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Multiple Levels of Influence on Wellbeing: Individual Factors, Relationships, and Life Events

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Chapter 6:

General Discussion

Our happiness, life satisfaction, and wellbeing in general are determined by many factors. This dissertation aimed to contribute to the research on the roles individual differences, relationships, and life events play in wellbeing. I focused on individual wellbeing in Chapter 2, and relationship wellbeing in Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 5. Moreover, although Chapter 2, Chapter 3, and Chapter 4 drew attention to self-control's association with wellbeing, Chapter 5 revealed that uncontrollable life events too affect our wellbeing.

In this general discussion chapter, I will first summarize the key findings in my empirical chapters. Then, I will stress theoretical, methodological, and practical implications of these findings as well as future directions for empirical research that would be promising. This chapter will end with concluding remarks.

Summary of Findings in Empirical Chapters

Chapter 2: Self-Control and Individual Wellbeing

My first empirical chapter (Chapter 2) in this dissertation investigated the interplay between self-control and wellbeing. In two longitudinal studies using different populations and time intervals, I showed both between-person differences and within-person deviations in self-control (i.e., intraindividual change in self-control over time) influence wellbeing. Although my focus was particularly on within-person deviations, I also replicated previous studies (Cheung, Gillebaart, Kroese, & De Ridder, 2014; Hofmann, Luhmann, Fisher, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2013), showing that people with higher levels of self-control are happier and more satisfied with their lives than people with lower levels of self-control. In Chapter 2, I also examined the influence of fluctuations in people's self-control levels across situations and over time (e.g., Hofmann, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2012; Vohs et al., 2008). The results revealed that intrapersonal upward shifts in self-control were positively related to wellbeing cross-sectionally. That is, when people had self-control levels higher than their average, they reported higher levels of wellbeing. Moreover, this result held for both low and high self-control people and was generalized to different indicators of wellbeing, namely mood, vitality, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and depressive symptoms.

Chapter 2 also investigated the hypothesis that self-control and wellbeing mutually reinforce each other over time. The results revealed a bidirectional association at the between-person level. People who had higher levels of self-control than others at a time point experienced higher levels of wellbeing than others at the later time point, and vice versa. Within the same person however, I did not find a bidirectional association. A higher self-control level than one's

own average at a time point did not predict a greater wellbeing level than one's own average at the later time point. The reverse longitudinal association at the within-person level was not significant either. Combined with the cross-sectional results described above, these results in Chapter 2 suggest that people benefit from positive shifts in their self-control only at the same time point. This intrapersonal effect does not contribute to wellbeing over time. Having a higher level of self-control than others (i.e., between-person differences) however, contributes to wellbeing both in the short- and long-run. Hence, Chapter 2 indicated that self-control as an individual difference is a stronger predictor of wellbeing than temporary intrapersonal shifts in self-control.

Chapter 3: Self-Control and Relationship Wellbeing

Chapter 3 investigated whether self-control provides people with the capacity to balance self-interests and partner-interests. My focus was on intrusive behaviors, such as giving unsolicited advice to the partner and reading the partner's emails without permission. By engaging in these behaviors, people pursue their own interests (e.g., reassurance about the partner's commitment, closeness) at the expense of their partner's interest, namely the partner's privacy (Lavy, Mikulincer, Shaver, & Gillath, 2009; Petronio, 1994; Vinkers, Finkenauer, & Hawk, 2011). Existing research showed that such an imbalance between self- and partner-interests is negatively associated with relationship wellbeing (Baxter, 1990; Rankin-Esquer, Burnett, Baucom, & Epstein, 1997; Saffrey, Bartholomew, Scharfe, Henderson, & Koopman, 2003). Chapter 3 showed that people need both trust in their partner and self-control in order to refrain themselves from intruding into their partner's privacy. The interactive effect of self-control with trust in the partner prevented intrusive behaviors not only cross-sectionally, but also longitudinally (albeit marginally). That is, people who had both trust and self-control showed the lowest level of intrusiveness toward their partner. This chapter demonstrated that the combination of trust in the partner and self-control contributes to relationship wellbeing by forestalling immoral and disrespectful behaviors toward the partner, even if doing so is contrary to one's own interests.

