International Journal of Peace Studies, Volume 18, Number 2, Winter 2013

Subjective Wellbeing, Body-Related Ability Expectations and Peace

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Abstract

Numerous studies covering various angles explore the interaction of subjective well-being and peace. However there are gaps in the analysis of the interaction between subjective well-being and peace. One angle missing is the voice of disabled people and what they perceive as essential for their subjective well-being and peace. I submit this is problematic not only because the list generated of subjective well-beings seen as essential and the strategies developed to achieve the items on the list has an impact on the subjective well-being of disabled people but also because disabled people have certain ability expectations non-disabled people might not think about. Another angle that is missing is the cultural investigation of ability expectations and preferences, an investigation started by the disability right movement, and their impact on peace dynamics. I submit that the academic fields of disability studies and ability studies and the social group of disabled people have something unique to offer to peace studies in general and the linkage between subjective well-being and peace in particular.

Introduction

In 2006 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities which so far has been ratified by 139 countries (United Nations, 2007). The Convention is a testament to the many problems disabled people face such as "prejudices and harmful practices relating to persons with disabilities" (Article 8), lack of access to "[b]uildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces" and "[i]nformation, communications and other services, including electronic services and emergency services" (Article 9), right to life (Article 10), lack of "protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters" (Article 11), lack of "equal protection in front of the law" (Article 12), lack of "liberty and security of the person" (Article 14), "freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" (Article 15), "freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse" (Article 16), lack of "living independently and being included in the community" (Article 19), lack of "freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information" (Article 21), lack of access to education (Article 24), lack of access "to gain a living by work freely

chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities". In 2013 participants of the discussion forum *Disability and the Post 2015 Development Goal Agenda* (Participants of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA] and UNICEF organized Online Consultation - 8 March - 5 April Disability Inclusive Development Agenda towards 2015 & Beyond, 2013) mentioned many times the negative attitudes towards disabled people such as the medical view of disabled people (Online Consultation Disability Inclusive Development Agenda towards 2015 & Beyond, 2013; Wolbring, Mackay, Rybchinski and Noga, 2013), the "don't bother and don't care" attitude of authorities and the society" (Online Consultation Disability Inclusive Development Agenda towards 2015 & Beyond. 2013; Wolbring et al., 2013), the "inadequate to misinformed views of persons with disabilities, which are often expressed in how persons with disabilities are identified, defined and presented in national and local laws and mass media" (Online Consultation Disability inclusive development agenda towards 2015 & beyond, 2013; Wolbring et al., 2013), and the stigma still linked to them (Wolbring et al., 2013) and they highlighted various problems in the development process that could be seen as impacting their subjective well-being. Many of these problems impact the subjective well-being (SWB) of disabled people.

SWB has been looked at for quite some time (Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith, 1999). It covered students, adolescents, age, countries economics, personal goals, consumption, income and hedonism to just name a few areas (e.g. Abdallah, Thompson, & Marks, 2008; Boarini, Comola, Smith, Manchin, & de Keulenaer, 2012, Ball & Chernova, 2008, Guillen-Royo, 2008).

SWB includes aspects such as 'being respected, having meaningful choices, and being able to preserve one's dignity" (Camfield, 2006). The participants of the discussion forum *disability and the Post 2015 development goal agenda* (Online Consultation Disability inclusive development agenda towards 2015 & beyond, 2013) outlined many issues one could categorize as a lack of being respected, not having meaningful choices and experiencing indignity on a systemic level. One participant expressed the view for example that there is a prevailing "'don't bother and don't care' attitude of authorities and the society" (quoted in (Wolbring et al., 2013)).

According to Diener et al. "subjective well-being (SWB), people's emotional and cognitive evaluations of their lives, includes what lay people call happiness, peace, fulfillment, and life satisfaction" (Diener, Lucas and Oishi, 2002) and various indictors for SWB exist (DeNeve and Cooper, 1998; Diener, 1995, 2000, 2006; Diener et al., 1995; Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin, 1985; Diener and Suh, 1997; Kahneman and Krueger, 2006; Konu, Lintonen and Rimpelä, 2002; Michalos, Diener, Glatzer, Moum and Vogel, 2002; Slocum-Gori, Zumbo, Michalos and Diener, 2009). However disabled people are missing in the discussion around the development of SWD indicators and definitions which is a problem given the difference in opinion of what disability is between many so called disabled and non-disabled people. Indeed the participants of the discussion forum *disability and the*

Post 2015 development goal agenda (Online Consultation Disability inclusive development agenda towards 2015 & beyond, 2013) highlighted the prevailing medical view of disabled people to be a problem in achieving a decent life (Wolbring et al., 2013). I posit in Wolbring et al., 2013 the stereotypical understanding of disabled people within a medical framework precludes them from being part of certain discourses as the focus towards them is about preventing 'disability' as in ill health not about decreasing their low social health.

