Well-Being Survey: Liberty Compared to Excelsior Springs

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Abstract

With the task of evaluating the well-being of residents in the area near Liberty, Missouri, the researchers of this study chose to survey residents of Liberty and Excelsior Springs, MO about their satisfaction with the city in which they live and with five factors affected by that city that likely influence its residents’ well-being. The five factors, determined by reviewing literature on previous studies regarding well-being and by concepts learned from Wheelan (2010), McKibben (2007), and Bok (2010), were health, safety, available resources, entertainment, and education. Results of the survey showed that residents of Liberty were happier and more satisfied across all factors and in the direct measures than those of Excelsior Springs. Safety and entertainment were the factors on which the two cities most differed, suggesting that these elements’ improvement in Excelsior Springs would also improve overall well-being of residents. Additionally, the factors found to most strongly influence well-being among survey participants of both cities were safety or family and property, education level, and entertainment options within the city. These results suggest that improving these factors in either Liberty or Excelsior Springs, and presumably any city, would increase the well-being of residents. While this study did not consider factors such as community service opportunities and religious practice, it was overall a successful measure of participants’ perceptions of their happiness with their city of residence.

*Keywords*: happiness, well-being, Liberty MO, Excelsior Springs MO, survey, comparison

Well-Being Survey: Liberty Compared to Excelsior Springs

Well-being, or quality of life, is a very difficult area of study due to the endless possibilities of what can cause or disrupt happiness. Before beginning a study, researchers must narrow their parameters of population, location, and influential factors. We, the current researchers, were tasked with evaluating the well-being of cities including Liberty, Missouri and the surrounding area. After reviewing previous research and evaluating our research capabilities, we chose Liberty and Excelsior Springs, MO as our location because their difference in population would potentially create a significant difference in environment. Liberty’s population in 2014 was 29,252 while Excelsior Springs’ population in the same year was 11,244 (Best Places). We selected 18 to 55 year old residents as our population because they represent the majority of adults in both cities and environmental factors largely in the city’s control as our influences because there were the most easily measured and comparable across the two towns. Ultimately, we created a survey to directly measure perceptions of a sample of each city’s residents fitting our population description, and we found that Liberty residents are more satisfied than Excelsior Springs residents due to lower rates of crime, better education, and higher availability of resources and entertainment within the town. To determine how to construct our original measurement, we first needed to evaluate similar previous studies. This provided both models for formatting our research and a basis for determining the factors we sought to measure within it.

**Factors Affecting Well-Being**

Money is often the first issue that comes to mind when people consider the factors that create their well-being, but upon closer examination it is clear that there are many more factors that promote a healthy quality of life. Stories of the rich and famous who are still unable to avoid depression and about the lottery winners who realize that their lives were much happier before their bank account balances increased in digits are familiar to most people in Western culture today. Even more common are students who elect not to immediately enter the work force after high school graduation, but to attend a higher education institution instead and go into debt in order to eventually receive a higher pay rate. Money provides many necessities, but it is not the deciding influence on the state of one’s well-being. So, in judging whether residents’ well-being may be higher in one city compared to another, there are many factors to consider that may matter more than the cities’ median salaries.

From the readings and research done in preparation for the current study, we, the researchers, found five factors related to people’s city and community that strongly influence well-being: health, safety, resources, education, and entertainment. The following is a literature review and explanation of these factors.

**Health**

When it comes to the relationship of health to well-being, individual perception is reality. In many situations, a general idea of what it means to be healthy may not be fitting for every person. If a man were to have a limb removed in order to prevent an infection from spreading, the amputation would increase his health; however, whether his well-being was increased or decreased will depend on his personal outlook—whether he is optimistic or pessimistic (Raibley, 2013). It is clear that “human flourishing depends substantially on the verdicts of our emotional natures, to a significant extent independently of what we think about our lives” (Raibley, 2013, p. 8). Health is a very important factor of people’s well-being, emotionally and physically.

