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Psychiatry and Military Conscription in Brazil: The Search for Opportunity and Institutionalized Therapy

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Abstract

Since the fall of the Brazilian military dictatorship in 1984, a number of structural and ideological changes associated with demilitarization and democracy have changed the face of psychiatric theory and practice. Around the country, pockets of innovative, politically sensitive and Marxist-inspired community-based forms of “psi” practice are developing. This emergent psi movement is making a range of positive contributions to the lives of average citizens, including those of poor disenfranchised youth. This paper, however, explores one particular dimension of the work of psi practitioners that has proven antithetical to the psi community’s current politicized community-based aims. Based on qualitative and quantitative longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork with therapists and young men in Pelotas, this paper analyzes how certain kinds of psi interventions being carried out in schools for a subset of lower-class young men during their early teen years are encouraging some youth to seek military training as a life option. Although these young men initially had quite captivating, engaged and politicized—if also conflicting—interactions with therapists, their eventual disillusionment with their therapeutic and scholastic experiences resulted in high levels of social alienation and depoliticization. In these young men’s search for what can best be described as formulaic solutions to troubling psychological experiences associated with a tumultuous institutionalized transition to adulthood, military training came to represent a form of self-cultivation and self-therapy. Several youth also hoped military training would enable them to actively disengage with local political processes and find shelter from troubling social inequities and injustice. The paper ends by reviewing the implications of these results for the future of psi knowledge and practice in Brazil.

Keywords

Brazil; Medicalization; Military; Class conflict; Psychoanalysis

Introduction

Since the fall of the military dictatorship in 1984, Brazilian psychiatric theory and practice have changed considerably. Through a number of structural and ideological changes associated with demilitarization and democracy, the psychoanalytically informed psychiatrist has become a key figure in a larger multi-institutional initiative. Although by no means a homogeneous endeavor, this initiative is comprised of a diverse constellation of professionals who are devoting themselves to ensuring that the period post-transition be as constructive, equitable and democratic as possible. For many of these professionals, key components to nurturing a healthy democracy include tackling the social and economic

uncertainties associated with the transition and boosting popular political awareness and participation.

For the first time in Brazil's history, these changes are enabling psychiatrists to systematically disseminate their expert knowledge throughout a variety of non-clinical institutional settings, including schools, local government and non-governmental community-based organizations. In doing so, they are simultaneously learning to work with new problems and under unfamiliar conditions. At a global level, this is not a unique development. Following the seminal works of Michel Foucault, several anthropologists and historians have demonstrated how the institutional domains of psychiatric practice have widened over the past century in several countries (e.g. Ehrenberg 1998). It is well known that this expansion endows psychiatry with greater authority over pre-existing and newly defined pathologies. At the same time, the diffusion of psychiatric techniques is heterogeneous, uneven and mediated through informal power. Indeed, it is not without some degree of turmoil, resistance and need for continual readjustment that psychiatric practice gains ground (Foucault 1965 [1988]; 1963 [1973]). That this process is currently in motion in Brazil provides an excellent opportunity to explore the mechanisms through which psychiatry expands its power by recognizing its own limitations, modifying itself to adapt to new social and political situations and integrating itself into a multi-institutional network of ideologies and practices.

The ethnography presented in this paper—conducted in the small city of Pelotas in southern Brazil since 1997—had as its overarching aim the documentation of the effects of psychiatry's expanding process in the lives of local families. I focused on psychiatry's potential to shape the way patients confront and manage the indeterminate aspects of rapid social and economic change. Because young people are now targeted by various new national and international initiatives (ASBRA 2002), my research focused specifically on young people's experiences and their transitional "adolescent" phase. I was particularly interested in how psychiatry relates to the other institutional settings that shape young people's transition to full adulthood.

Elsewhere, I show that in many instances, the interventions and insights psychiatrists provide are true to their socially imbued objectives (Béhague 2004). The findings presented in this paper, however, explore one particular dimension of the work of psychiatrists that has proven antithetical to their current aims. As the theories and practices of psychiatrists expand into a local "psi" complex¹—a term used locally to refer to the conglomerate of psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers situated in varied institutional settings—the psychiatrist's ideals are inevitably transformed. One such transformation, sparked by the implementation of psi interventions in schools for a subset of lower-class youth, is inadvertently depoliticizing young men and encouraging them to seek military training. In the military, these young men seek not only shelter from the everyday institutionalized inequities and injustices that cause them psychological distress, but also a strict and institutionalized form of self-cultivation and therapy.

This paper begins with an exploration of the practical and ideological changes that psi practice has undergone in order to contribute to solving the negative impact that Brazil's political transition has had in the lives of young people. The second half of the paper explores young men's experiences with psi knowledge and interventions over the course of

¹The term "psy," or "psi" in Brazilian Portuguese and Spanish, is used to designate the whole of the psychological, psychiatric and social work complex, notwithstanding the significant differences that separate each subdiscipline. Used in both Latin American and French literature, the term psi connotes a specific theoretical assumption: to describe a multisite institutionalized apparatus that has transformed the whole of society's attitude toward pathology, the individual and even notions of social participation and citizenship (Ehrenberg 1995; Russo 1993).

several years, ranging from their early to their late teens. I show how the multi-institutional network in which the psi world now functions first enables but then disallows psi professionals to operationalize their politicized objectives throughout the course of young people's lives. It is important to highlight that while the therapeutic expectations of military training that young men create are shaped by the psi encounter, they are not determined by it. Rather, they emerge through young men's experiences with the mixing of psi- and school-based ideologies and practices (what I term the "school-psi" system), imbued as this system is with larger societal and political values and practices.

Fieldwork Approach

The material presented in this paper is based on interviews and participant observation in several clinical and nonclinical venues with approximately 40 psi professionals. I also conducted 25 interviews with other professionals key to psi's institutional expansion, including teachers, school directors, psychopedagogical advisors, local politicians, staff from the local government's department of health and leaders of local shantytown neighborhood organizations. Because of my interest in comparative analysis and the growing multi-institutional nature of psi practice, I relied on a relatively large ethnographic sample size, a longitudinal life-history framework, and the use of a quantitative survey. For this work, I was fortunate to be able to collaborate on an ongoing population-based longitudinal study of children born in Pelotas in 1982 (Victora et al. 2003). My colleagues and I acquired specific funding for an in-depth ethnographic follow-up of 96 young informants and their mothers, selected randomly from this cohort, which we visited repeatedly from ages 15 to 23 years (Béhague et al. 1997). As a supplement to these detailed life histories, two quantitative survey with randomly selected subsamples from the original 1982 sample, were interviewed in 2001 and again in 2004 when the cohort youth were 19/20 years and 23/24 of age, using a structured questionnaire (Béhague et al. 2000; Victora et al. 2003).

