

JOURNAL OF The History of the Behavioral Sciences

CALL FOR PAPERS

HISTORICIZING “THERAPEUTIC CULTURE” TOWARDS A MATERIAL, PRAGMATIC, AND POLYCENTRIC HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGIZATION

Guest editors: R. Amouroux, L. Gerber, M. Aronov, C. Jaccard (University of Lausanne).

Building on sociological accounts of the rise of a ubiquitous “therapeutic culture” in contemporary Western societies, this special issue will feature case studies that historicize and complicate this diagnosis.

To date, sociologists have been at the forefront in identifying and criticizing the advent of a “therapeutic culture” in advanced liberal societies (Rosner 2018). From Philip Rieff’s seminal book *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (1966), to the Foucauldian-inspired writings of Nikolas Rose and Robert Castel on the “psychologization” of social life in Britain and France, through Eva Illouz’s (2008) pragmatic account of the emergence of a psychology-driven “emotional capitalism”, the extension of the domain of psychotherapy has been regarded as a characteristic phenomenon of the second half of the 20th century and beyond (Aubry & Travis 2015). In this period, psychotherapy-inspired discourses and practices increasingly reached beyond mental health care settings, as exemplified by the thriving editorial business of science-backed parenting books for raising an emotionally-intelligent child, the successful genre of confessional television shows, or the new attention paid to the subjectivity and happiness of employees in managing their performance. According to these social critics of varying intellectual traditions, psychotherapy evolved into a new “cultural idiom” linking the corporate workplace, the family, and the State (Illouz 2018). They thus converge in the identification of a therapeutic turn somewhere around the 1960s, involving widespread shifts in the constitution of the subject, in the relationships of individuals to traditional norms and gender roles, and in modes of government.

Despite the extent and transversality of the transformations attributed to “therapeutic culture,” generally towards an increasing individualization and depoliticization, it has not yet received in-depth attention from historians of psychology. What can empirical historical research on the “psychologization” or “psychotherapeutization” of subjectivity and social life contribute to our understanding? Was the phenomenon really as pervasive,

enduring and unequivocally antagonistic to emancipatory politics and communal life, as suggested by many of the above-mentioned critical social theory works?

By gathering historical case studies, this special issue seeks to help fill this historiographic gap. We invite contributions from historians who take as their object the psy-sciences and related practical fields of activity, including psychology, psychotherapies of various kinds, psychiatry, pedagogy, education and special education, social work, criminology and the justice system, human resource management, the corporate workplace, employment and return to work policies, nursing, public health, and sports. We will privilege carefully constructed empirical case studies over abstract theoretical generalization.

Of particular interest are papers that emphasize materiality, practice, and tools in the formation, diffusion and appropriation of psychological schemes, specifying how therapeutic ontologies and epistemologies are enacted in situated and localized contexts. We are also looking for papers that engage with the differential reception of psychotherapeutic expertise, taking actors' points of view seriously. Especially welcome are articles that investigate the ambivalent uses of psychology by workers, women, and other minoritized groups (Rutherford & Petit 2015; Harris, 2016; Wright 2008). Also encouraged are submissions that move beyond the Anglo-American-centric view of "therapeutic culture", and approach it from a "polycentric" and international perspective (Danziger 1996; Marks 2018; Shamsadani 2018; Nehring, Madsen, Cabanas, Mills & Kerrigan 2020). History and comparative studies can provide tools to critically evaluate some of the assumptions that have shaped this category, starting with its alleged ubiquity. Attention to territories and locales would also be helpful to unpack the different approaches subsumed under the general term of "psychotherapy", and examine the factors that have shaped their differential success or failure across time and places (Marks 2018). Finally, we invite contributions that take a history of social science perspective, and question the conditions of emergence and circulation of the therapeutic culture critique.

Under what conditions and how have psychological discourses been incorporated in key institutions of post-WWII societies? Through what practical and material means (manuals, questionnaires and other pencil-and-paper technologies, group practices, play-centred or space-based approaches) have psychotherapeutic interpretations been implemented in various social fields? What were the training paths and careers of those who could be called psychology brokers, and who were not necessarily psychologists?

How did the various actors within a field respond to the arrival of these new interpretative frameworks and techniques? For instance, how have school teachers, parents, and children perceived the addition of psychology to the existing pedagogical/disciplinary toolbox? Are there cases where psychological schemes have met with resistance, or

conversely been partially appropriated by the actors? In the long run, what was the fate of these tools and frameworks? Was their influence as important as suggested by some critics of the therapeutic turn?

What is the trans-Atlantic and international relevance of the therapy culture critique? Has ("American") psychology triumphed and become a global cultural force? What paths did the process of psychologization take outside the United States, in Europe, but also in the former Soviet Union and Russia, Asia, Africa, and South America? From one region of the world to another, and from one country to another, what differences can be documented in terms of the prevailing psychotherapeutic approach, the actors involved in the dissemination of psychological interpretations, the kind of the social and political fields concerned, and the strength of the psychologization process?

Expressions of interest should be emailed as soon as possible directly to the lead guest editor (remy.amouroux@unil.ch). Authors should aim to submit a 10,000–13,000 word paper, including references. Papers should be original research works, i.e. not previously published in other formats or venues. Full submissions must be received by **February 15, 2022**, and must be uploaded electronically to ScholarOne, using the submission portal at the JHBS website: <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jhbs>

The submitting author will be prompted to indicate that this submission is for the special issue "Therapeutic Culture." All submissions should follow the format outlined in the journal's [Author Guidelines](#). Submissions will be peer-reviewed per the standard procedures of the journal.

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