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Assessment within the Context of Positive Psychology: Examples from Ahmet Yesevi and Hacı Bektaş-i Veli

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to elucidate the concepts associated with positive psychology found in the thoughts of Ahmet Yesevi and Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli. The research utilized the document analysis technique. According to the findings obtained at the conclusion of the study, it is evident that concepts such as patience, encouragement, gratitude, optimism, social interest, and perseverance are associated with the thoughts of Ahmet Yesevi investigated in the research. Additionally, it is observed that the concepts of optimism and perseverance are also linked to the thoughts of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli examined in the research. Consequently, it is determined that the thoughts of both Ahmet Yesevi and Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli encompass concepts that can be correlated with positive psychology within the scope of this research. This underscores the presence of themes promoting positive psychological attributes within the philosophical and spiritual perspectives of these influential figures.

Keywords: Positive psychology, Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, Ahmet Yesevi

Introduction

Concepts of Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is a scientific discipline that assists individuals in establishing a positive connection at every stage of life and enhancing their lives by providing positive life experiences and insights (Peterson, 2000). It offers a perspective where not only illness, weakness, and harm are examined but also focuses on strengths and positive qualities. Additionally, positive psychology encompasses various life domains such as work, education, insight, love, personal development, and enjoyment (Seligman, 2002).

One of the significant concepts addressed within positive psychology is "flow." Hefferon and Boniwell (2018) define flow as being fully immersed in a physical or cognitive activity moment by moment. Flow is characterized by the individual's intense focus on the task at hand, where they become so engrossed that thoughts of failure disappear, and they are unable to think about anything else outside of that task (Dietrich, 2004). Achieving flow can be considered as an important method aimed at disregarding negative thoughts and increasing positive emotions (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2018).

The concept of gratitude is also addressed within positive psychology. Emmons (2004) describes gratitude as a feeling of satisfaction and also as a phenomenon that includes a cognitive dimension. It is observed that the term gratitude is used interchangeably with thankfulness and is also considered as a positive character strength (Sari

& Yıldırım, 2017). The word gratitude, of Latin origin, is associated with concepts of kindness, generosity, the beauty of giving and receiving gifts (Emmons, 2007).

Patience is a concept frequently encountered in positive psychology. Patience is the process of acceptance, endurance, and struggle in the face of any kind of difficulty, stress, loss, or hardship. Patience, which helps individuals cope with the challenges encountered throughout life, contributes to their success and ultimately to their happiness (Dogan & Gulmez, 2014). The tendency of calmly waiting while dealing with disappointment, distress, or pain is considered as patience, a desired character strength that supports individual well-being (Harned, 1997; Schnitker, 2012).

Encouragement is one of the important concepts addressed within positive psychology. Encouragement, which involves individuals having confidence in their potential to achieve their goals, is a process supported by psychological counselors (Cheston, 2000). This process helps individuals achieve their goals by encouraging them to have confidence in their abilities.

The concept of optimism is highly important in positive psychology. Seligman (1998) challenged the view of behaviorists, who believed that individuals' behaviors are shaped solely by rewards and punishments. According to him, behaviorists ignore individuals' consciousness and argue that the only way to change is to change environmental factors. Seligman (1998) argued that individuals can develop in a positive direction by changing their thought patterns. As the opposite concept of learned helplessness, the concept of learned optimism suggests that individuals can learn not only helplessness but also optimism in the face of negative events.

Social interest refers to caring about humanity in general and not putting one's own interests first. This type of interest involves individuals focusing on the well-being of society and people by empathizing with others (Leak and Leak, 2006). Social interest is essential for both individual and societal mental health.

Perseverance refers to the determination and resilience that do not diminish even after years of failure. This characteristic is seen as the determination of individuals to achieve their goals without giving up in the face of difficulties. In short, perseverance contributes to individuals achieving positive outcomes through steadfast effort (Pappano, 2013).

Ahmet Yesevi

Ahmet Yesevi was born in the town of Sayram in Western Turkistan. It is estimated that he was born in the second half of the 11th century. It is known that he passed away in 1116 (Bice, 2016). Concepts that can be associated with positive psychology are prominent in the wisdom of Ahmet Yesevi. In this context, it is seen that examining the life and wisdom of Ahmet Yesevi in the light of positive psychology is important for both history and psychology fields.

Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî

The probable birth and death dates of Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî are determined as 1209 and 1271, respectively, and it is thought that he passed away at the age of 63 (Coşan, 2013). The fundamental basis of Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî's perspective on people lies in the philosophy of Ahmet Yesevi. His aim is to ensure that people have the will to live together with good, right, and beautiful values (Bayar & Bayar, 2016).

Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî's Understanding of Ethics

When we look at Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî's work "Makâlât," it is generally seen that he mentions some moral virtues specifically in the understanding of "four gates forty stations," especially in the gates of gnosis and truth (Bayar and Bayar 2016). According to this Yılmaz et al. (2007):

- **The Stations of the Gate of Sharia:**

1. Believe
2. Learn knowledge

3. Earn halal (lawful) income
4. Worship
5. Be beneficial to one's family
6. Do not harm the environment
7. Obey the Prophet's commands
8. Be compassionate
9. Be clean
10. Avoid useless and unnecessary tasks

• **The Stations of the Gate of Tariqat:**

1. Repent
2. Obey the advice of the guide (spiritual leader)
3. Dress cleanly
4. Fight for goodness
5. Love to serve
6. Fear injustice
7. Do not fall into despair
8. Take lessons
9. Distribute blessings
10. See oneself as poor

• **The Stations of the Gate of Truth:**

1. Be humble
2. Do not see anyone's flaws
3. Do not refrain from any good deeds
4. Love everything created by God
5. See all people as one
6. Aim for and direct towards unity
7. Do not hide the truth
8. Know the meaning
9. Learn the divine secret
10. Reach the divine existence (Unity of Being)

• **The Stations of the Gate of Knowledge (Marifat):**

1. Be courteous
2. Stay away from selfishness, malice, and resentment
3. Excessive desires
4. Patience and contentment
5. Modesty
6. Generosity
7. Knowledge
8. Tolerance
9. Know oneself
10. Wisdom

Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî's Thoughts on Education

When we examine the life and works of Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî, we see that morality, personality, and spiritual education are prioritized. His ideal human model is someone who, even if hurt, does not hurt others, and is a mature and virtuous individual. In Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî' s approach to education, we see that there is no place for limiting thoughts and conventional ideas.

Furthermore, instead of using intimidating expressions like "you will go to hell" or "you will burn in fire," Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî employs an approach that does not rely on fear and terror, but rather engages readers with stories and narratives using a fluent language that encourages them to think (Bayar & Bayar, 2016).

According to Hacı Bektaş-ı Velî, the perfect human type is, above all, a person whose inner world is free from evil. Additionally, Hacı Bektaş-ı Velî's perspective on human beings and humanity transcends all narrow and prejudiced ideas, considering loving all humans and refraining from criticizing others as prerequisites for being human (Ozturk, 1995). Another aspect emphasized by Hacı Bektaş-ı Velî is gender equality. He advocated that there is no distinction between men and women in the eyes of God, that both genders are equal, and there is no superiority between them. This perspective is affirmed by the following quatrain: "In the language of love, male and female are not asked / Everything created by God is in its rightful place / In our view, there is no difference between male and female / Deficiency and lack are in your views" (Menemencioglu, 2011).

In schools, the concept that facilitates the definition of positive psychology is positive education (Güngör, 2017). Green et al. (2011) defined positive education as the application of positive psychology in education. In the surviving works of Hacı Bektaş-ı Velî, we see that there are no restrictions on thought and no conventional ideas in his educational approach (Bayar & Bayar, 2016). While the conceptualization of positive psychology may have a recent history, the concepts of positive psychology have found their place in oral and written language since the existence of humanity. In this context, it is thought that evaluating the views of individuals who have influenced the science and thought of humanity in their eras and subsequent generations would be beneficial for positive psychology. Therefore, the aim of the research is to evaluate the thoughts of Ahmet Yesevi and Hacı Bektaş-ı Velî in terms of the discipline of positive psychology.

Method

Research Model

Qualitative research encompasses approaches that involve qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interviews, and document analysis. In this study, document analysis has been utilized. The aim of qualitative research is to examine individuals' perceptions and events in a naturalistic and comprehensive manner (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2016, p. 39). Merriam (2009) has divided document analysis into stages: (1) finding appropriate documents, (2) checking the originality of documents, (3) creating a systematic approach to coding and cataloging, and (4) analyzing data (conducting content analysis). In this study, the thoughts of Ahmet Yesevi and Hacı Bektaş-ı Velî have been examined, and the focus has been on concepts that can be associated with positive psychology. The aim of the research is to describe these concepts. Data were collected through document examination method in the data collection phase. Document examination involves analyzing written materials related to the phenomenon or phenomena under investigation (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2016).

