

## Happy and Unhappy Competitors: What Makes the Difference?

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### Abstract

Interpersonal competition is present in all arenas of our life, i.e. within the family, in school, among peers, in the workplace, and in the sports ground. Competition can be an immensely joyful, exciting, and motivating experience that contributes to goal attainment, self-evaluation, development and improvement of the individual, the competing parties, the group and the society. However, it can also be an anxiety provoking, stressful, and exhausting negative experience that leads to interpersonal conflicts and has destructive consequences individually, to the group and ultimately to the society.

Competition can be a friendly process in which the competitive parties mutually motivate and improve each other, but can also be a desperate fight full of aggression among the competitors who consider each other enemy. The result of competition can be winning or losing. Winning typically evokes positive emotions like happiness, satisfaction, and pride, but sometimes negative emotions emerge like guilt or embarrassment. Losing, as a potential result of competition, may result in sadness, disappointment, frustration, anger, shame, but can have positive consequences like learning about the self, realizing strengths and weaknesses and increased motivation for the future. There is not "one" competitive process. Competition can take qualitatively different forms and patterns that are determined by individual, situational and cultural factors.

The paper will examine the factors that can be decisive in this respect: i.e., the characteristics of the competitive situation and the characteristics of the competing person. These situational and personality requirements will be further examined from a cultural perspective, taking examples from East-Asia (Japan), from North America (Canada) and from Europe (Hungary).

**Keywords:** competition, happiness, culture

Competition is an almost everyday experienced interpersonal phenomenon, and also it's a frequently experienced inter-group phenomenon. It is present in all of our

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life contexts, in our family life, workplace, in the school, in our hobbies, in our games, in our friendships, in our romantic relationships, in political life, in economic life, in inter-ethnic relationships, and of course in international relationships. Given its pervasive presence in our life it is not indifferent if experiencing competition and competing makes us happy or just the opposite, it destroys our happiness and does not contribute to our well-being.

### **The 'Beauty and the Beast' Paradigm of Competition and Cooperation**

Competition as one main form of social interaction – maybe almost without other example in the history of psychology – was symbiotically handled with cooperation in social and educational psychology (Deutsch, 1949, 1973; Johnson & Johnson, 1989). For the most part psychologists and educationalists have focused on cooperation and have studied competition only in relation to cooperation in order to identify those variables which govern an individual's choice to compete or to cooperate. In addition to this, they have been conceptualized as two extremes of a single behavioral dimension or polar opposites (Van de Vliert, 1999; Fülöp, 2004). Related to the tendency to dichotomize competition and cooperation has been the assumption in most of the literature in psychology and education that competition is a destructive force that should be eliminated as much as possible from the environments in which children and adolescents grow (Kohn, 1986, Johnson & Johnson, 1989). In those literatures, teamwork and cooperation have been extolled as healthy forms of interaction and leading to positive interpersonal relationships.

Due to that fact that competition was studied almost exclusively by comparing it to cooperation and therefore was considered to be basically negative (in contrast to for instance biology, evolutionary psychology and economics where there is no such value attached to the concept), it was impossible to reveal those conditions among which competition can be positive and constructive. This has established the "Beauty and Beast" paradigm (Fülöp, 2008a). Cooperation was considered to result in readiness to be helpful, supportive and respectful, in openness in communication, in trusting and friendly attitudes, sensitivity to common interests, orientation toward enhancing mutual power rather than power differences (Deutsch, 1990). In addition, cooperative goal structures were said to facilitate learning and bring about superior performance (Johnson & Johnson, 1989, 1999). In contrast, to this, competition was believed to induce tactics of coercion, threat or deception, poor communication, suspicious and hostile attitudes, anxiety, fear of failure, concern with preventing others from winning, self-orientation etc. Competition was also found to interfere with cognitive functioning needed to solve problems (Pepitone, 1980; Tjosvold et al., 2003; Fülöp, 2008a; 2008b). Many dichotomous adjectives were used to distinguish between the two patterns of activities such as: pro and con (Deutsch, 1962), association and disassociation (Triandis, 1972), correspondence

and non-correspondence (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), all favoring cooperation over competition. In addition, competition and cooperation elicited descriptive words in the literature like hate versus love, negative versus positive interpersonal dispositions, and hostile versus friendly descriptors (Deutsch, 1982).

The dichotomic conceptualization of competition and cooperation resulted in the evident call to bring up cooperative and not competitive people. Alfie Kohn's (1986) book "No Contest: The Case Against Competition", - a national best seller in the US for several years - served this purpose very well. Kohn conceptualized competition in a very narrow framework, and excluded many possible variations of the phenomena. He only focused on extrinsically structured competitions and on those intrinsically motivated competitions that were related to neurotic, pathological personalities. He denied that competing individuals could share mutual goals and assumed that their relations were based on aggression and incompatibility. In his view, competitors could not concentrate on how to improve their knowledge and performance, but focus on how others could do worse; thus their main interest is others' loss rather than their own success. Kohn could not conceive of a competition with positive aspects.

