RACE, ETHNICITY, AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN AMERICA, 1972-2006

by

CARLOS A. LOPEZ

(Under the Direction of James E. Coverdill)

ABSTRACT

Using data from the 1972-2006 General Social Surveys, this study extends and elaborates research on ascription and the quality of life. I examine how subjective measures such as happiness, health status, trust, and financial well-being are related to race, ethnicity, social class, and time. The results show that blacks assess their quality of life more negatively than whites. Over time, the prevailing pattern suggests a declining but still discernable significance of race. Notably, the racial gap persists with the introduction of class and demographic controls. The inclusion of Latino self-identification in the analyses shows a lower quality of life for Latinos compared to non-Latinos. That difference rarely remains when controls for class and demographics are considered. The use of partial proportional odds models that consider the nature of ordinal dependent variables corroborates previous quality of life research that use standard regression, a technically-inappropriate method for ordinal dependent variables.

INDEX WORDS: Quality of life, Subjective well-being, African-Americans, Latinos, Happiness, Trust, Financial well-being, Marital happiness, Self-assessed health status, Race relations, Inequality, Partial proportional odds model

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1. INTRODUCTION

Patterns of inequality have long been at the theoretical and empirical heart of the sociological enterprise. Who gets what, and why? Why do some get ahead while others lag or, worse yet, fall behind? Why do some enjoy the proverbial "good life" while others do not? Central to this line of investigation has been the role of ascription in shaping access to opportunities and distributions of outcomes. Ascription means that traits over which we have little-to-no control – things like race, gender, families of origin and orientation, and where in the world we are born – shape and may even determine opportunities and outcomes. Theoretical and empirical attention to processes of ascription focus on how and why such factors shape social processes, the magnitude of ascription's role in various domains of social life, and the extent to which ascription may wax and wane over time in response to social conditions (e.g., Reskin 2003). I suspect that an inventory of the truly vast literature on ascription and inequality would show that most research efforts focus on relatively objective indicators of inequality such as income, employment patterns, housing, health, and the like.

A primary focus on objective indicators of inequality, however important and worthy, nonetheless overlooks an important realm of human experience – namely, how we *feel* about and *appraise* ourselves, our experiences, and our position in the social world. Income, for example, is essential in helping us to secure adequate food, shelter, transportation, and health care – among a host of other such things – along with enhancing opportunities for enriching or enjoyable leisure experiences. There is no doubt that income is a critical indicator of inequality, and plays a leading if not fundamental role in shaping, quite broadly, life chances. But there is also no

doubt that objective indicators of inequality like income cannot be seen as fully capturing or determining the subjective experience and appraisal of a person's life. For example, Easterlin (2003) recently argued that the more-is-better thesis, as it applies to the pecuniary domain of life, is problematic because it does not bring with it a lasting increase in happiness, utility, well-being, or life satisfaction, terms which he views as roughly synonymous. That conclusion bolsters what I believe is a widely-held view and corroborates earlier, though less scientific, proclamations by the Beatles in "Can't Buy Me Love" and my mother.

The concept of subjective well-being is typically considered the domain of psychology and misguidedly overlooked in sociology. Subjective well-being measures a dimension of the quality of life that tends to be concerned with a person's own internal estimation of living *the good life*, rather than what social scientists or policymakers find representative of *a* good life. If the goal of social science is to improve the human condition (American Sociological Association 2005; Buroway 2005; Hughes 2006), then it is imperative that sociologists explore the antecedents and meanings of subjective appraisals of the quality of life in a sustained and systematic way (Ferriss 2004; Hughes 2006). If people's appraisals of their lives are negative, their feelings may be indicative of institutions not meeting the needs of people – even if other needs are being met such as protection or social welfare. The scientific understanding of the social causes of subjective-well being may be of use to policymakers seeking out new approaches to improving lives (Veenhoven 2008).

Subjective well-being is both a determinant and a result of a host of behaviors, social conditions, and social systems generally studied by sociologists. For example, subjective-well being is closely associated with participation in voluntary organizations, friendship networks, and families. It is also positively related with political participation. Subjective-well being is

higher in countries that provide a higher level of standard of living, that are democratic, and that possess a sense of trust amongst its citizens. Furthermore, the happier person tends to be married, religious, physically healthier, and lives longer (Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith 1999; Veenhoven 2008). Since subjective well-being has much to do with the quality of society itself, and it relates to a list of topics traditionally treated by sociologists, subjective well-being deserves to be a part of the sociological arsenal (Veenhoven 2008).

In this study I extend and elaborate an important thread of research on ascription and the quality of life begun in the 1980s by Thomas and Hughes (1986), revisited in the 1990s by Hughes and Thomas (1998), but largely overlooked by other scholars. In those studies, attention was focused on broad indicators of the quality of life – things like happiness, health, and perceptions of the trustworthiness of others we encounter in social life – and how they were related to race, class, and time. The story, consistent across both studies, was that a substantial disadvantage for blacks across a number of quality-of-life measures was not due in large part to the confounding influence of social class. Moreover, trend analyses pointed to the *continuing* significance of race into the 1990s despite what might be interpreted as substantial egalitarian shifts in American legal and social climates.

I extend and elaborate the provocative and seminal research of Hughes and Thomas in several ways. I *extend* it by revisiting their analysis with data that rounds out the 1990s and continues through 2006. In short, what does another decade of trend data reveal about race differences in the quality of life? I *elaborate* those earlier studies in three ways. First, I include and consider two subjective assessments of financial well being, a component of many conceptualizations of the subjective quality of life (e.g., Bramston, Pretty, and Chipuer 2002; Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith 1999; Seed and Lloyd 1997) that was overlooked in the earlier

studies. Second, using a subset of the data from 2000 - 2006, I explore how the quality of life may depend upon Latino self-identification and membership in a racial group other than "black" and "white," two issues that, again, were not considered in the earlier studies. And third, I probe a significant methodological threat to the detailed results and main story line presented in the earlier studies of Hughes and Thomas. Those earlier studies, like many others that have explored similar quality-of-life measures (Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Frijters 2004), use a means-based procedure – ordinary least squares regression – on outcomes measured at the ordinal level. I make use of partial proportional odds models, a recent development for ordinal dependent variables (Williams 2006; O'Connell 2006), in order to assess the sensitivity of the main results to the choice of multivariate model. Simply put, are the main results presented by Hughes and Thomas an artifact of an inappropriate statistical method?

The balance of the paper unfolds in six sections. In the second (next) section, I describe and develop in more detail how I extend and elaborate the earlier research of Hughes and Thomas. In the third section, I describe the survey data and variables. A fourth section overviews the statistical methods used in the analyses. The fifth section presents the results in two subsections, one for the main trend analysis that draws upon data from 1972 - 2006, a second for the exploration of how Latino self-identification and race shape the quality of life during the period from 2000 - 2006. A sixth and final section offers a broader discussion of the results, links them to previous studies, highlights some limitations of the study, and draws conclusions.

2. ELABORATING AND EXTENDING RESEARCH ON RACE AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE

This section has four main subsections. I begin by reviewing the quality-of-life measures used in the earlier studies of Thomas and Hughes (1986) and later in Hughes and Thomas (1998). I position them in the large and growing quality-of-life literature and then argue that perceptions and assessments of financial situations also merit consideration. In the second subsection, I argue that dramatic demographic changes in American society require that researchers include Latinos in their analyses. Those new Americans, I argue, may well have distinctive patterns with respect to the quality of life. In a third subsection, I argue that there are good reasons to suspect that there have been changes in the quality of life since the most recent analysis offered by Hughes and Thomas. I draw attention to enduring patterns of racial inequality and political change in America since the mid-1990s and connect those patterns to racial gaps in the quality of life. The fourth and final subsection describes in more detail the statistical threats posed by using standard regression analysis with ordinal dependent variables.

Measuring the Quality of Life

The large literature on the quality of life is far from monolithic across the social and behavioral sciences (e.g., Schuessler and Fischer 1985; Ring, Hofer, McGee, Hickey, and O'Boyle 2007). There is no consensus over the meaning, conceptualization, and measurement of the quality of life in terms of either objective (e.g., mortality, income, and educational

attainment) or subjective indicators (e.g., happiness and satisfaction). A comparison of conceptual and empirical issues in studies that use objective indicators – like Farley and Allen's (1987) classic *The Color Line and the Quality of Life in America* and the recent and important *What Has Happened to the Quality of Life in the Advanced Industrialized Nations?* (Wolff 2004) – suggest as many points of divergence as convergence. The same is true of studies that focus on subjective indicators of the quality of life. A recent integrative review and assessment of subjectively-oriented research on the quality of life, penned by the leading scholars in the field, summed the situation up in these words: "the construction of social indicators of the quality of life is essentially a political and philosophical exercise" (Sirgy, Michalos, Ferriss, Easterlin, Patrick, and Pavot 2006:349). Those qualities, they suggest, foment heterogeneity in the field.

Despite considerable conceptual and empirical diversity in the literature on the subjective side of the quality of life, three main convictions are common. First, the subjective quality of life is a multidimensional concept and construct (e.g., Bramston et al. 2002). For the most part, researchers explore observed dimensions and do not summarize or collapse them into a global or unitary latent construct. Second, considerations of the validity and reliability of subjective measures of the quality of life suggest that they are reasonably adequate on both counts (see Sirgy 2002; Veenhoven 1993; Frey and Stutzer 2002). Frey and Stutzer (2002:26), after reviewing the methodological studies, concluded that "extensive research has shown that people are capable of consistently evaluating their own state of well-being." Third, the subjective quality of life has both state-like and trait-like properties. It has trait-like properties in that it is relatively stable over time and can be viewed as partly due to personality or dispositions; it is state-like in that it responds to changes in experience and social situations (Sirgy 2002:15; Diener et al. 1999:279-280). Frey and Stutzer (2002:32) succinctly summarize this line of

thought by saying that measures of the subjective quality of life tend to be "moderately stable" but also "appropriately sensitive to changing life circumstances."

In Thomas and Hughes (1986) and later in Hughes and Thomas (1998), six dependent variables measuring diverse aspects of the quality of life were used to track differences between whites and blacks from 1972 until 1996. Although the dependent variables used in the two studies would appear to have a good deal of face validity and plausibility, neither paper makes much of an effort to justify the specific measures or position them within what was then an emerging literature on subjective indicators of the quality of life. Four of their quality-of-life variables square well with what the literature now calls the "hedonic approach" and measure subjective well-being (Ryan and Deci 2001; Ring et al. 2007). These measures assess overall and domain-specific (in marriage) happiness, satisfaction with a number of specific life domains (family life, friendships, non-work activities, city or place of residence, and health and physical condition) that were combined into a single life-satisfaction index, and a self-rating of physical health. A recent overview of quality-of-life research suggests that the preponderance of empirical research has used measures of subjective well-being akin to those four measures (Sirgy et al. 2006:385).

The other two quality-of-life measures used in the Hughes and Thomas studies were distinctive in that they assess more nearly aspects of meaning and interpretations of social conditions. These measures align roughly, but by no means perfectly, with what has come to be called the "eudaimonic approach" because they measure what is called psychological, not subjective, well-being (Ryan and Deci 2001; Ring et al. 2007). The first, somewhat loosely labeled anomia, attempted to get at that classic sociological concept by combining responses to three questions about the extent to which social conditions – the lot of average people, optimism

about the future, and the concern public officials have for the problems of average people – have deteriorated over time. A second, called trust, probed the extent to which respondents believed people tend to be helpful, fair, and trustworthy. Apart from their emphasis on attributes of social experience, these latter two measures are also "expert" driven (e.g., Ryan and Deci 2001:146) in that analysts pick content areas to probe and then *infer* that some responses – like a lack of trust or a loss of optimism – indicate poor quality of life. My sense is that these are not particularly problematic inferences, but they are less certain, and different, than linking a "lack of happiness" to a poor quality of life.

