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BRIEF REPORT

The Role of Familiarity in Daily Well-Being: Developmental and Cultural Variation

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The present study examined life stage and cultural differences in the degree to which familiarity of one's physical location and interaction partner is associated with daily well-being. Participants reported all the activities they engaged in and how they felt during these activities on a previous day using the Day Reconstruction Method (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004). Both Korean and American retirees were happier when in a familiar place than in an unfamiliar place, whereas the reverse was true for both Korean and American working adults. In addition, we found cultural differences in the role of familiarity of the interaction partner. Specifically, Koreans (both retirees and working adults) were substantially happier when they interacted with a familiar person than when they interacted with an unfamiliar person. In contrast, Americans (both retirees and working adults) were no happier with a familiar person than with an unfamiliar person.

Keywords: well-being, positive affect, familiarity, culture, retirement

That familiarity leads to liking is one of the most widely replicated phenomena in psychological science (Zajonc, 2001). In general, people feel more positive affect when they see familiar stimuli relative to unfamiliar stimuli (Monahan, Murphy, & Zajonc, 2000). In daily social interactions, people are generally happier when in the presence of familiar others than when alone or with unfamiliar others (Csikszentmihalyi & Hunter, 2003). However, increased familiarity might not necessarily result in greater positive affect, as people often experience the most intense negative emotion while interacting with familiar others such as spouses and parents (e.g., Chung, Flook, & Fuligni, 2009; Larson, Mannell, & Zuzanek, 1986). Thus, the relation between familiarity and well-being appears to be complex and possibly curvilinear. In the present work, we examined the role of familiarity in daily well-being from both cultural and developmental perspectives.

Zajonc (2001) theorized that the mere exposure effect, as observed in controlled laboratory experiments, is so fundamental that it should be seen universally. Indeed, the extant evidence certainly suggests that the positive mere exposure effect is pervasive, if not universal (e.g., Ishii, 2005; Suzuki & Gyoba, 2008). In contrast, past experience sampling studies have provided suggestive evidence pointing toward cultural variations in the role of familiar persons on daily well-being. Oishi, Diener, Napa Scollon, and Biswas-Diener (2004), for instance, found that the mood-enhancing effect of being with a romantic partner and a friend was stronger among Japanese than Americans. Although these studies did not measure the degree of familiarity, Oishi et al. speculated that in a society where people draw a sharp distinction between ingroup and outgroup (e.g., Japan), the joy of being with a familiar interaction partner is more intense than in a society where people do not draw such a sharp distinction (e.g., the United States; Antonucci et al., 2001; Wheeler, Reis, & Bond, 1989).

In terms of developmental differences, socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999) suggests that retirees, who perceive having only a limited amount of time left in their lives, often seek out and derive enjoyment from familiar social partners (e.g., family and close friends), whereas younger adults prefer to pursue novelty and excitement (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987; Ebner, Freund, & Baltes, 2006). Together, these findings suggest that retirees will feel happier in a familiar situation than in an unfamiliar situation.

We conducted the present study to test the role of familiarity in daily well-being. We examined two types of familiarity: familiarity of the interaction partner and familiarity of the location. In

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other words, we explored how people's well-being might change as a function of the individuals with whom they are interacting and the location in which their activities are taking place. Given the centrality of social relationships (Diener & Seligman, 2002) and the relative marginality of physical location on subjective well-being (Dunn, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2003), we predicted that familiarity of the interaction partner would be more strongly associated with daily positive emotion than familiarity of the physical location. There is no existing research that examines cultural and life stage differences in the role of familiarity on daily well-being. On the basis of previous research (Carstensen et al., 1999; Oishi et al., 2004), we predicted that the effect of familiarity on daily well-being would be stronger among Koreans than among Americans in general, and also stronger among older adults than among younger adults.