### **The Change of the Paradigm**

However, from the beginning of nineties, there has been a paradigm change towards a less dichotomic concept of competition and cooperation, and cooperation and competition have been no longer seen as mutually exclusive (Fülöp, 2008a; 2008b). In 1990 Deutsch "announced" that in his work he viewed cooperation and competition as idealized, separate psychological processes, however they are rarely found in their "pure" form in nature, but found more typically mixed together (Deutsch, 1990). Most forms of conflict can be viewed as mixtures of competitive and cooperative processes and further, the course of a conflict and its consequences are heavily dependent upon the nature of the cooperative-competitive mix (Deutsch, 1990). Research results increasingly indicated that competition and cooperation should not be viewed as mutually inconsistent, but rather seen as partners (Van de Vliert, 1999). Dichotomization is now seen as irreconcilable with biosocial theories of human behavior that emphasize the subtle interweaving of cooperation and competition as strategies used by individual primates and humans (Charlesworth, 1996). Competition and cooperation are no longer considered mutually exclusive in the business world either (Lado, Boyd, & Hanlon, 1997). Since the nineties new research results appeared, proving that cooperation combined with competition leads to the highest level of task enjoyment and also a higher level of performance than pure cooperation (Tauer & Harackiewicz, 2004). The ability to combine competition and cooperation also turned out to vary according to cultures. Japanese people appear able to combine cooperation with

competition, in other words to "compete under the umbrella of cooperation" (Shwalb, Shwalb & Nakazawa, 1995; Fülöp, 2004).

Looking at the motivational literature, there is an interesting parallel to this. Lepper and Henderlong (2000) argued that researchers tend to polarize concepts that are relatively independent of each other. The paradigm change that characterized the literature of competition and co-operation corresponds to the paradigm change in how extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and performance versus mastery goals were viewed in social and educational psychology. Within the motivational literature, Deci and Ryan (1985) have polarized motivation into intrinsic and extrinsic components. This work defined the research direction of motivational research for several decades, just as Deutsch and Johnson and Johnson's work did in the area of competition and co-operation. The subsequent literature dealing with achievement motivation was built on the same type of dichotomy distinguishing between mastery (learning) and performance (ego) motivation (Dweck, 1991, Midgley, 2002, etc). Mastery goals were shown to be leading to better affective (emotional) and cognitive consequences, increased learning and better behavioural outcomes. In contrast, performance goals were presumed to lead to negative consequences. In this sense, again we found "the beauty and the beast" paradigm; "the beauty" was the intrinsic and the task oriented/mastery motivation, and "the beast" the extrinsic and the performance oriented motivation, what was in fact very much connected with competitive strivings ("wants to be better, wants to be the best", Fülöp, 2008a). Since the early nineties, based on new empirical findings and resulting theoretical interpretations, these dichotomous motivational models have also been reconsidered at least by some researcher. The theory of multiple goals that have emerged and related research findings demonstrated that individuals can have various concurrent goals and that performance goals can be adaptive, leading to positive outcomes (e.g. Elliot, 1999; Harackiewicz et al., 1998). Trying to excel, to be the best in any given area should not be viewed in a negative light. Such efforts tend to lead to efficient learning and high level performance. As competition is an aspect of these types of goals, it should be considered as a potential positive influence or learning. The multiple goals perspective suggests that the focus should be on how multiple goals get established and what kind of interactions exist between various goals, rather than assuming students dichotomous motivational perspective. In pedagogical practice, it is especially difficult to separate learning goals that are intrinsically motivated from extrinsically motivated performance goals as they are often combined in the individuals' motivation. The quality of their goal combinations may determine how students approach their tasks. According to the new paradigm, students can be intrinsically and extrinsically motivated at the same time and recent research suggests that such combined motivational force may be the most adaptive (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001, Pintrich, 2000).

In summary, the more recent research does not indicate a polarization between competition and extrinsic motivation on one hand and cooperation and intrinsic

motivation on the other hand. Rather, they demonstrate that both co-operation and competition can potentially increase or decrease intrinsic motivation (Epstein & Harackiewicz, 1992). In addition, a positive feedback - a form of extrinsic reward – can contribute to increased intrinsic motivation (Tauer & Harackiewicz, 1999). At the same time, co-operative situations can have negative influence on participants who feel that they have lost their individual autonomy because they are part of a large group that controls them. Also if they notice that not all members of the group contribute equally to the task or if they cannot achieve the desired goal with the group, individuals' motivation may decrease (Tauer & Harackiewicz, 1999; Smart & Mtsi, 2006). Evidence was found also in post-socialist countries, like Croatia and Macedonia that extrinsic life goals in fact contribute to well-being in these countries (Rijavec et al., 2006; Rijavec et al., 2008; Miljković & Rijavec, 2008; Brdar et al., 2009; Spasovski, 2009).

### **Different Types of Competitive Processes**

For several decades competition was investigated not by examining its own properties, but by comparing it with cooperation. Consequently, features that differentiated the two were highlighted while other potentially important features remained obscured. The multidimensional nature of competition eluded researchers as qualitatively different processes got lumped together within a single and one-dimensional construct of competition (Schneider et al., 2006; Fülöp, 2008a; 2008b). However, competitive processes can be qualitatively different and their result can be harmful or beneficial, destructive or constructive, contributing to happiness and well-being and destroying happiness and well-being - depending on the nature of the goal of competition, the function of competition, the way competitors conceptualize each other, and the way they are able to cope with winning and losing (Fülöp, 2001, 2004). David and Roger Johnson, the main advocates of the destructiveness of competition (Johnson & Johnson, 1989), together with Dean Tjosvold and Haifa Sun carried out a research (Tjosvold et al., 2003) and came to the conclusion that constructive competition does exist in the real world and that this type of competition contributes to task effectiveness, personal benefits (such as social support), strong positive relationships, enjoyment of experience, desire to participate, confidence in working collaboratively with competitors in the future etc. Sheridan & Williams (2006) described how constructive competitive relationships are constituted and relate to pre-school children's motivation and learning.

