

Psychological Well-Being in MIDUS: Profiles of Ethnic/Racial Diversity and Life-Course Uniformity

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This study provides a descriptive overview of psychological well-being among multiple subgroups, differentiated by age, gender, and ethnic/racial status, in the MIDUS survey. The work extends previous studies of subjective well-being in America by the use of a theory-guided conception of positive psychological functioning, thereby offering a unique look at the psychological strengths of adults located at different positions in American social structure. This inquiry is timely in the context of minority research, which has been described as suffering from myopic attention to the problems and inadequacies, rather than strengths, of people in racially oppressed groups (Jackson and Neighbors 1996).

Quality of Life in America: Beyond Happiness and Life Satisfaction

A large body of research over the last few decades has probed who in the U.S. population is happy or satisfied with life (Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers 1976; Andrews 1991; Campbell 1981; Diener 1984; Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka 1981). These large descriptive studies map differences in avowed well-being linked with major sociodemographic factors (e.g., gender, age, race, marital status, income, education, religious orientation, and geographic location). Known initially as the “social indicators” movement, this work challenged earlier efforts to characterize quality of life in America in strictly economic terms (e.g., standard of living, GNP). Not surprisingly, the findings documented that more disadvantaged social groups (including racial subgroups) tended to report lower levels of subjective well-being.

Others, however, have argued that “most people are happy,” including disadvantaged groups, such as those who are poor, disabled, or of minority status (Diener and Diener 1996; Diener et al. 1993; Myers and Diener 1995). Scholars of this persuasion suggest that the more important question is *why* most people are happy (i.e., is it socialization? is it evolutionary priming?). Many such investigations suffer from limited, nonrepresentative samples, which undermines the evidential basis for concluding that happiness is pervasive. Beyond the need for substantiating such claims

with better samples, it is relevant to ask whether questions about happiness or life satisfaction are adequate to capture the full meaning of human well-being. Despite their prominence in studies of subjective well-being, neither happiness nor life satisfaction emerged from well-articulated conceptions of positive functioning (see Ryff 1989a).

The absence of theory is puzzling given the large literature in developmental and clinical psychology and the mental health arena that addresses the meaning of psychological well-being (see Ryff 1985). Points of convergence in these numerous accounts comprise core constructs in a multidimensional model of well-being (Ryff 1989b, 1995; Ryff and Keyes 1995). The distinct components are autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. As a group, they encompass a breadth of wellness that includes positive evaluations of one's self and one's past life, a sense of continued growth and development, the belief that one's life is purposeful and meaningful, the possession of quality relations with others, the capacity to manage effectively one's surrounding world, and the possession of a sense of self-determination. The constructs have been operationalized with structured, self-report scales.

Previous evidence indicates that perceived happiness and life satisfaction, the ubiquitous indicators of quality of life, are not strongly related to most of these theory-based dimensions of positive functioning (Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff 2002; Ryff and Keyes 1995). Thus, continued reliance on the prior indicators of quality of life neglects key aspects of positive psychological functioning. The objective of this study was to investigate age, gender, and ethnic/racial variations in well-being in a national survey using the six components of well-being listed earlier.

Replicable patterns of age and gender differences have been found in previous studies based on both community and national samples (Ryff 1989b, 1991; Ryff and Keyes 1995). Women, for example, consistently score higher than men on positive relations with others and have sometimes shown higher profiles on personal growth. The life-course trajectory of psychological well-being is diverse. Some aspects of well-being (e.g., environmental mastery) show increments with age, others show decrements (e.g., purpose in life, personal growth), and others show little variation with age (self-acceptance). For two dimensions (autonomy, positive relations with others), previous patterns have varied between showing stable or incremental age profiles. These patterns could reflect age changes or cohort differences (or both), although recent longitudinal evidence documents that psychological well-being shows

significant change over the course of a major life transition among aging women (Kling, Seltzer, and Ryff 1997).

Diversity and Well-Being: Racial/Ethnic Contrasts

Racial differences in subjective well-being have been a part of earlier national surveys. Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka (1981), for example, found that blacks reported less happiness compared with whites, but the differences are qualified by age, being most pronounced in young adulthood and generally nonexistent in old age. Blacks also reported worrying more than whites. Other research between 1972 and 1988 provided little evidence of differences between blacks and whites in well-being (Andrews 1991); both groups showed notable increases over this time period in their evaluations of personal self-efficacy, health, and standard of living. In specific life domains, however, blacks reported lower levels of well-being than did whites (e.g., income, marriage, neighborhood/community, national government) but also rated themselves higher than whites on two of three self-efficacy items. Summarizing work spanning nearly three decades (1972–96), Hughes and Thomas (1998) found that African Americans report consistently lower levels of quality of life (measured in terms of happiness, life satisfaction, marital happiness, mistrust, anomie, and so forth) than do whites.

In a separate literature, the mental health of minority populations has been investigated. Consistent with the imbalance pervading the mental “health” field, this work is primarily concerned with mental *illness*. Multiple studies show, for example, that African Americans are at high risk for the development of mental health problems (Jackson and Neighbors 1989). Recent findings from the National Survey of Black Americans (Jackson and Neighbors 1996) revealed a largely negative pattern over a recent thirteen-year period. From 1979 to 1992, black respondents reported significant increases in environmental problems, personal problems, and doctor-reported blood pressure, and significant declines in health satisfaction, self-esteem, and happiness. Interestingly, reports of life satisfaction *increased* over this period, which the authors suggest may reflect a kind of adjustment mechanism against more serious mental disorders in the face of declining resources and mounting stresses. A problem with the earlier literature has been the difficulty of disentangling whether the findings are about race or about the consequences of economic and educational disadvantage. Numerous studies suggest that the initially higher levels of distress among blacks

were attenuated when controls for social class were introduced (Kessler and Neighbors 1986), thus implying that elevated profiles of psychological distress were partly a social-class, not a racial, phenomenon. Kessler and Neighbors (1986) challenged the exclusively social-class view and argued for an *interactive* model of race and class. Using data from eight epidemiological surveys, they showed that race has a substantial effect on psychological functioning, but that these effects are most pronounced at the *lower* levels of income. More recent studies (Kessler et al. 1994; Williams and Harris-Reid 1999) have not found that African Americans were more likely than whites to have psychiatric disorders (affective disturbances, distress, substance-abuse problems, multiple disorders).

