

WELL-BEING IN PARENTING

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Introduction

Having children is a transformative life experience—heralding changes to parents' sleep schedules, social calendars, romantic relationships, and daily responsibilities. Notably, these many changes to parents' lives may be joyful and rewarding, frustrating and demanding or, in most cases—all. Psychological research on parenting has traditionally focused on understanding how parents influence their children by examining factors such as parenting techniques (Baumrind, 1991, 2012; Darling and Steinberg, 1993; Smiley et al., 2016), attachment styles (Bowlby, 1969), and parenting competence (Teti and Candelaria, 2002). Conversely, recent theory and empirical research has begun to study how children influence their parents, in part by investigating how having children is related to parents' happiness (Luthar and Ciciolla, 2015; Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky, 2014). In this chapter, we review the state of the literature on the association between parenthood and well-being.

Understanding the association between parenthood and well-being is an important topic for scientific inquiry. Approximately 85% of adults in the United States have children by the time they reach age 45 (Child Trends, 2002), and many parents consider their relationships with their children to be the most positive aspects of their lives (Bernsten, Rubin, and Siegler, 2011). In addition, classic psychological research suggests that generativity, which is characterized by guiding and supporting the next generation, is an important aspect of adult development (Erikson, 1963, 1968). Although adults have many opportunities to guide and support future generations through community involvement, career opportunities, and relationships with extended family (among others), one prominent way in which adults may seek generativity is through their relationships with their own children (McAdams and de St. Aubin, 1992).

In this chapter, we review current scientific evidence regarding the association between parenthood and well-being. In our review, we take a nuanced perspective, considering the ways in which parenthood may change over the life course as well as individual differences among parents. Moreover, beliefs about parenting and patterns of childrearing have changed drastically over time; accordingly, we begin with a discussion of historical considerations in parenting and well-being. Next, we consider central issues in understanding the association between parenting and well-being, including definitions of happiness and important methodological considerations. Our review of parenthood and well-being is guided by the Parents' Well-Being Model (Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky, 2014), which we then use to discuss classical and modern research on parenthood and well-being. We conclude the chapter with a discussion of practical considerations and suggestions for future research.

Historical Considerations in Parenting

Shifts in cultural norms, employment practices, and parenting beliefs in the last few hundred years have drastically altered parents' experiences (Senior, 2014; Stearns, 2003, 2017). In this section, we focus primarily on changes that occurred in the twentieth century and their implications for parenting, and particularly for parents' well-being. For example, the advent of oral contraception gave people greater control over whether, when, and how many children they would have, and laws restricting children's employment (i.e., Child Labor Laws) shifted children's roles in the family. Similarly, the women's rights movement and related changes in employment practices shifted gender beliefs and practices regarding childrearing. We argue that these and other cultural shifts in the last 150 years fall into three primary categories with important implications for parents' well-being: (1) changes in childrearing decisions, (2) changes in gender roles, and (3) changes in parenting beliefs and behaviors.

Changes in Childrearing Decisions

More than ever before, having children is considered a personal decision rather than an inevitable aspect of adults' lives. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, when people primarily lived on farms, having a large family with many children was advantageous, as more children meant more hands to contribute to household chores and labor on the farm. Although the Industrial Revolution moved economic labor from farms to factories, children continued to engage in wage labor. Accordingly, children were instrumental to their families' finances, either by contributing directly to a family's farm or by receiving monetary compensation for factory work. Coupled with little access to effective forms of birth control, many couples had relatively large families.

In many Western and industrialized countries, these patterns began to shift in the 1900s. In 1938, the Fair Labor Standards Act (commonly referred to as the Child Labor Laws) established guidelines for children's employment. These guidelines limited the number of hours per week children could be employed and prevented children from working under hazardous circumstances. As a result, many children no longer contributed to their families' finances. Notably, this time period also marked the beginning of the decline in family size (Willard and Zilibotti, 2005). Indeed, aside from the baby boom in the 1950s, fertility has been steadily declining in the United States since the early 1900s. The average number of children per woman in 1911 was approximately 3.5 and fell to 1.9 in 2010 (Mather, 2012). In addition to having smaller families, young adults also began to postpone childbearing. In 1970, the average woman had her first child by age 21. In 2015, however, women did not have their first child, on average, until the age of 26 (Pew Research Center, 2015a). Similarly, the average age that men tended to have their first child rose from 23 to 27. Thus, fertility patterns have changed in the last 150 years, with couples having fewer children at relatively older ages.

A major factor that may play a role in both reductions in family size and delayed parenthood is access to birth control. The United States Food and Drug Administration approved the first oral contraception in 1960 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009), and Supreme Court ruling *Eisenstadt v. Baird* legalized birth control for all citizens regardless of marital status in 1972 (*Eisenstadt v. Baird*, 1972). Prior to the development of birth control, parents had less opportunity to control when they would have children and how many children they would have. However, oral contraception gave people the freedom to decide when or whether they wanted to have children. Indeed, evidence from the World Fertility Survey suggests that the use of contraception explains nearly 90% of variation in fertility worldwide (Robey, Rutstein, and Morris, 1993). Results from this study suggest that a 15% increase in contraceptive use is associated with a decline in fertility equivalent to one child per woman. Thus, the development of oral contraception gave people greater control over their fertility and may have resulted in people delaying parenthood, having fewer children, or foregoing children altogether.

Of course, a number of factors could contribute to declining fertility rates and increasing age of parenthood, such as improvements in labor conditions and changing economic factors as well as improvements in health care and access to effective contraception. However, the declines in fertility also represent a cultural shift in how young adults make decisions about their fertility. Moreover, these laws demonstrated a notable change in children's roles both in society and in their families—that is, children shifted from being useful to being protected (Senior, 2014; Stearns, 2003). As a result, parents' experiences in the family also shifted toward providing for and protecting their children.

Many factors may explain the delay of parenthood. For instance, young adults spend more years pursuing higher education and investing in their careers before choosing to start a family. Among women, delaying parenthood may be related to increased educational and career opportunities. Many women are dedicated to launching their careers before having children. Indeed, more women pursued higher education in the early 2000s than in the 1950s (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), and more women were gainfully employed during this time period as well. Young women began entering graduate and professional schools in the 1970s, and the majority of women began engaging in paid employment after marrying and having children. Moreover, as childcare costs and the cost of living increase, more couples may choose to delay parenthood until they feel financially stable.

Are these changes important for parents' happiness? First, the shift to smaller families and to the protection of children has been accompanied by changes in parents' views of children. In particular, couples may choose to have children because they expect parenting to be emotionally rewarding (Langdrige, Sheeran, and Connolly, 2005). Many adults view children as one of life's biggest achievements and decide to have children on the basis of their own needs and to rear them after careful consideration of their childrearing philosophies (Senior, 2014). In addition, having fewer children allows parents to focus more time and energy on those children they have. Indeed, research suggests that there has been a cultural shift to more time-intensive and child-centered parenting (Hays, 1996; Sayer, Bianchi, and Robinson, 2004; Senior, 2014).

