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# Differences in life satisfaction among young adults in different living situations

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**DIFFERENCES IN LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN  
DIFFERENT LIVING SITUATIONS**

by  
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A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Psychology  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
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Thesis Chair: Matthew Miller, Ph.D.



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## ABSTRACT

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DIFFERENCES IN LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN  
DIFFERENT LIVING SITUATIONS  
2011/12  
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Differences in life satisfaction among young adults in different living situations were evaluated. The aims of this study were to use the Satisfaction with Life Scale to examine the differences in life satisfaction. Levels of depression as well as purpose in life were also evaluated using the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale and the Purpose in Life Scale. A total of 91 participants responses were included in the study, with 58 participants reporting living independently and 33 participants reporting living with parents. Independent *t*-tests found that individuals living at home report lower levels of life satisfaction compared to participants living independently. Additionally, individuals living independently report lower levels of depression. There was no difference in scores on the Purpose in Life scale. Further research implications are discussed.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

The U.S. Census Bureau recently released an article that examined the statistics related to how many young adults either return to their parents or never leave (2011). The Bureau found that between the years of 2005 and 2011 alone, the number of young adults continuing to live with their parents increased from 14% to 19% for men and 8% to 10% for women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). These increasing statistics are just looking at men and women aged 25 to 34. When looking at young adults between the ages of 18 and 24, about 59% of men and 50% of women are living with their parents. This trend of young adults continuing to live with their parents is not just happening in America. Comparing adults in Canada aged 25 to 29 between the years 1981 and 2001, adults staying home has increased from 12% to 24% and from 5% to 11% for those between the ages of 30 and 34 (Matarazzo, 2006). In addition to just the increase in living with parents, adults are also staying longer in the parental home and are more likely to return home after leaving (Glick & Lin, 1986; Heer, Hodge & Felson, 1985). Given the current status of the economy it is easy to suggest that the reason for young adults continuing to live at home is due to economic hardships; however, research finds that young adults began staying home at a higher rate than in the past before the recession had started (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

The media today is quick to inform the American public that more and more young adults are continuing to live with their parents past the age of what is considered to be the norm (Chevreau, 2011). Some of these reports go on to state that having adult children at home will cause economical struggles for the parents that will inevitably be

supporting these adults (Chevreau, 2011). Others state that having an adult child at home is sure to cause familial conflict and suggest that parents should consider kicking their adult children out of the house (Klimas, 2011). One blog writer, Christina Newberry, has created a website dedicated to helping parents survive the return of their children (2009). In all, most media reports and blogs seem to be looking at this growing issue from the parent's perspective and how having an adult child living at home will affect the parent. In addition, the overall attitude of the media presents this issue as a burden to parents. The current research has a similar trend, where the focus tends to be from the parent's point of view and does not take the adult-child into consideration.

### **Normative Role Transitions**

There are many different role changes that can occur in a young-adults' life that help to define the transition from adolescence to adulthood which include getting married, having a baby, gaining full-time employment and moving out of the house (Cohen, Kasen, Chen, Hartmark & Gordon, 2003). Historically, as well as currently in non-Western cultures, marriage was considered the main or defining transition to adulthood because with marriage also typically came financial and residential independence (Arnett, 1998). However, since World War II, marriage is being delayed by young adults in this generation when compared to previous generations, as well as other markers that had traditionally defined transitions to adulthood such as having a baby, financial independence, and as mentioned previously, moving out (Cohen et al, 2003; Arnett, 2000).

The rise in the average age of marriage began in America in the 1960's and within 30 years reached a new high – with 24.5 years being the average age of marriage for

women and 26.7 years for men (Arnett, 1998). Copen, Daniela, Vespa & Mosher (2012) recently published a report that looked at age of first marriage and found that the likelihood of a person being married by age 25 was 44% - a drop of about 25% since 1995. Similarly to the change in marriage, there has also been a change in achievements of higher education amongst young adults. In 1940, the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) reported that approximately one-fourth of the population over the age of 25 had a high school diploma. By 2009, 87% of the population held a high school diploma. When looking at number of bachelor's degrees held by the population – in 1940, only 5% of the population over the age of 25 held bachelor's degrees. Again, by 2009, 30% of the population has earned bachelor's degrees. However, adults are obtaining college educations in a “non-linear way”, specifically those aged 25-29, with planned/unplanned breaks and working through school (Arnett, 2000). Therefore, graduation is less definitive as a marker for adulthood, as some American's do not graduate until later in life, which could also be indicative of a prolonged adolescence. Researchers agree that the rate at which young adults in America make all of these transitions is varying. The transition to adulthood and independence seems to be a more gradual process than it had been historically (Cohen, Kasen, Chen, Hartmark, & Gordon, 2003).

Due to the above changes in young American's behaviors, there has arisen what Arnett (2000) defines as “emerging adulthood”, or a period when the adult is neither dependent nor independent from his or her parents. “Emerging adulthood” is typically defined by those between the ages of 18 and 25. During this time, a great amount of change occurs, such as finding employment, going to school and graduating, possibly having children and getting married. It is at this stage in life, where adults have the

highest rate of changes in their living situations when compared to other adults. These changes in living situations can include moving back and forth to a college campus, moving out on their own and returning to the parental home for various reasons (Rindfuss, 1991). Interestingly, individuals in this stage in life are aware that they are in a period of trying to come into their own and often do not define themselves as adults (Arnett, 2000).

