

REVIEWS/RECENZJE

In permanently introducing this new section to our periodical, we wish to call the reader's attention to a unique approach we are consciously taking. In a desire to identify impending foci in our field, we have invited the youngest of our colleagues – MA and PhD candidates in social work – to act as our reviewers. Furthermore, considering the vast multitude of scholarly articles published annually, we have asked our students to primarily focus on this segment which is more likely to reflect the most recent findings. That said, we have not set a strict date range in the hope that our reviewers will freely discover or recover studies which might have been overlooked heretofore.

Blackwell S.

Am I Bipolar or Waking Up?, Create Space Publishing, Washington 2011, pp. 231. ISBN – 13: 978-1461178255

Reviewed by: Paweł Koza

Psychiatric labels are very controversial. Clinical social workers, therapists and psychiatrists have a tendency to divide people into two different groups: normal and mentally ill. This is very useful for psychiatric treatment. Physicians know what dose of medication they should apply. Despite these advantages, medical perspectives create stigmatization. Patients after recovery are still treated as “mentally ill”.

A theory that every altered mental state means “mental illness” is a very serious mistake. The history of religions shows us that many Christian or Buddhist mystics experienced disintegrating mental states. Sean Blackwell, the author of “Am I Bipolar or Waking Up?”, was sent to a psychiatric hospital in 1996 because he experienced psychosis. After recovery he felt that the language of psychiatry was not appropriate for him. Why? – because it gave labels and categorizations, but forgot about the inner truth which was inside the psychotic experience. After a long exploration, he discovered a new category – “spiritual emergency”. This unit was created by Stanislav Grof, a Czech psychiatrist who experimented with LSD. Spiritual emergency is a crisis which is part of a spiritual path of meditation and contemplation. People experience “dark night” (in Christianity) or “makyo” (in Buddhism), but this is essentially the same experience. A previous life is totally destroyed; goals and priorities are devalued. Despite this ruin of life, the new order is not ready. A disintegration could be the result of this momentary

emptiness. It is not a “mental illness” but the necessary stage. If someone experiences it, s/he should pass through – without drugs, but with a wise mentor.

I think that this is a very important dilemma in clinical social work. We – as clinical social workers – are a part of the medical system and we should cooperate with physicians, nurses and psychologists. What should we do, if we meet a patient who experiences a spiritual emergency as a part of his/her spiritual path? I think that we can create an acceptable solution only in private practice. This is a place where we are free as professionals. Although it is a very attractive perspective, it can be a trap. What if I make a mistake? What if I treat a man or woman with schizophrenia as a “spiritual emergency”? Is it safe? This is not easy to answer.

The treatment of a spiritual emergency is not a task for one person. A single therapist is like Don Quixote and wages battle against the mainstream of psychiatry. This could be a danger for a social worker and his/her client because it might enforce a psychosis. The social worker very often touches a thin line and s/he should act as a minesweeper. This is the reason why social workers enthusiastically welcome any simple label or dualistic distinction. Even if these notions create a stigma and the suffering of patients, they provide a security and an undemanding solution. Firstly, we have an anti-psychiatric romantic view of psychosis as a creative “altered state of mind”. Secondly, we can opt for a cruel and suffering-produced mainstream psychiatric view of “mental illness” (meaning “serious damage” of the patient’s brain). A choice between these two options is like a choice between bubonic plague and a typhus. I think that we need two important things: (1) mental health care teams which have the same point of view about “spiritual emergency”; and (2) a new language in psychiatry and clinical social work.

The most excessive experience in spiritual emergency is the insight into light. This is not easy to recognize in clinical social work because this stage is *tremendum* and *fascinosum* simultaneously. Sean Blackwell (2011: 61) admits that this is the ultimate experience, like heaven or hell. Social work is “social” and disintegration almost always is treated as a danger.

I think that the experience of light (in some traditions called “Enlightenment”) is a very important part of the client’s development in clinical social work. The Enlightenment is a basis for a compassionate life in the Buddhist tradition. Plato wrote about the Light of Goodness as a fundamental philosophical experience. Our consumptionist culture forgot about it. We think that our first vocation is buying things, using smartphones and earning a huge amount of money. When we sit still and meditate we can see that we are more than only a consumer. We can hear silence and be in the presence of God. Sometimes people treat meditation as a miracle cure. It is not true – it is an illusion. Meditation opens us to Light and Love (to God) but this amazing experience can cause the disintegration of what we call “spiritual emergency”. But this is not the end – this a part of a human journey. The clinical social worker (as a part of the spiritual support team) can be a master and give support in this difficult time.

