-being for participants. It was described as “being OK with who I am” and accepting one's own imperfections. This element of well-being clearly evolved over the adult life span of the participants, and it was something that participants advised that they sometimes needed to expend effort to achieve.

***Self-awareness:*** Participants noted that their capacity for self-awareness had increased as they got older. While self-awareness was described as the discovery of oneself, it was also characterized by the joy found in the process of self-discovery—the personal growth which came with greater self-awareness created well-being. This was also an element of well-being which unfolded over time for the participants.

***Autonomy:*** Another strong theme revealed in the interviews was the satisfaction which came with the capacity to make choices for oneself. This was described as freedom, autonomy and doing something because they “want to” not because they “have to.” While there is research on the relationship between goal striving and well-being (Wrosch, et al., 2003; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999), as well as neuroscience studies on how the presence and absence of autonomy can trigger the brain's reward and threat responses respectively (Rock, 2008; Rock & Cox, 2012), the interviews conveyed a strong message that the capacity to make one's own choices is critical to well-being in adults. In part, this was related to the independence that financial security offers to individuals; however, for the participants, it was also the self-confidence and greater clarity about what one wants out of life which came with maturity.

***Giving Back:*** Several respondents discussed their desire and efforts to “give back” to society and the joy this brought them. For some, this consisted of a formal teaching role which allowed them to pass on their experience and knowledge to others. For others, it was sharing their wisdom by providing guidance to their children. Participants believed that they were at the stage of life in which they had acquired significant knowledge and experience and felt an obligation to share this for others' benefit; this obligation was not onerous, but rather something they greatly enjoyed, which enhanced their well-being.

### **Well-Being Over Time**

The new elements identified as contributing to these participants' well-being—inner peace, self-acceptance, self-awareness, autonomy, and giving back—were described as having gradually increased over the participants' adult life span as a result of life experience, maturity, and sometimes deliberate effort on the part of the participants. The participants reported that as they aged, they increasingly became aware that one can choose to increase one's well-being and that it is an ongoing process over which they had a great deal of control. There was also a general expectation that these well-being factors might change as the participants aged and as their life circumstances and personal desires change. This important aspect of the gradual development and expansion of well-being that comes with maturity and experience is not explored in the current well-being research. Of note, while the quantitative SWB research separates life satisfaction from positive and negative affect, in responding to the questions, the participants routinely crossed between both domains and did not make a clear distinction between the two, even though the questions asked about these two components individually.

In addition to identifying inner peace, self-acceptance, self-awareness, autonomy, and giving back as elements which contribute to adult well-being, the overall result of the interviews was a richer understanding of what contributes to well-being in the context of lived experience. The interviews provided an opportunity for new ideas to organically emerge, providing a deeper understanding of the context in which these well-being factors actually operate in people's lives.

### **Appreciative Inquiry Effect**

An unintended consequence of these interviews on well-being was that they had an *Appreciative Inquiry* effect on the participants. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a process of search and discovery designed to value, prize and honor, with the objective of touching the “positive core” of organizational life. AI operates from the premise that asking positive questions draws out the human spirit, with the objective that in a self-organizing way, people in organizations begin to construct a more desirable future (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003). At the end of the well-being interviews, several of the participants advised that they felt uplifted, and that they enjoyed focusing on and discussing those aspects of their lives which created well-being, reactions which have been seen at the conclusion of other interviews.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the current state of well-being research and results of the pilot research, the following recommendations are made for the conduct of future well-being research:

### **Utilize the New Scales of General Well-Being**

In contrast to most well-being research to date, a study published in 2017 describes the development of a new quantitative measure, the Scales of General Well-Being (SGWB). The SGWB includes calmness (defined as low-arousal pleasant feelings such as serenity and peacefulness), self-acceptance, and self-awareness as part of the scale (Longo, Coyne, & Joseph, 2017); these factors of well-being were not included in earlier scales. While three of the elements of well-being identified by the interview participants, inner peace, self-acceptance, and self-awareness, were contained in the SGWB, there were no factors of well-being in the SGWB which corresponded to autonomy and giving back. In addition, in comparison to the development of earlier well-being scales which used university students as study participants, data validating the SGWB was collected from U.S. samples found to be more heterogeneous than student samples, with demographics comparable to a large U.S. stratified survey: ages of participants ranged from 19 to 77 years and 60.9% were female (Longo, et al., 2017). The development of the new SGWB may indicate that quantitative well-being research is expanding to acquire more nuanced information about well-being, and that a wider participant pool is necessary to obtain a more complete picture of adult well-being and research which is applicable to a broader population.

### **Increase the Use of Qualitative Methodologies in Well-Being Research**

The interviews of professional adults not only revealed that there are topics important for well-being that are not well explored in the quantitative well-being literature, but also that the quantitative methodologies used in well-being research to date have not fully captured the richness and complexity of adult well-being. As people move through life, their experiences, both good and bad, and lessons learned from these experiences, become part of the fabric of who they are. The interviews revealed a deep appreciation by all of the participants for the intangible aspects of their lives, and the people with whom they share their lives. Rich descriptions such as “freedom”, “choice”, “want to, not have to”, “peacefulness”, “discovering me”, and “being OK

with who I am” used to convey the causes of their well-being had deep emotional meaning for the participants, which is difficult to capture through prepared surveys. The greater use of qualitative methodologies in well-being research would likely capture this nuance and richness in meaningful ways, which could create new interventions and techniques for use by well-being practitioners.

The qualitative methodologies which would likely contribute to research on the well-being of adults are:

**Narrative Inquiry.** This methodology was used with the pilot study participants. Considering the results, further use of narrative inquiry in well-being research will likely reveal greater insights into the sources of adult well-being which have not yet been examined by traditional quantitative methodologies.