While social norms contribute to what are considered to be appropriate role transitions to adulthood, so do young adult's attitudes towards these transitions. Arnett (1997) surveyed 486 young adults aged 21 to 28 to determine what they perceived to be a part of the transition to adulthood. Graduation, full-time employment, marriage and parent-hood were not considered to be important markers of adulthood for the sample surveyed, which are more traditional or historic markers of adulthood. Instead, the majority of participants reported that financial independence from parents and living away from parents were considered to be important transitions to adulthood. Other factors reported were not necessarily stages (i.e. graduating or moving out) but processes, such as being equal with parents or being able to make decisions and accepting responsibility for one's behavior. Arnett argues that these responses are tied to the individualistic nature of the American society, and that non-Western or industrialized cultures still consider marriage to be the defining transition to adulthood.

Since the transition to adulthood presents itself with a lot of changes, it is important to look at how these changes affect different aspects of the population. Aquilino (1997) interviewed 1,507 parents in order to examine the parent-child relationship at this stage in life. Aquilino found that leaving the parental house seems to

have the greatest influence on changing the relationships between the parent and child, as the parent recognizes that the child is becoming more independent. Parents also see marriage as an important marker of adulthood as well as greater independence. Just as a child's conceptualization of adulthood is important to consider, so are familial expectations that could be influencing the young adult and it is found that most parents expect that their child will leave the household in young adulthood (Mitchell, 1998). In fact, some parents expect that their child will be out of the house as early as 18 years of age, which could be indicative of the parent's having more traditional views of adulthood (Clemens & Axelson, 1985).

Leaving the parental home is not always "a straightforward event" (Buck & Scott, 1993). For example, in Australia, one study found that 50% of men and 40% of women return to live with their parents after having left for some time. Returning home was more common in those that did not leave the house to be married, but rather for other reasons such as school, travel, living with roommates, etc (Young, 1984 as cited in Buck & Scott, 1993). There are gender differences found in rates that adults leave home. Women tend to leave the parental household, and in fact make other transitions, at younger ages compared to men and are also less likely to return to the parental home (Ward, & Spitze, 1992). There are many reasons a young adult may be living or returning to the parental home, including financial problems, to save money, unemployed or just trouble getting "on his or her feet" (Clemens & Axelson, 1985). Whatever the reason is, not living independently could influence the individual's satisfaction with life.

## **Life Satisfaction**

Shin and Johnson (as cited in Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffen, 1985) define life satisfaction as a “global assessment of a person’s quality of life according to his chosen criteria”. Life satisfaction is a subjective positive measure of the respondent’s well being. Life satisfaction allows for the individual to make judgments on his or her satisfaction based on the standards that individual places on his or herself, not what other people deem to be an appropriate standard (Diener, 1984). While measuring life satisfaction is subjective compared to other psychological instruments, it is still important to study as it can affect mental health.

Despite the growing evidence that young adults are staying in the parental home at an increasing rate since the 1980s, there is little research available as to how these living arrangements may or may not affect that young adult (Matarazzo, 2006). However, there is research that examines parent’s satisfaction with life when they have an adult child living in the house. The research to date is mixed on parent’s satisfaction with the living arrangement. Mitchell (2008) conducted a study of 420 families that were interviewed over the phone in order to measure parental satisfaction. Mitchell found that parents that were single, divorced, or widowed were more likely to be very satisfied with having their adult child living at home. Parents were less likely to be satisfied if a daughter were continuing to live at home compared to a son. Parents were more satisfied with the arrangement when the adult child contributed to household chores and offered financial support, as well as when a child was returning home from college, rather than traveling. That being stated, other studies have found that a majority of adult children living in the parental household do not contribute financially or assist with

household chores and therefore are dissatisfied when their children live with them (Clemens & Axelson, 1985; Ward & Spitze, 1992). Conversely, Aquilino and Supple's (1991) study of 609 parent's with adult children living in the home found that not contributing financially through paying rent did not significantly impact parental satisfaction.

Similar conflicting reports have been found in other studies. Clemens and Axelson (1985) studied previous information from 39 families that had adult children living at home. About 48% of the families studied reported that having an adult child at home was putting a strain on their marriage. Also found in this study was that the older the young adult, the less satisfied the parent's were, as 80% of parents did not plan to have their child still living with them at or beyond age 22. Likewise, Umberson (1992) also found that parent's were not satisfied with adult children living at home and reported more of a strain on the parent-child relationship. On the other hand Aquilino (1991), who interview 851 parents that had children between the ages of 19 and 34 still living at home, found that approximately 70% of parents were very satisfied with their adult child living at home, with only about 17% reporting great dissatisfaction. In addition, it was found that the more conflict between parent and child, or the more intense the conflict between parent and child, the less satisfied the parents were with having their child live at home.

