Feminist and Social Theory Case Study

Tonya Bunch

University of North Carolina University Greensboro/

North Carolina Agricultural & State University

SWK-631 Social Work with Individuals and Family: Theory and Practice

May 29, 2018

Professor Thull

Academic Integrity Pledge: “I have abided by the Academic Integrity Policy on this assignment.”

\_Tonya Bunch\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_05/29/2018\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Introduction

A same-sex couple come into my office describing some issues they are facing as a couple and a family. A social worker can apply different theories to assist their clients. Feminist Theory and Social Learning Theory will be used to explain how a social worker will work with the clients. An explanation of each theory will be provided as well as how a social worker could apply the theories to, who will be referred to as, “Sergio and Richard.” Last, social workers must always be aware of the cultural, ethical, and social justice problems for each client. Therefore, the text will explore possible concerns a social worker may have when working with Sergio and Richard.

Explanation of Theories (Appealing and Unappealing)

Feminist theory is complex in the nature that it considers gender as a main issue concerning power. However, Feminist theory also goes beyond gender by looking at intersectionality and same-sex partnerships. According to Allen and Jaramillo-Sierra (2015) feminist perspective considers intersectionality by “intersectionality power relations, race, class, and sexual orientation” that can “intersect power relations” (p 94). Also, Feminist theory looks to advocate and educate clients. Feminists base “their work in the” actual happenings of humankind that is “power and oppression” (Allen, Jaramillo-Sierra, 2015, p 94). A social worker can identify what types of oppression their clients are experiencing and educate them. A social worker can also look to see if their clients are having less power than their partners.

Feminist theory looks at families in a multifaceted manner by considering same-sex couples and opposite-sex couples having conflict as well as love and care all at the same time (Allen, Jaramillo-Sierra, 2015). Social workers must identify what are the conflicts and if the couple wants to stay together. A social worker should ask each client what a relationship looks like to them. Also, Kelland (2014) explains neurosis having “their roots in childhood experiences which can lead to certain hostilities (p 171-172). Basic anxiety and basic hostility is a person holding in their unresolved feelings from childhood and bring them forth into adulthood (Kelland 2014).

Social learning theory is social learning from a child’s perspective that relies on learning from their parents about how they interact with the world (Rasmussen and Salhani, 2008). Parents who are raised in different regions of the world more than likely have been raised with different values and beliefs. Also, kids learn from their parents of what is acceptable by the “social-structure” inside the family (Rasmussen and Salhani, 2008, p 213). Parents who are on different ends of how to raise their children from a religious base could create havoc upon their children. Last, according to Rasmussen and Salhani (2008) “social character” combines “social structures forms and processes within individual psyche,” meaning it is “social and psychological” together. (p 213). Social workers should help parents realize that they begin the formation of how their children “think, act, and feel” (Rasmussen and Salhani, 2008, p 213).

What is appealing about Feminist theory is that is about equality and considers many different aspects of people, including race, gender, and sexual orientation to name a few. What is unappealing is that it is put on the client to advocate for themselves which could take weeks, or it could never happen (Allen, Jaramillo-Sierra, 2015). It can be challenging for a social worker seeing their client not making progress. What is appealing about Social Learning theory is that it helps a social worker explain how the client was brought up by their parents and how that could be affecting them today. Also, a social worker can help parents identify the negative parts and positive parts of how they are raising their children. What is unappealing is that it is only based off economic and social structure (Rasmussen and Salhani, 2008). It appears that biology and spirituality should be added to Social Learning theory.

Applicability to Client’s Case

A social worker can apply the Feminist theory to Sergio by looking at the family dynamics first. Of course, the social worker would have to gain rapport to bring forth possible uncomfortable situations. One dynamic would be that Sergio is undocumented, therefore; his partner Richard appears to have all the power. What this means is that Sergio is not an adoptive parent of their children, cannot be legally recognized in the U.S., must hide in a sense from the law. A social worker could bring this up to Richard and Sergio to help make them aware of Sergio’s circumstances. Second, a social worker could help Sergio and Richard to advocate for him as well as learning if he can become documented by looking at the legal side of things (Allen, Jaramillo-Sierra, 2015).

