Dissertation Defense for

JOCHEBED G. GAYLES

TITLE: AN INTEGRATED MULTIDIMENSIONAL MODEL OF INDIVIDUAL WELL-BEING IN MIDDLE ADOLESCENCE: EXAMINING PATTERNS OF WELL-BEING, GENDER GAPS, AND LINKS TO SOCIAL STATUS OUTCOMES IN YOUNG ADULTHOOD

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PLACE: Rm 311 BBH Building

Areas of Specialization: Adolescent Development, Developmental Methodology and Intervention
ABSTRACT

Well-being is considered the ideal achievement of development at all points across the lifespan (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; N. Park, 2004). Complexities in conceptualizing this phenomenon present challenges in its assessment and to date, there is no consensus on a general definition of well-being (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012; La Placa, McNaught, & Knight, 2013). Well-being in adolescence is important for youths’ health and development as well as adjustment outcomes in young adulthood. Yet, there are no existing models of individual well-being that reflect a multidimensional, multifaceted structure and are developmentally appropriate for middle adolescents.

Therefore, this dissertation develops and tests a multidimensional model of individual well-being in middle adolescence via: 1) investigation of relevant indicators across psychological/emotional, cognitive and behavioral domains of functioning; 2) a consideration of gender disparities in profiles of well-being; and, 3) examining the longitudinal implications of well-being profiles for young adult social and health status outcomes. Information on several indicators of health and well-being at middle adolescence as well as social and health status outcomes in young adulthood is obtained from a nationally representative sample of youths aged 14 – 16 (N = 3,295) followed into emerging and young adulthood. A person-centered methodological approach is used to classify adolescents into homogenous sub-groups given their configurations of well-being indicators across multiple dimensions of functioning.

This dissertation illuminates that middle adolescents could be classified into sub-groups of individual well-being based on configurations across dimensions; the five groups are “Well Adjusted”, “Overt Delinquents”, “High Risk Youth”, “Substance Users” and “Low Positive Affect”. The identified patterns illustrate that adolescents exhibit multiple patterns of effective and less effective functioning across psychological/emotional, cognitive and behavioral domains and boys and girls are differentially represented in those patterns. In addition, this dissertation indicates potential for multifinality and equifinality in how adolescent experiences are linked to social status outcomes (educational attainment, criminal arrests and convictions, and substance use related social problems) in young adulthood.

Future investigations are needed to understand the importance of positive and negative aspects of functioning, inclusion of more indicators (domain specific) within the individual and to understand stability and change in patterns of well-being for adolescents.