What is the most important? I think that the clinical social worker should create a space for a dialogue without labels. The aim of this dialogue is not a diagnosis but the

free expression of man in a “spiritual emergency”. Nordic social workers created the “Open Dialogue” method in which psychiatrists, nurses, social workers, friends and patient’s family build a support team. The patient can express himself/herself without limits. I think that this is a kind of “collective master” – the society plays the same role in this case as the master in Buddhist tradition. The clinical social worker should forget about labels (such “mania” or schizophrenia”) and open his or her eyes and ears to hear a message from the patient’s heart.

A man in a “spiritual emergency” looks straight to the Light and his/her eyes are very often blind. He can’t see anything, but this blindness is a very important part of recovery. The social worker is very often too “social” and underlines social functioning, forgetting about transcendent reality. Social workers use labels because they want to express that somebody can’t normally function in society. I feel that we (as social workers) very often forget that the social area is only a part of our life. We need not only clinical social work, but “spiritual” social work too. The aim of the therapeutic process is the reintegration, but this is impossible without the integration of the spiritual part of our nature. A “spiritual emergency” diagnosis shows us that we are not only citizens, but we are dignified human beings or, as Christians say, children of God – so the spiritual dimension in social work is very important.

The “spiritual emergency” in social work breaks stereotypes about the relations between social work and religion. Psychoanalytical social workers treat religion as a part of an illusion – like Marx who said “religion is the opium of the people”. This is an extreme misunderstanding. Religion is not an appendix to social life, but every religion explores the deep, unconscious and real level of human nature. When we – as social workers – cut this aspect, the client thinks that he is only a social element and his purpose is only to function. No – every human being is an infinite universe. Christians read that they are the children of God, Buddhists discover that they have a Buddha nature. Neither Christians nor Buddhists treat themselves only as a citizen, “excluded” or “ill”. Social workers should respond to this deep relation with transcendence.

The category of the “spiritual emergency” shows that we can’t use stereotypes in clinical social work. Unfortunately, our mind has a dual scheme of action. We divide into good and bad, beautiful and ugly, etc. – and we apply this division in clinical social work. However, the unity-based approach is the most powerful attitude. The social worker should not be a continuation of social power and use the stigmatized language of medical labels. The aim is create a new language which would be a basis for reintegration.

Our role is not easy. On the one hand we – as social workers – are part of state institutions, but, on the other hand, we should create a new compassionate relationship without institutional violence. This dilemma is like *koan* in Buddhist tradition. I think that we should have priorities. Social institutions are only a tool, but not an unconditional aim. State institutions create a frame, but it is very good that we forget about the frame and concentrate on the picture. Our picture (or rather *icon*, like in the Orthodox Church) is our client. A man with “spiritual emergency” diagnosis create test for us. We can treat the client as a “schizophrenic” or see and hear his/her story. When we are open, we hear more than a diagnosis – we can hear a message from heart to heart.

Boyd Webb N. (ed.)

Housing, Social Work Practice with Children and Families, 3rd ed. The Guilford Press, New York 2011. ISBN – 13: 978-1609186432

Reviewed by: Aleksandra Waszczuk

In this paper, I would like to discuss the book *Social Work Practice with children and families*, edited by Nancy Boyd Webb. It is actually a manual which discusses the basic techniques for working with children, applicable in social work. My choice of the reviewed text is dictated strictly, by my personal interest in the subject related to the work with youth and children. Manual discussed in this paper appears to contain basic and important information about issues and challenges related to the problem which has the authors of the individual studies. The text is clear, it explains all the important concepts, useful in working with children. For the wider information it refers to other authors, where you can deepen your knowledge on the interesting topic. In addition, the great advantage of this book is to recall many specific cases illustrating the theory or problem. Due to the significant amount of material contained in the manual, I will not be able to review all topics discussed in it. So I will focus on the issues, that interested me the most or somehow seems to be unique or important for students of social work, future practitioners.

The book is divided into four parts. The first two treat mainly about theory, while the third and final focus mainly on techniques that can be applied when working with children and their families. It is very notable that the authors do not treat problems in isolation from reality. An important factor which is constantly emphasizing the existence of changes in a world that undergoes constant transformation. In such a dynamic world variables will be both the needs and requirements of beneficiaries to social workers. Therefore, paying special attention to the cultural context, the specificity of a given environment or age group is very important in working with children who are particularly vulnerable to outside influences. In addition, manual proposes different methods of work in the environment of young people and families. You can move the knowledge, gained from a reading (appropriately extended to other bibliographic), directly into the field of practice. The authors also describe the basics of helping children in special circumstances, which might be useful for a social workers in their practice. I mentioned earlier that in this text, the authors placed many examples. They are very important, because when you read, you can see the learned theories in real-life situations. Extremely useful are also summaries, which are ending each chapter. There are questions related to the issues discussed in the some part of the book. This encourages the readers to the reflection, attempts to apply the theory in the right way and the acquisition of skills appropriate use of different methodologies in practice.

