The Influence of Employee Activation on Gender Differences in Job Satisfaction

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This study explored gender differences in job satisfaction and the role of employee activation determinants. A survey of 566 U.S. workers found partial support for prior findings, with men reporting higher job satisfaction than women. Regression analyses revealed employee activation variables, including engagement, meaning, belongingness, leadership, and career meaning, predicted satisfaction for both genders. However, certain activation aspects were more influential for women, supporting that non-traditional factors increasingly drive satisfaction. The findings reinforce the complex, evolving relationship between gender and satisfaction in today's workplace. Organizations seeking to enhance satisfaction and performance should focus on cultivating high activation among all employees.

Keywords: job satisfaction, gender, employee activation, engagement, purpose, belongingness, empowerment

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between gender and job satisfaction has remained a longstanding focus in organizational research due to important theoretical and practical implications. Earlier work established some key paradoxical findings, with women reporting higher satisfaction than men despite facing disadvantages like lower pay and fewer leadership opportunities (Clark, 1997; Gregory, 1990). Explanations centered on socialized expectations, flexibility to balance work and family roles, and self-selection into jobs with desirable intrinsic attributes (Bender et al., 2005; Hakim, 2000; Konrad et al., 2000).

However, evolving societal and workplace dynamics have raised questions about the persistence and drivers of gender differences in satisfaction today. Norms of equitable treatment and opportunity for women have progressed in many industries and geographical contexts (Kaiser, 2005; Perugini & Vladisavljevic, 2019). Furthermore, changing work models have decentralized locations and hours, empowering customization of roles around individual strengths and commitments (Andrade et al., 2020). These shifting dynamics may continue lessening distinctions in work experiences and satisfaction levels between genders.

Prior satisfaction research has also traditionally focused on task-based, extrinsic determinants like compensation, security and advancement (Andrade et al., 2019; Donohue & Heywood, 2004). However, today's knowledge workers are driven as much by non-tangible, discretionary factors centered around purpose, belongingness, development and career empowerment (Andrade et al., 2021; May et al., 2004).

Emerging "employee activation" concepts emphasize these intra-personal, socially-situated aspects motivating discretionary effort and performance (Galati et al., 2022).

To advance understanding of satisfaction in changing times, the current study examines gender differences through the lens of both traditional and non-traditional job satisfaction determinants. The aim is to offer updated insight into this important relationship with practical implications for cultivating engaged, high-performing workforces in evolving environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The paradox of the satisfied female worker refers to research findings that job satisfaction is higher for women than for men although women typically earn less, experience more discrimination, and have fewer opportunities for advancement (Bender et al., 2005; Clark, 1997; Donohue & Heywood, 2004; Hull, 1999; Kristensen & Johansson, 2008; McDuff, 2001; Metle, 2001; Sloane & Williams, 2000; Zou, 2015). Explanations for this include women being socialized to have lower expectations (Clark, 1997; Gregory, 1990; Gutek, 1993; Konrad et al., 2000), women having the flexibility to engage in family-friendly work (Bender et al., 2005; Hakim, 2000; Konrad et al., 2000), and women self-selecting into jobs with desirable characteristics (Sloane & Williams, 2000). However, some studies have found no gender job satisfaction differences (Andrade et al., 2019; Ehrenberg, 2003; Perugini & Vladisavljević, 2019; Sloane & Williams, 2000; Westover, 2009).

Research on the antecedents of job satisfaction, and particularly gender differences, is extensive. Extrinsic and intrinsic rewards; work relations, work-life balance, and worker activation determinants are relevant to the current study. An understanding of job satisfaction and gender differences can provide practical guidance to organizational leaders seeking to enhance job satisfaction and boost performance through cultivating activated employees.

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Rewards

Although research indicates that intrinsic rewards are more salient to women's job satisfaction than men's, findings are inconsistent (Andrade et al., 2019; Baeza et al., 2018; Grönlund & Öun, 2018). Some studies have found that men value extrinsic benefits such as pay more than women (Donohue & Heywood, 2004; Konrad et al., 2000; Sloane & Williams, 2000). This may lead to men staying in a job for purposes of security, which may decrease job satisfaction (Dyke & Murphy, 2006; Magee, 2015). For Gen-Y workers, job security does not affect job satisfaction for females but negatively impacts it for males (Muskat & Reitsamer, 2019). Other studies have found that women may value pay more than men in some professions (e.g., university professors) (Oshagbemi & Hickson, 2003).

If women are not the primary provider for a family, they may seek jobs with intrinsic rewards, leading to higher job satisfaction than men (Hodson, 2002; Konrad et al., 2000; Donohue & Heywood, 2004; Westover, 2009). Married women may also have more job flexibility, allowing them to leave unsatisfying work situations (Carleton & Clain, 2012) Women in entry-level positions take pride in their work but report less job satisfaction than men, possibly due to lower expectations for job promotion (Magee, 2015; Yap & Konrad, 2009). Contexts characterized by gender equality andequitable labor market access results in women having similar career expectations as men (Kaiser, 2005; Perugini & Vladisavljević, 2019) as well as higher job satisfaction (Grönlund & Öun, 2016, 2018; Hauret & Williams, 2017). Global comparative studies have found that although intrinsic factors are salient for both men and women, they have stronger predictability for women (Andrade, Schill, Westover, & King., 2021). For Gen-Y employees, the intrinsic factors of having a voice in decision making in independent organizations, opportunities for growth in corporate organizations, and receiving recognition contribute to job satisfaction for both genders although women are better able to manage low-appreciation work situations (Muskat & Reitsamer, 2019).

