

Life Satisfaction of Single Middle-Aged Professional Women

By: Virginia G. Lewis, [L. DiAnne Borders](#)

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Abstract:

This study examined 10 factors and their relation to the life satisfaction of single middle-aged professional women. The proposed regression model, which included job satisfaction, gender identity, locus of control, social support, health, financial resources, leisure-time activities, sexual satisfaction, and regrets regarding life circumstances, was explored through a questionnaire. Questionnaires were administered to single professional women in higher education institutions. Responses were received from 152 women. Performance on life satisfaction was significantly explained by recourse to the variables of job satisfaction, internal locus of control, regrets regarding life circumstances, sexual satisfaction, and leisure-time activities.

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Article:

Middle-aged women constitute the largest portion of the American female population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1977), and a significant proportion of these women are single (Houseknecht, Vaughan, & Statham, 1987). In fact, single women are one of the most rapidly growing populations in society, perhaps because of attractive career opportunities, high divorce rates, acceptance of cohabitation, and unbalanced gender ratios in middle and later adulthood (Lingren, Kimmans, Van Zandt, 1987; Stein, 1978). Highly educated women tend to remain single or become single through divorce more than any other group of women (Houseknecht et al., 1987).

Despite the growing numbers of single middle-aged women, little theoretical or empirical literature about them exists. Traditional theories of adult development (e.g., Erikson, 1950, 1964; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Neugarten, 1968, 1979; Rossi, 1980a, 1980b) primarily are based on studies of men, resulting in a deficit view of women and contributing to numerous myths and misconceptions about single women. According to these theorists, single women, particularly those who have no children, could not successfully resolve the midlife crisis because it includes marriage, children, and career.

Theoretical explorations specific to women's development, which are in the early stages of work (Gallos, 1989), also are quite limited and for similar reasons. The few, brief speculations about

women's development published to date (e.g., Giele, 1982; Gilligan, 1982; Hulbert, 1993; Scarf, 1980) offer little insight into single and childless middle-aged women for at least two reasons. First, many only attempt to describe women's development from infancy to the early adult years (Hulbert, 1993). Second, a major focus of these theories is a woman's struggle to choose between or to balance family (i.e., husband and children) and work (Gallos, 1989). In fact, the middle-aged woman's preoccupation supposedly is trying to deal with the loss of roles that had given her identity, power, and meaning. It is at this point, with children leaving the nest, that she may become more independent, assertive, and inclined to pursue a career (Giele, 1982), goals that the single women may have already achieved.

For the most part, then, existing theories of adult development, male or female, are not applicable to the population of single, childless, middle-aged women. As a result, researchers and practitioners have little objective information about the key dimensions of these women's experiences in the middle years (Hulbert, 1993), a critical time for reflection on one's life choices.

One strategy for discovering such dimensions, according to Giele (1992), is an integration approach in which the researcher asks what combination of factors are related to a sense of well-being and life satisfaction for these women. Life satisfaction, one of the oldest and most persistently investigated issues in the study of adulthood (George, 1979), refers to "an assessment of the overall conditions of existence as derived from a comparison of one's aspirations to one's actual achievements" (p. 210; see also Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976). Essentially, life satisfaction is a cognitive assessment of one's progress toward desired goals (George, 1979). Researchers have pursued a variety of factors in their attempt to identify components of life satisfaction for middle-aged adults (men and women, primarily married). Factors related to life satisfaction across several studies include being married (e.g., Haring-Hidore, Stock, Okun, & Witter, 1985), job satisfaction (Bearon, 1989; Crohan, Antonucci, Adelman, & Coleman, 1989; Rice, Near, & Hunt, 1980), social support (e.g., Cockrum & White, 1985; Ishii-Kuntz, 1987; Ward, 1979), health (e.g., Mitchell & Helson, 1990; Notman, 1979; Palmore & Kivett, 1977; Posner, 1979; Ward, 1979), and gender identity (e.g., Frank, Towell, & Huyck, 1985; Whitley, 1983). A few other significant factors were included in only one or two studies, such as locus of control (Bell, 1984), sexual enjoyment (Palmore & Kivett, 1977), social activity (Palmore & Kivett, 1977), and regrets regarding life circumstances (Metha, Kinnier, & McWhirter, 1989).

