

SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING IN THE UNITED STATES  
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RACE, GENDER AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

by

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## CHAPTER ONE

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research on subjective well-being in the United States has been a topic of great interest among social scientists throughout the past three decades (Gurin, Veroff and Feld 1960; Bradburn and Caplovitz 1965; Cantril 1965; Bradburn 1969; Campbell, Converse and Rodgers 1976; Campbell 1981). George (1981, p. 345) has suggested that even though there is a substantial body of literature on this topic, the meaning and definition of subjective well-being has been fraught with methodological and conceptual problems.

One of the main problems when examining subjective well-being is terminology. Subjective well-being has been identified with the concepts of mental illness, morale, affect balance and quality of life (Andrews 1986, p. ix). All of these terms, though different in meaning, are very important to understanding the social-psychological relationship between individuals and their overall perception of the world around them (Bradburn 1969, p.6).

#### Epidemiological Studies

Research on subjective well-being has its roots in two broad frameworks: epidemiological studies of the late 1950's and 1960's (Gurin, Veroff and Feld 1960; Bradburn and Caplovitz 1965; Bradburn 1969) and social indicators

research of the 1970's ( Campbell and Converse 1972; Land and Spilerman 1975; Andrews and Withey 1976; Campbell, Converse and Rodgers 1976). Early studies of well-being focused primarily on mental health. The book Americans View Their Mental Health (Gurin, Veroff and Feld 1960) is typically regarded as the first major study on subjective well-being. Data for the study were collected in 1957 and consisted of 2,460 respondents. According to Gurin, Veroff and Feld, the study was intended as an epidemiological account focusing on "feelings of adjustment and ways which individuals cope with emotional problems" (Gurin, Veroff and Feld 1960, p. 3). These authors were primarily concerned with four aspects of mental health: the overall mental health status of Americans, feelings of happiness and unhappiness, the ways in which variables such as gender, age, marital status and income relate to satisfaction and happiness, and allowing individuals, and not mental health professionals, to make an account of their overall sense of well-being. Gurin, Veroff and Feld intended for their study to not only allow individuals to define their general adjustment, but to enable individuals to take note of their problems and seek help from a mental health professional (Gurin, Veroff and Feld 1960, p.405). Research by these authors was also implemented in anticipation that it would facilitate programs to aid individuals in need of help (Gurin, Veroff and Feld 1960, p.406).

Another study which followed in the epidemiological tradition was published by Bradburn and Caplovitz in 1965. The study, which was entitled Reports on Happiness, was designed to examine the subjective well-being of individuals in the United States (Bradburn and Caplovitz 1965, p. 1). The main objective of the Bradburn and Caplovitz study was to create a time-series study which would allow other scholars to conduct longitudinal research on psychological well-being. (Bradburn and Caplovitz 1965, p. 1). These researchers chose to study individuals who lived in communities with various degrees of stress (Bradburn and Caplovitz 1965, p. 3). They worked under the assumption that if the subjective well-being of individuals who lived in stressful environments was studied, the results might give insight into the social psychological experiences of individuals who live in stressful communities (Bradburn and Caplovitz 1965, p. 3).

Bradburn and Caplovitz found that subjective well-being is best understood "as a function of the relative strengths of the positive and negative feelings an individual has experienced in the recent past" (Bradburn and Caplovitz 1965 p. 65). In addition, Bradburn and Caplovitz found that there were differences between each of the communities selected for study. Most of the differences could be attributed to economic conditions (Bradburn and Caplovitz 1965, p. 129). Variables such as low income and unemployment had a profound impact on individuals from poor socioeconomic backgrounds.



A third important study which focuses on epidemiological characteristics is Hadley Cantril's The Patterns of Human Concern. Cantril's basic assumption was that all individuals have "subjective standards which guide behavior and define satisfaction. Furthermore, the quality of any person's relationship to his group or his society is determined by the assumptions which he has built. These assumptions define for him the degree and nature of his satisfactions or dissatisfactions with that group or society" (Cantril 1965, p. 21).

Cantril suggested that one of the problems with examining subjective well-being is that researchers judge subjective well-being by definitions set by the mental health profession. Cantril emphasized the need to examine well-being based on definitions set by individuals (Cantril 1965, p. 21).

In addition, Cantril states that researchers can never really know an individual's reality by forcing the individual to make choices from a questionnaire. According to Cantril, the key to understanding an individual's reality lies within the Self-Anchoring Striving Scale. This scale was designed to determine which aspects of life the individual is most concerned with and to determine individuals' life perceptions (Cantril 1965, p. 22). Respondents using the Self-Anchoring Striving Scale were asked to define on the basis of "their knowledge, values, and perceptions the two extremes or anchoring points of the

spectrum on which some scale measurement is desired (Cantril 1965, p. 22). Cantril found that most Americans, regardless of socioeconomic status, felt that they "have a considerable distance to go in reaching the top of the ladder of life, which is perceived in terms of a healthy, happy family life and opportunities for children" (Cantril 1965, p. 44).

### Social Indicators Movement and Survey Research on Well-Being

According to Land, "the social indicators movement began as an attempt by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to assess the impact of the space program for American society." The main purpose of the study was to assess the economic, social and technological impact of the space program (Land 1983, p.2). As research began to progress, many scholars who were involved in the initial evaluation concluded that the data which had been gathered did not allow for a comprehensive assessment (Land 1983, p. 3). Most of the scholars agreed that an economic indicator such as the nation's gross national product (GNP) might be a good measure of the status of the nation's economy, but it was not a good indicator of the social psychological well-being of the nation (Land 1983, p. 3).

