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Charitable Organization for Sustainability Assessment

- ▶ Fraser Basin Council Sustainability Reporting

Chauvinism

- ▶ Ethnocentrism

Chauvinism and Religion

- ▶ Religion and Sexism

Cheerfulness

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Synonyms

Good spirits; Hilarity; Merriness

Definition

Cheerfulness denotes an individual's actual (as a mood state) or habitual (as a trait or temperament) disposition for amusement and laughter including seeing the bright side of life and taking adversity less seriously. Trait cheerfulness contributes to quality of life or overall well-being by enabling individuals to positive emotions and maintaining them in face of adversity, and longer lasting states of cheerfulness may be seen as element of well-being.

Description

Trait cheerfulness received theoretical and empirical attention by personality psychologists at the beginning of the last century. Meumann (1913) regarded cheerfulness as one of twelve basic temperaments equal to the well-known sanguine, choleric, or melancholic temperaments. Two dimensions were used to classify these temperaments: pleasure versus displeasure separated cheerful from (among others) serious and grumpy, and the dimension of shallow versus profound separated (among others) grumpy from cheerful and serious. Thus, cheerfulness is characterized by pleasure and profoundness. Later, Lersch (1962) did contrast cheerfulness and hilarity/merriment in his phenomenological approach. While both concepts share the elements of inner brightness, lightness, and relaxation, cheerfulness is more contemplative, pensive, profound, calm, and inward. Hilarity, however, was seen to be thoughtless, superficial, shallow, and outwardly directed. Young (1937) reported a positive relationship between retrospectively reported cheerful mood (i.e., state cheerfulness) and frequency of laughter during the last 24 h.

More recently, cheerfulness was examined in relation to amusement, smiling, and laughter. Ruch, Köhler and van Thriel (1996, 1997) distinguished between *trait cheerfulness* (as affect-based temperament presumably with a genetic basis) and *state cheerfulness* (as a transient mood) and suggested that both are needed to

account for individuals' readiness for positive emotions and laughter. Trait cheerfulness was used to describe the interindividual disposition (i.e., variations among people) for laughter, and amusement and state cheerfulness should account for the intraindividual variation (i.e., changes across situations). A reciprocal relationship was postulated as well (Ruch et al., 1996): laughter and positive emotions will, in turn, change the level of cheerfulness. In the past few years, cheerfulness was studied in the context of well-being. Correlations between cheerfulness and life satisfaction were established, and scientifically grounded training programs to enhance cheerfulness were designed and empirically evaluated (Hirsch, Junglas, Konradt, & Jonitz, 2010; McGhee, 2010; Papousek & Schulter, 2008, 2010) and the neuropsychology of cheerfulness was explored (Rapp, Wild, Erb, Rodden, Ruch, & Grodd, 2008) (for a review, see Ruch & Hofmann, 2012).

A structural model was put forward and tested in which both state and trait cheerfulness were operationalized with the help of facets. The "state-trait model of cheerfulness" suggests that trait cheerfulness is composed of five intercorrelated components, namely, a prevalence of cheerful mood, a low threshold for smiling and laughter, a composed view of adverse life circumstances, a broad range of active elicitors of cheerfulness and smiling or laughter, and a generally cheerful interaction style. While overall trait cheerfulness is treated as a unidimensional concept, at a more specific level, the distinction of the components of cheerfulness and hilarity (as sketched earlier by Lersch) is possible. Likewise, state cheerfulness is defined by the presence of a cheerful mood state, which is tranquil and composed, as well as by the presence of hilarity, which is a merry mood state, shallow and outwardly directed. The functional independence of these two highly correlated components of state cheerfulness was established through prior studies which involved the playful induction of different forms of positive mood (e.g., via guided imagery tasks, created situations of different affective value, jokes and cartoons, funny videos, humorous interactions) and the assessment of the resulting mood state via

a comprehensive set of words relating to cheerfulness as a state.

The Measurement of Cheerfulness as Trait and State

The State-Trait-Cheerfulness-Inventory (STCI; Ruch et al., 1996, 1997) provides a reliable, valid, and economical assessment of cheerfulness as a trait and as a state. It was developed pursuing a rational-theoretical construction strategy. In addition to cheerfulness, the STCI measures also seriousness and bad mood as states (STCI-S) and traits (STCI-T). The STCI is available in different versions for children, youth, and for adults, and several language versions exist (e.g., Chinese, English, German, Spanish). For the assessment of cheerfulness as a trait (STCI-T), short and long form exist for both self and peer report. The STCI-S assesses state cheerfulness as a current mood state, but also forms exist to describe predominant mood states of the last week, last month, or last year. All versions use a 4-point answer format (strongly disagree to strongly agree).

Psychometric Characteristics

Application of various forms of the STCI shows that the psychometric properties of the scales are satisfactory and replicable across countries. For example, Cronbach Alpha coefficients for the cheerfulness scale turned out to be high in different samples (.92 to .94 for the STCI-T and .93 to .94 for the STCI-S). Furthermore, trait cheerfulness is relatively stable for short time intervals (retest-reliability of .84 for a period of 1 month); the transient nature of states is underscored by the low coefficient (.33) obtained for state cheerfulness. The STCI-S is sensitive to changes in the environment (Ruch & Zweyer, 2001). Pre-post differences in level of state cheerfulness were found for experimental conditions with varying stimuli (ranging from serious to humorous), social situations, different type of interactions, sessions of a humor

training program, and clown interventions, but also pharmacological conditions (laughing gas, kava-kava).

