

Age, Tenure, and Job Satisfaction: A Tale of Two Perspectives

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This study was designed to explore the relations among tenure, age, and job satisfaction as a way of testing two alternative paradigmatic perspectives. Accordingly, it tells a "tale of two perspectives" in which previous researchers, using different "lenses," have seen different things even though ostensibly viewing the same employee characteristics. Hierarchical polynomial regression analysis was used to assess the form of the relations between tenure/age and job satisfaction, and to compare the stability of the relations as suggested by job experience and career stage models for separate samples of male ($n = 172$) and female ($n = 592$) respondents. Results indicate that though age and tenure are natural dependent, time-related variables which co-vary with one another, they are distinct variables leading to different outcomes. Tenure (however measured) was a more consistent and stable predictor of job satisfaction than chronological age. The functional relation between tenure and job satisfaction, however, was found to differ for males and females. © 1992 Academic Press, Inc.

Understanding changes in work attitudes is crucial for developing theories of the relations among individual characteristics and workplace behavior. Past studies focusing on job satisfaction as an indicator of one's experience in a work role have contributed to our understanding of work

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attitude changes and, thus, the development of theories relating individual characteristics and workplace behavior. Furthermore, this understanding has practical importance. Many human resource initiatives, like career development programs, are intended to influence both employee attitudes and behavior. If attitudes, like job satisfaction, are systematically related to age or tenure, this might have important implications for how such initiatives are designed and implemented.

Previous research relating tenure and age as individual characteristics to job satisfaction has been criticized for being atheoretical, as well as methodologically inconsistent. Given the continued validity of these criticisms, it is little wonder that research attention over the years has produced conflicting results. In brief, problems associated with past research have made arguments concerning the relation between either tenure or age and job satisfaction suspect. These problems include (1) inadequate measures, (2) failure to control for natural covariation between tenure and age, (3) failure to test for polynomial trends, (4) underpowered statistical tests in studies testing polynomial models, (5) inadequate tenure/age distributions, and (6) arbitrary tenure/age categorization (Olguin, 1989; White & Spector, 1987).

The present study investigates the relations among tenure, age, and job satisfaction as a way of testing two alternative paradigmatic perspectives. In doing so, we address the basic dilemma, generic to all scientific fields, of fitting together theory and method. Despite claims to the contrary (e.g., Wright & Hamilton, 1978), whether age (as contrasted to tenure) is the strongest demographic predictor of job satisfaction is arguably an open question. Additionally, because some studies have shown different patterns of age–job satisfaction relations (Kalleberg & Loscocco, 1983), and because recent research (i.e., Kacmar & Ferris, 1989) has investigated only females, there seems to be a need to examine whether age, tenure, and job satisfaction relations differ by gender.

In an effort to perform more theory-driven research, investigators studying tenure–satisfaction and age–satisfaction mechanisms have drawn other areas of literature into their analyses. In this respect, both career stage theory and job experience models have been accessed. As regards the former, various aspects of career stage theory have been used to explain a possible age–job–satisfaction relation (Kacmar & Ferris, 1989). First, different career stages have been associated with specific age ranges (Bedelian, Pizzolatto, Long, & Griffith, 1991). Second, it has been suggested that a positive relation exists between age and job opportunities, indicating that upper levels of administration are usually not open to young men or women (Quinn, Staines, & McCullough, 1974). This implies that the increased power and prestige often associated with upper level positions are also unavailable to younger employees. Following this rationale, the increased job satisfaction that is often associated with increased power

and status is also unavailable to younger employees. Finally, it is also suggested that advancing age alone can increase one's prestige and confidence, likewise contributing to a greater level of job satisfaction (Wright & Hamilton, 1978).

In contrast, job experience models (e.g., Katz, 1980) propose that the determinants of job satisfaction are likely to vary systematically with tenure. These models thus suggest that employee reactions (e.g., job satisfaction) are not only job specific, but time dependent. The main theme guiding job experience models is that tenure (variously defined) affects the manner in which work environment features combine to influence job satisfaction. Support for this theme comes from a variety of sources. For example, the work of White and Spector (1987) suggests that the effects of age on job satisfaction are indirect, acting through other variables. This suggests, among other things, that older workers are more satisfied not only because they get more of what they want out of work (i.e., enhanced feelings of control, higher salary, higher level), but also due to their longer tenure. Thus, while age may be intuitively associated with higher satisfaction, its power as an explanatory variable is questionable.

