Happiness index of Southeastern College students

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ABSTRACT

College students' happiness is one of the growing topics in social science today for multitudes of social and educational implications. This study aims to characterize the happiness of college students in the context of a college situated in a rural setting in Davao del Sur. The study utilized a mixed method type of research – qualitative research design was utilized by conducting three separate focus group discussions (n=40) of the possible sources of happiness of the students, yielding 146 discrete responses, followed by the use of the quantitative design, which employed the data reduction method in developing a measure of happiness. A total of n=416 students were randomly-chosen to respond on the survey and were asked on how happy they are on the pre-determined sources of happiness. Data reduction via factor analysis was employed to trim the 146 items down to 19 items, which loaded to five components or dimensions. It was revealed that the dimensions of happiness of college students include (1) outdoor activities, (2) within-the-generation activities, (3) romance, (4) self-indulgence, and (5) online gaming. It was further revealed that the top five sources of happiness are eating delicious food, vacation, having adventure, gifts, and hanging out with friends. As a whole, the extent of happiness of college students was high. The results can be a basis in the development of growth sessions, formation programs and classroom activities that can benefit college students. Likewise, it is recommended that the resulting happiness scale will be tested in other institutions of higher learning, or validated with existing measures to establish its psychometric properties.

Keywords: *social science, happiness, college students, factor analysis, Philippines.*

INTRODUCTION

Happiness is a positive emotional state that is most general and, thus, not restricted to any specific circumstances or events (Kitayama, Markus & Matsumoto, 2000). Happiness, in its broader definition, it derives in universal in nature. Although, happiness is experience in relation to social and environmental circumstances or events that results to emotional expressions. Furthermore, happiness is the degree to which someone evaluates positively the overall quality of his or her present "life as a whole" (Veenhoven, 2004, 2005, 2008). Everyone desires to have a happy life. Thus, living a happy life has been beneficial consequences of every person which tend to be a substantial factor in the emergence of this empirical inquiry (Primasari & Yuniarti, 2010).

In addition, certain people tend to be happier than others because of their personality traits which are believed to be one of the salient determinants of subjective well-being (Hayes & Joseph, 2003). Likewise, satisfaction with life is related to a high level of extraversion and a low level of neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1980). Also, people with higher happiness levels tend to perform better (Graham, Eggers & Sukhtankar, 2004). Thus, non-income components of inequality affect happiness (Graham & Felton, 2006). Consequently, happiness tended to focus on mental illness, therapy and psychological problems (Furnham & Cheng, 2000). Thus, health conditions and wellness outcomes are linked with happiness and happiness perspectives (Marmot, 2004).

Several studies have investigated happiness using quantitative research designs (Malkoc, 2011; Toner, Haslam, Robinson & Williams, 2012; Parks, Della Porta, Pierce, Zilca, & Lyubomirsky, 2012; Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006; Ganesan & Reyes, 2011). As early as 1960s, happiness was being explored through the use of different survey forms (Argyle as cited in Primasari & Yuniarti, 2010). Some of them focused on possible predictors of happiness which majority fall into the result of social economic status of a person (Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2011). On the contrary, positive self-regard is the most important predictor of happiness and as well as life satisfaction (Piccolo, Judge, Takahashi, Watanabe & Locke, 2005). It was found out that personality traits can mediate happiness, especially extraversion (Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006). Other studies revealed that happiness can be sourced from satisfaction of daily psychological needs (Howell, Chenot, Hill & Howell, 2011), their peers and family relationship (Holder & Coleman, 2007), romantic relationships (Demir, 2008) and bestfriend and parental relationships, i.e. with mother (Demir, 2010).

Given that individuals under this stage are prone to experience wide array of life challenges because of their quest to establish a stable sense of identity, it is quite interesting to look at specific features that typifies positive and joyous state sensitive to their developmental phase. The need to specify individual characteristics can be demarcated as well on the fact that individuals in the Asian cultures have lower regards on self-esteem and self-consistency in predicting psychological outcomes as opposed to higher levels of such variables from people in individualistic societies (Markus & Kitayama, 1998; Datu, 2013).

A lot of readings revealed multifarious sources of happiness. However, what may be true with the findings of others may not be in the same core with college students. In Southeastern College, an institution of higher learning in Padada, Davao del Sur, Philippines, college students are confronted with several problems arising from academic pressures, family problems and survival to finish the degrees they are earning. Worse, no studies have been conducted to ascertain these problems. Students' happiness, after all, is also a concern of the institution and a silent determinant of its survival. With all of these valuable facts and information, the researchers were motivated to explore and identify the sources of happiness of college students enrolled in Southeastern College in Padada, Davao del Sur.

