Life Satisfaction

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Affect Experiences pertaining to feelings, emotion, or mood.

Cognitive The mental process of knowing, thinking, learning, and judging.

Collectivist Cultures Members of collectivist cultures (e.g., Japan, China, Mexico) tend to value family, belonging, and the needs of the group.

Confounding Variable A variable that is so well correlated with the variable of interest that it is difficult to determine whether differences or changes are due to the variable of interest or to the confound.

Experience Sampling A method used to evaluate a participant's experience, mood, and/or behavior at a particular point in time. Experience sampling data are generally collected over several days and participants are asked to record their responses at the moment.

Individualist Cultures Members of individualist cultures (e.g., U.S., Western Europe) tend to value individuality and independence.

Informant Data Data obtained from a significant other such as a mother, father, spouse, or friend.

Internal Consistency Reliability of a measure determined by the intercorrelations of the components or items of the measure.

Longitudinal Design A research design in which participants are evaluated over a period of time.

Meta-Analysis A technique applied to summarize the literature in a particular area and to investigate conflicting findings. This method involves gathering the results from many studies on a specific topic to determine the average comprehensive finding.

Objective Objective factors are those that are perceptible to the outside world and can be evaluated by others.

Predictor A known variable that is used to predict a change in another variable. For example, if one is interested in the extent to which exercise, weight, and smoking are related to heart disease, then one might collect information on the three predictor variables (i.e., exercise, weight, and smoking), as well as on the outcome variable (i.e., disease). Such data will

presumably tell researchers something valuable about the potential influence of exercise, weight, and smoking on the rate of disease.

Social Desirability Bias A bias reflected in participants altering their responses based on their need for social approval. For example, a respondent who is concerned with social approval may inflate her response to the interview question, "Are you a happy person," because she does not wish to appear sad or depressed to the interviewer.

Subjective Subjective factors are those that are perceived only by the affected individual; they are not perceptible to the senses of another person.

Subjective Well-Being An evaluation of one's life assessed by measures of global life satisfaction, frequency of positive affect, and frequency of negative affect.

I. DEFINITION OF LIFE SATISFACTION

SATISFACTION is a Latin word that means to make or do <u>enough</u>. Satisfaction with one's <u>life</u> implies a contentment with or acceptance of one's life circumstances, or the fulfillment of one's wants and needs for one's life as a whole. In essence, life satisfaction is a subjective assessment of the quality of one's life. Because it is inherently an evaluation, judgments of life satisfaction have a large cognitive component.

II. DISTINCTION FROM RELATED CONSTRUCTS

A. Life Satisfaction vs. Subjective Well-Being

According to Ed Diener and his colleagues (1999), subjective well-being, or happiness, has both an affective (i.e., emotional) and a cognitive (i.e.,

judgmental) component. The affective component consists of how frequently an individual reports experiencing positive and negative affect. Life satisfaction is considered to be the cognitive component of this broader construct.

B. Life Satisfaction vs. Life-Domain Satisfaction

Researchers differentiate between life-domain satisfaction and life-as-a-whole (or global) life satisfaction. Life-domain satisfaction refers to satisfaction with specific areas of an individual's life, such as work, marriage, and income, whereas judgments of global life satisfaction are much more broad, consisting of an individual's comprehensive judgment of her life.

III. INTRODUCTION

The success of a community or nation is frequently judged by objective standards. Political parties often remind citizens of the prosperity of the nation during their party's governance as a method to encourage appreciation and re-election. To persuade people that quality of life has improved under their administration, they cite such factors as low unemployment rates, greater income, lower taxes, lower crime rates, and improvements in education and health care. The quality of life of the individual, however, cannot be quantified in this manner. Indeed, objective measures of quality of life (i.e., income, education) are often weakly related to people's subjective self-reports of the extent to which they are satisfied with their lives. For example, one might predict that individuals who have suffered a traumatic spinal cord injury would be significantly less satisfied with their lives than individuals who have not suffered such an injury. However, empirical research has not supported this

contention -- in fact, disabled individuals do not report lower levels of satisfaction than non-disabled ones. It is clear that a one-to-one relationship between observable life circumstances and subjective judgments of life satisfaction does not always exist.