Based on all these, we argue that there are qualitatively different competitive processes, that differ along several dimensions, and that contain different degree of cooperative elements. Different competitive processes establish the possibility of being a happy competitor to a different degree. The way competition manifests

itself is multidetermined and shaped by cultural, situational-normative, and individual-personality characteristics.

### **The Role of Culture: Can Competition Go Together With Cooperation?**

Cultures differ in the extent to which competition is emphasized (Triandis et al., 1988). Japan is an excellent place to study the structural components of competition from cultural perspective. Firstly, Robert Le Vine (2001) calls it the "Japanese problem of psychology" that while Japanese psychological development diverges substantially from Euro American patterns presumed to be universal, the difference cannot be attributed to poverty, illiteracy, backwardness or marginality. Japan as an affluent society admired in the West for its achievements in technology, industrial production, education, and the arts, commands the kind of respect that makes evidence of its distinctive psychological tendencies harder to ignore than if it were a "Third World" country (Fülöp, 2004).

Secondly, Japan is particularly interesting to study also because of a peculiar feature of her society. As we mentioned previously, competition in the Western psychological literature was not only studied together with cooperation, but also these two kinds of social interactions were considered to be mutually exclusive, polar opposites, we either compete or cooperate (Argyle, 1991). On one hand, it is emphasized in the social psychological and the anthropological literature that Japan is a collectivist (Triandis et al., 1988), groupist society (e.g. Nakane, 1970; Lebra, Lebra, 1986). Studies in non-Western cultures revealed that Japanese and other Asian cultural groups emphasize interdependence of the individual with the collective rather than independence from it (Markus, Kitayama, 1994), i.e. Japanese have an interdependent self-concept that is a culturally distinct construal of the self, which insists on the fundamental relatedness of individual to each other (Markus, Kitayama, 1991). This is in harmony with the Japanese cultural context in which people are required to be continually receptive and responsive to particular others. Compared to the Western concept of person as a seemingly separate and private store of thoughts etc. that is rooted in the ontological tradition of Cartesian split between mind and body, self and others, cognitive and affective, relationality, connectedness, interdependence and the participatory, responsive, interpersonal nature of all behavior are culturally emphasized. To stand out can be embarrassing in Japan (Markus, Kitayama, 1991) – while the wish of standing out is considered to be an inherent characteristic of competitive relationships in Western, individualistic societies.

On the other hand, Japan has been one of the most successful capitalist economies of the world with a school system that has been characterized as fiercely competitive and creating "examination hell" for the adolescents (Rohlen, 1983, Frost, 1991, Amano, 1993, Inui, 1993). Parallel to the notion of overheated competition, Japan is also claimed to be egalitarian, equality and co-operation

oriented (Iwama, 1993). In spite of this paradox (Fülöp, 1998), there has been a surprisingly limited number of empirical studies to reveal competitiveness among Japanese. The statements like "For Japan the most serious problem of education is extreme competition." (Inui, 1993) or that too much competition produces distortions and leads to school violence (Amano, 1993) have never been examined by proper empirical studies and challenged by examining the perception and experiences of the participants, the students themselves. Therefore it was particularly interesting to carry out a study on how Japanese experience competition and how they cope with the controversial expectations of their society concerning competition, what kind of concept of competition makes it possible to live in a cooperative-competitive society, how Japanese construct the meaning of competition (Fülöp, 1998b).

A similar question was raised concerning Hungary, that has gone through profound social, political and economical changes. In the transition of post-communist states to market economy, competition has been a key concept. Since 1989 competition, a previously ideologically denied and banned phenomenon, has become a highly required and praised one at all levels of the society, from politics to everyday individual life in Hungary (Fülöp, 2002, Fülöp and Berkics, 2002). The fast transition going on at every segment of the society required citizens to change their perception and understanding of competition and also to alter their attitude and values in connection with competition. The "success" of the change is represented in many studies. The GLOBE study (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) compared middle-level managers in 62 culturally diverse countries (House et al., 2004). It showed that, Hungarian business-people are the second highest in institutional individualism considering only their own interests and ignoring those of the group or the community. Taking into consideration the nature of the social transition, Hungary can also be considered as paradox in terms of competition, however here the paradox might stem from the mixture of the past political system's remnants of thinking and the new individualistic, market and competition oriented ideas.

As a third country Canada was chosen for comparison, where competition is a well accepted concept. As a North American democracy with long tradition of market economy Canada belongs to the group of countries that were characterized in Hofstede's (1980) original study by high level of individualism, by self-reliant individualism coupled with competitiveness (Triandis, et al., 1988) and other studies confirmed that the autonomous, independent self-concept prevails (Heine and Lehman, 1997). Most of the cultural comparisons in relation to individualism-collectivism compare the USA and East Asian countries, mostly Japan, but there are some studies carried out with Canadians that show similar features with the USA (Heine and Lehman, 1995). According to the more recent GLOBE study Canada belongs to the Anglo-cluster with other English speaking countries like the USA, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand etc. (Ashkanashy et al., 2002). In

terms of institutional individualism it falls into the mid-range of countries (however the level of individualism is significantly lower than among Hungarian respondents) and Canadian participants do not have an over emphasis on group loyalty and collective interests as opposed to individual goals and interests.

