
CARING AND DOING FOR OTHERS

Social Responsibility in the Domains of
Family, Work, and Community

(2001)

Edited by

Alice S. Rossi

The University of Chicago Press
Chicago and London

NINE

Themes and Variations in American Understandings of Responsibility

Hazel Rose Markus, Carol D. Ryff, Alana L. Conner,
Eden K. Pudberry, and Katherine L. Barnett

In the dichotomy often drawn between rights and responsibilities, rights are basic, inalienable, natural, and self-definitional. American legal and political culture promotes and protects these rights, and Americans are adept at enumerating the rights they already have and at claiming new rights for themselves (Glendon 1991; Meyer 1990). In the individualist culture that animates many middle-class contexts, talking about individual rights, as well as about the individual who has those rights (by expressing opinions, abilities, and attributes), comes quite easily to most Americans.

Responsibility, on the other hand, is a more nebulous concept for Americans (Wertsch and Penuel 1996). While there seems to be an understanding of responsibility as the price one pays for individual rights, the idea of responsibility as anything more than the undesirable side of a necessary trade-off is seldom publicly or officially elaborated. The social representation (Moscovici 1998) of responsibility—the web of values, ideas, and practices that enables orientation and communication within a community—is weak, muted, and sometimes incoherent, especially in comparison to the social representation of individual rights. Responsibility in most common senses of the word involves others and connections to others. At the same time, however, Americans “know” that God helps those who help themselves, and so responsibility can pose a dilemma for individualistic, self-reliant, autonomous Americans. This dilemma may become accentuated for Americans at midlife, when lives have become increasingly intertwined and interdependent with the lives of others.

OVERVIEW

The focus of this chapter is a careful study of just how Americans at midlife talk about responsibility. We will argue that some ideas about responsibility are shared by all Americans, but that educational level, because it is associated with different ways of being a self and being connected to others, shapes the form and content of these understand-

ings of responsibility in important ways. We will also address the concerns of cultural critics and social scientists who fear that Americans are becoming more isolated and less socially responsible in comparison with people of other nations or with themselves in the past. We will contend that the eighty-three Americans (a subsample of the MIDUS) who participated in our Everyday Well-Being Study are indeed quite responsible, albeit in ways that reflect their culture-specific notions of the self, of others, and of the relationship between the two.

MIDUS participants during the course of the questionnaire were asked to consider each of a series of thirty-one personal attributes (e.g., sympathetic, intelligent, responsible) and to determine how much each attribute described them. At least 70% of all respondents, regardless of gender or educational level, said that "responsible" described them "a lot" (point four on a four-point scale). From many perspectives, including their own, this level of self-proclaimed responsibility could be seen as surprising. Americans are repeatedly telling each other in newspaper columns, magazine articles, and town meetings across the country that they are not as responsible as they used to be, or as they should be, and that civic participation and social conscience are waning (Newman, chapter 5, this volume; Putnam 1995).

In this chapter we take both a broad and an in-depth look at what our subsample of MIDUS respondents may have had in mind when they characterized themselves as responsible. We began our study by asking the respondents for specific examples of being responsible. A qualitative analysis of the responses from this lengthy face-to-face interview suggests that while there is an American consensus on the necessity of being responsible, there are also strikingly different understandings of what responsibility is, what its consequences and antecedents are, and very importantly, who the person is who has responsibility, acts responsibly, or is responsible. In a subsequent analysis we chart when and how themes of social responsibility arise in respondents' discourses about why their lives have gone well and about their hopes for the future. We find that the lives of these respondents are pervaded by the socially responsible intentions and actions of themselves and others.

Responsibility, American Style

What does "responsibility" mean in the American context? As we asked our respondents about responsibility, we asked ourselves whether there is a common or everyday understanding of responsibility

in America. According to many analysts, the official American cultural goal—the right and moral way to be—is to be an autonomous, "free" entity who exercises her or his natural rights. One only needs to turn on network television or to open the pages of mainstream magazines or newspapers to find an unequivocal message about the right way to be: "be free," "be independent," "be unique," "individualize," "go your own way," "chart your own course," "think different," "break the rules," "be free from convention," and "be a driver, not a passenger, on the road of life." Whether referring to cosmetics, alcohol, a car, or insurance, the message is the same. In the classroom and in the workforce, people are urged to know themselves, to develop themselves, to express themselves. While American parents used to emphasize the values of discipline and obedience, they now emphasize the importance of independence and autonomy (Alwin 1989), and schools no longer claim a responsibility to inculcate notions of citizenship, civic responsibility, or respect for others. It has become a matter of individual parental discretion whether or to what extent a child receives some socialization with respect to responsibility.

Americans seem to know that it is important to pay attention to themselves and their rights and to maintain a good attitude toward themselves. Yet responsibility implicates others, and here the American imperative is less clear. While relationships with others are as important for Americans as they are for people everywhere, the nature of those relationships, whether with individuals or with institutions, is contested territory in the United States.

Although there are American communities where the way to think and talk about responsibilities is spelled out, overall the American dialogue on the whens, whys, and hows of responsibility is not particularly well developed (Bellah et al. 1985; Wertsch and Penuel 1996). It is instructive that while Americans are intensely concerned about not treading on the rights of others, the ways in which people should pay attention to others, connect to others, or respond to their expectations, needs, or predicaments are decidedly less emphasized in public policies and practices. Such matters are most often left to individual discretion and are not a matter of public discourse (Miller, Bersoff, and Harwood 1990). Moreover, tending and bending to the needs and demands of another is often cast as compromising one's own autonomy and independence and, very significantly, can be seen as an intrusion on the development and expression of the recipient's autonomous, intricately rendered self. As a result, "being responsible" can be a delicate matter;

at times it may be experienced as opposing the pursuit of the culturally appropriate, autonomous self. Responsibility to others may also be viewed as harmful to its recipients, construed as fostering their dependence and hampering their independence.

Responsibility as Protecting Individual Rights

A highly individualist perspective on responsibility has been directly incorporated into psychological theorizing about responsibility. According to Kohlberg (1981), an understanding of responsibility as protecting individual rights and avoiding the infliction of harm on others is the very basis of morality. From Kohlberg's perspective, responsibility in the sense of honoring interpersonal obligations and responding to the needs of others is a matter of personal choice and of social convention. In response to Kohlberg, Gilligan (1982) argues that moral truth is diverse, and that a concern for caring and social obligation (a concern that she suggests is particularly characteristic of women) should not be regarded as a moral weakness, but as a strength that recognizes social embeddedness and views responsibility to others as natural. Miller and Bersoff (1992) suggest, however, that even Gilligan's powerful critique of Kohlberg remains firmly within the individualist paradigm, due to its emphasis on conflicts between responsibility to the self and responsibility to others.

Miller (1994) contends that independence and salience of responsibility to the self and one's own rights is European-American in origin and decidedly less prominent in the discourse about responsibility in other parts of the world. One of the more striking demonstrations of the primacy and importance of rights-based responsibility among Americans comes from a comparative study of the moral reasoning of Americans and Hindu Indians. Miller and Bersoff's (1992) study of both children and adults show that Americans subordinate interpersonal responsibilities to concerns of justice and view interpersonal responsibilities as matters that should be left to the individual's personal choice. Conversely, Hindu Indians view interpersonal responsibilities as decidedly more important than the preservation of individual rights, and therefore subject to social regulation.

Theorists of responsibility seem to suggest that in American cultural contexts, a concern for others or a sense of social duty or interpersonal obligation will typically be secondary to a concern for one's own needs and rights. For some people, in some situations, a responsibility to others may be elevated so that it becomes as important as a concern for

one's own needs, but it rarely becomes *more* important. Many observers of the American scene claim that the current American perspective on responsibility, which focuses more on the individual than on the other, is in fact the basis for the lack of social cohesiveness and the growing sense of isolation among Americans. In their ground-breaking account of responsibility, Bellah and associates (1985) even suggest that this hyper-awareness of individual rights has led to an atrophying of the very language with which Americans discuss social responsibility. As a result, the interpersonal responsiveness that is actually quite widespread in the American context goes under-reported, making American lives "sound more isolated and arbitrary than . . . they actually are" (21).

Responsibility, Education, and Agency

Until quite recently (this volume contains several exceptions) the most detailed theoretical and empirical analyses of responsibility have focused on the middle class and on respondents with at least some college education. It is not surprising then that responsibility seems bound up with self-definition, with responsibility to the self, with protecting one's own rights, and with avoiding dependence on others or the influence of others. A variety of recent studies document a clear relationship between education and indicators of an agentic, independent self, and also between education and well-being (House et al. 1994; Herzog et al. 1998; Mirowsky 1995; Ryff and Singer 1998; Ryff et al. forthcoming; Ross and Wu 1995). For example, Heise (1990) argues that performing a role that is relatively esteemed or powerful, like those requiring or associated with a college education, will contribute to a sense of self-efficacy. Related studies comparing different social classes have noted a similar relationship, such that increased socioeconomic status is associated with increased individualism (Argyle 1994; Marshall 1997). Feagin (1972), for example, found that educated respondents are more likely to endorse individualistic explanations of poverty. Triandis and colleagues (Triandis 1995) also suggest that individualism increases with education. The ways of life typically associated with completing a college education are likely to result in the self of the American cultural imperative—an autonomous, free (from the undue influence of others), in-control self. Responsibility for such a self will be more "self-centered," and cast more in terms of "taking responsibility" or "having responsibilities" that have to be managed so they do not impinge upon the separated self.

The MIDUS data show striking demographic differences between high school-educated respondents (high school graduates without higher education) and college-educated respondents (those who have a bachelor's degree or higher graduate degrees) who have similar levels of psychological well-being. Compared to the college-educated respondents, high school-educated respondents earn less money, have spouses who earn less money, are more likely to be divorced, have more children, have less educated parents, have more total family abuse, and are much less healthy—reporting worse physical health, more chronic conditions, more symptoms (especially back pain), more smoking, more weight problems, and less exercise. In other words, the high school-educated respondents live in a world with more economic hardship and situational limitations than do the college-educated respondents. These differences lead us to believe that responsibility for those with a high school education will be understood and practiced in ways that seem more responsive to the needs or requirements of others and to the contingencies of the situation. Moreover, responsibility is less likely to be understood and expressed in terms of the actions of an agentic self, but experienced instead as accommodating to the expectations of others.

SAMPLE AND METHODS

Our Everyday Well-Being Study focused on structured, in-depth personal interviews with a subsample of eighty-three individuals who participated in the MIDUS national survey: twenty-one men with a bachelor's degree or higher; twenty-one women with a bachelor's degree or higher; twenty men with a high school degree; and twenty-one women with a high school degree. Our selection criteria reflected the objectives of focusing on the middle years of adulthood (ages forty to fifty-nine), educational differences, and gender differences. In addition, because we were interested in probing the experience of well-being, we selected our respondents from among those in the top two tertiles of overall well-being (as measured by Ryff's six dimensions of positive psychological functioning; Ryff and Keyes 1995) for the two educational groups. Each educational group consisted of equal numbers of respondents from the first and second tertile. Three trained and experienced interviewers conducted the interviews at either respondents' homes or a nearby location of their choice. The subsample includes residents from twenty-one states, representing a wide diversity of geographic regions in the continental United States.

The participation rate for our study was 86.5%, which is quite high considering that all of our respondents had already completed the MIDUS telephone survey and self-administered questionnaire, as well as the Harvard Study of Daily Experiences. To assess the similarities and differences between our subsample and the larger MIDUS sample, we compared our college-educated and high school-educated respondents with MIDUS respondents of the same educational levels, age group, and psychological well-being ($n = 497$). We found that our interview respondents were comparable to the MIDUS subsample with regard to work status, marital status, early life and family background (e.g., parental work status, quality of relationships with parents), physical and mental health (e.g., subjective health, chronic conditions, positive and negative affect), psychological traits, quality of life indicators (e.g., satisfaction with spouse/partner, children, religiosity) and social responsibility (e.g., primary and public obligations, generative concern and giving). For limited variables (e.g., personal and household income, and satisfaction with finances, work, and life overall), our interview subsample rated slightly higher than the MIDUS respondents, whereas for other variables (e.g., heart problems, amount of weekly exercise, number of prescription medications), MIDUS respondents rated slightly higher than our interview respondents.

We conducted in-depth, open-ended interviews (approximately two hours each) with respondents to ascertain, in their own words, what *being well* meant to them. Prior to the interview we mailed respondents a short (four-page) self-administered questionnaire that contained Ryff's psychological well-being items and twelve personality items. We began the actual interviews by inquiring about any major life changes in the past two years (approximately the amount of time that had passed since they had responded to the MIDUS questionnaires). We then asked subjects to give examples to explain why they answered structured questions about well-being or personality descriptors in the manner that they had. Some of these questions pertained directly to responsibility issues. We asked respondents to explain why they chose a certain quantitative response to the question "I am good at managing the responsibilities of life." We also asked respondents to provide real-life examples to help clarify the degree to which they rated themselves as "responsible." We then explored the meaning of well-being and positive life events across several dimensions of time (past, present, future) and life domains (family, work, home, community). Our initial review of protocols revealed that two particular questions prompted consider-

able discussion of issues and concerns directly relevant to social responsibility: "Thinking back over your life, what are some of the reasons why your life has gone well?" and "What are your hopes for the future?" However, it is important to note that the four questions we use in the current analysis constitute less than 15% of the entire interview protocol, which covered questions regarding what *being well* meant to respondents and asked about respondents' work and home lives, family events, and their daily lives in general.