A great deal of psychological research has explored the sources of people's life satisfaction. These sources include one's overall wealth, whether one is single or married, male or female, or young or old. Because most researchers investigating the predictors of life satisfaction have not specifically focused on the experiences of women, this review of the life satisfaction literature will describe research conducted with both sexes. Fortunately, however, the findings of many of these studies are directly relevant to women's lives. Life circumstances such as bearing and raising children, marriage, poverty, and inequality all influence the life satisfaction of women, despite the fact that studies of these factors have not necessarily been conducted with women participants only or been specifically analyzed for gender differences. Thus, this review will focus on life satisfaction in general but with women's lives and experiences in mind.

IV. MEASUREMENT

Before delving into the literature examining the factors related to life satisfaction, it is important to discuss how life satisfaction is measured. Researchers' overwhelming choice for assessing life satisfaction is through self-report. Self-report measures require respondents to indicate the extent to which they are satisfied with their lives by selecting a symbol (i.e., a number or

a facial expression) on a rating scale (e.g., from 1 to 7). Because life satisfaction is assumed to be a judgment, researchers believe that self-report is the most direct and most accurate way to measure it.

A. Single-Item vs. Multi-Item Measures of Life Satisfaction

There are many self-report measures of life satisfaction. Some measures consist of a single question, such as, "How satisfied with your life are you overall?", whereas other measures require participants to respond to multiple items. Overall, researchers agree that multi-item scales of life satisfaction are preferable to single-item scales. Although single-item scales have adequate convergent validity (i.e., the scales correlate well with other similar measures) and satisfactory reliability (i.e., the scale measures similarly over time), only multiple-item scales allow for the assessment of internal consistency, as well as the identification of errors associated with wording and measurement. Additionally, Ed Diener (1984) has argued that multi-item scales have demonstrated greater reliability and validity overall than single-item scales. Furthermore, a meta-analysis conducted by Martin Pinquart and Silvia Sorensen (2000) found that correlations between life satisfaction and variables such as income, education, gender, and age are significantly reduced when single-item, rather than multiple-item, scales are used. Researchers speculate that single-item scales may be more susceptible to social desirability biases than multiple-item ones because the latter request a wider range of information with more specificity. Despite these concerns, however, single-item scales have tended to correlate well with the multiple-item scales, so if an abridged

version is needed, single-item scales appear to be adequate. The most widely used and most well-validated measure of life satisfaction is a multi-item scale, the Satisfaction With Life Scale.

<div align="center">B. Satisfaction With Life Scale</div>

The 5-item Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) was designed by Ed Diener and his colleagues (1985) to measure global life satisfaction. Because the authors consider life satisfaction as the cognitive component of subjective well-being, they constructed this scale without reference to affect. The language used for the scale items is relatively broad and nonspecific, allowing the respondents to evaluate their overall life satisfaction subjectively.

The SWLS has been administered to many different groups of participants and has been found to have high internal consistency and reliability across gender, ethnicity, and age. This measure also has high convergent validity – for example, it correlates well with clinical ratings of satisfaction, a memory measure of satisfaction, and informant reports of satisfaction, as well as with scales assessing self-esteem. The instructions for the SWLS ask participants to rate the following five statements on 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 7 = strongly agree):

_____ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

_____ The conditions of my life are excellent.

_____ I am satisfied with my life.

_____ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.

_____ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

C. Other Measures of Satisfaction

1. Hadley Cantril's (1965) Self-Anchoring Scale

This is a single-item measure of life satisfaction, which instructs participants to mark one rung on a ladder, with the top of the ladder labeled "best life for you" and the bottom of the ladder labeled "worst possible life for you," to indicate their life satisfaction judgment.

2. Frank Andrews and Stephen Withey's (1976) Delighted-Terrible Scale

This single-item scale requires participants to indicate their level of life satisfaction by selecting one of seven faces ranging from a happy face (smiling, delighted) to a sad face (frowning, terrible) in response to the question, "How do you feel about your life as a whole?"

