

Gender and the Subjective Well-being of Widowed Elders

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ABSTRACT

Many studies suggest that aging women have unique experiences in widowhood, which are different from those of aging men because of gender inequality. This study explored the 2014 Health and Retirement Study (HRS) to discover whether gender influences the factors that affect subjective well-being of elderly widows and widowers (aged 65 and over). To look at subjective well-being, I used a feminist gerontological approach to explore possible gender differences and examined life satisfaction, a life satisfaction scale, and happiness, their corresponding predictive factors, and their importance for each of the measures of subjective well-being. This study found that there were gender differences in total household income and social support from friends. Although gender did not affect subjective well-being directly, there were gender differences in the ways that education, total household income, total wealth, and social support from children and friends affected the subjective well-being of widows and widowers.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Aging is getting increasing attention from scholars, policymakers, and the general public. However, the experiences of widowed elders are not at the center of attention, even though they constitute a considerable portion of the aging population. When scholars do focus on widowhood, the typical approach is to examine the negative sides of widowhood, such as depression. However, this study investigates the subjective well-being of widowed elders in terms of life satisfaction and happiness. Specifically, this study focuses on potential gender differences in sources of subjective well-being, and how these might relate to gender inequalities over the life course. The findings suggest that the ways education, income, wealth, and some sources of social support that affected life satisfaction and happiness did differ between widows and widowers. Women's roles as wives and mothers and their domestic labor meant that income and social support from children were important to their life satisfaction and happiness; widowers' life satisfaction was related only to income, although their happiness was sensitive to many factors. Further, even though elderly widows had much lower income and wealth, they still had comparable levels of subjective well-being as did elderly widowers. The results point to ways that inequality in terms of the gender division of labor shaped the sources of seemingly equal levels of subjective well-being.

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Chapter 1: Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Carr and Bodnar-Deren (2009) propose that widowhood is “a women’s issue” because women, in general, have longer lifespans than men and thus are more likely to experience the death of their spouses. They note that aging women outnumber aging men in general around the world. In comparison with women, men tend to have higher mortality rates from such diseases as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and chronic liver disease, in addition to those that result from unintentional injuries and suicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2015).

Furthermore, widowed men are more likely to remarry, especially given norms that encourage men, but not women, to seek younger dating partners; social norms value men’s maturity as they age, but women’s sexual attraction is mainly attributed to the young (van den Hoonaard 2009; Lopata 1996; Martin-Matthews 2011). Taken together, these factors result in the likelihood of aging women being widowed is three times greater than that of aging men (Michael et al. 2003). To Anne Martin-Matthews (2011:340), widowhood is not only “sex-selective,” but also “age-related.” Widowhood is more likely to be elderly women’s experience. In the United States, the numbers of widowed males and females reach about 12% and 34% respectively in their own populations aged 65 and older in 2015, compared with 3% and 9% in the whole population (The Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics 2016; U.S. Census Bureau 2016).

In part due to this gender difference in the likelihood of being widowed, researchers have questioned the ways in which gender influences experiences of widowhood in later life. Because widowhood is more common for them, most studies have focused on women’s experiences. Among these studies, Lopata’s (1970, 1981, 1996) pioneering work uses role theory to explore role loss/exit and identity change and characterizes widowhood as a socially constructed process

and status. Lopata and Thorne (1978:720) also argue that “gender identification” creates boxes of various social roles in which men and women are assigned. And the ways men and women act in various roles confirm the cultural norms which define manhood and womanhood. Women’s primary tasks are caregiving, nurturing, and domestic labor based on their roles as wives and mothers (Lopata 1973). A precursor to what we now think of as feminist gerontology, Lopata (1973:412) finds that for women, three main issues including “a feeling of incompetence and incompleteness as persons, being shunned by others, and experiences of strain in social interaction” contribute to problems in widowhood. In particular, she suggests that what affect experiences in widowhood are social factors, such as education, income, and social interactions in which people interact with others to exchange material resources and establish emotional bonds (Lopata 1970, 1973). Lopata (1970, 1973) finds that the loss of income caused by the death of a spouse results in financial stress and increases women’s vulnerability to poverty, but education can help them exit from the roles of wives in widowhood, and social support buffers some of the negative effects of widowhood, which affects subjective well-being directly. It is unknown whether these findings apply to contemporary cohorts of women. Thus, this study explored the influence of education, income, and social support on the subjective well-being of today’s widows to address this gap.

Among the smaller number of studies that focus on men, van den Hoonaard (2009, 2010) suggests that aging males, unlike females, are not as prepared for the possible occurrence of widowhood in their life course; thus, they suffer more from the unexpected loss. Also, widowers tend to struggle with dealing with daily life activities, such as cooking and cleaning, and managing their own health, unless they have gained the experience from caring for sick wives (van den Hoonaard 2010). Other than these, widowers tend to lack emotional support from others

because of the high dependency on their wives before (Carr and Bodnar-Deren 2009). They also are likely to have fewer confidants than women, even though the number of their friends may exceed that of widows (Davidson 1998). In other words, aging widowers have wider social networks often because of their paid work, but these may be less intimate and provide less emotional support.

Looking at both men and women, Martin-Matthews (1991) asserts that there are many variations in the experience of widowhood for men and women. Although issues such as loneliness derived from the death of spouse matter for both genders, economic situation can be both more likely and problematic for widows, while dealing with domestic labor related to daily living and ties with children could be more problematic for widowers. Carr (2004:233) suggests that it is crucial for future research to investigate the sources of inequality that affect gendered experiences of widowhood.

Drawing from feminist scholarship, Connidis and Barnett (2019:106) suggest that it is the “broader institutional and structural arrangements” which frame gender relations thus contributing to the gendered experience in widowhood. Feminists consider how societal norms and values contribute to the uniqueness of these experiences between genders (Martin Matthews 1991). Hence, feminist gerontologists argue that gender inequality over the life course causes gender disparities in later life. They begin with the concept of “gender relations,” which refers to the ways in which men and women’s behaviors conform to “ideals of manhood and womanhood” and thus influence identities, power, and life chances (Calasanti 2009: 472). Masculinity and femininity are mutually shaped in interaction (West and Zimmerman 1987); at the same time, gender relations are institutionalized and reinforced in both the private and public spheres. As a result of the uneven distribution of power, men receive unearned advantages

simply because they are men, while women are marginalized, thus shaping gendered life experiences (Calasanti 2009). To explain gender inequalities, Calasanti (2010b) suggests that, in general, such disparities emerge from the gender division of labor, that is, the gendered responsibilities concerning paid and unpaid labor. The gender division of labor not only translates into women's primary responsibility for reproductive labor, such as domestic tasks, but it also influences women's involvement in the public sphere and paid work, wherein women occupy unequal positions compared to men; and women's work is devalued in both arenas (Calasanti 2010b). The power relations in the gender division of labor reflect and reinforce inequalities, which continue over the life course, generating far-reaching economic and social-psychological consequences, and shaping what Calasanti (2010b:726) refers to as "gender repertoires— sets of skills and resources learned over the life course that affirm gender identities formed in a context of inequality." For instance, women are responsible for caring for other family members, and thus lose income but also develop close relationships with them; men gain particular types of occupational skills outside the home and reap economic resources but may not develop reproductive skills or the same family ties as women do (Calasanti 2010b). Understanding these gender repertoires may help explain the gendered experience of widowhood for older adults.

