



Christianity and Positive Affect

Lufanna C. H. LAI

Counselling and Psychology Department, Hong Kong Shue Yan University,
Hong Kong, China
chlai@hksyu.edu

Abstract. This study aimed to examine the affective composition of Christians in terms of homeostatically protected mood (HPMood), comprising content, happy and excited. It is postulated that biblical teaching may have an enhancement effect on the affective aspect of Christians. Hence, it is predicted that the three positive affects of content, happy and excited are able to explain significant subjective wellbeing variance of them. By means of convenient sampling, 173 adult Christians in Hong Kong were recruited to participate in a survey by filling in a questionnaire. The result of multiple regression revealed that, among these three affects, only content was able to explain significant subjective wellbeing variance. The findings were discussed with reference to the affective circumplex model by Davern et al. (2007). Also, the implications and limitations of this study were discussed.

Keywords. Christianity, positive affect, homeostatically protected mood (HPMood), content, happy, excited, subjective wellbeing.

1 Introduction

1.1 Positive Affect and Subjective Wellbeing

Subjective wellbeing (SWB) is a broad term, referring to a person's overall sense of wellbeing, happiness, and life satisfaction. It is a subjective and personal concept, based on each person's own perceptions and feelings about their life (Cummins, 2018, 2010). According to Cummins (2010), SWB is dominated by homeostatically protected mood (HPMood). HPMood is a construct inspired by Russell (2003) and conceived as a neuro-physiologically generated affect comprised of a simple, constant, and non-reflective feeling (Cummins, 2010; Cummins & Wooden, 2014; Lai, 2021). The initial supportive evidence for the domination of subjective wellbeing (SWB) by HPMood was obtained from Davern et al. (2007), represented HPMood using three descriptive affects, namely, content, happy and excited. These positive affects were postulated to be the dominant constituents of SWB and were later confirmed by Blore et al. (2011) and Tomin and Cummins (2011). Moreover, the level of HPMood represents the SWB set-point for every individual, and it is this set-point that homeostasis strives to defend (Cummins & Wooden, 2014). Following on from this, SWB is characterized as stable and positive.

1.2 Positive Affect on Christians

Many studies report that religion and wellbeing are positively related (e.g., Hoverd & Sibley, 2013; Lai, 2021; Lai et al., 2018; Pholpirul, 2015). Among different religions in the world, Christianity is one of the major religions. According to statistics provided by the Pew Research Centre (2025), 31.1% of the world's population are Christians (est. 2,382,750,000). In other words, roughly one-in-three people worldwide are Christians. Concerning their wellbeing, some studies demonstrated that it is closely related to Christian faith (e.g., Lai, 2021; Lai & Wong-Ip, 2023; Lai & Lee, 2025; Perry, 1998). That is, the biblical teaching, it is postulated, may have an enhancement effect on the SWB of adherents. Some examples are cited. Christians are taught to rejoice evermore (1 Thessalonians 5:16). Also, it is advised that a merry heart doeth good like a medicine (Proverbs 17:22). Furthermore, it is stated that because of God, my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiced (Psalms 16:9). In this analogy, due to religious learning and practice, Christians are more likely to experience positive affect, which in turn contribute to their SWB.

In view of the above, the objectives of this study are twofold. Firstly, to examine the affective composition of Christians in terms of HPMood, represented by the positive affects of content, happy and excited. Secondly, to examine whether these three affects are able to explain significant SWB variance of Christians.

2 Methods

2.1 Participants

By means of convenient sampling, 173 adult Christians in Hong Kong were recruited to participate in a survey by filling in a questionnaire. The demographic information is that the samples were slightly dominated by females, middle-aged adults (36-45 years) and high-income group (HKD20,001 & above).

2.2 Measures

In this study, SWB was measured by the Personal Wellbeing Index (International Wellbeing Group, 2013). The scale comprises 8 items measuring satisfaction with eight life domains as: standard of living, health, achieving in life, relationships, safety, community-connectedness, future security and spirituality or religion. The reliability coefficient obtained in this study was 0.88.

The three affective indicators of HPMood - content, happy and excited, were measured by asking participants to indicate how each of them described their feelings when they thought about their life in general.

An 11-point end-defined scale was used for all items, for its advantages of response simplicity and scale sensitivity over 5 or 7-point Likert scales (Cummins, 2003).

3 Results

SPSS version 22.0 was used to screen and analyze data. The data were standardized onto a 0-100 scale according to Percentage Scale Maximum scores (%SM) (International Wellbeing Group 2013).

