

THE LATIN-AMERICAN VIEW OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

LA MIRADA LATINA SOBRE LA PSICOLOGÍA POSITIVA

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Abstract

The present article aims to describe the progress of the study and application of Positive Psychology (PP) in Latin America. On one hand, it is described how the interest in PP has emerged in some Latin American countries such as Argentina, Peru and Mexico, among others. On the other hand, results of a literature review which explore the development of psychological assessments in the region are presented according to PP pillars proposed by Seligman (2002, 2009): positive emotions, positive traits, positive institutions and positive relationships (social life). Mexico, Chile, Brazil and Argentina appeared to be the countries with the highest levels of scientific production related to PP and the topics most frequently studied are psychological well-being, interpersonal relationships and psychotherapeutic interventions.

Key words: Positive psychology, pillars, assessment, Latin America.

Resumen

El siguiente trabajo intenta mostrar el avance que presenta Latinoamérica en cuanto al estudio y aplicación de temáticas relacionadas con la Psicología Positiva (PP). Por un lado, se pretendió describir cómo ha surgido el interés en PP en algunos países de Latinoamérica como Argentina, Perú, México, entre otros. Por otro lado, se analizaron los resultados de un rastrillaje realizado en el cual verifica el cúmulo de trabajos y pruebas psicológicas desarrolladas en la región, principalmente teniendo en cuenta los pilares de la PP propuestos por Seligman (2002, 2009): las *emociones positivas*, los *rasgos positivos*, las *instituciones positivas* y los *vínculos positivos* (la vida social). México, Chile, Brasil y Argentina, parecen ser los países con mayor productividad. Las temáticas frecuentemente estudiadas están en relación con el bienestar psicológico, las relaciones interpersonales y las intervenciones psicoterapéuticas. *Palabras clave*: Psicología positiva, pilares, evaluación, Latinoamérica.

Introduction

The objective of the present article is to describe the progress of the study and application of Positive Psychology (PP) in Latin America. PP topics are presented according to PP pillars proposed by Martin Seligman (2002): the study of *positive emotions*, *positive traits*, *positive institutions* and a fourth pillar, added in 2009, *positive relationships* (social life).

Positive Psychology

There is consensus in considering Martin Seligman's opening speech as president of the American Psychological Association (APA), in 1998, as the beginnings of Positive Psychology (Seligman, 1999). Before World War II, psychology had proposed three missions: Curing mental illness; helping people to have a more productive and satisfying life; and identify and nurturing individuals' talent. However, after the War, two events changed psychology's orientation: In 1946, the Veterans Administration was created and several psychologists dedicated their work to the treatment of mental illness; and, in 1947, the National Institute of Mental Health was founded, making researchers consider the study of psychopathologies as a relevant area. These events were the cause why only one of the three missions - curing mental illness – developed.

Thus, the emergence of PP is, in part, an attempt to continue with those forgotten missions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In the mentioned speech, Seligman declared that his APA's presidency will aim at emphasizing the interest towards a more positive psychology. "Psychology

is not just the study of weakness and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken. It is nurturing what is best within ourselves" (Seligman, 1999, p.1). The interest in studying human well-being and the factors that contribute to it are not exclusive to PP. However, Seligman had the virtue of organizing a structured program to promote its research and dissemination by identifying and naming trends, and adapting them to the orthodox canons of science (Gancedo, 2008; Linley, Joseph, Harrington & Wood, 2006).

It is important to clarify what actually does not define positive psychology. Firstly, it is neither a spiritual or philosophical movement nor self-help exercises to achieve happiness. PP has psychological constructs and empirical evidence with rigorous scientific basis. Secondly, PP is not based on the authority of its founder nor is seeking for adherents as pseudoscientific knowledge does. PP operates through the scientific community, publishing its research in well-known international journals. Thirdly, it does not imply the denial of people's negative aspects and suffering. PP tends towards complementarity and to correct the imbalance that psychology has suffered during the last 60 years emphasizing on individuals' pathological aspects (Castro-Solano, 2010).

In this line, Linley et al. (2006) defined PP as the scientific study of the possibilities of an optimal human development. At a meta-psychological level, it proposes to theoretically refocus and restructure the imbalance in psychological practi-

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