Psi Practitioners, the School-psi System, and Democratic Ideologies

In Brazil, the intellectual basis for an innovative and politically sensitive form of psi practice can be traced to early 20th century developments in psychoanalysis and Marxist-inspired medicine and, more recently, to the "antipsychiatry" movement (Duarte 1999–2000; Souza 2000; Tenorio 2002).² However, only during the two decades following the end of Brazil's military dictatorship have the necessary structural changes occurred to enable psi professionals to put their social theories into practice. Health care reform was initiated by Brazil's second substantial constitutional revision in 1988. Throughout the 1990s, several important changes ensued, including a large-scale expansion of the primary health care network into rural areas and shantytowns, the psychiatric deinstitutionalization movement, and the establishments of publicly funded posts for community-based mental health practitioners (CONASEMS 2002; Tenorio 2000). As Brazil has counted on a vibrant clinical and university-based psychiatric community from the early 1900s, there has been little difficulty in filling these posts, and in some parts of Brazil, supply exceeds demand—particularly in the private sector.

²In this regard, a subcommunity of psychoanalyst, as in Argentina, has become decidedly social and leftist, positioning themselves as key members of a larger social movement fighting against the oppressions of the dictatorships that have afflicted both countries (Chnaiderman 1998). Nevertheless, it should be noted that while key figures at Brazilian universities have had extensive contact with French schools of psychoanalysis and critical theory, including Lacanianism, Brazilians as a whole are less critically oriented than many of their Argentinean counterparts, for whom the more radical trends in psychoanalysis became an explicit and volatile vehicle of resistance against fascism (Plotkin 2001; Roudinesco and Plon 1997).

In Pelotas, throughout the 1990s, some therapists readily embraced the ideological ideals of community-based mental health practice, involving themselves in various institutional sectors beyond that of clinical practice. Today, many act as consultants for pedagogical initiatives, contribute to public health program development, and participate in community-based consciousness-raising and advocacy organizations, as well as national-level governmental and non-governmental policymaking. Staff members at schools, local primary health care clinics, and community-based organizations are now aware of the services offered by psi practitioners and play an active role in referring patients for therapy. This is having a clear impact on utilization rates among young people. In our survey of 1,300 youth, about 30% of youth had seen a psi professional by age 19, a rate that drops to only 25% in the poorest households. The high level of utilization matches that found in the United States, one of the most medicalized countries in the world (Rabinowitz et al. 1999; Shapiro et al. 1984).

Also important for the expansion of psi practice have been concurrent ideological transformations in three other institutional arenas—namely, medicine, pedagogy, and non-governmental organizations involved in community development. Key professionals in these three institutional arenas actively support widespread psi expansion, endorsing the notion that building a society with a healthy democratic infrastructure is not simply a governmental process; but also a personal-psychological one.³

While the influence of the therapist in society has grown, the expansion process is imbued with considerable upheaval and debate. Now confronted with a largely lower-middle-class public-sector clientele, psi professionals are being forced into an intimate relationship with Brazil's post-dictatorial social and economic crises. For most of these psi professionals, this constitutes an unprecedented and even daunting experience. Several of my informants were nonetheless quick to embrace this challenge, arguing that it requires a critical review of the therapist's role, not simply in the clinic but also in society. In an almost-unanimous voice, informants supported the view that Brazilian psychiatry should not follow a biomedical model (as has been increasingly the case in North American psychiatry, and even internationally [Luhmann 2000]) but should adapt to Brazilian society's changing needs. For some informants, the repudiation of globalizing biomedical trends nurtures not only flexible diagnostic and therapeutic practices, but also reflexivity. Importantly, informants argued for the constant re-evaluation of the therapist's own professional and personal identity, as well as the nature and status of his insertion into non-clinical institutional settings and society. To this end, a significant portion of Brazil's psychiatric and psychological communities is actively transforming what has largely been a historically entrenched, psychoanalytic tradition often criticized for being elitist, excessively introspective, and apolitical, into a more democratic, popular, psychodynamic—and even politicized—form of psi practice.⁴

Given this post-dictatorial ethos, it is not surprising to find that the mental health of young people has generated considerable enthusiasm. Indeed, for many therapists, the application of psi knowledge and practice to the “problem of youth” should not be viewed simply as a

³Since the fall of the regime, certain segments of medicine have seen the revival of Guevarian-inspired practice. Alongside this, community-based organizations, central to the ripening of the popular political movements of the 1960s and 1970s that contributed to the toppling of the dictatorship, have continued their work of political mobilization and helped to create what is today a clearly unified grassroots, working-class, and urban-based identity among shantytown dwellers (Alves 1985; Ammann 1991; Cardoso 1983), spilling over also into the growth of politicized youth groups.

⁴In Pelotas, the psychoanalytic community has outlived many of its counterparts in other larger cities, where international biomedical trends and pharmaceutical companies have contributed to the growth of biomedical psychiatry and the marginalization of psychodynamically informed interpretive and analytical processes in the clinical encounter (Leibing 1994). In addition, although “psi” experts are composed of various types of professionals, and the department of psychology at the local university is very prominent, psychodynamic psychiatry takes the lead in most domains of psi practice.

clinical endeavor that aims to target ailments specific to young people, such as externalizing/behavioral problems, attention deficit, and development distortions associated with the “adolescent” transition (Abreu 2002; Michaud et al. 2001; PROSAD 2000; WHO 2002). Rather, caring for young patients was said to be a uniquely reflexive process, one critical to bolstering and maintaining the psychological health of future generations and the sociopolitical “health” of society as a whole. These views partially reflect the specific model of the mind that therapists are using in their work with youth. Although resolutely Freudian, most therapists claim to be eclectic and theoretically inclusive, thereby also incorporating principals they have learned from key theorists in related schools of thought, namely, those from the British object-relations school (Melanie Klein and Winnicott), the North American school of self-psychology (associated with Heinz Kohut) and those associated with Erik Erikson, whose works emerged out of ego psychology (Roudinesco and Plon 1997). While Kohut has introduced in this community of therapists a relativistic form of therapy that takes social and cultural differences into account and that considers the political aspects behind systems of meaning, Erikson has been instrumental to fostering an interest in how developmental issues change throughout the lifespan. The focus on the role of youth for ensuring “sociopolitical health” also reflects broader non-medical concerns currently gaining ground. As the Brazilian Association for Adolescence has proclaimed, young people are the “vanguard” of society’s future and thereby represent a particularly important demographic group for a country undergoing political and economic transitions (ASBRA 2002).

On a practical level, ideological reform and decentralization of the Brazilian educational system, also accomplished throughout the 1990s, spawned a number of partnerships among medicine, pedagogy, and local neighborhood organizations (Cabral Costa 1997). Through these collaborations, psi practitioners have become active in public schools, many of them in shantytowns. Specifically, they provide teacher training in the identification and prevention of emotional problems, give lectures on the many psychological and health dangers associated with adolescence and partner with public health specialists and community-based organizations to develop school-based health prevention campaigns. Each school is staffed by a pedagogical specialist and, quite often, a clinical psychologist or social worker, who provides direct in-house consultations to students and parents and refers students to psychiatrists and psychologists working outside the school when necessary. Partnerships between schools and the local university department of psychiatry have also provided a space for training of psychiatric medical residents and for psychiatrists to take the lead in supervising school-based psychologists and social workers.

