

Exploring the Correlation Between Social Skills
and Life Satisfaction

Zachary D. Clark

Angelo State University

Abstract

The purpose of our study was to investigate the relationship between social skills and life satisfaction. Identifying a correlation between these variables could contribute to a better understanding of how social interaction relates to well-being and provide support for studies previously assessing this relationship. When conducting our study, we issued a survey, consisting of measures of social skills and life satisfaction, to a sample of 42 Angelo State University students. Our prediction was to find a positive correlation between the variables. Upon analysis of our data, we found our hypothesis to be supported; life satisfaction and social skills were positively correlated. Because the design is correlational, we cannot determine a causal effect between our variables. While the intent of our study did not include explanatory variables, future research could include such factors to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between social skills and life satisfaction. Doing so could present the opportunity for an experimental design to determine a causal effect, which could help emphasize the importance of developing social skills in order to increase life satisfaction. For now, however, we can only suggest that individuals who display high sociability are also highly satisfied with their lives.

Exploring the Correlation Between Social Skills and Life Satisfaction

Social interaction is part of our daily lives and social skills determine how well we participate in these interactions. These interactions have an influence on how we perceive ourselves, thus affecting our well-being. Identifying a relationship between social skills and life satisfaction is a continuing topic of research (Malinauskas, Dumciene, & Lapeniene, 2014; Ozben, 2013; Segrin, Hanzal, Donnerstein, Taylor, & Domschke, 2007). We aim to provide evidence supporting a positive, reliable correlation between social skills and life satisfaction by assessing data collected from students at Angelo State University. We will refer to research that has already assessed this relationship in other populations.

With evidence supporting a positive correlation between social skills and life satisfaction, studies attempt to identify other factors that could help us understand this relationship. One study used an assessment of perceived stress as a factor in associating social skills and psychological well-being, with depression and life satisfaction being indicators of well-being (Segrin et al., 2007). This research was conducted with the intent to show a negative correlation between social skills and stress experience, with the hopes that lower stress would explain the relationship between social skills and well-being. To investigate their prediction, Segrin et al. issued participants a questionnaire that contained measures of depression, perceived stress, social skills, major life events, and life satisfaction. The results of these measures were then assessed to identify any correlation, finding a reliable correlation between social skills, perceived stress, and well-being. To determine an explanation of stress as a factor affecting the relationship between social skills and well-being, the researchers correlated stress with social skills; stress with well-being; and social skills with well-being while controlling for stress. Social skills were shown to correlate with perceived stress, but no correlation was found between social skills and

objective reports of stress, indicating that the role of stress can only partially explain the relationship between social skills and well-being. Thus, we must also consider other factors to help explain the relationship between sociability and life satisfaction.

While understanding that stress can partially explain a correlation between social skills and life satisfaction, it is important to take other variables into account. Malinauskas et al. (2014) explored this relationship while observing the role of a few other factors. In this study, participants, who were students at a Lithuanian university, completed surveys assessing social skills and life satisfaction, while researchers took note of the participants' gender and year of study as variables. This research was conducted based on the prediction of 1) female students would score higher on social skills and life satisfaction ratings than would male students; 2) students in their senior year would rate higher in these categories than would freshman level students; and 3) social skill ratings and life satisfaction ratings would be positively correlated among the students. Upon collecting the data, Malinauskas et al., found each of the hypothesis to be supported. Female students scored reliably higher than male students in social skills ratings. Female student ratings in life satisfaction were also higher than those of male students, although Malinauskas et al. note that these findings were not consistent with other studies. This inconsistency might be explained by taking other variables into account to determine life satisfaction rather than just gender. Social skills and life satisfaction were each shown to be reliably different by year of study, with senior-level students scoring higher than freshman-level students. This suggests that students develop better social skills as they progress through their education, and that senior students view their experiences more positively than do freshman students. These results strengthen the relationship between social skills and life satisfaction by showing a difference based on gender. Evaluating the difference between senior-level students

and freshman-level students gives a possible explanation of this relationship, showing that senior-level students cope better with stressful events than do freshman-level students; however, we must also consider that, while social skills and life satisfaction may be higher in senior-level students, higher life satisfaction could be a result of factors other than just having better social skills.

