



## **Cultural orientation, Self-Determination, and Subjective Well-Being among Culturally Different College Students in Israel**

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### **Abstract**

*College students worldwide share a wide range of cognitive, motivational, and emotional similarities as a need for feeling autonomous, competent, or related to their family and the academic community. This study is a qualitative study, an interview has been conducted with 20 undergraduates (12 Arabs and 8 Jews) in order to enhance the understanding of the investigated phenomenon. one of the main findings is that the Arab students who represent collectivist culture, were beginning to demonstrate some kind of independence. Another finding shows there is no differences between Jewish students and Arab students regarding the autonomy and relatedness need; in addition, was found that the students from the two groups demonstrated a higher belief in their abilities to direct themselves for the purpose to succeed in achieving high academic achievements. Therefore, in academic studies, it is essential to make the lecturers aware of the importance of satisfying those needs, since they are necessary for the students and definitely for raising their academic motivation.*

**Key words:** Academic studies in Israel; Collectivis; Cultural Orientation; Individualis; Self-Determination; Students' life satisfaction

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## **1. Introduction**

Due to expanded immigration processes, many countries around the globe have become diverse social and multicultural countries, Israel being one of them. The cultural diversity that characterizes the State of Israel highlights many differences in various aspects between its communities and populations, such as social, ethnic, political, and academic differences. It is noteworthy that the most prominent distinction in Israeli society is between two cultures: a Jewish majority which represents individualistic society, and the Arab minority, which represents collectivistic society (Abu-Asaba, 2007; Elam & Vidergor, 2012). Regarding the academic aspect worldwide, there has been a low representation of cultural minority group members, compared to the cultural majority groups. For example, in Israel, there is evidence that the proportion of Arab students is lower than that of the Jewish students (Al-Haj, 2003). Recently, the accessibility to academic studies has increased in Arab society (Mana'a, 2008; Tutarie, 2009). However, there are still gaps between the two populations, reflected by a demonstration of low academic functioning and low achievements among the minorities (Abu-Asaba, 2005; Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013, p. 118-153).

This study will address the differences between two primary cultures. The first is the individualist culture that represents the Israeli Jewish society (Sagy et al., 2001) and focuses on the needs of the individuals and their goals. The second is the collectivistic culture that represents the Arab society, focusing on the needs of the family (Abu-Asaba, 2007). Moreover, there will be a reference to the self-determination theory (SDL) that constitutes the basis of this study. The current study is a qualitative study. an interview has been conducted with 20 undergraduates (12 Arabs and 8 Jews). The study aims to answer the question: "How does self-determination contribute to increasing the sense of subjective well-being?". This paper describes the first attempt (in Israel) to clarify the possible relation between cultural orientation and students' life satisfaction by examining this relationship among students at the beginning of their academic journey.

## **2. Literature review**

### ***2.1. Cultural Orientation: Individualism and Collectivism***

According to the empirical literature, intercultural research divides the world into two broad cultural categories, Individualism and Collectivism. Hofstede (2001) refers to the field in which collectivism and individualism are one of the most prominent cultural dimensions he explored. This dimension is associated with the relative priority granted to the individuals' goals and preferences, compared to the priority granted to the goals and social norms of the group to which they belong (Chirkov et al., 2003). These two main cultural orientations describe intercultural differences in values, attitudes, perceptions, needs, wishes, behaviors, and unique preferences of members of different cultures (Heinke & Louis, 2009). For instance, the *individualistic culture* emphasizes personal freedom, promoting personal needs and personal rights. Conversely, the *collectivistic culture* advocates interdependence, underscoring social harmony and sacrificing personal goals for the benefit of the collective goals (Biaswas-Diener et al., 2004; Matsumoto & Juang, 2004; Yanga et al., 2018).

Furthermore, in the individualistic culture, individuals assume responsibility for their actions and choices and, thus, they can increase their self-belief, their self-efficacy, strengthen their confidence, and certainly be empowered (Hofstede, 1980, cited in Scharf & Farah, 2011). This implies that individuals in the individualistic culture are unique independent people. They choose their lifestyle, freely set goals for themselves, independently address their problems, and accept their actions respectfully (Suh & Oishi, 2002). This encourages them to act out of self-esteem and intrinsic motivation in order to fulfill their aspirations and exhaust their inherent potential (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008). Moreover, this could positively affect people's sense of

life satisfaction and subjective well-being. On the other hand, collectivism relates to a cultural system of social norms. It refers to traditions and common beliefs among group members, the values that emphasize community, sharing, obedience, as well as to maintaining a group harmony (Bontempo et al., 1990, cited in Cox, Lobel, & McLeod, 1991; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2009; Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, & Peng, 2010; Zhu et al., 2008).