Previous research concerning the young adults viewpoints in different living situations, while very limited, is more consistent in its findings. Lee (2007) analyzed data from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health, giving the research a total of 7,619 participants to look at life satisfaction. Lee's research did not focus strictly

on life satisfaction and living arrangements but on other adult transitions as well. Lee found that adult women that had transitioned from living at home with parent's to living independently reported to have significantly higher levels of life satisfaction than those women that had lived independently and returned to the parental home. Women that had made transitions to employment, relationship and motherhood also showed greater life satisfaction than those that did not reach those transitions. Bell and Lee (2008a) looked at this same group of women again and determined that although some of these transitions are perceived as stressful, women undertaking these transitions actually felt and reported less stress than the women that had not undergone normative transitions. It was found again that stress levels among these Australian women were highest in women that had moved back into the parental home or had never left.

### **Mental Health**

It has been found that higher levels of life satisfaction lead to lower levels of depression and loneliness, better health, positive self-esteem, good income and lower levels of anxiety (Beutel, Glaesmer, Wiltink, Marian, & Brähler, 2010; Koivumaa-Honkanen, Kaprio, Honkanen, Viinamäki, & Koskenvuo, 2004; Swami et al 2007). Conversely, lower levels of life satisfaction can lead to mental health issues. If a young adult is living with parents and there is great conflict, Galambos, Barker and Krahn (2006) found that these young adults report higher levels of depression and anger. Additionally, older adults (closer to turning 30) that continue to live with their parents report higher levels of depressive symptoms than younger adults (closer to age 21) that continue to live with their parents (Galambos & Krahn, 2008).



As mentioned previously, continuing to live in the parental home or returning to the parental home can cause higher levels of stress than individuals living independently (Bell & Lee, 2008a). If a young adult is not able to handle stress properly, he or she could develop unhealthy coping mechanisms such as smoking or heavy drinking (Martikainen, 2008).

High level of stress is not the only negative emotion that seems to be common among young adults still living at home (Bell & Lee, 2008a; Clemens & Axelson, 1985). Shaver (as cited in Clemens & Axelson, 1985) reported that among young adults, those that report feeling the loneliest are not adults living alone, but rather adults still living in the parental home. This is likely because these adults witness friends moving away from home to establish families or careers, or gain new relationships and friendships that the young adults is not a part of. Feelings of loneliness can lead or contribute to feelings of depression, and it has been found that more medical and psychological problems are found in people that report being lonely (Rubinstein, Shaver, & Peplau, 1979).

### **Present Study**

This study aims to look at life satisfaction among young adults that have made normative transitions out of the parental home versus those that have not moved out of the parental home, or have moved back after a time. Prior research is limited in that there are few studies that look at the adults satisfaction with life, but rather their parents satisfaction with the adult child living with them (Aquilino & Supple, 1991; Clemens & Axelson, 1985; Ward & Spitze, 1992). This too is inconsistent as some researchers have found parents to be satisfied with their children residing with them and some are not satisfied. Research that does focus on the young adult is limited in that the information

that is being analyzed is taken from women at three-year intervals without knowing about significant changes in the participants lives that could have been related to a decline in mental health (Bell & Lee, 2008a; Lee & Gramotnev, 2007). Prior research is also limited in that there has not been much research done on the topic in general. Research is strongly focused on relations between parents and young children or adults and their elderly parents (Aquilino & Supple, 1991).

Research in this field could benefit mental health counselors that work with young adults to help better understand what the client is going through. To be able to understand how this specific transition may lead to different life satisfaction scores compared to peers that have achieved this transition will help professionals to develop strategies to assist individuals in coping with this stage in life, as well as help them overcome obstacles in order to help them move out of the house (Bell & Lee, 2008a). Also, this study is important as it can assist with generating more research that looks at the family dynamics and mental health issues of adults living at home versus their independent counterparts. A young adult living at home may be more immature than their peers living independently as they may not have as much responsibility (Clemens & Axelson, 1985). Since the rate of young adults continuing to live at home has only increased over the past twenty years, it will be important for the researchers to look at how this may affect individuals.

While the age range for what is considered to be young adulthood varies, this research will focus on individuals between the ages of 21 to 29. Age 21 was selected as the younger end cut-off in hopes to attain more participants that have a college degree, which would ensure that the participant has made at least one normative transition to

adulthood. Age 29 was selected as the older cut-off in order to control for higher levels of depression in older adults that continue to live with their parents (Galambos & Krahn, 2008). Also, the older the participant, the greater chance that there are other factor's coming into play that may affect his or her satisfaction with life as well as potential developmental factors that are outside the realm of this study. The research on this age group is limited due to little access that researcher's have to large groups of participants when compared to research on college-aged students or the elderly residing in nursing homes. However, with the accessibility and popularity of social networking websites, this research hopes to begin to bring to light issues this age group could be facing.