We trained three research assistants in qualitative interviewing techniques for this study (two at Stanford University and one at the University of Wisconsin, Madison). The interviewers from Stanford concentrated their efforts on the West Coast, the Southwest, and parts of the Northeast, whereas the interviewer from Madison covered the Midwest, some of the East Coast, and parts of the South. All interviews followed a strict protocol, and two of the sections included probes. The first probe was "tell me why you said that" and the second probe asked respondents for an example that supported the answer they had given. Interviewers used additional probes only to elicit varied examples or to bring the focus of the interview back to the question at hand.

All interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed and reviewed for accuracy. Multiple members of the research team read and re-read a representative subsample of transcript excerpts to develop inductive coding schemes that remained true to the concepts and words subjects presented. After several iterations, we agreed upon a set of codes and then created a database from the transcripts using a qualitative software package (QSR NUD*IST). The researchers at Stanford and Madison analyzed the data on a question-by-question basis and, where appropriate, grouped questions together. They began the analysis by applying the inductive codes to all the data and combining or eliminating categories that did not produce high enough frequencies.

In this chapter, we first elaborate the proportion of respondents (high school educated vs. college educated) who answered in each of our primary categories. We then probe more deeply into the meanings of these responses by examining subcategories within the primary coding categories as well as the actual text of the responses. The overarching aim is to summarize the findings, both quantitatively (e.g., how many persons answered in a particular category) and qualitatively (e.g., what were the kinds of answers given by high school- and college-educated individuals in particular categories). This combination of

percentages and actual words illustrates how social responsibility can take on different meanings and forms depending on one's education.

RESULTS: THEMES AND VARIATIONS IN AMERICAN
UNDERSTANDINGS OF RESPONSIBILITY
"What Does Responsibility Mean to Me?"

Two interview questions made possible a direct exploration of respondents' understandings and ideas about responsibility. Both of these probes asked respondents to explain answers they gave earlier on the Everyday Well-Being Study questionnaire. For the first question, respondents were reminded of the extent to which they had agreed with the statement "I am good at managing the responsibilities of life" and then were asked why they had given those answers. The second responsibility probe was similar in format: respondents were reminded of their answers to the item asking how much the word "responsibility" describes them and then were asked to give examples supporting the answers they had given. By giving respondents the opportunity to discuss these limited-choice survey items in their own words, we were able to chart the wide array of meanings and practices that middle-aged Americans associate with the terms "responsible" and "responsibility." Because these two probes evoked similar themes, we analyzed responses to both simultaneously.

When charting ways of being responsible, we sought to reflect the language, styles, and concepts used by the respondents. Their responses suggested eight seemingly distinct ways of being responsible: (1) Meeting Obligations; (2) Attending to the Needs of Others; (3) Being Dependable to Others; (4) Adjusting to Circumstances; (5) Juggling and Balancing; (6) Taking Initiative; (7) Doing What I Don't Want to Do; and (8) Taking Care of Myself.

The types of responses coded under each way of being responsible and the percentages of respondents who mentioned each category appear in table 9.1.¹ We computed the percentages presented in this table in the following manner: if respondents mentioned a category one or more times in the course of answering the two probes, they received a one for that category. If they did not mention the category, they received a zero. We then summed the ones and zeroes for each category across all respondents and divided by the total number of respondents ($N = 83$).

As table 9.1 shows, the majority of respondents endorsed Meeting Obligations, Attending to the Needs of Others, and Being Dependable

TABLE 9.1 Ways of Being Responsible

Meaning of Responsibility	Phrases Coded	Endorsers (%)
Meeting Obligations	I live up to my responsibilities	86.75
	I do what I'm supposed to do	
	I do what I need to do	
	I fulfill my day-to-day duties	
	I take care of things	
Attending to the Needs of Others	I get things done	60.24
	I help when asked	
	If others need help, then I help	
Being Dependable to Others	I take care of others	50.60
	People can count on me	
	I don't let others down	
Adjusting to Circumstances	I do what I say I'm going to do	27.71
	I am on time	
	I go with the flow	
Juggling and Balancing	I do what I can	28.92
	I try my best	
	I juggle many different tasks	
Taking Initiative	I balance the needs of others with my own needs	19.28
	I keep all the balls in the air	
	I seek out new responsibilities	
Doing What I Don't Want to Do	I take control of the situation	15.66
	I do more than is expected	
Taking Care of Myself	I will fulfill an obligation, even if it involves a task that I dislike	20.48
	I take time out for myself	
	I keep my health up	

to Others as ways to be responsible. We will characterize this triad below under the subheading "The Common Notion of Responsibility." Endorsement of the five remaining categories of responsibility, however, differed significantly between the high school-educated and college-educated subgroups. Accordingly, we will describe those categories endorsed by a significantly higher proportion of high school-educated respondents than college-educated respondents under "High School-Educated Responsibility," and we will describe those categories endorsed by a significantly higher proportion of college-educated respondents than high school-educated respondents under "College-Educated Responsibility."

Although we have divided the ways of being responsible into high

school-educated responsibility and college-educated responsibility, both education groups were represented with some frequency in all of the categories of responsibility. It appears, however, that responsibility is construed differently by the two educational groups, reflecting diversity in their understandings of the self, the social world, and the relationship between the two.

The Common Notion of Responsibility

As mentioned above, responses that could be categorized as Meeting Obligations, Attending to the Needs of Others, or Being Dependable to Others were generated by the highest percentages of respondents across educational groups (87%, 60%, and 51%, respectively). Responses that enumerated things that one "takes care of," such as obligations for which one is responsible, requirements or duties that one meets, or tasks that one gets done were coded as Meeting Obligations. Attending to the Needs of Others encompasses those responses which explicitly mentioned meeting the material or psychological needs of others, that is, giving care. The others being attended to could either be people in general or specific others, such as co-workers or loved ones. Mentions of role-related responsibilities, such as being "a father to my two children" or "a responsible teacher" were also subsumed under this category. Finally, communicating that others can rely on, can count on, or are not let down by a respondent were coded in the third most popular category, Being Dependable to Others.

Figure 9.1 shows the percentages of high school-educated ($n = 41$) and college-educated ($n = 42$) respondents endorsing each category. High school-educated and college-educated respondents equally generated responses of Meeting Obligations and Attending to the Needs of Others. This was not the case for Being Dependable to Others, which was endorsed by significantly more high school-educated respondents than college-educated respondents. Because of this difference between educational levels, Being Dependable to Others will be discussed at greater length under the subheading "High School-Educated Responsibility."

Men and women equally invoked the three categories that make up the common notion of responsibility. The lack of gender differences for Meeting Obligations and Attending to the Needs of Others is somewhat surprising because these two categories map roughly onto responsibility as "taking care" of things (a man's prerogative) and as "giving care" to others (a woman's sphere), respectively (Tronto 1993). Given our

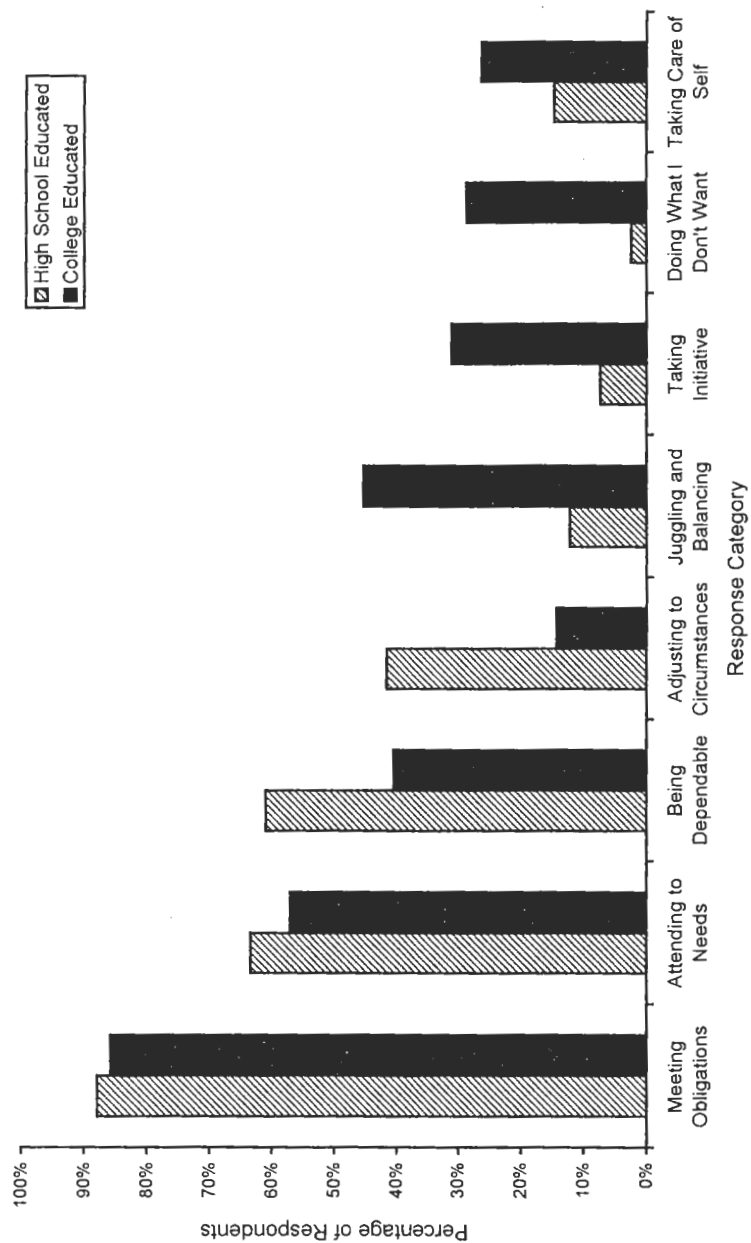


FIGURE 9.1. Mentions of categories of responsibility, by education level.

categories, we predicted that more men than women would mention Meeting Obligations and that more women than men would generate examples of Attending to the Needs of Others. While we did not find these differences, a closer analysis of the category Attending to the Needs of Others, in which the attention mentioned was further classified as either “material care” or “psychological/‘being there’ care,” revealed that slightly more men talked about giving material care than did women (27% of men vs. 14% of women). Because giving material care may be considered as “taking care of” instead of “giving care,” this gender difference is in keeping with those already noted in research on responsibility. However, equal numbers of men and women produced examples of giving psychological care (44% of men vs. 47% of women), a subcategory which more closely resonates with Tronto’s idea of caregiving and for which we predicted a greater number of mentions from women. A possible explanation for the gender similarities in mentions of Meeting Obligations and Attending to the Needs of Others and its subcategories may be that men and women at midlife are facing more similar challenges and goals than are the younger men and women among whom gender differences are often found.

Although there were no gender differences in Meeting Obligations and Attending to the Needs of Others, the greater frequency of mentions of Meeting Obligations is consonant with previous research showing the relative lack of emphasis on Attending to the Needs of Others within the mainstream American culture. Yet the fact that the entire respondent population mentioned Attending to the Needs of Others second most frequently out of the eight categories indicates that other-focused responsibility is indeed very much on the minds of some of these respondents. However, instead of the social causes and civic responsibilities often assumed to constitute the domain of social responsibility, family and employment (e.g., clients and co-workers) were usually the recipients of these respondents’ attention (mentioned by 71% of respondents and 58% of respondents, respectively). This observation echoes the growing sentiment that Americans may be socially responsible in their own individualistic and culturally mandated way—that is, by taking care of themselves, their jobs, and their own families.

An emphasis on taking care of local concerns, that is, taking care of the self and one’s own, may be the core of American-style social responsibility in that these are the first and most commonly produced explanations of responsibility. As with the New York minority group members in Newman’s study (see chapter 5, this volume), our respon-

dents sometimes construed being socially responsible as not being socially destructive. Rather than as proactively contributing to and expanding the social good, social responsibility in the current American perspective may be understood as not bothering others, as not contributing to social ills, or as not requiring help from other people or organizations—that is, social responsibility as independence or self-reliance. The relatively few mentions of social or charitable organizations as domains for which this sample of respondents feels responsible hints that Newman's characterization of minority groups may also accurately describe most Americans at midlife.

In summary, the frequency with which respondents mentioned Meeting Obligations, Attending to the Needs of Others, and Being Dependable to Others suggests that these categories form the backbone of American-style responsibility. The finding that more respondents mentioned Meeting Obligations than Attending to the Needs of Others or Being Dependable to Others as ways of being responsible reflects the greater concern among Americans for a contractual sense of responsibility than for more interpersonal concerns. However, the large number of respondents equating responsibility with Attending to the Needs of Others or Being Dependable to Others indicates that Americans are indeed socially oriented, although the "others" implicated in their explanations tend to reside in local worlds (the family or the workplace).

