Individual production of social well-being
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5.1. Introduction

In the chapter on SPF theory, it was argued that the definitions and conceptualisations of the three first-order goals for social well-being are unsatisfactory: they are in some respects vague and ambiguous, they partly define the goals by the means that may be used for their realisation, and, although the differences between the core meaning of the three goals may be clear enough, the precise boundaries between one goal and the other are not (cf. section 3.4.2.). Based on these arguments, the first of the research questions that were derived was:

What are the various and distinctive aspects of ‘status’, ‘behavioural confirmation’ and ‘affection’, respectively, and how and to what extent can the level of these goals be distinguished from the production factors that may be used to attain them?

In 4.2.1., some thoughts regarding the nature of the operation of conceptualising were expounded. In the case of this study, the relation between concept and the reality it refers to may be understood by analogy to the names of the primary colours and the range of shades subsumed under these. For answering the first research question, which the present chapter reports on, this analogy implies the following. A prism was used to decompose ‘social well-being’ as we normally see and experience it, into the full spectrum of colours it encompasses. For each of the three first-order goals for social well-being at a time, we then inspect the part of the spectrum to which it refers, considering and naming each of the recognisable shades that are subsumed under it. These shades are named the aspects of the first-order goals: the faces by which we can see them. The operation of conceptualising the first-order goals should thus be understood as the studying of the shades or faces by which they become apparent in reality. It may well be that, like the colours in the spectrum of light, the boundaries between the first-order goals are fluent in reality. Rather than imposing a definition that sets a strict (but with bare eyes indiscernible) boundary, such as by defining at what wavelength (orange-) red is distinguished from (orange-) yellow, the first-order goals are in this chapter ‘defined’ or rather conceptualised by means of their aspects. And it is granted that some aspects may lie close to the border where the one first-order goals flows over into the other. The disentanglement of the first-order goals proper and the means for realising them, answers to the same analogy: the aspects (shades) we perceive are the first-order goals proper. But in
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producing the first-order goals (the colours or one of their shades) the very shades that are part of them may be used also as ingredients for mixing, like one may use one shade of blue (which in itself is blue) to mix it with white in order to produce ‘baby-blue’.

This chapter reports the results of the exploratory study of the aspects of the status, behavioural confirmation and affection. A general description of the method that was used for analysing the qualitative data can be found in 4.5. More particulars concerning the analyses are occasionally reported in this chapter, where relevant. The results presented in this chapter are first and foremost derived from the qualitative data: the focus group interviews and case studies that I conducted. However, both before and during the data collection and analyses and afterwards, existing literature relating to the concepts of status, behavioural confirmation and affection of course influenced the emerging conceptualisations that are presented in this chapter. Given the vast amount of literature that touches on one or more of our central concepts, and the emphasis we chose to place on the ‘grounded theory-like’ elaboration of these concepts, I only conducted a limited and marginal literature study. After completing the analyses and interpreting the results, it is of course desirable to compare and try to relate these results to main insights from the literature. To a limited extent I did so, and where relevant, the results of this confrontation of my findings with the relevant literature are reported in this chapter as well.

The concepts of ‘status’, ‘behavioural confirmation’ and ‘affection’ and their respective aspects are consequently reported on in the sections 5.2. through 5.4. Each of these sections starts out with a concise restatement of the problems in the conceptualisation of the particular first-order goal that were identified in Chapter 3, followed by an exploration of the relevant and distinctive aspects of the concept.

Subsequently, in each section some attention is given to the problem of who are the ‘relevant others’ for the particular first-order goal, to the role of self-approval as a complement to the approval of others, and to some miscellaneous issues that emerged from the data. Each section is concluded by a graphical representation of the elaborated concept, that summarises the foregoing insights, and by the formulation of implications for the eventual development of measurement instruments for the subjective level of the first-order goal in question. In section 5.5. follows the conclusion.

The results I present in this chapter are frequently illustrated with quotations from the focus group interviews. Obviously, as these interviews were conducted in Dutch, the quotations had to be translated before inserting them in this chapter. I have tried to translate the quotations in such a way that the English version optimally confers what the respondent was trying to say. This meant that frequently I decided not to translate the original quotations literally, because that would not have expressed in the best way what the respondent intended. Generally, the meaning of quotations only becomes clear in the context of the discussion, sometimes it is even impossible to deduce from an isolated quotation what its subject is. Therefore, I give free translations, in which I often add some context information in the quotations to help the reader understand what the respondent is talking about.

5.2. Status: a further elaboration and conceptualisation

5.2.1. PRESENT AMBIGUITIES IN THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF STATUS

In Chapter 3, the concept of status as one of the three first-order instrumental goals in people’s
production functions for social well-being, was introduced. The definition Lindenberg gives of the concept is that “[s]tatus refers to a relative ranking, mainly based on control over scarce resources” (Lindenberg & Frey 1993, p. 196). The other authors who have thus far used SPF theory defined status in a largely similar vein, though sometimes in different wordings (cf. section 3.4.2., p. 20). In all applications of SPF theory thus far, we find agreement that ‘status’ refers to someone’s relative ranking in society, that it is based on the control over scarce goods, and that it is multidimensional, that is, that there are multiple goods that each may lend status.

It was asserted in Chapter 3 that concerning the exact content of the concept of status there is less unclarity or confusion than about the exact content of behavioural confirmation and affection. Thus, the exploration of its content in the analysis of the focus group data is neither expected nor intended to lead to completely new insights regarding the content of ‘status’. Yet, there are three respects in which the exploratory analyses may help to improve the conceptualisation of status as a first-order goal in SPF theory. In the first place, although we know quite well what exactly we mean by ‘status’, this need not imply that the forms in which status may present itself in people’s experience can easily be identified or recognized. There is reason to suspect that status, as a component of subjective social well-being, may often appear in disguise in people’s experience, for in many spheres of life there exists a taboo on wanting and enjoying to be better than others. It may be perfectly alright to strive for status and be competitive in sports or even in one’s work (although the acceptance of the latter varies with the sector one work in), but to acknowledge openly that you feel good about having more friends than others, or being more intelligent, attractive, etcetera, will most likely elicit outright social disapproval. This taboo on feeling better than others is not only likely to cause social desirability problems when asking people about it; it will often be so much internalised that people have learned not to be conscious of their status in very direct terms but only in euphemistic, more acceptable terms that disguise the true “I am better than they and I enjoy it”-nature of the feeling.

In the second place, the positional character of status raises the question of what is (are) the relevant reference group(s). Is the level of subjectively experienced status (that’s what ‘status’ in the framework of SPF theory refers to) determined by one’s ranking in society as a whole, or rather by one’s ranking in a smaller social environment, and if so, how should the relevant environment be delineated? Or is the subjectively experienced level of status a composite of a person’s rankings in all different social settings in which he participates?

In the third place, the supposed multidimensionality of status raises the question whether status can be obtained on the basis of one’s control over all scarce goods. If scarcity is not the decisive or the only criterion for which goods may yield status, what other criteria should we look at? But if scarcity is the only criterion, how should we assess which goods are scarce? Scarcity depends on both the availability and valuation of a good. Both characteristics may differ over different categories of people, thus what is scarce for certain people need not be so for others. How do such ambiguities affect the experienced status? Obviously, the answer to these questions is intertwined with the answers to the first two points.

5.2.2. ASPECTS OF ‘STATUS’ AS THE FIRST COMPONENT OF SOCIAL WELL-BEING

The conceptualisation of the three first-order goals for social well-being, as reported in this chapter, includes the exploration of the content of these concepts, i.e. the variety of elements

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1 For further reading on the notion of positional goods, see Hirsch 1976.
that they cover, the internal structure of the concept, i.e. the interrelations between and clustering of the elements it covers\(^2\), and, following these, the identification of the main aspects of these rather abstract goals.

It should be remembered that SPF theory claims that all forms or manifestations of social approval, or all contributions to social well-being can be subsumed under either the first-order goal of status, behavioural confirmation or affection. It follows from this claim that the conceptualisations of the three first-order goals for social well-being should be such that, indeed, all forms of social well-being or social approval can be categorized under one of these. The procedure followed here, of asking participants to tell about their well-being in general, about what they like and enjoy and what they dislike, is geared to result in conceptualisations of status, behavioural confirmation and affection that together cover all possible forms of social well-being.

As for status, it was already indicated above that one of the objectives in exploring the aspects and content of this first-order goal, was to find out how people talk and think about status indirectly, that is, in more socially accepted terms than plain ‘status’.

Formulated differently, I wanted to take stock of the main relevant aspects (in the literal sense) of status as a first-order instrumental goal and component to social well-being, that is, explore its phenomenology. Of course, as with all results I present in this chapter, it should be understood that the inventory of ways in which people talk about their perceived status cannot be assumed to be exhaustive. Yet, I believe the inventory is useful in two ways: firstly, the indirect ways of talking about status can be used in formulating questionnaire items that are likely to elicit adequate answers despite the taboo on striving for and valuing status; secondly, the different subjective aspects of status give us a better understanding of the content of this first-order goal in SPF theory, and will thus help in drawing the distinctions between status and the two other components of social well-being.

**Method of exploring the aspects of status / dimensional analysis**

In the qualitative study, all respondents were asked about their subjectively experienced status, using a variety of differently formulated open questions. Firstly, in the questionnaire all respondents filled in at home before participating in the focus group interviews, they were asked “are there things that you do, that bring you the regard, respect or admiration of others?” and “are there things that you do for other purposes, but that, unintended, bring you the regard, respect or admiration of other people?”\(^3\) Most respondents initially responded to the first question by stating that they do not strive for respect or admiration, and do not do particular things to get it. This supports the expectation that there exists a taboo on the pursuit of status. Yet, almost all reported one or more activities in answer to the second question. In the focus group interviews, participants were asked to tell about things they like and are satisfied with in their life and about things they do not like and are not satisfied with. These are the two most

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\(^2\) The investigation of the interrelations between and clustering of the elements or aspects of the first-order goals is probably best understood as a theoretical dimensional analysis, analogous to the primarily statistical technique of factor analysis.

\(^3\) Preceding these and other resource-related items, the respondents had first been asked to rate their own lives on several dimensions, one of which being ‘achievement’. For the complete pre-focus group questionnaire, see Appendix C.
general questions, with which the discussions were started, and they often triggered responses that could be related to either the production of status (or behavioural confirmation or affection) or its subjective experience. Later, in the course of each focus group discussion, I asked the participants about endowments and material resources, as well as about the activities or skills they had mentioned in the questionnaire they had filled in at home. I also asked the participants more specifically about things that people sometimes compliment them for, about things they are proud of, things they can do better than others, special skills that others envy or admire etcetera. Of course also the negative was asked: things that make others look down upon them, things that they feel ashamed of or that make them feel ‘unworthy’ and feelings of being less than others.

These questions (or rather: triggers) correspond with the main aspects of status in its definitions thus far, which I had decided to use as ‘sensitising concepts’: ‘distinguishing oneself from others’, ‘doing or being able to do something special’, and ‘receiving compliments or admiration’. These three aspects were used as sensitising concepts also in coding the text fragments from the transcriptions. This obviously effected that all statements which were triggered by one of the questions mentioned above were initially attributed the code ‘status’, but occasionally also other statements, which were not triggered in one of the above mentioned ways, fitted one or more of these three aspects of the sensitising concept, and therefore these were also coded as ‘status’.

