

How do people define happiness?

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BUT FIRST

Let's talk about Subjective Well-Being

Happiness Is Similar



“How do you define your subjective well-being?”

“Happiness” makes sense to people.

People have “LAY” or “Folk” theories about what happiness is.

Happiness is enmeshed in our social/cultural fabric.

So, we have been asking people:

**What is your definition of
happiness?**

AND

**What factors contribute to your
happiness?**

Folk theories as Heuristics

The world we live in is the same for all of us, but the way we experience it is different for each individual.

Kelley, G. A. (1955). *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*. New York: Norton.

Folk theories may be prescriptive or descriptive.

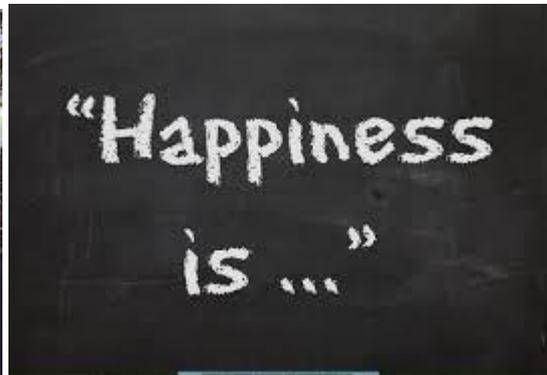
Dweck, C. S. (1999). *Self-Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development*. Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.

“How you think about yourself might be very important in creating yourself.”

— Shinobu Kitayama

Happiness is not “one size fits all”





**...singing
in the car.**



Today

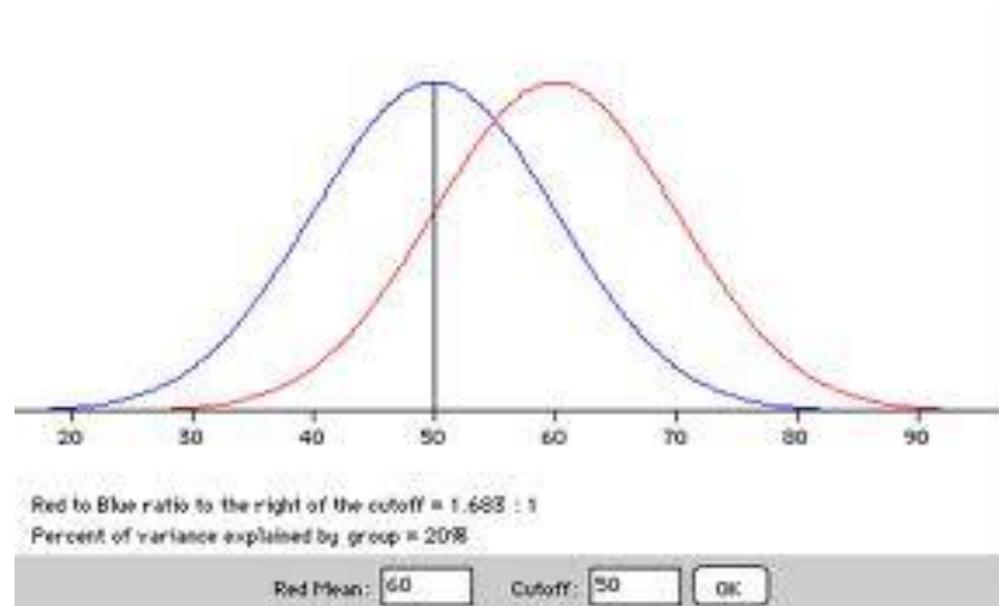
How do people define happiness?

- **Study 1:** Open-ended (online) – “What is your definition of happiness?”
- **Study 2:** RATE (online) – 28 statements – “How much is your happiness determined by . . .”

Examine group differences

- Low SES vs. High SES

SES = Socio-Economic Status



Study 1 – Spontaneous definitions of Happiness

Having the opportunity to love and be loved, and finding wonder in everyday things.

Happiness is not being upset at anything.

Being happy means feeling that your life is full of meaning and purpose.

Money and women. Luxuries in the world. Good food.

For me happiness is to be free of negative emotions, nasty problems, negative people in order to enjoy life.

It means security and being content.

Study 1 – Spontaneous definitions of Happiness

I'm happiest when I am fully engaged in things that i enjoy. I am "in the zone"

It is a feeling of contentment. It is a lack of worry or depression.

It's knowing who you are, what you're capable of, and showing that to yourself every day.

To me, happiness is helping others and seeing them happy. It is watching my kids enjoy life.

Happiness is having fun doing things. It is feeling like laughing, fooling around and making jokes.

Glaring Absences in people's spontaneous definitions

- Physical Health
- Mental Health
- Freedom
- Absence of a corrupt Government

Back to what the data did say

Let's examine between group differences

e.g., Low SES vs. High SES

n = 457

Curious: How do low income (low SES) people differ in their spontaneous happiness definitions?

