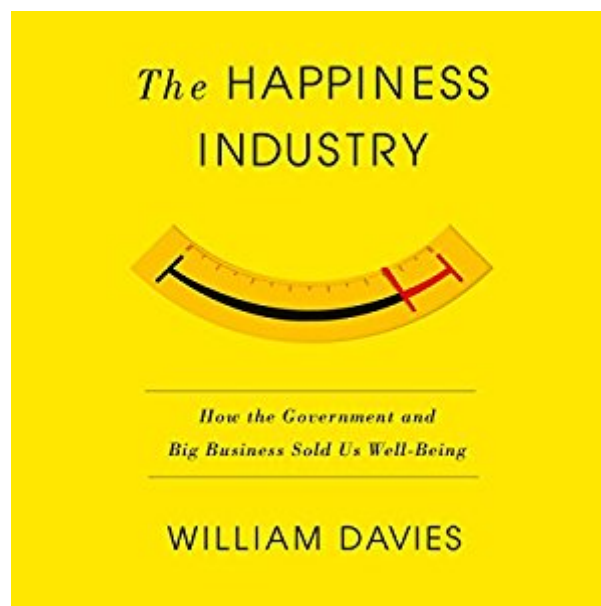




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The Happiness Industry: How The Government And Big Business Sold Us Well-Being



Synopsis

What was a Buddhist monk doing at the 2014 World Economic Forum in Davos lecturing the world's leaders on mindfulness? Why do many successful corporations have a chief happiness officer? What can the chemical composition of your brain tell a potential employer about you? In the past decade, governments and corporations have become increasingly interested in measuring the way people feel: the Happiness index, Gross National Happiness, well-being and positive psychology have come to dominate the way we live our lives. As a result, our emotions have become a new resource to be bought and sold. In a fascinating investigation combining history, science and ideas, William Davies shows how well-being influences all aspects of our lives: business, finance, marketing and smart technology. This audiobook will make you rethink everything from the way you work, the power of the Nudge, the ever-expanding definitions of depression, and the commercialization of your most private feelings. The Happiness Industry is a shocking and brilliantly argued warning about the new religion of the age: our emotions.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a remarkable tour through the painful evolution of behavioral economics, management consulting, advertising and psychiatry. It fills us with the realization that happiness has always been a factor (not necessarily respected, appreciated or understood) in numerous fields. Now suddenly, it is front and center as giant corporations focus on it, the better to get more out of employees and

customers. Happiness has made it to the front burner of multinationals. Look out. Rather than deal with the causes, happiness consultants actually advise companies to find the unhappiest 10%, and lay them off for being unhappy, somehow inspiring everyone else to become “super engaged.” Get happy or get out. It has come to the point where capitalism itself is under review: can measures of happiness replace market pricing as the main measure of the economy? Davies cites the Davos conference, where the who “of capitalism now actively pursues this approach. Over a third of Westerners suffer from some sort of mental health problem, he says, usually undiagnosed. It leads to inactivity, non productivity, lower government revenues and higher costs as the unhappy tap government services. It may already reduce GDP by 3-4%. Now a far greater cost than crime, it is expected to double in the next 20 years. It currently costs the American economy half a trillion dollars. There is an undercurrent of cynicism throughout The Happiness Industry, as Davies relates crackpot theories and crackpot theorists. Then he comes clean with force: “Once social relationships can be viewed as medical and biological properties of the human body, they can become dragged into the limitless pursuit of self optimization that counts for happiness in the age of neoliberalism.” He says disempowerment is at the bottom of stress, anxiety, frustration and mental problems. Not knowing if you have adequate income or even work is the most stressful condition in society. And it is now a way of life. By promoting happiness, companies deflect these anxieties without addressing them. It is a power play over employees and customers. Companies want everyone’s decisions to be predictable, so they frame everything to maximize that, creating a new normal for both happiness as a state of being, and for data collection. The book takes a very dark turn, as happiness requires a surveillance society to work properly. How happy were you yesterday, Davies asks? We can tell you exactly by your tweets, facebook posts, texts, pins and instagrams. Also your health-recording wristband. “They no longer care what people say in surveys; raw data is far more trustworthy. It is a fascinating turnaround for happiness, and well worth understanding, because it is coming to company near and dear to you. David Wineberg

“The Happiness Industry” by William Davies offers a thoughtful, passionate and powerful critique of the capitalist state. Mr. Davies is a U.K.-based educator and social critic who spent five years writing this exceptionally well-researched book. I believe that everyone alarmed by the intrusions of capital into our personal psyches will be empowered by this eye-opening book. Mr. Davies believes that Jeremy Bentham’s conceptualization of

money as a proximate measure of happiness set the stage for psychology and capitalism. The subsequent rise of consumerism has eviscerated the political subject: labor is endured merely to gain the money necessary for purchasing happiness. Mr. Davies explains that a predatory yet increasingly sophisticated marketing industry has become maniacally focused on the consumer as an object of surveillance, manipulation and profit. Mr. Davies contends that decades of Thatcher-style individualism has produced several generations of insecure workers who have internalized their precarious, impoverished circumstances. The pharmaceutical industry has gained enormously as the powerless seek relief from their depression through medication. An important takeaway from the author's lesson is that competitiveness and the management of happiness go hand in hand. Mr. Davies discusses the exploitation of the individual's social capital for marketing purposes, which he believes has steadily eroded personal friendships and altruism. Problematically, the enormous quantity of data captured by government and industry have allowed the powerful to manipulate individuals with precision; while few of us are capable of fully understanding the invidious forces that feed upon us. Mr. Davies believes people can fight back only when it is admitted that unhappiness is the product of a coercive capitalist culture that has succeeded in beating down the working class. In fact, the author argues that the relative happiness of empowered workers in employee-owned companies suggests that economic and political rights are keys to achieving real happiness. I highly recommend this excellent book to everyone.

Fascinating history of how we "measure" happiness and then how we try to manipulate it to serve power interests.

Will Davies is brilliant. The chapter on The Psychosomatic Worker alone--is worth the price of the hardback. I was fascinated, appalled, totally hooked from beginning to end. A real intellectual tour de force.

This book is a philosophically rigorous investigation of the modern obsession with happiness. I had pre-ordered the book, and I really wanted to like it more than I did. Truth be told, it was little dry. I think my issue was that I kept comparing it to Barbara Ehrenreich's "Bright Sided". That text is just told with more verve and it is more personalized to her her own life. Davies keeps the discourse mostly abstract so it covers the subject well, but doesn't have the story-teller's verve like Ehrenreich delivers. So if you haven't read that book, or have and are able to compartmentalize better than I can, you should like this book.

As a critique of the utilitarian view of work and society, and the flavor of capitalism that it has given rise to, this is an excellent read. The author has a sociologists view of the technology in question and so, in this reviewer's opinion, takes the hype a little too seriously. Also, and not surprisingly, he completely misses the point of mindfulness and meditation practice, making the common but erroneous assertion that it is all about introspection and self-improvement/relief. But, for the most part, he is spot on when detailing the ways in which pretty much every promising idea about how to make the lives of everyday citizens, and workers in particular, better has been co-opted by capital.

Good reading. Well written and informative.

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