D. Potential Problems with Life Satisfaction Measurement

Several concerns have been raised regarding the validity of life satisfaction measures. Critics have questioned whether people 1) are aware of their levels of satisfaction, 2) inflate their responses to appear more satisfied than they actually are, 3) confuse their own perceptions with how others perceive them, and 4) interpret the questions differently depending on their gender or their culture. Fortunately, each of these concerns appears to be unfounded. First, participants rarely fail to respond to satisfaction questions and they tend to answer such questions quickly, indicating that the extent to which they are satisfied with life is something they are well aware of and think about often. Second, as most life satisfaction assessments are conducted anonymously, there is little reason to believe that social desirability effects are

greatly inflating people's responses. Third, it is unlikely that respondents may confuse their own perceptions with that of others because then one would expect more affluent or better educated individuals to report much higher rates of satisfaction than others of less means or education. This has not generally been found. And, finally, because the SWLS is written in very general terms – a procedure that allows each individual to define life satisfaction for themselves – this widely-used life satisfaction scale appears to be gender and culture neutral (see also Section VII.A.). For example, in a recent study, Kari Tucker and colleagues found that the SWLS measures life satisfaction similarly for females and males in two different cultures.

V. HOW DO PEOPLE MAKE LIFE SATISFACTION JUDGMENTS?

We know that most people are fully capable of rating the level of their own life satisfaction. However, the question still remains, how exactly do people make such judgments? The conceptualizations of life satisfaction proposed by theorists in this area offer several clues. For example, Angus Campbell and his colleagues (1976) conceptualized life satisfaction as the difference between what one wants and what one has -- essentially, a comparison between reality and the ideal. Thus, a woman's judgment of her life satisfaction involves drawing on her personal standards and expectations for herself and assessing the extent to which her life measures up.

Alex Michalos's Multiple-Discrepancy-Theory (1986) also specifies how a woman might arrive at her personal level of satisfaction. According to this theory, satisfaction is determined by one's perceptions of "how things

are" vs. "how they should be." Comparisons between how things are and what one wants, what one had, what one expected, what others have, and what one feels one deserves combine to determine life satisfaction. Small discrepancies among these areas result in greater life satisfaction. Large discrepancies among these areas result in greater life dissatisfaction. Michalos's theory was supported using a sample of nearly 700 undergraduate participants, fifty-four percent of whom were women. Both women and men in his sample appeared to derive global satisfaction in comparable ways.

Joseph Sirgy's theory (1998) similarly mentions several comparisons that women may consider before arriving at a judgment of their life satisfaction. He suggests that expectations of what one is capable of accomplishing, one's past circumstances, one's ideals, what one feels one deserves, what one minimally requires to be content, and what one ultimately believes will occur are comparisons that help determine overall life satisfaction.

Other researchers have investigated whether people determine their personal estimates of their life satisfaction through a "top-down" or a "bottom-up" approach. If a woman were to use a top-down procedure, she might reflect on the value of her life as a whole, probe her sense or intuition for how happy and satisfied she is overall, and, therefore, conclude that she must have a good (or not-so-good) life. Alternatively, if she were to use a bottom-up approach, she might think about the various domains of her life (e.g., marriage, children, work, friendships, income) and arrive at her life satisfaction judgment based upon the average satisfaction she obtains from each of these domains. In other

words, does a woman have a good life because she is satisfied or is she satisfied because she has a good life? Preliminary research suggests that the answer is both, but additional work is needed to address this question further.

