Leaving Certificate Graduates Quality of School Life and Fear of Negative Evaluation: A Comparative Study.

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the BA Hons in Psychology Dublin Business School, School of Arts, Dublin.

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Department of Psychology

Dublin Business School
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Declaration</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Acknowledgements</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Abstract</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Comparing School Types</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Quality of School Life</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Fear of Negative Evaluation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Rationale</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Hypotheses</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Method</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Participants</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Design</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Materials</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Procedure</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Ethics</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 Data analysis</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Results.......................................................................................... 25

7. Discussion....................................................................................... 30

8. References...................................................................................... 38

9. Appendices...................................................................................... 41

   9.1 Appendix A.................................................................................. 42

   9.2 Appendix B..................................................................................44

   9.3 Appendix C..................................................................................50

   9.4 Appendix D.................................................................................. 51
1. Declaration

Declaration ‘I declare that this thesis that I have submitted to Dublin Business School for the award of BA (Hons) Psychology is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated, where it is clearly acknowledged by references. Furthermore, this work has not been submitted for any other degree.’

Signed: Saoirse Van den Bergh

Student Number: 10353987

Date: 19/03/2019
2. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Ronda Barron for her guidance and patience throughout this process and Rosie Reid for helping me so much with my analysis. I would also like to thank my family, especially my mum who has encouraged and supported me immensely. Thank you to my friends who have stuck with me every step of the way. Finally, thank you Morgan for your constant love and support.
3. Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the differences in quality of school life and fear of negative evaluation between those who attended a single-sex school and those who attended a coeducational school. Sex differences across the variables were also analysed. A quantitative quasi-experiment with a between-groups design was used. Participants consisted of 65 individuals, 19 of whom were males and 46 females, all over the age of 18 who had completed the leaving certificate a maximum of 18 months ago. The questionnaire consisted of the quality of school life scale and the brief fear of negative evaluation scale. The questionnaire was posted on social media with a desired snowball effect. Results found no significant differences across the variables, however it was concluded that a larger sample size is needed for future research.
4. Introduction

The question of whether single sex schools are more beneficial than coeducational schools is a long debate and has many different aspects such as academics, social advantages or disadvantages and general well-being. Most of the research conducted in this area has focused on academic success, by comparing single sex schools with coeducational schools. The argument for coeducational schools is that they provide a more natural social setting, while the argument for single-sex schools suggests that coeducational schools neglect to acknowledge the sex differences in interests and aptitudes academically (Schneider, Coutts, & Starr, 1988), however, there is limited research in the area of quality of school life or the advantages or disadvantages of each type of school.

Sex differences were studied by Martin & Fabes (2001) who looked at 61 children, 28 of which were boys and 33 of which were girls. The children had a mean age of 53 months and were studied by observation over 6 months by separating children into same sex groups for play versus mixing sexes in play. They found that when boys were in a same-sex environment they tended to be more aggressive and rough, although the boys did seem to enjoy playing with other boys more than playing with girls. As time passed, Martin & Fabes (2001) found that more sex-differentiated play was observed. When girls played with other girls, they were less aggressive and calmer in their play style. This could suggest that coeducational schooling may be more beneficial to males because females
may introduce a calmer and less aggressive play-style. It therefore possible that in the present study there may be sex differences in the results. Males may have a better quality of school life in coeducational schools than females.

Comparing School Types 4.1

Research has compared school types in a number of different ways to find which school type is more beneficial. Research by Trickett et al. (1982) formed the basis of the hypotheses for this study. They examined differences in perception of the classroom environment in 456 students from fifteen different schools between single-sex schools and coeducational schools across a number of different areas. The Classroom Environment Scale (CES) (Trickett & Moos, 1973) was used to compare the two school types. Results showed that single-sex schools scored higher on most measures, except on the clarity of rules, support of teachers and innovation. Single-sex schools were also perceived as being more structured and organised than coeducational schools, while coeducational schools were perceived as being more inclusive and less rule-orientated.

Students in single-sex schools reported spending more time doing homework both during the week and at weekends and therefore had less free time and engaged in less extracurricular activities than those who attended coeducational schools. Trickett et al. suggested that the results show that there is a difference in social influences among different schools. Trickett et al. (1982) also found that in the case of women attending single-sex schools, their perception is that their school has more interest and support for women than coeducational schools. This suggests that the current study may find that
women have a greater quality of school life in a single-sex school than men attending a single-sex school because they may feel more included and empowered.