The Present Study

In contrast to earlier work that focused on which gender experiences greater overall difficulty due to widowhood, studies increasingly focus on how men and women may experience widowhood differently on multiple dimensions (Carr 2004). For instance, Martin-Matthews (1991) find that some women gain more independence and freedom in widowhood. Also, the research points to a variety of impacts on men. Some scholars assert that men are more likely to

feel incapable and lonely because they lack daily life skills and social support, while others find that their economic situation advantages men in nearly all aspects of experience (Atchley 1975; van den Hoonaard 2009). Notably, many contemporary studies of widows' and widowers' experiences concentrate on psychological aspects, especially depression and mental disorders (e.g. van den Hoonaard 2010; Umberson, Wortman, and Kessler 1992); and to my knowledge, those that take a more sociological approach rarely adopt a feminist gerontological framework to examine gender similarities and differences or tie their findings to an explicit examination of gender inequality. Thus, I used feminist gerontology to examine the experience of aging widows and widowers and drew on previous research findings from Lopata, Carr, and Martin-Matthews to explore gender similarities and disparities in this experience. Specifically, I explored life satisfaction, the satisfaction with life scale, and happiness in the past 30 days of both aging widows and widowers.

Researchers introduced the concept of subjective well-being to examine people's positive "cognitive judgments and affective reactions" about their lives (Diener 1984: 542). Life satisfaction, "a cognitive constituent of subjective well-being," indicates the quality of life (Prasoon and Chaturvedi 2016: 30). Some studies use measures of happiness and life satisfaction together to detect subjective well-being since life satisfaction is stable across lifetimes and broad in terms of a global question (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2008). Diener, Shigehiro, and Lucas (2011: 189) introduce "at-the-moment feelings of well-being" as well as general judgments of life experience because a measure of happiness in a certain timespan provides a more concrete referent as it reflects life experience on a daily basis.

To better our understanding of subjective well-being, a large number of researchers have tried to discover predictors of life satisfaction in widowhood and the corresponding weight of

their influence (e.g. Angelini et al. 2012; Berg et al. 2006; D'Amato 1987; Salinas-Jiménez, Artés, and Salinas-Jiménez 2013; Zhang, Braunb, and Wu 2017). Berg et al. (2006) find that self-assessed health, financial satisfaction, sex, and occupation are correlated with subjective well-being of elders. Doyle and Forehand (1984) also discover that health condition, financial situation, and living arrangements are highly correlated with life satisfaction for all people, especially for elders. In addition to the aforementioned factors, age has a substantial effect on life satisfaction, and Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976) suggest most domains of life satisfaction improve with age especially after age 50. As well, some studies also find older people tend to report higher life satisfaction than younger ones (Mercier, Peladeau, and Tempier 1998; Zhang et al. 2017).

Regarding gender, Berg et al. (2006) find men aged 65 and older tend to be more satisfied with life as a whole than women in the same age group. Yet, many studies do not find a gender difference in life satisfaction, and some even assert that “gender had no effect on subjective quality of life” (Mercier et al. 1998: 488). Notably, gender is a deep structure which perpetuates in all aspects of life, and thus frame elders’ experience in widowhood as well (Sewell 1992). Although levels of subjective well-being do not always vary between both genders, the influence of its predictors may differ between genders (Lubben 1989). Gender may structure subjective well-being in widowhood through gendered identities, skills, and resources shaped by institutionalized gender inequalities over the life course (Calasanti and Slevin 2001). In particular, researchers find that predictors such as education, income, and social support that affect subjective well-being and the extent of their influences do differ between males and females. Income matters for men’s subjective well-being while education, income, and social support matter for women’s (Berg et al. 2006; Bourque et al. 2005).

With regards to happiness, people in the United States tend to perceive it as appreciative feelings today (McMahon 2006; Wierzbicka 2004). Although women are disadvantaged in health and socio-economic status, the gender difference in happiness is not significant and women tend to be slightly happier than men, while there is a decline in women's happiness compared to men (Zweig 2015). Those mixed findings indicate the complexity of subjective well-being of both genders.

Placing these factors into a feminist gerontological framework, I would argue that gendered experiences in widowhood derive from the gender division of labor that has shaped aging women's identities and positions as wives and mothers and hindered the present cohort of old women from equal access to (higher) education and to paid employment. As a result, even those who worked for pay are likely to have an identity based on family roles and have lower incomes based on their segregation into specific, lower-paid occupations and discontinuous work lives than men (Hegewisch et al. 2010). They also may have different skills and resources from men (Calasanti 1996; Lopata 1973). By contrast, men's different positions within the family and the workplace likely result in identities and skills based on paid work, and thus problem-solving and task management, rather than those derived from family relationships and domestic labor, shape them (Calasanti and King 2007; Thompson 2000). Their resources—both material (such as finances) and social—also differ from those of women (Calasanti 2010b). The social support from relatives, friends, and organizations that are based on women's identity in family lives, and women's domestic skills, may bring advantages to them.

Based on this review of the literature and feminist gerontology, my general research question is, how does gender influence life satisfaction, the satisfaction with life scale, and happiness of elderly widows and widowers? Specifically, based on my literature review, I

examined factors such as education, income, wealth, and sources and levels of social support. Some of these predictive factors may be more important for one group than the other one; some may matter for both genders, but one group lacks one set while the other group lacks another. For instance, income may matter to both men and women, but men may be advantaged in this regard while women might be disadvantaged. I looked at each possibility in this study.

Education

Education is found to be related to subjective well-being in different ways (Salinas-Jiménez et al. 2013; Zhang et al. 2017). Zhang et al. (2017) suggest that education affects subjective well-being for both genders, and it matters more to women than to men. Education provides women with skills and opportunities to close the gender gap in occupational achievement and increase their personal autonomy and self-reliance. These could contribute to subjective well-being even though men tend to obtain greater economic returns from higher education than do women (Roth 2003). Further, Lopata (1973) suggests that women with lower educational attainment tend to emphasize their roles as wives and thus struggle more to deal with spousal loss than women with higher educational attainment. Salinas-Jiménez, Artés, and Salinas-Jiménez (2013) find that education influences life satisfaction of women both in direct and indirect ways, while men are influenced only indirectly through its impact in terms of work opportunities and career development.