Positioned at the core of the psi system’s political objectives, these school-psi partnerships are full of inspiring prospects. While bringing expert knowledge and practices to the shantytown, they have also brought a hitherto far-removed reality to the therapist. As several therapists have indicated, the school provides the therapist with ready access to a young and lower-class patient population.⁵ Seen to be a reflection of wider societal dynamics, the school also represents a microcosm of society within which therapists can begin implementing “social therapy” in a contained and manageable way.

From the perspective of pedagogic experts, in turn, developing student-centered psi-based knowledge of relevance to general pedagogic processes is helpful for generating a sense of healthy democracy and “critical consciousness” in students. For several of the teachers I interviewed, critical consciousness constitutes the cornerstone of an empathetic, psychologically sensitive and, thus, non-disciplinarian, pedagogical philosophy (e.g.,

⁵This is particularly so in the more developed areas of the south, where the majority of children attend school for at least a few years. In our 2001 survey of the cohort youth, for example, only about 1% of adolescents had never been to school and only 5% were not in school at 15 years of age.

associated with the works of Paulo Freire). This philosophy has been posited by pedagogic specialists as a much-needed response to the damaging pedagogical practices that emerged during the dictatorship (Zaluar 1994). As one therapist argued, to be effectively implemented, this new pedagogical approach ideally requires school staff to engage with and be intimately knowledgeable about both formal and informal social dynamics that develop in the school environment. The most notable of these dynamics are the tensions and challenges that the interplay of economic and social inequities in schools creates for students and teachers alike. Indeed, school staff claimed that a major challenge of their work relates not to formal instruction itself, but to finding ways to more fruitfully help marginalized shantytown youth adapt to what is, for many, a foreign environment rife with new and conflict-ridden relationships. Psychologically informed pedagogical approaches that take such social dynamics into account were often cited by therapists and school staff as fundamental elements in the creation of a psychologically healthy and supportive school environment.

The Interplay of Schooling, Class, and Military Conscription

Given the carefully delineated social objectives laid out by partnerships between psychiatry and schooling, it is curious, if not unsettling, to find that psi interventions are in fact depoliticizing some youth, alienating them from the school environment and cultivating representations of military training as a self-perceived opportunity for young men to transform themselves. While school-based psi interventions and therapeutic representations of military training are intricately interrelated, in what follows, I show that the young person's interactions with psi knowledge and practice do not directly determine the desire for military training. Rather, they play a significant role as one in a series of social, economic, and institutional catalysts leading some young men to avidly desire military conscription as a solution to their psychological and social problems.

Before moving directly to the link between psi practices and enlistment, I will first explain how the draft in Brazil has effectively become a system of "voluntary conscription," however contradictory that may seem. At age 18, all young men are required to register with the military and undergo a series of physical and basic literacy tests. However, due to demilitarization and budget cuts since the mid-1980s, the government cannot finance full conscription and, so, has de facto operated a system of selective conscription. In theory, only those who are deemed healthy and able, and who have a minimum schooling requirement of 8 years, are selected to serve an obligatory 8–12 months of service (Castro 1990). There is little published information on how the recruitment process actually works, but it is well known that conscription is not a strictly enforced system and there are many ways of avoiding service if one so chooses. Indeed, the military became quite unpopular after the end of the dictatorship, and most youth now do their best to avoid the draft and what they typically identify as an isolating and arduous experience (Castro 1990). Often, decisions on who will be selected for service are made informally, through nepotistic relations, before young people even appear for the requisite exams. According to one source, about 75% of those who enlist receive indefinite deferments, and these tend to be those from the middle and upper-middle classes (Hudson 1997).

In contrast to this general trend, recent reports have documented that a growing proportion of recruits, usually those from poorer backgrounds who view military service as a potentially life-altering opportunity, is not only readily complying with conscription but actively seeking to be selected for service (Hudson 1997). This trend has been noted by military officials responsible for recruitment in Pelotas (R. Lima, personal communication, 2001). In my research, I found that lower-class youth who are particularly apt at lobbying recruitment officials will often succeed in being selected, even if they are not initially

identified as preferred recruits. In fact, in a 2004 survey we recently conducted of the 1982 cohort youth, almost 30% of those who ended up serving did not in fact have the requisite 8 years of schooling. In practice, then, Brazil's system of conscription is not at all an obligatory draft. Rather, it is easily rejected by some, made inaccessible to others and actively desired by a socially marginalized minority.

Given the existence of what is in fact a flexible system, understanding what influences choice and preference for military service is highly pertinent. In our 2001 survey, youth were asked, before being required to register for recruitment, if they wanted to serve, and 56% said yes. Perhaps one of the most important aspects influencing desire to enlist is class status. As shown in Table 1, the impetus to serve comes mostly from the lower and middle classes: only 30% of the very rich (more than ten minimum salaries per month) stated that they wanted to go, as opposed to about 60% among the lower and middle income groups (see Table 1).⁶

Interviews with the 46 young men participating in the qualitative portion of the study indicate that, apart from a small group of select middle- and upper-class boys who have effectively been tracked by their families into a military career since childhood, the majority of upper-class boys reject military service because it impedes their educational and professionalizing plans. Moreover, for some upperclass boys and their parents, the military is seen explicitly as an institution reserved for "second-class citizens" who have few options in life.

For many lower- and middle-class boys, in contrast, interest in military service was shaped by numerous perceived benefits. Training provides housing, basic skills, and course work. With multiple years of school retention having become the norm for lower-class youth (Barros et al. 1995), many youth were seduced by the prospect of longer-term stability associated with a possible future military education and career. Not surprisingly, some young men often understood military service to be a possible direct replacement for secondary schooling, indicated by the fact that the military examination process was referred to as a "competition," terminology that is actually specific to the selection process used at universities and technical colleges. Several of these young men were under the impression that should they "do well" in the first 9–12 months of service, they might be selected for entry into a military academy. The link between school failure and desire to serve was also clear in our survey: about 64% of boys who had failed a year or more in school by 15 years of age stated that they wanted to enlist, as opposed to 39% for those who had never failed a year (see Table 1). Financial considerations were also critical. Military stipends are between one and two minimum salaries per month,⁷ which, while quite low, for many youth, represents more than their whole family's combined monthly wage. With well-publicized high levels of unemployment looming in many of these young men's futures, the military was seen to provide much-needed financial security.

These social patterns are not new. Literature has shown that reasons for voluntary enlistment include restricted educational opportunities and unemployment, as well as problems with delinquency and the law (Cameron et al. 2000; Hopkin 2003). That social and economic marginalization from the onset of a young person's life is in some cases replaced by the "total" institutionalization of military training is also confirmed in historical works, showing that military institutionalization in Brazil and other Latin American countries has always

⁶Related to income is race, which is distributed in a similar way to income, whereby those who are racially excluded (black and mulatto) voiced a desire to enlist more frequently than white youth did (see Table 1).