## ***2.2. Culture and Its Implications on Academic Studies in Israel***

In the global academic system, such as higher education, there is a prominent catalog of Collectivistic-Individualistic, which reflects the complexity of the dynamics and interactions in different situations. Individuals from a collectivistic culture present themselves as part of this culture. This is due to the fact that this culture emphasizes the individuals' dependence on the group, family, and other people who are close and significant for them. On the other hand, individuals from an individualistic culture present themselves as separate individuals and independent people with an independent entity (Hofstede, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). It means that the Eastern culture (which represents the collectivistic culture), emphasizes the importance of socially-oriented values. Conversely, the Western cultures (which represent the individualistic culture) attribute greater importance to the personally-oriented values (Ralston et al., 1995, cited in Ye & Kin NG, 2019). Regarding the higher education system in Israel, in which students from different populations and communities learn, the most prominent and central ones are two ethnic-cultural groups, the Jewish majority dominant group and the Arab minority group.

Many perceive the academic institution as a place where a multicultural and multinational meeting takes place, and where there is intensive involvement between the students, who have different views. Actually, this encounter facilitates a better comprehension of the world (Bennett et al., 2013), affecting people's development and empowerment, since the education system in general and the academic system in particular, may accelerate and spur modernization. Due to the current situation in Israel that is managed by ongoing conflicts, there are educational gaps between the two ethnic-cultural groups (Jewish and Arab). Nevertheless, since the foundation of the State of Israel, there has been a considerable increase in the accessibility of Arab students to higher education (Abu-Asaba, 2005). Research findings indicate that integration in academia and acquisition of higher education among Arabs in Israel has empowered the Arab minority. Members of this group are supposed to get out of the marginal situation in which they find themselves (Abu-Asaba, 2007). However, there is ample evidence to support the claim that the social integration of the students from cultural minority groups in academia is still low. Moreover, the minority members' academic achievements are low compared to their peers from the majority group (Austin, 2012; Fairlie et al., 2014).

Higher education is an effective tool for the individuals' development and advancement both personally, socially, and economically. Some researchers have argued that members of minorities in a multicultural society attribute greater importance to the acquisition of higher education than do members of the majority. The reason is because they see it as a tool of empowerment that offers them many opportunities for improving their social, economic, and even political situation (Astin et al., 1991). Other researchers believe that higher education is essential for the underprivileged groups at the bottom of the socio-economic scale (Abu-Saad, 2016), being an important path for "upward" social mobility. This is due to the fact that higher education encompasses for the individuals' options of progress, development and empowerment by raising their social status in their community. Moreover, it offers them opportunities for being integrated into society in a better and more efficient way.

### **2.3. Salient Differences between Arab Students Jewish Students in Academia**

Despite the Arab students' progress and increased accessibility rates into the world of academia, there are still meaningful differences and gaps between them and the Jewish students in terms of achievements. According to Zesberg (2018), when comparing the achievements of Jewish students with those of Arab students in Israel, the results are consistent with the patterns found elsewhere in the world. From an in-depth examination in the field, it turns out that there are essential gaps between the achievements of students from Arab society and their peers from Jewish society. The achievements demonstrated by the Arab students are lower, ranging from elementary schools to academic institutions (Mana'a, 2008). One of the reasons for the Arab students' difficulty in demonstrating high achievements, is due to the problem of effectively and properly adapting to the framework of academic studies (in universities and colleges) compared to their fellow Jewish students (Tutarie, 2009).

