Happiness Across Cultures: An Exploratory Study of Indonesian, Indian, and American Perspectives

Mutiah Rana Athifah[1]*, Gumgum Gumelar[2], Yufiarti[3]

[1,2,3]Faculty of Psychology, State University of Jakarta, Indonesia
e-mail: *mutiah.rana.athifah@mhs.unj.ac.id

Abstract / *Abstrak*

This study aims to explore the different perspectives on the conception of happiness of Indonesians, Indians, and Americans. This study employs an exploratory qualitative approach using thematic data analysis with NVivo 12. Using purposive sampling, individual interviews were conducted with 7 participants aged between 25 to 50 years old. This study discerns divergent themes in happiness among three cultures, with notable similarities between Indonesians and Indians. Both cultures exhibit a pronounced emphasis on social ties and personal development and achievement. Additionally, religious and spiritual practices, positive outlook, and self-expression consistently emerge as significant factors shaping happiness in these cultures. Despite these similarities, each culture showed different contexts. In contrast, Americans showcase distinctive themes, prioritizing nature-connectedness, exploration, and autonomy which includes self-reliance. These findings underscore the pivotal role of cultural context in shaping perspectives on happiness, emphasizing the necessity for culturally tailored interventions to enhance happiness across diverse populations.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi perspektif yang berbeda mengenai konsepsi kebahagiaan orang Indonesia, India, dan Amerika. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif eksploratori dengan analisis tematik menggunakan NVivo 12. Dengan menggunakan purposive sampling, wawancara individu dilakukan dengan 7 partisipan yang berusia antara 25 hingga 50 tahun. Penelitian ini melihat perbedaan tema-tema kebahagiaan di antara tiga budaya, dengan kesamaan yang mencolok antara orang Indonesia dan India. Kedua kelompok menunjukkan penekanan pada ikatan sosial dan pengembangan pribadi serta pencapaian. Selain itu, praktik keagamaan dan spiritual, pandangan positif, dan ekspresi diri secara konsisten muncul sebagai faktor penting yang membentuk kebahagiaan dalam budaya-budaya ini. Terlepas dari kesamaan ini, setiap budaya menunjukkan konteks yang berbeda. Sebaliknya, orang Amerika menampilkan tema yang sangat berbeda, memprioritaskan keterhubungan dengan alam, eksplorasi, dan otonomi, yang mencakup kemandirian. Temuan ini menggarisbawahi peran penting konteks budaya dalam membentuk perspektif tentang kebahagiaan, menekankan perlunya intervensi yang disesuaikan dengan budaya untuk meningkatkan kebahagiaan di berbagai populasi.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a noticeable surge in the theme of happiness, with its profound implications observed not only in empirical studies but also in the realms of international companies' initiatives and social media content. International corporations are initiating well-being and happiness programs as essential strategies to engage and retain their employees and customers worldwide (Gaston-Breton et al., 2021). Employee happiness is associated with

organizational commitment (Paul et al., 2020; Thompson & Bruk-Lee, 2021), productivity (DiMaria et al., 2020; Oswald et al., 2015), performance (Lester et al., 2022; Thompson & Bruk-Lee, 2021). This upswing reflects a growing recognition of the significance of happiness, not just as a personal experience but as a crucial factor influencing various facets of society. However, these initiatives have faced criticism for their monolithic view of happiness, often focusing solely on individual orientation and pleasure, overlooking collectivist values. A

study by Layous et al. (2013) underscores the cultural importance of planning activities to enhance happiness.

The concept of happiness is often misconstrued due to the absence of standardized definitions (Lambert et al., 2022). Diener (1984) conceptualized the term subjective well-being (SWB) for studies related to happiness (Oishi et al., 2013). SWB is abundant in individuals when they experience numerous positive emotions and fewer negative emotions, engage in engaging activities, encounter pleasure more than pain, and feel satisfied with their lives (Diener, 2000) Happiness is linked to various health conditions (Steptoe, 2019) and can serve as a protective factor against all causes of mortality (Martín-María et al., 2017). It is also associated with economics, as evidenced by economists' studies on happiness (Piekałkiewicz, 2017) and correlates with successful outcomes in the workplace (Pavot & Diener, 2004).

Scientific studies on happiness have experienced significant growth in the last 30 years. Cultures have been found to play a significant role in psychological aspects including happiness (Ogihara & Uchida, 2014; Steel et al., 2018; Ye et al., 2015). It also has been recognized to shape our perception of happiness (Joshanloo, 2014). Based on Hofstede's (in Oishi et al., 2013) cultural dimensions study, Notably, Indonesia and India exhibit high power distance, contrasting with the low score in the United States. Regarding individualism, Indonesia has a low score, while the United States has a very high score, and India falls in between. These cultural variations highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of happiness from these three countries, emphasizing the crucial role of cultural contexts in shaping perceptions and experiences of well-being across different societies as the concept of happiness remains challenging to grasp, especially concerning the cultural differences between Western and Eastern concepts of happiness.

This disparity arises because most happiness research has been guided by Western conceptualizations and relies on Western measurement tools (Joshanloo, 2014). Happiness in Western cultures, such as the United States, known as the most individualist country is associated with the pursuit of personal desires, driving economic growth and urbanization (Hofstede in Oishi et al., 2013). There exists a strong belief in self-reliance and autonomy,

shaping happiness in this culture as often construed in terms of personal achievements (Uchida et al., 2004). Previous studies have explored the differences in the concept of happiness between Western and Eastern cultures (Fave et al., 2016; Joshanloo, 2014).

