

D

Diener, Ed



Ed Diener
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,
Urbana-Champaign, IL, USA

Personal Life and Educational Background

Born 1946, Ed Diener grew up on a California tomato and cotton farm. In his youth he raised horses, cattle, cotton, and sugar beets. Diener dropped out of his agriculture major at California State University at Fresno when he found that psychology courses fascinated and enthused him, compared to the study of weeds and seeds. Professors such as Wayne Holder and Alan Button were both funny and very interesting. Although Diener attempted to study happiness for his undergraduate research project, the professor told him that measuring it is impossible. Thus, Diener studied aggression and deindividuation in his early career and only turned to the study of happiness after receiving tenure. Diener attended the University of Washington in Seattle for his doctoral degree, studying with Professors Ron Smith, Irwin Sarason, and Scott Fraser.

Diener and his wife, Carol, started dating at age 16 in high school and then married while attending college together. Early in life Ed was a sensation seeker, doing things such as climbing the Golden Gate Bridge, taking his family down the

Amazon in a canoe, and serving as an expert witness in South Africa for rioters who had killed a police informant. He settled down at age 55. Diener was the Administrator of Tulare View Mental Hospital after college and before returning to graduate school. During graduate school the Dieners had twin daughters and a third child, Robert. Marissa is a developmental psychologist at the University of Utah; her twin, Mary Beth Diener McGavran, is a clinical psychologist at the University of Kentucky; and Robert Biswas-Diener runs Positive Acorn, a consulting and coach-training enterprise. The Dieners adopted two daughters (Kia and Susan), who live and work in Illinois. The Dieners have 12 grandkids, and none seem inclined to go into psychology.

Professional Career

Although Diener's first professorship offer came from Harvard, he went instead to the University of Illinois, where his wife was admitted to the doctoral clinical psychology program. Although he regretted turning down such a prestigious institution as Harvard, Illinois turned out to be wonderful for him. It was a cooperative atmosphere with excellent colleagues where he learned a great deal from other professors and his students. He remained at Illinois for his entire career until he became Emeritus there and then accepted professorships at the universities of Utah and Virginia. He also served as a senior scientist for the Gallup

Organization throughout much of his career, and this was very helpful for his research because it allowed access to Gallup data such as the Gallup World Poll.

During his career Diener was the president of several scientific societies, as well as winning numerous distinguished scientist awards. He is one of the most highly cited psychologists in the world. At the end of 2018, Diener had about 400 publications and a citation count of 180,000, primarily for his work on subjective well-being. He is one of the most published authors in journals such as *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and *Psychological Science*. Diener received honorary doctorates from several universities, and Fellow status in a number of scientific societies, as well as election to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In addition to awards for scientific merit and service, Diener received several recognitions for teaching, including for involving undergraduates in his research program. Diener was the associate editor and editor of *JPSP*, as well as being the founding editor of *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, and a co-founding editor of *Journal of Happiness Studies*.

During his career, Ed Diener has been privileged to work with distinguished colleagues such as Daniel Kahneman, Martin E. P. Seligman, Michael Eid, David Myers, and Lesley Lutes. He has also profited greatly from his collaborations with his outstanding postdoctoral students and two-dozen doctoral students. Diener worked and published with his wife, Carol; daughters, Marissa and Mary Beth; and son, Robert. With Robert he published a popular book on well-being and also studied well-being in a number of “exotic” cultures such as the Amish, Masai, Inuit, and sex workers and the homeless in Calcutta.

Research Interests

Diener’s interests in the causes of well-being include personality, income, culture, social relationships, attitudes, religion, and other factors. Diener frequently studied the association of income and well-being, discovering “declining

marginal utility” – that income has large effects on subjective well-being lower on the income ladder, but decreasing effects as one climbs in income, and perhaps eventually even reversing so that additional income becomes negative. Diener found that materialism is generally inversely related to well-being. A strong finding is that national levels of income are highly correlated with the average life satisfaction in countries, but this is much less true of positive and negative affect.

Diener studied well-being at three levels: individual differences (the standard level), societal and group differences (such as culture), and situational differences (some situations tend for most people to be more positive than other situations).

Diener found that culture also can strongly influence well-being. For example, the strong levels of social support found in Latin American cultures seem to produce higher levels of enjoyment of life than would be predicted based on economic development alone. Beyond examining common influences on well-being such as social support and the meeting of basic needs, Diener also studied more intricate questions. For example, he studied the differences in the causes of well-being across cultures. With his daughter, Marissa Diener, he found that self-esteem is a strong predictor of life satisfaction in individualistic cultures but much less so in collectivistic cultures. This finding led to numerous studies on differences in the causes of well-being across cultures and age groups. In addition, he studied what feelings universally represent well-being across cultures, as well as the feelings that are associated with well-being more in some cultures than in others.

A basic challenge for Diener in his early work was to define “happiness,” understand whether it is one thing or many, and develop valid measures of it. He did seminal work establishing the separate dimensions of subjective well-being such as life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect – showing that “happiness” is not a single entity. He created a number of measurement scales to assess facets of well-being, which are available on his website (eddiener.com). For example, Diener’s highly cited Satisfaction with

Life Scale (SWLS) assesses people's appraisals of their lives overall, his Flourishing Scale measures both subjective and eudemonic forms of well-being, and his Scale of Positive and Negative Emotions (SPANE) assesses both positive and negative feelings in a general way that attempts to give a good representation of the emotions in various cultures and age groups. Diener's website also contains downloadable versions of his publications and PowerPoints of some of his presentations.