In turn, such shifts may have important implications for parents' happiness. Parenthood is associated with elevated well-being specifically when people choose to have children (Cetce, Clark, and Senik, 2016). To the extent that parents' expectations that parenting will be emotionally rewarding are fulfilled, then they may experience gains in happiness. Conversely, if those expectations for emotional fulfillment are violated as they cope with the stresses and sleep deprivation of rearing children, then they may experience disappointment and declines in happiness. Happiness goals often backfire (Mauss, Tamir, Anderson, and Savino, 2011), and research on intensive parenting suggests that being overly focused on one's child (perhaps in the pursuit of happiness) may backfire as well. Parents who endorse intensive parenting styles, such as helicopter parenting (a parenting style characterized by over-involvement in children's lives), report greater depressive symptoms and lower levels of happiness than parents who do not endorse intensive parenting styles (Rizzo, Schiffrin, and Liss, 2013). Conversely, delayed parenthood may be associated with emotional benefits. Parents who are relatively older when they have their first child report relatively greater well-being (Luhmann, Hofmann, Eid, and Lucas, 2012).

Changing Gender Roles

Gender roles are beliefs about the ways in which individual, familial, community, and societal roles differ for men and women (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). According to long-held beliefs about gender, femininity is characterized by nurturing and emotional behaviors, whereas masculinity is characterized by independent and aggressive behaviors (Eagly, Wood, and Diekmann, 2000). As a result, such beliefs also shape expectations about men's and women's behaviors inside and outside the home. According to these norms, women are often responsible for household duties, including nurturing and caring for children as the primary caregiver, whereas men commonly work outside the home to provide financial support for the family (Eagly et al., 2000).

Notably, gender beliefs and patterns of behavior inside and outside the home began to shift in the twentieth century. By the mid-1980s, a sizeable majority of the population held positive attitudes toward gender egalitarian decision-making, about the involvement of women in previously male roles, and regarding the implications of maternal employment for children and families (Thornton and Young-DeMarco, 2001). Changes in workforce participation mirrored these attitude changes. In the 1950s, only 19% of mothers worked outside the home. By 2008, more than 60% of mothers were employed outside the home (Cohn, Livingston, and Wang, 2014). Similarly, fathers' roles shifted toward sharing greater responsibility in childrearing. For example, one study found that fathers spent an average of 1 hour more per day with their children in 1998 than they did in 1965 (Bianchi and Mattingly, 2003), and the number of stay-at-home fathers increased by 18% between 1994 and 2001 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Mothers' time with children remained relatively stable during this period of time, despite the increase in hours worked outside the home (Bianchi and Mattingly, 2003).

Women's increase in workforce participation also marks a rise in dual-income families. According to a report by the Pew Research Center, the number of dual-income families rose from roughly 25% in the 1960s to 60% in 2012 (Pew Research Center, 2015b). A number of factors may account for the rise in dual-income households. First, the women's rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s—in large part inspired by Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which argued that many women were dissatisfied with their narrow role in society—supported broader participation by women beyond the home. This movement fought to end workplace discrimination on the basis of gender, including the Equal Pay Act (1963) and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (1978). Thus, in large part due to the efforts backed by the women's rights movement, many women had the opportunity to choose to be employed outside the home. Second, changing economic pressures necessitated a second income in many families. The rising cost of living has not been accompanied by similar increases in minimum wage or average salaries for the majority of U.S. workers (Lee, 1999; Mishel, Bivens, Gould, and Shierholz, 2012). Accordingly, in contrast to previous historical eras, many families in the twenty-first century may not be able to live on one income.

The shifts in gender roles have important implications for parents' lives and their happiness. For example, equal divisions of caregiving responsibilities may reduce stress and burden among mothers. Indeed, research suggests that mothers who perceive fairness in sharing childrearing responsibilities reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Chong and Mickelson, 2016). Furthermore, in partnered couples in which both members are employed, families may enjoy greater financial security, thus reducing the economic burden of rearing children. In turn, these families may feel lower levels of stress as it relates to their financial situation. Indeed, financial strain has been identified as one factor that may reduce parents' well-being (Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky, 2014). However, working mothers may face greater challenges balancing work and family life, as they continue to carry primary responsibility for caregiving, despite their working status (Bianchi, 2000; Bianchi and Mattingly, 2003). As a result, working mothers may experience reduced happiness as they try to balance their work and family responsibilities. Despite changes in patterns of workforce participation, some mothers who work outside the home may feel guilty that they are not upholding traditionally prescribed gender norms (Borelli, Nelson, River, Birken, and Moss-Racusin, 2017; Borelli, Nelson-Coffey, River, Birken, and Moss-Racusin, 2017).

The vast majority of research and statistics previously discussed are based on opposite-sex couples. However, given the legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States in 2015, investigations of changing gender norms as they relate to parenting in same-sex couples are needed. Some parenting challenges as they relate to gender may be unique to opposite-sex couples and may not apply as readily to same-sex couples. For example, opposite-sex couples may be more likely than same-sex couples to adhere to gender-prescribed norms regarding childrearing. Although same-sex parents may face other stressors (e.g., social stigma), stress surrounding gendered division of labor may be less pronounced.

Parenting Beliefs and Behaviors

Finally, shifting patterns in family size and gender roles have been accompanied by changes over time in parenting beliefs and behaviors. In other words, parents may be thinking about their relationships with their children differently from previous generations, viewing children's roles in the family differently and, as a result, behaving differently toward their children. One of the most striking examples of this shift involves intensive parenting. In recent decades, parents have demonstrated a cultural shift to more time intensive and child-centered parenting (Hays, 1996; Sayer et al., 2004; Senior, 2014). Despite working more hours outside the home, mothers continue to spend many hours per day with their children (Bianchi, 2000). In 1965, mothers spent an average of 54 minutes daily providing direct care for their children (e.g., bathing), whereas in 2012 that number nearly doubled, with mothers averaging around 104 minutes per day with their children. Similarly, in 1965, fathers spent around 16 minutes caring for their children, and today's fathers spend close to 59 minutes a day caring for them (Treas and Drobic, 2010).

These changing patterns in parents' time with children are reflective of a broader trend toward intensive, child-centric parenting. Children are considered emotionally precious, and parents are increasingly concerned with the psychological well-being of their children as well as their physical health, academic success, and social skills—in summary, parents want their children to be “perfect” (Gopnik, 2016; Jacukowicz, Potocka, and Merez-Kot, 2016; Senior, 2014). The tendency for parents to prioritize their children's well-being over their own is commonly referred to as child-centrism (Ashton-James, Kushlev, and Dunn, 2013). As a result of their efforts to promote their children's happiness and success, many parents may schedule their children for numerous extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, music lessons) and feel pressured to spend every moment of their free time with or for their children (Hays, 1996).

