

**PERCEIVED SENSE OF SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING OF HIGHLY  
SUCCESSFUL ONLINE COLLEGE EDUCATORS:  
A GENERIC QUALITATIVE STUDY**

by

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## **Abstract**

Highly successful online educators are believed to have a perceived sense of subjective well-being in connection to the education they give to their students. The research question for this study was: what is the perceived subjective well-being for highly successful online educators? This generic qualitative research study used sampling that was purposive and a thematic probe of the data. The study included eight exceptional individuals who described their feelings of what it meant to be highly successful as online educators. A rich narrative of the experiences of the participants offers original insights that supplements a better understanding of how they associated with and taught learners. This research study acknowledged those experiences that are collective and exceptional among the participants. Conclusions from the analysis included online educators who are highly successful have a positive sense of subjective well-being in their jobs. There were four major themes found: satisfaction, creativity, motivation and appreciation. It is the goal of this research study that highly successful online educators will continue to engage and collaborate with their students and this provides the basis for both exceptional learning and teaching experiences alike.

*Keywords:* subjective well-being, highly successful educators, satisfaction, creativity, motivation and appreciation

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. To my husband Matthew, your encouragement has always kept me going even when things looked bleak. To my children, Maria and Andrew, you always showed your positive support for what I have been trying to accomplish with my educational goals. You gave me hope throughout the entire process. I have tried to set a good example by emphasizing that reaching your academic dreams is one of the most important things that you will ever achieve in your life. I've encouraged you both to seek out your ambitions and be exactly what you want to become as a professional. To my parents, Mario and Angela, you have been there for me for years waiting for me to finally complete my doctoral degree. A special thank you to my extended family members and friends who helped to keep me motivated. This dedication would not be complete if it wasn't for my brother Nick who passed away over Labor Day Weekend, 2014. He was always there to support me every step of the way and gave me encouragement to keep moving forward.

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	iv
List of Tables	viii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Introduction of the Problem	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Purpose of the Study	2
Significance of the Study	3
Research Design	4
Research Question	5
Assumptions and Limitations	5
Researcher Expectations	8
Organization of the Remainder of the Study	8
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	9
Introduction to the Literature Review	9
Theoretical Framework Perspectives	11
Methodological Perspectives	18
Literature on Subjective Well-Being	24
Synthesis of the Research Findings	35
Critique of the Previous Research	37
Summary	37

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY	39
Purpose of the Study	39
Research Design	39
Target Population and Participant Selection	42
Procedures	43
Instruments	45
Research Questions	46
Data Analysis	47
Ethical Considerations	48
Expected Findings	49
CHAPTER 4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS	51
Introduction	51
The Study and the Researcher	51
Description of the Sample	54
Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis	61
Generic Qualitative Research Methodology	61
Thematic Analysis	63
Presentation of the Data and Results of the Analysis	65
Themes	71
Summary	76



CHAPTER 5. RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND, RECOMMENDATIONS	77
Introduction	77
Summary of the Results	77
Literature Review	77
Methodology	83
Findings	84
Discussion of the Results	84
Discussion of the Conclusions	89
Summary	90
Limitations	91
Recommendations for Future Research or Interventions	92
Recommendations Derived from the Limitations of the Study	93
Recommendations Based on Delimitations	93
Contributions to the Existing Literature	94
Conclusion	95
REFERENCES	97
APPENDIX A.STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL WORK	105

## **List of Tables**

Table 1. Demographics of the Participants	55
Table 2. Recurring Themes of the Participants	72

## **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

### **Introduction of the Problem**

Subjective well-being among university learners has been an indicator of achievement in the classroom (Cenkseven-Önder & Sari, 2009). The positive subjective well-being of highly successful online college educators is emphatically as significant to comprehend. Presently, the necessity to understand the subjective well-being for highly successful online educators is significant because current scholarly journal articles have concentrated on student accomplishment in online education (Shaha & Ellsworth, 2013; Gregori, Torras, & Guasch, 2012). Exploration has been focused on learner subjective well-being in the classroom (Ratelle, Simard, & Guay, 2013); Ren, 2009). Other academic pieces target at effective online programs (McAllister & Watkins, 2012; Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, & Rapp, 2010). The fundamental research question, “what is the perceived subjective well-being for highly successful online educators” will explain the connection among highly successful online educators and the association with subjective well-being.

Prior exploration has been on student subjective well-being or achievement in the classroom. Eroğlu (2012, p. 168) stated, “Subjective well-being has a great role as an indicator of life quality, achievement of subjective aims, handling of difficulties of life and having pleasure from life.” Brannan, Biswas-Diener, Mohr, Mortazavi, and Stein

(2013) incorporated in their analysis that subjective-well-being is important for highly successful online educators in their instruction proficiencies.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The research problem for this generic qualitative study is to explore and describe the capabilities of highly successful online educators in relation to their perceived sense of subjective well-being. The perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators aids in explaining why they are content in the job that they do. Thus, the problem to be addressed by this study is an undeveloped interpretation within the theoretical and expert literature regarding the examination of the thoughts, beliefs and contemplations' on the subjective well-being for highly successful online educators.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The intent of this generic qualitative investigation is to comprehend what the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators is. A number of research studies looked into the subjective well-being of students (Dave, Tripathi, Singh, & Udainiya, 2011). Other researchers' work has been on student attainment in online education (Matuga, 2009). Yet, there has been no research done on the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. This generic qualitative research study will offer a meaningful understanding into the makeup of teaching and learning as it connects to the perceived sense of subjective well-being held by highly successful online educators. Chan (2009) thought that highly successful

online educators will feel happy and content in their jobs. Furthermore, a highly successful online educator conveying a positive subjective well-being to her students is a phenomenon that has not been frequently researched. The impact of positive subjective well-being and its additional illustration among students possibly happens because of the consistent contact between highly successful educators and students (Shaha & Ellsworth, 2013).

A perceived sense of subjective well-being is operationally described as how fulfilled individuals are with their lives. Furthermore, highly successful online educators are operationally described as those who recognize how students acquire and nurture analytical thinking proficiencies. Since studies presently focus on student success, there are no earlier recounted ones on the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. Understanding the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators will convey new and respected material to the current literature base and secure a disparity in the research that presently subsists.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this generic qualitative research is to understand the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. Understanding how students' academic experiences relate to highly successful online educators and their own perceived sense of subjective well-being is central to this research. Ozmete (2011) postulated that well-being is how fulfilled or happy one is with his or her life. He also thought that there are two types of well-being: objective and subjective. Objective well-being is occurrences seen in the environment. This would entail how satisfied individuals

are with how much wages they make, and the assets this gives them to buy nice possessions. Subjective well-being is how pleased individuals are with their lives, such as, their careers or their health. For example, highly successful online educators are gratified in their jobs because this gives them inner enjoyment or great happiness because they are helping their students (McKerlich, Riis, Anderson, & Eastman, 2011). This sense of being happy is the heart of this research study. As a result, this research topic is an examination of the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators.

### **Research Design**

This study incorporated positive psychology and a generic qualitative approach that helped to understand the connection between highly successful online educators and a perceived sense of subjective well-being. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) theorized that positive psychology focuses on the areas that make individuals value their lives. They thought that these areas include “hope, wisdom, creativity, future, mindedness, courage, spirituality, responsibility, and perseverance.” These critical areas are the embodiment of what happiness (Scoffham & Barnes, 2011) truly means to a person.

Through positive psychology combined with a generic qualitative approach, open-ended questions provided the basis for what it means for highly successful online educators to have a perceived sense of subjective well-being in the jobs that they do. Web-based face-to-face observations transpired between both the researcher and participant. Irvine (2011) thought that face-to-face meetings are suitable for qualitative

interviewing. The researcher posed open-ended questions (Moustakas, 1994) during the conferences in a dialogue style web-based interview. Using a web-based conferencing tool, interviews occurred at a time that was equally suitable for both parties involved at an impartial location. Planning of the duration of interviews happened ahead of time as well. All conversations were audio and/or videotaped.

### **Research Question**

What is the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators?

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

There is a preconceived notion that highly successful online educators are assumed to have a positive sense of subjective well-being. The encounter of subjective well-being might be different depending on what this means to each participant. Participants should incorporate positive psychology techniques into their pedagogy. Their pedagogy should signify positive instruction occurrences that are provided to their students. These positive teaching experiences are presumed to add value and meaning that educators place on their happiness. However, this happiness might have a limitation. This limitation might imply that highly successful online educators are happy, but they may feel as though they are lacking the full experience of being considered a college educator because they do not teach face-to-face. Therefore, online educators must find ways to sustain happiness (Seligman, 2006) in order to earn their title as highly successful online educators.

An assumption of positive psychology is that being happy does not just happen instantaneously. A person's happiness is dependent upon her own life experiences and what she makes of them. Therefore, a limitation is that an individual might perceive herself to be happy based on her present situation. However, this perception can change as situations do not remain the same. As positive psychology's main focus is on making people happy and provide value to their lives (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In order to achieve this, the person must change and adapt to situations. Adapting to situations occurs through altering behavior patterns. Changing behavior patterns is essentially what positive psychologists do: provide intervention and strategies that will help individuals learn techniques to be happy when situations are not always positive. Therefore, an online educator who is not happy in the job that she does will need to use a positive psychology approach so she can have a positive subjective well-being and be successful at the same time.

Subjective well-being theoretical assumptions are based on Maslow's (1943) motivational needs. Maslow's (1943) needs are based on ambitions and desires that individuals have. The primary ambition and desire that online educators want is to be successful and happy in the job that they do. This motivation and aspiration is more than just meeting the instinctual need to survive, such as, eating and breathing. However, these higher needs can be limited if just the basic survival ones are met. This would then imply that online educators may not be happy. For that reason, in order for online educators to be happy they should exhibit Maslow's (1943) higher needs. These higher



needs will add meaning and richness to the quality of the educators' lives and they will be successful in their jobs.

Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) assumed that participants who self-report their responses on the Satisfaction with Life Scale are being candid in their answers. The limitation is a result of those who are not honest in answering the statements. Because of this, they may not be happy as online educators. In other words, these online educators may not be as successful as they perceive to be in their careers. Because of this, the scale may not be a valid instrument in determining if online educators' subjective well-being actually exists.

Subjective well-being is exactly how satisfied individuals are on a global level with their own life occurrences (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999, p. 277). Turkdogan and Duru (2012) defined that subjective well-being signifies that a person is content with the experiences that life has given to oneself.

Highly successful educators are defined as educators who recognize how students gain knowledge, teach tactics to be successful in the online classroom and integrate objectives that nurture critical thinking skills (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009). Lanouette (2012) thought that highly successful educators are effective, motivating, cooperative and adaptive. Highly successful online educators are flexible, communicate proficiently with their students and make intentions distinctive to them as cited in Glassick, Taylor Huber, and Maeroff (1997). Therefore, the results should reveal that highly successful online educators do have a perceived sense of subjective well-being.

## **Researcher Expectations**

The expected findings of the research study are identified through data collection and analysis by means of conscious awareness. Due to a constant cognizance process, any preconceptions and bias will be avoided. To avoid any preconceptions, being accessible, easygoing and helpful will ensure that the participants are answering the research questions openly and honestly. By participants answering their questions in an honest manner, their responses will hopefully indicate that they are happy. Therefore, highly successful online educators are happy and will have made a difference in the lives of their students.

## **Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

This study is structured into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides familiarity with the topic. The chapter also introduces a broad synopsis of pertinent data. In addition, the problem statement, rationale, importance and theoretical/methodological structures are introduced. Chapter 2 includes an evaluation of the applicable scholarly research. This is followed by chapter 3, which explains the approach used and integrates a partial factual outline of the co-researchers. The rationale of chapter 4 is to describe and evaluate the data collected. Finally, chapter 5 equates previous research outcomes, contemporary respective ideas of the primary researcher, societal implications understood, limitations detailed, proposals for forthcoming research, and concluding comments.

## **CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction to the Literature Review**

The perceived sense of subjective well-being provided a description and conclusion of the experiences they had as highly successful online educators. This study placed itself at the juncture of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), Maslow's work (1943) and theory on metamotivation (1971) for highly successful online educators (Brookfield, 1995, 2006) and subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1999). A review of the literature helped to fill in the gap by understanding the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators.

There are three vital areas for highly successful online educators that were expanded upon in the literature base. The literature base included faculty development, online curriculum (Durdu, Yalabik, & Cagiltay, 2009), and interaction between students and teachers. Maslow (1971); Brookfield (1995, 2006); and Diener et al. (1999) postulated that faculty participates in online training and development in order to become highly successful educators. Highly successful online educators can bring their knowledge to the classroom through exploration and learning. Faculty who interact with their students on a regular basis provide for learner satisfaction and subjective well-being for all involved (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009).

Durdu et al. (2009) conducted a research study on online program development. Their model thought that uninterrupted consultation, views and assessment are important aspects in making an online course successful for both students and teachers. This is important because having a curriculum that is successful will help instructors more effectively do their jobs and assist their students.

Conclusions reveal that online curriculums require added aspects that are not the same as those offered in a traditional format. The researchers found that it is necessary for those involved in the development of curriculum work in partnership and correspond at all times. They discovered that elements in an effective curriculum were successful and this helped instructors to provide a solid foundation for students learning in the online environment.

Previous research has been the center of subjective well-being of students (Ratelle et al., 2013). The practical implications of this qualitative study informed best practices for online and adult learning, as well as, subjective well-being. The best practices of highly successful online educators included being a critically reflective teacher (Brookfield, 1995). Critically reflective teachers embrace reflections that are based on ideas. This influences their beliefs and actions that provide guidance, worth, and determination as highly successful online educators. This sense of worth is essential for critically reflective teachers to have.

A critically reflective teacher is much better placed to communicate to colleagues and students-as well as to herself-the rationale behind her practice. She works from a position of informed commitment. She knows why she does what she does, why she thinks what she thinks. (Brookfield, 1995, p. 23)

Therefore, critically reflective teachers look back at their instruction experiences. Reflection of these experiences helps to understand the true meaning of being a successful online educator. These reflective experiences are based on Maslow's (1971) metamotivation needs. Metamotivation needs are the highest level of needs through self-actualization (Maslow, 1967, 2013). These high level needs are only met after lower level ones are met. For example, Maslow (1971) thought that physiological and biological come after a person's basic needs are met. Basic needs include Understanding what it means to be a highly successful online educator and subjective well-being can provide the link that can expand to a larger population of highly successful land-based educators (Albuquerque, Pedroso de Lima, Figueiredo, & Matos, 2012). In turn, this research study extended prior knowledge and helped practitioners to understand what it means for online educators to have a positive subjective well-being while being highly successful at the same time.