Few studies have compared multiple ethnic and racial groups. An exception is the gerontological research on the “double jeopardy hypothesis” (Dowd and Bengtson 1978), which emphasized the combined disadvantages experienced by aged members of minority groups. The original test of the hypothesis, conducted with middle-aged and older blacks, Mexican Americans, and whites in Los Angeles, received mixed empirical support, and it was challenged by later national studies (Markides 1985). Nonetheless, this work illustrates explicit concern with variation among diverse ethnic/racial groups, and further, it attends to the cultural contexts of such groups, such as the importance of family values and authority relations among Mexican Americans, and a strong support and kinship system in African American families (Mindel 1985). More recent studies addressing mental health differences among multiple ethnic/minorities (Shrout et al. 1992) suggest that Mexican American immigrants had the fewest mental health problems of the groups considered.

In summary, earlier ethnic/racial studies have tended to underscore the compromised quality of life of minorities compared with that of members of majority groups but have shown more mixed findings regarding mental health problems. Cross-time analyses reveal notably negative patterns of change in health and quality of life from the late 1970s to the early 1990s among African Americans. An important message from earlier investigations is the need to examine race interactively with other major sociodemographic variables (e.g., social class, age). A further recurrent theme is the need to investigate possible strengths, not just weaknesses, vis-à-vis the adversity confronted by ethnic/racial minorities. Scientific pursuit of the latter requires empirical indicators of positive psychological characteristics.

Aims of the Present Study

Using data from MIDUS, the present investigation describes multiple aspects of psychological well-being in the white majority population and three ethnic/racial subgroups: African Americans in the survey, a subsample of Mexican Americans from Chicago, and another subsample of African Americans from New York City. Together, the groups provide a window through which to begin viewing profiles of positive mental health in diverse segments of American society. We chose these particular subgroups to underscore the heterogeneity among African Americans and to explore the finding from earlier work that Mexican Americans have more favored mental health status among multiple minority subgroups.

Of major interest was whether earlier findings of gender and age differences would be replicated in a national sample of whites as well as ethnic/racial subgroups. We had no major a priori predictions about how the groups might differ more generally, although the earlier literature on individualism versus collectivism, independence versus interdependence (Markus and Kitayama 1991, 1994), suggested a possible framework for examining majority–minority contrasts. That is, higher profiles on more individualistic qualities of well-being (e.g., self-acceptance, personal growth) might be evident in the majority context, whereas more interpersonal, others-oriented dimensions (e.g., positive relations with others) could have prominence in the minority context.

A final goal was to investigate in a multivariate framework the predictive influence of key sociodemographic variables (age, gender, race) on psychological well-being. Drawing on the class and health literature (Adler et al. 1994; Marmot et al. 1997), we were also interested in the influence of standing in the class hierarchy, possibly in interaction with race, on positive mental health. Following other MIDUS analyses (see chap. 3 in this volume by Marmot and Fuhrer), we chose education as our key measure of social class. Beyond the sociodemographic factors, our regression models included one psychosocial variable, which speaks to the growing interest in racism and health (Jackson et al. 1996; Williams 1999; Williams and Chung 1997), showing that poor treatment as a result of race is inversely related to mental and physical health. To pursue this question, our multivariate models included an assessment of perceived discrimination. Previous findings with the MIDUS sample have shown that perceived discrimination is common in the total population and is more prevalent among individuals with disadvantaged social status (Kessler, Mickelson, and Williams 1999).

METHODS

Sample

Our analyses are based on a subsample of 2455 white respondents aged 25–74 (1077 men, 1378 women) and a subsample of 333 blacks, from the MIDUS national survey, in the same age range (125 men, 208 women). In addition, we use city-specific subsamples of minority respondents. These ethnic/racial subsamples consisted of 345 African Americans (170 men, 165 women) drawn from New York City and 235 Mexican Americans (121 men, 111 women) drawn from Chicago. The latter studies used home interviews with quota samples of ethnic/racial minorities in Chicago and New York City. The sampling design employed census block groups as the primary sampling unit. Respondents completed about 65 percent of the material used in the national survey along with detailed descriptions of community, family, and kinship membership and stress in the workplace.

With regard to demographic characteristics, the Chicago sample of Mexican Americans was younger and less well educated than the remaining three groups (whites, national survey blacks, New York blacks). African American males in the national sample were more highly educated than males in the black New York sample. The majority of respondents were married, with the exception of black women in both the national and New York samples and black men in the New York sample. The New York sample (both men and women) had higher rates of unemployment compared with those of the other groups except Mexican American women from Chicago, of whom approximately half were not employed. These sociodemographic differences across the minority samples complicate the interpretation of findings when minority profiles are not uniform. However, they also increase the heterogeneity of the minority samples, which is the central rationale for including them in the analyses that follow.

Measures

Psychological well-being. In the original validation study (Ryff 1989b), each of six dimensions of well-being was operationalized with a twenty-item scale that showed high internal consistency and test-retest reliability as well as convergent and discriminant validity with other measures. For the national survey, only three of the original twenty items were used to measure each construct. Items were selected from the subfactors within each longer scale to maximize conceptual breadth of the shortened scales.

The shortened scales were shown to correlate from .70 to .89 with parent scales (Ryff and Keyes 1995). The alpha coefficients for the scales across the various subsamples ranged from .35 to .62. The lower coefficients are the result of an a priori decision to represent the multifactorial structure of each parent scale in selecting items for the dramatically reduced subscales (rather than selecting only to maximize internal consistency). Intercorrelations among the scales ranged from moderate to high, although previous analyses supported the six-factor model of well-being (Ryff and Keyes 1995).

Discrimination. In both studies, discrimination was measured as the perception of discriminatory experiences on a daily basis. These data were collected in the self-administered questionnaire in the national survey but by use of in-person interviews with the ethnic/racial subsamples. Instructions between the two were slightly different, with discrimination explicitly mentioned in the former but not the latter. Nine examples of discriminatory experience were listed: how often the respondent was treated with less courtesy than other people, treated with less respect than other people, received poorer service than other people at restaurants or stores, was called names or insulted, was threatened or harassed; and how often other people acted as if they thought the respondent was not smart, was dishonest, was not as good as they were, and as if they were afraid of the respondent. Response categories for the national survey were "often," "sometimes," "rarely," or "never" on a daily basis. In the ethnic/racial study, response categories were "very often," "often," "occasionally," "rarely," or "never" on a daily basis. To make the scales equivalent, the categories "very often" and "often" in the latter were combined, while all other categories were treated as roughly equivalent across the studies. Internal consistency (coefficient alpha) of the discrimination scale was .90.

