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(Article begins on next page)

Positive Psychology in Southern Europe (Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain)

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Italy

1. Historical Background to Positive Psychology in Southern Europe

The field of Positive Psychology in Southern Europe presents a peculiar trend. From a scientific viewpoint, the field is relatively new and somewhat behind Northern American or Australian rapid developments (Ruini & Fava, 2014). From a theoretical viewpoint, however, the philosophical roots of positive psychology are intrinsically embedded in Southern Europe cultural history. The ancient Greeks and Latin philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, Seneca and Socrates developed their frames of thoughts in Greece, Italy and inside the Mediterranean area. This means that the concepts of hedonic well-being and eudaimonia that nowadays characterize the major thematic fields of positive psychology research, could be distilled from the cultural background of this region of the world (Ryff & Singer, 2008).

Both concepts of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being have specific philosophical background deriving from Greek traditions: the eudaimonic is certainly more linked to Aristotelian approach, whereas the hedonic is more linked to Aristippus's and Epicurus's theories (Ryff & Singer, 2008). The former underlined the importance of pleasure, regardless of its cause. According to the hedonic philosophy, happiness can be defined as the total amount of pleasure experienced in life. Similarly, epicurean philosophers equated happiness with "pleasure in tranquility", and "pain avoiding" (*aponia*). Contemporary utilitarian philosophy reframed these Greek approaches by affirming the principle of utility. It states that thanks to individual's attempt to maximize pleasure and self-interest, the good society is built.

In overt contrast to this approach, other ancient philosophers as Aristotle, Plato and Socrates stated that happiness is something more noble, and argued that pleasure comes from exercising individual's virtues in a process of self-realization. In the *Nichomachean Ethics*,

written in 350 B.C., Aristotle asserted that human beings are basically virtuous and aspire to the highest of all goods: eudaimonia. He used this term to refer to activities of the soul in accordance with virtue. Accordingly, each person receives a call to know and live in line with his *daimon* (a sort of spirit/energy given to all individuals), thereby progressively actualizing an excellence (from the Greek “*arête*”). By a traditional Greek philosophical perspective, in fact, to reach true happiness individuals must follow a basic admonishment: “know thyself and become what you are” (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Aristotle’s deeper message about virtues was that it involves achieving the best that is within us, each according his/her unique talents and capacities, and this achievement leads to happiness. Importantly, Aristotle admonished to seek “that which is intermediate”, avoiding excess and extremes. Those of virtuous character thus engage in deliberate actions chosen to avoid excess or deficiency, whether they are extremes of pleasure or pain, fear or confidence, vanity or humility. In fact, the pursuit of well-being may be so solipsistic and individualistic to leave no room for human connection and the social good; or it could be so focused on responsibilities and duties outside the self that personal talents and capacities are neither recognized or developed (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Other similar formulations of happiness derived from the work of Plato and Epicuro. Plato emphasized the balance between reason, spirit and appetites, whereas Epicure’s concept of ataraxia referred to freedom from worries or anxiety through the ability of maintaining balance and serenity in both enjoyable and challenging times (Ryff & Singer, 2008).

Thus, in the contemporary Western society, happiness is defined by either the hedonic or the eudaimonic perspective, that governed ethics, social and cultural functioning starting from the Southern Europe region of the world.

2. Major Positive Psychologists of Southern Europe: Theory, Research, Assessment, and Practice

Even though current positive psychology research is indeed underrepresented in this region of the world, compared to what is occurring in USA, Canada, or Australia, or compared to the growing research in Asian countries, Southern Europe has several groups of researchers within the positive psychology perspectives. Although many private initiatives, associations, and practitioners are applying a positive psychology approach in their works, in this chapter the focus will be placed on academic professors and groups that are actually conducting evidence-based research in this field. Furthermore, these groups founded the national associations of Positive Psychology in their countries. In the next sessions, these groups of research will be presented, according to their specific country and following an alphabetical order.

