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Ethnic Identity and Subjective Wellbeing: Connections and Possibilities

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Abstract: The benefits of multicultural societies, and the contributions made by immigrant populations to daily life in their adopted countries, have been discussed in the literature for many years. In some countries like Australia, first and second generation immigrants comprise a large proportion of the population, suggesting that ongoing research on issues of cultural diversity and psychological wellbeing in these countries are likely to benefit our understanding of multicultural societies in general. Recent developments in the understanding of subjective wellbeing encourages the use of this variable to inform the potential of ethnic identity to influence an individual's sense of personal wellbeing. Using the homeostatic model of subjective wellbeing as a foundation, this theory-based paper discusses relationships between ethnic identity and the homeostatic model, outlines some of the complexities involved in measuring these constructs, and suggests a way ahead for future research.

Keywords: Ethnic Identity, Subjective Wellbeing, Psychological Wellbeing, Multicultural Societies

Introduction

IN SOME COUNTRIES, first and second generation immigrants comprise a large proportion of the population. In the Australian context for example, slightly less than half of the population was either born overseas (23%) (ABS 2004), or have parents who were born outside Australia (20%) (Khoo et al. 2002). Research into cultural diversity and psychological wellbeing is therefore essential to inform our understanding of such multicultural societies. Within this context our paper examines the following issues:

- The nature of ethnic identity;
- The homeostatic model of subjective wellbeing (SWB);
- Relationships between ethnic identity and SWB;
- Measurement issues regarding ethnic identity and SWB; and
- Potential research opportunities.

The Nature of Ethnic Identity

Before discussing psychological wellbeing and ethnic identity in combination, it is important to firstly, revisit identity theory in general.

Identity Theory

The need for social identity is a universal human characteristic that can be defined as 'those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging' (Tajfel & Turner 1986:16). Social identity

can take many forms such as gender, religion, class and ethnicity. This literature generally falls into two categories; studies of collective identity (group behaviour), or those involving personal identity (Abdelal et al. 2001). Within the personal identity literature, three main themes emerge: representation of the self as a distinct individual, the process of understanding the self as a social entity, and membership or a sense of affiliation with a particular social group. This paper is concerned with the latter two, which relate strongly to ethnic identity for many people in a multicultural society. Such identity is relevant to the quality of personal relationships and these, in turn, form an important part of life satisfaction judgements (Vaughn et al. 1985; Reis et al. 2000; Uliando 2004).

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity can be defined as 'a subjective belief in [a] common descent... whether or not an objective blood relationship exists... [it] identity easily embraces groups differentiated by color, language, and religion, it covers tribes, races, nationalities and castes' (Abdelal et al. 2001:7). More simply, ethnic identity can be described as an awareness of being a member of a cultural, ethnic or national category (Lorenzo-Hernandez & Ouellette 1998). Ethnic identity has special significance in multicultural societies. In the early stages of acculturation, immigrants retain aspects of the values, attitudes and behaviour of their original culture (Berry 2001). Then, over time, and particularly over successive generations, some of the original cultural values are re-

placed with others derived from the culture in which they now live and the distinction between the old and the new become increasingly blurred. This makes the measurement of ethnic identity quite challenging in the context of multicultural societies.

Identity theory informs such measurement by proposing that individuals can simultaneously hold multiple identity types (religion, gender, ethnicity) but typically will only possess one variety within each type (e.g. one religion, one ethnicity) (Abdelal et al. 2001). However, individuals possessing dual cultural identities have also been identified. Such people are able to engage in cultural frame-switching (Hong et al. 2003) in which they move between different cultural meaning systems, adopting the most appropriate form of ethnic identity to suit the situation at hand (Bertone and Leahy 2003; Runnymede Trust 2003; Ang et al. 2003; Benet-Martinez et al. 2002).

