Subjective Wellbeing in Large Cities: A Comparative Analysis of London and Mexico City

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Dedicated to the memory of my grandparents
“Nunca dejes de aprender”

Declaration

I, Martha Eugenia Lomeli Rodriguez confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Martha Eugenia Lomeli Rodriguez

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"In my life… I've loved them all…"

Abstract

Subjective wellbeing (SWB) encompasses experiencing positive emotions, the absence of negative emotions and judgments of life satisfaction. One might expect that individuals living in societal conditions that better fulfil predictors of SWB are happier than those living in less favourable conditions. However, levels of SWB in some Latin American countries are similar or even higher than those in some more developed countries in Western Europe, despite the well-documented social challenges faced within the region. This discrepancy highlights an important issue in SWB research: the discounting of diverse cultural factors in the construction of happiness. Bringing together social representations theory and cultural models, this thesis examines SWB in common sense thinking –and its underpinning cultural forces– of people living in London and Mexico City. Two cross-cultural studies were conducted using the Grid Elaboration Method (GEM), a novel free association and interview technique. In the first study, experiences of the city of 24 London and 24 Mexico City dwellers were investigated. Thematic analysis of the data suggested that representations of the self and the Other guided participants' emotional and cognitive experiences associated with living in the city. Moreover, it identified the special relevance that feelings of detachment and relegation from the environment had in London dwellers' unhappiness and the influence that family had for Mexico City dwellers' SWB. Building on these results, the second study examines in more depth the representation of family in 24 London dwellers and 24 Mexico City dwellers. Following the same methodology it was found that cultural values underpinned conceptualisations of relatedness and autonomy, which shaped participants' practices and affective experiences associated with family. This work makes a unique contribution in contextualising the plethora of quantitative SWB data and invites the consideration of socio-cultural factors in the design and implementation of SWB-related interventions and policies.

Impact Statement

The research presented in this thesis has impacts on both the study and understanding of SWB. First of all, it highlights that SWB cannot be fully explained by objective indicators such as GDP, as such variables are only a piece in the happiness puzzle. Accordingly, this investigation shows the value of the in-depth examination of people's common sense for the identification of forces that influence wellbeing. Furthermore, it shifts from the quantitative study of factors that correlate with SWB, as this approach could overlook nuances that are too complex to capture by instrument-based research. Hence, the qualitative approach taken by the studies in this research casted light on the complex multifaceted nature of the experience of happiness. Moreover, by comparing two different cultures, our findings uncover social and cultural forces that shape the way people see the world. Thus, this thesis emphasises the need to consider SWB factors in context rather than in isolation and the adequacy of qualitative methods for this purpose.

Correspondingly, this research uncovered individual, environmental, social and cultural influences that guided London and Mexico City dwellers' SWB associated with living in the city and family. The focus on the mundane and taken-for-granted allowed us to discover that life in London was characterised by feelings of detachment and relegation, prompted by the built and social environment. Conversely, the security and happiness found in the family buffered the negative effects associated with living in Mexico City. Governments, policy makers and international organisations are increasingly recognising SWB as an insightful indicator of people's societal circumstances and quality of life. Hence, beyond the quantification of levels of happiness, our findings contribute nuanced knowledge of how people make sense of their circumstances. Arguably, this is a crucial consideration for the development of successful policies and strategies aiming to increase societal wellbeing. Furthermore, our investigation of meanings of family casted light on the importance of autonomy and independence for individuals' wellbeing in London and that of social connection for those in Mexico City. The value for each of these psychological needs guided people's self-concept and the way they relate to others. Such findings are of paramount relevance for psychological theory and practice, as they inform on cultural differences in psychological processes that are essential to take into account for wellbeing related psychological models and interventions.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For thousands of years, humans have pursued happiness. History is full of intellectuals and philosophers speculating about its meaning and ways to achieve it, based on intuition, experience and observation – all influenced by the surrounding sociocultural context (Kesebir & Diener, 2008). Since the rise of the scientific method, happiness has been widely conceptualised and operationalised as Subjective Wellbeing (SWB)[1]. SWB encompasses cognitive and affective dimensions; the former concerns individual's judgments about life satisfaction, whereas the latter refers to the regular experience of positive feelings and emotions and a less frequent experience of negative affective states (Diener et al., 2018; Oishi, 2012).

Since the first empirical studies in SWB in the first half of the 20th century (see Flügel, 1925), research in the field has seen constant growth. To date, there are thousands of academic papers and different journals dedicated to the subject (Diener, 2009) (for comprehensive reviews, the reader is referred to Diener, 1984; Diener, et al., 1999; Diener et al., 2018; Dolan et al., 2008; Veenhoveen, 1991). Moreover, governments, policy makers and prestigious international organisations are increasingly recognising SWB as an insightful indicator of people's societal circumstances and quality of life (Diener, 2006; Tov & Diener, 2009). Publications like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *How is life in your region?* (OECD, 2018), as well as the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network's annual *World Happiness Report*[2] provide levels of SWB in cities, regions and countries around the globe.[3]

These measurements show that people from Nordic countries tend to report the highest levels of SWB as opposed to those in some African and Middle Eastern countries, who tend to report the lowest (Helliwell et al., 2018; 2019; 2020) and that people living in Helsinki, Aarhus

[1]In this thesis, SWB and happiness will be used as interchangeable concepts, a widespread practice when communicating SWB research (e.g. Helliwell et al., 2018; 2019; 2020; Diener et al., 2018). When researching SWB quantitatively, using the term happiness has to be done with caution, as meanings could differ according to contexts and populations (Diener et al., 2018). In this project, lay-understandings of SWB and happiness are explored, which allowed the identification of the overlap between the two terms as well as more nuanced cultural meanings of happiness.

[2] For the archive of all the Reports published since 2012 visit https://worldhappiness.report/archive/

[3] The World Happiness Report presents levels of SWB across countries, however, the 2020 report includes a chapter with city level rankings (De Neve and Krekel, 2020). OECD's Regional Well-being classifies regions as the first administrative tier of sub-national government (for example, States in Mexico and counties in the UK).

and Wellington are the most satisfied with their lives, contrary to those who live in Gaza, Sanaa and Kabul (De Neve & Krekel, 2020). Additionally, these reports include key predictors of SWB, such as GDP and healthy life expectancy at birth, which facilitate understanding of such figures. In De Neve and Krekel's (2020) city-level analysis, cities at the bottom of the rankings are those located in some of the least developed countries in the world and have recently experienced wars, political instability and/or critical natural catastrophes. Thus, one might surmise that differences in levels of SWB could be explained by the variance in societal and economic conditions.

However, some figures cannot be understood using this logic. Throughout the years, some Latin American countries have consistently reported similar or even higher levels of SWB than some Western European countries, despite contrasting differences in predictors of SWB (Helliwell, et al., 2018; 2019; 2020) with similar findings at the regional and city level (OECD, 2018; De Neve & Krekel, 2020). Hence, happiness in these countries is founded on factors that are not included in the key international analyses of SWB and are yet to be observed and identified (e.g., Dugain & Olaberría, 2015). It has been argued that attitudes and practices specific to Latin America are SWB conducive (Rojas, 2018). Therefore, as comprehensive and statistically robust as these reports are, they leave unaddressed an aspect that deeply influences people's SWB: culture. In response to this gap in the SWB literature, the aim of this thesis is to contextualise measurements of SWB by investigating the social and cultural forces that guide people's life satisfaction and affective experiences.

1.1 Setting the Scene: Culture, Society and SWB

An important advancement in the field of SWB is the recognition that culture has been traditionally overlooked (Diener et al., 2018). The concept of SWB has been developed from a Western perspective, which has shaped variables and factors measured for its study (Selin & Davey, 2012). Thus, as with many psychological phenomena, findings have been assumed to be universal and generalisable even though most studies use data from the US or other western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic countries (Henrich et al., 2010). (For examples, please refer to Diener, 1984; Wilson, 1967). Arguably, this belief has been costly for progressing knowledge in SWB, as culture plays a crucial role in individuals' emotions, values and conceptions of the self, others and the world (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Accordingly, research suggests that culture influences a variety of aspects related to SWB, such as meanings, ideal affective states, expression of emotions and the extent to which individuals can satisfy

wellbeing-related needs (Thin, 2018). Moreover, cultures differ not only in mean levels of happiness but also in predictors of SWB (Diener, et al., 2018). This is not to say that some aspects are not universal. For example, the fulfilment of basic and psychosocial needs is correlated to SWB across countries. However, the strength of the correlation and the ways in which these needs are satisfied vary between cultures and societies (Tay & Diener, 2011; Oishi et al., 2016).

The psychological literature offers a wide variety of definitions of culture. However, most of them entail communality in groups of people (Berry et al., 2011). In this thesis, culture is understood as: "the rich complex of meanings, beliefs, practices, symbols, norms and values prevalent among people in a society" (Schwartz, 2006, p. 138). In cross-cultural psychology cultures often refer to countries (Berry et al., 2011). Thus, a substantial body of research consists of correlational studies analysing how specific factors are associated with SWB using samples from different countries. Although this line of inquiry helps map out inconsistencies in what predicts SWB around the globe, understanding of such differences tends to be beyond its scope. Arguably, rather than cross-cultural studies, this research could be referred to as cross-country research. Findings from this research are valuable, as they flag the existence of further factors in need of examination.

Research delving into cultural influences on SWB is frequently based on and informed by cultural models. These models classify cultures according to their values, beliefs, norms and societal organisation (for a review of cultural models see Nardon & Steers, 2009). Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1980, Hofstede et al., 2010) and Triandis' (2000) cultural syndromes are widespread paradigms used for the study of cross-cultural differences. The individualism-collectivism dimension has been particularly influential in the field. Evidence shows that the cultural tendency to conceptualise the self as independent of, or interdependent with others permeates a variety of psychological phenomena, such as self-concept, wellbeing, attribution style and relationality (for a review see Oyserman, et al., 2002). Other culturally influenced attributes such as the value for cooperation and social equality have been associated with higher levels of SWB, whereas valuing achievement and self-interests have been associated with lower levels of SWB (Steel et al., 2018).

Cross-cultural research on SWB using cultural models has been fruitful, however, there are some significant limitations. Cultural trends for each country have been identified by their

scores regarding each dimension. Hofstede's cultural model was drawn from data from the late 60's and early 70's (1980). He argues that culture changes slowly and tends to be stable for long periods, so scores stay relevant across time (Hofstede et al., 2010). Nonetheless, as will be outlined in the literature review, research is proving otherwise. Postmodernism and the current digital revolution have brought rapid and unforeseeable changes to societal structures and dynamics, which are characterised by porosity, fragmentation and diversification (Preda, 2001). As culture and society are mutually constitutive (Raudsepp, 2005), this has made cultures increasingly heterogeneous and unbounded (Duveen, 2007). Arguably, contemporary cultural research needs to be sensitive to such fluidity and plurality. However, this complexity is hard to capture with the current widespread methodological approaches.

Quantitative methods have been considered the gold standard for research on SWB (Diener et al., 1999). Accordingly, the study of culture and SWB has heavily relied on the measurement of cultural values to establish a statistical relationship with measurements of SWB. Nonetheless, this approach could overlook above mentioned nuances and finer aspects of each culture that can be crucial for understanding SWB. For example, even though Latin American and East Asian cultures are high in collectivism (Hofstede et al., 2010), the associated beliefs and practices are rather different (e.g. Ruby et al., 2012) and so too are levels of SWB in these countries. Although efforts have been made to refine cultural dimensions and their instruments (Triandis, 1995) this is not a straight-forward endeavour, as cross-cultural instrument-based research needs to ensure that whatever is being measured is equivalent in meaning between the cultures of interest in order to draw valid conclusions (Matsumoto, 2009).

Arguably, the prevalence of quantitative approaches is a reflection of the marked preference for measurement, prediction and generalisability that has characterised research in SWB. Nonetheless, the rigour required in positivist approaches favours the study of phenomena isolated from their surrounding context (Thin, 2018). Thus, a main contribution of qualitative research in the study of SWB has been to highlight constructivist approaches, where wellbeing is understood as the product of the interaction of cultural, societal and individual forces. Qualitative methods can identify these influences by the in-depth investigation of meanings, experiences and expressions, which are assumed to be diverse, dynamic and distinctive of a period of time, rather than fixed, homogenous and a-temporal. Nonetheless, qualitative studies using theoretical frameworks that allow for the study of SWB considering this multifactorial complexity remain scarce.

1.2 Research Context and Rationale

This thesis was inspired by the need for further knowledge that could explain cross-cultural similarities in levels of SWB, in spite of disparities in societal and economic predictors of SWB. More specifically, it addresses city-level scores that reflect the same seemingly paradoxical trend. The focus on city-level data was influenced by the funding body for the first study, the Liveable Cities project, a multidisciplinary project that aimed to facilitate the development of cities that enhance societal wellbeing and low carbon living. Currently, more than half of the world's population live in cities, with a projection that this share will increase to 60% by 2030 (United Nations, 2020) which highlights the importance of expanding knowledge on urban environments and its relations with SWB. Even though cities share features that grant them the 'city' status (De Neve and Krekel, 2020) each has its own environmental, societal and cultural configurations, both between and within countries. Thus, city dwellers' SWB is influenced by this unique set of characteristics.

London and Mexico City were chosen as the cities for investigation for three reasons. Firstly, Mexico City levels of SWB have been higher (OECD, 2018) or almost equal to those of London (De Neve & Krekel, 2020) even though London scores considerably better in most predictors of SWB compared to Mexico City. Secondly, London and Mexico City share some characteristics, both are large, influential capital cities with roughly the same population size. Without accounting for the sprawling metropolitan area, Mexico City is home to 9 million dwellers (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI), 2020a) whilst London has a population of around 8.7 million people (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2020). Lastly, the researcher was born and raised in Mexico City but has been living in London for the last six years. Thus, there is familiarity and interest in both cities, which is valuable when conducting qualitative research (Yardley, 2008).

In order to dissect the variety of forces weighing on London and Mexico City dwellers' SWB judgments and experiences, cultural models need to be complemented with a theoretical framework that helps structure the examination of the complex dynamics between cultural, interpersonal and intrapersonal psychological processes. Accordingly, Social Representations Theory (SRT) (Moscovici, 1961/1976, 1984) was deemed fit for this purpose. With a constructivist epistemology, the main concern of SRT is the production and reproduction of

common sense (Gervais, 2002). Hence, from this theoretical perspective, SWB is not understood as a completely individual and private psychological process but one that is co-constructed and public (Thin, 2018). In *Study 1*: *Experiences in the City*, systems of values, ideas and practices associated with living in London and Mexico City are explored, in order to identify and compare aspects connected to positive feelings, negative feelings and judgments of life satisfaction. This study aims to answer:

1. What are the aspects and experiences in London associated with SWB?

2. What are the aspects and experiences in Mexico City associated with SWB?

3. What are the differences and similarities in SWB-related experiences in Mexico City and London dwellers?

In line with emerging literature, results from the first study cast light on the importance that family has for Mexico City dwellers' wellbeing, a finding that was not salient in London dwellers. Thus, *Study 2: Social Representations of Family* presents an in-depth analysis of social representations of family, with the purpose of identifying individual, social and cultural forces that can explain the influence that family has on dwellers' SWB. The research questions for this study are:

1. What are the social representations of family in London dwellers and how do these relate to individuals' SWB?

2. What are the social representations of family in Mexico City dwellers and how do these relate to individuals' SWB?

3. What are the factors that contribute to the cross-cultural differences in the relevance that family has for individuals' SWB?

In sum, this research provides a cross-cultural examination of city dwellers' experiences in the city and their representations of family. The investigation of people's lay thinking regarding the spheres in which they live their everyday lives allow for the identification of factors that are associated with SWB from their own perspective.

1.3 The Scope of the Thesis: Definitions and Caveats

This thesis presents an examination of individuals' own interpretations and experiences of SWB in their specific context, at a particular time point. As a psychological concept, SWB captures both people's positive and negative feelings and judgments about their lives (Diener et al., 2018). In the quantitative literature, a person is high in SWB when they report high positive affect, low negative affect and high life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999). However, in line with the objectives of qualitative inquiry, this research does not aim for the quantification of any of these dimensions. Instead, it aims to explore people's sense-making of what makes them (un)happy and why (Kavedžija & Walker, 2017).

Moreover, as Selin and Davey (2012) argued, Western interpretations in regards to meanings and affective experiences of happiness cannot be used as a baseline for the rest of the world. Research shows that even though some emotions are universal (Ortony, 2021), there is cultural variation in valence, desirability and expression of affective experiences (Diener, et al., 2003; Markus and Kitayama, 1991) as well as in conceptions of life satisfaction (Oishi, 2006). This could represent an issue for the validity of findings in quantitative research, however, in this thesis, affective experiences are mostly approached inductively based on individuals' personal narratives.

In the literature, there has been ongoing debate on distinctions between SWB and closely related concepts, such as eudaimonic wellbeing (which refers to sense of purpose) (Keyes, et al., 2002), hedonic wellbeing (which focuses on pain and pleasure in human experience) (Ryan & Deci, 2001) and quality of life (a person's life circumstances which are desirable or undesirable) (Diener et al., 2018). Although differentiation of each of these constructs is crucial for the validity and reliability of their measurement and quantitative evaluation, in qualitative approaches to the study of wellbeing it is expected that these elements will be intertwined (Thin, 2018). Thus, the stance and method adopted by this thesis allows for the simultaneous exploration of these constructs and their interconnections within people's representations.

Another concern in quantitative research in SWB is the variance in the results obtained by different levels of analysis. For example, results from a meta-analysis of cultural dimensions associated with SWB showed that at the national level, individualism is positively correlated to SWB, nonetheless, at the individual level, collectivistic tendencies are associated with higher levels of SWB (Steel et al., 2018). This thesis focuses on individual experiences associated

with SWB, however the prevalence of patterns found within and between the samples are also identified as potential cultural attributes.

An important caveat of this research is that findings are specific to London and Mexico City. Although there are elements of city life that have been associated with SWB across societies and cultures (Leyden et al., 2011), further empirical research will be needed to determine if findings from this research resonate in other sociocultural environments. Additionally, results are sensitive to the period of time when data was collected. For example, interviews for the first study were carried out just prior to the UK referendum to vote to leave or remain in the European Union, thus pressing issues around immigration and references to Brexit were salient in the narratives of London dwellers. Similarly, life in Mexico City had been affected by the then recently implemented governmental programme *'Hoy no circula'*, which prevented dwellers from driving their cars twice a week. Thus, caution must be taken when making assumptions about the consistency of the findings of this research across time.

Lastly, it should be noted that this research was predominantly conducted before the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, which, beyond a serious public health matter, signified a disruptive social event that changed people's everyday lives (Helliwell et al., 2021; Teti et al., 2020). Literature on SWB using data collected during the pandemic was not used to inform results of this research given that such findings are embedded in extraordinary circumstances. The latest World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al., 2021) shows that Mexico fell from the 23rd to the 46th place in levels of SWB during the pandemic. The difference in ranking for the UK is more subtle, going from the 13th to the 18th place. Nonetheless, findings of this thesis could be used as an inscription of London and Mexico City dwellers' lives and family dynamics before the pandemic.

1.4 Thesis Outline

Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive literature review of factors that have been associated with SWB. It starts with those that are inherent to each individual, such as genetics and personality, and then moves to those which are objective and external, such as money and social relationships. This is followed by literature on characteristics of British and Mexican culture and their relationship to SWB. Following this, factors within the urban environment that are associated with SWB are addressed, both in the context of London and Mexico City. The critical examination of this variety of factors highlights that SWB is the product of the

interaction of multiple forces; therefore, the approach of this study needs to be sensitive to this multifaceted complexity.

The second part of this chapter presents the theoretical framework that will guide the research. It introduces Social Representations Theory (SRT) and postulates that by applying it to the examination of features in lay thinking concerning *living in the city* and *family*, individual, societal, cultural and environmental factors that shape SWB can be identified. Furthermore, complementing cultural models, the concept of themata within SRT is introduced as a pathway to uncover the underlying cultural structures that guide individuals' SWB.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology implemented to answer the research questions of this thesis. It starts by providing the research rationale for the two interview-based, cross-cultural studies that constitute this thesis. It then introduces the studies on experiences in the city and meanings of family that were conducted. It includes an outline of the data collection process, the breakdown of participants' demographics and the presentation of the research method.

Chapter 4 and **Chapter 6** present the results of the two cross-cultural studies. **Chapter 4** presents the content analysis of the free-associations elicited by the Grid Elaboration Method and the thematic analysis of *Study 1: Experiences in the City.* It starts with findings from London and then moves to those from Mexico City. It will be noted that some aspects related to living in the city are shared between the two samples, however, underlying meanings and associations with SWB diverged.

Chapter 6 presents the results of the follow-up study that delves into representations of family. Based on the salience that family has for Mexico City dwellers found in the first study, *Study 2: Social Representations of Family* aims to deepen understanding of such cultural relevance by comparing lay understanding of the family in both cultures. Thematic analysis casted light on social and individual forces influencing the association between family and SWB in both cultures.

Chapter 5 and **7** present the discussions for each of the empirical studies. **Chapter 5** delves into aspects of living in the city that are un/favourable for city dwellers, according to the SWB literature. The chapter starts with those found in London and then moves to those from Mexico City. The discussions are followed by an analysis integrating the results from both cities,

offering a comparison of the sociocultural forces underpinning findings from each sample, based on cultural models, SRT and the theory of themata.

Similarly, **Chapter 7** integrates historical, cultural and societal influences that guide representations of family and their link with SWB for each culture, starting with the UK and then moving on to Mexico. This is followed by a cross-cultural analysis that compares findings from each sample and proposes possible explanations for the cross-cultural difference in the relevance that family has for individuals' SWB, according to social and cultural literature.

Chapter 8 consolidates the findings from the two cross-cultural studies. It answers the research questions stated at the beginning of the thesis and elaborates on how Social Representations Theory, the theory of themata and cultural models provide a powerful framework to study SWB of city dwellers from a sociocultural approach. It then states the novel theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions of this research for the SWB literature. Moreover, it considers the implications of the findings and outlines limitations of the studies as well as questions for further research. This thesis concludes by reflecting on how this work can inform wellbeing interventions and policy in large cities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

As a topic of interest for many disciplines, research in SWB has been in constant expansion. From refinement of the concept to the development of strategies and interventions, there are multiple aspects to the study of SWB. A central theme of this research, however, has been the identification of causes, predictors and correlates. Given its sociological roots, factors like demographics and GDP (Diener, 2009) have received significantly more attention than others such as culture, a factor that has been traditionally overlooked in SWB (Diener et al., 2018). However, from an interactional perspective (Ahuvia, et al., 2015; Oishi, 2014) SWB is not only an internal and private process (Thin, 2018) but the product of dynamics between individual, environmental, societal and cultural factors. Hence, our journey to the investigation of SWB in London and Mexico City dwellers begins with a review of these factors. Individual and external factors that have been deemed universally correlated to SWB are first presented. It is noted, however, that the relationship between these factors and SWB is sensitive to sociocultural influences. Hence, the next sections are dedicated to the investigation of cultural and societal characteristics that could promote or hinder SWB in the two cultures of interest in this thesis: the Mexican and the British culture. Lastly, Social Representations Theory is introduced as a theoretical framework that allows for the study of SWB as an interaction of different forces.

2.1 Individual Differences and SWB

2.1.1 Genetics and Heritability

In line with traditional nature vs. nurture research, twin studies have helped distinguish genetic influences on SWB from those that are external and environmental. In their influential twin study, Lykken and Tellegen (1996) found that demographic and situational factors only accounted for a small percent of the variance in SWB and that twins reported similar levels of happiness, even when they grew up in separate households. Moreover, their levels of SWB remained fairly consistent throughout the years. It was then concluded that SWB was mostly influenced by individuals' genetic make-up and consequently, tended to be stable and not fundamentally affected by external circumstances. Although such findings are correlational in nature, research in molecular genetics supports a causal relationship between genes and SWB. Okbay et al. (2016) reported genetic variants that influence SWB, neuroticism and depressive

symptoms. Similarly, Baselmans (2019) found that some people have genetic dispositions to feel happy whereas others to experience loneliness.

A systematic review of 30 twin-family studies showed that heritability accounts for up to 64% of variance in SWB, whereas a meta-analysis of 10 studies estimated a variance of 32 – 36%, depending on which SWB dimension was measured and how it was measured (Bartels, 2015; Nes & Røysamb, 2016). Thus, a considerable volume of studies suggests that SWB is moderately hereditable, to the extent that some researchers compare the dispositions to be happy to those related to mental health issues such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder (Nes & Røysamb, 2016). However, contrary to conclusions from earlier research (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996) it is important not to underestimate the role that external factors play on SWB. Recent findings from a sample of over 1000 twins suggest that the environment and personal relationships play a stronger role in overall judgments of life satisfaction compared to genetic predispositions (Røysamb et al., 2018). Moreover, findings from a meta-analysis including more than 30,000 twins across 7 countries suggest that the extent to which hereditability can explain SWB varies across age groups, SWB dimensions and cultures (Nes & Røysamb, 2017). Therefore, a causal link between genes and SWB is not straight forward, as evidence suggests that environmental influences interact with genetic dispositions. There are open questions about possible external mediators and moderators that could help understand the predictive power genes have on SWB. Moreover, a common limitation in genetic and hereditability studies is that they are conducted in Western industrialised countries. Consequently, the degree of generalisability of findings in such studies is potentially questionable, as hereditability could be sensitive to cultural factors (Nes & Røysamb, 2017).

2.1.2 Personality

Internal factors related to SWB are also studied in terms of personality. Personality refers to an individual's relatively stable cognitive, affective and behavioural patterns, which are known as personality traits (Røysamb, et al., 2018). The crucial role that personality plays on SWB is one of the most established and replicated findings across research in the field, as evidence suggests that personality influences people's judgments and emotions (Lucas & Diener, 2009). Research consistently shows that personality factors account for 30 to 46% of the variance in SWB. Across meta-analytical studies, personality dimensions such as extroversion and conscientiousness show a strong positive correlation with SWB, whereas

neuroticism shows a negative correlation (Anglim et al., 2020; DeNeve, 1998; Steel et al., 2008).

Most research investigating the relationship between personality and SWB focuses on the Big Five personality model (Anglim et al., 2020). This model is a culmination of decades of personality trait research, which clusters them in five personality domains: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness (Anglim & Grant, 2016; McCrae & Costa, 1991). DeNeve and Cooper (1998) provided strong empirical evidence for the crucial role personality has on SWB. Researchers carried a meta-analysis of 148 studies looking into the relation between 137 personality traits and SWB. Results showed that traits such as trust, emotional stability and locus of control correlated positively to SWB, while others such as hardiness and tension correlated negatively with SWB. When traits were clustered in accordance to the Big Five personality model, higher levels of neuroticism predicted more experience of negative affect and lower levels of life satisfaction. In contrast, extraversion and agreeableness predicted positive affect. Moreover, results showed that personality correlated more strongly with SWB than demographic variables such as age, sex and marital status. Findings from more recent and refined meta-analytical techniques support the results. Consistent with the studies carried out by DeNeve and Cooper (1998), Steel, et al. (2008) meta-analysis found that neuroticism and extraversion were strong predictors of negative and positive affect, respectively. Based on their results, the authors concluded that personality accounted for a total of 39% of variance in SWB.

These findings were also replicated in the most comprehensive meta-analysis on the topic to date. In addition to the Big Five dimensions, Anglim et al. (2020) included data from another reputable personality model, HEXACO (Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience). Data obtained from a total of 334,567 participants corroborated that within the Big Five model, neuroticism and extraversion were strongly correlated to SWB (negatively and positively correspondingly), whereas in the HEXACO model, extraversion was the strongest predictor of SWB. Conscientiousness emerged as an important trait in both models, which had been overlooked in previous literature. Moreover, the meta-analytical methodology employed allowed for a more detailed level of analyses. Facet-level analysis, the analysis of the components of personality dimensions, highlighted the strong predictive capacity particular facets have on SWB, such as depression, (component of neuroticism in the Big Five) and social self-esteem (component of extraversion

for HEXACO). Although most of this research relies on self-report measurements, the important role personality plays on SWB is consistent with results found using other research methods, such as informant reports[4] (Lucas & Fujita, 2000) and experience sampling method[5] (Horstmann et al., 2020).

There are several theoretical perspectives that explain the relationship between personality and SWB. On one hand, instrumental theories pose that personality influence SWB indirectly by creating conditions that promote happiness or unhappiness through choices. From this perspective, extraverts may experience more positive emotions because they are constantly looking for enjoyable social gatherings (Lucas & Diener, 2009). On the other hand, temperament theories suggest a direct association between personality and SWB that is not mediated by life choices, events or experiences (McCrae and Costa, 1991). The mechanisms underpinning the relationship between personality and SWB are not fully understood, yet progress is being made. Instrumental theories are being ruled out by using more complex analyses that account for possible mediators such as social activity (e.g., Lucas et al., 2008) whereas temperament theories are incorporating neurophysiological advances to refine current theoretical models (Moore & Depue, 2016).

The relationship between personality and culture remains underexplored, possibly due to the tendency to address personality as an individual, independent and unique attribute. However, this conceptualisation could reflect the Western inclination to value individuality. Cultural perspectives tend to question the extent of the generalizability of personality theories and models (Church, 2000). For example, although the popular model of the Big Five was lexically derived from the English language (Allport & Odbert, 1936), related inventories such as the NEO Personality Inventory have been successfully translated and tested in several cultural contexts (McCrae et al., 1996; McCrae et al., 2005), which suggests the universality of some personality dimensions. Nevertheless, some limitations have been identified. Benet et al. (1998) applied the translated version of the Big Five in a sample from Spain and did not

[4] To increase validity in self-report measurements, participants' personality and SWB measurements were also answered by their friends and family members, a methodology called informant reports (Lucas and Fujita, 2000).

[5] To explore the link between affect, personality, situation and behaviour Horstmann, Rauthmann, Sherman and Ziegler (2020) required participants to answer scales at different times and places. This method is called experience sampling method.

encounter reliability issues, however, Reyes et al. (2014) found low internal consistency on the dimension of agreeableness when applied to a Mexican sample. Moreover, the authors noted that this problem had consistently been found across instrument validation studies in Mexican samples, which could suggest cultural differences in how the construct is understood.

Furthermore, evidence shows that affective dimensions can correlate to different personality traits cross-culturally. For example, in Mexico, being alert and vigilant correlated to openness to experience and extraversion whereas in other cultures, it correlated to conscientiousness and neuroticism (Rodriguez & Church, 2003). Similarly, Ortiz et al. (2007) found that assertiveness presented a higher correlation to neuroticism in Mexicans compared to Americans, where assertiveness was associated with extraversion. Thus, while similar personality factors can be found in different cultural contexts, they are not homologues. Research shows that cultural values and ideals are embedded in meanings and conceptualisations of personality traits, which can differ from culture to culture. Church (2000) advances an integrative model where personality and culture are mutually constitutive: genetic dispositions influence an individual's processing and reaction to the sociocultural environment, while culture influences the way and extent to which genetic traits are expressed.

2.1.3 Needs and Desires

Another perspective which looks into individual differences in SWB is the study of needs and desires. Various theories pose that SWB increases according to the extent to which needs and desires are met. For example, Maslow's theory of human motivation (1943) contains five levels of needs, starting with physiological drives (e.g. food and rest) which once fulfilled, open the motivation to satisfy increasingly complex needs, such as psychological needs (e.g. love and esteem) and self-fulfilment needs (e.g. self-actualisation). Ryff and Keyes (1995) proposed a six-factor model for psychological well-being (PWB). From this theoretical perspective, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance are the main components for happiness and satisfaction. Similarly, Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-determination Theory (SDT) posits three psychological needs that are key for motivation and wellness: competence, autonomy and relatedness. The fulfilment of these needs fosters positive internal processes such as high-quality motivation, engagement and creativity, which are deemed essential for people's wellbeing (WB). This

theory has been used as a framework in successful interventions aiming to increase WB and SWB (see Ntoumanis et al., 2020 for a meta-analysis).

Consistent with Maslow (1943), a study with a sample including 123 countries showed that basic needs could be deemed universal, as they consistently predicted SWB across countries. However, their predictive capacity was stronger in poor nations than in wealthier countries, given that people in poorer nations struggle more to satisfy basic needs compared to wealthier countries (Tay & Diener, 2011). Similarly, cross-cultural research showed that psychosocial needs such as social support, feeling respected and autonomy correlated with affective dimensions of SWB, however, the strength of the associations varied across countries due to cultural and economic factors (Oishi et al., 2016). These results emphasise that the fulfilment of basic and psychosocial needs is universally correlated to SWB, nonetheless, individuals' sociocultural context could significantly moderate the impact that specific needs have on affective experiences and life satisfaction.

Despite being individual and personal, goals and desires are to an extent, guided by culture. Although cultures are no homogenous and sub-cultures may hold different ideals, there are general cultural tendencies to embrace and promote certain values. For example, in cultures that value in-group interdependence such as the Japanese one, goals are permeated by the culturally transmitted motivation to satisfy and benefit others, whereas in cultures like the North American one, which value individual independence, goals tend to be motivated by self-expression, internal attributes and uniqueness (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Radhakrishnan and Chan (1997) study provides enlightening evidence about cross-cultural differences in goals and motivations. Indian and American students were asked to write 10 goals that they have set for themselves and 10 goals that were set by their parents and to rate them in terms of how important these goals were for them. Results showed that for the American group, self-set goals were more important than the parental goals, whereas for the Indian group, both sets of goals were equally important. Moreover, a content analysis of the goals revealed that goals in American participants tended to be personal and abstract (e.g. "to become independent" and "to do well in school") whereas Indian participants' goals were more interpersonal and concrete (e.g. "to have a happy family" and "to get good grades"). When goal discrepancies and their association to SWB were analysed, findings suggested that conflicts with parents on the importance of a goal correlated negatively with life satisfaction in Indian students, which was

not the same for North American students, where own-goal discrepancies were more important to SWB.

On a similar note, it is important to culturally contextualise universal theories of SWB such as SDT. SDT suggests that motivations for goal achievement correlate differently to SWB and that extrinsic motivations such as others' recognition is associated with lower levels of SWB (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, in cultures where the self is conceptualised as interdependent from the ingroup, meeting others' expectations and pursuing goals to make family and friends happy has been associated with life satisfaction (Oishi & Diener, 2001). Arguably, in such cultures, doing things in favour of others could be understood as an intrinsic motivation, because the motives do not stem from craving other's recognition but from rooted cultural values.

To summarise, the study of the fulfilment of needs and personal strivings provide another valuable angle to understand individual differences in SWB. People who have their basic needs covered tend to be happier, especially when in circumstances where basic needs are not easy to access. Naturally then, once basic needs are fulfilled, more complex needs emerge, such as social desires and personal growth, which are also associated with SWB. Although basic needs and higher needs such as wanting to be respected are correlated with SWB across different countries, evidence shows cultural variation in their importance to individuals. Subsequently, in order to understand the association between what people want and levels of SWB, it is important to be informed of cultural ideals and values.

2.2 Objective Factors Associated with SWB

2.2.1 Money and SWB

The relationship between money and SWB has long been a key focus in the field. This is not surprising as, intuitively, financial resources open the possibility to afford and access correlates of WB, such as housing, healthcare and leisure experiences (Diener et al., 2018). A large volume of valid and reliable studies indicates that the correlation between income and SWB is in the range of 0.15 to 0.25 (Lucas & Schimmack, 2009; for a review, see Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002). However, as this research has evolved more nuances have emerged.

Thus, current studies focus on the intricacies and conditions that frame the complex association between income and SWB.

The relatively small effect that income has on individuals' SWB has led to the conclusion that money is most important when used to cover basic needs, but once these are fulfilled, it does not make much difference in people's SWB (Lucas & Diener, 2009). A study using a large representative sample worldwide found evidence for 'income satiation' –a level of income that once reached, more income provides no increase in levels of happiness. Globally, satiation occurred at $95,000 for life satisfaction, $60,000 for positive emotions and $75,000 for negative affect. Beyond these amounts, SWB levels did not increase and in the case of life satisfaction, once satiation was reached, increases in income were associated with small decreases in SWB. Moreover, it was found that the satiation point varied depending on the SWB dimension measured, country, gender and level of education. Although the study addressed limitations such as available data and factors affecting the veracity of the income reported, it provides robust evidence for a cap on the happiness that money affords individuals (Jebb, et al., 2018). Moreover, it supports previous findings that wealth matters more for SWB in richer countries (Tay et al., 2014). It is important to mention that these findings are not undisputable, as comparisons between and within countries have not found a critical level of income for SWB (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2013). Discrepancies in the results could be explained by differences in methodological approaches, however, even after standardisation, some results are still inconsistent (Diener et al., 2018).

A majorly discussed phenomenon in national level SWB studies is the "Easterlin Paradox", which posits that national sharp increases in income over time do not correspond to increased levels of SWB in the population (Diener et al., 2018). For example, in the United States, income per capita has more than doubled since 1972, however, SWB levels have stayed virtually the same since then (Sachs, 2018). Similarly, in worldwide happiness rankings, poorer countries such as Costa Rica and Mexico, report similar levels of SWB to wealthier countries such as the United Kingdom and France (Helliwell, et al., 2020). In support of the Easterlin Paradox, Easterlin and Sawangfa's (2010) investigation of cross-sectional data from different periods of time in 13 developing countries did not find long-term correspondence between economic growth and increased life or financial satisfaction. Nonetheless, other findings show that this is not always the case. In a study with large representative samples from more than 130 countries, Diener et al. (2013) found that household income increases correlated with increased

positive affect and life evaluations and decreased negative feelings. Similarly, rises in GDP per capita were positively correlated with cognitive SWB. Interestingly, the association between income and SWB was mediated by material possessions, financial satisfaction and optimism. Thus, SWB levels could improve from increased income if it led to purchasing power, more optimism and financial satisfaction. Importantly and against adaptation theories which pose that SWB levels hardly change from a baseline level, (Brickman & Campbell, 1971; Frederick & Loewenstein, 1999) the effects of increased income endured overtime.

Income inequality has been identified as a critical moderator for the absence of significant effects of increased income on SWB (Diener et al., 2018). Analysing data of 16 developed countries and 18 Latin-American countries, Oishi and Kesebir (2015) found that economic growth was associated with increased life satisfaction in developed countries, after controlling for the negative effects of income inequality. Nonetheless, economic growth in Latin America was associated with decreased life satisfaction. The authors argued that a possible explanation for these results is that in years of growth, economic gains were mostly concentrated in a small portion of elites in these countries. In a similar vein, Burkhauser et al. (2015) found that increases in income of the very rich correlated to less happiness and increased negative feelings in European samples. Thus, an even distribution of wealth could be a key element informing the relationship between national increases in income and SWB. Economic growth needs to be accompanied by income equality in order to be beneficial for people's SWB.

Data showing further nuances to income inequality on SWB is steadily emerging. For example, Jachimowicz et al., (2020) found that higher economic inequality intensified financial hardship, which was partially explained by a weakened community buffer. The authors hypothesised that poor people in countries with higher levels of economic inequality are less likely to seek financial aid, probably because of a strong societal sense of competitiveness and stigmatization of the poor. Furthermore, other societal conditions can also affect the influences of income on happiness. Sachs (2018) proposed that in the United States, the Easterlin Paradox could be explained by the escalation of other non-income related factors that have eclipsed the gains of economic growth, such as weakened social support networks, increased perception of corruption in the government, decline of trust in public institutions and the rise of epidemics of obesity and opioid addiction. Therefore, to understand the relationship between national increases in income and SWB, it is imperative to examine surrounding societal conditions. More research is needed to understand the potential impact contemporary issues such as

urbanisation, social capital and declining mental health could have on the benefits of economic growth (Diener et al., 2018).

Another possible explanation for why increased income does not necessarily lead to increased happiness pertains to the effects of social comparison. Easterlin (1974) hypothesised that national increases in income entail an increase for the population in general and not only for an individual. Thus, for income increases to benefit SWB change should happen in relative income – one's relative position in the socioeconomic scale, as opposed to absolute income (Sachs, 2018). Ferreri-i-Carbonell (2005) investigated the 'comparison income', which influences the income of a reference group –those living in the same region, similar in age and education level – on individuals' life satisfaction. Results showed that increases in family income did not lead to changes in SWB when accompanied by identical increases in the income of the reference group. Moreover, the larger an individual's income was in comparison with the income of the reference group, the more life satisfaction levels an individual reported. Thus, the author concluded that income of the reference group is as important as personal income in order to feel satisfied. Evidence of the effects of others' income is found in various sociocultural contexts. For example, an analysis of Japanese data revealed that the correlation with life satisfaction and income was mediated by the individual's tendency to make comparisons and the direction of the comparisons. Those who compared their income with their colleagues were unhappier than those whose references were friends (Clark et al., 2020). Nonetheless, despite the consistency of these findings, some studies have failed to replicate effects for social comparison on SWB. The aforementioned study by Diener et al. (2013) showed that national wealth leads to higher overall levels of SWB in poor and rich people, compared to their counterparts in poorer countries. Thus, comparison effects could be outweighed by factors related to higher levels of development, such as health care and security (Diener et al., 2018). Moreover, social comparisons are not always negative. For example, Senik (2004) found that in some contexts, the presence of richer individuals could improve levels of satisfaction, given that they signal the possibility of becoming richer in the future. Taken together, evidence suggest that people feel satisfied when they have enough money but also when they have more money than their peers (D'Ambrosio et al., 2020).

Most of the findings reviewed above are correlational in nature and come from cross-sectional data. Other studies have aimed to test a causal relationship to ascertain whether more money can buy more happiness. In Brickman et al. (1978) SWB levels of lottery winners did

not differ significantly from those of the control group. However, a longitudinal study looking into WB differences between medium-sized prize lottery winners, small-sized prize lottery winners and a control group, showed that after two years, medium-sized prize winners were happier compared to the other groups (Gardner & Oswald, 2007). Further evidence suggests that the impact which been given money has on SWB varies according to circumstances. For example, conditional cash transfer social programmes that aim to reduce poverty, such as *Más Familias en Acción* in Colombia generated mixed results on beneficiaries' SWB. Although there was an increased WB in areas such as satisfaction in health and education, cash transfers increased subjective poverty and did not improve life satisfaction. Thus, even though participants were receiving money to fulfil their basic needs, the possible effects of welfare stigma were notable (Morales Martinez, 2018). Diener et al., (2018) warns that lottery winner and cash transfers studies are useful in establishing a causal relationship between money and SWB, however, their generalisability is questionable. Actively earning money is not the same as passively receiving money, as in the former other variables such as self-esteem and mastery are involved. This argument can be complemented by evidence showing that unemployed people are amongst the most unhappy, even after controlling for differences in income (Campbell, 1976).

Another perspective on the relationship between money and happiness concerns how people spend their money (for a review, see Stanca & Veenhoven, 2015). Noll and Weick (2015) found that spending money increased life satisfaction, however, spending it on clothes and leisure brought more happiness than spending it on basic needs such as food and housing. In a similar vein, analysis of a wide set of consumption variables revealed that global happiness was strongly associated with saving money and keeping a lifestyle of travelling and going to amusement parks (Zhang & Xiong, 2015). Furthermore, evidence suggests that socioeconomic context could influence the effect that consumption variables have on life satisfaction. Comparing consumption variables as predictors of SWB between transitory countries and developed countries, Dumludag (2015) found that clothes, footwear and durable goods like household appliances and cars were significant predictors of SWB in both groups, but food, beverage, tobacco, utilities and education were significant predictors of SWB only in transitory countries. It is hypothesised that once basic needs are met, items that reflect status and luxury become more significant to achieve happiness, especially in wealthier countries. Similarly, a large cross-national study looking into data from more than 130 countries found that the relationship between income and life satisfaction was strongly mediated by satisfaction with

standard of living and ownership of non-basic conveniences (e.g. television and computer) (Diener et al., 2012). Thus, evidence suggests that people are more satisfied when they can afford more than that which is necessary to fulfil basic needs.

Lastly, research shows that it is not only what people buy but also for whom. Cross-sectional and longitudinal data consistently show that spending more money on others rather than on oneself is associated with higher level of happiness (Dunn et al., 2008). At the beginning of the day, participants were given money to spend on themselves or on others, depending on the group condition assigned. Consistent with other studies, analysis revealed that by the end of the day, people who were in the prosocial spending condition were significantly happier. Although a limitation of the results was the use of small samples, these findings have been replicated with larger samples, different experimental designs and across several cultures (Aknin et al., 2013; 2020).

Does money make people happy? Yes – but there is a finite amount of happiness that money can buy. The reviewed evidence shows that there are many intricacies involved in the relationship between income and SWB, many of which are shaped by sociocultural influences. Research shows that money is more important for happiness in wealthy societies. Moreover, cross-cultural findings suggest that money stops benefiting people's SWB at a certain level. Individual increases in income seem to be more advantageous for people's happiness when they put them in a better position compared to their peers, although national increases in income are associated with people's happiness when they promote equality. Buying goods such as clothes, computers and trips is more associated with SWB than just buying essential goods whereas spending money on others make people happier than spending it on oneself.

2.2.2 Social Relationships and SWB

The Harvard Study of Development, one of the longest-run studies of development and aging, followed the life of its participants for more than 75 years and concluded that one of the major predictors of happiness is good social relationships (Vaillant, 2002). The predominant role of social relationships in people's SWB is consistently emphasised in wellbeing research (Cohen, 2004; Diener, 2013; Dolan et al., 2008) to the extent that it can be referred to as an established fact in the field (Kushlev et al., 2018). Across cultures, having loving and supportive social relationships is positively associated with SWB (Tay & Diener, 2011).

Theories of WB, SWB and/or psychological wellbeing (PWB) (Deci & Ryan, 2006; Maslow, 1954; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) identify social life as a universal need. This might not be surprising, given that studies in evolutionary psychology, neuroscience and social cognition show that the human brain is wired for social interaction (see Lieberman, 2007; 2013). Thus, existing lines of research explore the effects that relationships and interactions with family, friends, neighbours, acquaintances and even strangers have on SWB. Moreover, different theories propose explanations for the mechanisms underpinning the relationship between social connectedness and SWB, such as belonging, support and mattering (Barrera, 1986; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Elliott et al., 2004).

Theories emphasising the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary ,1995) pose that the desire to belong is a fundamental human need, which is fulfilled by meaningful, stable, positive relationships of mutual concern. Theories of social support explain that different types of support such as social embeddedness (i.e. the frequency of contact with those in one's social network), perceived social support (i.e. appraisals of being connected to others), the support an individual receives (i.e. enacted support) and the support an individual provides (i.e. provided support) correlate with SWB (Barrera, 1986; Siedlecki et al., 2014). Moreover, theories of mattering, suggest that the perception and degree to which someone feels they are a significant part of the world and important to others plays an essential role in individuals' happiness (Elliott et al., 2004; Flett, 2018).

Support for these theories can be found in a large body of evidence. A considerable volume of research has focused on differences in levels of SWB in marital status (Diener et al., 2018). A study including data from 19 countries found that married people scored higher SWB levels compared to people that have never married, were divorced or widowed. Those who had been previously married, were generally unhappier, although widowers were the unhappiest and most dissatisfied (Mastekaasa, 1994). Additional evidence suggests that SWB is correlated to having a stable and secure romantic relationship, even when people are not married (Dolan et al., 2008). A study of differences in happiness of married vs. unmarried couples that lived together, found that although cohabitant unmarried couples tended to be more unstable, those who judged their relationship as unlikely to dissolve displayed similar levels of happiness to married couples (Brown, 2000). Thus, living with a stable partner benefits SWB, as it is a source of emotional and sexual intimacy, companionship, support, pooled resources and everyday interaction, all of which are associated with happiness (see Perelli-Harris, 2019).

Nonetheless, individuals who are in unsatisfactory romantic partnerships show more depressive symptoms and lower levels of objective and subjective health (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Proulx et al., 2007). Although many of the studies of family and SWB focus on marriage, other familial relationships such as those with parents, grandparents, adult children and siblings have also been shown to be beneficial or detrimental to people's SWB –depending on individual circumstances (Thomas et al., 2017).

Dunbar (2018) argues that based on the evidence that has emerged during the last couple of decades, friendship is the single most important factor influencing people's subjective wellbeing, mental wellbeing and physical health, as friends provide help, companionship and self-validation (Demir et al., 2011). A meta-analysis including more than 280 empirical studies, found that frequent contact with high quality friendships was more strongly correlated with SWB than frequent contact with family members. The authors proposed that an explanation for this finding was that meeting regularly with friends entails experiencing positive feelings whereas meeting with family members could be motivated by obligation or caring responsibilities. Thus, findings point to the importance of the quality of the relationship and motivations to connect for SWB (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2000). Moreover, evidence shows that friendships are a primary source of happiness particularly to those who are not in a romantic relationship (Demir, 2010).

Although a large volume of research focuses on close relationships (e.g. partners and friends), other studies emphasise 'weak ties', those involving less contact and lower levels of intimacy and affection (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014b). Evidence shows that supportive relationships and feelings of mutual concern with neighbours are associated with life satisfaction (Sirgy & Cornwell, 2002; Taniguchi & Potter, 2015). Conversely, people with lower contact and lower perceived support from neighbours are more prone to experience negative affect and lower levels of SWB (Greenfield & Reyes, 2014). In a similar line, research suggests that people benefit even from interactions with acquaintances and strangers (Sandstrom & Dunn 2014a; 2014b). In Sandstrom and Dunn (2014a) college students who were instructed to interact more with their peers reported higher levels of SWB compared to the control group. Similarly, Sandstrom and Dunn (2014b) found that people who instigated a brief conversation with the barista at a coffee shop reported higher levels of positive affect, lower negative affect and increased customer satisfaction, compared to those who made their drink request as efficiently as possible. Further analyses revealed that these associations were

mediated by a sense of belonging, which can be explained by previous research suggesting that people can feel included even with minimal social cues like making eye contact and smiling (Wesselman et al., 2012).

Taken together, these findings suggest that the quality and quantity of social interactions play a fundamental role in people's happiness. Longitudinal research found that negative social interactions are particularly detrimental for people's happiness as they were consistently correlated with negative daily mood, counteracted positive feelings and were predictors of depression and loneliness. On the other hand, positive interactions correlated with positive affective states and decreased effects of negative interactions (Rook, 2001). Comparably, recent research using self-report and observer-based measures found that people are happier and feel more connected when they have more social interactions in their everyday life. Thus, although intimate interactions in close relationships do bring greater levels of SWB, evidence suggests that in general, people who have positive social interactions throughout the day are happier than those who experience less interactions (Sun et al., 2019).

Despite the correlation between social relationships and SWB, there are caveats and limitations to such findings. Firstly, as noted above, there is a downside to social relationships. Just as positive relationships are associated with SWB, negative relationships and interactions are associated with unpleasant affective states and psychological health issues such as depression and loneliness (Proulx et al., 2007; Rook, 2001). In a similar vein, although some research suggests that people return to their baseline levels of SWB after major life events (Brickman et al., 1978), widowhood has shown to bring permanent declines in people's average levels of SWB (Yap et al., 2012). Thus, relationships are a double-edged sword: they can both promote and diminish happiness. Secondly, a set of studies found that just as in the case of money, time spent on social activities has a declining marginal utility for SWB, meaning that there is a cap to the benefits that social time brings to people's happiness. In data from more than 160 countries, people did not experience higher levels of SWB after spending more than three hours with their friends and family every day (Kushlev et al., 2018). Lastly, Lucas, et al. (2008) argue that claims that social relationships are one of the strongest predictors of SWB are exaggerated, as effect sizes tend to be small. Moreover, a large volume of research on the topic has used self-reported methodologies, which could inflate correlations between social relationships and SWB (Diener et al., 2018). Thus, even though the association between

relationships and SWB is well-established, the strength of the correlation is similar to the one with income and therefore not exceptionally strong (Lucas et al., 2008).

Arguably, it is important to consider that research on the topic has predominantly used Western samples (e.g. Hidore et al., 1985; Pinquart & Sorensen, 2000). Research using samples from other cultures shows variance in norms and expectations concerning social relationships. For example, a study looking into the association between marital status and SWB in 42 countries found that married people were more satisfied with their lives than those who lived with a significant other, however the difference was more substantial in conservative cultures. Similarly, the positive effects of being married were smaller in nations with less stigma around divorce. The benefits that marriage has on positive emotions was larger in countries where the self is seen as independent from its group (individualistic) compared to those who see the self as an interdependent element of the group (collectivistic), potentially explained by the strong support network outside marriage that family represents in collectivistic countries. Moreover, Miller (1994) found that in the Hindu Indian culture, supporting others is deemed an obligation, underpinned by a strong sociocultural enforceable moral code to help others regardless of the level of need. On the contrary, in the North American culture, supporting others was an individual decision.

Furthermore, evidence suggests cultural variation in terms of the sources of support and their relationship with SWB. In a cross-cultural examination of support networks, Brannan et al., (2013) found that perceived family support predicted positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction amongst students in Iran, Jordan and the US. Nonetheless, support from friends was a predictor of all components of SWB only in the US; in Jordan, it only predicted positive affect whereas in Iran it did not significantly correlate with SWB. Authors speculated that these differences could be underpinned by social norms in each country: Iranian culture promotes familial values, whereas Americans tend to build strong social networks outside the family. In the case of Jordan, results could reflect the happiness associated with the opportunity to socialise with other people at college, something which is not common in the country, as many have to stay at home and/or are not allowed to study.

Moreover Lucas et al., (2008) claim that social relationships are not *the* paramount predictor of SWB, could be challenged by evidence from Latin America (Rojas, 2018). Latin American countries are characterised by adverse socio-political climates and high poverty rates but show

similar levels of SWB to some Western European countries (Helliwell et al., 2020). As will be discussed in the next section, in countries like Mexico, social relationships are a main source of SWB. Interpersonal patterns and practices in Latin American are particular to this region. Warm, nurturing, positive relationships are not only main sources of life satisfaction and positive feelings but also a purpose in life (Rojas, 2018).

To summarise, social relationships are an important element of people's SWB. Positive relationships with friends and family give people a sense that they matter in the world and belong to a group. Moreover, relationships are sources of support and buffers of the effects of adverse circumstances. Positive social interactions could increase SWB, even when they are with acquaintances or strangers. Conversely, negative interactions and relationships are associated with lower levels of SWB. Furthermore, findings reviewed highlight cultural differences in norms, roles, values and expectations concerning social relationships (Diener, et al., 2000).

2.2.3 Demographic factors

Early studies on SWB derived from a sociological perspective. Consequently, research focused on the relationship between demographic factors such as age, gender, education and employment and people's happiness (Diener, 2009). A comprehensive review of the vast evidence on how different demographic factors correlate with SWB is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the reader is referred to reviews such as those by Diener et al. (1999) and Dolan et al. (2008). Nonetheless, a crucial finding in the literature is that demographic factors are not strong predictors of SWB (Diener et al., 1999). This section offers an overview of research on three of the most studied demographic factors: age, gender and religion, to conclude that people's demographics are not key predictors of SWB, although some factors such as religion do play a role in people's happiness.

2.2.3.1 Age

Findings concerning age and SWB have not shown consistent results. Studies dated before the 1970's, tend to report that younger people are happier than older people (see Diener, 2009). However, as research progressed, results started to vary. On one hand, investigations were showing no correlation between age and life satisfaction (Spreitzer & Snyder, 1974). One the

other hand, contemporary studies suggested that life satisfaction increased with age (Clemente & Sauer, 1976) and so did overall happiness. However further evidence showed that young people tended to exhibit higher positive affect (Braun, 1977). There are various methodological limitations in said wave of studies that could explain the discrepancies of the results (see Diener, 2009) although further reviews tended to show a weak correlation between age and SWB (Diener et al., 1999).

More recently, it has been proposed that happiness follows a U-shaped pattern throughout the span of adulthood: SWB is high in the 20s, then there is a decrease towards midlife and then a rise again into old age (Galambos et al., 2020). Evidence for this pattern has been found in large sample studies. For example, in a study with more than half a million participants, Blanchflower & Oswald (2008) found that the lowest point of SWB occurred during people's late 30s to early 50s. Similarly, in a study with a sample of over 340,000 people in the United States, Stone et al. (2010) found the U pattern in SWB and positive affect over the lifespan.

Nonetheless, as promising as the results are, there are several limitations to consider. The validity of the findings is weakened by using cross-sectional data that could possibly miss within-subject changes throughout the life of participants, thus conclusions are drawn from comparisons between age groups (Galambos et al., 2020). Moreover, these studies confound age and cohort differences, thus variations in happiness can be the result of being born in different historical climates. By studying the discrepancies between cross-sectional data and longitudinal data, N. Li (2016) concluded that the former describes whether an age group was happier than other ages in a particular year, whereas the latter describes fluctuations in happiness over their lifespan. Results for the U shape in longitudinal studies have been mixed. For example, 10-year follow-up data from the Midlife study in the United States (MIDUS) found that life satisfaction remained virtually stable from the 20s to the 40s, increased from 40s to 60s and then declined again towards the 70s (Lachman et al., 2015). Other longitudinal studies have found an S shape, as it was suggested that the U shape is followed by a decrease of SWB after the 70s (Bauer et al., 2017). Furthermore, the U shape found in some longitudinal data disappeared after controlling for other variables such as the number of years someone stayed in the study and interview experiences (e.g. gender of the interviewer) (Kassenboehmer & Haisken-DeNew, 2012). Thus, research looking into both cross-sectional and longitudinal data has failed to consistently find a U shaped pattern in SWB levels according to age (Baird et al., 2010).

An important point to highlight is that the findings that support the U shape pattern in age and SWB are based on data from wealthy Western countries, such as the US, Germany and the UK. Steptoe et al. (2015) investigated the changes in SWB over the lifespan in 160 countries and found that life satisfaction levels in some Eastern European countries and the former Soviet Union showed a steep progressive decrease of happiness with age. Moreover, Latin American countries also showed a moderate linear decrease, whereas satisfaction levels in people from Sub-Saharan Africa stayed virtually the same over time. Furthermore, the study also incorporated measurements of affective well-being, as opposed to a single-item measurements of life satisfaction (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008), providing a more complete study of SWB. Results showed that in high-income English speaking countries people between their mid-20s and mid-30s showed a peak in stress and worry that then decreased with age, whereas in Latin America stress decreased with age but worry tended to increase with age until the late 50s and then decreased into the 60s. Lawrie et al. (2019) advanced a cultural explanation for the variance in the relationship between age and SWB. They found that older age was correlated with lower wellbeing in countries less tolerant to ambiguity, an effect moderated by individuals' sense of control over their own lives. Hence, the universality of the U shape is controversial, as this pattern seems particular to countries with certain characteristics and cultural values.

Changes in SWB over the lifespan can be explained using theoretical frameworks from Developmental psychology, such as the lifespan and life course theories. On one hand, differences in levels of happiness are explained by within-person changes across their life, which can be captured by longitudinal within-subject studies investigating multiple indicators of SWB at different ages. Moreover, each dimension should not be expected to change in a linear way as there is no universal trajectory. On the other hand, life course perspectives emphasize historical and contextual differences in people's development. (Galambos et al., 2020). Thus, variance in SWB according to age could be the reflection of inner changes that happen in a specific sociocultural environment. For example, Freund (2020) theorised that the increase in longevity over the last centuries in Western countries has led to the emergence of the "bucket list effect", where people postpone leisure and social goals based on the idea that there is more time available to achieve them.

2.2.3.2 Gender

Given the worldwide gender inequalities that could hinder satisfaction of the needs and goals of women and gender minorities (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2016), it could be expected that women report lower levels of SWB. However, a comprehensive meta-analysis including more than 40 years of research in gender differences, found no association between gender and life satisfaction, even when accounting for various factors such as publication bias. Researchers concluded that the similarities in levels of life satisfaction between men and women could be the result of women using other women as a point of comparison when reflecting on their life. Moreover, gender differences in values and social roles may play a significant influence in judgments in SWB. Furthermore, a limitation addressed in the paper was that most research came from countries with higher levels of gender equality (Batz-Barbarich, 2018).

There is cross-cultural evidence for influences that social-cultural stances can have on gender differences in SWB (Tesch-Romer et al., 2008). The analysis of data from 57 countries showed that in countries where cultural attitudes and social structures support gender equality show smaller gender differences in satisfaction. Conversely, in countries where the majority reject gender equality the differences in SWB between genders were larger. Fewer research has focused on gender differences concerning the affective dimension of SWB. Different studies show that women tend to report more negative emotions than men (Geerling and Diener, 2017; Tesch-Romer et al., 2008). Researchers hypothesised that biological differences such as the production of progesterone and oestrogen could explain women's tendency to depression and anxiety. However, societal conditions have also been found to correlate with women's affective and cognitive experiences. Increasing opportunities to meet basic needs (e.g. food and shelter) and more advanced needs (e.g. education and work opportunities) to all citizens could lead to an increase in women's SWB (Zuckerman et al., 2017).

2.2.3.3 Religion

Religion has been consistently associated with SWB in research (Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Witter, et al., 1985) across various cultural contexts (Diener & Clifton, 2002). Religious people tend to be happier than those who are non-religious, irrespective of their faith (Dolan et al., 2008). Literature suggests that religion promotes SWB via social integration with like-minded

people, interaction with a divine order, the provision of systems of meaning and existential interpretations of life and the promotion of norms and lifestyles that could enhance happiness (Ellis, 1991). Moreover, evidence shows that religiosity could provide an 'insurance effect', protecting people's SWB from the effects of detrimental shocks in life circumstances, such as unemployment, divorce and challenging societal changes (Clark & Lelkes, 2005; Popova, 2014). Similarly, a meta-analysis of 49 studies found that religious coping strategies such as reappraising stressors through religion and having a 'give-and-take relationship with God' were associated with spiritual growth, positive affect, higher self-esteem and less negative emotions during challenging times. Nonetheless, the use of negative religious coping strategies in appraising circumstances as punishment was correlated to the experience of anxiety, depression and distress. Thus, not all religious-related beliefs are positive for SWB. These results complement findings showing that religions are more beneficial to people when based in a benevolent and secure relationship with God (Pargament, 2002).

Additionally, evidence suggests that sociocultural contexts play an important role in the relationship between religion and SWB. For example, a study using national representative samples from more than 150 nations found that countries with undesirable societal circumstances such as hunger or low levels of income and education were associated with greater national religiosity (Diener et al., 2011). Conversely, in wealthy countries with high levels of societal well-being (e.g. Northern Europe), religiosity is less prevalent. Moreover, although religion predicted SWB via social support, respect and purpose in life, individuals who lived in favourable nonreligious societies also achieved high levels of SWB and were high in social support and respect, although not in purpose of life. It is hypothesised that people living in adverse life and societal circumstances need coping mechanisms beyond personal resources. Additionally, the social support conveyed in religious practices could counteracts negative effects associated with such circumstances. In a similar vein, Graham and Crown (2014) found that both at a national and individual level, people who have more agency, means and capabilities, are less likely to rely on religion for life decisions and evaluations.

Moreover, further research shows that religious people living in religious societies were happier than nonreligious people in disadvantaged religious societies. However, in wealthy nonreligious nations, religious people did not have higher SWB than nonreligious people (Diener et al., 2011). Thus, evidence suggests that religion plays a more important role for people who live in disadvantaged conditions and when there is a match between the country's

dominant religion and the individual's religion. Together, these findings highlight the potential effect that societal circumstances have on the association between demographic factors and SWB.

2.3 Culture and Subjective Wellbeing

In the psychological literature, there are many definitions of the concept of culture. However, most converge on the notion that culture entails shared knowledge in groups of people (Berry & Triandis, 2006). In this thesis, culture is defined as "the rich complex of meanings, beliefs, practices, symbols, norms and values prevalent among people in a society" (Schwartz, 2006, p. 138). Findings from Western psychology have been overgeneralised and, in some cases, deemed universal (Henrich et al., 2010). Nonetheless, as emphasised throughout this review, sociocultural influences play an important role in determinants of SWB. Thus, in order to understand levels of SWB across the globe, it is imperative to put them in their corresponding cultural context.

There are various conceptual and empirical approaches to the study of culture. Cultural and cross-cultural research often rely on theories and models that organise cultures according to values, distributions of power in societies and/or individual–environment dynamics (for a review of cultural models see Nardon & Steers, 2009). Hofstede's cultural dimensions paradigm (1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010) and Triandis' (2000) cultural syndromes are influential approaches for the study of culture and SWB.

Hofstede's (1980) original paradigm recognised four value dimensions that differentiated cultures. In later years two more dimensions were added (Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010). **Table 1** provides an overview of each dimension.

In a similar vein, Triandis (2000) defines a cultural syndrome as a "shared pattern of attitudes, beliefs, categorizations, self-definitions, norms, role definitions, values and other subjective elements of culture that is organized around some theme" (p. 13). **Table 2** describes cultural syndromes proposed by Triandis (2000). As observed, there are conceptual overlaps between these models.

Table 1. Cultural value dimensions (Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010)

Value Dimension	Description
Individualism-Collectivism	The degree to which people prefer to act as individuals rather than as members of groups.
Power Distance	The extent to which less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. Authority figures are respected and unquestioned.
Uncertainty Avoidance	The extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable with novel, unknown and surprising situations.
Long-term vs Short-term Orientation	Reflects whether societies embrace future-oriented values such as perseverance and thrift or past-present oriented values, such as tradition and fulfilment of social obligations.
Masculinity - Femininity	Refers to the distribution of values between genders
Indulgence vs Restraint	The extent to which societies allow or restraint the gratification of natural desires such as enjoying life and having fun.

Table 2. Cultural syndromes (Triandis, 2000)

Cultural Syndromes	Description
Complexity-simplicity	Refers to roles and choices available in a society.
Tightness-looseness	Refers to extent to which a culture tolerates deviations from social norms.
Individualism – collectivism	The extent to which the self is regarded as independent or interdependent of their group.

Using these frameworks, the next section of the literature review examines evidence available on culture-specific characteristics and factors that are associated with SWB in the two cultures of interest in this thesis: the Mexican and the British culture.

2.3.1 Mexican Culture and SWB

Based on objective indicators of quality of life and correlates of SWB such as GDP and healthcare, Latin American countries live in less favourable conditions than Western European countries (Beytía, 2016). Nonetheless, cross-national studies of SWB consistently show that happiness levels in some Latin American countries such as Mexico, tend to challenge predictions based on commonly used SWB factors (Rojas, 2018). Mexico is classified as a middle-income country (The World Bank, 2021) and according to the Human Development Index (HDI), which assesses development based on health, education and income indicators, Mexico is one category below the level of development of Western European countries (UNDP, 2019). Moreover, Mexico faces well-documented social challenges which are predominant in the Latin American region, such as significant levels of crime, corruption and poverty (Yamamoto, 2016). However, the country reports high levels of positive affect, moderate experiences of negative affect and interestingly, levels of life satisfaction do not deviate much from those in countries with high GDP per capita and very high HDI, such as the United Kingdom (Helliwell & Wang, 2012). **Figure 1** shows a comparison between levels of happiness in Mexico and the United Kingdom as reported in the World Happiness Report throughout the years[6] (Helliwell et al., 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020) as well as the ranking positions for Mexico and the United Kingdom out of the 155 countries measured in the last five editions of the annual World Happiness Report.

