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"Before, Beside and After (Beyond)
the Biographical Narrative"

"Vor, Neben und Nach (Jenseits) der
Biographischen Erzählung"

"Avant, Auprès et Après (Au delà de)
le Récit Biographique"

PAPERS

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{ TC "*Monika Grochalska* - Discursive shaping of intimate relationships as a research field" \f \l }

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The main goal of this paper is to make a critical overview of intimate relationships research in Polish pedagogy and sociology and to suggest an alternative research direction, which treats intimate relationships as the effect of discursive shaping.

In Polish public discourse there are various patterns which determine ways of understanding family relationships, marital happiness, intimacy and other similar concepts. These are kinds of “reference points”, which also set the direction of research. Most Polish studies on intimate relationships are focused on problems within the family, excluding the intimacy issue.

The main goal of this paper is to explore and critically look at the research of intimate relationships in Polish pedagogy and sociology. Moreover it aims to outline an alternative research direction, which treats intimate relationships as the effect of discursive shaping. Most often Polish researchers are focused on particular problems within the family, excluding or at least marginalizing the issue of intimacy. Deconstruction of social assumptions ascribed into their studies can show the main constraints of such approach.

Definition of intimacy

The key issue is the definition of intimacy. Despite its importance, intimacy is a very difficult research subject. Especially interesting area of exploration are ways of creating and shaping intimate relationships by women, because of specific social expectations towards them. However, it is really important to acknowledge that “intimate relationship” is a social construct, which is variable in time and created by social actors in relations with their environment.

The category of intimacy or intimate relationship is very interesting, but difficult to capture over a period of time. ‘Intimate relationships’ is an ambiguous and imprecise term, can mean different kinds of relationships between friends, sexual partners and family members.

In sociology, the concept of privacy has replaced what was originally recorded in terms of family relationships or relationships in the community. At various times, research on intimate relationships in sociology has taken different directions. To the beginning of the 80s there were studies on the functions and structure of the family (Parsons, Goode), including a feminist approach (Millet, Mitchell, Oakley). The 80's brought a research and analysis focus

on interpersonal relationships in marriage, and critical analysis of economic aspects in the sphere of civil and professional relations (feminism, Marxism). In the late 80s, for the first time, non-heterosexual relations were considered (Gilles, 2003). Other studies on this topic include:

- J. Duncombe and D. Mardsen (early 90's) - discourses of love and intimacy, "played" in the household (gender, asymmetry of emotional behaviour)
- J. Gubrium and J. Holstein (early 90's) – the discursive nature of family relationships were reflected and reconstructed through everyday communication.
- D. Morgan (late 90's) - the family as an interactive process, "family practice".

In the course of the development of these studies the very concept of privacy (as a definition) underwent various transformations. Currently, for intimate relationships, researchers generally understand the relationship, usually sexual, among adults, defining these relations in terms of individualized, negotiable interaction. This is in contrast to earlier approaches to provide more flexible gender categories and the roles, responsibilities and duties assigned to a particular biological sex (Gilles, 2003).

Other popular researchers including L. Jamieson (1998), reveal the intimacy of a specific type of relationship based on openness, cooperation, and unlimited expression of feelings, paying particular attention to the quality of the relationship. In the 90s the concept of 'intimacy to be negotiated' appeared, it was also recognized that intimacy was a political category. Finally, A. Giddens (1992) introduced the term "pure relationship" and the category of "plastic sexuality" to describe what happens to intimacy in the pop culture. Transformations of intimacy by Giddens are a response to social changes, but they are also characterise these changes. A gradual individualisation and democratisation of intimate relationships follows and these are starting to be accepted as a norm for homosexual relationships, which are the best exemplification of Giddens 'pure relationship'. This critical view is to exemplify the current stage of Polish research on a family.

Polish public discourse of intimacy

Polish research within sociology of family and social pedagogy are full of cultural biases and schemes, which are usually harmful for females. Their main source is public discourse. Moreover, comparing to the world's research and understanding of intimacy, most Polish studies are stuck in 80's.

In Polish public discourse there are various patterns which determine ways of understanding family relationships, marital happiness, intimacy and other similar concepts. These various discourses penetrate also scientific environment. These are kinds of “reference points”, which set the direction of further research. But researchers hardly recognize their own social and cultural determination.

