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The Local-Ladder Effect: Social Status and Subjective Well-Being

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Abstract

Dozens of studies in different nations have revealed that socioeconomic status only weakly predicts an individual's subjective well-being (SWB). These results imply that although the pursuit of social status is a fundamental human motivation, achieving high status has little impact on one's SWB. However, we propose that sociometric status—the respect and admiration one has in face-to-face groups (e.g., among friends or coworkers)—has a stronger effect on SWB than does socioeconomic status. Using correlational, experimental, and longitudinal methodologies, four studies found consistent evidence for a *local-ladder effect*: Sociometric status significantly predicted satisfaction with life and the experience of positive and negative emotions. Longitudinally, as sociometric status rose or fell, SWB rose or fell accordingly. Furthermore, these effects were driven by feelings of power and social acceptance. Overall, individuals' sociometric status matters more to their SWB than does their socioeconomic status.

Keywords

social structure, socioeconomic status, well-being

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The pursuit of social status is a powerful motive that drives much of social behavior. But does achieving higher status bring happiness? Dozens of studies suggest that social status plays little role in subjective well-being (SWB). For example, within countries, there is only a weak association between socioeconomic status (SES) and dimensions of SWB, including life satisfaction and the experience of positive and negative emotions (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). In fact, individuals who more strongly value wealth and material possessions, which are components of SES, tend to experience lower SWB (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). The literature seems to suggest that attaining high status provides little benefit for one's SWB.

However, prior research linking status and SWB has focused almost exclusively on SES—material dimensions of status that arise from income and wealth—so it remains an open question whether other forms of status may have a stronger impact on SWB. *Sociometric status* is a distinct form of social status. It represents the respect and admiration individuals have in their face-to-face groups, such as among their neighbors, coworkers, or classmates (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001). A long tradition of research has documented that rank-order differences in sociometric status emerge in all kinds of face-to-face groups (Bales, Strodtbeck, Mills, & Roseborough, 1951), just as they do in nonhuman species, with some individuals attaining more respect and admiration than others.

One reason why SWB may be affected more by sociometric status than by SES is that sociometric status is defined locally, in the context of face-to-face groups, whereas SES is typically defined as global status within one's country. Individuals' comparisons with others immediately around them affect their happiness more than do distant comparisons (Festinger, 1954). As Bertrand Russell (1930) noted, "beggars do not envy millionaires, though of course they will envy other beggars who are more successful" (p. 90). Supporting our argument that local status matters more to SWB than global status does, a prior study showed that individuals with higher income relative to others in their own county reported higher life satisfaction (Boyce, Brown, & Moore, 2010).

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However, we hypothesize that sociometric status matters even more for SWB than does SES rank in the local environment because sociometric status is connected to a set of psychological and social processes that shape SWB. Sociometric status is based in peer respect rather than income or wealth (Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980; Blau, 1964). As a reflection of respect and admiration among peers, sociometric status is likely to strongly influence the personal sense of power and feelings of social acceptance, which are both critical determinants of psychological well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Individuals higher in sociometric status have more control over group decisions, more autonomy, and more influence over others' opinions (Berger et al., 1980). Sociometric status is thus likely to determine the personal sense of power and control. Moreover, individuals higher in sociometric status have more friends and are more frequently included in others' social activities (Thibault & Kelley, 1959). Sociometric status is thus a specific form of status that should boost the sense of belongingness and interpersonal connection. Although SES can also shape the sense of power (Anderson, John, & Keltner, in press), these effects tend to be weaker. In addition, people with higher SES show signs of impoverished social connections (Kraus & Keltner, 2009).

In light of this analysis, we propose a *local-ladder effect*, whereby higher sociometric status leads to higher SWB. We expected to observe this effect because sociometric status shapes two important determinants of psychological well-being: an increased sense of power and a sense of social acceptance. Further, given that some prior research has found significant (albeit modest) effects of SES on SWB, we also thought it important to test our hypothesis that the effects of sociometric status on SWB are stronger than the effects of SES.

