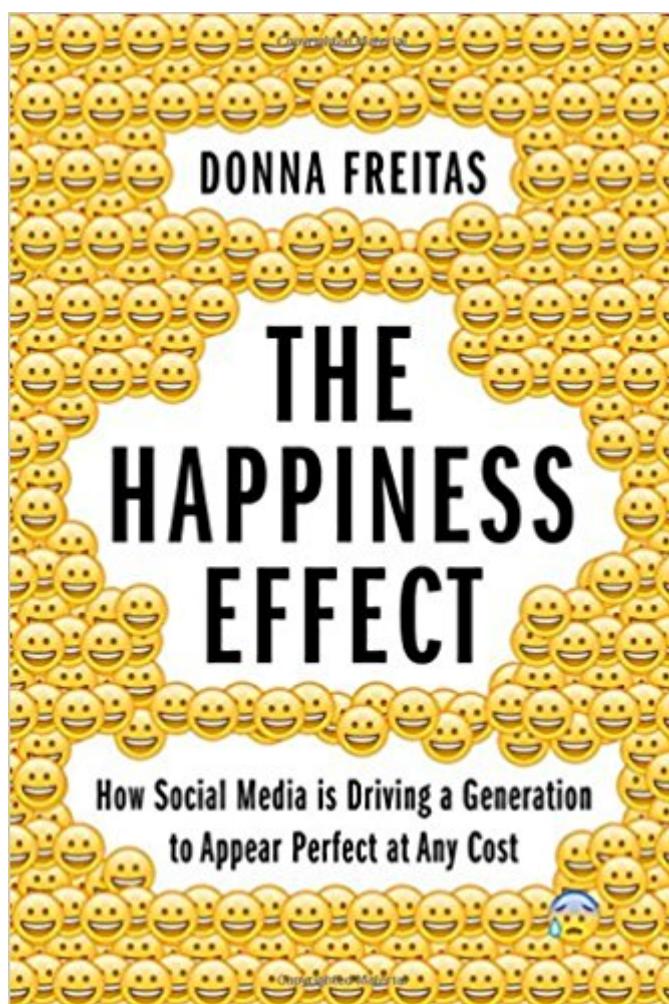


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# The Happiness Effect: How Social Media Is Driving A Generation To Appear Perfect At Any Cost



## Synopsis

Sexting. Cyberbullying. Narcissism. Social media has become the dominant force in young people's lives, and each day seems to bring another shocking tale of private pictures getting into the wrong hands, or a lament that young people feel compelled to share their each and every thought with the entire world. Have smartphones and social media created a generation of self-obsessed egomaniacs? Absolutely not, Donna Freitas argues in this provocative book. And, she says, these alarmist fears are drawing attention away from the real issues that young adults are facing. Drawing on a large-scale survey and interviews with students on thirteen college campuses, Freitas finds that what young people are overwhelmingly concerned with--what they really want to talk about--is happiness. They face enormous pressure to look perfect online--not just happy, but blissful, ecstatic, and fabulously successful. Unable to achieve this impossible standard, they are anxious about letting the less-than-perfect parts of themselves become public. Far from wanting to share everything, they are brutally selective when it comes to curating their personal profiles, and worry obsessively that they might unwittingly post something that could come back to haunt them later in life. Through candid conversations with young people from diverse backgrounds, Freitas reveals how even the most well-adjusted individuals can be stricken by self-doubt when they compare their experiences with the vast collective utopia that they see online. And sometimes, as on anonymous platforms like Yik Yak, what they see instead is a depressing cesspool of racism and misogyny. Yet young people are also extremely attached to their smartphones and apps, which sometimes bring them great pleasure. It is very much a love-hate relationship. While much of the public's attention has been focused on headline-grabbing stories, the everyday struggles and joys of young people have remained under the radar. Freitas brings their feelings to the fore, in the words of young people themselves. The Happiness Effect is an eye-opening window into their first-hand experiences of social media and its impact on them.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"With thick description and compelling accounts from youth, Freitas invites the reader to tour American collegiate life as she showcases how social media exacerbates the pressure that today's students feel to be happy and successful. The Happiness Effect demonstrates how timeless collegiate practices are being reshaped by the anxiety and stress students face, asking hard questions about technology and social life." -danah boyd, author of *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*"An eye-opening, data-driven look at how young people use social media to craft their images, keep tabs on their peers, and create their identities. This book is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand how technology is shaping an entire generation of Americans." - Scott Westerfeld, author of *Uglies* and *Zeroes* "In the age of social media, we live a new state of self: 'I share, therefore I am.' Here, media researcher Donna Freitas explores what this means for a generation that has never known another way of life. Or as one young man put is to Freitas, reflecting on a date with his girlfriend: 'It's not an official event until we have taken a selfie.' What Freitas finds is poignant, disturbing: There is only one way to be in public: smiling. Read this book to better understand the alienations that follow when we validate our private lives in public spaces." - Sherry Turkle, Professor, MIT; Author of *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* and *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* "Attention-grabbing research that amply shows the many detriments of social media, particularly for young adults." -Kirkus"In this extremely readable and hugely informative book, Freitas clarifies with tenderness and insight the profound challenges and implications of social networking for young adults. Psychologically astute, soulful, and full of wisdom, this book should be required reading for college students everywhere, as well as for adults who want to help this generation of digital pioneers." - Catherine Steiner-Adair, author of *The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age* "When I want to know what college students are thinking and feeling, I turn to Donna Freitas. At a moment when college students' happiness is at an all-time low, we need this book. Combining vibrant storytelling, original research, and cultural critique, *The Happiness Effect* is required reading for anyone parenting or teaching college

