Rethinking Life Satisfaction

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The behavioral reality referenced in the life satisfaction measurement of old people is examined conceptually and empirically. Three questions are addressed: (1) What is the image of life and satisfaction presented to subjects in the items of the five most commonly used scales and indices? (2) How might the image enter into the process of measurement? and (3) How does the image compare with experiences of life and its satisfactions among elders revealed by studies of daily living? Concluding comments deal with issues of reconceptualization.

THE LIFE SATISFACTION OF OLD PEOPLE has been a perennial concern of researchers in the field of aging. Beginning with the work of Cavan et al. (1949) on the meaning and measurement of personal adjustment to aging, researchers have explored and delineated its causes, correlates, and consequences. In the course of this activity, the meaning of life satisfaction has been reviewed and criticized. The ongoing attempt to measure it has generated diverse scales and indices, some of which have been refined (Kutner et al. 1956; Cumming and Henry 1961; Neugarten et al. 1961; Wood et al. 1969; Lawton 1972, 1975).

It is clear that the concept and condition of life satisfaction have been troublesome (George 1979; George and Bearon 1980; Nydegger 1977). While few have questioned its existence, terms used to describe it have varied: life satisfaction, morale, adjustment, well-being, happiness, successful aging. Its dimensionality has been debated, some claiming it to be unidimensional (e.g., Kutner et al. 1956) and others conceiving of it as multidimensional (e.g., Lawton 1972). Its behavioral status has been variously defined, some choosing to see it as an internal, psychological state (e.g., Neugarten et al. 1961) and others emphasizing its overt behavioral features (e.g., Cavan et al. 1949). Furthermore, the cross-validation of varied measures has been calibrated and improved, yet not convincingly (Lawton 1972; Neugarten et al. 1961).

By and large, both the concern and the trouble have been treated as technical challenges, leading to attempts at refinement, revision, and delineation, rather than to reconceptualization. The validity of the measures largely has been technically resolved by comparing results with trained observer ratings, each being informed by common and accepted conceptualizations of the subject matter. While validity allegedly raises the issue of what behavioral reality is at hand, it typically is circumvented by means of technical comparisons with the results of other devices whose own validity goes unquestioned or is assumed to be apparent, or is based on yet other devices whose own validity has been similarity addressed. Presumably, the more the results of separate measurement devices confirm each other, the greater the validity of any one device, a strategy that glosses over the possibility that all devices may be generated out of some taken-for-granted orthodoxy, namely, that it is more or less commonly known what the concept and condition of life satisfaction are in reality. Cumming et al. (1958:6) poignantly, but perhaps inadvertently, reveal the glossing of the validity problem when they state: "We assumed, in other words, that *whatever* morale is, it is possible to recognize it through the myriad complicated symbolic communications of the interview and to gauge its extent, or level."

This paper is not as concerned with the technical troubles of life satisfaction measurement as it is with its conceptualization. The aim is to consider the behavioral reality being referenced when old people and their researchers address the topic of life satisfaction, not whether some measurement device truthfully represents a reality that is intuitively, yet imprecisely, known. Three questions are addressed. First, what is the image of life and satisfaction presented to subjects by the five most commonly used scales and indices? Second, how might the image enter into the process of measurement? And third, how does the image compare with experiences of life and its satisfactions among elders revealed by studies of daily living?

The Image of Life and Satisfaction

To ask a question of anyone is not simply to obtain a response. Questions are not just elicitors of information; they direct attention to something. Questions are active features of interrogation, intended to be answered in particular ways (Schutz 1967, 1970). Whether we casually ask someone "How're you doing?" or more formally request people to consider, evaluate, and record their satisfactions with life, we intend particular responses by the sense of our questions. Something about the questions, in part, produces the responses given.

In this regard, suppose one were interested in the developmental quality of adult lives, as Kimmel (1974) is in his book *Adulthood and Aging*. Kimmel asks his subjects a variety of routine questions about life in terms of time, which he illustrates in several vignettes. Subjects are asked about life

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changes, particular stages, and what Kimmel refers to as "milestones." The vignettes reveal that it is not always clear to the subjects what Kimmel intends to ask about by his questions. Some ask Kimmel what *he* means by what is being asked, which the author attempts to clarify. When the author's intended sense of some aspect of life is accepted by a subject, the subject then formulates a response. A few declare that they have not, or do not think of their lives in a certain way, yet go on trying to do so at Kimmel's behest. It is evident that Kimmel's subjects are not simply reporting the developmental facts of their lives, but are doing so within the substantive purview of what they take to be the author's requests. The author's questions seem to be as much a part of his data as is the content of his subjects' lives (Gubrium and Buckholdt 1977). Every question contains a sense of things asked about—an image of them—which serves to frame or interpret them. The varied items of existing life satisfaction measures are a kind of question, many resembling those that Kimmel put to his subjects.

