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APPROACHES OF HAPPINESS AND WELL-BEING IN PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to present the paradigm changes in the investigation of happiness. Are highlighted some theoretical and methodological contributions in understanding of the concept in the shift from the hedonic perspective, focused on happiness, subjective well-being and life satisfaction to eudaimonic perspective, focused on psychological well-being, human potential and optimal functioning. According with the theoretical and methodological ways of conceptualizing, the concept of happiness has had slightly different meanings. Subjective and psychological well-being represent related but distinct conceptions of well-being. In the final part, is discussed one of the most referential approach of the happiness in the domain of positive psychology. Seligman's theoretical model of well-being helps us to understand what are the elements which contribute to well-being and what people can do to maximize each element to reach a life full of happiness. The model is in line with the ultimate goal of the positive psychology as scientific study of the strengths and well-being that enables both individuals and communities to flourish.

Keywords: happiness; subjective well-being; psychological well-being; good life; life satisfaction; positive psychology;

1. INTRODUCTION

From ancient Greek civilization until nowadays, people have always been interested in answering what is happiness. Many philosophers and then scientific researchers, both theorists and practitioners, have concerned about the possibilities to obtain happiness and a fulfilled human life. Frequently, the happiness was directly connected to well-being and the good life. These constructs have been investigated inclusively by psychologists. One of the premises of these studies is that "people all over the world most want to be happy by achieving the things they value" (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003, p. 420).



In the measurements concerning life quality objective well-being is a traditionally used indicator which has operationalized through economic and social standards (income level, consumptions, material conditions, employment status, physical and mental health, education, social interactions, leisure time, economic security, governance and basic rights, natural environment) that are not depended on individual perceptions and attitudes. Nevertheless, many researchers consider that subjective perceptions concerning well-being of their life are no less good indicators for the quality of life. People perceive, think and react differently to the same social situations, based on their values, goals, expectancies, interests, and previous experiences. Accordingly, is not sufficient to assess the life quality only through objective indicators, well-being and other subjective variables (emotional, cognitive and behavioral) are equally significant.

Traditional psychology approached well-being as a multidimensional psycho-social construct that has generated numerous endeavors of operationalization of the concept. Positive psychology considers well-being both as specific issue for empirical research and important aim for psychological interventions focused on optimization of the human functioning. There are two dominant paradigms regarding well-being: the hedonic approach, focused on happiness, which defines well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 1993) and the eudaimonic approach, focused on realization of human potential, which defines well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Therefore, the objective of this study is to discuss the paradigm changes from the hedonic approach to eudaimonic approach, under the positive psychology perspective, highlighting one of the most important theories concerning happiness and well-being.

2. THE HEDONIC APPROACH OF HAPPINESS

The hedonic view has origins in Epicurus' writings, one of the first hedonist philosophers. For Epicurus, pleasure was simply absence of mental or physical pain. Many other philosophers consider the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain as source of happiness and primary goal in life. Psychologists identify happiness as principal criterion of well-being and define well-being as subjective happiness which consists of the experience of pleasure and absence of displeasure (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The hedonic approach considers happiness in terms of pleasure or subjective well-being. The scientific study of subjective well-being partly appears as a reaction to the dominant approach of negative states in psychology (Diener, 2000).

Diener (1984, 2000) proposes a model of subjective well-being focusing on individual evaluations of the life. The subjective well-being is a multidimensional construct which includes two components. Life satisfaction is the cognitive component consists of judgments about the personal events in life (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), whereas the affective component concerns positive and negative emotions and moods associated with life situations and activities (Diener, Sapyta, & Suh, 1998; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996). Thus, taking into consideration all these three indicators, subjective well-being has defined as the preponderance of positive emotions, the incidental experience of negative emotions, and high levels of self-reported life satisfaction (Diener, 1984). Although subjective well-being has been associated with the hedonistic approach, life satisfaction is not strictly a hedonic concept because it involves cognitive evaluations of individuals about the conditions of their life: "life satisfaction is a conscious cognitive judgment of one's life in which the criteria or judgment are up to the individual" (Pavot & Diener, 1993, p. 164). A great amount of research provides empirical support for subjective well-being as a reliable and valid construct, a function of the balance of mental states, associated with automatic positive thoughts (Wong, 2010).