To triangulate on our central research question concerning the link between status and SWB, we conducted four studies using a diverse set of complementary designs. Study 1 examined status and SWB in intact groups and used multiple measures of sociometric status, including peer reports. Study 2 examined a broader national sample and tested power and social acceptance as mediators of the link between status and SWB. Whereas Studies 1 and 2 established ecological validity, Study 3 used experimental methods to test causal effects of sociometric status relative to SES. Study 4 used a longitudinal design that allowed us to assess whether changes in status lead to changes in SWB: We predicted that as an individual's sociometric status rises or falls after a significant life transition, his or her SWB rises or falls accordingly.

Study 1: Status and Well-Being in Extant Groups

In Study 1, we examined the associations between status—both sociometric and socioeconomic—and well-being in college student groups, such as sororities and Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) groups. College students value their membership in these kinds of groups and spend considerable time with fellow group members. Moreover, this design allowed us to collect multiple measures of sociometric status, including peer and self-report as well as leadership data.

Method

Participants. Eighty-eight members of 14 college student groups participated (53% male, 47% female; average age = 20.4 years, *SD* = 1.3). Participants were asked to select all racial-ethnic categories to which they belonged; 56% selected White, 18% selected African American, 10% selected Latino, 24% selected Asian American, 1% selected Native American, and 10% selected "other." Two groups provided unreliable peer ratings of status (see the next paragraph) and were excluded from the analyses. Thus, the final analyses included 80 participants from 12 separate groups.

Sociometric status. We measured sociometric status with three indices. First, participants rated each fellow group member on whether he or she was respected, admired, and looked up to in the group, using a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). We used Kenny and LaVoie's (1984) social relations model (SRM) to analyze these peer ratings. Two groups showed very low consensus in their peer ratings of status (αs of .00 and .08) and were therefore excluded from further analysis. There was high consensus among the remaining participants, α = .71. Second, participants rated their own status by responding to five items: "I have a high level of respect in others' eyes," "Others admire me," "Others look up to me," "I have high social standing," and "I am held in high regard by others." Responses were made on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Ratings on these items were combined into an overall measure of self-perceived status (α = .93). Third, we measured the number of leadership positions participants had held in their group (e.g., president, rush chairperson; *M* = 1.71, *SD* = 1.56). We formed an overall index of sociometric status by standardizing scores on each of the three indicators and then averaging across the standardized scores (α = .60). We centered this variable around the group mean to control for group effects.

Family income. SES was measured using a standard scale of family income (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000). Participants rated their "total household income," which included their parents' combined income, according to the following scale: 1 = $15,000 or less, 2 = $15,001–$25,000, 3 = $25,001–$35,000, 4 = $35,001–$50,000, 5 = $50,001–$75,000, 6 = $75,001–$100,000, 7 = $100,001–$150,000, and 8 = over $150,000. The average rating was 6.17 (*SD* = 1.44); that is, the average family income was between $75,000 and $100,000. Family income was centered around the group mean to reflect participants' local income relative to other group members.

SWB. We measured all three main components of SWB by administering the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), in which respondents provide a global, cognitive assessment of their life as a whole, and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, which measures the experience of positive and negative emotions (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). As in previous research (Sheldon, King, Houser-Marko, Osbaldiston, & Gunz, 2007), we averaged SWLS scores ($\alpha = .77$, $M = 5.38$, $SD = 0.94$) with Positive Affect (PA) scores ($\alpha = .89$, $M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.72$) and Negative Affect (NA) scores ($\alpha = .83$, $M = 1.80$, $SD = 0.53$), after reverse-scoring the latter. This SWB variable was also centered around the group mean.

Results

Because gender and ethnicity (in particular, minority status) sometimes predict sociometric status (Berger et al., 1980) and SWB (Diener et al., 1999), we controlled for both gender and ethnicity in all analyses.