Although empirical evidence has established that wealth and development are correlated to SWB (Lucas & Schimmack, 2009), the case of Mexico poses a challenge to this conclusion. As happiness levels in Mexico (and in Latin America in general) cannot be fully explained by the traditionally used indicators, their investigation represents a valuable opportunity to address gaps in the SWB literature.

[6] Data from the World Happiness Report 2021 (Helliwell et al., 2021) was not used to inform this thesis, as it was collected during the extraordinary circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. This report can be retrieved from: https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2021/

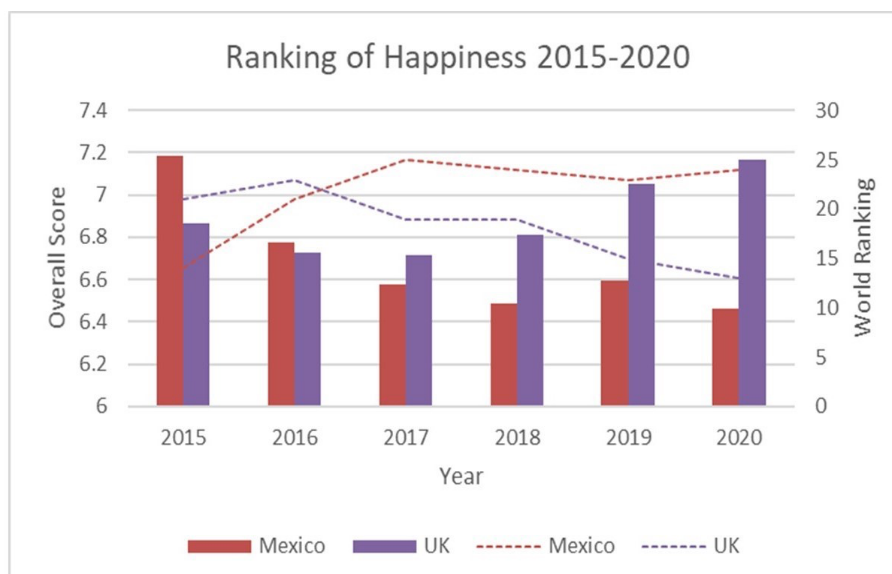

Figure 1. Overall scores and ranking positions of Mexico and UK in the last five years (N=155). Source: World Happiness Report 2015-2020 (Helliwell et al., 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020)

Evidence shows that the levels of indicators of quality of life and SWB in Mexico are not particularly good, which suggests that Mexicans' happiness could be attributed to other sources. As discussed in the previous section, research shows that some correlates of SWB are universal, but others are culture-specific. A study comparing determinants of happiness in Latin America, Western Europe (including data from Mexico and the United Kingdom) and the United States found that in the three regions, living with a partner, feeling healthy, being satisfied with the financial situation of the household, perceived freedom and religiosity were positively associated with SWB, whereas being 40 to 49 years old was negatively correlated to SWB (Beytía, 2011, 2016). However, the strength of the correlations varied amongst the three cultures. In Latin America, the correlation between subjective health and financial satisfaction with SWB was significantly weaker than in the other regions. Furthermore, for women in Latin America, being self-employed rather than working for someone else was correlated with higher levels of happiness, a unique regional finding. It is hypothesised that this could reflect cultural norms where looking after and spending time with one's children is a paramount element in maternity. Complementary to this result, recent data from the World Value Survey (2018) shows that most of the respondents in Mexico believe that pre-schoolers suffer if their mother works.

Moreover, the study shed light on culture-specific factors related to trust. Trust is a major component of positive relationships (Simpson, 2007) and a key ingredient in the concept of

social capital – the social networks that facilitate cooperation and support amongst individuals and within societies – which has been identified as an important predictor of SWB (OECD, 2001; Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). Trusting institutions was more important for the happiness of those in the US compared to the other two regions. Trust in weak ties, such as strangers, was only associated with happiness in Western Europe, whereas in Latin America only significantly large improvements in trust levels –both in institutions and in others– were associated with happiness. Data specific to Mexico from the World Value Survey (2018) shows that trust is almost exclusively reserved for family. The majority of respondents reported having low levels of trust in most people, including neighbours and people they know personally and very low trust in most institutions, including the army, police and courts. Thus, although evidence shows that countries with higher levels of SWB tend to have high levels of trust and indicators of cooperation such as volunteerism and democratic attitudes (Tov & Diener, 2009) in the case of Mexico, the benefits of social capital on wellbeing might be based on strong family ties.

Further evidence supporting the importance of social relationships in the happiness of Mexicans is found in Leyva, Bustos and Romo (2016). In a study which aimed to identify correlates of cognitive and affective well-being in the country, researchers assessed different variables, such as sociodemographic factors, personal experiences and satisfaction in dimensions such as family and emotional life. Results showed that individual factors such as freedom to make decisions, exercising and subjective sense of success were associated with happiness. Nonetheless, various significant predictors of happiness were inherently social, such as receiving praise and recognition, being satisfied with family and emotional life, gathering with family for special occasions and giving donations. On the contrary, comparisons in income and living conditions and being active on social media were negatively correlated with happiness. Moreover, the predominant role which family ties have in the happiness of Mexicans was highlighted by results showing that chances to achieve higher levels of SWB was associated with the number of family members believed to provide support and that not having a family was more beneficial to SWB than having a non-supportive one.

This centrality of close familial relations is what culture models classify as collectivism. Contrary to individualistic cultures where the self is regarded as autonomous, unique and independent, in collectivistic cultures the self is understood as a part of a group and interdependent with others. Thus, collectivistic cultures are characterised by a preference for in-group members, closeness and loyalty (Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010;

Triandis, 2000). Although cultures have both individualistic and collectivistic elements, most are inclined to either of the dimensions. In the literature, East Asian and Latin American countries are regarded as predominantly collectivistic cultures (Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010).

The independent or interdependent sense of self has important implications in understanding cross-cultural differences in SWB (Suh & Oishi, 2002). Self-enhancement constructs such as self-esteem, satisfaction with self and freedom are stronger predictors of SWB in individualistic cultures than in collectivistic cultures (Diener & Diener, 1995; Suh & Oishi, 2002). Conversely, social factors such as harmony in relationships and perceived support are stronger predictors of happiness in cultures that embrace an interdependent sense of self (Uchida et al., 2008, Uchida, et al., 2013). The value-as-a moderator theory posits that the impact satisfaction domains have on global assessments of happiness depend on what people value, which is influenced by culture (Oishi et al., 1999). Borrowing from this perspective, in cultures that promote uniqueness and personal achievement, self-related domains will be more strongly correlated to SWB whereas in collectivistic cultures, where the priority is social connectedness, social domains will be more closely associated with happiness.

Findings from meta-analytical studies show that, at a national level, happy cultures are those high in femininity and individualism and low in power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Moreover, they tend to be wealthy, as affluence is strongly correlated to individualism (Steel et al., 2018). The top 10 happiest countries in the world fit in this description (Helliwell et al., 2020). Countries such as Finland, Denmark and Switzerland are wealthy developed countries that score high in socioeconomic correlates of SWB such as purchasing power, valuing human rights and low levels of inequality (Triandis, 2000). Evidence shows that globalisation and consequent changes in a culture's economy are associated with shifts towards individualistic values in collectivistic cultures (Shah, 2009). As societies develop, basic needs are fulfilled, enabling more complex needs, such as those related to self-fulfilment (e.g. Maslow, 1954). Higher income is correlated to mastery and sense of control, which are factors also associated with SWB (Lachman & Weaver, 1998). As opposed to this, collectivistic countries tend to show lower levels of happiness, even those which are wealthy. For example, Japan and South Korea are high income (The World Bank, 2021), predominantly collectivistic countries (Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010) that report moderate levels of happiness (Helliwell, et al., 2020). Nonetheless, various Latin American countries, such as Mexico,

appear to be an exception to this trend. This makes it apparent that individualism and collectivism impact SWB in ways unrelated to wealth.

Singelis et al. (1995) distinguished two subdimensions that could explain differences *within* individualism and collectivism. Horizontal collectivism refers to the pattern where the self is merged with the other members of the group, who are seen as equal. On the contrary, vertical collectivism refers to the pattern where, although the self is also embedded in the group, ingroup members differ in terms of status and hierarchy. A comparative table between elements in horizontal and vertical collectivism is presented in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Comparison between horizontal and vertical collectivism (Singelis el at., 1995)

Horizontal Collectivism	Vertical Collectivism
Self is merged with the members of the in-group, who are regarded as equal. Equality is the essence of this pattern.	Self is seen as an aspect of the group but there are differences in status within in-group members. Serving and sacrificing is an important aspect of this pattern.

Similarly, in horizontal individualism, the self is independent but is somehow regarded as equal in status, whereas in vertical individualism, the autonomous self is regarded in different hierarchical positions in respect to others. **Table 4** shows the elements in horizontal and vertical individualism.

Table 4. Comparison between horizontal and vertical individualism (Singelis el at., 1995)

Horizontal Individualism	Vertical Individualism
Self is autonomous, but the individual is equal in status with others.	Self is autonomous but individuals see each other as different, so inequality is expected.

In other words, horizontal subdimensions result in equality, whereas vertical dimensions promote inequality. These have consequences in people's SWB. Vertical individualism is associated with factors that lower SWB, such as competition and stress. Horizontal individualism facilitates the pursuit of personal goals; however, it is also associated with loneliness (Triandis, 2000).

Despite research showing that both number and quality of relationships is correlated to SWB (see section on social relationships), Triandis (2000) argues that a lack of social support during

challenging events is often found in individualistic cultures. On the contrary, horizontal collectivism fosters cooperation and sharedness, whereas internalisation of social norms is a characteristic of vertical collectivism. Thus, social support patterns found in horizontal collectivism could promote people's happiness, whilst in vertical collectivism complying to the rules could foster SWB, however, opposition to social norms can decrease it. Nonetheless, a negative characteristic of collectivist cultures is that their preference to the ingroup can result in coldness and hostility to outgroup members, as well as lower levels of trust, which, as previously mentioned (Beytía, 2011, 2016), are associated with lower SWB. Arguably, there are trade-offs attached to each dimension that can promote or hinder happiness.

Similar to the vertical and horizontal facets of collectivism and individualism, Hofstede's power distance dimension refers to the extent to which a society endorses inequality (1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010). Small power-distance societies are more equal and non-hierarchical whereas large power-distance societies are characterised by inequality and hierarchical power. According to Hofstede's model, Mexico is classified as a society with a large power distance, which implies that it is a culture where authority figures are respected and unquestioned across contexts such as family, schools and government (Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010). Evidence shows that power distance is negatively correlated to societal happiness (Steel et al., 2018). However, recent findings suggest that Mexican culture predominantly reflects horizontal collectivist values such as cooperation, solidarity and unconditional support, with a tendency towards horizontal individualism values, such as independence, autonomy and equal rights (Díaz-Loving et al., 2018). Thus, it could be argued that the negative effects of power distance and the lack of trust in others and institutions seem to be outweighed by the positive effects of ingroup relationship dynamics.

These cultural characteristics have been part of Mexican society since the beginning of its history. Before the 16th century, Mexico was home to different indigenous cultures, such as the Aztecs and the Mayans. Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital which was situated in what is now Mexico City, had a population of 200, 000 people at the time of arrival of Spanish fleets. The Spanish conquest was not a peaceful process; it led to death, disease and radical sociocultural changes. Nonetheless, the indigenous populations were not exterminated or segregated, which gave rise to the 'mestizo', a racial group derived from the mix between Europeans and indigenous Americans (Rojas, 2018). The societal configuration that followed was an integration of conquerors and the conquered, although always delimiting that Europeans were

the dominant culture (Gonzalbo Aizpuru, 2005). Mexico was under Spanish reign until its independence in 1821, however, current beliefs and ideology still reflect the blend of the Spanish and Indigenous tradition. Indigenous values centred on coexistence with nature rather than transforming it for the sake of growth, so indigenous societies' foundations were community and cooperation, which fitted with familial ideals of the Spanish culture, such as value for the extended family (Gonzalbo Aizpuru, 2005; Rojas, 2018). This mix of values gave rise to a culture which promoted warm, close and enjoyable family ties, as family relationships were not considered the means to an end, but an end in itself (Rojas, 2018). Complementary to this argument, recent data shows that 97% of Mexican respondents considered their family a priority in their lives (World Value Survey, 2018). Thus, these cultural patterns offer an explanation to results showing that in Mexican samples, family-satisfaction related variables correlate stronger to SWB than other factors (Beytía, 2016; Rojas, 2018).

Another dimension in Mexican culture that could explain relatively high levels of happiness, pertains to the attitudes towards affective experiences. Individualistic cultures tend to value high activation affective states like excitement and enthusiasm, whereas East Asian collectivistic cultures prefer calmness and tranquillity (Tsai et al., 2006). However, Latin American people value the experience of high activation positive feelings and report experiencing positive affect frequently (Suh & Oishi, 2002). A large body of evidence in the study of cross-cultural differences focuses on comparisons between Western and Eastern cultures, as they are often represented as cultural opposites. Nonetheless, this tendency overlooks differences within cultural dimensions (Ruby et al., 2012). Contrary to East Asian cultures that are more tolerant of negative affective experiences (Diener & Suh, 2003; Suh & Oishi, 2002), Mexicans tend to depreciate such emotions despite experiencing them fairly often (Rojas, 2018; Ruby et al., 2012). The bias towards positive emotions may be key to understanding high levels of SWB in the Latin American region, as it may serve as a coping mechanism to an unfavourable environment. Yamamoto (2016) posits that optimism, the quality of being positive, appreciating current circumstances and adapting to adversity, is ingrained in the psychology of Latin American cultures. Thus, people from such cultures face unfavourable circumstances using optimistic adaptation as a coping mechanism. Although over habituation to traumatic events or challenging circumstances can lead to detrimental health outcomes (Dominguez et al., 2016) optimism and related coping mechanisms are associated with SWB and psychological well-being (Marrero et al., 2014; Prati & Pietrantoni, 2009).

Borrowing from Hofstede's cultural paradigm, these affective patterns pertain to the indulgence vs. restraint dimension. In restricted societies, predominantly found in Eastern Europe, Asia and Muslim countries, gratification, enjoyment and leisure are regulated by social norms. On the contrary, Latin American countries and specially Mexico and Venezuela, score very high in indulgence, which means that they are cultures that place great value on enjoying life and having fun (Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010). Similarly, Triandis (2000) proposes a cultural theme related to the tolerance to deviation from societal norms. Tight cultures have many rules and norms about social behaviour and sanction people if they fail to comply, whereas loose cultures represent the opposite. Thus, tight cultures are associated with lower levels of SWB, as they limit freedom of choice and agency. Building on this concept, Uz (2014) assessed cultural tightness and looseness in 68 societies. Countries like Belgium and Great Britain were amongst the top five in looseness scores, whereas Morocco and Indonesia were amongst the top five in tightness scores. Mexico, however, showed a tendency towards looseness, with scores close to those of Finland and Austria. Arguably, freedom to indulge is a significant characteristic in Mexican culture.

Another distinctive element between Latin American collectivism and East Asian collectivism relates to cultural norms of sharing emotions. The collectivism found in East Asian cultures favours the suppression of personal emotional experiences for the sake of maintaining harmony with others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). However, in Latin American cultures sharing emotions –both positive and negative– is encouraged, as it is a quality of socialisation processes (Diener & Suh, 2003) and fosters closeness in personal relationships – a desirable attribute in Mexican relationships (Klein, 1995). Triandis et al. (1984) identified a pattern of social interaction particular to Hispanic populations called *simpatía*. An individual who is *simpático* is likeable, easy going and fun to be with. Moreover, this individual shows certain levels of conformity, behaves respectfully and politely towards others and strives for harmony in personal relationships. Thus, the *simpático* tends to avoid interpersonal conflict and promotes positive behaviours in positive situations and downplays negative behaviours in negative situations. Although Triandis et al. (1984) posit that there is no English translation to *simpatía,* Ramírez-Esparza et al. (2008) argue that the concept could be understood as similar to agreeableness, the tendency to be compliant, kind, sympathetic and conflict-adverse.

Nonetheless, there is something about Mexican *simpatía* that research has not been able to capture. On one hand, in some studies measuring *simpatía* and related attributes, Mexicans do

not score particularly high (Schmitt et al., 2007). On the other hand, agreeableness is often a problematic dimension in the validation of personality instruments in Mexican samples (Reyes et al., 2014). A possible explanation for these findings might be found in the effects that this cultural pattern has on Mexicans' psyche. Modesty and a rejection of self-enhancement is part of being *simpático,* which could affect scores in self-report measures. In a study using a sample of bilingual Mexican-Americans, differences in mean levels of self-reported agreeableness showed that participants scored higher levels of agreeableness when the questionnaire was in English than when the questionnaire was in Spanish. However, in a subsequent conversational task, higher levels of agreeableness were detected when the interaction was carried out in Spanish rather than English (Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2008). Arguably, the operationalisation of the construct needs to be more refined, so it captures the essence of this cultural pattern.

From the evidence discussed, it can be noted that Mexican culture has distinctive social and emotional patterns, which are congruent with Mexicans' self-concept. La Rosa and Diaz-Loving (1991) found that Mexicans described themselves as socially orientated, polite, accessible, amiable and in-tune with other people's feelings. Moreover, they perceived themselves as emotionally expressive, happy and positive. Although this study used a sample of university students, results from other studies show similar findings. Using a representative sample of people from different age groups across four cities in Mexico, Díaz-Loving (2005) distinguished socio-emotional patterns that prevail in Mexicans' self-concept. In line with the concept of *simpatía* (Triandis et al., 1984) Mexicans view themselves as accommodating, respectful, decent, educated and honest. This tendency to connect to others in a pleasant and constructive manner was also explained by factors such as being calm, obedient, peaceful and tolerant. Moreover, Mexicans value social affection, being loving, caring, generous and considerate. Furthermore, being fun, talkative, jovial, sociable and animated was a cultural style of sociability. On a less positive side, emotional weaknesses and negative emotional power were also characteristics of interaction. The former is depicted by attributes such as being corrupt, lazy, slow and unreliable whereas the latter refers to being aggressive, authoritarian and impulsive. Lastly, researchers identified that the Mexican self also shows agency and instrumental qualities, such as being active, capable and efficient. Nonetheless, they do it in a way that does not risk the needs of the group.

The evidence reviewed shows that Mexican culture strikes a balance between collectivism and individualism that encompasses some of the positive sides of each dimension; relationships

are a priority, but freedom and independence are also valuable. Positive and close relationships are established by expression instead of suppression of feelings and happiness is an ideal, which society gives permission to pursue. This combination seems to act as a buffer to negative societal conditions. Moreover, challenges can be counteracted with optimism and focusing on what is really valuable: family.

Nonetheless, this is not to say that Mexicans SWB are immune to the effects of negative circumstances. **Figure 2** shows fluctuation in levels of life satisfaction, which overlap with significant societal changes: the introduction of free long-distance calls in 2015, the significant increase in fuel prices in 2017 and the presidential winning of the left-wing party in 2018. However, it can be noted that despite these societal changes, levels of satisfaction sustained an upward trend. Comparatively, domain satisfaction data from the same period (**Figure 3**) shows how personal relationships are constantly the highest scores throughout time (Helliwell et al., 2019). Thus, it can be concluded that Mexicans will be happy, as long as they are happy in their ingroup.

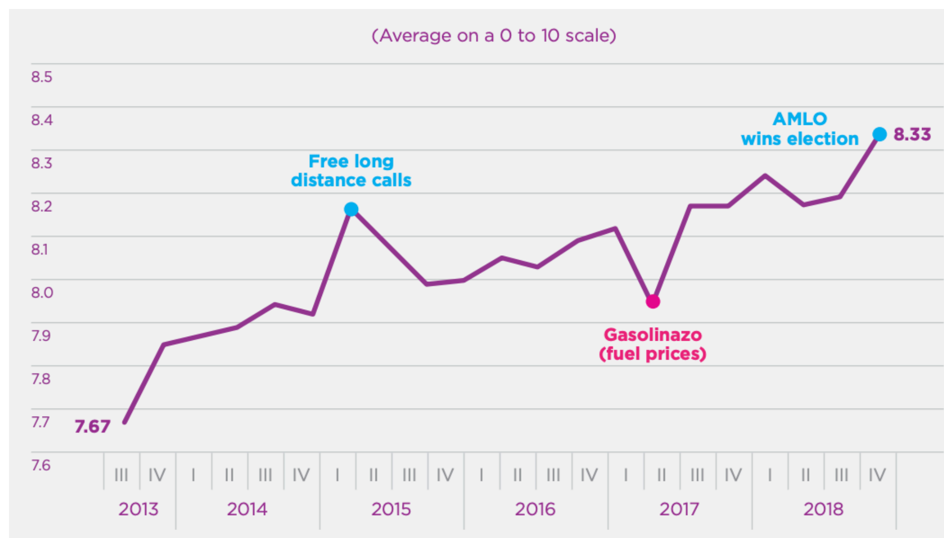

Figure 2. Life Satisfaction in Mexico 2013-2018, from World Happiness Report (p.6) by J.F. Helliwell et al., 2019 by Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

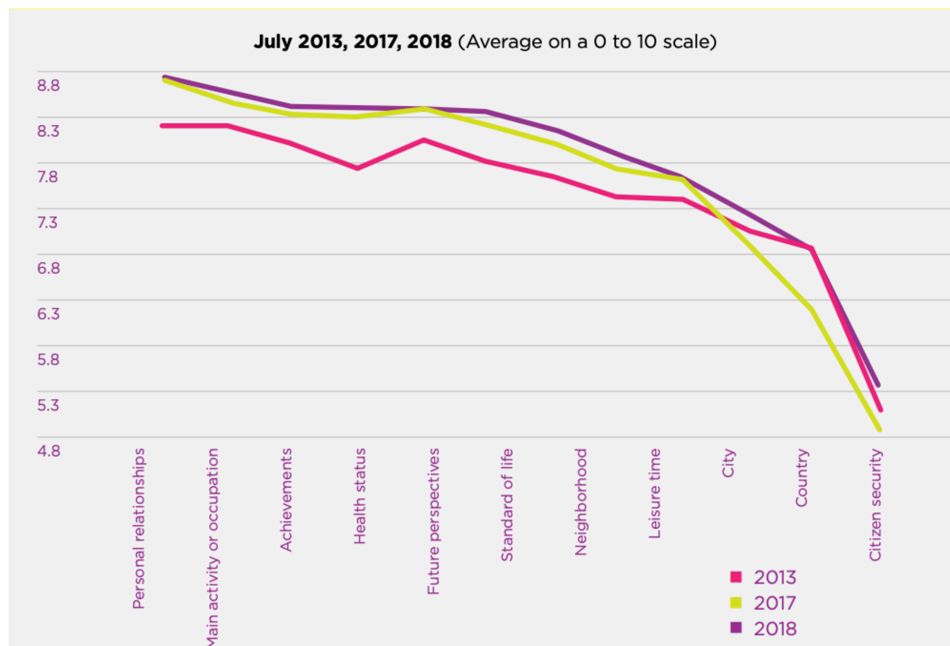

Figure 3. Domain Satisfaction in Mexico 2013-2018 from World Happiness Report (p.5) by J.F.Helliwell, et al., 2019 by Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

2.3.2 British Culture and SWB

Throughout this thesis, it has been argued that most research in the SWB literature – and in the psychological field in general – has been done using WEIRD samples, that is, people from Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic countries (Henrich et al., 2010). Indicators of national income and development show that the United Kingdom, falls within this description (UNDP, 2019; The World Bank, 2021). Consequently, most findings are likely to be generalisable to the UK population.

Similarly with most wealthy Western European and North American countries, the United Kingdom is classified as an individualistic culture. From Hofstede's (1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010) and Triandis (2000) theoretical paradigms, this implies that individuals understand themselves as independent entities instead of members of a group. The self is unique and autonomous and focuses on its personal goals and desires. Moreover, contrary to various collectivistic cultures where behaviour and social interactions are guided by norms, in cultures such as the British, these are driven by personal attitudes and attributes. Hence, self-related factors such as self-esteem and satisfaction with self are relevant predictors of people's happiness (Diener & Diener, 1995; Suh & Oishi, 2002).

Research shows that wealth and individualism are correlated, thus, together, this combination is a strong predictor of national happiness (Steel et al., 2018). Moreover, evidence suggests that positive feelings are associated with the fulfilment of psychological needs that are traditionally fostered in individualistic cultures, such as learning, autonomy and respect, whereas higher income is associated with higher levels of life satisfaction, especially in wealthy countries (Diener et al., 2010). Furthermore, developed countries often score high in levels of other SWB correlates, such as human rights and social equality (Diener et al., 1995). Thus, individualistic cultures not only encourage their members to pursue their personal happiness but also provide the resources and societal conditions to fulfil their desires (Ahuvia, 2002). Nonetheless, wealth and development are not exclusively associated with positive SWB. Research shows that increases in national income are correlated with more negative affective experiences, such as worry and anger (Tay et al., 2014). This could be explained by additional research showing that industrial development is associated with living a more stressful and fast paced life (Ng et al., 2008).

Using the four original dimensions advanced by Hofstede's cultural model (1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010), Steel et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis set to identify the cultural DNA of the 'happy culture'. Results show that at a national level, the happy culture is not only wealthy but also high in individualism and femininity, whereas it is low in power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Nordic sociocultural conditions closely match this description; they are high income countries (The World Bank, 2021) characterised by a generous welfare state, government and institutional quality, high levels of social equality, freedom to make choices and strong levels of trust and social cohesion (Martela et al., 2020). The original analysis by Hofstede (1980) describes the United Kingdom as a culture that strongly promotes independence (high in individualism), with a preference for equality (lesser power-distance), comfortable with ambiguous situations and lax about rules (low in uncertainty avoidance) – the UK is one of the few modern countries that does not have a written constitution.

However, contrary to Nordic countries, which endorse 'feminine' values such as emotional expression and equality in gender roles, the British culture is more inclined to 'masculine' values such as assertiveness, competition, acquisition of things and differentiation in gender roles (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede et al., 2010) which is negatively correlated to SWB (Taras et al., 2017). Moreover, in the 'happy culture' model, power distance effects were mediated by government effectiveness indicators, such as corruption indexes. Despite Britain scoring short

power distance (Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010) recent figures indicate that levels of corruption in the country are not as low as those in most Nordic countries (Transparency International, 2020). Furthermore, contrary to data from Nordic countries (Delhey & Dragolov, 2016) recent figures show that social capital in the UK has declined in the last decade (ONS, 2020a). Thus, even though Nordic countries and the UK share some cultural qualities that are associated with higher levels of SWB, there are fundamental sociocultural differences that could prevent the UK from becoming part of the very happy group. These differences can be traced back in the history of each culture. Since the beginning of the modern era, Nordic countries did not have the feudalism that other European countries had nor a strong class system. Throughout the years, society embraced integration, trust, compromise, equality and a focus on the common good (Martela et al., 2020). Conversely, the class system has been part of British culture historically and it is still reflected in today's society (Lawrence, 2000).

Furthermore, the current sociocultural climate in Britain has changed so radically that Hofstede's cultural scores may no longer apply. His original analysis used data from the late 60's and early 70's (1980). While Hofstede et al. argued that culture changes slowly and tends to be stable for long periods, meaning score dimensions are relevant across time (2010), recent data seem contrary to previous descriptions of British culture. The current exacerbation of social and income inequality (Fransham, 2020) does not reflect the values of a culture with a short power distance and results from the referendum to leave the European Union (EU) fit with the characteristics of a society in need of uncertainty avoidance. Intentions to leave the EU correlated with factors such as seeing the world as a dangerous place, seeing immigrants as a threat and a strong British identity (Van de Vyver et al., 2018). Arguably, these discrepancies between data from the 20th and from the 21st century suggest that British culture has transformed in recent decades and lower levels of SWB may be linked to such changes.

Also relevant to people's happiness, recent figures show that social capital in the UK has declined in the last decade. Feelings of belonging and interaction with neighbours have decreased and so has support between parents and adult children, organisational membership and participation and trust in the government (Office for National Statistics, 2020a). Processes of social stratification and inequality are associated with a decline in social capital (Li et al., 2008). Allan (2008) argues that late modernity, a term that encompasses the period of major social and economic change occurring since the 1970s, has brought a shift in patterns of personal relationship, characterised by more flexibility, fluidity, freedom and choice in social

relationships. For example, rather than a societal institution with prescribed characteristics, marriage is an individual commitment shaped by personal choice and so is having children or ending relationships. Partners create relationships that suit their lifestyles and people reflect more on the quality of the partnership and the extent to which it is fulfilling personal needs and expectations. Similarly, friendships are open and established in the terms set by the individual, albeit sometimes constrained by the social context (e.g. workplace). Consequently, family has been decentred from people's lifestyles in order to focus on relationships that are chosen voluntarily according to interests and compatibility. Suffusion is a concept that refers to the blurred boundaries and overlap between the characteristics of friends and family relationships (Pahl & Spencer, 2004) and the idea of creating 'families by choice', where qualities that were associated with family ties such as care, support, commitment and solidarity are conferred to nonfamily members (Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). Arguably, the quality of having relationships by choice rather than by social norms reflects individualistic values fostered in wealthy industrialised cultures and, although seemingly counterintuitive, evidence shows that people in these cultures have a tendency to be more actively engaged in their relationships by means of intimacy, support and self-disclosure than those in many collectivistic cultures (Kito et al., 2017).

A possible explanation for this tendency lies in the concept of relational mobility, defined as "the degree to which a particular society or group provides individuals with opportunities to choose relational partners based on their personal preference" (Yuki & Schug, 2012, p.137). Research shows that relational mobility tends to be high in individualistic societies and is associated with relevant SWB behaviours such as social support and general trust (Thomson et al., 2018). However, there are negative sides to relational mobility. For example, in the interest of acquiring and retaining friends and partners in a relationship market full of opportunities, individuals are faced with constant relational competition. Moreover, as relationships become disposable, people are required to engage in strategies that will allow them to retain desirable relationships, such as looking for people who are similar and showing commitment by self-disclosing vulnerabilities and providing support (Kito et al., 2017; Oishi, et al., 2015;). In other words, creating and retaining significant relationships in societies high in relational mobility requires effort, however, failing to do so could have negative outcomes such as social isolation and loneliness (Kito et al., 2017), which is a pervasive issue in contemporary British society (Linehan et al., 2014).

High relational mobility often goes in hand with high residential mobility areas. Residential mobility refers to the frequency with which people change their residence (Oishi, 2015). The UK is characterised by a constant flow of people moving in, out and within the country. In the year ending March 2020[7], around 715,000 people moved to the UK and around 403,000 people left the UK (ONS, 2020b). Research shows that residential mobility has implications in shaping people's self-concept, the way they relate to others and different life outcomes (Choi & Oishi, 2020). People who move more throughout their lives rely more on their personality traits to define themselves and feel happier when other people recognise them from their personal attributes. Moreover, frequent movers who value social support tend to spend time with different friends to ensure support availability (Lun et al., 2012) and are more motivated to broaden their social networks, probably as a mechanism to protect themselves from the anticipated loneliness and negative feelings associated with changing place of residency (Oishi et al., 2013). In opposition to this, people who have not moved as much define themselves in terms of the groups they belong to, such as clubs and sport teams and feel happier when people recognise them in terms of their collective self (Oishi et al., 2007). Additional evidence shows that residential stability is associated with a sense of community identity and pro-community behaviour such as supporting other members of the community, local causes and local teams (Oishi et al., 2007).

Thus, although places high in residential and relational mobility represent an opportunity to meet new people, they could also be linked with an eroded sense of belonging and community feeling. Arguably, this could represent a threat for British people's happiness as they value the sense of community. Evidence shows that in Britain, community evokes feelings of belonging, safety, happiness and positive social interactions (Joffe & Smith 2016). Furthermore, the effects of residential and relational mobility also depend on individual characteristics. Personality and social skills play an important role in meeting new people and maintaining relationships. Research suggests that residential mobility could be particularly detrimental for introverts, as it has been associated with higher mortality risk (Oishi & Schimmack, 2010) and chronic experience of negative feelings (Oishi et al., 2012), associations that were not found in extroverts in either of these studies. Such findings highlight the importance of the fit between

[7] Figures from March 2020 onwards were not included because of the impact that COVID-19 had on immigration trends.

an individual's happiness and their culture, environment and personality (see Jokela et al., 2015).

Based on this overview, current societal trends in the UK might be affecting the way people relate to each other. Individualistic cultures tend to look for strong social relationships outside the family (Allan, 2008). In the British culture, a sense of community is strongly valued (Joffe & Smith, 2016; Social Issues Research Centre (SIRC), 2007a) and trusting others, including strangers, is a significant predictor for life satisfaction (Beytía 2011, 2016). Arguably,
the current decline in social capital could be detrimental for British people. Moreover, the literature recognises self-disclosing personal information, weaknesses and vulnerabilities as an important means to signal commitment and maintain relationships (Kito et al., 2017; Oishi, 2015). Nonetheless, British people report being reserved in the expression of their emotions and find it rude subjecting others to their emotions, as it could result in making themselves or others feel embarrassed or uncomfortable (SIRC, 2007b). Thus, establishing strong social bonds could require time and effort, which is not always available in highly heterogeneous fast-paced societies where people are constantly on the move, leaving or arriving.

2.4 The Urban Environment and Subjective Wellbeing

Interactional approaches, such as socioecological psychology (Oishi, 2014) argue in favour of studying psychological phenomena as being a product of the complex interaction between internal and external factors (Ahuvia, et al., 2015). To gain a more complete picture of people's happiness, it is essential to explore the surrounding cultural, societal and environmental conditions. In previous sections, this thesis reviewed individual and objective factors that are associated with SWB across cultures, alongside sociocultural factors in Mexico and the United Kingdom that could influence people's happiness. In the last section of this literature review, environmental factors, particularly the urban environment and its relationship with SWB are discussed. Research on the effects of urbanisation on the individual is becoming increasingly relevant, as cities are the social environment in which more than half of the population in the world are immersed. It is estimated that by 2050, seven in ten people will be living in a city (De Neve & Krekel, 2020). Research in urbanity has highlighted the detrimental sides of cities, such as crowding, crime, pollution and social isolation. Nonetheless, there are positive sides too. Cities are places of opportunity, novelty, education, innovation and creativity (Park & Peterson, 2010).

Mexico City and London are influential capital cities with high population size. London is the capital of the United Kingdom and has a population of around 8.7 million people, with a projection of becoming a megacity between 2029 and 2033, depending on immigration trends (ONS, 2020). Throughout the years, Mexico City has gained a reputation regarding its size and population density, with an approximate population of 19.4 million people. However, this is a result of accounting for not only the population of Mexico City but also of the sprawling metropolitan area. Mexico City itself is home to almost 9 million inhabitants (INEGI, 2020a).

The OECD Regional Wellbeing index (2018) offers regional level data of SWB, alongside levels of objective indicators of wellbeing. Resonating with the national-level analyses, SWB levels (measured as Life Satisfaction) reported by Mexico City dwellers are higher than those reported by London dwellers. The scores in each of the domains measured for Mexico City and London are described in **Table 5.** The maximum score for each dimension is 10.

In terms of life satisfaction (the only subjective measure used in the analysis), London scores 5.9/10. This figure puts London in the penultimate place within cities measured in the United Kingdom and below the average of all OECD regions. On the contrary, life satisfaction represents the highest score within all domains in Mexico City with 8.9/10, placing it in the top 10 highest scoring cities within Mexico and in the top 20% within all OECD regions.

Furthermore, in the World Happiness Report (Helliwell, Layard, Sachs and De Neve, 2020) which includes city-level happiness rankings, London ranks in the 36th place out of the 155 cities measured. Mexico City follows closely, in the 38th place. **Figure 4** provides levels of happiness for London and Mexico City alongside other cities with close scores. The maximum score is 10.

Table 5. OECD Regional Wellbeing Scores (2018)

Wellbeing Dimension	London	Mexico City
Access to services	9.7	4.1
Civil engagement	4.4	4.8
Education	8.8	4.1
Jobs	7.5	6.7
Community	8.4	5.8
Environment	5.0	2.9
Income	6.8	0.8
Health	8.5	0.6
Safety	8.6	0.0
Housing	5.0	1.7
Life Satisfaction	5.9	8.9

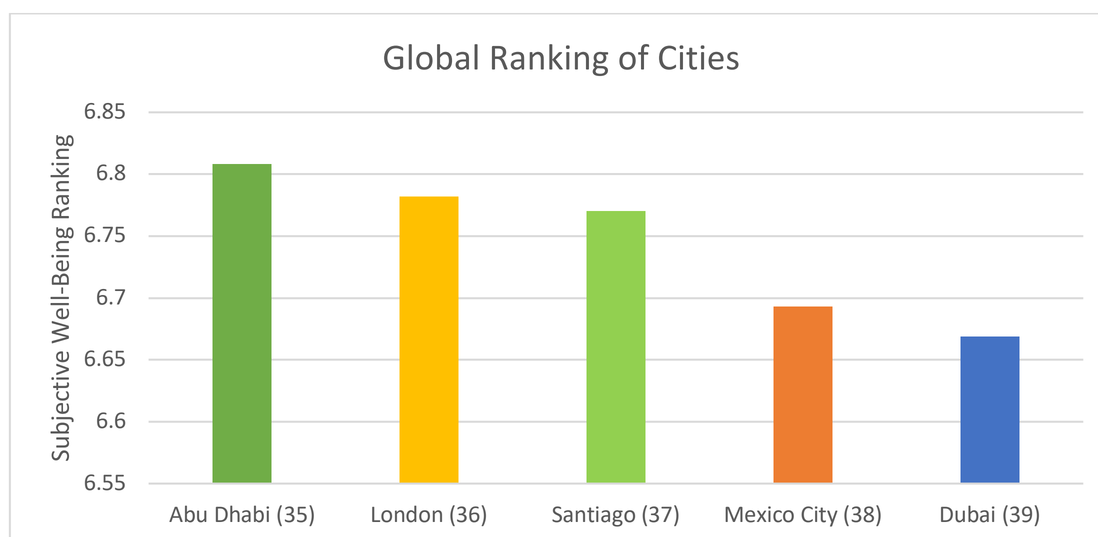

Figure 4. Global Ranking of Cities from the World Happiness Report, 2020 (N=155) Source: Helliwell et al., 2020

Arguably, as reviewed in the previous sections, according to differences in development and wealth, the gap in levels of SWB between Mexico and London would be expected to be

significantly higher, highlighting the importance of considering other factors in order to understand levels of SWB. In the following paragraphs, evidence in the most studied characteristics of the urban environment and its relationship with SWB is reviewed. Findings come from research across different cities, however, when available, data specific to Mexico City and London will be examined.

Veenhoven (2000) describes liveability of environment as the intersection between the qualities of a place and life chances. Arguably, cities are places of variety and opportunity. However, other urban characteristics, such as higher populations sizes have been associated with decreased levels of SWB in Europe (Okulicz-Kozaryn & Valente, 2019). Similarly, research on Latin American shows that living in highly populated cities could exacerbate factors that hinder SWB, such as social comparison and income inequality (Graham & Felton, 2005). However, in Mexico, people in medium-sized cities (15,000-99,000 inhabitants) are significantly less satisfied with their lives than those in smaller (<15,000 inhabitants) or larger cities (>100,000 inhabitants), presumably because medium-size cities have a lot of what is bad in large cities and just few of the benefits of smaller cities (Leyva et al., 2016).

Research shows that different physical and social characteristics of the city have an impact on dwellers' wellbeing (Joffe & Smith, 2016). Features such as climate and weather are associated with differences in levels of happiness. Existing cross-cultural evidence shows an association between milder climates and life satisfaction (Krekel & MacKerron; 2020; Maddison & Rehdanz, 2011). Similarly, weather has been consistently associated with affective experiences and life satisfaction, although the direction of the effects seems mixed. Connolly (2012) found that lower temperatures were associated with happiness and a decrease of negative feelings, whereas rain was linked to less life satisfaction. Likewise, Cunningham (1979) found that sunny days increased people's positive mood and prosocial behaviour. Places with mild temperatures like Mexico City (Climate Data, 2021) could strike the balance between cold and hot. Nonetheless, other factors may influence the effect that weather has on SWB (Ahumada et al., 2020). For example, city dwellers in the UK aspire for warmer temperatures (Joffe & Smith, 2016) but at the same time, the British weather is popularly considered an element of national identity (The Guardian, 2016).

Noise and air pollution are recognised downsides of urban living (De Neve & Krekel, 2020). Noise such as that caused by transport and neighbours (Fujiwara & Lawton, 2020) are

associated with lower levels of SWB and adverse mental health outcomes. Similarly, higher levels of air pollution represent a risk to people's wellbeing as they are associated with negative affective states such as depression and anxiety (Braithwaite et al., 2019) and decreased positive life evaluations (Krekel & MacKerron; 2020). This is especially relevant to Mexico City and London dwellers, as data from local authorities in both cities show that air pollution levels in some areas recurrently exceed recommended values (Calidad del Aire, 2020; Greater London Authority, 2020). Qualitative research shows that Londoners associate air pollution with disgust and distress (Joffe & Smith, 2016; O'Neill et al., 2013;). Similar studies particular to Mexico City dwellers are scarce. Durand and Durand (2004) found that environmental values and awareness were associated with an advance in economic security. Nonetheless, feelings and subjective experiences in regard to quality of the air and environmental pollution in Mexico City is a topic in need of further investigation.

A robust finding in the urbanisation literature is the importance of having access to green spaces. Different methodological approaches (i.e., experimental studies, quasi-experiments, experience sampling and longitudinal studies) consistently find a correlation between living in green areas and happiness (Diener et al., 2015). With more than 3000 public green spaces covering 18% of surface, local authorities proclaim London a 'green city' (Mayor of London, 2021). Correspondingly, qualitative evidence highlights the appeal that green spaces have for UK city dwellers. Joffe and Smith (2016) found that people in London held salient positive attitudes towards parks, as they represented them as pockets of wellbeing within the urban environment. Relevant evidence integrating elements of urban life and happiness is found in results from the Mappiness project. Mappiness is a large UK-based project that tracked participants using GPS location in order to measure affective states at different times and places throughout the day (Mackerron & Mourato, 2020). In Greater London, factors such as noise and pollution were not significantly correlated to SWB, whereas uninterrupted sunshine during the day and mildly warm weather increased people's positive affective states; rain and high winds decreased SWB (Krekel & Mackerron, 2020). Arguably the most important finding was that being in green (e.g. parks and allotments) and blue spaces (e.g. ponds and the River Thames) was a strong happiness booster. Just being outside was found to be beneficial for people's SWB although engaging in outdoor activities such as walking, gardening and sports showed the largest effects. Even after controlling for indirect benefits of the natural environment such as social interactions, the size of the effects that spending time in green and blue spaces have on SWB are equivalent to those of everyday leisure activities such as relaxing.

Although the study has limitations, such as not using a representative sample, it highlights the importance of green and blue spaces in Londoners' happiness.

On the contrary, parks in Mexico City might not be as accessible as in London. In 2009 the Environmental and Land Planning Agency (PAOT) estimated that inhabitants of Mexico City have 14.4m^2 of green space per capita, which is above recommended international guidelines of 9m^2 per inhabitant. Nonetheless, many green spaces are private and/or unevenly distributed, favouring wealthier areas in the city (Fernández-Álvarez, 2012). Moreover, Ayala-Azcárraga et al. (2019) noted that the figure reported by PAOT included all green surfaces, such as private gardens, green roofs and ridges. Researchers found that the use of green spaces in Mexico City and its correlation with SWB depended on factors such as size, accessibility and distance to the park. Furthermore, the SWB associated with park visits was explained by trust in neighbours and other visitors. Thus, people benefited from parks when they were perceived as a safe environment.

The built environment and design of the city also play a role in city dwellers' happiness. Areas with a combination of residential areas and workplaces along with shops and entertainment opportunities increase dweller's SWB and the desirability to live there (Jacobs, 1961). This idea is supported in more recent cross-cultural data. In a study including 10 major cities in the world, Leyden et al. (2011) found that people reported being happier when their city provided access to cultural, leisure and experiential amenities, such as theatres, museums and shops, alongside a good transport system. The cultural offer and opportunities for leisure are vast both in Mexico City and London. Mexico City is home to more than 150 museums (Sistema de Información Cultural (SIC), 2016a), and 160 theatres (SIC, 2016b) while London has more than 200 theatres (Theatres Trust, 2017) and a wide variety of museums (Time Out, 2021). Moreover, positive evaluations of the city such as perceiving it as beautiful and a good place to raise children were also associated with higher levels of happiness.

Furthermore, research shows that the built environment is also connected to people's sense of identity. In Mexico City, places like Plaza de la Constitución (Zócalo), the Cathedral, La Merced Market and Bellas Artes Palace were associated with personal and collective memories that connected Mexico City dwellers with their heritage and history (De Alba, et al., 2020). Similarly, heritage buildings like St. Paul's Cathedral and the London skyline, were found to

be connected to the history and character of the city, which evoked feelings of pride and awe in London dwellers (Joffe & Smith, 2016).

The configuration of the city can foster or hinder social connection, an important element in people's happiness. Mazumdar et al.'s (2017) systematic review shows that social capital is significantly associated with the built environment. More specifically, destination accessibility and walkability were associated with social cohesion, which is the antecedent of social capital (e.g., familiarity and informal social interactions). Similarly, mixed use of land and green spaces positively correlated with social capital. Additional research shows that although most individuals value vibrant cities (Joffe & Smith, 2016), evidence shows a negative correlation between urban vitality and social cohesion, possibly because vitality is associated with higher density of people, which hinders social connection (Mouratidisa & Poortinga, 2020). However, other findings show that density could increase social capital as more people represent more opportunities for social interaction (e.g. Boyko & Cooper, 2014; Mouratidis, 2018).

To summarise, different characteristics of the urban environment are associated with dwellers' SWB. Living in large cities has both positive and negative sides. On one hand, they are vibrant cities with a vast offer of services and amenities, which is associated with SWB. On the other hand, they have high population density and higher levels of noise and pollution, which can be detrimental for people's happiness. Moreover, the city aesthetics, as well as areas that combine residential, workplaces, shops and green spaces are correlated with happiness. Similarly, city design can foster other SWB factors. Research shows that walkability is a significant element associated with social capital, as familiarity and informal interactions can develop into social relationships.

2.5 Literature Review Summary and Critical Reflection

From an interactionist approach, it is argued that in order to understand the differences in levels of happiness it is imperative to place them in their corresponding sociocultural and environmental context. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to provide a review of multiple factors that research shows are associated with SWB. Firstly, universal factors, those that are found to be significant across cultures were examined. Genotype, personality, needs and goals were identified as important predictors of SWB. Although these factors are often deemed internal, the evidence reviewed showed that societal, cultural and environmental circumstances play a

role in their manifestation and interpretation. Thus, such factors should not be understood as completely independent of influences outside the individual (Ahuvia, 2015).

External factors, such as money, social relationships and demographic characteristics were also reviewed. The evidence analysed suggests that money does bring happiness but only to an extent. Seemingly, there is a cap on the amount of money that is associated with SWB. Increases in income are only beneficial under certain circumstances. Moreover, money brings more happiness to people when it is to buy computers than when it is to buy food, as well as when it is spent on others rather than oneself. Positive social interactions and relationships are important for happiness, as they provide support and a sense of mattering and belonging. Lastly, apart from religion, other demographic factors does not seem to be consistently significant associated with SWB. As noted for the internal factors, the strength of the correlation between objective factors and SWB was sensitive to sociocultural influences, which were later examined. Societal conditions in Mexico were identified as adverse, given the high levels of poverty, inequality and corruption. However, levels of happiness are as high as certain wealthy developed countries. It is argued that this could be explained by the focus on positive relationships, strong family ties and the valuing of happiness, which characterise the culture. On the other hand, the British culture benefits from more prosperous societal conditions. Nonetheless, current trends in relational and residential mobility might oppose British cultural values of trust, social connection, community and emotional reserve, which can be hindering people's happiness. The last dimension discussed refers to the urban environment. London and Mexico City are two global capital cities, characterised by high population density. Evidence shows that this characteristic alongside others associated with urbanisation, such as pollution and noise, hinder SWB. However, there is a positive side to cities, such as provision of access to services and amenities. Moreover, cities with mixed use of land (i.e. areas with shops, residential areas and leisure opportunities) and green spaces seem particularly positive for people's happiness. Similarly, cities' walkability is associated with social cohesion and trust, which then can develop into social capital, an important predictor of SWB. At the same time, large cities are associated with less social interaction, which could hinder people's happiness.

Having identified the different factors that are associated with SWB in various dimensions, a question that arises is how people make sense of this factors and connect them to their wellbeing. Most research on SWB adopts a quantitative approach. In fact, Diener (1984) claims that a characteristic of SWB is that it is measurable. Nonetheless, moving on from the question

'how happy are you', the exploration of SWB conceptually could lead to valuable insights into what makes people happy (Kavedžija & Walker, 2017). Qualitative research can delve into individuals' experiences of SWB to understand what makes them happy, which will be the result of the interaction of factors reviewed in this section. Furthermore, cross-cultural comparisons of said experiences have the potential to uncover differences and similarities in SWB, accounting for the mutually interactive dynamic between individual, society and cultures. Stemming from this rationale, this thesis aims to investigate how SWB is experienced and conceptualised among London and Mexico City dwellers, in order to offer an explanation to the similarities in levels of SWB between the two cities.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

"The universe as we know it," as Teilhard de Chardin said, "is a joint product of the observer and the observed." We make progress by a constant spiralling back and forth between the inner world and the outer one, the personal and the political, the self and the circumstance. Nature doesn't move on a straight line, and as part of nature, neither do we"

Gloria Steinem (1992, p.8)

From the large body of evidence reviewed above, one main conclusion can be drawn: happiness is multifactorial. From genes and personality to the social and cultural milieu, many forces interplay in people's SWB. Nonetheless, it can be observed that research in the field has predominantly focused on the capacity of a specific factor to predict SWB, often overlooking the influence that culture has on thoughts and behaviour. The cultural factor has been consistently unaccounted for and 'taken for granted', even though cognitive and affective mechanisms, as well as their manifestations, are intimately linked to the social group and broader culture one belongs to (Moscovici & Duveen, 2000). Arguably, the field needs to be enriched with research that accounts for such multifaceted complexity and does not isolate psychological phenomena from their context.

Social Representations Theory (SRT) is a social psychological framework for the study of psychosocial phenomena in modern societies. It sought to overcome the shortcomings of behaviourism and other epistemological approaches that separate the subject from the object (Sammut et al., 2015; Wagner et al., 1999). A core tenet of the theory is that a social psychological phenomenon can only be understood if it is seen as being embedded in historical, cultural and macrosocial conditions (Wagner et al., 1999). Moreover, it shifts the focus on the

predictive capacity of theory to an interpretative capacity, providing structure to the examination of the complex dynamics between cultural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal psychological processes (Joffe, 1997). By using this theoretical framework in this thesis, SWB switches from being understood as a de-contextualised judgment about life satisfaction and affective experiences, to being recognised as a 'pragmatic manifestation' (Liu, 2004) of the interaction between psychological, social, and cultural forces.

This chapter starts with a brief history of the creation of SRT, followed by a review of its core ideas and tenets, which emphasises its suitability for the study of psychological phenomena from a perspective that is sensitive to sociocultural factors. Then, it delves into the theory of themata, the dyadic oppositions which structure common sense thinking, providing empirical examples. Lastly, research using SRT as a theoretical approach in the sociocultural context of contemporary London and Mexico City is reviewed. It will be highlighted that in the current literature, there is no evidence particular to these cities which connects lay ideas of city life with affective experiences and judgments of life satisfaction.

This chapter provides justification of the use of SRT as a theoretical framework to uncover dwellers' social representations of life in their city and its associations with SWB dimensions. Arguably, the comparison between social representations relevant to SWB in London and Mexico City dwellers, could enhance understanding of what underpins levels of SWB reported by the OECD (2018) and the World Happiness Report (DeNeve & Krekel, 2020).

2.6.1 Social Representations Theory: An Overview

Building on ideas posed by Durkeheim, Lévy-Bruhl, Piaget, Vygotsky and Freud (Jovchelovitch, 2007), Moscovici advanced a novel theory for the study of common sense. In his book, La Psychanalyse: Son Image et Son Public (1961/76), Moscovici explores the dynamics underpinning the incorporation of psychoanalytic scientific knowledge into everyday discourse and lay thinking of different groups, such as communists, Catholics and middle-class professionals, in the context of France in the late 1950's. His systematic analysis of questionnaire, media and interview data revealed the variation in meanings, values and beliefs amongst social groups concerning the concept of psychoanalysis. For example, Catholics appropriated aspects of psychoanalysis that were coherent with Catholic values such as the importance of the family, and omitted those which conflicted, such as its theories concerning

sexuality. Communists were sceptical, given that they associated it with American capitalism, whereas middle-class people showed interest but held diffuse attitudes towards it. Evidence of the heterogeneity in the ideas about psychoanalysis across sectors provided a valuable illustration of the intimate connection between in-group values and the construction and communication of knowledge. Since then, SRT's main concern has been the investigation of the creation, transmission and transformation of common sense thinking by particular groups (Moscovici & Marková, 1998). From this perspective, common sense is equated to social representations, which can be defined as systems of values, ideas and practices that serve to establish social order and facilitate communication (Moscovici, 1973).

However, social representations not only refer to a product but also to a dynamic process (Valsiner, 2003). As a process, social representations emerge with the purpose of making something unfamiliar, familiar (Moscovici, 1984). When a member of a particular group is presented with a stimulus (e.g. an idea, phenomenon or person) which does not already exist in the knowledge catalogue of that group, it is regarded as unknown and strange. This lack of categorisation in familiar terms, can be menacing and disconcerting for the group member (Moscovici, 2001). Consequently, in an effort to provide the stimulus with recognisable properties, it is incorporated into symbolic language by two mechanisms: anchoring and objectification. Anchoring refers to the process of naming and classifying an alien stimulus within known categories and images, whereas objectification refers to the process of turning the abstract phenomenon into something physical and concrete (Moscovici, 1984). Thus, by anchoring and objectification, the strange and novel is incorporated into the social environment, letting individuals regain their sense of mastery over their known universe (Joffe, 1996). Once established as a product, social representations influence social behaviour and identities by guiding and delimiting social interaction and socio-cognitive processes (Sammut & Howard, 2014).

In summary, social representations give meaning and sense to the material and social world; it is this 'sense' that is exchanged by members of a group (Abreu Lopes & Gaskell, 2015). To date, the application of the theory has expanded beyond the study of the 'popularisation of science' to the exploration of everyday conceptualisations (Wagner, 1998) of a vast range of social phenomena (for a comprehensive review, see Wagner & Hayes, 2005) in a variety of social and cultural conditions. Within the SRT literature, it is possible to distinguish different underlying epistemologies and approaches such as the classical school, the structural school

and the socio-dynamic approach. The classical school, started by Serge Moscovici and refined by Denise Jodelet, is at the core of the theory and studies representations through language and social action of a particular group with an emphasis on the role of context. The works of Jean-Claude Abric and Claude Flament advanced the structural approach, also known as the Aix-en-Provence School, which investigates the psycho-cognitive processes that allow social representations to be stable and flexible at the same time. The Geneva socio-dynamic approach led by Willem Doise studies social representations as spaces for symbolic exchange between individuals' social metasystem (i.e. normative societal schemes) and mental universe (Rubira-García, et al., 2018). Other approaches include the dialogical approach (Marková 2003) and the narrative approach (Liu & László, 2007), which have also made significant contributions to the theory. Nonetheless, regardless of the approach, SRT studies the networks of concepts, symbols, images and metaphors embedded in the thinking of groups and communities, and the creation of social realities through tradition, communication and experience (Marková, 2012).

2.6.2 Social Representations, a Window to Society and Culture

"Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)"
-Walt Whitman p.107

Moscovici (1988) argued that the main aim of the theory of social representations is to use everyday communication and thinking as a window to examine the link between human psychology and modern social and cultural trends. Societies, their rituals, symbols, institutions, norms, and values are underpinned by their history and culture (Moscovici, 2000), and so are the social representations that form and transform within them (Duveen, 2007). In this theoretical framework, society, culture and an individual's cognition are regarded as mutually constitutive and interdependent elements of the same system (Raudsepp, 2005). Thus, research on social representations is inherently research on culture (Moscovici & Marková, 1998).

Social representations reflect the fluidity and plurality in beliefs, knowledge, and practices characteristic of modern societies (Jovchelovitch 2007) and are sensitive to sociocultural changes and exchanges inherent in the modern world (Duveen, 2007). Thus, they are always in the making, constantly formed and transformed (Howarth, 2006; Marková, 2012). In line with such heterogeneity and dynamism, three different types of social representations can be

distinguished according to their scope of consensus: hegemonic, emancipated, and polemical (Moscovici, 1988).

Hegemonic representations are those which are widely shared by members of a highly structured group (i.e. city or a nation) and prevail implicitly in symbolic or affective practices. Emancipated representations are those formed in subgroups that have extended their reach to other groups and no longer belong exclusively to the subgroup where they were created. Each subgroup creates its own version of the social representation and shares it with the others. Lastly, polemical representations are those generated during conflict and social controversy and are shared only by some members of society (Duveen, 2007; Jovchelovitch 2007). Thus, hegemonic representations are stable, subconscious, and deeply embedded in everyday life, whereas emancipated and polemical representations imply reflection and need to be defended and legitimised by argument and debate (Duveen, 2007). Hegemonic representations and polemic representations are highly consensual, nonetheless, polemic representations are not held by society as a whole; therefore, they lack objectification in social institutions and widespread practices. Emancipated representations are characteristic of diverse and politically open societies and are enabled by the diffusion of knowledge by mass media and intergroup exchanges. In contemporary societies, all of these types of representations co-exist (Jovchelovitch 2007). Consequently, when analysing the social representations of phenomena in a particular group, inconsistency, conflict and tension around ideas and knowledge about the same concept is expected (Marková, 2012).

Social representations are informed by cultural values (Duveen, 2005). In SRT, culture can be understood as the foundational set of representations that provides structure to a group by guiding the way its members make sense of the world, others and themselves. Accordingly, the salience and nature of the categories and objects available for anchoring and objectification processes are guided by these overarching cultural structures, meanings, and practices (Marková, 2005). Thus, cultural values are accessible through the study of social representations, as they are manifestations of culture (Duveen, 2007).

However, this is not to imply that the relationship between culture and social representations is unilateral. Marková (2012) advises against understanding culture as simply the context or container in which social representations arise and are communicated, given that both social representations and culture are forces that constitute one another, and their interaction with

each other is what establishes people's position towards phenomena. Changes in culture are possible through the dynamics of social representations. Over time, polemical representations started by minorities seeking change, could become part of the culture of a group (Duveen, 2007). For example, a review of research on social representations of gender minorities showed that gender is mostly understood in terms of the traditional binary male-female across cultures. Nonetheless, researchers highlighted that when gender was represented as an unique subjective experience associated with human rights, the heteronormative understanding of gender weakened, opening the possibility for a social representation of gender that goes beyond women-men (Ferrari & Mancini, 2020). Arguably, the extent to which this latter representation is embraced by people and reflected in society (for example, the existence of gender neutral toilets in public spaces), could prompt a cultural shift in structural representations (themata) of gender.

Moreover, it should not be assumed that cultures are homogenous, static, and delimited. In line with social representations, cultures in the modern world, are porous and fluid, therefore, they are not clear-cut. However, boundaries between cultures are identified in processes of acculturation (Duveen, 2007). This is evident in Jovchelovitch and Gervais' (1999) research on social representations of health and illness held by the Chinese community in England. Data from participants of different occupation, age and level of acculturation revealed that social representations of health and illness were overarchingly permeated by traditional Chinese knowledge, such as the principles of balance and harmony. Across participants, food ingredients, alongside their preparation and consumption rituals were central to the representation of health and illness: good food fostered health and prevented and cured illness. Furthermore, food rituals were identified as one of the main vehicles of transmission for health beliefs. Nonetheless, older and less acculturated members of the community found it easier to sustain Western and Chinese beliefs around health without conflicts. Their identity was predominantly Chinese, they spoke little or no English and in line with their tradition, they used both sources of knowledge pragmatically. However, younger participants and those who came to Britain as teenagers struggled to reconcile the beliefs grounded in their heritage and origins with those from the culture they were integrated into. The encounter of divergent frameworks of knowledge and practices required these individuals to negotiate and create new identities. Thus, acculturation weakened the structural network of representation that guided the younger participants on how to make sense of the world, resulting in identity conflict.

2.6.3 Themata: the Building Blocks of Cultural Reasoning

The close examination of the cultural structure that moulds social representations is an area of increasing interest in the field. For this purpose, the theory of themata provides a valuable framework to delve into the 'deep structures' that underpin social representations (Liu, 2004) and cultural thinking (Duveen, 2007).

The starting point of the theory of themata is that a fundamental feature of human cognition is to classify and understand phenomena in the form of antinomies. Antinomies are features of logic, language and communication in all cultures, although their organisation and salience are specific to each culture and society (Marková, 2012). Themata refer to such dyadic oppositions that lie at the root of common sense and guide the way a group makes sense of the world (Smith et al., 2015).

The idea of themata in SRT was inspired by its application in physics, advanced by Gerald Holton (1975). Holton posed that dyadic oppositions such as 'constancy – change' and 'complexity – simplicity', are basic elements that structure and constrain scientific thinking. Thus, throughout the years and across cultures, themata have been implicitly part of the development of knowledge (Marková, 2015). For instance, antinomies have been particularly relevant for the study and understanding of cultures (see Nardon and Steers, 2009). Triandis' cultural syndromes (2000) pose dyadic opposites that organise and characterise cultures around a thema, such as 'complexity - simplicity' according to the variety of roles and choices available in a society, and 'tightness - looseness' to conceptualise cultures in terms of tolerance to deviation to rules and norms. Hosftede's cultural dimensions (1980, 2011) include antinomies such as 'masculinity - femininity', which relate to the division in emotional roles between women and men, 'short-term orientation - long-term orientation' to classify if members focus their efforts on the future, present or past, and 'indulgence - restraint', which refers to the cultural tendency to gratify or control desires. Trompenaars (1993) proposes cultural characteristics such as 'universalism – particularism' to determine if rules are applied equally to all members or exceptions are made in rule enforcement and 'achievement – ascription', which refers to how respect and status are accorded in society. Similarly, Schwartz (1994) defines cultures in terms of 'hierarchy – egalitarianism', that is, the extent to which equality is valued and expected, 'mastery - harmony', the extent to which members seek to change the natural and social world to advance personal or group interests, and 'conservatism

– autonomy', the extent to which individuals are integrated in groups. Moreover, the dyad 'individualism – collectivism', which refers to the cultural tendency to regard the self as independent or interdependent of the rest of the group, has been crucial to conceptualise and typify cultures in the fields of cultural and cross-cultural psychology (Hofstede et al., 2010; Nardon & Steers, 2009; Triandis, 2000).

In addition, Holton (1973) emphasises that themata not only underpin the sciences, but human knowledge in general. Hence, themata represent the fundamental structures that bridges science and common-sense. Whilst Holton's concerns relate to the themata that underpin scientific explanations, in SRT, the focus is on the themata that underpin everyday knowledge and beliefs (Marková, 2015, 2017). Nonetheless, there are some differences between scientific and non-scientific (common sense) themata. For the development of science, only a number of oppositions are relevant, and their communication is restricted to experts committed to a particular thema. On the contrary, non-scientific themata are infinite, as they are not committed to a specific interest and are openly communicated in public discourse. In turn, these characteristics give rise to the dynamic nature of themata, and explain the dynamism of social representations.

Physical themata (e.g. warm – coldness) biological themata (e.g. wellness – sickness) and social themata (e.g. self – other) (Marková, 2017) are the building blocks that structure people's common sense understanding of phenomena (Smith et al., 2015). These polarities are interdependent and co-exist in a complementary rather than conflicting way, operate at a nonconscious level, and are shared by communities. Although there are many dyadic oppositions underpinning human thinking, they become themata when sociocultural circumstances require them to resurface to the realm of reflection and discussion as sources of conflict and/or topics of interest. Furthermore, as 'deep structures', themata are not directly observable. They are accessible via their manifestations, that is, the content and meanings revealed in narratives, explanation and rationalisation in people's process of thematisation (Liu, 2004).

Tensions and disputes showcase individuals' ability to question and interpret a thema[8] in a variety of ways (Liu, 2004). As a result, they are prone to change, transformation or even

[8] Thema is the singular of themata

extinction (Marková, 2017). Thus, the concept of themata operationalises the interdependence between individuals, society and culture that is essential to SRT (Marková, 2003), as they originate from individual and collective forces. They are shared and communicated by the community but at the same time, individuals' expression and interpretation of themata is subject to their own experiences, psychology and circumstances (Marková, 2015). Hence, research on social representations in regard to a specific phenomenon and the themata underpinning such representations, casts light not only on the building blocks of cultural reasoning but also on its interactions with the individual mind.

For example, similar to the topic of interest of this thesis, De Paola et al. (2020) studied the social representations and themata underpinning the concept of happiness in Finland by analysing pictures uploaded to the social media platform Instagram. Using thematic analysis, they found that happiness on Instagram was construed by social relationships, physical appearance, free time, nature, success, pets and material possessions, which were mainly anchored to feelings of gratitude and pride. Further analysis revealed that underpinning these anchors was the 'self-oriented – other-oriented' thema, where gratitude was directed towards others and pride towards oneself. The researchers speculate that striking a balance between individuality – collectivism is a dilemma that reflects the late transition in Finland from an agrarian-collectivistic society to an industrial-individualistic one. Taken together, the findings made tangible the content and images that form social representations of happiness in Finnish culture, as well as revealing the organising principles that underpin them.

Another relevant example is Liu's (2006) investigation of the social representations and underlying themata of quality of life in contemporary Chinese culture. Results showed that lay thinking concerning quality of life was represented in terms of five main domains: health, family, work, social relations, and the natural environment. Moreover, further analysis identified that the 'having – being' thema was an overarching force underlying such representations. 'Being' reflected Chinese values of rootedness, connectedness, and mutual commitment between self and others, whereas 'having' prioritised material possessions and consumption, which reflected the ongoing economic transformation in contemporary China. 'To be' and 'to have' are forces that do not act on their own; it is their interrelatedness that shape the meaning of quality of life for Chinese people, according to their traditional and modern values.

2.6.4 Social Representations in London and Mexico City Dwellers

In current literature, there are not many empirical studies using SRT on phenomena linked to SWB that focus on London and even less so on Mexico City. Nonetheless, existing evidence offers valuable insights into social and cultural elements that could influence individuals' judgments of life satisfaction and affective experiences in these particular contexts.