Chapter 4: Self-Control and Family Wellbeing

Chapter 4 considered wellbeing in family relationships, and investigated whether family members detect each other's self-control levels as an indicator of their trustworthiness. The results of the Social Relations Model analysis using a full family design (2 parents and 2 children in each family) showed that families with higher levels of perceived self-control (i.e., average of all family members)

reported higher levels of trust than families with lower levels of perceived self-control. Furthermore, not only parents but also children trusted the family members, whom they perceived to have higher self-control, more. Examinations of dyadic relationships in families revealed that the positive association between perceived self-control and trust took place in 10 out of 12 dyadic relationships in four-member families. These findings suggest that people do not trust their family members unconditionally. Perceived self-control in a family member is a sign for other family members indicating that that particular family member can provide them beneficial outcomes, or at least would not engage in harmful behaviors (cf. Robinson, 1996).

Chapter 5: Uncontrollable Life Events and Relationship Wellbeing

Chapter 5 zoomed in relationship wellbeing after one of the most devastating life events a person can experience, namely child loss. The findings in Chapter 5 revealed that perception that the partner had dissimilar (higher or lower) levels of grief than oneself was negatively related to relationship satisfaction. Bereaved parents, who thought that they and their partner had similar levels of grief however, reported the highest level of relationship satisfaction. Moreover, Chapter 5 revealed that the negative effect of perceived dissimilarity in grief across partners on relationship wellbeing increased over time. This negative effect (i.e., decline in relationship satisfaction) was stronger for the perception that one experienced less grief than the partner compared to the perception that one experienced more grief than the partner. Thus, bereaved parents, who perceived themselves to have less grief than their partner, experienced greater declines in their relationship satisfaction over time than bereaved parents who perceived themselves to have more grief than their partner. These results indicate that perceived dissimilarity in grief between bereaved parents may amplify the difficulties associated with their traumatic life experience.

Theoretical Implications and Future Directions

In this dissertation, I have considered the influences on wellbeing at multiple levels, specifically individual factors, relationships, and life events. The findings in this dissertation show that all these factors harm or improve wellbeing. At the end of each empirical chapter (Chapters 2-5), I have discussed theoretical implications and future directions of that specific chapter. Here therefore, I will present implications and possible future pathways, which were not discussed in the empirical chapters.

Conceptualization of Variables

In this dissertation, psychological wellbeing was used as an umbrella term covering many components, including, but not limited to, temporary (e.g., mood), positive (e.g., happiness) and negative (depressive symptoms) psychological concepts. Also, both a domain-specific wellbeing component (i.e., relationship wellbeing) and a broad wellbeing component (i.e., life satisfaction) were covered. Although this dissertation considered these various aspects of wellbeing, it did not address self-growth. Self-growth, which can be defined as pursuing one's goals, having a meaning in life, and developing one's own characteristics, is described as one of the main components of psychological wellbeing in the literature (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Do the findings in Chapter 2 on the link between self-control and individual wellbeing extend to self-growth? For example, is self-control effective on self-growth? Do within-person deviations in self-control influence this component of wellbeing? Is the association between self-control and self-growth bidirectional too? Abundant research has shown that people with higher levels of self-control are better able to pursue their goals and engage in necessary behaviors to reach long-term goals than people with lower levels of self-control (e.g., Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Galla & Duckworth, *in press*; Myrseth & Fishbach, 2009). Considering these findings, self-control should also contribute to feeling satisfied with one's own growth through goal accomplishments (Hofmann et al., 2013). Hence, future research should examine the role of self-control in self-growth component of wellbeing.

Similarly, my conceptualization of self-control was very broad. Although various self-regulatory processes altogether contribute to better functioning across several life domains (e.g., Bridgett, Burt, Edwards, & Deater-Deckard, 2015; Fujita, 2011; Finkenauer et al., 2015), research should examine whether specific self-control components (e.g., cognitive flexibility, inhibition, executive functions) are differentially related to individual and relationship wellbeing, and whether they affect wellbeing through different processes (cf. Bridgett et al., 2015; De Moor et al., 2015; Deater-Deckard, 2014; Morean et al., 2014). For example, the cognitive flexibility function of self-control can help people to alter their thoughts and stop ruminating, which can help them to protect their psychological wellbeing especially at difficult time periods such as after losing a loved one (Davis & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010; Nolen-Hoeksema, Parker, & Larson, 1994). Inhibition and executive functions however may be especially important when the temptation to engage in undesirable behavior (e.g.,

drugs, procrastination) is strong (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Hofmann, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2012; Pronk, Karremans, & Wigboldus, 2011; Ritter, Karremans, & van Schie, 2010). Thus, which component of self-control is more influential on wellbeing under different conditions requires more research.

