What “wellbeing” means and how it feels vary across cultures (e.g., Delie Faye et al., 2011) and different mechanisms to achieve wellbeing across cultures (e.g., Kang et al., 2003; Uchida et al., 2008).

Issues Remain …

? Non-western, “wellbeing”-like concepts have been overlooked

? The issue of Eurocentric wellbeing, and more broadly positive psychology, model (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008)

Purpose: to inductively theorize ikigai among Japanese students

1. Background

Cross-Cultural Studies on Wellbeing

- What “wellbeing” means and how it feels vary across cultures (e.g., Delie Faye et al., 2011)
- Different mechanisms to achieve wellbeing across cultures (e.g., Kang et al., 2003; Uchida et al., 2008)

2. Literature Review

Ikigai in Japan

- Roughly translated into “purpose in life” or “a life worth living” (Mathews, 1996)
- Different meaning from “happiness” in Japanese or shiawase (Kumano, in press)
- Predicts positive outcomes including longevity (Tanno et al., 2009)
- Attention from Western psychologists

- The notion of ikigai is a good reminder to positive psychologists in the United States that our science should not simply be an export business. There are lessons to be learned in all cultures about what makes life worth living, and no language has a monopoly on the vocabulary for describing the good life. (C. Peterson, 2008)

3. Methods

Overall Research Design: Sequential Mixed Methods (QUAL → QUAN)

- Grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015)
- Photo-elicitation interviews (Tinkler, 2013)
  - Max 10 ikigai pictures
  - Grouping and ranking pictures
  - Coding transcripts (106 mins avg.)
  - Memo-writing and other analytic techniques
- Final data characteristics:
  - 27 Japanese university students
  - 243 pictures
  - 1,293-page transcripts
  - 496 codes
  - 136 memos

4. Results

Keiken (Valued Experience) Based Theory of Ikigai

“I think that ikigai is related to experience. If I have experienced different things, they would have become my ikigai. And [ikigai] is to cherish what I have experienced so far.”

Experiential Processes toward Ikigai

- Value experience: to engage with one of four experience values: enjoyment, effort, stimuli, and comfort
- Value diversification: to engage with multiple experience values at a time
- Value balance: to balance competing values (e.g., enjoyment vs. effort)
- Value disengagement: to take a break from overwhelming experiences to regain energy

Ikigai States

- Life affirmation: the perception that one’s daily life is worth living
- Life vibrancy: the perception that one’s daily life is full of energy and motivation

Conditions of Ikigai

- Action: one’s ability to act on opportunities for potentially valuable experiences without hesitation
- Value understanding: an understanding of what type(s) of experiences makes one’s current life worthier

5. Discussion

A mixture of hedonic and eudaimonic values as the core of ikigai pursuit (Huta & Ryan, 2010)

- A diversity of, and balance among, hedonic and eudaimonic experiences
- The two ikigai states resemble some existing constructs

- Life affirmation and significance within the tripartite model of meaning in life (Martela & Steger, 2016)
- Life vibrancy and subjective vitality (Ryan & Frederick, 1997)

However, our ikigai theory shifts attention from psychological states of inner being to perceptions of one’s immediate life

6. Future Research & Implications

Future Research Directions

- Quantitative test of the current grounded theory
- Cross-cultural applications of our model
  - Does ikigai apply to non-Japanese people and cultures?
- Intervention studies to enhance people’s ikigai perception
  - Also to test causality in this theory

Practical Implications

- Design campus recreation programs that are conducive to multiple experience values
- Experiential interventions for students with mental health issues
  - From analyzing one’s mind to studying and changing one’s daily life