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Don't Worry Be Unhappy: A Critical Perspective on Happiness

In the last decades it is possible to detect increasing interest in happiness ranging from academic and expert level to therapy and self-help books on the level of mundane cultural practices. Happiness is approached in a plethora of diverse modes, out of which most of them conceive of happiness as inherently positive and unproblematic phenomenon. The paper will question such assumption arguing that happiness is a historically specific cultural construction closely connected with the relations of power in society. This means that what in a certain society counts as happiness always corresponds to a product of a particular constellation of relations between culture and power, through which a certain representation of happiness becomes dominant. Following from this the paper will propose a critical perspective that would stress to examine the problematic effects of particular cultural representations of happiness and the historical processes that entered into their constitution.