Critical Education

The Pursuit of [Un]happiness
A Study of Critical Perspectives of Living and Constraints of Social Stratification

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Abstract

This paper presents the pursuit of [un]happiness from a critical standpoint, and it examines how [un]happiness is influenced by social, political, historical, and economic systems. A mix-methods pilot study was conducted to find out how U.S. southwestern borderland community feel about happiness. The research participants included students and persons from the local border region. [Un]happiness is a byproduct of social justice or lack thereof; hence, this theoretical study analyzes implications of sustainable socioeconomic and unequal structures that produce it. It inquires how the fulfillment of basic existential needs and access to quality education can guarantee critical, authentic, and hopeful opportunities for a happier and healthier life. We question whether social justice opportunities for happiness, and how the constitutional pursuit of happiness guarantee its effectiveness and applicability. How should education promote curricular and pedagogical programs that facilitate the foundational means of happiness and how to live healthier lives? The overall findings indicate that countries that distribute resources more equitably have fewer social problems. The paper discusses eastern and western paradigms and recommends educational programs that can influence happiness.

Introduction

Countries that have a high disparity between the rich and the poor harbor high rates of unhappiness, even among countries that create policies to raise the levels of happiness. For any US citizen, familiar with the famous words from the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (Congress, U. S., 1776), it is important that s/he examine this non-hegemonic discourse designed to liberate, particularly that of the 'pursuit of happiness' in a critical post-modern world. Although within a neoliberal context, what it really means is that people ought to "pull themselves up by the bootstraps". However, this view of the "pursuit" does not guarantee access to nor achievement of happiness. Nonetheless, we advocate an interpretation of this "pursuit" to mean the guarantee of equal opportunity from the starting point, and reparations to those who have historically been left behind. Thus, this study will recommend a pedagogy of happiness and a program of social justice that guarantee opportunities for everyone "to make it".

Hence, for this study, we critically examine happiness within a contemporary context. To be critical means to question reality, to challenge the status quo, by asking difficult questions of why things are the way they are and why they cannot be different. We inquire whether conditions of social justice create opportunities of happiness. What are the structural, circumstantial, cultural, and social implications of the 'pursuit of happiness'? Should education promote curricular and pedagogical programs that teach students how to live happier and healthier lives? To answer these questions, we first:

- use a theoretical study to explore implications of [un]happiness in schooling and society in general;
- subsequently, we articulate a theoretical framework focusing on the implications of neoliberalism, economics, mental health, and [un]happiness;
- after, we analyze regional controversies, cultural and historical associations to [un]happiness;
- in addition, we examine the effects of social stratification, inequality, and school-to-prison pipeline, and how predatory capitalism impacts student performance;
- next, we present results from a pilot case study
- finally, propose a pedagogy of happiness based on critical pedagogy and quality education principles followed by concluding remarks.

Theoretical Implications of [Un]Happiness in Schooling and Society

[Un]happiness in a neoliberal context depends on each human's ability to learn how to change and adjust to novel existential challenges. One objective of education is to see how various educational programs impact students' levels of happiness because of, for example, meritocratic and achievement ideology, and/or mastery of knowledge, all of which in most cases affect children negatively. But when education values students' well-being and has a holistic perspective and is engaging, students are more likely to be happier. In attempting to describe what happiness is, however, one cannot discuss it without having to talk about its antithesis—unhappiness, which will also be addressed in this article.

Case in point – Joel Springs (2007), an indigenous scholar, points out why colonizers are never happy. He says: "…after all they took possession of indigenous lands and resources, but it seems more is never enough". For the colonizers, it appears that happiness is closely related to material possessions. Thus, we first want to define what unhappiness is, and secondly what happiness is. In the book, *The Spirit Level*, Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) present overwhelming evidence that the wider the gap in social class difference between the rich and the poor, the higher the social problems and sense of unhappiness. Countries that exhibit a higher economic difference between the *haves* and *have nots* have higher illiteracy rates, increased number of (mental) health problems/depression, more imprisoned citizens and crime, early pregnancy, high levels of school dropouts, drug use, chronic and terminal illness, obesity, social isolation, suicide rates, and so on (National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control, & Prevention, 2015). In fact, in the US, roughly more than half of the population reflects this condition. The World Happiness Report (2016) also affirms that levels of [un]happiness are intrinsically related to socio-economic, political, and historical contexts. From a global spectrum, this sense of unhappiness tends to increase as two-thirds of the population of new generations will not be able to advance their incomes to the level of their parents or previous generations' incomes or demographic profiles (Dobbs, et al. 2016; Foroohar, 2016).

Thus, unhappiness is defined in an objective way, a result of social ills manifesting themselves publicly, which can then be quantified. Unhappiness is a feeling derived from social injustice, lack of political citizenry agency on social decision making or lack of economic self-sufficiency that affects a person's self-will and sense of self-determination. Given this status quo, we can infer and hypothesize that unhappiness is structural, not coincidental, in which *the haves* take advantage of *the have nots* through predatory or undemocratic practices and discrimination that affect the most vulnerable sectors of society.