Fundamental distinctions between Western and Eastern cultures have been identified (Joshanloo, 2014): (1) In Eastern cultures, happiness is associated with self-transcendence, eudaimonistic pursuits, harmony, contentment, valuing suffering, and the significance of spirituality and religion; (2) in Western cultures, the concept of happiness is linked to self-enhancement, hedonism, mastery, life satisfaction, avoiding suffering, and the relatively lesser importance of spirituality and religion.

In Indonesia, studies on happiness have been frequently explored quantitatively (Purwanti, 2022; Rahayu, 2016; Sohn, 2013; Solehah & Solichah, 2021). Qualitative research regarding the perspective of happiness in Indonesia has been less common. Maulana et al. (2018) investigated the Indonesian perspective of well-being and revealed the main themes: fulfillment of basic needs; social relations with family and community; and the positive world views of self-acceptance, gratitude, and spirituality as key aspects of well-being. When compared to the study from, Singh et al. (2022a) on subjective perceptions of happiness in India, the themes share similarities yet are distinctive at some point: feelings and expressions of happiness; human ties and happiness which encompassed four sub-themes—family bond, the company one keeps, the pandemic and social disengagement, and the nation, society and happiness; satisfaction with material needs and resources; lifestyle and health; work and play; accomplishment and appreciation; nature connectedness; religious and spiritual beliefs; and happiness as a personal responsibility—role of positive personality traits.

Indonesia and India, being nations rich in cultural diversity, require further exploration in research regarding the perspectives on happiness in these countries (Maulana et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2022a). This study aims to explore the different perspectives of happiness among people from Indonesia, India, and the United States—a representative of Western culture.

This study used qualitative approach, specifically thematic analysis, to examine the diverse concepts of happiness within Indonesia, India, and the United States. This method was chosen as it aligns with the constructivist

paradigm, which suggests that social reality is shaped by individual perspectives. Thematic analysis, as described by (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is known for its flexibility to accommodate various data types and research goals. It also allows researchers to actively identify and interpret themes based on their research questions (Maulana et al., 2018). The study's findings will contribute valuable insights to happiness-related studies and aid international organizations in developing programs and policies on happiness that consider cultural differences.

Method

This is an exploratory study across different cultures, using a qualitative method. This study involved selecting seven adult participants (age 25 – 50 years old) from three cultural background: Indonesia, India, United States (M_{age} = 30.5 years, SD = 8.14) as outlined in Table 1. Initially, convinience sampling was used and the selection of participants was based on their accessibility and willingness to take part.

Data for this study was gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted in November 2023. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom all participants using Bahasa Indonesia for Indonesian participants and English for Indian and American participants. Participants were asked to provide both written via docusign and verbal consent before the interview started. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were ensured.

Tabel 1
Participants characteristics

Initials	Characteristics
ASF	25 year-old; female; Bekasi, Indonesia; single; Master's degree; content writer;
DFA	28 year-old; male; Makassar, Indonesia; married; Bachelor degree; entrepreur
MSK	25 year-old; male; Guwahati, India; singlee; Bachelor degree; Software engineer
SJD	27 year-old; female; Amravati, India, single; Master's degree; software engineer
ZHA	29 year-old; male; Bangalore, India; single; Bachelor's degree; business analyst
GFT	30 year-old; male; Washington State, USA; single; high school diploma; traveller
WPA	50 year-old; female; Washington State, USA; married; high school diploma; manager

Note: sorted by age, gender, domicile/place of living, marital status, occupation

Table 2
Thematic analysis result for Indonesians

Main Themes	Sub-themes
Social ties	Family connectedness and support
	Serving to family
	Maintaining friendships
Development and Achievement	Achieving personal goals
	Shared-goals with others
	Goals toward future
Positive outlook	Gratitude
	Valuing struggle
Religious and spirituality	Faith
	Religious practices
Self-connection	Self-reflection
	Self-awareness
	Self-acceptance
Self-expression	Reading and writing
	Meditation

The interview questions explored the participants' perceptions of happiness, how their understanding of happiness has evolved, the factors influencing their happiness, their positive and negative life experiences, as well as their coping mechanisms and routines that contribute to their happiness. Additionally, participants were asked about their aspirations for a happier self and their suggestions for others seeking to enhance their happiness. Probing questions were employed as necessary to delve deeper into participants' responses. Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes.

NVivo 12 was used for thematic data analysis within inductive or data-driven approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). Six-phase of thematic data analysis as proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006) was followed. The first phase of this research involved a familiarization with the textual data collected, including transcripts and other pertinent materials. Subsequently, initial codes were generated, serving as the foundational elements for qualitative data analysis. These codes were created to capture significant features within the raw data and facilitate the identification of patterns and relationships.

The next phase was the transition from codes to potential themes, organizing and exploring the coded data to uncover meaningful patterns and relationships. This process allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the data, emphasizing the importance of coherent and internally consistent themes. A thematic review was conducted, during which emerging themes would be refined, ensuring internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. Following the

identification of refined themes, a meticulous process of definition and naming was undertaken. Each theme was carefully defined, and descriptive yet concise names were chosen to provide a direct overview of their meanings. Finally, the resulting thematic analysis report was produced, incorporating selected data quotations within a well-structured analytical framework.

Results

Indonesian Perspective of Happiness

Six main themes and fifteen sub-themes emerged from Indonesian participants as summarized in Table 2. Happiness revolves around strong social ties, development and achievement, a positive outlook, religious and spirituality, self-connection, and various forms of self-expression. Study by Rahayu (2016) and Sohn (2013) suggest that factors like education, employment, and income, which contribute to personal development and achievements, are also linked to happiness in Indonesia.

