

Entering the "Real World": An Empirical Investigation of College Graduates'

Satisfaction With Life

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INTRODUCTION

According to Arnett (2000), the distinct developmental time period, following adolescence and preceding adulthood (i.e., ages 18-25), is characterized by instability, vast changes, experimentation, and diverse possibilities in areas such as education, work, and intimate relationships. Indeed, within the past 50 years, notable demographic changes in the attainment of adulthood status have taken place (Arnett, 2000), including: age at first childbirth, age of marriage, participation in higher education, and rate of residential change. Emerging adults have willingly delayed the role transitions that have traditionally been the markers of adulthood, such as marriage, child rearing, establishing a career and financial stability, and consequently, full adulthood is reached later in life than it has been historically (Arnett, 2004). Arnett (2000) clarifies that emerging adulthood is not a period when mental health functioning is simply better or worse than other developmental age periods; rather it is a period of more diversity.

Discernible stress, difficulties, and challenges constitute much of the experience of individuals ages 21-28 (Arnett, 2000; Kenny & Sirin, 2006; Schulenberg, Bryant, & O'Malley, 2004), thus, it is imperative that the specificity and high functioning of college graduates are highlighted in the wake of psychological discord. Emphasis must be placed not only on symptomology, or lack thereof, exhibited by college graduates, but rather, on the factors of their context and perceptions of such contexts that lead to more satisfactory assessments of their current lives. Empirical research is needed on this specific population of emerging adults, preferably within a framework that accounts for the aforementioned diversity and transitivity.

Although many young people are taking longer to complete school, Bowlby (2000) suggests that young people may also be taking longer to find work after graduation than has historically been the case. Unemployment and underemployment, in addition to job loss, have

been highlighted in the psychological literature as relevant to study of mental health (Dooley, 2003; Dooley, Prause, & Ham-Rowbottom, 2000). Dooley (2003), however, makes note of the tendency of existing studies on unemployment to focus on job loss as a major contributor to psychological maladjustment, often as a function of financial strain. It is a wonder to what degree these findings are applicable to the specific population of college graduates who are often just entering the workforce as career professionals. Perhaps, more relevant to the experience of college graduates is the body of literature that examines the school-to-work transition (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Cable & Parsons, 2001; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2005; Nelson, Quick, & Eakin, 1988), although these findings are similarly discordant due to their emphases on graduates' adjustment specifically to the workplace and limited exploration of life outside employment organizations. Nonetheless, findings regarding the school-to-work transition remain compellingly relevant to one's satisfaction with their work life, serving to elucidate a range of challenges faced by college graduates even within a specific domain of life.

Graduates experience a great deal of surprise while working at their first "real world" job (Arnold, 1985), and many undergo a reality check of sorts or "culture shock" upon joining an organization because they do not fully understand the culture before entry (Dean, 1983). There is incongruity between expectations prior to graduation and actual experiences on the job, and these differences remain prevalent beyond the first year of employment, sometimes persisting into the second year as well (Gardner & Lambert, 1993; Nicholson & Arnold, 1989, 1991). Ultimately, unfulfilled expectations and hopes lead to disappointment and job dissatisfaction, a common experience for college graduates during their first year of employment (Holton, 1995; Richards, 1984); these experiences often result in job turnover and may impact the well-being and psychological functioning of graduates during their first few years out of college. Job satisfaction

has been shown impactful to overall satisfaction with life and psychological adjustment (Adams, King, & King, 1996; Barnett, Brennan, Raudenbush, Pleck, & Marshall, 1995).

In order to expand upon these findings, this study was designed to investigate life satisfaction as a more broadly defined construct, encompassing many key areas of life. Thus, we are interested in exploring not only how satisfied recent college graduates, presumed to be some of the most high functioning and well-equipped of their generation, are, but also what factors are predictive of greater satisfaction with life? The precise array of predictive factors that would suggest an adaptive transition from college, with respect to satisfaction with life, during the emerging adulthood period, and specifically for college graduates, have not been well-defined nor keenly investigated. There are, however, a number of findings that have been offered on potential contributors to life satisfaction.

Life Satisfaction

The construct of subjective well-being, one firmly implanted in the history and emphases of positive psychology, has been used to explore a person's cognitive and affective evaluation of the quality of his or her life (Diener, 1994), playing a critical role in the promotion of optimal mental health (Park, 2004). Life satisfaction, more specifically, endorses, and rather strictly, the cognitive elements of subjective well-being, distinguishing itself from the similar, although related, concept of psychological well-being, which, in contrast, alludes to the existential questions of personal growth, potentiality, and self-fulfillment (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002).

Life satisfaction can generally be defined as one's cognizance of the extent to which the conditions of his/her life match his/her aspirations and expectations. With respect to assessment of life satisfaction, it has been argued that measures containing affective terminology (e.g., "happiness", "vigor") are less able to access the purely cognitive component of subjective well-

being than measures that do not include affective-oriented items (Alfonso, Allison, Rader, & Gorman, 1996). There has also been a tendency for assessment of life satisfaction to involve a domain approach conceptualization wherein specific domains of life are assessed in addition to global life satisfaction--much the same way as domains regarded as being most relevant and pertinent to subjective well-being are those that are most immediate to people's lives (e.g., self, income, job, and relationships; Alfonso et al., 1996).

