



How does living as part of a Buddhist community effect conceptions of happiness in both Eastern and Western cultures? A qualitative exploration

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ABSTRACT

A review of the literature revealed happiness to be a promising area of research (Pavot, 2008), and specifically the study of happiness within the context of culture due to the construction of meaning through indigenous psychologies and language (Bruner, 1990; Heelas & Lock, 198; Suh & Oishi). The current research explored Buddhist conceptions of happiness and comprised two phases; Phase 1 took place in Chiang Rai, Thailand, using informal ethnographic semi-structured interviews; and Phase 2 took place in Manchester, UK, using similar in-depth interviews. Conceptions of happiness were found to be directly linked to notions of the self and were interpreted through an analytic framework of Sampson's (1988) theories of individualism, whereby both Eastern and Western Buddhist communities used collectivist ensembled individualism, and some aspects of exclusive self-contained individualism, to explain conceptions of the self and happiness. Thematic analysis, informed by Braun & Clarke (2006), found Buddhist conceptions of happiness were linked to a felt connection to the environment, felt connection to other people, a cultivation of positive personal qualities, and an understanding of relative and absolute happiness. Implications may be significant with the areas of happiness studies, community psychology, and positive psychology, as a critical social psychological perspective.

KEY WORDS:	BUDDHISM	HAPPINESS	INDIVIDUALISM	ORIENTALISM	CULTURE
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Introduction

As something humanity consistently strives for, it is somewhat perplexing that happiness research has received relatively little attention within psychology until recent years. Development within the discipline shows a shift away from some of the more well-trodden paths, such as the medicalisation of depression, illuminating happiness as a promising area of focus (Pavot, 2008). Current definitions of happiness, or 'subjective well-being' (SWB), centre on a prevalence of positive over negative affect and the amount of global life satisfaction people convey (Argyle, Martin, & Crossland, 1989; Diener & Emmons, 1984; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991).

The systematic study of happiness was instigated by Ed Diener (1984) who began work on measuring SWB through the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), a psychometric instrument used to measure global life satisfaction (Larsen & Eid, 2008). The Temporal Satisfaction with Life Scale (Pavot, Diener, & Suh, 1998) is an advancement of the SWLS claiming to allow assessment of past, present and future satisfaction. However these kinds of psychometric scales divide happiness into separate components, only focusing on the aspect of life satisfaction, ignoring emotional content, which may be considered a weakness.

Other instruments attempt to measure SWB as a whole, such as the Oxford Happiness Inventory (Argyle, Martin, & Lu, 1995) as used by Lu, Gilmour & Kao (2001) who assessed the relationship between Eastern cultural values and happiness in Taiwan and the UK, finding Eastern cultural values had stronger effects on happiness amongst the Taiwanese. They suggest this finding supports the idea that culture makes meaning (Bruner, 1990) and that the dominant Western values of 'individualistic striving and advancement' (Lu, Gilmour, & Kao, 2001, p. 489) dictate different ideas of happiness to that of the East. However this large cross-cultural experiment applied Western psychological methodology and constructs to 783 participants, all of whom were university students. Apart from a huge lack of diversity in the sample, there is also a loss of personal meaning both British and Taiwanese participants associate with happiness.

Sources of happiness have also been assessed by juxtaposing East and West, finding Western sources were linked to 'intrapersonal and internal evaluation and contentment' and Eastern sources were linked to 'interpersonal and external evaluation and satisfaction' (Lu & Shih, 1997, p.181). We can detect the culture-specific themes of individualism (West) and collectivism (East) as predictors of conceptions of happiness, which are shared in the recent work by Lu & Gilmour (2004). They found that for Asians there was a socially-oriented SWB highlighting 'role obligation' and 'dialectical balance', and for Euro-Americans an individually-oriented SWB highlighting 'personal accountability' and 'explicit pursuit' (Lu & Gilmour, 2004). However the results were limited by an unrepresentative sample, using only students, and an inability to expand upon the answers as they were written by participants in essay format.

As research into happiness has grown, so too has the idea that happiness must be understood within the realms of an individual's culture (Suh & Oishi, 2004). Critiques of the literature recognise that limitations exist within a lack of diversity in the

perspectives, emphasising the overuse of quantitative analyses of large international data sets, and call for a move into qualitative research (Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009).