High School-Educated Responsibility

In addition to subscribing to the core American notion of responsibility, high school-educated respondents sketched a sense of responsibility that highlights adjustment, effort, and a focus on others that is markedly different from the college-educated notion of responsibility depicted below. These differing senses of responsibility are evidenced by high school-educated respondents' significantly greater emphasis on Being Dependable to Others (61% of high school-educated vs. 40% of college-educated respondents) and Adjusting to Circumstances (41% vs. 14%).

As the labels for these two categories imply, the high school-educated respondents' sense of responsibility is defined with respect to other people and features of the shared world. For example, statements coded in the category Being Dependable to Others had to mention or imply other people. In the case of explicit mentions of others, respondents most often communicated that others "can rely on," "can count on," or "aren't let down by" them. As one high school-educated

woman put it, "People know they can count on me. That's being responsible, in my book." Likewise, a high school-educated man responded, "I have an employer that depends on me [and] friends that trust me."

Another type of response in this category that implies others most often took the form of "I do what I say I am going to do." Formulated exclusively by high school-educated respondents, this variant of response was included under Being Dependable to Others because it was very frequently accompanied by the sentiments "and if I cannot, I let others know" and "I don't let others down." As one high school-educated woman asserted, "If I say I'm gonna do something, I do it, unless something just prohibits it. Definitely then I would come and explain what had happened. I believe that you're as good as your word." Similarly, a high school-educated man stated, "'Responsible,' to me, means doing what you say you're going to do and not letting people down."

Being responsible, for high school-educated respondents, is not only contingent on the judgments of others, but is also constrained by situations and respondents' perceived limitations in affecting those situations. Many explanations given by high school-educated respondents when discussing responsibility reveal a sense of the need to adjust or adapt to one's circumstances. Responses of this type convey an acceptance of situations, accompanied by attempts to adapt the self to them. Responses coded in this category include mentions of "coping," "dealing," "adapting," "surviving," and "making do." A high school-educated man summarized the spirit of this category best: "Life is a big responsibility. And it's not going to always go . . . the way that we want it to go. So there's just sometimes where you've got to go with the flow."

Also coded as Adjusting to Circumstances were comments to the effect of "I try," "I try my best," and "I do (did) my best." Although such explanations convey pushing oneself or striving, such comments were considered as indicative of adjusting to the given situation because they communicate that efforts were made, but that they were constrained by personal abilities or immutable features of the external world. Furthermore, respondents' answers often combined the ideas of enduring situations and doing one's best. For example, a high school-educated woman commenting on her familial responsibilities offered, "There's certain family members I'd just as soon not see again. But . . . we run into them all the time, and there's nothing you can do about it. But I try." Emphasizing his efforts while revealing a sense of his own limita-

tions, a high school–educated man stated, “I’m not the most responsible person, but at the same time, I make a lot of effort to be that.”

College-Educated Responsibility

In contrast to the accommodating, effort-focused, socially situated style of responsibility portrayed by the high school–educated respondents, college-educated respondents depicted a sense of responsibility that was more proactive, achievement-oriented, and self-focused. In addition to Meeting Obligations, Attending to the Needs of Others, and Being Dependable to Others, college-educated respondents’ sense of responsibility included Juggling and Balancing, Taking Initiative, Doing What I Don’t Want to Do, and Taking Care of Myself. As figure 9.1 shows, these four additional ways of being responsible were ranked third, fifth, sixth, and seventh in percentage of college-educated respondents mentioning them. In comparison to 12% of high school–educated respondents, 45% of college-educated respondents mentioned Juggling and Balancing responsibilities as a way of being responsible. Similarly, significantly more college-educated than high school–educated respondents mentioned Taking Initiative (31% vs. 7%) and Doing What I Don’t Want to Do (29% vs. 2%). Likewise, Taking Care of Myself was mentioned by substantially more college-educated respondents (26%) than high school–educated respondents (15%), although this difference did not reach significance at the .05 level.

Juggling and Balancing proved to be the dominant metaphors that college-educated respondents used to discuss responsibility. Via these metaphors, responsibilities become depersonalized and objectified commodities that can be selected, manipulated, controlled, “fudged,” or even dropped altogether. Work, family, social life, and “self-time” then become “balls in the air” that must be kept aloft, and the task of the responsible college-educated person becomes to “lay things down just perfectly so all the pieces fit.” In keeping with the idea of controlling responsibilities, mentions of prioritizing, planning, list-making, organizing, or otherwise “taming” responsibilities were also included in this category. One college-educated woman gave a typical example of this way of being responsible: “I am good at juggling multiple tasks. I have a family life that demands that, I have a personal life that demands that, and I have a professional life that demands that.”

This category is not just the sentiment of working mothers; college-educated men also more frequently summoned the metaphor of Juggling and Balancing responsibilities than did high school–educated

respondents: “Life should be a balance, you know, of work, of fun, of commitments.” However, among college-educated respondents, significantly more women than men mentioned Juggling and Balancing in the course of their interviews (57% vs. 28%). This interaction of gender with education may reflect both the greater number of domains for which college-educated women are responsible as well as the type of self required by the work and community roles that they occupy. While high school–educated women doubtlessly encounter the same array of responsibilities as homemakers, caregivers, workers, and community members, college-educated women often face greater expectations in each of these domains, by virtue of the increased status, skills, and resources that their education imparts. As the number of responsibilities and the time and attention that they demand increase for college-educated women, so may the premium they place on organization and planning. Moreover, in assuming higher-status work and community roles that have traditionally been occupied by college-educated men, college-educated women may also be adopting the ways of being often associated with their predecessors—namely, an independent, autonomous, and proactive approach to the world. Thus this heightened emphasis on Juggling and Balancing by college-educated women may reflect both their interaction in historically male workplaces and the panoply of domains to which they are accountable.

Similar to Juggling and Balancing, the category Taking Initiative communicates the idea of having control over one’s responsibilities. Instead of subscribing to the high school–educated respondents’ idea of social responsibility as adjusting themselves to circumstances, college-educated respondents equated being responsible with adjusting circumstances to themselves, that is, with affecting situations according to their own needs, desires, and abilities. Responses in this category took two forms. The first sense of Taking Initiative involves seeking out new responsibilities, taking on extra responsibilities, exceeding expectations, and taking control of outcomes. As a college-educated man expressed this idea, “I seek out responsibility, and I believe in an individual being responsible for his or her own actions.” A college-educated woman echoed this controlled, self-focused sense of responsibility with, “I tend to take a little more responsibility than maybe what’s expected of me. When I want to do something, I want to do it right.”

This woman’s emphasis on “doing things right”—as opposed to the high school–educated way of being responsible, “doing my best”—hints at a second manifestation of the category Taking Initiative. In this

formulation of the category, respondents list good outcomes or their current contentment as evidence of having been responsible. Thus being responsible is not merely a matter of exerting effort, but of achieving and succeeding. For example, a college-educated man reasoned, "Things have turned out reasonably successful for me. . . . I sort of believe that if you have some successes, you've had to manage in certain ways to achieve that success." Discussing the responsibility associated with building a house of her own, a college-educated woman stated, "I have to say, I did a great job."

The experience of control over responsibilities by college-educated respondents also seems to heighten their awareness of those responsibilities that they would prefer not to have. This is reflected in their significantly greater tendency to explain that they are responsible because they are Doing What I Don't Want to Do. When defining responsibilities as undesirable impositions, these respondents seem to be suggesting that what one has to do is inherently antithetical to what one wants to do. The college-educated woman quoted above cinched this opposition between "extrinsic" and "intrinsic" motivators—between "have to" and "want to"—with her claim, "when I want to do something, I want to do it right, not because I'm supposed to, but because that makes me feel good." In this distinction, responsibilities are typically designated as have-to's that conflict with want-to's. Thus responsibilities that are "things I don't want to do" are experienced as encroaching or impinging upon the self instead of as integral or desirable to the self. A college-educated woman captured the essence of this category with, "There are things that I have to take care of, and that doesn't necessarily mean that it's all going to be for my gratification. It's not all going to be because I'm going to get something out of it." Speaking about his church duties, a college-educated man echoed this sentiment with, "I take on the responsibility and I complete it, which is the reason for instance why I have stuck with being treasurer at church and with this other committee that I'm on that I'd really rather not be spending all my time at right now."

The idea of responsibilities as objects in the world that are juggled, balanced, sought, mastered, external, and often unwanted presumes the existence of a self that juggles, balances, takes initiative, and knows its preferences. As alluded to by their relatively higher endorsement of Taking Care of Myself, college-educated respondents seem to have reified this elaborated, independent self as another obligation. A result of this reification is their frequent lament of failing to take care of the self.

As a college-educated woman related, "And typically what gets lost for me is . . . a sense of responsibility to myself, which would be, you know, take a weekend off and just go sit under a tree."

Moreover, respondents often viewed Taking Care of Myself as a necessary precursor to, and yet competing with, fulfilling obligations to others. For example, college-educated respondents often expressed that attending to others hinges on first taking care of the self: "Be good to myself, responsible to myself . . . realize that I have to, you know, go to the gym and, you know, keep my health up, and get my down time. . . . Otherwise [I] build up a lot of passive-aggressive resentment." The need to take care of the self in order to take care of others, as expressed by many college-educated respondents, contrasts with the high school-educated respondents' references to others as the source of their own sense of being responsible. Thus for college-educated respondents, the experience of responsibility seems to be more self-situated, while for high school-educated respondents, the experience of responsibility may be more socially derived and maintained.

Contrasting High School-Educated and College-Educated Selves

We have argued that the meanings and understandings of responsibility outlined so far are differentially distributed across educational strata because of differences in the primary and extended social worlds of these respondents, and thus in the selves that are developed and maintained to link individuals to their relevant communities and societies. Based on findings from the national data set, we know that respondents with a high school education, compared to respondents with a college education, are likely to participate in communities where there are more people confronting serious illness, unemployment, and a variety of complex financial and family problems either of their own or of the significant others in their lives. Moreover, these respondents have fewer resources of every type with which to confront these difficulties.

It is reasonable then that the everyday lived experiences of the high school-educated respondents afford and foster the greater awareness of social embeddedness that characterizes their explanations of responsibility. In many working-class contexts, it is essential to be attuned and responsive to the needs and requirements of others—such needs and requirements structure everyday life. Agency may be experienced as adjusting to these contingencies and obligations—"catching the ball when it's thrown." The immediate pressures associated with lives in these contexts may well preclude the opportunity to focus on and care

for one's self and thus also preclude a sense of responsibility to do so. Moreover, the structure of networks and communities with fewer financial resources is likely to foster reciprocity and interdependence among people. If people do not help or respond to others when required to do so, they are unlikely to get help when they need it.

In contrast, respondents with a college education live lives in which they confront more "individualized" problems and stresses that need to be "controlled" and "managed" and in which immediate hands-on support from other people is less likely to be required and is also not as useful. The college educated are then relatively more "free" to focus on themselves and their responsibilities to their own individual needs and requirements. Moreover, as a consequence of the more extended social world of those with a college education, they are likely to encounter a more diverse set of expectations and requirements from others—expectations that call on them to take initiative and control, which fosters a proactive sense of agency.

The self then is the primary locus of sociocultural influence and will reflect the patterns of interpersonal relationships and the ways in which people habitually relate to each other in their relevant social worlds. Some ways of being responsible imply a sense of self that is fully interdependent with the encompassing social world, while other ways define the self as separate from and even in opposition to the social world and the responsibilities it entails. Attending to the Needs of Others and Being Dependable to Others are examples of the former, while Juggling and Balancing, Doing What I Don't Want to Do, and Taking Care of Myself are examples of the latter. Adjusting to Circumstances suggests a self that exercises agency by adapting to the external world, while Taking Initiative suggests a self that exercises agency by influencing the external world. Given the differences between high school-educated and college-educated respondents in their mentions of these different ways of being responsible, we may infer that the high school-educated respondents and college-educated respondents have somewhat different senses of self.

To provide better snapshots of these two kinds of self, we calculated the relative emphases placed on different ways of being responsible within each educational group. Using the categorical coding described above, we summed the total number of coded statements for high school-educated respondents ($n = 119$) and college-educated respondents ($n = 138$). There was no significant difference in number of coded statements between education groups. Within each education

group, we then summed the number of coded statements for each category and divided them by the total number of coded statements for the group. Figure 9.2 represents the resulting percentages.

For high school-educated respondents, the ways of being responsible that make up the common notion of responsibility—that is, Meeting Obligations, Attending to the Needs of Others, and Being Dependable to Others—account for 73% of their codable responses to the two probes. In contrast, the same combination of responses accounts for only 56% of the college-educated respondents' answers. This comparison suggests that while the majority of respondents across educational levels adhere to the common notion of responsibility, high school-educated respondents place a greater emphasis on these core ideas than do college-educated respondents.