The contrary is also true--countries that can maintain a historical sustainable socioeconomic condition, with lower levels of social class inequality, have less social problems, and are therefore healthier and happier. These conditions provide for sustainable structures in which, in addition to educational opportunities, empower people to not only study for a profession but also how to make a significant contribution to society. When sustainable systems are reinforced by well-educated citizens, they facilitate the development of diversified infrastructures enabling dynamic sources of opportunities for happiness. So, happiness in this sense is a byproduct of these social conditions.

Happiness depends on conditions to be positive, inner peace does not (Tolle, 2010). Happiness can also be contingent upon one's perceptions. We define it in subjective terms for the most part, but for purposes of this study, we consider both subjective and objective definitions, as each individual can assume a different stance in its pursuit. Notwithstanding, a person can make the best of a situation despite adverse conditions. A lot can be discussed about happiness. For instance, Buddhism proclaims that the more a person is attached to worldly and material things, the more an individual is inclined to suffer. Nevertheless, we focus mainly on the **collective** aspect or effects of happiness, or lack thereof. We do not advocate happiness as an end goal, nor a recipe for it; instead, it is a natural consequence of fairness. Happiness is defined as the ability to feel good about who we are and being with others; it precludes a balance of work, love, and fun.

Happiness is a byproduct of social justice based on social, historical, political, and economic foundations that guarantee access, equity, and empowerment that facilitate a better

quality of life for all persons. Democratic participatory practices and nondiscriminatory structures that secure conditions of social justice can create opportunities for happiness. Maslow (2013) early on asserted that when physiological primordial needs along with safety, love and belonging, self-esteem, cognitive and aesthetic needs are met, this leads to self-actualization.

Happiness can also mean different things within philosophical, psychological, pedagogical and science fields of study. For instance, philosophical approaches are concerned with a general sense of life satisfaction, virtues, and well-being. Pedagogically, happiness may encompass the relationship between educational structures, historical paradigms, media, society, social justice issues, economics and student satisfaction; while in science, the concern may be more focused on statistical data and analysis, or genetic influences. Psychology, on the other hand, may be concentrated on perception and emotions, ranging from feelings of contentment and joy, to hedonistic feelings of pleasure.

Happiness can also be understood within constraints of optimism and its relation to time. In a cross-cultural study, Rossatto (2005) uses a mix-method study to examine how people perceive and use time and their sense of optimism, or lack of it. This study analyzed the consequences of fatalism in poor areas of Brazil and the US. The main findings indicate four categories: *blind optimism, fatalistic, resilient* and *transformative optimism*. These categories clearly show people are not necessarily pessimistic, but rather less optimistic depending on real possibilities and resources available within their reach. The optimism found depends on how people perceive real possibilities for their future and how they exercise their sense of self-determination or lack of it. Thus, within sociological, anthropological, and psychological realms, happiness is limited or influenced by intrinsic or extrinsic motivations.

Hence, in this article, we examine how [un]happiness is influenced by economics, and mental health from a theoretical point of view within Western and Eastern paradigms, in a critical post-modern context. It discusses regional controversies, cultural and historical situated notions with its stratifications, inequalities, and implications to education. Lastly, we build up a critique of predatory aspects of capitalism that influence science and positive psychology versions of [un]happiness. Ultimately, this research presents a pilot case study to subsequently suggest a pedagogy of happiness.

Economists, Mental Health, and [Un]Happiness

Joseph Stiglitz, a renowned Nobel Laureate economist, asserts that more equality means more economic growth, contributing to social stability and well-being. He debunks the trickle-down notion, urging a rethinking of this unproven idea due to the fact that the top 1 percent of Americans control 40 percent of the nation's wealth, while those at the top also enjoy the best health care. Whilst the elite enjoy their privilege, the majority (99%) of the population (middle and upper class) contends with the remainder distribution of 60% of the wealth, as the poorest (40% of the population) scrounge at the liminal spaces in society. Certainly, the privilege of the few comes at a high price for the majority (Stiglitz, 2012).

Hegemonic conditions of inequity, oppression, or injustice, such as patriarchy, whiteness, and economic elitism can contribute to discontentment and unhappiness. In fact, happiness studies are becoming a centerpiece of discussion for economists, as they are beginning to realize the value of happiness impacting human well-being--an important issue, as mental health problems in this country are on the rise at an alarming rate. According to the National Alliance

on Mental Illness (NAMI), approximately "1 in 5 adults in the US--43.7 million (18.6%) experience mental illness in a given year" (NCHS, 2015; Holmes, in press).