This paper thematizes subjective well-being in general and subjective well-being as it's applied to peace in particular through the lens of disability studies. Disability studies is an academic disciplines that looks at the social reality disabled people face (Albrecht, Seelman and Bury, 2001; Barton and Oliver, 1997; Davis, 2013). I chose this analysis angle not just because it's important to involve disabled people simply because they are disabled people but because disabled people have one very unique angle of analysis of societal dynamics that I submit is of high value to SWB and peace discourses. Disabled activists and disability studies scholars were the first to investigate the "cultural dynamics and the cultural impact of ability preferences, coining the term ableism as a cultural concept in the process" (Wolbring, 2012c). The disability studies field and disability activists focus on body-related ability expectations and the disablism (Miller, Parker and Gillinson, 2004) disabled people experience because they are labelled as not having expected species-typical body-linked abilities (Ayim, 1997; Campbell Kumari, 2009; Carlson, 2001; Hehir, 2002; Imrie, 1996; Livingston, 2000; Wolbring, 2008b). Investigating body ability expectations is part of the disability studies discipline but also of the ability studies discipline which is the cultural investigation of ability expectations and preferences (want stage) and ableism (need stage) and their consequences (Wolbring, 2008c). As to body-linkedbody-linked abilities, ability studies investigates not only why we cherish certain species-typical body abilities and why we treat the people we label as missing these abilities badly. Ability studies also analyzes the push to move beyond the species-typical (body enhancement) and the impact on the groups of people in the moment labelled as impaired or normal. This paper introduces body ability expectation as a parameter of subjective well-being and evaluates the impact of body ability expectation on peace. I submit that body-related ability expectation might be the next frontier of discontent between people, a discontent posing a new challenge to subjective well-being in general and subjective well-being and peace in particular. I posit further that disabled people and the ability expectation discourse around them and the dynamic of ability expectations in general pose a challenge to achieving subjective well-being by itself and in relation to peace.

Subjective well-being and disabled people

The following section looks at the linkage between subjective well-being and disabled people by investigating the measure of quality of life. Subjective Well-Being (SWB) is seen as one important "measure of the quality of life of an individual and of societies"(Diener, Oishi and Lucas, 2003). As to disabled

people many studies investigated the quality of life of disabled people. To just cover a few; Stensman investigated in 1985 "36 severely mobility-disabled individuals (aged 24–52 years) using a wheelchair and in need of daily assistance and 36 non handicapped as the controls (Stensman, 1985). They were asked "to rank 30 abilities involving physical and mental functions and interpersonal and social relationships and to rate their overall quality of life (QOL) on a 10-point scale"(Stensman, 1985). Stensman did not find significant difference between the disabled group and the control group(Stensman, 1985). Eisenberg *et al.* did in 1991 a review of existing data on quality of life of people with spinal cord injury and concluded that "the quality of life enjoyed by those with SCI, young and old, is relatively good and, in the case of older SCI veterans, is actually better than similarly aged able-bodied males"(Eisenberg and Saltz, 1991).

Gerhart *et al.* compared view of "emergency nurses, emergency medicine technicians, emergency medicine residents, and attending physicians at three level I trauma" and "high-level SCI survivors" and concluded "The quality of life, self-esteem, and outcomes that emergency health care providers imagine after SCI are considerably more negative than those reported by SCI survivors"(Gerhart, Koziol-McLain, Lowenstein and Whiteneck, 1994).

A 1994 study by Gill and Feinstein concluded that "most measurements of quality of life in the medical literature seem to aim at the wrong target. Quality of life can be suitably measured only by determining the opinions of patients and by supplementing (or replacing) the instruments developed by experts" (Gill and Feinstein, 1994). Many other studies exist that conclude that the quality of life of disabled people is equal to so called non-disabled people. On the other hand studies also exist that concluded the opposite. Russo *et al.* investigated "self-esteem, self-concept and quality of life in children with hemiplegic cerebral palsy (HCP) compared with typically developing peers" found that Children with HCP experience reduced quality of life and self-concept compared with typically developing peers" (Russo et al., 2008).

