



Bottom-up or top-down? Examining global and domain-specific evaluations of how one's life is unfolding over time

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Abstract

Objective: We employed bottom-up and top-down perspectives to evaluate the link between how individuals view their lives as unfolding over time overall and in multiple life domains.

Method: Participants from an American adult lifespan sample ($n = 1,003$, mean age = 54.39 years, 49% female, 94% Caucasian) evaluated their recollected past, current, and anticipated future satisfaction in seven life domains (health, work, finances, contribution to others, relationships with one's children, close relationships, sex life) and for their lives overall (life satisfaction) at two time points separated by 9 years.

Results: Mean-level trends varied by life domain and age. In cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses, domain-specific beliefs about changes in one's life explained substantial amounts of variance in perceived changes in overall life satisfaction, and multiple domains had unique predictive effects. Domain-specific beliefs also substantially mediated the predictive effect of age on perceived change in life satisfaction.

Conclusions: Findings provide consistent support for the bottom-up perspective and limited support for the top-down model. Accordingly, individuals seem to derive beliefs concerning how their lives overall are unfolding over time based on perceived changes across multiple life domains.

KEYWORDS

bottom-up, domain satisfaction, life satisfaction, subjective temporal evaluations, top-down

1 | INTRODUCTION

Individuals' global evaluations of their lives are a key part of their subjective well-being (Diener, 1984). Such summary judgments, typically referred to as “life satisfaction” (LS), are among the most widely used indicators of positive individual- and societal-level functioning (Busseri & Sadava, 2011; Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2015). Most research on LS focuses on individuals' evaluations of their lives at present or overall (Pavot & Diener, 2008). However, a related line of inquiry examines individuals' evaluations of their lives from a subjective temporal perspective, based on their recollected past, current, and anticipated future LS (Diener, Suh,

Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Pavot, Diener, & Suh, 1998). Such subjective temporal evaluations convey unique and psychologically significant information concerning how individuals view their lives—and their well-being—to be unfolding over time (Busseri, Choma, & Sadava, 2009a; Lachman, Röcke, Rosnick, & Ryff, 2008; Shmotkin, 2005). Beliefs about how one's LS is changing over time are contoured by age: Younger adults tend to perceive their lives overall as getting better and better over time, whereas older adults anticipate decreases (Busseri, 2013; Röcke & Lachman, 2008; Shmotkin, 1991; Staudinger, Bluck, & Herzberg, 2003). In the present work, we investigated such age-graded beliefs using results from a large-scale, longitudinal, lifespan sample. Drawing on

bottom-up and top-down perspectives (Diener, 1984), we examined individuals' evaluations concerning how their lives overall are unfolding over time in relation to their beliefs about how various domains of their lives are changing.

1.1 | Subjective trajectories for LS

The narratives individuals hold about their life stories—encompassing their recollected past, current, and anticipated future lives—comprise a core part of their personality (McAdams, 1993; McAdams & Pals, 2006). With respect to personal stories about their well-being, many individuals believe that their LS is subject to fairly dramatic changes over time. In particular, younger adults typically perceive their lives as becoming more and more satisfying over time (i.e., an increasing “subjective trajectory”), whereas older adults perceive decreases in LS (i.e., a decreasing subjective trajectory; Busseri, 2013; Shmotkin, 1991; Staudinger et al., 2003). However, longitudinal studies demonstrate that average LS levels tend to be relatively stable over time, particularly over periods of several years, rather than consistently increasing or decreasing (e.g., Fujita & Diener, 2005; Lucas, 2007)—with the exception of the very old or individuals approaching the end of their lives (Gerstorff et al., 2010). Furthermore, even in studies indicating age-related changes in LS over time (e.g., u-shaped or inverted u-shaped trends), such changes are typically very modest in magnitude. As a result, many individuals are biased, both with respect to their evaluations of the recollected past and the anticipated future (Busseri et al., 2009a; Lachman et al., 2008). In particular, younger adults typically have an overly negative view of their past LS and an overly positive view of their future LS; in contrast, older adults tend to have an overly positive view of their past LS and an overly negative view of their future LS.

Furthermore, individuals' beliefs about how their LS is changing over time are connected in important—and surprising—ways to various aspects of positive functioning. It is often assumed that the belief that life gets more and more satisfying is an optimistic or adaptive way to view one's life (Gallagher, Lopez, & Pressman, 2013; Shmotkin, 2005). However, individuals characterized by the highest levels of psychological, physical, and interpersonal functioning tend to view their LS as *stable* over time, rather than improving, particularly from the present to the anticipated future (Busseri, Choma, & Sadava, 2012; Busseri et al., 2009a; Lachman et al., 2008). In contrast, those who are struggling in their current lives, including dispositional pessimists and clinically depressed younger adults, tend to anticipate that the most dramatic improvements in their LS are yet to come (Busseri, Choma, & Sadava, 2009a, 2009b; Busseri & Peck, 2015; Röcke & Lachman, 2008). Among younger adults, such links between more steeply increasing subjective LS trajectories and less positive functioning have been observed both at a

single time period (e.g., Busseri, Malinowski, & Choma, 2013; Busseri et al., 2009b, 2009a; Röcke & Lachman, 2008) and across time (e.g., Busseri & Peck, 2015; Busseri et al., 2009a; Lachman et al., 2008).

Such findings concerning the biases and psychological implications associated with individuals' subjective LS trajectories raise several important questions. In particular, why do younger adults believe that their lives overall are getting better and better over time, whereas older adults anticipate that the worst is yet to come? Furthermore, do individuals' beliefs about how their LS is changing over time also apply to how they experience and evaluate specific domains of their lives (e.g., health, finances, relationships)? Satisfaction judgments can be conceptualized both in terms of global and domain-specific evaluations, for example, of one's health, finances, and close relationships (Diener et al., 1999; Schimmack, Diener, & Oishi, 2002). However, most research examining subjective temporal evaluations has focused on individuals' global assessments of their lives. Even in the few studies that have examined such issues with respect to specific life domains, researchers either have aggregated the various domain-specific evaluations within each subjective temporal period (STP) (Staudinger et al., 2003), or averaged across the STP ratings within each life domain (e.g., Myers et al., 2014; Prilleltensky et al., 2015). Consequently, little is known concerning how individuals evaluate various specific domains of their lives as changing over time, and how such beliefs are related to their subjective trajectories for their lives overall. To address these issues, we draw on a long-standing distinction in research on LS between bottom-up and top-down processes (Diener, 1984).

1.2 | Bottom-up perspective

According to the bottom-up perspective, global LS evaluations are a product of domain-specific satisfactions (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Campbell, Converse, & Rogers, 1976). That is, individuals are thought to mentally combine their experiences and evaluations of various life domains (e.g., family, work, finances, health) to arrive at a summary evaluation of their lives overall (Diener, 1984; Headey, Holmstrom, & Wearing, 1985; Michalos, 1980). Accordingly, knowing how individuals evaluate various domains of their lives should provide an accurate prediction of their overall LS (Diener, Lucas, Oishi, & Suh, 2002). Further, evaluations of various life domain should make independent contributions to predicting LS (Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004). From this perspective, therefore, individuals experience higher (vs. lower) LS *because* they experience greater satisfaction in various life domains.

Supporting research indicates that evaluations concerning personally important life domains (e.g., health, finances, relationships) are chronically accessible to individuals when

forming LS judgments (Schimmack et al., 2002; Schimmack & Oishi, 2005). Furthermore, substantial amounts of variance in global LS evaluations can be explained by predictive models in which domain-specific evaluations are treated as simultaneous predictors (Casas et al., 2015; Cummins et al., 2003; Gonzalez, Coenders, Saez, & Casas, 2010; Loewe, Bagherzadeh, Araya-Castillo, Thieme, & Batista-Foguet, 2014; Tiefenbach & Kohlbacher, 2015; van Praag, Frijters, & Ferrer-i-Carbonell, 2003). In such studies, multiple domain satisfactions make unique contributions to predicting overall LS. Other research has shown that although mean-level trends over time in satisfactions may differ across life domains, aggregated domain-specific satisfaction evaluations can closely approximate the mean-level trend in global LS evaluations (Easterlin, 2006; McAdams, Lucas, & Donnellan, 2012).

With respect to how individuals view their lives to be unfolding over time, a bottom-up perspective would imply that individuals mentally combine their beliefs concerning perceived changes in various life domains to arrive at a summary evaluation of how their lives overall are unfolding. From this perspective, even though individuals may perceive different aspects of their lives to be changing over time in different directions, they would perceive their lives overall to be becoming more and more (vs. less and less) satisfying over time *because* they perceive greater improvements (vs. decreases) in satisfaction within multiple domains of their lives and/or within the most important domains of their lives. Support for this notion would come from research indicating that substantial amounts of variance in individuals' subjective LS trajectories could be explained by the combination of multiple domain-specific subjective trajectories. Further, various domain-specific subjective trajectories should make independent predictive contributions. And the extent to which some domains have stronger predictive effects than others would indicate which domains may play a more influential role in shaping how individuals view their lives overall to be unfolding over time. Given the possibility of variability (and inconsistency) in perceptions of perceived change across life domains, influences on global life evaluations should be strongest for life domains in which the perceived direction of change over time is consistent with the direction of the perceived change in LS.