The relationship between Buddhism and psychology is unique. Buddhism states that control of the mind practiced through meditation will lead any human being to happiness. Like Western science, Buddhism strives for an understanding of the nature of reality, however contrary to Western methods of a neutral observer validating the external world, it focuses on the nature of experience: consciousness as reality, as the world is understood in experience, using complex analysis of the mind (Bhikkhu, 1993). Therefore it can be suggested that Buddhism is a psychology of its own: 'Buddhists and scientists have much in common, while in the field of psychology the Buddhists are well ahead. By 2000 years.' Palin (2004, p.85) quoting a speech by The Dalai Lama given in India.

With a renewed interest in religion within psychology (Coyle, 2008), the integration of Buddhism and psychology has been written about considerably, much research drawing similarities between them as psychologies, and incorporating this into new styles of therapy (Avants, Beital, & Margolin, 2005; Mikulas, 2007; Toneatto, 2002).

Though the link between Buddhism and psychology is well researched, the link between Buddhism and happiness is not, despite happiness being at the core of the religion (Gyatso, 2001). A recent paper by Zhang & Veehoven (2008) reviews three ancient Chinese philosophies: Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, and examines whether each would promise happiness in modern society. The study compares the recommended behaviours from each philosophy to findings from the international data set of the World Database of Happiness (WDH; Veehoven, 2005), looking at how the philosophies corresponded with the 'life-satisfaction' component. They found that Buddhism was 'best avoided' in modern society as it had low levels of correlation with aspects of 'life-satisfaction' found in the WDH. However there are significant limitations to this research, primarily that it is based on ancient Chinese versions of each philosophy, and modern Buddhism varies greatly to the one used here. The philosophies are taken out of context, interpreted solely by the researchers and applied to 'the average citizen', and therefore bear little relevance to reality.

Thailand has a long history of practicing Buddhism, but as a developing country in an increasingly economically competitive world, will the subscription to a Buddhist way of thinking, and ideas of happiness, be weakened by this opposition with materialism? McDaniel (2006) suggests Thai Buddhists are innovative, engaging and negotiating with the modern age through political and social activism. As Eastern cultures are increasingly challenged in adopting Western cultures of avarice and globalisation, it must be suggested that this challenge is inversely reflected in Western cultures who adopt Eastern philosophies of spirituality and modesty. Research suggests some Western Buddhists do suffer psychological conflicts, the majority relating to feelings of selfish desire, as Buddhism is perceived as promoting the suppression of this (Carey, 2006). The participants in this study, however, were selected on the premise that they were struggling to align their culture and spirituality, therefore research needs to be conducted into both the positive and negative aspects of living in Eastern and Western Buddhist communities.

Goldberg (2006) suggests Buddhism in the West is a permanent feature of the culture but has undergone major alteration since its initial contact in 1893, which was

the fruition of Orientalism. An appreciation of Orientalism is important within the current research as a perspective for understanding issues of representing ‘the other’. Said (1978) assesses the idea of ‘The Orient’ as a body of fabricated assumptions used by the West for colonialist advantage, evolving directly from its comparison to ‘The Occident’, therefore only existing in a context of being non-Western. As psychology is a predominantly Western discipline which creates knowledge, therefore already having authority in representing others (Spivak, 1988), there is a danger of speaking for ‘the other’ (hooks, 1990), becoming a regulatory function (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996). Therefore it is vital that the current research is conducted in a manner which is sensitive to this risk.

An understanding of different notions of personhood is a fundamental aspect of the current research due to cultural meanings being explored. Drawing upon the work of Heelas & Lock (1981), Sampson uses the two universal dimensions of indigenous psychology to form the basis of two diverse forms of individualism; self-contained individualism, and ensembled individualism. The universal dimensions used consist of the self – non-self boundary, a concept which denotes where a culture may place the limits of the self in relation to extrinsic non-selves. Western psychology typically denotes that maintaining a sharp self boundary (SSB) conceptualised as the physical body (Spence, 1985), is necessary to maintain healthy societal functioning (Perloff, 1987; Spence, 1985; Waterman, 1981). However, Eastern cultures adopt a fluid self boundary (FSB), not existing individually but collectively, finding the idea of separating themselves from the environment alien (Howell, 1981; Kojima, 1984). The other universal dimension includes the location of control, whereby a culture may position the power over one’s experiences. Western indigenous psychology places large emphasis on high personal control, while other typically Eastern cultures position control within the field, meaning that power includes but stretches beyond the individual, connecting them to the environment (Sampson, 1988). Figure 1 demonstrates the two forms of individualism in line with their unique features.