Moreover, Indonesians' development and achievement are not only related to individual goals but also shared goals with others, this is linked to Indonesia being one of the most collectivist society with the number of 95% on collectivism (Hofstede Insights, 2023). Supporting this view, happiness in Indonesia is also is linked to social ties and a positive outlook, consistent with the findings of Maulana et al. (2018) that emphasize the importance of social needs and optimistic perspectives in Indonesian happiness.

Recognizing the value of struggle, as a sub-theme of positive outlook, resonates with Islamic teachings. Indonesia, with the world's largest Muslim population, has 86.7% of its population dominated by Muslims (World Population Review, 2024), clearly reflects this alignment. In Islam, hardship is perceived as a divine test, requiring patience and reliance on God (Husain, 1998; Joshanloo, 2013). The faith's teachings also advocate that virtues such as patience and reliance on God can turn suffering into a form of blessing (Joshanloo, 2013; Watt, 1979) This is further explained by other emerging theme, religious and spirituality as happiness in Indonesia is associated with spirituality (Rostiana, 2020; Yuzarion et al., 2022)

Theme 1: Social ties

The first overarching theme is social ties which includes family connections and support, serving family, and maintaining friendships. Participants highlighted the joy they derive from social interactions and maintaining friendships. Regular gatherings or activities with friends energize them, offering a sense of positivity and support. They find happiness in both providing help and receiving support, particularly when friends share personal issues, as it fosters a deep sense of connection and support, "*Happiness for me is when comfort meets the right person. That's one of the definitions of happiness for me*" (DFA).

Happiness for the participants is also deeply intertwined with family bonds. They associate happiness with the comfort and support received from family members. Regular communication, sharing stories, and spending quality time with family, whether through watching movies together or engaging in discussions, form the core of their happiness. The mutual happiness shared among family members contributes significantly to their sense of contentment, "*like hanging out with my parents or with my siblings and then watch movies together or sometimes argue, but in a good way that is educational. And also to have a little family gathering, that is what I love the most. I think that's.. that's all.*" (ASF).

Another aspect that brings them happiness is the desire to contribute and give back to their parents or family members. They express a sense of fulfillment in wanting to provide something they haven't given before, acknowledging their responsibilities toward their family's happiness. For instance, "*I would also like to give something to my parents something I haven't. given before.*" (ASF). However, unfulfilled desires or unmet expectations in fulfilling these responsibilities can sometimes lead to introspection and feelings of sadness, "*…sometimes repetitive thoughts cross my mind, and it's common for me to sit and contemplate alone. I wonder how things could be like that, how to make it better. Sometimes, in those moments, I feel a bit sad.*" (DFA).

Theme 2: Development and Achievement

The second prevailing theme that emerged from the participants' discussions on happiness centered around the attainment of personal goals and ambitions. Finding happiness through personal achievements, whether big or small, was underscored as crucial to their overall sense of fulfillment. These accomplishments served as validation for their efforts and aspirations, contributing significantly to their happiness. For instance, "*And another thing about happiness is to me, it is when I achieve some sort of personal*

satisfaction, like achieving little small goals or achieving good grades, etc." (ASF).

Interestingly, collaborating on shared goals with others was identified as another contributor to happiness for male participant. Working collectively within a team or among friends toward a common objective and celebrating joint successes generated feelings of happiness and fulfillment. The camaraderie and cooperation among friends or within a team to accomplish shared goals significantly enhanced their overall sense of contentment and satisfaction. For instance, "*The team's effort really makes me happy. Especially when we have work goals that we can achieve well. I believe happiness will come too.*" (DFA).

At their core, participants find joy and satisfaction in pursuing and achieving personal and shared goals. These achievements, both individually and collectively, contributed significantly to their sense of satisfaction and well-being, validating their efforts and aspirations in various aspects of life. Moreover, setting future-oriented goals plays an important role in their happiness. Ranging from simple aspirations to more ambitious desires for advancement, for instance, "*There are still many things in my 28 years of life. I feel that there are still many things I can do in the future, many things I can gain, and many dreams and aspirations that I can still achieve.*" (DFA).

Theme 3: Positive Outlook

The participants' perspectives on happiness are also rooted in positive outlook which comes from gratitude. Expressing gratitude for the smallest moments and achievements emerges as a key aspect of their happiness. They acknowledge that happiness isn't solely found in grandeur but in the little things—small goals achieved, minor interactions, and even the simplest dreams. For instance, "*I just have to be grateful of the things that I have, of the things that I have achieved, of the things that are just not as fortunate I am.*" (ASF).

Interestingly, the participants also find happiness in moments of struggle or hardship. They value struggling and highlight the strength of family connections and relationships during challenging times, particularly during the pandemic, "*Well, Alhamdulillah, because of COVID-19, it's not just bringing negative things; indirectly, there are positive aspects too*." (DFA), "*Pandemic was horrible, but also, in that very moment I realized how happy I was to be able to*

be surrounded by my family during such a hard time." (ASF).

In essence, their positive outlook on life is deeply intertwined with their ability to find joy in gratitude, cherish moments of struggle as opportunities for growth, and embrace the lessons learned from struggle. These perspectives collectively contribute to their experiences of happiness and contentment.

Theme 4: Self-connection

The theme of self-connection was also emerged from the data, unveiling the participants' relationship with themselves. Self-reflection was expressed as a means of engaging in contemplation, allowing them to thoughts about things in life, "*I handled it by talking to myself, actually, reflecting about things in my life*" (ASF), "*Sometimes repetitive thoughts cross my mind, and it's common for me to sit and contemplate alone. I wonder how things could be like that, how to make it better. Sometimes, in those moments, I feel a bit sad*" (DFA).

