

Generation Z's Perception & Vision of "HAPPINESS" – An Innovative Practice of Mental Health Wellbeing

Chin-Nu Lin, PhD, MSN, MA, RN

Introduction

Happiness is a lifelong experience and, perhaps, a goal to pursue for most of people. It is nonetheless subjective. The meaning of "happiness, in general, differs from one generation to another. **Generation Z**, those who were **born between mid-1990s and mid-2000s**, grew up with and have experienced the most technological advancements when compared to the other generations. It is therefore referred to as **iGeneration (iGen)** and **Net Gen of digital natives**. Generation Z are now young adults and will soon enter the workforce and shape working environment in the next few decades. Studies on the differences between generations have shown similarities in what constitutes "happiness" among the generations. **Pand (2015)**, for example, indicated that Generation Z have cravings for the same things: **peace, love, happiness and security**.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify the **meaning of happiness and its perception** by Generation Z. To address this objective, participants were asked to respond to 2 research questions: (1) the perceptions and visions of "happiness", and (2) the reasons/factors of being "happy."

Method

This was a qualitative, exploratory study that took place between **January 2017 and May 2018**. A total of 3 cohorts of college nursing students (**N=204**) from a 4-year BSN program participated in this study. The inclusion criteria were (1) enrolled into a psychiatric nursing/mental health course; (2) age was 18 or greater; and (3) capable to process and upload image files into word files.

Narrative research method was applied in this study. Participants were asked to respond to the two research questions by proving narrative statements and using photos & images to express their perceived meaning of happiness and the reason for feeling happy.

To respond to the first question, the participants were asked to select an image or photos that represented their "meaning of happiness." To respond to the second question, the participants were asked to take photos in which they were part of the photo as a mean to explain the reason(s) that made them feel happy.

Data Analysis. Qualitative data including the narrative statements and image/photos were analyzed with **Nvivo 12**. Themes then emerged from the analysis. A second coinvestigator who was familiar with Nvivo 12® repeated the data analysis process and cross-examined the emerged themes.

