

The Contemporary Family and the Responsibilities of the Social Worker in Direct Practice*

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... To help our clients enjoy marriage and family life, we have to help them realize that their role partners can never supply them with eternal bliss. . . and accept frustration as an inevitable part of living.

In September 1977, a five-year study conducted by the Carnegie Corporation concluded that the American family is in no great danger of disappearing. Once again a strain was created between colleagues in research and those in practice. What did those of us in practice declare after the research investigators thoughtfully and rigorously designed a study, worked arduously on it and then presented their conclusions about the family? We averred, "We knew it all the time!"¹

Regardless of our field of practice, the setting in which we work, or the clientele whom we serve, social workers have a commitment, a deep interest in, and attachment to the family. And, social workers do not stand alone. Since the beginning of recorded time and in all kinds of cultures, the family has existed as a bond that has taken precedence over other ties, and indeed, has often superseded the individual's own personal welfare and at times, even his survival. It is clear that families provide more social care to dependent members than do health and welfare agencies.²

* Parts of this paper were presented at the Leon and Rae Weil Lecture sponsored by the Jewish Family Service of Cleveland, Ohio; to a Conference sponsored by the Jewish Family Service of Bergen County; to a Symposium sponsored by the New York Chapter of Clinical Social Workers and as a keynote address to the New Jersey N.A.S.W. Symposium "The Social Worker as Psychotherapist."

¹ David Fanshell, "Sources of Strain in Practice-Oriented Research," *Social Casework*, Vol. 47, No. 6, 1966.

² R. Moroney, "The Family as a Social Service: Implications for Policy and Practice," *Child Welfare*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (April 1978).

The impact of the family is constantly reflected in our language, in our folklore, and virtually everywhere. We speak of *homely* truths, *familiar* surroundings, and of the *domesticated* in contrast to the primitive. "Home Sweet Home," "There is no place like home," and "Home is where the heart is" are refrains most of us enjoy. Jews speak warmly of the *Meeshpoh*, and many synagogues and temples have as their name, *Beth* which means "home". Almost every Jewish service begins with *Mah Tov*—"How good it is for brothers and sisters to be under one tent!" A very popular Yiddish song is, *Alah mentchen zinen brider*—Human beings are all brothers.

The need for a family is observed in the persistence of organized religion, for all religions may be viewed as psychological families. Jews and Christians have Fathers in heaven and Sons in the form of Moses and Jesus. The Holy Mother is an important symbol in Christianity and the Greek Goddesses are well known for their fertility, creativity and capacity to nurture. Despite all of the obstacles imposed on them, black slaves made many efforts to achieve and maintain family ties and much of the sociological research on Blacks points to more family solidarity than is usually recognized.³

The family, whether we revile it, reject it, or renounce it, shapes us more than anything else does or ever will. We cannot resign from it. A number of research experiments have clearly demonstrated that the capacity to love, to respond warmly and affectionately, and later to socialize with others stems from early body contacts and emotionally gratifying communi-

³ R. Merton and R. Nisbet, *Contemporary Social Problems*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1966.

cations between mother and infant.⁴ Educators now are convinced that how well a child learns and how much pleasure he extracts from learning depends on how warmly and consistently he was taught the "do's and don'ts" by his parents and close relatives.⁵ How an individual relates to the opposite sex and how comfortable he or she feels in his or her sexual role evolve mainly from his observations on how his parents related to each other. Even sex therapists like Masters and Johnson have shifted their focus from an exclusive emphasis on bodily experiences to how people feel toward each other and feel about themselves. In their latest book, Masters and Johnson have joined those of us who work with people and their feelings and they point out that the capacity to enjoy oneself in physical expressions of love derives mainly from the observations the child makes as he witnesses how his parents greet, communicate, and resolve conflicts with each other.⁶

The child is a good team member if he has learned to tame his competitive and aggressive impulses by living in a cooperative family. The teenager copes better with the *sturm and drang* of adolescence if his family atmosphere is structured so that he may receive appropriate doses of autonomy while he concomitantly receives appropriate controls. It has been well documented that teenagers who resort to violence and impulsive behavior are subtly and tacitly, albeit unconsciously, encouraged by their parents to do so, and that those who champion love, work and consideration for others have been exposed to a loving and cooperative family.⁷

In a recent book, *Adaptation to Life*,⁸

⁴ J. Bowlby, *Maternal Care and Mental Health*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 1951.

E. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*. New York: Norton, 1950.

⁵ Anna Freud, *Normality and Pathology in Childhood*. Vol. 6, *Writings of Anna Freud*. New York: Int'l Universities Press, 1965.

⁶ W. Masters and V. Johnson, *Human Sexual Inadequacy*, Boston: Little & Brown, 1970.

⁷ Nathan Ackerman, *The Psychodynamics of Family Life*. New York: Basic Books, 1958.

⁸ Boston: Little and Brown, 1977.

which studied the lives of 95 successful men, best-selling novelists, cabinet members, scholars, captains of industry, physicians, teachers of the first rank, judges and newspaper editors, the author, Dr. George Valiant demonstrated that, contrary to popular belief, men who became successful had very happy marriages, enjoyable family relationships and rich friendships.

Sigmund Freud in a letter written in the early 1900's said: "The announcement of my unpleasant findings had the result that I lost the largest part of my human relations. In this loneliness, there awoke within me the longing for a circle of select, high-minded men who would accept me in friendship in spite of my daring opinions. B'nai Brith was pointed out to me as the place where such men were to be found. The fact that you were Jews could only be desirable to me, for I myself was a Jew and I had always deemed it not only unworthy, but nonsensical to deny it."⁹

Here was the independent scientist, Freud, the free thinker, the atheistic infidel, acknowledging that when the going gets tough, the tough turn to the familiar.

Dysfunctions and Stresses of the Contemporary Family

Although the Carnegie Study concluded that the family is alive—social workers and other professionals know it is not well. Actually, the family of the 1970s is in deep trouble. We now have a divorce epidemic in this country, and, in 1977, there was close to one divorce for every two marriages. Of marriages that sustain themselves, many can be characterized as full of one-upmanship fracas and pervasive friction. Teenage suicide has reached its highest level and has increased 250 percent in the last twenty years; suicide among children is also up. The drug culture is proliferating and the "battered woman" syndrome is now a well-known clinical entity. In a recent book, *Wife Beating: The Silent Crisis*,¹⁰ Langley and

⁹ E. Jones, *Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 1. New York: Basic Books, 1953.

¹⁰ New York: Dutton, 1977.

Levy reported that one fifth of the married women in America beat their husbands, but that few of the men would admit it. We now have deserting mothers as well as deserting fathers. The reported incidence of child abuse has soared. A new phenomenon has emerged which is labeled "child-snatching"—angry spouses who are divorced perpetuate their vindictiveness by stealing their children when the other is not looking. As households change or break up, children are increasingly under the care of one parent. In a growing shift from the past, in 1977, 450,000 youngsters lived with their divorced or separated fathers.

The Jewish family is not exempt from conflict. Divorce statistics among Jews have risen and recently a *New York Times* survey¹¹ reported one out of four orthodox Jewish marriages ends up in divorce. Jewish alcoholism has risen and depressions, psychosomatic ailments and obesity are all "popular" neurotic responses among Jews. Phillip Roth and other authors have portrayed the Jewish mother as an all-consuming ogre. While this description of the model Jewish mother is exaggerated, Roth's books would not be so popular unless they were striking a responsive chord that is ready to resonate with vindictiveness.

Recently, one of the world's largest Jewish women's organizations, Hadassah, had to affirm its "deep conviction that the Jewish family is the keystone of Jewish survival" and that "the Jewish woman and mother serves as a central model." At this Hadassah convention was Margaret Costanza, President Carter's former Special Assistant who had to reassure the ladies present. She said, "Ladies, don't be ashamed of ever having made the choice of being married and raising a family!" When Hadassah women have to reaffirm themselves and receive assurance that it is desirable to be a wife and mother, we can infer that the contemporary Jewish woman is having some uncertainty about her identity!

Narcissism and the Contemporary Family

The family, at one time so universally accepted as the mainstay of our society, is now facing stresses so serious that we need a Carnegie Commission to tell us that it is still a viable institution. While many factors coalesce to undermine the contemporary American family, Jewish and non-Jewish, in this paper I would like to focus on one phenomenon which contributes heavily to the weakening of the bonds that unite a family. Psychoanalysts have referred to this phenomenon as increased narcissism and one analyst, Dr. Herbert Hendin, has labeled our current era *The Age of Sensation*¹² in which people want what they want when they want it and get furious when they don't get it.