On the other hand, some individuals find that ethnicity is not relevant to their search for social belonging (Ang et al. 2006; Bertone & Leahy 2003; Chung & Fischer 2001; Noble et al. 1999). People may differ in this regard even within the same family, where some siblings have a strong ethnic orientation and others have none at all (Perkins 2004:197). It is important to note from this that ethnic values cannot be inferred from objective ethnic characteristics. Moreover, the ability to predict the behaviour or attitudes of an ethnic sub-group is a fraught process in contemporary multicultural societies. Hence, our understanding about how multicultural societies work is importantly informed by knowledge about the relationship between ethnic identity and psychological wellbeing.

Measuring Ethnic Identity

Despite the caveats above, ethnic groups are generally treated by researchers as homogenous, exhaustive and mutually exclusive (e.g., Noble et al. 1999; Brubaker & Cooper 2000; Ang et al. 2003; Runnymede Trust 2003; Poynting & Noble 2004; Kramvig 2005). While such gross categorizations simplify the research process, they may also inhibit understanding. Measurements of intensity, meaningfulness and attachment to an ethnic identity are best undertaken at the individual level (Abdelal et al. 2005; Shearer 2003; Davis 1999).

As with any social category, people who include ethnic identity as part of their personal identity do so because they derive some form of psychological meaning from it. In an important sense, this derived meaning is developmental (Phinney 1992) in that it changes over a person's lifetime, as recognized many years ago by Erikson (1968). In order to further characterize this process, the four stages of social

identity development (*diffusion*, *foreclosure*, *moratorium* and *achieved* identity) proposed by Marcia (1980), have been adapted by Phinney (1989) to form a three stage model of ethnic identity as, *diffusion*, *moratorium*, and *achieved* ethnic identity.

At the intuitive *diffusion* stage, individuals hold either positive or negative attitudes to their ethnic background. These views are derived from parents or society rather than being obtained independently (Phinney & Chavira 1992). The explorative *moratorium* stage is usually activated by a problem such as ethnic conflict, discrimination, or by experiences where a person's cultural values conflict with others around them. This can prompt the individual to embark on a process of ethnic identity exploration as a way of resolving the conflict and potentially affirming their ethnic identity in the process (Frable 1997). The ethnic identity *achieved* stage can be defined as a 'secure commitment to one's group based on the knowledge and understanding obtained through an active exploration of one's cultural background' (Phinney & Chavira 1992:272). At this stage ethnicity may become the most important identity or one of several that these individuals are able to integrate into a harmonious whole (Frable 1997). Notably, the *achieved* level of ethnic identity development tends to remain consistent over the long term (Phinney & Chavira 1992).

As verification of this categorization, researchers have consistently shown a positive relationship between an *achieved* level of ethnic identity and self-esteem (Phinney & Chavira 1992; Phinney 1989). The *achieved* stage of ethnic identity development has also shown the most potential as a variable for statistical analysis, as this level is more stable than either *diffusion* or *moratorium* (Phinney 1991, 1989). These links to self-esteem suggest that ethnic identity has a part to play in the ongoing maintenance of psychological wellbeing and this will be discussed in more detail with respect to the homeostatic model of SWB.

The Homeostatic Model of Subjective Wellbeing

A sense of wellbeing is important in order to lead a productive, happy life. One of the keys to such wellbeing is a positive level of self-satisfaction (Cummins & Nistico 2001). These authors suggest that 'satisfaction with the self' can be divided into three components, (1) a sense of worth or value; (2) a sense of control, that one can change the environment in accordance with one's wishes, and (3) feelings of optimism regarding the future. These components, when discussed in the context of the homeostatic model of SWB, are collectively known as cognitive buffers. The buffers are part of a wider

homeostatic control system (shown at Figure 1) that may have evolved to ensure the continued survival of the population by maintaining an individual's subjective wellbeing at a positive level (Cummins 2003). The cognitive buffers *self-esteem*, *control* and *optimism* are belief systems that act to mitigate any negative impact of life events an individual may experience when interacting with their environment.