Theory been the main topic, which underlies most of the chapters is an ecological model of social work. The main thesis of this methodology in relation to work with children and youth, is the belief that there are family and social factors having

a significant impact on a child's behavior or development. Practitioners should have adequate sensitivity to properly interpret the specific circumstances of each individual. It should also be remembered that the shattered child's behavior consists of the interaction between biological, psychological, social and environmental factors. In order to that, no longer can a practitioner focus primarily on a child's inner world. Social workers need to see the broad picture of a child and his reality. That is why practitioners should develop the skills of listening, observing and empathizing. The perspective adopted in the handbook focuses on the micro sphere, in other words, the most important is to observe and react to situations having to do with the family or community with which the child has contact. It is impossible to overstate the active presence of parents in the lives of their children. Therefore practitioners should pay particular attention to family bonds and give special support to those who have problems with forming appropriate relationships between family members. An interesting observation is that poverty is a serious social problem, but most of the children experiencing it do not develop psychological problems. Also unemployment, abuses or inadequate healthcare have strong impact on the children. All this factors combined with lack of proper parental care can produce some kind of disturbance in a child's behavior. Authors say that kids are products of their own environment.

Book described in this review raises an important issue which is specialization of social work practice. It is said, that having an experience in raising children is not sufficient to be able to professionally deal with social work with children. Usually social workers synthesize all the relevant information obtained from various sources and organize it into a biopsychosocial summary. It requires a knowledge of the many different ranges, that basically means that practitioners are people with many skills and broad competence. In addition, the social worker must be disposable, mobile, needs to easily adapts cause of "meeting clients where they are". A social worker must be flexible, but at the same time firm and effective. Practitioners apply a code of ethics and a set of values, which are specific for their profession. It is also important to remember about some potential pitfalls in work with children, such as "rescue fantasy", competing and "triangulating" with the parents. Social worker occupation is associated with great responsibility, the need to have considerable knowledge and the appropriate level of distancing. We also learn about the important role of supervision in social work. It is difficult to be objective about our own actions, supervision provides a significant opportunity for practitioners to review their own strengths and weaknesses in carrying out the helping process.

The book demonstrates how to work with children and their families in different problematic situations with which practitioners could be dealing. The authors mention the physical, mental violence, abuses, unemployment, as well as problems related to the school, like bullying. There is no simple way to provide any ways to deal with all kinds of problems related to family and children. These issues are too complex, often overlapping, where in one case, we have to deal with a lot of abuse. In addition, each beneficiary is different and it should be treated individually, so cases given in the textbook are only some kind of guidelines, which can be used in the course of your own work.

There are a number of publications related to social work with children and families. Discussed book is a comprehensive collection, a brief outline showing how specific are problems related to this topic. The authors provide many sources to which you can reach, in order to obtain more detailed information regarding the subject of your interests or the single case. The resources section, at the end of the manual, and the names of individual researchers in the continuous text, will certainly help you find the required publication.

In summary, the book *Social Work Practice with children and families* is a position which can be a kind of base for further studies related to the issues of children and families. Definitely I would recommend this position for students of social work due to the approximation of the basic concepts of this range in a transparent and understandable way. In addition, the book contains numerous examples, each describing the theory and technique of the work cited by various authors. Finally I would like to draw attention to the image of a social worker, which is shown in this manual. Practitioners are individuals characterized by a number of skills, such as empathy, the ability to respond quickly, flexibility, mobility, but at the same time having reliable knowledge, which requires constant replenishment. In my opinion we should disseminate such a picture of a social worker to the public – as a specialists in helping other people.

McNeil F., Weaver B.

Lifelines: Desistance, social relations, and reciprocity. "Criminal Justice and Behavior", 2015, 42 (1): 95–107

Reviewed by: Sabine Krumböck

This article focuses on desistance of crime and the whole process of change coming with it. Therefore, the authors take a closer look on how social relations affect this process. To do so, they chose to analyse a friendship group, who used to get engaged in criminal activities in their youth together. The analysis given in the article refers to Donati's relational sociology.

