

Sigmund and Michel, Alain and Mary Go Shopping: The commodification of misery*

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SUMMARY: Misery, like anything, can be sold. Selling requires relabelling, promotion and, in the case of illusory Psy 'conditions', the prospect of 'cure.' This article explores the commodification of distress with particular reference to sexual 'problems' and ADHD.

KEY WORDS: ADHD, pathologisation, sex, Asperger's syndrome

Not so very long ago, in 1847, Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Mason offered a vision of madness, derangement and disorder familiar to our forebears. An essentially private, shameful, affliction, what we would now understand as a 'psychiatric condition', was to be disowned, denied and hidden from public view.¹ In 2011, reviews of David Cronenberg's *A Dangerous Method* – certainly in the British press – were more focussed on the frisson generated by Keira Knightley's (rather tame) spanking scenes than on the notion of psychoanalysis as a 'cure' for mental disorder.² Indeed, the very idea that derangement should be susceptible to talking therapy has become, it would appear, entirely unremarkable. No longer 'a most dangerous method' as William James had it³ nor, it would appear, even a remotely dangerous idea, therapy is a cultural commonplace. The corollary of course, is that the issues now requiring 'therapy' are also themselves cultural commonplaces. Unlike Bertha Mason, Sabina Spielrein's contemporary successors do not need to be kept in an attic.

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