In the focus group discussions the respondents used very many different wordings for positive and negative feelings, states of being and aspects of social well-being. All of these expressions and statements had to be categorised as belonging to one of the three first-order goals (see section 5.1.). The set of statements that I categorised as forms or aspects of status consisted of over 90 statements, almost all in slightly different wordings. However, we need not distinguish that many different aspects of status: often the differences in wording between statements were but slight, and thus many of the statements could be clustered as referring to the same aspect of status. This clustering is a process of interpretation, which can be conceived of as the qualitative counterpart of quantitative factor analysis. Even though, essentially, the act of interpretation (seeing, recognising the similarity in meaning of two different statements) cannot be explained in terms of a replicable procedure, the use of Atlas/ti and its conceptual network building tool (see also section 4.5.2.) allowed to perform a systematic check on the internal consistency of the conceptual network one develops when reducing different statements to single concepts. For the large majority of statements, I had before starting the analysis of the concepts of status, behavioural confirmation and affection, specified some logical relations to other emerging concepts (the codes used in open coding), on the basis of the direct content of the statement. Thus, if a respondent told about a negative experience at the local welfare agency and said that the officer “just did not take him seriously, for he did not listen to the respondents own view of his problems and did not heed the solutions he proposed himself when deciding what should be done”, I had specified a positive logical relation between the emerging codes of ‘be taken seriously’, ‘opinion listened to / valued’, ‘autonomy over self’, and a negative relation with ‘dependency’. When later, in the interpretation of the many different wordings of aspects of status, I considered two different statements to refer to the same aspect of status, I checked, using Atlas for selective

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4 In the course of this section it will become clear whether and how statements were decided to be related to status or not; see also chapter 4 section 4.5.3.
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retrieval, the consistency of the various relations I had specified for the terms in these two statements. Only when the two concrete terms I wanted to merge into one more abstract aspect had identical or easily compatible relations to other terms or concepts, I accepted my interpretation directly. When one or more of the relations with other terms or concepts that were specified for the two statements differed, I reconsidered my interpretation and tried to find out which differences or nuances I had overlooked. In such cases, I sometimes decided not to merge the two statements into one more abstract aspect after all, or to specify a different unifying term, but at other times I decided to retain my original interpretation as the differences between the two statements with regard to their relations to other concepts appeared not really relevant after all.

Results: the aspects of status

After clustering the statements with closely similar meaning, six different aspects or forms in which status may be manifested remained: being taken seriously or being treated respectfully; being independent or autonomous; being powerful or influential; self realisation; performing better than others; and being known for one’s achievements, skills or assets. Each of these aspects can be conceived of as a dimension on which people (perceive to) have a certain position; these dimensions are depicted in figure 5.1. as the aspects that together constitute the status-component of subjective social well-being.

As to the first dimension, being taken seriously versus not being taken seriously or being disregarded, this refers to a situation like the one sketched above: people generally want others to heed their wishes, suggestions, opinions or questions, and they experience negative affect or a decrease in social well-being when others either make fun of them and their opinions or just pay no attention and act as if the person weren’t there. While most people say that in general they neither seek nor value status (“people need not look up to me, I would not even want them to” or “I do not want to go round impressing people or acting important”), it appears that in our culture it is okay, and even considered normal and healthy to want to be taken seriously. Yet, as is easily seen, the question of whether one’s opinions are heeded or disregarded and joked about is clearly a matter of one’s relative ranking, and thus an instance or aspect of status. The following quotation illustrates this to some extent:

Greetje Brink (female, age 68): “When I was 12 years old I had to quit school and had to start helping in the housekeeping. My brothers were allowed to stay in school, but I was just a girl, and it did not matter that I really wanted to go to school and learn things. And now, I am not stupid, but I never had a chance to learn much, and you just notice that they do not quite treat you as an equal. Friday night we were with my brother, he has a degree in psychology, and they live and behave in a different way. And when I mention my regret that I could not study, they simply say, “oh, come on, why don’t you look at people who are worse off than you”. And I find that a bromide. They just don’t really listen to me…”

Both in existing literature (e.g. Garfinkel 1984) and in conventional thinking about status, it is frequently considered to be related to or to be reflected in the respect with which one is treated by others. In the qualitative data that I used for this study, I have not found direct references to being treated respectfully as an aspect of subjectively experienced status. In a qualitative, exploratory study like this, however, not finding something in one’s data does not mean that

5 See Appendix A for background characteristics of the respondents.
the thing is not there in reality. If there are good reasons to assume the empirical prevalence of some phenomenon, this assumption should be held on to, despite a lack of evidence in the data. In this case, it is very likely that the way one is treated - or perceives to be treated - by others, be they acquaintances or strangers, has a direct impact on the level of status one experiences. Being treated respectfully boils down to others taking care that they give you what is due to you, that is, others being careful to acknowledge and give you what you are entitled to. That others take you seriously and heed your wishes and opinions is part of the respect with which they treat you; it is a particular - and rather crucial - form of respect. The first dimension of status may therefore be renamed more generally as being treated respectfully, which should be taken to include at least the aspect of being taken seriously.

The second dimension of status that I distinguish is that of being autonomous and independent versus being dependent and lacking autonomy. This is also an aspect of one’s relative ranking that is not subject to the cultural taboo on status in general. It appears to be a culturally highly valued good to be independent and autonomous, and most people experience a severe decrease in social well-being when they become one-sidedly dependent upon others and lose autonomy. Of course, no one is completely independent and autonomous, and what is a ‘normal’ degree of autonomy and independence varies between age groups and also, to some extent between the sexes, and it appears to be the deviation from this ‘normal’ degree of dependence that causes experiences of high or low status.

Irene van der Wal (female, age 59): “My mother is quite old now, and gradually loses many of her physical capacities for daily functioning. And it is hard to see that, because it makes her feel inferior. “I can’t be myself anymore” she says. That sense of being someone to reckon with. She says “I am nobody now, merely someone who needs to be given care.” That is loneliness, I think. Not being able to function as you used to.”

Irene: “When my youngest daughter left the house, I fell in a void. Now I am all right again, but what a depression that was! I suddenly realised that I had no job, I had no purpose. My husband went to work early each morning, he earned our living and there I was, sitting at home, waiting for the household money to be put in my hand. I felt so terrible. What I needed was to have a job of my own, I had worked before my marriage too and I always enjoyed it. Why wouldn’t I be able to earn my own money, even if it were just a little something. But to earn it myself, to prove myself again...”

Mirthe Ganzevoort (female, age 26): “I am unemployed at the moment, and what I find the worst about it is that you are being dependent on the social welfare office. Every month you have to send in a report about what jobs you applied for and what you earned on small odd jobs. When you’re too late they sanction you. I have a small cleaning job for a few hours a week, and everything I earn I have to turn in. But most of all, every month when I post that form, I still have the feeling: yes, of course all those people have to do this, but I am not one of them, I don’t belong to that kind of people! I do not want to belong to the group of

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6 Of course, if one’s data contain contra-evidence, it is a different case.

7 Your entitlement to a certain level of respect may be regarded as the ‘stock’-component of status, which determines the respect others are due to give you, constituting (part of) the ‘flow’-component. See section 5.2.3.
people that need unemployment benefits. I feel very strongly about that.”

Hylkje Brouwer (female, age 26): “I have always done a lot of things purely for myself, I particularly wanted to do those things that my parents did not encourage or support, and then it is really great when people indeed admire you: “how cool that you did that!” These are the things I am really proud of, precisely because I did them all by myself.”

The third dimension of status concerns the power or influence one perceives to exert over others. This dimension is in a sense an extended and surpassing form of the second dimension, which refers to the control one has over oneself, but yet it appears that it is of a sufficiently different quality to be treated as a separate dimension. In people’s perception the control one has over oneself and the control one has over others are two fundamentally different things; to name but one strong difference, the first agrees with the general norms and ideals in the dominant Dutch culture, while the second is subject to the aforementioned taboo on status. Yet incidentally people do reveal that they like power and influence:

Gloria Pareman (female, age 57): “When you are just a member of a neighbourhood council or some other voluntary organization, participating has few advantages. You probably put in quite some time and energy, but only to ends that others have decided on. That is why I volunteered to get on the board. Once you are a member of the board, or rather, the executive committee, you have influence. Then it is you who decides what is to be done, who is to do it, and how. And people listen to you, and accept that you make decisions, because you are in that position.”

An other important difference in the subjective experience of this dimension of status and that of being in control of oneself, is that the effect of autonomy and independence on subjective well-being appears to occur mainly at the negative pole of that dimension, while the having power or influence over others seems to become significant only at the positive side of the dimension. Thus, having much power over others seems to affect subjective social well-being positively, but a low position on the former appears to have a far more dramatic, negative effect on subjective well-being. One respondent stated explicitly that autonomy is more important to him than having power over others:

Edwin Eijkhof (male, age 67): “Having a high position, as manager or supervisor, does not make you happy because it is a high position. But it does bring you freedom, freedom from what others want. When you are in a firm you may accept a subordinate position, with poor salary, and let others dictate what you are to do. But you can also try to obtain an executive position, not just because of the higher income, but also because it gives you the freedom to develop yourself.”

The fourth dimension of status that I found is the already mentioned self realisation: to what extent has one realised one’s potential or does one fall short of what could have been achieved. Here the reference point is not in society or in one’s social network, it rather is the best potential self. The following quotation illustrates both the aspiration to do well in comparison to others (the fifth dimension, see below) as the aspiration to become the best potential self:
Barbara van Kesteren: “When you are in school you want to manifest yourself in a positive way in your class, you want to graduate with good grades, you want to secure access to the best university study, or when you go and seek a job, you want to get the nicest and most prestigious position. You aim to get the best of it. But also for yourself personally, say when you get a child, you have a personal goal and intention to become the best mother you can be...These may be very abstract goals, I find it hard to explain, but I think that is how it works...”

The fifth dimension of status that I distinguish is most similar to the original definition of status: one’s performance as compared to that of others.

Johan Berghuis: “There is a whole lot of things that I might like to do, that I might enjoy learning. But if I do not feel quite sure from the start that I will be able to do well, that is, that others may be impressed, I just don’t find it worthwhile to try. You see, one has to be selective anyway, for there are so many things one might do...so I find it rather logical to choose those things that you may be able to do better than others.”

Anneke de Wit: “There is nothing that I am particularly good at. My husband, and my brothers and sisters, they all have certain hobbies that they are good at, but I can never show them something that I made or something. And I do not feel worthless because of that, but... Sometimes I wish that I had a musical gift, that I could play organ or some other instrument, so that the others would admire that. But still, I also have things that I feel I do well: because I do not have such hobbies, I have much more time for my mother, to visit her, give her attention and care for her. And she sometimes says, that of all her children I am the one that does most for her.”

This dimension is similar in character to the fourth dimension, but just as was the case with the second and third dimension, here again distinguishing oneself from others is much more subject to the taboo on status than doing well in comparison with one’s own potential, which is generally valued in dominant Dutch cultural norms. In contrast to what was reported above about the differences between the second and the third dimension, I have found no reason to assume that the fourth and fifth dimensions differ in importance for subjective social well-being.

The sixth dimension of status that I find useful to distinguish is the extent to which one’s achievements, assets, or skills are acknowledged. This dimension may be either conceived of as a separate dimension or as a special case of the fifth dimension, to which it is obviously related. Although being acknowledged for special skills, achievements or assets is almost identical to ‘outperforming others’, there is a difference, namely that this last dimension refers to the status yielding endowments a person has. This is for example the case when a person is retired but still derives status from his former occupational achievements:

Simon Goudsmid (male, age 69): “I have retired from work since a couple of years. And I do not miss it; for now I can do all the things that I never had the time for. Occasionally I still meet former business partners or clients, and it is satisfying to notice how they still respect me. They do not treat me like an old retired person at all, they still see me as that business consultant who did that or that job so well, and who built his own firm from
nothing. One does not necessarily lose one’s position when retiring.”

Whether status is received for one’s immediate actions and performance or for one’s endowments appears to make a difference in the subjective experience of status. For one thing, the very fact that one’s endowments are relatively stable over time, suggests that adaptation may occur: it is likely that people adapt their standards of comparison, and thus their reference groups, to stable and enduring circumstances, so that only global status is still based on these endowments, but local status is insensitive to them. An other difference between the subjective experience of status based on general acknowledgement of one’s skills and achievements and of status based on immediate performance is the perceived security or threat of one’s ranking. In case of acknowledged skills, assets or achievements, people are likely to perceive their status as far more secure than when it is based on their immediate performance. Depending on how an interviewer formulates his questions, he may either tap his respondent’s immediate, transient level of perceived status, or the more stable, acknowledged form. If one wants to obtain a complete assessment of a respondent’s subjectively experienced status, it thus seems advisable to make a distinction between the fifth and the sixth dimension and to include both in one’s questions. A nice example of the simultaneous existence of transient and stable status (the fifth and the sixth dimension) is found in the following quotation:

Cobie Strating: “Gradually I have found out that I am really good at organizing things. I always organize a lot of things for the club, and it is quite self-evident by now that when something has to be done or arranged, they turn to me. And ten years ago, I was far more insecure, and I always wanted to get approval or confirmation that I had done well. And still, I notice that I am quite sensitive to compliments for what I organized. Because sometimes I get home thinking ‘they didn’t say anything to me about how I did it’, and then I sit there feeling gloomy, feeling that perhaps things did not go very well. But then I realize that they do not have to compliment me every single time, I do not need to be patted on the shoulder always. I know that I do well...but still I am sensitive to approval and compliments.”

