Who is happy and why? Subjective well-being and associated thinking styles of US and Canadian students.

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Happiness, or subjective well being (SWB), has been associated with several positive outcomes, and Myers (2000) charged researchers to uncover its predictors. With this goal in mind, the present research investigated SWB and associated thinking styles in a sample of Canadian and US students. Findings and future directions are discussed.

Happiness, or subjective well being (SWB) has been associated with positive outcomes such as, increased sociability (Diener, Sandvik, Pavot, & Fujita, 1992), creativity (Hirt, E. R., Melton, R. J. McDonald, H. E., & Harackiewicz, J. M., 1996), increased health (Weisse, 1992), and marital satisfaction (Myers, 2000). Additionally, SWB on a national level has been positively correlated with increased productivity (Diener, 2002). Indeed, SWB has been deemed so important that there has been a call for a national index of SWB (Diener, 2000).

Myers (2000) stated that age, gender and income add little to predicting happiness. But what does predict it? Lyubomirsky (2001) states that to "understand why some people are happier than others, one must understand the cognitive and motivational processes that serve to maintain, and even enhance, enduring happiness and transient mood" (p. 239).

The present research investigated possible motivational (security vs. satisfaction needs) and cognitive (thinking styles) processes that are associated with SWB. Another important facet to consider is cultural influences (individualistic vs. collectivist) on SWB.

Participants

Students enrolled in psychology courses at four U.S. universities and one Canadian university completed the questionnaire. The Canadian sample consisted of 104 participants (87 female) and the U.S. sample included 78 participants (59 female). The average ages of the Canadian and U.S. samples were 23.1 and 32.5, respectively.

Measures

Thinking Styles The *Life Style Inventory*™ (LSI; Lafferty, 1989) was used to measure the thinking styles and underlying motivations. The LSI is a survey that assesses how the respondent perceives others' reactions to him/her. The LSI contains 240 items designed to produce 12 scales of 20 items each. Each item describes a behavior or personal style that is like or unlike the respondent. On a scale of 0 (*Essentially unlike me*) to 2 (*Like me most of the time*), respondents were asked to rank each item by how accurately it describes them. The 12 scales and the patterns they reflect are

classified into three major clusters, Constructive, Passive/Defensive and Aggressive/Defensive, with four styles each (Table 1).

The 12 styles measured by the LSI are placed around a circumplex on which scores can be plotted to generate a profile of the respondent's current view of him/herself. The location of the styles is based on a People vs. Task emphasis and Satisfaction vs. Security needs (Lafferty, 1989).

The styles near the top of the circumplex are those styles, if adopted; permit members to fill satisfaction needs. Styles near the bottom of the circumplex are those that require members to think in terms of security and promote self-protective behaviors. Styles on the right side of the circumplex indicate an emphasis on people, whereas the styles on the left side of the circumplex indicate an emphasis on tasks (Figure 1). Based on the satisfaction/security and people/task distinctions, conflict frames can be examined in terms of the three general clusters: Constructive, Passive/Defensive, or Aggressive/Defensive.

The style scores are derived by summing the raw scores for each style and converting them to percentile scores that compare their scores to those obtained by others. On the circumplex, the center ring presents the 50th percentile. Scores falling below the 25th percentile reflect weak expectations for the behavior in question. Scores falling above the 75th percentile reflect strong expectations for the behavior in question. Scores that fall close to the 50th percentile reflect moderate expectations for the behavior in question (Figure 2). In practice, when interpreting the LSI results, emphasis should be on the percentile scores, not the raw scores.

Subjective well-being A six-item satisfaction scale was used to measure global life satisfaction. Participants indicated on a 5-point Likert-scale (1=not at all satisfied, and 5=completely satisfied) how satisfied they are with their "ability to manage stress," "family life," "leisure time activities," "health," "general state of mind," and "personal growth and development." The mean of the responses was used as the SWB score. The alpha for the entire sample was .83, coefficients for the Canadian sample was .80, and .87 for the U.S. sample. See table 2 for complete descriptives.

Results and Discussion

Analysis revealed that there was not a significant difference between Canadian (M=3.67, s=.71) and U.S. (M=3.66, s=.75) students (t=-.070, df=159, p=.945) in SWB. Additionally, there were no significant differences between any of the thinking styles or clusters (see Table 3). As a result, all subsequent analyses will concern the total group only.

