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WORK STATUS AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE*

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ABSTRACT. The general thesis from which this paper derived is that objective conditions are related to perceptions and evaluations of those conditions, but that such relationships are mediated by personal characteristics such as expectation and aspiration levels, and other motivational factors. The specific relationship examined is that between work status and overall life satisfaction among women. Although there is little difference in average levels of life satisfaction expressed by housewives and by women working outside the home, substantial differences emerge when women are distinguished by their motivation with respect to paid work: among women who want jobs, working women are more satisfied with their lives than are housewives; while among those who would prefer not to work, housewives are more satisfied. Evidence is also found in support of a hypothesis that work tends to be less central to the overall quality of women's lives than is true for men.

'Quality of life' is a voguish concept that has perhaps already passed its prime, and one that suffers, like other catch phrases, from a lack of any clear definition. In various guises, it is central to a wide variety of empirical studies. For example, the quality of life in several American cities has been compared by using a collection of social indicators, including crime rates, unemployment rates, infant mortality rates, and average income (Flax, 1972). Changes in the quality of American life have been examined using time series data about such topics as housing adequacy, educational attainment, and recreational facilities (U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 1973). In both of these reports, and in numerous other reports, the primary if not exclusive emphasis is on what have been called objective social indicators, by which is meant quantifiable characteristics of the environments within which people live, work, and play. In contrast to objective indicators of the quality of life are direct expressions by individuals about the quality of their own lives. The relationship between the objective indicators of the sort generally used by scientists or public officials to assess relative life quality, and subjective indicators, the expressions of people about their own lives, is largely unknown; but it is certainly the case that there is not a simple correspondence between these two types of indicators. How people feel about their own lives depends

on a wide variety of psychological processes, such as expectations and values, in addition to the environmental factors of the sort that are measured by objective indicators.

There is considerable potential value, both theoretical and practical, in learning more about the linkages between environmental conditions and subjective evaluations of those conditions. Such information would offer, from a practical standpoint, guidelines about what aspects of the environment breed discontent for what kinds of people, and why. It might also suggest more effective ways for administering goods and services so as to minimize feelings of inequity and insufficiency, and counterproductive types of behavior. From a more theoretical standpoint, such information would be valuable in increasing our understanding of the psychological and sociological processes involved in perception and evaluation of environmental stimuli. In another context, a conceptual model to guide in the exploration of such linkages has been presented (Marans and Rodgers, 1975).

This paper will present data from a survey study of the subjective quality of the lives of Americans (Campbell *et al.*, 1976). The interviews included questions about a set of approximately 12 so-called 'domains of life experience', an amorphous term including environmental contexts (such as housing and community); social roles (such as work and marriage); and personal characteristics (such as educational attainment and health).

Among the objectives of the study was that of assessing the importance of particular domains of experience to the overall quality of life. The present paper is concerned with analyses that were designed to elucidate the importance of one particular domain, that of work. There are several possible strategies for assessing the importance of a domain of experience. To be specific, consider how one might define and measure the importance of marriage to the overall quality of life for American adults. One definition of importance might be in terms of the causal influence of marital satisfaction on overall life satisfaction. Causal influence, in turn, might be assessed by a regression analysis, predicting to a measure of overall life satisfaction from marital satisfaction, perhaps along with a set of other domain satisfactions. (Note that this definition implies analysis of a restricted sample, excluding those who are not currently married.) Another definition of importance would be more direct, the statements of individuals about the importance they themselves attach to having a happy marriage. (In this case, even more than others, careful attention must be given to the validity of the measures,

since past research has suggested that people may not be very adept at reporting the importance to them of a state or value.) A third definition of importance is available for those domains in which it makes sense to speak of their presence or absence: in such a case, the apparent effects of the domain can be analyzed by comparisons of individuals with and without that type of experience. Thus the importance of the domain of marriage might be evaluated by comparisons of married and unmarried individuals. It turns out that all three approaches lead to the reasonable conclusion that marriage is a highly important domain of life. The relationship between marital satisfaction and life satisfaction is stronger than that for most other domains; respondents tell us that a happy marriage is more important than almost any other domain (Campbell *et al.*, 1976: 85); and unmarried people (especially the divorced and separated) are considerably less satisfied with their lives than are married respondents, on the average.