The five most commonly used life satisfaction measures are the Chicago Attitude Inventory (Cavan et al. 1949); Kutner's morale scale (Kutner et al. 1956); Cumming's morale index (Cumming and Henry 1961); Life Satisfaction Indexes A and B, or LSI-A/LSI-B (Neugarten et al. 1961); and the Philadelphia Geriatric Center, or PGC, morale scale (Lawton 1972). There is considerable homogeneity across the measures as a result of the common usage of select items. To some extent each newly developed measure was expressly compiled out of items selected from existing measures. For example, items that were originally part of Kutner's morale scale were used to derive the LSI-A and LSI-B (Neugarten et al. 1961:140). The PGC morale scale was constructed, in part, from items taken from existing scales (Lawton 1972:146). Indeed, it might be said that the Chicago Attitude Inventory set the tone for all subsequent scales and indexes. At least three of the measures (Chicago Attitude Inventory, Cumming's morale index, LSI-A/LSI-B) grew out of the continuing research of members of the Committee on Human Development at the University of Chicago. It is evident in the literature that while the measures are spoken of as five in number, they are tightly bound organizationally. The image of life satisfaction they contain is one they share.

The image articulated by the items of the measures has at least three themes. One theme is a sense of life as being wholly conceivable and universally relevant to each of its considerations. When elderly subjects are asked about their satisfaction with changes in their lives, they are to think of life as a transcendent object, as if its whole continuity were being evaluated, not that particular occasion's sense of the continuity. The questions request them to think of life as continuous, yet changeable, not as a collection of discrete moments joined together by retrospective interpretation (Garfinkel 1967).

Take the following typical items. It is not the particular choice of answers that is relevant here, but the sense of life articulated by the items.

"As I look back on life, I am fairly well satisfied." (agree, disagree, not sure)

"As I get older, things are (better, worse, same) than/as I thought they would be."

"I am just as happy as when I was younger." (agree, disagree, not sure)

"What age would you most like to be?"

"Things just keep getting worse and worse for me as I get older." (agree, disagree)

Such questions assume that what life was at some earlier point in time is not wholly discrete and qualitatively distinct from what it wholly is currently. Life is not experienced as a different thing each time the subject encounters questions about it. Upon being asked, say, if things are better, worse, or the same as he thought they would be, the subject considers some time past in his life, compares it with the present, and makes his judgment accordingly. The possibility that life is circumstantially constructed for consideration, understood within the context of the relevancies at hand, or made over for the purpose of examination each time one encounters a question about it, is not entertained.

Not only is the elderly person who completes the various measures treated as if he had a whole, universally relevant life to inspect for its satisfaction, but that life is presented as having a beginning or middle, and an end or, at the very least, an earlier portion and a later part. This is a second theme of the image, one that carries a distinct temporal quality. The sense of time presented is mechanical and linear, like clock time, as distinguished from the stream of experienced time (Hendricks and Hendricks 1976).

Clock time flows forward. This feature is apparent in various items of the life satisfaction measures. For example, subjects are asked to think about whether things have gotten better, worse, or remained the same "as [they] get older." It is clear that the current point in time is older, not younger. What they look back upon is a younger life, as suggested by the item, "I am just as happy as when I was younger." Indeed, there is something implicitly pathological about an elderly person who expresses a desire to make time flow backward (or forward in the opposite direction). The pathology is revealed in Cumming's (1961:262) codes for the item "What age would you most like to be?" A score of one is given for the answer, "The age I am," which enhances one's overall morale index. Needless to say, an expressed desire to be younger serves to lower one's measured morale.

There is an overall sense that the present, relative to the past, is life gone by. Subjects are not asked to think about life but to "think back over" it. A current endpoint is implied by a clause (emphasized) in one of Kutner's items: "How much do you regret the chances you *missed during your life* to do a better job of living?" The item places the subject, as a current respondent, outside of his life and asks him to retrospectively evaluate it. The present is, ironically, not substantively during the subject's life. That life has gone by; it is a thing to be perused for how adequately it *was* lived, now that it has been lived. The words (emphasized) of one of Lawton's items rather straightforwardly locate the subject toward the end of time: "I am as happy *now* as I was when I *was younger*." It informs those who respond to it that now is older and some time past, or then, was younger, not the reverse. "Then" is certainly not an earlier time or place when one might have felt "older," or the many times past when one felt older and then, strangely, younger at the same time. The various measures do not present such complex times to subjects. Not being asked to evaluate them, subjects produce no corresponding data.

The substance of this unitary, progressive lifetime is a third theme of the image. As Rosow (1963) has pointed out, there is a special style of living presumed to be normal in the various

measures. While the response codes, of course, provide for alternative answers—routinely from "agree" to "disagree"—the contents of the items themselves are parochial. They present a fixed lifestyle to subjects, who then are free to evaluate it.

