# QUEER FEMINIST APPROACHES TO WELL-BEING

Practical Information Notes of Political Well-being

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# Content

# A

# Introduction

From Aristotle to today, answers have been sought to the questions of what happiness is, how do we feel good, how does one get satisfaction and fulfillment from life, what does well-being depend on, but "well-being" was first defined by Halbert Dunn in 1961 in his book High Level Wellness. Especially with the Covid-19 pandemic, we see that this issue has become mainstream worldwide and concepts such as well-being, resilience, self-care, coping skills, etc. have become more common in everyday language.

Besides the prominence of intensive subjective well-being, well-being is also a psych political issue. Lacan said that *happiness is a political issue* and Foucault said that *the study of happiness and health is related to the political management of life*.(1) While scientific and non-scientific methods continue to seek answers to questions about well-being, in this paper we will try to re-examine well-being through the debates raised by feminist and queer movements.(2)

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**1)** Wright, C. (2013). age.
**2)** For viewing at practical information notes within the scope of the study of Well-being, Please see. https://politikadaiyilikhali.org/tr_tr/politik-iyilik-haliniz-icin-pratik-bilgiler/

# B

# Well-being

In 1948, the World Health Organization brought the concepts of health and *well-being* together. It defined the concept of health not only as the absence of disease but also as a state of holistic physical, mental and social well-being(3) ve According to the current definition of the World Health Organization, *well-being is the state in which people can cope with the stress of life, fulfill their potential, learn, produce, and contribute to their communities.* (4)

Well-being has been addressed not only in psychology, but also in sociology, anthropology, economics, and politics. Well-being has been defined as physical, economic, social, developmental, emotional, and mental well-being. Well-being studies were previously defined as happiness studies. Especially in the context of welfare, happiness and quality of life indices have emerged as monitoring tools (for examples, see the World Health Organization's Quality of Life (5) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's [OECD](6) Better Life Index).  When the relationship between income and happiness began to be researched, indices of social and quality of life were added to the monitoring so that the economy would not be the sole determinant; it was demonstrated that well-being could not be limited to happiness and life satisfaction criteria. Thus, happiness became a state that could be *measured, counted, rationalized, and allocated. (7)*

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**3)** World Health Organisation Constitution of WHO: principles.
**https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution** is accessible on 19.08.2023.
**4)** Bkz. WHO (2022). Mental Health. **https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response** .  is accessible on 19.08.2023.
**5)** Bkz. **https://www.who.int/tools/whoqol** . is accessible on 19.08.2023.
**6)** Bkz. **https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/#/11111111111** . is accessible on 19.08.2023.
**7)** Wright, C. (2014). Happiness studies and wellbeing: A Lacanian critique of contemporary conceptualisations of the cure. Culture Unbound. Volume 6, ss 794. Hosted by Linköping University Electronic Press: **http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se**

Methods of collecting data on well-being have been criticized for being neoliberal and heteronormative, due to the reasons such as the acceptance of high-income levels and the association of marriage with happiness as the norm when monitoring quality of life. (8) Nowadays, we see that variables such as gender, age and social/collective well-being have started to be added to the monitoring studies in the indices. When we look at the data published with the indicators monitored through these indices in recent years, we see that while Turkey had a score of 4.9 in the 0-10 range according to the Better Life 2020 index of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (9) (OECD average is 6.7);  it has a score of 4.6 according to the 2023 World Happiness Report. (10)

Psychology simultaneously continued to ask the question "What is happiness?" while trying to understand and measure well-being and developed the alternative question "What is a meaningful life?". In trying to define and measure well-being, it has brought along the following questions: Is happiness positive thinking? Is it satisfaction with life? Is it realizing your potential? Is it fulfilling your functions? Is it finding meaning in life? Is it taking pleasure in life? Is it purely subjective and individual or purely social and collective?  In 1988, with the emergence of Positive Psychology, positive thinking became the norm regarding well-being. The systematic evaluation conducted by Zyl, Gaffaney, Bryan and Doladson (2023)(11)  criticized the positive psychology approach as having a neoliberal tendency with claims that happiness is an individual initiative with life choices; ignoring context, social structures, sociocultural norms, socioeconomic classes and that how to be happy is marketed to individuals (remember the market of happiness and mental capital in cost-benefit calculations). (12)

