

## **Examining the Effects of Community Satisfaction and Attachment on Individual Well-Being\***

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**ABSTRACT** Using data collected in a general population survey from a random sample of individuals in four communities in Pennsylvania, I examine the effects of community satisfaction and attachment on self-assessed individual well-being. I find substantial support for the hypothesis that satisfaction with the community and attachment to the community are associated independently and positively with individual well-being. Bivariate and multiple correlation/regression analyses reveal that greater community satisfaction and attachment result in higher levels of perceived well-being. Although the total explained variances of the community satisfaction and attachment measures are small, they do not differ substantially from various social and demographic factors that have been found to be associated with well-being. I propose possible implications of these findings and make suggestions for future research.

An extensive literature has investigated satisfaction and attachment at the neighborhood and community levels of analysis. The concepts of community satisfaction and attachment have been used primarily as dependent variables. The objective of most studies that have treated satisfaction and attachment as dependent has been to identify their determinants. Although justifiably worthy, such studies have suffered from confusion concerning levels of analysis, have provided few definitive findings on the most important predictors of satisfaction and attachment, and have produced little information on the implications of varying levels of community satisfaction and/or attachment for individual- and community-level issues (Theodori 2000). Furthermore, few researchers have offered persuasive arguments expressing the advantages of continued efforts at examining community satisfaction and attachment.

In the early 1980s, Goudy and Ryan (1982:259) stated “[L]ittle is known about the consequences of different levels of community attachment on either residents or the community itself.” They asserted that research was needed to examine how community attachment contributed to factors such as quality of life, community decision-making processes and development efforts, and the main-

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tenance of community groups and institutions. Today, approximately two decades later, the situation, as manifested in the extant literatures on community attachment and the related community satisfaction, remains very much the same.

The purpose of this paper is to extend the literature on community satisfaction and attachment. Specifically, I examine the effects of these phenomena on one individual-level measure: perceived individual well-being. In doing so, I test the hypothesis that both satisfaction and attachment are associated independently and positively with individual well-being. Before describing the data, measurement, and findings, I summarize the contemporary literature on this topic.

### **Literature Review**

Findings from sociological investigations of satisfaction in both the rural and the urban literature are fairly consistent across time. Research has continually documented that individuals, including many of those who live in inferior environments, hold satisfactory views of their localities (Bayer et al. 1994; Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers 1976; Times Mirror Center 1994) and that the proportion of residents in rural areas who are happy and satisfied with their community tends to be higher than among urban dwellers (see Campbell 1981; Marans and Rodgers 1975; Ploch 1985; Rodgers 1980). National sample data have shown that approximately one-half (48 percent) of rural residents report complete satisfaction with their community, while only one central-city resident in five (20 percent) does so (Campbell 1981; Marans and Rodgers 1975).

In addition to ecological factors, considerable evidence shows that community satisfaction is influenced by a broad array of objective and subjectively perceived conditions. Factors found to be related to community satisfaction include age (Campbell et al. 1976; Filkins, Allen, and Cordes 2000; Goudy 1977; Marans and Rodgers 1975; Rojek, Clemente, and Summers 1975); income and occupational status (Bradburn 1969); gender (Filkins et al. 2000; Schulze, Artis, and Beegle 1963); education (Bradburn 1969; Campbell et al. 1976; Filkins et al. 2000; Marans and Rodgers 1975; Miller and Crader 1979); family size (Miller and Crader 1979); migration attitudes (Schulze et al. 1963); migrant status (Stinner and Toney 1980); social participation, residential mobility, and residential satisfaction (Jesser 1967); proportion of friends living in the community, proportion of adults known in the community, and organizational membership (Goudy 1977); social/spiritual satisfaction (Filkins et al. 2000); satisfaction with employment (Brown 1993; Filkins et al. 2000); and duration of residence (Brown 1993; Campbell et al. 1976; Marans and Rodgers 1975; Miller and Crader 1979; Rojek et al. 1975). Overall the researchers have produced mixed

findings about the relative importance of these factors as predictors of community satisfaction.

Unlike research on community satisfaction, investigations of community attachment in both the urban and the rural literature have yielded inconsistent results with respect to the influence of ecological factors (Hummon 1992; Taylor, Gottfredson, and Brower 1985; Theodori and Luloff 2000). Community attachment has not been shown to be associated strongly with differences between urbanism or rurality (Goudy 1990; Kasarda and Janowitz 1974; Stinner et al. 1990; but also see Buttel, Martinson, and Wilkening 1979; Theodori and Luloff 2000). Yet, as in the findings from community satisfaction studies, a wide array of individual, social, environmental, and perceptual factors are associated with community attachment.