The need for a measure which would allow researchers to study the social psychological well-being of individuals led to the development of the social indicators movement and the

use of three types of social indicators: normative welfare indicators, descriptive indicators and satisfaction indicators (Land 1983, p. 4).

Land states normative welfare indicators are "direct measures of welfare; if all things remain equal and it changes in the right direction, things have gotten better or people are better off." Examples of normative indicators are health rates and crime rates (Land 1983, p. 4).

A second type of social indicator is a descriptive indicator. Descriptive indicators are "indices of social conditions and changes therein for various segments of the population (Land 1983, p. 5). These types of indicators "help individuals to understand what the main features of society are, how they interrelate, and how those features and relationships change." (Land 1983, p. 5).

Satisfaction indicators are used to measure social psychological aspects such as happiness, satisfaction, life fulfillment and well-being using survey research (Land 1983, p. 6). Research using satisfaction indicators began with the work of Campbell and Converse with the publication of The Human Meaning of Social Change. Although the focus of this study was primarily on measuring subjective well-being, Campbell and Converse recognized the importance of examining society's progress from a social psychological perspective (Campbell and Converse 1972, p. 10).

One of the first studies to go beyond the epidemiology studies of the late 1950's and 1960's was Campbell, Converse

and Rodgers publication entitled Quality of American Life (Campbell, Converse and Rodgers 1976). These researchers "proposed to monitor the quality of American life" using a national random sample and survey research. (Campbell, Converse and Rodgers 1976, p. 7). The mental health tradition that preceded the work of Campbell, Converse and Rodgers viewed positive mental health as separate from negative aspects of mental health (Bradburn and Caplovitz 1965; Bradburn 1969). Campbell and associates felt the need to examine both positive and negative life experiences in order to get a more complete understanding of subjective well-being.

The main emphasis of the Campbell, Converse and Rodgers study was on life experience and satisfaction (Campbell, Converse and Rodgers 1976, p. 8). These researchers thought monitoring satisfaction was important because it had a greater relevancy to social policy (Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers 1976, p. 8) and because policy makers are more accustomed to meeting the public's need for satisfaction.

### The Definition of Subjective Well-Being

As noted above, the term subjective well-being has been linked with many other concepts. For the purposes of this research, Angus Campbell's definition of well-being will be used. According to Campbell (1981, p. 14), "well-being is primarily subjective in nature. It is a state which an

individual is cognizant of and it is made apparent to other individuals though verbal acknowledgment or behavior." The definition of well-being consists of two underlying concepts: life satisfaction and happiness. The former refers to an individual's "overall assessment of life and a long range evaluation of well-being based on ideal and real life circumstances" (George 1981, p. 350). Life satisfaction is also indicative of a cognitive state and is believed to be a more stable assessment. On the other hand, happiness is considered a temporary and effective indicator of an individual's well-being (George 1981, p. 351).

#### Conceptual Framework and Purpose of Study

The conceptualization of subjective well-being has been considered by many researchers to be problematic. One of the questions which is often elicited by the discussion of subjective well-being centers around the importance of this issue with regard to social science and policy related issues (Andrews and Withey 1972, p. 9). Although the study of subjective well-being is not grounded in a classical theoretical framework, researchers such as Andrews and Withey (1972) have offered several reasons as to why this subject is pertinent to social science and relevant to policy issues.

According to these authors, it is important to examine trends which indicate social change. The use of research methodology to determine how satisfied or how happy

individuals are in a particular society may indicate the impact which social change has had on that particular society (Andrew and Withey 1972, p. 9). Second, it is important that social scientists have an understanding of the ways in which subjective well-being is distributed throughout society. An important question which arises is : "Are some groups less satisfied with life than others and do demographic variables such as age, gender, and marital status have an impact on subjective well-being (Andrews and Withey 1972, p. 9). In addition, these authors stress the need to understand the structure of well-being and to take into account how individuals evaluate their overall feelings of life (Andrews and Withey 1972, p. 10). More importantly, Andrews and Withey stress that it is important to examine subjective well-being because "governments are responsive to expressions of dissatisfaction" (Andrews and Withey 1972, p. 10). Perhaps an understanding of individuals' well-being may lead to the development of mechanisms to maintain adequate levels of subjective well-being.

Research has shown that several factors have a profound effect on subjective well-being. Among these factors are health, family life, work, children, age and marital status (Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers, 1976; Clemente and Sauer 1976; Campbell 1981; Glenn and Weaver 1981; Glenn and McLanahan 1982; Andrews 1986). However, in most of these studies, the samples have been primarily White. Although a few researchers have used data from the National Survey of

Black Americans to examine variables which may contribute to the subjective well-being of Blacks (Broman 1988; Ellison 1990; Ellison and Gay 1990), Blacks have typically been a small subgroup of the data studied (Campbell, Converse and Rodgers 1976; Clemente and Sauer 1976; Campbell 1981; Andrews and Withey 1976).

Studies by researchers such as Ball and Robbins (1986) and Ellison (1990) have indicated that many of the variables which are commonly associated with subjective well-being among Whites, also play a significant role in determining life satisfaction and happiness among Blacks. There is some indication that the overall quality of life among Blacks is less positive than Whites (Farley and Allen, 1987) and that there has been no significant improvement in the quality of life among Black Americans in recent years.