Though they are not all concrete about it, several items imply that past life, youthful life, not old age, is the time one does, or one should have made the most of life, when life's important events occurred. The LSI-A, for example, contains the following items:

"I would not change my past life even if I could." (point awarded for "agree")

"When I think back over my life, I didn't get most of the important things I wanted." (point awarded for a "disagree")

"I've gotten pretty much what I expected out of life." (point awarded for an "agree")

A premium is given to those subjects who respond that they would not change their past life, as one item states, "even if I could."

Compare this with a selection of items that refer only to the present, presumably to old age. As always, subjects are free to agree, disagree, or respond in some alternate fashion.

"I feel just miserable most of the time." (agree, disagree, not sure)

"I am perfectly satisfied with my health." (agree, disagree, not sure)

"I have so few friends that I am lonely much of the time." (agree, disagree, not sure)

"I sometimes feel that life isn't worth living." (no, yes)

"I get upset easily." (no, yes)

"I have a lot to be sad about." (no, yes)

"I feel my age, but it does not bother me." (agree, disagree, not sure)

"How much unhappiness would you say you find in your life today?" (almost none, some, a great deal)

"I can't help feeling now that my life is not very useful." (agree, disagree, not sure)

As presented to respondents, the vision of old age in the items is one nearly empty of concrete human affairs, the practical events that people encounter in doing the business of daily living. With a few general exceptions such as health and finances, being old has no concrete objects. One is asked if he gets upset easily, but over what? One is asked if she is miserable most of the time, but with what or whom? One is asked if he feels life is worth living, but no particular aspect of it is specified.

The items that pertain to the present suggest that old age is made of feelings. When an object is specified, is may be a nebulous reference to self, as in "I feel miserable most of the time," or an equally vague reference to life, as in "I sometimes feel life isn't worth living." Other exceptions emphasize an emotional orientation to their objects, not a practical one. For example, items about one's relations with friends and family deal primarily with the subject's satisfactions with his frequency of contact with them, as in this typical item from the Chicago Attitude Inventory: "I would be happier if I could see my friends more often." Some dwell on the presumed felt isolation of a lack of contact, as in the item: "I have so few friends that I am lonely much of the time." The unidimensionality of the exceptions, in their portrayal of the subject's relations to objects such as friends, glosses over the many practical contingencies and conceptual transformations of friendship. Is friendship, at any age, a relationship that one just has more or less of, that ideally one has more of? What of the mutual economic obligations of friendship (Siegel 1978; Stephens 1976; Teski 1979; Wiseman 1970)? The interpretation of friendship as an everyday economic contingency—as a negative factor in personal solvency—is not within the technical capability of unidimensional conceptions of it.

As a theme, the relatively empty substance of late life reflects what Burgess (1960) once called the "roleless role" of the aged. In early life, one possesses a number of socially recognizable roles, such as work and parental roles. Upon becoming old, however, such roles disappear for the most part, and it becomes unclear what one is or should be. What is left, presumably, is a history of roles, roles typical of earlier life. Together with this residue one has feelings about how much the present reflects what one possessed at an earlier point in time.

The Image in Measurement

The second question raised at the beginning of the paper concerns how the image might enter into the process of measurement. Contrast what is assumed to be the measurement behavior of the subject with what some recent social research suggests about the individual and collective cognitive organization of responses to similar demands (Garfinkel 1967; Cicourel 1974; Perrucci 1974; Pfohl 1978; Buckholdt and Gubrium 1979).

What the life satisfaction literature tells us directly about subjects' measurement behavior, concerns the technical problems that arise in the administration of scales and indices, problems such as item clarity and the fatigue of respondents, and researchers' attempts to deal with them, such as methods of increasing reliability and test validity. Little is said about working subjects other than that some respond slowly or inappropriately, their background characteristics are such and such, and the like. Yet we can reconstruct what the working behavior of the subject must be assumed to resemble if the methodology of life satisfaction measurement is accepted.

The logic of life satisfaction measures assumes, in principle, that when subjects respond to items concerning their lives and satisfactions, they respond in terms of what the items ask about, not for the sake of the items themselves. That is, the items of the measures do not, upon the *occasion* of their presentation, serve to generate life satisfaction or dissatisfaction in whatever degree they do so. It is not at the behest of measurement that life and its satisfactions appear as they do. It is taken for granted, after all, that there is a thing called "life" that is perusable as a whole, that can be addressed by subjects for evaluation, and that would be recognizable as such on any evaluative occasion. Moreover, it is assumed that each item independently taps this same reality. Should a subject raise questions about the clarity or legitimacy of select items, he is taken to be technically dissatisfied with them, not essentially so.