Work Relations and Work-Life Balance

Relations with co-workers and supervisors have been found more salient to job satisfaction for women than men (Andrade, Miller, & Westover, 2021; Harris et al. 2001; Konrad et al., 2000). Women may

experience higher satisfaction levels in female-dominated work contexts (Clerkin, 2017) than in male-dominated workplaces (Sloane & Williams, 2000). In gender-balanced workplaces, employees show more job satisfaction and commitment than in work environments that are either male- or female-dominated although men report lower satisfaction and commitment in male-dominated workplaces (Olafsdottir & Einarsdottir, 2024).

Research on gender and work-life conflict has had mixed results with some studies finding that women experience higher levels of conflict than men (Cropton & Lyonette, 2006; Duxbury & Higgins, 1991), and others finding no differences (Bari & Róbert, 2016; Keene & Quadagno, 2004). Both males and females value flexible work arrangements and time to spend with family (Doble & Supriya, 2010; Mulik, 2017). Work demands, specifically the number of hours worked and work spillover into home life create imbalance for both (Keene & Quadangno, 2004). Work schedules negatively impact men's job satisfaction and lack flexibility to deal with family matters (Hall et al., 2023; Padavic et al., 2020).

For global hospitality workers, work-life balance factors such as working weekends were more salient to women yet work interfering with family was important across genders (Andrade, Miller, & Westover, 2021). Another study found that gender differences in work-life balance perceptions were influenced by women's feelings of incompatibility with home and work roles (Morgenroth et al., 2021). This was influenced by women's perceived lack of leader fit in male-dominated environments, which could be addressed through the presence of female leaders.

Worker Activation

Five employee "activation" aspects that lead to greater job satisfaction include worker engagement, understanding of meaning and purpose, sense of encouragement and belonging, leadership efficacy, and career meaning and commitment.

Worker Engagement

One of the most examined topics within the realm of employee activation is worker engagement. Scholarly research conceptualizes engagement as a positive, fulfilling work-related state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Vigor refers to high levels of energy and resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort, and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication represents a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties detaching oneself from work.

Higher levels of engagement have repeatedly been linked to improved individual outcomes like job satisfaction, commitment, and performance, as well as organizational outcomes including profitability, productivity, customer loyalty, and reduced turnover (Bakker, 2011; Richman, 2006; Saks, 2006). For example, one study across seven different countries found that business units in the top-quartile for engagement scored 26% higher profitability than those in the bottom quartile (Coffman & Gonzalez-Molina, 2002). Given these beneficial impacts, actively cultivating higher engagement has become a key focus area for many leading companies.

Understanding of Meaning and Purpose

Beyond engagement, finding personal meaning and purpose in one's work is another important driver of activation. Research demonstrates individuals with a strong sense of meaning and purpose are more motivated, satisfied, and committed in their jobs (Steger et al., 2012). Having a clear understanding of how one's daily duties and efforts contribute to organizational goals that matter can offer an intrinsic reward that deepens work motivation. However, meaning is a subjective experience that individuals must construct based on their role, values, and beliefs (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Therefore, organizational leaders play a key role in helping employees find purpose.

Sense of Encouragement and Belonging

Another key facet of activation involves cultivating among staff a sense of encouragement, support, and belonging within the organization. A psychologically safe and inclusive work environment where employees feel appreciated, respected and able to fully contribute without fear of negative consequences is fundamental to mobilizing discretionary effort (May et al., 2004). Leaders play a central role in fostering such conditions through everyday behaviors and priorities.

Leadership Efficacy

Research also demonstrates leader efficacy significantly influences employee activation levels. Efficacy refers to leaders' beliefs in their own abilities to guide and motivate others towards shared goals (McCormick, 2001). Leaders with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to set inspirational visions, establish stretch objectives, model aspirational behaviors, provide timely feedback and recognition, effectively problem-solve challenges, and believe in people's capabilities to excel - all of which studies prove enhance work satisfaction and performance (Paglis & Green, 2002; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Career Meaning and Commitment

The final element of activation relates to fostering among employees a sense of career meaning and commitment to the organization over the long-term. Meaning arises when people feel their career prospects align with their passions, strengths, and sense of purpose (Dik et al., 2009). Commitment develops as employees feel loyalty and affiliation towards their employer based on fair treatment, career support, and a credible future.

RESEARCH MODEL AND DESIGN

The literature on gender differences in job satisfaction variables remains mixed, leading Grönlund and Öun (2018) to conclude the "gender-job satisfaction paradox could appear more paradoxical than ever" (p. 543). Additional research is needed to clarify "the extent to which the gender-job satisfaction paradox exists, where, and why, given gains in labor market equality for women and some evidence that women continue exhibiting greater job satisfaction than men despite equal education, occupations, and gender-equal societal conditions" (Andrade, Schill, Westover, & King, 2021, p. 7). Leveraging insights from the literature, we propose the following hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis 1**: Male and female workers will report similar levels of job satisfaction.
- **Hypothesis 2a:** Both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards will predict job satisfaction for male and female workers.
- **Hypothesis 2b**: Extrinsic rewards will influence job satisfaction more strongly than intrinsic rewards among male workers.
- **Hypothesis 2c:** Intrinsic rewards will influence job satisfaction more strongly than extrinsic rewards among female workers.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Work relations will be more salient in predicting job satisfaction than motivational rewards for both female and male workers.
- **Hypothesis 4:** Work-life balance determinants will be more salient in predicting job satisfaction for female workers than male workers.
- **Hypothesis 5:** Worker activation determinants will be more salient in predicting job satisfaction for female workers than male workers.