A bottom-up perspective would also imply that although mean-level trends in the subjective trajectories may differ across life domains, the mean-level trend in a subjective trajectory based on the aggregate domain-specific evaluations—representing a composite evaluation of one's life—should closely approximate the mean-level trend in the subjective LS trajectory. The mean-level trend in the aggregated domain-specific subjective trajectory should also be contoured by life stage in a manner that mimics the age-related changes in the subjective LS trajectory, that is, perceived improvements during younger adulthood,

anticipated decreases during older adulthood. In addition, a bottom-up account would be supported by research demonstrating that the negative predictive effect of age on the slope of the subjective LS trajectory was mediated by the domain-specific subjective trajectories. According to such a model, the reason why older (vs. younger) adults tend to view their overall LS to be decreasing (vs. increasing) over time is *because* they view multiple (and/or important) domains of their lives to be becoming less and less satisfying over time.

Although previous studies have not addressed these issues, individuals do hold clear conceptions concerning the timing of changes in various personal characteristics and abilities across the lifespan (Fleeson & Heckhausen, 1997; Heckhausen, Dixon, & Baltes, 1989; Krueger & Heckhausen, 1993); for many such characteristics, with greater age the anticipated losses outnumber anticipated gains (Mustafic & Freund, 2012). Also relevant, research examining stereotypes and attitudes toward aging has demonstrated a robust network of (largely negative) beliefs concerning the effects of aging, including anticipated decreases in various specific domains such as physical, social, and mental functioning (Kite, Stockdale, Whitley, & Johnson, 2005; Kornadt & Rothermund, 2011; Levy, 2009). Together, such previous theory and research provide the foundation for a bottom-up perspective concerning the sources of individuals' subjective LS trajectories across the lifespan.

1.3 | Top-down perspective

In contrast, according to the top-down perspective global life evaluations influence a wide range of domain-specific satisfactions (Diener, 1984). That is, individuals' summary evaluations of their lives overall impact their interpretations of their experiences and evaluations of various life domains. From this perspective individuals tend to perceive more (vs. less) satisfaction within various domains of their lives *because* they are more (vs. less) satisfied with their lives overall. Studies have shown that global LS evaluations are moderately to strongly related to a wide range of domain-specific beliefs (Heller et al., 2004; Kozma, Stone, & Stones, 2000; Lance, Lautenschlager, Sloan, & Varca, 2005; Mallard, Lance, & Michalos, 1997; Scherpenzeel & Saris, 1996). Also relevant from a top-down perspective are stable dispositional factors, including basic personality traits, that are thought to color how individuals perceive their lives overall, as well as how they think about, experience, and react to events in multiple areas of their lives (Brief, Butcher, George, & Link, 1993; Diener, Napa-Scollon, Oishi, Dzokoto, & Suh, 2000; Schimmack et al., 2002). Consistent with this notion, studies suggest that traits such as Extraversion and Neuroticism, as well as dispositional optimism, are linked to higher satisfaction with one's life (Busseri et al., 2013; Steel, Schmidt, &

Shultz, 2008; Sun, Kaufman, & Smilie, 2018). Such evidence is consistent with the notion of the top-down influence of dispositional factors and global evaluations of one's life.

With respect to how individuals view their lives to be unfolding over time, a top-down perspective implies that individuals should consult their summary impression of how their lives overall are changing over time when forming their evaluations concerning changes in various domains of their lives. Furthermore, dispositional factors should influence a wide range of domain-specific beliefs. Drawing on previous personality research, such influences could include broad dimensions of personality such as Extraversion and Neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1980; Schimmack, 2008), dispositional optimism (Busseri, 2013; Busseri & Choma, 2016), and a generalized propensity to experience and evaluate one's life in a positive manner (Caprara et al., 2012; Cummins & Nistico, 2002; Diener et al., 2000). From this perspective, individuals perceive multiple domains of their lives to be getting more and more (or less and less) satisfying over time *because* they perceive greater improvements (vs. decreases) over time in their lives overall, and as result of broad traits that color how individuals perceive, react to, and evaluate domain-specific experiences. Support for such notions would come from research indicating that individuals' subjective trajectories for their overall LS, along with broad dispositional tendencies, have pervasive predictive effects on multiple domain-specific subjective trajectories.

Furthermore, the mean-level trend in individuals' subjective LS trajectories should be reflected in the mean-level trends of the subjective trajectories for multiple life domains. And given the possibility of variability in perceptions of perceived change across life domains, evidence of the influence of global life evaluations on life domains would be provided by showing that the perceived directions of change over time in multiple life domains are consistent with the direction of the perceived change in LS. A top-down perspective would also imply that predictive effects of age on the domain-specific subjective trajectories should be mediated by the subjective LS trajectory and dispositional tendencies. According to such a model, the reason why older (vs. younger) adults may view their satisfaction within various life domains to be decreasing (vs. increasing) over time is *because* they view their satisfaction with their lives overall to be decreasing (vs. increasing), and as result of basic dispositional tendencies that may color how their view various aspects of their lives.

To date, such issues concerning subjective trajectories have not been well examined in previous research in relation to basic personality traits (but see Gomez, Grob, & Orth, 2013). However, theory and research on identity and personal life narratives (Bluck & Habermas, 2000; Gergen & Gergen, 2010; McAdams, 1993; Shmotkin, 2005) suggests that individuals often perceive their lives to be unfolding over time in a particular direction (e.g., progression, stability, regression).

Adoption of such a narrative form is thought to provide structure, meaning, and coherence to individuals' recollections of past events, interpretations of present experiences, and predictions for future outcomes. Also relevant is research based on lifespan theory indicating widely shared conceptions concerning the broad dynamics of human development. Such conceptions include a shifting balance between gains and losses across the lifespan (Baltes, 1997; Heckhausen et al., 1989), as well as developmental changes in the relative salience of goals pertaining to growth, maintenance, and both avoidance of and compensation for losses (Ebner, Freund, & Baltes, 2006; Freund, 2006). Furthermore, some research has shown that dispositional optimism contours how individuals view their lives to be unfolding over time, and that such differences between optimists and pessimists vary across the lifespan (Busseri, 2013; Busseri et al., 2009b, 2009a). Together, this previous theory and research are consistent with a top-down perspective.

1.4 | The present study

In the present work, we evaluated bottom-up and top-down perspectives concerning how individuals view their lives to be unfolding over time. Our first goal was to examine how individuals from the across the adult lifespan view their lives overall and within various life domains to be unfolding over time. Based on previous research, we anticipated that younger adults would view their lives overall as getting better and better over time, as reflected in increasing subjective LS trajectories. In contrast, we anticipated that older adults would view their lives overall as getting worse and worse over time, as reflected in decreasing subjective LS trajectories. Less clear was whether younger and older adults would also perceive various aspects of their lives to be improving or deteriorating, as reflected in increasing or decreasing domain-specific subjective trajectories. According to the bottom-up perspective, domain-specific subjective trajectories may have distinct directions even within the same life stage; nonetheless, the mean trend in the aggregated domain-specific subjective trajectory should provide a close approximation of the subjective LS trajectory. In contrast, according to the top-down perspective, within each life stage the subjective LS trajectory should be clearly reflected in the various domain-specific subjective trajectories.

Our second goal was to evaluate individuals' views concerning how their LS was unfolding over time in relation to their beliefs about how various domains of their lives were changing. According to the bottom-up perspective, the combination of multiple domain-specific subjective trajectories should together explain a substantial amount of variance in the subjective LS trajectory, and various domain-specific subjective trajectories should make unique predictive contributions of varying strengths. Furthermore, the negative

effect of age on the subjective LS trajectories should be mediated by the domain-specific subjective trajectories. In contrast, according to the top-down perspective, the subjective LS trajectory, along with broad dispositional factors such as basic personality traits and dispositional optimism, should be reflected in, and thus predict, each of the domain-specific subjective trajectories. In addition, the effects of age on the domain-specific trajectories should be mediated by the subjective LS trajectory and dispositional tendencies.

2 | METHOD

2.1 | Participants and procedure

The data were drawn from the Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) study, a three-wave national probability sample of American middle-aged adults recruited using random-digit dialing (Brim, Ryff, & Kessler, 2004). The first wave was conducted in 1995–1996 with phone interviews and self-report surveys ($N = 7,108$), with the second and third waves ($ns = 4,963$ and $3,294$, respectively) completed using the same methodology approximately nine and 18 years following the initial wave. The present study examined results for the 1,003 participants who completed all of the relevant measures (described below) at Wave 2 and Wave 3. Note that results from Wave 1 were not included because the measure of dispositional optimism (described below) was included only at Wave 2 and Wave 3 only. These 1,003 participants had a mean age of 54.39 years ($SD = 9.16$), 49% were female, 94% were White, 97% were married, 71% had at least some postsecondary education, and median household income was \$77,500 USD.¹

2.2 | Measures

The present study examined domain-specific and overall life satisfaction ratings from Wave 2 and Wave 3, along with participant age, personality, and dispositional optimism ratings from Wave 2. Note that the publicly available MIDUS data contains a large number of measures, but the only measures examined for the present study are those described below.