Disruptive family life seems to reflect a cultural trend toward replacing commitment, involvement, and tenderness with self-aggrandizement, exploitativeness, and titillation. We now live in an age where we have unlimited expectations; many of us fantasize that Paradise can be regained and that the Garden of Eden can be located. We live in a culture in which anything done for another person must result in some immediate personal gain. As Robert Coles the Harvard psychiatrist has stated, "In a highly secular, materialistic culture like ours, anyone who gets too altruistic is looked upon as 'kooky'."¹³ Young children are often seen as pleasureless burdens and older children frequently become extensions of the need to validate one's life. Witness Little League baseball games or basketball games between community centers where the fathers and mothers from opposing teams bicker while their children try, frequently in vain, to play ball cooperatively. Anthropologist Margaret Mead said, "We have become a society of people who neglect our children, are afraid of our children, and find children a surplus instead of the *raison d'être* of living."¹⁴

¹² New York: Dutton, 1975.

¹³ "The Cold, Tough World of the Affluent Family," *Psychology Today*, Nov. 1975.

¹⁴ 1975.

¹¹ "Confronting Crisis in the Orthodox Jewish Family," January 25, 1978.

Many in our society are captivated by a B.F. Skinner who wants to avoid freedom and dignity and make feelings irrelevant through totally ordering and controlling experience or by a Timothy Leary who wants to escape beyond emotion through abandonment of control. To be a precisely constructed machine or a mass of waving sense cells reflects the common rejection of feeling, commitment and involvement.¹⁵

Those of us who work professionally with families frequently observe housewives berating themselves because they have failed to become an amalgam of an orgasmic playmate, intellectual stimulator, emotional empathizer, cathartic absorber, and autonomous strong woman. Many of them seem to be aspiring toward a role set which is a cross between Madame Pompadour and Madame Curie. Not only does Mrs. 1979 desire a great deal for herself, but she expects as much, if not more, from her husband. He should be a willing provider of much money but enjoy her gainful employment; he should be a sparkling conversationalist but respect his wife's need for solitude; he should help with domestic chores but have a stable role as masculine father; he should be an appetizing sexual partner but tolerate his wife's flirtations with other men.

Husbands are in tremendous conflict and social workers observe countless numbers of them who often feel desperate in not being a complete sexual athlete, provider of profound wisdom and plenty of money. If they do not berate themselves, they are preoccupied with a fantasy that life could be more fulfilling if their wives were more motherly, tender, supportive, and feminine, but concomitantly their counterparts should also be ecstatically erotic, decisive, and brilliant.

Husbands and wives of the 1970s, in effect, frequently expect of themselves and each other to enact the role of an omnipotent, omniscient parental figure. Unconsciously many people are seeking daily for the excitement of a Purim carnival and because they want so very much and feel so very deprived, many wives characterize their husbands as ogres and many

¹⁵ Henden, *Op.cit.*

husbands experience their wives as witches.

Because it is difficult for many spouses to achieve what they deem is sufficient fulfillment in a marriage, extra-marital affairs are not uncommon. Note the popularity of "swinging" and "switching" and the interest in encounter, sensitivity and nude marathon groups which renounce self and interpersonal understanding but champion instead, physical holding and sex play. They all reflect a craving for blissful excitement which does not seem available within the confines of marital life. No longer does society frown as much as it once did on wedding ceremonies for other than two members of the opposite sex. Recently the Des Moines Register told of four-person marriages in which one husband-wife dyad married the other and shared sex and a home in staid Iowa.

Inasmuch as living in the 1970s has caused many to believe that blissful excitement is eminently and consistently attainable, a lot of people are in a state of frustration. This frustration activates hatred and has made the war of the sexes more acute than ever. Because men and women are so frequently locked in struggles, there are now accepted alternatives to heterosexuality—homosexuality and bisexuality. Mayors boast of Gay Pride Week and college officials get brownie points when they speak of increased attendance in gay groups on campus. Social workers have been quick to legitimize and organizationally support Gay Social Workers and Lesbian Social Workers without giving much thought to why these social workers fear heterosexual love and resist family life and procreation.

Testimony to our age of sensation and narcissism is what makes a book a bestseller in the 1970s. Bestsellers are frequently self-help books which place almost exclusive stress on gratifying the narcissism of the individual reader. His desires become rights and others are expected to cater to him. Nothing the reader does should be considered wrong, and guilt should always be suppressed, not understood.