Modeled, in part, after the International Social Survey Work Orientations Module and the work of Andrade et al. (2023), we developed a web-based survey to explore the shifting nature of the workplace. The survey included a range of questions related to intrinsic, extrinsic, workplace relations, work-life balance, and employee activation variables. The survey was administered during winter 2024 using a stratified random sampling method across the United States, resulting in 566 completed surveys.

FIGURE 1
RESEARCH MODEL
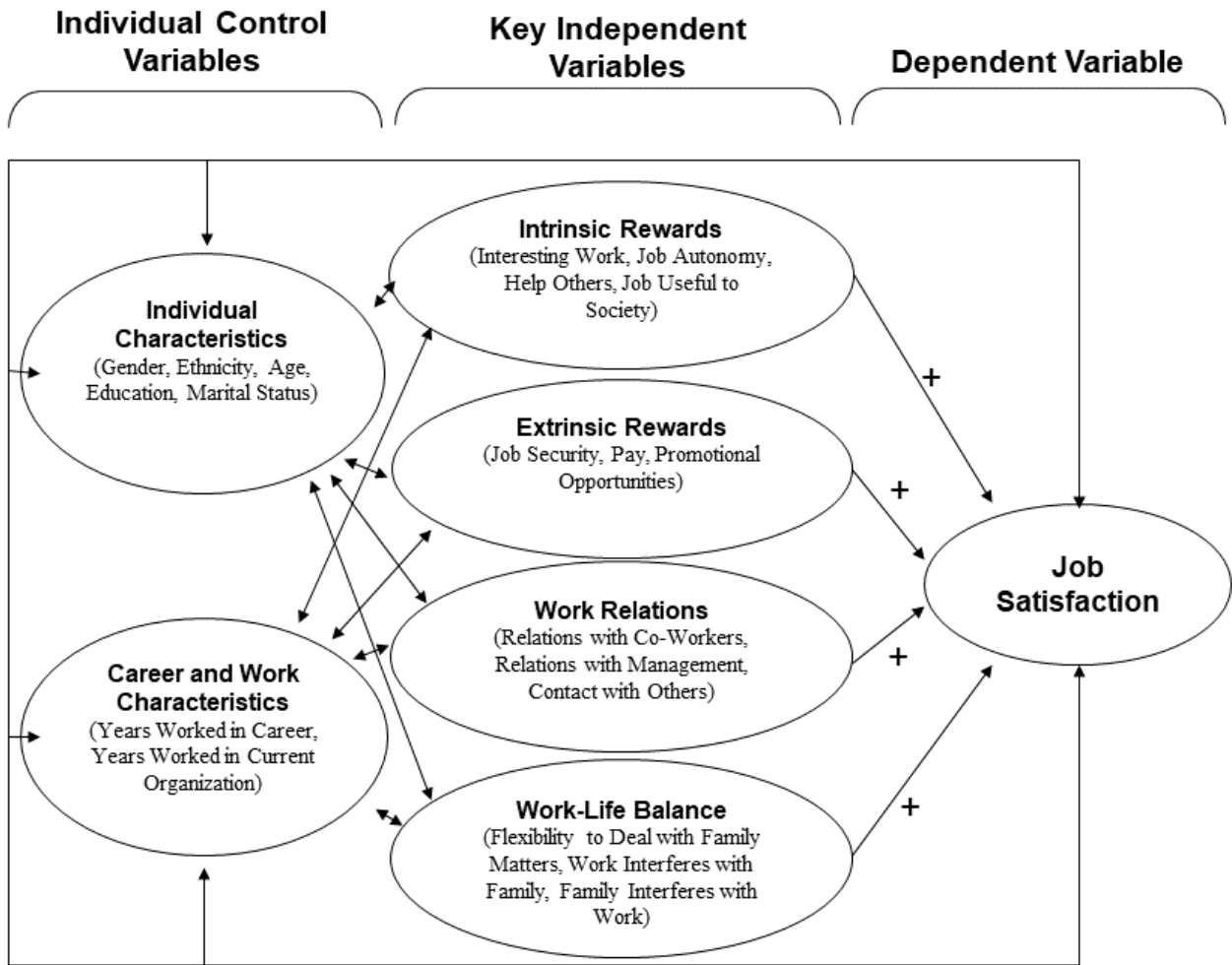
Operationalization of Variables

We operationalized the study variables following the approach of Andrade et al. (2023). Additionally, buidling on the survey conducted by Andrade et al. (2023), new survey questions were added to the follow-up survey, which allowed us to utilize new variables in the analysis. See Table 1 below.