For example, Joffe and Smith (2016) explored dweller's aspirations for cities of the future in London and Birmingham. Overall, desires for the city included physical and social elements, such as diverse services and facilities, green spaces and sense of community, although some representations were shared by many and others were particular to some demographic groups. For example, liveliness of the city and mentions of services and facilities was more salient in higher socio-economic groups compared to lower socio-economic groups. Representations of the city as too busy, noisy and detrimental to wellbeing were more prominent in women than in men. Moreover, white dwellers were more likely than British minority ethnic dwellers to experience the city in a positive light. Arguably, these findings highlighted the societal privilege and power that white men have held throughout history. Other findings included the strong association between nature and health, relaxation, and escape. Green spaces were regarded as highly desirable, given that when living in an urban environment there are not many opportunities for contact with nature. The researchers suggest that the longing for nature is rooted in the Romantic Movement of the 17th century, which idealised rural settings and has lingered throughout generations in the British psyche. Nostalgia was also present in terms of sense of community and the associated feelings of warmth, happiness, and safety. Children playing outside, bobbies patrolling the street on foot, and frequenting local shops, pubs and community centres were symbols of a time of neighbourly connection that city dwellers craved in the present and wished for in the future. On the contrary, contemporary society was predominantly represented as bad, associated with gangs and shopping centres with dull shopping chains, which threatened the social representation of the city's character. Together, findings reflected the qualities of the city that London and Birmingham city dwellers conceptualised as sources of happiness.

Addressing the relevance that weak ties have on SWB, Zeeb and Joffe (2021) investigated the social representations and motivations for social connection with strangers in London and Birmingham. They found that strangers were represented as 'good' when they were friendly,

interesting and worthy of support, whereas 'bad' strangers were those who were conceptualised as dangerous, rude and annoying. Additionally, results showed that context played an important role in people's representations of strangers and desire to interact with them. Semi-public spaces such as shops and sports stadiums were associated with 'good' strangers and openness to social interaction, which was underpinned by a sense of affinity that made the stranger more familiar. On the contrary, the 'bad' stranger was associated with public spaces (e.g., streets) and night time. Open spaces and darkness were associated with a lack of sense of control of the environment, vulnerability and unsafeness, which in turn, led to social disconnection. Similarly, a busy and hectic environment was associated with the rude, unavailable and distracted-with-their-phone 'bad' stranger, particularly in London. Furthermore, more in-depth analysis revealed that the 'good-bad' and 'self-other' themata shaped the conceptualisations of strangers in the city. City dwellers moved between polarities, which emphasises the dialogical nature of common sense. Strangers were deemed as 'good' when they were closer to conceptualisations of the self, whereas 'bad' strangers did not possess qualities of the self, causing negative feelings, rejection and avoidance. In conclusion, this study facilitates understanding of the dynamics that underpin social interaction with strangers in the context of two British cities by identifying the social representations of strangers and the foundations that guided such beliefs and thinking.

In the context of Mexico City, de Alba González (2017) investigated the social representations and experiences of everyday life and their relationship with the concept of quality of life of older Mexico City dwellers. Analysis showed that quality of life was enhanced by the sense of belonging and attachment to the city, which was rooted in participant's life history and familiarity with the environment. Moreover, positive affective experiences were also associated with the opportunities for growth and development that the city had provided them. Nonetheless, quality of life was strongly associated with family and friends. Most interviewees lived with their adult children and grandchildren, who were represented as sources of support and positive feelings, as long as they made them feel loved, integrated and looked after. Those who lived on their own, sought interaction, although it became harder as they became weaker and lost mobility, as traffic and long distances were represented as obstacles to social interactions in the City. Similarly, friends were identified as a source of wellbeing for the elderly because they represented people to bond over the same tastes, experiences, and stories. Cultural centres, sports clubs, and churches were represented as spaces for socialisation and recreation that increased quality of life. Moreover, participants enjoyed going to the

cinema, workshops, museums, and public spaces assigned for dancing. The cultural offer was conceptualised as a distinctive element of Mexico City that fostered wellbeing. Other elements of the built environment such as the Historic Centre and La Alameda, were associated with positive experiences, given their walkability, aesthetics, and atmosphere. Moreover, green spaces represented places for resting, leisure, social interaction, and relaxation. They were associated with positive feelings and nostalgia, given that they reminded the elderly of times when Mexico City was greener, as it was not as populated as it is now.

On the contrary, the experience of insecurity, saturation and others' impatience were characteristics of the city that negatively affected older dwellers' quality of life; navigating a rushed and busy city made them feel overlooked and uncomfortable, leaving them with a sense of vulnerability. In the urban jungle, the elderly felt that only those strong enough to keep up the pace and to fight for a place (literally and symbolically) were capable of surviving. Long distances within Mexico City, the lack of courtesy on the streets and the saturation of spaces, were aspects of the city that made participants struggle with mobility. Furthermore, all participants represented the City as unsafe and expressed living with fear of being mugged, assaulted or abducted. Similarly, they worried for the safety of their loved ones. In addition, quality of life was also decreased by the anxiety associated with the negative representations of *'the future of Mexico City'*, which made them worry about younger generations. They represented the city as chaotic, anarchic, unliveable, polluted, overpopulated and as having deficient services, which in turn, will affect future opportunities for good education and employment. Participants expressed that not everyone had the financial resources to access services associated with quality of life, blaming local and national authorities for social inequality. Similarly, they expressed a lack of trust in institutions and authorities and deemed government's efforts to increase quality of life insufficient. Overall, findings from this research shed light on which aspects of Mexico City fostered or hindered quality of life in elderly dwellers.

2.6.5 Social Representations in the Forthcoming Empirical Study

From the research outlined above, it is possible to differentiate two approaches to the study of happiness. On one hand, De Paola et al. (2020) and Liu (2006) look directly into the social representations of happiness and quality of life (a related concept of SWB, see Diener et al., 2018) respectively. On the other hand, Zeeb and Joffe (2021) and Joffe and Smith (2016)

approached SWB indirectly by exploring representations of phenomena that are correlated with life satisfaction and affective experiences. As this thesis focuses on the role of sociocultural contexts in shaping SWB, the first study takes a similar approach to de Alba González (2017) and explores social representations of the experience of living in London and Mexico City. However, instead of matching such representations with the concept of quality of life, it connects them with the dimensions of SWB: life satisfaction, positive feelings and negative feelings (Diener et al., 2017; Oishi, 2012) in order to identify the cultural, social and individual factors that weigh on people's happiness. Furthermore, based on the results of the first study and evidence showing the importance of family in Mexican culture, the second study delves into the social representations of family and their associations to SWB dimensions in London and Mexico City dwellers.

Much research using SRT focuses on one culture, however, cross-cultural studies provide valuable data on sociocultural specific factors by way of the comparisons they allow. For example, by comparing social representations of earthquakes held by dwellers of highly seismic places (Seattle, U.S., Izmir, Turkey and Osaka, Japan), Joffe et al. (2013) found that although fear and anxiety were prevalently associated with earthquakes across cultures, in Seattle dwellers, there was also a sense of awe and fascination. In Osaka dwellers, the main object of fear was one's and others wellbeing, whereas responses in Izmir dwellers, were loaded with negative emotions such as anger and blame, alongside negative evaluations of the government's competence and the morality of society. Thus, the studies of this thesis aim to provide a comparison of social representations of city life and family between London and Mexico City dwellers and their association with SWB dimensions, in order to expand knowledge on cultural, social and individual factors that could explain why Mexico City and London dwellers report similar levels of SWB, in spite of living in very different circumstances.

2.7 Theoretical Framework Summary

This section has presented the theoretical framework for the proceeding empirical chapters: Social Representations Theory. It has provided a brief history of the theory and has introduced its core ideas, including the conceptualisation of the individual, society and culture as mutually constitutive. This is particularly relevant for the study of SWB, given that, as seen in the

literature review, SWB is associated with a variety of factors, which research tends to examine in isolation. Moreover, it has explained how social representations are a window to culture and has introduced the concept of themata, the foundational antinomies that structure common sense thinking. Furthermore, research using SRT as a theoretical approach has been discussed, with an emphasis that in existing literature, there are no investigations of SWB in the context of London and Mexico City from this theoretical perspective. Lastly, the use of SRT in the forthcoming studies has been explained, highlighting the value of exploring social representations of the same phenomena in two different cultures for advancing understanding of social and cultural forces that influence people's SWB

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology used for the two cross-cultural studies undertaken for this thesis: an exploration of London and Mexico City dwellers' experiences in the city and the in-depth analysis of representations of family in London and Mexico City dwellers. In both studies, the focus of the investigation is to identify how representations of each of these topics are associated with positive feelings, negative feelings and life satisfaction. Thus, the chapter begins with the rationale for the exploration of SWB through interviews, as well as an outline of the types of interviews in qualitative research. It then presents the Grid Elaboration Method (GEM), an interview-based free association task used for the elicitation of naturalistic and spontaneous data. After assessing the strengths of using free association in qualitative research methods, the chapter outlines the steps taken to ensure the quality of the research. Following this, the procedure undertaken for both studies in this thesis is described, covering the design of the sample, participant recruitment, interview procedure and the methods used to analyse the data: content and thematic analysis. The chapter ends with a reflexive discussion of the interview process and possible factors that could have influenced the interviews and the analysis.

3.1 Rationale for the Interview Study

Research in SWB has relied heavily on quantitative approaches to measure people's levels of SWB and to determine causes and correlators that could explain such levels, which are core interests of the field (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999). However, quantitative methods require those responding to the surveys to reduce their experiences of wellbeing to numerical representations (Thin, 2018). Thus, little is known about individuals' sense-making, meaning and construction of such experiences. Moreover, research shows that a wide variety of factors are associated with SWB (see **Chapter 2**). Nonetheless, evidence showcasing how these forces shape and interact with each other is scarce, potentially because such dynamics are too complex to capture using quantitative methods. Arguably, qualitative methods can overcome such limitations, as they allow the in-depth examination of people's own explanations and experiences of wellbeing. Furthermore, the comparison of such meanings and experiences between two cultures provides a pathway for the identification of sociocultural forces influencing people's common sense thinking. Thus, in order to understand levels of SWB in

London and Mexico City beyond what different quantifiable factors can explain, this thesis delves into dwellers' everyday thinking via interviews.

Qualitative interviews are widely used in social research, as a method to map people's motives, meanings, interpretations and common-sense theories (Hopf, 2004). Gaskell (2000) characterises interviewing as a technique to access the 'lifeworld' of the individual or a given group of people. The aim of the interview is to capture phenomena of interest as seen by respondents, which represents a shift from more traditional research methods in social psychology, such as surveys, where participants are asked to express their perspectives through the selection of pre-defined options. Arguably, confining participants to a limited selection of answers that may not be representative of the way they understand a given topic may result in distorted psychological data (O'Connor & Joffe, 2014). In contrast, although with some limitations, interviews can provide a more ecologically valid and complex depiction of the way in which people represent phenomena (Cicourel, 1982).

Nonetheless, when using interviews as a research method, one must be aware of their limitations. Firstly, the interview is an artificial social situation and therefore it does not fully capture social phenomena as they manifest in the 'real world'. Participants in this study elaborate on their experiences in the city and their representations of family, however, through an interview, the researcher cannot observe how dwellers' engage and interact with the environment nor with their families in their everyday lives. Moreover, important elements of communication such as non-verbal cues, facial expressions and changes in tone associated with emotional reactions can be lost during the transcription of the data (Gaskell, 2000). Furthermore, contrary to focus groups where meanings and perspectives are negotiated within the group, interviews are individualistic, therefore they do not capture social behaviour beyond the interview context. Additionally, such one to one interaction with the researcher raises a common challenge of interview research, social desirability bias, the tendency to report desirable attributes and underreport socially undesirable attitudes (Latkin et al., 2017). This issue is especially salient when studying cultures like that in Mexico, as research suggests that people from collectivist cultures are more prone to show this bias (Lalwani et al., 2006).

Despite interviews' limitations, it is important to recognise that all research methods have strengths and weaknesses, and each of them capture aspects and dimensions of socio-psychological phenomena to different extents (O'Connor, 2013). Hence, the researcher needs to make decisions about the best research method, according to the research questions and

dimensions of interest (Flick & Foster, 2008). In this thesis, delving into city dwellers' sense-making and affective experiences was the main objective. For this reason, focus groups and participant observation were discarded, as they do not offer the same opportunity to capture participants' narratives in the same depth as interviews with individuals.

3.2. Interviewing as a Research Method

This section reviews aspects to consider when using interviewing as a research method. It starts by presenting different types of interview design and then elaborates on the value of free association, the technique in which the GEM (Joffe & Elsey, 2013) is based. Following this, it critically discusses aspects that must be considered and reflected upon before undertaking interview research: participant selection, quality criteria and the interpersonal context.

3.2.1 Interview Design

Interviewing is a widely used research method in social research and across disciplines there are numerous procedures that can be followed. However, an important aspect to question when distinguishing between types of interviews is the extent to which the researcher is oriented by pre-formulated questions during the interviewing process (Hopf, 2004). Structured interviews are those where questions and response categories are predetermined by the researcher. In contrast, unstructured interviews are those where the researcher has, at most, a list of topics to discuss, but the interview is mostly led by the participant. Semi-structured interviews are those where the researcher has a list of questions but there is space for the participants to raise issues that the researcher has not anticipated (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Which of these strategies is employed depends on the nature of the research project and the research questions under study. Unstructured interviews are used in anthropology and sociology in order to elicit people's social realities through spontaneous conversation between the participant and the researcher (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Structured interviews are most common for quantitative projects, as they aim to obtain specific information. Semi-structured interviews are the most frequent type of interviews in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Qualitative research, and more specifically, the Social Representation Theory (SRT) tradition, often aims to identify symbolic, affective and cultural elements in representations of phenomena. Specific and pre-set questions are not the best way to elicit this type of material, as they target reasoned-based and easily accessible information (Joffe, 2012; Joffe & Elsey, 2014). Thus, the more flexible, reflective and unconstrained narratives produced by unstructured and semi-structured methods

align best with the objectives of SRT research. The GEM (Joffe & Elsey, 2013) is presented in the next section as a useful technique to loosely structure participants' elaborations without the need to have pre-defined interview questions.

3.2.2 Free Association and the Interview Process

The interviewing technique used in the two cross-cultural studies in this thesis is the GEM, a free association-based technique designed to elicit people's naturalistic and spontaneous thoughts, feelings and behaviours about a given topic (Joffe & Elsey, 2014). The GEM consists of a free association task that is then followed by an interview in which each of the free associations is further elaborated.

Free association has played a crucial role in the development of psychological knowledge. In the late 19th century, Galton (1879) explored the nature of free associations by recording thoughts that came to mind while walking in London. He noted that certain thoughts were consistently associated with a particular object in the environment every time he did the walk. Later on, Wundt and colleagues developed Galton's work in a more systematic way, using larger sample sizes. However, the more experimental fashion of their work sacrificed some of the depth seen in Galton's work. Nonetheless, with Freud, free association was developed as a therapeutic technique to explore unconscious emotional conflicts that rooted patients' symptoms (Joffe & Elsey, 2014).

Thus, the value of the free association lies in its capacity to access areas of the mind beyond the analytic and deliberative, prompting the spontaneous, unconscious and emotional to emerge. Contemporary free association approaches within SRT research include that used by Moloney, Hall, and Walker (2005) to explore the core-periphery elements of social representations and the free association narrative interview (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 2008). In Moloney et al.'s (2005) experimental paradigm, representations of blood and organ donation were examined using reflective (e.g. questionnaire) and non-reflective (free association) tasks, under the premise that both processes could yield different responses (Marková, 1996). By asking participants to free associate on the issue of study in different contexts, researchers identified subjective meanings of blood and organ donation and distinguished which elements of such representations were central and non-refutable (core) across participants and which were more flexible and personal to the individual (periphery).

Outside experimental paradigms, the Free Association Narrative Interview method (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 2008) draws on psychoanalytic theory and procedures to uncover subjective and nonconscious meanings of social issues such as crime. By use of this method, interviewees are perceived as revealing unconscious mental material through the choices they make in telling particular aspects of their story. During the interview, the input of the researcher is reduced to prompt elaboration through minimal intervention, such as repetition of the interviewee's phrasing, in order to not distort the naturalistic structure of the narratives. Interpretations of the interviews are triangulated afterwards by having both the interviewer and another researcher give their perspectives and a list of tailored questions is produced for a second interview in order to go more in-depth into the dominating themes of the first interview.

Similarly to the techniques outlined above, the GEM was devised as a method to elicit naturalistic thoughts and feelings that people hold in relation to a particular phenomenon. Capitalising on the strengths of the free association, the GEM is a tool to access people's more implicit and affective dimensions of representations. In the first part of the method, the researcher begins the interview by presenting the participant with an A4 sheet of paper containing four empty boxes and a written instruction to write or draw in each box any image, word or feeling that comes to mind when prompted about the research topic.

During the second part of the method, participants are asked to elaborate on each of their associations (Joffe & Elsey, 2014). Thus, the first part of the GEM elicits emotive and experiential data, by allowing participants to express freely and spontaneously as, apart from a single prompt, there are no predefined questions or categories. This feature distinguishes the GEM from 'why?', 'how?' and 'when?' questions commonly used in semi- structured interviews, which prioritise reason-based explanations (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Moreover, the elaboration phase of the GEM allows subjective meanings to be further expressed with minimal input from the researcher, which lets complexities and nuances around phenomena emerge (Joffe & Elsey, 2014). The GEM has been used to capture people's representations of a variety of issues, such as earthquakes (Joffe et al., 2013), global warming (Smith & Joffe, 2013), chronic pain (Keen et al., 2021) and strangers in the city (Zeeb & Joffe, 2021). Hence, in this thesis, the GEM is used as a tool to explore dwellers' subjective experience, in order to identify naturalistic cognitive and affective dimensions associated with living in the city and family.

3.2.3 Participant Selection

Braun and Clarke (2013) argue that the central characteristic that distinguishes qualitative research as a field is that it is interested in meaning, rather than numbers. Thus, the selection of participants in qualitative and quantitative methods is guided by different criteria. While quantitative projects aim to use statistically representative samples to increase the validity of the results (Gaskell, 2000; Yardley, 2000), qualitative projects need a sample that is appropriate to the research topic and that provides an adequate amount of data to conduct an analysis that answers the research question (Morse & Field, 2002).

The target group of this research project are London and Mexico City dwellers. Contrary to qualitative studies that look into more specific groups (e.g. parents with children with conduct disorder in Roberts et al., 2018), the population of interest for this study is broad. Thus, besides the inclusion of participants from each city, to ensure that 'typical exemplars' (Yardley, 2000) are included in the sample, a variety of demographics are covered, such as age, gender and socio-economic status (Joffe et al., 2013). Research suggests that demographics are not strong predictors of SWB, however, when incorporating socio-cultural variables such as cultural values (Lawrie et al., 2019) and levels of gender inequality (Tesch-Romer et al., 2008), evidence shows mixed results (see **Chapter 2**).

Hence, exploring potential differences and similarities in sense-making and meaning across different demographic groups and cultures could help understand the nuances in the relationship between culture, demographic factors and SWB. Additional selection criteria for Study 1 was being born and having lived in the city of interest for the majority of their lives, in order to capture the experience of individuals whose lives have been shaped by the city and have witnessed changes and transformations in the social and physical environment. For Study 2, as well as the criteria for Study 1, in London, participants were required to identify as White British. This was because family dynamics and configuration are highly influenced by culture (see Poortinga & Georgas, 2006) so it was decided to focus on London's ethnic majority group. In Mexico, ethnicity is not a demographic that is commonly asked as it is predominantly used to identify people from indigenous groups (see INEGI, 2020b). Hence, potential cultural influences were controlled by requiring having been born, and lived for the majority of their lives, in Mexico City.

In quantitative research, power analysis can be used to calculate the minimum sample size required for a study, given a desired significance level and effect size (Joffe, 2012). However, qualitative research does not aim to test hypotheses nor obtain generalisable findings, therefore sample sizes tend to be smaller. Guidelines for the GEM recommend medium sized (n= 40 - 144), samples for the method and to choose a number that is divisible in equal numbers per demographic cell, (numbers such as 48, 60 and 80 are appropriate as they can be divided into sets of cells in a way that a primary number cannot). In this study, 48 was chosen as it could be divided equally by category of interest. This enables valid comparisons between groups, as with sufficient data it is possible to distinguish between patterns of meaning in a group and idiosyncratic tangents of meaning (Joffe, 2012). In a comparative analysis of two cultures, like in this thesis, this is of special relevance, as one can match both cultures according to demographic variables and then assess how meanings and experiences change across groups between and within cultures. More details of the sampling process will be discussed in section 3.3.1.

3.2.4 Quality Criteria

The criteria to evaluate quantitative research is generally agreed upon; good research is valid and reliable. Measurements produce consistent results, studies are replicable and findings can be generalised to the wider population. For this purpose, the methods and tools used seek to minimise the influence of the researcher, as it can result in error and bias. These standards are based on the overall objective of quantitative research: developing generalisable laws (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Yardley, 2008). However, qualitative research has its origins in epistemological assumptions such as phenomenology and constructivism, which argue that all knowledge is inevitably mediated and constrained by people's own perspectives, purposes, language and culture (Camic, et al., 2003) . Therefore, the aspiration of objectivity is viewed as unattainable – and even inappropriate. Thus, qualitative research not only acknowledges the inevitable influence of the researcher but also sees it as an opportunity to increase the quality and value of the research (Yardley, 2008). Researcher-participant dynamics, place and context of the interview and the themes extracted during the analysis of the data are all factors that shape the product of the research project (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The subjective, interpretative and non-generalisable nature of qualitative research has led to its derogation in fields that have traditionally ascribed to more positivistic perspectives such as that of wellbeing (Thin, 2018).

However, because of the difference in epistemological assumptions, qualitative and quantitative cannot be judged using the same criteria.

This is not to say that qualitative research does not have any quality criteria, as there are different ways to promote the value and trustworthiness of the findings (Gaskell & Bauer, 2000; Joffe, 2012). The studies in this thesis adopted a number of steps to ensure rigour and accountability during data collection and analysis. Decisions regarding the place to hold the interviews were not taken without careful deliberation of possible repercussions on the ecological validity of the data. Furthermore, prompts for the GEM were carefully designed and piloted in both cultures to ensure they were comprehensible and to explore the quality of the responses they elicited. Moreover, in order to promote systematicity and transparency of the coding process, intercoder-reliability (ICR) (O'Connor & Joffe, 2021) was assessed. This ensured that the coding frame developed was sufficiently clear, specific and robust for an independent researcher to apply consistently to the data. Lastly, every step taken during the research process was recorded, alongside the rationale that informed each step.

Other techniques to promote quality in qualitative research such as triangulation (e.g. the use of two or more methods of data collection to examine the same phenomenon (Patton, 1999), were not enforced, because of the nature of the research questions. This research was designed to capture participant's meanings and experiences in depth, thus the resulting datasets were rich and complex. Hence, thorough and comprehensive analysis of such data was prioritised, ensuring that other quality criteria such as sensitivity, rigour and transparency were consistent throughout the research project (Yardley, 2000, 2008).

3.2.5 The Interpersonal Context

As a type of conversation, interviews come with expectations and norms as to how they are supposed to 'work' (Grice, 1967), and such expectations can obstruct and clash with the aims of the research. For example, interview styles used in methods such as the GEM where the researcher's input is limited, can lead participants that were not expecting to dominate the conversation to feel uncomfortable or not knowing what to say. Further mismatches in expectations pertain to the way in which participants construe the research relationship. Some participants can represent it as a form of therapy (Letherby, 2000) or friendship (Duncombe & Jessop, 2002), which can obstruct the progression of the interview. Moreover, differences in power can hinder the interview process. The researcher–participant relationship is commonly

seen as hierarchical, which could hinder the establishment of rapport and therefore preclude participants from talking freely.

Although interview guidelines highlight the importance of showing interest in and appearing non-judgmental about what the participants are saying in order to develop 'rapport', (Braun & Clarke, 2013), there is not much advice available on how to deal with interpersonal tensions. However, a crucial tool to overcome these issues is researcher reflexivity, given that the critical reflection on the research process and the role of the researcher (Finlay, 2002) can help manage the respondents' discomfort and unease. In the studies presented in this thesis, the researcher received training on the interview technique and studied previous anonymised transcripts where the GEM was used. Furthermore, participants had the nature of the interview style explained to them and were encouraged to 'take the floor', assuring them that there were no right or wrong answers and that any questions would be answered by the end of the interview. Furthermore, the researcher's background in psychology and experience in clinical settings aided conversations to flow comfortably through tone and non-verbal cues of encouragement (nods and facial gestures). Finally, after every interview, the researcher made notes in which personal impressions were recorded, which helped the interview process and the analysis of the data.

3.3. Study Methodology

This section outlines the data collection process. It presents the design of the sample and the participant recruitment procedure. Moreover, it provides an overview of the interview process and a description of the instruments used for the GEM. Data for Study 1 was collected between May 2016 and July 2016. Data for Study 2 was collected between April and July 2019. All interviews were conducted by the PhD candidate. Study methodology for both studies was similar and as such the studies will be presented together to avoid repetition.

3.3.1 Participant Recruitment and Demographics

Study 1

The sample size was based on Joffe and Elsey's (2014) guidelines for qualitative studies that aim to look at valid group variations. Using a recruitment agency in each city, a purposive sample of 24 London dwellers and 24 Mexico City dwellers was recruited. Participants were approached by a recruitment agency by telephone and an initial screening questionnaire was

used to establish participants' demographic details. Both samples contained an equal number of participants according to age group, gender and socioeconomic levels. The three age groups (18–35, 36–54, 55–67) were each split evenly between male and female dwellers. In each sample, half of the participants were of higher socio-economic status and half of a lower socio-economic status. In London, this was determined using a social grade system based on the type of occupation used by the Office of National Statistics (UK). The descriptions of London grades are described in **Appendix A**. Higher socio-economic status included grades A, B and C1, whereas lower socio-economic status included grades C2, D and E.

In Mexico City, socio-economic status was determined using the criteria established by the Mexican Association of Market Research and Public Opinion (AMAI), a well-established, frequently used comprehensive framework which classifies households according to wellbeing indicators. The descriptions of each level are described in **Appendix B**. Higher socio-economic status included levels A/B, C+ and whereas lower socio-economic status included C and D. London and Mexico City (without including the sprawling metropolitan area) are similar in population size (see **Chapter 1**), which increases the qualitative validity of the comparison. Nonetheless, location at the level of boroughs (London) and councils (Mexico City) was not controlled for, given the small size of the sample and the prioritisation of the demographics. However, agencies in each city were instructed to recruit people from different areas of the city. Moreover, in order to be eligible to take part in the study, participants were required to have been born in the country and have lived most of their lives in the city of study. Sample characteristics are outlined in **Figure 5**.

Study 2

For Study 2, sample criteria and recruitment procedures for Study 1 were replicated. However, eligibility in London included identifying as White British, in order to control for potential cultural differences associated with ethnicity. As previously mentioned, in Mexico, ethnicity is not a demographic that is commonly asked for, therefore potential cultural differences in relation to the family were controlled by recruiting participants that were born in Mexico, had lived in Mexico City their whole lives and had Mexican parents. Sample characteristics are outlined in **Figure 6**.

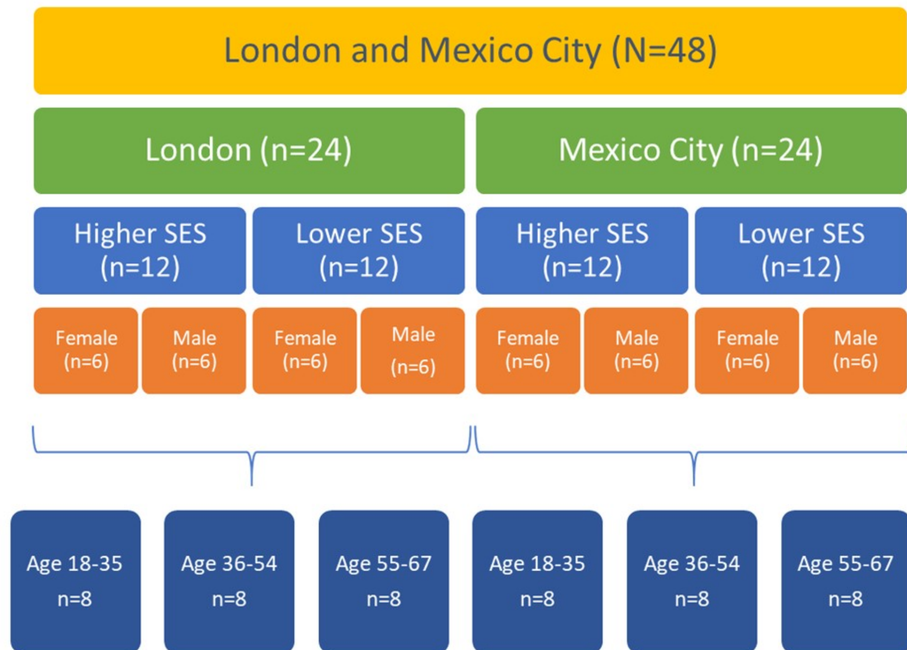

Figure 5. City dweller demographics Study 1.

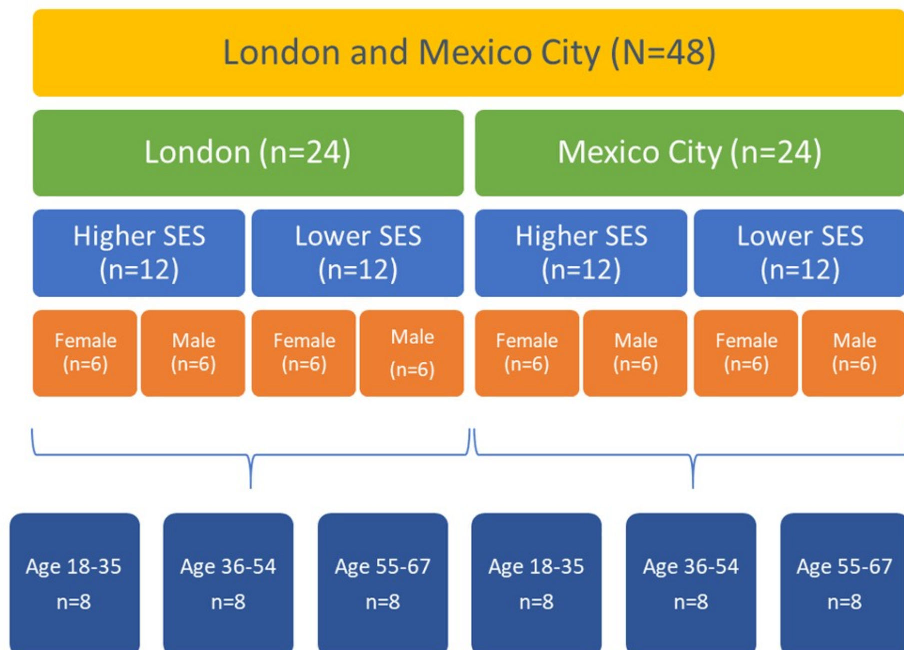

Figure 6. City dweller demographics Study 2.

3.3.2 Interview Procedure

The two studies received ethical approval for Non-Invasive Research on Healthy Adults from the UCL Division of Psychology and Language Sciences Ethics Committee (REF: CEHP/2013/500). Both studies followed the same interview procedure, therefore will be described jointly.

Study 1 aimed to explore experiences in the city and their relationship to SWB. Following a trial phase in which the grid and interview process were piloted, interviews were conducted between May 2016 and July 2016. In London, interviews were conducted at the UCL Psychology and Language department. In Mexico City, interviews were conducted in a hired office space. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

Study 2 aimed to explore representations of family and their relationship to SWB. Following a trial phase in which the grid and interview process were piloted, interviews were conducted between April and July 2019. In London, interviews were conducted at participants' homes. In Mexico City, interviews were conducted either at participants' homes or a hired office space when participants' residence was located in a potentially unsafe area. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

Before starting the GEM procedure, participants were provided with an information sheet that outlined the nature of the study: a research project to explore Mexico City dwellers experiences in the city. All participants signed a consent form agreeing to be interviewed and audiotaped and were assured of the interview's anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were told that they could withdraw from the interview at any point. In line with the Grid Elaboration Method (Joffe & Elsey, 2014), a free association task was first administered. London and Mexico City dwellers were provided with a piece of paper with a grid containing four blank boxes. In Study 1 the prompt read: *"We are interested in the way you experience living in your city. Please express this with words or images in the grid below. Please put one image/word per box"*. In Study 2 the prompt read "*We are interested in what family means to you. Please express this with words or images in the grid below. Please put one image/word per box"*. **Figure 7** displays an example of a completed grid by a London and a Mexican dweller for Study 1 and **Figure 8** displays an example of a completed grid by a London and a Mexican dweller for Study 2. Participants were told that there were no right or wrong answers

and to write down 'whatever came to their mind'. All material used in Mexico City was translated to Spanish by the PhD candidate and interviews were conducted in Spanish.

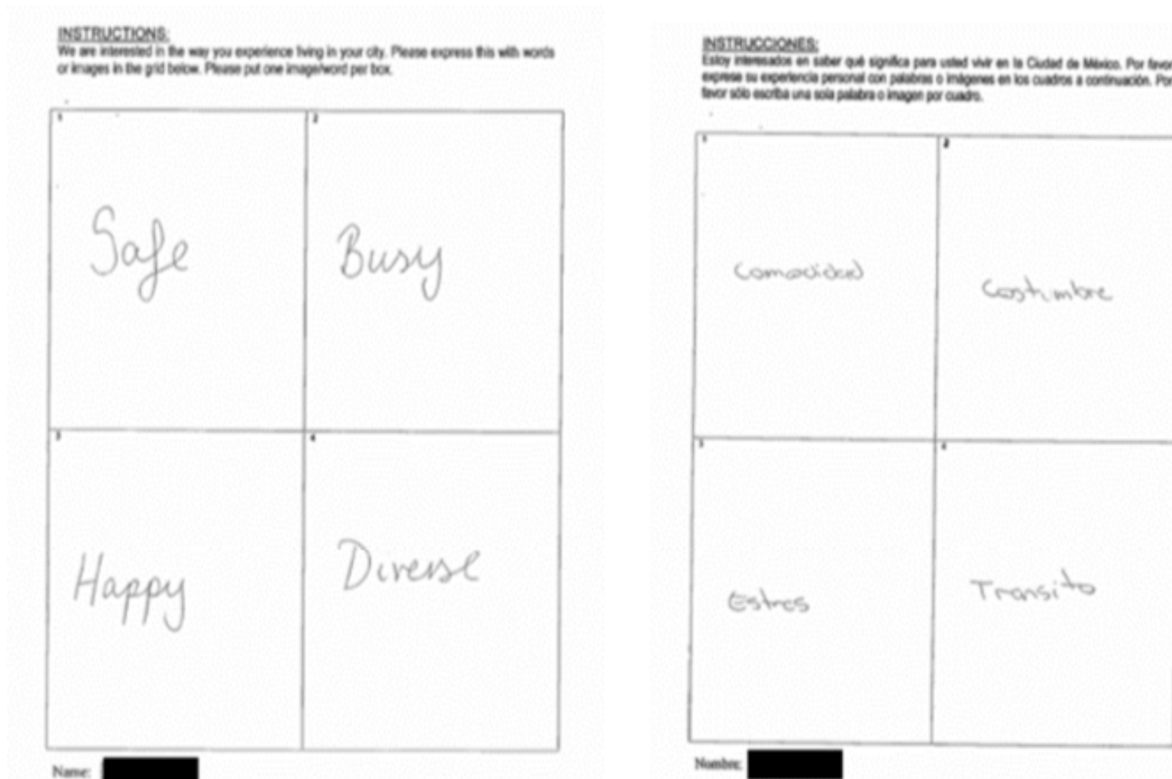

Figure 7. Study 1: Grid Examples (Left: London dweller, right: Mexico City dweller).

Having completed their four associations, dwellers were then asked to elaborate on the content of each box in a subsequent interview. This began with "can you talk me through what you have drawn/written in the first box?". Once participants had elaborated on the first free association, the process was continued until the context of all boxes had been addressed in order. Prompts such as *"can you tell me more about that?"* were used to ensure dwellers' thoughts and feelings emerged naturalistically without insertion of content via researcher questioning. Moreover, before moving to the next box or ending the interview after the elaboration of the last box, the researcher always asked if there was anything else they would like to add about that association. The researcher moved to the next box only when the participant considered that everything had already been covered. Participants were free to introduce new topics that they had not included in their free association grid responses.

INSTRUCTIONS:
We are interested in what family means to you. Please express this with words or images in the grid below. Please put one image/word per box.

1 community	2 love
3 support	4 arguments

Name:

INSTRUCCIONES:
Estoy interesada en saber qué significa familia para usted. Por favor exprese su experiencia personal con palabras o imágenes en los cuadros a continuación. Por favor sólo escriba una **sola** palabra o imagen por cuadro.

1 Unidad	2 Amor
3 Respeto	4 Lealtad

Nombre:

Figure 8. Study 2: Grid Examples (Left: London dweller, right: Mexico City dweller).

After the interview, each participant completed a questionnaire that asked for demographic details. After completing the questionnaire, participants were debriefed on the purpose of the interview and received a cash incentive. The interviews were recorded using an unobtrusive digital audio-recorder. London dwellers' interviews were subsequently transcribed verbatim by a native English professional transcriber. Mexico City dwellers' interviews were subsequently transcribed and translated to English by the PhD candidate. The transcripts were then imported into ATLAS.ti software package for analysis and organised per country and demographic groups.

3.4. Data Analysis

There are a number of analytical approaches in qualitative research. Some are descriptive and exploratory, whilst others seek to gain a deeper understanding of the data through interpretation. Methods like thematic analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis, narrative analysis and grounded theory are often used for interpretative qualitative research that aims to provide a conceptual and/or theoretical account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For the two cross-cultural studies outlined above, content analysis was chosen as the most

appropriate to analyse the written content of the grids and thematic analysis was chosen as the most fitting method of analysis for the verbal elaborations of the grids. The following section briefly describes these two types of analyses and discusses why they were decided the most appropriate for these studies.

3.4.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis is a commonly used method to examine texts, films or pictures, particularly in mass communication research. It involves creating categories and then counting the number of instances in which they are used in content communicated via the materials of interest (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Content analysis helps convert qualitative information into numerical representations, which helps determine the salience of words and concepts in the data through the examination of its frequency (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Moreover, it allows the researcher to analyse large amounts of data by coding into a number of set categories, making the dataset more manageable than if one were converting the data into a new analytical narrative (Krippendorff & Bock, 2009). As in other types of qualitative analysis, coding of the data can be approached inductively or deductively (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In deductive coding, categories are drawn from existing theoretical ideas, whereas in inductive coding, codes are derived from the raw data. Whilst deductive coding aids the replication, expansion or refutation of previous findings, inductive coding is useful for new areas of research (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). These approaches are not mutually exclusive and can be applied in conjunction. It has been argued that a dual deductive–inductive approach to coding increases the quality of the analysis, as the researcher can avoid 'reinventing the wheel' unnecessarily, whilst remaining open to new and revolutionary concepts that emerge naturalistically from the data (Joffe, 2012). Accordingly, this was the approach taken to code the content of the grids. Even though categories were created naturalistically, factors associated with SWB covered in the literature review (See Chapter 2) informed the organisation and labelling of some of the categories. This was done because the topics investigated in this thesis (living in the city, family and SWB) are broad and the prompt of the GEM was designed to not direct the participants to any specific dimensions of these concepts, which resulted in a wide variety of answers. Hence, theoretical and empirical knowledge helped structure the dataset.

Historically, content analysis has been embedded within a positivistic paradigm, so it is used to make valid and replicable inferences from the data (Neuendorf, 2018). However, it has been argued that this method can remove meaning from its context. Frequency of a word or concept

could imply a variety of meanings depending on the context, however the identification of such connotations is beyond the scope of the analysis. Nonetheless, other methodologies such as thematic analysis, offer the systematicity characteristic of content analysis but also allow the researcher to examine the frequency of codes with analysis of their meaning in context (Joffe & Yardley, 2004).

3.4.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying and analysing the most prevalent patterns of meaning in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes are composed of manifest content, which is directly observable from the interview transcripts but also of latent content, which is found implicitly in the data (Joffe, 2012). Thematic analysis is a foundational, widely used method in qualitative research. Compared to other methods such as grounded theory and interpretative phenomenological analysis, it does not prescribe methods of data collection, theoretical positions or epistemological frameworks. Such flexibility is one of the main strengths of the method, as it can be used to answer many types of research question, based in almost any kind of data (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Thematic analysis works particularly well with the social constructivist epistemology of Social Representations Theory (SRT), as it reveals how meaning is constructed and shared within a group without having to reference the 'reality' of a phenomenon (Gervais, 2002). In this thesis, it allows the researcher to explore the subjective experience of living in the city and sense-making of family including naturalistic connections to positive and negative feelings and life satisfaction – without imposing factors that can be relevant for participants' wellbeing. Moreover, it aids the identification of latent and symbolic dimensions of such representations and how they differ within dwellers of each city and between city dwellers from two different cultures.

Furthermore, thematic analysis is among the most systematic and transparent forms of qualitative analysis, largely because it requires the development of a coding frame in order to guide the analysis (Joffe & Elsey, 2014). A coding frame is a conceptual tool with which the raw data is categorised, defined and organised. Stipulating criteria concerning what can and cannot be coded promotes a systematic and consistent analytic process (Joffe, 2012), which is especially relevant when extracting latent content from the data, as its identification requires interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As previously mentioned, codes and themes can be

derived via deductive and inductive strategies, nonetheless, a combination of both is often most effective. Thus, thematic analysis allows for an analysis that is both theoretically informed and grounded in the data (Joffe, 2012; Joffe & Yardley, 2004).

Even though thematic analysis' main concern is the identification of explicit and implicit patterns in the content of the interviews, its systematic nature enables numerical thinking about the data in terms of code frequency and theme prevalence. Arguably, the importance of a theme is not necessarily determined by its pervasiveness in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as some idiosyncratic elements could provide valuable insights to answer the research question (Joffe, 2012). Nonetheless, theme prevalence and differences in frequency of themes capture valuable information, especially in the SRT framework where degrees of consensus within and between groups hold theoretical implications. While this assertion has been questioned (see Rose et al., 1995), code and theme quantification acts like an informal assessment to ensure the researcher does not unintentionally inflate the importance of infrequent ideas nor overlook the possible meanings of absences or scarcity of other concepts (see Gervais et al., 1999).

As is the case with all analytical methods, despite its many strengths, thematic analysis has some weaknesses (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It has been argued that its interpretative power is limited, as results often only consist of descriptions of participants' thoughts, an issue that is not aided by the lack of clear guidelines for the achievement of a higher level, more interpretative analysis. Moreover, the focus on patterns across datasets cannot provide any sense of the continuity and contradictions within individual accounts. Lastly, contrary to other methods such as discourse analysis, it cannot be used to make claims about the use of language. However, many of these limitations can be overcome when using the analysis within a SRT framework, as it provides a paradigm for an in-depth investigation of lay-thinking, drawing attention to what is collective and shared but also to conflicts and tensions between and within individuals.

3.4.3 Analysis Procedure

The analysis procedure was the same for the two studies in this thesis, as both used the Grid Elaboration Method. Thus, data from both studies were analysed using content and thematic analysis. In order to conduct the content analysis of the grids, the content of each grid was first recorded on Microsoft Excel. The exact words used by participants were copied and any drawings were described in parenthesis. These were then read through multiple times and

categories were created when they matched the content of a minimum of three grids. Given the wide variety of associations, categories were developed conceptually, informed by the empirical and theoretical literature on SWB. Associations that did not fit within any category were labelled as 'no category'. Categories in Study 1 captured 98% of associations written by London dwellers and 96% associations written by Mexico City dwellers. Categories in Study 2 captured 85% of London dwellers' responses and 91% of Mexico City dwellers' responses. Further details on how categories were created can be found in **Appendix C**.

After salient categories of the grids were identified, a thematic analysis of the interview data was performed (Joffe, 2012; Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Transcripts were first read a number of times to identify salient topics and recurrent patterns in the data. During this phase of comprehensive reading of the interview transcripts, emerging ideas and concepts that could be relevant to answer the research questions were recorded in a notebook. Such annotations became the basis for the coding frame that was gradually developed and refined. In both studies, most codes were mostly developed inductively, which means that they emerged naturalistically from the data and were not theory driven. However, in line with Bauer's guidelines (2000), all codes were devised in light on the research questions, discerning on the information that would bring coherence to the analysis of the data. Therefore, not all ideas found in the interviews were translated into codes. Moreover, factors that have been associated with SWB in the literature informed the labelling and categorisation of codes and codes for the dimensions of SWB were created deductively. The coding frame is an analytic instrument where raw data is classified into a more conceptual framework (Gaskell, 2000). Once developed, the coding frame is applied systematically to the data. This means that the data is segmented into units and according to its content, each data unit is labelled with the relevant codes. Using ATLAS.ti software, the coding frames developed for Study 1 and Study 2 were applied electronically to all 48 interviews in each study.

Evaluating the intercoder reliability (ICR) is a controversial topic in qualitative research (O'Connor and Joffe's, 2020). ICR is a numerical measure of the agreement between different coders regarding how the same data units should be coded. Even though conducting an ICR assessment yields many benefits for qualitative studies, such as the improvement of systematicity and transparency of the coding process, some argue that it contradicts the interpretative value of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In this thesis, ICR assessments were conducted for both studies, as previous research shows that they are

especially beneficial in studies where data were collected in different languages and cultural contexts (Joffe, 1999; Joffe et al., 2013), given that they increase the confidence that data were coded consistently across samples (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

Following O'Connor and Joffe's (2020) guidelines for ICR tests, 12.5% of all the interviews in each study were double coded, including interviews from London and Mexico City in equal numbers. The interview transcripts were independently coded by the author and an independent researcher who was not involved in the research project. To assess inter-coding consistency, coded data from the second coder was compared with the primary coding. This was achieved by exporting both coded datasets to SPSS software and performing a Cohen's Kappa analysis. For Study 1, inter-coder reliability revealed an average Kappa of .66, indicating that 'substantial' reliability had been achieved (Landis & Koch, 1977) and one of .64 for Study 2, also indicating that 'substantial' reliability had been achieved. For both coding frames, discrepancies were resolved following discussion between coders. All interviews were then coded using the revised coding frame. The final coding frame for Study 1 contained 54 codes and the one for Study 2 was composed of 55 codes. The coding frames for each study can be found in **Appendix D** and **E** respectively.

Once all transcripts were fully coded with the revised coding frame, a frequency table was produced. This table indicates the number of interviews in which each code appeared. This gives an initial indication of the salience of concepts and ideas across the whole dataset, extending beyond the idiosyncrasies of a single interview. Codes are the 'building blocks' that structure the analysis (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). As this data was analysed using Thematic Analysis, codes were then clustered into themes and interpreted according to the research questions. ATLAS.ti's query tool was used to visualise all data units coded under each code. Moreover, co-occurrence explorer was used to identify connections within the data, as it shows how codes co-occur with each other within the data units. Thorough examination of the data allowed for a rich set of results to emerge. **Appendix F** presents further details on how rata was converted into themes.

ATLAS.ti's network function was used to visually represent the connection between different themes and subthemes within the data. The network charts are structures that represent how different codes link together, giving an overarching picture of how ideas and patterns composing each theme are organised. The visual representation of the data is an important step that allows the researcher to move from text to interpretation (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The

network charts for the themes found in Study 1 and Study 2 are presented at the beginning of each theme in the results sections in **Chapter 4** and **Chapter 6.**

3.5 Reflections on the Interview Process

As it has been noted throughout the chapter, qualitative research places value on the researcher's interpretation of data (Yardley, 2008). Thus, reflexivity, the conscious examination of researcher's possible biases and assumptions that could potentially influence the research process, is a fundamental aspect of qualitative work (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020). In this thesis, there are a number of aspects of the interviewer that may have impacted the studies' results.

First of all, the researcher is not impartial to either culture. On one hand, she was born in Mexico and lived in Mexico City for 26 years. On the other hand, she has been living in the UK for the last six years and has immersed herself in British culture through music, arts and literature since a young age. Although this embeddedness in both cultures can enrich the analysis, ingrained cultural values and personal experiences and interests could have unconsciously shaped the way the data was interpreted, especially in the study of family.

A second influence was the accent of the researcher. As a non-native English speaker, interviews with London dwellers were at times affected by a language barrier, where the researcher had to ask participants to repeat what they said or to provide further clarification. This could have interrupted the flow of participants' elaborations. Moreover, as an international student, London participants might have limited their elaborations on immigration. Participants expressing negative attitudes in relation to immigration tended to clarify that foreign students 'were not the problem'. Furthermore, London dwellers tended to ask the researcher about her nationality. In the first few interviews for Study 1 this question was answered during the interview, which steered participants towards comparisons between London and Mexico City. Although these insights were valuable, it was decided to deflect from this question in the remaining interviews. However, being seen as an 'outsider' interested in their culture was also favourable as London participants were motivated to explain their ideas more explicitly.

The place in which interviews took place could have also influenced findings of the studies. Interviews for Study 1 took place at UCL's Psychology and Language department in London

and in a hired office space in Mexico City. Upon arrival, some participants mentioned being stressed from trying to make it on time for the appointment and/or from struggling to find the address. Requesting participants to navigate the city for the interviews could have influenced their elaborations, as the research question was associated with city life. Moreover, the unfamiliarity of the environment might have impacted on participants, especially because spaces in both cities were professional. Nonetheless, rapport was successfully built throughout the interviews and various participants in both samples expressed enjoying taking part of the study at the end of the interviews. In Study 2, the majority of interviews took place at participants' homes, therefore participants felt at ease. However, as the topic of conversation was family, participants may have felt constrained in what they could say, especially if family members were in earshot. In addition, being in participants' homes might have had an influence on the researcher's interpretations of the data, as there were elements in the environment that provided information about participants' family life.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the design and methodology of the two studies that form the empirical basis of this thesis. It provides a rationale for use of qualitative methods for the study of SWB in London and Mexico City dwellers. It discusses the value of the free association and the interview as research tools and introduces the GEM as the method used in the two studies of this thesis. Moreover, it elaborates on the procedures to select and recruit participants and the steps taken to ensure the quality of the research. Furthermore, it describes the procedure of the interview and describes the two analytical approaches used in Study 1 (**Chapter 4**) and Study 2 (**Chapter 6**), content and thematic analysis. The upcoming chapters present the empirical results of these studies.

Chapter 4: Study 1: Experiences in the City

This chapter presents the results of the first study, a cross-cultural investigation of experiences in the city and their relationship with dwellers' subjective wellbeing (SWB). For each city, the results begin with the content analysis of the free association task, which gauges participants' immediate responses when asked about the way they experience living in their city. This is followed by the results of the thematic analysis on the elaborations of the free association task. Themes outline the most prevalent aspects of living in the city and their association with dwellers' emotions and life satisfaction. Results from the London sample are presented first and are then followed by those from Mexico City. The chapter concludes with a comparative table of the themes found in each sample.

4.1. Experiences in London and Subjective Wellbeing

4.1.1 London Dwellers: Free Association Task

The free association task was completed by the 24 London dwellers (See **Chapter 3** for sample details) and yielded 96 main responses in the form of text and/or images. These responses were recorded and examined to identify recurrent conceptual ideas. Results of the content analysis show that associations written on the grid can be classified into 11 main categories. Three (3%) responses did not fit within any category. The prevalence of each category can be found in **Figure 9**.

The most prevalent associations were positive characteristics of the City (21%). This category includes associations such as *'interesting'* and *'wonderful'*. However, one of the second most prevalent categories refers to negative characteristics of the City (15%), which encompasses associations such as *'expensive'* and *'difficult'*. Associations related to positive SWB such as *'happy'* and *'love'* were also the second most prevalent (15%). These are followed by mentions of multiculturalism (13%), quantity of people (10%) and culture and entertainment (10%). Associations related to negative SWB such as *'stressful'* and *'frustrated'* were the fifth most prevalent categories out of the 11. This analysis serves as a starting point in the investigation of London dwellers' representations of living in the city. It can be noted that naturalistically, living in the city is associated with SWB. Moreover, dwellers associated

their experience living in London with positive and negative characteristics of the City. Determining if such characteristics are associated with SWB is beyond the scope of the analysis, however, delving into further elaborations of these aspects allowed the identification of affective meanings attached to them.

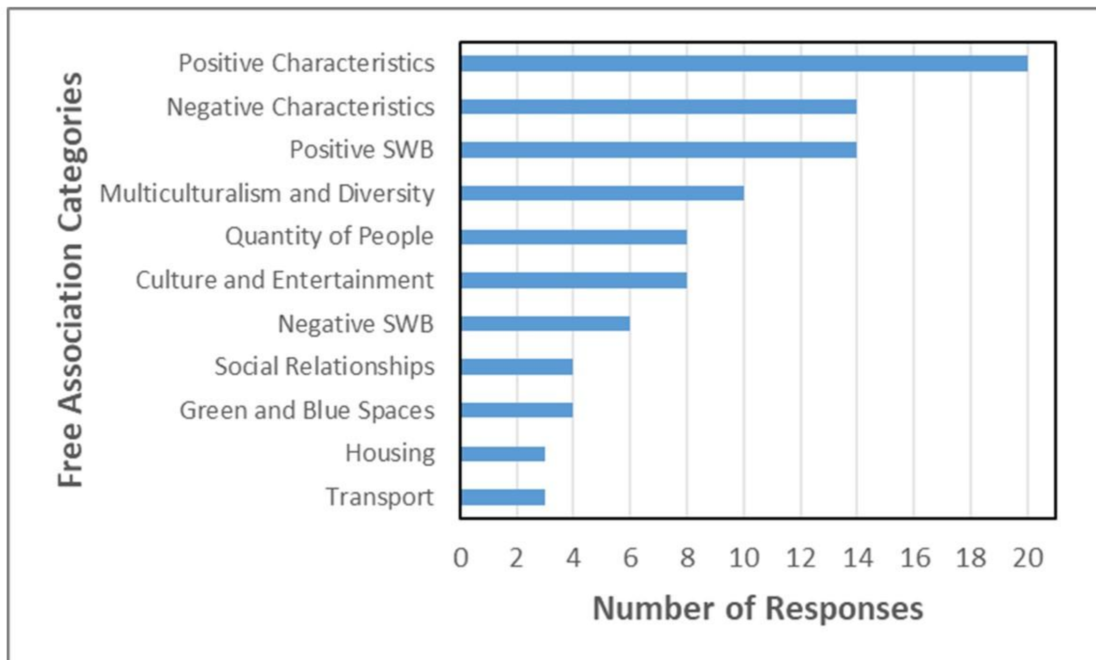

Figure 9. Categories elicited by the prompt 'experience living in your City' from the free association task in London.

4.1.2 London: Interview Themes

Thematic analysis of the elaborations prompted by the GEM revealed that experiences in London related to four main themes (**Figure 10**), which are presented according to their prevalence in the data: multiculturalism, hustle and bustle, cultural and entertainment offer and changes in the environment. Notably, the nuances of each theme indicate various pathways in which living in London could have an impact on dwellers' affective experiences and life satisfaction.

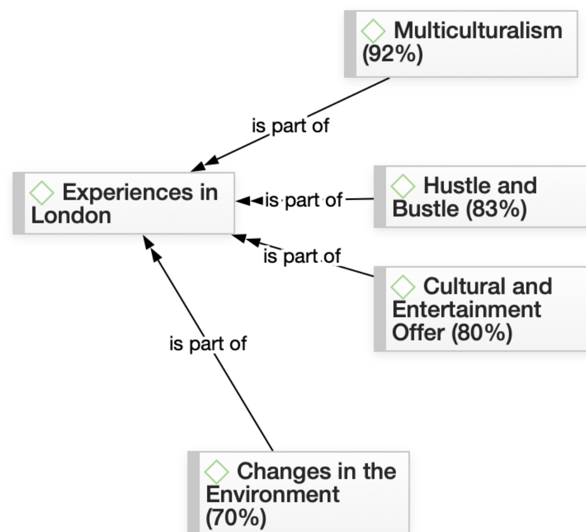

Figure 10. Representations of living in London.

4.1.2.1 Theme 1: Multiculturalism

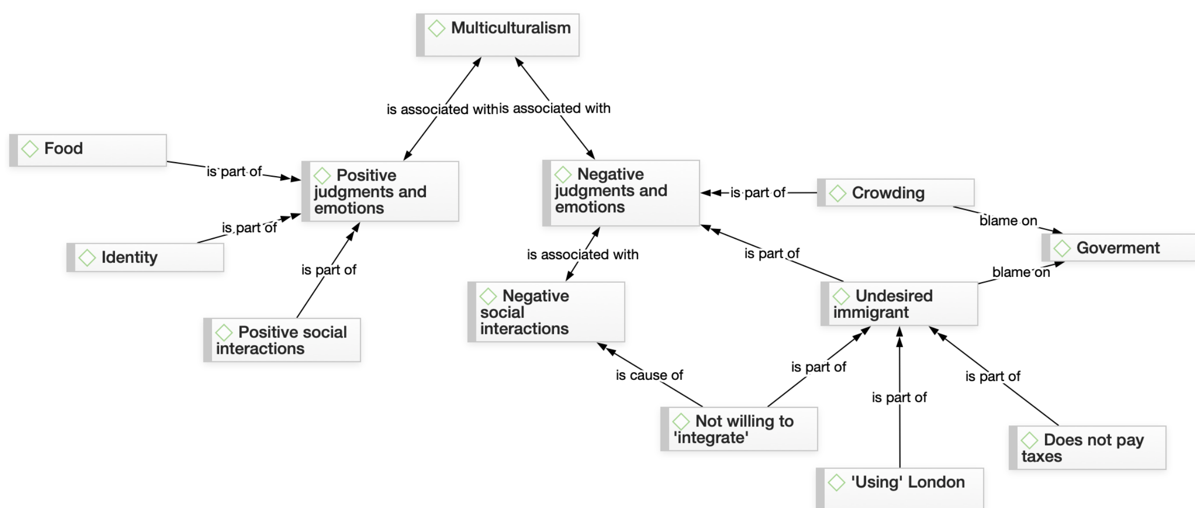

Figure 11. Ideas associated with multiculturalism.

Living in London was associated with multiculturalism by the vast majority of the participants; ideas, feelings and judgments attached to diversity were varied. Benefits of multiculturalism were recognised and valued. Moreover, openness and tolerance were conceptualised part of the Londoner identity. Nonetheless, for some, not all immigrants were equally welcome. The conceptualisation of *'integration'* was key: those who did not behave

according to *'British values'* were regarded as a nuisance in the environment. Ideas associated with multiculturalism are shown in **Figure 11**.

Multiculturalism as a component of Londoner's Identity

Regardless of age group, socioeconomic level and gender, multiculturalism and diversity were predominantly perceived as essential components of the experience of living in London. For most London dwellers, living with people from other cultures was deeply anchored to sensorial experiences: seeing different skin colours, tasting different food and hearing different languages. Participants mentioned how multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism have been a constant characteristic of the city throughout London's history, using the arrival of Huguenot and Jewish communities as examples. From participants' perspective, this constant exposure to and interaction with other cultures has had an impact on their identity, making them more understanding, accepting and open-minded. Moreover, being part of a tolerant society was associated with a sense of pride.

> *"Well, thankfully, we are a very cosmopolitan country and city and that has infiltrated every aspect of our lives and I think it's lovely. Coming back to the cafe life, coming back to, eateries, you know, clothes, everything, it's great – and languages. We are a multicultural country. And I suppose I'm proud of that, that we are very accepting and enjoy being cosmopolitan in this country."* (Male, 52, Higher SES, White British)

For several participants in the 18 to 35 range and for some in the 36 to 54-year-old groups, contact with other cultures was so deeply-rooted in the London lifestyle that it was *'taken for granted'*; people mentioned that whenever they went out to other places they could really appreciate how multicultural London was.

> *"When I moved up to Yorkshire, 'cause I was still school age, there were only white children. There was one girl – her mum was black, her dad was white and she came from Leeds – and everyone spoke about her 'cause she was different, you know (…) And that made me feel quite uncomfortable, 'cause I hadn't grown up with that kind of separation from other people. You know, all I knew was, yeah, we're all different, but we're all the*

> *same. That's what I love about London – that we embrace that... yeah."* (Female, 36, Lower SES, White British)

Participants tended to compare London with places that were represented as the converse of multicultural. Places like Chatham, Norwich, Yorkshire, Poland and Russia where conceptualised as predominantly White societies which was associated with negative judgments such as '*boring', 'weird'* or *'not as interesting'*. Such comparisons were used to give more value to London's multiculturalism, as it was perceived as a unique characteristic and therefore, something to feel lucky and grateful for. Moreover, those from an ethnic background other than White British tended to talk about their own experience of being a minority. With few exceptions, most reported not having experienced racism in the city, which made them feel comfortable living in London.

> *"I mean I have never experienced any racism in my work place, or outside, so I feel it is a very multicultural city. And everyone just lives with each other. So yeah, so that's why I like London. Whereas in other cities, I have seen, you know, racism and stuff like that. But in London, it is very multicultural and I feel like I can live here comfortably"* (Male, 28, Lower SES, BAME)

The exposure and interaction with people from several cultures was linked to various positive outcomes. Multiculturalism was predominately associated with a more interesting city, an opportunity to learn, to meet and befriend people with different lifestyles and as a first encounter with other countries and traditions. Moreover, for some participants, living in a multicultural society resembled the experience of travelling but without needing to go outside the country. For others, it sparked their curiosity, prompting them to travel abroad.

The Flavours of Multiculturalism

The most consistently perceived benefit associated with multiculturalism was the vast array of food available in the city, which was considered a London particularity.

> *"Well one of the advantages of, a multicultural society is they bring good food. Actually, this is a massive advantage. English food is terrible and I think everybody knows that, right, it's revolting, basically, right. So, you've got all these lovely cultures, you know,*

> *Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Brazilian, Russian and, you know, maybe even Russian, Polish, whatever – they're all bringing in the foods, so therefore, if you want to go and eat out, London's probably one of the best places in the world."* (Male, 57, Higher SES, White British)

Although younger participants mentioned being friends with people from different ethnic backgrounds, for the rest of participants the experience of multiculturalism was mainly via food. Some of them mentioned enjoying going out for dinner to Chinese and Indian restaurants, while others expressed how much they liked going to an Italian or Polish delicatessen to buy *'genuine'* ingredients to cook food from different parts of the world.

> *"Well, I have Italian delicatessens near me, or in town. Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, Korean. Where I am there's a lot of Polish, for some reason, Polish community – a lot of Polish, supermarkets (...) with an amazing array of nuts and, baked bread and fantastic vegetables, much cheaper than the supermarkets."* (Female, 65, Higher SES, White British)

Despite the general appreciation for the diversity of the food, older dwellers tended to emphasise that years back, the diversity of people's backgrounds in London was not as wide as it is currently. Therefore, a broader variety of cultures represented more options in terms of restaurants and shops.

> *"I've seen how poor the food was before, you know and it would be a struggle... We used to eat out in the 70s, but we nearly always used to go to French restaurants, because that was the only cuisine and if you found a good French restaurant, that was fantastic. Now we're more likely to go to an Italian restaurant, or a Thai restaurant, or an Indian/Bangladeshi restaurant, you know, erm, so you've got all this choice, this variety, which is great."* (Male, 67, Lower SES, White British)

Downsides of Multiculturalism: The 'Undesired Immigrant'

When talking about multiculturalism, participants tended to readily verbalise positive judgments. Nonetheless, for some, the topic of multiculturalism led to talk about immigration. For various participants in the middle-aged and older groups, immigration represented one of the most important problems in London. Some of them expressed that the number of

immigrants who had been allowed to enter the country in the last years was the reason why London felt crowded. Blame was put on the government and its lack of capacity to control immigration. Associated problems with immigration and quantity of people in the city included saturation of services such as schools, hospitals and public transport. Moreover, some participants held the strong belief that immigrants did not pay taxes. Consequently, the pattern of thought was that immigrants were not only saturating the services but also not contributing to their funding. Therefore, these participants felt that they were paying for immigrants to live in London.

> *"I think we need control of our borders – we need control of our borders (…) if you walk into a doctor's surgery now, you just can't get a doctor's appointment. And if I think about my children's children, where are they gonna go to school? Well, if you don't control immigration, the schools will just be full of everybody who probably hasn't paid any taxes, which is unfair."* (Male, 57, Higher SES, White British)

Further analysis revealed that negative ideas around multiculturalism were associated with behaviours and attitudes that conflicted with participants' expectations about how immigrants should integrate into society. Based on these ideas, the social representation of the **'undesired immigrant'** was identified. Anchors for this representation included a variety of groups, such as refugees, Muslims and Chinese people.

Participants identified sharing a language as a key element of an integrated society, as it enabled communication regardless of cultural background. Moreover, speaking English represented common ground for people who otherwise could be embodied as too different, preventing approach and interaction. Thus, for various participants, immigrants who did not speak English were described as *'not willing to integrate'*. This representation was linked to the idea that some immigrants were not keen on interacting with people who were not from their own background and chose to stay segregated, something that was negatively judged. Moreover, the lack of interaction was associated with feelings of distrust and fear. Furthermore, some participants felt alien in their *'own city'* when hearing different languages. This association was predominately experienced in enclosed spaces, such as the bus and the underground. Being in a confined space with people speaking other languages heightened the sense that there were too many immigrants in London, which was accompanied by a sense of displacement.

> *"I'm in the Hammersmith/Richmond, which is not quite Greater London, but it's not quite central. And even on the bus there's hardly any English spoken at all – again, I don't have a problem with it, but you do feel a tourist in your own country in a weird way, because every single language is being spoken apart from English"* (Male, 52, Higher SES, White British)

More saliently, lack of integration was represented by immigrants who failed to adopt British cultural ideas, values and practices. This was conceptualised to be one of the main causes of intercultural conflicts and tensions. Participants predominantly had Islamism anchored as a set of ideas and practices incompatible to the ideas and practices that characterise London. Intolerance and mistreatment of women and the LGTBQ community were perceived as cultural characteristics of Muslims. Hence, people who practiced Islamism were associated with the antithesis of the tolerant and open-minded social representation of the Londoner identity, causing rejection.

> *"(…) one of my boys is gay, for instance and it infuriated me that he was walking with his boyfriend, a little while ago and some Arab guy spat at them. And I thought, well, 'no, you know, you're here. We're not there. You know – I'm not saying you can't spit at gays in where you come from, but you don't do that here.' You know, that doesn't belong here."* (Male, 52, Higher SES, White British)

As a consequence of failing to speak English and/or not adapting to London's values and practices, the undesired immigrant was predominantly perceived as someone that only used London to make money, emotionally detached from London and its people. Rather than providing any benefits, they made the city busier and less liveable.