In a simultaneous regression, we found that sociometric status predicted SWB ($\beta = 0.35$; $b = 0.33$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .002$), whereas SES (family income rank, locally defined relative to other group members) did not ($\beta = 0.02$; $b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .85$). SWB was not predicted by either gender ($\beta = 0.05$; $b = 0.08$, $SE = 0.15$, $p = .63$) or ethnicity (White/non-White; $\beta = -0.04$, $b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.15$, $p = .72$). (See the Supplemental Material available online for analyses of each of the individual components of SWB in all four studies.)

To examine whether sociometric status predicted SWB more strongly than did income, we compared the residual from an *unrestricted* regression model, in which sociometric status and income were entered into the regression separately, with the residual from a *restricted* regression model, in which the predictors were combined (i.e., sociometric status and income were summed; Adler et al., 2000). The unrestricted model had significantly less error variance than the restricted model, $F(1, 78) = 14.15$, $p < .001$; thus, the relation between sociometric status and SWB was stronger than the relation between SES and SWB.

Study 2: Status and Well-Being in a National Sample

The link between SES and SWB tends to be weakest in populations with the highest average levels of income (Howell & Howell, 2008). Because Study 1 used a college-student sample with a high average income, the link between SES and SWB might have been reduced. Therefore, in Study 2, we examined a national online sample that had a wider range of income, education, and backgrounds, which allowed us to test whether the findings from Study 1 would generalize to a broader population. We also examined the sense of power and social acceptance as possible mediators. Finally, we controlled for the personality trait of extraversion, which predicts both sociometric status (Anderson et al., 2001) and SWB (Diener et al., 1999), to rule out the possibility that extraversion might have driven a spurious link between sociometric status and SWB in Study 1.

Method

Participants. Participants were 315 individuals (36% male, 64% female; average age = 32.8 years, $SD = 11.0$) recruited online from around the United States via Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Participants were asked to select all racial-ethnic categories to which they belonged; 74% selected White, 5% selected African American, 6% selected Latino, 7% selected Asian American, 9% selected Native American, and 10% selected "other."

Sociometric status. Participants rated the respect and admiration they received in the three most important groups to which they belonged (e.g., friends, family, work group). For each group, participants indicated their agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) with four items: "I have a high level of respect in others' eyes," "Others admire me," "I have high social standing," and "Others look up to me." Ratings on these four items correlated with each other (average $\alpha = .94$ in the three groups). Furthermore, participants' sociometric status in the three groups was intercorrelated, $\alpha = .62$, which indicated that individuals had either consistently high or consistently low sociometric status in their three groups. We therefore calculated a combined sociometric-status score (average) for each participant across his or her groups ($\alpha = .62$, $M = 5.16$, $SD = 0.93$).

SES. Total household income was measured as in Study 1. The mean was 4.12 ($SD = 1.94$); that is, the average income was between $35,001 and $50,000, which is consistent with the mean U.S. income (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2010). We measured education with an index used in previous studies (e.g., Willer, 2009; $M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.75$). As in prior work (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2009), we standardized household income and education and combined these scores to form an overall measure of SES.

SWB. We measured SWB the same way as in Study 1: with the SWLS ($\alpha = .92$, $M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.47$), PANAS PA scale ($\alpha = .90$, $M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.78$), and PANAS NA scale ($\alpha = .91$, $M = 2.08$, $SD = 0.82$). As in Study 1, these three measures were combined, after reverse-scoring NA.

Extraversion. We measured extraversion with the Big Five Inventory (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991; $M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.82$, $\alpha = .88$).

Personal sense of power. Participants reported their sense of power in their relationships within each of their three groups using the Sense of Power scale (Anderson et al., in press; average $\alpha = .90$ in the three groups). Participants' aggregate scores

correlated across the three groups, α = .54. Therefore, individuals who felt more (or less) powerful in one group tended to feel more (or less) powerful in their other groups. The scores for the three groups were averaged to form an overall measure of the sense of power (M = 4.82, SD = 0.75).

