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Table of Contents

Editorial: The Toxic Work Environment: A Question of Ethics. Laura Smith, MSW, LCSW

Articles

Web 2.0 in Social Work Macro Practice: Ethical Considerations and Questions. Katharine Hill, MSW, MPP, Ph.D.

Grade Inflation, Gatekeeping, and Social Work Education: Ethics and Perils. Gary Miller, MSW, M.A., Ph.D.

Guidelines for Social Workers' Use of Social Networking Websites. Donalda Halabuza, Ph.D.

Father Involvement and Child Welfare: The Voices of Men of Color. Kilolo Brodie, MSW, Ph.D., Natasha Paddock, MSW, Christa Gilliam, MSW & Jackelin Chavez, B.A.

Toward a Context-Specific Definition of Social Justice for Social Work: In Search of Overlapping Consensus. Janice A. Gasker, DSW & Alice C. Fischer, A.B.

Social Work and Social Media: Reconciling Ethical Standards and Emerging Technologies. Kimberly Strom-Gottfried, Ph.D., LISW, Mary Shannon Thomas, MSW, LICSW & Hillary Anderson, MSW, LCSW

Infusing a New Ethical Decision-Making Model Throughout a BSW Curriculum. Connie M. Fossen, MSSW, Ed.D., Jennifer I. Anderson-Meger, MSSW, DSW & Debra A. Daehn Zellmer, MSW

Book Reviews

Callus, A. (2013). *Becoming self-advocates: People with intellectual disability seeking a voice*. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang. Reviewed by Laura Gibson, Ph.D.

Krason, S. M. (2013). *Child abuse, family rights, and the child protective system: A critical analysis from law, ethics, and Catholic social teaching*. The Scarecrow Press, Inc.: Lanham, UK. Reviewed by Wayne C. Evens, Ph.D.

Wolfer, T.A., Franklin, L.D., & Gray, K. A. (2013). *Decision cases for advanced social work practice*. New York: Columbia University Press. Reviewed by Summer G. Stanley, Ph.D.

Rosenberger, J. B. (Ed.). (2014). *Relational social work practice with diverse populations*. New York, NY: Springer. Reviewed by Ann M. Callahan, Ph.D.

Landale, N. S., McHale, S. M., & Booth A. (Eds.). (2013). *Families and child health*. New York: Springer. Reviewed by Herbert I. Burson, Ph.D.

Robila, M. (Ed.). (2014). *Handbook of family policies across the globe*. New York, NY: Springer. Reviewed by David H. Johnson, Ph.D.

Matto, H., Strolin-Goltzman, J., & Ballan, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Neuroscience for Social Work: Current research and practice*. New York: Springer. Reviewed by Peggy Proudfoot Harman, Ph.D.

South, J., White, J., & Gamsu, M. (2013). *People-centred public health. Evidence for public health practice series*. Great Britain, Policy Press. Reviewed by J. Porter Lillis, Ph.D.

Roy, R. N., Schumm, W. R., & Britt, S. L. (2014). *Transition to parenthood*. New York, NY: Springer. Reviewed by Rasby Marlene Powell, Ph.D.

The Toxic Work Environment: A Question of Ethics

Laura Smith, MSW, LCSW, Member of the Editorial Board
lauranellsmith@yahoo.com

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I've been in the mental health service arena since 1988 and have seen many trends come and go. I've worked in the public and private sectors, for large and small agencies, served on boards and community/state task forces, and held front line positions and senior management positions. Through all those trends and different roles, the Code of Ethics has been a constant and reliable source of grounding.

About 10 years into practice, I realized that I actually encounter few true ethical dilemmas. As I understand ethical dilemmas, social workers are faced with competing values and must choose between the competing values; there is no clear or perfect solution and a social work value gets compromised. Situations that often get identified as an ethical dilemma are really situations where the ethical answer is clear (no competing values to choose between) but implementation is uncomfortable for the social worker. Following through on what is ethically correct is not always popular and can even lead to serious jeopardy for the social worker.

In my experience, many of these uncomfortable ethical situations are inherent in unhealthy work place cultures. Two of the most common unethical situations I've encountered in such cultures are professionals advancing themselves 1) at the expense of others, and/or 2) misrepresenting their accomplishments. These are not ethical dilemmas because there are no competing values to choose between. But such ethical misconduct violates the Code on multiple accounts, i.e., the value of Integrity, Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues, Ethical Responsibilities as Professionals, and Ethical Responsibilities to the Social Work Profession.

The Code is clear that we are to directly address concerns with colleagues "when feasible and when such discussion is likely to be productive". We are also exhorted to "take action through appropriate formal channels" if necessary. However, colleagues who advance themselves at the expense of others or by misrepresenting their accomplishments do not tend to engage in meaningful or productive dialogue about their misconduct. When the work place culture supports or dismisses their misconduct, it is almost impossible to reasonably resolve the situation. Often there is inadequate concrete evidence to present to more formal channels such as licensure boards or ethics committees. This leaves the social worker in a troubling ethical spot because there is often no effective recourse.