Despite the current research showing that adults living with-in the home are less likely to assist with household chores or contribute financially to their parents – therefore having less responsibilities that those adults that live independently, this author hypothesizes that those living at home will be less satisfied with life than those that have moved out of the home. It is also hypothesized that individuals living with parents and either unemployed or not in school will be less satisfied with life than those either attending school or working. This author hypothesizes that individuals living with parents will report higher levels of depression than those living independently as well as higher scores on the purpose in life scale.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

A total of 106 participants completed the study. However, responses from ten participants were omitted as they were older than 30 years of age, and this research is focusing on individuals in their 20's. Additionally, five participants that did not complete the questionnaire were also omitted, leaving a final sample of 91 participants (76% female and 24% male). Participants ranged in age from 21 to 29, with eight participants not reporting their age. The majority of participants identified as Caucasian (84%), followed by African American (5%), Asian (3%), Pacific Islander (1%), other (1%), and from multiple races (4%). The majority of participants reported having a Bachelor's degree (50%), followed by a Graduate degree (28%), some graduate work (16%), a Doctorate degree (2%), while three participants did not respond. Regarding occupational status, working full-time was reported by the majority of participants (58%), followed by student and working part-time (13%), working part-time (10%), student and working full-time (9%), student (8%), and unemployed (2%). Finally a total of 58 participants (64%) reported living independently and 33 participants (36%) reported living with their parents. See Table 1 for more information regarding demographics.

#### **Procedure**

Participants gained access to this study through social networking websites, such as Facebook. Participants were informed that the study was anonymous and voluntary and that they could drop out of the study at any time. They were informed that the researcher was examining the differences in life satisfaction among young adults.

Participants then completed measures relating to living arrangements, life satisfaction, depression and purpose in life. At the end of the survey, participants were debriefed and given information for a hotline to locate nearby counseling services if desired, as well as information to contact this researcher about any questions regarding their participation. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the author's institution approved this study.

## **Measures**

**Demographic questionnaire.** Participants were first asked for information regarding age, gender, race, marital status, number of children, and level of education. In addition, information regarding living arrangements was also obtained. Participants chose from "living with parents", "living independently", "living independently with spouse", "living independently with roommates", "living on a college campus", or "other". If the answerer reported living with his or her parents, the participant was further asked how long he or she has been living there, how long he or she plans to continue living there, and if he or she is able to financially support themselves independently. Finally, those participants living with their parents answered two open ended questions: five reasons they are living with their parents and what they hope to accomplish by living with their parents (Appendix A).

**Satisfaction with Life Scale.** The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985) is a 5-item scale measuring life satisfaction based on the participant's own standards of evaluating his or her life rather than where they "should" be in their lives. Each statement on the scale is rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The higher the overall score, the more satisfied one is considered to be with their life at the moment. The SWLS is a

widely used scale that has good internal consistency, with a reported cronbach's alpha of .87 (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffen, 1985). The SWLS also has a correlation between .35 and .82 against other measures of life satisfaction (Pavot & Diener, 1993; Appendix B).

**Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale.** The Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977) is a 20-item self-report scale created to identify depressive symptoms. Participants are asked to reflect on how they may have felt or behaved over the past week and answer on a 4 point Likert scale with 1=rarely or none of the time and 4=most or all of the time. Scores are added together after reverse scoring the four positively framed items on the test. Scores can range from 0 to 60, with higher scores denote greater levels of depression. Sample statements include “Depressed mood most of the day” and “markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all or almost all activities”. The CES-D has been found to have good internal consistency within the general population, with a cronbach's alpha between 0.85 and .90 (Al-Modallal, 2010; Radloff, 1997). The CES-D has been found to have a correlation of .70 against the Beck's Depression Inventory (Roberts et al., 1991; Appendix C).

**Purpose in Life Scale.** The Purpose in Life Scale (PLS; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964) is a 20-item scale that examines a person's meaning and purpose in life. Participants answer on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 = low purpose and 7= high purpose. After completing the scale, the scores are added up, with higher scores indicating more meaningfulness in life. This scale has been found to have good internal consistency, with a reported cronbach alpha of 0.85 (Crumbaugh, 1968). The PLS has been correlated

against the MMPI and has been found to have a correlation of .65 (Crumbaugh;  
Appendix D).

## CHAPTER III

### Results

An independent *t*-test was conducted to examine the differences in life satisfaction among young adults living at home versus those not living at home. Results revealed that there were significant differences in satisfaction with life scores when looking at the two groups ( $t(89) = 2.28, p = .02$ ). Specifically, those living independently reported higher levels of life satisfaction ( $M = 26.59, SD = 5.99$ ) than those living with parents ( $M = 23.45, SD = 6.75$ ). The effect size was  $d = 0.49$ , which is a small effect size. In order to attempt to control for individuals that may be suffering from moderate to severe depression, which may lower life satisfaction scores, a CES-D cut-off score of 24 was applied and the independent *t*-test was reanalyzed (Zich, Attkisson & Greenfield, 1990). Results included 79 participants (living independently  $n = 52$ ; living with parents  $n = 27$ ) and still found a significant difference in satisfaction with life scores ( $t(77) = 2.64, p = .01$ ). Those living independently still reported higher levels of life satisfaction ( $M = 27.98, SD = 4.86$ ) than those living with parents ( $M = 24.25, SD = 6.85$ ). The effect size was  $d = 0.59$ , which is a medium effect size.

The majority of participants reported being very satisfied (scores between 25-29; 39.5%), followed by highly satisfied (scores between 30-35; 28.5%), somewhat satisfied (scores between 20-24; 15.5%), dissatisfied (scores between 10-14; 8.8%), somewhat dissatisfied (scores between 15-19; 6.6%) and finally extremely dissatisfied (scores between 5-9; 1.1%).