TABLE 1
STUDY VARIABLES AND MEASUREMENTS

Variable	Item
Dependent Variable	
Job satisfaction	"How satisfied are you in your main job?" (0) extremely dissatisfied to (10) extremely satisfied
Intrinsic Rewards	
Interesting Job	"My job is interesting." (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Job autonomy	"I can work independently." (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Help others	"In my job I can help other people." (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Job useful to society	"My job is useful to society." (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Extrinsic Rewards	
Pay	"My income is high." (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Job security	"My job is secure." (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Promotional opportunities	"My opportunities for advancement are high." (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Work stress	"How often do you find your work stressful?" (1) never to (5) always
Work Relations	
Relations with management	"In general, how would you describe relations at your workplace between management and employees?" (1) very bad to (5) very good
Relations with coworkers	"In general, how would you describe relations at your workplace between workmates/colleagues?" (1) very bad to (5) very good
Contact with others	"In my job, I have personal contact with others." (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Work-Life Balance	
Flexibility to deal with family matters	"How difficult would it be for you to take an hour or two off during work hours, to take care of personal or family matters? (1) not difficult at all to (5) very difficult
Work interference with family	"How often do you feel that the demands of your job interfere with your family?" (1) never to (3) always
Family interference with work	"How often do you feel that the demands of your family interfere with your job?" (1) never to (3) always
Worker Engagement	
Job engagement	"Overall, how engaged are you in your (main) job?" (1) not at all engaged to (10) extremely engaged
Do what you do best	"I Have the opportunity to do what I do best every day." (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Understanding of Meaning and Purpose	
Meaningful work	"I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful." (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Purposeful work	"I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose." (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree

Sense of Encouragement and Belonging	
Supervisor encouragement	"My supervisor shows me encouragement for my work efforts." (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree
Where I am meant to be	"I believe that my work group is where I am meant to be." (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree
Leadership Efficacy	"I see myself as a leader." (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Career Meaning and Commitment	
Meaningful career	"I have found a meaningful career." (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Organizational Commitment	"I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization." (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Controls	Dummy variables for race, ethnicity, education level, marital status, and state of residence; Continuous variables for birth year, full-time years worked in career, and years worked in current organization.

Statistical Methodology

Following the approach of Andrade et. al (2023), we used a multi-step approach to analyze respondents' work experience and characteristics data as well as their job satisfaction responses. First, we conducted bivariate and descriptive analyses of work characteristics and attitudes by gender and for the full sample. Next, we tested for statistically significant differences in job satisfaction between genders (Hypothesis 1) using t-test analyses. We then examined gender-specific OLS and ordered probit regression models to evaluate the relative contribution of work characteristics and experiences to job satisfaction for each gender (Hypotheses 2-3). Finally, using moderation analyses, we tested for statistically significant differences between genders in the impact of work-life and worker activation determinants on job satisfaction (Hypotheses 4-5).

RESULTS

Participant Demographics

More than 550 respondents (*n*=566) participated in the modal stratified random sample in Utah and other areas of the U.S. The respondents were full- or part-time workers who worked before the COVID pandemic and were employed at the time of the study. As seen in Table 2, males comprised 46.11% (*n*=261) of the sample and females 53.89% (*n*=305). Respondents provided details on their racial and ethnic background; as seen in Tables 3 and 4 below, 67.67% of the sample was White or Caucasian, 19.96% of the sample was Black or African American, 9.72% of the sample was Asian, just over 1% was Native American or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Less than 2% of the sample reported race as "other". They also reported their ethnicity, and 88.34% of respondents were not Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin, and 11.66% of respondents were.

As seen in Table 5, over 44% (*n*=249) of the sample have only some college or less, and a little under 56% (*n*=314) have a college degree or higher. As seen in Table 6, 62.7% of respondents are married of cohabitating and 36.59% of the sample are single (with just 4 respondents preferring not to say). As seen in Table 7, 1977 is the average birth year of respondents, 20.57 is the average full-time years worked in the respondent's career, and 13.94 is the average years worked in the respondent's current organization.

TABLE 2
GENDER OF RESPONDENT

	Freq	Percent
Female	305	53.89
Male	261	46.11
Total	566	100

TABLE 3
RACE OF RESPONDENT

	Freq	Percent
White	383	67.67
Black or African-American	113	19.96
Asina	55	9.72
Native American or Alaska Native	2	0.35
Native Hawaiian or Pacific islander	4	0.71
Other	9	1.59
Total	566	100

TABLE 4
ETHNICICY OF RESPONDENT

	Freq	Percent
Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin	66	11.66
Not Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin	500	88.34
Total	566	100

TABLE 5
EDUCATION LEVEL OF RESPONDENT

	Freq	Percent
Less than high school	6	1.07
High school diploma	96	17.05
Some college, but o degree	147	26.11
Bachelor's degree	192	34.1
Master's degree	97	17.23
Doctoral degree	25	4.44
Total	563	100

TABLE 6
MARITAL STATUS OF RESPONDENT

	Freq	Percent
Married or cohabitating	353	62.7
Single	206	36.59
Prefer not to say	4	0.71
Total	563	100

TABLE 7
OTHER DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENT

	Freq	Percent
Birth year	1977.34	13.99
Full-time years worked in career	20.57	13.92
Years worked in current organization	13.94	86.29

Descriptive Results

Table 8 below shows the means of job satisfaction and other main study variables, by gender, and significant differences where present. As shown, there is a statistically significant difference in reported job satisfaction between men and women, thus not supporting hypothesis 1. There are also significant differences in several other variables. Namely, male workers report significantly higher mean scores on many study variables. Female workers did not have statistically significant higher mean scores on any of the variables. These results are consistent with prior research examining gender differences in job satisfaction and job characteristics (Bokemeier & William, 1987; Hodson, 1989; Blau & Kahn, 1992; Lynch, 1992; Mobley et al., 1994; Roxburgh, 1999; Clark, 1997; Konrad et al., 2000; Donohue & Heywood, 2004).