My consideration of race differences in the quality of life offers both continuity and change from the early studies of Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998). Four of the six dependent variables used in those earlier analyses – marital happiness, overall happiness, self-assessed health status, and trust – are included in the empirical analysis. The remaining dependent variables differ from those in the earlier analyses in two main ways. First, I was unable to include variables that measured anomia and life satisfaction because those items were dropped by the General Social Surveys (the data drawn upon in my study and those by Hughes and Thomas) as of 1994, two years prior to the end-point in the trend analyses presented in Hughes and Thomas (1998). Second, I compensate for that loss and elaborate the earlier analyses by including two measures of the quality of life that tap perceived financial conditions, a dimension of the quality of life neglected by Hughes and Thomas but central to many current research efforts (e.g., Seed and Lloyd 1997; Bowling 2005; Sirgy 2002; Bramston et al. 2002; Diener et al. 1999). The first assesses change in financial situations over the past few years (as getting better, worse, or staying about the same); a second assesses satisfaction with financial situations.

Together, these new measures add what I believe is an important new dimension – perceptions of change in, and satisfaction with, financial situations – to the consideration of race, ethnicity, and the quality of life in America. The new measures should permit a richer and broader account of the quality of life that is reminiscent of Weber's concept of personal life experience and its relation to life chances and class position. Weber ([1922]1978) referred to an inner satisfaction (psychological well-being) that coincides with increased life chances that come from gains in marketplace interactions.

A Surging and Distinctive Latino Population in America

The United States is experiencing extraordinary population change. Consider a few statistics about population composition and change. Excluding Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, the 2000 U.S. Census reported that the Latino population was 12.5 percent of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau 2001a). A few short years later, the 2006 American Community Survey conduced by the U.S. Census Bureau reported that the Latino share of the U.S. population was 14.8 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). By comparison, the black population in both surveys remained at about 12 percent. Between 1990 and 2000, the Latino population surged by 58 percent, while the U.S. population as a whole increased by only 12 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2001b). Between July 1, 2004 and July 1, 2005, one of every two people added to the U.S. population was Latino. Those changes imply that the overall U.S. population may well be about 25 percent Latino by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau 2004).

Comparisons between black and Latino patterns of inequality are mixed. In some cases, Latinos fair better than blacks. For example, in 2006, Latino households earned 72 percent of

the median income of white households compared to 61 percent for African Americans (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). Latino poverty rates are slightly lower than those for blacks. In addition, Latinos do not experience the same level of residential segregation as that experienced by blacks (Alba et al. 2000). Other measures suggest that Latinos trail blacks. For example, nearly one third of Latinos do not possess health care coverage compared to one tenth of whites and one fifth of blacks. The Latino high school drop-out rate is about twice that of blacks; the black rate, in turn, is twice the rate for whites. It follows that the college completion rate for Latinos is lower than that of African Americans.

Latino or Hispanic is an aggregate ethnic category that can, and often does, contain more than one race. Within this category, country of origin, migration patterns, assimilation patterns, host reception, severity of discriminatory treatment, ease of accessibility to permanent residency, culture, and other facets vary by and within subgroups. These variations in experience are important for a complete understanding of the causes of Latino inequality and the views Latinos have about their quality of life in America. While recognizing the heterogeneity of Latinos, Padilla (1985) makes a case for a pan-ethnic identity that emerges when Spanish-speaking populations are confronted with similar social-structural constraints such as poor educational quality and poverty.

Pan-Latino culture and some of the structural barriers experienced by Latinos are distinct enough from whites and blacks to warrant investigation of their quality of life. For example, immigrant status or having a significant other with a precarious residential status may result in anxiety and feelings of uncertainty (Escobar, Nervi, and Gara 2000). A deficit of English proficiency may make it difficult to secure social services, housing, and economic opportunities (Hagan 2004; Singer 2004). Living in a city with few Latinos, especially for newly arrived

Latino immigrants, may be socially isolating. Adapting to a new geographic space with noteworthy differences in values and expectations, institutional arrangements and practices, and views of race and gender can be stressful and disorienting (Singer 2004). In addition, for acculturated Latinos, issues of identity may impact subjective assessments of the quality of life.

Cultural values and norms that make Latino families distinctive – referred to as Latino familism or *familismo* – manifest in a variety of ways and may well influence subjective assessments of the quality of life (Weaver 2003aa). Extended family forms, along with the inclusion of fictive kin, are commonplace in Latino families (Keefe and Padilla 1987). This kind of family system increases the potential for receiving everyday advice, domestic help, and financial assistance. Research shows that kin ties for Mexican Americans are not only more extensive but more intensive, which may increase social cohesion and improve psychological well-being (Weaver 2003a). At the same time, an over-reliance on family members along with a more collectivist approach to social life may create a burden on individual family members.

Latino familism also places a relatively high value on traditional gender roles and marriage (Weaver 2003a; Keefe and Padilla 1987). In the context of living in America, expectations placed on Latinas to reach an idealized traditional gender role, of Latin American origin, may result in negative affect (Avila and Avila 1995). In Latino marriages with children, parents may value the relationship between parent and child over nuptial concerns. In fact, achieving a satisfying family life may not require a happy marriage (Bulanda and Brown 2007).

Given how little research attention has been devoted to Latinos and the quality of life (see also Weaver 2003a), I couch my interest in this group as exploratory, and thus do not offer specific hypotheses as to how Latinos may fall relative to whites and blacks on the various quality-of-life dimensions. The surging Latino population, its current and anticipated size over

time, along with culturally-distinctive aspects of Latino culture all point to two conclusions: first, this group simply must be included in social research; and second, there are good reasons to suspect that Latinos may well differ from whites and blacks with respect to the quality of life.

Has it been a Decade of Change or Continuity in the Quality of Life?

My extension of the earlier studies of Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998) pushes the evidence through the 1990s and up through 2006. That extension implies that time may well have changed patterns found in those earlier studies, both of which showed strong and consistent evidence for the *continuing significance of race* with respect to the quality of life in America. Since the mid-1990s, have social conditions changed in such a way that we might expect a broadly-improved quality of life for blacks and hence a decline in the significance of race? My reading of social conditions suggests that the answer to that question is no for two main reasons: continuing patterns of objective inequality and a shift to the political right in America. Both patterns are likely to either sustain or widen racial gaps in the quality of life. I develop each idea in turn.

Evidence suggests that racial inequality remains rather pronounced in American society. A typical black family's income in 2006 was a little more than half of a typical white family's income. Poverty rates amongst black individuals still hover around three times those of white individuals, and the unemployment rate is double (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). Additionally, de facto racial segregation restricts upward social mobility, aids in preventing blacks from gaining access to valuable social networks, and coincides with neighborhood disorganization such as the

high prevalence of crime (Massey and Denton 1993). The evidence, overall, suggests that blacks continue to inhabit a disadvantageous position in social structure.

Do the attitudes of blacks on the state of Black America reflect objective, social-scientific descriptions of a stratified United States? The answer to that question appears to be yes. The percentage of blacks who say that circumstances have gotten worse for blacks in America has more than doubled from 1999 to 2007 (Pew Research Center 2007). This finding of decreased optimism regarding the position of blacks in America coincides with the slight widening of the black-white household income gap beginning in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). In addition, two thirds of blacks reported that they frequently face discrimination when applying for a job or seeking housing, and one half made the same claim in everyday, more mundane activities like eating at a restaurant or shopping (Pew Research Center 2007). These experiences and conclusions are surely likely to shape how blacks view and assess the quality of life in America.

A changing political climate in America might also shape racial gaps in the quality of life from the 1990s until 2006. In the mid-1990s, conservative Republicans gained control of both houses of Congress and later the Executive Branch in 2001. Republican thought puts considerable trust in capitalism and in unfettered free markets (a la Milton Friedman) to solve domestic social problems. The Republican Party typically espouses a libertarian-leaning role for government in alleviating income and racial disparities. This philosophy is well illustrated by the Republican Contract with America (1994) in which the following principles and policy commitments were conveyed: smaller government as an ideal; fiscal responsibility, which includes reductions of federal cash assistance and subsidies for those at the bottom end of the income hierarchy; promotion of personal responsibility in the lives of individuals; a staunch belief of the existence of fluid social mobility reminiscent of the Horatio Alger story;

reprioritizing national security relative to domestic social programs; and tax relief. Not surprisingly, based on that political ideology, race-specific programs like affirmative action were seen as discriminatory and unfair. Many of the principles and policy commitments conveyed in the Contract with America eventually resulted in law; the substantial welfare reform legislation in 1996 is one such example.

Hughes and Thomas (1998), mirroring their 1986 paper, concluded that not only was there a racial *tax* on black wages (see also Willie 1979), but also that there was continuing evidence for a tax on black well-being in America. I propose that both of these interrelated taxes are still imposed. In addition, I highlight the exceptional "Republican Revolution," and argue that an ideological shift to the political right at the federal level and in many state governments did not temper – and may have aggravated – race-based inequality during the years from 1996 through 2006. I thus anticipate a continued if not greater significance of race for the quality of life over the past decade.

Do Methods Matter? Standard Regression vs. Ordinal Models

Most quality-of-life measures found in the literature are classic examples of an ordinal level of measurement (Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Frijters 2004). Ordinal variables distinguish outcome categories in terms of a rank order, from low to high, strongly disagree to strongly agree, not so happy to very happy, and so forth. While differences in rank order are indicated by ordinal measurement, precise distances between ranks are not. As an example, consider the global assessment of happiness, a variable used in the earlier studies by Thomas and Hughes (1986), Hughes and Thomas (1998), and in my analysis as well. The three ranks, presented to

respondents as “not too happy,” “pretty happy,” and “very happy” are assigned the numerical scores of 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Those numbers surely indicate an increasing degree or amount of happiness. It is not clear, however, whether the distance or magnitude of change in happiness between levels 1 and 2 is in fact the same as that between levels 2 and 3.

The measurement properties of ordinal variables constrain statistical operations. At the most basic level, data-analysis textbooks typically admonish readers not to calculate or interpret means as measures of central tendency when measurement is at the ordinal level (e.g., Frankfort-Nachmias and Leon-Guerrero 2006:113). The inappropriateness of the mean for ordinal variables then limits what statistical methods can be used to explore and establish patterns of association among variables. Correlation and standard forms of ordinary least squares regression analysis require means to calculate variances and covariances, and if means are not appropriate, then those forms of analysis are not appropriate with ordinal variables. As Allison (1999:10) put it in his text on regression analysis, “ordinal variables are inappropriate for multiple regression.”

In practice, however, many researchers have thrown caution to the wind and have used standard regression analysis with ordinal dependent variables because there have been few good alternatives (Allison 1999:10; O’Connell 2006:3). This is clearly the case with the literature on subjective aspects of the quality of life – a literature positively awash with ordinal dependent variables and regression analysis. In addition to the analyses of Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998), recent examples include Veenhoven (1993), Frey and Stutzer (2002), and Bowling (2005), to name just a few. Ordinal regression models, which developed largely over the past decade, have been hailed as the proper and practical alternative to standard regression when a dependent variable is ordinal (O’Connell 2006; Long and Freese 2006). The most common ordinal-response model, the proportional (or “cumulative”) odds model, can be

seen as a relatively straightforward extension of logistic regression for binary response data (O'Connell 2006).