Taking into consideration the different traditions of these societies with competition it seemed to be rewarding to study how competition is conceptualized in these three different countries, if Japanese, Hungarians and Canadian mean the same when they speak about competition or when they identify a behavior or situation as competitive.

Subjects participating in the research were university students in each country. The Hungarian sample included 166, the Japanese 151 and the Canadian 194 students coming from different universities. A questionnaire with open-ended questions was distributed among the students in their respective language. It consisted of 23 questions asking about different aspects of competition e.g. "What do you think about competition in general?", "Do you like to compete? Please explain your answer", "What do you think about being competitive and being successful in Hungary (Japan)?" etc. Students gave free descriptions of their ideas. The qualitative analysis of their answers revealed those categories and dimensions of thinking students apply when they perceive and understand competition. The quantitative, statistical analysis pointed to significant differences in the use of these different categories and dimensions and made it possible to set up the culturally different concept of competition of Hungarian, Japanese and Canadian young people.

### **Functions of Competition**

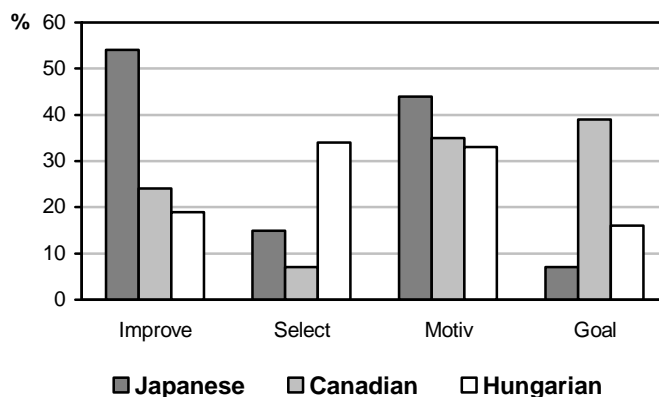
According to our results depending on the particular person and the particular cultural historical traditions of the person, competition can be viewed to serve different functions. People coming from different cultures can have qualitatively different notions about what it means to compete. The following functions were mentioned by all cultural groups but the frequency of the mentioning of the different categories was distinctively different.

*Motivation, stimulation and encouragement for work* was considered by each group an important function of competition, however Japanese respondents mentioned significantly more often than Hungarians (JPN vs. HUN: Chi-Square (1) = 4.73,  $p < .05$ ). Between Hungarians and Canadian, and Canadian and Japanese there was no such difference. do so more often (53% and 32% percent respectively). The most important function of competition for the Japanese was found to be *improvement of the self, each other and the society*. On Figure 1. it can be seen that more than half of the Japanese respondents mentioned improvement and growth by competition, significantly more than Hungarian (JPN vs. HUN: Chi-Square (1) = 44.18,  $p < .001$ ) and Canadian (JPN vs. CAN: Chi-Square (1) = 22.54,



$p < .001$ ). Japanese respondents expressed the view that due to competition with others one can improve many of one's characteristics and abilities that would improve otherwise slower or would not improve at all. In their view competition can serve the continuous unfolding process of inner potentials and competencies. Most of the time this means that the target of comparison or the competitive party is somebody who is a person with definitely better qualities. Japanese who consider self-improvement as the main function of competition consider upward comparison the source of learning and development. Among the Hungarian respondents the highest number of answers were related to *selection*, reflecting a more social-Darwinist view of competition. Conceptualizing competition as a social-Darwinist selection process and considering it improvement, self improvement and growth reflects very different competitive processes. Competition in the previous case implies finding the most able one, the best who fits a certain position and finding the strong and talented. Competition in this view can serve the decision about who are those who meet a desired criteria the most. This kind of social-darwinistic function of competition is significantly more frequently mentioned by Hungarians than by Japanese or Canadian (HUN vs. JPN: Chi-Square (1) = 18.26,  $p < .001$ ; JPN vs. CAN: Chi-Square (1) = 4.86,  $p < .05$ ). Among the Canadian respondents the most frequently mentioned function of competition was *goal attainment*. *Significantly more Canadians mentioned it than Hungarian or Japanese (CAN vs. HUN: Chi-Square (1) = 11.22,  $p < .001$ ; CAN vs. JPN: Chi-Square (1) = 6.72,  $p < .01$ )*. This notion meant that competition appears in case a goal can be reached only by a competitive process, or in other words competition helps to achieve a desired goal.