students." - Rachel Simmons, author of *Odd Girl Out* "Freitas takes a thoughtful look at dilemmas arising from young people's social media use. Her opinion, based on interviews with 184 students at 13 colleges in the U.S. and 884 survey responses, is that there are more insidious problems than rampant bullying and sexting. " - Publishers Weekly "The Happiness Effect is a compassionate and well-meaning introduction to the perils and pleasures of social media . . ." - Bitch Magazine "The headlong rush into a digital future has brought anguish as well as enlightenment. It makes people seamlessly connected, better informed and able to achieve things that were unimaginable not long ago. But it has not made them happy. Freitas's students are fretful, restless and insecure - addicted to apps, plagued by their fears of missing out, and longing to be 'liked.'" - John Gapper, The Financial Times "As Freitas puts it, Facebook and Twitter are, in a way, the anti-confession, the places we pretend that we have it all together, as though we were the gods of our own future. The gospel challenges the assumption that confessing weakness and need makes you a failure. Those who minister to young adults will have an important task in opening up space for them to honestly confide their brokenness. It is only here that transformation happens, as God meets us in our weakness." - Andrew Root, Christianity Today "Donna Freitas argues in this provocative book . . . these alarmist fears are drawing attention away from the real issues that young adults are facing. While much of the public's attention has been focused on headline-grabbing stories, the everyday struggles and joys of young people have remained under the radar. Freitas brings their feelings to the fore, in the words of young people themselves. The Happiness Effect is an eye-opening window into their first-hand experiences of social media and its impact on them." - Regal Critiques "She [Freitas] limits herself to a single topic-the effect of social media on the lives of college students-that turns out to have myriad dimensions, each of them explored in informative, artfully crafted chapters on selfies and self-image, sex and sexting, public and private identity, and more." - The Gospel Coalition

Donna Freitas is a Nonresident Research Associate at the University of Notre Dame's Center for the Study of Religion and Society, and when she is not traveling for research she teaches in the Honors Colleges at Hofstra University. She is the author of *Sex and the Soul: Juggling Sexuality, Spirituality, Romance and Religion on America's College Campuses* (Oxford University Press, 2008), as well as several novels for young adults. A regular contributor to Publishers Weekly, she has also written for The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, and The Washington Post.

The continuing work of the NSYR. Very helpful for anyone working with young adults (parents,

teachers, pastors, etc.) to understand how they think about themselves and how they perceive that the world works today.

-I liked the testimonies of students. I could identify with most of their struggles- I would recommend this book to everyone

Great book.