5.2.3. THE ‘RELEVANT OTHERS’, SELF RANKING, AND FURTHER ISSUES

Who are the ‘relevant others’?

One of the questions regarding status that we started out with concerned the choice of reference groups. With whom do people compare themselves to arrive at some self ranking? And when status is received from other people, on what comparison with what people is that status based? The data from my exploratory study are not adequate to answer these questions with any claim to general tenability. Yet, some tentative ideas that emerged during the data collection and analyses may be formulated here.

In the first place, it appears that in people’s own perception of the status they enjoy, their global status is of no more (and frequently less) importance than their local status. Global status is what is conventionally meant by and measured as ‘status’, namely one’s ranking on visible dimensions such as occupational prestige, income, et cetera, as compared to the whole Dutch (or other national) population. Local status is confined to smaller reference groups: the people a person lives and works with, but also the group he was born in and the people of roughly similar ranking in dimensions relevant to him.

The global status of a PhD-student, for example, would by the conventional measures of
income, level of education and occupational prestige, respectively, be low, high or moderate. But his local status depends on the educational level, job and income of his parents and siblings, as well as on, say, his prestige and social role among colleagues, his relative delay in finishing his dissertation, his command of advanced research techniques and his hobbies and achievements outside the work sphere.

In the focus groups, when respondents talked about status, in particular when they talked about their own perceived status, they rarely referred to a global ranking, and almost invariably chose as reference groups their family, their colleagues and other people that either belong to their social network or have a similar global status:

Johan Berghuis: “No, I do not feel like I have achieved something special. That is, of course, I had a good job, a good income, and some average person would probably think that I had a successful career. But I did no better than my brother or sister, and also my fellow students that I still have contact with, they just had similar careers. So I think I did about average, or only slightly better.”

Hetty Stubbe (female, age 30): “I am very satisfied with what I have achieved, and with my position in society. Of course, there are also people who have fancy jobs and great incomes or expensive houses, but I would not even want that. When I just look at the education that my parents had, and how they started in life, and I compare that to my own position... Why, I am only thirty years now, and I have a husband, two sons, we have our own house, not a big one, but it is our own, and we have a car...I think that is quite something. And I believe that what I have now, is what most people would call ‘success’.”

In the focus group discussions, when respondents talked about their own perceived status, several implicitly told that, for a part, they cognitively manipulate their reference groups, sometimes consciously, but more often unconsciously.

Johan Berghuis: “The activities I prefer doing are things that pose a challenge to me but that I yet feel confident about that I will succeed. I’ll not let myself be challenged to do something I may fail in.”

Frank Zuidema, when asked whether he enjoys and strives for a coaching role amongst his colleagues at work: “Oh yes, I do like to have a certain position as coach or adviser for my colleagues, as someone who is there for them if they need to talk, or want a sound opinion...Yes, sure. But I would not like the manager to set me apart then, and give it some official status, absolutely not. For then it is no good anymore.”

Cobie Strating: “I find the neighbourhood that one lives in very important. That is... Well, my neighbourhood is not at all ‘chique’ or so, its just very plain, normal, decent people living there. I would never want to live in an ‘uppish’ or high-class neighbourhood, I would not feel at ease there.”

In neither of these quotations it is explicitly said that the respondent wants a reference group in which his relative ranking is at least not one of the lowest. In the first quotation, Johan almost explicitly says that he avoids situations in which he may turn out less capable than others: by only engaging in activities that he knows he will succeed in, he makes sure that he
will always do at least moderately well in comparison to others that do the same things. In the second quotation, Frank seems to say that, as long as his present colleagues are formally his equals, it feels good to have some special position amongst them. This may perhaps be interpreted as saying that, as long as his colleagues are his proper reference group, it pays to have this coaching role, because it yield some relative ranking, thus status. Yet, if his special role would be formalised, his present colleagues would not be his proper reference groups anymore, and in that way the basis for his status amongst them would be lost.

In the third quotation, Cobie clearly shows to weigh her position relative to others in her neighbourhood more heavily than global status, for the latter would increase if she lived in a high-class neighbourhood. It should be noted that this quotation, and the interpretation thereof, reveal a tension between the maximisation of global status and the maximisation of local status; a tension that I think is inherent in the relation between global and local status. The active manipulation of reference groups is, of course, not unknown in the literature. In particular ‘choosing the right pond’ (Frank 1985), as a mechanism to increase one’s local status and, thus, one’s subjectively experienced status, is illustrative for this type of manipulation of reference groups. The distinction and the inherent tension between global and local status is also found in Frank (ibid.).

**Self ranking**

One searchlight for finding possible instances of status in the data was the receiving of compliments or admiration. In analysing the quotations that were categorized as ‘status’, I found that this aspect was not, in general, adequate. When a compliment or other token of admiration is received, there is, as a rule, status at stake. But status in the form of compliments or admiration received from others is but a part of the status a person experiences. It appears that the experienced level of status consists of two components. The status received from others is one component, self evaluation - in the case of status: self ranking - is the other (in Lindenberg 1996 the idea that status would consist of these two components was already proposed; the evidence from the present study supports this claim).

While the status received from others is always based upon some comparison between a person’s skills or achievements and those of others, self ranking can be based on either such a comparison with others or a comparison with what the person wants to be or knows to be capable of. For self ranking there is thus one more possible reference point: the (best) potential self. A nice example is found in the following statement of Cobie Strating, who responds to the moderator’s remark that it seems quite impressive how actively she is involved in voluntary work:

“Well, I do voluntary work for a local political party, I am responsible for the portfolio of social affairs and labour policy. That is something I’m just very much interested in. But - I would have been able to do that work also when I would have had a paid job. If had had a paid job, I would just do this voluntary work all the same...”

It should be noted that recognising the role of the comparison of one’s actual with one’s best potential self in the self ranking-component of status brings in the notions of self realisation and realisation of one’s potential in the SPF framework. Self realisation or realisation of one’s potential is considered by some authors (amongst which of course Maslow 1970, but also Michalos 1991) to be central to quality of life. In empirical research, the degree of realisation of one’s potential is generally found to be positively related to other positive or desirable states, such as autonomy, vitality, openness to one’s own experiences, empathic capacity, self-
esteem et cetera (see e.g. Sheldon & Kasser 1995, for several further references). In our framework its role is confined to being an ingredient of self ranking as component of status, and being a likely ingredient to self-rewarded behavioural confirmation. Self ranking and status received from others are not two fully independent components to subjectively experienced status. The literature (for example Goffman 1971 [1959]) and the data suggest that self ranking is to some extent related to the status that is received from others:

Hylkje Brouwer: “I feel proud that I have lived in Paris for one year, that I speak French fluently, that I play electrical guitar in a band... I feel also proud that I worked as a youth welfare worker for a few years and that I really did a good job then. I think it is good when you can feel proud about what you do. That is good. I don’t think that’s arrogant, it is okay. Especially when you’ve had to fight hard for these things, like I had to. And then, of course, it is indeed good to find that other people respect and value the things you do too. If other people respect or admire these things, that really supports and boosts your appreciation of yourself.”

Conny van Ooij (female, age 27): “When someone from another firm, with whom you have worked together, tells your boss that he liked working with you, and that you did a good job, I really like that. And I also like my colleagues to hear that then. That is, well obviously you are just very proud of it. And then, well, normally I am not very self assured and I often feel uncertain whether I am doing well, and it feels good when someone reassures you. [...] It works two ways: it is good for my own self respect and it boosts my self-assurance, but also I simply enjoy it. And I enjoy it too when others get to know about it, yes.”

The second quotation also suggests that there exists a dependency between the two components with regard to the weight they are given: when a person’s self ranking is insecure, he may weigh the ranking others attribute to him more heavily than when his self ranking is firm and stable. It seems likely too that a person whose self ranking is insecure will actually seek status from others more than someone with a solid self ranking.

Cobie Strating: “Oh yes, I am quite sensitive to such things. Perhaps that is because, as a kid, I never got any approval or compliments from my parents. But everyone needs approval. So what I noticed later, is that I tend to play the clown when I am in a group. You get a lot of attention then.”

Hylkje Brouwer: “Yes, when your parents never praised you much when you were young, you stay more dependent on praise from others even when you grow up, I know that from my own experience. I just notice that I am more sensitive than others for that. That I more often feel I need to prove myself. Or do something special, something different than everyone else does. That is just the way of dealing with that lack of self-confidence.”

The self ranking component to status, when compared to the component of status received from others, does not only have an additional reference point in the ‘best potential self’, there are also differences in the (quality of) information that is available for ranking the person and his achievements. As to the information about external reference points, there is no reason to expect systematic differences in the quality of information that others or the person himself
avails of. There is a systematic difference, however, in information about the extent to which a particular performance or achievement should really be attributed to the person himself, or rather to circumstance.

Ascription versus achievement, or: are endowments valued as much as achievements?
The relevance of this question of how much of a person’s skills, performance or assets are obtained through his own effort and merit and how much of it has just fallen upon him by lucky chance, is closely related to the conventional distinction between societies where status is mainly based upon ascription versus achievement-focussed societies. The data of this study, though they are severely restricted because of the small number of people interviewed, suggest that the generally hypothesized trend in society, from ascription to achievement, also works at small scale: in judging and ranking each other as well as themselves, people appear to weigh self-achieved skills or assets heavier than endowments. The following quotations may illustrate this:

Simon Goudsmid: “About 15 years ago, a nephew of my wife lost his job when his firm downsized. That man works in the office furnishing branch, and that is quite some business, all over the world. When losing his job he moved to Bahrain, and started his own business. And by now this has developed into an international firm, with also a large department in the Netherlands. That boy took his lot into his own hands and was willing to take the risk. I think he was lucky to have the right conditions and personality, but still, he is the one who jumped onto the bus when it came by…”

Greetje Brink: “In the past, at least in the kind of place where I grew up, people used to judge you merely by the family you came from, by your father’s occupation. “Oh, she is just the daughter of so-and-so”, they would say, or, for the sons of the doctor, they would have deep respect, just like that. And it is good that nowadays people look much more at what you have done yourself, at your own behaviour and capacities. They have to, of course, for no-one can keep track anymore of what family someone comes from, but it is so much better to judge people by their own deeds. It gives you more freedom to escape from a situation you couldn’t help.”

As regards the distinction between self ranking and status given by others, it was already mentioned that there may exist information asymmetry between the self and others, concerning the extent to which a certain achievement was the person’s own doing. Given that achievements seem to be valued higher than endowments, it is probable that others would reward a person with less status if they knew that his achievements were merely lucky chance. Usually, though, others can less easily assess the extent to which achievements should be attributed to the person’s skill and effort or to chance than the person him- or herself.

Yasmin Rais (female, age 40): “When Dutch people hear me talking, and when they hear that I am a nurse, they probably think not much of that. But I know how hard I had to fight for learning to speak Dutch like this, and how hard I had to fight to get into the nursing school. When I see what my starting position was, and where I am now, I know I have achieved more than folks may think.”

Scarcity
In several statements it appeared that ‘being able to do something special’ is not a sufficiently
specific indication for what elicits status: the approval or admiration people may get for their ‘special’ activities or skills depends on the demand for these activities or skills, that is, on their scarcity. For example, one participant told us:

Cobie Strating: “Voluntary work is not inferior to having a paid job. You see, if all voluntary work in the Netherlands would not be done anymore, we would really be in trouble. For society voluntary work has a very important function, it is indispensable. For the volunteers themselves, but just as much for the people they ‘serve’. Therefore, doing paid work is not more important or valuable than voluntary work, not in my view.”