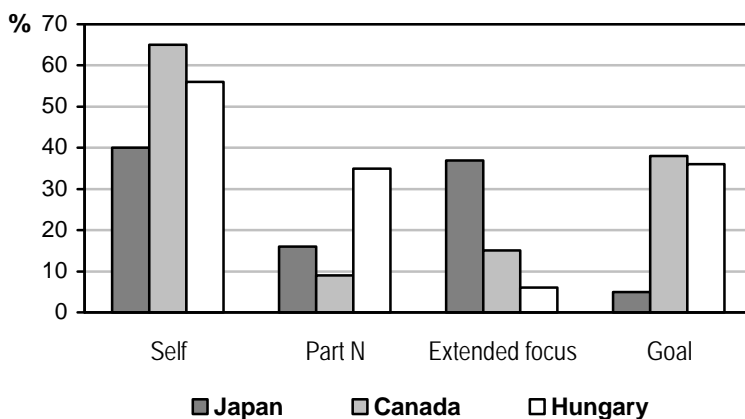
Figure 1. Functions of competition



### The Focus of the Competitive Process

Answers were analyzed in the terms of what kind of focus the competitive process has (Figure 2). The focus of the competitive process can be the *self*. In these cases respondents say "competition motivates me" or for example "improves me". On the other hand, the focus of the competitive process can be the competitive *partner* as well, in a *negative way*, for instance "competition is beating your enemies" or "fighting against your rivals". Japanese typically described that they improve *each other* in the competitive process, in other words they cooperate with each other in this improvement process. This was called *extended focus* and Japanese free descriptions significantly more often referred to this (e.g. in competition we motivate or improve *each other*) than their Hungarian or Canadian counterparts (Chi-Square (2) = 76.32,  $p < .001$ ) The *goal* as the focus of competition was the most frequently mentioned by Canadian and Hungarian respondents, but significantly less often by Japanese (Chi-Square (2) = 87.60,  $p < .001$ ).

Figure 2. Focus of competitive process



### Different Types of Goals in Competition

Competition is a goal oriented behaviour. Depending on the nature of the goal two different types of competitive goals were distinguished. One type of goal is winning, in terms of getting something like a position, an award or a scholarship, etc. or in terms of being the best or being better than someone. If the goal of competition is winning in these two respects then the rival is conceptualized more as an opponent whom someone has to win over; or as an enemy who has to be get rid of in order to achieve the desired goal of winning. The rivals as autonomous, independent beings fight against each other whose self is separated (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). This means that it can be a goal to eliminate the rival from the

competitive process. A Canadian university students' answer reflects this type of conceptualisation *"Winning is everything to me; if given the opportunity, I would sabotage others to get ahead. When I win I feel superior to others as well as attaining a sense of personal pride"*.

Another type of goal less goal or other focused and more self and extended focused: for instance it can be improvement (as many of the Japanese answers describe), or mastery ("Let's compete to see which one of us learns sooner how to ride the bicycle"), or learning about oneself. In these cases the focus of the process for the self is to improve, to master something, to be competent at something and self-evaluation, to learn about strengths and weaknesses by comparison to others. If the goal is such, then the rival can of the competition can be a kind of tool to be used to promote one's mastery, self learning or improvement. The rival can also be an active partner in this process; competing parties can agree upon this, and they can for instance decide to compete with each other in order for both to learn more. This conceptualizing the rival was more the case among the Japanese. If a rival is considered necessary for one's self development, if the rival is used to increase mastery, then it is not the goal to lose the rival, just the opposite, one is somewhat dependent on the given rival and the competing parties' self is in fact interdependent (Markus and Kitayama, 1991, Green et al., 2005). Within this interdependence, there is a high degree of cooperative element between the competitive partners, they are literary more partners than enemies. A Japanese example is: *"The competition which enhances both sides is important, because it can improve ability and humanity. But competition only for the sake of winning makes people degenerate."*

Based on the *nature of the goal*, the *attributed function of competition*, and the *relationship among the rivals* during the competitive process three qualitatively different types of typical processes were identified as the most prevalent in the three examined cultural groups. In case of the *Japanese* young adults, the main function of competition was found to be improvement/ growth and motivation. The focus of the competitive process was the self or both parties in the competition, i.e. an extended focus. The role of the rival is a stimulator who is a kind of impersonal agent or an active partner of the self-improvement process or mutual enhancement. Peers who fulfill this role are precious and thus must be kept and not eliminated from the competitive process as they are the ones who guarantee that the person in question doesn't stop the process of self-perfection. They are contributing to improvement, gaining mastery or learning about the self. The degree of the cooperation between the competitive parties is high, and the motivation is more of an intrinsic/mastery type; to learn, to grow, to develop, to master. In case of the *Canadian* respondents, the main function of competition was found to be motivation and goal attainment. In the focus of the process was the self (to be best or better than the other) or the goal to win. The role of the rival in this case was mainly an opponent to win over. This process implies a medium level of

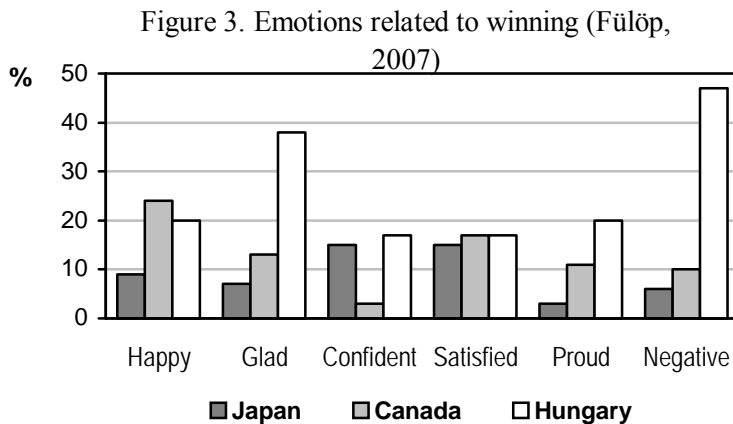
cooperation and more an extrinsic/performance motivation process. *Hungarian* respondents besides the function motivation mentioned as a function selection the most frequently; the focus of the competitive process was on the self or the partner in a negative sense, an enemy who must be beaten and removed during the competitive process as an objection of personal success. This process implies a low level of cooperation and more of an extrinsic/performance type of motivation.