	Ensembled Individualism	Self-Contained
Individualism		
Self – Non-Self	Fluid (FSB)	Sharp (SSB)
Boundary	Field (HFC)	Personal (HPC)
Location of Control	Inclusionary	Exclusionary
Conception of the Self		

Figure 1: Two Separate Forms of Individualism

The current study used qualitative methodology to meaningfully explore conceptions of happiness in both Eastern and Western Buddhist communities in order to develop the necessary areas of happiness research as previously outlined. The research aims are: (1) To examine the impact that living within a Buddhist community has on the conceptions happiness of its members in Manchester and Chiang Rai; (2) To explore the extent to which these conceptions differ according to the practice of Buddhism in an Eastern and Western communities; (3) To investigate the extent to

which living within an Eastern and a Western community influences the relationship between Buddhism and happiness.

Method

To understand the conceptualisation of happiness amongst Eastern and Western Buddhist communities, a qualitative methodological approach was used to extract data concerned with meaning. The design was split into 2 phases: Phase 1 incorporated the use of ethnographic informal semi-structured interviews for the period the researcher spent in Thailand in August 2009; Phase 2 took place in Manchester, UK, building on Phase 1 by integrating themes found in Thailand into similar in-depth interviews. This method allows for a development of the Lu & Gilmour (2004) paper, as the in-depth nature of ethnographic interviews will perhaps give a more meaningful exploration of cultural conceptions of happiness.

Consent forms (Appendix A) were signed by all informants prior to interview after viewing a written brief (Appendix B) and engaging in discussion about the interview process, to ensure they understood their involvement.

The researcher spent four weeks working as part of a community project in Chiang Rai, made possible through separately becoming a volunteer for the charity 'Volunteers for Educational Support and Learning' (V.E.S.L), who set up projects across Asia to provide educational assistance in schools. In accordance with ethical guidelines the permission of V.E.S.L was obtained before research went ahead (Appendix C) and ethics were approved through the appropriate channels (Appendix D).

This experience entailed ethnographic absorption into a rural Thai village, whereby the researcher lived with a Thai family and worked as a teacher 5 days a week at the local primary school. Ethnography, descending from descriptive anthropology (Tedlock, 2001; Vidich & Lyman, 2000), involves deep immersion within a culture, whereby the researcher explores rich meanings through integrating with members of the community, allowing a purposeful interview processes which extradites significant events and structures within the group (Corbett, 1998; Goodley, Lawthom, Clough, & Moore, 2004; Heyl, 2001). An ethnographic field diary was kept to record experiences in order to establish an internal frame of reference (Appendix E). The current research critically engages with a potentially more representative postmodern ethnographic approach which attempts to eradicate binary power relationships through being part of the everyday realities of an under-represented group (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This differentiates significantly from "*grasping the native's point of view*" (Malinowski, 1922, cited in Edgerton, 1984, p.498) which exposes Western colonialist views.

Only two interviews took place in Thailand as opportunities were limited by language barriers, time restrictions, and ethnographic interviews being less clearly defined within a local and temporal structure (Flick, 2009), meaning situations arose impulsively through field contacts. However, it was felt by the researcher that it was integral to spend time, becoming aware of and engaging with the Thai community, in order to facilitate a relevant and expressive interview process, with members the research had developed a relationship with (Spradley, 1979).

A key informant was recruited through V.E.S.L. As the Thai co-ordinator of the projects, this individual spoke good English and was in regular contact with the researcher. Five interviews took place in Manchester with members of a Nichiren Buddhist community and access to all participants was gained through a key informant. A small amount of ethnography took place within this community whereby the researcher attended a discussion meeting, also recorded in the field diary (Appendix E). As a respectful piece of ethnographic research, pen portraits have been used to maintain the personal humanity of the participants (Appendix F).

It is ethically fundamental that the researcher understands their influential role in the work, as impartiality cannot be maintained due to the relational ontology of 'self' and 'other', the 'other' often positioned subordinately (Lutz, 1985). This gives rise to the notion of 'giving voice', a problematic approach used in psychology to overcome its tendency to only represent 'the standard', suggesting 'the other' may only have access to representation within the dominant discourse (Sampson, 1993). Sampson (Ibid) suggests the only way for those misrepresented to reclaim voice is when they can speak positively about their own positions. Although part of Western psychology, the current research aimed to avoid adopting authority over the East by facilitating an interview process in which the Thai informants could talk positively about the meanings embedded in their culture.