In the 1970s, parents' expectations of their children are excessively high. David should be

a great ball player, a superior student and an expert socializer. But, he should also be able to tolerate failure with ease. He should be aggressive but conforming, autonomous but obedient, well-groomed but modishly sloppy. To help him feel "secure" he should be given plenty of rewards and other indulgences. However, he should also take his parents' withholding very gracefully. Many young people, who frequently have been quite gratified if not over-gratified most of their lives, often rebel at the restraints that the responsibilities of incipient adulthood place on them and argue that their parents and other adults do not understand them sufficiently. Depressed because their powerful and frequently insatiable, but in their opinion justifiable, wants are frustrated, many of them look for the excitement which is absent but "necessary" by participating in the drug scene and in love-ins. There are now in this country close to a million teen-age alcoholics. The popular practice among young people of living together but not being formally married, reveals a wish for gratification, but without the responsibilities of a commitment. The question is, "Why should I commit myself to one person when somebody or something else that is better might turn up?" Their fears of intimacy, involvement and empathetic closeness go underground. Just as the parents of our young people feel that there is an available paradise, young people find it difficult to commit themselves to one person, one occupation, or even one major in college. "I don't want to be confined or controlled. There is something better but I haven't found it yet!" seems to be the sentiment of many young people. It is a fight, of course, against the anxiety that punctured omnipotence and narcissism stir up. As Bettelheim put it, "Whenever the older generation has lost its bearings, the younger generation is lost."

The urban and suburban dweller, in contrast to his rural antecedent, is swamped by many primitive desires. Life contains very few limits and controls and even these can be challenged. Living can be much better, and if we can't find it in our job, marriage, neighborhood or

community, we can switch. Similar to the young child, many adults believe that paradise and constant joy can be achieved. It is somewhere and that is why we Americans are so mobile. Perfection in a job, mate, sex, is available. Many will travel miles to get it—it's there!

Because we want so very much that is unrealistic, our frustration turns into desperation and our anguish becomes converted into a series of rallying cries. If growing up in a family has been a horror, do away with families. If intimacy is frightening, let us have open marriage. If we are unsure about our sexual identities, let us attack the opposite sex and if children seem like a curse, let's stop having them.¹⁶

Industrialized society with its unlimited opportunity structure has not only made us think that constant bliss is eminently attainable, but that it is just around the corner. One can be the recipient of love and admiration always; we just have to learn the right mechanical methods of attaining them. Sex manuals which often forget about love and genuine intimacy but concentrate instead on steps 1, 2, 3, and 4, are more popular than ever. We are constantly stimulated everywhere and many of us are in a state of anxious excitation, wanting and wishing for more and more. No wonder depressions, tranquilizers, suicides, divorces, power struggles and the rest are commonplace. If one does not get his rightful due, something is terribly wrong with him or terribly wrong with his spouse, relative, friend, or associate.

Peter Glick has documented how individualism as it is being pursued today expresses itself in egocentricity and impulse-ridden behavior. Glick has effectively demonstrated how increased narcissism is tearing the family apart and that the tremendous value placed on "doing one's thing" is fostering the demise of the family unit.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ "Individualism, Society, and Social Work," *Social Casework*, Vol. 56, No. 10 (1977).

The Contemporary Family and Social Work Intervention

Many of the families that confront today's social work practitioners are unfortunately plagued by infantile, grandiose, and omnipotent desires reminiscent of a young child and much of family life is a paradigm of discontent because of the reduced capacity of men and women to give and to feel protective and loving towards each other and their children.

Depression, dejection, anger and unhappiness in the contemporary family are not well-understood even by contemporary psychotherapists. Unhappy people *feel* deprived and angry but they frequently are miserable because they want things which cannot be attained: perfect looks, the perfect job, the perfect spouse, the perfect supervisor, etc., and frequently they are unwilling to expend the effort to secure what is realistically attainable. As social workers who want to strengthen family life, we have to face the fact that many of our clients do not know that one cannot expect to be understood and loved in a family or elsewhere without understanding and loving. Many of our clients do not know that one cannot expect cooperation from another without himself cooperating. In the families that we see many of their members need help in understanding that they cannot expect "the other" to stop resenting them unless they first come to grips with their own contempt. Many of our clients have not learned that they cannot compete gracefully unless they allow for a loss. Some do not know that they cannot be heard unless they are also willing to listen. Many of our clients still believe that they can, should, and have a right to be considered at all times what Freud referred to as "His Majesty the Prince or Princess." Holding onto this conviction with tenacity, they become easily angered, and easily depressed.