Then, there is the problem of drugs in the US. To date, according to the National Survey on Drug Use, more than 22 million Americans age 12 and older (9%) use illegal drugs. Though genetics have some bearing on one's drug use, other factors including poverty, social changes, employment status, poor academic performance, social deprivation, and health are leading factors resulting in substance addictions (World Health Organization—WHO, 2014). This societal sickness does not include behavioral disorders, such as gambling or hoarding, or alcohol use. Nor does this problem reflect the use of prescribed drugs in the US. Drugs that are prescribed by doctors is even more alarming, as pharmaceutical companies lobby to promote certain drugs—resulting in doctors bequeathed as the new drug dealers in society working for these avaricious drug companies who just see this as 'business as usual' and nothing personal. Doctors—iconic representatives for the promotion of health and well-being—are now complicit in the demise of society's 'collective welfare', and all for greedy purposes, a 3 trillion-dollar business. Thus, while the US is ranked at the top of the wealthiest nations in the world, too, our health disorders are commensurate with this uptrend in income, resulting in a very disturbing trend. When people are sick, they are certainly unhappy. In addition, the results of unemployment and divorce are related to the *equation* of unhappiness, affecting people in a detrimental way.

Regional Controversies, Cultural and Historical Situated Notions of Happiness

Financial stability plays a significant role in the conceptualization of happiness. According to the 2016 World Happiness Report, a measure of happiness published by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Nordic European countries like Denmark 1st, and Norway 2nd, lead the Gallop polls. Mexico is positioned in the 16th place, while the US is in 17th and Brazil in 24th. In this report, leading experts in several fields: economics, psychology, surveys, analysis, national statistics, and more, describe how measurements of well-being can be used effectively to assess the progress of nations. The report uses a scale, running from 0 to 10, surveying people in over 150 countries by Gallup over the period 2010-12. The researchers use six key variables to explain three-quarters of variation in annual national average scores over time and among countries. These six factors include: real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, health, life expectancy, having someone to count on, perceived freedom to make life choices, freedom from corruption, and generosity (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2016).

In contrast, the environment can also play a significant role on how we theorize happiness. According to the 2012 *Happy Planet Index* (HPI), nine out of the ten top countries are in the Caribbean Basin. Despite high levels of poverty, the ranking was led by Costa Rica for the second time in a row, enjoying *La Pura Vida* (the wonderful life). The report indicated that these countries experienced well-being higher than many richer nations. Venezuela is in number 9, Cuba in 12, Mexico in 21, Brazil in 22 and the US in 105.The HPI is an index of human well-being and environmental impact that was introduced by the *New Economics Foundation* (NEF) in July 2006. HPI is based on general utilitarian principles--that most people want to live long and fulfilling lives, and the country which is doing the best is the one that allows its citizens to do so, whilst avoiding infringing on the opportunity of people in other countries to do the same. The different indices of "measuring happiness" can be viewed as inappropriate depending on

socio-economic context vis-a-vis environment, as happiness may not be about wealth but rather about health and contentment in uplifting ecological surroundings.

When thinking about happiness, we also must consider historical events in time and how this affects different social groups. When are we supposed to feel or be happy? Are oppressed peoples around the globe supposed to forget genocide, slavery, colonization, and other historical injustices just to be happy? These events have significant historical trauma, however, that may affect generations to come. We cannot ignore or deny the influences of past events that continue to have neo-colonization effects. As studied and argued in psychology, most of what we can control is internal. An obstacle to be happy, for example, is not living in the moment, not being happy in the present, but enjoying simple things (Lozano, 2012). Living in a present state of contentment and joy can influence our levels of happiness. But these solutions may not be enough without addressing social and historical issues that affect people, and this needs to be done in a very objective way.

Zevnik (2014) argues that the Western culture concept of happiness is a relative and subjective ideal, culturally and historically situated, and unattainable to perfection. Measuring how happiness is produced by means of our social institutions can be a complex endeavor. Research shows that our current educational system reproduces society at large, including many negative aspects of our predatory capitalist culture (Apple, 2014; Anyon, 1981; Foley, 2010). After years of learning from troubled educational institutions and media enterprises, (Giroux, 2006), many students end up confusing "The Pursuit of Happiness" with the pursuit of power, money and prestige. "To have or to be" is a questionable dilemma, which westernized society has yet to address in pedagogy, curricula, and school practices. And sadly, a system of *manufactured illiteracy* or *miseducation* is present in the US schooling system today (Giroux, 2017). In contrast, some Asian societies, such as Bhutan, value more their citizens' levels of happiness rather than their Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

In the movie, *Happy* (2011), researchers compare the level of happiness of a young Indian male who works carrying passengers as a human taxi on foot, living in a simple hut covered in plastic, to the average level of happiness of most Americans. By the same token, an international study done by the Happy Planet Index--HPI (2012) indicated that people in economically developing nations are sometimes happier than those living in developed nations, as wealth and prestigious positions does not necessarily equate or add to levels of happiness; for some, familial relations and non-material attachment can be sources of happiness.

Arguably, economic data can be collected to different interest, and more and more research confirms that, when people reach a little beyond the average middle-class income level, even big financial gains do not necessarily increase happiness significantly. As such, relieving poverty is important to reach a certain level of happiness, but accumulating more capital, in itself, will not make a person any happier. It is more important to feel useful, and to develop a sense of ownership over accomplishments to increase happiness (Kahneman, 2003).