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**8)** Wright, C. (2013). Against Flourishing: Wellbeing as bio-politics and psychoanalytic alternative. Health, Culture and Society. Volume 5, No. 1, ss 24. DOI:10.5195/hcs.2013.151
**9)** Bkz. **https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/turkiye/** . is accessible on 19.08.2023.
**10)** Bkz. **https://worldhappiness.report/data/**  is accessible on 19.08.2023.
**11)**  Llewellyn E. van Zyl, Jaclyn Gaffaney, Leoni van der Vaart, Bryan J. Dik & Stewart I Donaldson (2023) The critiques and criticisms of positive psychology: A systematic review. The Journal of Positive Psychology, ss 25. DOI: 10.1080/17439760.2023.2178956
**12)** People's mental capital, including cognitive and emotional resources, learning and social skills, and resilience.

*""If religion is the opium of the masses, as Marx said in the 19th century, positive thinking is probably the Prozac of the 21st century neoliberal individual."(13)*

This dominant approach presented well-being by detaching it from its context. The positive psychology approach, which bases well-being on a neutral individual and argues that happiness is the "power of the mind", has been criticized both for its deficiencies in scientific method and theoretical framework and for detaching happiness from its context. It has also been criticized for reinforcing gender stereotypes by emphasizing positive gender characteristics. In contrast with this approach, well-being has been redefined, acknowledging that it is socially and culturally structured in a particular time and place. Consequently, the concept of *Relational Well-being* emerged, which focuses on the interaction of personal (internal processes, personal history, identity, etc.), social (sociopolitical/cultural structures, economic conditions) and environmental (relations with the planet beyond human control) processes, as well as collective and interpersonal relationships, rather than purely individual characteristics. (14) As a result, in contrast to the industry's efforts to exclude the voice of the individual's spirituality with the goal of standardization, relational well-being tries to hear this voice; it interprets well-being as a process rather than a state to be achieved. (15) It underlines power relations in *collective well-being.*

**13)** Wright, C. (2016). Age. ss 795
**14)** White, Sarah C. (2015) : Relational wellbeing: A theoretical and operational approach, Bath Papers in International Development and Wellbeing, No. 43, University of Bath, Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Bath, ss10. **http://www.bath.ac.uk/cds/publications/bpd43.pdf** is accessible on 19.08.2023.
**15)** White, Sarah C. (2015). age. ss10
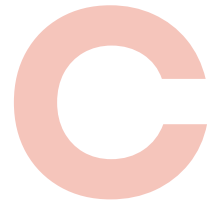
# Queer Feminist Approaches

Gender inequality, discrimination and violence based on gender and sexual orientation, socio-economic disadvantages, marginalization, isolation, disproportionate care responsibilities are gender-specific factors that negatively affect well-being. In addition, gender also intersects with class, age, geographical region, ethnicity and so on, creating power asymmetries. As a dynamic system, power dynamics can be viewed as the more or less visible forms of power, exercising power, establishing authority, inconsistent power, and retaining power in interpersonal relationships(16).  In addition, oppression and discrimination such as sexism, homophobia and transphobia and the macro and micro tensions they create are detrimental to mental health. Starting from the 1960s, feminist psychologists have begun to develop feminist psychotherapy methods based on the experiences of women and LGBTI+ people through the practices, debates and methods of feminist and queer struggles. Mentioning some of their principles at this point may be useful for understanding the individual, social and political foundations of *well-being:*

- The heteropatriarchal system shapes the individual and reality; it disempowers women and LGBTI+ people and men who want to build a life outside these norms.
- The female and LGBTI+ perspective is valuable: "*Why is information collected by men for men?*" It is important to include the perspectives, knowledge and experiences of women and LGBTI+ people to achieve equality.(17)
- The personal is political (18) КProblems that are personal (violence, labor and body, etc.) are also political and cannot be solved by purely personal solutions. It is important to see social/cultural/societal dynamics and conflicts in personal problems(19)

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16) Bache, I and Scott, К, (2017) Politics and Wellbeing, CWiPP Working Paper No.10 Centre for Wellbeing in Public Policy, University of Sheffield. ss 8.
17) Note: It shouldn't be deduced from that sentences as "The perspective of men is worthless"
18) It is considered that this was inspired from the book "Sociological Imagination"  written by Wright Mills in 1959
19) Brodsky, A.M. (1973). The consciousness-raising group as a model for therapy with women.
Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice, 10, 24-29. **https://doi.org/10.1037/h0087537**

- Individual and social identities are interconnected: Assigned sex and assigned gender roles can affect a person's identity from birth in various ways, and gender should not be considered separately from identities such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and class.

