



# **Life in Worrying Times**

## **Life Conceptions and their Happiness Dividend**

18th Conference “Social Monitoring and Reporting in Europe”

Fears, Worries, and Anxieties in Contemporary Europe. Is There a Societal Climate Change and What Are the Consequences for Quality of Life?

October 9, 2024

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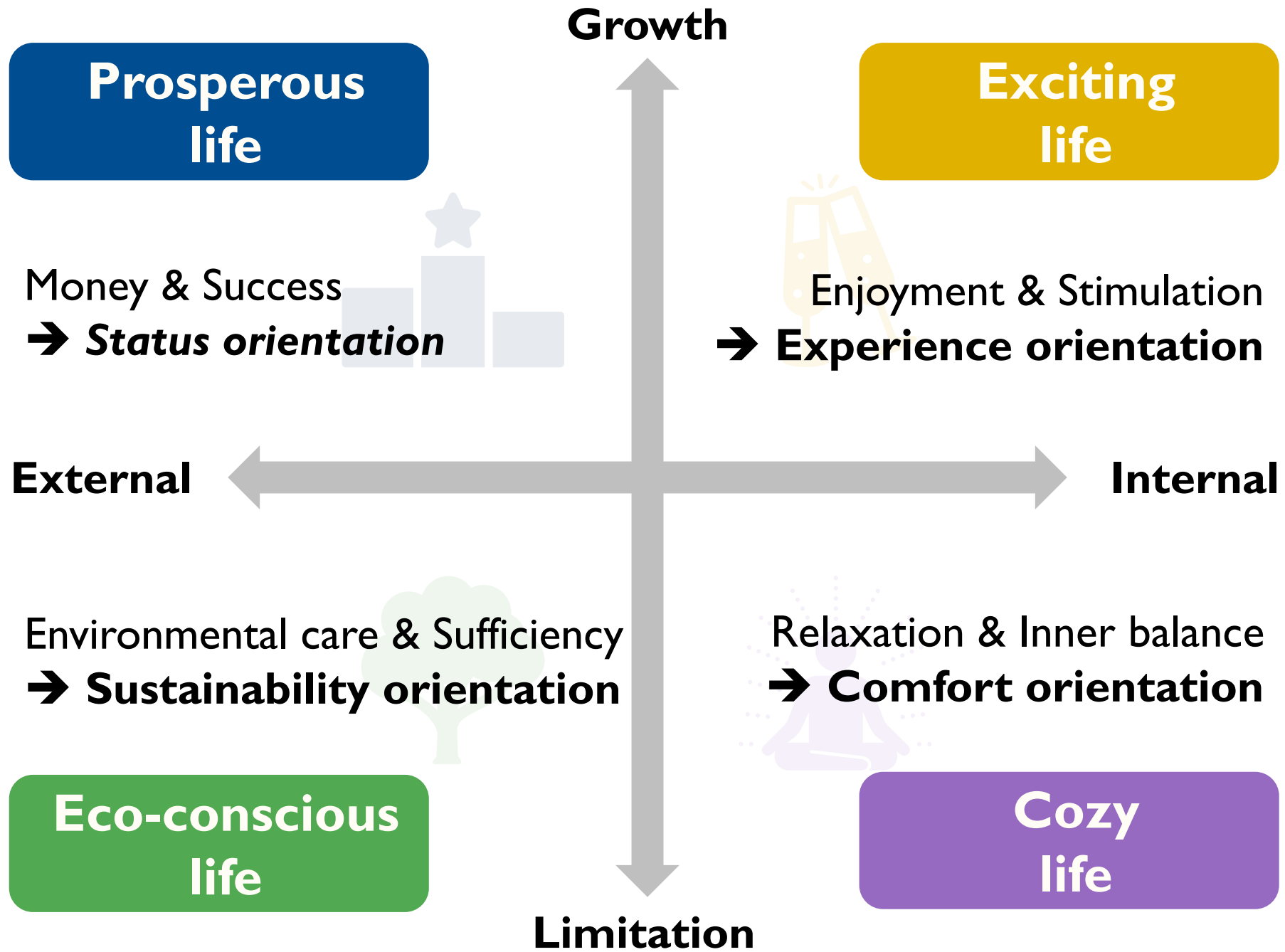
## ***The big question: what makes a happy and content life?***