I wish I could close with some breakthrough formula for managing these insidious ethical offenses. Sadly, my experience has been that it becomes my word against their word. An unhealthy or toxic work place culture permits the misconduct to continue. If a social worker is committed to the Code of Ethics, the choices are limited. Typically, the social worker either suffers in silence or moves onto another employment situation in hopes of an ethical fit. I have done the latter on several occasions. But, only after taking my concerns to the highest possible authority in my agency. Notifying senior management of egregious ethical conduct did not change the situation and most of those unethical colleagues are still in place. However, I upheld the Code and my personal integrity...and that is what we are all called to do, even when it is unpleasant and the system we work in is beyond our individual influence.

Web 2.0 in Social Work Macro Practice: Ethical Considerations and Questions

Katharine Hill, MSW, MPP, Ph.D., LISW
St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work
Katharine.hill@stthomas.edu

Sarah M. Ferguson, M.A., MSW, Ph.D., LISW
St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work
smferguson@stkate.edu

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Abstract

The use of Web 2.0 technologies in macro practice social work is increasingly common. This paper provides an overview of the strengths and limitations of using these new technologies in macro practice settings and a discussion of ethical considerations. It also identifies areas for future investigation and discussion.

Keywords: macro practice social work, social work ethics, Web 2.0, Internet, social network sites

1. Introduction

There is an increasing social reliance on electronic communication and digital media (Homan, 2011) in the United States. Social media technologies are pervasive in political and community-based work (Edwards & Hoefler, 2010; Dunlop & Fawcett, 2008; McNutt, 2006), and can increase the reach of macro social work. While the “digital divide” still exists, traditional concepts of who does and does not use electronic media are becoming less valid. Gifford (2009) suggests that Web 2.0 (i.e.: social media, user-generated content) enables all people to participate in a virtual world, so long as they have access to an Internet connection or a smart phone.

This ease of participation may empower social workers to more easily establish connections and relationships, collaborate with each other and with other community stakeholders, and seek support for themselves, their agencies and organizations, and for causes in which they believe (O’Hear, 2006). Despite the rapid growth of technology, and acknowledgement of its impact on social work practice (Edwards & Hoefler, 2010; Judd & Johnson, 2012; NASW & ASWB, 2005), there has been very little discussion of the relationship between social work ethics and the use of these new technologies in social work macro practice. This paper will provide a brief overview of some of the new web-based technologies and their uses in macro practice, discuss potential ethical challenges of their use in macro practice, and identify areas for future research and discussion.

2. Literature Review

Macro social work practice is an intrinsic component of generalist social work practice and may take an administrative, community, or policy focus. The International Federation of Social Workers (2000) defines macro practice as “engaging in social and political action to impact social policy and economic development.” Rothman (2010), in an update of his classic analysis of

community interventions, identifies three distinct forms of macro social work practice: (a) social policy planning/policy practice, (b) capacity development, and (c) advocacy. The most recent *Educational Policies and Academic Standards of the Council on Social Work Education* include multiple competencies that encompass macro practice (for example EPAS 2.1.5, 2.1.8, 2.1.9, and 2.1.10), as does the NASW Code of Ethics (2008). Overall, macro social work practice involves the ability of social workers to engage stakeholders to come together to respond to larger systems' concerns and to create long-term solutions (Gamble & Weil, 2010; Homan, 2011), regardless of whether that work is face-to-face or mediated by technology.

Many practitioners and academics use the terms "community" and "macro" practice interchangeably; for example, Gamble and Weil (2010) describe community practice social work as encompassing multiple areas of practice, including organizing, sustainable development, planning, and progressive change. This manuscript will follow Netting's (2008) definitions, using macro practice to refer to the breadth of practice with larger systems, community practice to refer to practice specifically with communities and neighborhoods, administrative practice to refer to work with organizations and agencies, and policy practice to refer to legislative and governmental advocacy.

3. What Do We Mean by Web 2.0?

Web 2.0 is a broad term, generally used to refer to Internet-based technologies that are marked by user-generated content, social networking, quick and informal collaborations, and evolving communities of like-minded individuals (Giffords, 2009). For comparison, traditional websites, which are generally static, read only, and non-interactive, may be called Web 1.0. The reader is allowed to read the materials on a Web 1.0 website and may download the content, but is not generally able to contribute, collaborate, or change its content (Edwards & Hoefler, 2010;

Richards, 2010). With Web 2.0, readers can contribute, collaborate, and change the content. Examples of Web 2.0 technology include social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter, and user-generated content sites, such as Wikipedia or Flickr or YouTube.

