

THE CONCEPT OF HAPPINESS OF FILIPINAS IN THE ACADEMIC SETTING

THE CONCEPT OF HAPPINESS AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF “FILIPINAS” IN THE ACADEMIC SETTING

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ABSTRACT

This study determined salient themes of female individuals who are inside the academic setting on their concept of happiness and moral development. The idea of studying the Filipina Female Concept of Happiness came from two areas of study – Female Psychology and Positive Psychology. The researchers were intrigued by the idea that since the female brain is influenced by various amounts of hormones during different stages in their life, affecting their perceptions, emotions and behaviors and perhaps it will show differences in the concept of happiness and moral development. Content analysis of interviews and essays from 12 participants suggested that compared to emerging adults, early teens and late teens attributed their happiness more on extrinsic factors. The results showed that as Filipinas grow older, their concept of happiness became more intrinsic. The study explored the Filipina's concept of happiness and moral development.

Keywords: Academic Setting, Filipina, Concept of Happiness, Moral Development, early teens, late teens, adults

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INTRODUCTION

The happiness of a Filipina is not often a topic of discussion even amongst people living in the Philippines. In a society where women are expected to be in-charge of the household affairs and at the same time expected to contribute to family income. It is interesting that only few researchers are dedicated to the Filipino woman. The book "Female Brain" by Brizendine (2006) introduced the concept of female psychology to the researchers in this study. The main premise of her book was that the behavior of women was greatly different from that of men due to hormonal and brain structure differences.

On the other hand, Positive Psychology is a relatively young branch of Psychology. It is rooted from the theories of many philosophers such as Aristotle, Epicurus, and tenets of religions such as Judaism, Buddhism and Christianity. Formal studies started by Humanistic psychologists such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. Dr. Martin Seligman, during his APA presidency in 1998, focused more on positive psychology (Linley, 2009). He is currently Director of the Penn Positive Psychology Center and Zellerbach Family Professor of Psychology in the Penn Department of Psychology. He is also Director of the Penn Master of Applied Positive Psychology program (MAPP). He is a leading authority in the fields of Positive Psychology, resilience, learned helplessness, depression, optimism and pessimism.

<http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/bio.htm>

Statement of the Problem

This study explored the Filipina concept of happiness. Having gathered insights from various studies on happiness and female psychology, the researchers wanted to find out how these theories apply to the female population of the Philippines in the academic setting. The study answered the following questions:

1. What is the concept of happiness moral development to a Filipina in the academic setting?
2. Is there a difference in the concept of happiness of women across different age groups in the academic setting?

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Significance of the Study

The results of the study have led to a deeper understanding of women's happiness and motivations, and the Filipino culture. Identifying and understanding the factors that contributed to their happiness. In this context, true happiness refers to an individual's realization of what will give them lasting happiness or contentment, finding the means to its attainment, and finally achieving it. The study will answer the question on why some women lose their motivation to be happy as they experience life-changing events (i.e. graduating, becoming financially independent). The study helped in understanding how adolescent females view happiness during the important stages of their physical, emotional and moral development.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Assessed the effects of gender, race, and socioeconomic status (SES) on the general and area-specific self-esteem of 195 11th graders. The sample was 48% female and 52% male, 75% Black and 25% White. Ss completed a battery that included the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale and the Brookover Self-Concept of Ability and School Achievement Scales. Data indicate that females, Whites, and lower-SES Ss were consistently lower in their self-esteem scores than were males, Blacks, and upper-SES Ss, respectively. White females were found to be lower in general and happiness self-esteem than all other gender by race subgroups. High-SES White Ss were lower on the happiness and behavior self-esteem measures than Black Ss and White middle-class Ss. Black males and White females were less confident in their school ability than were Black females and White males. (44 ref) (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2012 APA, all rights reserved) General and specific self-esteem in late adolescent students: Race x gender x SES effects. Richman, Charles L.; Clark, M. L.; Brown, Kathryn P. *Adolescence*, Vol 20(79), 1985, 555-566.