Many studies have concluded that it is self-perceived health that affects well-being (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). For instance, a woman may fit or even fall below the standard medical definition of an appropriate weight for her height and age, but if she believes the number on her scale is too high, her psychological well-being is decreased despite her friends’, family’s, doctor’s, and even society’s assurances that she is healthy.

Quantifying the relationship between well-being and health is quite difficult. It is invalid to assume that duration of life, which can easily be measured, increases well-being, for it is the quality of life that is most important (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). However, individuals with positive well-being often experience longevity due to healthy habits or behaviors. In numerous studies, positive well-being was highly correlated with those who were medically healthy and had healthy work atmospheres, healthy family relationships, low risks of illnesses, and high productivity (Lyubomirsky, 2005).

**Safety**

Happiness and physical health are very dependent upon the ability to feel safe in one’s environment. Naturally, most people would like to live in an area that allows them to feel secure with their surroundings and secure about the safety of their friends and loved ones. Among western democracies, the United States rates very high in homicides, robberies, and assaults; in fact, people between the ages of 14 and 30 are more likely to die from homicide than from any other cause, excluding unintentional injuries (McGarrell, 2010). It is all the more important for one’s well-being, then, that one reside in a city that allows one to live more than to worry.

Safety is a factor that is quite easy to measure. Crime rates and the overall “vibe” of an area may convey to visitors whether or not they should feel safe. Jones (2006) conducted a study comparing crime rates of low income and middle income homes. The result suggested that people living in an area in which the median income was above $30,000 experienced less crime than those in an area with a median income below the same amount.

Although crime is a significant factor of people’s safety, it is surely not the only one. The safety of the roads in a town can either lead to positive well-being or they can be very detrimental. Cities that have high accident rates usually have poor road conditions and/or busy intersections.

**Resources**

Well-being is also influenced by the range and availability of resources that a city is able to offer. At the most basic level, a city should provide energy, water, and food (Heaven, 2014). These things are taken for granted by many U.S. residents, who are used to having them at the reach of their fingertips, as they usually do. For those people, the absence of one of these resources would likely be detrimental to well-being, but residents of urban areas that are labeled “food deserts” understand the importance of nearby resources more than most.

Public transportation is another important resource. Not everyone has the pleasure of a personal vehicle, and those who do may not have the necessary income to operate and take care of it, so public transportation such as trains, buses, and taxis are essential. It is not only important for them to exist but also for them to be accessible enough to reach jobs and attractions that increase well-being (Heaven, 2014).

**Education**

Access to a great education is also vital to residents’ well-being. A city that does not well educate its children and teens creates generations of poverty and perpetuates health risks. According to many studies, people that receive an additional four years of school (high school) live 1.8% longer than those who do not, are 2.16 percentage points less at risk for heart disease, and are 1.3% less likely to have diabetes (Picker, 2007) .

Furthermore, those who are more educated are less likely to be diagnosed with diseases such as stroke, hypertension, emphysema, and bad cholesterol. Statistics also show that when the more educated do become ill with these diseases they are still less likely to die from them than are those with less education (Picker, 2007). Picker (2007) writes, “Those with more years of schooling are less likely to smoke, to drink heavily, to be overweight or obese, or to use illegal drugs.” Education is not only reflective in health, but also in finances, as every year of additional schooling raises potential earnings by ten percent (Picker, 2007).

**Entertainment**

To our knowledge, little if any literature exists discussing the influence of hobbies, community activities, and other forms of entertainment on personal or communal well-being. However, from our own perspectives and experiences, we believe that whether one is satisfied with one’s options for occupying one’s leisure time is important for overall happiness. The gap in published studies perhaps points to a need for research on this factor rather than to a lack of effect.

**Determining Means for Measurement**

Measuring happiness and overall well-being has proved to be a difficult task. Even in today's world, with extensive histories of science, psychology, and anthropology as models, there is still a shroud of mystery accompanies a puzzle such as this. The exact happiness level of an individual is shaped both internally and by the influence of the external environment. We desired to investigate the importance of specific influences of the external environment, specifically the city in which people reside, and we recognized that for this type of investigation, there are two ways of examining well-being and happiness. One is a subjective, self-report approach, in which individuals respond to survey statements in a way that rates their outlook on the subject given, normally on a scale. The other is more objective but less personal, examining existing facts and statistics about the city. Both of these approaches have advantages and disadvantages, so it was important for us to decide which would best fit the goals of our current study.