- Individual empowerment and social transformation are important goals: The symptom may emerge as a reaction to oppression or as a survival strategy; therefore, one's struggle for social change against heteropatriarchal oppression, one's external struggle against oppression, may also be therapeutic in terms of the internal oppression experienced by the person[20].

- Mental health is discussed considering structures along with the individual matters and the symptom is framed biopsychosocially: The biopsychosocial framework is a model that holistically assesses the interactions of biological (e.g. genetic predisposition or neurological variation), psychological (e.g. emotions or insight) and social (e.g. sociocultural or socioeconomic conditions) aspects of a person's health and well-being. In addition, "the personal is political" emphasizes that the symptom is an attempt to cope with negative circumstances, underlining that it affects survival mechanisms; it provides information about one's circumstances and strengths. The feminist perspective can interpret symptoms as coping with oppression, as a survival strategy, as role conflicts, as the consequences of being labeled for being outside the role/norm, as a way of communicating the experience. [21]

- Power and control dynamics cannot be dealt with independently of class and gender: Power is historically and structurally unequally distributed across gender identities and orientations, classes and identities.

On the ground of these principles, we see the traces of two fundamental concepts that structure *well-being* from a feminist perspective. The first of these is relationality, which we have also discussed under the heading of Well-being, and the other is self-understanding and self-respect. The main goal for *well-being* is to survive by being liberated from oppression and domination[22] It is relational because *well-being* is not independent from sociopolitical and cultural structures, power relations and the invisible labor that these relations entail, and can be collectively constructed. Purely individualist approaches obscure the weight and specificity of oppressive structures on queers, the poor, children, Gypsies, etc. by trivializing experiences.[23]

**20)** Ernst, C. Z. (2002). Feminist psychotherapy. *Encyclopedia of Psychotherapies,* Volume 1, 801-808. Academic Press.
**21)** Evans, K. M., Kincade, E. A., Marbley, A. F., & Seem, S. R. (2005). Feminism and feminist therapy: Lessons from the past and hopes for the future. Journal of Counseling & Development, 83(3), 269-277.
**22)** Knowles, C. (2018). Feminist perspectives on wellbeing. Handbook of Wellbeing, ss 68-75. Routledge College
**23)** Baritta, M. A. ve Wong-Padoongpatt, G. (2021). Resilience and Queer People. Encyclopedia of Queer Studies in Education (pp.600-605).

However, oppression can not only be external and social, but also internalized. For example, patriarchal norms and beliefs can create psychological colonies(24), especially conflicting norms brought about by gender inequality can dominate women's lives and make women feel guilty.(25) Societies shaped around capitalist interests can promote the perception among the poor that poverty is caused by their own incompetence and laziness. Therefore, building self-respect is at the very core of *well-being;* and self-understanding helps in thinking of the self as subjective and valuable and deserving of respect in the face of oppression and domination.(26) A 2015 study published by Tesla (27) found that queer people who are proud of their identity tend to see the impact of oppressive conditions as less of a problem than queer people who are less proud. . According to the study conducted by Haymana and Kolburan (2015), *as women's adoption of egalitarian gender roles increases, their psychological well-being increases in various dimensions; and as their adoption of traditional gender roles increases, their psychological well-being decreases.(28)* . In addition, Saunders and Kashubeck-West's 2006 study found that the development of feminist identity is also related to psychological well-being. (29) The queer feminist approach also breaks the dichotomy of individual and collective well-being. Although the queerfeminist approach emerges from the struggles and experiences of women and LGBTI+ people, it also supports the well-being of cishet men in the face of heteropatriarchal gender norms with the discussions and methods it has put forward. Indeed, according to the World Health Organization (2023), gender norms also affect men's well-being negatively. Some forms of being a man can result in men taking more risks or not seeking support when they need it, and can lead to gender-based violence, which also affects the well-being of women and LGBTI+ people (30)

