

# THE EFFECTS OF AGE AND CULTURE ON SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING: A CASE STUDY IN THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS

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## ABSTRACT

The present study of diachronous ratings of subjective well-being (SWB) was modeled on research undertaken by Staudinger, Bluck & Herzberg (2003). In addition, we were interested in determining the effects of culture and context (where one lives) on SWB ratings. To gauge these effects, we included the factor of mother tongue and altered the Life Satisfaction Questionnaire by adding a question concerning *expected well-being in Quebec*. We asked 350 Anglophones and Francophones from the Eastern Townships, aged 18 to 95, to rate their SWB in the past, present, future, and future 'in Quebec'. The results concerning the effects of chronological age on diachronistic SWB ratings followed the patterns of previous research: young people (aged 18–38) rate past SWB lower than present SWB and future SWB much higher; middle-aged people (aged 39–64) rate their SWB the same regardless of time; And the elderly (67–95) rated past SWB higher than the present and their future SWB much lower. There were no differences between Anglophones or Francophones. Further analysis revealed the disturbing finding that the oldest participants rated their current SWB significantly lower than the other two age groups. In the second half of our study we found that by simply asking Francophones and Anglophones to rate their SWB in the future – first unspecified as to location, and then in a future 'if they stay in Quebec' – produced different response patterns. Both future SWB ratings were the same for Francophones, indicating that the questions were simply redundant. The Anglophones, on the other hand, rated their future SWB in Quebec consistently lower than an unspecified future.

## RÉSUMÉ

*La présente étude des évaluations diachroniques du bien-être personnel s'inspire des découvertes de Staudinger, Bluck et Herzberg (2003). Nous avons demandé à*

*358 anglophones et francophones des Cantons de l'Est d'évaluer leur bien-être personnel passé, présent et futur ainsi que leur bien-être personnel futur considérant qu'ils doivent demeurer au Québec. Les résultats concernant les effets de l'âge chronologique sur les évaluations diachroniques du bien-être personnel étaient conformes aux modèles obtenus lors de recherches antérieures. Le plus jeune groupe d'âge (17–39 ans) évalue son bien-être personnel passé comme étant inférieur à son bien-être personnel présent et son bien-être futur comme étant de beaucoup supérieur à son bien-être présent. Le groupe d'âge moyen (40–64 ans) évalue son bien-être personnel au même niveau au fil des années (passé, présent, futur). Le groupe d'âge le plus élevé (67–95 ans) évalue son bien-être personnel passé comme étant supérieur à son bien-être présent ou futur. Dans la seconde partie de notre étude, nous avons découvert nous obtenons des modèles de réponse différents en demandant aux francophones et aux anglophones d'évaluer leur bien-être futur, sans préciser de lieu, et d'évaluer leur bien-être futur dans la perspective de demeurer au Québec. Chez les francophones, les deux évaluations sont identiques. Les anglophones, quant à eux, évaluent systématiquement leur bien-être futur moins grand lorsque la perspective de demeurer au Québec est mentionnée.*

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### **The Effects of Age and Culture on Subjective Well-Being: A Case Study in the Eastern Townships<sup>1</sup>**

**W**e each occupy an interval of time and then we are gone. Kurt Lewin (1926) referred to this interval as our 'life space'. He gravitated to a geometric metaphor because he thought the meaning of psychological experience resided in the nature relationships. It is in geometry where an angle means nothing without lines, and angles and lines mean nothing without shape. For Lewin, 'life space' contained within it the reference points that made experience meaningful. How we feel about our life, the degree to which it is satisfying, reflects the coordination of internal and external factors extended through time. Our 'life space', in other words, involves us in an ongoing and complex temporal integration of our self. Our occupation of the present time nourishes continuity with a past and a future. Our sense of self is temporally multi-dimensional.

To suggest that our present is a temporal mongrel is not to say that the past and future occupy us in the same way. In this research, we have found that both culture and chronological age affect how time commingles. In the first part of our study, we show that Anglophones and Francophones living in the Eastern Townships follow the trends found by other researchers with respect to how chronological age

affects ratings of well-being. We did find that our oldest group, aged 67–95, showed a decline in current well-being, a trend that breaks with the findings of most previous research. This is troubling as it suggests that life in the Townships for our oldest members is not perceived as satisfying as it is for those who are younger (18–64 years). In the second part, and here the present research opens new ground, we show that expected future well-being, should one stay in Quebec, is different for Francophones and Anglophones. This difference holds even when we control for the effect of bilingualism. Let us first look at the relationship between chronological age and ratings of subjective well-being (SWB).

### **Life Space and Well-being**

It makes sense that chronological age would affect the way we occupy time, this life space of ours, as Lewin would say. For a 20-year-old, the future tends to be welcoming and is greeted with imagined worlds, better worlds. The openness of the future contrasts with the brevity of the past. As we age, the past and future change spaces, the future becoming short, the past so long as to make parts of it difficult to retrieve. When we are 80, the past stockpiles our stories, and the future shrivels, getting both shorter and narrower. Middle age procures the balance, as the psychological space of past and future bears on us with equal force.