As can be seen in the correlation table (Table 2), SWB has a significant positive correlation with the Constructive cluster (r=.27, p=.001), and significant negative correlations with both the Passive/Defensive cluster, (r=-.25, p=.002) and the Aggressive/Defensive cluster (r=-.24, p=.002). In fact, this pattern is evident in the majority of thinking styles, where two of the four Constructive styles

(Humanistic-Encouraging and Affiliative), two of the four Passive/Defensive styles (Approval and Avoidance) and three of the four Aggressive/Defensive styles (Oppositional, Power and Perfectionistic) are significantly correlated with SWB. But what about the styles that did follow the pattern but were not significantly correlated – namely the Achievement, Conventional, Dependent and Competitive thinking styles? Knowing that the sample consisted of students, whose lives revolve around achievement (setting and reaching goals), convention (following different professors' rules), dependence (looking for professors to tell them how and what to do) and competition (getting the best grades and outscoring fellow students), it seems understandable that these styles would not be related to SWB.

To further determine the relationship between subjective well and thinking styles, a high score (75th percentile or above) and a low score (25th percentile or below) for each thinking style and style cluster was found and SWB for each group was compared. As can be seen in Table 4, the expected patterns were found between the groups. That is, when Constructive thinking was low, then SWB was low, as compared to high Constructive thinking; and when Passive/Defensive or Aggressive/Defensive thinking was low, then SWB was high, as compared to high Defensive thinking. However for the Achievement, Dependent and Competitive thinking styles the means were not significantly different. These are styles that are directly affected by being a student.

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Table 1.
*Descriptions of the 12Thinking Styles and Style Clusters measured by the Life Styles Inventory. ***

Constructive – Styles promoting satisfaction behaviors

Achievement	Measures a way of thinking that is highly associated with personal effectiveness..
Self-Actualizing	Measures a way of thinking that results in the highest form of personal fulfillment..
Humanistic Encouraging	Measures interest in people, the tendency to care about others and our ability to encourage them to improve.
Affiliative	Measures the degree of commitment to forming and sustaining satisfying relationships.

Passive/Defensive – Styles promoting people-security behaviors

Approval	Measures the need to be accepted by others to increase or sustain feelings of self-worth.
Conventional	Measures the tendency to act in a conforming way.
Dependent	Measures the degree to which one feels his/her efforts do not count.
Avoidance	Measures the tendency to use the defensive strategy of withdrawal..

Aggressive/Defensive – Styles promoting task-security behaviors

Oppositional	Measures the tendency to use the defensive and aggressive tendency of disagreeing with others, and to seek attention by being critical and cynical..
Power	Measures the tendency to associate one's self-worth with the degree to which one can control and dominate others..
Competitive	Measures the need to establish a sense of self-worth through competing against and comparing oneself to others..
Perfectionistic	Measures the degree to which one feels a driven need to be seen by others as perfect..

Table 2
Descriptive statistics, reliabilities (on the diagonal) and inter-correlations among variables (total group).

Variables	M	SD	SWB	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Subjective Well Being (SWB)	3.67	.72	*.84*															
LSI Scales and Subscales																		
1. Constructive Cluster	29.84	4.76	.27*	*.85*														
2. Humanistic-encouraging	30.83	5.23	.18*	.84*	*.84*													
3. Affiliative	31.54	5.67	.29*	.85*	.75*	*.87*												
4. Achievement	29.79	5.79	.12	.79*	.54*	.45*	*.84*											
5. Self-Actualizing	27.20	6.18	.30*	.85*	.54*	.64*	.62*	*.83*										
6. Passive/Defensive Cluster	15.49	5.09	-.25*	-.05	.09	.08	-.14	-.18*	*.86*									
7. Approval	16.15	6.17	-.20*	.12	.25*	.25*	-.08	.00	.83*	*.80*								
8. Conventional	17.39	5.89	-.14	-.02	.05	.12	-.09	-.12	.84*	.58*	*.79*							
9. Dependent	18.24	6.16	-.12	.08	.19*	.19*	-.01	-.07	.88*	.69*	.65*	*.80*						
10. Avoidance	10.16	5.90	-.36*	-.37*	-.21*	-.30*	-.29*	-.42*	.82*	.53*	.62*	.62*	*.81*					
11. Aggressive/Defensive Cluster	12.63	4.97	-.24*	-.08	-.14	-.19*	.08	-.02	.41*	.29*	.45*	.22*	.42*	*.84*				
12. Oppositional	10.91	5.87	-.26*	-.25*	-.20*	-.25*	-.12	-.26*	.57*	.37*	.54*	.39*	.638	.81*	*.82*			
13. Power	8.15	6.24	-.25*	-.21*	-.21*	-.28*	-.09	-.12	.29*	.16*	.34*	.08	.41*	.86*	.66*	*.87*		
14. Competitive	13.41	6.11	-.05	.07	-.01	-.04	.18*	.11	.35*	.34*	.39*	.21*	.24*	.85*	.60*	.60*	*.80*	
15. Perfectionistic	18.03	5.93	-.24*	.13	-.04	-.04	.30*	.19*	.13	.09	.22*	.04	.11	.77*	.40*	.57*	.57*	*.78*

Note: N=182, * p ≤ .05, two-tailed.