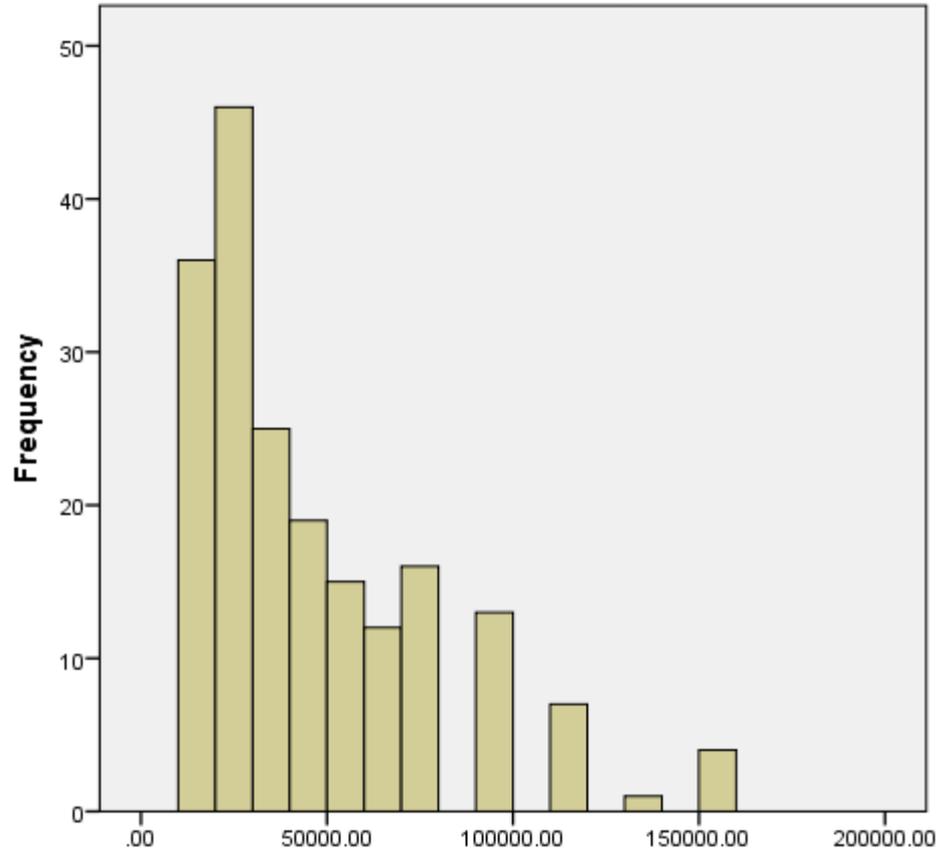
Low Happiness High Happiness

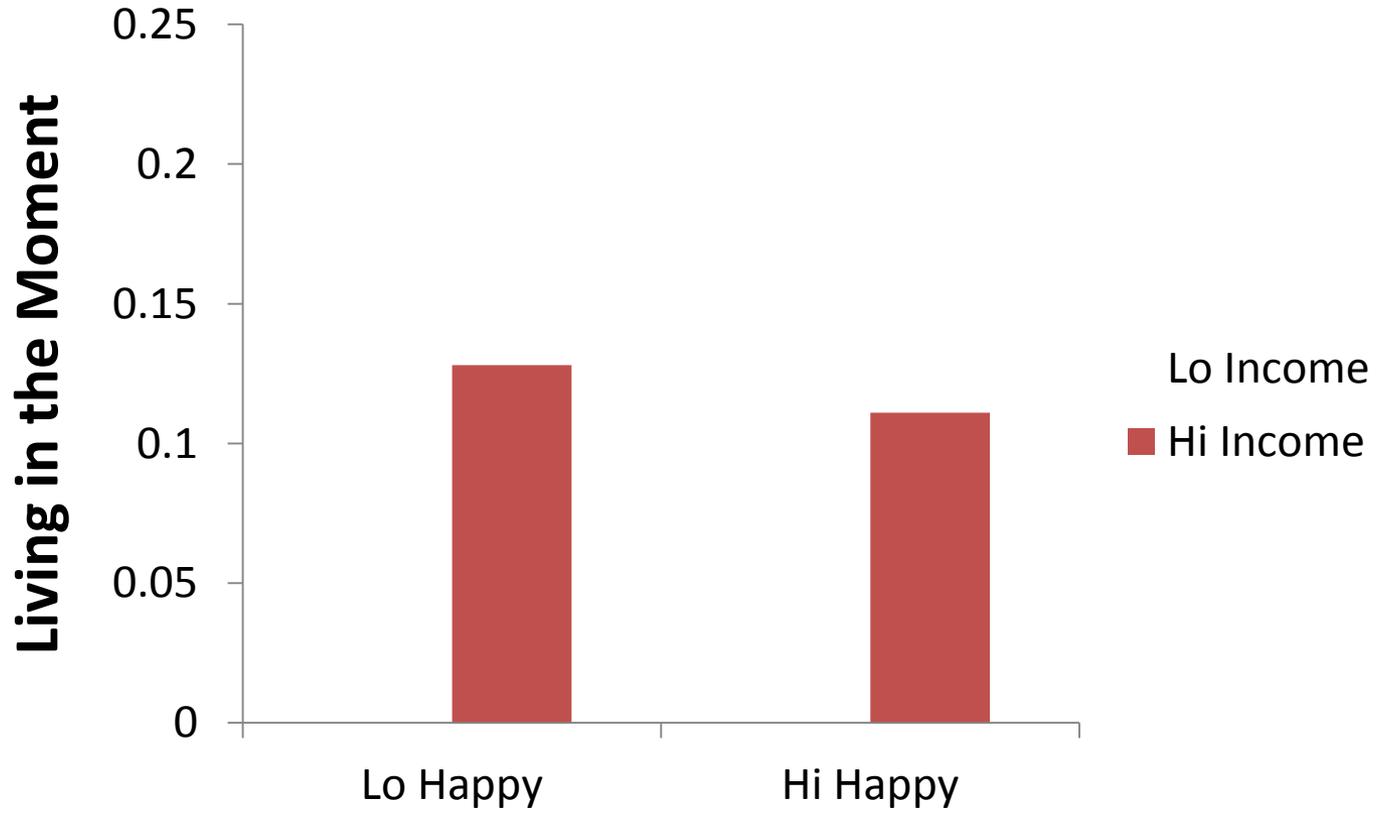
Low SES (income)

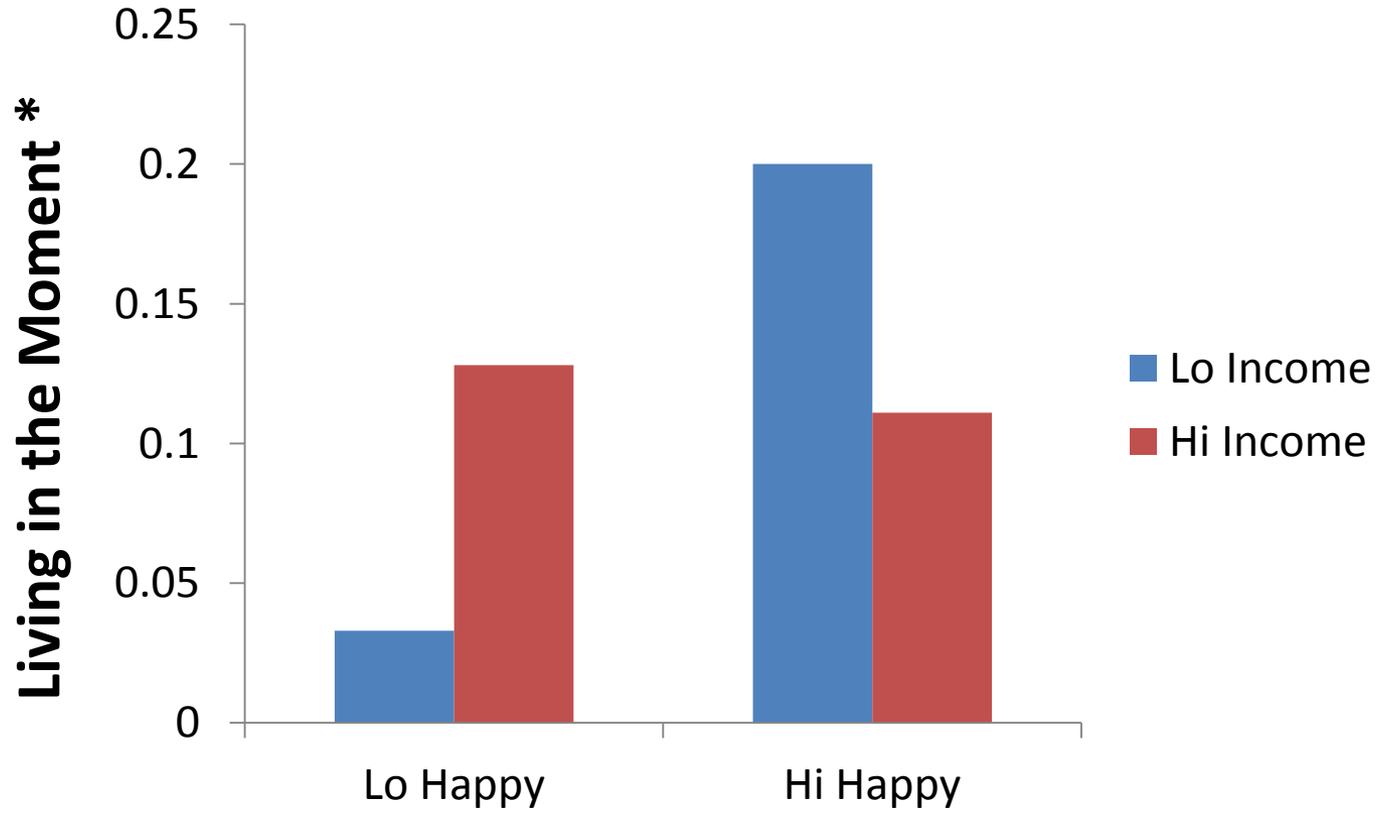
High SES (income)

