

Chapter 13

Life Satisfaction in Youth

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13.1 Introduction

The promotion of well-being among young people is an ongoing concern for mental health professionals and educators (Huebner et al. 2006). Indeed, how to better the lives of children is central to the mission of positive psychology. Although a variety of constructs have been proposed, understanding and fostering life satisfaction is widely agreed as being critical to achieving this goal. Life satisfaction is the cognitive, global appraisal of life as a whole (Shin and Johnson 1978), and one of the most well-established indicators of happiness, well-being, and positive functioning among young people (Suldo et al. 2006). Indeed, empirical research has demonstrated it to be positively related to a broad spectrum of positive personal, psychological, behavioral, social, interpersonal, and intrapersonal outcomes (see Proctor et al. 2009b for a review). Life satisfaction is seen as one element of subjective well-being (SWB; together with positive affect and negative affect), and thereby distinct from, but related to, psychological well-being as defined by Ryff and Keyes (1995). Evidence suggests that, for adults at least, the domains of subjective well-being and psychological well-being are distinct, yet still related (Keyes et al. 2002; Linley et al. 2009). Notwithstanding this, this chapter focuses specifically on the role of life satisfaction in youth, and does not review subjective well-being or psychological well-being more broadly.

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Recent empirical evidence suggests that youths with extremely high levels of life satisfaction benefit from increased adaptive psychosocial functioning, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social relationships, academic success, and decreased behavioral problems, over and above those with average levels of life satisfaction (Gilman and Huebner 2006; Proctor et al. 2010; Suldo and Huebner 2006). Increased life satisfaction is also associated with multiple school-related variables, including school satisfaction, teacher support, and perceived academic achievement, competence, and self-efficacy (see Suldo et al. 2006 for a review). Moreover, research suggests that life satisfaction is not simply an epiphenomenon (i.e., a by-product of individual differences in personality and life experiences), but an important determinant of outcomes that are beneficial to individuals, families, and communities (K. Martin et al. 2008). For example, empirical evidence suggests that life satisfaction buffers against the negative effects of stress and the development of psychological disorder (Suldo and Huebner 2004a). That is, adolescents with positive life satisfaction have been demonstrated to be less likely to develop later externalizing behaviors as a result of stressful life events than adolescents with low life satisfaction, suggesting that life satisfaction acts as a moderator for (i.e., buffer against) externalizing behavior (Suldo and Huebner 2004a).

Historically, approaches aimed at promoting well-being among young people have focused on maladaptive outcomes, with positive psychological function being informed from the absence of psychopathological symptoms; psychopathology refers to both internalizing psychological disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety) and externalizing disorders (e.g., conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder) (Suldo and Shaffer 2008). However, more recent evidence suggests that high psychopathology can be accompanied by high SWB, just as low psychopathology can be accompanied by low SWB (Greenspoon and Saklofske 2001). For example, an individual may display symptoms of psychopathology and still be highly satisfied with life or not display psychopathological symptoms and yet be very dissatisfied with life. These findings suggest that the absence of psychopathological symptoms is not necessarily an indication of positive mental health and that the study of optimal functioning and well-being is an important endeavor in its own right (Huebner et al. 2006). In the first part of this book the relationships between well-being and distress have been analyzed in adult clinical populations.

With the advent of positive psychology, there has been resurgence of the study of optimal functioning and well-being among young people and increased recognition of the distinction between these two conceptualizations. For example, Suldo and Shaffer (2008) examined the existence and utility of a dual-factor model in early adolescence and found that students with complete mental health (i.e., high SWB, low psychopathology) had better reading skills, school attendance, academic self-perceptions, academic-related goals, social support from parents and peers, self-perceived physical health, and fewer social problems than vulnerable youths (i.e., low psychopathology, low SWB). Among students with clinical levels of psychopathology, students with high SWB (symptomatic but content youth) perceived better social functioning and physical health (Suldo and Shaffer 2008). Overall, results support the existence of a dual-factor model and the importance of high SWB to optimal functioning during adolescence (Suldo and Shaffer 2008).