### **Theoretical Framework Perspectives**

For the purpose of this generic qualitative research study, theoretical elements bracketed the interest in the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) provided the empirical concept behind the theory of positive psychology. Together, they pioneered the meaning of what happiness means. The theorists postulated that happiness is dependent upon life satisfaction in our past experiences, being optimistic for the future and being content in the present time. As a result, these things provided the reasons as to the

meaning of more than just being alive, but what makes life experiences worth living. A life worth living is based on being motivated.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) recommended that an individual should remember all the positive situations instead of negative ones. These positive events are the key to remaining happy over time. They thought that the discipline of positive psychology did have a disparity in information previously learned. This limitation needed further clarification so there could be an understanding of the aiding features of happiness. Assuming that the supporting elements are the causes of being happy, future research should be focused on those factors, such as, being motivated and courageous and taking responsibility for one's actions. Focusing on these influences will help to explain what makes a person happy.

Being motivated is something that Maslow (1943) theorized. Maslow's (1943) groundbreaking theory on human motivation synthesized what he called "general-dynamic" theory. He provided the structure that future research on the topic was based upon. He theorized that human motivation is based on aspirations that are set forth in the intuitive mind. He felt that the needs individuals have are arranged in an order. For example, every motive is dependent upon the next one and it is not based on animal desires. Maslow (1943) first described motivation as survival needs centered on innate instincts, such as breathing air, drinking liquids, eating food and sleeping. These survival instincts form the foundation of higher order needs that complement the meaning of being happy in relation to subjective well-being.

Maslow (1943) recommended that sophisticated needs develop once the basic ones are met. This implied that the basic needs are satisfied by emerging into a higher one. He assumed that individuals who have been satiated in the early years of their lives are resilient to whatever is presented to them. This theorist felt that there are limitations put forth on the basic needs. He thought that ideals are limitations in relation to motivations. Future research should be geared towards basic needs and how they relate to ethnic issues. In addition, how basic needs are met in interpersonal relationships need to be explored.

Maslow (1971) expanded his ideas on human motivation to include metamotivation theory discussed individuals who are mature and motivated in sophisticated ways in relation to their own subjective well-being. This sense of happiness was something that Maslow (1971) referred to as his “metaneeds.” Metaneeds are necessities that go beyond basic needs. There are 17 metaneeds. They are “truth, goodness, beauty, unity, aliveness, uniqueness, perfection, necessity, completion, justice, order, richness, simplicity, effortless, playfulness, self-sufficiency and meaningfulness.” The metaneeds are important qualities that define and measure subjective well-being as this relates to happiness.

Measuring subjective well-being is important in understanding happiness. To measure this perceived sense of happiness, Diener et al. (1985) created the “Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS).” The SWLS measures life gratification and subjective well-being. These two things are the key to happiness. The scale has a high level of inner dependability and reliability. For example, this also predictably associates with positive

subjective well-being. The formation of the scale describes how happy a participant is with his or her life overall. For the study, 176 participants were sampled. Results revealed that there was a robust association between the scores and participants that were satisfied with their lives.

Diener et al. (1985) recommended that the SWLS might be advantageous to a clinician in understanding how happy individuals are. Diener et al. (1985) indicated that the interviewer was partial in how content individuals were over a lifetime. Assuming that the interviewer was partial then bias might occur. When bias occurs, then this imposes limitations on the results of the study. Future research needed to ascertain the authenticity of the scale. Also, that life satisfaction and how it affects a person should be looked into further. Therefore, life satisfaction is directly related to subjective well-being as this will tell how content individuals are with their lives.

This sense of subjective well-being and life satisfaction exemplified the connection that individuals felt with the quality of their lives (Diener et al., 1999). In order to fully understand subjective well-being and life satisfaction, the researchers examined 30 years of evolvement. The authors discussed Wilson's (1967) thoughts on what subjective well-being meant to him. They analyzed his conclusions and discussed up-to-date theories on subjective well-being. Previously, psychologists focused on negative feelings. However, trends have made strides on how happy people are. For example, an emotion that envisages happiness is a person's disposition and a person's temperament is thought to be inbred. Temperament is considered a direct link to an individual's subjective well-being. The researchers agreed with Wilson (1967) that



subjective well-being is associated with one's health. A person whose health is disabling will not feel good about herself. In contrast, a person who has less profound health problems will be content with her life.

Diener et al. (1999) recommended that researchers should continue with prudence when interpreting subjective well-being. As subjective well-being can be positive in one trait, it might not be so across the board for all emotions. The researchers implied that subjective well-being is not easy to define as there are many reasons why a person is happy or not. An assumption is that in the future, subjective well-being will have made headway on the topic. This is because the reasons that make a person happy will be explained in great detail through longitudinal studies. A limitation was the use of a cross-sectional study instead of a longitudinal study. They felt that by using a longitudinal study this will provide an answer for the causes of subjective well-being. Future research needed to focus on the processes of an individual's ability to adjust to experiences as they are occurring. These processes will provide insight in understanding why some individuals experience positive subjective well-being and being happy (Wilson, 1967).

Wilson (1967) wrote a groundbreaking article regarding being happy. The theorist looked at how dependable and justifiable happiness is and its' correlations. He found that happiness is consistent. However, he found that when happiness was evaluated for authenticity, it was good for additional attributes other than being happy. The researcher thought that positive features of self-worth and happiness linked with each other. In addition, negative facets of happiness also interconnected with each other. He concluded that people are happiest when their public life is prosperous. For example, he also found

that individuals who were wedded were happier than those that were not. In contrast, Wilson (1967) posited that it is significant to take other considerations into account when assessing how happy a person is. For example, individuals who suffer from mental disorders may not be happy. Therefore, measuring happiness should be inclusive of additional reasons why individuals have a positive subjective well-being.

Wilson's (1967) work divulged that recommendations are necessary when measuring for happiness. He implied that modifications need to be made to the assessments that are testing for being happy. He assumed that if variations are made, a more accurate picture will shed light on the mystery of self-worth and happiness. A limitation was that the results could be skewed if negative moods are not taken into account when measuring happiness. He did think that future research should be directed to the affiliation of happiness in relation to other components. In doing so, this would provide a more comprehensive picture of the factors involved with self-worth and happiness.

Self-worth and happiness can be measured so this can be understood by researchers more comprehensively. Sherer et al. (1982) constructed and validated a scale on self-worth. Self-worth involves certain behaviors that will result in either positive or negative consequences. For example, behavior instabilities are essential in order to adjust to circumstances as they occur. To test the scale's dependability, the researchers surveyed 376 participants who were taking introduction to psychology courses. The researchers discovered that the level of achievement that one reaches is reliant on the encounters she has. The more successful a person is at what she does, the more positive self-confidence

she will feel. This goal is important for highly successful online educators so they have a positive self-worth about themselves.

The researchers recommended that for those individuals who believe that they are not thriving, treatment can help them to attain this. This implication is important so that individuals obtain the best treatment likely and alter their behavior patterns. This assumption means that once an individual accepts therapy, she will be triumphant in everything she tries to do. However, Sherer et al. (1982) did suggest that the scale used on self-worth may not be phrased correctly for everyone to comprehend and this is a definite limitation of the study. Therefore, future research should look at how individuals in particularly, highly successful online educators, adapt in situations using another scale for more precise results.

Self-worth and happiness are just a few aspects that highly successful online educators should possess. Brookfield (2006) thought that these educators also have authenticity and credibility. Highly successful online educators are approachable, straightforward and present in the classroom (McKerlich et al., 2011) and with their students. He thought that these educators are influential in their students learning processes. Educators influence their students by building trust. Students who trust their instructors will interact more effectively in their classrooms. He postulated that educators who are effective in their teaching methods will help students to produce quality work in their classes. Teaching methods include educating from the learners' perspective. This perspective helps educators to reflect on best practices that are valued and are necessary for students to succeed.

Teachers that are succeeding in the class often will add something of value to offer their students. The value of the experience provides a richness that enhances the positive learning process that the highly successful educator can provide to the student (Knowles, 1970). He thought that highly successful educators provide information to students because they want to know why they are learning something. Students need to understand the reason why they need to learn information and this will help them to reach their goals. He theorized that when learners are involved in making informative decisions involving their education, they will succeed and meet their ambitions. Their ambitions are encouraged by highly successful educators so students academically function at their fullest potential.

### **Methodological Perspectives**

Methodological foundations linked the significance in the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. Methodology utilized the rudiments of positive psychology in order to comprehend the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. Heidegger (1962) theorized that occurrences happened in normal living circumstances and is a portion of an individuals' intentional consciousness. Moustakas (1994) supported a qualitative methodology that involved two levels. Level I comprise the distinct data of narratives by means of open-ended questions. Level II conveys occurrences based on observations, and this infers and exemplifies the person's happenings. Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) are in support of positive psychology. They thought that this encompassed affirmative sentiments and optimistic temperament characteristics: these typify a

perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. Seligman (2011) understood that positive psychology is the analysis of favorable happenings. Also, positive psychology offers awareness in interpreting happiness for not just online educators but for persons from diverse ethnicities and customs (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005).

Dahlsgaard et al. (2005) conducted a research study based on positive psychology assets as this relates to ethnicity and historical content. Ethnicity and antiquity were examined in China, South Asia and the West in relation to enlightened and sacred customs. Understanding what makes these cultures happy can help medical professionals with diagnosis and intervention tactics. All cultures surveyed responded with similar reappearance of six essential values: “courage, justice, humanity, temperance, wisdom, and transcendence.” In essence, the researchers concluded that these virtues are the makeup of what it means to have a content life.

The authors recommend that researchers focus on repetitive virtues instead of ones that do not reappear often. For example, Dahlsgaard et al. (2005) found two virtues happened most often in their study; justice and humanity. In other words, this implies that these virtues were repeated across cultures consistently. The researchers assumed that this is because these virtues are most important across cultures. However, the researchers cautioned that the virtues might have other reasons for recurring constantly. They speculated that the virtues might be inbred or simply a survival technique. By stating this to be true, would limit the results that the researchers found. Future research would need to continue to focus on the connection between positive psychology and the virtues that

Dahlsgaard et al. (2005) wrote about. This intersection will hopefully provide an explanation on positive psychology as it relates to what a person values most in her life (Seligman et al., 2005).

Seligman et al. (2005) expanded the literature base on the topic of positive psychology interventions. They reviewed innovative advancements in the realm of positive psychology and classifications corresponding to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). They appraised five interventions based on contentment and one application built on limitation. The interventions were based upon the assets and qualities of positive psychology. According to the theorists, the virtues are “wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence” (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005). The strengths associated with those virtues include “ubiquity, fulfilling, morally valued, does not diminish others, non-felicitous opposite, trait-like, measurable, distinctiveness, paragons, prodigies, selective absence and institutions.” These benefits and strengths provided the configuration for positive psychology interventions in the future. For example, in order for a person to achieve happiness, she must seek out intervention strategies when sadness occurs. For the study, there were 577 participants with a makeup of 42% males and 58% females. Many of the participants were between 30 and 55 years of age and a little less than 40% earned a college education. Results found that all the participants were content posttest. This meant that the participants who continued intervention strategies over a long period of time were happier.

Recommendations made by Seligman et al. (2005) included people who were depressed and sad and need to take part in long term intervention therapy sessions. Assuming one continues to go to intervention, she will change her mood from sad to happy. This implied that once a person becomes happy through intervention techniques, she will remain happy as long as she does not stop attending therapy. However, the researchers warned that if a person stops attending therapy, she may not remain happy and the sad feelings will return. Those happy feelings guided the study and could have limited the results found. For example, once a person is not happy any longer, researchers would need to find reasons why this has occurred especially if continued therapy is ongoing. The researchers speculated that a person who is no longer happy would need additional intervention techniques to improve her mood. They thought that future qualitative methodological research can help in explaining feelings regarding different areas of a person's life. Whether or not intervention is necessary, providing justification on how someone feels can be helpful for those that need it the most.

Heimbrock (2011) explored qualitative methodology and how this relates to religious studies. His report looked at novel opportunities between the associations of the unique explanations of faith. The author differentiated between methods and methodology. For example, his thoughts led him to comprehend that a method is a way to gather data. In contrast, methodology involves the way to perform a research study. He concluded that qualitative methodology assists to absorb a richer significance of what faith means to a person.

Utilizing other means of qualitative approaches is recommended in order to grasp theology as a whole. A limitation of Heimbrocks' (2011) work is the distinction between religions. The notion of faith has a different meaning from one religion to another. He assumed that there are various viewpoints on the topic of theology. This implied that insight of a person's faith is uniquely comprehended according to one's religion. Future research should be centered on the effect theology has on a person's faith through qualitative methods.

In addition to Heimbrocks' (2011) work on qualitative methods, Nicholls (2009) discussed methodology in research. The author described a diverse qualitative methodological approach called discourse analysis. With discourse analysis, this challenges passive thinking patterns. For example, he called these thinking patterns "a happy acceptance." The author outlined the relationship between the researcher and her participants. The relationship between the researcher and participant is the parting of feelings so bias does not occur. He concluded that the different methodologies eventually directed the study being conducted.

Nicholls (2009) recommended that the approach produced abundant data collection and analysis. This implied that by yielding significant data and analysis will construct upon theory. By building upon theory the author assumed that qualitative research can be generalized to other populations. However, the author thought that the researcher should be guarded if theory is not designed as a result of the data derived and subsequently analyzed. Future research should continue to focus on the different approaches as they relate to qualitative research as this links philosophical views with



methodology. Focusing on the different approaches can help researchers who might be more familiar with quantitative methods (Kisely & Kendall, 2011) assess qualitative ones.

Kisely and Kendall (2011) created a manual for qualitative research assessment for clinicians who are more accustomed with quantitative methods. The authors thought that quantitative techniques, such as, validity and reliability have qualitative counterparts. They felt that research that is qualitative can work hand-in-hand with quantitative methodologies. There are several parallels between qualitative and quantitative methods. Generalizing in quantitative research is similar to transferability in qualitative. This would be applicably true in mixed method research studies.

