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LIFE SATISFACTION: A STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATE  
AND GRADUATE STUDENTS

by  
Stacy A. Behlau

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
May 11, 2010

Thesis Chair: Roberta Dihoff, Ph.D. & John Klanderman, Ph.D.

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## ABSTRACT

Stacy A. Behlau

### LIFE SATISFACTION: A STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS

2009/10

Roberta Dihoff, Ph.D. and John Klanderman, Ph.D.  
Master of Arts in School Psychology

The stresses of life that college students face can be overwhelming at times and may affect the student's satisfaction with life. The purpose of this study was to examine the factors in student's lives that diminish their life satisfaction, and to examine which group of students had a lower life satisfaction in each area. Participants in this study were all Rowan University undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in Psychology courses. Within the study, there were 57 total participants, 30 of which were undergraduate students and 27 graduate students. In addition, 47 participants were females while only 10 were males. Participants ranged in age from 20-49 years old. All participants of the study filled out a shortened version of the Quality of Life Questionnaire created by Bigelow, Olsen, Smoyer, and Stewart (1991), and also their own demographic information on the survey. Data derived was run through the SPSS analysis system, and T-Tests were conducted on the data. Results of this study both supported and disproved the hypotheses finding that graduate students do have lesser life satisfaction, but not in all areas of their lives. In addition it was also revealed that students who were working have a slightly lower life satisfaction level than those who were unemployed.

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# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

### Statement of the Problem

According to the 2008 census, 19 million students enrolled were in colleges and universities within the United States (US Census, 2008). The educational goals of the students enrolled range from obtaining their bachelors degree, master's degree, or doctorate. Many students acquiring their Bachelor's degree are the traditional college students in their twenties, working part-time or not at all while going to school. Other students however, typically those in Graduate school, are older, non-traditional students who have jobs, family obligations, and other life stresses. In fact, about 15% of all college students are aged 35 or older (US Census, 2008).

The stresses of life that undergraduate and graduate college students face can at times be overwhelming, and that in turn may affect the student's quality of life and satisfaction with life. The demands that college places on students, along with their other life demands, are what could possibly diminish a person's quality of life. Every student, regardless of their graduate or undergraduate status, has other roles or responsibilities in life, and their complete focus cannot be on school alone. These multiple roles that students participate in make it difficult for individuals to accomplish their goals and be happy or satisfied doing it. It is important to look at exactly what factors in student's lives

are affecting their happiness and life satisfaction so that perhaps it will be possible to see what is impacting the students life satisfaction level.

Conversations with graduate students have brought about the idea that perhaps they are not as satisfied with their lives as they were while in undergraduate studies. Previous literature reveals that there has not been much research done on the topic of life satisfaction differences in undergraduate students as opposed to graduate students. For the previously mentioned reasons, it seemed necessary to further research causation of this issue.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors in student's lives that diminish their life satisfaction. This study looks mainly to see which type of students have less life satisfaction, undergraduate or graduate students, and in what areas of their lives they suffer lower life satisfaction. Different roles the students may participate in were taken into account when examining life satisfaction. This study focuses on a multitude of factors such as age, graduate or undergraduate status, marital status, parental status, and work status in order to see their effect on life satisfaction. In addition, this study is designed to examine what group of students has less life satisfaction and the possible reasons for this decrease in satisfaction.

#### Hypotheses

Most students enrolled in Graduate school are traditionally older than students enrolled in undergraduate studies. Out of all college students, 15% of those enrolled are aged 35 years or older (US Census, 2008). Graduate students may participate in many

other roles in their lives that undergraduates do not participate in, and may be unable to devote as the necessary time for school. With the amount of responsibilities and roles that come along with getting older, it was hypothesized that the students who are enrolled in Graduate school would experience a lower life satisfaction level than those who are in undergraduate school in all areas of their lives. In addition, it was hypothesized that the work status of an individual (full-time or part-time) would effect life satisfaction with a lower level of overall life satisfaction being developed from those who work full time along with attending college. Additional factors examined were the concept that those who were parents, regardless of their student status, would have a lower overall life satisfaction level than those who were not parents because of their increase in life roles and responsibility.

## Theory

College is a stressful time for many students to go through as they experience and attempt to process new educational environments as well as social situations. Even those who have already been through school for their undergraduate degree and are now returning for their master's degree suffer from stress. The very nature of college and the college lifestyle often causes depression in many students (Liu & LaRose, 2008). The workload that comes along with college as well as other individual roles can cause students a great deal of distress.

Previous research reveals that most students have reported experiencing high amounts of academic stress in college. Most frequently, this stress is found in exam preparation and taking of exams. This also takes into affect grade competition that is

often found in higher level classes such as graduate school and the large amount of information that they must process in a limited amount of time (Misra & Castillo, 2004). Studies also indicate that there is a nationwide increase in the level of stress in college students. As stressors accumulate, the individual's ability to cope with stress can be overwhelmed. This effect may deplete the student's physical or psychological resources, causing physical illness to soon follow. It is not uncommon to find college students who are afflicted with a persistent lack of energy, loss of appetite, frequent headaches, or gastrointestinal problems (Misra & Castillo, 2004).

Due to the heavy workload of a students, it is often found that they are unable to be in full control of their own lives. It has been found that people feel better when they are in control of their own lives, in addition to when events are thought of positively. In the aftermath, one tends to assume that they have had some control over the event (Reich & Zautra, 1981).

College students are not the only ones that suffer from stress and lack of happiness. It appears that happiness and satisfaction with life are not uniformly distributed among all people (Reich & Zautra, 1981). Some people are just happier than others while some appear to be more distressed than others. The reason that most studies focus on college students and not the general public is due to the fact that college students are some of the easiest research subjects to obtain.

The way that people adapt to the events of their lives and their life satisfaction is a very complex and poorly understood issue (Reich & Zautra, 1981). Recent research on the topic has been focused on when and why people are satisfied with their lives, and on

what influences their life satisfaction (Liu & LaRosa, 2008). Life satisfaction or quality of life refers to an individual's subjective evaluation to the degree in which his or her needs, goals, and wishes have been met and fulfilled. Life satisfaction is viewed as a construct of subjective well-being and happiness (Frisch, Cornell, Villanueva, & Retzlaff, 1992).

Previous research has assumed that satisfaction in areas of life that are highly valued have a greater influence on the evaluation of overall life satisfaction than do areas of life that are judged to be of lesser importance (Frisch et. al, 1992). Education, for those who are in college, is often viewed as an area of great value. Since going to a college is optional, more value is placed on this type of schooling because it is something that the student chooses to do. Because of these factors, students are more likely to care about their grades and what happens to them during college, and therefore derive a level of life satisfaction from this.

Students who are enrolled in college encompass a large age range. Due to this factor, many of these students are at various places in their lives. It has become increasingly common for both women and men to balance multiple roles in their lives such as those of a worker, student, spouse, or parent. Because of these multiple roles, one may experience a high level of role salience for a combination of these roles (Perrone & Civiletto, 2004). Approximately one half of all married women are also employed, revealing that they are combining their family role along with their role as an employee (DiBenedetto & Tittle, 1990). The number of these women who are also enrolled in school is unknown, but there are many women enrolled in college who take on the role of student, employee, mother, and parent. Any student who participates in more than one

student, employee, mother, and parent. Any student who participates in more than one life role at a time is apt to feel the stress of role strain. One factor that can be connected to a decrease in life satisfaction is role commitment and its relation to multiple life roles by one person (Perrone & Civileto, 2004).

Role strain can be defined as the feeling of stress that can result when there are competing and excessive demands placed on someone from their multiple life roles. When one experiences high work, home, or family salience, whether it be from school or from a place of employment, there is more likely to be role strain (Perrone and Civileto, 2004). Life role salience is based on three aspects: participation, commitment, and value expectation. Participation refers to the amount of time a person spends in their role. Commitment refers to the importance of the role on the person's self-concept. Finally, value expectation addresses how well the individual is able to express their personal values in the role (Perrone & Civileto, 2004).

Role strain has also been linked to negative outcomes in life such as psychological distress, decreased quality of life, and decreased quality of relationships. If a person perceives themselves as being able to cope well with all of their different roles they are more likely to lessen their feelings of role strain and increase their life satisfaction (Perrone & Civileto, 2004). However, if they let the feeling of being overwhelmed by their roles take over, they will decrease their life satisfaction and increase strain.

These multiple life roles, along with the overall stress of being in college can have implication on life satisfaction for those who are enrolled as college students. Little

research has been done in distinguishing life satisfaction in undergraduate students from that of graduate students, but it is an area of research that needs further exploration.

