Although most people want to feel good, people vary in the specific positive states they value and ideally want to feel (their “ideal affect”). In this talk, I will describe a series of studies demonstrating that: (1) how people want to feel differs from how they actually feel (their “actual affect”), (2) cultural factors shape people’s ideal affect even more than their actual affect, and (3) cultural differences in ideal affect have important implications for what people choose, how they define well-being, and how they perceive and respond to other people. Together, these studies demonstrate the importance of people’s ideal affect in everyday life.