Recommendations by Kisely and Kendall (2011) indicated that doctors need to combine qualitative and quantitative methods in treating patients. By combining these methodologies mental illness symptoms can be reduced and/or prevented. For example, this will lead to a road of recovery for those who have emotional disorders. A limitation considered by the authors was the issue of researcher beliefs of the study being conducted. This would put the participants at a disadvantage as counter-transference might occur. An assumption that the authors contemplated was the strengths and limitations of qualitative and quantitative methods. The writers implied that both qualitative and quantitative research must address issues of non-disclosure. Future research should be aimed at different approaches in qualitative methodology in relation to sampling, collecting data and assessment. This will ensure accurate evaluation of the approaches and techniques used.

## **Literature on Subjective Well-Being**

The literature on subjective well-being consisted of features that sustained relevance as this related to highly successful online educators. Subjective well-being among college learners has been an indicator of achievement for them (Scoffham & Barnes, 2011). The subjective well-being of highly successful online college educators is emphatically imperative to comprehend (Lanouette, 2012). Presently, the necessity to grasp the subjective well-being for highly successful online educators is essential because current academic journal articles have concentrated on learner achievement in education delivered on the computer (Matuga, 2009; McAllister & Watkins, 2012; Suldo et al., 2009). Exploration has been focused on learner or land based instructor subjective well-being (Ren, 2009; Dave et al., 2011; Cenkseven-Önder & Sari, 2009; Scoffham & Barnes, 2011). Supplementary academic efforts are directed at accomplished online curriculums (Durdu et al., 2009). In addition, overall subjective well-being (Ozmete, 2011; Albuquerque et al., 2012) has been studied and also in relation to demographics (Agrawal et al., 2011). The fundamental research question, “what is the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators” clarifies the connection among highly successful online educators and the relationship with a perceived sense of subjective well-being.

Albuquerque et al. (2012) completed a research study on subjective well-being in relation to life satisfaction, positive and negative affect. Teachers were surveyed on how they felt about their own happiness as it relates to these three areas. The researchers argue that staying positive increases memory and attention spans when faced with negative

situations. Results revealed that the three correlates are moderately independent of each other.

Future research is recommended to support the results found by sampling other populations. Generalizations to other populaces were limited since the participants were teachers only. Other populations should include samples across cultures and demographics (Agrawal et al., 2011) to see if results are consistent. In doing so, results found would reinforce the researchers' viewpoints that life satisfaction, negative and positive affect are both moderately correlated and independent of one another.

Subjective well-being has been studied by Agrawal et al. (2011) in connection with demographics. Their study explored the correlations of subjective well-being. They postulated that subjective well-being is significant to study because of the association for interventions. Results revealed that demographic variables have a least possible outcome on subjective well-being and there is a need to investigate other areas that offer projections on this topic.

Recommendation for future research should center on the subjective well-being of a much bigger populace. Because the sample size was small (the main limitation of the study), there were no generalities that could be made. Agrawal et al. (2011) concluded, "There were significant differences in subjective well-being across gender, age, education, work status, income and religion." This finding meant that other differences, such as disposition and social encouragement or success (Eroğlu, 2012) were not included in the considerations. A more thorough clarification was necessary to realize the impact of subjective well-being.

Previous research has been on student subjective well-being or student success in the classroom. Eroğlu (2012, p. 168) stated, “Subjective well-being has a great role as an indicator of life quality, achievement of subjective aims, handling of difficulties of life and having pleasure from life.” Suldo et al. (2009) postulated that instructors who attempt to connect with their students bring a fostering and caring learning environment to the classroom. Brannan et al. (2013) included in their discussions that subjective-well-being is how happy highly successful online educators are with their teaching experiences. Happiness among college students has been an indicator of success in the classroom (Turkdogan & Duru, 2012). Being successful in the classroom helps students to achieve their goals thought Shaha and Ellsworth (2013). Therefore, the perceived sense of subjective well-being of highly successful online college educators is just as important to understand.

Lanouette (2012) presented information on the traits that led to content feelings for highly effective instructors possess. He listed ten traits. They are: “mobile, organized, patient, challenging, adaptive, syntactic, passionate, interactive, serious and caring.” The author conducted research involving five hundred educators in various parts of the country. These educators were evaluated for their performance level and how content students were with them. Results found that educators who were ineffectual had conflicting characteristics than the ones listed above.

A recommendation by Lanouette (2012) was that for instructors to be effective in their jobs they must insist that students keep their cell phones on. For example, he made this recommendation based on the fact that cell phones are tools for acquiring

information. This implied that students will use their cell phones to assist in their education by researching information on the internet. Lanouette (2012) assumed that the tools for being a highly successful educator are used as he suggests. This also implied that the instructor will provide efficient instruction to her students. However, this can be limited by not identifying the warning signs of ineffective teaching approaches. Research should be geared to future analysis to see if the tools that Lanouette (2012) described are helpful.

Ren (2009) explored the context of how happy college students were in general. He conducted a research study that indiscriminately surveyed 1200 college students to see how happy they were. The researcher compared inner-city and rural higher education students. There were gender differences but all were happy with their lives. Students based their happiness according to the education they received and how driven they were to accomplish their ambitions. He concluded that no matter what students majored in college, they had a positive subjective well-being.

A recommendation by Ren (2009) included that college instructors should add significance to their students' lives by incorporating this into their college major. For example, this would imply that students would be happier in their classes if there was importance to the learning process. Assuming that this information is true, then students will be creative and inspired in their classes. However, learning might be limited if teachers do not incite their students. An emphasis should be placed on future research that aligned with the societal standards that college students have as this relates to their subjective well-being (Dave et al., 2011).

Dave et al. (2011) conducted a study in regards to the variables of subjective well-being, monitoring one's behaviors and overall capability to for college students to achieve their ambitions. The researchers wanted to see if these variables were correlated. The tools that the researchers used were the "Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)" (Diener et al., 1985), Locus of Control Scale (Hasnain & Joshi, 1992) and the General Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (Sherer et al., 1982). The researchers included 36 participants who were between the ages of 21-25. ANOVA and Coefficient of Correlation testing were used to analyze the data. Results revealed that there is a correlation between subjective well-being and internal locus of control, as well as, self-efficacy.

Dave et al. (2011) recommended that subjective well-being is related to how healthy a person is psychologically. For example, individuals who are sad or suffer from apprehension will not have an optimistic subjective well-being. A limitation of the study is that it was geared only to college students who were 25 years old or under. This implication meant that there was a change from internal to external locus of control increasing subjective well-being. The sample population limited the study and should have been generalized to a much larger population. Future research should focus on attributes of life as this relates to subjective well-being (Ratelle et al., 2013) and also among the different age groups of college students.

Ratelle et al. (2013) investigated subjective well-being of college students related to those who are most important to them in their lives. In their study, the researchers surveyed 256 college students to see if they had a positive sense of subjective well-being

if emotional support was received. The authors thought that those students who were happy did better in their academic studies and had improved communication skills.

The researchers concluded that college students benefit from having a support system in place. This implies that these students adapt to social situations and gives them confidence in the classroom. Surveying the same students for the study was the major limitation as bias could have been present. Recommendation included replication of the study to address the limitation. Replicating the study should include not only land based students or instructors (Cenkseven-Önder & Sari, 2009) but distance education as well.

Cenkseven-Önder and Sari (2009) did a research study involving the predictors of subjective well-being for land based instructors. The researchers surveyed 161 instructors to see if they had a positive or negative affect in regards to their quality of their lives as teachers. Results found that coping strategies are necessary components for instructors to take advantage of if stress factors are present in their teaching lives.

Future recommendation suggested that studies should be done on the topic including both descriptive and predictive factors that contribute to a positive quality of life as an instructor. Lack of descriptive and predictive factors was the main limitation of the study. This would have provided clarity of the positive feelings that teachers have in regards to their work (Scoffham & Barnes, 2011).

Scoffham and Barnes (2011) believed that researching happiness and subjective well-being in a learning environment was important to pursue. They defined what happiness meant to students and that being fulfilled was important to them. They found

that students who are happy value their educational experience. Students will become optimistic because they feel positive that their teachers will provide the tools to succeed.

The authors found that there were challenges that educators faced while promoting happiness for their students. They felt that happiness is hard to measure and instructors should make this a priority so students receive a meaningful education. Since measuring happiness is not an easy task, this limited the conclusions of the Scoffham and Barnes (2011) study. These conclusions helped them to understand that teachers and students' regard happiness as the most important priority for both parties (Eroğlu, 2012).

Eroğlu (2012) completed a study involving subjective well-being in relation to college students' happiness. The researcher examined gender and age, self-esteem, family support and how satisfied one is at his or her job. These factors were compared to one another as they relate to students' happiness. 240 participants were sampled and two questionnaires were used to obtain the data. The questionnaires included one on decision making styles and another on subjective well-being. In addition, a form that contained private information was employed. Results indicated that gender and ethnicity was a factor in determining subjective well-being.

Recommendations for the Eroğlu (2012) research study were based on the findings. Findings indicated that subjective well-being was dependent upon where the college students lived. Female students also reported having a higher subjective well-being than males did. Therefore, a basic assumption was that beliefs influenced the happiness of college students. The researcher implied that there should a better policy for questionnaires so questions asked can take into account a person's culture. Another



implication of the study was that negative consequences exist because of cultural differences resulting in a decrease in subjective well-being. Cultural differences and demographics limited the study. For example, as demographics relate with economic stability this could affect the results that were found. Future research should focus on different cross-cultures (Brannan et al., 2013) to see if the same results are obtained or if they are different and an explanation needed to be provided for what is found.

Brannan et al. (2013) conducted a research study on subjective well-being and the support that is gained from social support of family members and friends. This cross-cultural research explored how happy college students were through a support system that they could count on. Participants included students who were from different cultures and ethnicities. For example, this study included Middle Eastern cultures in Iran and Jordan. Students who lived in the United States were part of the study as well. The researchers controlled the gender of the participant. Results found that there was an inter-correlation among the variables. Social support and subjective well-being were found to be positive for all participants. In addition, feelings produced negative and positive emotional states for every participant.

A recommendation by Brannan et al. (2013) suggested that the results should be generalized to a larger population and caution in doing this must be used. A limitation of the study was that it did not analyze social support systems among the college students. The college students implied that it was important in having a friend there to support them. Assuming that friends provided support would solidify that social support systems exist among that population. Future research should be geared towards finding out why

there were no differences between the countries that were surveyed. Also, that the age of the participant needed to be obtained first in order to obtain gender differences that would occur.

Turkdogan and Duru (2012) carried out a research study involving satisfying fundamental necessities in relation to college students' happiness. The researchers surveyed 627 students and used the Satisfaction with Life Scale and the Negative Affect Scale as the instruments. Results indicated that students' who have their essential basics met are happy overall. Furthermore, an awareness of fitting in and affection are the most important factors for college students' happiness. The most common necessary want that all the participants' conveyed was independence. For example, independence provided a sense of happiness and satisfaction in life.

The researchers recommended that those students' who are in jeopardy need suitable approaches to attain life satisfaction and meet their general needs (Turkdogan & Duru, 2012). This implication indicated that students who do not have a sense of happiness are not satisfied with their basic needs. When basic needs are not satisfied students are not motivated to do well (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009). This basic assumption concluded that when vital needs are not met then students will have trouble being happy in their future or in society. Students are not happy with their future, might have problems being content with their lives (Ozmete, 2011). This means that central needs are not met and this will limit how students' interrelate with others and will have trouble achieving success in their classwork. Future research should look at additional universities to generalize the findings to other populations. Comparing the university that

was used for this study to others; members of different professions, such as educational counselors would provide a more thorough investigation and add valuable information to the literature base.

The literature base expanded to students being motivated through positive teacher and student interactions (Rugutt & Chemosil, 2009). The authors postulated that students who are motivated do better academically because of teachers who take an interest in them. This sense of motivation helps students to have a positive sense of subjective well-being and this fosters vital critical thinking skills. A cross-sectional study was done to analyze how motivated students are if they receive support from their teachers.

Rugutt and Chemosil (2009) found that students who are motivated are successful in their educational studies. They thought that since this characteristic is essential for success in the classroom, that students should strengthen their need for expression and creativeness so they keep motivated. This implication would improve critical thinking skills that are the essentials of higher learning educational goals. These skills would also help students to be content in their lives if their academic needs are met (Ozmete, 2011).

Ozmete (2011) conducted research on subjective well-being as this relates to being content with one's life. Life fulfillment is contingent on a person's perception. The researcher felt that subjective well-being is not easy to gauge. In order to determine subjective well-being, he surveyed 108 participants who completed the life satisfaction scale. The results of the study indicated that the participants were pleased with their lives. When participants are pleased with their lives, they find true life contentment.

Recommendations of the research study should continue to focus on how satisfied people are with their lives. Ozmete (2011) indicated that men are more satisfied than women are with their lives. Because of this indication, he assumed that there are distinctions between the genders in relation to how happy a person is with her life. A limitation of the study was the generalization element. The study was not generalized to a larger population consisting of varied countries, such as Hong Kong (Chan, 2009). For example, this means that there may be differences between city and rustic populations. Future research should focus on the speculation behind subjective well-being and how satisfied individuals are with their lives. By doing this, a framework can be used as a beginning point that can be built upon.

Chan (2009) did a research study on three constructs of being happy and the associations with subjective well-being among educators in Hong Kong. The model included a life of worth, a life of gratification and a life of commitment. He showcased the example of three constructs would forecast life fulfillment and the positive feelings of subjective well-being. He also had three components of subjective well-being that included an undesirable affect. The researcher sampled 228 participants who utilized three scales that were scored. The first scale was the orientations to happiness scale. The second scale is the satisfaction with life scale and the third is the positive and negative affect schedule. Results showed that there was construct validity among the three paradigms that were utilized. The researcher found that the satisfaction with life scale was optimistically linked with positive affect and negatively associated with an undesirable influence.