The premise of presenting subjective statements for agreement is to get a first-person account of the subjects’ attitude or feelings, to find how members of communities within a city actually perceive their situation. For example, a statement could say, "I am satisfied with my life right now,” or, “I often feel anxious about my current living situation.” Then, the subjects are to choose the number from the scale, generally 1 to 5 or 1 to 7 with specification as to which corresponds to agreement and which to disagreement, which best represents their feelings. Although this is not definitive data, due to the potentially inaccurate nature of self-report, it gives the researcher an in-depth look at tendencies or correlations of a population of people within a given study. On the other hand, objective measures of the factors effecting well-being, such as official crime rates, number of entertainment establishments, or average standardized test scores of elementary and secondary students, do not consider the population’s individual perceptions of their own happiness. Residents could be highly satisfied or terribly disappointed with their lives despite objective data that would predict the contrary. Comparing self-report data from a city’s people with objective measures about that city could provide valuable insight on what actually determines a well-being.

Developing both subjective and objective well-being measures has proven to be problematic. According to Smith and Clay (2010), “Problems with well-being variables are: they are typically static, covering only one point in time; data are not always readily available; predefined indices may miss situation-specific issues; and the data are expensive to collect” (p. 159). That is not to say that developing a well-being measure cannot be done. Smith and Clay argue that a well-being measure needs to follow four criteria to be considered applicable. It needs to follow logically and simply from available data, allow comparisons across time and among different places, apply to groups as well as to individuals, and contain both objective and subjective components.

However, because it is often is not feasible for researchers to gather both objective and subjective data within a single study, we decided to examine whether the two types seemed to produce significantly different results or whether both types could be considered equally valid. To do this, we needed to compare objective and subjective data that measured the same elements and to see whether they produced similar results. If so, it is likely that they are both valid measures. If not, one or both of them are inaccurate. A study conducted by Oswald and Wu (2010) examined the correlation of subjective data provided by 1.3 million United States citizens across all 50 states with a previous ranking of quality of life in each state based on objective factors. The purpose was to find whether the two types of measures produced the same rankings, and the study found that rankings based on self-report data nearly matched the state rankings of the previous objective study, suggesting that either will produce accurate measurements of well-being.

Because of the findings of the Oswald and Wu study, and because self-report data seemed to be the most widely used method among other previous research, this type of data seemed fitting for our study. Whether or not this subjective method allows for objectivity, it is logical that the best way to determine whether people have a high quality of life is to ask them whether they believe they do. Even if their perception is inaccurate, it is that perception that most directly affects their happiness. Self-report from a sample of a population also provides for a broader nature of the data that is measured and qualitative rather than quantitative study. For example, we may count the number of extracurricular activities offered in a school and how many students participate in them, but without asking residents for their opinions on the quality of those activities, we cannot know whether that aspect of education is actually improving lives. Because of the subjective trend in previous research and the logic behind it, we chose a self-report survey as the format of the current study.

**Methodology**

Goals of measuring happiness in the present research were to construct a survey and poll the citizens of an area to better understand how their well-being was affected by their city of residence. Using that data, we would compare the different cities in that area and evaluate which provided greater happiness and what each city might do to increase its residents’ well-being. We constructed the survey as a group after determining the five factors listed above that largely come from a city environment and affect the well-being of those within the environment, which are safety, education, available resources, health, and entertainment. Drawing from the research above, general demographic information about each city, and personal perceptions of what components constitute each of the five factors, we wrote items for the survey to measure how well participants believed their cities fulfilled those needs and to what degree that influenced their happiness with their city. Each item on the survey asks participates to rate a statement from 1 to 5, with 1 corresponding to strong disagreement with the statement and 5 to strong agreement.

