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## Review of the Publication: *Diagnoza w socjoterapii* [Diagnosis in Sociotherapy]

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**Reviewed publication:** Maciej Wilk, *Diagnoza w socjoterapii* [Diagnosis in Sociotherapy], GWP, Sopot 2014, p. 152, ISBN 978-83-7489-571-2.

Sociotherapy is one of the methods used in psychological counselling offered to children and teenagers. However, many authors do not always understand the term *sociotherapy* in the same way, which results in differing content in sociotherapeutic trainings or courses organized by various institutions which might be misleading. The author of *Diagnoza w socjoterapii* (*Diagnosis in Sociotherapy*) advocates assuming one definition of this term based on the psychodynamic paradigm, within which he operates in his professional career, as he is a co-founder of Krakowskie Centrum Psychodynamiczne (Cracow Psychodynamic Center). Moreover, he postulates viewing sociotherapy as a kind of psychological counselling connected with psychoeducation. He points to frequent confusions connected with definitions of terms from the area of education, psychological counselling, and psychotherapy. His goal is to present sociotherapy, the process of diagnosis and eligibility for sociotherapy from the perspective of psychodynamic psychology.

In the first part the author addresses the question of terminology. First, he focuses on the meaning of the term *sociotherapy*. He analyses several definitions provided by such authors as K. Sawicka or J. Jagieła, and opts for the one developed by B. Jankowiak, who describes sociotherapy as “the form of psychological counselling in the area of education and caring institutions, directed at children and teenagers from

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high-risk groups and/or those displaying disorders in their psycho-social functioning, which is based on intentional initiation of factors supporting group processes in order to compensate for potential deficits in psycho-social development of the group members" (p. 22).

While Wilk describes the tasks and goals of sociotherapy, he also argues with K. Sawicka, who states that the goal of sociotherapy is treatment. M. Wilk believes that the main objective of sociotherapy is to teach certain skills, and not to trigger a considerable personality change, which is the ultimate goal of psychotherapy. Thus, for him the main aims of sociotherapy are developmental and psychoeducational ones rather than therapeutic ones.

In the next chapter the author presents the definition of psychotherapy as treatment. He makes reference to L. Grzesiuk, who views psychotherapy as treatment using psychological means and for whom the main goals and tasks of psychotherapy include getting rid of symptoms or their weakening, activating blocked forms of activity and making way for a more adequate adaptation, which leads to realizing one's developmental tasks.

New skills, more thorough knowledge of oneself or a higher level of assertiveness can only be additional benefits of psychotherapy. The key element of psychotherapy is a therapeutic relation, and therapeutic aims are achieved through the modification of defence mechanisms or the reduction of developmental deficits.

M. Wilk also highlights the difference between the psychotherapy of adults and psychotherapy of children and teenagers, who need a more flexible approach, often in the form of play. The author emphasises the fact that the people connected with the psychodynamic paradigm believe that a healthy person should not be subjected to psychotherapy, but only exposed to the processes of psychoeducation, personal development or personality analysis, which are not connected with changes in personality structure.

Another term defined by the author is *diagnosis* understood as recognition and differentiation. The author makes reference to N. McWilliams's advantages of good diagnosis. The result of diagnostic sessions in psy-

chotherapy is the possibility of naming the patient's disorder using the language of the paradigm within which the therapist works. M. Wilk discusses definitions of diagnosis in sociotherapy provided by K. Sawicka and J. Strzemienny and stresses that emotional trauma does not have to be the cause of a disorder which requires sociotherapy or psychotherapy. The author states that not every child reacts to a pathological situation at home in a pathological way, as it depends on numerous other factors, so it is worth applying an intrapsychical approach here, and not only behavioral-cognitive and phenomenal ones. The psychodynamic theory offers such perspective, as it takes into account processes taking place inside a person's mind, thanks to which it is easier to understand why, under the same conditions, one child suffers from trauma, while another is able to successfully cope with the same situation. When M. Wilk writes about diagnosis in sociotherapy based on the psychodynamic theory, he indicates that "it requires the person's readiness for changing his way of thinking, openness to the unexpected, readiness for accepting uncertainty and receiving these states with humility and a belief that the right time for solving his problems will come" (p. 58). This very sentence proves the value of diagnosis in the psychodynamic paradigm, as diagnosis here is not treated as labelling, but as an open and real search for the psychological truth about man. In such a diagnosis it is important to determine the degree of the child's disorder and the factors which are decisive in looking for counsel.

In the second part of the book the author describes the process of diagnosing children, and in the third part – diagnosing teenagers. The structure of these parts is very important. They include the description (written in the language of the psychodynamic approach) of the developmental stages and psychopathologies characteristic for these periods. Childhood problems include depressive states and social maladjustment, which are described in a way which enriches traditional descriptions. Social maladjustment is presented from the perspective of psychodynamic psychology and explained in terms of suppression of love towards an object during early stages of a child's life. Wilk shows ways in which this problem can lead to the lack of development of adequate social attitudes

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among children. The third part presents the psychodynamic perspective of adolescence and its typical psychopathological problems, such as: personality disorders, teenage depression, eating disorders, social maladjustments, behavioral disorders, emotional traumas and addictions. In the chapter devoted to personality disorders the author comments on a current discussion among psychologists on how legitimate it is to talk about personality disorders, such as e.g. a borderline disorder, among teenagers undergoing maturity crisis whose personalities are not yet fully shaped. According to the author, the solution to this dilemma can be found by considering it on a continuum running from a personality crisis, natural in adolescence, to a pathological type of personality.

In the part devoted to psychopathologies typical for adolescents, the chapter on emotional trauma is especially interesting. The author lists features helping to diagnose such traumas. These features include particular emotions, somatic problems and emotional reactions which take place inside the teenager's mind. This means that it is not the traumatic situation itself that leads to the emotional trauma, but the person's reaction to such a situation. Another of Wilk's observation seems especially valuable: persons (not only children) who have experienced violence frequently display an unconscious tendency to repeat the role of a victim in their contact with carers. It is a transference reaction in which the people coming into contact with such a person are unconsciously encouraged to play the role of a persecutor. This remark can prove extremely useful for carers and educators.

The last part of the book focuses on diagnosis in the sociotherapeutic relation. Chapter 9 presents the rules operating within a sociotherapy group as well as the norms and frames which should be implemented by the group leader. In chapter 10, M. Wilk describes the rules governing group work using psychodynamic language, which include transference, setting and the need for and the value of supervision of a sociotherapist.

Overall, M. Wilk's book is an extremely valuable publication for several reasons. First of all, the novelty of the book lies in its consistent use of the language of psychodynamic psychology, which substantially enriches sociotherapeutic theory and practice. Moreover, in a clear and lucid

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way, the book shows the subtleties connected with definitions, which are often blurred in the subject literature. It is definitely a must for those sociotherapists who identify themselves with psychodynamic theory, as it offers them invaluable help in understanding complicated issues from the area of the developmental psychology of children and adolescents. People who are not interested in psychodynamic psychology may find this book helpful in broadening their horizons. However, it is a pity that it does not contain the descriptions of particular cases studies, which could be useful in understanding the theoretical intricacies of this complicated psychodynamic psychological paradigm.

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