VI. WHAT DETERMINES LIFE SATISFACTION?: ENVIRONMENT VS. PERSONALITY

One of the principal questions that researchers are tackling is, what causes life satisfaction? That is, why are some women more satisfied than others? Most of the research in this area can be subsumed under two categories -- namely, evidence implicating personality (i.e., genetics, inborn traits) and evidence implicating environment (i.e., life circumstances and life events). A great deal of work has investigated whether life satisfaction is a stable, enduring trait or whether it is a variable that is highly influenced by external events and life circumstances. For example, will the experience of discrimination or harassment, the birth of a child, a divorce, purchasing a house, obtaining an advanced degree, or the day-to-day hassles of balancing work and home life greatly influence a woman's satisfaction with her life?   Alternatively, will a woman's stable characteristic patterns of responding to events determine her life satisfaction, such that she remains satisfied (or dissatisfied) despite changes in income, social relationships, employment, or other significant life events. In support of the latter view, research has shown that individuals tend to show similar levels of satisfaction across time and across many life domains. For example, women who are content with their marriages are also likely to be content with their work, their children, their financial situation, and even the

daily weather. However, this finding should not be overstated, as it is certainly possible to be dissatisfied with one's partner but satisfied with one's job. In support of the alternative perspective, another study found that the proportion of positive to negative life events experienced during the previous year predicted an individual's life satisfaction during the following year. This finding suggests that life events, such as a new marriage or a new job, may indeed significantly boost or deflate one's overall life satisfaction.

Eunkook Suh and his colleagues (1996) conducted a longitudinal study that may help explain such conflicting findings. They asked recent female and male college graduates to report their significant life events and their subjective well-being, including their life satisfaction, approximately every 6 months over a 2-year period. The results showed that the occurrence of particular life events in these students' lives was related to changes in their well-being -- but these effects did not endure. That is, recent life events in both men and women predicted changes in well-being while distal events did not, possibly because people adapt to significant life changes over long periods of time. The results of this study suggest that "personality" or "environmental" explanations in isolation may not be sufficient to explain the source of people's life satisfaction judgments. That is, life satisfaction may have both stable, trait-like components (reflecting the effect of a personality predisposition), as well as variable, state-like components (reflecting environmental influences). However, it may be impossible to entirely discriminate between these two sets of components because one's personality may influence one's life events. For

example, an extraverted woman may place herself in social situations, giving herself the opportunity to have more encounters and a greater wealth of life experiences. Indeed, Robert Plomin and his colleagues (1990) provide evidence that genes do have a small influence on the actual types of life events people experience.

Supporting the argument that personality plays a role in determining life satisfaction, personality variables such as psychological resilience, assertiveness, empathy, internal locus of control, extraversion, and openness to experience have been found to be related to life satisfaction. Furthermore, Keith Magnus and his colleagues (1993) found in a longitudinal study that personality predicted life satisfaction 4 years subsequent to the study. This pattern of results suggests that life satisfaction may have a dispositional component or at least interacts with the environment to influence life satisfaction. Finally, as previously mentioned, satisfied individuals tend to be satisfied across several life domains. Combined, these findings suggest that life satisfaction is stable over time and consistent across situations.

Further supporting the view that life satisfaction has trait-like characteristics, several studies have also found that subjective well-being, which encompasses life satisfaction, has a substantial genetic component. For example, Auke Tellegen and his colleagues showed that identical twins (who share 100% of their genes) reared in separate environments are more alike in their levels of well-being than fraternal twins (who share 50% or their genes) reared in either separate or similar environments. Future research would benefit

from studies that measure life satisfaction specifically to reach stronger conclusions about the links between personality and life satisfaction. Currently, the literature suggests that personality plays a significant role in whether a women will judge her life to be satisfying. However, proximal environmental factors (e.g., recent life events) can influence life satisfaction judgments in the short term. In conclusion, as with many variables in the field of psychology, both nature and nurture (i.e., personality and environment) appear to be influential in determining life satisfaction, and to discount one explanation in favor of the other would not be empirically or theoretically productive.

VII. DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AS PREDICTORS OF LIFE SATISFACTION

The vast majority of research on life satisfaction investigates the extent to which various demographic variables predict life satisfaction. However, because researchers are not able to perform true experiments by randomly assigning participants to demographic groups (e.g., gender, income, age), all of this research has necessarily been correlational. Much of the work has focused on the "objective" determinants of life satisfaction -- that is, the extent to which satisfaction is related to the environment, both imposed (e.g., culture) and relatively controllable (e.g., income, occupation, education, marriage), as well as to specific aspects of persons (e.g., gender, age).