⁷This is equivalent to ~US\$100–200 per month, which, for a family of three or four, constitutes a lower-class wage and is a level typical of families living in shantytowns.

functioned as a repository for various segments of society's underclass (Beattie 2001; Cameron et al. 2000; Flynn 2002).

The Meaning of Psi Referrals for Young Teenage Boys: Conflict and Opportunities for Change

Despite the conspicuousness of these results, the link between scholastic and economic marginalization and desire to be drafted appeared to me to explain only part of the story. Upon further exploration, I began to notice that while several boys who had done poorly in school and who worried about unemployment stated they wanted to enlist, many did not hold onto this aspiration for long. It was, rather, those who had been readily psychologized as young teenagers who spoke of military training in a sustained and potentially life-altering way. As I elaborate below, although these boys had initially had quite captivating and hopeful (if also conflicting) interactions with the school-psi system, their eventual disillusionment with their therapeutic and scholastic experiences resulted in high levels of social alienation and depoliticization.

But how exactly were these youth readily psychologized, at least initially? Captivating the attention and interest of poor young men was not generally an easy endeavor for therapists. On the contrary, most young men from the lower classes responded to referrals for psi therapy either with resolute indifference, and thus passive dismissal, or with vehement rejection. Even a cursory investigation of the school context in which youth are referred for therapy explains this normative response. High rates of retention, generalized discontentment among school staff, intense conflicts between “troublesome” students and teachers, and tensions between students fueled by class differentials make the school environment an extremely volatile one (Gatti et al. 1996; Skidmore 1999). Given this atmosphere, it is not surprising that problems relating specifically to disruptive behaviors—aggression, violence, acting-out, attention difficulties and school failure—were the prime symptoms leading many lower-class boys to be referred for therapy by school staff. For most young men, diagnostic labels such as these were interpreted to be a form of personal critique rather than a pathway toward support. Because psi professionals were identified by these boys as part and parcel of an unjust schooling system where social marginalization, uncertainty, and class-based conflict colored their everyday existence, the psi encounter generally served only to highlight existing tensions and reaffirm these young men's social marginalization.

In contrast, the boys whose interactions with the school-psi system during their early teen years eventually led to a sustained interest in military training as a form of self-imposed therapy had (ironically) been initially less resolute about their rejection of the school-psi system. In fact, some were clearly enticed by the therapeutic interventions they experienced and the psi knowledge they gained. In part, this response was a result of their more politicized nature. These young men demonstrated a form of politicization that supported a genuine interest in engaging with the school-psi environment and with school-based democratic processes. While this often led them toward more socially volatile and conflicting relationships with school authorities, it was precisely because they understood these conflicts within a politicized framework that they were, at the same time, comparatively open to psi efforts. Many demonstrated positive and engaged, if also contentious, reactions to the idea that in-depth social and personal analysis of their situation could soften their own emotional turmoil, as well as lead to the improvement of the school environment.

Alex, a boy from one of Pelotas's most isolated and poorest of shantytowns, provides a case in point. When I met alex, at 15 years of age, he had already failed 3 years in school: the

first time in first grade and then, again, twice in fifth grade. Alex's mother, Silvia, believed that her son's failure was resolutely a matter of his difficulty with learning, coupled with his lack of interest in applying himself to his studies. Throughout his 15th year, he was frequently sent out of the classroom for misbehavior and referred to the school psychologist, who told him that he has difficulties with his "attention abilities." Although Alex's experiences with school staff, including the school psychologist, were quite contentious and inflammatory, making him outwardly resistant to the idea that the psychologist could help him with his studies, he did not reject the school-psi system from the upstart. In private, he accepted what he was told—to spend more time on his homework, to "try harder" and to think about the reasons for his emotional and behavioral outbursts. In contrast to many other youth, who see the school system as resolutely unfair and do their best to pass by cheating, Alex tried to adapt to school in an "appropriate way," arguing that it is important to try to learn the material students are given and despondently citing examples of young men with college degrees who are extremely ignorant. When asked if he struggled to pass his subjects because he lacked knowledge, Alex was quick to provide an explanation for his troubles that lies with his emotional health: "Well, no, I get very nervous. The minute I get nervous, I forget, I forget the simplest things."

At the same time that Alex clearly accepted the value of trying hard and studying more, acknowledging that some of his problems emerge from his own individual emotional and learning difficulties, he was also careful to avoid accepting the whole of the responsibility and readily pointed to numerous weaknesses in the school system. This more critical position became increasingly apparent during Alex's 16th year, when he was once again sent to the psychologist for his schooling problems and for his "aggressive" reactions during an incident with a teacher that, according to Alex, escalated into a full-blown conflict:

She [the teacher] stormed out really angry, like a "fera" [wild animal]. She said she was disgusted by my face, that she hated me, could not stand me anymore. But I don't know why, because I never did anything to her. And then I went to talk to the psychologist, who just kept asking me what happened, asking me other questions, and when I told her what the teacher had said, she said that wasn't true, that's not what the teacher said. She didn't explain anything to me.

Alex was befuddled by his experience with the psychologist, who simply asked questions and refrained from explaining the reason for the psi referral and for the teacher's hostility toward him. For Alex, the psychologist's role should be an explanatory rather than an inquisitive one, particularly since, he pointed out, the psychologist is knowledgeable about the school, adulthood, and conventional (upper-class) society. Alex's analysis of the situation led him to critically question the role of psychologist in school, arguing that she is employed by the school "just to say they have one, just there to make money." "There's one that they tried to get rid of," he added, "but it didn't work. I have already gone to talk to her, but it didn't help, she didn't give me any advice." Alex was disheartened at the school psychologist's inability to address the reason for the teacher's "hatred of him" and felt only partially able to renegotiate what he felt was a legitimate standing in the school. As he described:

I told the director she should go to the actual classrooms and ask there, and not just hear things, because they can't write on my card that I'm aggressive. I admit it with teachers, if they yell at me, I find it hard to keep still. It's very hard for me...the blood rises to my head and nothing can stop me. But shit, there are some teachers that really offend you, that leave you completely crazy. Even if you don't say anything back, they still reprimand you. There are some that just come straight at me, and I can't even defend myself. I can't even give an explanation.

The therapist's interventions clearly frustrated Alex. At the same time, this did not preclude the therapist from also responding to Alex's need to engage with a wider and socially imbued understanding of his problems. With the therapist's support, Alex analyzed the social elements of his school problems and decided to change schools in an attempt to improve his school performance by starting from ground zero: "I decided to change schools when I got a bit older. I was not doing well, I was very *bagunçeiro* [creating a riot] and was so picked on by the teachers, I got very 'marked up' [stigmatized] and blamed always for other kids' *bagunça* that I took on." Having changed schools several times in an effort to pass the year, he was able to compare different school environments and come to the conclusion that in schools where he is valued and not harassed by the teachers, he "loses" his tendency to fight and be rebellious. After a small period of dropping out of school in order to search for employment (unsuccessfully), he returned to school once again, beginning what for many boys is a cycle of truancy and social and scholastic withdrawal.