Studies conducted in Israel have investigated the Arab students' adaptation difficulties within the academic institution. Research findings indicate several reasons, such as: difficulty in coping with assignments required in academic studies, as well as failure to acquire the relevant skills at high school, preparing them for academic studies (Tutarie, 2009). Another difficulty related to the socio-cultural field. Many Arab students pointed out a sense of alienation and non-belonging to the academic establishment, while others felt they were foreign and belonged to a marginalized group and. Hence, they tended to shut themselves down ethnically (Al-Haj, 2003; Tutarie, 2009), preventing themselves from being properly integrated into the academic framework. Another reason that emphasized their sense of foreignness was the difficulty in understanding the Hebrew language that was not their mother tongue. On the other hand, it is the official instruction language on the academic campus. Many students argued that language difficulties greatly affected their academic achievements, as well as their social integration. For example, student who do not speak Hebrew well, cannot express themselves freely, nor can they participate in many discussions in the classroom. Moreover, lack of language proficiency also prevents them from receiving assistance from various campus support infrastructures, like scholarship assistance counseling. Some students refrain from addressing the lecturer in order to clarify essential matters related to their studies (Tutarie, 2009).

### **2.4. Learning and Self-Determination**

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) constitutes a broad framework for studying people's motivation and functioning. Ryan and Deci (2017), who conceived this theory, maintained that it became one of the most researched and applied theories in the field of psychology. According to the humanistic approach that is perceived as a source of the self-determination theory, all individuals have ambitions to develop, grow, and indeed a tendency to realize their true and authentic self (Deci & Ryan, 2000). People must be active, act correctly and in a controlled manner, and not ignore the environment in which they have grown up and by which they have been affected for the purpose of exhausting their inherent potential. Consequently, it is necessary to provide them with three basic psychological needs: *autonomy, competence, and relatedness*, that are all considered as critical resources that underlie people's tendency to develop, experience well-being, adapt and thrive (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2017;). Other researchers argued that satisfying those psychological needs and balancing them might predict optimal well-being, integrity, and psychological growth (Chen et al., 2015; Church et al., 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2008; Deci & Ryan, 2000). On the other hand, if these needs are not satisfied, it can lead to passiveness, frustration, inefficiency, failure, dissatisfaction, and even illness (Ryan, 1995; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013).

In many studies of this field, the relationship between satisfaction of the three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, relatedness, and well-being, has been proven empirically. Furthermore, the findings indicate differences on the personal and interpersonal

levels. That is, people who experienced a high level of satisfaction of psychological needs have reported good feelings about themselves and their lives, as well as a high self-esteem (Deci et al., 2001). Chen et al. (2015) also suggested that the exact psychological needs are necessary for the individuals' development and success in life. In addition., satisfaction is a necessary incentive for the people's integration process in society, allowing them to interact with others. This communication has consequences for their success in various ways, and satisfying those needs has a meaningful contribution to the optimistic psychological health and well-being, helping people in moving forward, striving, planning, implementing and enjoying the product.

### **2.5. Culture and Self-Determination**

Deci & Ryan (2000) stipulate, that psychological needs are innate in all people, and their satisfaction represents universal positive well-being. According to the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), people in every culture and diverse countries share three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). All these elements play an essential role in people's life, contributing to their development and making them feel happiness and well-being (Chen et al., 2015). This increase in their intrinsic motivation stem from their free and personal will, without any effect by any external factor, making them continue striving, be integrated, plan, and act in order to accomplish their goals and actualize themselves (; Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Undoubtedly, if people act freely and autonomously and out of intrinsic motivation, they will obtain satisfactory results that will increase their sense of well-being, since they act, initiate and research out of an interest in discovering and understanding. Thus, people's learning will also be effective as it stems from inquisitiveness and free will. For instance, a study conducted among students from Canada indicated a relationship between intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being, with no correlation or dependence on academic performance (Burton et al., 2006).

Although the three psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) are common to all human beings from all cultures, their expression and satisfaction could vary according to the cultural context (Deci & Ryan, 2000). That is to say, the experience of self-determination may change in different cultures (Chirkov & Ryan, 2003; Ginevra et al., 2015). This emphasizes that we cannot ignore that differences between cultures regarding perceptions, customs, beliefs, and values that can also affect the individuals' self-determination, behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. For instance, many multicultural psychologists have focused mainly on cultural differences that affect the well-being of people in different cultures. Some psychologists have shown that in individualistic countries, the sense of autonomy and the level of self-satisfaction are high, predicting a life satisfaction (Oishi et al., 1999). Many studies that have specifically referred to autonomy, indicated that autonomy is an essential component that can exist in both individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Ginevra et al., 2015; Sheldon et al., 2017). Findings of studies conducted among adolescents from Belgium (Van Petegen et al., 2012), China (Chen et al., 2013), and Greece (Fousiani et al., 2014), illustrated aa meaningful difference in the independent and voluntary decision-making, compared to other adolescents who depended on their parents, leading them to make decisions under "coercion". Examination of the relationship between making decisions out of free will (without coercion) and well-being, showed a positive and strong correlation (Van Petegem et al., 2012).

