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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Beverly Carol Huffstetler entitled, "Sense of Identity and Life Satisfaction in College Students." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Psychology.

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**SENSE OF IDENTITY AND LIFE SATISFACTION IN COLLEGE STUDENTS**

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Beverly Carol Huffstetler

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**DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my committee members: John W. Lounsbury (chair), Fred T. Leong, Richard A. Saudargas, and Charles L. Thompson. Without their guidance, support, and challenging questions, it would not have been possible.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the relationships between sense of identity, life satisfaction, and the Big Five personality traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability (inverse of neuroticism), extraversion, and openness. It considered overall life satisfaction as well as the life satisfaction subsets of personal, extrinsic, school, and outcome satisfaction. The present investigation was a secondary analysis of an archival data source. The data were collected from 2,300 students at a large, southeastern university. Significant correlations were found for sense of identity in relation to all aspects of life satisfaction. Sense of identity added incremental validity to the Big Five normal personality traits in predicting life satisfaction. Age and gender were not moderator variables for the relationship between sense of identity and life satisfaction. Implications for theory and future research were discussed.

## **PREFACE**

This dissertation and line of research was born out of a conversation with my advisor, Dr. John W. Lounsbury. One spring day we had a thoughtful conversation about what drives change in psychotherapy. Our conclusion was that many of the issues brought to therapy by college students center around questions of identity: Who am I? What do I believe? What have I accepted or rejected from my past and present?

I considered my own journey, how joy and peace have increased in my life as I matured and successfully navigated trials and triumphs. Thus, a dissertation was engendered. I am greatly indebted to my advisor and committee members for paving the way with their own research. I hope to pave the way for others when I apply the knowledge gained through this research to my own psychotherapy clients.

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## CHAPTER 1

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Sense of Identity

Sense of identity has been defined and conceptualized in many different ways. Noam (1999) finds that identity is the transformation of childhood relationships into more mature adult-to-adult relationships. Historically, there are several theoretical models of identity and operationalizations of these models. In *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), William James postulated that the self could be divided into the “me” (material, social and spiritual self) and the “I” (safe place where the mind collects and perceives objects). James (1890) viewed the self as having spiritual, material, and social aspects, and it includes attitudes and feelings as well as dynamic qualities.

Other theorists postulated that sense of identity can be driven by values or social roles. In nearly all conceptualizations, sense of identity or sense of self can vary yet have an overall recurring structure and composition. Erikson (1950) found that identity is “one’s ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity” (p. 135). Many of the earlier conceptualizations of sense of identity came from the psychoanalysts. Freud (1950) created the term “ego,” and Hartmann (1958) refined the concept to mean an individual’s thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and control of one’s environment through controlling oneself. This is closely akin to the modern day construct of sense of identity.

The psychoanalytic thinkers Lichenstein and Eissler purported that sexuality was the main component of identity. For Eissler, identity was a fourth component of the individual, along with ego, superego, and id (Lichenstein, 1961). Rather than focusing

on the ego, per se, Wheelis (1958) asserted that values determine goals which in turn determine identity. Weinreich (1985) also stressed using values as a framework for identity.

While Wheelis believed that identity was created from the inside out, Fromm (1955) contended that identity was determined by one's social role. In his conceptualization, identity formation moves from the outside in. Gordon Allport (1963) found sense of identity to be equivalent to sense of self and thus to determine the core of our personality. The phenomenologist Carl Rogers was the first to recognize that the self-concept, or sense of identity, is multifaceted. He defined self-concept as perceptions of one's own self, both good and bad, as well as experiences and interactions with the environment (Rogers, 1951). The existentialist Rollo May focused on man's conscious search for self (May 1953, 1961). He advocated that individuals should work to develop their own sense of identity rather than adopting the identity of the masses.

While many others had hinted at the concept of ego and sense of identity, Erik Erikson was the first to use the term "ego identity" (Kroger, 2003). Erikson's many works on identity (1956, 1959, 1963, 1968) have clouded as well as clarified. Erikson himself looked to his predecessors to ultimately define identity. In *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, he wrote:

what I would call a sense of identity seems to me best described by William James in a letter to his wife: a man's character is discernible in the mental or moral attitude in which, when it came upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensely active and alive. At such moments there is a voice inside which speaks and says, '*This is the real me*' (Erikson, 1968, p. 19).

Erikson later articulates this same idea when he notes that identity includes continuity of experience and an understanding of one's uniqueness as well as how one

fits in the broader social order. This understanding of one's self comes from synthesizing all past experiences and integrating this with the current environment. Erikson notes that identity occurs at three levels: Soma, Psyche, and Polis (1968, p. 289). Soma is one's position in the life cycle, or where one stands as an individual. Psyche can be thought of as ego, or the organizing principle that connects one as an individual to society at large and Polis can be thought of as one's social recognition, or one's role in the community at large.

Simply put, "ego identity formation is the synthesis of external and internal forces by the individual who either enters into or remains remote from a crisis period of doubt and rebellion" (Wires & Barocas, 1994, p. 361). Identity formation is a major task for adolescents and successful completion is necessary for satisfactory adult adjustment (Erikson, 1956; Harper, 1984; Weinreich, 1985). Identity achievement is necessary in order to live at peace with oneself and one's companions because "[p]sychosocial identity is necessary as the anchoring of man's transient existence in the here and the now" (Erikson, 1968, p. 42). Thus, having a sense of identity anchors one in a changing world.

Erik Erikson's work gave a theoretical framework for the concept of identity and Marcia (1964, 1966, 1980) operationalized the concept. He conceptualized identity as consisting of crises and commitments and resulting in one of four statuses: achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, or diffusion. Identity achievement is a clear commitment to ideological (occupational, religion, politics, philosophy) and interpersonal (friendship, dating, gender roles, recreation) issues that is achieved after a period of exploration. Moratorium is characterized by exploration of ideological and interpersonal possibilities and lack of a clear commitment while diffusion represents both a lack of commitment and

a lack of exploration. Foreclosure reflects ideological and interpersonal commitments but with no exploration. Individuals in this state have usually adopted the views of their parents without exploring alternatives (Marcia, 1964, 1966). Building on Marcia's discrete categories, Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, and Vollebergh (1999) argue that identity development is not necessarily unidirectional and an individual can either progress (from moratorium to achieved) or regress (from moratorium to diffusion).

For Waterman (1990), identity is achieved through exploration, commitment, and intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is best defined by personal expressiveness (Waterman, Schwartz, Goldbacher, Green, Miller, & Philip, 2003). Personal expressiveness is closely akin to the Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia*, or the ethical mandate that admonishes individuals to recognize their true potential (Aristotle, 1985). Thus, the individual with intrinsic motivation or personal expressiveness will pursue activities and goals that lead to a true sense of identity rather than activities and goals that merely may be rewarded by others (Waterman, 1992). Like Wheelis (1958), Waterman (1990) believes that true identity wells up inside and is not externally defined or achieved. His conceptualization of identity paralleled that of White (1958): "identity refers to the self or the person one feels oneself to be" (p. 332).

Erikson (1968) asserted that developing a sense of identity, or a clear, stable sense of self, is the major developmental task of adolescence. Though this "identity crisis" is not necessarily acute or severe, it is necessary and exploration is at the heart of adolescent transition (Erikson, 1959). This period of identity formation may be marked by confusion, conflict and vulnerability (Erikson, 1975). This time of inner turmoil may be manifest through fluctuating ego strength, mood swings, and rebellious, as well as

physical and psychological symptoms (Erikson, 1959). Kidwell & Dunham (1995) found support for this theory; subjects in their study who were actively engaged in identity exploration were more likely to demonstrate conflicts with authority, self-doubt, confusion, increased physical symptoms, reduced ego strength, inner conflicts, vacillation between low self-esteem and grandiosity, heightened feelings of worry and confusion, feelings of being misunderstood by authority figures, and general unhappiness, compared to adolescents who were not actively exploring their identity. The symptoms associated with identity diffusion are even more pronounced and include lack of authenticity, moral relativism, contradictory character traits, discontinuity of self, feelings of emptiness and gender dysphoria (Akhtar, 1984). Graham (1987) suggested that adolescents actively engaged in the exploration process are more likely to demonstrate inner conflicts, vacillation between low self-esteem and grandiosity, heightened feelings of worry and confusion, feelings of being misunderstood by authority figures, and general unhappiness, compared to adolescents who were not actively exploring their identity. Meeus (1996) argued that high commitment statuses (achieved or foreclosed) demonstrate the highest level of psychological well-being while individuals in the moratorium stage are least happy.