2.2.1 | Domain satisfactions and life satisfaction

Single-item self-anchoring ladders (Kilpatrick & Cantril, 1960) assessed participants' current, recollected past (10 years ago), and anticipated future (10 years ahead) lives in seven domains, as well as with respect to their lives overall (LS). Ratings ranged from 0—*worst possible* to 10—*best possible* such that higher ratings indicated greater satisfaction. Such single-item satisfaction ratings have been shown to be reliable and valid (Cheung & Lucas, 2014; Lucas & Donnellan,

2012; McIntosh, 2001). The seven domain-specific evaluations included health (“rate your health”), work (“rate your work situation”), finances (“rate your financial situation”), contribution to others (“rate your contribution to the welfare and well-being of others”), relationship with one's children (“rate your overall relationship with your children”), close relationship (“rate your marriage or close relationship”), and sex life (“rate the sexual aspect of your life”). Note that within each domain the three ratings (i.e., recollected past, current, anticipated future satisfaction) were completed together, but the domains (and LS) were each assessed in separate sections of the survey.

2.2.2 | Disposition

Participants completed self-descriptive adjectives corresponding to the Big Five personality traits (Keyes et al., 2002; Lachman & Weaver, 1997). Multi-item ratings, ranging from 1—*a lot* to 4—*not at all*, were used to assess Neuroticism (four items, e.g., moody; $\alpha = .74$), Extraversion (five items, e.g., out-going; $\alpha = .76$), Openness to Experience (seven items, e.g., creative; $\alpha = .77$), Agreeableness (five items, e.g., caring; $\alpha = .80$), and Conscientiousness (five items, e.g., organized; $\alpha = .68$). Items were averaged such that higher scores indicated higher levels of the personality trait. Participants also completed the six items related to optimism (e.g., “In uncertain times I usually expect the best”) and pessimism (e.g., “If something can go wrong for me, it will”) comprising the *Life Orientation Test-Revised* (Scheier et al., 1994). Ratings, ranging from 1—*a lot agree* to 5—*a lot disagree*, were averaged such that higher scores indicated higher levels of dispositional optimism (vs. pessimism).

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Subjective trajectories by life domain and age

Our first goal was to examine how individuals from the across the adult lifespan view their lives overall and within various life domains as unfolding over time. Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1. Also shown are two domain-aggregated satisfaction indices formed at each wave by (a) averaging across the seven domain ratings within each STP (i.e., “unit-weighted” domain aggregate) and (b) combining the seven domain ratings from within each STP using the intercept and regression weights from a model in which an LS rating (recollected past, current, anticipated future) was regressed simultaneously onto the seven corresponding domain ratings (i.e., “regression-weighted” domain aggregate; see Supplemental Table 1).

Repeated-measures ANOVAs with STP (three levels: recollected past, current, anticipated future) as a within-subjects

Measure type	Domain	STP	Wave 2		Wave 3	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Satisfaction	Health	Past	8.34	1.47	8.17	1.55
		Current	7.63	1.38	7.51	1.46
		Future	7.06	1.67	6.74	1.87
	Work	Past	7.07	2.13	7.81	1.94
		Current	7.74	1.90	7.84	2.13
		Future	7.95	2.07	7.46	2.59
	Finances	Past	6.32	2.06	7.28	1.83
		Current	6.87	1.79	7.03	1.96
		Future	7.50	1.80	7.06	2.15
	Contr. others	Past	6.49	2.03	6.55	2.02
		Current	6.72	1.99	6.59	2.05
		Future	7.00	2.02	6.41	2.26
	Rel w children	Past	8.29	1.57	8.58	1.60
		Current	8.59	1.37	8.77	1.54
		Future	8.99	1.18	9.03	1.37
	Close relationship	Past	7.64	2.13	8.30	1.75
		Current	8.34	1.60	8.54	1.65
		Future	8.77	1.47	8.77	1.64
	Sex life	Past	6.99	2.28	6.83	2.45
		Current	5.86	2.63	5.05	2.93
		Future	5.86	2.71	4.74	3.09
	Life overall	Past	7.55	1.63	8.05	1.38
		Current	8.18	1.21	8.20	1.31
		Future	8.42	1.35	8.08	1.72
	Domain aggregate UW	Past	7.31	1.06	7.65	0.99
		Current	7.39	0.98	7.33	1.10
		Future	7.59	1.10	7.17	1.31
Domain aggregate RW	Past	7.52	1.13	8.04	0.93	
	Current	8.09	0.83	8.24	0.94	
	Future	8.42	0.92	8.03	1.16	
Disposition	Neuroticism		2.02	0.61		
	Extraversion		3.09	0.56		
	Openness to Experience		2.88	0.52		
	Conscientiousness		3.44	0.41		
	Agreeableness		3.41	0.49		
	Optimism		3.99	0.76		

Notes: $N = 1,003$. STP = subjective temporal period; UW = unit-weighted; RW = regression-weighted.

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics for study variables

factor were conducted using the Wave 2 responses for each of the seven domain satisfaction ratings, both domain aggregates, and LS. The main effect of STP was statistically significant in each model ($ps < .001$), suggesting that at Wave 2 participants viewed their satisfaction as changing over time

within each life domain, across domains, and with respect to their overall LS. The directions of these perceived changes varied across life domains, with increasing subjective trajectories in five domains (work, finances, contributions to others, relationships with one's children, close relationship)

along with both domain aggregates and LS, and decreasing subjective trajectories in two domains (health, sex life). Also noteworthy, of the two domain aggregates, the regression-weighted aggregate provided a very close approximation of the subjective trajectory for LS.²

To evaluate the subjective trajectories in relation to participant age, we computed slope scores for each subjective trajectory (i.e., slope = anticipated future minus recollected past) and examined each slope in relation to age. Descriptive statistics for these slopes scores and correlations with participant age are shown in Table 2. Wave 2 age was significantly and negatively correlated with each of the subjective trajectory slopes except relationship with one's children. Such findings suggest that at Wave 2 older adults tended to view their lives as improving less (for work, finances, contributions to others, close relationship, LS) and decreasing more (for health, sex life) than younger adults.

To further examine these age-related findings, the mean subjective trajectories at Wave 2 were plotted for each life domain, both domain aggregates, and overall LS within each of three age groups: younger (ages = 20–44 years, $n = 149$), middle-age (ages = 45–64 years, $n = 697$), and older adulthood (ages = 65 years and older, $n = 157$). As show in Figure 1, the subjective trajectories among younger adults were increasing for LS, both domain aggregates, and each domain except health (decreasing). Among middle-aged adults, the subjective trajectories were increasing for LS, both domain aggregates, and each domain except health and sex life (both decreasing). And among older adults, the subjective trajectories were decreasing for LS, both domain aggregates, and each domain except relationship with one's children and close relationships (both increasing). These findings reveal that, within each age group, the mean trend in the subjective trajectory for LS was similar in direction

to several of the domain-specific subjective trajectories; however, the mean trend in one or more of the domain-specific subjective trajectories also differed from that of the subjective LS trajectory. Furthermore, of the two domain aggregates, within each age group the regression-weighted approach provided a close approximation of the LS subjective trajectory.³

3.2 | Bottom-up and top-down models

Our second goal was to evaluate individuals' views concerning how their LS was unfolding over time in relation to their beliefs about various domains of their lives. To do so, we tested both bottom-up and top-down perspectives using cross-sectional results from Wave 2 and longitudinal results from Wave 2 to Wave 3. See Supplemental Table 2 for correlations among the analysis variables.

3.2.1 | Bottom-up models

Cross-sectional analysis (Wave 2)

We first tested a bottom-up path model using AMOS software (v. 25, maximum likelihood estimation) based on the cross-sectional results from Wave 2. This model assessed (i) the predictive effects of the domain-specific subjective trajectory slopes on the subjective LS trajectory slope and (ii) the extent to which the domain slopes mediated the predictive effect of age on the LS slope. Participant age was specified as predicting the subjective LS trajectory slope and each of the domain-specific subjective trajectory slopes (with correlations specified among the residuals of the domain-specific slopes); the domain-specific slopes were specified as simultaneous predictors of the subjective LS trajectory slope. The model was saturated ($df = 0$) and

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics for subjective trajectory slopes and correlations with age

Satisfaction domain	Wave 2			Wave 3		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r</i>
Health	−1.28	2.00	−.20	−1.44	2.18	−.23
Work	0.88	2.85	−.15	−0.36	3.09	−.22
Finances	1.18	2.63	−.35	−0.23	2.61	−.31
Contr. others	0.51	1.93	−.29	−0.14	2.04	−.26
Rel w children	0.70	1.42	.02 [^]	0.45	1.31	−.13
Close relationship	1.13	2.15	−.21	0.47	1.66	−.20
Sex life	−1.13	3.02	−.33	−2.10	2.86	−.26
LS	0.87	2.00	−.34	0.03	1.92	−.33
Domain aggregate UW	0.29	1.30	−.41	−0.48	1.28	−.42
Domain aggregate RW	0.90	1.25	−.40	−0.01	1.18	−.45

Notes: $N = 1,003$. LS = life satisfaction; UW = unit-weighted domain aggregate; RW = regression-weighted domain aggregate; r = correlation with participant age (for $\hat{p} = .45$; all other $ps < .001$).

