

SOCIAL REPRESENTATION OF CONDITIONS FOR HAPPINESS AND LIVING EXPERIENCES SOURCE OF HAPPINESS IN CHILE AND ITALY

REPRESENTACIÓN SOCIAL DE CONDICIONES Y EXPERIENCIAS VITALES FUENTE DE FELICIDAD EN CHILE E ITALIA

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Abstract

The research is aimed at understanding and qualitatively describing the social representation of conditions for happiness and of living experiences source of happiness in the discourse of socializing agents in matters of well-being and quality of life. Whether these attributions are consistent with the findings of positive psychology was also analyzed. The study was non experimental, transversal, cross-cultural, and qualitative. The sample was non-probabilistic and included health and education students and professionals in Chile and Italy. Open-ended questions were applied to students of psychology, obstetrics and related fields of both sexes aged between 18 and 38 years. Focus groups were conducted with students and professionals of both sexes, including educators, psychologists and related professionals, aged between 22 and 67 years. People attributed happiness to external conditions (affection and personal freedom) and internal factors (psychological capital). The discourse balanced the presence of experiences of satisfaction by reception (passive role) and by realization (active role). The ranges of these experiences vary from individual to collective scopes. A common nucleus of social representation in both groups was identified, which included elements that positive psychology has linked with happiness. This information guides the training of professionals influencing the lifestyles of the population.

Keywords: Social representations, happiness, conditions and living experiences source of happiness, psychological capital, cross-cultural study.

Resumen

La investigación tuvo como objetivo comprender y describir cualitativamente la representación social de las condiciones y experiencias vitales fuente de la felicidad en los discursos de agentes socializadores en materia de bienestar y calidad de vida. Se analizó además si estas atribuciones se condicen con los hallazgos aportados desde la psicología positiva. El estudio fue no experimental, transeccional, transcultural y cualitativo con muestras no probabilísticas de estudiantes y profesionales de la salud y la educación en Chile e Italia. Se aplicaron cuestionarios de preguntas abiertas a estudiantes de ambos sexos de carreras de psicología, obstetricia y afines de entre 18 y 38 años de edad. Se realizaron grupos focales con estudiantes y profesionales de ambos sexos, incluyendo educadores, psicólogos y profesionales afines, con edades entre los 22 y 67 años. Las personas atribuyeron la felicidad a condiciones externas (afectos y la libertad personal) e internas (capital psicológico). Entre las fuentes de la felicidad el discurso equilibró experiencias de satisfacción por susceptión (rol pasivo), como por realización (rol activo). Los alcances de dichas experiencias variaron de lo individual a lo colectivo. Se identificó un núcleo común de la representación social para ambos colectivos, que incluyó elementos que la psicología positiva ha relacionado a la felicidad. Esta información orienta la formación de los profesionales que ejercen influencia en los estilos de vida de la población.

Palabras Clave: Representaciones sociales, felicidad, condiciones y experiencias vitales fuentes de felicidad, capital psicológico, estudio transcultural.

Introduction

Positive psychology is a recent field of research that is centered on the meaning of the happy moments of human life (Seligman, 2003). The studies have contributed novel information with respect to what makes people happy (Lyubomirsky, 2008). However, research on these issues is just starting in Latin America (Reyes-Jarquín & Hernández-Pozo, 2012) and the socialization of this knowledge is recent.

Now, in the daily life setting, together with expert discourse, there is the construction of common sense knowledge, a space in which social representations (SRs) are constructed. Although they are nourished from formal knowledge, they evolve in a manner that belongs to social conversation, they are naturalized and acquire the status of fiduciary reality in everyday life (Moscovici, 1993). So a SR is finally a point of reference of social practice, knowledge, and action systems. It also expresses social subjectivity and is objectified in multiple codes, standards, values, monuments and organizations (González, 2008).

The objective of this research is to understand and describe qualitatively the meanings associated with the social representation of the causal attributions of happiness that are reproduced in

everyday life. Which are the conditions that are deemed necessary for happiness? Which are the vital experiences that are considered sources of happiness? Is it believed that happiness is an event that takes place passively or is it the result of an active behavior?

With the purpose of gaining access to core aspects of SR, the study was made transculturally. Participants from Chile (Santiago) and Italy (Rome), both of them latin, western and modern countries, were included. They have important economic differences, but similar levels of human development: 0.783 Chile and 0.854 Italy (United Nations Development Programme, 2011) and happiness: 6.5 Chile and 6.9 Italy (New Economics Foundation, 2009), 6.82 Chile and 6.77 Italy (Veenhoven, 2011).

In the literature no record was found on studies of the SR of happiness. The study of Sotgio, Galati & Manzano (2011) compared the subjective representation by elderly adults in Cuba and Italy of the components of happiness (what people consider that is needed to be happy). The study identified that Italians give greater value to health, family and money, while the Cubans valued health, love and faith. Only the Italians mentioned hobbies, sex

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