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Giedrė
PLEPYTĖ-DAVIDAVIČIENĖ

**SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF HAPPINESS
IN SELF-HELP TEACHERS' NARRATIVES
IN LITHUANIA**

Summary of Doctoral Dissertation
Social Sciences, Sociology (S 005)

Vilnius, 2023

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SAVI-PAGALBOS MOKYTOJŲ NARATYVUOSE
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Since the time of Antiquity, happiness has been the subject of philosophical reflection, encompassing ideas about the meaning of life, ethics, morality, and man's relationship to religion. For a long time, happiness has been linked to the idea or to the vision of a possible ideal society. Only in the last two hundred years, and especially since the middle of the 20th century, happiness has come to be thought of not only as a practical possibility but also as an individual right or even an obligation. Today, striving for a happy life is becoming one of the main goals for both the individual and the society. Happiness has become a defining measure of societal well-being and progress, an integral concept in the activities of both political or public institutions and private market organisations, and pervasive in the public discourse. Higher levels of happiness are believed to indicate higher levels of societal progress, and the need to monitor such progress is the basis for measuring national happiness indicators (Hyman 2014a: 13). Such measures of happiness allow countries to be compared and ranked according to measurable levels of happiness. Based on such measurements, it is possible to say, for example, that Finns are happier than Lithuanians, but Lithuanians are happier than Estonians or Latvians¹. However, these surveys do not reveal how Lithuanians perceive happiness or lack of happiness, or what criteria they use to assess their level of happiness. Quantification turns happiness into an objective number with no clear value (Cabanas and Illouz, 2019: 42), and its interpretation does not consider the possible historical or cultural context of a given country (Bauman, 2008: 42-44). Happiness, like other emotions, is embedded in a cultural context (Illouz et al. 2014, McCarthy, 2017, Ahmed, 2010, Hochschild, 2012). Culture provides a vocabulary of emotions and shapes beliefs and norms about emotions, which together constitute "the emotion culture of a society" (Turner and Stets, 2005: 31). Therefore, based solely on a happiness measurement, it

¹ According to the latest World Happiness Index (2022), Finns are ranked in the 1st place (with a score of 7,8), Estonians are ranked 36th (with a score of 6.3) and Latvians are ranked 42nd (with a score of 6.2) (Helliwell et al. 2022).

is not possible to understand how the prevailing Lithuanian emotional culture affects the experience and expression of happiness. Similarly, the happiness measurement has a limited insight into the expectations or values Lithuanians associate with the concept of happiness, which is shaped by the public discourses on happiness.

Normative categories of happiness circulating in the public discourse of modern consumer societies are shaped and transmitted through mass media, popular culture, market institutions or self-help literature, providing and reinforcing the normative models of a happy life that individuals are forced to strive for. (Ahmed 2010, Cabanas and Illouz, 2019). The actualization of happiness in the Lithuanian public space can be illustrated by a number of examples. In 2017, one of the most popular women's magazines "Laima" was renamed "Laimė"². The radio programme of the Lithuanian public broadcaster LRT is called "Laimės dieta" (*The diet of happiness*). The word happiness is used for marketing purposes. For example, the online news portal 15min.lt in 2020 ran a project sponsored by the IF insurance company called "Laimė jaustis saugiai" (*The happiness to feel safe*). At the end of January 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, an online conference on Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Resilience called the "Happiness Forum" was held, where representatives from psychology and business shared tips on how to keep people positive during a pandemic. One of the projects of the Kaunas - European Capital of Culture 2022 programme was dedicated to the International Day of Happiness³. Emphasizing happiness not only allows but even obliges every person to create her own happy life and to be happy by constantly rethinking, comparing, and evaluating her personal life with the perceived ideal "happy" life.

² „Laima“ refers to the female name and „Laimė“ refers to Happiness. Since 2022, the publication of the magazine "Laimė" has been suspended. Online access: <https://www.zmones.lt/naujiena/stabdoma-laimes-leidyba-2022-aisiais-zmones-pristatys-nauju-teminiu-zurnalui.133a0cd1-3c7b-11ec-b17e-aa00003c90d0> [accessed 21/03/2022].