2.1 Greece

The main Greek contributions to positive psychology research and practice are represented by the work of Anastassios Stalikas, currently professor at the Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences Education. After obtaining his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, at the University of Ottawa, he was associate professor at the department of Educational and Counselling at McGill University. As of 2017 he is serving as the President of the Greek Association of Positive Psychology (www.positiveemotions.gr). His main clinical, educational and research interests focus on the application of the principles of Positive Psychology in creating positive organizational culture, leadership, motivation and productivity growth. He is also interested in studying the psychotherapeutic process and in particular the important role of positive emotions. In a recent work Stalikas et al. (Stalikas, Fitzpatrick, Mistkidou, Boutri, & Seryianni, 2015) described the broaden-and-build theory and its contribution to psychotherapy theory, research and practice. They focus on the concepts of broadening, undoing, and building and their potential contribution to psychotherapy. In fact, positive emotions have been implicated in the development of coping

resources and resilience for psychological health across various significant settings (such as the psychotherapeutic one), and therefore they should be integrated in the psychotherapeutic work (Fitzpatrick & Stalikas, 2008) . Positive emotions have important roles also across various life events. For instance, in another investigation Stalikas examined the influence of positive emotions on women during their transition into motherhood (Moraitou, Galanakis, Stalikas, & Garivaldis, 2011). Authors found specific positive emotions such as joyfulness, pride, and interest after childbirth. Participants between the ages of 30 and 34 experienced a greater variety and intensity of positive emotions before and after childbirth. In turn, a negative relationship was found between the experience of positive emotion intensity and post-natal depressive symptomatology. Factors such as education level, whether the birth was planned or not, and environmental and partner support were found to relate significantly to the manifestation of positive emotions. These findings have potential implications for preventing post-partum depression, a clinical phenomenon which is rapidly spreading also in southern Europe countries.

Finally, Stalikas examined the role of positive emotions in work and organizational settings. In a recent investigation (Galanakis, Galanopoulou, & Stalikas, 2011) Stalikas et al. applied the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions as an alternative approach to prevent occupational stress. They examined the relationship between positive emotions and strain in a sample of 2775 professionals. The results indicate that the experiencing of positive emotions is negatively correlated with occupational strain and that overall and discrete positive emotions predicted individual strain over and beyond stressors. Within organizational settings, Stalikas also found that sharing positive emotions can enhance teamwork and effective problem solving in various Greek organizations (Galanakis & Anastasios, 2007).

Finally, his recent work consist of validating the *Differential Emotions Scale* (DES) in Greek individuals (Galanakis, Stalikas, Pezirkianidis, & Karakasidou, 2016). The scale was modified in order to include the specific evaluation of positive emotions. Results from this research showed that the psychometric properties of the scale are good. However, the factor analysis disconfirmed previous findings and showed a three factor structure. Authors commented on this difference by attributing it to cultural elements in the Greek population.

In conclusion, Professor Stalikas and collaborators have also contributed important work to positive psychology in Greece and Southern Europe more broadly, by integrating positive psychology into clinical practice and providing new assessment tools for measuring positive dimensions

2.2 Italy

The SIPP (Italian Society of Positive Psychology) is a non-profit society with the aim of promoting research in Positive Psychology areas, such as: such as identification of human potential and resources; biopsychosocial aspects of cognition, emotions, and positive experiences; subjective well-being, self-esteem, creativity, and spirituality; explanatory styles, social relationships, and coping abilities; and well-being in specific populations. The SIPP aims at fostering the dissemination and teaching of theoretical and applied advancements in the field of Positive Psychology by providing professionals with training programs and courses. In pursuing these goals, SIPP organizes and takes part in national and international congresses, conferences, seminars, courses, and meetings. In addition, it promotes the publication of paper and electronic articles, journals, and books. Its website is <http://www.psicologiapositiva.it> As of 2017 the SIPP President is Dr. Andrea Fianco, and the President-Elect is Prof. Chiara Ruini, from the University of Bologna. A former President and one of the most prominent leaders of the SIPP is Prof. Antonella delle Fave, from the

University of Milan. The main Italian contributors to positive psychology research in this country are active members of SIPP.

Chiara Ruini, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Bologna, Department of Psychology. Since 2006 she has been teaching the course “Clinical Applications of Positive Psychology” for students attending the Master Program in Clinical Psychology. Chiara Ruini has authored more than 60 articles published in peer-reviewed international journals, has edited a book entitled *Increasing Psychological well-being across cultures* (Ruini & Fava, 2014) for the Springer series (Positive Psychology across Cultures) and serves the Editorial Boards for international journals such as *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, the *Psychology of Well-being*, *Theories Research and Practice*, the *Journal of Happiness and Wellbeing*. Her research interests are concerned with positive psychology, clinical psychology, resilience, and psychotherapy. As a clinician, she devoted attention to the integration of positive psychology research into the clinical domains, and she recently published a book entitled *Positive Psychology in the Clinical Domains. Research and Practice* where the main applications of positive interventions are illustrated (Ruini, 2017). Themes such as psychological well-being, quality of life, resilience and their main applications in clinical domains (positive psychotherapy, well-being therapy, strength-based interventions, mindfulness) are reviewed with a peculiar attention to the balance between positivity and psychological distress or psychopathology. Together with Prof. Giovanni Fava from the same University, she developed the Well-being Therapy – WBT (Fava, 2016; Fava & Ruini, 2003; Ruini & Fava, 2012), one of the first positive interventions specifically devoted to patients with affective disorders (anxiety and depression) . WBT was tested in several controlled investigations and was found to be effective in promoting eudaimonic well-being and in preventing relapses in mood and anxiety disorders (Fava et al., 2004; Ruini & Fava, 2009; Ruini & Ryff, 2016).