TABLE 8
VARIABLE MEANS AND TEST OF DIFFERENCES BY GENDER

	Females		Male		All		T Statistic & p-value for sig. diff		
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	t	p-value	df
Dependent Variable									
Job Satisfaction	5.06	1.700	5.39	1.50	5.21	1.62	-2.39**	0.009	562
Intrinsic Rewards									
Interesting Job	3.76	1.08	3.90	0.94	3.83	1.02	-2.39**	0.050	563
Job autonomy	4.04	1.03	4.07	0.94	4.06	0.99	-1.645*	n.s.	n.s.
Help others	4.18	0.88	4.1	0.84	4.15	0.86	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Job useful to society	4.06	0.97	3.95	1.00	4.01	0.98	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Extrinsic Rewards									
Pay	2.84	1.20	3.21	1.13	3.01	1.18	-3.767***	0.000	563
Job security	3.94	1.00	4.06	0.91	3.99	0.96	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Promotional opportunities	3.10	1.21	3.32	1.14	3.20	1.18	-2.20*	0.12	563
Work Relations									
Relations with management	3.67	1.01	3.85	0.95	3.75	0.99	-2.207*	0.014	563
Relations with coworkers	3.98	0.89	4.13	0.81	4.05	0.85	-2.041*	0.021	563
Contact with others	4.24	0.90	4.09	0.88	4.14	0.89	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Work-Life Balance									
Flexibility to deal with family matters	2.14	0.96	2.05	0.98	2.10	0.97	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Work interference with family	1.72	0.67	1.81	0.67	1.76	0.67	-1.618*	0.050	563
Family interference with work	1.59	0.64	1.63	0.69	1.61	0.66	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

	Females		Male		All		T Statistic & p-value for sig. diff		
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	t	p-value	df
Worker Activation									
Job engagement	7.70	2.21	8.19	1.74	7.93	2.02	-861**	0.002	563
I see myself as a leader	3.85	1.62	4.08	1.44	3.96	1.54	-781*	0.038	56
I have found a meaningful career	3.86	1.17	4.05	1.09	3.95	1.14	-2.000*	0.023	563
Work that has a satisfying purpose	3.87	1.20	4.04	0.99	3.95	1.11	-1.850*	0.032	563
Supervisor Encouragement	5.03	1.73	5.30	1.51	5.16	1.64	-1.927*	0.027	563
Where I am mean to be	4.91	1.80	5.32	1.54	5.10	1.70	-2860**	0.002	562
My work contributes to my life's meaning	3.84	1.14	3.96	1.00	3.90	1.08	*n.s.*	*n.s.*	*n.s.*
Organizational commitment	4.93	1.88	5.30	1.73	5.10	1.82	-2404**	0.008	562

Regression Results

Following the approach of Andrade et al. (2023), we examined the association between job satisfaction and the independent variables across multiple regression analyses. The first model (Table 9) examined the influence of intrinsic rewards, extrinsic rewards, work relations, work-life balance variables, and control variables on job satisfaction, by gender. In the second model (Table 10), we examined those same areas' joint influence of all control and independent variables on job satisfaction. Still, we added a series of "worker activation" variables for each gender and the total sample. Once these "worker activation" variables were added to the second model, many of the variables in the first model fell out of significance. Therefore, the last model (Table 11) focuses in on the "worker activation" variables and represent what we consider to be "the best" model.

Table 9 shows variation in standardized beta coefficient statistical significance for each variable. For women, "interesting job," "pay", and "relations with management" are each statistically significant variables in predicting worker job satisfaction. For men, "interesting job," "pay", "job security", and "relations with management", and "work interferes with family" are each statistically significant variables in predicting worker job satisfaction. Additionally, there were variations in *adjusted r-squared* values for the female (adjusted r-squared = 0.554) and male (adjusted r-squared = 0.664) OLS regression models, meaning the model accounted for over 55% of the variation in job satisfaction for women and over 66% of the variation in job satisfaction for men.

Table 10 shows variation in standardized beta coefficient statistical significance for each variable. For women, only "pay" remained significant from the original model, with all of the "worker activation" variables being significant but "My work contributes to my life's meaning" and "relations with management". For men, "job useful to society" and "relations with management" remained significant from the original model, with all of the "worker activation" variables being significant but "I see myself as a leader". Additionally, there were variations in *adjusted r-squared* values for the female (adjusted r-squared = 0.751) and male (adjusted r-squared = 0.775) OLS regression models.

Finally, Table 11 shows variation in standardized beta coefficient statistical significance for each variable. In the overall model we see that all "worker engagement", "understanding of meaning and purpose", "sense of encouragement and belonging", "leadership efficacy", and "career meaning and commitment" variables were statistically significant. For women, all variables were significant except "I have the opportunity to do what I do best everyday", "I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful", and "I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose." All variables were significant for men except "I see myself as a leader". Additionally, there were variations in *adjusted r-squared* values for the female (adjusted r-squared = 0.811) and male (adjusted r-squared = 0.830) OLS regression models,

meaning the model accounted for over 81% of the variation in job satisfaction for women and over 83% of the variation in job satisfaction for men.