The importance of the domain of work, as measured by either of the first two strategies, is somewhat less than that of marriage: the relationship between work satisfaction and overall life satisfaction is moderately strong, but exceeded by several other domains; and the respondents tend to rate the importance of a good job below that of several other domains. The main purpose of this paper is to examine the data for evidence about the importance of the work domain by pursuing the third strategy suggested above: how does the quality of life differ for individuals in different work status categories? The analysis will be limited, for the most part, to women, primarily because there is a more readily available alternative to having a paid job for women than is true for men in our present-day society. It is true that for men as well as women at the two ends of the age distribution, the alternatives of student status and retirement are available, and it is also true that a few percent of the population are unemployed; but the alternative role of housewife is available to women, whereas a comparable role for men is only an idea whose time has not come.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The major theoretical notion that underlies the analysis reported in this paper can be stated very simply: People's reactions to their environments depend on how well those environments match their own needs and values. This can be elaborated at some length, and has been by, among others, the

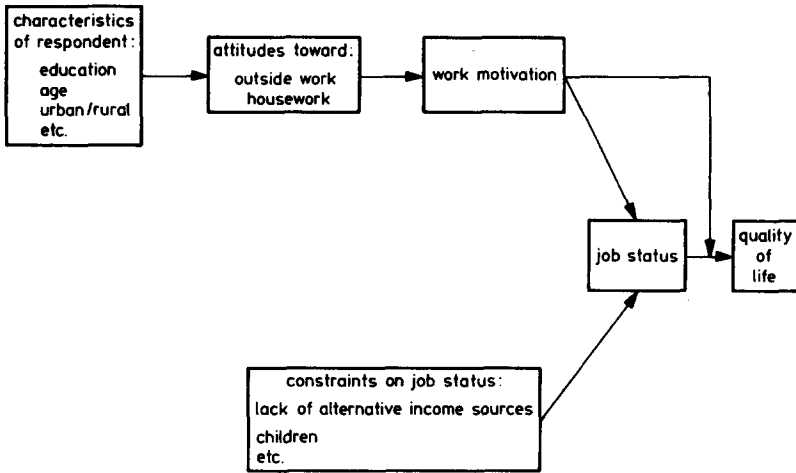


Fig. 1. Quality of life as a joint function of job status and motivation

present author (French *et al.*, 1974). In that paper, the concept of person-environment fit is introduced as an important intervening variable between environmental characteristics and a wide range of possible responses by individuals, including physiological changes, illnesses, and various types of behavior.

The manner in which this notion has guided the present analysis is illustrated in Figure 1. The environmental condition which we propose to examine is that of job status: whether or not the individual has a paying job. Our goal is to determine the extent to which job status is related to the overall quality of life of the individual as he or she assesses it. The person-environment fit model suggests that this relationship may be conditional upon certain characteristics of the individual — specifically, on his or her *motivation* with respect to work. Those who *want* to work and *are* working, or who do *not* want to work and are *not* working, have a better degree of fit, on this dimension, than do those who want to work but are *not* doing so, or contrariwise than those who are working against their wishes. This better fit, in turn, is expected to be reflected in the quality of the lives of such people as they themselves report it.

The possibility of misfit implies that other factors besides motivation can influence work status. In this paper, we will examine some of the constraints that keep some from working despite their wishes, and that keep others work-

ing who would prefer not to do so. Two such possible constraints (i.e., children and lack of alternative income sources) that will be examined are indicated in the lower part of Figure 1.

As is suggested by the top part of Figure 1, we will also ask some questions about why people differ with respect to their work motivation, first in terms of some psychological variables (attitudes toward housework and toward outside work), and then in terms of background variables such as age and education.

METHODOLOGY

Details of the study design can be found in the more complete report on this research (Campbell *et al.*, 1976: esp. Appendix A). In brief, interviews were sought from a randomly assigned adult, defined as anyone aged 18 or older, living in each household in a national probability sample of households in the contiguous 48 states. Interviews were obtained from 2,164 respondents, representing a completion rate of about 80 percent. These interviews were conducted by the interviewing staff of the Survey Research Center, and lasted an average of one hour and 15 minutes. Field work began in July, 1971 and was completed in September, 1971. Comparisons with the 1970 census data revealed no particular bias in the sampling frame nor in the completion of assigned interviews, except with respect to sex. (Only 42 percent of the respondents were male, as compared to an estimated 49 percent in the 1970 population; a not unusual bias for a variety of reasons that affect census counts as well as sample surveys, and are not germane to the present paper.)

Several months after the interviews were completed, in the Spring of 1972, a subset of the respondents were randomly selected for a reinterview study. A total of 285 reinterviews were obtained, representing 82 percent of the selections. Many of the questions from the initial interview were included in the the reinterview as well, so that estimates of the stability of the answers to these questions can be made.

