

Book Review

Weinberg, M. (2016). *Paradoxes in social work practice: Mitigating ethical trespass*. New York, NY: Routledge.

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Merlinda Weinberg, Ph.D., is associate professor of social work at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. She has an extensive practice history prior to her academic life, including “25 years as front-line social worker, manager, consultant and practitioner in private practice” (p. Preface). [Full disclosure: Dr. Weinberg’s work is quite well known to this reviewer, and Dr. Weinberg contributed a chapter to this reviewer’s recently published text *Social Work Ethics: Progressive, Practical and Relational Approaches* (Spencer, Massing, & Gough, 2017).] Dr. Weinberg has published an array of articles and book chapters, adding her voice to the critical progressive analysis of social work practice, with a focus on ethics, mothering, and commitment to practice assistance. See the Dalhousie University website for further information on her published works.

Paradoxes in Social Work Practice: Mitigating Ethical Trespass expands on the findings of an in-depth study Dr. Weinberg conducted with professional social carers about their construction of ethics in their work with young solo mothers. The primary premise of the text is, ultimately that complex understanding and commitment to ethical practice can aid us in realizing a society that is more socially just. Weinberg unravels practice and theory meanings and conflicts from the experiences of the workers in the study and deftly constructs mitigating strategies like “resistance practice” (p. 125) and “responsible traitors” (p. 130), instead of leaving us staring bleakly at the state of our chosen profession.

Using a combination of theories, well laid out in the opening chapters, Weinberg respectfully paints a thicker picture of “dilemmas and tensions that arise.....making their [social workers’] practice difficult, complex, and fraught with angst both for their clients and themselves” (p. 4). A romp through Foucault’s philosophy and an examination of structural and postmodern approaches, along with an overview of both traditional and newer views of ethics, assists the reader in diving deeper into the understandings and meanings made of the study. To echo Weinberg’s review of limitations, there are no client voices in this study, which would have added another layer to this deftly constructed dissertation.

This text is about paradoxes and illustrates them in the overarching themes. It is a book about social workers’ efforts to assist young single mothers, yet there is linkage to how “we, as a society, treat and should be treating those most marginalized” (p. 27). It is a “tale of [Dr. Weinberg’s] anguish about the current state of social services” (p.26) and a dispute with Margolin’s and others’ excoriating critique of our profession. Weinberg lays out six distinct paradoxes and overviews the inevitability of ethical trespass while also laying out stories of resistance, and collaborative political action to allay cynicism and despair. Particularly encouraging was an entire chapter (Chapter Five) dedicated to mitigating trespass. In the style of other progressive pragmatists [my term, loosely applied here] (e.g., Baines, Turbett, and Fook), Weinberg deconstructs and makes plain a disconnect between the self-

identification of workers as anti-oppressive and the practice being largely focused on a conception of private troubles. I do no justice to the nuanced and fulsome examination and of the intricacies and variations on this theme yet regard the analysis of the workers' experiences as perhaps of the most important offering from this text to students, practitioners, and educators alike.

These are the six paradoxes that light up the complexities of ethics in practice (pp. 1-4):

1. Care and Discipline
2. More than one "Client in a Case"
3. Non-judgmentalism vs. Need to Make Judgments
4. The Setting of Norms vs. Encouraging "Free Choice" and Client Empowerment
5. Self-disclosure as Necessary and Risky for Clients
6. Equality vs. Equity

Weinberg argues, in her conclusion, "multiple paradoxes are endemic to the social work field and result in no completely adequate solutions" (p. 155). Ultimately, this text is of tremendous use to all of us who query the narrow, proscriptive, binary conceptualizations of ethics in social work practice. It will be of particular help to upper-level learners and experienced practitioners with interest in the challenging confluence of postmodern theory and structural thought. The text lays out the complexities of real-life practice and has the power to deeply affect learners and practitioners to more rigorous self-critique and practice. To this reviewer, the examples, drawn from Weinberg's study participants, of acts of resistance, the description of strategies of a "responsible traitor" (p. 130), and the clarity of conceptualizations on how to mitigate trespass were the juicy fruits of this deceptively dense tree.