### Limitations

This study had a few limitations that may have jeopardized the ability to generalize the results. The main limitation was that research was only conducted on Rowan University undergraduate and graduate students. In addition, all of these students were enrolled in psychology programs, so they all come from the same major. As a result, there was a decreased number of male participants due to the high percentage of females enrolled in the Psychology program. Another limitation was the fact that the surveys completed by participants were subjective, and on the day they were filled out life events may have been more overwhelming than that of other days which may skew their opinion of their life satisfaction.

### Assumptions

Due to the limitations mentioned, there were some assumptions made about the study. Since it was only administered to Rowan University students, it has been assumed that the student population of Rowan University is an accurate representation of a normal society. Another assumption was that the males represented in this study represent the feelings of all males. Also, it was assumed that although all of these students are in psychology classes, they are representative of all college students in all Universities.

### Definitions

Role Strain- the feelings of stress that resulting from the demands of multiple life roles.

**Life Satisfaction-** is defined as a person's cognitive evaluation of his or her quality of life as a whole or with specific domains of life.

**Happiness-** a composite of life satisfaction. Happiness predicts desirable life outcomes in many life domains.

**Subjective well-being-** is a person's evaluative reaction to his or her life either in terms of life satisfaction or affect.

**Role Salience-** refers to the importance of a role which is determined by commitment to the role, including attitudes and emotions, participation in the role, and knowledge about the role.

**Maladaptive-** marked by poor or inadequate adaptation, not conducive to adaptation

**Extroverts-** A term used to characterize children and adults who are typically outgoing, friendly, and open toward others.

**Introverts-** A commonly used term for adults or children who are quiet, reserved, thoughtful, and self-reliant and who tend to prefer solitary work and leisure activities.

## **Summary**

In the chapters that follow the present research is discussed further. Chapter II focuses on a comprehensive review of previous literature on the topic of life satisfaction



as it applies to college students. Also, various student life roles are explored in relation to the impact that they have on life satisfaction of college students.

Chapter III focuses on the specific design of this study including the participants of the study as well as the measure being used, the design, independent variables, and dependent variables. In addition, chapter III is a compressive and specific list of the procedures followed in this study.

In chapter IV the details of the findings of the study are discussed. More specifically this is where it is determined if the hypotheses that were stated in this study were supported or disproven.

Finally, chapter V discusses the results of this study in-depth in relation to the hypotheses stated. Also, the limitations found while conducting the study, implications for further research, and how the results found relate to previous literature are discussed.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of Research

#### Introduction

The question of what makes people satisfied with their lives or not is one that has fascinated economists and writers for some time. The topic of life satisfaction has been of interest to psychologists mainly because it is considered to be part of the movement of positive psychology. Positive psychology turns its focus on studying the strengths and virtues of individuals that enable the individual and their communities to thrive. Due to the nature of positive psychology, it makes sense that psychologists want to find the reasons why people are satisfied or dissatisfied so they can help strengthen communities and individuals.

Life satisfaction has been a topic of study by many researchers in the past few decades. The recent focus of life satisfaction research has been when and why people are satisfied with their life, and what processes are influencing their life satisfaction (Liu & Larose, 2008). All researchers have a slightly different version of the definition of life satisfaction, but essentially they all state that life satisfaction is a person's cognitive evaluation of his or her quality of life as a whole, or within specific life domains (Paolini, Yanez, & Kelly, 2006). Life satisfaction, along with negative and positive affects, is viewed as being components of the broader construct of subjective well-being. The term subjective well being is defined as the individual's current evaluation or his or her happiness. Because subjective well being is an evaluation of a person's happiness at any certain time in an individual's life, satisfaction can fluctuate substantially over time

depending on their current level of happiness (Liu & Larose, 2008). Since happiness, quality of life, satisfaction with life, and life satisfaction are terms used when talking about subjective well being, in this research the terms will be synonymous.

Life satisfaction is based on essentially what a person believes their life should be in relation to what it truly is (Paolini, Yanez, & Kelly, 2006). When people believe that their life should be of a certain way their expectations rise. When their life does not live up to their expectations, they experience a drop in life satisfaction. Past research has shown that if a person maintains positive levels of life satisfaction it is crucial for normal life adaptation. If you fall into negative levels of life satisfaction there is an increased risk for maladaptive life outcomes such as physical or psychological illness (Kitsantas, Gilligan, & Kamata, 2003).

Life satisfaction is dependent on a number of life domains such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, student status, job status, family, and others. Each domain has a large effect on an individual's life satisfaction. Domains create roles that an individual participates in, and when one is participating in multiple roles it is likely that a decrease in life satisfaction will occur. Although much research has been done on the different causes of positive or negative life satisfaction, rarely has research been done on the subject pool of college students.

The focus on this chapter is on different aspects of life and how they each affect life satisfaction levels. Also focused on will be some specific experiments that were conducted in previous research that bear resemblance to the experiment conducted in the present research were looked at.

## Subjective Well-being

As mentioned previously, life satisfaction is part of an individual's subjective well-being. Subjective well-being has been defined as a person's evaluative reaction to his or her life in terms of either life satisfaction or affect (Diener & Diener, 1995). An individual's subjective well-being also includes the positive and negative effect of emotional responses, global judgments, and specific judgments of life satisfaction (Kitsantas, Gilligan, & Kamata, 2003). Liu & Larose (2008) have stated that one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of subjective well-being is personality. In order to have a high degree of subjective well-being and life satisfaction one needs to feel that they are in control of the situations that are happening around them. Liu & Larose (2008) state that extroversion in personality is a critical component to the experiencing of subjective well-being. It was thought that because extroverts tend to be more outgoing and involved in their life, and believe that what they do affects their lives, the events that take place in them are likely to have a higher subjective well-being. On the opposite end, introverts tend to be less likely to believe what they do affects their lives.

## Happiness

Happiness and satisfaction with life are not uniformly distributed among all individuals. Some individuals seem to just be happier with their lives while others seem to suffer more distress (Reich & Zautra, 1981). When individuals speak about life satisfaction or happiness with their lives they typically speak about relatively long lasting, justified, good feelings and attitudes about their lives (Moller, 1996). It is possible that an individual could perceive that they have a high quality of life yet be dissatisfied with their

life. In addition, it is also possible that individuals could perceive an average or low level of quality of life and be completely satisfied with it (Palys & Little, 1983). Just like any other area of life, not everyone experiences happiness the same way or in the same situations. Many people may feel that the birth of a baby is a happy event while others may feel dissatisfied.

Previous studies have shown that individuals who are happier with their lives achieve better life outcomes. These outcomes include better financial success, mental health, relationships, coping skills, and even physical health and longevity (Cohn, Brown, Conway, Fredrickson, & Mikels, 2009). Theorists agree that a client's happiness is an essential criterion of mental health and positive outcomes in psychotherapy that should be assessed by researchers (Frisch, Cornell, Villanueva, & Retzlaff, 1992). Without life satisfaction, a number of maladaptive outcomes may arise. Research shows that life satisfaction appears to have experienced a large drop due to the rates of depression and suicide in young people being at an all time high (Liu & Larose, 2008). For these reasons further research needed to be done on the population of college students to discover what could be responsible for their lack of life satisfaction. In their research, Diener and Diener (1995) showed that most people in the United States are somewhat happy and satisfied with their lives, but as with anything, there is room for improvement. The happiness of student populations is an emerging topic of research that requires further research. College students are a perfect sample to use because not only are they easily accessible for basic research, but also because their welfare should be a subject of general concern for all (Moller, 1996).

## Life Roles

It has been theorized that one's life career is composed of a series of roles occupied over the span of one's life. It is very common for women and men to balance multiple roles in their lives such as those of a career person, spouse, student, and parent. Because of these multiple roles, it is highly likely for them to experience a high degree of role salience for any combination of these roles. The term role salience has been defined as the importance that an individual places on a life role (Perrone & Civileto, 2004). When an individual experiences a high degree of role salience for multiple roles this can cause the individual role strain. This is especially the case when each different role demands a substantial amount of time. Role strain is defined as a feeling of stress that results from competing or excessive demands from multiple life roles (Perrone & Civileto, 2004). If an individual perceives one role to be more important than another he or she will invest more time, and therefore allow less time and energy on other roles (Cinamon & Rich, 2002). Because they are focusing more time on one role their role strain grows and the individual feels a drop in life satisfaction. The decrease in life satisfaction is due to the fact that they cannot focus the attention needed on each of their life roles. It is assumed that satisfaction in areas of life that a person highly values have a greater influence on their overall evaluations of life satisfaction than those areas that are judged to be of lesser value (Frisch, Cornell, Villanueva, & Retzlaff, 1992).