In any intimate relationship we crave two contradictories: closeness and independence. It means that living in a relationship with another person always results in conflict. We often think in terms of opposites: love-hate, peace-war, cooperation-conflict. Thus, in our society, there exists a conflict taboo which considers conflict, war and hate wrong. The same way occurs a popular view of a family as ideal heaven, a sphere of harmony and security. This is ‘the folk concept of the family’, which emphasizes support, understanding, happiness and warm holiday rituals (Williams, Sawyer and Wahlstrom, 2013: 179). This concept is specifically strong in Polish culture because of its’ Roman Catholic roots. Roman Catholic teaching identifies the family as the social and moral centre of the community; the family, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, is ‘the original cell of social life’. The guiding principle of church teaching, the stability of the family, does not admit divorce. Although the church long defined the family as a hierarchical structure headed by the father, it now in keeping with the declarations of Vatican and the teachings of John Paul II rejects the traditional subordination of women in the family in favour of equality of dignity and responsibility between men and women. The family, moreover, is child-centred; traditional Catholic teaching makes the primary end of marriage the procreation and rearing of children. Only recently have Catholic theologians begun to speak of mutual love as an end ‘equally primary’ (according to Encyclopedia Britannica).

This concept dominates also in a public discourse in Poland. Even left-wing politicians are usually very conservative when it comes about e.g. same-sex couples.

Public discourse influence the real intimate relationships, because usually the boundaries and ways of protecting intimacy are inscribed in a set of standards concerning social life model and culture of the social group. In the intimate relationship exists a special code depending on the type of intimate interaction, their meaning and influence of the relations on the level of individualization of each person. Rules of the code are related to emotions – ways of expressing, shaping and simulating them (Luhmann 2003: 21), but also are framed and shaped by a social context. Codes of relations, differentiates in terms of language, embodiment, gestures and erotic relations, regarding to social capital of the persons involved.

As Lynn Jamieson interprets, contemporary relationships are very open and devoid of shyness, embarrassment, mystery and distance. What matters in private life is the desire of intimate conversation, listening and understanding the partner (Jamieson 1998: 158), but in terms of public discourse more important are legality of a relationship (marriage), having children and parenting. Alternative forms of relationships are often regarded as a threat for 'the real Polish family'.

Polish family studies

The main aim of the paper is a critical analysis of main Polish studies within pedagogy and sociology of family published in the last 12 years. Deconstruction of social assumptions ascribed into these studies can show the main constraints of such approach. Such a critic enables rethinking intimate relationships as an effect of discursive learning, which is understood as a phenomenon of social cognition in the discursive reality.

There were chosen four books very often used as students handbooks in the courses of pedagogy and sociology of the family:

- S. Kawula, J. Brągiel, A. W. Janke, *Pedagogy of a family. The areas and panorama of issues*, Toruń 2009.
- F. Adamski, *The family. Socio-cultural dimension*, Kraków 2002.
- L. Kocik, *The family faced with the values and patterns of life in the postmodern world*, Kraków 2006.
- T. Rostowska, *Marriage, family, work and the life quality*, Kraków 2009.

All of them contain word 'family' in the title. The main critical questions were:

- What is the content of these books?
- What and how do they teach us about a family?
- What kind of stories do they 'sell' us?
- Do they contain any concepts of intimacy between partners in the relationship? What vision of intimacy is it?

Table 1. The content of books – main themes.

Themes	T. Rostowska	L. Kocik	F. Adamski	S. Kawula, J. Brągiel, A.W. Janke
structure of a family	+	+	+	+
support within family	+	-	-	+
conflicts/crises in relations	-	-	-	+
marriage	+	+	+	-
communication	+	-	-	-
alternative forms of relations	+	+ (in negative context)	-	+ (mainly in negative context)
social roles	+	-	+	+
parenting	+	+	+	+
work-life balance	+	-	+	-
gender differences	+	-	+	-
intimacy	-	+	-	-
having children	+	+	+	+
involvement	+	-	-	-
love	-	-	-	-
sexuality	-	-	-	-
uncoupling	-	+	-	+

All chosen books refer to the structure of a family, having children and parenting. Moreover most of them treat formal relationship - marriage as the core of a family. Alternative forms of relationships e.g. cohabitation, homosexual relationships, DINKs are usually commented in a negative way. Only T. Rostowska (2009) who adopts family systems perspective, treats all alternative relationships as equally valuable and possible to choose. Analysed books do not contain issues of love and sexuality. Authors also rarely mention about involvement in the relationships and about intimacy between partners. Those are silenced discourses of Polish pedagogy and sociology of a family.