In their review of 141 empirical studies of youth life satisfaction C. L. Proctor et al. (2009b) concluded that, in general, research indicates that youths who report high levels of life satisfaction have better social and interpersonal relationships, engage in healthier behaviors, exhibit less antisocial and violent behavior, and develop fewer externalizing problems following stressful events than those with low life satisfaction; for a review of the measures of adolescent life satisfaction, the interested reader is directed to C. Proctor et al. (2009a). Expanding on this review, the following sections contain summaries of the current major findings of the youth life satisfaction literature as it pertains to the promotion of well-being in young people.

13.2 Supportive Interpersonal Relationships

13.2.1 Parenting Style

Both being involved in supportive relationships with parents and peers and the perception of adequate social support from significant others is essential to positive mental health throughout development. Although reliance on support can shift from parents to peers as age increases (e.g., Steinberg 1987; Nickerson and Nagle 2004), it is adolescents' perception of parental involvement, relationship with parents, and family functioning that has the greatest impact on level of life satisfaction, over and above stressful life circumstances. For instance, Suldo and Huebner (2004b) found that all three dimensions of the authoritative parenting style: social support-involvement, strictness-supervision, and psychological autonomy granting were positively related to life satisfaction among adolescents, with perceived parental social support having the strongest correlation. Specifically, an interaction effect was found between life satisfaction and parental social support such that the influence of parenting behaviors on adolescent global life satisfaction decreased as age increased (cf., Goldbeck et al. 2007).

Similarly, Milevsky et al. (2007) found authoritative mothering to be related to higher self-esteem and life satisfaction, and lower depression among adolescents, with the advantages of authoritative mothering being more advantageous than permissive mothering on all outcomes. Thus, despite the increasing importance of autonomy among young people, programs aimed at enhancing life satisfaction need to include strong family components (Huebner et al. 2006). Moreover, considering the greater impact of peer relationships in older adolescents, programs aimed at the development of social skills and peer interactions are also crucial (see Waas 2006 for a review).

13.2.2 Family Relationships and Family Structure

Cross-culturally, research among British and Italian adolescents has shown that cohesive family relationships are associated with better psychological well-being (Manzi et al. 2006). Comparatively, studies of adolescents in the East have revealed

relationships between parenting style and adolescent life satisfaction similar to those found in the West. For example, Shek et al. (2006) found that satisfaction with and quality of parent-adolescent communication were more strongly related to adolescent psychological well-being than frequency of parent-adolescent communication; similar results have also been found among Hungarian adolescents where being able to talk to parents about problems was a universal correlate of increased life satisfaction (see B. F. Piko and Hamvai 2010).

Related to these findings, research among Chinese adolescents has demonstrated that perceived parental psychological control is associated with reduced psychological well-being (Shek 2007a) and that parental behavioral control processes and parent-child relationship quality is higher in intact families (Shek and Lee 2007; Shek 2007b). Indeed, research conducted by Kwan (2010) found that Chinese adolescents living with both parents enjoyed higher life satisfaction across six domains (i.e., family, friends, school, self, living place, and overall), and had higher assessed health across four aspects (i.e., overall, physical, mental, and activity-day); comparatively however, self-assessed health and life satisfaction were lower among Chinese adolescents than American. Similarly, Antaramian et al. (2008) found that among American middle school students family structure was significantly related to family satisfaction, with adolescents from single-parent and stepparent families reporting lower satisfaction than adolescents from intact families.

In Germany, however, Winkelmann (2006) demonstrated that it is living circumstance and not parental separation, which is having the greatest negative effect on adolescent well-being among youths from non-intact families (cf., Sharma and Silbereisen 2007). Further, research with adopted children demonstrates the reciprocal nature of family relationships by indicating that the parent's level of relationship satisfaction with their adopted child is positively related to the parent's level of satisfaction and adolescent attachments to parents is related to adolescent life satisfaction and parent level of relationship satisfaction with their adopted child (Erich et al. 2009). These findings highlight the importance of the family as an institution that is central to the facilitation of optimal well-being (Antaramian et al. 2008).