³ Due to the war in Ukraine, which started on 24 February 2022, the "Day of Happiness" events were cancelled. Available online: <https://www.laimesdiena.lt/kaune-atsaukti-laimes-dienos-renginiai-visas-demesys-ukrainai-ir-jos-zmonems/> [accessed 21/03/2022].

Discursive narratives of happiness shape people's expectations of lifestyles, attitudes and thus happiness. Happiness in contemporary consumer societies is becoming a social category associated with success, goodness, health and authenticity (Cabanas and Illouz 2019). The legitimisation of happiness as the desired social norm in society simultaneously avoids accepting or justifying any unhappiness by portraying it as a deviation from the norm (Bauman, 2011: 85). The development of a happy self becomes not only a personal good, but also a social duty and the ultimate goal of human existence (Aubry and Travis, 2015: 1). Similarly cultivating a happy life becomes a personal project carried out in the intimate space of everyday life (Binkley 2011). However, over-valuing and exaggerating happiness can, on the contrary, make people less happy (Mauss et al. 2012, Cabanas and Illouz 2019, Ahmed 2010). When feeling unhappy, people seek expert knowledge to help them overcome failure and become happy.

So-called self-help teachers and practitioners become one of these experts. These are people who, based on their personal experience and knowledge, convey their formed attitudes, beliefs about what a happy life is, and offer behavioural strategies needed to achieve a better and happier life. They become "authorities on the equivalent of experience" (Kavolis 1996: 53). Self-help teachers share their experience and knowledge in their books⁴, through interviews, in mass media, public events, as well as through personal lectures, consultations, or seminars. In the Lithuanian internet space one can find a number of lessons, seminars or workshops, during which the lecturers promise to teach you how to "*start living the life of your dreams*", "*return to balance, ease and peace*", "*calm your mind, and live a productive life of happiness and fullness*". The annual festivals such as Masters of Calm, "*Debesų pieva*" (*Cloud field*) or Mandala bring together practices, lectures and experiences that allow you to "*taste the feeling of fullness and know yourself*"⁵. Self-help teachers become one of those who provide alternative ways of living, as well as a new cultural understanding of the self and social

⁴ Self-help or self-motivation literature is one of the bestsellers in Lithuania (Ožalas and Karalius, 2020).

⁵ From the Masters of Calm Festival presentation on the website. Online access: <https://mastersofcalm.lt/> [accessed 21/03/2022].

reality (Salmenniemi 2017). Such people draw on their personal experiences to construct specific methodologies, practices, or strategies that they offer to their clients and become participants in the 'happiness industry' (Cabanas and Illouz 2019). The relevance of self-help teachers' narratives as a target object of research can be defined by several factors. First, these are people who claim to have experienced self-transformation. This means that at a particular stage in their lives they have felt unhappy and have actively started to look for solutions and ways to make themselves feel better. In this respect their stories should be based on their own personal life and experiences. On the other hand, currently they are teachers or counsellors offering their services to clients. They share ideas, knowledge, and methods on how people can overcome suffering and become happy. In this way, they become social agents, shaping the discourse of happiness, authorities in their field, believed, followed, and accepted by others. Thirdly, they also become experts in their field. Other people who find themselves in critical life situations or simply want to feel better turn to them. Thus, self-help teachers can not only talk about their own personal experiences but can also refer to the cases of other people and their problems. Finally, such people are more likely than others to talk about happiness and a happy life and therefore have their own specific language, values and behavioural strategies related to happiness. Applying Van Dijk's perspective, it can be assumed that by communicating their belief system, knowledge, behavioural and lifestyle strategies, self-help teachers are actively shaping both general behavioural guidelines and their ideology as a particular "professional" group (Van Dijk 2006). The authority of such people is based not so much on theoretical knowledge, but on their personal experiences, which represent the problems and solutions of a particular group, and sometimes of society as a whole. Moreover, such people and their life stories illustrate the process of creating and managing personal life as a project. As a result, the stories of such people enable us to understand both what people do to be happy, how they reflect on and redesign themselves and their lives, and how understanding happiness and the strategies of behaving, thinking, or feeling to achieve happiness are constructed. Therefore, the **main question of the thesis is**: how do self-help teachers in Lithuania construct and shape

happiness narratives and what are the social experiences and behavioural strategies associated with the pursuit of happiness?