Recommendation by Chan (2009) included focusing on overall areas of happiness. Happiness could be interpreted as interventions and ways to ease exhaustion is necessary for future research. For the teachers to be happy in their jobs, they need to have opportunities and options. For example, he also believed that teachers who saw importance in their work were more content and this avoided exhaustion. The researcher discovered many limitations with the study. One limitation was an inconsistency between the construct and the perceptible happenings the participant had. Another limitation was the regulated sample range. Chan (2009) speculated that enlisting college educators might be representative and this would determine generalizability on teacher's subjective well-being. An assumption of the study was that the constructs would involuntarily increase subjective well-being. This implies that the encounter of positive feelings guided the confirmation of a life of engagement. The researcher felt that this could not be eliminated. Future research should be focused on a longitudinal design. In addition, additional variables should be used to establish well-being, such as, job happiness or performance.

### **Synthesis of the Research Findings**

The main focus of the literature included theory and methodology in connection with subjective well-being. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) and Maslow's work (1943, 1971) provided the framework on metamotivation needs that highly successful online educators (Brookfield, 1995, 2006) possess. These needs specify the meaning of subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1999). Diener et al. (1985) research revealed a positive correlation between subjective well-being and life fulfillment. Wilson (1967)

agreed with Diener et al. (1999) and added that individuals who are happy with themselves will also have good health. Brookfield (2006) agreed with Diener et al. (1985) as he thought that subjective well-being is interrelated to happiness. For example, this happiness provides for a positive learning environment for students (Knowles, 1970). Happiness is important for subjective well-being as this relates to positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Heidegger, 1962; Seligman et al., 2005; Dahlsgaard et al., 2005). These thoughts are part of the person's consciousness and are observed through the daily positive experiences she has (Moustakas, 1994).

Scholarly research on subjective well-being and happiness has been at the core of positive experiences that happen daily. These experiences exhibit certain values (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005). The researchers concluded that these values and positive feelings are what encompass a happy life (Lanouette, 2012). Before positive feelings can be identified, Nicholls (2009) established that a bond should be formed between the researcher and participant and this will help to avoid bias. For example, Kisely and Kendall (2011) decided that bias needs to be avoided so counter-transference does not occur in the online learning environment. Bias can occur if the researcher engages herself fully in what the online learner is trying to convey.

Exploring the results of the literature base further and understanding the meaning of subjective well-being (Ren, 2009) one must think empirically (Lanouette, 2012). For example, thinking empirically includes understanding information at a higher level using critical thinking skills so positive subjective well-being can be understood more fully (Ren, 2009; Dave et al., 2011; Rugutt & Chemosil, 2009). Eroğlu (2012) presumed that

subjective well-being starts with inspirations and self-efficacy (Turkdogan & Duru, 2012). This positive subjective well-being extended to teachers and other professionals as well (Brannan et al., 2013; Chan, 2009; Ozmete, 2011).

### **Critique of the Previous Research**

Previous research has focused on the meaning of subjective well-being. The meaning of subjective well-being includes using critical thinking skills. Utilizing critical thinking skills gives strength to the literature base that highly successful online educators have (Lanouette, 2012). Using critical thinking skills will help to synthesize what this means to be content in the jobs that they do. Furthermore, they strive to provide excellence in the online learning environment. However, in contrast, a weakness can occur if the highly successful online educator becomes bias and countertransference of thoughts happen (Kisely & Kendall, 2011). Therefore, highly successful online educators must be happy with the job that they are doing. For example, the happiness that the online educator exemplifies comes from feeling positive and this is essential for students to succeed (Knowles, 1970). As happiness and positive psychology go hand-in-hand (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Dahlsgaard et al., 2005), these are important aspects of educator/student interactions and life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985).

### **Summary**

The literature review included pertinent information on the topic of subjective well-being. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), Maslow (1943, 1971), Brookfield (2006) and Knowles (1970) discussed the theory behind the meaning of subjective well-being. Heidegger (1962) postulated that happiness and subjective well-being interrelates

with positive psychology methodology. Moustakas (1994) believed that individuals are conscious of their own subjective well-being. Therefore, several researchers have conducted research on subjective well-being. The research has defined what subjective well-being means. Eroğlu (2012) defined that that subjective well-being comes from an inspiration a person has and a sense of self-efficacy that begins the journey into discovering what the true idea of subjective well-being is (Turkdogan & Duru, 2012). Furthermore, Dahlsgaard et al. (2005) implied that subjective well-being involves a person's values. As values are described, goals in relation to subjective well-being can be achieved and critical thinking skills must be empirical in nature as this relates to the meaning of subjective well-being (Lanouette, 2012). Based on the review of the literature, highly successful online educators will have a perceived sense of subjective well-being so students can have rewarding learning experiences in their academic careers.



## **CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY**

### **Purpose of the Study**

A generic qualitative methodology was utilized to solve the research question, “What is the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators?” The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of how happy highly successful online educators are in their jobs. Understanding this sense of happiness is an idea that has been passed over in the current literature base. Therefore, this research study discovered a perceived sense of subjective well-being by exploring the thoughts, impressions and experiences that have an influence in online educators’ lives.

The literature base detailed that subjective well-being did associate with positive psychology methodology. Subjective well-being is thought to be inspirational (Eroğlu, 2012) that comes from self-efficacy and values (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005) that a person has. Chan (2009) believes that for educators to have a sense of subjective well-being they must be given options and opportunities to further their careers. The research study encompassed earlier exploration by taking part in the innovation of a perceived sense of subjective well-being of highly successful online educators.

### **Research Design**

A generic qualitative research design was utilized for this study. A generic design is beneficial in answering the research question. This is because this type of design

describes the meaning and essence of the experiences of a perceived sense of subjective well-being as highly successful online educators interpret it. Rich data is gathered from participant experiences in order to explore the phenomenon. The rich data gathered from the perceived sense of subjective well-being of highly successful online educators included their beliefs, notions and contemplations of what this meant to them.

The total encounters, feelings, and overall viewpoints of the participants were the focus of this generic qualitative study on the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. The actual experiences were of interest for the researcher in order to provide a better understanding of how happy highly successful online educators are. The researcher conducted face-to-face semi-structured conversation style observations using a web-based conferencing tool with online educators that were highly successful and happy in their current jobs. Irvine (2011) thought that face-to-face conferences that are web-based are suitable for qualitative interviewing. The researcher asked questions that were open-ended (Moustakas, 1994). Rich data came from questions that were of a contemplative nature through a conversation that was narrated. This dialogue consisted of real world experiences that were appropriate for the participant choice. Participant selection included a small sample size of 11. Out of the 11 participants asked to participate in the study, three did not meet the preliminary qualifications. Eight participants met the criteria for the research study and were interviewed using a web-based conferencing tool.

The web-based conferencing tool provided several sources to the researcher and all participants were audio taped. However, only one out of the eight participants was

able to use her video webcam. In addition, there was an on-screen white board where the researcher and participant were both able to type responses as the interviews were being conducted. Participants were asked to keep and record in an optional journal of their daily experiences. Only one out of the eight participants agreed to keep the journal. The journal was emailed to the researcher for data analysis after 30 days.

The pertinent stages for enlisting participants and collecting data happened after the researcher received official approval of the research plan and from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participant enrollment came from an online university. The university's Psychology Chair was contacted requesting site permission. Once approved, emails were directed to the Psychology department Chairs to find out who met the criteria of the study. Each Chair emailed faculty members in their respective departments asking if they were willing to participate. From there, prospective participants made contact and then the subject matter and overall information about the study was deliberated on. Potential participants were chosen based on whether they met the conditions or not.

When 11 participants were chosen for the study, each completed a preliminary survey to see if they met the criteria. Three out of the 11 potential participants did not meet the criteria. Again, the remaining eight participants did meet the criteria and interviews were scheduled via a web-based conferencing tool called Adobe Connect Pro. Adobe Connect Pro permits for subject annotations to be included specifically into the recorded session. Interviews were accomplished supporting confidentiality as each session was audio recorded. All interviews took approximately 40-45 minutes in length. This allowed the researcher to record each participant's answers as they were being

taped. Recorded sessions were played back and field notes were examined over post interview sessions to detail any inconsistencies and for accuracy.

After all the interviews were completed, transcripts verbatim were attained and assessed for the data collection procedure. The data analysis occurred after the transcripts were recorded and read-through thoroughly. Themes were found for each participant's responses and a comprehensive evaluation was made to find common themes in total.

Direct quotes helped to hold the interest of the reader allowing for evaluation to see if the circumstances had any value. Generalizations can be made once the research question is fulfilled so that the study can be transferable to the encounters of other participants of a larger population or a land-based study instead. Speculations and preconceptions related to the topic include that highly successful online educators need to be adaptable and accommodating. Biases include not having acceptance or endurance for their students. Also, they may not be available for students who need assistance.

### **Target Population and Participant Selection**

Attributes of the population of significance were from an online university from their Psychology department. Each participant needed to score 25 or higher on the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and have received recognition at a various point in their present career. This recognition honors educating or being a mentor that provides an excellent education for those who are on the path to success. The Satisfaction with Life Scale is:

A short 5-item instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. The scale usually requires only about one minute of a respondent's time. The scale is in the public domain (not copyrighted) and therefore you are free to use it without permission or charge by all professionals (researchers and practitioners) as long as you give credit to the authors of the scale: Ed Diener, Robert A. Emmons, Randy J. Larsen and Sharon Griffin as noted in the 1985 article in the *Journal of Personality Assessment* (Diener et al., 1985).

The size of sample comprised of eight participants. Three additional faculty members attempted to be included in the study. However, they did not meet the initial criteria of scoring 25 or higher on the SWLS. Had data saturation not been met, additional participants would have been recruited. Data saturation happens when there is no novel information found. Purposive sampling was used as the most suitable choice for this study. Researchers make an educated evaluation on the justification for the participants who will be involved in the study (Patton, 2002) when using purposive sampling. This is a very effectual way for researchers to discover information through participant occurrences and gives perceptive information regarding the phenomena at hand. The purpose was not to oversimplify the outcomes to a larger population.

### **Procedures**

This research study assessed the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. Highly successful online educators who worked in the Psychology department of an online university were contacted first by the Chair and then were informed of the research study at hand. A generic qualitative methodology was utilized and involved interviews that were semi-structured. This allowed for new ideas to be brought up during the interview process.

A purposive sampling methodology procedure involved eight participants. This type of sampling procedure is appropriate with a generic qualitative study as it is adaptable and empirical in nature. The participants were selected from those who had met the preliminary criteria and communication was made with each via email. The initial benchmarks included those who received recognition and received a score of 25 or higher on the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Interviews were arranged at a suitable time for the participant. An informed consent form was emailed over to the participant who endorsed the document and returned it back to the researcher. Interviews were conducted using Adobe Connect Pro. Adobe Connect Pro is a web-conferencing tool used by the online university. This web-conferencing tool allows for interviews to be taped, along with the participant and researcher being able to see each other using their computer's webcam. However, only one of the participants was able to use her webcam for the interview. Before the interviews took place and the data collection process happened, the researcher originally made rapport with each participant and provided context in regards to the research study. Each interview was primarily allocated 30-45 minutes. In fact, each interview took between 30-40 minutes in total. A headset was utilized for two of the interviews as the speaker button was not working correctly for the majority of the participants to hear what the researcher was trying to convey. Questions that were open-ended were utilized for data collection procedures.

Participants were asked if they would be willing to keep a journal where they would write down their feelings on what it meant to be a highly successful online educator daily. Only one participant agreed to keep the journal for 30 days. The other

participants were unable to keep the journal due to time constraints. At the end of the 30 days, the researcher contacted the participant to see if the journal was completed. The participant emailed the completed journal back to the researcher for data analysis and transcription. Dwyer, Piquette, Buckle, and McCaslin (2013) contemplated that journaling aids in various features of the research process. Field notes were taken during the interview as each participant responded to the open-ended questions. At the end of each interview, the researcher asked the participants if there was any supplementary information that he or she would like to add. The researcher expressed thanks to each participant and then asked if further contact could be made with them if needed for interview interpretation reasons.

Transcriptions of the interviews were stored on a USB flash drive and kept in a sealed cabinet in a restricted place so no other individual besides the researcher had access to it. Davidson (2009) thought that transcriptions are an important part of the empirical process. Duplicates of the transcripts were reproduced and also kept in the same cabinet that was sealed in the researcher's household. To safeguard the privacy of each participant, the computer files were kept secure through an exclusive password that the researcher selected. Every safety measure was taken to make sure that participants remained unidentified.

### **Instruments**

The interviews were led by the researcher as the solitary method used for data collection reasons. During the interview process, member checking occurred by the researcher. This also took place at the conclusion of the study to ensure precision and

believability. Open-ended and follow up questions were inquired by the researcher so exact portrayals of the phenomenon were described. The researcher's capability to ask questions in a dialogue style approach associated with her current experience as a face-to-face instructor. Face-to-face instructors ask conversation type questions to students in order to produce a response of whether they comprehend significant ideas effectively. As the researcher is an online educator, she was able to connect with the participants experiences. The interview questions explored those experiences of being highly successful online educators and how happy they were in their jobs. All participant responses were then recorded.

### **Research Questions**

The research study used dialogue style semi-structured interviews for information that was significant to the research question. The research question was fulfilled through the participants' encounters. The experiences were subjective in nature, establishing feelings, reflections and attitudes of their own free will. These occurrences formed the foundation of what the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators meant to them. Prior to conducting the interviews a field test was done with the researcher's mentor. This made certain that each query related precisely to the research question. The questions for the interview comprised of:

1. What does it mean to you to be a highly successful online educator?
2. How satisfied are you with your teaching life?
3. How does that satisfaction or lack of it in your teaching life add value to the quality of your life?
4. How do you adapt and accommodate to the changes in your teaching life?



5. How does this ability to adapt and accommodate affect your overall level of happiness?
6. In what ways do you use creative and critically reflective thinking patterns in your teaching life?
7. What are your personal practices that allow you to feel happy about your teaching style? Tell me more about those practices; meditation, yoga, etc. that keeps you sharp.
8. What are the ways that you keep yourself motivated so you remain successful as an online educator?
9. It would appear that highly successful online educators are optimistic in their teaching lifestyle. How does that describe you?
10. In what ways do you encourage social participation in your classrooms?
11. How does your online teaching give meaning to your life?