An independent *t*-test was conducted to examine the differences in reported levels of depression among adults living at home versus those living independently. Prior to



analysis, those participants that did not complete the CES-D were removed before running the ANOVA, which left 83 participants scores remaining, 53 which lived independently and 30 which lived with parents. Results revealed that there were significant differences in depressive symptoms when looking at the two groups ( $t(81) = -2.46, p = .016$ ). Those living independently reported lower levels of depression ( $M = 10.35, SD = 8.38$ ) than those living with parents ( $M = 15.86, SD = 11.86$ ). The effect size was  $d = 0.53$ , a medium effect size.

A third independent  $t$ -test was conducted to examine the differences in reported purpose in life among adults living at home versus those living independently. Prior to analysis, those participants that did not complete the Purpose in Life Scale were removed before running the ANOVA, which left 83 participants scores remaining, 53 which lived independently and 30 which lived with parents. Results revealed that there were no significant differences in Purpose in Life scores between the two groups ( $t(81) = .43, p = .60$ ).

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine if the participants' marital status, number of children, occupational status, or employment status were influencing scores on the satisfaction with life scale. Results found no significant correlation between the above variables and scores on the SWLS scale ( $F(4,83) = 1.03, p = .37$ ). The multiple correlation was  $.22, R^2 = .05, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .001$ .

Independent  $t$ -tests were also conducted to examine potential gender differences on life satisfaction, depression and purpose in life. When looking at males, 14 living independently and 8 living with their parents, there were no differences in scores on the SWLS ( $t(18) = .70, p = .49$ ), the CES-D ( $t(16) = -.61, p = .55$ ), or the PIL ( $t(18) = -1.89,$

$p = .07$ ),. Looking only at females (living independently  $n=44$ ; living with parents  $n=25$ ) found significant differences on both the SWLS ( $t(67) = .22, p = .03$ ) and the CES-D ( $t(60) = -2.90, p = .005$ ). Similar to previous results, females living independently were more satisfied ( $M = 26.66, SD = 6.03$ ) than those living with parents ( $M = 23.16, SD = 6.82$ ). Also as reported above, females living independently reported less symptoms of depression ( $M = 10.49, SD = 8.84$ ) than those living with their parents ( $M = 18.43, SD = 12.51$ ). Purpose in life scores revealed no difference for females ( $t(61) = 1.58, p = .12$ ).

A total of 33 participants reported living with their parents (Female,  $N = 24$ ; Male,  $N = 8$ ). The majority of these participants fell between the ages of 23 to 26 ( $M = 24.66, SD = 1.91$ ). Most participants reported living with parents interrupted for three years or more (33.3%), followed by 0-6 months (24.2%), between 2 and 3 years (18.2%), between 1 and 2 years (15.2%), and finally 6-12 months (6.1%). Most participants planned to continue living with their parents for another 6-12 months (24.2%), followed by another 0-6 months (18.2%), 3-5 years (12.1%), 1-2 years (11%), and finally 2-3 years (9.1%). A total of twenty-three participants (69.7%) reported being unable to financially support themselves independently from their parents, while ten participants (30.3%) reported that they were able to support themselves financially.

Answers to open-ended questions were recoded in order to analyze results. The first question allowed participants to give five separate answers. The majority of respondents listed convenience as their reason other than the economy for continuing to live with parents after graduation followed by saving money, unemployed, attending school, helping parents, financial difficulties, paying off debt, and finally culture. Convenience was reported by the majority of participants as the second reason they

continued to live at home followed by unable to afford to leave home, desire to live with parents, helping parents, save money, and other reasons. Convenience was again reported by the majority of participants as the third reason they continued to live at home followed by other reasons, school, financial difficulties, save money, nobody else to live with, and paying off debt. The majority of respondents listed convenience as the fourth reason for continuing to live home, followed by paying off debt, enjoy living at home, save money, financial difficulties, and helping parents. For the final answer, the majority of respondents listed unable to afford to, convenience, other reasons, not the right time, paying off debt, and want to/enjoy it. See Table 2 for more information.

The final open-ended question was also recoded in order to analyze results. Twenty-eight participants (84.8%) reported that what they hoped to accomplish by living at home was to save money, followed by two participants (6.1%) hoping to pay off debt, one participant (3.0%) hoping to earn a degree, and one participant (3.0%) that reports not having anything to accomplish.

## CHAPTER IV

### Discussion

#### Conclusions

Overall, results supported the hypothesis that young adults living independently would report significantly higher levels of life satisfaction than young adults continuing to live with their parents. The second hypothesis that individuals living with parents would report significantly higher levels of depression than those living independently was also supported. The third hypothesis, that individuals living with parents would have lower scores on the Purpose in Life Scale, was not supported. Specifically, there was no significant difference between groups when looking at purpose in life scores (see Figure 1). These findings are consistent with previous research reporting that lower levels of life satisfaction can lead to higher levels of depression (Beutel, Glaesmer, Wiltink, Marian, & Brähler, 2010; Koivumaa-Honkanen, Kaprio, Honkanen, Viinamäki, & Koskenvuo, 2004; Swami et al 2007).

