

Student scientific conference

Examining the emotional intelligence of Generation Z economics students

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Abstract

The research was conducted as part of a bachelor student thesis. My work is divided into two structural parts. The first is a kind of theoretical overview, in which I summarize the development of emotional intelligence based on the literature, examine the different types of intelligence, and present the differences between generations, focusing on Generation Z. While in the second part, I present the research I conducted with the help of full-time students of the Faculty of Economics of Gál Ferenc University. I conducted my research as part of undergraduate student work, with the Bar-ON emotional intelligence questionnaire. My aim is, on one hand, to illustrate the importance of emotional intelligence, to present the emotional intelligence of the student, and on the other hand, to examine the differences between genders and students in different majors.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, Gen Z, students, workplace

Introduction

Over the past few decades, the topic of emotional intelligence has had significant evolution. This research explains how Gen Z students at the Gál Ferenc University feel about their life, how they perceive reality, how they tolerate stress and how empathetic they are. Since this is the youngest generation (2025), I wanted to examine the factors that influence them in the labor market and in their private lives.

I believe that the topic I have chosen is of interest to both employees and employers as this is one of the key factors that can help in effective work, it is important for both parties to understand each other. The goal of the research is to examine the differences between genders, ages and then the magnitude of the differences by profession with members of Gen Z.

In terms of the structure of my thesis, it can be divided into two parts. In the first part, I conducted secondary research, meaning that the data I describe had already been collected for other research purposes. Through these, I present the types of intelligence, their descriptions, and explain the concept of emotional intelligence and its development. Furthermore, I present the differences between emotional and logical intelligence and define the concept of generation, then their grouping. After that, I present the specific characteristics of generation Z, and how young people belonging to this group imagine what work is like and what expectations they have when entering the labor market.

In the second part of my research, I present and analyze my own research results. The quantitative research I conducted was completed in a primary manner, in which I examined the emotional intelligence level of full-time students of the Faculty of Economics of Gál Ferenc University using the Bar-On emotional intelligence questionnaire.

1. Definition of emotional intelligence

The first experiment, to measure individual differences in intelligence, was at the London World's Fair in 1884. At this event, people had the opportunity to have their vision, reaction time, hearing, and other intelligence-related tests measured.

Emotional intelligence was first researched by academic psychology, later on it became popular among psychiatrists and other professionals. Today, the topic is covered in books and scientific journals. John Jack D. Mayer was the first to study emotional intelligence. He began studying

how emotions and thinking interact in the 1970s. Then, in the early 1990s, the first scientific works on EQ were developed jointly at Yale University in America. (Mayer, 2001)

“Emotional intelligence necessarily involves our ability to recognize and be aware of the influence of emotions on our memory, thinking, judgments, and interpersonal behaviors.” (John D. Mayer: Emotional Intelligence in Everyday Life, 2001, p. 99)

1.1. Alexithymia

We are all different, so we experience emotions in different ways. However, not all people are able to identify, process and regulate these emotions. Alexithymia is the phenomenon when an individual has difficulty properly identifying their own and others' emotions. The employee's self-confidence determines how the employee thinks and feels, and the degree of this and the severity of alexithymia are predictive of the frequency of mental illnesses. Numerous studies have shown that alexithymia is closely related to depression and burnout due to work. (Walker G, 2023)

1.2. Bar-On

Bar-On divided emotional intelligence into five parts. He begins with accurate perception, which he calls intrapersonal EQ. This is emotional awareness, self-assertion, independence, and self-knowledge. The second component is interpersonal EQ: manifested in empathy and social responsibility. Next is adaptive EQ; this examines problem solving and realism. This is followed by stress management EQ, which assesses stress tolerance and impulse control. The last element is general mood EQ, which is responsible for happiness and optimism. (Mayer, 2001)