Income

Researchers find that income consistently, strongly, and positively affects the life satisfaction of elderly people, although some find that the influence of income on life satisfaction attenuates among the oldest-old (Berg et al. 2006).

Since women's roles as mothers and wives shape their skills and resources, and

occupational segregation limits working women's abilities to gain higher earnings, income (which may be mediated by education) may be more important for women than men in widowhood since women tend not to be the primary breadwinner (Carr and Bodnar-Deren 2009; Hegewisch et al. 2010; Lopata 1973). Aging women are less likely to have continuous work lives because of their primary roles as wives and mothers or occupy jobs as high in status or income as men because of occupational segregation. Both of these situations would contribute to women's lower pension benefits (Calasanti 2010a). Aging widows also may not get the pension benefits and Social Security Income of their husbands at all or in full (Carr and Bodnar-Deren 2009). Hence, women in widowhood, especially those who used to be dependent on their husbands economically, tend to have a lower income than their male counterparts (Martin-Matthews 1991; Umberson et al. 1992).

Wealth

Compared with income, wealth functions well in measuring the level of a family in terms of "economic security and the ability to absorb economic shocks, such as unemployment" (Willson, Shuey, and Elder 2007:1896). The correlation between income and wealth is not high, especially when asset income is excluded; the lack of correlation may be partly due to the fact that wealthy people tend not to rely heavily on paid work to maintain their lifestyles. As a result, wealth is increasingly included along with income to measure socio-economic status, especially for the elderly population (Lerman and Mikesell 1988; Wolff 1995). Keister and Moller (2000) find that household wealth contributes separately to well-being, and Willson et al. (2007) discover that wealth is positively associated with financial satisfaction, which is an important part of overall life satisfaction. Given gender relations, women tend to have less wealth than men (Denton and Boos 2007). Especially in widowhood, women's different skills and lack of

resources to accumulate wealth and manage liabilities or debt, along with the loss of economic resources following spousal death, can worsen their economic conditions. This reality is reflected in data that show that many of the poor elderly are widows, not widowers (Hurd and Wise 1987).

Social Support

Social support, which comes from a network of “relatives, friends, and organizations that provide both emotional support and instrumental support,” contributes to well-being (Quadagno 2008:168; Martin-Matthews 2011).

Given the social and physical changes that often accompany later life, social support takes on a special significance for elders (Martin-Matthews 2011). Social support may also differ between men and women, especially among those who are older, and thus we may find different sources of social support or levels matter for men and women (Antonucci and Akiyama 1987). Women have multiple sources of support such as children, other relatives, friends, and neighbors to resort to, while men tend to depend on their wives alone for support (Antonucci 1990; Martin-Matthews 2011). Because women tend to spend more time and energy on family reproduction than men, they become more likely to foster an intimate relationship with children both instrumentally and emotionally (Connidis and Barnett 2019). However, some studies find that widows intensify their relationships with children shortly after the spousal loss, which has limited influence on their life satisfaction because of obligatory family responsibilities in the long run; but they are more likely to benefit from the support of their friends such as other widows, siblings, and neighbors who can provide them with daily help, which contributes to their well-being (Arling 1976; Davidson 1998; Lopata 1996; Lubben 1989). Widows may lose some friends in couples, but also enter the circle of other widows with whom they share the same life experience. However, men don’t have the same opportunity to gain friends who are

widowers, in part because of the small number of widowers compared to widows (Schuster and Butler 1989). Pihlblad and Adams (1972) find that widowers' friendship networks shrink to half their original size, while those of widows see no change. As well, widowers often have fewer confidants than widows. However, friends, especially those with whom widowers share the same hobbies, rather than children and neighbors, bear more on their life satisfaction (Martin-Matthews 1991; Rubinstein 1986; van den Hoonaard 2010). What's more, the loose networks which widowers tend to have could be beneficial in helping them deal with the transition from married to widowed in the long run since they could empower widowers to embark on their new lives according to their new status, while close and intense networks mainly help with coping with spousal loss in the short term (Martin-Matthews 1991). Such research indicates the need to assess different aspects of social support.

Along these lines, Powers, Bisconti, and Bergeman (2014) point to two main aspects of social support that we should consider. First, structural support is objective in the sense that it assesses "the size of the social network or the frequency of contact with that network," while functional support refers to the subjective evaluation in the sense that it regards "emotional, instrumental, or informational support as well as the perceptions and judgments about that support" (2014: 500). Some studies suggest using perceived social support to examine the operating mechanisms between subjective measures (Berg et al. 2006; Jacobson, Lord, and Newman 2017).

Research Questions

Based on the preceding literature review, I use a feminist gerontological framework to examine gender differences in factors leading to subjective well-being in widowhood as reflected in life satisfaction and happiness. I assume that the gender division of labor over the life course

leads men and women to develop similar but also different resources, skills, and identities; and I expect that these will shape the factors that have been found to influence subjective well-being. Thus, I assume the gender division of labor between home and family such that contemporary elderly widows are predominantly responsible for domestic labor and elderly widowers focus primarily on paid labor Calasanti (2010b). Guided by the literature above, I thus explore the gendered resources that flow from these life course differences, and differences in paid labor (occupations).

In this study, I ask the following questions of widowed elders:

1. Are there gender differences in life satisfaction (measured as a single indicator and with a scale) and happiness of widowed elders?

I hypothesize that there will be no gender differences in life satisfaction and happiness for widowed elders. If true, the findings will indicate that, although women might be disadvantaged in some social aspects of life such as economic conditions, their coping strategies, which developed in their early life experiences of marginalization, can help them deal with the negative effect of those disadvantages, thus contributing to their higher levels of subjective well-being than expected.

2. Are there gender differences in overall levels of education, income, wealth, and social support?

I propose that aging widows will differ from aging widowers in education, income, wealth, and social support from children, other family members, and friends. I predict they are disadvantaged in education, income, wealth while advantaged in social support from children, other family members, and friends. The gender division of labor hinders women from accessing higher education, income, and wealth because of their positions and identities as housewives, and

their interrupted work lives or low-status occupations and positions. This has a negative effect on women's economic status, hence increasing their dependency on their spouses, and it will lead to greater economic difficulties in their widowhood since widows tend to lose some economic sources accompanying the death of the spouse. At the same time, women's unpaid work at home provides them with chances to foster intimate relationships with children, other family members, and friends, thus advantaging them in social support.