By adding Adjusting to Circumstances to the common notion of responsibility, we can account for almost 90% of high school-educated respondents' answers to the two direct questions about their responsibility. Yet the same combination of reasons only explains 60% of the college-educated respondents' answers. The remaining 40% fell into the more self-focused categories of Juggling and Balancing, Taking Initiative, Doing What I Don't Want to Do, and Taking Care of Myself. Comparing the charts for the two groups, it is these four segments of the pie that differ the most between educational levels, constituting a much larger proportion of the pie for college-educated respondents than for high school-educated respondents. Accordingly, the more other-focused ways of being responsible are less prominent for the college-educated respondents.

These comparisons of the relative emphases on the different ways of being responsible within each educational group echo the findings from the group comparisons discussed above. High school-educated respondents' relatively greater emphasis on the common notion of responsibility is largely due to their greater emphasis on Being Dependable to Others (high school educated: 21%; college educated: 12%), suggesting that these respondents' experiences of being responsible are more dependent on the trust, dependence, and reliance of others. From this we may infer that for high school-educated respondents, the self is experienced as more interdependent with specific others than is the case for college-educated respondents. High school-educated respondents also placed greater relative emphasis on Attending to the Needs of Others (high school educated: 22%; college educated: 17%), providing further evidence that being responsible is more other-focused for

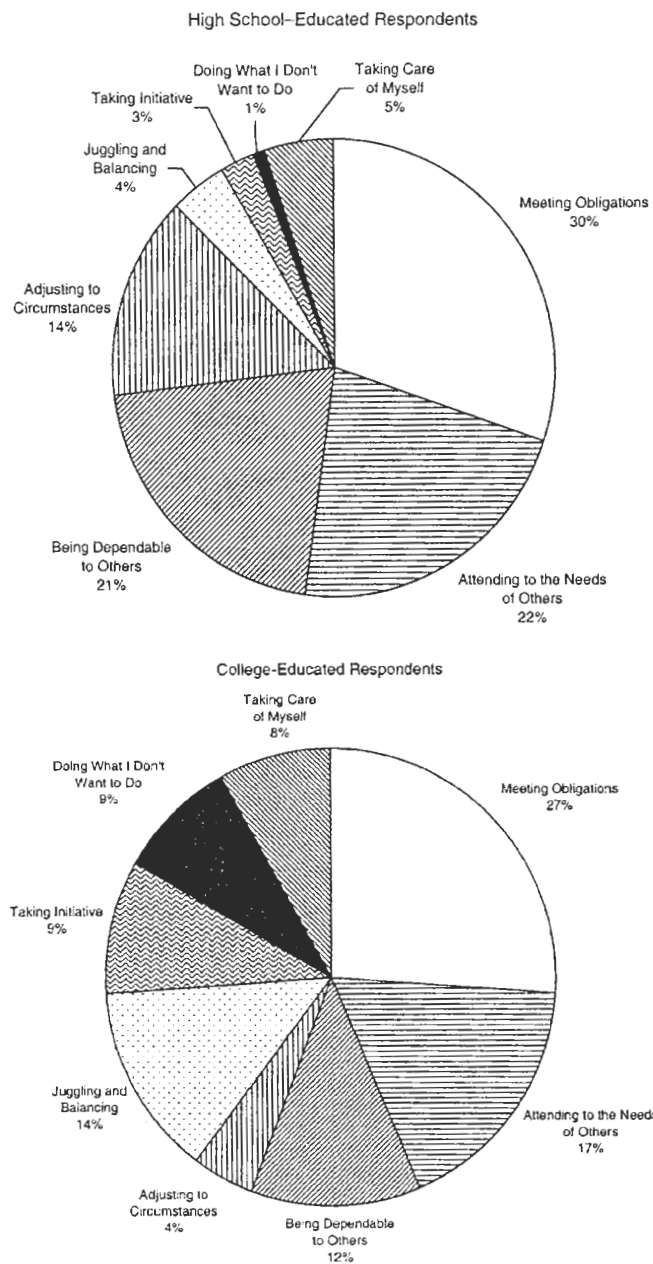


FIGURE 9.2. Relative emphases on categories of responsibility, by education level.

them than it is for college-educated respondents. Finally, their greater relative emphasis on Adjusting to Circumstances (high school educated: 14%; college educated: 4%) suggests that the more interdependent high school-educated respondents are more intent on tailoring themselves to a world of which they are an integral part, instead of manipulating a world from which they are independent.

College-educated respondents, on the other hand, seem to have a more defined, more separated sense of self that not only requires their responsiveness, but is sometimes in conflict with the requirements of others or at odds with the contingencies of the shared world. As their greater relative emphasis on the metaphor of Juggling and Balancing would suggest (high school educated: 4%; college educated: 14%), college-educated respondents may view the self as separated from its obligations and responsibilities. Not only is this self separated, but its preferences and desires are also more highly elaborated, as shown through their more frequent endorsement of Doing What I Don't Want to Do as a way of being responsible (high school educated: 1%; college educated: 9%). Finally, this more individuated, autonomous self may also express its preferences, traits, and abilities by Taking Initiative—that is, by selecting and excelling at those responsibilities that best reflect one's "true" self (high school educated: 3%; college educated: 9%). In this manner, the external world in which one participates is chosen, controlled, and even changed according to the needs and desires of the self.

Self-Focused versus Other-Focused Answers

To explore further the emerging trend for college-educated respondents to portray a self that is more elaborated, separate, and autonomous than high school-educated respondents do, we coded every sentence of the answers explaining the statements "I am responsible" and "I am good at managing the responsibilities of life" according to whether the emphasis of the sentence was on the self or on other people. There were no significant differences among the gender and education subgroups in the number of sentences spoken. These self/other coding categories (Mention of Self, Mention of Others, Focus on Self, Focus on Others) were designed to determine (1) who (the self, the other, or both) was mentioned in each sentence of a respondent's answer and (2) who was the main focus of each sentence.

Sentences were coded in the Mentions of Self category when the respondent explicitly mentioned the self by using the words "me," "my-

self," or "I" (e.g., as when a college-educated woman said, "I guess, because I think like that, I'm list maker, and, you know, following through on the tasks, and that kind of thing"). This category included the words "you," "we," and mentions of the generic person ("everybody," "people," etc.) when they were appropriate substitutes for the words "I" or "me" (i.e., when they implied that the self was included in their meaning).

Sentences were coded in the Mentions of Others category when the respondent explicitly mentioned other people in the sentence. This category included both specified others such as children, relatives, friends, and co-workers as well as unspecified others labeled "people," "others," etc. (e.g., as when a high school-educated man answered, "And if I were not responsible, if I made a mistake, I could be responsible for hurting someone"). Mentions of roles that implied relations with others were also counted (e.g., parent).

Sentences were coded in the Focus on Self category when the self was the subject of the sentence or the main focus of the content was the self. Respondents often portrayed the self as a proactive agent influencing the external world. They may have mentioned other people, but others were not the primary focus of the sentence. For example, a college-educated man expressed this kind of self-focus with his statement, "I believe that, uh, I have a strong personality, and I am a person who accepts responsibility—in fact seeks it out."

Sentences were coded in the Focus on Others category when other people were the subject of the sentence or the main focus of the content was on other people. The respondent may have mentioned himself or herself, but he or she was not the primary focus of the sentence. Respondents often portrayed themselves as playing a reactive role in response to external circumstances, as when a high school-educated man explained, "I have a sense of responsibility towards my family and my community."

In general, the majority of sentences for the total population only mentioned the self ("The older I got, the more responsibilities I got"), and a few sentences mentioned only the other ("She was always the strong one"). Many sentences like the following mentioned both the self and the other: "When someone's asked me to do something, I've done it to the best of my ability." Some sentences mentioned others, but focused on the self: "I was independent for years before I married my husband." Other sentences mentioned the self, but focused on oth-

ers: "If somebody tells me they're going to be somewhere and they want to meet me, I'll be there." A few sentences like the following focused equally on the self and the other: "Not a day goes by that my daughter and I don't talk; either she calls me or I call her."

All of the self/other coding categories contained at least one sentence from each of the subgroups created by educational level and gender. We divided each respondent's sentences mentioning or focusing on the self by his or her sentences mentioning or focusing on others. The ratios presented below are the means for each subgroup.

Men mentioned the self 1.89 times more often than they mentioned others, while women mentioned the self 1.28 times more often than they mentioned others. This finding is in accordance with a variety of findings that suggest that women are more interconnected with others than men are (Cross and Madson 1997).

A more striking difference occurs when we compare the sentence ratios of Focus on Self to Focus on Others between education subgroups. College-educated respondents focused on the self 3.85 times more often than they focused on others, while high school-educated respondents focused on the self only 1.79 times more often than they focused on others (figure 9.3). A college-educated woman focusing on the self gave the following response: "Because I am very responsible, even when it's something I really don't like to do, and there are quite a few things like that." In contrast, a high school-educated man focusing on others said, "For my family and . . . if somebody's counting on me for something, I try not to let him down, you know."

Furthermore, when we compared the ratios of self/other mentions with self/other focused sentences (figure 9.3), we found that even though both college-educated and high school-educated respondents mention the self and others in similar ratios, the focuses of these sentences differ. In other words, even though college-educated respondents mentioned the self or others just as many times as high school-educated respondents, the college-educated respondents focused more on themselves, even when they mentioned others. For example, the following response from a college-educated man mentions others but focuses on the self: "Well, I mean, I'm responsible in that, if when, when people bring work in to have it done, I mean, I get it done. I get it back to them." In contrast, the following response from a high school-educated man mentions others and focuses on others: "Responsibilities that I have have to do with her [wife] . . . make sure she's happy and

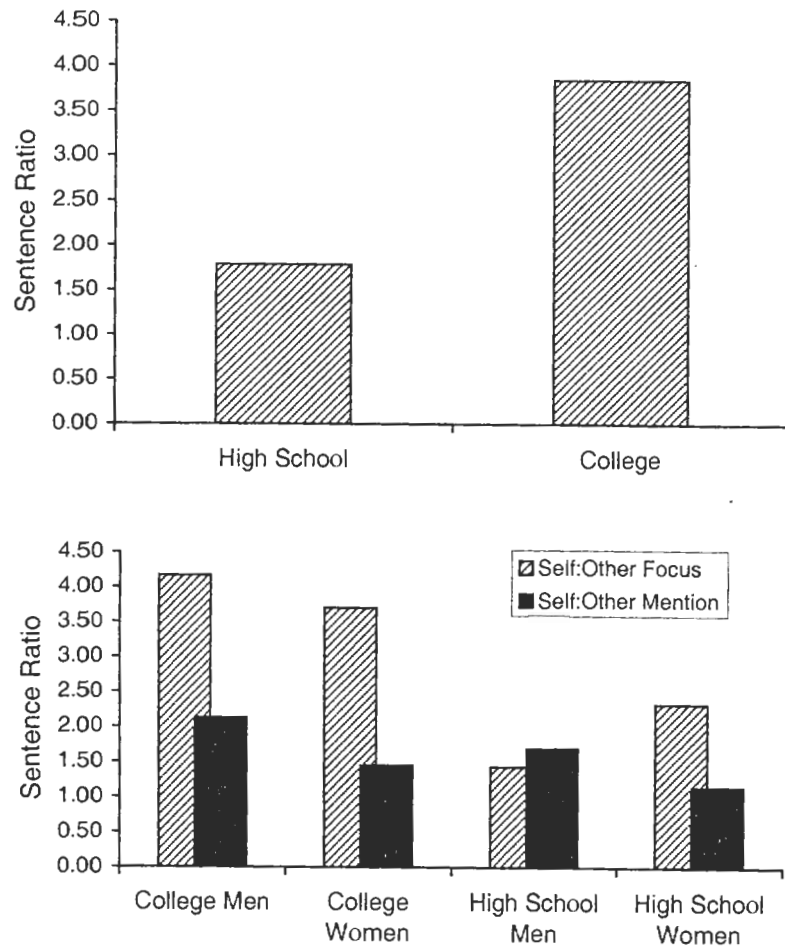


FIGURE 9.3. Mentions of focus on self versus others when providing examples and explanations of responsibility. The top chart shows the ratio of self-focused to other-focused sentences. The bottom chart shows the ratios of self-mentioned to other-mentioned sentences and corresponding ratios of self-focused to other-focused sentences.

pleased.” This difference in focus occurs most strongly among men. High school–educated men were more likely to focus on others when others were mentioned in a sentence than any other subgroup.

In summary, college-educated respondents did mention others in their answers just as often as high school–educated respondents, but the college-educated respondents’ language and phrasing reveal a focus

on a self that is separate from others. The following statement from a college-educated man exemplifies this self-focus in mentions of others: “I went away to college, seven hundred miles from my family and everyone I knew. That made me responsible.” As this response illustrates, the college-educated, independent and proactive selves might be due in part to the geographic move away from families of origin and into the diffuse social world of the university.

