

* **Book review**

“Practical Health Knowledge. The Systems of Healthiness in Daily Life” discusses the concepts of healthiness and well-being, revealing their social and cultural contingencies.

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Saber Prático de Saúde. As lógicas do Saudável no Quotidiano,

by Luísa Ferreira da Silva, Porto, Afrontamento Editions, 2008

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The author, Luísa Ferreira da Silva, a sociologist whose research is focused on the health and illness field, attempts to question health and well-being experiences using the study described in this book. In this study, she proposes the analysis and interpretation of lay knowledge and daily practices related to health and well-being using an extensive approach based on qualitative methodologies. The in-depth interviews performed within a diversified and non-representative population sample from northern Portugal allow for the presentation of new information, reflections, and interpretations as sociological knowledge that would be difficult to obtain using other methods.

The sociological approaches used in this field of study, initially known as “medical sociology” and later as “the sociology of health and illness,” have a long historical trajectory that is described in this book, which heavily references the principal work produced in this field. This study delineates the sociology of health and illness and posits a challenge for the health sciences (i.e., medicine and its professions) and the social sciences themselves. It advocates for the creation of spaces for dialogue and the interconnection of perspectives, allowing for further development of knowledge related to the realities that are affected and reflected.

The concerns the social sciences address regarding health and illness in addition to social and

individual well-being reveal one of the classic debates of sociology regarding the structure vs. agency dichotomy: To what extent is health determined by structures? To what extent can people control their own health? On the one hand, these preoccupations are related to the importance of cultural, social, and economic structures in determining the health possibilities for people's lives. However, these preoccupations are also related to the extent to which people, through their individual or collective actions, may have some type of control over their own health. Indeed, social sciences have produced perceptions and interpretations in this field that reveal the importance of the contexts (not only structural or institutional but also relational) in which these phenomena are lived and experienced and the universe of representations that the actors create or act out.

In terms of the contradictory messages dominating the paradigm of health and wellness, this sociological study used interviews and inquiries to demonstrate different ways of expressing health (i.e., the concept, daily practices, and healthy behaviors) in relation to the socioeconomic factors associated with it. This study follows the comprehension of the incorporation of dominant normative discourses on healthiness and lay practices, directing the research towards the observation of daily practices and representations related to health and well-being and the ways to effectively have a healthy life. In other words, the study attempted to clarify the inter-influence between concepts of health (expressed in interviews) and the reality of health as lived in the day-to-day (the relationship between attitudes and behaviors) and the relationship this reality has with messages of health and well-being.

This study was focused on the lay view of notions of health, well-being, and healthy living. The research was directed towards the systems of practice, their senses, and meanings; it was also directed towards uncovering the underlying rationales for decisions involving choices. This research allowed the author to distinguish between the willingness to believe or to act; that is, although there is an effective individual internalization of the dominant behavior models (shown mainly on the level of discourse), it does not result in effective practical attitudes (the willingness to act).

The results of this study are presented in three main chapters, in which the lay rationales (the product of practical knowledge) serve as a heuristic tool for the discussion and description of the Portuguese society.

In the first chapter, which is focused on the "promotion of healthiness and health through the individual," the author defines the principles supporting her research: controlling health through medicine, the social construction of health and illness, the incorporation of healthiness into daily life, and the complexity of lay knowledge.

In the second chapter, which is dedicated to "healthiness in daily life," the author presents the results of her empirical study in terms of the level of comprehension of the meanings of well-being and health. Despite finding various concepts of health, health as a destination (instead of a product of a lifestyle) was identified among the discourses. This dimension of health is not integrated into the notion of well-being, but it is present as a condition for it. Well-being appears to be mediated by three types of relationships that the author defines as "family relations," "job satisfaction," and "professional gratification."

The lay thinking on healthiness integrates the normativity of practices, which is also true for experts, but also demonstrates different systems of thought that are based on two points. On the one hand, this system sometimes involves behaviors (medical goals) or sensations (subjective meanings). On the other hand, healthiness is related to lifestyle, with the more traditional daily activities opposing the modern ones. From the point of view of practices, the author directs her analysis towards health practices. She focuses at the level of nutrition, exercise, and aging, where there is a more explicit relationship between structures and individual agency. This approach allows for the recognition of the coexistence of public and private discourses in the explanation of concepts and practices.

The topic "Health and Illness" is discussed in the third chapter. There, the author presents results related to health as a preoccupation with illness (i.e., medical prevention, social risk factors, responsibility for health, and social representations) and with the illness itself or the discomfort in the relationship with medicine (i.e., the concepts of illness and its causes and its relationship with therapeutic systems, whether dominant or alternative).

This book reveals a "culture of resistance" to the specialized orientation of practices and recovers practical health knowledge, which is organized into daily wellness, health, and illness practices. The large variety of key concepts and arguments created and recreated to report the data analysis constitutes a significant contribution not only towards the comprehension of the lay relationship with health, well-being, and lifestyles but also towards the sociology of health and illness itself. The discussion found in this book is a jumping-off point for new research, hopefully that will include more