Social acceptance. We based our measure of social acceptance on previous research (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Participants rated how much they felt accepted, included, liked, and welcomed by their fellow members in each of their three groups (average α = .96 in the three groups). Participants' aggregate scores correlated across the three groups, α = .57. Therefore, individuals who felt accepted in one group tended to feel accepted in their other groups. The scores for the three groups were averaged to form an overall measure of acceptance (M = 5.80, SD = 0.79).

Results

As shown in Table 1, sociometric status predicted SWB, and this relationship held even after controlling for SES, gender, ethnicity (White/non-White), and extraversion. Moreover, as in Study 1, sociometric status predicted SWB more strongly than did SES, as the unrestricted model had less error variance than the restricted model, $F(1, 313) = 14.13$, $p < .001$.

Mediation analyses demonstrated that sociometric status predicted SWB through the indirect effects of sense of power and social acceptance. Sociometric status predicted the sense of power (β = 0.57; b = 0.47, SE = 0.04, $p < .001$), and when sense of power and sociometric status were entered simultaneously as predictors of SWB, there was a drop in the effect of sociometric status (Sobel z = 4.90, $p < .001$; see Model 3 in Table 1). Sociometric status also predicted social acceptance (β = 0.65; b = 0.56, SE = 0.04, $p < .001$), and when sociometric status and social acceptance were entered simultaneously as predictors of SWB, there was a drop in the effect of sociometric status (Sobel z = 5.89, $p < .001$; see Model 4 in Table 1). Thus, individuals higher in sociometric status had higher SWB because they felt a greater sense of power and greater acceptance in their groups.

Social status predicted SWB above and beyond the effect of the personality dimension of extraversion. Where people stand in their local hierarchy matters to their happiness.

Study 3: Experimental Manipulation of Status

Our first two studies were correlational in design, and thus limited the causal inferences we could draw about the relationship between status and well-being. In Study 3, therefore, we manipulated the subjective sense of status using a priming technique in which participants compared themselves with someone who had either high or low sociometric or socioeconomic status (Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010).

Method

Participants. Two-hundred twenty-eight participants (38% male, 62% female) were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Participants were asked to select all racial-ethnic categories to which they belonged; 72% selected White, 7% selected African American, 6% selected Latino, 8% selected Asian American, 5% selected Native American, and 7% selected "other."

Experimental manipulation. Participants were shown a ladder with 10 rungs (Kraus et al., 2010). In the sociometric-status conditions, participants were told: "Think of the ladder above as

Table 1. Study 2: Results From Stepwise Regression Analyses Predicting Subjective Well-Being

Independent variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Sociometric status	0.43** (0.04)	0.30** (0.04)	0.15* (0.05)	0.09 (0.05)
Socioeconomic status	0.07 (0.05)	0.09 (0.05)	0.12* (0.04)	0.12* (0.04)
Gender (1 = male, 0 = female)		−0.04 (0.08)	−0.02 (0.07)	−0.01 (0.07)
Ethnicity (1 = White, 0 = non-White)		0.11 (0.09)	0.07 (0.08)	0.07 (0.08)
Extraversion		0.41** (0.05)	0.35** (0.05)	0.36** (0.05)
Sense of power			0.33** (0.06)	
Social acceptance				0.39** (0.06)
R^2	.250**	.404**	.456**	.476**
ΔR^2		.153**	.052**	.073**
F test of model	50.22	40.33	41.49	45.05

Note: The table presents unstandardized regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. ΔR^2 for Models 3 and 4 was based on ΔR^2 from Model 2.
*$p < .01$. **$p < .001$.

representing where people stand in the important groups to which they belong." For participants in the high-sociometric-status condition, the instructions continued as follows:

> Now please compare yourself to the people at the very bottom rung of the ladder. These are people who have absolutely NO RESPECT, ADMIRATION, and INFLUENCE in ALL of their important social groups. In particular, we'd like you to COMPARE YOURSELF TO THESE PEOPLE in terms of your own respect, admiration, and influence in your important groups.