A formidable practical problem with standard ordinal regression models is that a key model assumption – the parallel lines (proportional odds) assumption – is often violated (Williams 2006:60). The parallel-lines assumption implies that the effect of a given independent variable on the odds of being in a higher rather than a lower category on the dependent variable is stable (except for sampling variation) across the various thresholds on the dependent variable. For a three-level dependent variable like happiness (described above), the assumption requires that each slope be largely invariant across two different implicit models: one in which level 1 on happiness is contrasted against the combination of levels 2 and 3; and then a second in which levels 1 and 2 on happiness are contrasted against level 3. A slope that is substantially larger in one contrast than another suggests a violation of the parallel lines assumption (for a more technical discussion, see O'Connell 2006:44-47). Assessments made on a variable-by-variable basis, along with global tests for the entire model, commonly indicate violations of the parallel-lines assumption. Somewhat ironically, that pattern prevailed in the example developed by Long and Freese (2006:189-200) to illustrate the proportional odds model.

The *partial* proportional odds model provides a solution to that problem (Long and Freese 2006:220-21; O'Connell 2006; Williams 2006). If a variable's effect is relatively invariant across thresholds on the dependent variable, and hence meets the parallel-lines assumption, the variable has but one slope in the partial proportional odds model. If, however, there is evidence that the effect varies across thresholds, then the slope is allowed to vary in magnitude across those thresholds. The model is thus less restrictive than the standard ordinal regression model but far more parsimonious than the multinomial logit model that is commonly

viewed as the fall-back alternative when the parallel-lines assumption is not met (Long and Freese 2006; O'Connell 2006). I use these models to examine the extent to which the main story line of the regression analysis can be viewed as an artifact of an inappropriate statistical method – namely, the use of ordinary least squares regression with ordinal dependent variables.

3. SURVEY DATA AND VARIABLES

The analysis makes use of the General Social Surveys (hereafter GSS) from their inception in 1972 until 2006, the most recent wave of data released in July of 2007 (Davis and Smith 2007). The data were generated by face-to-face interviews, with a median length of about one and a half hours, conducted during February, March, and April of 1972 - 1978, 1980, 1982 - 1991, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, and 2006. Response rates range from a low of 70 percent in 2000 to a high of 82 in 1993. The sample is designed to cover the adult (18 years of age or older) household population of the United States. Those living in institutional settings, such as college dormitories, prisons, and military quarters, are outside the sampling frame. According to GSS documentation, only about 2.7 percent of the adult population, as of 1985, was excluded because of that restriction (Davis and Smith 2007:2096). Each survey is a separate sample, and contains overlapping participants only by chance, not design. The design thus permits an examination of broad trends over time in thought and action rather than an assessment of how particular individuals remain stable or change over time. The cumulative survey file contains responses from 51,020 respondents and represents the largest and most sustained survey effort of its kind in the United States.

While the sampling principles and practices used in the GSS are too detailed and complex to convey in a simple summary (for details see Davis and Smith 2007), three features of the survey are particularly notable. First, the GSS has made primary use of a full probability sample since 1977. The early surveys, from 1972 until 1974, employed a modified probability sample that used a non-probability "quota" approach at the block level. A consideration of the 1975 and

1976 transitional surveys, which contained both probability and non-probability sub-samples, suggests that the change to an admittedly superior, full-probability, design did not substantially alter trend patterns (Stephenson 1979). Analyses of long trend patterns, from the inception of the GSS until the most recent survey, are thus valid.

Second, the full-probability samples are designed to give each household in a sampled area (the primary sampling is on areas, not individuals) an equal chance of being selected for participation in the survey. Given that only one respondent is included from each household, the survey randomly chooses that participant, but thereby makes those in large households less likely to be included in the survey. For that reason, along with considerations of non-response in survey years 2004 and 2006, the GSS recommends use of a sampling weight (dubbed WTSSALL) for studies that aim to generalize to adults living in households in the United States (Davis and Smith 2007:2110). That weight, rescaled so that it did not alter the sample size from the number of actual respondents, was used throughout the analyses that follow.

Third, the presence of Latinos in the GSS has, until recently, been unclear. Until the most recent survey in 2006, all interviews were conducted in English, thus limiting participation by those who are uncomfortable with English or who grasp it poorly. Furthermore, until the 2000 survey, no effort was made to inquire as to which respondents identified as Latino. Prior to 2000, then, it is extremely difficult to identify this ethnic subgroup, and efforts to do so on the basis of "country of origin" questions yield few cases and questionable results because they represent only those born outside of the United States (e.g., Weaver 2003a). In light of those limitations in the data, my consideration of Latinos begins with the 2000 survey and includes evidence from that year, 2002, 2004, and 2006. I recognize, however, that the language

limitation in every year except for 2006 means that the evidence falls short of being ideal and that the results will be more nearly exploratory than conclusive.

The specific variables used in the analyses to follow are listed and described in Table 1. My effort to replicate as much as possible the earlier analyses of Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998) guided my choice of both dependent and independent variables. Four of the six dependent variables used in those earlier analyses remained among the core questions in recent waves of the GSS: marital happiness, overall happiness, self-assessed health status, and trust. These variables are described in rows 1 through 4 of Table 1. The first three, which are single-item variables, are measured exactly as they had been in the two papers by Thomas and Hughes. The latter variable is an index, created by summing responses to three indicator variables about helpfulness, trust, and fairness. Consistent with Thomas and Hughes (1986), I code this so that higher values mean a more trusting posture. In their more recent analysis, Hughes and Thomas (1998) reverse-coded the index so that higher levels indicated more mistrust. I retain the original coding and note that these decisions are merely stylistic and will have no effect on the results other than to switch the signs of coefficients (but not their values).

The remaining dependent variables differ from those in the earlier analyses of Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998) in two main ways. First, I was unable to include variables that measured anomia (a three-item index) and satisfaction with various domains of life (a five-item index which included family, friendships, non-working activities, the city or place in which the respondent lived, and health and physical condition). The GSS dropped these variables as of 1994, two years prior to the end-point in the trend analyses presented in Hughes and Thomas (1998). Second, I compensate for that loss and elaborate the

earlier analyses of Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998) by including two measures of the quality of life that bear on financial conditions. The first, found in row 5 of Table 1, assesses how respondents view change in their financial situation over the past few years. Respondents are asked to summarize their financial situation and note if it has been getting worse, better, or if it has stayed the same. A second measure (described in row 6 of Table 1) probes how satisfied respondents are with their present financial situation. Together, these two variables add what I believe is an important new dimension – perceptions of change in, and satisfaction with, financial situations – into the consideration of race, ethnicity, and the quality of life in America.

It is important to note several coding conventions and transformations of the dependent variables. With respect to coding conventions, I coded every quality-of-life measure so that higher values indicated "more" or "better" states, conventionally understood. On the two happiness measures (marital and overall), higher levels thus mean greater happiness. For health status and the trust index, higher levels mean better health or a more trusting outlook. Likewise, the two financial-situation measures are coded so that higher values mean change "for the better" and "more satisfaction." What this means is that positive slopes in the models that follow indicate that a unit increase in the independent variable improves, to at least some extent, the quality of life. With respect to transformations, I embraced those used in the earlier analyses of Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998). In an effort to create comparable metrics across the various quality-of-life measures, and hence ease interpretation, every measure was transformed so that it had a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 10 in each regression analysis after the listwise deletion of missing data. These transformations merely rescale coefficients; the relative magnitudes of effects, significance levels, and the general pattern of

results are not altered by these scale transformations. The coding, however, is switched back to the original format provided in Table 1 when I employ ordinal models to explore the stability of the results produced by the regression analyses.

Independent variables are described in rows 7 through 15 of Table 1. As with the dependent variables, I strove to replicate the earlier analyses of Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998), and thus include their control variables with only a few minor alterations. Education (row 8), employment status (row 9), marital status (row 10), and age (row 11) perfectly replicate variables used in those earlier studies. The measure of family income (row 7) differs only in that I use a measure that has been adjusted across survey years to constant dollars (the base is 1986), a measure that is better and more meaningful than the unadjusted yearly values for family income used in Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998). One new variable, not controlled in those earlier studies, is gender, a variable that plays a role in so many aspects of social life that it merits inclusion in the analysis. Hughes and Thomas (1998:788) argued that gender "does not influence the findings," a pattern that I confirmed as well (its presence does not, in any analysis, alter the main results). These control variables, per the logic used by Hughes and Thomas (1998), were centered after the deletion of missing data so that they had means of zero.

Two final sets of variables include measures of the year in which the survey was conducted along with measures of race and Latino status. Trends over time, along with possible interactions between time and race, are of course the primary foci of the analysis. In the earlier analyses of Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998), time was measured by an additive term for the year the survey was conducted and then the square and cube of year in order to account for nonlinear temporal patterns. Each of those terms was multiplied by race to

explore how the effect of race might have changed over time. With more years of data in hand, I was able to adopt a different measurement strategy, one which accommodates possible nonlinearities and interactions but eases greatly the interpretational challenges posed by the use of additive, squared, and cubed terms for year along with their multiplicative interactions with race. I used a set of dummy variables that distinguish the 1970s (the omitted or reference category) from the 1980s, the 1990s, and then the 2000s. Given the substantial sample sizes for the surveys in the 2000s (typically around 4,000 cases), and the fact that only 2008 will be added to the decade I call "2000s," this last decade is more complete in terms of data than it might seem at first glance. The ease of interpreting dummy variables, both as additive effects and as interactions between race and decade, together with their ability to capture complex nonlinear patterns, make them a reasonable choice. While admittedly somewhat arbitrary, the use of decades rather than other categorizations of time (such as finer year groupings) has little effect on the main patterns presented here (a finding confirmed in exploratory analyses).

The measurement of race and ethnicity depend upon the analysis they enter. In the main analysis that extends and elaborates the earlier analyses of Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998) to include the full range of years from 1972 to 2006, race is measured by the simple dichotomy of "black" versus "white" (the omitted category). I omitted respondents who were coded as "other race" by the GSS from this main analysis in order to replicate those earlier studies. In addition, no measure of Latino status is used in that main analysis because it is not available until 2000. In the second, more exploratory analysis of the effect of both race and Latino status on the quality of life, I draw upon data from 2000 to 2006 and include a three-category measure of race, which includes categories for "black" and "other race" (white is again the omitted category). Latino status is measured by a simple dummy

variable based on a question that asked respondents if they identified themselves as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino/a (see row 14 in Table 1). In this latter analysis, I also consider interactions between Latino status and race given that they are distinctive concepts and may well have nonlinear effects on the quality-of-life measures. Unfortunately, there are too few cases in non-Mexican subtypes of the Latino measure to effectively explore within-Latino variation. I am thus left to consider a type of "pan ethnicity" wherein various Latin American ethnic groups and a mix of Spanish and Portuguese are collectivized as "Latinos."

4. STATISTICAL METHODS

The analysis draws upon a mix of common and relatively innovative statistical approaches. One approach that is common is the use of listwise deletion for all analyses. In 1988, the GSS began to include many trend questions (like the quality-of-life measures) on random subsets rather than the entire sample. That practice produces a substantial amount of missing data, but a pattern whereby the data can confidently be seen as "missing completely at random" per the terminology of the missing-data literature (Allison 2001). Data that is missing completely at random does not bias regression results (Allison 2001). A good example of that practice can be found in Table 2, which provides information on patterns of missing data for the full trend analysis, 1972 - 2006. For two quality-of-life measures, health and trust, fully 16.6 and 29.5 percent of respondents, respectively, were not asked about those issues (see column 1 in Table 2 for each of those measures). Patterns of missing data that do not derive from skip patterns on the dependent variables are shown in column 2 for each of the quality-of-life measures. The measure of family income has the largest amount of missing data, typically just short of 10 percent in each analysis. Recent developments for handling missing data, such as "multiple imputation," are not yet compatible with the ordinal models used in the analysis and are not used here (Royston 2004, 2005).

