Introduction to the issue

HAPPINESS AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING

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In recent decades, the public and scientific arenas have been pervaded by discourse concerning 'life satisfaction', 'well-being', and 'quality of life', yet mainly from a person-centred and de-contextualized perspective. Particularly since the '60s, psychology and social sciences have shifted focus from the study of psychological distress to human flourishing (Jahoda, 1958), thereby introducing new concepts such as 'flourishing', 'thriving', and 'prospering' (Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). At the same time, the disciplines have seen the promotion of good practices aimed at fostering internal resources, social relationships, goal achievement (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer 2008; Seligman 2002, 2011), enjoyment in specific life domains such as work, marriage, and leisure time (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), and changing dysfunctional cognitive and motivational processes by engaging in happiness-increasing activities (Lyubomirsky, 2007; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005).

However, these developments show that there is still widespread incapacity to consider well-being and life satisfaction as socially constructed products. The most direct result of this is a deeply rooted understanding of happiness and well-being more as a subjective state, which is the end product of personal efforts, rather than as socially mediated outcome of person-environment transactions.

Overly individualistic approaches tend to overlook broader elements that are paramount to the pursuit and maintenance of a good life. Among these, the following aspects should figure prominently: the presence/absence of conditions of justice and fairness, the role of power and liberation for the promotion of well-being, the relevance of environmental and contextual circumstances, the importance of values as well as social ethics, and a broad understanding of how neoliberalism, capitalism, globalization and market-driven economic approaches impact on people's quality of life (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

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In the light of this, the purpose of the present issue is to report contributions on happiness and well-being that are consistent with the Community and Critical Psychology ethos as well as related scholarship, both within and outside of psychology. Its '*fil rouge'* is the understanding of happiness and well-being in their contextual and social determinants (i.e. democracy, justice, and social responsibility, and access to resources); concepts such as justice and fairness, grassroots engagement, social change, empowerment, relational values, and social capital are all relevant to the exploration of happiness and well-being from an alternative viewpoint.

Consistent with Isaac Prilleltensky's ecological vision, well-being is understood as "*a positive state of affairs brought about by the simultaneous and balanced satisfaction of diverse objective and subjective needs of individuals, relationships, organizations and communities*" (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 12). Thus, from a critical perspective, we argue that well-being is a multi-faceted and complex construct linked to manifold levels of analysis. Moreover, we should bear in mind that whenever the power of individual efforts crowds out the role of external circumstances, and the effect of contextual factors is overlooked, the risk of "blaming the victim" for failing to achieve a happy life is likely to loom quite large (Ryan, 1971; Held, 2004).

Given these premises, this thematic issue aims to address a number of questions, among which are:

- Why do we need to promote happiness and well-being beyond the individual level?
- Is it possible to promote happiness and well-being in a capitalistic, market-driven and globalized world?
- What kind of values can best underpin the pursuit of a good life?

The following thematic issue opens with a contribution written by Caterina Arcidiacono and Salvatore Di Martino bearing the ambitious title: 'A critical analysis of Happiness and Well-being. Where we stand now, where we need to go'. The aim of this article is, in the first place, to present an overview of the current state of thought in happiness and well-being scholarship, and in the second, to describe alternative approaches. These introduce novel elements into the scientific debate on quality of life, namely the economics of happiness, feminist economics, the capabilities approach, and the model of four qualities of life. Among these, the contribution of Critical Community Psychology (CCP) figures prominently. The authors argue in particular that this discipline offers a new vision that frames happiness and well-being in a contextual perspective that links multiple levels of analysis, including the individual level with the macro-level. Moreover CCP includes an understanding of how conditions of social justice, power and liberation shape individual and social pursuit of the good life. Lastly, the vision of CCP contributes to the promotion of responsible participation in community life, reciprocity, and a sense of ethics, which are paramount elements in building better societies.

In a paper titled 'Family relationships: A long-lasting source of well-being*',* Eugenia Scabini describes not only the richness, but also the constraints faced by family relationships today, with a specific focus on the family as a possible source of individual and social well-being. In this paper Scabini proposes her relational symbolic model, which sees 'generativity' as *'the outcome of family relationships and of the exchange between generations'.*

One of the central themes around which Scabini's contribution revolves is a new subtle form of social stagnation, where the power of family generativity is reduced by a selfish interest "*to make oneself happy, and to promote self-actualization… very often through the child".* Generativity, in that regard, is hindered by the prolonged nurturing of the offspring as well as by

a constant parental presence that decreases the push towards emancipation (i.e. the case of 'helicopter parenting').

The solution the author offers to reactivate the power of generativity is to move from parental generativity to social generativity. As opposed to the former, "*social generativity is aimed at the future of all young people: it promotes an ethical cycle of generational inclusion and supports the establishment of intergenerational equity*". This entails the capacity to adopt, among other things, a trans-generational perspective, according to which the power of generativity is passed on to the next generations rather than consumed or withheld during the life-span of the current one.

In 'Friend, foe or facilitator? The role of the parent-service provider relationship in the early implementation of a family-based community intervention', Judy Lovett, Eylin Palamaro Munsell, Kelly McNamara, and Orla Doyle discuss a family- and community-based early childhood intervention in Ireland. Their qualitative study was aimed at investigating the parents' and home visitor's views related to early programme implementation in order to increase their trust in the interventions and make the latter more effective as a consequence.

Based on the evidence that early home visiting intervention programmes produce a positive impact on children's well-being and that of their families, the authors are also mindful that "*sensitive implementation, including the flexibility to adapt the programme if necessary, is critical to successful programme delivery*". Elements such as good parent-home visitor relationships, and compatibility between parent and home visitor are fundamental in the regard.

