

NORMALIZING THE IDEAL: PSYCHOLOGY, SCHOOLING, AND THE FAMILY IN POSTWAR CANADA

Homemaker mother, breadwinning father who played hockey with his son on the weekends, two children, ideally a boy and a girl – this was normal Canadian life in the fifties, right? Well, not quite, and author Mona Gleason argues that Canadian psychologists were in part responsible for this fiction of normalcy.

Postwar insecurity about the stability of family life became a platform on which to elevate the role of psychologists in society. Moving outside the universities with radio shows and child-rearing manuals, these figures of authority changed the tenor of parental and familial concern from physical to mental health. Influential psychologists such as Samuel Laycock and William Blatz spread their own vision of life as the healthy goal for which society should strive. Their ideal of 'normal' reflected and helped to entrench the dominant white, Anglo-Celtic, patriarchal vision of life. Those who did not fit the model because of skin colour, class, or ethnicity were marginalized or silenced, and, as Gleason's innovative feminist approach emphasizes, whether male or female, simply trying to fit within the prescribed gender roles inevitably led to alienation.

In this history of psychology and its effects, new and necessary questions are asked about the role of the social sciences in shaping the private experiences of ordinary Canadians.

MONA GLEASON recently completed her postdoctoral fellowship at the University of British Columbia.

STUDIES IN GENDER AND HISTORY

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