Ran a 2 x 2 ANOVA

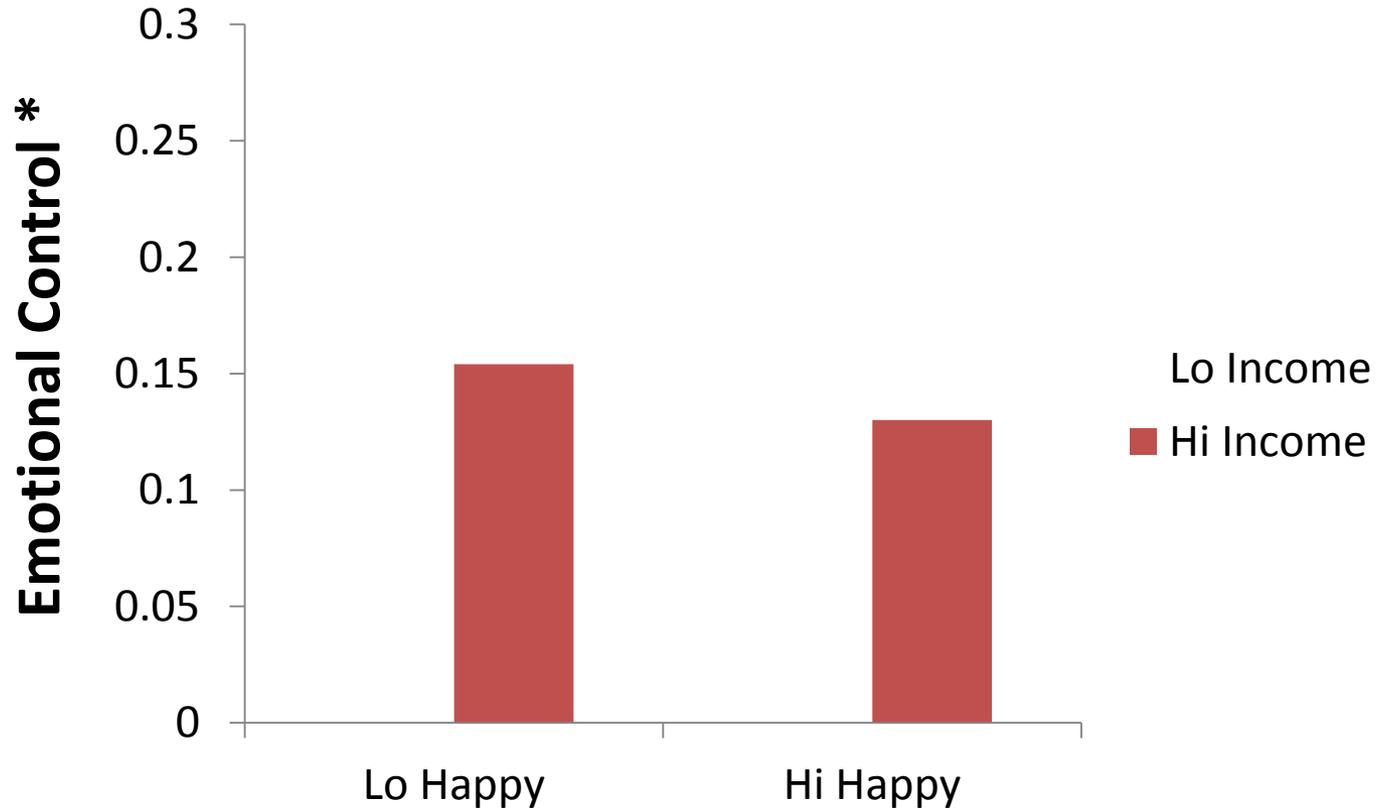
Histogram



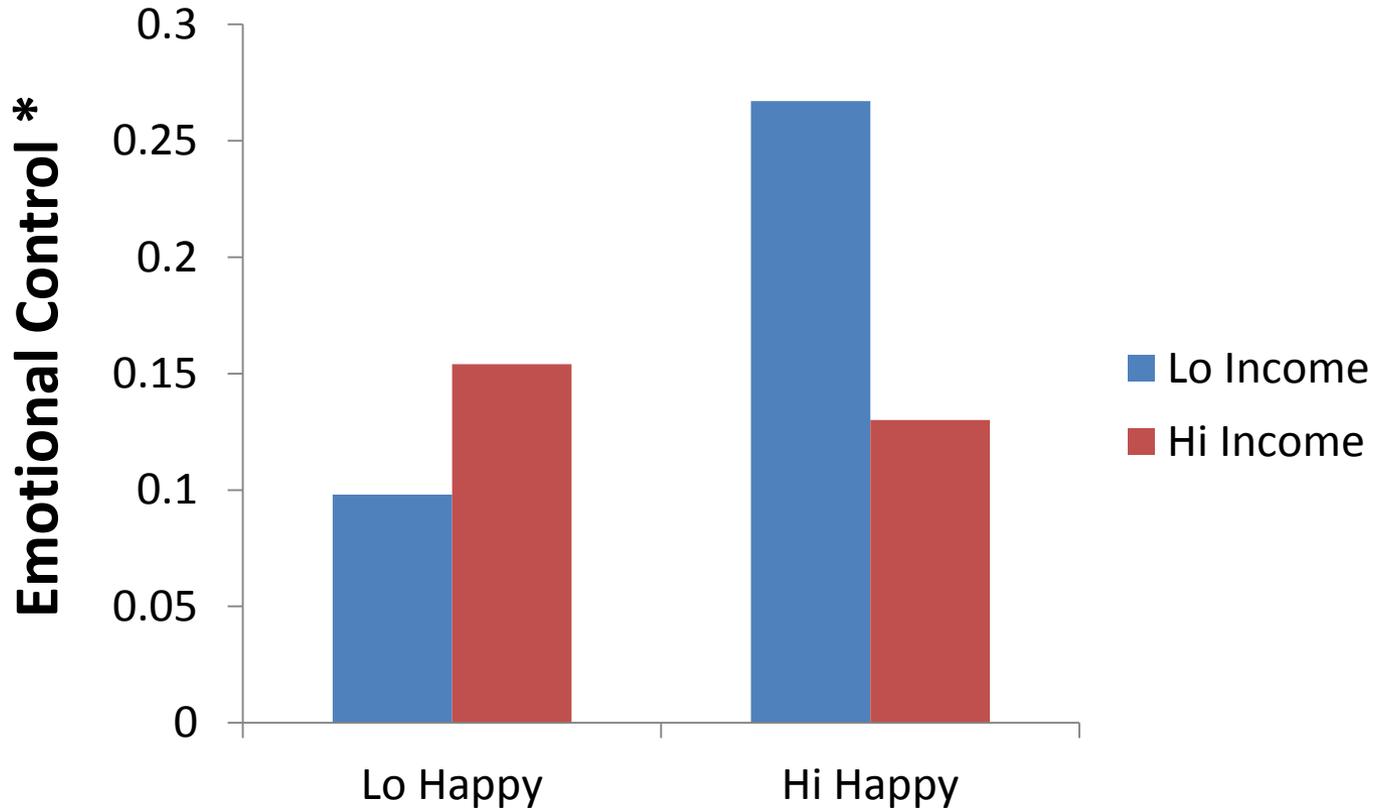




$p = .04$



- Taking the good with the bad
- Making the best of situations



$p = .05$

- Taking the good with the bad
- Making the best of situations

SUMMARY:

For 'self-generated' (spontaneous) definitions of happiness, LOW SES people report MORE instances of

1. *Living in the Moment, and*
2. *Making the best of situations*

Corroborating Evidence:

Palys & Little (1983)

Higher Life Satisfaction when projects were:

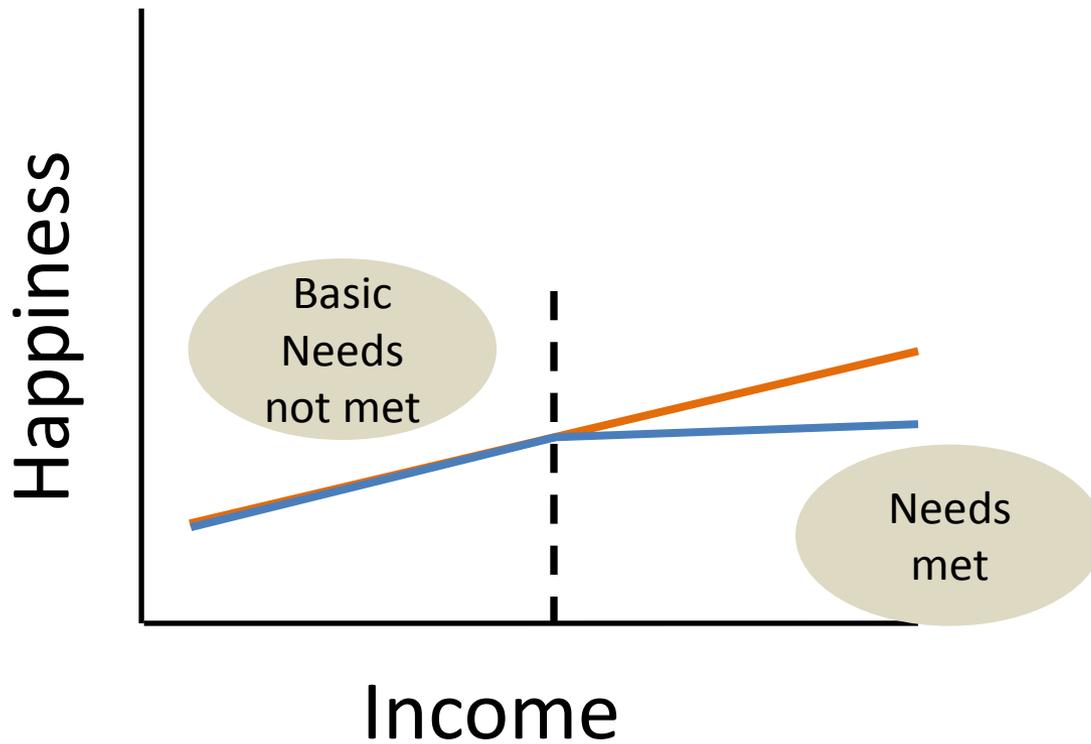
- Short term – enjoyable tasks – moderately difficult

GOOD - right?

DISCOVERED: Unique strategies that low SES people may tend to use.

BUT – self-generated definitions seemed to MISS important factors

AND – is 35K an appropriate split between LOW and HIGH income?



$r = .39$ (collapsed across countries)

World Happiness Report,
2012, Helliwell et al.

$r = .23^{**}$ (our U.S. samples)

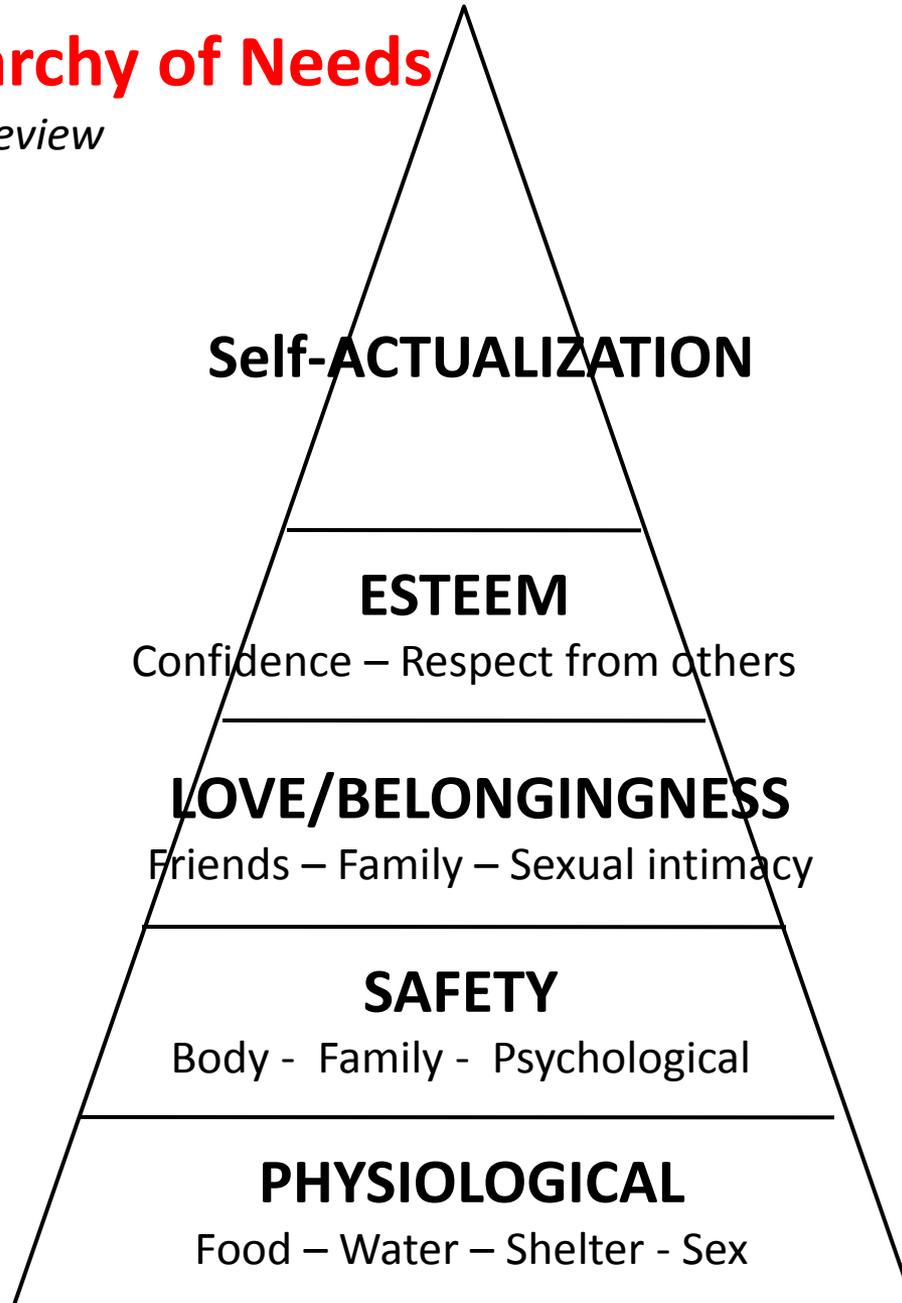
**Let's see if there is something that
can better capture
– SES**