Although these studies have provided fairly consistent views of life satisfaction for middle-aged adults, they either did not include single middle-aged women at all or combined them with other women or men. In fact, only two studies highlighting the life satisfaction of single middle-aged women were located. In the first, Loewenstein et al. (1981) investigated satisfactions and stresses of women being single at midlife. Participants in the study, 60 previously married or never-married women, 35 to 65 years of age, generally reported high life satisfaction. The variable most closely associated with life satisfaction was health, followed by living with a peer

companion, work, and perceptions of salary fairness. Desire for steady companionship (either gender, with or without marriage) was widespread among the single women; in fact, loneliness was highly correlated with low life satisfaction.

Baruch, Barnett, and Rivers (1983) also offered relevant information for single women in their study of the life satisfaction of 300 middle-aged women (age 35-55 years). Defining life satisfaction or well-being as a combination of mastery and pleasure, Baruch et al. determined that mastery was the greater contributor to life satisfaction, and the factor that determined women's sense of mastery was paid employment. Total family income and sexual satisfaction also were important contributors to life satisfaction. For single women, challenging work and occupational prestige affected both pleasure and mastery. Social support from friends was particularly important, along with a concern about not having an intimate relationship. Although single women reported lower pleasure than their married counterparts, those single women in challenging and prestigious jobs had high mastery and thus had a good chance of achieving high life satisfaction.

These two studies provided evidence that single middle-aged women could achieve high life satisfaction, despite prevailing adult development theories and societal expectations. Results also offered some contrasts to studies of middle-aged married men and women. Each of the two studies, however, provided only a partial explanation of the components of life satisfaction for single, professional, middle-aged women: (a) Only a limited number of possible contributing factors were included, (b) results were based on interview data only, and (c) data analyses tested associations rather than possible predictors of life satisfaction.

Thus, in line with Giele's (1982) suggestion, we designed this study (a) to be a more comprehensive investigation of possible factors that contribute to life satisfaction of single, childless, professional, middle-aged women, including all factors identified in studies of middle-aged adults; and (b) to provide an estimate of the contribution these factors make to life satisfaction scores. With this approach, we sought to integrate the limited and fragmented research published to date and to test the significance of all identified variables in relation to each other. In contrast to many previous studies, we used established measures of the variables of interest as much as possible. We also studied members of one broad profession (academic women) as a control for professional field. Finally, we gathered descriptive information regarding the women's major regrets about their life circumstances.

METHOD

Participants

It is virtually impossible to identify and randomly select from an intact group of single, childless, professional, middle-aged women.

Although one could assume that these women would belong to a variety of professional organizations, membership lists do not provide demographic information that pulls out the population of interest. Thus, it was necessary to canvas the entire memberships of three professional organizations in North Carolina and their colleagues, even though we were certain that a large percentage of these women would not meet criteria for participation in the study.

To identify a sample of professional women who were single, middle-aged, between the ages of 35 and 65 years, and who had no children, we contacted all female members of three professional organizations in North Carolina. (Available descriptive information did not include criteria for the study; thus, all of the members were contacted.) Members were employed as administrators, counselors, and faculty members at colleges and universities in the state. Members were requested to enlist the participation of two eligible colleagues on their campuses. A total of 686 questionnaires were distributed to 526 women members (some women received 2 questionnaires because of dual membership in the professional organizations). Although 224 questionnaires were returned at a response rate of 33%, 72 were not sufficiently complete to ensure accurate results, thus yielding a final response rate of 22% and 152 completed questionnaires. It should be noted, however, that this percentage does not reflect a true response rate from the sample of interest.

Of the 152 participants, 60 (40%) were in their 30s, 58 (38%) were in their 40s, and 34 (22%) were 50 years and older. The majority ($n = 109$, 72%) had never married, 40 (26%) were divorced, and 3 (2%) were widowed. Most of the women were White ($n = 132$, 87%), 18 (12%) were African American, 1 (0.7) was Native American, and 1 was listed as "other." Their educational degrees included bachelors or lower ($n = 20$, 5%), master's ($n = 77$, 51%), specialist ($n = 6$, 4%), and doctorate ($n = 49$, 32%). A number of women also indicated that they had taken graduate level courses beyond the highest degree they currently held.