A second common statistical approach is the use of ordinary least squares regression, the analytic approach used in the earlier analyses of Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998). I use this in part to replicate and extend those analyses. It is also, in my view (see also Ferrer-i-Carbonel and Frijters 2004), the most commonly-used statistical method for

ordinal dependent variables, despite the obvious flaws involved in using a means-based logic on variables that do not readily lend themselves to such calculations. I make use of and report unstandardized regression slopes, R^2 values, and F ratios, all common to regression analyses. I use standard regression in both main sections of the analysis: the trend analysis, which uses the complete 1972 - 2006 data, and then the more exploratory 2000 - 2006 consideration of both race and Latino status.

Less standard aspects of the analysis include the use of robust standard errors and partial proportional odds models. The use of a sample weight makes conventional formulas for standard errors – the central component of significance tests on slopes – inappropriate (Winship and Radbill 1994). It also tends to deflate the true magnitude of the standard errors and hence artificially increase the likelihood of detecting statistically-significant slopes. Robust standard errors, also known as Huber, White, or sandwich standard errors, are better – and more conservative – estimates (see Long and Freese 2006:86-87 and Arminger 1995 for more details and discussion). In exploratory analyses that compared regular and robust standard errors, the latter values were consistently larger, thus providing more conservative (and I hope more accurate) tests of statistical significance.

A second relatively unconventional aspect of the analysis is the use of partial proportional odds models. I use these models to examine the extent to which the main story line of the regression analysis can be viewed as an artifact of an inappropriate statistical method. These models, described in Williams (2006) and O'Connell (2006), represent a major advance over standard ordinal regression or "proportional odds" models, long considered the technically-appropriate way to obtain regression-like results with ordinal dependent variables (for an overview, see Long and Freese 2006:183-220). I make use of software developed and described

by Williams (2006) to estimate these models; software developed by Long and Freese (2006) draws upon those results to produce predicted probabilities for each level of the ordinal dependent variables based on specified levels of the independent variables. All analyses were conducted using Stata 10 statistical software.

5. RESULTS

The results are presented in two subsections. The first contains the analysis of race differences in the quality of life and draws upon the entire span of evidence, 1972 - 2006. The second considers only the most recent data, 2000 - 2006, in an effort to explore the impact of Latino self-identification on the quality of life.

Results of the Race-Difference Analyses: 1972 - 2006

Tables 3 and 4 present the standard regression results for the six quality-of-life measures. Table 3 contains the results for martial happiness, overall happiness, and self-assessed health status, while Table 4 contains results for the trust index, change in financial situation, and satisfaction with financial situation. For each quality-of-life measure, three models are estimated. The first is essentially a zero-order model, including only race and year dummies. The second is the full model and includes the class measures and other control variables. A comparison of the slopes on race in the first and second models is important to a logic used by Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998). Given that most of the variables added in the second model are related to the idea of "social class," that comparison allows me to determine how much of the overall race difference found in model 1 can be attributed to the shared covariation between race and class. If the reduction is substantial, then much of the overall race effect can be seen as due to class, a pattern that would indicate that class, not race, is most closely related to quality of life. The third and final model allows year to interact with race.

That analysis permits an assessment of how race differences in the quality of life have changed over the four decades considered in the study. An F ratio, presented in the penultimate row of the table, allows me to determine if that interaction model, as a whole, fits the data better than the full additive model. A significant F ratio indicates that the fit is improved and that there is evidence that the race effect varies over the decades.

The results are clear and consistent across each zero-order model (columns 1, 4, and 7) in Tables 3 and 4. Every analysis shows that blacks have a significantly lower quality of life than whites. The smallest effect, -1.435, is for the change-in-financial-situation measure (model 4 of Table 4), while the effect with the largest magnitude, -6.791, is for the trust index (model 1, Table 4). Three of the race effects are in the -3 range (marital happiness, overall happiness, and satisfaction with financial situation) with a fourth (self-assessed health status) at -2.6. These effects, quite comparable with those identified in Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998), point to the conclusion that there are substantial and consistent race differences in virtually every measure of the quality of life. Every race slope is significant at the $p<.001$ level or below.

Models 2, 5, and 8 in Tables 3 and 4 introduce the control variables for class and several demographic traits. In each case, there is a reduction in the race effect, but in no case is the effect reduced to statistical insignificance. The percent reductions for the six quality-of-life measures, in the order they are presented in Tables 3 and 4, are as follows: 8, 37, 44, 25, 72, and 41. Quite clearly, race prevails over class when it comes to marital happiness and trust, which are reduced by only 8 and 25 percent, respectively, when class is controlled. It is also true that the race effect is in fact reduced dramatically by class when I consider the change-in-financial-situation measure. That, in my view, makes sense, as the more objective measures of class

should have substantial effects on that perception of financial change. Overall, more than half of the race effect remains after controlling for class on five of the six quality-of-life measures. It is thus fair to say that race has a continued significance for quality of life even after controlling for class and, importantly, several key demographic traits. For most of the quality-of-life measures, class clearly matters, a pattern evident in the typically large and statistically-significant slopes on family income, education, and employment status. That class effect, however, neither overshadows nor overwhelms the continuing and independent role of race in shaping the quality of life.

The third model for each quality-of-life measure (models 3, 6, and 9) in Tables 3 and 4 explores the interaction of race and time. For all but the analysis of satisfaction with financial situation (models 7 - 9 of Table 4), the F ratio that compares the fit of the full and interaction models provides evidence that the interaction model fits the data better. There is thus general support for the idea that race differences in quality of life have changed over the decades. Tables 3 and 4 provide the full results of those models, but they are unfortunately difficult to read and interpret, as slopes need to be added together to figure out the race differences in each decade. Table 5 presents those same results in a simplified, and much easier-to-read, format. Note that the interaction model, as formulated in Table 4 (with the multiplicative interaction terms), is technically identical to one in which seven dummy variables, one for whites and blacks for each of the four decades, is contrasted against an omitted category (whites in the 1970s). Those seven included dummies provide the same information – but without the need to add slopes together – as the seven terms for race and year in the interaction models (3, 6, and 9) in Tables 3 and 4. But they are easier to read and facilitate valuable significance tests that allow for the assessment of differences across both decades (indicated by the superscripted "d" next to a

coefficient) and race (indicated by the superscripted "r" next to a coefficient). Race- and decade-specific tests of significance were estimated with the post-estimation "test" command in Stata 10 (Long and Freese 2006).

The overall results of Table 5 suggest that time has tempered racial differences in the quality of life. Four of the six quality-of-life measures – marital and overall happiness, trust, and change in financial situations – show that the racial gap has been significantly reduced from the 1970s to the 2000s. That "base difference" between the 1970s and the 2000s is indicated in Table 5 by a superscripted "b." Decade-by-decade changes in the racial gap, however, are only occasionally significant, as is evident in the one quality-of-life measure – overall happiness – that shows a consistently narrowing racial gap over time. For that quality-of-life measure, a gap of 3.145 points in the 1970s is reduced in the 2000s to a much smaller, though still significant, gap of .836, a 73 percent reduction. However, only the change from a gap of 2.017 in the 1990s to a gap of .836 in the 2000s is sizable enough to be statistically significant. The results for martial happiness show that the race gap diminished from the 1970s to the 1980s, bumped back up again in the 1990s, only to plummet in the 2000s to a level 53 percent lower than the gap in the 1970s. The trust index shows a minor increase in the race gap from the 1970s to the 1980s but then a steady and substantial falloff that produces a total drop of about 34 percent from the 1970s to the 2000s.

The results for the two financial-situation measures show distinctive patterns. The change-in-situation measure shows that a disadvantage for blacks in the 1970s and 1980s became an advantage in subsequent decades. In the two most recent decades, blacks are more likely than whites, on the average, to believe that their financial situations are improving. That racial advantage for blacks, however, is not significant at the .05 level, but it suggests the complete

disappearance of what had been a significant disadvantage in the 1970s and 1980s. The satisfaction-with-finances measure indicates another distinctive pattern: a slight widening of the gap between blacks and whites. This is the only quality-of-life measure to suggest that pattern. Overall, the prevailing pattern indicates the declining significance of race for the quality of life, a pattern present for five of the six measures. Importantly, however, those gaps still represent significant statistical differences. The analysis thus points to the declining – but still discernable – significance of race for the quality of life.

Several different trends underlie the declining significance of race. In some cases, the black-white gap diminishes because of black gains. Overall happiness is the clearest expression of this pattern because the reduction in that gap is almost entirely due to black gains. In other cases, white losses in quality of life paired with either relative stability or less notable losses by blacks combine to produce a smaller race gap. Examples of this are martial happiness, where small gains by blacks and losses by whites serve to cut the gap in half. The trust index shows how a large gap in the 1970s between blacks and whites is reduced over time even in the face of *worsening* conditions among blacks. It does so because whites experience a substantial decline in trust, a decline that serves to narrow the black-white gap in the 1990s and 2000s. Despite variation in the detailed patterns across the specific quality-of-life measures, the basic pattern is clear: the race gap in the quality of life has been diminished in part because of white losses rather than black gains. That pattern, in my view, should dampen enthusiasm for what could otherwise be encouraging news about the declining significance of race. Race is, in fact, declining in significance, but it strikes me that staying about the same – or losing less than another group – is not quite the same as gaining ground.

Table 6 presents the final results of my consideration of race differences over the period from 1972 - 2006. The table provides race- and decade-specific predicted probabilities from the partial proportional odds models for each level of each quality-of-life measure. In the detailed results (not presented), all models failed the global parallel-lines assumption, thus meaning that the final models include a mix of slopes that are constrained (equal across thresholds) and unconstrained (allowed to vary across thresholds). Of particular interest was the failure of the slope on the race dummy in the zero-order models with respect to the parallel-lines assumption. That failure was evident in all but the health status and financial satisfaction models. The results thus suggest that a rather complicated ordinal model – the partial proportional odds model – is required to fit the data properly and avoid the violation of key model assumptions.

My primary interest in these results can be stated easily: do the basic patterns yielded by the ordinal models corroborate or challenge main patterns from the technically-inappropriate – but user-friendly and often-used – ordinary least squares regressions? My conclusion is that the results look very much the same and thus serve to strengthen my confidence in the basic patterns. For example, overall happiness had one of the strongest patterns in the regression results: a marked improvement for blacks, a trivial decline for whites, and thus a substantial reduction in the race gap over time. The pattern of predicted probabilities shows an improvement for blacks, with probabilities of being "very happy" increasing from .22 in the 1970s to .30 in the 2000s. Whites, in both the 1970s and 2000s, were about equally likely to be "very happy" (.33 and .32, respectively). The mirror image of that pattern is that blacks became less likely to be "not too happy" over time, from .16 in the 1970s to .11 in the 2000s, while whites remained relatively stable in that regard (.09 in the 1970s to .10 in the 2000s). Summed up, the story is one of a notable improvement for blacks, relatively stable patterns for whites, and thus trivial race

differences during the 2000s. One difference, however, is that the race effect in the 2000s is no longer statistically significant in the ordinal model ($p = .09$), whereas it remains significant ($p = .03$) in the regression model.

Other patterns in the table also serve to corroborate the regression results. The results for trust in the regression analyses showed a decline in the race gap only because white trust eroded even faster than black trust over the decades. A slower decline for blacks, relative to whites, thus produced a smaller race gap. The ordinal results, once again, show exactly the same pattern. For the sake of simplicity, the predicted probabilities for trust are presented in three groups rather than for the full seven-point scale. What the probabilities show is a strong pattern whereby trust diminishes over time for both blacks and whites. Whites, for example, had a predicted probability of .36 of being in the highest trust category in the 1970s. By the 2000s, that value fell to .22. Black trust declined for that highest level as well, from .16 in the 1970s to .09 in the 2000s. But the overall pattern involves greater losses for whites, which by the 2000s had cut the overall trust differences from .20 on each end of the scale to .13. The race gap, in both the ordinal and regression analyses, closes because of greater white losses, not black gains.