Measurement of the Subjective Quality of Life

The major dependent variable to be examined in this paper is the subjective quality of life: that is, how people feel about their own lives. A variety of approaches to measuring this concept have been reported (e.g., Gurin *et al.*,

1960; Bradburn, 1969; Cantril, 1965). A decision was made in the present study to focus 1) on cognitive evaluations of life domains and of life as a whole, rather than affective responses; and 2) on relatively stable evaluations of one's present situation, rather than, on the one hand, transitory moods or, on the other hand, more permanent (and therefore presumably less sensitive to changes in situation) evaluations of one's entire life span. (Cf. Campbell *et al.*, 1976, Chapters 1 and 2, for the reasons upon which this decision was based.)

During the interview, respondents were asked sets of questions about a particular domain of experience, such as their community of residence or their marriage. Each such set of questions was terminated by asking them to summarize how they felt about that domain on a seven-point satisfaction scale, ranging from 'completely satisfied' down to 'completely dissatisfied'. Finally, toward the end of the interview after several such specific domains had been explored, we asked people to think about their lives as a whole, and to tell us how satisfied they were with their lives using the same seven-point scale. This overall satisfaction item constitutes a major ingredient of our measure of the subjective quality of life.

The other component of our measure of this concept was obtained by a set of adjective pairs in terms of which respondents were asked to describe their lives. Ten such pairs were provided, including 'worthwhile vs. useless' and 'rewarding vs. disappointing'. Respondents read these adjective pairs on a card, and placed a check in one of seven boxes placed between the descriptions so as to best describe their lives. Analysis revealed that eight of the ten original adjective pairs seemed to reflect a single underlying dimension, and furthermore that these could be combined with the overall life satisfaction item into an index with desirable properties. We named this the Index of Well-being.¹

THE JOB STATUS OF WOMEN

The distribution of the respondents in the quality of life study into the various work status categories is shown in Table I. Whereas three out of four men are employed full-time, only a third of the women are in this category. Another 10 percent of the women have part-time jobs, and a similar proportion is scattered across the student, retired, and unemployed categories. The remaining half of the women classify themselves as housewives, and are doing no work for which they are paid.

TABLE I
Job status distribution of all respondents and of women and men separately*

	work full-time	work part-time	housewife	retired	student	unemployed or disabled	Total	N
all respondents	52%	7	26	9	3	3	100%	2164
women	32%	10	48	5	2	3	100%	1259
men	75%	4	-	14	3	4	100%	905

* Job status was defined by the answers to the following questions. First, all respondents were asked:

'Are you working for pay, either full-time or part-time?'

Those who said they did work for pay were later asked:

'About how many hours do you work on this job (i.e., their main job) in the average week?'

Those who said they worked at least 35 hours in the average week were classified as working 'full-time', while those who worked less than 35 hours were classified as working 'part-time'.

Male respondents who said they did not work for pay, in answer to the first question above, were asked:

'Are you unemployed, retired, a student, or what?'

Female respondents who did not work for pay were asked:

'Are you a housewife, unemployed, retired, a student, or what?'

It comes as no surprise to note that there has been a secular trend toward increased participation of women in the job market over the past decades. The proportion of women with paid jobs has increased dramatically since the end of the last century: from only 12 percent of white women in 1890 to 42 percent in 1971 (cf. Lebergott, 1968: 104, Table 5; Waldman and Gover, 1972: 5, Table I).

WORK MOTIVATION

There are many possible reasons for working, and the available data allow only gross distinctions of motivations. For women who were working for pay at the time of the study, a question was asked which permits a distinction to be made between those who work primarily for economic reasons, and those who have other reasons for working. All respondents with jobs were asked if they thought they would continue to work 'even if you had enough money to live as comfortably as you'd like for the rest of your life.' For those who said that they would continue working, a further distinction is made between those who thought they would keep their present job and those who would

TABLE II

Proportion of working respondents who would work, either at the same or on any job, if money were not needed*

	would continue to work:		would not work	total	N	MD
	same job	different job				
all	39%	28	33	100%	1201	37
women	39%	19	42	100%	516	11
men	40%	34	26	100%	685	26

$X^2 = 44.80$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$

* Respondents who said that they were doing any work for pay were asked the following question:

'If you were to get enough money to live as comfortably as you'd like for the rest of your life, would you continue to work?'

Those who said that they would continue to work were asked:

'Would you continue to work at the same job as you now have?'