Pedagogy of [Un]happiness: Inequality and School-to-Prison Pipeline

Moreover, our educational institutions are formed in structures producing social inequality leading to 'discontentment' for many students. Schooling social stratification (i.e. tracking, standardized testing, remedial programs, meritocratic practices, etc.) in schools produces unhappiness among students, as curricula focus mainly in preparing students for achievement in a competitive global world. Passing a test and jumping hoops becomes the primary indicators representative of their performance. This conservative way of thinking about education is based on a pedagogy of unhappiness which produces detrimental consequences and results for student satisfaction (Mullis, Gonzalez, & Chrostowski, 2004; Mullis, & Martin, 2014). Pedagogy of unhappiness is a byproduct of unhealthy social conditions which produce feelings of hopelessness among people that usually affects their political agency and ability to stand up for themselves; for the most part, acceptance of this status quo implies socially constructed and learned behavior, which people learn in educational institutions, communities, social medias, etc.

A conservative ideological-educational agenda often on is a top-down approach where mastery of knowledge is enforced. It is based on a banking method of transmitting and receiving knowledge that robs students of their own voice, critical thinking, and sense of hope (Freire, 2000). Those who fall through the cracks are generally people of color, and people from low socio-economic (SES) backgrounds, including poor whites lacking optimism that are usually not equipped to pass a generic test prepared by whites who also establish a white school curriculum. In contrast, people with higher SES, which includes even people of color and not living in poverty, are usually more optimistic about life, thus, happier (Graham & Pinto, 2016). In the spirit of Westernized schooling, the sole objective is to have students perform at a high level on mainly math and science. Students' academic success is not the kind that engages their daily life experiences, but one that promotes neoliberal ideology in which the bottom line is not quality education for an individual, but rather--a world of dualities of right and wrong or good and bad instead of a more encompassing and holistic education which we discuss below. This push for excellence is all but a masquerade to hide the real issues that students (and schools) are confronted with daily: high drop-out rates, out-of-control drug abuse, violent-seeded bullying, unwarranted teen pregnancy, suicides, etc. Schools have essentially become dystopias of crime and mechanism(s) of legislation of hidden agendas and political underhandedness, like *Common Core* and *NCLB* which are set out to cement repressive ideology into the very foundation of schooling institutions. Such reform policy of standardization produces experiences that do not generate equality for its attendees, but rather, promote stratification and inequality within schools.

Hence, what happens for persons when their pursuit of happiness is a fair educational opportunity amidst a system that yields inequalities particularly for those economically challenged, or ethnic and gender discriminated? Is happiness attainable in such a learning environment that oppresses students through testing that fail a significant portion of student population? There is ample evidence that economic status, longevity of and happiness in life are related to quality of education. Spring (2007) alludes to the fact that those who are privileged enough to have a quality of education benefit in multiple ways, from better health to better job prospects. As such, education ought to provide opportunity for all individuals, not just a selected few; otherwise, a portion of the student population may be inclined to be disappointed with the schooling experience, if not "falling through the cracks".

As Nocella et al. (2014) point out, there is a school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon inherited by remedial programs that wind up producing marginalization and unhappiness. These kinds of experiences lead to more and more student drop outs. Students who cannot meet the standardizations of schooling, relegated by neoliberal conservative ideology, are "kicked to the curb", increasing the number of students who become part of statistical data for school-to-prison pipeline. In fact, Fine (1991) attests to the astonishing rates of drop outs, especially the poor and people of color. In addition, studies on income inequality assert that many children from the new generation are poorer than their parents and rarely will have what their parents were able to acquire (Dobbs, et al., 2016).

Finally, there is overwhelming evidence worldwide that happiness is related to a better quality of education where students learn a holistic approach that leads them to a long lasting and happy life; to become participatory citizens who can make a substantial worthwhile contribution to society (Spring, 2007).

The Pursuit of Happiness, Predatory Capitalism, and Critiques of Positivism

Abraham Lincoln wrote that most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be, but this is true so long as we are bestowed equal rights along with structural and institutional opportunities. The US Declaration of Independence proposes that the right to pursue happiness is an unalienable right. In fact, the *Constitution* states that *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness* are rights guaranteed to all citizens. But can the *pursuit happiness* be guaranteed? Or is the *pursuit of happiness* really perceived as the pursuit of riches? The *pursuit of happiness* is a preamble for policy and creation of structures that guarantee equal rights and access to (educational) programs (or resources) of advancement for every citizen. However, people can [mis]interpret this pursuit and therefore have different outcomes as a result. To illustrate, the biographical Hollywood movie: *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2006), supposedly a biographical account about a black man (Will Smith) who ends up living in the streets of New York for about a year as a homeless parent, sleeping in public bathrooms with his son, but "making it big" on Wall Street due to his perseverance and strong ambitions. Happiness in this context is not necessarily equated to an *inner* feeling of well-being, but rather, the underpinning idea is based on wealth for purchasing power, since the pursuit of happiness does not necessarily meet the basic living needs. Nevertheless, this is a representative illustration of homelessness statistics in the US, which is about 564,708 people (HUD report, 2016).