A. Culture

Before describing research on cultural influences, we must revisit the question of whether life satisfaction can be measured similarly across cultures. Fortunately, satisfaction appears to be a universal term, and cross-cultural researchers have not had any difficulty translating measures of life satisfaction into many different languages. People from different cultures are able to distinguish between such terms as "happiness," "satisfaction with life," "best possible life," and "worst possible life," and there does not appear to be a linguistic bias. Thus, research suggests that life satisfaction is not a uniquely Western concept. For example, non-response and "don't know" answers to questions about life satisfaction are no more frequent in non-Western cultures than in Western ones. In sum, such evidence for the cultural universality of the construct of life satisfaction has allowed researchers to compare life satisfaction across cultures.

Current research shows that members of individualist cultures (e.g., U.S., England, Australia) report greater satisfaction relative to members of collectivist cultures (e.g., China, Japan, India). Life satisfaction also appears to vary with other cultural dimensions. For example, citizens of wealthy, industrialized nations have very high levels of satisfaction overall, and citizens of poor, third-world nations have low levels of satisfaction overall. Research suggests that once a community of people reach a decent standard of living, however, differences in life satisfaction are less likely to be related to differences in wealth.

Once subsistence levels have been reached, recent research suggests that members of different cultures reach life satisfaction judgments in distinct ways. Eunkook Suh and colleagues (1998) conducted a large international study of 61 nations, with close to 62,500 participants. Their findings suggested that members of collectivist and individualist cultures chronically rely on different types of information when assessing their life satisfaction. That is, members of collectivist cultures appear to rely on cultural norms (i.e., Am I expected to be satisfied?) to determine their life satisfaction judgments, whereas members of individualist cultures appear to rely on emotional experiences (i.e., Do I frequently feel happy and content?) as their guide to life satisfaction judgments. Interestingly, participants from Hong Kong, a collectivist city, appear to rely on emotion to determine their life satisfaction judgments. The rapid Westernization and modernization of this continually changing culture may account for this surprising finding. Moreover, it serves as an example of our earlier point that personality and environment are both important determinants of life satisfaction -- that is, that life satisfaction judgments can be fluid and subject to the changing social environment.

Reinforcing the importance of the social climate in people's life satisfaction, researchers have also found that life satisfaction is greatest among prosperous nations characterized by gender-equality, care for human rights, political freedom, and access to knowledge. Cultures that are more accepting of differences (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, religion) and those that demand equal treatment of and equal opportunity for their citizens, appear

to foster greater overall satisfaction. It is not surprising that women living in patriarchal cultures in which equal opportunities are unavailable and equal value is not afforded would experience greater dissatisfaction with their lives than women living in egalitarian cultures.

B. Gender

An apparently paradoxical finding in the literature is that women show higher rates of depression than men, but also report higher levels of well-being. At the same time, the majority of studies find no gender differences in life satisfaction. These conflicting findings can be resolved by considering the range of affect that men and women typically experience. Women report experiencing affect -- both positive and negative -- with greater intensity and frequency than do men. That is, women tend to experience greater joy and deeper sadness -- and experience these emotions more often -- than do men. Hence, measures of depression and subjective well-being, which include affective components, appear to capture the extreme lows that leave women vulnerable to depression, as well as the extreme highs that allow for greater well-being. By contrast, men and women report similar rates of global life satisfaction, which is primarily a cognitive assessment.

Despite similar levels of life satisfaction across gender, women and men appear to derive life satisfaction from different sources. For example, Ed Diener and Frank Fujita (1995) found that social resources (i.e., family, friends, access to social services) are predictive of life satisfaction for both men and women, but they are more predictive of life satisfaction for women. Perhaps

women's roles as the conservators of contact with friends and family -- both a blessing and a burden -- lead to their relatively greater reliance on social support. By contrast, factors that may be more relevant to men's personal goals, such as athleticism, influential connections, and authority, were found to be related to life satisfaction for men, but not for women.