METHOD

This study utilized a mixed method research type which employed the qualitative and quantitative designs. Qualitative research is "a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning" (Shank, 2002). In the present study, sources of happiness are explored through narrative experiences and these experiences of college students are examined through

individual interviews. Furthermore, the researchers utilized the quantitative design by using the data reduction procedure. This procedure includes organizing the data; identifying emerging themes, categories, and patterns; and testing hypotheses against the data (Lepine, 2011). Quantitative phase is then used in the manner of running exploratory factor analysis to discriminate items that do not passed the statistical tests, with remaining items to be considered as measures of happiness among college students. In context, this research examined the dimensionality of happiness of Southeastern College students.

The study was conducted in Southeastern College, a higher education institute situated in the the rural municipality of Padada in the Province of Davao del Sur. The research respondents were college students. At the time of the conduct of the study, there were a total of 1,959 college students enrolled. Of this, 40 students were randomly contacted to be informants for focus group discussions in order to identify the possible sources of students' happiness, of which yielded 146 discrete responses. Furthermore, a total of n=416 students were randomly chosen to respond on the survey and were asked on how happy they are on the 146 pre-determined sources of happiness.

Sources of happiness were explored through narrative experiences of n=40 college students through individual interviews. The first group was all males, second group is all females, and third group is combination of both sexes. They were asked on the things that make them happy through FGD. There are 786 responses gathered from the three separate focus group discussions (FGDs) from these students, which were merged and clustered together to arrive 146 items, which was the basis for the preliminary "*Happiness Questionnaire*". The questionnaire consists of 146 items identified as possible sources of happiness. Each item is scored on a 5-point scale using sematic pairing of 1: Unhappy and 5: Very Happy. Higher scores indicate greater happiness. Initial alpha of the questionnaire was 0.956.

The study employed data reduction through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) where a large number of variables are put into statistical software (SPSS 16.0) to see what might fit together; then a theory is built around what is found (Kim & Mueller, 1978). Using the principal components factor analysis in the SPSS 16, items which did not reach the +0.50 coefficient were removed from the scale. Furthermore, weighted mean was used to ascertain the level of each item as to how they make the Southeastern College students happy.

RESULTS

Table 1 below reveals the measures used to determine if the 146-item scale is suitable for the conduct of factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was found to be 0.887, which is higher than the required 0.60 (Kaiser & Rice, 1974). This means that the data was adequate and is acceptable for the conduct of factor analysis. Also, the approximate chi-square value was 1743, with p-value of 0.000, which is lower than the required 0.05. This means that the responses for the scale was significant and deemed appropriate.

Table 1. *Measures of Sampling Adequacy and Sphericity*

Measurement	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.887
Bartlett's test of Sphericity	
χ^2	1743
p-value	0.000

Results of the VARIMAX rotation were displayed in Table 2. Rotated component matrix was set at 25 iterations, with coefficients lower than the required ±0.50 were eliminated. Of the 146 items responded, only 21 were retained in the final scale. Likewise, the rotated component matrix revealed robust coefficient values, and extracted five (5) constructs of happiness. These five include outdoor activities, within-the-generation activities, romance, self-indulgence, and online gaming. These constructs are the dimensions described the sources of happiness. Also, the 21 items were found to have an overall alpha coefficient value of 0.895, which is higher than the required 0.70 (Hair et al., 2007).

Table 2. *Rotated Component Matrix*

Item	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Having adventure	.793				
Outing	.761				
Hiking	.722				
Hanging out with friends	.671				
Vacation	.595				
Going to the beach	.584				
Games		.793			
Gadgets		.685			
Watching Youtube videos		.610			
Going to the mall		.574			
Texting			.739		
Phone conversations			.708		
Dating			.707		
Hugging			.556		
Decorating				.812	
Dancing				.662	
Eating delicious food				.634	
Gifts				.525	
DOTA/DOTA 2.0					.936
Clash of Clans (COC)					.642
League of Legends					.606
% Variance Explained	34.468	8.000	6.668	5.596	4.858

Moreover, Table 3 shows the mean values of the 19 sources of happiness of college students. Based on the mean scores, eating delicious food and vacation tied in the first rank of happiness, having a mean score of 4.55. These are followed by adventures, with a mean score of 4.51 for the second spot, gift landed third, with mean score of 4.50, hanging out with friends was found to be the fourth-ranking happiness source with a mean score of 4.34, while travelling and outing tied for the fifth spot, based on the mean score of 4.32. On the other hand, playing DOTA was found to be the least-rated happiness source by SC students, with a mean score of 2.62.

