Abstract

Despite research, advocacy, and internal changes, the child welfare system in British Columbia continues to be described as “broken.” While most agree that ameliorating the system is hampered by inadequate funding, few assert that theoretical commitments also are impeding change. In this thesis, I argue that the individualistic conception of selfhood promoted by disciplinary psychology and adopted by child protection systems in North America is contributing to problems in child welfare. This conception of selfhood attributes what are fundamentally social problems to individuals, allowing for social inequalities to remain unexamined. In its place, I propose a communal conception of self. I defend this theoretical revision on the grounds that it properly reconceives the self ontologically, broadens the boundaries of analysis of intervention to enable distinguishing between maltreatment and social disadvantage, relieves families from the sole burden of responsibility for change, and provides a blueprint for the integration of services.

Keywords: child welfare; child protection policy; Ministry of Children and Family Development; selfhood; individualistic self; communal self