**Participants**

Residents of Liberty and Excelsior Springs, Missouri were asked to participate in our survey. Our researchers distributed paper surveys individually in popular retail establishments within each city and electronically with the help of the Excelsior Springs Chamber of Commerce. Anyone who was 18 to 55 years of age and a resident of one of the two cities was allowed to participate in the survey. No incentives or rewards were offered in exchange for participation. Responses were voluntary and anonymous after obtaining written consent to participation. A total of 38 surveys were collected with 19 from each city.

**Items and their Relevance**

At the beginning of the survey were simple demographic identifiers to examine any trends related to gender, age, and how long participants have lived in their cities. For instance, if the data showed a large number of individuals who lived in the city for long periods of time, we may want to investigate what factors are influencing their decision to stay there, especially whether it is actually due to positive attributes of the city itself or whether it is more because of external factors such as family in the area, job security, or inability to relocate to somewhere more desirable to each individual. After these demographics, participants responded to forty items encompassing our five identified factors and direct measures of perceived well-being.

Safety is represented in the survey by statements such as, “I feel safe walking alone around town,” and “I trust my neighbors to watch my home and belongings.” These kinds of items are aimed at identifying not only how people perceive their safety but to what degree they feel that their environment has established community values. Community and trust are crucial components to individual well-being as they provides a stable foundation for emotional safety in addition to physical safety.

Available resources, in our survey, refers to finances, helpfulness of neighbors, and stores in the city that provide necessities such as groceries and clothing. The category also refers to participants’ proximity to schools and their jobs. Statements like, “I grocery shop in town,” and “I enjoy my current job,” help us determine whether the town provides an adequate amount of businesses and establishments to meet the citizens demands. These questions pertain to well-being in multiple ways. For instance, if a large portion of people do their shopping out of town, they are using time, vehicle fuel, and money that could all be saved if grocery stores closer to home could fulfill their needs. If many people indicate that they are unhappy with their jobs, not only are their individual well-beings directly affected, but that also shows a need for economic improvement to provide better jobs and increase productivity. As jobs occupy much of each person’s life, people’s working in a position that causes unhappiness wastes potential for their own well-being and potential for them to improve the situation of others.

Health as a factor examines a city’s hospitals and clinics as well as whether residents believe their city facilitates a healthy style of life. Items on the survey asked participants directly to rate their agreement with the statements, “There are a variety of health care options here,” “The health care options are of high quality,” and, “This town allows me to have a healthy lifestyle.” Having such services readily available contributes to actual health as well as peace of mind. Gyms, fresh foods, clean air and outdoor spaces, and other infrastructure meant to promote good health are important to well-being as being active and eating nutritiously can both make people feel better while living their lives and extend the length of their lives.

The fourth factor regarded entertainment provided by the city. A few items in this category were, “I usually stay in town for entertainment,” and, “I like the bars in my town.” Entertainment is important to many people because it allows them to unwind, to express aspects of themselves not represented in their jobs, and to build meaningful relationships with others in their community. Like available resources, if people are most often driving out of town to meet their entertainment needs, they are wasting time, fuel, and money that could be better spent if they could meet these needs within city limits.

Items focused on education directed participants’ attention to their city’s available school systems including elementary through high school. These items addressed the programs within the schools with statements like, “The schools have plenty of activities and clubs,” and “I am pleased with schools musical and theater programs.” The purpose of the education category was to gauge the opinion of recent graduates and parents in regards to whether they believed their schools sufficiently provide them and their children with the curriculum and programs that can most help them become successful and happy. This measurement includes electives, creative programs, clubs, and activities for students who wish to explore more than core subjects. Schools, especially public schools, play an important part role in influencing well-being because general education affects all aspects of life both while students are in school and in their futures. It also affects how students interact with each other and the community as adults. Education can promote better understanding of oneself and one’s needs, helping individuals to change and improve their own well-being and the well-being of those around them within the other four qualities of well-being addressed in this study.