Schneider, Coutts & Starr (1988) studied educational attitudes in single-sex schools in comparison with attitudes in mixed schools. The sample consisted of 2029 students from grades 10 to 12. Participants were taken from 13 schools, 5 of which were coeducational, 4 of which were female only and 4 that were male only. The schools were located in Southwestern Ontario. They had four different hypotheses before their study. The first was that students in a coeducational school would have more positive attitudes towards teachers than those in a single-sex school. The second hypothesis was that those who attended a coeducational school would have a more positive self-concept of their academic ability than those who attended a single-sex school. The third hypothesis was that students in a coeducational school would have more positive attitudes towards school in general. The final hypothesis was that students in a coeducational school would have a stronger preference for their type of school. Results confirmed the second and the last hypothesis. In other words, students in a coeducational school did have a more positive self-concept of their academic ability than those in a single-sex school. This may be because single-sex schools are perceived as being more academically driven and more rule orientated (Trickett et al, 1982). Students in a coeducational school also had a stronger preference for their type of school. This may suggest that those students enjoy school more and therefore this study expects that they may have a higher quality of school life than those in a single-sex school.
Schneider, Coutts & Starr (1979) as cited in Schneider, Coutts & Starr (1988) studied the acceptability of student’s typical masculine or feminine behaviours and also assessed teacher’s beliefs about the teaching process and compared results between single sex schools and coeducational schools. They found that teachers in coeducational schools were more flexible towards masculine and feminine behaviours than teachers in single sex schools. Their results also pointed to coeducational school teachers possessing more of a belief that teachers should be concerned with student’s interests and needs.

A later study by Schneider, Coutts & Starr (1982) compared students who attended single-sex schools with those who attended coeducational schools using the High School Characteristic Index (HSCI). This measure describes school environments. They looked at five coeducational schools, four all female, and four all male schools. Schneider and Coutts examined whether or not differences could be found between school type and emphasis on achievement and scholarships, along with whether or not there would be a difference between the school types on non-academic activities, affiliation, control and discipline.

The outcome of the study suggested that single-sex school goers rated higher on abasement press, which refers to the statement ‘The teacher very often makes you feel like a child’. They also rated lower in response to the statement ‘everyone has the same opportunity to get good marks because the tests are marked fairly’. (Schneider, Coutts & Starr, 1982 as cited in Scheider, Coutts & Starr, 1988). The results also showed that
coeducational schools had more of an emphasis on affiliation and non-academic activities and placed less of an emphasis on control and discipline. There was no evidence to suggest that coeducational schools placed less of an emphasis on achievement and scholarships. From this, it was suggested that coeducational schools have an atmosphere that is more friendly, entertaining and enjoyable. They are more tolerant of spontaneity and non-compliance. They are more highly conducive to developing self-confidence and self-respect and are less prejudiced (Schneider & Coutts, 1982). From this study, it can be suggested that students in coeducational schools reported being happier in school (Schneider & Coutts, 1982).

A study by Brutsaert & Van Houtte, M (2002) looked at sense of belonging in single-sex schools versus coeducational schools. There was an observed gender difference. In coeducational schools, for boys, the presence of girls did not affect their sense of belonging, however, girls had more of a sense of belonging in a single-sex school than in a coeducational school. This could suggest that when looking at fear of negative evaluation, girls may have higher levels than males in a coeducational school and girls in a single-sex school may have lower levels of fear of negative evaluation than girls in a coeducational school.

A study by Hoffnung (2011) looked at career and family outcomes for women who attended coeducational colleges and compared them with women who attended single-sex colleges. No significant differences in career status or advanced degrees was observed. There were also no significant differences in marriage or in motherhood. Hoffnung (2011) only found a difference in keeping in contact with friends from college.
It was found that white graduates of coeducational colleges were more in contact with friends than those who went to single-sex colleges. This may possibly suggest that coeducational colleges may be a better base for building friendships, suggesting in turn that there may be more social benefits for attendees of coeducational colleges.

**Quality of School Life 4.2**

The quality of school life scale proposed by Epstein & McPartland (1976) was the first of its kind. Previous to this, student’s quality of school life was not researched. The measure includes three subscales, the satisfaction subscale, the commitment to classwork subscale and the reactions to teachers subscale. The satisfaction subscale measures general well-being in school while the commitment to classwork measures life plans and behaviour towards academics. The more positive the reactions are to the quality of school life scale, the better quality of school life the individual has.

Epstein & McPartland (1976) identified possible limitations in their results that showed that older students seemed to score lower than younger students in quality of school life. They suggested that a possible reason for this could be that as students get older, they become more critical of their environment. This study hopes to control for this by only including students who have finished secondary school and asking them to reflect on their schooling experience. Results showed that individuals who scored higher were better able to cope with the demands of school and were also more creative. These higher scoring individuals evaluated themselves more positively and were evaluated by their teachers in a more positive way (Epstein & McPartland, 1976).
Epstein & McParland (1976) concluded that the quality of school life scale was a reliable test and they suggested that the higher quality of school life that students have in general, the lower the school drop-out rate will be. In this way, by increasing student’s quality of school life and making school a more inviting an enjoyable environment, students will want to stay in school. When applying this theory to the present study, by determining whether single-sex schools or coeducational schools have a higher quality of school life, the higher scoring type of school could be promoted more in the hope of lessening school drop-out levels.