Data Collection

In this study, data were collected through the method of document examination. Document examination is a method that involves analyzing written materials related to the subject of research (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2016). In the process of collecting data, the book "Günümüzün Aşk Yolcuna Divanı Hikmet" by Bice (2016) for discussing the positive psychology concepts of Ahmet Yesevi and the book "Makalat" by Yılmaz et al. (2007) for discussing the positive psychology concepts of Hacı Bektaş-ı Velî were used as primary sources. While examining these sources, concepts related to positive psychology were identified and evaluated.

Data Analysis

The data collected through document analysis method were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The main aim of descriptive analysis is to reach concepts and relationships that can explain the collected data. Descriptive analysis consists of four stages: creating a framework for descriptive analysis, processing data according to the thematic framework, identifying findings, and interpreting findings (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2016). In this study, information related to Ahmet Yesevi and Hacı Bektaş-ı Velî was searched, and then these sources were matched with positive psychology concepts based on their relevance. Themes were determined according to these concepts, and data were evaluated and discussed based on the appropriate positive psychology concept.

Limitations of the Research

The research is limited to the accessible written sources of Ahmet Yesevi and Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli's words and thoughts.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, the concepts classified by the researcher through descriptive analysis were presented to a subject matter expert for evaluation. In line with the opinions of the subject matter expert, certain keywords were added to the thematic frameworks. During the descriptive analysis of keywords, the common opinions of the researchers and the subject matter expert were taken into account, thus ensuring validity and reliability.

Results and Discussion

Evaluation of Ahmet Yesevi's Thoughts in terms of Positive Psychology

Gratitude

When the concept of gratitude, meaning giving thanks for what one has, is considered, it can be explained within the framework of focusing on strengths. Gratitude is also emphasized implicitly or explicitly in the wisdom of Ahmed Yesevi. For example (Bice, 2016):

"I swallowed blood, said 'God,' He showed mercy; He took my sorrow, saying, 'Don't let him stay in hell'; I became happy and went underground; This is how I came after hitting the stone."

In another example;

"What comes, you must see it from God; They separated his Yusuf from that Kenan; I came from that blessed Turkestan where I was born; I came after beating the stone."

Patience

Patience is considered one of the essential traits of a strong personality in positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The concept of patience is also emphasized in the wisdom of Ahmed Yesevi. For example (Bice, 2016):

"The one who forgives, he who helps the poor; He who knows the grace, he who does not feel sad; It is, he who does not get angry, he who does not envy; They are patient, and their virtue is high."

In another example;

"Don't blame me for being patient; It is my habit to be patient and to persevere; My heart is a lion, my love is Yusuf; I don't eat his teeth, I die."

Encouragement

Encouragement, the practice of inspiring and uplifting others, is an essential aspect of positive psychology (Seligman, 2002). In the teachings of Ahmed Yesevi, encouragement is often highlighted. For instance (Bice, 2016):

"Whoever claims to be righteous, to be a believer;
Should harbor no anger, harbor no malice;
To forgive, to do good to those who do wrong;
This is true greatness, this is the mark of the noble."

In another instance;

"If you seek the path of faith, how do you tread?
How do you ascend the mountain the Prophet once led?"

If unsure, then seek; May God grant you grace,
To embody forgiveness, and walk in noble embrace."

Optimism

A pessimistic outlook, perceiving negative events as generally permanent and pervasive, negatively affects individuals' life satisfaction, while an optimistic outlook or learned optimism perceives negative events as generally temporary and specific, and positive events as permanent and pervasive, positively impacting life satisfaction (Szczesniak & Soares, 2011). In the wisdom of Ahmed Yesevi, evil is associated with hell while goodness is associated with heaven. It is evident that optimism is closely related to the tendency to focus on the positive, a concept frequently addressed in positive psychology.

Social Interest

When examining the wisdom of Ahmed Yesevi, it is observed that he focused on the well-being of society. In this regard, Ahmed Yesevi and his teachings are directly relevant to the domain of social interest in positive psychology. Indeed, when explaining Islam to the newly converted community or imparting Sufi etiquette and guidance to his disciples, he acted with a social consciousness devoid of selfishness. An example of this can be seen in the following excerpt (Bice, 2016):

"Oh friends, in the path, I saw the market; I found my earnings and set up shop there; My heedless heart awakened there on its own, If pleased, I would endure night and day in love."