Included in the category 'work at same job' are two percent who gave qualified answers, such as saying they would keep their job under certain conditions or only on a part-time basis; and a fraction of a percent who said they would keep working at the same type of job, but in a different place or for a different employer.

like to get a different job. The distribution of respondents in these three categories is shown in Table II. A majority of working women say that they would keep on working even if they did not need the money, and a large minority (39 percent) say that they would keep their present jobs. It is interesting to note that the same proportion of men as of women say that they would keep their present jobs; but that of the others, most of the men say that they would want to get a different job, while most of the women say that they would stop working altogether. It appears that men are no more attached to their present jobs than women, but that they *are* more attached to the work role. We interpret this as one bit of evidence for a hypothesis that will be amplified later: namely that having a paid job — being perceived as a responsible husband and a good provider — is more central to the self-esteem of men than is true for women.

Housewives were also asked some questions that indicate their motivation with respect to having a paid job. They were asked whether they had ever wanted a career. About a third of the housewives replied in the affirmative. However, this question does not distinguish those who had such notions as young women but have since then gladly taken on the role of housewife from women who still nourish such a wish, and see their present role either as a frustrating trap or as a temporary diversion. Another question concerned expectations; about one in four of the housewives said that they expected to work in the future. Of these, a majority gave financial reasons when asked what their main reasons would be for working. On the other hand, about a fifth of these women, including a majority of those with a college education, gave reasons of personal fulfillment for expecting to work. Finally, the housewives were asked if they would like to work right now, assuming that suitable arrangements could be made for their home responsibilities. Eighteen percent of the women said they would like to work; the others said that they were 'happy enough to be at home'.

In the absence of longitudinal data, we cannot say very much about the extent to which the motivations tapped by these questions influenced the decision of the respondents to enter the job market or to be housewives. On the face of it, it appears that most of the housewives are there because they want to be; and that a somewhat smaller majority of working women are there because they want to be; though not necessarily in the right job, they say they want to work for more than reasons of economic necessity. Our conclusion about the strength of the link between motivation and behavior

must be tempered by the probability that many women make the best of their situation once they are in it, and would perhaps find it difficult to admit that they are not doing what they want to do. Nevertheless, we conclude that there is a real link between motivation with respect to work and the decision to seek paid work.

We now turn to some consideration of the factors that are related to work motivation. It is reasonable to suppose that a woman's wish to have a paid job would be influenced by her satisfaction with the two primary alternatives: that is, with her paid job, if she has one; and with her housework. Satisfaction levels with both roles were measured by using a seven-point scale, running from 'completely dissatisfied' to 'completely satisfied'; the same seven-point scale was used to measure satisfactions with all of the domains of life in our study. Consider first the job satisfaction of working women. The average level of job satisfaction expressed by women is indistinguishable from that of men. It can be noted in passing that this is true despite the fact that women tend to have less responsible jobs, and to be considerably underpaid relative to men; that has been documented with data from a national study of working conditions (Levitin *et al.*, 1971) and has been confirmed with data from the present study. Satisfaction with the job is about average in comparison with other domains; somewhat over a third of the respondents said that they were completely satisfied with their jobs, and less than one in ten said that they were more dissatisfied than satisfied.

The first panel in Table III shows the association between job dissatisfaction and desire to stop working at any paid job: half of the women who felt neutral or negative about their jobs said that they would stop working, compared to a third of the women who felt completely satisfied with their jobs. Job satisfaction is more strongly related to the wish to keep their present jobs: indeed, only 12 percent of the women who felt neutral or negative about their jobs would want to keep that same job if they did not need the money.

We now turn to satisfaction with housework; but before asking how it is related to work motivation, we will devote some attention to the distribution of housework satisfaction across women, and how it seems to be changing over time. Needless to say, interest in the significance of sex roles has increased greatly in recent years, and a primary focus of attention has been housework, since this has traditionally been considered a woman's work. Housework is often portrayed as thankless drudgery; the present study allows us to examine

TABLE III
 Job motivation among women in relationship to attitudes
 toward paying jobs and toward housework

working women

job satisfaction	keep job	change jobs	not work	total	N
completely satisfied	54%	10	36	100%	211
satisfied	36%	22	42	100%	186
neutral or dissatisfied	12%	35	53	100%	107

$\chi^2 = 40.65, df = 4, p < .001, T_b = .220$

working women

housework satisfaction	keep job	change jobs	not work	total	N
completely satisfied	42%	13	45	100%	183
satisfied	38%	17	45	100%	164
neutral or dissatisfied	35%	29	36	100%	148

$\chi^2 = 14.34, df = 4, p < .01, T_b = .017$

housewives

housework satisfaction	want to work	do not want to work now:			N
		expect to work	don't expect to work	total	
completely satisfied	12%	21	67	100%	305
satisfied	18%	29	53	100%	179
neutral or dissatisfied	37%	26	37	100%	104

$\chi^2 = 42.30, df = 4, p < .001, T_b = .226$

how widespread such dissatisfaction is within the American population.