RESULTS

Age and Gender Differences in Psychological Well-Being

As stated earlier, a primary objective of the study was to determine whether previously noted empirical patterns of age and gender differences in psychological well-being would be replicated with a national sample and ethnic/racial subsamples. Life-span developmental theories, which provided the basis for key dimensions of well-being, have emphasized patterns of change associated with the transitions from young adulthood to midlife to old age. Thus, we investigated mean-level differences in psychological well-being associated with these age periods.

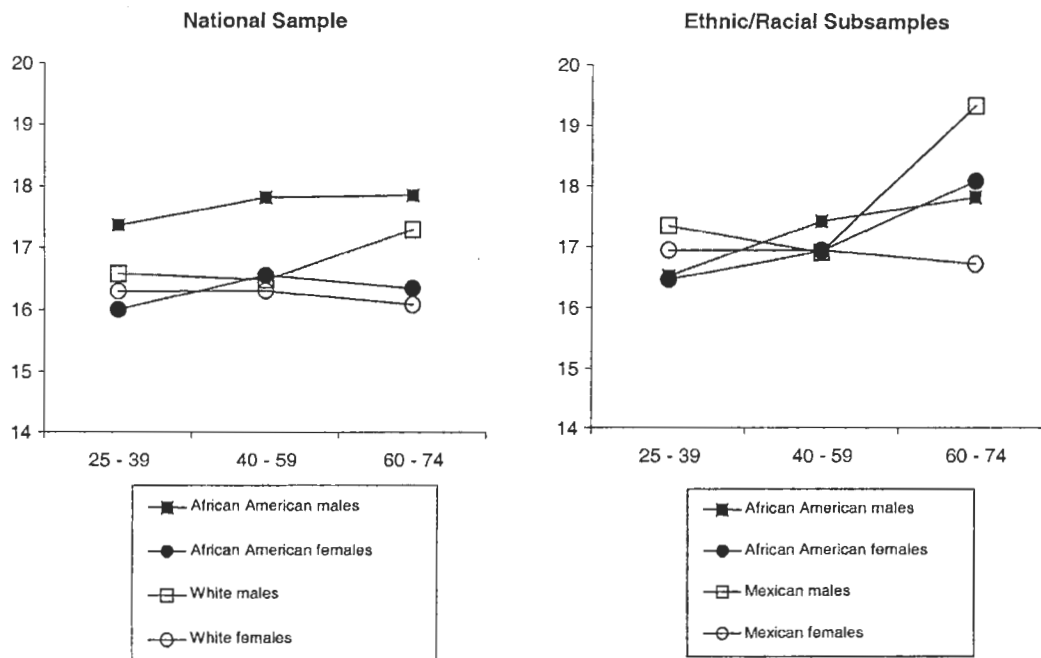


FIGURE 1. Self-acceptance: Age, gender, and ethnic/racial differences.

A limitation of these analyses was that older age groups in the ethnic racial subsamples contained only limited cases ($n = 54$ African Americans in the national sample; $n = 51$ in the New York African American sample; $n = 20$ in the Chicago Mexican American sample). Cell sizes for the remaining age groups in the minority sample sizes ranged from 94 to 228. Using ANOVA models, we investigated separately, for the national survey and the Chicago/New York subsamples, mean-level differences by age, gender, and ethnic/racial group. The primary reason for separate analyses at this point is to facilitate graphic representation to compare age and gender profiles in the four ethnic/racial subgroups. Subsequent multivariate analyses combine all samples.

Self-acceptance. In the national sample (see fig. 1), men were found to have significantly higher scores than women ($F(1, 2748) = 14.33$, $p < .001$). However, an age by gender interaction ($F(2, 2748) = 4.31$; $p < .01$) revealed that these differences occurred only among oldest respondents.

Findings for the Chicago/New York subsamples revealed no significant differences, although there was a trend toward a main effect of age ($F(2, 544) = 2.59$, $p < .07$), with young adults scoring lower than middle-aged adults, who in turn scored lower than older-aged adults.

Environmental mastery. The national sample (see fig. 2) showed a main effect of age ($F(1, 2748) = 15.07$, $p < .001$). Older respondents,

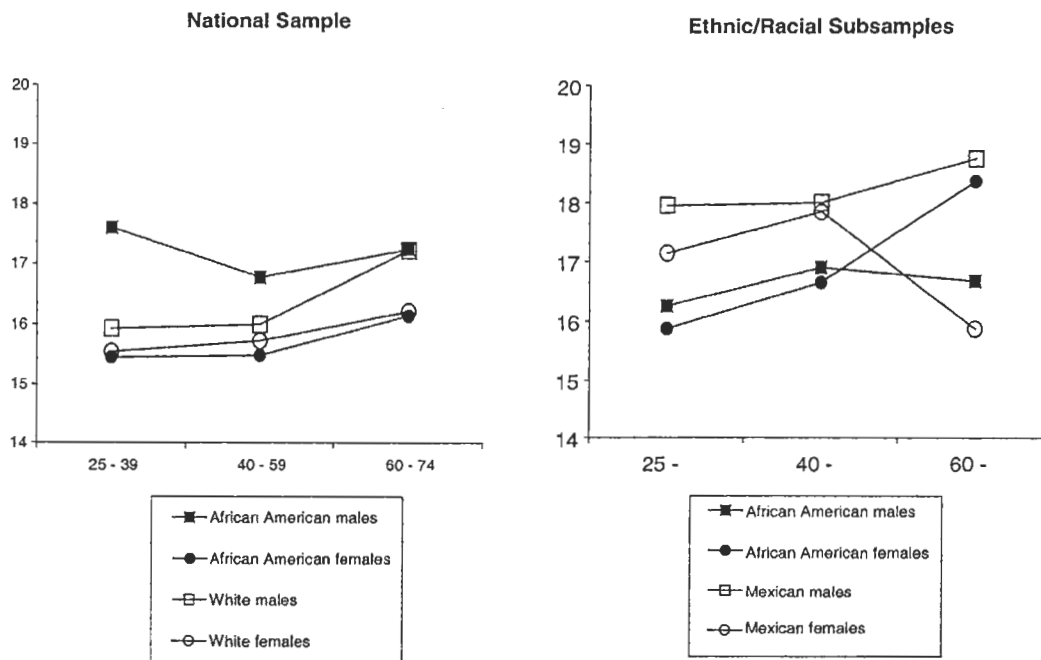


FIGURE 2. Environmental mastery: Age, gender, and ethnic/racial differences.

