

Regional Variation in Happy Life & Healthy Life Expectancies in the U.S.

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Introduction

- Are we adding “life to years?”
 - Happy vs. Healthy Life Expectancies
 - Health well studied...happiness not
- Does it make sense to look at the US as a whole?
 - People in the South tend to be less healthy but happier compared to people from other US regions
- Does early-life region matter?
 - i.e. Grow up in South move to North East

Happiness

- Age/happiness relationship
 - positive, negative, U-Shaped, and curved
- J-shaped age/happiness relationship
 - Yang's (2008) A-P-C analysis
- Health predicts happiness
 - Happiness also predicts health

Happy & Healthy Life Expectancies

- Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE)
 - Increased since 1960s
- Happy Life Expectancy (HapLE)
 - Given current age-specific rates of mortality and happiness what is the average number of years a member of the life table cohort could expect to be happy
 - Increased since at least the 1970s
- Both HLE and HapLE display racial, sex, and socioeconomic inequalities

Geographic Variation

- “There are quite probably physical and social influences related to culture that are inculcated in individuals across regions” (Lin & Zimmer, 2002, pp. 407)
 - (e.g., diet, exercise activities, leisure activities, and risk-taking behaviors)
- Not much on US regional variation in HLE & HapLE
 - Health: South least healthy
 - Happiness: West most happy

WEST

(including AK and HI)



MIDWEST



NORTHEAST



SOUTH



Research Questions

- Is there regional variation in happy and healthy life expectancies?
 - (i.e., can individuals in one region expect to live happier and/or healthier lives compared to individuals in other regions?)
 - Can people in the West expect to live happier and healthier lives?
 - Does early-life region matter?
 - Can people who grew up in the South and move expect to add healthy years?
- What mechanisms may be related to this regional variation?

Data / Methods

- General Social Survey (GSS)
 - 1998-2008 [1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008]
- National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS)
 - Mortality data 2004-2008 [2004, 2006, 2008]
- Bayesian Sullivan Life Tables (Lynch & Brown, 2010)
 - Proportion of life remaining to be spent in each state
 - 64 rows and 37 columns

Measures

- General Social Survey (GSS)
 - Happiness: “Taken all together, how would you say things are these days – would you say that you are” ...
 1. Very happy
 2. Pretty happy
 3. Not too happy
 - Health: “Would you say your own health, in general, is” ...
 1. Excellent
 2. Good
 3. Fair
 4. Poor

Basic Descriptive

Variable	Ranges	Descriptives
Years	'98-08'	n=7,363
Age	years: 30-89+	
Sex	male	44%
Race	black	14%
Happiness	Happy (dichotomous)	88%
Health	Healthy (dichotomous)	70%
Current Region	North East, Midwest, South, West	
Region at 16	North East, Midwest, South, West	

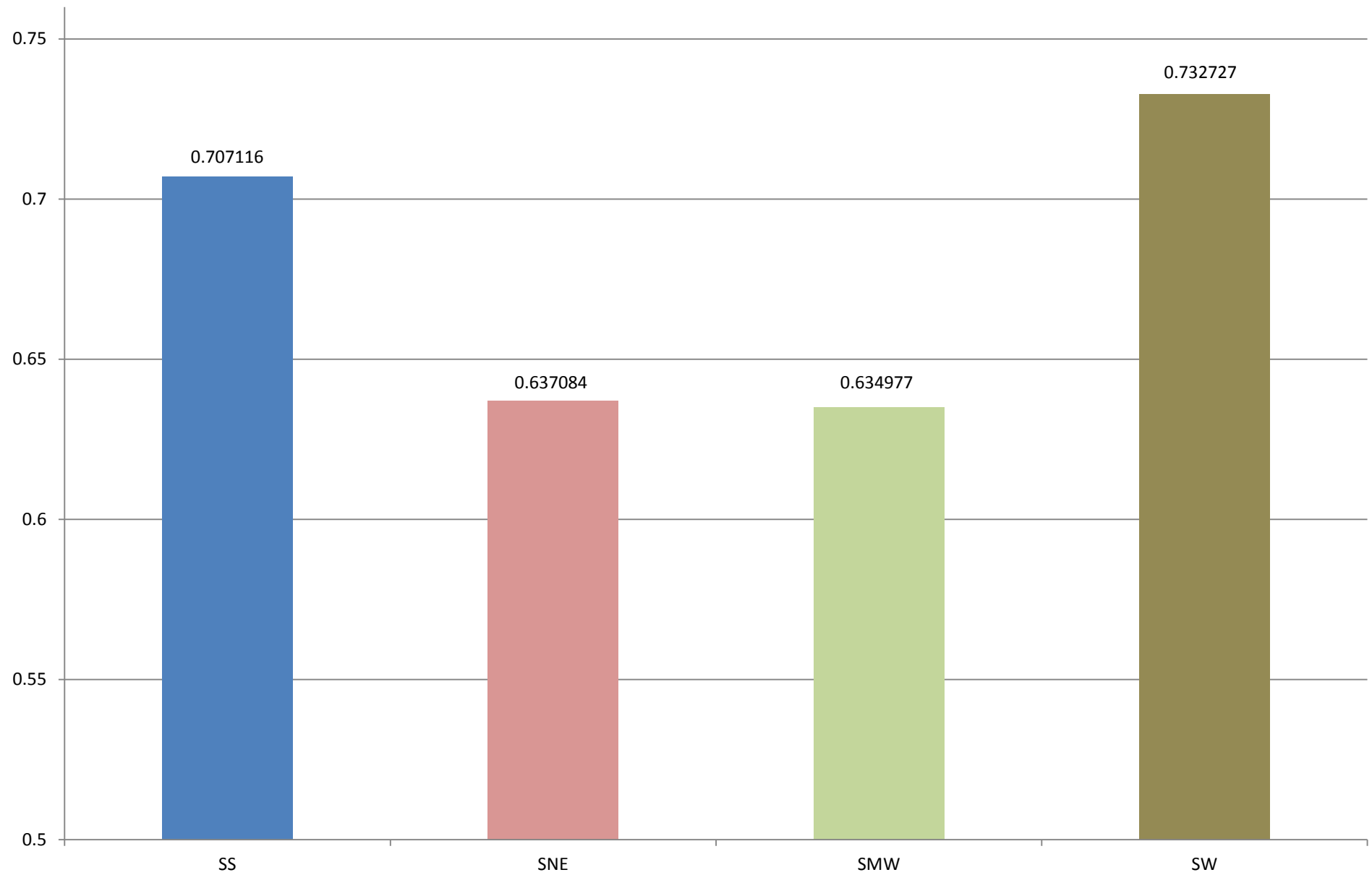
Findings (overview)