Greater exploration was demonstrated by students in the achieved and moratorium groups while the achieved and foreclosed groups had significantly higher measures of commitment (Dejong, 1997). One study of 215 university students (age 18-25 years) found that 18.1% were classified as identity diffused, 22.3% as foreclosed, 22.3% as moratorium, and 37.2% as achieved (Berman, Schwartz, Kurtines, & Berman, 2001). Archer (1989) asserts that identity achievement status is related with the highest

psychological functioning while identity diffusion status is associated with poorer psychological functioning. Another study reports that those in identity moratorium ranked highest in psychological health (Raphael, Feinberg, & Bachor, 1987). Teenagers considered identity diffused displayed more verbal and physical violence towards their parents while those in identity foreclosure routinely avoided heated discussions (Peterson, 1987). Low commitment is also linked the problematic behavior (Schoen-Ferreira, Aznar-Farias, de Mattos-Silvares, 2003). Thus, having a well-formed identity appears to be correlated with higher psychological functioning and less conflictual interpersonal relationships.

Sense of identity has also been studied in various countries (Nurmi, Poole, & Kalakoski, 1996; Osbourn, 2000), among exchange students (Van den Broucke & Vandereycken, 1986), among immigrants (Ben-Shalom & Horenczyk, 2000; Berger, 1997) and among ethnic minorities (Kim, 1998; Roberts, 1998). Examining immigrants and exchange students is particularly salient because sense of identity is particularly crucial for those undergoing transitions (Younis, 2000). As college students are leaving home for the first time and forming a new life in a new environment, much like immigrants only to a lesser extent, it is important to study the impact of sense of identity on this new life.

### Influences on Identity

Components of overall identity include occupation, values, relationships, physical appearance, and sex roles (Bosma & Gerrits, 1985). Familial relations are a part of identity and family rituals can contribute to identity achievement (Hammond, 2001).

Community, family, and religious identity are negatively correlated with depression (Koteskey, Little, & Matthews, 1991). Conversely, gang membership can also contribute to sense of identity (Vigil, 1988). Perceptions of high parental control, however, can detract from rather than contribute to identity formation (Quintana & Lapsley, 1987). One's religious faith can also provide a setting for identity development (King, 2003).

Studies have been conducted to show how adolescents create social identity by comparing themselves to other groups and to others in the in group (Widdicombe, 1988). Many studies have been conducted on attachment style and sense of identity with most reporting that a secure attachment style leads to a greater sense of identity (Bartle-Haring, Brucker, & Hock, 2002; Soares & Campos, 1988). Further, a mature ego identity development is associated with connectedness and separation from family of origin (Anderson, 2003). Related, adolescents deemed "delinquent" were less likely to perceive parents and other adults as influential with regards to their sense of identity (Oyserman, 1993). Another study compared identity development in private and public school adolescents (Roker & Banks, 1993), while Phillips & Pittman (2003) examined the relationship between socioeconomic status and identity formation.

From a socioeconomic standpoint, adolescents from a working class background are more likely than middle-class adolescents to be either identity achieved or identity diffused. They were also less likely to be in a state of crisis or to have accepted parental values without questioning (foreclosure) (Morash, 1980). Arnstein (1979) advocated caution in using the term "identity crisis" so that it will not become meaningless from overuse. More recent research contended that regression, defined in psychodynamic

literature as a return to earlier developmental levels to overcome childhood trauma, is a feature of normal adolescent identity development (Kroger, 1996).

### Measures of Identity

Marcia's original semi-structured interview determines the presence or absence of commitment or crisis in the three domains of occupation, religion, and politics. Later researchers added the concepts of sexual behavior (Marcia & Friedman, 1970) and friendship, dating, and sex roles (Grotevant & Cooper, 1981; Grotevant, Thorbecke, & Meyer, 1982).

The high cost of individual interviews in terms of researcher time and resources inspired Adams, Shea, and Fitch (1979) to develop a paper and pencil measure, the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (OM-EIS). Grotevant and Adams (1984) extended this into the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOM-EIS). The EOM-EIS is a self-report questionnaire that measures ideological domains of occupation, religion, politics and lifestyle as well as interpersonal domains of friendship, dating, sex roles, and recreation. Bennion and Adams (1986) revised the EOM-EIS into the EOM-EIS-2 in order to improve certain items. The EOM-EIS demonstrates acceptable reliability and validity (Johnson, Buboltz, & Seemann, 2003).

The Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ), developed by (Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1995), sought to improve psychometric validity and provide a shorter instrument. The EIPQ has 32 Likert scale items which assess four domains in the ideological realm (occupation, religion, politics, and values) and four domains in the interpersonal realm (family, friendship, dating, and sex roles). Cronbach's alpha for the

commitment scale was reported to be .75 with a test-retest coefficient of .76 (Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1993). A main difference between the two scales is that the EIPQ assesses values while the EOM-EIS assesses lifestyle, and the EIPQ, at 32 items, is half the length of the EOM-EIS.

Sentence completion tests have long been used to measure ego development. Loevinger's Washington Sentence Completion Test of Ego Development (Loevinger & Wessler, 1976) is one such example. Loevinger describes ego development as the "master" personality trait, asserting that the ego is the organizing schema in which people view the world and themselves. In his theory, people move from the presocial stage, in which they have not differentiated self from environment, to the integrated stage. Intervening stages include the symbiotic stage (represented by the symbiotic relationship of child and caregiver), the impulsive stage (self-differentiation and view of environment as punishing or rewarding), the self-protective stage (notion of blame, but not necessarily personal responsibility exists), to the conformist stage (identification of personal welfare with the group), to the self-aware stage (characterized by self-awareness and ability to appreciate multiple perspectives), to the conscientious stage (view of self as active decision maker with intrinsic respect for rules and values), to the individualistic stage (recognition of self as individual as well as emotional interdependence), to the autonomous stage (awareness of complexity in handling conflict). Few individuals reach the integrated stage, distinguished by self-actualization and transcendence of conflict (Loevinger, 1976).

For this study, I used the Transition to College (TTC) sense of identity and satisfaction scales (Lounsbury, Saudargas, & Gibson, 2004; Lounsbury, Saudargas,

Gibson, & Leong, 2005) to measure both constructs among college students. The TTC inventory demonstrates acceptable measures of validity and reliability with other established instruments. It correlates highly ( $r = .80, p < .01$ ) with Bennion and Adam's (1986) Identity Achievement subscale (combined) of their Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status and it correlates .60 with White, Wampler, and Winn's (1998) identity commitment subscale of the Identity Style Inventory. The TTC sense of identity scale measures identity through eight items. See the "Measures" section for a copy of the sense of identity items.

The TTC satisfaction scale assesses overall life satisfaction and its components of personal satisfaction, extrinsic satisfaction, school satisfaction, and outcome satisfaction through twenty-two items. Personal satisfaction assesses the domain of relationships---with oneself and with others while extrinsic satisfaction examines one's physical environment. School satisfaction measures overall satisfaction with the college experience such as how much one is learning, rate of progress towards a degree, and quality of professors and academic advisors. Outcome satisfaction is concerned with factors such as grade point average for students or job satisfaction scores. This scale is contained in the appendix.

My study focused on identity as a single variable that can be represented on a continuum from low to high rather than identity as a discrete categories, as conceptualized by Marcia. My conceptualization of identity is most closely related to Marcia's identity achievement category.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE PRESENT STUDY**

#### Implication of Identity for College Students

Although sense of identity had not previously been explicitly studied in relation to life satisfaction of college students, I expected and found substantive linkages. My hypothesis of connection between sense of identity and life satisfaction was based on prior research and theorizing on identity. Successful identity formation had been linked to academic achievement (Marcia & Friedman, 1970), academic motivation (Randazzo & Carrie, 2001), a flexible coping style (Marcia, 1966), and ability to commit and form meaningful relationships (Marcia & Friedman, 1970; Schiedel & Marcia, 1985). Further, several researchers have found support for Marcia's theory that identity is mainly formed between the ages of 18 and 22 (Archer, 1989; Waterman, 1985, 1993), the age at which many students attend college. College provides a fertile ground for identity development because it provides opportunities for cognitive and psychological development. Chickering (1972) notes that college is a crucial time for identity development because it includes opportunities for academic and social exploration as well as goal setting and values exploration. Of all the tasks of college students, identity formation is regarded by Chickering (1972) as the singular, most important vector. All other vectors—developing competence, managing emotions, developing autonomy, freeing interpersonal relationship, developing purpose, and developing integrity—lead to identity formation. Thus, identity formation is the penultimate purpose and goal of adolescence.