Shifts in parents' beliefs and behaviors toward their children also have important implications for parents' happiness. On the one hand, if parents find themselves overly involved and concerned with their children, they may feel less happy, as they may be overscheduling themselves and their children, worrying incessantly about their children's future, and feeling they are not living up to their own parenting standards (e.g., Rizzo et al., 2013). On the other hand, parents who place the needs of their children above their own report more happiness and meaning in life when they spend time with their children (Ashton-James et al., 2013), suggesting a potential benefit of these changing views of parenting. Ultimately, the happiest parents may be those who find the right balance—the balance between caring for their children and placing their children's needs first and not becoming overly invested and emotionally burnt out.

In summary, many cultural changes in the last century in the United States have resulted in notable shifts in parents' experiences, including their decisions about whether or when to have children, how they share childrearing responsibilities, and how they shape their relationships with their children. In turn, these changes have important implications for parents' happiness. In the remainder of this chapter, we consider the many factors that may influence parents' happiness under current cultural circumstances. The majority of this research has been conducted in the United States and other Western cultures, and cultural changes regarding child labor, access to contraception, and gender equality are ongoing in many low-income nations. Many people living in low-income countries have less access to birth control (United Nations, 2016) and experience greater gender disparity in division of household responsibilities, access to educational and employment opportunities, and political power (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). In addition, children in low-income countries spend less time in school and more time in household and paid labor (Larson and Verma, 1999). Accordingly, the information presented in this chapter may be the most applicable to parents from Western, industrialized cultures, and it remains unclear whether the findings discussed in this chapter will generalize to parents from other cultures.

Central Issues in Parenting and Well-Being

Evaluating the association between parenting and well-being relies on a clear definition of well-being as well as consideration of the primary methodologies used to investigate parenting and well-being. In this section, we begin with an overview of well-being, including its definition and measurement. Next, we discuss three methodologies (cross-sectional, longitudinal, and daily experience studies) that have been implemented in research on parenting and well-being, along with their strengths and limitations.

What Is Well-Being?

Much psychological research in the twentieth century focused on alleviating suffering and curing mental illness (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). By this standard, researchers often defined well-being by the absence of symptoms of psychological disorder (e.g., experiencing few symptoms of depression). However, with increased research in positive psychology since the late 1990s, definitions of well-being have evolved to consider happiness as a positive state beyond the absence of mental illness (Slade, 2010).

Drawing on Aristotle's notions of *hedonia* (i.e., the pursuit of pleasure) and *eudaimonia* (i.e., living up to one's full potential), psychological approaches to well-being have distinguished two types of well-being. Hedonic well-being is often defined by the aspects of well-being that feel good, such as happiness and positive emotions (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade, 2005; Ryan and Deci, 2001). Most commonly, researchers define happiness with the construct of subjective well-being—as consisting of a cognitive component (i.e., life satisfaction) and an affective component (i.e., frequent positive emotions and infrequent negative emotions; Diener, 1984; Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith, 1999). By this definition, a happy person would be one who is highly satisfied with life and experiences frequent positive emotions, such as love, joy, and gratitude, and infrequent negative emotions, such as sadness, anger, or frustration. By contrast, eudaimonic well-being is often defined by the extent to which a person is fully functioning (Ryan and Deci, 2001), with a focus on indicators such as meaning in life. Like subjective well-being, meaning in life is thought to include three components—coherence (i.e., the feeling that life makes sense), purpose (i.e., that one is pursuing important goals), and significance (i.e., feeling that one's life is valuable and important; King, Heintzelman, and Ward, 2016).

One unfortunate consequence of distinguishing the constructs of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being has been drawing a similar distinction between happy lives and meaningful lives. In other words, people might assume that happy lives are devoid of meaning and meaningful lives are not joyful. However, hedonic and eudaimonic well-being have considerable overlap, and most commonly, lives that are experienced as meaningful are also experienced as joyful (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, and King, 2008). Indeed, happiness predicts a number of indicators of success, including positive social relationships, physical health, and workplace success (for a review, see Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener, 2005), suggesting that happy people are also fully functioning. Additionally, meaningful pursuits elicit happiness. For example, being kind to others (an arguably eudaimonic pursuit) leads to greater increases in positive emotions and happiness than being kind to oneself (an arguably hedonic pursuit; Nelson, Layous, Cole, and Lyubomirsky, 2016).

Other approaches to well-being suggest that happiness is multidimensional (Coffey, Wray-Lake, Mashek, and Branand, 2016; Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011). For example, psychological well-being includes six components: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989). Additionally, flourishing entails a sense of psychological well-being (including the six previous components), social well-being, and emotional well-being (Keyes, 2007). Rather than separating hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, these multidimensional approaches encompass both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of well-being.

Regardless of its many definitions, happiness is largely considered to be a subjective experience (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon et al., 2005). In other words, happiness is best understood or defined from the perspective of the individual. For this reason, happiness is most commonly measured using self-report questionnaires assessing individual's feelings of happiness, life satisfaction, meaning in life, or flourishing. Research on the psychometric properties of well-being measurements suggest that self-report well-being measures demonstrate adequate validity, reliability, and sensitivity to change (Diener, 1994; Sandvik, Diener, and Siedlitz, 1993), and that the facets of subjective well-being (life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect) are unique and discriminable from each other and from related constructs, such as optimism and self-esteem (Lucas, Diener, and Suh, 1996). To provide a comprehensive overview of the literature on parenting and well-being, in the current chapter, we draw on research using these many different approaches to well-being, including the many constructs we describe here. In addition, we also consider studies investigating parenting as it relates to symptoms of anxiety and depression in nonclinical populations. We use the term "well-being" to broadly encompass these many different approaches, and we rely on the more specific terms when discussing the findings from individual studies.

Methodological Approaches to Investigating Parenting and Well-Being

Studies investigating parents' well-being have primarily used three methodological approaches: cross-sectional, longitudinal, and daily experience methods (see Nelson, Kushlev and Lyubomirsky, 2014, for a review). First, several studies have investigated how parents compare with nonparents in global measures of well-being, such as happiness, stress, or depressive symptoms. These studies inform our understanding of whether happiness and parenthood can coexist, but are limited by selection biases—that happy people are more likely to become parents (Cetre et al., 2016; Kim and Hicks, 2016). Another challenge to interpreting findings across these studies involves the variety of statistical approaches used. In an effort to minimize selection and other biases in comparing parents and nonparents, many researchers include a long list of covariates in their analyses, such as age, gender, marital status, income, employment, and so on. Unfortunately, no two studies include the same list of covariates, making it difficult to compare across studies. In addition, one assumption of including covariates in these analyses is that the experience of parenthood is similar across different groups (see Nelson, Kushlev, Dunn, and Lyubomirsky, 2014); however, several studies have found that parents' happiness differs depending on their age, gender, marital status, income, and many other factors often included as covariates (for a review of these and other moderators of parents' happiness, see Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky, 2014).