- » Since long, a question for **philosophers** (Michalos & Weljers 2017)
- » A question that more and more **people** are asking themselves:  
happiness as a life goal (Burnett 2012)
- » **Empirical** happiness research: identifies correlates & determinants  
(Veenhoven 2012) – 24.000 correlates of happiness in the WDH!
- » Happiness appears to be the sum of many, many small things

## ***A more holistic perspective:* Life Conceptions**

- » **Collectively shared** notions of a meaningful way of life (e.g., the prosperous life)
- » Tie together **thematically related** ideas of a good life that address a common **existential problem**
- » In any society: Co-existence of **several** life conceptions
- » In their search for the good life, people **are guided** by these life conceptions → evaluation schemas for their own lives

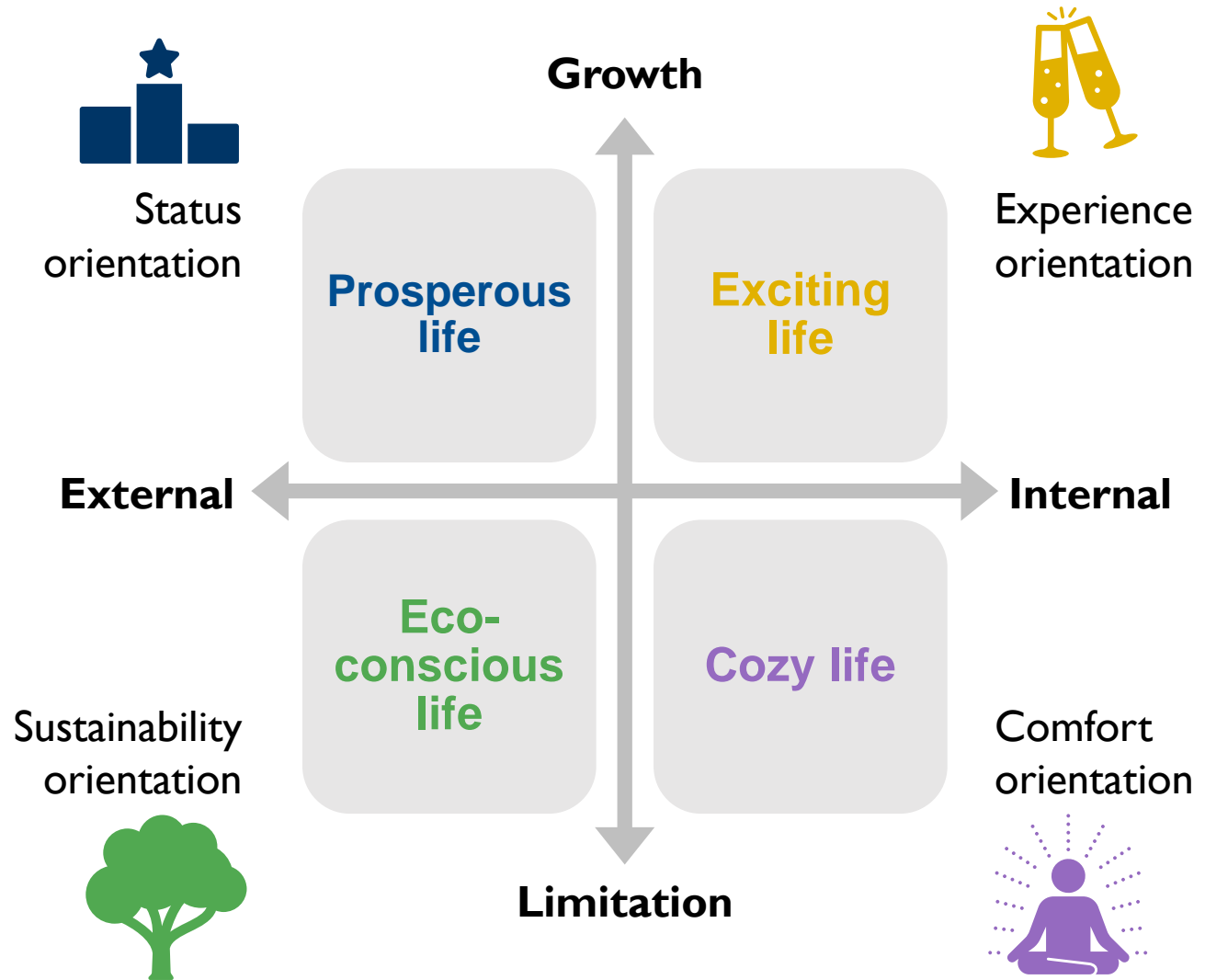
The **realization of** (and the **orientation toward**) life conceptions influences people's **life happiness**





