

Newsletter

March 2020

We are pleased to launch the monthly newsletter for *Popular Psychology, Self-Help Culture and the Happiness Industry*. The newsletter showcases the work of our members, and we hope and expect that it will be of interest to you. We would like to thank the contributors for their submissions. Alongside the newsletter, we are planning further activities to improve our network in the coming months, and we would appreciate any suggestions you might have in this regard.

If you would like to contribute to the April edition of the newsletter, please send us your submission via e-mail by April 15.

Daniel Nehring, Edgar Cabanas, Dylan Kerrigan, Ole Jacob Madsen, and China Mills

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1. **Nick Bartlett**

Barnard College, Columbia University

My first book, *Recovering Histories: Life and labor after heroin in reform-era China*, will be available from the University of California in October (details [here](#)). Published in *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* in 2018, my article "Idling in Mao's Shadow: Heroin Addiction and the Contested Therapeutic Value of Socialist Traditions of Laboring" is available [here](#). A second article, *The Ones Who Struck Out: Entrepreneurialism, Heroin Addiction, and Historical Obsolescence in Reform Era China*, appeared in *positions* in 2018 and is available [here](#).

2. **Kristiina Brunila**

University of Helsinki

Professor Kristiina Brunila and her research group have published actively in terms of the following themes (between 2018-2020):

- the alliance of the ethos of vulnerability, neoliberal rationality and the precision education governance
- psychological management of education and training and psy-subjectivity
- youth transitions, economic worries and therapeutic solutions
- influence of diagnosis and psychopathologies
- ethos of vulnerability, psycho-emotional deficiencies and youth support systems
- ethos of vulnerability and identity politics
- anxiety and neoliberal academia
- rise of the therapeutic state

Cartography of Articles – open access

Brunila, K., Mertanen, K., Tiainen, K., Mäkelä, K., Masoud, A., Kurki, T., Ikävalko, E. (2019). About Vulnerabilising Young People. Interrupting the ethos of vulnerability, the neoliberal rationality and the precision education governance. *Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society*. Open access: <https://journal.fi/suomenantropologi/issue/view/5645>

Brunila, K. (2019). Interrupting the Psychological Management of Transitions and Youth Training in an Era of Multiple Crises. *Education Inquiry*. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/20004508.2019.1624458>

Other scientific articles

Lanas, M. & Brunila, K. (2019). Mapping the Bad Behaviour in School. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. Published on-line 10.1080/01425692.2019.1581052

Koutsoklenis, A., Honkasilta, J. & Brunila, K. (2019). Reviewing and reframing the influence of relative age on ADHD diagnosis: beyond individual psycho(patho)logy. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*. Published on-line <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2019.1624599>

Brunila, K. & Rossi, L-M. (2018). Identity Politics, the Ethos of Vulnerability, and Education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 50(3), 287-298.

Brunila, K. & Valero, P. (2018). Anxiety and the Making of Research(ing) Subjects in Neo-liberal Academia. *Subjectivity. International Journal of Critical Psychology*, 11(1),74–89.

Chapters in Research Books

Brunila, K., Honkasilta, J., Ikävalko, E., Lanas, M., Masoud, A., Mertanen, K. & Mäkelä, K. (in press). The Cultivation of Psy-Subjectivity of Young Adults 'at Risk' in the Ethos of Vulnerability. In Nehring, Daniel, Madsen, Ole Jacob Gabanas, Edgar, Mills, China & Kerrigan, Dylan (eds). *The Handbook of Therapeutic Cultures*. Routledge.

Brunila, K. & Ylöstalo, H. (2020). The Rise of the Therapeutic State and Education of Human Capital. In Nehring, Daniel, Madsen, Ole Jacob Gabanas, Edgar, Mills, China & Kerrigan, Dylan (eds). *The Handbook of Therapeutic Cultures*.