Social Support

Over the past twenty years, research studies have consistently reported the profound influence of social support, including its ability to facilitate adaptation, "buffer" or protect individuals from the adverse consequences of stress, and extend coping resources (Cohen, McGowan, Fooskas, & Rose, 1984; Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Martin & Burks, 1985). Considerable changes to the quality and quantity of emerging adults' relationships have the potential to evoke similarly incendiary changes to their perceived satisfaction with life, or at the very least, aspects of it.

With respect to peer relationships, the number of friends in social support networks drops considerably after college (Fischer, Sollie, Sorell, & Green, 1989), while the intimacy of friendships increases from adolescence to emerging adulthood (Collins & van Dulmen, 2006). Moreover, reliance on friends to satisfy relational needs is greatest during the single phase of emerging adulthood and significantly decreases with the addition of new family roles, including marriage and parenthood, which typically occurs at the cusp of adulthood, near the end of the emerging adulthood developmental phase (Carbery & Buhrmester, 1998). Similarly, intimate adult relationships significantly impact the psychological well-being and socio-emotional functioning of romantic partners and prove to be an important predictor of psychological

adjustment (Khaleque, 2004). Zimmer-Gembeck and Gallaty (2006) found that at age 20, more time spent with a romantic partner was associated with an increase in psychological well-being and reduced negative affect and loneliness; at age 23, romantic support (i.e., source of intimacy and nurturance), rather than romantic affiliation, has been associated with increases in psychological well-being and decreases in negative affect and loneliness. Parents also function as one of the most important providers of relational support in emerging adulthood (Flaherty & Richman, 1989), maintaining a significant role in the psychosocial development, well-being, and adaptive social and psychological functioning of their emerging adult children (Kenny & Barton, 2002; Shulman & Ben-Artzi, 2003), an impact that has been shown to extend through the course of emerging adulthood and remain robust (van Wel, Linssen, & Ruud, 2000).

Clearly, relationships with others, whether with parents, friends, or romantic partners, provide emerging adults with much-needed social support. Weiss (1974) posited that people have a number of social needs or “provisions” that are necessary for individuals to feel adequately supported. These social needs include: guidance, reliable alliance, reassurance of worth, and opportunity for nurturance, attachment, and social integration. Weiss (1974) contended that each provision is obtained from particular interpersonal relationships within individuals’ social networks and vary at different stages of the life cycle. Therefore, one’s social needs provisionally shift throughout development. Intuitively, this conceptualization is especially appropriate for a consideration of the post-college transition and within the emerging adulthood literature. Additionally, increased social supports have been linked to improved psychological well-being, adaptation, higher self esteem, fewer depressive symptoms and fewer expressions of anger; whereas, a lack of support has been associated with a decrease in well-being and poorer

overall adjustment (Flaherty & Richman, 1989; Galambos, Barker, & Krahn, 2006; Mortimer, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Holmes, 2002; Polach, 2004).

Loneliness

Loneliness is “a response to the absence of some particular relational provisions” (Weiss, 1974, p. 17), such as deficits in the social integration and attachment provisions, the relational provisions involved in social support. This theory contests that social support is negatively correlated to loneliness. Weiss contended that there are two distinct types of loneliness, social and emotional, which correspond to the attachment and social integration provisions.

Attachment, which is provided by relationships in which the person receives a sense of safety, security, and comfort and satisfies the need for proximity and love (Russell, Cutrona, Rose, & Yurko, 1984), is key in prevention of emotional loneliness. Social loneliness results from the lack of belonging to a social network composed of individuals who share common interests and activities. When relationships fail to satisfactorily supply needed social provisions, people experience detriments to their socio-emotional functioning, including feelings of loneliness, lower self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (Arkar, Sari, and Didaner, 2004; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Mahon, Yarcheski, & Yarcheski, 1998; Nolen-Hoeksema & Ahrens, 2002). Therefore, because college graduates go through substantial changes following graduation, including changes in geographic location and relationships with friends, family, and intimate partners, they are particularly susceptible to experiencing such detriments. The negative impacts of loneliness on individuals' overall well-being lead naturally to the supposition that the construct of loneliness will hold predictive value for the assessment of global life satisfaction of college graduates.

Hope

Snyder (1995) defines hope as being the coupling of mental willpower and waypower for goals, suggesting that an individual cannot simply wish for something, but rather, requires also the means, whether internal or external, to attain it. In more expansive terms, hope is defined as “a cognitive set that is based on reciprocally derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed determination) and (b) pathways (planning of ways to meet goals)” (Synder et al., 1991, p. 571). This point of contention can be used to distinguish hope from optimism that, differentially, involves expectations that the desired goal can be achieved.

Therefore, hope encompasses the range of thoughts *and* motivations in relation to the achievement of goals, while optimism is defined as expectations about whether or not goals will be achieved. Recent research has revealed a positive relationship between hope and life satisfaction (Bailey & Snyder, 2007) and coping efficacy (Danoff-Burg, Prelow, & Swenson, 2004) in emerging adulthood. Moreover, in a correlational study examining human strengths across the lifespan, Isaacowitz, Vaillant, and Seligman (2003) found that hope was the only predictor of life satisfaction for emerging adults.