Female participant showed self-awareness and highlighted the psychological effect of societal pressures, noting that failing to meet predefined benchmarks led to self-reproach and heightened mental health concerns. However, embracing self-acceptance emerged as a cornerstone, emphasizing that genuine happiness isn't contingent upon monumental ambitions or aligning with societal norms, "*you don't have to dream big to be able to be happy and you don't have to have or you don't have to chase other people's pace. just so you can feel happy about yourself.*" (ASF).

Theme 5: Religious and Spirituality

The participants also find their sense of happiness in their faith and spiritual beliefs. Their faith in a higher power or God, plays a fundamental role in shaping their understanding of happiness. They emphasize the importance of not giving up, even during challenging times, as they believe in the divine plan and the potential for success and blessings that may come in unexpected ways, "*…So, no matter how sad you are, never stop and give up on your dreams because we don't know at what time and what moment God has prepared beautiful things behind our sorrows and failures.*" (DFA).

Engaging in religious practices is also a source of happiness for them. For example: "*Reading Quran is actually very helpful to me. to make me feel relaxed, to make me feel more*

*conten*t" (ASF). Faith in a higher power and their commitment to religious practices are integral components that shape their understanding of happiness, providing them with guidance, comfort, and a sense of fulfillment in their journey through life.

Theme 6: Expressing Oneself
Self-expressions are different among gender. Female participant find immense joy and excitement in their hobbies of reading and writing. Writing, in various forms like personal essays, poetry, and short stories, serves as a means of self-expression and exploration for her. Through her writings, she navigate personal reflections and commentary on global events, finding satisfaction in the process of articulating her thoughts and perspectives, "*Usually personal essays. Sometimes I do poetry because I love writing poems. Sometimes I do also short stories…*" (ASF).

Meanwhile, male participant find happiness in practicing meditation, which involves maintaining a positive mindset: "*Meditation every morning or night, keep thinking positive. In the future, it will be like this, it will get better, even better*" (DFA). Despite this difference, both participants share a common thread in actively engaging with activities that bring them happiness, emphasizing the importance of personal fulfillment in different forms.

Indian Perspective of Happiness
Eight main themes and twenty sub-themes were emerged as summarized in Table 3. Happiness revolves around strong personal development and achievement, social ties, self-expression, positive outlook, balance of life, religious and spirituality, health and lifestyle, fulfillment of basic and material needs. In line with (Singh et al., 2022a) which emphasize the role of personal development, the importance of social connections like family and community, the satisfaction derived from fulfilling material needs, and the contribution of health, religious, and spiritual practices to overall happiness among Indians.

Similar to theme emerged from Indonesian culture, social ties, can be explained by how most societies outside the Western culture exhibit an interdependent self-construal (Kitayama et al., 2000), marked by a deep integration of individual identity within the family and broader social context (Maulana et al., 2018). The concept of quiescent harmony, characterized by a state of peaceful coexistence and contentment, is closely intertwined with the preservation of social norms in interdependent societies (Hitokoto & Uchida, 2014).

Personal development and achievement emerged from Indian participants in relation to professionalism and work. This can correlate with Lakshmanasamy's (2022) findings, which indicate that for individuals in India, life satisfaction is predominantly influenced by their income in comparison to others than by their own absolute income. Such workplace successes and the pursuit of personal goals may contribute to one's perception of relative success. If individuals measure their achievements against their peers, then personal development becomes not just a source of intrinsic satisfaction but also a way to maintain or improve their social standing, which according to Lakshmanasamy (2022), could significantly influence their life satisfaction.

Furthermore, the emphasis on personal growth and learning resonates with a competitive nature of society in India (Furnham, 1994). Individuals may be motivated to pursue lifelong learning and success by their competitive drive, as they aim to succeed not just for their own satisfaction but also to obtain an advantage in the social hierarchy.

Table 3
Thematic analysis result for Indians

Main Themes	Sub-themes
Personal Development and Achievement	Work
	Achieving goals
	Challenging oneself
	Continuous learning
	Consistency
Social ties	Relationship with others
	Family well-being and support
	Meeting family's expectations
Self-expression	Writing and journaling
	Sharing with others
Positive outlook	Gratitude
	Honesty
	Patience
	Valuing struggle
Balance of life	
Religious and spirituality	Faith
	Religious practices
Health and lifestyle	Maintaining a healthy life style
	Taking care of oneself
Fulfillment of basic and material needs	Food and place of living
	Compensation

Theme 1: Personal Development and Achievement

The first theme in the recent data from Indians evolves around the notion that personal development and achievement significantly contribute to happiness. Happiness is strongly associated with work for both female and male participants and involves helping each other with coworkers. For instance, "*I really love my job. I really do. And that's why I'm going to the office and do the work.*" (SJD), "*…what my co-worker faces is related to work is related to coding, software and all so solving their problem makes them happy and again I'm happy that I was able to solve their problem.*" (MSK).

Setting goals and achieving them also contribute to their happiness: "*I have set my goals for the next year, some of like related to my studies and related to my like certifications and all.*" (SJD)

Moreover, challenging oneself and continuous learning are essential components of their happiness. All participants emphasized this aspect as part of their lives. They find joy in challenging tasks and the process of learning something new, "*Learning something new makes me happy. Building something from scratch makes me happy.*" (MSK).