Method

Participants were 133 Americans (57 nonretired: 42 men, 15 women; 76 retired: 25 men, 51 women) and 79 Koreans (40 nonretired: 20 men, 20 women; 39 retired: 31 men, 8 women). Retirement was defined as the withdrawal from full-time work. American participants were recruited in the area surrounding Charlottesville, Virginia, which is located roughly 2 hr southwest of the U.S. capital, Washington, D.C. Korean participants were recruited in the area surrounding Anyang, Gyeonggi, roughly 1 hr southwest of the Korean capital, Seoul. Participants in both the United States and Korea were recruited via local newspaper ads and fliers in the business districts, the city hall, and various senior centers. All materials were translated into Korean by an experienced Korean cross-cultural psychologist, and then back-translated by another experienced Korean cross-cultural psychologist to ensure equivalence of English and Korean versions of the materials. The mean age of nonretirees in Korea was 46.08 years ($SD = 7.57$), whereas the mean age of nonretirees in the United States was 52.61 years ($SD = 6.26$). Although Korean working adults were younger than American working adults, the estimated years to retirement did not differ between Koreans and Americans ($M = 13.65$ years vs. 11.66 years; $t = 1.07$, *ns*). The mean age of retirees in Korea was 69.51 years ($SD = 5.30$), whereas it was 68.62 years ($SD = 7.24$) in the United States. The length of being in retirement ranged from 1 month to 456 months with the mean of 116.62 months ($SD = 93.74$). There were also no differences between Korean and American retirees in the length of being in retirement ($M = 127.31$ months vs. 111.78 months; $t = 0.79$, *ns*).

We used the paper–pencil version of the Day Reconstruction Method (DRM; Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004) to assess the daily well-being of participants. In the DRM, participants were asked to list all the activities they engaged in on the previous day. Specifically, on the first sheet, they were asked to list all the activities they engaged in on the morning of the previous day and to describe each activity briefly (e.g., "breakfast"). On the second sheet, they were asked to list and describe all the activities they engaged in in the afternoon (e.g., "grocery shopping"). On the third sheet, they were asked to list and describe all the activities they engaged in in the evening of the previous day (e.g., "dinner"). Then, for each activity, they were asked to indicate with whom they interacted, where they were, and how they felt during the activity. We asked how familiar they were with the place where they were and with the person with whom they were interacting on a 7-point scale (0 = *not at all* to 6 = *very much*). They also indicated how happy, excited, calm, and pleasant they felt (these four emotions formed positive affect with alphas ranging from .67 to .84 for the four groups), as well as how depressed, worried, frustrated, and tired they felt (these four emotions formed negative affect with alphas ranging from .56 to .79) during each activity. The mean number of DRM reports from nonretirees in Korea was 9.40 ($SD = 3.73$), whereas the mean number of reports from nonretirees in the United States was 13.72 ($SD = 4.86$). The mean number of reports from retirees in Korea was 7.90 ($SD = 3.35$), whereas it was 11.99 ($SD = 4.00$) in the United States.

After completing the DRM packet, participants completed the Satisfaction with Life Scale, a commonly used five-item measure of global life satisfaction (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; alphas ranged from .81 to .91 for the four groups) and various questions concerning their retirement or their plans for retirement.

Results

The descriptive statistics regarding the mean familiarity of the location and the interaction partner are reported in Table 1. We first tested our main research question: namely, whether participants were happier when they were in a familiar location and/or with a familiar person than when they were in an unfamiliar location or with an unfamiliar person, and whether there were

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Familiarity of Location and Familiarity of Interaction Partner in Daily Activities

	Location						Interaction partner					
	Working		Retired				Working		Retired			
Variable	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Koreans	5.29	0.84	5.61	0.69	5.45_a	0.78	4.76_c	0.95	5.52_d	0.57	5.13	0.87
Americans	5.55	0.58	5.81	0.34	5.70_b	0.47	4.92	0.93	4.86	1.15	4.89	1.06
M	5.44		5.74		5.61		4.86		5.07		4.98	
SD	0.71		0.49		0.61		0.94		1.05		1.00	

Note. Americans spent more time in a familiar location than Koreans. Korean retirees spent more time with a familiar other than Korean working adults. Subscripts a and b are significantly different from each other, as are c and d.

cultural and life stage differences. We used multilevel random coefficient modeling (HLM 6.04 program) because our data consisted of two levels: within-person and between-person levels. Because quadratic terms with familiarity of the interaction partner, familiarity of the location, and the interaction term between familiarity of the partner and the location were all nonsignificant, we did not include these terms in the following analysis. The specific model that we tested was as follows:

Level 1 (within-person):

$$\text{Positive Affect}_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} * \text{Location Familiarity} + \beta_{2j} * \text{Person Familiarity} + e_{ij},$$

