

Happiness and Its Political Consequences: A Proposal for a Socially Constructed Object

Authors : Luciano E. Sewaybricker

Abstract : Psychology has faced many challenges in order to claim its right to study happiness. Probably the major issue has been to present a clear definition of happiness, which has a long history outside the scientific field and has been used imprecisely in the daily life. Even after years of great improvement, different meanings of happiness still have been seen in academic studies. This scenario allows to question if any definition is consistent enough to sustain the recent findings of the psychological processes behind happiness. Moreover, does it make sense to seek a single definition of happiness? By investigating the history of happiness and the theoretical foundations of Positive Psychology, it can be advocated that it's proper for happiness to be polysemic. Since Ancient Greece most attempts to outline happiness consists of an appreciation of the "best way to live" and consequently requires a delineation of the most important things in life. Besides this generic definition, it's hard to find consensus about happiness. In fact, what and how much something will be considered important to happiness depend on social influence. This compels happiness to vary between groups, historical periods, and even for the same person over time. Therefore, the same psychological processes will not necessarily be behind all forms of happiness. Consequently, three assumptions should be considered when studying happiness: it's intrinsic of happiness to be transitory and socially influenced; happiness refers not only to what is possible in the present, but also to an ideal future; when someone (including a scientist) talks about happiness they describe and prescribe a better way to live. Because any attempt to define happiness will be limited in space and time, it's more suitable to study its variations than its universalities. This may have considerable consequences to political agenda on happiness evaluation and maximization, like Gross National Happiness and utilitarian initiatives. Happiness policies should be understood as an arbitrary choice amongst all kinds of happiness and as prescriptive of what "the best way to live" should be.

Keywords : happiness, politics, positive psychology, well-being

Conference Title : ICHD 2015 : International Conference on Happiness and Development

Conference Location : Prague, Czechia

Conference Dates : July 09-10, 2015