This is a classic example of the North American neoliberal narrative promoted by the media, which romanticizes the idea that accumulation of capital is a very important factor to achieve independence and happiness. Another example of this can be seen in the movie *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), a narrative endorsing the neoliberal/capitalistic American Dream, where anyone can "make it big" if only they work hard and have enough ambition. This is a portrayal of hedonistic immoral excesses and corruption of money as recent studies in psychology and genetics are finding that having lots of money, does not necessarily make people happier (Mogilner, 2010). Another illustration depicting how greed of actual American lives and minds are socially constructed is revealed in the monetization of everything as seen in propaganda (news, newspapers, etc.). A case in point, the real estate bubble burst in 2008 which exemplified a "modus vivendi" of obsession with exorbitant consumption of real estate through loans based on nefarious lending practices. Through deregulated predatory capitalism, *the big fish ate the*

small fish, culminating in the infamous Wall Street crash. This sense of happiness is based on false ideas where to be happy is construed to being buried in debt, but in reality led to the demise of many who ultimately became homeless.

Evaluating happiness is a challenging task. There is plenty of quantitative research in the Western world (usually from an economic or marketing perspective) that shows a variety of products that can make people happy. In addition, an adequate amount of resources can add to the quality of life, and subsequently to happiness. But excess materialism and predatory capitalism may have negative consequences for the human psyche, and may contribute to unhappiness (Ashman & Callinicos, 2007) and a zombie culture (Giroux, 2011). In fact, present day there is a minimalist movement in which members try to live with the least amount of material belongings, critiquing the notion that having more is counterproductive. Moreover, relationships are more contractual rather than caring based. In this postmodern context, individuals end up using people and loving things, when the reverse is ideal—to love people and use things—which enables happiness. This practice can eliminate the tensions built by interest-based interactions as opposed to love- based communities. Thus, assessing happiness may rely on multiple perspectives of human and cultural life.

The indications of unhappiness (or at least the searching for happiness) is observable as evidenced in the increasing demand for courses on positive psychology (via university websites). Every year it seems that more and more universities across the US offer classes on positive psychology and the science of happiness. Social media also has substantial amount of propaganda on how to become happier. No doubt, there seems to be a great demand for happiness everywhere. The fact is for many people in the Western Hemisphere, the idea of happiness in life is, for the most part, questionably related to material prosperity and economic success.

After more than three decades of empirical research on genetic, economic, psychology and neuro-scientific perspectives of happiness, studies have shown that, although money is an important factor for being happy, having more of it and living in opulence does not develop further the happiness a person can experience (De Neve, Christakis, Fowler, & Frey, 2012). According to the World Happiness Report (2013), mental health is one of the most important determinants of individual happiness (in cases where this has been studied). About 10% of the world's population suffers from clinical depression or crippling anxiety disorders. But does this mean many unhappy people are mentally ill? Hence, it may be argued that, in some cases, the accumulation of lots of money and capital, without care for others, may constitute a disease of the mind, which can be a social concern. As part of a qualitative methodology, below, we present a case study that highlights mental health issues and sources of unhappiness.

Depression Case-Findings and Interpretation

Independent of a person being wealthy or poor, chemical dependency is detrimental to mental health. To illustrate this notion, we discuss a specific case. While gathering data at an anonymous local treatment center, a beautiful and elegantly dressed woman in her forties, in good physical shape, came into the recovery room where all patients share their experiences. A group of people were undergoing therapy. In the middle of the session, she interrupted abruptly and shared how she had tried to commit suicide days before. The woman was obviously shaken: "I work out every day. I have three muscle cars in the garage… (She paused while crying).

Yesterday, I overdosed on pills overnight trying to kill myself. By morning, as I remembered I had to go to work… (pauses, sobbing), I started throwing up". Her sharing left a deep impact on those present in the room. She was a beautiful woman who appeared to be successful and likable. The fact that she was under the influence of alcohol and tried to commit suicide was surprising and unexpected from the observers' point of view--because she had everything to be grateful, if not happy for, in terms of essential material well-being, yet her denial of her mental health state and alcohol abuse left her stunned to the realization that her source of happiness produced *non-fructiferous* or unintended outcomes.