A meta-analysis of the predictors of life satisfaction in the elderly conducted by Martin Pinquart and Silvia Sorensen (2000) found additional support for the assertion that men and women derive satisfaction from different sources. In their study, life satisfaction was more highly related to income for men than for women. The authors hypothesized that because men are more socialized to draw their sense of identity from work and income, they tend to look to income as a barometer of their success and satisfaction with their life. In addition, more women live in poverty than do men, so it may be easier for men to obtain satisfaction from their financial situation than it is for women.

Although most research on life satisfaction has not been directly focused on the experiences of women, a few studies have investigated the unique predictors of life satisfaction for women. For example, as stated previously, several studies have demonstrated that the greater the gender equality within a culture (i.e., freedom to make reproductive choices, equal pay, equal value under the law, equal opportunity to education and achievement), the greater reported life satisfaction. This finding spans both equality in the broader cultural sense and equality within a marriage. For example, Gloria

Cowan and her colleagues (1998) found that women who report greater equality in their marriages tend to report greater life satisfaction than women whose marriages are relatively more traditional. That is, women seem to achieve greater satisfaction with their lives overall when they are in marriages in which their roles are not traditionally proscribed. Marital equality may manifest itself in the sharing of household chores and responsibility for childcare, as well as equal say in family decision-making. However, this ideal is not often achieved. Susan Nolen-Hoeksema and her colleagues (1999) found that women carry the overwhelming burden in regard to household and parental responsibility, and report feeling relatively less appreciated by their spouse. Regardless of the type of marriage, however, married women report greater life satisfaction than single, widowed, or divorced women.

In further research, Arlene Metha and her colleagues (1989) conducted a survey investigating the major regrets and priorities of women. Overall, the least satisfied women surveyed reported that their greatest regret was having failed to take risks. Possibly because of women's childcare burdens, many cultures discourage women from risk-taking. However, despite their many dangers, taking risks also provides access to greater opportunities. That is, without the ability to take risks, a woman would not be able to start her own business, move to a new city, pursue a graduate education, or ask for a promotion. Thus, it would not be difficult to imagine that failing to take risks might translate into missed opportunities and greater dissatisfaction.

John Haworth and his colleagues (1997) found that, among their sample of American working women, those who had an internal locus of control (i.e., who believed that control of events comes from within themselves rather than outside of themselves) were relatively more satisfied with their lives. For example, a woman who perceives her success to be due to her hard work and determination would report greater satisfaction than a woman who perceives her success to be due to luck or chance. This is not surprising, as a belief in one's own ability to effect changes and choose the course of one's life is undoubtedly more satisfying than believing that one has no control over life's outcomes.

An additional study found that women's hostility toward other women was inversely associated with life satisfaction. That is, women who harbored hostile feelings toward other women were less likely to be satisfied with their own lives. This finding appears to correspond well with the comparison theories discussed earlier. Researchers have suggested that people's perceptions of their life satisfaction are in part due to comparisons that they make between what they have, what they want, what they used to have, and what others have. Thus, hostility toward other women may be a consequence of unfavorable social comparisons. That is, the recognition that another woman is clearly better off may be related to dissatisfaction with one's own life.

C. Age

Numerous studies have provided evidence that, contrary to common expectations, life satisfaction does not decline with age. For example, in a

cross-cultural study conducted in 40 different nations and with nearly 6,000 participants, Ed Diener and Eunkook Suh (1998) found that reported life satisfaction generally remained stable throughout the life span, showing just a slight increasing trend between the ages of 20 and 80 years.

The predominant explanation for this surprising lack of difference in life satisfaction levels across the life span is that people have an extraordinary capacity to adapt to significant life changes. In a study by Carol Ryff (1991), older participants reported smaller discrepancies between their realistic and their ideal selves than did younger participants. Perhaps, as women age, they revise their ideals to accommodate their current circumstances (i.e., engage in "accommodative coping"). For example, a woman who had intended to have three children may have only been able to bear two. With time, she might decide that having three is impractical financially and that having two is actually preferable. This conclusion would serve to decrease the discrepancy between her ideal and the reality of her life. Indeed, according to Jochen Brandtstaedter and Gerolf Renner (1990), accommodative coping does tend to increase with age. Alternatively, as women age, they may achieve their goals with greater frequency (i.e., a family, career success, and financial comfort), moving closer to their ideal self.