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**24)** Brown, L. S. (2018). Introduction: Feminist therapy—Not for cisgender women only. In L. S. Brown, Feminist therapy (pp. 3–10). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/0000092-001
**25)** Holroyd, J. (2016). Feminism and wellbeing. Handbook of Philosophy of Wellbeing, ss 463-476. Routledge College
**26)** Knowles, C. (2018). age.
**27)** Testa, R. J., Habarth, J., Peta, J., Balsam, K., & Bockting, W. (2015). Development of the gender minority stress and resilience measure. Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, 2(1), 65–77. https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000081
**28)** Haymana, P ve Kolburan G. Ş. (2019). Kadınların İyilik Halinin Algılanan Toplumsal Cinsiyet Rolleriyle İlişkisi. Aydın Toplum ve İnsan Dergisi Year 5 Issue 1 - April 2019 (29-53).
**29)** Saunders, K. J., & Kashubeck-West, S. (2006). The Relations Among Feminist Identity Development, Gender-Role Orientation, and Psychological Well-Being in Women. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 30(2), 199–211. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2006.002
**30)** Dünya Sağlık Örgütü, Gender Overview. **https://www.who.int/europe/health-topics/gender#tab=tab_1** 19.98.2023 tarihinde erişilebilir. 82.x

# D

# Individual and Collective Well-Being

> *"The citizens have become consumers. Their freedom is replaced by passivity. Voters as consumers today show no real interest in politics, in taking an active role in shaping society. They have neither the will nor the ability to engage in collective political action. They react to politics only passively, grumbling and complaining, just as they do to goods and services they don't like. Politicians and parties behave according to this mentality of consumption. They have to "supply". They thus become suppliers who must satisfy the voter as a consumer."*
>
> **Byung-Chul Han, Psychopolitics, Back cover introductory text**

Based on Byung-Chul Han's assessment, we would like to take a queer feminist approach to strengthen our self-esteem for *individual well-being*, to understand ourselves, and to encourage us to take initiatives to support our relationships for collective well-being. In this section, instead of using quick-fix phrases such as "if you do this and do that.." (without denying that some quick-fixes are life-saving), we would like to raise some questions to deepen both our individual and collective well-being process. You can diversify these questions in terms of your individual, social and organizational relationships:

- **What do I see about gender, class and identity when I look at my personal values, family dynamics, cultural background today or in the past?**

- **Do I experience internal oppression due to assigned gender?**

- **Do I catch sexist, homophobic/transphobic sentences in my inner voice?**

- **Do I try to cope with a challenging situation by adapting to gender norms and roles?**

- **How do I remember my past experience of oppression or violence today and how did I cope with it?**

- **Do I have my own care plan?**

- **Do the methods I use empower me? What are the methods that empower me?**

- **At what points do gender norms and class conditions make my life difficult? How and from whom can I ask for support on this issue? How and to whom can I offer support on this issue? What kind of political struggle can I wage on this issue?**

- **Where do I feel physically and psychologically safe?**

- **With whom can I share my care responsibilities if I have them?**

- **Is it challenging for me to try to be resilient?**

- **How does the distribution of power work in our group? Is the use of power transparent and shared?**

- **How do decision-making and representation processes work? How is the division of labor determined in our group? How do we include invisible labor?**

- **Can we talk about our privileges or advantages in our group? What statements do we hear in the group about gender, identity, class, belief, etc.?**

- **Are we able to see both the strengths and vulnerabilities of ourselves and others in our group?**

- **How does feedback work in our group, does it become a form of learning for us?**

- **Are we afraid of making mistakes in our group, and if we do, how are they handled?**

- **Are we open to criticism and suggestions about our mistakes? Do we take a restorative initiative to solve the problem?**

- **If there is an opinion contrary to the prevailing view in our group, can it be shared? How are opposing views handled?**

- **Do various identities and experiences find a place in our group?**

- **Is there room and a mechanism for criticism in our group? How do self-criticism processes work? How do we handle any negative situation (internal or external)?**

- **How do we support each other's self-care? What are our collective care practices in our group? How would we describe our process towards Collective Well-being? (31)(32)(33)**