1.3. Evaluation of EQ

There are many tests available today to measure emotional intelligence. According to experts, a test must meet four criteria to give an ideal picture of our emotional intelligence. EQ measurement tools can be divided into two types: self-report and performance tests. While performance tests can be assessed objectively, as predefined criteria are available, questionnaires that are based on self-report are less objective. Popular performance tests include the Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale and the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test, of which two versions have been developed (V.1.1. and V.2.0.). One of the

most famous self-report tests is the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Questionnaire and the Schuttefle Self-Report Questionnaire. (Mayer, 2001)

1.4. Emotional Intelligence in the workplace

Emotional intelligence has a huge impact on our success at work. This type of intelligence is responsible for 60% of our success. No matter how much emotional intelligence we have, we always have a chance to improve. Large companies, such as L'Oreal, have been able to save a lot of money by introducing emotional intelligence training. This is because it helps us focus our energy effectively, so we can achieve better results. The L'Oreal case highlights that emotional intelligence is not only important for the individual, but also for the team, a kind of strategic investment, thus helping the team (work) to develop in the long term and making motivation sustainable. (Bradberry & Greaves, 2005)

The five components of emotional intelligence contribute to job performance in different ways. The general mood is closely related to expectations about the future, which can be reflected in how persistent the individual is in achieving their work-related goals; the degree of job satisfaction, and the psychological well-being they have. This component has a significant influence on organizational commitment and employee behavior at work. These can have both negative and positive outcomes, such as work-related anxiety, intention to quit, and loyalty. (Heitlerné Lehoczky, 2018)

2. Generations

The definition of generation is a group of people born at roughly the same time, with similar childhood socialization, and thus sharing many of the same characteristics, habits, and values. Generational affiliation is not necessarily limited to the category indicated by our year of birth. Our experiences, current trends, and societal behavior can also color it. (Steigervald, 2023.)

2.1 Gen Z

Generation Z members were born between 1995 and 2009. This is the first generation that is significantly different from previous generations, which is why they grew up on similar or the same music, television films, series or food. Furthermore, compared to previous generations, this group has the fewest people. The members of this group were already born into the online,

digitalized world. Generation Z members see digitalization tools not only as tools, but as part of their everyday lives. Therefore, it can be said that they also live in a virtual community, which spends most of their lives online. They also mostly maintain their relationships virtually, and sometimes even build them there. (Ruzsa, 2018)

2.1.1 Gen Z in the workplace

In the current labor market (2025), four generations work together, yet the consequences of generational differences are rarely taken into account in teamwork. Since this generation has a huge amount of information at its disposal thanks to the internet, they are more analytical in their decision-making than previous generations. Unlike Generation Y, they do not believe in joint success, but prefer to work independently. When members of Generation Z enter the labor market, they expect a flexible career path. Due to their young age, they want to experience different jobs, rather than settle for one job for the rest of their lives, like members of Generation X and baby boomers. This makes them much more optimistic and aware of their potential, so they can easily switch jobs between companies. (Magano, Silva, Figueiredo, Vitória & Dinis, 2020)

For Generation Z, the ideal workplace is one that is characterized by management expertise, diverse work tasks, and flexibility. Furthermore, collegial relationships are important to them, which make them feel that they are capable of developing and are recognized. They are attracted to a good atmosphere in the workplace. Recognition at work makes them willing to work harder to achieve their goals. Generation Z members are highly sensitive to the identity, development and learning opportunities provided by the company. (Dr. Fodor, Dr. Jäckel & Nagy, 2017)

3. Research

In my research, I wanted to examine the emotional intelligence of full-time students of the Faculty of Economics of Ferenc Gál University. All of the individuals participating in the research were born between 1995 and 2009, thus belonging to the Generation Z group. Since the gap between individuals belonging to the Generation Z group is 15 years, I wanted to examine the emotional intelligence level of students of different ages and majors. My research also aimed to assess gender differences using different scales of emotional intelligence.