**Fear of Negative Evaluation 4.3**

The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation scale is a measure of a person’s tolerance for the possibility that they may be judged in a hostile way by others (Leary, 1983). This fear of negative evaluation can lead to other problems such as other more generalised fears, anxiety, and psychopathologies (Carleton et al, 2011). The brief fear of negative evaluation scale is a two-factor scale which means that it has some items to be reverse coded. However, there was a problem with the reverse coded items because they were “consistently forming a methodologically biased factor during psychometric testing” (Carleton et al., 2007 p.132). Due to this bias, it was decided that the reverse items needed to be reworded and so Carleton et al. put forward the brief fear of negative evaluation scale II.

Upon testing the new scale, Carleton et al. (2007) found that it was a valid measure. Results showed that when comparisons were made between sexes, women had higher levels of fear of negative evaluation, social anxiety and social phobia than men,
however there were no differences in self-confidence (Carleton et al. 2007). Taking these results into account, the current study expects to find gender differences in fear of negative evaluation with women being expected to score higher.

Fear of negative evaluation is a core element of social anxiety disorder (Leary, M. R, 1983). It is possible that because participants who attended single-sex schools will have been separated from the opposite sex in school, they may experience more social anxiety when communicating with the opposite sex. The opposite may also be possible, because participants in coeducational schools are always around the opposite sex, they may find school a more socially anxious place. This study aims to explore this.

Social anxiety in adolescents was studied by La Greca & Lopez (1998) who looked at how social anxiety impacted on adolescent relationships. They found that core components of social anxiety; fear of negative evaluation (which will be researched in the current study), social avoidance and distress, were seen in children as young as seven years old, however social anxiety seems to arise with a mean age of fifteen to sixteen (La Greca & Lopez, 1998). They predicted that their study would find a difference in sex in levels of social anxiety. They suggested that girls would have higher levels of social anxiety than boys. In La Greca & Lopez’s study, they found that many of their predictions were supported. They found that there was a gender difference in social anxiety. Adolescent girls scored higher than adolescent boys. Adolescents with high levels of social anxiety reported feeling less acceptance and support from peers. They also reported feeling like they have less romantic appeal (La Greca & Lopez, 1998). They also found that girls who were socially anxious felt less acceptance, support and romantic
appeal than boys who were socially anxious. This leads to the suggestion that because socially anxious individuals experience less acceptance and support, they will have a lower quality of school life than those who are not socially anxious. In other words, those who score higher on the fear of negative evaluation scale in the current study may score lower in the quality of school life scale. Also girls who are socially anxious may score even lower than boys in quality of school life because they feel less acceptance, support and romantic appeal. This leads to the suggestion that social anxiety may have a bigger impact on girls than it does on boys.

Previous literature has found that adolescent girls are more concerned with their appearance and behaviour being judged than boys. Findings suggested that girls are more likely to internalize their problems and it was also found that adult women are more likely to be socially phobic than adult men (Schneider et al, 1992, as cited by La Greca & Lopez (1998).

**Rationale 4.4**

This study aims to compare the different school types on quality of school life along with fear of negative evaluation and whether gender plays a role in either of these. As quality of school life has not been researched much before, and has not been researched in terms of comparing the different school types, this research will be filling gaps in the existing research in this area.

In terms of comparing the school types more generally, the existing research does not agree on which school type is more beneficial. There are studies to suggest that single-
sex schools will have a higher quality of school life (Trickett et al, 1982), especially for girls in a single-sex school, (Brutsaert & Van Houtte (2002). However, there are also studies that suggest that coeducational schools have a higher quality of school life (Schneider, Coutts, & Starr, 1988; Schneider & Coutts, 1982). The findings of the present study will add to the conflicting existing research.

Research has also not compared the fear of negative evaluation differences in single-sex schools versus coeducational schools. As mentioned before, La Greca & Lopez (1998) found that girls were more socially anxious than boys and therefore this study may find that girls may have a lower quality of school life than boys, therefore in this study, it is suggested that there will be higher levels of fear of negative evaluation in women, both in single sex and coeducational schools. However the levels of fear of negative evaluation could be higher girls in single sex schools when they encounter members of the opposite sex outside of school because they are simply not exposed to boys in school and have not been acclimatised to them. The other possibility is that girls in coeducational schools may have higher levels of fear of negative evaluation because in school they may be worried of what others, especially boys, think of them.

The current study aims to explore, not just the advantages or disadvantages of each type of school, but the quality of school experience in each type of school from the view of those who experienced it. By asking individuals who attended these schools to give their opinion, a much more accurate representation of how they feel about their school experience will be obtained, instead of focusing on academics or activities of the students in one school compared with the students in the other school.
This research will have an important impact because by finding which type of school promotes a better quality of school life; efforts can be made to increase the number of this type of school. This study will fill a large gap in research in finding whether single-sex schools or coeducational schools promote more or less fear of negative evaluation in their students. Ireland is a country that for many years has had a large number of single-sex schools, probably more than many countries. This research will help to answer the question of if these single-sex schools are more beneficial, or if Ireland should have more coeducational schools.