Second, some researchers have used longitudinal designs to examine changes in well-being across the transition to parenthood (i.e., before and after having children). The strength of this design includes the use of within-person comparisons, which minimizes potential selection biases. These studies are limited, however, by the timing of well-being assessments before and after childbirth. For example, in one meta-analysis of longitudinal studies investigating the transition to parenthood, the average timing of the baseline well-being assessment was roughly 2.5 months prior to childbirth (Luhmann et al., 2012). Given that well-being often begins to change prior to the experience of a major life event—a phenomenon referred to as an "anticipatory effect"—evaluating expectant parents' happiness just 2 months before the birth of their child may be an overestimation of their baseline well-being, rendering subsequent changes in happiness difficult to interpret. Furthermore, given that most couples have their first child within a few years of marriage, which is also associated with a boost in well-being (Luhmann et al., 2012), parents' pre-birth well-being assessments may be inflated due to this "honeymoon" effect. Finally, readers of transition-to-parenthood studies should interpret any subsequent changes in happiness with a life course perspective. Parenthood is a notably dynamic life event, as children are constantly growing and changing, presenting new challenges at

each stage. For example, changes in happiness in the 5 years after childbirth might be more appropriately interpreted as changes in happiness associated with having an infant, a toddler, or a preschooler, rather than changes solely associated with being a parent.

Third, research has investigated parents' feelings during their time spent with children, typically using daily diary or experience sampling methodologies. In these studies, participants typically provide multiple reports of their emotions and activities, affording the opportunity to understand how participants' emotions differ across these activities. Using the Day Reconstruction Method, for example, participants provide a detailed, retrospective account of their days, episode by episode, including information about who they were with, what they were doing, and how they were feeling during each episode (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, and Stone, 2004). Experience sampling studies, by contrast, typically contact participants a few times a day over the course of several days and ask them to provide in-the-moment reports of who they are with, what they are doing, and how they are feeling (Hektner, Schmidt, and Csikszentmihalyi, 2007). Using either approach, researchers can then ascertain how participants were feeling when they were engaged in caregiving relative to other activities.

These studies typically rely on reports of momentary emotion rather than global well-being and inform understanding of parents' feelings specifically when they are engaged in caregiving. As with studies examining the transition to parenthood, one strength of this approach is the opportunity for within-person comparisons, thus avoiding possible selection biases. Notably, however, different studies using this method have relied on different analytic approaches. Some studies provide a rank-ordered list of daily activities by positivity (e.g., Kahneman et al., 2004). This approach is limited, however, because it does not directly compare participants' emotions across the various activities, and it includes activities (e.g., having sex) that might be relatively rare on any given day. To better understand specifically how parenting is associated with positive or negative emotions, other studies conducted within-person comparisons of participants' emotions when they were engaged in caregiving relative to their other daily activities (e.g., Nelson, Kushlev, English, Dunn, and Lyubomirsky, 2013; Nelson-Coffey, Borelli, and River, 2017). This analytic approach better captures parents' feelings while caregiving relative to other activities they actually engage in on a given day.

In summary, because we cannot randomly assign people to have or to forego children, understanding whether having children causes people to be more or less happy is difficult to discern. Researchers have relied on a variety of methodological and statistical approaches in efforts to understand the association between parenthood and well-being—each approach with unique strengths and limitations. In the remainder of this chapter, we review research using each of these approaches to evaluate the literature on parenthood and happiness. Furthermore, we believe the strongest claims regarding parenthood and happiness rely on evidence from two or more of these methodological approaches.

Theory in Parenting and Well-Being

The primary theory in parenting and well-being aims to explain the diversity of parents' experiences and suggests psychological mechanisms explaining when parenthood will be associated with greater well-being and, conversely, when parenthood will be associated with lower well-being (Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky, 2014). In this section, we provide an overview of this theory and discuss empirical support for the theory.

Parents' Well-Being Model

Drawing on theory and empirical evidence from psychology, sociology, and economics, we developed a model to understand when, why, and how parenthood is associated with more or less well-being (see Figure 17.1; Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky, 2014). According to this theory, parents

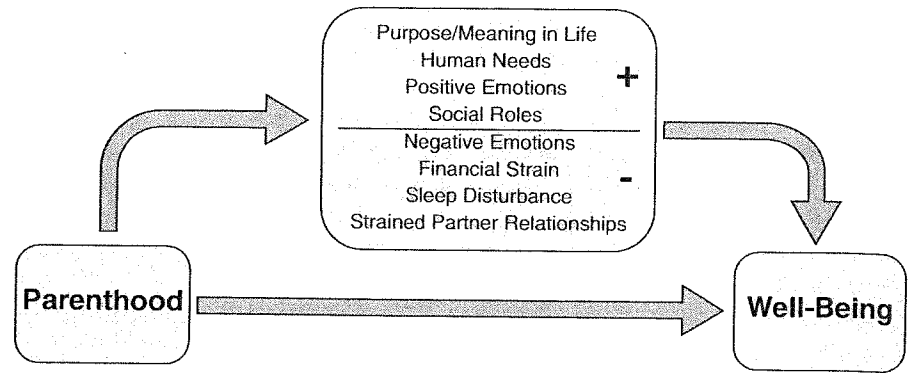


Figure 17.1 Parents' well-being model

Source: Reprinted with permission from Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky (2014), p. 847.

experience greater well-being when they feel that their lives are meaningful, when they experience satisfaction of their basic psychological needs, when they experience positive emotions, and when they feel fulfilled in their social roles. By contrast, parents will experience lower well-being when they experience greater negative emotions, financial strain, sleep disturbance and fatigue, and strained romantic relationships.

Parents' Paths to Greater Happiness

Why do parents experience relatively greater happiness? Ahead, we describe theory and research suggesting potential mechanisms explaining the link between parenthood and greater well-being.

Meaning in Life

Parents may experience greater overall well-being to the extent that becoming a parent elicits greater meaning in life, which is, in turn, related to greater overall well-being. Parenting likely elicits meaning in life via each of the three components: purpose, coherence, and significance. For example, parenting may engender purpose by eliciting important goals, such as cultivating kindness and independence in one's children, parenting may engender coherence by imposing a set of routines on daily life, and parenting may engender significance by providing parents with a sense that their life is important. Indeed, parents experience greater meaning in life relative to their counterparts without children, in their daily lives, and specifically when they are spending time with their children (Baumeister, 1991; Nelson et al., 2013; Nelson-Coffey, Borelli et al., 2017). Finally, meaning in life is related to greater overall well-being (Ryff, 1989; Steger, 2009).

Positive Emotions

Having children may offer parents many opportunities to experience positive emotions, such as pride in witnessing a child's first steps, love when given a warm hug after a long day, and amusement in experiencing a child's budding sense of humor. In turn, experiencing frequent positive emotions is critical to overall feelings of well-being (Fredrickson, 1998, 2013; Fredrickson and Joiner, 2002; Lyubomirsky, King et al., 2005). Parents experience a small increase in positive emotions after childbirth (Luhmann et al., 2012), parents report more positive emotions in their day-to-day lives than nonparents (Deaton and Stone, 2014; Nelson et al., 2013), and parents experience more positive

emotions specifically when they are spending time with their children than their other daily activities (Musick, Meier, and Flood, 2016; Nelson et al., 2013; Nelson-Coffey, Borelli et al., 2017).