Such findings, as they relate to the present study, intimate that job satisfaction is not so much a function of age-based career stages as it is at least partially a function of duration of employment in a single or multiple role(s) (i.e., time in grade, department, or company). While traditional career stage theory holds that career development is linear and progresses according to chronological age, mounting evidence and common sense suggest that people may encounter (or reencounter) a variety of career experiences at different times in their lives (Jans, 1989).

The acknowledged shortcomings of past research and the above theoretical considerations underscore the need to more accurately depict the relation between job satisfaction and both tenure and age. The current study represents an improvement over much of the previous research in several ways. First, three different types of tenure were employed, thus acknowledging that there is more than one type of tenure and that the focal relations under study may be a function of how tenure is measured (i.e., organization tenure, job tenure, and tenure working for current supervisor). Second, overall as well as facet-specific job satisfaction was measured using the Job Descriptive Index (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969), a measure which has been repeatedly shown to possess adequate convergent and discriminant validity for individual analysis. Third, the natural covariation between tenure and age was controlled. Fourth, various forms of the tenure/age-job satisfaction relations were tested. Fifth, the sample size was large enough to draw firm conclusions. Sixth, data were analyzed by gender so as not to attenuate and obscure focal relations. Seventh, an adequate age distribution was obtained. Eighth, neither tenure nor age were arbitrarily reduced to categories.

METHOD

Sample

The universe for this study consisted of 3120 nonacademic employees working in a large land-grant university located in the southwestern United States. This population was specifically chosen for its wide tenure and age ranges. Each subject was sent a questionnaire via campus mail, together with a cover letter explaining the general purpose of the research and assuring respondent anonymity. The participation rate was 26%, yielding an effective sample of 821 respondents. This participation rate compares favorably with other surveys of university-affiliated respondents (Allen & Keaveny, 1981). Due to missing data, the sample was reduced to 764 for the current research. Respondents included employees from 195 different departments ranging from the university's medical school to the Office of the President. Sample representativeness appeared to be adequate on the basis of comparisons of sample and population distributions by gender, age, tenure, years of education, salary, marital status, and race. Although the sample was limited to nonacademic university employees, generalization to other types of workers is possible. Spector (1985) has found that the job satisfaction of public (i.e., civil service) employees is quite similar to that of employees in the private sector.

The age range of males ($n = 172$) in the focal sample was 21 to 71 years with a median age of 37 years. For females ($n = 592$) in the focal sample, the age range was 18 to 69 years, with a median age of 33 years. Frequency distributions for both age and gender were found to be roughly similar to those of the U.S. workforce in general (U.S. Department of Labor, 1990).

The median levels of organization tenure, job tenure, and tenure working for current supervisor for males were 63.0 months (range 3 to 421), 43.0 months (range 2 to 288), and 36.0 months (range 1 to 240), respectively. For females, the comparable statistics were 50.0 months (range 2 to 408), 24.0 months (range 1 to 336), and 22.0 months (range 1 to 252). While national data are unavailable for either job tenure or tenure with current superior, the distributions of male and female subjects by years of organization tenure are likewise similar to those of the general U.S. workforce (U.S. Department of Labor, 1987). The frequency distributions for both males and females on all three tenure measures were slightly right-skewed. The asymmetrical nature of these distributions was offset, however, by the large sample sizes for both groups (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, & Bent, 1975, p. 341).

Measures

Demographic variables. The five demographic variables used in the analyses were gender, chronological age, organization tenure, job tenure,

and tenure with current supervisor. Age was measured in years, while the three types of tenure were measured in months.

Job satisfaction. Both overall and facet-specific job satisfaction were assessed using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI; Smith et al., 1969). As originally developed, the JDI consists of 72 items, scored on a 3-point scale, measuring five dimensions of job satisfaction: work, supervision, pay, promotions, and co-workers. A sixth dimension has since been added, satisfaction with job in general, which measures global or overall job satisfaction (Ironson, Smith, Brannick, Gibson, & Paul, 1989). As noted by Ironson et al. (1989), because individuals use different frames of reference when responding to measures of facet versus global or overall satisfaction, it is inappropriate to simply sum across facet satisfaction scales to compute an overall job satisfaction index. Extensive research on the JDI has shown it to be a useful and accurate measure of job satisfaction, with acceptable psychometric properties. Coefficient α internal consistency reliability estimates for males and females (in parentheses) on the six JDI scales were: Satisfaction with Work = .83 (.83), Satisfaction with Supervision = .91 (.89), Satisfaction with Pay = .75 (.78), Satisfaction with Promotions = .84 (.86), Satisfaction with Co-workers = .90 (.89), and Satisfaction in General = .94 (.93).