Another example of his abandonment of self-interest for social concern is evident in his addressing those who would receive spiritual guidance through his wisdom:

"In the fields of eternity, I shall guide them; If troubled, I shall be their remedy."

Social interest entails a concern for humanity in general and putting one's own interests aside. This type of interest involves focusing on the well-being of society and individuals through empathy (Leak & Leak, 2006). It contributes to an individual's belief in their own success, thus aiding in their motivation (Kandemir, 2015). Social interest is indispensable in positive psychology for both individual and societal well-being. In the wisdom of Ahmed Yesevi, there is a concept of "we" rather than "I". Social interest is evident in the following lines from Ahmed Yesevi's wisdom (Bice, 2016):

"I took pearls from the sea of truth, I served the perfect guide perfectly, I released those who strayed from the path, I became a leader for those followers."

"The perfect guide from Hemedan, The cherished abode of the inner and outer saints, The source of light within and without, At the age of seven, I received a share from the guide."

"If I were to utter their names, my tongue would burn, The word of the perfect guide is my condition, Both the guide and the guidance of soul and tongue, I remained separate from the guide in this way."

Perseverance

Perseverance refers to the determination to overcome difficulties and the unwavering interest and determination that persists despite years of failure (Pappano, 2013). In the field of positive psychology, concepts such as perseverance and determination are emphasized. Accordingly, if an individual possesses these qualities, they are closer to realizing their potential. Ahmed Yesevi valued the concept of perseverance and being perseverant in his teachings. In the etiquette of the Sufi order, both disciples and spiritual guides are obligated to wake up early in the morning and perform their prayers with a certain principle, while also fulfilling their worldly duties. In doing so, their sole aim is to become beloved servants of God. It is stated that only through perseverance can the disciple and spiritual guide achieve the mentioned goal, as expressed in the following lines (Bice, 2016):

"The disciple and spiritual guide will achieve the mentioned goal only through perseverance; They will rise with tears and walk, They will fear God and express their plea at dawn."

Evaluation of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli's Thoughts in terms of Positive Psychology

Optimism and Perseverance

In line with the optimistic perspective of positive psychology, it can be observed that the ideal human model defined by Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, which emphasizes qualities such as humility, being free from demonic attributes, being at peace with society, and being good, righteous, and beautiful, parallels the principles of positive psychology. Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli considered loving all people and refraining from blaming others as prerequisites for being human (Ozturk, 1995). Positive psychology argues that focusing on individuals' positive traits will enhance their quality of life and develop their potential (Gungor, 2017). In Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli's educational approach, there are no punitive reinforcements directed towards negative situations such as "you will go to hell" or "you will burn in fire". According to Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli's view of the perfect human, the truly uninjured person is the one who is not hurt, even if they are physically hurt (Bayar & Bayar, 2016).

In relation to Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli's moral understanding, it is observed that a variety of moral virtues are mentioned in all forty stations of the "four gates forty stations" understanding, especially in the stations of marifat (knowledge) and hakikat (truth) (Bayar & Bayar, 2016). Accordingly, being humble, not seeing anyone's faults, not withholding any good deeds you can do, loving everything God has created, seeing all people as one, directing towards unity, being courteous, being free from selfishness, enmity, and resentment, practicing moderation (limiting excessive desires), patience and contentment, generosity, tolerance, self-knowledge (Yılmaz et al.,2007) are directly related to positive psychology. The station of moderation (limiting excessive desires) can be associated with the concept of flow in positive psychology. In the concept of flow, there needs to be a balance between competence and challenge in an individual's life for continuity to exist. When an individual faces situations that are either too easy or too difficult for their competence level, an imbalance occurs. Therefore, the concept of moderation (limiting excessive desires) is important for the existence of balance.

Conclusion

In this study, the thoughts of Ahmet Yesevi and Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli were evaluated in terms of positive psychology. As a result of the research, it was determined that both Ahmet Yesevi and Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli emphasized concepts such as gratitude, patience, forgiveness, love, and compassion in their wisdom. These concepts are among the main components of positive psychology. Therefore, it can be said that the thoughts of Ahmet Yesevi and Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli have significant contributions to positive psychology. The evaluation of the wisdom of Ahmet Yesevi and Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli in terms of positive psychology can shed light on both psychology and philosophy. Positive psychology can benefit from the thoughts of these two thinkers, who have played a significant role in the development of Turkish-Islamic culture and thought.

Scientific Ethics Declaration

The authors declare that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS journal belongs to the authors.

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