There has been extensive research on identity in relation to cognitive and psychological development (cf., Archer, 1994; Kroger, 1993; Streitmatter, 1988). Based on reviews by Adams and Fitch (1982), Bourne (1978), Marcia (1980), and Waterman (1982), Muuss (1996) summarizes the main finding for adolescents (including college students) as: “those who have achieved an identity status...tend to possess desirable psychological and mental health attributes and to have developed effective ways of adapting” (pp. 68-69). Some examples of positive correlates of achieved identity are autonomy, self-esteem, mature intimacy, and internal locus of control (Archer, 1989). Thus, by extension, it is likely that college students who have developed a sense of identity would also demonstrate greater life satisfaction.

#### Life Satisfaction among College Students

Life satisfaction represents a person’s overall cognitive assessment of his or her life. Life satisfaction is “a psychological experience” which “may not correspond very closely to...external conditions of life” (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976, p. 9). Life satisfaction differs from happiness in that happiness represents a subjective emotional state whereas life satisfaction represents one’s cognitive assessment of his or her life situation. Global life satisfaction has been studied, but it is generally more useful to examine the domains that comprise the overall life satisfaction measure. Examples of domains that have been used include satisfaction with religion, national government, friendships, family, work, health, and standard of living (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976).

In the present study, life satisfaction is represented by four dimensions. Personal satisfaction is a component of life satisfaction that describes relationships (i.e. “the number and quality of your friendships,” “your love life,” “your social life as a whole”). Extrinsic satisfaction describes one’s satisfaction with physical surroundings such as roommates, finances, health, available free time, and living situation. Outcome satisfaction measures satisfaction with grade point average and job satisfaction. School satisfaction represents one’s level of approval with school—availability of courses and progress toward degree.

Though I will be examining overall life satisfaction, researchers have also focused specifically on college satisfaction, a related corollary. College satisfaction is a multifaceted concept that involves positive evaluations of one’s college experience, ranging from living arrangements to social life to academics. Previous studies have examined the components and outcomes of college satisfaction. College self-efficacy, but not social and general self-efficacy, is correlated with college satisfaction (DeWitz & Walsh, 2002). For nontraditional students (defined here as being over 25 years old), interactions with professors were especially important in determining college satisfaction (Landrum, Hood, & McAdams, 2001). Dissatisfaction with social life leads to overall dissatisfaction with college in black students (Carter, 1998). The four life satisfaction components in this study measure the same constructs of college satisfaction.

Overall life satisfaction is also related to personality, or specifically the five-factor model of normal personality (Heller, Judge, & Watson, 2002). The five-factor model of personality has become the major theory of personality, as it is both parsimonious and well-validated (De Raad, 2000; Lounsbury, Tatum, Chambers, Owens, & Gibson, 1999).

The “Big Five” factors of agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and openness were derived from factor analysis (McCrae & Costa, 2003; Digman, 1990). The “Big Five” factors are consistent, stable, and related to overt behavior (Costa & McCrae, 1994).

A brief description of the Big Five factors follows. The trait of agreeableness reflects concern for others. Agreeable individuals tend to trust easily, give generously of time and money, and get along well with others. Conscientiousness refers to an individual’s disposition toward organization, achievement, and self-discipline. Highly conscientious individuals tend to be ambitious and hard working. Extraversion refers to an individual’s preference for amount and type of social interaction. Individuals high on extraversion like to be around others and join in all types of activities. They may be described as involved and talkative. The trait of neuroticism involves the degree of negative, disturbing feelings and consequent unpleasant thoughts and actions. Individuals high on neuroticism tend to be anxious, tense, and self-critical (McCrae & Costa, 2003). My study examines emotional stability, a positive personality trait that is the inverse of neuroticism. Openness refers to an individual’s receptivity to new ideas and experiences. It does not refer to an individual’s willingness to self-disclose, but rather to his or her preference for creative and novel approaches (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Individuals who are low on openness are not necessarily narrow-minded, they just prefer the familiar.

Neuroticism, extraversion and conscientiousness are three personality factors that are relevant to life satisfaction (Heller, Judge, & Watson, 2002). Using the technique of meta-analysis, DeNeve and Cooper (1998) found that uncorrected mean correlations with

life satisfaction were neuroticism,  $r = -.24$  ( $k=44$ ); extraversion,  $r = .017$  ( $k=54$ ); and conscientiousness,  $r = .22$  ( $k = 97$ ). People high on neuroticism may show preferential attention to negative situations (Rusting & Larsen, 1998), thus leading to lower life satisfaction. Extraverts may demonstrate higher life satisfaction because they have more relationships and increased social interactions (Watson & Clark, 1997) as well as tending to experience more positive emotions in general (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Individuals high on conscientiousness may enjoy the increased life satisfaction that comes from successful task completion (McCrae & Costa, 1991). Although life satisfaction has been shown to be linked to personality (Heller, Judge, and Watson, 2002), no studies have examined the link between sense of identity and life satisfaction. Owing to the comprehensiveness of the Big Five model, this study will also examine the Big Five traits, as measured by the Transition to College inventory, in order to determine if sense of identity adds incremental validity to the prediction of college satisfaction.

### Rationale and Hypotheses

The purpose of the present investigation is to examine: (1) the relationship between sense of identity and life satisfaction of college students; (2) whether sense of identity adds incremental validity to the “Big Five” personality traits in determining life satisfaction; and (3) if age and gender are moderator variables for the relationship between sense of identity and life satisfaction.

In this study, sense of identity and life satisfaction will both be measured using the Transition to College Inventory (Lounsbury, Saudargas, & Gibson, 2004; Lounsbury,

Saudargas, Gibson, & Leong, 2005). The following hypotheses are derived from a review of the literature.

*Hypothesis 1:* Overall life satisfaction will be positively correlated with sense of identity. Identity exploration is often a time of inner turmoil, mood swings, rebelliousness, self-doubt, confusion, and physical symptoms (Akhtar, 1984; Erikson, 1959; Kidwell & Dunham, 1995). Archer (1989) noted that those who have achieved a sense of identity are the most psychologically healthy. Thus, it was a logical extrapolation that those who have a strong sense of identity would also demonstrate greater life satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 2:* Personal satisfaction, a component of life satisfaction, will be positively correlated with sense of identity. Personal satisfaction, as measured by the TTC, involves relationships (i.e. “the number and quality of your friendships,” “your love life,” “your social life as a whole”) and research has consistently linked having close relationships with life satisfaction (Myers, 1993; Myers & Diener, 1996). Successful identity formation is linked with the ability to commit and form meaningful relationships (Marcia & Friedman, 1970; Schiedel & Marcia, 1985). Thus, those with a sense of identity would be able to form meaningful relationships and demonstrate high personal satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 3:* Extrinsic satisfaction, a component of life satisfaction, will be positively correlated with sense of identity. Extrinsic satisfaction describes one’s satisfaction with physical surroundings such as roommates, finances, health, available free time, and living situation. Erikson (1968) described how the development of a sense of identity involves

integrating all past experiences with the current environment (Polis). Thus, a person who is satisfied with his or her physical environment has likely developed a sense of identity and has integrated him- or herself into it.

*Hypothesis 4:* School satisfaction, a component of life satisfaction, will be positively correlated with sense of identity. Successful identity formation has been linked to academic achievement (Marcia & Friedman, 1970) and academic motivation (Randazzo & Carrie, 2001). Thus, school satisfaction would also likely be correlated with sense of identity because those most satisfied with their college experience are likely those who are successful because they are motivated and focused.

*Hypothesis 5:* Outcome satisfaction, a component of life satisfaction, will be positively correlated with sense of identity. Wheelis (1958) asserted that values determine goals which then determine identity. Along the same lines, Waterman (1990), maintained that the psychologically healthy individuals partially creates his identity by pursuing activities and goals in which he or she is intrinsically interested. The individual who has created identity by passionately pursuing his own goals and hobbies would be more likely to be satisfied with the outcome of these goal pursuits. Thus, if measure of outcome satisfaction, such as grade point average and job satisfaction, are high, that subject should also demonstrate a high sense of identity.