There are no gender differences in trait cheerfulness and in general, cheerfulness remains stable across the life span. However, for one of the components (“composed view of adverse life circumstances”), a steady increase can be found after the age of 40; people seem to adopt a more lighthearted view of the adversities they encounter in life and this tendency increases even more after the age of 60 years. Using self-report and peer report (three friends filled in the peer version of the STCI-T) data on the STCI-T, but also and aggregated state data (STCI-S administered on 8 successive days). Carretero-Dios, Eid, and Ruch (2011) found very high convergent and discriminant validity for the scales of the different versions of the STCI. This is notable as trait cheerfulness is a socially desirable trait.

Cheerfulness and Its Relation to Amusement and Laughter

Every person is in a cheerful state now and then; however, experiments demonstrate that high the trait cheerful differ from the low trait cheerful with respect to frequency, threshold, intensity, and duration of state cheerfulness (Ruch & Köhler, 2007). Most importantly, trait cheerful individuals seem to have enhanced thresholds for antagonistic states; i.e., it takes more powerful stimuli and interventions to bring them out of cheerful mood. Several experiments show that trait cheerful individuals “keep their humor” when facing adverse situations (e.g., when having to elaborate on negative proverbs; when having to work in a dark, badly lit, depressing room; Ruch & Köhler, 2007), while low trait cheerful people lose their humor and get grumpy or sullen; i.e., the cheerful states of high trait cheerful individuals are more robust. When in a low cheerful state, high trait cheerful people regain a cheerful mood faster than low trait cheerful individuals do.

Furthermore, there is ample evidence that both state and trait cheerfulness are predictors of

laughter and the intensity of positive affect (Ruch & Köhler, 2007). Experiments confirm that only individuals in a high cheerful mood smile and laugh more often to jokes in social situations, and the laughter of an instructed model is only contagious for them. Trait cheerful individuals are more likely to laugh than individuals low in trait cheerfulness when involved in a clownesque interview, inhaling nitrous oxide, or watching funny films, and cheerful individuals recall an amusing event more quickly than low trait cheerful individuals (Ruch, 1997).

The Role of Cheerfulness in Humor

The robustness of cheerful mood found among trait cheerful individuals suggests that trait cheerfulness and the “sense of humor” overlap conceptually. Indeed, cheerfulness as trait and state explains individual differences in readiness for amusement and predicts affect-based humor behavior like smile and laughter. Furthermore, it also accounts for a variety of phenomena, such as appreciation of types of humor, quantity of humor production, keeping or losing humor when facing adversity, and it has been shown to be a moderator to stress just. Finally, the STCI-T was shown to correlate substantially with various inventories measuring “sense of humor” and also with behavioral measures of humor. For example, factor analysis revealed that the available sense of humor scales and the facets of cheerfulness merge in a potent factor that comprises elements, such as a prevalent cheerful mood, smiling and laughter, coping humor and cheerful composedness, humor under stress, laughing at yourself, initiating humor, enjoyment of humor, verbal humor, finding humor in everyday life, socially warm humor, and a positive attitude to things being related to cheerfulness and playfulness (Ruch, 2008). This finding suggests that current measures of “sense of humor” actually account for cheerfulness rather than for humor. Nevertheless, cheerfulness should not be equated to the “sense of humor.” For example, as it is a unipolar construct, its low

pole can only partially account for the phenomena typically subsumed under “humorlessness.”

Cheerfulness and Quality of Life

Cheerfulness as state and trait as personal resources contribute to the quality of life in two ways, namely, through bringing about positive affect and helping to maintain it when facing adversity. Thus, a “hilarity pathway” describes how funny and playfully processed incongruities lead to positive emotion and laughter. Here positive affect is induced by a positive situation. In the “cheerful composure pathway” (akin to resilience), trait cheerfulness is an antagonist to the effects of adversity on mood level and emotion, a part of a psychological immune system that helps as a puffer against adversity. Prior research has shown that high trait cheerful individuals do not only cope better with experimentally induced adversity, but also with stress in everyday life; they use healthier coping strategies, such as relaxation to deal with stress, than low trait cheerful people. Moreover, high trait cheerful persons report less psychosomatic disturbances such as headache, tonicity, or Cardiac and Circulatory Troubles and react differently to experimentally induced pain (Ruch, 2008; Ruch & Köhler, 2007; Ruch & Zwyer, 2001). Trait cheerfulness is a predictor of satisfaction with life among children as early as in the ages between 10 and 14 years, it is positively related to the life of pleasure (but also to a minor extent to life of engagement and meaning). Trait cheerfulness predicts life satisfaction even when the effects of the three orientations to happiness are being controlled for, and it predicts a variety of positive outcomes in research as diverse as education, mental health, and perceived physical health.

Discussion

While cheerfulness has been related to different indicators of well-being as comprehensive study linking its components (hilarity, cheerful

composedness) to quality of life is still missing. Also long-term studies of the effects of cheerfulness are not yet conducted. Intervention studies do show that there is an impact on state but also (in the short term range) on trait cheerfulness. Cheerfulness should be studied in connection with seriousness, as playful cheerfulness and serious cheerfulness will yield different outcomes. Long-term cheerful mood state might also serve as one indicator of quality of life.

Cross-References

- ▶ Education
- ▶ Happiness
- ▶ Health
- ▶ Life satisfaction
- ▶ Quality of Life
- ▶ Self-Reported Health
- ▶ Well-Being

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