HOW ABOUT:

If your income needs are MET?

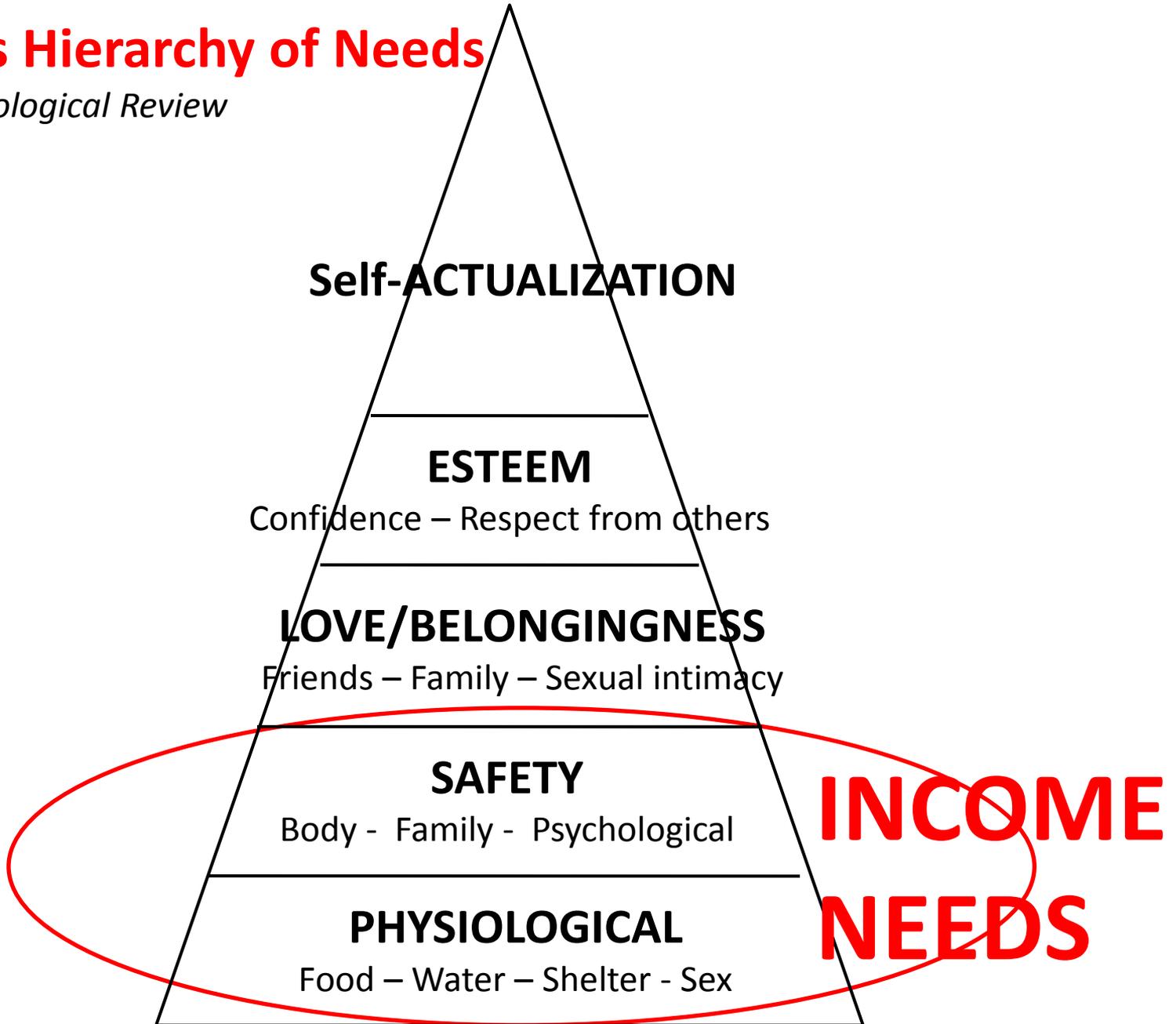
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

(1943) *Psychological Review*



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

(1943) *Psychological Review*



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

(1943) *Psychological Review*

Self-ACTUALIZATION

ESTEEM

Confidence – Respect from others

LOVE/BELONGINGNESS

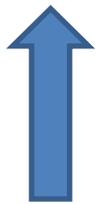
Friends – Family – Sexual intimacy

SAFETY

Body - Family - Psychological

PHYSIOLOGICAL

Food – Water – Shelter - Sex

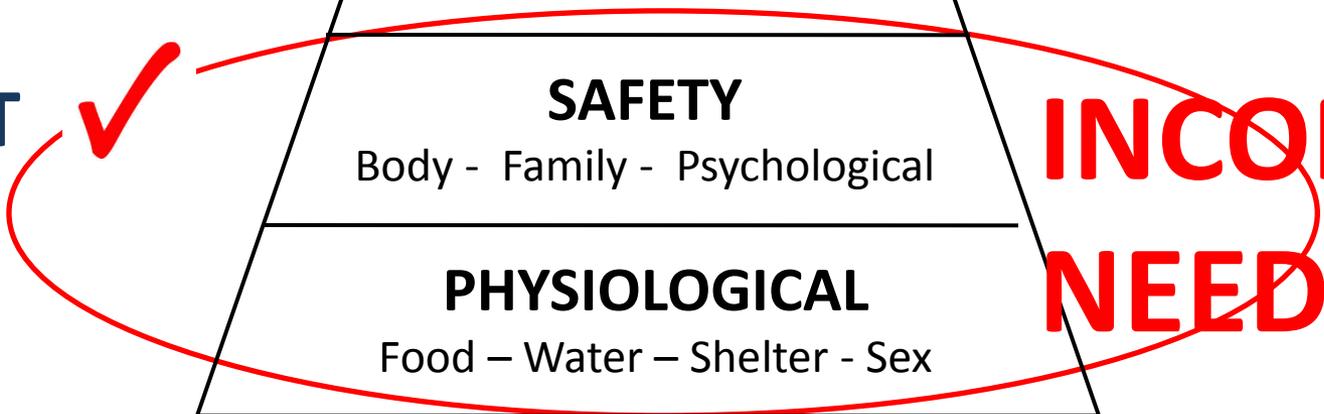


MET



INCOME

NEEDS



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

(1943) *Psychological Review*

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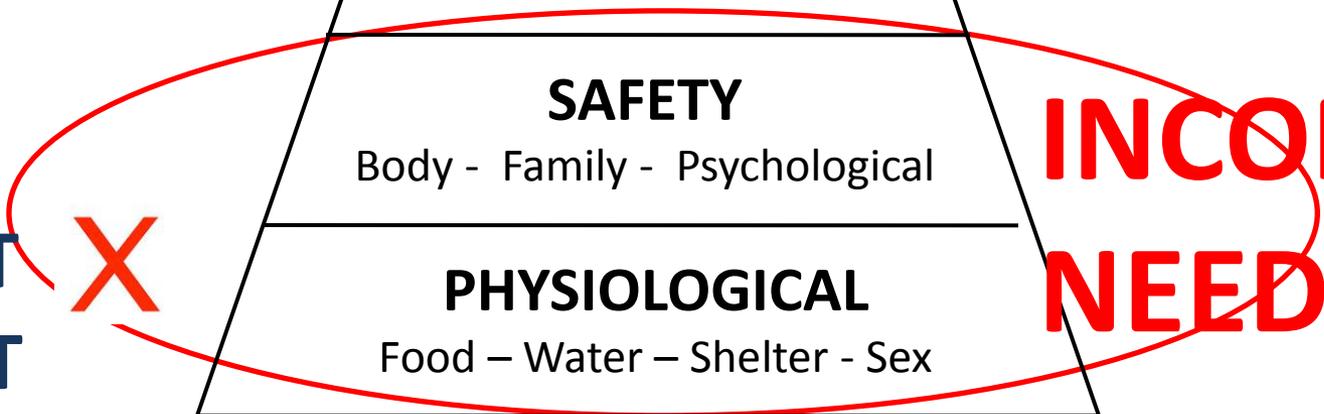
Food – Water – Shelter - Sex