Seventh heaven – idealisation of the family relationships

According to J.M. Crawford, ‘Society’s definition of >family< is rapidly expanding and has come to include single parents, biracial couples, blended families, unrelated individuals living cooperatively, and homosexual couples, among others. Unfortunately, family policy has been slow to catch up to changing trends in modern lifestyles’ (Crawford, 1999: 271). It’s specifically true in a Polish context, where The Constitution of the Republic of Poland says: ‘Marriage is a union of man and woman, the family, motherhood and parenthood are under the protection and care of the Polish Republic’. There is no room for alternatives. The most visible is a central role of heterosexual marriage and having children. There is a strong belief that the external norms should govern the relationships. National protection should be reserved only for the ‘right’ or ‘real’ families.

This idea has its own representation also in handbooks, where are a lot of paradoxes. On the one hand L. Kocik (2006) wrote, ‘family relationships are primarily based not on what

individual members have, but on what and who they are for each other” (Kocik, 2006: 62). But on the other he says, that ‘inclusive definitions, drawing attention to the relationships between family members are inconsistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church’ (Kocik, 2006: 69). This is quite odd opinion taking into consideration the fact that Catholic Church should be inclusive institution from its foundations. Moreover, The Constitution of the Republic of Poland guarantees the secularity of the state and at the same time it fully complies with the teachings of Catholic Church, especially when it goes about family life.

Other author – F. Adamski (2002) – quotes such a definition of a family:

a family is the spiritual union of small group of people gathered in a common household by mutual assistance and care, based on faith in a real or perceived biological connectivity, as well as family and social traditions. A family group distinguished from other groups on the basis of co-occurrence of the following features: a common residence of members, common surname, common ownership, biological continuity and common spiritual culture (Adamski, 2002: 29).

There is a paradox too. Inclusive elements, as the spiritual union, mutual assistance and care occur next to the excluding biological continuity or common surname (!). In mentioned books we find usually very traditional definitions which generally focus on either structure or function of the family. The presented structure of family assumes that the relationships among members that are based on marriage, blood or adoption. The main functions are tasks performed by families, such as child rearing, meeting affectional needs of adults and transmitting the values of the larger society. Traditional family provides physical care, allocates resources, determines who does what, assures members’ socialization, establishes interaction patterns, incorporates and releases members and relates to the society through its institutions.

In analysed books dominate three perspectives (Williams, Sawyer and Wahlstrom, 2013):

- the structural-functional perspective – a family is seen as a social institution performing essential functions
- the family systems perspective – a family members seen as interconnected elements influencing system as a whole,
- the ecological perspective – stresses the interaction of families and their political and societal environments.

There is evident lack of:

- the conflict perspective,
- the symbolic interaction perspective,
- the social change perspective,
- the feminist perspective,
- the family development perspective.

Structural-functional perspective gives very narrow view of a family as a harmonious unit with shared values. Divorce is seen as disintegration. Interactions between members of a family are not so important for the researchers of such orientation. Especially love and sexuality are taboo themes. Sex in our society is surrounded by an army of social norms, religious restrictions and moral taboos. It is seen as a private sphere, so the researchers do not feel allowed to write about it in the context of a family.

(Un)Importance of choice and happiness

In the opinion of L. Kocik (2006), the core of the family is always a heterosexual couple: 'marriage can be attributed to a feature of universality, because it occurs in every era, in every culture, in every religion, in every place on Earth. As a specific relationship of a woman with a man it initiates the family, and so provides a continuance of our species' (Kocik, 2006: 63). The family has only biological task – reproduction and it has a meaning as long as it contributes to give birth to new children. Author does not say what about couples which cannot have children or consciously decide not to have an offspring. Author also has clear ideas about the cohabitation. He says: 'research confirms that relationships of people who have opted for cohabitation before marriage are less stable than those which have not decided to live together before marriage, treating marriage as a holy sacrament. Cohabitation relationships break down by a lack of trust among partners - for this reason they are taking less conventional solutions than most people' (Kocik, 2006: 86). It is rather radical judgement, although author does not provide a direct source of such a research results. This is not an isolated view.