Another line of research where Prof. Ruini has devoted her work is health psychology and psychosomatics: she has investigated the role of psychological factors involved in positive adaptation to chronic illnesses (post-traumatic growth, gratitude, meaning in life). Ruini and Vescovelli (2013) examined the role of gratitude in a breast cancer sample and its correlations with post- traumatic growth (PTG), psychological well-being, and distress. They also compared patients reporting higher levels of gratitude versus those reporting lower levels of gratitude and found that the former displayed higher levels of PTG, positive affect and lower symptomatology, compared to the latter. However, the two groups did not differ on psychological well-being. Furthermore, gratitude was significantly and positively correlated to PTG, to positive relations, and negatively related to anxiety, depression, and hostility-irritability. Since the majority of cancer patients reported low gratitude, the authors suggested the importance of developing clinical interventions aimed at increasing gratitude in patients with oncological illnesses . In another related article (Ruini, Vescovelli, & Albieri, 2013) the authors compared breast cancer survivors to healthy women reporting other stressful events and found that survivors reported significantly higher levels of PTG and distress, and lower levels of PWB compared to healthy women. Thus, PTG levels were higher in cancer survivors and associated with decreased psychological distress and somatisation. These results carry important implications for clinical assessment, as well as for planning interventions to improve well-being and resilience in oncology. Together with another group of positive psychologists working in Spain (see next section) Ruini recently summarized the clinical and psychological correlates of PTG in cancer (Casellas-Grau, Ochoa, & Ruini, 2017) and found that the medical variables associated with the illness (i.e., time since diagnosis, type of treatment, stage of cancer, etc..) showed surprisingly few associations with PTG. The authors concluded that PTG in cancer should be investigated adopting a medical,

psychosomatic approach, with more consideration to the variables related to the illness and the body as a source of threat, with fear of recurrences as potential moderator for PTG.

Recently, Prof. Ruini was also involved in research projects for the promotion of well-being in special populations: older adults (Positive Aging and its interventions) and children/adolescents. In these domains she developed preventive interventions (i.e., the promotion of well-being to prevent the onset of psychological distress), as well as new treatment protocols derived from positive psychology research. Concerning older adults, two pilot interventions have been recently developed and tested. One intervention involved American community dwellers, who received a program entitled: “Lighten UP!” (Friedman et al., 2017). It is an eight-week program consisting of a 90-minute group session designed to teach participants to identify and savor positive experiences across multiple domains of eudaimonic well-being. At the end of the eight weeks, participants reported significantly increased PWB, life satisfaction, and social well-being along with lower levels of depression and fewer physical symptoms and sleep complaints. These gains were particularly robust for individuals with lower pre-program levels of PWB. The second recent intervention for the promotion of positive aging was tested in nursing homes (Cesetti, Vescovelli, & Ruini, 2017). Authors documented that older adults living in nursing homes are more vulnerable than those living in the community since they presented more depression and less well-being. A short group intervention based on fairytales and performed inside the nursing homes yielded improvements in well-being and sleep quality in these older adults.

Concerning younger populations, Ruini et al. (Ruini et al., 2009; Tomba et al., 2010); developed a school program for the promotion of eudaimonic well-being in adolescents and teenagers. This short group program yielded beneficial effects in terms of well-being, anxiety and somatisation, which lasted over six month follow-up. Recently, this program has been adapted and applied to children with affective, behavioral and eating disorders. In all these

clinical case series the promotion of well-being produced improvements also in psychopathology (Albieri, Visani, Offidani, Ottolini, & Ruini, 2009; Ruini, Albieri, & Vescovelli, 2015; Vescovelli, Albieri, & Ruini, 2017). Thus, Ruini and colleagues provided important contributions to the development of Positive Psychology in Southern Europe by the development of positive interventions. This line of research points to the integration between positive and clinical psychology (Ruini, 2017).

