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The Relationship Between Demographic Variables and Life Satisfaction of College Students

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Abstract

This paper explains a research proposal on the relationship between demographic variables and life satisfaction of college students. The variables being measured are gender, race, socioeconomic class, and college majors. A literature review was conducted to examine previous research on these variables in relation to life satisfaction. A relationship between these variables was found throughout the research studies that were analyzed. The proposed methodology for this research is a survey distributed to students at Lindenwood University. The survey will consist of four demographic questions as well as the Riverside Life Satisfaction Scale (Margolis et al., 2019) for participants to complete. A scale has been created to assess the results by labeling participants as having low, medium, or high satisfaction with life. There are many benefits of conducting this research that are discussed throughout this proposal. This research will contribute to a better understanding of possible factors that may contribute to one's overall satisfaction with life.

Introduction

There are many factors in a person's life that can contribute to their overall life satisfaction. Researchers have been studying life satisfaction along with its correlates for many years. Demographics are characteristics that often affect many aspects of life. It is plausible to question whether demographics correlate with the amount of satisfaction with life one has. I am interested in examining the relationship between gender, race, socioeconomic class, college majors, and life satisfaction of college students. College students make up a large percentage of

the population, and information that can help researchers better understand what contributes to their life satisfaction levels is very important. Obtaining information on the relationship between demographic variables and life satisfaction may help to improve the overall well-being of college students and increase knowledge on the topic.

The importance of this study can be shown through the various benefits that it may provide. Results of this study will provide a better understanding of how and why these demographics may be contributing to life satisfaction. This study may also help students gear towards optimal life satisfaction and improve their quality of life. In addition, this information can be applied to demographic groups outside of college students, such as the adult population. Psychologists may find this information useful when treating and assessing patients with a low satisfaction with life. Lastly, this research may inspire institutions to implement programs and policies to help prevent certain student demographic groups from experiencing low-life satisfaction than others.

As Lindenwood University gears towards a more inclusive and diverse community, it is important that the well-being of students, especially those in underrepresented communities, is analyzed. My research can provide Lindenwood and other institutions with valuable information on how a student's gender, race, class, or major can be contributing to an increased or decreased amount of satisfaction with their life. This information will allow Lindenwood to identify various student populations that may need more social support from the university. It can also help the university to discover improvements that they can make in the areas of diversity, inclusion, and equity. This will create a more enjoyable student experience at Lindenwood University, which will increase the retention of students.

Literature Review

Gender is important to consider when discussing the overall satisfaction of one's life. Davis and Wu (2014) studied life satisfaction and collected information regarding gender, income, age, race, and marital status from participants. Davis and Wu (2014) found that Hispanic women were much less satisfied with their lives than Hispanic men, while life satisfaction was higher in White, Black, and Asian women than their respective male counterparts. Furthermore, Wood et al. (1989) studied how gender correlates with the overall well-being of women and men. The authors explained that previous studies have shown that women are more emotionally sensitive and tend to have a lower self-esteem. However, in the results of the study conducted by Wood et al. (1989), women reported greater life satisfaction than men. Zhang et al. (2014) also studied life satisfaction and collected gender as one of the variables to study. In this study, findings revealed that college females reported greater life satisfaction than males (Zhang et al., 2014). This may mean that characteristics, such as sensitivity and self-esteem, might not contribute greatly to life satisfaction levels. This information can be beneficial when making assumptions about gender and life satisfaction.

Regarding race and ethnicity, I discovered a small amount of research on its association with life satisfaction. Davis and Wu (2014) found that average life satisfaction is higher for White people than for other racial groups (Davis and Wu, 2014). This finding allows researchers to examine the reason behind why this relationship may be present. Variables like societal privilege, job opportunities, and discrimination are some factors that may be contributing to this correlation. Krause et al. (2018) studied how responses to spiritual struggles, defined as difficulties that a person may encounter with his or her faith, differ across racial/ethnic groups. Krause et al. (2018) found that Black people experience fewer symptoms of physical illness and anxiety (Krause et al., 2018) and tend to be happier than White and Hispanic people when

dealing with spiritual struggles (Krause et al., 2018). These findings can allow researchers to question how religion and spirituality play a role in the life satisfaction of different racial groups. They also help to uncover some additional factors that may be contributing to the life satisfaction of people of different races.

It is possible that socioeconomic class can correlate with one's well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction. Allan et al. (2016) surveyed a sample of 1,225 college students to examine links between social class, being first-generation college students, and well-being outcomes. Allan et al. (2016) stated that there was a significant relationship between social class and life satisfaction via institutionalized classism (the way classism manifests into various institutions in society). The study also reported that students with low social class backgrounds and first-generation college student status experienced discrimination and prejudice on campus, which can contribute to lower life satisfaction levels (Allan et al., 2016). Davis and Wu (2014) also studied the relationship between these two variables and found that life satisfaction is positively related to income. This information can contribute to the assumption that students that report high-income levels may be more likely to report higher life satisfaction levels due to the discrimination and prejudice that low-income students face.