To examine the relative contribution of the three positive affects on SWB, multiple regression was used to analyze the data. Prior to running a multiple regression, several assumptions were tested. The ratio of cases to independent variables (IV) was assessed based on the rule of thumb: $N > 50 + 8m$ (Pallant, 2020). The number of cases required was 74, which was less than the number of participants ($N = 173$). Among the IVs, the values for tolerance and variance inflation were, respectively, well above 0.10 and below 10; and the bivariate correlations between all IVs were mostly below 0.70; hence, the assumption of multicollinearity was not violated (Pallant 2020). Furthermore, the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedacity of residuals were upheld by inspecting the residuals scatterplot and normal probability plot. The results are provided below:

Table 1: Regression Analyses for Positive Affects on SWB

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r</i>	β	<i>sr</i> ²	<i>R</i> ²
Excited	59.71	17.98	0.57***	0.83		0.56***
Happy	68.03	18.57	0.65***	0.11		
Content	69.60	18.69	0.74***	0.60***	0.13	
(SWB:DV)	66.83	13.00				

Model: Unique variability = 0.13; shared variability = 0.43; *** $p < .001$.

The result revealed that, among the three positive affects, only content was able to explain significant SWB variance (13%).

4 Discussion

This study aimed to examine the affective composition of Christians in terms of HPMood represented by the positive affects of content, happy and excited, as well as to examine whether these three affects are able to explain significant SWB variance of Christians. The result of multiple regression revealed that, among these three affects, while content (13%) was able to explain significant SWB variance, happy and excited failed to account for any significant variance. Such findings were discussed with reference to the affective circumplex model including 31 affective descriptors defined by two dimensions (vertical dimension: activated vs. deactivated; horizontal dimension: pleasant vs. unpleasant) (Davern et al., 2007, as cited in Lai, 2010)(see Figure 1). In this study, Davern collaborated with other researchers targeted at exploring the affective content of SWB. Hence, to conduct this study, thirty-one affect items were selected from literature. Based on these items, the affective circumplex model was produced by plotting their relative location with the utilization of CIRCUM programs (Browne, 1992; Fabrigar et al., 1997). These programs were able to provide an estimate of the polar angle between 0° and 360° for each of the affect items; thus, enabling them to be plotted on a circle. In this affective circumplex model, the affect item of pleased

was specified as the reference variable set at 0°, with the location of the other affect items estimated relative to this reference variable.

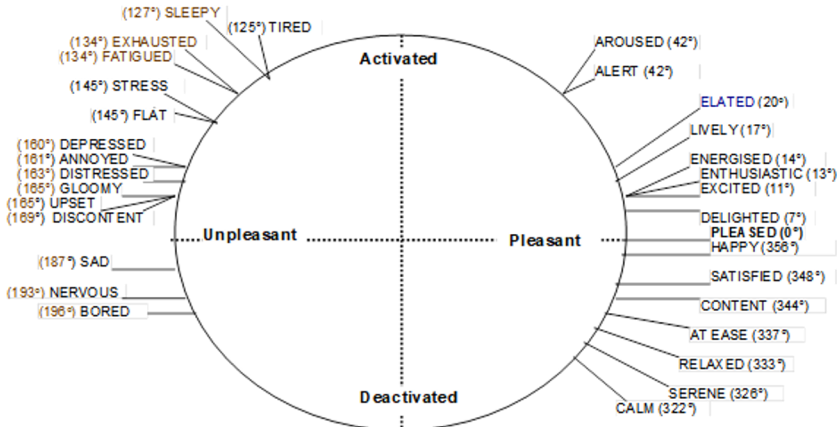


Figure 1: Affective Circumplex Model including 31 Affective Descriptors (Davern et al., 2007, as cited in Lai, 2010)

According to this model, content together with other affects like satisfied, at ease, relaxed, serene and calm were located in the pleasant-deactivated quadrant. The affect of excited was found to be situated in the pleasant-activated quadrant. Regarding the affect of happy, in spite of belonging to the pleasant-deactivated quadrant, it was very close to the pleasant-activated one.

In this study, the finding of only content explained significant SWB variance implies that Christianity learning and experience are more likely to nurture the pleasant-deactivated nature of affects. Hence, to better understand the affective composition of Christians, the affective indicators like satisfied, at ease, relaxed, serene, calm should be included in future studies.

The implication of this study is that, based on the above findings, as Christian faith is associated with the positive affect of content; Christian faith, it is inferred, may have a buffering effect on the wellbeing of Christians in facing life adversity. That is, Christian faith may serve as a kind of religious coping in face of life adversity, which in turn allow people to become more satisfied with the adverse situation. Let's say, to interpret life adversity as spiritual training of God such that one may feel more content with the situation (Lai, 2024; Lai & Lee, 2025).

5 Limitation and Conclusion

The limitation of this study is related to the use of convenience sampling and the relatively small sample size. Besides, by using the samples from Hong Kong China, the findings may perhaps have cultural relevance for the Asian population. However, in view of the issue of cultural differences and the concern of generalizability of findings, it seems necessary to replicate the study by using Western samples; as some studies have indicated that the Asians, compared with the Westerners, tend to be more restrained and reserved in reporting their feeling; thus, resulting in lower rating scores on self-evaluative scales (Lai et al., 2013; Lau et al. 2005; Lau et al. 2008). Hence, further study is warranted by using samples from Western countries.

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