

Introduction

Psychology and families

Relatively neglected by SP as an area of study, despite many researchers acknowledging the family as a kind of group. More commonly researched as part of developmental psychology.

Focus is often on mother-child interactions (father-child rarely studied according to **O'Brien**) and often on failure to achieve good outcomes - e.g. eating disorders and incest (**Cawson et al**) and their causes.

Developmental psychologists usual focus on young children (**Bradley**) and very particular ideas about children's (lack of) subjectivity - they are in the process of 'becoming' (**James and Prout**) are pervasive. **Dunn** and others contest this view (that childhood is simply a transitional stage to adulthood) however.

Developmental psychology views adolescence as a normal transitional phase; characterised by identity formation; focused on the individual and peer group (**Coleman**). Families (if included) tend simply to be analysed for their effect on adolescent outcomes.

As developmental psychology is primarily interested in what happens inside the family, boundaries have to be drawn as a way of investigating with certainty.

Changes in cognitive, biological and sexual development of children are seen as most relevant (**Durkin**) rather than other changes that take place in family structures.

Regarded as being separate from the more public realms of society and culture; neither influencing nor being influenced by them.

Universality of processes within families is assumed; differences (when acknowledged) are marginalised and flattened out in data analyses.

SPM Chapter 3 - Families

Feminist psychologists have challenged over-generalised accounts of development and child-rearing on grounds of racial, gender and class differences - e.g. **Walkerdine and Lucey; Phoenix**.

Situated knowledges are important - bringing attention to the way that ideas produced at a particular period and context hugely influence commonsense and professional ideas about all families, which in turn influence government policy.

Building a social psychology of the family

The idea of family creates challenges for SP - e.g. tensions between the concepts of self and other; individual and society; private and public. Reflected in the differing approaches of SSP and PSP. Creates an opportunity for an emerging SP where individuals are not studied apart from their context.

Studying families can therefore tell us much about power relations, situated knowledges and should transcend agency-structure and individual-social dualisms.

SSP emphasis has been on the role of families in the socialisation and development of children.

SSP emphasis has been on processes at work in society and the ways these impact family structures and practices.

SSP therefore views family boundaries as more fluid - so not characterised by universal processes and features.

SSP would investigate contradictions which show quantitatively that families are a key site of change, while qualitative studies show many people as being committed to the idea that the family is a site of unchanging tradition.

"Friendships are as important as families" - has entered popular discourse about the family.

This chapter is oriented towards an SSP view of the family - emphasising mutual interdependence of individuals and groups.

Families and change

The idea of a clearly definable 'bounded' family is up for challenge (**McKie et al.**).

Morrow - 8-14 yr olds consider quality of relationships in family as well as roles performed to be more important than biological relatedness / marriage.

Edwards et al. - Children often include peers, parent's friends, neighbours, teachers as family members.

Cicirelli - Boundaries set vary according to ethnicity (e.g. **Chamberlain** study into African Caribbean families), class, cultural, religious & political contexts.

Trans-national families and identities

Williams - defines families as networks of affection. Affected by a range of influences - economic, patterns of employment, consequences of history (e.g. war, slave trade), consequences of globalisation. Recently, the phenomena of 'trans-national' families has emerged - ability to travel globally and new means of communication has made the maintenance of family bonds possible.

Sutton - family reunion rituals of three African Caribbean families investigated through in-depth interviews 'back home in the Caribbean'. Found:

- Inclusive, elastic definition of family used
- Re-union activities as a way of introducing children to their family
- Explicit connection between identity and family - reunions used to create knowledge of family as fundamental part of identity

Sutton's research shows up the complexities in the definition of families (e.g. due to migration) and how identity definitions between individuals and groups are blurred.

Tensions between agency and structure: economic factors cause people to migrate, yet other structures allow personal agency - e.g. the ability to choose to travel for reunions.

Changing family forms

UK census data shows over last 30 years:

- Large increases in single and lone-parent households
- Women participating more often in full-time work even if they have children
- Shifts in patterns of child bearing

Changes can be constructed (negatively) as:

- Undermining values and bonds of family life (**Putnam**)
- Responsible for weakening family ties (**Beck and Beck-Gernsheim**)
- Individualising close relationships - love becomes more important but more difficult to maintain (**Giddens**)

Or positively as:

- Resulting in more egalitarian relationships
- Emergence of families of 'choice'
- Growing importance of non-kin relationships (**Roseneil and Budgeon**)

Civil partnership act allows same-sex 'marriage'; but heterosexual relationships are still constructed as normal and natural. Such ideas have a wide impact - e.g. **Langdrige and Blyth** found access to assisted conception services still largely exclude single women and lesbian couples. Gay and lesbian parenting provokes strong anxieties; contemporary response is to focus on supposed differences (+ve or -ve) children in non-traditional families exhibit (**Hicks**).