### **Data Analysis**

After the data collection process happened, all transcripts were systematically evaluated for accurateness. The researcher transcribed the interviews and journal entries so synthesis of textural and structure significances and real importance of the experiences were found. Opinions came about through a technique of coding and breaking down those codes as much as possible (Smith & Firth, 2011). This was precisely indicated in facts, images and dialogues (Creswell, 2007, 2009) as explorations and prospects of innovative ideas were discovered. This researcher acquired information from the meanings and importance of themes that derived from participants' knowledge (Heimbrock, 2011). Therefore, the research question, "what is the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators?" included the subsequent steps of data analysis:

1. Information that is relevant to the study was emphasized with a yellow marker. Any information that was not linked to the study was set aside in a file for potential assessment.
2. Descriptive codes were provided for each data element.
3. Information was arranged collectively as themes appeared.
4. Direct quotations were used for illustration purposes.
5. Repetitions were established through the themes attained.
6. All patterns and themes were evaluated comprehensively to make certain that they related precisely to the research question.
7. All expressions were coded significantly through documentation, that was arranged and phrases were combined as the themes materialized.

The researcher took every single opportunity to actively look over the innovative interviews. Original interviews were listened and examined several times to establish their accurateness. Also, to understand if any novel information was to be acquired from them or to ensure nothing was left behind.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are essential to the success of any research study. For that reason, the researcher made certain to focus on ethical considerations as completely as possible. Significant components were adhered to in accord with the American Psychological Association (2002). Compliance involved participants' distinctiveness and confidential material to be protected in order to safeguard them from maltreatment. Any distinguishing information that was utilized on the interview procedures were kept indistinctive so all participants' characteristics were secure.

Every participant was emailed an informed consent form. The informed consent form is essential as it gave the participants the opportunity to join in the study. The informed consent form contained within the entitlement to leave from the study at any time. All eight participants endorsed the informed consent form via an electronic signature before the study started and emailed it back completed (American Psychological Association, 2002).

### **Expected Findings**

The research study concentrated on the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. The encounters of the highly successful online educators were observed using a generic qualitative approach. The generic qualitative approach included interviewing all eight participants in a semi-structured manner. The eight participants were selected of their own free will from a group of psychology online instructors. The main expectancy of the outcomes is that highly successful online educators are happy in the jobs that they do. Since the researcher is an online instructor, it was significant that the probable conclusion did not include bias letting the data to speak for itself. The researcher prevented bias about subjective well-being by remaining impartial. Without impartiality, this may mean that the researcher got too near to the situation and this would have doubted the study's credibility as a consequence. The credibility of the research study was reliant on how capable the researcher was able to incorporate it successfully (Patton, 2002). Consequently, for the research study to be credible, it was also truthful, dependable and effective (Creswell, 2007, 2009). Berger (2012) speculated that a researcher must be cognizant of bias that might affect both

internal and external validity. To evade any predeterminations the researcher had about highly successful online educators, she remained benevolent and a neutral party towards the participants in the study (Patton, 2002). In other words, the researcher engrossed herself in the study, and did not place judgment on any of the participants. By not being partial, the researcher was able to concentrate on features of positive psychology. Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn (2003) thought that positive psychology focuses on experiences that are positive. The researcher remained positive in order to study the participants' encounters in relation to the sense of subjective well-being and what this meant to be highly successful in the position that these educators do.

## **CHAPTER 4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 4 describes a comprehensive exploration of the data that is relevant to the dissertation topic and associated interview questions. For this dissertation, the researcher investigated the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. The data provided a description of the occurrences of a total of eight participants ( $n=8$ ). These online educators met the benchmarks of receiving a score of 25 or higher on the Satisfaction with Life Scale and have received recognition from the online university they work for. All eight educators participated in semi-structured informal style interviews to illustrate significant and rich data that noted their views, encounters, opinions and feelings. As such, the researcher was able to better comprehend the experiences of what their professional lives were like. Thematic analysis was utilized as part of this generic qualitative research study in grasping rich thoughts of the participants.

### **The Study and the Researcher**

This generic qualitative research study investigated what it means to have a perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. The researcher selected this topic because of her own work as an online educator. This was an opportunity to learn from highly successful online educators at an online university and

what makes them have a perceived sense of subjective well-being. Supplementing scholarly research to the current literature could support further understanding as to why highly successful online educators are content in the jobs that they are doing.

This study's researcher acted as the sole instrument for interviewing purposes, collecting of data and analysis and all associated constituents that were part of this endeavor. The researcher primed herself academically through her familiarity with psychology. This awareness came from taking a variety of doctoral courses. For example, the researcher took the succeeding classes: Qualitative Analysis (PSY7630), Advanced Qualitative Analysis (PSY7635) and Research Methods (PSY7650) over the past four years. Each class was mastered as an "A" grade and this was accomplished and validated. Professionally, the researcher also has proficiency teaching online classes for the past five years and this helped to gauge the overall qualitative experiences. She also holds a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and a Master's Degree in Mental Health Counseling. She is also a land-based college professor and the face-to-face interactions with her students helped to provide effective communication skills that were necessary to contact participants and discuss with them their experiences as online educators.

The researcher has found from her own qualitative experiences as an online educator that she is empathetic and attentive with her students. For example, this idea of devoted support brought to light a positive subjective well-being in her participants' code of ethics. This is because there is a self-realization that she has made a positive change in the lives of her students. The idea of making a positive change for students is something that highly successful online educators have already achieved.

Given the researcher's training as an established online educator, there was the chance of personal bias that could have intervened with data analysis. To attend to these potential limitations, certain methods were in place for the researcher to set aside any bias by staying impartial. Instead, the researcher concentrated on facets of positive psychology. Cameron et al. (2003) proposed, "Positive psychology focuses on positive experiences." In order to center on the concept of positive psychology, the researcher was self-aware of her own thoughts where she wrote down her own beliefs and apprehensions in a journal and self-reflected. This self-reflection helped the researcher to remain a neutral party as she analyzed participants' occurrences of what it means to be highly successful in the job that he or she does.

Significant concepts were integrated to uphold the accuracy of the research. These ideas were trustworthy, dependable and transferable. Opinions that are dependable and credible are linked to a study's legitimacy and consistency. A research study is valid if it evaluates what it intends to measure. Also, if the research study can be believable and exchangeable to other populaces then the study is deemed valid (Bannigan & Watson, 2009). They thought that validity forecasts suppositions and any assessment that takes place could only be relevant for those persons that psychologists assess. The study has appropriate internal uniformities so psychological concepts were decided applicably. The concept of validity is not simple to identify and will this evaluate what it is expected to. A reliable research study necessitates dependability. However, not all research studies are either reliable or valid at the same instant. A credible study intertwines with internal validity and this is how conceivable the results are from the participants' beliefs. The

research study encompasses the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. This maintains the credibility of the study because the participants conveyed their experiences first hand.

### **Description of the Sample**

The sample size consisted of eight participants; three males and five females who worked at an online university in their Psychology department. Selection of the participants was conducted utilizing purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is critical in integrating the rich experiences that the participants had. The participants were suitable based on the criterion involving those faculty members who have received recognition and scored 25 or higher on the Satisfaction with Life Scale.

Originally, a total of 11 faculty members responded to inquiries asking if they would like to participate in the study. Three of those 11 potential participants were excluded because they did not meet the criteria. Two of the three possible participants scored under 25 on the Satisfaction with Life Scale and the third faculty member did not receive recognition from the online university. All participants were interviewed of their own accord using Adobe Connect Pro, a web-based face-to-face conferencing tool. Knoll, Uther, and Costall (2011) felt that utilizing the internet is a useful way to gather data by making it an effective research study.

To safeguard anonymity and privacy of any classifying information obtained from each participant the demographic questions asked of them were their official title capacity, what area of specialization in the Psychology department did they teach at in their online university and their gender. For this research study, each participant was



given a pseudonym, such as Participant A, Participant B, Participant C and so on as to adhere to confidentiality and privacy guidelines. Below is Table 1 for basic demographic information.

Table 1. Demographics of the Participants

Demographic	Number of Participants
Gender:	
Males	3
Females	5
Official Title:	
Adjunct/Part Time Faculty Members	5
Core Faculty Members	3
Area of Specialization:	
Educational Psychology, Evaluation, Research & Management	2
Research	1
Industrial/Organizational Psychology, Leadership Coaching Psychology and Sport Psychology	4
Psychology	1

**Participant A** is a male adjunct/part time faculty member with an online university. He currently works in the Psychology department for 11 years. Previously, he worked for a different online university as a faculty instructor but felt that the quality of students there went “downhill.”

The overall mood of Participant A during the interview process was positive and upbeat. He was open, optimistic, creative and very satisfied regarding his current experiences as a highly successful online educator. He felt that the satisfaction in his teaching life adds value to the quality of his life. He stated, "If I am satisfied then the students are satisfied." Participant A did think that his ability to adapt and accommodate to the changes in his teaching life suffered at first because of the new teaching platform at the online university. He said that he stumbled through it at first and then he integrated the new system and it became a part of his teaching style.

**Participant B** is a male core faculty member with an online university. He works in the Psychology department for four years. Previously, he was an adjunct/part time faculty member with another online university for 11 years.

Overall, Participant B was professional during the entire interview process. He provided thorough explanations of the questions that were asked of him. He explained that he was very satisfied with his experiences as a highly successful online educator and made the transition from a traditional teaching format to an online platform successfully. He thought that the satisfaction of his teaching life added value to the quality of his life. Participant B stated:

The quality of my life is strongly related to my satisfaction. Not only for the money I earn and transient fact for what I do and providing information about difficult subjects that are necessary for students and that is what is meaningful.

He did think that his ability to adapt and accommodate to the changes in his teaching life was challenging. He thought that since technology was evolving all the time, new things are put in place. He felt that just when was getting used to something or

comfortable with what he knew already, it is gone and something supposedly better takes its' place as far as the online platform is concerned.

**Participant C** is a female adjunct/part time faculty member with an online university for four years. She works in the Psychology department. Previously, she worked for a community college teaching online classes for seven years. She also has experience as an educator working with a diverse student body teaching face-to-face classes as well.

Participant C was receptive, detailed and thorough in responding to the questions asked of her. She explained that she was very satisfied with her teaching life as she has taught every grade from K-6<sup>th</sup> grade, including pre-school and continuing education classes at the university level as well. She retired from teaching face-to-face and transitioned to the online platform and loves the flexibility it offers. She stated, "I enjoy the academic challenge and working with students. I enjoy listening to them and learning what they have to say. They keep me young and informed. I really enjoy it." She did think that her ability to adapt and accommodate to the changes in her teaching life was a positive one. She enjoys the freedom of being able to do the things she most loves in between meeting and working with students online in the classes that she teaches. Participant C thought that she would be terribly disappointed if she could not teach online classes and this would definitely have a negative overall impact on her happiness if it didn't exist.

**Participant D** is a female adjunct/part time faculty member with an online university for 14 years. She works in the Psychology department. She is also the owner of a consulting firm as well.

Participant D was detailed oriented, comprehensive and accommodating during the interview process. She explained that she was very satisfied with her teaching life. This is because she is able to offer the students more through the various connections with the readings and materials presented. She stated, “A student will cite something and it seems really interesting and I’ll track it down and read it.” This allows her to obtain great ideas as she learns from her students as much as they learn from her. This participant thought that the flexibility of teaching online classes has helped her to be adaptive and accommodating with her students while engaging her passion for educating others. She feels that being an online teacher builds identity always trying to remain optimistic and make connections as she encourages social participation in the her classroom.

**Participant E** is a male adjunct/part time faculty member with an online university for six years. He works in their Psychology department. He is also a faculty member at three additional online universities for several years. In addition, he is a partner at an independent consulting firm.

Participant E was helpful and accommodating during the interview process. He explained that he was highly satisfied as a successful online educator. He is content in the work he does at the online university. He feels that he is making a difference in the lives of others. In regards to teaching adults, he stated, “I am helping them to pursue the

American Dream.” This participant accommodates his students by adapting to the changes in technology that occurs in the online environment. He feels a sense of satisfaction and achievement when he can integrate critical and reflective thinking patterns and real life experiences into the classroom. These experiences help him to network with others so he can strategize ideas for new opportunities as he learns as much from his students as they do him.

**Participant F** is a female core faculty member at an online university for five years. She works in the Psychology department. She is also a core faculty member in the IRB. In addition, she is a partner/owner of a small business for several years.

Participant F was pleasant, professional and accommodating during the interview process. She is satisfied with her job as a highly successful online educator. She enjoys the meaningful interactions with students and she is content in her teaching life. She is adaptable with the ever changing technological advances in the courseroom. She encourages social participation with her students by forming an integrative bond with them. As an instructor, this participant stated that she is helping students to “pursue their education” through “leading by examples.” By critically reflecting on what works in the courseroom helps her to be part of the interactions with students and this gives the most meaning to her as an instructor.

**Participant G** is a female core faculty member at an online university for 15 years. She works in the Psychology department. Participant G was kind, altruistic and professional during the interview process. She is satisfied as a highly successful online educator. She loves teaching students at her online university and collaborating with

them. She is adaptive and accommodating by being a part of a support group with other faculty members. This helps her to stay connected and has a positive impact on her direct happiness. This participant encourages social participation with her students. She stated “Be kind. Be courteous. Ask questions. Ones that might help them.” This is what gives overall meaning to her life as a highly successful online educator.

**Participant H** is a female adjunct/part time faculty member at an online university for four years. She works in the Psychology department. She also has five years’ experience working as an adjunct for five additional online universities. However, she has reduced her workload working for three universities instead.

Participant H was courteous, respectful and accommodating during the interview process. She is very satisfied as a highly successful online educator. She described what it meant for her students to be successful. She stated:

They are learning immediately. My students are learning. They are enjoying the learning experience with me. Long term, they are achieving outcome goals they associated with for getting their education. Are they mastering it? Are they moving forward? It’s about making people come alive. I love seeing those aha moments. It’s the light bulb moments. Sharing those light bulb moments is fantastic!

Upon further clarification of her quote, the participant stated:

The very process of interacting with me, other learners, and the reading materials does start the learning process for everyone. I really see myself as a motivational guide on the side providing the human touch that 'greases the wheel' of individual learning. In so doing, that makes me feel like I'm making a difference in people's lives and that is what is satisfying to me.