Relevance of the thesis

Happiness has long been the subject of philosophers from all periods of history, from the philosophers of Ancient Greece to the thinkers of the 19th century and contemporary philosophers (D. H. Heybron, M. Nusbaum, W. Davies). In the twenty-first century, happiness research is already characterised by interdisciplinarity. Happiness research is perhaps most closely associated with the fields of psychology (Diener, Helliwell and Kahneman, 2010), economics (Helliwell, Layard and Sachs, 2012; 2019) and politics (Inglehart, 2009, 2018, Dutt and Radcliff, 2009, Pirralha, 2017, Putnam, 2001) and the work of their respective disciplines. Although happiness is also mentioned in the works of the sociological classics, it is only in the 21st century that happiness has become an object of sociological research. The Dutch sociologist Ruth Veenhoven is one of the pioneers of this research. It should be noted that the dominant research on happiness by scholars in economics, psychology, politics, or sociology is based on a positivist research methodology. Also, happiness research is often intertwined with research on subjective well-being, quality of life and the good life. This is partly because happiness is often used as an umbrella term to describe both the psychological and socio-economic conditions of people's lives and is used synonymously with terms such as quality of life, subjective well-being, life satisfaction and others.

However, some scholars point to the complexity of the concept of happiness and question the validity and comparability of its measurement. It is noted that the word happiness has different definitions or equivalents in different languages (Wierbicka 1999, Oishi et al. 2013, McMahon 2006) and cultures (Uchida et al. 2004, Pflug 2009, Delle Fave et al. 2011). This can lead to problems in data translation and interpretation. It is also noted that concepts such as happiness, subjective well-being, life satisfaction or quality of life accommodate different contents (McKenzie 2015, 2016, Raibley 2011, Carlquist et al. 2017), and therefore their equivalent use is not correct.

In recent years, happiness has become the subject of cultural and emotional sociology (McKenzie, Holmes, Hyman, Cieslik, Cabanas, Illouz). Sociological analyses have been critical of the idea of universal happiness and of the validity of positivist studies of happiness. According to Zygmunt Bauman, the emphasis on the pursuit of happiness shapes the constant formation of new expectations and encourages consumerism (Bauman 2011). Sara Ahmed has argued that dominant cultural narratives of happiness shape normative models of happiness and thus indicate what kind of happiness people should pursue (Ahmed 2010). According to William Davies, happiness has become a tool of the interests of large market corporations, the ruling elite, and is used as a marketing tool to promote consumerist lifestyles and to disguise the exploitation of workers (Davies 2016). Edgar Cabanas and Eva Illouz's study demonstrated how happiness is becoming part of a therapeutic culture and a new social category associated with success, authenticity, and well-being (Cabanas and Illouz 2019). It can be stated that the first-person narratives of happiness have been little researched both in Lithuanian and in foreign scientific literature. These include narratives of happiness in Western societies, specifically in the UK (Hyman 2014a, Cieslik 2017). Sociological studies of ordinary people's accounts of happiness, reveal the complexity of the concept of happiness (Cieslik 2017) and the importance of happiness in the construction and acceptance of self-identity (Hyman 2014a).

In Lithuania, as well as in the world in general, happiness is usually analysed in the context of subjective well-being or quality of life and the factors determining these aspects (Telešienė, 2015; Degutis and Urbonavičius, 2013; Gataūlinas, 2012, 2013). In particular, the concept of happiness can be found only in isolated works by Lithuanian scientists. On the other hand, the validity of economic indicators of happiness has been questioned by A. Mackonis (2012). Tereškinas (2013) has analysed the therapeutic nature of popular TV talk shows in Lithuania. A collective research study by Lithuanian sociologists was devoted to the analysis of the concept of the good life of men belonging to different social exclusion groups in Lithuania (Tereškinas et al. 2016). It can be stated that even though the discourse of happiness is significant and relevant in Lithuania, there is a lack of coherent

sociological research analysing the experience, expression, or discourse of happiness in Lithuania.