Studies also looked into impact of technologies that are to improve quality of life. Beach *et al.* looked into implicit trade-offs between privacy and the potential for improved health among older and disabled adults in quality of life technology applications (Beach et al., 2009). However, although many different measurements have been developed to ascertain the quality of life of disabled people (see over forty listed in (Wolbring, 2005)) these measurement tools have problems in their assumptions and premises as to how they perceive disabled people and what they look for. Indeed of the forty quality of life measurements listed in (Wolbring, 2005) all perceive disabled people as having a medical condition that causes certain quality of life issues. The premise is that one has a defect, disease,

'disability' and based on that assumption questions are asked that try to generate data on how medical determinants impact social wellbeing and medical health and how social determinants of health (for example income, education, transport...) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (USA), 2010; Mikkonen and Raphael, 2010; The Commission on Social Determinants of Health Knowledge Networks, 2011; Wolbring, 2011) impact/ worsen medical health (Wolbring, 2005). The disability studies field questions this medical premise related to disabled people and follow a social premise that the impact on quality of life is caused by the social environment not the body one has (Campbell Kumari, 2009; Carlson, 2001; Overboe, 2007; Wolbring, 2008b, 2012c). In (Wolbring, 2005) Nord is cited as follows, "Nord provides the following example (Nord, 1993): "Take a person in a wheelchair. His condition is to most people highly undesirable compared to being in full health.(Nord, 2001, 2005) But his subjective well-being, i.e. his mood or inner feeling of happiness, may be comparable to that of non-disabled people."(Nord, 2001, 2005), Nord concludes: "In QALY-calculations the distinction seems to have been completely disregarded, if not explicitly rejected." (Nord, 2001, 2005)".

SWB is seen as an important "measure of the quality of life of an individual and of societies"(Diener et al., 2003). However so far no data exist that reveals for example at whether disabled people from various backgrounds would rank existing SWB instruments in the same way as the non-disabled people covered or whether disabled people would want to see different parameters not present in SWB instruments. Furthermore no data exist as to the impact of SWB ranking by others on the population of disabled people. I posit that this omission is problematic given the reported controversy around quality of life measures as they relate to disabled people and the vastly different results obtained about the quality of life of a disabled person.

This section revealed the problem of the non-engagement with disabled people within SWB using the quality of life instrument as an example. SWB is seen as a quality of life measure however most quality of life instruments are seen as problematic from a disability studies perspective and the question raised by this section is whether the SWB as a measure of quality of life might be also problematic once looked at through a disability studies lens.

Subjective well-being and peace

In this section I look into the relationship between SWB and peace-relevant attitudes. Diener and Trov examined the relations between person-level subjective well-being (SWB) and peace-relevant attitudes, and how these relations vary across nations in the World Values Survey"(Diener and Tov, 2007). They submitted that the subjective well-being (SWB) of the citizenry should be added to the bases of a culture of peace (Diener and Tov, 2007). Inner or

relational and societal peace are often seen as being part of feeling well (Rask, Asted Kurki and Laippala, 2002). A link between subjective well-being researchers and peace studies programs is seen as beneficial (De Rivera and Páez, 2007). Dolan highlighted that the following subjective well-being should be measured for public policy, life satisfaction, happy yesterday, purpose, worthwhile, personal relationships, physical health, mental well-being, work situation, financial situation, area where you live, the amount of time you have to do things you like doing, well-being of child/children (Dolan, Layard and Metcalfe, 2011). According to Diener and Trov "individual level, SWB may foster peace attitudes by influencing the way people perceive and relate to others" and "prolonged periods of anger and anxiety in a society can lead to instability" (Diener and Tov, 2007). Diener and Trov (Diener and Tov, 2007) highlight that de Rivera (De Rivera, 2004) developed four social indicators as being essential for a culture of peace namely "and arrived at four peace factors: liberal development (an indicator of economic strength and democratic institutions), violent inequality (which reflects homicide rates and unequal income distribution), violent means (the extent of military spending and use), and nurturance (which includes tolerance and education spending)". Diener and Trov measured the following; person-level criterion variables, a) confidence in Parliament, civil service, and the armed forces; b) endorsement of army rule, autocracy, and democracy; c) postmaterialist values: d) racial intolerance; e) restrictions on immigration; f) willingness to fight for country. As to Nation-level predictors they used the four peace factors (liberal development, violent inequality, violent means, and nurturance from de Rivera, 2004) (Diener and Tov, 2007). Diener and Trov concluded that "the social, political, and economic structures of a society are related to peace, as reflected in the attitudes of the people living in that society. In nations where GDP and liberal development are high, there are greater levels of opposition to military rule and less willingness to fight a war for one's country. In addition, liberal development and GDP were associated with a greater emphasis on postmaterialist concerns and lower levels of racially intolerant attitudes in society." However they also found that "increasing national wealth or civil and political liberties though important—does not ensure that people will be confident in their government."