Most of the women respondents – including those who work for pay, but excluding the seven percent who are students or retired – were asked about their feelings toward housework: ‘Overall, how satisfied are you with being a homemaker – I don’t mean with your family life, but with housework?’ Overall, women say that they are about as satisfied with housework as all respondents (including men) who work for pay say they are with their paid jobs. Indeed, the proportion of women who say that they are ‘completely

satisfied' with their housework is somewhat higher (44 percent) than the proportion of respondents who are completely satisfied with their jobs (36 percent).

The level of satisfaction with housework varies substantially among demographically defined groups of women. For example, over half of those with less than a high school education are completely satisfied, as contrasted with only a fifth of the college graduates. At all educational levels except that of the college graduates, the proportion of women who are completely satisfied with housework is about the same as the proportion completely satisfied with their paid jobs; college graduates, however, are considerably less likely to be satisfied with housework than with their paid jobs. Moreover, younger women are less likely than older women to be satisfied with housework: only a third of those aged 25-34 are completely satisfied, compared to almost two-thirds of those aged 65 or older.

The higher proportions of dissatisfaction observed among the younger and better educated women might be interpreted as a consequence of the greater receptivity of such women to changing societal norms and expectations. The women's liberation movement has been primarily visible among such women, and so perhaps the impact of the ideas with which it is associated has been greatest on this type of respondent. On the other hand, perhaps the dissatisfaction has always been greatest among those with more education and it is for this reason that they are more likely to be attracted to the ideas of women's liberation. If housework is indeed the drudgery it is often described to be, it would not be surprising to find that the most educated find it least attractive and that they are most likely to rebel against the societal norms that pressure them to accept such tasks as exclusively their own sex's responsibility.

There is some information from an earlier study which can be compared with that from the present study and which allows us to draw some inferences about time trends and possible causal directions. In the 1957 study of mental health conducted by Gurin *et al.* (1960), women who were not doing any work for pay were asked the following question:

Different people feel differently about taking care of a home. I don't mean taking care of children, but things like cooking, sewing, and keeping house. Some women look on these things as just a job that has to be done; other women really enjoy them. How do you feel about this?

This question was repeated as part of the present study. The distribution of

TABLE IV
Attitudes of housewives (age 21 or older) toward their
housework, 1956 and 1971 data

	1957	1971
1. unqualified liking	51%	60%
2. qualified liking	19	14
3. ambivalent	14	9
4. qualified disliking	2	3
5. unqualified disliking	3	3
6. just a job that has to be done	11	11
Total	100%	100%
N	864	562

$X^2 = 18.82$, $df = 5$, $p < .005$

If categories 2 through 6 are collapsed: $X^2 = 10.93$, $df = 1$,
 $p < .001$

answers at the two times is shown in Table IV. There is no indication that housework has become any less popular in the years since 1957; indeed, the proportion of women who express unqualified enjoyment with housework has increased somewhat, from 51 percent to 60 percent. (This may in part be explained by a selection process; a higher proportion of women were working in 1971 than in 1957, and perhaps this has thinned the ranks of frustrated housewives.)

Trends in the answers to this question were examined separately for several demographically defined subgroups of women. Among age groups, there has been little change for those under age 50, whereas those age 50 or older say they enjoy housework more than did their counterparts in 1967. Similarly, among those with a high school education or less, average enjoyment of housework has increased, but among the few college graduates who are housewives it has declined. Enjoyment of housework has increased among those in rural areas and in the suburbs of large cities, but not in more urban areas. There has also been an increase in enjoyment among those with family incomes in the bottom two-thirds of the respective income distributions for each sample, but not among those with incomes in the upper third.

The above data can be interpreted by postulating two trends with opposite effects. On the one hand, there has been a rising standard of living since 1957 which has enabled more people to purchase time-saving home conveniences and make housework a less burdensome task. This would be true primarily

of those with relatively low incomes, who tend to be older, more rural, and less educated than those with higher incomes.² It can be further postulated that in opposition to the effects of the trend in the standard of living are those of the women's liberation movement and the changing attitudes of which it is a symptom. The women who are probably most affected by this movement are the ones in groups in which no increase in enjoyment of housework has been observed: the younger, the college-educated, the upper-middle class, and the urbanites.