Open access books (therapeutic ethos in education & youth transitions)

Brunila, K. & Lundahl, L. (Eds.) 2020. *Youth on the Move. Tendencies and Tensions in Youth Policies and Practices*. Helsinki University Press.
<https://www.hup.fi/site/books/10.33134/HUP-3/read/?loc=002.xhtml>

3. Edgar Cabanas

Camilo José Cela University

Books

Cabanas, Edgar, and Eva Illouz. 2019. *Manufacturing Happy Citizens. How the Science and Industry of Happiness Control our Lives*. Cambridge and Medford: Polity. [Book translated into French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and German].

Pérez-Álvarez, Marino; José C. Sánchez-González; Edgar Cabanas. 2019. *La Vida Real en Tiempos de Felicidad: Crítica de la psicología (y de la ideología) positiva*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

Scientific Papers (peer-reviewed)

Cabanas, Edgar. 2019. "Experiencing designs and designing experiences: Emotions and theme parks from a symbolic interactionist perspective". *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*. DOI: [10.1016/j.jdmm.2018.12.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2018.12.004).

Book Chapters (peer-reviewed)

Cabanas, Edgar, and Eva Illouz. 2019. "Hijacking the language of functionality?: In praise of negative emotions against happiness". In *Critical Happiness Studies*, ed. Svend Brinkmann, Anders Petersen and Nicholas Hill. London: Routledge.

Cabanas, Edgar, Razak Khan, and Jani Marjanen. 2019. "Travellers. Transformative Journeys and Emotional Contacts". In *Encounters with Emotions: Negotiating Cultural Differences since Early Modernity*, ed. Benno Gammerl, Philipp Nielsen, and Margrit Pernau. Berlin: Berghahn Books, 61-84

Other publications (non-peer-reviewed)

Cabanas, Edgar. 2019. "Manufacturing Personal Happiness". *Economic Sociology and Political Economy*. Retrieved: <https://economicsociology.org/2019/10/29/manufacturing-personal-happiness/>

Cabanas, Edgar. 2019, March. "Happy employees make submissive employees. Challenging the perks of workplace happiness". *Octave webmagazine*. Retrieved: <https://programmeoctave.com/en/8602/happiness-workplace-edgar-cabanas/>

Dissemination activities

TEDx TALK

"Las claves para vender la felicidad"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWYAUSXbCfI&feature=emb_title

4. Ashley Frawley

University of Swansea

- Sunday 15th of March I will be appearing on BBC's the Big Questions to talk about the problems with mindfulness
- On the 23rd of March I will be taking part in a public debate at the Ayn Rand centre on the topic, 'Heroism, Happiness, and a Search for Meaning - Ashley Frawley & Andrew Bernstein'. Details [here](#).

- Starting in May I will be hosting the 'Resisting Wokeness' tour which aims to be a conversation between left and right about the benefits and drawbacks associated with today's 'culture war'. Details [here](#).
- I have become a regular writer for UnHerd. I write about therapy culture, the culture war and other miscellaneous issues. Posts listed [here](#).
- I am a regular host of the Zero Books podcast and YouTube live stream. Zero Books is a left-wing publisher interested in examining current issues from a left-wing (mostly Marxist) perspective. Channel [here](#). I am interested in hosting coversations about therapy culture, its benefits and drawbacks, and anything in between. So please do get in touch if you would like to be interviewed on the channel.

5. Dylan Kerrigan

University of Leicester and University of the West Indies at St. Augustine

I am currently a lead researcher on the GCRF-funded 'Mental Health, Neurological and Substance Abuse Disorders in Guyana's Prisons: 1825 to the Present' (2019-2022) - The project received a grant of £1.2 million to investigate to the mental health legacy of colonialism and Empire in Guyana's jails, and combines a 12 person multidisciplinary team from University of Leicester and the University of Guyana (more details available here <https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/history/research/grants/MNS-Disorders>)

My new co-authored book 'Imagining Society. The Case for Sociology' was published by Bristol University Press in Feb 2020. The book includes a chapter on the Social Self, that provides content on the relationship between popular psychology and the remaking of the social self

I was the lead researcher for the United Nations Development Programme, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago for the pilot project 'Using Positive Deviance Techniques to Reduce Gang Violence Project in Trinidad and Tobago' (2018-2019). The project looked at the relationship between socio-economic situation, psych-social injuries and life skill deficits, and the ways to treat with the consequences of this relationship such as reducing gang membership and violent masculinities.