Regarding life satisfaction, there are two types of theories: 1. bottom-up theories that investigate life satisfaction as effect of other variables and assert that people experience satisfaction in certain domains of life such as job, health, family, social relationships, education. The overall satisfaction is the result of influence and combining of the domain-specific satisfaction; 2. top-down theories which state that overall life satisfaction is a cause variable which influences or even determines the life satisfaction in different domains of life (Heady, Veenhoven, & Wearing, 1991). Although self-perceptions of the life satisfaction incorporate both objective (wealth, employment status, health, education, social and material resources) and subjective assessments (values, personal attitudes, goals, expectations), most studies have investigated life satisfaction as a global subjective variable. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) is one the most popular and widely used measure of life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is not a simply result of life events, but influences in turn important life outcomes (Lopez, 2009). Research shows that life satisfaction is a significant predictor of interpersonal, educational, and vocational success as well as mental and physical health in adults. Also, life satisfaction is negatively associated with multiple risk behaviors in adolescence, including alcohol and drug use, sexual risk behavior, aggressive behavior, victimization, unhealthy eating and exercise behavior. Adults who have high scores for hope have higher levels of life satisfaction (Bailey & Snyder, 2007).

Positive and negative types of affect are separated and distinct of life satisfaction construct. Measures of affective component include both pleasant and unpleasant long-term moods (pleasure, displeasure, calm, anxiety, anger, or sadness etc.) as results of individuals' evaluations of the events that occur in their lives (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Individuals with high scores of positive affect live intense and frequent experiences of pleasure while individuals with high scores on negative affect have higher levels of displeasure (Watson, 2005). It is possible for a person to obtain high scores in both dimensions. Levels of positive and negative affect are stable over time (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Positive affect positively correlates with optimism and self-esteem (Norem & Chang, 2002).

With regard to the components of subjective well-being, people can be divided into four types: (1) Achievers who are satisfied individuals with a high positive affective balance; (2) Aspirers who are unsatisfied individuals with a high positive affective balance; (3) Resigners are satisfied individuals with a negative affective balance; (4) The frustrated are unsatisfied individuals with a negative affective balance (McKennell, 1978).

3. THE EUDAIMONIC APPROACH OF HAPPINESS

Emanating from ancient Greek philosophy, the central idea of this second perspective is that happiness cannot be equated with pleasure. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, written in 350 B.C., Aristotle presents his view about happiness that is still relevant today. He states that every human being need to be happy and leisure provides pleasure and happiness in life. Although people have always sough pleasure, wealth, money, power, honor, reputation and other goods, happiness is the end or goal that people aim in all their activities. According to Aristotle, the highest of all goods achievable by human action is "eudaimonia". The good represents the end of an action and the end is more valuable than the activity itself. Happiness is both the ultimate purpose of human life and a goal in itself, measuring how well a person have lived up to his/her full potential as a human being. Aristotle describes happy life as moral, rational, virtuous, perfect, wise, right, chosen, and good. In his view, happiness is dependent on the cultivation of virtue which is a disposition rather than an activity. "If happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be that of the best thing in us" (p. 263). A genuinely happy life requires the fulfillment of a broad range of conditions, including physical and mental well-being. As Aristotle says, "for as it is not

one swallow or one fine day that makes a spring, so it is not one day or a short time that makes a man blessed and happy” (1098a, p. 37). Later, in 19th century, the utilitarian philosopher Bradburn uses the term happiness as synonymous for “eudaimonia”. Eudaimonia and principal elements of “the good life” have been a subject of scholarly interest (Ryff, 1989).

The eudaimonic view (Waterman, 1993) focuses on the realization of human potential and optimal functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Well-being is more than happiness because people who report feelings of happiness and satisfaction or positive emotions are not necessarily psychologically well. The new central concept is psychological well-being, as one important aspect of efficient psychological functioning, defined as full engagement and optimal performance in the existential challenges of life (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Subjective and psychological well-being represent related but distinct conceptions of well-being (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002).

Based on life span developmental and humanistic psychology, clinical theories on personal growth and the criteria of positive mental health (Jahoda, 1958), Ryff (1989) developed an integrated theoretical framework of well-being. The author considers that all these guided theories have generated a new model of psychological health based on the conception that well-being means not only the absence of illness but the presence of something positive (Ryff & Singer, 1998). In fact, absence of psychological stressors can reduce the likelihood of suffering and pain but does not ensure thriving in one’s life. Much research suggested that happy people experience a number of benefits ranging from physical health to better relationships to high-level performance (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Moreover, engaging in “happiness-relevant activities”, especially intentional activities, represents one way to facilitate psychological well-being (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005).