### **2.6. The Three Basic Psychological Needs**

The three psychological needs are essential for positive and optimal universal human functioning (Chen et al., 2014).

**Autonomy:** according to the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), autonomy is consistently defined as an experience of the individuals' free will to act independently, feeling capable of making personal and meaningful choices without any external control or coercion (Chen et al.,

2014; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Lynch et al., 2009). People feel they are the initiator, planner, and act to accomplish the personal goals they have set for themselves at reasonable discretion. Thus, satisfying the individuals' need for autonomy, makes them experience a sense of wholeness and happiness, as this is a fundamental and essential part of the learning process and personal growth (Chen et al., 2014; Patrick et al., 2007).

**Competence:** is a sense of ability that refers to security and efficiency while performing actions (Jansenn et al., 2013). It reflects the need for feeling control over the environment in which people live, as well as being capable of generating changes and achieving the desired results (Church et al., 2013; Janssen et al., 2013; Patrick et al., 2007; Reiset al., 2000). This makes people feel happiness, satisfaction, and impulse to keep moving forward and accomplishing their goals. On the other hand, failure to satisfy this need evokes a feeling of inefficiency, helplessness, and failure (Chen et al., 2014; Ryan, 1995), which can undermine individuals' self-esteem and personal well-being.

**Relatedness:** Deci and Ryan (2000) posit that relatedness reflects daily feelings of closeness and connection between human beings, affecting their development. The concept of relatedness refers to the human need for developing interpersonal relationships, experiencing the connection with others, and feeling accepted within the environment where they are integrated (Church et al., 2013; Patrick et al., 2007; Reis et al., 2000). Some researchers maintain that people who feel a sense of relatedness to a group, and are satisfied with the connection and interaction within it, experience warmth, caring, and attachment that are considered as part of the essential needs for "survival", as well as a social, emotional and achievement-oriented prosperity. Conversely, failure to satisfy this need, causes disappointment and a sense of loneliness, exclusion, and social alienation (Chen et al., 2014; Ryan, 1995), which have negative consequences for people's sense of well-being (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013).

### ***2.7. Subjective Well-Being Factors and Cultural Differences***

Subjective well-being (SWB) is the central concept of humanistic and positive psychology (Diener, 2000). In recent years, the practice in the field has been expanding and increasing as part of the realization that subjective well-being has great importance among individuals and society in general (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Some researchers claimed that SWB is one way of assessing individuals' quality of life, to what extent they feel good and satisfied with their life, and indeed also assessing the quality of the society (Diener & Suh, cited 1998 in Diener, et al., 2003). From an extensive review that dealt in the field, a thorough and clear definition of the concept of SWB can be presented. It explains that subjective well-being comprises cognitive and affective components that refer to people's experience of positive or negative emotions (Diener & Diener, 1995; Lau & Li, 2011).

Some researchers argue that life satisfaction is one aspect of positive subjective well-being and an essential construct in positive psychology. This concept focuses on the cultivation and maintenance of positive life dimensions (Diener & Diener, 1995; Gilman & Huebner, 2003). Undoubtedly, subjective well-being is necessary for all people so that they can enjoy their life and feel happy and satisfied with their life. This aims to make a progress and succeed in fulfilling their dreams and accomplishing their goals. The reason is that when people feel satisfied with life and their subjective well-being is high, they always think positively, and in this way, they are able to actualize themselves. This enables them to continue striving and achieving, as well as contributing to the development of the society in which they have grown up, turning it into an enlightened society (Diener et al., 2003).

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

Data were collected from (N= 20) students (12 Arab and 8 Jewish students) from different communities: Jewish, Arab, Christian, Muslim, and Druze. who learned in the first and second undergraduate years of their studies. They all studied in various departments in multicultural colleges at the North of Israel.