- Consistent patterns across regions & age groups
 - Race: Whites are happier, healthier, & happy-healthier than Blacks
 - Sex: Men are happier than women and happy-healthier
 - *Women are healthier
- Regional patterns evident across race, sex, and age
 - e.g. Being from the South isn't good for HLE, but not bad for HapLE
 - Moving to the South is often positive
 - Being from the West isn't as great as moving there

Findings (South early life region)

- Being from the South isn't good for HLE, but not bad for HapLE
- Loose HapLE if move from South
- People from the South have the lowest HLE no matter where they move
 - Only gain in HLE if move West

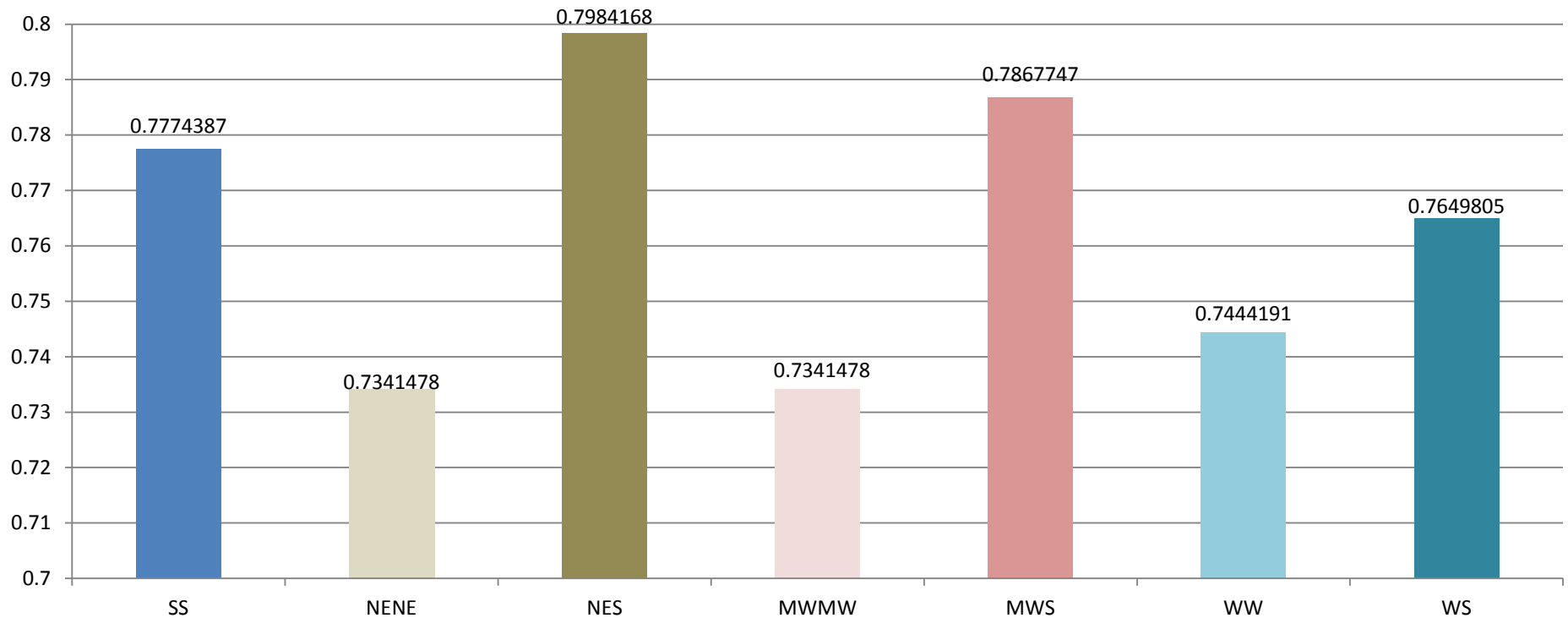
White men from the South (30yrs) - HLE



Moving to the South is often positive

- Among sex and race groups, people currently living in the South have the greatest HapLE

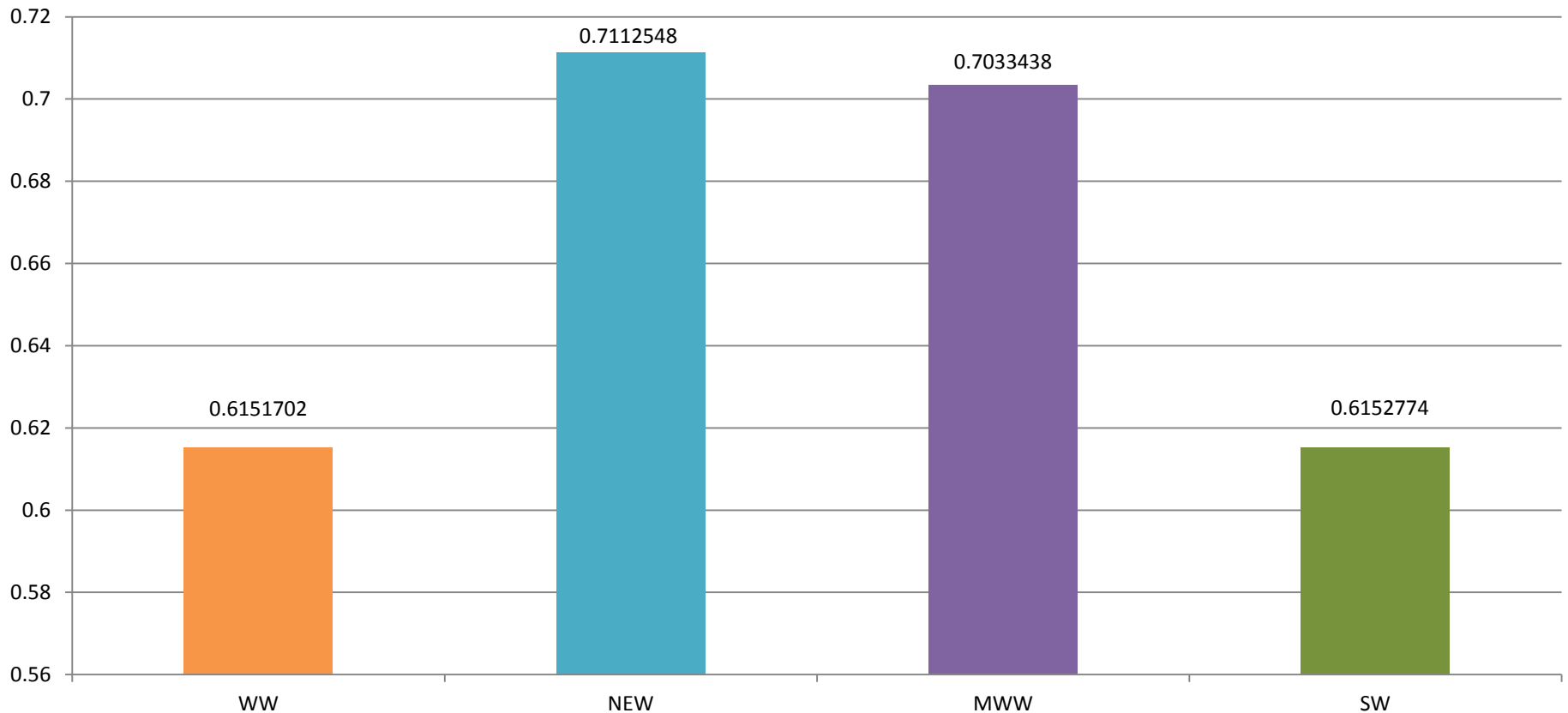
Black men (30yrs) - HapLE



Findings cont.

- Being from the West isn't as great as moving there

White Women (30yrs) – Hap-HLE



Discussion

- Geographic region matters for HapLE, HLE, and Hap-HLE
- Early life region plays a major role in shaping these outcomes
- The South isn't ALL bad
- HapLE is important when considering adding "life to years"