Returning to our primary discussion, we will now examine the relationship between housework satisfaction and work motivation. This association is shown for working women in the second panel of Table III. Those women who are satisfied with housework are somewhat more likely than those who are dissatisfied to say that they would stop working if they did not need the money (45 percent vs. 36 percent), presumably because they have an acceptable alternative to the work role. While there seems to be a weak relationship between housework satisfaction and the work motivation of working women, it is not as strong as the relationship between job satisfaction and work motivation.

The association between housework satisfaction and the work motivation of housewives is shown in the last panel of Table III. The relationship in this case is clear: only one out of eight housewives who are completely satisfied with their housework would like to work now, compared to more than one-third of the women who feel neutral or dissatisfied with housework. Furthermore, two-thirds of the completely satisfied housewives never expect to work, compared to just over one-third of the neutral and dissatisfied. For housewives, then, there is a clear relationship between attitude toward housework and their desire to work outside the home.

To summarize our data on work motivation, it appears that work motivation may indeed have at least some influence on the decision to enter the job market. We have also seen that work motivation is affected by satisfaction with the two alternatives: satisfaction with their paying job, for working women; and satisfaction with housework, especially for housewives. We have also seen that housework satisfaction has apparently increased somewhat over the past decade and a half, but that this increase is not observed among certain groups of women, perhaps because of increasing awareness of sexual inequalities in our society.

Constraints on Work Status

While there does seem to be a relationship between motivation with respect to work and actual work status, it is far from a perfect one. Part of this may be attributable to other motivational factors that we have not considered, and to the imperfection of our measures of work motivation. However, there are certainly many factors besides the motivation of the individual which influence her actual behavior. In this section, we will consider some of the constraints that may operate on women, inducing them to work outside the home when they would prefer to be housewives, or compelling them to stay at home when they would prefer to have a paying job.

There are a set of constraints for which there are no indicators available within the present data set, namely the societal norms and living patterns that operate to make it less likely that a woman will enter the labor force. To the extent that these are indeed universal constraints on all women, they are irrelevant to the present analysis which is confined to comparisons among groups of women. However, there is evidence that these constraints are weakening. For example, Duncan and Evers (1975) report that a smaller proportion of both women and men in the Detroit urbanized area feel that women should not have certain kinds of work. To the extent that these constraints are indeed weakening, it should be found that the relationship between work motivation and labor force participation is stronger in future replications of this type of analysis.

One such constraint on job status, not only for women but for men as well, is represented by age, and by the age of about 65 in particular. Only one woman in 20 age 65 or older has a paying job. The societal norm that workers should retire at the age of about 65 is a powerful constraint.

Another constraint is that of the responsibilities for raising one's children, which traditionally are part of the mother's role. Whereas the employment rate of men peaks between the ages of 25 and 44, the employment rate of women actually declines in this age range, then rises again until the retirement age. It is in the former age range that women are most likely to have young children to care for, and this responsibility evidently keeps many women from seeking employment.

There is some evidence that the societal norm against women with family responsibilities also having paid jobs is becoming less powerful. The historic rise in participation in the labor force has been greatest among married

women, white married women especially (Lebergott, 1968: 104, Table 5). When we examine trends for other subgroups by comparing data from the 1957 mental health study with the 1971 data, we find that the increase in employment rates has been most noticeable among educated women, with little change among the less educated. This, in combination with the trend toward more education among younger women, helps to explain the trend toward increasing employment among women. It will be recalled that it was also the better educated and younger women who are less satisfied with housework than others, and who have tended to become less satisfied since 1957. We argued earlier that this might be due to a rejection by such women of the traditional housewife role for women; evidently these attitudes are reflected in their behavior as well.

These trends are also observed in the future job expectations of housewives, only one out of six of whom expected to get a job in 1957, compared to one out of four in 1971. This trend is more marked, once again, among younger women: only one in five housewives under age 40 expected to work in 1957, but in 1971 half of them expected to work.

A different type of constraint is that of the financial necessity for some women to work. Over half of the women who are the only source of their family income (mostly those who are unmarried) have full-time jobs. On the other hand, less than one in four women who report family incomes of \$15,000 or more from sources other than their own earnings have even part-time jobs.

THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF WOMEN IN DIFFERENT JOB STATUS CATEGORIES

We now can turn to the primary question which we set out to answer in this paper: how does the subjective quality of life differ for women in different job status categories? One answer is provided by Figure 2 which shows very little difference in the average scores on the Index of Well-being of working women and housewives. The most discrepant group, for men even more than for women, is that of the unemployed. The relatively low satisfaction of unemployed women can largely be explained by the fact that unemployed women have low incomes; when the scores on the index are adjusted to remove their correlation with income, the unemployed women have approximately average scores. This is not true for men, however; their very low scores on the Index of Well-being are only slightly explained by their relatively low

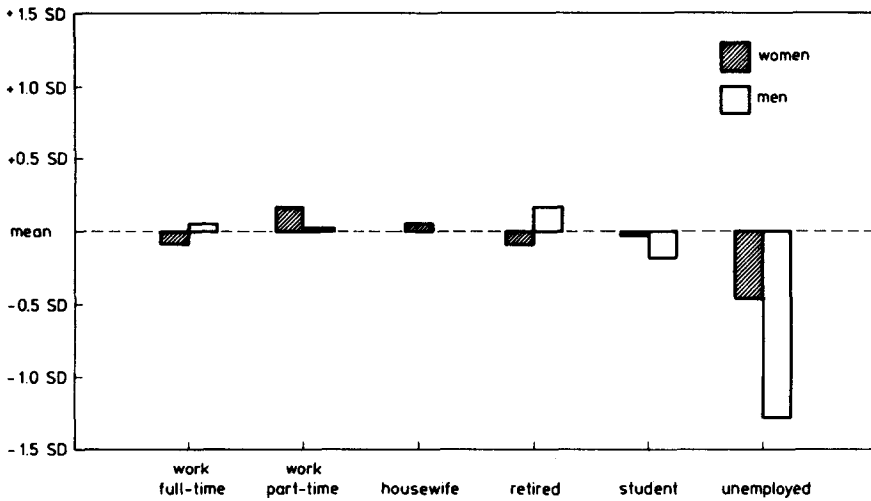


Fig. 2. Average scores on index of well-being for women and men in different job status categories

family incomes. While the number of cases is small, this is another piece of evidence in support of the hypothesis mentioned earlier that having a paying job is more critical to men than to women.³ For a man to be jobless is a demeaning experience, marking him as unfit and useless for his prescribed role. For a woman, being jobless may mean a loss of income, and therefore be a source of considerable hardship, but it evidently is not taken as a reflection of her own worth; she has an alternative, societally acceptable role available as a mother and housewife. Perhaps this sex difference is changing, but in 1971 it emerged from the data.

The more important fact from Figure 2, however, is that there is little difference in the subjective quality of life of working women and housewives. That is, the direct link between job status and the quality of life as suggested in Figure 1 is evidently a rather weak one. However, Figure 1 also suggests that this would be a conditional relationship; specifically, we postulated that quality of life is related to the fit between desired and actual work status. This is, women who want to work and are in fact working should be more satisfied with their lives than women who are working but would prefer to be housewives, or women who are housewives but would prefer to be working for pay. Similarly, women who are housewives and do not wish to work

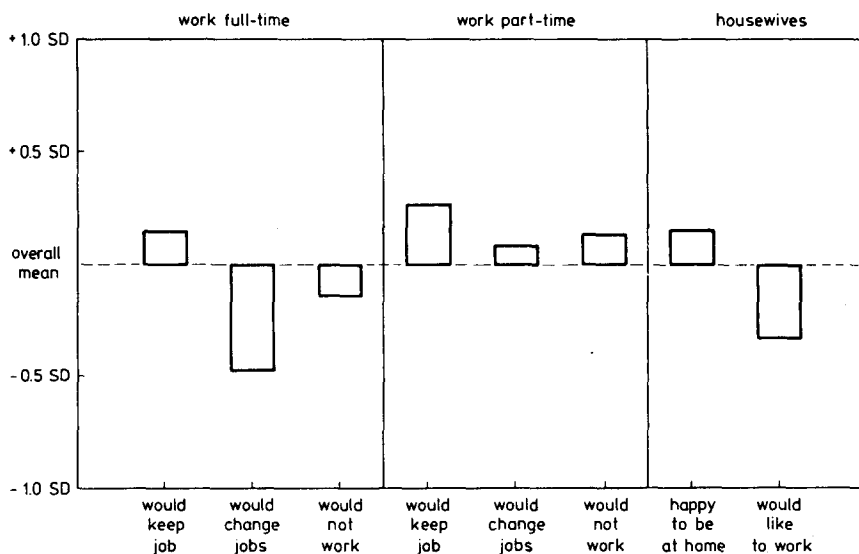


Fig. 3. Average scores on index of well-being for women in different job status categories and with different orientations to work*

* *t*-tests, comparing all relevant pairs of groups of women with full-time jobs and of housewives show that all differences are significant at least at the 0.01 level except the comparison of working women who would not work at all and those who would change jobs, significant at only the 0.02 level.

outside the home should be relatively well satisfied with their lives.

