

New Discourses on happiness and neoliberal governmentality: “Dedicate yourself to being happy and everything else will follow”

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Abstract

This paper analyses the new discourses on happiness. Such discourses began to break into the West culture from the early 2000s, particularly in the fields of public policy and “Psy” knowledges, especially in the sub - discipline called Positive Psychology. The main hypothesis of this paper is that these discourses participate in the contemporary neoliberal rationalities of the government of ourselves and of the others. In the first place, this paper shows that public policies – to the detriment of traditional objective variables, such as GDP or Per Capita Income – have incorporated the need to measure and produce subjective wellbeing. Secondly, the paper shows the inaugural turn of Positive Psychology, which affirms that happiness would not be the effect of external circumstances, but primarily the result of voluntary activities that each individual can make. Finally, using the distinctions introduced by M. Foucault between classical liberal and neoliberal ways of governing, the paper shows the particular form of subjectivity that these discourses about happiness interpellate and produce.

Keywords: Happiness, public policies, Positive Psychology, neoliberal governmentality.