My chapter 'Therapeutic Jurisprudence in Trinidad and Tobago: Legitimacy, Inclusion and the Neo Colonialism of Procedural Justice' was accepted for inclusion in the Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures

6. Teresa Kuan

Chinese University of Hong Kong

An anthropologist engages systemic therapy

Since my first project, which ended as a book publication titled Love's Uncertainty: The Politics and Ethics of Child Rearing in Contemporary China (UC Press, 2015), I have always been interested in the social life of psychological ideas. While the dissertation-based book project focused on the lived experience of parenting in relation to popular child rearing

advice – much of which promotes the idea of a psychological child with psychological needs – recent field research has taken me into a highly specialized world of therapeutic practice: systemic family therapy. Systemic therapy may not be the most popular in the context of China’s “psycho-boom,” a heterogenous landscape composed of a great variety of modalities, practices, and forms of engagement. It is however good to think with. The key idioms in systemic therapy as they were practiced at my field site seem to emphasize the kinds of things anthropologists like to problematize, e.g. the notion of self-determination and the aspiration for separateness. Training and observing as an intern alongside other trainees, I have come to understand clinical idioms as cultural idioms for selectively problematizing some aspects of reality and not others, in the formulation of pragmatic responses. I recently published an article titled “Feelings run in the family” in the journal *Ethnos* on this research (see link below), and I am now struggling to make sense of yet another highly specialized world of theory and practice, which feels like having to learn a new language all over again.

Link/Citation:

Teresa Kuan (2019) Feelings Run in the Family: Kin Therapeutics and the Configuration of Cause in China, *Ethnos*, DOI: [10.1080/00141844.2019.1634614](https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2019.1634614).

7. China Mills

City, University of London

Publications:

A commentary piece on the lancet Commission on Global Mental Health:

Cosgrove, L., Mills, C., Amsterdam, J., Heath, I., Mehta, A., Kalathil, J., and Shaughnessy, A. (2019). Global Mental Health. *The Lancet*. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)30945-64](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)30945-64)

Two publications about the 'social life' of global mental health technologies, focused on the WHO's mhGAP-IG:

China Mills & Kimberly Lacroix (2019) Reflections on doing training for the World Health Organization’s mental health gap action program intervention guide (mhGAP-IG). *International Journal of Mental Health*
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00207411.2019.1683681>

China Mills and Eva Hilberg (2019) ‘Built for expansion’: the ‘social life’ of the WHO's mental health GAP Intervention Guide. *Sociology of Health and Illness*.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-9566.12870>

A new publication about psy-practices with children in Poland as part of a special issue of Global Studies of Childhood on 'Psychiatrised Childhoods: Observed, Understood and Experienced':

Timo Beeker, Anna Witeska-Młynarczyk, Sanne te Meerman, and China Mills (2020). Psychiatrization of, with and by children: Drawing a complex picture. *Global Studies of Childhood*, 10(1): 12-5. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610619890074>

Research grants:

I am working with Dr Reima Ana Maglajlic (University of Sussex) and two mental health user and survivor organisations in Sarajevo on a project funded by the International Social Research Foundation (ISRF) titled: ““Madness” after the war – exploring alternatives to dominant understandings of mental health in the context of political conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina’.

8. Daniel Nehring

East China University of Science and Technology, Shanghai

In late February, my new book, *Imagining Society: The case for sociology*, was published by Bristol University Press. In *Imagining Society*, Dylan Kerrigan and I survey contemporary sociological thought and set out a case for its contemporary relevance to public life and politics. In doing so, we argue for a global sociology capable of moving beyond the Eurocentrism that has defined much of the discipline’s history. We consider the rise of the ‘psychological imagination’ as a salient alternative mode of explaining social problems in contemporary societies, and we consider why sociological arguments nonetheless should matter today.