3. Does gender influence the way that education, income, wealth, and social support from children, friends, and other family members affect life satisfaction and happiness among widows and widowers?

In general, these factors could be different between genders and yet still not have predictive power; or may have different predictive power on subjective well-being.

Specifically, I ask:

- Which variables have significant relationships with life satisfaction (measured as a single indicator and with a scale) and happiness of aging widows and aging widowers?

Widows might be more sensitive to education, income, wealth, and social support given their lack of the first three and their dependence on the last one. Although income and wealth also matter for widowers, they will not face a radical economic change since they are more likely to be breadwinners and have skills and resources to accumulate wealth based on their paid work. Also, widowers tend to rely solely on their wives to manage kinships and other intimate relationships, which is partly due to their emphasis on paid work. This also contributes to their inclination not to take social support as an important part of their lives. How this situation would play out in widowhood is not totally clear. On the one hand, it might mean that social support is not as central to their well-being as it might be to widows. On the other hand, it might be that

without their wives' kin-keeping, they have an even greater need for such support. Therefore, social support may matter or not for aging widowers' subjective well-being.

- Are there any differences in the importance of those variables on both genders' life satisfaction and happiness?

Income might matter more for widows because they are more likely to lack it to support themselves while social support matters since they rely on intimate relationships based on their family roles. If true, the findings will suggest that the gender division of labor not only affects economic status but also subjective well-being, generating comprehensive and far-reaching influences on both genders. If not, it might indicate women's marginalization, which is based on their unpaid labor at home and underpaid work in the workplace, is not further increased in widowhood. Put differently, if women develop resources related to social networks over their life courses, and these ties help mitigate the effects of marginalization in their earlier lives, widows may already have the resources and skills to deal with further marginalization, and thus education, income, and wealth might not affect their life satisfaction as expected.

To reduce the effect of the bereavement process itself, this study examined those who have been in widowhood for at least two years. Martin-Matthews (1991) finds psychological disorganization is often seen in the earlier stage of bereavement affecting the experiences of the surviving spouse. And Lund, Caserta, and Dimond (1989) find that depression drops dramatically in the first 18 months and there are no obvious differences in the levels of life satisfaction between the widowed and the non-widowed two years after their spousal death. Parkes and Prigerson (2009) also suggest two years are a dividing line in widowed people's lives with regard to the declining yearning, disbelief, depression, and anger, and increasing acceptance of their spousal loss. As my focus is on the subjective well-being of those who are widowed,

those persons who have remarried are also excluded (Martin-Matthews 1991; Martin-Matthews and Davidson 2005).

Findings from this study will demonstrate whether gender inequalities influence different and similar patterns of gendered experience in widowhood for elderly people, thus broadening our understanding of the bases for possible differences in subjective well-being among widows and widowers in later life.

Chapter 2: Methods

Data

I used the 2014 Health and Retirement Study (HRS) to conduct the study. HRS is a biannual longitudinal study conducted by the University of Michigan. It covers more than 22,000 Americans aged 50 and over and follows them over time. It focuses on the overall health, housing, insurance coverage, socio-economic status, family structure, labor market status, and retirement planning of elders. As new cohorts are added every six years, the response rate of the 2014 HRS is 87.9%, which is obtained through the result of the sample size of those who continued in the longitudinal sample in the 12th wave divided by that of the first wave of 1992/1993(HRS Staff 2017).

The RAND Center for the Study of Aging, sponsored by the National Institute on Aging and the Social Security Administration, provides an easy-to-use version of the HRS; the data are “cleaned and processed” with model-based imputations and consistent conventions (Bugliari et al. 2018:2). For this study, I merged the 2014 RAND HRS fat file and the RAND HRS longitudinal file 2014 V2 (1992-2014). The 2014 fat file has most original variables in the HRS and the leave behind questionnaires, and the longitudinal file has some restricted variables, such as race (Bugliari et al. 2018). The sample size for this study is 692 in total, 578 females and 114 males. The sample reflects those aged 65 and over who had been widowed for at least two years and had children.

Measures

Dependent variables

For my study, I examined life satisfaction in two ways. One of these was a global measure of life satisfaction that was based on a single question, “Please think about your life as a

whole. How satisfied are you with it? Are you completely satisfied, very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?” Response choices were “1. Completely satisfied; 2. Very satisfied; 3. Somewhat satisfied; 4. Not very satisfied; 5. Not at all satisfied.” I combined the last two categories because of their low percentages and recoded them in the ascending direction, in which bigger values indicate higher levels of life satisfaction.

Since a single item might not capture the various aspects of life satisfaction, multiple-item scales are often preferred (Diener 1984). I therefore used a life satisfaction scale comprised of five items as follows: “In most ways my life is close to ideal,” “The conditions of my life are excellent,” “I am satisfied with my life,” “So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life,” and “If I could live my life again, I would change almost nothing.” The answers had 7 values and I recoded them in an ascending direction too. The Cronbach’s alpha of the scale was 0.87.

Happiness was assessed by the question: “During the past 30 days, to what degree did you feel happy?” The answers range from “Very much,” “Quite a bit,” “Moderately,” “A Little,” “Not at all.” I recoded them in the same direction as life satisfaction and the life satisfaction scale.

Independent variables

The independent variables in this study included education, income, wealth, and social support. For education, I used respondents’ highest level of education, which provides more educational level options than does specifying degrees (Berg et al. 2006). It was measured by responses to the question, “What is the highest grade of school or year of college you completed?” The answer of “0” stood for “For no formal education,” “1-11” stood for the “Grades,” “12” stood for “High school,” “13-15” stood for “Some college,” “16” stood for “College grad,” and “17” stood for “Post college (17+ years).”

With regard to income, I used total household income. It consisted of “benefits from Social Security and defined- benefit pension plans, government transfer income, and dividends, interest payments, rent received, and other income from assets” (Poterba, Venti, and Wise 2012: 70). To avoid large coefficients, I used total income in thousands of dollars (Kiecolt, Hughes, and Keith 2008).

For wealth, I used respondents’ total wealth, which excluded individual retirement accounts (IRAs) (Willson et al. 2007). Total wealth was obtained by subtracting total liabilities or debt from the sum of all assets (Keister and Moller 2000). I used total wealth in thousands of dollars to let it be consistent with total household income.