Whether in constructing a new scale or in administering an established one, subjects who have or cause trouble in responding to items are treated as if they would not have done so had the items been clear and to the point. This means that items can be constructed that precisely elicit information about life and its satisfactions. The logic of measures like morale scales cannot entertain essential dissatisfaction. For example, in regard to existing measures, a respondent who saw his life as disconnected and thereby as appreciable in a multiplicity of ways, and who chose to make his thoughts and evaluations known on measurement protocols, would be uncodeable. His "completed" protocol would be discarded.

Validation procedures for the various measures, of course, are used to justify the presumed behavioral realities being tapped. The measures are not asserted to be valid at face value. For example, responses to items of the PGC morale scale were compared with the independent evaluation of staff members of institutions where subjects were residents. And the performance of subjects on the LSI-A and LSI-B was checked against ratings of life satisfaction made by a clinical psychologist. In the case of the PGC morale scale, even the elimination of items not contributing to validity did not appreciably change the .47 correlation of the 22-item scale with the judgments of the criterion staff (Lawton 1972:151). As for the LSI-A and LSI-B, coefficients of correlation with judges' ratings were no better, being .39 and .47, respectively (Neugarten et al. 1961:142).

While the developers of both measures agree that the coefficients serving as the basis for validity claims are rather low, surprisingly they then justify them on various grounds, from the special (superior) psychological make-up of respondents used to validate the items to the following curious conclusion (Neugarten et al. 1961:142):

> Nevertheless, the more important point is undoubtedly that direct self-reports, even though carefully measured, can be expected to agree only partially with the evaluations of life satisfaction made by an outside observer (in this case, the judges who made the LSR ratings).

Why this should be expected is not explained. But what is even more peculiar is that these authors seem to be attempting both to establish the validity of the LSI-A and LSI-B and to dismiss the very basis on which an undesireably low index of validation has been obtained.

Whether or not one is justified in being satisfied with the validity assertions made in the literature does not deny that the measures have been treated as valid. With various cautions, each of the measures is reported to be usable by their respective developers. Moreover, each has been used successfully in numerous studies of life satisfaction/morale, constituting a very large area of research activity in the field of aging. If not on empirical grounds, then by the sheer force of usage the various measures have earned a certain validity. This brings us again to the question of the measurement behavior of the working subject. The ground for making claims about it seems not to be as much empirical as it is conventional. The widespread use of measures takes for granted that the subject who is administered, say, the PGC morale scale or the Chicago Attitude Inventory behaves in accordance with the vision of life satisfaction articulated by their items.

To ask an elderly person whether "things have gotten worse and worse as [he's] gotten older" and to treat his response as a general one is to assume that, barring inconsistency in measurement and granting test validity, the person who responds with disagreement, for example, would judge his life likewise on any other current occasion. The assumed stability of judgment takes for granted that the subject tacitly and principally organizes his responses within the framework of established test reliability and validity. But does the subject naively do so? Is it not possible that when the subject does satisfactorily complete a life satisfaction questionnaire or interview, he does so against a background of known and unknown, connected and unconnected events in his life, which, perhaps for the sake of the test, he treats as known and connected and, somehow, thereby comparable? Is it not possible that when responses are obtained, they are produced by a different means than assumed?

The behavior of the working subject assumed in life satisfaction measurement is the behavior of a "cultural dope" (Garfinkel 1967). In principle, the validity of such measurement rests on the expectation that the subject accepts the measures' realities as the essential concrete features of life and that the acceptance is a general feature of his attention to such matters. The assumption is that the measures and the situations in which they are administered are not themselves critical (epistemological) features of subjects' responses, that subjects simply respond to the items, not to "What this here is all about, anyway?" or to "What these people [researchers] mean by these questions?" or even to "What these [same] people want from me?" Such fleeting thoughts or casual expressions raise laypersons' brands of ontological, epistemological, and procedural questions, respectively. Taken seriously, they abrogate the cultural dope who participates in life satisfaction measures.

Investigations of what subjects talk of, and do, in practice, in response to demands on their knowledge about their own and others' lives suggest that what is tapped in life satisfaction measures is not satisfaction in general with life in general, but life satisfaction as understood by subjects on the occasion of their acceptance of the task of responding to questions about life and its satisfactions in terms of the image presented to them. In one widely cited experiment, Garfinkel (1967) solicited undergraduate students to participate in what was said to be an alternative means of psychotherapy. Each student was asked to describe what he considered to be a serious problem in need of advice and to address a (confederate) counselor with questions that permitted yes or no answers. Students and counselor were located in separate rooms and communicated by means of intercom. After each answer, students were instructed to unplug their end of the intercom and to tape record their reactions to the exchange. Unknown to subjects, counselors' yeses and noes were predecided by random number.

Recorded reactions showed that subjects actively participated in their counseling, not only posing questions but interpreting the answers given by the counselors. Each question became a partial document of the developing and attributed sense of the answers given by the counselors. The tacit contribution that subjects made to their own counseling (in the main, believed to be the professional counselors' activity) suggests that they were, in practice, anything but "cultural dopes," as, in a different setting, Kimmel's vignettes also suggest.