Self-help topics are commonly addressed in the context of therapeutic culture (Furedi 2004, Illouz 2003, 2007, 2009a), consumer society and market relations (Davies 2016, Ehrenreich 2009). The nature of self-help literature (Riley et al. 2019), the relationship of readers to the normative models of personality it offers (Salmenniemi and Vorona 2014), are analysed. Such studies are usually based on an analysis of American or Western culture in general. Studies examining the expression of therapeutic culture in the post-Soviet countries (Lerner and Zbenovich 2013, Lerner 2015, Salmenniemi 2017, Tereškinas 2013) more often concerned with self-help themes and their expression in public discourse, and the theme of happiness is rarely reflected in them. Even less often the personal life stories of self-help teachers are studied, revealing how their stories reflect the management of their lives as a project and the pursuit of happiness as one of their goals. **All this implies the need to** investigate the first-person narratives of the active shapers of happiness narratives in the Lithuanian public sphere - self-help teachers.

The aim of the research is to analyse the construction of the pursuit of happiness in the narratives of self-help teachers, assessing the cultural and social factors shaping the perception and experience of happiness in Lithuania, in the context of sociology of emotions.

Research objectives:

1. Examining the historical development of the concept of happiness, to highlight the possibilities and limitations of contemporary positivistic research on happiness.
2. To theoretically analyse the influence of cultural factors on the experience and expression of happiness from the perspective of the sociology of emotions.
3. To analyse the construction and formation of the pursuit of personal happiness through therapeutic narratives in contemporary Western market societies.
4. To investigate how self-help teachers construct narratives of the pursuit of happiness in Lithuania.

5. To reveal the specificity of social and cultural factors identified by Lithuanian self-help teachers in the experience and expression of happiness.

The defended statements:

1. Happiness in Lithuania can be influenced not only by objective living conditions or a subjective assessment of them, but also by the historically prevailing emotional culture in Lithuania, which defines the vocabulary of emotions, rules, norms, and expectations related to happiness.
2. Happiness is related to confirmation of personal identity and acceptance within a social group and society in general.
3. The narratives of self-help teachers' life stories adapt the structure of the Western therapeutic narrative, but they also highlight the unique structural units of the narrative specific to Lithuania.
4. The self-help strategies used by teachers to achieve happiness emphasize the individual's responsibility for her happiness, encouraging not so much critical reflection and pro-social action to increase happiness in society, but rather distancing oneself from societal problems through the creation of a social environment that is conducive to a positive, emotionally empowering experience.

Methodology of the empirical survey

The empirical research is based on original 23 qualitative interviews with self-help teachers in Lithuania. Based on the narrative approach, the construction of narratives of the pursuit of happiness of Lithuanian self-help teachers is examined. The causes of lack of happiness, social experiences to become happy and behavioural or cognitive strategies that enable a person to be happy are analysed in detail.

The structure of the work

The dissertation consists of three parts. The first part of the dissertation provides an overview of happiness research in the social sciences. The historical development of the study of happiness in philosophy and the place of happiness in classic and contemporary sociology is presented. It also looks at the development of the happiness science in the twenty-first century by overview of the main happiness researchers and their ideas, the methodological principles, and basic results of happiness measurement. Finally, a critique of positivist approach on happiness is presented, highlighting the main limitations of this research, considering the methodological, linguistic, cultural, and ethical aspects of the concept of happiness and its measurement. The second part of the thesis presents an analysis of happiness from a cultural sociological perspective. First, the cultural significance of emotions for the expression and experience of happiness is analysed. It is stated that the culture provides a basis for classifying, categorising, and interpreting emotions. Further the formation of happiness as a normative social category in contemporary therapeutic culture is discussed, and the role of happiness in the reflection and formation of self-identity is analysed. Finally, the main social agents shaping the narratives of happiness are presented. The third part of work is devoted to the presentation of the methodology and results of the empirical research.