**Methods of Analysis**

In addition to items related to each of the five factors, direct items asking participants to rate their enjoyment of and satisfaction with their city were included to compare well-being between the two cities. Averages for each item, direct measures of happiness and statements within the factors alike, within each city were compared to the corresponding average of the other city. This provides a simple way to see which city has a greater amount of satisfaction in a particular area. We then examined correlations of the items within the factors with the items directly measuring well-being in order to determine which of these factors might have the most influence on quality of life.

**Results and Recommendations**

According to the data from our surveys, residents of Liberty are happier with their city and have better quality of life on our five life factors than residents of Excelsior Springs. Of the thirty-nine[[1]](#footnote-1) items that measured satisfaction with or quality of life in the participant’s city, thirty-six had better average ratings from Liberty residents, one was equal for both cities, and two had slightly better averages from Excelsior Springs. Five of the items with higher averages from Liberty were significant, defined by a difference in averages of more than one full rating point. These were: “Crime does not happen here often” (Liberty average L = 3.74, Excelsior Springs average E = 2.35); “I grocery shop in town” (L = 4.58, E = 3.58); “I do my clothing, home, and accessory shopping in town” (L = 3.89, E = 2.47); “I feel that my town provides a wide variety of entertainment” (L = 3.53, E = 2.42); and “Overall, I am satisfied with shopping and entertainment where I live” (L = 3.89, E = 2.79). These differences perhaps point to opportunities for improvement—lowering crime and increasing the city’s shopping options—that might help increase residents overall satisfaction with life in Excelsior Springs.

Demographic information of the survey participants produced some interesting statistics. Liberty participants were 11 women and 8 men, and Excelsior Springs participants were 17 women and 2 men, but gender produced no significant correlations. Ages in both groups ranged from 18 to 55, though the average age of Excelsior Springs participants was slightly higher (L = 35.42, E = 42). Excelsior Springs participants had lived in their city an average of 14.42 years longer than those of Liberty (L = 9.42, E = 23.84), and only 4 participants from Excelsior Springs had an associate’s degree or higher versus 16 degree-holding Liberty counterparts.

Four items directly measured participants’ happiness with their city. Liberty participants on average agreed more than did Excelsior Springs participants that they enjoy living in their city, that they would not move out of their city even if they had the opportunity, that they planned to stay in their current city for all of most of their lives (despite Liberty participants being of a younger age on average), and that they were satisfied with their city overall. Beyond measuring which items had significantly higher averages in Liberty participants as mentioned above, we looked for items that significantly correlated with these four direct measures regardless of city in order to determine which of our variables might most effect happiness and satisfaction with life in one’s city.

Fifteen variables were found to correlate significantly with at least one of these four direct measures, using an alpha level of p ≤ .001. A much higher number of variables were found to correlate using the standard alpha levels of p ≤ .05 and p ≤ .01, so the stricter alpha level was used to ensure that only the strongest correlations were considered. This alpha level means that there is less than a 0.1% chance that these variables are related simply by chance. Though the relationships are still only correlations, meaning we cannot say definitively that these variables *cause* greater well-being, the relationship does suggests that increasing city residents’ agreement with these items would also increase enjoyment of the city, willingness to stay in the city even with an opportunity to move, desire to live in the city for most of one’s life, and overall satisfaction with the city.

“I feel my children/family are safe walking around town alone” was the only variable that correlated with three of the four direct measures, which were enjoying the city, not wanting to move, and overall satisfaction. Variables that correlated with both enjoying the city and overall satisfaction were education level[[2]](#footnote-2), trusting neighbors to watch homes and belongings, buying groceries in town, shopping for clothing and accessories in town, and approval of the schools’ physical education classes. Feeling safe walking around town alone correlated with both willingness to stay in the city even with an opportunity to move and overall satisfaction, and the item, “I do not worry about my property being stolen,” correlated with a desire to stay in the city for all or most of one’s life as well as with overall satisfaction. Seven other variables correlated only with enjoying the city: low frequency of crime, generous and helpful people, ideal living situation, not minding to drive for entertainment, quality of school electives, entertainment in the town, and residence close to stores, schools, and jobs.