More than half of the women ($n = 79$, 53%) spent the majority of their time handling administrative affairs, 45 (30%) were faculty members, and 26 (17%) were counselors. Approximately 20% ($n = 30$) earned less than \$25,000, 57 (38%) earned between \$25,000 and \$34,999, 39 (26%) earned between \$35,000 and \$44,999, and 26 (17%) earned over \$45,000. Almost 70% lived alone. Of those who lived with someone else, 11 lived with family members, 9% lived with a partner, and 11% lived with a roommate. The majority (89%) had no financial dependents.

Instrument

Participants completed a questionnaire composed of previously established measures and published interview questions adapted to questionnaire format. Demographic items also were included (i.e., age, status of singlehood, highest degree held, current job position, salary range, ethnic group, dependents, and current living situation). The instrument was pilot tested with a

local sample of 25 women; on the basis of their feedback, format changes were made and questions about leisure activities were added (see later).

Predictor variables. Gender identity was measured by the short form of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974, 1981). The BSRI is composed of 30 items, including 10 stereotypically feminine characteristics, 10 stereotypically masculine characteristics, and 10 filler items. Respondents indicate on a 7-point scale (1 = never or almost never true; 7 = always or almost always true) to what extent each characteristic is self-descriptive. On the basis of a normative sample median split reported by Bem (1981), respondents are classified as feminine, masculine, androgynous, or undifferentiated. Reliability estimates for the short form include coefficient alphas for internal consistency (.84 and .85) and test-retest reliabilities of .85, .91, and .88. Validity was established in a series of studies comparing responses of androgynous and sex-typed individuals in a variety of sex-typed situations (see Bem, 1981).

Locus of control was measured by the Levenson Locus of Control Scale (LCS; Levenson, 1974). The LCS is composed of 24 statements arranged in a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Respondents are classified as internal, external, or chance locus of control on the basis of their highest scale score. Reliability estimates for the three scales include coefficient alphas (.64, .77, and .78), split-halves (.62, .66, and .64), and test-retests (.64, .74, and .78). Validity studies, including factor analysis and interscale correlations, provided support for the tripartite measure of locus of control (Levenson, 1974).

Social support was measured by the Perceived Social Support-Friends and the Perceived Social Support-Family (Procidano & Heller, 1983) scales. The two scales indicate the extent to which respondents perceive their needs for support, information, and feedback are fulfilled by friends or family. Each scale consists of 20 statements that refer to feelings and experiences that typically occur in relationships with friends or family. Respondents indicate yes, no, or don't know to each item, so that scores range from 0 to 20. Reliability estimates include Cronbach's alphas (.88 and .90) and test-retest (.93). Factor analysis and comparisons with ratings of positive and negative life events and symptomatology provided support for the validity of the scales (Procidano & Heller, 1983).

Questions concerning health, financial resources, and sexual satisfaction were based on interview questions from the Baruch et al. (1983) study of middle-aged women. Respondents used a Likert scale format to respond to each item; their responses were totaled to obtain a continuous score for each scale. Scores for the two health questions (e.g., "How would you describe your present health?," from "poor" to "excellent") could range from 2 (poor health) to 10 (excellent health). For the two financial resources questions (e.g., "How adequately do you believe that you support yourself?:" from "not at all adequately" to "quite adequately"), scores could range from 2 (not able to support self) to 9 (quite able to support self). The eight sexual satisfaction questions (e.g., "To what extent, if any, is each of the following a concern for you as your life is today?: Not having sexual relationships:" from "not at all" to "extremely," and "How would you describe the

way things are going for you now sexually:' from "very dissatisfying" to "very satisfying") could yield continuous scores from 8 (low sexual satisfaction) to 32 (high sexual satisfaction; reverse scoring was required for some items). These questions were submitted to an iterative principal axes factor analysis with varimax rotation, which indicated seven factors, with items on each scale loading only on factors associated with that scale.