This is the embodiment of what this participant feels why she is highly satisfied in the job she is doing. Because of this, she feels valued as an instructor. She is motivated by critically thinking and reflecting on what her students need as she wants them to learn

as much as they can. In doing so, she feels accomplished as she provides excellence in the courseroom at all times.

The online university faculty members provided a general idea of what it means to have a perceived sense of subjective well-being as highly successful online educators. Successful educators are open-minded and accessible to the idea of teaching in an online environment. They must be compliant to their students learning requirements. Edwards, Perry, and Janzen (2011) felt that online instructors are also effective in assisting their students synthesize information. Fish and Wickersham (2009) speculated that online teachers look outside the box because of the web technology that is encompassed in learning. Online educators assist their students to learn more efficiently through computer based classes. The next section of chapter 4 progresses with a depiction of the research methodology and data analysis as relevant to the interview information collected from the eight participants of this generic qualitative study.

### **Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis**

#### **Generic Qualitative Research Methodology**

This generic research study contains certain qualitative features. A generic qualitative research methodology was useful in a number of ways. For example, based on the literature review, one study concentrated on successful online educators aiding their learners in attaining their own potential (Edwards et al., 2011). They thought that successful online educators as this associated with their own subjective well-being. The authors work interrelated to the phenomena and experiences of those who were processing the information on the inside. In order for the researcher to efficaciously

process the information, a theory must be determined even before beginning the research study. Thematic analysis followed positive psychology theory (Seligman et al., 2005); Maslow's (1971) metamotivation theory and Brookfield's (2006) work on analytical reflective processes.

This research study used a semi-structured interview in a vernacular style so rich data could be collected. The interview sessions nurtured the data collection process through a succession of questions that were asked to all of the participants. These questions aided in comprehending the real life views according to the size of the sample. Interviews were audio and video taped and then transcribed at a later time before data analysis occurred.

The sample size consisted of eight participants who met the criteria for the research study. Additionally, three members of an online university's faculty were eliminated from the study because they did not meet the criteria. As data saturation was met, there was no need to take on any additional participants. Interviews were conducted via face-to-face using a web-based conferencing tool called Adobe Connect Pro. Questions that were open-ended produced comprehensive and subjective responses. Each participant analytically responded truthfully and directly to the questions that were asked of them. Each interview was audio and video recorded due to Adobe Connect Pro's capabilities. The recorded files were protected in separate Microsoft Word documents to finish the transcription process. Each participant was referred to as Participant A, Participant B, and Participant C...etc., and this was an indication that differentiated one participant from the other. In doing so, each participant's anonymity was secured. When



the interviews were completed, each participant was shown gratitude for their time and the researcher sent a follow-up email expressing that if any further questions remained, she would be back in touch with them. Upon evaluating the transcriptions, the researcher did contact each participant for additional clarification to make sure that the recorded files were accurate.

### **Thematic Analysis**

There were several positive themes that were consistently expressed throughout the interviews that were conducted. Braun and Clarke (2006) felt that thematic analysis illustrates and classifies data themes. The major themes that all eight participants had in common were satisfaction, creativity, motivation and appreciation. Points of additional interest in the study were that the majority of participants stated that they were helping their students, their jobs were fun and they enjoyed what they were doing. They were understanding and had a connection to their students. They felt that they were successful and content in the jobs that they were doing and even found their jobs humorous at times.

Data analysis included examining codes through a succession of phases (Smith & Firth, 2011) and establishing common themes. Participant thoughts were coded and condensed down as much as possible as the data was transcribed (Smith, 2011) and precisely denoted in conversations (Creswell, 2007). Because of this, new themes were founded (Saldana, 2009). Information was obtained from the significance of the themes found from the participants' occurrences (Heimbrock, 2011). Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) and Clarke and Braun's (2013) thematic analysis for this qualitative generic research study using the subsequent guide:

1. Analysis began with perusing over the interviews in a thorough manner in order to uncover patterns and themes that materialized. Note taking and initial coding was created. The researcher engrossed herself in the data, looking over everything for accurate detail many times.
2. Important information related to the study was highlighted with a yellow marker. Initial expressive codes were given for each data item. These descriptive codes assessed the phenomenon that was being studied as the researcher recurrently examined the data for accuracy.
3. Information was gathered together as themes formed. Important statements were clustered into units and the researcher omitted any themes that did not answer the research question. For representation purposes, direct quotes were utilized.
4. All phrases were significantly coded through detection, sorting out and integrating phrases as themes came to light.
5. The data was deciphered after it was described. The essence of the research was gauged during the analysis of the data. Themes were then specified and considered for the relationship between them and the research question.
6. Allocation and a narrative representation of the essence of the phenomenon presented the results of the data analysis.

Integration provides the fundamental combined synthesis including the selected theoretical assimilation of this particular study. Validation of data includes “searching for life’s meaning” (Humphrey, 1989). Humphrey recapped that there is an obscure side to the exploration for meaning and this was fearsome because it had no meaning. There is despondency in upholding something rather than for it to be meaningless (pp. 81-82). Braun and Clarke (2006) claimed that there is a cause and effect affiliation between meaning and experiences. Discovering the meaning of the experiences will aid in giving a description of the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. Each experience is understood rendering to the participants’ experience so a

rudimentary meaning can be comprehended (Husserl, 1931). These experiences occur through the person's own intention and preference and this is exclusive to him or her.

### **Presentation of the Data and Results of the Analysis**

Data presentation and results of the analysis helped to answer the research question, "What is the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators?" After immersion of the data, coding of the units, patterns exploration and forming themes, analysis showed a precise depiction of the phenomenon of searching what happiness means to an online university Psychology department faculty members.

There were 11 interview questions asked of each participant and a sample of his or her answers are included. Advantageous to the reader, offering a comprehensive description aided in placing comments into a framework and answered the research question.

#### **Question 1:**

What does it mean to you to be a highly successful online educator? The answer to this first question varied from helping students to knowing that students understand and are learning something. Participant E said, "To me, to be a highly successful online educator is making a difference that matters. I view that as helping them to pursue the American Dream." Participant B described his experience as "it means that you receive recognition for the skills you feel you have." Participant F felt that being a highly successful online educator meant that she is "able to connect with students where they are at. It is a meaningful interaction by being very accessible and responsive."

**Question 2:**

How satisfied are you with your teaching life? Answering this question, participants thought that they were “satisfied” as highly successful online educators. Participant D felt, “I do like being able to teach the same class for several quarters in a row because then I feel like the material becomes more familiar to me and the various readings that we are doing and I am able to offer more to the students for the various connections.” Participant G thought, “I am more individual. I love teaching individual students and the collaboration and resident feel between us as long as everything is thriving, it is all good.” Participant E stated, “I am content with what I am doing.”

**Question 3:**

How does that satisfaction or lack of it in your teaching life add value to the quality of your life? All participants stated that the satisfaction they have as highly successful online educators adds value to the quality of their lives. Participant A stated, “If I am satisfied, then the students are satisfied.” Participant C thought, “Working with adults who are going to go out and make the world a better place” is what adds value to her teaching life. Participant F postulated, “The contentedness that I feel in my teaching life makes it so that everything runs more smoothly” and this adds overall quality to her life.

**Question 4:**

How do you adapt and accommodate to the changes in your teaching life? The answer to this question was difficult for many of the participants to answer. For example, Participant B stated, “Not that well. Technology is evolving and new things are put into

place. When you get used to something and comfortable with what you knew its' gone and something that is supposedly better is put into place." Participant G felt that in order to adapt and accommodate changes in her teaching life she "uses individuals in the community." Participant A thought, "I suffered at first with the platform. You stumble through it and then it becomes part of you and the sooner the better." By doing this, he was able to adapt and accommodate to changes that occur in his teaching life. Just a couple of participants said that they were successful at adapting and accommodating to changes in their teaching life.

Participant C related that:

I check my email and classes and then speak to students. I'm free and meeting student needs and I talk to them in the afternoon. I do what I have to do in the morning and I am adaptable and accommodating to them and then I'm free. I'm gone for day and come back at night and talk to them again. I can take my computer with me and do my work.

Participant D stated:

It gives me the flexibility to do my work from various kinds of places and also traveling. In my consulting work, I travel sometimes. So, as long as I have an internet connection and a little bit of energy, I can do some work no matter where I am.

Participant E thought:

It adds in that I have more control over my full time agenda and I don't leave the house every day to go to the same place and come home. Every day is different for me.

### **Question 5:**

How does this ability to adapt and accommodate affect your overall level of happiness? The majority of participants felt that being able to adapt and accommodate

positively affects their overall level of happiness. Participant G thought, “It impacts my ability to stay connect with what is real and that impacts my happiness.” Participant E reiterated, “If anything there is a sense of satisfaction and achievement.” Participant C agreed with the other participants and stated, “It has made a tremendous difference in my happiness.” Furthermore, she felt, “I would be terribly disappointed if I couldn’t do it.”

**Question 6:**

In what ways do you use creative and critically reflective thinking patterns in your teaching life? As highly successful online educators, most of the participants felt that they are creative and critically reflective in the jobs that they do.

Participant G stated:

With critically reflective thinking, our biggest challenge is to know when we are not being reflective. Other people know. It is very difficult for the individual to recognize when we are not being reflective. It is almost a reflex. We need to reflect and understand. We are all creative. We are always communicating. It is exciting how much we know; how creative and reflective we are.

Participant C thought that:

I am creative and critically reflect on what they are saying or what I know to students in private and I have students who say I did not even think about that. I am very creative and I come up with new things and I add more things in and do this for discussions and assignments.

**Question 7:**

What are your personal practices that allow you to feel happy about your teaching style? Tell me more about those practices; meditation, yoga, etc. that keeps you sharp. A few of the participants either meditate or do yoga as part of their personal practices that allow them to feel happy in relation to their teaching style. Participant A felt that he “loves meditation and yoga.”

Participant D described her experience:

I really try to create balance in my life. I try to create boundaries around the work that I do. I meditate in the mornings and exercise every day. I meditate and it helps me to center and quiet down a little bit.

Other participants did other forms of personal practices that allowed them to feel happy about their teaching style. Participant H said that she does “her walking and exercise for fun.” Participant F reflected, “I start my day with a five mile walk and I use that time to walk and enjoy the outdoor beauty and reflect on non-work related things.” Participant B expressed, “I play music and this helps me to relax.”

**Question 8:**

What are the ways that you keep yourself motivated so you remain successful as an online educator? A few of the participants stated that teaching students is the motivation factor that helps them to remain successful as a highly successful online educator. This sense of motivation that educators have also assists students in remaining ambitious (Xie, 2013). Participant A stated, “I enjoy teaching students and letting them know what I know. That keeps me motivated.” Participant C explained, “My experience is intrinsically motivating. I really enjoy what I do. I don’t have to keep myself motivated. I am motivated. It is an automatic thing with me.”

**Question 9:**

It would appear that highly successful online educators are optimistic in their teaching lifestyle. How does that describe you? The majority of participants are optimistic in their teaching lifestyle. Participant F stated, “I am a hopeful and optimistic person.” Participant C felt, “Yes. I am optimistic and very happy with it and successful. If

I make a mistake then I go back and fix it. I'm not beyond making an error and going back and fixing it." Participant B conveyed, "When you are successful, you are optimistic and when you are optimistic you are successful. It is a correlation."

**Question 10:**

In what ways do you encourage social participation in your classrooms? All participants stated that they do encourage social participation in their classrooms. Educators and students need to be present and interact with each other (Gregori et al., 2012) so social participation is a successful component of the online learning environment. Participant G stated that the way she encourages social participation is by "being kind and courteous and asking questions." Participant D expressed, "Social participation is to encourage them to communicate with one another. Let them know that they can earn points. Make references back to other people's posts and then I make a connection."

Participant E described his experience:

There are a couple of things that I do to encourage this. I emphasize it in my welcome message which is an important part of the class. I have been providing the opportunity to do a visual meet and greet because I can get the whole class online at the same time. That has not been working well asynchronous two or three people at one time. The ones that come on get really connected well. One of the things I do is when students post a primary response to a discussion question is to respond to them and this encourages participation. They are saying that I am in there and so are they.

**Question 11:**

How does your online teaching give meaning to your life? All participants thought that online teaching gives meaning to their lives. Participant C stated, "I am making the world a better place." Participant B thought, "It gives meaning to my life



because I can continue to try to understand the deeper dynamics of what I teach.”

Participant A felt, “It is part of my life.” Participant E expressed, “I feel like I am making a difference for some people.” Participant G added, “Online teaching is my life. It becomes who you are.”

Participant H reflected on her experience:

I feel like I am making a difference. I am earning the oxygen I am taking while I am on this planet. I am doing the work that I do and having it be well received. It is just extremely rewarding for me.

### **Themes**

Themes were categorized through data analysis of each participant’s interview that was audio and video recorded to confirm accurate details. Data was gathered from phrases that were emphasized that seemed to relate to the research question. Themes were organized and interviews were evaluated methodically and integrated to answer the research question.

Shared themes were found in the interviews that were revealed through the participants’ experiences of what it means to have a perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful educators. The data was prearranged through the themes that were created in order to outline the theoretical orientation of the study.

There were four major themes that developed from the interview sessions. They are: satisfaction, creativity, motivation and appreciation. Below is Table 2 for major themes information.

Table 2. Recurring Themes of the Participants

Recurring Theme	Number of Participants who referenced the theme
Satisfaction	8
Creativity	8
Motivation	8
Appreciation	8

### **Theme 1 – Satisfaction**

Satisfaction was the strongest theme present by all participants at some point during the interview sessions. From asking participants’ how satisfied they were in their teaching life to how that satisfaction added value to the quality of their lives, being satisfied was the embodiment of their experiences. Participant E stated, “I am highly satisfied” and Participant D postulated, “Overall, I say very satisfied.” For these participants, online teaching provides enjoyment. This sheer enjoyment provides satisfaction for these instructors, but for the students that they teach too. The satisfaction of knowing that helping students with concepts that are they are trying to understand is important (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009). As Participant E puts it, he feels that he takes the big picture into account. He feels he is helping his students to “pursue the American Dream.” This driven dream spans across states, cities, boroughs, county lines and even time. Time and time again, all of the participants thought that being satisfied is the reason that they are still teaching. It is more than just a job this is a way of living life on their own terms. Their lives are touched by so many students from all walks of life and

this is what makes what they do so satisfying. This sense of satisfaction comes unconditionally as students become scholars and scholars become educators. This cycle is the embodiment of what it means to have a perceived sense of subjective well-being as highly successful online educators. Therefore, this embodiment provides for a strong positive correlation between being a highly successful online educator and being satisfied in the job that each is doing.