Main findings

Based on theoretical and empirical findings it can be stated that the pursuit of happiness in modern societies, which is encouraged by the idea of universal happiness as a measure of well-being and the therapeutic culture prevailing in Western societies, not only forms normative discourses of happiness, defines the objects (objects, attitudes, values, lifestyles) associated with happiness, but also generates a new way of thinking about oneself, one's own identity, and the relationship between the self and its environment. Happiness becomes everyone's ultimate goal, and to achieve it means to continuously improve and reflect on oneself, one's identity and one's life. Moreover, if certain objects are associated with happiness in the

context of therapeutic culture, it is their lack or absence that becomes relevant here, which refers to the lack of happiness that needs to be overcome. The dominance of happiness research in contemporary social sciences, based on a positivist methodology, reduces happiness to an objective numerical expression and removes some of the knowledge of what happiness is for people, based on which people assess how happy or unhappy they consider themselves to be. Such measurements of happiness do not reveal the cultural, linguistic differences between societies or social groups and their influence on the contextual experience of happiness. Nor do such studies reveal or explain how differently or similarly individuals themselves narrate, explain, and interpret their experiences of happiness. The first-person accounts of the pursuit of happiness explored in this thesis compensate for the lack of research on this topic using a constructivist approach.

The empirical research involved qualitative interviews with self-help teachers in Lithuania. Such people take the place of psychologists, psychotherapists, spiritual leaders and become, in Kavolis' terms, "the authorities equivalent to experience". Such people were unhappy at a particular point in their lives and actively sought ways to make themselves feel better, so their stories are based on their personal life experiences and their interpretation of their experiences. Using their personal experiences and their accumulated, usually eclectic, knowledge, they not only convey the attitudes and beliefs they have formed about what a happy life is or should be, but also suggest *self-management* behavioural strategies and techniques that are necessary to achieve not only a relatively better life, but also an experientially happier life in the long term. In this way, they construct concrete models for the transformation from an "unhappy" to a "happy" life, shape their own ideology as a social group of happiness teachers, and become significant shapers of the discourse of happy living, primarily in the happiness industry. It can be concluded that the analysis of the life stories of such people can be conducted in two ways—as testimonies of personal experience and as testimonies of the transformation of the publicly constructed self.

The interviews suggest that the self-transformation narratives of the happiness teachers reveal a fairly coherent and common structure of the therapeutic narrative that is characteristic of this group, which demonstrates

the adaptation of the Western therapeutic culture to the local sociocultural context. In addition, they can also reveal commonly formed attitudes about happiness and the lack of its experiences or attributes, specific to the Lithuanian context. The interviews revealed that one of the main causes of the experience of adversity in Lithuania is seen by the interviewees not so much as an individual's unique experience, which is most usually refers to traumatized childhood experience in parents' family, but as a "pathology" of society as a whole - widespread deviant behaviour (alcoholism, living in a single-parent family, psychological and physical abuse), economic deprivation, and moral inconsistency.

Based on the results of the empirical research, it can be concluded that the experiences of happiness, its expression, and, at the same time, the causes of unhappiness in the perspective of the research participants can be attributed to the historically formed emotional culture in Lithuania, which, according to them, is characterised by a collective sense of fear. The theoretical analysis showed that such social knowledge can be explained through the theoretical perspective of cultural trauma. From this perspective, collective fear, passed on from one generation to the next, is intertwined with actual insecurity and mistrust, which is reinforced by the phenomena of social anomie that are still present in Lithuanian society. In the context of Lithuania's modern history, we can observe the formation of emotional rules and norms that limit and stigmatise the public display of happiness. Based on the research of historians, social philosophers, and anthropologists, we can say that the public display of happiness is still associated with insecurity, fear, social or psychological "abnormality" in contemporary Lithuania. The formation of such rules and norms about where, when and with what intensity to display happiness or other emotions is linked both to Lithuania's experience of cultural trauma (the First and Second World Wars, Stalin's repressions, the Soviet occupation) and to the ideology of control of emotions prevalent in the Soviet period. Here a position of repression of authentic, spontaneous emotions, including happiness, prevailed. Tranquillity, calm or stillness became the most desirable states. According to the research participants, the historical, cultural, and social context of Soviet Lithuania in particular, which some researchers refer to as "hyper-normality", which demanded hyper-adaptive skills, shaped the posture of "devaluing", "levelling", "greying",

and “not showing off” authentic and spontaneous experiences, emotional states in public contexts. On the other hand, with the end of the Soviet period and the systemic breakdown, the trauma of cultural maladaptation and anomie pushed towards a more pronounced individualisation of affects and the search for and application of personal management strategies.