Perceived stress, gender, and year of study all contribute to understanding the association between social skills and life satisfaction (Malinauskas et al., 2014; Segrin et al., 2007). To provide additional information to this understanding, Ozben (2013) assessed this relationship in Turkish students and considered the effect of loneliness. Ozben predicted that loneliness would be negatively correlated with social skills and life satisfaction, while social skills and life satisfaction would be positively correlated. This study utilized scales of life satisfaction, social skills, and loneliness to gather data from students. Ozben found support for a gender difference in life satisfaction and social skills, with female students scoring higher on both ratings than did male students. This points to the assumption that the higher level of social skills in women allows for better relationship development, contributing to better life satisfaction. Although, men scoring lower in life satisfaction could be explained by the stresses of higher responsibility than that of women. Ozben also found a reliable, negative correlation between loneliness and social skills; loneliness and life satisfaction; and a positive correlation between social skills and life satisfaction. This suggests that those with higher levels of social skills experience less loneliness, and those that experience less loneliness have a higher level of life satisfaction. Thus, loneliness is another factor that contributes to an understanding of the relationship between social skills and life satisfaction.

While we have several explanations of why a relationship exists between social skills and life satisfaction, these explanations come with some limitations. The studies discussed in support of correlating social skills and life satisfaction have been limited to South-Western university students (Segrin et al., 2007), Lithuanian university students (Malinauskas et al., 2014), and Turkish university students (Ozben, 2013). While the research gives us an idea of factors that influence this relationship, our study intends to expand on the relationship itself. We expect to find a positive correlation between social skills and life satisfaction within students at Angelo State University. Understanding the limitations of past research, we would like to include another population sample, that of Angelo State University students, to find supporting evidence to help us generalize a positive correlation between social skills and life satisfaction across populations. By generalizing this relationship, we hope to provide a foundation for further research, as the studies previously discussed have done, to understanding what variables can account for this relationship.

Method

Participants

Our study consisted of 42 students of Angelo State University. Of the 42 participants, 32 were women and 10 were men. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 33 years ($M = 19.6$, $SD = 2.50$); 17 participants self-identified as white or Caucasian; 17 as Hispanic or Latino; 3 as Asian or Pacific Islander; 2 as black or African American; 1 as Native American or American Indian; 1 as white and Hispanic; and 1 who preferred not to answer. We recruited participants by utilizing the SONA Systems tool—a database that provides a list of studies for participants to choose from. Our participants chose our study from this list by their own will.

Design

For our study, we used a correlational design to identify a relationship between social skills and life satisfaction; thus, we could not determine a cause-and-effect relationship. Our study is a within-subjects design because participants answered questions on scales of social skills and life satisfaction; the scores for each scale were then compared to each other to identify if a correlation existed between these variables.

Measures

Our study assesses a relationship between participants' social skills and life satisfaction. To do this, we used a combination of questions from The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larson, & Griffin, 1985); The Life Satisfaction Survey (Krapu, Meinke, Kramer, Friedman, & Voda, 2006); and Social Skill Strategies (Gajewski, Hirn, & Mayo, 1998). Questions included on our survey were adapted from these scales. Our questionnaire contained 30 questions, with 15 questions assessing social skills and 15 questions assessing life satisfaction. We reverse-coded four items on our survey to ensure that questions were properly attended to. Questions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale: strongly disagree = -2, neutral = 0, and strongly agree = +2. Example items include *It is easy for me to introduce myself to people* and *I do not know* and *I am polite and use my manners when in social situations*. Demographic questions were included in the survey that asked for information regarding ethnicity, age, and gender. Demographics were included for the purpose identifying what populations made up our sample.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from Angelo State University by using the SONA Systems tool, which allows participants to choose from a list of studies to choose from. Researchers greeted participants as they entered and introduced themselves. Researchers then read a script

