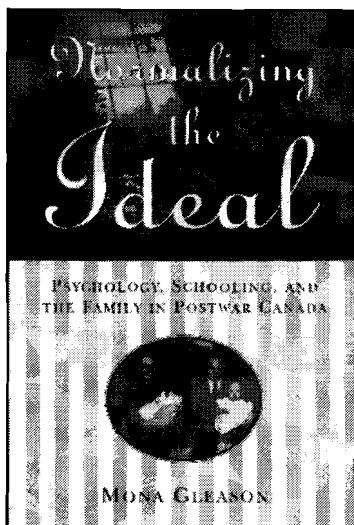


Mona Gleason. *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling, and the Family in Postwar Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. Pp. 196.

What is the "ideal" family, and through what dimensions of social life have the effects of that normalizing construct become invested and lodged in Canadian consciousness? If, indeed, the notion of "the ideal family" has contributed to particular relations of social knowledge and power (through, for example, local practices of schooling, examination, justice, healthcare, childcare, custody, homecare, and so on), what can be said about how the discursive construct actually managed to effect ("normalize") and objectify human behaviour? In turn, how did such idealized notions of behaviour provide a necessary condition for the emergence and disciplinary effects of the human science of psychology in post-war Canadian society?

Normalizing the Ideal is the tenth volume to appear in the University of Toronto Press *Studies in Gender and History* series, and in it author Mona Gleason makes useful points about the modes of objectification through which human beings become discursive subjects in a disciplinary field. Perhaps the most substantial is her argument that the discipline of psychology systematically affected ordinary Canadians during the early postwar decades primarily as a normalizing or regulating mechanism through which families and schools could be shaped and brought under the suasion of "ideals" that were white, middle-class, patriarchal, and heterosexual in sensibility. Gleason calls on theorist Michel Foucault's notion of "technologies of the self" to inspire what she calls her examination of "technologies of normalcy." The concept is meant to underscore how particular discursive networks and mechanisms, represented by the school system, childcare agencies, public health systems, and popular media,

conflated the normal with the socially acceptable... strengthened Canadians' receptiveness to psychological discourse and, in turn,



ensured the primacy and endurance of psychology's notions of the normal family." (9)

The hypothesis is theoretically exciting insofar as it sets out to make visible how particular "rules" or formal modes of thought in a discipline take root in a social body at a specific historical conjuncture, and how "effects of truth" can then invest the production of practices, subjectification, forces, materials, desires, thoughts and so on at play in wide scale ideological production. Gleason incites educators and health care professionals to question received assumptions about "normalcy" in citizenry, and to think about how much of social, healthcare, and educational theory is due to the play of gendered and racialized assumptions that are inscribed within every facet of the socialization process. The bywords of "normalcy" in the postwar family populate psychological discourse, through constructs such as stability, order, prevention, and then, "pervasively and insidiously," intervention.

The book is ambitious in scope but has problems. Most particularly, the author at times betrays what feels like a fixity of position or predictability, revealed in teleological assertions about psychology's coercive effects in the minds and hearts of Canadian teachers, childcare workers, and parents. For example, fixated on the deficit model of the problematized family, "psychologists spent a great deal of time detailing normal and abnormal characteristics of parenting." (105) This is one of Gleason's telling insights into the social construction of psychology as a household fixture and public panacea. But the unanswered question in her analysis is how, exactly, such details took explicit effects in forms and practices of everyday life. Thus, the author exhibits a tendency to repeat her argument in an attempt to persuade, rather than to demonstrate precisely the mechanisms through which the production of consent in postwar Canadians occurred through psychology's normalizing strategies of "comparing, differentiating, hierarchizing, homogenizing, and excluding." (9) The reader would welcome more finely nuanced illustrations showing how the ideas of leading psychologists (such as Drs. William Blatz and Samuel Laycock, known as Canada's Dr. Spock) came to leave colonizing traces on the minds and bodies of actual men and women struggling to re-make life in Canada's towns and countryside after the painful disruptions of a Depression and two World Wars. We are left to puzzle out what were the local tactics and regional forms of resistance or transformation that must also have played out in this landscape of codification of a concept of a monolithic family unit. And although the assimilation of immigrant families is alluded to in the consideration of psychology's forms of knowledge and power in Canada, French Canada and parti-

cularly Québec are omitted from the equation, apart from occasional references to Dr. Laycock's preoccupation with the Dionne family phenomenon.

Another problem is that the book pays too little attention to the mechanisms through which psychology possessed moral, aesthetic, political and historical value for citizens, through discourses that might humanize, liberate, and repair, as well as dominate and regulate. Gleason is not always at home or conversant with the psychological literature on child development and child care (for example, the significant contributions of European psychologists such as Freud, Winnicott, Bion, and Klein) that has contributed to the contemporary desire to make a better world through understanding the vicissitudes of early relationality, infantile attachment, the significance of the maternal body, the experience of separation and loss, the human passion for aggressivity, and the transference experience in human relations. The author de-emphasizes the possibility for renewal through discourse, and tends not to acknowledge the potential for the humane function of psychological and psychoanalytic endeavour that is perhaps under attended by the author in her explication of the construction of normal citizens through psychology in postwar family and schools. We would have liked to see more room for theoretical and methodological play, open reflection, and honest musing on the contradictions, overlaps, border areas, turnings around, and pleasures of dalliance, as "good enough" parents and teachers (like yours or mine) internalized the ideal of "safeguarding the family" in late 20th century Canada.

Gleason's historical examination of psychologically-influenced aspects of the postwar family proceeds under the convention that the historical present is influenced by what came before. In portraying the history of the intersection of psychology and the construction of the normative family ideal, Gleason has a tendency arbitrarily to engage in time travel, for example, from the 1950s to the 1930s, and back to the 1940s and 50s. In one instance, a discussion of the construction of psychology's "technologies of normalcy," we are introduced to Vancouver schools in 1951 (31), then to "social welfare agencies" in the late 1930s (31), and then to assessments of soldiers in 1939-1945 (32). Although she is speaking in a chapter on "Psychology in Early Twentieth Century Canada," we believe it would provide a clearer and more coherent view of the normalizing techniques of discourse to try for a more chronologically coherent presentation of its practices, relations, and effects. A similar analytical strategy of tile-like jumping occurs throughout Chapter Two, weakening the genealogical elaboration of the

thesis. On a minor note, the author's frequent excursions into Masters' student theses to substantiate her claim of psychology's "analytics of power" *a propos* a national trend toward normalization, were irritating. These warrants were generally unhelpful and ultimately not convincing in the overall conceptualization of an archeology of human sciences whose mechanisms of power invest bodies, acts, and forms of behaviour in the ideological will to knowledge as these are lived and crystallized in social hegemonies enacted at local levels.

Despite these shortcomings, *Normalizing the Ideal* is a thought-provoking introduction to a period of Canadian history when psychology "came of age" in its bearing on Canadian bodies. Reading between the lines, it was intriguing to speculate on what currents, at a professional and personal level, underlay psychology's aspirations for power and prestige in postwar Canada.

Perhaps in a future volume in the series, it would be possible to be treated to more finely nuanced case studies and genealogical instances that show not only how and why the idea of the ideal family was cherished (thus enabling Canadian psychologists to be embraced as knowledge exemplars within the Canadian scene), but also the disparity, deviations, and dispersion behind the constructed fantasy of the normal ideal family, and the discontinuities and struggles that also constituted what came to exist and have value in the family's name.

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