The homeostatic control system is a useful starting point for examining the relationship between ethnic identity and SWB. Figure 1 is a simplified illustration of the components of the homeostatic model. Research to date suggests that the strength or resilience of a person's homeostatic system is genetically predetermined and, when combined with life experience, produces a set-point level of SWB at which an individual will generally experience life satisfaction on an ongoing basis (Cummins 2006). However when challenged by negative external influences (Figure 1, annotation 1), resources such as a network of supportive friends and family, or adequate sources of income help to offset these negative circumstances and protect the individual's sense of wellbeing (Figure 1, annotation 2). In addition, the internal cognitive buffers of self-esteem, perceived control

and optimism (Figure 1, annotation 3), can be adjusted to reduce the negative effects of external events, thus returning an individual to their normal set point range of SWB. For example, following a negative experience, the optimism buffer may be used to create the self-talk 'Today has been a bad experience but tomorrow will be better' (Cummins 2000:137). For an extensive explanation of the cognitive buffers, refer to Cummins, Gullone & Lau (2002).

However, the cognitive buffers can be overwhelmed by strong and sustained negative experience, thus allowing more negative feelings to prevail (Cummins 2003; Cummins, Gullone & Lau 2002; Cummins & Nistico 2001; Cummins 2000). When this occurs, the period over which positive wellbeing is lost depends on the intensity of the initial assault, its duration, and the resilience and strength of the homeostatic system. Thus, strengthening the cognitive buffers and ensuring the availability of suitable external resources such as income and good quality personal relationships is essential to build resilience against negative life events. The role of ethnic identity in this regard will be discussed in the next section of this paper

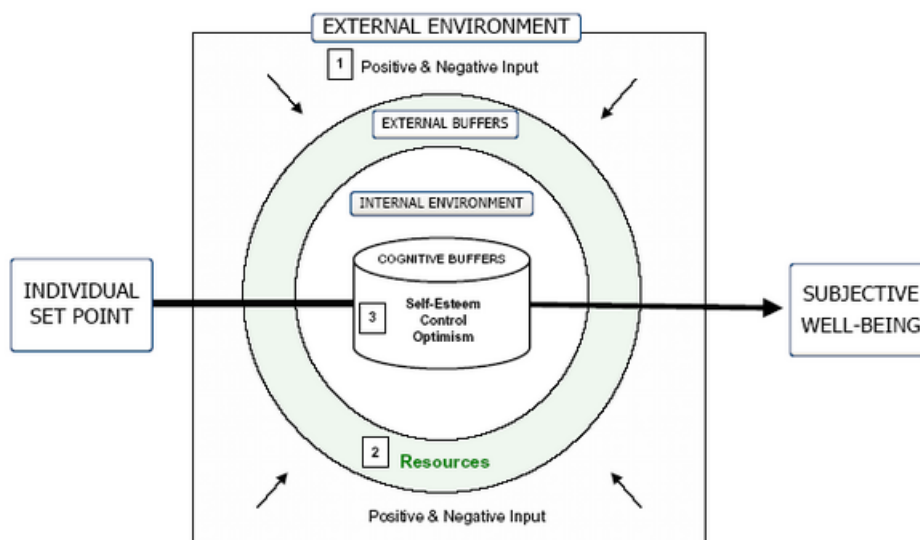


Figure 1: Homeostatic Model of SWB, Source: Adapted from Cummins 2000:137

Relationship between Ethnic Identity and SWB

Various studies have identified a relationship between ethnic identity and psychological wellbeing. Theoretical approaches to ethnic identity can be divided into two main themes:

- Ethnic identity as a protective mechanism against the psychological effects of ethnic stereotyping (Phinney & Chavira 1992, Dukes & Martinez 1997); and

- Ethnic identity as enhancement to psychological wellbeing through increased self-esteem, self-confidence and purpose in life (Smith et al. 1999; Dukes & Martinez 1997).

The remainder of this paper will focus on these aspects in relation to the cognitive buffers and will briefly discuss the external buffers as shown in Figure 1, annotation 2.

Self-esteem Cognitive Buffer

Self-esteem is one of the most widely studied aspects of the self (Bracey, Bamaca & Umana-Taylor 2004).

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner 1986) proposes that the primary purpose of a social identity is to maintain and enhance personal self-esteem. A growing number of studies, including those on ethnic identity, find a positive relationship between connection to a group and self-esteem (Smith et al. 1999; Lorenzo-Hernandez & Ouellette 1998; Phinney 1992, 1991, 1990;).