Questions related to job satisfaction were adapted from interview questions in the Baruch et al. (1983) and Campbell et al. (1976) studies. Respondents indicated on a scale from 1 (strongly dissatisfied) to 6 (strongly satisfied) their level of satisfaction with 22 job characteristics (e.g., hours that fit your needs, being able to work on your own, and having a prestigious job), yielding a possible range of 22 to 132.

Questions concerning leisure-time activities were created by Virginia G. Lewis on the basis of responses of women in the pilot study. Respondents indicated on a scale from 1 (never important) to 5 (extremely important) the importance of nine activities (e.g., travel, interests or hobbies, and volunteer or service activities) to enjoyment of life, yielding a possible range of 8 to 40.

Questions concerning common regrets regarding life circumstances were taken from the Baruch et al. (1983) and Metha et al. (1989) studies (e.g., "I would have saved more money," "I would have had children," and "I would have worked less and enjoyed my life more"). Blanks also were provided so that respondents could add and rate additional regrets. Respondents were assigned a categorical score (i.e., low, moderate, and high regret) on the basis of their ratings of each regret (1 = strongly do not regret to 6 = strongly regret; low regret < 2.5, moderate regret > 2.5 but < 4.5, and high regret > 4.5). Regrets differed somewhat for the divorced/widowed versus the never-married respondents (e.g., "I would have waited longer before getting married" was listed only for the divorced/widowed respondents, "I would have gotten married" for the never-married only).

Dependent variable. Life satisfaction was measured by two scales: the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) and the Semantic Differential Scale (SDS; Campbell et al., 1976). The SWLS, designed to measure global life satisfaction, consists of five statements that deal with the quality of life (e.g., "In most ways, my life is close to my ideal"). Participants indicate on a Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) their agreement with each item. An overall life satisfaction score ranging from 5 to 35 is possible. Reliability estimates include a coefficient alpha of .87 and a test-retest correlation of .82. Validity studies include supportive factor analysis and correlations ($r = .50$ to $.75$) with other well-being measures (Diener et al., 1985).

The SDS, also designed to measure global life satisfaction, contains eight pairs of words or phrases placed at the extremes of a 7-point rating scale. For each pair, respondents circle the location (numbered 1 to 7) between the extremes that they believe best describes their present

lives. An overall life satisfaction score ranging from 8 to 56 is possible. Reliability estimates include Cronbach's alpha and Heise and Borhnstedt's omega (both .89) and a stability correlation of .43. Intercorrelations of the items and correlation with a single life satisfaction item (.59; Campbell et al., 1976) provided support for the validity of the scale.

Procedure

All members of the three professional organizations in North Carolina were mailed a packet containing a letter of introduction and instructions, two copies of the questionnaire, two return postcards (to request a copy of results), and stamped, preaddressed return envelopes. Members of these organizations who fit the study's definition of single, professional, middle-aged women were asked to complete one questionnaire and to give the second to an eligible colleague on their campus. Members who did not fit the study's eligibility requirements were asked to give the questionnaires to two colleagues who were eligible. No follow-up mailing was made to nonrespondents.

RESULTS

Descriptive Results

Participants indicated that they were slightly to moderately satisfied with their jobs (total score $M = 101.76$, $SD = 16.34$; item score $M = 4.63$). They perceived they were financially able to take care of themselves adequately (total score $M = 6.59$, $SD = 1.58$; item score $M = 3.3$) and were in good health (total score $M = 8.16$, $SD = 1.37$; item score $M = 4.08$). They reported more social support from friends (total score $M = 16.37$, $SD = 3.79$; item score $M = 0.82$) than from family members (total score $M = 12.16$, $SD = 6.40$; item score $M = 0.61$). Respondents regarded their leisure-time activities as moderately important (total score $M = 30.65$, $SD = 3.72$; item score $M = 3.83$) and reported that they were moderately satisfied sexually (total score $M = 21.18$, $SD = 6.28$; item score $M = 2.65$).

In terms of gender identity, most respondents were classified as either masculine ($n = 61$, 40) or androgynous ($n = 57$, 389), 19 were undifferentiated (13%), and 15 were feminine (10%). For the most part, they had an internal locus of control ($n = 142$, 93%). Regrets regarding life circumstances were in the low-to-moderate range, with 100 (66%) in the moderate range, 49 (32%) in the low range, and only 3 (2%) in the high range of regret.