13.2.3 Relationship Quality, Perceived Support, and Values

Additional elements of a supportive parent-child relationship include the facilitation of protective factors, quality of attachment, and the modeling of values. For example, Valois et al. (2009) explored the relationship between developmental assets (building blocks that, when present in children and adolescents, serve to protect them from engagement in health-compromising behaviors and to enhance their opportunity to achieve success in academic and interpersonal contexts) and life satisfaction. These researchers explored seven important developmental assets (i.e., support by parents/other adults; accountability to adults; empowerment; school support; values regarding risk behaviors; quantity of other adult support; empathetic relationships) and life satisfaction among adolescents.

Consistent with findings from previous studies, results revealed life satisfaction to be significantly related to perceived support by parents (e.g., Dew and Huebner 1994; Greenberg et al. 1983; Ma and Huebner 2008). For example, Ma and Huebner (2008) examined the extent to which the quality of parent and peer attachments related to early adolescents' life satisfaction and found parental attachment to be the strongest unique predictor, with peer attachment partially mediating the relationship between parental attachment and life satisfaction among adolescent girls.

Life satisfaction was also related to accountability to parents/other adults and values regarding risk behaviors among African American females, which is consistent with previous studies of risk-taking behavior and life satisfaction (Valois et al. 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2010; Zullig et al. 2001, 2005).

Similarly, life satisfaction was found to be significantly associated with quality of other adult support, which is consistent with findings from a study by Paxton et al. (2006) demonstrating that in addition to supportive parental relationships, opportunities for adult bonding and meaningful relationships in the neighborhood are associated with increased life satisfaction.

Related to this, research has shown that there is substantial transmission of mental distress and SWB between parents and children, such that parental distress effects the life satisfaction of their child and the child's life satisfaction influences the happiness of their parent (Powdthavee and Vignoles 2008). Finally, life satisfaction was also linked to empathetic relationships such that students who reported an absence of this quality were more likely to report lower levels of life satisfaction.

13.3 Meaningful Instrumental Activities

As noted, perceptions of adequate social support from parents, peers, and others is a key factor in the life satisfaction of adolescents. Notwithstanding this, is the importance promoting involvement in meaningful instrumental activity. The term 'meaningful instrumental activity' denotes individual perceptions of participating in psychologically significant, as well as personally significant, activities that are not limited to the work/school domain, but that may include other skill, goal, or task-based activities as well (Maton 1990).

13.3.1 *Flow*

For example, researchers such as Csikszentmihalyi (2002) have long underscored the importance of encouraging adolescent participation in activities that facilitate 'flow' – a mental state in which the challenge of an activity matches skill, such that neither anxiety or boredom occur (i.e., the activity is neither too easy nor too difficult). The flow state is an innately positive experience, one which is linked to academic success, diminished delinquency, physical health, and satisfaction with life

(see Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2002). Thus, providing opportunities for students to engage in activities that facilitate flow states allows them to perform optimally in education and sport.

13.3.2 Physical Exercise and Structured Extracurricular Activities

Indeed, life satisfaction has been consistently linked with academic achievement and participation in exercise and structured extracurricular activities (see Gilman et al. 2004; Suldo et al. 2006 for reviews). Similarly, Froh et al. (2010b) found that young people high in engaged living (social integration and absorption; i.e., having a passion to help others and be completely immersed in activity) are more grateful, hopeful, happier, prosocial, and report elevated life satisfaction, positive affect, self-esteem, school experience, and grade point average, as well as, tend to be less depressed, envious, antisocial, and delinquent. Thus, helping adolescents become more passionate about helping others and absorbed in their activities is one way to help lay the foundation for growth and positive experiences, which promotes psychological well-being both now and in the future (Froh et al. 2010b). Moreover, being engaged in life may help cultivate a sense of purpose in life, which is vital considering evidence that many young people lack a realistic plan for succeeding in life, with no commitment beyond disconnected interests, and therefore are in need of serious guidance in an increasingly complicated society (Froh et al. 2010b).

