

Investigating the Effect of Alignment Between College Major and Current Occupation on Life Satisfaction

Jiayi Cheng

British School of Milan – Sir James Henderson
 Email: r840475108@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

College major and job satisfaction are both known predictors. However, how aligned the between college major and current occupation may have an impact on life satisfaction and has been understudied in the past literature. To provide ore insights for graduating students during such transferring stage, the aim of this paper is to investigate the effect of the alignment between college major and current occupation on life satisfaction. We conducted an online survey with 85 participants from various background in the United States. Evidence showed that the alignment between college major and current occupation significantly predicts life satisfaction, such that the more aligned between college major and current occupation, the more satisfied people are with their lives in general.

Keywords: *college major, current occupation, alignment, life satisfaction*

1. INTRODUCTION

The research on the relationship between job satisfaction and life satisfaction has grown rapidly. For example, The Job Satisfaction-Life Satisfaction Relationship Revisited research done by Mishra, Smyth, and Newman (2014) [1] investigated the causal relationship between job satisfaction and life satisfaction/two factors. They let 3000 working participants from six cities in China to complete a questionnaire with an interviewer that measures their life satisfaction using Personal Wellbeing Index (Cummins, 2006), job satisfaction with Job Satisfaction Survey (Spector, 1985) and other control variables. They demonstrated the causal relationships between life satisfaction and job satisfaction, with additional consideration of different aspects of job satisfaction. The result shows the two factors are interrelated and mutually casual. Another study conducted by YAZICIOĞLU and KUBİLAY (2017) [2] did an analysis on the relationship between job satisfaction and life satisfaction with demographic variables. The finding suggests there is a positive correlation between the two factors. In Christian Krekel's global happiness policy report (2018) [3], it also provides significant evidence on how hugely satisfaction of occupation can affect one's life satisfaction. From a global and universal perspective, the data came from participants all over the world with

the assistance of two international survey organizations. On the other hand, some studies provided evidence showing that college major has an impact on life satisfaction. For example, Nauta (2007) [4] suggests that college major is a potential construct that influence students' life satisfaction. Chow (2005) [5] did an investigation about college students' life satisfaction, which reflects that higher grade point average also contributes to students' higher life satisfaction.

As both job satisfaction and college major have an impact on life satisfaction, in this study we want to explore whether the interaction between college major and current occupation influences life satisfaction. We focus on the change occurred during a crucial transferring stage when students start to find an occupation after graduation. It is possible that students may choose to work in a different field than the field of their major (John, 2007) [6]. This shows that college major may, or may not match with occupation. Therefore, we decided to investigate whether and how the alignment between college major and current occupation can influence one's life satisfaction. In this study, our hypothesis is that the alignment between college major and current occupation is a predictor for life satisfaction. We assume that when college major and current occupation are aligned, the life satisfaction increases; whereas, if the college major is not aligned with current occupation, then life satisfaction decreases.

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

Eighty-five participants ($N = 85$) were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk to complete an online survey via Qualtrics in exchange for \$1.05. Majority of the participants were white ($N_{white} = 59$), the rest consisted of Asian, Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, and people identified with multiple races. Participants' educational level ranges from associate degree to master's degree, which bachelor's degree is the most common ($N_{bachelor} = 54$). Two third of the participants identified as men ($N_{men} = 59$), and one participant identified as non-binary.

2.2 Procedures

Once recruited on Amazon Mechanical Turk, participants were directed via a Qualtrics link to the main survey. After providing their consent to our research study, participants first answered questions related to the alignment between college major and occupation. Then participants answered questions about life satisfaction. Demographic information was collected at the end of the survey.

2.3 Measurement

Life satisfaction was measured with the 5-item SWLS Scale (Diener & Emmons, 1985) on a 7-point Likert scale. Items are "In most ways my life is close to ideal", "The condition of my life are excellent", "I am satisfied with my life", "So far I have gotten the important things I want in life", and "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing". Participants were asked to indicate the degree of agreement they have upon these statements from 7 strongly agree to 1 strongly disagree.

The alignment between college major and current occupation is measured by a single question "In your opinion, how aligned are your college major and current occupation", where participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale from 1(very unaligned) to 7 (very aligned).

3. RESULTS

3.1 Covariates

While the focus of our research is to study the effect of alignment between college major and current occupation on life satisfaction, there are other known factors that could have influenced these outcomes. Adding covariates can greatly improve the accuracy of

our models and reduce errors. For the current analysis, we control the effects of gender and education level.

3.2 Regression Analysis

Table 1. Summary of Regression Model Predicting Life Satisfaction

Dependent Variable	B	SE	95% CI		p	R ² / η ²	F
Life Satisfaction	Overall Model	-	-	-	-	.40	4.4
	Constant	3.933	.58	2.0	5.8	<.001	
	Alignment	.255	.075	.10	.40	.001	
	Education	.053	.270	-	.59	.845	
	Gender	-.171	.300	-.42	.56	.569	
				.769	6	9	

Note. $N = 84$, $B =$ unstandardized coefficient. $SE =$ standard error of the coefficient. Higher values indicate a greater amount of the construct. Education level was coded as 1 = associate degree, 2 = bachelor's degree, 3 = master's degree. Gender was coded as 1 = men, 2 = women, 3 = non-binary.