Level 2 (between-person):

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} * (\text{Culture}) + \gamma_{02} * (\text{Retirement Status}) + \gamma_{03} * (\text{Gender}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11} * (\text{Culture}) + \gamma_{12} * (\text{Retirement Status}) + \gamma_{13} * (\text{Gender}) + u_{1j}$$

$$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20} + \gamma_{21} * (\text{Culture}) + \gamma_{22} * (\text{Retirement Status}) + \gamma_{23} * (\text{Gender}) + u_{2j},$$

where the outcome variable *Positive Affect* is positive affect reported on occasion *i* by individual *j*. *Location Familiarity* denotes the degree to which the location the activity took place was familiar or unfamiliar, and *Person Familiarity* denotes the degree to which the interaction partner was familiar or unfamiliar. Both Level 1 predictors were centered around each participant's mean. At the between-person level of analysis, Level 1 intercept and Level 1 coefficients were predicted from gender (0 = male, 1 = female), culture (0 = Korean, 1 = American), and retirement status (0 = nonretired, 1 = retired) of the participants. Level 1 coefficients were modeled as the random effects.[1]

In keeping with previous research (e.g., Mroczek & Kolarz, 1998; Siedlecki, Tucker-Drob, Oishi, & Salthouse, 2008), retirees reported higher levels of daily positive affect than nonretirees, $\gamma_{02} = 0.65$, $t(197) = 4.49$, $p = .000$. The HLM analysis also revealed that the degree to which familiarity of the location was associated with positive affect was stronger among retirees than among nonretirees, $\gamma_{12} = 0.151$, $t(197) = 2.37$, $p < .05$. As seen in Figure 1, retirees were happier when in a familiar location than when in an unfamiliar location. In contrast, working adults were not happier in a familiar location than in an unfamiliar location.[2] As predicted, the degree to which familiarity of the interaction partner was associated with positive affect was significantly stronger among Koreans than among Americans, $\gamma_{21} = -0.25$, $t(197) = -4.24$, $p = .000$ (see Figure 2). There were no gender or retirement status differences (see Table 2).

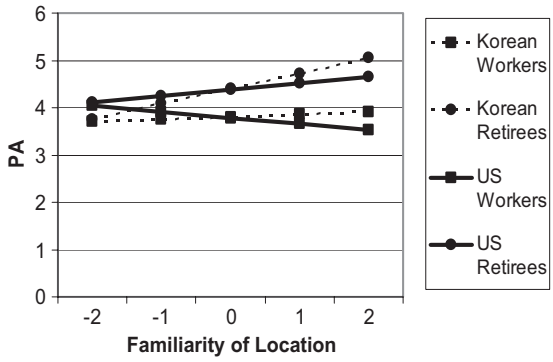

Figure 1. The within-person association between familiarity of place and positive affect (PA). Zero in the *x*-axis denotes each participant's average familiarity of the interaction partner.

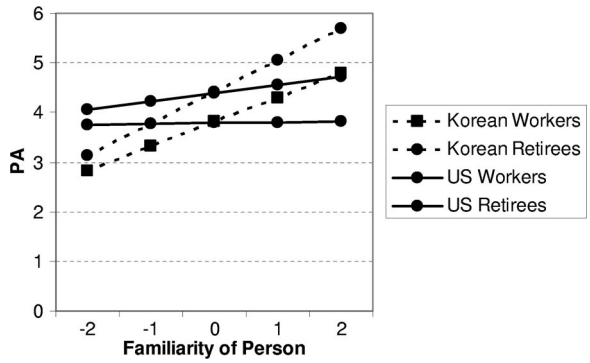

Figure 2. The within-person association between familiarity of the interaction partner and positive affect (PA). Zero in the *x*-axis denotes each participant's average familiarity of the interaction partner.

Next, we examined whether our participants experienced less negative affect when they were in a familiar location and/or with a familiar person than when they were in an unfamiliar location or with an unfamiliar person. This analysis revealed that the relation between familiarity of the interaction partner and daily negative emotion was quadratic, $\gamma_{50} = 0.039$, $t(1098) = 3.79$, $p < .01$. Thus, we included the quadratic terms in addition to the familiarity of the interaction partner and the location in the following hypothesis testing. As in the above analysis, intercept and Level 1 coefficients were predicted from culture, retirement status, and gender at Level 2. Level 1 coefficients were again modeled as the random effects.