Another Italian positive psychology contributor is Prof. Antonella delle Fave, who leads a large research group at the University of Milan. After getting an MD degree, she specialized in clinical psychology and devoted her research activities to the investigation of well-being indicators, with a particular attention to cultural and diversity issues. The main research areas concern flow and optimal experience and its applications in various settings, from health, to school and work psychology (Bassi & delle Fave, 2012; Bassi, Falautano, et al., 2014; Bassi, Steca, Monzani, Greco, & delle Fave, 2014;). In an interesting investigation (Bassi & Delle Fave, 2012) the authors aimed at understanding the characteristics of optimal experience in academic activities and findings showed that during schoolwork as optimal activity (high challenges and high skills) students mostly reported low levels of self-determination. Subsequently, the Milan group analyzed optimal experience in association with personality traits, hedonic and eudaimonic well-being in adolescence (Bassi, Steca, Monzani, Greco, & delle Fave, 2014). They found that the trait openness to experience was the sole personality factor predicting the occurrence of optimal experience, and that no personality factors were predictive of type of activities adolescents associated with optimal experience. These findings point to the promotion of optimal experience among adolescents through the support of curiosity and openness to new experiences.

Delle Fave developed further research and intervention projects in the domains of health and education, and supervised international cooperation programs to promote resource

implementation in conditions of disability and social maladjustment. Together with international partners she launched and implemented the “Eudaimonic and Hedonic Happiness Investigation”, aimed at identifying well-being components across cultures (Delle Fave, Brdar, Freire, Vella-Brodrick, & Wissing, 2011). This international group, developed a new assessment tool: the “*Eudaimonic and Hedonic Happiness Investigation*”. It is an instrument consisting of open-ended questions addressing objects such as the respondent’s definition of happiness and what is perceived as most meaningful in life. The instrument also includes ratings of happiness levels and meaningfulness in different life domains. Thus, delle Fave’s line of research provided important innovations also in the field of positive psychology assessment.

Her group is currently conducting research and intervention projects on well-being promotion in conditions of chronic and degenerative diseases among patients and caregivers, exploring the potential of an integrated treatment approach (Bassi, Falautano, et al., 2014; Bassi et al., 2016; Fianco et al., 2015). In one investigation (Fianco et al., 2015) authors assessed Italian caregivers and found that those perceiving high burden reported higher levels of depression-related emotions, lower life satisfaction and lower resilience than participants perceiving low burden. They also found that the best predictor of perceived burden was life satisfaction, followed to a lesser extent by resilience, while depression-related emotions did not provide significant contribution. Findings suggest that burden and well-being are co-existing in caregivers' experience and their joint assessment would allow for the identification of personal and relational resources that can be usefully included in interventions addressed to caregivers. Similarly, Bassi et al. (Bassi, et al., 2014) documented the coexistence of well-being and distress in individuals with multiple sclerosis (MS) and in their caregivers. Compared to healthy populations, MS individuals reported higher depression, and lower general well-being; caregivers presented higher depression and lower general well-being; and

medical professionals reported the best ill- and well-being profiles. However, after controlling for demographic differences in age and education, hierarchical regressions highlighted that general well-being of MS patients substantially leveled off, and it can counterbalance the negative effects of disease or caregiving. In a subsequent study (Bassi et al., 2016) the same group of investigators found that well-being in MS patients and in their caregivers was positively associated with their belief that they understood the disease, and inversely associated with their representations of the disease and with negative emotions. In addition, among patients, well-being was inversely associated with the number of symptoms they specifically attributed to their illness, while among caregivers, well-being was positively associated with beliefs that treatment could control the disease. These investigations have several important implications for implementing psychosocial intervention to sustain patient's and caregivers' well-being during the course of MS or other chronic conditions.

Finally, Delle Fave contributed as field editor and author to *The Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research* (edited by Michalos, 2014). She served as President of the International Positive Psychology Association (2009-2011) and of the European Network of Positive Psychology (2006-2010). Since 2010 she is Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Happiness Studies*, one of the main scientific journals devoted to publish research on positive psychology, with a multidisciplinary approach.