D. Social Relationships

Francis Bacon (1625) said that human relationships double our joys and halve our sorrows. Many studies have supported this contention. High levels of social support have been shown to be strongly associated with high levels of

life satisfaction. For example, one study found that participants who could list five or more friends were happier than participants who could not list many friends. In addition to the number of social contacts, it appears that gender is a factor in the quality of intimate relationships as well. Women tend to provide greater and more meaningful support than men. That is, both women and men report that their friendships with women are more intimate, nurturing, and supportive than their friendships with men. Perhaps this is due to the finding that conversations with women involve greater self-disclosure and empathy.

In Western nations, marriage appears to be even more predictive of life satisfaction than relationships with friends and family. Ed Diener and his colleagues (2000) found that married women do not differ in their levels of life satisfaction from married men. However, married men reported greater positive affect than did married women, as well as did single people of both genders. Thus, men appear to benefit more from marriage than do women -- possibly because husbands become dependent on their wives' emotional support and household care. This study also found that cohabitating unmarried participants, especially those from collectivist cultures, reported less life satisfaction than did married participants.

Interestingly, having children does not appear to increase people's life satisfaction, although this finding is difficult to interpret given that childless individuals are different from parents in numerous ways. However, for those who have children, the quality of their relationships with their children is highly related to their level of satisfaction with their life overall. Also, several

studies have suggested that parents' life satisfaction tends to correlate negatively with the number of children that they have -- that is, life satisfaction decreases as the number of children increases.

E. Income

The relationship between income and life satisfaction is a complicated one. It seems that within nations, wealthier individuals are more satisfied than poorer individuals. Across nations, wealthier nations also show greater levels of life satisfaction than poorer nations; however, across-nation differences are smaller than within-nation differences. Furthermore, a robust finding in this literature concerns the distribution of wealth within a nation – that is, the greater the economic disparities among income levels and classes in a nation, the greater the dissatisfaction expressed overall and the greater the disparity between satisfaction levels of the wealthy and the poor. Thus, women who live in poorer, less egalitarian nations tend to be less satisfied with their lives overall than women who live in wealthier nations.

Despite significant correlations between life satisfaction and wealth, longitudinal research has shown that rises in people's incomes do not necessarily coincide with related increases in life satisfaction. For example, Americans' levels of life satisfaction before and after World War II did not increase despite significant growth in income during this time period. Several explanations have been offered to account for these results. Perhaps once a certain level of wealth is obtained, life satisfaction is no longer anchored to increases in wealth and in material goods. In addition, social comparison may

account for this effect – that is, comparing oneself with others as income and wealth increase may produce corresponding increases in expectations such that levels of satisfaction remain stable.

F. Employment

An individual's employment status, regardless of income, appears to predict life satisfaction, such that the unemployed report significantly diminished satisfaction compared with the employed. When gender is taken into account, it appears that employment (or lack thereof) is more strongly associated with life satisfaction for men than for women. This finding is not surprising, given that there is less cultural pressure on women to work outside the home. However, this pattern may change as existing gender roles broaden. At present, men's sense of self and identity is more strongly tied to their employment status than it is for women.

G. Education

Overall, researchers have found a small correlation between education and life satisfaction. However, the correlation appears to disappear when income and occupation are statistically controlled. That is, the relationship between education and life satisfaction is probably due to the fact that higher levels of education are associated with higher incomes.

Education also appears to be more highly related to life satisfaction for individuals with lower incomes and in poor nations. Perhaps poorer persons obtain greater satisfaction from education because the achievement surpasses their expectations of what is attainable. For example, poor women in some

cultures have little access to education, so when they do gain access, they may value and appreciate the experience more than those who perceive access to education as universal and easily available. Education may also provide access to greater occupational and income opportunities, which may additionally influence life satisfaction.