Results of the Race and Ethnicity Analyses: 2000 - 2006

The second prong of the analysis aims to become both more inclusive and more exploratory. Those of "other races" were excluded in the first phase of the analysis, reported above, because that had been done in the earlier analyses of Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998), which I aimed to extend and elaborate. In addition, information on Latino self-identification was not available in the GSS until the 2000 survey. I thus make use of

the most recent decade of data to explore how race, measured now as black and "other race" versus white (the omitted category), and Latino status shape responses to the quality-of-life measures. Latinos fell overwhelmingly into the "white" and "other race" categories. For example, of the 7,844 cases in the health-status analysis (Table 7), 841, or 11 percent, identify as Latino. Latinos, in turn, identify as white, black, or other race in these percentages: 39.6, 2.8, and 57.6. The same racial breakdown for non-Latinos is 81.7, 13.9, and 4.4. Overall, about 77 percent of the sample is white, 13 percent is black, and 10 percent is of some other race.

Tables 7 and 8 contain the regression results. The first model for each quality-of-life analysis is once again a zero-order model, including only the dummy for Latino status along with the two race dummies, one for black and one for those of some other, non-white race. In the second model, I add controls for class and several demographic variables. The third and final model for each quality-of-life measure considers the interaction of race and Latino status. Note that the full interaction model has been simplified in that I collapsed Latino and non-Latino dummies for blacks into a single "black" dummy because of concerns about the very small number black Latino cases (around 30 in most analyses). That simplification had no effect on the other results. All race-ethnicity dummies are contrasted against whites who do not identify as Latino.

The focus here is less on black-white differences, the main contrast in the first prong of the analysis, above, and more on what is gained by including the "other race" cases and information about Latino self-identification. In short, what is gained by being more inclusive with respect to race and more nuanced with respect to Latino identification? Starting first with the inclusion of "other race" cases, the results show a significant coefficient on that dummy variable for four of the six quality-of-life measures. The distinction appears to have no bearing

on the two financial-situation measures in Table 8. Whites and "other race" participants thus appear to have distinctive levels with respect to most quality-of-life measures. Moreover, the pattern is clear and consistent: those in the other-race category have a lower quality of life than whites.

The lower quality of life evident for those of other races makes them appear, in at least some analyses, to resemble blacks. I thus conducted a series of tests to determine the significance of the difference between the slopes for blacks and those in the other-race category. For martial and overall happiness, no such differences are significant at the .05 level, which leads to the conclusion that the primary distinction is between whites and non-whites. But for the four other quality-of-life measures, significant differences are the norm rather than the exception. For example, the black and other-race dummies differ significantly in model 8 of Table 7 and models 1, 2, 4, 7, and 8 of Table 8. When the two effects differ significantly, the typical pattern is for the other-race effect to be weaker than the black effect, thus suggesting that quality-of-life differences with whites are less pronounced for those of other races than for blacks. In some cases, the differences are fairly large. In the trust models, for example (Table 8, models 1 and 2), the other-race effects are less than half the magnitude of those for blacks. The black-white difference is clearly more prominent than the distinction between whites and those in the diffuse other-race category.

The indicator for Latino self identification shows a mixed but rather weak pattern of results. For four of the six quality-of-life measures, it displays a statistically significant and modest (e.g., model 7, Table 7) to fairly strong effect (e.g., model 4, Table 7, and model 1, Table 8) in the zero-order models. The general pattern is that Latinos have a lower quality of life than non-Latinos. But in only two of those four models – overall happiness and trust – does the

Latino effect persist after the controls for class and demographic traits are introduced. In the trust results, the Latino effect is only about 40 percent as large as the black effect, and the difference is significant at the .01 level. The overall happiness effect for Latinos is statistically indistinguishable from that for blacks, although it appears to be slightly stronger. Overall, the results thus far suggest that Latinos are not particularly distinctive with respect to the quality-of-life measures.

Potential interactions between race and Latino self-identification are considered in models 3, 6, and 9 in Tables 7 and 8. Each included dummy is contrasted against white, non-Latinos, a strategy that is technically equivalent to using the three additive variables in the "full" model (2, 5, and 8 in each table) along with the multiplicative term formed by taking the product of the other-race dummy and the Latino indicator. A first and key piece of information is the F ratio for the R^2 change, a statistic found near the bottom of each table. Fully five of the six analyses fail to yield significant F ratios and thus suggest that the interaction model provides little-to-no advantage over the additive model. A different conclusion is reached in the analysis of health status. Despite the nearly null and highly insignificant additive effect for Latinos in the health-status model (model 8, Table 7), Latino status would appear to condition the effect of race. Non-Latinos in the other-race category appear to be worse off than their peers who self-identify as Latino (e.g., -2.736 vs. -1.155). That difference, however, does not quite reach a conventional level of statistical significance (p=.06).

My overall conclusion about the interaction results is that they add little to the additive models. Latino self-identification does not have a large or consistent effect upon the quality-of-life measures. That weakness is not produced by a more complex pattern of interactions. Latino self-identification would thus appear to have little bearing on how race shapes the quality of life.

A final analysis took seriously the ordinal measurement of the quality-of-life measures and made use of the partial proportional odds models, described above, and used in the first prong of the analysis. As before, my aim is to assess the stability of the results. Are the regression results robust and credible? Thus far, the story for the second prong of the analysis has two main themes. First, when differences are significant, those in the "other race" category tend to fall between whites and blacks with respect to the quality-of-life measures. And second, Latinos are not particularly distinctive with respect to most quality-of-life measures. My conclusion from the ordinal models is that they convey quite similar patterns and thus support the regression results. Given that coefficients in regression and ordinal models are not easily compared, I prepared, as before, a table of predicted probabilities for the five race-ethnicity groups. Table 9 contains those probabilities from interaction models that are specified in the same way as models 3, 6, and 9 in Tables 7 and 8.

Comparisons between the slopes in Tables 7 and 8 and the probabilities in Table 9 suggest substantial convergence. For example, consider the results for heath status, the one quality-of-life measure to show evidence that race interacted with Latino status. The negative, though insignificant, slope on "white Latino" in the regression analysis suggests that whites who also identify as Latino have slightly lower health-status ratings. The probabilities in Table 9 show exactly that pattern: compared to their non-Latino counterparts, fewer white Latinos claim "excellent" health (.25 vs. .30) and more claim "fair" health (.19 vs. .16). Likewise, the large and nearly-significant difference between "other race" Latinos and non-Latinos in the regression analysis in Table 7 (model 9) is mirrored in the probabilities from the ordinal model. The probabilities show "other race, non-Latinos" to have the highest concentration of "poor" (.04) and "fair" (.24) health statuses of any group and the lowest concentration of those with

"excellent" (.19) health. Latinos in the other-race category fair better in comparison to their non-Latino peers and, moreover, look much like white Latinos, a pattern also suggested by the slopes in the regression model. Other detailed comparisons show the same pattern of convergence in the results of the regression and ordinal models. As with the first prong of the analysis, my conclusion is that the regression results have proven to be quite robust. In this case, methods matter very little in shaping the main pattern of results.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

My goals were to extend and elaborate an important thread of research on ascription and the quality of life begun in the 1980s by Thomas and Hughes (1986) and revisited in the 1990s by Hughes and Thomas (1998). I extended it by revisiting the issues with another decade of data that ran through 2006. I elaborated those earlier studies by including two subjective assessments of financial well being, by exploring how the quality of life may depend upon Latino self-identification and membership in a racial group other than "black" and "white," and through my consideration of an alternative method of analysis, the partial proportional odds model. In this final section, I first revisit the results, discuss them in broader terms, draw some conclusions, and then turn to some significant limitations of the argument and analysis.

An Overview of the Main Findings

Six main findings are particularly important and merit additional discussion: (1) the overall black-white gap in the quality of life, (2) the role of social class, (3) change over time, (4) new measures of financial well-being, (5) methodological concerns, and (6) the impact of Latino self-identification. I consider each in turn.

The overall black-white gap in the quality of life. Consistent with previous research, the results show that blacks assess their general quality of life more negatively than whites (Thomas and Hughes 1986; Hughes and Thomas 1998; Bracy 1976; Campbell 1981; Austin and Dodge 1992; Thomas and Holmes 1992). Importantly, that racial gap persists with the introduction of

controls for social class and demographic traits. The overall size of the gap ranges from small, as indicated by the change-in-financial-situation measure, to notable, as evident in the measure of trust. The magnitude of the five point black-white gap in trust needs to be understood in light of the variable's mean of 100 and standard deviation of 10. In my view, a gap of five percent, or half a standard deviation, is notable, but certainly pales in comparison with many differences in *objective* quality-of-life measures like household net worth, home ownership rates, median household income, age-adjusted death rates, and so forth (Arthur 2005:48). Subjective measures of the quality of life thus appear to converge more than objective measures for blacks and whites. It is nonetheless correct to say that there is a continuing significance of race for the subjective quality of life in America. That overall conclusion squares well with the earlier studies of Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998).

The role of social class. In recent years, the race-versus-class debate, initiated in large part by Wilson (1978), has made researchers question whether race shapes experiences and outcomes in a way that is independent of social class. In short, is it really race that drives some social pattern, or is it social class? Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998) saw one main thrust of their analysis as an extension of that debate to the realm of subjective measures of the quality of life. When controlling for social class, some research does *not* demonstrate that blacks are worse off than whites on other quality-of-life measures such as mental health outcomes (Kessler, McGonagle, Zhao, Nelson, Hughes, Eshleman, Wittchen, and Kendler 1994; Warner, Kessler, Hughes, Anthony, and Nelson 1995; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1996) and some measures of eudiamonic well-being like self-esteem (Hughes and Demo 1989; Cross 1991). However, I corroborate the findings in Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998) that race plays an important and *independent*

role in shaping "life chances" when that broad concept is interpreted to include subjective measures of the quality of life. My results support the conclusion that the effect of race cannot be seen as wholly or even largely due to differences in class standing for blacks and whites. In short, class matters, but race does too.

Trends over time. Hughes and Thomas (1998) argued that black-white gaps in the quality of life had either remained constant or narrowed slightly from the early 1970s until the mid-1990s. One main purpose of my analysis was to examine what had happened to those trends since the mid-1990s. Enduring patterns of inequality with respect to objective measures of the quality of life, together with an ideological shift to the political right since the mid-1990s, led me to anticipate a continued – if not greater – significance of race for the quality of life over the past decade. The results, however, do not support that general hypothesis. The prevailing pattern suggests a *declining but still discernable* significance of race for the quality of life, a pattern present for five of the six quality-of-life measures. In some cases, the black-white gap diminished almost entirely because of black gains, a pattern illustrated well by the results for overall happiness. In other cases, the gap diminished largely because of white losses, not black gains, a pattern evident in the results for martial happiness and trust. These more nuanced patterns over time lead to the conclusion that race is declining in significance in part because of white losses rather than black gains. Gaining ground relative to another group by *staying the same* or *losing less* is a form of social progress that I am reluctant to applaud.

Changes in the racial gap in the quality of life deserve more research attention. The distinctive patterns – black gains versus white losses – point to the likelihood of quite different mechanisms. Further study of overall happiness needs to focus on why blacks view things better now than in the past. Just as important, however, is a better understanding of why assessments

of the quality of life have eroded for whites over time. Unfortunately, the data I draw upon lacks information on what has emerged as a primary theoretical mechanism in shaping subjective perceptions of the quality of life: social comparisons. That shortcoming, however, is shared with virtually every large body of data with which I am familiar. Recent reviews (e.g., Diener et al. 1999; Sirgy et al. 2006) propose that assessments of the quality of life are constructed in a relative, not an absolute fashion, and thus hinge upon information one has about one's own circumstances, what holds for other individuals and groups, and, importantly, which individuals and groups are used for the purpose of comparison. What individuals, groups, and information become part of social comparisons are, at present, not well formulated or understood, a point I will return to and develop further in a subsequent section. I suspect, however, that rising levels of objective inequality in recent years might have prompted many whites to see themselves less favorably than in the past, a pattern that may well diminish how whites assess their quality of life. Why that pattern does not hold for blacks is unclear to me.