Interestingly, there were no significant correlations between lower levels of life satisfaction and other role transitions. This seems to be consistent with previous research, which reports that young adults define the transition to adulthood as gaining independence from parents (Arnett, 1997; Aquilino, 1997). This research supports the notion that living independently is a more definitive indicator of gaining independence from parents when compared having a full-time job.

Young adulthood is associated with constant life changes and is considered a time to figure out and work towards goals, it is possible that this is the reason for no significant differences in scores on the PIL. Living with parents, as evidenced by the

results on the open-ended questions, does not appear to affect purpose or meaning in life, as the majority of participants were able to verbalize clear goals they hoped to achieve by living with parents. These goals included saving enough money to be able to live independently, pay for school, or pay for a wedding. One 24 year-old female participant stated her overall attitude about living with her parents:

As I get older, I have noticed I don't have enough privacy here. When I was 22 I loved living here but at 24, after living alone for 2.5 years in college...and the fact that I have a boyfriend now...I am anxious to get out of my Mom's even though I do still like many aspects of living here.

It is possible that other participants living with parents share a similar attitude. Based on this attitude, it is likely that as young adults get older, their overall satisfaction with life could decrease as they continue to live with their parents. Many participants' responses to this question included "smart way to save money", "practical", "convenient", but only two participants wrote that living with their parents was enjoyable. This could indicate that there is more conflict between parent and child than previous research has reported, or that young adults still strive to be independent from their parent's despite the picture that the media paints for the general population.

### **Limitations and future research**

A limitation of this study includes the small sample size. The sample size of 91 makes it difficult to generalize results to all young adults. In addition to the small sample size, there were many participants that did not complete the CES-D and Purpose in Life scales, further making it difficult to generalize these specific results to the young adult population. Ideally, future research would benefit from having more male

participants, as this sample included only 20 males, the majority of which lived independently. Current literature suggests that males living with parents are more accepted by their parents to continue living at home and that males are not required to make as many contributions to the parental home as females (Clemens & Axelson, 1985; Ward & Spitze, 1992). This could be contributing to the current results, which finds that men are not reporting a significant difference in life satisfaction and depression based on living arrangements than their female counterparts.

This researcher intended to conduct analysis only with individuals that had already obtained a bachelor's degree and so this survey was posted on Alumni social-networking websites. However, since these websites are not limited to only alumni, it is possible that individuals that have not earned their bachelor's degree participated in the study. It is unclear at this time whether or not this would have an effect on the results. The purpose of having only participants that graduated from college was to target individuals that have completed at least one of the role transitions, as well as to try and control for individuals that may be unemployed in this economy due to not having a degree or not wanting to be employed if going to school full-time. In order to better control for this in future research, when demographic information is being collected, an option that indicates the participant is currently enrolled in a bachelor's program should be included.

A larger sample size would also allow for researchers to examine differences in levels of satisfaction among young adults in their 20's. It is likely that 22-year-old individuals may report higher levels of satisfaction than individuals 25 or 28 years old. This research left out individuals in their 30's for this reason, but it would be beneficial to

examine differences within 20 year olds in order to further differentiate the needs of young adults. The small sample size of this study did not allow the researcher to look at such differences.

This research indicates that young adults living independently are more satisfied than young adults living at home. Yet a limitation in this current research is that a reason for this is not given. Further questioning should be introduced in order to determine why young adults living at home are less satisfied than those living independently. There did not seem to be any significant correlation between other role transitions and life satisfaction in this study, and so it is possible that a reason for lower levels of satisfaction could be the relationship with the parent, rules placed on the adult, or a combination of factors that could not be determined within the scope of this study. Either way, research would benefit from examining potential reasons for this instead of speculating possible reasons for lower satisfaction. Also, since this is a cross-sectional study, it was not possible to determine if depression is the reason young adults are living at home or if they are reporting higher levels of depression because of living at home.

A strength in this study is the finding that young adults are willing to participate in research studies available to them on social networking websites. There is not a lot of research on young adults in the mainstream population as they are not as easily accessible; especially individuals that have graduated college, as many college students participate in surveys to meet certain major/classroom requirements. The participants in this study were not compensated for their time in any way, which hopefully yielded more honest results as participants were not trying to reach the end in order to receive

compensation as well as they likely participated in the survey because the topic interested them.

The findings in the study are important to the clinical field. If a therapist is understanding of how living with parents may affect the individuals satisfaction with life and levels of depression, a more appropriate treatment approach can be applied versus if this information were to go unrecognized in therapy. Diener (2006) suggests that persons that report scores that indicate either dissatisfaction or extreme dissatisfaction, seek help from a counselor in order to assist the person in making positive changes. A therapist would also benefit from examining the maturity level of his or her client as well as their responsibilities in the home, which could also be potential reasons for either depression or not leaving the parental house.

In addition, future research or clinical implications may focus on how adolescents and young adults can perhaps better prepare themselves for adulthood in order to make necessary transitions. Do young adults have realistic ideals about what life should be like the first time on their own? At what age are individuals actively planning on making transitions to adulthood, and is it soon enough? Or are individuals waiting until college is over before they try to create a plan (the same time loans begin, the job search begins, and figuring out living arrangements)? Has it become socially acceptable to extend an individuals dependence his or her parents? These are all questions that need to be answered in future research in order to further determine the direction future clinical and perhaps educational paths.