Research concerning the subjective well-being among Blacks has been groundbreaking in nature, but very few studies have focused on the subjective well-being of Black women (Bracy 1976; Ball and Robbins 1986), and most of these studies lack an analysis of the impact of race, gender, class and the relationship of this intersection to the subjective well-being of Black women and Black men.

The primary purpose of this paper is to examine subjective well-being among Blacks in the United States. Special attention will be placed on the subjective well-being of Black women and the implications of race, gender and

class. There are three reasons why these issues will be examined.

First of all, legislation of the 1960's such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was implemented to help alleviate blatant inequality and discrimination which existed in American society at that time (Franklin and Moss, 1988). Historically, Blacks in the United States have always made significant contributions to the areas of education, natural science and social science, but the civil rights legislation of the 1960's enabled Black Americans to make further strides in the economic, political, and social sectors of American society (Bennet 1979). Also, some researchers have indicated that negative attitudes toward Blacks have declined in recent years (Schumann 1985; Jaynes and Williams 1989; Jorgenson and Jorgenson 1992). If the study of subjective well-being can be viewed as monitoring social change, it is very important that social scientists study the subjective well-being of Black Americans. In this case, an improvement in social status as well as social change in terms of real or perceived opportunities throughout the various institutions of society should be evident. Also, certain social institutions have undergone many changes during the last decade (Eitzen and Baca Zinn 1991; Kornblum and Julian 1992), and the United States is continually plagued with problems such as poverty, unequal access to health care, problems which effect the family and economic inequality (Neubeck 1991). The question



is: What is the status of subjective well-being among Black Americans in 1990 considering the legislation of the 1960's and the socio-political changes of the 1980s?

A second factor which motivates the current research is related to the current sociological debate regarding the issue of class. According to William Julius Wilson (1978), social class, not race, is an important factor determining life chances and social mobility among Black Americans, particularly middle class Blacks. More recently, Wilson has asserted that more attention should be given to the "truly disadvantaged", or individuals who are severely concentrated in urban poverty (Wilson 1987). A second question in regard to this study is: Do social class indicators (i.e. income and education) play a more important role than race in determining subjective well-being in the United States?

Third, there is a widely held belief that Black women hold a double advantage because of their racial and gender status (Epstein 1973). Black men are considered a dying species and Black women are viewed as having greater economic mobility because of their dual status. One thing that many have failed to realize is the double burden that many Black women and other women of color must face as a result of both racism and sexism (King 1990, p. 268). Furthermore, most studies fail to take into account the importance of race, gender, and class in the lives of women. Therefore, do Black women experience a greater sense of well-being because

of their dual status or do the effects of race, gender, and class present multiple burdens for Black women?

### Subjective Well-Being Among Black Americans

Social scientists have given a great deal of attention to subjective well-being in recent years (Campbell, Converse and Rodgers 1976; Campbell 1981; Clemente and Sauer 1976). However, the majority of the research on subjective well-being was designed to study the general population and not the subjective well-being of Blacks in the United States (Campbell, Converse and Rodgers 1976; Campbell 1981; Clemente and Sauer 1976; Andrews 1986; Mookherjee 1990). As a result, many of the studies which have examined the subjective well-being of Blacks are based on samples in which Blacks make up only a small subgroup of the overall sample. The basic finding supported by most research is that Blacks report lower levels of subjective well-being than Whites (Bracy 1976; Campbell 1981; Clemente and Sauer 1976; Thomas and Hughes 1986; Jackson, Chatters and Neighbors 1986; Mookherjee 1990). Bracy (1976, pp. 445-446) indicates there are several problems with using samples which were intended to study the general population for the study of subjective well-being among Blacks. First of all, researchers have found that certain demographic variables such as age, education, income and occupation are associated with subjective well-being for both Blacks and Whites, but

these indicators do not help researchers determine how discriminatory acts and other life experiences may have an impact on the subjective well-being of Blacks (Bracy 1976, p. 445). Second, Bracy has pointed out that if a study is based on a sample of the total population, the questions involved are general and one's ethnic background is not taken into consideration. According to Bracy, a study based on the experiences of Black Americans would take into consideration some of the constraints associated with being Black in the United States (Bracy 1976, p. 446). In addition, a sample with a small number of Black respondents results in a large sampling error which makes it difficult to make comparisons within the Black community (Bracy 1976, p. 447). The National Opinion Research Center has made attempts to oversample Black respondents during some years, but overall Blacks typically make up a small proportion of the annual survey conducted by this organization (Davis 1990).

Although Bracy realized the limitations of his study and many other studies which are not based on a representative sample of Black Americans, Bracy's work is probably one of the most comprehensive studies on subjective well-being among Black Americans to date. Using data from the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), Bracy examined life satisfaction, happiness, general affect and sense of stress among Blacks, and he compared Blacks to Whites with regard to each of these measures of subjective well-being (Bracy 1976, p. 447).

The results from Bracy's study show that between 1957 and 1972, Blacks report less favorably on every measure of subjective well-being except feelings of stress (Bracy 1976, p. 447). A particularly important finding by Bracy was that Black women were the least satisfied of all groups. Even when the samples were controlled for demographic variables such as income, education, age, occupation and residence, Black women still reported lower levels of subjective well-being compared to Black men, White women, and White men (Bracy 1976, p. 457). Although Bracy found that Blacks were less satisfied with every domain of subjective well-being, Blacks reported the most satisfaction with marriage, friendships, and family (Bracy 1976, p. 460).