Some perceive their life roles as being enhancing to one another while others see their roles as being conflicting. Still, another group of people see that multiple life roles can be both complimenting and conflicting to each other at certain times. Marks (1977), suggests that participation in many different roles is likely to enhance the resources and

energy that an individual has rather than depleting them, and therefore enhances overall well-being. However, when individuals experience role strain there may be maladaptive effects that take place as a result. Role strain has been linked to negative outcomes such as psychological distress, decreased quality of life, and a decrease in relationship quality. It has been found that when people see themselves successfully dealing with their role strain they are more likely to lessen the effects and pressure of role strain, and obtain an increase in life satisfaction (Perrone & Civiletto, 2004). Not only may an individual develop role strain that may cause them to have a drop in life satisfaction, they may have too many different roles in their lives and not enough time to participate in all of them. The effects of this are known as role overload (Hirsch & Rapkin, 1986).

#### Life Events

Different life events that take place over the span of one's life also can affect life satisfaction in negative or positive ways. The ways in which individuals adapt to the complexities of life events is a poorly understood issue. Individuals tend to have a better feeling of happiness when they possess a sense of control over their current life events, and especially when such events are regarded as positive. When these events are positive, individuals tend to assume that they had some effect and control over the reason and success of the events (Reich & Zautra, 1981). Life events could include things such as losing a job, getting married or divorced, having a child, failing a class, graduating, or any other major thing that takes place in the individual's life. The amount of impact the event has on other parts of life will determine if it has an effect on life satisfaction. If an event such as failing a class in school occurs and it really has no effect on other area of a person's life it would not really have a large impact on their life satisfaction. However, if

a person loses their job and are unable to provide for their family their life satisfaction will be significantly lowered as a result. Research has shown that problems with personal and intimate life, stress and time pressures, and financial problems contribute more to a decrease in life satisfaction than do any other life problems.

### Job Stresses

An individual's work environment and the nature of their work can have a large impact on their life satisfaction in the job domain as well as overall life satisfaction. Not only does job satisfaction have an effect on life satisfaction, but life satisfaction can also have an effect on job satisfaction. However, it has been revealed that life satisfaction has a stronger effect on job satisfaction than the other way around. Individuals who are more satisfied with their lives are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs because their general state of satisfaction influences their evaluation of job conditions and past job events (Judge & Watanabe, 1993).

One reason that has been cited in previous research as a reason for decreased life satisfaction, in regards to employment is the increase in work hours during the average work week. Before the 1970's, an individual would put in their time at work to go home and spend time with their families. Beginning in the 1970's, employee's began spending more time at work, working longer hours, taking on more responsibilities, and spending less time with their families. Because of this increased time at work, the boundaries between work time and family time have been blurred, causing family stress (Heller, Ilies, & Watson, 2004). In addition, individuals today may not be as happy with the type of job that they have as the people in the 1970's were. In today's economy, individuals



have to take what jobs are available to them and cannot be selective with which jobs they take. One could really want to be a lawyer in a big firm but perhaps they are working as a secretary in an office building because that is all that was available to them. If an individual is not completely happy with the job they are doing for the majority of their week it will have a significant effect on their life satisfaction.

## Relationships

Almost all previous research confirms the fact that people who are in relationships are more satisfied with their lives than those who are single. Research by Bailey & Snyder (2007) shows that individuals who are married or living with a significant other are more satisfied than those who are separated, widowed, or divorced. Although this fact may be true for most marriages and relationships, not all are healthy ones. It is thought that an individual who does not have to spend a lot of their energy on dysfunctional and draining relationships can focus more of their energy on productive work and attainment of goals (Bailey & Miller, 1998). Satisfying marriages have been found to buffer spouses from distress psychologically, but unhealthy and unhappy marriages have been found to cause negative consequences emotionally for spouses (Heller, Ilies, & Watson, 2004). It is thought that those in marriages or long term relationships derive a source of support from their significant other thus making them more satisfied with life because they know they have someone to support them.

In the student sample, those who are most satisfied with their lives get a significant amount of happiness from their dating relationships and family relationships. Although previous research has not focused much on family such as parents or siblings

and their effect on one's life satisfaction, it is felt that this is also a topic that should be of interest. It would make sense that those who have supportive parents would derive a higher level of life satisfaction than those who have parents who disapprove of what one is doing.

### Work/Family Conflict

As mentioned previously, both work and family have significant effects on life satisfaction in individuals. The work/family conflict is also an area that shows to have effects on life satisfaction. Currently, approximately one half of all married women now combine traditional family responsibilities with job obligations (DiBenedetto & Tittle, 1990). Many married women are also in college also which could be another pressing issue on life satisfaction. Work/family conflict arises when the demands of participation in one domain are incompatible with the demands of participation in the other domain. This conflict has an effect on the quality of both work and family life (Adams, King, & King, 1996). Work/family conflict occurs when one attributes a higher importance to the work role and lower importance to the family role. Someone who attributes the same level of importance to both areas will experience less conflict in this area (Cinamon & Rich, 2002). When one experiences work/family conflict it has been associated with a number of dysfunctional outcomes such as burnout, decreased family and occupational well-being, and job and life satisfaction (Cinamon & Rich, 2002).

### Socioeconomic Status

Not much of previous research discovered has focused on the effect of socioeconomic status on life satisfaction. Typically, those who have a lower

socioeconomic status tend to be minorities. As stated in Judge & Watanabe (1993), Diener concluded that minorities generally have lower life satisfaction than whites do, and this is perhaps because of lower socioeconomic status stresses. Multiple studies have shown that those who come from higher income homes and families are significantly more satisfied with life than those from low income families. Although some college students may come from high income families, they themselves may not be in good financial situations, and therefore may consider themselves to be in lower socioeconomic status causing them financial stress and possibly lower life satisfaction.

### Alcohol

Many students in college experiment with alcohol, some for the first time. Students may drink for entertainment and social purposes, or to relieve stress after something such as an important exam. Either way, the use of alcohol can have significant effects on a student's life satisfaction. Murphy, McDevitt-Murphy, & Barnett (2005) claim that it is possible that low life satisfaction is a risk factor that causes drinking in individuals rather than a consequence of drinking. Their study also suggests that alcohol related problems are associated with a drop in life satisfaction in both male and female college students. Alcohol related problems have mostly been associated with overall satisfaction but also associated with diminished social and school satisfaction.

### Time

For college students the subject of time is something that causes great stress for most individuals. Reports and papers are due at a certain time, tests are set on certain dates, and presentations need to be given on specific days. Since time is a limited

resource, things such as extra work hours or additional hours spent on non-school related activities detract from the available time students have to get everything they need done. Frequently, the result of lack of time and a large workload causes students to have what is referred to as burnout. Burnout has been defined as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann, 2000). Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann (2000), relate time to the work environment as well as stating that excessive work and time spent after work detract from time necessary to share with friends and family. Individuals usually use this personal time to maintain relationships outside of work that are necessary for social connectedness.

### Social Connectedness

As previously mentioned, time is an element that is necessary to maintain relationships and develop social connectedness. Social connectedness is necessary for individuals to have in order to maintain their life satisfaction. In relation to students, because the workload that schools demand is so high it reduces one's ability to be able to interact meaningfully with others despite limited time frames. Happiness and life satisfaction are strongly related to social connectedness.

It has been found that the support or rejection of a social network is likely to have a very large impact on life satisfaction (Hirsch & Rapkin, 1986). Social networks provide the necessary social support that individuals need in multiple aspects of their lives. Social support has been defined as a flow of communication between people involving emotional concern, caring, and information as well as instrumental help. Research shows that social support helps to contribute to one's overall life satisfaction. Social support

provides a buffer to stress and can help reduce the draining aspects of an active life style (Bailey & Miller, 1998).

A topic that is relatively new to the research in life satisfaction is the internet and its effect on the amount of social connectedness that individuals have with each other. Today's generation, "Gen-Xer's" are less participatory, trusting, and satisfied with their lives than their baby boomer parents, who themselves are less connected and involved than the members of the preceding generations were (Liu & Larose, 2008). People in the civic generation were closer to those around them because they did not have the technology that we have now. They lacked the ability to go on the computer and email someone or leave them a message on a social networking site. They were forced to talk to people face to face or even actually speak to them on the phone rather than text messaging them. Increased social connectedness made people feel closer to each other. Current methods of communication limit social connectedness and lack the important aspect of emotional interaction.

Some research does show that the internet is beneficial for life satisfaction in some. Liu & Larose (2008) say that online chatting, games, and social networking sites can distract people from ruminating on un-pleasurable happenings and help them build pleasurable moods. Within groups of college students, the internet can facilitate and maintain social relationships that contribute positively to their quality of life.