The narratives of the Lithuanian self-help teachers not only adapt the Western therapeutic narrative, but also expand it, using a dichotomy between ‘real’ and ‘fake’ personal transformation, the definition of ‘real’ and ‘fake’ happiness, while at the same time drawing opposition between theoretical knowledge and practical experience. The latter is always presented as more real, reliable, and authentic. As a result, socio-cultural authorities who declare their own ‘real’ personal experience, overcoming real suffering and finding more sustainable happiness, rather than those who operate solely on theoretical knowledge, become more credible in the eyes of the research participants. The ‘real’ change that creates a lasting experience of happiness is associated by the subjects with a change in lifestyle, values, attitudes towards the content and conditions of the experience of happiness. This change depends exclusively on the individual’s conscious willingness and determination to be effectively ‘productively’ happy, whereas the inability to be happy is seen as a lack of responsibility, will, desire or motivation. The narratives construct a contrast between ‘real’ and ‘false’ happiness. The latter is associated with normative categories of happiness (material well-being, career, family, etc.) and the ability to conform to social norms and expectations. ‘Real’ happiness, on the other hand, is perceived by the subjects as the ability to distinguish between ‘true’ and ‘false’ needs, which is only possible through personal resistance to social norms, the creation of one’s own alternative lifestyles, and the prioritisation of one’s own direct experience, developed intuition, and spontaneous feelings. This creates the notion that there can be qualitatively different states of happiness with different experiential values. An examination of the strategies for achieving happiness in the narratives of Lithuanian self-help teachers suggests that there is not a critical assessment of the society but rather an individualistic and morally or politically passive attitude towards social or wealth inequality, injustice, and undemocratic power relations in society. Moreover, the pursuit of ‘true’ happiness overemphasises personal responsibility for

one's own life and for the quality and experience of happiness. Liberation from suffering is associated with personal detachment from the norms and rules prevailing in society, acceptance, and justification of social problems as inevitable or even able to positively encourage the pursuit of true happiness. Similarly, the inability to be happy is associated with a dysfunction of the individual's will - an unconscious or uninformed 'choice' to suffer for short-term, unsustainable personal gain, such as attention or recognition from others.

The survey findings suggest that the personal assessment of happiness in Lithuania may be determined as a result of a complex interaction of both objective evaluation of a person's living conditions as well as a subjective state of affect. It can be stated that the self-help teachers in Lithuania nowadays associate happiness with a state of inner tranquillity and peace. The sense of tranquillity as a basis for happiness reflects the orientation towards a 'peaceful' life, untroubled by interference from institutions or others, which prevailed during the Soviet period. However, if in Soviet times tranquillity meant avoidance and suppression of conflicts, and at the same time protection of 'those one's own' from 'strangers' or from 'the government' – today it is reinterpreted by interviewees in value-terms as the ability to accept oneself, one's own feelings or desires that are different from those around them, as well as the different situations of life as valuable dispositions that need to be mastered and developed. Therefore, we can say that tranquillity, as a desirable state, remains normatively important in Lithuania, but its value content and practical interpretations have changed radically. It is no longer the "grey", "indistinguishable" Soviet citizen shielded from the gaze of institutions or neighbours, but a consumer trying to find the harmony of his or her own spontaneous desires and possibilities in the abundance of market supply and media information.

In addition, happiness in the self-help teachers' narratives is associated with freedom, that is, an externally unlimited opportunity to choose to do what you want and security (both material and emotional), which means the ability to enjoy "casual things", being "here and now" and the experience of self-acceptance. At the same time happiness is linked to continuous self-improvement, which is seen as a never-ending process, echoing the view of life as a self-creation project. This suggests that, in general, at least in

modern societies, happiness is highly complex notion. It combines rather contextualised conceptions of both hedonistic and eudaimonic happiness, and at the same time it is linked to a wide range of other emotions. Hence, happiness is not just a universally recognisable positive emotional state in modern market societies, and in this case in Lithuania, but is discursively shaped and practiced as a complex and contextual set of a whole spectrum of feelings, emotions, and the abilities to reflect, accept, “use”, and transform them.