both black and white, had significantly higher scores on mastery than did young adult or middle-aged respondents. A main effect of gender was also obtained ($F(1, 2748) = 16.95, p < .001$), which was further qualified by a gender–race interaction ($F(1, 1, 2748) = 4.77, p < .05$). As figure 2 demonstrates, gender differences among African Americans are greater than among whites.

For the Chicago/New York subsamples, there was a trend toward ethnic differences ($F(1, 534) = 3.45, p < .06$), with African Americans scoring lower than Mexican Americans. There was also a significant gender–ethnicity interaction ($F(1, 534) = 3.89, p < .05$), which revealed that the previous African American women, particularly in old age, scored significantly higher on environmental mastery than did the Mexican American women, whereas among men, the differences across all age groups revealed higher profiles for Mexican American than African American males.

Purpose in life. A main effect of age ($F(1, 2740) = 31.73, p < .001$) showed that older adults had significantly lower scores on purpose in life than did middle-aged or younger adults (see fig. 3). A significant gender–age interaction was also found ($F(2, 2740) = 4.69, p < .01$), which showed that men had significantly higher scores than women only in young adulthood.

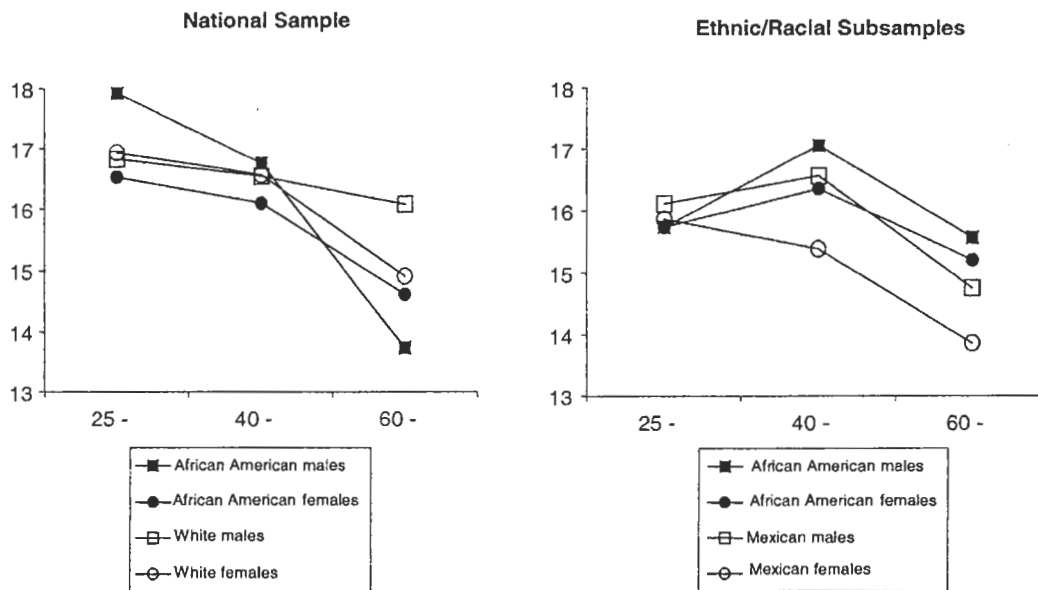


FIGURE 3. Purpose in life: Age, gender, and ethnic/racial differences.

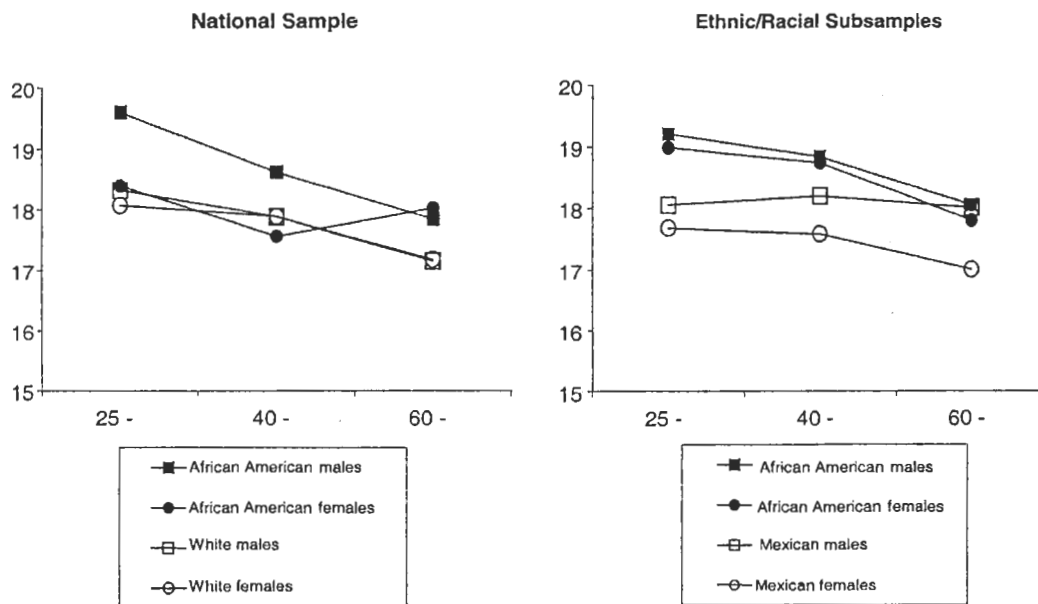


FIGURE 4. Personal growth: Age, gender, and ethnic/racial differences.