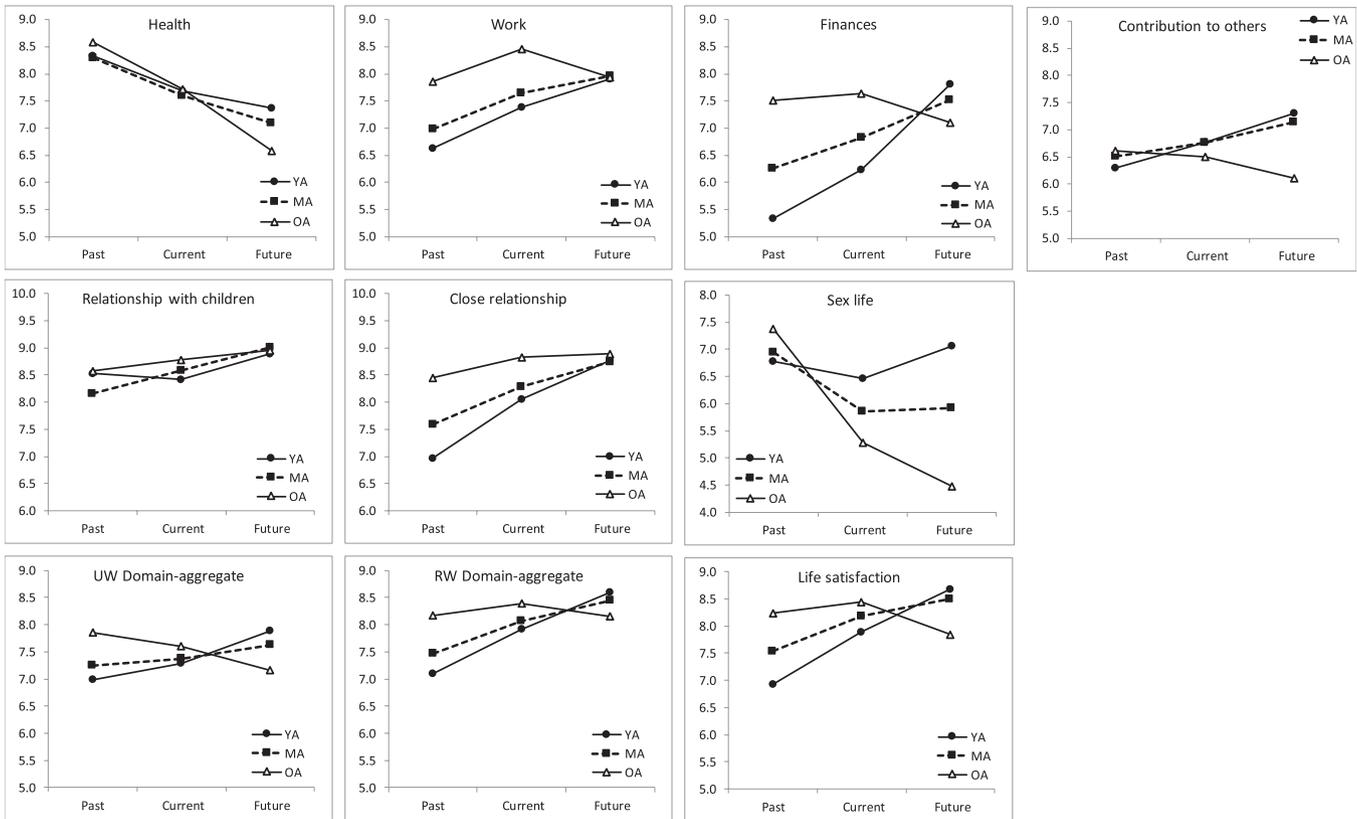


FIGURE 1 Mean Wave 2 subjective temporal period (STP) ratings by domain. Domains are plotted in separate panels. In each panel mean satisfaction (y-axis) is plotted by STP (x-axis: recollected past, current, anticipated future). Mean trends are shown separately for younger (YA), middle-aged (MA), and older adults (OA). UW = unit-weighted domain aggregate; RW = regression-weighted domain aggregate

thus provided perfect fit. More importantly, as shown in Figure 2, each of the domain-specific slopes had positive and unique predictive effects on the LS slope ($R^2 = .48$, $p < .001$). That is, more steeply increasing subjective LS trajectories were predicted by more steeply increasing subjective trajectories for work, finances, contributions to others, relationship with one's children, and close relationships, as well as less steeply decreasing subjective trajectories for one's health and sex life. The strongest predictive effects were found for finances and close relationships. Also noteworthy, the total (unstandardized) predictive effect of age on the subjective LS trajectory slope ($b = -.07$, $p = .001$) comprised significant direct ($b = -.02$, $p = .003$) and indirect ($b = -.06$, $p = .001$) effects, as estimated using 1,000 bootstrapped samples. These latter results suggest that 76% of the total predictive effect of age on the subjective LS trajectory slope was mediated by the domain-specific slopes.

Longitudinal analysis (Wave 2 to Wave 3)

We next tested a bottom-up path model using the longitudinal findings from Wave 2 and Wave 3. This model assessed (i) the predictive effects of the Wave 2 domain-specific subjective trajectory slopes on the Wave 3 subjective LS trajectory slope (controlling for the LS slope at Wave 2)

and (ii) the extent to which the Wave 2 domain slopes mediated the predictive effect of Wave 2 age on the Wave 3 LS slope. Participant age at Wave 2 was specified as predicting the Wave 3 subjective LS trajectory slope along with each of the Wave 2 domain-specific subjective trajectory slopes and the Wave 2 subjective LS trajectory slope (with correlations specified among the residuals of the Wave 2 slopes); the Wave 2 slopes for each domain and LS were also specified as predictors of the Wave 3 subjective LS trajectory slope. This model was saturated ($df = 0$) and thus provided perfect fit. As shown in Figure 3, five of the Wave 2 domain-specific slopes had unique predictive effects on the Wave 3 LS slope ($R^2 = .18$, $p < .001$). In particular, more steeply increasing subjective LS trajectories at Wave 3 were predicted by more steeply increasing subjective trajectories at Wave 2 for LS and contribution to others, more stable (i.e., less increasing) subjective trajectories for work and close relationships, and less steeply decreasing subjective trajectories for one's health and sex life. Furthermore, the total unique predictive effect of Wave 2 age on the Wave 3 subjective LS trajectory slope ($b = -.07$, $p = .002$) comprised significant direct ($b = -.05$, $p = .002$) and indirect ($b = -.03$, $p = .002$) effects. These latter results suggest that 43% of unique predictive effect of Wave 2 age on the