Unlike many youth who eventually disengage from the educational system altogether, however, Alex kept his circle of friends from school and continued to analyze what might be going wrong with his school trajectory, looking toward both his own contributions and those of the school environment. He described the characteristics of "good and bad" teachers, criticizing bad teachers for using foul language when addressing "students like him" and for telling youth who struggle with exams that they are "catatonic." In an attempt to remedy such situations, he continually reviewed his options with the psychologist, and even tried to engage with the formal political processes in the school, becoming involved in circulating petitions to get bad teachers fired and resorting to using the class representative and the *Gremio Estudantil*, a recently rekindled system of student representation (branded ineffective by most students), to try to get his opinions heard. Alex is, in fact, one of a 20% minority in the survey sample of 1,300 youth who not only participated in the *Gremio Estudantil*, but also believed in the formal political system enough to have voted in the last elections.

Through these various activities, Alex was engaging in the kind of institutionally contextual and personal analysis that he had hoped the psychologist would more proactively explore together with him. His grueling and only partially successful struggle no doubt reflects the fact that he faced many different institutional and personal constraints—constraints that are experienced as daunting to tackle even by therapists themselves. Added to these challenges is the complex and even politicized nature of the psi encounters as Alex experienced them. As his experience shows, the therapist acted both as a representative of institutional authority, an "upper class" power to be struggled and reckoned with, and as a potential guide and support to navigating the injustices and inefficiencies of the school setting. These two roles are clearly at odds with one another and require a certain amount of tactful dexterity to be reconciled. Nevertheless, the dual and contradictory role of the psi professional in the school context represents an excellent opportunity for the implementation of psychiatry's social objectives.

The simultaneous challenge and opportunity represented by these boys' predicaments was also evident in the experiences of Raul, a boy who had also already failed several years in school by age 15. Since age 10, Raul's behavioral problems and aggressive tendencies had been cause for repeated referrals to psi clinicians. His contacts with psi services were particularly tumultuous, but he was not at all indifferent to them. Instead, he went to the session of his own volition once or twice and recognized the potential use of the psi sessions in assisting him with emotional control. "I used to talk to some psychologists there," he stated, "it was just to calm me down a bit because I was too much of a pain in school. I was the kind of guy, when it came down to the wire, I would study, but when it was time to make

a ruckus in class I was the first one to be there, agitating things. I was never one to receive orders easily, it horrifies me.”

At the same time that Raul did not unconditionally reject psi values, the referral clearly put his normalcy into question, to the point that he felt compelled to prove he was mentally healthy and intellectually competent. Likening the psychological sessions to school exams, he argued that he “always came out very well and never got any of the psychologist’s answers wrong.” Yet, his focus did not remain there, for he also made sure to not adopt a “subservient” attitude toward the school psychologist. In several different instances, he explicitly rejected the school staff’s suggestions that the only solution to his problems lies in changes he must make in his personality or emotional state. Like Alex, Raul pointed to aspects of the school environment that needed remedying and that could account for his troubles, such as problems with student-teacher relations.

Particularly telling in Alex’s and Raul’s experiences was their ability to engage with psi practitioners, accepting those aspects of psi knowledge that they found useful, while still avoiding overindividualized medicalization. Despite the inevitable focus on their individual scholastic abilities and dysfunctional behavioral reactions, neither of them developed understandings of their problems that were devoid of the importance of institutional and political factors. Conversely, while they were openly critical of the injustices being played out in the school, they were also not able to ignore or lightly brush off what psychologists told them and, thus, did not turn an indifferent eye to the focus on their own psychological needs and difficulties.

The nuanced way in which these young men initially approached their predicament and the therapy they were offered reflects not just the imprint of the therapeutic encounter, but the politicized institutional opportunities they encountered throughout their social development. The nature of the social conflict these young men experienced in the school was heightened by a sense of political awareness and desire to engage with democratizing changes being implemented by school staff and psi therapists. Although struggling to succeed in school, both socially and scholastically, for them, the struggle was not simply personal or cognitive. It was also political. Because of their political sensitivities, these young men initially entered into the psi encounter with an open mind, hopeful that it would help them make sense of the confusing social relations and emotions they were experiencing. Indeed, what was unique about this comparatively atypical subset of youth was not that they were identified for psi referral but, rather, that they maintained a skeptical optimism about institutional authority, used the psi language of introspection genuinely and initially banked on their ability to change both themselves *and* the school environment.

The impetus to engage with change at both a personal and a social level was particularly marked in Flavio’s life course. This young man had had relatively extensive contact with the school psychologist for both his “attention difficulties” and his “aggression” throughout his early teen years. He rejected any insinuation that he might be “crazy,” as he stated, and repeatedly made clear that one of the reasons for his problems lay in a prejudicial and inequitable social and schooling system. At the same time, Flavio also partially accepted the suggestion that his emotional difficulties arose out of what he identified as an psychologically “tumultuous adolescent phase,” a concept that featured heavily in his interactions with the psychologist and that he partially accepted. Compared to those youth who explicitly stated that the concept of an emotionally irrational “adolescence” was used by adults to stigmatize lower-class youth, Flavio’s attitude toward his psi sessions showed considerable openness and willingness to engage with both environmental and personal constraints. Like Alex, then, he too sought social as well as personal-emotional guidance from therapy.

Flavio's inward therapeutic focus in no way impeded his political inclinations, however. In fact, Flavio was probably one of the most politicized young men in the sample, a quality that also served a therapeutic function. Involved in a number of different youth subcultures, including those associated with skateboarding and rap music, Flavio used his participation in these activities to develop his political views and to counter stigmatizing stereotypes often held of youth like him. He argued, for example, that although the skateboarder is seen as a *marginal*, a vagabond who is unemployed and not interested in working, such assessments are not always true and local police should be made aware of this. While he was often openly confrontational when encountering class prejudice, be it in school or the streets (often becoming the target of police attention), he was not gratuitously so. In fact, Flavio motivated his friends to lobby the local government for the installation of a proper skateboard ramp, and even helped organize excursions for shantytown youth to travel to surrounding, more progressive towns that have a designated and legitimate space for skateboarding.

Given the extent of these young men's political interests, involvement in the school and at least somewhat positive and socially imbued experiences with psi therapists, I was surprised to find that, upon approaching their 18th birthdays, they all, in their own distinctive ways, dreamt of serving in the military and were actively finding ways to implement their desire. To be sure, their choices partly reflect the alienating experiences they had had with institutionalized inequities and injustices in the school. However, these young men had been comparatively less estranged and more socially involved than many of their socioeconomic counterparts. They had all, at some point, argued against, and at times actively struggled to address, what they identified to be an unjust and alienating social system. Yet, after a few years of struggling in the school-psi system, it seems that they had changed their position quite radically, actively seeking refuge from the school and moving toward a life in the military, an institution that segregates its members from mainstream society in a totalizing way. What could account for this seemingly incongruous turn of events?