And Gloria Pareman:

“I also do various other activities. My hobby is decorating cakes. That’s a very precise job, very delicate. Hours, days, sometimes months you work on one cake or on the design of it, say for a wedding cake. And to finish that so very delicately, yes, that is something only very few people can do. I sometimes do cakes for acquaintances, but more often for people who have heard somehow that I do this thing. It’s an American thing, but in our Antillean culture it is also popular. And when someone hears that somebody wants a cake, and they have heard of me, then they call me. People know that I do it well. But I don’t do it for free, I ask money for it. Because they want that cake and there’s only few people who can do a nice one.”

Of course, this scarcity-relatedness of status was already part of its initial definition, but apparently it also exists in people’s perception and experience.

When first reading the statements that were coded as relevant for status, it struck me that in several statements it appeared that status can not only be obtained through scarce activities or scarce skills, but also through combining skills or activities that are not particularly scarce in themselves, but the combination of which is scarce or uncommon, such as doing voluntary work, while also holding a paid job and being a house maker. All three tasks are valued, certainly, but none of these is in itself so special or scarce that it is likely to yield much status (at least, when the paid job that is concerned is of average occupational status). Yet, the fact that someone manages to combine all three often elicits admiration or status.

At second thought, however, I came to believe that it is not really the combination of skills or activities in itself that elicits admiration. Rather, combining such skills or activities may serve as an indicator of some quality or skill that others cannot directly observe, such as being productive and energetic, and capable of dealing with pressure and conflicting demands. I believe that what elicits admiration and status are in fact these ‘latent’ qualities, which are signalled by certain activity patterns. It seems possible, though, that some particular combinations of activities or skills have gained independence of the initially supposed latent qualities they may indicate, and are now admired as such. This may e.g. be the case for working mothers who manage to combine all three often elicits admiration or status.

Anneke de Wit: “When I see some of these women, like my neighbours and one of my daughters, I cannot understand how they manage. Children, a job, a house to keep clean, a husband to care for... I mean, well, I could have done paid work if I had wanted to when I was their age, but only if I had not had my man and children to care for, and the housekeeping to do. I just couldn’t have managed. And I know that many of these women nowadays who try to combine everything at once, they can’t really
manage either: they give but little attention to the children and never play with them, or they let their husbands iron their own shirts, or they let neglect house and garden... But there are also those women who seem to manage everything at once: they have a job and a house and children, and even if they have a high job, they find the time to do all kind of nice things with their kids: read to them, take them places, do creative things... I just can’t imagine, but they really must be so energetic or talented to do all that..."

Not only scarce skills can elicit status, also the possession of scarce material goods or assets can serve that role. In conventional conceptualisations of status as social-economic status, income or wealth are generally included as material predictors or indicators of status. In the focus group interviews, it appeared that indeed people’s financial situation plays an important role in the status they receive from others and attribute to themselves:

Simon Goudsmit: “I feel proud that I have had a very successful career. I built my own firm, and did very, very well financially. I am not ashamed to say that for many years I have been able to pay over two hundred thousand guilders per year in income-taxes, and thus make a considerable contribution to the common good.”

Sometimes also other material assets were mentioned, like having an expensive car, or showing off with wearing fancy clothes or jewels, but such assets seem to be - at least for the largest part - but different indicators for one’s financial situation.

‘Being busy’: a generalized indicator of scarce skills
In the focus groups, it emerged that many people tend to view ‘being busy’ as something related to high status. Partly, being busy may indicate being productive and energetic (although it may just as well be the result of a lack of planning and managing skills). Partly, and probably more importantly, it conveys a signal that the busy person, or her skills, are in high demand, for she is wanted almost at several places at the same time: obviously there is more demand for the things she can do than there are people who can do it. This, of course, is the exact meaning of the adjective ‘scarce’ in the initial definitions of status. ‘Being busy’ may thus be considered as a generalized indicator of scarce skills. As such, it is not an aspect of the status concept proper, but rather a production factor for status. Therefore, I will postpone the further discussion of ‘being busy’ as something that frequently elicits status to the next chapter, in which the main relevant production factors for social well-being are discussed.

5.2.4. Graphical representation of the concept of status and implications for the development of a measurement instrument
In conclusion to this section, the concept of status as it emerged from the exploratory analyses may be depicted as follows (figure 5.1). The implications of this conceptualisation for the measurement of status can be summarized accordingly:

- When asking respondents about their (or someone else’s) level of status, different formulations should be used alongside, so that the six main aspects of subjective status are represented. The measurement should thus include items referring to the extent to which the respondent feels to be taken seriously; the extent to which he perceives to be autonomous and independent; the extent to which he exerts power or influence over...
others; the extent to which he has succeeded in realizing his potential; the extent to which he performs better than others; and the extent to which he is acknowledged for his skills, assets or achievements;

- For each of these dimensions, the ideal measurement instrument would include both items that refer to the respondent’s self ranking and items that refer to the status the respondent feels to be given by others;
- For each of the dimensions, a measurement instrument should ideally include items that refer to the comparison with others as well as items that refer to comparison with the respondent’s ‘best potential self’.

![Graphical representation of the aspects and determinants of the status concept](image)

**Figure 5.1.: Graphical representation of the aspects and determinants of the status concept**

### 5.3. Behavioural confirmation: a further elaboration and conceptualisation

#### 5.3.1. Present ambiguities in the conceptualisation of ‘behavioural confirmation’

In this section, the concept of behavioural confirmation, the second component of social well-being or first-order goal for social well-being according to SPF theory, is further elaborated and explored on the basis of the data from the qualitative study. In chapter 3, section 3.4.2., I have pointed out some ambiguities and problems in the definitions that were used for the concept of behavioural confirmation thus far. The shared elements in the definition of behavioural confirmation which the varying definitions of different authors have in common, are that behavioural confirmation follows from, or is the feeling of, *doing the ‘right’ thing in the eyes of ‘relevant’ others* (cf. the definition of behavioural confirmation given in Lindenberg & Frey 1993, p. 196). The main problems or ambiguities that were identified in section 3.4.2. were (a) the problem of determining who is the ‘relevant other’, and (b) the fact...
that the concept is defined by the means that produce it, rather than by its own quality
(although Van Eijk’s [1997, p. 43] definition of the concept includes the statement that, if
behaving in accordance with the norms of a group of significant others, “[o]thers then make
one feel accepted and confirmed in one’s activities” - my italics).

In order to elaborate and improve the conceptualisation of behavioural confirmation, a similar
procedure was followed as that explained in the previous section for status. In 5.3.2. I present
the aspects of behavioural confirmation that emerged from the qualitative dimensional
analysis of the respondents’ statements concerning behavioural confirmation. In 5.3.3. I give
attention to the issues of the relevant others, self approval and some further concerns, and in
5.3.4. the presented findings are summarized in a graphical representation of the concept of
behavioural confirmation as it emerges from the qualitative data, and the main implications
for the eventual development of a measurement instrument are formulated.

5.3.2. ASPECTS OF ‘BEHAVIOURAL CONFIRMATION’ AS THE SECOND COMPONENT OF SOCIAL
WELL-BEING

In what terms do people think and talk about behavioural confirmation? How does this
component of social well-being manifest itself in people’s experience? What are the essential
and distinctive aspects of this component of social well-being, that lend themselves to be
asked after in an eventual questionnaire?

For behavioural confirmation, there is no reason to expect that people will think and talk about
it in a somewhat disguised way, as was the case with status. Yet, it is very unlikely that people
will use the term behavioural confirmation for this kind of social well-being or social
approval, and therefore it is still important to explore the terms that they do use.

In coding the transcripts of the focus group interviews, I started out with three general ‘search
lights’ that I believed would help me recognize statements in which respondents mention
forms of well-being that might be reckoned as instances of behavioural confirmation: getting
approval for one’s behaviour; feeling to belong to a group, a sense of belonging and being
accepted; and a sense of shared norms and values. Coding the focus group transcripts with the
help of these three searchlights, I first categorized over hundred statements as referring in
some way to an instance or aspect of behavioural confirmation.

Respondents in the focus group discussions used various different terms and wordings when
they talked about feelings and experiences that I categorized as ‘behavioural confirmation’
(rather than ‘affection’ or ‘status’). As was explained in the previous section about the aspects
of status, I clustered the terms that were closely similar, until six main aspects of behavioural
confirmation remained. These six aspects are: doing good things; doing things well; being a
good person; being useful; contributing to a common cause or a common good; and - what I
called - functional belonging.

Just like the aspects of ‘status’ reported in section 5.2.2., these six aspects of behavioural
confirmation can be interpreted as dimensions on which people perceive to take a certain
position. The first dimension would be to do the right things versus doing ‘wrong’ or ‘bad’
things. This dimension primarily refers to the choices one makes about what to do and what
not.

Hylkje Brouwer: “My parents never approved of the things I chose to do. They had
rather seen me choose a different kind of occupation, follow a different education... I
worked as a social worker in a youth penitentiary. They neither approve of the other
things I do, like playing in a band, and my stay in Paris. But for myself I feel I have made the right choices, I always consider whether something is okay and right, and other people regularly tell me that the things I do are good.”

The second dimension is to do the things one does well, versus doing one’s things ‘bad’ or ‘sloppy’. It is not difficult to imagine empirical examples of this dimension, and several statements from the focus interview transcripts bear on it. For example:

Anneke de Wit: “I find it important to do the housekeeping well. When cleaning, I always try to do it very meticulously, and also in other things I try to do it to the standards that I was taught. When I see how some other people do their so-called housekeeping...Why, even after they have cleaned you can just see the dirt.”

Gloria Pareman: “Now I am appointed as supervisor of the volunteers of our foundation. I have to supervise some 15 volunteers. And I just want them to deliver good work. I accept no shirking or sloppiness. I just do not accept it, and fire them immediately when I see it. For others depend on how they work, and they should just put in the same amount of effort and diligence as when it would be a paid job.”

The third dimension refers to the coagulated or generalized form of behavioural confirmation: the feeling of being a good person versus being a bad person. A good illustration is found in the following statement:

Hylkje Brouwer: “My parents never approved of the things I did, and of the choices I made. I just did not live up to their expectations. My sister did, she is the perfect daughter: properly married, after two years pregnant, goes to church twice a week... And of course I love them, and I know they do love me too, but I think loving should also include acceptation and respect for who one is and wants to be. And it is rather hard to hear them complain “why have you turned out to be like this”. But still, I have a strong sense that I am okay, that I am a good person, because through the years I have always had good friends who valued the things I did and gave me the confirmation my parents withheld. Because I had sufficient other people around me, who told me what I did was okay and that I did it well, I just came to know myself, know what I want and what is good and bad according to my own norms and values.”

The fourth, fifth and sixth aspects are closely similar and may be either considered to represent three probably highly correlated dimensions or to represent one common dimension. Being useful, contributing to a common cause and being part of a functional entity may be aspects of behavioural confirmation that trigger somewhat different reactions from respondents, but theoretically they are not clearly distinct (to a lesser extent the same of course holds for the first three aspects of behavioural confirmation). Being useful is a more general feeling than the feeling to contribute to a common cause; the latter feeling will only occur in situations when there is an explicit and clear ‘goal’, while the first can more easily occur in situations where the ‘goals’ are implicit and vague. An example of an instance in which behavioural confirmation (in this case: self approval) is derived from contributing to a clear and explicit goal is found in the following statement:

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8 When operationalising these dimensions, this question may be decided empirically.
Rosa Boogert: “I am involved in the client council that works on behalf of the clients of the social welfare office in this town. All my fellow members of that council are unemployed too, but we all have some education or knowledge that we can use on behalf of the goals of the client council. It is so important to fight for the position of the unemployed, and to help improve regulations and procedures. I find it very important to do this. After all, being clients ourselves, who would know better, from own experience, what should be changed in the system? It is important to do that, and I know I can make a worthwhile contribution. Together with the others we may really redress some of the wrongs in the system and the procedures the social welfare office employs.”