> *"You know, that's what it's all about; we're all lumped in together in this mad city together and we should all share it. It would make life so much easier if we tried to, you know, make an effort with each other.' And this might sound racist, but if you wanna live like a Chinese man maybe go back to those places and be insular there. There's no point being in a city that's diverse like this and want to be insular (…) 'Cause you're not sharing anything with me, I'm not learning anything from you about Chinese people or the culture or the language".* (Male, 50, Lower SES, BAME)

Furthermore, across those participants who saw immigration as an issue, there was the shared view that the government was surrendering the city to the 'undesired immigrants' by allowing their entrance, supporting their attitudes and prioritising their needs at the expense of those of the British people. A constant feeling among dwellers from the middle age and older groups was that Londoners' tolerance had been pushed to uncomfortable limits. The government was perceived as being *'too politically correct'*, trying to avoid friction with ethnic groups. Moreover, aware of this political position, the 'undesired immigrant' consciously took advantage and stayed rigid in its cultural values and practices.

> *"I remember reading about, a Sudanese guy who had assaulted some women and raped one and had been caught and he misunderstood – it was a cultural thing – he used his culture as a way of not understanding our culture. And he actually got off in court and I thought, 'no. No, I'm sorry, you know, you can't use that as an excuse.' (...) the judge was being so PC. So tolerance can go the other way. We're in many ways I think too tolerant."* (Male, 52, Higher SES, White British)

Additional negative mentions referred to a sense of favouritism by the government towards other religions, which conflicted with the conceptualisation of Christianity as an important part of the country's identity. This perception reinforced a feeling that foreign people had taken over the city.

> *"In Brent there was actually no Christmas decorations because it might offend. But yet still, when Ramadan or something comes along, you see big signs, you see it in Asda and other places like that, because Asda has a high population of Asian employees. So you see that – it's like, 'hold on a minute! You promote this, but you don't promote Christmas – what's going on here?'"* (Male, 51, Lower SES, BAME)

Furthermore, putative government preference for people from other cultural backgrounds was objectified in London's built environment by the construction of mosques, synagogues and cultural centres. These buildings were considered to prompt segregation, as they were only open for people from a specific background. Altogether, the lack of ability to approach and communicate with the 'undesired immigrant' made these London dwellers feel alienated in a place that *'belongs to them'* and to resent the government for neglecting British people and benefiting outsiders.

Thus, elaborations show that multiculturalism is both advantageous and detrimental for people's subjective wellbeing in the city. For those more open to diversity and immigration, it represented an opportunity for discovery and social connection. However, for those with more negative and ambivalent representations, multiculturalism could lead to avoidance, negative interactions and feelings of displacement.

4.1.2.2 Theme 2: London's Hustle and Bustle

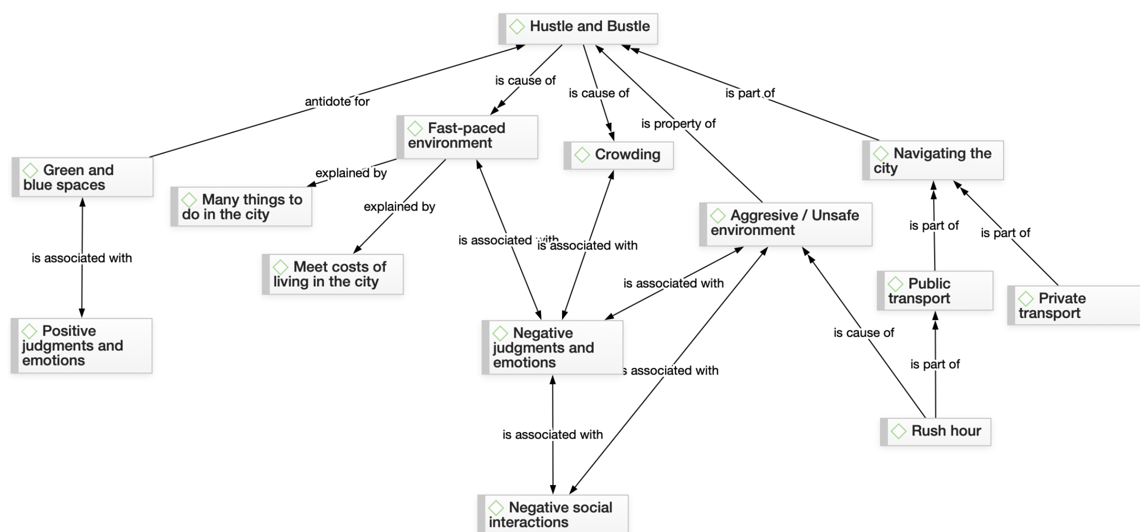

Figure 12. Prevalent ideas associated with London's hustle and bustle

The social representation of living in London was strongly built on the pace at which dwellers lived: the sensed speed at which the city and its dwellers moved, as shown in

Figure 12. Most participants mentioned that living in London involved living a fast-paced life, which meant constantly *'being on the run', 'having something to do'* or *'somewhere to be'*. Participants reasoned that the city's fast-paced was a result of its wide offer in terms of jobs, education, services, shops and entertainment. London dwellers mentioned conducting many activities on a daily basis, which led them to feel busy during the day. Moreover, having to move to different locations to do these activities in a specific timeframe was associated with been constantly *'in a rush'* and *'under pressure'*.

> *"So, living in London is – it's a pretty hectic city. (...) Lots of rushing around, I think compared to a lot of other places, we tend to cram a lot into our day, those of us that live*

in London. It tends to get a little bit crazy, a little bit hectic. I find that I'm always cramming far too much into my day than I can do." (Female, 36, Lower SES, White British)

For others, London's fast-pace was related to financial needs. Some participants explained that meeting the cost of living in London means having more than one job. Therefore, London dwellers were perceived to be constantly running around the city to reach their jobs and make the necessary money to live in an expensive city.

"Because life in the city has now become ever busier as we move forward toward our 24-hour life in London city. From the fairly well affluent, to the poorest, even, those who are actually on the street or begging, life is on the go: 'I've got- I've got to get this to survive,' 'I need this to survive', it's a constant 'go, go, go, go, go, go, go.'" (Male, 51, Lower SES, BAME)

The stress of having various things to do and having to be somewhere on time was strongly heightened by the number of co-habitants whom participants had to share the city with. Participants held the representation of London as a crowded place, which was associated with a saturation of the environment and the city's services. Arguably, the conceptualisation of the urban experience in Londoners was predominantly built on the combination of living a fast-pace life with large quantities of people, which was associated with tiredness and frustration. Moreover, the environment was considered aggressive and impersonal, with some young participants referring to it as a *'rat race'*.

"There are so many different people that are moving at different speeds and wanna be in different places and have different ideals for where they should be and what they should be doing. You know that common term 'rat race' – everyone's trying to climb all over each other – it's just quite a high-octane environment." (Male, 29, Lower SES, White British)

Although the majority mentioned negative associations with living in a fast-paced and congested city, it became salient that the hectic and busy lifestyle was ingrained in various participants, who explained that they were '*used to it'*, or that it matched their personality. Moreover, there was a tendency to mention experiences and conceptualisations of the

countryside lifestyle, in attempt to justify their preference for living in London. Participants explained that despite living a calmer life in smaller places, with time they felt *'bored'* and *'in need of the adrenaline'* of the city.

> *"I don't feel like I could live somewhere else. Whenever I go somewhere else I always feel like, 'arr no, I can't wait to get back.' Yeah, you just miss the hustle and bustle; you just miss – yeah, the noise and things like that. (...) I'm just used to rushing around and I'm used to, you know, there being a lot of traffic, or cars going up and down and, at all times of night."* (Female, 18, Lower SES, White British)

Navigating a Busy Environment

Moving around the city was a strong association with the life in London. Participants navigated the city on a daily basis in order to go to work, see friends and family, run errands and do a vast array of activities. Most participants used buses and the underground whereas few reported driving a car or a bicycle. Thus, public transport was the main method of transportation within the sample. Overall judgments regarding London's public transport service were positive, with associations such as *'sprawling', 'useful, 'good service'* and *'helpful staff'*.

> *"I love London, because I find that it's so easy to get to places. You can go to north, south, east, west, because where I work I have to travel across the borough, so for me it's lovely – the travel is fantastic, you know, you could go Underground, DLR, British Rail and you get to the places you need to"* (Female, 44, Higher SES, BAME)

However, there was disagreement among participants regarding the price. With a few exceptions, those from a lower socioeconomic level tended to express that travel fare was expensive, while higher socioeconomic level participants mentioned that the price was *'affordable'* or *'cheaper compared to other places in Europe'*.

Beyond comments regarding transport services, for London dwellers getting from place to place was both a sensorial and affective experience. Traveling during rush hour was consistently conceptualised as a daunting, adverse and exhausting. Large quantities of people sharing a constrained space was associated with bad smells and suffocation. The latter was also

regarded as the *'tight'* feeling, *'not having personal space'* or *'with no room to move'*. Moreover, people wearing backpacks on the bus and the tube were judged as main contributors of this sensation.

> *"You know, my hate, my biggest hate, is someone with a backpack that don't take it off. It's like 'please take it off', you know, it's like 'why do you have that on? That's another person, you know, like, behind you', so that I don't like – you know, being packed on the train, but the thing is, you get to your destination."* (Female, 44, Higher SES, BAME)

Accordingly, crowded underground carriages or buses were associated with anxiety, stress, anger and with being physically pushed. This situation created a hostile atmosphere were social interaction was undesirable. When commuting and more specifically, during *'rush hour'*, co-habitants turned into adversaries and were perceived as obstacles to getting to one's destination.

> *"I don't really have too many problems on the tube – it's just the volume of people that can be quite wearing, you know, whether it be crowing – I really try to avoid tube in rush hour, that's just soul destroying. Just, it wears you out, standing with your head in someone's armpit. It's awful, you know and people just pushing – I don't like that, I don't like that at all."* (Female, 36, Lower SES, White British)

Apart from the aversion to traveling during rush hour, it became salient that women across the sample had stopped using public transport as a safety measure. Some reported not using the underground out of fear of terror attacks. Consequently, they were trying to shift to other forms of transport, such as walking and cycling.

> *"I don't like the tubes. I'm very – I think we all get that slight paranoia of terrorist attacks. (...) I got stuck when it was overcrowded the other week and it was really horrible. You're like stuck and it's like, 'no one can leave.' And I got like a panic attack and I was just like, 'I don't like this.'"* (Female, 45, Higher SES, White British)

In relation to the bus, some women mentioned that they felt unsafe whenever there were male teenager users, as they were judged as loud, rude and aggressive.

"There's other times that like, you just feel like, when a certain person is sitting next you, you're just like, I feel like to move (...) I've done it before, like, I just saw like a group of boys – loud, rowdy boys, you know with their hoodies and tracksuits – I've got off the bus, 'cause I don't feel safe." (Female, 18, Lower SES, White British)

Despite the issues, most people were willing to keep using public transport. Women stayed safe by getting off the bus whenever they saw dodgy users and reporting suspicious backpacks on the tube. Moreover, participants across groups mentioned the devising of tactics in order to avoid travelling during certain times, so they could protect their wellbeing.

"London has got really good transportation system. Even the crowded thing that I said – it's only certain areas that you find it's very crowded on the tube and the train and all those things. But generally, generally, if it's not peak hours, it's lovely to travel around. You always find something to see in London – you never get tired." (Female, 55, Lower SES, BAME)

Green and Blue Spaces

Most dwellers associated living in London with parks and blue spaces like the river Thames. Londoners constantly talked about the need to have moments to slow-down as a coping mechanism to the fast-paced lifestyle. Some participants reported going to the countryside or to smaller cities from time to time to experience calmness. Nevertheless, for most participants the same experience associated with the countryside was recreated in parks.

Parks represented a haven in the city, away from the hustle and bustle. Despite the social representation that London had plenty of green spaces, for participants the magic of these places was that they simulated the sensation of not being in the city.

"Hampstead Heath is a really gorgeous park because it's very wild, so you can just disappear over into the back and you don't see anything; you could be anywhere, you know; you're in the middle of London but you could be anywhere. It makes me feel healthier, it makes me feel grounded, it makes me feel a lot more relaxed; I can just unwind, yeah, definitely more peaceful, just being in nature and not in the city – definitely one of my preferred places to be, yeah, I love it." (Female, 36, Lower SES, White British)

Parks and the river Thames were predominantly associated with energy, calmness and relaxation. Consequently, they represented an antidote to the downsides of the urban lifestyle.

> *"I feel energised and I love walking. I love being with nature, because when you're living in the city, you forget nature; you're on the pavements, you're on the tubes, you're on the taxis; you're inside buildings the whole time."* (Female, 58, Higher SES, White British)

Moreover, it was found that green and blue spaces not only counterbalanced the subjective effects of living a fast-paced life but also the ones of living in a polluted environment. Some participants across the sample expressed their concern regarding the bad air quality in London and the potential repercussions to their health. Furthermore, others talked about high levels of pollution in the city in terms of saturation of images and noise. Thus, parks also served as places to purify the lungs and the senses.

> *"I think it's important for your energy levels, you get good energy from trees and being around water and I think it's very important – especially when you live in the city amongst technology, adverts, you know, cars and stuff. And I think the vibrational energy, can be polluting to you – not just polluting as in just chemicals and carbon, but just vibrationally polluting, so for your own aura and calmness, it's good to try and get away from that and find a little space."* (Female, 33, Lower SES, White British)

Frequency of visiting parks varied. Some participants reported visiting them once a week while others mentioned going twice per day. Nonetheless, parks were constantly referred to as one of the best characteristics of London and played a central role in promoting participants' experience of wellbeing in the city.

In conclusion, living in London meant living a fast-paced of life where everyone is busy. Although for some this was a preferred lifestyle, for many, running around was associated with stress and tiredness. Moreover, negative experiences were heightened when places and services were crowded. Using public transport during *'rush hour'* not only elicited negative feelings but also negative social interactions. Hence, coping mechanisms such as going to parks, changes

in the use of transport and schedule adjustments helped participants counterbalance the effects associated with the distress associated with the city's hustle and bustle.

4.1.2.3 Theme 3: Cultural and Entertainment Offer

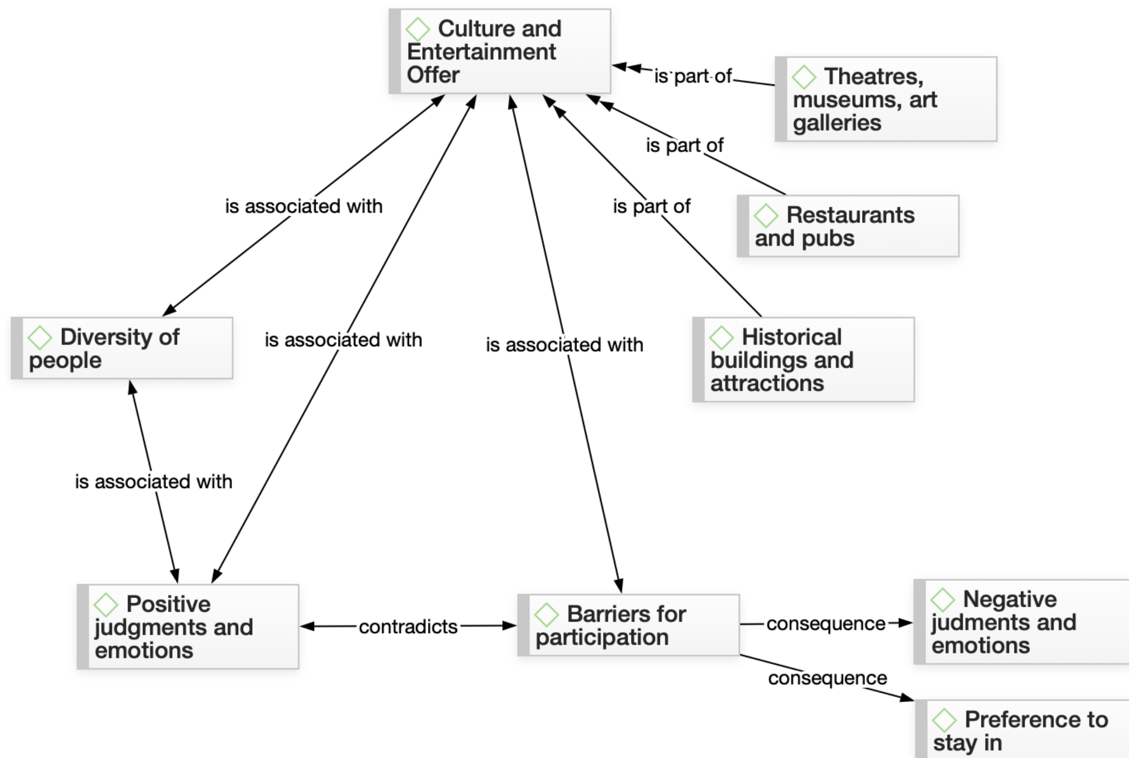

Figure 13. Ideas associated with the culture and entertainment offer in London.

Related to the representation that there are many things to do in London, participants associated the city with a wide culture and entertainment offer. (See **Figure 13**). The number of theatres, art galleries, museums and historical buildings were praised as distinctive elements of the environment. London dwellers enjoyed going to the theatre, ballet, music concerts and exhibitions. For participants, the cultural offer made the city more interesting and exciting and represented a source of stimulation and inspiration.

"I mean, for me it's important, because my job is sometimes quite basic and, you know, although it's quite well – relatively well –paid, I kind of need a bit more mental stimulation. So, visiting museums, it expands the mind. It's really important and it's one

> *of the great things London has, you know, it has museums and art galleries and a lot of them are free."* (Male, 57, Higher SES, White British)

Furthermore, the conceptualisation of London as highly cultural was associated with the idea that London attracts artists and creative people. This was related to the social representation of Londoners having an open and tolerant mentality towards others. London was represented as a diverse city, home to many different cultures and sub-cultures. Such heterogeneity resulted in a city with a wide variety of things to do. Participants mentioned that the city was full of activities for everyone's tastes and interests, which was positively regarded.

> *"(…) there's so much to do in London, you know. I think there's probably something for everybody if you, you know, I don't even think you have to look very hard. There's all types of music, all types of theatre, or there's all kinds of people; there's, you know, there's, I think there's something for everyone one in London."* (Female, 33, Lower SES, White British)

Apart from engaging in the cultural offer, participants also liked going out for food and drinks. The variety of restaurants, pubs and bars in the city was another positive aspect of living in London. Nevertheless, set against this positive orientation, there were a range of downsides mentioned. Firstly, the continuous array of events in London was defined as potentially addictive and risky. Some participants mentioned having to be disciplined and sensible in regard to how often they went out as it could be detrimental to their finances and the fulfilment of their responsibilities. In a similar vein, others elaborated on the challenges to stay focused on work when attractive things were happening around.

> *"It inspires me. But you also have to be disciplined, because you can't be distracted by too many of the – you know, going out and drinking – you have to keep tight reins on, you know – which I'm able to do. I kind of treat it with respect; you dip your toes in occasionally."* (Female, 45, Higher SES, White British)

Secondly and in a related vein, some participants expressed what is colloquially known as '*F.O.M.O'*. (fear of missing out), associated with feeling overwhelmed and anxious about not knowing about or not being able to attend events happening in London. *F.O.M.O*. impacted

negatively on people's subjective control over the environment, place attachment and feelings of ownership towards the city.

> *"London for me feels like endless things that you can be discovering, finding and trying out. It's almost too much (...) When I lived in Manchester, you kind of know what's going on, you have a hold on the city because there are less options which makes it feel more of your city because you know this is the best place for comedy, you know this is the best place for whatever. Whereas in London, I still don't know what my favourite pub is, I still don't know what my favourite something is because I always think maybe there is another one."* (Female, 27, Higher SES, White British)

Thirdly, despite the representation of London as a city with endless possibilities in terms of entertainment, for various participants, prices in the city were represented as a barrier to going to these places as much as they would want to. London was consistently classified as expensive, thus going out was a luxury. Hence, some participants were only observers of the activities happening in London as they did not have the means to be part of them.

> *"I think there is so much more now to do. And so we're sort of – we don't use London as much as we should, but then a lot of it is because it's expensive. You know, it's one of the most expensive cities. So the juxtaposition is that there is a lot to do, but it is expensive, so it limits what you can do unless you've got money."* (Male, 58, Higher SES, White British)

Lastly, negative judgments about going out were associated with the quantity of people living in London. Participants mentioned having to queue, book in advance or missing things they wanted to do because places and events get too busy and crowded. This affected participants' motivation to go out, preventing them from having a good time and affected the uniqueness of the experiences.

> *"'I've lived in London all my life and everywhere just seems so packed now; there's like nothing sacred (...) everything is packed all the time. It's, you know, that's one thing about going out actually, now, it is off-putting – you gotta queue up for ages, you spend ages getting to the bar. Not only is it expensive also, but it just feels very crowded. Every part*

> *of London seems to have been taken over, you know."* (Female, 33, Lower SES, White British)

London dwellers from the middle and older age groups tended to mention that London was for younger people. These participants explained they *'had lived London'*, going out for drinks and clubbing when younger. However, in their current age, the preference was living a calmer life inside their homes or going out locally.

> *"I think you change as you get older. I mean, I used to be in the clubs every weekend, you know, until quite recently. Probably about eight years ago, I would be out dancing at night, late and lots happening and parties. Now I have a quieter life and I have friends for dinner."* (Female, 58, Higher SES, White British)

In conclusion, it became salient that London had a positive reputation for its wide culture and entertainment, which was seen a benefit of living in London. Moreover, attending such events was associated with positive feelings and experiences. However, living surrounded by appealing opportunities to have fun proved to have its downsides. Focusing on work and responsibilities was challenging when many attractive things were happening around, thus discipline and self-control were required. Furthermore, for some, the vast array of events and things to do led to a fear of missing out. More importantly, money and the quantity of people represented obstacles for participation and enjoyment of what was on offer. In line with the representation of London as an expensive city, entertainment was regarded as costly and for some, unaffordable, thus, many participants did not going out as often as they wished because of the costs. Additionally, places were judged as too busy and crowded, which made participants less motivated to go out or prevented them from having a good time. Thus, despite the representation of London as a vibrant, lively, entertaining city, from participants' point of view only the imaginary of a young, moneyed person with no responsibilities could really make the most out of the city.

4.1.2.4 Theme 4: Changes in the Environment

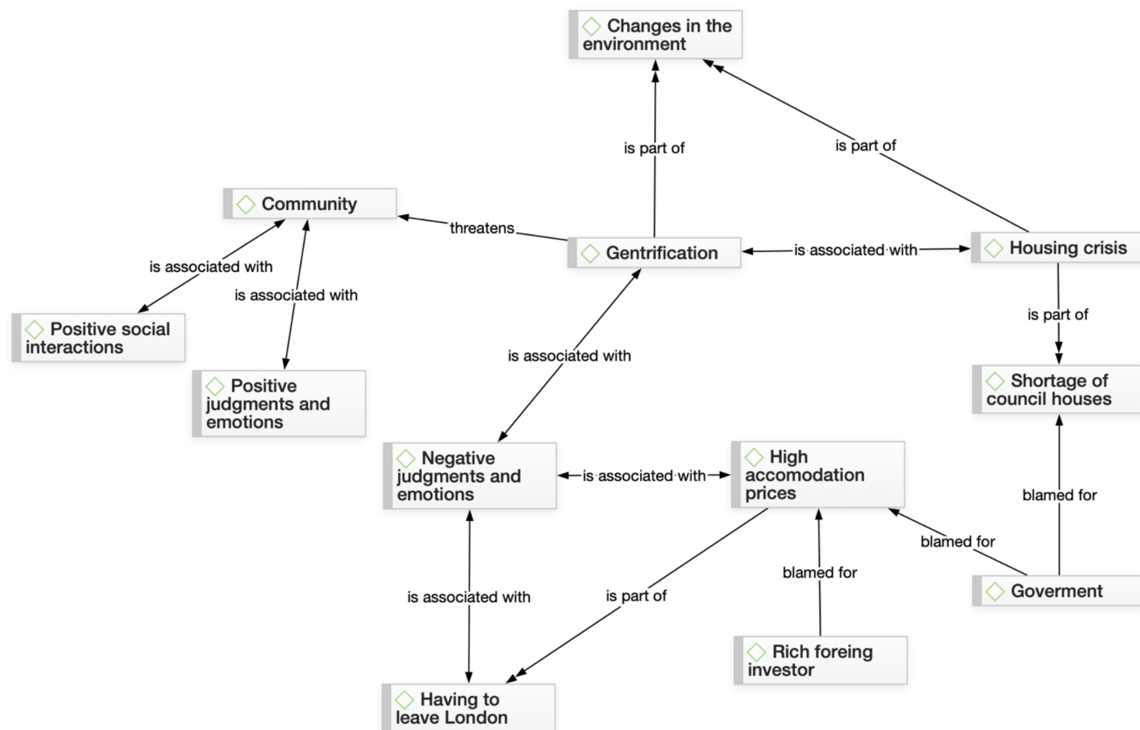

Figure 14. Ideas associated with changes in the environment

Almost three quarters of participants associated living in London with changes in the physical environment that implicitly had important repercussions for the social environment, as depicted in **Figure 14**. Even though such changes were deemed beneficial by some, a considerable number of participants shared the sentiment that they were pushing Londoners out of the City.

The 'Housing Crisis'

Almost all London dwellers mentioned that the cost of living in the city was high, however, housing and accommodation prices were of special concern. Hence, the social representation of the **'housing crisis'** was identified. The content of this conceptualisation varied depending on participant's age and socioeconomic level, as well as the perceived impact on their lives. However, participants across the sample shared the idea that accommodation prices were too

high, that there was a shortage of council houses and that the government and foreign investors were to blame.

Lower Socioeconomic Level Participants

Lower socioeconomic level participants expressed that most of their *'hard-earned'* money went only to accommodation and bills. Consequently, life in London was predominantly about trying to meet costs of living rather than spending money on things they would like to do and buy, which affected their life satisfaction.

> *"I class myself as a servant because I'm working to serve somebody else – I'm not working to serve myself (...) Any monies that I do make, I mean, it's for the other person. (...) Me, personally now, I'm just about living; after I've paid my rent, electricity bill, there's nothing, there is literally nothing."* (Male, 51, Lower SES, BAME)

For these participants, living in London meant a struggle, which was associated with various negative feelings and emotions such as anger, frustration, depression and uncertainty about the future. Others referred to feeling tired and stressed frequently.

> *"It's very expensive living in London. For some couple of years now, things have moved up, up, up, up, up, up, up and it's like, your whole salary goes into accommodation and you're left with not much to spend (...) That makes me feel depressed sometimes."* (Female, 55, Lower SES, BAME)

Younger Participants

In terms of age group, most participants aged from 18 to 35 years old lived with their parents as a way of being able to afford life in London. Some mentioned not being economically stable to become independent, whereas others had gone back to their family house despite having left home years ago. Although participants recognised the benefits of not having to pay rent, for some, living with their parents conflicted with expectations of personal development and life goals.

> *"I don't wanna be at home, 'cause I wanna, like, progress and move further, like... going*

back home feels like a bit of a step back in your progression. But for now it's good; it works." (Male, 29, Lower SES, White British)

The 'housing crisis' prevented young participants from seeing their future in London, as they had internalised the notion that it would be impossible to buy a house and settle down there. Moreover, there was a shared forecast that prices were going to keep escalating, minimising their chances of staying. Therefore, in spite of being born and raised in London, the City had become a temporary place. Although young participants expressed discomfort and anger towards the situation, they accepted it, planning their future accordingly.

"I can sometimes feel quite frustrated with the London renting scheme, how disgustingly and extortionately priced it is… and I'm from London and I know I probably won't be able to live here forever. When I buy, if I can ever buy a house, I know it won't be in London…the prices are insane (…) So it's really an unknown about how long I will be here for and I guess to try and enjoy what I have here." (Female, 27, Higher SES, White British)

Shortage of Social Housing

The housing situation of participants from the middle and older groups was mixed, some owned a house or rented private accommodation, while others lived in council houses. Nonetheless, regardless of their housing status or age, participants consistently expressed that in the last decade, one of the causes for the 'housing crisis' was the government selling off council buildings to the private sector, which translated into eviction of those who could not afford rent prices. Participants expressed resentment towards the government and worry towards co-habitants who lived in council houses, given that they were at risk of being *'kicked out'* to the outskirts of the city, *'far away from their families, friends and jobs'.*

"Councils are actually turning round and saying to people, 'well listen, we can move you,' 'out of London', 'to Hull, Stoke and places like that.' Because rent is cheaper. Regardless of whether you've got family here, regardless of whether you were actually born here and have attachments to London, they're saying, 'the only other alternative is to move you out of London' (…) normal, ordinary Londoners, who were born in London, cannot afford to stay here." (Male, 51, Lower SES, BAME)

Furthermore, the situation was aggravated by the presence of foreign investors, whom participants identified as the main culprits of the 'housing crisis'. They expressed that the prices to which properties were being sold made them exclusive for rich foreign people, as average Londoners' salaries were not proportional to the housing prices. As a result, participants believed that London was not for Londoners anymore.

> *"It's a written fact that house prices in London are going up and up and up – even though, Londoners aren't buying them because they can't afford them. You have foreign investors who will come in and buy X amount of properties (...) So with that now, rents go up, 'cause demand on rent... people in London cannot afford them"* (Male, 51, Lower SES, BAME)

Sense of Community and Gentrification

Participants' life in the city was fundamentally associated with their local environment, where their everyday lives happened. Boroughs and neighbourhoods were associated with identity and place attachment.

> *"I feel quite attached to where I am; it's like if I'm in Archway, or parts of, you know Golders Green or somewhere, 'cause, you know, London's so huge, I don't associate myself with those areas of London. I don't feel at home, if you like. Even though I'm a Londoner, North London is so different from South London, I feel like a fish out of water if I'm in North London– it's a different vibe."* (Male, 52, Higher SES, White British)

A sense of community was a critical factor in participants' attachment to their neighbourhood. Being part of a community involved positive social interactions, connectedness, belonging, social support and safety. Thus, living in a close community was one of the most important factors associated with subjective wellbeing.

> *"The community I live in – everybody knows everybody (...) and people are happy and if anything happens, you know, people would* know *who it is, what it is and how to address the situation. So it's just a nice community feeling (...)"* (Female, 44, Higher SES, BAME)

The sense of community in an area seemed to be predominantly achieved via two processes: a passive process related to familiarity with the neighbours and the built environment and an active process, related to the social interactions within co-habitants. Familiarity was closely associated with the time participants had been living in a particular area. It could be classified as a passive process as it mostly entailed elements in the context that had remained constant and therefore embedded in the environment. Associations to the sense of familiarity included knowing the area, having lived in the same place for years, recognising the people who lived around and being observant of these people's lives (i.e. witnessing children in the neighbourhood growing up). Hence, it seemed that regardless of any social interaction, coexisting with others in the same place and time could enhance the development of feelings of attachment to a place and its co-habitants.

> *"(Community) you know, it reaffirms that sense of home and belonging. You help each other, you know, I mean... it's not nice to think of people going through life alone and I have a couple of neighbours that live alone. But we all make sure that we communicate with them and, you know and make sure that they feel like they have an extended family. I have an old boy that's from Ireland that lives next door to me and he knew my grandmother (...) And I talk to him over the garden wall, like my grandma would've done, you know, 40 years ago."* (Female, 36, Lower SES, White British)

Interaction with others was identified as the backbone of the sense of community. Arguably, this was an active process, as it required conscious verbal and non-verbal exchanges between co-habitants. Participants mentioned different styles of interaction associated with the sense community. For some, smiling and greeting others was a way to acknowledge co-habitants and to keep a friendly and pleasant atmosphere in the area. Others talked about enjoying a casual chat with the neighbours, whilst some mentioned being close friends with other locals. Furthermore, participants consistently expressed that the most salient gain from these interactions was the mutual support in times of need.

Local parks, pubs, independent businesses and street markets played an important role in the participants' sense of community. These places not only brought local people together but, contrary to chain shops and new buildings, they were regarded as intimately connected to the community. On one hand, they represented a setting for interaction. On the other hand, they

enhanced the sense of familiarity by being distinctive elements of the local environment over the years, which was also associated with the sense of uniqueness of an area.

> *"(...) the small shopkeeper, who is doing a service, who is open, who is talking to the little old lady that never speaks to anyone. She comes in and gets eggs, or whatever it is and she'll have a little chat (...) So I think, the local trade is very, very important to keep a community together; it's part of the community and our communities are breaking down. And because of our communities breaking down, the law is not respected and you get a lot of crime"* (Female, 58, Higher SES, White British)

When elaborating on the topic of community, several participants expressed worry about the future of their own communities, which they experienced to be under threat due to a recent phenomenon. Some called it *'rejuvenation'* others '*regeneration'* while others referred to it as *'gentrification'*. Regardless of the name, participants described the phenomenon as the construction of modern and/or luxurious buildings and the presence of chain restaurants, bars and shops as an effort to make areas more attractive.

> *"So a lot of certain areas were run down so a lot of people wouldn't even dream about living there. Like Islington used to be like that, Hackney, Shoreditch, Brixton, it's happening there now, Peckham. They weren't desirable areas. And then gentrification started to happen and they became more desirable places to live because shops became nice and price houses went up."* (Female, 29, Higher SES, White British)

Areas anchored to the phenomenon included Shoreditch, Islington and Brixton. Gentrification was considered harmful for communities' closeness, as it affected the two fundamental components of the sense of community: the uniqueness of the built environment and the relationship among locals. Moreover, gentrification was strongly linked with the 'housing crisis' representation. Participants reasoned that by making places more attractive and with more people wanting to move into an area, the housing demand escalated, increasing accommodation prices. As expected, people who had spent their lives in an area became unable to afford rent prices were forced to move out to cheaper places. Local people were seen to have *'vanished'* or *'disappeared'*.

> *"(...) everything loses its charm, you know. I think a lot of places just become homogenised. Instead of your local pubs, working class pubs where, you know, you would go and play pool, you would go and meet up with local people (...) they've been replaced by these bars that they all look the same and it's just not that same atmosphere. People tend to stay in their own groups."* (Female, 33, Lower SES, White British)

Despite the strong negative judgments about the phenomenon of gentrification, some participants elaborated its benefits, especially men in the middle and the older age groups and those from a higher SES. For these participants, gentrification was also associated with development and rejuvenation. Thanks to gentrification, areas in the city that were previously neglected were revived by the investment in their reconstruction. The presence of more shops and restaurants was associated with making a place livelier and more interesting. Furthermore, making places *'nicer'* was linked to having people from higher socioeconomic level moving into the area, which translated into the area becoming safer. Together, these changes increased the perceived liveability of a place.

> *"I guess it's become a bit more, dare I say, gentrified. And that makes me sound terribly conservative and I'm not, but it's – it used to be – where we lived was not a particularly nice place, you know. Whether it was the people, or – because there was not so much going on – there was crime (...) And you know, there's been investment, which changes the way people treat areas and of course that then brings people into an area."* (Male, 52, Higher SES, White British)

Nonetheless, in general, gentrification tended to be conceptualised negatively as it represented a phenomenon that spoilt the character of the city and local communities.

To conclude, this theme elucidates the dynamics between the physical and social environment and the potential impact they could have on dwellers' subjective wellbeing. Accommodation prices prevented lower SES and younger dwellers from settling in London, which resulted in feelings of detachment and an eroded sense of belonging in relation to the city. Furthermore, gentrification stripped the character of local environments and disrupted community ties by forcing out long-term residents that cannot afford increases in rent prices. Despite the positive representations associated with gentrification (predominately by those from a higher socioeconomic status), such as increased sense of vibrancy and safety of the area,

the impossibility high accommodation prices in London led participants to wonder: who is London for?

4.1.3 Experiences in London: Summary of Results

In summary, London dwellers' experiences were associated with the diversity and multiculturalism of people in the city, living a fast-paced life whilst sharing the space with a large quantity of people, a rich culture and entertainment offer and changes in the environment that were transforming London's physical and social configuration. Each of these aspects had implications for dwellers' SWB, as they shaped the way in which dwellers interacted with others and the extent to which they engaged and felt part of the city. Moreover, It could be noted, that some ideas were more prevalent in particular groups.

4.2 Experiences in Mexico City and Subjective Wellbeing

4.2.1 Mexico City Dwellers: Free Association Task

Replicating the procedure followed for the London sample, the free association task was completed by the 24 Mexico City dwellers (See **Chapter 3** for sample details) and yielded 96 main responses in the form of text and/or images. These responses were recorded and examined to identify recurrent categories. The results of the content analysis show that the associations can be classified into nine categories. Four associations (4%) did not fit into any category. Most prevalent categories are described below. The prevalence of each category can be found in **Figure 15**.

The most prevalent associations were positive characteristics of the City (28%). This category includes associations such as *'charming'* and *'cool things'*. Nonetheless, the second most prevalent category referred to negative characteristics of the City, which encompassed associations such as *'traffic'* and *'pollution'*. These were followed by associations related to negative SWB (14%), including *'stress'* and *'sadness'*. The fourth most prevalent categories were crime and insecurity (10%), encompassing words like '*delinquency'* and '*violence'* and positive SWB (10%), which encompassed associations such as *'wellbeing'* and *'happiness'*. As seen in London dwellers' responses, experiences in Mexico City also had an important affective component. Moreover, Mexico City dwellers associated the city with positive and negative characteristics and, although positive characteristics were dominant, associations

related to crime and insecurity issues were so prevalent that they were categorised separately from negative characteristics. Arguably, the most prevalent categories provide a first glance of tensions and contradictions associated with living in Mexico City. Thematic analysis of the further elaborations of these associations allowed us to recognise how these aspects of the city were connected to dwellers' SWB.

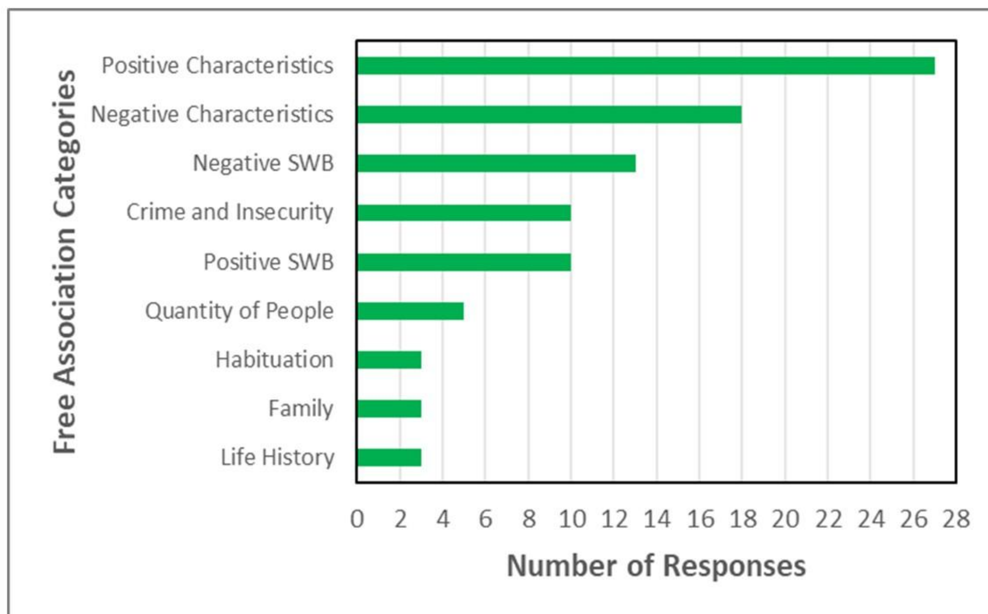

Figure 15. Categories elicited by the prompt 'experience living in your City' from the free association task in Mexico City.

4.2.2 Mexico City Dwellers: Interview Themes

In line with the methodology used in the London sample, Mexico City dwellers were required to write the first word or image that came to their minds when asked about their 'experience in Mexico City'. Once they had put down four associations, participants were interviewed about their answers. Interviews were analysed by way of a thematic analysis to identify patterns of content in the data. This chapter presents the four main themes related to living in Mexico City: crime and insecurity, amenities and the built environment, co-habitants and family. These themes are depicted in **Figure 16**. As it will be noted, elements constituting each of these themes had important implications in dwellers' SWB.

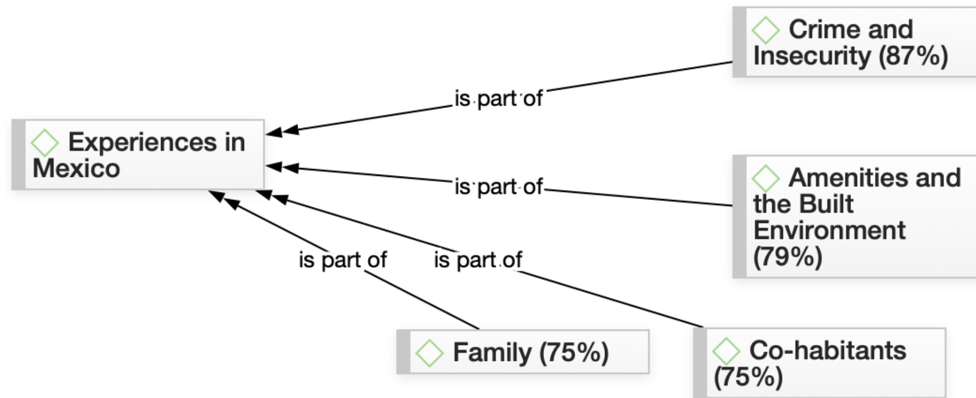

Figure 16. Representations of living in Mexico City.

4.2.2.1 Theme 1: Crime and Insecurity

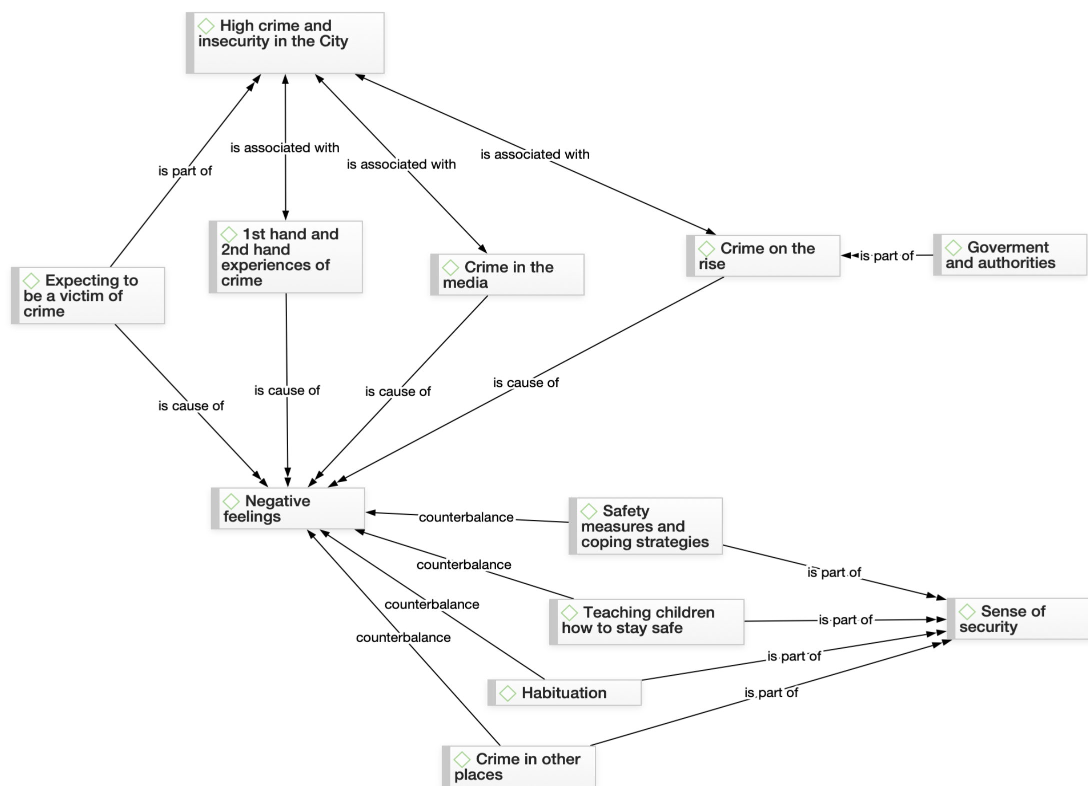

Figure 17. Prevalent ideas related to the crime and insecurity in Mexico City.

The vast majority of Mexican dwellers associated living in Mexico City with crime and insecurity. **Figure 17** shows the prevalent ideas on this theme. Half of these respondents spontaneously reported having been victims of crime and most mentioned having a friend or family member who had experienced crime. Most reported events were related to mugging; however, a couple of participants reported having their homes broken into whilst one

participant talked about the murder of her younger brother. These first and second-hand experiences of crime were considered an element of everyday life; they could happen anytime, anywhere and to anyone, contrary to past decades where crime was associated with particular areas in the city and night-time. Thus, experiencing crime was not only seen as common but was expected, with participants saying *'it was my turn this time'*, *'it was my destiny'* and *'it happens to everyone'*.

> *"My mum has been mugged, everyone actually, my sister, some of them have been mugged multiple times (...) so because of what they've told me I'm more careful, even though it hasn't happened to me I'm thinking of it, "I'm the next in the line" it's not like "it hasn't happened to me, it's fine", no, I am actually waiting for the moment for it to happen, with the anxiety that it's going to happen because it happens to everyone."* (Male, 22, Higher SES)

Living in an unsafe environment impacted on participant's wellbeing in both the short and long term. Participants who had experienced crime tended to narrate the details of the event, which in most cases involved psychological and physical harm. Participants recalled having felt petrified, frustrated, angry and/or helpless during the attack.

> *"I was walking and they threatened me with a butchers' knife. I was wearing a gold chain, my husband had bought it for me. I am talking about the first time I got mugged, it emotionally scarred me. It made me realise that I pee myself when I get scared."* (Female, 45, Lower SES)

For the majority of victims, the psychological distress lingered for some time. Several participants mentioned feeling anxious, paranoid and insecure for days, months and even years after the attack, whilst some participants referred to the experience as so traumatic that it was life changing.

> *"(...) besides it was a car that was bought with efforts, it was a new car and suddenly you don't have anything, it marked me for months, I mean, I still feel unsafe, but for months it was like… I really didn't want to go out for the first eight days, I always checked that the doors were locked, it was horrible… eventually I started to deal with it."* (Female, 53, Higher SES)

Beyond those directly affected, second-hand experiences and media exposure influenced people's sense of security. Participants mentioned constantly hearing or reading about missing people and victims of murder on television, social media and in newspapers.

This high exposure to crime resulted in Mexico City dwellers living in a constant state of vulnerability and feeling permanently at risk. Participants repeatedly mentioned that every time they left their homes it was uncertain whether they were going to come back.

> *"When you leave home you don't know if you are going to come back, I mean, if you are going to come back safe and sound or if you are going to do something that makes you not come back well or not coming back at all. You don't know whether it's the last time you are going to see your family…"* (Male, 58, Lower SES)

Moreover, emotions related to the representation of Mexico City as unsafe, such as anxiety and fear, were heightened in participants who had children, especially in mothers across the sample. Parents expressed great concern for their children's safety and security and constantly mentioned the fear of having their children kidnapped. Likewise, they emphasised that people were not to be trusted as it was impossible to know their real intentions (see also Theme 3). Consequently, they tended to keep their children as near to them as possible and did not let them go out by themselves. Thus, giving independence to children was challenging to parents, often leading to an internal conflict between allowing their children to grow up and keeping them safe.

> *"My son could go to his swimming lessons by foot. He could walk to the Sports Club, it is just eight blocks away. But no, I can't, I can't let him go alone. I am scared. Sometimes I let him go to the supermarket by himself, but it makes me crazy anxious, looking through the window, calling him all the time…"* (Female, 41 Higher SES)

Participants with older children also lived with a latent worry, which affected their reactions to common everyday life situations.

> *"If I call my daughter, three tones and [she] doesn't pick up the phone, I feel like a disruption in my body, like a palpitation. So I say "please be okay" I don't think "oh she can't pick up the phone because she is driving or with her friends" that never crosses my*

mind, I always think "what happened to her?!" that's what I always think first and gives me tachycardia." (Female, 53, Higher SES)

The extent to which insecurity affected participants' lives and wellbeing varied. Participants who felt in control of their own safety tended to feel more secure. Many respondents adopted safety measures such as not going out late, not wearing jewellery, avoiding public transport and keeping their phones in their pockets. Moreover, for several participants, praying for one's own and others' safety made them feel protected and less vulnerable. Thus, most participants identified insecurity as an obstacle in their lives but consciously made an effort to counterbalance it.

"You need to have dexterity to get things done, the will to… take a risk, knowing that you might be in danger but you have to do your things, you don't go thinking that something is going to happen to you but you need to have skills. To have initiative, even when others say "no, don't go there" I'm confident I can do it." (Female, 57, Higher SES)

Parents mentioned their children's wellbeing as a key motivation to overcome fears caused by Mexico City's insecurity issues. They elaborated on the importance of not transmitting their fear and anxiety to their children; and instead, of teaching them how to stay safe and how to react to different scenarios.

"They left my nose bruised. I healed and I have always been a cheerful person and well… I had to tell myself that I needed to go out and live, I couldn't stay like an ostrich so I just said "I have to carry on", I go out with my children, you know, all young people want to wear good brands, to be fashionable and I tell them: that it's okay, but we need to see where we are going, because sometimes people can see your watch, little precautions like that, but by doing them you can go out everywhere…" (Male, 46, Lower SES)

Other participants found comfort by comparing Mexico City to other cities and countries. These participants tended to mention that although there were high rates of crime in Mexico City, they were often related to mugging and stealing while in other places such as Torreon, Queretaro, Brazil and Colombia, crimes involved violence, kidnapping, drug fights and murder. Thus, by taking this perspective Mexico City was deemed a safer environment to live in.

Moreover, some participants expressed habituation, using phrases such as *'it is the same everywhere'* or *'I am used to it'*, which was a way to dismiss the gravity of the problem.

> *"People talk a lot about crime but thanks God I have never had such sort of conflict and I think you can face this type of problem everywhere, violence, crime, I mean, Mexico City is at the centre and everything that has to do with crime is more in the surroundings, I mean, there are thieves and all that but I feel that the more severe violence happens outside Mexico City."* (Female, 28, Higher SES)

By using these behavioural and cognitive strategies, Mexico City dwellers increased their sense of safety. Nonetheless, the prevalent shared idea was that crime rates and violence were increasing. These made participants fear that the city could fall into the hands of organised crime, which was highly associated with kidnapping, which participants tended to be most scared about.

> *"I feel anxious in that sense, because I see Guerrero, Morelos, Ecatepec, we have everything in the surroundings, femicide, everything, the fact that they say it isn't true or doesn't go public doesn't mean it doesn't exist, at least for me, it is relevant that crime has increased in parts like Ecatepec, in Naucalpan, everything is happening outside, so I do feel anxious, thinking when all these are going to come to the city? in a way it's like a plague and the only thing left is for it to come here."* (Male, 22, Higher SES)

Moreover, Mexico City dwellers expressed feeling hopeless about the government's ability to tackle the problem. Most participants did not trust the government nor the police force as both were often seen as criminals too. Authorities were recurrently deemed corrupted, negligent and *'looking for their own benefit'*. This lack of trust resulted in people not reporting crimes or having the idea that doing so could be more detrimental than beneficial. Nonetheless, a small group of participants were optimistic about the installation of CCTV cameras in streets, a measure implemented some years back. However, participants who had experienced crime recently commented that they tried to get footage of the cameras but for diverse reasons, the cameras were not working.

> *"Here at the neighbourhood we have cameras, most streets have cameras. There have been some robberies and assaults and the cameras have never worked. They don't work.*

That makes you think that the problem comes from the government because it's not possible for them to not know what is happening when there are cameras, this stresses me out" (Female, 41, Higher SES)

In conclusion, participants' representations of the environment as unsafe had important repercussions for their subjective wellbeing, as they lived feeling scared, anxious and vulnerable. As a reaction, they had adopted safety measures and strategies that made them feel more in control of their own security and allowed them to overcome the fear of going out. Nonetheless, Mexico City dwellers lived in a hyper-vigilant state, relentlessly dreading an invisible menace that could be targeting them or their families.

4.2.2.2 Theme 2: Amenities and the Built Environment

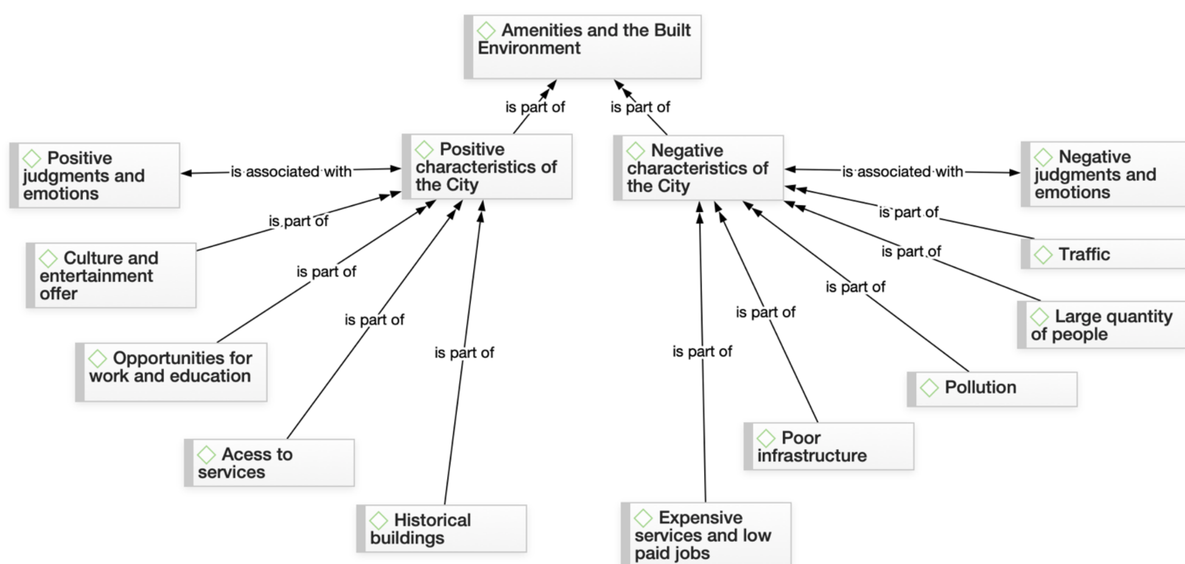

Figure 18. Prevalent ideas associated with amenities and the built environment.

Four fifths of participants elaborated on different positive sides of living in Mexico's capital city. The city's aesthetics, the culture and entertainment offer, access to a variety of services and having opportunities for work and education grounded the representation that Mexico City was the best place to live in the country, as summarised in **Figure 18**.

The Built Environment

Historical Buildings, Museums and Culture

Participants valued the aesthetics of historical buildings, such as the Angel of Independence, the Palace of Fine Arts, the Metropolitan Cathedral, Chapultepec Castle and the Zocalo as they were ingrained elements of the city landscape and anchored to the character of the city. Participants enjoyed seeing and visiting them as they were *'beautiful'*, *'interesting'* and sparked a sense of identity, as they were symbols of Mexico City's history.

> *"The buildings, I love Paseo de la Reforma very much, you go there, see the roundabouts and by the end you see the [Chapultepec] Castle, astonishing, I love that and I like every place I go to, the centre, like my husband tells me "why do you go to the centre that much?" and I say "look, I don't go by myself, I teach my son to like the place he lives in, to value the city" honestly, we have such a nice history (...)"* (Female, 36, Lower SES)

Furthermore, participants consistently talked about the large number of museums in the city. Alongside historical buildings and monuments, museums were important constituents of the representation of Mexico City as a place rich in culture. Moreover, museums were considered affordable, which intensified the positive attitudes towards them. The National Museum of Anthropology was repeatedly regarded as a timeless main attraction in the City. Mothers liked visiting museums and historic places with their children and emphasised that Mexico City was a good place for new experiences and learning.

> *"I am always checking deals so (my kids) never stop seeing something they want to see or "there is a Jackson Pollock at the Modern Art Museum" maybe I don't know if they are going to like it but I always take them and tell them 'maybe you like it or maybe you think you can make it at home using some ketchup, but at least you have seen with your own eyes how a Jackson Pollock looks like and if you ever go to New York you can say you saw one in Mexico'."* (Female, 46, Higher SES)

Activities, Facilities and Entertainment

Apart from the cultural offer, Mexico City was described as highly attractive because of the many activities available, as well as its facilities and recreational spaces. Participants mentioned the abundance of shopping centres, restaurants and theatres in the City, which were linked to modernity and development. Moreover, these places were associated with positive feelings such as fun and amusement and represented an environment for social interaction with friends and family. The wide diversity of leisure activities converted into opportunities for experiencing new and exciting things, making Mexico City a place of novelty.

> *"I have three kids so... I mean, I've lived here my whole life... so in matters of entertainment one has a wide scope of things to see, many places to go (...) state-of-the-art concert venues, theatres, movie theatres, shopping centres, cultural matters, there are free things, cultural events... you can practice any activity you want... acting, theatre, dancing... and there are so many places that are nearby home."* (Male, 46, Lower SES)

Access to Services

Several positive opinions about Mexico City were built on the comparison between the City and places outside the capital. Primarily, access to services and opportunities for work and education were the most distinctive and appreciated characteristics of Mexico City.

The vast number of supermarkets and hospitals were associated with the idea that Mexico City had accessible services regardless of the day and time. This was described as a crucial advantage of living in the City, with some participants recalling emergencies that they or others had experienced in other cities or towns where services were not available. These comparisons contributed to peoples' positive judgments about Mexico City and promoted a sense of security, given that participants felt confident that in case of a medical emergency they would easily find a hospital or pharmacy available.

In a similar vein, respondents consistently classified the City as *'convenient'*, which meant having facilities and services nearby. Participants mentioned having schools and shopping malls within a short distance of their homes, which prompted behaviours such as walking

instead of using the car and going out instead of staying at home. Moreover, *'convenient'* also conveyed finding whatever they needed within the same building or area, making reaching these places effortless and less time-consuming. This was something participants valued, given the many problems reported in relation to navigation across the city (see sub-theme 2.4.1).

> *"Commodity", reachable. Basically we have everything at hand (...) here in Mexico City we can find all the commodities, culture-wise, everything you need, good schools, good museums, very good movie theatres, very expensive but very good, I think you can find everything here. That's why I wrote "commodity" (...) it makes me feel good because you don't need to go to different places to find what you need."* (Male, 57, Higher SES)

Opportunities: an idea or a reality?

Apart from access to services, another valuable characteristic of Mexico City was that it was a place full of opportunities. The City was associated with novelty, learning and personal growth. On one hand, the offer of schools and universities was associated with academic achievement and on the other hand, Mexico City's national and international relevance was associated with the presence of public and private enterprises and consequently, jobs. However, as participants elaborated further, it became salient that many opportunities did not necessarily entail many **good** opportunities.

Academic achievement was important for many participants, as it was associated with a good upbringing, well-paid jobs, a healthier lifestyle and a better future. Nonetheless, various factors prevented people from obtaining a degree. Participants talked about the saturation in schools and the shortage of places in public universities. Some participants from the lower socioeconomic group mentioned repeatedly failing to be accepted at university. For these respondents, private education was not affordable, hence, they had to abandon their career goals, something that affected their life satisfaction.

> *"Unsatisfied. Unsatisfied because of what I was telling you, in education matters. We sometimes don't have the chance to keep studying. I would have liked to keep studying… so… for people to have more opportunities, for all the ones like me that wanted to study (...)"* (Female, 34, Lower SES)

Private education was seen as the pathway to a better-quality education, however, it was also described as very costly. Parents that wanted their children to study in private schools mentioned making efforts to afford fees, which was associated with anxiety and worry.

> *"I want my son to study Chinese so I signed him up to Chinese lessons despite the 600 or 1000 pesos they cost each month, even if I have to work a little bit more and go to bed later, I do it because I want that for my children. So that´s what is happening, that's what worries me, it worries me that we are more and more each time (…)"* (Female, 41, Higher SES)

In terms of work, many held the representation that the City offered numerous job opportunities. However, the majority believed that most jobs were not well-paid, regardless of one's academic achievement. Older participants tended to emphasise that this was not a problem in the past, so it was regarded as a contemporary problem affecting young people mainly.

> *"I see it economically, salaries are very low, well, my husband is an engineer and he still gets a good salary, he worked in the Comision Federal de Electricidad and thanks God that's why we have a good quality of life but now, our children don't have those salaries. And you know what are they doing? They sell this, they sell that and they have a degree, that worries me…"* (Female, 63, Higher SES)

Respondents across the sample mentioned that salaries were not sufficient to live in the City. Mexico City was predominantly conceptualised as expensive, which was associated with the cost of basic services and taxes.

> *"The taxes, the electricity bill is a nightmare…I mean you pay every three months, I don't know, in half a year you pay a certain amount and all of a sudden one day you receive a bill with the double or the triple and they tell you to check your system, but you have to pay and then see what happens, the Government doesn't do anything to help you, same with the water, it's very expensive."* (Male, 37, Lower SES)

This economic situation had been pushing participants to have more than one job, work for longer hours and refrain from buying or doing things they liked. A considerable number of

Mexico City dwellers expressed financial concerns and were worried about their and their families' future.

> *"I know that we all are not going to earn the same, but regarding goods, if they increase the price, they must increase wages. It goes together. They increase the price of everything, basic foods, egg, milk, bread, even a one peso increase affects you. Before, when we took the children out, I used to take them to the movies two times per week and now you can just take them once"* (Male, 57, Higher SES)

Quantity of People

In the participants' opinion, Mexico City's capital city status and positive characteristics had attracted numerous people to it. Consequently, the city felt congested and saturated and faced related issues such as pollution, traffic and a shortage of services and infrastructure.

Navigating the City

Experiences related to moving around the city were identified as a source of negative judgments about the city, negative feelings and negative interactions with other dwellers.

> *"Well, I wrote that for me living in Mexico City means some stress because of all the people that exist in the City. This comes together with the traffic, I don't have a car but it is so saturated with people and cars that is causes me stress. And well… stress in every sense, in the public transport and so on, all the saturation that exists, people from the metropolitan area comes to work or for shopping so (...)"* (Male, 22, Higher SES)

Commuting was an activity dreaded by most, as regardless of the distance, times were long because of the traffic. Participants mentioned spending a long period of their days in a vehicle, which was associated with life dissatisfaction. Moreover, to avoid being late for their jobs, some participants reported cutting their sleeping hours in order to have more time on hand. This made them feel tired and fatigued from the journey even before starting their working day, impacting their performance. On top of that, the pressure of having to be on time for their jobs resulted in high levels stress and anxiety.

"In my car and in public transport, because of the traffic during rush hour, doing an assessment, me in my car or me using the public transport, we are talking about three hours every day, 15 hours per week, 60 hours per month, 60 hours of my life on transport with its chaos, stress and other things, it is not possible to live in Mexico (…) for me it is an important issue that affects my wellbeing." (Male, 59, Lower SES)

Mexico City's infrastructure was constantly criticised. Some participants mentioned that recent changes implemented by the government regarding the car flow direction of some main roads and streets had not been beneficial and, on the contrary, had hindered traffic flow. Others complained about street conditions and elaborated that unfixed potholes and road works were recurrent obstacles for circulation. Dwellers thought there were not enough bridges and flyovers to reduce congestion. Furthermore, the overload of vehicles on the streets also resulted in a remarkable parking problem. Finding a place to park was described as problematic, annoying and stressful and thus, some mentioned having stopped using their cars just to avoid the stress related to finding a spot. Moreover, participants talked about a *'parking war'* ongoing in the city, where residents become hostile when preserving their parking space, creating friction between neighbours and co-habitants.

"I used to live by Iztapalapa and we had the "parking war" going on. There used to be some people that visited us and one day one of the girls got her white car marked with a permanent marker, just for parking outside someone's fence." (Female, 66, Lower SES)

In a similar vein, negative attitudes amongst dwellers were associated with the frequent protests happening in the City. Although participants expressed sympathy and understanding in relation to social issues, they disapproved of public demonstrations, given that they restricted access to different parts of the city, which resulted in traffic. Participants resented protestors because their lack of consideration to other city dwellers.

"It has affected me (…) you have to wake up earlier, change your routine so you don't use your car, modify, look for the best alternative, the roads, you have to be more cautious, the protests, protests are another topic, the social problems of a big city, all the social problems, the teacher's protest, why isn't there a solution? But yeah, these issues exist too." (Male, 46, Lower SES)

Traffic was not the only challenge in navigating the environment. There was general discontent due to the implementation of the programme *"Hoy No Circula",* a governmental strategy to reduce pollution levels in the City. As part of the policy, private vehicles were not allowed to circulate one or two days per week. Participant mentioned that despite the *"Hoy No Circula*", high pollution still remained and was an important pervasive problem in the City. Moreover, using public transport did not represent a better option. Although a few participants had positive judgments about public transport (e.g. affordable and running regularly), the overarching opinion was that it was in poor condition and too busy. Furthermore, people sensed a hostile atmosphere on the bus and underground, which was associated with negative social interactions (see Theme 3) and feeling unsafe.

Despite the overarching association between traffic and other restrictions to navigate the environment with negative experiences, individual factors played an important in role in the extent to which participants were affected by these issues. Participants mentioned making a conscious effort to deal better with the negative effects associated with traffic and having their own coping strategies such as listening to music, finding shortcuts and *'mentally preparing'* themselves. Moreover, Mexico City dwellers had conceptualised traffic as an irremediable downside of living in large, highly populated capital city.

> *"I in particular stress out, but I snap out of it because I... I get relaxed, I prepare my mind. For example, when we were coming here and took us a while, I was like "okay it doesn't matter, you are already here and you can't do anything about it" so yes, it's very stressful, you have to prepare yourself mentally and have a blank head… thinking that you will also get to look around…"* (Male, 36, Lower SES)

In conclusion, aspects related to the city's-built environment had salient connections with dwellers' SWB. Historical buildings held symbolic meanings that fostered attachment towards the City and a sense of identity. Moreover, living in the capital was represented as advantageous because of the easy access to services and all the opportunities for education, work and leisure. However, there was another side to these characteristics; services were not always affordable, public schools and universities were saturated and jobs were poorly paid. Besides, the large quantity of people coming to city had resulted in a saturated environment with consequences such as traffic and pollution. Although all these downsides were associated with negative judgments about the city and the experience of negative feelings, traffic and restrictions to move

around the city were salient issues that participants represented as particularly detrimental for their SWB. Nonetheless, Mexico City dwellers developed coping strategies that helped counterbalance the effects of these problems.