assigned it in my class

In the three-year process of researching and writing my book on digital media (12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You [April 2017]) I read over 1,100 articles and somewhere around 50 books on smartphones, digital technology, and social media. The Happiness Effect (Feb. 2017 release date) was the last book I read, and it easily finishes in the top three of what I think are most helpful books in the field. It is a rare must-read in a crowding shelf of digital tech diagnostic studies. Donna Freitas surveyed about 800 students, and met and interviewed about 200 students in person, a group spread out across the country, and she compiled it all into this well-researched and brilliantly organized collection of insightful interviews on the social media habits of college students. She reinforces some of the major concerns, brushes aside a number of false presumptions and oversimplifications, raises new issues I found nowhere else (like the link between digital addictions and personal insecurity), and she illustrates all of the points from her lively anecdotal interviews. As a Christian reader, this book is not necessarily Christian, though there are several key interviews with professing Christian college students. The overall strength of the work serves as the most thorough, balanced, illustrative, and shrewd diagnostic tool into the social media habits of college students. And who better to pull off such a thing than Freitas? In the end, this is a brilliant work of data collection and synthesis for any student, leader, or parent wanting to awaken to the new trends and pressures and expectations in smartphone habits, but with critical thinking and with an awareness of the complex social dimensions navigated by this smartphone generation. It is highly recommended as a diagnostic study that exposes the strengths and weakness of the digital age, and begs for solid gospel solutions going forward. Here is one little taste from the book, on the constant love/hate schizophrenic relationship we have with our phones. Freitas writes this on page 230: "The burden we are carrying around because of our phones would be lifted if they would only disappear off the face of this earth. These tiny, light, pretty, shiny devices have

come to represent an outsized weight upon our shoulders. We look at them and see our to-do lists, our responsibilities, other people's needs, our perpetual inability to keep up, the ways in which others constantly judge us, everyone's successes amid all our failures, among so many other stresses. To make it all seem simpler would be a disservice to this generation.

Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Yik Yak, and ChatRoulette. (The last two I have never heard of until this book). There are so many social media tools out there and it can be overwhelming. And it is overwhelming for Millennials and younger. Donna Freitas interviews various college students all over the country to get their opinions on social media. Reading what they thought in their own words was something! I learned so much while reading *The Happiness Effect: How Social Media Is Driving a Generation to Appear Perfect at Any Cost*. I realized how much I didn't know was out there. That was a wake up call for me. I told my husband if we have children one day that he will have to stay up to date on all the social media tools that are out there. (He knew about the social media tools that I did not know about. He is much more familiar with all of that than I). I found it hard to comprehend how much Millennials think about social media: What to post, who can see what they post (They make groups so they can decide what that group will or won't see!), how many friends do I have and does so and so have more?. The number of friends is apparently very important too. And most importantly: Never post anything that could be considered bad or negative; that looks bad on your "online image". You MUST appear happy. That was hard to believe how they feel everything has to be happy even if you aren't. It was hard to comprehend what how much some think before they post. "If it won't get a like then I won't post it!" Or if they post it and don't get likes, they remove it! Some spend hours thinking about what they will post!! And they won't post controversial as they could be looked upon as negative and they can't have that. I also found it interesting that college students in fraternities/sororities are monitored and if a post is/ or appears possibly negative for that fraternity/sorority, they will be forced to remove it. Even before they are in college they think about

what they post in case a college admissions person looks at their social media, which could affect their future enrollment. And college students are careful to what they post so they aren't affected by future employment. (I do this myself- I also do not list where I work on my social media). Also interesting was how often Millennials think about getting rid of social media- for a short amount of time or longer. Some can't even put their phones down for two minutes, they have to constantly check their social media for that ever important post. It was interesting to learn how they feel that they must be available 24-7. Granted, not every Millennial is like this. There are some Millennials that do not use social media at all. They are the minority. As I read this book, it got me thinking about how I use social media, specifically Facebook. I hope to not use it as much in the future. This was a good read and again, I learned so much. I recommend everyone to read *The Happiness Effect: How Social Media Is Driving a Generation to Appear Perfect at Any Cost*. It could be an eye opening read.\*\*\*\*I received a copy from NetGalley that I voluntarily reviewed.

I'm giving this book a five stars but I wish I could give it four and-a-half to emphasize the the fact that the desire to appear perfect is a universal human condition. Upper middle class housewives who appear perfect outwardly while concealing their raging alcoholism, religious leaders who proclaim their lofty perfection above their congregations while regularly succumbing to various sins of the flesh, politicians who profess to work for the people while being paid off by special interests; these are only the tip of the iceberg. Everyone puts on their best face in front of others but the fact is, we are all ugly, stinking, insecure, worried, angry children. The only time we aren't is when we lower our defenses, admit that we are human, and engage in the hilarious self-depreciation that is the mark of all truly honest people. This book illustrates the fact that humans use whatever tool they can find to aggrandize themselves. Social media is the latest of these tools but it will be fascinating to watch not only what tools come next, but how rabidly humans grab them in order to proclaim, "I'm better than everybody else on the planet!"

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