Our occupation of this 'life space' has not gone unnoticed by the research community. In 1977, S. Albert introduced temporal comparison theory. Albert drew from Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory (comparisons made between two individuals) but changed the comparison to a temporal one, in which the same person assesses two time-periods in their own life. Using Albert's paradigm, Wilson & Ross (2000) found that people tended to make as many temporal comparisons as social comparisons. It would seem that it is quite common for us to use temporal judgments in evaluating ourselves. They also noted that 'temporal past' comparisons tend to be gratifying for current levels of life satisfaction, producing a self-enhancement effect by focusing on achievements made over time. In a follow-up study in 2001, they noted that self-enhancement is maintained by disparaging the distant past.

Okun, Dittburner & Huff (2006) decided to examine future states of well-being as a function of age. Their younger participants produced higher future well-being scores than did middle-aged participants. Their findings support the earlier work by Ryff (1991), who had noted that the oldest participants were less optimistic and foresaw a decline

in their well-being with advancing years. This perception of older people as less satisfied with life was the subject of a study by Lacey, Smith and Ubel (2006). They asked participants to compare their perceptions of the well-being of others at two target ages, 70 and 30 years old. They found that, regardless of the participant's chronological age, the well-being ratings for the older target group were lower than those for the younger target (aged 30). Yet when asked to rate their own subjective well-being, the older participant's ratings were higher than were those of the younger participants.

Most studies confirm this pattern of results. There is a tendency to perceive the well-being of older people as lower than that of younger age groups. Yet when people are asked to rate their current state of well-being, older people's self-assessments tend to be higher than are those of the younger age groups. So, although we dread the thought of growing old, people who are old tend to be just as happy (or happier) as younger age groups. This phenomenon has come to be known as the 'well-being paradox'.

The study, however, that caught our interest and on which we patterned our own research, was by Staudinger, Bluck & Herzberg (2003). Like other researchers, they thought of the present as anchoring our recollections and expectations. They reasoned that we accommodate the past and future by comparing it to our present. In our temporal sense of our self, then, the present serves as the pivot, providing the spin we will take when considering our well-being in the past and future. What made their study different was that they included all age groups (young, middle-aged and old-aged) with a view to comparing the participant's rating *patterns* of subjective well-being across time – past, present, and future. This involves making a 'diachronistic' evaluation. For example, they asked their participants questions like, "How would you rate your satisfaction with work, these days? Looking back 10 years ago? Looking ahead 10 years into the future?"

Staudinger et al. (2003) thought that people of similar chronological age would produce similar diachronistic rating patterns, while different age groups would produce different patterns. These patterns, then, would characterize the different chronological age groups. Their approach was more in step with Lewin's insight about the temporal integration of our self-concept. Staudinger, et al. (2003) used the "Life Satisfaction Questionnaire"<sup>2</sup>. This research found that the diachronistic well-being ratings of the younger subjects were the most variable. That is, their temporal self-concept made little room for the past, thereby rating their subjective well-being (SWB) in the past as significantly

lower than their present state of well-being. This fits with Wilson & Ross's (2001) finding that there is a tendency to disparage the past to enhance self-assessment. The future for the young invites the possibility of change, and imagining personal transformation is seductive. These young participants rated their future well-being much higher than their present state of well-being. Staudinger showed that middle-aged people produce the smallest variation in their ratings of past, present and future well-being. This suggests that for middle-aged individuals, the present has enough stretch to incorporate the idea of a past and future not much different from the present state of things. Although Staudinger's group thought that their oldest subjects would be much like the middle-aged, they found something different. The older participants perceived their past more fondly and their future more darkly. The old-aged group presented a negatively sloping diachronistic pattern. This stood in striking contrast to the positive slope of the young group's ratings of well-being in the past, present and future.

For the most part, we replicated Staudinger's patterns in our research. However, there were some differences, which could be tracked to our older aged category. Before entering into the details of our findings, it is important to describe the participants in our study.

### **Description of our Participants**

Research participants were drawn from across the Eastern Townships. Our aim was to have a diverse sample in terms of education, age, and type of employment. All contact was initiated through face-to-face meetings. We did not interview people over the telephone, nor did we solicit their responses through electronic means (email or other Web-based survey approaches). We approached people at shopping malls, country fairs, homes for the elderly, canvassing neighbourhoods and meeting them in their homes, at their workplaces, and through university classes. Although our sample was not randomly chosen in any technical sense, there was nothing systematic in our selection of participants. People were simply asked if they would like to take part in a survey. If they agreed, we asked them to read and sign the consent form. This form outlined the purpose of the study and their rights as participants, while providing them with contact information should they have any questions or demonstrate interest in our research findings. Following this, all participants were asked to answer questions on the Life Satisfaction Scale. In this way, we gathered 358 participants. Of these, 171 were Francophones and 176 were Anglophones. Eleven participants specified their mother tongue as

“other.” Ages ranged from 18 to 95 years old. Genders were balanced (163 females and 172 males), while the remaining people did not specify their gender.