Broadly understood as happiness, psychological well-being has been operationalized as a multidimensional construct (Ryff, 1989) that includes different social, psychological and physiological aspects of life, which are interrelated with and determine each other. The construct consists of six core dimensions which define it both theoretically and operationally (Ryff & Singer, 1998): Personal growth, Autonomy, Environmental mastery, Self-acceptance, Purpose in life, and Positive relations with others. The definitions of each dimension were constructed by integrating different elements from the guiding theories (Ryff, 1989) and were identified what promotes effective adaptation to life events and emotional and physical health (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Personal growth relates to being open to new experiences as well as having a sense of continued self-development and realization the own potential. People with high scores on this dimension have feelings of continued growing, needs of improvement themselves over time, and good ability of self-evaluation that drives them to efficient changes in their behavior. Contrariwise, people with low scores have a sense of personal stagnation, low needs of improvement over time, feelings of disinterest toward their personal development and are unable to develop new attitudes or behaviors (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Autonomy refers to peoples’ sense of self-determination, independence, and freedom from norms. People with high scores on this dimension are able to follow their own beliefs and convictions, evaluate themselves by personal standards and regulates their behavior from within, are self-determining and independent, able to resist on social pressures and to think and behave in certain ways. People with low scores in autonomy are more conformist and concerned about the expectations and evaluations of others and tend to rely on external factors in their important decisions (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Environmental mastery means the personal ability to manage life and the surroundings. People with high scores on this dimension have a sense of mastery and competence in managing the environment, are able to choose or create contexts that are suitable to their personal needs and values, use and control efficiently the surrounding opportunities and external activities. People with low scores

have difficulty in managing everyday events, are unable to change, control or improve surroundings and opportunities and have a lack in their sense of control over external world (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Self-acceptance is defined as positive attitude towards oneself and one's past life. People with high scores on this dimension have positive attitudes toward themselves, acknowledge and accept multiple aspects of their self, including good and bad qualities, and feel positive about their past life. Contrariwise, people with low scores feel dissatisfied with themselves, tend to be disappointed with what has occurred with their past life, and wish to be different than what they are (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Purpose in life is present when people have life goals and a meaningful life. People with high scores have a sense of directedness, strong convictions that give life purpose, aims and objectives for living. People with low scores have few goals or aims, no belief that their life is meaningful and lack a sense of directedness (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Personal relations dimension refers to high quality relationships with others. People with high scores have warm, satisfying and trusting relationships with others, are capable of empathy, intimacy, affection and concerned about the welfare of others while people with low scores have few close and trusting relationships with others, are unfriendly, isolated and frustrated in their relations and are not willing to make compromises to sustain important ties with others (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Some dimensions are conceptually and empirically related to the hedonic well-being. Specifically, self-acceptance and environmental mastery dimensions are highly correlated with measures of affective balance and life satisfaction. In contrast, purpose in life and personal growth are strongly correlated and conceptually closer to the eudaimonic well-being (Ryff, 1989). Ryff and her coworkers (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Ryff & Singer, 2006) develop a successful psychological well-being scale which is widely used in measurement of positive mental health.

4. THEORIES OF HAPPINESS: SELIGMAN'S APPROACH

A number of theories which offer scientific explanations of happiness has developed by positive psychologists. According with the theoretical and methodological ways of conceptualizing, the concept of happiness has had slightly different meanings. Process-activity theories consider that happiness results from engaging in activities which require effort to accomplish certain purposes. Personality predisposition theories stipulates that happiness may be a genetic characteristic which is associated with the personality traits such as extraversion and neuroticism. Accordingly, well-being does not change much over time. Need-goal satisfaction theories assert that happiness comes from the necessity of satisfying certain fundamental human needs and striving to achieve appropriate goals (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). One of the most important is Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) which states that well-being is a result of achieving autonomy, competence, and relatedness fundamental human needs. In his book *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*, Martin Seligman (2002) develops his significant theory starting from the assumption that happiness is not fixed that can never increase. The authentic happiness results from identifying and cultivating personal strengths and using them in every day contexts of life (Seligman, 2002). Moreover, there are three different elements which lead to happiness and must take into consideration in analyzing: positive emotion, engagement and meaning. Happiness appears when positive emotions such as pleasure, comfort, excitement are frequent and intense while negative emotions are minimal and rarely experienced. The "pleasant life" is related to pleasure and is one which involves many positive and enjoyable experiences (Seligman, 2002, 2004). People can increase the amount of happiness in their pleasant life when they have the skills to grow and multiply their pleasures. Engagement refers to being fully involved in an activity considered pleasurable and being absorbed by it. All people are able to develop the state of engagement in relation to an activity and should identify what are those