Commitment to Career

Career decidedness has been found to be significantly related to well-being around graduation with the sustainment of a decision through the college-to-work transition leading to the highest levels of well-being for emerging adults (Arnold, 1989). The premise that career choice could function as a fixed point for young people as they make sense of their new work and non-work environments is also especially relevant to the study hand, seeking to explore the varying influence of career commitment and explorative factors as well as social and personal properties and perspectives on college graduates' assessments of their lives. Arnold (1989) suggests that pressure from “socializing forces” could lead to difficulties during this phase of life

(Arnold, 1989, p. 174), thus, offering an alternative way of considering the social networks to which young people belong. Adams et al. (1996) contend that relationships of job and family can indeed provide conflict and support simultaneously, yet the overall impact of these relationships on various domains of life satisfaction is unknown. The degree to which aspects of individuals' lives, whether personal or interpersonal, particularly in the realm of career, to impact their cognitive appraisals of life, is similarly yet to be known.

Investigation of individuals' commitment to career, relying upon the model proposed by Blustein, Ellis, and Devenis (1989) is useful in exploring the interdependence and simultaneity of career, introspective, and social spheres of life. The tendency to foreclose (TTF) has been conceptualized as a continuum engendering openness to diversity of experience during the career commitment process on the one end and a strong desire to commit to decisions (e.g., education, job) in accordance with a particular career goal or emphasis, even in the face of disconfirming evidence on the other (Blustein et al., 1989). A person maintaining a tendency to foreclose could conceivably engage in behaviors and make decisions regarding his/her professional development in an effort to avoid the anxiety, discomfort, and ambiguousness that is definitive of career exploration; whereas those that are open to diversity in their pursuits of career identity and decisiveness, might be more able and/or willing to tolerate such ambiguity. Moreover, differences in TTF are likely to impact experiences throughout the career exploration process (Blustein et al., 1989), particularly for college graduates who firmly implanted in the career exploration phase of their lives.

The preference for diversity in exploration, or lack thereof, can be distinguished from the related, although unique, construct of commitment to career vis-à-vis a construct termed, vocational exploration and commitment (VEC). This concept can be differentiated due to its

emphasis on the level of commitment itself, as opposed to how the commitment to career is manifested in the individual's life (i.e., TTF). Thus, one's VEC reflects the degree to which an individual has committed to and explored a particular career focus, while TTF is the extent to which he/she remains open to experiences that may differ from his/her conception of that career path. The distinction between these constructs has been affirmed in the research (Blustein et al, 1989).

It has been theorized that the tendency to foreclose may prove advantageous in the alleviation of anxiety and cognitive dissonance for individuals (Blustein et al., 1989) and thus would be especially relevant to recent college graduates as they navigate their new professional and personal environments. Relatedly, it has been noted that close relationships are called upon as social networks assistive and facilitative in the exploration and commitment tasks of career development (Felsman & Blustein, 1999), suggesting a linkage between one's embedment in a social network and endorsement of career. Moreover, individuals who are engaged in explorations of environment and self with respect to career may also tend to be more involved in a broader process of seeking out information and experiences that coincide with other dimensions of their identities (Blustein, Devenis, & Kidney, 1989), meaning that individuals' commitment to career orientations may influence multiple areas of their lives, such as relationships with others or cognitive appraisals of self and others. A more relational perspective that emphasizes contextual factors has been prescribed for the consideration of career progress, especially in the field of counseling psychology (Palladino Schultheiss, Kress, Manzi, & Jeffrey Glasscock, 2001) and it has been recommended that counselors begin to (or continue to if already doing so) "assess the quality, availability, and responsiveness of a variety of relationship resources in their client's lives" (p. 238). Counselors might help clients to locate and utilize

significant others as sources of social support, as these relationships have to potential to help them face novel and anxiety-producing challenges within the career domain (Palladino Schultheiss et al., 2001).

Purpose

Given this plethora of challenges faced by graduates, many that have yet to be identified and are inextricably related to one another, it is easy to see how the post-college transition can easily become an arduous and disjointed task. Thus, the need for empirical research of this specific cohort of emerging adults is clear. The specific aims of this study were to (a) examine the contribution of the proposed collection of psychosocial constructs social support, loneliness, and hope to the prediction of life satisfaction and (b) investigate how the aforementioned variables differentially predict domains of life satisfaction. In this study, we expect that stronger perceived relational support, lessened loneliness, greater hopefulness, greater vocational exploration and commitment to career, and a lessened tendency to foreclose with respect to career commitment, will predict reports of greater life satisfaction for emerging adults in various domains of life, controlling for a host of demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, graduation year). It is also hypothesized that differences in the predictive utility of these factors, collectively and individually, will emerge for each domain of life satisfaction (i.e., general life, social life, self, physical appearance, job, and relationship) demonstrating the utility of a domain approach to conceptualizing the construct of life satisfaction.

METHOD

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of 237 individuals (57 males, 180 females) who had graduated from a medium-sized private Catholic university in the northeastern region of the

United States in 2007 (28.3%), 2005 (30.8%), and 2003 (40.9%), intervals of within 6 months, 2 years, and 4 years, respectively, from their graduation date. Participants in the study were predominantly Caucasian, non-Hispanic (80.6%) and female (75.9%) between the ages of 21 and 33 years old ($M=24.4$, $sd=1.84$). See *Table 1* (Appendix A).