Medications to improve mental health conditions and anxiety are still among those that sell the most in the United States, not to mention the high demand for a great variety of legal and illegal mood-altering substances, including alcohol. As a society, it is evident that there is an abuse of drugs and alcohol. For the most part, this societal addiction problem surfaces where substance abusers predominantly exhibit feelings of denial. For instance, in the US, there are 23.5 million people officially diagnosed with substance abuse problems, but only 2-3% seek treatment (www.treatmentgap.org; www.dualdiagnosis.org/drug-policy-america; Open Society Foundations, 2017). Essentially, substance abuse is a disease of denial, which is a preventative safeguard from facing the truth or a defense mechanism in which a person is uncomfortable accepting the "truth" and rejecting overwhelming evidence of the cause(s) of self-destructive behavior. These outcomes of denial are certainly signs and symptoms of unhappiness or at least a search for unhealthy and shortsighted forms of happiness (Siegel, 1998).

We present next a qualitative and quantitative study that examines [un]happiness in the US Southwest borderlands.

Pilot Case Study Findings and Interpretations

This comparative international study conducted on US/Mexico Southwest borderlands utilizes a mixed-methods analyses that include surveys and interviews among teachers, adult bilingual students, and blue or white-collar workers.

Qualitative Section

By interviewing these research participants constituting of five professionals, educators, and higher education students in Mexico, this study confirms our theoretical findings, suggesting that having quality education and a prolific profession, along with family and strong social bonds, contributes significantly to happiness. At the same time, these research participants indicated that they see their US counterparts as less happy, as the US dominant cultural practices tend to emphasize mostly on individualistic and materialistic mainstream lifestyles.

This qualitative portion of the study was conducted and videotaped (in Spanish) through a series of interviews among the students and educators in the border city of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. The questions posed were: What is happiness to you? Are you happy or unhappy, why? What makes you happy? How can the education system make you or students happier? Can money make you happy? Do you think people in the US are happier than people in Mexico? And does technology increase the quality of your life? This is a translated summary of some their answers:

Research participant 1: An Engineering and Aeronautics major stated that happiness is when you achieve your goals…

I am happy because I have adapted to see the world as it is, not as I want it to be, and that is the key to happiness. Money doesn't make you happy completely, but it is a factor in achieving your goals. If you have it or if you don't, life teaches you with or without it. I don't think North Americans are happier. Their perspectives of happiness are very different when compared to Mexicans. Everything seems to be relative. It isn't a standard that only adapts to certain societies. Education can make us happier by trying to make us better persons and by focusing more on our goals, canalizing towards good common interests with career and with our objectives.

Research participant 2: A psychology major and researcher stated,

Happiness is a very ephemeral state that repeats in our life, stimulated by different kinds of things. It can be a constant search, a state that we pretend to achieve, but is complicated. The problem is when your ambition is having money for the sake of it, or when you think that money by itself, the currency or paper, brings you happiness. Money doesn't bring happiness; it's a medium to obtain a certain type of happiness. Happiness is a social construct. In the US, you can obtain a lot of pleasures through consumption. In Mexico and Latin America, happiness is a cultural matter; we still have certain types of cultural activities that bring us happiness. There are studies that indicate that Mexicans are happier than North Americans despite ... [social issues]. *This attitude is the classic discourse of Mexicans. We are happy in spite of...* [social problems]*; we are happy, and continue forward. In terms of education, I think the problem is that teachers repeat previous (conservative) patterns, a generalized education, systematized* [which contributes to unhappiness]. *It doesn't contemplate individual specific aptitudes. Everyone processes information differently. Teachers should be facilitators or mentors; instead, they try to impose ideology--very specific positionalities.*

Research participant 3: A media major stated,

Happiness is to feel complete in every sense: job-wise, academic and personal, with a partner or not. Certain recent studies report that Mexicans, in comparison to US citizens, feel more fulfilled. Why? Maybe because Mexicans care more about familial values rather than the acquiring of material things. I don't think education can make you happy, especially if you have a bad experience with it.

Research participant 4: A business major and housewife stated,

Happiness is something you construct, based on family and what you have. I am happy because my children are healthy, and I am achieving my objectives. I have a good husband. Of course, money can make you happy, but we shouldn't leave everything else aside; the material is not always the essential. The times I have been in the US, I have seen people stuck in a work routine. I see that their faces look strange, and I don't see

them happy. For me, El Paso is a boring city. People don't go out. I think Mexico is more "movido" (energetic). *Mexico seems to be more spontaneous and lively in contrast to El Paso, where entertainment is disciplined by distinct institutions (ex. movie theatres) and facilities (restaurants, nightclubs) where the weight of the law is observably present.*

Research participant 5: A school supervisor stated,

Happiness is a state of mind. The important thing is to be satisfied with oneself for the things achieved. Happiness is being well emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. It doesn't just depend on other persons, but rather depends on having positive relationships with those persons and surrounding yourself with people that contribute to your well-being. Education can make students happy when it improves infrastructure, equips schools with new technologies, and finances school maintenance.

What was predominantly observable in the interview patterns is that the research participants' perceived people in the US as individualistic and materialistic, thus, less happy than Mexicans who are more culturally and socially familial-oriented and a bit less driven by consumerism. On another note, technology can make people happier, but it can also be used in a negative and addicting dehumanizing way.

By the same token, the quantitative analysis done also revealed similar patterns as aforementioned.

