

The Biopolitics of Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Disorders of Youth

The Biomedicalization and Geneticization of Youth Emotions and Behaviors

The Multiple (Bio)Politics of Health and Illness:
Biomedicalization and Geneticization of the Emotions and Behaviors of Youth

Abstract:

In the past few decades, health and illness have increasingly become (re)framed in biomedical terms. Contemporary technoscientific medicine has shifted from a clinical to a molecular gaze (Foucault 1973; Rose 2007, 2006). Following Foucauldian theories of biopolitics, I examine a few of the ways that contemporary technoscientific biomedicine deploys an array of techniques to understand the body and mind, health and illness at the biological, genetic and molecular level. This paper examines the following three concrete sites of biopolitical action surrounding youth mental health and illness: (1) technoscientific knowledge practices of youth mental, emotional and behavioral care work, (2) the emergent technoscience of behavioral genetics, specifically the truth claims of behavioral genetics research about normality and health and illness in general and youth emotions and behaviors in particular, and finally, (3) national scientific research funding patterns on mental health and illness. Through discourse analysis of mental health practitioners' treatment ideologies and knowledge practices, of the content of behavioral genetics research on youth emotions and behaviors, and of national scientific research funding patterns, I deconstruct how these technoscientific knowledges and practices shape societal understandings and responses to the mental, emotional and behavioral disturbances of youth.

Amber D. Nelson
2011-2012 Research Fellow, IAS-STC
Phd Candidate, University of Maryland