## **Theme 2 – Creativity**

Being creative was another strong theme that all the participants expressed during the interview sessions. The participants thought that creativity is an important part of being successful as an online educator. Participant C felt that being creative meant that she “came up with new things and added more things in for discussions and assignments.” Participant B felt, “I try to be humorous to show that I am a real person.” Bringing humor into the classroom helps students to connect to instructors on a personal level. Participant H stated, “I bring in videos and recordings to explain a concept.” Creativity in the online classroom helps learners in understanding the concepts of different subjects presented to them (Brinthaupt, Fisher, Gardner, Raffo, & Woodard, 2011). For Participant C, she creates new things for learning concepts online and has students use their critical thinking skills so they can respond with more effective discussions. Participant B remains creative by remembering who his audience is. He keeps in mind that he is educating a diverse population of students so encouraging different viewpoints is important in the learning process. While Participant H stays current with learning materials through her creativity. Creatively, she uses technology as

an educational tool so her students can get the most out of what she is trying to teach them.

### **Theme 3 – Motivation**

All of the participants felt motivated as highly successful online educators. Participant G felt, "I pay attention to the learners." By paying attention to students, this participant is motivated to help them. Participant H thought, "What motivates me? It is thinking about the students. I want them to learn." For example, this participant felt that students learning are the number one priority. Participant E stated, "I always have been motivated by personal development and driven by that." Keeping motivated is essential in helping students to learn. Highly successful online educators are positive role models for their students. They know that they have made a difference and an impact in the lives of their learners (Gorsky & Blau, 2009). Motivation for Participant G is something that comes natural for her. She keeps motivated by listening to her students to get to know them. She felt that there is importance in understanding what each student needs and that personal attention keeps her motivated. Participant G felt that both she and the students are continuously learning through mutual interactions with each other. She adds, "We don't have to worry about being motivated." It just happens and is a natural part of the learning process. Participant H agrees with Participant G because she felt that motivation is a big part of being an online educator. Her students motivate her as she wants them to learn. Motivation for Participant E comes in the form of personal development. Keeping motivated arises from old ideas and manifests in new opportunities in the form of

mentoring. These mentoring opportunities are what keeps him challenged. It is this challenge that he finds most rewarding as a highly successful online educator.

#### **Theme 4 – Appreciation**

Appreciation was felt by all of the participants of this research study. Participant A enthusiastically exclaimed, “I am absolutely appreciated for my work!” Participant F answered, “I feel appreciated by my learners and Chair of my department.” For this participant, it is important to be appreciated not only by her students by those she works for as well. Participant E agreed with the other participants and stated, “Yes, I think I am appreciated. There is enough recognition to feel that what I do makes a difference that matters for some people.” Highly successful online educators feel appreciated because they are helping students achieve their dreams and goals. Bailey and Card (2009) thought that successful online educators engage and encourage their students and they appreciate the help provided by their instructors. These professionals not only are helping their students to learn, they are learning something new every day from their students. This is evident with Participant A as he feels that appreciation comes in the form of satisfaction and happiness. Happiness for students occurs because of the positive learning environment that Participant A provides. As he puts it, “I try to make it as much fun as possible” and having a “good sense of humor” is what successful online teaching is all about. With Participant F, she feels being appreciated equates with a connection to her students. This connection is present in her interactions as she tries to have the best relationship with those she is trying to provide a solid education for. Being appreciated is what provides meaning to her as she interacts and connects with online learners. This

level of appreciation can be found in the thoughts of Participant E. He is appreciated because he feels he is making a difference in the lives of the students who he is teaching.

### **Summary**

This generic qualitative research study's purpose was to explore highly successful online educators who have a perceived sense of positive subjective well-being in relation to the education they provide for their students. Eight participants who were psychology faculty members of an online university were interviewed. The research achieved its purpose through the accomplishment of the transcribed interviews.

The analysis of the data revealed four themes: satisfaction, creativity, motivation and appreciation. The data represented in the study depicted the experiences of the participants who were interviewed. Each participant had a distinctive experience that was described in the analysis using quoted materials to exemplify their experiences and themes that were formed. Thematic analysis showed a shared unity among the participants. Chapter 5 will comprise a summary and discussion of the results and its outcomes. In addition, the literature will be examined and how it either adds or does not add with present findings, the study's limitations, any recommendations for enhancements and proposals for research in the future will be contained within.

## **CHAPTER 5. RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Introduction**

The main purpose of this chapter is to explain the results, conclusions and recommendations of what it means to be highly successful online educators who have a perceived sense of subjective well-being and how this was addressed. In order to achieve this, after this transitory overview a synopsis and examination of the results and the conclusions are included. In this discussion the literature is generated to discover whether and in what ways it matches with the study. After this, there is a segment comprising of the limitations of the research study, suggestions of future research and a conclusion.

### **Summary of the Results**

The rationale of the research study was to investigate what the perceived sense of subjective well-being was for highly successful online educators. The exploration comprehended the encounters through the interviews. One prospect was that the research would specify whether highly successful online educators were happy in the jobs they do. With this awareness the occupation of online teaching could possibly be improved by identifying how these educators are happy and successful at the same time.

### **Literature Review**

The literature reviewed for this research study included themes from positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) research methodology assessment (Heidegger, 1962),

research on subjective well-being (Maslow, 1971; Diener et al., 1999) and critical reflection (Brookfield, 1995). Through the literature review it was ascertained that there was a necessity to investigate a perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. While the literature in the areas of being a critically reflective instructor has flourished, the information about the encounter of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators is still deficient. An additional and more current evaluation of the literature disclosed that no novel applicable research was published during the accomplishment of this study. The literature review helped to expand knowledge exploring subjective well-being for both educators and students alike. Subjective well-being formed the methodological basis of positive psychology based on the works of Heidegger (1962) and Moustakas (1994). The theoretical framework consisted of works by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) and Maslow (1943). This connection substantiated the results found in the current study based on the four major themes found. Those themes (satisfaction, creativity, motivation and appreciation) supported the literature base because of the strong link between the outcomes ascertained in this study and previous literature completed. The themes that came about from the data strengthen the knowledge between the experiences of highly successful online educators and their perceived sense of subjective well-being. This sense of subjective well-being was the basis for this study in understanding how online educators become successful and are happy in their jobs that they do.

The theme of satisfaction in the current study supported and validated the literature base. Satisfaction was the strongest theme among the participants' responses



and this provided quality to their overall lives. For Participant H, satisfaction for her meant that she was “valued as an instructor” and Participant F felt that she is content and this adds to her “overall quality of life.” This enrichment came in the form of helping their students to understand concepts and apply what is learned in their everyday lives. Bollinger and Wasilik (2009) agreed with this in their research study about the satisfaction that online educators feel in relation to their jobs. The participants in the study revealed that they are satisfied in their jobs because students are successful. Recognition was just as important as being satisfied with their work. Being recognized helped online educators to remain satisfied because their jobs value their employees. This sense of satisfaction validated the connection to the current study as it builds upon what has already been concluded in the literature base.

Similarly, Bollinger and Wasilik (2009) followed up on the theme of satisfaction and completed another research study the same year. They thought that online instructors are satisfied in their work when students are motivated in learning concepts. This satisfaction happens because online educators are involved in new technologies that can be implemented in the e-courseroom. The newest technology is what drives the instructors in their teaching platforms as they provide information to their students. The researchers concluded that online instructors are most satisfied when they have a connection to their students as they build confidence and foster a positive learning environment that can be extended outside the classroom. As Participant A thought, “If I am satisfied, then the students are satisfied.” The current study placed satisfaction as the

single most important aspect contributing to the success of being an online educator and builds upon the works in the literature base.

This theme of satisfaction can also be seen in the McLawhon and Cutright (2012) research study. They thought that online instructors have a sense of satisfaction based on Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs model. They concluded that student motivation and involvement was essential for online instructors to be satisfied in their jobs. This sense of satisfaction is exactly what Participant C thought because she feels that she has "made a difference and the world a better place." Therefore, this study positively connects to the current research study and expands upon the literature already known on online instructors and how satisfied they are.

The next theme that the current study's participants all had in common was creativity. Online educators felt that they are creative with their students and this contributes to their success. Brinthaup et al. (2011) described what the best practices were of online educators and being creative was one of them. Being creative included encouraging a critical thinking learning environment and learner interactions. Participant G felt that for her creativity involves communicating with her students and other faculty members through "reflective thinking patterns." Creativity is an essential tool for those online educators to be successful and this builds upon the current study as it provides credibility and validity.

The theme of creativity was evident in the Perry, Dalton, and Edwards (2009) study. Their exploratory qualitative research study stressed the importance of creativity and the way to incorporate this was through the use of technology. Incorporating

technology is exactly what Participant A does in his online classes in order to remain creative. They found that students felt more connected to each other and their instructors when taking online courses. Interactions among students were increased as students engaged in all creative technological advances that the online instructor added into the courseroom. Online instructors' presence helped to initiate student engagement through various uses on the computer.

Kippen's (2009) research study also displayed a theme of creativity. This researcher thought that creativity in the online learning environment should come from inspiration and motivation. By doing this, knowledge comes to life that can be applied in real world experiences and interactions. For example, Participant F thought that creativity comes in the form of interacting with students to know "what is working and what is not." This helps Participant A to understand if she is doing a successful job by creating a positive learning environment. This knowledge and experiences are reflective in nature and fosters creativity for the students whom are willing to learn through an online classroom platform. In comparison to the present study, creativity is an essential part of what makes for best practices that online instructors should adhere to at all times.

As motivation was one of the key themes found in this current study, Tipple (2010) agreed that successful online educators are motivated in their jobs. The researcher felt that online educators who are visionaries and motivate their students are considered leaders in their industry. He found that online educators place motivation at the top of their lists in regards to their overall level of happiness and being personally satisfied. For example, Participant D felt that motivation comes in the form of "bringing new things

into the courseroom” and the interactions between herself and her students. This motivates her and makes her feel like she is doing a great job. The results revealed that online educators are motivated because they can grow as a person while helping learners seek an education. This sense of motivation is at the essence of the present study on a perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators.

In addition to Tipple (2010), Green, Alejandro, and Brown (2009) also concluded that motivation is a central factor for why online instructors are successful in their jobs. Motivated online educators experience personal growth and the use of technological advancements. In relation to personal growth, Participant A thought that motivation is present through “teaching students and letting them know what I know.” This participant feels that this keeps him motivated as “teaching good students is important” to him. In addition to personal growth, technological advancement helps to reach new students as distance education reaches all places over the world. New students and online educators benefit from both being motivated and this is what makes this type of e-learning most successful.

The last theme that all participants exhibited during the current study was appreciation. The participants felt appreciated by their students and students appreciate their online instructors because a sense of community exists among those who are willing to learn. Learning comes from interactions and a reflective process that only the online instructor can fully foster (Ke, 2010). These interactions can result in a “deep learning.” For example, Participant E thought that for him this “deep learning” arrives after the class is over where students “took the time to thank me” for what they have not only learned

but remembered after the course has ended. Ke (2010) reiterated, “Deep learning is where the learner actively integrates new ideas into his or her cognitive structure through learning in a social negotiation environment.” This environment is encouraged by online instructors who want their students to not only succeed at the course presently being taken, but to use those newfound skills in their everyday lives.

As appreciation was a common theme in the current study, Barbour and Plough (2009) agreed that successful online educators are valued by their students. Students felt that they appreciate their instructors when they are interactive on the computer through social networking sites. Instructors who foster, collaborate and discuss ideas with their students are those that are most successful in their jobs. For Participant B, he sums it up that being appreciated means to him that “in a very small way helping someone for a better life and that to me is sufficient.” This culminates in the embodiment of students understanding materials effectively where they can feel a connection to not only other students but most especially their own instructors.

## **Methodology**

A generic qualitative approach was used for this research study. The proposed sample size was eight to twelve participants and the subsequent participant pool included three males and five females who were faculty members at an online university in the Psychology department. The initial target population was highly successful online educators who met the criteria of receiving recognition and a score of 25 or higher on the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Three participants were omitted from the pool because they did not meet the primary benchmarks. Therefore, only eight participants were comprised

in the study. Interviews were accomplished involving open-ended questions using Adobe Connect Pro; a web-based conferencing tool. The interviews were recorded and were examined using thematic analysis following positive psychology as described in chapter 4.

### **Findings**

As reviewed in chapter 4, examination of the data disclosed four main themes – satisfaction, creativity, motivation and appreciation. These themes are a mixture of why these participants are successful and happy in their work. Some of the themes are included in preceding research conducted around the occupation of online teaching and subjective well-being, but some of the information supplements the current literature. The conclusions from this research and how this adds to the existing literature are discussed below. Included in this section is whether and in what means the themes interrelate with or dispute one another.

### **Discussion of the Results**

The research question was “What is the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators?” The objective was to understand the nature of a perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. There were four primary themes that appeared through the data analysis - satisfaction, creativity, motivation and appreciation.

In order to implore honest replies from the participants, open-ended questions were intended to gain knowledge that was subjective, perceptive, and candid. Of the eight participants all were satisfied with the outcomes of the research study. As the researcher

listened to the participants describe their occurrences, she noticed that they each brought their own style to the inquiries as each of their interpretations varied and were distinctive. Being highly successful online educators, they were all assertive, engaging and self-cognizant. They were direct and optimistic. They were modest and were eager to present their experiences to those who might gain from their narratives.

Of greatest significance in this research study and the results that were generated is that positive psychology is one supposition that assisted the researcher in establishing the data. The theory of positive psychology justifies that of the four major themes recognized; these were constantly ascertained by the participants as a significant feature of successful online teaching. Of the eight participants interviewed, three felt that they were helping students, had careers that were enjoyable and it was a gratifying experience. Two participants thought that they were productive and satisfied in their jobs and this was entertaining on numerous instances. There were no unforeseen themes found in the exploration and the overall major theme of satisfaction was revealed in chapter 3 as something that the researcher anticipated from the results.