**Table 1.** Participants' profile

Student	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Nation	Religion	Specialization in the academic studies
S 1	20	Female	Single	Arab	Druze	Especial Education
S 2	21	Female	Betrothed	Arab	Muslim	Multicultural studies
S 3	21	Female	Single	Arab	Muslim	Economic and Education
S 4	22	Female	Single	Arab	Muslim	Hebrew literature and education
S5	22	Male	Single	Arab	Christian	Multicultural studies
S 6	23	Male	Single	Arab	Muslim	Economic
S 7	23	Female	Single	Jewish		Special Education
S 8	23	Female	Single	Jewish		Multicultural studies
S 9	24	Male	Single	Arab	Christian	Criminology and Education
S 10	24	Female	Single	Arab	Muslim	Psychology and Education
S 11	24	Female	Betrothed	Jewish		The Middle East and Education
S 12	25	Female	Single	Jewish		Special Education
S 13	25	Male	Single	Jewish		Economic
S 14	25	Female	Betrothed	Arab	Christian	The Middle East and Education
S 15	25	Male	Single	Arab	Druze	The Middle East and Education
S 16	25	Female	Betrothed	Arab	Druze	Multicultural studies
S 17	25	Male	Single	Jewish		Economic and Education
S 18	26	Female	Betrothed	Arab	Druze	Criminology and Education
S19	27	Female	Divorcee	Jewish		Education
S 20	27	Female	Betrothed	Jewish		Multicultural studies

#### 3.2. Research Instruments: In-depth Interview

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted on the basis of the research questions. All the questions prepared for the interview focused on several main themes, aiming to enhance the understanding of the investigated phenomenon. The themes related to the students' perceptions, values, attitudes, and behaviors concerning their beliefs about their culture (in the aspect of collectivism/individualism), in which they grow up, and referred to three basic psychological needs for their subjective well-being.

#### 3.3. Research Procedure

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic that had broken out around the globe, it was impossible to meet the students face-to-face. Consequently, the interviews were conducted with each student separately through the Zoom system, by prior arrangement regarding the time and date that suits each student. The interview lasted about 20-25 minutes and included ten questions (Appendix 1). The questions examined the following characteristics: students' perceptions and attitudes concerning their *culture* (Q 1, 2, 7); students' perceptions concerning the three *basic psychological needs* (Q 3, 4, 6, 9); and students' perceptions concerning subjective well-being (Q 5, 8, 10).

### 3.4. Data analysis

In order to enhance the comprehension of the investigated phenomena, qualitative data were collected from semi-structured interviews. Twenty undergraduates (12 Arabs and 8 Jewish) were interviewed. The interviews focused on understanding the students' different perceptions and attitudes about their beliefs, the culture in which they grew up, their subjective well-being, and basic psychological needs. The themes used for the content analysis were predetermined according to the research question.

## 4. Results

For the purpose of reliability of the qualitative findings, the statements from the interviews were classified according to categories in each of the three themes:

- perceptions about their culture;
- perceptions about basic psychological needs;
- perceptions about subjective well-being.

Based on the content analysis of the interviews, the statements that stood out in the interviewees' answers were divided into three main themes, and each theme was divided into categories.

**Table 2.** Themes and categories obtained from the content analysis (*Frequency of occurrence: J= Jewish \ A= Arabs*)

Cultural Orientation	Basic Psychological Needs			Subjective Well-Being
1. Are your parents involved in your choices and decisions about your studies? 2. Do you think consulting with your parents could help you make the right decision for you? 3. Is your success in life also for your family	Autonomy	Competence	Relatedness	1. What can make you feel satisfied with life? 2. What is subjective well-being for you? 3. What challenges you in your learning/ in your life in general?
<b>Categories:</b>				
<i>Collectivistic culture perception</i>	<i>Autonomy</i>			<i>Personal development in various aspects</i>
<i>Frequency of occurrence</i>	<i>Frequency of occurrence</i>			<i>Frequency of occurrence</i>
Examples of students' statements:	Examples of students' statements:			
<i>"I am part of my family, and it is important for me to consult with them, so because it is important for me to hear their advice, I prefer their involvement in making various decisions in my life" (7A/ 2J)</i> (S1, S2, S4, S6, S8, S10,	<i>"Definitely, I am an autonomous person .. I feel I have intellectual independence"</i> (4A/5J) (S3, S5, S7, S9, S11, S12, S13, S15, S18, S20)			<i>"Demonstrating a high achievement in my undergraduate degree encourages me to continue my academic studies, so in this way, I can build a stable career that will help me live happily ever after and have a sense of well-being" (7A/4J)</i> (S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S8, S9,