Because we wanted to replicate the results of Staudinger et al., we too categorized our participants into three age groups just as they had done. The young adulthood group, which included 103 participants, ranged in age from 18 to 38 years with a mean age of 26.5 years. The middle-aged group ranged in age from 39 to 64 years, with a mean age of 49. This was our largest category with 168 participants. Our last category, the older-aged group, was the smallest with 82 participants ranging in age from 67 to 95 years, with a mean age of 79. Five participants did not include their age so they were excluded from the study.

Our older-aged group differed from Staudinger et al’s group. In their study, their oldest participants were only 74 years old and the group had a mean age of 63 years. In our study, not only did we have a higher mean age, but also our median age was 79 years. This means that 50% of our elderly participants were 80 years of age or older. In addition, because this group was elderly, we were concerned about their present state of well-being in terms of their health and finances. We were hoping that these factors would not contribute negatively to their overall present SWB score given that they are on fixed incomes and health declines with age. In terms of their present well-being ratings on health, they were not significantly different from the other two age groups ( $F_{(2, 351)} = 1.80, p. > .05$ ). On their rating of finances, they were the most satisfied, though they did not differ significantly from the middle-age group. Both the older-aged group and the middle-aged group however, were more satisfied with their finances than were the younger adults ( $F_{(2, 350)} = 7.44, p. = .001$ ).

Considering all of these factors, we believe that the composition of our older-age group is more representative in term of the age range than was Staudinger’s. It is also worth noting that they are just as satisfied with their health and the state of their finances as the other two age categories. As a final point, it is to be noted that each of our groups was composed of a balance of Francophone and Anglophone participants.<sup>3</sup>

### **Diachronistic Patterns of Subjective Well-Being in the Townships**

As indicated above, all participants were asked to answer the questions on the Life Satisfaction Scale, altered to reflect our interests in detecting the effects of place on subjective well-being. In keeping with previous

research, we expected that there would be different patterns for each timeline (rating the past, present and future), since chronological age has been shown to have an impact on ratings of subjective well-being (SWB). Figure 1 shows the pattern of SWB ratings as a function of chronological age rather than in terms of generalized age categories.

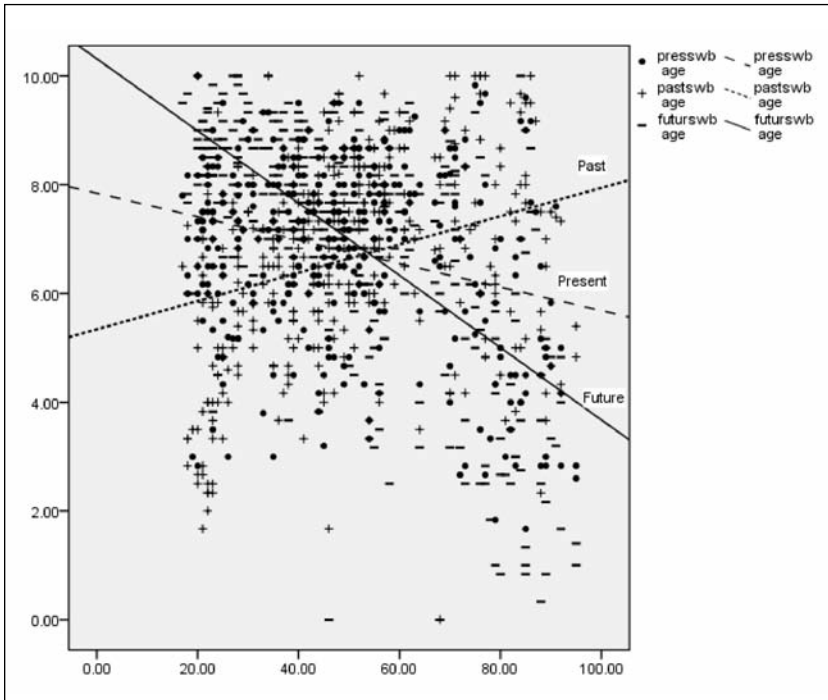


Figure 1: Age as a continuous variable, subjective well-being as a dependent variable: regressions lines indicate trends of past, present, future subjective well-being across age.

Looking at Figure 1, ratings of subjective well-being across time differ depending on the age of the participants – as expected. Asking people of different ages to think about their well-being across time, 10 years this way or that, is asking them to rate quite different temporal landscapes. Each line in the graph represents the subjective well-being rating at a *different time*. The large dashed-line indicates the regression line for SWB ratings in the *present*. There is a statistically significant negative slope to the line showing that present ratings of well-being decline with age ( $r = -.255$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $n = 350$ ). This goes against the trend found in previous research, which contends that present ratings of well-being increase and become stable as people get older. Our results project a less optimistic view. We will return to this point later. The small dashed-line represents the regression line for ratings 10 years

in the *past*. This positive slope is statistically significant as well, suggesting that as we age there is a tendency to rate our well-being in the past as higher than our present well-being ( $r = .284, p = .000, n = 350$ ). This finding is consistent with previous research. The third line, the solid black line, shows the regression for *future* ratings. This is significant and suggests that as we age, we tend to be less optimistic about the future ( $r = -.618, p = .000, n = 350$ ). Again, this pattern fits with what other researchers have found with respect to predicting future states of well-being. What Figure 1 shows, then, is that past, present and future ratings of SWB have different slopes as a function of chronological age.