Quantitative Section

For the quantitative part, the same questions were asked via a survey to thirty-two US students, teachers, and professionals. While surveying these research participants, this mixed methods pilot case study revealed the importance of addressing happiness in schooling. The research participants' answers once again confirming our theoretical findings and literature support --that *economic resources, health and food, quality of life/optimism, satisfaction/feeling of completion,* and *education* are important social notions of happiness. Thus, access to *resources, quality education,* and *quality of life* are strong indicators of a healthier and content society. There was also a noteworthy signifier that *relationships* (familial or otherwise), in a predominantly Latino community, are intrinsic elements for the development of happiness. Further along, research participants valued *love* and *compassion*, *contentment*, and *creativity*, confirming patterns found in the literature reviewed for this study.

In the survey format, the same open-ended questionnaire was used in the qualitative portion of the study. However, the quantified results that emerged in the research participants' responses revealed consistency, demonstrating a statistically significant connection of happiness to sources of social justice and equality. In their own words, a high percentage of research participants expressed their views regarding happiness in the following manner: *strong (real) relationships, friends, family, quality time, love/feeling loved or cared for, hope, compassion, supportive (relations), contentment, fulfillment, enjoyment, joy, laughter, explore, discovery, creativity, new challenges, adventure, (transformative) optimism/being positive, sense of future, self-satisfaction,* and *feeling of completeness.* The statistical relevance in this pilot study clearly

demonstrates that happiness is indeed a byproduct of essential life components which preclude the presence of met basic needs as Maslow established.

The bulk high percentage of research participants' own written responses to the guided questions of *resources* and *financial stability* strongly showed that *health and food,* and *'not having to worry about money'* are important for the establishment and sustainability of happiness. This fact confirms as Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) assert that a healthy access to resources by each societal member contributes to the collective well-being of society thereby leading to less social problems. By the same token, unhappiness is a byproduct of a stressful lifestyle or lack of resources. In fact, our findings showed that unhappiness was present in the research participants' life due to a stressful routine, the pressures of deadlines, lack of financial resources, all of which can engender a series of personal and social problems. More along, Wilkinson and Pickett show that developed countries with less differences between the rich and poor have fewer social problems.

Pedagogy of Happiness, Quality Education, and Critical Pedagogy

Pedagogy of happiness builds on previous work established by pedagogy of hope and critical pedagogy. It would be naïve to think that the oppressor would offer the oppressed a liberating kind of education. With this kind of education, the oppressed would find out all the injustice that the oppressor does to them (Freire, 2000). Paulo Freire had been a renowned educator, an inspiration of hope and a sense of revolutionary love. He stated how important it is to struggle against injustices, and advocate for a better world, to make it less ugly. For him, love is a feeling of knowing that there are differences and similarities among people, yet we can thrive together being who we are and feeling good about being with others. Thus, happiness depends on our ability to transcend differences. To the degree that we are able to embrace the similarities will happiness then become an attainable end. The more schooling allows differences to divide students, the unhappier they become. The more schooling can surpass differences and find ways to promote equity, access, caring, and empowerment, the happier all involved become (Noddings, 2015). Yet the conditions set for happiness need to be realistic and up-to-date, as a *Don Quixote* outdated style of "tilting the windmills" can turn into a pursuit of unhappiness. A view of education as an ideal, conducive to happiness, needs to be substantial for its practicality and tangible establishment (Verducci, 2013; Gibbons, 2013).

Today's education system prioritizes economic, vocational, and technological schooling over health, holistic education, and psychological well-being. School curriculum, rather than concentrating on teaching economic and competitive aspects of "success" through meritocratic ideologies and standardization, could include the mental and psychological aspects of reaching a balanced, wiser, and healthier life for students. We advocate in this paper for an oppositional stance to the reproduction of a society that mainly focuses on the domination of the other, or that is concerned about achievement, being overly competitive, and solely efficient rather than building student critical awareness (Happy, 2011). Hence, it is imperative that quality educational systems incorporate ways of teaching students and future citizens how to live a more content and fulfilling life. "To maintain hope alive, since it is indispensable for happiness in school life, educators ought to always analyze the comings and goings of social reality" (Freire 1990, p. 107). That is, learning should be realistic and empowering for students by incorporating their daily lives experiences. Curriculum could integrate an appreciation for different cultures and use a culturally responsive pedagogy to affirm the genuine aspect of each student identity,

while at the same time being critical of problematic structures that hinder the development of contentment (Orstein et al., 2003).