Responses from the high school–educated, on the other hand, reveal a self which is embedded in a network of other people. Responsibilities are framed and explained from the perspective of other people. A high school–educated woman provides a clear example: “My pastor even says when somebody says something to him, you just give it to [respondent], she’ll take care of it, she knows what to do.” This interconnected sense of self might also contribute to the high school–educated respondents’ readiness to adjust to circumstances. For example, if they are subject to multiple demands from close kin, they might adopt a more reactive style of acting in the world.

“Why Has My Life Gone Well?”

Mentions of responsibility also occurred in responses to open-ended questions that did not directly ask about responsibility. The question “Thinking back over your life, what are some of the reasons your life has gone well?” generated extensive commentary from respondents about the socially responsible behavior of others that they regarded as part of the explanation for their own well-being. That is, our sample participants accounted for why their own lives had turned out well by pointing to the responsible, caring, giving actions of significant others, such as parents. These responses underscore an important connection between the giving and receiving ends of social responsibility and, thereby, convey possible socialization avenues through which individuals come to be responsive to the needs of others (i.e., by having been the recipients of such efforts from others).

Overall, our respondents provided a wide variety of reasons to account for why their lives had gone well, such as their early family life, their current family life, or their hard work, education, or faith. Organized from a social responsibility perspective, their answers generated eight primary categories, five of which speak directly to issues of responsibility: generativity (e.g., being helped or encouraged by others, especially at work, or mentoring others), early family (e.g., having nurturing, supportive parents), current family (e.g., having wonderful chil-

dren, a loving spouse), caring (e.g., caring about and for others), and support (e.g., from friends, social networks, co-workers). For some of these answers (e.g., those in the categories of generativity, early family, and support), the respondents were speaking of themselves as recipients of others' social responsibility. For others (e.g., those in the caring category), their comments described themselves as doing for others. Other typical answers to why life had gone well dealt with themes of work (e.g., working hard, following a work ethic), agency (e.g., pursuing goals, having control), and religion/spirituality (e.g., having faith in God). These answers may be indirectly linked to social responsibility (i.e., by working hard, pursuing goals, or practicing my faith, I may contribute positively to the lives of others). Alternatively, answers in the work and agency categories may reflect strongly individualistic themes in accounting for why life has gone well. Finally, two kinds of responses for why life has gone well (pertaining to luck or openness to experience) revealed little connection to the theme of social responsibility and, as such, were not included in the analyses summarized below.

Figure 9.4 reveals the proportion of persons (by educational level) who answered in the eight primary response categories. References to early family were made by most respondents across both groups, although significantly more college-educated than high school-educated respondents answered in this category. Second highest, in terms of proportion of respondents, were answers pertaining to current family, where there was minimal difference by educational standing. Significantly more college-educated respondents spoke of their own agency in explaining why their lives had gone well, thereby underscoring their more individualistic, proactive ways of framing life success; significantly more high school-educated respondents spoke of religion/spirituality. Similarly, significantly more college-educated respondents spoke of support from friends and others, while more high school-educated respondents referred to their own hard work. High school-educated respondents were also more likely to emphasize caring than college-educated respondents, and both groups gave comparable emphasis to generativity. Men and women revealed generally similar patterns (i.e., what category was first, second, third, etc. in proportion of respondents), although within each category, men responded with greater frequency than women.

Figure 9.5 further differentiates the types of answers obtained when respondents spoke about aspects of their early family in explaining why their lives had gone well. The pie charts summarize the frequency

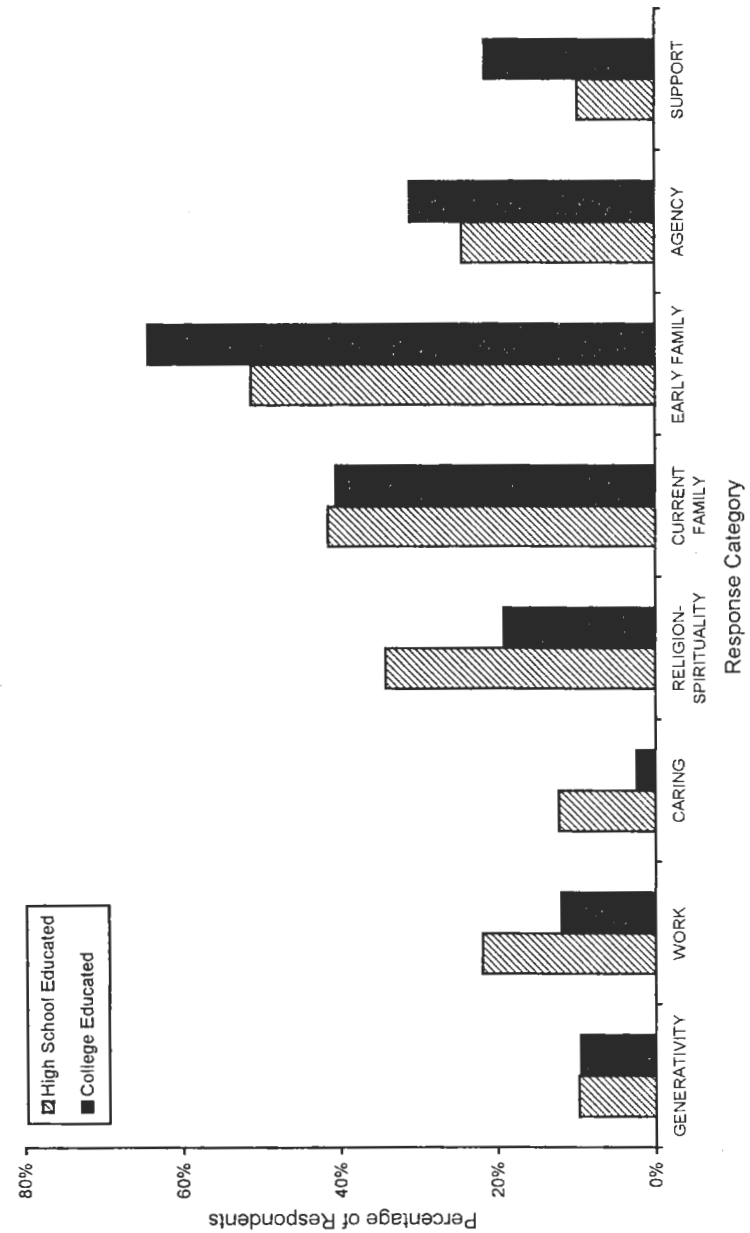


FIGURE 9.4. Social responsibility categories of responses to the question "Why has your life gone well?" Note that 11.9% of the college educated and 2.4% of the high school educated did not mention any social responsibility category.

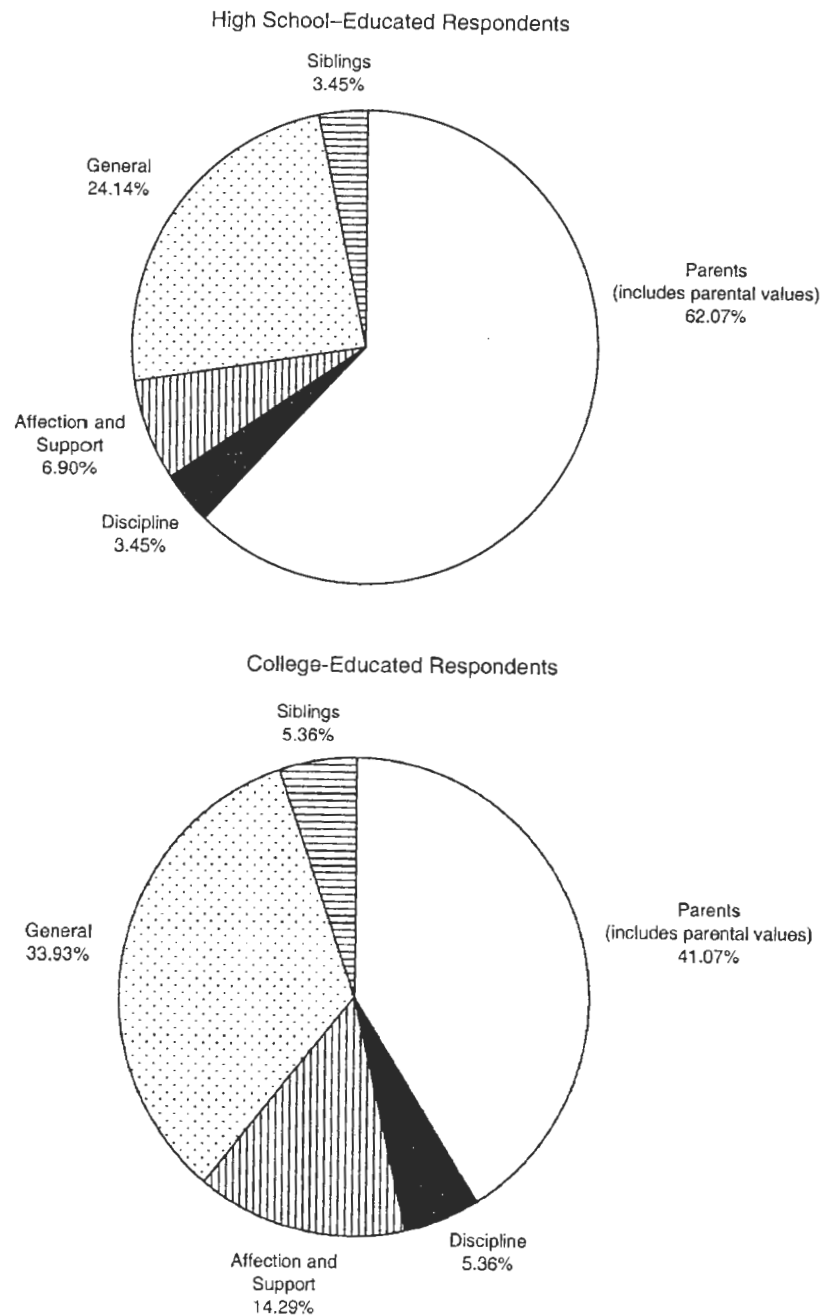


FIGURE 9.5. “Why has your life gone well?”: Early family influences. For high school–educated respondents, $n = 41$, total number of mentions = 29. For college-educated respondents, $n = 42$, total number of mentions = 56.

of mentions about parents (including specific mentions of mother, father, and parental values), discipline, affection/support (includes affection and support of parents, grandparents, and other family members), siblings, and general early family influences (e.g., a good foundation, a wonderful family). Note that because each respondent could answer in more than one category, these charts do not show percentages of respondents (as in the bar graphs), but frequencies of mentions of particular categories. Educational level, again, reveals more noticeable differences than gender does. For example, nearly two-thirds of comments from high school–educated respondents cited parents in explaining why their lives had turned out well, compared to only about 40% of the comments of college-educated respondents, a significant difference. College-educated individuals, however, made significantly more specific mentions of the affection/support of their parents than did high school–educated respondents.

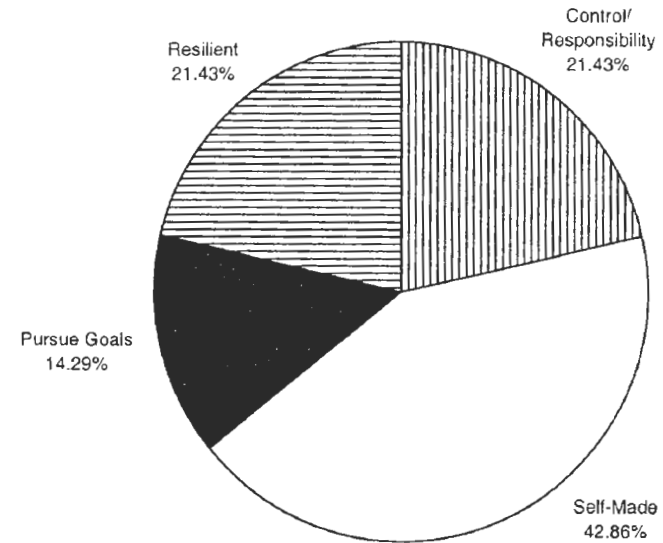
Apart from these percentage differences, differences in how respondents spoke about these early family influences were evident. Illustrative comments when respondents spoke about parental values and parental support are summarized in table 9.2. We selected these answers from among the larger pool of responses because they show overlap in certain values, such as honesty and hard work, for both educational groups, as well as distinctive differences in values. For example, these high school–educated respondents referred to being taught “right from wrong,” while the college-educated respondents emphasized being taught the importance of education and volunteering. In speaking about parental support, these selected responses exhibit more college-educated respondent commentary about being loved and having opportunities than do the responses from the high school educated. However, both groups frequently mentioned supportive parents.

Figure 9.6 elaborates the subcategories of answers coded under the primary category of agency: being self-made, exercising control/responsibility, pursuing goals, and being resilient. Both educational groups (and both genders) revealed generally similar patterns of emphasis, although college-educated respondents spoke more frequently of pursuing goals than did high school–educated respondents, and the latter, in turn, spoke more frequently about their resilience in the face of life’s adversities than did those with college degrees. The resilience category reveals the same emphasis on reacting to external circumstances that is central to the category Adjusting to Circumstances noted in the earlier depiction of high school–educated responsibility.