The current paper aimed to explore the meaning and conception of happiness among selected Filipino adolescents. Ten Filipino college students whose ages range between 16 and 20 were selected through purposive sampling. The study employed qualitative-descriptive research design. Findings showed that happiness is a multifaceted construct that involved the following major themes: satisfaction of wants, absence of worries, expression of positive emotions, motivational drive, and fulfillment

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of relational needs. Distinct personal characteristics and positive behavioral strategies predictive of happiness were identified as well. Enhancing positive emotions, positive traits and behavioral strategies of individuals from this developmental phase may be a good step to increase their social, psychological and occupational functioning in the form of academic, extra-curricular, co-curricular endeavours. (Jesus Alfonso D Datu, Jana Patricia M Valdez, 2012 "Exploring Filipino adolescents' conception of happiness")

Qualitative research designs were also employed to strengthen formulations on happiness (Chiu, Hsieh, Yeh, Kuo, Lee, & Yu, 2010; Lu & Gilmour, 2004). For instance, Chiu, Hsieh, Yeh, Kuo, Lee, and Yu (2010) explored conception of happiness among Chinese students through a model-building approach. They have identified specific determinants of happiness, specifically caring, environment, balancing, owning, playing, being rewarded, interaction, and self-realization. Lu and Gilmour (2004) utilized a qualitative design as part of their two-fold study in figuring out conceptions of happiness between individuals from Asian and Western contexts. Findings of their study validated the underpinning that conception of happiness among Asian people is socially-construed as opposed to individually-construed well-being of Euro-American individuals.

The first aim of the study is to look at how Filipino adolescents define happiness as meaning and concepts about a specific phenomenon is highly shaped by one's culture (Bruner, 1990). In other words, we take the stance that conception of happiness among Asians significantly differs from that of Westerners. The second objective is to explicitly examine personal characteristics that describe a happy Filipino adolescent. Given that individuals under this stage are prone to experience wide array of life challenges as a result 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). The third objective is to identify particular behavioral strategies that are predictive of happiness among the intended participants since intentional behaviors account for a significant portion of how happiness can be realized among individuals (Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006). The ultimate goal of the study is to better understand conception of happiness among selected Filipino adolescents.

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The paper examines subjective well-being among selected Filipino adolescents in the context of Horney's Psychoanalytic Social Theory. Ten college students who were part of the larger population of individuals whose age ranges from 16 to 20 from a private collegiate institution in Metro Manila were selected and scheduled for an in-depth interview to express their immediate and past experiences in relation to happiness. The study employed interpretative phenomenological analysis which involved pertinent experiences of the participants in their joyous and positive states. After the transcription of participants' responses, the researchers utilized macro thematic analysis and it was revealed academic achievements, happiness in God, satisfaction of psychosocial needs, material things satisfaction and feeling of isolation were the themes that are relevant to happiness. Upon further analysis, it was found out that satisfaction of neurotic needs for affection and approval, powerful partner, narrow limits to life, personal achievement and self-sufficiency and independence would lead to the realization of happiness. Implications of the findings to the intended populace and practicing psychologists were also discussed. (Datu & Mateo 2012. Investigating happiness through a psychoanalytic social lens: Perspectives from Filipino adolescents)

In pursuit of acquiring a newer paradigm in describing the dynamics of happiness, Psychoanalytic Social theory pioneered by Dr. Karen Horney was utilized in the current paper. This appeared to be noteworthy theoretical framework to be leaned upon as participants' past experiences were taken into account as main sources of data, along with their immediate experiences. Since adolescence is a transition period from childhood to adulthood, childhood experiences are responsible for the development of the physical, psychological, social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects of one's personality (Feist & Feist, 2007). For instance, if parents do not satisfy the child's needs for safety and satisfaction, the child develops feeling of basic hostility toward parents. Repressed hostility toward the parents, on the other hand, will then lead to profound feelings of insecurity and a vague sense of appreciation, a condition called basic anxiety which Horney (1950) defined as a feeling of being isolated and helpless in a world conceived as potentially hostile. Subsequently, Horney identified ten categories of neurotic needs that are considered defensive modes to combat basic anxiety. These include the neurotic needs for affection and approval, powerful partner, narrow limits to life, power, exploitation, recognition and unassailability, personal admiration, personal achievement, self-sufficiency and independence, and perfection and prestige (Feist & Feist, 2007).