As to person level SWB peace was associated with greater confidence in parliament and civil services, with endorsement of democracy, greater emphasis on postmaterialist values, and less intolerance of immigrants and members of different racial and ethnic groups and these effects were not moderated by GDP or liberal development (Diener and Tov, 2007). Sagiv and Schwartz (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2000) investigated the linkage between value priorities and subjective well-being. They used the following 10 value types: power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, (understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature), benevolence, tradition, conformity and security. Each of these value types had various values attached to it which were seen as valid across cultures. Interestingly the following were excluded as they were seen not to be valued across cultures (social recognition, intelligence, self-respect, inner harmony, true friendship, a spiritual life, mature love, meaning in life, privacy, punctuality, sense of belonging, healthy).

They found "that many types of values are directly, albeit weakly, relevant to the affective aspect of subjective well-being but not to cognitive aspects" and "that different types of values (perhaps all) may be relevant to subjective well-being, depending on the value environment" (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2000).

Ginty (Ginty, 2012) believes that "many of the approaches to measuring peace favoured by international organisations, INGOs and donor governments are deficient" and "are meaningless to local communities". Ginty proposes "a new generation of locally organised indicators that are based in everyday life" and whose generation involves the community to generate measures relevant for them. This section reveals that although numerous indicators are in use to measure peace and person-level subjective well-being (SWB) and relationship between SWB and peace-relevant attitudes, no consensus exist as to what measurement tools to use.

Subjective well-being, peace and disabled people

In this section I investigate the linkage of Subjective well-being and peace relevant attitudes covered in the last section through a disability studies lens. No data exist that look at the interaction of subjective well-being and peace from the point of disabled people. That comes with consequences; for example the study of (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2000) excluded the following as they were seen as not to be valued across cultures (social recognition, intelligent, self-respect, inner harmony, true friendship, a spiritual life, mature love, meaning in life, privacy, punctuality, sense of belonging, healthy). Through a disability studies lens this seems not be right. Not only is the cherishing of being healthy one of the reason of the existence of disability studies as the wide use of a normalized species-typical understanding of healthy is seen as one of the reasons for the problematic societal responses disabled people, the 'non-healthy', the 'defective', experience, but disability studies scholars and disabled people would content that various parameters excluded by Sagiv and Schwartz are of importance to disabled people such as self-respect, as being able to belong and true friendship. Indeed a vast disability studies literature exists that questions the exclusion of disabled people, that they cannot belong, that they are not seen as citizens on equal level with as non-disabled labelled people (Abberley, 1999; Barton, 1993; Connors and Donnellan, 1993; Morris, 2005; Redley, 2009; Wolbring, 2012a). Furthermore disability studies scholars and disabled people would question the assumption that intelligence is not seen as important. It might be true that it is not being seen as important to be a prodigy however falling beyond a certain level of cognitive ability comes with severe levels of exclusion in nearly every culture and for sure in Western cultures. We have an ability expectation of certain levels of cognitive abilities (Carlson, 2001). Indeed nearly all of the SWB listed in the last section I submit might be questioned if one involves disabled people.

I submit further that if one wants to achieve the goals listed in the last section that disabled people pose a challenge not solved yet (Wolbring, 2012a, 2012d). This section

highlighted the problem of non-involvement of disabled people at the nexus of subjective well-being and peace. It outlines that certain findings around SWB seem not to make sense such as the reported lack of importance of 'being healthy' in (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2000). Indeed this section outlined how most SWB measures could be questioned if looked at through a disability studies lens.