TABLE 9.2 Early Family Influences
 "WHY HAS YOUR LIFE GONE WELL?"

HIGH SCHOOL-EDUCATED RESPONDENTS
<p>Parental Values: (female) Well, the way I was raised, the things my parents taught me—I guess right from wrong, basically. • (female) I think it was the love and some of the values that she tried to teach me. . . . To do it the right way the first time, and you won't have to go back to it. I never forget that. And I've always told my girls that, "If you do it right the first time, you won't have to go back and do it again." And she also taught me: "If you tell one lie, you'll have to tell another one to support that lie, and before you know it, you done tell so many lies that you're bogged down until you don't know what the truth is yourself." So she always told me, "Be truthful and the truth will always win." • (male) I think he was extremely honest, an extremely hard worker, and taught me that whatever I was going to make, I would have to do it on my own. • (male) They taught me right from wrong. And I just knew what was right and what was wrong, and just as far as I go up from there, as far as going from the ground up. And in all of those areas.</p> <p>Affection/Support: (male) My parents were fairly strict, not overly, but made sure we knew right from wrong. And they encouraged us to do a lot of different things, to try a lot of different things.</p>
COLLEGE-EDUCATED RESPONDENTS
<p>Parental Values: (female) Honesty and trustworthiness, religion, hard work—they're just hard workers. Just basic kinds of moral-type values. • (female) They gave us a strong sense of values. Education was very important. Sharing and giving back something was always important. Strong sense of family. • (male) My father worked in a factory all of his life. He taught me to always do your best in whatever you do. I've tried to adhere to that. I've tried to pass that on to my kids. • (male) My parents demonstrated to me that hard work was necessary and worthwhile. That volunteering in certain things was the right thing to do because I got a lot of satisfaction from that kind of stuff, although it's a pain in the neck sometimes, too. But I feel good about me when I've done something, and I know that's why (wife) does it, and why she's at the soup kitchen this afternoon.</p> <p>Affection/Support: (female) Well, I think because I feel like my parents love me, and I had a happy childhood, and opportunities to learn things, go to school, and was supported in worthwhile things that I wanted to do. • (male) I had parents that were extremely supportive. In terms of my talent and my abilities in where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do with my life, they understood it partially because they're both artistic. . . . And I'm their pride and joy, and they love me to death, and we have a great relationship, and a lot of mutual respect, and they were always encouraging me.</p>

High School-Educated Respondents



College-Educated Respondents

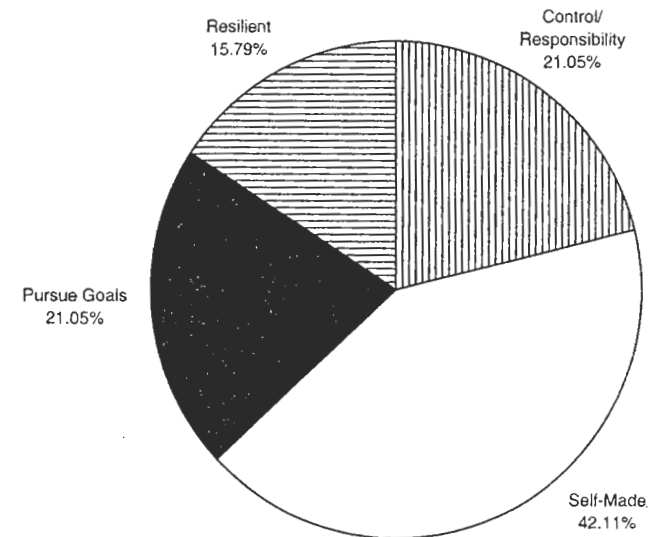


FIGURE 9.6. "Why has your life gone well?": Agency. For high school-educated respondents, $n = 41$, total number of mentions = 14. For college-educated respondents, $n = 42$, total number of mentions = 19.

Similarly, the theme of pursuing goals is similar in tone to the proactive, achievement-oriented Juggling and Balancing conception of social responsibility found among college-educated individuals.

The quantitative contrasts are again embellished by examination of differences in the actual words coded into these categories. Rather than provide an exhaustive summary of all comments, we chose responses that reveal both similarities (at the level of abstract categories) and differences (at the level of specific illustrations) between educational groups. Table 9.3 provides select responses for high school-educated and college-educated men and women across the subcategories of agency. Both genders and both educational groups spoke about pursuing goals, having a sense of control/responsibility (e.g., "I've always accepted responsibility for making my own way through life"; "I'm the kind of person who says I'm going to take control of my life") and being self-made ("taking initiative," "making it happen"), but these were described with different examples according to educational level (i.e., college-educated respondents spoke of working to get a college education or to finish nursing school, whereas high school-educated respondents spoke of these qualities with regard to efforts to quit smoking, make a down payment on a house, or have another child). All respondents, but especially high school-educated respondents, emphasized similar themes of hanging tough, not buckling under, and surviving obstacles (coded as resilient responses) in explaining why their lives have gone well.

In summary, our analyses of spontaneously generated answers to why life has gone well revealed numerous patterns. Overall, men answered with greater frequency in all categories than did women, although the general pattern of responses was similar by gender. With regard to education, the college-educated respondents gave greater emphasis to early family, agency, and support, while the high school-educated respondents gave greater emphasis to religion/spirituality, work, and caring. The emphasis on agency among college-educated respondents extends the more proactive, individualistic themes found among college-educated respondents in the prior analyses of questions that asked directly about responsibility. In addition, the other-oriented responses regarding caring given more often by the high school-educated respondents reveal an emphasis on the self giving to others. In contrast, the responses regarding support given more often by college-educated respondents reveal a need for others to be giving to the self. This college-educated self-focus versus the high school-educated

TABLE 9.3 Agency Responses

"WHY HAS YOUR LIFE GONE WELL?"

HIGH SCHOOL-EDUCATED RESPONDENTS

Control/Responsibility: (female) *I thought, if I worked hard enough and got money for a down payment on a house and got out of the apartment—that's when I wanted to have another (child); that's when I was beginning to see that I could, didn't have to drift with things; I could take charge of things.*

Self-Made: (male) *I don't know, whenever I've made up my mind to do something, really made up my mind to do it, I could do it. I wanted to quit smoking. I made up my mind to quit smoking. I was smoking two and a half packs a day, and I just made up my mind that that was it. It took me six months on a smoking program. . . . I was smoking two and a half packs, I cut it down to a pack. And I did that because that was a unit that I could work with. And so then when I made up my mind that I was quitting altogether, I was then smoking a pack a day. And I just stopped smoking. I haven't had a cigarette since.*

Pursue Goals: (female) *You have goals and you work for them. . . . I had to work at night and go to school in the daytime. I worked till midnight every night and went to school all day to achieve what I wanted. But you know if you want somethin', and you work hard, then you know, you know, you're gonna get it, sooner or later.*

Resilient: (male) *Yeah, probably the self-confidence, endurance, you know, not giving up. Just hang in there, hang tough. Things are going to get around to here real eventually.* • (female) *I've worked hard—physically, mentally. There's been a lot of hard times, but we've come through them all. . . . So all of those things just taught me more and more about what was important. It's how you survive the obstacles, and probably with truth for knowing that I've done pretty well with it is just that—at least I did go find the help and sought and sought and sought till somebody gave me some answers and helped me, even though it took four years of total frustration.*

COLLEGE-EDUCATED RESPONDENTS

Control/Responsibility: (male) *But probably the main reason I think is I've always accepted responsibility for making my own way through life, not look for excuses, or things like that.*

Self-Made: (male) *I don't sit back and wait for things to happen. You know, I'm very motivated and engageable. So I'm always thinking about "What do I want to do now?" and "What do I want to do next?" . . . [S]o I'd have to say one of the reasons why my life has gone well is because . . . I'm not leaning against a tree somewhere watching things, just waiting for something to happen to me. You know, I'm actively pursuing, and I'm researching and looking and figuring out, and uh, and enjoying that process. . . . I think that's another reason why my life goes where it does, because I push it along.*

Pursue Goals: (male) *Well, one of the reasons is I set up my goals, and I, uh, followed my goals. In other words, it's like early in the game, I set a goal: "Okay, I'm gonna get a college education." I knew exactly what college I was gonna go, and I could. I knew exactly what degree I was gonna get and everything, and that was my first goal. Also, a goal at that time was start investing, which I did. So the goals I have set, you know, that the reason that, I guess I'm fairly well off.* • (female) *Because I was goal-oriented from an early age. . . . I was blessed with ability to do whatever it was I wanted to do.*

Resilient: (female) *I will take some credit for things going well because I think I'm a, a fairly strong person, and I think when there are things that are tough for some people, maybe would, would buckle under or not be able to move forward, I, I think I'm stronger than some in that way.*

other-focus is similar to the results of the self/other coding mentioned earlier.

The unpacking of subcategories from the major categories revealed largely similar gender profiles, but markedly different profiles between educational levels. High school-educated respondents made more frequent mentions of their parents (including parental values), while college-educated respondents spoke more frequently about the affection and support from parents and other family members. Both groups emphasized values of honesty and hard work that had come from parents, but discipline was a more prominent topic among high school-educated respondents. Finally, not only did the frequency of responses within the agency category reveal different patterns by education (college-educated respondents generated responses about pursuing goals, and high school-educated respondents generated responses with resilience themes), but actual text, again in preliminary fashion, also illustrated distinct life challenges and pursuits for the high school educated versus college educated, among whom different types of agency are enacted.

Despite the prominence of the agentic, self-oriented responses among college-educated respondents, we underscore the notable emphasis they gave to acknowledging their parents and early home life in accounting for why their lives had gone well. Conceivably, their own midlife experiences as parents, where focus on the “other” is required, may prompt among them a new appreciation of the love, discipline, and resources provided by their own parents.

“What Are My Hopes for the Future?”

Themes of social responsibility were also evident in our respondents’ answers to questions about their hopes for the future. Figure 9.7 reveals the proportion of college-educated versus high school-educated respondents who answered in the five primary response categories: own generativity, family and work, behavior and attitudes, religion/spirituality, and health. The most frequently occurring answer type involved family and work, which included references to various aspects of family life, work, and education. Significantly more college-educated than high school-educated respondents (as well as more women than men) answered in this category. The second most prominent answer among all subgroups was health (especially remaining healthy). Again, more college-educated than high school-educated respondents and more women than men generated this category and de-

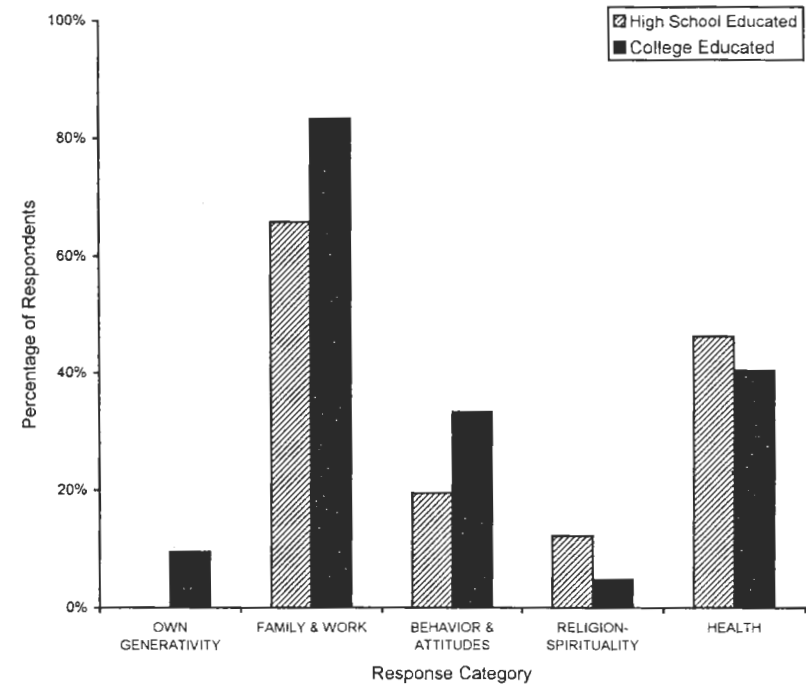


FIGURE 9.7. Social responsibility categories of responses to the question “What are your hopes for the future?” Note that 4.76% of the college educated and 9.76% of the high school educated did not mention any social responsibility category.

scribed their future hopes according to health topics. The third most frequently occurring response referred to prosocial behaviors and attitudes (e.g., concern about caring for the aging population; hopes for cures for major diseases; particular volunteer activities). More college-educated than high school-educated respondents referred to their future hopes in such terms. More high school-educated than college-educated respondents (and also more women than men) spoke about religion/spirituality (e.g., expressions of faith or religious practices such as praying or going to church) in describing their future hopes. References to their own generativity (e.g., helping future generations through efforts that revolve around teaching) were provided only by college-educated women.