It was found that all three patterns of competition were present in all three groups, but to a different degree. Therefore I argue that while in competition there are individual differences, and situational differences, still there are also historically and culturally embedded conceptualisations that allow competition to be constructive or destructive to a different degree. This study proved that high level of interdependence can be coupled with high level of competitiveness and that intensive competition does not necessarily ruins interpersonal relationships and disrupts harmony but by contributing to both parties improvement may bring joy, satisfaction and happiness in a mutually rewarding way.

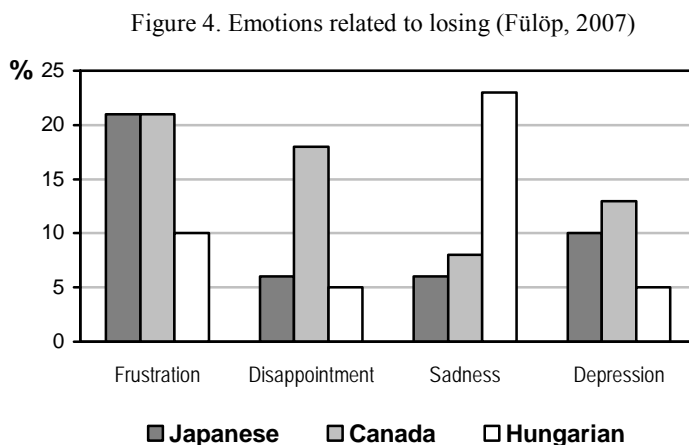
### **Reactions to Winning and Losing**

In the previously mentioned study we also asked about the conceptualization of winning and losing. The following open-ended questions were asked: "what does winning/losing mean to you and how do you react to it?"

While Hungarians connected with winning (Figure 3), lots of positive emotions like being happy or being glad, there was a striking number of respondents (47% of them) who in addition to positive emotions mentioned negative emotions in relation to winning as well, mostly fear of the interpersonal consequences of being a winner like: "I like when I'm acknowledged, but I'm also afraid of the consequences" or "I feel a kind of inner joy, and at the same time I feel I have to humiliate myself or hide that I am happy, not to awake envy or negative attitudes toward me in others". The reactions to winning clearly showed a different construction of what it means to be a winner in the three groups. In a more social-darwinistic conceptualization of competition in which rivals are considered to be enemies the winner can expect more inimical reactions than in a self-improvement type conceptualization where the rivals ensure each other's development.



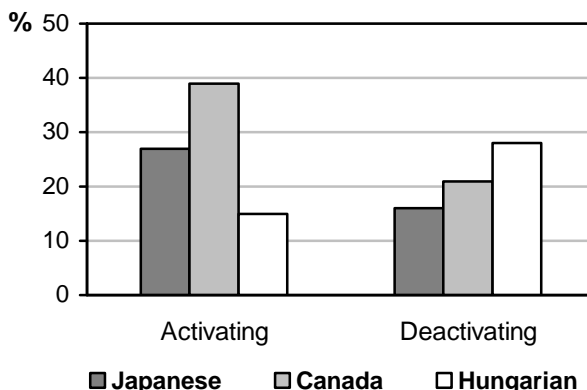
In case of losing, the biggest categories of mentioned emotional reactions were frustration (being somewhat angry at oneself why not being a winner), disappointment (expecting a better result, that could not be reached), and sadness and depression (Figure 4). Depression was categorized only in case the person used the expression "depression", for instance "I am depressed", or wrote things like "this was the last nail into my tomb" etc.



Pekrun (1992) categorized emotions as activating and deactivating positive and negative emotions. Frustration and dissatisfaction are activating negative emotions because they keep the person active after losing, while sadness and depression are deactivating emotions; people feel really low if they are sad or depressed. When emotional reactions to losing were grouped according to their activating/deactivating effect (Figure 5), it was found that the three respondent

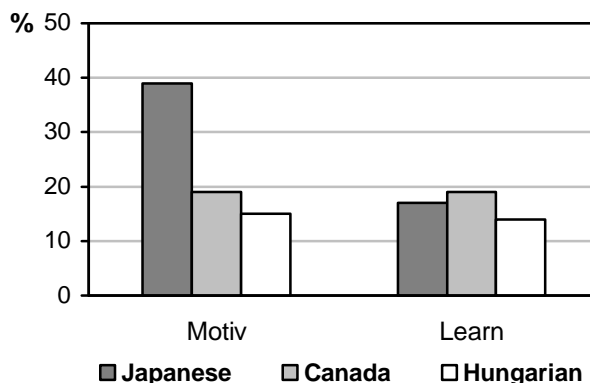
groups differed in the combinations of these. Hungarian respondents mentioned more deactivating emotions than activating emotions after losing, but Japanese and Canadians did just the opposite; they reported more activating emotions related to losing than deactivating emotions. This shows a different potential of successful coping with the negative results of a competitive process i.e. losing. It seems that in the Hungarian culture if one is a winner and feels happy about it, it is better not to show it because of the potential negative reactions of the social environment and if one is a loser has less successful coping mechanisms to stand up and continue.