## School

A common assumption by many researchers has been that overall school life satisfaction of students is determined by satisfaction with specific domains of experience

such as living arrangements, social life, workload, finances, security, academic performance, professors, and so forth (Lounsbury, Saudargas, Gibson, & Leong, 2005). All of these different aspects of college life have an impact on the satisfaction that a student feels with their life and their college experience. It has been found that students who are satisfied with one domain of their college experiences are likely to be satisfied with other domains and vice-versa (Lounsbury, Saudargas, Gibson, Leong, 2005). Life satisfaction in college students has recently been examined as a precursor of withdrawal and dropout for students that are experiencing low life satisfaction.

Those who are in college are usually at a higher level of maturity and growth than peers who are not in college. Moller (1996), said that students attributed improvement of their sense of well-being mainly to personal growth and maturity and a sense of achievement. Other positive factors that could influence their sense of satisfaction include progress with their studies, personal and intimate life, and also a change in their attitude toward life. The many academic stressors that students encounter have a great influence on them. Studies that have been done on college students from around the world show that college students are predominantly satisfied with their lives, themselves, and with the social domains of family and friends (Diener & Diener, 1995). Some studies show that college students are more satisfied with their lives because they experienced an increase in roles and responsibility (Bailey & Miller, 1998). Other studies show that college students have a high need for cognition and that they derived a sense of satisfaction from their need for cognition (Coutinho & Woolery, 2004). For college students, it has been shown that studying significantly promoted their life satisfaction perhaps because they gather a sense of achievement from it (Coutinho & Woolery, 2004).

## Stress

College has been found to be a stressful time for many students as they go through the process of adapting to their new setting (Misra & Castillo, 2004). As stressors accumulate in students their ability to cope or readjust to them can be overtaxing, and in turn depleted physical and psychological resources (Misra & Castillo, 2004). In a majority of cases, college students were caused stress by the immense amount of required work mixed with the limited amount of time to accomplish it. This stress, because of the lack of time, may have caused the student to have a lowered sense of life satisfaction. Stress also causes physical problems as well. It is not uncommon to find stressed-out college students showing a persistent lack of energy, loss of appetite, headaches, or gastrointestinal problems (Misra & Castillo, 2004).

## Gender

Research has shown that gender is an important factor in life satisfaction. Women and men both experience situations differently, and due to this, different life events have different effects on each gender. There have been suggestions in previous research that women are more likely to be satisfied with their lives than men are (Judge & Watanabe, 1993). However, such findings are somewhat inconsistent. Aguilar-Gaxiola, Norris, & Carter (1984) said that when women and men are given surveys they answer general questions regarding their quality of life experiences almost identically. Differences have been found when each gender was asked to answer questions regarding specific domains in their lives, however, when asked about overall life satisfaction such gender differences disappeared. Overall, in an experiment conducted by Aguilar-Gaxiola et. al. (1984) it was

found in graduate students that their quality of life did not differ significantly even though others in their lives have different influences on them. Men obtain more satisfaction from things such as reading, listening to music, or observing sporting events or entertainment. Women find more satisfaction meeting people, doing things with them and throwing and attending parties. Female students more often reported controlling their emotions, accepting problems, and avoiding situations and problem solving efforts which could cause a decrease in life satisfaction (Misra & Castillo, 2004). It has also been found that for women, being a parent and raising children conflicted with their ability to socialize and have close friends. As mentioned previously, time is a limited resource and children may require more time that was previously spent on things such as socializing (Aguilar-Gaxiola et. al., 1984).

For genders, multiple roles also play a significant part. Women's roles have been changing more rapidly over the past few decades than men's roles have. Females are expected to work and share the breadwinning responsibilities with their husbands. Because of the increase in women working, many also have been pursuing higher education while still trying to maintain their traditional roles (Bailey & Miller, 1998). As more and more women enter the work force they are exposed to not only the same stress in the work world as men but also to the pressures of being a mother or a wife or any other time consuming role (Stewart & Salt, 1981). Other research shows that women who have lead more traditional roles such as being a homemaker instead of a business executive have lower levels of life satisfaction. It was thought that because these women lead less active lifestyles than some other women they experience a lower life satisfaction (Bailey & Miller, 1998).



## Self-Esteem

Research has shown that a person's level of self esteem or self regard is important to their level of life satisfaction. In individualistic cultures, how a person feels about himself or herself is more strongly correlated with life satisfaction than it is in a collectivist culture (Diener & Diener, 1995). Such findings are important yet sometimes overlooked in the study of different cultures. Past research in the West has shown that self-esteem is a strong predictor of life satisfaction (Diener & Diener, 1995). In a study conducted by Campbell (1981) it was found that self esteem was the strongest predictor of life satisfaction in a national sample of adults in the United States. Individuals who have high self-esteem and self-efficacy were found to be more likely to find life satisfying and exciting because they felt that they were in control of their personal destinies (Bailey & Miller, 1998). Also, several authors found that individuals who perceive themselves positively tend to pursue goals that they want to pursue than people with a negative self-view (Judge, Erez, Bono, Locke, 2005). Industrial Organizational psychologists believe that individuals with positive self-esteem and self-regard tend to be more satisfied with their work and life than individuals who have a negative self-esteem (Judge et. al, 2005).

## Studies

In an experiment conducted by Cohn, Frederickson, Brown, Mikels, & Conway (2009) the researchers focused on happiness and how day to day positive emotions have a relationship with global life satisfaction. Participants were obtained from a university using newspaper ads and posters offering money for participation. The study required

participants to be involved for a month while researchers studied psychological adjustment and subjects answered questionnaires regarding depression. Participants recorded their emotions daily. Results showed that participants who experience positive emotions were more satisfied not only because they were enjoying themselves but also because they developed the resources that they need to help them deal with life's challenges.

This study also suggested that life satisfaction is more than just a bunch of good and bad feelings over time. Life satisfaction is correlated with positive emotions, yet ultimately depends on ego-resilience. Also found was that growth in life satisfaction was predicted by feeling good and not by avoiding negative emotions.

Diener & Diener (1995) focused on studying life satisfaction among different cultures. One purpose of their study was to describe the levels of life satisfaction of college students in various countries. A seven point Likert scale was used to measure satisfaction on their surveys. Diener & Diener (1995) predicted that most people in the United States have a positive level of life satisfaction and that most American's are happy. The participants for this study were 13,118 college students from 49 universities in 31 countries on 5 continents. Eighty percent of the participants were in the 17-25 year old age range, 90% of them were single, and 63% were unemployed. Respondents completed a demographic information sheet as well as rating their satisfaction with 12 life domains on a 7 point Likert scale. Also measured at the end of the surveys was satisfaction with life as a whole.

Results showed that 4 of the life domains correlated with life satisfaction across all nations. Satisfaction in the areas of self, family, friends, and finances were highly significant predictors of overall life satisfaction across all nations. When individuals are the focus of attention then life satisfaction is more strongly correlated to how a person feels about him- or herself as opposed to those in a collectivist nation. This study also demonstrates that college students from around the world are predominately satisfied with their lives, themselves, and with the social domains of family and friends.

Bolin & Dodder (2001) used the affect balance scale to measure psychological well being in their experiment. Although this scale typically has been used on older adults, this study looked at its application to college students. Participants for this study included 380 undergraduate students randomly selected from introduction to sociology classes. The sample contained 55% female students and 45% males, 50% of them lived in residence halls, and 79% of them were aged between 18 to 20 years old. Responses to the surveys showed that students felt a duality of feelings at times. Many participants said they felt on top of the world yet depressed at the same time or interested in something but restless. Researchers state that feelings like this that are polar opposites may be common for individuals at this time in their lives. Such a theory is believed to be because adolescents and young adults are in a period of great transition. At this point in their lives, due to leaving the security of their childhood, they may not be accepted as adults yet. This could cause a great conflict in feelings and it is thought to be a reason for the duality.

This experiment conducted by Bailey & Miller (1998) had a main objective of determining if global life satisfaction in college students was related to active

involvement in life. Their assumption was that people who lead more active lives will set more goals and pursue them as well as have a larger number of roles. It was also believed that college students with less life satisfaction would be characterized by a more constricted life style. The researchers believed that global life satisfaction would be related to a person's tendency to approach or avoid life. Also studied was the role that school performance and relationships play in overall life satisfaction.

Subjects for this study included 243 undergraduate students at a Tennessee University. The average age of the subject pool was 20.59 years old. Participants were given test booklets in which they answered questions regarding life satisfaction on a 5 point Likert scale. Researchers then assigned participants to one of three life satisfaction groups (high, moderate, or low) to see if these groups differed in their stress, role responsibilities, and decision making styles. Participants then answered questions about their personal responsibilities, life roles, and stress.

