

REVIEWS/RECENZJE

Brian Rasmussen, Daniel Salhani

Some social implications of psychoanalytic theory: A social work perspective. "Journal of Social Work Practice" 2010; 24 (2): 209–225

Reviewed by: Tomasz Kuźmiński

Can psychoanalysis improve relations between social workers and their clients? Which aspects of psychoanalytic theory are used by case workers today? Are they aware of their actually using it? This article describes the possibilities of the psychodynamic approach in social work. The authors try to discover the influence of psychoanalytical theories on contemporary social work. Theoretical knowledge of Freud and his continuers apparently exists in many university curriculums as well as in the everyday practice of social workers. However, it is often taught and applied without actually being called by its name – the theory of psychoanalysis.

Here the authors use the Canadian social work system as an example. The dominant approach of this national academic context is structural social work. It focuses on the broader social structure and describes an individual against the background of his/her social surrounding. At first glance, structural social workers in Canada work without any reference to psychoanalytic approaches. The authors, however, notice that some of the methods (especially of social workers with longer practice) may be considered psychoanalytic. The main problem is that the practitioners can rarely tell what kind of theoretical background is underlying their actions.

The psychoanalytic approach focuses on the intrapsychic side of human nature – the unconscious, repression or the nature of drives – and there is a lot of criticism about using such a theoretical (and sometimes unscientific) method as this in social work. Instructors who value this method often face an uphill battle with those colleagues who claim that such ideas are outdated, pathologizing, unscientific, sexist, culturally irrelevant, lacking in evidence-based support, and ill-suited to the reality of social work practice. In my opinion, the critics often use stereotypes of classical Freudian theory which is, of course, very much outdated. They rarely even want to learn about any subsequent theories of the psychoanalytic school.

When someone today uses the word “psychoanalysis” in the context of social work, it is immediately attached to the name of Freud, but no one else really. Indeed, it is easy to criticize the most basic and often purely theoretical teachings of the founder of psychoanalysis. Still, it is important to keep in mind that these theories are almost one hundred years old and were very innovative back then. To criticize psychoanalytical approach only by criticizing some of Freud’s ideas is, in my eyes, the same as picking holes in Galileo’s telescope for being very primitive. The general idea was almost revolutionary and had a great impact on many levels of modern society, yet very few people decide to familiarize themselves with contemporary psychoanalysis and with what it has to offer in fields such as social work.

In my opinion, the absence of psychoanalytic theory sets us at a distance from the real reasons for some of our clients’ problems. Therefore, the ability of social workers to improve the life situation of certain individuals is doomed to failure. There are too many examples of such “diagnoses” as chronic unemployment, child abuse, inability to form and maintain a relationship, alcoholism etc. It is no surprise that these clients (even if they are motivated enough to try) are unable to change anything. The answer to their problems often lies deeper in their unconscious behavior patterns. Only someone who is skilled enough can detect a signal of a deep personality disorder. If social workers were trained in psychoanalysis, they could know when it is appropriate to locate such a person in a special psychiatric ward or even (if professionally trained) to form a therapeutic bond with the client.

During my internship in the Babiński Hospital in Cracow I assisted a social worker who led a group therapy. The ward in which I practiced worked psychoanalytically and so did the social worker. At the same time the hospital was running a program focused on unemployed individuals with personality disorders. During this program, a group of specialists (i.e., social workers, psychotherapists, psychiatrists, and nurses) worked with participants a few hours a day. The goal was to work with clients on many levels – diagnosis, treatment, group therapy, vocational activation, pharmacology (if necessary) etc. The results of this initiative demonstrated that it is significantly less expensive and more effective to cure patients this way. This may be a path that social work will choose in upcoming decades – to help people by working in with a team of specialists, all applying one specific model (for example, psychoanalysis).