The subject who participates in life satisfaction measurement faces a task similar to that encountered by Garfinkel's student subjects. Each is asked to address and evaluate what the meaning is of life experiences. Can we be sure that the subjects of life satisfaction measurement treat its items discretely? As an elderly person proceeds through a scale or index, might he perhaps not, as did Garfinkel's students, get a sense of what each particular item means from what he, upon consideration, *now* understands to have been the meaning of items already completed, from what he now, and later then, takes to be the sense of the measurement exercise? Each retrospective interpretation might serve to completely transform the ongoing sense of earlier items and answers as subjects proceed through the protocols, yet perhaps leave unaltered their already recorded responses.

Not only might the behavior of the working subject cast doubt on the independence of life satisfaction items and responses to them (which would make coding, indexing, scaling, and statistical analysis dubious), but the subject's well-intentioned attempt to answer the items reasonably might, in its own right, serve to display his life in a particular way for measurement purposes. Life satisfaction items, after all, ask subjects certain things, not just anything. To the extent that subjects attempt to respond reasonably to what is asked of them, they interpret their lives accordingly. This brings us full circle to the place of image in measurement. The working subject is not a cultural dope on two counts. First, as Garfinkel reminds us, he virtually constitutes whatever he confronts. Second, the things he is confronted by, such as life satisfaction items or questions, are not innocent choices or interrogations but are ontologically suggestive in their own right. In responding to what he is presented, the acquiescent subject reproduces and confirms its image of life.

There is a growing body of empirical research that lends credence to the reality-constructing quality of images in everyday life, especially in formal decision-making situations. The research suggests that, in their use, images serve to frame experience, to organize it (Goffman 1974). Pfohl (1978), for example, has shown in considerable detail how panels of human service experts (social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists) articulate the formal demand to think of incarcerated mental patients as either dangerous or not for the eventual purpose of reducing the patient census in a maximum security hospital for the criminally insane. His documentation of the working communication between panel members shows that a legal image of insanity constantly confronts medical, behavioral, and less formal images of it, and that to complete their assignment, members attempt to arrive at a legal decision based on their nonlegal expertise. Similar or related findings are reported by Tuchman (1978) and Altheide (1976) for the mass media, Wiseman (1970) for the treatment of alcoholics, Perrucci (1974) in describing how patients "go to staff" in a mental hospital, Gubrium and Buckholdt (1982) for reporting practices in rehabilitation, and Edelman (1977) in the helping professions, among others.

What, then, might all of this tell us about the data produced by the elderly subjects who complete life satisfaction measures? It suggests that while such measurement is completable, what gets done is not simply a more or less reliable and valid report of life satisfaction. There is reason to believe that what life satisfaction scales and indices measure is old people's interpretations of their lives and related satisfactions within the framework of the particular image presented to them on measurement occasions. While interpretation is a pervasive feature of everyday life, images do vary, which is the measurement issue of the next section.

Unmeasured Satisfactions

The third question raised at the beginning of the paper asks how the image of life and its satisfactions presented in measurement compares with experiences of life and its satisfactions on other occasions. Relevant data are reported by a number of ethnographic accounts of the daily life of old people, from accounts of life in a nursing home (Gubrium 1975) to apartment buildings (Hochschild 1973; Jacobs 1975; Ross 1977), a retirement hotel (Teski 1979), single-room occupancy (SRO) dwellings (Stephens 1976; Siegel 1978; Eckert 1980), urban neighborhoods (Frankfather 1977; Wiseman 1970), retirement communities (Jacobs 1974; Johnson 1971), and activity centers (Hazan 1980; Myerhoff 1978). Though the specific topics of the accounts differ, they do describe the ongoing issues and sentiments of daily living among the elderly when the latter are not being formally measured.

Take the theme that life is a unitary entity and, as such, relevant to all its considered occasions. The ethnographic data show that for old people (though not implying only old people) the quality of life is articulated through the ongoing experiences of those who live it. This is not to suggest that its quality is determined by particular living conditions such as health or finances. Rather, the data indicate that the meaning of life is understood in relation to its now current, later current, and still later current practical considerations. Life seems to be many things: the whole thing it was then, the whole thing it is now, and the whole thing it may come to be.