The next statement, in contrast, does not refer to any explicit common cause or clear goal. I think statements of this kind are better considered as instances of a general feeling of ‘being useful’:

Yoesoef Benadi: “I have no work. I am a foreigner, do not speak Dutch. My education in Somalia is not recognised here. I go to the employment lady every week, begging her to give me work. I want to work. I can work, I am healthy and strong…Why can I not do something like everybody? Now I only baby-sit sometimes, but that is not work. I am a man, it is not good that I just sit and wait and rot. Maybe I will return to Somalia. I will be more poor there, and life is hard, but it is harder to sit here and nobody needing me, no chance to use my strength and energy for something…”

The aspect of ‘being part of a functional entity’ refers to the extent to which a person experiences a mutual dependency with others in the realisation of some objective, each one’s functioning and performance allowing the other to function (the most adequate term I can think of here is ‘organic functional dependency’, suggesting that both one’s own performance and that of others is subservient to the group’s functioning):

Frank Zuidema: “It is a good feeling when, say, at work you see that things are running smoothly, everything is going well, and you know that it is partly because of you that it just goes well. Nobody needs to tell me so, and I would not even want people to stop and think about who is contributing what, who is better or does more… No, just to have things running smoothly and being part of that, that is how I like my work to be…”

5.3.3. THE ‘RELEVANT OTHERS’, SELF APPROVAL, AND FURTHER ISSUES

One point I noted in the respondents’ statements regarding behavioural confirmation, is the importance of the word ‘feeling’ in the definition of behavioural confirmation: it denotes the feeling to have done the right thing (see the various definitions of the concept that have been used thus far, section 3.4.2.). The reason for emphasizing that it is the feeling that constitutes this component of social well-being, is that this implies that signals of others, that you have done the right thing, do not automatically contribute to one’s level of behavioural confirmation, but that between the signal and the level there is a translation-step. The ‘feeling to have done the right thing in the eyes of relevant others’ is not necessarily a direct reflection of the signals received from others; these signals may be selected and weighted. Although the data from this study are not suited to investigate how the selection and weighing of signals of behavioural approval from others takes place, the data do suggest at least three issues that play
a role in determining the outcome of this process. These three issues are: the question of whether the other person is indeed a ‘relevant’ or ‘significant’ other; the consistency of the signals received from others with one’s own evaluation of one’s behaviour; and the extent to which the evaluation of one’s behaviour by the other is perceived to be critical and objective. These three issues are discussed below, followed by some further issues that came up during the analysis of the focus group transcripts.

**Who are the ‘relevant others’?**

In 3.4.2. I have argued that the term ‘relevant others’ in the definition of behavioural confirmation probably refers to the people who play a significant role in our realization of the other four first-order instrumental goals according to SPF theory, that is, to the people whom we need to produce and to get comfort, stimulation, status and affection. In the data from the focus group interviews it appears that the people from whom the respondents receive behavioural confirmation can, indeed, for the largest part be categorized as people who are important for their production of one or more of the other four first-order instrumental goals. There are many statements in which we find behavioural confirmation given by persons who are important for the respondents’ production of comfort and stimulation, as is generally the case with colleagues at work:

Simon Goudsmid: “In your job, it is a matter of course that there is a sort of interplay with your colleagues, interaction... There are briefings and changing shifts, there are phone calls, and consultations. For myself, my work has always been a real satisfying way of social existence...I thoroughly enjoyed it.”

And it is neither difficult to find instances where the behavioural confirmation a respondent receives is given by persons who are important in his or her production of status or affection:

Kees Nagelkerke: “My parents have for 17, 18 years witnessed how I spent my life on alcohol. Several times, even a few years, we did not have any contact. They strongly disapproved of my life right then, and their only way of showing that was by refusing contact...And when I had a good period, we did have contact again, and also when I had to be treated in the hospital. But every time there came a new deterioration, that caused a new pause in our relation...”

Hetty Stubbe: “I do not mind being a housewife at all! It was my own choice to stop working, so that I could give all my time and attention to my two little boys. It gives me much satisfaction to take care of them and to do the housekeeping. And when I have put some extra effort into cooking the meal, they need not give me a compliment for that, it is enough satisfaction for me to see them enjoy the meal with good appetite...”

Gloria Pareman: “I am doing volunteer work in our neighbourhood council. So many people see you and know your position. And when they then see how you act in council meetings, and like the way you speak out when there is a problem, they come to you more and more. As soon as they see you’re a person who can take responsibility, people start asking you to do a many more other things too...”
In contrast to the argument in section 3.4.2., that the ‘relevant other’ that can give behavioural (dis-) confirmation should not be relevant solely because he gives behavioural confirmation (as that would make the definition a circular one), the data seem to suggest that such instances do occur incidentally. However, it seems that these instances are seldom ‘pure’: mostly when behavioural confirmation is received from someone who is not ‘relevant’ for one’s other first-order goals, it just co-occurs with a larger or smaller amount of self approval on the basis of internalised norms, and the other person appears merely to give extra salience to these norms:

Kees Nagelkerke: “In my volunteer job I have a colleague who has been begging for months to be transferred to my team. And when he finally could try for a few times, he did not show up on the days he had to work. So he was dismissed, he was told they did not want him back. I think that was a right decision. As for me, I’d find it all right if they would be even stricter. That’s because I regard this volunteer work as a regular commitment, where you have to show up and keep appointments just like in a regular job. When I have to start at a quarter to nine, I just have to start at a quarter to nine. And if others, like that guy, start being sloppy, they devaluate our work too. They should take the work serious, for then they also take serious what I am doing.”

Cobie Strating: “These elderly people, who live in the same block as I do, they lead a highly structured life. At this time they cook, at that time they do their grocery shopping, on that day the car is to be washed...So you know exactly: oh, Mr. Van der Plas and his wife are going to do that today; all according to fixed schemes. So they find me very chaotic. They also say that to me: “well, we can clearly see that you’re not married, for you are so undependable, then you are there, then you do that again...”[...] And they cannot understand that in the summer I sometimes have dinner at eight or even later, because people should have dinner at six, shouldn’t they? But that is their world, and it is not mine.”

Rutger van Woerden (male, age 22): “Sometimes when I do my shopping Saturday afternoon, and I’m in the Albert Heijn or V&D or some other store, I like to act very politely, say, by keeping open the doors for some lady, or by helping someone who drops something because he has already some heavy bags... And then such a person usually reacts very nicely, sometimes a bit surprised, but in general they clearly appreciate. And yes, that makes me feel good.”

On the basis of these data, I think the claim that the ‘relevant others’ from whom behavioural confirmation may be received are those persons who have a significant role in the realization of other first-order goals, is well tenable. It should be noted that this claim implies that, as a rule, there is multifunctionality in the production of behavioural confirmation.

**Self approval**

From what our respondents told about approval they receive for their actions and their feelings of ‘doing the right thing’, it clearly appears desirable to distinguish two components of behavioural confirmation: the confirmation of one’s behaviour that is received from others and that which is received from oneself, the self approval. Distinguishing these two

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For empirical evidence of self-approval contributing to happiness, cf. Carlson & Miller 1987 who found that
components is the more important because it appears to be quite common that they differ considerably, both only in the amount of approval that is received but even in the sign of it: positive approval from others may co-occur with self-disapproval and vice versa. Sometimes others give more approval for one’s behaviour than oneself would:

Bram Kooistra (male, age 29): “Last year I worked on a ship. The shipmaster always corrected me when I did things the wrong way. Just in the daily work, I mean. But a few times we have also had a good talk together, just in the evening, over a beer... And at those occasions he told me to my surprise that he was quite content with how I worked, that I did quite a lot of things well... I felt amazed and relieved. Because when you only receive corrections, you start to think you are good for nothing. I had really wondered sometimes whether I shouldn’t better leave... But apparently the skipper thought my work okay, after all...”

Cobie Strating: “I receive disability benefits, I have been declared unfit for the labour market. So I should not feel guilty or ashamed that I am not working. But sometimes, when I receive the monthly benefits, I think “again a month that I did nothing to earn this”. That really troubles me, that money coming in without I doing anything to earn it. I have been raised, I come from a religious, a Calvinistic milieu, to see one’s work as meaningful, as a calling. You know, “Thou shaltt inhabit and work this earth”, so put in all effort, no matter what’s your job...So, it troubles me, even though according to the law and regulations it is all right.”

In other cases the individual himself approves of what he is doing, even though others do not or in a lesser degree:

Bram Kooistra: “I think people will judge me differently when I find a paid job. That finally I would do ‘real’ work. They say it constantly: “when will you apply for a job again?” And then I myself think ‘why can’t you leave me alone! I am doing good things, you know, I am being useful right now’.”

Bram: “At my voluntary job - I give computer courses for long-term unemployed just like myself - there are quite a lot of volunteers who really know a lot about computers. And they start to behave terribly arrogant. They use a lot of difficult technical terms, just to impress the students. The average beginner, who knows nothing of computers is really impressed then, and thinks they are quite something. But I... I am proud of myself that I know I can explain things well to people who have never touched a computer before. I avoid all difficult technical words and use may examples to clarify what I mean. And then the students may regard me as simple and far less an expert than the others, but at least they understand the thing when they go home.”

Kees Nagelkerke: “A few years ago I have moved out of my old neighbourhood because, eh, I just had these unbearable neighbours there. I feel much better in my present neighbourhood. This is because...well, I lived eight years in my old neighbourhood, and six of these eight years I drank far too much...was an alcoholic. As long as that lasted, I got along with my neighbours well, we had a good time, but of

those who follow norms, the conscientious, are happier than others.
course there were also frequent annoyances and inconvenience. And when I quit drinking, they disliked it, so... they constantly tried to get me to drink, to go along with them. When they failed to do so, they just did not accept me anymore. So that is why I moved out of there. And now I live nice and quiet, no more people harassing me to have a drink.”

Clearly, thus, the two components of behavioural confirmation can differ with regard to concrete behaviours; they may even differ widely. So, how do these two components interact and combine into the overall level of subjectively experienced behavioural confirmation? The data of this study do not permit answering this question, beyond saying that most probably the extent to which the other is regarded as a relevant other and the extent to which the other’s judgement is regarded to be critical and objective will give the other’s approval a larger weight compared to the self approval.

Weight of approval depends on objectivity and informedness of judgement
The third issue concerning the selection and weighing of signals of approval from others is that of the perceived objectivity and criticalness with which the other judges one’s behaviour. It seems that the more critical and objective one thinks to be judged, the more weight one attaches to the (dis-) approval that is given. This need not surprise us, for the notion of objectivity refers to a judgement that ‘others in general’ would agree with. Thus, when someone gives us approval on the basis of an objective evaluation of our actions, we may imagine that people in general judge us that favourably, and thus we may take the approval we get for general approval. In contrast, when we receive approval from someone that we know does not judge us critically and objectively, say, from someone ‘close’, no matter how happy we are to have pleased this one person, we cannot interpret this signal as an indication of general approval. It seems that the criticalness and objectivity with which people perceive to be judged, depend mainly on two things. In the first place, as I already mentioned, the affective closeness between the giver and the receiver of approval is generally negatively related to the objectivity of judgement:

Annette de Hoog (female, age 58): “I am a housewife, but since some ten years I also have my own hobbies and voluntary activities. I find it very important to have activities outside the sphere of your own family. What I mean is, it is almost a matter of course that you function well at home, and of course it does make you happy when you feel you do, but outside, beyond the circle of your own family, the demands on you are perhaps higher, and people are more critical in judging how you function. And when you then hear, perhaps through the grapevine, that they think you do a good job, it is somehow more solid, more meaningful. It gives you the idea that you can make a valuable contribution, not just as a mother and a housewife, but also otherwise...”

In the second place, the extent to which the person who judges one’s behaviour and gives approval is capable of judging the particular kind of performance, is generally positively related to the weight that is given to his approval:

Bram Kooistra: “At our last work meeting, one of my colleagues told me he thought I do a good job. He said that he had seen me at work, and he was quite positive about it. Yeah, that was something I liked to hear. I know that the students appreciate my work,
but to hear it from a colleague... It is different. Because he does the same work, he
knows how it is and what it requires, it is more telling... Yeah, I find it more positive
somehow.”