Psychological Need Satisfaction

Self-determination theory suggests that for humans the need to fulfill three basic psychological needs—autonomy (i.e., feeling in control of important outcomes), competence (i.e., feeling effective and skilled), and connectedness (i.e., feeling close to important people)—is essential to psychological functioning and well-being (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Drawing on this theory, parenting may offer parents opportunities to fulfill these three needs, which would, in turn, be related to greater overall well-being (Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky, 2014). For example, becoming a parent may mark an adult's status in making important decisions (eliciting autonomy), parenting may provide parents with countless tasks to accomplish as children grow into adults (eliciting competence), and parenting may offer parents opportunities to develop a close relationship with their children (eliciting connectedness).

Relatively few studies have directly tested this piece of the Parents' Well-Being Model; however, some evidence provides preliminary support for the idea that parenting may provide opportunities to fulfill these psychological needs. First, autonomy and sense of control during pregnancy and across the transition to parenthood are related to greater well-being and fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety (Grossman, Pollack, Golding, and Fedele, 1987; Keeton, Perry-Jenkins, and Sayer, 2008). Second, research on family efficacy, parent confidence, and parenting sense of competence suggests that these constructs are related to greater family satisfaction and emotional well-being, along with fewer depressive symptoms (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Regalia, and Scabini, 2011; O'Neil, Wilson, Shaw, and Dishion, 2009; Williams et al., 1987). Third, parent-child closeness is associated with greater positive emotions (Aber, Belsky, Slade, and Crnic, 1999), whereas conflict with children (indicating low levels of connectedness) is associated with lower levels of well-being (Birditt et al., 2009; Kiecolt, Blieszner, and Savla, 2011). Notably, however, becoming a parent is associated with a decline in relationship satisfaction (Luhmann et al., 2012; Twenge, Campbell, and Foster, 2003), which may compromise parents' feelings of connectedness.

Social Roles

Finally, parents may experience greater happiness to the extent that they feel fulfilled in their social roles. Research on social complexity suggests that people enjoy greater overall well-being when they participate in a greater number of social roles, in part by bolstering their sense of identity (Barnett and Hyde, 2001; Thoits, 1992). When one's identity is based on multiple relevant domains and experiences (e.g., parent, friend, partner, worker), then a negative experience in one role may be offset by positive experiences in another role. To the extent that becoming a parent increases the number of social roles with which a person identifies, then parents may enjoy greater overall well-being. Notably, this argument rests on the assumption that parents do not give up other aspects of their identities—for example, by quitting a job—when they become parents. Few studies have directly evaluated the social complexity hypothesis in regards to parenthood, but one study suggests that experiencing positive relationships with one's family minimizes the effects of stressful experiences at work (Barnett, Marshall, and Pleck, 1992).

Parents' Paths to Lower Happiness

Not all parents will enjoy greater happiness, nor will happiness or unhappiness be consistent across the course of child development. Many parents may find parenting to be stressful, demanding, and exhausting, and as a result they experience lower levels of well-being—either temporarily or over



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longer periods of time. Ahead, we describe four psychological mechanisms explaining why parenthood might be related to lower levels of happiness.

Negative Emotions

One reason why parents may experience lower levels of well-being may be in part due to their experience of relatively greater negative emotions, such as anxiety, stress, and frustration. For example, parents worry a great deal about their children's health and safety (Stickler, Salter, Broughton, and Alario, 1991), and may feel angry and frustrated when dealing with defiant toddlers or rebellious teenagers (Ross and Van Willingen, 1996; Simon and Nath, 2004). Some evidence supports these propositions. For example, one study found that parents experience more daily stress than nonparents (Deaton and Stone, 2014); however, another study found that parents reported similar levels of negative emotion when they were caring for their young children relative to other activities in their days (Nelson-Coffey, Borelli et al., 2017). Together, these findings might suggest that parents experience greater overall negative emotions, but that those negative emotions are not restricted to the time parents spend with their children. One possibility might be that parents experience elevated anger and frustration when caring for their children and guilt and worry when they are apart. In turn, such elevated negative emotions may reduce parents' overall well-being (Schiffrin, Rezendes, and Nelson, 2010).

Financial Strain

Paying for children's housing, childcare, food, and medical care may place a financial burden on families, which could reduce parents' overall well-being. Indeed, the costs of rearing a child are not insignificant. In a report from the United States Department of Agriculture using information from the Consumer Expenditures Survey, middle-income families spent approximately \$13,000 annually per child and may expect to spend up to \$285,000 by the child's 18th birthday (Lino, Kuczynski, Rodriguez, and Schap, 2017). According to this report, top expenses included housing (29% of total costs), food (18%), and childcare/education (16%). Furthermore, evidence suggests that parents report greater financial strain and reduced financial satisfaction than nonparents (McLanahan and Adams, 1987; Ross and Van Willingen, 1996; Umberson and Gove, 1989; Zimmermann and Easterlin, 2006). In addition, economic hardship mediates the link between parenthood and psychological distress (Bird, 1997). Thus, existing evidence suggests that financial strain may reduce parents' overall well-being.

Sleep Disturbance and Fatigue

In addition to being expensive, rearing children is exhausting. Many parents report sleep disturbances and fatigue after welcoming a child into their families—a pattern that does not necessarily dissipate after infancy. The presence of children (of any age) in the home predicts insufficient sleep (less than 6 hours in a 24-hour period) and feeling unrested for women, but not men (Sullivan, 2017). Other studies have suggested that insufficient sleep is a common problem for parents—especially new parents (Chalmers and Meyer, 1996; Gay, Lee, and Lee, 2004; Lee, Zaffke, and McEnany, 2000; Yamazaki, Lee, Kennedy, and Weiss, 2005). Furthermore, sleep is central to mental and physical well-being. In one experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: (1) to experience interrupted sleep, in which they were awakened several times throughout the night, (2) to experience uninterrupted, but restricted sleep, or (3) to experience uninterrupted, unrestricted sleep. Participants whose sleep was interrupted throughout the night (a proxy for parenting an infant) experienced less slow wave sleep, which, in turn, predicted reduced positive mood after two nights (Finan, Quartana, and Smith, 2015). Other evidence has linked good sleep quality to cheerfulness and positive moods (Totterdell, Reynolds, Parkinson, and Briner, 1994), whereas poor sleep quality is linked to anger

and hostility (Selvi, Gulec, Agargun, and Besiroglu, 2007) and depressive symptoms during pregnancy (Skouteris, Germano, Wertheim, Paxton, and Milgrom, 2008), along with reduced friendliness and positive mood (Acheson, Richards, and de Wit, 2007). Thus, parents may experience reduced positive emotions in their day-to-day lives, as well as impairments in their overall well-being, to the extent that they experience interrupted, restricted, and insufficient sleep.