Figure 5. Activating/ deactivating emotions  
(Pekrun, 1999; Fulop, 2004)



It was also found that among Japanese respondents almost 40 percent reported that losing motivates them (Figure 6). A great number of them indicated that losing is the source of motivation as opposed to losing self-esteem, or feeling depressed. This may be in connection with the function Japanese mainly attribute to competition i.e. self-improvement. This implies that when one loses this is understood as the indicator of a need and space to learn to improve. Losing simply informs the person that there is still work to do. An example of this Japanese reaction is: "...I will put more effort into this, and I will try to make sure that I achieve the best I can next time, so that I don't end up with the negative comparative result." These type of answers appeared among the Canadian and Hungarian as well, but the difference among the three groups proved to be significant indicating a different potential to cope with winning and losing in a constructive way.

Figure 6. Losing motives



### Coping With Winning and Losing

Competition and its positive and negative effects also depend on the personality, or to put it differently, how one copes with winning and losing. In another study (Fülöp and Berkics, 2007) with 360 Hungarian secondary school students we used a closed-ended questionnaire based on the results of the open-ended questionnaire study. Participants had to indicate in a 5-point Likert-type scale their emotional and behavioural reactions and the meaning they attribute to winning and losing.

The main-component analysis with varimax rotation revealed three different factors as a reaction to winning; (1) joy and activation (e.g. being enthusiastic, elevated, feeling successful and competent and being energized), (2) narcissistic self enhancement and devaluation of others (also malicious joy, looking down upon the loser, feeling superior etc.), and (3) social caution (having negative emotions related to winning, like embarrassment, shame and fear of reactions of others and being cautious about winning).

In case of losing a four-factor solution was found: (1) self-devaluation (e.g. I am a bad person, I am useless, I am stupid, I am afraid of not being loved etc.), (2) sadness and frustration (e.g. I am sad, I am angry at myself, I am nervous, I hate losing etc.), (3) aggression towards the winner (e.g. hates the winner, gets mad, envious etc.), and (4) denial of losing (e.g. does not care, tired, bored etc.).

Several significant correlations were found between the different emotional reaction factors to winning and losing. The joy and activation factor in the case of winning correlated positively with sadness and frustration in case of losing ( $r = .44$ ,  $p < .01$ ) both being energizing reactions. Narcissistic self-enhancement as a reaction to winning correlated positively with aggression towards the winner in the case of losing ( $r = .57$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Being socially cautious in case of winning correlated

positively with self-devaluation ( $r = .45$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and denial of losing ( $r = .35$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

These results show that there are identifiable patterns of cognitive, emotional and behavioural coping with winning and losing. Reactions to winning and losing are non-arbitrary, but they have a psychologically coherent relationship with each other. The different coping patterns may result in different psychological well-being. Adaptive coping, that can benefit from both winning and losing can contribute to mental health while non-adaptive coping like narcissistic/aggressive or socially cautious/self-devaluating reactions may result in a lower level of subjective well-being. These relationships however need further investigations.

### **Morality of the Competitive Process**

Several studies showed that the most important condition under which competition can be constructive or destructive is its morality (Fülöp, 2001). Morality refers to several aspects of the competitive process: fairness of the rules (Tjosvold et al., 2003), clear criteria of evaluation (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, Fülöp, 2001), keeping the explicit and implicit rules of competition and in connection with this, the nature of the applied means in order to win. A dishonest competition means that the competing parties break the rules, they apply immoral means, they cheat, lie, mislead, falsify results, sabotage rivals, bribe, corrupt etc. in order to win over their rival. When criteria of evaluation are not transparent and known by all participating parties, or the rules of the competition are not fairly enforced, then the structural conditions of the competitive process are not fair (Fülöp, 2008b). The fairness of a competitive situation does partly depend on the behavior of the participating parties and partly on the characteristics of the competitive structure that provides the context for the competitive event (Fülöp, 2001; Tjosvold et al., 2003, Fülöp, 2008b).

In a study carried out with 230 college students (Fülöp, 2008a, 2008c) the goal was to reveal the effect of breaking the rule of competition on the cognitive, emotional and short- and long-term behavioural coping with winning and losing. The college students were asked to give free descriptive answers to different competitive scenarios that were based on a previous collection of real competitive events described by a group of college students in a diary form. The scenarios covered six different domains (university life, studies, sports, romantic relationships, popularity, friendship and jobs). Each scenario had two versions: a fair competition, in which the competitive parties relied on their own efforts, achievement, and an unfair version, in which one of the competitors made an immoral act and as a result of that became the winner. Each scenario had a male and a female version, to provide potential identification with a person of the same gender. Here we present two versions of the competitive scenario related to sports:



Scenario 1 (Fair): Anna and Christina have pursued competitive swimming for several years. They are good friends, but so far they have not had to compete with each other. Now they participate in the same swimming competition and they are equally good, with similar chances to win. They both aim for the gold medal. They have been training very hard and they are both very well prepared for the competition. They both do their best and finally Anna wins and Christina gets the third prize.