Consistency in pursuing their goals also emerges as a vital factor contributing to their happiness, "*So, my consistency gets connected to the happiness. I know that if I am consistent with achieving my goals, then there will be a day when I'll see the progress in my fitness journey or in my any journey for that matter.*" (ZHA).

Overall, work, achieving goals, continuous learning, challenging oneself, and maintaining consistency in pursuing goals play pivotal roles in contributing to the happiness of the participants.

Theme 2: Social Ties

Similar to findings from Indonesian perspectives, the participants from India emphasized the importance of maintaining relationships. However, this theme is not only in personal context, but also also professional. They emphasized the importance of building and maintaining relationships, indicating that it can be beneficial both personally and professionally: "*Relationships are important. Building a relationship is very important thing. Building a connections is also one of the thing that will be helping you in future … Because nobody knows when you will be needing that company or where*

that company will be needing you. So having a connections with your past members and your past companies is very important thing." (MSK).

Conscious behavior and positive interactions with others play a role in their happiness. They strive to ensure that they do not offend or upset anyone through their actions or words. For instance, "*… so I make sure that my words are pretty clear and they are not offensive. They don't get offended by any of my actions and not just by words.*" (ZHA).

Family's well-being and support also linked to happiness for both male and female from different parts of India. Participants emphasize the reciprocal happiness within their families, noting that their joy directly contributes to their family members' happiness and vice versa. For instance, "*Like if I am with my family now then like I believe that I am having a like calm and composed life. I am sharing my time with them. I'm sharing my problem with them*" (MSK).

Serving to family was also found in contributing to happiness among male participants. This can be reducing their burdens by helping with household chores, or striving to be successful in their careers to support their families better. For instance, "*…helping them in the kitchen or making their life easier basically. So these are some of the things that would make me feel happy.*" (ZHA), "*My pay should not be less because end of the day, I'll have to serve my family.*" (MSK).

The importance of relationship with others, family well-being and support, and servint to family emerges as a common thread among Indian participants, shedding light on the interconnected nature of relationships and their impact on individual happiness.

Theme 3: Self-expression

The participants, both female and male, underscored the habitual practice of writing and journaling as a means of self-expression, employing it as a valuable tool for obtaining insights and resolving issues, serving dual roles in both personal introspection and professional contexts. By documenting events, they analyze the root causes of challenges, enabling future decision-making. Digital journaling also serves as a tool for discipline and task accomplishment. They believe that writing down tasks significantly enhances their fulfillment. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of noting down not just successes but also areas for improvement, fostering personal growth. For

instance, "*journaling is one of the point that makes me understand why things didn't go as expected, what could be done better*" (MSK).

For female participant, expressing oneself is also involving others. For instance, "*So I just come up with the things which makes me happy. I go to the people, I talk to them. I'm really expressing my feelings*" (SJD).

Theme 4: Positive Outlook

Participants exhibit a positive outlook, emphasizing gratitude for their health and acknowledging the journey of facing challenges. They see obstacles as starting points and learning opportunities rather than setbacks. For instance, "*Facing challenges at work or while preparing for exams is like a starting point. It's not about being the only one facing difficulty. It's about learning and growing through these situations.*" (MSK).

They also value honesty and patience, both with oneself and others. They acknowledge that patience is crucial in achieving goals and maintaining perseverance. For instance, "*To be honest with yourself and others is essential.*" (ZHA), "*You have to pause yourself and you have to think that it takes time, whatever you are thinking, whatever your goals are. It takes time, but you have to be patient.*" (SJD)

Participants also find meaning in the struggle, highlighting that success after facing hardships provides deeper insight into the true essence of happiness and accomplishment. They recognize that even failures contribute to future successes and learning, "*But if we get a success after a lot of struggle, then you will be understanding the meaning of actual happiness and actual success.*" (MSK).

This demonstrates how they view challenges as opportunities for growth, valuing the journey and learning experiences, even when faced with setbacks or difficulties.

Theme 5: Balance of Life

Maintaining equilibrium across various aspects of life is vital for them. They emphasize the importance of balance, indicating that singular factors don't solely contribute to their happiness. Instead, it's about finding harmony across different areas, "*So everything has to be balanced. We can't say that only there is only one reason that will be making me happy, but things needs to be balanced.*" (MSK).

They also express a desire for better work-life balance, especially if they were to engage with companies that allow more flexibility. They value having sufficient free time to nurture personal interests, "*A great work-life balance if I would join any other company and it would be a startup then I would be more satisfied if I'm allowed to get more free time.*" (MSK).

Acknowledging the reality of demanding work schedules, they share the necessity of dedicating additional hours beyond the regular workday, "*Sometimes you are having a long day, you have to work after your work time also ... so it will skip some things which you have scheduled for the day. You have to skip them and you have to do work on weekends also sometimes.*" (SJD).

This demonstrates their awareness of the need for balance, particularly in managing work commitments alongside personal life, while expressing a desire for more flexibility to maintain this equilibrium.

Theme 6: Religious and Spirituality

Religious beliefs play a significant role in shaping their perspective during difficult times. One participant views challenging situations through a religious lens, believing that there's a divine reason behind hardships, ultimately leading to better outcomes, whether in this life or the afterlife, "*So whenever I'm sad I.. I look into the I look into This sad situation from a religious perspective. I know that The God has some reason for this particular situation to be bad. So there will be a time When it has to become good either. Sure, or in the afterlife so that we I try to console myself that yeah there is a time for it to become good.*" (ZHA).