Findings of the study have delineated that selected Filipino adolescents' concept of happiness can be perceived as the satisfaction of the neurotic needs for affection and

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approval, powerful partner, ambition and personal achievement, self-sufficiency and independence, and narrow limits to life. By employing a qualitative-phenomenological research design, the researchers portrayed a much clearer imagery of one's happiness, specifically through synthesizing the conglomeration of experiential strand gathered from participants. It has been found out as well how important past experiences are in describing the co-researchers' realization of happiness, in contrary with the existentialist perspective as it customary explains happiness using immediate experiences. Co-researchers' past experiences that dwell with their parental relational patterns may possibly affect attainment of subjective well-being as it can inflict basic hostility if the needs for care and support will be jeopardized at the earlier stages of life. Attainment of happiness is a process which involves combating basic anxiety, that is, the feeling of helplessness and isolation in a world conceived as potentially hostile. On that note, happiness can be seen as a process of positively adjusting to the hazards of basic anxiety. This proved to be a very interesting innovation on the part of the growing fund of knowledge in the field of Psychology particularly on the continuous proliferation of researches which encompass the issue of subjective well-being as most of them have not utilized neo-Freudian paradigms like Horney's theory. Hence, future researchers are recommended to employ the same paradigm in discussing how individuals attain happiness. The findings will help psychologists and mental health practitioners to understand holistically precursors of the adolescent's attainment of a positive and joyous state with respect to unresolved issues on the past that affect their psychological functioning and not just the present factors that would pronounce such. Likewise, this will also be purposeful in the practice of counseling as it will allow the guidance counselors to assist adolescents in making important choices in their lives to become happier, subsequently letting them realize the worth of life satisfaction in light of their neurotic needs. In that sense, the notion that adolescence is "the period of storm and stress" can be gradually altered and further promising opportunities can be optimize to hone their skills and abilities in pursuit of happiness. (Datu & Mateo 2012. Investigating happiness through a psychoanalytic social lens: Perspectives from filipino adolescents).

We explored cultural and historical variation in concepts of happiness. First, we analyzed the definitions of happiness in dictionaries from 30 nations to understand cultural similarities and differences in happiness concepts. Second, we analyzed the definition of happiness in Webster's dictionaries from 1850 to present day in order to understand historical changes in American English. Third, we coded the State of the Union addresses given by U.S. presidents from 1790 to 2010. Finally, we investigated the appearance of the phrases "happy nation" vs. "happy person" in Google Ngram Viewer from 1800 to 2008. Across cultures and time, happiness was most frequently defined as good luck and favorable external conditions. However, in American English,

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this definition was replaced by definitions focused on favorable internal feeling states. Our findings highlight the value of a historical perspective in the study of psychological concepts. (Oishi, Graham, Kesebir, Galinha. Concepts of Happiness Across Time and Cultures. In Press *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*)

When and how did the view of happiness turn from non-agentive to agentive, external to internal? According to McMahon (2006), it was a gradual process, but it accelerated in the Enlightenment era. McMahon summarized the antagonistic sentiment toward pursuit of happiness in earlier eras. For instance, St. Augustine's City of God (believed to be written in the early 5th century) stated that "the earthly quest for happiness is doomed" (McMahon, 2006, p.102) and that true happiness is "unattainable in our present life" (p. 104). In the 13th century, however, St. Thomas Aquinas clarified the role of human effort in the process of eudemonia, which he conceived as becoming closer to God. Aquinas claimed that partial happiness can be achieved in this life via "the 'theological virtues' of charity, hope, and faith" (p. 131). This signaled an important departure from ancient Greece in that Aristotle and Plato viewed happiness as something that can be achieved only by a small number of extremely fortunate and talented individuals, whereas Aquinas viewed partial happiness as obtainable by everyone via a divine gift. In the 16th century, Martin Luther went one step further, claiming that it was not a sin to be happy, and that "Christians should be merry...To live life as a justified man was apparently to experience the world as a 'pleasure garden for the soul'" (McMahon, 2006, p. 172).