Results from this study showed that majority of college students were generally satisfied with their lives, but the most satisfied students were happier when they believed that their lives were characterized by increasing responsibilities and roles. Also revealed was the idea that students who were most satisfied with their lives derive a considerable amount of happiness from good dating and family relationships.

College is a period of time where many students do not get as much sleep as they need or would like. Kelly (2004) studied the relationship between sleep-length and global life satisfaction in a sample of college students. Subjects consisted of 212 students, 171 females and 41 males, who were enrolled in undergraduate psychology and graduate

counseling courses. The average age of students in the sample was 26.9 years old. Participants were asked to write the amount of time, hours, and minutes they slept in a 24 hour period. In this study life satisfaction was measured using the 5 item Satisfaction with Life scale on which they rated their answers on a 7 point Likert scale. The average sleep-length that was reported by participants was 6.96 hours per 24 hours. Results show that attaining less sleep was associated with less life satisfaction. College students who attain less sleep tend to be less psychologically healthy.

Coutinho, Savia, & Woolery (2004) looked into the hypothesis that need for cognition is positively related to life satisfaction among college students. The participants for this study were 157 undergraduate students aged between 17 to 49 years old. Participants answered questions regarding demographics and questions regarding life satisfaction. Results show that as the need for cognition among college students increased, the scores on life satisfaction increased as well. Students who enjoyed intellectual challenges were most likely to be satisfied with life while they are in college.

Based on their literature review Paolini, Yanez, & Kelly (2006) predicted that individuals who scored high on a measure of worry would have lower life satisfaction than those scoring low on worry. Also predicted was that worries about the future would be related to low satisfaction. Participants included 160 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in a college in the southwest. Ages of the participants ranged from 18-65 with the average age being 25.1 years old. Surveys regarding worry and life satisfaction were used by researchers and were randomly ordered.

The researchers found the expected results. Individuals who scored high on worry scored low on life satisfaction. Their findings also supported the idea that the tendency to worry hinders life satisfaction; therefore, a decrease in worry might increase life satisfaction. Also revealed was that financial worries also accounted for a significant variance in the relationship between worry and life satisfaction.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology of Study

#### Introduction

As mentioned previously, the purpose of this study was to look at the levels of life satisfaction for both graduate level students and undergraduate level students to examine which group had a perceived lower level of life satisfaction and why. It was hypothesized that students who are in graduate school will have a lower life satisfaction than those in college for their undergraduate degree due to the various life roles traditional graduate school students participate in. The different roles examined in this study that could have an effect on life satisfaction were the student's age, marital status, parental status, and work status.

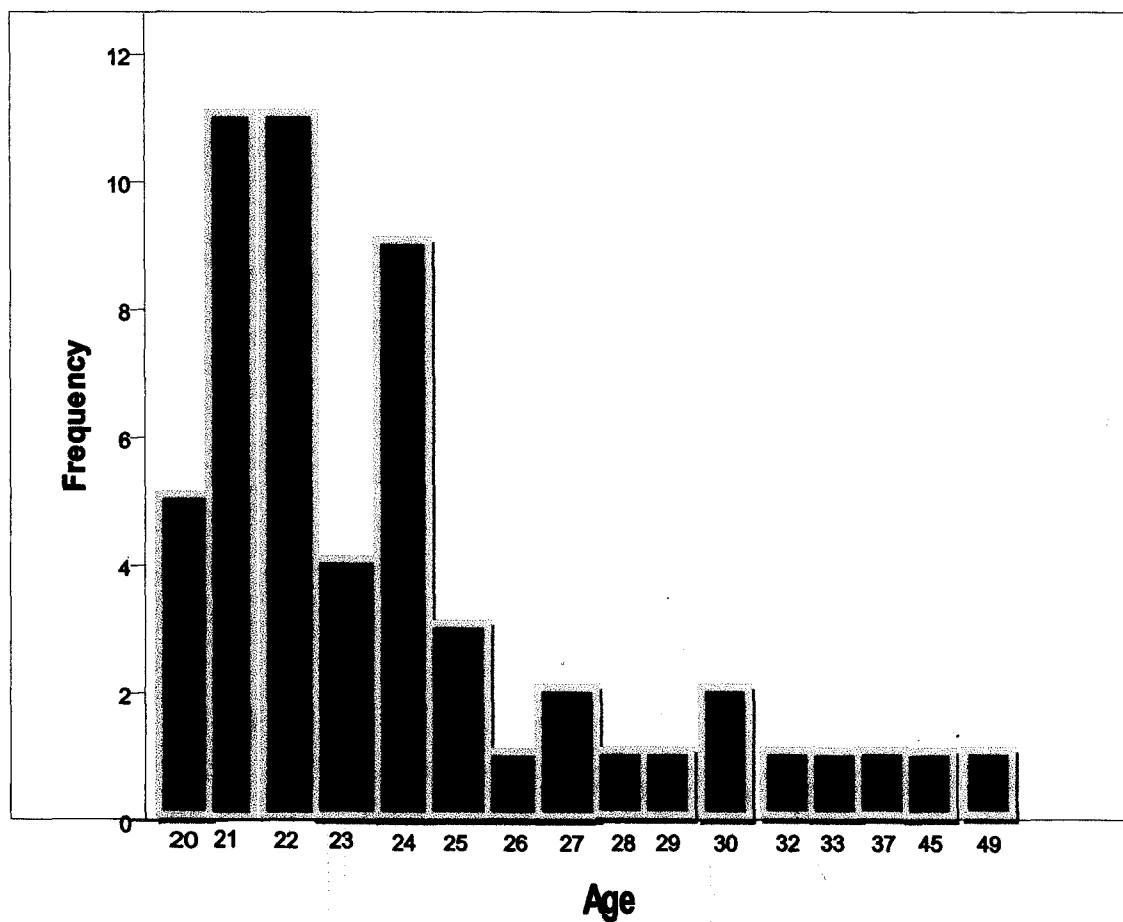
This chapter outlines the specifics of this study. Included in this chapter are the participant's of the study, the design of the study, and the type of analysis that was conducted. In addition, this chapter includes a comprehensive overview of the procedure that was followed to conduct this study.

#### Participants

The participants in this study were graduate student and undergraduate students all from the Rowan University community. All participants were enrolled and surveyed during a psychology related course. A total of 57 participants filled out surveys and returned them to the researcher. Participants for this study included 27 graduate level

students as well as 30 undergraduate level students. The participants indicated that 12 are part time students while the majority, 45 participants, were full time students. Of the 57 participants, only 55 participants responded with their ages. Ages of participants in this study ranged from 20-49 years old with most participants falling in the age range of 21-24 years old. Chart 3.1 shows the distribution of ages of participants for this study.

Chart 3.1. Participant Ages



In relation to gender, out of the 57 participants 10 were males and 47 participants were females. When answering a question related to work, 49 participants responded that



they are working currently. Out of the 49 participants who are working, 20 participants are working full time jobs while 29 are employed part time. In addition, 7 participants were married while 50 answered that they were not married. Also, 10 participants listed they were parents. Participants were not compensated for their time or for participating in the study. About 60 surveys were distributed over all. Two surveys were returned incomplete so were thrown out of the sample and one survey was not returned to the researcher. Overall, the return rate for the surveys was 95% participation.

### Design

As mentioned previously, this study is focused on examining which students, undergraduate or graduate, have lower life satisfaction and the possible reasons for this decrease. A variety of different variables were studied to see if these variables had an effect on the amount of life satisfaction students that had. The dependent variable in this study was the student's level of life satisfaction. Independent variables of this study included age, student status, marital status, employment status, parental status, feelings, handling feelings, use of time, support systems, relationships, assertiveness, and living situation.

Participants of this study filled out an altered version of the Quality of Life Questionnaire created by Bigelow, Olsen, Smoyer, and Stewart (1991). This questionnaire was shortened from its original form and questions that were not relevant to this study were omitted. The original questionnaire featured 109 questions for participants to fill out. The shortened version that was used for this study featured only 30 questions. Participants were asked to answer questions relating to their feelings, use of

free time, relationships, handling feelings, support system, living situation, assertiveness, work situation, and overall life satisfaction. Participants were asked to rate their answers on the 4 point Likert type scale provided for them. Examples of questions include, “In the past week how often have you been pleased with something you did?”, “In the past week how often have you felt angry”, “How satisfied are you with your home?”, “In the last week, how often did you go out socially?”, “In general, how much do you like your job?”, “Overall, how satisfied are you with your life?”. The response to the question of overall life satisfaction was meant to give insight into how they felt their life was overall regardless of the independent variables.