## Theorizing life conceptions

- » *First distinction:* focus on **life circumstances** or **inner psycho-physical states** (external v internal)
- » *Second distinction:* logic of "**more is better**" or "**less is more**" (growth v limitation)
- » The **cozy** life and the **eco-conscious** life address "new" existential problems: **accelerated society & global warming** → avoiding "bads"





**RQ1: Self-assessed realization:** How much do people believe they effectively realize these four life conceptions?

**RQ2: Influence on life satisfaction (I):** The realization of which life conception has the strongest influence on life satisfaction?

**RQ3: Influence on life satisfaction (II):** Does the personal importance of these life conceptions influence life satisfaction (beyond the extent of realization)?

## German Gesis Panel (2023)

- » random probability mixed-mode access panel survey
- » It is a mixed-mode panel (online and by postal questionnaire), with
  - » *approx. 75 % participating online*
- » 4 rounds per year
- » 2023 module "Transformation of the experience society" in wave 2 (core topic: personality, values and environmental orientations)



» German population aged 18 to 70 years; permanently resident in Germany. **N= 3,972**

## Life Satisfaction

» All in all, how satisfied are you with your current life?

0=Not at all satisfied      4= Totally satisfied



## Realized way of life

When you think about what your life actually looks like: How much do you agree with the following statements about your life? I lead a life full of...

**Prosperous life**

» prosperity and success.

**Exciting life**

» fun and wonderful experiences.

**Cozy life**

» of inner balance and free from stress.

**Eco-conscious life**

» consideration for nature and the environment.

0 = do not agree

5 = very much agree





We will now briefly describe various persons. Please read each description and think about the extent to which the person the person is similar or dissimilar to you. **It is important to her/him to**

## Status

- (1) be rich and admired
- (2) be able to afford expensive things.
- (3) be very successful.
- (4) be admired for her/his abilities.

## Experiences

- (1) to have an exciting life.
- (2) try out different things as often as possible.
- (3) do things that give her/him pleasure.
- (4) enjoy life to the fullest.

## Comfort

- (1) lead a life without stress and pressure.
- (2) live a very relaxed life and avoid any hectic pace.
- (3) consciously perceive every single moment in life.
- (4) live life according to her/his innermost feelings.

## Sustainability

- (1) take care of nature.
- (2) put the interests of the environment first in everything she/he does.
- (3) use as few resources as possible to protect nature.
- (4) to reduce her/his own standard of living in favor of the environment.