*Hypothesis 6:* Sense of identity will add incremental validity to the “Big Five” personality traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability (inverse of

neuroticism), extraversion, and openness in predicting life satisfaction. Neuroticism, extraversion and conscientiousness are three personality factors that are relevant to life satisfaction (Heller, Judge, & Watson, 2002). Using the technique of meta-analysis, DeNeve and Cooper (1998) found that uncorrected mean correlations with life satisfaction were neuroticism,  $r = -.24$  ( $k=44$ ); extraversion,  $r = .017$  ( $k=54$ ); and conscientiousness,  $r = .22$  ( $k = 97$ ). People high on neuroticism may show preferential attention to negative situations (Rusting & Larsen, 1998), thus leading to lower life satisfaction. Extraverts may demonstrate higher life satisfaction because they have more relationships and increased social interactions (Watson & Clark, 1997) as well as tending to experience more positive emotions in general (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Individuals high on conscientiousness may enjoy the increased life satisfaction that comes from successful task completion (McCrae & Costa, 1991). Although life satisfaction has been shown to be linked to personality (Heller, Judge, & Watson, 2002), no published studies have examined the link between sense of identity and life satisfaction. The Big Five demonstrate predictive validity in determining life satisfaction and I hypothesized that sense of identity would add incremental validity due to the strong predicted link between sense of identity and life satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 7:* The relationship between sense of identity and life satisfaction will be moderated by age. Sense of identity tends to be formed between ages 18 and 22 (Archer, 1989; Waterman, 1985, 1993) so I anticipated that sense of identity would increase from age 18 onward. There is also a trend that life satisfaction increases with age (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976). Age has been shown to be a moderator variable (Lipsey,

2003) in other studies; therefore, I predicted that the relationship between sense of identity and life satisfaction would be moderated by age such that there would be higher correlations for younger individuals because of the greater variance in sense of identity for individuals in the 18-22 group.

*Hypothesis 8:* The relationship between sense of identity and life satisfaction will be moderated by gender. The literature on the moderating effects of gender on life satisfaction is mixed. Levinson (1978, 1996) found that both males and females experience an Early Adult Transition, moving from childhood into adulthood between ages 17 and 22 while others have found that male and females have differing patterns of identity formation (Anderson, 1999; Cooper & Grotevant, 1987). Due to the more empirical methods of those who found that gender does have an effect, I predicted that gender will be a moderator variable for identity and life satisfaction, though I did not posit a priori the direction of differences.

### Method

Participants were 2,300 volunteers enrolled in an introductory psychology course or a first year studies course at a large, southeastern university. The students completed the online instrument between August and October of 2004.

Of the 2,300 participants, 66.7% were female (32.1% male). In terms of ethnicity, 80.5% self identified as Caucasian/White; 11.6% as Black/African American; 1.8% as Hispanic/Latino; 1.9% as Asian; .3% as Aleut/Pacific Islander; .2% as Arabic; .4% as India(n); .4% as Native North American; 1.6% as Other; and .3% did not respond.

**Table 1: AGE**

|             | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------|-----------|---------|
| Valid       |           |         |
| Under 18    | 163       | 7.0     |
| 18-19       | 1738      | 75.6    |
| 20-21       | 167       | 7.3     |
| 22-25       | 73        | 3.2     |
| 26-30       | 51        | 2.2     |
| 31-39       | 58        | 2.5     |
| 40-49       | 24        | 1.0     |
| 50 and over | 9         | .4      |

Agewise, 82.8% were between ages 18 and 21, the traditional college age, while 9.3% were 22 or older. Those who were under age 18 or who did not give their age totaled 7.8%. For a more exact breakdown of age, see Table 1.

### Measures

Sense of identity and life satisfaction were measured by the Resource Associates Transition to College (TTC) instrument. The TTC is a normal personality inventory contextualized for the college or university settings and validated in terms of the college student experience. Scale development, norming, reliability, criterion-related validity, and construct validity information for the TTC can be found in Lounsbury, Saudargas, and Gibson (2004) as well as Lounsbury, Saudargas, Gibson, and Leong (2005). For this study, a 198-item version of the TTC was used to measure the constructs. Each item was measured on a five-point bi-polar scale.

The TTC sense of identity scale demonstrates construct validity with other established measures of identity. As evidence of convergence of indicators, the TTC sense of identity measure correlated highly ( $r = .80, p < .01$ ) with Bennion and Adam's Identity Achievement subscale (combined) of their Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status inventory. Consistent with what I expected from research on identity demonstrating positive relationships between identity and psychological health and positive functioning (e.g., Kroger, 1996), the TTC sense of identity scale correlated significantly and positively with: personal commitment ( $r = .69, p < .01$ ), career-decidedness ( $r = .56, p < .01$ ), optimism ( $r = .59, p < .01$ ), life satisfaction ( $r = .55, p < .01$ ), self-discipline ( $r = .33, p < .01$ ), competence ( $r = .41, p < .01$ ), and self-actualization ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ).

The eight items comprising the TTC sense of identity scale are as follows, for which item responses were made on a five-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral/Undecided; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree.

#### TTC Sense of Identity Items

1. I have a definite sense of purpose in life.
2. I have a firm sense of who I am.
3. I have a set of basic beliefs and values that guide my actions and decisions.
4. I know what I want out of life.
5. I have a clear set of personal values or moral standards.
6. I don't know where I fit in the world. (reverse-scored)
7. I have specific personal goals for the future.

8. I have a clear sense of who I want to be when I am an adult.

For a sample of 1,800 college students, the coefficient alpha for the above sense identity scale was .84 with mean = 3.95 and standard deviation = .61.

#### Construct Validity of the TTC Sense of Identity and Life Satisfaction Scales

Scale development, norming, reliability, criterion-related validity, and construct validity information for the TTC can be found in Lounsbury, Sundstrom, Loveland, and Gibson (2003); Lounsbury, Saudargas, and Gibson (2004); Lounsbury, Saudargas, Gibson, and Leong (2005); Lounsbury, Tatum, Chambers, Owens, and Gibson (1999); Lounsbury, Gibson, and Hamrick (2004); Lounsbury, Gibson, Steel, Sundstrom, and Loveland (in press); Lounsbury, Gibson, Sundstrom, Wilburn, and Loveland (2003); Lounsbury, Loveland, Sundstrom, Gibson, Drost, and Hamrick (2003).

#### Relationship between Sense of Identity and College Satisfaction

My data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Statistics used included correlational and regression analyses as well as moderator analyses, using tests of difference of correlation coefficients.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

Sense of identity had a range of 1 to 5 with a mean of 3.97 and a standard deviation of .60. All measures of life satisfaction had a range of 1 to 7. Overall life satisfaction had a mean of 5.35 and a standard deviation of .78 while personal satisfaction had a mean of 5.55 and a standard deviation of .91. Extrinsic satisfaction had a mean of 4.98 and a standard deviation of 1.07 and school satisfaction had a mean of 5.45 with a standard deviation of .85. Outcome satisfaction had a mean of 5.08 and a standard deviation of 1.06. It is important to measure overall life satisfaction as well as personal, extrinsic, outcome, and school because the four subtypes are orthogonal factors that measure varying constructs. See Table 2 for more information.

**Table 2: RANGE, MEANS, AND STANDARD DEVIATION**

|                | N    | Min. | Max. | Mean   | Std. Dev. |
|----------------|------|------|------|--------|-----------|
| Identity       | 2295 | 1.13 | 5.00 | 3.9692 | .6008     |
| Life           | 2283 | 1.00 | 7.00 | 5.3459 | .7783     |
| Personal Sat.  | 2285 | 1.00 | 7.00 | 5.5485 | .9091     |
| Extrinsic Sat. | 2274 | 1.00 | 7.00 | 4.9759 | 1.0690    |
| School Sat.    | 2153 | 1.00 | 7.00 | 5.4544 | .8492     |
| Outcome Sat.   | 2158 | 1.00 | 7.00 | 5.0831 | 1.0561    |

*Hypothesis 1:* Overall life satisfaction was positively correlated with sense of identity  $r = .53, p < .01$ .

*Hypothesis 2:* Personal satisfaction, a component of life satisfaction, was positively correlated with sense of identity,  $r = .55, p < .01$ .

*Hypothesis 3:* Extrinsic satisfaction, a component of life satisfaction, was positively correlated with sense of identity,  $r = .28, p < .01$ .

*Hypothesis 4:* School satisfaction, a component of life satisfaction, was positively correlated with sense of identity,  $r = .42, p < .01$ .

*Hypothesis 5:* Outcome satisfaction, a component of life satisfaction, was positively correlated with sense of identity,  $r = .41, p < .01$ .