Findings for the Chicago/New York subsamples revealed a trend toward a main effect of age ($F(2, 544) = 2.58, p < .08$), indicating that older adults scored lower than young adults, who in turn scored lower than middle-aged adults.

Personal growth. The national sample (see fig. 4) revealed a main effect of age ($F(2, 2740) = 18.29, p < .001$), with each of the age groups significantly different from each other in a downward direction. Approaching

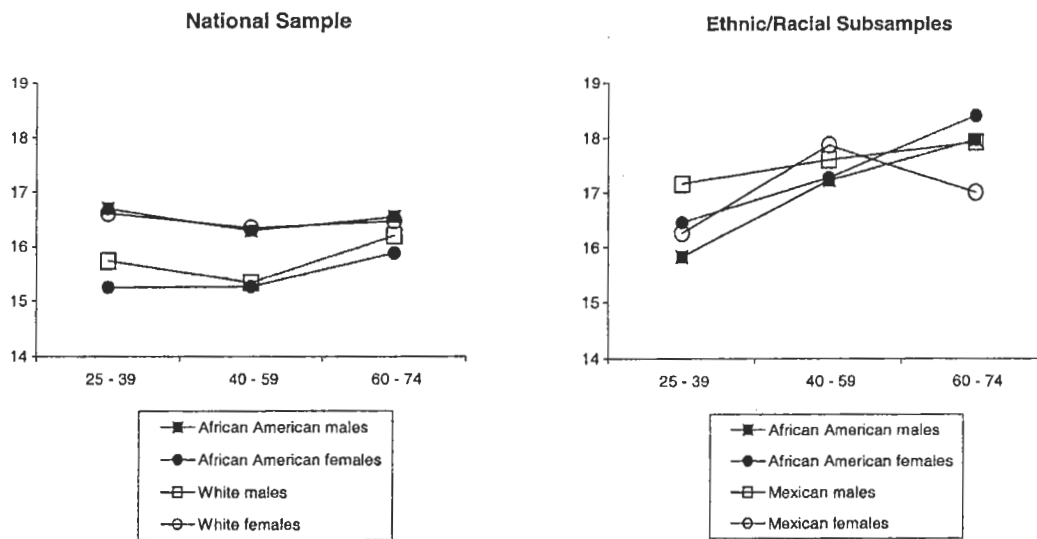


FIGURE 5. Positive relations with others: Age, gender, and ethnic/racial differences.

significance was a main effect of race ($F(1, 2740) = 3.41, p < .07$) in which blacks scored higher than whites.

Analyses for the Chicago/New York subsamples did not reveal an age effect, although ethnic differences were present ($F(1, 544) = 7.23, p < .01$), with African Americans scoring higher than Mexican Americans.

Positive relations with others. A main effect of gender was found for positive relations with others in the national sample ($F(1, 2748) = 19.95, p < .001$), with women scoring higher than men, but it was qualified by a gender–race interaction ($F(1, 2748) = 9.47, p < .002$). As illustrated in figure 5, among whites, women had significantly higher scores on positive relations with others than did men. Among blacks, the reverse pattern was found: men scored significantly higher than women. A significant age effect was also found ($F(2, 2748) = 3.27, p < .05$). Older adults had significantly higher reports of positive relations with others than did middle-aged adults.

Interestingly, no main effects of gender were found in the ethnic/racial subsamples, although a main effect of age was evident ($F(2, 544) = 6.14, p < .01$), with young adults scoring significantly lower than middle-aged adults, who in turn scored significantly lower than older adults.

Autonomy. Age emerged as a key factor in the national survey as well ($F(2, 2740) = 16.84, p < .001$), with young adults scoring significantly lower than middle-aged or older adults. However, a main effect of gender was also obtained ($F(1, 2740) = 16.62, p < .001$), which was further qualified by a gender–age interaction ($F(2, 2740) = 3.55, p < .05$). As

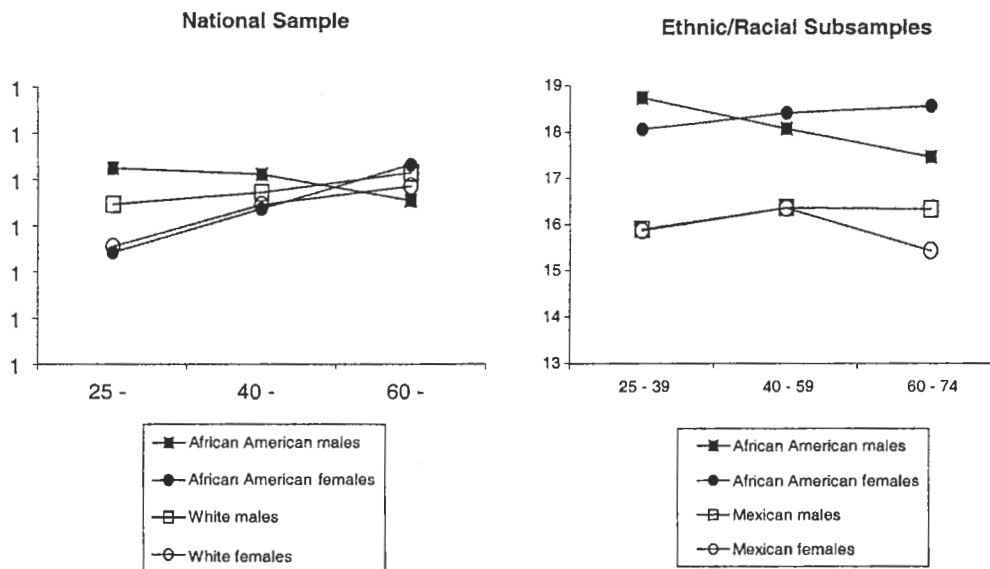


FIGURE 6. Autonomy: Age, gender, and ethnic/racial differences.

figure 6 illustrates, all age groups except African American males showed upward patterns with age on autonomy. Black males, however, revealed a decremental age pattern.

For the Chicago/New York subsamples, age was not a key differentiating factor. Rather, ethnicity was the important variable ($F(1, 534) = 33.30, p < .001$), with African Americans scoring notably higher than Mexican Americans.