activities. The “good life” is one which involves developing and demonstrating of one’s “signature” strengths and virtues in activities (work, leisure) (Seligman, 2002). Premise for a “good life” is to use personal strengths and spend more time in activities which reflect personal values to have more flow in life such as work, love, friendship, relationships, leisure, parenting. The authentic happiness can be increased when people discover their own personal strengths that they already have and take ownership of them (Seligman, 2002). The third element is related to the search for purpose in life. Meaning exists when we have a higher purpose than ourselves. A “meaningful life” consists of belonging and serving something that people believe is greater than they are. The meaningful life is about using the personal strengths in the service of something that is bigger than us (Seligman, 2002). Combination of these three elements generates in authentic and stable happiness (Vella-Brodrick, Park & Peterson, 2009). Authentic happiness results from identifying, developing and using “signature strengths” and virtues to work towards the greater good. This postulation recommends that in order to achieve authentic happiness, people should pay attention to their strengths rather than their weaknesses. Positive emotion, positive traits, and positive institutions are the three pillars of positive psychology that has the goal to increase life satisfaction (Seligman, 2002).

The authentic happiness theory was reviewed few years later, in 2011, when Seligman reformulates the positive psychology goal and promotes the “new Positive Psychology”. The change was from seeking authentic happiness to promoting well-being and human flourishing. The new Positive Psychology is defined as science of well-being which is the new central concept. The PERMA model of flourishing (Seligman, 2011) approaches psychological well-being in terms of five factors: Positive emotions (P), Engagement (E), Relationships (R), Meaning (M), and Accomplishment (A). Positive emotion (P) is the element strongly related with happiness and life satisfaction. According to Seligman (2011), positive emotions can be related to past, present or future events. The emotions related to the past are satisfaction, pride, serenity and accomplishment, those related to the present are joy, pleasure, calm, excitement, ecstasy and plenitude, while emotions concerning the future are optimism, hope and faith. All these types of emotions bring many benefits for mental health, can be measured individually with specific instruments (scales of emotions) and are not necessarily correlated each other. The second element, engagement (E), has the same meaning as in authentic happiness theory. The sense of engagement helps people to completely involve in activity, to remain present, to have feeling that time has stopped, and to experience the flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Relationships are fundamental for a meaningful life. This factor refers to the people’s need of connecting each other, and establishing healthy emotional and physical interactions with other humans to achieve well-being. The next factor, meaning (M), is related with a purposeful existence. Understanding the significance and impact of their work and activities may help people to become fulfilled with what they do. The sense of meaning helps people to become more satisfied with what they do. Finally, the fifth factor, accomplishment (A), refers to the sense of achievement in live. Having accomplishments in life is important to propel people to thrive and flourish. Aside from positive emotion which is a subjective element, all other factors comprise of both subjective and objective components. All five factors contribute to obtaining well-being.

According to Seligman’s studies, optimists cultivate healthier attitudes, adopt healthier lifestyles, respond more adequately to medical prescriptions and tend to believe that their attitudes are important, unlike pessimists. People with high levels of satisfaction with life are more likely to watch what they eat, not smoke and exercise regularly, also having more regular sleep (Seligman, 2011). Interpersonal relationships are sources of support in difficult times that require resilience and also contexts for sharing joy. Seligman (2011) noted that the loneliest people tend to report lower levels of well-being, while those who engage emotionally with

others in loving relationships or friendship tend to develop more adaptive strategies to face difficulties. Volunteering for a cause, helping others, contributing to our community, expressing ourselves creatively, working for a good cause, religion and spirituality are several examples of meaning in life for many people that may help them to become fulfilled and more satisfied with what they do.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The well-being is a multifaceted concept understood as a combination of feeling good, finding flow, having a purposeful life, establishing of authentic connections and having a sense of accomplishment. People are able to obtain well-being through maximizing of all these elements (Seligman, 2011). In this way, the goal of positive psychology is to sustain well-being and contribute to human flourishing.

Seligman's theoretical model of well-being helps us to understand what are the elements which contribute to well-being and what people can do to maximize each element to reach a life full of happiness. The PERMA model can be integrated and applied by individuals in their daily life in a large number of settings. Also, institutions such as family, school, social groups, community can use the model to help individuals to discover and use their strengths to achieve well-being. Such considerations refer to the possibility of developing intervention programs aiming both at individual and collective well-being through thriving. This is the ultimate goal of the positive psychology as scientific study of the strengths and well-being that enable both individuals and communities to flourish.

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