The current research adopted a blend of approaches to allow different perspectives to occur (Parker, 2005) which included ethnography (establishing an internal framework), feminism (highlighting the power dimensions between the researcher and the researched) and social constructionism, (challenging traditional psychology that clutches at empiricism in its obsessive search for 'truth') (Burman, 1994; Burman & Parker, 1993).

The data was analysed using thematic analysis, as it allows the social construction of cultural meanings to be reliably communicated through consistent emerging themes (Boyatzis, 1998). The analysis process was informed by Braun & Clarke's (2006) comprehensive guidelines which allow the analyst to produce sophisticated results (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). Initial familiarisation with the interview data took place through the interview process itself and the subsequent transcription, allowing the researcher to develop a sense of the direction of the data. Initial coding was then completed to provide identification of key points, which were then purposefully collapsed to form themes. These were reviewed in order to refine and reinforce the analysis and were finally labelled. The themes were then interpreted through Sampson's (1988) framework of individualism.

Results

After a thorough thematic analysis and interpretation using Sampson's (1988) framework, four major themes were identified; connection of self to the environment, connection of self to others, cultivation of positive personal qualities, and an understanding of relative and absolute happiness each containing a number of sub-themes. For interview transcripts please see Appendix G.

Connection of Self to the Environment

Interviewees linked happiness to feeling connected to the environment. The Western Nichiren Buddhist group conceptualised this as being connected to the '*mystic law*' and Rachael's response typifies their care to distinguish this from an '*external god*', describing it as 'implicitly in everything'. Chanting the phrase Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo is a fundamental aspect of the Nichiren practice and Tara suggests it means 'connection of all things' and states when chanting she is 'fusing with ...cosmic energy'. Feeling separate from the environment is specifically linked to unhappiness by Sarah who explains 'unhappiness is feeling separate from the whole ...universe'. The Buddhist concept of 'dependant origination' dictates that unhappiness stems from the illusionary perception of oneself as a despotic individual, as all life is interdependent (Allwrite, 1998). It could be suggested this is demonstrative of FSB and indicative of a culture of EI (Sampson, 1988), as the Western group talk of being connected to an external whole leading to a sense of happiness.

The sub-theme of impermanence arose most prominently in the Eastern community, and refers to the environments constant state of flux, which causes suffering to individuals if they attempt to control their surroundings because they are over-attached to an aspect of it (Allwrite,1998), which is cogent of HFC and EI. Pisit suggests 'if we are in bad situation, it's only bad situation sometimes ...another time it may be a good situation ...so we should not attach'.

Death was the source of much specific anxiety for most of the Western group, exemplified by Linda, describing herself as having a real 'fear ...of death' before practicing, which is echoed by Sarah who is 'terrified of bereavement'. This anxiety could be due to an upbringing in a Western culture of SCI where HPC is prioritised but is still unable to control and overcome death. Both Sarah and Linda suggested Buddhism eased their fear of death, while Pisit spoke imperviously about death, simply describing the 'cycle of rebirth', perhaps highlighting the natural acceptance of death and HFC associated with EI.

Impermanence is linked to happiness through the idea of 'choosing happiness' discussed by both communities. Like most informants Nigel states he must 'choose to be happy' and Amorn also suggests happiness is 'always in your mind'. This indicates HFC as it reflects the ever-changing nature of the environment, acceptance of which empowers the individual to find happiness within themselves rather than externally.

Empowerment through connection to the environment arose as a sub-theme. Rachael describes unhappiness as not having 'appreciation for the power in your own life', and says chanting gives access to 'effect positive change ...in the environment'. To elaborate on this Sarah uses the concept of Ichinen Sanzen, which states that all events in the universe are connected and combine into a single entity, therefore making all individuals and events interdependent (Seikyo Times, 1993), and discusses the power in being connected because 'you are the universe ...it is you'. This demonstrates HFC through suggesting that in being connected to the environment one inherently has access to its inherent power. This is also related to Sampson's (1989) theory of the decentralised, non-equilibrium self which suggests that control may be better gained through individuals connecting to the environment and minimising self-other distinctions, as opposed to singular units maintaining independent control.

Cause and effect, was also highlighted as a sub-theme mentioned by both communities, as Pisit explains 'what we do will decide the future of us', and Sarah discusses how this may connect to the environment in saying 'respect breeds more respect ...it changes your environment naturally'. It may seem the power is being located within the individual, however causes are made and adapted through the complete system of all influences, and therefore control is always in the field, though a person may still have a sense of agency when connected to or placed within it (Bateson, 1972).