The results of the empirical study confirm that happiness is related to the reflection, evaluation, acceptance, and affirmation of a person’s identity. The lack of social acceptance or recognition of a person in Lithuanian society can be identified as one of the causes of unhappiness. This is linked to the lack of a person’s acceptance within a social group or society, regardless of the extent to which he or she conforms to societal norms, rules, or standards. It can therefore be concluded that the lack of happiness in Lithuania is linked to a lack of social tolerance. Hence, rethinking self-identity becomes an important issue in the pursuit of happiness. Here the difference among social, role and personal identities can be distinguished. In the narratives of the self-help teachers, the abandonment of old social roles and social identity, which are usually associated with imposed social norms at the same time the formation or assimilation of new roles associated with biological nature or intuition is manifested. Contrary, the process of experiencing happiness is not so much associated with a desire to change one’s personal identity, but rather to re-accept it. The behavioural strategies of self-knowledge, self-acceptance and self-creation used here assume that what may seem unacceptable or undesirable to the majority may be, in most cases, a personal advantage and uniqueness that is conducive to the pursuit of happiness.

The main strategies for achieving happiness, as seen in the empirical data of this thesis, are focused on personal need satisfaction and individual happiness. The main strategies for behavioural change are drawn from the science of psychology, which emphasises the importance of individual experience, personal pathology, and ways of overcoming it. In addition, many self-help teachers adopt techniques used in business, especially in marketing, which are not so much focused on the realisation of common

socio-cultural goals, but rather on personal efficiency in adapting and achieving prosperity in the market society, that is, personal achievements and personal responsibility for those achievements in relation to the other members of the market society or the social structures. As a result, the most common strategies used by self-help teachers are directed at the individual, the socially atomised, the culturally uncommitted individual, who is not bound by rigid traditions or narrower identities.

Although happiness is perceived as an individual emotion, and the strategies used emphasise individual rather than collective happiness, people often join groups to achieve happiness (group workshops, experiential trips, retreats, or festivals etc.). This confirms that happiness is a relational emotion that can be experienced in relation to others, but in today's context is only normalised at the micro-social level, or even at the level of a person's psychological experiences. On the other hand, this individualistic pursuit of happiness is linked to the (re)formation and reaffirmation of one's personal identity in a more general socio-cultural context. This is where the uniqueness and authenticity of a person becomes important, which is perceived through the opposition of 'me' vs 'other'. Through it, it is highlighted how different 'I' am from 'others', how much 'my' experience and the personal identity are unique in relation to the general context. Participation in self-help groups, thus, has a dual function. Since such groups are based on mutual recognition, each person gains recognition of her uniqueness from the other members of the group and acquires a new group identity based on that uniqueness. On the other hand, such groups are also based on a certain shared experience, a minimum of common ethical or value attitudes, but their realisation involves a strong emotional basis as a norm of membership. By spontaneously and authentically expressing emotions in such a group, a person receives not only a confirmation of herself, but also a sense of belonging to an 'own group', which in turn increases security, self-confidence, and a general sense of happiness.

The results of the empirical study provide support for the notion that focusing on the personal happiness may not so much improve the living conditions of members of a society, but rather maintain the *status quo*. The strategies used and proposed by self-help teachers do not encourage critical reflection on social inequalities or injustices, socio-economic or

cultural exclusion, and power relations that create or enlarge anomie in society. More often, the “pathologies” of society are justified or adaptively accepted, arguing on the principles of personal choice, social Darwinism, or metaphysical determinism. Instead of pro-active social action to alleviate social problems, which are visible in society, the emphasis is put on a stance of personal responsibility for happiness, with a pronounced reduction of any emotional response to social environments. This leads to strategies of acceptance and justification for existing social problems and an evasion of pro-active citizenship.