The Prediction of Well-Being: Sociodemographic Influences and Discrimination

For the multivariate analysis, data from the national sample and ethnic/racial subsamples were combined to allow for assessment of possible differences among the three minority samples as well as between each of these samples and the white majority group, after controlling for differences in employment status and marital status. Separate regression models were run for each of the six scales of psychological well-being. Results were largely the same, using weighted or unweighted data. The tables show only unweighted sample results.

Model 1 for each analysis included major sociodemographic variables of age, gender, and race and controlled for employment status and marital status. Because of prior theory and empirical results, we checked for interactions of race with age (double jeopardy) as well as race with gender. Race was coded to maximize the majority/minority contrast; thus the contrast category is whites. Age was coded categorically (young, middle,

old) to continue with the earlier analyses and literature on well-being (young is the contrast category). Model 2 for each analysis added education to the model as well as allowed for entrance into the equation of significant interactions of education with other variables (to explore, in particular, the claim that race and class have an interactive relationship). Model 3 added the psychosocial variable of perception of discrimination. Findings from these analyses are summarized in tables 1–6. Only interactions having a significant predictive influence on the dependent measure are included in the tables (exceptions are noted and explained later).

Self-acceptance. Model 1 (see table 1) revealed that self-acceptance was significantly predicted by race (blacks, from both the national survey and New York subsample, and Mexican Americans had more positive scores than whites); gender (women had more negative scores than men); age (older adults had higher scores compared with young adults); marital status (married persons had higher scores than unmarried persons); and

TABLE 1 Prediction of Self-Acceptance (unstandardized coefficients)

Predictors	Models		
	1	2	3
Control variables			
Not married	—	—	—
Married	1.1**	1.1**	1.0**
Unemployed	—	—	—
Employed	.75**	.60**	.58**
Key sociodemographics			
Whites, national sample	—	—	—
Blacks, national sample	.76**	2.1**	2.6**
Blacks, New York	1.2**	1.4**	1.2**
Mexicans, Chicago	.81**	1.6**	1.3**
Males	—	—	—
Females	-.27*	-.21	-.25*
Adults aged 25–39	—	—	—
Adults aged 40–59	.02	.01	-.06
Adults aged 60–74	.78**	.86**	.61**
Social class (education)			
Education		.51**	.51**
Blacks, national sample × Education		-.46*	-.30
Psychosocial			
Perceived discrimination			-.14**
Intercept	15.2	13.7	14.4
R ²	.05	.06	.09

Notes: $N = 3200$. Ordinary least squares estimation. All regression models estimated on the unweighted sample.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

TABLE 2 Prediction of Environmental Mastery
(unstandardized coefficients)

Predictors	Models		
	1	2	3
Control variables			
Not married	—	—	—
Married	.35**	.37**	.27*
Unemployed	—	—	—
Employed	.52**	.43**	.42**
Key sociodemographics			
Whites, national sample	—	—	—
Blacks, national sample	.52**	.58**	1.5**
Blacks, New York	.95**	1.1**	.83**
Mexicans, Chicago	1.9**	2.3**	1.9**
Males	—	—	—
Females	-.42**	-.39**	-.43**
Adults aged 25–39	—	—	—
Adults aged 40–59	.17	.16	.08
Adults aged 60–74	1.3**	1.3**	1.0**
Social class (education)			
Education		.27**	.28**
Psychosocial			
Perceived discrimination			-.14**
Intercept	15.2	14.5	15.1
R ²	.04	.05	.08

Notes: $N = 3199$. Ordinary least squares estimation. All regression models estimated on the unweighted sample.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

employment status (employed persons had higher scores than unemployed persons). There were no significant interactions among any of these sociodemographic variables. Model 2 showed that education also has significant positive influence on self-acceptance ratings, although it did not reduce or explain the influence of any of the previous sociodemographic variables. A significant race–education interaction was also found: blacks (in the national sample) compared with whites showed less boost in self-acceptance with increments in education. Thus, the greatest difference in self-acceptance is at the lowest levels of education, with blacks showing higher levels than whites; at higher educational levels, there is no racial difference.

Model 3 revealed the continuing influence of all prior factors (except one) when the discrimination variable was added to the model. Perceived discrimination was also a strong negative influence on self-acceptance. The race–education interaction dropped to nonsignificance

TABLE 3 Prediction of Purpose in Life (unstandardized coefficients)

Predictors	Models		
	1	2	3
Control variables			
Not married	—	—	—
Married	.82**	.84**	.75**
Unemployed	—	—	—
Employed	.73**	.50**	.48**
Key sociodemographics			
Whites, national sample	—	—	—
Blacks, national sample	.22	−1.3	−.94
Blacks, New York	−.04	.08	−.29
Mexicans, Chicago	−.70**	.23	.07
Males	—	—	—
Females	−.09	−.01	−.05
Adults aged 25–39	—	—	—
Adults aged 40–59	−.27	−.29	−.36*
Adults aged 60–74	−.94**	−.83**	−1.0**
Blacks, New York × adults aged 40–59	.99*	1.1*	1.1*
Social class (education)			
Education		.61**	.61**
Blacks, national sample × education		.60**	.74**
Psychosocial			
Perceived discrimination			−.12**
Intercept	15.6	14.0	14.6
R ²	.04	.07	.09

Notes: $N = 3202$. Ordinary least squares estimation. All regression models estimated on the unweighted sample.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

once discrimination was added to the model. What this suggests is that the reason blacks in the national sample do not benefit from more education is discrimination. Once accounted for, blacks and whites experience the psychological benefits of greater education.

Environmental mastery. Model 1 (see table 2) revealed that nearly all sociodemographic variables were significant predictors of this aspect of well-being. Minority group status (for all three groups) was a significant positive predictor of environmental mastery compared with majority white status. Being married, employed, and older (compared with being a young adult) were also significant positive influences. Being female was a significant negative influence. Model 2 showed that in addition to these variables, education is a significant positive predictor of mastery, and there were no interactions with other variables. Model 3 added the significant negative influence of discrimination experiences. All other

TABLE 4 Prediction of Personal Growth (unstandardized coefficients)

Predictors	Models		
	1	2	3
Control variables			
Not married	—	—	—
Married	.15	.17	.14
Unemployed	—	—	—
Employed	.74**	.56**	.56**
Key sociodemographics			
Whites, national sample	—	—	—
Blacks, national sample	.60**	.72**	.96**
Blacks, New York	1.2**	1.4**	1.3**
Mexicans, Chicago	-.06	.74**	.65**
Males	—	—	—
Females	-.08	.01	.02
Adults aged 25–39	—	—	—
Adults aged 40–59	-.31**	-.32**	-.34**
Adults aged 60–74	-.55**	-.46**	-.53**
Social class (education)			
Education		.53**	.54**
Psychosocial			
Perceived discrimination			-.04**
Intercept	17.5	16.0	16.2
R ²	.03	.07	.07

Notes: $N = 3196$. Ordinary least squares estimation. All regression models estimated on the unweighted sample.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

variables remained significant negative predictors, even after the effects of perceived discrimination were added to the model.