Despite the overall trend suggesting that education is more strongly related to life satisfaction for the poor, recent studies have found that, in wealthy nations, the most highly educated individuals seem to be slightly dissatisfied with their lives. It is possible that the educational elite have higher expectations or greater cynicism about their lives. Indeed, income appears to be a better predictor of life satisfaction than level of education.

H. General Comments

While this review of the predictors of life satisfaction provides valuable information and raises some intriguing questions, we must be cautious in interpreting these findings because the possibility of selection effects may artificially bolster some of the results. For example, the observation that married individuals are more satisfied with their lives than unmarried ones may be confounded by the fact that more mentally healthy, extraverted, and stable individuals are able to find and sustain quality relationships with a spouse, and those factors are also correlated with life satisfaction. Similar selection effects may account for some of the findings regarding gender, income, employment, education, and age.

VIII. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The vast majority of studies investigating life satisfaction have been survey-based. Although current self-report measures of life satisfaction have good reliability and validity, the field would benefit greatly from the use of alternative methodologies. For example, expanding the measurement of life satisfaction with physiological data (e.g., skin conductance, heart rate, blood pressure, neuropsychological measures), informant data, daily experience sampling, facial expressions, and cognitive procedures (e.g. reaction times) would greatly bolster the validity of self-reports and ensure that future measures of life satisfaction are completely gender-neutral.

Studies of life satisfaction would also benefit from greater complexity of research design. Longitudinal studies and studies using causal modeling statistical techniques would bolster researchers' conclusions by moving beyond correlational methods that make it difficult to disentangle causal relationships among variables. For example, the finding that income seems to be more strongly related to life satisfaction for men than for women is difficult to interpret without greater statistical and methodological precision.

More sophisticated methodologies could also shed light on how interactions between women's personalities and their environment (i.e., nature and nurture) may influence their life satisfaction. Sonja Lyubomirsky (2000) argues that three types of personality-environment interactions may be operating in this area. One type of interaction is referred to as "reactive" – that is, satisfied women may perceive and respond to the same circumstances

differently from unsatisfied ones (e.g., cope better with poverty or adversity).
Another type of interaction is called "evocative" -- that is, satisfied women
may evoke different kinds of reactions in others (e.g., may be better liked and
more successful at obtaining jobs or marriage partners). The final type of
interaction is called "proactive" -- that is, satisfied women may find and
construct different social worlds and environments (e.g., choose to leave an
unfulfilling job or to move abroad). Empirical investigations of these
personality-environment interactions may help shed light on some of the
conflicting findings regarding the predictors of life satisfaction. For example,
studies of this kind may help reconcile the findings that life satisfaction has
been found to be both stable over time as well as influenced by recent life
events.

IX. CONCLUSIONS

Although much of the research described in this article has not
specifically addressed the experiences of women, it nevertheless provides a
great deal of information about life satisfaction in women. For example, women
who live in egalitarian nations characterized by greater gender equality are
relatively more satisfied with their lives than women who live in regions in
which more traditional gender roles are observed. In addition, women who
show an internal locus of control and less hostility toward other women, who
have less traditional marriages and relatively more friends, and who have
relatively higher incomes and greater levels of education tend to be more
satisfied with their lives. Because measures of life satisfaction have been

shown to be gender neutral, researchers can maintain a reasonable degree of confidence in these findings. Interestingly, women and men appear to differ with respect to the sources from which they derive their life satisfaction. For example, women tend to draw on social resources (i.e., friends, family, community) to assess their satisfaction with their lives, whereas men are inclined to draw on financial and occupational status. Further research, however, is needed to specify more precisely the differences in the factors related to life satisfaction judgments for men versus women. Additionally, questions such as, "Is the life satisfaction of women from diverse backgrounds (i.e., different races, cultures, ages, classes, and sexual orientations) related to a unique set of variables?" remain to be explored. Future studies focusing on the lives and experiences of women are needed to further develop and explore such questions.

<div align="center">Further Reading</div>

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