Another study in which the researchers were primarily interested in the subjective well-being of Black Americans was conducted by Thomas and Hughes (1986). These authors were primarily interested in the significance of race for subjective well-being, as well as whether or not class was a more important determinant of subjective well-being than race (Thomas and Hughes 1986, p. 830). Thomas and Hughes examined General Social Survey data from the years 1972-1986 and their findings were similar to the findings made by Bracy in 1976. These researchers found that from 1972-1986, Blacks continued to score lower than Whites on measures of happiness and satisfaction even when demographic variables were controlled (Thomas and Hughes 1986, p. 839). Thomas and Hughes suggest that the significance of race continues despite the legal,

political and social changes which have occurred since the 1960's (Thomas and Hughes 1986, p. 840).

Andrews and Withey (1976), Clemente and Sauer (1976), Campbell (1981) and Mookherjee (1990) are all researchers who have indicated that Blacks report lower levels of subjective well-being than Whites. The aforementioned studies made some reporting about the subjective well-being among Black Americans, but these studies were not comprehensive studies about the subjective well-being of Black Americans. However, some of the findings from these studies merit some attention. Campbell (1981) found that not only are Blacks less satisfied with life than Whites, low income Blacks and urban Blacks are some of the most dissatisfied individuals in the United States (Campbell, 1981, p. 169). According to Campbell, a great deal of dissatisfaction among Blacks, particularly low income Blacks may be attributed to double jeopardy. In other words, the effects of being both Black and poor have a profound impact on the subjective well-being of some Black in the United States (Campbell 1981, p. 232). Campbell also found that Blacks who reside in the South are more content than Blacks who reside in the North (Campbell 1981, p. 147) and that Blacks have fewer friends and have less trust in people (Campbell 1981, p. 104). These differences, according to Campbell, "are not surprising considering the maltreatment that Blacks have suffered over the past 300 years" (Campbell 1981, p. 106).

Clemente and Sauer (1976) and Mookherjee (1990) also found that Blacks were less satisfied and reported less happiness than Whites. The primary focus of both of these studies was psychological well-being of individuals in the United States. Both studies used General Social Survey data. Race was only one of the demographic variables that these researchers examined (Clemente and Sauer 1976, pp. 622-623; Mookherjee 1990, p. 408). While Clemente and Sauer simply report that Blacks indicate less subjective well-being than Whites, Mookherjee also indicates that non-white women were less satisfied with their lives than any other group (Mookherjee 1990, p. 409). This latter finding lends some support to the finding by Bracy (1976).

As indicated above, most studies dealing with subjective well-being among Black Americans have typically examined the differences between Blacks and Whites or the significance of race for subjective well-being (Bracy 1976; Campbell 1981; Clemente and Sauer 1976; Mookherjee 1990; Thomas and Hughes 1986). Jackson, Chatters and Neighbors (1986), Broman (1988), Ellison, (1990) and Ellison and Gay (1990) are some of the few researchers who have made use of a representative sample of Black Americans to study subjective well-being. The latter studies have all made use of a data set known as The National Survey of Black Americans or the NSBA. The data for the NSBA were collected in 1978 by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan (Broman 1988, p. 46). The National Survey of Black Americans is unique in that it

is the first national, representative sample of Black Americans (Broman 1988, p. 46).

Unlike studies based on samples representing the general population, Jackson, Chatters, and Neighbors (1986, p. 211) found that socioeconomic indicators such as income and education had very little impact on subjective well-being among Black Americans. Previous studies have found that socioeconomic indicators were correlated with well-being (Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers 1976; Andrews and Withey 1976; Clemente and Sauer 1976; Campbell 1981). These authors also found that Blacks who live in the South are more satisfied than Blacks who reside in the North. This finding supports the finding reported by Campbell (1981). In addition, Jackson, Chatters and Neighbors found that marital status had a significant impact on life satisfaction and happiness (Jackson, Chatters and Neighbors 1986, p. 211). Although these findings are similar to previous research that was not based on the National Survey of Black Americans, the most important difference is that these researchers were able to make an "in-group analysis" of Blacks. Often times this is not possible when using a data set which is representative of the general population, but not representative of the Black population.

Some researchers using the National Survey of Black Americans have found some findings which have not been noted by previous researchers who examined subjective well-being among Black Americans. For instance, Ellison (1990) is one

of the only researchers who has attempted to examine the relationship between family ties, friendships and subjective well-being among Black Americans. Ellison found that "affective bonds among extended family members are related to personal happiness among Blacks, regardless of age, but kinship ties are only associated with life satisfaction among elderly Black Americans" (Ellison 1990, p. 305). In addition, friendship networks are related to general happiness, but not to overall life satisfaction (Ellison 1990, p. 305).

Ellison and Gay (1990) used the National Survey of Black Americans to examine the relationship between religious commitment and life satisfaction. The basic assumption held by Ellison and Gay was that the church has played both a social and cultural role in the Black community (Ellison and Gay 1990, p. 124). Ellison and Gay were interested in the effects that religion could have on the subjective well-being of Black Americans. These researchers indicate that religious affiliation is very important to many Black Americans (Ellison and Gay 1990, p. 139). In addition, there were some differences among Blacks with regard to denomination. Ellison and Gay report that "non-southern members of churches which are considered traditional Black denominations (i.e. Baptists and Methodists) and Southern Catholics reported high levels of satisfaction" (Ellison and Gay 1990, pp. 12-128).