Stock and flow: the stable and the transient components of behavioural confirmation
Before turning to the last part of this section, in which the different aspects of the concept of
behavioural confirmation are discussed, one more issue need be mentioned. The data from the
focus group interviews suggest that - just like for status and, as we will see below, affection -
the subjectively experienced level of behavioural confirmation cannot only be distinguished in
a self approval component and a component of approval received from relevant others, but it
also appears to consist of a relatively stable and a more transient component, which may most
aptly be designated as the stock, respectively the flow component. This of course is in line
with Heady and Wearing (1989, 1991) and also corresponds closely with general insights from
the psychology of moods and emotions (e.g. Cacioppo et al. 1999; Russell & Barrett 1999):
how people feel at a particular moment is generally the combined outcome of a relatively
stable mood component and more transient affects. On the basis of the general insights
regarding the interplay between mood and affect, it seems safe to assume that the stock and
the flow components of the subjective level of behavioural confirmation are interrelated in a
similar manner: most likely the total input of transient signals of approval a person receives
gradually shapes the stock or basic feeling of behavioural confirmation, of ‘being a good
person, who does things well’, while in turn the stock component, the extent to which a person
is used to think of himself as doing and being ‘good’ is likely to affect the absorption of
positive signals concerning one’s behaviour positively.

In the focus group discussions, it appeared that approving signals from others may condense
into a general feeling that one does good things, which may in turn condense into a sense of
being a ‘good person’. This is most clearly illustrated with the words of Hylkje Brouwer, of
whom a similar statement was already presented in the above:

“Even though I regret that my parents do not approve of my life and the things I do,
even though I know that they are disappointed in me, I also know that I am a good
person. My friends, and also other people frequently let me know that they think the
things I do are okay... my colleagues at work tell me they value how I do my job and
that they like to work with me... Overall, I get sufficient positive feedback of people to
make me know I am all right, that the choices I make are good and that I am a good
person.”

5.3.4. GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE CONCEPT OF BEHAVIOURAL CONFIRMATION, AND
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT
This conceptualisation of behavioural confirmation (see figure 5.2.), implies that if the
concept is to be operationalised in order to allow standardized measurement of levels of
behavioural confirmation through, say, written or telephone questionnaires, the measurement
instrument should include:

• items for each of the six aspects or dimensions;
• for each dimension both items that refer to the approval received from others and items
tapping self-approval;
• for both the approval received from others and the self approval on each dimension of
behavioural confirmation, items that tap transient behavioural confirmation (the flow-
component) as well as items that tap the stock-component (the stable part of behavioural confirmation).

BEHAVIOURAL CONFIRMATION
the sense of...

doing good things      doing bad things
doing one's things well doing one's things poorly
being a good person    being a bad person
being useful           being a burden
contributing to a common cause not contributing to common cause
functional belonging    being no part of a functional entity

Figure 5.2.: Graphical representation of the aspects and determinants of behavioural confirmation

Before turning to the conceptualisation of the third first-order goal, affection, we may now make one remark concerning the boundary between the first two first-order goals for social well-being. Part of the task in answering the first research question is the clarification of the boundaries between the three first-order goals. In the data from the focus group interviews it was apparent that, no matter how sharply one would try to define status and behavioural confirmation, there remain many empirical instances that may be reckoned to refer to both. At least I could not find a watertight criterion for disentangling both forms of social approval in all cases. What I did find a very practicable rule of thumb, however, was this. Whereas status is essentially about distinguishing oneself from others, behavioural confirmation, as it is conceptualised here, is essentially about forming a functional entity with others, about belonging to some more-person entity, for which it is more important to make the ‘entity’ run smoothly than to distinguish oneself from the other members. Essential for behavioural confirmation seems thus that it is the social well-being that is realised by making one’s own performance or achievements subservient to the goals of one’s group.

10 Of course, examples where, even according to this criterion, status and behavioural confirmation can hardly be distinguished empirically, are easily conceived. E.g. when a key player in a soccer team gives an excellent pass, he is likely to receive and experience both status for his individual performance and behavioural - confirmation for contributing to his team’s victory. The difference between the two forms of social approval can be seen theoretically, but empirically it can hardly be disentangled.
5.4. Affection: a further elaboration and conceptualisation

5.4.1. Present ambiguities in the conceptualisation of affection

In his preface to *The Psychology of Love* (1988), Zick Rubin states that “Love had always been one thing - maybe the only thing - that seemed safely beyond the research scientist’s ever-extending grasp. “So far as love or affection is concerned”, Harry Harlow declared in his presidential address to the American Psychological Association in 1958, “psychologists have failed in their mission. The little we know about love does not transcend simple observation, and the little we write about it has been written better by poets and novelists.” Since poets and novelists had always been notoriously contradictory about love, defining it as everything from ‘a spirit all compact of fire’ to ‘a state of perpetual anaesthesia’, this was a pretty serious indictment.”

Although Rubin then proceeds to argue that in the last two decades the situation has changed and psychologists have made progress in investigating and understanding both attachment and romantic love, the quote yet strongly presses the near impossibility of conceptualising or defining love or affection, and warns against any pretensions regarding the conceptualisation of affection that is proposed in this section.

In this section, we turn to the third of SPF theory’s first-order goals for social well-being: affection. Affection is described by Lindenberg and Frey (1993, p.196) as:

“Affect is what Ego gets from Alter if Ego and Alter are involved in an affective relationship. A central ingredient in such a relationship is that Ego and Alter care for each other. ‘Caring for somebody’ here means that indicators of Ego’s utility have become goods which produce a certain amount of physical well-being in Alter and vice versa.”

As we saw in section 3.4.2., affection has been defined in later applications of SPF theory (Nieboer 1997, p. 33; Van Eijk 1997, p. 43; and Steverink 1996, p. 19-20) as the approval you get for what you are, rather than for what you do, or as the things you get when people care about and love you, and have an intimate relation with you.

Close examination of these definitions, led to the identification of two major difficulties or unclarities concerning the concept of affection. In the first place, I have argued that the emphasis on affection being given on the basis of what one ‘is’, in contrast to behavioural confirmation which one gets for what one ‘does’, is problematic. How can people know who you are but through your behaviour, the choice you make and what you tell them about this (which is also behaviour)?Moreover, as it must be expected that behavioural confirmation and affection are frequently received from the same person(s), and frequently simultaneously, it would be problematic to detect affection empirically using these definitions. We must expect affection and behavioural confirmation to be found simultaneously in many or most cases. If we would maintain the criterion of ‘approval for what you are instead of what you do’, we should label as affection only those instances where there exists a positively valued relationship between two persons that does not include approval for each other’s behaviour. This would imply the exclusion of many, and possibly the most ‘normal’ cases of affection. The only way of avoiding this problem, is to arrive at a conceptualisation of affection by which we are able to recognize it, no matter if there is also behavioural confirmation or not. If it would be possible to define or even describe affection by its own quality instead of by the
basis on which it may be given, this would give more solid ground for empirical measurements of affection.

In the second place, the definitions of affection used by the authors mentioned above, restrict the possible sources of affection to ‘affective relationships’. This would imply that affection cannot be obtained from strangers or mere acquaintances, thus, that people with whom we do not have a close and caring relationship can only contribute to our social well-being by giving status or behavioural confirmation. It is worth investigating whether this implication is adequate or whether the concept of affection should be defined differently, in order to allow for forms of affection that can be exchanged between people outside close and caring relationships. In the following subsection I present the aspects of affection that could be identified on the basis of the qualitative data. The identification of these aspects will help to a better understanding of the affection component of social well-being, with which we can subsequently explore whether it seems tenable to assume that affection is only produced and exchanged in close and caring relationships, or whether it can also be found with people who have no such relationship.

It is necessary, before turning to the exploration of the concept of affection as it is used in SPF theory, to clarify how the use of this term in SPF theory, as in this book, diverges from its common use in the literature on love and attachment. According to SPF theory, all forms of and contributions to social well-being can be categorized as either status, behavioural confirmation or affection. This implies that these three concepts each should cover all contributions to social well-being that fall outside the scope of the other two. In the following subsections of 5.4., we will see how this works out for the contents of ‘affection’ in SPF theory. It is however clear that ‘affection’ as it is used in this book is a different and more encompassing concept than ‘affection’ in its conventional meaning in the literature. Usually, theorists about love, affection, attachment and similar emotions use the term love as the overarching concept. Within this container-concept they usually distinguish several varieties or species of ‘love’. Berscheid (1988, p. 364-366) discusses a scheme consisting of four species of love, proposed by Lewis (1960), which is built on classical Greek distinctions of love and which appears to correspond closely to the dimensions that are usually found in factor analytic empirical studies of love. The four species of love, that together constitute the container-concept ‘love’, according to this scheme are:

1. Agape: disinterested, altruistic or ‘Christian’ love, Maslow’s ‘B-love’, love that consists of the intention of furthering the welfare and survival of the other without thought of receiving some reward from the other in return;
2. Affection: what is also called ‘attachment’ (cf. Bowlby, e.g. 1973): primarily consisting of proximity-seeking and proximity-maintenance, and requiring familiarity with the other;
3. Philias: friendship, or ‘pragmatic love’, based on ‘the expectation and / or receipt of concrete rewards from another in the course of interaction with them, with a quid pro quo giving of rewards in return; expressions of admiration, support, and the attribution of positive qualities to the other’;
4. Eros: romantic love, the definitive behavioural events of which have to do with sexual desire. (Berscheid 1988, p. 364-365).

Although there are several objections to be made against this four-species scheme of love, no better alternatives appear to have been proposed thus far. In any case, it is clear that our use of the term ‘affection’ diverges from the use of concepts by Lewis and Berscheid. What we name
affection appears to coincide roughly with their container-concept love. In their terminology, ‘affection’ is one of the species of love, i.e. it is one of the narrower elements of the larger class, while in our conceptual framework affection is the overarching class of which ‘love’ is (as will be argued in 5.4.2.) one of the aspects.

The above also makes clear that, although in the conventional use of the concepts, affection and attachment may be equated (they are used to refer to the same subclass of ‘love’), they should not be equated in the conceptual framework of SPF theory, as ‘affection’ there refers to the overall class of phenomena of which attachment and love are but elements. The exploration of the aspects of affection in 5.4.2. and the discussion of several further issues concerning this concept in 5.4.3. will clarify this point.

5.4.2. ASPECTS OF ‘AFFECTION’ AS THE THIRD COMPONENT OF SOCIAL WELL-BEING

For the first categorization of the statements of respondents as referring to either status, behavioural confirmation, or affection (or to none of these three at all), I used four ‘search lights’, i.e. four elements that had in previous studies been considered characteristic of affection. I considered it likely that a statement was about affection when:

1) it referred to ‘caring about someone’ or being cared about by someone;
2) it revealed dependency of the respondents well-being on the well-being of someone else, thus when there are ‘interdependent utility functions’;
3) it referred to a situation or relationship in which reciprocity of feeling is essential and weighs more heavily than concrete behaviours;
4) it revealed a willingness to make unilateral transfers of goods, i.e. when it referred to a relationship in which a person is willing to give resources or effort or time to the other without expecting or wanting something particular in return.

Using these sensitising elements as search lights, the transcripts from the focus group discussions were screened for instances of affection, which resulted in a set of more than 150 statements that could be used to explore the content of this third component of social well-being.

Generally, affection appears to be inversely related to loneliness, a concept that is equally hard to define yet easily recognizable for most people. I believe most people would describe loneliness as ‘missing or lacking important personal relations’, and that affection may be considered as the thing lonely people miss\( ^{11} \). But even saying this does not really clarify the concept. For if affection refers to ‘having important personal relationships’, what is ‘important’? Without further elaboration of the concept, such a simple ‘definition’ seems to be circular. Therefore, let us look what aspects of affection could be found.

All statements that, in open coding, had been labelled as ‘possibly affection’, were reread, and one or more keywords were attached that expressed in more concrete terms than ‘affection’ what the statement was about. As keyword I sometimes used a word that was taken directly from the respective statement, sometimes I paraphrased and summarized the statement into one or a few words myself. After doing this for all statements that possibly referred to ‘affection’, there were 32 more or less different terms and keywords that were thought to

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11 This notion is consistent with the way Steverink (1996) treated affection: she used the (inverse) Loneliness-scale of De Jong-Gierveld & Kamphuis (1985) to operationalise the level of this first-order instrumental goal.
RESULTS 1: THE ASPECTS OF THE FIRST-ORDER GOALS

reflect the aspects of affection that had surfaced in the focus group interviews. As some keywords were highly similar, this number could be reduced to 9 aspects of affection: (1) liking; (2) emotional trust, acceptance, safety; (3) communicating at an ‘existential’ level; (4) empathy; (5) interdependency of well-being; (6) reciprocity of feelings towards each other; (7) physical attraction; (8) willingness for unilateral transfers; (9) love.