Since the members of this generation are the youngest generation (2025) currently present in the labor market or will be the youngest soon, I considered it important to examine their level of emotional intelligence using 15 scales, with which they work in the labor market and will work in the future. I believe that with this information, the members of Generation Z will understand themselves and others more easily, and they can also help the members of the older generation to understand the behavior of the members of Generation Z. Based on the information collected, it can also help in performing their work more effectively. I formulated five hypotheses regarding the questions of my research:

H1: Women have a higher level of emotional intelligence than men.

H2: The youngest students have the lowest level of emotional intelligence.

H3: The interpersonal scales of students majoring in business and management are higher than those of students majoring in technical management.

3.1. Research method

The questionnaire I used was the Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, which consisted of 121 questions. The 121 questions belong to 5 main scales, which can be further divided into 15 subscales. In the first part, I asked demographic data, which were gender, major, and age. I wanted to determine the differences between genders, what gender differences can occur within the 5 areas of emotional intelligence. This was followed by mapping the differences by major, which is which majors are stronger in certain qualities, such as empathy or problem solving. I also wanted to measure whether there is a relationship between age and emotional intelligence levels in students belonging to the Generation Z group.

3.2 Evaluation and analysis of results

A total of 119 students completed the questionnaire, all of whom belong to the Generation Z group and are active full-time students at the Faculty of Economics of Ferenc Gál University. In the fall semester of 2025, 178 students will officially continue their studies actively, which means a participation rate of 66.85 in completing the questionnaires.

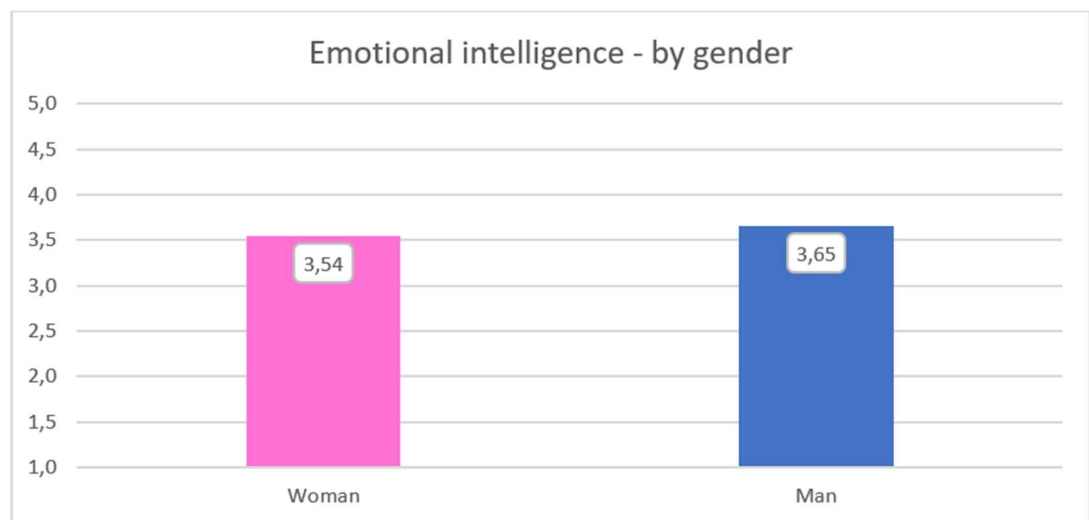
At the Faculty of Economics of Gál Ferenc University, students could choose from 3 majors: economics and management, finance and accounting, and technical management. The majority of respondents were students majoring in finance and accounting, or economics and

management. There were 60 respondents studying economics and management, which made up the vast majority, 51%, of the respondents. This was followed by the distribution of students majoring in finance and accounting, which was 48, which meant 40%. Finally, there were only 11 respondents majoring in technical management, thus making up 9% of the group.

Of the women, 78 completed the questionnaire, while 41 men completed it. This shows that the vast majority of respondents (66%) were women.