The authors here are attempting to find a middle ground between structural social work (oriented towards a social context) and psychoanalytical/psychodynamical theories that may be used in social work. They present the ideas of some of the Freud’s continuers (e.g., Melanie Klein, Heinz Kohut, Erich Fromm, and others). In my opinion, their goal was not to argue the merits of one theory over another, but rather to present the psychoanalytic theory as a tool which can allow social workers to look more broadly at their clients’ problems and find the best possible solution there is.

Nehami Baum

The Unheard Gender: The Neglect of Men as Social Work Clients.

“British Journal of Social Work” 2015; 46 (5): 1463–1471

Reviewed by: Irmina Czysnok

The article’s main thesis is that, in the UK, a man’s voice and his needs receive much less attention and support in the social care system than a woman’s. The article briefly presents several reasons supporting this opinion. I would like to try to refer some of the author’s conclusions to my observations about the social environment and cultural conditioning of social work practice and research in Poland.

I would like to mention a short anecdote, a situation which happened to me. Most of my male friends identify themselves as feminists and Andrzej (name changed) is definitely one of them. That day we went together to a meeting and, before reaching our destination, we had to enter and leave a few places. Each time there was a door to be opened by one of us, he passed me and let me go first. I did not expect that traditional Polish gentleman’s gesture from him and he could see I was surprised and a bit confused. In the end he asked me, if it bothers me that he behaves that way and what do I generally think about this tradition. The fact that he decided to raise this question made me think that he himself might feel insecure and confused in this situation. I think that nowadays many more men can experience similar uncertainty and doubts when facing certain demands and expectations (or a lack thereof) related to their gender identification.

The times have changed, women have changed, and, nowadays, the inherited cultural patterns of male behavior often seem no longer adequate or necessary. Therefore men can find themselves in trouble, forced to evolve and adapt, trying to understand that they are no longer the only instigator of dynamics in social life. Moreover, the female influence and power to shape rules and patterns of behaviors can easily be identified in many other fields than just in the realm of interpersonal interactions. Both theoretical and practical dimensions of social work are immersed in interpersonal relations and a set of characteristics associated with the social construct of the woman. The focus in modern social work has been strongly on the female gender, with a noticeable lack of interest in men.

The author of the article stresses that a paradox of men being neglected by social work practitioners and researchers in a world ruled by a patriarchal system and its values consists of several different and complex explanations. Nehami Baum (the author) points out only some of them in order to provide a general view of the situation in the UK.

One of the main factors she mentions contributing to social workers’ neglect of men is the dominance of women in the profession. I could agree with that argument only to some extent. First of all, it needs to be highlighted that we have been experiencing the same disproportion in Poland and it starts already at the educational level. Schools of social work in the past and universities nowadays have received more applications from young women than young men and have “produced” more female social workers.

But what needs to be specified is that, at least in Poland, the dominance of women has a more theoretical than practical dimension. If one tries to picture social work in Poland, the landscape of the profession is highly feminized, but supposedly only at the level of ordinary workers (Frysztański 2014: 241): the people responsible for decision-making are, in fact, mostly men. This phenomenon can be seen as the heritage of a patriarchal system that separates and labels directions of opportunities for professional development, careers, and privileges as accessible or not for representatives of the female gender. These arguments would lead to the conclusion that social work can be described as a female profession under male power of decision-making and control (Froschl 2002: 88). The question which arises is if a quantitative, not a qualitative, prevalence of women can still be called a dominance.

Another argument given by the author in order to justify the main thesis was the quality of education in the field of social work. Nehami Baum stated that most of the (British) manuals and courses are written from the female perspective and they seriously neglect men – their needs and gender-related forms of expression. For many years now the importance of gender as a factor in social work has been recognized within British literature and the main focus has been on women and femininity (Bates, Thompson 2002: 97).