**Hypothesis 4.5**

The current study has six hypotheses:

1. There will be a difference in satisfaction with school between participants who attended a single-sex school and participants who attended a coeducational school.

2. There will be a difference in commitment to classwork between participants who attended a single-sex school and participants who attended a coeducational school.

3. There will be a gender difference in satisfaction with school.

4. There will be a gender difference in commitment to classwork.
5. There will be a difference in negative fear of evaluation between those who attended single-sex school and those who attended a coeducational school.

6. There will be a gender difference in negative fear of evaluation.

Therefore this study expects to find that there will be a difference in satisfaction between single-sex schools and coeducational schools (Hypothesis 1). The current study also expects to find a difference in commitment to classwork between the school types (Hypothesis 2) along with a gender difference in satisfaction and commitment to classwork (Hypothesis 3 and 4), with the literature seeming to suggest that girls in a single-sex school may have a better sense of belonging (Lee & Marks, 1990). Although there is no solid evidence to suggest that girls have a higher quality of school life than boys. This study will examine whether there will be a difference in quality of school life.

This study hypothesises that there may be a difference in fear of negative evaluation between single-sex schools and coeducational schools (Hypothesis 5) although there is no existing research comparing fear of negative evaluation scores between single-sex schools and mixed schools. It is predicted that girls will have higher levels of fear of negative evaluation than boys (Hypothesis 6) (La Greca & Lopez, 1998).
5. Method Section

Participants 5.1

65 Participants were recruited from an online sample. Participants were over the age of 18 and had completed the leaving certificate a maximum of 18 months ago. The number of participants was chosen to gain a medium effect size. Participants were selected using a snowball method where individuals share the survey online with others. Participants included 19 males and 46 females.

Design 5.2

The study will be a quantitative quasi-experiment with a between-groups design focusing on the differences between the two school groups on quality of school life and fear of negative evaluation, and also assessing sex differences between each group

DV1- Satisfaction with school

DV2- Commitment to classwork

DV3- Fear of negative evaluation

IV1- sex

IV2- School type (single sex/ coeducational)
The hypotheses are listed as follows:

1. There will be a difference in satisfaction with school between participants who attended a single-sex school and participants who attended a coeducational school.

2. There will be a difference in commitment to classwork between participants who attended a single-sex school and participants who attended a coeducational school.

3. There will be a gender difference in satisfaction with school.

4. There will be a gender difference in commitment to classwork.

5. There will be a difference in negative fear of evaluation between those who attended single-sex school and those who attended a coeducational school.

6. There will be a gender difference in negative fear of evaluation.
**Materials 5.3**

An information sheet was provided before the commencement of the questionnaire (See Appendix A). The information sheet explained the purpose of the study and explained that the questionnaire was completely confidential and anonymous and because of this, withdrawal of answers was not possible after clicking submit. The participants were asked if they were over the age of 18 and were only permitted to proceed after answering this question.

The materials used include two questionnaires. The first is the Quality of School Life questionnaire (Epstein & McPartland, 1976) (see Appendix B). This questionnaire assesses student’s quality of school life. As the current study is retrospective, all statements and answers have been changed into the past tense. The ‘Reactions to teachers subscale’ will be omitted because the current study is not measuring student’s reactions to teachers. The scale contains 16 items and two subscales (As the third subscale has been omitted). The scoring goes as follows, Items 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16 (COM) Commitment to classwork subscale. Items 2, 4, 6, 10, 14 (SAT) Satisfaction subscale. Quality of school life will be assessed using the subscales of commitment to classwork and satisfaction with the subscales being analysed separately, however they will be discussed as an overall quality of school life variable.

The participants were asked questions, an example of which was “Upon reflection of your time in secondary school, read each statement then circle the one answer that tells best what you thought”. Participants then were provided with questions such as “In class, I often counted the minutes till it ended” and were provided with five options such as “1.
In all my classes, 2. In most of my classes, 3. In about half of my classes, 4. In one or two of my classes, 5. In none of my classes”. Upon choosing an option, participants moved on to the next item. The participants scored between 1 and 5 for each question. The higher the score, the higher the quality of school life. The quality of school life scale does not report a Cronbach’s alpha value, however it is stated that the measure has been shown to be valid (Epstein & McPartland, 1976).

The second scale is the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation II (Carleton, Collimore & Asmundson, 2007) (see Appendix C) Participants were instructed to “Please circle the number that best corresponds to how much you agree with each item.” This scale contains 12 items, for example “I worry about what other people will think of me even when I know it doesn't make any difference.” Participants then were asked to choose one of five options: 1= Not at all characteristic of me, 2= A little characteristic of me, 3= somewhat characteristic of me, 4=Very characteristic of me, 5= entirely characteristic of me. The higher the score, the higher fear of negative evaluation levels the participants had. This scale has been shown to have high internal validity (α= .95)

Upon completion of the questionnaire, participants were provided with contact information for organisations that could provide support if any distress was experienced by the participant. These organisations were AWARE and Samaritans (see appendix D)
Procedure 5.4

The questionnaire was created using Google docs and was posted on social media. Participants were provided with the title of the study and an information sheet (see appendix A) where they were made aware of the aims of the study and that participation was voluntary. When finished the questions, participants were provided with contact information for organisations that help with emotional distress, in the case that they experienced any distress while completing the questionnaire. Participants then submitted their responses.