13.3.3 Employment Experience

Purpose in life plays an important positive role in the development of young people (Bronk and Finch 2010). Indeed, having an identified purpose in life is associated with increased life satisfaction during adolescence (Bronk et al. 2009). Moreover, purpose in life is associated with having long-term aims in life, including vocational interests – which involves setting goals and developing skills enabling young people to obtain their desired career.

By providing opportunities for work experience, educators and support staff (e.g., school counselors) are able to link adolescent career development with positive youth development. Indeed, findings reported by Hirschi (2009) demonstrate that by supporting the connection between career adaptability and positive youth development through vocational education and social support, young people experience an increased sense of power and life satisfaction. Related to these findings, O'Brien et al. (1994) found that employed youth have higher adjustment levels (as measured by affect, work values, and personal control), lower depressive affect, higher life satisfaction, greater commitment to values, more internal control, and higher perceived competence than low-quality leisure unemployed youth.

13.4 Healthy Lifestyle

13.4.1 Substance Abuse

Successful transition into adulthood can be greatly hindered by health-risk behavior during adolescence. Unfortunately, a great number of young people do not make it through adolescence unscathed by the effects of substance use and abuse. Indeed, development of substance use disorders during adolescence is associated with deleterious consequences across multiple life domains, including school dropout, delayed entry into the labor force, job instability job dissatisfaction, early marriage and divorce, impaired relationships with family and friends, and early parenthood (see Rohde et al. 2007 for a review).

As demonstrated by Rohde et al. (2007), adolescent substance use disorder (before age 19) is associated with numerous functioning difficulties at age 30, including academic and occupational functioning and lower life satisfaction. Similarly, Valois et al. (2010) found that reduced life satisfaction is associated with cigarette smoking, chewing tobacco, cigar smoking, and alcohol, marijuana, and inhalant use in students as young as 11–14.

Related to these findings are those reported by Sun and Shek (2010) among Chinese adolescents, whereby it was found that adolescents with poor positive development have lower life satisfaction and higher levels of substance abuse, delinquency, and intention to engage in problem behavior. Examination of the longitudinal associations between adolescent tobacco and cannabis use and young adult functioning has further shown that those who initiate tobacco use in adolescence, but desist, continue to be at an elevated risk for poorer physical health, depression, low life satisfaction, and fewer years of education 14–18 years later (Georgiades and Boyle 2007). Similarly, cannabis use continued into adulthood is associated with lower life satisfaction and increased risk of major depressive disorder (Georgiades and Boyle 2007).

Moreover, research has demonstrated that alcohol is the most important predictor variable associated with cigarette smoking, regardless of socioeconomic status, school type, or parental demographic features (Kasapoglu and Ozerkmen 2008). Further, more frequent use of alcohol and cigarettes is associated with increased sexual activity, physical fighting, and stress among adolescents (Harvey 1995).

Overall, research findings suggest that health-risk behaviors initiated in childhood and adolescence are associated with behavioral, psychological, psychosocial, and physical factors that continue for a lifetime. Thus, the long-term risks associated with adolescent health-risk behavior underscore the importance of early prevention and intervention (Georgiades and Boyle 2007). Indeed, promotion of positive youth development is of paramount importance in enabling life satisfaction and mitigating the risk-taking behavior among early adolescents (Sun and Shek 2010).

13.4.2 Eating Behaviours and Obesity

Early prevention and intervention of health-risk behaviors among young people also includes addressing the psychosocial factors associated with the etiology of obesity. Although obesity is influenced by multiple factors, including both biological and genetic conditions, the impact of social, physical, and dietary influences cannot be ignored, especially considering that the psychological issues and habits of young people with excess weight can persist into adulthood (Saloumi and Plourde 2010). For example, Saloumi and Plourde (2010) found that being dissatisfied with the way their body looks, having a strong fear of being too fat, and engaging in potential weight control practices, such as smoking and avoiding food, were associated with reduced life satisfaction among Canadian adolescents.