INCOME

NEEDS

**NOT
MET**

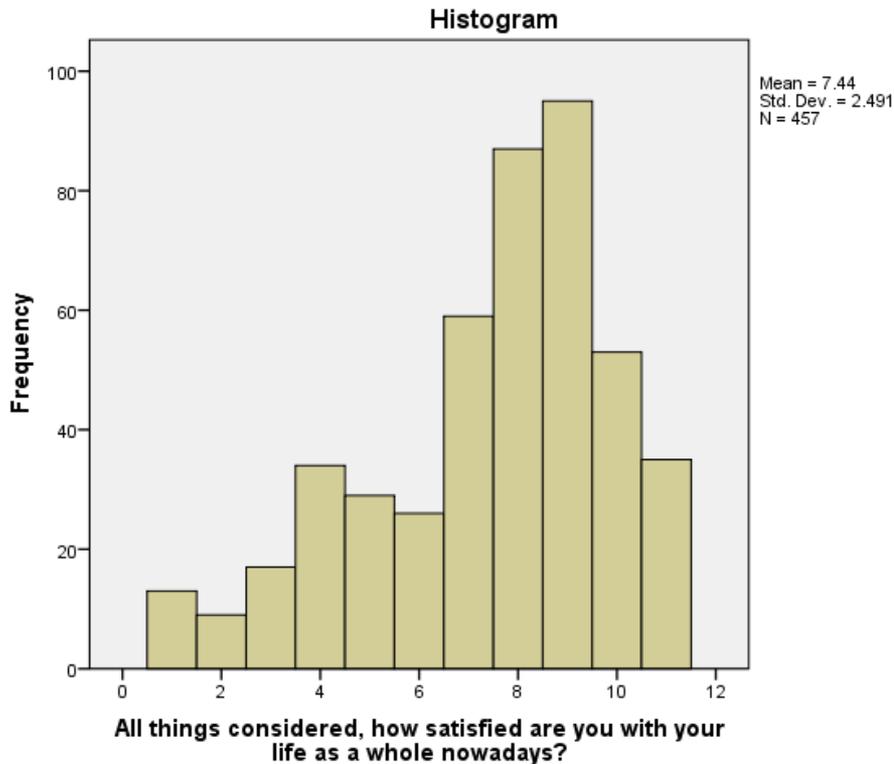
X



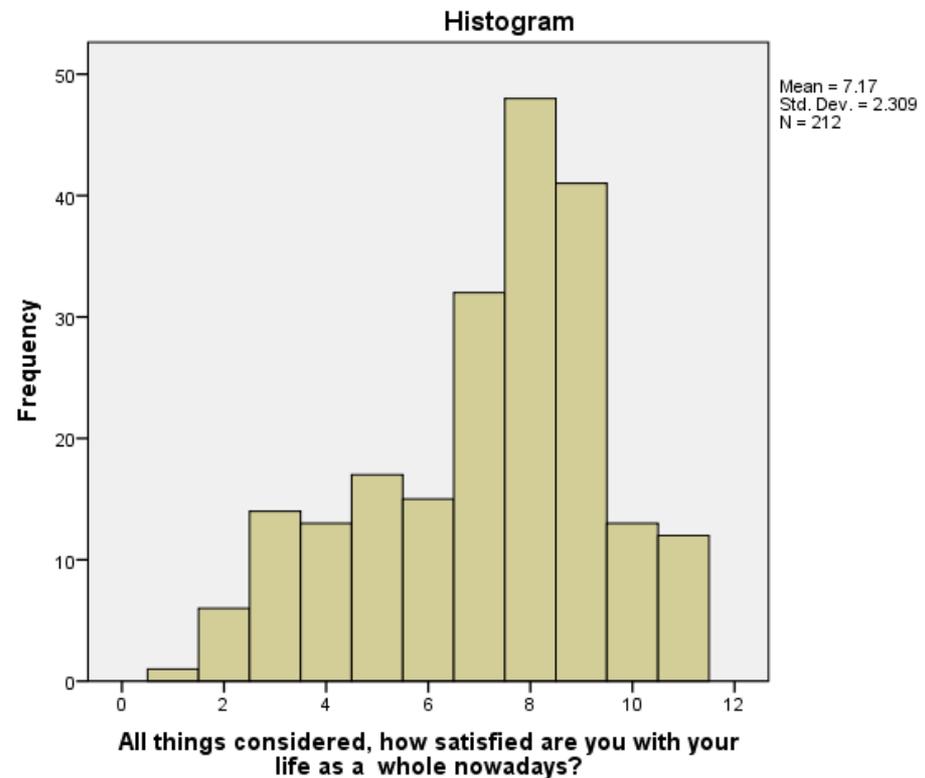
LASTLY

I don't really trust self-reported HAPPINESS

An 'optimism' bias – a 'happiness' bias



Study 1



Study 2

SO . . .

Splitting on low vs. high happiness
might not necessarily be appropriate
either.

Study 2: New variable: Are your income needs met?

Qu: What factors contribute to your happiness?

How much is YOUR overall happiness determined by:

28 factors

-
-
-
-

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

Not at all
important for
my happiness

Very important
for my happiness

n = 205

A Much simpler analysis:

What do people rate as more important to their happiness when:

Income needs are MET

VS

When Income needs are NOT MET

Factors (important for happiness) for which there were NO differences between groups:

Positive Affect

Negative Affect

Goals

Connectedness

Feeling Safe

Self-Esteem (e.g., liking myself)

Spirituality

Secure job

Liking my job

Physical health

Mental health

Factors (important for happiness) for which there were differences between groups:

Calm

Content

Living in the Moment

Grateful

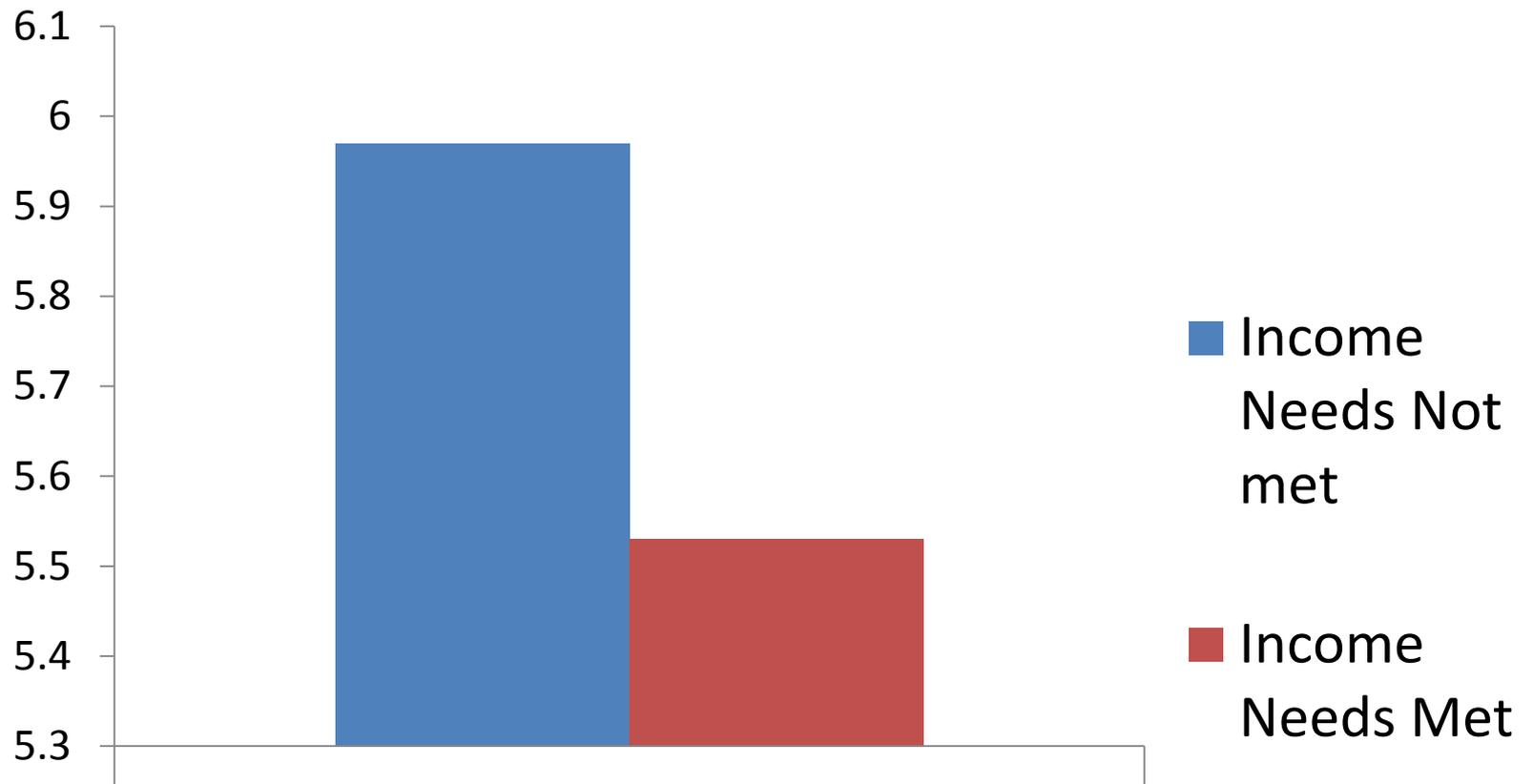
Hope

Doing things for others, with others

Emotional Control *

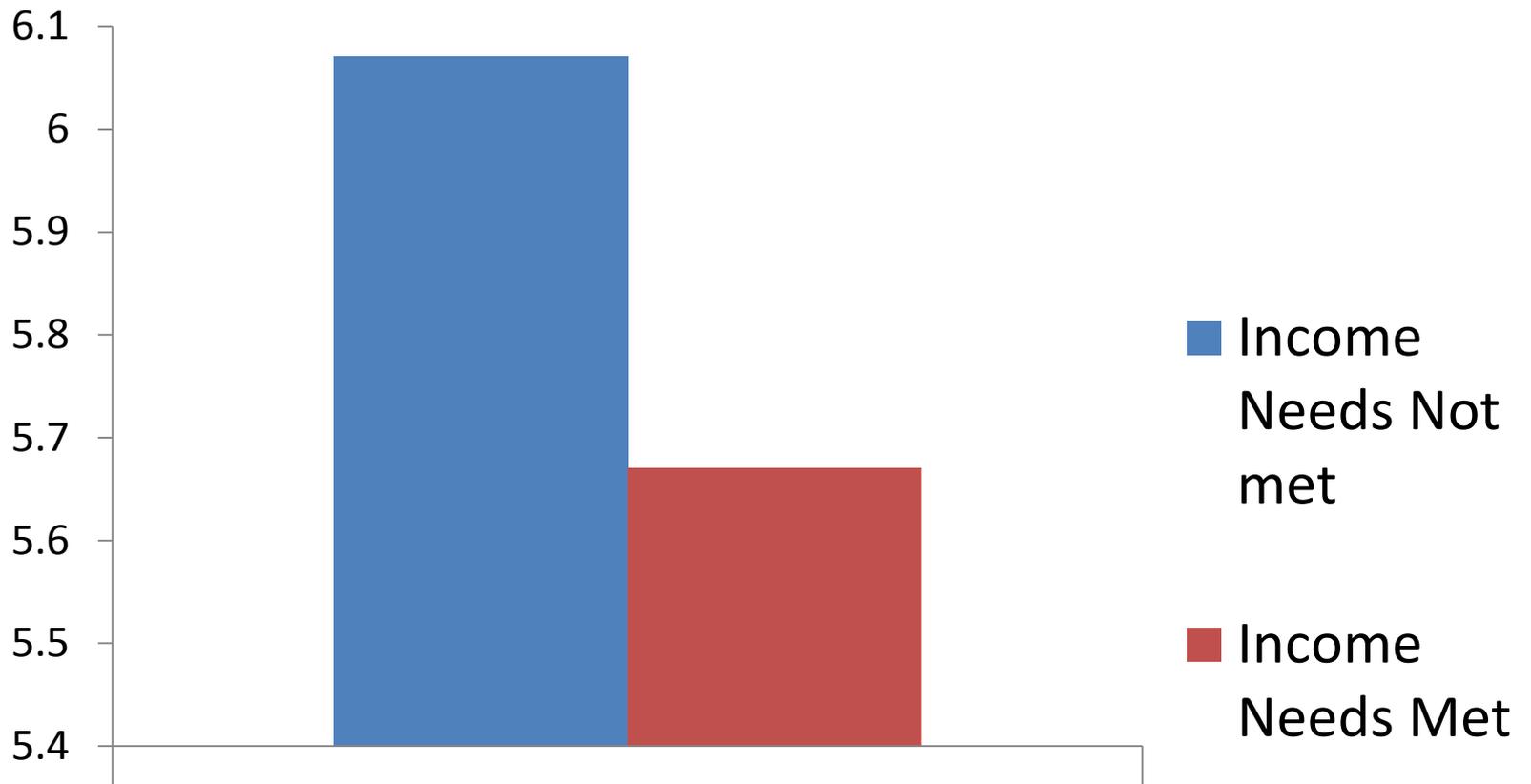
Happy Philosophy *

Doing things for others *



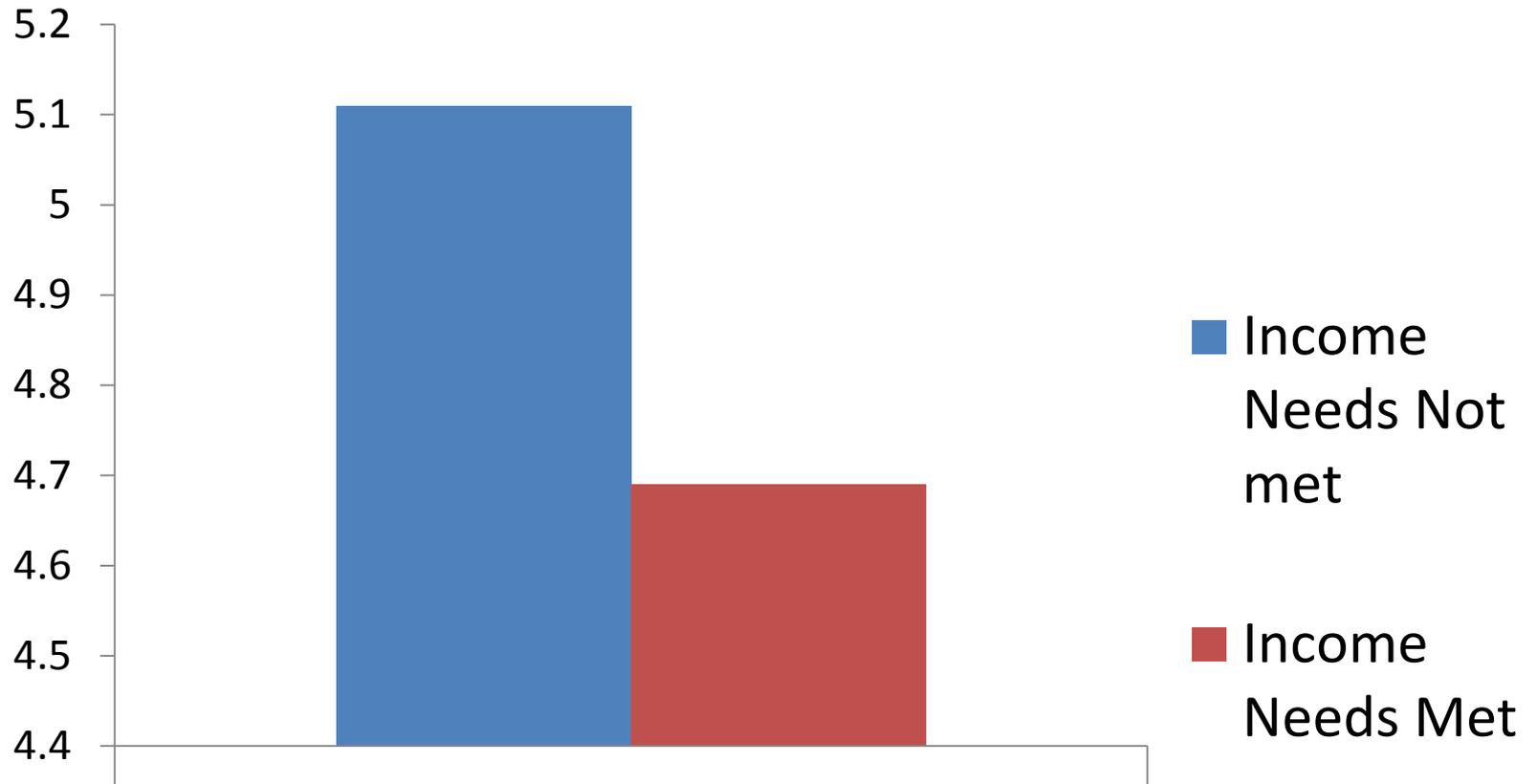
Calm

$p = .02$