Connection of Self and Others

The universality of Buddhism was also discussed by both communities. Rachael suggests that Buddhism aims to 'enable everyone no matter what to have happiness', through accommodating any individual 'rich or poor ...gay or straight ...black or white' because everyone possesses Buddhahood. Like Linda, Sarah alludes to the 'accessibility' of the practice, and how well it can be applied to the 'modern world' hinting at its adaptability to the West by stating her frustration at the 'big belief that being a Buddhist is just about being a monk in a temple' and its association with being 'beautiful and mystical'. It could be argued the group are challenging the Western process of orientalisising Buddhism, whereby they reject their experiences of the exoticising of the practice by occidental non-Buddhists (Said, 1978).

Pisit proposes 'happiness can happen anywhere ...happiness does not belong to Buddhism' promoting its inclusiveness. Tara highlights that Buddhism 'tries to break down barriers between 'isms' ...so we can harmonise' and that it is not 'an exclusive train of thought'. This is indicative of Sampson's (1988) inclusionary conception of the self, and FSB as the separation of people through categorisation is actively rejected and for a more flexible approach.

Respect and compassion were raised in both communities, and were linked explicitly to happiness by Rachael who says 'part of happiness is about respecting ...life'. Nigel, like most Western informants, states that being connected to others through the concept of Buddhahood allows him happiness as he can respect others 'the same way' he respects himself. Harvey (2000) implies that respect in Buddhism cannot be centred solely on the self because no self exists within a person, undermining any illusionary attachment. Pisit explains that through a shared understanding that everyone is subject to suffering through impermanence then they 'can respect each other'.

Sampson's (1988) model of EI applies here because the connection of self and others through Buddhahood and impermanence reflects FSB leading to mutual respect. It could be argued in a culture of SCI it becomes much easier to disrespect others because interdependence is avoided to secure one's own happiness (Sampson, 1977) and a general unawareness of others is assumed (Sampson, 1989).

The sub-theme of community featured strongly in the interviews with both groups. The Thai interviewees' ideas around local community centred on a shared 'understanding' achieved by Buddhism making the community 'respect each other' allowing them to 'be together happily'. The Western group alluded to a wider global community, demonstrated by Rachael who describes the Nichiren Buddhist

community as existing 'nationally and internationally' stating it feels like 'extended family'. Most of the Western informants compare the Buddhist community to feeling like 'a family' and this may be evidential of their roots in an SCI culture. Tuan (1982) refers to 'urban villages' where although individuals may live fragmented within a city, group selves still form within households, which is analogous of EI. Therefore the groups' only previous experiences of EI will have been with their family, which they associate with their current Buddhist community.

Other traces of SCI arise in the western group interviews, as Nigel refers to his initial suspicion in being part of an organised religion which he later accepted because 'it's not an authoritative thing'. Sampson (1988) citing Hogan (1975) suggests a manifestation of HPC would include a distrust of social institutions that impinge on individual autonomy.

Tara also maintains aspects of SCI in saying 'it's not about losing yourself to a common identity; it's about bringing out your individual identity'. This reflects cultural ideals of uniqueness, which are epitomised by the West and SCI (Weisz, Rothbaum & Blackburn, 1984). However Tara also directly undermines the 'individualistic culture' of the West, testifying it 'can't ever make you happy' aligning herself more with EI (Sampson, 1977).

The notion of altruism is also drawn upon by most Western participants who consider giving to be an important aspect of happiness that Buddhism has helped them to realise. Rachael also links this to the idea of connection in the community commenting:

'It enables you to be more altruistic because we exist within a community, we don't exist as separate individuals, so when we give to a community we give to ourselves'

Noddings (1984) suggests that when one exists in an inclusive self-in-relation model such as EI, because one is defined through one's interdependent connection to others, helping others is concurrently helping oneself. Sampson (1988), however, is keen to disassociate this from self-interest, reiterating that self-interest is impossible when no solid self exists, confirmed by Mills & Clark (1982).

Personal Qualities

Most Western interviewees alluded to personal qualities cultivated through Buddhism which allowed them to be happier, possibly due to the effects of living within a culture of SCI where the ideal person possesses all culturally esteemed qualities within themselves (Sampson, 1977).