Analysis

Consistent with the study's purpose of testing two alternative paradigmatic perspectives to determine whether tenure or age is the strongest demographic predictor of job satisfaction, two parallel analyses were performed. Hierarchical polynomial regression analysis was used in each to assess the form of the relations between tenure/age and job satisfaction and to compare the strength of the relations as suggested by job experience and career stage models. Specifically, in an initial analysis for each of the job satisfaction measures, age was entered first into a regression equation, age squared was entered second, and age-cubed was entered last. This procedure was repeated in a second analysis, sequentially replacing age with a specific type of tenure. In the first analysis, the magnitude of the age–job satisfaction relation was determined, controlling for all three tenure measures simultaneously. In the second analysis, the magnitude of the tenure–job satisfaction relation was determined, controlling for age. Both analyses were conducted separately by gender to allow for possible gender-linked differences. Respective pairs of β weights for males and females were examined for significant differences using a two-tailed t test. This procedure was preferable to testing for the overall difference between regression equations, as it provides specific information on the differences between single coefficients.

In hierarchical polynomial regression analysis, higher-order exponential terms are entered to determine if the increment in the proportion of the

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics for Males ($n = 172$) and Females ($n = 592$)

Variable	Males		Females		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Age	39.58	12.31	35.30	11.04	4.10**
Organization tenure	92.61	82.39	70.43	66.71	3.23**
Job tenure	62.42	60.38	44.44	51.45	3.54**
Tenure w/supervisor	46.70	43.50	37.67	44.15	2.38*
JDI-Work	27.53	12.65	31.33	11.84	-3.50**
JDI-Supervision	35.53	15.42	41.17	12.84	-4.36**
JDI-Co-workers	32.74	15.17	38.22	13.15	-4.27**
JDI-Pay	8.42	6.24	7.79	6.18	1.15
JDI-Promotions	5.71	6.48	6.95	7.01	-2.15*
JDI-General	49.59	20.20	54.75	17.43	-3.04**

Note. The three tenure variables were measured in months.

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

criterion variance explained reaches statistical significance. This permits identification of a nonlinear trend and helps isolate the trend's form by indicating the number of bends in the curved regression line. In the case of a significant squared term, if the sign of the slope coefficient is positive, a U-shaped relationship is indicated, whereas a negative slope coefficient indicates a \cap -shaped relationship. A significant cubed term is characterized by two bends (e.g., an S-shape).

RESULTS

Table 1 reports the means and standard deviations by gender for the age, tenure, and job satisfaction variables. All variables had good range and variation. Consistent with the findings of Hodson (1989), female satisfaction scores, with the exception of satisfaction with pay, were higher than males. As expected, given their longer workplace presence, males ranked higher on all three tenure measures.

Intercorrelations among the study variables are displayed in Table 2. Separate correlation matrices were computed for males and females. The overall pattern of relations within each matrix was similar for the two groups. As expected, age and the three tenure measures correlated significantly and positively for both males and females. The correlations between these variables and the satisfaction measures were generally modest for both groups, ranging from $-.21$ to $.22$. Specific differences in correlation pairs between groups were evaluated with Fisher's *Z* transformation and test. As shown in Table 2, the correlations between tenure with supervisor and satisfaction with both pay and promotions were significantly different for the two groups, as were the correlations between