Thomas and Holmes (1992) make an attempt to move away from merely looking at the effects of race on subjective



well-being. Using the Quality of American Life surveys of 1972 and 1978, these authors attempt to examine the determinants of subjective well-being among Blacks and Whites (Thomas and Holmes 1992, p. 459). Thomas and Holmes worked under the assumption that determinants of life satisfaction would be different for Blacks and Whites (Thomas and Holmes, 1992 p. 464).

The authors of this study found that there were similarities as well as differences. For instance, social relationships are important for both Whites and Blacks and age is positively related to subjective well-being for both groups (Thomas and Holmes 1992, p. 460). On the other hand, socioeconomic indicators are associated with increasing satisfaction for Whites, but not for Blacks (Thomas and Holmes 1992, p. 464).

Gender differences were not significant for Whites, but among Blacks, Black women report lower levels of satisfaction. This finding is consistent with Bracy (1976) and Mookherjee (1990). In addition, religious participation was a key determinant of life satisfaction for Blacks but not for Whites (Thomas and Holmes 1992, p. 463).

## CHAPTER TWO

### DATA AND METHODS

#### Sample

The data for this study consisted of responses to questions from the 1990 General Social Survey (Davis 1990). This survey consists of a national representative sample of noninstitutionalized individuals who reside in the United States. The sampling technique used in this survey is a stratified, full probability sample. The use of this technique assures that every household, racial group, age group, and gender has an equal chance of being selected. Data for 1, 150 individuals were available for the General Social Survey. Out of the 1, 150 respondents only 159 were Black. Since there was such a large racial imbalance, a subsample of 159 Whites was randomly drawn, making the total number of individuals in this study 318.

Table 1 displays the background characteristics of the respondents. Overall, the majority of the respondents were female and over half the respondents were between the ages of 30-39 and over 60. Table 1 also indicates that 61% of the respondents reported an income which was greater than or equal to \$15, 000 and 52% of the respondents had completed more than twelve years of school. In addition, 56% of the

respondents in the sample were married. Compared to Whites, the majority of Blacks in this sample were younger and they reported earning less income. Also, 65% of Blacks were not married compared to 44% of Whites.

Table 1. Background Characteristics

	Black		White	
	N	%	N	%
Sex				
Female	94	60	94	60
Male	65	40	63	40
Age				
less than 20	8	5	6	3
20-29	34	15	22	13
30-39	40	25	35	22
40-49	27	16	31	19
50-59	24	15	18	11
60 and older	36	22	46	29
Income				
<5,000	4	5	10	10
5,000 - 9,999	13	16	11	11
10,000 - 14,999	15	18	14	15
≥ 15,000	48	6	57	61
Education				
< H.S.	47	29	37	23
H.S.	48	30	39	24
> H.S.	64	40	83	52
Marital Status				
Not married	104	65	70	44
Married	55	35	89	56

### Measurement

The 1990 General Social Survey contains seven questions related to subjective well-being. After reviewing the literature and running a preliminary statistical analysis, the author of this study decided to use only five of the

subjective well-being questions. In order to examine the research questions, the researcher chose to use responses from questions relating to satisfaction with family, friends, work, health ,and general happiness.

The respondents for the 1990 General Social Survey were read the following statement regarding satisfaction with family, friends, and health: "For each area of life I am going to name, tell me the number that shows how much satisfaction you get from that area." The seven possible responses included: a very great deal, a great deal, quite a bit, a fair amount, some, a little, and none. Respondents were asked the following question regarding satisfaction with work: "On the whole, how satisfied are you with the work you do--would you say you were satisfied, moderately satisfied, a little dissatisfied, or very satisfied." General happiness was measured using the following question: "Taken altogether, how would you say things are these days--would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?" These satisfaction and happiness variables constitute the dependent variables.

Race, gender and marital status were coded as dummy variables. For the variable RACE, Whites were scored one and Blacks were scored zero. The variable SEX was recoded so that males equal one and females equal zero. Marital status was recoded so that respondents who were married were scored one and respondents who were not married were scored zero. In order to examine the subjective well-being of Black women,

the dummy variable FEMALE was created. Black women were coded as one and White women were coded as zero. These variables constitute the independent variables.

Many researchers examine well-being by creating an index using the satisfaction variables and the index becomes a measure of satisfaction for the respondents. Preliminary procedures showed that creating an index of satisfaction was not in the best interest for this study, so each well-being measure will be examined separately. There is also a distinct difference between satisfaction and happiness, and one of the objectives of this research is to determine whether or not Black Americans report less satisfaction and happiness.

Subjective well-being was measured using four satisfaction variables and one variable for happiness. These variables are: SATFAM (satisfaction with family), SATFRND (satisfaction with friendships), SATJOB (satisfaction with work), SATHEALT (satisfaction with health) and HAPPY (general happiness).

### Hypotheses

1. There is an inverse relationship between being Black and subjective well-being.
  - (1a) There is an inverse relationship between being Black and satisfaction with family.
  - (1b) There is an inverse relationship between being Black and satisfaction with friends.
  - (1c) There is an inverse relationship between being Black and satisfaction with health.