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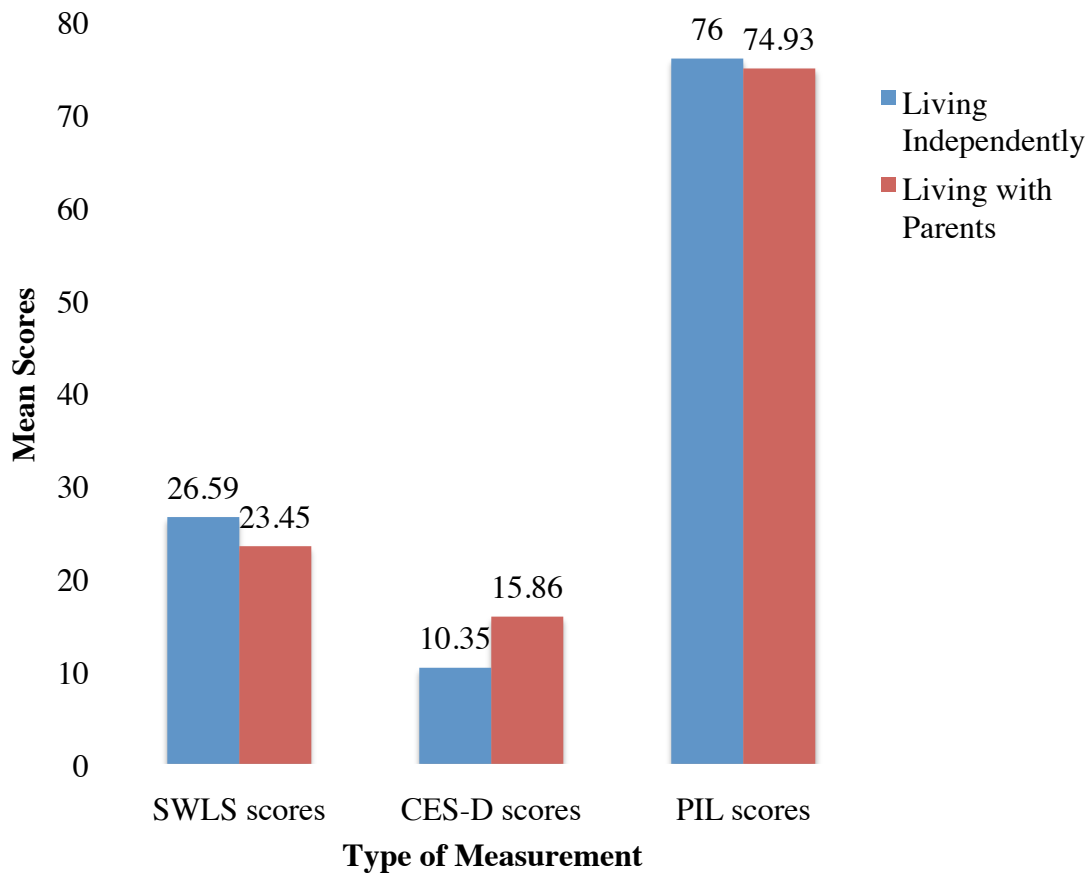
Table 1. *Demographic Information Based on Living Arrangements*

Demographic Information		Living Arrangements		Total (N=91)
		Living Independently (N=58)	Living with Parents (N=33)	
Gender	Male	14	8	22
	Female	44	25	69
Race	White	51	26	77
	African-American	1	4	5
	Asian	2	1	3
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	1	1
	From Multiple Race	4	0	4
	Other	0	1	1
Educational Achievement	Bachelor's Degree	28	18	46
	Graduate Degree	15	10	25
	Some Graduate Work	11	4	15
	Doctorate Degree	2	0	2
Marital Status	Single	24	22	46
	In long term relationship	18	8	26
	Married	14	2	16
	Divorced	2	1	3
Number of Children	0	55	31	86
	1	1	0	1
	2	2	2	4
Occupational Status	Unemployed/ Not working	0	2	2
	Working part-time	1	8	9
	Working full-time	39	14	53
	Student	5	2	7
	Student and working part-time	7	5	12
	Student and working full-time	6	2	8

Table 2. *Reasons for Continuing to Live with Parents*

Reason	Percentile
Convenience	29%
Financial difficulties/Can't afford to	15%
Save money	12%
Enjoy it/Want to	9%
Other	8%
Helping parents	7%
Attending school	6%
Paying off debt	6%
Unemployed	4%
Single/Nobody to live with	2%
Not right area or time	2%
Culture	1%

*Note:* sum is >100% due to multiple responses from each participant



*Figure 1.* Participant's scores on three measures

## Appendix A

### Demographic Information:

How old are you? (open ended)

Gender: Male      Female

Race: Caucasian      African American      Asian      American Indian  
Pacific Islander      From multiple races      Other (please specify)