*Hypothesis 6:* Sense of identity added incremental validity to the Big Five in predicting life satisfaction. To evaluate this hypothesis, I ran a hierarchical regression analysis with the Big Five entered in the first step and sense of identity entered in the second step. Results were significant at the  $p < .01$ . See Tables 3 and 4. The Big Five personality traits of conscientiousness, emotional stability and extroversion accounted for 36.3% of the variance in life satisfaction. Sense of identity accounted for an additional 6.7% of the variance in life satisfaction, producing a total of 43% of the predicted variance. In other

**Table 3: BIG FIVE AND IDENTITY R, R SQUARE, AND R SQUARE CHANGE**

| Model                                                                       | R    | R Square | R Square Change |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------|-----------------|
| Extroversion,<br>Conscientiousness,<br>Emotional Stability                  | .603 | .363     | .363            |
| Extroversion,<br>Conscientiousness,<br>Emotional Stability<br>plus Identity | .656 | .430     | .066            |

\*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 4: BIG FIVE AND IDENTITY COEFFICIENTS**

| Coefficients |                     |                             |            |                           |        |      |
|--------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
| Model        |                     | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t      | Sig. |
|              |                     | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |        |      |
| 1            | (Constant)          | 2.244                       | .102       |                           | 21.985 | .000 |
|              | Conscientiousness   | .175                        | .021       | .138                      | 8.213  | .000 |
|              | Emotional Stability | .534                        | .020       | .473                      | 26.785 | .000 |
|              | Extroversion        | .216                        | .019       | .204                      | 11.614 | .000 |
| 2            | (Constant)          | 1.594                       | .105       |                           | 15.244 | .000 |
|              | Conscientiousness   | 8.095E-02                   | .021       | .064                      | 3.859  | .000 |
|              | Emotional Stability | .406                        | .020       | .360                      | 19.858 | .000 |
|              | Extroversion        | .163                        | .018       | .154                      | 9.109  | .000 |
|              | Identity            | .397                        | .024       | .305                      | 16.284 | .000 |

words, even when controlling for the Big Five traits of conscientiousness, emotional stability and extroversion, sense of identity is a significant predictor of life satisfaction. All of the Big Five variables were independently significantly related to life satisfaction. The correlations were as follows: openness  $r = .11, p < .01$ ; conscientiousness  $r = .21, p < .01$ ; extraversion  $r = .36, p < .01$ ; agreeableness,  $r = .23, p < .01$ ; and emotional stability  $r = .55, p < .01$ ; however, only the conscientiousness, emotional stability and extroversion were significant predictors of life satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 7:* The relationship between sense of identity and life satisfaction will be moderated by age. Age was not a moderator variable for the relationship between sense of identity and life satisfaction. I used the test of independent correlation coefficients to determine this (Guilford & Fruchter, 1979). I divided age into two groups: Traditional (age 18-22) and Non-traditional (over age 22). I chose this division because sense of identity is formed mainly between the ages of 18 and 22 (Archer, 1989; Waterman, 1985, 1993). For traditional students (age 18-22), the sense of identity mean is 3.96 with a standard deviation of .6 and variance of .36. For the non-traditional students, the sense of identity mean is 4.12 with a standard deviation of .57 and variance of .33. The correlation between sense of identity and life satisfaction was .57 for Traditional Students and .55 for Non-traditional students. I then tested the difference between two correlation coefficients. First, I converted the  $r$  into a  $z$  score then found the standard error for the difference between the two independent Fisher  $z$  scores using the formula

$$\sigma_{d_z} = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N_1 - 3} + \frac{1}{N_2 - 3}}. \text{ For this case, the standard error for the difference was}$$

.0591807. I then calculated a standard  $z$  score using the formula  $\bar{z} = \frac{z_{r_1} - z_{r_2}}{\sigma_{d_z}}$ . This value was .33, considerably below the 1.96 level needed for significance. Thus, age is not a moderator variable for the relationship between sense of identity and life satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 8:* The relationship between sense of identity and life satisfaction will be moderated by gender. Contrary to my hypothesis, gender was not a moderator variable for sense of identity and life satisfaction. Again, I determined this by testing the difference between two independent correlation coefficients (Guilford & Fruchter, 1979). First, I converted the  $r$  into a  $z$  score then found the standard error for the difference between the two independent Fisher  $z$  scores using the formula

$\sigma_{d_z} = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N_1 - 3} + \frac{1}{N_2 - 3}}$ . For this case, the standard error for the difference was

.0448538. I then calculated a standard  $z$  score using the formula  $\bar{z} = \frac{z_{r_1} - z_{r_2}}{\sigma_{d_z}}$ . This value was -.9586701, considerably below the 1.96 level needed for significance. Thus, gender is not a moderator variable for the relationship between sense of identity and life satisfaction.

## CHAPTER 4

### DICUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Analyses supported hypotheses 1 through 6 but not 7 and 8. Further explanations follow.

Regarding the first hypothesis, overall life satisfaction was positively correlated with sense of identity. As noted earlier, those who have achieved a sense of identity are the most psychologically healthy (Archer, 1989). Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976) noted “that satisfaction is a psychological experience and that the quality of this experience may not correspond very closely to these external conditions of life” (p. 9). Thus it is not surprising that those who have a greater sense of identity are more psychologically healthy and have higher overall life satisfaction. These individuals have the energy and drive to create an environment in which they are happy or the flexibility to adjust to wherever they are.

This finding is consistent with the finding of Waterman (1990), who theorized that participating in life activities consistent with one’s “true self” would create *eudaimonia*, a condition of inner happiness that differs from hedonistic pleasures. Those who have created their identity based on their intrinsic motivators would live their life according to those goals and purposes and thus would have greater overall life satisfaction.

Regarding the second hypothesis, personal satisfaction, a component of life satisfaction, was positively correlated with sense of identity. Personal satisfaction, as

measured by the TTC, involves relationships (i.e. “the number and quality of your friendships,” “your love life,” “your social life as a whole”) and research has consistently linked having close relationships with life satisfaction (Myers, 1993; Myers & Diener, 1996). Successful identity formation is linked with the ability to commit and form meaningful relationships (Heath, 1959; Marcia & Friedman, 1970; Schiedel & Marcia, 1985) at any level, from casual acquaintances to intimate love partners. Erikson (1959) stated that the youth who is unclear about his identity avoids interpersonal intimacy and vice versa. White (1958) also noted that once a sense of identity has been developed, relationships are characterized by increasing respect, spontaneity, respect and openness. Thus, having established a firm sense of identity allows one to then form meaningful relationships which contribute to higher levels of satisfaction. In psychosocial development, identity is a necessary antecedent to intimate relationships (Erikson, 1956; Muus, 1996).

In Eriksonian terms, identity occurs at three levels: where one stands as an individual (Soma), how one is connected to society (Psyche) and one’s role in society (Polis). The individual with a high level of personal satisfaction is probably most focus on the Psyche area of identity.

Regarding the third hypothesis, extrinsic satisfaction, a component of life satisfaction, was positively correlated with sense of identity. Extrinsic satisfaction describes one’s satisfaction with physical surroundings such as roommates, living situation, health, available free time, and finances. Erikson (1968) describes how the development of a sense of identity involves integrating all past experiences with the

current environment. Thus, a person who is satisfied with his or her physical environment has likely developed a sense of identity and has integrated him- or herself into it.

In terms of satisfaction with one's roommate and living situation, having a solid sense of identity is linked to the ability to form meaningful relationships, including a relationship with one's roommate (Marcia & Friedman, 1970; Schiedel & Marcia, 1985). Thus, the person with a solid sense of identity would be more capable of forming a healthy, mature relationship with her roommate, leading to greater extrinsic satisfaction. Other research has given evidence for this. Phelps, Potter, Slavic, and Day (1996) found that college students with a well-developed sense of racial identity were most likely to express happiness with their roommate situation.

Those with a solid sense of identity value themselves and practice more self-care, which impacts other aspects of extrinsic satisfaction. For example, the individual with a solid sense of identity would be more likely to take care of herself by not experimenting with drugs or alcohol and by exercising, thus she would be more likely to be satisfied with her health. Further, the individual with a solid sense of identity would be certain of his interests and would spend free time exploring these interests. The individual with a greater sense of identity is more likely to be more mature and better able to adjust his lifestyle to fit his financial means, or better able to adjust his income to fit his lifestyle. Health, free time and finances are all other components of extrinsic satisfaction.

Notably, the correlation between sense of identity and extrinsic satisfaction is the lowest (.284) of all correlations, perhaps indicating that extrinsic satisfaction is most loosely connected to sense of identity. Nevertheless, the correlation was significant.

