

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The purpose of the project is to investigate the history of the cognitive-behavioral conceptualization of the unconscious. Cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy is nowadays the mainstream school of therapy and is sometimes called „the hegemon of mental health care”.

The creator of cognitive theory and founder of cognitive therapy school was Aaron T. Beck, the American psychiatrist working in Philadelphia. As often assumed by therapists of other modalities and according to the origin myth of the cognitive therapy itself, Aaron Beck rejected the concept of the unconscious in the 1960s in order to focus exclusively on the conscious meaning and to give up discerning the hidden agenda in the statements of patients. As the myth further proclaims, Beck was thereby excluded from psychoanalytic circles and became a fierce enemy of psychoanalysis. He considered dealing with the unconscious world of a patient as unscientific, authoritarian and, before all, unclear. “The dirty unconscious” as “the boiling cauldron of drives” was deleted from the list of interests of a modern therapist which was enthusiastically welcomed by the American National Institute of Mental Health which directed its efforts at well evidenced, short-term therapy.

Meanwhile since the 1980s the experimental research on implicit processes unusually flourished. Currently, the existence of unconscious perception, memory, emotion, learning, and motivation is widely accepted in psychology.

A detailed historical analysis shows that the reality was much more complicated. The idea of the unconscious developed by Freud, as a set of irrational, primitive, and primordial processes which have to be controlled and dominated using the rational mind – was still present in Aaron Beck’s writings. Additionally, the 1990s brought a significant turn in the cognitive theory which also exerted its influence on the thinking about the unconscious.

In the present project specific stages will be reconstructed in Beck's conceptualization of the unconscious between 1963 – 2014 and in the so called Third Wave of the cognitive-behavioral therapy which was inspired by Buddhist ideas. The analysis of the archival material gathered at Pennsylvania University in Philadelphia, where the cognitive theory was born, monographs on the history of the American psychiatry, and works on the cultural specificity of this country will allow for taking look at the theory from the broader perspective.

The project will have a historical-critical and meta-theoretical character and will help in a reflection on the subject of interest of psychology, on the role of power relations and politics in the choice of this subject, and on the problem of hidden values in psychological theories.