Among different concepts for social work is precisely “female social work,” a concept born in 1970 (Każmierczak 2014: 503), which is built on the male and female dichotomy. This identifies social work as a female profession with a woman as the vulnerable gender, more prone to being the primary victim of any kind of oppression, and a man as the oppressor who acts according to a socially inherited right to dominate that is the core part of his gender identification. The risk that arises is that female social work may enforce the stereotypical division of gender roles and very comfortably categorize different actors of a complex reality into two dichotomous categories of victims and aggressors. Nonetheless, this is an unrealistic picture of the dynamics of social life, one which deprives men of the right and responsibility to be part of a solution to social problems. Female social work emphasizes a set of characteristics described as feminine experiences and competences: being emotional and caring, the ability to understand another’s perspective, delicacy, care for the feelings of others (see Kaźmierczak 2014: 512). The components building the female stereotype become precisely the features demanded in the profession of social work. And, as mentioned earlier, stereotypes can only reinforce the traditional patriarchal model of social landscapes.

We can find similar patterns in Polish realities of academic publications and manuals that follow the British example; masculinity and its challenges remain on the margins of scientific discourse and research (Miś 2013: 112). During my formal education about social work I can barely recall any discussion or course particularly focused on the male point of view and male needs in social work whereas feminist social work is part of the obligatory coursework in the second year of our MA studies. Professor Lucjan Miś addressed a need to balance the focus and to direct academic discourse towards men and masculinity through the development of “male social work.” This concept would

mean taking up efforts to have more men enter the profession and have a separate male space for social work interventions which derive from a set of traditional male roles and assumptions. The idea comes from a very novel perspective, however, it seems to me that the evolution of a distinct branch of social work dedicated to and aimed at men can lead to the further categorization and isolation of genders.

The idea of a woman as a representative of the weaker gender was also mentioned by the author of this article as an element influencing the structure and interest of studies conducted in social work. Nehami Baum stresses that, since the beginning of the profession, there have been very few studies published on men from the perspective of their gender. Patriarchy literally means “the rule of the father” (from the Greek) and an article I would like to mention here deals directly with the male parent. The paper “Finding Fathers in Social Work Research and Practice” was done by Alyson F. Shapiro and Judy Krysik from Arizona State University and published in 2010. The article evaluates father-focused research and the inclusion of fathers in social work practice based on a review of six professional and credible American journals. The database examined for the purpose of that review were publications from 2004–2008, containing 263 articles which dealt with parenting issues. The results were that these papers published in professional journals speak of parenting mainly from the female perspective and for the female audience. The study showed that only 7 (2.6%) family-focused articles reported on fathers and 55 (21%) included both parents. This research illustrates an imbalance in the attention given to female and male parenting, which can be explained by the norms and values derived from the traditional, patriarchal social order that sees parenting as a primarily female role and part of a woman’s social identity.

I do observe that patriarchy understood as a social concept enforcing a clear division and defense of gender dichotomies and gender roles is still a useful model to describe the relations of and limits of power in societies attached to traditional values. I believe that the Polish social landscape, including the social work landscape, is dominated by a patriarchal system that functions effectively despite the fact that many aspects have turned out to be harmful to men as well. The interesting paradox is that male dominance starts to be problematic and complex when we discuss the reality of our cultural and social identity, which includes both the practice and research of social work (closely related to the aspect of relations, culture and human behavior). The traditional expectations associated with men – such as both mental and physical strength and endurance, courage, and an ability to hide emotions – indirectly removes a right to ask for help, to speak up about the problems or oppression they experience.

Our cultural conditioning undoubtedly has an important impact on the quality of functioning and the presence of men in social work research and practice. The dichotomy of gender roles stemming from the patriarchal system leads to a very clear division of power and influence. In this way an isolated part of our social dynamics has been assigned as a sphere where not only the woman’s voice can be heard, but also the values and practices associated with femininity (according to patriarchal assumptions) can flourish. But as long as patriarchy and its values determine all dimensions of our

life, the men will remain the (involuntary) casualties of their own system. The question is if – and which – vision of social work can overcome gender-specific dichotomies and lead towards a holistic theory and practice in the social work world.