Data relevant to this hypothesis are shown in Figure 3. For simplicity, we can disregard part-time workers and focus on the differences between housewives and women with full-time paid jobs. (The apparent relationship between part- vs full-time work and life satisfaction is probably spurious, explained by the greater proportion of married women, who tend to express greater satisfaction than do single, divorced, or separated women, with part-time jobs.) In general, the hypothesis is supported. Housewives who do not wish to work have higher average scores on the Index of Well-being than those who would like to work. Working women who would keep their jobs even if they did not need the money are more satisfied than those who would stop working. However, it is interesting to note that even less satisfied than working women who would stop working if they did not need the money are those who would want to get a different job. These women evidently are career-oriented, but feel that they are locked into rather unsatisfactory jobs, perhaps

because they cannot afford to quit those jobs to seek better jobs, or to accept less secure positions; and women who want careers but find themselves in unsatisfactory jobs are less satisfied with their lives than women who would stay at home as housewives if they did not need to work to earn money.

SUMMARY

These findings can best be summarized by returning to Figure 1. We have examined evidence showing that the work status of women depends in part on their motivation with respect to work. Most housewives say they are happy to be at home, and most working women say that they would work even if they did not need to do so for money. Work motivation, in turn, is related to satisfaction with the two alternatives, the paid job and housework. While average satisfaction with housework has evidently become higher in the past 15 years, satisfaction has declined among the college educated; and it is the better educated women who also seem to be leading a trend toward greater participation by women in the job market.

Work status is also affected by various constraints that limit the options of individual women. Societal norms with respect to working mothers are one such constraint, although it is evidently becoming a less powerful one. Another constraint is that of financial need, which induces some women who would prefer to be housewives to enter the job market.

The average quality of life expressed by working women and by housewives is not very different. However, when the motivations of women are considered, it appears that the subjective quality of life does depend on work status: women who are in the role they prefer are more satisfied with their lives than women who feel constrained to be in a role that is contrary to their preferences.

The analysis reported in this paper suggested, and provided support for, another hypothesis about the relationship between work status and the quality of life: The work role does not seem to be as important to women as it is to men. This hypothesis was initially suggested by the data in Table II, which indicated that while working women are just as likely as working men to be attached to their jobs for reasons other than strictly monetary ones, women are *less* likely to be committed to the work role. A somewhat higher proportion of women than of men say that they would not work at all if they did not need the money.

Support for this hypothesis was found in analysis of respondents who said that they were unemployed (rather than retired or housewives). Unemployed women, like unemployed men, are considerably less satisfied with their lives than are those in other work statuses. Unlike men, however, most of the dissatisfaction of women can be explained in terms of their below average family incomes. This finding is based on only a small number of cases, but if true it can be interpreted as meaning that while unemployment hurts women in the pocketbook, it has an additional shattering effect on the self-esteem of men who find themselves apparent failures in a key societal role.

Further evidence for the relative importance of the work role to women as compared to men was cited in terms of direct ratings by respondents; and the correlation between job satisfaction and overall life satisfaction. This relationship may turn out to be a revealing social indicator. We suspect that the relationship is weakening, and that in the future the work role will become central to more and more women — and, perhaps, less central to an increasing number of men.

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NOTES

* This paper is based on data from a study, 'Monitoring the Quality of American Life', that was funded primarily by the Russell Sage Foundation. A fuller report of the findings from this study is provided in Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976).

¹ The interested reader is referred to Campbell *et al.*, 1975, ch. 2, for details about the analyses leading to the construction of this index. The estimated reliability of the Index of Well being is 0.89 (coefficient alpha), and its stability over a six to eight month period for 285 respondents who were reinterviewed was found to be 0.53 (product moment correlation). A complementary measure, formed by combining domain satisfaction into an overall quality of life index, has also been shown to have similar reliability and stability coefficients to those of the Index of Well-being (Rodgers and Converse, 1975). The analyses reported in this paper were repeated with this index of domain satisfactions, with highly comparable findings.

² The actual process involved may be considerably more complex than implied by this relatively simpleminded hypothesis. There is evidence from time use studies that whereas time spent on household chores has declined this has been offset by increasing time spent on shopping and chauffeuring (cf. Robinson and Converse, 1972: pp. 48–51 and Appendix Tables C and E). The present data might be interpreted as reflecting differences in the attractiveness of various chores.

³ Additional evidence for this hypothesis is found in the lower correlation between job satisfaction and the Index of Well-being among working women ($r = .40$) than among working men ($r = .50$). Furthermore, women give lower direct importance ratings to having an interesting job than do men.

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