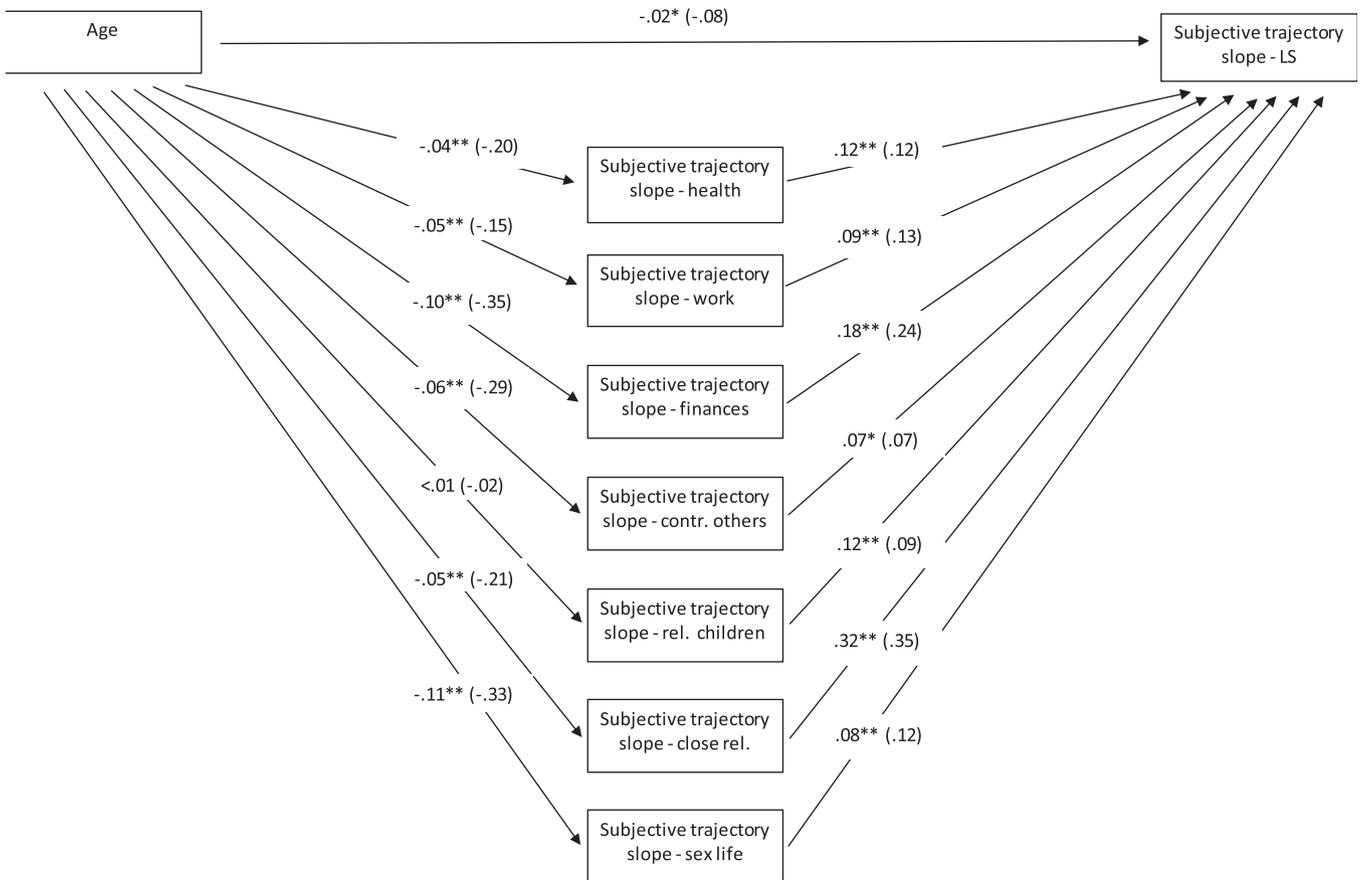


FIGURE 2 Wave 2 bottom-up model predicting subjective LS trajectory slope from age and domain-specific subjective trajectory slopes. Unstandardized (and standardized) path coefficients are shown. For clarity of presentation residual variances in the domain-specific and LS subjective trajectory slopes are not shown; similarly, correlations among residual variances in the domain-specific slopes are not shown. * $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$

Wave 3 subjective LS trajectory slope was mediated by the Wave 2 slopes.

3.2.2 | Top-down models

Cross-sectional analysis (Wave 2)

We then tested a top-down path model based on results from Wave 2. This model assessed (i) the predictive effects of the LS subjective trajectory slope and disposition measures on each of the domain-specific subjective LS trajectory slopes and (ii) the extent to which the LS slope and disposition measures mediated the predictive effects of age on the domain-specific slopes. Participant age was specified as predicting each of the domain-specific subjective trajectory slopes, as well as the subjective LS trajectory slope and the six disposition measures (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Optimism; with correlations specified among the residuals from the LS slope and disposition measures); the LS slope and the disposition measures were also specified as predicting each of the domain slopes; see Supplemental Figure 1. This model was saturated ($df = 0$) and thus provided perfect fit. As shown in

Table 3, the subjective LS trajectory slope had a significant and positive predictive effect on each domain-specific slope. That is, more steeply increasing (or less steeply decreasing) domain-specific subjective trajectories were predicted by more steeply increasing subjective LS trajectories. The unique predictive effects of the disposition measures were inconsistent across domains. The direct predictive effects of age on the domain-specific slopes were significant for each domain except close relationships. Also noteworthy, as shown in Table 4 the total predictive effect of age was significant for each domain-specific slope except relationship with one's children, and comprised significant direct (except for work, relationship with children, and close relationship) and indirect effects. Overall, the LS slope and the disposition measures provided at least partial mediation ($mdn = 33%$) of the effects of age on the domain-specific slopes.

Longitudinal analysis (Wave 2 to Wave 3)

We next tested a series of top-down longitudinal path models. These models assessed (i) the predictive effects of the Wave 2 subjective LS trajectory slope and disposition measures on the Wave 3 domain-specific subjective

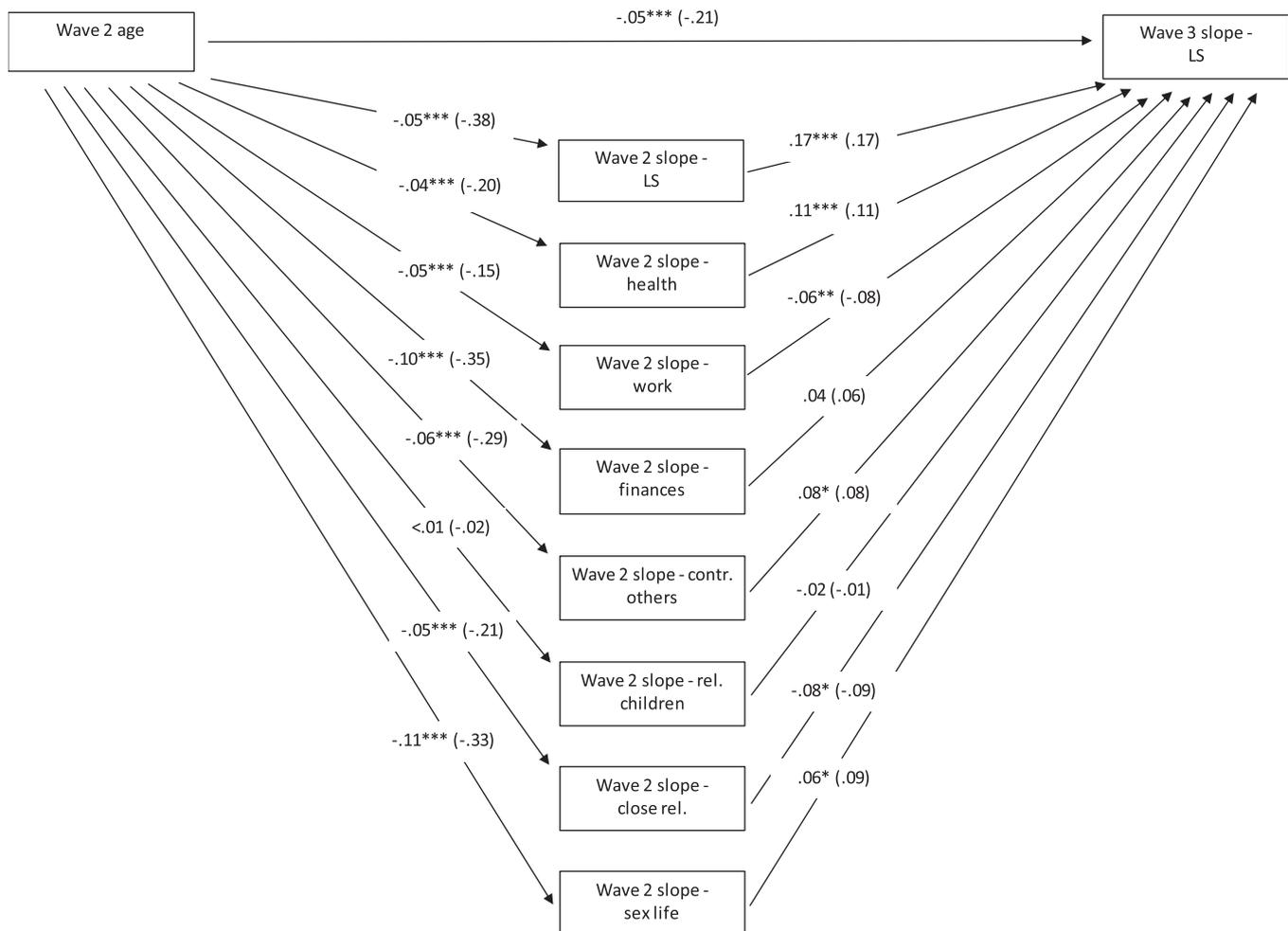


FIGURE 3 Longitudinal bottom-up model predicting Wave 3 subjective LS trajectory slope from Wave 2 age and domain-specific subjective trajectory slopes. Unstandardized (and standardized) path coefficients are shown. For clarity of presentation residual variances in the domain-specific and LS subjective trajectory slopes are not shown; similarly, correlations among residual variances in the domain-specific slopes are not shown. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

trajectory slopes (controlling for the corresponding Wave 2 domain slope), along with (ii) the extent to which the Wave LS slope and disposition measures mediated the predictive effect of Wave 2 age on the Wave 3 domain slopes. In each model, Wave 2 age was specified as predicting one of the Wave 3 domain-specific subjective trajectory slopes, the corresponding Wave 2 domain slope, the Wave 2 subjective LS trajectory slope, and the six Wave 2 disposition scores (with correlations specified among the residuals from the Wave 2 slopes and disposition measures); each of the Wave 2 slopes and disposition scores also predicted the Wave 3 domain-specific slope (see Supplemental Figure 2 for an example). These models were saturated ($df = 0$) and thus provided perfect fit. As detailed in Table 5, the Wave 2 subjective LS trajectory slope had a significant unique predictive effect on just two of the seven Wave 3 domain-specific slopes (work, close relationship). Similarly, significant unique predictive effects for the six Wave 2

dispositional measures were infrequent and inconsistent across models. Also noteworthy, the unique predictive effect of Wave 2 age on the Wave 3 domain-specific slopes was significant in each model. As shown in Table 6, the total predictive effect of Wave 2 age was significant for each Wave 3 domain-specific slope, and comprised significant direct and (in four models) indirect effects. Such results suggest that the Wave 2 subjective LS trajectory slope and dispositional measures provided minimal mediation ($mdn = 17\%$) of the predictive effect of Wave 2 age on the Wave 3 domain-specific slopes.