Purpose in life. Model 1 (see table 3) revealed significant positive influences on purpose in life associated with being married and employed, and significant negative influences associated with being Mexican (compared with being white) and being older (compared with being a young adult). There was also a significant interaction of race by age, with midlife whites having higher levels of purpose in life than midlife blacks in the national sample.

Model 2 showed that being educated was a significant positive influence on purpose in life. In addition, the effects of education worked differently for various racial groups. Blacks in the national sample received a greater boost in purpose for each increment in education compared with the other racial/ethnic groups. The significant negative effect that was evident for Mexican Americans dropped out once educational interactions were added to the equation.

TABLE 5 Prediction of Positive Relations with Others
(unstandardized coefficients)

Predictors	Models		
	1	2	3
Control variables			
Not married	—	—	—
Married	1.5**	1.5**	1.4**
Unemployed			
Employed	.54**	.42**	.39**
Key sociodemographics			
Whites, national sample	—	—	—
Blacks, national sample	1.3**	1.4**	2.8**
Blacks, New York	.78*	.92*	.61
Mexicans, Chicago	1.3**	1.8**	1.4**
Males	—	—	—
Females	.99**	1.0**	1.0**
Mexicans × females	-1.6**	-1.6**	-1.7**
Blacks, national sample × females	-1.9**	-1.9**	-2.3**
Adults aged 25–39	—	—	—
Adults aged 40–59	-.34*	-.36*	-.47**
Adults aged 60–74	.41	.46*	.14
Blacks, New York × adults aged 60–74	1.8**	1.7*	1.9**
Blacks, New York × adults aged 40–59	1.2*	1.3*	1.3*
Mexicans × adults aged 40–59	1.2*	1.3*	1.4*
Social class (education)			
Education		.35**	.35**
Psychosocial			
Perceived discrimination			-.17**
Intercept	14.2	13.3	14.1
R ²	.05	.06	.09

Notes: $N = 3197$. Ordinary least squares estimation. All regression models estimated on the unweighted sample.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Model 3, the final equation, revealed the same pattern of effects established in previous models, once reports of discrimination, which were significant negative influences on purpose in life, were taken into account.

Personal growth. Model 1 (see table 4) revealed that personal growth was positively predicted by being employed and being black (both the national sample and New York subsample) compared with being white. Personal growth was negatively predicted by age (both middle-aged and older adults differing significantly from young adults). All of these effects remained in model 2, which also showed that education was a significant positive predictor of personal growth. Model 3 showed the persistence

of these predictor variables as well as the negative effects associated with reports of discrimination.

Positive relations with others. Model 1 (see table 5) revealed that positive relations with others was significantly predicted by being married, employed, and a member of a minority (all three subgroups had positive effects compared with whites). Women also had higher scores than men, and midlife adults had lower scores than young adults. However, numerous interaction effects were also obtained. A race–gender interaction showed that the scores for positive relations with others for two groups of minority women (Mexican Americans, blacks in the national survey) were lower than those of their male counterparts. Further, a race–age interaction revealed that older blacks (both from the national sample and the New York sample) reported higher positive relations with others compared with younger blacks, which is in contrast to white adults, who

TABLE 6 Prediction of Autonomy (unstandardized coefficients)

Predictors	Models		
	1	2	3
Control variables			
Not married	—	—	—
Married	-.05	-.04	-.07
Unemployed	—	—	—
Employed	.26	.25	.25
Key sociodemographics			
Whites, national sample	—	—	—
Blacks, national sample	.19	.19	.53*
Blacks, New York	2.1**	2.1**	2.0**
Mexicans, Chicago	-.27	-1.1*	-1.2**
Males	—	—	—
Females	-.42**	-.40**	-.43**
Adults aged 25–39	—	—	—
Adults aged 40–59	.53**	.54**	.51**
Adults aged 60–74	1.1**	1.1**	1.0**
Blacks, New York × adults aged 60–74	-1.1*	-1.1*	-1.1*
Social class (education)			
Education		.01	.01
Mexicans × education		.60*	.61*
Psychosocial			
Perceived discrimination			-.05**
Intercept	16.1	16.0	16.3
R ²	.04	.04	.05

Notes: $N = 3190$. Ordinary least squares estimation. All regression models estimated on the unweighted sample.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

showed little age variation. Education was a strong positive predictor, and there were no significant interactions with education. All variables remained in the final model (model 3), and perceived discrimination was also a strong negative predictor of positive relations with others.

Autonomy. Model 1 (see table 6) revealed that autonomy is positively predicted by being an African American in New York, male, and middle-aged or old-aged. A significant race–age interaction indicated, however, that older blacks in New York did not have higher profiles on autonomy than did the two younger age groups, as was evident for the three other racial/ethnic groups. Model 2 showed that the preceding variables remained significant predictors, when education was added to the model, even though education itself was not a significant predictor of autonomy. A race–education interaction revealed that Mexican Americans in Chicago showed notable gains in autonomy with additional levels of education, whereas no such gains were evident for the other three racial/ethnic groups. Model 3 revealed a significant negative influence of perceived discrimination, with all other previous influences remaining in the model.