New measures of financial well-being. Many who have written about subjective measures of the quality of life have highlighted the salience of financial matters (e.g., Seed and Lloyd 1997; Bowling 2005; Sirgy 2002; Bramston et al. 2002; Diener et al. 1999). I extended the earlier studies of Hughes and Thomas by including measures of change in financial situations and satisfaction with financial situations. Those two measures added what I believe is an important dimension to the consideration of race, ethnicity, and the quality of life in America. The results showed divergent patterns. With respect to the change-in-situation measure, a disadvantage for blacks in the 1970s and 1980s disappeared entirely in 1990s and 2000s. Conversely, the satisfaction-with-finances measure is the only quality-of-life measure to suggest a *widening* of the gap between blacks and whites. This gap makes sense since financial

satisfaction may be negatively impacted by the belief that racial discrimination exists in the job market (Bendick 1997; Wilson 1996) and, in turn, by a sense of perceived injustice in the manner in which resources are distributed (Shepelak and Alwin 1986). Furthermore, considering the inevitable ups and downs of the economy, the relatively low levels of wealth accrued by blacks (Kochhar 2004) may not provide a sufficient safety net to ease financial uncertainty.

Taken together, the results are somewhat puzzling, as blacks, on average, see themselves as doing better financially at the same time that they are less satisfied with their financial situations. I am, unfortunately, in the position of being unable to interpret with confidence why such patterns would exist. What is important, however, is that a traditional dimension of the quality of life – satisfaction with the financial domain of life – that was overlooked in the earlier studies of Hughes and Thomas represents a form of discrepant evidence that needs to be explored more carefully in future research. In my view, racial gaps that widen are at least as important, if not more so, than those that show signs of narrowing.

Methodological concerns. Given the ordinal character of most measures of the subjective quality of life and the widespread use of ordinary least squares regression in previous research, I sought to examine the extent to which the main results were sensitive to methodological choices. I surmised that it was at least possible that the main storyline of the Hughes and Thomas studies – that race had a substantial and continuing significance for the quality of life in America – was little more than an artifact of an analytic technique ill-suited for the analysis of ordinal dependent variables. News of that sort would be quite consequential and unsettling because it would cast doubt upon vast quantities of research findings. The results, however, are comforting because the technically-appropriate partial proportional odds models provided strong and consistent corroboration for the regression results. No doubt, the ordinal

models have many conceptual and technical advantages over standard regression for quality-of-life variables of the sort considered here. I believe that they should be embraced by the quality-of-life research community. But they shed much the same light on the social processes explored here and thus offer little-to-no practical advantage over regular regression.

The impact of Latino self-identification and those of "other" races. The growing diversity of America demands that attention be paid to Latinos and other non-white sectors of American society. My consideration of Latinos suggested that there were good reasons to suspect that Latinos may well differ from whites and blacks with respect to the quality of life. I thus aimed to examine what, if anything, is gained by including the "other race" cases – excluded in the Hughes and Thomas studies, a pattern common in the literature – and information about Latino self-identification.

The results were largely weak. Whites and "other race" participants differ on most quality-of-life measures. The consistent pattern is that those in the other-race category have a lower quality of life than whites. The black-white difference, however, is more prominent than the distinction between whites and those in the diffuse other-race category. The indicator for Latino self identification showed that Latinos have a lower quality of life than non-Latinos. That difference, however, rarely remains when controls for class and demographic traits are introduced. That weakness is not produced by a more complex pattern of interactions because that possibility was explored as well and was found to be largely unimportant. All things considered, the impact of Latino-self identification is minimal on the quality of life.

Quality-of-life researchers should follow my lead and move beyond a dichotomous construction of race. Weaver (2003) has made some headway recently in his examinations of correlates of Mexican American happiness and the determinants of Mexican American trust

(2003b; 2006). Unfortunately, however, he excluded blacks and those in the diverse other-race category from the samples, and we thus have no idea how non-whites compare. It is increasingly important that researchers theorize quality-of-life concepts and processes with non-whites experiences in mind. For example, it would be prudent to investigate how levels of acculturation and assimilation impact the quality of life of Latinos. For example, there is evidence that acculturation diminishes Mexican American political trust (Michelson 2003) and that Mexican Americans born in the United States are unhealthier than those born in Mexico, patterns that persist when class is controlled (Crimmins, Kim, Alley, Karlamangla, and Seeman 2007). These findings point to mechanisms that may impact the broad quality of life of Latinos.

Limitations of the Study

My discussion has already hinted at a few limitations of this study. In this section, I note several issues that constrain the contribution of my study. Since those limitations are shared with most of the literature on the subjective quality of life, the discussion should have broader relevance to the quality-of-life research community. Three issues are probed: (1) the selection and conceptualization of independent and dependent variables; (2) the use of cross-sectional rather than longitudinal forms of evidence; and (3) theorizing about the social processes that produce assessments of the subjective quality of life.

Selection and conceptualization of independent and dependent variables. Recent reviews of the literature (Diener et al. 1999; Sirgy et al. 2006) emphasized a point that is painfully obvious to anyone who begins to read and mull the quality-of-life literature. In short, there is little-to-no consensus or consistency in the variables used across studies. Which dimensions of

the quality of life are included varies just as much as which variables are placed on the right side of the equation and considered "causal factors" in the process leading to subjective evaluations. That uncertainty and inconsistency carries over to measurement operations as well. Few concepts are measured consistently. Sirgy (2002:1-32) implicitly demonstrates a pattern of inconsistencies in his masterful review of conceptual issues (his chapter "Definitions and Distinctions") and measurement efforts (his chapter "Examples of Measures of Subjective Well Being"). In the chapter on measurement, Sirgy overviews no fewer than thirteen approaches to the measurement of the subjective quality of life. Quite importantly, those thirteen measurement strategies are presented as informative *examples*, not as an inventory of *all* approaches that have been used in the literature.

The literature's lack of consensus and consistency with respect to conceptualization, measurement, and model specification leave me uneasy about some of the choices that guide the study. Since my main aim was to extend and elaborate the formative studies by Thomas and Hughes (1986) and Hughes and Thomas (1998), I did not explore and evaluate determinants of the quality of life other than social class, race, age, gender, and marital status. I can imagine, for example, how a list of variables like the following might well be viewed as reasonable and important influences on the quality of life: levels and types of religiosity; political affiliations and beliefs; social integration; strength of familial ties; family size; neighborhood characteristics; sexual identity; disability status; and a host of personality and psychological indicators. The salience of those factors needs to be assessed. Like the independent variables, the dependent variables in my study were chosen to allow for an extension and elaboration of the Hughes and Thomas studies. As with the selection of independent variables, that decision brings a mix of benefits and burdens, a point I recognize clearly.

Model specifications in the literature also tend to be additive. Independent variables are thus typically constrained to have the same effects on the quality of life for different groups. In the analysis, I allowed year to interact with race – per the Hughes and Thomas specification – and then Latino status to interact with race, but I did not systematically explore or theorize other interactions. It is possible, for example, that social class interacts with race in such a way that the racial gap in the quality of life changes as one goes up the class hierarchy. In Hughes and Thomas (1998), they explored that possibility, but found no support for it. But that does not imply that support has not emerged over the past decade. These alternative specifications need more theoretical and empirical attention.

The use of cross-sectional rather than longitudinal forms of evidence. Even though I tracked changes in each dependent variable over four decades, each data-set year contains different respondents. This pooled cross-sectional data does not allow me to monitor circumstantial changes such as a respondent's affective state (e.g., depression), the experience of a significant life event (e.g, losing one's job), or the happenstance of a macro event that may impact an entire subgroup's quality of life (e.g., Hurricane Katrina). In my view, this is a key limitation of the study, but one that is shared with nearly all research on the quality of life.

The widespread use of cross-sectional rather than longitudinal designs imposes two main constraints. First, cross-sectional evidence sheds no light whatsoever on the long-standing debate over the extent to which assessments of the subjective quality of life are driven by state-like properties or trait-like properties (e.g., Sirgy 2002:15; Diener et al. 1999:279-280). Some argue that assessments of the quality of life have trait-like properties because they tend to be relatively stable over time and depend, in part, on enduring "traits" like personality. Others argue that assessments of the quality of life are state-like in that they respond to changes in

experience and social situations and hence depend upon circumstances or "states." In my view, those who argue that assessments of the subjective quality of life are "moderately stable" but also "appropriately sensitive to changing life circumstances" do so more on the basis of conviction and anecdote than compelling evidence (e.g., Frey and Stutzer 2002:32). A second, and related, limitation is that cross-sectional evidence cannot do much to untangle the sources of group differences like those between blacks and whites. Documenting a difference, as I have done here, is surely valuable, but it is another matter altogether to shed light on the mechanisms that produce those differences. Like other researchers, including Hughes and Thomas, I am unable to determine whether racial gaps in the quality of life spring from relatively stable *traits* or variable *states*. Cross-sectional evidence simply cannot answer those questions.

Theory matters. From a sociological standpoint, the quality-of-life literature is surprisingly devoid of theory building and testing. A common and consistent complaint in reviews of the quality-of-life literature by sociologists (Gerson 1976; Schuessler and Fisher 1985; Ferriss 2004) is a lack of theoretical development. Ferriss (2004), for example, suggests that the relatively atheoretical approach embraced by most quality-of-life studies may deter many sociologists from entering and contributing to the literature. In my view, two aspects of the theoretical base of the quality-of-life literature are particularly in need of further development: the conceptualization of the quality of life and then the process by which "states" shape evaluations.

Consider first the conceptualization of the subjective quality of life. Theoretical positions staked out recently by Hughes (2006) and Ryan and Deci (2001) call for more attention to meaning and less to affective states. Affective states like happiness and satisfaction have traditionally been, and remain, at the conceptual heart of quality-of-life studies. Those affective

notions are critical to the so-called "hedonic" perspective on subjective well being (e.g., Ryan and Deci 2001) and much past research, including the research by Hughes and Thomas that I extended and elaborated in this study. Hughes now argues that *purpose* in life and the *meaning* placed on activities and relationships may very well be the most important dimensions of the quality of life. Others, like Ryan and Deci (2001:146), decompose what Hughes refers to globally and somewhat loosely as meaning or purpose into aspects of what they call "human actualization": autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, mastery, and positive relatedness.

A few examples might help to establish this line of thought. Consider first the meaning an adult daughter derives from the care she provides to her elderly mother. Care work of that sort can be physically and emotionally exhausting, and it is hard to see how anyone would have a particularly positive affect – happiness or satisfaction – flow from care work. But in this case, a profound sense of meaning or what Ryan and Deci (2001:146) call "positive relatedness" might well overwhelm or moderate any negative affective states that are experienced. In other words, the daughter might not be *feeling* happy or even particularly satisfied, but as long as she derives *meaning* or *a sense of purpose* from her care activities she may well believe that she has a very good quality of life (for evidence on this see Marks, Lambert, and Choi 2002). In a like way, Hughes offers a familiar example by suggesting that few would associate positive affect with these two words: graduate school. Hughes (2006:618) argues that a lack of positive affect does not imply a low quality of life, but rather the need to explore "a range of complex meanings and purposes that people attach to organized purposeful actions such as graduate school."

I echo Hughes's call (2006:622) for more theoretical and empirical attention to the process and implications of "meaning making" for assessments of the quality of life.

Sociologists should explore the idea that a sense of purpose or life meaning – which results from engaging in relationships, social networks, and institutions – may significantly impact the quality of life. Meaning construction may be constrained by social structures (Hughes 2006; Hughes and Demo 1989) which, in turn, might well pattern group access to situations that enhance the perceived quality of life. With respect to race differences in the quality of life, meaning may be created by blacks that reflects the realities of their position in social structure. This life meaning may counterbalance the negative outcomes of racism and discrimination and even increase the quality of life.