Individual and Relationship Wellbeing

Although I have covered both individual wellbeing (Chapter 2) and relationship wellbeing (Chapters 3, 4, and 5) in this dissertation, I did not compare the processes of these two wellbeing components in the same study. When do these two components of wellbeing show differential processes and mechanisms? For example, is the bidirectional association between self-control and individual wellbeing (Chapter 2) generalizable to the association between self-control and relationship wellbeing? Previous studies (e.g., Finkel & Campbell, 2001; Finkenauer et al., 2015; Pronk, Karremans, & Wigboldus, 2011; Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011) and chapters in this dissertation (Chapters 3 and 4) have demonstrated the beneficial influence of self-control on relationship wellbeing. A recent study however, revealed that the opposite influence is significant too; that is, relationship wellbeing boosts people's self-regulatory capabilities (Hofmann, Finkel, & Fitzsimons, in press). Combined with this recent finding, the literature suggests that the finding on the bidirectional association between self-control and individual wellbeing may be generalized to relationship wellbeing. Comparisons of the processes in this dissertation across individual and relationship wellbeing await more research.

Furthermore, I have not directly tested the association between relationship wellbeing and individual wellbeing, and the role of self-control in their association. Research showed that people who have stronger bonds with close others are healthier and happier (Frost & Forrester, 2013; Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010; Stack & Eshleman, 1998; Whitton, Rhoades, & Whisman, 2014; Whitton & Whisman, 2010). Nevertheless, is it possible that self-control moderates the association between relationship wellbeing and individual wellbeing? Recent research showed that people with higher levels of self-control can sometimes choose to protect their self-interests, rather than to overinvest in their relationship, in case they perceive it to be the optimal choice (Pronk & Righetti, 2015; Righetti, Finkenauer, & Finkel, 2013). This research raises the question whether it is possible that when the relationship comes to an end, people with higher levels of self-control are less likely to be affected by the destructive influence of relationship dissatisfaction on individual wellbeing than

people with lower levels of self-control. For example, people with higher levels of self-control can devalue their relationship in that situation in order to protect their own wellbeing (cf. Myrseth, Fishbach, & Trope, 2009). Future studies should examine this research question by including individual wellbeing and relationship wellbeing in the same research, and investigate the role of self-control in their link.

Self-Control and Individual and Relationship Wellbeing

The findings in this dissertation indicate that individual differences in self-control provide beneficial outcomes for oneself (Chapter 2), for partners (Chapter 3), and family members (Chapter 4). People with higher levels of self-control experience greater levels of individual and relationship wellbeing than people with lower levels of self-control. The findings on the within-person deviations in self-control however, revealed that positive shifts in self-control are beneficial only in the short-run, but do not affect wellbeing in the long-run (Chapter 2). Does this mean that people cannot benefit from increases in self-control *over time*? Chapter 2 in this dissertation focused only on temporary shifts, rather than long-term stable changes in self-control. Nevertheless, previous research showed that self-control can be improved through long-term continuous efforts (Berkman, Graham, & Fisher, 2012; Diamond & Lee, 2011; Oaten & Cheng, 2006). An important research question for future studies therefore, is to examine whether and when short-term fluctuations in self-control are predictors of long-term stable changes in self-control (cf. Wichers, 2014). For example, temporary fluctuations in self-control may be a sign of flexibility and malleability of self-control (cf. Van der Giessen, Branje, Frijns, & Meeus, 2013). If these temporary fluctuations result in a stable change in one's average self-control, that change in turn may contribute to wellbeing in the long-run.

Although the results in my dissertation contribute to research, highlighting the beneficial effects of high self-control on relationship and family wellbeing, it is possible that high self-control can be a disadvantage in relationships under some conditions. To illustrate, Koval, VanDellen, Fitzsimons, and Ranby (2015) found that people have higher expectations of others, who have high levels of self-control, than others, who have low levels of self-control. Such expectations, however, are negatively related to high self-control people's satisfaction with their relationships because of the imbalance of burden across partners. Thus, self-control resources can sometimes be detrimental to one's own satisfaction in interpersonal relationships.

