

ACTIVITY 1.1

How to Measure Happiness

Concept

Review operational definitions with students by considering different ways to measure a very subjective concept like happiness. Students will look at different terms and sort them into ways of measuring in psychological research. This activity reinforces research methods and tools.

Units it could embed into

Research methods, psychology of emotions

Learning Targets

1. Students will understand the challenges associated with operationally defining psychological constructs.
2. Students will differentiate between subjective and objective measurement.
3. Students will be able to identify biological and behavioral indicators of happiness.

Materials

[Handout 1.1](#)

Time

10-20 minutes

Instructions

- Begin the activity by refreshing students' understanding of subjective and objective measurements. Teachers may also want to have a brief discussion about empirically measurements and operational definitions.
- In groups, or by themselves, have students read through the scenarios in the left-hand boxes on the handout and sort them into the appropriate category-- biological or behavioral variable, reports by others, or self-report. Then students make a checkmark in the boxes that they feel would provide the most accurate assessment of happiness.
- Engage students in a discussion about what makes a measurable variable and why happiness might be an easy or challenging topic to research.

Extension activities

- Have students search for studies in psychology that used tools to measure happiness and report their findings back to the class.
- Have students read through the article, "[How to Measure Happiness with Tests and Surveys](#)," from PositivePsychology.com. Have students create a T-chart to sort qualitative research and quantitative research. As students work through the article, have them list studies that fit into both categories (Sugay, 2020).

HANDOUT 1.1
How to Measure Happiness

Learning Targets

- 1. Students will understand the challenges associated with operationally defining psychological constructs.
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Measuring abstract concepts in science can be difficult, and happiness is very abstract. The interest in measuring psychological ideas has increased in the past 30 years. In this exercise, you will sort potential variables into the categories of measurement labeled below by checking a box.

	Biological Variable	Behavioral Variable	Reports By Other People	Self-Report
A person analyzes how they experience positive emotions and engage in daily tasks.				
The peripheral nervous system alters heart and breathing rhythms at the site of a loved one.				
After hearing a joke, a person’s Duchenne smile is measured.				
A teacher completes a worksheet that asks about the mood of his student.				
Corners of the mouth slope upward toward the ears after a song from your past is played.				
A partner completes a true-false series of questions on their significant other				
In anticipation of a fun event, the ventral tegmental area (VTA) releases dopamine.				

Make a checkmark next to the potential variables that you feel would provide the most accurate way(s) of measuring happiness. Explain why you feel that they are accurate.

When a variable is operationally defined, it is described in terms by which it can be observed and measured. Select one of the descriptions of happiness above and operationally define the variable.

ACTIVITY 1.2**Happiness Index****Concept**

Beginning in 2011, the United Nations has recognized happiness as a component of global well-being, publishing the results in the first Happiness Report in 2012. Students will investigate the six variables used to measure happiness, determine the strengths and limitations of the World Happiness Index, and consider variables for well-being in their own lives.

Units it could embed into

Social psychology, psychology of emotions, research methods

Learning Targets

1. Examine the six variables used by the United Nations to measure a country's happiness.
2. Analyze the validity and reliability used to measure happiness.
3. Look at international differences in happiness and determine the happiness strengths and limitations in your country.

Materials

[Handout 1.2](#), Internet access for research

Time

20-30 minutes; however, this activity could prompt excellent conversation and may extend beyond that time.

Instructions

- Students may work on this activity independently, but a group effort would offer better conversation and analysis.
- Provide students access to the [Handout 1.2](#). Invite students to consider how to measure the well-being of a nation. It may be beneficial to have a conversation about other factors that are used to rank how well a country is doing in comparison to others- gross national product (GNP), happy planet index (HPI), etc. For more information about these measures, review Andester's [article on "GDP Alternatives: 7 Ways to Measure a Country's Wealth"](#) on Ethical.net (2019).
- Students will review the "[Statistical Appendix for Chapter 2 of the World Happiness Report 2020](#)" (Helliwell et al., 2020). Then they will identify and describe the tools used to measure the six variables used to determine a country's ranking in the Happiness Index.
- Students will analyze the top 20 happiest counties for the year 2020.
- In step 4 on the handout, students will look at the variables for the index and examine the role these variables play in their own lives. After students answer the questions on the handout, encourage a group or class discussion.

Extension activities

- In groups or individually, students research a country on the 20 happiest countries list and report on the norms of the society that lead to a higher happiness score.
- In groups or individually, students analyze Hofstede's [cultural dimensions](#) (2011). Examine the intersection of the cultural dimensions and the variables used for the happiness index. Students can write an essay on the similarities, differences, strengths, and limitations for the descriptors.

References

- Andester, N. (2019, June 10). GDP Alternatives: 7 Ways to Measure a Country's Wealth. *Ethical.net*. <https://ethical.net/politics/gdp-alternatives-7-ways-to-measure-countries-wealth/>
- Helliwell, J.F., Huang, H., Wang, S. & Norton, M. (2020) *Statistical Appendix for Chapter 2 of the World Happiness Report 2020*. https://happiness-report.s3.amazonaws.com/2020/WHR20_Ch2-Statistical_Appendix.pdf
- Hofstede, G. (2011). *Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context*. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, Unit 2. <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/orpc/vol2/iss1/8>