Figure 9.8 differentiates the various types of answers obtained when respondents spoke about family and work in describing their hopes for

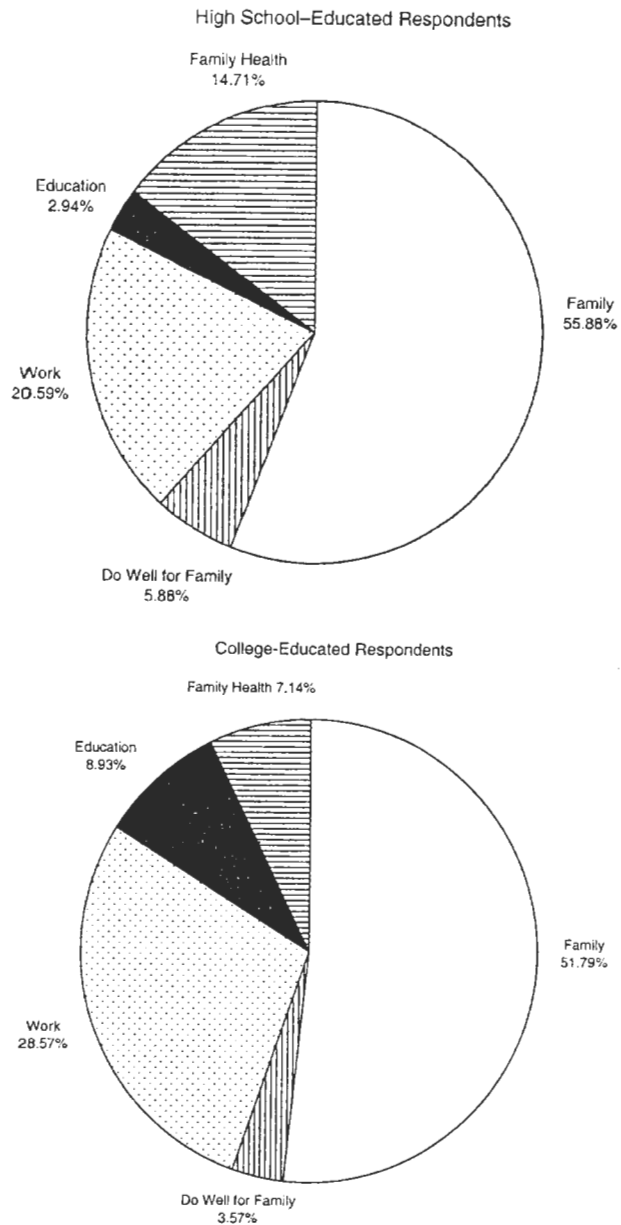


FIGURE 9.8. “What are your hopes for the future?”: Family and work. For high school-educated respondents, $n = 41$, total number of mentions = 34. For college-educated respondents, $n = 42$, total number of mentions = 56.

the future. The most frequently mentioned subcategory for both educational groups was family. High school-educated respondents gave comparatively greater emphasis to speaking about family health, while college-educated respondents gave greater emphasis to speaking about their work and education. Women gave more emphasis to family, while men gave greater emphasis to work (data not shown). Illustrative answers (by educational subgroups) for some of these subcategories appear in table 9.4. Both educational groups spoke in detail about family, but they spoke about different things. High school-educated respondents spoke of wanting their children to find a good partner and of wanting grandchildren. College-educated respondents spoke about their children’s education and careers. With regard to their own personal future hopes about work or education, high school-educated respondents spoke of wanting work to wind down or of wanting to continue learning for a specific activity (dog judging), while college-educated respondents spoke of getting another book published, establishing a new line of business (a court reporting firm), or learning new surgical techniques. These specifics about respondents’ future hopes thus reflected differences in actual work lives and pursuits linked with occupations, which are in turn linked with different levels of educational attainment.

Figure 9.9 summarizes the distributions of subcategories within the main category of behaviors and attitudes when respondents spoke about their hopes for the future. College-educated respondents spoke most about making a contribution, having social concerns (such as having systems in place in society to handle the aging population, improved family values, and less prejudice) and being engaged in volunteerism. High school-educated respondents emphasized altruistic hopes (such as cures for diseases in the world and hopes that the whole world would be at peace) along with social concerns, and making a contribution, but did not mention volunteerism. Additionally, men gave greater emphasis to making a contribution, and women to social concerns and volunteerism. The fact that only college-educated respondents mentioned volunteerism while only high school-educated respondents mentioned altruistic hopes reflects their different ways of being an agent in the world. In the case of wanting to address societal concerns, college-educated people directly act on the cause by volunteering while high school-educated people indirectly act on the cause by expressing altruistic hopes.

Table 9.5 provides illustrative answers for our educational sub-

TABLE 9.4 Family and Work

“WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE?”

HIGH SCHOOL-EDUCATED RESPONDENTS

Family: (female) *To have grandkids, take care of them. See my son do well. But my son's just starting, so I would really, I'm looking forward to him getting a good job, and finding a nice girl, and having whatever kids if he wants kids. But that's—he's my life. Yeah, after my husband, he's my life. And that's what I'm looking forward to. After that everything else is fine.* • (male) *Hopes for my future are probably more targeted toward my kids and being happy, and finding someone that they can share their life with, like my wife and I have.*

Work: (female) *I really would like to put in about fifteen more years working, and I'm hoping that I really will have enough money or enough something, equity in my house or something.* • (male) *I'd like to enjoy the trips more, that's all. My business, I don't want the business necessarily to grow. I want it to grow enough to sustain itself, but not to, I don't need—If I make eighty chairs this year, I'll be very happy to make eighty chairs next year. I don't need to make eighty-five.*

Education: (female) *I would like to continue advancing with my career with dog judging. I have two groups. I'm applying now, working on the third group, which is a constant learning process. You have to take tests and do a lot of research and studyin' to each breed to apply, so it's a lot of work. I'd like to continue doing that.*

COLLEGE-EDUCATED RESPONDENTS

Family: (female) *You know, most of my hopes about the future, my thoughts turn to my children and what they're gonna do with their lives. Uh, I don't have any great hopes for starting a new career or things like that, but my hopes are tied up in the choices my kids are gonna make about which education they're gonna get. Are they going to be happy in their careers? Are they gonna marry? I've got a couple of kids who are older, who are not married, and so there's kind of a concern there. Will they marry? And if they don't, will they be happy? And I look forward to grandchildren. That's kind of an unknown area, but I think that's something that I'm looking forward to.* • (male) *Hopes for the future are to, to make sure my children get off to a good start when they get out of high school. That they're able to make some decisions about where they want to go with their education and not be prevented from doing it. And those areas of support, either financial support, or, um, sometimes it's just transportation, or whatever I can do in those areas to really make sure they get off on the right foot, they feel comfortable, and positive about their learning experience in college.*

Work: (female) *Well, I hope to graduate from court reporting school. And I would like actually to, what I would like to do is freelance, which, freelance reporters kind of make their own hours, schedule their own appointments. Uh, my eventual goal is to have my own court reporting firm, but I'm gonna get out and kind of work for awhile and kind of learn the ropes of that and, how to put it all together, and then that's really my plan as far as personally, I mean, for myself.* • (male) *Well, in the immediate future, I hope to get the second book published and uh, see what happens from that. I intend to keep studying and doing research, 'cause it's what I really enjoy doing. I just hope to be able to do it as long as I can.*

Education: (female) *I'm taking particular medical classes in surgical techniques, tropical medicine—things that will prepare me to even be better in what I like to do. And by this summer I should have a bed and breakfast. Other concrete hopes are I might do midwifery, which is a two-year, but mostly in-house. I wouldn't have to travel to Kentucky; I would do it through the local midwives, because I basically have a lot of the credentials already.* • (male) *I think by working towards this certification with these night classes that I'm taking—that'll certainly prepare me to go out and find another job if I need to.*

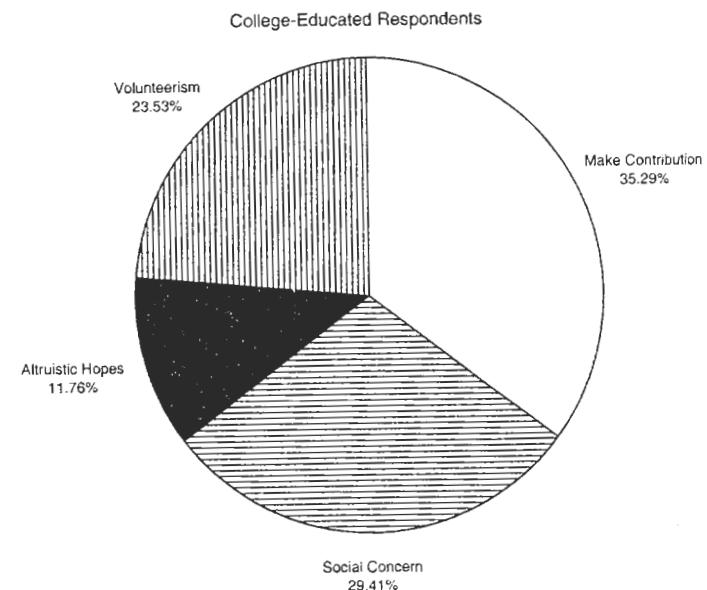
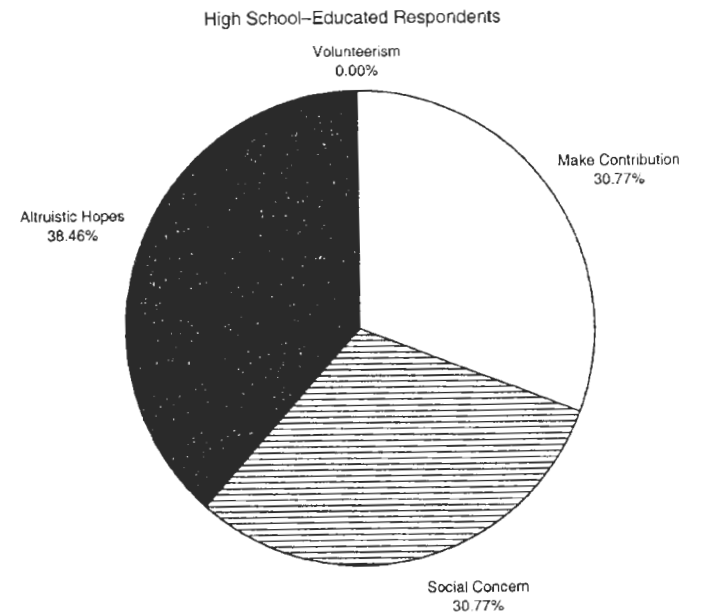


FIGURE 9.9. “What are your hopes for the future?”: Socially responsible behaviors and attitudes. For high school-educated respondents, $n = 41$, total number of mentions = 13. For college-educated respondents, $n = 42$, total number of mentions = 17.

TABLE 9.5 Socially Responsible Behaviors and Attitudes

"WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE?"

HIGH SCHOOL-EDUCATED RESPONDENTS

Make Contribution: (male) *I ask the Lord, use me use, me in any way he see fit. Use me. Use me till you use me up. Whether it's preaching your word, whether it's singing your word, whether it's helping people. Whatever it is, use me. And that's for the future.* • (female) *Be a person that's willing to go that extra mile to help somebody in need.*

Social Concern: (male) *As far as my hopes for society, I guess you would say, or the world, I just would really like to see a lot of people change their attitudes. It seems like today a lot of people just don't care about themselves or anybody else. I think I'd like to see everybody just be a little more caring and think about other people's feelings a little more. I think the world would be a lot better place to live in all over if people just did that.* • (female) *As far as the, uh, world is concerned, I wish that, I would hope that they would come to their senses and come back to the Lord. I would hope that we would get a president and some men that were leaders of our country that would be true Christians. I firmly believe our country is going directly to hell.*

COLLEGE-EDUCATED RESPONDENTS

Make Contribution: (male) *It's been good, and if I can continue this kind of life and eventually, since I do not have any heirs, I would like to make sure that whatever I do accumulate goes to somewhere where it can be used beneficially for the most people.* • (female) *Yeah I like trips, but, I don't see those things as having any kind of meaning, or being any kind of contribution to the world, whereas by staying working, I think you can continue to impact, have some kind of driving force within your life that keeps you going, keeps you alive, and not dying in an intellectually or emotional fashion.*

Social Concern: (male) *Well, I hope that man goes on and explores the stars. I think it's important that humanity continues. We've explored all of this planet, and I think that we're surviving on a very, very fragile place. I think if humanity is going to survive this next millennium, we're going to need to spread ourselves to the universe, otherwise I don't think we'll survive. I hope that we're able to protect and take care of this planet of ours, but I don't know if we will. . . . I also hope that because the world is shrinking—due to travel and communications and all of that—that we will get beyond our differences. One of the most frustrating things in my life is seeing the fear and the hate between races and religions and countries. . . . I just hope that the consciousness of humanity will be raised to the point where we just all nurture each other.* • (female) *I would hope that people would, in general, realize the consequences of the choices they make, and how much impact that has on their lives and others. I really feel like correct choices with your interpersonal relationships and trying to do your best there could have the biggest impact on making changes in the world for the better. People can have a more stable and happier family life. I definitely believe that making the change with individuals, the individual lives, is much more important than big social or government programs. I think changes need to come in individual lives.*

groups. High school-educated respondents spoke of having the "Lord use me" or going "that extra mile to help somebody" in elaborating their version of making a contribution, while college-educated respondents emphasized making beneficial use of what they had accumulated (presumably wealth) and also "continuing to have impact." With regard to social concerns, high school-educated individuals spoke of people needing to be "more caring" and the need to "come back to the Lord." The college-educated version of social concerns addressed the need to "spread ourselves out into the universe" so as to "survive the next millennium" and to make "correct choices" with regard to interpersonal relationships. Such answers suggest additional educational differences in how social concerns are perceived and pursued, although further quantitative summaries are needed to gauge the extent of such differences.