3.2. Hypotheses

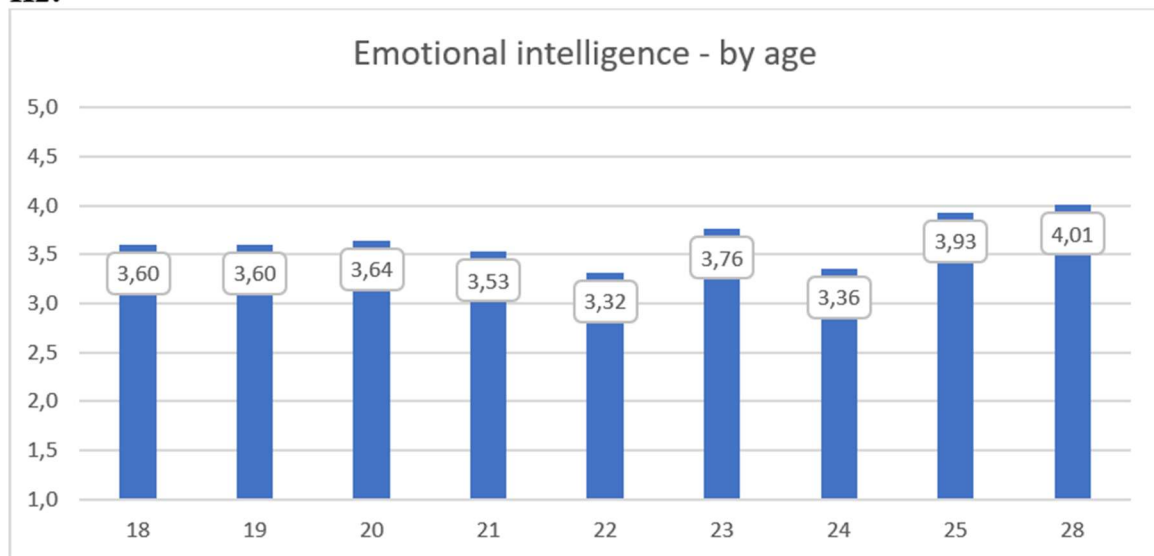
H1:



SOURCE: OWN WORK.

In my first hypothesis, I assumed that women have a higher level of emotional intelligence than men, because women are on average more empathetic than men due to evolution. The data obtained from my questionnaire research and the results of that research showed that women have a higher level of emotional intelligence than men, and even slightly lower. This showed a difference of 0.16 points in terms of values, which cannot be considered significant. Thus, this hypothesis of mine was not confirmed based on the results obtained.

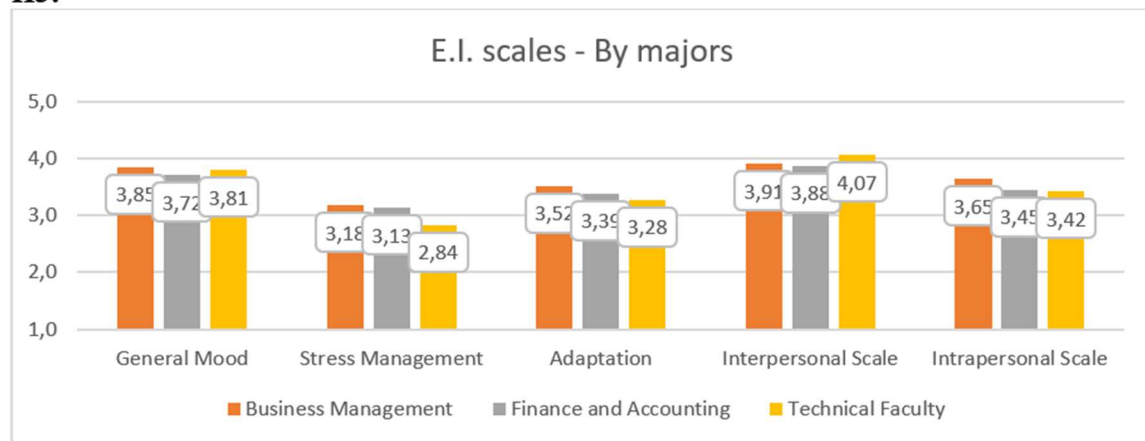
H2:



SOURCE: OWN WORK.