2.3 Portugal

The main Portuguese contributions to positive psychology research and practice are represented by the work of Professor Teresa Freire, from the University of Porto and by Prof. Luis Miguel Neto and his wife Prof. Elana Marujo. Luís Miguel Neto is presently Assistant Professor at Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas (School of Social and Political Sciences), University of Lisbon. He studied at the University of Massachusetts, USA, where

he received his Ed.D . in Family Therapy, and he got a post-graduate degree on Systemic Family Therapy from Sevilla University in Spain. Together with Prof. Marujo, Prof. Neto recently launched the Platform for Public Happiness at Lisbon University, where he is the Scientific Coordinator of the Executive Master in Applied Positive Psychology. He is a co-founder, vice-president and member of the Scientific Committee of the Portuguese Association on Positive Psychology/Associação Portuguesa de Estudos e Intervenções em Psicologia Positiva (APPEIP). Neto and Marujo recently co-organized the first and the second Portuguese Positive Psychology Conference, on the theme of Positive Communities and Relational Goods: Co-constructing Felicitas Publica (Public Happiness). They are also members of the Board of Directors of the International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA).

Both investigators pioneered the teaching of Appreciative Inquiry, Social Constructionistic models, Systemic and Positive approaches in Portugal and Europe. In one of their investigations (Marujo & Neto, 2010) they described an intervention aimed at integrating positive psychology and community psychology. The intervention was implemented with populations living under the poverty line in the Portuguese Azores Islands. Throughout participative and appreciative interventions, and under a community development positive focus, the project enhanced optimism, hope, sense of humor and positive emotions in general. Therefore, they connected recent scientific data from positive psychology and from community psychology into a critical, appreciative, and generative practice involving transformational changes co-constructed between mental health professionals and poverty populations. Another community project (D'Araújo, Alpuim, Rivero, & Marujo, 2016) entitled “The Wednesday Tea Project (Chá das Quartas)” involved a group of elderly women experiencing high levels of loneliness and isolation in their small village in Portugal. The Wednesday Tea Project is based on positive psychology

methodologies and consists of ritualized sessions that encourage participatory group dynamics. The authors used various narrative practices that gave these women the opportunity to celebrate life after the age of 80, while also allowing the community to be part of and to benefit from the process.

Relying on her skills as family therapist, Marujo aimed at combining together traditional family and couple interventions with positive psychology approaches. Balancho and Marujo (2006) developed a positive preventive program in order to promote family well-being and happiness in its life context. The program used teleconferences and internet chats with experts in order to get in touch with each family from different countries and reduce problems in participation. This project provided families with scheduled exercises aimed at developing individual, relational and parental skills linked with happiness, optimism, hope and creativity, as much as at creating more pleasurable, positive and efficacious emotional climates and communicational patterns within the family. Also, children were involved and provided with weekly happiness focused assignments. The preliminary results confirmed the feasibility of this virtual training and these new technologies as a frame for creative and innovative psychological interventions to collectively create and increase happiness, positive emotions, and well-being directly in the family context.

Subsequently the same group (De Fatima Perloiro, Neto and Marujo, 2009) developed a specific intervention aimed at enhancing optimal couple's functioning using positive psychology concepts and strategies. Thus, authors developed a therapeutic protocol model characterized by specific ways of questioning and specific time dimensions (past, present, future). Questions are based on three concepts: a) Questions that introduce positive information (e.g. "What is your biggest strength as a couple?"); b) Questions that induce the search for solutions (e.g. "What does your wife has to do in order to make you happy?"); c) Questions that follow appreciative inquiry characteristics - being positive, provocative,

applicable, collaborative and motivated to identify the best qualities of the couple (e.g. “Tell me about a moment when you both felt you were an exceptional couple”).

A specific focus on time dimensions is also included: the past, the present and the future of the relationship. Authors created a group of questions devoted to different time periods of the relationship, to explore and improve partners’ affiliation: a) considering past, the work centered on gratitude to help the couple to feel connected and thankful for their shared experiences (“Think about the moments when you were dating: What are you proud of saying/doing at those moments?”; “How these years as a couple made you grow as a person, even when experiencing more troubled times?”); b) considering present, therapists should enhance couple’s optimistic view of their current shared experiences (following Seligman’s explanatory style research); c) when working on future, therapists should develop hope for the future of the relationship. The model appeared to be clinically helpful for couples in promoting a more positive communicative style focused on optimism and hope, but there have not been any controlled trials yet.

The other relevant group of Portuguese positive psychology investigators is headed by Prof. Teresa Freire, from the University of Porto. She performed several important studies on optimal experience and leisure activities (Freire, 2006) and developed a short assessment tool to measure leisure attitude (the “*Leisure Attitude Scale*” (Teixeira & Freire, 2013). It has strong psychometric properties and it evaluates the personal attitude toward leisure activities. It was found that positive attitudes tend to be associated with greater engagement in leisure.