Replicating the findings with positive affect, retirees reported lower levels of negative affect than nonretirees, $\gamma_{02} = -0.399$, $t(193) = -3.01$, $p < .01$. In addition, there was a cultural difference in the quadratic relation between familiarity of the interaction partner and negative affect, $\gamma_{31} = 0.058$, $t(193) = 2.12$, $p < .05$. As seen in Figure 3, both American retirees and nonretirees showed the quadratic relation between familiarity of the interac-

[1] When we reran the HLM analysis in which Level 1 coefficients were modeled as the fixed effects, the main cultural and life stage differences remained significant in terms of both positive affect and negative affect. Thus, our results do not depend on the way in which Level 1 coefficients were modeled as the fixed or random effects.

[2] Working adults spent a lot of time in their workplace and were generally not happy at work. We thus excluded all reports in which working adults were at work and reran a HLM analysis. The results did not change; retirees were still much happier in a familiar location than working adults when engaging in nonwork-related activities ($\gamma_{12} = 0.20$, $t = 2.62$, $p = .01$).

Table 2
HLM Analysis on Positive Affect

Fixed effect	Coefficient	*SE*	*t*	*p*
		Intercept, β0		
Intercept, γ_{00}	3.840	0.144	26.725	.000
Culture, γ_{01}	0.029	0.150	0.191	.849
Retirement status, γ_{02}	0.651	0.145	4.498	.000
Gender, γ_{03}	−0.232	0.147	−1.582	.115
		Location familiarity slope, β1		
Intercept, γ_{10}	−0.109	0.062	−1.760	.079
Culture, γ_{11}	0.056	0.064	0.864	.389
Retirement status, γ_{12}	0.151	0.064	2.367	.019
Gender, γ_{13}	−0.046	0.064	−0.705	.482
		Person familiarity slope, β2		
Intercept, γ_{20}	0.332	0.057	5.789	.000
Culture, γ_{21}	−0.252	0.059	−4.235	.000
Retirement status, γ_{22}	0.001	0.051	0.025	.980
Gender, γ_{23}	0.026	0.051	0.504	.615

Note. Error variance for the intercept (u_0) was 0.85166. $\chi^2(197) = 1541.20$, $p < .01$. Error variance for Level 1 model (e_{ij}) was 0.721.

tion partner and negative affect. In contrast, Korean working adults felt progressively less negative affect as the familiarity of the interaction partner increased, whereas Korean retirees felt less negative affect while interacting with an unfamiliar person than a familiar person. This could be due to the fact that strangers typically treat the elderly in Korea with respect. Finally, there were no other gender or cultural differences in the within-person association between familiarity of the location and the interaction partner and negative affect (see Table 3).

In the earlier HLM analysis, we found that Koreans felt more positive affect when interacting with a familiar other than with an unfamiliar other to a greater degree than Americans. This could be due to cultural differences in the frequency with which they interacted with family members. In the next analysis, therefore, we added three dummy codes that represent four types of relationship partners (dummy code 1: 1 = spouse/partner, 0 = others; dummy code 2: 1 = family/relative, 0 = others; dummy 3: 1 = friend, 0 = others) as Level 1 predictors. When we controlled for the type of interaction partner, Koreans still reported feeling more positive affect while interacting with a familiar other, compared with Americans, $\gamma_{21} = -0.146$, $t(200) = -2.21$, $p < .01$. Also when we controlled for the type of interaction partner, retirees still reported feeling more positive affect than nonretirees while being in a familiar location, $\gamma_{12} = 0.156$, $t(200) = 2.34$, $p < .05$.

Retirees were more satisfied with their lives in general than working adults. Americans were also more satisfied with their lives than Koreans.[3] Thus, we examined whether these differences would affect the results reported above by adding general life satisfaction as a Level 2 predictor. This did not change any of the main results. When we controlled for general life satisfaction, retirees still reported feeling more positive affect than working adults, $\gamma_{02} = 0.439$, $t(196) = 3.27$, $p < .01$. Furthermore, Koreans still reported experiencing more positive emotion while interacting with a familiar other than an unfamiliar other, $\gamma_{21} = -0.253$, $t(196) = -4.16$, $p < .01$. Likewise, retirees still reported experiencing more positive emotions in a familiar location, $\gamma_{12} = 0.154$, $t(196) = 2.40$, $p < .05$. Cultural differences in the quadratic effect of familiarity of the interaction partner on daily negative emotion also remained significant when general life satisfaction was added as a Level 2 predictor, $\gamma_{31} = 0.060$, $t(192) = 2.11$, $p < .05$.

