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Is residents' satisfaction with life a precursor to experiencing emotional solidarity with tourists?

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ABSTRACT

In an effort to explore additional variables as antecedents of emotional solidarity, satisfaction with life (SWL) was considered in this study. More specifically, the research question posed in this paper is, can Deiner et al.'s (1985) Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) significantly predict the three factors of the Emotional Solidarity Scale (ESS): welcoming nature, emotional closeness, and sympathetic understanding? Reliabilities were strong for all four measures. SWLS significantly predicted all three emotional solidarity factors, albeit only explaining a modest degree of variance in each of the dependent variables. Practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: *Psychometrics, Emotional Solidarity Scale, Satisfaction with Life Scale, emotional closeness, sympathetic understanding, and welcoming nature*

INTRODUCTION

There is no disputing the fact that some individuals are happier than others in life. Such varying degrees of satisfaction with life undoubtedly have implications for the relationships individuals pursue and the interactions they have with others. A host of variables have been used to explain the relationship between residents and tourists when considering the relationship beyond an exchange of resources. Such predictors include the degree of intimacy (Pizam, Uriely, and Reichel 2000), interaction (Pizam, Jafari, and Milman 1991), and emotional labor (Wong and Wang 2009) to name a few. What is true of many of the measures used is that they focus on socialization between representatives of each group. Arguably, cognitive processes within the individual may serve to shed light on perceptions of the relationship.

A measure that has been utilized extensively by Woosnam and colleagues to assess extant relationships between residents and tourists is that of emotional solidarity. Up to this point, a limited number of antecedents have been considered in explaining the construct. Such measures include interaction, shared beliefs, and shared behavior (Woosnam 2011). The purpose of this

paper is to examine whether residents' satisfaction with life is another potential precursor to the degree of emotional solidarity such individuals experience with tourists in their rural destination. More specifically, the research question posed in this paper is, can Deiner et al.'s (1985) Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) significantly predict the three factors of the Emotional Solidarity Scale (ESS): *welcoming nature*, *emotional closeness*, and *sympathetic understanding*?

RESEARCH METHODS

The study site selected for this paper was Caldwell, Texas, which is approximately an hour from Austin, the state capital. This rural town of 4,104 individuals (U.S. Census Bureau 2012) is well-known throughout Texas for its large population of Czechs and the annual Kolache Festival (which is currently in its 27th year) that currently attracts roughly 20,000 visitors to celebrate the cultural heritage of the region. Over five weekends during the fall (following the festival), on-site data were collected through a self-administered survey instrument from residents of Caldwell at their homes. Following a multi-stage cluster sampling strategy and the U.S. Census Bureau's designations, Caldwell was reduced from census tracts to block groups and finally to households—at each stage, elements were randomly selected.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Caldwell was comprised of 1452 households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The research team visited 986 of these households, at which slightly less than half of the inhabitants ($n = 477$) were contacted and asked to participate. Sixty-one individuals declined to participate, which indicates an acceptance rate of 87.2%. From the 416 survey instruments that were distributed, 348 were completed by residents (83.7%). The effective response rate for this study was 73.0%.

As stated above, two primary measures were utilized in this study, Deiner et al.'s (1985) 5-item SWLS and Woosnam's (2011) 10-item ESS, both on a scale of 1-7 (where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). Given three factors exist for the ESS, separate linear regression analyses were examined based on composite factor means for both the independent variable (i.e., the unidimensional SWLS) and dependent variable (i.e., the three dimensions of ESS: *welcoming nature*, *emotional closeness*, and *sympathetic understanding*).

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Reliabilities and factor means were fairly high for SWLS ($\alpha = .88$; $M = 5.84$, $SD = .90$) as well as for each ESS factor: *welcoming nature* (four items, $\alpha = .92$; $M = 6.48$, $SD = .73$); *emotional closeness* (two items, $\alpha = .93$; $M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.16$); and *sympathetic understanding* (four items, $\alpha = .91$; $M = 5.65$, $SD = .93$). Residents' SWL significantly predicted such individuals' welcoming nature toward tourists ($F = 66.47$, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.16$), their perceived emotional closeness with tourists ($F = 55.13$, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.14$), and sympathetic understanding with tourists ($F = 57.46$, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.14$).

While variance explained (i.e., unique effect sizes) in each of the ESS factors by SWLS is modest, this work complements the research focusing on Durkheim's (1995[1915]) model of emotional solidarity as put for by Woosnam (2011). Such work largely emphasizes the social nature of the relationship; however the current findings indicate the importance of the cognitive-

judgmental process to the relationship. Not only should SWLS be considered a viable measure to add to the emotional solidarity model to explain a greater degree of variance but this work begs the question, what role does personality play in forging a sense of emotional solidarity with others? Including a vetted personality scale (i.e., “The Big Five” or the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) in the emotional solidarity model should also be considered. Additionally, future research concerning resident attitudes toward tourism and its accompanying development may be better served by including measures of satisfaction with life as a predictor of such attitudes as well.

Practitioners within DMOs and tourism planning organizations that care to broker and maintain positive relationships between residents and tourists should focus on opportunities throughout the community that could serve to improve residents’ satisfaction with life. The first step in undertaking this endeavor is to cast a wide net in asking residents outright, “What makes you happy or satisfied in your life?” At that point, common themes should be determined and assessed to determine those opportunities that are most feasible.

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