We social workers sometimes get overly influenced by our hate culture and can forget our mission with married couples and families. Instead of using our knowledge of the unconscious and defenses to help a wife or

husband who blasts the marital partner, we are too often tempted to join the client in his or her attacks, under the guise of enhancing assertiveness and freedom. When a husband or wife complains about the partner's sadism, stupidity, or lack of sexuality, we always have to ask, "Why does the client unconsciously want it that way? What protection does it offer the client when he or she experiences the spouse as a punitive superego, a half-dead mammal, or a ninny? In family therapy we always must ferret out why a particular member of the family is used as a scapegoat. What's in it for the goat and what's in it for members who are abusing him or her? Social workers must recognize that hatred is a resistance against love and that many of our clients feel humiliated, guilty, and weakened when they think of loving someone. They do not see love as liberating and leading to mental health. We as social workers must communicate our love, not by advice-giving, not by reward and punishment, not necessarily by championing what the client champions, but by demonstrating our faith in his or her ability to look beneath the surface of his complaints and help him see how he writes in many ways his own self-destructive script.

Social workers who live in the Age of Sensation which favors instant gratification over the reality principle, narcissism over interpersonal cooperation, and ventilation over introspection, have at times been too seduced by the encounter movement, the marathons, and the sensitivity movements. These so-called therapies all too often promote a type of aggressive foreplay—stimulating, exciting, but regressive and rarely ego-building.

As Dr. Hans Strupp has recently pointed out,¹⁸ increasing numbers of people are entering a vastly expanding arena of therapies and quasi-therapies. Many of these innovative approaches to human problems depart sharply from the better known traditional therapies and capitalize upon sensationalism, promising

¹⁸ Hans Strupp, S. Hadley, and B. Gomes-Schwartz, *Psychotherapy for Better or Worse*. New York: Jason Aronsen, 1977.

substantial results in brief periods of time. Significant change in these therapies is often predicated upon an intense emotionally charged experience for the patient. Any massive assault on a person's defenses, as occurs in weekend encounter groups, marathons, primal therapy, Erhard training seminars and others, heightens the potential for arousal of uncontrolled powerful affects and the possibility of decompensation or other negative effects. Because of these hazards one might expect that close attention would have been paid by researchers and clinicians to the study of outcomes from these therapies. This has not been the case and the few reports available are self-serving testimonials gathered by the proponents of a particular approach rather than objective and dispassionate investigations.

Even within the province of the more traditional therapeutic approaches, there is a movement toward brief interventions. Evaluations of results are focused on a narrow range of outcomes or changes in "target complaints" which fail to provide a complete assessment of the impact of these confrontative, short-term therapies on the client's total life.

Of course these new therapies "work." But, so does torture! The issue here is not the efficacy but the ethical and therapeutic dimensions of manipulative therapies, short-term symptomatic gains are achieved at the cost of sacrificing the client's long-term developmental potential and as Robert Langs has said, "Many deviations in technique are not undertaken primarily because of the patient's needs, but are rationalizations of the extensive counter-gratifications they offer the therapist."¹⁹

If one looks at the profession of social work historically one would have to characterize a good deal of current practice as regressive and fragmentary. In the days of Mary Richmond, although most help was limited to manipulating the client's environment and attempting to

influence the client's "significant others," the friendly visitor was a disciplined professional who, though rigid and moralistic, had a clear focus in his diagnostic and interventive efforts.²⁰

When the friendly visitor learned that all clients did not respond positively to environmental manipulation and advice, psychoanalysis helped the social worker understand that while people may consciously want to change, they have unconscious wishes to preserve the status quo and can derive neurotic gratification from their suffering.²¹

Although the metapsychology of Freud was and is helpful to social workers, his theory of treatment was misused and abused by many of them. It took social workers some time to realize that interpretations of defenses and unconscious wishes have to be done judiciously. Of more importance, techniques like free association and dream analysis, social workers slowly and painfully realized, are more applicable to middle-class clients with observing egos and full stomachs.

The Depression and the way years helped social workers once again appreciate the fact that people live in situations and that all of the self-understanding in the world cannot rectify a dilapidated house, a decrepit neighborhood, or a chaotic welfare system. Social workers by the 1950s were actively talking about the person-situation constellation²² and recognized that we cannot help a client unless we appreciate how and why his situation influences him and vice-versa.