A social worker could then discuss with Richard and Sergio about the power that Richard may carry since he is of legal standing with being a citizen in the U.S. Richard may or may not know this. This could help Richard discover if he likes power or would want Sergio and Richard’s power dynamic to be equal. Next, a social worker could discuss with Richard and Sergio about the inequalities they may be experiencing because of their sexual orientation. Together the social worker and Richard and Sergio could begin to see that they are being oppressed, not only by Sergio being undocumented but because they are a gay couple (Allen, Jaramillo-Sierra, 2015).

A social worker could also explore with Richard and Sergio, in separate sessions, what their childhood was like. For instance, is Sergio having some sort of hostility from him losing his father and having to take over as the man of the house. Is Sergio carrying anxiety and hostility towards his father and mother for having to give up his teen years? Next, Richard’s case, does he carry anxiety and hostility from his childhood. A social worker could ask Richard if he grew up with a family that turned to alcohol for coping through rough times. Is that Richard’s crutch (Kelland 2014)?

A social worker could apply social learning theory to Richard and Sergio by helping them understand that they are the first to influence their children’s way of thinking, behaving, and feeling. Social workers should educate her clients that their issues of how to raise their kids could be affecting them negatively or positively. For instance, Richard and Sergio’s issues may already be affecting their daughter because they have already had the school social worker refer her to get tested for autism. A social worker could explore with Richard and Sergio about what their parenting style looks like at home (Rasmussen and Salhani, 2008).

Cultural, Ethical, and Social Justice Issues

Cultural issues to consider is Sergio being from Brazil and raised Catholic. On the other hand, Richard was raised Jewish and is now an Atheist. This conflict can be explored to have Richard and Sergio come to an agreement as to how their children will be raised. However, this may be the only power Sergio has, raising their kids as Catholics. A social worker must be very careful not to put her values toward the issue. The couple should make all their decisions.

From an ethical standpoint, does the social worker working with Richard and Sergio need to speak with the social worker at their daughter’s school? On one hand, the social worker could gain knowledge about why the school social worker thinks Richard and Sergio’s daughter may have autism. The social worker could then identify a possible resource as well as working with Richard and Sergio by discussing if her demeanor has changed since their problems began to get troublesome. On the other hand, is it ethical to go that far into their family issues? A social worker must be aware of the boundaries of the clients she is helping. Therefore, a social worker with such questions should speak to her colleagues and supervisor to gain more knowledge on how to approach the situation.

Last, social justice is always on the mind of a social worker by way of discovering what can be done with the clients she is working with. For instance, Richard and Sergio are being oppressed by their sexual orientation. Richard and Sergio were unable to get married 15 years ago which would have afforded Sergio a green card. Hence, there would be no issue of Sergio being undocumented. A social worker should continue to advocate for equal rights for all no matter their sexual orientation. Next, Sergio is being oppressed because of him having to leave the country 60 days after he finished school. There is something not quite right with this picture. A social worker should advocate for the rights of people who come to the U.S. for education. What this means is that a person who comes to the U.S. should have an opportunity to gain employment and stay in the United States upon completion of their education.

Conclusion

Sergio and Richard’s case are complex because there are many issues separately, as a couple, and as parents that are happening. Applying Feminist theory can help Sergio and Richard advocate for his documentation. Also, they can help identify if their childhood experiences were ever resolved. Next, Social learning theory can be applied to their parenting style and how it is affecting their children. It appears that Richard and Sergio’s cultures clash from a religious standpoint which can raise many issues within the relationship. A social worker must always be aware of their values as well as ethical issues. Should the social worker ask for permission to speak to the school social worker? Last, social justice issues which are many that include Sergio being undocumented and their sexual orientation. Why should anyone have to hide who they are and where they live? Social workers always have to fight for the rights of everyone.

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