The understanding of ‘happiness’ and ‘meaning of life’
in the concept of human nature
of Germans and Peruvians.
An empirical cross-cultural comparison

Inaugural-Dissertation
zur Erlangung des Grades eines Doktors der Philosophie
am Fachbereich für Erziehungswissenschaft und Psychologie
der Freien Universität Berlin

eingereicht von
Judith Bäßler

Berlin, April 2001

Gutachter:
Prof. Dr. Ralf Schwarzer, Freie Universität Berlin
Prof. Dr. Rolf Oerter, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Rolf Oerter and Prof. Dr. Ralf Schwarzer for supervising this thesis. I am especially grateful to Dr. Britta Renner and Tony Arthur for the invaluable support they provided. I also want to thank all the participants and colleagues in Germany and Peru who invested a lot of time and effort in making this investigation possible.
## Contents

1. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1

2. Theoretical part ..................................................................................................................... 3

   2.1 The Concept of Human Nature ....................................................................................... 3
   2.1.1 Social representations ............................................................................................... 3
   2.1.1.1 A brief history of social representations ............................................................... 3

   2.2 Individualism and Collectivism ...................................................................................... 5
   2.2.1 Different Research Approaches on the Concept of Human Nature ......................... 7
   2.2.1.1 Sociological concepts .......................................................................................... 8
   2.2.1.2 Psychological concepts ....................................................................................... 8
     2.2.1.2.1 Montada’s typology of theories of personality ............................................... 9
     2.2.1.2.2 Anthropological basis of transactional personality theories ....................... 16

   2.3 The concept of human nature in cross-cultural research .............................................. 20
   2.3.1 The independent and the interdependent self .............................................................. 20
   2.3.1.1 The independent view of the self ....................................................................... 22
   2.3.1.2 The interdependent view of the self ................................................................... 23

   2.4 The search for meaning and the pursuit of happiness ................................................... 34
   2.4.1 What are people’s meanings in life? ......................................................................... 39
   2.4.2 What makes people happy? ...................................................................................... 42
   2.4.3 How are meaning and happiness connected? ............................................................ 52
   2.4.4 Schulz-Hardt and Frey’s theses of meaning .............................................................. 53
   2.4.5 Baumeister’s distinction of four basic needs for meaning ....................................... 54
   2.4.6 Baumeister’s empirical studies of personal narratives ........................................... 55
   2.4.7 Personal goals as one of the main sources for meaning .......................................... 58
   2.4.8 Psychological assessment of meaning in life ............................................................. 61
   2.4.8.1 Implicit theories of a meaningful life ................................................................... 62
   2.4.8.2 Measuring depth of meaning .............................................................................. 67

   2.5 Culture ............................................................................................................................ 68
   2.5.1 Cross-cultural research .............................................................................................. 69
   2.5.1.1 Classification of cross-cultural studies .................................................................. 69
   2.5.1.2 Basic problems in cross-cultural psychology ....................................................... 72
     2.5.1.2.1 The universalistic position .......................................................................... 72
     2.5.1.2.2 The contextualist position ........................................................................... 73
     2.5.1.2.3 The integrationist position ............................................................................ 78

   2.6 Peru ................................................................................................................................ 80
   2.6.1 Brief description of the Peruvian culture ................................................................... 80
   2.6.2 Peru’s people .............................................................................................................. 84
   2.6.3 Peru’s indigenous people ........................................................................................... 85

3. Methodological part .............................................................................................................. 87

   3.1. Objectives of the study .................................................................................................. 87

   3.2 Samples ........................................................................................................................... 87
   3.2.1 Germany ...................................................................................................................... 87
   3.2.2 Peru ............................................................................................................................. 88
     3.2.2.1 Peruvian students ............................................................................................... 88
     3.2.2.2 Peruvian night-school students ........................................................................ 89
     3.2.2.3 Peruvian immigrants ......................................................................................... 89
     3.2.2.4 Peruvian Highland Indians .............................................................................. 90
5.3.2 Question 2: Happiness
5.3.2.1 Happiness by German students
5.3.2.3 Happiness by German non-students
5.3.2.4 Happiness by Peruvian students
5.3.2.5 Happiness by Peruvian immigrants
5.3.2.6 Happiness by Peruvian Indians
5.3.2.7 Summary of the results concerning happiness
5.3.2.8 Conclusion

