

## INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN SELF-PERCEPTION AND THE JOB-LIFE SATISFACTION RELATIONSHIP\*<sup>1</sup>

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### SUMMARY

This study investigated the relationship of self-perception to job-life satisfaction. Eighty-four male engineers completed (a) the Job Description Index (JDI), (b) a measure of life satisfaction, and (c) the Thompson Biographical Information Blank (BIB). Two sets of parallel analyses were performed in order to assess the moderating effect of individual differences in self-perception upon the job-life satisfaction relationship. First, *Ss* were divided at the median with respect to the distribution of BIB scores into high and low self-perception groups and differences in correlation pairs were examined. Second, to cross-validate the results obtained, moderated regression analyses were performed to assess further the statistical significance of each of the moderating effects achieved. The data indicated a significant positive relationship between JDI satisfaction with supervision and satisfaction with life in general as moderated by high self-perception. Self-perception was also found to moderate the relationship between overall job satisfaction and JDI satisfaction with both co-workers and supervision. These results were related to Korman's self-consistency hypothesis of work behavior, as well as to Super's self-implementation theory of vocational choice.

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### A. INTRODUCTION

For at least three decades an area of continuing concern in social psychology has been the interrelationship of job attitudes and life satisfaction.

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Early work by Friend and Haggard (6, 7) was concerned with identifying the common ground between job satisfaction and general emotional adjustment. More contemporary research has investigated the role of community variables (11); the importance of selected occupational factors (12, 13, 15), and the influence of sex differences (14) on the job-life satisfaction relationship.

Perhaps the most complete data in this area can be derived from Kornhauser's (16) investigation of the mental health of over 400 Detroit area workers. Skilled and unskilled workers were interviewed concerning their employment and the satisfaction they gained from both their work and life in general. Intercorrelations of responses to questions regarding satisfactions in different sectors of life showed job satisfaction and life satisfaction to be positively correlated ( $r = .58$ ). In interpreting these data, Kornhauser concluded that the available evidence favored the existence of a "spillover" rather than a "compensatory" relationship between job and life satisfaction: workers who experienced discontentment in their work did not compensate for this lack of psychological gratification by finding satisfaction in other aspects of their life, but rather were more likely to experience a greater incidence of unhappiness in nonwork activities.

Although the relationship between job satisfaction and life satisfaction has been the subject of past research, an important area of concern yet to be fully investigated is the effect individual differences in self-perception have upon this association (8, 22). On the basis of theories of cognitive balance (10) and dissonance (5), it can be proposed that self-perception may affect the interrelationship of job attitudes and life satisfaction. Likewise, consistency theory (17) would suggest the individuals find most satisfying those activities that are congruent with their self-cognitions. This reasoning is also consistent with Super's (24) "self-implementation" theory of vocational choice. The fundamental construct underlying this theory is that personal adjustment is dependent upon the successful translation of one's self into vocational terms. This "translation," in turn, is seen by Super (25) as being fundamental to the job-life satisfaction relationship. Super maintains that "satisfaction in one's work and on one's job depends upon the extent to which the work, the job, and the way of life that goes with them, enable one to play the kind of role that one wants to play" (25, p. 189). The present study was designed to expand understanding in this area by exploring the relationship between self-perception and job-life satisfaction.

## B. METHOD

### 1. *Subjects*

The sample consisted of 84 professional male engineers enrolled in a two-day developmental program sponsored by the engineering extension service of a major Southeastern university. They were employed in both the private and governmental sectors. Their ages ranged from 25 to 67, with a mean of approximately 39.

### 2. *Questionnaires*

*a. Job satisfaction.* The Job Description Index [JDI (23)] was used to measure five separate dimensions of job satisfaction: satisfaction with opportunities for promotion, satisfaction with co-workers, satisfaction with supervision, satisfaction with pay, and satisfaction with the work itself. The JDI is a cumulative point adjective checklist measure of job satisfaction. It has been repeatedly shown to possess adequate convergent and discriminant validity for individual analysis (21).