Table 3. *Extent of Happiness of SC Students on the Identified Sources of Happiness*

Sources of Happiness	Index	Ranking
Eating delicious food	4.55	1
Vacation	4.55	1
Having adventure	4.51	2
Gifts	4.50	3
Hanging out with friends	4.34	4
Travelling	4.32	5
Clash of Clans	4.32	5
Outing	4.32	5
Going to the mall	4.11	6
Going to the beach	4.06	7
Games	4.05	8
Hiking	3.94	9
Gadgets	3.89	10
Texting	3.88	11
Decorating	3.87	12
Watching YouTube videos	3.79	13
Dancing	3.78	14
Hugging	3.72	15
Dating	3.20	16
Phone conversations (calling)	3.04	17
League of Legends	2.97	18
DOTA	2.62	19

DISCUSSION

Based on the study conducted, there are five types or constructs of happiness that characterize Southeastern College (SC) students. Exploratory factor analysis revealed that SC students' sources of happiness stemmed from outdoor activities, within-the-generation activities, romance, self-indulgence (self-gratifying activities), and online games. Overall, Southeastern College students are happy individuals. They really exhibit happiness to the different experiences that they encountered in their life. With the feeling of happiness, they can be productive individuals in their field of profession.

Outdoor activities as a construct of happiness includes having adventure, outing, hiking, hanging out with friends, vacation, and going to the beach. This finding was parallel with the contentions of Lu and Hu (2005), citing that children who regularly experience natural play are healthier, happier, and test better in school. Moreover, these outdoor activities are just a few of the endless ways to enjoy nature.

Within-the-generation activities were found to load into a single construct of happiness. This finding is analogous with the findings of Muduli (2014) on gadgets, being one of the college students' sources of happiness and past-time/hobby. The dependency of the youth on these technological gadgets and services provided by these, however, is leading to addiction of the

tech-devices and services. Also, in an article written by McGonigal (2011), games consistently fulfil genuine human needs that the real world fails to satisfy. More than that, they may prove to be a key resource for solving some of our most pressing real-world problems. Likewise, Cheng and Liu (2010) found out that those who had shared or would share Youtube videos felt happiness, humor, surprise, fear, sadness, and anger more strongly than those who had not shared or would not share the videos. Those more likely to share also found the videos more enjoyable, intense, informative and less provocative; thought the videos were useful, important for society, and reflected their tastes; and anticipated that people would feel happy and grateful to them for sharing the videos.

Romance is one of the leading happiness sources of students, such that Jaffe (2010) stated that the transition period of college lends itself to new opportunities and experiences in which young adults learn to express themselves within different types of romantic relationships. One aspect of college that influences these relationships is the emerging "hook-up" culture, leading to relationships being less of a norm in college settings.

Self-indulgence or self-gratifying activities are those who are enjoyed by college students alone. This construct includes decorating, dancing, eating delicious food and gifts. Boden (2013) found out that dancing relieves physical and psychological tension and improves the ability to express oneself. Women emphasize dance that allows acceptance of the female body, which is perceived as a self-satisfying effect with great impact, while men put greater emphasis on self-confidence and that dancing may help finding identity. Elfver, Thyr and Cser (2013) mentioned that in the process of decorating one's home the identity will inevitably shine through, much due to personal preferences that reflects the identity, further making individuals happy. Further, people seem to believe that others form judgements based on their home decoration, which also affects the connections between the identity and consumption of interior products. Stanish (2010), on the other hand, emphasizes the happiness of eating delicious food in the context of students with obesity problems, who have unanimously stated that eating is their guilty pleasures.

Online gaming was also found as one of the constructs of happiness of college students. Aquino (2012) verbalized that computer gaming is one of the most favorite hobbies and pastime of the Filipinos aside from watching television and playing sports. The invasion of DOTA in the Philippines is very massive, that millions of Filipinos are getting involved into it. Many other people are encouraged and influenced to play this strategy game that led to their addiction. In addition, Rayo (2014) pointed out that the culture of DOTA (Defense of the Ancients) has taken the Philippines to storm because of its very creative gameplay that caused millions of Filipino students hard for them to avoid playing the game. Such happiness in playing DOTA is also evident from media to the internet, which resulted computer shops to have been growing massively since its release. College students and non-students alike are gathered there to play informally and to show their enthusiasm and foster friendship, teamwork and camaraderie.

The results can be a basis in the development of growth sessions, formation programs and classroom activities that can benefit college students. School administration can used this result to provide programs or activities that will stimulate students' interests that will make them feel happy and satisfied. Likewise, it is recommended that the resulting happiness scale will be tested in other institutions of higher learning, or validated with existing measures to establish its psychometric properties.

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