

The Savior, the Absent, and the Model: The Role Social Workers Play in Young Women's Romantic Relationships

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Abstract : Being involved in romantic relationships is a key task in the development of identity during emerging adulthood. To date, little research has focused on romantic relationships among young women who have coped with situations of distress and are treated by social workers. Moreover, the role of social workers in young women's romantic relations is underexplored. This paper focuses on young women's perception of the role played by their social workers in guiding them through romantic relationships. Methodology: This qualitative-feminist study is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with 25 young heterosexual Jewish women aged 18-25 who are currently supported by social workers in the welfare system. Findings: The findings uncover three meanings given by participants to their relations with social workers regarding the young women's romantic relationships: 1) "The social worker as role model" namely, the social worker as setting an example for healthy conduct in romantic relationships. 2) "The social worker as savior," namely, the social worker as the one who supports participants escaping abusive romantic relationships. 3) "The present-absent social worker," namely, despite being a significant figure in their lives, the social worker is experienced as disconnected and alienated. Conclusions and practice: Social workers can have a positive and important contribution to the romantic relationships of these young women. To be a central source of support in the young women's life, the social workers must be able to establish a relationship of trust with the young women.

Keywords : young women, emerging adulthood, romantic relationship, women in distress

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