In general, respondents scored in the high range on both indexes of life satisfaction, although there was variation in ratings. The SWLS scores covered the entire possible range of 5 to 35, with a total mean score of 24.09 ($SD = 6.78$; item score $M = 4.82$). The SDS scores ranged from 19 to 56, with a total mean score of 44.46 ($SD = 8.25$; item score $M = 5.56$).

Prediction of Life Satisfaction

Because almost all of the respondents scored internal locus of control, all participants were classified as internal and then were recoded as high or low in internality. Scores on the two life satisfaction scales were transformed to z scores; after transformation, a simple unit-weighted linear combination of both scales was used in the regression analyses.

Intercorrelations of the independent variables indicated that multicollinearity was not a problem. Correlations of the independent variables with the combined dependent measure ranged from .22 (social support-family) to .62 (job satisfaction).

To test which factors significantly predicted life satisfaction, we first conducted a full model multiple regression analysis. Results from this regression, which included all variables in the model, yielded an R^2 of .64 ($p < .05$), indicating that five predictor variables in combination were highly predictive of life satisfaction (see Table 1). (All tables omitted.) The five significant predictors were job satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, regrets regarding life circumstances, internal locus of control, and leisure-time activities.

Second, we conducted a stepwise regression analysis to test whether the identified model was robust and stable. This procedure begins with the predictor variable that is most highly related to the dependent measure. The procedure then identifies the set of two variables that in combination are most highly predictive of the dependent variable. This is followed by the set of three variables, four variables, and so forth. A variable that did not meet the .05 significance level of entry into the model was not included. Job satisfaction was the first variable entered and remained in all subsequent predictor sets. Sexual satisfaction, regrets regarding life circumstances, internal locus of control, and leisure-time activities were the other variables retained by the stepwise procedure. Gender identity, financial resources, health, social support-friends, and social support-family did not enter into any of the predictor equations. The R^2 for this model was .63 ($p < .01$). Finally, a backward elimination procedure confirmed that the final predictor set was a robust one ($R^2 = .62$, $p < .01$).

Regrets Regarding Life Circumstances

Rank order lists for regrets of (a) never-married women and (b) divorced or widowed women were created from highest regret to lowest regret on the basis of the mean score for each item. As indicated in Table 2, the greatest regret for both groups of women was "would have saved more money."

To further compare the never-married and the divorced/widowed women on their ranking of life regrets, we calculated a Spearman's rank order correlation. Using the 19 regrets that were the same for both groups of women, we obtained a correlation of .84. In essence, the order in which never-married women ranked their regrets was essentially the same as the order in which the divorced/widowed women ranked those same regrets.

In addition, we conducted a chi-square test of association to compare the never-married and divorced/widowed women on degree of regret (overall low, moderate, or high regret). The degree of regret did not vary as a function of marital status, $\chi^2(2, N = 152) = 1.21, p = .546$.

DISCUSSION

An examination of 10 factors drawn from previous studies indicated that 5 of these factors explained a significant proportion of the variance in life satisfaction scores for the single, middle-aged, childless, professional women in this study. This result has some basis in previous literature but also provides important new information. First, job satisfaction was the best single predictor of life satisfaction. The importance of job satisfaction is consistent with previous literature for middle-aged women in general (e.g., Baruch et al., 1983; Crohan et al., 1989; Loewenstein et al., 1981; Rice et al., 1980). It is clear that job satisfaction is a major component of overall life satisfaction for middle-aged women, including single professional women.