Procedure

Students who graduated 6 months, 2 years, and 4 years prior to data collection from a medium-sized private Catholic university in the northeastern region of the United States were recruited through email solicitation. The names, emails, and majors of the college graduates were acquired through the college alumni office. The email invitation included information regarding the anonymity of the participants and the purpose of the study. Individuals who chose to participate in the survey selected a link that directed them to the comprehensive Internet survey, provided by the online survey developer SurveyMonkey.com. Participants completed the online survey at a place and time of their convenience, on a computer of their choosing. The survey took each participant approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. All responses were encrypted and saved in anonymous form in an account set up via SurveyMonkey.com. Two follow-up email reminders were sent to prospective participants over the course of three months to enhance the response rate. Participants were entered in a raffle for twenty-five \$25 Starbucks gift cards.

Every fifth person on the email lists was selected to receive an email invite to participate in the study, resulting in a random sample of 39% of the 2007 graduates ($N = 585$), 33% of the 2005 graduates ($N = 573$), and 28% of the 2003 graduates ($N = 497$). Eighty-three emails were undeliverable for the class of 2007, resulting in 502 graduates receiving the email invite; 127 people responded to the survey; 30 had missing data and were excluded from analyses, resulting in 97 usable questionnaires, for a response rate of 25%. For the 2005 cohort, 52 emails were

undeliverable, resulting in 521 graduates receiving the email; 97 people responded to the survey; 24 had missing data and were excluded, resulting in 73 usable questionnaires, for a response rate of 19%. Twenty-eight emails were undeliverable for the 2003 class, resulting in 469 graduates receiving the email solicitation; 18 people had missing data and were therefore excluded from analyses, resulting in 67 usable questionnaires, for a response rate of 18%. Overall, 1492 emails were sent and received by the college graduates and 309 people responded to the questionnaire in full or partially, for a 21% response rate. However, 163 people were removed due to missing data and/or rendering surveys that were incomplete. Thus, a total of 237 completed questionnaires from college graduates were available for analyses.

Measures

Demographic variables. A demographic form developed for this study included questions about age, gender, race, employment status, marital status, student status, number of children, living situation, primary and secondary parents' highest level of education completed and occupation.

Life Satisfaction. The Extended Satisfaction with Life Scale (ESWLS; Alfonso et al., 1996) is a 50-item multidimensional general life satisfaction scale that was designed to measure satisfaction with life in nine domains, including general life, social life, relationship, occupational satisfaction, family life, sex life, self, physical appearance, and school life. For this study, we used the General Life, Social Life, Relationship, Self, Physical Appearance, Family Life, and Job satisfaction subscales, with the General Life subscale representing a global measure of life satisfaction. The Sex Life subscale was not included in our survey and the School Life results were not included for these purposes due to the small number of students indicating

participation in school at the time of the study (i.e., if were not currently attending school, no responses were provided to these items).

Response options for every item on each of the subscales range from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Higher scores represent greater satisfaction. Typically, the ESWLS takes less than 20 minutes to complete and it has been shown to have sound psychometric properties that indicate both internal consistency (Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.81 to 0.96 for the nine subscales) and stability at a 2-week retest ($r_s = .74 - .87$ for the nine subscales; Alfonso et al., 1996). For this study, the internal consistency for the General Life Satisfaction subscale was .92.

Social Support. The Social Provisions Scale (SPS; Cutrona & Russell, 1987) is a 24-item measure of perceived social support based on Weiss's (1973, 1974) six provisions of social relationships. Participants respond using a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. The SPS has six subscales that correspond to the six social provisions of Weiss's theory, each composed of four items, including two that describe the presence and two that describe the absence of the provision. The six social provisions include: (a) Guidance, or the availability of confidants or authoritative others to provide advice; (b) Reliable Alliance, or the assurance that one can count on assistance being available under any circumstances; (c) Reassurance of Worth, of having one's skills, competencies, and abilities recognized and valued; (d) Opportunity for Nurturance, or the sense of contributing or being responsible for the well-being of another person; (e) Attachment, or feelings of safety and security in a close emotional bond; and (f) Social Integration, or a sense of belonging to a group that shares common interests and concerns. Scores can be derived for each subscale as well as for a global social support score. High social provision scores indicate that the respondent is

receiving those particular provisions, and a high total score computed across the six provisions indicate high levels of perceived social support. Research has supported the reliability (Russell & Cutrona, 1987; Russell, Altmaier, & Van Velzen, 1987) and validity (Cutrona, 1982; Russell et al., 1984) of the Social Provisions Scale. Coefficient alphas of the individual subscales range from .65 to .76 and .92 for the total Social Provisions score. In addition, the six-factor structure corresponding to Weiss's social provisions has been validated through factor analysis, indicating that each item adequately represents the construct that it was designed to assess (Cutrona & Russell, 1987). For the current sample, the internal consistency for the total Social Provisions score was .92. Cronbach's alphas for the six subscales were .85 for Guidance, .74 for Reassurance of Worth, .81 for Social Integration, .74 for Attachment, .78 for Opportunity for Nurturance, and .53 for Reliable Alliance. The Reliable Alliance subscale was not included in analyses due to low reliability with the current sample.