Ethics 5.5

The ethical process commenced upon receiving ethical approval from Dublin Business School. Ethical considerations were made from the beginning of the study and throughout. The Psychological Society of Ireland’s code of ethics was referred to throughout the study and the four principals of the code of ethics were considered carefully when planning and carrying out this research.

This study does not include vulnerable populations. To ensure that participants were aged 18 or over, they were asked if they were 18 and provided with a yes or no answer. This question was mandatory on the survey. The study, from the outset and throughout is de-identified. All information provided by participants was anonymous and therefore they were made aware in the cover sheet (see appendix A) that by submitting their responses, participant’s responses could not be withdrawn because at no point are they identifiable. This study used informed consent by letting the participants know of
the exact nature of the study. The study also did not use deception or any incentive for participation. Participants were made aware before commencement of the study that the measures used have been widely used in research and have not been shown to cause distress, however if distress was experienced throughout the study, contact information for organisations that deal with distress are provided at the end of the survey (see appendix D). Participants were also informed on the cover sheet (see appendix A) that participation is completely voluntary, therefore there is no obligation to take part.

Once the de-identified data was collected, it was stored on a password protected computer to protect the rights, dignity and integrity of participants.

**Data Analysis 5.6**

Independent samples t-tests will be used to analyse all the data. The study will assess differences in quality of school life and fear of negative evaluation between the variables.
6. Results

Introduction

Two participants did not answer the fear of negative evaluation scale, therefore they were omitted from the analysis including the fear of negative evaluation scale. 63 participants were included for the brief fear of negative evaluation scale, while 65 were included for the quality of school life scale. Missing values were assigned the value -9.

The analysis was carried out using SPSS. The fear of negative evaluation scale had a Cronbach’s alpha value of .96, which is over .7, meaning that the fear of negative evaluation scale was reliable in this instance.

The quality of school life scale was divided into two subscales to test reliability. Satisfaction had a Cronbach’s alpha of .5 while commitment to classwork had a Cronbach’s alpha of .28. These values are both under .7 which means that they were not reliable.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were carried out on sex of participants and are presented in Table 1 below. 70.8 percent of participants being female while only 29.2 percent are male,
therefore the test did not meet the assumptions. Non-parametric tests were carried out when analysing inferential statistics using sex.

*Table 1* below also shows the frequency of participants who were from single sex schools and the frequency of participants from coeducational schools. There is only one more participant in the single sex school category than in the mixed school category. Therefore parametric test can be used.

*Table 1 Descriptives frequency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Total</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single sex</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>50.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coeducational</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School total</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 below shows descriptive statistics for the measures used in inferential statistics. The Satisfaction subscale (SAT) had a mean of 2.78, a standard deviation of .62, a range of 3, with a maximum value of 4 and a minimum value of 2.

The Commitment to Classwork subscale (COM) had a mean of 2.8, a standard deviation of .36, a range of 1, with a maximum of 3 and a minimum of 2.

The Brief Fear of Negative evaluation scale (BFNE) had a mean of 40.16, with a standard deviation of 12.64, a range of 47 and a maximum of 60 along with a minimum of 13.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of psychological measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAT</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COM</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFNE</td>
<td>40.16</td>
<td>12.64</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Inferential Statistics

1. There will be a difference in satisfaction between participants who attended a single-sex school and participants who attended a coeducational school

An independent samples t-test found that there was no statistically significant difference in satisfaction between those who attended a single sex school (M = 2.8, SD = 6.23) and those who attended a coeducational school (M = 2.72, SD = .62) (t(63) = .71, p = .473, CI (95%) -.2 -> .42). Therefore the null must be accepted.

2. There will be a difference in Commitment to classwork between participants who attended a single-sex school and participants who attended a coeducational school

An independent samples t-test found that there was no statistically significant difference in Commitment to classwork between those who attended a single sex school (M = 2.77, SD = .38) and those who attended a coeducational school (M = 2.83, SD = .34) (t(63) = -.65, p = .52, CI (95%) -.24-> .12). Therefore the null must be accepted.

3. There will be a difference in gender in satisfaction.

A Mann-Whitney U test revealed that the males (mean rank = 31.18) condition and the females (mean rank = 33.75) condition did not differ significantly (Z = -.5, p = .617) Therefore the null must be accepted.
4. There will be a difference in gender in commitment to classwork

A Mann-Whitney U test revealed that the males (mean rank = 29.84) condition and the females (mean rank = 34.3) condition did not differ significantly (Z = -8.7, p = .384). Therefore the null must be accepted.

5. There will be a difference in negative fear of evaluation between those who attended single-sex school and those who attended a coeducational school.