1. What is your educational achievement?

Bachelor's degree

Graduate Degree

Some graduate work

Doctorate Degree

2. What is your marital status?

Single, never married

In a long term relationship

Married

Divorced

Widowed

3. How many children do you have? 0      1      2      3      4      5+

4. What is your occupational status?

Unemployed/not working

Working part time

Working full time

Student

Student and working part time

Student and working full time

5. What are your living arrangements?



- Living with parent(s)
- Living independently
- Living independently with spouse
- Living independently with roommates
- Living on a college campus
- Other (please specify)

6. If you are living with parent(s), how long have you been there uninterrupted?

- 0-6 months
- 6-12 months
- 1-2 years
- 2-3 years
- 3+ years

8. How long do you plan to live with your parent(s)?

- 0-6 months
- 6-12 months
- 1-2 years
- 2-3 years
- 3-5 years
- Indefinitely

7. Are you able to financially support yourself independently from your parent(s)?

- Yes
- No

8. The economy is not good. Young adults are continuing to live with their parent's after graduation from college. Besides the economy, list 5 reasons you are living with your parent(s):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

9. What do you hope to accomplish by living with your parent(s)? (open ended)

## Appendix B

Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin (1985): Satisfaction with Life Scale

Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6 - Agree
- 5 - Slightly agree
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 - Slightly disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 - Strongly disagree

\_\_\_\_\_ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

\_\_\_\_\_ The conditions of my life are excellent.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am satisfied with my life.

\_\_\_\_\_ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.

\_\_\_\_\_ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

## Appendix C

Radloff (1977): Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale

Below is a list of the ways you might have felt or behaved. Please indicate how often you have felt this way **during the past week**.

- 1 = Rarely or none of the time (less than one day)
- 2 = Some or a little of the time (1-2 days)
- 3 = Occasionally or a moderate amount of time (3-4 days)
- 4 = Most or all of the time (5-7 days)

1. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me:	1	2	3	4
2. I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor:	1	2	3	4
3. I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from family or friends:	1	2	3	4
4. I felt that I was just as good as other people:	1	2	3	4
5. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing:	1	2	3	4
6. I felt depressed:	1	2	3	4
7. I felt that everything I did was an effort:	1	2	3	4
8. I felt hopeful about the future:	1	2	3	4
9. I thought my life had been a failure:	1	2	3	4
10. I felt fearful:	1	2	3	4
11. My sleep was restless:	1	2	3	4
12. I was happy:	1	2	3	4
13. I talked less than usual:	1	2	3	4
14. I felt lonely:	1	2	3	4
15. People were unfriendly:	1	2	3	4
16. I enjoyed life:	1	2	3	4
17. I had crying spells:	1	2	3	4
18. I felt sad:	1	2	3	4
19. I felt that people disliked me:	1	2	3	4
20. I could not get "going":	1	2	3	4

## Appendix D

Crumbaugh & Maholick (1964): Purpose in Life Scale

Select the number (1 to 5) next to each statement that is most true for you right now:

- |   |   |   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1. I am usually:                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| bored                                   |   |   |   |   | enthusiastic   |
| 2. Life to me seems:                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| completely routine                      |   |   |   |   | always exciting  |
| 3. In life I have:                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| no goals or aims                        |   |   |   |   | clear goals and aims                                       |
| 4. My personal existence is:            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| utterly meaningless,<br>without purpose |   |   |   |   | purposeful<br>and meaningful                               |
| 5. Everyday is:                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| exactly the same                        |   |   |   |   | constantly new<br>and different                            |
| 6. If I could chose, I would:           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| prefer never to<br>have been born       |   |   |   |   | want 9 more lives<br>just like this one                    |
| 7. After retiring, I would:             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| loaf completely<br>the rest of my life  |   |   |   |   | do some of the exciting<br>things I've always wanted to do |
| 8. In achieving life goals I've:        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| made no progress<br>whatsoever          |   |   |   |   | progressed to<br>complete fulfillment                      |
| 9. My life is:                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| empty, filled only<br>with despair      |   |   |   |   | running over with<br>exciting things                       |
| 10. If I should die today               |   |   |   |   |  |
| I'd feel my life has been:              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| Completely worthless                    |   |   |   |   | very worthwhile  |

11. In thinking of my life, I: 1 2 3 4 5  
often wonder why I exist always see reasons for being here
12. As I view that world in relation to my life, the world: 1 2 3 4 5  
completely confuses me fits meaningfully with my life
13. I am a: 1 2 3 4 5  
very irresponsible person very responsible person
14. Concerning freedom to chose, I believe humans are: 1 2 3 4 5  
Completely bound by Limitations of heredity and environment totally free to make all life choices
15. With regard to death, I am: 1 2 3 4 5  
unprepared and frightened prepared and unafraid
16. Regarding suicide, I have: 1 2 3 4 5  
thought of it seriously as a way out never given it a second thought
17. I regard my ability to find purpose or mission in life as: 1 2 3 4 5  
practically none very great
18. My life is: 1 2 3 4 5  
out of my hands and controlled by external factors in my hands and I'm in control of it
19. Facing my daily tasks is: 1 2 3 4 5  
a painful and boring experience a source of pleasure & satisfaction
20. I have discovered: 1 2 3 4 5  
no mission or purpose in life a satisfying life purpose