Scenario 1 (Unfair): Andrew and Peter have been athletes for several years. They are good friends, but so far they have not had to compete with each other. Now they participate in the same competition and they are equally good, with similar chances to win. They both aim for the gold medal. They have been training very hard and they are both very well prepared for the competition. At the beginning of the competition Peter is in the leading position, but Andrew manages to catch up, however he feels he is unable to get ahead. He decides to do something. At a certain point he elbows Peter, who loses his balance for a second, enough for Andrew to get ahead and win the competition. Nobody notices what Andrew has done, only Peter knows it, who finally loses the competition.

Respondents had to identify in random order with the winner and loser and answer the following questions: What does the winner/loser feel? (Emotions); What does the winner/loser think? (Cognitive reaction); What does the winner/loser do now? (Immediate behavioral reaction); What will happen in the future, what kind of effect this event has on the winner/loser in the long-run? (Long-term behavioral consequences). The free descriptive answers were categorized by two researchers and the debated categorizations were discussed and decided by a third researcher.

Results show that the person who became a winner in a fair process is more prone to feel joy/happiness, satisfaction and pride over winning and it is less frequent that he/she experiences guilt or shame. Although those winners who became winners as a result of an immoral act may also experience positive emotions, this is less frequent than in case of a fair victory. Malicious joy (a positive emotion that has an aggressive element) was reported only by unfair winners. They also reported positive emotions coupled with guilt or guilt and shame without positive emotions and also fear over the consequences of the unfair act.

According to the results, the fair winner, while being happy about winning, is able to feel sympathy toward the loser. On the contrary, the cheater is not able to create an emotional bond with the loser. Instead of sympathy, which would connect winner and loser emotionally, he/she experiences emotions like malicious joy, guilt and shame and fear that result in an emotional detachment from the loser.

The loser's emotional reactions are also different depending on the fairness of the competitive process. After a fair competition, the loser experiences negative emotions that have mainly intra-psychic significance, like disappointment, sadness,

and desperation. However, the person who lost as a result of cheating turns negative emotions outward and is predominantly angry at the winner. Helplessness as an utterly deactivating emotional state is reported only in this case. If somebody lost in a fair competition, then he/she, in spite of his/her own sadness, is able to have positive emotions towards the winner and is able to be happy over his/her winning. Losers are able to experience a kind happiness over doing their best, even if it did not end with winning. By contrast, if somebody lost in an unjust way, then there are only negative emotions towards the winner and no positive ones.

The reported potential behavioral responses to winning and losing were also analyzed. Celebration of winning is characteristic of both the moral and the immoral winner. However, only in the case of a fair process does the winner celebrate together with the loser. The biggest number of answers in this case indicated an engagement with the loser (the winner congratulates the loser, consoles the loser, encourages the loser, acknowledges and praises the loser's abilities etc.). This shows that in case somebody proved to be better than an opponent among fair circumstances, then he/she is able to pay attention to the loser and strengthen a cooperative and friendly relationship. However, the cheater tries to avoid the loser and instead of trying to reduce a kind of emotional distance, strives to create a physical distance between them. The unfair winner also tries to be silent about the cheating and keep it a secret. This further isolates him/her from both the loser and the social environment. The loser who lost in a fair competition is able to keep his/her motivation and concentrates on his/her self-improvement (i.e. continues training) in order to have a higher achievement next time. At the same time, he/she does not separate himself/herself from the winner but congratulates, acknowledges and celebrates together with him/her. In contrast to this, the person who became loser as a result of an unjust competition, is mostly occupied with proving his/her truth and with taking aggressive revenge. As a result of being the victim of cheating the loser loses trust and becomes suspicious in subsequent competitive situations. In case of a fair defeat, this is not the case.

These results confirm the previous ones, that fairness and morality are one of the main determinants of the constructive or destructive nature of competition. In this case fairness means that there is a basic agreement and cooperation among the competing parties that they both keep the implicit and explicit rules of competition. When both parties can trust that this will be the case, then both the winner and loser will be able to keep a positive interpersonal relationship, social closeness and constructiveness. When parties break the basic cooperation in keeping the rules of competition, they may become enemies and this creates both emotional and behavioral distance between them. The winner cannot endorse the loser and the loser is unable to acknowledge the winner. In case of a fair process, the loser is able to devote energy to improvement while after an unfair process his/her energy is used mainly for actions against the unfair winner.

## Conclusion

The results of cultural comparisons, and the analysis of winning and losing situations prove that competition is not in a dichotomic relationship with cooperation; it is possible to compete in a cooperative way, but to be able to do this different conditions have to be present. The self-improvement type of competition, which characterized mainly Japanese participants shows that competition is not only extrinsic and performance motivated, but it is also intrinsic and mastery motivated and relates to self growth. From the Japanese data it can also be seen that it is not only the characteristic of the individualistic society and the independent self construct, but there a different kind of competition is normative and typical in societies that are collectivistic and in which the population has rather interdependent self-concept.

Different patterns of competition are determined by culture, personality and situational factors. Of course, there are other important factors, like age and gender, but these were not discussed in this paper. To the question "what makes a happy competitor" some answers and some suggestions based can be given. First of all, self improvement and self development competition can make a happy competitor. High degree of cooperation in the competitive process contributes to rewarding relationship between the competitive parties. Optimal coping strategies with winning and losing and fairness and rule keeping also make the competitor be able to use the experience of competition as a constructive force in life. It is not a question anymore if competition can contribute or not to well-being, but there is a lot to investigate the kind of competition that is able to achieve this goal both at the individual and the societal level.

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