Participants in the low-sociometric-status conditions received the same instructions, except that they were asked to compare themselves to the people at the top rung, and the instructions said that such people have "A GREAT DEAL OF RESPECT, ADMIRATION, and INFLUENCE" in their social groups. Participants in the SES conditions were given similar instructions but compared themselves with someone with more or less wealth, education, and job status. Following this prompt, all participants were instructed to think of how "the similarities and differences" between them and the comparison target would affect a getting-acquainted interaction. As a manipulation check, participants were asked, "Where would you place yourself on this ladder relative to these people on the very bottom [top] rung?" Responses were made on a scale from 1 (*bottom rung*) to 10 (*top rung*).

SWB. We again measured SWB with the SWLS ($\alpha = .91$, $M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.45$), PANAS PA scale ($\alpha = .91$, $M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.83$), and PANAS NA scale ($\alpha = .91$, $M = 1.56$, $SD = 0.73$). In this study, participants were asked the extent to which they were feeling each emotion on the PANAS at that time. We computed overall SWB as in the previous studies.

Results

Manipulation check. A 2 (level: high, low) × 2 (type of status: sociometric, socioeconomic) between-participants analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that participants in the high-status conditions ($M = 6.23$, $SD = 1.99$) reported higher status than participants in the low-status conditions ($M = 5.19$, $SD = 1.85$), $F(1, 224) = 16.39$, $p < .001$. There was no interaction between level and type of status, $F(1, 224) = 1.38$, $p = .24$. This suggests that the sociometric and socioeconomic manipulations were equally effective.

SWB. We next submitted SWB scores to a 2 (level: high, low) × 2 (type of status: sociometric, socioeconomic) between-participants ANOVA. There was a main effect of level, $F(1, 224) = 5.06$, $p = .03$, but more important, there was also a significant interaction between level and type of status, $F(1, 224) = 4.73$, $p = .03$ (see Fig. 1). Individuals in the high-sociometric-status condition had higher SWB than those in the low-sociometric-status condition, $t(115) = 3.05$, $p = .003$. In contrast, individuals in the high-SES condition did not have higher SWB than those in the low-SES condition, $t(109) = 0.06$, $p = .96$. Therefore, these findings provide evidence for a causal effect of sociometric status on SWB that is stronger than the effect of SES on SWB.[1]

Study 4: Longitudinal Assessment of Changes in Status

Study 4 used a longitudinal design to examine whether changes in sociometric status following a major life transition predict corresponding changes in SWB. That is, when individuals' sociometric status rises or falls after a significant life transition, does their SWB rise or fall accordingly?

To answer this question, we assessed Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.) students a month before they graduated (Time 1) and then 9 months after graduation (Time 2). Graduating from an M.B.A. program involves moving from one important sociometric-status hierarchy (the cohort of M.B.A. classmates) to another (typically, the workplace). Such a move could involve an increase or decrease in sociometric status and, we predicted, systematic changes in SWB.

Method

Participants. One hundred fifty-six M.B.A. students participated at Time 1. Of those, 116 (74%) participated at Time 2 (71% male, 29% female; average age = 30.63 years, $SD = 2.71$). Participants were asked to select all racial-ethnic categories to which they belonged; 50% selected White, 1% selected African American, 6% selected Latino, 37% selected Asian American, and 11% selected "other." We focused on participants who were assessed at both times. These participants did not differ on any dimension from those who completed only the first assessment.