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PUBLIKACIJŲ IR PRANEŠIMŲ SĄRAŠAS / LIST OF PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Publikacijos disertacijos tema / List of publications

Plepytė-Davidavičienė, G. 2022. „Kaip tapti laimingam? Terapinio naratyvo konstravimas savi-pagalbos mokytojų gyvenimo istorijose Lietuvoje“. *Filosofija. Sociologija*. T. 33 Nr. 2 (2022). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6001/fil-soc.v33i2.4717>

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Pranešimai disertacijos tema / List of presentations

Tarptautinės konferencijos/International conferences:

15th Conference of the European Sociological Association (ESA), “Sociological Knowledges for Alternative Futures” (nuotolinė), Barselona, Ispanija. Pranešimas tema: “Selling Happiness: The Use of Therapeutic Narrative in Personal Stories of Pursuit Happiness” (lt. *Laimės pardavimas: terapinio naratyvo panaudojimas asmeninėse laimės siekimo istorijose*). 2021-08-31 – 09-03.

Tarptautinė konferencija „Transformacijos naratyvai be „laimėtojų“ ir „pralaimėtojų“: giliosios istorijos Vidurio ir Rytų Europoje“, organizuota TSPMI, Vilniaus Universitetas, Vilnius, Lietuva. Pranešimas tema “In search for happiness: the first-person stories of self-transformation” (lt. *Laimės beiškant: asmeninės savęs keitimo istorijos*). 2020-06-17.

9th Midterm Conference on Emotions, RN11 “Sociology of Emotions” of the European Sociological Association (ESA) (nuotolinė), Barselona, Ispanija. Pranešimas tema: „Why are we unhappy? Happiness Discourses Among Young People in Lithuania“ (lt. *Ar mes esame laimingi? Jaunų žmonių laimės diskursai Lietuvoje*) 2020-11-25 –27.

14th Conference of the European Sociological Association (ESA), "Europe and Beyond: Boundaries, Barriers and Belonging", Manchester, UK. Pranešimas tema: "Conceptualizing Happiness: Social Behaviour Strategies in Identification Process" (lt. *Laimės konceptualizavimas: Socialinio elgesio strategijos identifikacijos procese*). 2019-08-20 –23.

I tarptautinė konferencija "Aristotle and Critical Theory", organizuota "Aristoteliškų studijų ir kritinės teorijos centro" MRU, Vilnius, Lietuva. Pranešimas tema: "Sociological Approach to Happiness and Eudaimonian Ethic" (lt. *Sociologinis požiūris į laimę ir eudaimoninę etiką*). 2019-05-24.

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XII Lietuvos sociologų draugijos konferencija „Visuomenė, regionai, transformacijos: ar turime scenarijus ateičiai?“ (nuotolinė), Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas, Kaunas, Lietuva. Pranešimas tema: „Laimės siekis: naratyvai ir strategijos“. 2021-01-14.

19-as Prigimtinės kultūros seminaras „Gebėjimas džiaugtis ir laimė gyvenimo“, Prigimtinės kultūros institutas ir Lietuvos literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, Lietuva. Pranešimas tema: „Socialinis laimės konstravimas“. 2020-07-02 –05.

XI Lietuvos sociologų draugijos konferencija „Sociologija be ribų: anapus žmogiškumo“, Vilniaus Universitetas, Vilnius, Lietuva. Pranešimas tema: „Laimės patyrimai tapatybės konstravime“. 2019-11-22.

V Nacionalinė jaunųjų sociologų ir antropologų konferencija „Aktualūs sociologijos ir antropologijos tyrimai: problemos ir kontekstai“, Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas, Kaunas, Lietuva. Pranešimas tema: „Laimės konceptualizavimas: kaip VU studentai apibrėžia laimę?“. 2019-04-12.

X Lietuvos sociologų draugijos konferencija „Sociologinio žinojimo autoritetas: poviekis, vertės kūrimas ir kvestionavimas“, Klaipėdos Universitetas, Klaipėda, Lietuva. Pranešimas tema: „Tyrimo imties reprezentatyvumo beiėškant“. 2018-10-12 –13.

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