The Search for a Military Therapeutic Solution among 18-Year-Olds: Limitations of the School-Psi System

In seeking to understand how the change from active social engagement to desired social isolation emerged, I explored the specific meanings and views that these young men developed with regard to military service as they approached 18 years of age. As already noted, for several of these young men, military service was not just motivated by a need to guarantee their future and find a source of ready income. Rather, they focused on the "knowledge," attitudes and personal strength they would acquire through undergoing both physical and psychological discipline and adversity. Several highlighted the way that military instruction shapes one's "way of thinking" and gives one a *boa cabeça* [good mind]. As one boy explained shortly after lamenting the daily grind of trying to avoid victimization in school: "You can go into the barracks practically illiterate, and they will make you capable, ignite your interests, make you see things clearly.... It doesn't matter if you start out an ignorant person, you all come out the same." Others focused not only on the positive outcomes of physical suffering, but on the need to learn to live in a fiercely competitive—and yet controlled—environment. As one such youth described:

Sometimes they take you to a field and throw a chicken in the middle, can you imagine, one chicken and tons of soldiers—they have to all run after this one chicken. They are dying of hunger—Can you imagine?—starving.... With that kind of shit, of course after they are done with you, you will be a man. Even those that say they are already a man, they become even more of a man. Because you have to

learn how to go without food...although I have already gone through hunger a lot in my life. But still, it must be good inside there.

The intense transformative process expected of training for these young men referred mostly to discipline and behavioral compliance—saluting others, following orders, waking early, and marching in line. Through routine and regulation, these activities were surmised to have a beneficial effect on the *cabeça* [mind]. However, when pressed to provide details on how military training actually works, what a military career consists of and the kind of work one would engage in after training is complete, some youth suggested that they would rather not know about instruction and future responsibilities in any detail. In a sense, the mystery of an unrevealed opportunity added to the instructional and transforming quality of the experience. While they knew that training must be demanding, their focus rested more concretely on the end result of the transformation.

Also important for some of these young men was the desire for homogeneity and predictability of social relationships. Alex, for example, focused on behavioral discipline within the context of what he expected would be a regularized and predictable social world in the “barracks.” He explained that rules are set out clearly, and while potentially severe, the consequences of failing to comply with them are unambiguous. As he stated, “In the barracks you learn to *viver direito* [live correctly], you learn respect.... If they tell you to arrive at 6 am, and you get there at 6:01, they close the door on you. And then the next day, you come and they give you a special piece of work as a *pena* [punishment].”

When asked what exactly the military trains young men to do, Alex, like other boys, could not answer in any detail. What he focused on instead was the notion that progress in the military is largely a matter of the individual’s choice, rather than his knowledge of or ability to manage injustice through informal patronage systems. Unlike the school-psi system—where, in the worst of situations, rules are not uniformly applied, and in the best of situations, they are continually being contested and relativized in the spirit of democratic change—in the military system, rules are constant. If followed, rules are a facilitating force, as they enable young recruits to be unconditionally ushered along the ranks. Equally encouraging to Alex was the notion that even if you opt to remain at a lower rank, you will continue to be part of the military community and your livelihood will not be in danger. Again, this represented for him a stark and welcomed contrast to the situations found in the school-psi setting, where, as he pointed out, everyday life in a position of low status is painful, and where informal knowledge and ability to maneuver through social inequities are necessary for survival and success.

Not coincidentally, Alex’s views of the military emerged after a lengthy discussion of his various attempts to deal with school authorities, including the psychologist, as well as after a discussion on the inequities of the Brazilian university system. Echoing his mother’s sentiments, Alex contrasted what he perceived to be the more equitably structured military system with the exclusivity of university. As he described, “The entrance exams for college are unfair. Instead of giving the spot to a poor person, they will give it to a rich person, who has a better chance of passing the exam. He is better educated, he is a refined person, so it’s obvious they will not give to a poor person if there is a rich one there wanting it too.”

Alex’s search for a solution to his personal and practical problems in military service was not simply behavioral; it was analytical as well. Having carefully thought about both his emotional reactions and the institutional and societal context in which his problems developed, Alex was also trying to address what he came to understand as the main cause of his distress—injustice. By leaving mainstream society and entering into the homogeneous world of the military, he hoped to effectively eliminate the social and economic inequities

and corresponding conflicts that he felt had given rise to his emotional outbursts and “aggressiveness.”

Ironically, perhaps, it was the very school-psi system that partially enabled, and then become the conduit for, these young men’s analysis of their social situation and eventual disillusionment with the school. For youth such as Alex, who had willingly nurtured a critical perspective alongside the support of psi therapists, hopeful that such a process would help them manage an inequitable institutional existence, the reality of their eventual failure to do so was vividly felt. With each conflicting experience in the school, the feeling that they would be incapable of success in such an unjust system was reinforced. Because these young men had initially held high expectations regarding the power that psi knowledge and insight could have to change their personal situation *and* the school’s institutional failings, they also experienced the limitations of the school-psi system more profoundly. As noted, several young men were sorely disheartened to find therapists suggesting few solutions and expecting them, the patient, to do all the analytical work. In several instances, they highlighted that the therapist should be particularly knowledgeable about their social troubles, being not only adults but also members of the upper class.

The transition from therapeutic optimism and politicized engagement to eventual societal disengagement is aptly exemplified by Raul. Raul, it will be recalled, partially welcomed psi therapy in his attempt to control his emotional outbursts. Over time, however, episodes of conflict with school staff escalated to such an extent that the school director suspended Raul temporarily and then transferred him to night school. Raul felt utterly deceived, and decided he would simply not return to school. Although he did eventually return to school, by that time his sense of alienation and rejection had grown too large for any politicized psi initiative to have an effect on his scholastic progress, his relationship with school staff or the school’s institutional dynamics.

When asked how he expected life to develop in his late teens, without hesitation Raul cited three key issues: money, having “a good mind” and “becoming someone” through military service. At this age, however, Raul’s hoped-for pathway toward emotional well-being depended less on self-analysis and more on a process of cutting himself off from society and on a rigorous retraining of his behaviors and ways of thinking through military service. Although he voiced concerns regarding the “totalizing” aspects of the military, Raul indicated that he needed to endure such “captivity” to achieve functional adulthood, marked as this was for him by the acquisition of a *boa cabeça* [good mind]. He imagined that in “the barracks,” he would be able to rid himself “of all vices,” referring not only to alcohol use or cigarette smoking, but also to his negative adolescent-related attitudinal and behavioral habits. Also comforting to Raul was the perception that military officials would not require him to engage in “too much thinking and talking,” as had been required of him by school staff.

In a sense, the expectations and values Raul and other young men like him held appeared contradictory. While these young men ultimately disregarded the utility of talk therapy, they nevertheless continued to emphasize both their psychological difficulties and the importance of having a strong and healthy psyche. Therefore, the impetus to seek military conscription as a response to the disillusionment these young men experienced with the school-psi system was not imbedded in a desire to reject the school-psi system altogether. Rather, these young men retained some aspects of psi knowledge and values but, with time, sought an alternative and, in their view, more effective, if radically different, way to develop psychologically and socially.