I believe that the person-in-situation focus with its strong emphasis on study, diagnosis, and treatment, so widely adhered to in the 1950s, is what makes social work unique and what social workers should stress more today. Instead, practitioners have not taken sufficient

²⁰ *What Is Social Casework*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1922.

²¹ Gordon Hamilton, "A Theory of Personality: Freud's Contribution to Social Work," in H. Parod, ed., *Ego Psychology and Dynamic Casework*. New York: FSAA, 1958.

²² _____ *Theory and Practice of Social Casework*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1951.

¹⁹ *The Bipersonal Field*. New York: Jason Aronsen, 1976

pride in their understanding and skill in working with inner man and his environment, but have been unduly influenced by manipulative techniques like behavior modification and other therapies which do not focus very much on person-situation interaction. All too often the social worker of the 1970s is too intimidated by the knowledge explosion and feels that his practice must be viewed in the language of system theory, role theory, organizational theory, and communication theory. To surround social work practice with a flock of theories that are not always applicable to the person-in-his-situation is not even a constructive intellectual exercise! The social worker of the 1970s always must ask of the new theoretical perspectives: What is pertinent to practice? How will the concept help clients?

As new modalities confront social workers such as task-oriented casework, crisis intervention, and brief family therapy, they are too often experienced as panaceas and used indiscriminately. Insufficiently asked by social workers are the following questions: What is the level of psychosocial functioning of the individual and/or family members that makes a particular modality the intervention of choice? What are the defensive patterns of the client or client system that makes one form of intervention threatening while another one is more palatable? How does the client experience the worker transferentially as he enacts the broker role, the crisis intervenor, short-term therapist or advocate? Does the particular modality induce regression or progression, and what will be most therapeutic now? In sum, there seems to be in current social work practice an absence of careful selection of modalities and an absence of a careful assessment of their usefulness for specific person-situation constellations.²³

Just as our Age of Sensation has induced much regressive behavior, more and more social workers seem to be attracted to regressive therapies like encounter groups,

²³ "Psychoanalysis versus Psychotherapy," *Bulletin of Washington Square Institute*, New York, 1978.

primal scream, and the sensitivity movements. More and more in the social work literature one notes the endorsement of therapeutic interventions which reduce the human being to an aggregate of stimuli and responses, devoid of hopes, dreams, fantasies, values, hurts, joys, and no unconscious mind. In our current era, the social work practitioner all too often overlooks the uniqueness of the person as he pigeonholes people into roles and subsystems and loses sight of the unifying genetic and experiential bases and the dynamic interaction of its parts. In many quarters social work's traditional commitment to problem-solving is whittled down from the person with the problem, to the problem. We are now witnessing a proliferation of specialists each confining himself to an artificially delineated and inevitably sterile area of practice. A number of experts converge on one family, each one nibbling in his domain, be it marital problems, child care, or employment.²⁴

As practitioners have become enamored of superficial interventions, as panaceas become popular like gurus are to young people, we have been witnessing more and more of what I have referred to as "The Flight from the Client."²⁵ In current social work we have a reward and punishment system which demeans practice. If a practitioner does good work with clients, he is promoted by removing him from clients and making him a supervisor. In effect, the more ability the worker has, the more he'll be removed to the periphery of practice. The same phenomenon exists in our schools of social work where those who are nearest to practice and to clients, i.e., the field work instructors, have the least status. A social work educator, like a practitioner, is also rewarded by being removed from practice. If he does well as a field work instructor, he'll be transferred to the classroom and if he does well in the classroom, he'll become a sequence chairman or a dean and be further removed

²⁴ H. Grossbard, Book Review of *Personality Theory and Social Work Practice*, by Herbert Strean in *Social Work*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1976).

²⁵ Herbert Strean, *Clinical Social Work*. New York: Free Press, 1978.

from practice.

As part of our current regression in social work, the modal practitioner is fast becoming a B.S.W. who is supervised by an M.S.W. with limited practice experiences; both are being educated by a D.S.W. who has worked with clients for only a short while, or who has not seen a client in years.

