It’s Life, What do you Expect?

I strutted in the door and all of my friends came and surrounded me with screams of “Happy Sweet Sixteen!” and “How does it feel?” All I knew is that I was sixteen now and that meant I was free. I finally was about to experience the thrill of the open road. This day had been on my mind for years now; the day I would get my first car. I had gone to countless “Sweet Sixteens” of my friends and witnessed them receive a car. It was my turn now. My parents called me over and say a few corny things about me. I scanned my eyes around the room hoping to see some movement of people getting ready for the big reveal. My heart felt like it fell to the pit of my stomach as my mom hands me a box. In my head I was thinking, “A box...there can’t be a car in this little box?” Then it came to me. It has to be the key! I tear it open as fast as I can. When I got all the paper off, I froze. Anger and sadness started to brew inside of me. It was a new phone. The was my day for a car, and was not happening tonight. I knew my parents could see the absolute disappointment on my face. I fell into a state of pure unhappiness.

In the interview, “The Sociology of Happiness and Contentment” Dr. Jordan McKenzie, a psychologist, gives his own definition and opinion of happiness. He focuses mainly on expectations and the difference between happiness and contentment. There seems to be a problematic nature of happiness that has caused happiness to alter in it’s meaning. He discusses why it may be difficult for certain people to reach their desired level of happiness. According to
Dr. McKenzie, true happiness is more difficult to reach in today’s society because of our higher expectations.

In the interview, McKenzie explains how expectations have risen through the years. This is not saying that the search for happiness did not exist one-hundred years ago, but it has become more apparent in the recent years. When it comes to happiness levels, “it does appear in a lot of this research that happiness is in decline” (McKenzie 176). People seem to be finding it harder to be happy, whatever that happiness may mean. Because of this decrease in happiness levels, something has to be changing in the world to cause this type of problem. Individuals expect more and more as the years go by because the world is constantly advancing. Technology has made it to where certain everyday tasks can be handled with a tap of a screen. Not only this, but people expect it to take no time at all. Happiness can be lost today over something that people a century ago could not even dream of. Dr. McKenzie discusses that “as disposable income goes up in advanced world countries, the number of people reporting that they’re actually very happy goes down” (176). The more people have, it seems, the harder it is for them to be happy. The levels of happiness are in decline because people of today feel entitled for their expectations to be reached. There comes a point when people create unrealistic expectations, which will have a direct correlation with their inability to find true happiness.

McKenzie talks about how the world is dynamic and unstable, so it can be hard to fixate on expectations. The world tends to set certain guidelines on how life is supposed to be lived, and if this is not accomplished it can affect people’s overall happiness. In the interview, McKenzie discusses why setting expectations for our lives is difficult: “these expectations are really tricky, because we live in a world that is increasingly unpredictable and kind of chaotic” (176). Society tends to give us a layout of what must be done at our lives at a certain time.
Because life is constantly changing, individuals have to be willing to adapt with the changes. A person can spend his whole life in school trying to become a doctor, and their mindset begins to be “this is the only option.” If this career path ends up not working out, they feel lost. Happiness today is based on what all someone has accomplished, and their successes, but it should be based on what really gives us joy. He uses a metaphor that really rounds up the idea of fixating on our expectations of life: “You’re setting up these life goals, but by the time you’re ready to accomplish them the goal posts have moved” (McKenzie 716). Everything that is worth accomplishing takes time and dedication. People are successful in different ways, so if you try to emulate someone else’s success it may turn out as an opposite result. People living in this day and age must figure out how they want their life to turn out, and then do it in a way that can fulfill them in terms of happiness. This is the only way any expectations will be reached.

In the “Sociology of Happiness and Contentment”, Dr. McKenzie discusses how hard work is a key component to achieving happiness. With hard work comes ups and downs in life, which can lead to moments of sadness. It is a common idea to believe sadness is a negative aspect of life. People have expectations of a perfect life being filled with happiness only, and that happiness and sadness do not go hand in hand. However, you cannot have one without the other. McKenzie explains “A few hundred years ago we would think about melancholia as being something that highly intelligent people had” (178). Sadness is an element of life that everyone, even the happiest of people, have to go through. The feeling of happiness cannot be defined without being familiar with the feeling of sadness. If individuals today expect a life without sadness to be the only way to a happy one, reaching true happiness would be impossible.

Happiness is a state of mind and body that can be hard to define, and will forever be analyzed and argued. In the interview, McKenzie explains how having such high expectations
today can make it hard to reach a level of true happiness. With the rise of expectations comes people never being satisfied if the world does not give them what is expected of out their life. In the world today, things are constantly changing and advancing to make things easier and more efficient. This can cause people to not understand what it means to work hard for happiness, and they will feel it should be handed to them. Happiness is only revealed through the struggles of life, and people need to find happiness in themselves and their relationships, not in material things they expect to receive. At my sixteenth birthday party, I was devastated and shocked at the fact I did not receive a car. I just could not understand what I did or who I wronged to have this happen to me. I heard and couple voices outside and everybody started looking at me. My mom turns to me and says, “We got one more surprise for you, follow me outside.” Feeling completely ashamed of the way I was thinking, I walked outside and saw a Toyota Corolla sitting there waiting for me. Needless to say, I was absolutely ecstatic about getting my car, however, I could not help but realize something from this day. My happiness comes from my expectations, and that is something that calls for change.