Loneliness. Loneliness was investigated using the 20-item UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980), which taps the subjective experience of loneliness, including feelings of isolation and connections to others. Participants were asked to respond to questions such as, "How often do you feel that you lack companionship?" "How often do you feel left out?" and "How often do you feel close to people?" Response options are rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 = never and 4 = always, and positive items were reverse coded so that higher scores indicate higher loneliness. The instrument has been used with a range of populations and coefficient alphas ranged from .89 to .94. Furthermore, test-retest reliabilities of .73 over 12 months were found (Russell, 1996). Evidence for validity includes significant positive correlations with other instruments tapping loneliness, and construct validity is

demonstrated by negative correlations with measures of social support (Russell, 1996). Internal consistency for the present sample was adequate (.93).

Hope. Hope was measured with the dispositional version of the Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991). The scale contains four items tapping agency (e.g., “I energetically pursue my goals”), and four items tapping pathways (e.g., “I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me”), all of which are rated on a 4-point scale. Response options range from 1 = *definitely false* to 4 = *definitely true*. For the total scale, Snyder et al. (1991) reported Cronbach's coefficient alphas as ranging from .74 to .84. The test-retest reliabilities (.73 to .82 over a 3–10-week period) reported by the authors are adequate for the eight items in the total scale. For the current study, only the total scale was used in data analysis and the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) was .87.

Commitment to Career Choices Scale. Items from the revised Commitment to Career Choices Scale (CCCS), which originally consisted of 49-items anchored on a 7-point Likert scale (e.g., 1=Never true about me, 3=Usually not true about me, 6=Almost always true about me, and 7=Always true about me), were used to measure the career commitment constructs of tendency to foreclose (9-items; TTF) and vocational exploration and commitment (19-items; VEC; Blustein et al., 1989). These items were found to be representative of the intended constructs using factor analysis procedures that elicited Cronbach's alpha coefficients for both derivation and cross-validation samples of .82 and .78 (i.e., final 9-item TTFS) and .92 and .91 (i.e., the final 19-item VECS), respectively (Blustein et al., 1989). Two week test-retest reliability has been established with coefficients ranging between .82 and .92 for both subscales. Moreover, the scales have been demonstrated as reliable and valid (Blustein et al., 1989), with validity holding also in use with alternative samples (Lopez, 1994).

The following instructions were given to participants, “On the items that follow, please indicate the appropriate number that most accurately reflects the extent to which you have a specific career goal, respond to the following items in a way that could reflect your behavior and attitudes if you did have an occupational preference” (Blustein et al., 1989, p. 355).

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

Preliminary statistical analyses were conducted in order to obtain information on the composition of the sample and to assess the data's suitability for further analysis. Many of the continuous variable scores including those obtained for hope, loneliness, social support, TTF, and VEC were centered as a means of enhancing the specificity of the tests conducted. Data were then inspected to determine to extent to which they met the assumptions of MMLR analysis. Because in deriving prediction equations for MMLR procedures, the correlations among dependent variables are not examined (Stevens, 2009), the correlations among the ESWL subscales were not considered. Given the predictive, as opposed to explanatory, nature of this analysis, multicollinearity is not a major cause for concern, although it is important to at least make note of issues of multicollinearity given its potential to impact findings. Even still, the collinearity statistics obtained did not suggest any problems with multicollinearity as tolerance and variance inflator factor (VIF) values were within the recommended range (i.e., $VIF < 10$ and $tolerance < .10$). These findings permitted further investigation using multivariate MMLR procedures.

A significant result (*Wilks' lambda* = .141, $p < .001$) was obtained using a MMLR, indicating the presence of a significant relationship between life satisfaction subscales (general, social, self physical, family, job, or relationship) and the predictor variables included in the model (i.e., race, relationship status, gender, age, graduation year, social support, hope,

loneliness, TTFS, and VECS). Accordingly, effective predictors of post-college life satisfaction were, indeed, identified for various subscales of the ESWL measure.

The results of univariate F-tests for each of the dependent variables demonstrated, with the exception of the job subscale ($p=.762$), significant regression results ($p<.001$), allowing for conclusions to be drawn about the set of predictors for each of model to the extent that it contains predictor variables with beta weights that are significantly different from 0. The significant models that were obtained were found to account for anywhere from 16.9% (family life subscale) and 57.6% (relationship subscale) of the variance in ESWL scores ($p<.001$). On average, these multiple linear regression models accounted for 37.5% of the variance in ESWL subscales scores (average across all significant models). See *Table 2* (Appendix B).

The multiple regression model for the ESWL general subscale accounted for 43.7% of the variance in scores ($p<.001$), with relationship status ($p=.001$), hope ($p<.001$), social support ($p=.001$), and VEC ($p<.001$) emerging as significant predictors of general life satisfaction scores. Of the significant predictors, social support ($\beta =.256$), VECS ($\beta =-.212$) and hope ($\beta =.203$) were found to have the greatest bearing on ESWL general subscale scores, with UCLA loneliness scores ($\beta =-.143$) and relationship status ($\beta =.178$) indicating a lesser, although still significant, effect on general life satisfaction.