Since this survey was previously created by other researchers, the validity of it was slightly higher than if it were created purely for this research. As with all self-report surveys, the validity of this survey may not have been completely accurate due to the participants not being focused completely on the questions, simply because they were answering them quickly to get it done. The reliability of the answers may also not have been accurate due to the nature of the study itself. Since this is a study on life satisfaction the answers may have been skewed by the events that happened to subjects on the day the survey was taken. All students who participated were all enrolled in Psychology programs which may affect validity. Another factor that could affect reliability and validity was that people may not have wanted to become too personal with the questions, and therefore, may not have been answering them accurately and truthfully.

### Procedures

Participants were solicited in both undergraduate and graduate school classes at Rowan University. With professor permission, surveys were handed out to the students

during classes. Participants were made aware that the study was a comparison of life satisfaction and also what was the purpose was for conducting this particular study. Participants were also informed that their participation in this study was completely voluntary and not mandatory in any way. In addition, no students were compensated in any way for their participation in this study. Students were made aware that they could choose at any point in time to not participate in the survey without any consequences to them. Surveys were handed out to participants in their classroom and returned to the researcher when completed. To maintain confidentiality of the participants, when the surveys were completed they were placed directly into an envelope by the participant.

After completion, surveys were separated into two groups, a group for undergraduate students and a group for graduate students. Upon completion of the survey, questions number 2,4,7,8,10,12,13,14,19,24, and 25 were reverse scored. Also questions were separated after completion based on the independent variable that they correspond to for scoring. Questions number 1, 28, and 29 were under the variable of use of time. Questions 2-13 related to feelings. Question 14 related to handling feelings. Questions 15 and 16 were related to the individuals living situation. Questions 17,18, and 19 related to the participants assertiveness and decision making. Questions 20 and 21 were related to the participant's relationships. Questions 22 and 23 involved the participant's support systems. Questions 24-27 related to the participants work situation. Lastly, question 30 related to the participants overall life satisfaction. Data was then entered into the SPSS data analysis system for analysis.

## Type of Analysis

After data from was entered into the SPSS data analysis system, independent samples T-tests were conducted on each independent variable with the grouping variable being what level student they are, undergraduate or graduate, in order to compare which group had a higher mean score. For this research, a higher mean score in the specific variables meant that that group had a higher level of life satisfaction.

## Summary

The data that has been found in this section and run through the SPSS system has provided the information needed to further explore the hypotheses stated in this study. From the data that has been collected it could be seen if the hypotheses that were stated were supported or disproved. The next chapter discusses the specific findings of this data as well as summarizing all of the information gathered from this research.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

#### Introduction

Previous chapters have highlighted the purpose for this study, hypotheses, the past literature on the topic, and the specifics about this study such as participants and procedures. This chapter focuses on the results that have been found in this research. In this chapter the hypotheses are revisited to see if the data that was collected supported or disproved the hypotheses.

#### Hypotheses

In order to effectively speak about the hypotheses that were stated at the beginning of this research it is necessary to restate them once again. With the amount of responsibilities and roles that come along with getting older, it was hypothesized that the students who are enrolled in Graduate school would experience a lower life satisfaction level than those who are in undergraduate school in all areas of their lives. In addition, it was hypothesized that the work status of an individual (full-time or part-time) would effect life satisfaction with a lower level of overall life satisfaction being developed from those who work full time along with attending college. An additional factor studied was the concept that those who were parents, regardless of their student status, would have a lower overall life satisfaction level than those who were not parents because of their increase in life roles and responsibility.

## Results

After independent samples t-tests were run on all of the data to derive results we can now begin to speak about the results that have been found through this research. In regards to the first hypothesis, that students enrolled in graduate school would have a lower life satisfaction in all areas of their lives than those in college for undergraduate degrees, the results disproved our thesis. Graduate students did reveal that they have a lower level of life satisfaction in most, but not all areas of their lives examined by the questionnaire. In the area of feeling, results showed that graduate students scored about 3 points higher on average than undergraduate students (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Feelings

Student	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Feeling 1.00	30	31.7667	5.52539	1.00879
2.00	27	34.5556	5.34454	1.02856

Graduate students also scored slightly higher in the area of handling their feelings than undergraduate students did. Undergraduate students had a mean score of 2.13 while Graduate students scored slightly higher with a score of 2.18. Graduate students also were found to have more life satisfaction in the area of living situation than undergraduate students do (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Living Situation

student	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Livingsit 1.00	30	5.7000	1.36836	.24983
2.00	27	6.2222	1.64862	.31728

In the area of work, it was found that more graduate students were working than undergraduate students. The results showed graduate students had more life satisfaction in this area than undergraduate students. The reason assumed for this is that graduate level students have more professional, higher-paying jobs than undergraduate students do so they are happier with their jobs.

In all of the other areas assessed by our survey, results revealed that undergraduate level students did score slightly higher in their level of life satisfaction than graduate students did. These results supported the hypothesis that undergraduate students would have higher life satisfaction levels than graduate students. In the area of assertiveness and decision making, undergraduate level students had a higher mean score on these questions. Undergraduate level students had a mean score of 8.76 while graduate level students only scored 8.37 (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Assertiveness

	Student	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Assertiveness	1.00	30	8.7667	1.45468	.26559
	2.00	27	8.3704	1.33440	.25681

Undergraduate students also showed a slightly higher level of life satisfaction in the area of relationships. There were two questions in this category; however, while scoring the results it was determined that one question was not answered by all participants so it was thrown out. Results show that undergraduate students have a slightly higher mean score of 3.76 while graduate students only have a mean score of 3.59 (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Relationships

N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
30	3.7667	.43018	.07854
27	3.5926	.74726	.14381

While most students in this study felt that they did have support systems from family and friend's results showed that the undergraduate students had a slightly higher level of life satisfaction in this area than graduate students do (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Support Systems

Student	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Support 1.00	30	6.6333	1.35146	.24674
2.00	27	6.4074	1.82418	.35106

Also, undergraduate level students showed having a higher level of life satisfaction in the area of use of time. Undergraduate students enjoyed more leisurely activities and spent their time more usefully than graduate students did. Graduate level students had a mean score of 6.40 while undergraduate students scored slightly higher with a level of 6.93 (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6 Use of Time

Student	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Time 1.00	30	6.9333	2.04995	.37427
2.00	27	6.4074	1.15223	.22175

The last field explored for the first hypothesis was the area of overall life satisfaction and how satisfied with their life the individual is. The results from this



section once again supported the hypothesis that undergraduate students are more satisfied than graduate students, although the scores were only slightly different. Table 4.7 shows the scores for overall life satisfaction.

While many of the areas showed undergraduate students as having a higher level of life satisfaction than graduate students the hypothesis was not supported because undergraduates did not have a higher level of life satisfaction in all areas of life. Interestingly, results show that no student rated themselves as being very unsatisfied with their lives. Results showed that 7 students rated themselves as being unsatisfied. The majority of participants, 35, rated themselves as being satisfied. Lastly, 15 of the participants rated themselves as being very satisfied. Chart 4.1 shows the distribution of students and their satisfaction with life ratings.

Table 4.7 Overall Life Satisfaction

	Student	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Overall	1.00	30	3.1667	.59209	.10810
	2.00	27	3.1111	.64051	.12327

The second hypothesis stated in this study was that the work status of an individual (full-time or part-time) would effect life satisfaction, with a lower level of overall life satisfaction being developed from those who work full time along with attending college. After completing an independent samples T-test for this area it was determined that the hypothesis was supported. Results showed that students, regardless of graduate or undergraduate status, had a slightly lower level of overall life satisfaction if they were working full time than if they were working part time (Table 4.8).