S14, S15, S17)		S11, S14, S19, S20)
"I feel that a trust has developed and has been created between my parents that is important for me. Therefore, I try meeting meet their expectations" (8A / 5J) (S1, S3, S4, S7, S8, S9, S10, S12, S14, S16, S18)	"I think I am responsible for myself, and for my life. I have to plan my life for myself and to decide what I need to achieve. Actually, I act according to what I think and what I feel!" (5A/5J)  (S3, S4, S5, S7, S10, S11, S13, S15, S17, S19, S20)	"Getting high grades, which actually bring me closer to my goals and pushes me to move forward to achieve more successes and, especially, to develop in my life, in my career. That is what makes me feel well-being and happier person". (6A/4J)  (S1, S3, S5, S6, S8, S10, S12, S13, S15, S19)
"My parents have a rich life experience, and I do not see myself not consulting with them. Every time they advise me, I succeed to make the right decision, and their support lead me how to move forward in my life" 5A/4J (S1, S3, S6, S7, S8, S9, S9, S12, S15, S20)	"I am an autonomous person; I feel I have intellectual independence" (5 A/ 5 J).	"Studying, moving forward in life, accomplishing goals, in fact, all this is exactly what can give me a sense of well-being and happiness, because I am all the way can move forward, strive to evolving and fulfilling myself" (5A/5J) (S2, S4, S5, S8, S10 S12, S13, S15, S17, S20)
"My success also it is for my parents. I am part of my family, and I feel that I have to fulfill the dream for them and for me, because if I succeed, actually I bring them a proud and happiness" 4A\3J (S3, S4, S6, S8, S10, S11, S14, S16, S20)	"I am an autonomous person. In my opinion, it is a very important part of my personal development. For example, regarding my studies, I prepare all the assignments alone because that way I can understand better. Also, in other fields in my life up today, I make the decisions, although I discuss many matters with my parents" (5 A/ 5 J).	"If I evaluate my abilities, If I believe I can improve myself, and always I check with myself how I keep improving in order to achieve the goals I have set for myself. It makes me feel satisfied because I can discover more abilities lien within me that will help me later in personal development which will give me feel well-being" (6A/3J) (S1, S2, S4, S5, S8, S10, S12, S15, S17)
"We are a consolidated family, so it is important to consult with each other. For example, before I began my academic studies, it was important for me to get the opinions of my mother and my brother. I think they helped me to choose the right field to study". 4A/3J (S3, S4, S6, S7, S8, S10, S12)	"Definitely, I'm an autonomous person. In my opinion, it is a very important part of my personal development... For example, regards my studies, I prepare all the assignments alone because that way I can understand better. Also, in other fields in my life up to the day, I am who decide although I discuss with my parents regards many matters". (5A/5J) (S3, S6, S7, S9, S11, S12, S13, S15, S16, S20)	"Academic success confers progress and personal development, which make me feel happy and satisfied". (6A/5J)  (S3, S4, S6, S8, S10, S11, S12, S14, S17, S18, S20)
	"I can say that I am an independent person, for example, many times I make decisions	