TABLE 2
Zero-Order Correlations for Males and Females

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age										
2. Organization tenure	.53			.35	.00	-.14	-.04	-.12	-.09	.02
3. Job tenure	.51	.77		.60	-.08	-.21	-.10 ^a	-.02	-.16	-.02
4. Tenure w/supervisor	.41	.56	.66	.69	-.09	-.20	-.10 ^b	-.03	-.13	-.04
5. JDI-Work	.02	-.01	.03	.07	-.06	-.15	-.09	.02 ^c	-.12 ^d	.00
6. JDI-Supervision	-.19	-.19	-.17	-.12	.51	.55	.53	.33	.41	.81
7. JDI-Co-workers	.02	.08 ^a	.09 ^b	.08	.62	.46	.50	.31	.39	.58
8. JDI-Pay	-.04	.12	.11	.22 ^c	.43	.36	.37	.32	.32	.55
9. JDI-Promotions	-.05	-.03	-.01	.09 ^d	.43	.42	.32	.37	.35	.39 ^e
10. JDI-General	.04	.07	.05	.14	.82	.55	.64	.55 ^e	.48	.40

Note. Female sample ($n = 583-592$ due to missing data) above diagonal; because of the large sample size, virtually all correlations are significant ($p < .05$). Male sample ($n = 170-172$ due to missing data) below diagonal; $r \geq \pm .14$, $p \leq .05$. The tenure variables were measured in months. Correlations having the same subscript differ significantly at $p < .05$.

both organization tenure and job tenure and satisfaction with co-workers. Finally, the high correlations between the tenure measures for both males and females should not be taken as evidence of their operational interchangeability. For the three measures to be interchangeable, their strict proportionality would be a minimum requirement (Jackson & Dunlevy, 1982). That is, they must be proportional to each other such that the results obtained would be independent of the particular tenure measure used. Inspection of the zero-order correlations in Table 2 (together with the results presented below) shows that this condition is unmet.

The first analysis was conducted by gender (a copy of these results is available from the first author). For both males and females, the various job satisfaction facets were regressed on age, age-squared, and age-cubed, simultaneously controlling for all three tenure measures. The effect of age-squared on each facet of job satisfaction was larger for males than for females ($p < .05$). No other gender differences were evident. In only one instance did an age term significantly contribute to either regression: for females, satisfaction with pay exhibited a significant change in R^2 when the linear age term was entered, $F(1, 562) = 10.75, p < .01$. This one finding could well have occurred by chance. Moreover, the unique criterion variance attributed to age was only 1.9%. In no instance did a cubed term enter the focal equations.

The results of the second analysis are shown in Table 3 for males and Table 4 for females. In both cases, job satisfaction was sequentially regressed on each of the three tenure measures, controlling for age. Inspection of the respective coefficients in Tables 3 and 4 reveals a limited number of gender differences. There was a significantly stronger negative correlation between satisfaction with work and job tenure for females than males ($p < .05$). Similarly, the association between satisfaction with pay and job tenure-cubed was also significantly (and negatively) stronger for females ($p < .05$). The effects of tenure with supervisor on satisfaction with pay, co-workers, and promotions are likewise larger for males than females (all at $p < .05$). Finally, there was a significantly stronger relation between satisfaction with co-workers and both organization tenure and organization-tenured squared for males than females ($p < .05$ in both cases).

Focusing on males alone (Table 3), a direct (linear) relation existed between tenure and job satisfaction in four instances. Three of these instances involved satisfaction with pay which showed a significant change in R^2 when job tenure ($F[1, 163] = 5.74, p < .05$), tenure with supervisor ($F[1, 163] = 11.13, p < .01$), and organization tenure ($F[1, 163] = 6.34, p < .05$) were entered. In the fourth instance, satisfaction with co-workers demonstrated a significant change in R^2 when job tenure ($F[1, 163] = 4.39, p < .05$) was entered. The unique variance in satisfaction with pay attributed to the three tenure measures ranged from 3.5 to 6.5%. The

TABLE 3
 Hierarchical Polynomial Regression Results for Three Tenure Measures and Job Satisfaction, Controlling for Age (Males, $n = 166$)