Many of Diener's publications concern validating the well-being self-report survey measures, for example, by determining how they converge with nonself-report measures. He was a pioneer in using experience-sampling and informant-reports to measure well-being, as well as memory measures to assess it. Diener extensively studied the biases that might influence the self-report measures and how to control them. He authored and co-authored three influential *Psychological Bulletin* reviews (1984, 1999, and 2005), as well as several *American Psychologist* articles on topics such as national accounts of well-being for policy purposes.

One of Diener's largest contributions in the twenty-first century was to discover that subjective well-being does not just feel good but has a beneficial influence on health and longevity, supportive social relationships, and citizenship. In both reviews and empirical work, Diener has shown that people with positive well-being are better employees. For example, soldiers high in well-being are much more likely to win both service and heroism awards. Furthermore, he established that happy young people tend on average to go on to earn higher incomes, controlling for other possible explanatory factors. Diener has shown that happy people appraise their own lives positively, but this does not mean they are less concerned about societal and human problems. In fact, Diener's work shows that happy people tend to be more involved not only in activities such as volunteer work but also are more likely to get involved in social action work to cure societal problems.

Diener helped establish that "positivity bias" is a universal human property. Except for very bad

circumstances, people tend to have a predisposition for mild or moderate positive feelings and tend to evaluate things in a positive direction. However, he also found that being intensely happy is not a prerequisite for happiness in achievement domains – moderately high well-being seems sufficient or even superior. This is consistent with the idea that although positive long-term levels of emotions are helpful, occasional negative feelings can be adaptive as well. Along with colleagues such as Andrew Clark and Richard Lucas, Diener showed that people do not invariably adapt to all circumstances, thus calling into question strong forms of the "hedonic treadmill" idea.

Diener has worked to establish national accounts of well-being so that policy makers can consider psychosocial well-being as well as economic and other factors when debating policy and program alternatives. Nations such as the United Kingdom and others are now adopting well-being measures for policy. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, which helps coordinate statistics collection between many major nations in the world, has made recommendations regarding the national accounts of well-being, and the United Nations adopted a resolution calling for governments to consider well-being when formulating policies. Economists and those in other disciplines are now frequently using happiness measures in analyzing policy alternatives.

Beyond studying causes of well-being such as societal factors and income, Diener also studied how people's outlook (e.g., attention, interpretation, and memories of events) influences their well-being. This led him and his wife, Carol, to develop an intervention to increase well-being. The ENHANCE intervention has lessons in areas such as social skills, mindfulness, handling negative events and stress, and using one's personal strengths. Findings from randomized controlled trial studies suggest that not only do the interventions raise subjective well-being, but they can also improve health and cognitive functioning. One form of the intervention is web-based, with weekly lessons and assessments, and the other is App-based for mobile devices,

which offers daily lessons. Going beyond general populations, the ENHANCE program also has versions targeting specific groups such as people coming to counseling. ENHANCE is not meant to replace therapy in most cases, but to supplement it, although for some subclinical problems it may be useful by itself.

In addition to the projects above, the Dieners have been involved in other activities and philanthropy. For instance, their charitable gifts created midcareer awards in both Personality and Social Psychology, awarded by the Society of Personality and Social Psychology. With their son, Robert, and the generous funding from the Frank C. Diener Foundation, the Dieners have created and funded a free psychology textbook and educational website, Nobaproject.com, as well as created ENHANCE.

References

- Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin*, *95*, 542–575.
- Diener, E. (2000). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness, and a proposal for a national index. *American Psychologist*, *55*, 34–43.
- Diener, E. (2009a). *The science of well-being: The collected works of Ed Diener* (Social indicators research series, Vol. 37). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Diener, E. (2009b). *Culture and well-being: The collected works of Ed Diener* (Social indicators research series, Vol. 38). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Diener, E. (2009c). *Assessing well-being: The collected works of Ed Diener* (Social indicators research series, Vol. 39). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Diener, E., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). Beyond money: Toward an economy of well-being. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, *5*, 1–31.
- Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *49*, 71–75.
- Diener, E., Suh, E. M., Lucas, R. E., & Smith, H. L. (1999). Subjective well-being: Three decades of progress. *Psychological Bulletin*, *125*, 276–302.
- Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim-Prieto, C., Choi, D. W., Oishi, S., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2010). New well-being measures: Short scales to assess flourishing and positive and negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research*, *97*, 143–156.
- Diener, E., Inglehart, R., & Tay, L. (2013). Theory and validity of life satisfaction measures. *Social Indicators Research*, *112*, 497–527.
- Diener, E., Kanazawa, S., Suh, E. M., & Oishi, S. (2015a). Why people are in a generally good mood. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *19*, 235–256.
- Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Lucas, R. E. (2015b). National accounts of subjective well-being. *American Psychologist*, *70*, 234–242.
- Diener, E., Pressman, S., Hunter, J., & Delgado-Chase, D. (2017). If, why, and when subjective well-being influences health, and future needed research. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, *9*(2), 133–167.
- Kahneman, D., Diener, E., & Schwarz, N. (Eds.). (1999). *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, *131*, 803–855.