In the diagram below, I calculated the average of the components of emotional intelligence, thereby obtaining the total emotional intelligence values. The diagram I created shows that the emotional intelligence level of the oldest people participating in the research reached the highest score of 4.01 compared to the maximum of 5.00. Although it can be stated that the level of emotional intelligence is not directly proportional to the number of years. The lowest level of emotional intelligence was not obtained by 18-year-olds, but by 22-year-old students with a value of 3.32. The aforementioned 18-year-olds are the youngest members of the Generation Z group I examined, receiving a value of 3.6, as well as the 19-year-olds. This is followed by 20-year-olds with a slightly higher score than the previous ones, with a value of 3.64. The lowest value was observed among 22-year-olds with a value of 3.32. There was another increase in the 23-year-olds, who scored 3.76. The second highest score was for the 25-year-olds, who scored an average emotional intelligence level of 3.93 out of a maximum score of 5.00. No responses were received from the 26- and 27-year-olds. Thus, this hypothesis of mine was not confirmed based on the results obtained.

H3:



SOURCE: OWN WORK.

In my last hypothesis, I assume that the interpersonal scales are higher for students majoring in business and management than for students majoring in technical management. My hypothesis does not hold up, as based on the results obtained, it can be said that in the case of students majoring in technical management, the interpersonal scale (empathy, social responsibility and interpersonal relationships) is the highest. My hypothesis stems from the fact that in the field of business and management, students are given more emphasis on leadership, communication and the development of presentation skills. In my opinion, the result obtained can be explained by the fact that in the case of students majoring in technical management, there are also - albeit not to a large extent - management-related subjects that help develop their interpersonal skills.

Conclusions

In the following concluding chapter, I would like to summarize my research findings, which can help us understand the emotional abilities of Generation Z and other generations, such as reality sensing, problem solving, and optimism. I believe that this information can help us to better manage conflict and thrive in the workplace. Since this generation has only recently entered the workforce, I assume that the previous generation currently has less information about how to best work with Generation Z employees and how to build teamwork. I believe that my research can help managers and HR professionals respond more empathetically to the work needs of the younger generation.

My research also revealed that age is not directly proportional to emotional intelligence level, which also only confirmed that emotional intelligence can be developed. So we cannot conclude that an individual has an emotional intelligence level based on their age alone.

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Appendices

EI KÉRDŐÍV

Kérjük, hogy gondosan olvassa el az alábbi állításokat, majd a válaszlapon megfelelő oszlopában jelölje be azt a válaszlehetőséget, amit Önre a leginkább jellemzőnek tart. Befejezés előtt szíveskedjen még egyszer ellenőrizni, hogy egyetlen tétel se maradjon megválaszolatlanul!