Of the three cognitive buffers, self-esteem has the strongest correlation with SWB (Davern 2004) and also contributes the highest level of unique variance (Davey 2004). While Self-esteem is broadly linked to ethnic identity, the way people use this to obtain such self-esteem depends on the cultural context in which they are involved (Heine et al. 1999). For example, individuals with multiple cultural identities are inclined to be more resilient to challenges to their feelings of self worth, as they have a broader base of social support on which to draw, and they also tend to possess a stronger sense of personal identity and efficacy (Bracey, Bamaca & Umana-Taylor 2004; Dukes & Martinez 1997).

The causal relationship between ethnic identity and self-esteem is not straightforward as the two constructs interact. An individual with a strong sense of connection to their cultural background is likely to experience higher levels of self-esteem. This in turn can promote a desire to explore their ethnicity in more detail, thereby creating a stronger connection to their cultural background. However, the relationship between the two constructs is strongest when individuals have reached the *achieved* stage of development in Phinney's (1989) model (Phinney & Chavira 1992).

Self-esteem represents an important component of SWB in the homeostatic model which can be enhanced by a positive sense of ethnic identity. However, the relationship between ethnic identity and the other two buffers of perceived control and optimism is more complex.

Perceived Control Cognitive Buffer

Control is defined as an individual's general belief that they can influence important outcomes in their life (Folkman 1984). More specifically, beliefs in self-efficacy [control] can positively influence many aspects of an individual's behaviour and sense of wellbeing. These can include goal setting, effort and perseverance, resilience under stress, and positive or negative thought patterns that can result in self-supporting or self-defeating behaviour (Bandura 1997). Put simply, a belief in self-efficacy is associated with positive affective states (Luszczynska, Scholz & Schwarzer 2005).

Control can be classified as either primary or secondary. Primary control refers to direct action and a

belief that one can influence or change the immediate environment to meet personal needs. Secondary control involves attempts to accommodate existing environmental forces rather than initiating change through active behaviour. This form of control is activated in circumstances where primary control has failed or is impossible to achieve (Rothbaum, Weisz & Snyder 1982). There are psychological benefits in the use of secondary control as it 'protects emotional well-being and self-esteem, and preserves and rekindles the individual's motivational resources for maintaining and enhancing primary control in the future' (Heckhausen & Schulz 1995:286). Although secondary control is considered to be less powerfully linked to SWB than primary control, the two forms are intertwined (Weisz, Rothbaum & Blackburn 1984), requiring a balance between them for optimal SWB (Cummins 2005).

People's perceptions of control can be influenced by their age, gender, educational attainment, socioeconomic status and ethnicity (Swenson & Prelow 2004), and the way in which primary and secondary control is applied is influenced by cultural background. For example, American culture is more inclined to rely on primary control in major aspects of life (work, raising children) whereas Japanese culture is more orientated towards secondary control (Weisz, Rothbaum & Blackburn 1984).

Differences in the balance between primary and secondary control are also evident where religion plays an integral part in the cultural framework of an ethnic group. Christianity, for example, "although embedded within the context of secondary control that frames most religions [Christianity] reflects an emphasis on primary control" (Weisz, Rothbaum & Blackburn 1984:961). Even in prayer, Christians will often petition God to intervene on their behalf. Zen Buddhism, on the other hand, is a contrasting example where primary control is relinquished in favour of secondary control through interpretation or reframing perspectives on events and existing realities (Weisz, Rothbaum & Blackburn 1984).

Secondary control also has a role to play in offsetting potentially negative effects of ethnic conflict, ethnic discrimination, or where an individual questions the validity of their own cultural values and beliefs as a result of exposure to others with different cultural values to their own. It is evident that the interaction between ethnic identity, the control cognitive buffer and religion/spirituality is a useful area for future study.