Little research has been conducted to investigate the connection between college majors and life satisfaction. However, variables, such as academic performance, grades, and occupation, can provide insight into a possible relationship between majors and life satisfaction. Antaramian (2017) studied life satisfaction and academic performance among students. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) was used to measure life satisfaction, and GPA was self-reported. Antaramian (2017) found that students with higher life satisfaction tended to have higher

academic performance (higher GPA's). Antaramian (2017) believes that variables such as student engagement, goals, and lower stress may have contributed to her findings.

In addition, information regarding occupation and its relation to life satisfaction can be useful to better understand a possible connection between majors and life satisfaction. Zhang et al. (2014) conducted a questionnaire at Shandong University regarding life satisfaction of college students. Findings revealed that freshman were more satisfied with their lives than students in other grades (Zhang et al., 2014). Zhang et al. (2014) also predicted that self-esteem and social support were positively related to life satisfaction. If this prediction is true, then it may be possible that younger students tend to have higher self-esteem and more social support than older students. This study provides critical information on how college grades play a role in life satisfaction, which can be beneficial to note when studying college majors. It also raises the question of how age and life satisfaction correlate with each other.

Hoffman et al. (2019) used three orientations of happiness (pleasure, engagement, and meaning) to predict and assess the relationship between life satisfaction and occupations. A questionnaire was conducted with 1,140 working adults. Hoffman et al. (2019) found that people in low-skill occupations had lower life satisfaction than those in high-skill occupations (Hoffman et al., 2019). If this trend continues in relation to college majors, it may be assumed that students in majors with less challenging coursework will report lower satisfaction levels than those in more challenging majors. Reviewing previous research on occupations and life satisfaction can contribute to a better understanding of college majors and life satisfaction as well. It can also help to predict life satisfaction levels of students in the future based on their current major.

Methods

I plan to conduct a survey to assess the relationship between these variables. The sample in which the survey will be distributed to will be Lindenwood University students. These students will be recruited through the Lindenwood Participant Pool and via social media. The study will take place online via Qualtrics. No identifying data will be collected from participants, making the survey completely anonymous. Two extra credit points will be given to participants in the Lindenwood Participant Pool. It is estimated that the survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. This study is set to take place in the fall of 2021.

The survey will ask participants four demographic questions regarding gender, race, socioeconomic class, and college major. Then, participants will be prompted to complete the Riverside Life Satisfaction Scale (Margolis et al., 2019). This scale will measure the amount of life satisfaction that each participant has. The scale consists of six statements about one's life. Participants are given a 7-point scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree), in which they must agree or disagree with each statement. Upon completing the scale, students will be asked two discussion questions about their satisfaction with life and what they believe is contributing to it.

Analysis

A scoring system was created to identify the amount of life satisfaction of participants. A low score will be defined as disagreeing with a positive life statement and agreeing with a negative life statement. A high score will be defined as disagreeing with a positive life statement and agreeing with a negative life statement. Any response of "neither agree nor disagree" on the scale will not be counted towards the score. Participants that answer the statements with a

majority of low scores will be considered to have low satisfaction with their life. Participants that answer the statements with a majority of high scores will be considered to have high-life satisfaction. An equal number of low and high scores will result in a label of medium-life satisfaction.

Expected Results

1. I hypothesize that women will be more satisfied with their lives than men. I will classify participant into low, medium, and high levels of satisfaction based on their scores on the Riverside Life Satisfaction Scale (Margolis et al., 2019), and then conduct a 2 (Gender) X 3 (Life Satisfaction) chi-square analysis to test this hypothesis.
2. I hypothesize that White participants will have higher life satisfaction levels than Non-white participants. I will classify participant into low, medium, and high levels of satisfaction based on their scores on the Riverside Life Satisfaction Scale (Margolis et al., 2019), and then conduct a 2 (Race) X 3 (Life Satisfaction) chi-square analysis to test this hypothesis.
3. I hypothesize that socioeconomic class will be positively related to life satisfaction. I will conduct a Pearson's correlational analysis to see if Riverside Life Satisfaction Scale (Margolis et al., 2019) scores are positively related to socioeconomic class.
4. I hypothesize that life satisfaction will vary based on majors. I will examine Riverside Life Satisfaction Scale (Margolis et al., 2019) by major, using descriptive statistics.

Discussion

If a relationship is found between these demographic groups and life satisfaction, one must interpret these results by analyzing the possible factors related to this correlation. There are

many social and psychological factors that may contribute to this relationship. Mistreatment and inequality are important to consider. Minorities frequently experience discrimination and prejudice, which can relate to lower levels of life satisfaction. Family and friend dynamics should also be assessed when analyzing these results. What are the differences in the type of support systems often seen in these demographic groups? In addition, personality types could give insight into why one group of people has higher or lower life satisfaction. Health is another important indicator of well-being and life satisfaction. Access to proper health care and even income can contribute to this. This may be particularly noticeable between different racial groups. Intelligence, substance abuse, and envy are more important factors that could explain the relationship between these demographic groups and life satisfaction. It is important to interpret the findings of this study if a relationship between these variables is indeed found.

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