	<i>alone in various matters and many fields, especially in my studies. my parents trust me and they believe in my chooses" (6A/5J)</i> (S2, S3, S5, S7, S9, S11, S12, S14, S15, S19, S20)	
<i>"Sometimes yes I do... I consult with my parents, and sometimes they are involved in life, but to a certain extent because I feel I have to be responsible for my life, and the decisions are only mine". 5A/5J</i> (S4, S6, S9, S11, S12, S13, S14, S15, S17, S19)	<i>"I have the ability, and I believe in myself that I can direct and guide myself in my studies... and I awareness for that I have to act responsibly in order to succeed" (8J/5A)</i> (S1, S2, S4, S5, S6, S10, S7, S8 S10, S11, S16, S18, S20)	<i>"To Challenge myself in all kind of tasks including studies, and making decisions independently in which I will feel that I can realize myself" (5A/5J)</i> (S1, S3, S5, S6, S8, S10, S12, S14, S17, S20)
<i>"I think I need to act responsibly towards my life; however, at times, I feel the need to consult with the parents because they can help me and guide me in the right way". 7A/5J</i>	<i>"Mostly I believe in myself and I confident if I invest, I will succeed" (7A/5J)</i> (S2, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S10, S12, S13, S14, S20)	<i>"To try new things and not stay in the same place or go according to what is expected of me. I need to meet new challenges... Only in this way, I believe that I will be able to fulfill myself and feel well-being". (7A/6J)</i> (S2, S4, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S16, S17, S18, S19, S20)
<i>"Although I consult with my parents and in my opinion, it is essential to do this, but I decide about everything related to my life, in terms of studies, choosing a partner, career .."</i> (5A/5J) (S2, S6, S9, S11, S12, S13, S14, S16, S19, S20)	<i>" It is good to learn from the experiences and advice, but I believe that everything depends on me because this is my life and I need to direct myself, first because I have the ability and second I know what I need to do to achieve the goals I have set for myself .. I have the competence to succeed, and nothing could stop me" (6A / 4J)</i> (S3, S4, S5, S6, S9, S11, S13, S17, S18, S20)	<i>"To challenge me all the time, to strive for more in order to succeed in achieving what I plan for myself" (6A/5J)</i>  (S1, S3, S4, S5, S8, S10, S11, S12, S14, S19, S20)
	<i>"Because I believe in myself and my abilities, so the most thing that challenges me is to deal with complex situations like courses that you always hear from some students that are difficult, so I try and check how hard and how can I deal with them" (5A/3J)</i>	
	<i>"My autonomy is rooted in the opinions of my parents because I still belong to my family, and I am part of them. I respect the conventions it makes kind of organization and rests for me" 4A/1J</i> (S1, S3, S10, S14, S12)	<i>"Self-actualization is what makes me happy and satisfied" (6A / 5J)</i>  (S2, S4, S5, S7, S8, S10, S12, S14, S16, S19, S20)

	"I do not feel that I belong to a certain group as part of my studies. I study in order to be successful and finish my degree; I do not need to make connections with others". (4A/ 3J) (S1, S5, S6, S12, S13, S19, S20)	"To act autonomously, to feel free in my personal choices, to think freely without any expectations of anyone... I mean to meet my expectations of myself" (6A/6J) (S2, S3, S5, S8, S9, S11, S13, S15, S18, S19, S20)
	"Sometimes feeling that you belong to a group makes it easier for you and also encourages you, that is, in your learning process to be a part of a group that is studying seriously, it encourages you to act seriously as well." (5A/4J) (S1, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S17, S20)	
	"I do not feel that the sense of belonging to the institution where I study matters to me. Because my goal is to finish my degree successfully". (3A/3J) (S5, S6, S8, S10, S19, S20)	
	"I think belonging to a group of friends you study with them, or to feel you belong to an academic institution where you study has a positive contribution but not necessarily to my academic success. Perhaps socially". (3A/3J) (S5, S6, S8, S10, S19, S20)	

***a. Students' perceptions about the culture in which they grew up***

Regarding the first category, "***cultural orientation***", some of the Arab and Jewish students who participated in the interviews, emphasized family cohesion. They explained that they were an integral part of the family, and it was essential for them to consult with their parents. Others have stated that their parents' involvement helped them in making different decisions in different areas of their life. Additional statements indicated uniformity in the family, and the students' explanation stood out. There were trust relationships between them and their parents. Hence, they found it important to meet their parents' expectations in terms of success and achievements. For example, some of them argued: "*My success is also their success, so I bring pride to my parents*". These findings were similar to the findings of previous studies of this field, showing that a *collectivistic culture* is a culture of values and norms that underscore community, family cohesion, and respect for authority. In addition, the individuals share their success with others, as well as succeed in order to meet the family's expectations (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2010; Triandis et al., 1986). From the description of the students' statements, individuals in the collectivistic society still perceive themselves as part of the collective, and highlight their connection to the other members of the group/society (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1995, cited in Scharf et al., 2011).

On the other hand, there were statements that indicate an *individualistic culture*, it is important to note that statements of this style came up in the words of students from both populations. The statements indicated that the Arab students that represented the collectivistic culture, were beginning to demonstrate some kind of independence. Although they consulted with their parents, they needed to decide for themselves about everything related to their private life and academic and professional lives. This finding indicates the effect of the involvement between Jews and Arabs (individualism and collectivism) in society. In fact, it highlighted the uniqueness of individualistic culture in that it prioritized the individuals and their goals. Although the parents

advised and guided their children, they also allowed them to act freely, responsibly, and independently (Dwairy, 2010; Triandis et al., 1986).