Secondary Control and Potential Impediments to SWB

Any discussion on ethnic identity and SWB should examine the potentially negative effects that ethnic

identity may have on SWB. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner 1986) explores relationships between minority and majority groups and the psychological and behavioural implications of their social position. Attempts by a group to retain their position of social dominance can result in overtly hostile behaviour (primary control) towards a less dominant group who may see the status quo as unacceptable and make attempts to change it (primary control). When conflict between the groups is high, members of the dominant group are likely to experience heightened levels of identification and attachment to the group (Tajfel & Turner 1986). This can provide a powerful means to enhance the self-esteem and SWB of individual members but will do so at the expense of others outside the group. One of the psychological implications of ethnic minority group membership is the potential threat to an individual's self concept of not being able to join a more socially dominant group (Verkuyten & Masson 1995). Individuals may deal with such challenges through the use of secondary control, particularly where direct action (primary control) is either inappropriate or not helpful in overcoming conflict. Secondary control strategies can include:

- Making comparisons with groups of a similar social status rather than with the majority population (Lorenzo-Hernandez & Ouellette 1998);
- Devaluing attributes in which the ethnic group has limitations and overemphasising those in which the ethnic group excels (Lorenzo-Hernandez & Ouellette 1998);
- Attributing the group's perceived limitations to prejudice in society (Lorenzo-Hernandez & Ouellette 1998); and
- Denying that prejudice towards the minority group exists (Weinreich 1986, in Smith 1991).

The effects of threats to self-worth arising from majority versus minority conflict, individual discrimination, and the conflicting values of others, can be informed by a consideration of the cognitive buffers in interaction with SWB.

Optimism Cognitive Buffer

Optimism is linked to happiness, perseverance, achievement & health (Peterson 2000). The construct represents a positive view of the future and a conviction that contingencies in life can be successfully dealt with (Davern 2004). A positive outlook on life not only protects against depression, but provides the individual with the wherewithal to engage in positive, active behaviour that can include forming relationships with others, or obtaining external resources, such as adequate income (Cummins 2003). Thus, optimism enhances the probability of receiving

support for the homeostatic system via external resources (Figure 1, annotation 1).

The optimism control buffer has received the least research attention in relation to ethnic identity. Indirectly, relationships between ethnic identity and optimism could be considered in the context of religion. Belief in a higher power can reduce concerns about an unknown future (Grewal et al. 2004; Weisz, Rothbaum & Blackburn 1984), thereby protecting an individual's normal level of SWB. A challenge for researchers in this case is to determine the relationship between ethnic identity and religious beliefs and how they can contribute directly to a sense of optimism.

Summary of Ethnic Identity and the Cognitive Buffers

From this review it can be concluded that ethnic group identification clarifies one's sense of identity, and creates a sense of pride and self-worth. In relation to SWB the role of ethnic identity can be described as:

- Generally enhancing to the self-esteem cognitive buffer;
- A form of protection against negative aspects of ethnicity via the perceived control cognitive buffer; and
- Having some relationship with optimism that is yet to be fully explored.

Beyond the Cognitive Buffers

The relationship between ethnic identity and the cognitive buffers that help maintain an individual's SWB set point has been discussed. However, determining the precise contribution of ethnic identity to SWB is not a simple task. As Diener, Oishi and Lucas (2003) suggest, 'It seems reasonable, of course, to suggest that there are both universal and culture-specific causes of SWB. The empirical challenge is to identify these two types of variables and determine the degree to which universal needs are channeled by the culture' (Diener, Oishi & Lucas 2003:417).

One fruitful way of exploring the contributions of ethnic identity to SWB may be through the quality and nature of personal relationships. One of the main predictors of SWB is satisfying personal relationships with others. When people were asked to identify domains that would be included in their best imaginable lives, intimacy and good relationships with others featured most prominently (Mellor, Cummins & Loquet 1999).

Membership of a collective such as a family, ethnic group or a country creates a sense of personal identity, feelings of pride and self-respect (Davis 1999). As with other forms of belonging, a sense of

ethnic belonging serves to anchor the individual's relatedness to others in society (Smith 1991). The foundation on which a sense of ethnic belonging is based begins within the family when a child's earliest experiences include exposure to certain foods, smells, music, dance, clothing styles, sport, religious observances and the physical environment (Mack 1983). In later years, involvement in these activities, particularly in an ethnic group setting, can provide unique social contexts to satisfy a need for belonging (Vaughn et al. 1985), for it is through social interaction that a sense of connectedness is most likely to be obtained (Ang et al. 2006; Uliando 2004; Reis et al. 2000; Noble et al. 1999; Vaughn et al. 1985). It is the need for belonging and connectedness that drives the way in which ethnic identity is negotiated and applied in social settings (Ang et al. 2006; Noble et al. 1999).