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**31)** For example, you may kindly access the article about how "Frida Genç Feminist Fonu " supports and implements self-care, collaboratively written by them **https://youngfeministfund.org/solidarity-storms/self-care/#** is accessible on 19.08.2023.
**32)** Moreover, you may kindly view Consumed Activists Club Gatherings and Resting Festival (restfest) held by TQPoC Mental Health that was established in 2015: https://restforresistance.com/about is accessible on 19.08.2023 .
**33)** Regarding preventative activities in the scale of organization, you may kindly view the guide which was prepared by feminist women health- Victoria in Australia **https://whise.org.au/assets/docs/whise_info/Mental-Health-Theory-of-Change-.pdf** is accessible on 19.08.2023 .

# E

# Conclusion

It is possible to say that well-being started to be studied in Turkey in the 1990s in medicine and in the 2000s in psychology. In the years 2000-2010, studies progressed within the framework of the well-being of students, young people and employees. We estimate that the first discussion on well-being that intersected with the feminist movement in Turkey was at the AWID forum held in Istanbul in 2012.(34)

Feminist and queer movements in Turkey and around the world are carrying out a wide range of empowerment and healing practices. Meetings to raise awareness, publishing, experience sharing, peer groups, sharing groups, counseling and solidarity hotlines, efforts to create safe spaces and methods, correspondence, parties, solidarity nights, events, discussions continue to shape the work in this field; because for women and LGBTI+s, queer feminist well-being started to be addressed as a matter of survival long before it was named. Queer feminist well-being has long been practiced through methods such as eliminating the individual-collective dichotomy (e.g. counseling and solidarity lines), building collective well-being (e.g. creating safe spaces); understanding well-being (e.g. peer groups), self-respect (e.g. sharing groups) and self-understanding (e.g. meetings that raise awareness and experience sharing) as a process; talking and building relationality (e.g. events and discussions) and discussing power dynamics (e.g. methodology).

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**34)** AWID(2012). Wellness and Self-Care, **https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/wellness-self-care-and-security-why-important-feminism** is accessible on 19.08.2023.

*(Kaktüs Dergisi, Sayı 2, 1988)*
*(35)*

## 📚 READING RECOMMONDATIONS*

- **Sustainable Development Solutions Network, World Happiness Report 2023:** https://resources.unsdsn.org/world-happiness-report-2023

- **Kadın ve Kadın Ruh Sağlığı:** https://tpdyayin.psikiyatri.org.tr/Book.aspx?book=2

- **Kadın Olmak: Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitsizlikleri ve Ruh Sağlığı:** https://www.nobelyayin.com/kitap_19444.html

- **Lubunyalar için Dayanıklılık Geliştirme Rehberi:** https://guclenmepratikleri.noblogs.org/files/2020/11/lubunyalar_icin_dayaniklilik_gelistirme_rehberi_ebook.pd

- **Örgütsel Esenlik El Kitabı:** http://www.siddetsizlikmerkezi.org/orgutsel-esenlik-el-kitabi/6050

- **Örgütsel Dayanıklılık El Kitabı:** http://www.siddetsizlikmerkezi.org/orgutsel-dayaniklilik-el-kitabi/8053

- **Dare to Care Self Care and Collective Care Trainings** https://svri.thinkific.com/courses/dare-to-care

- **OECD Better Life Index:** https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/

RECOMMOADAATIONS

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**35) It is the image of the article published in the Kaktüs magazine with the title "Is Agaoraphobia a woman's strategy?"**
**\*The recommodations mostly includeTurkish resources**

## PODCAST RECOMMADATIONS*

**Cinsel Şiddetle Mücadele Derneği yayınları:**
https://cinselsiddetlemucadele.org/podcastler/

**Ruh Sağlığı ve Ruhsal İyilik Halini Küresel Bir Öncelik Haline Getirelim, Doç. Dr. İrem Ertekçi Ekmek:**
https://open.spotify.com/episode/5urqsjX3y3o9ghEyOdvmK0?si=a5add0144dbb4d0b

## RECOMMONDATION FOR MOBILE APPLICATION

**The LGBTQIA+ Mental Health App**
https://www.voda.co/

## WATCHING RECOMMONDATION*

**Mutluluk Zorlantısı, Ömer Aygün:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jS813qsgzXQ

**\*The recommodations include Turkish resources**

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