Ross (1977) describes the daily lives of the elderly French men and women of Les Floralies, a retirement residence for Parisian construction workers and their wives or widows. People of their age in France are referred to as the '14 generation because they were young during World War I. Most experienced that war either as active combatants or by having lost relatives to it. World War II claimed sons from some of the residents. Such was part of what life was like for these elderly. Ross writes (p. 86): "For all of them [the residents], it provided a pair of symbols, Vichy and the Resistance, in terms of which they still orient their lives." But Ross then notes (p. 86): "Although few people fought in the Resistance, and few people gave active support to Petain, almost everyone who lived through the occupation now feels that he or she made a choice between the two." The meaning of having been a collaborator or active in the Resistance is not something that simply grew out of past life and which one now looks back upon in satisfaction or dissatisfaction. For those residents who now speak of having had a part in the Resistance, the experience is, if not actual, then at least a symbol of claims to the worth of one's life. It is not so much the facts of past life in their own right that determine one's current evaluation of life as a whole as it is current social considerations that retrospectively serve to articulate both what life was and how satisfying it is said to have been. Consequently, as residents of Les Floralies in the company and culture of other members of the '14 generation, the

facts of life take on a certain meaning. For all practical purposes, they become new facts and their lives new lives. As residents, to report that one fought in the Resistance means that one's life has been meritorious or undistinguished, which one depending on one's political orientation, on whether one's sympathies are Communist or not, on which of Les Floralies' social and/or political factions enter into one's daily affairs in the residence.

The elderly community residents described by Frankfather (1977), who "loop" various urban scenes and agencies in managing their ostensible senility or deviance, present a multiplicity of lives. Frankfather shows that as an elder loops from, say, a community residence to encounters with the police, medical hospitalization, mental hospitalization, nursing home residence, and deinstitutionalization, his life fluctuates among many senses of what it is and has been. Life comes to be a set of "multiple and contradicting interpretations of the same 'facts' " (p. 15).

By Frankfather's account, there are at least two views of the etiology of senility operating in the daily encounters of the community residents. The one taken by most professionals is that senility is a pathological condition that is irreversible. Its "symptoms" are a routine expectation of aging. Another view, Frankfather maintains, holds that senile "characteristics" (note the change in language) are products of current living conditions and encounters. This view is not typical of professionals but is variously maintained by community members like neighbors and the personnel of local commercial establishments. One is likely to be "routinely and obviously" senile should he encounter a professional agent who sees elderly dependency and fragility in those terms. To encounter someone who sees dependency and fragility differently is not to have to deal with one's senility. Thus, to loop various urban scenes is now to experience senility and now to not. It is not just that one tends to become senile as one ages but that, if it must be described in terms of becoming, one risks becoming senile in circumstances where this ostensible fact of life exists and does not when it is absent.

In their own fashion, elderly persons understand this. It is a kind of tacit knowledge that serves to inform their management of daily affairs. To be satisfied with life may then mean that one has, for the time being, managed to avoid undesirable senses of it (which, perhaps, might be one of the unforeseen benefits of being a nonrespondent in life satisfaction measurement).

The temporal theme of the image of life satisfaction makes it reasonable to ask questions about satisfactions with what life has or has not become. The ethnographic data, however, show that time is complicated by a variety of practical conditions, such that in certain situations, for example, the present has no past.

Hazan's (1980) fieldwork was conducted in a day center for elderly Jews in Marlsden, a London borough. His aim was to show how the elders' pre-Center lives in Marlsden were transformed in quality upon their becoming Center participants, especially how the elders experienced changes in the way they reckoned the course of their lives in time. Hazan interprets his data to reveal that lifetime reckoning is not purely developmental, that one's sense of the past, future, and present does not just grow, regress, or cycle in an orderly or sequential fashion. Rather, it is shown that people—old people—may experience a multiplicity of time worlds and that changes in lifetime reckoning are experienced within the ongoing course of their everyday affairs. Upon becoming full Center participants, the elders' time world flattened. Where in the pre-Center period the present was reckoned in terms of an alienated past and future, life became mainly present-specific in the Center. Important elements of their past, such as growing up in the East End of London, were renounced by participants, not to be spoken of nor to be used as a background against which to evaluate present matters. In the Center, the future was a period that became, at best, something fatalistically vague, not seriously entertained nor estimated. Those few participants who dared to dwell on the past or to prognosticate on the future were summarily called to task. As Hazan writes, it is "almost as though time does not exist in the Center itself, but is capable of being a nuisance outside" (p. 89).

When time enters into their conversation, Center members are fatalistic: whatever was, was; whatever will be, will be. To them, as Hazan (p. 98) states, "nothing is really in a process of change and progression." This is the normal Center sense of lifetime reckoning. To evaluate members against the standard of time presented by the measurement image of life satisfaction would be to produce related morale scores that have no meaning for participants' Center lives. Health, for example, is not something that can be evaluated for whether or not it has been stable or has deteriorated.

> . . . participants usually refer to their medical condition as if it was static. No cure is to be expected, but deterioration is unlikely. Thus people with terminal disease speak freely of their present hardships, but rarely contemplate a possible worsening in their condition. The implicit feeling is that the Center is a sanctuary, impervious to the ordinary processes of change dominating the "normal" course of events in the outside world (p. 99).