Liking refers to the feeling of appreciating the other person. It should not, I believe, be conceptualised as ‘love to a lesser extent’, that is, the aspects liking and love are not properly conceived of as different points or parts of a single dimension; they are qualitatively different. You may like a person more or less, but it is not so that ‘liking much’ at some point flows over continuously into ‘loving’. If you like a person very much, this may develop into loving him, but then the feeling not only becomes ‘more’, it also changes in quality. While liking is in general consciously based on particular characteristics or behavioural habits, loving can less easily be accounted for by reference to specific traits or characteristics of the person. The love between parent and child, for example, is often independent of the extent to which they like each other, and the question whether they would like each other’s personality at all if they had not happened to be parent and child. Also when we look at the negative poles of these aspects, there appears to be a difference: whereas the opposite of liking is disliking - a similar but negative feeling - the opposite of love is, I think, not hate, but rather indifference and complete lack of interest. Therefore the two are considered to be separate aspects of affection. There is broad consensus in the literature on the distinct quality of (romantic) loving and liking, that is, on these being different emotions rather than different intensities of one single emotion:

“First, it seems quite clear that more and more liking for another does not, in the end, lead to romantic love; more and more liking just leads to a lot of liking. Liking for another - whether affection or philias (friendship - AvB) in form - and romantic love are not different points of quantitative intensity on the same dimension; the two are different tracks altogether. [...] Second, the probability that romantic love is a different animal from the other varieties of love as argued for by the fact that some of the conditions that are conducive to the development of, say, philias are not conducive to the development of romantic love and may even be detrimental to it.” (Berscheid, 1988, p. 369).

In the focus group discussions many instances surfaced both of liking others and of being liked oneself:

Simon Goudsmid: “Just this morning, when I arrived here at the train station and waited at the bus stand, I started a chat with a young man who stood waiting there too. And he reacted with such enthusiasm, saying that he liked being addressed so spontaneously. He told me how sorry he often feels that people in these parts of the Netherlands are generally so tight, so little extrovert. I’ll probably never meet that man again, but I felt he really liked me. Just like that, spontaneously. Things like that can really make me feel happy.”

Johan Berghuis: “If you mean the things that make me feel good, that make me feel happy, I find it much more important that I like the people that I meet and have to deal with, then whether they like me. That is, how would it help me if someone likes me if I can not stand that person? No, to find out that those people that you have to deal with
are nice, that you find them pleasant and okay, and that you like them is much more important for me. If you find that the people around you are nice, you can feel at ease, you feel socially in place, you feel that you could have good contacts with the people around you...”

Both seem to contribute to - what I would consider to be – people’s experienced level of affection (see also section 5.4.3., below).

Emotional trust, acceptance and safety is the second aspect I distinguish. This aspect refers to the extent to which you feel you can show your thoughts, moods, and emotions to the other without being hurt, rejected or taken advantage of. Acceptance is essential in this: that, even if something you say or do would be a thing the other does not like or agree with, this would not affect the relationship. Some respondents talked about having someone who acts as a ‘sounding board’, meaning someone to whom they could say anything that was on their minds, things which they would not normally express to others.

Cobie Strating: “When my father died 18 years ago, it deeply affected me. I was almost thirty then, and I knew he was going to die soon, for he had severe heart problems. And when he was gone, I felt a great void: my sounding board was not there any more...”

This aspect of affection appears to be related to Goffman’s (1971) concept of a backstage, a social situation where people can drop their ‘masks’ and can stop their impression management for a moment.

Communication at an ‘existential’ level, the third aspect of affection that is distinguished here, refers to what respondents frequently named ‘really talking’. It means the actual exchange of thoughts and ideas about serious and important things. In the interviews, it appeared that this type of communication is both an aspect or element of affection and something that may lead to establishing and developing an affective relationship.

Irene van der Wal: “I have worked as a volunteer some time, for our church. This voluntary work consisted of visiting elderly members in our community. And I found out that there were several of these elderly persons that I liked very much. Even now that I quit the voluntary job, I still visit some of these people. They captured my interest. When talking with them, I find so much wisdom in such an old lady...I always feel that through these talks, exchanging thoughts about serious things, I can mean something for them, and they for me. They confirm me in being a human being...”

Together with the third aspect of affection, emotional trust and acceptance, this aspect is likely to bring about also the feeling of being known as a person (and knowing the other as a person) that is something respondents repeatedly mentioned as one of the elements of affection. Here, I subsume this aspect under the aspect ‘existential communication’.

Empathy is the fourth aspect distinguished here. It refers to the ability to put oneself into the other’s position, and to imagine how he perceives and experiences this. This aspect is distinct from the next aspect, the interdependency of each other’s well-being, which refers to the extent to which the pain or pleasure of the one elicits pain respectively pleasure in the other.
Annette de Hoog: “When something is wrong with my children, I am sad and worried too. I can’t help that, even though I know it does not help them when I sit crying. And it is the same when they are happy: then I am happy too.”

While one may understand that something is painful or pleasurable for the other, this need not necessarily imply that this also causes a decrease or increase in one’s own well-being. In reverse, one may not be able to understand exactly why the other is happy or crying or upset, and yet experience an effect on one’s own well-being.

The sixth aspect of affection is *reciprocity of feelings towards each other*. This should not be confused with the interdependency of well-being, for this sixth aspect is not about feeling glad or sad with the other, but about feeling the same things for each other. Both from the focus group interviews and - for most people - from introspection, it is clear that for our level of affection it matters quite a lot whether the person who likes or loves us is someone whom we dislike, like or love. But also in finer nuances the reciprocity of the feelings people have towards each other seems to be positively related to the affection they experience. Even when two people love each other, it seems probable that they derive more well-being from that fact when they feel they love each other in a similar way, say, because they understand each other’s moods, or because they communicate well, or because they care about the same things, or because they feel physical attraction. If A receives affection from B because B is physically attracted to A, while A cares about B because of the intimate and confidential talks they can have, I expect A, and probably B as well, to derive less well-being from their relationship than if both would feel about each other in the same way.

Rutger van Woerden: “What made us split up, the mother of my daughters and me, was not so much the drugs, but rather the different ideas that we had about our relationship. I cared for her because I thought she was okay to be with, I could have lots of fun with her, and that was what made me feel I would like her as a partner. But she had quite different ideas about being partners. She said she loved me because she liked to talk with me, you know, these emotional talks, and because I am a good father for our daughters. But I do not always feel like having such ‘deep’ talks, and I wanted her to like me for other things than just for being a great dad.”

Another example of the importance of reciprocity or similarity of feelings towards each other is provided in the story of Anneke de Wit (see later, in section 5.4.3., under ‘the relation between affection and behavioural confirmation’). She relates how hard or even impossible it was for her mother to accept that her youngest son did not want to see her or come to her birthdays anymore. Clearly his refusal caused intense distress, an incapacity to deal with or understand this disparity of feelings towards each other, which is most clearly expressed in the mother’s words: “But I still love him!”

*Physical attraction and touching* is the seventh aspect of affection. This aspect, like the others, is not necessarily present in all affective relationships. However, again like the other aspects, it seems that people generally seek to find this aspect of affection in at least one or few of their relations to other people. It also seems that there exist differences between people in the weight they attach to this aspect; it is not clear though what these differences should be attributed to: whether they are merely an inborn character trait, or whether they are also
affected by present and previous experiences regarding affection and physical contact. It should be noted that in this aspect, affection touches with, and perhaps even flows over into physical well-being. Yet the crucial difference between ‘mere’ physical well-being and the physical aspect of affection, is that the latter is always first and foremost a signal that expresses feelings of love, liking or empathy, while for the first the physical touching in itself is more relevant than the feelings of the other person (as when, say, getting a massage). Physical contact as an aspect of affection is first and foremost a specific form of communication that both presupposes and strengthens feelings of being close to someone else.

Barend van der Weijde: “You may think it odd that I tell you this, but I feel it is highly relevant for the subject of social well-being; as for overall well-being, for that matter. I want to say that for my well-being it is really important that I have a very good sexual relationship with my wife. One of the great things of being a pensioner is that you also have more time and occasion to do some cuddling during the daytime. It is no longer something you can only do at night. My wife and I have sex almost every day. Or, well, of course when you get older it cannot always be ‘sex’ in the sense that younger people mostly think of. But it is so good just to lie beside one another, holding each other. I feel so rich, so satisfied then. Having my wife so near.”

Willingness for unilateral transfers is the eighth aspect of affection. In a sense it is the logical consequence of interdependency of well-being, that one does not feel one has to be compensated for what one gives to and does for the other: through adding to the other’s well-being, one’s own well-being also increases.

Edwin Eijkhof: “My wife loves to play bridge. At Thursday evenings, we always play bridge with the same people. And frankly, I do not like it much myself. If it were only for me, I’d know many more pleasant ways to spend my evening. But it is so nice to see my wife enjoying herself, that makes up for everything. So I never tell her I don’t like to go. Although bridging itself is not my favourite, it is nice to do my wife that pleasure, even though she does not really know I do it for her sake.”

Love, finally, is the ninth aspect of affection that I distinguish. It is also the most difficult to describe or define. It appears to me that the eight foregoing aspects of affection are all highly important for one’s social well-being, and they are all in some way related to what people use to call love, yet even when all eight coincide, I am not sure that there will always be love. In contrast, I believe people can experience love even in a relationship in which but few of the foregoing eight aspects of affection are present. Therefore, and because respondents repeatedly stressed that love was essential for their overall happiness (but failed to explain what love then exactly means), I think it should be included as a separate aspect.

Lidia Roodwijn (female, age 64): “But still, even liking someone a lot, trusting him, caring about someone and perhaps even being, you know, physically attracted to him or to her, is not yet the same as ‘love’. I think it is not. Love is something…autonomous or so, it follows its own logic and is not automatically a consequence of all these other things. I mean real love… the love that is a source of inspiration… I believe that a person that has never felt that kind of love has somehow never really lived. I had such love twice in my live, and even though it is years past
When studying affection empirically, and measuring the level of it, researchers can decide themselves whether in a particular study it makes sense to distinguish love as a separate aspect of affection.

5.4.3. THE ‘RELEVANT OTHERS’, SELF-AFFECTION, AND FURTHER ISSUES

The relevant others: can affection also be obtained outside close and caring relationships?

In the beginning of this section I have questioned whether affection is necessarily restricted to exchanges in close and caring relationships. If one accepts the conceptualisation of affection as developed above, and thus accepts that the nine aspects that I have identified there distinguish affection from other forms of social approval, it is not difficult to find instances of affection for and from people with whom there is no close and caring relationship. Evidence of this could also be found in the data.

One respondent, for example, told about a formal meeting which she attended for her work, where suddenly halfway the dull agenda, she met the eye of someone across the table, an employee from another firm, whom she had not met before. And for some reason both my respondent and this other person started to giggle and a moment later both were weak with laughter. My respondent explained this by saying that they were just feeling the same thing at the same moment and they knew it, and she added that she had thoroughly enjoyed this burst of merriment. Although most people will not intuitively associate an incident like this with ‘affection’, I believe that the shared feeling when their eyes met and when they were laughing, is a mixture of stimulation and affection. Stimulation of course, because of the arousal it produces (and the subsequent tension reduction), but I believe the social component should not be underestimated.

Another example, that is somewhat similar but probably more convincing, is that of the respondent who had sat in the local bus, when it stopped and a woman with a young and very cute baby stepped in. My respondent told that he had met the eye of another passenger and that they had smiled at each other when they saw that they were both endeared by the sight of this baby. In this case the enjoyment of knowing that you and the other both share the same feeling is not a matter of stimulation, here it is clearer that there is affection: shared feelings that diminish the perceived distance between oneself and a stranger.

A third example, which is very different, is that of a respondent who told me that she always watches a particular soap on TV, and strongly feels for the personages playing in it. She dislikes the ‘bad guys’, feels sorry for the heroine who is cheated on, and is sincerely worried that certain intrigues will turn out wrong. She even told that watching the soap makes her feel less lonely. In this case, the personages in the soap-series are not exactly what we would normally refer to as ‘strangers’, because they are not real people and because my respondent knows a lot of intimate details about these personages. However, the main point seems to be that we can neither say that my respondent has a ‘close and caring relationship’ with these personages, and yet the involvement in their virtual lives provides my respondent with a real sense of affection (as conceptualised in the above).