A second limitation of the theoretical development of the quality-of-life literature centers on the social processes that generate assessments about the quality of life. As I noted in my review of the findings, I confirmed the continuing, although diminished, significance of race for the quality of life in America. By controlling for several plausible measures of social class, I am able to say that race has an effect on the quality of life that is largely *independent* of social class. We know, in short, what *does not* explain or produce the race effect – namely, social class. My analysis – like those of Thomas and Hughes (1986), Hughes and Thomas (1998) and virtually all other similar studies of race differences – fails to shed light on what actually generates observed race differences.

As I mentioned briefly in my review of the results, recent reviews of the quality-of-life literature (Diener et al. 1999; Sirgy et al. 2006) propose that assessments of the quality of life involve *social comparisons*. In short, we draw upon information about our own circumstances and those of other individuals and groups. Information is obviously important, but so also is the process of determining which individuals and groups are used for the purpose of comparison. That latter process is not, at present, well formulated or understood. My sense is that theoretical

development in this area can and should lean upon several well-established, and inter-related, sociological traditions: reference groups and relative deprivation.

Consider first the long tradition in sociology of the concept of "reference groups." As virtually every textbook in Introductory Sociology will say, a reference group is what we turn to in order to evaluate our own qualities, circumstances, attitudes, values, and behaviors (e.g., Thompson and Hickey 2005). Reference groups, in short, provide benchmarks and contrasts that are needed for us to assess and evaluate individual and group characteristics and standing. If quality-of-life assessments are fundamentally social comparisons, then it becomes an urgent matter to more fully theorize how both individuals and groups – like blacks, whites, and Latinos – establish and employ reference groups to form quality-of-life assessments. Empirical assessments of that sort of theorizing, however, would require data on social comparisons and reference groups, something that, like longitudinal evidence, is currently in very short supply.

A second, and related, theoretical tradition is the concept and analysis of "relative deprivation." As defined by Walker and Smith (2001), relative deprivation is the experience of being deprived of something that seems both attainable and deserved. Like social comparisons more broadly, it involves a process of obtaining information and making assessments that are relative rather than absolute and dynamic rather than static (Bayertz 1999). For example, a group that experiences improvements in political rights or economic opportunities – such as blacks following the broad Civil Rights Movement in the United States – may experience relative deprivation if rising expectations are not met sufficiently or social conditions hamper the attainment of aspirations. Traditionally, the concept of relative deprivation has been linked to political attitudes and participation in collective action and social movements (e.g., Gurr 1970), but it would appear to be of clear relevance to the study of subjective aspects of the quality of

life. In a way that parallels my comments about social comparison, I note that any effort to explore the relevance of relative deprivation for the quality of life would require new forms of evidence that currently do not exist. These directions, however, appear quite promising as a way to invigorate and advance the theoretical foundation of quality-of-life research.

In closing, I note that both Hughes (2006) and the classic study by Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976) concluded that the quality of life may be one of the most importance concepts in the social sciences. Since the quality of life includes a host of both objective and subjective indicators, it is difficult to disagree with that claim. In many ways, investigations into the quality of life are a way of gauging the human condition itself. If governments are concerned with creating the greatest happiness for the greatest number, it behooves them, social scientists, and social change agents to support and refine research on the quality of life.

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Table 1. Variable Names, Questions, Coding, and Years Evidence is Available.

Row	Name (GSS mnemonic)	Questions	Coding	Years Available
1.	Marital Happiness (hapmar)	Taking all things together, how would you describe your marriage?	1 = not too happy; 2 = pretty happy; 3 = very happy (reverse coded)	1973, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 1980, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 1990, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 2000, 02, 04, 06
2.	Overall Happiness (happy)	Taken all together, how would you say things are these days?	1 = not too happy; 2 = pretty happy; 3 = very happy (reverse coded)	1972, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 1980, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 1990, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 2000, 02, 04, 06
3.	Self-Assessed Health (health)	Would you say your own health is excellent, good, fair, or poor?	1 = poor; 2 = fair; 3 = good; 4 = excellent (reverse coded)	1972, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 1980, 82, 84, 85, 87, 88, 89, 1990, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 2000, 02, 04, 06
4.	Trust Index (summation of helpful, fair, trust)	Helpful: Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful, or that they are mostly just looking out for themselves? Trust: Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in life? Fair: Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair?	1 = just look out for themselves; 2 = depends; 3 = try to be helpful (coding order altered) 1 = can't be too careful; 2 = depends; 3 = most people can be trusted (coding order altered) 1 = would take advantage of you; 2 = depends; 3 = would try to be fair (coding order altered)	1972, 73, 75, 76, 78, 1980, 83, 84, 86, 87, 88, 89, 1990, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 2000, 02, 04, 06

5.	Change in Financial Status (finalter)	During the last few years, has your financial situation been getting better, worse, or has it stayed the same?	1 = worse; 2 = stayed the same; 3 = better (reverse coded)	1972, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 1980, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 1990, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 2000, 02, 04, 06
6.	Satisfaction with Financial Situation (satfin)	We are interested in how people are getting along financially these days. So far as you and your family are concerned, would you say that you are pretty well satisfied with your present financial situation, more or less satisfied, or not satisfied at all?	1 = not satisfied at all; 2 = more or less satisfied; 3 = pretty well satisfied (reverse coded)	1972, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 1980, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 1990, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 2000, 02, 04, 06
7.	Real Family Income (realinc)	family income adjusted for inflation (ordinal categories recoded to dollar mid-points prior to adjustments)		1972, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 1980, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 1990, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 2000, 02, 04, 06
8.	Education (educ)	Years of schooling completed.	0 - 20 (maximum value)	1972, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 1980, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 1990, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 2000, 02, 04, 06
9.	Employed (wrkstat)	The week prior to the interview, the respondent was working full time, part time, or with a job but not at work because of temporary illness, vacation, or a strike.	0 = no; 1 = yes	1972, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 1980, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 1990, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 2000, 02, 04, 06
10.	Married (marital)	Respondent is currently married.	0 = no; 1 = yes	1972, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 1980, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 1990, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 2000, 02, 04, 06
11.	Age (age)	Age of the respondent.		1972, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 1980, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 1990, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 2000, 02, 04, 06

12.	Female (sex)	Respondent is female.	0 = no; 1 = yes	1972, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 1980, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 1990, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 2000, 02, 04, 06
13.	Year Groups (year)	Dummy variables for survey years: 1970s as reference with included dummies for the 1980s, 1990s, and the 2000s.	0 = not in year range; 1 = in year range	1972, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 1980, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 1990, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 2000, 02, 04, 06
14.	Latino (hispanic)	Are you Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino/Latina?	0 = no; 1 = yes	2000, 02, 04, 06
15.	Racial Groups (race)	Dummy variables for black and "other race" respondents (white as reference).	0 = not in racial group; 1 = in racial group	1972, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 1980, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 1990, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 2000, 02, 04, 06

Table 2. Missing Data for the Quality of Life Measures and the Independent Variables: General Social Surveys, 1972 to 2006.

	Marital Happiness		Overall Happiness		Self-Assessed Health		Trust Index		Change in Financial Situation		Satisfaction with Financial Situation	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Skip-Induced Missing on the Dependent Variable	49.8%		8.2%		16.6%		29.5%		8.2%		8.2%	
Other Missing Data on the Dependent Variable		.7%		.7%		.3%		1.8%		.7%		.4%
Race		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%
Family Income		8.6%		9.8%		9.9%		9.6%		9.8%		9.8%
Education		.2%		.3%		.3%		.3%		.3%		.3%
Employed		*		*		*		*		*		*
Married		*		*		*		*		*		*
Age		.2%		.4%		.4%		.3%		.4%		.4%
Female		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%
Maximum N	47188	23696	48797	44794	44267	36935	42482	29958	48797	44794	48797	44794
Listwise N	23696	21504	44794	40047	36935	33103	29958	26564	44794	40086	44794	40200

Notes: Except for the final two rows, entries indicate the percentage of the "Maximum N". The first column for each dependent variable indicates the percentage of data that is missing due to (a) the split ballot survey design wherein only random subsets of respondents are asked the question or (b) another skip-type logic. For example, column 1 for marital happiness shows that 23,696 of 47,188 respondents were asked about their marital happiness due to skip logics (primarily the fact that the question is not asked of those not currently married). 49.8% of the "Maximum N" for that analysis is thus deleted because of the skip logic. Column 2 for marital happiness indicates the percentage of cases with missing information of the 23,696 who were asked about martial happiness. Asterisks for "employed" and "married" mean that fewer than .01% of cases are missing, but that there is some missing data (ranging from a low of 2 cases to a high of 11).

Table 3. Unstandardized Coefficients from the Regression of Marital Happiness, Overall Happiness, and Self-Assessed Health Status on Race, Class, and Selected Control Variables: General Social Surveys, 1972 to 2006.

Independent Variables	Marital Happiness			Overall Happiness			Self-Assessed Health Status		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Race (black = 1)	-3.552***	-3.255***	-3.851***	-3.624***	-2.284***	-3.145***	-2.623***	-1.477***	-2.187***
Year (1970s as reference)									
1980s	-.658***	-.728***	-.818***	.002	.171	.133	.649***	.100	-.007
race * 1980s			.984			.485			.869
1990s	-.832***	-1.053***	-1.024***	-.088	.007	-.121	.933***	-.238	-.378*
race * 1990s			-.293			1.129*			1.176*
2000s	-.654***	-1.027***	-1.210***	.207	.248	-.044	.679***	-.611***	-.679***
race * 2000s			2.055*			2.309***			.637
Family Income		.013***	.013***		.031***	.031***		.040***	.040***
Education		.137***	.136***		.192***	.190***		.624***	.623***
Employed		-.671***	-.670***		-.012	-.015		2.222***	2.228***
Married		---	---		3.630***	3.632***		.608***	.613***
Age		.010	.010		.022***	.022***		-.112***	-.111***
Female		-1.023***	-1.021***		.722***	.714***		.213	.208
Intercept	100.9***	101.0***	101.0***	100.5***	100.2***	100.3***	99.8***	100.4***	100.5***
R^2	.012	.019	.019	.015	.068	.068	.009	.161	.162
F Ratio -- R^2 Change			4.38**			10.03***			2.63*
N	21,504			40,047			33,103		

Notes: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001. The "F Ratio -- R^2 Change" statistic compares the fit of the full additive model (the second for each quality-of-life measure) with the final (interaction) model. Some R^2 values, such as those in models 2 and 3 and then 5 and 6, appear identical because of rounding (actual values are, respectively, .0185, .0191, .0677, and .0684). The "F Ratio -- R^2 Change" calculation uses the four-digit value reported by Stata.

Table 4. Unstandardized Coefficients from the Regression of Trust, Change in Financial Situation, and Satisfaction with Financial Situation on Race, Class, and Selected Control Variables: General Social Surveys, 1972 to 2006.