Table 3
US vs. Canadian scores on variables.

	United States (n=78)		Canada (n=104)	
	<u>M</u>	SD	<u>M</u>	SD
Subjective Well Being (SWB)	3.66	.75	3.67	.71
LSI Scales and Subscales				
Constructive Cluster	30.35	5.24	29.46	4.35
Humanistic-encouraging	30.96	5.43	30.73	5.11
Affiliative	31.74	6.27	31.38	5.20
Achievement	30.74	5.93	29.08	5.61
Self-Actualizing	27.97	6.76	26.63	5.67
Passive/Defensive Cluster	15.34	5.29	15.60	4.95
Approval	15.93	6.10	16.32	6.25
Conventional	17.19	5.75	17.54	6.02
Dependent	18.55	6.39	18.01	6.00
Avoidance	9.68	6.42	10.52	5.49
Aggressive/Defensive Cluster	11.93	4.68	13.15	5.13
Oppositional	10.05	5.75	11.55	5.91
Power	7.13	5.73	8.92	6.51
Competitive	12.74	6.20	13.91	6.02
Perfectionistic	17.81	5.47	18.20	6.28

* $p \leq .05$, two-tailed.

Table 4
Subjective Well Being by high (75th percentile or above) and low (25th percentile or below) thinking styles.

	Low thinking style (25th percentile or below)	High thinking style (75th percentile or above)	Prob.
Constructive Cluster	3.34 (.75)	3.84 (.70)	.002
Humanistic-encouraging	3.39 (.72)	3.79 (.70)	.007
Affiliative	3.37 (.75)	3.82 (.69)	.003
Achievement	3.63 (.61)	3.83 (.78)	.196
Self-Actualizing	3.33 (.71)	3.91 (.61)	.000
Passive/Defensive Cluster	3.81 (.66)	3.40 (.70)	.017
Approval	3.88 (.71)	3.43 (.67)	.003
Conventional	3.74 (.68)	3.31 (.58)	.002
Dependent	3.77 (.77)	3.46 (.64)	.057
Avoidance	3.84 (.59)	3.23 (.78)	.000
Aggressive/Defensive Cluster	3.87 (.62)	3.55 (.74)	.037
Oppositional	3.89 (.61)	3.43 (.71)	.002
Power	3.90 (.60)	3.44 (.70)	.002
Competitive	3.74 (.67)	3.67 (.62)	.620
Perfectionistic	3.96 (.57)	3.50 (.79)	.002

Note: Judgments were made on a 5-point scale (1=*Not at all satisfied*, 5=*Completely satisfied*).

Shows strong commitment to organization
Receptive to change
Creative problem solver
Non-defensive
Self respecting
12

Trustworthy
Resolves conflicts constructively
Encourages growth and development in others
Involves others in decision making
Motivates by serving as a role model
1

Achieves self set goals
Accepts and shares responsibility
Insightful in diagnosing problems
Believes that individual effort is important
Takes on challenging tasks
11

Cooperative
Friendly
Genuine concern for others
Accepts change
2

Never wants to make a mistake
Sets unrealistic goals
Personally takes care of every detail
Creates self-induced stress
10

Sets goals that please others
Supports those with the most authority
Agrees with everyone
Reluctantly deals with conflict
3

Competes rather than cooperates
Strong need to win
Constantly compares self to others
9

Treats rules as more important than ideas
Follows policies and practices
Reliable and steady
Sets predictable goals and objectives
4

Wants to control everything
Believes in force
Has little confidence in people
Seldom admits mistakes
8

Relies on others for direction
A good follower
Doesn't challenge others
Aims to please everyone
5

Opposes new ideas
Looks for mistakes
Resists change
Critical of others
7

Avoids conflict
Has difficulty making decisions
Is non-committal
"Lays low" when things get tough
Hopes that problems will take care of themselves
6