Regarding the fourth hypothesis, school satisfaction, a component of life satisfaction, was positively correlated with sense of identity. Successful identity formation has been linked to academic achievement (Marcia & Friedman, 1970) and academic motivation (Randazzo & Carrie, 2001). Thus, the strong relationship between sense of identity and school satisfaction is not surprising. College students who have a firm sense of identity and are not actively exploring are at an academic advantage for several reasons. First, the student with a firm sense of identity will be clear on his or her passions and will pursue classes and a major in keeping with this. The focus and passion will make it easier for him or her to excel. Secondly, students who have already established their sense of identity have more time to focus on academics as they are not engaged in activities (e.g. rebellious behaviors) often associated with identity formation.

This finding corroborated the findings of past studies of collegiate identity formation. In a study of men at Princeton, Heath (1959) found those with successful ego integration and identity formation had a strong curiosity, future orientation, and intrinsic interest in liberal arts studies. All of these characteristics would engender a successful academic experience. Having a successful academic experience contributes to overall college satisfaction. Students who experienced a vocational identity crisis while in college reported greater dissatisfaction with their collegiate experience, perhaps because they associated the stress of the vocational identity crisis with college (Waterman & Waterman, 1970). Further, for students who entered college in Marcia's identity achievement category and later withdrew, most left in good standing while students who entered college in Marcia's identity diffused or foreclosed category who left school did

so due to academic failure (Waterman & Waterman, 1972). Thus, students with a greater sense of personal identity are less likely to switch majors or experience a career crisis and more likely to achieve academically. Thus, students with greater personal identity are more likely to report satisfaction with their school experience.

As for the fifth hypothesis, outcome satisfaction, a component of life satisfaction, was positively correlated with sense of identity. Outcome satisfaction refers to concrete measures of performance, such as grade point average or job satisfaction ratings.

Wheelis (1958) and Waterman (1990) assert that goals drive identity. Waterman (1990) further maintains that the psychologically healthy individual partially creates his identity by pursuing activities and goals in which he or she is intrinsically interested. In both of these conceptualizations, goals engender identity. My study corroborates this hypothesis by providing evidence that identity then leads to outcome satisfaction. Having a sense of identity allows one to focus on classes and occupations at which one will excel.

Waterman and Waterman (1976) noted that individuals who had achieved a sense of identity tended to obtain the highest level of education and be the most intrinsically interested in their chosen profession. In the present study, it is a logical conclusion that individuals with a higher sense of identity would pursue occupations (as shown by major selection in the college student) in which they were interested and thus would be more likely to excel. As interest increases, commitment to education increases and as educational level increases, salary tends to increase. Thus, establishing a sense of identity allows one to focus and thus demonstrate greater satisfaction with one's chosen course of study or occupation.

Regarding the sixth hypothesis, sense of identity added incremental validity to the Big Five in predicting life satisfaction. Even when controlling for the Big Five, sense of identity is a significant predictor of life satisfaction. The Big Five is a robust model of normal personality with excellent predictive validity. That sense of identity adds to the predictive validity of the Big Five in determining life satisfaction speaks to the significance and importance of sense of identity.

Heller, Judge, and Watson (2002) determined that neuroticism, extraversion and conscientiousness are three personality factors most highly related to life satisfaction. This was consistent with my findings in which the best prediction of life satisfaction came from extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability (neuroticism) and sense of identity. While individuals with certain personality traits may be more prone to having higher life satisfaction, developing a solid sense of identity can enhance life satisfaction even more.

In the seventh hypothesis, I predicted that the relationship between sense of identity and life satisfaction would be moderated by age. The correlations were not significantly different for the younger and older groups results, thus the seventh hypothesis was not supported. One possible explanation for this finding is that identity formation is a similar process for all college students. Chickering (1972) noted that all developmental paths of college students fall under sense of identity formation. He also noted that achieving identity formation encourages the development of interpersonal relationships, purpose and integrity. Muus (1996) also concludes that identity formation

is the most crucial task for successful living. Thus, identity formation may be such a crucial task that follows such a similar pattern for college students, it is not impacted by moderator variables.

The finding that age is not a moderator variable for identity formation noticeably differs from the literature, which purported that identity is formed between ages 18 and 22 (Archer, 1989; Waterman, 1985, 1993). It may be that identity formation is the task of the college student of any age. This explanation, however, does not account for the many people who do not pursue higher education. Given that aging is not necessarily equivalent to forming a sense of identity, there are unknown contributing factors to identity formation.

Contrary to the eighth hypothesis, gender was not a moderator variable for the relationship between identity and life satisfaction. This result is at variance with other studies (Anderson, 1999; Cooper & Grotevant, 1987; Douvan & Adelson, 1966) which have found that identity formation patterns differ by gender. One interpretation for the present finding is that sense of identity may be so strongly related to other variables such as satisfaction that potential moderator variables do not play a role. Along these lines, Levinson (1978, 1996) found that both males and females experience an Early Adult Transition, moving from childhood into adulthood between ages 17 and 22. It appears that sense of identity formation patterns are similar for both males and females. It may be that male and female gender roles are less rigidly defined than they were several decades ago so identity development no longer differs as it is more of an individual process of moving into one's being rather than of taking on a specific gender role.

### Summary and Discussion

My study firmly establishes the link between sense of identity and all aspects of life satisfaction, including overall, personal, extrinsic, school, and outcome satisfaction. Furthermore, sense of identity adds incremental validity to the Big Five normal personality traits in predicting life satisfaction. In this study, age and gender were not moderator variables of the relationship between identity and satisfaction.

### Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is the lack of variability among participants in terms of ethnicity, gender, and age. The data points came from primarily Caucasian/White (80.5%) , female (66.7%) students aged 18-21 (82.8%). Due to the overwhelming lack of ethnic variability, I did not test ethnicity as a moderator variable. Along the same lines, though there was a large sample (N=2300), all data points came from a single, large southeastern public university, thus making generalizability suspect. Sense of identity may vary between public and private universities, the southeast and other regions, and first year students and other students.

Though my study firmly establishes the correlational link between sense of identity and life satisfaction, it does not establish causality. The present study used a single measure of identity at one particular point in time. Therefore, a longitudinal study is needed to clarify the relationship between sense of identity and life satisfaction. It may be that sense of identity leads to increased life satisfaction or it may be that a third variable such as optimism or emotional stability underlies both. All of the Big Five

variables were independently significantly related to life satisfaction. Thus, it could be that one of the Big Five factors is the driving force behind sense of identity and life satisfaction, or it could be that identity alone drives life satisfaction. A longitudinal study would be needed to determine the causality of identity and life satisfaction.

### Directions for Further Research

The next step in continuing this research is to repeat the study with a more diverse sample, particularly in the area of ethnicity and age. While my study strongly establishes the link between sense of identity and all aspects of life satisfaction (overall, personal, extrinsic, school, and outcome), a sample with greater variability may give insight into potential moderator variables. Thus, it would be informative to repeat the study at various institutions of higher learning (public, private, community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities) across the nation.

A second direction for further research is to examine the relationship between identity and life satisfaction in a longitudinal study. A longitudinal study could first settle the riddle of causality among identity and life satisfaction. The researcher could measure sense of identity and life satisfaction in multiple year intervals to determine the issues of causality. This longitudinal study would also provide further information about age as a potential moderator variable. Research questions could focus on the impact of identity on life satisfaction over the lifespan.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, is the need for further research to clarify exactly how and why sense of identity and life satisfaction are correlated. It may be that particular personality traits or life experiences give rise to identity also engender life

satisfaction. For example, the individual with a higher level of openness may explore various religious faiths before choosing one. The individual would then have part of his identity because he actively explored and committed and would also have higher satisfaction for the same reasons.

There are two viewpoints about how identity develops. Waterman (1990) theorized that identity is internally driven and the quest for identity is identical to the journey for personal expressiveness. On the other end of the spectrum is the viewpoint is that identity is created by one's social role and identity formation is externally, rather than internally, driven (Fromm, 1955). The root cause of identity is most likely some combination of personality traits and external roles. It may be that more independent individuals search out their own identity while more conforming individuals find theirs through social roles. In this scenario, both types of individuals would have identity and be satisfied with how they achieved it because the searching and finding were congruent with personality traits of independence or conformity (high or low levels of openness and/or agreeableness). More research is needed to determine what other personality traits, experiences, and activities contribute to identity formation and increased life satisfaction. For example, the individual who is high on need for achievement may successfully pursue academic or occupational activities which then determine identity and grant a sense of satisfaction. It may also be that there are certain rites of passage, such as one's first sexual experience, that contribute to identity formation. If this is the case, the contribution of such activities to life satisfaction is less clear. The lack of moderator variables in the form of age and gender illuminate a complex question: What drives identity and what drives the relationship between identity and life satisfaction?