Yet there are select occasions when time is expanded. For example, participation in the East End demonstrations against Fascism in the 1930s is recalled with pride. Depending on the occasion, the past bursts forth for these elders, or is carefully edited, or most commonly, is completely missing. The working version of time at the Center is a sharp contrast to the theme of linear, progressive time. It is, moreover, believed by participants to be the normal view, one that Hazan expressly notes, integrates elders into the Center. Organizing one's Center life in accordance with the measurement theme of time results in demoralization. Indeed, given Center participants' low tolerance for time supposition and linear reckoning, it is doubtful if any of the life satisfaction indexes and scales could be successfully, if not validly, administered to them.

As practiced and lived by elders, time has other dimensions that make its measurement theme a particular, not general, reflection of it. Gubrium (1975) describes how daily time and daily life satisfactions in a nursing home are worked through the contingencies of staff/patient interaction. For example, the widely used technique of behavior rehabilitation called "reality orientation" or "RO" is informed by a clock time chronology. Yet, in application, it continually confronts the multiple senses of timing held by patients and working therapists (Gubrium and Ksander 1975). Hochschild's (1973) discussion of what she calls "altruistic surrender" is a form of nested time, in which a community of 43 grandmothers, who live in a small apartment building near San Francisco Bay, conduct a good share of their daily lives. The 43 women keep

track of each other's daily lives and satisfactions, in part in terms of the ongoing daily lives and satisfactions of their children. And Myerhoff's (1978) Venice, California, Jewish elders do not "number their days" as isolated individuals. Their daily, past, and future satisfactions are intertwined with each other: Olga's happiness is tied to Gita's, Basha's feeling of loneliness sympathetically reflects Rachel's, Heschel's depression is really Jake's, and so on.

The third theme of the measurement image of life satisfaction suggests that life's major events, whatever they are, occur at an earlier time, not in old age. Old age primarily is a time of feelings. The ethnographic data show, on the contrary, that old people do play definite concrete roles. They are not only more or less satisfied with their past, but present events impinge critically on their satisfactions. Moreover, the routine substantive concerns of old age presented to elders in measurement—such as social contact, solvency, and health—are complicated in meaning by a variety of contextual considerations. The substance and complications of elders' lives and satisfactions cannot be understood only in terms of an ostensible past life but must be interpreted against a background of continually lived experiences.

In her ethnography of Mayfair, a Chicago retirement hotel, Teski (1979) describes various territories in the public areas of the ground floor: the Card Room, the gift shop, the Theatre Room, and the Greenhill Lounge.

> Through time, the different public areas in the hotel have become associated with different groups of people, and there is shared consensus about the type of activities which take place in these different locations. The feeling that certain areas "belong" to certain groups is very strong and many residents say firmly that they "never go into" certain rooms (p. 48).

The various areas are routinely used to define their frequenters as types of persons. Those who spend most of their time in one of the rooms come to be identified as "one of them." The informal territorial identities generate a set of roles or behavioral rules that, together with other identities, both articulate and enter into the management of everyday interactions in the hotel.

The Card Room contrasts dramatically with the Greenhill Lounge. The Card Room has a clublike atmosphere, is considered to be particular men's territory, is smoke filled, and resounds of hearty laughter and men's talk. Its occupants consider themselves to be rational people, albeit some have admittedly unusual opinions. On occasion, a resident believed to be senile walks into the room and falls asleep. Such a person is treated with repugnance, his or her territorial invasion generating disgust and grumbling. The Card Room, after all, is not believed to be for "that kind," but rather, as might be heard there, for "our kind of people."

The Greenhill Lounge, on the other hand, is viewed by regular occupants of the Card Room as a "repository for senile-seeming and sometimes repulsive old women." The lounge has chairs along the walls and a few others scattered in open space. There is a television area located within the Lounge. In contrast to the atmosphere of the Card Room, the lounge is very quiet. Many of its occupants sit in easy chairs and sleep. Conversation is hushed; new arrivals are stared at by those who are not sleeping. Card Room devotees believe the lounge to be a kind of "nursing home area," an opinion shared by some of the other residents. The lounge is also known to be gossip-ridden, a place where people "sit and spend their time inventing and spreading vicious stories about their fellow residents."

Whether or not occupants of the Card Room and Greenhill Lounge would differ in their rationality and self-control on objective behavioral grounds does not deny the fact that hotel residents organize their talk about, and orientation to, room regulars in accordance with such a belief. For whatever personal or interpersonal reason an occupant takes a place in either room, his behavior is considered to reveal the type of individual he is, which in turn serves to interpret his actions. To be, say, a Card Room regular is to imply publicly who one is, to play a kind of role in the daily life of the hotel. Such a role, like others that enter into daily hotel life, articulates life's satisfactions and dissatisfactions.