Their religious practices are also integral to their daily lives. These rituals provide solace and instill a sense of happiness and positive energy, "*… I will feel very happy. I go to the temples and all.*" (SJD). Their faith and religious practices are pivotal in guiding their perspectives, providing comfort, and fostering positivity during challenging times.

Theme 7: Health and Lifestyle

The theme of health and lifestyle was also found both from female and male participants. All male participants emphasized the importance of good health and its impact on their ability to enjoy success. They adhere to a disciplined daily routine to ensure physical fitness, including waking up early, engaging in workouts, and following a healthy diet. For instance, "*I do have everyday goals such as waking up on a regular, like waking up at nine o'clock. then having a*

good breakfast, healthy breakfast. And I also make sure that I work out for at least 60 minutes a day. And make sure that I'm sleeping for about seven hours and having good sleep." (ZHA).

For female participant engaging in personal care routines, like makeup application, contributes to their happiness, "*When I woke up, I feel like I personally like to do the makeup and all. So it makes me happy in such a way*" (SJD). Prioritizing health and personal care routines emerged as vital elements for fostering overall well-being among the participants, regardless of gender.

Theme 8: Fulfillment of Basic and Material Needs

Fulfillment of basic needs and material well-being also crucial contributors to overall happiness among Indians. Participants expressed the significance of factors such as having a comfortable living space, access to good food, and the assurance of financial stability. For instance, "*First is, from a career standpoint, I would say I'm very satisfied that I'm earning good, I'm living in a good place.*" (ZHA). However, challenges related to privacy and accommodating guests were also acknowledged, "*I live in a rented house, so there are a lot of guests who keep arriving at home. To accommodate those guests, it's a little difficult. You have to give up your privacy.*" (ZHA).

Food also emerged as a significant factor influencing happiness, with participants expressing joy and contentment when enjoying good meals. Female participant emphasized the connection between food and happiness, stating "*Whenever I eat something very good, I feel very happy.*" (SJD). The importance of fair compensation was also underscored, for instance: "*it can be of my compensation*" and expressing a clear stance, "*My pay should not be less.*" (MSK).

This indicates that the fulfillment of basic needs, including a comfortable living environment, access to good food, and fair financial compensation, plays a pivotal role in contributing to the happiness of individuals.

American Perspective of Happiness

Five main themes and ten sub-themes emerged from American participants as summarized in Table 4. Happiness revolves around nature connectedness and exploration, autonomy, family dynamics and support, goals toward future, and experiential and creative pursuits resonate with Joshanloo's (2014) study regarding Western notions of self. According to Joshanloo (2014), Western ideals typically revolve around a fixed and independent self, actively seeking personal enhancement and fulfillment—a notion deeply embedded in the values of liberal individualism that elevate individual autonomy and self-guidance. Moreover, this cultural model often views the pursuit of happiness as a individual endeavor, underscoring individual success and emotional experiences.

These themes dovetail with the perspectives of Kitayama et al. (2000), who highlight that Western viewpoints, particularly in the United States, emphasize a self-concept of independence and self-sufficiency. Unlike Eastern cultural norms, this cultural model places significant value on personal accomplishments, abilities, and internal attributes.

Theme 1: Nature Connectedness and Exploration

The perspective of happiness for American participants is strongly related to a deep appreciation for nature and animals. Engaging in activities like photography during road trips to mountainous areas is a source of immense joy. Capturing the scenic beauty through photographs, particularly sunsets, is seen as a personal success and a source of happiness. Documenting the natural world, including the sky, plants, and animals, serves as a way to preserve cherished memories and appreciate the beauty of the environment. For instance, "*also I take pictures throughout the day of the sky and the plants and the animals and I like to do it because I like to preserve the memory and document what's around me.*" (GFT), "*I do also have a dog that is like my attached to my hip. And he's like the funniest, goofiest thing ever. He makes me happy.*" (WPA).

Happiness for younger participant involves exploring new environments and embracing unfamiliar territories. Traveling to different cities or countries allows for the discovery of new cultures, environments, and experiences firsthand. Visiting unexplored areas, meeting new people, and discovering unique aspects of various places through travel and exploration are significant contributors to their happiness. For instance, "*For me personally, it's trying new things, developing new interests, becoming visiting new and unfamiliar environments is what happiness means to me.*" (GFT). These two aspects form the essence of happiness by

fostering a deep connection with the natural world and embracing exploration and discovery.

Theme 2: Autonomy

The prevalent theme that surfaced from the data revolves autonomy. Independence is highlighted from younger participant, in a contrast between their inclinations towards exploration and the contentment observed in the majority who prefer staying within familiar territories, "*they don't have any desire to explore new places or see new cultures or see different parts of the world they're just content with staying there and they have other goals. I just I'm kind of uh um different than them.*" (GFT). Expressing skepticism about trusting others was also emphasized, "*learned not to trust people*" (GFT).

Beside independence, self-reliance emerged as a significant trait among both participants who cherish solitude. Spending substantial time alone, they value the freedom that comes with not relying on others, a sentiment echoed by the experience of handling life's challenges independently. For instance, "*because I didn't have to rely on other people for transportation and I could drive wherever I wanted*" (GFT).

For older participant, navigating through the uncertainties of divorce while single-handedly managing work, bills, and ensuring their children's well-being underscores their strong sense of self-reliance, "*…we went through a divorce and I didn't know what I was going to do. I didn't know how I was going to take care of my sons. I didn't know. I didn't know what was going to happen with us, and I did it. I went to work, I paid the bills, they always had food in their bellies. I did it, I made it.*" (WPA).