Considering the Big Five, it seems that the individual high on all traits except neuroticism would be at an advantage for identity development. The person with higher levels of openness would be more likely to explore other cultures and religions through travel or study. The more conscientious individual demonstrates greater job success or outcome satisfaction (Salgado, 1997). Utilizing the conscientiousness trait to focus one's energy would contribute to one's sense of identity by "developing one's talents" (Waterman, 1990, p. 56). The highly extraverted and high agreeable person would be more likely to seek out relationships which could give a context to positively or negatively influence identity development through shared activities. The individual high on neuroticism may demonstrate levels of anxiety high enough to prevent relationship formation. In the present study the Big Five traits of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability (inverse of neuroticism) were shown to be positively correlated with sense of identity. Future research could clarify the basis for and causal direction of these relationships.

### Implications and Conclusion

My study firmly establishes the linkage between sense of identity and all aspects of life satisfaction, ranging from overall to personal to extrinsic to school to outcome. These results are consistent with Chickering and Reisser's (1993) contention that identity is, indeed, the overarching developmental task for college students and precedes any other success or happiness (Chickering, 1972).

If the causal link from identity to satisfaction can be confirmed, there are two important implications for practice. First, those who advise, counsel, and otherwise work

with college students in a supportive capacity to help them improve their quality of life and satisfaction with college (e.g., counseling center staff, advisers, professors, residence hall coordinators, resident assistants, Greek organization sponsors) should encourage them to explore and develop a firm sense of identity through activities such as study abroad, forming relationships, and taking classes outside of the major. Waterman (1989) explores several interventions designed to encourage identity development. These curricula interventions include writing activities to encourage self-reflection, exposing students to other students undergoing an identity crisis, and developing decision-making skills. His article also explores ethical considerations of such interventions. The extent to which school officials need be involved in identity development of students is another question for another study. However, given the many positive correlates of sense of identity, including a greater commitment to education and a more positive evaluation of the college experience, it would behoove professors and other advisors to encourage identity development activities in students.

The other major implication is that sense of identity may have diagnostic value for professionals who are working in a counseling or therapeutic role with unhappy college students. They may want to examine whether lack of identity is a contributive factor to a student's overall adjustment. Having a well-developed sense of identity is positively correlated with successful college adjustment (Coburn, 2004). In this vein, it might be advisable to include a measure of identity status as part of any initial assessment battery. If assessment determines that lack of identity is an issue for the malcontent student, the professional may focus on identity development. Further research is needed

to determine what experiences and activities contribute to identity formation in order that more concrete recommendations may be made.

Sense of identity does add incremental validity to the Big Five normal personality model in predicting life satisfaction. Given the robustness of the Big Five model, this speaks to the importance of the relationship between sense of identity and life satisfaction. When working with students to increase sense of identity, it is crucial to take personality into account. For example, the more introverted and neurotic student may need urging from faculty and friends to try new things and individuate from his or her family of origin. The more agreeable student may benefit from encouragement to explore his or her own interest rather than going with the crowd.

In summary, the present study has demonstrated multiple linkages between sense of identity and both overall life satisfaction and college-specific facets of life satisfaction. When these results are considered in conjunction with significantly, positive correlations between sense of identity and: personal commitment, career-decidedness, optimism, life satisfaction, self-discipline, competence, self-actualization, and the Big Five traits, it is clear that sense of identity is a rich construct that has wide *nomothetic span* (Messick, 1989) for research on college students and that there are a variety of interesting issues for future theoretical development and practice.

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**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**

[illegible]

**APPENDIX B**

## APPENDIX B: CORRELATIONS FOR IDENTITY, LIFE SATISFACTION, AND BIG FIVE

### Correlations

|                        |                     | Life Sat. | Identity | Openness | Conscien. | Extraver. | Agreeable. | Emotional<br>Stability |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------------------|
| Life Sat.              | Pearson Correlation | 1         | .532**   | .109**   | .209**    | .358**    | .225**     | .552**                 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .         | .000     | .000     | .000      | .000      | .000       | .000                   |
|                        | N                   | 2283      | 2283     | 2283     | 2283      | 2283      | 2283       | 2283                   |
| Identity               | Pearson Correlation | .532**    | 1        | .207**   | .302**    | .298**    | .353**     | .452**                 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .        | .000     | .000      | .000      | .000       | .000                   |
|                        | N                   | 2283      | 2295     | 2295     | 2295      | 2295      | 2295       | 2295                   |
| Openness               | Pearson Correlation | .109**    | .207**   | 1        | .044*     | .048*     | .195**     | .070**                 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .        | .036      | .023      | .000       | .001                   |
|                        | N                   | 2283      | 2295     | 2295     | 2295      | 2295      | 2295       | 2295                   |
| Conscientious          | Pearson Correlation | .209**    | .302**   | .044*    | 1         | .071**    | .190**     | .122**                 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .036     | .         | .001      | .000       | .000                   |
|                        | N                   | 2283      | 2295     | 2295     | 2295      | 2295      | 2295       | 2295                   |
| Extraversion           | Pearson Correlation | .358**    | .298**   | .048*    | .071**    | 1         | .084**     | .309**                 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .023     | .001      | .         | .000       | .000                   |
|                        | N                   | 2283      | 2295     | 2295     | 2295      | 2295      | 2295       | 2295                   |
| Agreeableness          | Pearson Correlation | .225**    | .353**   | .195**   | .190**    | .084**    | 1          | .282**                 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .000     | .000      | .000      | .          | .000                   |
|                        | N                   | 2283      | 2295     | 2295     | 2295      | 2295      | 2295       | 2295                   |
| Emotional<br>Stability | Pearson Correlation | .552**    | .452**   | .070**   | .122**    | .309**    | .282**     | 1                      |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .001     | .000      | .000      | .000       | .                      |
|                        | N                   | 2283      | 2295     | 2295     | 2295      | 2295      | 2295       | 2295                   |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**APPENDIX C**

**APPENDIX C:**  
**CORRELATIONS FOR IDENTITY, LIFE SATISFACTION, AND BIG FIVE BY GENDER**

**CORRELATIONS FOR MALES**

|                        |                     | Life Sat. | Identity | Openness | Conscien. | Extravers. | Agreeable. | Emotional<br>Stability |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------------------|
| Life Sat.              | Pearson Correlation | 1         | .535**   | .058     | .231**    | .383**     | .206**     | .574**                 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .         | .000     | .116     | .000      | .000       | .000       | .000                   |
|                        | N                   | 736       | 736      | 736      | 736       | 736        | 736        | 736                    |
| Identity               | Pearson Correlation | .535**    | 1        | .183**   | .334**    | .344**     | .315**     | .449**                 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .        | .000     | .000      | .000       | .000       | .000                   |
|                        | N                   | 736       | 739      | 739      | 739       | 739        | 739        | 739                    |
| Openness               | Pearson Correlation | .058      | .183**   | 1        | .081*     | .046       | .198**     | -.004                  |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .116      | .000     | .        | .027      | .208       | .000       | .910                   |
|                        | N                   | 736       | 739      | 739      | 739       | 739        | 739        | 739                    |
| Conscien.              | Pearson Correlation | .231**    | .334**   | .081*    | 1         | .117**     | .167**     | .143**                 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .027     | .         | .001       | .000       | .000                   |
|                        | N                   | 736       | 739      | 739      | 739       | 739        | 739        | 739                    |
| Extraversion           | Pearson Correlation | .383**    | .344**   | .046     | .117**    | 1          | .104**     | .335**                 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .208     | .001      | .          | .005       | .000                   |
|                        | N                   | 736       | 739      | 739      | 739       | 739        | 739        | 739                    |
| Agreeable.             | Pearson Correlation | .206**    | .315**   | .198**   | .167**    | .104**     | 1          | .274**                 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .000     | .000      | .005       | .          | .000                   |
|                        | N                   | 736       | 739      | 739      | 739       | 739        | 739        | 739                    |
| Emotional<br>Stability | Pearson Correlation | .574**    | .449**   | -.004    | .143**    | .335**     | .274**     | 1                      |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .910     | .000      | .000       | .000       | .                      |
|                        | N                   | 736       | 739      | 739      | 739       | 739        | 739        | 739                    |