TABLE 9
MODEL 1 - OLS TRADITIONAL JOB SATISFACTION REGRESSION RESULTS, BY GENDER

	Female	Male	All
Intrinsic Rewards			
Interesting Job	0.319***	0.315***	0.316***
Job autonomy	0.065	0.044	0.063
Help others	0.102	0.060	0.079*
Job useful to society	-0.010	-0.065	-0.035
Extrinsic Rewards			
Pay	0.157**	.227***	0.180***
Job security	-0.038	.100*	0.020
Promotional opportunities	0.115	0.109	0.120**
Work Relations			
Relations with management	0.233***	0.238***	0.233***
Relations with coworkers	0.052	-0.011	0.028
Contact with others	0.026	-0.047	-0.012
Work-Life Balance			
Flexibility to deal with family matters	-0.067	0.016	-0.026
Work interference with family	-0.063	-0.129*	-0.086*
Family interference with work	0.065	0.057	0.057
Controls			
Race	-0.018	0.034	-0.003
Gender	--	--	0.000
Ethnicity	-0.010	0.024	0.013
State of Residence	0.035	0.000	0.020
Birth Year	-0.032	-0.137	-0.078
Education Level	-0.020	0.010	-0.009
Marital Status	-0.029	-0.063	-0.042
Years Worked in Career	0.025	0.011	-0.012
Years Worked in Current Organization	-0.057	-0.001	-0.012
N	300	261	561
Adjusted R-Squared	**0.554**	**0.6644**	**0.596**
F	18.68***	23.0***	38.49***

*Note: Beta values; Significance levels: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001*

TABLE 10
MODEL 2 - OLS JOB SATISFACTION REGRESSION RESULTS WITH WORKER ACTIVATION VARIABLE, BY GENDER

	Female	**Male**	**All**
Intrinsic Rewards			
Interesting Job	0.030	0.073	0.051
Job autonomy	-0.012	0.071	0.023
Help others	0.019	0.057	0.036
Job useful to society	-0.023	-0.110**	-0.074*
Extrinsic Rewards			
Pay	0.096*	0.054	0.080
Job security	-0.003	0.005	0.080
Promotional opportunities	0.056	0.045	0.056
Work Relations			
Relations with management	0.047	0.085*	0.076*
Relations with coworkers	0.019	-0.034	-0.004
Contact with others	0.043	-0.002	0.021
Work-Life Balance			
Flexibility to deal with family matters	-0.045	0.052	-0.003
Work interference with family	-0.046	-0.058	-0.039
Family interference with work	0.027	-0.017	-0.008
Worker Activation			
Job engagement	0.194***	0.203***	0.198***
I see myself as a leader	-0.104***	-0.014	-0.063**
I have found a meaningful career	0.212***	0.201***	0.182***
My work contributes to my life's meaning	0.053	0.085*	0.093**
Organizational commitment	0.390***	0.344***	0.366***
Controls			
Race	0.017	0.044	0.031
Gender	--	--	-0.002
Ethnicity	-0.021	0.026	0.009
State of Residence	-0.015	-0.012	-0.016
Birth Year	-0.045	-0.065	-0.046
Education Level	0.002	-0.004	-0.002
Marital Status	0.026	-0.022	0.006
Years Worked in Career	-0.058	-0.065	-0.054
Years Worked in Current Organization	-0.063*	-0.013	-0.002
N	300	261	561
Adjusted R-Squared	**0.751**	**0.775**	**0.763**
F	35.61***	35.38***	67.76***

Note: Beta values; Significance levels: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

TABLE 11
MODEL 3 - NEW OLS JOB SATISFACTION REGRESSION RESULTS BY GENDER

	Female	Male	All
Worker Engagement			
Overall, how engaged are you in your (main) job	0.126***	0.081*	0.108***
I have the opportunity to do what I do best very day	0.046	0.120***	0.076***
Understanding of Meaning and Purpose			
I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful	0.064	0.120**	0.083**
I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose	0.061	0.103*	0.073*
Sense of Encouragement			
My supervisor shows me encouragement for my work efforts	0.198***	0.114**	0.166***
I believe that my work group is where I am meant to be	0.219***	0.146**	0.204**
Leadership Efficacy			
I see myself as a leader	-0.082**	-0.022	-0.058**
Career Meaning and Commitment			
I have found a meaningful career	0.115*	0.106*	0.108***
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization	0.316***	0.343***	0.324***
Controls			
Race	0.024	0.032	0.030
Gender	--	--	0.002
Ethnicity	-0.029	0.013	-0.012
State of Residence	-0.029	-0.007	-0.019
Birth Year	-0.032	-0.075	-0.052
Educational Level	-0.008	-0.026	-0.014
Marital Status	-0.036	-0.026	-0.10
Years Worked in Career	-0.046	-0.091	-0.066**
N	300	261	561
Adjusted R-Squared	**0.811**	**0.83**	**0.821**
F	80.98***	80.53***	151.60***

*Note: Beta values; Significance levels: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001*

Revisiting the Job Satisfaction Model

The initial research model presented in Figure 1 (and the corresponding hypotheses) only partially captured the complex relationship between job satisfaction, gender, and key workplace determinants revealed through this study. While traditional factors like rewards and work-life balance retain relevance, the prominent influence of employee activation constructs substantiated updating the conceptual framework.

Figure 2 below presents the revised research model incorporating insights from this investigation. Critically, the revised model positions employee activation as a core driver of satisfaction rather than a standalone set of supplementary predictors. Recognition of activation's multidimensional nature comprising engagement, meaning, belongingness, leadership efficacy, and career empowerment offers a more comprehensive lens for understanding satisfaction in dynamic work environments.

By integrating activation at the model's center, the revised framework accommodates findings demonstrating satisfaction is increasingly influenced by discretionary commitment cultivated through inclusive, empowering organizational cultures versus baseline expectations alone. The updated model also reflects activation's cross-gender significance in motivating discretionary effort toward optimal well-being and business outcomes.