In contrast, B. F. Piko (2006) found that health behaviors and good diet control practices contributed significantly to life satisfaction, whereas smoking was related to decreased life satisfaction among Hungarian adolescents. Moreover, body image dissatisfaction and poor weight control practices, including poor eating and low physical activity, were found to persist to adulthood. Considering societal changes in energy intake and sedentary lifestyle, promotion of healthy eating and exercise is a timely concern.

13.5 Positive Behavior and Prosocial Peer Interactions

Peer victimization is associated with reduced emotional well-being among adolescents and continues to be a pervasive problem for young people today (Martin and Huebner 2007). As demonstrated by Martin and Huebner (2007), overt (e.g., physical or verbal insults) and relational (e.g., spreading rumors, exclusion) victimization experiences are correlated with reduced life satisfaction and affect among adolescents. Similarly, low life satisfaction is a precursor of relational victimization and reduced prosocial experiences, suggesting bidirectional effects between these variables (Martin et al. 2008).

Research has also revealed, however, that prosocial experiences are associated with increased life satisfaction and positive affect over and above the influence of victimization experiences, suggesting that receipt of positive social acts from peers operates as a protective factor for adolescents' emotional well-being.

Similar findings have been reported by Sun and Shek (2010) in the Chinese context, whereby adolescents were less likely to be involved in problem behavior when they are more satisfied with life, have strong relationships with adults and peers, have a sense of purpose and meaning in life, and have clear standards for prosocial engagement; results support findings indicating a bidirectional relationship between life satisfaction and problem behavior. Therefore, facilitating opportunities for students to engage in positive interactions with other students in different settings is an intervention that will enhance resilience in the face of adversity (Martin and Huebner 2007).

As discussed by M.T. Greenberg et al. (2003), education should teach young people to interact in socially skilled and respectful ways, practice positive, safe, and healthy behaviors, contribute ethically and responsibly to their peer group, family, school, and community, and possess basic competencies, work habits, and values, and in order to achieve this school-based prevention and intervention programming needs to be based on a coordinated social, emotional, and academic learning environment.

13.6 Positive Psychological Interventions and Character Strengths

A promising approach to increase well-being among young people is through positive psychological interventions – that is, intentional activities that aim to cultivate positive feelings, behaviors, or cognitions (Sin and Lyubomirsky 2009). For example, recent research has demonstrated that performing positive psychological exercises, such as counting blessings (i.e., daily gratitude journal-keeping exercise) (Froh et al. 2008) or counting one’s own acts of kindness for 1 week (Otake et al. 2006), are associated with increased positive affect and life satisfaction. Indeed, Froh et al. (2008) found that adolescents who listed up to five things that they were grateful for daily for 2 weeks had increased well-being, life satisfaction, and decreased negative affect at follow-up. Further, research has demonstrated that adolescents who report grateful moods indicate greater SWB, optimism, prosocial behavior, gratitude in response to aid, and social support (Froh et al. 2009).

Gratitude has also been found to be a motivator of future benevolent actions on the part of the recipient (Froh et al. 2010a). Specifically, findings reported by Froh et al. (2010a) indicate that gratitude predicts social integrations, prosocial behavior, and life satisfaction among early adolescents, which suggests an ‘upward spiral’ of gratitude and happiness. Similarly, Geraghty et al. (2010b) have found that cultivating gratitude through daily gratitude diaries is as successful at reducing worry as standard cognitive techniques (cf. Geraghty et al. 2010a). Moreover, M. E. P. Seligman et al. (2005) have demonstrated that writing down three good things that went well each day, and using identified top strengths in a new way each day, for 1 week increases happiness and decreases depressive symptoms for 6 months. For a detailed description of strengths based interventions in young populations, see Chap. 10 of this book.