Chart 4.1 Overall Life Satisfaction

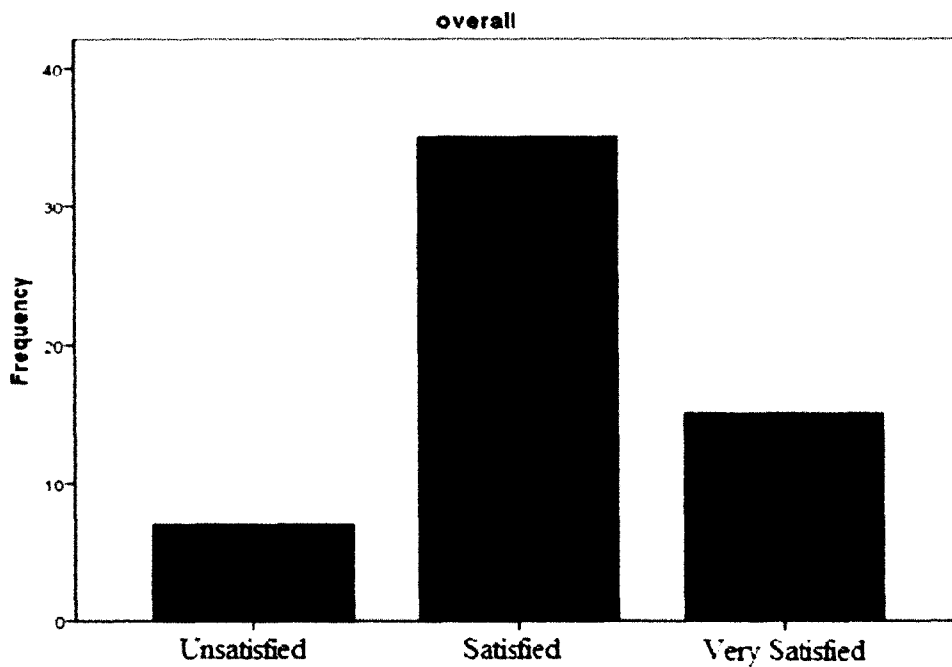


Table 4.8 Overall Satisfaction and Work

EmpStatus	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Overall - Full-time	20	3.1500	.67082	.15000
- Part-time	29	3.1724	.65841	.12226

Lastly, the third hypothesis tested in this study was that those who were parents, regardless of their student status, would have a lower overall life satisfaction level than those who are not parents because of the increase in life roles and responsibility they have. The results support the hypothesis. It was found that those who were parents, regardless of if they are graduate students or undergraduate students had a lower level of life satisfaction. Although only 10 participants in this study indicated that they were

parents their level of overall life satisfaction is 3.10, while those who were not parents had a mean score of 3.14. Results are shown below in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9 Overall Satisfaction and Parental Status

ParentalStatus		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Overall	Parent	10	3.1000	.73786	.23333
	Not Parent	47	3.1489	.58898	.08591

### Summary

The data that was collected for this study did seem to support most hypotheses posed. Although graduate students did not have a lower life satisfaction in all areas of their life, they scored lower in most areas than undergraduate students including the category of overall life satisfaction. In addition, the second hypothesis, that those working full time regardless of student status would have a lower level of life satisfaction than those working part time was also supported. Lastly, the hypothesis that parents would have a lower level of life satisfaction was also supported by the research. The next chapter discusses implications for further research, limitations of the study, and past research in relation to this research.

## CHAPTER V

### Summary and Conclusions

#### Discussion

Past chapters have discussed the need for the study, previous literature on this topic, procedures, and also the results of this study. This chapter focuses on how the previous literature relates to this study, problems with this study, and implications for further research.

There were three different hypotheses posed for this study. These hypotheses were both supported and disproved. With the amount of responsibilities and roles that come along with getting older, it was hypothesized that the students who were enrolled in graduate school would experience a lower life satisfaction level than those who were in undergraduate school in all areas of their lives. In addition, it was hypothesized that the work status of an individual (full-time or part-time) would effect life satisfaction with a lower level of overall life satisfaction being developed from those who work full time along with attending college. Additional factors reviewed were the concept that those who were parents, regardless of their student status, would have a lower overall life satisfaction level than those who were not parents due to the increase in life roles and responsibility they have.

Results showed the first hypothesis was both supported and disproved. Graduate students did show a lower level of life satisfaction in most areas of their lives, but not in

all areas. Graduate students showed a higher level of life satisfaction than undergraduate students in the areas of feelings, handling feelings, living situation, and work situation. In regards to feelings and handling feelings, the results may have been discovered because graduate students are generally older than undergraduate students and may be more mature in their feelings. Students in the graduate school program also rated themselves as having more life satisfaction in the area of living situation. This finding could possibly have been due to the fact that a good number of undergraduate students are living on campus in typically cramped conditions, while graduate students are generally out on their own or living at home with their parents. While living at home with parents may not be the ideal living situation, there is generally more privacy and space than living in a dorm room with others.

Consistent with the hypothesis listed above, undergraduate students did rate themselves as having a higher level of life satisfaction in the areas of assertiveness, support system, use of time, and overall life satisfaction. In regards to the area of support system, undergraduates may have a bigger group of friends because they do not usually have many other responsibilities. In addition, undergraduates may have the support of a family who is paying for their college or with whom they are living. Graduate students may feel they do not have the same support because they are older and out on their own. The area of use of time also was rated higher by undergraduates. This finding may have been due to the fact that undergraduate students typically do not have many other responsibilities such as a family or a full time job.

In the area of assertiveness, undergraduate students did rate themselves as more satisfied. The category initially included two questions for the participants to fill out.

When surveys were returned to the researcher it was discovered that most students did not answer the question 21 that stated “If married or living as married: In the last month, how much have you enjoyed your spouse’s company?” Because this question was not relevant to most participants it was eliminated.

Finally, undergraduate students rated themselves as higher on the level of overall life satisfaction than graduate students did. As mentioned before, no student rated themselves as being very unsatisfied with their lives, and the majority of students rated themselves in the category of satisfied. For this question it is important to remember that an individual could perceive that they have a high quality of life yet be dissatisfied with their life or perceive an average or low level of quality of life and be completely satisfied with it (Palys & Little, 1983).

The second hypothesis was that those students who work full time would have a lower life satisfaction level than those who work part time or not at all. Results showed the hypothesis was correct and that students who were working full time did show a lower level of life satisfaction. This finding appears to be due to the fact that those students who are working full time have less time for school work than those working part time which then affects their social lives or other areas of their lives.

Lastly, the third hypothesis posed was that those who were parents would have a lower level of life satisfaction than those students who did not have children. This hypothesis was shown to have been proven by the results derived in this study. Much like the above hypothesis about work, students who were parents typically have less time

to focus on other areas of their lives due to the fact that they have to take care of another person.

When looking at the data found in this study it is important to remember that life satisfaction is a person's cognitive evaluation of his or her quality of life as a whole or within specific domains (Paolini, Yanez, & Kelly, 2006). This topic is one that is very subjective because it entails the way that one feels that their life is or how they perceive their life to be. Because of that factor a person's life satisfaction may fluctuate depending on the level of happiness they are feeling when they are asked about life satisfaction.

In their research, Liu & Larose (2008) stated that one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of subjective well-being is personality. Liu & Larose (2008) also stated that in order to have a high level of life satisfaction one needs to feel that they are in control of their own situations and surroundings. Although this research did not focus on a participant's personality, it is feasible to speculate that someone who is in control of their lives would be happier with the events that were going on around them. The survey that was used for this study did not specifically list questions regarding this subject but it may be a topic of interest to look at in future research.

Palys & Little (1983), stated that it was possible that an individual could perceive they had a high quality of life and yet be dissatisfied with their lives or vice versa. The findings of Palys & Little (1983) are also exhibited in this study. While looking at the results of individual surveys, it can be concluded that some participants rated themselves as being very unsatisfied with things such as their living situation or job, and yet for their overall life satisfaction they rated themselves as satisfied. This shows that although they

were very unhappy with one area of their lives it really did not have a deep impact on their overall life satisfaction level. Diener and Diener (1995) showed that most people were somewhat happy and satisfied with their lives, but there is still room for improvement. This statement is consistent with results found in this study. As shown previously in Chart 2, most participants rated themselves as being satisfied with their lives. Although most were satisfied, they were not very satisfied so there is still room for improvement in order to feel very satisfied.

The survey used in this study asked about the different roles that participants have. In a study conducted by Marks (1977), it was suggested that participation in many different roles was likely to enhance the resources and energy than an individual has rather than depleting them, and this therefore enhanced overall well-being. This suggestion is opposite of what was hypothesized in this study. Hypothesized in this study was that because of the many roles that participants in Graduate school have they would have a lower level of life satisfaction. More research should be done in the future to further examine this relationship.

In an experiment conducted by the researchers Bolin & Dodder (2001) they looked at life satisfaction of college students. What was found in their research was that many of the participants stated they felt on top of the world and yet depressed at the same time or interested in something but restless. In the present study it was found that many of the participants reported being dissatisfied with things such as their social support or work situation but they reported being very satisfied overall with their lives. These results showed that although one may not be happy with one aspect of life it does not completely ruin their overall life satisfaction.



Lastly, in 1998 Bailey & Miller conducted a study to determine if global life satisfaction in college students was related to active involvement in life. Their results showed that the majority of college students were generally satisfied with their lives, but the most satisfied students were happier because they believed that their lives were characterized by increased responsibility and roles. Their study also revealed that the students who were most satisfied derived a large amount of satisfaction from relationships and family. The present research did not question students on their relationships other than if they were married or not. Future research should be done on this topic.