Independent Variables	Trust Index			Change in Financial Situation			Satisfaction with Financial Situation		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Race (black = 1)	-6.791***	-5.123***	-5.516***	-1.435***	-.406**	-1.483***	-3.924***	-2.330***	-2.301***
Year (1970s as reference)									
1980s	-.146	-.780***	-.710***	-.445***	-.615***	-.673***	-.771***	-.784***	-.774***
race * 1980s			-.405			.675			-.072
1990s	-1.122***	-2.480***	-2.578***	.053	-.430**	-.664***	-.820***	-1.171***	-1.201***
race * 1990s			.812			1.983***			.230
2000s	-1.113***	-3.008***	-3.244***	.483**	-.158	-.380*	-.242	-1.124***	-1.071***
race * 2000s			1.860***			1.833***			-.391
Family Income		.030***	.030***		.064***	.064***		.099***	.099***
Education		.810***	.809***		.132***	.129***		.094***	.094***
Employed		.303*	.302*		2.350***	2.351***		-.253*	-.252*
Married		.702***	.702***		.446***	.450***		.170	.170
Age		.122***	.122***		-.054***	-.054***		.106***	.106***
Female		1.001***	.997***		-.147	-.155		.132	.132
Intercept	101.4***	102.1***	102.1***	100.2***	100.4***	100.5***	101.0***	101.1***	101.1***
R^2	.055	.156	.157	.003	.086	.087	.019	.129	.129
F Ratio -- R^2 Change			8.39***			10.23***			1.54
N	26,564			40,086			40,200		

Notes: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001. The "F Ratio -- R^2 Change" statistic compares the fit of the full additive model (the second for each quality-of-life measure) with the final (interaction) model. Some R^2 values (models 8 and 9) appear identical because of rounding (actual values are, respectively, .1287 and .1288). The "F Ratio -- R^2 Change" calculation uses the four-digit value reported by Stata.

Table 5. Summary of Changes over Time in Race Differences in Quality of Life Measures: General Social Surveys, 1972 to 2006.

Quality of Life Measures	Decade-Specific Race Differences			
	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
Marital Happiness				
Blacks	-3.851	-3.685	-5.168[d]	-3.006[d]
Whites	reference	-.818[d]	-1.024	-1.210
Difference: Black - White	-3.851[r]	-2.867[r]	-4.144[r,b]	-1.796[r,d,b]
Overall Happiness				
Blacks	-3.145	-2.527	-2.138	-.880[d]
Whites	reference	.133	-.121	-.044
Difference: Black - White	-3.145[r]	-2.660[r]	-2.017[r,b]	-.836[r,d,b]
Self-Assessed Health Status				
Blacks	-2.187	-1.325[d]	-1.389	-2.229
Whites	reference	-.007	-.378[d]	-.679
Difference: Black - White	-2.187[r]	-1.318[r]	-1.011[r,b]	-1.550[r]
Trust Index				
Blacks	-5.516	-6.631[d]	-7.283	-6.901
Whites	reference	-.710[d]	-2.578[d]	-3.244[d]
Difference: Black - White	-5.516[r]	-5.921[r]	-4.705[r,d]	-3.657[r,d,b]
Change in Financial Situation				
Blacks	-1.483	-1.482	-.164[d]	-.030
Whites	reference	-.673[d]	-.664	-.380
Difference: Black - White	-1.483[r]	-.809[r]	.500[d,b]	.350[b]
Satisfaction with Financial Situation				
Blacks	-2.301	-3.147[d]	-3.273	-3.762
Whites	reference	-.774[d]	-1.201[d]	-1.071
Difference: Black - White	-2.301[r]	-2.373[r]	-2.072[r]	-2.691[r]

Notes: Coefficients and significance tests are derived from the full interaction models in Tables 3 and 4. A superscripted "r" (for *r*ace effect) indicates that there is a significant ($p<.05$) difference between black and white slopes in a given decade. For example, the -1.796 gap between black and white slopes for martial happiness in the 2000s is significant. A superscripted "d" (for *d*ecade effect) indicates that there is a significant ($p<.05$) difference across decades for a group's slope (black or white) or the difference in group slopes. For example, the difference between the black slopes on martial happiness in the 1990s and 2000s (-5.168 and -3.006) is significant, as is the difference in racial gaps (-4.144 and -1.796) for martial happiness across those same two decades. A superscripted "b" (for *b*ase change), restricted to the estimates of the difference between black and white slopes (the rows labeled as "Difference: Black - White"), indicates that there is a significant ($p<.05$) difference between the racial gap in a given decade and the initial gap that appeared in the 1970s. For example, the racial gap of -4.144 in the 1990s differs significantly from the gap of -3.851 in the 1970s. The reference group for all slope values in the table is whites in the 1970s. All significance tests are based on F ratios and were performed in Stata 10 with the "test" procedure.

Table 6. Race- and Decade-Specific Predicted Probabilities from the Partial Proportional Odds Models for the Quality of Life Measures: General Social Surveys, 1972 to 2006.

	1970s			1980s			1990s			2000s		
Quality of Life Measure	Black	White	B-W	Black	White	B-W	Black	White	B-W	Black	White	B-W
Marital Happiness												
not too happy	.04	.02	.02	.04	.03	.01	.06	.03	.03	.04	.03	.01
pretty happy	.45	.29	.16	.44	.33	.11	.50	.34	.16	.41	.35	.06
very happy	.51	.69	-.18	.52	.64	-.12	.44	.63	-.19	.55	.62	-.07
Overall Happiness												
not too happy	.16	.09	.07	.15	.10	.05	.14	.09	.05	.11	.10	.01
pretty happy	.62	.58	.04	.62	.57	.05	.62	.60	.02	.59	.58	.01
very happy	.22	.33	-.11	.23	.33	-.10	.24	.31	-.07	.30	.32	-.02
Health Status												
poor	.04	.02	.02	.03	.03	.00	.04	.03	.01	.04	.03	.01
fair	.23	.17	.06	.21	.17	.04	.21	.17	.04	.24	.17	.07
good	.49	.48	.01	.49	.48	.01	.49	.52	-.03	.49	.53	-.04
excellent	.24	.33	-.09	.27	.32	-.05	.26	.29	-.03	.23	.27	-.04
Trust Index (collapsed)												
low (3-4)	.37	.17	.20	.39	.18	.21	.42	.26	.16	.40	.27	.13
medium (5-7)	.47	.47	.00	.51	.50	.01	.49	.49	.00	.50	.51	-.01
high (8-9)	.16	.36	-.20	.10	.32	-.22	.09	.25	-.16	.09	.22	-.13
Change in Finances												
worse	.24	.20	.04	.25	.22	.03	.17	.22	-.05	.20	.21	-.01
stayed the same	.42	.40	.02	.42	.41	.01	.47	.41	.06	.40	.41	-.01
better	.33	.40	.07	.33	.37	-.04	.36	.37	-.01	.40	.38	.02
Satisfaction with Finances												
not at all satisfied	.28	.20	.08	.31	.22	.09	.32	.24	.08	.34	.23	.11
more or less satisfied	.49	.48	.01	.48	.49	-.01	.48	.49	-.01	.47	.49	-.02
pretty well satisfied	.23	.32	-.09	.21	.29	-.08	.20	.27	-.07	.19	.28	-.09

Notes: Probabilities were calculated with control variables set at sample means. The trust-index models used the full ordinal scale, but predicted probabilities are presented here in a collapsed format for the sake of brevity. Columns labeled "B-W" provide the difference between the probabilities for blacks and whites.

Table 7. Unstandardized Coefficients from the Regression of Marital Happiness, Overall Happiness, and Self-Assessed Health Status on Race, Ethnicity, Class, and Selected Control Variables: General Social Surveys, 2000 to 2006.

Independent Variables	Marital Happiness			Overall Happiness			Self-Assessed Health Status		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Race (reference = white)									
Black	-2.126***	-1.751**		-2.423***	-.823*		-2.512***	-1.640***	
Other race	-2.964***	-3.024***		-1.398**	-1.138**		-1.080*	-1.691**	
Latino	-.765	.007		-2.093***	-1.217**		-.906*	-.036	
Race by Ethnicity (reference = white, non-Latino)									
White, Latino			.487			-1.694*			-1.069
Black			-1.729*			-.867*			-1.694***
Other, non-Latino			-2.638***			-1.847**			-2.736***
Other, Latino			-3.285***			-1.868**			-1.155*
Family Income		.010*	.010*		.024***	.024***		.033***	.034***
Education		.250***	.246***		.241***	.247***		.628***	.633***
Employed		-.376	-.373		.068	.057		2.730***	2.722***
Married					4.418***	4.414***		.862***	.863***
Age		.003	.003		-.003	-.003		-.100***	-.100***
Female		-1.181***	-1.179***		.142	.146		.355	.354
Intercept	100.5***	100.4***	100.4***	100.7***	100.3***	100.4***	100.5***	100.4***	100.4***
R^2	.012	.024	.025	.013	.088	.088	.009	.145	.147
F Ratio -- R^2 Change			.709			.807			10.096**
N	3,467			7,368			7,844		

Notes: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001. The "F Ratio -- R^2 Change" statistic compares the fit of the full additive model (the second for each quality of life measure) with the final (interaction) model.

Table 8. Unstandardized Coefficients from the Regression of Trust, Change in Financial Situation, and Satisfaction with Financial Situation on Race, Ethnicity, Class, and Selected Control Variables: General Social Surveys, 2000 to 2006.

Independent Variables	Trust Index			Change in Financial Situation			Satisfaction with Financial Situation		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Race (reference = white)									
Black	-5.738***	-3.901***		-.793*	.101		-4.895***	-2.996***	
Other race	-2.159***	-1.338*		.623	.250		-.695	.051	
Latino	-3.795***	-1.562**		.019	.056		-1.868***	-.562	
Race by Ethnicity (reference = white, non-Latino)									
White, Latino			-1.326			-.377			-.721
Black			-1.993***			.081			-3.016***
Other, non-Latino			-.854			-.192			-.141
Other, Latino			-3.238***			.591			-.384
Family Income		.025***	.026***		.049***	.049***		.080***	.080***
Education		.684***	.676***		.095*	.098*		.158***	.160***
Employed		.639	.664		3.235***	3.226***		-.207	-.209
Married		1.146***	1.140***		1.006***	1.005***		.545*	.544*
Age		.122***	.123***		-.083***	-.083***		.065***	.065***
Female		.458	.450		-.474	-.471		-.270	-.268
Intercept	101.3***	100.8***	100.7***	100.0***	100.0***	100.0**	100.9***	100.4***	100.4***
R^2	.053	.156	.157	.001	.107	.107	.028	.135	.135
F Ratio -- R^2 Change			3.460			1.652			.000
N	4,872			7,389			7,395		

Notes: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001. The "F Ratio -- R^2 Change" statistic compares the fit of the full additive model (the second for each quality of life measure) with the final (interaction) model.

Table 9. Predicted Probabilities from the Partial Proportional Odds Models for the Quality of Life Measures: General Social Surveys, 2000 - 2006.

Quality of Life Measure	Race and Ethnic Groups				
	White, non-Latino	White, Latino	Black, Latino or non-Latino	Other Race, non-Latino	Other Race, Latino
Marital Happiness					
not too happy	.03	.02	.03	.04	.05
pretty happy	.34	.32	.41	.46	.47
very happy	.63	.66	.56	.50	.48
Overall Happiness					
not too happy	.09	.13	.11	.13	.13
pretty happy	.60	.63	.61	.63	.63
very happy	.31	.24	.28	.24	.24
Health Status					
poor	.02	.03	.03	.04	.03
fair	.16	.19	.21	.24	.20
good	.52	.53	.53	.53	.53
excellent	.30	.25	.23	.19	.24
Trust Index (collapsed)					
low (3-4)	.23	.28	.39	.26	.36
medium (5-7)	.52	.51	.47	.52	.49
high (8-9)	.25	.21	.14	.22	.15
Change in Finances					
worse	.20	.20	.19	.21	.18
stayed the same	.40	.41	.40	.41	.39
better	.40	.39	.41	.38	.43
Satisfaction with Finances					
not at all satisfied	.22	.25	.34	.23	.18
more or less satisfied	.48	.48	.47	.48	.60
pretty well satisfied	.30	.27	.19	.29	.22

Notes: Probabilities were calculated with coefficients from the interaction models and control variables set at sample means. The trust models used the full ordinal scale; predicted probabilities are presented here in a collapsed format for the sake of brevity.