

SATISFACTION

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**THIS IS THE KERNEL OF A NEW BOOK ALL
COMMENTS ARE WELCOME NOT TO BE QUOTED
WITHOUT PERMISSION**

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APPENDIX A ANALYSES WITH SELF-DEFINED
SATISFACTION

The results of any analysis will depend on how the dependent variable ---- the thing to be explained is defined and measured. In the body of the text, we have measured "satisfaction" in a particular way; the question this Appendix addresses is whether our conclusions would change much if we measured it differently.

Someone might argue, for example, that people substitute goals and accommodate to reality so that, in the end, they end up with virtually as much satisfaction as they can hope to get. As Tepperman argued in Choices and Chances, people learn to want what they get, not remain in a state of gross, unrequited desire. If so, satisfaction scores should be essentially the same for all people.

Are people roughly equally satisfied with life, and are measurable variations small and essentially random: unexplainable by any systematic variation in life goals or otherwise? To answer this question is the purpose of the present analysis.

No one is better equipped to judge people's satisfaction than the people themselves, since satisfaction is a subjective phenomenon. If so, "errors" in our data will reflect systematic distortion lies, momentary changes of heart, lack of insight into real feelings but these too are real reports on satisfaction too: albeit, unreliable, incomplete ones. We argued earlier that an important problem with self-reporting of

satisfaction is that a single measure gives less variation than a multi-item scale. So we are bound to get less predictive power when analysing a single-item global self-report of satisfaction, as well as less reliability and more distortion.

Be that as it may, we do well to examine people's own global assessment of their satisfaction and compare the results with what we have reported above. The global measure used here is the response people gave to the question: "All things considered, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your life as a whole? Which number (from 0 = the worst life you can imagine, to 10=the, best life you can imagine, comes the closest to how you feel?"

Analysing the answers to this question by life-goal group reveals the following:

	Global_Life_Satisfaction	
	_mean_score	standard _deviation
Self-centred	8.354	1.748
Heaven-centred	8.660	1.644
Money-centred	8.186	1.883
Family-cent red	8.601	1.609

These results show, first, that the mean scores of the four groups are very close together ----- much closer than they were when we used our multi-item measure. On the other hand, the standard deviations are quite wide relative to the means. Just as we predicted, the single-item measure gives less variance in the dependent variable than our multi-item measure.

Results using this single item are also substantively somewhat different from before. Now, the heaven-centred respondents appear most satisfied, followed closely by the family-centreds; this reverses the order we found with the multi-item measure. Likewise, the money-centreds are least satisfied, followed closely by the self-centreds. This is also reverses the order we found earlier. But in general, whichever measure we use, the two most satisfied groups stay the most satisfied and the two least satisfied groups stay the least satisfied.

Carrying out the same regression procedures we used with the multi-item measure of satisfaction gives the expected reduction in the variance our predictor variables can account for. For all of the four groups, variance explained drops by about one-third, from 45-60% to 35-40%, using the single item measure. This is simply because there is less variation to explain in the single-item measure of satisfaction.

As before, the same dozen or so predictor variables play a major part in predicting satisfaction: optimism, congruence, loneliness, tranquillity, hugs and kisses, age and physical health among them. However, an important change does take place. In the analyses reported above, we found that the six states of mind explained little additional variance once the satisfying experiences were taken into account. By and large, the states of mind were intervening variables which carried the effects

of satisfying experiences into satisfaction. But this is no longer true when we measure satisfaction with a single, global item.

Now, we find that the state of mind variables have become the dominant predictors of satisfaction and the satisfying experiences, secondary, when all are entered in the regression equation. Among satisfying experiences, hugs and kisses remain reasonably important for all groups except the money-centred; but age becomes a very unimportant predictor for the self-centred, and physical health very unimportant for all groups except the family-centred. Job improvement experienced in the past two years remains an important predictor for the money-centred and family-centred groups.

On the other hand, the four groups continue to differ in many of the same ways as we found earlier. That is, variable X continues to be a particularly important or unimportant influence on satisfaction for Group A, not Group B, just as before. Where changes occur, it is largely because of the general shrink in variance of the dependent variable, and the general shrink in the overall influence of a given independent variable.

So, in summary, the same major variables are important to the same groups as before, whichever way we measure satisfaction: but satisfying experiences and states of mind reverse their overall order of importance.

This does not make the single self-assessment of satisfaction "unreal", merely peculiar or particular. The single-item measure of global satisfaction is fairly highly correlated with many of the domain satisfactions (e.g., over $r=.4$ for satisfaction with way spare time is spent, with present income, standard of living, present financial situation; also, over $r=.35$ for satisfaction with health, friendships). On the other hand, it averages a lower correlation -----closer to $r=.2$ -----for satisfactions related to love, marriage and parenting.

Given the high degree of importance Canadians appear to attribute to the latter domain satisfactions, it seems hard to believe they really do not matter to their satisfaction overall. Perhaps, when people are asked how satisfied they are with life overall, they take love, marriage and other stable, intimate relations for granted and base their assessment on more public, rapidly changing (hence, current and pressing) domains of life.

This is to say, then, that the single-item measure of satisfaction is less likely to give over-time (or test-retest) reliability, in the way that a multi-item measure would do. Said otherwise, the multi-item measure may be a "trait" measure while the single-item is a "state" measure. (It would be desirable to verify that the multi-item measure really does provide a stabler assessment of life satisfaction than the single-item measure.)

If our conclusion is valid, it makes more sense to advise people on life strategies using information on long-term "traits", rather than on transient "states". Therefore it makes more sense to base our advice on findings derived from the multi-item measure of satisfaction, as we have done above. However it would be desirable to verify, when possible, that the multi-item measure really does provide a stabler assessment of life satisfaction than the single-item.