Social support included that derived from different sources, children, other family members, and friends, each assessed separately. I included subjective indicators instead of objective ones since perceived social support was preferable to evaluate subjective outcomes (Jacobson, Lord, and Newman 2017), and the alpha values of the contact frequencies with children, other family members, and friends in various ways were all less than 0.6, which was also problematic. I used seven subjective items to create an index, following the work of King, Carr, and Taylor (2018), including “How much do they really understand the way you feel about things?”; “How much can you rely on them if you have a serious problem?”; “How much can you open up to them if you need to talk about your worries?”; “How often do they make too many demands on you?”; “How much do they criticize you?”; “How much do they let you down when you are counting on them?”; “How much do they get on your nerves?” Response choices ranged from 1-4 and were specified as “A lot,” “Some,” “A little,” and “Not at all.” The measure of social support was based on the difference between the means of the positive and negative items in social support (King et al. 2018).

Control variables

Many additional factors were controlled in the study. One was health, which consistently emerges as one of the most important factors on life satisfaction (Musschenga 1997). Declining health, including that which results from diseases, and physical limitations tend to lower people's life satisfaction, including among the elderly population (Angelini et al. 2012). I used a measure of self-rated health, since it works well in indicating mortality, functioning, and medical care use, and is thus widely collected in population-level surveys (Benyamini and Idler 1999; Idler and Benyamini 1997). It had five values, including "excellent," "very good," "good," "fair," and "poor." I also recoded it in an ascending direction.

Some studies find that aging Whites have higher life satisfaction than their black and Hispanic counterparts in general (Barger, Donoho, and Wayment 2009; Krause 1993). Huebner, Drane, and Valois (2000) also discover that race affects some specific satisfaction domains, such as that relating to friends and to the living environment. Thus, I generated three dichotomous variables including Non-Hispanic White, Non-Hispanic Black/African American, and Hispanic to control for race (Zhang et al. 2017). Other races occupied only 1% and 3% of the elderly widows and widowers respectively. Given this small number, they were excluded in this study.

Age was measured in continuous years. The impact of age on subjective well-being is mixed. Angeli et al. (2012) find that age has a substantial positive effect on life satisfaction and also discover that aging corresponds to lower satisfaction especially among people aged 70 and above. Guven and Sørensen (2012: 441) indicate that in general, we find "a U-shaped relationship between age and happiness." So, I controlled both age and age squared to eliminate its complex function in my analysis.

Analytic Strategy

To address my research questions, I examined aging widows and widowers respectively at the beginning. First, I examined descriptive statistics including the mean/median, proportion, range, standard error of education, total household income, total wealth, social support from children, other family members, and friends, life satisfaction, the life satisfaction scale, and happiness of aging widows and widowers respectively. For total household income and total wealth, I used the median instead of the mean to eliminate the influence of outliers. Then, I performed bivariate regressions using weights to investigate whether there were significant gender differences in all variables.

To find out which variables have significant relationships with life satisfaction, the satisfaction of life scale, and happiness of aging widows and aging widowers and the differences in the importance of those variables on these outcome variables, I ran ordinal logistic regressions for life satisfaction and happiness and ordinary least squares (OLS) regression for the life satisfaction scale for both genders. Then I regressed life satisfaction, the life satisfaction scale, and happiness on education, total household income, total wealth, and social support from children, other family members, and friends of widows and widowers respectively. I employed seemingly unrelated estimation, which is a postestimation for comparing parameter estimates across groups, to see if the coefficients and odds ratios of widows equated with those of widowers (Öst 2012). Since the HRS oversamples African American, Hispanics, and Florida residents, respondent-level analysis weight was employed. Given that there were 20 people in nursing homes, I applied the combined respondent weight and nursing home resident weight to yield unbiased estimates. I employed STATA to conduct all statistical analyses.

Chapter 3: Results

Table 1 shows the means, medians, or the proportions of the study variables. The results highlight the small proportion of widowed elders who perceive themselves to be “Not very/at all satisfied,” or “Not at all” happy. Also, those who chose “disagree” with the items in the life satisfaction scale only included 14% of the whole sample. As expected, elderly widows and widowers had similar mean levels of life satisfaction (2.85 and 2.82), the life satisfaction scale scores (5.06 and 5.17), and happiness (3.91 and 3.81). There was no significant difference in those outcome variables between genders. Men and women also had similar educational levels and the difference between their mean years of education was only about 0.12 years. Gender differences emerged in total household income ($p = .083$). The median total household income was about \$21,320 for widows and \$27,160 for widowers. At the same time, I found gender differences in social support from friends ($p = .002$). Women had a higher mean value in support from friends than did men. However, no gender differences emerged in terms of support from children and other family members, education, and total wealth. As well, there were no gender differences in the control variables. The racial proportions matched the general proportion within the elderly population, 85% of which were non-Hispanic Whites (Siegel 1999).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of study variables by gender

Variable	Range	Widows		Widowers	
		M(SE) or proportion	N	M(SE) or proportion	N
Life satisfaction	1–4		553		111
Not very/at all satisfied		0.04		0.02	
Somewhat satisfied		0.30		0.35	
Very satisfied		0.44		0.42	
Completely satisfied		0.23		0.21	
Life satisfaction scale	1–7	5.06 (0.07)	549	5.17 (0.15)	112
Happiness	1–5		572		112
Not at all		0.02		0.05	
A little		0.06		0.07	
Moderately		0.24		0.19	
Quite a bit		0.33		0.41	
Very much		0.34		0.28	
Education	0–17	12.36 (0.12)	578	12.28 (0.33)	114
Total household income (thousands of dollars)	0–460	21.32* (1.54)	578	27.16* (4.64)	114
Total wealth (thousands of dollars)	-100–5540	125.5 (21.77)	578	181.65 (48.13)	114
Social support from children	-3–3	1.83 (0.06)	578	1.95 (0.13)	114
Social support from friends	-3–3	1.87* (0.04)	578	1.57* (0.09)	114
Social support from other family members	-3–3	1.60 (0.05)	578	1.50 (0.11)	114
Health	1–5	3.13 (0.05)	578	3.14 (0.12)	114
Age	65–104	79.73 (0.41)	578	78.03 (0.91)	114
Race			578		114
Non-Hispanic White	0, 1	0.84		0.85	
Non-Hispanic Black	0, 1	0.10		0.07	
Hispanic	0, 1	0.05		0.05	

Note. Results are weighted.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2 presents the odds ratios of the ordinal logistic regressions for life satisfaction and happiness, and the coefficients of the OLS regression for the life satisfaction scale of the whole sample, controlling for health, age, age squared, and race. Gender (Female) itself did not have a significant relationship with the three outcome items ($p = .88, .59, .49$ respectively). Education was related only to widowers' happiness in a slightly negative way. Total household income was related positively to all the outcome variables, such that higher income predicted better life satisfaction and more happiness, but the effect sizes were quite small (OR=1.01, 1.01; Coef. = .004). However, total wealth was not related to the outcome items.