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Ludwig F. Lowenstein

Parent alienation syndrome: A two step approach toward a solution.
"Contemporary Family Therapy" 1998; 20 (4): 505–520

Reviewed by: Katarzyna Bułka

The article at hand is about the syndrome of parental alienation (PAS), and has been chosen because this phenomenon has interested me since completion of my BA degree. It was at that time that I heard about PAS for the first time. My BA research was based on individual interviews with fathers who tried to contact their children; all of my respondents could not meet their children or faced impediments in contact with them. Of course, I took up the analysis of the father's situation but PAS could concern both men and women – this depends upon which of the parents is closer to the child. This article was chosen, too, because, in the future, I would want to work in a court to assist children experiencing this alienation syndrome.

What is the parental alienation syndrome? The parent alienation syndrome (PAS) was described for the first time by Richard A. Gardner who worked in a court as an expert psychiatrist. He noticed that, among children whose parents divorced and fought for custody, symptoms appeared of a distancing from one of the parents in the emotional and behavioral spheres. The children felt stronger ties only with the parent who lived with them and looked after them during the divorce process. Gardner noted the resident parent (RP) who was with the child and the non-resident parent (NRP) who moved out of the home and thus had limited contact with the child. According to Gardner, PAS is a disorder in the way in which children behave or perceive the NRP as a result of their involvement in the conflict between the mother and father. The children begin to take an active part in offending and criticizing one of the parents without any reason. We have to know that PAS affects children, parents, their family, and all of their friends.

How can we fight against PAS? The author shows that parents themselves could prevent PAS by preparing the children for a stressful divorce situation. The second opportunity is the court's ruling: the judge could force on a solution on the children which they would have to respect.

With respect to children's adjustment to divorce, the author creates a long list of circumstances like domestic violence, visitation interference, parental conflict etc., all of which could indicate that parental alienation syndrome is present. This academic also showed us the results of many studies which have described the influence of parental behavior before, during, and after divorce on the mental health and social life of their child. For example, Lowenstein mentioned research done by Elowod and Stolberg (1993) which showed that child adjustment to divorce is strictly connected with family competence. Higher levels of family functioning were associated with families in which parental hostility was low and parents displayed few rejecting behaviors while practicing consistent and appropriate discipline (1998: 507).

Another research study, conducted by Amato and Rezac, tested the thesis that children who have contact with both of their parents also have fewer behavior problems, but only when inter-parental conflict is low. When the parents are antagonistic towards each other, it is better for the child not to contact the NRP because, in these circumstances, problems appear with loyalty. The child is forced to participate in a stressful situation, requiring a choice between mother and father. Hence the parents should either cooperate and work out their own method of agreement, or go to court or limit contact with one of them if they cannot reach any agreement. Of course, only the first solution is good for both the mental and social life of the child, but it is hard to carry out.

The legal system is another aspect. Here the author refers to Gardner who thought that the best way to help a family afflicted with PAS is to send them to mediation. Mediation is the most common solution in conflicts between parents. The court practices this kind of therapy especially in cases with abusive couples. The questionnaire which was created by Gardner helped identify the dysfunction in the family – a method used during and after separation and divorce. The first and the most important thing in this therapy is to guarantee the wife and children safety. The author said that divorce is associated with the risk of being battered or even killed for women (1998: 58).

I could not fully agree with him because nowadays we know that women, too, are the offenders in domestic violence which society very often ignores, unfortunately. However, the role of the mediator is really responsible. He has to be neutral and help settle some plan which will allow the family to resolve the difficult situation. Bonney, who is also interested in mediation strategies, noticed that the process of mediation should not be extended by the before-divorce aspects which could influence relationships in the family after divorce. These cases are: “the amount of conflict between parents, parental agreement on access, use of support, parental well-being, parent-child relationship” (1998: 510). All of these are important because they are the basis for a post-divorce agreement. The mediator should know the history of the family with whom he or she will work so as to understand the relationship among its members. Only if the parents share values, express feelings, listen, and talk to each other can they reach an agreement. The role of the mediator is to encourage the parents to get involved in drafting a post-divorce agreement.