Strained Romantic Relationships

Finally, couples report a drop in marital satisfaction after childbirth (Luhmann et al., 2012; Twenge et al., 2003). In one meta-analysis of studies comparing marital satisfaction of parents and nonparents, parents reported significantly lower levels of marital satisfaction (Twenge et al., 2003). In addition, this difference was larger among women and couples with relatively more children. Another meta-analysis reviewed how relationship satisfaction changes across the transition to parenthood (Luhmann et al., 2012). Similarly, this meta-analysis found that relationship satisfaction decreases in the months after a child is born. Finally, another study indicated that marital satisfaction improves when children leave the home (Gorchoff, John, and Helson, 2008), suggesting that the stresses and restrictions of childrearing may contribute to reduced relationship satisfaction. In turn, evidence indicates that relationship satisfaction is positively correlated with overall well-being (Kamp Dush and Amato, 2005; Kamp Dush, Taylor, and Kroeger, 2008; Schwarz, Strack, and Mai, 1991), suggesting a final path by which parenting may reduce happiness.

In summary, the Parents' Well-Being Model offers one theoretical lens by which to consider the association between parenting and well-being. Furthermore, this approach may clarify previously discrepant findings by suggesting psychological mechanisms that may predict both greater (meaning in life, positive emotions, psychological need satisfaction, and social roles) and lower (negative emotions, financial strain, sleep disturbance, and strained partner relationships) well-being among parents.

Classical and Modern Research in Parenting and Well-Being

Classical and modern research in parenting and well-being has focused on two slightly different questions. Classical research has primarily addressed the relative happiness of parents and nonparents. Modern research has extended this work to investigate parents' well-being from a more detailed approach, including a greater focus on parents' emotions and experiences, along with moderators of parents' happiness.

Classical Research: Is Parenthood Associated With Well-Being?

The majority of research investigating parents' well-being has aimed to answer this question: Is parenthood associated with increases or decreases in well-being? Notably, however, findings addressing this question are mixed (for a comprehensive review, see Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky, 2014). For example, studies comparing parents with nonparents in their overall well-being levels have found that parents are happier than nonparents (Nelson et al., 2013), that parents are less happy than nonparents (Evenson and Simon, 2005; McLanahan and Adams, 1987, 1989), and that parents and nonparents experience similar happiness levels (Rothrauff and Cooney, 2008). Studies investigating the transition to parenthood indicate that parents experience a boost in well-being, as well as in stress and marital discord, in the years surrounding childbirth (Clark, Diener, Georgellis, and Lucas, 2008; Dyrdal and Lucas, 2013; Miller and Sollie, 1980). Furthermore, the rise in well-being associated with childbirth typically dissipates by the child's first or second birthday (Dyrdal and Lucas, 2013; Luhmann et al., 2012). Finally, studies investigating parents' emotions while they are spending time with their children suggest that such moments are marked by greater positive emotions and meaning in

life relative to other daily activities (Musick et al., 2016; Nelson et al., 2013; Nelson-Coffey, Borelli et al., 2017).

Thus, the answer to the question “Is parenthood associated with greater or lower levels of well-being?” is relatively murky. The conflicting findings described earlier suggest that parents experience greater happiness in some (but not all) circumstances, or that some parents experience greater happiness whereas other parents experience lower levels of happiness. Accordingly, modern research has taken a more nuanced approach focused on uncovering when, why, and how parents experience greater or lessened well-being.

Modern Research on Parenthood and Well-Being: A Detailed Approach

Building on earlier research investigating the association between parenthood and well-being, contemporary studies have taken a more comprehensive approach to the topic by examining parents' experiences in greater detail. First, this research more thoroughly investigates parents' well-being by exploring parents' emotions in their day-to-day lives as a complement to measures of global well-being. Second, rather than focusing broadly on whether parents are happy, these studies focus on understanding differences among parents' experiences and their well-being (Galatzer-Levy, Mazursky, Mancini, and Bonanno, 2011; Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky, 2014). For example, several factors (e.g., age, gender, attachment style) moderate the association between parenthood and well-being.

Parenting and Emotion

Understanding parents' emotions in their day-to-day lives provides an important complement to studies investigating parents' global well-being. First, positive and negative emotions are important predictors of global well-being (Busseri and Sadava, 2011; Fredrickson and Joiner, 2002). Thus, investigations of parents' day-to-day emotions may also provide insight into their global well-being. Second, measures of global well-being may be susceptible to response biases (e.g., Eibach and Mock, 2011), whereas measures of daily emotion may not. For example, one study found that reminding parents of the financial cost of rearing children is associated with idealization of parenthood—likely in an effort to reduce cognitive dissonance—which may bias reports of global well-being (Eibach and Mock, 2011). Finally, parents' emotions are central to effective parenting (Dix, 1991; Rutherford, Wallace, Laurent, and Mayes, 2015). For example, mothers exhibit more supportive parenting behaviors in interactions with their children when they experience relatively higher levels of positive emotions and lower levels of negative emotions (Dix, Gershoff, Meunier, and Miller, 2004).

Parents' emotions are most commonly investigated in studies employing experience sampling methodology (in which participants are contacted several times per day and asked about their activities and emotions; Hektner et al., 2007), the Day Reconstruction Method (in which participants reconstruct one day from start to finish, including their activities and emotions; Kahneman et al., 2004), or other daily diary procedures (in which participants typically record information about their emotions and experiences at the end of each day over the course of several days). In studies using these approaches, parents have reported more positive emotions and meaningful moments throughout their days compared with nonparents (Nelson et al., 2013) and specifically when they spent time with their children compared with their other daily activities (Musick et al., 2016; Nelson et al., 2013; Nelson-Coffey, Borelli et al., 2017).

Moderators of Parents' Well-Being

A second way in which modern research has explored parents' well-being in greater detail has been by investigating moderating factors that may alter parents' experiences and overall well-being

(Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky, 2014). Notably, research has suggested that both psychological and demographic factors moderate the association between parenthood and well-being. For example, in one study of the transition to parenthood, parents reported an overall rise in well-being surrounding the birth of their child, followed by a decline in the first years to pre-childbirth levels; however, trajectories of well-being differed depending on parents' age (Myrskylä and Margolis, 2014). Although a complete review of all moderating factors is outside the scope of this chapter, ahead we provide a brief review of the evidence for three demographic factors (i.e., parent age, parent gender, and socioeconomic status) and two psychological factors (i.e., attachment and social support; for a review of many additional moderating factors, see Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky, 2014).