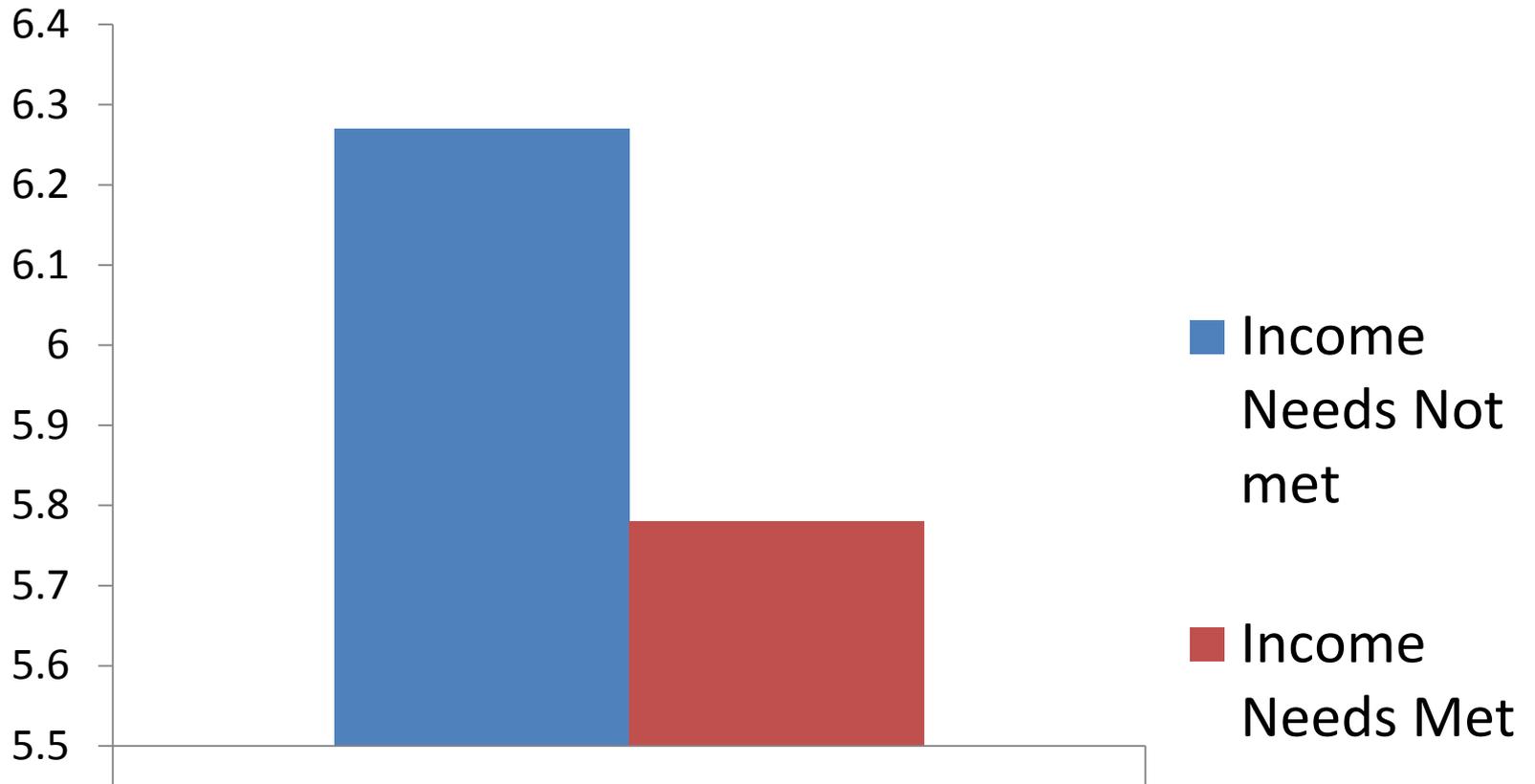
Content

$p = .04$



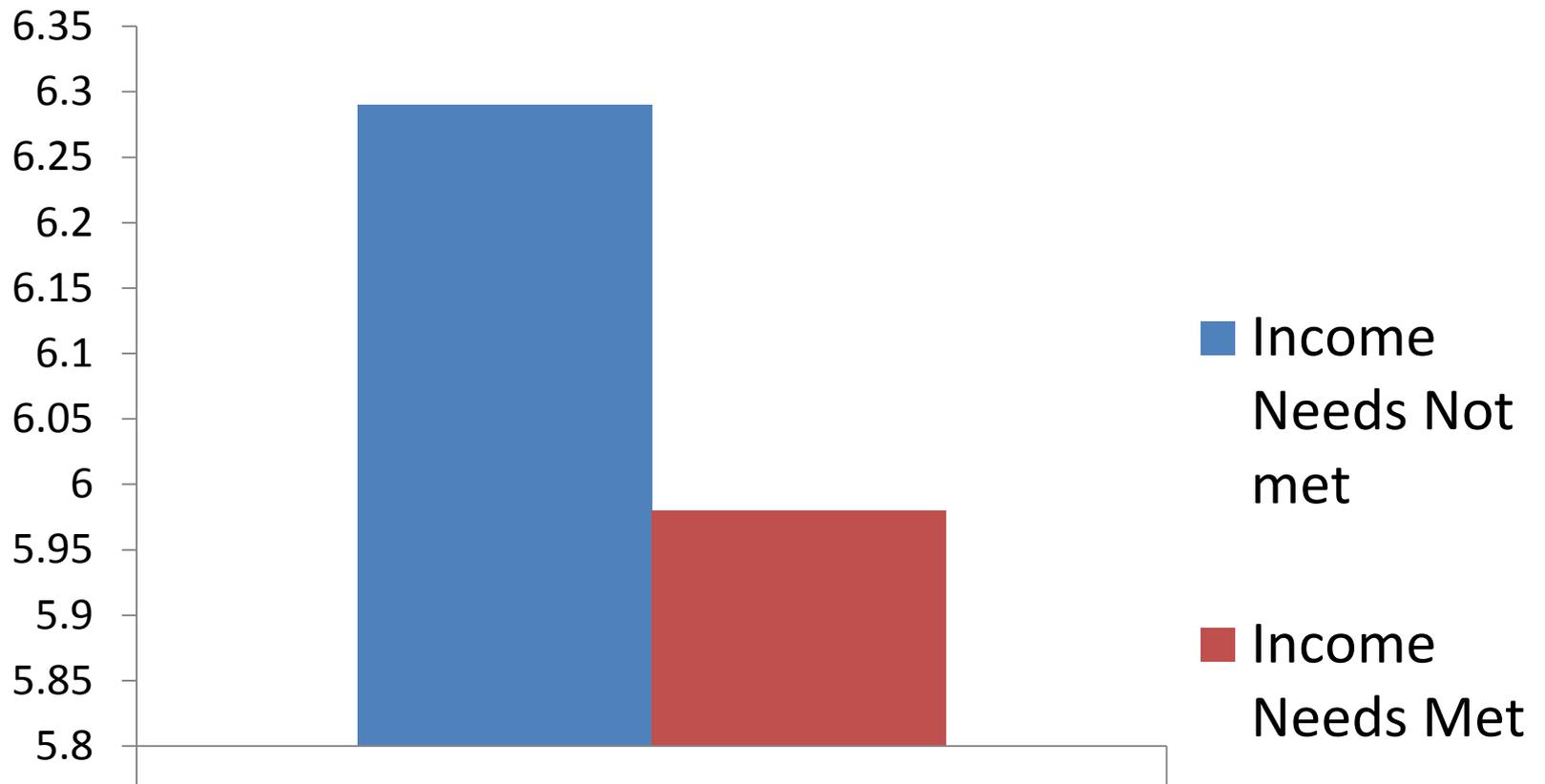
Living in Moment

$p = .05$



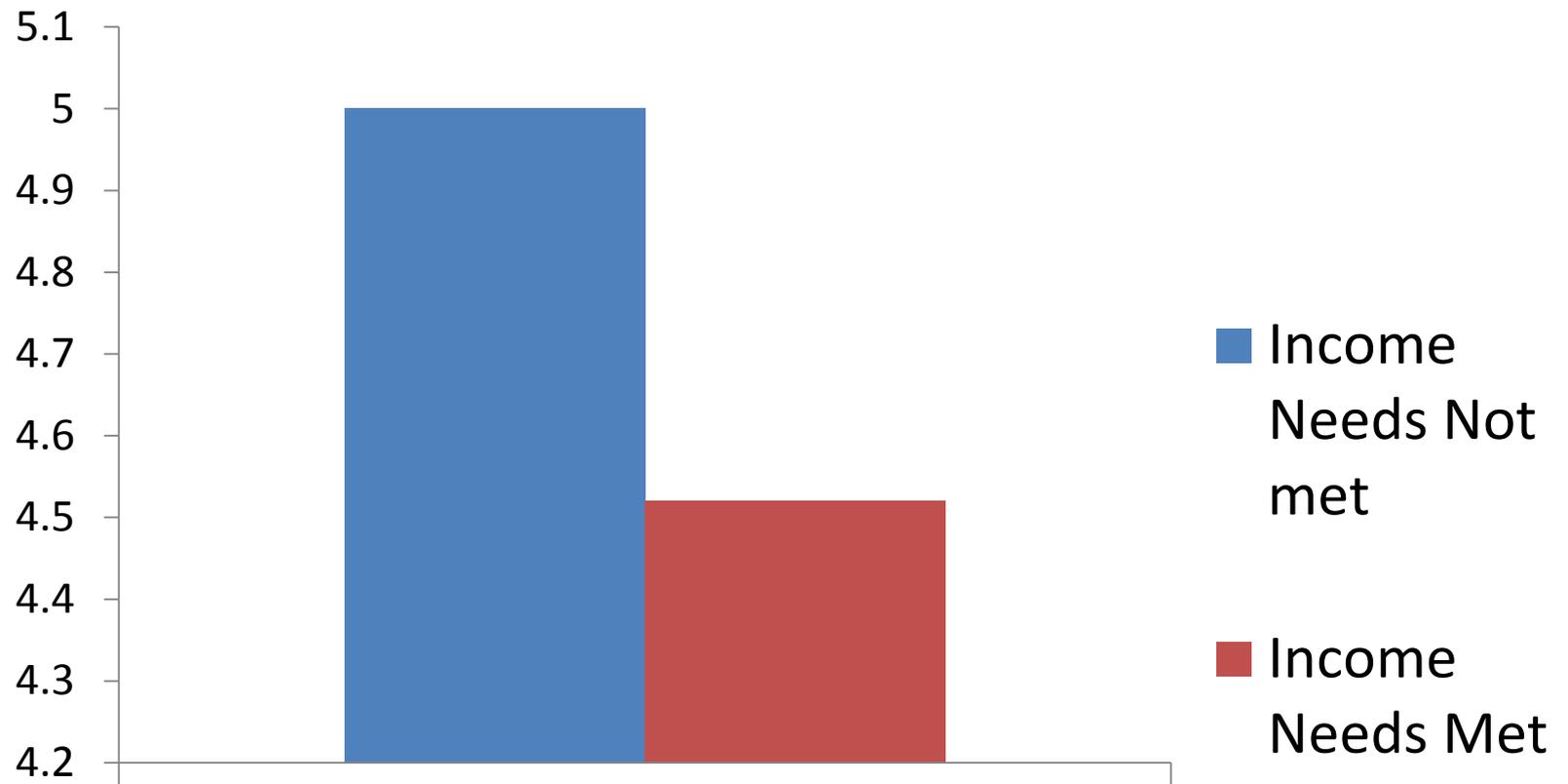
Feel Grateful

$p < .01$



Hope

$p = .05$



Doing things with others for others

$p = .08^t$

The factors THAT contribute to the 'happiness' of low SES people?