An independent samples t-test found that there was no statistically significant difference in fear of negative evaluation between those who attended a single sex school (M = 41.06, SD = 12.25) and those who attended a coeducational school (M = 39.28, SD = 13.14) (t(61) = .56, p = .58, CI (95%) = -4.62 to 8.19). Therefore the null must be accepted.

6. There will be a gender difference in negative fear of evaluation

A Mann-Whitney U test revealed that the male (mean rank = 25.19) condition and the Female (mean rank = 34.72) condition did not differ significantly (Z = -1.87, p = .062). Therefore the null must be accepted.
7. Discussion

The aim of this research was to examine the differences in quality of school life using the Quality of school life scale (Epstein & McPartland, 1976) and fear of negative evaluation using the Brief fear of negative evaluation scale (Carleton et al, 2007) between those who attended a single-sex school and those who attended a coeducational school, along with looking at gender differences across the variables. This specific area has not been researched before, especially with a retrospective aspect, therefore the findings are an important addition to existing research. The study included 65 participants for the quality of school life aspect and 63 participants for the fear of negative evaluation aspect. Participants were over the age of 18 and had completed the leaving certificate a maximum of 18 months prior to the commencement of the study. The questionnaire was posted online with a desired snowball effect.

As mentioned before, the quality of school life scale has three subscales, one of which was removed for the purposes of this study. The subscales used in the current study were satisfaction with school and commitment to classwork. Before the current study, the quality of school life scale was not used in the context of comparing school type, therefore there was not much research to point to one type of school being more beneficial than another in quality of school life. Therefore this study looked at other measures of benefit for the school types.

When comparing single-sex schools and coeducational schools to see which school type is more beneficial in general, research exists supporting each side of the argument. The perceived differences between each school type were examined by
Trickett et al. (1982). Trickett et al. found differences in the perceptions of each school type, with differences in academics and extra-curricular activities. Trickett et al. also found that women perceived single sex schools to be more supportive of women than coeducational schools. Trickett’s research was done some time ago so perhaps attitudes and perceptions of single sex schools compared to coeducational schools have changed.

Schneider, Coutts & Starr (1988) looked at educational attitudes in single-sex schools compared with educational attitudes in coeducational schools. Results showed differences in attitudes between the two schools. Two previous studies by Schneider, Coutts & Starr in 1979 and 1982 also found differences in school types, with results favouring coeducational schools as being more beneficial than single-sex schools. Another study that suggested that coeducational schools are more beneficial is Hoffnung (2011), who found that graduates of coeducational colleges kept in better contact with their friends than those who graduated from a single-sex colleges. This may suggest that attendees of coeducational schools may form longer-lasting friendships, however this was not the focus of the study and may be a topic for future research.

Results of the current research found no significant difference in satisfaction or commitment to classwork (hypotheses 1 and 2) between the school types. Possible explanations for these findings is the sample size. The other studies had a much larger sample size, therefore by increasing the sample size, more significant results may be found. The previously existing research is not in agreement on whether single-sex school or coeducational schools are more beneficial. It may be the case that neither single-sex
schools nor coeducational schools are more beneficial. Perhaps differences are individual and depend on the school itself.

When looking at the third and fourth hypotheses which is the quality of school life subscales and gender differences, existing literature such as a study by Martin & Fabes (2001) found gender differences in the play styles of children. Boys were more aggressive in their play style in a single-sex setting then when they were with girls. Furthermore, girls were calmer when playing with other girls and more aggressive when playing with boys. This study formed the basis for the suggestion that there may be a gender difference in quality of school life between the school types. Brutsaert & Van Houtte (2002) found a gender difference in sense of belonging between the school types. They found that single-sex schools provided a better sense of belonging for girls but the same was not found for boys.

The third hypothesis was that there would be a difference in commitment to classwork between single-sex attendees and coeducational attendees. Previous research by Schneider & Coutts (1982) looked at differences in the emphasis placed in achievement and non-academic activities between the different school types. Results showed no significant difference in the emphasis placed on achievement between the school types. In other words, it was suggested that girls may have a higher quality of school life in a single-sex school than boys and boys may have a higher quality of school life in a coeducational school than girls. The results of research in the area of which school type is more beneficial are conflicting. Some found that single-sex schools were more beneficial, however most of the research agrees that the benefits are mainly for girls.
attending single-sex schools. Some research however finds that coeducational schools are more beneficial in general.

Results of the current study show no significant gender differences in satisfaction or commitment to classwork. This suggests that there were no significant gender differences in quality of school life. This does not agree with or disagree with previous research as no other research exists specifically addressing these hypotheses. The previously existing research is not in agreement on whether single-sex schools or coeducational schools are more beneficial. It may be the case that neither single-sex schools nor coeducational schools are more beneficial. Perhaps differences are individual and depend on the school itself.