First, several studies indicate that parenthood is more strongly associated with well-being improvements among relatively older parents. In one study drawing on a nationally representative sample of adults from the United States, young parents (ages 17–25) were less satisfied with their lives relative to their childless peers, but parents between the ages of 26–62 were relatively more satisfied (Nelson et al., 2013). Of course, in cross-sectional samples such as this one, parent age is intertwined with child age, making it difficult to disentangle whether young parents are less satisfied because they are younger or because their children are younger. Other studies have dealt with this limitation by investigating how parent age is related to changes in well-being during the transition to parenthood. Research using this approach has consistently found that the transition to parenthood is more strongly related to positive well-being among relatively older parents (Luhmann et al., 2012; Myrskylä and Margolis, 2014). For example, one study found that, on average, the transition to parenthood was associated with a boost in life satisfaction during the year surrounding childbirth, but that well-being returns to pre-birth baseline levels within 1–2 years (Myrskylä and Margolis, 2014). Notably, however, these trajectories differed depending on parents' age. In this study, parents who were 35 or older when they had their first child reported an increase in life satisfaction the year their child was born, followed by a slight decline, but that their satisfaction levels remained above their pre-birth baseline. Conversely, relatively younger parents (ages 18–22) reported declining satisfaction levels with no boost during the year their child was born.

Why do relatively older parents report greater well-being? Using the Parents' Well-Being Model as a guide, it appears that, as compared with their younger counterparts, older parents experience fewer negatives in parenting (particularly negative emotions, financial strain, and strained partner relationships; bottom path in Figure 17.1). For example, older parents may be more established in their careers and secure in their relationships, thus providing greater financial and relationship stability. Indeed, older parents report lower levels of financial stress (Frankel and Wise, 1982). Other evidence suggests that older parents report feeling more competent and less stressed, depressed, and lonely (Cowan and Cowan, 1992; Frankel and Wise, 1982; Garrison, Blalock, Zarski, and Merritt, 1997; Mirowsky and Ross, 2002), further indicating the role of negative emotions in understanding the link between parent age and well-being.

A second demographic factor that has been strongly linked to parents' well-being is parent gender. Evidence suggests that fathers report relatively greater well-being than men without children (Nelson et al., 2013). Conversely, studies have found either no association between motherhood and well-being, or a negative association (Musick et al., 2016; Nelson et al., 2013; Nelson-Coffey, Killingsworth, Layous, Cole, and Lyubomirsky, 2017). For example, in one cross-sectional study, fathers reported greater well-being than men without children, whereas mothers and women without children did not differ in well-being (Nelson et al., 2013). Other work has found that mothers report less positive affect than fathers when engaged in child-related activities (Larson, Richards, and Perry-Jenkins, 1994; Nelson-Coffey, Killingsworth et al., 2017).

Gender differences in caregiving responsibilities and social norms regarding mothers' and fathers' time spent in work and family may explain the variation in mothers' and fathers' well-being. Research indicates that mothers spend more time with their children than fathers (Bianchi and Mattingly,

2003; Nelson-Coffey, Borelli et al., 2017). Additionally, mothers spent more time with their children providing basic care, as well as cooking, cleaning, and solo parenting, whereas most of fathers' time spent with children was in play and leisure (Musick et al., 2016; Nelson-Coffey, Killingsworth et al., 2017). Furthermore, these differences in how parents spent time with their children explained differences in how they felt during these activities. Mothers reported more stress and fatigue in parenting than did fathers (Musick et al., 2016). Finally, in addition to gender differences in parenting activities, working mothers may also experience relatively lower levels of well-being as they combine the competing roles of being a mother and maintaining a career. Indeed working mothers report more feelings of guilt about working than do working fathers (Borelli, Nelson et al., 2017; Borelli, Nelson-Coffey et al., 2017). Drawing on the Parents' Well-Being Model, this evidence suggests that mothers experience lower levels of well-being in part due to elevated negative emotions, whereas fathers experience greater well-being in part due to their experience of more positive emotions.

Third, the association between parenthood and well-being may also depend on parents' socioeconomic status (SES). Low-SES has been linked to greater risk for depression and poor health outcomes (Barefoot et al., 1991; Lynch, Kaplan, and Salonen, 1997). Few studies have directly examined whether and how SES moderates the association between parenthood and well-being; however, existing research suggests that parents of high SES experience relatively lower well-being. For example, high educational attainment is associated with finding less value and fulfillment in parenthood (Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka, 1981), and high-SES parents reported less meaning and purpose during childcare relative to low-SES parents (Kushlev, Dunn, and Ashton-James, 2012). Furthermore, reminders of wealth led parents to report less meaning while spending time with their child at a festival (Kushlev et al., 2012). Thus, evidence suggests that relatively high SES may be associated with decreased well-being, in part due to reduced levels of meaning in life.

Low-SES parenting may also be associated with reduced well-being. Low-SES parents are at increased risk for experiencing negative life events, for having limited coping skills, and for developing anxiety and depression (McLoyd, 1990). In addition, low-SES parents experience greater parenting stress (Steele et al., 2016). In a sample of low-income parents of young children, anxiety, intimate partner violence, and perceptions of financial hardship predicted reports of daily parenting hassles (Finewood, Raver, DeJoseph, and Blair, 2017). Furthermore, to the extent that parents with low socioeconomic status suffer greater financial strain, they may experience reduced life satisfaction (Kostouli, Xanthopoulou, and Athanasiades, 2016; Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky, 2014). Thus, low-SES parents likely experience reduced well-being in part due to elevated stress, negative emotion, and financial strain; however, more work is needed to further investigate psychological mechanisms that may limit the well-being of low-SES parents.

In addition to these demographic factors, several psychological factors moderate the association between parenthood and well-being. First, parents' attachment orientation—which characterizes an individual's comfort or discomfort in close relationships (Bowlby, 1969; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007)—is an important predictor of parents' well-being. Attachment styles are thought to develop based on the pattern of care people receive starting during infancy and continuing through childhood, which then shapes how comfortable they feel giving and receiving care in other relationships across the life span (Bowlby, 1969; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007). Infants who receive consistent, sensitive responses from their caregivers develop a secure attachment style, in which they are comfortable giving and receiving care in other relationships over the course of their lives. Conversely, infants who receive inconsistent or unreliable care may develop an insecure attachment style, often characterized by anxiety or avoidance. Attachment orientations are thought to shape not only how people respond in relationships, but also how they regulate their emotions (Shaver and Mikulincer, 2007).

A few studies have begun to investigate how parents' attachment styles predict their well-being. Attachment avoidance (which is characterized by discomfort with closeness, emotional deactivation

in close relationships, and a need for self-reliance; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall, 1978; Main, 1981; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2003) predicts poorer well-being among parents. For example, parents high in attachment avoidance reported lower levels of positive emotions during caregiving compared with their other daily activities on the Day Reconstruction Method (Nelson-Coffey, Borelli et al., 2017). Similarly, in another 7-day daily diary study, middle-age parents high in attachment avoidance reported lower levels of love, joy, and pride when they were spending time with their adult children (Impett, English, and John, 2011). Few studies have investigated how parents' attachment style is related to reports of their global well-being; however, drawing on the Parents' Well-Being Model and the research described here, parents high in attachment avoidance may report lower levels of well-being in part due to their experience of relatively few positive emotions.