Subjective well-being, body-related ability expectations and peace: The future

In this section I focus on the consequence of not engaging with body-related ability expectations outside of the framework of disabled people but within the framework of people seen to exhibit what are so far seen as species-typical body abilities. Subjective well-being discourses have so far ignored the importance of body-related ability expectations as they may have taken species-typical body abilities for granted given the ability status of the discourse participants. Looking at the SWB discourse in general and the SWB and peace discourse in particular I highlighted already the problems this neglect causes disabled people. However this neglect will increasingly also cause problems for the so far as species-typical perceived people. So far body-related ability expectations are based on the species-typical. As a species, humans are expected to have the ability to walk but not to fly. A bird is supposed to be able to fly. If you do not exhibit these species-typical abilities you are labelled as impaired, as defective. I already outlined that the disability studies field and the disability rights movement question the normative idea of species-typical body abilities by questioning being labelled as impaired and defective because they do not exhibit the species-typical abilities. However the body ability expectation of species-typical ability is also increasingly questioned from another angle. Species-typical so far assumes that indeed we are to walk but its normal that humans do not fly. However an increasing amount of people such as the social movement of transhumanists (Humanity Plus formerly World Transhumanist Association, 2005) believe that the human body is a work in progress and can and should be improved upon. Humans have constantly tried to add abilities to their body by using external tools. Our body does not allow us to fly but we use a plane to achieve the same goal. However increasingly scientific and technological advancements have the potential to change body-related ability expectations by intervening directly on the level of the human body whether through genetic interventions or addition of devices into and onto the body (Wolbring, 2005, 2010b, 2013c). Therefore flying might become a new norm and not flying might be a new aspect of being impaired, being defective. Some already talk about the moral obligation to ability enhance oneself (for a discussion on the topic see (Wolbring, 2012b, 2012c)). Indeed the subjective well-being of the so far species-typical might dependent on the ability to have access to beyond species-typical body abilities. I submit that this body ability expectation is an underappreciated frontier of discontent between people within SWB and peace discourses and a threat to peace given the experience of disabled people that we do not treat the 'less able' kindly. I submit that the beyond species-typical will not treat the techno-poor, the techno-poor impaired, the techno-poor disabled

(Wolbring, 2006, 2008a) the people who cannot afford or do not want to have the newest body gadgets kindly either. I posit that an essential component of peace is the experience of ability security (that one is accepted and has a chance for a decent life independent of ones set of abilities) and self-identity security (that one is accepted independent of one's ability make-up)(Wolbring, 2010a, 2013b). There is no way for an harmonious relationship which is seen as one aspect of peace (Royce, 2004) without ability security and self-identity security.

Conclusion

A complicated relationship exists between ability expectations, values and goals of people and nations, subjective well-being and peace which needs much more research on at least two fronts; one being the disability studies angle and one being the ability studies angle. Employing the disability studies angle would mean that a) disabled people have to be actively involved in the discussion around subjective well-being and their indicators ensuring that the impact is not negative on disabled people; b) the social portrayal of disablement would have to be used discarding the medical portrayal of the body as the cause of the low SBW and c) it would allow for the investigation of body ability expectation as a parameter of subjective well-being and evaluation of the impact of body ability expectations on peace.

Employing an ability studies lens allows for investigating ability expectations social entities from individuals to countries exhibit and their impact on SWB of an individual but also of a country. To just stay with the social entity country, often war/violence of one country against another country is waged because the SWB of a give country and its individuals is seen is indicating that their well-being is in jeopardy. These SWB feelings are all the time linked to unfulfilled ability expectations. There are many ability expectations that can and have been used to justify violent acts such as lack of ability to have a job; ability to live out ones believes, believe one's ability to live a secure life is threatened, believe one's ability to live a good life (income, jobs...) are threatened. These ability expectations were not only used to justify violence between countries but also to justify violent behaviour of socially powerful groups against weaker social groups such as immigrants; ethnic minorities and disabled people.

I also submit that the discourse has to become more foresight oriented especially looking at the impact of body-linkedbody-linked scientific and technological advancement. I covered in this article only one aspect of ability expectations and how they impact humans; however ability expectations impact many other facets of human life. Nearly every aspect of human security and a culture of peace in general (Wolbring, 2013b) is impacted by ability expectations whereby many ability expectations I submit have a negative impact on numerous facets of human security and a culture of peace in general which in turn impacts SWB in a negative way. Furthermore ability expectations also change how humans relate to nature and to animals (Wolbring, 2013a, 2013c) which I submit will increasingly influence subjective well-being and peace.

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