- (1d) There is an inverse relationship between being Black and satisfaction with work.
- (1e) There is an inverse relationship between being Black and general happiness.
- 2. There is an inverse relationship between being a Black female and subjective well-being.
  - (2a) There is an inverse relationship between being a Black female and satisfaction with family life.
  - (2b) There is an inverse relationship between being a Black female and satisfaction with friendships.
  - (2c) There is an inverse relationship between being a Black female and satisfaction with health.
  - (2d) There is an inverse relationship between being a Black female and satisfaction with work.
  - (2e) There is an inverse relationship between being a Black female and general happiness.
- 3. There is a positive relationship between structural variables and the five indicators of subjective well-being.
  - (3a) Being male is positively related to satisfaction with family, satisfaction with friends, satisfaction with work, satisfaction with health and general happiness.
  - (3b) Age is positively related to satisfaction with family, satisfaction with friends, satisfaction with work, satisfaction with health, and general happiness.
  - (3c) Educational attainment is positively related to satisfaction with family, satisfaction with friends, satisfaction with work, satisfaction with health and general happiness.
  - (3d) Income is positively related to satisfaction with family, satisfaction with friends, satisfaction with work, satisfaction with health, and general happiness.
  - (3e) Being married is positively related to satisfaction with family, satisfaction with

friends, satisfaction with work, satisfaction with health and general happiness.

4. Race has an effect on the relationship between the structural variables and the five measures of subjective well-being.
  - (4a) Race has an effect on the relationship between being male and satisfaction with family, satisfaction with friends, satisfaction with work, satisfaction with health, and general happiness.
  - (4b) Race has an effect on the relationship between age and satisfaction with family, satisfaction with friends, satisfaction with work, satisfaction with health, and general happiness.
  - (4c) Race has an effect on the relationship between educational attainment and satisfaction with family, satisfaction with friends, satisfaction with work, satisfaction with health and general happiness.
  - (4d) Race has an effect on the relationship between income and satisfaction with family, satisfaction with friends, satisfaction with work, satisfaction with health, and general happiness.
  - (4e) Race has an effect on the relationship between being married and satisfaction with family, satisfaction with friends, satisfaction with work, satisfaction with health, and general happiness.
5. Race, gender, and socioeconomic status will be the best determinants of subjective well-being.
  - (5a) Race, gender, and socioeconomic status will be the best determinants of satisfaction with family.
  - (5b) Race, gender, and socioeconomic status will be the best determinants of satisfaction with friends.
  - (5c) Race, gender, and socioeconomic status will be the best determinants of satisfaction with work.
  - (5d) Race, gender, and socioeconomic status will be the best determinants of satisfaction

with health.

- (5e) Race, gender, and socioeconomic status will be the best determinants of general happiness.

### Statistical Analysis

Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were tested by using bivariate correlations (Pearson's  $r$ ). In order to determine the effects of race when examining the relationship between indicators of socioeconomic status and subjective well-being, a partial correlation was performed to test hypothesis 4. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine whether race, gender, or socioeconomic status was the best predictor of each measure of subjective well-being.



## CHAPTER 3

### FINDINGS

Hypothesis 1: There is an inverse relationship between being Black and the measures of subjective well-being.

Results from the zero order correlations in Table 2 indicate that there is an inverse relationship between being Black and the subjective indicators of well-being. Being White is positively correlated with each of the five measures of subjective well-being.

Among the variables used to measure subjective well-being, only the correlation coefficients obtained for the relationship between the variable RACE and satisfaction with friendships and satisfaction with work were significant at the .01 level. Although the correlations between RACE and the remaining indicators of subjective well-being were not significant at either the .01 level or .05 level, the results indicate that blacks still report lower levels of satisfaction with family life and health, as well as lower level of general happiness. In addition, the mean scores for the five measures of subjective well-being by race and gender displayed in Table 3 appears to indicate that Blacks report lower levels of subjective well-being.

Table 2. Zero Order Correlations for Selected Variables

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
(1) Race	---	-1.0	.08	.14	-.03*	.21**	.04	.12	.23**	.07	.19**	.11
(2) Female		---	-.11	-.09	.15	-.23**	.07	-.14	-.30**	-.11	-.24**	-.16*
(3) Age			---	-.20**	.17*	.01	-.30**	-.20**	-.03	-.29**	-.07	-.04
(4) Education				---	.29**	.05	.28**	.17**	.16*	.27**	.15*	-.01
(5) Income					---	.06	.11	-.01	.06	.09	.18**	-.07
(6) Marital						---	.07	.37**	.14*	.10	.14*	.30
(7) Health							---	.32**	.18*	.67**	.26**	.24**
(8) SatFam								---	.45**	.47**	.26**	.54**
(9) SatFrnd									---	.46**	.27**	.36**
(10) SatHealt										---	.22**	.36**
(11) SatJob											---	.37**
(12) Happy												---

Race (W=1, B=0)

Female (B=1, W=0)

Marital (1=married, 0=not married)

\* P<.05

\*\* P<.01

\*\*\* P<.001

Table 3. Mean Scores for Selected Variables by Race and Gender

Variables	Total	BLACKS		Total	WHITES	
		Females	Males		Females	Males
SATFAM	5.42	5.44	5.40	5.76	5.83	5.66
SATFRND	5.25	5.15	5.40	5.90	6.02	5.71
SATHEALT	5.19	5.03	5.41	5.40	5.40	5.41
SATJOB	3.10	3.04	3.24	3.43	3.45	3.40
HAPPY	2.10	2.08	2.12	2.28	2.26	2.18

Hypothesis 2: There is an inverse relationship between being a Black female and the indicators of subjective well-being.

