

The Measurement of Subjective Well-Being:

Item Response Theory, Classical Test Theory,
and Multidimensional Item Response Theory

The concept of happiness and the good life has been a matter of discussion and interest for academics and laypeople. Aristotle, for example, considered happiness to be the end goal of almost everything we feel, think, and do. For his teacher, Plato, happiness was the highest aim of moral thinking and behavior which is reflected in a person's virtues (Greek *aretê*). For the past 35 years, modern science has conceptualized happiness as subjective well-being, which until today consists of an affective (positive and negative emotions) and a cognitive dimension (life satisfaction).

While methodological studies show that the affective and cognitive dimensions together constitute a person's happiness, ancient Greek philosophers and recent research suggest that harmony, a person's ability to maintain balance and calm in both happy and difficult times, is an important part of our sense of well-being. For instance, when people think of happiness, they first think of adjustment and balance and then about satisfaction and emotions. In this dissertation, I therefore propose harmony as a third dimension of subjective well-being—harmony consists of assessments of our own social behavior when we strive for acceptance, adaptation, and balance in life regardless of surrounding circumstances.

The purpose of my dissertation was to test whether subjective well-being can be measured as a three-dimensional model. In three studies I have examined the psychometric properties of each component of the three most common self-reports used to measure subjective well-being. My dissertation shows that subjective well-being has a three-dimensional structure that requires advanced statistical techniques to measure human happiness in a more reliable way. From a theoretical and empirical perspective, human happiness should be understood as the simultaneous experience of emotions, life satisfaction, and harmony in life. In other words, it is equally important to measure the parts as it is to measure the whole to understand the experience of happiness within the individual. This is because the subjective well-being dimensions function as an adaptive complex system with interdependent relationships between them. The awareness of this dynamic process can help clinicians and practitioners to understand why a person experiences life as meaningless or dissatisfied with their life even though, for example, they often experience positive emotions — perhaps the person experiences negative emotions regularly and lacks acceptance, adaptation, and balance in life, which affects her/his general experience of happiness. More importantly, since happiness is a dynamic interaction of affective assessments of our biological emotional reactions (the affective component), assessments of how satisfied we are with our lives (the cognitive component), and assessments of our social behavior in pursuit of harmony in life (the social component), interventions need to promote all components in order to help people to develop sustainable happiness, resilience, and an outlook of unity even amidst the current and future challenges of the twenty-first century.



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
PSYKOLOGISKA INSTITUTIONEN

ISBN: 978-91-8009-799-4 (Print) / 978-91-8009-800-7 (PDF) ISSN: 1101-718X
avhandling/Göteborgs universitet, Psykologiska inst. <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/71227>

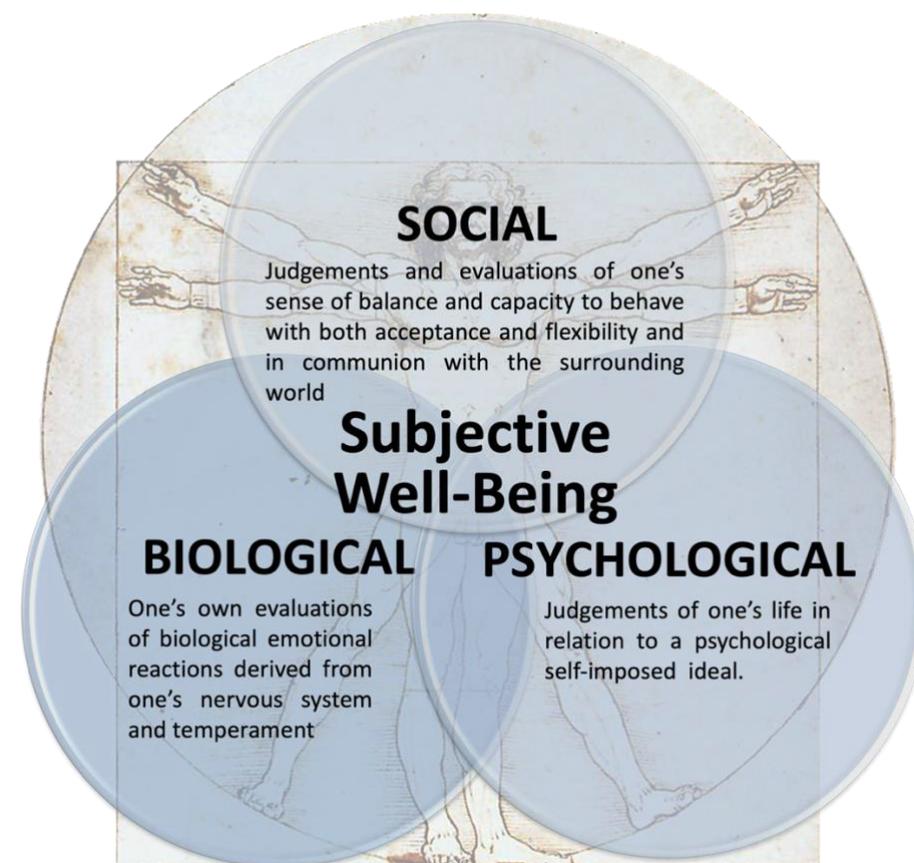
Ph.D. thesis

The Measurement of Subjective Well-Being: Item Response Theory,
Classical Test Theory, and Multidimensional Item Response Theory

Ali Al Nima

2022

The Measurement of Subjective Well-Being: Item Response Theory, Classical Test Theory, and Multidimensional Item Response Theory



Ali Al Nima

Department of Psychology

University of Gothenburg, 2022



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
PSYKOLOGISKA INSTITUTIONEN