Interestingly, four of our five measured qualities (health, safety, resources, entertainment, and education) are represented in these correlations. Five of them are safety items, and because there were a total of five safety items on the survey, safety is 100% represented among the correlations. Resource availability follows with 40%, or four of ten items. Entertainment and education both have three of nine items correlating (33%) when education level is included. Only health is not represented; however, our study only included three items related to health, so this quality may not have been adequately measured, and the importance of physical education classes may be related to the importance of physical health. Based on these measures, what would most increase well-being in these cities, or presumably in any city, would be decreasing crime against individuals and property and fostering trusting relationships between neighbors. Encouraging citizens to continue education beyond high school and creating more and better grocery, clothing, and accessory shopping options in town should also increase satisfaction among residents.

When looking independently at the combined item averages of each category of variable, residents of both cities were most satisfied with their availability of resources (L = 4.14, E = 3.62) and least satisfied with their entertainment quality (L = 3.52, E = 2.97). Combined averages for the other three categories were as follows: Health: L = 4.10, E = 3.53; Safety: L = 3.92, E = 3.04; Education: L = 3.90, E = 3.61. In addition to entertainment, then, Liberty could most improve its qualities of education and safety while Excelsior Springs could most improve its qualities of safety and health. More research with residents would be helpful in determining specific steps to take to improve these qualities and increase average residents’ well-being.

**Assessment of the Process**

In designing the study on the well-being of Liberty and Excelsior Springs, Missouri, it was important to us that we analyze the attitudes of the members of the respective communities. To this end, we collected surveys gathering data on five main criteria: health, safety, availability of resources, education, and entertainment.

These criteria are related to the ideas discussed in the books by Charles Wheelan (2010), Bill McKibben (2007), and Sissela Bok (2010). From Wheelan, we gathered that community members should have access to health care, safety resources and education which would give them the capabilities to pursue their own form of well-being. McKibben led us to ask a few questions on the locality of resources—how far did people have to go in order to get the resources they desired? McKibben is very community oriented, and we wanted to know if Liberty and Excelsior, although far from having a local economy, could at least provide rudimentary resources within their own city limits. We also asked our subjects a few questions on wealth, wondering if they felt that a higher income was directly correlated to higher levels of happiness, an issue which Sissela Bok delves into in her book, *Exploring Happiness: From Aristotle to Brain Science*. Finally, we chose to add questions on entertainment, as we were targeting a very wide age group and felt that younger subjects would particularly value this aspect.

Upon further inspection of our process, there are several other areas we would have liked to explore. Bok (2010) devotes much of her book to the issue of depression and avenues people have taken to combat depression, such as illusion/delusion and community service and investing in something other than the self. Had we included these aspects, we believe the process would have been more complete and the data a bit more telling of the well-being of both municipalities.

Wheelan (2010) introduced us to the concept of capability. The more “information” community members have, the more capable they are of pursuing well-being (p. 108). According to Wheelan, individuals are primarily interested in the self, working to better their own economic situation before thinking of anyone else’s. Access to information makes this endeavor more fruitful, as the individual is better equipped to pursue their version of well-being. Thus, in this case, information refers to anything that would offer an advantage to the individual in the market. Wheelan gives the example of a person buying a used car—knowing what to look for better equips the buyer to make the best investment possible. The same goes for accessing healthcare and wrestling with insurance companies. While we asked our subjects if they were satisfied with their area’s schools and healthcare resources (as far as quality and variety), we failed to assess the reach of information in the two municipalities. Even if there are a variety of good schools and healthcare resources, lack of information might limit an individual’s access.