4.2.2.3 Theme 3: Co-habitants

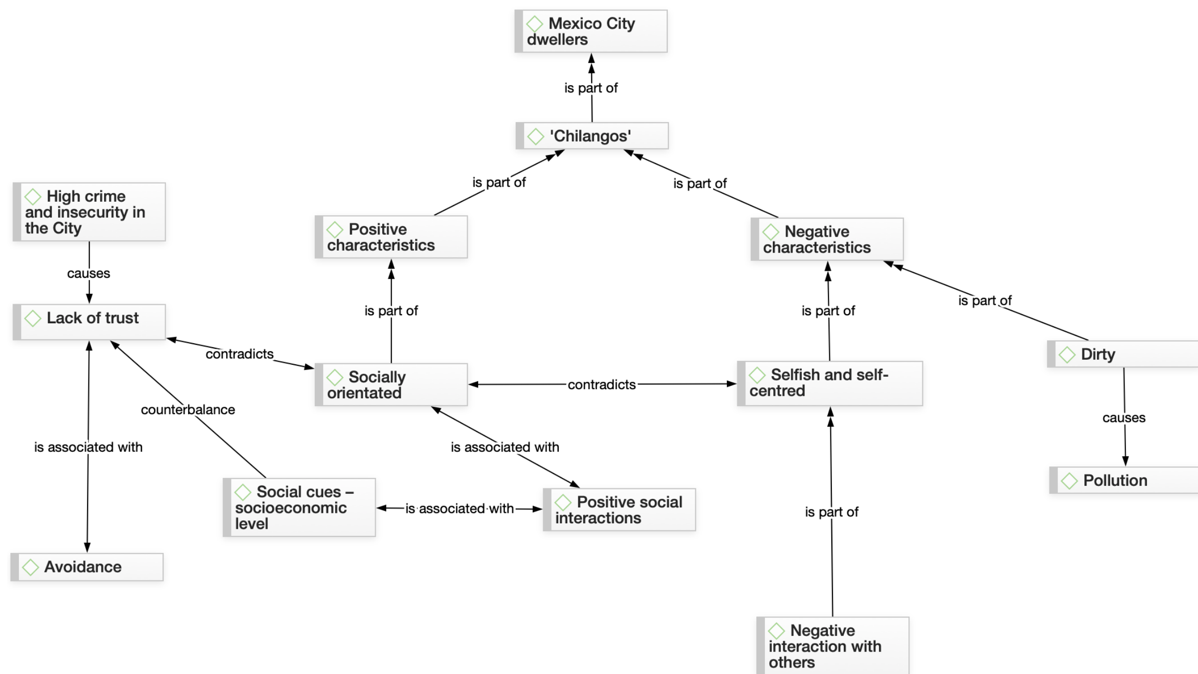

Figure 19. Prevalent ideas associated with co-habitants.

Three quarters of Mexico City dwellers elaborated on how the experience of life in the City was influenced by their-co-habitants and the everyday interactions between them (See prevalent ideas in **Figure 19**). When talking about the topic, representations about the *'chilango'* emerged. The word *'chilango'* refers to people from Mexico City. The word was coined by people from outside the capital city and was used as a derogative term to refer to people from the capital. When elaborating on their representations of the *'chilango'* participants described people from Mexico City as hard working, highly driven, motivated and *'fighters'* who overcome adversities to make their own opportunities. Moreover, several respondents shared the notion that people from Mexico City were united, willing to help others, kind, warm and welcoming, especially with foreigners and tourists.

> *"I think the Chilango is very canny, very bold, very alert… they are only waiting to find opportunities and try to find the means…I mean, they are not people that give up easily,*

you try to find the way, they like businesses, maybe you are getting paid peanuts but you are also selling watches, bracelets, necklaces, doing whatever it takes to keep going… I think we are fighters, that we are entrepreneurs and many follow their dreams, we are hard-workers" (Female, 28, Higher SES)

However, there were also negative characteristics associated with the *'chilango'*. Participants mentioned that traditionally, people from Mexico City had been described as dirty and suggested that a reason for the City's pollution was the poor environmental education of its dwellers. Nonetheless, some participants expressed that they had recently seen an improvement in terms of cleanliness and pollution levels and elaborated on how awareness of environmental issues had led them to stop using their automobiles. Accordingly, they criticised people who used cars to go to nearby places and those who littered on the streets, behaviours that were judged as uncivil, inconsiderate and unfair, given that some people were making an effort to help the environment.

"The environment… there are many respiratory tract infections, garbage, negative people, that are ignorant and toss gum on the street, how hard is to put it inside a piece of paper and put it in the bin, the environment, you see the smog that comes out of the buses, the lorries, you can see the black smoke coming out and you ask yourself "what can I do?" (Female, 57, Higher SES)

Moreover, participants described Mexico City dwellers as selfish, uncivil, self-centred and oblivious to their surroundings and co-habitants. A consistent scenario associated with this appraisal was public transport. Respondents mentioned experiencing or witnessing verbal and non-verbal aggressions, such as insults and pushing when using the underground or the bus.

"There's no civility, people are wearing backpacks, you can be walking on the streets and get hit by their backpacks when they turn around (..) people aren't kind, we aren't kind, we don't care about the others and we have become very cold citizens. We are trying to figure out how to take advantage of the other, most people." (Male, 57, Higher SES)

Furthermore, some participants mentioned that they felt obligated to tolerate these and other uncomfortable situations for fear of a dangerous reaction from the instigator to a comment or

complaint. This was associated with frustration and helplessness, especially in older participants.

> *"I mean the city is nice and everything… but it's the people (…) they push you and hit you without even noticing. It has happened to me; it really makes me mad when they hit me or push me. I mean, I understand but they don't even apologise… with an apology the anger disappears, but when you see that they don't even realise… that's the problem."* (Male, 58, Lower SES)

Negative attitudes towards other co-habitants were also associated with feelings of insecurity. Crime in the City had made participants live with feelings of uncertainty about others and with a generalised lack of trust. Participants from the middle and older age groups recalled that years ago there was no need to question other people's intentions or to be sceptical about them. This trust was associated with freedom to interact with strangers and a higher sense of security.

> *"I say to my daughter "don't take anything from anyone" because there are lots of people that want to harm you and us, we used to have that freedom, that trust, we never had to think about it, we were kids, there was no distrust, on the contrary, there was gratefulness, you were grateful if someone gave you a candy, some bread."* (Female, 45, Lower SES)

Nowadays, however, participants considered anyone outside their close social groups as a potential threat to their wellbeing. Distrusting co-habitants made Mexico City dwellers live in a permanent defensive state, which prevented social interaction. Furthermore, being weary and distant conflicted with values of openness, kindness and friendliness, creating an ambivalence in how to behave with others. On one hand, there was a willingness to preserve good manners and communication. On the other hand, doing so could potentially put people in a vulnerable and risky position.

> *"I think we are good people… but… it's a double-edged sword, nowadays you can't trust anyone. You want to show that you are a good person by saying "come over to my place to have lunch" but it's hard because you are not going to open your door to everyone."* (Female, 57, Higher SES)

Hence, in order to expand social interaction beyond family members, participants selected people who they felt they could trust. The different socioeconomic levels represented an important cue that enabled approach and interaction among Mexico City dwellers. Participants tended to interact with people of their own socioeconomic level, as they believed that there was more affinity with them in terms of values, education and interests. Moreover, there were mentions of feeling safer and more comfortable when surrounded by people from a similar socioeconomic status.

> *"(I feel) very good, at ease. Confident that I can have a good communication with my neighbour, that I can even go and visit him and him visit me whenever we want. This wasn't possible in the place I used to live in. There were people with other educational level. That's important, the educational level we have because that way you can relate to others better, having the same level."* (Male, 59 Lower SES)

Furthermore, significant negative attitudes towards homeless people and beggars were identified. Although participants mentioned feeling worry, pity and compassion towards people in that situation, they also referred to them as *"ugly people"* and *"animals"*. Furthermore, their presence was associated with insecurity and negative feelings such as fear and disgust. Some participants blamed the government for not helping these people, while others expressed discontent with the authorities because they had not *"cleaned"* the streets from homeless people.

> *"I can't stand the windshield washers… and in this neighbourhood there are a lot of homeless people, I mean, a shelter, so there is a lot of ugly people around, poor people, they are wearing the same clothes for four years, they have their nails very long, they smell bad and look bad, it bothers me that the shelter let them out and they bother people a lot, sometimes they approach you and you get scared."* (Male, 31, Higher SES)

In conclusion, this theme shows the positive and negative characteristics attached to representations about Mexico City dwellers. Even though the social nature of the *'chilango',* social interaction with other co-habitants was limited and undesirable. This was predominately associated by the representation of the City as unsafe. In general, increased sense of security could be achieved by not trusting anyone and assuming bad intentions. This led to suspicion

and avoidance towards others, which contradicted sociability values. Therefore, to expand their social groups participants relied on cues that they associated with trust such as socioeconomic level. People with similar socioeconomic backgrounds were assumed to have similar levels of education and values. On the contrary, those from a lower socioeconomic level were rejected and considered potentially dangerous.

4.2.2.4 Theme 4: Family

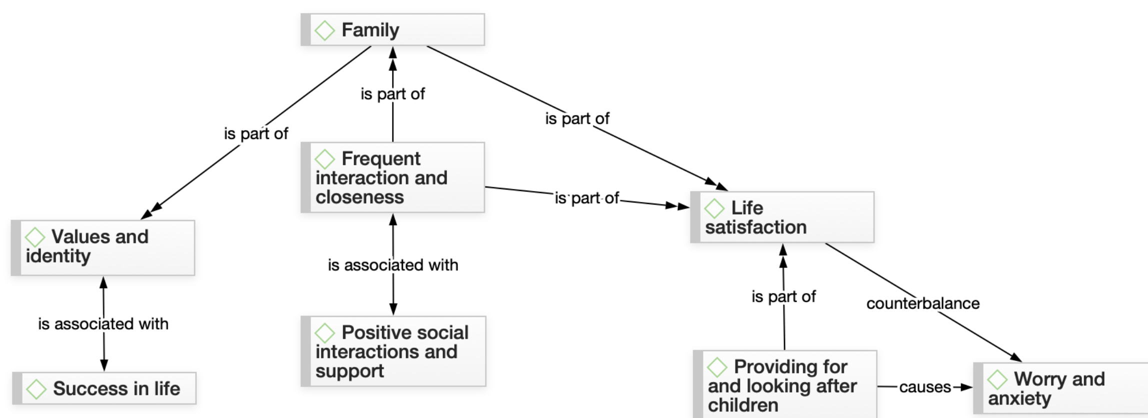

Figure 20. Prevalent ideas associated with family in Mexico City dwellers

Three quarters of participants associated living in the City with their family. Family was a constant element in representations of life history, identity, goals and everyday life (**Figure 20**). Thus, the value of the family was identified at the core of Mexico City dwellers' attachment to the City, affective experiences and judgments of life satisfaction.

Family and Identity

Family played a role in the definition of the self. It was conceived as the main source of education, which, rather than an academic connotation, related to values and manners. Respondents considered values, such as respect and responsibility, to be building blocks of their identity and expressed pride in having been raised with them. Furthermore, values were associated with traditions and older generations. Participants talked about how grandparents transmitted those values to younger generations and the importance of teaching them to their children to preserve them across time. The teaching of values was considered a sign of good

upbringing, as they were principles given by the family with the purpose of succeeding in life and contributing positively to society.

> *"The values come from my grandparents… To be polite, greet people "good morning, afternoon". I think that values and education come from home. How you behave at home, you eventually realise how you behave with the neighbours, at work, mainly at school, with your friends, neighbours, professionally (…) I was taught all these values."* (Male, 37, Higher SES)

Accordingly, criminals and drug users were reasoned as the product of *"dysfunctional families"*. Meanings of *"dysfunctional family"* were varied, as some participants associated it with divorce and single parenthood whilst others with domestic violence or child neglect. Nevertheless, the *"dysfunctional family"* was characterised by not teaching values to children and not supporting their upbringing.

> *"We know that the foundation for every society is the family and if your parents, even if they hate each other are with you, supporting you and everything, you will be a good adult and you will have that value to spread it with your family". In my family, we are a close-knit family, wherever one goes, the other ones follow. And for me that's the foundation of everything."* (Female, 36, Lower SES)

Several participants expressed concern about the decline of values in society, an idea that was predominantly associated with young people and their behaviour. During elaboration, participants principally blamed technology (e.g. mobile phones and computers) for the lack of interaction within families. Young people were described as *'always on their phones'*. Although this was an idea shared by participants across the sample, it was more salient in older participants and middle-aged women from a lower socioeconomic level.

> *"Even with my daughter, always on her phone, we don't get to talk at the table (…) Last Sunday was my husband's birthday, we invited him out for lunch (…) my son on his phone asking for the WiFi password (…) I'm on Facebook but I am never posting what I'm doing or anything. That's what I tell them, they even post when they are going to the bathroom. It has lots of consequences, I'm telling you this with sadness."* (Female, 58, Lower SES)

Family Connectedness

Frequent interaction and closeness with family members was ingrained in Mexico City dwellers' lives. Time outside work was commonly spent with family members. People from the younger group enjoyed spending their free time with their families and friends whilst respondents from the middle and older group mentioned the importance of keeping their grown-up children close, even if they did not live with them anymore. This closeness was associated with reciprocal support and the experience of positive feelings. Given the importance and frequency of family interactions it could be argued that connectedness with family members was an important component in Mexico City dwellers' subjective wellbeing. Accordingly, lack of interaction with the family was associated with the experience of negative feelings such as loneliness.

> *"I wrote "lately there has been a family disintegration" I am very worried about that, for me that I'm in my old days, there is so much loneliness. I only had two children, they don't call me anymore, you have to be the one who calls (...) that's something I work on a lot, because you've been with them their whole life, they are your children and I don't think it's right for them to forget you once they are away"* (Female, 63, Higher SES)

Family and Life Satisfaction

The importance of the family for Mexico City dwellers was also reflected in representations of being a parent. Four fifths of participants had children and their lives revolved around that role. For most women in the sample, their everyday priority was their children and partners. Most of them mentioned having stopped working or working part-time so they could have time to look after their children and home. Moreover, it became salient that mothers spent much of their time with their children, as they were responsible for picking them up from school, feeding them and checking their homework. Taking care of the children and the household was associated with stress and tiredness, however, participants mostly associated it with happiness, as having kids was a key component of their life satisfaction.

> *"At the moment, I am housewife, sometimes I plan an event, as I mentioned to you I studied Hospitality so I love things like wedding planning, planning events and all that,*

so if someone tells me: "hey, I need this" I try to plan it and yes, I mean I do that but is more like… it's not like I have to be paying fully attention to them, right now my attention is on my baby and maybe in some years, a couple of years I will look for a job again…" (Female, 28, Higher SES)

The role of the father was less demarcated compared to the one of mother. However, for parents in general, providing for their families was seen as both a responsibility and a life goal. Giving the children the means to study was a prevalent goal within the sample, as academic preparation was highly associated with success (see Theme 2).

"It makes me feel good because despite the problems we had during our youth and the lack of things, we lived we got over that, as I tell my children: "if you don't study you can't say it's because you don't have a pencil, a pen or a peso for the bus. Maybe you haven't had enough but you have had the necessary to succeed" and I think they have understood this and they have seized it… they are on a good path." (Male, 57, Higher SES)

However, providing children with what is necessary for education and development was not always easy for participants mostly because of economic factors. Money related problems were linked to negative feelings such as anxiety and worry, pressurised by the idea that the future and wellbeing of their children depended highly on what they could afford for them. Thus, participants mentioned working long hours or having different jobs to fully ensure their family's wellbeing and emphasised the importance of sacrificing for the family.

"Very bad, I even sold AVON at some point. I'm not saying that's a bad thing but I started to do things that I didn't use to do. Go around selling stuff? What's that? Your kids make you do lots of things." (Female, 58, Lower SES)

These efforts, however, did not go unnoticed. Apart from the participants with no children, most participants talked about their family from both a parent and a daughter/son perspective. When talking as a daughter/son, participants expressed gratitude towards their parents for what they had given to them. These feelings were linked to positive emotions, positive overall life appraisals and nostalgia. Moreover, it reinforced their will of providing the best for their families. Thus, family's wellbeing guided participants' life goals and aspirations.

"'Wellbeing' I am lucky… I am lucky to live in Mexico City… I had a nice childhood, yes lacking of some things, I am grateful with my parents that I had the opportunity and I seized the opportunities they gave me to study and build a career. That's what I can say about wellbeing in terms of living here at Mexico City." (Male, 59, Lower SES)

In conclusion, this theme shows the cultural importance of the family and its fundamental role in the lives of Mexico City dwellers. Family-related values guided participant's identity, goals and aspirations. Moreover, family was at the core of their everyday activities: parents worked to provide for their children, mothers organised their days around the needs of their children and free time was spent with family members. In addition, these family values and experiences were associated with life satisfaction and the experience of positive feelings. Hence, family could be identified as a crucial element of Mexico City dweller's SWB. For many, the best part of living in the City was that their families lived there too.

"My life is in here, my daughter, everything and I like it here. I'm from here, my family is from here, all my family is here so what would I go somewhere else?" (Female, 31, Lower SES)

4.2.3 Experiences in Mexico City: Summary of Results

To sum up, Mexico City dwellers' experiences were associated with crime and insecurity, the access to many amenities and services, dynamics amongst co-habitants and family. Dwellers valued the many opportunities for work, education and leisure in the environment, however low salaries and poor quality of services and infrastructure decreased the benefits associated with such opportunities. Crime was a pervasive issue in the City that affected dwellers' everyday life, as they lived with a prevalent fear of something happening to them, which made them suspicious of other dwellers. However, the downsides of living in Mexico City were countered by the happiness associated with family life.

4.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the results from the first interview study in London and Mexico City dwellers' experiences in the city. The chapter began by presenting the results from London and then those from Mexico City. For each city, results from the content analysis of the free associations are first described and are then followed by those from the thematic analysis of the further elaborations of the free associations. **Table 6** shows the most prevalent themes found in each city.

Table 6. Most prevalent themes associated with experiences in the city in London and Mexico City

London	Mexico City
Multiculturalism (92%)	Crime and Insecurity (87%)
Hustle and Bustle (83%)	Amenities and the Built Environment (79%)
Cultural and Entertainment Offer (80%)	Co-habitants (75%)
Changes in the Environment (70%)	Family (75%)

Results showed that experiences in the city were associated with the built and social environment. In both cities, spaces such as museums and theatres were associated with positive feelings and judgments about the city. However, dwellers faced different obstacles to benefit from such amenities, which hindered their potential to foster people's SWB. Moreover, both in London and Mexico City, high costs of living and large quantities of people were aspects of the city associated with negative feelings and decreased life satisfaction. Furthermore, social phenomena particular to each city played an important role in people's representations of life in the city and wellbeing. In London, issues associated with immigration, housing and gentrification were damaging the City's liveability. The extent to which these problems affected dwellers' wellbeing depended on their demographics. Lower SES London dwellers struggled to afford living in London and so did younger dwellers, nonetheless, many of the latter counted this with the support of their parents. For various middle-aged males and older dwellers, *'uncontrolled'* immigration was associated with a decreased sense of ownership of the City, which negatively impacted the way in which they experienced their life in London.

For the majority of dwellers, gentrification and the '*housing crisis'* was seen as damaging to the character of London by transforming the physical and social environment and consequently weakening dwellers' attachment to the city and sense of community. In Mexico City, crime and insecurity affected dwellers' everyday lives and SWB, as they were often suspicious of everyone outside their close social groups and in fear of something happening to them at any point. Nonetheless, in spite of these issues, the detrimental aspects of living in the city were lessened by different factors. Many dwellers in both cultures expressed a personal preference for living in large cities and several have devised a variety of strategies to navigate the environment more efficiently and safely. Whilst London dwellers found an antidote for the effects associated with living a fast-paced life in parks, Mexico City dwellers' focus on their family life buffered the effects associated with living in a challenging environment.

Chapter 5: Experiences in the City and SWB: Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate London and Mexico City dwellers' experiences in the city and how they associated with positive and negative emotions and life satisfaction. Thematic analysis of the elaborations on the free associations prompted by the GEM (Joffe & Elsey, 2014) allowed the identification of recurrent themes in dwellers' sense-making of life in their city. In this chapter, results from the thematic analysis are now discussed, in order to outline different forces that may be impacting dwellers' SWB according to the literature. The chapter begins with the discussion of the results in London and then moves to those in Mexico City. Then, a cross-cultural discussion of socio-cultural factors shaping dwellers' experiences in the city is presented.

5.1 Experiences in London and SWB

Thematic analysis of the elaborations on the free associations showed that Londoners' experience of their city is mostly associated with multiculturalism, the hustle and bustle, culture and entertainment and changes in the environment.

The first theme exposes social representations of living in a multicultural environment. For London dwellers, the interaction with people from various backgrounds was the norm, especially for young participants, who expressed 'taking it for granted'. Participants expressed that historically, London has welcomed people from all ethnicities and religions. Thus, openness and tolerance towards other cultures were deemed an essential constituent of the identity of a Londoner and something to be proud of. For London dwellers, diversity made the city *'more interesting'*, by sparking curiosity, bringing opportunities to learn about other cultures and befriend people from different backgrounds. Nonetheless, the most salient gain associated with multiculturalism was the wide variety of food available in the city. However, in spite of these progressive attitudes towards cosmopolitanism, views on its antecedent, immigration, were not as positive. For several middle-aged and older respondents (especially males) immigration was an important problem the UK was facing. During elaborations, the social representation of the 'undesired immigrant' emerged. The 'undesired immigrant' was the one that took advantage of London and Londoners by using services and taking up space without giving anything in return. These immigrants were associated with not paying taxes and

with the idea that they were *'not integrated'*, which meant that they neither speak English nor abide by British values and rules. Furthermore, immigrants were represented as the culprits for the saturation of services such as schools, hospitals and public transport. Participants blamed the government for not controlling the *'excessive'* number of immigrants arriving in the country and resented the favouring of immigrants' needs over those of the British people. A persistent idea associated with the representation of immigration was that tolerance had been pushed to uncomfortable limits. Striving to be '*politically correct'*, the government was allowing immigrants stay rigid in their incompatible values and to *'take over'* the city by endorsing their cultural practices and supporting the construction of cultural centres and places of worship. Hence, although Londoners were happy about the flavours of multiculturalism, for some, being surrounded by people with different skin colours and talking in other languages made them feel that they were not in their country own anymore.

Research on the effects that immigration has on natives' SWB shows mixed results, potentially because of the variety of methodological and statistical approaches to its study (Howley et al., 2018; O'Connor, 2020). Similarly, research on diversity, an inherent consequence of immigration, has been linked to positive outcomes such as the increase of ethnic shops and restaurants, social tolerance, enhanced creativity and economic growth. However, in the UK and other countries such as the US, it has also been associated with lower levels of life satisfaction (Longhi, 2014; Putnam, 2007). Longhi (2014) found that white British people living in diverse areas have lower levels of SWB than those living in more homogenous neighbourhoods. This effect became stronger when natives were homeowners, possibly because they might find it harder to leave the area. Conversely, there was no correlation found between diversity and life satisfaction for non-white British people or for those born outside the UK.

Putnam (2007) suggests that this could be explained by the decline of trust and social capital associated with diversity. He argues that three main theoretical perspectives could justify the different effects that diversity has on social connections: contact hypothesis, conflict theory and constrict theory. In our study, support for the first two theories was found across groups. On one hand, the positive attitudes and everyday contact expressed especially by young people, supports the contact hypothesis which poses that frequent contact with out-group members decreases hostility, promoting trust and solidarity. On the other hand, supporting the views of some middle-aged and older participants about saturation and scarcity, conflict theory poses

that contention over limited resources fosters distrust in the out-group and in-group preference. Although evidence for the constrict theory was not clearly outlined in our study, Putnam argues that constrict effects explain contemporary social trends. Constrict theory poses that diversity reduces both in-group and out-group solidarity, which results in isolation. From this perspective, diversity is not associated with hostility towards out-group members nor to bonding with in-group members, but with general social withdrawal. Evidence supporting constrict theory is mixed, however, research suggest that constricting effects are spatially bound to neighbourhoods and other contextual factors. Feelings of anomie, such as being uncertain of how to behave, how to communicate and whom to trust is hypothesised as the main mechanism for the relationship between eroded social connection and diversity at the neighbourhood level and could account for the absence of spill over effects beyond neighbourhoods (Meer & Tolsma, 2014). Complementing these findings, evidence from London shows that ethnic diversity correlated positively with social cohesion in neighbourhoods once the level of economic deprivation was controlled (Sturgis et al., 2014). Similarly, Laurence (2017) found that the association between diversity and trust depend on the levels of segregation across the wider community in which the neighbourhoods are nested, as dwellers of diverse neighbourhoods nested within integrated wider communities did not show a decrease in trust. Thus, ethnic diversity could be detrimental to social cohesion when the environment is high in segregation and inequality.

The second most prevalent experience in London relates to a fast-pace of life and the large quantity of people in the city. Supporting dwellers' perspective, evidence shows that London possesses characteristics that have been correlated with a faster pace of living, such as high population density (Bornstein, 1979; Bornstein & Bornstein 1976), colder weather, economic vitality and individualism (Levine & Norenzayan, 1999). In Levine and Norenzayan's (1999) cross-cultural comparison of pace of life in 31 cities, London was the 6th fastest city. For London dwellers in this study, being constantly on the run was associated with negative feelings, such as stress, tiredness, and frustration. However, further elaboration on the topic showed that for many participants, the fast-paced life had been internalised; some said they were used to it, while others considered it a personal preference. In line with this paradox, evidence shows that fast pace of life is associated with negative health outcomes, such as higher rates of death from coronary heart disease and smoking but at the same time, with increased levels of SWB (Garhammer, 2002; Levine & Norenzayan, 1999). Garhammer (2002) considers different explanations for such findings. From the perspective of modernization theory, life

satisfaction and quality of life grow in parallel to economic growth and living standards, hence, the negative effects of time pressure are counterbalanced by the gains of modernization. From a psychological approach, dwellers benefit from living in a society with a wide variety of attractive options and want to take advantage of every opportunity, which results in engaging in too many activities. Lastly, based on Simmel's classical theories on urbanization, Garhammer argues that ambivalence is a consequence of modernity; dwellers seek to seize opportunities however, they also value free time and have a salient need to ease time-pressure.

Complementary to these hypotheses, our findings show how London dwellers make sense of the fast-paced life. Some participants mentioned having many things to do and cramming lots of activities in the day, which were not only exclusive to work, but also included recreational activities and social events. As such, living a fast-paced life was a way to take advantage of the appealing opportunities found in the environment, which Garhammer (2002) associates with positive arousal and stimulation. However, for others, the fast-paced of life was mostly linked to financial needs. These participants were constantly rushing because they had to work more hours and/or had more than one job to meet the costs of living London. For these dwellers, running was a mechanism of survival, which is strongly associated with stress and burnout (Garhammer, 2002). Thus, despite the commonality of living a fast-paced of life, the motivations behind differed for each dweller. Arguably, the association between fast-pace and SWB would be different for those who must rush to meet basic needs compared to the ones that are looking to seize the variety of opportunities that the city offers. Moreover, our results highlight that individual factors play a part in the effects that the fast-pace of life has on dwellers' SWB. Some dwellers mentioned being *'used to it'* while for others, the constant rushing matched their personality. These participants represented life in the countryside and smaller towns as *'calmer'*, but also *'boring'* and dull, therefore, a fast-paced life was preferred.

Furthermore, supporting Garhammer's (2002) argument on the heightened needs of city dwellers to ease time-pressure, London dwellers' everyday life was associated with going to parks as an antidote for the stress of living in the City. Adding more evidence to an increasing body of research showing the benefits that contact with nature have in people's happiness (see Diener, et al., 2015; Krekel & Mackerron, 2020; Mackerron & Mourato, 2020) and the positive attitudes Londoners have regarding green spaces (Joffe & Smith, 2016), parks and green spaces represented wellbeing bubbles in the city to slow-down, unwind and relax. Thus, green and

blue spaces in London played an essential role in dweller's SWB as they were represented as counteractive of the negative effects of living in the city.

Another relevant finding concerns to the role that other city dwellers played in people's everyday life and SWB. In London, the stress associated with the fast-pace of life was highly influenced by the quantity of people. Despite the overall positive opinion about the quality of public transport services in London, which could promote dwellers' happiness (Leyden et al., 2011), navigating the city during rush hour evoked exhaustion, tiredness, anger, and stress. Although many participants mentioned adapting their daily routine to avoid travelling during this time, for those without this flexibility, the chronic experience of negative feelings could have a lasting impact on their SWB (e.g. Lancée et al., 2017). Moreover, London dwellers deemed the atmosphere in public places aggressive and impersonal. Negative conceptualisations of other users, such as the '*inconsiderate backpack wearer'*, the '*rowdy group of teenagers'* and the *'dodgy'* person that made the environment unsafe, prevented participants from wanting any kind of interaction. This supports previous evidence showing that city dwellers tended to conceptualise strangers in public transport settings as 'bad', which hinders motivation for social connection (Zeeb & Joffe, 2021). Such dynamics could have an important impact on dweller's happiness, given that research shows that even brief social interactions contribute to people's SWB (Rook, 2001; Sun et al., 2019) and minimal social cues like making eye contact and smiling can prompt a sense of belonging (Wesselman et al., 2012). However, positive interaction with strangers in the city seemed to have deteriorated in the last years. Participants mentioned pushing, shoving and stepping over people had become the standard behaviour in London. Courtesies such as holding the doors for others, helping and trusting strangers were only reminiscent of past times.

Related to the representation of London as rich in activities and things to do, the third theme talks about the culture and entertainment offer in the city. The social representation of London as a stimulating city was connected to the many theatres, galleries, museums, and concert venues in the environment. Participants associated going to places and events with mental health and positive affective experiences, which supports previous findings that suggest a positive correlation between the cultural and entertainment offer in cities and the SWB of their dwellers (Leyden et al., 2011). Research suggests that leisure is a key element in people's overall wellbeing, as recreational activities help people detach from demanding activities (e.g. work) and aid the recovery of mental resources. More importantly, they can facilitate the

fulfilment of psychological needs such as autonomy, mastery and sense of purpose (see Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Furthermore, the nature of some activities help the fulfilment of affiliative and social interaction needs, which are central in the promotion of SWB (Newman et al., 2014). Moreover, the rich cultural scene and the many opportunities for leisure found in London were associated with positive appraisals about the city such as *'interesting'* and *'attractive'*. These positive judgments could foster place attachment (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001) which has been associated with psychological benefits such as sense belonging and positive emotions (Scannell & Gifford, 2017). Hence, opportunities for leisure and recreation in the environment could be identified as a potential source of SWB for London dwellers.

Nonetheless, there were downsides to being exposed to such a wide array of opportunities that could result detrimental for SWB. Some participants mentioned that living in London requires discipline in order to not get distracted from other less pleasurable duties and work, which highlights the possible challenges associated with living in a stimulating environment for those who prioritise gratification and/or struggle with self-control. Moreover, the many things to do in London also prompted what in consumer psychology is known as the paradox of choice. Choice is predominantly associated with wellbeing, as it is an act of autonomy, freedom and self-determination. Having no choice is detrimental to people's wellbeing however, having too many choices could also elicit negative feelings such anxiety and regret. Increased choices put people under pressure to choose *'the best'* option available, which could not only result overwhelming and paralysing, but also frequently leaves them unsatisfied with their decisions (Schwartz & Ward, 2004). In a similar vein, our results showed that for some, the representation of London as a place with a variety of activities was associated with anxiety of not taking part in events. Moreover, the *'fear of missing out'*, described in research as "a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent" (p. 1841), has been linked to decreased levels of SWB (Przybylski et al., 2013).

Furthermore, money and quantity of people were identified as obstacles to enjoyment of the cultural and entertainment offer in London. Regardless of their SES, most participants expressed that London was an expensive city. Thus, even though London dwellers recognised all the possibilities for recreation in the city, they were constrained by their financial resources. Research shows that spending money beyond basic needs is correlated with higher levels of SWB (Noll & Weick, 2015; Zhang & Xiong, 2005), so not being able to spend money on

leisure and recreational experiences could hamper dwellers' SWB. Likewise, it has been argued that cities magnify consumerism (Okulicz-Kozaryn & Valente, 2019), meaning that the negative effects of not having money to spend on more than basic needs could be intensified in an environment like London.

Moreover, crowded places, queuing and having to book in advance represented obstacles to engagement and enjoyment of the cultural and entertainment offer of the city. Additionally, the quantity of people threatened the sense of uniqueness and individuality of the experiences, making them less appealing. All these reasons demotivated dwellers from attending events and going to places. Specifically, middle-aged and older participants preferred staying home than going out, arguing that they '*have lived London',* casting light on potential differences in the benefits that leisure and cultural amenities could pose according to age groups. Thus, our findings highlight important nuances within the positive correlation between leisure and cultural amenities and dwellers' SWB. For London dwellers, the city is inviting at the same time that is constraining. From participants' perspectives only the imaginary of a young, moneyed person with no responsibilities could really make the most out of the city.

The fourth and last theme encapsulates dynamics between the built and social environment. Changes in the built environment had an impact on dweller's sense of belonging, place attachment, sense of community and perceptions of London's liveability. Participants held the representation that London was going through a *'housing crisis'* characterised by exorbitant accommodation costs and a lack of social housing, which made settling down in London a challenge. For low SES participants, living in London represented a struggle. Most of their money was spent in accommodation, which prevented them from being able to spend money on other things. This was associated with negative judgments about their lives (e.g. *'I am a slave')* and negative feelings such as anger, frustration, despair, and uncertainty about the future. Cross-cultural research shows that having enough money for shelter is a basic need that positively correlates with higher levels of SWB (Tay & Diener, 2011) but in wealthy countries like the UK, having money to spend beyond basic needs is even more important for SWB (Diener et al., 2012; Dumludag, 2015; Noll & Weick, 2015). As such, not having the financial resources to spend on recreation, entertainment and other non-essential items like electronic gadgets and clothing could result particularly detrimental for London dwellers.

During elaborations on housing, it became salient that younger participants lived at their parents' homes. Some of them could not afford to move out, whereas others had to move back due a lack of financial resources to live on their own. Although participants recognised the value of having their parents to help them, for some, living with the family as adults conflicted with their goals and ideas of personal development. Furthermore, many had internalised the notion that, in spite of having lived their whole life in London, their future was not in the city, as they were certain they would never be able to afford a house there. Thus, these findings not only emphasise that house ownership is an important aspiration and a symbol for independence and stability in young Londoners, but also that current housing trends in the city block the fulfilment of this desire. Traditionally, buying a house has been a marker of membership in society (Hirayama, 2012), however, young people in the UK have been dubbed 'generation rent' because of their limited access to the housing ladder (Minton, 2017). The inability to satisfy the aspiration for homeownership could have important consequences for young people's SWB and development. Beyond the unhappiness brought by the frustration of unachieved goals (e.g., Emmons, 1986), even when ready to become independent, young people might not be able to afford to leave their homes, thereby prolonging their transition to adulthood (McKee, 2012). Arguably, this could be of significant relevance in an individualistic culture such as the British, where autonomy, independence and the pursuit of personal goals are not only valued but also expected (Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010; Triandis, 2000). Furthermore, the transitory status given to London, could lead to a weaker sense of belonging and attachment towards the city, which, as previously mentioned, are associated with SWB (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Scannell & Gifford, 2017).

Moreover, our findings highlight the connection between housing and sense of community. Rather than being attached to London as a whole, most dwellers held affective bonds towards their local environment, such as their neighbourhoods. Familiarity with the environment and neighbours, alongside the distinctive buildings and spaces that made places unique (e.g. independent shops, the local pub) were essential components of the representation of the sense of community. Sense of community was associated with sense of belonging, positive social interactions and feelings of safety. From a nod to a conversation, London dwellers enjoyed and valued communication with their neighbours, as it created an atmosphere of friendliness, security and reciprocal support. Evidence shows that social cohesion and attachment to neighbourhood are correlated to wellbeing (Curtis et al., 2019) and to social capital (Mazumdar

et al., 2018), which itself is a key constituent of people's SWB (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). Hence, sense of community is a potential source of happiness in London dwellers.

However, a major concern amongst the sample was that communities were under threat due to gentrification. This phenomenon was conceptualised as the modernization of old houses, the construction of luxurious buildings and the presence of chain bars, restaurants, and shops, with the objective of making areas more appealing. Participants reasoned that as demand increased, prices did too, exiling long-term locals that could not afford the increase in costs. Correspondingly, gentrification had an impact on all the building blocks of the sense of community. Familiarity with others and the area weakened, as the built environment changed and acquainted locals *'vanished'* or *'disappeared'*, whilst unique independent shops and restaurants were replaced by impersonal big chains with no character. Furthermore, displacement and inequality were strongly anchored to the representation that there was a shortage of council buildings resulting from the government selling buildings to the private sector and rich foreign investors paying prices which the *'average Londoner'* would never be able to afford. In line with these findings, research shows that gentrification exacerbates social inequality by delimiting socio-spatial divisions according to SES (Hochstenbach & Musterd, 2018) and weakens social cohesion, as dwellers tend to stay within "bubbles" with people similar to their demographics (Butler, 2003). Nonetheless, in our sample, some participants from higher SES elaborated on the positive sides to gentrification, such as making places livelier and safer. However, reviews on the evidence on the effects of environmental renewal projects suggests that dwellers' wellbeing only increases when such strategies promote social cohesion between groups from diverse backgrounds and when the community is involved in the planning and execution of the intervention (Bagnal et al., 2018). Altogether, our findings highlight that changes in the built environment could threaten predictors of SWB, such as the fulfilment of basic needs, autonomy, place attachment, sense of community and social cohesion, especially in younger city dwellers and those with lower levels of income.

This analysis has outlined how representations of living in London connect with dwellers' SWB. Each theme encompasses different phenomena with both positive and negative judgments and feelings attached to them. Most representations converge around inaccessibility, displacement, segregation, and exclusion, which could have a negative impact on dwellers' SWB, especially in lower SES dwellers.

5.2 Experiences in Mexico City and SWB

Thematic analysis of the free elaborations showed that experiences in Mexico City could be organised into four main themes: crime and insecurity, amenities and the built environment, co-habitants and family.

The first theme delves into the representation of Mexico City as an unsafe place. From being mugged to the murder of a brother, participants shared that either they or someone they knew had been a victim of crime. Crime was considered such a pervasive phenomenon in the City that dwellers were not only used to it but expected it: it was a matter of time until something happened to them. Contrasting the idea that in past decades crime was more specific to certain areas of the City and times of the day, participants mentioned that currently, attacks happened anytime, anywhere and to anyone. Thus, being a victim of crime was conceptualised as something inevitable when living in Mexico City. Quantitative data support this notion; in Mexico City, around 3 out of 10 dwellers are victims of crime (INEGI, 2019a).

Safety is a crucial domain in models of WB, SWB, quality of life and liveability of the environment (Millan, 2018; OECD, 2018; Veenhoven, 2000). Moreover, in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), personal safety and living free from harm is just above basic physiological needs. Based on this, it is expected that when these fundamental needs are not satisfied, people's happiness is at stake and our results corroborate it. Mexico City dwellers who had been victims of crime, described the event as physically and psychologically damaging. Some mentioned having lived with lingering distress for months or even years, whilst others referred to the event as life changing. In line with participants' narratives, reviewing the effects of experiencing crime, Shapland and Hall (2007) describe negative physical, psychological, social and financial consequences, such as short-term and long-term injuries, fear, decline in trust in others and financial loss. Furthermore, research shows that the negative impacts of living in an unsafe environment are not exclusive to victims. Evidence from a Mexican sample found that whilst past victimization predicted anxiety disorders, perceptions of insecurity increased the likelihood of presenting a variety of mental health issues, such as depression, agoraphobia and alcohol abuse (Altman et al., 2018). Additionally, the literature distinguishes indirect ways in which fear of crime can have a negative effect on people's SWB, for example, by restricting beneficial activities outside their homes, such as social meetings and exercising (Villareal & Yu, 2017).

In our data, perceptions of insecurity and fear of crime were salient in most Mexico City dwellers, irrespective of past victimization and although they were not associated with the mental health disorders described by Altman et al. (2018), they were linked to affective experiences that antagonise SWB, such as feelings of uncertainty, risk, vulnerability and a state of hyper-vigilance. Furthermore, the strength of this representation had been aggravated in the last few years, as there was a widespread notion that crime in Mexico City was on the rise. In 2006, the government of former president Felipe Calderón declared the 'war on drugs', which led to drug cartels becoming more competitive to control traffic routes and therefore increasing crime rates (Beittel, 2013). Longitudinal data found that the increment in local and state-level homicide rates as a consequence of the 'war on drugs' elicited psychological distress comparable to that from experiencing a major household economic shock or becoming divorced (Villareal & Yu, 2017). To date, crime rates in Mexico and Mexico City fluctuate every year (INEGI, 2019b).

For some, the notion that crime and insecurity was on the rise was grounded on first and second-hand experiences of crimes, however, for many, this representation was mainly fed by the media, where crimes featured on a daily basis. Evidence shows that the news and the media play an important role in the way that people construct their reality and their power to amplify or attenuate risk perceptions (Joffe, 2005, 2008). It has been argued that since the 'war on drugs', the government and organised crime have been the forces that control the Mexican news. Both authorities and cartels are main sources of information that seek to influence the coverage of their activities through economic means or violence towards journalists. Whilst authorities try to restrict what the media reports about crime and insecurity, cartels use the platform to send messages to other cartels. Moreover, it has been argued that other pervasive factors in the Mexican press such as the scarcity of investigative journalism and the lack of economic resources create a decontextualized coverage of the phenomenon, appealing to tabloids, which tend to emphasise the sensationalist side of events such as beheadings and torture (González, 2018). Cognitive theories suggest that exposure to such impactful and vivid visuals could result in the overestimation of relative risk (Joffe, 2008). Shocking stimuli are more memorable, thus by relying on cognitive heuristics to assess risks, individuals consider events that they recall better as being more frequent (Villareal & Yu, 2017), which could explain the salience of fear of abduction and homicide found in our results.

The fragile sense of security associated with the overexposure to crime was reflected in participant's prevalent belief that every time they stepped out of their house, they were not certain if they were going to make it back. Moreover, negative feelings associated with unsafety such as anxiety and fear were particularly present in parents, and more specifically, mothers, as they were concerned about their children's wellbeing. In a metanalysis of factors that best predict fear of crime, gender was the most reliable variable, as women were more consistently afraid than men. It was hypothesised that gender differences could be based on women's particular fear of being physically or sexually assaulted (Collins, 2006), however, our findings casts light on the possibility that in environments like Mexico City, women's fear of crime could also be associated with worry for their children rather than concerns about their own safety.

Representations of the government and the police force were associated with insecurity and hopelessness about a decrease in crime in Mexico. Mexico City dwellers did not trust the authorities and considered them criminals as well, as they were regarded as corrupt and self-interested. Supporting these attitudes, the latest data from the World's Value Survey (2018) shows that 46% of Mexicans had no confidence at all in the police force whilst 54% had no confidence in the government. Evidence on the negative effects of perception of corruption in authorities have been documented in previous studies. Vilalta and Fondevila (2020) found that in Mexico, seeing the police as corrupt is the third strongest predictor of fear of crime, just after victimisation and perception of neighbourhood incivilities (e.g., vandalism and drug use on streets). Likewise, cross-national results show that perceptions of corruption may affect an individual's happiness via decreasing the levels of SWB predictors such as trust in institutions (Tay et al., 2014). Similarly, Blanco (2013) reports that in Mexico, perceptions of insecurity were negatively associated with satisfaction with democracy and trust in the police and judicial system, which could weaken social capital, an important element for society's development and individual's SWB (Helliwell, 2006; Van Oorschot & Arts, 2004).

Given that lack of confidence in authorities to keep them safe, dwellers' main reaction to the high levels of insecurity in Mexico City was the development of good practices to stay safe in their everyday lives. Besides, parents found in their children the motivation to overcome their fear, as they did not want them to grow up scared. Such coping mechanisms illustrate those posed by the two-process model of self-regulation to help reduce discrepancies between desires and contextual constraints. On one hand, assimilative coping comprises of intentional

efforts and activities to modify the current situation to attain personal goals and projects. This was the case for participants who made a conscious effort to overcome their fear and develop active strategies to feel in control of their safety, such as not looking at anyone on the street, walking with confidence and not wearing jewellery when going out. On the other hand, accommodative coping compromises mechanisms by which goals and projects are adjusted to available resources. This is related to the participants who have adopted a subconscious behavioural code, such as a preference to stay at home, rather than going out. Both processes have been associated with life satisfaction and an increased sense of control (Brandtstädter & Renner, 1990; Brandtstädter & Rothermund, 2002). Nonetheless, some coping mechanisms could be more beneficial than others. Relying on religious faith and social support could have more positive outcomes than not going to parks or avoiding walking to places (Altman et al., 2018).

In a similar manner, other participants used their attitudes and perspectives to buffer the effects of insecurity and fear of crime. Some Mexico City dwellers found comfort in comparing Mexico City to places they represented as even more unsafe, such as the north of the country and other Latin American countries. Thus, from their perspective, it was better to be mugged than to deal with fights between drug cartels and murders. Furthermore, other participants expressed habituation (e.g. *'I am used to it'*) and overgeneralisation of the issue (e.g. '*it's the same everywhere'*). Cognitive reappraisal is a regulation strategy regarding changing the way one thinks about potentially emotion-eliciting situations. This strategy has been associated with a decrease in the experience of negative feelings, a greater experience of positive emotions and other beneficial outcomes for SWB, such as higher environmental mastery levels and sense of autonomy (Cutuli, 2014). Arguably, by re-interpreting Mexico City's insecurity issue as familiar, common or not as bad as other places, participants attenuated the detrimental effects of living in adverse environment.

Analysing the effects of victimisation and fear of crime in a municipality in South Africa, Møller (2005) concluded that the line between resilience and resignation is blurry. Dwellers lives were characterised by stress but the negative effects of crime were overshadowed by those from more pressing issues of racial inequality and poverty. Better-off victims of crime reported higher levels of SWB than non-victims because, even though material goods might attract crime, they enhanced other aspects of quality of life and boosted life satisfaction. Arguably, a similar conclusion could be drawn for Mexico City. As levels of SWB in Mexico have stayed

constantly high throughout the years, it is proposed that the negative effects of crime could be minimised by other sociocultural problems and/or mitigated by satisfaction in domains that correlate more strongly to Mexican's SWB, such as family life satisfaction (Millan, 2018). Furthermore, evidence shows that because basic needs such as safety are tied to societal conditions whereas psychosocial needs depend more on the individual, people living in adverse contexts can achieve SWB by the fulfilment of psychosocial needs even when basic needs remain unmet (Tay & Diener, 2011).

The second theme reflects that representations of Mexico City in dwellers were largely associated with physical and symbolic properties of the built environment. Mexico City was conceptualised as a place of opportunity, novelty, learning and personal growth. The number of museums, theatres, restaurants and shopping malls were attributes of the City that made it rich in culture, attractive and fun, thus in the eyes of participants, there was no better place in the country to experience new and exciting things. Moreover, this exclusivity also extended to access to services. In contrast to representations of towns and smaller cities, Mexico City was considered a *'convenient'* place, as amenities were found nearby and were open fulltime. Furthermore, positive judgments and feelings towards the city were also linked to distinctive elements of Mexico City's landscape, such as the Angel of Independence, the Metropolitan Cathedral and the Zocalo. These historical buildings not only added aesthetic value to the city but were also fundamental part of its character, serving as reminders of Mexico's history, which was associated with identity and place attachment.

Supporting our results, cross-cultural research shows that access to cultural and leisure activities in the environment are positively correlated with SWB in city dwellers (Leyden et al, 2011). Although these findings did not include data from Mexico City, further evidence shows that services and facilities are determinant for Mexican's appraisals of quality of life (de Alba González, 2017; Felix & Garcia-Vega, 2012). Additionally, people's reference to the city as *'convenient'* recalls what in urban literature is referred as 'mixed use' areas, those which combine places to live, work, shop and leisure within a close radius (Jacobs, 1961). In line with Jacobs proposals of the benefits of such urban design, participants associated convenience with desirability and positive judgments about living in the City. Moreover, the salience of historical buildings and monuments in the social representation of Mexico City expands previous findings showing their symbolic properties (de Alba González et al., 2020) and the potential benefits these meanings have for dweller's SWB. Research shows that heritage buildings are

associated with social connection, life satisfaction, sense of belonging, pride of place and sense of ownership (McElroy et al., 2021). Similarly, place attachment is associated with psychological benefits and positive emotions (Scannell & Gifford, 2017). Hence, our results contribute to the literature showcasing the importance that the built environment –and meanings attached to it– has on positive judgements about the City and SWB-related factors.

Apart from the culture and entertainment offer, positive judgments about Mexico City related to its representation as a place with a wide range of opportunities for education and work. On one hand, education opportunities were associated with the many educational institutions in the City. On the other hand, job opportunities were anchored to the presence of headquarters of national and international enterprises, which grounded the conceptualisation that Mexico City was a modern and developed city of global relevance. Nevertheless, despite these positive appraisals, further elaborations revealed that admission to public universities was a highly competitive process that often led to abandonment of career goals. Moreover, parents preferred sending their children to private institutions, nonetheless, they were difficult to afford, which elicited anxiety and worry. Furthermore, despite the vast job opportunities in Mexico City, jobs were prevalently judged as not well-paid and salaries were deemed insufficient to afford the costs of living in Mexico City. For some participants, this meant having to work extra hours and refraining from buying or doing things they liked. Accordingly, most Mexico City dwellers expressed financial concerns and worry about the economy in the future. Thus, our findings highlight that *'many'* opportunities do not necessarily translates into high quality opportunities, which could have a negative impact on dweller's SWB. Research in Mexican samples show that education correlates to happiness when it is associated with good income and achievement of goals, whereas jobs could be detrimental for life satisfaction when people are not satisfied with the activities they have to do or their work is not respected (Millan, 2018). Moreover, our results provide qualitative evidence for Mexico City dwellers' financial dissatisfaction, irrespective of socioeconomic level. Evidence shows that the extent to which people can cover their own and their family necessities, afford their lifestyle preferences and are able to pay the costs for health emergencies or road accidents are significant factors that contribute to life satisfaction (Millan, 2018). Hence, low quality jobs and their related income dissatisfaction could be a source of lower SWB in Mexico City dwellers.

Another detrimental factor associated with the environment was the large quantity of people in the City. Evidence from Europe and Latin America shows that dwellers of large and

crowded cities report lower levels of SWB (Leyva et al., 2016; Okulicz-Kozaryn & Valente, 2019). Mexico City dwellers reasoned that the many opportunities in the environment had attracted too many people to the City, making it saturated, congested and short on services. The most salient experience associated with this representation was navigating the environment. Large quantities of people in combination with poor urban infrastructure resulted in long commuting times that were linked with a variety of negative effects, from chronic fatigue to decreased job performance. Moreover, inefficient governmental strategies to tackle traffic like the *'Hoy No Circula'* had made it even more challenging to move freely within the city. Arguably, these difficulties could potentially decrease SWB of Mexico City dwellers.

Research shows that longer commuting times are associated with stress, impatience, lower levels of job satisfaction and leisure time satisfaction, increased strain, decreased mental health and decreased life satisfaction (B. Clark et al., 2019; for a review see De Vos et al., 2013). Additionally, evidence suggests that negative aspects of commuting could be counteracted when looking at the bigger picture such as employment and earnings (B. Clark et al., 2019) nonetheless, given the overall negative judgments about work and income expressed by participants, it is possible that Mexico City dwellers do not benefit from this effect. Moreover, the *'Hoy No Circula'* strategy could also have detrimental consequences for dwellers happiness, as mobility and travel limitations could lead to decreased levels of SWB as public transport users tend to show lower levels of SWB compared to car users (De Vos et al., 2013). Furthermore, negative judgments about the city's infrastructure and public transport services could also hinder people's happiness, as research shows a correlation between perceptions of the quality of public services (e.g. maintenance of the streets) and public transport infrastructure with quality of life and SWB (Leyden et al., 2011; Millan, 2018). Moreover, congestion and saturation in public and private transport was associated with negative interactions with other dwellers. Nonetheless, aware of the negative effects of transport-related experiences, Mexico City dwellers had devised individual strategies to diminish their impact. It is important not to overlook such remarks as they reflect aspects that psychological theories postulate as crucial for wellbeing, such as environmental mastery (Ryff, 2014) and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2006).

The third theme explores Mexico City dwellers' representations of their co-habitants. Participants referred to themselves as '*chilangos*', a colloquial adjective to refer to people from Mexico's capital city (Real Academia Española, n.d.). This term was originally used by people

from outside Mexico City as a pejorative, given that, because of living in the country's political centre, they were ascribed characteristics associated with the government. Thus, the *'chilango'* is traditionally considered arrogant, rude and remarkably sharp to make things work for their personal advantage (Vila, 2000). In our interviews, a more nuanced identity of the *chilango* emerged. On one hand, they were described as hard working, resilient, kind, warm, helpful and welcoming. On the other hand, they were deemed dirty, uncivil, inconsiderate and self-centred. These findings echo those from previous research showing similar paradoxes in Mexican's self-concept. Research using samples from different parts of Mexico, showed that Mexicans tend to think of themselves as polite, accessible, caring, active and honest at the same time as believing they are lazy, corrupt, unreliable and authoritarian (Díaz-Loving, 2005; La Rosa & Diaz-Loving, 1991;). It is salient that such negative characteristics found by La Rosa and Diaz-Loving (1991) and Díaz-Loving (2005) were prevalent associations that participants of this study held about the government and public institutions. Arguably, negative dimensions of the *chilangos* and, more generally, Mexicans' self-concept, could be rooted in representations of the government. This spoiled identity effect has been found in research in other predominantly collectivistic cultures, such as the Turkish, where the boundaries between self and other are less defined (Joffe et al., 2013). Moreover, as previously mentioned, unfavourable representations of politicians and governmental institutions were associated with a strong lack of trust. Thus, the extrapolation of such characteristics about the government to the Mexican population could explain the prevalent generalised distrust towards others found in our data.

Social trust, the generalised trust in institutions and other people, is considered a dimension of the concept of social capital (Van Oorschot & Arts, 2004). Coordinated actions and knowing what to expect from others help diminishes the costs of dealing with uncertainty, which in turn reinforces trust (Monchón Morcillo & de Juan Díaz, 2016). Literature suggests that trust in institutions and interpersonal trust are mutually constitutive, thus, when institutions are corrupted and law is not applied fairly, interpersonal exchanges are affected and so does the drive for cooperation (Blajer de la Garza, 2019). Hence, this supports the potential role that negative representations about the government and institutions play in Mexico dwellers distrust towards others. Nonetheless, participants primarily attributed the lack of trust to the insecurity of the environment. City dwellers mentioned that fear of crime had led them to feel uncertain about others. Thus, an effective strategy to stay safe was to assume bad intentions by default. This made dwellers live in a constant state of defensiveness that hindered approach and interaction with others.

Negative attitudes and behaviours amongst cohabitants were frequently associated with experiences in public transport. In this context, other dwellers were deemed selfish, uncivil and aggressive. Previous research in urban environments shows that the representation of strangers and the motivation to interact with them is influenced by context, such as place and time. In their UK-based research, Zeeb and Joffe (2021) showed that public transport was a setting where cohabitants were seen in a particularly negative light. Similar to our results, London and Birmingham dwellers deemed public transport users rude, inconsiderate and too distracted with their phones to pay attention to others' needs. Thus, our findings add cross-cultural evidence on public transport being frequently associated with feelings of dismissiveness and indifference, which could be detrimental to individuals' SWB by hindering their sense of mattering (Elliott, et al., 2004; Flett, 2018) and fostering negative social interactions (Rook, 2001).

Data shows that 90% of Mexicans think that they need to be careful in dealing with people, 50% do not trust their neighbours and more than half do not trust people they have just met nor people they know personally (WVS, 2018). This overarching lack of trust could be costly for Mexico City dweller's wellbeing as evidence shows that people who trust others and institutions are not only more satisfied with their lives (Monchón Morcillo & de Juan Díaz, 2016) but also more protected against the detrimental effects that challenging circumstances such as ill-health, unemployment and safety concerns have on WB (Helliwell et al., 2020). Moreover, this wariness towards others is conflictive with aspects of Mexico City dwellers self-concept that revolve around positive social interactions, leading to an ambivalence concerning how to treat others. Whilst Mexico City dwellers valued good manners and connecting with others, doing so could put them in danger. Thus, social cues such as SES were used as indicators of potential risk or affinity. People from a similar socioeconomic status were assumed to have the same level of education, values and interests, hence, participants felt safer and more open to trust and interact with them. These ideas fit with the postulate of social identity theory that trust is more likely to emerge when individuals recognise salient in-group characteristics in others (Stets & Burke, 2000) as similarities could decrease uncertainty (Hogg, 2000). Hence, the more similarities, the greater likelihood of forming a connection (Cook, 2014). Nonetheless, beyond the realm of identity and intergroup dynamics, our findings cast light on the embedded class-based prejudice in social representations of others and its influence on social interaction. Class has been considered the most important and rigid social cleavage in Mexican society (González Casanova, 1965) and a reflection of the well-documented

problem of economic and social inequality in Mexico (Esquivel Hernández, 2015; Flores & Telles, 2012). Inequality is correlated with lower levels of trust, civic engagement, and inter-group cooperation (OECD, 2001). Therefore, it could represent another social factor that could explain the expressed low levels of interpersonal trust found in the data.

So far, apart from the positive judgments and affective attachment to some places, living in Mexico City has been mostly associated with factors that are detrimental to SWB. Nevertheless, Theme 4 provides crucial evidence that not all factors weigh the same in the SWB equation. For Mexico City dwellers, family was the spearhead of judgements of life satisfaction. For most participants, the best aspect of living in Mexico City was that their families lived there too.

Data shows that 97% of Mexicans consider family very important in their life (WVS, 2018). In line with this figure, participants' aspirations and goals were oriented towards the family. Moreover, family was represented as the building block of identity and the cornerstone of personal achievements. Mexico City dwellers' lives revolved around those of their family, especially for mothers. Looking after the children and household was associated with stress and tiredness, however, negative emotions and feelings were overridden by the happiness associated with having children. Furthermore, for parents in the sample, providing for the family was conceptualised both as a responsibility and a life goal. Participants emphasised the importance of making sacrifices for the family and children's wellbeing. These efforts did not go unnoticed as when talking from an adult-children perspective, participants expressed gratitude towards their parents and their motivation to do the same for their own children, perpetuating the ideal of placing family as a top priority in life.

The strong presence of the family in the life of Mexico City dwellers was also reflected in the frequency of interaction. Across age groups, free time and recreational activities were commonly spent and done with family members. Being part of a close-knit family was associated with positive feelings, cooperation and reciprocal support. On the contrary, lack of connection with the family was judged negatively and associated with loneliness. Arguably, Mexico City dwellers interest in regular contact with family members could aid the fulfilment of psychosocial needs such as the sense of belonging and feeling supported (Barrera, 1986; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Siedlecki et al., 2014). Moreover, even though social connection is regarded in the literature as an universal component of people's wellbeing (Deci and Ryan, 2006; Maslow, 1954; Ryff; 2014; Ryff & Keyes, 1995), our findings complement quantitative

data showing that family related domains such as satisfaction with family life (Leyva et al., 2016; Millan, 2019) are of particular relevance for the SWB of Mexican people (Rojas, 2018). This could be explained by the value-as-a moderator theory (Oishi et al., 1999), which poses that the impact that different domains have on SWB depend on what people value. Arguably, our findings suggest that the benefits of having a happy and satisfied family life could outweigh the negative effect associated with living in unfavourable socioenvironmental conditions.

5.3 Experiences in the City: Cross-cultural Analysis

In the previous sections, the salient experiences associated with living in London and Mexico City and their possible influence on dweller's subjective wellbeing were identified. The contrasting results between the two cultures, not only demonstrate the divergent nature of the sociocultural contexts surrounding reported levels of SWB but also the sense-making of such circumstances. Relying on cultural models and the theory of themata, this section brings together findings from each culture to elucidate the sociocultural forces that could have guided the cognitive and affective dimensions found in social representations associated with living in the city to provide a culturally-sensitive explanation of the similarities in levels in SWB reported by London and Mexico City dwellers.

In both cultures, social representations of the city were strongly linked to the built environment. Spaces such as museums and theatres embodied a rich cultural and entertainment offer that was associated with positive affective experiences and positive judgments about the city. However, cross-cultural comparison of the nuances in the ideas and emotions attached to this representation expose intricate differences in the dynamic relationship between individual and their environment.

From having too many choices to financial restrictions, London dwellers identified various aspects that prevented them from seizing the possibilities in the environment, which elicited negative emotions and judgments about living in UK's capital city. Hence, whilst taking part in London's entertainment could increase dwellers' SWB, barriers for participation might have the opposite effect. Jovchelovitch et al. (2020) posits that symbolic, material and socio-institutional borders delineate the spatial and territorial reality, identity and social representations of city dwellers. Arguably, access to the culture and entertainment offer in the city depended on the time and money available. Overall, restrictions led to an experience of the city characterised by boundaries and exclusion. Cultural models have described the British

culture as one prone to indulgence and which values leisure time. Hence, not being able to seize opportunities for entertainment in the environment could be especially problematic for British London dwellers (Hofstede et al., 2010).

In the Mexican sample, apart from entertainment venues, positive judgments about the city were associated with different amenities. All these elements of the built environment anchored the representation of Mexico City as *'convenient'* for services and *'full of opportunities'* for work and education. However, it became salient that quantity did not equate to quality. Opportunities for high quality education were bound up with limited spaces available at renowned public schools or having the financial resources to afford private institutions, whilst jobs were predominantly regarded as poorly paid and unsatisfactory. Nonetheless, having access to a wide array of services, regardless of their quality, made Mexico City a better place to live compared to the rest of the country. The higher status associated with living in the capital was built on downward comparisons with other places in Mexico which were conceptualised as not having the same level of development and consequently, not having as many jobs, schools, services and amenities available. Additionally, the many city landmarks and historical buildings were also seen as unique characteristics of Mexico City, which fostered feelings of attachment and sense of identity. Altogether, it could be argued that living in Mexico City was permeated with a sense of privilege. Hofstede et al.'s cultural model (2010) classifies Mexican culture as hierarchical; social asymmetries are not only tolerated but also expected, which could underpin dwellers' tendency to emphasise the benefits and status of living in the capital. In addition, Mexican culture has been described as success and competition driven. Arguably, the representation of Mexico City as a place for education and jobs taps the cultural value for achievement. Moreover, living in an environment that offered many options for leisure and entertainment could also be of special relevance in a culture that strongly values indulgence and having fun (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Thus, our findings show that cross-culturally, the built environment was an important constituent of representations of experiences in the city. In both samples, spaces associated with culture and entertainment provided opportunities for the fulfilment of psychosocial needs. However, for London dwellers the benefits of having such opportunities depended on the extent to which they could seize them, whereas for Mexico City dwellers just having these elements entailed a sense of privilege over the rest of the country. Moreover, Mexico City dwellers emphasised the value of having services at hand. Evidence shows that the predictive power that

the fulfilment of basic needs has on people's SWB varies according to indicators of development of their country. Those who have their basic needs covered tend to be happier, but especially in circumstances when basic needs are not easy to fulfil (Tay & Diener, 2011). Presumably, the value that Mexico City dwellers held in relation to having access to services in the city was grounded in the notion that such access is more limited in the rest of the country. Hence, living in Mexico City was represented as advantageous for the fulfilment of both basic and psychosocial needs. However, such salience was not found in the London sample. Possibly, for London dwellers, access to services is taken for granted, therefore, the SWB that can be brought by the environment depend on the extent to which it enables the fulfilment of more complex needs.

Another experience of the city found cross-culturally was that of living in highly populated environments. For London dwellers, the large number of people contributed to the city's high-pace whereas Mexico City dwellers linked the quantity of people with congestion, saturation and insufficient infrastructure. In both samples, crowding was consistently linked to negative feelings. London dwellers dreaded rush hour, as it was associated with feeling exhausted, angry and stressed. Similarly, for Mexico City dwellers the hours spent stuck in traffic and long commuting times were associated with experiencing anxiety and fatigue. Moreover, in both cultures, crowding was particularly detrimental in public transport settings, as it was not only linked to the experience of negative feelings but also to negative interactions with other dwellers. Cross-culturally, the atmosphere in busy public transport settings was deemed as aggressive, impersonal and unsafe. Dwellers strongly disliked having to struggle for personal space and longed for cordiality and courtesy in public spaces.

In the urban literature, crowding is often depicted as a negative side of city life (Park & Peterson, 2010). In their cross-cultural and longitudinal studies, Lepore et al. (1991) found that chronic crowding amplified the psychological distress associated with every day social challenges. Moreover, evidence shows a correlation between crowded environments with social withdrawal and decreased social support (Lepore et al., 1991; Evans and Lepore, 1993). Evans and Lepore (1993) theorise that these negative effects could be explained by three mechanisms. The behavioural constraint hypothesis poses that high density could interfere with goal obtainment by restricting movement and freedom, which is detrimental for people's SWB. The control hypothesis stipulates that crowding could be harmful as it increases unpredictability in the environment, exposing dwellers to situations where they have little or

no control, such as unwanted social interactions or events. Lastly, overload/arousal hypothesis suggests that living in a crowded place is detrimental because an excess of stimulation/arousal causes an unpleasant overload and decreases task performance. Evidence supporting these hypotheses are found in the social representations of living in London and Mexico City. Cross-culturally, other dwellers were represented as obstacles to reach destinations comfortably and swiftly. Furthermore, in order to travel more efficiently and safely, dwellers avoided social interaction with others. Similarly, in London the busy and fast-paced environment was associated with withdrawal as a mean to cope with social overload. However, in addition to these mechanisms, our findings add evidence to emerging research casting light on the negative effect that the frustration of the fundamental human desire to matter to others could have on people's SWB (Zeeb & Joffe, 2021). Mattering theory poses that individuals' well-being is linked to being acknowledged and feeling important and needed by others (Elliott, et al., 2004). In line with these postulates, London and Mexico City dwellers felt particularly distressed in situations and interactions where their presence was overlooked and their needs were not taken into consideration, making them feel non-existent and irrelevant to others. Thus, in both Mexican and British samples, crowding was a detrimental characteristic of the city as it elicited negative social interaction amongst dwellers and the experience of negative affective states.

Besides the abovementioned cross-cultural similarities in experiences of the city, our investigation casts light on social representations of contemporary phenomena distinctive to London and Mexico City respectively. As discussed in previous sections, London dweller's experience of the city was pervaded by issues around multiculturalism, immigration, housing, and community. For London dwellers, diversity added more flavours to the city and made it more interesting. Openness and tolerance to other cultures were represented as aspects of the identity of being a Londoner, nonetheless, some held negative attitudes about immigration. Several middle aged and older respondents considered problematic the number and *quality* of immigrants coming to London and the UK. Immigrants who were represented as taking advantage of the city without giving anything in return were deemed undesirable. Participants holding these views, tended to blame the government for the presence and misconducts of these immigrants, by not controlling the border and enabling their ways and practices; even when conflictive with British values and traditions. Various London dwellers expressed that being surrounded by foreign elements in the built environment, languages other than English and different skin colours made them feel as an outsider in their own country.

The representation of the ‘housing crisis’ referred to the hardships associated with affording accommodation in London as a result of gentrification and insufficient social housing. These issues affected demographic groups in different ways; lower SES represented life in London as barely surviving, whilst younger dwellers were pushed to remain or go back to their family home due to a lack of sufficient income. Furthermore, despite being born and raised in London, younger participants visualised their future elsewhere, as they had internalised the notion that buying a house in the city was impossible. Moreover, gentrification fractured the sense of community in local areas by changing the familiar environment and expelling local residents and independent business owners that could not afford increases in rent prices. Although the majority of participants held negative attitudes towards gentrification and blamed the government for selling out London, some elaborated on its benefits, such as increased sense of security and liveliness of the environment.

