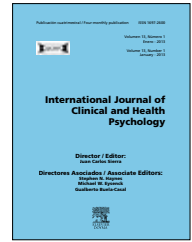


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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Is it possible to be too happy? Happiness, personality, and psychopathology

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Abstract The types of relationship between happiness, personality and psychopathology are assessed in an available sample ($n = 321$, adults, both sexes). Empirical results from two happiness scales and two questionnaires, one of personality (NEO-PI-R) and other of personality disorders (Loranger's scale), do not confirm the Diener's threshold hypothesis, that makes a distinction between optimum and maximum happiness; or the Seligman's supposition, that assumes that happiness has no limits; The main results are: a) negative affect (Neuroticism) is negatively related to happiness across its full range; b) Extraversion and Openness to experience are positively related to happiness across its full range; c) in the rest of the basic personality factors, relationships are not linear, though not in the sense anticipated by Diener, and d) in personality disorders, the tendencies observed diversify according to the type of disorder, and the type of happiness factor. On most occasions, the close relationship between personality disorders and the Neuroticism dimension is verified in a consistent manner. These results are discussed within the context of clinical psychology, and the general theory about happiness.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Felicidad;
Personalidad;
Trastornos de personalidad;
Estudio *ex post facto*

Resumen En este estudio se ponen a prueba los tipos de relación entre felicidad, personalidad y psicopatología en una muestra de 321 adultos de ambos sexos. Los resultados, en dos escalas de felicidad, un cuestionario de personalidad (NEO-PI-R) y otro de trastornos de personalidad (escala de Loranger) no confirman la hipótesis del umbral de Diener, de que existe una felicidad óptima y otra máxima; ni el supuesto de Seligman, de que la felicidad no tiene límites: a) la afectividad negativa (neuroticismo) se relaciona negativamente con la felicidad en todo su rango; b) extraversión y apertura a la experiencia se relacionan positivamente con felicidad en

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todo su rango; c) en el resto de factores básicos de personalidad las relaciones son no lineales, aunque no en el sentido previsto por Diener; d) en los trastornos de personalidad las tendencias se diversifican por el tipo de trastorno y tipo de factor de felicidad, aunque se contrasta en la mayoría de las ocasiones el compromiso de los trastornos de personalidad con la dimensión de neuroticismo de manera coherente. Se discuten estos resultados en el contexto de la clínica psicológica y la teoría general sobre la felicidad.

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Everybody wants to be happier, and achievement of happiness is the main objective of positive psychology (Seligman, 2002, 2011); although there are authors that wrongly define positive psychology as paradigm (Fernández-Ríos & Novo, 2012). But, can one get to be too happy? And, if one can, is a paradoxical effect achieved? (which would be a contradiction and limitation of that movement). In two of the three currently most powerful theories, Seligman, on the one part, and Lyubomirsky (2008), on the other, say nothing about it, since they assume that there is an unlimited growth and, to the extent positive affect is identified with happiness, from a psychological viewpoint, the relationship between positive affect and happiness would be linear and positive. Diener differs from them (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008): he assumes that there is a level of “optimum” happiness, which is different and lower than the “maximum” happiness, as assessed by happiness scales, basically with his scale of subjective well-being and satisfaction with life (Diener, 1984), also happy people live longer (Diener & Chan, 2011). He proposes that this optimum happiness is found around score 8, on a happiness scale from 0 through 10 based on an empirical review, and the rest, up to 10, would correspond to negative affect, which would act as a compensating incentive for the individual to continue to pursue happiness.

Happiness is theoretically conceptualized as a process rather than a state (with some critics, Burns, 2010, 2011; Kristjánson, 2010), in which achievements many times matter less than the fact of having actually achieved them, and which demands effort. Its assessment is possible through estimations of a single question (indicate on a scale the degree of happiness felt), of several questions (such as Diener’s subjective well-being scale, with five questions), or of a questionnaire with alternative answers (such as Argyle’s Oxford questionnaire, with four options in each of the 25 items). There are more complex options, even for the estimation of subjective well-being, though they are less used.

The connection of happiness with psychopathology and psychotherapy has been scarcely thematized (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2009; Burns, 2010). In Seligman, and in Diener, bipolar disorder and sadism are pointed out as clear limits of happiness: the sadist can be extremely happy, but with actions which are completely disturbing for the others; and in the manic phase, the feeling is that of happiness, although behavioral effectiveness has disappeared. And there are

more examples concerning personality disorders, which could be the histrionic, the dissocial, the discussed narcissist, and, possibly within the latter category, the psychopath, who seem to be happy by causing damage to the rest of humans or threatening them, without being conscious of that damage. The study of the relationship between happiness and personality disorders is presented as a way of opening the repercussions experienced by individuals with possible personality disorders with respect to their happiness, which, so far, has not appeared to be an issue discussed or supported by empirical data. On a very general level, the affect present in most personality disorders might be expected to be negative, and, therefore, the same hypotheses might be extended to this group of disorders, and, in any case, based on the achieved results, more precise hypotheses could be formulated.

Method

Design

It is a descriptive cross-sectional population study with non-probabilistic samples (Montero & León, 2007), by means of questionnaires with *ex post facto* components for the contrasting of hypotheses on happiness and personality on the one hand, and on the relationship between personality disorders and happiness based on very general hypotheses.

Participants

The participating available sample consisted of 321 adult subjects, of a mean age of 24.2 years ($SD = 7.43$); 63% of them were women, with 45% of university students, and 12% married or living as a couple.

Instruments

The personality questionnaire used was NEO-PI-R authored by Costa and McCrae (1992), official Spanish version (Avia, Sanz, & Sánchez-Bernardos, 1997), which evaluates the “Big Five”: *Neuroticism*, *Extraversion*, *Openness to experience*, *Agreeableness*, and *Conscientiousness*, each of them having six facets. The first is mainly identified with emotional instability, and tendency to anxiety, characteristic of the so-called “negative affect”. *Extraversion* is characterized

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