Table 2 depicts the relationship between being a Black female and the indicators of subjective well-being. Each of the correlations between the variable FEMALE and the measures of subjective well-being is a negative one. These results show that black women report less satisfaction and less happiness than White women. Although each of the correlations between the variable FEMALE and the indicators of subjective well-being is negative, two of the correlation coefficients, satisfaction with job and satisfaction with friendships, are significant at the .01 level. The correlation between FEMALE and general happiness is significant at the .05 level.

Table 3 also depicts the mean scores for each subjective well-being variable by gender. It is evident that Black women report lower levels of subjective well-being than their

counterparts in every area except satisfaction with family. In this case, Black men appear to report less satisfaction with family life than Black women, White women and White men.

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between structural variables and the five indicators of subjective well-being.

According to Table 2, marital status is positively correlated with life satisfaction and general happiness. The correlations between marital status and satisfaction with friendships and satisfaction with work are both significant at the .05 level. In addition, the relationship between marital status and satisfaction with friendships and the relationship between marital status and general happiness are both significant at the .01 level.

Both measures of SES are positively correlated with satisfaction with friends, satisfaction with health and job satisfaction. The results show that as education and income increase, general happiness decreases slightly and is not statistically significant. The correlation between education and satisfaction with friends and satisfaction with work are significant at the .05 level. Also, there are significant relationships at the .01 level between education and satisfaction with family and satisfaction with health. Only the relationship between income and satisfaction with work was significant at the .01 level.

The correlation between age and subjective well-being is a negative relationship. This finding supports the findings by Clemente and Sauer (1976) which showed that as a person

became older, subjective well-being declined. The relationship between age and satisfaction with family and satisfaction with health were both significant at the .01 level.

Hypothesis 4: Race has an effect on the relationship between the structural variables and the five measures of subjective well-being.

From Table 3 it can be seen that the relationship between education and satisfaction with friends and the relationship between education and satisfaction with work were found to be significant at the .05 level. When these relationships are controlled for race (Table 4), the results are no longer a significant relationship. The relationship between education and satisfaction with health are both significant at the .01 level. However, when race is entered as a control variable, neither of these relationships is

Table 4. Partial Correlation Coefficients for Selected Independent Variables and Five Variables Of Well-Being Controlling For Race

	<u>SATFAM</u>	<u>SATFRND</u>	<u>SATJOB</u>	<u>SATHEALT</u>	<u>HAPPY</u>
Sex (1=M, 0=F)	-.05	-.03	-.03	.15	.15
Age	-.07	.04	.07	-.15	-.18
Educ	.02	.14	.13	.09	.05
Income	.04	.05	.11	-.03	-.06
Marital	.34	.15	-.02	.13	.31

significant. The relationship between income and satisfaction with work was significant before race was entered as a control variable. When race was controlled, the

relationship was weakened but still significant. This shows that race has little effect. None of the correlations between the indicators of socioeconomic status and happiness were significant, but when the relationships are controlled for race, it appears that race does have some effect on the relationship between the indicators of SES and general happiness.

Hypothesis 5: Race, gender, and socioeconomic status will be the best determinants of subjective well-being.

Tables 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 depict the results of the multiple regression analysis for each of the subjective well-being variables. Here all of the independent variables are considered for each of the dependent variables to determine which variable was the best predictor. In Table 5, it can be seen that the best predictor of satisfaction with family is marital status. This variable explains 9% of the variance ( $R^2=.09$ ) followed by age and health. The three variables were significantly related and together they explain 13% of the total variance in satisfaction with family.

Table 5. Stepwise Multiple Regression Coefficients and R-Square Change For SATFAM

<u>Variables</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>Beta</u>	<u>F-value</u>	<u>R squared change</u>
Marital	.73	.30	38.74*	.09
Age	-.01	-.14	26.22*	.12
Health	.19	.11	19.15*	.13

Constant 5.17

\* < .001

Table 6 depicts the regression coefficients for satisfaction with friends. Two variables, FEMALE and EDUC were the best determinants of satisfaction with friends.

Table 6. Stepwise Multiple Regression Coefficients and R-Square Change for SATFRND

<u>Variables</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>Beta</u>	<u>F-value</u>	<u>R-- Squared Change</u>
Female	-.57	-.17	11.47*	.03
Educ	.04	.12	8.47*	.04
Constant	5.27			

\* < .001

The variable FEMALE was the best predictor and this variable explained 3% of the variance, while EDUC explained 1% of the variance. Together, these variables account for 4% of the total variance in satisfaction with friendships.

The best predictor of satisfaction with health was age followed by education. These variables accounted for 6% and 3% of the variance. As indicated in Table 8, 9% of the total variance in satisfaction with health is explained with these two variables.

Table 7. Stepwise Multiple Regression Coefficients and R-Square Change for SATHEALT

<u>Variables</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>Beta</u>	<u>F-Value</u>	<u>R Square Change</u>
Age	-.01	-.20	22.54*	.06
Educ	.07	.18	17.68*	.09
Constant	5.11			

\* < .001

Satisfaction with work (Table 8) was determined by three variables: health, female and income. Health was the best predictor ( $R^2=2$ ) followed by FEMALE ( $R^2=3$ ) and RINCOME ( $R^2=2$ ). Overall these three variables account for 7% of the variance.