As in the community satisfaction literature, empirical investigations of community attachment have examined the effects of several objective and subjectively perceived variables. Factors found to be related to community attachment include duration of local residence (Austin and Baba 1990; Brown 1993; Goudy 1990; Kasarda and Janowitz 1974; St. John, Austin, and Baba 1986; Theodori and Luloff 2000); home ownership and race (Austin and Baba 1990); income and number of children living at home (Riger and Lavrakas 1981); age and level of education (Riger and Lavrakas 1981; Stinner et al. 1990; Theodori and Luloff 2000); social interactions (Theodori and Luloff 2000); and marital status, presence of children, children's ages, and religious status (Stinner et al. 1990). Like the findings in the literature on community satisfaction, research results have been mixed as to the relative importance of these variables for community attachment.

Despite this large body of literature, few researchers (e.g., Cowell and Green 1994; Fernandez and Dillman 1979; Schulze et al. 1963; Stinner and Van Loon 1992) have examined the consequences of varying levels of community satisfaction and attachment on a dependent measure by incorporating one or both of these concepts into their work as the primary independent variable(s) of interest. Schulze et al. (1963) uncovered a negative association between community satisfaction and the desire to migrate. Similarly, Fernandez and Dillman (1979) reported that higher levels of community attachment exerted a moderate retarding effect on geographic mobility. Examining the influence of community size preference and six domains of community satisfaction on migration intentions, Stinner and Van Loon (1992) found that regardless of location, migration intentions were determined largely by the level of satisfaction with two domains of community satisfaction: economic opportunity and public services. More recently, Cowell and Green (1994) examined factors influencing locations of spending for goods and services among households; they found that residents with higher

levels of community attachment spent more locally than those with less community attachment.

Although a handful of studies have explicitly assessed the association(s) of community satisfaction and/or attachment with dependent measures such as migration and spending location, additional work is warranted. In the present study I add to the current research on community satisfaction and attachment by examining the effects of both concepts on self-reported individual well-being.

### **Data and Measurement**

The data used for this study were drawn from a general population survey of individuals in four communities located in two northern-tier Pennsylvania counties.<sup>1</sup> A team of researchers gathered the data via a drop-off/pickup questionnaire procedure (Melbye et al. 2000). During the summer of 1998, survey questionnaires were hand-delivered to 400 randomly selected households in each study site and were picked up within a few days of delivery. To obtain a representative sample of individuals within households, we requested a response from the adult with the most recent birthday. The survey instrument, organized as a self-completion booklet, contained 61 questions and required approximately 30 minutes to complete. Overall we achieved a 72 percent response rate, resulting in 1,265 completed questionnaires across the four sites.

### **Measuring Individual Well-Being**

In general, individual well-being refers to a broad array of conditions including access to material resources for meeting daily needs, freedom from threats and oppression, and physical and mental health. The perceived individual well-being variable discussed here consisted of a multiple-item index composed of nine

<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the research design of a larger project on rural economic development and individual well-being, from which these data were drawn, we purposively selected each site to represent a typology of recent economic performance (i.e., growth or decline) and availability of health and social services (dichotomized as high and low availability). The sites chosen for in-depth study were the Wellsboro and Blossburg areas of Tioga County (PA) and the Bradford and Port Allegany areas of McKean County (PA).

Each site consisted of several contiguous minor civil divisions. The Wellsboro site (economic growth/high availability of services) consisted of Wellsboro Borough and Delmar Township. The Blossburg site (economic growth/low availability of services) included Blossburg and Liberty Boroughs and Bloss, Hamilton, Liberty, and Union Townships. The Bradford site (economic decline/high availability of services) consisted of Bradford City, Lewis Run Borough, and Bradford and Foster Townships. The Port Allegany site (economic decline/low availability of services) was represented by Port Allegany Borough and Annin, Ceres, Liberty, and Norwich Townships. Previous work with similar aggregations revealed that the units were meaningful for respondents (Claude and Luloff 1995; Theodori, Luloff, and Willits 1998).