We also wanted to show the ‘diachronistic rating’ profile for each age group to provide a more general view of the results. We did this by plotting each age group’s mean SWB rating for past, present and future. The information is the same as that presented in the first figure, but this second figure draws attention to the diachronistic rating patterns within each age category. That is, instead of regressing diachronistic SWB ratings across age as in Figure 1, we plotted the mean SWB rating for each age category across time (past, present and future). We analyzed each group’s mean subjective well-being scores (SWB) and compared them across time using a repeated measures analysis of variance.

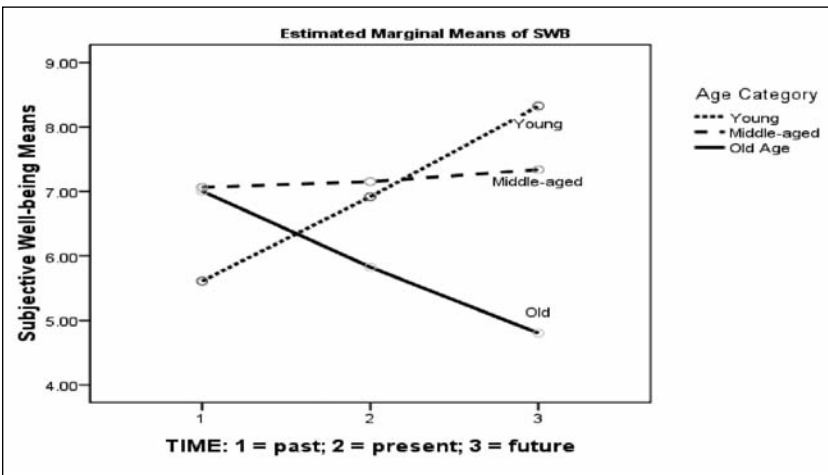


Figure 2: Age as a categorical variable, subjective well-being as a dependent variable: the lines show the age trends of past, present and future subjective well-being (SWB) means.

While the regression analysis depicted in the first figure showed the general trends of diachronistic SWB ratings *across age*, the analysis captured in the second figure attends to different patterns *within* each



*age group.* The younger group is indicated by the small dashed-line, the middle-aged group by the large dashed-line, and the old-aged group by the solid black line. Notice that the young (small dashed-line) generally find the past less satisfying than the present and the future more promising. This effect is called 'future self-enhancement'. A repeated measures analysis of variance on these ratings of subjective well-being (SWB) across time was significant ( $F_{(2, 204)} = 126.27, p = .000$ ), indicating that the young rated their well-being in the past significantly lower, and their future well-being higher, than their present SWB. All of these mean differences were confirmed by a series of paired sample t-tests<sup>4</sup>. The large dashed-line of the middle-aged group is fairly flat and a repeated measures analysis of variance showed that these means were not statistically different from one another (Multivariate  $F_{(2, 167)} = 2.48, p = .087$ ).<sup>5</sup> These results are in line with the findings of Staudinger, et al. (2003), suggesting that, for middle-aged adults, ratings for remembered or expected well-being are not different from current ratings of well-being.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the old-aged group (the solid line) produced diachronistic ratings of SWB that were significantly different, as revealed by a repeated measures analysis of variance ( $F_{(2, 162)} = 66.16, p = .000$ ).<sup>7</sup>

What is most disturbing about the results from the oldest group, however, is not revealed in the pattern of subjective well-being ratings. It is not surprising that the past is rated higher than the present, which, in turn, is rated higher than the future. What is surprising, and what goes against previous research findings, is that this older-aged group rates their current state of well-being so much lower than the other two groups. This tells us that these older-aged Townshippers are less satisfied with their lives than are other age groups.<sup>8</sup> We return to this finding in the conclusion.

### **Life in Quebec**

We were also interested in determining the effects of context (where one lives) and mother tongue on rating of subjective well-being. In the psychometry of well-being, there have been few attempts to isolate, and draw attention to, the sociopolitical & cultural dimensions of location as they bear on ratings of well-being. This may in part have to do with the fact that these dimensions are difficult to identify and isolate. Yet these are just as important as other more easily documented factors when examining patterns of happiness or subjective well-being. Just as it was germane to consider the effects of different chronological ages on perceived well-being, it seemed obvious that the culture in which we live would influence our sense of well-

being.

How we go about our daily life is reflective of where we live. The way we occupy Sherbrooke – its institutions, public bureaucracies, universities, schools, shops, restaurants, and grocery stores – is different from how we would occupy some other city, like Calgary. This is true, not just in what we see, but in what we are reminded of, and in what we can expect to receive from or give back to the community. If you are French-speaking and living in Calgary, you are reminded of your minority status. This probably affects how you think about yourself, and perhaps how satisfied you are with your life. If you are French-speaking and living in Sherbrooke, the situation is quite different. Now if you are English-speaking and living in Sherbrooke, you are likely to be reminded that you are a minority here, regarding language and perhaps culture.