Table 4

Thematic analysis result for Americans

Main Themes	Sub-themes
Nature Connectedness and exploration	Appreciation for nature and animals
	Exploration of new places
Autonomy	Independence
	Self-reliance
Family Dynamics and Support	Shared-interest with family
	Family well-being and support
Goals toward future	Travelling
	Financial planning
Experiential and creative pursuits	Discovery of different environments
	Creating something new

Theme 3: Family well-being and support

The notion of family well-being and support was found across age. However, there are some distictions. For the younger participant, the joy of shared interests and family adventures emerged as a vital source of happiness, "*I always enjoyed going on I always enjoyed going on trips and road trips with my family like we went to Wyoming before my dad we used to go to Idaho every month no not every month every year my grandparents and I used to go to the ocean shores it's a coastal area of Washington where else we used to go camping my grandparents and I went to Crater Lake we went to Disneyland lots of times in California those are those are really nice happy memories for me because I've always since as far back as I can remember I've enjoyed traveling*" (GFT).

Conversely, the older participant highlights family well-being and support as the cornerstone of happiness. Such as finding joy in the achievements and kindness of their children, witnessing their milestones, and the positive moments in their lives deeply contributes to their sense of contentment. Additionally, the stability and kindness within their marriage and the support provided by their husband during challenging times significantly contribute to their happiness, "*..with the kids, when I see them.. have good achievements and set goals and make their goals. It makes me very happy. When I see them being kind and doing things for each other, it makes me happy. When I get a phone call out of the blue from one of them, it makes me happy*" (WPA). However, although this theme is still related to family, the context is different from what was found among Indonesians and Indians. This is further discussed in discussion section.

Theme 4: Goals Toward Future

The data highlights aspirations related to future goals, particularly in the realms of travel and financial planning, as contributors to happiness and fulfillment. However, this is different among different age. Younger individual expresses a strong desire to explore various destinations worldwide, setting a personal goal to visit numerous countries and cities they've never experienced. The anticipation of discovering new continents and cultures is aligned with their pursuit of happiness, "*My goals towards happiness is to visit new continents and countries I've never been to before*." (GFT).

Conversely, older participant emphasized the significance of financial planning in their

pursuit of happiness This endeavor is seen as not only a significant professional achievement but also a strategic step toward securing their fut.ure, ensuring financial stability for retirement, "*…we're buying the company. So that will happen within the next couple of years. So that's a big goal…*" (WPA).

In both instances, whether through the thrill of traveling and experiencing diverse cultures or through strategic financial planning and business endeavors, the pursuit of future goals is deeply intertwined with the pursuit of happiness.

Theme 5: Experiential and Creative Pursuits
This main theme derives from the sub themes of discovery of different envieroments and creating something new. Younger partitipant emphasized discovering of different environments as the notion of happiness, "*go to especially places that most people haven't been.*" (GFT).

On the other hand, older participant gets the enjoyment from creating something new like crochetting with yarn, "*I have my favorite hobby, and I do it almost every single night. I crochet with yarn. and I just finished a blanket that I made for my husband's mother.*" (WPA).

Although these two aspects are different, but they share a common thread in their pursuit of originality, demonstrating a preference for activities that set them apart from conventional or mainstream pursuits. Both individuals find their happiness in unique, less-trodden paths.

Discussions

The current study reveals distinctions in the emerged themes among different cultures. Although Indonesia and India are both Eastern cultures characterized by collective values and interdependence happiness (Hitokoto & Uchida, 2015), the identified themes exhibit similarities with nuanced differences. For instance, the subtle distinctions in the themes of social ties and relationships suggest that even within this cultural context, variations exist. Participants from both countries emphasize the importance of relationships with family and friends in shaping their happiness. However, the importance of professional relations emerged within the Indian context. This may be associated with other themes within this culture. For example, in development and achievement, Indian people strongly emphasized this within a professional context, such as acquiring certifications, completing tasks at work, and building something. This is in line

with previous study that work and accomplishment are sources of happiness among Indians (Singh et al., 2022a) Helping co-workers also was also emerged and is linked to previous study showing that Indians' motivation at work includes well-being of co-workers (Tripathi & Cervone, 2008)

Even in the theme of self-expression, the sub-theme of writing and journaling among Indians, especially males, involves the purpose of problem-solving and achieving tasks. The strong emphasis on work-related satisfaction among Indians in some themes may be influenced by cultural norms regarding professional success, as India is one of the countries with the highest rates of competitiveness in society (Furnham et al., 1994). However, this is accompanied by the emerged theme of balance of life, which shows that although Indians demonstrate strong professional development and achievement, they also express the need for a balance between life and work. This is an important note in the study of happiness among indians that work-life balance contributes to their happiness (Dhingra & Dhingra, 2021)

Indonesians, on the other hand, show stronger involvement of others for both male and female participants in several themes emerged in this research. Indonesians find happiness in social ties, particularly in family connectedness and support and maintaining friendships. Positive interactions with family and friends energize them, and the exchange of personal issues fosters a deep sense of connection and support. This finding supports study by Maulana et al. (2018) that relationship with family and friends is important for their well-being. More collectivist values are shown in the theme of development and achievement that not only achieving personal goals is important for their happiness but also shared-goals with others prominently from male participant. This may be linked with Indonesian being one of the most collectivist culture and when compared to India, Indonesia scored higher in collectivism (Hofstede in Oishi et al., 2013).