After the discussion about what parents and the court could do, the author finally describes the two step approach, involving mediation which has two alternative but not separate ways. The first is based on the cooperation of the parents. It assumes that each parent will meet with a psychologist or other mental health specialist to talk about his/her expectations. They look for a solution which will be acceptable for him/her and then present it to other parties. Most important in this method is cooperation and readiness to reach an agreement for the good of the child. Of course, the situation in which both parents are fully happy will never happen because the child will always be living with one of them. But this method saves time and makes the divorce easier for all family members. After the parties manage to hammer out a solution, the specialist presents it in front of the court. If the parents still maintain their position and are unanimous, the

court will accept the proposal which is presented. But if the parents change their minds or engage in an intensive and destructive conflict, we should apply solution number two. In this step, the court decides about the parents' future. The judge appoints a consultant who has to issue an opinion about the situation in the family. They seek the reasons why the parents cannot cooperate with each other. The degree of contact with the child is decided upon by the court which earlier familiarizes itself with the advice of mental health workers. If both parents become aware that they will lose control of their family situation and they start to seek a solution together, the court could withdraw the decision and wait for the parents' proposition.

In my opinion, this text is really interesting, especially for students who want to work in a court. The area of law regarding domestic relations is complicated and difficult because the family is the most significant social group. Every single case – a divorce case, paternity suit, custody case etc. – bears bitterness, grief, and anger. As a future social worker I want to work with children who have an experience with the court. Nowadays we can observe an increase in the number of divorces. Couples increasingly often decide to part forever but, unfortunately, if they are parents, they very often forget about the good of their child. A mutual aversion and sense of emotional damage brings conflict and a lack of cooperation.

This text is relatively old but the described cases are still relevant today. For example, in Poland, a special institution issuing expert opinions has been established – the *Rodziny Ośrodek Diagnostyczno-Konsultacyjny*. This is the place to which both parents must report; the specialist also studies each child because he or she will want to know what the child thinks about the divorce situation and with whom he/she has better ties. After my research I would claim that these institutions do not work well because the expert who works there most often gives a mother the most positive opinion. This is the result of a stereotype which states that the child should always be with the mother who knows better what the child needs than the father. It is alarming that even those institutions which should be staffed with professional personnel who care about the good of the whole family commit gross negligence and neglect fathers' rights in silence. In Poland the number of mothers who have full custody is overwhelming.

In the closing discussion, Lowenstein provides us with some recommendations on how we can counteract the consequences of parental alienation. Two of them are the most important for me. Firstly, during and after divorce each family member should be provided with free psychological care. The expert who will be appointed by the court has a role as an intermediary between the parents and the court. Mediation is the best way whereby children could gain stability in a divorce situation which will influence all their future lives. The second thing is the need for research about PAS. Legal specialists should cooperate with experts from other areas, among others, psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, and other mental and social health workers. Only if all of them combine forces can we seek effective ways to help the parents who are conflict-ridden and divided.

Anna Malmquist, Anna Mollerstrand, Maria Wikstrom,
Karin Zetterqvist Nelson

A daddy is the same as a mummy: Swedish children in lesbian households talk about fathers and donors. "Childhood" 2014; 21 (1): 119–133

Reviewed by: Justyna Kulas

Throughout the centuries social problems have been changing. At present, people have different habits, and live according to different ideologies than years ago. This article deals with the problem of raising children in a same-sex parenting family. Since homosexuality has ceased to be a taboo and more people live in open, homosexual relationships, new social problems have appeared, especially connected with the upbringing of children.