explaining the purpose of the study, that their participation was voluntary, and that no personally identifying information would be collected in order to maintain confidentiality. We issued participants a consent form and asked them to look it over carefully before signing. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions before proceeding. Researchers then informed the participants to leave their completed surveys in a folder by the door as they exited to ensure confidentiality. Participants were told that next to this folder, they would find a debriefing form containing contact information for the faculty advisor. We thanked them for their participation and asked them if they were ready to begin. Once participants were ready, we presented them with the survey.

Results

The purpose of our research was to identify a positive correlation between life satisfaction and social skills. Our survey included 4 reverse-coded items which were recoded so that the scores were scaled consistently with the rest of our survey items. We then averaged the scores for social skills and life satisfaction to create the variables we tested. We used a Pearson's r correlation to test the correlation between these variables and found social skills and life satisfaction to be positively correlated, Pearson's $r(42) = .46$, $p = .002$. Thus, the results support our hypothesis.

Additional Analyses

Our survey also obtained demographic information from participants. Although we did not have a hypothesis based on gender and our variables, we chose to analyze our data to identify if there was a gender difference in social skills scores and life satisfaction scores.

An independent samples t-test indicated no significant difference in social skills between women ($M = 10.47$, $SD = 6.83$) and men ($M = 9.20$, $SD = 4.61$), $t(40) = -.55$, $p = .587$, $d = .22$.

An independent samples t-test indicated no significant difference in life satisfaction between women ($M = 9.75$, $SD = 8.17$) and men ($M = 6.60$, $SD = 6.98$), $t(40) = -1.09$, $p = .279$, $d = .42$.

Thus, we found no significant gender difference in social skills scores or life satisfaction scores.

Discussion

We studied Angelo State University students to determine a relationship between social skills and life satisfaction. We expected to find a positive correlation between these variables within our participants. Upon assessing the data collected during our study, we found that participants who scored higher in social skills also tended to score higher in life satisfaction; thus, our hypothesis was supported. The correlation between these factors suggest that social interaction plays an important role in our well-being.

Identifying a relationship between social skills and life satisfaction shows us that humans are indeed a social species. We rely on our interaction with other people, to some extent, to experience a positive outlook in our own lives. With this in mind, we can turn to other factors that may play a part in the interaction between social skills and life satisfaction. For example, Segrin et al. (2007) found the same relationship to exist between social skills and life satisfaction while studying the effect of perceived stress as a factor in students of a South-Western university. They found that instances of social interaction were negatively correlated with perceived stress, meaning the more an individual engages in social situations, the lower amount of stress the individual experienced. Similarly, they found levels of perceived stress were negatively correlated with levels of life satisfaction. These results imply that successful social interactions produce lower levels of stress which, in turn, increase life satisfaction.

Malinauskas et al. (2014) also found a positive correlation between social skills and life satisfaction while studying the roles of gender and year of study as variables to help explain the

correlation in Lithuanian University students. When studying gender, they found that women tended to score higher in social skills and life satisfaction than did men, which points to the assumption that while typical gender roles for women suggest they are more social than men, this difference in sociability could possibly account for the difference in life satisfaction between genders. While we did not include a hypothesis involving a gender difference, we did analyze our data to identify if a gender difference existed. We did not find a reliable difference in scores of social skills or life satisfaction between men and women.

Our findings also provide support for a study conducted by Ozben (2013). While finding a positive correlation between social skills and life satisfaction, she also studied how loneliness factored into the relationship. As a result of her study, she found that levels of loneliness were negatively correlated with social skills and life satisfaction, meaning that participants who scored higher in social skills experienced decreased levels of loneliness and higher levels of life satisfaction. This suggests that loneliness could help explain the effect of social skills on the experience of life satisfaction.