There was a consistent pattern for the effect of social support from children on all three outcome items. It influenced life satisfaction, the life satisfaction scale, and the happiness positively with considerable effect sizes (OR= 1.80, 1.36; Coef. = .34). In other words, the higher the social support from children, the higher the subjective well-being. Social support from friends was related to all the outcome variables, showing positive substantive effects (OR= 1.25, 1.27; Coef. = .16). Social support from other family members was not related to any outcome variables. Health consistently affected the outcome variables. Its odds ratios were 1.96 and 1.91, and the coefficient was 0.34, which were quite large compared to that of other predictors. Each unit increase in self-reported health corresponded to a considerable increase in subjective well-being.

The findings on race were mixed. Non-Hispanic Blacks were more likely to have lower levels on the life satisfaction scale but higher levels of happiness than were Non-Hispanic Whites. Being Hispanic was not related to the outcome variables.

Table 2. Odds ratios from the ordinal logit regressions and coefficients from the OLS regression of the whole sample

Independent variable	Life satisfaction	Life satisfaction scale	Happiness
Female	1.04	-0.08	1.18
Education	0.97	-0.00 ^a	0.93*
Total household income (thousands of dollars)	1.01*	0.00 ^a ***	1.01*
Total wealth (thousands of dollars)	1.00	-0.00 ^a	1.00
Social support from children	1.80***	0.34***	1.36**
Social support from friends	1.25*	0.16*	1.27*
Social support from other family members	1.02	0.07	1.05
Health	1.96***	0.34***	1.91***
Age	1.05	-0.01	0.87
Age*age	1.00	0.00 ^a	1.00
Non-Hispanic Black	1.17	-0.41*	1.62 [†]
Hispanic	0.71	0.37	0.64
N	664	661	684

Note. White is omitted as the reference category.

^a The absolute value is less than 0.005.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3 presents odds ratios from the ordinal logistic regressions and the coefficient from the OLS regression for widows and widowers respectively. Education was related negatively to widowers' happiness ($p = .015$; OR = .82). As before, total household income still showed stable effects on all three outcome variables in general. Higher total household income positively influenced the subjective well-being of both genders except the life satisfaction scale of widows. Total wealth remained unrelated to all the outcomes variables except widowers' happiness ($p = .031$). However, the size of the negative effect was very small since the odds ratios were below 1.00 before being rounded. As expected, social support from children was related only to widows' subjective well-being. This predictor was related to positively all the three outcomes

variables of widows, and the effects are moderate for each. However, it did not have a statistically significant relationship with any of the outcome variables for widowers. Findings on the effect of social support from friends were mixed. It was positively related to life satisfaction ($p = .088$) and the life satisfaction scale of widows ($p = .103$), but not for widowers. Yet, it positively mattered to widowers' happiness ($p = .022$), but not for widows. Its odds ratio of 2.22 showed a large substantive effect on males' happiness. Not surprisingly, given the descriptive statistics, social support from other family members still did not show significant relationships with any of the outcome variables.

Health was still related to all the outcome variables of both genders. Notably, non-Hispanic Black widowers' happiness was higher than that of non-Hispanic whites. However, non-Hispanic Black widows had lower life satisfaction scale than their white counterparts. Hispanic widows had higher life satisfaction scale than their white counterparts.

In order to assess whether the differences in the estimates across genders were significant, I used seemingly unrelated estimations. On life satisfaction as a single indicator, there were gender differences in the estimates of total household income ($p=.009$), social support from children ($p=.000$) and friends ($p=.070$). Total household income and social support from friends had a larger positive effect on life satisfaction (as a single indicator) for widowers than for widows. And social support from children had a larger effect on life satisfaction for widows than for widowers. For the life satisfaction scale, gender differences emerged in the estimates of total household income ($p=.001$) and social support from children ($p=.000$). The coefficients of total household income were .0044 and .0041 before being rounded for widows and widowers respectively. That means total household income and social support from children had more effects on widows' satisfaction with life (as a scale) than widowers'. Nevertheless, the gender

difference in the effect of total household income was quite small. For happiness, gender differences existed in the estimates of education ($p=.026$), total household income ($p=.006$), total wealth ($p=.080$), and social support from children ($p=.007$) and friends ($p=.019$). Education, total household income, total wealth and social support from friends had a larger effect on happiness for widowers than for widows. The odds ratios of total wealth were .9999 and .9991 before being rounded for widows and widowers respectively. And the effect of education and total wealth were negative, while the effects of total household income and social support from friends were positive. And social support from children had a larger positive effect on happiness for widows than for widowers.

Table 3. Odds ratios from the ordinal logit regressions and coefficients from the OLS regression by gender

Independent variables	Life satisfaction		Life satisfaction scale		Happiness	
	Widows	Widowers	Widows	Widowers	Widows	Widowers
Education	0.98	0.93	0.01	-0.02	0.96	0.82*
Total household income (thousands of dollars)	1.01 [†]	1.02*	0.00***	0.00 ^a	1.00 [†]	1.02**
Total wealth (thousands of dollars)	1.00	1.00	0.00 ^a	-0.00 ^a	1.00	1.00*
Social support from children	1.90***	1.35	0.37***	0.16	1.41**	1.11
Social support from friends	1.24 [†]	1.53	0.14 [†]	0.23	1.21	2.22*
Social support from other family members	1.06	0.90	0.07	0.14	1.08	0.85
Health	1.96***	1.96**	0.34***	0.36**	2.05***	1.84*
Age	1.14	0.60	0.04	-0.10	0.73	2.30
Age*age	1.00	1.00	0.00 ^a	0.00 ^a	1.00	0.99
Non-Hispanic Black	1.01	3.83	-0.38 [†]	-0.38	1.41	3.40*
Hispanic	0.55	2.44	0.50 [†]	0.06	0.54	3.18
N	553	111	549	112	572	112

Note. Non-Hispanic White is omitted as the reference category.

^a The absolute value is less than 0.005.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Chapter 4: Discussion

Using the 2014 Health and Retirement study, my study investigated which factors influenced widowed elders' subjective well-being as a whole and whether there were gender differences in the way the corresponding predictive factors explained life satisfaction, assessed both globally and with a life satisfaction scale, and happiness.

I discuss the results following my research questions. First, are there gender differences in life satisfaction (measured as a single indicator and with a scale) and happiness of widowed elders? Second, are there gender differences in overall levels of education, income, wealth, and social support? Third, does gender influence the way that education, income, wealth, and social support from children, other family members, and friends affect life satisfaction and happiness among widowers and widows?