The fifth hypothesis is that there will be a difference in fear of negative evaluation between those who attended a single-sex school and those who attended a coeducational school. The brief fear of negative evaluation scale (Carleton et al, 2007) was used as there were concerns about using the reverse coded items. Research has never compared the school types on fear of negative evaluation therefore there were no expectations of what the results of the current study would be. The results showed that there was no significant difference in fear of negative evaluation between those who attended a single-sex school and those who attended a coeducational school. Suggesting that single-sex schools do not have higher instances of social anxiety than coeducational schools and vice versa.

The sixth hypothesis was that there would be a difference in gender in fear of negative evaluation. Carleton et al (2007) found that women had higher levels of fear of negative evaluation than men. Fear of negative evaluation is a core element of social
anxiety (Leary, 1983). La Greca & Lopez (1998) studied social anxiety and results also showed that girls had higher fear of negative evaluation than men. Furthermore, research has shown that there is a higher instance of social phobia in women than in men (Schneider et al, 1992, as cited by La Greca & Lopez, 1998).

Due to the findings of existing literature in the area, the current study expected to find a gender difference in fear of negative evaluation, specifically that females would have higher levels of fear of negative evaluation than men. Results did not support this expectation. Analysis did not find any significant differences in fear of negative evaluation, however females did have insignificant higher levels of fear of negative evaluation than males, with females having a mean of (34.72) and males having a mean of (25.19).

This study has a number of limitations. The first is that the sample size is smaller than the other research in the area. Considering that this research did not support the widely supported evidence suggesting that females have significantly higher levels of fear of negative evaluation than males, it is possible that a small sample size may be the cause. The sample size that was planned to get a medium effect size was 64. The study gained 65 participants however two of them did not answer items on the fear of negative evaluation scale, which caused the sample size for the fear of negative evaluation analysis to be 63, which is slightly below the number of participants necessary for a medium effect size.

The quality of school life subscales of satisfaction and commitment to classwork were not reliable in the current study. They had Cronbach’s alpha values of .501 and .28
respectively. The quality of school life scale may not have been reliable due to the smaller sample size. Alternatively the scale may not be suitable to a study such as this. Future research should aim to redo the test with a bigger sample size and if the quality of school life scale is still not reliable, a similar but more reliable scale must be obtained.

Another limitation is the retrospective aspect of the study. Participants were required to have completed the leaving cert a maximum of 18 months before the commencement of the study. Participants were then asked to answer the items on the questionnaire by recalling how they felt while in school. This may have impacted on the accurateness of the results as participants’ current feelings about their school experience may be different to feelings they experienced while in school. Also when answering the fear of negative evaluation scale, circumstances in the participants’ life may have occurred to increase or decrease their fear of negative evaluation since they were in school, therefore results may not be as accurate as planned.

This study was also limited by a gender imbalance. Participants consisted of 19 males and 46 females. It is clear that there were substantially more females than males. Therefore males were under-represented in this research.

The strengths of this study include the novelty of the research. Quality of school life has never been used to examine differences between single-sex schools and coeducational schools. Furthermore, no research could be found comparing which type of school has higher levels of fear of negative evaluation in their students. Therefore this research is an important addition to existing knowledge on this area.
The current research have several implications. Comparing single-sex and coeducational schools on quality of school life and fear of negative evaluation has not been researched before, as such, the current research is novel. It can be suggested that because there was no significant gender difference or difference in quality of school life or fear of negative evaluation between the school types, and the existing research is conflicting on which school type is more beneficial, there may not be a significant difference. Future research should explore this with a bigger sample size. Future research should also carry out the same study but with a larger sample size and compare the results to see if a larger sample size would yield significant results. Furthermore, by administering the questionnaire to participants who are still in school, it would omit the retrospective aspect that may have interfered with the results. By comparing the results of this possible future research, it would add to the understanding of how big of a role the retrospective aspect had in the research. Future research should also aim to gain a similar number of males and females to make the representation of each sex more accurate.

Epstein & McPartland (1976) found that there were age differences in quality of school life scores. They found that older students scored lower than younger students. Therefore future research should administer the questionnaire to different age groups to see if there are differences in age in the quality of school life and fear of negative evaluation, as the current study did not include an age factor. As mentioned in the introduction, individuals who score higher on the quality of school life scale tend to cope better with school and are more creative. Higher scoring students tend to be rated higher by their teachers and see themselves in a more positive way. Future research should use the quality of school life scale can be used to identify and improve conditions in schools.
In conclusion, although the current study did not find any significant differences in quality of school life or fear of negative evaluation between those who attended a single-sex school and those who attended a coeducational school, the research is novel and therefore is an important addition to research in the area. The study also did not find significant gender differences in quality of school life or fear of negative evaluation, however it is recommended that future research should be carried out with a bigger sample size and a similar number of males and females to see if that would yield significant results. If significant differences in quality of school life or fear of negative evaluation were obtained, there would be important implications for education. In the case of insignificant results still being obtained, it is suggested that this, along with the existing conflicting research in the area would suggest that there are no significant differences between school types, and therefore, there is no significant benefits to a single-sex schooling or a coeducational schooling.
8. References


9. APPENDICES
9.1 Appendix A - Information sheet

My name is Saoirse Van den Bergh and I am conducting research in the Department of Psychology that explores Quality of school life. This research is being conducted as part of my undergraduate studies and will be submitted for examination.