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants were twelve (12) females from St. Nicolas College of Business and Technology, all single from ages 16 to 25 years old.

Sampling

Random Sampling was used to choose the participants in the study.

Interview and Essay Content Analysis

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The participants were asked to either participate in an interview or submit an essay that answered four questions. The data collected from each age group was analyzed qualitatively by deriving common and salient themes and indicating the frequency of each theme per age group.

RESULTS

Common and Salient Themes

A. Material objects and rewards

Statements of happiness that come from praise from other people, rewards (in cash or kind), and other material things not necessary for survival fall under this theme.

B. Interactions with people

All statements of happiness attributed to interactions with other people fall under this theme. It is further divided into two subthemes: Making other people happy and being happy because of other people.

C. Faith and Religion

Most of the participants stated that the most important source of their happiness is God. Statements that express faith in God and loyalty to religion fall under this theme.

D. Contentment

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Contentment is comprised mainly of statements that express acceptance and appreciation of what a person already possess. It also means wanting nothing more.

E. Pride and self-esteem

Statements of pride and self-esteem are mainly about happiness brought by performing well and feeling proud of ones' self.

F. Desires

Desire, in this context, refers to statements about sources of happiness that fulfill the person's wants which are not material.

DISCUSSION

Both the early teens and late teens study at academic institutions. The emerging adult group is comprised of employed women. This supports the theory that important life events, in this case, joining the workforce can affect the Filipina concept of happiness. Joining encourages independences from the guardians, financially and emotionally. Independence contributes to an individual's perception of maturity, self-appreciation and confidence. These developments in the individual's character can be accompanied by increased intrinsic attribution.

Aside from independence, a more recognized and even anticipated consequence of becoming an emerging adult is responsibility. In a collectivistic country like the Philippines, the off-springs who have graduated from college are expected to contribute to if not shoulder the family's finances. These factors may affect the increase of intrinsic attribution among adults.

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The themes *Material Objects and Rewards*, *Interactions with People* (though there are differing opinions on whether human interaction is intrinsic or extrinsic, this study worked on the assumption that is more extrinsic) and *Faith and Religion* are extrinsic factors while the themes *Contentment*, *Pride and Self-Esteem* and *Desires* are intrinsic factors.

In this study it can be inferred from the data gathered that the happiness of early teen respondents greatly depend on the presence of supportive relationships. The study also determined their perceptions of their relationship with God. Most of the respondents who frequently mentioned family, friends, and God stated that these relationships are important because these are the sources of strength, support and guidance. They also mentioned the importance of benefiting from the relationship more often than making others happy. Similar to Gilligan's theory of moral development, these results suggest that individual survival is very important to these respondents.

On the other hand, early teen respondents rarely mentioned their personal dreams or life goals and pride and self-esteem were not mentioned at all.

Based on the content analysis, the emerging adult respondents showed highest intrinsic attribution (lowest frequency in material objects/rewards and faith/religion themes while cited to have a high attribution to contentment, pride/self-esteem, and desire themes). Relative to other age groups the emerging adult respondents were also more concerned with making other people happy. These results are consistent with Gilligan's conventional stage which states that females eventually prefer self-sacrifice than individual survival.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For future studies, the researchers suggest the following:

1. Increase the sample size, especially for the content analysis. This will improve the validity of the results and make generalizations possible.
2. Get samples from different areas in the Philippines.

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3. Compare the concept of happiness of single and married women. Another variation would be the comparison of the concept of happiness of women with and without children. The presence or absence of strong attachment to the spouse or the child might influence a woman's concept of happiness.
4. Another Qualitative study that aims to define happiness from the Filipino perspective can be a huge contribution to Filipino Psychology.

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