***b. Students' perceptions about basic psychological needs***

The second theme was divided into three main categories that referred to three basic psychological needs: *Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness*.

In order to examine the statements relating to the basic psychological needs of *autonomy and relatedness*, no differences were found in the two groups (Arab and Jewish students). Students from both cultural groups expressed a similar need in terms of the need for autonomy and its importance for their personal development. Some students expressed satisfaction in connecting with peers who had the same academic goals. According to them, *belonging* to those groups contributed in that it encouraged serious learning that led to success and accomplishment of goals.

As for the *competence need*, Arab students, compared to Jewish students, demonstrated a higher belief in their abilities to direct themselves. They strongly believed in their ability to assume responsibility for their actions for the purpose of succeeding. According to the statements made by the students who participated in the interviews, similar to the claim made by Deci and Ryan's (2000), the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs, *autonomy, competence, and relatedness*, was very important for their academic success and personal development.

***c. Perceptions about subjective well-being***

The third theme was divided into three main categories that referred to subjective well-being. Regarding three categories, obtained from the theme of *subjective well-being* according to the statements of the interviewees, it turned out that in both the collectivistic and individualistic cultures, the students had new experiences, intellectual freedom, and coped independently with empowering challenges. This helped them in discovering additional abilities embodied in them. Moreover, it increased their self-belief and self-efficacy that determined their level of motivation (Bandura, 1989) and, thus, impact their ability to plan the learning process effectively. This is a necessary task for achieving success, which has implications for personal empowerment, enhancing self-confidence, and increasing the subjective well-being.

## **5. Discussion**

The study examined how self-determination increases the sense of subjective well-being among culturally different college students. The interviews conducted with the students showed that autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs were necessary conditions for encouraging and reinforcing their self-confidence and self-esteem, increasing their sense of satisfaction and well-being, which also had implications for healthy personal development. Similar to the findings of previous studies that indicated a correlation between satisfaction and self-esteem (Diener & Diener, 1995), other studies noted self-esteem as one of the strongest predictors of satisfaction and subjective well-being (Cha, 2003). Thus, the results emphasized the need for satisfying the three basic psychological needs: *autonomy, competence, and relatedness*, as unique predictors of personal well-being (Chen et al., 2014). This process is doable. Hence, in academic studies, it is essential to make the lecturers aware of the importance of satisfying those needs, since they are necessary for the students and definitely for raising their academic motivation. The lecturers must be willing to empower their students by treating them as unique and independent individuals, constantly increasing their sense of ability. In this way, the lecturers will enhance the students' self-esteem and intrinsic motivation necessary for their overall success in different fields and different respects, both socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and academically.

## **6. Conclusion**

The study shed light on the relationship between the components of self-determination and the increase of subjective well-being, as well as on the relationship between cultural orientation

and its effect on the sense of subjective well-being. It is recommended conducting future studies based on the findings of this study and examine the relationships more in-depth. We have to think about a new model in which subjective well-being constitutes an independent variable. Moreover, we have to consider the three psychological needs (Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness) and the various interactions between them, elements that affect the degree of success of all students, from both the majority and the minority group studying in academic settings. Such a model will contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of cultural differences on learners and their subjective well-being in academic institutions.

### **Research Limitations**

This is only a preliminary study (at least in Israel). The sampling framework and the sample should probably be greater. In order to represent and achieve more extensive results in the field, based on those findings, a comprehensive model should be built, advancing the situation of students from both cultures. Another limitation is the timing of the study. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted through Zoom, a situation in which we believe there was a limitation and inconvenience for some of the interviewees. In the frontal interview, the interpersonal interaction encompasses certainly positive benefits and implications for managing the interviewer-interviewee discourse. It is, therefore, recommended expanding the research and allowing a higher number of students to participate, as well as enable the participation of students from many academic institutions in Israel. A future study should also ensure an equal number of participants in each group (Arabs and Jews).

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## **Appendix 1. Interview Questions**

1. Are your parents involved in your choices and decisions about your studies?
2. Does your success in life is also for your family?
3. Do you think you need help from others in order to perform various tasks or make some decisions?
4. Do you define yourself as an independent person?
5. What challenges you in your learning / in your life in general?
6. Would you choose to study at another college? Why?
7. Do you think consulting with your parents could help you make the right decision for you?
8. What could make you feel satisfied with life?
9. Is interacting with others important for you?
10. What is life satisfaction for you?