In the first paragraph, there is an important statement given, which is – at least in my opinion – key to understanding the article's topic: "Social relations are those bonds maintained between people that constitute their reciprocal orientations toward each other" and that this is being viewed as crucial to conceive how society and social change works. The writers then dive directly into the meaning of social relations, how they work and the issue of interpersonal bonding and the possible results it can bring. I like the way the authors shortly summarize the different effects social relations can have reciprocally. Up next follows a description how and why social relations influence people's behaviour. Following this, also the importance of the structural and cultural context is mentioned, since social relations are embedded in it. Starting to read the first part of the article, I was already wondering if this also will be addressed – so I'm glad the authors did that. They also deliver an explanation about how and why the structural/cultural context plays a role in shaping social relations.

The writers then make a connection between what they've just said about social relations and the actual topic: desistance of crime. At this point, I personally would have found it to be better if they used simpler terms to describe the correlation between social relations and desistance of crime. In the previous part, where the authors wrote about social relations, they already used solely abstractive terms to describe the different possible effects of interpersonal relations and the reasons for them. If that wasn't concrete enough for the reader, then the next part certainly wouldn't be. It is comprehensible to me that for sociological topics, certain terms and ways of explaining facts are to be used. Nevertheless, I think that when talking about interpersonal topics, at some point of writing an article, expressions can be used that also non-social scientists would probably use.

Now comes the part where the writers go into concrete studies about how and why an individual's social relations influence the commitment of offending and the accomplishment of desisting crime. The friendship group chosen for this study consists of six male mid-40s who used to offend together when they were young. Thereby, a table shows their actual ages, offense types, their ages when they got into offending and their ages when they became desisting. Also, their amounts of conviction and lengths of offending career is shown. In my opinion, showing such a table right at the beginning

of the research-part is a good way to give the reader a quick overview about what is being talked about. Following, the method of research is being explained.

Presenting their results, the writers immediately mention where the friendship groups come from and important facts about the culture's values. Furthermore, an explanation of how the participants relate to each other and the results of these relations (a sense of belonging, recognition, etc.; turning them into strong relations and other effects). It is interesting to read about the process of their bonds being shaped with all the factors that were influencing it. Through the research they also found out how the men see their relationships to each other. The statement that none of the individuals would've done the offending actions alone was predictable I think. Though, it was good that the motives for committing it when together as a group are also described in the results of the research. Economic and social changes in the group led to desistance, indeed. The reasons for that are also very well described by the authors. In this part, they finally describe in simple enough terms what they have described in a very complicated way earlier. For me as the reader, it is very satisfying that now the abstract descriptions take on a clear and concrete form now.

After the writers also say something about work and then spirituality concerning groups, they write down a "discussion"-section, where they summarize and generalize what they found out through their research once again. In my opinion, this is a very well chosen method to show the reader the gathered information and messages "all in one".

All in all, I think it is a pleasure to read this article – even though there are very abstract, complicated explanations of certain points, the reader can also find easier, clearer summaries of the information in between. From my point of view, this makes it easy to keep on track with the facts given in the article. For sure, this topic has a lot to offer and this article by Fergus McNeill and Beth Weaver shows an interesting perspective of it.

Schechner R., Chatterjee S., Boal A., City Councillor.
Legislative theatre and the chamber in the streets: An interview. "TDR",
 1998, 4: 75–90

Reviewed by: Marta Ryś

In this essay I shall review the depth of an extended conversation between Richard Schechner, Sudipto Chatterjee and Augusto Boal, published as an interview in *The Drama Review* in winter 1998. The interview begins and ends in the middle of a triologue, which took place in late 1996, during Boal's visit in the USA. Richard Schechner (2015) is Professor of Performance Studies at the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, and editor of TDR: The Drama Review, and the author of the experimental The Performance Group theatre and his well-known shows (Commune, Dionysus in '69). Sudipto Chatterjee (2015) is an Indian performance scholar actor, playwright, filmmaker and poet. His research areas include Indian and Asian performance, colonialism and theatre, political and popular performance in the Third World, and music (2015: 90). Augusto Boal (1931–2009) was a Brazilian theatre director, writer and politician. He was the founder of the Theatre of the Oppressed, a theatrical form originally used in radical popular education movements. Boal served one term as a *Vereador* (the Brazilian equivalent of a city councillor) in Rio de Janeiro from 1993 to 1997, where he developed *legislative theatre* (Paterson 2015). The idea of legislative theatre is a persistent theme in this interview. In this paper I will attempt to show common elements of Boal's methods and the methods of community social work which are just developing in Poland.