More recently Freire investigated adolescent clinical populations and described positive intervention strategies. She reported that interventions based on positive psychology promote a more balanced approach that takes into consideration the negative and positive aspects of experience and aims to enhance well-being (Freire, Teixeira, Silva, & Matias, 2014). Her

research group developed a new intervention, the Optimal Functioning Therapy for Adolescents, which suggest that the focus of treatment for depressed adolescents should integrate symptom reduction and well-being enhancement to achieve optimal functioning. Helping young people be happier and more engaged in their lives is considered an important new perspective for clinical psychology practice. The same considerations could be applied to another vulnerable age group, which is older age. In this setting Freire investigated optimal experience in relation to loneliness (Ferreira & Freire, 2010). Authors found that personal strengths and well-being are key ingredients for successful aging, despite age related loss and declines.

Finally, together with Prof. Antonella delle Fave in Italy, Freire investigated well-being adopting an international perspective (delle Fave et al., 2011). This international group examined the lay definitions of happiness in various countries and found that the concept of inner harmony predominated among psychological definitions, and family and social relationships among contextual definitions with little variation by age and gender, across all included countries (delle Fave et al., 2016). Whereas interpersonal relationships are widely acknowledged as basic happiness components, inner harmony is substantially neglected. Nevertheless, it is consistent with several conceptual frameworks of happiness provided by philosophical and psychosocial disciplines. At the methodological level, these cross cultural findings suggest the potential of a bottom-up, mixed-method approach to contextualize psychological dimensions within culture and lay understanding of happiness and well-being. Thus, the collaboration between various European positive psychology investigators resulted in new advancements in defining happiness and well-being and in implementing new methodologies for evaluating these constructs within a cross cultural approach.

2.4 Spain

The main Spanish contributions to positive psychology research are represented by the work of Carmelo Vazquez, Professor of Psychopathology at the Complutense University of Madrid, and his team of collaborators. Prof. Carmelo Vazquez devoted efforts to the study of positive emotions, in relation to psychopathology. In several studies his research group has documented the existence of positive biases in the processing of information. This line of research shows that positive illusions and memory bias play a very important role in mental health (Vázquez, 2015). In one important recent investigation (Romero, Sanchez, Vázquez, & Valiente, 2016) authors evaluated self –esteem and memory bias in a group of depressed patients and compared their scores to non-depressed individuals. They found that participants diagnosed with depression showed lower levels of both explicit and implicit self-esteem and they also recalled a greater number of depressed self-referent adjectives and lower recall of positive self-referent information, compared to non-depressed participants. These findings suggest an association between implicit and explicit self-esteem in depression that may result in negative cognitive processing, as reflected by self-referent memory biases. Within the field of depression, Vazquez and his colleagues (Covadonga Chaves, Lopez-Gomez, Hervas, & Vazquez, 2016) also applied a therapeutic intervention based on positive psychology and compared its efficacy to standard cognitive behavioral treatment. After the randomized trial, authors found significant differences between treatment groups in either severity of depressive symptoms or positive and negative affect, and satisfaction with life. Importantly, even within the most severely depressed participants, no differences between the two treatment modalities emerged. This paves the way for the application of positive psychotherapy even among acute forms of psychopathology.

In collaboration with an international group of investigators, Vazquez also recently developed a self-report instrument that combines together hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions of well-being, with the aim of providing an integrative assessment. The

“*Pemberton Happiness Index*” (PHI) (Hervás & Vázquez, 2013; Paiva et al., 2016) makes an interesting distinction between remembered well-being and actual experience of well-being in present life. PHI contains eleven items that measure remembered well-being (general, hedonic, eudaimonic, and social well-being) and ten items related to experienced well-being (i.e., positive and negative emotional events that possibly happened the day before); the sum of these items produces a combined well-being index. Initial results from this cross-cultural, international validation study provided support for the good psychometric properties of the PHI (i.e., internal consistency, a single-factor structure, and convergent and incremental validity) and authors suggest that it could be used as an instrument to monitor changes in well-being in individuals and communities. Also in this case, Vazquez contributed to advances in positive psychology by providing new, integrative assessment methods.