**Table 1. Factor Loadings for Individual Well-Being Items**

Items	Factor Loading
I generally feel in good spirits.	.80
I feel depressed.	.65
I find a great deal of happiness in life.	.82
Things seem hopeless.	.67
I am very satisfied with life.	.80
I feel bored.	.54
I feel I am getting the things I want out of life.	.79
I feel down in the dumps.	.70
I feel the future looks bright.	.77
Eigenvalue	5.24
% of cumulative variance	53.35
Cronbach's alpha	.91

items addressing health, depression, and anxiety. Respondents were asked to respond to the following statements: (a) "I generally feel in good spirits"; (b) "I feel depressed"; (c) "I find a good deal of happiness in life"; (d) "Things seem hopeless"; (e) "I am very satisfied with life"; (f) "I feel bored"; (g) "I feel I am getting the things I want out of life"; (h) "I feel down in the dumps"; and (i) "I feel the future looks bright." Response categories included (1) never true; (2) seldom true; (3) sometimes true; (4) often true; and (5) almost always true. After reverse coding items b, d, f, and h, I calculated a composite well-being score by averaging the scores for the individual items. High scores reflected high levels of perceived individual well-being; low scores indicated low levels. A principal-axis factor analysis with oblique rotation revealed that these measures of individual well-being were unidimensional and explained 53 percent of the variance (Table 1). Cronbach's alpha for this well-being scale was .91.

### **Measuring Community Satisfaction and Attachment**

Community satisfaction and attachment were the independent variables of primary interest in this study. I assessed community satisfaction with both a multi-item domain-specific satisfaction scale and a single measure of general satisfaction. First, respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the following nine items: (1) as a place to raise a family; (2) medical and health care services; (3) local schools; (4) opportunity to earn an adequate income; (5) senior citizens' programs; (6) youth programs; (7) local shopping facilities; (8) recreation facilities and programs; and (9) overall physical appearance of the community. Responses ranged from 1 (completely dissatisfied) to 5 (completely satisfied). A principal-axis factor analysis with oblique rotation revealed that these measures of

**Table 2. Factor Loadings for Community Satisfaction Items**

Items	Factor Loading
As a place to raise a family	.53
Medical and health care services	.61
Local schools	.53
Opportunity to earn an adequate income	.53
Senior citizens' programs	.56
Youth programs	.59
Local shopping facilities	.54
Recreation facilities and programs	.66
Overall physical appearance of the community	.51
Eigenvalue	3.53
% of cumulative variance	31.71
Cronbach's alpha	.80

community satisfaction were unidimensional and explained 32 percent of the variance (Table 2).<sup>2</sup> Cronbach's alpha for this satisfaction scale was .80. In a general measure I then asked respondents to indicate, overall, how satisfied they were with life in their community. Response categories ranged from (1) very unsatisfied to (5) very satisfied.

Community attachment was measured by two questions. The first question was "Suppose that for some reason you had to move away from this community. How sorry or pleased would you be to leave?" Response categories included (1) very pleased to leave; (2) somewhat pleased to leave; (3) it would not make a difference one way or the other; (4) somewhat sorry to leave; and (5) very sorry to leave. In the second question I asked "How interested are you in knowing what goes on in your community?" Response categories included (1) very disinterested; (2) somewhat disinterested; (3) neither interested nor disinterested; (4) somewhat interested; and (5) very interested. These two questions, termed *sorrow leaving* and *interest in community*, are similar to those used by other researchers (Cowell and Green 1994; Goudy 1977, 1990; Jacob 1997; Kasarda and Janowitz 1974; Theodori and Luloff 2000). I propose that the first measure taps an affective dimension of community attachment, while the second refers to a cognitive component (Connerly and Marans 1985; Theodori and Luloff 2000).

<sup>2</sup>In an earlier analysis (Theodori 1999), the item measuring satisfaction with medical and health care services was removed from the satisfaction index and treated as a separate measure. I conducted a factor analysis on the remaining eight items to search for factor patterns. For that analysis I chose a two-factor solution because it seemed most compatible with the data and with my goals. In this paper, in which I conducted a factor analysis on all nine satisfaction items, a one-factor solution yielded the most parsimonious model.

**Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Variables Used in the Analyses<sup>a</sup>**

Variables <sup>b</sup>	Mean	SD
Community satisfaction		
Satisfaction with domains	3.04	.67
Overall satisfaction	3.96	.83
Community attachment		
Sorrow leaving	4.06	1.05
Interest in community	4.34	.72
Control factors		
Income	4.53	2.39
Home ownership	.84	.36
Attendance at religious meetings	2.21	1.85
Social support	3.43	.57
Dependent variable		
Individual well-being	3.84	.70

<sup>a</sup> A listwise deletion reduced the sample to 840 cases.

<sup>b</sup> See text for operational coding of variables.