1. Nehezen tudom megértetni magam másokkal.
2. Elég könnyen ki tudom fejezni, hogy mit érzek.
3. A legtöbb helyzetben magabiztos vagyok.
4. Jobban szeretem az olyan munkát, ahol megmondják, hogy mit kell tennem.
5. Megpróbálom a lehető legértelmesebb módon élni az életemet.
6. Nehezen értem meg mások érzéseit.
7. Szívesen segítek másokon.
8. Nehezen tudom kimutatni az érzéseimet.
9. Megpróbálom fantáziálás és álmodozás nélkül látni a dolgokat, úgy ahogy azok a valóságban vannak.
10. Nehezen vágok bele új dolgokba.
11. A nehézségek leküzdésében szeretek lépésről-lépésre haladni.
12. Tudom, hogyan kezeljem a nyugtalanító helyzeteket.
13. Nehéz visszafogni magam, ha feldühítenek.
14. A legtöbb helyzetben magabiztos vagyok.
15. Nehezemre esik élvezni az életet.
16. Ha valakire dühös vagyok, azt megmondom neki.
17. Tisztában vagyok az érzéseimmel.
18. Önbizalomhiányban szenvedek.
19. Amikor másokkal együtt dolgozom, inkább az ő elképzeléseikre támaszkodom, mint a sajátomra.
20. Nem igazán tudom, hogy mihez értek.
21. Nagyon jól megértem mások érzéseit.
22. Nyugodt szívvel kihasználom az embereket, különösen akkor, ha ezt megérdemlik.
23. A legbensőbb érzéseimet nehezen tudom megosztani másokkal.
24. Nehéz megértenem az érzéseimet.
25. Általában nehezemre esik alkalmazkodni a körülményekhez.
26. Ha egy nehéz problémával szembesülök, szeretek annyi információt összegyűjteni a helyzetről, amennyit csak tudok.
27. Úgy gondolom, hogy a nehéz helyzeteken is úrrá tudok lenni.
28. Ha elkezdek beszélni, nehezen hagyom abba.
29. Azt hiszem, hogy a nehéz helyzeteken is úrrá tudok lenni.
30. Nehezemre esik mosolyogni.
31. Ha valakivel nem értek egyet, azt a szemébe mondom.
32. Érzéseimet nehezen tudom megosztani másokkal.
33. Jó az önbecsülésem.
34. Jobban szeretem, ha mások döntenek helyettem.
35. Az utóbbi néhány évben nem értem el túl sokat.

36. A barátaim legbensőbb dolgaikat is elmesélik nekem.
37. Mások nem bíznak bennem.
38. Meglehetősen vidám személy vagyok.
39. Voltak olyan szokatlan és furcsa élményeim, amiket nem tudok megmagyarázni.
40. Nehezen változtatam meg a véleményemet.
41. Szeretem átlátni a feladatot, mielőtt megpróbálnám megoldani.
42. Tudom kezelni a stresszes helyzeteket anélkül, hogy túl idegessé válnék.
43. A megfontolatlanúságom sokszor okoz problémát.
44. A legtöbb dologban optimista vagyok.
45. Elég vidám egyéniség vagyok.
46. Nehezen tudok nemet mondani.
47. Érzéseimet nehezen értem meg.
48. Nem tudom magam elfogadni.
49. Nehezen tudok egyedül dönteni.
50. Nem okoz örömet számomra az, amit csinálok.
51. Erzékenyen reagálok mások érzéseire.
52. En még akkor is megállnék segíteni egy síró gyermeknek, hogy megtalálja a szüleit, ha éppen nagyon szítem kellene valahová.
53. Könnyen barátkozom másokkal.
54. Az emberek nem értik a gondolkodásmódomat.
55. Könnyen alkalmazkodom az új körülményekhez.
56. Mikor felmerül egy probléma, az első dologom, hogy leülök és átgondolom.
57. Nehezen viselem a stresszes helyzeteket.
58. Ha magyarázok valamit, többnyire rám szoktak szólni, hogy halkabban beszéljek.
59. Általában bizakodó vagyok.
60. Elégedett vagyok az életemmel.
61. Sokan azt hiszik, nem vagyok elég rámenős.
62. Nehezen tudom kifejezni a legbensőbb érzéseimet.
63. Nehéz elfogadni magamat olyannak, amilyen vagyok.
64. Inkább beosztott típus vagyok, mintsem vezető.
65. Nem hoznak igazán lázba azok a dolgok, amik fontosak számomra.
66. Mások érzéseit igyekszem tiszteletben tartani.
67. Érdekel, hogy mi történik másokkal.
68. A barátaim szívesen megosztják velem a legbensőbb érzéseiket.
69. Gyakran elvesztem a kapcsolatot a körülöttem történő dolgokkal.
70. Nem vagyok képes változtatni már régen kialakult szokásaimon.
71. Amikor egy problémát meg kell oldani, minden lehetőséget mérlegelek és a lehető legjobb mellett döntök.
72. Úgy érzem, hogy nem tudok a félelmeimen úrrá lenni.
73. Türelmetlen vagyok.
74. Általában kitartó vagyok, akkor is, ha a dolgok rosszabbra fordulnak.
75. Mások jól szórakoznak a társaságomban.
76. Nehezen tudok kiállni az igazamért.
77. Érzéseimmel tisztában vagyok.