*b. Life satisfaction.* This measure, developed by Iris and Barrett (13) following the lead of Kornhauser (16), includes four items assessing attitudes toward satisfaction. While the limitations of using single item scales are recognized (e.g., reliabilities cannot be measured), it was deemed desirable to utilize this format in order to maintain continuity with previous research. Each item was interpreted with the use of a five-point scale ranging from "completely satisfied" to "very dissatisfied."

*c. Individual differences in self-perception.* The Thompson (27) Biographical Information Blank (BIB) was used to gather individual differences information regarding respondent's self-perceived background experiences and expectations. The BIB is a 14-item biographical data inventory covering antecedent life experiences (19, 20). Individual scale items deal with, for example, the self-assessment of respondent potential, perceived values gained from education attained, and self-judged personal preferences. The BIB was constructed, with the use of factor analytic techniques, on the assumption "that an individual's background of experience and appraisal of abilities would combine to form a measure of his self-perception and, hence, an indication of the types of treatment the individual would expect" in response to various stimuli (27, p. 349). A detailed description of the development and reliability of the BIB measure is provided by Thompson

(26). For example, it has been found to be statistically related to other similarly developed self-measurement instruments. In the present sample, the BIB demonstrated a coefficient alpha reliability of .68. Although opinion varies somewhat on standards of reliability, Nunnally (18) advises that in early stages of research on a construct, reliabilities as modest as .50 or .60 are acceptable, although reliabilities approaching .70 (as is the present case) are preferable.

### 3. *Procedure*

Questionnaires were administered at the initial meeting of the two-day session. Although the general nature of the study was explained, the hypothesis and the variables to be analyzed were not mentioned. *Ss* were requested to follow the written instructions on each questionnaire and to answer all questions. All *Ss* remained completely anonymous.

### C. RESULTS

Two major sets of parallel analyses were conducted. In the first set, *Ss* were partitioned at the median with respect to the distribution of BIB scores into high and low self-perception groups,  $t(82) = 13.14$ ,  $p < .001$ . The significance of differences in correlation pairs was then examined to assess moderating effects (9). Product-moment correlations between JDI subscale scores and satisfaction with life in general, with family, with leisure activities, and with overall job satisfaction are presented for each group in Table 1. Of particular note are the contrasting response patterns of the two groups. For the high self-perception group, there was in general a significant and positive relationship, corresponding to that reported by Kornhauser (16), between JDI job satisfaction and overall life satisfaction. Noticeably, however, a similar relationship was not revealed for those classified as low in self-perception. For this group, none of the correlations between JDI job satisfaction and overall life satisfaction were significant, and most were rather low. The moderating effect of self-perception on certain aspects of the relationship between job satisfaction and overall life satisfaction is apparent. The correlations between satisfaction with both co-workers and supervision and overall life satisfaction were significantly different for the two groups.

The between group variation in correlations for the five JDI subscales and overall job satisfaction is also of particular interest. The relationships between satisfaction with both co-workers and supervision and overall job satisfaction were significantly moderated by self-perception, with the rela-

TABLE 1  
CORRELATIONS AND DIFFERENCES IN CORRELATIONS<sup>a</sup> BETWEEN JOB SATISFACTION AND  
LIFE SATISFACTION FOR HIGH AND LOW SELF-PERCEPTION GROUPS

Job satisfaction	Correlates of life satisfaction			
	Life	Family	Leisure	Job
High self-perception ( <i>n</i> = 40)				
Promotion	.23	-.18	-.01	.36*
Co-worker	.57*** <sup>b</sup>	.13	.18	.65*** <sup>c</sup>
Supervision	.46*** <sup>c</sup>	-.13	.38*	.52*** <sup>c</sup>
Pay	.31*	.10	-.07	.36*
Work	.42**	.17	.04	.61***
Low self-perception ( <i>n</i> = 44)				
Promotion	-.07	-.01	.16	.06
Co-worker	.20	-.08	.11	.16
Supervision	-.16	.10	.06	-.01
Pay	.07	.12	.04	.12
Work	.24	-.11	.19	.41**

<sup>a</sup> Differences in correlation pairs were evaluated with Fisher's *Z* transformation and test (9).