Discussion

We investigated (a) the role of familiarity in daily emotional experiences and (b) the potential cultural and life stage differences in the role of familiarity in daily emotional experiences using DRM (Kahneman et al., 2004). As predicted, familiarity of the interaction partner played a much larger, positive role in Koreans' daily happiness than in Americans' daily happiness. This could be partly explained by cultural differences in the preference of high arousal positive versus low arousal positive experiences (Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006). Koreans might prefer less emotionally stimulating experiences (e.g., interacting with a familiar person) than Americans. This explanation should be explicitly examined in the future.

Retirees, regardless of cultural background, reported more positive affect when in a familiar location than in an unfamiliar location, whereas there was no such association among working adults. This was not due to working adults spending more time at work. As suggested by Smith, Fleeson, Geiselmann, Setter-

[3] We conducted the multigroup mean and covariance structure analysis (Card & Little, 2006) on the Satisfaction with Life Scale using Mplus 4.2. We constrained the factor loadings of all five Satisfaction with Life Scale items to be identical and the intercepts of the first three items to be identical between American and Korean samples. This model fit the data very well, $\chi^2(14, 211) = 20.10$, $p = .13$, comparative fit index = .991, Tucker–Lewis index = .987, root-mean-square error of approximation = .064, and revealed that Americans' latent life satisfaction score was higher than Koreans' (0.41, *SE* = 0.21, $z = 1.95$, $p = .05$).

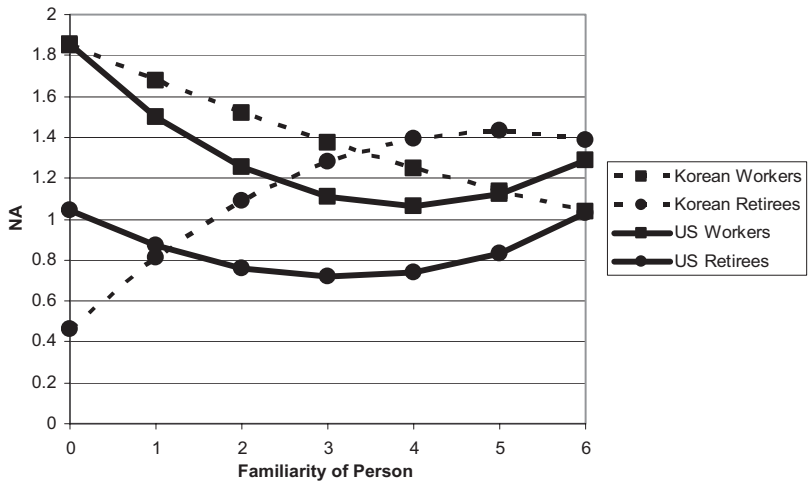

Figure 3. The within-person association between familiarity of the interaction partner and negative affect (NA). Zero in the *x*-axis denotes 0 in the original familiarity of the interaction partner scale (*not at all familiar*).

sten, and Kunzmann (1999), there might be a developmental shift in the source of happiness, whereby retirees really do begin to derive more enjoyment from familiar locations. It should be noted, however, that we did not find the life stage difference in the relation between familiarity of the interaction partner and daily emotion. Namely, both retirees and working adults were happier when interacting with a familiar other than interacting with an unfamiliar other. Thus, the developmental