Similarly, high self-control may backfire in families under some conditions. For example, do children have a closer relationship with their parents if they perceive them to have high self-control? Or, does a high self-control parent indicate to children that they can turn to that parent when they need help in difficult time periods (i.e., trust, Chapter 4), but not when they would like to take risks or indulge in temptations associated with certain childhood periods (e.g., experiment with drugs and alcohol, eating snacks before dinner)? Thus, regulatory resources may be a disadvantage for parents in terms of closeness with their children, especially during adolescence when children are more likely to engage in deviant behaviors (Huizinga, Loeber, & Thornberry, 1993; Kosterman, Hawkins, Guo, Catalano, & Abbott, 2000; Stoolmiller, 1994). Similarly, high self-control can also be a disadvantage for children, because parents may have high expectations from them (cf. Koval et al., 2015). In case of failure however, children's perceptions that they do not fulfill their parents' expectations may be negatively related to their adjustment (Ali, Khaleque, & Rohner, 2015; Khaleque & Rohner, 2012).

Another situation when high self-control can backfire may be chaotic family conditions. As argued by Finkenauer et al. (2015), in unpredictable situations, low self-control may be beneficial for family members. Not delaying gratification and engaging in self-interested behavior may help individuals in unpredictable, chaotic, or threatening contexts to protect themselves from other family members' harmful behaviors such as abuse and violence (cf. Otto, Markman, & Love, 2012; Sims, Neth, Jacobs, & Gray, 2013). Thus, the questions whether and under which conditions regulatory resources can be a disadvantage for individual and relationship wellbeing require further research.

Life Events and Individual and Relationship Wellbeing

This dissertation also revealed the importance of the interparental context during bereavement after the child loss. Nevertheless, grief reactions may be affected not only by parents' relationships with each other, but also by their relationships with surviving children (Albuquerque, Pereira, & Narciso, in press; Gilbert, 1996; Stroebe, Schut, & Finkenauer, 2013a). Therefore, future research on bereavement should consider both horizontal (i.e., parent–parent and sibling–sibling) and vertical (i.e., parent–child and child–parent) family relationships as well as the general family context (e.g., family chaos), and further investigate the interpersonal aspects of grief.

Another important line of research for future studies is to examine whether grief affects relationship satisfaction differentially across different types of people.

Although my dissertation (Chapter 5) and previous studies (Gottlieb, Lang, & Amsel, 1996; Lyngstad, 2013) showed that relationship satisfaction of bereaved parents decreases on average over time, this common fate may also create a sense of closeness between some parents (Stroebe, Schut, & Finkenauer, 2013a). For example, Bonanno (2004) argued that some people are better in adapting to loss over time than others. Do some parents show an adaptation (i.e., returning back to initial level of relationship satisfaction), or even become closer over time, while others experience a continuous decline in relationship wellbeing? Future studies should investigate whether there are bereaved parents who experience a trajectory different from the average linear decline in relationship satisfaction to enhance our understanding of individual and relational factors that facilitate versus impede parental adjustment after the loss of a child.

Multiple Levels of Influence on Wellbeing

This dissertation points to the complex interplay of different factors on wellbeing. There are several factors, including but not limited to individual differences, relationships, and life events, that affect wellbeing. Although the empirical chapters zoomed in on each of them separately, these factors independently and in concert may influence people's individual and relational wellbeing. An important direction for research centers on the interactive effects of different influences (e.g., individual differences and life events) on wellbeing (e.g., Yap, Anusic, & Lucas, 2012). To illustrate, future studies should investigate the function of family members' self-control levels during the bereavement process. Do recovery trajectories after the loss of a child differ across high and low self-control parents? Can a partner with high levels of self-control add to bereaved parents' resilience to declines in their wellbeing? Studies on these questions could contribute to the research regarding the interactive effects of individual differences and life events on wellbeing and examine whether self-control has a role in maintaining wellbeing especially in difficult time periods and surrounding stressful life-events (e.g., unemployment, illness of one partner, transition to parenthood).