The same regression model, when configured to account for variability in the ESWL social subscale scores, was found to account for 38.9% of the variance in ESWL social life subscale scores ($p<.001$), however, only two significant predictors emerged in this model: relationship status ($\beta =.127$, $p<.020$), loneliness ($\beta =-.427$, $p<.001$). Interestingly, the social support variable ($\beta =.135$) only approached significance ($p=.092$). Forty-six and eight tenths of the variance in ESWL self subscale scores was accounted for by the regression model ($p<.001$),

with hope ($\beta = .369, p < .001$), social support ($\beta = .201, p = .009$), and both commitment to career subscale scores (TTFS, $\beta = -.108, p = .040$; VECS, $\beta = -.189, p = .001$), significant impact on satisfaction with self scores, as measured by the ESWL social subscale.

For the ESWL physical appearance subscale, the regression model was found to account for 21.4% of the variance in scores ($p < .001$). For this model, significant predictors included whether or not individuals identified as Caucasian ($\beta = -.186, p = .002$), reported being in an exclusive relationship ($\beta = .124, p = .044$), how hopeful respondents were ($\beta = .158, p = .027$), and how highly they scored on the VECS of the Commitment to Career Scale (CCCS; $\beta = -.156, p = .027$). For this model, loneliness of respondents approached significance ($\beta = -.165, p = .065$). The model for the ESWL family life subscale yielded two significant predictors: identifying as Caucasian ($\beta = .174, p = .006$) and VECS score ($\beta = -.165, p = .023$), accounting for 16.9% of the variance in scores. Similarly, two significant predictors, relationship status ($\beta = .676, p < .001$) and hope ($\beta = .103, p = .050$), were identified for the model with respect to ESWL relationship subscale, although this model accounted for a much higher proportion (57.6%) of the variance in scores. The social support variable in this model only approached significance ($p = .079$).

DISCUSSION

The findings obtained in this investigation and described herein suggest that indeed there are factors related to demographics and psychosocial constructs that are predictive of college graduates' satisfaction with life in a number of domains, particularly with respect to social, self, physical, family, relationship and general spheres of life. Year of graduation, age, and gender were not found to significantly predict satisfaction with life scores on any of the subscales. Thus, it can be concluded that belongingness to a particular category of graduation year (i.e., less than one, two years, or four years ago) or gender (i.e., male or female) led consistently, or

significantly, to increases or reductions in scores on measures of life satisfaction for this sample of college graduates. Age was not significantly contributory to the prediction of satisfaction on any of the subscales. Generally speaking across significant regression models, which were obtained for the general, social, self, physical appearance, family, and relationship domains of satisfaction with life, most frequently contained the following variables: perceived social support, hopefulness, race, relationship status, and the vocational commitment and exploration (VEC).

General satisfaction with life was found to be significantly predicted by whether or not individuals were in a relationship at the time of the survey, degree of perceived social support, and VECS score. Thus, individuals who reported that they were in an exclusive relationship and that they higher levels of social support scored higher on the ESWL general subscale; whereas, reports of a greater tendency for career exploration led to lower general life satisfaction scores. Being in an exclusive relationship predicted a remarkable 2.27 score increase in general life satisfaction thereby affirming the value placed by recent college graduates on romantic partnerships. Not surprisingly, being an in exclusive relationship was also significantly associated with participants' scores on the relationship subscale (i.e., predicting a 17.07 increase in scores for participants in an exclusive relationship). With regard to the relationship domain of life satisfaction, the only other significant predictor that emerged was hope. Social support, however, was found only to approach significance for the relationship subscale. Therefore, it appears that college graduates are more inclined to evaluate their satisfaction with their relational lives positively to the extent that they are currently in a relationship and are hopeful about the future, regardless of their perceptions of social support, loneliness, and career commitment.

The failure to identify a single significant predictor for job domain of life satisfaction, despite measures of career commitment predicting outcomes on other satisfaction with life subscales warrants further consideration. This finding could allude to a commonality among the constructs tested that impeded upon the capacity of the regression analysis to detect predictive factors specifically for the job satisfaction measure. On the other hand, this finding may also serve to concretize the notion that although one's job satisfaction, or lack thereof, can greatly impact one's evaluation of life in general (Adams et al., 1996), within the life satisfaction domain of job, psychosocial and demographic factors, are less salient, serving neither to improve or diminish reported levels of satisfaction. Unlike in other relational and personal domains of life satisfaction, participants' reported satisfaction with the job domain of their lives, was not positively contributed to by hope, perceived social support, or commitment to career variables in a significant way. Accordingly, perceptions of strong relational supports and/or a sense of hopefulness about the future were not found to significantly reduce college graduates' reported dissatisfaction in the job domain. Most striking, differing reports of tendency to foreclose with respect to career and/or to explore careers do not lead to significant changes in satisfaction with life in the job domain.

The ESWL family subscale also yielded results that should be considered in the context of the study at large, as it was on this dependent measure only that identification as a Caucasian was found to significantly predict satisfaction. Individuals that identified as Caucasian scored, on average, 3.44 increase on the ESWL family subscale, than their non-Caucasian counterparts, controlling for other factors. This finding could very well be related to the underrepresentation of minority groups in institutions of higher education (Charles, Roscigno, & Torres, 2007). College graduates who belong to racial minority groups may, as a result, be more likely to be first-

generation college students and/or first-generation college graduates, thus complicating the existing their familial infrastructure, and likewise, relationships with family members following graduation. Vocational exploration and commitment scale score emerged as the only other significant predictor for the job domain of satisfaction with life (i.e., predicted lower satisfaction), when all other variables were held constant including age and gender, suggesting that discordance between career and family values for non-Caucasian college graduates may be at the root of reported satisfaction with life in the family domain.