Arguably, the discomfort attached to representations of immigration and housing could be explained by the clash of these issues with cultural values. These phenomena are represented as only favouring *some,* which contradicts British values for equality and fairness in opportunities. Furthermore, although British culture has been described as success-driven, current societal disparities could make success more difficult to achieve for some groups. Moreover, in spite of being classified as a culture lax about control, the expressed sense of derogation for the British people in the public sphere has pushed for a need of rules to protect their place in society – which aligns with the discourse of pro-Brexit supporters (Van de Vyer et al., 2018). Additionally, not being able to afford to move out from the family house and homogenisation of the local environment contradicts values of independence, self-expression and uniqueness, which are important for individualistic cultures such as the British (Hofstede 1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010; Triandis, 2000).

Living in Mexico City was represented as living with fear and being sceptical about everyone, but with the silver lining of having the family present. Hegemonically, Mexico City was conceptualised as an unsafe place, thus falling victim was deemed inevitable. Crime was seen to be on the rise as authorities not only failed to tackle the issue but were represented as criminals too. Consequently, Mexico City dwellers’ relied on their own strategies in order to increase their sense of security. Arguably, the hopelessness associated with the government reflects Mexican culture’s long power distance, where authorities are unquestioned, whilst the

emphasis in the creation of rules for safety aligns with the cultural need to avoid uncertainty (Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010).

Furthermore, Mexico City dwellers expressed a generalised lack of trust towards others as a means to stay safe. Representations of crime potentialized uncertainty towards the social environment, including government, institutions and other dwellers. Consequently, despite their representations of Mexico City dwellers as highly social, participants avoided approach and interaction with people outside their close circles. However, dwellers relied on social cues to facilitate social connection, especially perceived socioeconomic status. The poor and those from lower socioeconomic status were rejected whereas those from the same socioeconomic status were assumed to have similar family backgrounds, education, interests, and values. These affinities decreased uncertainty about others and enabled social interaction and trust, which again could reflect the cultural tendency to abide by social stratification (Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010).

Nonetheless, it became salient that for Mexico City dwellers, close social bonds pertained strongly and primarily to family ties. The paramount value that such relationships had for participants was highlighted by the common conception that having family around was the best part of living in Mexico City. Family was conceived as a building block of identity and a predictor of success in life. Parents' lives were shaped around their family and providing for their children was seen both as a responsibility and a life goal. For many, closeness and frequent interaction with family members was inbuilt in their everyday lives and was associated with positive feelings and positive relationships. This centrality of the family reflects Mexican collectivistic values of group membership: the lives and SWB of Mexico City dwellers were saliently guided by their family life (Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010; Triandis, 2000).

The representations presented in this analysis were those most salient in the data. Nonetheless, it is crucial to note that many were not shared hegemonically by all Londoners nor by all Mexico City dwellers. Representations differed in content, salience, and consensus across groups, which reflects the fluidity and plurality in beliefs, knowledge and practices characteristic of contemporary societies (Jovchelovitch 2007). For example, younger people in London did not tend to associate diversity with immigration, since the population in the city inherently included people from different ethnical and cultural background. Conversely, for various middle-aged and older participants, the variety of languages and skin colours in the

city represented a threat for their entitlement to the physical and social environment. Importantly, divergent representations were not only observed between groups but also within individuals. Each participant held a variety of representations, which at times were seemingly incompatible. For instance, many who were proud of the Londoner identity because of its openness and tolerance towards cultural and ethnical diversity at the same time held the view that foreigners were taking over the city, so immigration needed to be restricted. Similarly, some dwellers that criticised gentrification and deemed it unfair for *'the average Londoner'* also conceptualised it as advantageous and praised the presence of people from a higher socioeconomic level in the local environment. Holding inconsistent and contradictory social representations is referred in the literature as cognitive polyphasia. This capacity to sustain multiple and even discrepant social representations is an adaptive mechanism that allows sense-making while taking into account the multiple and diverse sources of information and knowledge that co-exist in today's societies (Jovchelovitch, 2007; Howarth et al., 2014). In Mexico City, representations were more homogenous across groups, which is characteristic of more traditional and less diverse societies (Duveen, 2000). However, within-person discrepancies were also identified, mostly in representations of behaviour towards the outgroup, as it required the negotiation of religious values of 'love thy neighbour' with embedded ideological classism and individual perceptions of risk.

Having analysed differences and similarities in social representations in London and Mexico City, another point of convergence can be identified: living in the city is a strongly relational phenomenon. Our findings show that social representations related to city life are predominately structured around the position of the self in respect to the other in the public sphere. Furthermore, it could be noted that most negative emotions and judgments found in the data were attached to representations that contained elements of the other, who challenged the existence and liveability of the self in the environment. In the literature, the self/other dyadic has been recognised as the central epistemological thema underpinning social representations of a variety of phenomena (Marková, 2015). Evidence suggests that conceptualisations of the self and the other shape behaviour (e.g. blood donation) (Moloney et al., 2015), motivation for social connection (Zeeb & Joffe, 2021) and public's response to a variety of risks, such as infectious diseases, earthquakes and climate change (see Smith et al., 2015).

Moreover, the valence in the affective components found in representations could also be explained by self/other conceptualisations. Research shows that self and other are commonly

understood in a polarised way, where the 'good' is ascribed to the self and the 'bad' to the other (Joffe, 1996). Hence, positive and desired emotions are ascribed to the self, whereas negative emotions and judgments pertain to the realm of the other. This polarisation serves an identity protective function, as it allows the 'good' self to stay distant from the 'bad' other. Turning to Kleinian psychodynamic theory Joffe (1996) explains that emotional responses to representations of self and the other are rooted in unconscious infantile fantasies. From birth, infants' relationship with the primary object is gratifying and simultaneously frustrating. When needs are not fulfilled, the primary object is experienced as persecutory – 'bad'. Conversely, when needs are fulfilled, the primary object is experienced as loving and satisfying – 'good'.

Given that boundaries between the self and the other are blurred in early stages of life, the baby also experiences itself as 'good' and 'bad'. Experiences of persecution coming from inside, or outside forces, evoke feelings of destruction and aggression, which are accompanied by extreme anxiety. In order to ease this anxiety and maintain experiences of nurturance, satisfaction and safety with the primary object and itself, the infant makes positive experiences and feelings part of the self and ascribes the undesired to others. This defence mechanism known as splitting, allows the infant to keep the 'good' whilst getting rid of the 'bad'. To a certain extent, splitting helps the individual gain a sense of control over danger, as the self can project negative feelings onto the other. Nonetheless, this could also lead to fear of the other as a powerful source of aggression. Although this theory refers to individual-level development, Joffe argues that similar mechanisms apply at the inter-group level, given that social identity is a part of personal identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, at group level, the need to perceive oneself in a positive light translates into a need to perceive one's group favourably and derogate the outgroup.

Who is represented as 'us' and 'them' is subjected to individual, cultural, societal and temporospatial forces (Marková, 2015) and each society has social groups which historically, have been targets for projection (Joffe, 1996). Accordingly, between and within the cultures studied in this thesis, groups that were ascribed with 'otherness' depended on the phenomena being represented. For London dwellers, regarding experiences of busyness and crowding, people in the city were represented as the other that dehumanised the self. In these representations, the thema civil/uncivil was of special relevance. Negative emotions associated with navigating the environment and making use of London's services were attributed to an uncivil, selfish other that overlooked the existence of the self. In representations of the

entertainment offer in the city and the housing crisis, a 'moneyed other' spoilt London's character and, in turn, its liveability for *'average Londoners'*. Despite the many things available to do in the city, only the *'wealthy with plenty of free time'* were able to make the most out of it. The *'average Londoner'* had to work to afford living in the city and had to be cautious regarding money. Moreover, *'rich foreign investors'* were ruining London by changing the built environment with impersonal modern constructions and chain shops. Furthermore, with gentrification of areas, *'average Londoners'* who could not keep up with prices had no option but to leave, fracturing communities and weakening the sense of belonging and attachment to the city. In addition, a threatening 'foreign-other' also featured in representations of multiculturalism. Representations concerning diversity and immigration were guided by a good/bad immigrant thema. Positive representations were associated with a 'good-immigrant' whose presence in the environment proved beneficial for the self. By sharing its food, culture and making itself approachable, the 'good immigrant' made Londoner's life more interesting. However, the voracious bad immigrant (see Joffe, 2015), that behaves inappropriately stays segregated and only comes to London to appropriate its resources, was perceived as a nuisance in the physical and social environment.

Furthermore, the Government played an important role in representations associated with living in the City. Phenomena like the housing crisis and uncontrolled immigration were described as the result of a government-other that neglected the needs and desires of '*real Londoners'* and favoured those from the threatening others. By selling council buildings to the private sector, the government was aiding the 'rich other' to expel 'average Londoners' from the City. Moreover, the lack of control in immigration had saturated the environment with 'bad immigrants' and the government's agenda of political correctness had enabled them to stay rigid in their behaviours and practices even when these clashed with British values and customs. This alliance of the government with the other led to a stronger sense of isolation for the self/ingroup.

Representations of otherness also guided experiences of the city in Mexico City and the feelings attached to them. Similar to their European counterparts, navigating and occupying a space in the environment was represented as a competition between the self and the other. Moreover, the uncivil/civil thema proved to be of cross-cultural relevance. Negative transport-related experiences were mostly produced by the uncivil other that disregarded the needs and space of the self. On the contrary, the civil other facilitated co-existence by acknowledging the

self (e.g., giving away their seat) and respecting the shared environment (e.g., picking up litter). However, conceiving co-habitants as a threatening other was not limited to travelling around the City. Representations of Mexico City as an unsafe place had led everyone outside the ingroup to be deemed potentially harmful. This generalised fear and distrust towards others strongly shaped Mexico City dwellers' lifestyles and principles for social connection. Aligned with the findings in London, the government was represented as the culprit for the negative aspects of living in Mexico City, such as traffic, failures in infrastructure, lack of services and insecurity. Authorities were conceptualised as corrupt, untrustworthy, unreliable, and self-serving. In the literature, it has been noted that, contrary to the more traditional 'downward' blame (i.e., blaming minorities and marginalised groups), contemporary risks have been attributed to the government and powerful elites (Joffe, 2011; Smith, et al., 2015). In line with this argument, blame for threatening phenomena happening in London and Mexico City was heavily placed upon the government. Nevertheless, opposed to most thematisations that left the self in a vulnerable position in respect to the Other, representations of the self-associated with the '*chilango'* identity and family membership grounded positive conceptualisations about living in Mexico City. Although the Mexico City dweller was represented as being selfish and cunning, it also had a positive side to it, such as being hard-working, welcoming and resilient. Furthermore, comparisons with those living outside the capital city strengthen the positive aspects of being a *'chilango'*, as they lived in a safer and more beneficial environment than the rest of the people in Mexico. Moreover, life in the city was centred in close ingroup relationships. Even though affinity and social cues like socioeconomic level facilitated inter-group connection, most Mexico City dwellers held a strong demarcation between 'us' – family and 'them' – everyone else. As a collectivistic culture, this ingroup membership guided and defined Mexico City dweller's personal and social lives.

This valuing of close and positive social relationships could be key for understanding similarities in levels of SWB between London and Mexico City. Research suggests that cultures that foster social relationships, interaction and cooperation report higher levels of SWB (Steel et al., 2018). Arguably, the cultural value for close relationships (Rojas, 2018) in combination with societal conditions that push Mexico City dwellers to stay within their ingroup as a mean to remain safe reinforces the centrality of the family in their lives and SWB. Thus, despite the challenging societal circumstances associated with living in Mexico City, sociocultural dynamics facilitate the fulfilment of psychosocial needs. Conversely, representations of life in London reveal that current societal phenomena in the City is proving

isolating for the self, as identification and connection with the other in the social and physical space decreases. In individualistic cultures like the British one, social relationships reflect values of freedom and personal choice according to the interests of each individual. Hence, contrary to what is observed in the Mexican sample, British people tend to look for strong social relationships outside the family (Allan, 2008). Thus, in such cultures, generalised trust in the social environment is essential, which could explain the subjective importance of the *'integration'* of immigrants and the importance of the local community found in Londoners' representations. It has been argued that beyond commonalities (such as living in the same area), in diverse societies like London where different views and identities co-exist, communities are based on working together to achieve shared goals (Howarth, Cornish and Gillespie, 2014). However, as societal conditions are represented as benefiting the other whilst excluding the self, London dwellers' defence mechanism is to either leave (as expressed by younger participants) or to legitimise the 'real Londoner' identity and reclaim their entitlement to the City. The lack of identification of the common ground with the other hinders possibilities for community formation which could lead to uncertainty, fragmentation and isolation (Jovchelovitch, 2007). Hence, despite the better objective societal circumstances surrounding the lives of London dwellers, psychosocial needs such as mattering, sense of belonging and social connection are not as easily fulfilled as for those living in Mexico.

Chapter 6: Study 2: Social Representations of Family in London and Mexico City dwellers

Building on the results of the first study, the aim of the second study was to investigate social representations of family in London and Mexico City dwellers, in order to identify sociocultural forces that could influence the pathways by which family is associated with SWB. This chapter presents the empirical findings from both samples, starting with those pertaining to London dwellers. Replicating the methodology used for Study 1, it begins with the results of the content analysis of free elaborations elicited by the GEM. Then, it presents the most prevalent themes found during the subsequent interviews and concludes with a summary of the findings pertaining to each culture.

6.1 Representations of family in London dwellers

6.1.1 London Dwellers: Free Association Task

The free association task was completed by 24 London dwellers (See **Chapter 3** for sample details) and yielded 96 main responses in the form of text and/or images. These responses were recorded and examined to identify recurrent ideas. The results of the content analysis show that the data obtained can be classified into 10 categories. 14 of the associations did not fit into any category (15%), hence there were not categorised. Most prevalent categories are described below. The prevalence of each category can be found in **Figure 21**.

The most prevalent associations referred to positive SWB (33%), which predominantly include mentions to '*love'* and other positive affective experiences like *'happiness'*. The second most prevalent category, togetherness (13%) includes associations such as *'unity' and 'togetherness'*. The third most prevalent category, support (10%), includes mentions of the word 'support' and others such as *'reliability'*. The fourth most prevalent category encompasses associations related to life history and identity (8%), such as *'history'* and *'roots'*. This first approach to the data suggested that family in London was predominately associated with positive feelings. Nonetheless, it is not known how dwellers make sense of such affective experiences. Thus, subsequent thematic analysis of the elaborations on the free associations helped the elucidation of family characteristics and dynamics associated with SWB.

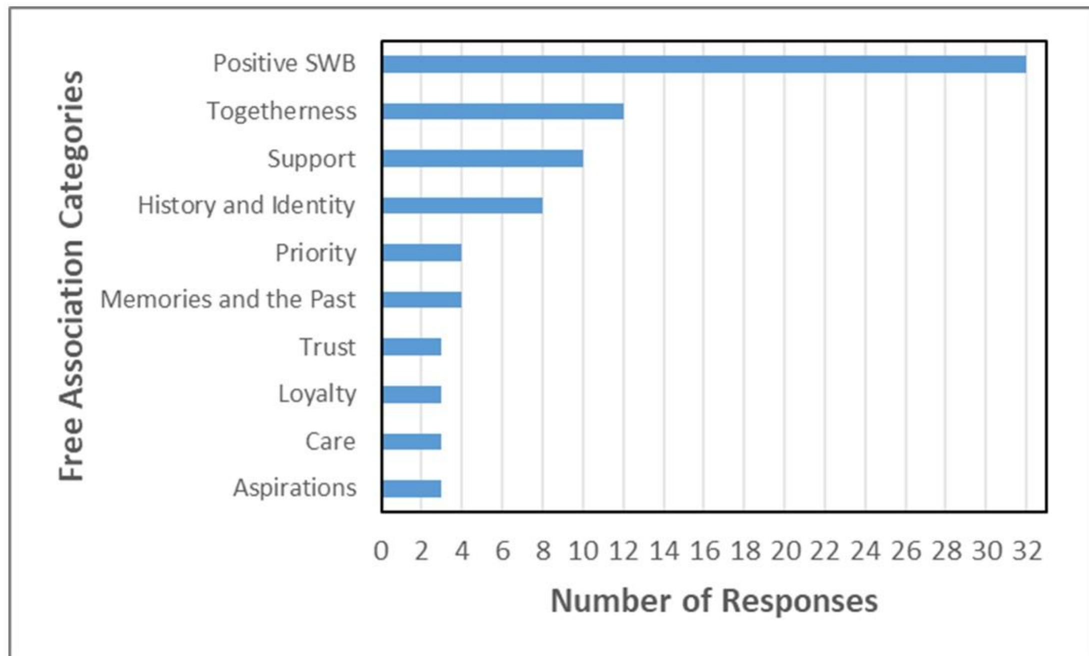

Figure 21. Categories elicited by the prompt 'what family means to you' in the free association task in London.

6.1.2 London Dwellers: Interview Themes

From the elaborations prompted by the GEM, family was associated with four main themes: support, patterns of attachment, wellbeing and love (**Figure 22**), which are presented in order of prevalence in the data.

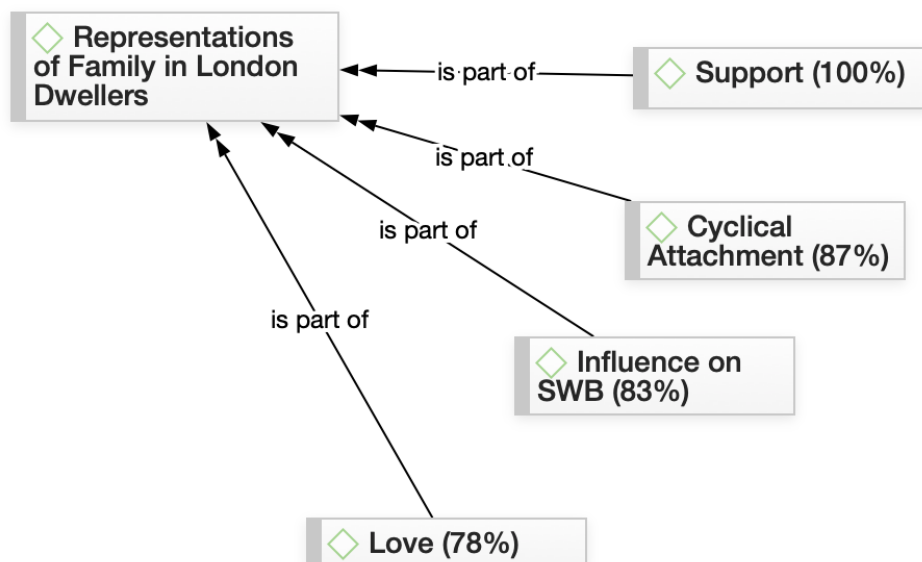

Figure 22. Representations of family in London dwellers.

6.1.2.1 Theme 1: Support: The Symbolic Currency of Kinship

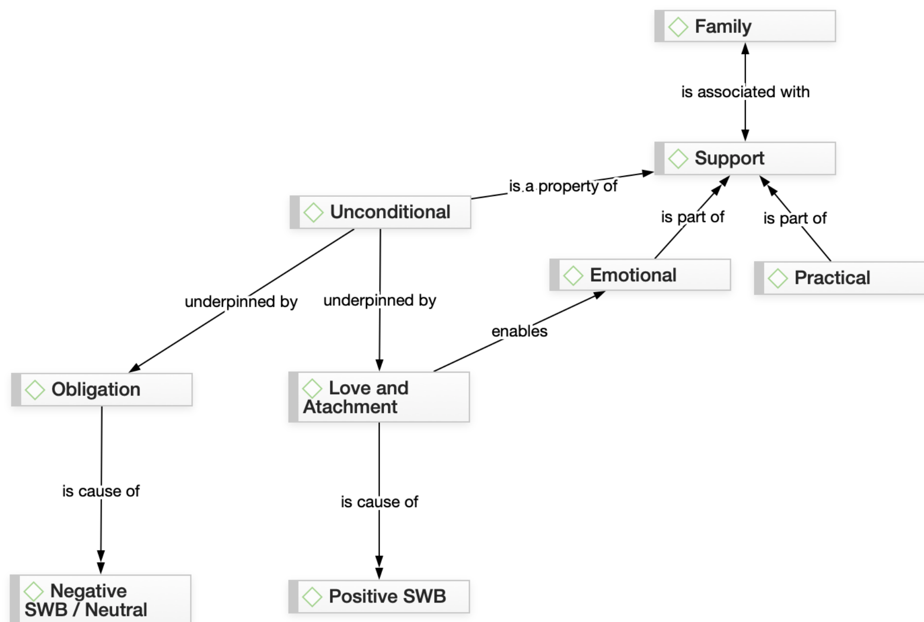

Figure 23. Representations of family support in London dwellers.

All participants viewed family in terms of support, as depicted in **Figure 23**. Offering and giving support to family members was an ingrained expectation linked to kinship; it was taken for granted.

The meaning of support was varied, given that it was approached from various angles. It encompassed care, looking after, help, guidance and exchange of advice. Nonetheless, the fundamental connotation revolved around two main principles: 1) companionship during situations of vulnerability and/or adversity and 2) fostering flourishing and wellbeing.

> *"Support. So I guess that's just us all supporting each other with, you know, daily life and when I had my youngest the older two were a great support and they still are with her actually. You know, they really help her and help me and then, you know, my parents support me a lot, they're always at the end of the phone."* (Female, 42, Higher SES)

Moreover, support was conceptualised within two dimensions. On one hand, practical support, which involved the execution of actions and behaviour, included financial support (i.e. borrowing and lending money), '*doing favours'* (i.e. picking up the children from school) and providing care during times of illness or disability.

> *"Support. So yeah family is there for support or, you know, I think if there's anyone, you know, like need help with something. Like my mum's just had an operation on her knee, so she needs extra support for things. Just helping her carry things or just she may need."* (Male, 43, Lower SES)

On the other hand, emotional support, which by nature was affective and psychological, included encouragement, companionship and giving and receiving advice. Moreover, for those who mentioned having a supportive family, emotional support was predominantly underpinned by their family members' acceptance and endorsement of decisions and plans.

> *"(...) it's like providing support for each other and support you can break down into, you know, whether it's financial support or just mental support or support in your career, telling you that you're doing the right thing, you know. Because I moved away from my hometown and they were very supportive of that."* (Male, 31, Higher SES)

Furthermore, blood-relationships implicitly carried a sense of trustworthiness, as many participants mentioned that family members were people they could trust. This idea was grounded in the family containing the people who knew them most intimately and for the longest.

> *"These are the best people to trust, your family. I mean I would trust my daughters with my life, I don't have a partner so I would trust my daughters with my life and looking at my mum now, I could be at that stage at some point, if I live to be that long (sic) and I know that they would do their best and I would trust that they would do their best. So that's what I meant by trust."* (Female, 61, Higher SES)

The exchange of support in any of its forms elicited an array of positive affective experiences in participants. The main emotions and feelings associated with the concept included love, comfort, protection and safety. Moreover, participants symbolised being supported by their family members as being inside a *"protective bubble"* and having a *"cushion"* to fall back on. It became apparent that for most of the participants, support was founded on love and attachment. Nonetheless, in-depth analysis revealed that emotional closeness was not indispensable to provide support. Conversely, helping and looking after family members was understood as a responsibility inherent in a blood relationship; an almost-obligatory contract of solidarity and reciprocity. Thus, support amongst family members was expected to be unconditional, irrespective of the quality of the relationship:

"I was always there for them, always, as soon as my mum was unwell, bang, I was at the hospital bed. When she passed away I was going up to see my father and staying up there, it was just, you just feel that you've got to do the right thing. I was doing it as much for myself as well, I wouldn't have felt comfortable abandoning him, that's not what you do. And as much as the troubles I may have had with him as an adolescent, I still respected him(...)" (Male, 53, Lower SES)

Despite the aforementioned positive characteristics of *giving* support, for some (mostly male participants), *asking* for support entailed dependence and emphasised the importance of not relying too much on their families to be successful. Moreover, they elaborated on the value of independence and being able to manage adversity without needing someone's help.

"I'm sort of more sort of eager to succeed because, you know, you sort of realise that family aren't going to be around forever, you know, and I think certainly my mother and my father have been really supportive and have always been there, which has maybe been not good for me. So knowing that they won't be there forever is actually kind of a good wake-up call to kick me into gear, you know, that's my personal experience." (Male, 35, Higher SES)

To summarise, representations of family in London dwellers were strongly associated with giving and receiving unconditional support. From doing favours to giving advice, support was expressed in a variety of ways. Furthermore, support amongst family members was characterised by trust and was not only enabled by love. For some, helping family members was associated with an inherent sense of responsibility associated with kinship rather than close attachment.

6.1.2.2 Theme 2: Family and Attachment: Closeness as Cyclical Process

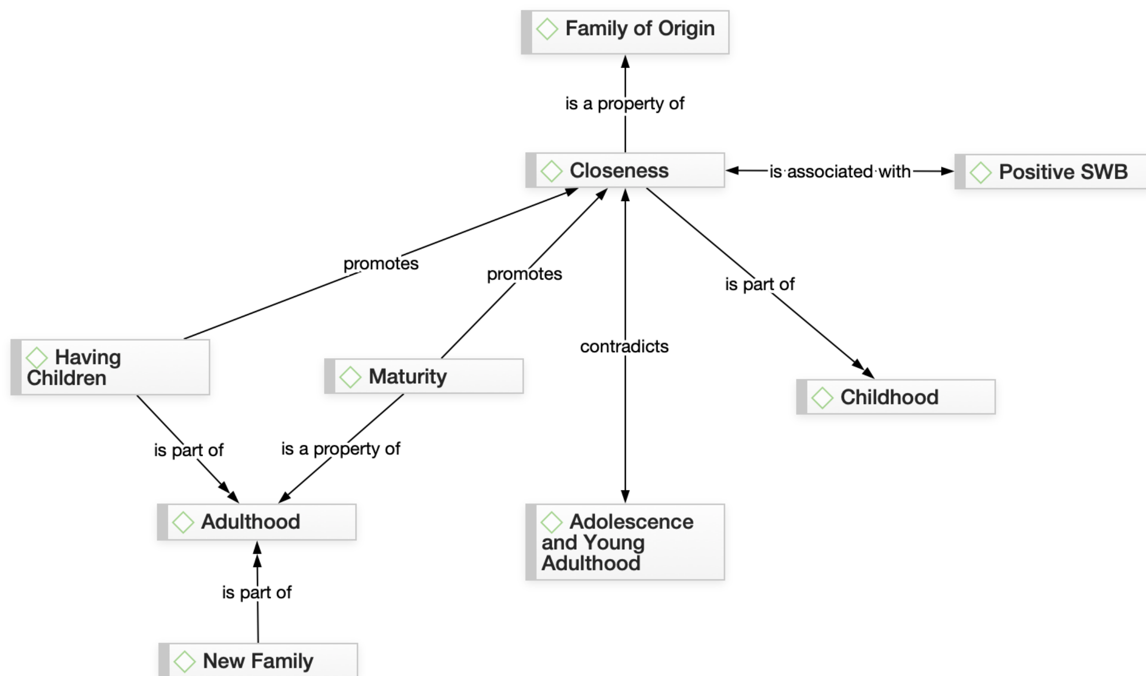

Figure 24. Representations of closeness with family members in London dwellers.

The second theme was found implicitly during participants' elaborations of representations of family, as shown in **Figure 24**. In 20 out of the 24 London dwellers of the sample, closeness and attachment to family members fluctuated throughout the life course, especially in relation to the family of origin. From participants' narratives, it became salient that loving someone did not necessarily equate to being close to them. To an extent, closeness referred to a more tangible and intimate quality of relationships. Even though participants expressed loving various family members, they considered themselves close to only a few – if at all. Closeness was mostly represented by 1) spending time together and 2) being in regular contact, either physically or virtually (i.e. calls and texts). Based on these ideas, the relevance of physical proximity became salient, as it was seen as the main instigator of bonding. Thus, changes in place and stages of development were associated with changes in closeness within familial relationships.

Participants associated childhood as a time of strong attachment to family members, as children depend on their families to cover basic needs; such as education, food and care. Various participants represented having a *'happy childhood'* based on the fulfilment of these

needs. Moreover, some recognised that dynamics within their nuclear family shaped their affective world, morals and values. Thus, participants reasoned that high dependence and cohabitation explained strong attachment with family members during childhood.

> *"Well it says what does family mean to you so they're everything, because they're usually the people that you kind of spend the most of your time with, especially when you're growing up. Usually your first friends or the people that you kind of fall in love with first are your family members so it's like you have that close bond, you know."* (Female, 31, Lower SES)

Childhood was also characterised by the presence of the extended family, such as grandparents, uncles, cousins and aunts. Some participants' extended family lived close by, which resulted in regular contact. Furthermore, many recalled occasions where both nuclear and extended family met, such as birthday parties, Sunday roasts and specially, Christmas. With few exceptions, most of these memories were associated with positive feelings and were appraised as positive experiences.

> *"Loved it. Big family. Always people around. Always someone to help you. I was brought up by my aunty sometimes because my mum was a nurse so she was at work 50, 60 hours a week (...) it was quite fun and organised and I had a happy childhood, very happy childhood, I had no problems at all."* (Female, 41, Lower SES)

In some cases, the strength of the connection with extended family members weakened as they grew older. Contact became scarce and limited to *"funerals and weddings"*. There was no clear explanation for this, although there was an emphasis on geographical distance as a reason for emotional distance and lack of interaction. Other explanations were changes in life circumstances such as the death of a family member and in the words of some participants just *"growing apart"*. However, in some cases, the bond established during early years proved resistant to both physical and emotional distancing, which broadened participants' conception of the meaning of belonging and family.

> *"It's not many, a couple of my mum's cousins that they keep in touch with, they were at the funeral, my dad's funeral was a couple of years ago so they came for that. We're not close but we're still, you know, family turn up at weddings and funerals but you might not see them that much during the years."* (Male, 58, Higher SES)

Adolescence and early adulthood were regarded as a time of detachment and in some cases, conflict with authority figures in the family. Some participants reflected on their own struggle during this time while others talked about their experience as parents of teenagers and young adults. Irrespective of the perspective, this time was characterised by the need for independence (i.e. emotional, physical and financial), which resulted in a decrease of time spent with the family. Accordingly, the majority of participants mentioned moving out from their parents' home during their late teens/early 20s.

> *"I think I was, the most unhappy was the last year that I was at home, when I was 17 and I wanted to be independent and I wanted to go out and I had to be home by midnight.(…) it was horrible that year, I hated it."* (Female, 54, Higher SES)

When speaking of their own experience as young adults, participants regarded moving out as something exciting and liberating, nonetheless, for parents (specially mothers), feelings were mixed. They mentioned the importance of encouraging independence in their children, however, it also meant spending less time and having less control over them, which was associated with feelings of anxiety, loneliness and lack of sense of purpose.

> *"When kids go off to university, people say they flee the nest and it's, you know, well what shall I do with myself now. And it is, you know, you can't really explain to them until it happens, you know, it's like they break up the next day and everything's changed, you know."* (Female, 55, Lower SES)

Adulthood was a period in which the meaning of family reshaped. Within our sample, there were participants who started their own family, others who mentioned not being married and/or not having children. With the exception of a few participants who had broken from family ties completely, subsequent to the distancing that happened during the search for independence, there was a phase of re-evaluation of the significance of family ties, which motivated reconnection. Physical distancing (i.e. not living under the same roof) was associated with improved relationships with the family. Without having *"forced"* contact every day, participants had more control over the interactions with their family, giving them a sense of agency in the dynamic of their relationships. Having the option to decide when to reach out or maintain a distance was associated with less conflict. Moreover, some missed the daily

communication and presence of others, which in turn made them more appreciative of their family members.

> *"I think just spending less time with each other and maybe appreciating each other more. And when you spend less time with each other you don't build up kind of negative feelings as much because you kind of miss being around each other (...)I think it's to do with spending less time together and appreciating each other more and growing up."* (Male, 32, Lower SES)

Having children was identified as a catalyst for reconnecting with the family. Those whose communication with family decreased during their late teens and early adulthood found themselves getting close again to their parents, siblings and even extended family in order to get support and advice on childcare and upbringing. This was particularly notable in participants who had recently become parents.

> *"I've just had my first child and my parents and family have seemed to have come together and really come around me and my partner and my daughter to kind of help, help us through what is a very tough time for any new parent, going through, learning about how to raise someone is a big job. And I really feel like that's where I've really seen what family is about, which is odd because perhaps I should have realised this earlier in my life, but I really feel the grouping together, someone's talked about it takes a village to raise a child kind of thing and I feel like my family have really embodied that."* (Female, 27, Higher SES)

Furthermore, maturity was associated with empathy towards family members. Participants said that with age, they were able to recognise efforts and sacrifices made by their parents during their upbringing. This understanding fostered reconnection and re-strengthened attachment.

Lastly, family also represented a window to the past and early years. Family members were seen as part of the individual's identity, associated with memories, life history and a sense of belonging.

> *"History of being a child is holidays, like you know childhood holidays because sometimes when life wasn't that good when you were at home as in, you know, parents*

> *working and different things, on holidays it was always fun (...) And history also with siblings, whatever happens in life you've always got that history, you can't change that history so you grew up together, you went through good times together, bad times, you argued, you fought, you know, all those things, but it's still the history that makes you."* (Female, 51, Lower SES)

Thus, in most cases, experiencing independence and having children led participants to re-assess the meaning of family and its contribution to their lives and sense of self. Although this was not true for all participants, for the majority, the last stage of the cycle of attachment was characterised by reconnection with the family of origin and the individual's negotiation of two spheres: family of origin and nuclear family.

> *"The connection, it's important, particularly as you get older because I think family has, perhaps has more meaning as you get older and I think roots, your roots become more dominant in your life and become perhaps more necessary. The connection's always there, regardless of how long the gaps are between sort of seeing one another."* (Female, 60 Higher SES)

To sum up, this theme captures fluctuations in closeness with the family throughout different developmental stages. Whilst childhood was represented as the stage of maximum attachment with the family of origin and extended family, late teenage years and early adulthood were characterised by a need for physical and emotional independence from the family. For many, adulthood re-shaped their meanings of family, especially that of the family of origin. Decreased interaction, maturity and having children were catalysts for reconnection with family, as dwellers become more understanding and appreciative of family members. Autonomy was a key component in the SWB associated with family, as participants valued interaction with family members when it was done under their own terms and motivated by personal preference.

6.1.2.3 Theme 3: Family and Subjective Wellbeing

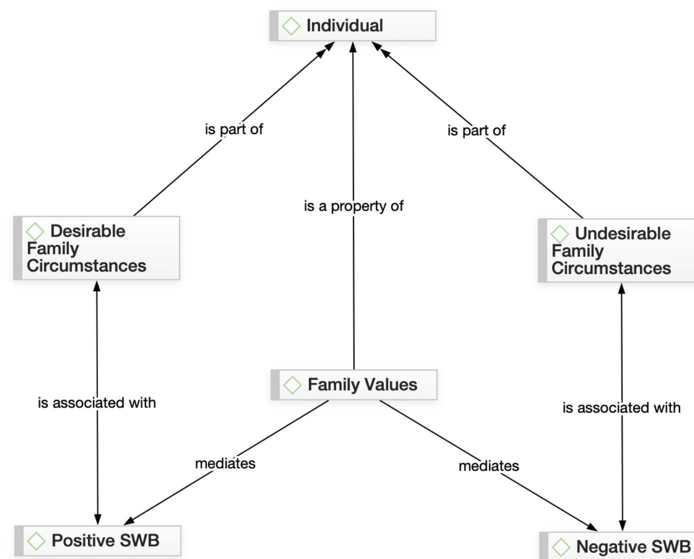

Figure 25. Representations of family and SWB in London dwellers.

For better or worse, the interplay between the representations of family, societal ideas and personal circumstances influenced participants' wellbeing. Family was understood as a unit, which meant that although participants recognised themselves as individuals, they were also part of a larger entity. Family was seen as the institution responsible for a good upbringing, values and education. The ideal family was represented as having close, strong and positive ties between members. Having a family with these characteristics was seen as a privilege, with participants expressing pity and sympathy for those who did not or that were part of a *'dysfunctional'* family, casting light on the social desirability of belonging to a close-knit family. For some, unfulfilled expectations concerning family life were associated with negative feelings (**Figure 25**).

> *"I think there's a lot of pressure on it, to have like the idea that you get on with your parents and everyone's happy and you sit round the table and you have food and you all get on and there aren't arguments and you go on holiday and it's fun. But to me I remember that everyone was getting in at different times because they were all working hard so we wouldn't always sit at the table so I don't think we got to know each other properly."* (Female, 30, Higher SES)

For participants who had a good relationship with family members, *'togetherness'* and spending time with family was strongly associated with subjective wellbeing, as it fostered closeness, strengthened family bonds and promoted positive affective experiences.

> *"(...)spending as much time as you can together. Like a few weeks ago, so last month, my brother was there at my mum's house and I said to my mum when I saw her, I said 'you miss all your 3 children together', like it's a bit rare when we actually do that, like literally have a full-blown conversation (...)"* (Female, 31, Lower SES)

Some participants who had troubled relationships with family members and at the same time ascribed to familial values craved the interaction and closeness expected amongst family members. The discrepancy between ideals and personal circumstances was associated with negative feelings and emotions, such as loneliness and rejection, as illustrated in the following excerpt by a woman who broke ties with her siblings after being excluded from her mother's will.

> "*I feel lonely loads of times since all this happened because I have nobody (...) And it's a loneliness in a different way, it's not like an old person who sits in the house all day and she's got nobody and she's lonely because all she has is the television. I don't have that loneliness because I've got friends and I live a busy life. My loneliness is I don't have siblings, they're the only ones who, you know, that I'm supposed to be close to."* (Female, 51, Lower SES)

Furthermore, the desire and social expectation of spending time with family proved difficult to achieve. Participants mentioned that there were different obstacles to overcome, such as work and others' *'busy lives*. Some participants followed this idea by mentioning that living in London was expensive, which required them or their family members to work long hours to be able to provide for the family. In line with this notion, participants from the older group who had retired addressed positively having more time to invest in their family relationships. However, participants who had a job, talked about the challenges around finding a work-family life balance.

> *"So I do three jobs every day just so I have enough money because I like them to travel so we go to a lot of different countries, they do a lot of sports so obviously this costs a lot*

of money, I make sure that I'm here for them, I do their breakfast in the morning before I go to work, I come in and make sure their dinner's ready for them, sometimes I go back to work again but I like to know that everything's organised and everything's ready for them. So that's what I call devoted." (Female, 41, Lower SES)

Negative emotions were also found in relation to the nature of the love felt towards family members, as intensity carried vulnerability. Arguments and differences between family members were judged as *'normal'* and *'expected'* however, they were regarded as more hurtful compared to conflict with other people.

"I think probably because of that level of love and respect that was there in the first place and that sense of loyalty and perhaps if you feel that perhaps someone has maybe betrayed you in a way then it cuts a lot deeper when it's somebody that's so close to you and you wouldn't necessary expect it to come from" (Male, 41, Higher SES)

Moreover, mothers expressed continued worry and anxiety linked to their children's wellbeing. For example, some female participants elaborated on how they felt that crime in London was steadily increasing, which made them apprehensive about their children's safety.

"And I know that there are gangs up there so if ever they are walking in the road I say go the high street way, do not walk that way at the top, you know. It's just as a parent it's all these instincts kicking, you know, and all these fears. And there's so many fears, you know, just, just for their safety, especially when you hear all those things that are going on." (Female, 55, Lower SES)

Furthermore, illness and dead of loved family members had a strong negative impact on wellbeing. Participants who had been through bereavement as a result of the loss of a close family member mentioned experiencing intense negative emotions and, in some cases, struggled to get their life back to normal. Similarly, participants with a sick family member described the experience as overwhelming, stressful and both physically and emotionally draining.

"In my first box I put stressful. The reason why we are here today at my mother's house is actually because, you know, my grandmother has Alzheimer's so she's very ill and my mum's very stressed, which then makes me worry (...) so family in the last 3, 4 years for

me, has just been like very kind of like depressing. And hard work. So yeah, stressful, you know, because like they mean so much to me, all these people, but all of these things are out of my control." (Male, 35, Higher SES)

Thus, affective components attached to the representation of family depended on individual's value for the family and their personal circumstances. SWB was more strongly associated with family in participants who thought of family as important and held close ties with family members. On the contrary, discrepancies between family expectations, value and circumstances were more associated with negative SWB or the absence of affective components in representations of family. Accordingly, a small group of male participants mentioned cutting ties with their family members as a way to improve their SWB.

"You know, some other people don't have families or they don't live with their family or I don't know, they don't, you know, have connection with their parents or family so I think I do have that a bit, sometimes I don't really want to be with them too much" (Male, 28, Higher SES)

To summarise, this theme captures the interplay between societal ideals, personal values and individual circumstances in representations of family and their effects on people's SWB. Across London dwellers, family was seen as a unit and the institution responsible for children's upbringing. London dwellers shared the notion that in society, the ideal family is that where ties were close and strong. Nonetheless, not all participants ascribed to those values and for some, personal family circumstances made it difficult to fulfil such expectations. Discrepancies between societal ideals, individual values and individuals' family life were associated with negative feelings and emotions, especially for those who held family values but had conflictive relationships with family members. Moreover, close attachment to family was associated with SWB, however, at the same time it implied some vulnerability, as the effects of less favourable circumstances such as conflict, illness and death were experienced more intensely when involving a beloved family member.

6.1.2.4 Theme 4: Love and Family

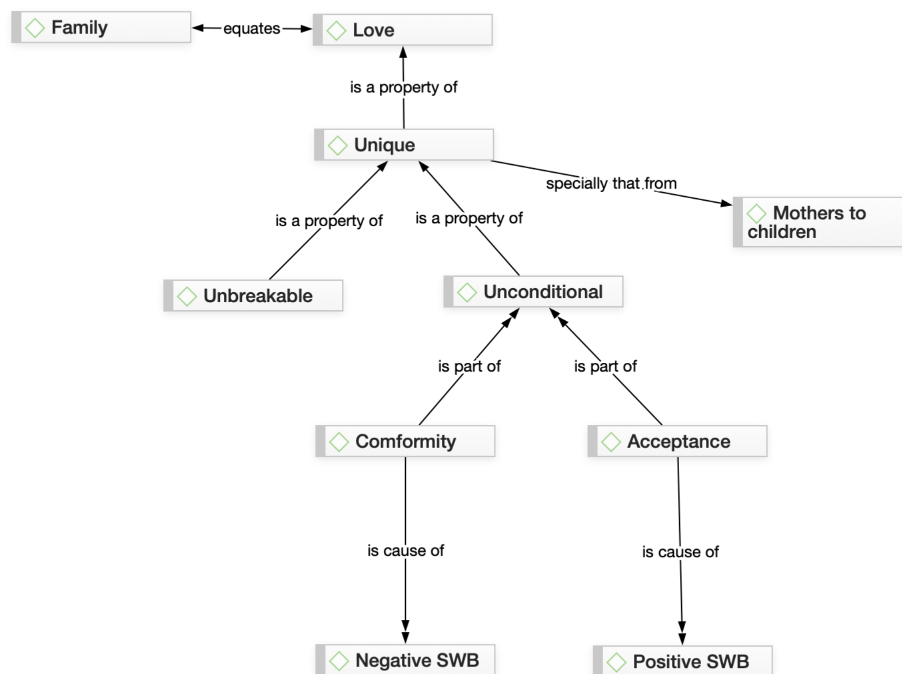

Figure 26. Representations of love and family in London dwellers.

For almost three quarters of the sample, love was the most salient feeling attached to the meaning of family. Nevertheless, this representation proved to be nuanced, intricate and difficult to express in words. The relationship between the family and love was understood as causal. For most participants, being blood-related to someone resulted in loving them. This association was so strong that conceptually, meanings were intertwined. Talking about family was intrinsically the same as talking about love. Thus, love was regarded as an overlapping and inherently indivisible element in the representation of family, as explained by the representations in **Figure 26.**

> *"I just put love. I just, I think that fundamentally is what family is normally about. I know there's lots of families out there that perhaps that isn't the case always but I think underlying there's this, yeah, there's that phrase isn't there, blood is thicker than water, that kind of sense of loyalty that comes within a unit of a family and that wider family."* (Male, 41, Higher SES)

Family and love were so fused together that some struggled to differentiate them. Upon reflection, there were participants who realised that giving love and receiving love from family members was taken for granted.

> *"Well you have all sorts of different love but I think the, the, what you have for your family is just almost natural, in fact it's, it's something you don't really notice but when you, when you think about it, yeah of course you have, you have it. Because you're grateful as well I think. So I think yeah, the main emotion is love for your family. Yeah"* (Male, 55, lower SES)

Family love was distinguished from other types of love, such as that felt towards friends. The most salient distinctive feature of the love between family members was that it was unconditional. Friendships could be strong and close, however there was an element of uncertainty attached to them. Contrary to the family bond, friendships could end or fall apart for various reasons. This idea highlighted that family ties were assumed to be virtually unbreakable.

> *"Well with friends …there's a few that like you might think they're like glue and like they'll always be with you and that you're stuck with them but actually they're not and that has happened a few times in my life (…) Whereas I think with family it's a lot harder to do that. So it's almost just a bit more solid, family, than friendships."* (Female, 27, Higher SES)

This unconditionality was considered valuable and broadly regarded as something positive. However, elaboration of unconditional love shed light on the emotional effort required to love family members despite conflict, ideological incompatibility, personality clashes, arguments or unmet expectations.

> *"I probably should have put unconditional love actually because to me family is that, so even, I have one sister so even with her we don't actually get on that well but if there was ever anything she needed and likewise we'd both still be there. And she may drive me up the wall but you still love her, do you know, it's family. So it's kind of unquestionable what you do for them and that love that you have."* (Female, 30, Higher SES)

Further analysis revealed that unconditional love was strongly underpinned by feelings of acceptance and/or resignation, depending on individual family experiences. Participants who held more positive cognitive and affective associations with the representation of family linked unconditional love with concepts such as loyalty, forgiveness, security and comfort.

> *"I think it's, the kind of trust that they won't turn their backs on you, even if you did something wrong or made mistakes or if you had an argument with them or fell out with them or did something that upset them, they would always I think be there for you once the dust has settled. So yeah, it kind of links to security and comfort but it's that, really, just that they will always be there for you and always care about you."* (Male, 32, Lower SES)

Nonetheless, the associations varied for participants who mentioned having a difficult relationship with a member of their family. This was found in almost half of the sample. An underlying feeling of conformity, as opposed to acceptance, existed within their narrative. For these participants, unconditional love was dictated by cultural expectations around family relationships rather than organic affection.

Participants mentioned feeling *"stuck"*, linked to a lack of sense of agency and choice. Similarly, others said that they would prefer not having a given member of their family in their life while some identified kinship as the only reason for interaction with some people.

> *"My siblings, they're not people who I would have had as friends, I don't like them, they're not very nice people so even when I was growing up they weren't very nice siblings. So I wouldn't have chosen them as my friends if I was at school with them. But when they're your family you have no choice."* (Female, 51, Lower SES)

Thus, regardless of their personal experiences, most participants conceptualised the love within the family as an unconditional, unbreakable feeling unrelated to compatibility and subjective criteria for social likeability. For some, acceptance was identified as the mechanism with which to provide unconditional love; some participants' acceptance of other family members was grounded in symbols such as *"blood is thicker than water"*. For others, this acceptance was experienced as conformity, underpinned by the realisation that the social representation of family determined that family relationships are outside the scope of volition.

> *"I mean it is difficult to put into words but that's probably because it's so innate and so deep. I can say for example I love my youngest, obviously, but goodness gracious there are times where, you know, I really, really could do without him. But I, you know, the love is too big to get in the way of any of how difficult he is, obviously. So yeah it's hard to describe that depth of love, isn't it, because it's, yes it's innate I think."* (Female, 55, Lower SES)

Love for Children

As described above, love towards family members was characterised as strong and unconditional. Nonetheless, there was a particular intensity around the love parents had for their children. Participants who had children and more saliently, those who were mothers, differentiated the love for their daughters and sons from the love towards any other family member. This love was experienced as unspeakably deep and powerful, with parents explaining that this was an emotion that only people who had children could understand. Moreover, it became salient that the love associated with the concept of family was symbolised by the bond between parent-child.

> *"Love. It's all about love, isn't it (...) when people say to you, you don't know what love is until you have a child in your arms, you go, oh whatever, no, no, you know, you meet your husband and you think you're in love, but it's a different love, it's a totally different love. When you have your child, something in you comes out, protection, just you can't love anyone more than you love your children."* (Female, 41, Lower SES)

In summary, this theme captures representations of love associated with the family. Love between family members, and especially that felt for children, was represented as intense and unbreakable. The concept of family and love were so fused together, that it proved difficult to distinguish one from the other; family meant love and love meant family. Nonetheless, loving the family did not always come easy. Various participants elaborated on the challenges and difficulties associated with loving their family members in spite of conflict, arguments and incompatibility. However, ideals of unity and unconditionality attached to the representation of family underpinned either acceptance of, or conformity to, the permanence of family bonds.

6.1.3 Representations of Family in London Dwellers: Summary of Results

For British London dwellers, representations of family were predominantly associated with support, cyclical attachment, influenced on SWB and love. Giving and receiving support was one the main functions of family ties. Either practical or emotional, blood-relationships implicitly carried a commitment to help those in need, even when relationships were not close. Moreover, it became salient that London dwellers' attachment towards family members fluctuated throughout developmental stages. Thus, whilst the search of independence associated with teenage years and early adulthood resulted in distancing from the family, having children and becoming older were represented as catalysts for re-connection during adulthood. However, despite shared representations of unconditional love towards the family, this did not apply for everyone, as the extent to which participants endorsed family values varied. Some London dwellers considered family a very important aspect of their lives, whilst others preferred to '*do without'.* The (mis)match between societal expectations, individuals' endorsement of such ideals and personal family circumstances influenced dwellers' SWB associated with the family. Those who felt forced to love and interact with family members tended to experience family more negatively. On the contrary, those who held family ideals and had positive relationships with their family associated family with positive feelings and experiences.

6.2 Representations of family in Mexico City Dwellers

6.2.1 Mexico City Dwellers: Free Association Task

The free association task was completed by 24 Mexico City dwellers (see **Chapter 3** for sample details) and yielded 96 main responses in the form of text and/or images. These responses were recorded and examined to identify recurrent ideas. The results of the content analysis show that the data obtained can be classified into seven categories. Nine (9%) of the associations did not fit in any category, hence there were not categorised. Most prevalent categories are described below. The prevalence of each category can be found in **Figure 27**.

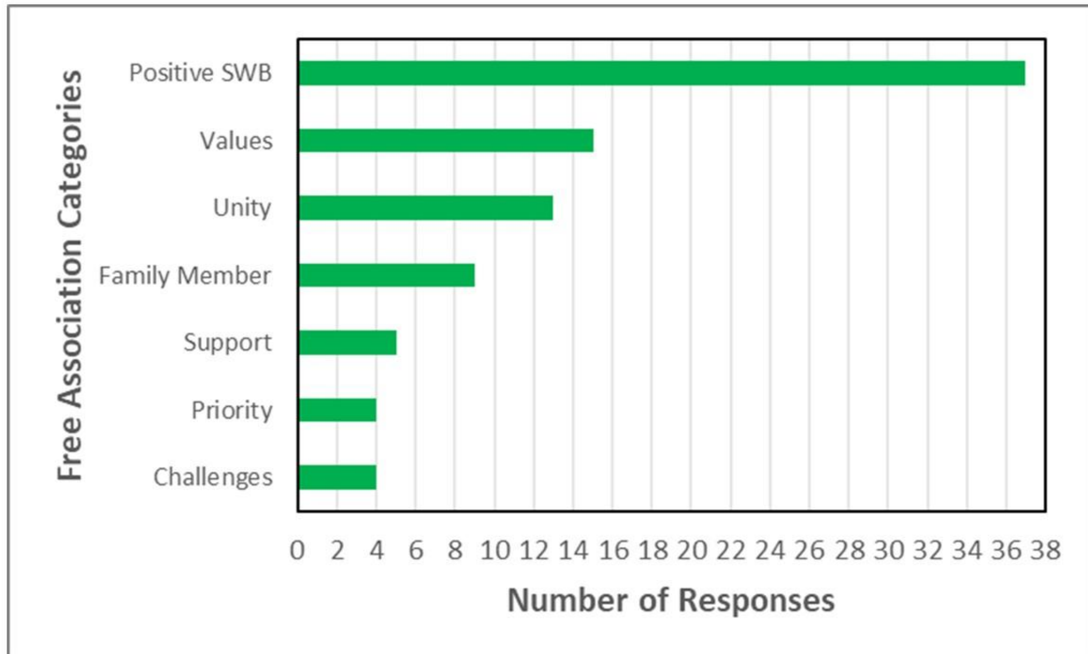

Figure 27. Categories elicited by the prompt 'what family means to you' in the free association task in Mexico City.

6.2.2 Mexico City Dwellers: Interview Themes

From the elaborations prompted by the GEM, family was associated with four main themes, depicted in **Figure 28**: support, unity, happiness and society, which are presented in order of prevalence in the data.

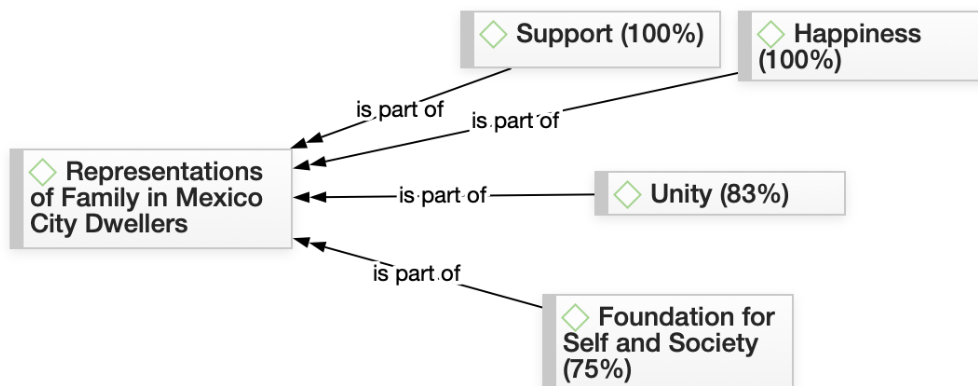

Figure 28. Representations of family in Mexico City dwellers.

6.2.2.1 Theme 1: Support and Flourishment

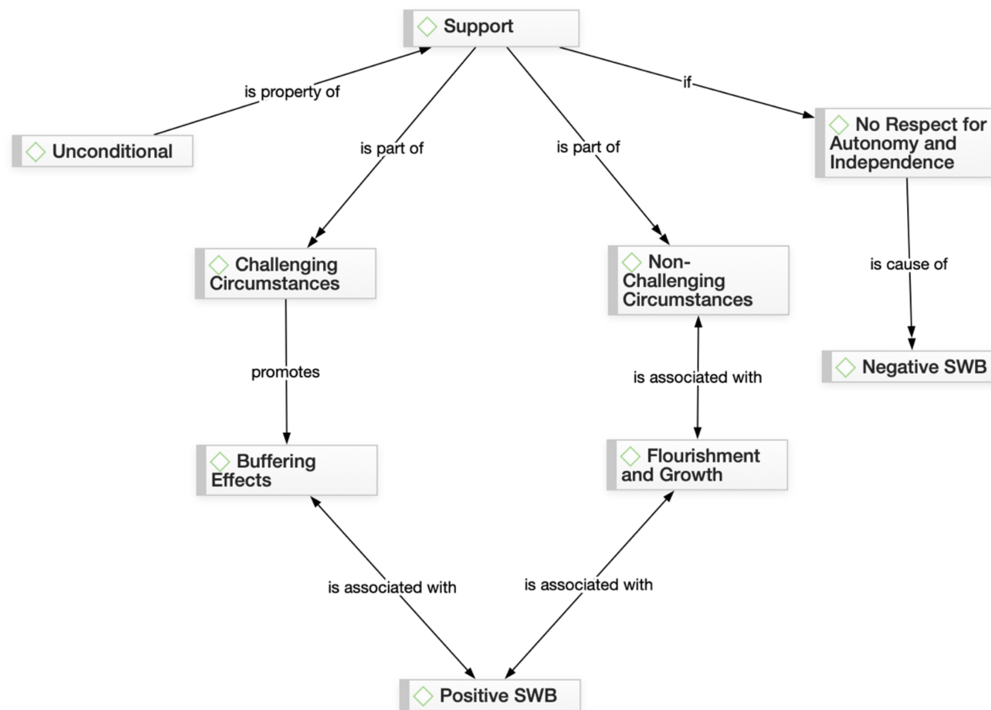

Figure 29. Representations of family support in Mexico City dwellers.

As seen in **Figure 29**, the most prevalent association with family was the notion of giving and receiving support. Family support was mainly characterised by being *'unconditional'*. Mexican dwellers attached two main meanings to this quality. On one hand, it was understood in terms of the circumstances: family is there regardless of the problem or situation. On the other hand, it was conceptualised in terms of the quality of the relationship with family members: supporting the family goes before fall outs, conflicts and disagreements.

> *"I wrote "support", what I mean is that no matter what sort of problem I could have, financial, social, some problem, my family supports me, not only my parents but my siblings as well, so anything that happens I could make a phone call or go to someone's place and I know they are going to be there to support me."* (Male, 26, Higher SES)

Participants attributed unconditional support to the trust, loyalty and solidarity, which were identified as inherent elements of the representation of family ties, especially (but not exclusively) between members of the nuclear family. Some participants elaborated on how

they were able to talk openly with their family without fear of being judged. Similarly, others mentioned feeling confident of the *'good intentions'* of their family members towards them.

> *"Loyalty, the family also needs to vent out unholy things so to speak, so there's why you need to trust them (...) everything has to be founded in mutual trust for it to work, you can't live in a house where things disappear or get lost, it wouldn't be easy to live like that."* (Male, 59, Lower SES)

Support took the shape of attitudes and behaviours. For example, from the perspective of the giver, participants talked about doing favours, such as looking after someone's child and helping family members when ill, whereas participants exemplified the receiver perspective with actions such as asking for advice in times of confusion and borrowing money. Nonetheless, further analysis revealed that for Mexican dwellers, support was predominantly represented in terms of active involvement in the lives of close family members. Beyond times of need, support implied constant and proactive companionship. Participants demonstrated and experienced support by continuously looking after their family members, checking on them, asking how they were doing, showing interest in their activities and being present on occasions that were significant for their family members. Although this was found across all demographics in the sample, elaborations from participants who were parents clearly illustrated this idea. They predominantly associated supporting their children with spending time with them, helping with their homework, getting involved in their activities, and encouraging them to achieve their goals.

> *"For example, my kids (...) are young men dedicated to sports. They've got competitions, races and we go with them. I don't run, I'm very lazy, I'm a bad runner. But if they say there's going to be a run and they want me to go, I'll go. I'll finish last in the finish line but we'll go together (...) that's our family unity: we support each other, they help me a lot too."* (Female, 44, Lower SES)

Correspondingly, when speaking from a son/daughter perspective, several participants elaborated on the value of being on the receiving end of family support.

> *"Impulse. For me, my family represents a catapult, the ones who are going to tell you "go for it, do it, I support you, I'm here with you"* (Female, 29, Lower SES)

Proactive involvement, however, came with certain restrictions in order to be positive. Some participants emphasised the importance of giving family members independence, and not getting *‘too involved’*. Mexico City dwellers valued when their parents and other family members supported their decisions, instead of imposing ideas, even when they were in disagreement. Moreover, others reported giving advice only when asked to do so, as there was a risk of conflict when others did not like a certain opinion or point of view. Some participants shared having arguments and disagreements with family members when decisions were met with disapproval or criticism or when boundaries in relation to autonomy and independence were pushed.

> *“I try not sticking my nose in their problems… maybe they don’t mind but things that aren’t my business… This happens in families, maybe I wanted to help my brother or give him a piece of advice but he might react badly and tell me to stay out of it. I try to support them and give them advice but within some boundaries to avoid any issues.”* (Female, 29, Higher SES)

Thus, the representation of support within the Mexican sample was predominantly built on the day-to-day actions that showed care and interest in the lives of family members, ideally without trespassing their individuality and independence.

Another finding in the representation of family support was its close connection to Mexican dwellers’ subjective wellbeing. In terms of affect, family support provided an aid to the experience of negative feelings. Family members were regarded as the first people to go to when feeling emotionally distressed in order to find relief. Moreover, participants mentioned that the burden of dealing with challenging situations and difficult decisions was eased by getting the backing and input from other family members.

> *“It makes me feel good, feeling the family’s support, in case of a more serious situation –god forbid—we make decisions together, one becomes stronger, there are more shoulders carrying the weight, the odds of taking a wrong decision decrease, the chances are still there but taking decisions together increases the chances of making the right decision.”* (Female, 64, Higher SES)

Furthermore, support elicited a broad spectrum of positive feelings, emotions and bodily sensations such as, comfort, happiness, companionship and a sense of safety and security. Symbols representing these feelings included living with a *'safety net'* and *the 'warmth of a hug'*.

Support was also associated with judgments of life satisfaction. Several Mexico City dwellers mentioned that helping and caring for their family members was rewarding and made them feel good about themselves. Furthermore, numerous participants represented supporting others – not only family – as a quality of human nature that gives life purpose and direction. In some cases, this was also linked to the idea that if they supported and help others, life or god would give them good things in return.

> *"It's like when I talk to my mum, my siblings, my friends. They've got a problem; if it can be solved, I give them a hand. That's the best thing for me, support and help people in general. If you need anything, I don't know, emotional, family, money, I would support you and give you advice. And I feel good about it. I have this idea, if you do good no matter to whom, it will be reciprocated somehow (...) everything comes back your way if you do good. If you give and help, asking for nothing, life will give you things back, everything"* (Male, 47, Higher SES)

Finally, supporting others was frequently represented as a way to promote close and positive family relationships, which was found to be of great importance for Mexico City dwellers. Moreover, participants strongly held the idea that the ethos of supporting others learned in the family was extrapolated to relationships outside the family, which helped cultivating friendships.

> *"I think that regardless what you do, for example, at work, if your family's got your back, you can immediately tell. If you harvest good feelings, good principles, you can tell, either with your friends, at work or your day-to-day life. If your parents guided you well, you won't be thinking of harming someone but helping him, supporting him."* (Male, 55, Higher SES)

In summary, all Mexico City dwellers of the sample associated family with support. Support amongst family members was characterised as being unconditional, a quality attributed to the

inherent trust and loyalty ascribed to familial relationships. Meanings of support entailed helping others in times of need but also promoting others' flourishment and growth, through proactive companionship beyond challenging circumstances. However, for support to be associated with beneficial outcomes, others' autonomy and individuality had to be respected. Overall, family support was associated with positive affective experiences and a sense of protection against detrimental circumstances. Moreover, various Mexico City dwellers represented supporting others as the meaning of existence and also a pathway to attract positive things in their lives.

6.2.2.2 Theme 2: Happiness

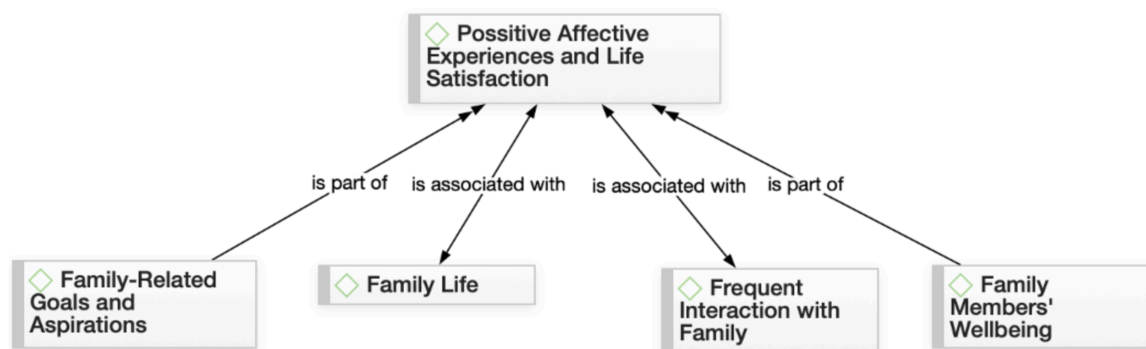

Figure 30. Representations of happiness in Mexico City dwellers.

All participants' representations of family in Mexico City dwellers contained positive affective experiences and judgments of life satisfaction, especially love and happiness, as shown in **Figure 30**. Love was represented as a condition for family to be family. Participants mentioned that love was the foundation for families to be families and enabled unity and support. Moreover, it was represented as unique, unconditional, selfless and distinctively intense compared to the that felt for people outside the family. With almost no exception, participants expressed that their family members were the people they loved the most, above friends and in some cases, partners.

> *"Love, that's what makes us so close in my family, because there's a history of commitment, solidarity, spending time together, but I think that's the first ingredient in my family life in order to be united, and that leads to different implications in the relationship."* (Female, 65, Lower SES)

For the majority of Mexico City dwellers, representations of happiness were grounded on their family life: the routine at home, family traditions, everyday interactions, holidays, occasions and other life experiences. Moreover, representations of family also had a number of positive bodily feelings and sensations attached to it, such as harmony, feeling calm and at peace.

> *"My family gives me a lot of happiness, having my daughter, I am very happy, with my family, I'm completely happy, because that's what is most important for me, my daughter and my husband… spending time with them, living with them, going out together…it makes me so happy, how can I explain it? I feel like there's nothing missing."* (Female, 40, Higher SES)

Further associations related to life satisfaction and family included *'fulfilment', 'plenitude', 'accomplishment'* and *'stability'*. Participants referred to their family as the most important thing in their lives and placed them at the centre of their priorities and aspirations.

> *"I think that family must be everything, your kids, your wife, and give each of them time and their place in your life, always remember what they represent and the feelings we have towards them. They make us happiness, sometimes they make us upset, but family is family and I believe it is the most important thing we have."* (Male, 36, Higher SES)

Accordingly, other areas of participants' lives were understood in relation to family. For example, work and earning capacity was frequently seen as the means to provide for the family. Moreover, various participants mentioned that for them, it was more important to have a job that allowed them to spend time with their families than getting paid more. Furthermore, some participants conceptualised life satisfaction as finding the balance between work, financial needs and family life.

"For me, plenitude is being aware of your reality and accepting it. I've said to my kids, I could have a job that paid 50k, 60k, but what would I have to give in exchange? Them. I would have to leave them with their grandma, see who is available, pay someone to look after them. Plenitude for me is a perfect balance, to be aware of that balance and to be grateful, because it's very difficult finding this balance, and there are lots of things that could affect it." (Male, 44, Lower SES)

Parent-children Relationships

Overall, participants' SWB was strongly associated with their family ties. However, this connection was even more salient in parent-children relationships. A couple of women in the younger group and most participants from the middle-age and older group mentioned their children during elaborations. For the majority of these participants, children played a central role in their affective experiences and life satisfaction. Having children was represented as life changing, not only in practical terms but also in terms of values, goals and priorities. These references were more frequent in male participants, who tended to emphasise that fatherhood led them to change their interests and behaviours.