### Control Variables

Building on previous research (Andrews and Withey 1976; Bradburn 1969; Campbell et al. 1976; House, Landis, and Umberson 1988), I included as control factors four variables that have been associated with levels of individual well-being: measures of income, home ownership, attendance at religious meetings, and social support. I measured income in 10 categories ranging from (1) less than \$9,999 to (10) more than \$90,000. Home ownership was dummy coded (1 = yes). Attendance at religious meetings was scored as follows: (0) never, (1) a few times a year, (2) once a month, (3) a few times a month, (4) once a week, and (5) more than once a week. I measured social support by asking respondents whether they (1) strongly disagreed, (2) disagreed, (3) agreed, or (4) strongly agreed with each of the following items concerning their family members and/or friends: (a) "I know enough people to help me with tasks or errands"; (b) "I know someone who will take care of my house while I am away"; (c) "If I am sick, I have someone to care for me"; and (d) "If I need a ride to some place, I have someone to take me." I calculated a composite social support score by summing the scores for the individual items. High scores reflected high levels of social support; low scores indicated low levels. Table 3 displays descriptive statistics for the control factors, the independent measures, and the dependent variable included in the analysis.

**Table 4. Bivariate and Multiple Correlation/Regression Analyses Relating Community Satisfaction, Community Attachment, and the Control Variables to Perceived Individual Well-Being<sup>a</sup>**

Multiple Correlation/ Regression			
Variables	Bivariate <i>r</i>	<i>b</i>	Partial Correlation
Community satisfaction			
Satisfaction with domains	.32***	.19***	.19
Overall satisfaction	.33***	.09**	.10
Community attachment			
Sorrow leaving	.31***	.06*	.08
Interest in community	.22***	.07*	.08
Control variables			
Income	.24***	.05***	.17
Home ownership	.21***	.20**	.11
Attendance at religious meetings	.24***	.05***	.16
Social support	.29***	.26***	.23
Constant		1.02***	
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.28***	

<sup>a</sup> *N* = 840; see text for operational coding of variables.

\* *p* < .05; \*\* *p* < .01; \*\*\* *p* < .001.

### Results and Concluding Comments

I assessed the relationships of community satisfaction and attachment to perceived individual well-being using bivariate and multiple correlation/regression techniques. As noted in Table 4, I found considerable support at the zero-order level for the proposition that both community satisfaction and community attachment are associated with perceptions of well-being. The bivariate relationships for each measure of community satisfaction and attachment were positive and statistically significant. Similarly, each control variable correlated positively and significantly with self-rated well-being in the bivariate case.

As shown in the multiple correlation-regression analysis, the net effect of each measure of community satisfaction and attachment remained positive and statistically significant. Individuals who were more highly satisfied with their communities and more strongly attached were more likely than their counterparts to exhibit higher levels of individual well-being. Income, home ownership, attendance at religious meetings, and social support were also associated with increased levels of perceived well-being. The adjusted *R*<sup>2</sup> was .28, significant at the .001 level.

What, then, can be concluded from these data? First, the findings

provide considerable support for my hypothesis: that community attachment and community satisfaction are associated positively and independently with individual well-being. Higher levels of attachment to one's community resulted in perceptions of greater well-being. In addition, the greater the residents' satisfaction with their local community, the more likely they were to express greater individual well-being.

Second, the zero-order and partial  $r$ -values and the corresponding  $r^2$ -values for the measures of community satisfaction and attachment, although statistically significant, were not large. I had anticipated low to modest correlations, however. I had expected measurement imprecision regarding the community attachment and satisfaction variables to attenuate the relationships, and in turn to increase the proportion of unexplained variation (see Theodori 2000). Despite the somewhat weak associations, overall the bivariate and net correlation coefficients did not differ substantially from the control factors that have been shown elsewhere to be associated with individual well-being. In this paper I was less concerned with achieving high levels of explained variation than with examining the relative effects of "traditional" items measuring community satisfaction and attachment (e.g., objective indicators of satisfaction such as local programs and services; one's degree of sorrow if it was necessary to leave the community; one's interest in the community) on perceived levels of individual well-being. Taken together, these findings suggest the need for refinement of measurement in regard to the concepts of community attachment and satisfaction, as well as individual well-being.

Finally, if researchers and policy makers are to understand these complex phenomena, further study is needed to examine the effects of community satisfaction and attachment on additional dependent variables. Little justification has been found for programs directed at strengthening community satisfaction and/or attachment; a possible reason is that little is known about their potential effects on individual- and community-level issues (see Goudy and Ryan 1982; Theodori 2000).

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