13.6.1 Curriculum Based Interventions

Exploratory investigations into the teaching of well-being in school through the application of positive psychology interventions and theory has also led to reliable improvements in students’ well-being (see Seligman et al. 2009 for a review).

For example, in America the *Positive Psychology Program*, which consisted of approximately 20–25 sessions delivered over 1 year, integrated learning of the 24 VIA (Values-In-Action – Inventory of Strengths; Peterson and Seligman 2004) character strengths through character strengths discussion sessions, in-class activities, real-world homework activities, and follow-up journal reflections (Seligman et al. 2009). Participating students were randomly assigned to Language Arts classes that either contained the positive psychology curriculum (positive psychology condition) or did not contain the positive psychology curriculum (control). The program was demonstrated to increase enjoyment and engagement in school and improve social skills among adolescent students (see M. E. P. Seligman et al. 2009).

A similar example of a program based on the VIA classification from Britain is *Strengths Gym* (Proctor and Fox Eades 2009). This program involves students completing age appropriate strengths-based exercises on each of the 24 VIA strengths through in-class activities, philosophical discussions, stories, and real-world homework activities where students can apply the concepts and skills in their own lives. Students are provided with the opportunity to self-identify with their signature strengths at the beginning of each of the three levels of the program and to re-evaluate them again before moving on to the next level. This program provides teachers with flexible lesson plans enabling them to choose activities that suit the mood and the needs of their class. Students who have participated in Strengths Gym have been demonstrated to have significantly higher life satisfaction compared to adolescents who did not participate in the program (Proctor et al. 2011).

Another similar program from Australia, the *Geelong Grammar School Project*, involved training 100 members of faculty in the principles and skills of positive psychology, such as resilience, strengths, gratitude, and positive communication so that they could incorporate these skills into their teaching. The program has resulted in the creation of stand alone courses in several grades, such as character strengths and positive education, supplemented by whole school practices, such as students in the elementary school starting the day with a focus on ‘what went well’ the day before (Fox Eades 2008). Teachers are developing their own methods of using the principles they have learned. For example, a sports coach may use a character strengths framework to debrief teams following a game.

13.6.2 Character Strengths

Character strengths have also been shown to longitudinally predict SWB during adolescence. For example, Gillham et al. (2011) have demonstrated that transcendent (e.g., hope, gratitude, meaning), temperance (e.g., self-regulation, perseverance), other-directed (e.g., forgiveness, kindness, teamwork), and intellectual (e.g., curiosity, love of learning) strengths significantly predict greater life satisfaction, and that other-directed strengths and temperance at the start of high school predict fewer symptoms of depression by grade 10, even when controlling for the influence of other types of strengths; similarly hope and optimism have been shown

to predict life satisfaction in adolescents with cognitive disabilities (see Shogren et al. 2006). Similarly, hope has been found to be positively related to positive affect, life satisfaction, support from family and friends, and optimism (Edwards et al. 2007).

In contrast, other research has indicated that both working on developing character strengths and relative character weaknesses may assist in increasing life satisfaction (see Rust et al. 2009). Finally, spirituality, positive religious coping, and daily spiritual experiences have also been shown to be positively related to positive affect and life satisfaction among young people (Van Dyke et al. 2009). These results suggest that holistic approaches to increasing well-being should consider the use of positive religious coping strategies among youths who are religious and the role of spirituality in early adolescents' psychological well-being (Bjorck et al. 2010; Van Dyke et al. 2009; Baroun 2006).

13.7 Cultural Integration

The acculturation and psychological adaptation of adolescents of immigrant families has important implications for life satisfaction as young people experience changes in identity, attitudes, values, and behaviors as a function of intercultural contact (Ward 2006). For example, Ward (2006) has demonstrated that dual heritage youth absorb cultural influences from two traditions and that, as a result, their values, perceptions and patterns of adaptation fall between those of single heritage youth. Specifically, among New Zealand adolescents, adolescents identified as Maori and Pakeha exhibited pragmatically blended constellation of values, attitudes and self-perceptions that reflected the influence of both cultural groups and did not significantly differ from single ancestry groups in terms of psychological symptoms, life satisfaction, behavioral problems, or school adjustment. Similarly, in Germany Pfafferott and Brown (2006) found that acculturative integration was more strongly associated with favorable intergroup relations and, in the case of minority members, life satisfaction, than the other acculturation orientations; highlighting the personal relevance of acculturation for adolescents from immigrant families.

