

What it means to be happy: Insights and perspectives from New Zealand adolescents

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Biography

Victoria is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Canterbury. Her background in educational psychology and her passion for philosophies surrounding mental health and well-being have informed her current doctoral research. Her research explores the contributing factors to the perspectives and experiences of happiness amongst adolescents in Aotearoa New Zealand and how these are shaped by aspects of social media consumption and related behaviours.

ABSTRACT

For centuries the concept of happiness has been defined, deconstructed, and defined time and again. Upon reflection of both Western and Eastern perspectives, it becomes clear that the definition of happiness is not unanimous. Despite this lack of unanimity, it is well-documented that the pursuit of happiness is a goal shared by most people. Moreover, these goals and aspirations become more developed and salient as we grow and develop as individuals. With ever-changing spaces and environments adolescents find themselves within, including physical, social, and digital, it is worthwhile considering how they both perceive, and experience happiness in light of the often complex and highly unique developmental period of adolescence. This research seeks to better understand how young people in Aotearoa New Zealand define and experience happiness for themselves. The sample comprises adolescents from across New Zealand ranging from North to South, and 12 to 19 years of age. Participants were invited to participate in an asynchronous interview conducted over the Signal Messaging App, where they provided voice-recorded messages to answer questions. The interview comprised of 14 questions covering different aspects of happiness such as the socialisation of happiness, the experience of happiness, the pursuit of happiness, and impacts on future thinking. The data analysis will be conducted using modified analytic induction methods to allow for multiple hypotheses to emerge from the data. This research is currently in progress, so preliminary findings will be presented. It is hoped that the results from this research will help to fill the gap in our collective knowledge about how young people conceptualise happiness and therefore could have the potential to inform wellbeing intervention and policy, as well as begin important conversations about the messaging that surrounds the concept of happiness.