Introduction

Happiness is a lifelong experience and, perhaps, a goal to pursue for most 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 and shape the workforce 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 about (1) their perceptions and visions of “happiness”, and (2) the reasons/factors of being “happy.”

Methods:

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 over 18, (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 a narrative statement and by using photos & images to express their perceived meaning of happiness and the reason for feeling happy. To respond to the first questions, the participants were asked to select an image or photos that represent 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.

Qualitative data including the narrative statements and image/photos were analyzed with Nvivo 12®. Due to the abundant qualitative data and images/photos, the data was categorized into 3 different groups. Several themes emerged from the analysis. A second coinvestigator who was familiar with Nvivo 12 repeated the data analysis process and cross-examined the emerged themes.

Results:

A. Demographic data

The average age of this cohort of Generation Z was between 21 and 22. Majority of the participants were white female. All the participants (100%) 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 first time college students and 5% of the participants had had another college degree. Majority of the participants were single
and 52% of the participants either had a full-time or part-time job. There was higher percentage of female than male students actively engaged in campus organizations.

B. 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. This needs for “intimacy with another” at this age group was also highlighted in Erick Erickson’s theory. The second theme identified was “independence.” Several participants stated that making independent decisions and the willingness to take responsibility made them feel happy. Another subtheme was “being alone”, where doing the things they prefer brought the same happiness. The third theme identified was “appreciation.” This theme somewhat overlapped with “relationship”. Participants’ statements expressed cherish and appreciation to being watched by “God” and their parents and family, support by friends, and the accompaniment of their pets. The fourth theme identified was “simplicity.” Some of the participants indicated that living in a simple life with family, or immersion in nature gave them a “sense of peace” and calmness. This implied that “simplicity” without worrying promoted 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 demand for nurses all over the country, which inadvertently guaranteed a job in health care profession and a “sense of security” after graduating from a nursing program.

C. Gallery of imagines/photos
Data analysis with Nvivo of the images/photos highly correlated with the 5 themes that were addressed above. Many images/photos were of family members, significant ones, close friends, and pets.

Conclusion:
“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 well-being. Despite growing up with social media, which might seem isolated or self-centered, their desire for a close relationship with the higher power, family, friends, and pets indicates that human interaction is 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 (Broadbent, Gougoulis, Lui, Pota, & Simons, 2017). In another study of more than 3 thousand participants aged from 15-19s across Europe, it was similarly found that 78% indicated that “choosing to be happy is more important than anything you can do in your life” (Claveric, 2018).

Nursing Implication
Former President of South Africa, Mr. Nelson Madela 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 signals that relationships 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 to create innovative teaching strategies and contents to improve students’ mental health wellbeing.

Title:
Generation Z's Perception and Vision of "Happiness": An Innovative Practice of Mental Health Well-Being

Keywords:
Mental Health Well-being, Generation Z and Happiness

References:

Abstract Summary:
Qualitative research was carried-out to identify generation Z's perception of ‘happiness’. Participants were asked to take photos/images that answer ‘my definition of happiness’ and ‘I am happy because’. ‘Relationship' emerged as a major theme from data analysis. This exercise was also found to enhance participants’ understanding of mental-health welling.

Content Outline:
I. Introduction
1. A.Characters of generation “Z”
2. Generation Z's perception and vision of “happiness
II. Body
A. Research purpose
B. Research questions
  1. My definition of “Happiness”
2. I am happy because ……

C. Research method

1. Qualitative design
2. Total of 204 participants
3. Study dates: from January 2017 to May 2018
4. Identified participant's perception of “happiness” and the reason for being "happy"
5. Data analyzing with NVivo12 software

D. Findings/ Conclusions

1. Relationship between self and family/family members, nature, and/or beloved one (pet, hobby, procession) was the major theme identified
2. Although generation Z is growing up in a digital world, human connection remains as a significant factor for improving

E. Nursing implications

1. An innovative evidence-based practice & teaching strategy for improving mental health wellbeing
2. Improving young adults’ mental health wellbeing by understand generation Z’s perception of “happiness”

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Author Summary: Dr. Lin's research emphasis on transcultural nursing and cultural competence. She has more than 20 years of academic and practical experiences. She is a member of “Service –Learning Faculty Fellow Seminar” and is a “Gulf Coast ADVANCE Fellow.” At Texas Woman's University in August 2018, Dr. Lin was a fellow of the Hanover Grant Academy and awarded for several Faculty Development Grants. Dr. Lin's research areas have been focused on Service-Learning, Homeless and Yough LGBTQ Homeless.