Further information about the book can be found under the following links:

<https://bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/imagining-society>

<https://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/distributed/l/bo57720953.html>

9. Mariano Ben Plotkin

Institute for Economic and Social Development (IDES), Buenos Aires

From Candomblé to Freud: A New Approach to Therapeutic Cultures from the South

This project, carried out by Mariano Ben Plotkin, Nicolás Viotti and Piroka Csúri, is an attempt to revisit the concept of “therapeutic culture” from a South American perspective. It focuses in two cities: Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research carried out in both cities, we show the complexities of the conformation of therapeutic constellations in contexts in which “modern” and “global” forms of therapy coexist and are combined with “traditional” forms of therapy and Afro religions; and where individualistic forms of conformation of the self (usually associated to global therapeutic cultures) are intertwined with relational frames of the subjectivity.

10. Suvi Salmenniemi

University of Turku

Recent publications:

Assembling Therapeutics: Cultures, Politics and Materiality (edited by Suvi Salmenniemi, Johanna Nurmi, Inna Perheentupa and Harley Bergroth), Routledge, 2020. Open access publication: <https://www.routledge.com/Assembling-Therapeutics-Open-Access-Cultures-Politics-and-Materiality/Salmenniemi-Nurmi-Perheentupa-Bergroth/p/book/9780815377979>

This volume examines the ways in which people engage with therapeutic practices, such as life coaching, mindfulness, complementary and alternative medicine, sex and relationship counselling, spiritual healing and self-tracking. It investigates how human and non-human actors, systems of thought and practice are assembled and interwoven in therapeutic engagements, and traces the situated, material and political dimensions of these engagements. By focusing on lived experiences through ethnographically informed case studies, the book elucidates the diverse forms, meanings and embodied effects of therapeutic engagements in different settings, as well as their potential for both oppressive and subversive social change. In this way, *Assembling Therapeutics* contributes to our understanding of multiple modes of healing, self-knowledge and power in contemporary societies.

Salmenniemi, Suvi (2019) *Therapeutic Politics: Critique and Contestation in the Post-Political Conjuncture*. *Social Movement Studies* 18:4, 408-424. (Open Access publication)

This article addresses forms of political engagement in the therapeutic field. Drawing on ethnographic research on popular psychology self-help, alternative and complementary health practices and new spiritualities, the paper takes issue with the dominant interpretation of the therapeutic as a depoliticizing force. Although this interpretation captures important facets of the phenomenon, the paper suggests that something more complex is afoot. It argues that therapeutic practices may also animate political contestation and critique, and challenge the prevailing grammar of political conflict. It substantiates this argument by identifying two modalities of politics in the therapeutic field: collective mobilization through a political party, and therapeutic practices as a form of lifestyle politics. It goes on to suggest that, together, these modalities constitute a subaltern counterpublic politicizing the political economy of health and the erosion of democratic governance. The paper concludes by suggesting that analysis of the therapeutic field may shed light on the shifting logics of political contestation at the contemporary political conjuncture.

Perheentupa, Inna & Salmenniemi, Suvi (2019) *Treading the tightrope of femininity: Gender and subjectivity in a therapeutic community*. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 26:4, 390-404.

This article examines the therapeutic self-transformation process in a self-help group in Russia. Drawing on participant observation and interviews, and engaging with

debates on therapeutic technologies and the transformation of gender relations, it explores how the self-help group shapes how participants come to understand and act upon themselves. It shows that the process of self-transformation is profoundly gendered, problematising femininity and identifying it as an object of therapeutic intervention. Rather than collectively contesting gendered power and disadvantage, participants are invited to cultivate traditional notions of femininity and masculinity and learn to draw pleasure from them. We argue that this message may be appealing to women because it speaks to their lived experience of exhaustion and precarity, and offers them the prospect of overcoming it through a mythologised heteronormative order. It offers solace and a potential escape route where room for political agency is limited and feminist discourse heavily vilified. Yet the article also shows that participants do not merely internalise the ideological messages of the group, but engage with them in contradictory and ambivalent ways.