"If you liked hanging out with your mates frequently, you start planning it in a different way and you might go to the bar. When you start a family, you don't go to the bar anymore, you can go to a house party or a birthday and that's it. You leave the bar for your family." (Male, 56, Lower SES)

Beyond the feelings of unconditional and selfless love for children, children also brought participants joy, pride and happiness. However, love for children was also associated with strong negative affective experiences. Parents mentioned worrying about their children's wellbeing and safety, which was associated with the representation of Mexico City as an insecure and dangerous environment.

"When my children graduated I was so happy, I can't express how happy I was, well, since they were little, when they started to go to nursery, you see them so happy, the satisfaction I felt when my first daughter finished primary school (...) I had a daughter that almost died too (...) there are very painful moments, but we can get through them with all the happiness that children bring to our lives." (Female, 65, Lower SES)

Furthermore, children were identified as the foundation of Mexico City dwellers' sense of purpose. Participants organised and planned their lives according to their children's needs and wellbeing. Providing children with a good education, teaching them values and spending time with them were parents' most prevalent goals and aspirations. Hence, the fulfilment of these ideals was strongly associated with life satisfaction.

> *"I feel satisfaction because my daughters are good people, they surround themselves with people who have good feelings, they have manners, they don't go out late, both of them have a university degree, so this gives me a great satisfaction because I feel that we fulfilled the responsibility we had as parents to our children, we opened doors for them, for them to defend themselves in life, that's the reason why you go to uni."* (Female, 65, Higher SES)

Further understanding of parent-child bonds comes from participant's elaborations from a daughter/son perspective. Although positive feelings and attitudes towards parents were not as salient as the ones parents held for children, several participants mentioned being close to their parents, living with them and/or seeing them frequently. Moreover, there was a widespread sense of gratefulness towards parents, mostly for their positive influence in participant's sense of identity and the provision of opportunities for success. In some cases, gratitude translated into motivation to give back to parents, financially and emotionally.

> *"My mum doesn't live with us but she is very important for me. If she wasn't around, that would be so hard for me, because she's my motor. She means everything to me, because of the situations we've lived together, since I was little I've always been by her side. She was a single mum, so she was the one who supported me in every single way. I got my degree thanks to her sacrifice and all that, so I think that she's my drive, if she isn't around, life doesn't have meaning for me"* (Female, 29, Higher SES)

To sum up, this theme and subtheme show the intimate link between representations of happiness and family in Mexico City dwellers. Love was represented as the foundational feeling that enabled other qualities associated with family such as unconditional unity and support. Moreover, love towards family members and particularly that felt for children was described as distinctively genuine, intense and selfless. Furthermore, beyond affective

experiences, judgments of life satisfaction were also guided by the fulfilment of family-related aspirations and goals, given that family was represented as a priority in life. For participants who were parents, children strongly shaped their everyday lives and provided them with a sense of purpose. For participants who did not have children, spending time with their parents and caring for them was important, as it was a way to show gratitude and pay them back for their efforts.

6.2.2.3 Theme 3: Unity

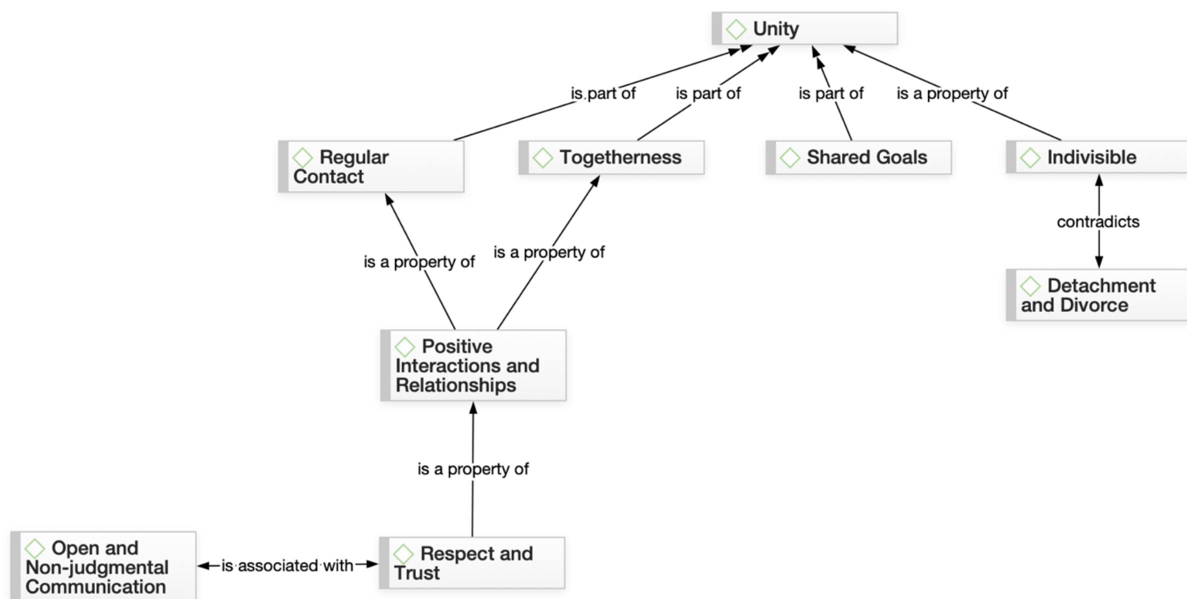

Figure 31. Representations of unity in Mexico City dwellers.

The vast majority of Mexico City dwellers emphasised the importance of unity within the family (**Figure 31**). On one hand, to be united meant loving and supporting family members unconditionally and staying close despite conflicts and arguments. On the other hand, it referred to spending time and doing activities together regularly. Accordingly, a prominent characteristic of participants' lives was that they tended to be interwoven with those of their families. Family was not represented as a close group but as an indivisible entity. Family members were permanently present in participants' lives, which in turn, significantly influenced their experiences and reality. Some participants represented family union as that in a football team; everyone doing their part in order to achieve goals together.

> *"Every time I think of my family… well, my nuclear family is small, mum, dad, my sister and I. Then my grandparents, cousins, all that, but I think of them as a whole, as a group. Obviously, I trust more my parents and my sister, so it's like my nucleus, like a main unit, I feel it like a strong unity, I mean, we have our differences but I feel we go hand in hand, we are always together. I feel it like a group, like a team, I identify everything as a unit. I also play football so it's the same concept, we all support each other"* (Male, 26, Higher SES)

Respect and trust were identified as key values to maintain family unity and positive relationships and interactions. On one hand, respect mostly encompassed accepting others without trying to change them and accepting people's decisions and points of view in spite of disagreements. Moreover, respect was also associated with the recognition of others' individuality and autonomy. To a lesser extent, it also referred to addressing others politely and/or affectionately.

> *"Respect, respect in the family… it's when no matter what decisions you make and regardless of what they think, they are with you somehow, that they are okay with what you're going to do. I don't know for example, in the family there's someone who is homosexual and it's really cool because the family respects that 100%, it's not like in old-school families or even some families nowadays that don't approve it. My family is very open-minded, respect our sexual preferences and that's a very good way to show respect."* (Male, 23, Lower SES)

On the other hand, trust was frequently referred to as the enabler of close and intimate relationships. In a way, trust went hand in hand with respect, as it was associated with having the confidence to be oneself without fear of being judged or criticised. It also allowed for transparency in communication, which meant being able to talk openly. Moreover, in line with findings described in the first theme, trust was strongly associated with support and feelings of security; having someone to trust made participants feel safe and protected.

> *"In my first box I wrote trust, because trust is the basis for any relationship, not only in the family but with anyone else, if you don't trust others you can't do anything, I mean you can but wouldn't be genuine. I think that there must be trust in the family so they can*

support you if anything happens. It's about putting yourself in others' hand without having to think about it." (Male, 23, Higher SES)

However, valuing closeness and positive interactions did not lead to a complete absence of conflict amongst family members. Participants shared negative experiences which varied in terms of seriousness. Some talked about mild disagreements, where the effects were temporary and did not have any impact on the relationship. Others talked about more significant arguments that resulted in distancing from other members. These participants elaborated how emotionally challenging was to cope with these situations, as they were represented as highly undesirable. The reasons behind detachment varied, however, for several participants, it resulted from the negative influence of a romantic partner on the family member. Nonetheless, in line with the representation of family as an indivisible unit, the majority of participants reaffirmed that family ties are unbreakable so forgiveness, reunions and reconciliation were frequent in participants' personal stories.

"Some years ago, I had a serious problem and I said, we would never stop being siblings, wherever I saw you, I'd say hi, maybe we had a disagreement, you have your reasons, I've got mine, each of us believes we are on the right but I'd still say hi. (…) All families have problems, of a variety of natures. In my family, the problem was related to some apartments, not inherited at all, but I got mad because I would expect that kind of behaviour from any person but from a sibling." (Male, 55, Higher SES)

While participants handled challenges within the family without breaking the family union, one type of separation shattered the ideal of the family as a unit and had a deep impact on female participants: divorce. Elaborations of this experience shows the interplay between representations of family union and gender, which will be analysed in the next subtheme.

Women and Family Unity

As described above, union was a dominant ideal in representations of family across the sample. However, the elaborations of divorced women in the sample pointed to how ingrained this expectation was in Mexico City dwellers' ideology. Five out of the twelve female participants disclosed being divorced during their interview. Common to all of these participants' experiences was the pressure to avoid getting divorced, even when the relationship compromised their personal happiness and wellbeing. Moreover, divorce

conflicted with their own values and ideals, which affected their capacity to take action and make decisions.

> *"The relationship with the father wasn't that bad, it was good, but he drank a lot and it had become worse, so I got fed up and left the house. He lost his mind, I stayed with a cousin and he was looking for me everywhere, my mum used to tell me that if I didn't get back with him he was going to kill himself, so I got scared. A few days afterwards it was my birthday and we lived very close to the house of an uncle of his. They invited me for lunch and gave me a lecture on how marriage wasn't easy, mostly his auntie, she told me that she had 5 children plus the relationship with the husband and that we needed to put up with everything and suffer if necessary, but I didn't want that."* (Female, 65, Lower SES)

The experience of getting divorce was deemed emotionally challenging and traumatic. However, for the majority of women, it led to an improvement of their wellbeing. They mentioned rediscovering themselves, improving their self-esteem and finding financial independence and freedom. Furthermore, divorcing did not mean losing the feeling of unity, as they reconstructed it around their children, other family members and friends.

> *"There is mourning, but in the end you realise that it's for the best because, I can tell you that today, I love my freedom (…) I come and go whenever I want and I don't have to give explanations to anyone. So, that freedom makes you value yourself as a person, and most of all, I have time for myself and I use that time for some quality time with myself and that helps you re-value yourself as a person"* (Female, 51, Higher SES)

The major role of women in fostering and maintaining family union was consistently found in participants' narratives. For example, when talking about family reunions and occasions, it was identified that these were mostly organised by the participant herself or a participant's female family member. Moreover, female members of the family such as mothers and grandmothers were identified as facilitators for conflict resolutions.

> *"Funny story, after my mum died, I became the matriarch of the family. If somebody's got a problem, they will look for me, they ask my advice, so I try to analyse the situations, give advice… but one day I got upset and I told one of my brothers, "I'm not here just to*

fix your mess, I'm younger than you, it should be the other way around". But nowadays I'm the one that's does the speeches in birthday parties, anniversaries, I'm the one looking after everything, I try to keep us united even my parents are not here anymore." (Female, 44, Lower SES)

To summarise, this theme highlights the importance of family unity for Mexico City dwellers. Unity entailed supporting family members unconditionally (see Theme 1), staying close despite conflicts and spending time together frequently. Ideals of unity made participants' everyday lives interlinked with those of their family members. Hence, in order to keep such proximity, trust and respect were represented as key values to foster positive interactions and strong family ties. Furthermore, it became salient that women in Mexico City held a special role in bringing and keeping the family together, even when that became costly for their own SWB.

6.2.2.4 Theme 4: Foundation for Self and Society

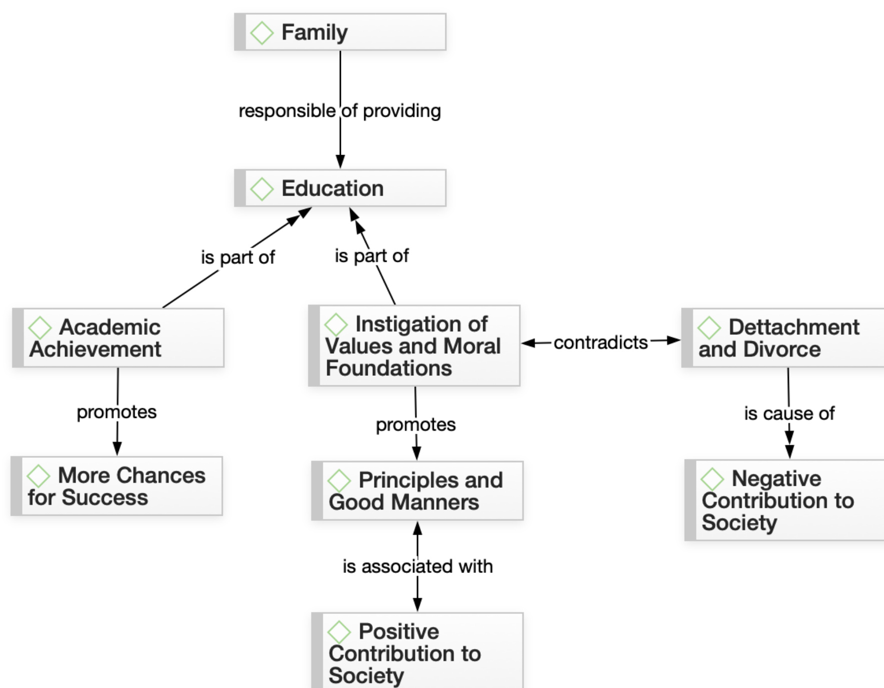

Figure 32. Representations of family as the foundation of self and society in Mexico City dwellers.

The last theme found concerns representations of the influence that family has on self and society, depicted in **Figure 32**. Throughout the interviews, Mexican dwellers talked about the

role of the family in an individual's life and consequently, in society. Most participants represented the family as the *'foundation'* of the individual and the *'basis'* of society. Further elaborations revealed that this idea principally meant that the family was represented as responsible for providing individuals with education and more importantly, with a moral and ethical grounding. For Mexico City dwellers, going to school and getting an education was highly valued. One of parents' key roles was to provide children with a school and helping with their homework. Getting an education was conceptualised as *'opening doors'* to opportunities and a way to increase the chances to succeed in a competitive world. Accordingly, for children to go to university was deemed one of participants' most important goals and greatest satisfactions.

> *"Well, I've always said that she must have a degree, she has to study, you need it to succeed in life, she has to be an important person (...) there's nothing I'd like more than for my daughter to finish uni, have a good job, make good money, travel, to be independent, I have talked about this a lot with her."* (Female, 40, Higher SES)

Nonetheless, the most valuable form of education that could be given to children was not the one coming from educational institutions but from the family. As shown in the previous themes, participants' elaborations about family were strongly associated with values. Thus, education did not only encompass academic achievement but also the instigation of moral foundations, principles and good manners. Family was represented as the environment where values such as respect, loyalty, solidarity, confidence, humbleness and independence were learnt. Thus, a main concern of Mexican dwellers was to teach these values to their children as a way to foster positive behaviours such as altruism, politeness and healthy habits in adulthood. Moreover, participants believed that values are reflected in relationships outside the family. For example, they reasoned that if children were taught respect within their family group, then they were going to be respectful with their friends, co-workers and the other people in general. Accordingly, antisocial behaviour was seen as the product of broken families or a lack of attention from parents.

> *"I've been to homes where children are just told to shut up, with parents that don't do actual parenting, they don't scold them directly and with confidence, and that's how values start, such as respect, respect for their homes, for their environment to be pretty, respect towards their parents, siblings, values come from this, if we don't teach them*

> *they are not going to do it. People who litter, what kind of person are they, what mentality, the people who spit, what's their problem, they were poorly raised."* (Female, 64 Higher SES)

Hence, these elaborations revealed that the broader meaning of *'foundation'* and *'basis'* referred to the formative capacity of family at the individual and societal level. Participants recognised that parents had the duty to be good role models and examples for their children not only to promote their success but also to ensure they will contribute positively to society.

> *"We normally misunderstand what education is. We think that we are going to be educated at school, but I think that school teaches certain subjects and education comes from the family, from your home, down to the way our parents educate us. The way my dad is will be the reflection of what I will become. If he is aggressive, I will become aggressive, if he is calm, I will be calm because that was the role model I followed. If he is driving and he gets into an argument with someone, it will be the same with me when I drive. That is the basis."* (Male, 55, Higher SES)

This last theme captures the representation of the family as the foundation of the self and society. Family was considered responsible for providing individuals with *'education'*, which encompassed supporting academic achievement and more importantly, the instigation of values. Whilst academic achievement was conceptualised as important for personal growth and success, having a strong moral foundation was crucial to be able to positively contribute to society. Mexico City dwellers held the notion that whatever is learned within the family group is echoed in the outside world, hence, parents recognised their duty to be good role models and to teach children values that promote civil behaviour and positive relationships with others beyond family members.

6.2.3 Representations of Family in Mexico City Dwellers: Summary of Results

For Mexico City dwellers, representations of family were predominantly associated with support, happiness, unity and ideas of family as a foundation of the self and society. Participants' everyday lives were interconnected with those of their family members and individual aspirations and goals were built around them. Having close and positive relationships with family members, spending time with them and providing for children were

prevalent components in representations of life satisfaction. Such interdependency was associated with ideals of family unity, which were characterised by togetherness and unconditional loyalty, love and support. Love for family members was conceptualised as particularly intense and selfless, especially that felt towards children. Moreover, beyond the exchange of help in times of need, most Mexico City dwellers represented familial support as the involvement of family members in other's activities and interests as well as the encouragement of personal growth and flourishment. Nonetheless, in order to foster and maintain close positive relationships, participants highlighted the importance of respecting others' autonomy and individuality, as well as trusting others' good intentions. Furthermore, even though family unity and closeness were mostly associated with positive SWB, fear of breaking such ideals pushed women to stay in detrimental marriages, which had a negative impact on their wellbeing. Arguably, deviating from family-related expectations was difficult for Mexico City dwellers, given that family was represented as the foundation of self and society. For Mexican dwellers, becoming an adult that was respectful to others and contributed positively to society was rooted in family dynamics and upbringing. Consequently, parents aspired to be good role models for their children and to teach them how to be morally upright outside of the family group.

6.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the results from the second interview-based cross-cultural study on representations of family in London dwellers and Mexico City dwellers. The chapter began by presenting the results in London and then those in Mexico City. For each city, results from the content analysis of the written free associations are described first and are then followed by those from the thematic analysis of the further verbal elaborations of the free associations. **Table 7** shows the most prevalent themes found in each city.

Cross-culturally, family was predominantly associated with support, which was characterised by its quality of unconditionality. For many, such unconditionality was underpinned by love; nonetheless, for others, especially in London, it stemmed from the inherent sense of loyalty and commitment attached to meanings of kinship.

Table 7. Most prevalent representations of family in London and Mexico City dwellers.

London	Mexico City
Support (100%)	Support (100%)
Cyclical Attachment (87%)	Happiness (100%)
Influence on SWB (83%)	Unity (83%)
Love (78%)	Foundation for Self and Society (75%)

In both cultures, support entailed giving and receiving help during challenging circumstances and fostering others' flourishment beyond times of need. However, the latter was more salient in Mexico City dwellers. Furthermore, in London dwellers, attachment towards family members fluctuated across developmental stages. Whilst some London dwellers chose to stay distant from their families after leaving the family home, others sought reconnection during later years. On the contrary, Mexico City dwellers' representations of unity prompted closeness and togetherness with family members throughout the years, as distancing and detachment were undesirable. In both cultures, family was associated with SWB. However, in London this association depended on the fit between individuals' family values and personal circumstances. For those who ascribed to societal ideals of having close and strong family ties but had conflictive relationships with family members, family was associated with negative feelings. Similarly, familial relationships were detrimental for those who felt forced to interact, love and support family members. Conversely, all Mexico City dwellers associated family with positive feelings and life satisfaction, through frequently spending time with the family, support and fulfilment of family-related goals and aspirations. This association was also true for London dwellers that valued family and had positive relations with their family members, however, Mexico City dwellers consistently emphasised the importance of fostering close and positive family bonds. Lastly, in both cultures, family was represented as the institution responsible for the fulfilment of basic needs and children's upbringing. Nonetheless, Mexico City dwellers tended to highlight the overarching role of the family as the basis of the self and society and consequently, parents' responsibility to instigate values in their children that will allow them to contribute positively to society, an idea that was not salient in London dwellers.

Chapter 7: Representations of Family and SWB in London and Mexico City Dwellers: Discussion

Findings from the first study of this thesis and emerging literature show that family plays a crucial role in the SWB of Mexican people (Leyva et al., 2016; Rojas, 2018). Despite the virtual universality of the family (Poortinga & Georgas, 2006), this correlation seems to be culture-specific. Thus, the aim of this study was to deepen the investigation of social representations of family in British and Mexican city dwellers, in order to expand understanding of the sociocultural influences that underpin differences in the relevance of the family in people's SWB.

7.1 Representations of Family and SWB in London

Family function and structure in Britain has transformed. With the rise of divorce, cohabitation and single parenthood following World War II, family stopped being understood in terms of a married couple and their children (Goodwin et al., 2006). Moreover, it has been argued that social and economic changes that have been occurring in Western Societies since 1970 have brought more fluidity and freedom to relationships, which has loosened boundaries in the construction of the family. Partnership and marriage are products of individual choice guided by preferences and there is more flexibility in decisions regarding having children or ending the relationship (Allan, 2008). Furthermore, with the possibility of creating *'families by choice',* qualities traditionally associated with family ties have been conferred on friends and non-family members (Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004; Pahl & Spencer, 2006). From the perspective of cultural models, these relational characteristics reflect the predominance of individualistic values in British culture; the self is understood as independent, unique, autonomous and oriented to the fulfilment of personal goals, needs and desires (Hofstede et al., 2010; Triandis, 2000). Goodwin, et al. (2006) argue that in spite of claims that these trends could mean the end of the family, research shows that family is still very much alive in Britain. Accordingly, our findings support the relevance of the family in British culture and society, as for many London dwellers, representations of family permeated –for better or for worse– their sense of self, affective experiences and judgments of life satisfaction.

In spite of claims that with individualism, boundaries between friendships and family ties have blurred (Pahl & Spencer, 2006; Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004) our results show that family is still associated with distinctive affective experiences and exclusive relational expectations. The love for family members, especially that from parents to their children was represented as unique, to the extent that *'only those who have children can understand'*. At the same time, loving and caring for family members was also associated with strong negative emotions. On one hand, parents reported living in constant worry for their children. On the other hand, participants mentioned that the detrimental effects of conflict, illness and death were particularly intense when caused by a family member. Furthermore, whilst love in friendships could be strong, it was also represented as vulnerable to circumstances such as arguments and physical distancing. Conversely, love between family members was represented as unconditional and unbreakable.

Furthermore, dynamics of support within the family also proved to have characteristics distinctive from those with friends and other non-kin relationships. Those who were close to family members considered them the best people to approach for support, given that they knew them the best and for the longest, which was associated with trust. Furthermore, some matters were predominantly confined to family members, such as asking for money. Importantly, even in the absence of strong attachment, supporting family members was seen as an obligation and/or responsibility, associated with the inherent quality of unconditionality attached to blood-relationships. These findings align with Allan's (2008) thesis that despite contemporary flexibility and freedom in the creation of social networks, family and friendships are pervasively understood in distinctive ways. He notes that although family and friend relationships can share functions and activities, different forms of solidarity and commitment separate one from another. Whilst friendships tend to be non-hierarchical and maintained by a balance of reciprocity, in family relationships there is less of a concern with equality and repayment. Hence, support in family relationships is strongly underpinned by the intrinsic sense of commitment and obligation entailed in the concept of kinship.

Love and support are qualities of positive social relationships, which are crucial for people's SWB (Barrera, 1986; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Siedlecki et al., 2014; Tay and Diener, 2011). However, findings from this study show that when it comes to family relationships, the link between love/support and SWB is not straightforward. For some, unconditional love and support for family members was grounded in acceptance whereas for others in conformity and

resignation. When unconditionality was underpinned by acceptance, love and support were associated with positive affective experiences. This was often the case in participants that mentioned being close or having a generally positive relationship with one or more family members. However, when unconditionality was grounded in having no choice, participants felt *'stuck'* in the relationship, which led to negative affective experiences and interactions. This sentiment was more frequent in those who mentioned conflict and incompatibility with family members.

Arguably, these negative experiences reflect the struggle to negotiate the cultural value of freedom of choice with the more traditional notion that family ties are unbreakable; which was illustrated in a recurrent idea mentioned in the interviews: *'blood is thicker than water'*. Aligning with our results, previous research in individualistic cultures shows that contact and support amongst family members is associated with lower levels of SWB when is motivated by obligation (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2000) and that quality of the relationships mediates the direction of the correlation between familial support and wellbeing (Merz et al., 2009).

Further evidence showing the importance of the family for London dwellers was found in representations of the role of the family and ideals of *'unity'* and *'togetherness'*. The family of origin was seen as the primary system responsible for the fulfilment of the basic and social needs of a child as well as for the instigation of values. The ideal family was represented as that where bonds were close, strong and positive. Nonetheless, our results suggest that for London dwellers, closeness and attachment towards family members followed a cycle. Whilst childhood was represented as the stage of maximum dependency and closeness to family members, adolescence and young adulthood were stages of physical and emotional distancing from the family. These years were associated with a desire for self-sufficiency and independence that led to spending less time with the family and eventually moving out from the family home. Distance allowed participants to take control over their family relationships: participants could decide when to interact with family members, *if* they wanted to interact. This was deemed beneficial for their own wellbeing but also for the quality of the relationship with the other person. Although some participants had chosen to stay distant from their families throughout adulthood, for many, growing older and having children was associated with a reconnection to the family of origin and extended family. *'Maturity'* and the experience of becoming a parent allowed London dwellers to revalue their family through identification and empathy, which strengthened family bonds. Moreover, those that had become parents recently

sought the support and guidance of their parents and other family members such as siblings and aunts.

Western developmental theories posit that the role of caregivers is to provide children with the foundations that will let them become self-sufficient, competent and autonomous (Rothbaum & Trommsdorff, 2007). Furthermore, theories of attachment argue that the emotional bond developed with caregivers during infancy will guide and shape the bonds established throughout the course of one's life (Fraley, 2019). Attachment theories are intimately related to the development of autonomy; children's ability to use their caregivers as a secure base allows them to explore the world on their own, knowing that they can go back to their parents for closeness and comfort (Rothbaum & Trommsdorff, 2007). Evidence shows that as the child grows, the functions of the secure base are shifted to peers, especially when the bond with parents is seen as less secure (Nickerson & Nagle, 2005). By adulthood, romantic partners are the main source of proximity, comfort and security (Doherty & Feeney 2004). Nonetheless, our results add evidence to research showing that family attachments stay relevant during adulthood (Grusec, 2011; Rothbaum & Trommsdorff, 2007). At the very least, family of origin influenced participants' sense of self, identity and narratives about their life history. Furthermore, for those who held positive relationships with family members, getting together and feeling connected with the family was valued and linked to positive feelings and satisfaction. Conversely, for those whose ideals of family unity and connectedness did not align with their individual circumstances, lack of closeness and interaction was associated with experiencing loneliness and alienation.

It is important to note that when elaborating on this topic, participants tended to refer to their parents and siblings. Thus, representations of family were strongly associated with family of origin, even in those who had started their own families. These participants tended to negotiate their family representations according to their symbolic place and role in the family units they were part of (i.e., family of origin, own family, partner's family). Accordingly, Doherty & Feeney's (2004) analysis of attachment networks, found that after romantic relationships, mothers remained primary attachment figures in adulthood. In a similar vein, research suggests that different attachment figures influence different dimensions of wellbeing (Klohnen et al., 2005).

The importance of these findings is twofold. On one hand, the overarching idealisation and desire to have or belong to a close-knit family shows a more collectivistic side of British culture, supporting evidence that values of independence and interdependence coexist within the same culture (Tafarodi et al., 1999). On the other hand, it casts light on the crucial importance of *choice* in familial relationships. Aligned to findings in relation to unconditionality of love and support, closeness and interaction with family members were beneficial for London dwellers when motivated by personal choice and particularly detrimental when stemming from a sense of obligation or societal pressure. Thus, rather than dependence, the lack of sense of agency over relationships and being forced to behave in ways that do not align with one's values or interest (i.e. heteronomy) conflicted with autonomy (Chirkov et al., 2003), especially when circumstances did not match expectations or relationships are experienced as detrimental to individual WB.

7.2. Representations of Family and SWB in Mexico City

The significance of the family and the prioritisation of interdependence and cooperation over independence and competition has been referred to in the literature as *familism* (Bermudez & Mancini, 2013). From the perspective of cultural models, *familism* reflects Mexican culture's predominately collectivistic values, where the self is understood as part of a group and not as an individual entity (Hofstede et al., 2010; Triandis, 2000). The centrality of the family in Mexican culture is rooted in the country's indigenous and Spanish heritage. Before European colonisation, indigenous societies were built on cooperation and community. Within the family, women and men held equal status, although adequate family function was based on well-established gender roles. With the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century, family structure dramatically transformed. Marriage became an everlasting union shaped by strict Catholic codes of monogamy, decency, honour and reproduction. The father's duty was to be an authority and a provider, whilst the mother's role was to give care, tenderness and protection to their offspring. In return, children were expected to love, respect and obey their parents. In spite of these changes, some indigenous values endured, although shaped according to Spanish traditions. Indigenous values of community and cohesion blended with Catholic values of closeness with the extended family, loyalty and unity. Thus, the centrality of the family in Mexican culture comes from the amalgamation of cultural forces that converged in the importance of close relationships, a legacy that to date, guides the way Mexican people construct reality (Diaz-Loving, 2006; Gonzalbo, 2005; Rojas, 2018).

This cultural heritage is evidenced throughout the themes found in this study. Mexico City dwellers understood family as an indivisible entity. Participants' lives were intertwined with those of their family and individual aspirations of each member were seen as communal goals. Hence, unity and closeness were fundamental in the representation of family. In order to achieve these ideals, Mexico City dwellers were motivated to foster positive familial relationships through unconditional love, support and frequent interaction. Respecting individual boundaries, communicating in an affectionate manner and avoiding judging others were seen as key aspects to foster positive relationships. This relational style shows what the literature identifies as *simpatía*, which is characteristic of Hispanic cultures. It refers to the value of warm and pleasant social relationships, achieved by respect, politeness, kindness and the avoidance of conflict and confrontation (Ramírez-Esparza et. al., 2008; Triandis et al., 1984; Yu et al., 2008).

In our results, arguments and distancing from family members were present, thus *simpatía* does not imply the absence of conflict. However, there was a tendency to look for prompt reconciliation, forgiveness and de-escalation of conflicts, given that negative interactions amongst family members were experienced as particularly painful and/or incompatible with personal values. Thus, *familism and simpatía* are elements of Mexican culture that facilitate aspects of social connection that are correlated with higher levels of SWB, such as intimacy and positive interactions. Furthermore, *familism* and *simpatía* are risk-protective and resilience inducing factors associated with positive psychological and physical health outcomes in contexts of adversity (Bermudez and Mancini, 2013; Gallo et al., 2009).

In spite of the aforementioned benefits, our findings cast light on a more detrimental side to the cultural striving for unity and togetherness. Throughout the interviews, the predominant role women had in fostering closeness and unity between family members was salient. They were the conflict mediators and organisers of reunions to bring the family together. However, this ingrained responsibility became problematic for those in unhappy marriages. Female participants that shared their experience of divorce elaborated on the pressure felt to stay in their marriages to avoid breaking the family unit – even when their wellbeing was at stake. Mexican women's reluctance in relation to divorce could be explained by the internalisation of gender roles rooted in Catholic dogma (Diaz-Loving, 2006), where the role of the male is one of dominance (Machismo) and the one of the female is of submissiveness (Marianism). *Marianism* refers to the idealisation of Virgin Mary as the exemplary woman and mother,

characterised by her moral superiority, martyrdom, self-sacrifice and unconditional love towards her family (Gallo et al., 2009; Stevens, 1973). The influence of *Marianism* could underpin a variety of detrimental outcomes for women in predominantly Catholic cultures (Bermudez and Mancini, 2013). As seen in the experiences of divorced females in this study, it could push them to stay in unsatisfactory and harmful relationships. Moreover, it could foster the perpetuation of domestic and gender violence by legitimising aggression and other types of abuse (Agoff et al., 2007). Furthermore, evidence shows that the obligation to put family first influences women's lack of free time to engage in self-care behaviours, which could be damaging for their physical and psychological wellbeing (D'Alonzo & Sharma, 2010).

It's important to highlight that based on our findings, cultural tendencies towards *Machism* and *Marianism* did not suggest that women were the only ones whose lives were dedicated to their families. Across demographics, Mexico City dwellers referred to their family as their number one priority, thus, personal goals and desires were shaped by familial values and family-related aspirations. Participants' experience of fulfilment, plenitude, accomplishment and stability was vastly grounded in finding a balance between working hours, earning capacity and time spent with their family. Moreover, everyday family interactions were associated with joy, harmony and contentment. Research shows that cultural gender roles are not hegemonically embraced, as other values influence couple and parenting relationships. Nonetheless, those held by the father tend to have a stronger influence on family dynamics (Lindsey, 2018; Yu et al., 2008).

Altogether, these findings provide qualitative evidence supporting the importance of family-related domains in the SWB of Latin American populations (Leyva et al., 2016; Rojas, 2018). Nonetheless, when speaking of family, love and happiness, the bond between parents and children was of special salience. Children played a central role in participants' affective experiences and judgments of life satisfaction. Having children was considered a life changing experience, associated with an indescribable type of love and various positive feelings. Furthermore, participants' sense of life purpose was predominantly based on providing for and supporting their children. The strong parent – child bond was also identified when participants spoke from a son/daughter perspective. Feelings of gratitude, appreciation and reciprocity accompanied a motivation for keeping strong bonds with parents and to stay in frequent contact with them. Hence, it became salient that for many, the representation of family was predominantly anchored to the parent – child bond and especially, the mother – child bond.

This could have important implications for understanding SWB in Mexican and other Latin American populations, as a large body of evidence on the correlation between family and SWB does not look into particular relationships and when it does, tends to be on the effects of marital relationships (Diener et al., 2018). However, the values of devotion, loyalty and affection towards parents that underpin parent – child relationships in Mexican culture (Diaz-Loving, 2006) foster the endurance of close ties across one's life span, which is reflected in regional patterns of intergenerational interaction, care and cohabitation (Rojas, 2018). Thus, findings of this study suggest that for Mexico City dwellers, a large proportion of the SWB associated with family ties could come from parent – child bonds rather than from romantic relationships.

In addition to unity and love, giving and receiving support was identified as another building block of the representation of family and a source of SWB. Support amongst family members was represented as unconditional, which was underpinned by the inherent loyalty, solidarity and trust attributed to kinship. Support took the shape of a variety of actions, however a predominant meaning of support amongst participants was showing interest in the lives of others. This support was not reactionary, as it was not given in circumstances that required other's help. Rather, it entailed proactively checking on family members regularly, asking how they were doing and showing interest in their activities. Hence, different pathways in which support was associated with SWB were identified. Receiving support in times of need decreased the detrimental effects brought by challenging circumstances, whilst support in non-challenging circumstances was associated with encouragement and achievement. Furthermore, helping and caring for family members was experienced as rewarding and made participants feel good about themselves. For some, this was rooted in the belief that by supporting others good things would happen to them, whilst others believed that meaning of life lay in helping others. Moreover, support represented a way to foster close social relationships; parents deemed important the teaching children the value of supporting others to cultivate positive relations inside and outside the family.

In the literature, support exchange is a well-established cornerstone of beneficial social relationships (Feeney & Collins, 2015). Moreover, different types of support have been distinguished, such as emotional support (i.e., caring, love and empathy), instrumental support (i.e., tangible aid), informational support (i.e., guidance and advice), appraisal support (i.e., information relevant to self-evaluation) and social companionship (i.e., spending time with others) (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991). Regardless of the type, giving and receiving support,

frequent contact with social networks and subjective sense of feeling supported have been associated with SWB (Barrera, 1986; Siedlecki et al., 2014). Social support theory poses two models to explain these correlations. On one hand, the buffering model posits that social support protects individuals from the potentially harmful effects associated with challenging events or circumstances. On the other hand, the main effect model emphasises social support as embeddedness and integration, which have a beneficial effect even in the absence of adversity (Armstrong et al., 2005). Although support research and theory is predominantly drawn from Western samples, findings from this study show that Mexico City dwellers' practices and expectations around familial support overlap with the variety of ways in which support fosters SWB.

Mexico City dwellers' prioritisation of family and positive social relationships translated into an ethos of openness, availability and drive to give and receive support amongst family members in times of need. Furthermore, participants' involvement and interest in the lives of their family members and the drive for frequent interaction fostered growth, sense of companionship and guidance. Thus, family members were conceptualised as *'cushions'* at the same time that they were *'motors'* showing that familial relationships were not only safe havens but also catalysts for self-development. Such relational patterns are essential for human thriving and flourishing both in contexts of adversity and opportunity (Feeney & Collins, 2015). Moreover, of special relevance is participants' emphasis on the importance of not trespassing boundaries of individuality and independence. Respecting others' decisions, not giving unrequested advice and avoiding imposition of perspectives, were crucial to maintain positive relationships amongst family members. These findings support research showing that despite the historically ingrained values of solidarity and cooperation, there is a tendency towards values of independence and autonomy in Mexican culture, also referred to as horizontal individualism (Díaz-Loving et al., 2018). Accordingly, evidence shows that freedom to make decisions predicts higher levels of wellbeing in Mexican populations (Leyva et al., 2016). Arguably, the co-existence of individualistic and collectivistic values in the fabric of Mexican culture strikes a balance between social embeddedness and independence, which is advantageous for the fulfilment of psychosocial needs of Mexico City dwellers.

Nonetheless, the dominance of values of collectivism and interdependence in Mexican culture is demonstrated in representations of the formative and structural capacity of the family. Family was represented as the backbone of individual development and the foundation of a

good society; everything that is learned within the family echoes in the external world. Thus, a main responsibility of the family was to provide children with *'education'*. One one hand, *'education'* referred to sending them to school, as academic achievement was associated with better opportunities to succeed in a competitive society. However, it predominantly referred to the instillation of moral grounds for good behaviour and positive contribution to society. Thus, parents emphasised their duty to set a good example for their children, as they imitated their attitudes, perspectives and behaviours. Accordingly, antisocial behaviour was considered the result of growing up in a family where parents did not support their children's upbringing or did not have positive role models. Parental ethnotheories, that is, the beliefs, values and practices regarding the best way to raise a child are important windows into cultural values, as they reflect societal structures and norms (P. M. Greenfield et al., 2003). Aligned with our results, Reese et al. (1995) found that in Latino samples, providing children with *'educación'* was seen as parents' central responsibility. Moreover, they identified that '*educación'* does not directly translate into 'education'. Mirroring our findings, "*educación*" encompassed academic and moral development oriented to becoming a "good person" (i.e., someone who distinguishes right from wrong and behaves accordingly). Thus, in Mexican culture, ideal development is associated with academic achievement but first and foremost, with the implementation of codes of social behaviour. Reese and colleagues (1995) suggest that in fact, moral behaviour precedes academic achievement in Latin cultures.

Furthermore, respect was a salient value in the representation of *'educación'*. This is consistent with a body of evidence showing that respect is a core value in Mexican culture (Díaz-Loving, 2005, 2006; Hofstede et al., 2010; Reese et al, 1995; Triandis et al., 1984) which has been associated with family connectedness and solidarity (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). Arguably, the importance of respect could reflect the hierarchical structure in which Mexican society is built (Diaz-Loving, 2006). Differences in power (i.e., long power distance) are recognised and expected, hence, authority figures are obeyed and unquestioned. (Hofstede et al., 2010). Thus, values such as respect, cooperation and conformity are crucial for achieving social harmony (Greenfield et al., 2003). Large power distance has been associated with lower levels of SWB in different contexts, nonetheless, perceived suitability of authority figures could mediate this relationship (Steel et al., 2018). Arguably, in the case of Mexican culture, respect can also be traced back to the Catholic hierarchical tradition where parents and elders are recognised as knowing best. Therefore, children unquestionably obey these authority figures and in return, they receive security, love and protection (Diaz-Loving, 2006).

Accordingly, evidence shows that authoritarian parenting styles have been associated with negative SWB within individualistic cultures but not within predominantly collectivistic cultures (Rudy & Grusec, 2006). Moreover, research identifies parental respect as a protective factor of Latin American cultures in risk contexts (see Bermudez & Mancini, 2013). For example, Gil, Wagner and Vega (2000) found that parental respect decreases the disposition for deviant behaviours such as alcohol use in young Latino males.

7.3 Representations of Family and SWB: Cross-cultural Analysis

Across cultures, family is an institution necessary for survival (Poortinga & Georgas, 2006). Moreover, family is a bridge between individuals and society, as they are inherently built in accordance with societal values, norms and practices (Greenfield et al., 2003; Kagitcibasi, 2017). From the perspective of social representation theory, family signifies a smaller-scale model of larger-social processes that ratify the notion of reality and ordinariness through everyday social interactions (Wagner & Hayes, 2005). Hence, despite its recognised universality (Poortinga & Georgas, 2006) family functions and dynamics are formed and transformed by sociocultural forces. Accordingly, research shows that family related domains are particularly influential for the SWB of Latin American populations (Rojas, 2018). This was also seen in the results of the first study of this thesis, which revealed that for Mexico City dwellers, family life grounded positive experiences associated with living in the city, a finding that was not replicated in London dwellers. This section provides a comparison between representations of family in London and Mexico City dwellers and identifies the sociocultural forces that makes family conducive to SWB.

In both cultures, family was represented as the institution responsible for the fulfilment of basic needs and children's upbringing. Nonetheless, Mexico City dwellers tended to highlight the overarching role of the family as the basis of the self and society. Individual attitudes, perspectives and behaviour were seen as a reflection of what was learned in the family. Hence, compared to British participants who predominantly represented the role of the parents as providers of love and care, Mexican participants emphasised the importance of giving children opportunities for academic achievement and providing them with strong moral foundations and principles for positive interaction with others. Accordingly, whilst London dwellers expressed sympathy towards those who did not have the '*privilege*' of growing up in a loving family, Mexico City dwellers represented divorce, single parenthood and the lack of close family ties

as the reason behind antisocial behaviour such as delinquency and drug use. Thus, London dwellers often represented having a good upbringing and satisfactory family life as a matter of luck, whereas Mexico City dwellers tended to blame parents for children's negative outcomes. Accordingly, London dwellers were more tolerant of deviation from ideals related to the family and were less strict about parents' responsibilities, compared to Mexico City dwellers, who held more rigid representations of family roles and responsibilities.

Cross-culturally, love, unity and support were the building blocks which constituted representations of the family. In both cultures, these representations were predominantly characterised by being unconditional, a quality ascribed almost exclusively to family ties. However, further manifestations and implications associated with this fundamental triad varied between the two cultures.

For many, the concept of love and family were so fused together that differentiating them proved challenging: love signified family and family signified love. Whilst love towards friends and other relationships was seen as vulnerable to conflicts and distancing, love towards family members was represented as unbreakable and resilient. Furthermore, it was represented as unique, intense and unconditional, especially in relation to children. Overall, qualities of family love were valuable and special. However, London dwellers elaborated on the emotional effort required to love family members in spite of arguments, incompatibility and unmet expectations. For those who mentioned being close to their family, unconditional love was underpinned by acceptance and associated with positive affective experiences. Nonetheless, half of the sample mentioned having conflictual relationships within their family. For them, love was underpinned by resignation and conformity, which led them to feel stuck in the relationship. Incompatibility and conflict led to less interaction, emotional distancing and/or complete detachment. This was mostly detrimental for participants who held more traditional family values and ideals, as they associated these experiences with loneliness and feelings of rejection. Thus, it became salient that for London dwellers, loving someone did not necessarily mean being close to someone.

On the contrary, for Mexican participants, family ties were prevalently associated with positive attitudes and affective experiences. The majority of participants expressed that their family members were the people they loved most. Furthermore, love was represented as the catalyst that enabled other qualities that constituted the representation of family such as

closeness and unconditional support. Love and striving for unity made arguments and distancing from family members short-lived. Conflicts were experienced as distinctively painful and not in line with personal and cultural values, thus something that was best to avoid. Accordingly, whilst some British participants mentioned not having any contact with their families, this was not the case in any Mexican participant.

In general, London and Mexico City dwellers valued spending time with their family and being in regular contact with them. This was associated with the cross-cultural salience of ideals of unity in representations of family. Nonetheless, patterns related to family attachment and interaction proved to differ between cultures. In London dwellers, closeness with family members was cyclical. Whilst childhood was represented as a period of maximum dependency and togetherness with nuclear and extended family, adolescence and young adulthood were times of distancing from family, fuelled by the need to become physically, financially and emotionally independent. However, for some, later years in adulthood represented a time for reconnection with the family. Physical distance (i.e. not living in the same house), maturity and empathy were factors that improved the quality of ties and increased motivation for interaction. Furthermore, participants who had started their own family and had their own children reconnected with their family of origin and extended family looking for support and advice. Nonetheless, reconnection was not present in all participants. Some dwellers expressed having cut ties or gradually distancing from their families after leaving their family home. This was often the case in those who held conflictual relationships with some members or found their personalities and lifestyles incompatible with those of their family members. In these cases, breaking ties with family was associated with positive SWB.

Thus, for London dwellers, closeness and attachment with family members was dependent on their life stage and the quality of the relationships. Other practical factors, such as working hours or differences in schedules were represented as further barriers to connecting with the family. Conversely, in Mexico City dwellers, closeness and attachment in family ties tended to be a constant. Across demographics and age groups, time outside work or study was mostly spent with the family. Participants' lives were interconnected with those of their family, individual goals were represented as communal and the majority of Mexico City dwellers represented family as an indivisible entity. Overall, these representations were associated with positive feelings and life satisfaction. However, elaborations by divorced women showed that ideals of unity could also be detrimental for SWB. Participants recounted feeling pressured to

stay in unsatisfactory and harmful marriages because of the fear and guilt associated with breaking the family unit. In the sample, it became salient that women were represented as conflict mediators and responsible for keeping the family together.

Support was strongly associated with family in both cultures. For London and Mexico City dwellers, support encompassed caring and helping with the purpose of buffering negative effects associated with adversity and fostering flourishment and wellbeing. Nonetheless, whilst the tendency in the London sample was to conceptualise support in the context of times of need, Mexico City dwellers provided support irrespective of the circumstances by getting involved in the activities and interests of their family members and continuously checking on them. This kind of support was also mentioned by London dwellers, but was mostly represented as that provided to young children. Furthermore, cross-culturally, trust, loyalty and solidarity were values attached to familial support. British participants trusted their family members because they were the people who knew them most intimately and for the longest. Mexican participants' trust was built on the notion of being able to be themselves without fear of judgment and on the confidence that their family wanted the best for them.

Moreover, loyalty and solidarity grounded representations of unconditionality ascribed to family ties. In both samples, support within the family was characterised as independent of the quality of the relationship and was represented as a responsibility attached to blood relationships. In Mexico City dwellers the notion of unconditional support was also included irrespective of the situation in which support was needed, something which was not as salient in the British sample. Further cross-cultural differences emerged in motivations and implications related to helping others. For British participants, familial support that was motivated by love and close attachment was intimate and associated with positive feelings. Conversely, that fuelled by a sense of obligation tended to be affectively neutral and/or associated with negative judgments. For Mexico City dwellers, giving support was motivated by the idea that it enabled closeness and positive social relationships. For some, this motivation was accompanied by the belief that helping and caring for others (not only family members) was the meaning of life and a way to attract positivity. Thus, for the Mexican sample, giving support was not only associated with positive feelings but also with the enhancement of the self-concept and life satisfaction.

Thus, it can be noted that there are points of cross-cultural convergence, as well as of discrepancy in representations of family. Arguably, such differences are largely explained by the different values which characterise each culture. On one hand, Mexican culture has been classified as predominantly collectivistic, therefore characterised by ideals of in-group interdependence, relational harmony and social hierarchy. On the other hand, British culture has been identified as strongly individualistic, favouring independence, self-enhancement and social equality (Hofstede et al., 2010). These cultural differences can be traced to the history of each country and especially to the legacy of their traditional religious beliefs.

Since Spanish colonisation in the 15th century, Mexican culture reflects the combination of Catholic and indigenous values oriented to the formation of close social relationships and the endorsement of established societal roles that varied in functions and levels of power (Diaz-Loving, 2006; Rojas, 2018). Conversely, British culture is largely influenced by Protestantism, a form of Christianity that emerged in the 16th and 17th centuries as a reaction to the perceived corruption of the Catholic church. One of the main ideological shifts proposed by Protestantism was that individuals could communicate with God directly by reading the Bible without having the Church as an intermediary. Additionally, Protestantism posited that God gave everyone a unique set of skills to fulfil their sacred calling, which was predetermined before birth – a belief that caused a major shift in people's values and motivation. Whilst Catholicism used guilt as a main drive to become a better person, Protestants focused on the maximisation of individual qualities and hard work as a way to confirm predestination for salvation. Accordingly, it has been argued that individualistic values prevalent in Western societies are vestiges of the individual – God relationship that emerged during the Reformation (Heine, 2016). Furthermore, evidence suggests that wealth and economic development associated with Western European countries could be potentially explained by Protestant values (Cavalcanti et al., 2007).

Individualism – collectivism and independence – interdependence of the self, are fruitful dimensions to understand psychological differences between cultures at the group and individual levels respectively (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman et al., 2002). Arguably, from the social representations theory perspective, these cultural values relate to the self/other epistemological thema: the dynamics of the self in relation to the other underpin the way reality is construed (Joffe, 1999).

Based on our results we distinguished three different pathways in which culture influences the association between family and individual SWB. 1) the extent to which individuals endorse familial values and ideals (value-as-a-moderator model) (Oishi et al., 1999), 2) the coherence between personal values and those inscribed in the public sphere (person-culture fit hypothesis) (Hanel et al., 2020) and 3) by the instillation of practices that facilitate the fulfilment of universal psychosocial needs (Elliott et al., 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Findings from the Mexican sample shows that having strong family bonds and simply living every day surrounded by the family was the basis of the experience of positive feelings and life satisfaction. This could be explained by the value-as-a-moderator model, which posits that individuals' priorities in life are influenced by their culture (Oishi et al., 1999). From a SRT perspective, these results suggest that happiness anchors representations of family in Mexican culture. In the literature, emotional anchoring refers to the processes by which an unknown phenomenon becomes familiar by attaching well-known affective components to it (Höijer, 2010). Arguably, our findings show that emotional anchoring also pervades lay understanding of everyday concepts: happiness was understood in terms of the family. This could potentially lead to a positivity bias (Hoorens, 2014) in family experiences. The cultural tendency to look at the family through rose-tinted glasses could push Mexican people to overlook detrimental family circumstances or to re-interpret them in a favourable light, which questions the objectivity in responses in family-related research in Mexican samples.

Importantly, the representation of family as the cornerstone of happiness proved to be internalised by all Mexico City dwellers. Although these findings are not generalisable, quantitative research backs up the overarching importance that family has for SWB in Mexico (Rojas, 2018). Research looking into person-culture fit hypotheses show that congruence between individual and sociocultural values is positively associated with SWB (Hanel et al., 2020). Although this is not true for all values, those characteristics of the Mexican culture such as family, achievement and power did show this correlation (Schwartz et al., 2012). Thus, the relationship between family and SWB in Mexican culture could be reinforced by the collective understanding of family as happiness, the tendency for individual endorsement of such familial values and the prevalent match between individual values and those in the public sphere, which in turn, fosters the perpetuation of such ideals. Accordingly, evidence shows that acculturation is associated with intergenerational conflicts and negative psychological outcomes in first and

second generation Latinos, explained by the mismatch between societal values, individual values and those held by their parents (Dennis et al., 2010).

In the British sample, results suggest that in spite of a shared recognition of the importance of the family and ideals of unity, participants valued family to different extents and as previously mentioned, deviations from family ideals were tolerated. Thus, interaction with the family depended on individual motivation and detachment from family members was legitimised. Furthermore, individualistic values characteristic of the British culture such as self-direction, stimulation and pleasure seeking are negatively associated with SWB when shared by the majority of people (Hanel et al., 2020), potentially because they overshadow individuals' uniqueness (Eriksson et al., 2011).

From a SRT perspective, person – culture fit effects can be explored in terms of hegemony and resistance (Glăveanu, 2009). Hegemonic representations are those shared by the majority and are inscribed in societal norms, institutions and widespread practices (Jovchelovitch, 2007). As previously mentioned, the value of the family in Mexico is a heritage of the still reminiscent power of the Catholic Church over Mexican culture (Diaz-Loving, 2006). Thus, as a hegemonic representation, values around the family are predominantly consensual and unquestioned. As a culture high in uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede et al., 2010), finding a point of sharedness and identification with the other in the importance of the family could ease the anxiety associated with the unknown, especially because family is ascribed the role of the instigator of good moral foundations and the maintenance of social order. However, in London, traditional representations of family are faced with resistance, which allow for alternatives and transformations. Arguably, individualistic values rooted in British culture have aided the emancipation of representations of family in society and the creation of new identities (Duveen, 2001) where, contrary to what was observed in Mexico City dwellers, defined family ideals do not play a predominant role in shaping peoples' reality. Hence, as family is ascribed more varied meanings and functions by individuals and society, the likelihood of London dwellers benefiting from person – culture fit effects in family related values could be significantly less than that for Mexico City dwellers.

Accordingly, in London dwellers, normative responsibilities ascribed to family ties were predominantly associated with negative feelings and attitudes, especially when they did not tally with individuals' motivations and interests. Thus, for British participants, SWB associated

with family strongly depended on their personal value of the family and the quality of familial bonds. In line with the value-as-a-moderator model (Oishi et al., 1999), those who held familial values and reported having positive relationships with their family members attached more positive feelings and experiences to the representation of family. Conversely, for those who had internalised traditional family values but in circumstances that did not align with their expectations, family was associated with negative experiences and decreased SWB. Furthermore, for the couple of participants that represented family as something only pertaining to childhood, distancing and lack of interaction with family members during adulthood was deemed natural and expected, thus not associated with either positive or negative affective experiences.

Thus, whilst in Mexico City dwellers the representation of family as happiness was preserved by a cycle of mutual ratification between individual and cultural values, in London dwellers, this association was more fluid: family meant happiness when personal and family circumstances aligned.

Another pathway via which culture influences SWB pertains to the fulfilment of basic psychosocial needs through relational patterns. Self Determination Theory argues that autonomy (sense of volition), competence (sense of mastery and self-efficacy) and relatedness (connection to others) are universal needs that promote wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Accordingly, research shows that relationships that aid the satisfaction of these needs could increase an individual's SWB (La Guardia et al., 2000; Patrick et al., 2007). In the context of familial relationships, research shows that in collectivistic cultures, parents tend to guide their children's development towards relatedness goals, whereas those from individualistic cultures guide their children towards goals of autonomy (Grusec, 2011). These orientations are instilled from very early on in life and are reflected in mothers' interactions with their children, such as body contact, physical stimulation, eye-to-eye contact and content of discourse (Greenfield et al., 2003; Keller et al., 2004; Keller et al., 2007). Expanding this area of research, findings from our study suggest that socialisation patterns in Mexican culture could facilitate the fulfilment of these three needs whereas in British culture, meanings of autonomy could compromise relatedness needs.

As seen throughout the results, Mexican culture is strongly relational. Mexico City dwellers consistently emphasised the importance of spending time with the family and striving for

respectful, warm and conflict-free interactions. In the literature, this has been referred to as *convivial collectivism* and it is found in Latin American cultures. In this form of collectivism, relationships are built and maintained through open and frequent expression of positive emotions, regular social gathering and polite interaction, whilst avoiding topics that could cause embarrassment or conflict. At the core of this interactional pattern are the values of *simpatía,* respect and *familism* (Campos & Kim, 2017). In contrast, London dwellers did not share an outlined pattern of interaction with family members. Positive familial relationships were built on affinity, compatibility and acceptance. Furthermore, although some participants elaborated on family rituals and traditions, frequency of interaction depended on multiple factors. Thus, whereas values in Mexican culture orientate individuals to create family bonds with qualities that are beneficial for SWB, satisfaction of relatedness needs in British individuals are more dependent on personality, compatibility, social skills and having time to invest in relationships.

Moreover, our findings show the remarkable importance that autonomy has in British culture and that for many, family was represented as the antithesis of this value. Participants emphasised not having a choice over their familial relationships and dynamics which, depending on their circumstances, made them feel either lucky or stuck. In a similar vein, doing things for the family because of a sense of obligation instead of personal preference was a cause of negative affective experiences and attitudes. In the literature, heteronomy, having to behave in specific ways because of forces out of one's control, has been recognised as the opposite of autonomy (Chirkov et al., 2003). In Western cultures, with the exception of partners and some friends, many relationships are conceptualised in terms of duty and unwanted pressure (Markus & Kitayama, 2003) which could be detrimental for people's WB (Chirkov et al., 2003). Moreover, some London dwellers represented autonomy as independence from others, which prevented asking the family (and others) for support. Nonetheless, the literature has emphasised the distinction between freedom *to* self-govern based on awareness of one's own needs and freedom *from* the governance of others, in the sense of independence and non-reliance on others (Hodgins et al., 1996). From the perspective of SDT, dependency does not oppose autonomy (Chirkov & Ryan, 2001) on the contrary, having close, supportive relationships goes in hand with the fulfilment of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For example, research shows that those with higher levels of autonomy are more accommodating to their partners, which helps the maintenance of positive relationships (Kluwer et al. 2020). Arguably, representations of autonomy that entailed independence and not asking for support, could hinder the fulfilment

psychosocial needs. All in all, positive relationships in cultures like the British are characterised by a close connection to others that is derived from volition and not from external forces.

In Mexico City dwellers, autonomy was also highly valued, however, it did not conflict with representations of family. Conversely, validating others' individuality was represented as a mechanism to foster closeness and unity. Participants emphasised the importance of respecting others' decisions and not imposing their opinions in order to keep harmony in their relationships. Thus, autonomy was represented in the context of relatedness, supporting research showing that the former does not necessarily oppose the latter (Chirkov et al., 2003). Previous evidence suggests that highly educated urban families in non-Western cultures, combine goals of autonomy and relatedness (Keller, 2019). In our results, the negotiation between these values was prevalent in both SES groups which adds to evidence showing that Mexican culture is shifting to the prioritisation of autonomy, independence and equal rights (Diaz-Loving et al., 2018).

Competence refers to one's sense of mastery and self-efficacy. Research shows that contrary to those where criticism is continuous, relationships that are reliable, responsive and sensitive can foster an individual's sense of competency and wellbeing (La Guardia et al., 2000; Patrick et al., 2007). In our findings, parents in both cultures represented discovery, learning and mastery of skills as important elements of children's development. Nonetheless, for Mexican parents, competence was aided by continuous support and involvement in others' activities, whereas for British parents competence was aided by giving children the means and freedom to pursue their goals and interests. Thus, whilst fostering competence was a relational process in Mexico, in London, competence was oriented towards self-sufficiency. Arguably, such differences in meaning are reflected in representations of support in adulthood.

In Mexico City dwellers, meanings of support conveyed acceptance, encouragement and the promotion of self-discovery and confidence. In London dwellers, this type of support was mostly represented as the one parents provided to their young children. However in Mexico City dwellers it was given throughout the life course and amongst different family relations (e.g. between siblings, and children to parents). Family support in London dwellers was mostly represented in terms of help during challenging times, thus, encouragement during adulthood was not as salient as in Mexico City. Arguably, the cultural interest to strengthen others' sense

of competence could be beneficial for Mexicans' wellbeing, as support provided for the purpose of development is crucial for thriving (Feeney & Collins, 2015). In London dwellers, expectations of self-efficacy and self-reliance associated with competence made development and growth a more individual and private process compared to that in Mexico City dwellers. Nonetheless, rather than by family members, competence in individualistic cultures can be promoted by positive and close relationships from other sources, such as partners (Patrick et al., 2007).

Overall, the qualities of interaction and bonding found in Mexico City dwellers tended to fit with those that the literature show are beneficial for SWB. Moreover, beyond the satisfaction of needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy, we argue that familial relationships in Mexican culture aid the fulfilment of a sense of mattering. The degree to which someone feels they are a significant part of the world and important to others plays an essential role in individuals' wellbeing (Elliott, et al., 2004; Flett, 2018). Accordingly, Mexican interdependence implicated being cared for and caring for others and recognising the influence that one had on the family and vice versa. Meta-analytical studies show that although individualism is positively correlated with SWB at the national level, at the individual level, values of interdependence and lower individualism are associated with higher SWB (Steel et al., 2018). Thus, it can be concluded that compared to British culture, values underpinning Mexican culture provide a bedrock for the formation and maintenance of positive social relationships that aid the fulfilment of psychosocial needs.

Chapter 8: Overall Discussion and Conclusion

In order to contextualise levels of SWB in London and Mexico City, the aim of this thesis is to explore dwellers' social representations of a) living in the city and b) family. By examining the way dwellers make sense of the spheres in which they live their everyday lives, it is possible to identify aspects that are associated with the experience of positive and negative feelings as well as life satisfaction. The specific questions this thesis addresses are 1) What are the aspects and experiences in London associated with SWB? 2) What are the aspects and experiences in Mexico City associated with SWB? 3) What are the differences and similarities in SWB-related experiences in Mexico City and London dwellers? 4) What are the social representations of family in London dwellers and how do these relate to individuals' SWB? 5) What are the social representations of family in Mexico City dwellers and how do these relate to individuals' SWB? 6) What are the factors that contribute to the cross-cultural differences in the relevance that family has for individuals' SWB?

The purpose of this final chapter is to summarise and consolidate key findings that provide an answer to each of these questions. Furthermore, it presents the novel empirical, theoretical and methodological contributions to the SWB and culture literature. It then looks at the implications that findings have for city policy and planning, as well as for SWB interventions. Limitations and directions for future research are then presented before reaching the final conclusions of this investigation.

8.1. Integration and consolidation of research findings

8.1.1 What are the aspects and experiences in London associated with SWB?

The most prevalent themes associated with living in London were multiculturalism, the hustle and bustle, the culture and entertainment offer and changes in the built and social environment. Accordingly, all of these themes captured representations of social phenomena that could potentially foster or hinder dwellers' SWB.

For the majority of London dwellers, multiculturalism made the city more interesting, as it brought opportunities to learn about other cultures and most saliently, to try different cuisines. Moreover, being tolerant and open to others was represented as a key element of the Londoner

identity. However, several middle-aged male participants as well as some males and females from the older group, negatively elaborated on issues associated with multiculturalism and more specifically, its precursor, immigration. For this group, the number of immigrants settling in the city made them feel as 'if they were living in another country'; they held negative attitudes towards those dwellers who did not speak English, stayed within their groups and/or behaved in ways that did not match with British norms and values. Thus, for these participants, immigration signified a threat to London's liveability. Research on the correlation between immigration and diversity with natives' SWB tend to find mixed results (Howley et al., 2018; Longhi, 2014; O'Connor, 2020; Putnam, 2007), however further findings suggest that effects could be mediated by contextual variables such as neighbourhoods' levels of inequality and levels of segregation in the wider community in which neighbourhoods are nested (Laurence 2017; Sturgis et al., 2014). Our findings highlight the importance of contact and opportunities for engagement with other cultures in processes of openness and resistance towards multiculturalism; participants held positive views about diversity when they could gain something from it.

Life in London was also strongly associated with living in a fast-paced and highly populated environment. Expanding Garhammer's (2002) hypotheses on the relationship between pace of life and wellbeing, the effects that London's fast-pace had on people's SWB depended on one's reasons to be rushing around. London dwellers from a lower SES tended to represent living in the city as a financial struggle, which was associated with negative feelings and life dissatisfaction. These dwellers had to rush to get to their different jobs or to attend to their families before and after work, given that they could not afford any help. Nonetheless, for those who were better off financially, London was a place full of things to do, moving around the city was not only associated with responsibilities but also with leisure and social commitments. Thus, the tiredness and stress linked to fast-pace was linked to doing enjoyable activities and living in a stimulating environment and therefore was not represented as detrimental to SWB. Moreover, some of these dwellers added they were used to the fast-pace and/or preferred it over the slow-pace of the countryside.

However, for all London dwellers, it was the quantity of people that made navigating the environment challenging and unpleasant, given that others were seen as obstacles to reaching one's destination. Hence, even though transport services in the city were considered good, using them was linked to negative experiences, especially during rush hour, as the atmosphere

was represented as hostile, aggressive and –for some female dwellers– unsafe. This support previous evidence showing that crowding is negatively associated with SWB (Lepore et al., 1991) and that public spaces are settings where the other tends to be represented negatively, which could prevent positive social interaction (Zeeb & Joffe, 2021). Nonetheless, London dwellers had developed strategies to cope with the negative effects associated with this aspect of urban living, such as changing modes of transportation, however, spending time in green and blue spaces was of special salience. Parks and the Thames were represented as havens in the environment, sources of SWB that eased negative feelings and fostered positive feelings and social interactions in that dwellers could disconnect from the hustle and bustle of the city. This aligns with an increasing body of literature showing the positive effects that contact with nature has on people's SWB (Diener, et al., 2015; Krekel & Mackerron, 2020; Mackerron & Mourato, 2020).

Another prevalent association with living in London was the wide and diverse culture and entertainment offer. Supporting research on the positive association between a city's amenities and dwellers' SWB (Leyden et al., 2011), the many opportunities for cultural learning, leisure and recreation in the city made it desirable, exciting and interesting. The variety of things to do in London kept dwellers stimulated and invited them to discover and engage in activities that sparked their curiosity. Nonetheless, individual factors countered the positive effect that the culture and entertainment offer had on dweller's SWB. For some, having too much choice spoilt the experience of going to places due to the anxiety associated with choosing the best option and/or fear of missing out, factors that in other contexts have been associated with lower levels of SWB (Przybylski et al., 2013; Schwartz & Ward, 2004). Moreover, others elaborated on the self-control needed to focus on work while surrounded by attractive things to do and to be careful with the amount of money spent on leisure, which opens further questions of the possible implications that personality – environment fit effects have on people's SWB (Jokela et al., 2015). Furthermore, dwellers elaborated on different barriers that prevented them from seizing London's opportunities such as economic constraints, the energy to go out and the apathy associated with crowding. Although these were associated with negative feelings and dissatisfaction judgments, individual psychological resources helped people cope with detrimental sides of living in London.