DISCUSSION

A major objective of the present study was to investigate the consistency of previously established patterns of age and gender differences on six different dimensions of psychological well-being (Ryff 1989b, 1991; Ryff and Keyes 1995). The merits of these descriptive questions were underscored by the nationally representative nature of the sample plus the added sampling of diverse ethnic/racial subgroups. The life-course patterns, assessed by mean-level analyses, revealed considerable convergence with earlier findings on community samples. Specifically, age decrements were replicated for purpose in life in all ethnic/racial groups. Personal growth also replicated patterns of decrement with age for all groups, although these effects were statistically significant only for blacks and whites in the national sample. With regard to age increments, blacks and whites in the national sample replicated earlier findings of older adults scoring higher than young adult or middle-aged respondents on environmental mastery, although no such effect was evident in the Chicago and New York subsamples. Similarly, middle- and older-aged adults in the national sample showed significantly higher scores on autonomy than did young adults (for all groups except African American males), but age was not a differentiating factor for the city-specific subsamples. For positive relations with others, the older age groups scored higher

than did the group of young adults, but only for the Chicago Mexican Americans and New York African Americans. Finally, as evident in earlier research, self-acceptance showed little significant variation by age across all groups.

This collective portrait of psychological well-being across the adult life course thus shows notable consistency across multiple samples, differing not only in their size and representativeness but also with regard to depth of measurement in assessing well-being (i.e., twenty-item versus three-item scales). The findings leave unanswered whether aging or cohort processes (or both) explain such patterns, but even in the absence of such understanding, the results document important diversity in life-course trajectories. As previously argued (Ryff 1989b; Ryff and Keyes 1995), the panoply of age profiles underscores the need for a multidimensional conception of positive functioning, because it suggests gains in some areas, losses in others, and stability in still others. Longitudinal analysis will, of course, be necessary to determine the actual nature of these dynamics.

Gender differences were generally stronger in the present study than has been previously documented (Ryff 1989b, 1991; Ryff and Keyes 1995). Positive relations with others has consistently shown higher scores among women compared with men, and this pattern was upheld with the MIDUS data, but in a qualified fashion. For white women in the national sample, scores were, as expected, higher than those of their male counterparts, but for blacks in the national sample, men actually scored higher than women. In addition, disadvantage for women relative to men was further evident for self-acceptance (only among older respondents in the national sample), environmental mastery (more strongly for blacks than whites in the national sample, for Mexican Americans in Chicago), purpose in life (only among young adults in national sample), and autonomy (only among young adults in national sample). Taken together, the findings underscore a wider expanse of compromised well-being among ethnic/minority women of differing ages.

The multivariate prediction of psychological well-being, which incorporated controls for employment and marital status, revealed the most novel findings of this investigation. Across numerous outcomes (self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth), racial minority status was a significant *positive* predictor of well-being, an effect evident for all three minority subgroups. These positive effects also remained in the model once other factors (education, perceived discrimination) were accounted for. Minority advantage was also evident for autonomy, but only for African Americans (both national sample and New York

subsample). Being Mexican American was, however, a negative predictor of autonomy and purpose in life relative to whites. On the other hand, purpose in life was positively predicted by being African American, but this effect held true only for better-educated blacks in the national sample.

Overall, these findings provide a novel portrayal of psychological strengths of ethnic/racial minorities on numerous aspects of well-being. Viewed in the context of prior research, some of which documents the higher profiles of psychological distress among racial minorities (Jackson and Neighbors 1989, 1996; Kessler and Neighbors 1986), and compromised quality of life (Hughes and Thomas 1998), the present findings draw attention to a frequently neglected phenomenon, namely, that the presence of the negative in the lives of oppressed groups does not automatically imply an absence of the positive. That is, advantage in well-being may sometimes exist concomitantly with negative outcomes (Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff 2002; Singer et al. 1998). In fact, some might argue that certain aspects of well-being, such as having a high sense of self-regard, mastery, and personal growth, may actually be honed by challenge, applied in this case to the difficulties of minority life. Such thinking is evident in Frankl's work (1992), which views adversity, particularly when meaning is attached to it, as a possible contributor to human strength (Ryff and Singer 1998). Similarly, others have emphasized the growth that sometimes follows in the aftermath of suffering or trauma (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1995). Our analyses offer no insight on *how* such strength building may come about but instead call for future research not only to assess the consistency of minority advantage in well-being but also to explore possible socialization practices and supportive social environments that may nurture it.

Education was also found to be a strong positive predictor of all aspects of psychological well-being (except autonomy). But importantly, educational differences did not account for the above racial effects. If anything, once education was in the model, the positive effects of minority group status were more strongly evident. Only for purpose in life did the findings show support for the argument that class and race interact to account for mental health effects (Kessler and Neighbors 1986). But the nature of the interaction was that blacks in the national sample showed greater boosts in purpose with additional increments in education, as compared with whites. Our analyses also revealed little support for the double jeopardy hypothesis (Dowd and Bengtson 1978), which predicts diminished well-being among those who are both old and members of a racial minority. Older blacks (both the national sample and New York

sample) revealed higher scores on positive relations with others relative to younger blacks. Only for African Americans in the New York sample, and only for one outcome (autonomy), was the combination of age and race a negative predictor of well-being. The nature of the interaction, however, showed that age effects were diminished, rather than exacerbated, for New York blacks compared with whites.

The psychosocial variable of perceived discrimination emerged as a significant negative predictor of every dimension of psychological well-being, net of all other sociodemographic variables in the model. The juxtaposition of this subjective rating, along with the objective social structural factors (e.g., education, race), underscores the need for combined consideration of both internal and external influences on psychological well-being. Previous MIDUS findings on perceived discrimination (Kessler, Mickelson, and Williams 1999) revealed links between the perception that one has been treated unfairly by others and mental problems (depression, anxiety). Our findings show that in addition, perceived discrimination diminishes the likelihood of psychological well-being. In fact, were it not for the negative effects of such perceptions, the previously described minority advantage in psychological well-being would have been even greater.

How these strengths develop and what protective roles they serve are important items on the agenda for future research. Pursuit of such questions is usefully framed in the context of long-term, life history approaches that speak to the cumulation of adversity in people's lives (Singer et al. 1998), while simultaneously keeping track of compensating psychosocial advantages that foster resilience (Singer and Ryff 1997; Singer et al. 1998). Psychological resilience in the face of life stresses, including experiences of racism and discrimination, may also have protective effects at the physiological level, with implications for unfolding physical health trajectories (Singer and Ryff 1999; Ryff and Singer 2000). Thus, the present findings point to numerous future directions for sharpening understanding of how, in the face of difficult life circumstances, some individuals are able to lead healthy, productive, and fulfilling lives.

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