Both Indonesian and Indian participants, positive outlook such as gratitude and valuing struggle among Indonesians and gratitude, honesty, patience and valuing struggle among Indians emerged rather than among Americans. This may be associated with the theme of religious and spirituality from both cultures where strong religious teaching influence their perception of happiness. For instance, in Hinduism and Buddhism (Predominantly in India) there are teachings on contentment, mindfulness, and

optimum human functioning (Sanivarapu, 2016; Singh et al., 2022b).

Similarly, in Islam (predominant in Indonesia), concepts like gratitude (*shukr*), patience (*sabr*), and reliance on a higher power are integral to the faith (Chalmiers et al., 2023). In Islam, enduring hardship is seen as a test from God, necessitating both patience and dependence on God (Husain, 1998; Joshanloo, 2013). Islamic teachings also suggest that qualities like patience and trusting in God can transform suffering into a blessing (Joshanloo, 2013; Watt, 1979).

This Islamic context can also be an explanation of the emerged theme of valuing struggle. The concept of valuing struggle, as emerged from Indonesian participants, involves understanding and appreciating how difficult experiences contribute to personal development by recognizing and valuing the beneficial outcomes that emerge from confronting and surmounting challenges such as COVID-19. Valuing struggle can be analyzed as a response to social cultural conditions as this active valuing influences how individuals and communities shape their responses to life's challenges and their overall worldview (Steinert, 2023). Furthermore, considering that Indonesia is among the most collectivist nations based on Hofstede Insights (2023), appreciating struggle is frequently a shared experience in Indonesia, highlighting the nation's collectivist values.

On the other hand, Americans show distinctive themes emerged from the study. While Indonesians and Indians mentioned relationships with others as a vital source of their happiness, Americans show more personal experiences and independence happiness. This is aligned with their independence self-construal which greater emphasizes on personal accomplishments, abilities, and internal attributes (Kitayama et. al., 2000). According to Markus and Conner (2013), compared to individuals in East Asian or South Asian environments, people in American contexts typically exhibit an independent psychological profile—viewing themselves as distinct and autonomous, capable of impacting others and their surroundings, free from external control, and equal to or surpassing others. These characteristics have been illustrated by the themes emerging from American participants in this study.

Although Americans seem to also find joy in relationships with their nuclear family, it is not similar to Indonesians and Indians as for young american, happiness is derived from shared interests with family and for older American,

family achievements and milestones as sources of joy. This underscores the presence of individuality and an appreciation for others' individualism within this theme. Both Americans did not specifically mention the importance of maintaining friendships as a sub-theme that emerged among Indonesian and Indian cultures.

This absence then supported by the emerging theme of autonomy which includes independence and self-reliance. Unlike Indonesians and Indians, who seek the involvement of family when facing challenges or experiencing distress, Americans emphasized self-reliance and derive happiness from not having to depend on others for their happiness. This emphasis on autonomy resonates with the individualistic values commonly attributed to American culture, where the importance of self-sufficiency and personal agency is highly esteemed. This result is consistent with study by Uchida et al. (2004), which suggests that in Western cultures such as the United States, there is a significant emphasis on self-reliance and autonomy. Consequently, happiness in this context is frequently defined in relation to individual accomplishments rather than development and achievement which compasses personal and collective goals among Indonesians and Indians.

In essence, Indonesian and Indian cultures emphasize the involvement of others in several emerged themes, supporting previous studies that collectivist societies behaviors that promote collective efforts, teamwork, and shared responsibility contribute to social harmony and consequently to the well-being of the individuals (Joshanloo & Weijers, 2014; Sirgy, 2020). The cultural emphasis on individualism in the United States may lead to a greater diversity of themes and priorities in discussions about happiness as emotional experiences play a crucial role in influencing their judgments of life satisfaction than in collectivist cultures where cultural norms shape the way individuals in collectivist cultures evaluate their life satisfaction (Suh et al., 1998).

Development and achievement which emerged among Indians and Indonesians are different from future-oriented goals among Americans which shows more distinct personal values. This may be linked to the collectivist culture which is more likely to engage in social comparison and competition based on common standards, while those from individualistic cultures, such as the United States, may define their self-worth more based on individual standards (Wu & Talhelm, 2023). In relation, this

may explain why nature connectedness and exploration emerged strongly among Americans.

The research contributes valuable insights into the study of happiness by incorporating different cultural perspectives. It provides guidance for individuals seeking greater happiness and offers considerations for companies aiming to develop employee happiness programs. However, the study's sample size is limited, and as a result, it cannot comprehensively represent the overall perspectives of the three countries studied. Additionally, since happiness is a subjective individual evaluation, the background of individuals, such as gender, age, education, economic status, employment status, and marital aspects play crucial role in happiness studies (Batz & Tay, 2018; Blanchflower, 2021; Diener et al., 2018; Karabati et al., 2019; Perelli-Harris et al., 2019; Ray, 2022; Wang & Sohail, 2022). It is important to note that participants in this research are within the age range of 25-30 years, with only one participant aged 50. Future studies should consider age and background variations to obtain a comprehensive overview from diverse perspectives.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that there are discernible variations in the themes associated with happiness across three distinct cultures. Indonesians and Indians share a strong emphasis on social ties, personal development, and achievement, along with consistent factors such as religious practices, positive outlooks, and self-expression shaping happiness. Despite these simmilaritiea, each culture exhibits unique contextual nuances. In contrast, Americans exhibit distinctive themes, prioritizing nature-connectedness, exploration, and autonomy, emphasizing self-reliance. These findings emphasize the varying perceptions of happiness among individuals from different cultures, underscoring the critical need for interventions that are carefully adapted to the specific cultural nuances. Such tailored interventions are essential to effectively enhance happiness across diverse populations.

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