Similarly, research indicated an interplay between self-regulatory resources and interpersonal relationships on wellbeing. To illustrate, recent models point to the necessity of theorizing self-regulatory processes as an integral part of an interpersonal system (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2015). Self-regulatory resources are affected by several interpersonal influences including our partners, parents, and siblings, and people's outcomes are predicted by not

only their own but also their significant others' self-control levels (Bridgett et al., 2015). For example, mothers' level of self-regulation is negatively related to their children's levels of negative emotions (e.g., sadness, distress) through stable home environment and satisfied relationships with fathers (Bridgett, Burt, Laake, & Oddi, 2013). Highly conscientious people, who are able to show self-discipline, positively affect their partners' future success at work (Solomon & Jackson, 2014). Future studies should further focus on the mechanisms and processes how our significant others affect our wellbeing through their influences on our self-control. To illustrate, are people, who are high in self-control, better in affirming their partner and thereby facilitating their partner's goal accomplishments than people, who are low in self-control (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999)? Additionally, is this goal achievement related to increases in partners' personal and relationship wellbeing in turn (Drigotas, 2002; Drigotas et al., 1999; Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009)?

In addition to multiple levels of influences, this dissertation also points to the importance of multi-disciplinary approach to develop our scientific knowledge on wellbeing. This dissertation benefited from research across social, clinical, and developmental psychology. For example, my chapter on intrusive behaviors (Chapter 3) integrated social psychological concepts and processes with clinical implications. Chapter 4 combined the developmental psychology literature on parent-child relationships with the social psychological literature on adult relationships to shed new light on the link between trust and perceived self-control in different types of relationships. Hence, integration of different fields could advance our understanding of wellbeing from different angles and contribute to research's implications.

What about Culture?

An important question that awaits future research is whether the results in this dissertation vary across cultures. Other than Chapter 2, which included both American and Dutch participants, all empirical chapters in this dissertation were based on the data collected from Dutch participants. Nevertheless, some of the psychological processes covered in this dissertation may change across cultures. For example, is it possible that intrusive behaviors toward significant others (Chapter 3) are perceived less negatively in cultures where interdependence with others is highly valued (Chentsova-Dutton & Vaughn, 2012)? If this were the case, do people in these cultures still need self-control to refrain themselves from engaging in intrusive behaviors? Two speculations can be made. On the one hand,

research showed that the first step for exerting influence on behaviors is defining the situation as a conflicting situation (e.g., between self-interests and partner-interests, or between short-term goals and long-term goals) (e.g., Fujita, 2011; Myrseth & Fishbach, 2009). If interdependent people do not perceive intrusive behaviors negatively (Chentsova-Dutton & Vaughn, 2012), they may not need self-regulatory resources to refrain themselves from intruding into their partner's privacy. On the other hand, research indicated that people with interdependent self-construal are better able to regulate their behaviors than people with autonomous self-construal (e.g., Seeley & Gardner, 2003; Zhang & Shrum, 2009). Thus, they may be better able to refrain themselves from engaging in actions such as intrusive behaviors that can negatively affect their future relationships especially with close others than autonomous people (cf. Zhang & Shrum, 2009). Future research should pit these hypotheses against each other to advance our understanding of relationships across countries and cultures.

Similar cultural differences may apply to the other findings reported in this dissertation. For example, the positive association between perceived self-control and trust in families (Chapter 4) may be even stronger in countries, where trust in others is low on average, such as Turkey (Van Lange, 2015). That is, because it is difficult for people in these countries to trust others, people may give even more importance to indicators of trustworthiness such as self-control. Culture also affects grieving and mourning (Stroebe & Schut, 1998). According to traditional social norms, mothers are perceived as the primary sufferers after the child loss and fathers are expected to stay strong to support the partner (Cook, 1988; Stroebe, Stroebe, & Schut, 2001). Thus, in countries where gender roles are more traditional (e.g., Turkey), as compared to countries where gender roles are less traditional (e.g., the Netherlands), fathers (mothers) may be more accepting when they perceive that their partner has a higher (lower) level of grief than themselves than the perception that their partner has a lower (higher) level of grief than themselves (Chapter 5).