5.4 Testing Hypothesis 3

5.5 Testing Hypothesis 4

6. Discussion

6.1 Concept of human nature
6.1.1 Ideal concept
6.1.2 Real concept
6.1.3 Change
6.1.4 Categories
6.1.5 Closer examination of the results of the Highland Indians

6.2 Meaning in life

6.3 Happiness

6.4 Interconnectedness of meaning and happiness

6.5 Individualism and collectivism

6.6 Oerter’s stage model

6.7 Cross-cultural research

6.8 Conclusions

7. References

8. Deutsche Zusammenfassung

8.1 Hypothesen

8.2 Stichprobe

8.3 Ergebnisse
8.3.1 Hypothese 1
8.3.2 Hypothese 2
8.3.3 Hypothese 3
8.3.4 Hypothese 4

Appendix A

Appendix B
Professional Career

1967    born in Berlin
1981    moved with family to Lima, Peru
1986    ‘Abitur’ at the Peruvian-German Alexander von Humboldt School in Lima
1987    returned to Germany to study Psychology
1990    awarded my ‘Vordiplom’ in Psychology at the Institute of Psychology at the Free University of Berlin
1990-1994 taught German and Spanish as foreign languages
1992    worked for six months in the fields of prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation with victims of sexual abuse at the ‘Ser y Crecer’ Foundation in San José, Costa Rica
1992-1994 worked as a research assistant in the Department of Educational Psychology and Health Psychology at the Free University of Berlin under Prof. Dr. Ralf Schwarzer
1993-1994 worked on a research project at the Berlin Scientific Centre for Social Research, investigating methods of communication in Environmental Studies under the direction of Dr. Hans-Joachim Fietkau and Dr. Helmut Weidner
1994    awarded my diploma in Psychology at the Free University of Berlin

*Title of thesis:* "Evaluating psychometric scales for measuring general and specific perceived self-efficacy in a cross-cultural research project"

1995-1999 worked as a member of the evaluation team for a governmental pilot study entitled "Self-Efficacious Schools in Germany" under the direction of Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Edelstein and Prof. Dr. Bernhard Brackhahn. *Responsibilities:* data collection and analysis, monitoring the pilot study, training teachers, counselling and assisting at the internal evaluation of the participating schools, developing evaluation tools for the study

1996-1999 worked on a project entitled ‘The concept of human nature in Peru’, funded by the German Research Association, in the Department of Developmental Psychology and Educational Psychology at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich, under Prof. Dr. Rolf Oerter. *Responsibilities:* data collection, data analysis, and co-ordination of the study in Peru and Germany

1996-2000 working as a junior lecturer at the Institute for Education at Potsdam University under Prof. Dr. Diether Hopf. *Responsibilities:* teaching and research in Educational Psychology

since 2000 working as a psychologist in the further vocational training of teachers and doctors (e.g. giving talks at the Academy of Social Medicine in Berlin)

since 2000 project evaluator for the Ministry of Economic Co-operation and Development in Bonn

May 2000 co-directing the seminar: ‘Council of Europe In-Service Training Program for Educational Staff European Seminar № 87 “What makes children strong” at the ‘Staatliche Akademie für Lehrerfortbildung Donaueschingen [Governmental Academy for teacher training in Donaueschingen]’, together with Karlo Hafner, Blaustein

August 2000 moved to Southampton to write my doctoral thesis in Developmental and Cross-Cultural Psychology

April 2001 handed in my doctoral thesis at the Free University of Berlin

Title of thesis: "The understanding of ‘happiness’ and ‘meaning of life’ in the concept of human nature of Germans and Peruvians. An empirical cross-cultural comparison"

Research Interests

Developmental Psychology
Health Psychology
Educational Psychology
Cross-cultural research
Prevention of sexual abuse

Future Projects

March 2002 co-directing seminars about social learning theories (target group: school directors and teachers in South Germany)

July 2002 directing seminars for the Council of Europe about prevention and intervention of the burnout syndrome (target group: school directors and teachers from 12 European countries)

Languages

Fluent in German and Spanish
Virtually fluent in English
Functional knowledge of French
Basic knowledge of Italian and Portuguese