The second best predictor of life satisfaction was sexual satisfaction. This factor has rarely been considered by previous researchers and, therefore, adds important new information to an understanding of the life satisfaction of single, middle-aged, professional women. Of particular interest in this study is the fact that positive responses to the sexual satisfaction questions did not necessarily imply enjoyment of or participation in sexual activity. Of the 152 participants, 68 (45%) responded that their sexual activity was "nonexistent." In addition, more women reported either no sexual activity or less frequent sexual activity than they would like and still scored relatively high on the sexual satisfaction scale. This result is not easily interpretable. It may be, in line with Loewenstein et al.'s (1991) conclusions, that single women are characterized more by sexual indifference than by sexual frustration or repression. In contrast, this result instead may imply that these women have accepted this aspect of their lives (i.e., lack of sexual activity) so that it does not interfere with their level of life satisfaction. In fact, the wording of several of the sexual satisfaction items may have tapped lack of concern rather than satisfaction. Further research is needed to clarify this result.

The third best predictor of life satisfaction was regrets regarding life circumstances. The lower the degree of regret, the higher life satisfaction was for these women. For the most part, regrets for the entire sample were clustered in the moderate and low range. Three of the 152 women averaged in the high regret range, and all 3 were never-married women. Contrary to implications of developmental theory and popular myths, then, the single, middle-aged, professional women in this study did not seem to be filled with thoughts of "what life could have been

The fourth best predictor of life satisfaction was internal locus of control. Consistent with Bell's (1984) finding, a higher level of internality demonstrated a higher level of life satisfaction. Although locus of control has not been investigated, for the most part, in studies of life satisfaction, the consistent finding of internal locus of control in this study indicates that this

variable may be an important component of life satisfaction. Furthermore, the consistency of internal locus of control in this sample suggests that these women may believe that life satisfaction is the result of their own attitudes and efforts.

The last significant predictor of life satisfaction was leisure-time activities. Previous efforts in the literature have not included this variable in examining life satisfaction. The women in this study, however, indicated the importance of leisure activities, rating them on average as "often important. The fact that leisure-time activities was a significant predictor of life satisfaction suggests that it should be included in future studies of single middle-aged women and life satisfaction in general.

Variables that did not prove predictive of life satisfaction scores were gender identity, social support, health, and financial resources. These results were contrary to previous literature for self-rated health (i.e., Mitchell & Helson, 1990; Palmore & Kivett, 1977; Thomas, 1988; Ward, 1979) and financial resources (i.e., Baruch et al., 1983; Crohan et al., 1989; Mitchell & Helson, 1990; Ward, 1979). Nonsignificance for health and financial resources may stem from the small number of items or lack of variability in scores for these two factors (i.e., a large majority reported that they were in good to excellent health and that they adequately supported themselves).

Findings on gender identity and social support were quite unexpected. Results of previous studies (i.e., Frank et al., 1985; Tinsley, Sullivan-Guest, & McGuire, 1984; Whitley, 1983) suggested that life satisfaction was a function of the extent to which individuals held a masculine sex role orientation. In this study, however, gender identity of any type was not a significant predictor of life satisfaction.

Similarly, previous studies (i.e., Cockrum & White, 1985; Ishii-Kuntz, 1987; Loewenstein et al., 1981; Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983) indicated that social support had a strong effect on life satisfaction. The lack of variability in social support scores may account for the failure of social support to be a significant predictor of life satisfaction in this study. The Social Support-Family scale showed wider variability than the Social Support-Friends scale, but social support from family did not appear as important to this sample of women. Many of the women commented on the questionnaire that family members lived too far away for continuous contact or that family members (particularly parents) were deceased. Another possible explanation for the lack of influence of social support on life satisfaction was the women's reliance on an internal locus of control. In addition, a majority of women wrote in and gave a high rating to "time spent alone" as a leisure-time activity necessary to their enjoyment of life. These results substantiate the findings of Loewenstein et al. (1981) that although the desire for steady companionship may be present, the absence of intimate friendships does not preclude high life satisfaction, nor does the presence of major relationships ensure high life satisfaction. The results also question existing assumptions about all women's defining themselves almost exclusively in terms of connectedness (relationships).

In summary, the regression analyses provided a stable set of predictor variables, namely, job satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, regrets regarding life circumstances, internal locus of control, and leisure-time activities, for life satisfaction of these single, professional, middle-aged women. The significance of regrets, internal locus of control, and leisure activities to life satisfaction suggested there are some unique factors to be considered for this particular population. Taken together, the five significant predictors may imply the importance of a balanced life of work and leisure for these women. On the basis of their responses overall, these satisfied women have careers, friends, and leisure activities.