Education can play a pivotal role to deconstruct the overwhelming power of predatory capitalist practices in society. Ultimately, schools need to advocate for and implement a pedagogy of happiness in all levels of education so that students and teachers can learn to reinvent themselves in a way that brings about their well-being and dignity. Such action has the potential to develop more hopeful and healthier generations, allowing them to face life (on life's terms) and challenges in a way that narrows social differences. For Cornell West and Paulo Freire, hope is an ontological necessity; it is an integral part of our humanity that emerges out of concrete and imperative realities, based on social, philosophical, political, historical, and economic conditions that explain social reality and how things are and come to be, which are not necessarily coincidental. There are dominant groups interested in keeping structures that benefit them. Therefore, there is a need of a pedagogy of hope, hence, a pedagogy of happiness to examine social conditions directly connected with classroom experience. Learning in this context of schooling welcomes students to be transformative agents of history whereby they can experience better life outcomes and enjoy education. Ultimately, a pedagogy of hope and love can transform the resistance to happiness that holds them back, keeping them from realizing their true potential selves (Kelly, 2016). As Rossatto, Rivas, Heiman, and Esparza (2015) assert, children come to school eager to learn with positive aspirations, but through oppressive structural institutionalization and unproductive hyper-standardization practices, many end up losing their initial motivation, if not killing their spirit, provoking a high rate of student drop-outs. Unless a critical pedagogy is established to empower them, their chances for success are minimized. Happiness matters (Scoffham, & Barnes, 2011). Ultimately, pedagogy of happiness requires a revolutionary education that not only transforms at the individual and collective levels but also sets the stages for community members to change their own realities and systems that oppress them, where students learn to be contributing citizens as historical and transformative agents. By deconstructing hegemonic structures, communities can generate happier and permanent neo systems of living which starts at the critical consciousness level.

Finally, Pedagogy of Happiness examines happiness studies with the sole purpose of promoting social justice through quality education. In doing so, it gives historical agency for people to equalize the plain field by building permanent structures that guarantee safety, and equal opportunities in a sustainable way. This pedagogy de-centers oppressive neo-colonizing ideologies, and socio-economic political structures that keep people in naivete, ignorance, and oppression—which produces unhappiness. An approximation to the truth through scientific educational means that empower, give voice, develop participatory citizenship, and build critical consciousness ultimately is the source of a reliable sense of hope, transformative optimism, and happiness.

Concluding Remarks

In sum, based on analyses of existing bodies of knowledge and literature, our study presents happiness as an arguable social construction due to its subjective aspect and different communities' spiritual and intellectual localities. In contrast, unhappiness can be viewed in a very objective way due to strong evidence suggesting that economic inequalities are the main source of social ills and societal problems. The greater the economic differences between liminal and mainstream groups, the higher and wider the causes of social problems. The consequences

of these inequalities engender illiteracy, mental health, imprisonment, crime, early pregnancy, school dropouts, drug and alcohol addiction, chronic illness, obesity, social isolation, etc. In the US, more than half of the population reflects such social ills. The contrary is also true--countries that have fewer disparities between the rich and poor have fewer social problems.

According to our research and case study, equalizing the social playing field improves levels of happiness, whereby, collectively and individually, people are more apt and hopeful to live better lives. In other words, advancing socio-economic conditions and equality, together with access to technological and scientific knowledge can increase society's happiness. Its sustainability relies on social equality as the basis of living, where the differences between the rich and the poor are at least minimized. Critical conscientization and social justice are essential components in education and schooling to facilitate realistic social transformation for the development of happiness. Subsequently, the findings of this study present a pedagogy of happiness wherein holistic education becomes the cornerstone for healthy human development. Meritocratic ideologies of jumping hoops and keeping score keep students at bay and in detrimental localities. Rather, holistic education through a pedagogy of happiness empowers individuals and fosters democratic opportunities as an equal starting point for everyone to "make it" while at the same time learning to become contributors of society and active agents and citizens of their own history for social transformation.

Education ought to promote curricular and pedagogical programs that teach students how to live happier and healthier lives. When meritocratic and achievement ideology, remedial programs, and mastery of knowledge are the core bases of education, they affect children in a negative manner. But when education values students' life experiences, culture, identity, and well-being into the construction of knowledge, students can relate better and connect with learning content already familiar to them. Hence, by engaging students in a holistic way, students are more likely to enjoy schooling in general.

Sustainable social systems that are reinforced by well-educated and empowered citizens are integral to the advancement of healthier democracy and are the underpinning infrastructures for happiness to flourish and thrive. The US Constitution mentions the 'pursuit of happiness' as a desirable achievable goal; however, structural, circumstantial, cultural, and social implications leave many groups of people behind; for example, Blacks, Latinos, Indigenous, Women, etc. In comparison, Bhutan is a country that includes happiness in their constitution but use it in a pragmatic way to improve conditions that facilitate the achievement of that goal by allocating economic resources to sectors of society that have the greatest need (or that are unhappy). The US, alternately, does not necessarily follow such policies, practices, or initiatives.

Essentially, quality education, through a pedagogy of happiness, and social justice practices can guarantee and facilitate authentic opportunities for constructive learning. It is by promoting a fair playing field for all citizens that justice and happiness will prevail. Healthier societies are a natural consequence of social justice, where social, historical, political, and economic foundations can assure access, equity, and empowerment for the betterment of quality of life for all persons.

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