Lastly, experiences in London were associated with changes in the environment, which were intrinsically connected to changes in the social environment. The *'housing crisis'* referred to

the high costs of accommodation in London and the lack of council housing. The majority of participants held negative views towards this, given that it was represented as the result of a government that favoured selling council houses to the private sector and opened the house market to *'rich foreign investors'*. Nonetheless, those directly affected by this were lower SES and younger London dwellers. On one hand, people with lower SES mentioned that most of their money went on paying rent, leaving them with little to spare, which was associated with a variety of negative feelings and life dissatisfaction. On the other hand, younger London dwellers elaborated on how the impossibility of affording rent had pushed them to remain at their parents' houses, which had weakened their sense of independence and autonomy. Accordingly, evidence shows that in wealthy countries like the UK, not having money to spend beyond basic needs is associated with lower levels of SWB (Diener et al., 2012) and that the frustration of autonomy-related values could be detrimental for the fulfilment of psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Furthermore, some of these younger dwellers were certain that they would never be able to afford buying a house in the city, thus London was represented as a temporary place to live until they were ready to settle down elsewhere. High property prices were associated with representations of gentrification in the city. Gentrification entailed the modernisation of old buildings and the presence of chain enterprises and shops to make areas more attractive and consequently, more expensive. With the exception of a couple of London dwellers who believed that this had made areas more interesting and safer, gentrification was seen as a social problem, mostly because it disrupted the character of the city and people's sense of community. Sense of community was built on familiarity with the built and social environment. London dwellers cherished independent shops, restaurants and pubs as they were elements distinctive to their area. Furthermore, they valued interacting with local residents and the relationships that formed with them throughout the years. From fostering social connection to a sense of safety; sense of community grounded positive experiences associated with living in London. Nonetheless, it had become threatened by the *'social cleansing'* and impersonal atmosphere associated with gentrification. Evidence shows that gentrification could be costly for dwellers' SWB, as it exacerbates social inequality (Hochstenbach & Musterd, 2018) and weakens social cohesion (Bagnal et al., 2018). Our results support these findings and also elucidate on the importance of place attachment and sense of community in positive judgments about the city and life satisfaction.

8.1.2 What are the aspects and experiences in Mexico City associated with SWB?

Experiences in Mexico City were predominantly associated with: insecurity, amenities in the environment, co-habitants and family life. Insecurity in Mexico City influenced dwellers' everyday life. Participants lived with fear of something happening to them or their loved ones; being a victim of crime was represented as *'only a matter of time'*. Delinquency was represented as a pervasive issue in the country that continued to grow, as authorities were not only seen as incompetent to handle the problem but as criminals too. However, Mexico City dwellers were motivated to not succumb to fear and live life normally. For this purpose, they had developed strategies to increase their sense of security such as keeping a low-profile in public and praying for safety every day. Moreover, some dwellers attenuated their negative feelings by overgeneralising the issue to all places or representing other cities and countries as more insecure, making Mexico City seem not particularly dangerous. All in all, crime and insecurity in the city made dwellers live in a hypervigilant anxious state that pushed them to distrust everyone outside of their close social circle. Safety is a crucial domain in models of wellbeing (Millan, 2018; OECD, 2018; Veenhoven, 2000). Thus, as seen in our results, representations of crime in the city were associated with an overarching sense of insecurity that affected participants' everyday lives. Moreover, crime and insecurity in the city weakened trust amongst dwellers, an important predictor of individual and societal wellbeing (Helliwell, 2006; Van Oorschot and Arts, 2004).

The second most prevalent association was related to the convenience of living in the country's capital city. Mexico City was represented as the place in Mexico with more facilities and amenities available, therefore people not only had easy access to basic services but also to learning, development and having fun, all of which were valued by dwellers. Accordingly, evidence suggests that dwellers of cities that have access to facilities in the environment show higher levels of SWB (Leyden et al., 2011). Moreover, supporting evidence of the potential power of heritage buildings to promote people's wellbeing (McElroy et al., 2021), some buildings in the city were associated with positive feelings, attachment to the city and sense of identity. Nonetheless, representations of living in Mexico City as advantageous were hampered by the quality of such benefits. Infrastructure was deemed poor, public services deficient and jobs badly paid. Many city dwellers expressed concern about their financial situation and being able to afford private higher quality services for their children. This could hamper the positive gains of having access to services, as research shows that job dissatisfaction and not being able

to cover for one's necessities are detrimental to SWB (Millan, 2018). Furthermore, the job market in the city was seen as the reason for the city being crowded. Crowding was associated with experiencing Mexico City as saturated and congested, especially when navigating the city. Long commuting times and other mobility obstacles were represented as detrimental sides of living in Mexico City and were associated with the experience of negative feelings as well as negative interactions with other dwellers. Accordingly, evidence shows that longer commuting hours are associated with negative affective experiences and decreased life satisfaction (Clark et al., 2019; for a review see De Vos et al., 2013).

Experiences in Mexico City were also associated with dynamics and interactions with co-habitants. Mexico City dwellers' self-concept was paradoxical, they represented themselves as warm, friendly and kind and at the same time, untrustworthy, uncivil and inconsiderate. Hence, the *chilango* was sociable but simultaneously defensive and aggressive, which was reflected in participants' contrasting experiences when interacting with strangers in the city. Overall, because of representations of crime, Mexico City dwellers expressed being sceptic of other people's intentions, however, others' characteristics that cued similarity in socioeconomic level aided dwellers' openness to interact with strangers and less known people, as they were assumed to have the same values and levels of education. Thus, the positive side of the *chilango* was shown almost exclusively to close relationships and people from the same socioeconomic background, whereas the rest were approached and reacted to with defensiveness and hesitation. This overarching lack of trust could be costly for Mexico City dweller's wellbeing, as research shows that people living in trusting social environments are most satisfied with their lives (Monchón Morcillo & de Juan Díaz, 2016) and are less affected by the detrimental effects of challenging life circumstances (Helliwell et al., 2020).

Although most experiences in Mexico City were negatively associated with SWB, they seemed to be counteracted by the reason given for why living in the city was positive: family life. Participants' everyday lives were interconnected with those of their families. Personal goals and aspirations were oriented towards the family and so were meanings of life satisfaction. Similarly, positive affective experiences were predominantly associated with family members. Hence, although family ties were also linked to the experience of negative feelings, such as worrying for children's safety, for the majority of Mexican dwellers, their life in the city was good because their family was there. This supports previous research showing that happiness in Mexico and other Latin American is founded on the family (Rojas, 2018).

8.1.3 What are the differences and similarities in SWB-related experiences in Mexico City and London dwellers?

In London and Mexico City, the wide array of amenities available was associated with positive judgments about the city and positive affective experiences. However, Mexico City dwellers also valued easy access to services, based on the representation that in other parts of the country services are limited. However, in both cultures, different aspects overshadowed the benefits associated with services and amenities. On one hand, London dwellers identified multiple restrictions and barriers to engage with the culture and entertainment offer in the city, which for some, was detrimental to their SWB. On the other hand, Mexico City dwellers deemed public services low in quality, forcing them to turn to the private sector, which was hard to afford and therefore causing dwellers anxiety and worry.

Living a fast-paced life was only salient in the London sample. Whilst London dwellers associated life in the city with being constantly on the move, Mexico City dwellers linked it to *'feeling stuck',* given the traffic and saturation of transport services. For both cities, living in highly populated environments was associated with challenges to navigate the environment. This was associated with the experience of negative emotions, as well as with unpleasant social interactions on public transport. Nonetheless, whilst London dwellers used green and blue spaces as havens in the city to cope with the pressures of urban life, Mexico City dwellers found relaxation in spending time with the family.

Culture-specific phenomena associated with life in London related to multiculturalism and the dramatic changes in the built environment. Representations of both themes converged in the idea that London was taken over either by immigrants or rich foreign investors, who, with the help of the government, were appropriating both the physical and social environments and consequently, pushing out *'real Londoners'*. Moreover, in both representations of multiculturalism and gentrification, dwellers' sense of entitlement to the city and social connection with other co-habitants was disrupted.

A culture-specific finding to Mexico City was the issue of insecurity, which affected dwellers' everyday lives by causing them to live in fear that something could happen to them or their family at any point. Even though they tried to gain a sense of safety by developing strategies to diminish risks, once they stepped out of their homes, Mexican participants were uncertain that they were going to make it back. Insecurity issues pushed Mexico City dwellers

to not trust anyone outside their close group of people. However, this was not represented as a significant problem, as Mexico City dwellers' lives were strongly oriented to their family life. Hence, detrimental sides of living in the city were eclipsed by the focus on spending time with family members and fulfilling family-related goals and aspirations.

The valence in attitudes and feelings associated with social phenomena in the city could be rooted in cultural values. In Hofstede's model (1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010), British culture is classified as predominantly individualistic, low in power distance, success oriented, low in uncertainty avoidance and high in indulgence. Arguably, social phenomena occurring in London did not align with such values, as the physical and social environment favoured the other and restricted and derogated the self. Thus, British values such as self-expression, success and indulgence were more challenging to achieve and social inequality and differences in status were becoming more visible. On the other hand, Mexican collectivism seems to be a resilience factor to cope with the challenges associated with living in the city. For Mexico City dwellers, family was a priority, hence, many aspects associated with the environment were not considered relevant. This could be aided by other cultural values such as high-power distance and uncertainty avoidance, meaning that Mexican culture is more tolerant of inequalities and focuses on what gives it security.

Thus, from the perspective of the theory of themata, much of the SWB associated with living in the city was underpinned by the position that the self held in relation to the other (Marková, 2015). In London, the self was fighting against the other to occupy a place in the social and physical environment, whereas in Mexico City, the overwhelming and threatening other that represented everyone outside the ingroup, was mitigated by the cohesion, protection and support of the collective self.

8.1.4 What are the social representations of family in London dwellers and how do these relate to individuals' SWB?

London dwellers represented family as an important piece of their life history and identity. Close attachment and frequent interaction with family was mostly associated with childhood, as bonds and connection to family members '*naturally*' weakened as London dwellers left their family home to look for independence and autonomy during early adulthood. Whilst some dwellers chose to stay distant from the family of origin as they grew older, others felt motivated to reconnect with them. Negative associations with the family mostly stemmed from the

mismatch between personal values and individuals' family circumstances. Family bonds were characterised by unconditional love, support and unity, however, this was hard to provide for those who did not represent family as a priority and/or had difficult relationships with family members. For them, loving, spending time and doing things for the family was associated with negative affective experiences and interactions, as it was underpinned by obligation and normativity rather than personal choice. Conversely, for participants who held family values and had overall positive relationships with family members, family was predominantly represented as a source of SWB. Thus, whilst representations of family in London dwellers corroborate Western cultures' flexibility in relationships, they also show that some qualities and affective experiences are still exclusively ascribed to family ties (Allan, 2008). Nonetheless, supporting previous research (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2000), it became salient that family was only beneficial for London dwellers when interactions and emotional closeness derived from personal choice rather than obligation

8.1.5 What are the social representations of family in Mexico City dwellers and how do these relate to individuals' SWB?

Mexico City dwellers represented family as the foundation of the self and society. The main role of parents was to provide children with *education,* which, beyond academic achievement, meant teaching them values to ensure they knew how to behave with others and contribute positively to society. Mexico City dwellers represented family as the priority in life, the people they loved the most and the meaning of happiness. Therefore, personal goals and aspirations strongly related to the fulfilment of family expectations and ideals. Furthermore, for Mexico City dwellers, family were impelled to support each other and be united, regardless of circumstances. Participants' lives were interconnected with those of their family members; they spent time together regularly and were involved in each other's projects and interests. For this purpose, trust and respect of others' individuality were represented as key values to foster and maintain unity and close positive relationships. All in all, close attachment throughout life and frequent interaction with family members were important sources of wellbeing for Mexico City dwellers. All in all representations of family support previous research highlighting the importance of family in Latin American populations (Leyva et al., 2016; Rojas, 2018). Moreover, they show that *familism*, the value for family interdependence (Bermudez & Mancini, 2013) and *simpatía*, the value for positive social relationships (Triandis et al., 1984) are elements of Mexican culture that facilitate the aspects of social connection which are

associated with SWB, such as support exchange (Barrera, 1986; Siedlecki et al., 2014) and sense of mattering in the world (Elliott, et al., 2004; Flett, 2018).

8. 1. 6 What are the factors that contribute to the cross-cultural differences in the relevance that family has for individuals' SWB?

In both cultures, representations of family were based on closeness, togetherness, love and support. However, whilst the majority of Mexico City dwellers actively shaped their family lives according to such expectations, for London dwellers it was down to luck if individuals' family life aligned with those ideals. Hence, results suggest that whilst family could influence London dweller's SWB, this association depended on the extent to which each individual held traditional family ideals and the quality of their relationships with family members. When individuals' family values matched personal circumstances, connection with family (or the lack thereof) was associated with SWB, whereas misalignment between these two factors often led to negative SWB. On the contrary, all Mexico City dwellers represented family as the foundation of the self and society, therefore deviations from family ideals were believed to result in negative outcomes, such as antisocial behaviour. For the vast majority of Mexico City dwellers, family was a priority and the meaning of happiness. Consequently, their lives were shaped around the family and oriented to fulfilling expectations, which was associated positively with SWB.

Cross-cultural differences in representations of family and the weight that they could have on people's SWB can be explained by cultural forces (Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010; Triandis, 2000). As a predominantly collectivistic culture, Mexicans' ingroup interdependence was reflected throughout the themes, however, the attention to foster other members' personal growth, the importance of interpersonal boundaries and the cruciality of respecting other's autonomy showcase individualistic tendencies that co-exist in Mexican culture (Díaz-Loving et al., 2018). Thus, even though Mexico City dwellers conceptualised themselves as part of their family group, there was also an emphasis on individuality and autonomy, which families were expected to respect and support. In London, representations of family showcased the importance of personal choice in predominantly individualistic cultures such as the British. Love and support in the family was represented as unbreakable and unconditional, nonetheless, for those whose family was not a priority and/or had difficult relationships with family members, fulfilling those expectations was challenging. Thus, for

family to be beneficial for Londoner's SWB, attachment and interaction needed to be motivated by personal choice and in individual's own terms, as when prompted by obligation and conformity to social norms, it was associated with negative SWB. The cross-cultural comparison of representations of family casted light on how interactional dynamics associated with the family facilitated the fulfilment of psychosocial needs. In Mexico City dwellers. family fostered individuals' autonomy and competence through relatedness. In London dwellers, autonomy and competence were more private and individual and relatedness needs were only promoted by the family when underpinned by personal preference.

Arguably, compared to London, the relational patterns amongst families in Mexico City could facilitate to a greater extent the fulfilment of psychosocial needs, which could be beneficial for people's SWB. This does not imply that family is always beneficial for Mexicans' wellbeing nor that British people do not benefit from family relationships. Nonetheless, it is more likely that the lives of Mexico City dwellers are guided by the abovementioned family values and norms, as other cultural characteristics such as a high uncertainty avoidance make it harder for people to diverge from norms, such as the valuing of family, especially when they are historically ingrained.

8.2. Empirical Contributions

Cross-country rankings show that London and Mexico City report similar levels of SWB, despite differences in objective predictors. Thus, addressing the need to explore SWB beyond objective life circumstances, this thesis makes a unique contribution to the literature by investigating dwellers' subjective experiences of the city in order to identify factors that, from their own perspective, hinder or promote their wellbeing. Accordingly, our results show that SWB in the cities was associated with individual, environmental, social and cultural factors.

Within-country measurements show that in the UK, London often ranks at the bottom in levels of SWB, despite scoring high in indicators such as access to services, education and health (OECD, 2018; ONS, 2019). It has been suggested that this could be attributed to less favourable scores on factors such as housing and income deprivation (ONS, 2019). Our findings qualitatively support this association and cast light on further considerations. For example, issues around housing not only affected those who struggled with paying for accommodation. In the context of a conceptualisation of it being difficult to get onto the housing ladder, parents worried about the future and permanence of their children in the city.

Moreover, regardless of the demographic group, participants' sense of community was weakened by the *'disappearance'* of local neighbours and independent shops that could not keep up with increased rents. Similarly, whilst lower SES dwellers associated living in the city with stress and frustration caused by the efforts required to make ends meet, a shared idea across demographic groups was that only rich people could make the most of London. Furthermore, our results show that rather than issues associated with the city's services, physical environment and infrastructure, it was representations of the social environment which were mostly associated with negative feelings and decreased life satisfaction. Across participants, experiences in London converged in weakened social cohesion, segregation, inequality and status (dis)advantages – all of which had a negative impact on their SWB.

On the contrary, measurements of SWB within the country ranks Mexico City in the top five places (OECD, 2018), in spite of scores close to zero on indicators such as safety and disposable income (OECD, 2018). Nonetheless, our findings show that in spite of issues associated with insecurity, quality of services, infrastructure and quantity of people, Mexico City dwellers represented living in the capital as advantageous based on comparisons with representations of circumstances in the rest of the country and more importantly, because their family lived there too. Spending time with the family and fulfilling family related goals and aspirations saliently underpinned Mexico City dwellers' affective experiences and judgments of life satisfaction. Therefore, challenges associated with the built and social environment were outweighed by having a positive and satisfying family life.

Families are a universal institution (Poortinga & Georgas, 2006), however the relevance of family in experiences in Mexico City casted light on the need for further examination of social and cultural factors that could explain why this finding was not replicated in London. Therefore, the second study of this thesis makes a unique contribution by comparing representations of family and their association with SWB in London and Mexico City. Our findings show that for all Mexico City participants, family was not only associated with SWB but was represented as the meaning of happiness. Thus, this potentially hegemonic representation oriented Mexico City dwellers' lives towards the fulfilment of cultural ideals related to family, such as fostering close attachment, maintaining positive interactions and the provision of unconditional support. In London, value for the family and its influence on everyday life was not as overarching as in Mexico City. Hence, even though representations of family in the two cultures converged in their formative relevance during early years and the

unconditionality of love and support amongst family members, London dwellers' family circumstances and experiences were more diverse. Accordingly, family was predominantly associated with SWB when individual and circumstantial factors aligned.

The cross-cultural divergence in representations of family is underpinned by cultural values, especially those related to individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010). In broad terms, these concepts encompass the cultural tendency to conceptualise the self as independent or interdependent of the ingroup. Nonetheless, our results contribute to a more nuanced understanding of these dimensions. As opposed to collectivism found in East Asian cultures where the priority is maintaining harmony in the ingroup through self-sacrifice, cooperation and caution of not burdening or distressing others (Kim et al., 2008), in Mexico City dwellers respecting autonomy and independence was a main concern. Therefore, the role of the family was to foster individuals' development, personal growth and happiness. On the contrary, several London dwellers tended to represent family and autonomy as opposites. Thus, the cultural valuing of independence and self-sufficiency maintained family relationships as a surrounding element in London City dwellers' everyday lives rather than at the core, as observed in Mexico City dwellers.

Lastly, research shows that the fulfilment of basic (Maslow, 1954) and psychosocial needs, such as the need for autonomy, relatedness and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000) as well as the sense of mattering in the world (Elliott, Kao, & Grant, 2004; Flett, 2018) are conducive to SWB universally. Moreover, evidence suggests that because the fulfilment of basic needs is dependent on societal circumstances beyond individuals' control, to an extent, people living in adverse environments can achieve SWB by the fulfilment of psychosocial needs (Tay & Diener, 2011). Thus, a crucial contribution of this investigation is to show that social phenomena in London hindered the fulfilment of basic needs for some groups (i.e., lower SES and younger dwellers) and for many, those of a psychosocial nature, reflected in dwellers' sense of being overlooked in the environment, difficulties in connecting with other co-habitants and a variety of obstacles to attain personal goals and desires. On the contrary, family represents a strength and resilience factor for Mexico City dwellers, as it fosters the fulfilment of psychosocial needs despite the city's adverse socio-environmental conditions.

8.3 Theoretical contributions

This thesis has used Social Representations Theory (SRT) as its central theoretical framework. Social representations, the socially constructed systems of values, ideas and practices that serve to establish social order and facilitate communication (Moscovici, 1973) have strong affective components (Joffe, 1999; Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernández, 2015). Accordingly, the study of social representations of living in the city and family served as a pathway to explore people's SWB associated with two spheres in which they experience their everyday life. SRT proved fit for the cross-cultural examination of SWB for two main reasons: 1) its focus is the study of common sense and lay knowledge rather than scientific knowledge (Abreu-Lopes & Gaskell, 2015), allowing an approach to wellbeing from an interpretative perspective rather than a predictive one 2) it posits that a social psychological phenomenon can only be understood if it is not separated from its historical, cultural and social conditions (Wagner et al., 1999). Hence, this investigation advances the theory as a useful framework for the in-depth analysis of SWB from a sociocultural perspective.

Moreover, the theory of themata alongside Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1980, 2011; Hoftstede et al., 2010) proved to be a powerful framework to identify cultural forces underpinning social representations. Conceptually, Hofstede's cultural dimensions inherently organise cultures around polarities in values and ingroup/outgroup dynamics. Similarly, the theory of themata focuses on the dyadic oppositions that guide the way a group makes sense of the world (Smith et al., 2015). However, whilst cultural dimensions only cover a number of polarities, themata can help identify those that emerge naturalistically from common-sense (Marková, 2017) which may or not fit within those pre-defined in cultural models. Hence, the value of using these theories together lies in that they can inform each other to enrich and expand cultural knowledge. For example, in our investigation, individualism and collectivism were fundamental to understand cross-cultural differences in SWB, which cultural models broadly describe as the tendency to see the self as independent or interdependent from the ingroup. Nonetheless, in-depth investigation of representations underpinned by the self/other thema helped understand characteristics, attributes and feelings ascribed to each of these entities, as well as the identification of societal groups represented as the 'other' – a level of detail that cultural dimensions cannot capture.

Moscovici (1988) argued that the main aim of the theory of social representations is to use everyday communication as a window to examine the link between human psychology and social and cultural trends in modern societies, which are characterised by fluidity and plurality in beliefs, knowledge and practices (Jovchelovitch, 2007). As opposed to pre-modern societies where centralised institutions (i.e., Church and State) regulated the legitimation of knowledge, in modern societies power is decentralised and appropriated by a variety of authorities claiming legitimacy – a switch aided by the increased circulation and reach of ideas that new forms of mass media communication has enabled (Duveen, 2000). Thus, since its inception, a crucial element of SRT research is to explore how different social groups represent the same social phenomenon (Moscovici, 1961/76), as each group draws on their own stories and diverse sources of information to make sense of phenomena (Abreu-Lopes & Gaskell, 2015).

As a theory postulated more than half a century ago, one can question its usefulness in current late modern times and beyond. With the rise of technology and electronic media, large proportions of the social world are media generated, which has aided the pervasiveness of knowledge, fragmentation of social identity and diversification of cultures (Preda, 2001). This thesis shows that within SRT, the concept of themata and cognitive polyphasia are especially relevant to study phenomena in increasingly plural and interconnected societies, as they are key to identifying points of intersection and contradiction in knowledge between and within individuals. Moloney and colleagues (2012) advanced that themata underpin cognitive polyphasia, given that such oppositional antinomies allow the coexistence of contradictory beliefs and modalities of reasoning. Accordingly, our findings provide support for this postulate. For example, some London dwellers' represented the Londoner identity as open and understanding of other cultures and at the same time, held negative judgments about immigrants in the city. Similarly, Mexico City dwellers often expressed the importance of civility in helping others but simultaneously represented anyone outside their family as a threat. Furthermore, representations of family showed important emotional polyphasic states (Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernández, 2015). For example, for London dwellers, unconditional love was simultaneously associated with negative affective experiences and conformity. Arguably, all of these contradictions were underpinned by self/other thema tensions and dynamics (Joffe, 1996).

Lastly, an important contribution of this thesis is the showcase of the power of bridging traditionally divergent epistemological approaches for the benefit of understanding social

phenomena. Theories of SWB have predominantly focused on psychological factors that could explain people's levels of SWB, such as personality, motivation and goals, capacity to adapt to life events and other cognitive processes (Diener et al., 2018). Nonetheless, despite the rich body of evidence supporting their importance, none of these factors can fully explain people's SWB. As highlighted throughout this thesis, SWB is constituted not only by individuals' psychological characteristics but also by societal and cultural influences. Approaches such as the Socio-Ecological approach attempt to address such theoretical shortcomings by accounting for different individual and contextual predictors for SWB (Ahuvia, 2015). However, this paradigm takes an objectivistic perspective, focusing on the influence that objective social and physical environments (e.g. residential mobility, green spaces, population density, etc) have on people's SWB. These theoretical perspectives have been developed from the overarching positivistic epistemology used in the field, characterised by a value for quantification, predictability and generalisation of results. Thanks to this approach, it has been possible to identify factors that are significant for people's wellbeing across cultures. Nonetheless, from such theoretical frameworks, the study of the s*ubjective* in SWB has been predominantly reduced to the use of self-report measurements. To address this limitation, this thesis delves into people's subjectivity using a social constructivist epistemology, which inherently acknowledges that individual's knowledge and experiences are the product of the interaction between individual, social and cultural forces. The research presented in this thesis bridges positivistic and constructivist paradigms to analyse people's SWB related meanings and experiences inductively and deductively in parallel, resulting in the development of findings gleaned from the quantitative data in identifying in-depth nuances of the relationship between society, culture and SWB. Arguably, this thesis shows that rather than being mutually exclusive, positivistic and social constructivist epistemologies are complimentary of each other and when used together, they present a more rounded understanding of social phenomena.

8.4 Methodological Contributions

Shifting from the examination of the predictive capacity of objective factors that researchers have deemed important for people's SWB, this thesis casts light on salient aspects that constitute the experience of living in the city and their association to SWB from London and Mexico City dwellers' own perspectives. Moreover, the in-depth examination of representations of family revealed sociocultural beliefs and practices that could explain the salience of the family for Mexico City dwellers. Thus, our results identify individual, environmental, social and cultural factors that constitute people's experiences of SWB, as well as the inherent interdependence of these factors – a complexity which would be challenging to capture by quantitative methods. Hence, the use of the GEM (Grid Elaboration Method) for the objectives of this thesis proved fruitful, as it allowed access to city dwellers' thoughts in a naturalistic, reflective and non-restrictive way with minimal influence of the researcher. This method has been predominantly used to explore lay representations of risks such as infectious diseases, earthquakes and climate change (Joffe, 2003, 2011; Joffe & Elsey, 2014; Joffe, et al., 2011; Smith, et al., 2015). Nonetheless, recent research has used the GEM for the study of subjective experience and everyday life matters, such as chronic pain (Keen et al., 2021) and interactions with strangers (Zeeb & Joffe, 2021). Thus, this research adds to the increasing body of evidence supporting the usefulness and value of the GEM for the study of more ordinary and personal topics.

8.5 Implications

The work completed for this thesis has implications for city design and wellbeing interventions and policy. Cities are public spheres comprised of political, spatial and social psychological dimensions (Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernández, 2015). Accordingly, results of our first study highlight the symbolic meanings attached to the built environment and therefore the need to proceed with caution when altering it. In London, the modernisation of buildings and rise of chain restaurants were associated with negative judgments and feelings, as that threatened the '*character of the city'*. Moreover, restaurants, theatres and other amenities in the city were not represented as advantageous if they were inaccessible, as they served as symbolic boundaries, designating social differences in status and financial power. Similarly, in Mexico City the monuments and historical areas were symbols of identity and attachment to the city. Arguably, development projects need to be designed while thinking beyond physical and

economic qualities as these elements have social implications attached that alter the way people experience their environment.

Findings for this thesis can also inform SWB interventions and strategies. Amassing bodies of evidence show that the factors that matter the most for wellbeing are: health (both physical and mental), education and skills, personal finances, social relationships, environment, use of time (i.e. employment, job quality and time spent outside work), qualities of areas of residence (i.e. crime rates, access to green spaces and services, housing satisfaction, etc.) and governance (i.e. trust in government and participation) (Hardoon, et al., 2020). Our results suggest that in London, personal finances, sense of community, satisfaction with housing and trust in government are aspects people often expressed dissatisfaction with, therefore potentially decreasing their wellbeing. The UK has implemented campaigns directly targeted at individuals' WB such as 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' (Aked et al., 2009). However, issues around housing and income are tied to macro-societal conditions and are beyond individuals' control, highlighting the relevance of putting people's wellbeing at the heart of public policy and national strategies for development.

In Mexico, current programmes implemented by the Ministry of Wellbeing consist of the provision of financial support to vulnerable populations, such as the elderly and the disabled. (Secretaría de Bienestar, 2021). Even though family is acting as a powerful resilience factor to buffer societal and economic problems, our findings show that there are many areas of opportunity to foster dwellers' SWB. The OECD (2015) recognises efforts and development in objective indicators of wellbeing, such as education and housing in the last decade. Nonetheless, our findings suggest how crucial social connection is for Mexico City dwellers. As a highly relational culture, focusing on social capital could be key to improving Mexico City dwellers' SWB. Encouraging and facilitating social connection outside the family via participation and involvement in community level programmes could be a way to promote societal trust.

Overall, our findings support previous cross-cultural research highlighting the importance of the social environment for SWB (Helliwell et al., 2020). Key aspects in positive social environments are having someone to count on, a sense of freedom to make life decisions, generosity and trust. Although to different extents, social phenomena in both London and Mexico City dwellers were associated with a pervasive lack of trust in government, institutions and other cohabitants, as well as a lack of sense of control over the environment. Thus, beyond

economic growth, governmental efforts could be directed to tackle issues in the social environment in order to promote people's SWB.

8.6 Limitations and Future Directions

The design of any research project necessarily involves the setting of parameters that exclude certain features of the phenomenon under study, which must be reflected on by any conscientious researcher. Acknowledging these constraints helps identify ways to move forward, as gaps and limitations offer opportunities for future research.

A first general limitation of this thesis is the sample that was used. Even though it was designed to roughly represent British London dwellers and Mexican Mexico City dwellers, the sample was small and non-representative. Thus, further research using quantitative methods is needed to determine the generalisability of these results. Furthermore, findings reflect the socio-cultural climate during the times of data collection. The relevance and salience of the representations discussed in this research can change over time. This consideration is especially important because interviews were conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic, which dramatically altered people's everyday lives (Helliwell et al., 2021; Teti et al., 2020). Nonetheless, this opens an opportunity to replicate this research after COVID-19 in order to explore changes in representations of life in the city and family and what such changes could mean for people's SWB.

The validity of our findings could also be improved by triangulation, a common practice in qualitative research. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods to develop a more comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999), which at the same time, serves as a strategy to increase validity of the results (Carter et al., 2014). In this thesis, the nature of the research questions and the use of samples from two cultures required extensive time to collect and analyse data, which resulted in the constraint of excluding other methodologies. Nonetheless, using other methods would have been valuable to counteract potential biases related to the interview process. For example, during London dwellers' elaborations on immigration, some participants referred to the researcher when saying that foreign students were not a problem. Arguably, this opens questions about how comfortable these participants felt to express their views freely when interviewed by a non-British researcher. Moreover, representations of family showed strong societal expectations, especially in Mexico City dwellers. Research shows that prevalent collectivistic societies are prone to social desirability

bias (Lalwani et al., 2006) hence, participants' elaborations could be a reflection of what is believed to be socially acceptable rather than their actual experience. Thus, both studies could be complemented with other methods such as observation or experience sampling approaches to identify discrepancies and variations between representations and actual individuals' circumstances.

The findings of this thesis cast light on future research directions to expand knowledge on SWB. First and foremost, our results show that in order to understand people's SWB, factors should also be explored from individuals' subjective perspective. Objective indicators such as higher levels of income and being employed do not necessarily translate into income and job satisfaction. Hence, research on objective factors and their association to SWB need to be complemented by data on people's sense-making of such topics. Moreover, our findings show the importance that subjective factors, such as place attachment, sense of community and the extent to which people feel they can engage with the environment, have on SWB. These factors could be harder to study using quantitative methods but qualitative and mixed approaches could provide valuable insights on aspects that influence people's happiness in urban environments beyond objective circumstances.

Moreover, social capital has been a topic of interest in SWB literature, as evidence shows it is key for individual and societal wellbeing. Nonetheless, social capital is highly associated with trust, which our findings suggest is strongly influenced by sociocultural factors. Thus, the field would strongly benefit from in-depth analyses on social and cultural constructions of trust, like that by Jovchelovitch (2008) on Brazilian society. Such examinations that account for historical, cultural and societal forces in the psychology of trust are crucial not only to understand findings related to social capital but also for the development of related strategies. For example, the weakened sense of trust in others found in our results could be especially detrimental for London dwellers, as British culture has historically valued membership and community, (Joffe & Smith, 2016; SIR, 2007a) and, as our findings suggest, British people do not necessarily rely on their family members to fulfil psychosocial needs. Hence, further research on the psychology of trust from a sociocultural perspective could provide valuable insights to understand and tackle contemporary issues such as loneliness (Linehan et al., 2014) and decreased social participation (ONS, 2020a).

Furthermore, our results in representations of family opened up a variety of questions worth pursuing. One relates to the cross-cultural role of women in the family. In both cultures, women

played a central role in representations of family, especially in bringing and keeping the family together. Arguably, the persistent anchoring of the female gender to the representation of family carries important individual and societal implications that could influence women's SWB, which should be further investigated. Moreover, our findings suggest that representations of family were strongly based on mother–child relationships in both cultures, however, other relationships such as that with the spouse, did not seem to have the same significance in Mexico City compared to London. Thus, further research delving into culture, family and SWB could look into representations of different types of familial relationships in order to identify variance in expectations, feelings and practices associated with each.

8.7. Conclusion

In spite of differences in societal circumstances, London and Mexico City dwellers report similar levels of SWB. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to provide possible explanations for this. Shifting from the examination of objective factors or any other predetermined variables that research suggests could be relevant for SWB, this thesis investigates aspects of city life and family that are associated with SWB from city dwellers' own perspectives. The examination of social representations associated with the spheres in which dwellers live their everyday lives allowed the identification of individual, social and cultural forces that guided their affective experiences and judgments of life satisfaction.

Our findings show that although living in London was associated with positive qualities such as multiculturalism, a vast culture and entertainment offer, access to green spaces and good public transport services, financial constraints and issues related to the social environment could potentially be decreasing London dweller's SWB. As a culture which values self-sufficiency, autonomy, equality, success and indulgence, the experience of barriers to engage with opportunities available in the environment could be particularly detrimental for people's SWB.

Living in Mexico City was associated with a variety of issues such as crime, traffic, lack of trust amongst co-habitants, low quality of services and poorly paid jobs. However, dwellers valued having access to shops and amenities and were attached to elements of the environment such as historical buildings. Nonetheless, the most positive side of living in Mexico City was having the family around. The centrality of the family reflected Mexican culture's

predominantly collectivistic values, which served as a buffer for the negative effects associated with challenging societal circumstances.

Further investigation of the cross-cultural differences in salience of the family, showed that for London dwellers, family was associated with SWB when individual ideals and values matched their personal circumstances. Doing things for the family out of obligation or societal expectation was predominantly associated with negative feelings, which reflects the value for autonomy and choice in British culture. On the contrary, Mexico City dwellers had anchored family to the meaning of happiness, hence their everyday lives and goals were orientated towards the family.

Mexico City dwellers' cultural value for close and positive relationships with the family aided the fulfilment of psychosocial needs, which could explain their higher levels of SWB. On the contrary, values characteristic of British culture direct the self to rely on its capacity to seize opportunities in the environment to fulfil its needs. However, representations of social phenomena associated with living in London converged in the feel that immigrants, the government and the rich were derogating the self and therefore, restricting their opportunities to seize the environment – which could be hindering dwellers' SWB.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Table 8. London's Socio-economic Grade Classification (ONS, 2021).

Grade	Description
A	Higher managerial, administrative and professional
B	Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional
C1	Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional
C2	Skilled manual workers
D	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers
E	State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only

Appendix B

Table 9. Mexico City's Socio-economic Grade Classification (AMAI, 2021).

Grade	Description
A/B	Socio-economic level A/B is defined as households in which the head of the family has professional studies (82%). 98% of these households have internet at home. This level invests the most in education (10% of its spending) and spends the least proportion of their income on food (28%).
C+	87% of households in this level have one or more vehicles for transportation and 91% have internet access at home. Less than a third (32%) of their spending goes to food and 28% to transport and communication.
C	83% of households in this level have a head of household that has education higher than primary school and 77% have internet at home. 35% percent of their total expenses go to food and 7% to education.
C-	73% percent of households in this level have a head of household with education higher than primary school. 52% have internet at home. 38% of their total expenditure goes to food and 24% is spent on transport and communication
D+	62% of households in this level have a head of household with education above primary school. Only 22% have internet at home. 42% of their expenses go to food and 7% towards education
D	56% of households have a head of household with education above primary school and only 4% have internet at home. Around 46% of their spending is on food.
E	95% have a head of the household that has no more education beyond primary school. Home internet connectivity is minimal (0.1%). This is the level where the highest expenses go to food (52%) and the group in which the lowest portion of expenses go to education, only 5%.

Appendix C

In order to conduct the content analysis of the grids, the content of each grid was first recorded on Microsoft Excel. The exact words used by participants were copied and any drawings were described in parenthesis. These were then read through multiple times and categories were created when they matched the content of a minimum of three grids. Given the wide variety of associations, most categories were developed conceptually, informed by the empirical and theoretical literature on SWB. However, when a particular association was repeated various times textually it was given its own category in order to emphasise its salience. Associations that did not fit within any category were labelled as 'no category'. Categories in Study 1 captured 98% of associations written by London dwellers and 96% of associations written by Mexico City dwellers. Categories in Study 2 captured 85% of London dwellers' responses and 91% of Mexico City dwellers' responses.

The following tables present more detail on the responses that each category yielded.

Table 10. Categories used for the Content Analysis of Study 1: London.

Study 1: London		
Category	**Description**	**Examples**
Positive characteristics	Positive judgments about the city and other urban aspects that literature suggests could be conducive of subjective wellbeing	Safe, wonderful, interesting
Negative characteristics	Negative judgments about the city and other urban aspects that literature suggests could be detrimental for dwellers' subjective wellbeing	Noisy, difficult, expensive
Positive SWB	Positive feelings and positive judgments of life satisfaction	Love, happy, comfortable
Negative SWB	Negative feelings and negative judgments of life satisfaction	Frustrated, tired, powerless
Multiculturalism	References to multiculturalism and diversity in the City	Multicultural, cosmopolitan, diverse
Quantity of people	References to the number of people in the City	Busy, lots of people, crowded
Culture and entertainment	References to cultural spaces and other things to do in the City	Markets, museums, restaurants

Green and blue spaces	References to parks and nature	Parks and River Thames
Housing	Associations related to housing	Rent, accommodation
Transport	References to transport	Tube logo, travel, transport

Table 11. Categories used for the Content Analysis of Study 1: Mexico City.

Study 1: Mexico City		
Category	**Description**	**Examples**
Positive characteristics	Positive judgments about the city and other urban aspects that literature suggests could be conducive of subjective wellbeing	Opportunities, relevant, commodities
Negative characteristics	Negative judgments about the city and other urban aspects that literature suggests could be detrimental for dwellers' subjective wellbeing	Chaotic, poverty, pollution
Positive SWB	Positive feelings and positive judgments of life satisfaction	Fun, wellbeing, stability
Negative SWB	Negative feelings and negative judgments of life satisfaction	Fear, stress, sadness
Crime and insecurity	References crime and insecurity in the City	Insecurity, violence, kidnapping
Quantity of people	References to the number of people in the City	Busy, saturation, demographic explosion
Habituation	References to been *'used to'* the City	Been used to
Family	References to family	Family, happy family
Life history	References to life history	*'I was born here', 'all my life',* life

Table 12. Categories used for the Content Analysis of Study 2: London.

Study 2: London		
Category	**Description**	**Examples**
Positive SWB	Positive feelings and positive judgments of life satisfaction	Love, happiness, wellbeing
Togetherness	References to unity, closeness and being together	Unity, togetherness, *drawing of a bottle of glue*
Support	References to reliability and support	Support, reliability

History and identity	References to life history and identity	History, growing up, roots
Priority	References of family as a priority	Everything, most important, devotion
Memories	Word: memories	Memories
Trust	Word: trust	Trust
Loyalty	Word: loyalty	Loyalty
Care	Word: Care	Care
Aspirations	References to aspirations/goals	Healthy, goals, aspirations

Table 13. Categories used for the Content Analysis of Study 2: Mexico City.

Study 2: Mexico City		
Category	**Description**	**Examples**
Positive SWB	Positive feelings and positive judgments of life satisfaction	Love, happiness, prosperity
Values	References to values	Respect, trust, responsibility
Unity	References to unity and togetherness	Unity, companionship, integration
Family member	References to a specific family member	Daughter, son, mum
Support	Word: support	Support
Priority	References of family as a priority	Priority, *'the most important thing'*
Challenges	References to challenges and difficulties associated with family	Differences, sickness, challenges

Appendix D

Coding frame S1.

Table 14. Coding frame for Study 1: Experiences in the City.

Code	Description	Example
Meta-code: Individual		
Positive judgments about something	Reference to positive attitudes, judgments and perceptions	I think London is fantastic.
Negative judgments about something	Reference to negative attitudes, judgments and perceptions	London can be a downer, suck away your spirit and happiness.
Positive emotions and/or bodily feelings	Reference to positive emotions and/or bodily feelings	It makes me feel lucky, or fortunate, that I

		actually live in London. I am always happy to come home.
Negative emotions and/or bodily feelings	Reference to negative and/or bodily feelings	I call my daughter, three tones, she doesn't pick up the phone and I feel like a disruption in my body, like a palpitation.
Life history	Reference to the participant's life history. Childhood and memories.	Sometimes I go to certain places that I haven't been in a while and memories come back. It's nostalgic.
City as a part of the personal identity	Reference to the sense of belonging/identity/character that the city provides to the individual/city as 'home'	All these cultural things have made me an interesting person and an interested person.
Personality traits	Reference to self-determination, capacity to adapt, saying that one is in charge of making/seizing opportunities and other personality traits, having learnt something by experience	London not necessarily gives me opportunities. You have to make the opportunities yourself. But there are people that can see your work and can help you.
Interests	Reference to activities and hobbies	My favourite thing to do is swimming outdoors.
Been used to/ routine/ resignation/ the normality	Reference to been used to something or/and that something is part of the routine/ resignation that something is not going to change/say it's the normality/it's the same everywhere	When you are born here you get used to the noise, the people, to everything and if you go to another place sometimes you miss these things.
Future	Reference to the future, upcoming times, aspirations	Despair of thinking of the future and how it's going to be.
Past	Reference to the past, past times	London has become a cultural centre, which it wasn't before. And that really only happened over the past 10 years.
Meta code: Personal relationships		
Family	References to family	I love my family very much… I have siblings, all of them are here, it's a very close-knitted family, we love each

		other and get along well.
Friends	References to friends	I have lot of friends here. You know, a big part of my living in London would be spending time with my friends –or making new friends
Weak ties	References to neighbours and acquaintances	Funnily enough, when you have dogs, you tend to meet the same people, so you have a little bit of, you know, 'how are you?'. There's a bit of camaraderie that goes on with dog walkers.
Interaction with others	Reference to interaction/connection with other people	It's lovely when you arrive home to see your kids, hug them, cuddle them, play with them.
Meta code: Other places		
Other places	Reference to places outside the city	In smaller towns and villages you get more the community feeling.
People from other places	Reference to people from other places. Includes the surroundings and metropolitan area	People from other places don't want to come to Mexico because they have the idea of the insecurity; they think they can't even go outside
Desire to leave	Expressed desire or planning to leaving the city and live somewhere else	People who are once away, they don't want to come back.
Desire to stay	Expressed desire of staying, not wanting to leave the city	I wouldn't like to live anywhere else. I like walking, I'm attracted to the river.
Meta-code: City composition		
Identity, character and history of the city	Reference to something that is well rooted in the city/ part of its identity as a city/ historical/ character. Traditions	Multiculturality is London's identity - it would be weird if all people in London were white British.
Built environment	Reference to the built environment, buildings, constructions. City's layout. City sights are included here.	I see very nice buildings and makes me say 'wow!' High

		quality, modern, nice churches.
Different areas	Reference to a particular area of the city, having moved from one area to another. EXCLUDES London and Mexico City in general	Brixton is predominantly Black, Golders Green Jewish, but you can walk in there without feeling threaten or anything.
Progress, development, growth and/or opportunities	Reference to progress, development, growth and/or opportunities	London a good place to progress: Lot of stuff going on, a lot of creatives, a lot of opportunities to get your stuff seen.
City lifestyle	Reference to commonly stereotypical aspects of a city, pace, hustle and bustle, things to do.	My personal life is fast paced: when I'm not working I am studying or doing something. Always on the move.
Natural environment	Reference to the parks, green spaces and wildlife in the city. Includes rivers, lakes and weather	We have lots of wonderful parks –I have two dogs, so I have a lot of choice of where to walk them. I live in North London, and I'm surrounded by parks, which I enjoy.
Food	Reference to any food related things: eating out, restaurants, farmers markets, street markets, cooking.	I love Mexican food, trying new dishes. Try something different during the weekends. Mexico is characterised by the tacos.
Culture and entertainment	Reference to culture and entertainment: museums, theatres, movie theatres	I live in Soho so I get to see lots of things: cinemas, restaurants, bars, bookshops, theatre, gallery and I found that exciting cause I've got that on my doorstep.
Shopping Centres	Reference to shopping centres	I do like going there, but I also like going to shopping centres, Plaza Universidad, that sort of shopping centres
Independent businesses	Reference to independent/local businesses	London's always been about establishments that were made from families, we should

		keep those. I prefer going to independent places.
Changes in the city	Reference to have seen the city changing/ thinking the city is not the same as it was	Mexico City has changed a lot, has had many changes to date, the city centre mainly.
Housing	Reference to housing/ accommodation, references to the houses, the participant's house, someone's house	Am I going to be moved away? Bulldozed?
Pollution	Reference to pollution (not exclusive to air pollution), rubbish and noise	Walking down the street every day, you are dying cause of what you breath in.
Services	Reference to the services that the city offers (hospitals, schools) excluding entertainment	There's a lack of services because of the quantity of people.
Meta-code: Transport		
Transport and navigating the city	References to the buses, trains and any other form transport, traffic, commuting, and city navigation. Proximity, getting from a to b	I don't like the tube. I'm still paranoid from the attacks. Got stuck in a crowd the other week and it was horrible
Meta-code: Society		
Co-habitants	Reference to the quantity and mentality/ characteristics of the people that live in the city. Includes attitudes, ideas and actions towards the other city dwellers	I think that the Mexican population is hard-working, fighters.
Multiculturalism and diversity	Reference to the diversity of cultures that can be found (or not) in the city	London is multicultural. There's all different people from all different paths of life –countries you know, from the world. So it's nice and mixed.
Immigration	Reference to immigrants and immigration	People from other less privileged countries come to do cheap labour.
Religion	Reference to religion or mentions of god	England was a Cristian country and when you start surrendering certain boundaries what happens is that people become fearful and they become

		distrustful, and that becomes hate.
Values, morality and education	References to values, morality, education and/or manners	The values come from grandparents, to be polite, greet people. I think that values and education come from home.
Community	Reference to community and/or the community feeling	The Southeast has changed considerably. It has a nice community, nice feel, nice vibe.
Young people and children	Reference to young people and/or children	Kids are no longer kids we used to go to the park with friends now they are on their phones, hardly go out.
Integration/Segregation/ Racism/ Discrimination	Reference to the integration/discrimination segregation/division/racism in society	There's a division between people who have always lived there and the new younger people that has arrived.
Tightness/looseness	Reference to the tolerance of a society to the breach of norms. Includes political correctness (PC)	And I'd like to think that if a copper was nearby and witnessed it that they'd be arrested, but I have my doubts. And that's where the police get it wrong because we're too PC.
Technology and media	Reference to technology and media; phones, social networks	My sister, she is 18 and she has always the phone in her hand, even when we are eating.
Meta code: Safety and security		
Crime and insecurity	References to crime. Includes terrorism	There's all sort of crimes in the surroundings, it makes me anxious to feel that everything is coming to the city like a plague.
First hand experiences of crime	Reference to have been a victim of a crime	I have been robbed many times, I actually I was robbed less than 15 days ago, they took my cell phone.
Second hand experiences of crime	Reference to knowing someone that has been a victim of a crime	I know about a girl from Taxqueña that

		was robbed, she was locked in a warehouse and beaten up badly.
Safety	Practices to stay safe. Includes rituals and habits to stay safe.	You live day by day praying to God to look after us because we aren't safe.
Children's safety	Reference to the children's security and safety	My kids can't go out by themselves. I have to be with them all the time, because of the fear or something happening to them.
Meta code: Narrative style		
My home is your home	The participant expressed that his/her home was the home of the interviewer as a courtesy	I can't stand the windshield washers… here where I live, your home as well, you go round the corner and there this neighbourhood…
Apologies	When the participant apologised when giving his/her opinion about something	I'm quite negative, I'm sorry.
Meta code: Government and Economy		
Jobs	References to jobs/competition for places/ job performance	5 years ago there were more jobs, now is less and less as time goes by. It's very hard unless you know someone that can get you in.
Government and public organisms	References to the government and public organisms, including the police force	Mexico is on the correct path to move forward, but the government only cares of power, not the people. They only care about the money.
Money	References to prices, salaries and expenses. Affording goods. Privatization of public services, gentrification, social inequality, poverty and homeless people.	It's very expensive living in London. Your whole salary goes into accommodation, and you're left with not much to spend

Appendix E

Coding frame S2

Table 15. Coding frame for Study 2: Social Representations of Family in London and Mexico City dwellers.

Code	Description	Example
Metacode: Family History		
Memories	Any references to memories	"I've just got one distinct memory of my brother coming back and just kind of noticing that things maybe weren't quite right and then just being quite loving and having a chat with me and saying, you know, I'm here if you ever want to, if you ever need anything and my sister doing something similar"
Moving out	Any references to moving out from home / leaving home	"You would, wouldn't you, he moved out for 9 months, he moved out with a friend when he was 18 which I encouraged because I thought it was good, you know, I knew I'd moved away from home so I thought well, you know, he might not like it that much."
Aging	Any references to get old, getting older, aging	"Particularly as you get older because I think family has, perhaps has more meaning as you get older"
Having children	Any references to having your own children	"When people say to you, you don't know what love is until you have a child in your arms, you go, oh whatever, no, no, you know, you meet your husband and you think you're in love, but it's a different love, it's a totally different love."
Roots	Any refences to roots, origins, history, heritage, DNA and family history	"Heritage. So that's like knowing your family's background and like I, I, I'm 43 years old now, right, but it wasn't until I was about 41 that I knew my ethnicity, you know, because I did the DNA test, yeah."
Upbringing	Any references to upbringing and childhood	"What family means to me is childhood, past, the past. Because I haven't, there's no family now as I've explained so I would just reflect on childhood. "
Education	Any references to education	"First of all, giving them a home, with harmony, food, dressing and the resources to thrive in life, which is education"
Metacode: Family characteristics		
Change	Any references to change/unchangeable	"I mean your family you can't change"
Choice	Any reference to choice or to choose. Includes not having a choice.	"Ok so in my 1st box I've done a weird picture of glue because I think that you're basically stuck with your family,

		like forever, you don't choose them, they're there whether you like it or not, they're your family and so there's kind of different aspects to it."
Unbreakable	Any references to family ties as an unbreakable	"In the end family is family and will always be family"
Unconditional	Any references to something or someone being unconditional, that will always be there no matter what	"Despite making mistakes, despite having a different personality, one that maybe I don't think it's good, despite making good decisions too, you will always love the family"
Priority	Any references to something or someone being a priority/important/above all/everything	"Therefore, my biggest priority is my kids. If I take a job, any decision is based upon their needs, our day to day life, the time we spend together, all that. Every decision I make is based on my kids.
Foundation	Any references to something or someone being a foundation/building blocks/basis	"There must be love in the family, the foundation of all families is love, first and foremost, loving your parents, your siblings, your children, everyone."
Activities	Any references to activities done with the family/a family member such as gatherings, holidays, trips, going to the movies, doing homework, etc	"Memories, yeah just thinking about things that happened from when you were like younger or like just things that you've done like creating memories, like going on holidays and spending as much time as you can together"
Familiarity	Any references to knowing someone very well, to family as the people who first know you or knows you best	"I really like, you know, I don't know, just having that home comfort and being able to have that solid group of people that aren't like your friends, that you can like spend time with and that you're close to and rely on for anything and who know you like inside and out as well, like your family know you so well that like, I don't know, I'd quite like to just build that kind of unit, family unit."
Commitment	Any references to commitment and responsibility	"Well, in things like that, looking after each other, to be somehow tied, I also identify it as a commitment, which I also wrote because you do it happily but at the same time is a responsibility and a commitment"
Metacode: External factors (context)		
Other places	Any references to places outside Mexico City or London	"I was born in Preston and I live in London now so if I go to see family, even if I go to see my mum's sister, so my aunty, it's a feeling of actually belonging somewhere."
Others	Any references to people who aren't friends or family, other people, people in general, generalisations of the population, society	I don't think it's the same for everybody. I mean there are a lot of people who live in this country, especially in London, who are not from the UK and if it goes wrong for them they don't have their family in this

		country to go back to, if they want to stay her
Technology	Any references to technology like cellphones, whatsapp, social media	"Yeah, yeah, so got a, got a WhatsApp group with my mum, my dad and my sister and then my mum's just WhatsApping me all the time, like sending me pictures of my nephew and stuff so yeah, we keep in touch a lot. Pretty much every day, maybe every 2 days, 3 days at the most"
Family stereotypes	Any references to stereotypical ideas /societal and cultural ideals regarding family or a family member	"I think there's a lot of pressure on it, to have like the idea that you get on with your parents and everyone's happy and you sit round the table and you have food and you all get on and there aren't arguments and you go on holiday and it's fun."
Work	Any references to work and jobs	"I think he was, he was a great dad but he worked all the time to support us and that's the sad part I think, mum and dad both worked so hard they weren't there but they did that for us"
Food	Any references to food, drinking and eating	"You know, when I go back to Norwich I will sit up for hours in the evening and have drinks and eat and chat and laugh, we're very similar people so they give me that, yeah, happiness is a big one for me with them."
Metacode: Individual		
Independence	Any references to independence/being independent/ having your own life/freedom	"I love them and always respect their freedom, their decisions, whatever they decide."
Personality	Any references to one's or someone else's personality or character (in general or specific traits), individual differences	"I was a selfish person, stubborn, but with my children, I am not like that"
Desires	Any references to one's personal aspirations, goals, hopes, dreams, desires, expectations, plans	"My family are not that close and I don't know if that means now I really want a close family and I really appreciate a close family and I wish I had it but my family I think are so, we're all so different and abnormal that it just would never work unfortunately, so they're the kind of ups and downs"
Time	Any references to giving time, making time or not having time for something or someone	"Time is precious, everybody has their time, everybody has their important things going on in their life, they don't always make time for the family unless it's their own little family"
Money	Any references to money, resources and finance	"I don't want it to sound wrong, but, that you can solve it, even with people saying that money isn't everything, the truth is that it is very important, maybe it doesn't give you happiness" but to know that you

		have enough to pay anything you could need, that gives you tranquillity"
Religion	Any references to god and religion	"I like to give them a kiss, I'm Catholic so I like to bless them and I like to wave them down the road and as they're walking down the road I say remember your goals and your dreams and they wave back and they go we do"
Values	Any references to values in general or values in specific, such as solidarity, honesty, tolerance, responsibility, respect. Manners, politeness, goodness and morals	"I think it's getting harder to trust people in society nowadays just because of the way the world is, social media eroding social values, very, very difficult."
Limits	Any references to limits, boundaries, not getting into other people's businesses , respect others	"She let us go out but everything within boundaries, I had to come back at a certain time and I was rebellious so I came back later, which resulted in little fights."
Metacode: Relationships		
Friends	Any references to friends and friendship	"I often class like my friends are my family in a way, like I chose them to be kind of family"
In-laws	Any references to in-laws family	"My son-in-law, when he got married to my daughter… maybe it's wrong to say this but I kind of adopted him. For me, he's another son"
Mother-children	Any references to motherhood and mother to children relationship and vice versa	"I mean I don't know, I mean I can find my mother sometimes a bit overbearing, maybe my father sometimes more distant."
Father-children	Any references to fatherhood and father to children relationship and vice versa	"My father's not very, he's quite closed but yeah, but, you know, he's still, he's kind of like available to talk if I need him but he's not the greatest at talking."
Extended/extension family	Any reference to extended family (the word) or relatives such as uncles, aunts and cousins	"My mum's cousins that they keep in touch with, they were at the funeral, my dad's funeral was a couple of years ago so they came for that."
Siblinghood	Any references to the relation between siblings	"So when we grew up and formed our own identity then that, then that didn't become so important but when you're what, when you're growing up, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and you've got a brother and sister and they're both younger than me, I'm the oldest one, then you're just naturally together, you know."
Romantic relationships	Any references to romantic relationships, includes divorce, infidelity, etc	"In our society infidelity is very common, it happened to me"
Closeness	Any references to closeness, being close-knitted, attached	"The closeness box, that would be, because that's important to me, to be close to people and even though I don't

		have that anymore it's still an important thing"
Togetherness	Any references to union, togetherness, to be united, integration, be unity	"Togetherness. So I think togetherness is something about kind of what I said about being able to, like when I say I meet up with my family quite often, that's quite an important element of togetherness for me, it's having, like when there's all five of us immediate family there, that feels like that doesn't always manage to get achieved very often, but it feels like much more of an accomplishment."
Communication	Any references to communication/talk/chat/been in touch	"She lives separately, but we have a lot of communication, we often go out for lunch or she comes over to see me"
Metacode: Positive Wellbeing		
Affection	Any references to affection or being affectionate, such as hugging and kissing	"Affection. I define it like the oil, the lubricant that make things no to grind, many times the same activity with a little bit of affection, I compare it to the doors and locks when they get tight and you have to put a drop of oil on them"
Safety	Any references to safety and security	"So yeah I guess it just makes you feel secure in yourself and allows you to do things."
Support	Any reference to giving or receiving support, help, have someone's back, to count on someone, asking for or receiving favours, doing things for others, giving and receiving advice	"I wrote support. So I wrote support because, particularly now because I've just had my first child and my parents and family have seemed to have come together and really come around me and my partner and my daughter to kind of help, help us through what is a very tough time for any new parent, going through, learning about how to raise someone is a big job."
Positive_affect	Any references to positive feelings, emotions and bodily feelings, such as love, trust, loyalty, gratefulness, peace, harmomy, stability	"I just think having a family and having that support network and being able to, I guess, having those moments of happiness"
Positive_cog	Any references to positive judments, attitudes and opinions about something or someone, such, as liking someone	"She was very loving, very gentle like most mothers, or like most mothers should be, very loving, just a very nice lady"
Metacode: Negative wellbeing		
Illness	Any references to illness, alcoholism/drug addiction	It started as mammary cancer, by the end, it was metastasis, it was really hard. We didn't fall apart, it brought us together.
Detachment	Any references to non-romantic separations, cutting ties, taking distance from someone	"I still love them even though we have arguments where I sometimes don't want to be with them"

Dead	Any references to dead, dying, bereavement	"My father died last October so it's given me time, 6 months ago, so it's given me time to reflect on what I liked about him and what I didn't like about him and what he got right, what he got wrong.
Crime	Any references to crime and insecurity	"Any moment you can get mugged, attacked or even murdered. The city is very dangerous at the moment"
Loneliness	Any references to being alone, on your own, loneliness and social isolation	"I was going to gatherings and I didn't enjoy them, I felt alone, because you are not living, you don't enjoy the moment because you're there by force"
Conflict	Any references to interpersonal conflict, fights, arguments, disagreements, fall outs	"I've fought infinite times with mum and dad and we've said things that you would not forgive your friends, but well, they are your family"
Sacrifices	Any references to sacrifices and trade-offs	"I am very structured so when there's something unexpected it kinds of affect me, however, doing favours for my sister gives me wellbeing and sometimes you have to sacrifice things for others' benefit"
Negative_affect	Any references to negative feelings, emotions and bodily feelings	"This is going to sound wrong but I don't get that worried about my husband not being at home, but I do worry a lot about my daughter when she isn't in"
Negative_cog	Any references to negative judgments, attitudes and opinions, such as not liking something or someone, something being difficult, etc	I think sometimes in London it's not good to have too many children because you really need to keep control of them
Forced	Any references to forced, obligatory, non-negotiable/ compulsory	"Sometimes you feel obliged to do some things, like having to go somewhere when you don't wanna go, it's bothersome but is a commitment."

Appendix F

Thematic Analysis

The following diagram presents the strategy followed for the creation of themes in the four datasets used in this thesis.

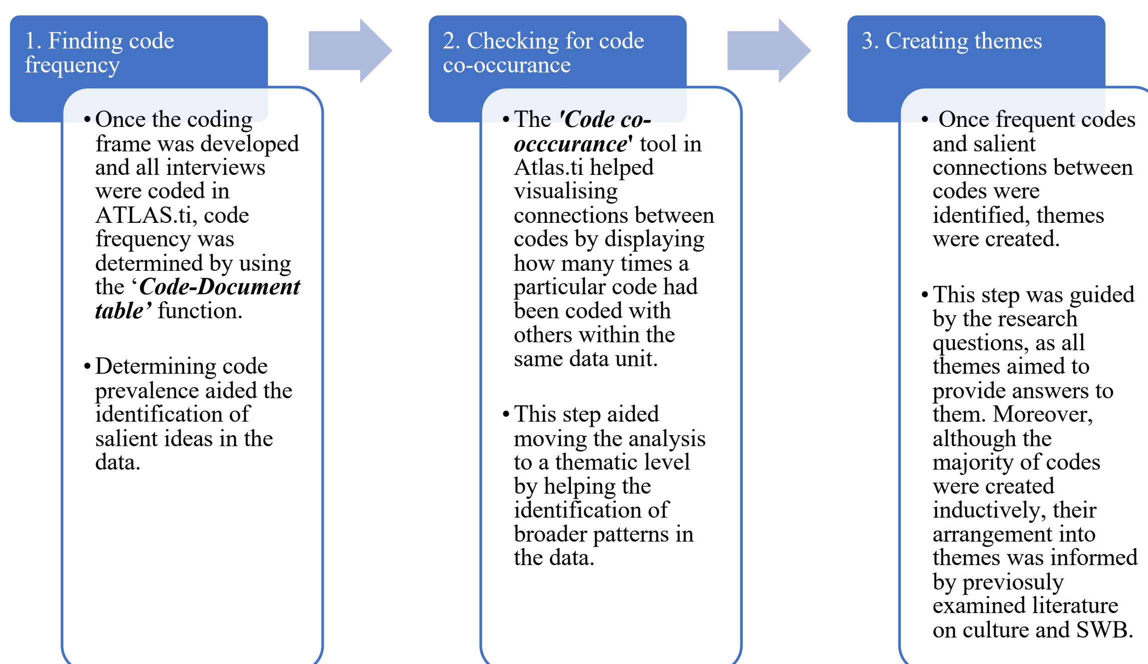

Figure 33. Thematic Analysis Workflow.

The following tables present prevalent codes that structured each of the themes presented in the result section of this thesis.

Table 16. Prevalent Codes in the Thematic Analysis for Study 1: Experiences in the City: London.

Study 1: Experiences in the City – London			
Theme 1: Multiculturalism	**Theme 2: Hustle and Bustle**	**Theme 3: Cultural and Entertainment offer**	**Theme 4: Changes in the environment**
Codes: • City as a part of the personal identity • Identity, character and history of the city • Interaction with others • Food • Multiculturalism and diversity • Immigration • Co-habitants • Positive judgments • Negative judgments • Government and public organisms	Codes: • Natural environment • Other places • Desire to leave the city • Desire to stay in the city • City lifestyle • Transport and navigating the city • Money • Positive judgments • Positive feelings • Negative judgments	Codes: • Interests • Interaction with others • Culture and entertainment • Co-habitants • Multiculturalism and diversity • Built environment • Positive judgments • Positive feelings • Negative judgments • Negative feelings	Codes: • Community • Interaction with others • Built environment • Different areas • Independent businesses • Changes in the city • Housing • Government and public organisms • Money • Positive judgments • Positive feelings

	• Negative feelings		• Negative judgments • Negative feelings

Table 17. Prevalent Codes in the Thematic Analysis for Study 1: Experiences in the City: Mexico City.

Study 1: Experiences in the City – Mexico City			
Theme 1:Crime and Insecurity	**Theme 2: Amenities and the built environment**	**Theme 3: Cohabitants**	**Theme 4: Family**
Codes: • Crime and insecurity • First hand experiences of crime • Second hand experiences of crime • Safety • Children's safety • Government and public organisms • Negative judgments • Negative feelings • Other places	Codes: • Interests • Interaction with others • Culture and entertainment • Co-habitants • Built environment • Positive judgments • Positive feelings • Negative judgments • Negative feelings • Progress, development, growth and/or opportunities • Services • Pollution • Transport and navigating the city	Codes: • City as a part of the personal identity • Life history • Values, morality and education • Interaction with others • Positive judgments • Negative judgments	Codes: • Family • Interaction with others • Life history • Desire to stay • Values, morality and education • Positive judgments • Positive feelings

Table 18. Prevalent Codes in the Thematic Analysis for Study 2: Representations of Family: London.

Study 2: Representations of family – London			
Theme 1: Support	**Theme 2: Cyclical attachment**	**Theme 3: Influence on SWB**	**Theme 4: Love**
Codes: • Support • Unconditional • Unbreakable • Commitment	Codes: • Moving out • Aging • Having children	Codes: • Positive affect • Negative affect • Positive judgments	Codes: • Unconditional • Unbreakable • Affection • Closeness

• Forced • Positive affect • Negative affect • Positive judgments • Negative judgments	• Independence • Closeness • Togetherness • Detachment • Conflict • Positive affect	• Negative judgments • Conflict • Loneliness • Change • Choice • Family stereotypes • Values • Closeness • Togetherness • Safety • Forced	• Togetherness • Safety • Mother-children • Change • Positive judgments • Positive feelings • Negative judgments • Negative feelings

Table 19. Prevalent Codes in the Thematic Analysis for Study 2: Representations of Family Mexico City.

Study 2: Representations of family – Mexico City			
Theme 1: Support	**Theme 2: Happiness**	**Theme 3: Unity**	**Theme 4: Foundation for self and society**
Codes: • Support • Unconditional • Unbreakable • Commitment • Values • Limits • Positive affect • Negative affect • Affection	Codes: • Having children • Activities • Desires • Values • Positive judgments • Positive affect • Negative judgments • Negative affect • Closeness • Togetherness • Affection • Sacrifices • Priority	Codes: • Activities • Affection • Closeness • Togetherness • Desires • Unbreakable • Detachment • Romantic relationships • Mother-children • Communication • Values • Positive judgments • Positive feelings • Negative judgments • Negative feelings	Codes: • Foundation • Education • Values • Crime • Detachment • Negative judgments • Positive judgments • Closeness • Family stereotypes • Upbringing