#### Limitations

One major limitation of this study was that it was administered to only students enrolled in psychology courses. An original hypothesis of this study was going to focus on gender differences and the difference in life satisfaction depending on gender. Unfortunately, due to a lack of significant numbers of male participants this hypothesis was thrown out of the study. Because we were working with students, both undergraduate and graduate, enrolled in psychology classes it is sometimes hard to find males who are in these classes.

The survey used in this study was a previously created survey but because the original was so long it was cut down in size for this research in an effort to be time efficient for participants. Unfortunately, it is felt that cutting down the survey was a limitation because participants were not offered a large enough assortment of question to get them to think about their life satisfaction. Another limitation of the study in regards

to the survey used was that since life satisfaction is a subjective topic, participants may not have been completely truthful while answering the questions.

When working with a topic that is as subjective as life satisfaction it is important to remember that life satisfaction can fluctuate substantially over time, depending on the level of happiness that they are experiencing (Liu & Larose, 2008). This revealed to be a major limitation of the study. Participants took the survey from this study one time. Depending on when in the semester they took the survey their life satisfaction level could be completely different. Students may have felt a higher life satisfaction level in the beginning of the semester when work is less demanding than at the end.

#### Implications for Further Research

Since life satisfaction can fluctuate over time perhaps something to look at in future research would be to administer the survey to participants twice, once at the beginning of the semester and once again at the end of the semester, to see when life satisfaction is the highest.

As mentioned previously, the survey administered in this research was cut down from its original format because of the length of the original survey. In doing this, it is felt that important questions that should have been included in this study were not included. In future research it may be helpful for researchers to use the whole Satisfaction with Life Questionnaire to get a more accurate level of life satisfaction for participants.

Past research has shown that individuals who are happier with their lives achieve better life outcomes. Such outcomes include better financial success, mental health, relationships, coping skills, and even physical health and longevity (Cohn, Brown,

Fredrickson, & Mikels, 2009). Further research should be done at a later time to look at life satisfaction and the variables listed above.

It was found that previous research did not focus much on family and their effect on one's life satisfaction. This topic is one that was also not extensively focused on in this study. An implication for further research would be to focus specifically on siblings and parents and how they affect a student's life satisfaction. Another topic that has come out of previous research but has not really been focused on is life satisfaction in minorities. Deiner (1995) concluded that minorities generally have lower life satisfaction than whites do and this is perhaps because of lower socioeconomic status stresses. Future research should be done on this topic to get a better understanding of this culture.

## Conclusion

The results of this study were somewhat consistent with the hypotheses posed for this research. Although graduate students did not suffer lower life satisfaction in all areas of life they did have a lower level in most areas. The results showed that even though the graduate students did have a lower level of life satisfaction it is not as big of a difference as was expected. Previous research on the topic of life satisfaction is consistent in areas with this study, but the current study has shown areas of further research needed.

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APPENDIX  
Quality of Life Questionnaire

Please fill out the following demographic information:

Student Status:  Undergraduate Student  Graduate Student

Also include if you are a full time student or part time student: \_\_\_\_\_

GPA: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender:  Male  Female

Are you married?  Yes  No

Are you a parent?  Yes  No

Do you currently work?  Yes  No

If so, what is the status of your employment?  Full time  Part time

Please answer the following questions by putting a check mark next to the answer that best fits you.

1. In the past week, how often have you enjoyed your leisure hours (evenings, days off, etc.)?

*All the time*  4  
*Often*  3  
*Several times*  2  
*None of the time*  1

2. In the past week, how often have you felt preoccupied with your problems (can't think of anything else)?

*All the time*  4  
*Often*  3  
*Several times*  2  
*None of the time*  1

3. In the past week, how often have you been pleased with something you did?

*All the time*  4  
*Often*  3  
*Several times*  2  
*None of the time*  1

4. In the past week, how often have you felt unpleasantly different from everyone and everything around you?

*All the time* \_\_4  
*Often* \_\_3  
*Several times* \_\_2  
*None of the time* \_\_1

5. In the past week, how often have you felt proud because you were complimented?

*All the time* \_\_4  
*Often* \_\_3  
*Several times* \_\_2  
*None of the time* \_\_1

6. In the past week, how often have you felt that things were "going your way"?

*All the time* \_\_4  
*Often* \_\_3  
*Several times* \_\_2  
*None of the time* \_\_1

7. In the past week, how often have you felt angry?

*All the time* \_\_4  
*Often* \_\_3  
*Several times* \_\_2  
*None of the time* \_\_1

8. In the past week, how often have you felt mixed-up or confused?

*All the time* \_\_4  
*Often* \_\_3  
*Several times* \_\_2  
*None of the time* \_\_1

9. In the past week, how often have you felt like you've spent a worthwhile day?

*All the time* \_\_4  
*Often* \_\_3  
*Several times* \_\_2  
*None of the time* \_\_1

10. In the past week, how often have you had trouble with poor appetite, or inability to eat?

*All the time* \_\_4  
*Often* \_\_3  
*Several times* \_\_2  
*None of the time* \_\_1

11. In the past week, how often have you felt serene and calm?

*All the time* \_\_4  
*Often* \_\_3  
*Several times* \_\_2  
*None of the time* \_\_1

12. In the past week, how often have you had trouble with indigestion?

*All the time* \_\_4  
*Often* \_\_3  
*Several times* \_\_2  
*None of the time* \_\_1

13. In the past week, how often have you had trouble with fatigue?

*All the time* \_\_4  
*Often* \_\_3  
*Several times* \_\_2  
*None of the time* \_\_1

14. How much difficulty have you had handling frustration recently?

*Great difficulty* \_\_3  
*Some difficulty* \_\_2  
*No difficulty* \_\_1

15. How satisfied are you with your home – its state of repair, amount of room, furnishing, warmth, lighting, etc.?

*Very satisfied* \_\_4  
*Satisfied* \_\_3  
*Dissatisfied* \_\_2  
*Very dissatisfied* \_\_1

16. How satisfied are you with your home, considering the amount of privacy, your neighbors, security, etc.?

*Very satisfied* \_\_4  
*Satisfied* \_\_3  
*Dissatisfied* \_\_2  
*Very dissatisfied* \_\_1

17. In the last week, how often did you go out socially?

*More than 3 times* \_\_4  
*2 or 3 times* \_\_3  
*Once* \_\_2  
*Never* \_\_1

18. How confident are you in the decisions you make for yourself (what to buy, where to live, what to do, etc.)?

*Quite confident* \_\_4  
*Some confidence* \_\_3  
*Little confidence* \_\_2  
*No confidence* \_\_1

19. How often do you put off making important decisions until it is too late?

*Always* \_\_4  
*Often* \_\_3  
*Occasionally* \_\_2  
*Never* \_\_1

20. In the last week, how often have you spoken with people you saw at work or school or other daily activities?

*More than 3 times* \_\_4  
*2 or 3 times* \_\_3  
*Once* \_\_2  
*Never* \_\_1

21. *If married or living as married:* In the last month, how much have you enjoyed your spouse's company?

*A great deal* \_\_4  
*Quite a bit* \_\_3  
*A little* \_\_2  
*Not at all* \_\_1

22. How much would your family be of help and support if you were sick, or moving, or having any other kind of problem?

*A great deal* \_\_4  
*A lot* \_\_3  
*A little* \_\_2  
*None* \_\_1

23. How much would your friends be of help and support to you if you were sick, or moving, or having any other kind of problem?

*A great deal* \_\_4  
*A lot* \_\_3  
*A little* \_\_2  
*None* \_\_1

If you are working answer the following questions:

24. In the last month, how much time did you miss from work?

*Several days* \_\_4  
*A day or two* \_\_3  
*A little* \_\_2  
*None* \_\_1

25. In the last month, how much difficulty did you have in doing your work?

*A great deal* \_\_4  
*Quite a bit* \_\_3  
*An hour or so* \_\_2  
*None* \_\_1

26. How did you feel about the quality of work you did recently?

*Very good* \_\_4  
*Good* \_\_3  
*Bad* \_\_2  
*Very bad* \_\_1

27. In general, how much do you like your job?

*Really like it* \_\_4  
*Like it* \_\_3  
*Don't like it* \_\_2  
*Hate it* \_\_1

28. In the last week, how much time did you spend on your hobbies, creative pursuits, or games?

*20+ hours* \_\_4  
*8-20 hours* \_\_3  
*1-7 hours* \_\_2  
*None* \_\_1

29. Of the TV watching you did last week, how much time did you spend on really interesting programs?

*20+ hours* \_\_4  
*8-20 hours* \_\_3  
*1-7 hours* \_\_2  
*None* \_\_1

30. Overall, how satisfied are you with your life?

*Very Satisfied* \_\_\_\_4  
*Satisfied* \_\_\_\_3  
*Unsatisfied* \_\_\_\_2  
*Very Unsatisfied* \_\_1