Are there any gender differences in life satisfaction, the life satisfaction scale, and happiness of widowed elders?

As I had expected, there were no statistically gender differences in life satisfaction, the life satisfaction scale, and happiness of widowed elders. My findings matched the existing literature which suggests that women's levels of subjective well-being tend to be the same as or more than that of men's (Lubben 1989; Zweig 2015). Women's economic disadvantages did not translate into lower levels of subjective well-being, perhaps because they had developed coping strategies throughout their marginalized life courses (Gattuso 2003). Also, their advantages in social support from different sources and intense relationships with some family members and friends also help them maintain high levels of subjective well-being (Antonucci 1990; Martin-Matthews 2011).

Are there any gender differences in education, income, wealth, and social support from children, friends, and other family members of widowed elders?

Statistically, total household income and social support from friends showed significant gender differences among widowed elders. Women's disadvantages in economic predictors and advantage in social support dovetail with the existing literature. Women's family responsibilities hinder their continuous participation in the labor market (Hegewisch et al. 2010). Also, occupational segregation hampers women from placement into higher-paid, male-dominated occupations. Even when women and men have the same position with equal human capital, there is still a gender pay gap (Acker 1990; Hegewisch et al. 2010). These labor market and family issues accumulate and result in women's disadvantages in total household income. Thus, it is no surprise that widows, as well as single women, are more likely to be poor than are married women (Crystal, Shea, and Reyes 2016). Feminist gerontologists suggest that these economic disparities reflect the gender inequalities that stem from the gender division of labor. At the same time, the gender division of labor benefits women in terms of social networks, strengthening their relationships with others (Calasanti 2010b: 722). Gender differences did not emerge in the case of social support from children and other family members. Widowers' higher levels of perceived social support from children might come from their lower expectations from children based on their earlier lives. In other words, social support from children becomes more apparent as it is out of the ordinary. The only significant gender difference in terms of social support emerged in the case of friends, in which men had lower levels than women. This matches the fact women tend to have an intense social network with more confidants, thus having more corresponding support from friends than do men (Davidson 1998).

Does gender influence the way that education, income, wealth, and social support from children, other family members, and friends affect life satisfaction, the life satisfaction scale, and happiness among widowers and widows?

- Which variables have significant relationships with life satisfaction, the satisfaction of life scale, happiness of aging widows and aging widowers?

For aging widows, total household income and social support from children and friends were related to their general life satisfaction and life satisfaction scale; total household income and social support from children were related to their happiness. For aging widowers, only total household income mattered to their general life satisfaction; many predictors, including education, total household income, total wealth, social support from friends, were related to their happiness.

Women's subjective well-being was sensitive to total household income and social support from children and friends. It matched the existing literature that finds that economic factors and social interactions with other people have an impact on experiences in widowhood, especially given widows' fewer opportunities and resources for procuring a well-paid job relative to men (Carr and Bodnar-Deren 2009; Lopata 1970, 1973). However, education, total wealth, and social support from other family members did not affect widows' subjective well-being as expected. Since education correlates with income, education's effect on life satisfaction might be offset by income in some cases. This might also be the case for wealth. In addition, Diener et al. (2011) argue that the influence of wealth is most significant in contexts where people struggle to meet daily needs. Given the mean age of my sample (79) and the fact that wealth dwindles with age as it is used to supplement income, it may be that gender differences in the impact of wealth are somewhat muted with age. Finally, the absence of the effect of social support from other family members might result from the impact of some lateral sources of support, such as that derived from siblings, being countered by intergenerational ones, such as that elicited from grandchildren.

What is notable is that I did not find the consistency of predictive factors among general life satisfaction, life satisfaction scale, and happiness of men. Life satisfaction asks one to reflect upon one's life. Happiness is a more straightforward question about how one feels at a particular moment, rather than assessing one's overall life. Diener (1984: 543) suggests that "[h]ow these two components [(satisfaction with life and positive affect)] relate to one another is an empirical question, not one of definition." The findings of my study suggest that these measures comprise similar and different dimensions and that we need to consider this when choosing measures in our research. The reasons for the gender differences in how some social factors affected happiness is not clear. They could stem from the differences between life satisfaction and happiness, gender itself, or both.

Total household income and social support from friends all affected widowers' happiness positively while education and total wealth had a negative impact. More educated and wealthier people might have higher expectations of life, so they might not be as happy as less educated and poorer ones. Moreover, social support from friends (OR = 2.26) showed its great influence on men's happiness, a finding that echoes many researchers' findings that widowers' perceived social support from friends has a larger effect on their subjective well-being than does the support of children (Martin-Matthews 1991; Rubinstein 1986, van den Hoonaard 2010). Also, the absence of the effect of social support from children and other family members is not surprising, given their relative lack of involvement in the family and despite their perception of higher levels of support from children.

Considering the effects of the gender differences on subjective well-being, total household income showed consistent significance across life satisfaction and happiness

measures. Social support from friends had a substantial effect on widows' life satisfaction, both on the single indicator and with the scale, and on widowers' happiness.

- Are there any differences in the importance of those variables on both genders' life satisfaction and happiness?

Ultimately, this study is concerned with whether the gender variations discovered in the analyses of life satisfaction and happiness constitute gender differences in pathways to subjective well-being, and along the lines predicted by feminist gerontology.

In seemingly unrelated estimation tests, total household income, social support from children, and support from friends showed significance with life satisfaction, and education and total wealth also showed significance with happiness additionally. The effect sizes of total household income on men's life satisfaction and happiness were a little larger than on women's while the opposite held true for the life satisfaction scale, but the differences were quite small. Social support from friends had a larger positive effect on widowers' life satisfaction and happiness than they did on widows' subjective well-being. Education and total wealth had a larger effect on widowers' happiness than on widows'.

I assumed total household income would matter more to widows than to widowers. However, the extent of its influence on women's life satisfaction (as a single indicator) and happiness was a little smaller than that of men. Although there was a disparity in the total household income of both genders, women's disadvantage in income did not affect their subjective well-being. This might stem from women's earlier experiences of marginalization, which can help them cope with further marginalization by economic disadvantages (Gattuso 2003). It also matches Zweig's (2015) findings that women tended to be happier than men, even when disadvantaged economically. In line with expectations derived from feminist gerontology,

social support from children exerted a quite large, positive substantive effect on widows' subjective well-being, which stems from their domestic labor as mothers. Hence, their relationships with their children played an important role in their lives. The finding of gender difference in the effect of social support from friends challenges Davidson et al.'s (2003) conclusion that widowers tend to rely more on children than on friends after the spouse's death. Even though widowers tend to have fewer confidants and looser relationships with friends than widows, social support from friends did matter to their happiness in my study. In addition, the findings on education and the gender differences in the negative effect of total wealth on widowers' happiness also contradict many of the previous findings, although the differences in the effect of total wealth were small. Possibly the higher education and wealth of men results in their having higher expectations and thus more educated and wealthier widowers tend not to be as happy as widows; this is a question for future research.