Being secure in oneself arose frequently, exemplified by Sarah's statement 'real happiness is that confidence to just be yourself', supported by Tara and Rachael. Linda discusses how 'women feel obligated to apply themselves ...to what society thinks', however because of Buddhism she feels she does not need to be told how to behave. Sampson (1989) suggests that centralised equilibrium notions of personhood, typified by SCI, do not allow people to have individuality or freedom because they rely on control through autocratic rulers, such as government and media. EI cultures do not need autocratic rule as they are connected to others as a

form of social control, not set against each other (Geertz, 1979), which is mirrored by the group.

Fear was referenced recurrently by the Western group when discussing unhappiness, linking it to their lives before Buddhism. Linda describes unhappiness as conforming to something 'out of fear' and both she and Sarah discuss their heightened fear before practicing Buddhism. This could be related to living within a Western culture of SCI as Sampson (1977) suggests extreme forms of individualism lead to alienation, harbouring negative effects. Excessive individualism also places sole responsibility on individuals to comprise all the culturally desirable characteristics, leading to a fear of failure (Sampson, 1977). The FSB within EI culture means this responsibility is distributed because characteristics are located in the collective, not the individual, and the culture naturally works towards group, rather than personal, achievement further lessening the burden (Sampson, 1988).

Appreciation featured in both Thai and British interviews as an essential aspect of happiness, exemplified by Linda who states happiness is 'having gratitude for life'. Amorn similarly states happiness is being 'satisfied' with what she has, and not wanting 'what others have'. A lack of appreciation may be more likely in a SCI culture where an individual self is set against others (Geertz, 1979) in obtaining the characteristics stipulated by autocratic rule in order to feel valued (Sampson, 1977). EI cultures adopt a FSB and cannot compare individuals in the same way, allowing one to appreciate what one has, rather than what one does not have compared to others.

The ability to grow through challenges emerged as a sub-theme. Rachael suggests that through Buddhism everything 'becomes an opportunity for growth' and negative situations 'become challenges as opposed to making you unhappy'. Buddhist philosophy suggests suffering is an inherent part of life because of impermanence, signalling HFC characteristics of EI (Sampson, 1988). It could be argued HFC makes challenges easier to accept as one fits in more naturally with environmental reality rather than trying to control it (Weisz, Rothbaum & Blackburn, 1984).

Linda asserts Buddhism gives her 'joy because it's a focus everyday', and Nigel states 'unhappiness is a lack of purpose', and Buddhism gives him purpose in 'society and the wider world'. This may be linked to Sampson (1988) who suggests the FSB leads individuals to work towards group achievement. Deutsch (1973) demonstrates that groups working towards a common goal can be highly effective and satisfying.

Relative and Absolute Happiness/Reality

Both communities refer to two kinds of happiness or reality, what Rachael calls 'relative and absolute' happiness. She associates relative happiness with 'consumer things' and absolute happiness, developed through Buddhism, with a 'solid sense of self. All informants suggest relative happiness is associated with external things which are unsustainable, whereas ultimate happiness is a constant source found inside the individual.

Similarly Pisit spoke about conventional and ultimate reality, and explained that conventional reality uses 'language' to construct false understandings of the world therefore also locating conventional reality externally in language discourses. In

giving an example of ultimate reality he states 'if we analyse' a person, they may be broken down into 'many parts', eventually becoming a 'nucleus' or 'atom', concluding that a person is 'not human' anymore once analysed. Pisit believes that human beings exist because of 'many factors joined together'. Pisit directly undermines the most fundamental basis of the Western self, the body (Spence, 1985), by suggesting the body and the individual self do not exist as an absolute, but as a composite of related factors which reduce to nothing, indicating FSB. Pisit suggests that over-attachment to conventional reality causes unhappiness because it is located externally and the environment is constantly changing, mirroring the concept of relative happiness which focuses on superficial pleasures. The constant source of absolute happiness can only be found when one understands the ultimate reality that one must nurture happiness within the mind. This is indicative of HFC and therefore EI, as it is implied that to try to rule or possess things in the environment is impossible because of their uncontrollable transient nature (Sampson, 1988).

Most interviewees associated Western ideals of happiness with relative happiness, which Linda describes as 'materialistic'. Interestingly, Amorn suggests that Thai culture is 'becoming the Western culture', feeling she encounters 'more materialism', and explains that young people no longer go to the temple but find the time to 'go to the pub', finding happiness hedonistically. It could be suggested materialism is a feature of SCI as each person aspires to accumulate their own possessions to exist independently, which simultaneously contributes to a hierarchy of status that excludes others, both traits of SCI (Sampson, 1988). The western group frequently associate the media with relative happiness in telling people what buy in order to be happy, demonstrative of the autocratic rule, identified by Sampson (1977), as feature of SCI.