While we were able to identify a positive correlation between social skills and life satisfaction, we are unable to determine a cause and effect relationship between the two variables. As illustrated in previous studies, there are too many factors to control for when studying the relationship between social skills and life satisfaction (Malinauskas et al., 2014; Ozben, 2013; Segrin et al., 2007). Similar to these studies, a limitation of our study is that it focused on a very specific population, consisting of students attending Angelo State University; thus, the results cannot be generalized to the global population. While our analysis for a gender difference are inconsistent with the findings of the study conducted by Malinauskas et al. (2014), we cannot assume that a gender difference doesn't exist because our study design did not seek to

find this relationship. In other words, a research design could be developed that studies the relationship between social skills and life satisfaction while containing more control for gender.

Despite the limitations of our study, additional studies may be conducted that builds on the results of our research. While our study consisted of a very specific population, future studies could gather a broader population of participants, such as residents of San Angelo, TX who are not students of Angelo State University. Perhaps there are variables involved within university settings which provide an explanation for why social interaction may correlate with life satisfaction. By involving participants outside of university settings, we can identify if the relationship exists in real world settings or if it is a phenomenon existing specifically within university settings.

To elaborate further on the relationship between social skills and life satisfaction, researchers might conduct future studies involving our same population—Angelo State University students—which control for year of study, loneliness ratings, and perceived stress to validate or disprove the results of prior research (Malinauskas et al., 2014; Ozben, 2013; Segrin et al., 2007). By doing this, we can increase the diversity in populations in which these factors have been studied. If the results support prior research, they increase the number of populations this relationship represents. Should the results be inconsistent with prior research, we may look to identify what differences in the populations could account for the inconsistency.

Similarly, future research could focus on analyzing other populations, such as students attending universities of different regions of the world. A positive correlation between social skills and life satisfaction has been identified in students of a south-western university (Segrin et al., 2007), a Turkish university (Ozben, 2013), a Lithuanian university (Malinauskas et al., 2014), and Angelo State University. Researchers may wish to study this relationship in students

of additional universities, such as Purdue or Moscow State University, to increase the populations studied. In doing so, we may increase the populations in which the relationship between social skills and life satisfaction is representative. Should there be a population in which the results are inconsistent, we may further examine factors that may account for differences between the populations.

As researchers in the field of psychology, we are constantly asking questions which help us understand how humans think, behave, and interact. Researching the relationship between social skills and life satisfaction contributes to increasing our knowledge in this respect. By identifying a positive correlation between these variables, we can understand that social interaction is closely involved with how we think and behave. While we cannot determine a causal effect of social skills on life satisfaction, we do know that increasing the development of these skills are linked improved experiences of life satisfaction. Knowing this, we can explore factors to help explain this relationship, perhaps leaning towards a cause-and-effect between these variables. If we can discover evidence in support of this assumption, perhaps we can decrease the incidence of suppressing disorders—such as depression—by emphasizing the development of skills which enhance social interaction.

References

- Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 49*, 71-75.
- Domschke, T., Donnerstein, C., Hanzal, A., Segrin, C., & Taylor, M. (2007). Social skills, psychological well-being, and the mediating role of perceived stress. *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping, 20*(9), 321-329.
- Dumciene, A., Lapeniene, D., & Malinauskas, R. (2014). Social skills and life satisfaction of Lithuanian first- and senior- year university students. *Social Behavior and Personality, 42*(9), 285-293.
- Gajewski, N., Hirn, P., Mayo, P. (1998). Social skill strategies. *Thinking Publications*.
- Krapu, T. M., Meinke, L., Kramer, L., Friedman, R., & Voda, J. (2006). The life satisfaction survey (LSS): Development of the instrument. *Proceedings of the Fourth International Coach Federation Coaching Research Symposium, 67-82*.
- Ozben, S., (2013). Social skills and life satisfaction, and loneliness in Turkish university students. *Social Behavior and Personality, 41*(11), 203-213.