Most researchers who tackle the issue of culture and its impact on perceived well-being use a cross-cultural methodology. They attempt to document the moderating effects of culture by comparing similar groups in different countries (Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006; Westerhof & Barrett, 2005; Duncan & Grazzani-Gavazzi, 2004; Diner, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Staudinger, Fleeson & Bates, 1999). Other approaches focus on the experiences of immigrants and their assimilation into their new countries and, in this way, hold constant the host culture. Many of these studies have found congruence between immigrants' expectations and their experience in the adopted country is predictive of well-being (Murphy & Mahalingam, 2006; Mirsky, Slonim-Nevo, & Rubinstein, 2007). Neither approach, however, is suited to our situation in Quebec. There may be two (or more) cultures in the Townships, but they occupy the same physical space. While studies on immigrants are valuable in determining possible factors that affect ratings of well-being, they are not applicable to the Francophone/Anglophone experiences of Quebec culture.

We thought Quebec provided an opportunity for investigating the integration of location into ratings of subjective well-being. Occupying the same space are French and English Quebecers who stand in different relations to the greater North American English culture and to the salient Quebec French culture. It may be that the Francophones and Anglophones have a different Quebec experience, insofar as expected well-being is concerned. The challenge, then, was in determining ways of discovering this difference. We wanted to explore the effects of physical location, with its sociopolitical and cultural resonances, on the subjective well-being of French and English speaking groups, while isolating key factors affecting these ratings.

We arrived at a modest solution. According to Lewin (1926, 1935), our life space involves the temporal integration of internal factors (like age and personality) and external factors (like location and culture). We have shown that chronological age affects rating of future well-being. If Lewin is right, it makes sense that physical location too should affect ratings of future well-being. Yet, strictly speaking, future location is undetermined, unlike past and present location. This means that if place affects ratings of future SWB, then these effects draw on past and present experiences. Because of this indeterminacy of place in the future, this left room for a simple manipulation. We could ask our participants to rate their future well-being under two conditions: one, a future unspecified as to place (“how would you rate your well-being looking ahead 10 years?”) and the other, specified, as in “how would you rate your well-being looking ahead 10 years if you stay in Quebec?”

It occurred to us that if Francophones and Anglophones had different Quebec experiences affecting ratings of well-being, these might show up as different response patterns to our two questions about future well-being. Since our participants resided in the Townships for most of their lives, it is only their futures that remain open to a possible life outside of Quebec. When French and English participants think about their future, do they think about it as being lived in Quebec? When we ask our participants to rate their future well-being and their future well-being if they stay in Quebec, our question draws attention to place in the future. Do Francophones and Anglophones react differently?

It was this kind of thinking that led us to alter the Life Satisfaction Questionnaire. The ‘Quebec’ question was added to each of the six domain-specific categories used to assess well-being<sup>9</sup>, and within each domain, participants were asked to provide an evaluation of their well-being 10 years ago, in the present, and 10 years from now. The Quebec question consisted in asking each participant to rate his or her well-being 10 years from now if they were to stay in Quebec. For example, we asked people to rate their health 10 years from now and then to rate their health 10 years from now if they were to stay in Quebec.

If you have never thought of yourself as living anywhere else, such a question is just odd. Rating your well-being 10 years from now and 10 years from now if you stay in Quebec should not make any difference. Nor should such a question make any difference if subjective well-being evaluations are not affected by our relationship to location. If location has no bearing on well-being ratings, you would expect the French and English speakers to be no different in their

ratings of future well-being for each question, thereby producing similar patterns. The Quebec question, posed as it is in the questionnaire, would appear superfluous. If, however, location structures our considerations of the future time, then a question drawing attention to one's life in Quebec will likely have an effect on future well-being ratings. We thought that our English- and French-speaking participants would differ in their response patterns on the two questions. We thought that the Anglophones would react differently, particularly the young, as they might very well conceive of their future as unfolding outside of Quebec. The idea of remaining in Quebec while wanting to be away might lead to lower ratings for future well-being. Reflecting on this future in Quebec, we also thought that the old-aged group would rate their future health lower in Quebec because of concerns about the availability of services in English. As for the young French-speaking Townshippers, it occurred to us that they too might envisage a future lived away from here. Should that be the case, would their future well-being if they stayed in Quebec have a lower rating than an unspecified future?

### **Future and Future in Quebec**

As in earlier analyses, we used the total score on the questionnaire as the dependent measure.<sup>10</sup> The first thing to notice is that the chronological age patterns for future SWB ratings are the same for both Francophones and Anglophones. The young rated the future more positively than any other age group, middle-aged participants were also positive about their future but less so than the young, and the old were not very optimistic about their future. This pattern held as well for both linguistic groups as they rated their future well-being in Quebec. But there was a difference between Francophones and Anglophones that was picked up in an interaction, as demonstrated in the figures below.