Table 8. Stepwise Multiple Regression Coefficients And R-Square Change For SATJOB

<u>Variables</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>Beta</u>	<u>F-Value</u>	<u>R-Square Change</u>
Health	.16	.15	11.03*	.02
Female	-.32	-.16	10.00*	.05
Income	.05	.15	9.81*	.07

Constant 2.50

\* < .001

In addition, general happiness (Table 9) was predicted by marital status and health. Marital status accounted for 9% of the variance and health accounted for 3% of the variance. Overall, 12% of the variance in general happiness is explained by these two variables.

Table 9. Stepwise Multiple Regression Coefficients and R-Square Change for HAPPY

<u>Variables</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>Beta</u>	<u>F-value</u>	<u>R Square Change</u>
Marital	.35	.29	36.61*	.09
Health	.16	.18	26.02*	.12

Constant 1.55

\* < .001



## CHAPTER FOUR

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research has focused on three areas: subjective well-being among Black Americans, the effects of race on the relationship between demographic variables and subjective well-being and the predictors of subjective well-being. It was initially proposed that Blacks in the United States would report less favorably on measures of well-being compared to Whites. The findings from this study suggest that Blacks are indeed less satisfied with various aspects of life compared to Whites and Black Americans report less favorably on measures of general happiness than Whites.

Although these findings are similar to those reported in previous studies, these findings should be examined with caution (Bracy 1976; Broman 1988; Clemente and Sauer 1976; Thomas and Hughes 1986; Mookherjee 1990). Bracy (1976) and Broman (1988) have clearly stated that using data sets in which Blacks constitute a small subgroup of the total sample poses several limitations. For instance, the questions on the survey are general and fail to take into account the racial background of the respondent. Consequently, questions which could paint a clearer picture of the respondent's individual life experiences and realities are not included as survey

questions. The findings from this study indicate that Blacks report lower levels of well-being, but the underlying causes of this phenomenon are not totally clear. Is this finding the result of discrimination or class issues?

Also, a small number of Black respondents limits the ability of the researcher to make comparisons within groups and results in a large sampling error. Perhaps factor analysis or discriminant function analysis could have been used to look at the variables within each group (i.e. Black men, Black women, White women and White men) thereby providing a clearer picture of the situation. Unfortunately, a subsample of this size limits such an analysis.

Black women were found to be less satisfied than Black men, White women and White men on every measure of satisfaction except satisfaction with family. In this case, Black males report the lowest level of satisfaction. These results support the findings of Bracy (1976), Mookherjee (1990) and Thomas and Holmes (1992). In addition, Black women report the lowest levels of happiness compared to Black men, White women, and White men.

Very few studies have focused primarily on the subjective well-being of Black women (Ball and Robbins 1988). The myth that Black women enjoy a double advantage probably accounts for the paucity of research on their subjective well-being (Epstein 1973). Such beliefs may have caused researchers to overlook the triple impact that race, gender,

and class may have on the lives of Black women and other minority women.

Current discussion surrounding the roles of Black men and women typically regard the Black man as either a dying species who is a constant victim of the criminal 'injustice' system, or a threat to the establishment if he is attempting to become successful within the education, political or economic system. Given this argument, one would think that being a Black male in the United States would result in lower scores for Black men on various measures of subjective well-being.

The results of this study show that Black women report less favorably on almost all measures of subjective well-being compared to their counterparts. Obviously being a Black and female plays some role in determining one's subjective well-being, but the extent to which these differences are affected by race and gender has not been determined. Some scholars have examined the ways in which Black women have historically juggled the roles of wage earners and family caretaker (Giddings 1984; Jones 1985) and coping strategies of Black women have also attracted the attention of scholars (Meyers 1984; Scott 1992). Perhaps a further examination of the how multiple roles effects the subjective well-being of Black women is needed.

This study also examined the effect of race on the relationship between demographic variables and measures of subjective well-being, as well as the predictors of

subjective well-being. Race had an effect on the each of the relationships between structural variables and subjective well-being. In addition, the variable RACE was never a main predictor of subjective well-being, but the variable FEMALE (Black women=1 and White women=0) was a key determinant of satisfaction with friends and satisfaction with work. Indicators of socioeconomic status were also key determinants of subjective well-being. Education was the second best predictor of satisfaction with friendships and satisfaction with health. Income was a key determinant of satisfaction with work.

Overall, the results from the 1990 General Social Survey support the hypotheses posed by the researcher of this study. One of the major objectives of previous research of subjective well-being was to monitor the quality of individual life experiences in an attempt to make policy makers aware of the needs of individuals. To some extent it can be argued that the needs of Blacks, and more specifically the needs of Black women need to be analyzed more thoroughly. It is evident that race may be an important factor when examining subjective well-being, but the way in which race, gender, and class interact to generate unfavorable feelings of well-being is unclear.

Furthermore, attention should be focused on the dissatisfaction of minority groups considering the structural changes being forecast by demographers. Takaki notes that by the twentieth century, people of color will constitute over

30% of the United States population. In some states such as California, predictions suggest that racial minorities will constitute the majority of the population by the end of this decade (Takaki 1987, p. 9).

If the demographers' predictions are indeed true, these demographic changes will have some very important implications for the economic, political and technological progress of the United States (Takaki 1987, p. 10). Currently, Blacks are the largest minority group in this country, but they are disproportionately represented in the statistics on poverty and AIDS cases. In addition, Blacks receive less adequate health care and suffer high unemployment and underemployment rates. If the United States is going to progress into the 21st century, it can not allow institutional discrimination and classism to continue to have dire effects on certain segments of the population.

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