3.3 | Bottom-up versus top-down models

In a final pair of analyses, we used multiple regression to test aspects of the bottom-up and top-down perspectives simultaneously. In these analyses, the subjective LS trajectory slope was the criterion of interest, and the dispositional measures,

TABLE 3 Results from Wave 2 models regressing domain-specific subjective trajectory slopes on age, LS slope, and disposition measures

Predictor	Criterion																				
	Health			Work			Finances			Contr others			Relat children			Close Relat			Sex life		
	b	p	β	b	p	β	b	p	β	b	p	β	b	p	β	b	p	β	b	p	β
Age	-.03	<.001	-.15	-.02	<.001	-.07	.04	-.07	-.23	<.001	-.22	.01	.13	.05	-.01	.32	-.03	-.07	<.001	-.22	
LS slope	.22	<.001	.22	.42	<.001	.29	.52	<.001	.40	.24	<.001	.25	.15	<.001	.21	.56	<.001	.52	<.001	.38	
Neuroticism	-.19	.09	-.06	.01	.93	.01	-.26	.05	-.06	-.05	.65	-.02	-.05	.52	-.02	.82	-.01	-.08	.60	-.02	
Extraversion	.21	.13	.06	-.38	.05	-.07	.37	.02	.08	<.01	.99	<.01	.01	.95	<.01	.11	.06	.05	.78	.01	
Openness	.20	.14	.05	.55	.01	.10	.16	.33	.03	.20	.12	.05	.16	.12	.06	-.33	.01	-.08	-.29	-.05	
Conscientious	.14	.38	.03	.10	.66	.01	.06	.73	.01	-.06	.66	-.01	.25	.03	.07	-.26	.08	-.05	-.24	-.03	
Agreeableness	.05	.70	.01	.21	.30	.04	-.25	.13	-.05	-.16	.21	-.04	-.13	.20	-.05	.16	.23	.04	.15	.43	
Optimism	.17	.09	.06	.24	.08	.06	.05	.64	.02	.22	.02	.09	-.07	.31	-.04	-.11	.25	-.04	.39	.003	
Model R ²	.12	<.001	.12	<.001	.27	<.001	.27	<.001	.15	<.001	.15	<.001	.05	<.001	.29	<.001	.29	<.001	.24	<.001	

Note: N = 1,003. LS = life satisfaction; Contr = contribution; Relat = relationship.

domain-specific subjective trajectory slopes, and participant age were treated as joint predictors. These models allowed us to evaluate the relative contributions of the bottom-up and top-down variables to predicting the subjective LS trajectory slope. First, using the cross-sectional results from Wave 2, the LS slope was regressed simultaneously onto age, the six dispositional measures, and the seven domain-specific slopes. As shown in Table 7, unique variance in the LS slope was predicted by age and each domain slope, but just two of the disposition measures (Neuroticism, Extraversion). Second, using the longitudinal results, the Wave 3 LS slope was regressed simultaneously onto Wave 2 age, disposition measures, domain slopes, and the LS slope. Unique variance in the Wave 3 LS slope (controlling for the Wave 2 LS slope) was predicted by Wave 2 age and five of the seven domain slopes, but just one disposition measure (Neuroticism).

4 | DISCUSSION

4.1 | Subjective trajectories across the adult lifespan

Individuals' personal life narratives comprise an important part of their personalities (McAdams, 1993; McAdams & Pals, 2006). Consistent with this perspective, our first goal was to examine individuals' beliefs concerning how their lives were changing over time, as reflected in their subjective trajectories for seven life domains. On average, participants perceived their satisfaction in each life domain as changing over time, with increasing subjective trajectories found for five domains (work, finances, contributions to others, relationships with one's children, close relationship) and decreasing subjective trajectories in two domains (health, sex life). Furthermore, as with the subjective LS trajectories, the domain-specific subjective trajectories were contoured by life stage. In particular, older age was associated with more strongly decreasing (or less strongly increasing) subjective trajectories in each life domain (except relationships with one's children at Wave 2). Previous research has identified age-related differences in individuals' subjective trajectories for their overall LS (e.g., Busseri, 2013; Röcke & Lachman, 2008; Staudinger et al., 2003). Our findings extend this previous research by illuminating how individuals view multiple aspects of their lives as unfolding over time: Across the adult lifespan, there appears to be a pervasive belief that life (overall and in various life domains) gets better and better during younger adulthood, but worse and worse during later adulthood.

Such findings are consistent with several aspects of lifespan theory and research. In particular, previous work has shown that individuals of various ages hold clear conceptions concerning the timing of changes in personal characteristics and abilities across the lifespan (Fleeson

Criterion	Total		Direct		Indirect		% Mediated
	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	
Health slope	-.04	.002	-.03	.002	-.01	.034	25%
Work slope	-.05	.002	-.02	.066	-.03	.002	60%
Finances slope	-.10	.002	-.07	.003	-.03	.002	30%
Contribution to others slope	-.06	.001	-.05	.001	-.01	.001	17%
Relationship w children slope	.00	.440	.01	.124	-.01	.001	n/c
Close relationship slope	-.05	.001	-.01	.268	-.04	.001	80%
Sex life slope	-.11	.001	-.07	.002	-.04	.001	36%

Note: $N = 1,003$. LS = life satisfaction. Unstandardized direct, indirect, and total predictive effects of age are shown by criterion (row variable). *p* values are bias-corrected estimates derived from 1,000 bootstrapped samples. n/c = not calculated because total predictive effect not significantly different from zero.

& Heckhausen, 1997; Heckhausen et al., 1989; Krueger & Heckhausen, 1993); for most characteristics, with advancing age anticipated losses outnumber expected gains. Individuals also hold robust stereotypes concerning the effects of aging on a variety life domains; in most cases, such domain-specific beliefs comprise anticipated dysfunction and impairments with greater age (Kite et al., 2005; Kornadt & Rothermund, 2011; Levy, 2009). Thus, the present findings concerning the widespread decreasing subjective trajectories with advancing age are consistent with the underlying dynamics proposed by lifespan development theory, particularly the transition in prioritization from growth and gains during youth and younger adulthood, to optimization and maintenance in middle and early-late adulthood, to avoiding and dealing with losses during older adulthood (Baltes, 1997; Freund, 2006).

And yet exceptions were found within each age group. Among younger adults, the directions for the domain-specific subjective trajectories were increasing except for one's health, the subjective trajectory for which was decreasing. Among middle-aged adults, the subjective trajectories were characterized by improvement (finances, contribution to others, relationship with one's children, close relationship, LS), stability (work), and decreases (health, sex life). And among older adults, all of the subjective trajectories were decreasing except the two relationship domains (relationships with one's children, close relationships). Thus, the developmental progression observed in the direction of individuals' subjective trajectories for their lives overall (i.e., increasing during younger adulthood, decreasing during older adulthood) did not characterize their beliefs concerning *each* life domain. Rather, beliefs concerning several life domains were characterized by their own subjective developmental sequences (e.g., relationships with one's children, sex life). And in other domains (e.g., health, close relationship), the directions of

TABLE 4 Total, direct, and indirect predictive effects of Wave 2 age on Wave 2 subjective trajectory slopes

the subjective trajectories did not vary as a function of age. Thus, individuals' beliefs concerning how their lives are unfolding over time were not uniform across domains and did not necessarily share the same direction as their LS.

Also noteworthy from a lifespan perspective, even in old age the slopes of the subjective trajectories were not uniformly negative—despite the decreasing subjective trajectory for LS during this life stage. Thus, it might be possible to encourage older adults to view anticipated changes in their lives overall in a more positive light by placing greater emphasis on those aspects of their lives in which they anticipate stability, if not future improvements, rather than decreases. In particular, consistent with socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 2006), the present findings suggest that social relationships (e.g., with one's children or partner) may be especially important domains in this regard.

Our findings highlight several issues for future research, including the sources of the domain-specific subjective trajectories and their respective developmental sequences, both within and across adult life stages. For example, although objective life circumstances and demographic factors (e.g., income, health status, gender) have relatively modest impact on global life evaluations (Diener et al., 1999), such factors may have stronger links with corresponding domain-specific evaluations (Leonardi et al., 2005; Michalos, 1980; Schimmack, 2008; van Praag et al., 2003). For example, changes in income may impact the subjective trajectory for satisfaction with one's finances, and changes in health status may impact the subjective trajectory for satisfaction with one's health (Bunda & Busseri, 2019). Accordingly, an important next step would be to assess whether objective circumstances and changes in such circumstances over time influence subjective trajectories in corresponding life domains. It would also be valuable to identify the sources of the age-related differences in the domain-specific subjective

TABLE 5 Results from longitudinal models regressing Wave 3 domain-specific subjective trajectory slopes on Wave 2 age, LS slope, and disposition