You are invited to take part in this study and participation involves completing and returning the attached anonymous survey. While the survey asks some questions that might cause some minor negative feelings, it has been used widely in research. If any of the questions do raise difficult feelings for you, contact information for support services are included on the final page.

Participation is completely voluntary and so you are not obliged to take part.

Participation is anonymous and confidential. Thus responses cannot be attributed to any one participant. For this reason, it will not be possible to withdraw from participation after your answers have been submitted.

The questionnaires will be securely stored and data from the questionnaires will be transferred from the paper record to electronic format and stored on a password protected computer.

Please only complete this study if you are over the age of 18 and you have completed the leaving certificate a maximum of 18 months ago.

It is important that you understand that by completing and submitting the questionnaire, you are over the age of 18 and consent to participate in the study.
Should you require any further information about the research, please contact Saoirse Van den Bergh xxxxxxxx. My supervisor can be contacted at xxxxxxxx

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.
9.2 Appendix B - Quality of school life scale

Upon reflection of your time in secondary school, read each statement then circle the one answer that tells best what you thought.

1. In class, I often counted the minutes till it ended
   1. In all my classes
   2. In most of my classes
   3. In about half of my classes
   4. In one or two of my classes
   5. In none of my classes

2. Most of the time, I did not want to go to school
   1. I always felt this way
   2. I often felt this way
   3. I sometimes felt this way
   4. I seldom felt this way
   5. I never felt this way

3. I hardly ever did anything very exciting in class
   1. I always felt this way
   2. I often felt this way
   3. I sometimes felt this way
4. I seldom felt this way
5. I never felt this way

4. I was very happy when I was in school
   1. All the time
   2. Often
   3. Sometimes
   4. Seldom
   5. Never

5. I daydreamed a lot in class
   1. In all my classes
   2. In most of my classes
   3. In about half of my classes
   4. In one or two of my classes
   5. In none of my classes

6. I liked school very much
   1. I always felt this way
   1. I often felt this way
   2. I sometimes felt this way
   3. I seldom felt this way
   4. I never felt this way
7. Most of the topics we studied in class couldn’t end soon enough to suit me.

1. I always felt this way
2. I often felt this way
3. I sometimes felt this way
4. I seldom felt this way
5. I never felt this way

8. Last semester I was eager to get to...

1. All my classes
2. Most of my classes
3. About half of my classes
4. One or two of my classes
5. None of my classes

9. In my classes I got so interested in an assignment or project that I didn’t want to stop work.

1. This never happened
2. This hardly ever happened
3. This sometimes happened
4. This happened quite often
5. This happened every day
10. The school and I were like...

1. Good friends
2. Friends
3. Distant relatives
4. Strangers
5. Enemies

11. The work I did in most classes was ...

1. Not at all important to me
2. Not too important to me
3. Somewhat important to me
4. Pretty important to me
5. Very important to me

12. The things I got to work on in most of my classes were...

1. Great stuff- really interesting to me
2. Good stuff- pretty interesting to me
3. OK - school work is school work
4. Dull stuff- not very interesting to me
5. Trash - a total waste of time
13. If you could have chosen to take any subjects at all, how many of your subjects would you have taken?

1. All of them
2. More than half of them
3. About half of them
4. Fewer than half of them
5. None of them

14. I enjoyed the work I did in class.

1. Always
2. Often
3. Sometimes
4. Seldom
5. Never

15. Work in class was just busy work and a waste of time.

1. Always
2. Often
3. Sometimes
4. Seldom
5. Never

16. School work was dull and boring for me.
1. Always
2. Often
3. Sometimes
4. Seldom
5. Never

**Scoring**-

Items 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16 (COM) Commitment to classwork subscale

Items 2, 4, 6, 10, 14 (SAT) Satisfaction subscale

NOTE: the reactions to teachers subscale has been omitted.
### 9.3 Appendix C - Brief fear of Negative Evaluation scale

**Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation-II**

*(Carleton, Collimore, & Asmundson, 2007)*

Please circle the number that best corresponds to how much you agree with each item

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I worry about what other people will think of me even when I know it doesn't make any difference.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It bothers me when people form an unfavourable impression of me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I am frequently afraid of other people noticing my shortcomings.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I worry about what kind of impression I make on people.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I am afraid that others will not approve of me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am afraid that other people will find fault with me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I am concerned about other people's opinions of me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. When I am talking to someone, I worry about what they may be thinking about me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I am usually worried about what kind of impression I make.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. If I know someone is judging me, it tends to bother me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Sometimes I think I am too concerned with what other people think of me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I often worry that I will say or do wrong things.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.4 Appendix D- Debrief sheet

Thank you for participating!

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