<sup>b</sup> Significance of differences in correlation pairs was  $p < .05$ .

<sup>c</sup> Significance of differences in correlation pairs was  $p < .01$ .

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

tionships being more positive for the high self-perception group. For high self-perception *Ss*, positive and significant correlations were found between all JDI subscales and overall job satisfaction. In contrast, for those *Ss* low in self-perception, only the correlation between JDI work itself and overall job satisfaction was significant.

Before evaluating these results, it should be noted that Zedeck (28) has cautioned—because of numerous pitfalls (e.g., abnormal distributions, nonlinear relationships, etc.) associated with moderator variable research based on separate correlational analyses of subgroups formed by dividing a continuous qualitative variable—that results obtained in this manner should always be cross-validated. Accordingly, in the second set of analyses, moderated regression techniques were used to assess further the statistical significance of the moderating effect of individual differences in self-perception. Statistical tests employed to compare the multiple correlation coefficients yielded in such regression analyses are indicated by Cohen (1).

Given the outcome of the initial subgroup correlational analysis, moderated regressions were calculated concerning the two areas of life satisfaction (life in general and overall job satisfaction to satisfaction with co-workers and satisfaction with supervision) for which earlier results had indicated self-perception was a significant moderator. The outcomes of the

moderated regressions generally, though not completely, confirmed those of the initial correlational subgroup analysis. Table 2 presents the  $R$  values for the simple, multiple (including self-perception), and moderated regressions performed. The increments in  $R$  from the addition of the interaction terms are significant in all cases except the moderated regression for overall life satisfaction to satisfaction with co-workers. In this case, the self-perception  $\times$  co-worker interaction had no effect.

#### D. DISCUSSION

This study aimed at further understanding in the area of job-life satisfaction by examining the moderating effect of individual differences in self-perception. Cross-validated results indicated that self-perception served as a significant moderator between (a) overall life satisfaction and satisfaction with co-workers and (b) overall job satisfaction and satisfaction with both co-workers and supervision. While the results do not allow an unqualified test of the existence of either a "spillover" or "compensatory" relationship between job and life satisfaction, they do suggest that the absence of an association between job and life satisfaction for  $S$ s with low self-perception may stem from behaviorally related job roles which are inconsistent with their self-cognitions. Such an interpretation would be theoretically congruent with both Korman's (17) self-consistency hypothesis of work behavior and Super's (24) self-implementation theory of vocational choice. On the basis of this logic, it would appear that these individuals may have largely

TABLE 2  
RESULTS OF MODERATED REGRESSION FOR GENERAL LIFE SATISFACTION, OVERALL JOB SATISFACTION, JOB SATISFACTION VARIABLES, AND SELF-PERCEPTION

Measure	Job satisfaction variables	
	Co-worker	Supervision
<i>General life satisfaction</i>		
Zero order correlation with general life satisfaction	.40	.17
$R$ 's adding self-perception		
$R_1$ (linear multiple correlation)	.41	.17
$R_m$ (moderated multiple correlation)	.43	.34
$F$ [significance of increase ( $R_m - R_1$ )]	.98	3.82*
<i>Overall life satisfaction</i>		
Zero order correlation with overall job satisfaction	.39	.26
$R$ 's adding self-perception		
$R_1$	.39	.27
$R_m$	.48	.37
$F$	3.64*	2.87*

Note:  $N = 84$ .

\*  $p < .05$ .

segmented their behavior patterns so that attitudes developed in one setting have limited effect on attitudes developed in the other. This reasoning is also consistent with Dubin and his associates' (2, 3, 4) conclusion that for a broad range of people, self-actualization on the job is of no importance. Rather, the central focus of their life is directed at seeking satisfaction elsewhere, away from work.

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