Discussion

The current research aimed to explore conceptions of happiness within Buddhist communities in both Eastern and Western contexts. An internal framework of SCI and EI developed by Sampson (1988) was used to meaningfully interpret the data, as indigenous psychologies create different conceptions of the self and therefore happiness. The research is therefore located in a position of critical social psychology, commenting on happiness and the self as developed by Sampson.

An objective of the research was to examine the impact of Buddhism on conceptions of happiness. The analysis revealed that both Eastern and Western communities used a culture of EI in order to conceptualise the self which allowed them to obtain happiness through being connected to the environment, connected to other people, developing positive personal qualities, and forming an understanding of relative and absolute happiness. Both communities associated characteristics of Western SCI culture, such as materialism, narcissism and isolationism, directly with unhappiness, and the Western community demonstrated that adopting a culture of EI through Buddhism increased their experiences of, and potential for, happiness.

This supports Lu, Gilmour & Kao (2001) who suggest the dominant Western values of 'individualistic striving and advancement' (p. 489) dictate different ideas of happiness to Eastern cultures, as well as Lu & Gilmour's (2004) findings of Eastern socially-oriented SWB and Western individually-oriented SWB. It also supports Lu &

Shih's (1997) work which suggests that Western sources of happiness are linked to 'intrapersonal and internal evaluation' constituting the SSB and HPC requirements of SCI, and Eastern sources are linked to 'interpersonal and external evaluation', which is tantamount to the FSB and HFC of EI.

Though conceptions of happiness in each Buddhist community centre on a self-conception that is inherent within a culture of EI, some contentious points are raised. In discussing them we simultaneously fulfil the objectives of exploring the differences between Eastern and Western conceptions of happiness, and how living in an oriental and occidental culture may influence the relationship between Buddhism and happiness.

Language was used differently to describe the self in relation to happiness between the East and West. The Western group indicated FSB through associating happiness with being connected to the whole and to others, using esoteric language such as being connected to their Buddhahood and the mystic law. The transcendental language used by the Mancunian group to create the organic sense of Buddhist self and happiness which is at odds with the Western urban reality could be interpreted as an orientalisering of the practice (Said, 1978), especially since no such language was used by the Thai community. However it is important to remember that this is an identity which the community has established, as they align themselves with the oriental 'other' and a culture of EI. Perhaps this language is used as a device to clearly demark themselves as a community from SCI culture and confirm their relocation within EI, which would be unnecessary in the EI culture of Thailand.

The issue of death highlights the Western group's roots in a British SCI culture as they express their fear surrounding it. Although they believe Buddhism had helped to lessen the anxiety, it could be argued that this signals some elements of the self are still rather entrenched in SCI, as death is the ultimate infringement on personal control, whereas the Eastern group demonstrated more acceptance of death, typical of EI.

The sub-theme of the universality of Buddhism to accommodate happiness for all was referenced heavily by the Western group, especially in the defence of its appropriateness for Western use. This could be interpreted as a blurring of the boundaries whereby EI is amalgamated into the standing Western culture of SCI, possibly weakening the values and effectiveness of EI. However Sampson (1988) insists SCI and EI exist incommensurably and interviewees do indicate a predominate identification with EI in their conceptions of self and happiness. The Thai community also reference the adaptability of the practice, therefore the idea of accessibility within the practice could be interpreted as equitable to the EI notion of inclusiveness, extraditing SCI altogether. Goldberg (2006) suggests Western Buddhism has undergone major alteration, which began through a process of orientalism, confirmed by Snodgrass's (2003) suggestion that Buddhism is the oriental 'other' of occidental Christianity. Therefore is the universality of Buddhism, as referred to here, the justification of a gross orientalisering of the practice for Western benefit, or a genuine pillar of the philosophy that allows its global widespread success, which in itself deconstructs orientalist notions?

This research has further highlighted the need for happiness research to be focused on exposing culture-specific conceptions of happiness (Lu & Gilmour, 2004; Suh &

Oishi, 2004), as happiness here was found to be inextricably linked to self-conceptions, which are determined through indigenous psychologies and forms of individualism (Heelas & Lock, 1981; Sampson, 1977; Sampson, 1988; Sampson, 1989).