In making this shift, however, several of these men became markedly depoliticized. Flavio, it will be recalled, was highly politicized and cognizant of the social determinants of his emotional and scholastic problems. Although he meaningfully embraced psychologized concepts such as the importance of “adolescence” and developmental maturity, his continual conflicting experiences with school staff and, by extension, the school psychologist were eventually colored only by the negotiation of blame. As he explained, at age 18:

On that last time, when she [the teacher] yelled at me, I just yelled right back. Oh yes, if they yell, we have a right to yell too. So then, there we went, the two of us who had yelled, to the director’s office. And I continued arguing. {Hmm... and then you say the psychologists, no? What did she say?} Oh, they all have nothing to say. If you could see the *papo* [hot air, discourse] they come to you with, they tell you, “No, because adolescents, they have this way, this habit, this manner of being rebellious....” Well, if they ever came near me with that, I would say, “Listen, I am very conscious (consciênte) of what I do. This story [of adolescence], it’s just what psychologists say....” I would just laugh at them. I would tell them that the crazy ones are the teachers!

By this age, with registration for enlisting looming, Flavio had developed high hopes for military training. He now rejected the opportunities provided by the school-psi system but, at the same time, preserved several fundamental psychological concepts. Despite his view that the injustices experienced in the school-psi system were at the root of his problems, when he spoke of conscription, it was clear that his expectations of training were tinged with psychological notions of “acquiring consciousness” and with an effort to put an end to his “rebellious adolescent phase.” These two concepts had been pivotal points in his discussions with the psychologist. As a result, he held firm to the idea that many of his problems with the authorities and schooling could be resolved by ensuring a clean cut and curtailing his adolescence-inspired emotional outbursts. As he described, “I have always wanted to go into the military, of course, I know that means I have to stop the skateboarding, I will have to stop with all of that, cut it all off completely—I’m conscious of this, I know what it means. I only have one year left to take advantage of these things.”

The military, Flavio hoped, would help cut himself off from his youthful subcultural activities and from the perils of adolescence, a cutting-off that he, in his later years, admitted would be necessary, despite the fact that these were precisely the activities he had engaged in during previous years to make political statements about class prejudice. Like Alex, he also imagined “the barracks” to be a sheltered and cooperative community—almost like “a boarding school,” he stated, “a place where there are many people, and where each person helps the other.” Although he recognized that social inequities from the outside world do not completely disappear once inside the barracks, Flavio was nevertheless attracted to the potential equalizing and homogenizing nature of military training. The desire to eradicate social conflict and to find an institutionalized solution to the psychological difficulties he came to associate with his “adolescence” became more important than his desire to remain politically active or engage in class struggles. Indeed, Flavio eventually demonstrated little faith in, and even some despondence about, the democratic mechanisms of the school system. Furthermore, the psychologized values that he did retain—the idea that adolescent upheaval is at the root of his problems and must come to an abrupt end for his own well-being—only served to further depoliticize and alienate him from the everyday institutions of Brazilian democracy.

Do these young men’s experiences represent an isolated occurrence found among a handful of individuals, or a growing social phenomenon? The survey we conducted enabled us to explore these patterns in a wider sample, at least to the extent that measurement of a few key indicators allows. Table 2 supports the premise that what I have described qualitatively is

also the case for the sample of 1,300 youth interviewed in the quantitative survey. Specifically, Table 2 shows that upward of three-quarters of the boys who had been given expert psi attention for their schooling problems before or at about 15 years of age wished to enroll in the military when asked at age 18.

Table 3 explores this relationship further, looking at lifetime use of a psi therapist up until 18 years of age and desire to enlist for three main socioeconomic subgroups. As described in qualitative terms above, Table 3 reaffirms that the importance of the relationship between having contact with therapists and having the desire to enlist is specific to lower-class youth only.

As noted, it is not just any form of psi intervention that generates polemic and contestation from young men. Rather, it is specifically those forms of intervention and diagnosis that are linked to school-based dynamics, often focused on the inappropriate behaviors of lower-class youth, that led some youth to seek alternative and more resolutely institutionalized solutions to their problems. Although motives for seeking psi care varied, youth were classified as having been given one of three types of diagnoses: those relating specifically to a life-cycle crisis, those relating to a specific learning impediment and those relating more generally to externalization of behavioral problems (see Table 4).

As shown in Table 4, of those young men given psi attention, the desire for military training was more common among those who had so-designated behavioral problems, precisely those kinds of problems that more frequently emerge from contested and tumultuous processes imbedded in the school-psi system.

Discussion

It is well-known that increases in what is effectively “voluntary conscription” are shaped by low educational and employment opportunities and generalized societal marginalization (Cameron et al. 2000; Hopkin 2003). This paper adds to this literature by exploring one additional element contributing to the popularity of military training. I have shown that for a number of reasons relating to the social, political, and economic contexts in which psi knowledge and interventions are imparted, several young men come to view military training as a self-perceived opportunity to transform their psychologies. Having been referred for psychiatric therapy and had contact with what became for many a frustrating, if initially hopeful, diagnostic, and therapeutic process in schools, these young men became disillusioned with the societal and therapeutic options available to them. Looking for an alternative, in military training they sought a formulaic and highly institutionalized solution to socioeconomic strains and to psychological distress resulting from a conflicting institutionalized transition to adulthood. As an alternative passage to adulthood, these youth hope that military training will become a prime socializing and remedial agent—not only of adulthood and masculinity, as one might expect, but also of psychological, social and economic well-being.

What is particularly telling about these young people’s expectations of a military-induced therapeutic process is the fact that it is fueled by a process of depoliticization, by a desire for the homogenizing, socially predictable and allegedly equitable aspects of the military. After repeated experiences with thwarted attempts to engage with political and personal change in what several youth identified as an unjust school-psi system, the strictly regulated structure of the military came to be viewed as a more equitable life option. This indicates that the attraction for a militaristic life in these men is shaped not by the normalization of violence or by romanticized notions of warfare but, rather, by the dualistic quality of school-based psi interventions.

On the one hand, the school provides the therapist with fertile ground. By working within a changing institutional system, where school staff seek to nurture democratic practices and a sense of critical consciousness among youth, the socially inclined therapist is in a fortunate, if challenging, position. Psi professionals now have a golden opportunity to work not simply with the traditional focus of psychiatry—analyzing individual psychologies—but with the individual's insertion in specific social and institutional milieus. Through this, therapists ideally could not only address the distress felt by young people, but also use in-house therapy as a resource for institutional change. As several of my informants claimed, therapy should aim to help students *and* school staff engage with social-political issues and conflicts, thereby having a lasting institutionalized impact. As shown, therapists' efforts do partially contribute to these goals by responding to, and at times nurturing, young men's desire to think critically about socioinstitutional inequities.