Dependent variable	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F (step)
Job tenure				
JDI-Pay				
Age	-.03	.000	.001	<1
Tenure	.21	.035	.034	5.74*
Tenure ²	.03	.035	.000	<1
JDI-Work				
Age	.05	.002	.002	<1
Tenure	.10	.010	.007	1.23
Tenure ²	.00	.010	.000	<1
JDI-Co-workers				
Age	.06	.003	.003	<1
Tenure	.19	.029	.026	4.39*
Tenure ²	-.10	.030	.001	<1
JDI-Supervision				
Age	-.17	.028	.028	4.69*
Tenure	-.05	.030	.002	<1
Tenure ²	.38	.045	.016	2.63
JDI-Promotions				
Age	-.04	.002	.002	<1
Tenure	.06	.004	.002	<1
Tenure ²	.29	.014	.009	1.55
JDI-General				
Age	.09	.009	.009	1.45
Tenure	.12	.020	.011	1.85
Tenure ²	-.15	.023	.003	<1
Tenure with supervisor				
JDI-Pay				
Age	-.03	.000	.001	<1
Tenure	.28	.065	.064	11.13**
Tenure ²	-.03	.065	.000	<1
JDI-Work				
Age	.05	.002	.002	<1
Tenure	.08	.007	.005	<1
Tenure ²	-.17	.011	.004	<1
JDI-Co-workers				
Age	.06	.003	.003	<1
Tenure	.10	.011	.008	1.36
Tenure ²	.12	.013	.002	<1
JDI-Supervision				
Age	-.17	.028	.028	4.69*
Tenure	-.05	.030	.002	<1
Tenure ²	.41	.054	.024	4.19*
JDI-Promotions				
Age	-.04	.002	.002	<1
Tenure	.14	.018	.016	2.72
Tenure ²	.28	.030	.012	1.94

TABLE 3—Continued

Dependent variable	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F (step)
JDI-General				
Age	.09	.009	.009	1.45
Tenure	.16	.030	.021	3.65
Tenure ²	.02	.031	.001	<1
	Organizational tenure			
JDI-Pay				
Age	-.03	.001	.001	<1
Tenure	.23	.038	.037	6.34*
Tenure ²	-.16	.041	.003	<1
JDI-Work				
Age	.05	.002	.002	<1
Tenure	.02	.003	.001	<1
Tenure ²	-.19	.006	.004	<1
JDI-Co-workers				
Age	.06	.003	.003	<1
Tenure	.12	.013	.010	1.68
Tenure ²	-.41	.031	.018	3.04
JDI-Supervision				
Age	-.17	.028	.028	4.68*
Tenure	-.11	.036	.008	1.37
Tenure ²	.34	.048	.012	2.04
JDI-Promotions				
Age	-.04	.002	.002	<1
Tenure	.01	.002	.000	<1
Tenure ²	.24	.008	.006	1.02
JDI-General				
Age	.09	.009	.009	1.45
Tenure	.10	.017	.008	1.30
Tenure ²	-.30	.026	.009	1.60

Note: Degrees of freedom (by step) are 1/164, 1/163, 1/162.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

unique variance accounted for in satisfaction with co-workers attributed to job tenure was 2.6%. In only one instance (satisfaction with supervision) did a significant increment in the proportion of variance explained occur when a squared term (tenure with supervisor squared) was entered into the male regression equations. When this term was added, it explained an additional 2.4% of the criterion variance, suggesting that for males the relation between satisfaction with supervision and tenure with supervisor might be best represented by a squared curvilinear trend. Finally, no tenure-cubed term entered any of the focal equations.

Table 4 reveals only one monotonic (positive) relation between tenure and job satisfaction for females: satisfaction with pay exhibited a significant change in R^2 when the linear organization-tenure term was entered, $F(1,$

TABLE 4
 Hierarchical Polynomial Regression Results for Three Tenure Measures and Job Satisfaction, Controlling for Age (Females, $n = 567$)

Dependent variable	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F (step)
Job tenure				
JDI-Pay				
Age	-.11	.013	.013	7.56**
Tenure	.05	.014	.002	<1
Tenure ²	.05	.015	.000	<1
Tenure ³	-.55	.024	.009	5.18*
JDI-Work				
Age	.02	.000	.000	<1
Tenure	-.10	.008	.008	4.38*
Tenure ²	.21	.015	.007	4.19*
Tenure ³	.03	.015	.000	<1
JDI-Co-workers				
Age	-.04	.002	.002	<1
Tenure	-.08	.006	.004	2.73
Tenure ²	.25	.017	.010	5.89*
Tenure ³	-.21	.018	.001	<1
JDI-Supervision				
Age	-.13	.018	.018	10.09**
Tenure	-.14	.003	.016	9.11**
Tenure ²	.34	.053	.020	11.69**
Tenure ³	.09	.053	.000	<1
JDI-Promotions				
Age	-.09	.009	.009	5.08*
Tenure	-.11	.018	.009	5.20*
Tenure ²	.45	.053	.035	20.71**
Tenure ³	.16	.054	.001	<1
JDI-General				
Age	.03	.001	.001	<1
Tenure	-.05	.003	.002	<1
Tenure ²	.09	.004	.001	<1
Tenure ³	-.04	.004	.000	<1
Tenure with supervisor				
JDI-Pay				
Age	-.11	.013	.013	7.56**
Tenure	.09	.020	.006	3.66
Tenure ²	-.00	.020	.000	<1
JDI-Work				
Age	.02	.000	.000	<1
Tenure	-.05	.003	.002	1.32
Tenure ²	-.11	.004	.002	<1
JDI-Co-workers				
Age	-.04	.002	.002	<1
Tenure	-.06	.005	.004	2.01
Tenure ²	.16	.008	.003	1.92