FIGURE 2
REVISED RESEARCH MODEL
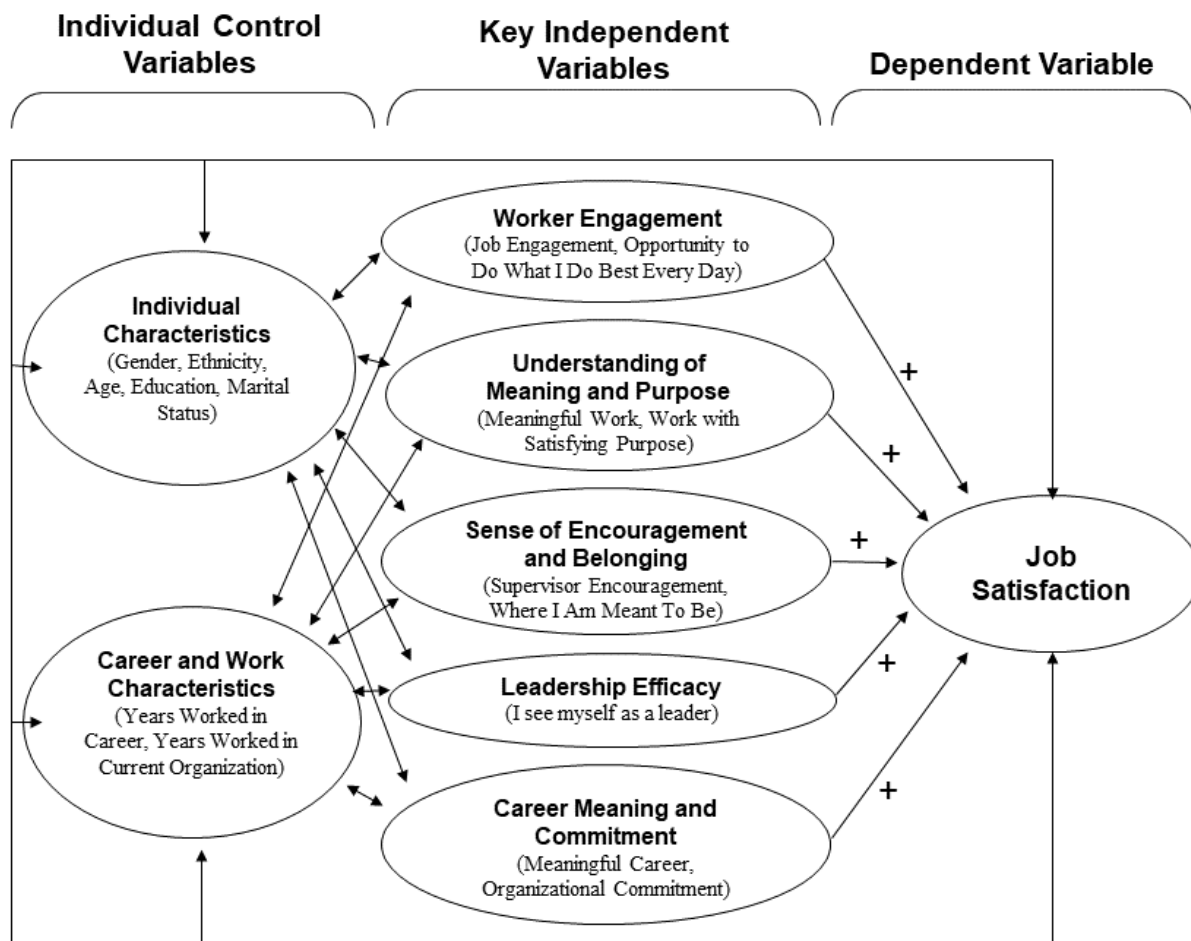
Perhaps most importantly, the revised research model supports future theorizing and testing of satisfaction as a fluid, context-dependent experience shaped not only by demographics but also strategically designed workplace experiences responsive to changing workplace and societal norms. The model thereby opens new pathways for optimizing diverse, thriving workforces through customized investment in cultivating high activation.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into understanding the complex relationship between gender, job satisfaction, and the role of employee activation factors. While some prior research findings were partially replicated, such as men reporting higher overall job satisfaction than women, the results also elucidate important shifts.

Traditionally examined determinants like rewards and work-life balance did predict satisfaction for both genders as expected based on prior literature. However, their influence decreased once employee activation variables were included in the models. This suggests that non-financial, non-task-oriented aspects centered on engagement, purpose, belongingness, and empowerment are increasingly salient drivers of satisfaction, especially but not exclusively for women. As workplace cultures and demographics continue diversifying, discretionary commitment motivated by these activation factors may become even more important.

Looking more closely, the results indicate meaningful nuances. For example, while men's satisfaction was still significantly tied to some extrinsic rewards like pay and security, intrinsic aspects fully surpassed these for women in predicting satisfaction once controls were applied. Additionally, relationships with management remained an equal priority across genders, highlighting equitable treatment and respect as foundationally important.

The findings also point to areas where satisfaction differences may lessen further going forward. Younger generations of all identitiesvalue flexible and inclusive cultures activating individual strengths, growth and well-being over strictly defined roles and hierarchies. As non-traditional families and careers continue expanding possibilities, satisfaction drivers are adapting accordingly.

An important consideration is how fluidly satisfaction can change based on shifting opportunity and societal norms. For example, gender gaps observed decades ago narrowed as more equitable access to education and career options arose for women. Future research should examine activating underrepresented demographics through diverse pathways as opportunities broaden.