Being a Caucasian college graduate was, in contrast, associated with the most prominent change in reported satisfaction with life for the physical appearance domain, regardless of gender or age—those who identified as Caucasian, on average, scored 3.55 points lower than non-Caucasian identified participants. In the domain of physical appearance, exploration of and commitment to career (VEC) was also found to be negatively associated with reported life satisfaction, whereas, hopefulness and being in an exclusive relationship were significantly positively associated with the ESWL physical appearance subscale.

The findings collectively suggest some patterns among variables that are both interesting and worthwhile to consider, some of which are rather unlikely and in contrast to the hypotheses proposed by the researchers. Although many of the variables of interest were found to be significant to the prediction of general life satisfaction, these same variables did not necessarily, and in most cases did not, serve as predictors of ESWL scores in other domains. The considerable variation in predictive utility of the model predictors for these subscales provides further justification for the use of subscales in the measurement of life satisfaction. Differences across domains are helpful in discriminating among potentially impactful factors to satisfaction with life, while general trends across the life satisfaction measures, such as the insignificance of

gender, age, and graduation year, are helpful in refuting competing hypotheses (i.e., controlling for at least a few extraneous variables). The outcome of these analyses also provides further evidence of the need to distinguish between related constructs, such as VEC and TTF or loneliness and perceived social support.

Future investigations and /or replications should seek to explore the distinctiveness of college graduates and/or emerging adults by comparing the findings obtained herein with those obtained using alternative samples, such as emerging adults that did not graduate college or current college students. A longitudinal design would allow researchers to examine changes in life satisfaction for college graduates or other populations of emerging adults over a longer period of time. In addition, a more diverse sample is needed to improve the generalizability of findings. Findings regarding race most especially, although poignant, are not generalizable, as the sample used in this study was predominantly Caucasian, such that the race variable was coded to categorize participants as Caucasian or non-Caucasian. The diversity within the non-Caucasian group should certainly be acknowledged for the purposes of interpretability. Therefore, future studies should seek to improve the sample composition not only with respect to race, but also with respect to gender, geographic region, and type of college. Interesting findings will likely emerge when graduates from throughout the country and from a variety of academic settings, including community colleges, 2-year colleges, Ivy League institutions, and both larger and smaller universities are included as participants and can be compared with one another.

Another major weakness of the study is its reliance entirely on the self-report of participants. From a methodological and theoretical stand point, it would be challenging to tap into participants' perceptions of their lived experience without utilizing a self-report procedure, as the perceptual underpinnings of the constructs under investigation warrant access to the

participants' immediate and authentic responses to survey items. Future investigations might find it worthwhile to include open-ended questions that would serve to validate the findings gathered here. Perhaps, a mixed-method would foster greater understanding of the post-college transition from the perspective of recent graduates that is not limited to the realm of satisfaction with life. Clearly, the population of college graduates is one that is ripe for further investigation.

Although the population of college graduates is regarded more often than not as a capable and psychologically stable group, there exists a great deal of variability in their experiences and the challenges they face that has yet to be pinpointed in the literature. It was found in this investigation that romantic relationships are considerably important to a number of domains of life satisfaction for these graduates, having led to notable increases in scores on multiple subscales. In addition, perceptions of social support, hopefulness, and exploration of career choices, led to discrepancies in life satisfaction subscale scores, while age, gender, graduation year, and tendency to foreclose (a relatively decisive component of career commitment) did not yield similar significant results. Although stronger perceived social support and being in an exclusive relationship were associated with more satisfaction in several areas of life controlling for other factors, loneliness was not found to be significantly related to any of the life satisfaction domains. Given their significant contribution to the regression model, it is clear that perceived social support and involvement in an exclusive romantic relationship lead to greater life satisfaction not solely due to their capacity to combat feelings of loneliness.

These results suggest that interpersonal relationships do not simply safeguard against college graduates' experiences of loneliness, but also offer additional benefits such that an improved perception of one's life ensues. Considered through the lens of Weiss's (1974) social provisions theory, it would make sense that these relationships would fulfill needs for the

individual throughout the transition from college. Relationships were found to serve a pivotal function in the perceptions of college graduates as they evaluate and make determinations about the extent to which they are satisfied with various aspects of their lives thereby supporting the view that a more relational approach to assessment of individuals and their associated support systems is most appropriate (Palladino Schultheiss et al., 2001), especially during a phase of development that is dominated by career-related tasks and decisions (i.e., the post-college transition). Recognizing the benefits of personal relationships to many domains of life satisfaction serves to enlighten researchers and professionals alike to areas of life that should be the targets of intervention and prevention programs in the community, as are greatly needed when susceptibility is high due to rampant unemployment and underemployment (Dooley, 2003). Therefore,

conceptualizations of exploration within career development need to treat life roles as intertwined and pliable. Rather than examine the exploration process from the lens of a circumscribed vocational perspective, we believe that scholarship needs to become explicitly embedded in the full array of life roles that individuals occupy in modern life (Flum & Blustein, 2000, p. 348).