In summary:

- Quantitative and qualitative research suggests families are diverse, rather than homogenous
- Identity is bound up in family groups - tensions occur between agency and structure
- Changes in family forms are debated and contested strongly
- Normative ideologies dominate institutional and everyday life
- Discussion of singleness, family life and domestic practices is influenced by the ideological aspects of everyday discourse

Discursive psychological perspective on families

Assumptions / focus:

- Focus is on the way language and discourse constructs reality. Discourse processes are a form of social action; talk constructs social reality and is *not* simply a way of passing on ideas and experiences
- Existing cultural ideas (discourse resources) are drawn on by speakers
- Uses analysis of spoken/written texts
- Identifies commonsense but contradictory explanations (interpretative repertoires) people use
- Looks at how subject positions are taken up
- Looks at how talk is constructed to justify and blame - it is situated in the context of giving an account
- Analysis leads to highlighting of ideological features of discourse, how social inequality is constructed and reconstructed through language

Singleness

As this is constructed against the notion of family, it and other non-conventional family forms allow an opportunity to see how family limits are constructed in

discourse.

Roseneil and Budgeon - single people not isolated, but often woven into networks of support, care & friendship. But discourse resources available to single women are inadequate to express this.

Adams - singleness not viewed as a healthy or normative state, despite its increasing prevalence.

Reynolds and Taylor - not understood as a preference or choice, but as a personal failure.

Reynolds and Wetherell - argue for a feminist psychology of singleness based on CDP - focus should be on patterning of ideology, not single women's supposed dysfunction, as:

- The single state and status of singleness are socially constructed - they are therefore historically and culturally variable
- Singleness is a social category - constructed to provide a 'neat' framework for life
- Singleness is a discourse - complex meaning and practices produce knowledge and truth about singles.
- Singleness is constructed on relation to power - it is an 'ideological field'.

Singleness therefore needs studying from the point of view that it consists of personal narratives and subject positions.

Found in interviews with 30 single women, publicly available interpretative repertoires are used as components to develop their account of what it is to be single. They are 'what everyone knows' about a topic but are often contradictory.

Singleness is an uneasy subject position: repertoires used include personal deficit, social exclusion, independence and choice, self-actualisation and achievement.

e.g. Case of Annie (**Reynolds and Wetherell**). Constructs singleness +vely (independence, choice) in one phase of the interview, but held in check by the danger of being thought selfish. In another phase, -ve constructions are placed on the condition by the use of the repertoire of social exclusion (couples exclude singles from the privileged space of coupledness - as they are perceived as lacking (a man, for example and so perceived as a threat))

Most +ve strategy used by some women was to look at this dilemma reflexively - rather than alternating between both sides of the dilemma.

Gender - domestic division of labour and power

Baxter - Women do more childcare & housework
Dempsey - even when in paid work

Many couples look at the unequal division of labour as being fair however - **Coltrane**.

This is a paradox - researchers such as **Hawkins et al** have looked at the feelings & attitudes in this area.

Distributive Justice Framework (DJF) - questionnaire methodology; influential in SP of domestic labour - **Thompson**.

States women's sense of entitlement as a way of understanding and explaining gender inequalities - identifies three factors:

- Outcome values (regarding housework, children as important in loving relationships)
- Comparison referents (favourable view of relationship w.r.t. other people's are more satisfied with their own housework allocation)
- Justifications (men have less time; less able to multi-task; lower standards than women - plus if discussed openly with partner, women feel division is reasonable)

However, such research is less helpful when looking at sense of fairness in family settings over this division of labour.

e.g. Case of Rachel (**Dryden**).

Extract shows:

- No information on fairness of task distribution
- Sees housework as her responsibility
- Justifies this by saying he works full-time and hates housework
- ... but argues he is enlightened as he'd do the plasterwork - something she would never do.

Dixon and Wetherell - principles of 'fair shares', 'equity' literally brought to meaning by everyday discourse. Most research on family life judges fairness out of context with their setting - hiding situated discursive practices.

Questionnaires cannot:

- Take account of the wider context of family negotiations - advantages to some, disadvantages to others.
- Give much idea as to how identities are constructed w.r.t. domestic practices

Even an argument over who does the laundry triggers different identities which evolve through social interaction and changing power relations.