Overall, the results underscore treating employees holistically by cultivating affiliation, empowerment and purpose across teams yields discretionary effort critical for thriving organizational performance. Continuous and nuanced understanding of well-being factors will help navigate a dynamic work future for mutual benefit.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND WORKERS

The findings point to meaningful actions organizations can take to enhance activation, satisfaction, and performance across diverse workforces. Fostering engagement requires flexibility allowing focus on meaningful work combined with development opportunities, recognition of contributions, and influence over decisions impacting roles. Platforms for open communication of goals and collaborative problem-solving keep purpose clear.

Cultivating belonging involves weaving inclusion into all systems from recruitment to performance reviews to compensate for implicit biases that may undermine retention of underrepresented talent. Leaders must model equitable treatment and zero tolerance for harassment. Employee resource groups can advise creating safe spaces while feeling psychologically secure to contribute unique perspectives.

Developing confident, empowering leadership involves coaching self and social awareness paired with skills like setting vision, taking feedback, and empowering others. Rewarding interpersonal skills rather than just outcomes indicates priorities. Mentoring programs passing wisdom between demographic groups nurture tomorrow's talent pipeline.

To ensure ongoing meaning and alignment with evolving aspirations, it is crucial to personalize career paths through individual roadmaps that clearly outline how roles progress, and strengths will develop. Flexible work policies accommodating life demands demonstrate commitment to well-being, boosting discretionary motivation.

For workers, maintaining skills, agility, and networking broadens opportunities to find work tapping strengths through purposes aligning with personal values and communities. Prioritizing self-care and setting boundaries between work and personal obligations safeguards against burnout that erodes productivity and satisfaction over the long term. To cultivate a positive and inclusive work culture, it is important to respectfully voice your thoughts and ideas through appropriate channels, as this can lead to a sense of empowerment and engagement.

Strategic yet adaptable investments in these interconnected aspects enable organizations and employees to thrive through cooperation amid dynamic change. An equitable future depends on it. Continuous efforts toward activating humanity's best through diverse teams promise rewards for all.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study provides a springboard for future investigations into the evolving relationship between gender, job satisfaction, and employee activation. Larger and more diverse samples examining multiple industries and global contexts could yield noteworthy cultural comparisons. For example, exploring activation factors in various sectors like technology, healthcare, education and hospitality may uncover uniqueness. Cross-national studies analyzing satisfaction dynamics where gender norms differ could also offer depth.

Longitudinal approaches tracking satisfaction levels throughout careers as workplace trends change would lend insights into adaptation. For instance, examining satisfaction pre- and post-pandemic could unveil the impacts of disrupted boundaries and remote flexibility. Interviews providing richer lived experiences would supplement survey findings. Mixed methods combining qualitative employee narratives with quantitative analyses may offer fuller pictures.

Investigating demographic intersections representing diverse identities could enhance understanding of satisfaction influences. For example, analyzing the role of activation by gender combined with factors like ethnicity, family status, job type, tenure, and age could reveal interaction effects. This would enable tailored recommendations optimizing all talents.

Additional consideration of emerging satisfaction predictors is warranted as work continues evolving. Future research incorporating psychometric scales measuring increasingly pertinent aspects like well-being, belonging, adaptability and purpose could keep pace with fluid dynamics. Exploring activation antecedents at multiple organizational levels from immediate managers to executive leadership could offer leverage points.

From a practical application standpoint, experimental designs pilot testing customized activation interventions targeted at different demographics would guide real-world optimization. Outcome studies could then assess impacts on key metrics like retention, productivity and customer satisfaction over time.

Overall, continued exploration of the gender-job satisfaction relationship through rigorous, inclusive and multidimensional scholarship remains an opportunity for making valuable contributions aligning workforce well-being with business prosperity amid workplace transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to expand understanding of the evolving relationship between gender, job satisfaction and the role of employee activation factors in the modern workplace. By examining these variables through a survey of over 500 U.S. workers, valuable insights were gained. While some historical satisfaction differences between men and women remained, the results also highlighted important shifts driven by changing opportunity structures and priorities.

Traditional determinants like extrinsic rewards and work-life balance retained relevance but were superseded by non-financial activation aspects centered on engagement, purpose, belongingness and empowerment—particularly though not exclusively for women. The nuanced analysis also revealed that equitable treatment remained equally important across genders. Overall, a more multidimensional, holistic

understanding of satisfaction emerged, influenced by fair treatment and opportunities to invest discretionary effort.

The findings underscore that cultivating workforces empowered through strong activation rooted in inclusion, growth and impact can optimize human capital central to organizational success amid fluid workplace changes. However, more research examining diverse industries, cultural contexts and intersecting identities remains needed to sustain progress and clarify emerging satisfaction dynamics.

Moving forward, continuous exploration of well-being factors through rigorous yet nimble scholarship will guide navigation. Mixed method longitudinal approaches mapping satisfaction as roles transform appear especially impactful. From a practical perspective, customized activation interventions targeted at underrepresented groups show promise if measured for outcomes enhancing prosperity for all.

As diversity grows and technologies disrupt boundaries, discretionary talent committed through purpose and community will prove indispensable. Organizations and society can mutually thrive with ongoing commitment to equitable cultures activating diverse potential. Overall, this evolving field merits persistent collaborative effort toward a future work wherein all find work meaningful and fulfilling regardless of attributes.

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