TABLE 4—Continued

Dependent variable	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F (step)
JDI-Supervision				
Age	-.13	.018	.018	10.09**
Tenure	-.09	.025	.007	4.03*
Tenure ²	.27	.035	.010	5.96*
JDI-Promotions				
Age	-.09	.009	.009	5.08*
Tenure	-.09	.016	.007	4.18*
Tenure ²	.35	.033	.017	9.79**
JDI-General				
Age	.03	.001	.001	<1
Tenure	.02	.001	.000	<1
Tenure ²	-.03	.001	.000	<1
Organization tenure				
JDI-Pay				
Age	-.11	.013	.013	7.56**
Tenure	.10	.021	.007	4.22*
Tenure ²	.00	.021	.000	<1
JDI-Work				
Age	.02	.000	.000	<1
Tenure	-.09	.006	.006	2.98
Tenure ²	.19	.011	.005	2.91
JDI-Co-workers				
Age	-.04	.002	.002	<1
Tenure	-.08	.007	.005	2.86
Tenure ²	.23	.014	.008	4.28*
JDI-Supervision				
Age	-.13	.018	.018	10.09**
Tenure	-.15	.033	.015	9.01**
Tenure ²	.26	.043	.010	5.69*
JDI-Promotions				
Age	-.09	.009	.009	5.08*
Tenure	-.14	.022	.014	7.83**
Tenure ²	.38	.043	.021	12.12**
JDI-General				
Age	.03	.001	.001	<1
Tenure	-.01	.001	.000	<1
Tenure ²	.09	.002	.001	<1

Note: Degrees of freedom (by step) are 1/565, 1/564, 1/563, 1/562.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

564) = 4.22, $p < .05$. Of particular interest, however, are nine statistically significant squared terms. Four of these terms related to job tenure squared, three to organization tenure squared, and two to tenure with supervisor squared. The increment in the proportion of criterion variance explained by these squared terms in no case exceeded 3.5%. Additionally,

a significant increment in the proportion of criterion variance explained also occurred when job-tenure cubed was entered into the regression equation for satisfaction with pay, $F(1, 562) = 5.18, p < .05$. Although the proportion of variance accounted for in all cases was small, the 10 significant higher-order terms together suggest that for females the relation between various job satisfaction facets and different tenure measures might be best represented by either a second- or -third-order polynomial trend.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the relations among tenure, age, and job satisfaction as a way of testing two alternative paradigmatic perspectives. The results clearly demonstrate that when one adopts different "lenses" to view the same phenomenon (i.e., job satisfaction), one does "see" different things. In attempting to match theory and method, these results suggest several major conclusions for the vocational behavior field.

First, although age and tenure are natural dependent, time-related variables which co-vary with one another, they are distinct variables leading to different outcomes. Reviewing our results, it is clear for both males and females that tenure (however measured) is a more stable predictor of job satisfaction than chronological age. Tenure seemingly affects satisfaction in a manner distinct from the effects of age. This conclusion supports Gordon and Johnson's (1982) contention that, rather than being treated as a nuisance variable, tenure is an important topic deserving further study. This importance not only derives from its explanatory power, but because, unlike related demographic variables such as age, or sex, tenure has been judged a legal and defensible basis for disbursing organizational rewards and making staffing decisions (Gordon & Johnson, 1982).