Nowadays, homosexual relationships are much more popular than in the past. Due to enhanced tolerance, the number of people admitting they are gay has increased in recent years. This situation means that homosexual people are courageous enough to fight, not only for their rights to be together, but also to legalize their relationships and to have children. Firstly, in the seventies, organizations acting on behalf of gay and lesbian rights (like Gay Liberation) acted against family and motherhood (Stacey 1999). Later, in the eighties, the situation changed – a lesbian and gay baby boom (lesbaby boom, gaybaby boom) was observed, which means that many same-sex couples decided to be parents (Stacey 1999).

In present day Sweden, where the studies described in the article have been carried out, marriage between persons of the same sex is legal. According to Statistics Sweden (Andersson, Noack 2010: 1–19), by 2009 almost 40% of the legalized lesbian marriages and 6% of gay marriages had brought up a child. Families consisting of two mothers bring a new understanding of social roles performed in the family. The main question that should be asked, according to this new situation, is how children understand the fact that they have two mothers and no father, and how this affects their lives. The authors of the article, through their research, tried to answer these questions.

In their research, the authors of the article conducted interviews with 12 children, aged from 5 to 8, from lesbian planned families; the children were asked about their families and especially about who the father is, as they do not have one. All interviews were video recorded and transcribed. Each was divided into four parts. The first part was related to general family relationships; the second one was about the role of the father and who he is; the third part tried to answer questions about how it is not to have a dad; and the final part shows the children's conception of a man as a sperm donor.

The results demonstrated that the children include as members of their families their mothers, siblings, and pets. They describe mothers using only positive features. The authors of the research claim that, according to the interviews, children from same-sex parenting families often do not know what a father is. Half of them describe "daddy" as a man, but most of them believes that mom and dad play the same role in the family; they (moms and dads) do not differ in function and do the same things (2014: 125).

Most of the child respondents admit that they do not have a “daddy” and, according to the authors of the paper, they avoid talking about fathers. The children studied rather knew that they come from “one of their mummies’ tummies” (2014: 127), but they often believe that they were constructed without a male sperm. Even if they know that babies come from an egg and sperm, they often do not connect “sperm” with a “dad” or a “man.” Many of them say that the seed comes from the doctor.

In order to discuss findings from the interviews, the authors of the article compare the results of their research with previous studies about the role of a father carried out in heterosexual families (Oliveira-Formosinho 2009). They noticed that, in families with heterosexual parents, children describe “mommies” and “daddies” as different and taking on different functions, while children from this study claim that moms and dads are the same and take on the same roles in the family. The authors of this paper believe that this result proves that children from lesbian families are less gender-stereotyped than children from traditional families. I suppose that it could also be caused by the children’s conviction that their family with same-sex parents is a complete one and the same as a family with different-sex parents. Still, it is a concern of mine that these children in the future might have problems with the definition of the father’s role in the family, especially boys when they start their own families.

Although many previous studies show that children from same-sex families are more tolerant, less stereotyped, and also often start their own heterosexual relationships in the future, I am still afraid that many of them can have problems with understanding existing social roles in families. Perhaps this problem looks different in Swedish culture than in the Polish one. As mentioned above, in Sweden same-sex marriages are legal and common. In Poland not only are these formal forms of homosexual relationships forbidden, but also these couples cannot adopt or officially raise a child (both as legal guardians). Moreover, only 8% of the Polish community supports adoption by homosexual couples (CBOS 2013: 4). This means that children from same-sex parenting families are much more vulnerable in Poland to social exclusion. They more often face discrimination, and even aggression towards them from the social environment.

To sum up, I would like to note that the article is of an explorative nature. Despite the fact that, in the last few years, studies about children reared in homosexual families start to be more popular, there was no research including young children (under 12 years old) before this one. The study described in this paper was conducted on a group of quite young children (5–8 years old) and, surprisingly, evidences different results than the previous ones. It turned out that children do not understand that their same-sex parenting families are different than the traditional ones. The question is, if it is good or bad? Perhaps it can help children to grow up in normal conditions, or maybe it can cause social troubles in their future life. Time will show the answer.