78. Meg vagyok elégedve saját magammal.
79. Ragaszkodó vagyok.
80. Próbálom fenntartani azokat a tevékenységeket, amelyekben örööm lelem.
81. Bizonyos helyzetekben biztos, hogy megszegném a törvényt, ha tudnám, hogy megúszom.
82. Nehezen jövök ki másokkal.
83. A fantáziám és a képzeletem gyakran elragad.
84. Általában nehezen változtatok a mindennapos tevékenységeimen.
85. Ha egy probléma merül fel, nehezen tudom eldönteni, hogy melyik a legjobb megoldás.
86. Nehéz helyzetekben is meg tudom őrizni a nyugalmaim.
87. Nagyon indulatos vagyok, nehezen tudom kontrollálni magam.
88. Általában bizok benne, hogy a dolgok jobbra fordulnak, még akkor is, ha időnként csalódás ér.
89. Hajlamos vagyok a depresszióra.
90. Nehezen tudom megfogalmazni azt, hogy mit érzek.
91. Jól érzem magam a bőrömben.
92. Úgy érzem, inkább nekem van szükségem másokra, mint másoknak rám.
93. Nem tudom, hogy mihez kezdjek az életemmel.
94. Nem tudok tisztelni másokat.
95. A közeli kapcsolataim sokat jelentenek nekem és a barátaimnak.
96. Még akkor is tudatában vagyok, hogy mi történik velem, ha ki vagyok borulva.
97. Nehezen változtatok meg az elképzeléseimet.
98. A felmerülő problémák megoldásához igyekszem az összes lehetőséget végiggondolni.
99. Nehezen tudok a kellemetlen dolgokkal szembesülni.
100. Lobbanékony természetű vagyok.
101. Bizom benne, hogy a legelkeserítőbb helyzeteket is képes vagyok megoldani.
102. Nem vagyok túlságosan elégedett az életemmel.
103. Elégedett vagyok a külsőmmel.
104. Szerintem fontos, hogy az ember törvénytisztelő legyen.
105. Jó a kapcsolatom másokkal.
106. Hajlamos vagyok túlzásokba esni.
107. Nehezen tudnék alkalmazkodni ahhoz, ha el kellene hagynom az otthonomat.
108. Általában megtorpanok, amikor egy probléma kezelése során többféle megoldást is át kell gondolnom.
109. Bizom benne, hogy képes vagyok kezelni a legtöbb nyugtalanító problémát.
110. Ingerlékeny vagyok.
111. Mielőtt belekezdnek valamibe, általában úgy érzem, hogy nem fog sikerülni.
112. Minden jó és rossz tulajdonságomat mérlegelve, elégedett vagyok magammal.
113. Nehezen tudom elviselni, ha más embereket szenvedni látok.
114. Mások szerint társaságkedvelő és könnyen barátkozó vagyok.
115. Könnyen abba tudom hagyni az ábrándozást, és rá tudok hangolódni a pillanatnyi helyzetre.

116. Könnyen dühbe gurulok.
117. Imádom a hétvégeket és a nyaralást.
118. A barátaimmal nem tartok szoros kapcsolatot.
119. Nehezen tudom a helyes nézőpontból szemlélni a dolgokat.
120. Szeretek szórakozni.
121. Aggódó természetű vagyok.