In summary, when describing their hopes for the future, we found that more high school-educated than college-educated respondents emphasized family and work. Within this category, those with less education spoke more frequently about family health, perhaps reflecting education-based inequalities in health and healthcare resources (see chapter 3). In addition, high school-educated respondents spoke more often about wanting their children to "find a good partner" in life. Such findings converge with the greater "other" orientation found among high school-educated respondents in our prior self/other analyses. College-educated respondents spoke more often about work or education goals for their children as well as their own occupational pursuits, thereby underscoring their proactive desires to have a wide sphere of influence. Both groups demonstrated themes of socially responsible behaviors and attitudes in articulating future hopes, but among the college-educated this was linked with volunteerism, "having impact," or making beneficial use of their resources. That is, the college-educated conception of a socially responsible future assumes the possession of time, resources, and energy, and being well-positioned to proactively make the world a better place. For high school-educated respondents, a socially responsible future is tied more to religious sentiments (having the "Lord use me," needing to "come back to the Lord") and helping or caring for others (altruistic hopes). Religion and spirituality thus emerged as more prominent among high school-educated responses, not only for why their lives had gone well, but also as a theme in their hopes for the future. Such religious beliefs may be part of dealing with adversity (linked with the prior high school-educated emphasis on

resilience and finding the strength to persevere) as well as central to how an uncertain future is to be negotiated (e.g., being a vessel of the Lord).

A theme underlying these educational differences in hopes for the future is that the more expansive social worlds of the college educated lead them to think of their communities or even of global issues, whereas the high school-educated respondents focus on the proximal social worlds of work and family, along with their religious connections.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we explored responsibility in two ways: via direct questions about responsibility and indirect probes coded for mentions of social responsibility. The direct route involved asking respondents to tell us *why* they described themselves as more or less responsible. These items allowed respondents to discuss responsibility in their own words, offering insight into the variety of meanings that may be assigned to "responsibility." In answers to the indirect probes, "Why has your life gone well?" and "What are your hopes for the future?" the centrality of social responsibility concerns was striking. In addition, this set of questions provided us with multiple avenues into the notion of responsibility over time. In other words, we were able to find out the ways in which respondents consider themselves to be responsible in everyday life, how other people's past socially responsible actions have enabled respondents' lives to go well, and the ways in which respondents hope to be socially responsible in the future. These findings enable us to identify the agreements about responsibility among midlife Americans, as well as to illuminate gender and educational differences in these notions. In addition, our results allow us to sketch the complexities of social responsibility in late-twentieth-century American life.

Educational differences provided insight into the different ways in which people are responsible, conceive of the self, and perceive the self in relation to others. As analyses of the direct probes demonstrate, college-educated respondents presented more elaborated conceptions of the self, as reflected in their greater emphasis on self-focused responsibility categories. Further, these self-focused ways of being responsible (e.g., Doing What I Don't Want to Do, Juggling and Balancing, Taking Care of Myself) suggest a sense of self that is autonomous, separated from, and sometimes in opposition to, other people. In contrast, high school-educated respondents placed less emphasis on these self-

focused categories and greater emphasis on the common notion of responsibility and on more socially situated ways of being responsible (e.g., Being Dependable to Others).

We found further evidence for educational differences, both in the conception of the self and in the relationship between the self and others, in the coding for self-focused and other-focused sentences. While both high school-educated and college-educated respondents mentioned other people in their answers, high school-educated respondents focused on the self significantly less than did college-educated respondents. Additionally, in response to the indirect probe asking why one's life had gone well, high school-educated respondents' more frequent mentions of caring for others (i.e., *others* are the recipients of care) contrasts with college-educated respondents' heightened emphasis on receiving support (i.e., the *self* is the recipient of care).

Differences in high school-educated and college-educated conceptions of the self and the social surround were also revealed by the types of agency that respondents at each educational level described. Across direct and indirect probes, the way of interacting with the world espoused by high school-educated respondents portrayed a sense of self as embedded in, adapting to, and constrained by external situations, while college-educated respondents' way of interacting with the world implied a sense of self as independent of, acting on, and controlling external situations. This difference is reflected in the finding that more high school-educated respondents than college-educated respondents invoked Adjusting to Circumstances in their answers to the direct probes. In contrast, college-educated respondents placed greater emphasis on Taking Initiative as a way of being responsible.

In addition, responses to the indirect probes coded as agency from high school-educated respondents tended to reflect the idea of resilience (e.g., surviving obstacles, hanging tough), whereas college-educated respondents more often exhibited agency through actively pursuing goals (e.g. set goals from an early age, "blessed with an ability to do whatever I wanted to do"). Similar differences emerged within the category socially responsible behaviors and attitudes: more college-educated respondents spoke of volunteerism—suggesting that better-educated people feel empowered and able to effect change—while high school-educated people more frequently mentioned altruistic hopes—indicating less of a sense of one's own personal, tangible influence on the world.

A final contrast between high school-educated and college-edu-

cated respondents is reflected in the examples and particular details they used in their narratives. For instance, coding of the family subcategory, within the category of family and work, revealed that high school-educated respondents spoke more about concern for their children's future health and choice of spouse. In contrast, college-educated respondents' concerns for their children focused more on educational and career goals. Similarly, college-educated respondents spoke of work aspirations, such as publishing another book, whereas high school-educated respondents spoke of putting in just enough time to retire comfortably. These differences in content reflect the realities of life for those occupying different social classes.

Though gender was one component of our selection criteria, gender differences were not pronounced in our analyses for this chapter. Regarding the direct probes, the only category which revealed gender differences was Juggling and Balancing responsibilities; more than twice as many college-educated women as college-educated men mentioned this category (57% vs. 28%). This finding may reflect the "second shift" that more college-educated women than men experience; several studies suggest that women maintain primary responsibility for domestic chores and upkeep (e.g., Hochschild 1989).

In addition, the self/other sentence coding revealed that men mentioned the self more often than they mentioned others with much greater frequency than women did. This finding supports the commonly held notion that women are more interconnected with others than men are. It should be noted, however, that high school-educated men were more likely to *focus* on others when others were mentioned in a sentence than any other subgroup. This second finding seems to reflect the overarching influence of educational level on a socially embedded sense of self.

The indirect questions about why one's life has gone well and what one's hopes are for the future revealed few but intriguing gender differences. Nearly twice as many men as women endorsed the category of work (22% vs. 11.9%). This may reflect the fact that work outside of the home plays a more central role for these midlife men than for the women. Nearly all the men were working outside the home for pay at the time of the MIDUS survey, and they had nearly three times more earnings than their spouses, on average. In contrast, only 50% of the high school-educated women were working for pay. Though 90% of college-educated women were working for pay, their earnings were

about half of their husband's earnings, on average (see chapter 11, this volume). When talking about hopes for the future, women spoke more frequently about their families. Specifically, of the respondents who endorsed the category of family, 45.2% of the women (vs. 9.8% of the men) mentioned grandchildren. Thus the analysis of indirect probes reveals typical gender differences regarding separate spheres of influence for men and women: work and family, respectively.

Though we have highlighted the above gender differences, on the whole, our analyses did not reveal extensive differences between men and women. In some ways this trend is consistent with prior studies showing few differences in reported well-being of adult males and females (Ryff and Singer 1998). The one exception to this pattern is women's consistently higher profiles on positive relations with others. The fact that we preselected our respondents to be in the top two tertiles of well-being (see "Sample and Methods") may also account, in part, for the absence of strong gender differences.

Because we collected the data for the analyses in this chapter during our study of well-being at midlife, it is appropriate to mention connections between well-being and social responsibility. Our sample, chosen because they demonstrated high levels of psychological well-being, articulated varied examples of responsibility in many domains suggesting a link between well-being and responsibility. Evidence of this link is found in respondents' answers to our inquiry about why their lives have gone well: respondents frequently pointed to other people's socially responsible attitudes and actions. In addition, our respondents articulated their hopes for the future in terms of social responsibility, suggesting that being socially responsible may be one aspect of having a good life. Clearly, being responsible to one's self and others has potential psychological benefits that have not yet been explored, proffering an area for future research in the social sciences.

These qualitative data provide a rare opportunity to investigate meaning in a variety of ways. First, unpacking survey questions allows us to understand the layered meanings behind similar answers. Thus, when many respondents say that "responsible" describes them a lot, our analysis provides insight into what the word "responsible" means to different people. Second, open-ended questions allow researchers to explore meaning from the respondent's point of view, rather than creating a viewpoint with which respondents are only able to either agree or disagree. A clear example of this is the category names which were

generated from respondents' replies, such as the categories Juggling and Balancing for the direct probes, or religion/spirituality for the indirect ones.

Analysis of qualitative data enables us to look at meaning from several perspectives, including the content of responses as well as the meaning behind the content, which we gathered from close examination of language use. We pursued this type of analysis by the coding of self-focused versus other-focused responses, but further analyses could be conducted by examining word usage through word counts, etc. Furthermore, despite our small sample size ($N = 83$), our results are quite consistent with the educational differences shown in the MIDUS analysis of social responsibility in chapter 3. Since our study was an offshoot of a larger, quantitative-based research endeavor, it demonstrates the unique complementarity between qualitative and quantitative data, which can deepen current understanding of social phenomena and inform directions for future research and theories.

Our qualitative data also implicate differing social worlds for the high school- versus the college-educated respondents. For the former, the focus is narrower (primarily family) and involves fewer distant institutions (e.g., community organizations), whereas the focus of the latter involves a wider sphere of influence and participation. The content of these primary social worlds may differ as well. Among the high school-educated respondents, proximal familial environments likely involve more confrontations with illness, unemployment, and financial constraints, which may prompt greater reciprocity between the self and significant others. In contrast, those in upper socioeconomic strata may confront fewer such challenges and therefore rely less on reciprocity. Qualitative inquiries provide valuable tools for probing the content of surrounding social worlds as well as the beliefs and behaviors of the individuals within those worlds.

In concluding this chapter, we return to where we began. The tension between individual rights and obligations to others has made the area of social responsibility contested terrain in the highly individualized context of mainstream America. While Americans sense the importance of creating and maintaining community, American culture has only a skeletal blueprint of the path to these ideals. In competition with this pale collective representation of the socially responsible citizen is the highly crystallized, well-learned representation of the individual as self-reliant, independent, and self-sufficient. As a result of this cultural notion of the good person, the way to be a socially responsible

citizen is often translated as taking care of the self so that no one else will have to. Similarly, a second translation of the way to be socially responsible is to allow others to become self-reliant, independent, and self-sufficient individuals.

Our results, coupled with the dramatic social changes that have occurred during the latter half of the twentieth century, suggest the need to rethink our concepts of social responsibility so that they better reflect current society. An earlier American context was the two-parent family with a solitary breadwinner, intergenerational socioeconomic advancement, and less geographic mobility. Currently there are more women participating in the workforce (Oppenheimer 1996), more single-parent households, and a higher divorce rate than ever before (Bumpass 1990). Added to these social shifts are the rapid technological changes that have occurred in the past decade—more personal computers than ever before, the World Wide Web, and the myriad forms of communication (e-mail, fax, the Internet, cellular phones, etc.). These many changes are so recent and multitudinous that social scientists have only begun to assess the impact that they have on our lives.

While some might argue that these changes have eroded the moral fiber of American society, our results indicate otherwise. Our systematic probe via quantitative and qualitative methods reveals a great deal of social responsibility in contemporary American life, which includes being attentive to others as well as to one's self. Rather than seeing the component of self-care as in opposition to caring for others, such self-care may be what enables individuals to care for others (Hahn 1991). In a world where people juggle competing demands of work, childcare, and familial and social obligations, it is increasingly important to take care of one's self so that one can continue to care for others. Furthermore, our respondents conveyed the multifaceted nature of social responsibility: it is taking care of your offspring financially and emotionally; it is working; it is caring for society through prosocial actions and beliefs; it is meeting obligations, being dependable, attending to needs of others and taking care of one's self. Explicating how these avenues of social responsibility contribute to the well-being of individuals and of society is a key challenge for the future.

NOTES

1. For each of the eight categories, the number of high school- and college-educated respondents mentioning that category were compared, using the chi-

square (χ^2) statistic ($df = 1, N = 83$). Men's and women's mentions of each category were compared in this way. When a difference between educational levels or sexes is described as "significant," the p -value of χ^2 is less than .05.

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