\*\* · Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* · Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## CORRELATIONS FOR FEMALES

|                     |                     | Life Sat. | Identity | Openness | Conscien. | Extravers. | Agreeable. | Emotional Stability |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|---------------------|
| Life Sat.           | Pearson Correlation | 1         | .536**   | .132**   | .199**    | .348**     | .239**     | .552**              |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .         | .000     | .000     | .000      | .000       | .000       | .000                |
|                     | N                   | 1531      | 1531     | 1531     | 1531      | 1531       | 1531       | 1531                |
| Identity            | Pearson Correlation | .536**    | 1        | .210**   | .268**    | .257**     | .354**     | .488**              |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .        | .000     | .000      | .000       | .000       | .000                |
|                     | N                   | 1531      | 1534     | 1534     | 1534      | 1534       | 1534       | 1534                |
| Openness            | Pearson Correlation | .132**    | .210**   | 1        | .002      | .038       | .174**     | .119**              |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .        | .948      | .140       | .000       | .000                |
|                     | N                   | 1531      | 1534     | 1534     | 1534      | 1534       | 1534       | 1534                |
| Conscien.           | Pearson Correlation | .199**    | .268**   | .002     | 1         | .030       | .169**     | .132**              |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .948     | .         | .233       | .000       | .000                |
|                     | N                   | 1531      | 1534     | 1534     | 1534      | 1534       | 1534       | 1534                |
| Extravers.          | Pearson Correlation | .348**    | .257**   | .038     | .030      | 1          | .051*      | .318**              |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .140     | .233      | .          | .045       | .000                |
|                     | N                   | 1531      | 1534     | 1534     | 1534      | 1534       | 1534       | 1534                |
| Agreeable.          | Pearson Correlation | .239**    | .354**   | .174**   | .169**    | .051*      | 1          | .334**              |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .000     | .000      | .045       | .          | .000                |
|                     | N                   | 1531      | 1534     | 1534     | 1534      | 1534       | 1534       | 1534                |
| Emotional Stability | Pearson Correlation | .552**    | .488**   | .119**   | .132**    | .318**     | .334**     | 1                   |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .000     | .000      | .000       | .000       | .                   |
|                     | N                   | 1531      | 1534     | 1534     | 1534      | 1534       | 1534       | 1534                |

\*\* · Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* · Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**APPENDIX D**

**APPENDIX D:**  
**CORRELATIONS FOR IDENTITY, LIFE SATISFACTION AND BIG FIVE BY AGE**

**CORRELATIONS FOR TRADITIONAL STUDENTS**

|                        |                     | Life Sat. | Identity | Openness | Conscien. | Extravers. | Agreeable. | Emotional<br>Stability |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------------------|
| Life Sat.              | Pearson Correlation | 1         | .547**   | .108**   | .223**    | .360**     | .243**     | .552**                 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .         | .000     | .000     | .000      | .000       | .000       | .000                   |
|                        | N                   | 1902      | 1902     | 1902     | 1902      | 1902       | 1902       | 1902                   |
| Identity               | Pearson Correlation | .547**    | 1        | .205**   | .295**    | .315**     | .349**     | .456**                 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .        | .000     | .000      | .000       | .000       | .000                   |
|                        | N                   | 1902      | 1905     | 1905     | 1905      | 1905       | 1905       | 1905                   |
| Openness               | Pearson Correlation | .108**    | .205**   | 1        | .054*     | .036       | .186**     | .052*                  |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .        | .018      | .119       | .000       | .023                   |
|                        | N                   | 1902      | 1905     | 1905     | 1905      | 1905       | 1905       | 1905                   |
| Conscien.              | Pearson Correlation | .223**    | .295**   | .054*    | 1         | .081**     | .192**     | .133**                 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .018     | .         | .000       | .000       | .000                   |
|                        | N                   | 1902      | 1905     | 1905     | 1905      | 1905       | 1905       | 1905                   |
| Extravers.             | Pearson Correlation | .360**    | .315**   | .036     | .081**    | 1          | .122**     | .318**                 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .119     | .000      | .          | .000       | .000                   |
|                        | N                   | 1902      | 1905     | 1905     | 1905      | 1905       | 1905       | 1905                   |
| Agreeable.             | Pearson Correlation | .243**    | .349**   | .186**   | .192**    | .122**     | 1          | .274**                 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .000     | .000      | .000       | .          | .000                   |
|                        | N                   | 1902      | 1905     | 1905     | 1905      | 1905       | 1905       | 1905                   |
| Emotional<br>Stability | Pearson Correlation | .552**    | .456**   | .052*    | .133**    | .318**     | .274**     | 1                      |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .023     | .000      | .000       | .000       | .                      |
|                        | N                   | 1902      | 1905     | 1905     | 1905      | 1905       | 1905       | 1905                   |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## CORRELATIONS FOR NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

|                     |                     | Life Sat. | Identity | Openness | Conscien. | Extravers. | Agreeable. | Emotional Stability |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|---------------------|
| Life Sat.           | Pearson Correlation | 1         | .535**   | .196**   | .053      | .356**     | .178**     | .580**              |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .         | .000     | .004     | .436      | .000       | .009       | .000                |
|                     | N                   | 214       | 214      | 214      | 214       | 214        | 214        | 214                 |
| Identity            | Pearson Correlation | .535**    | 1        | .215**   | .297**    | .253**     | .399**     | .425**              |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .        | .002     | .000      | .000       | .000       | .000                |
|                     | N                   | 214       | 215      | 215      | 215       | 215        | 215        | 215                 |
| Openness            | Pearson Correlation | .196**    | .215**   | 1        | .027      | .299**     | .067       | .198**              |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .004      | .002     | .        | .692      | .000       | .330       | .003                |
|                     | N                   | 214       | 215      | 215      | 215       | 215        | 215        | 215                 |
| Conscien.           | Pearson Correlation | .053      | .297**   | .027     | 1         | -.018      | .230**     | .058                |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .436      | .000     | .692     | .         | .791       | .001       | .394                |
|                     | N                   | 214       | 215      | 215      | 215       | 215        | 215        | 215                 |
| Extravers.          | Pearson Correlation | .356**    | .253**   | .299**   | -.018     | 1          | -.121      | .338**              |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .000     | .791      | .          | .077       | .000                |
|                     | N                   | 214       | 215      | 215      | 215       | 215        | 215        | 215                 |
| Agreeable.          | Pearson Correlation | .178**    | .399**   | .067     | .230**    | -.121      | 1          | .273**              |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .009      | .000     | .330     | .001      | .077       | .          | .000                |
|                     | N                   | 214       | 215      | 215      | 215       | 215        | 215        | 215                 |
| Emotional Stability | Pearson Correlation | .580**    | .425**   | .198**   | .058      | .338**     | .273**     | 1                   |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      | .000     | .003     | .394      | .000       | .000       | .                   |
|                     | N                   | 214       | 215      | 215      | 215       | 215        | 215        | 215                 |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**APPENDIX E**

**APPENDIX E:**  
**CORRELATIONS BETWEEN OVERALL LIFE, PERSONAL, EXTRINSIC, OUTCOME, AND SCHOOL SATISFACTION**

|                   |                     | <b>Correlations</b> |               |                |              |             |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|
|                   |                     | Life Sat.           | Personal Sat. | Extrinsic Sat. | Outcome Sat. | School Sat. |
| Life Satisfaction | Pearson Correlation | 1                   | .856**        | .776**         | .644**       | .798**      |
|                   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .                   | .000          | .000           | .000         | .000        |
|                   | N                   | 2283                | 2283          | 2273           | 2158         | 2153        |
| Personal Sat.     | Pearson Correlation | .856**              | 1             | .577**         | .438**       | .530**      |
|                   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000                | .             | .000           | .000         | .000        |
|                   | N                   | 2283                | 2285          | 2274           | 2158         | 2153        |
| Extrinsic Sat.    | Pearson Correlation | .776**              | .577**        | 1              | .344**       | .474**      |
|                   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000                | .000          | .              | .000         | .000        |
|                   | N                   | 2273                | 2274          | 2274           | 2151         | 2145        |
| Outcome Sat.      | Pearson Correlation | .644**              | .438**        | .344**         | 1            | .544**      |
|                   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000                | .000          | .000           | .            | .000        |
|                   | N                   | 2158                | 2158          | 2151           | 2158         | 2078        |
| School Sat.       | Pearson Correlation | .798**              | .530**        | .474**         | .544**       | 1           |
|                   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000                | .000          | .000           | .000         | .           |
|                   | N                   | 2153                | 2153          | 2145           | 2078         | 2153        |

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### VITA

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