The first graph in Figure 3 depicts the patterns of the French-speaking participants while the second portrays the patterns of English speakers. The negative sloping lines in both graphs reflect the fact that the older age groups rate their future well-being lower than the young, regardless of mother tongue ( $F_{(2, 341)} = 82.66, p. < .000$ ). The solid line reflects their future rating and the dashed line reflects their future rating if they stay in Quebec. These lines are not significantly different from one another when they are averaged over both graphs, but the two graphs are significantly different from each other. This is suggested by an interaction between future/future in Quebec and language groups ( $F_{(1, 341)} = 12.06, p. < .001$ ).

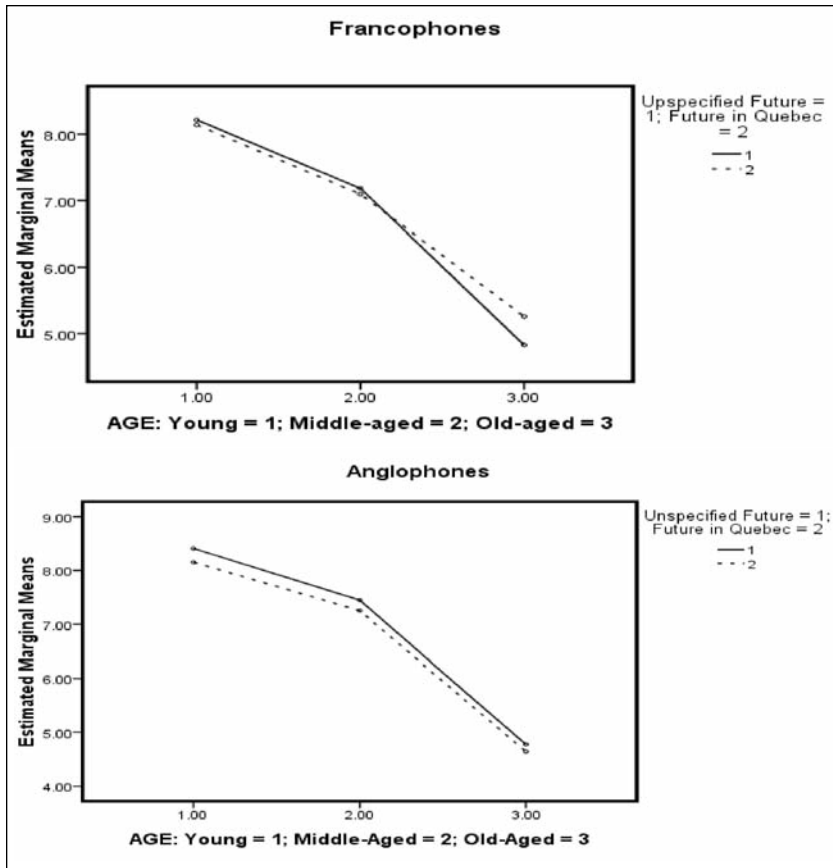


Figure 3: Future and Future Quebec Ratings.

What this means is that the ratings of future SWB and future SWB if you stay in Quebec differ depending on whether your mother tongue is French or English. This is visible in the graphs themselves. In the first graph, the solid and dashed lines indicating “future” and “future in Quebec”, respectively, are essentially on top of each other, except for the older-aged group of Francophones. They see their future in Quebec as better than the unspecified future.<sup>11</sup> When we turn to the second graph, depicting the patterns of the Anglophones, we notice a separation between the two lines. Though this separation is small, it reflects significant differences in the patterns produced by Francophones and Anglophones.

Breaking down this analysis further in an effort to make better sense of the patterns, we carried out a series of paired sample t-tests. These analyses highlight the line differences depicted in the two graphs. We

found that *young* Francophones did not rate differently their future and their future if they stayed in Quebec ( $t_{(54)} = 1.20, p. > .05$ ), yet *young* Anglophones did. They rated their future in Quebec significantly lower than their unspecified future ( $t_{(44)} = 2.92, p. = .006$ ). We found the same pattern in the middle-aged groups. Whereas the *middle-aged* Francophones did not rate their 'future' and 'future in Quebec' SWB differently ( $t_{(73)} = 1.94, p. = .056$ )<sup>12</sup>, *middle-aged* Anglophones did ( $t_{(90)} = 3.51, p. = .001$ ). Finally, Francophones and Anglophones in the old-aged group rated their SWB in the 'future' and their SWB for their 'future in Quebec' as the same.

As stated above, the difference in the lines depicting an unspecified future and a future if you stay in Quebec is visually (and numerically) small. What provides the statistical significance is that, while the two linguistic groups are consistent in their response patterns, the patterns are different.

