



The Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics
Term Paper Contest
August 15, 2015

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Values and Ethics

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Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, Volume 12, Number 2 (2015) Copyright 2015, ASWB

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Abstract

Values and Ethics is a paper of self-discovery while comparing micro, mezzo, and macro levels of social work. The paper flows through the writer's life, illustrating how nature prepared the writer for a vocation of social work. It serves as both an emotional and an analytical reminder of why the world needs social workers.

Keywords: moral, ethical, just, serve, advocate

What does it mean to serve the vulnerable populations in society while looking at life through a micro, mezzo, and macro lens? While helping reframe the legal constraints of corrupt, self-serving policies; a bigger picture emerges. A strengths-based approach is important when considering what is moral, ethical, and just. Social work is more than a profession, it is a "vocation and a calling" (Sutton, Personal Communication, 2014). Social work strongly binds to the altruistic and transcendent facet; it holds out no incentive to the worldly-wise—not for ease, credit, nor wealth (Flexner, 1915).

Before I knew what it was, I was a social worker. I grew up protecting the weaker kids on the playground, believing that life should be fair; and peers often criticized my do-right nature. As an adolescent, I read my father's law and psychology books. I was deeply moved and fascinated by people and what law considered just. I realized that laws were not always fair. I found myself wanting to be a part of the solution instead of contributing to the problems that plagued society. The field of social work is unlike any other. "The mission of social work is founded on a set of values; service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence" (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008).

As a young lady I participated in peaceful demonstrations, created petitions, and advocated for the rights of others. Social workers, work toward changing society, expressly those susceptible to poor outcomes and overloaded by life's burdens (NASW, 2008). My life developed through serendipitous experiences, lessons, and job placements that would later prepare me for social work. I went to nanny school and became a preschool teacher. Not soon after, I was expecting my first son, so I married. I was 20 years old and unaware that my new husband had bipolar disorder. Five years later he left me penniless. With three

children in tow, head bowed, I applied for state aid. The worker who helped me was rude and condescending. I gathered the shred of dignity that remained in me and told her that I could do her job better. Not because I was better, but because I could treat people with respect and still ask questions to gather facts. She challenged me to apply to be a worker, so I did. Six months later, fate sat me by her desk. She warmly introduced herself, and I asked her if she remembered me. She did not, so I reminded her that I had been a recent intake client. She hoped that she had been nice to me; and although she had not been, that fact was not as important as the career path her insensitive comments had set forth.

Social workers treat others with consideration and regard, knowing that individual differences akin to culture and ethnicity should be welcomed, not displaced (NASW, 2008). I became an example to her and those like her in the system that perpetuates inequality and injustice. I worked within the parameters of county and state welfare programs. I went on to supervise three counties and provided a guideline for the workers within my grasp to change how they treated their clients. Life shifted focus to domestic violence. I worked as an advocate and led support groups. Subsequently, I will end my undergraduate work history where I had begun, working with children and their families.

My journey of self-discovery and purpose carried many hardships. Twenty years of overcoming obstacles and removing barriers that both I and others had created. I learned to serve and advocate on behalf of others because there were a mere few who served and advocated for me and my children. Social workers rely on their understanding, ethics, and expertise to help the disenfranchised and promote social change (NASW, 2008). Young single mothers, as well as all vulnerable people, need a voice of inspiration and hope. Relationships with others are not made-to-order; I have known individuals for a lifetime and others for a day. Some come into my life needing my help, while others are in my life to help me. I deeply value the importance of human relationships.

Through contemplative insight, social workers can identify predispositions or inclinations that affect their values when dealing with ethical predicaments (Mattison, 2000). Constructing and maintaining boundaries are vital to preserving healthy professional and personal relationships; in addition, healthy boundaries support ethical dilemma resolution. The clearer the boundaries within the focused system, the less likely an ethical dilemma will occur. The therapeutic bond that a therapist and client create is central when establishing a trusting relationship that can lead to client success. Professional relationships are built upon a foundation of boundaries and ethical limitations, and they should be a guidebook (Buhari, 2013).

Along with keeping proper and professional boundaries within ethical decision-making, social workers have to use sound judgment while consistently upholding integrity. It is crucial for my community to have confidence in my professionalism. Honesty, reliability, trustworthiness, credibility, sincerity, and fidelity are markers of who I am as a social worker and a person. "Social workers are continually aware of the profession's mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards and practice in a manner consistent with them" (NASW, 2008, para. 22). I know that during my career as a social worker I will be stretched past my personal and moral views. I will have to balance my internal guide with the NASW Code of Ethics to provide ethical care to the people I work with professionally. Along with making education a lifetime pursuit, it is important to make sure the duties performed are competent and correct. Social workers believe in professional development and growth through knowledge and practice (NASW, 2008, para. 23).

When social workers focus their efforts within the microsystem, their strength is concentrated on an individual or working with a family to address concerns that are affecting the client and possibly the client's family. The mezzo system embraces the people or groups outside the individual or family that may influence and contribute to an individual specifically or to the family's dynamics. When social workers provide resources and connect a client to a support group, they are supporting the client by looking through the mezzo level lens. The socio-ecological model observes the interlaced connection that occurs between

people and their surroundings (Wilson, 2014). When operating on the macro level, a social worker is concerned with systemic issues, such as establishing programs or policy for social change. The International Federation of Social Workers (2014) states, "The holistic focus of social work is universal, but the priorities of social work practice will vary from one country to the next, and from time-to-time depending on historical, cultural, political and socio-economic conditions" (IFSW General Meeting, 2015, para. 14).

My goal in becoming a social worker is to help the unfortunate, helpless, and burdened learn to be their own change agents: To equip and empower others to realize their personal strengths and ability to have a different life if they so choose. Empowering others is the basis of my helping belief system. A holistic approach is necessary when looking at the complexities of an individual. "Empowerment is a multilevel construct that involves people assuming control and mastery over their lives toward a sense of purpose; it is an ecological idea that applies interactive development and change at the individual, family, and community levels" (Kurtz, 1997, para. 1).

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