Calm

Content

Living in the Moment

Grateful

Hope

Doing things for others, with others

Emotional Control *

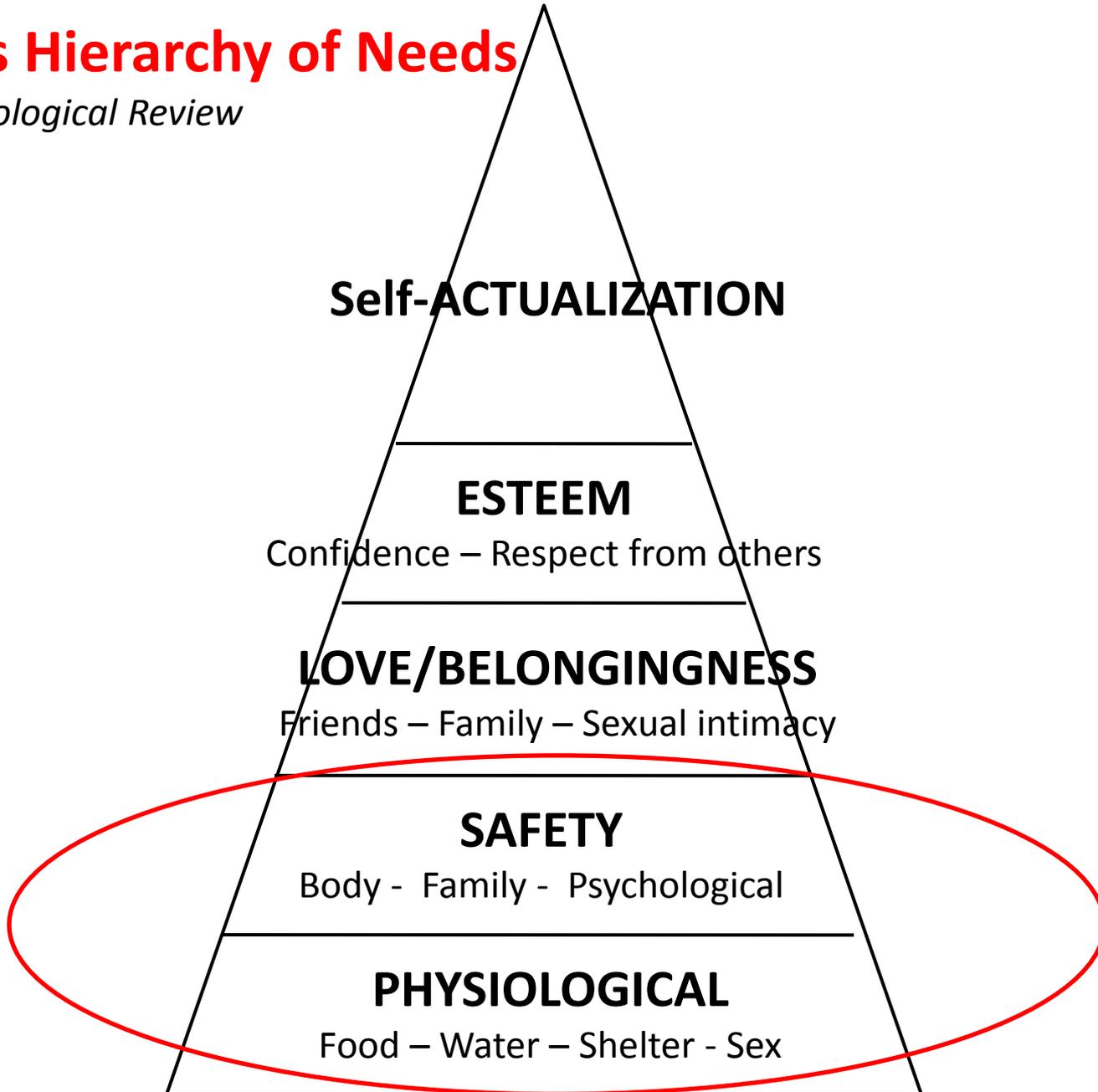
Happy Philosophy *

Doing things for others *

In addition

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

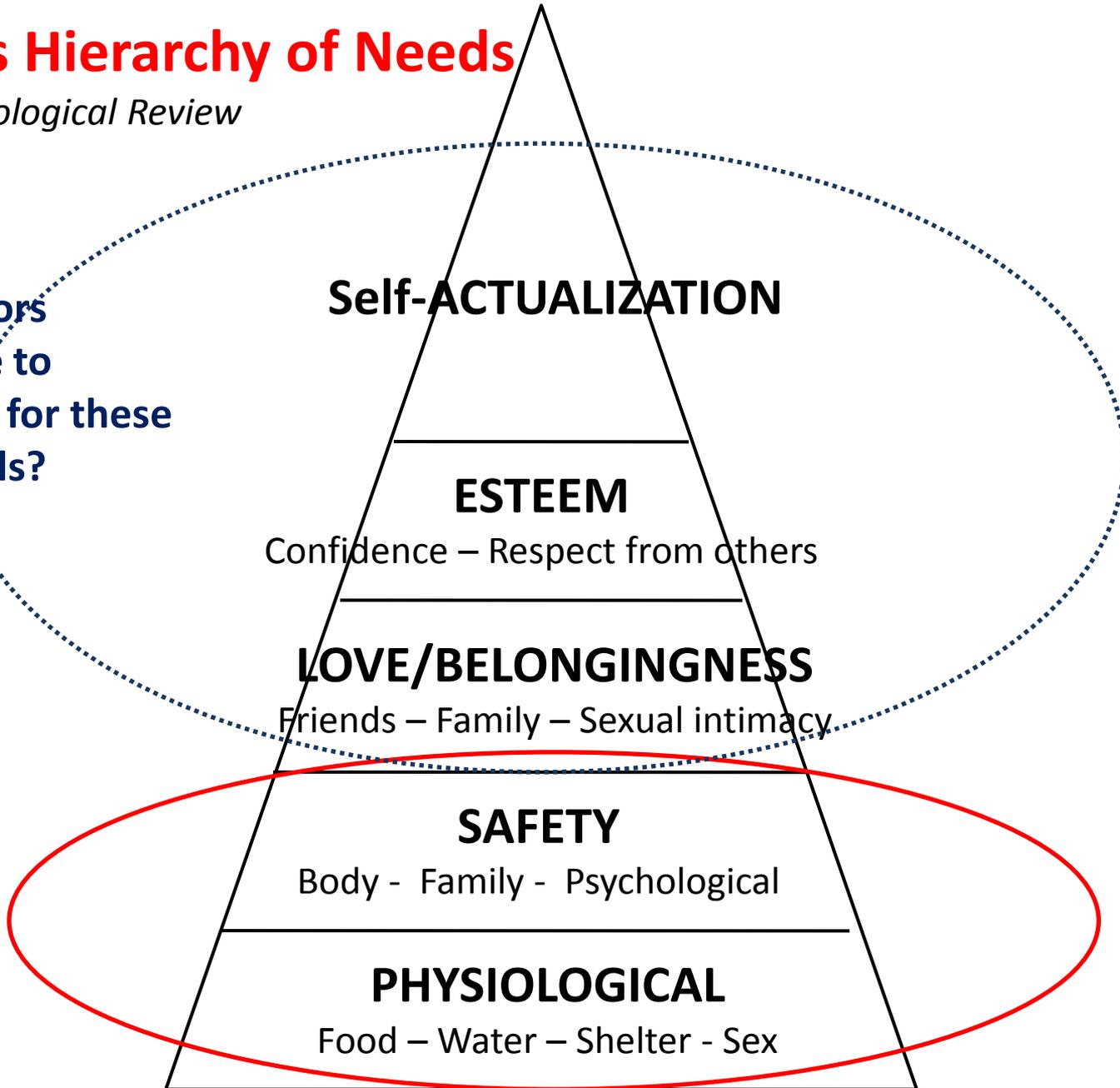
(1943) *Psychological Review*



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

(1943) *Psychological Review*

What factors contribute to happiness for these NEED levels?



CONCLUSION:

There is more than one definition of happiness.

It may depend on the NEEDS people are seeking to fulfill and if those needs are met or not met.

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Collaborators:

Anne Wilson

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Study 1 – Coded for 28 common categories

Top 10