W2 predictor		W3 criterion																					
		Health			Work			Finances			Contr others			Relat children			Close Relat.			Sex life			
b	p	β	b	p	β	b	p	β	b	p	β	b	p	β	b	p	β	b	p	β	b	p	β
Age	<.001	-.17	-.07	<.001	-.20	-.07	<.001	-.23	-.05	<.001	-.23	-.02	<.001	-.13	-.03	<.001	-.15	-.07	<.001	-.15	-.07	<.001	-.22
Domain slope	<.001	.21	.08	.02	.07	.18	<.001	.18	.21	<.001	.20	.20	<.001	.22	.08	.004	.10	.23	<.001	.10	.23	<.001	.24
LS slope	.09	.06	.14	.01	.09	.08	.08	.06	-.02	.63	-.02	.01	.78	.01	.07	.02	.09	-.08	.10	.09	-.08	.10	-.06
Neuroticism	.51	.02	-.31	.08	-.06	-.05	.74	-.01	-.22	.06	-.06	-.02	.79	-.01	-.06	.55	-.02	-.11	.50	-.02	-.11	.50	-.02
Extraversion	.74	-.01	-.30	.16	-.05	-.07	.68	-.02	-.05	.73	-.01	.03	.75	.01	-.06	.58	-.02	-.24	.22	-.02	-.24	.22	-.05
Openness	.59	.02	.04	.87	.01	-.13	.46	-.03	-.06	.65	-.02	.04	.66	.02	.11	.34	.04	.13	.51	.04	.13	.51	.02
Conscientious	.17	.32	.03	-.02	.93	.00	-.04	.85	-.01	.11	.48	.02	-.05	.62	-.02	-.09	.51	-.02	.10	-.02	.10	.66	.01
Agreeableness	-.08	.60	-.02	.00	.99	.00	-.23	.20	-.04	-.27	.05	-.06	-.02	.81	-.01	-.06	.62	-.12	.54	-.02	-.12	.54	-.02
Optimism	.19	.07	.07	.30	.05	.07	.21	.08	.21	.04	.08	.01	.83	.01	-.04	.62	-.02	.34	.01	-.04	.62	.01	.09
Model R ²	<.001	.08	.08	<.001	.14	.14	<.001	.13	.13	<.001	.07	.07	<.001	.07	.07	<.001	.13	.13	<.001	.13	.13	<.001	.13

Note: N = 1,003. W = Wave; LS = life satisfaction; Contr = contribution; Relat = relationship.

trajectories. Such sources could include stereotypes and attitudes toward aging pertaining to specific life domains (e.g., Kornadt & Rothermund, 2011).

An additional consideration is that the domain-aggregate subjective trajectory provided a reasonable approximation of the subjective LS trajectory. Previous research has reported parallels between mean-level trends in composite domain satisfactions and LS evaluations across age groups or over time based on evaluations of current LS (e.g., Easterlin, 2006; McAdams et al., 2012). The present study extends this work by revealing such parallels in terms of perceived changes over time in individuals' evaluations of their recollected past, current, and anticipated future lives. An important caveat, however, is that the regression-weighted domain-aggregate subjective trajectory provided a much better approximation of the subjective LS trajectory than did the unit-weighted aggregate. This difference suggests that individuals may not give equal weight to each life domain when forming their evaluations of their lives overall (Luhman, Hawkey, & Cacioppo, 2014; Schimmack & Oishi, 2005; Schimmack et al., 2002). Previous research assessing participants' self-reports of domain importance has provided conflicting evidence concerning the incremental utility of assigning differential (vs. unit) weights to various life domains in estimating individual differences in current LS (Gonzalez et al., 2010; Hsieh, 2003; Rojas, 2006; Wu, Chen, & Tsai, 2009). Yet in light of the present findings, an important next step is determining whether there are reliable differences within and/or between individuals in the relative weightings they give to different domains when construing how their lives overall are unfolding over time. Also noteworthy, whereas within each age group the regression-weighted domain-aggregate subjective trajectory provided a close estimate of the subjective LS trajectory, the subjective LS trajectory was not a good approximation of each domain-specific subjective trajectory. Collectively, such aspects of the present findings provide stronger evidence for the bottom-up than the top-down perspective.

4.2 | Associations between subjective trajectories

Our second goal was to examine individuals' subjective trajectories for their LS in relation to their domain-specific subjective trajectories. From a bottom-up perspective, individuals' beliefs about how their lives overall are unfolding over time should be a product of how their view various domains of their lives to be changing. In support of this perspective, the domain-specific subjective trajectory slopes together explained a substantial amount of variance in the slope of the subjective LS trajectory. Such findings were particularly robust based on the cross-sectional results. Nonetheless, parallel results for several of the life domains were observed in the longitudinal analyses spanning a 9-year period. Previous

Wave 3 criterion	Total		Direct		Indirect		% Mediated
	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	
Health slope	-.05	.002	-.04	.002	-.01	.005	20%
Work slope	-.07	.002	-.07	.002	-.01	.298	14%
Finances slope	-.09	.003	-.07	.003	-.02	.001	22%
Contribution to others slope	-.06	.002	-.05	.002	-.01	.072	17%
Relationship with children slope	-.02	.002	-.02	.002	.00	.790	0%
Close relationship slope	-.04	.002	-.03	.001	-.01	.007	25%
Sex life slope	-.08	.002	-.07	.002	-.01	.025	13%

Note: $N = 1,003$. LS = life satisfaction. Unstandardized direct, indirect, and total predictive effects of Wave 2 age are shown by Wave 3 criterion (row variable). *p* values are bias-corrected estimates derived from 1,000 bootstrapped samples.

TABLE 6 Total, direct, and indirect predictive effects of Wave 2 age on Wave 3 subjective trajectory slopes

Wave 2 predictor	Criterion					
	Wave 2 LS slope			Wave 3 LS slope		
	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	β	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	β
Age	-.02	.007	-.07	-.05	<.001	-.22
Neuroticism	.23	.009	.07	-.22	.040	-.07
Extraversion	-.27	.010	-.07	-.13	.307	-.04
Openness	.17	.118	.04	-.10	.460	-.03
Conscientious	.10	.392	.02	.11	.435	.02
Agreeableness	.10	.330	.03	.06	.666	.01
Optimism	.03	.641	.01	-.08	.383	-.03
Health slope	.12	<.001	.12	.11	<.001	.12
Work slope	.08	<.001	.12	-.06	.010	-.08
Finances slope	.19	<.001	.25	.04	.087	.06
Contribution to others slope	.07	.009	.07	.08	.013	.08
Relationship with children slope	.12	<.001	.08	-.02	.615	-.02
Close relationship slope	.32	<.001	.35	-.08	.014	-.09
Sex life slope	.08	<.001	.12	.05	.017	.09
LS slope	–	–	–	.17	<.001	.18
Model R^2	.49	<.001		.19	<.001	

Note: $N = 1,003$. LS = life satisfaction.

TABLE 7 Results from regressing subjective trajectory slope for LS on age, domain-specific slopes, and disposition measures

studies have found that domain satisfactions collectively explain substantial amounts of variance in current LS evaluations, with multiple domain-specific evaluations making unique predictive contributions to LS (e.g., Casas et al., 2015; Loewe et al., 2014; Tiefenbach & Kohlbacher, 2015). The present study extends this previous work by demonstrating such patterns based on individuals' evaluations of how their lives are unfolding over time, and based on a longitudinal

analyses in which the domain-specific predictors were separated from the criterion by an extended period of time. Such findings suggest that the various domain-specific evaluations provide valuable and unique information to predicting individuals' evaluations of how their lives are changing over time.

The present findings also suggest that when forming global evaluations about how one's life is changing over time,

the most important life domains maybe finances and close relationships. The relative predictive weights for these two particular life domains is consistent with previous research examining domain-specific predictors of current LS (e.g., Casas et al., 2015; Chmiel et al., 2012; Lance et al., 2005; Richardson et al., 2016; Schneider & Schimmack, 2010). Furthermore, results concerning the close relationship domain are consistent with previous research indicating that strong interpersonal bonds are among the most important predictors of well-being (e.g., Diener & Seligman, 2002). The present findings extend this previous work by revealing that perceived changes in satisfaction within financial and interpersonal domains are among the most important predictors of individuals' conceptions concerning how their lives overall are unfolding over time. Whereas the present work addressed such issues concerning the relative importance of different life domains based on differences between individuals, a valuable next step would be to examine such dynamics based on differences *within* individuals (e.g., across multiple contexts or numerous repeated assessments).

From a top-down perspective, individuals' beliefs about how their lives overall are unfolding over time should have a pervasive influence on how they view various domains of their lives to be changing. We found that the subjective LS trajectory slope was positively correlated with each of the domain-specific slopes. Whereas previous studies have reported top-down predictive effects of current LS on current domain satisfactions (e.g., Heller et al., 2004; Kozma et al., 2000; Lance et al., 2005; Mallard et al., 1997; Scherpenzeel & Saris, 1996), the present study is the first to demonstrate such associations with respect to individuals' evaluations of their lives as unfolding over time. And yet the magnitudes of these associations were not consistent across life domains (e.g., close relationships vs. health), suggesting that a top-down influence may vary across life domains. Furthermore, the longitudinal predictive effects of the subjective LS trajectory on the domain-specific subjective trajectories were inconsistent and small in magnitude. Similarly, even the inclusion of measures of the Big Five personality traits and dispositional optimism failed to provide robust or consistent evidence of utility in predicting how individuals view various domains of their lives to be unfolding over time (see also Gomez et al., 2013). Together, such findings suggest raise questions about the viability of the top-down perspective.