0 = very dissimilar                      5 = very similar



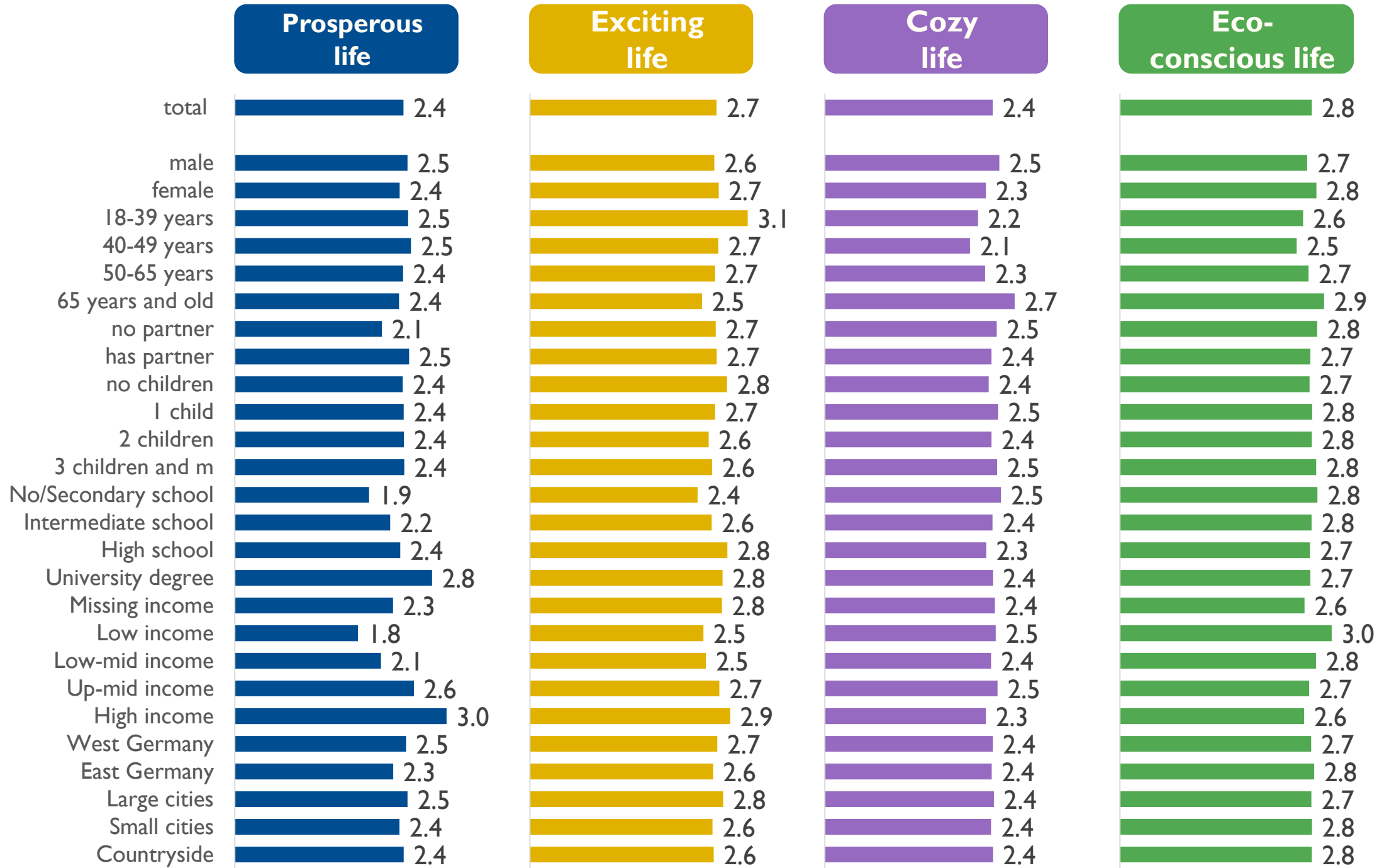


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# RQ I: Self-assessed realization