Finally, Prof. Vazquez investigated human resistance to adversity in clinical and psychosocial settings. In this regard, he participated with some organizations (such as Médecins Sans Frontières - Spain) in intervention projects in critical incidents, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, terroristic attacks or oncological settings. In one article, Vazquez and his collaborators (García, Cova, Rincón, Vázquez, & Páez, 2016) adopted a positive psychology perspective and investigated the predictors of post traumatic growth (PTG) in 349 adult men and women who experienced the earthquake and tsunami on February 27, 2010 in Chile. Results showed a direct influence of the subjective severity, problem-focused coping, and deliberate rumination on the development of PTG. The authors concluded by underlying the relevant role of cognitive processes such as deliberate rumination and behavioral processes such as problem-focused coping in the presence of PTG. A similar concept (benefit finding) was also recently investigated in a group of children with life-threatening illnesses. Since suffering from illness is usually associated with challenge and growth, Vazquez et al. (Chaves, Hervás, & Vazquez, 2016) hypothesized that changes in life satisfaction in a

sample of ill children would depend on to what extent they developed positive resources. The findings of this research revealed that health-related functioning problems were associated with negative changes in life satisfaction over time. Moreover, increases in benefit finding and character strengths (i.e., love and gratitude) predicted positive changes in life satisfaction over time. Thus, the development of positive psychological resources in children experiencing high levels of stress may promote desirable psychological outcomes. Similar conclusions were replicated in a group of seriously-ill children who received a positive intervention (i.e. granting a wish) aimed at promoting positive psychological and physical changes (e.g. reduced nausea and pain; Chaves, Vazquez, & Hervas, 2016). Wish intervention significantly increased levels of positive emotions, satisfaction with life, personal strengths, and reduced rates of nausea compared with the waiting list group. Mothers in the wish group also perceived positive changes in children's benefit finding and quality of life. Importantly, improvements in well-being, love, gratitude and benefit findings have been observed also in children's parents. (Chaves, Hervas, & Vazquez, 2016)

In the field of psycho-oncology, Vazquez collaborated with the group of Prof. Christian Ochoa at the University of Barcelona, where the concept of post-traumatic growth has been investigated in cross-cultural studies (Vázquez, Pérez-Sales, & Ochoa, 2014) and in cancer patients. In these populations Casellas-Grau et al . (Casellas-Grau, Vives, Font, & Ochoa, 2016) found that positive psychological functioning (i.e., well-being, post-traumatic growth, finding benefit and meaning) could be influenced by sociodemographic, medical, and psychosocial characteristics, such as being young, undergoing chemotherapy, and having social support. The perceived impact of breast cancer on a patient, as well as the perceived support from significant others can result in better functioning in women with breast cancer. In another review article, this group of Spanish investigators examined the effects of positive interventions (i.e., mindfulness-based approaches, expression of positive emotions, spiritual

interventions, hope therapy, and meaning-making interventions) in breast cancer participants (Casellas-Grau, Font, & Vives, 2014). These specific interventions promoted positive changes in enhanced quality of life, well-being, hope, benefit finding, or optimism. Recently, these authors developed a specific psychotherapy to be applied to cancer survivors : the Positive Psychotherapy for Cancer (PPC) survivors (Ochoa, Casellas-Grau, Vives, Font, & Borràs, 2017). It aims to facilitate PTG as a way of achieving significant reductions in the symptoms of emotional distress and posttraumatic stress. The PPC group obtained significantly better results after treatment compared to a waiting list group, showing reduced distress, decreased post-traumatic symptoms, and increased PTG. The benefits were maintained at 3 and 12 months' follow-up. Even though results are preliminary, the implications are important for psycho-oncology and related disciplines.

Thus, investigators adopting a positive psychology perspective in Spain produced important advancements in the field of positive interventions with clinical populations, both involving mental illnesses (i.e., depression) or physical illnesses (cancer and other life threatening conditions). The role of resilience, well-being and PTG have been deeply investigated in these settings.

3. Future of Positive Psychology in Southern Europe

As described in the first part of the chapter, positive psychology in southern Europe may be not as diffused as in other parts of the world, as North America or Australia. However, positive psychology is actually flourishing in this region of Europe, as described by the various research presented in the previous pages. These pages are in no ways exhaustive of the full reality of researchers, practitioners and psychologists who work using a positive psychology approach in Southern European countries. In writing this chapter, the main exponents and representatives of universities or national societies of positive psychology

have been briefly described, but there are many other private practitioners, or societies and associations that are applying positive psychology methodologies for assessing and promoting well-being and personal resources in individuals, communities, and organizations in Southern Europe.