A second important psychological factor that predicts parents' well-being is social support. Given the many tasks, stresses, and responsibilities associated with rearing children, it is not surprising that parents with stronger social support systems report higher levels of well-being—whether that support is from a spouse or partner, extended family, or friends (Koeske and Koeske, 1990; Luthar and Ciciolla, 2015; Pittman and Lloyd, 1988; Rizzo et al., 2013; Wandersman, Wandersman, and Kahn, 1980). In one study, for example, new parents reported an increase in contact with close family members, which was, in turn, related to improvements in psychological adjustment and fewer symptoms of depression (Bost, Cox, and Payne, 2002). In another investigation, support received from their husbands predicted new mothers' life satisfaction (Levitt, Weber, and Clark, 1986). Finally, another study found that social support was related to greater self-efficacy and fewer depressive symptoms among new mothers 6 weeks post-childbirth (Leahy-Warren, McCarthy, and Corcoran, 2012). Thus, social support appears to be related parents' well-being by boosting confidence and positive emotions, and by reducing stress and strain.

In summary, although early research on parenthood and well-being focused on *whether* parents were happy or unhappy, research since has noted the complexity and diversity of parents' experiences (e.g., Galatzer-Levy et al., 2011) and has aimed to uncover *why* or *how* parents are happy or unhappy. In particular, a number of demographic and psychological factors moderate the association between parenthood and well-being and partially explain the diversity of parents' experiences. Furthermore, we argue that the Parents' Well-Being Model (Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky, 2014) can help to explain how and why these demographic and psychological factors moderate the association between parenthood and well-being.

Practical Information About Parenting and Well-Being

Gaining insight into the factors that predict parents' happiness has many practical applications. Happiness is a major goal for people around the world (Diener, 2000) and predicts a number of important outcomes, such as physical health, improved social relationships, and job security (Lyubomirsky, King et al., 2005). Furthermore, understanding aspects of parenthood that predict happiness or unhappiness may better help therapists, medical professionals, and loved ones advise parents on the best ways to improve their well-being.

Given the many benefits of happiness for individuals and society (Lyubomirsky, King et al., 2005), parents' happiness likely influences children as well (e.g., Coffey, in press; Dix, 1991). For example, parents' happiness, stress, and negative moods predict important parenting behaviors, such as greater efforts to be supportive, to speak positively, and to cognitively stimulate children (Belsky, Crnic, and Woodworth, 1995; Bornstein, Putnick, and Suwalsky, 2018; Dix et al., 2004; Jouriles and O'Leary, 1991; Pett, Vaughan-Cole, and Wampold, 1994), and less detachment, negative affect, and irritability expressed toward children (Belsky et al., 1995; Dumas, 1986; Patterson, 1983). In turn, these positive parenting behaviors may confer long-term benefits to children (Bornstein et al., 2018). For example, in one study, mothers' life satisfaction was related to having children with fewer socioemotional

problems and higher verbal skills (Berger and Spiess, 2011), and another study found that parents' positive emotional expression toward adolescent children was related to more positive peer relationships 2 years later (Paley, Conger, and Harold, 2000). Thus, parents—who make many sacrifices for their children—may actually benefit their children by improving their own happiness.

Future Directions in Parenting and Well-Being

Although research on parenthood and well-being has provided many insights in recent years, several questions remain. First, the Parents' Well-Being Model (Figure 17.1; Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky, 2014) integrated research on parents' well-being across psychology, sociology, and economics, and although each piece of the model is strongly supported by theory or empirical evidence, little research has investigated mechanisms in the model simultaneously. Future studies examining all of the proposed mechanisms in the Parents' Well-Being Model together would be informative. Such studies would illuminate whether some mechanisms in the model are more important for parents' well-being than others. For example, previous research found that positive emotions are stronger predictors of long-term well-being than negative emotions (Coffey, Warren, and Gottfried, 2015; Cohn, Fredrickson, Broen, Mikels, and Conway, 2009; Kuppens, Realo, and Diener, 2008; Nelson et al., 2016). Thus, investigating the predictive validity of the mechanisms in the Parents' Well-Being Model would be informative.

Second, although studies are beginning to highlight the diversity of parents' experiences by investigating moderators of the association between parenthood and well-being, more work in this area is needed. We envision research on the moderators of parents' well-being to occur in two stages, moving from broad descriptions of patterns of individual differences in parents' well-being to understanding the underlying mechanisms of such patterns. Using parent gender as an example, such studies might begin by describing how parent gender is related to well-being (e.g., "Fatherhood is associated with relatively greater well-being, but motherhood is not."). An important second step in this line of research would then involve understanding why fathers are relatively happier and why mothers are not. The Parents' Well-Being Model may provide a starting place for potential mechanisms explaining differences among parents.

Third, understanding parents' happiness would also benefit from future work employing a greater variety of methodological approaches. Because parenthood cannot be randomly assigned, understanding the causal association between parenthood and well-being is not possible. In the absence of experimental methods, studies using multiple methodologies to triangulate on parents' experiences are informative. For example, a series of studies using both daily diary and cross-sectional methods to examine gender differences in parents' well-being would be more informative than studies relying on only one approach. Furthermore, although parenthood itself cannot be randomly assigned, experiments could be employed to better understand the underlying mechanisms predicting parents' happiness and to better understand how and why some parents are happier than others. For example, if a cross-sectional study identifies that fathers are happier than mothers (Nelson et al., 2013; Nelson-Coffey, Killingsworth et al., 2017) and that fathers and mothers differ in how they spend time with their children (Musick et al., 2016), an experimental study could randomly assign mothers and fathers to make small changes to how they spend time with their children (e.g., by spending an additional 30 minutes per week in play) to better understand the causal relation between parents' time with children and well-being.

Finally, studies could build on prior work on parenthood and well-being to develop methods to improve parents' happiness. A large body of literature suggests that happiness is attainable via simple, self-directed activities, such as practicing gratitude, kindness, or optimism (for a review, see Lyubomirsky and Layous, 2013). Coupled with a greater understanding of factors that predict parents' happiness, such activities could be tailored to help parents manage the stresses of parenthood

and improve their happiness levels. For example, evidence suggests that savoring positive experiences shared with one's children boosts positive affect among parents (Burkhart, Borelli, Rasmussen, and Sbarra, 2015). In turn, this experimental work could also be applied to investigate the effects of parents' happiness on other parenting behaviors and child outcomes.

Conclusion

The association between parenthood and well-being is remarkably complex, depending on a number of factors ranging from parents' attachment orientations and parenting style to their age and gender. Research investigating parents' happiness has moved beyond the question of whether parents are happy to gaining a deeper understanding of the circumstances that promote parents' happiness, along with the underlying psychological mechanisms explaining differences among parents. The Parents' Well-Being Model provides insight into these differences, suggesting that such differences hang in balancing the benefits (i.e., meaning in life, positive emotions, psychological need satisfaction, fulfilled social roles) with the costs (i.e., negative emotions, financial strain, sleep disturbance, strained partner relationships) of parenthood.

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