**Phenomenology.** Phenomenology reflects on the essential themes which emerge from the descriptions of the lived experiences (Jones, et al., 2014). Phenomenology could be a useful methodology, particularly for longitudinal studies which examine how adult well-being manifests as people age and mature and could provide a deeper and more complex understanding of this process.

**Ethnography.** Ethnography research examines the cultural phenomena, cultural contexts, and cultural interpretations of a particular group of people and their behaviors, norms, rituals, and values. It is characterized by extensive fieldwork, immersion in a particular setting, prolonged engagement and relationship building, and generates a rich description of the people, processes, relationships, and space in that setting (Jones, et al., 2014). As described, there are some areas of the world where little research on well-being has been conducted, and ethnography would allow for cultural differences in well-being to emerge.

### **Use Mixed Methodologies in Well-Being Research**

Well-being research would benefit from the use of qualitative methodologies such as those identified above. As with resilience research, quantitative research which supports the findings of the qualitative research could be highlighted. This would likely result in a more expansive body of research on well-being, and possibly inform future quantitative research into newly identified elements contributing to adult well-being. The ultimate goal of well-being



research is to improve people's lives, and a broader and deeper understanding of the facets which lead to adult well-being acquired through research using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies will likely enhance well-being for a wider spectrum of the population.

### **Diversify the Participant Pool**

More research is needed on adults outside of university students and the elderly adults over age 60. Considering that various life events, circumstances, experiences, personal growth, and maturity impact an individual's well-being, the assumption that those factors which contribute to an adult over the age of 60 or university students' well-being also apply to the mid-range age group should be questioned. The pilot research indicated that some facets of well-being develop over time and that those factors which contribute to well-being change and are enriched as individuals mature. Therefore, more participants in the mid-range adult age group should be included in future research.

In addition, significantly more research is needed on minority groups in the U.S., as it is important to understand how well-being is the same and different for members of minority groups in comparison to non-minority groups. Given the initial results of the pilot research that uncovered aspects of well-being in adults not previously researched, the use of qualitative methodologies would likely be useful in researching minority groups in order to acquire a greater understanding of their lived experience and challenges and contributors to their well-being. More research is also needed in non-Western cultures in order to understand the impact of culture on well-being. More data on the well-being of adults, minority groups, and non-Western cultures is crucial, as differences in well-being in these groups compared to the participants in current research will alter the design of well-being interventions.

### **Encourage Researchers from Diverse Backgrounds**

More researchers from diverse backgrounds are needed as they may have greater capacity to conduct research with groups which are currently not being researched. This would likely result in new and important information which may have policy implications. For example, the pilot research revealed that one of the factors which can generate adult well-being is the ability to make one's own choices; greater research with minority groups may reveal that they have lower well-being, and if so, this potentially could be caused by a lack of autonomy due to their

minority status. If this is the case, policies could be developed to include ways to increase individual decision-making and autonomy in these groups.

### **Expand International Research**

Qualitative methodologies have the potential to reveal cultural differences in well-being and improve the development of well-being interventions. Inclusion of local researchers and researchers with diverse backgrounds would increase access to a greater variety of participants. There are large differences in SWB among societies, and a number of culture-specific predictors of SWB have been found (Diener, 2012). Many associations with SWB depend on people's culture and values, as well as the context in which people live.

### **CONCLUSION**

Dr. Ed Diener, one of the world's pioneering and leading researchers on SWB stated that the sophistication of well-being research methods being used has been improving, with many more multi-method and longitudinal studies needed. He commented that the past was dominated by simple correlational studies, but the promise of the future will come from experimental, longitudinal, and multi-method approaches (Diener, 2012). As the use of longitudinal and experimental designs has increased, it has allowed for a much greater understanding of the role SWB plays in preceding health and positive adaptation. Recent research using longitudinal and experimental designs as well as employing multi-method measurement reveals that prior conclusions must often be revised when more sophisticated methodologies are used; thus, we need more rigorous research methods in the field (Diener, 2012).

Quantitative methodologies have created a useful body of knowledge about the factors which contribute to individual well-being and have helped to establish well-being research as an accepted and viable field of study. Well-being research can now benefit from the increased use of qualitative methodologies to expand the field to reveal additional factors which contribute to well-being, examine why these factors contribute to well-being, and develop a richer and deeper understanding of adult well-being. As knowledge about well-being increases, the number of practitioners engaged in promoting human well-being is increasing. Practitioners such as clinical psychologists, health care providers, executive coaches, human resource officers, educators, and

others, rely on well-being research to develop the best interventions possible for their clients and organizations. Because the clientele these practitioners serve include the full range of the diversity of the population, more extensive research will help these practitioners to develop interventions which better serve the needs of under researched groups.

In addition, well-being research can inform business leaders and policy makers in areas such as economics, health care, the environment, and social issues, by enhancing the quantitative measures currently used (e.g. measures of GDP, poverty, income, crime, literacy, and longevity). Well-being research can significantly add to the information available to guide policy decisions and advise policy makers on how citizens are evaluating the quality of their lives by creating a fuller picture of the well-being of the nation and how its citizens view their personal well-being and the well-being of the society (Diener, Lucas, Schimmack, & Helliwell, 2009). It is therefore highly recommended that diversity among researchers be increased, future researchers embrace the use of qualitative methodologies and diversity of the participant pool be expanded in order to broaden the understanding of the complexities, diversity, and nuances of well-being which will be needed to promote public policies of benefit to our society and across the world.

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