11. Peter Skagius

Linköping University

New article published: Brains and psyches: Child psychological and psychiatric expertise in a Swedish newspaper, 1980–2008

Drawing on Actor–Network theory, in this this article I explore two child psychological and psychiatric modes of ordering children’s mental health discernible in Sweden’s largest morning newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, during the years 1980 to 2008: a psychodynamic mode and a neuro-centered mode. The psychodynamic mode stressed the parents’ role in structuring and affecting the child’s unconscious and saw them as the primary cause of any mental illness. In contrast, the neuro-centered mode highlighted that mental issues were related to the child’s brain and proposed different solutions depending on whether the child’s brain functioned in a ‘normal’ or ‘atypical’ manner.

You can find the article at

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0952695118810284>

CfP: Futures ahead: Translations and collaborations between medicine, social science and the humanities

At this conference, taking place in November at Linköping university, Linköping Sweden, we seek to explore the already existing collaborations between medicine, the humanities, and the social sciences. The conference focuses, for instance, on lived experiences of embodiment and illness, on ethical and in other ways normative aspects of medicine, on local and global health challenges. It focuses also on how sociocultural knowledge is translated into medical or health care practices, or the other way around, how discourses of society and culture are produced within medicine and health care. We also explore collaborations between researchers and clinicians, and seek to grasp new challenges and central collaborations for the future.

More info at:

<https://liu.se/en/research/medicinsk-humaniora-och-samhallsvetenskap>

12. Magdalene Sylvaire

University of Tasmania

Book Review Highlights A Turn From DSM Psychiatry

Magdalene Sylvaire wrote a book review article in September 2019, about a self-published book by a US medical doctor who resolved his own long-term 'Bi-Polar' psychiatric diagnosis. The doctor quit psychiatric drugs and instead used ancient spiritual practices to fully recover. The book is called "I: Unnameable" (2016) by Jeffrey Fidel MD.

Magdalene's review can be seen

here: <https://www.madinamerica.com/2019/09/doctor-cures-bipolar-diagnosis-without-psychiatry/>

Article About YouTube As A Whistleblowing Tool

Magdalene Sylvaire wrote an oped for 'The Whistle' October 2019 newsletter, published by *Whistleblowers Australia*. Discussing a famous 2019 US beauty guru incident on YouTube, Magdalene's oped explained why it was an act of 'whistleblowing'. Magdalene's oped theorised that whistleblowing is likely to occur in a 'Narcissism Drama Triangle' (adapting Stephen Karpman's Drama Triangle Theory) and offered her idea that 'narcissism' is a relationship system (rather an individually diagnosable medical condition). The article can be seen here: https://www.bmartin.cc/dissent/contacts/au_wba/

13. Hanna Ylöstalo

University of Turku

Depoliticisation and repoliticisation of feminist knowledge in a Nordic knowledge regime: The case of gender budgeting in Finland.

Hanna Ylöstalo's article about feminist knowledge in policy making has been published in *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* special issue: Feminist perspectives to the economy within transforming Nordic welfare states. The article analyses the role, form and producers of feminist knowledge in the recent gender budgeting initiative in Finland. It focuses on the depoliticizing as well as the repoliticizing tendencies in feminist knowledge production.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2020.1727008>

'Scientific' policymaking in a 'complex' world - what can we learn from the Finnish experience?

Hanna Ylöstalo's blog text in *Discover Society* deals with the role of scientific knowledge in contemporary policy reforms. It shows that the rise of the evidence-based policymaking movement, combined with the popular conviction that the world has become more complex, has encouraged policy practitioners to justify different kinds of policy reforms using knowledge and science. Although the evidence-based policy movement has 'scientised' contemporary policy reforms, the role of scientific knowledge remains contested within these reforms.

Link to blog: <https://discoversociety.org/2020/02/05/policy-and-politics-scientific-policymaking-in-a-complex-world-what-can-we-learn-from-the-finnish-experience/>