In order to highlight this difference between Francophones and Anglophones, we removed age as a factor. Our reasoning was that the age trends for SWB ratings being the same for both Francophones and Anglophones, suggests that age cannot be the factor differentiating these groups. Specifically, we know that as age increases, future SWB ratings go down. Because these patterns are the same for both Francophones and Anglophones, we collapsed the age factor to highlight the differences on their SWB ratings in the future (unspecified) and in the future if they were to stay in Quebec.<sup>13</sup>

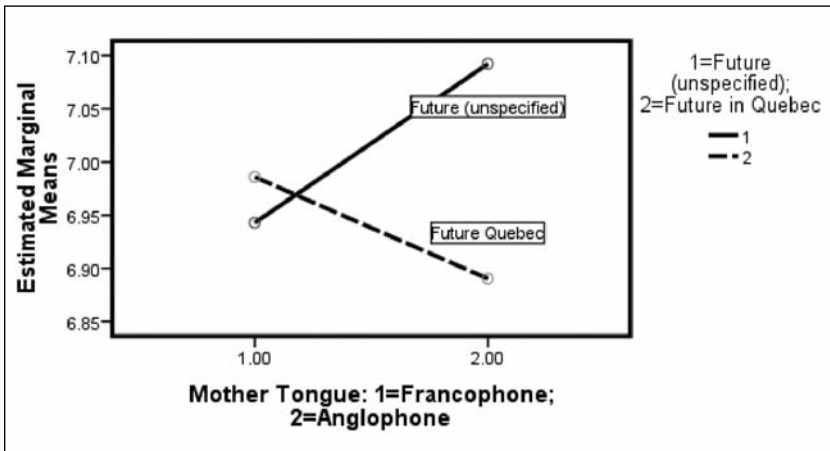


Figure 4: Future (unspecified) and Future Quebec: SWB Ratings for Francophones (1) and Anglophones (2)

What is evident in viewing this graph is that Francophones do not rate their well-being in the future differently under conditions of an

unspecified future or a future in Quebec. The reason for their slightly higher SWB score in the “Quebec future” condition has to do with the fact that the older-aged subjects rated their Quebec future SWB higher, the only group to do so.<sup>14</sup> The Anglophones rated their future well-being in Quebec lower than the unspecified future (paired-sampled  $t_{(178)} = 4.28, p = .000$ ). These results reflect the fact that, while raw-score differences are small, they nevertheless are statistically significant and reflect a fundamental difference between Anglophones and Francophones’ ratings of future well-being in Quebec.

### **What about being Bilingual?**

Our findings prompted the question as to whether bilingualism might be a factor in altering the patterns of English- and French-speaking groups. Specifically, if we controlled for participants’ level of bilingualism, would Anglophones and Francophones still produce different SWB ratings for an unspecified future versus a future in Quebec? We approached this question by using a hierarchical regression analysis.

We thought that SWB ratings for an unspecified future and a future in Quebec would be highly correlated. Indeed they are, the correlation was  $r = .94$  ( $p < .000, n = 337$ ). Yet, while both future ratings are similar, the “future in Quebec” ratings are not predictable from unspecified future ratings. We also determined that bilingualism was significantly correlated to both unspecified future ratings ( $r = .329, p = .000$ ) and future in Quebec ratings ( $r = .306, p = .000$ ). This suggests that as bilingualism increases, so do both future SWB ratings: the more bilingual a person is, the more positive are their future SWB ratings. The question remained; does this correlation between bilingualism and SWB help us account for that portion of “future in Quebec” ratings that remain uncorrelated with unspecified future ratings? This is precisely what the hierarchical regression addressed.

When we entered bilingualism into our analysis, it did not result in any change in our ability to predict Quebec future ratings (F Change  $_{(1,334)} = .04, p = .841$ ). In the next step of the analysis, we entered mother tongue. This produced a significant change in the multiple regression (F Change  $_{(1,333)} = 9.53, p = .002$ ). What this suggests is that the different “future in Quebec” rating patterns associated with the two language groups remain even after we control for bilingualism. Irrespective of their level of bilingualism, the two linguistic groups respond differently when rating their future well-being if they stay in Quebec. As we have seen, Anglophones tend to rate their future in Quebec SWB lower than when it relates to an unspecified future.

Francophones do not show this relational pattern difference when rating their future well-being. For them, mention of an unspecified future and a future in Quebec makes no difference, SWB ratings are the same. The degree to which someone is bilingual does not affect these patterns.

### Conclusion

The present study of subjective well-being in the Townships was modeled on Staudinger et al.'s (2003) method for evaluating diachronous SWB across age. We added in mother tongue because we thought that the sociopolitical & cultural dimensions of Quebec society would be reflected through the two dominant language groups. We reasoned that if culture affected SWB ratings, this would be reflected in the different response patterns of Francophones and Anglophones.

Overall, we replicated Staudinger et al.'s findings. We found that chronological age affects diachronistic ratings of well-being. Relative to the present time, young adults rate their future SWB much higher and past SWB much lower. Middle-aged adults show the most consistency in diachronistic (past, present, and future) SWB ratings. If well-being is a construct that is relatively stable over time then this may indicate that middle-aged adults are the most realistic and consistent in their evaluation of the past and the future. Their ratings reflect a maturity born of experience, while also suggesting fewer encounters with the hardships of declining age and the heartaches associated with the death of loved ones. However, these are exactly the kinds of experiences that form the crust of old age, turning us back toward the past as a better place: acts of remembering now occupy the time once used for planning futures. Thus, it was our oldest age group that contemplated their SWB in the past in a more positive light than their current well-being, while having a dimmer view of their future, rating it much lower than their present SWB.