From personal experience and introspection, most readers will easily be able to come up with similar examples.

Affection for oneself: self affection

In the two previous sections, on the conceptualisation of status and behavioural confirmation,
it was argued that both these first-order instrumental goals consist of two components: one component that is formed by the status or approval received from others, and one component formed by - respectively - self ranking and self approval. It appears adequate to assume a similar two-component structure for the concept of affection: besides the affection we give to and receive from others, there is also a component of affection that we feel for ourselves. I will refer to this component as self affection.

It is common notion that there exists something like self love, as a form of liking, understanding and being at ease with oneself, and that people differ in their level of self affection. One respondent mentioned such conventional wisdom:

Annette de Hoog: “You can not love someone else until you have learned to love yourself. That’s what they have said to me too. And I believe many people think that is true. But it cost me a long time before I could even accept myself, and only very slowly I have come to regard myself as someone worthwhile…”

The mental representation of affection as ‘having’ people around: the metaphor of the onion
Besides what respondents told about the aspects, the phenomenology of ‘affection’, several respondents used some metaphors when speaking of affection. What I found remarkable in these, is that many respondents referred to a metaphor of concentric circles around themselves, in which other people are placed according to the extent of ‘closeness’ that exists, to express how they perceived affection, or rather, their affective relationships:

Frank Zuidema: “The most important ‘source’ of my well-being is my family. My two sons and my wife, these are the most precious people for me. The most precious thing in my life. And further, well, then around that there comes the family that I come from, my parents and brother and sisters, that is the next thing, and then further...outside that, it is just the people that I meet on my way…”

Johan Berghuis: “People do not often take me in confidence, and nor do I with them. As I see it, when people are getting more close to you... I have some sort of fence around me, that clearly says: to this point and no further. And some people I allow beyond that, but only a few... my wife. Not even my daughters can always come that close. And with the people in the outer circles, acquaintances etcetera, I really like to meet them and exchange some information, but they need not get closer.”

Annette de Hoog: “You just draw a circle, and inside it is your family, around it there are other relatives and beyond that there are others. Those outside, they are the critics...”

A fitting metaphor for this model of concentric circles is found in the skin-structure of an onion, and the criterion for positioning relevant others in the ‘skins’ of the onion is the emotional closeness that exists between them and Ego. Yasmin Rais actually named her affective relationships by that term:

“I have good contact with my neighbours, but they are not really precious to me. I always think it is like an onion: you know, the skins an onion has. These neighbours can only get to the second outer skin, no further. Who are in the most inner skin? My
husband. And my son. One skin further to the outside there is my family. My sister and brother-in-law. I do not tell them everything, like I do to my husband and son. But we are rather close though.12

It seems plausible to expect that it makes a difference for one’s level of well-being whether, say, one realizes all nine aspects of affection with just one or two persons, or whether one realizes the same number of aspects via a larger number of relationships, each providing but one or two aspects of affection13. Given our conceptualisation of affection, and the suggestions for its operationalisation (see section 5.4.4., below), this difference need not become visible in the subjective level of affection. I rather expect it to affect the overall subjective level of social well-being, through the quality of one’s production functions, in particular through the efficiency in production.

The efficiency, and more in general, the quality of production functions is extensively discussed in Chapter 7; therefore this issue is given no further attention here.

Subjective affection consists both by what is received and by what is given

It should be noted that the formulation of the expected determinants of the level of affection includes both the giving and the receiving of affection. As for status and behavioural confirmation, the other two components of social well-being, these consist only of what one receives from others and oneself, and do not increase through giving status and behavioural confirmation to others. One’s level of affection, in contrast, appears to increase both from receiving and from giving affection to others.

In section 5.4.2, above, this issue was already touched upon in the discussion of the first aspect of affection, liking. It was seen there, and illustrated with quotes from the focus group discussions, that both being liked by others and liking others oneself may contribute positively to one’s subjective level of affection. Although the issue was not repeated for each of the other aspects of affection anew, I think it should be considered to hold for all nine aspects of affection that I have distinguished.

The relation between affection and behavioural confirmation

It became apparent in the focus group discussions that describing affection as ‘approval for what you are instead of what you do’ is not always adequate. Affection appears not to be completely unrelated to behavioural confirmation in practice.

If you like the things a person does you can - but need not necessarily - also like him as a person. Research on the emergence of friendships (the choice of friends, e.g. Zeggelink 1993)

12 The practical implications of this notion of an onion-like structure of affection (such as for the development of a measurement instrument) are not immediately clear. The data from this study do not give guidance on that point. As far as can be guessed on the basis of the interviews, however, the level of affection that a person experiences depends on two factors combinedly: the number of relations with ‘others’, weighed by their proximity (in which ‘skin of the onion’ are they located?) and the number of aspects of affection that are present in the total of relations with others. Probably, these factors are not independent, and it requires a different kind of study to find out how they should be measured and weighted empirically.

13 In reality, the latter extreme of the contrast will probably occur but seldom, as many of the nine aspects of affection are unlikely to be realized in complete absence of the other aspects. But it is likely that there exists considerable variation in both the number of affective relationships people have and - probably related to that - in the intensity or completeness of these relationships.
suggests that similarities between persons in the activities they do, increases the likelihood that they will become friends. A statement of Hylkje Brouwer may illustrate this:

“As my parents did not approve of the things I wanted to do, and of the choices I made, I rely more on my friends for that. I have a lot of friends, who do the same kind of things as I like to do, friends that I met when working in the youth penitentiary, too. You know, when people are involved in the same things as you are, they understand you better, and it is just easier to have good contacts.”

If you like someone, as a rule you want him to approve of your behaviour. Of course, in terms of production functions, it is more efficient if, through one relationship, you can realize both affection and behavioural confirmation; and besides, in the previous section we have seen that behavioural confirmation is the approval you get from relevant others, which already suggests that these may also be the people you get affection from:

Kees Nagelkerke: “When I was drinking, I mean when I was still an alcoholic, the worst thing was knowing that I caused my parents grief. To know that they found it wrong how I lived... Of course I also wanted to stop drinking for myself, but also because I wanted to change my life so that my parents could approve of it. And since I quit drinking, our contact has become so much better again, it feels good now.”

It seems that behavioural confirmation can be produced without affection, say when you obtain it from people with whom you have a purely business-like relationship or to whom you stand in a certain status-relationship, but the data provide no evidence of instances where affection is completely without behavioural confirmation, or completely independent of it. There are of course instances where two persons who have an affective relationship disapprove of the behaviour of the other, but the data suggest that such instances are perceived to be problematic, that people in such situations experience stress and incongruence, as is the case between Anneke de Wit and her younger brother:

“In my family, it is so odd. I am the eldest of seven children, and I think I live exactly according to the norms of my parents, because that is how I am raised. And five of the other children do so too. But my youngest brother, he is so different... He moved to Amsterdam, and two years ago he even broke all contacts with the whole family. Even with my mother: he did not go to her funeral. And I just can’t understand how that can be. We always loved him, and my parents both adored him, all through his growing up... How can he now act like this? A few years ago, when my mother was still alive, she had her eightieth birthday and she wanted my brother to come too. And he refused to come. And we tried to make her accept that, because there was nothing we could do about it, but she just could not accept it. So, despite that she had Parkinson’s disease and could hardly walk or write anymore, she managed to walk to my father’s study to find some paper, and she tried to write him a letter, begging him to come. One of the other brothers happened to come by and saw that she did this. So she just couldn’t accept that her son wanted to do other things...”

**Affection and the control over one’s own production of well-being**

There is one more point regarding affection as it is conceptualised here that should be mentioned. This point concerns the relation between the production of affection and the
control one has over one’s own production of well-being. The interdependency of well-being that usually is part of affective relationships has as implication that one partly loses control over what happens with one’s well-being. In terms of metagoals, this has to be judged as a negative side-effect, as the quality of one’s production function is regarded to be positively related to the agency or the extent to which one has the production of one’s well-being in one’s own hands. The fact that with affection it is almost unavoidable to lose part of this control, also means that the more one’s social well-being depends on the affection component, as compared to the status component and the behavioural confirmation component, the lower the overall control over one’s production of well-being. Thus, a person is more vulnerable and dependent on things beyond his own control, when the relative importance of affection in his total social well-being is larger.

5.4.4. GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE CONCEPT OF AFFECTION, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT

In figure 5.3., the resulting conceptualisation of affection is presented graphically.

From this conceptualisation of affection, a number of implications can be derived for the eventual empirical measurement of people’s subjective level of affection. A measurement instrument for subjective levels of affection should:

- include items for each of the nine aspects of affection that were identified in section 5.4.2., in order to be able to assess to what extent each of these aspects is realized for a respondent;
• include items that assess the number of people14 from whom the respondent receives affection in the form of each of the nine aspects;
• include items that assess the number of people to whom the respondent gives affection in the form of each of the nine aspects of this component of social well-being;
• be constructed such that, combined, the items provide information regarding the intensity of the affective relationships between the respondent and the people from which he gets affection (intensity being conceived of as the number of aspects of affection that are realised within a dyadic relationship);
• include items (or an existing scale) that measure the level of self affection, that is, the extent to which the respondent likes and loves himself.

5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter the aspects of the three first-order instrumental goals for social well-being have been explored. Starting out from the original definitions of these three components of social well-being according to SPF theory, all forms and instances of social well-being that emerged in the focus group discussions were classified as belonging to one (or sometimes two) of these three components, following which the content of each of the first order goals was reconsidered. For each of the three components of social well-being, the most relevant aspects were identified. These aspects should ideally be represented in measurement instruments when one intends to systematically investigate the subjective level of status, behavioural confirmation and affection of respondents empirically.

It has become clear on the basis of the qualitative data that it is useful for each of the three components of social well-being, to distinguish between the status, behavioural confirmation and affection that is received from others and from oneself. The self-rewarded elements of these forms of social approval have been named self ranking, self approval and self affection.

Although quantitative research is needed to establish the potential variation between people’s subjective level of social approval that is received from others and the level of social approval they have for themselves, it seems that in many cases - though of course depending on one’s research interests - it is useful to assess both elements separately.

The conceptualisations of status, behavioural confirmation and affection, as they emerged from the analyses of the qualitative data do of course not diverge drastically from their original definitions. And as I have explained in the introduction to this chapter, it has not been my objective to arrive at new definitions of these three components of social well-being, but rather to get a better grasp on the parts of reality that they refer to. By identifying and considering the respective aspects of the three first-order goals, I think we have learnt more about them and their content than we could have by seeking more precise definitions.

Moreover, having seen the main aspects (or: the most important and familiar faces) by which these components of social well-being present themselves to our perception, we are likely to perceive and recognise these aspects far more easily when we look for social well-being, even

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14 From the findings about the aspects of affection described in this chapter, there is no direct reason for wanting the number of people from whom one receives or whom one gives affection included in a measurement instrument for affection. It is only obvious that it matters whether there are any people (one or more) or none (zero). The argument for wanting to go beyond such a mere dichotomy runs ahead of Chapter 7 of this book. It is derived from the metagoals that matter for the level of social well-being that can be attained: for the stability and security of one’s production of affection having more than one person as source of the nine aspects of affection is a manner of risk spreading.
if the aspects take on context-specific looks. For status and behavioural confirmation, there is indeed no reason to adapt the existing definitions; the analyses reported in this chapter just contribute to the conceptualisation of what these definitions contain. For affection, the results reported in section 5.4. do give reason to adapt the definition. It was argued that for at least some aspects of affection, the existence of a ‘close and caring relationship’ is no prerequisite. If the conceptualisation of affection as proposed in this chapter is accepted, it appears better to define affection as ‘the feeling to have others close, either emotionally, physically or both; affection includes feelings of liking, loving, understanding, empathy, communication and trust, the interdependency of well-being, and willingness for unilateral transfers’.

By exploring at some length the range of instances and forms of social well-being that each of the three first order instrumental goals covers, a better sense was also gained as to the differences and boundaries or border areas between these goals.