

# The Clinics of Work: Subjective Distress Derived from Labour Fragmentation

**Clinica del trabajo: El malestar subjetivo derivado de la fragmentación laboral**

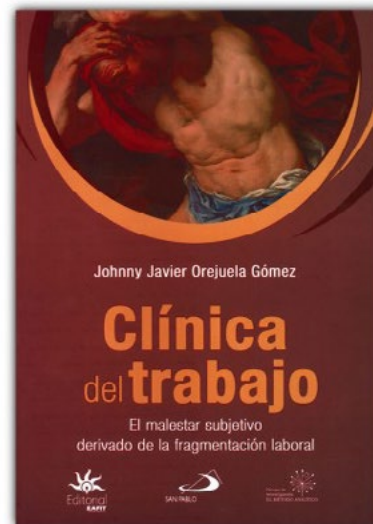
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The study of work has always been inspiring, challenging and reluctant in its issues. Inspiring, because work feeds the dream of comprehending our reality, which is a significant factor. Challenging, due to its condition of interiority and exteriority, that resists an analysis by its fragmentation. Reluctant, because even if there are widely recognized advances, its comprehension does not resolve the raised questions that keep defying the relationships of the individual with society.

In his book *The Clinics of Work*, Orejuela Gómez reproduces and reinforces the impacts work produces on individuals. Its content adds more elements that enable the understanding of such impacts. Its main merit is to involve readers in several aspects of work while accompanying them in the search for the deepening of its study. The reading enriches the comprehension of the interface between work and human existence. Though the questions remain reluctant, or even augmented. If the reading of this book multiplies the questions in the reader's mind, this will be a sign of an improved understanding of the object.

Its content presents the complexity and epistemological and theoretical obstacles involved in research on work. In reviewing the challenges conveyed in the literature and enlarging the questions raised from emerging conditions of the digitalized society, Orejuela Gómez reveals himself as an author familiar with the most fundamental aspects of work. The book takes up the questions necessary for the comprehension of work adaptation, under the technological evolution that exploits the fierce economic competitiveness enhanced within financial capitalism. The analysis of this evolution highlights the fragmentation of activities, the weakening of bonds and the difficulty of sense



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formation facing the high speed and vast virtualization of events that tend to impair the development of workers' interior life.

This content offers a panoramic view of work in the context of the 21st century, clearly identifying its paradoxical conditions of activity: creative and destructive, pleasant and distressful, producing of suffering, and both necessary and separate from human existence. The rationality of this essay is not designed to offer a mere review or new opinions on the current debate in taking up discussions that have existed in the literature for forty years. Conversely, it presents the reader with a panoramic and integrated view of the problems and aspects that constitute the debate of the relation between subjectivity and work. It makes readers an active participant in the evolution

of this debate because it deepens their capability to comprehend and place ideas, enhancing their own understanding of the diversity of epistemological bases of these ideas.

From the first chapter it is already clear that the study of work implies research on the relation between employment institutionalization and human subjectivity. The reading of this chapter displays the territory of controversies, in which four distinct paradigms are described in order to identify, as if from inside of a labyrinth, the epistemological matters the researcher faces while exploring his subject of study, and the frontiers that the understanding of the concepts require. How can we categorize the field of work study that does not aim to comprehend performance effectiveness, but rather, its impacts in human subjectivity? Which category best captures work as a factor of human existence in all its diversity and paradoxes: clinical elements, psychopathology, suffering or psychodynamics? The chapter allows the reader to identify the aspects that differentiate the diverse interpretations of reality made by different researchers, and in this way allows for a dialogue with them. Orejuela Gómez does not interfere with the reader's opinion, but offers the main frames that establish the diversity of this field, promoting dialogue between the authors and the reader that allows the reader to choose the next step.

Chapters II, III and IV depict the analysis of the different perspectives offered by psychology that impact the configuration of the object studied. In such science, tradition reveals a diversity of paths for the study of behavior and subjectivity. Some engage the field through behavior, prioritizing the learning process. Other research paths engage through cognition and prioritize perceptive processes. Yet others conduct research through feelings, and therefore highlight affect and emotions. These possibilities, that have been vastly studied remain open, accepted and mutually enriching, promoted by emerging aspects in the field of work organization. That diversity of views has always fertilized the recognition of work interiority and exteriority as inseparable factors. Those differences appear in the different categorizations of the impact of work on subjectivity as dissatisfaction, suffering, subjective distress or as a symptom of work psychopathology.

The question that arises from the analysis done by Orejuela Gómez is “could the differences in study object configuration be an enriching factor instead of a problem?”. The relation between subject and work is a plural phenomenon in which objective and subjective factors are implicated, articulated in a dynamic fashion by the force of the multiple adaptation resources that an individual exhibits and uses creatively, within differentiators produced by the

force of contextualization. In this debate, drawing on historical information that greatly helps explain concepts, a question arises in chapter II about the use of the word identity to represent the subjective evaluation of work. This word expresses an articulation between similarities and differences that offers a unified sense of the named object. Rather than this unity epistemological differences suggested by the author that explain the subjective evaluation of work are the source of controversy. This is a matter that requires further study.

After exploring the object of study, the book devotes chapters V and VI to the understanding of emerging work conditions in the 21st century, including their causes and possible impacts on the relation between work and existence. This description highlights automatization, fragmentation, the demand of fast reactions and interventions, and vast flexibilization, particularly of the bonds and identified frontiers in a causality chain with increased demand, distress, paradoxes, recognition limitations, constant validation of self-competence, and insecurity. The text does not explain this directly, but it is easily inferred from its analysis that the main impact of technological evolution on individuals is the increasing demand for their competence and flexibility, and their search for abilities to achieve their adaptation and trajectory in contexts filled with drastic changes and uncertainty. These impacts were further detailed in their relations with subjectivity, in chapter VII, which emerges as the key element of the whole book's rationality.

Orejuela Gómez finishes the book with an acknowledgement of work as an influential force over the condition of subjectivity, ending with a brief analysis of the clinical proposal of work. Chapter VII is committed to a vast and motivating literature review of recognition in its distinct aspects, to offer the reader the fundamentals of the effect this process has on distress and pleasure. Besides the clarity and the details of this review, its content emphasizes the sense of recognition, not as a source of reward as if it were something limited to its functionality, but rather as an affirmation of the human condition. It is not about some mirror of individual actions, but rather one's identity as human being. For this reason, when the author criticizes the evolution of the institutionalization of work in the direction of a fragile and fragmented activity, it is clear that this recognition acts as a determinant of pleasure and its denial as a factor of suffering.

Finally, the book closes its content with chapter IX, devoted to the clinical proposal of work. This vision evolves through a brief analysis of the recognition of the paradox of the organization of work, which demands the creative performance of the worker while simultaneously placing him as an object limited to its own subjectivation.