SATISFACTION NEEDS
CONSTRUCTIVE STYLES
SELF-ACTUALIZING
HUMANISTIC-ENCOURAGING
ACHIEVEMENT
AFFILIATIVE
PERFECTIONISTIC
APPROVAL
TASK ORIENTATION
PEOPLE ORIENTATION
COMPETITIVE
AGGRESSIVE / DEFENSIVE STYLES
CONVENTIONAL
POWER
DEPENDENT
OPPOSITIONAL
AVOIDANCE
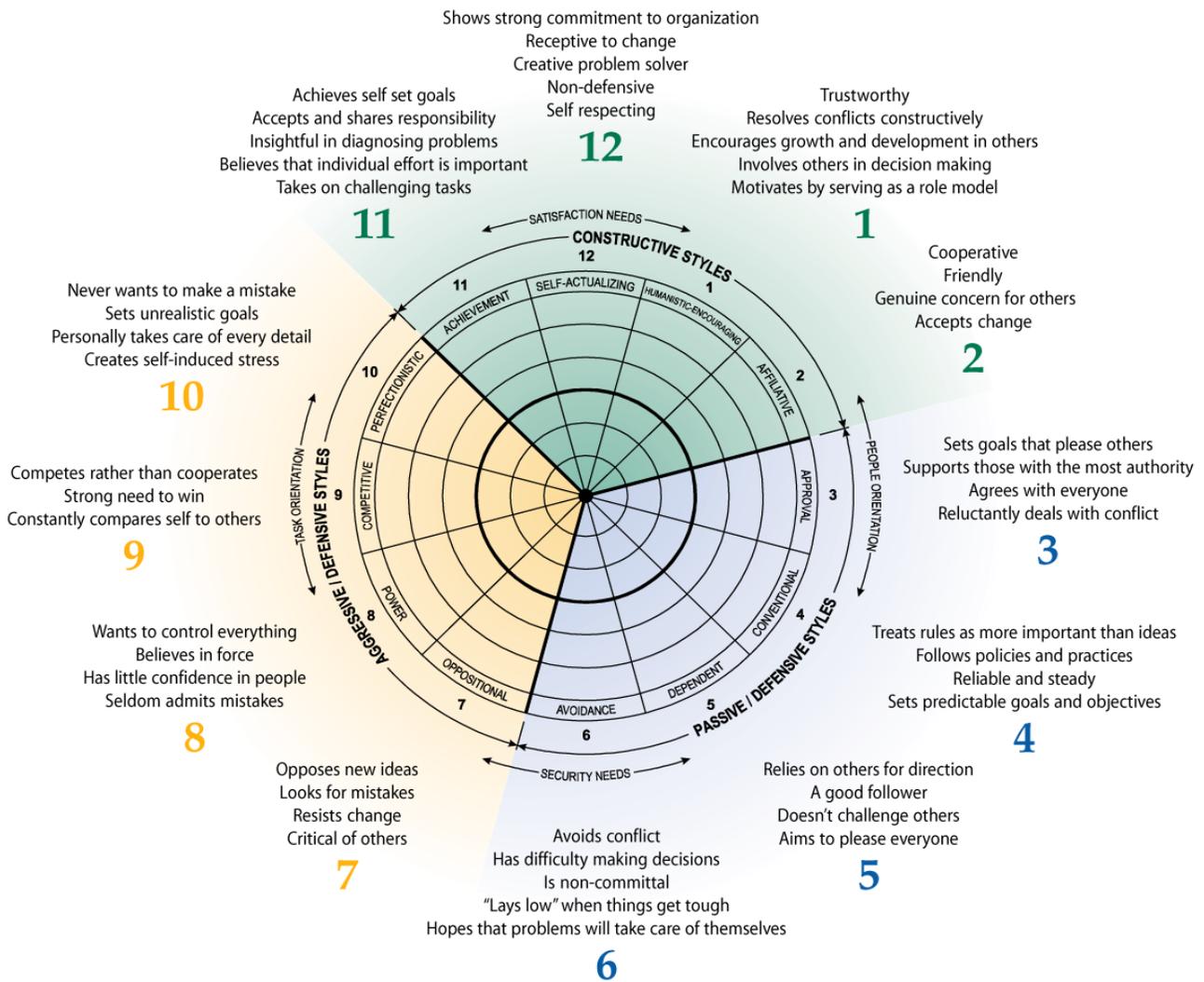PASSIVE / DEFENSIVE STYLES
SECURITY NEEDS

Figure 1. The *Life Styles Inventory (LSI) Circumplex* allows an individual to profile his/her score against a normed score. From *Life Styles Inventory TM* by and J.C. Lafferty, 1989, Plymouth, MI: Human Synergistics. Copyright 2005 by Human Synergistics, Int. Adapted by permission.