Participants felt a tie to their students and expressed their experiences in a meaningful way as to obtain information from them. It was with an appealing manner that they spoke of their occurrences. For example, Participant H said, “Doing the work that I do and having it be well received is just really great. I don’t know how to break it down more than that. It’s just extremely rewarding for me.” Participant A stated, “It adds to the quality of my life. If I am satisfied then the students are satisfied.” Brookfield (1995) felt that there is a structure of societal and psychological sources when individuals

realize ways of acting and reflecting in an optimistic way. Making an association to the current research, as the participants taught their students and their relationships with them cultivated, they acquired new ways to be answerable to both themselves and others. These novel behaviors enriched other thoughts, such as an evident way of thinking and a yearning to progress and grow. The collaboration among the four themes authenticates the data related to this research study.

The participants in the research study answered questions that were intended to discover their individual encounters as highly successful online educators. The openness, with which each participant replied to the questions, left the researcher self-assured that the occurrence was comprehensively investigated and the information acquired was truthful and perceptive. By listening with an open mentality to the participants as they explained what emerged within the restricted affiliation between online educators and their students, the viewpoints and themes that appeared are precise to the best of the researcher's capability and know-how. Consequently, it is conceivable for successful online educators to find pertinent information in the concluding analysis to utilize in their own teaching customs.

The outcomes from this research study support the theories of positive psychology, which has its origins in humanism (Seligman et al., 2005). It was this knowledge that assisted the researcher through organization of the data after analysis had been examined and this theory that establishes the groundwork that the suppositions are founded upon.



## **Satisfaction**

Satisfaction is a theme that was enunciated by all the participants in the research study and reinforces the literature. Participant B said, “I am very satisfied.” Participant D agreed and stated, “Overall, I say very satisfied.” For some, satisfaction came in the form of teaching learner and the classes that they taught. Others thought that being satisfied associated with being content. Satisfaction was, for these eight participants, a meaningful part of the success equation. Instructors are determined individuals who work self-sufficiently and this helps to keep themselves and their students satisfied (Beaudoin, Kurtz, & Eden, 2009). As far as satisfaction evolving as one of the themes, the researcher was not astonished. At a minimum, it appears that all eight participants had some success in the area of achieving satisfaction in the jobs they are doing.

In regards to theory, satisfaction is referred to in the positive psychology literature (Seligman et al., 2005). Although the discovery of the theme satisfaction reinforces the literature, in the current study it was distinct to each of the participants that they desired to be satisfied for themselves as instructors and for those that they educate.

## **Creativity**

The theme of creativity forms a basis for the online teaching experience that aids the educator to succeed in the online classroom. Six of the participants conveyed the significance of being creative with their students. For example, Participant E said, “I network a lot and pick up ideas that I like to experiment with.” Participant C stated, “I am creative on what they are saying or what I know. I come up with new things and I add more things in.” When the participants talked about being creative it was in optimistic

terms. Every one of these interpretations and explanations accentuated the significance of the affiliation to the process of being successful as an online educator. Generally, creativity is meaningful because it supports the interests between the online educator and the student. As conferred above, the discovery of this theme strengthens the literature.

### **Motivation**

The theme of motivation incorporates encouragement and determination. Participant D said, “Being motivated keeps me current so I’m not teaching the same old stuff that I’ve been teaching forever and ever even if the curriculum has changed it keeps it fresh for me.” Participant H commented, “What motivates me? It is thinking about the students. I want them to learn.” Knowledge from the interviews showed that the participants were motivated in the jobs they are doing as successful educators. In this perspective, motivated comes through living the occurrence and is novel information in that there are presently no analyses that look at this notion. From the commentaries that participants made about being motivated, it is apparent that motivation has significance to them. The participants feel that they are motivated because their students are learning something innovative. Kui (2013) implied that being motivated helps to entice all e-learners in the class. A supposition of making these innovations will help all students relate more with each other. Being motivated is a vital facet to doing their jobs productively. This is new awareness, not apparent from the prevailing literature, and indicates an essential prospect for further research.

## **Appreciation**

The theme of appreciation was represented in all of the participant responses who were interviewed. This theme corroborates the literature as it compliments subjective well-being. Those who revealed being appreciated associated the term with being capable to adapt and assist to changes that happen in their teaching life. For example, Participant A commented that being appreciated meant “contentment.” A good example was Participant C’s thought, “I am very happy with my teaching lifestyle.” This participant felt happy because she is appreciated by her students. This is the heart of what these successful online educators feel as they involve their students as they adapt and find ways to help their students (Wilson, 1967). Being appreciated was essential to the participants in this study as they interrelated this to students prospering in their classes.

## **Discussion of the Conclusions**

The study discovered and illuminated the experiences of the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. The purpose of the study was to comprehend if highly successful online educators had a positive sense of subjective well-being and to recognize how those occurrences associate to successfully teaching their students. This information was attained by acquiring viewpoints on the experiences of a perceived sense of subjective well-being in the participants own utterances, using a generic qualitative research design. The depictions of their experiences offer an awareness and insight about subjective well-being while being a highly successful online educator.

Even though research in the domain of positive psychology has intensified in the past years, there are limited studies that have assessed the association between subjective well-being and online educators. This would be an indication of the achievement of students success in the class (Eroğlu, 2012, p. 168) or the subjective well-being of students (Albuquerque et al., 2012) leaving this area of knowledge in need of greater evaluation. Since studies presently concentrate on student success, there are no earlier reported ones on subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. Comprehending the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators brings novel and valued information to the current literature and closes a disparity in the research that currently subsists.

### **Summary**

The results of the generic qualitative research study created four major themes: satisfaction, creativity, motivation and appreciation. The outcomes of all the themes reinforce the prevailing literature. The most important themes emerge together and stimulate the others such as satisfaction/appreciation, and motivation/creativity. Overall, the participants found their encounters valuable and were placated with what resulted. Ultimately, the research study fulfilled the research question and the objectives of the exploration were accomplished. The results confirmed that highly successful online educators have a sense of subjective well-being. Subjective well-being helped to comprehend the outcomes and was one of the main purposes of the research study. By communicating to online educators who are successful and understanding their own

interpretation of their experiences, other web-based instructors can take their accounts and relate the information to their own students.

Additionally, the research study was successful in investigating the experience of being happy. It was through the statements of the participants that the fundamental experiences had been discovered. The participants in the research study were clear about what they wanted to achieve from their online teaching experiences and were reflective in understanding if they accomplished their objectives.

The researcher was satisfied and content by how willingly the participants disclosed their personal encounters. They were enthusiastic, straightforward and approachable in their responses. This was an outstanding group of faculty members. Each takes pride in working for their online university and cherishes their experiences with other faculty members and students in a similar way. It was a suitable end to the research study to comprehend that the research question was entirely addressed and the objectives were fulfilled.

### **Limitations**

The initial rationale behind the research was an evaluation of what it means to have a perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators. The researcher sought to confer with faculty members who were successful educators at an online university in their Psychology department. Originally, there were some impediments that were overcome in pinpointing participants who were agreeable to participate in the study. The researcher welcomed help from the different Chairs in the Psychology department, as well as, the committee members of this dissertation. The

requirement to participate in the study was to receive recognition and a score of 25 or higher on the Satisfaction with Life Scale. In the end, finding participants who were inclined to speak with the researcher was the utmost limitation of the research study.

Soliciting well-regarded faculty members about their experiences as highly successful online educators produced substantial information. Conversely, the researcher asserts that conferring with non-online faculty members would feasibly generate different results. Highly successful online educators comprehend the process inward, while faculty members who teach in a land-based setting would mainly understand the process externally. This diverse viewpoint would possibly create answers different from what was revealed during the current research study.

Another limitation is all participants were from the same online university. It is conceivable that asking the same questions to faculty members at other online universities would produce different outcomes. A larger sample size might have stipulated answers to the research questions that authenticate the present data or could challenge the current outcomes.

The interview questions were welcomed by the participants and appeared to have embraced the research question well. Only one participant kept a journal and her thoughts added value to this study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research or Interventions**

The primary recommendation would be a follow-up study that encompasses faculty members who did not receive recognition. This would produce distinctive information not found in the current research study. Another recommendation would be

to interview participants who were from different departments at their online university. A third recommendation would be to conduct a research study from other online universities. By doing so, a quantitative research study could be done comparing subjective well-being for online educators to participant experiences at another online university.

### **Recommendations Derived from the Limitations of the Study**

The main recommendation is that there is a continuous need for research around the vocation of teaching in an online learning environment in relation to subjective well-being. The profession necessitates substantiation that not only is subjective well-being vital to the success of online teaching, but in what ways it is advantageous. This field presents researchers abundant prospects for research that might establish the direction of the profession of online teaching as it relates to instructors subjective well-being. Prospects for research might include ways for online educators to communicate more effectively with their students and training for those educators who are not as successful in the online teaching environment as they should be.

### **Recommendations Based on Delimitations**

All the participants signified that they were satisfied in their jobs as online educators. However, for those online instructors who are not content, a question worth soliciting might be, “What are some of the ways that online educators change their thinking patterns so they have a positive sense of subjective well-being?” As there is not enough research being done, this leaves those online educators who are not happy in their jobs ambiguous about what facets of their teaching experiences that need to be improved

and whether this modification can help their students to prosper in the classroom. The online educator's main concern should be for the student's success.

Contemplation for enhancing the subjective well-being for those online educators who are not happy in their jobs is to necessitate training and education. It is imperative that professional ethics are constructed and implemented for all online educators. A portion of the education and training for online educators may include being coached by those who are successful as online educators for an indicated aggregate of time. Either or both of these experiences could be valued in assisting the online educator to comprehend how to reach success because there is guided training that needs to be made readily available.

### **Contributions to the Existing Literature**

This research study contributes to the current literature through the discovery that successful online educators do not inevitably understand why they are happy in their jobs. This is significant because it can assist other online educators to consider training methods that would make them successful. The research study supplements the present literature because it gives intersubjective legitimacy to the group it is intended for. Moustakas (1994) examined the concept of intersubjective validity that it encompasses interaction between two people. In this intersubjective encounter, highly successful online educators connect and work cohesively with their students on a continuing basis. They nurture an essence of communal enthusiasm and ponder upon the information communicated between themselves and their students. In other words, highly successful online educators have a positive sense of subjective well-being because they stand out in



the crowd. These educators go the extra mile and the rewards are more than just monetary. There is an inner sense of contentment as they feel that they are changing the world; one online class and successful student at a time.

### **Conclusion**

The research explored the perceived sense of subjective well-being for highly successful online educators have been informative, fulfilling, and intuitive. As the interviews progressed, the researcher achieved a greater understanding of why highly successful online educators are happy in their area of expertise. As an online educator herself, the research was created of an authentic inquisitiveness for understanding what the experience is like for those who are at present successful. There is still a vast amount to learn about the experience that will continue to guide the profession forward.

Much of what was discovered in the research confirms present research studies while other areas complement the current literature. There were four themes that developed and were examined: satisfaction, creativity, motivation and appreciation. Other researchers could further investigate any of these subject matters. The participants in the research study came from diverse surroundings, but they all had a mutual thread: working for an online university in their Psychology department. Understanding the participants' describe their encounters was something that the researcher will not quickly stop thinking about. There was an awareness of lives that are touched, most times in an encouraging way, through the experience of being a successful online educator.

Although it is reasonable to state that the research question was satisfied through the interviews, it is of relevance to mention that the results did not ratify the field of

online education. However, it is important to keep in mind that the dedication of the research was to discover the online teaching experience, not to validate the field of online education. Most of the participants were satisfied with their online teaching experience and felt that their encounters were useful and valuable. By and large, the participants thought that they would not be where they are without teaching in an online learning environment.

By means of research, this study has initiated many areas of thought and topics worthwhile of future evaluation. The researcher is self-confident that she has incorporated those recommendations most pertinent to the present research. It was her specific endeavor to be as all-encompassing as possible without being wide-ranging as to go off topic and deviate away from the research question.

This research study will conceivably spark an interest on the profession of online teaching in relation to a positive sense of subjective well-being. It is scholars that crave to investigate what happens within the discretion of the online teaching relationship. The participants in this study established the capability to succeed and take possession of their own preferences and free will. Their teaching practices are effective. They were agreeable in discussing their experiences to assist other online educators understand how to be successful in their jobs. What they expressed from their subjective, personal experiences should be used to establish new research in the area of online teaching as it relates to a sense of subjective well-being.

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## **APPENDIX A. STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL WORK**

### **Academic Honesty Policy**

Capella University's Academic Honesty Policy ([3.01.01](#)) holds learners accountable for the integrity of work they submit, which includes but is not limited to discussion postings, assignments, comprehensive exams, and the dissertation or capstone project.

Established in the Policy are the expectations for original work, rationale for the policy, definition of terms that pertain to academic honesty and original work, and disciplinary consequences of academic dishonesty. Also stated in the Policy is the expectation that learners will follow APA rules for citing another person's ideas or works.

The following standards for original work and definition of *plagiarism* are discussed in the Policy:

Learners are expected to be the sole authors of their work and to acknowledge the authorship of others' work through proper citation and reference. Use of another person's ideas, including another learner's, without proper reference or citation constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty and is prohibited conduct. (p. 1)

Plagiarism is one example of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own. Plagiarism also includes copying verbatim or rephrasing ideas without properly acknowledging the source by author, date, and publication medium. (p. 2)

Capella University's Research Misconduct Policy ([3.03.06](#)) holds learners accountable for research integrity. What constitutes research misconduct is discussed in the Policy:

Research misconduct includes but is not limited to falsification, fabrication, plagiarism, misappropriation, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the academic community for proposing, conducting, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. (p. 1)

Learners failing to abide by these policies are subject to consequences, including but not limited to dismissal or revocation of the degree.

### Statement of Original Work and Signature

I have read, understood, and abided by Capella University's Academic Honesty Policy ([3.01.01](#)) and Research Misconduct Policy ([3.03.06](#)), including Policy Statements, Rationale, and Definitions.

I attest that this dissertation or capstone project is my own work. Where I have used the ideas or words of others, I have paraphrased, summarized, or used direct quotes following the guidelines set forth in the *APA Publication Manual*.

Learner name and date	<u>Susan Gunther 01/01/15</u>
Mentor name and school	<u>Dr. Mike Doogan, Harold Abel School of Social and Behavioral Sciences</u>