Furthermore, considering the author's background, the emphasis has been placed on general, clinical and health psychology, whereas other lines of research, such as social and community psychology, or work psychology have been scarcely described. This is a major limitation of this work, since many new applications and research in positive psychology are emerging just in these fields in many of the Southern Europe countries.

According to the literature presented here, positive psychology in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain has been applied in clinical settings, ranging from mental health, psychotherapy and counseling to medical domains such as cancer, multiple sclerosis and other chronic illnesses. Patients and caregivers in these countries derived benefits from the promotion of positive emotions, resilience and well-being during the course of their illness, whether mental or physical. These beneficial effects of evaluating and promoting positive emotions and positive functioning have been applied to different age populations, from children to adult and aging individuals. In all cases, positive psychology approach shed new lights on the experience of the illness and on individual's positive resources.

Another common line of application of positive psychology is the school/educational settings, where positive emotions, optimal experiences, and well-being have been investigated and /or promoted in children and adolescence. These applications of positive psychology in young populations entail many psychosocial implications. In fact, there is evidence that mental health problems in childhood generate additional costs in adulthood and can have largely hidden costs, such as disrupting education and the opportunity of careers

(Beesdo et al. 2009). Recent positive psychology research also showed that positive emotions in children and adolescents seem to play a crucial role (Gilbert 2012; Gillham et al. 2006, 2011; Vescovelli et al. 2014). For instance, children who report more positive emotions, tend to display better social, school, and familial functioning (Gillham et al., 2011). Positive affectivity in children was found to be associated with better cognitive development, as well with as the use of adaptive coping skills and better behavioral and emotional regulations (Gilbert, 2012). Hence, the applications of positive interventions in school and in preventive settings in Southern Europe pave the way for building future generations of Southern Europeans who will be more aware of their resources and more focused on maintaining and promoting well-being.

Another age group which has received attention in current research on positive psychology in Southern Europe is older adults. This is in line with the sociodemographic trend of longevity, which is particularly frequent in Southern Europe and in the Mediterranean area. This phenomenon will bring economic, political and social consequences, forcing governments and institutions to reorganize and implement social and health assistance. Within positive psychology research, recent studies are considering the aging process within the perspective of positive aging (Hill & Smith, 2015). Accordingly, personal well-being, self-acceptance and a sense of growth are emphasized, despite the presence of inevitable age-related decline and losses. Recent studies reported how hedonic and eudaimonic well-being are associated with better health profiles, lower morbidity and longer life-expectancy (Ryff, 2014; Steptoe, Dockray & Wardle, 2009). For instance, some researchers observed an association between higher levels of purpose in life and lower risk of Alzheimer's disease, of cognitive decline (Boyle, Buchman, Barnes & Benett, 2010), of ictus (Kim, Sun, Park & Peterson, 2013b), of myocardial infarction (Kim, Sun, Park, Kubzanskyn & Peterson, 2013a) and of mortality (Boyle, Barnes, Buchman & Bennett, 2009; Hill &

Turiano, 2014). Similarly, it was found a negative link between hedonic well-being and the risk of cardiovascular diseases and mortality (Kimm, Sull, Gombojav, Yi, & Ohrr, 2012). Considering these results, impairments of well-being may represent a risk factor for aging populations' psychological and physical health (Ryff, 2014). By an opposite mechanism, thus, the presence and promotion of well-being may represent a protective factor for aging individuals' physical and psychological health (Friedman, Ruini, Foy, Jaros, Sampson & Ryff, 2017). Hence, a specific focus on positive aging and the implementation of interventions to promote well-being in later life become essential in this part of Europe in order to help people to live a longer and happier life.

However, one of the main common obstacles to the growth of positive psychology research and intervention in Southern Europe is represented by the paucity of funding. The economic crisis that characterizes particularly this part of Europe led governments to progressively cut funding for research and interventions. In fact, when it comes to health care systems or to school/educational systems, the essential programs and services are granted, but innovations or new approaches, such as the ones endorsed by positive psychology, received scarce attention and resources. Even though the European Commission considered well-being as a core theme in the research program "Horizon 2020", many of the single contributors described in this chapter received very little economic resources from it, or from their universities. Thus, in Southern Europe positive psychology needs more funding to be devoted to the assessment, investigation, and promotion of positive functioning and well-being. Only in this way could Southern Europeans fully flourish and lead positive lives, despite their actual sociodemographic, political and economic difficulties.

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