Methodological Implications and Future Directions

All chapters in this dissertation benefited from advanced and complex longitudinal and/or multilevel data analysis. In Chapter 2, I was able to differentiate between- and within-person variations in self-control and wellbeing (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013). Additionally, using latent variables in Chapter 2 allowed me to disentangle error variance from real variance (Bartholomew, Knott, & Moustaki, 2011). In Chapters 3 and 5, I conducted analyses using longitudinal

and dyadic datasets and considered the interdependence between the reports of partners in a couple and across study waves within a participant (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Thanks to the Social Relations Model, I was able to investigate my research questions in Chapter 4 across 12 types of relationships in families with four members (Kenny et al., 2006; Kenny & Livi, 2009). Together, these different strategies of analysis across chapters allowed me to examine novel research questions that can be tackled with longitudinal, dyadic, and family data.

Despite the complex datasets and analyses across chapters, the findings in this dissertation relied on self-reports and other-reports (i.e., family members, partner), and thus, were correlational. It should be noted that I do not argue that the models described in this dissertation are able to determine whether a particular relationship is causal. Although time-ordering and testing possible effects controlling for confounding variables provided me the opportunity to discuss the directionality of an association in longitudinal analyses and explore the plausibility of causality, the research designs used in these studies remain correlational. Because there is no random assignment and manipulation, unobserved confounding variables might still have affected the results (Foster, 2010). For example, the findings on the role of self-control in individual wellbeing might have been confounded with neuroticism, which was not assessed in Chapter 2 (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). Future studies therefore should examine research questions in this dissertation by employing multiple methods such as laboratory experiments, genetic studies, and observations to demonstrate the robustness of the findings (e.g., De Moor, Boomsma, Stubbe, Willemsen, & De Geus, 2008; Eid & Diener, 2006; Ellemers, 2013).

Two chapters of this dissertation also contributed to the replications in psychological science (Makel, Plucker, & Hegarty, 2012). First, Chapter 2 not only examined novel research questions, but also replicated findings of previous studies (Cheung et al., 2014; Hofmann et al., 2013) showing that between-person differences in self-control are related to happiness and life satisfaction. Second, Chapter 4 both replicated the association between perceived self-control and trust among romantic partners (Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011), and extended this finding by showing that this relation also holds for relationships among siblings, and in vertical family relationships (i.e., parent-child and child-parent relationships). These replications confirm that these findings are robust across different samples.

Practical Implications and Future Directions

From an applied perspective, this dissertation suggests that prevention and intervention programs for improving wellbeing should consider several indicators (e.g., individual differences, relationships, and life events) at the same time. The findings also suggest that self-control can be one of the key concepts for boosting individual and relationship wellbeing. Couple and family therapists should consider the critical role of self-control in improving happiness and overcoming depressive symptoms (Chapter 2), balancing self- and partner-interests in relationships (Chapter 3), and developing trust within families (Chapter 4) (for suggestions to promote self-control in family therapies and interventions, see Sanders & Mazzucchelli, 2013). Furthermore, given that self-control is malleable and can be improved through efforts (Berkman et al., 2012; Diamond & Lee, 2011; Oaten & Cheng, 2006), prevention and intervention programs should include tasks such as physical exercises to maintain and develop self-control (Hung & Labroo, 2011; Oaten & Cheng, 2006).

Additionally, this dissertation (Chapter 5) suggested that understanding and accepting dissimilarities in grief reactions across partners should be a component of intervention and prevention programs targeting bereaved parents. This component may buffer bereaved parents' negative experiences and increase their resilience to declines in their individual and relationship wellbeing (e.g., Cheng & Grünh, in press; Essakow & Miller, 2013; Lang & Gottlieb, 1993). Thus, programs and family therapies should consider both the interpersonal context after grief and the comparison of grief between partners (cf. Arigo, Suls, & Smyth, 2012).

Concluding Remarks

“Understanding and improving well-being requires a sound evidence base that can inform policymakers and citizens alike where, when, and for whom life is getting better.”

(The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2013, p. 3)

This dissertation aimed to contribute to the scientific research on the psychological mechanisms and processes, which improve wellbeing. Specifically, it focused on three factors that affect wellbeing: individual differences, relationships, and life events. The findings in this dissertation point to the fact that all three factors influence wellbeing. The interplay of these factors shapes the quality of our lives. Therefore, these factors deserve further scientific evidence and provide exciting avenues for future research. Beyond providing an overview of the current state of the art of research on the effects of individual, relationship, and contextual factors on wellbeing, I hope that this dissertation will stimulate future investigations in this fascinating and important area of research.