We met several different types of communities in Bill McKibben’s book, *Deep Economy* (2007), all of which shared the aspect of a deep-rooted sense of connectedness. Whether it was the ingeniousness of Curitiba in Brazil or the sustainable town in Gorasin, McKibben’s examples always encouraged the reader to seek out places that were resourceful on their own. Both Liberty and Excelsior Springs rely on huge corporations such as Wal-Mart and HYVEE for their resources. In hindsight, the survey should have included questions regarding community-oriented resources such as farmer’s markets or food drives done in each municipality in order to better discern whether there is a sense of commitment to community in either town. McKibben argues that the self has completely overwhelmed society, so that now we are not communities but rather “hyper-individualists” (p. 97). Both Excelsior Springs and Liberty are suburban cities, so even if they were generally neutral on the topic of whether they worried about their property being stolen, this is likely due more to the fact that their property is not easily accessible to most of the people around them rather than to a sense of trust or relationships with their neighbors. If McKibben were analyzing these two municipalities, he might be concerned, as we are, that there was not a higher level of trust among participants and their neighbors.

Bok’s book, *Exploring Happiness* (2010), offers a history on research done on the definition of happiness and how to achieve it. From Bok we learn that “people regularly report being happier in societies that enjoy high standards of living” (p. 142). We asked our subjects if they felt that their happiness depended on their income, but according to Bertrand Russel as cited by Bok, “The most basic form of happiness is available to human beings…regardless of their level of education, so long as they enjoy health and physical vigor, loving relationships, and a sense of achievement in life, of overcoming obstacles” (p. 134). Along with asking our subjects if they felt that their happiness was directly correlated with their income, we also should have asked more questions that probed the ability of the municipality to provide spaces to further their health as well as places to build lasting relationships. These types of places would include gyms, community centers, parks, and as previously mentioned, farmer’s markets and other community driven events.

Bok (2010) also touches on the issues of illusion and delusion in the pursuit of happiness. Bok gives us Lycas as an example, who was completely happy but was under the illusion that theatrical performances were constantly being performed around him. While Lycas was immensely happy in his delusion, his family found the situation troubling. In light of this, we could have asked participants about their perception of the ability of their friends and family to be happy within their city (provided as it was the same as the participant’s own). Such questions might have provided insight as to whether happiness and satisfaction within each city could be attributed to illusion.

Another of Bok’s (2010) considerations is religion, especially Christianity in the Western world, which can be discussed in terms of an illusion that makes people feel a sense of purpose and understand their place in the world. We did not ask a single question on religion in our survey, which we see as a vast oversight considering illusion was one of the main avenues to happiness discussed by Bok. Community members might derive their happiness from their respective illusions, in which case the availability of, say, a church in which to practice a religion would be a priority when choosing a place to live. Finally, Bok cites Seneca, who essentially promotes the renunciation of the self and even of hyper-individualism. Seneca writes that being kind to others without expecting anything in return is one way of bringing “peace and harmony of the soul” (p. 62). Community service is a prime example of this sort of behavior, and further studies should include questions on the opportunities for community service in the two municipalities.

In conclusion, our process included several key issues of well-being as delineated by Wheelan (2010), Mckibben (2007), and Bok (2010). These include access to information, access to resources locally, and the issue of the necessity of wealth for the achievement of happiness. Upon inspection of our process, which consisted of surveys distributed to members of the two municipalities, there are several other areas which would have been productive to explore in determining the cities’ respective levels of well-being. These include analyzing the reach of the information available in both municipalities, analyzing the respective levels of community oriented behaviors, and evaluating the access to illusions such as religion (in the form of churches and other areas of worship). By adding these factors, we feel our process would have been more well-rounded and would have accurately fit what we have learned of well-being from our readings. Despite these shortcomings, our study still adequately covered the five factors of health, safety, resource availability, entertainment, and education, finding that lack of quality entertainment and higher crime rates are the main qualities that make residents of Excelsior Springs less satisfied with their city than residents of Liberty.

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1. One item of the forty on the survey was not related to life in one’s city. It read “My happiness is dependent on my income,” and was not significant between the two cities, nor did it correlate significantly with any other variable. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Education level was part of the demographic information, not one of the forty items, but its correlation with the direct measures of happiness may be considered just as relevant, so it is included here. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)