Social Work Intervention and Values

In order to help our clients—individuals, dyads, and families—our work must be guided by some values. We believe that man and woman, boy and girl, can attain happiness through a way of living which involves love rather than hate, pleasure, sexual gratification, a feeling for life but which is guided by reason, an adequate role in the family, a sense of identity, constructive work, and a role in the social order. This is what Dr. Reuben Fine calls the “analytic ideal.”²⁶ If social workers strive for this ideal they serve as appropriate models for their clients, but not by imposing these values on them but by helping them look at what in them prevents them from having realistic pleasure and enjoyable interpersonal relationships.

Continual psychosocial growth and an enjoyable family life, whether it be for a child, man, or woman, not only imply realistic gratifications but also experiences in coping with frustration. Most would agree that the maturation of a youngster not only requires the tenderness and nurturing of a mother, but eventual weaning must take place. Further growth inevitably requires frustrating the child’s natural inclination to soil his diapers; toilet training is inevitable. Just as children need warm but firm training in giving up certain pleasures like the breast and soiling and learning to adapt to what Sigmund Freud called the reality principle, so too we must help our adult clients who have not grown up to recognize that there is no Garden of Eden. The idea of living in a Garden of Eden is pure fantasy and even Adam and Eve had their troubles there!

²⁶ *The Healing of the Mind*. New York: David McKay, 1971.

To help our clients enjoy marriage and family life, we have to help them realize that their role partners can never supply them with eternal bliss. As therapists we know that bliss is always a momentary experience. But, our clients’ lives can be fuller and more satisfying when they can truly accept frustration as an inevitable part of living. When they can assimilate and integrate into their daily interactions that their relatives, friends, colleagues and therapists cannot minister to their every wish, they are freer to enjoy their potentials. Furthermore, they are also helped when they can recognize that they cannot nor should not attempt to gratify each and every desire of their mates and friends. To aim for omnipotence, our clients should learn, is to court disaster. To accept reality as it is, permits much room for happiness.

Urban industrialized society does whet our clients’ appetites. They often find themselves placed in a position similar to that of a young child in an immense candy store. They get overwhelmed by all of the niceties but find it difficult to forego pleasure. Yet, they can learn they do not have to eat everything in sight because if they do they’ll get sick and if they even try, they might get nauseous. High on the list of the most common neurotic symptoms today are ulcers and obesity. These gastrointestinal disorders are manifestations of psychological hunger. People want to devour everything in sight but simultaneously want to be svelte and have a well-functioning stomach.

Our clients and we, too, are entitled to some inner peace, some pleasure from our confreres, some fulfillment from our pursuits and some feeling of stable identity. When Freud was asked how to achieve these precious ingredients, he answered tersely, *Lieben und arbiten*—“Love and work!” Those of his followers who wished to embellish on this prescription have offered rather simple but sage prescriptions. They have pointed out that a mutual love relationship involves listening to one’s mate, not only being listened to. It involves absorbing his or her “no’s” as well as being pleased with his or her “yes’s” and it involves a concern for and understanding of

his or her feelings and appreciating his or her attempts at same. Mature love requires an identification with "the other" so that his or her triumphs and disappointments, frustrations and joys are in some way ours, as well. It involves the ability to light a candle rather than curse the darkness. That is the attitude that stimulates love, and a family without love among its members is really no family.

With regard to children, true love means not just vicariously enjoying their pleasures and achievements but absorbing and understanding their anger when they must be frustrated. It involves not only helping them enjoy the successes of which they are capable of achieving but helping them recognize that part of the human experience is encountering and living with failure in ourselves and others.

To function maturely in today's complex society requires of the individual sufficient autonomy so that the lack of praise or criticism does not crush him. When he can accept what he has rather than fantasize about what he doesn't have, he can better withstand the onslaughts of those who do not view him so positively.

Love, empathy and work, though the hallmarks and necessary ingredients for a

sound family life and sound mental health, never mean an endorsement of masochism. If marriage, parenthood and the nurturing of children are viewed as unjustifiable self-sacrifice, then mutual self-affirming love will be replaced by resentment and an inability to communicate real love.

Winston Churchill once said that democracy is the worst form of government except for all other forms. Something similar might be said of the family. There is nothing better and we know that individuals who have renounced ties to a family are miserable, unhappy and angry individuals.

James Reston of the *New York Times* has written:

If preachers are not to be believed and politicians are not to be trusted, and society as a whole is a jumble of lies and tricks, then the family may still be the best bet available, maybe even better than being liberated into loneliness.

Wrote James Baldwin:

The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us. The moment we stop holding one another, the moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out.