Other lifestyles claiming elderly adherents present them with additional concrete roles. Stephens's (1976) and Eckert's (1980) SRO hotels confront their permanent aged residents with younger, weekend transients who are, like Teski's Greenhill Loungers, "not like us." Hochschild's (1973) Merrill Court organizes a hierarchical system of roles around an informal rule of "poor dear" references. A woman who routinely refers to another as a "poor dear" commands the satisfaction that she is in greater luck than the latter, which, as Hochschild cautiously suggests, serves "to buttress a sense of her own achieved or ascribed superiority" (p. 59). And Gubrium's (1975) Murray Manor, a nursing home, not only is a place for what some gerontologists call "abnormal aging" but, like other places, also serves as a setting for the use and abuse of a wide range of roles—from the good resident to the seemingly well-recognized combative types, sweet patients, isolates, know-it-alls, mentals, and those who have "all their marbles."

Life in each of these places is full of roles taken and roles abandoned, roles claimed and roles assigned. None are places from which the aged only look back on a life that was lived, feeling one way or another about how it was compared to how it is now. In each instance, it is evident that, as Ross (1974) puts it, "life goes on." As life concretely flows, so do its satisfactions.

The routine substantive concerns of old age do not, in some straightforward degree, influence satisfaction with life. In the life satisfaction literature, it commonly is argued that a modicum of social contact, especially with relatives and friends, has a positive effect on life satisfaction. However, the social settings in which elders organize their lives complicate this. For example, Stephens (1976) and Eckert (1980) show how being socially unattached in the down-and-out world of the SRO is a desirable lifestyle, one that breaks down under the economic burdens and interpersonal obligations of attachment. The satisfactions of SRO marginality hinge on being a "loner," the familiarities of social contacts posing the constant threat of trouble. Even the meaning of health is interpreted against varying background understandings. To talk about one's aches and pains in vivid detail, for instance, is not to be morbid nor is it necessarily a sign of low morale. It may, indeed, be a conversational resource that commands the attention, recognition, and respect that others, who merely listen, do not share (Gubrium 1975; Teski 1979).

Rethinking Life Satisfaction

The preceding questions, analytic problems, and body of data suggest that it is time to rethink life satisfaction in old age. First, what has been and continues to be troublesome both conceptually and empirically is the extent that varying measures of life satisfaction dwell on past life, on one's younger years. The ongoing lives of the elderly are evaluated in a past-oriented time frame, something that tends to short-change the current practicalities of lived experience. It is evident that the aged, like other people, do seriously live in their practical presents, and that they do produce and reproduce their acknowledged pasts, presents, and futures in relation to current considerations. To ignore this is to cheat their lives of its persistent richness.

Second, some conceptual and technical provision might best be made for revealing the multiplicity of life. This, it seems, is not within the technical capacity of life satisfaction measurement as currently conceived. Current measures do not allow for co-equal dialogue between subject and researcher about the content of items and responses. Rather, subjects are allowed to make moves in a preset game, as it were. Dialogical data, on the other hand, at least would not conceptually foreclose the entertainment of other games. Such data, of course, would be largely narrative, and furthermore, would be emergently revealing of life satisfaction. The aim of a dialogical strategy would not as much be to be precise about life satisfaction measurement, as to be adequate to it. Linking a dialogical strategy to a concrete concern with the context of dialogue would approximate ethnographic method.

Third, measures of life satisfaction are unjustifiably individualistic in two ways. It is assumed that index or scale scores represent the life satisfaction of each of their respective subjects. Should a woman's LSI-A score be, for example, 18 out of a possible 20, it would be concluded that *she* was quite satisfied with life. The score of 18 is taken to belong to her, not to anything else, not to the measurement occasion, not to the themes presented in measurement items, not to the logic of score computation. The assumption permits arithmetic calculations, such that, for example, out of a sample of 100 subjects, it is possible to conclude (given one has calculated correctly) that one quarter or 25% scored 16 or higher. The logic of arithmetic requires each score to be independent of every other one. Responses to individual measurement items are also assumed to be independent, which originally allowed the arithmetic calculation of each subject's score: responses to any one item do not depend on the subject's analytic assessment of his response to other items.

The individualistic character of life satisfaction measurement displaces the social features of daily living. The measurement vision is of a collection of independent individuals who each in his own right confronts and evaluates life. The measures do not reveal the social ties and social flux of life confrontations and assessments. Even the practical activity of being a subject in life satisfaction measurement is social, for it is, like all human action, dialectically an activity-in-relation-to something, whether measurement items or something else (Giddens 1979). Merely to assume that subjects can think about and assess themselves is simultaneously to assume action (thoughts and evaluations of self), which at once is dual and social (what one thinks and feels about oneself). One is social even in technical isolation. Life satisfaction measurement glosses over this. But, curiously, it is what must be assumed in order to achieve measured life satisfaction responses in the first place. As currently conceived, life satisfaction measurement floats on an unacceptable, yet preferably unanalyzed, foundation.

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