Second, the present findings might be interpreted as casting doubt on studies which have operationalized career stages on the basis of age ranges. The belief that a link exists between a person's career stage and age, and that successive career stages are characterized by differences in job satisfaction, seems tenuous at best. Past findings concerning age may well have resulted from the fact that age is at best a shorthand for other variables which are typically identified with experiential events or conditions (e.g., perceptual, cognitive, and linguistic development) acting over time (Wohlwill, 1970).

By contrast, although we can only speculate given the nature of the present study, the plausibility of job experience models proposing that the determinants of job satisfaction are likely to vary systematically with tenure would seem enhanced by the reported present results. The main theme of job experience models, that tenure (variously defined) affects

the manner in which work environment features combine to influence job satisfaction, dovetails nicely with the increasingly popular interactionist perspective. Both the job experience model and the interactionist perspective recognize the impact of both personal (demographic) factors and situational (environmental) characteristics on job satisfaction. Indeed, Chatman (1989) intimated that an individual's person-organization fit and, thus, job satisfaction will vary with the duration of one's employment.

A final conclusion concerns the relations between tenure and both facet-free and facet-specific satisfaction. In contrast to its relation with global measures, the present results suggest that tenure is differentially related to various elements comprising satisfaction. As can be seen in Tables 3 and 4, the three tenure measures failed to explain a statistically significant proportion of variance in general job satisfaction for either males or females. This result is consistent with the view that the frame of reference used by individuals in responding to global assessments of job satisfaction differs from that used when evaluating the discrete elements of which a job is composed. Indeed, Smith et al. (1969) contend that individuals use a relative frame of reference (focusing on currently available alternatives) when responding to measures of facet satisfaction as contrasted to an absolute frame of reference when responding to global assessments. The latter is thought to evolve from a stable internalized standard of what constitutes an equitable (i.e., fair) day's work. To date, little evidence has been reported to support Smith et al.'s contention.

Although care was taken to assure that the present comparative test of alternative perspectives was fair (Cooper & Richardson, 1986), we acknowledge that our study has limitations that need to be noted and addressed. We recognize the dangers involved in using cross-sectional data to draw developmental inferences. Variations among subjects of different ages/tenure may not only reflect the consequences of these variables, but also of cohort differences, potentially reducing effect sizes. Still, cross-sectional data can help identify areas and variables for which longitudinal research may be warranted. Moreover, for theoretical purposes, cross-sectional studies can provide as much useful information as cohort or panel data (Glenn, 1981). Further, cross-sectional data do not confound age/tenure and cohort differences with influences due to period effects (Kalleberg & Loscocco, 1983).

A more fundamental limitation of our study, as well as all other similar investigations, is our inability to separate the effects of age/tenure from compositional effects resulting from the systematic selection of individuals into and out of the workforce. Compositional effects can be reflected in the "early" departure of dissatisfied employees, as well as the "late" entry of employees (e.g, professionals) who tend to be satisfied (Kalleberg & Loscocco, 1983, p. 81). This continual inflow and outflow of employees

places limits on what can be concluded empirically about the age-tenure-job satisfaction relation.

An additional concern might be the limited criterion variance explained. However, an important objective of this research was to investigate the form as well as the magnitude of the age, tenure, and job satisfaction relationships. O'Grady (1982) had indicated that it is quite common in the behavioral sciences to over-emphasize the proportion of variance explained to the exclusion of other issues. He argued that in much research, establishing the shape or functional relation between key variables should be emphasized and that measures of explained variance may be misleading or inappropriate indicators of a finding's importance. The intent of such research is usually to explain or understand, so that maximizing variance accounted for is not of primary concern. Furthermore, Rosenthal (1990) has recently argued that in the "softer, wilder areas of psychology" (including organizational), the practical value of a result should not be based on the magnitude of the associated effect.

We believe that the results of our study present a sufficiently compelling case to issue a call for more research to examine the theoretical and methodological importance of tenure in employee work attitudes. But by no means would we suggest a moratorium on the explanatory capabilities of age as a variable of importance in its own right. It is premature to draw conclusions of this sort at present before we formulate and test more precise theoretical models that describe the dynamics of these variables. Age and tenure are theoretically interesting variables which unfortunately have been neglected with regard to how and why we might expect them to be related to outcomes of interest and importance. Such theoretical and methodological advances concerning these two variables should prove fruitful both scientifically and practically.

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