But on the other hand, youth often viewed the therapist to be a representative of the upper class and of an elitist school system, rendering therapy itself a conflict-ridden endeavor. This socioeconomic power imbalance further constrains what is already often an inequitable relationship between provider and patient. Moreover, such dynamics are not all within the therapist's control. By situating psi encounters in a multi-institutional network, therapists do not automatically gain power—as some theorists might claim—but are confronted with their diminished control and authority. As therapists empower teachers, school-based social workers, community leaders, and even parents to use psi knowledge, they are also inevitably relinquishing control over how that knowledge is interpreted and used. Teachers' and pedagogical specialists' use of behavior-based diagnostics to label lower-class youth "problematic" is certainly not an intended outcome stipulated by the socially sensitive psi therapist. Additionally, that the educational and societal context in which psi interventions are delivered provides young people with confirmation of their low status reflects an entrenched society-wide history of elitism rather than the actions of any one therapist. Even therapists who are in direct and continued contact with young patients are confronted with the challenge of disassociating themselves from such deeply engrained inequities, at least enough to gain young persons' therapeutic confidence.

As shown, the dualistic quality of school-based psi interventions has the potential to support rather than negate therapists' original politicizing therapeutic objectives. Although the psi therapist is a contentious and conflict-inducing figure for some young men, these very qualities also make the therapist a productive counterpoint through which youth could work through their difficulties. And to a certain extent, the conundrum faced by these young men emerges partially out of a wider attempt on the part of therapists and school staff to encourage positive politicization and critical consciousness. Ultimately, however, the very psi-informed process becomes a depoliticizing one, serving as a sort of test of social adaptability and leading some young people to disengage with sociodemocratizing processes altogether. Therefore, despite what is initially a unique opportunity for institutional and psychological transformation, the psi professional is thus far failing to help this group of young men engage with the school—and society—in a way that enables sustained politicized engagement and change. Rather, psi professionals have become inadvertently complicit in cultivating and reinforcing some youth's sense of hopelessness and desire for more radical forms of self-discipline and self-transformation.

Conclusions

The implications for the future of psi knowledge and practice are potentially far-reaching, but also uncertain. It would be empirically inaccurate to state that psi interventions led in any direct way to the desire for military training as a solution to emotional difficulties. Young men's interactions with and responses to psi professionals are determined not by

psychiatry and psychology as isolated bodies of expert knowledge and practice, but by the institutionalized joining of psi and pedagogical knowledge during an era of considerable societal and political upheaval. Psychologized notions of military training found in these young men's ideologies are also shaped by the growing generalized prevalence of psi knowledge in modern society. It is likely that at least some young men who have never personally visited a therapist will seek conscription specifically for reasons pertaining to their mental well-being.

This paper should therefore not be read as an indictment of psi practice in the school environment as it stands today. Rather, it is an attempt to highlight what are, in effect, excellent opportunities for psychiatrists explicitly wanting to engage with the social and political dimensions of young people's experiences. But the effective use of therapy to help young people analyze and engage with the social world requires critical insight regarding why psychiatry is currently falling short of some of its goals. Certainly, the potential of therapy to provide concrete solutions pales in significance alongside the huge social and economic challenges that young people face and that are often at the root of their distress. However, it may also be that the use of a psychodynamic model of therapy needs further modification. Despite psychiatry's interest in widening the definition of therapy to consider society itself an object of therapeutic action, the psychiatrist's practical starting point is what he knows best—a model based on the clinic, a one-to-one encounter where, in general, conversation is expected to be primarily one-sided and analysis free-flowing from the patient. While meant to guide the patient's own self-discovery, the use of this model within the school-psi context tends to only reaffirm that the primary focus for change is the young person's emotional control, rather than staff-student relations, socioeconomic inequities, institutional constraints, or even political empowerment.

As an alternative, the therapist would do well to use the conflict that youth experience in school, which is brought to and reproduced in the clinical encounter, to help young people engage with inequities rather than feel persecuted by them. As this paper has shown, the class divide between the upper and the lower classes latently plays into the relationship between therapists and young patients, a fact that may not be as self-evident to therapists as it is to young people themselves. Yet, engaging directly with class struggles and social conflicts in order to improve school environments is what the democratic ethos now in the school supports, and what some of the youth are seen trying to do of their own volition. The psi-school system can be at least partially credited for enabling an environment that fosters healthy political contestation; as such, it would also do well to self-reflectively nurture this process further, before problematic interactions with the school-psi system continue to divert young men toward seeking a more socially isolated and radical option to their problems.

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Table 1Social and economic factors related to the desire to serve in the military: *N*(%)

	<u>Would the adolescent like to enter into military service? (2001 survey)</u>		Total
	No	Yes	
Family income: minimum salaries per month (2001 survey) ^{a,*}			
0–3	90 (39)	144 (62)	234 (100)
3.1–6	74 (42)	103 (58)	177 (100)
6.1–10	33 (38)	55 (63)	88 (100)
>10	65 (71)	24 (29)	91 (100)
Total	262 (44)	326 (55)	590 (100)
Had the adolescent failed one or more years of schooling by age 15? (1997 survey) ^{**}			
No	225 (46)	266 (54)	491 (100)
Yes	7 (23)	24 (77)	31 (100)
Total	232 (44)	290 (56)	522 (100)

*
 $p < 0.0001$ **
 $p < 0.01$

^aIn general, a family living on a monthly income of 0–3 minimum salaries is considered lower-class; 3–6 minimum salaries, lower middle-class; 6–10 minimum salaries, middle-class; > 10 minimum salaries, not “rich” but upper middle-class

Table 2Psi interventions and desire to serve in the military: $N(\%)$

<u>Would the adolescent like to enter into military service? (2001 survey)</u>			Total
	No	Yes	
Did the adolescent receive psi therapy for school-related problems? (1997 survey) *			
No	225 (46)	266 (54)	491 (100)
Yes	7 (23)	24 (77)	31 (100)
Total	232 (44)	290 (56)	522 (100)

*
 $p < 0.01$

Table 3

Lifetime use of psi services by age 18 and desire to serve in the military according to family income at birth (1982): *N*(%)

Monthly family income (1982 survey)	Would the adolescent like to enter into military service? (2001 survey)		Total
	No	Yes	
0–3 minimum salaries *			
Use of psi services			
No	133 (43)	180 (58)	313 (100)
Yes	32 (31)	71 (69)	103 (100)
Total	165 (40)	251 (60)	416 (100)
4–6 minimum salaries **			
Use of psi services			
No	37 (40)	56 (60)	93 (100)
Yes	21 (47)	24 (53)	45 (100)
Total	58 (42)	80 (58)	138 (100)
>6 minimum salaries ***			
Use of psi services			
No	42 (77)	13 (23)	56 (100)
Yes	18 (62)	11 (38)	29 (100)
Total	61 (72)	24 (28)	85 (100)

*
 $p < 0.05$

**
 $p = 0.4$

 $p = 0.2$

Table 4Type of diagnosis given and desire to enlist: *N*(%)

	<u>Would the adolescent like to enter into military service?</u>		Total
	No	Yes	
Type of problem leading to psi intervention *			
Life crisis/narrative	29 (45)	35 (55)	64 (100)
Learning impediment	20 (50)	20 (50)	40 (100)
Externalization of behavioral problem	8 (25)	24 (75)	32 (100)
Total	57 (42)	79 (58)	136 (100)

*
 $p < 0.01$