This research demonstrates that Buddhist practice in both Eastern and Western communities creates conceptions of self and happiness which are located within EI. It exposes, with the example of the Western Buddhist community, that an understanding of the self and happiness which is characteristic of EI can be adopted within a larger national culture of SCI, allowing community members to become happier than they were before practicing. This could have important implications within the field of happiness studies, positive psychology, community psychology and perhaps critical social psychology, as if the findings here can be replicated, EI may be developed in communities within SCI cultures to allow people to further their happiness. If the inclusive self-conception inherent in EI culture can truly exist in the West, this could have hugely significant applications politically and socially within the functioning of communities and wider society.

However the current research also suggests that some aspects of the self within the Western Buddhist group still had roots in SCI culture, such as issues around death and identity. Sampson (1988) insists that EI and SCI are 'incommensurate systems of belief' (p.21) which cannot be balanced or exist coalesced, a position which the researcher does not deny. However the current research brings to light that although the Western Buddhists place themselves firmly within a culture of EI, aspects of SCI colour their understanding. The cultural values of SCI which constantly surround them may still shape their conceptions of self and happiness even though they actively denounce it. Three of the Western Buddhists identified personal conflict in trying to negotiate between their EI culture and the non-Buddhist SCI culture they live in. This may go some way in explaining Carey's (2006) findings that many Western Buddhists suffer psychological difficulties in applying Buddhism to Western society.

The hybridisation of Eastern and Western culture is also present in the ethnographic research carried out in Thailand, in the hedonistic attitude of the Thai youth, as discussed by Amorn and the researcher within the field diary, adding an interesting dimension to the research. This could be a fruitful direction for further research, in exploring how Thai Buddhist youths specifically conceptualise the self and happiness, and the adaptability of Thai Buddhism to the changing culture.

The qualitative methodology undertaken in this research, recognised as key area of development within happiness studies (Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009; Suh & Oishi, 2004), has revealed other possible new areas for future research in the field. The four major themes identified by this study should be explored to gain further understanding of their effects on happiness, and specifically within both cultures of SCI and EI. In particular they should be studied outside of Buddhism in order to understand their applicability to different areas of society.

Sampson (1977) indicates that SCI cultures that harbour excessive individualism leads people to feel isolated and estranged, and that as a belief system it 'separates us from the very nutrient soil out of which we were cast' (p.780) as interdependence is ingrained through attachments in childhood. Sampson (Ibid) further asserts

societal dysfunction results directly from SCI as it breeds an inability to cope with necessary connections with others.

Sampson (1988; 1989) calls for bold research which examines the self in relation to EI structures and its consequences for existing together in society. Sampson ascertains the task is to move towards the support of EI as an alternative to SCI, and promote structures within society which facilitate this. The current research hopes to have successfully contributed in supporting Sampson by demonstrating the way in which Buddhist communities in Eastern and Western contexts use the notion of the self as understood in EI as a way of manifesting happiness, not just individually but collectively, whilst simultaneously associating SCI with unhappiness.

There is a recommendation that future research concerning conceptions of the self and happiness should be carried out by Eastern Buddhists themselves, as most research is created as a result of Western psychology that by nature can only conceptualise from a background of individualism, unable to perceive possibilities outside of this (Azuma, 1984).

Reflexivity

The issue of representation within psychology is contentious as it has been recognised that not only the subject of study must be understood in socio-political cultural terms, but also those carrying out the research, who exist not as passive actors but also in their own social reality (Morawski, 2000). Notions of the relational ontology of self and other (Goodley, 2010; Segel, 1994) mean that binary power relations can form within psychological research situations, making representation of any disadvantaged group tenuous (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996; Spivak, 1988). With reference to the issues of orientalism as outlined by Said (1978), it has been imperative that the current paper reflects an acute awareness of the position of the researcher as part of a privileged white Western group in representing the Thai community, as subordination of this group could have been possible through exoticising the culture (Aziz, 1992).

Informed by its critical psychological perspective, with an awareness of the implications of 'giving voice', the current research uses aspects of the strategy of 'celebrating otherness', whereby Thai informants were able to speak positively about their religion and culture, though caution was taken not to romanticise this (Borland, 1991). The current research draws on the many similarities between Eastern and Western Buddhist culture, emphasising the positive effect of EI on conceptions of happiness, therefore undermining any oppressive and authoritative implications research of this nature may have had. The ideal solution to avoid misrepresentation in cultural research of this nature is to engage in emancipatory research, in which the conclusions drawn could be developed and approved by the communities studied (Fine, 1994; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996).

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