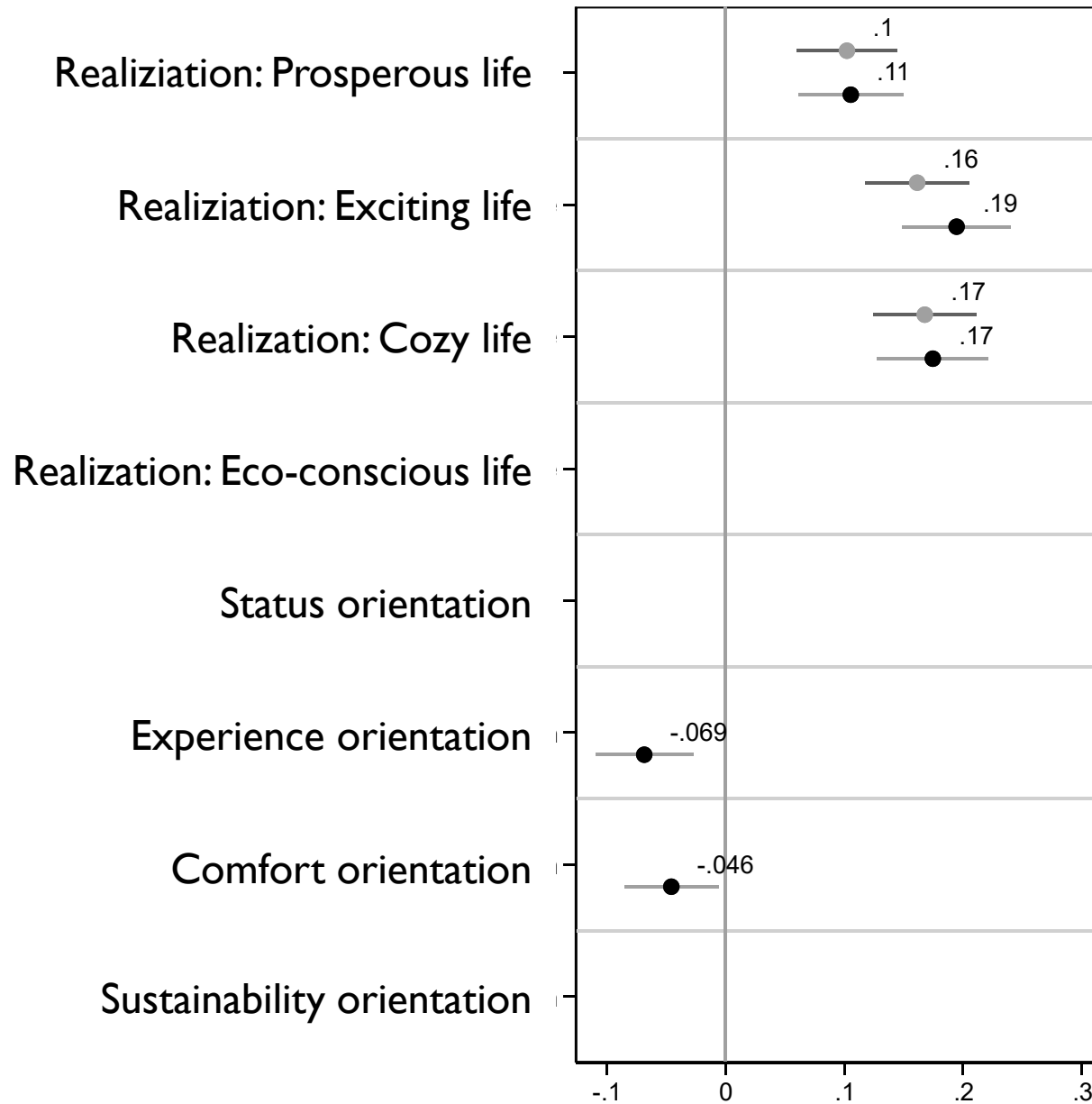


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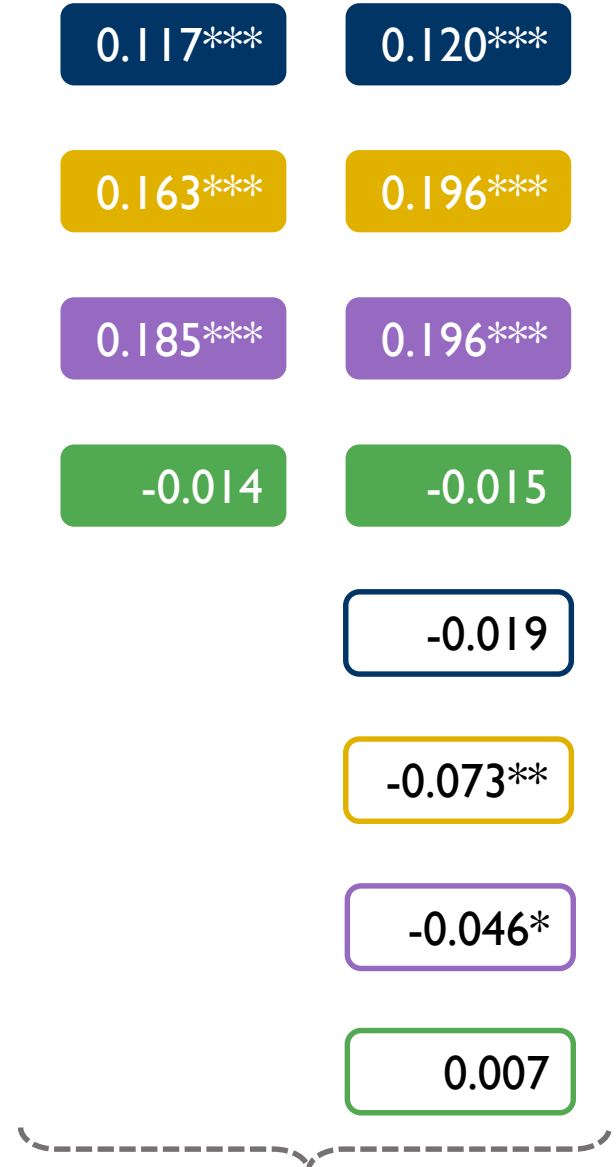
# RQ2/3: Influence on life satisfaction