Sociometric status. At Time 1, participants rated their sociometric status in their M.B.A. cohort with the same five self-report items used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .94$, $M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.02$). At

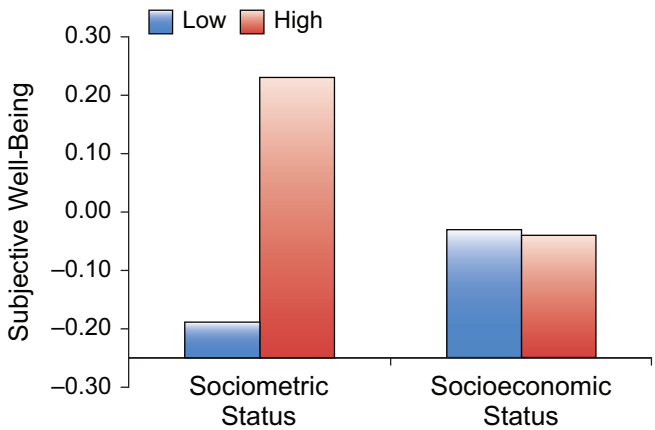

Fig. 1. Results from Study 3: subjective well-being as a function of condition (high vs. low sociometric status, high vs. low socioeconomic status).

Time 2, participants indicated their agreement with the same items, but with respect to their workplace, or their most important group if they were unemployed (α = .94, *M* = 5.16, *SD* = 0.98). Because none of the significant results changed depending on whether we included or excluded the few participants who were unemployed at Time 2, we report analyses including those participants.

Income. As in Study 1, we focused on participants' total household income, which was reported using the same scale as in that study. At Time 1, the mean income was 4.89 (*SD* = 2.82), which indicated an average income between $35,001 and $50,000. At Time 2, the mean was 6.89 (*SD* = 1.46), which indicated an average income between $75,001 and $100,000.

SWB. For each time of assessment, we standardized the SWLS scores (Time 1: α = .91, *M* = 5.07, *SD* = 1.32; Time 2: α = .89, *M* = 5.12, *SD* = 1.20), PANAS PA scores (Time 1: α = .88, *M* = 3.68, *SD* = 0.64; Time 2: α = .90, *M* = 3.67, *SD* = 0.65), and PANAS NA scores (reverse-scored; Time 1: α = .85, *M* = 1.88, *SD* = 0.58; Time 2: α = .86, *M* = 1.78, *SD* = 0.59). These standardized scores were averaged to create an SWB measure for each time of assessment.

Results

As shown in Table 2, Time 2 sociometric status predicted Time 2 SWB. This relationship held up even after controlling for Time 1 sociometric status, Time 1 SWB, Time 1 SES, Time 2 SES, gender, and ethnicity (White/non-White; see Model 4). Therefore, as M.B.A. students' sociometric status rose or fell after they graduated, their SWB rose or fell accordingly.

We also used a difference-score approach (Allison, 1990) to test our hypothesis. This analysis showed that changes in sociometric status from Time 1 to Time 2 predicted changes in SWB from Time 1 to Time 2 (β = 0.22; *b* = 0.14, *SE* = 0.06, *p* = .02).

Furthermore, Time 2 sociometric status predicted Time 2 SWB more strongly than did Time 2 SES, as the unrestricted model had less error variance than the restricted model, $F(1, 154) = 20.17$, $p < .001$. Together, the findings from Study 4 suggest that as M.B.A. students' sociometric status rose or fell after they graduated, their SWB rose or fell accordingly. Moreover, with this longitudinal design, we were able to establish that changes in sociometric status predicted changes in SWB more strongly than did changes in SES.

Discussion

Four studies, triangulating on our research question using correlational, experimental, and longitudinal designs, found consistent evidence for a local-ladder effect: Increases in sociometric status were associated with rises in SWB. These findings were robust regardless of whether we measured sociometric status with peer or self-ratings, and held up after controlling for the possible confounding variables of gender, ethnicity, and extraversion. Individuals higher in sociometric status experienced elevated SWB because they felt more powerful and more accepted in their social groups. Occupying a higher position in the local ladder thus created a sense of influence and control over the social environment, as well as a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Our findings suggest that possessing high status is more important to SWB than some prior scholarship has suggested. However, not all forms of status affect SWB equally. Individuals' sociometric status in their local, face-to-face groups predicted SWB more strongly than did SES. These findings dovetail nicely with work based on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which suggests that variables related to sociometric status, such as prototypicality within