Some forms of social involvement provide more enduring opportunities for attachment than others. For example, sporting activities can provide powerful opportunities for feeling connected. However, there is also a downside to this. A national study of SWB in Australia found that feeling connected through a sporting culture (for example, being part of a sporting team) has SWB benefits for younger age groups (18-25 years), but in later years, the level of SWB decreases as people lose the active sense of connection (Cummins 2006). This loss may be due to a number of influences including injury, illness or other commitments. In any event, it is clear that this type of involvement is a riskier form of attachment than that made in the context of a family.

Social and family relations have received some attention in the literature on ethnic identity. For example, Phinney & Chavira (1992) found that high levels of achieved ethnic identity and high self-esteem correlated with high levels of social and peer relations and family relations. While this is to be expected, the critical information, that has not so far been provided, is the extent to which these influences contribute unique variance to SWB.

The literature on personal relationships and ethnic identity can be summarized as follows:

- Good quality relationships act as an external buffer against the negative effects of life events, thereby contributing to the maintenance of SWB;
- Being part of a collective (family, friends, ethnic group, country) is one way of developing and maintaining personal relationships and feeling a sense of belonging;
- Social interaction provides the best opportunities to experience feelings of connectedness through personal relationships with others;
- Opportunities to develop and maintain personal relationships via social settings in which ethnic identity is salient is likely to represent an access-

ible and enduring path to identity and social belonging.

Measurement Issues - Ethnic Identity and SWB

This paper has identified two main areas where ethnic identity and SWB intersect. Through enhancement of the self esteem cognitive buffer in the homeostatic model of SWB, and potentially, through personal resources that are developed and maintained in ethnic-related social settings. Empirical work on personal relationships and the role of ethnic identity have received little attention in the literature but further exploration of these issues can only be undertaken if the methodological aspects of measuring both constructs are fully understood.

Importantly, the nature of the links between ethnic identity and SWB will depend on the level of abstraction at which SWB is measured. The global, whole of life perspective represents the most abstract level, while specific aspects of daily life represent the most concrete (Cummins 2005). At the abstract level, measures of SWB involve a single question requiring an individual to indicate their level of satisfaction with their life as a whole (Campbell, Converse & Rogers 1976). When asked this question, individuals in a Western population will usually report a level of life satisfaction that averages 75 on a zero to 100 scale (Cummins & Nistico 2001). Only around 4.4% of people report a life satisfaction level below 50 points (Cummins, Lau & Davern, 2008, in press).

While this single item has been shown to be a reliable and valid measure of SWB, single items are less robust measures than scales. Thus, the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) (International Wellbeing Group 2006) measures an individual's rating of their general sense of wellbeing across eight life domains; Standard of living, Personal health, Achieving in life, Personal safety, Community connectedness, Future security, Personal relationships and Spiritual/religious experience.

Causal variables that have demonstrated a relationship to SWB via the Personal Well-being Index (PWI) include:

- Gender – females tend to report higher levels of SWB than males (Cummins et al. 2003);
- Age – after 55 years, SWB ratings tend to increase (Cummins et al. 2003); and
- Income – low levels of income can have a negative effect on SWB (Cummins 2000).

Measures of ethnicity have also been included as a categorical/causal variable in the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index Survey (Cummins et al. 2003), a quarterly report that measures the SWB of Australians at a national level using the PWI. The ethnic re-

lated variables in the survey were based on citizenship, country of birth, and ethnic origin (Cummins et al. 2003). The results found no significant differences on any of the PWI life domains when tested against the ethnicity-related categories. Of most interest is the result for Personal Relationships as it is counterintuitive to claims in the literature regarding an achieved level of ethnic identity, group identification and membership and psychological wellbeing. However, these findings must be seen within the limitations of the study. Most important, only respondents fluent in English were recruited. This may well mean that, in a highly ethnically integrated culture like Australia, the people who have achieved this level of language competence regard themselves primarily as Australians, such that their ethnic identity plays a subsidiary role in their lives.