The article points out that caring and caregivers competencies can be improved by social support. Addressing the highly topical and interesting question 'who takes care of caregivers?' the paper proposes a project that provides support to family members in the early stage of their infants' childhood. The implicit value of this project is to show how caregiving has a social function and therefore how important it is to assume measures to its protection and support.

Virginia Paloma, Manuel García-Ramírez, Carlos Camacho, and Lucas Olmedo address the issue of migrants' wellbeing in 'How are we studying migrant well-being? A critical view from a liberating community psychology approach'. The paper gives voice to the experience of the Seville community psychology team project led by Manuel García-Ramírez, Their thought-provoking paper develops a liberating community psychology approach for the study of migrant well-being. This novel critical perspective has the credit of overcoming individual and cultural levels of analysis as well as exploring the impact of oppressive contextual factor on migrants' well-being.

Departing from the Psychology Acculturation perspective to assume one of Liberating Community Psychology (LCPA), the paper attempts to explain how social, economic, and political conditions, as well as power dynamics within societies, play a critical role in influencing migrants' wellness. Moreover, the LCPA perspective considers migrants as active agents who struggle to improve their conditions and transform their living contexts, thus overcoming an individualistic vocabulary, which threatens to undermine their political agency by placing them in a passive role. We can see in this paper how social context can positively influence individual dimensions of well-being through enhancing living conditions or, conversely, negatively affecting them by generating structural oppression.

A further element of originality in this work is the introduction of a novel methodology, namely multilevel regression analysis, for studying migrants' well-being in relation to the contexts in which they are embedded. This new procedure not only allows us to account for variability in different levels of analysis, but also for conducting virtual experiments and

simulations "in order to propose effective interventions to increase the well-being of migrants".

Phil Arthington's paper, titled 'Mindfulness: A critical perspective' provides a detailed and interesting outlook of Mindfulness in a radical critical view. It is well known that mindfulness is becoming increasingly established as a tool for promoting individual well-being in modern society. The approach of this article has the credit of framing this secular practice in the context of advanced capitalism from a critical psychology perspective. Drawing on Foucault, the author argues: "*mindfulness is commonly being used as a technique for the regulation of individual subjectivity in a manner which is in line with neoliberalism, one of the major ideologies supporting capitalist system*".

In Arthington's view, mindfulness results in an undue focus on the power of individuals to determine their life, and little interest in how to change social determinants. In so doing, it emphasizes individual freedom, but also personal responsibility in cases where the individual fails to achieve a satisfactory level of happiness and well-being. Moreover, it encourages 'healthism' as form of self-improvement, which '*implicitly encourages the mindfulness practitioners to behave in normative ways with regards to that which is deemed healthy*'. This article highlights a clear divide between capitalistic and individualistic ways of attaining individual well-being, and more social and relational ways to cope with adversity. The article addressed a very topical issue, since mindfulness is increasingly practiced in Western countries as form of healing to overcome individual distress.

Finally 'Community psychology, happiness and the third industrial revolution' by Patrizia Meringolo and Carlo Volpi, frames the pursuit of happiness within the contradictions of modern society. In their paper, the authors forecast that the challenge lying ahead calls for new social and ethical values to promote happiness and well-being in a capitalistic, market-driven and globalized world. In that regard, the article focuses on the necessity of developing interventions not only aimed at improving the life conditions of marginalized groups, but for the whole citizenship. This can be achieved only if we work on improving those social determinants that influence both individual capabilities and social welfare. In this sense, the issue gives evidence to the fact that it is not only advisable, but also necessary, to promote happiness and well-being at a social level.

All the contributions presented in this thematic issue give an evaluation of present contextual resources while looking at future perspectives. Understanding these holistically is important in order to express individual and community agency, which is in turn aimed at achieving public happiness. In that regard, CCP vision introduces a novel critical stance relative to happiness and well-being scholarship, taking into account elements such as social justice, inequalities, power differentials, care for social relationships, and respect and maintenance of the natural environment. We hope this issue will bring a step forward discussion and research in the field.

Where this thematic issue is lacking is in the range of empirical examples of good practice and intervention for the promotion of happiness and well-being in a critical perspective. Given the relevance that this topic has acquired in recent decades - even in the CCP field - we expected an intense response to our call for papers, from CCP academics, social practitioners, and activists, as well as from researchers working in companion approaches. Contrary to our expectations, we received only a small number of contributions, from those 'brave' scholars who took on this challenge. These are mainly theoretical and therefore only partially address the questions that we feel are key to the well-being discussion at the present time. Some topics could not be addressed at all, given the limited number of works we received, thereby leaving a whole area of enquiry still open. Despite this, the articles presented in this thematic issue shed some

light on the complex and variegated field of happiness and well-being studies. We hope that they will help to stimulate the interest of many others, and invite them to take part in discussion of the issues we still need to face if we are to promote a new vision of the good life.

In fact, although community-based practices and social initiatives for the promotion of social happiness and well-being are increasingly gaining recognition, we need more examples of practices of liberation, empowerment, participation that can positively impact on people's lives, and that can lead to more powerful and effective intervention strategies. We also need a deeper understanding of how social justice, inequalities, different cultures, and marginalization affect people's well-being and what we can do to promote better life conditions at the personal, interpersonal, communal, and social levels. Lastly, we need to develop novel instruments and techniques to tap into people's appraisal of their life condition and hence to increase their satisfaction and enjoyment of life.

We hope that this thematic issue will serve as a means of raising awareness of the challenges of our era, and that it will spur our efforts in the promotion of the good life.

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