The interview begins with a reflection on the major issue of social work, the idea of helping. Boal provokes this discussion wondering how to ask for good help. He proposes two questions: "What should you do to help others?" and "What should you do to work with others to help themselves" (2015: 75). According to him, effective help is that which brings real change. The method of working with the community which is proposed is based on "creating a net of solidarity" (2015: 76). He defines this way of thinking with the sentence: "Not my family, my race, my sex for itself, but my family, my race, my sex with the other ones" (2015: 75). He states that it is necessary to produce change.

I think that this attitude can be associated with communism and the idea of everything being shared in common by the Polish people. Similar assumptions are at the base of community social work, which is becoming more popular in Poland. It involves organizing local communities to create a real community, overcoming isolation and loneliness and building relationships and social networks. The aim is to cooperate among institutions, organizations and individuals. This method lets cooperation can be initiated from individuals to institutions as well as from institutions to individuals.

Nevertheless, I have the impression that Boal represents an opinion about helping which contemporary social work is leaving behind. Today the idea of empowerment and accompaniment becomes more important than achieving change at all costs. In community work we talk about the process of assisting people to improve the communities

in which they live by undertaking independent and shared activities. Today we do not use the term “change” in the discourse of community social work.

Boal is asked about his job as a member of the City Council. He is one of the 42 Councillors in Rio de Janeiro, in which the population is seven or eight million officially, but almost as many people live in favelas (2015: 76). He talks about the Chamber in the Street, he created to help himself determine how to vote during general sessions. Sometimes certain questions are very complicated and he does not know what effect his position will have on the people. For instance, he made a Chamber in the Street to listen to the opinions of the people about the Municipal Guard and sterilizing women (2015: 77).

Alan Twelvetrees notes that a healthy society is based on the activity of its citizens (2014: 22). To improve the quality of citizens' lives we must find a way of working to create, promote and empower social groups. It should also be assured that they are effective in action and able to influence; they should be democratic and focused on achieving the goals which are completely with the principle of justice. The Chamber in the Street could be one such way. Solving social problems is effective only when we engage the persons whom these solutions are intended to serve. Boal did not know what effect may have armed, what guards would think about it, what they fear and which benefits they might see. He thought it would be dangerous for people if the city guards had guns, but he was not absolutely sure. So he decided to ask them and some guards said that they did not want to be armed because if the narco-traffickers knew they were armed, the gangs would shoot the guards (Schechner, Chatterjee 1998: 77).

In addition to the Chamber in the Street, he also uses the Forum Theater to discover what people think, what they want, what they do not like and what they would like to change in their city. He has formed about 50 Theatre of the Oppressed groups of about 12 people each (Schechner, Chatterjee 1998: 81). Each group has their own Joker, the person who moderates meetings and discussions, but does not dictate their themes. The Joker asks the people what they want to talk about and prepares a performance about it for the community. This way the community sees and discusses their own problems (1998: 81).

Boal tells how, on the basis of the Forum Theatre, the Legislative Theatre was founded. Every half-year Boal and his team organize the festival. They invite 10 to 12 Theatre of the Oppressed groups who come from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and perform nonstop Forum Theatre. During a festival many problems are explored. While the performances are going on, a group of people write up reports about what is suggested by the spectators. Then the group of lawyers, under the coordination of Boal, read all the reports and processes. On the grounds of what people say, they create protest, legal action, suggestion for legislation, and so on, which Boal introduces into the Chamber.

Schechner asks Boal about the relationship between his work, *Theatre of the Oppressed* and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In his opinion, *at the base of both is truth that you cannot teach if you don't learn from those you are teaching* (1998: 89). Boal discovered Freire at the moment when he felt he could really do something in Brazil.

They met each other sometimes, but they never have worked together. He talks about a fascination with the idea that oppression begins when the dialogue becomes monolog. He sees, in too many cases, that very soon one side begins to monologue and the other is reduced to listener only; one commands, the other obeys. Both Freire and Boal share the idea of dialogue in education as the root of their methods. Boal acknowledges that he was so fascinated reading *Pedagogy of Oppressed*, that he began working in a similar way, so the title of his book refers to the title of Freire's work (1998: 90).

I think that in our country there is never enough dialogue between citizens and the lawmakers constituter's. Pressure from social groups is not enough to convince state institutions to completely change applied policy. However, these pressures can contribute to change it, especially when several groups combine efforts in this case, creating more influence. Applying the policy of equality in many institutions and incorporating it into law has its origins in the campaigns of women's or antiracist movements. The most important result of community work is, rather the long-term influence that they wield on public opinion and legislation than any direct effect.

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