Hochschild - 'economies of gratitude' - men's participation in housework as gifts or favours - may shed some light on Rachel's account. **Dixon and Wetherell** suggest such a notion demonstrates dialogic practices that provide a building block for definitions of justice and equality at home. Not always a 'fair' compromise, as what is agreed is influenced strongly by cultural norms.

Social psychoanalytic perspective on families

Assumptions / focus:

- Psychological and social life is inseparable, dynamic & relational: interested in how subjectivity emerges in the social domain (**Frosh**).
- Unconscious & conscious processes are important
- Anxiety & our defences against anxiety are central to construction of our individual, social, cultural & institutional lives
- Theoretically plural - i.e. concepts take account of interior processes (individual and group emotions) and those in the social world (structure and power)
- Interpretative, qualitative methods

Psychoanalysis starting point is that our behaviour and the way we interact are in some part the product of irrational, unconscious processes - challenges the widely held view that human nature and relationships are fundamentally rational.

Conscious thought only a very small part of our make-up - the vast and hidden unconscious processes is where most of our inner world is. Hence unconscious anxiety needs managing through unconscious defence mechanisms including splitting, projection & projective identification if we are to function at all.

Unconscious anxiety therefore normal, central to development of personality. **Frosh** - if this is so, then there is no unbiased real perception.

As with CDP, external realities are viewed as co-constructions of social and interpersonal interactions.

Discourse is also regarded as important in producing subjectivity. The role of history, location and culture are important in understanding why particular subject positions are taken, rather than others.

Hollway - 'investment' not 'choice' is the best way to understand why particular subject positions are adopted - such investments are both psychic and social. We therefore are constrained as to which discourses we can 'choose'.

Psychoanalysis and the family

Viewed as a site ruled by repressed and contradictory emotions - e.g. love and hate, destructive and reparative. Families are highly charged, intense, emotional environments.

However, most attention has been focused on relationships between parents and children.

Psychoanalysis and siblings

Siblings sidelined in most psychoanalysis - parent - child relationship regarded as most important (**Bank and Kahn**), e.g. Oedipus complex.

Mitchell - points to the prevailing psychoanalytic view that intense sibling bonds are seen as having no intrinsic value and instead are a response to unsatisfactory parenting, a substitute for 'good enough' mothering.

Coles - argues this view reduces them to bit parts in the Oedipal theatre. Sibling attachment is marginalised; rivalry is the norm. They are therefore in a contradictory position - marginalised, yet significant enough to provoke primal hatred and hostility.

Mitchell - points out another contradiction - siblings are everywhere in psychoanalytic accounts but absent from theory and clinical practice. Argues that instead we need to consider the construction of the ego when thinking about sibling relationships - classically viewed as being modelled on the father, but **Mitchell** argues it need not be so - as when our conscience is kicking in, the voice heard reminds us of other children's taunts, not those of adults.

Siblings are often major object-elements in early life - so the idea siblings are introjected and become part of the self suggests siblings play a central role in the development of the self.

Five sisters

Edwards et al - Interview with 2 of 5 Bangladeshi Muslim sisters. Azra - the eldest has moved away.

Mitchell's argument that siblings can be internalised as ego-ideals supported by the sisters' identification with Azra - embodying purity, goodness, kindness, good sense. They hated the idea of being thought negatively of by their sister - so Azra represents a potent moral authority, introjected into her sisters as an internal policeman.

Subjectivity and interdependence: family, culture and community

Not sufficient to simply consider psychodynamics of sibling relationships - as social and structural forces are combined with individual and group psychic processes.

E.g. the sisters are influenced by wider ethical and moral codes from wider family and the Muslim community they are part of.

They stress the importance of family and show they have an active and dynamic sense of belonging. Large investments in immediate and wider family of this scale => scaling down of investments in non-family friendships.

Hennink et al - Asian teenage girls/young women more influenced than British white by cultural traditions etc. e.g. unthinkable to transgress cultural rules of Asian Muslim marriage.

Psychoanalytic view of us being unconsciously defended challenges to what extent we can ever be completely autonomous.

The five sisters present a strong challenge to the denial of dependency - instead, interdependency is at the centre of their ideas about what it is to be a sister, Muslim woman, daughter etc.

'My reputation as a family' is not a slip of the tongue - but an expression of interdependency

For them, authority automatically invested in Azra is closely linked to the family's good reputation in the community.

Important note: Moving from a purely psychoanalytic perspective to a social psychoanalytic one therefore requires going beyond psychodynamics of particular sibling groups to considering the influence of social and cultural forces.

Summary and Conclusion

There is common ground in the research perspectives of CDP and SPA - they explore the place of families in the construction of identities.

Unlike PSP perspectives, they do not draw a clear boundary between what happens 'inside' a family and wider society.