Regression model was run via Microsoft SPSS using alignment as the predictor of life satisfaction controlling for the effect of education level and gender. Table 1 shows the results of our regression model that the alignment between college major and current occupation is a significant predictor for life satisfaction ($B = .225$, $SE = .075$, $p = .001$) controlling for participants' education level and gender, such that better alignment leads to higher life satisfaction. It also indicates that education ($B = .053$, $SE = .270$, $p = .845$) and gender ($B = -.171$, $SE = .300$, $p = .569$) are not significant covariates.

4. DISCUSSION

In this paper we have used the SWLS scale (Diener, E., Emmons, 1985) to measure the effect of alignment between college major and current occupation on life satisfaction. We found that the alignment between college major and current occupation is a predictor for life satisfaction. The influence of the relationship between college major and current occupation on life satisfaction is not obvious to us. Firstly, it is because the area is not studied, secondly, in real life we almost never considered the change between college major, and occupation can affect one's life satisfaction. This shows us college education is an important part of one's life, as it does have an impact on one's career, hence on one's life satisfaction. The result provides us with some opportunities to reflect upon this finding, to reason why the alignment between college major and life satisfaction has an impact on one's life satisfaction. Bear in the mind the deduction we have, that college education is important for future career. It is possible that for people who have an unaligned relationship between college major and current occupation, they

need to learn new skills and knowledge that they have never touched before. As what they have learned in their majors was irrelevant to their current jobs, their skills and knowledge learned from college major became unhelpful. This demands more efforts from them later when they start working,

This may be time consuming and inefficient for these people, as they not only have to accumulate their knowledge but their experiences. However, it is more probable that they are not good at their current job. So, it is likely that because of their lack of skill and experience in current occupation, the chance of being replaced and surpassed is high. As a result, they may find themselves hard to catch up with the works assigned to them, or extremely difficult to get a promotion. These factors may lead to getting lower incomes and poor achievements, which on one hand can cause career insecurity and financial difficulty, on the other hand can damage one's self-esteem and confidence. As a result, one's life satisfaction can be affected in terms of these factors.

In addition, it is possible that people are not satisfied with their current jobs. What they do are not what they love or enjoy. This can be the result of choosing current jobs only to meet one's basic needs, which demands certain amount of salary. Because what they love to do cannot help them to make a living, which can be the reason why they choose current occupation. However, because they do not like their current jobs, the unpleasant experience of working may lower their life satisfaction.

This finding brings us more insight on how the match between college major and current occupation influences one's life. Very importantly, it provides suggestive advice for students who will consider choosing a college major or a career, the more aligned the college major and current occupation the higher the life satisfaction. However, it is invalid to say that people whose college major is different from their current occupation all have low life satisfaction. We only know that the alignment between college major and current occupation can influence one's life satisfaction to some degree, but one's satisfaction does not only depend on this alignment. In the area of studying the effect of the alignment between college major and current occupation on life satisfaction, we may further investigate other potential factors that may show us more details about why, or how, they form this kind of relationship.

Furthermore, it is possible that we did not include some crucial factors that lead to the result. For example, the influence of the culture. Individualism from western countries values freedom more, where everyone has the right to choose what they want to do, at the same time being responsible for themselves. Including the decision of choosing a career, people in western countries may find it normal to choose what they want to do in life by

themselves. Whereas, in eastern countries being influenced by collectiveness, people often consider others' opinions when making important choices. For example, in China, people may listen to what their family hope them to do in the future. Many of them need to get the approval from their parents in terms of occupation choices, this is related to the Chinese culture that people need to take care and support their parents financially and emotionally. It is a duty in China. Thus, unlike the western culture that children have bare connection to their parents when they become adults, parents merely rely on the salary of their children and think it is plausible. But Chinese do not cut their contact with their parents when they become adults, their parents or other family members may need their salary to live. The burden and responsibility create more pressure on them, hence, may of the time Chinese people do not make decision on career choice just based on their own willing. They need to consider many practical aspects instead of idealism.

Moreover, participants' financial situation is a potential factor too. For example, people who have sufficient financial support from family may not worry about the salary they get from working. They may have more freedom and choices available to decide what they want to do in life without concerning the problem of money. This can be the reason why people choose their current occupation instead of what they want to do in life, as a result, it affects their life satisfaction.

5. CONCLUSION

In this study, we aimed to scrutinise the effect of alignment between college major and current occupation on life satisfaction. Based on previous studies, the inspiration came from considering how college major and current occupation influence life satisfaction respectively. The two factors college major and current occupation are closely connected with each other, as what students learn in college should be applicable and advantageous for their careers. Moreover they both are predictors of life satisfaction. This helped us form the hypothesis "higher alignment predicts higher life satisfaction.", and find the way of examining the impact of the alignment on life satisfaction.

We conducted an online survey and found supporting evidence to our hypothesis that the alignment between college major and current occupation is a predictor for life satisfaction. The more aligned the college major and current occupation, the higher the life satisfaction. This result may provide helpful insights for high school students, graduates, and educational institutions. When choosing a college major, students may consider its close connection with occupation and life satisfaction. This may help students to have the awareness of discovering their passions at an earlier

stage, hence, making the best decisions for their college major and career choices.

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