Further controlled for gender, age, partner, parenthood, income, educational level and place of residence

N=3,972

only significant coefficients displayed



Standardized Beta coefficient



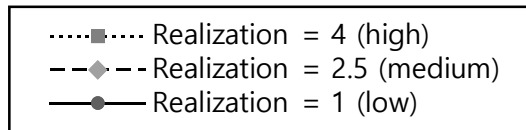
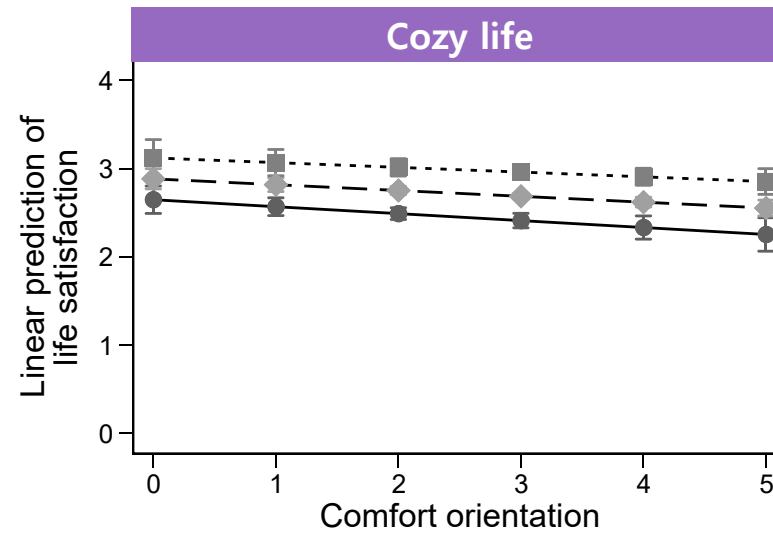
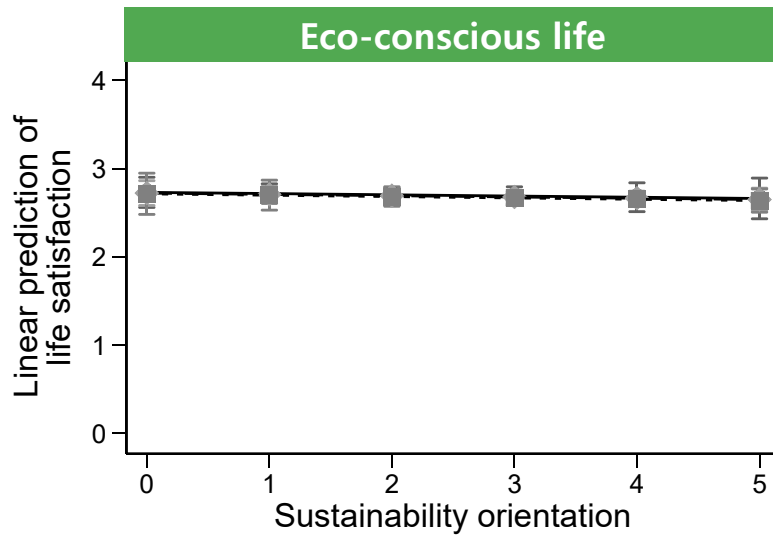
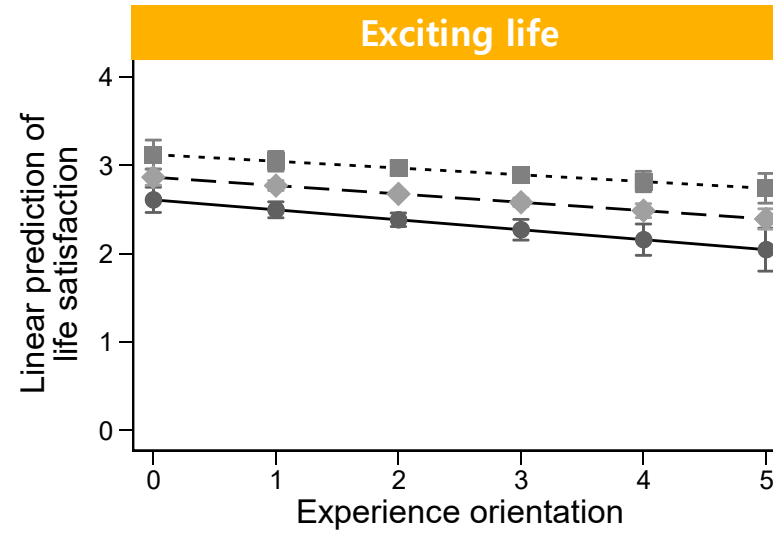
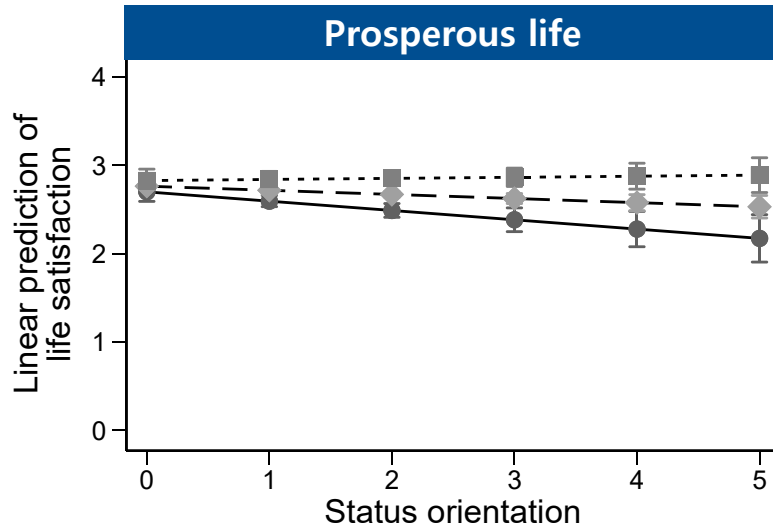
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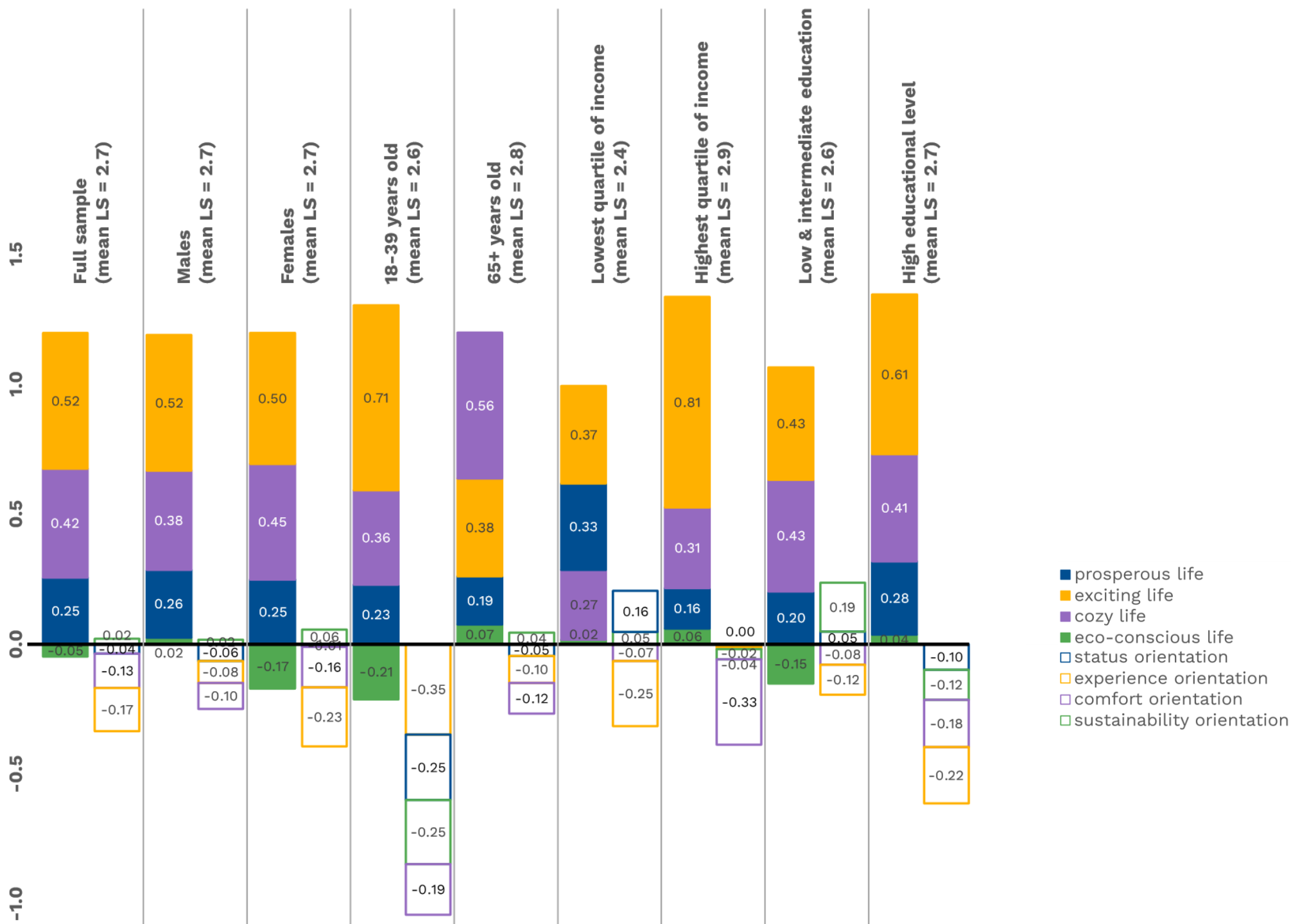
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# RQ2/3: Influence on life satisfaction



# RQ2/3: Level importance for LS





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**RQ2:** The realization of which life conception has the strongest influence on life satisfaction?

**RQ3:** Does the personal significance of these life conceptions influence life satisfaction (beyond the extent of realization)?



**1. Fairly even realization:**

Eco-conscious life > exciting life > prosperous life = cozy life

**2. Inner > External:**

Experiences and comfort most important, followed by prosperity. Eco-consciousness does not impact life satisfaction

**3. Only for inner orientations – but negatively!**



- 1 Life satisfaction depends much more on **how life actually is** (the realized ways of life) than on how much a person strives for a certain way of life (people's basic orientations).
- 2 A particularly high happiness dividend is promised by a **inner-directed** life, the **exciting life** (especially for the young and the wealthy) and the **cozy life** (especially for the elderly).
- 3 **However, striving** strongly for an **inner-directed life** (that is, a strong experience orientation and a strong comfort orientation) tends to be **harmful** for life satisfaction.
- 4 Leading an **eco-conscious life** does not contribute to life satisfaction, despite the often-cited warm glow effect of environmental-friendly behavior (Van der Linden 2018)





**Thank you very much for your attention!**

Questions, remarks, ideas and feedback are very welcome



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