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Table 1. Sample Characteristics (N=237)

Demographic Characteristic	N(% of total)
Race	
White, non-Hispanic	191(80.6)
Black	4(1.7%)
Hispanic	8(3.4%)
Asian	18(7.6%)
Biracial	14(5.9%)
Other	2(.8%)
Graduation Year	
2007	67(28.3%)
2005	73(30.8%)
2003	97(40.9%)
Relationship Status	
In an exclusive romantic relationship	126(53.2%)
Not in an exclusive romantic relationship	111(46.8%)
Age	
21-24 years old	131(55.3%)
25-29 years old	105(44.3%)
>29 years old	1(.4%)
Gender	
Female	180(75.9%)
Male	57(24.1%)

Table 2. Multivariate Multiple Linear Regression (MMLR) Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting Extended Satisfaction With Life (ESWL) Subscales (N=237)

		Predictor Variables (Independent Variable)									
ESWL Subscale (Dependent Variable)	Statistic	Race (White=1, Non-White=0)	Relationship Status (Yes=1, No=0)	Gender (Male=1, Female=0)	Age	Graduated 2 years ago	Graduated 4 years ago	TTFS (centered)	VECS (centered)	Hope (centered)	Loneliness (centered)
GENERAL <i>R</i> ² =.437	B	0.884	2.266	-0.116	0.048	-0.373	-0.875	0.011	-0.065	0.401	-0.096
	β	0.054	0.178	-0.008	0.013	-0.027	-0.068	0.014	-0.212	0.203	-0.143
	SE	0.824	0.661	0.770	0.460	1.228	2.051	0.406	0.018	0.119	0.050
	<i>t</i>	1.073	3.431	-0.150	0.104	-0.303	-0.426	0.260	-3.576	3.368	-1.899
	<i>p</i>	0.284	.001**	0.881	0.917	0.762	0.670	0.796	.000**	.000**	0.059
SOCIAL <i>R</i> ² =.387	B	-0.381	2.036	-0.104	-0.114	1.024	-0.410	-0.072	0.002	0.274	-0.361
	β	-0.019	0.126	-0.006	-0.026	0.059	-0.251	-0.076	0.005	0.110	-0.427
	SE	1.085	0.870	1.014	0.605	1.617	2.702	0.053	0.024	0.157	0.066
	<i>t</i>	-0.353	2.340	-0.102	-0.189	0.633	-0.152	-1.353	0.080	1.748	-5.435
	<i>p</i>	0.725	0.020*	0.919	0.850	0.527	0.880	0.177	0.937	0.082	.000**
SELF <i>R</i> ² =.468	B	-0.196	0.388	-0.016	-0.101	0.727	1.130	-0.060	-0.043	0.534	-0.052
	β	-0.017	0.041	-0.001	-0.040	0.072	0.119	-0.108	-0.189	0.369	-0.107
	SE	0.588	0.471	0.550	0.328	0.877	1.465	0.029	0.013	0.085	0.036
	<i>t</i>	-0.332	0.823	-0.029	-0.309	0.830	0.771	-2.061	-3.279	6.290	-1.456
	<i>p</i>	0.740	0.412	0.977	0.758	0.407	0.441	.040*	.001**	.000**	0.147

Appendix B

PHYSICAL $R^2=.214$	B	-3.548	1.873	-0.336	0.269	2.623	-0.102	-0.062	-0.057	0.371	-0.131
	β	-0.186	0.124	-0.019	0.065	0.161	-0.006	-0.070	-0.157	0.158	-0.165
	SE	1.153	0.924	1.079	0.643	1.078	2.872	0.057	0.026	0.167	0.071
	t	-3.076	2.026	-0.312	0.418	-0.312	-0.035	-1.096	-2.226	2.224	-1.857
	p	0.002	.044*	0.755	0.676	0.755	0.972	0.274	.027*	.027*	0.065
FAMILY $R^2=.169$	B	3.442	0.098	0.369	-0.324	1.014	1.739	0.023	-0.063	-0.170	-0.105
	β	0.174	0.006	0.020	-0.076	0.058	0.109	0.025	-0.165	-0.070	-0.127
	SE	1.232	0.988	1.152	0.687	1.837	3.069	0.061	0.027	0.178	0.076
	t	2.793	0.099	0.321	-0.472	0.552	0.567	0.386	-2.294	-0.953	1.918
	p	.006**	0.921	0.749	0.637	0.581	0.571	0.700	.023*	0.342	0.056
RELATIONSHIP $R^2=.576$	B	-0.952	17.072	-0.501	-0.109	3.104	1.328	0.035	-0.014	0.403	-0.103
	β	-0.030	0.676	-0.017	-0.016	0.114	0.052	0.024	-0.023	0.103	-0.078
	SE	1.415	1.135	1.323	0.789	2.110	3.524	0.070	0.031	0.204	0.087
	t	-0.672	15.041	-0.378	-0.138	1.471	0.377	0.505	-0.455	1.973	-1.186
	p	0.502	.000**	0.706	0.891	0.143	0.707	0.614	0.650	.050*	0.237

Note: * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .001$