F. Adamski (2002) seems to be even more radical and stereotypical in his opinions:

In broad opinion the action professional activation of women should include mainly unmarried or married but childless women eventually. Widely proclaimed thesis that women should work, because it is the only way to their full social emancipation is not so accepted among women themselves. More often unemployed women advocate for it, while working women more forcefully

advocate against it. Those women learned by the life experience, use a lot of arguments against economically forced professional activation of married women (Adamski, 2002: 205).

However the author quotes neither specific examples of research which would indicate that, nor the arguments of those women. He writes further:

According to the commonly accepted models, a good husband should get paid to keep the house, and a good wife should take care of the house and deal with the upbringing of children, and she should not work professionally. Not very rare are opinions that women are more specifically mentally attributed to a domestic and family matters than to professional ones - and hence they would always be less useful at work. This fact is also the reason of avoiding by women some activities and positions, which seem to be more responsible and absorbing. Such work could potentially diminish interest, time and energy which women have to devote to their homes (Adamski, 2002: 206).

This work is extremely stereotyped and discriminating women, who are not given even the right to make their own choices. Author's view is relentlessly patriarchal. He arbitrarily decides what women should or should not do.

Intimacy – gender differences and heterocentrism

In Polish literature and public discourse dominates the family as the centre of considerations. There is nearly nothing about close relationships between partners. It is very rare to find the word 'intimacy' and quite impossible to find any kind of its definitions.

When there is mentioned a unique character of homosexual relations, it is usually placed in the negative context. The only one handbook, where homosexual relationships are treated equally is T. Rostowska's (2009) writing:

Talks about feelings are for women the primary way of creating, developing and exhibiting closeness and intimacy. Men create and express intimacy rather by common action. There is no such confusion in the homosexual couples (Rostowska, 2009: 111).

She is the one and only among four authors who openly and objectively writes about intimacy, gender differences, gendered communication and homosexual couples. She considers a family as a system and she does not judge people because of non-traditional relationships choices.

Most Polish studies on intimate relationships neglect or totally ignore the issue of intimacy. In Polish public discourse there are various patterns which determine ways of understanding family relationships and marital happiness. Intimacy is the absent trait in most of the studies. These various discourses penetrate also scientific environment. They are kinds of "reference

points”, which set the direction of further research. But researchers hardly recognize their own social and cultural determination.

Conclusion

Not only giving a critical overview of intimate relationships research in Polish pedagogy and sociology is important, but also an alternative research direction should be outlined. Polish studies on families lack socio-cognitive perspective which treats intimate relationships as the effect of discursive shaping. Most Polish studies on intimate relationships are focused on particular problems within the family, excluding or at least marginalizing the issue of intimacy. The authors are under an influence of unconscious processes, their own narratives and the public discourse constituting their writing and research.

Meanwhile the meanings of intimacy are shaped in the process of social cognition through everyday communication. This is closely related to biographical stories of women as long as the discourse shapes biographies. Women learn how to (re)build their intimate relationships and they construct their narrations in particular discursive context. That is why among other promising methods Critical Discourse Analysis can give us a chance to acknowledge better the building and transformation of relationships in life and research.

The narratives shape our culture and our minds. To change either the quality of relationships, or the most common topics, perspectives and patterns in research, we should change the dominant narratives first. As a good start is worth recommending to understand relations in a partnership as a socio-cognitive phenomenon, which consists of perceptions, attributional processes, memories, beliefs, expectations and self-perceptions. People built their relationships implementing different strategies of impression management. The primary concern of Polish sociology and pedagogy of a family should become the way we think about our relationships. It should be considered how people’s judgements of their partners and their behaviour set the stage for the events that follow, as well as people’s efforts to influence and control what their partners think about them. The discourse and narratives we construct are of enormous importance, because they determine our perceptions and interpretations of the partnerships (Miller, 2012: 105). This is the perspective which Polish research field on family lacks the most.

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