Perceived family support and family processes also play a crucial role in the well-being of immigrant adolescents. For example, Edwards and Lopez (2006) found that perceived support from family and Mexican orientation were significantly positively associated with life satisfaction among Latino American adolescents. In fact, youths identified their family as the most important contributing factor in their level of life satisfaction, over and above the influence of friends, religion, or money.

In Canada, non-economically motivated immigration by Hong Kong families was associated with markedly higher level of life satisfaction among their adolescent children, along with positive experience making friends with Canadians, positive academic experience, absence of discrimination experience, and presence of both parents in Canada. Moreover, research has also demonstrated that context

influences adolescent perceptions of racial discrimination. For example, Seaton and Yip (2009) found that school diversity appears to be linked to increasing perceptions of individual racism, whereas neighborhood diversity appears to be linked to decreasing perceptions of cultural racism among African American youths and that high levels of collective/institutional discrimination is associated with lower life satisfaction. Moreover, perceptions of discrimination have been demonstrated to be linked to depressive symptoms and low self-esteem and life satisfaction (Seaton et al. 2008, 2010). Similarly, R. Q. Shin et al. (2010) found that neighborhood satisfaction was a significant predictor of both school and overall life satisfaction among adolescents of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Finally, Neto and Barros (2007) found that psychosocial adjustment variables (i.e., psychological symptoms (e.g., absence of depression), mastery, and behavioral problems (i.e., absence of antisocial behavior)) were the best predictors of life satisfaction among Portuguese immigrant families in Switzerland. Indeed, adaptation to a new cultural context is challenging, however research suggests that support from families and communities, cultural integration, and mastery are important in the life satisfaction of adolescent immigrant youths. Thus, providing environments that support cultural integration and opportunities for developing a sense of mastery may improve the life satisfaction and successful acculturation of immigrant youths.

13.8 Conclusion

As we hope to have demonstrated throughout this chapter, life satisfaction is integral to positive and successful functioning in youth. Youths with higher levels of life satisfaction benefit from a range of positive life outcomes, including adaptive psychosocial functioning, better interpersonal and social relationships, fewer behavioral problems, and a host of school-related positive outcomes, including greater academic success, higher school satisfaction, perceived academic achievement, competence, and self-efficacy. Clearly, experiencing high levels of life satisfaction is good for youth and leads to a range of good outcomes for youth.

Further, we have shown the diverse range of variables that can and do impact on life satisfaction in youth, including, for example, supportive interpersonal relationships with family, friends, and school colleagues, participation in meaningful instrumental activities, leading a healthy lifestyle that avoids substance misuse, excess alcohol, and tobacco, and demonstrating positive behavior that reinforces positive, prosocial interactions with peers.

From the perspective of positive psychology, we have also shown how certain positive psychology interventions have been shown to promote and enhance life satisfaction in youth. These include having young people complete gratitude diaries which record the things for which they are grateful, teaching well-being at school, and enabling students to develop character strengths through a series of tailored developmental interventions.

Above all, we have set out to show in this chapter that, first, life satisfaction is fundamentally important for well-being in youth; second, to review and summarize the various factors that influence and enable life satisfaction in youth; and third, to show that life satisfaction can be enhanced through the deployment of positive psychology interventions. It is this final element that we believe holds the greatest promise for the future, and we encourage researchers and practitioners alike to turn their attention to greater understanding of the ways in which we can enhance and promote life satisfaction and well-being in young people. Such a laudable undertaking will ultimately be to the advantage of us all.

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