It is also notable that the ethnicity variables used in this study are presented at the highest unit of analysis; a single category representing a country. The lack of sub-levels, such as those available for age and gender, reduces the scope for detecting group-specific effects. Variables such as country of birth incorrectly imply a homogenous group. Unlike age and gender which are undeniably objective, ethnicity is best viewed as subjective, with various levels of salience. Phinney's (1989) developmental approach to measuring ethnic identity may provide a variable that is more meaningful for empirical analysis than a single uni-dimensional category.

The inability to detect ethnic based differences in PWI responses may also be attributed to the level of abstraction of the PWI. The broad nature of the life domain questions encourages responses based on an overall affective assessment of satisfaction with the domains (Davern 2004). Respondents do not normally incorporate into such judgments specific events or day to day social activities where ethnic identity may have been at its most salient, and where positive relationships with others may be experienced as a temporary rise in levels of SWB. This is not necessarily a limitation of the scale as it is a useful diagnostic tool for detecting ongoing psychological ill-being (Davern 2004). However, use of the PWI in isolation may not present the full picture regarding SWB and ethnic identity. While the PWI examines overall satisfaction with a particular life domain, measures that are more situation-specific can also be of value. Deci & Ryan's (2000) Self-determination Theory, based on the need for *autonomy*, *competence* and *relatedness*, can be used to explore the satisfaction of needs on a daily, single-item basis.

There is some conceptual overlap between the cognitive buffers of the homeostatic model and the three needs of Self-determination Theory. The description of the need for competence (Deci & Ryan 2000) can also be attributed to some aspects of the

control and self-esteem cognitive buffers. Such approaches to measurement, involving the daily, situation-specific determinants of emotional wellbeing, should be viewed as complementary to the more stable, global models of SWB (Diener 1996). This approach has been investigated further by Reis (2000) and Uliando (2004).

Using a Self-determination Theory approach, Uliando (2004) demonstrated that the fulfillment of psychological needs in daily activities is related to both fluctuating short term levels of SWB and long-term levels of SWB (based on assessments of satisfaction with 'life as a whole'). This study did not include ethnic identity as a variable but the combination of both situation-specific and more global measures of SWB in the one study suggests potential applications for the measurement of ethnic identity and SWB at similar multiple levels of abstraction. There is much research to be done in this area but the continuing growth of cultural diversity in many countries warrants a fresh approach to ethnic identity research; one that combines more meaningful measures of ethnic identity with the latest developments in SWB theory.

Further Research

This paper has highlighted several areas where further research could contribute to the current literature on SWB and ethnic identity:

- Determining the full extent of associations between ethnic identity and SWB;
- Exploring potential links between an achieved level of ethnic identity and the quality of personal relationships; and
- Exploring potential connections between ethnic identity, religion/spirituality and the homeostatic model of SWB.

Conclusion

Ethnic identity is one of many forms of social identity that individuals can use to recognise themselves, to create a positive sense of self, and to negotiate their social environment.

However, not everyone finds meaning in ethnicity as a social identity, even though their cultural lineage may entitle them to do so. For this reason, ethnic identity is best viewed empirically as an individual difference rather than a set of characteristics broadly attributed to an ethnic group.

The development and subsequent maintenance of an ethnic identity can be encouraged by such simple practices as consuming traditional ethnic food with others. This is important not only for the contribution it can make to higher levels of self-esteem, but also the potential to develop good quality relationships

and ultimately, assist in maintaining a sense of SWB overall. However, the relationship between ethnic identity and SWB can only be fully understood when ethnic identity is effectively conceptualized and the appropriate measures of SWB are applied. A greater

understanding of these issues is likely to assist in the development of appropriate and realistic social policies that meet the needs of immigrants, their successive generations, and be of benefit to multicultural societies overall.

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