A review of regrets regarding life circumstances revealed no significant difference in degree of regret between the never-married and the divorced/widowed women, and both groups of women ranked their regrets in basically the same order. In addition, inspection of item means reveals similar ratings for most regrets; it may be that divorced/widowed women have somewhat higher regrets about not having had children and never-married women may have somewhat higher regrets about taking more risks. Some caution must be used in comparing the two groups, however, because the never-married women outnumbered the divorced/widowed women two to one, and there were few serious regrets overall. Nevertheless, there was no support for the popular myth that all never-married women deeply regret not having married and not having children.

Although the one other study of life regrets (Metha et al., 1989) cannot be compared directly with the present study (e.g., differences in item format, marital status, age, and statistical methodology), there are striking similarities and contrasts. Women from both studies wished they had taken more control of their lives and looked out for themselves more (e.g., been more assertive, taken more risks, worked less, and enjoyed life more). In contrast to the Metha et al. study, however, women in this study seemed to view their education as more important. Their regrets may be indicative of hard workers who wished they had had more balance and enjoyment in their lives. The high ranking of saving money may reflect inequities in pay. Two women with doctoral degrees, for example, earned less than \$25,000, 9 earned \$25,000-\$34,999, and 20 earned \$35,000-\$44,999; only 18 earned \$45,000 or more. The ranking also may reflect the women's concern about being the sole provider for themselves.

This study was an exploratory and descriptive one designed to call attention to a small, select group of women. Thus, findings can only be generalized to similar groups of women. Because of lack of easy access to this population, random selection of participants was not possible. In addition, a low response rate must be considered. It should be noted, however, that the total number of surveys mailed most likely does not equal the number of surveys actually distributed to the sample of interest. Not all of the women who received a packet met the criteria for inclusion in the study; many may not have taken the time to locate eligible colleagues. Nevertheless, it is impossible to know how respondents' results differed from nonrespondents and from eligible women who did not receive an invitation to participate in the study. Methodological limitations include reliance on self-report data and lack of a comparison group

(e.g., married women employed in the same settings). In addition, it was necessary to combine the never-married, divorced, and widowed women into one group for the regression analyses. We hope that future researchers can obtain large enough samples to investigate any differences that may exist among these types of single women, although it should be noted that we found no significant differences in several analyses. Finally, not all factors were assessed by established instruments, and several were assessed by a minimal number of items.

Despite these limitations, however, baseline data about the life satisfaction of single, childless, middle-aged, professional women are now available. Further research based on these data is needed to broaden our scant knowledge on this growing population. Data on groups of similar women in other professions (e.g., business, law, and medicine) would be informative, as well as groups of single middle-aged women who have different levels of education or who have children, and those who represent a more diverse ethnic group. In addition, the use of qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, observations, or journals) might enhance our understanding of the exceptional aspects of the life satisfaction for these women.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING

Before this study, the literature related to counseling of single, middle-aged, professional women lacked an empirical basis even for description of the issues these women may present in the counseling setting. This study has provided both descriptive and empirical information that contradicts some previous myths and begins to build toward a more informed knowledge base. It seems that counselors working with these women should give particular attention to career satisfaction. In addition, counselors need to be attuned to and ask women themselves what constitutes sexual satisfaction, because it is clearly related in some way to life satisfaction. Helping these women to find time for leisure activities, to develop internal evaluations of happiness and satisfaction, to gain more control of their lives, and to take more risks also are indicated. On the basis of population trends (Stein, 1978; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1977), it seems that counselors will have ample opportunities to work with these women and so will need to be well educated regarding their life perspectives. It is hoped that continued work in this area will better inform counselors' work with this population as well as their work with younger women, who make life and career decisions long before reaching middle age.

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- Virginia G. Lewis is a private practitioner in Charlotte, North Carolina. L. DiAnne Borders is an associate professor of counselor education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. This article is based on the dissertation study conducted by Virginia G. Lewis and supervised by L. DiAnne Borders. Correspondence regarding this article should be sent to Virginia G. Lewis, 4401 Colwick Road, Suite 303, Charlotte, NC 28211.