Most troubling, however, was not the diachronistic *pattern* of SWB ratings among our oldest participants. Earlier studies had described similar results. Rather it was that our oldest participants rated their current state of well-being so low. This goes against the "well-being paradox". This paradox suggests that although we commonly believe that life will be less satisfying for the elderly, when we in fact ask older-aged people to rate their well-being, they often produce ratings that are equal to, or higher than, those from younger age groups. This was not the case with our 82 participants from the Eastern Townships. Their current SWB ratings were significantly lower than were those of both



young and middle-aged adults.

It is difficult to interpret this result. There are at least two possible readings. It may be that the results reflect something specific about life in the Eastern Townships for our oldest citizens. However, it may also have to do with the fact that we used a more representative sample of older-aged people, having a range of ages between 68 and 95 years. If this is the case, our results simply paint a more realistic picture of the elderly. Our immediate concern, however, is that the elderly in our region are not as satisfied with life as other age groups. We need to consider ways to make our culture more sensitive to the needs of the elderly. Further, we need to find ways to encourage their participation in our culture, to benefit from their experience. In other words, it is not enough to tend to the elderly; we must find our way to a sincere receptivity of their contributions to our own lives and to that of our culture.

In the second half of this study, we were interested in determining the effects of context (where one lives) and mother tongue on SWB ratings. We found that by simply asking Francophones and Anglophones to rate their SWB in a future, unspecified as to location, and in a future where they remained in Quebec produced different response patterns. Both future ratings were the same for the Francophones, indicating that the questions were simply redundant. The Anglophones, on the other hand, rated their future in Quebec consistently lower than their unspecified future. The Quebec question tapped into something of importance among the Anglophones, uneasiness about a future in Quebec. The rating drop in SWB is small, but it is there, nonetheless, a drone of discontent.

These pattern differences tell us something about the power of expectations and locations. We need to be cautious of our interpretations, however. A statement about a future remains a statement made in the present. Our questions seem to tap into a more prominent Anglophone restlessness, though one that exists, to some extent, in all age groups. The temptation is to focus on these patterns as a signal about Anglophone migration. A sensitive reading, however, is both more literal and telling: for Anglophones an unspecified future looks better than a future in Quebec *today*.

No one knows what Quebec's future will be like, but expectations are made of the fabric of previous experiences, melding together the fibres of a past and present Quebec. The composition is different for Francophones and Anglophones. We need a better understanding of the craft-knowledge required for future making. We need to make a present that invites a future for all of Quebec's people.

In closing, a quote from the psychologist and philosopher William James (1902) seems appropriate. He wrote in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*:

If we were to ask the question: "What is human life's chief concern? One of the answers we should receive would be: "It is happiness." How to gain, how to keep, how to recover happiness, is in fact for most men at all times the secret motive of all they do, and all they are willing to endure (révérend 68).

What we have found in our study are robust statistical patterns when people answer specific questions about their well-being over time. What we now need to do is to find in these patterns the stories our participants have mumbled through numbers.

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## ENDNOTES

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2. The "Life Satisfaction Questionnaire" was drawn from the on-going John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation survey of midlife experiences, also known as the MIDUS study. It consists of six domain-specific categories used to assess well-being. These domains included partnership, sexuality, finances, work, health and caring for the welfare of others. We made some modest changes to their questionnaire, but these will be addressed later.
3. In the young group there were 55 Francophones, 45 Anglophones. In the middle-aged group there were 74 Francophones and 91 Anglophones. In the older-aged group there were 42 Francophones and 40 Anglophones.
4. For present to past comparisons,  $t_{(102)} = 6.77$ ,  $p < .000$ ; from present to future,  $t_{(102)} = 10.87$ ,  $p < .000$  for the young age category.
5. Exploring our data in more detail, what we found was that the past-present comparison was not significant ( $t_{(168)} = .860$ ,  $p > .05$ ), nor was the future-present comparison ( $t_{(168)} = -1.85$ ,  $p > .05$ ).
6. We found the past to future comparison significant ( $t_{(168)} = 2.12$ ,  $p = .036$ ) which shows a slight tendency toward a 'future self-enhancement effect' for the middle-aged group.
7. They rated their well-being in the past significantly higher than the present ( $t_{(81)} = 6.31$ ,  $p < .000$ ) and their future significantly lower ( $t_{(81)} = -5.66$ ,  $p < .000$ ).
8. The analysis of variance on 'present' SWB ratings showed a significant difference among the groups ( $F_{(2,351)} = 18.77$ ,  $p < .000$ ). A follow-up analysis using Tukey's post-hoc test confirmed that the SWB rating for the oldest group was significantly different from both the young and middle-aged groups while these latter two groups were not different from each other on ratings of present SWB.
9. As noted above, these domains included partnership, sexuality, finances, work, health and caring for the welfare of others.
10. We conducted a 2 (Future/Quebec) X 2 (Language) X 3 (Age) repeated measures analysis of variance. The 'repeated' variable – where the same people rate their SWB across two factors – was on 'future' and 'future in Quebec'. The statistics that follow are taken from this analysis.