Indeed, even in the analyses assessing simultaneously the bottom-up and top-down predictors of the subjective trajectory slope for LS, predictive effects of the top-down dispositional measures were inconsistent and limited to just one or two effects (most notably Neuroticism). In contrast, unique predictive effects in such models were found for multiple domain-specific subjective trajectories, even independent of the dispositional measures. Collectively, therefore, present findings concerning the associations among the domain-specific

subjective trajectories and the subjective LS trajectory provide stronger support for the bottom-up perspective than the top-down perspective.

4.3 | The effect of age on subjective trajectories

The cross-sectional findings indicated that the domain-specific slopes together provided a substantial degree of mediation of the negative predictive effect of age on the slope of the subjective LS trajectory. Such results extend previous research that has found that the slope of the subjective LS trajectory varies systematically across age (e.g., Busseri, 2013; Röcke & Lachman, 2008; Shmotkin, 1991; Staudinger et al., 2003), by suggesting a bottom-up mechanism that may explain this association: As individuals age, their perceptions concerning how various domains of their lives are changing over time are altered from perceptions of improvement to anticipation of decreases; such age-related alterations result in a subjective developmental sequence for how individuals view their lives overall to be changing over time.

And yet some support was also found for a top-down perspective based on the cross-sectional results, in that the subjective LS trajectory slope at least partially mediated the negative predictive effects of age on the slopes of the domain-specific subjective trajectories. Such findings suggest a possible top-down explanation (in part) for why age is associated with individuals' domain-specific subjective trajectories: As individuals age, their beliefs concerning how their lives *overall* are changing over time are altered from perceptions of improvement to decreases; such age-related alterations create a pervasive subjective developmental sequence for how individuals view various domains of their lives as changing over time. However, compared to the degree of mediation of the negative predictive effect of age on the subjective LS trajectory slope via the domain-specific subjective trajectory slopes, the effects of age on several of the domain-specific subjective trajectory slopes were not as well explained by the subjective LS trajectory. Together, therefore, the cross-sectional mediation results provide stronger support for the bottom-up perspective than the top-down perspective.

Importantly, however, neither the bottom-up or top-down perspectives accounted for (even) the majority of the predictive effects of age in the longitudinal analyses. Although the longitudinal mediation results were stronger based on the bottom-up than the top-down model, results suggest that the reason *why* age predicts (future) changes to personal beliefs about how one's life is unfolding over time is not well-explained by beliefs about changes in one's life assessed concurrently with age. It is possible that the explanatory mechanisms are themselves dynamic, thus requiring a research design and analytic approach incorporating more than one period of change over time. Indeed, the modest

stabilities over time in the domain-specific and LS subjective trajectory slopes observed in the present work suggest that changes in such beliefs are common and may be substantive in magnitude. Future research should explore such notions through assessing changes in the domain-specific subjective trajectories over one period of time as predictors of change in the subjective trajectory for LS over a subsequent period of time—and vice versa.

4.4 | Limitations

Although drawn from a random probability sample of American adults (Brim et al., 2004), the present findings are based on a subset of the participants who completed the relevant measures at Wave 2 and Wave 3. Thus, our results may not generalize to all of the individuals in the survey or to the American adult population more broadly, particularly to those who were never married or never had children. Furthermore, although the survey included a range of life domains, other studies have included various additional life domains that may be applicable to a wider range of participants, such as leisure, housing, and spirituality (Casas et al., 2015; Rojas, 2006; Wu et al., 2009). Future research is needed to determine the domain-specific subjective trajectories for additional life domains, as well as their associations with individuals' views concerning how their lives overall are changing over time.

In addition, we evaluated bottom-up and top-down perspectives with respect to how individuals' evaluated various aspects of their lives, as well as basic personality traits and dispositional optimism. However, additional bottom-up influences may include demographic factors, life circumstances, and life events; such factors may be particularly relevant to predicting domain-specific evaluations. And other top-down influences could include personal values and cultural norms (Oishi, Diener, Suh, & Lucas, 1999; Tiefenbach & Kohlbacher, 2015); such factors may be relevant to predicting both global and domain-specific evaluations, as well as moderating the relationship between them (Diener et al., 2002; Mallard et al., 1997; Schimmack, 2008). Future studies could extend the present work by examining additional bottom-up and top-down factors.

Furthermore, the present work focused on individuals' ratings of their recollected past, current, and anticipated future lives. However, from a narrative perspective, beliefs about how one's life is changing over time may be better captured through use of an open-ended, oral life story interview—data for which is available from a small subsample of MIDUS participants (Pals Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011). Future research linking individuals' personal life narratives with their subjective trajectories would provide a valuable extension of the present work.

Finally, because the present work employed a correlation approach, causality remains unclear. Some studies have shown bidirectional or reciprocal links between domain-specific and global LS evaluations (Kozma et al., 2000; Lance et al., 2005; Mallard et al., 1997; Scherpenzeel & Saris, 1996). Such findings suggest that associations between global and domain-specific evaluations may reflect both bottom-up and top-down processes. Even the present longitudinal results, although supportive of several hypothesized directional effects over time, cannot provide certainty concerning the direction of influence (e.g., bottom-up to top-down or vice versa). Instead, more extensive longitudinal testing is needed to evaluate such issues, particularly using intensive repeated-measures designs that capture the on-line judgment processes presumed to underlie the satisfaction evaluations. Future research is also needed employing an experimental approach to evaluate the causal dynamics implied by bottom-up and top-down perspectives. For example, researchers could seek to manipulate individuals' domain-specific beliefs and gauge the impact on evaluations of their lives overall (and vice versa).

5 | CONCLUSIONS

The present study provides a novel picture of how individuals from across the adult lifespan view multiple aspects of their lives as unfolding over time. Our findings primarily support a bottom-up perspective. According to this view, younger adults may evaluate their lives overall to be getting more and more satisfying over time *because* of how they view various domains of their lives to be changing, including perceived improvement in several important life domains such as close relationships and finances. Furthermore, older adults may evaluate their lives overall to be getting less satisfying over time *because* of how they view various domains of their lives to be changing, particularly anticipated decreases (or less improvement) in multiple important domains. Such insights pave the way for future personality research examining the sources of individuals' domain-specific beliefs about their lives, as well as implications for LS across the adult lifespan.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The dataset examined in the present work and all of the study measures are available at <http://midus.wisc.edu/>.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Of the 4,963 Wave 2 participants, 2,093 provided complete data for the 31 measures from Wave 2 utilized in the present analyses (i.e., 24 STP ratings, comprising three ratings per domain for seven domains an overall LS; five personality scores; dispositional optimism; and age). The greatest number of respondents on any of the individual Wave 2 measures (other than participant age) was 4,023; response was less frequent for domain satisfaction questions pertaining to relationship with one's children and close relationship (fewest respondents = 3,012 and 3,002, respectively). Of the 3,294 Wave 3 participants, 1,341 provided complete data for the 24 STP ratings utilized in the present analyses from Wave 3. The greatest number of respondents on any of the individual Wave 3 measures was 2,726; response was least frequency for domain satisfaction questions pertaining to relationship with one's children and close relationship (fewest respondents = 2,247 and 1,847, respectively). Across waves, 1,003 participants provided complete responses for the 55 measures utilized in the present study. These participants represent 14% of the Wave 1 sample, 20% of the Wave 2 sample, and 30% of the Wave 3 sample.

² A pair of repeated-measures ANOVAs was computed in which STP and measure type (i.e., either unit-weighted aggregate vs. LS, or regression-weighted aggregate vs. LS) were treated as within-subjects factors. For the model comparing the unit-weighted aggregate versus LS ratings, there were statistically significant main effects for STP and measure type, as well as for the STP by measure-type interaction ($ps < .001$). For the model comparing the regression-weighted aggregate versus LS ratings, there was a significant main effect for STP ($p < .001$), but the effects of measure type and the STP by measure-type interaction were not significant ($ps = .09$ and $.08$, respectively).

³ Within each age group, a pair of repeated-measures ANOVAs was computed in which STP and measure type (i.e., either unit-weighted aggregate vs. LS, or regression-weighted aggregate vs. LS) were treated as within-subjects factors. Younger adults: For the model comparing the unit-weighted aggregate versus LS ratings, there were

statistically significant main effects for STP, measure type, and the STP by measure-type interaction ($ps < .001$); for the model comparing the regression-weighted aggregate versus LS ratings, there was a significant main effect for STP ($p < .001$), but the effects of measure type and the STP by measure-type interaction were not significant ($ps = .58$ and $.06$, respectively). Middle-aged adults: For the model comparing the unit-weighted aggregate versus LS ratings, there were statistically significant main effects for STP, measure type, and the STP by measure-type interaction ($ps < .001$); for the model comparing the regression-weighted aggregate versus LS ratings, there were significant main effects for STP ($p < .001$) and measure type ($p = .004$), but their interaction was not significant ($ps = .28$). Older adults: For the model comparing the unit-weighted aggregate versus LS ratings, there were statistically significant main effects for STP, measure type, and the STP by measure-type interaction ($ps < .001$); for the model comparing the regression-weighted aggregate versus LS ratings, there was a significant main effect for STP ($p < .001$), the effect of measure type was not significant ($p = .35$), and the interaction was significant ($p = .001$).

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

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