Conclusions

There is a dearth of studies on how gender affects the subjective well-being of widowed elders beyond bereavement in the sociological literature. Drawing on feminist gerontology to frame this study, I sought to pinpoint the factors that affect the subjective well-being of aging widows and widowers and possible gender differences in these factors. I used measures of life satisfaction, including a global measure and a life satisfaction scale, and a measure of happiness to examine possible gender differences in predictive factors and their importance for each of these outcome measures life satisfaction scale.

To investigate the potential gender similarities and differences among widowed elders, I asked three main questions in my study: Are there any gender differences in life satisfaction, the life satisfaction scale, happiness; and in overall levels of education, income, wealth, and social

support of widowed elders? Does gender influence the way that education, income, wealth, and social support from children, friends, and other family members affect life satisfaction, life satisfaction scale, and happiness among widowers and widows?

First, I found there were no gender differences in life satisfaction, measured as a single item or on a scale, and happiness. This is in line with the existing literature which has found that women report similar levels of life satisfaction as men, even when they are in a worse economic condition than are men (Zweig 2015).

Second, I found gender differences in total household income and social support from friends, each of which echoes the gender division of labor, in which women are disadvantaged economically while advantaged in social networks and support. However, I did not find any differences in education as Lopata's (1970) earlier research would have suggested, and social support from children and other family members. This divergence from Lopata points to the important changes that have occurred since her landmark study, particularly in relation to women's educational attainment, which now approximates men's (and has exceeded men's in the most recent cohorts). The disparities in the total household income echo the fact that occupational segregation hinders women from having the same economic gains as men have, even when both genders have the same educational attainment. Women do not receive the same returns from education (Hegewisch et al. 2010). Gender inequality shows up in the inconsistency of the relationship between education and income, in which women's education did not render the same returns to income as it did for men. In general, total household income was related to the subjective well-being of both genders. However, its effect sizes were quite small. Some studies suggest that income's influence declines with advanced age, and this partly explains the

reason why total household income didn't have a large effect on subjective well-being (Berg et al. 2006). Those gender similarities were not assumed in the past studies.

Although gender did not affect subjective well-being directly, as feminist gerontology would predict, there were gender differences in the ways that education, total household income, total wealth and social support from children and friends affected the subjective well-being of widowers and widows. Education's influence only emerged in the case of widowers' happiness, and total household income was not related to the subjective well-being in terms of widowers' satisfaction with life (as a scale). Social support from children and friends was more likely to be related to widows' subjective well-being than for widowers. Women's advantages in family responsibilities and friend networks seemingly protected them from having lower life satisfaction. But when the outcome of interest was happiness, social support from friends mattered to widowers. This indicates that some predictors of general subjective well-being may not have a daily effect.

The results also suggest that social support from other family members was not related to the subjective well-being of both widows and widowers, which has been little discussed by previous studies. However, there are some studies which suggest siblings' positive influence on elders' subjective well-being (Arling 1976; Davidson 1998; Lopata 1996; Lubben 1989). Distinguishing different sources of support from other family members is important for future studies on subjective well-being to consider.

With regards to the gender differences in the predictors' importance for subjective well-being, total household income was more important to widowers' life satisfaction (as a single indicator) and happiness than to widows'. Social support from children had a larger positive effect on widows' subjective well-being than on widowers', while social support from friends

had a larger positive effect on widowers' life satisfaction (as a single indicator) and happiness than on widows'. Also, education and total wealth had a larger negative effect on happiness for widowers than for widows. These findings add to evidence to the importance of the gender division of labor, which strengthens women's relationships with children, but also point to the greater importance of total household income and social support from friends to widowers in some cases. Although the significance of social support from friends may point again to the gender division of labor in that men's stronger relationships may be with friends (often the result of activities in paid labor), why total household income should matter more for men is unclear.

In sum, the findings lend support to the feminist gerontologists' theory that the gender division of labor, in which women's previous primary roles as wives and mothers disadvantage them in income and wealth, but advantage them in social support from friends and other family members. The substantive effect of social support from children on women's subjective well-being also aligns with women's life courses, wherein they invest more time and energy than men in domestic labor, leading to intimate relationships with their children throughout their lives (Calasanti 2010b). This study also challenges some studies with the finding that the influence of total household income on the subjective well-being exists not only for women but also for men.

The conclusions of this study must be examined with an awareness of its limitations. First, along with gender, widowhood was my research interest. I assumed widowed people were different from those who were not widowed, which was not examined in this study. That is, once past the bereavement stage, it is possible that widowed elders do not differ significantly from those who are still married in predictors of life satisfaction or happiness. Second, since life satisfaction is stable and it can return fully or partly to its original level after bereavement, this item may not fully examine the variation of life experience before and in widowhood, although

happiness was added to strengthen the outcome variables in the study. Third, in the 2014 Health and Retirement Study, the social support from other family members covered brothers, sisters, parents, cousins, and grandchildren, in which both lateral relationships with siblings and lineal relationships with parents and grandchildren were involved. This might result in the insignificance of the social support from other family members since the intergenerational relationship can create tensions, thus offsetting the positive influences of siblings (Golaz, Wandera, and Rutaremwa 2017). Fourth, this study didn't examine the time point when the respondents lost their spouses. There are mixed findings on this point. Sanders (1993) suggest that elders suffer more than the younger counterparts from the spousal loss because of long-term partnerships, but some studies suggest that elders can deal with it better since they're more mature and tend to be more prepared for spousal loss than are younger people (Davidson 1998). All these should be considered with regards to future studies.

This study has shown the gender differences among contemporary widowed elders in education, income, wealth, and social support from children and friends in terms of their respective values and importance on subjective well-being. What needs to be addressed are why wealth and social support from family members were not significant with subjective well-being in general. Wealth was considered to contribute to elders' well-being in some previous studies, while it was not the case in this study (Lerman and Mikesell 1988; Wolff 1995). Widowhood might contribute to the insignificance of social support from family members. Including marital status as a variable and running analyses that control for widowhood, married, divorced, and never married could tackle this problem. As well, we need to distinguish among different groups of family members, such as siblings (distinguish step- and half-siblings also if possible), parents,

grandchildren and so on, in our analyses. Using surveys that allow us to study the different groups of family members will help address this question.

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