Table 2. Study 4: Results From Stepwise Regression Analyses Predicting Subjective Well-Being (SWB) at Time 2

Independent variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Sociometric status at Time 2	0.55** (0.09)	0.37** (0.08)	0.38** (0.09)	0.35** (0.09)
Sociometric status at Time 1		−0.08 (0.09)	−0.07 (0.10)	−0.06 (0.10)
SWB at Time 1		0.49** (0.10)	0.46** (0.10)	0.44** (0.11)
Socioeconomic status at Time 1			−0.03 (0.03)	−0.03 (0.03)
Socioeconomic status at Time 2			0.05 (0.08)	0.06 (0.08)
Gender (1 = male, 0 = female)				−0.24 (0.19)
Ethnicity (1 = White, 0 = non-White)				0.24 (0.55)
R^2	.451**	.643**	.651**	.666**
ΔR^2		.192**	.008	.016
F test of model	39.39	27.60	16.39	11.98

Note: The table presents unstandardized regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. ΔR^2 for Models 3 and 4 was based on ΔR^2 from Model 2.
**$p < .001$.

a group, affect self-esteem and one's sense of meaning, purpose, and belonging (e.g., Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009).

Future studies should continue to explore why sociometric status has a stronger effect on SWB than does SES. One possibility is that although individuals adapt to their income or education (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978), they might not adapt in the same way to their sociometric status. The joy that comes with an influx of money wanes quickly as people become accustomed to how wealth shapes their daily lives. Yet respect and admiration from one's face-to-face groups might bring sustained SWB. Moreover, future work should examine potential moderators of the link between sociometric status and SWB. For example, related research suggests that one's anticipated future sociometric status (Jetten, Branscombe, & Spears, 2002) and the sociometric status of one's group relative to other groups (Sani, Magrin, Scrignaro, & McCollum, 2010) might moderate the effects of one's current sociometric status.

It is interesting to speculate about the evolutionary origins of the association between sociometric status and SWB. The finding that elevated status is highly correlated with reproductive success and SWB in chimpanzees (Weiss, King, & Enns, 2002), humans' close primate relatives, parallels the local-ladder effect we observed. In hominid predecessors, the capacity to enjoy elevated status in small face-to-face groups was also likely associated with greater survival rates and reproductive success (Buss, 1999). Thus, sociometric status might have become intrinsically rewarding over humans' evolutionary history.

Other research has shown that individuals who place more importance on attaining outcomes related to social status—such as power, control, and prominence (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996)—exhibit lower SWB than individuals who placed less importance on those outcomes. Thus, our findings suggest that whereas longing for status might dampen SWB, possessing status (at least, sociometric status) bolsters SWB (see Gruber, Mauss, & Tamir, 2011).

In sum, the current research highlights the importance of local status hierarchies to happiness. Individuals' standing in their local ladders of respect—their friendship, workplace, or neighborhood groups—has a strong impact on their life satisfaction and the degree to which they experience positive and negative emotion. The respect one commands locally shapes how one feels globally.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interest with respect to their authorship or the publication of this article.

Supplemental Material

Additional supporting information may be found at http://pss.sagepub.com/content/by/supplemental-data

Note

1. We do not believe that demand effects drove the findings in Study 3 for two reasons. First, if demand characteristics were at play, one would expect the effects for the SES manipulation to have been even stronger than those for the sociometric-status manipulation. People tend to believe that if they had more money, they would be happier (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003), yet there are no documented lay beliefs about sociometric status and SWB. Second, we asked all participants, "What ideas or hypotheses do you think the researchers in this experiment were attempting to study?" No participants correctly guessed the study's hypotheses (i.e., that sociometric status affects SWB and that it has a stronger effect on SWB than does SES).

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