Table 3
HLM Analysis on Negative Affect

Fixed effect	Coefficient	*SE*	*t*	*p*
		Intercept, β0		
Intercept, γ_{00}	1.236	0.131	9.464	.000
Culture, γ_{01}	−0.026	0.137	−0.187	.852
Retirement status, γ_{02}	−0.399	0.132	−3.009	.003
Gender, γ_{03}	0.107	0.135	0.798	.426
		Location familiarity slope, β1		
Intercept, γ_{10}	−0.211	0.214	−0.985	.326
Culture, γ_{11}	0.259	0.234	1.090	.277
Retirement status, γ_{12}	0.191	0.247	0.770	.442
Gender, γ_{13}	0.013	0.242	0.054	.719
		Location familiarity slope, β2		
Intercept, γ_{20}	0.033	0.028	1.159	.248
Culture, γ_{21}	−0.032	0.031	−1.028	.306
Retirement status, γ_{22}	−0.036	0.032	−1.137	.257
Gender, γ_{23}	−0.052	0.031	−0.165	.869
		Person familiarity slope, β3		
Intercept, γ_{30}	−0.161	0.198	−0.811	.418
Culture, γ_{31}	−0.378	0.212	−1.788	.075
Retirement status, γ_{32}	0.233	0.184	1.266	.207
Gender, γ_{33}	0.066	0.184	0.360	.719
		Person familiarity slope, β4		
Intercept, γ_{40}	0.013	0.026	0.546	.585
Culture, γ_{41}	0.058	0.027	2.117	.035
Retirement status, γ_{42}	−0.025	0.024	−1.020	.309
Gender, γ_{43}	−0.014	0.024	−0.555	.579

Note. Error variance for the intercept (u_0) was 0.69236. $\chi^2(193) = 1472.38$, $p < .01$. Error variance for Level 1 model (e_{ij}) was 0.54934.

shift in the preference for familiarity seems greater in the domain of physical location.

The present findings also shed new light on the apparent paradox of familiarity. It is widely accepted that people seek out and enjoy things that are familiar (Zajonc, 2001). However, familiarity can sometimes breed boredom (Bornstein, Kale, & Cornall, 1990). In fact, the frequently cited work on hedonic adaptation (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978) makes a strong argument for the importance of novelty on happiness. According to this theory, new sources of stimulation are constantly required to maintain positive affect. The present findings, however, suggest a more nuanced and complex relationship. Although novelty is certainly attention-grabbing and exciting, familiarity often brings a feeling of comfort. As such, we found a main effect of familiarity on positive affect, where an interaction with a familiar person is more positive than one with an unfamiliar person, particularly among Koreans. People derive happiness from meaningful, enduring interpersonal relationships more than from a potentially exciting encounter with a stranger. Intuitive as this may seem, it does call into question the benefits of novelty as predicted from adaptation theory.

The present findings also suggest that interactions with people and interactions with physical locations produce different affective responses. Whereas people generally preferred to interact with someone familiar, younger people are happier in a novel location than in a familiar one. Because people are more dynamic and unpredictable than are physical locations, there is an inherent sense of novelty in a social interaction, even with people who are highly familiar. In short, it seems that we adapt to locations but not necessarily to people. In terms of application, there may be more to gain, affectively speaking, from seeking out a new physical environment rather than a new interaction partner. Future research should continue to examine the more subtle predictors of hedonic adaptation.

Before closing, it is important to recognize major limitations of the current research. First, because of the cross-sectional nature of our data collection, our samples of retirees and working adults may differ for reasons other than their developmental stage (e.g., cohort effects). Although marital status, income, educational attainment, and religious and political affiliation were not different between working adults and retirees in our study (see Oishi, Whitchurch, Miao, Kurtz, & Park, 2009), future studies should employ a longitudinal design to more fully understand the cohort effect and also eliminate the potential impact of third variables. Second, as expected, retirement status and age were highly correlated in our sample ($r = .80$, $p < .01$). Thus, the findings related to retirement status differences observed above could be due to age. We reran all the above analyses using age as a Level 2 predictor in place of retirement status and found the same moderation effect on the association between familiarity of location and positive affect. When we entered both age and retirement status simultaneously as Level 2 predictors, neither of these variables uniquely moderated the association between familiarity of location and positive affect. Thus, we were unable to determine which variable is a stronger moderator. It is thus important to clarify the unique role of retirement status versus age in the future. Third, we did not assess the quality of relationships with various interaction partners. Thus, it is unclear whether our findings are moderated by the quality of relationships in general.

Despite these limitations, the present research demonstrated clear and robust cultural and developmental differences in the degree to which people derive daily happiness from the comforts of familiar others and familiar locations. Relatively few studies have examined the role of culture and life stage on subjective well-being simultaneously (see Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003, for a review). In the future, it is important to consider both culture and developmental stages when examining factors that promote or relate to well-being.

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