Findings

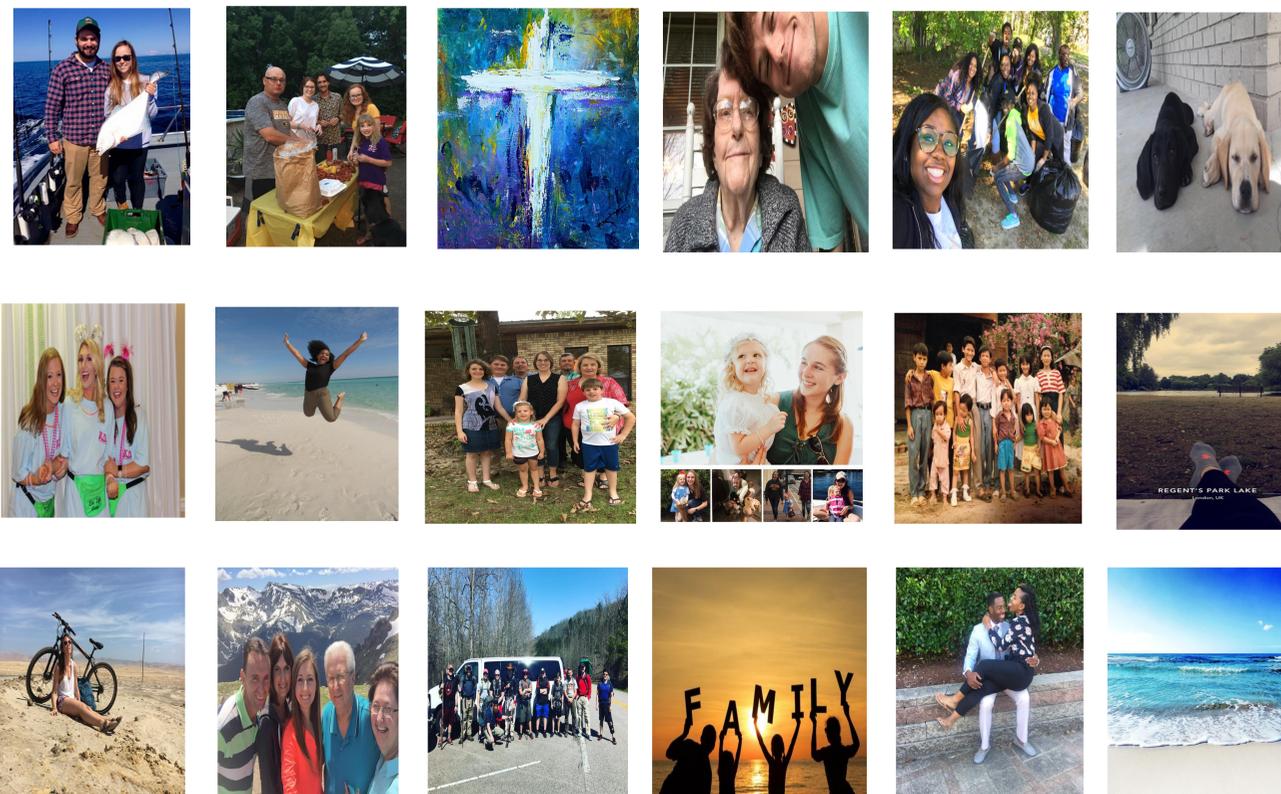
Demographic Data

The average age of the participants of Generation Z' was between 21 and 22. Majority of the participants were white female. All the participants (100%) processed and used cellphone to access social media and to connect with others, such as family members, relatives, and friends. More than 95% of the participants were the first time college students and 5% of the participants had had a previous college degree. Majority of the participants were single and 52% of the participants either had full-time or part-time job. There was higher percentage of female than male students actively engaged in campus organizations.

Themes

The **top 5 themes** that emerged from the data analysis were **relationships, independence, appreciation, simplicity, and sense of security**. Themes were further divided into subcategories. The first theme identified was **"RELATIONSHIPS"**. It was interpreted as **a close connection with higher power (God), family, friends, nature, and/or pets**. It indicated that there were needs for "building/establishing intimacy with others" at this age group, which was also highlighted in **Erick Erickson's psychosocial development** theory. The second theme identified was **"INDEPENDENCE."** Participants stated that making independent decisions and the willingness to take responsibility made them feel happy. Another subtheme was **"BEING ALONE"**, where they preferred doing the things solely. The third theme identified was **"APPRECIATION."** This theme somewhat overlapped with "relationship". Participants' statements expressed cherish and appreciation to being watched by "The God" and their parents and family, support by friends, and the accompany with their pets. The fourth theme identified was **"SIMPLICITY."** Some of the participants indicated that living in a simple life with family, or **immersion in the nature** giving them a **"sense of peace" and calmness**. This implied that "simplicity" was living with worry-free promoting happiness. The fifth theme identified was **"SECURITY."** Many participants expressed choosing "nursing" as a profession not due to passion but rather to be **"financially secure"**. Nurse shortage has created demanding for nurses all over the country, which inadvertently guaranteed a job in healthcare profession and a "sense of security" after graduating from a nursing program.

Gallery of Images of Happiness



Conclusions

"Relationship" represents a significant and critical factor to an individual's support system and a major component of happiness. Generation Z grew up in a digitalized era where social media has served as their major connection to the world. From the findings of this study, Generation Z appeared to care about and wanted to pursue a meaningful psychological wellbeing. Despite growing up with social media, which might seem to be isolated or self-centered, their desire for a close relationship with the higher power, family, friends, and pets indicates that **human interaction** was a key factor towards meaningful happiness. The other themes; independence, appreciation, simplicity, and sense of security were also found to be significant characteristics of the mental health wellbeing and happiness of this generation. Having positive theme associated with happiness, generation Z could be characterized as being **optimistic**. In another study of more than 3 thousand participants aged from 15-19s across Europe, was similarly found that 78% indicated that "choosing to be happy is more important than anything you can do in your life".

Nursing Implications

Former President of South Africa, Mr. Nelson Mandela said that "sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great. You can be that great generation." Being a great generation is linked with success and mental wellbeing, and consequently happiness. Stress and isolation are unfortunately part of modern life. As generation Z embraces the digital world and social media, this study signaled that **relationships (connection) with others, the higher power, or nature is a key to improve mental health wellbeing**. Understanding Generation Z's feelings and attitudes can help the educator create innovative teaching contents to improve students' mental health wellbeing.

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