3.1 How Are Web 2.0 Technologies Used in Macro Practice?

As noted earlier, the use of web-based media for social change efforts is becoming increasingly prevalent, and it is constantly being adapted to include new technologies and meet new demands (Edwards & Hoefler, 2010; Dunlop & Fawcett, 2008; McNutt, 2006). Digital media in community and policy practice serves six main functions. These include 1) policy research and information gathering, 2) public awareness and education, 3) building transnational and cyber communities and activism, 4) organizing and coordinating of both on and offline communities, 5) raising funds, and 6) pressuring and influencing decision makers (McNutt, 2006; Homan, 2011; Trippi, 2008). Clearly none of these are new activities for macro practice social workers; however, the introduction of new technologies to accomplish these activities also introduces new ethical considerations and concerns.

4. Strengths of Social Media Technology in Macro Practice

Two of the greatest strengths of Web 2.0 technology as a tool for macro practice are its efficiency and effectiveness (McNutt, 2008). Using Web 2.0 technology requires few resources, allowing even the most cash-strapped grassroots organization to have a large impact on social change (McNutt & Menon, 2008). Brotherton and Scheiderer (2008) report that Web 2.0 technology is a great way to tell an organization's or a social issue's "story." A wider audience and more effective storytelling venue also provide a global reach for community practice, allowing social workers to potentially influence change on a global level (McNutt, 2006; McNutt & Menon, 2008).

Web 2.0 allows social movements to engage new members, members who may have been disengaged, or individuals who were denied access to the more traditional but time-consuming in-person meetings (McNutt & Menon, 2008). When face-to-face meetings or social action is required, Web 2.0 can be an effective tool for coordinating such events, allowing the organizers to track who has been invited and who will attend, and to create contact lists that allow the coordinators to inform the attendees of any last minute scheduling changes. Web 2.0 technologies allow social workers to be responsive to critical changes and to keep the members of the organizational structure informed as soon as those changes occur.

Web 2.0 tools also increase constituents' and potential constituents' access to organizations, which may improve participation in macro practice activities (Giffords, 2009). Potential participants only need a computer with Internet access, or more recently a smart phone (Purcell, Rainie, Rosenstiel, & Mitchell, 2011), to gain entrance to the organization. Indeed, the USC Annenberg Digital Futures Project (2007) reported that online users value their "non-place" online communities as highly as they value their real-life communities. Web 2.0 encourages constituent participation by allowing participants to be a part of the conversation, to influence the decisions made, and to be active participants in the process (Brotherton & Schneiderer, 2008; USC-Annenberg Digital Futures Project, 2007).

Not only is overall engagement in social action improved, but also who is engaged in that action is enlarged by use of Web 2.0 (McNutt & Menon, 2008). The USC Annenberg Digital Futures Project (2007) study reported that that 64.9% of respondents involved in online communities are involved in causes that they were not involved in prior to joining those communities, with 43.7% reporting they are more engaged in social action since beginning their Internet participation. Some research indicates that online action leads to increased off-line action as well (Rohlinger & Brown, 2009; USC Annenberg

Digital Futures Project, 2007). McNutt & Menon (2008) point out that the medium allows for engagement with hard to reach constituents, including people with disabilities and people with work or family commitments that preclude in-person involvement. Finally, with the growth of mobile technologies, access to Web 2.0 technologies is not limited to those who have access to a computer; indeed, over 50% of adults in the United States own a smartphone (Smith, 2012), meaning that they are able to participate in web-based activities from almost anywhere.

The benefit of broader access also creates a benefit of expanded and diversified ownership of information. When more voices are heard, more grassroots-based decisions are made. The power of Web 2.0 is that no single person controls the information; everyone contributes (Giffords, 2009). Not only are avenues for contribution widened, so is access to decision makers. For example, after the blizzards in New York City in 2011, Twitter followers publicly scolded the city's mayor for the city's response to the snow, which ultimately led to a public apology from the administration, as well as a change in policy (Auer, 2011). Broadening participation in and access to the public arena can be a powerful tool for macro practice social work. New technologies may level the playing field so that all the voices have equalized power.

5. Ethical Concerns in Using Web 2.0 Technologies

The NASW and ASWB *Standards for Technology and Social Work Practice* (2005) draws on the NASW *Code of Ethics* and the ASWB *Model Social Work Practice Act* to create guidelines for social work practice using technology. The practice competencies in this document encompass both micro and macro knowledge and skills, including advocacy and social action (9-1), community practice (9-2), and administrative practice (9-3). Although the document was written prior to the explosion of many social media and Web 2.0 applications, it

is clear that social work's leading professional organizations recognize that the expansion of information technology will touch all areas of social work practice, and will demand adaptation and adjustment on the part of social work practitioners, regardless of their area of practice. Part of this adjustment includes becoming cognizant of the ethical dilemmas that arise when practicing with social media and Web 2.0 (Marson, 2009).

A number of ethical challenges specific to macro practice in social work have been discussed in the literature, including issues of informed consent and confidentiality, boundaries, and paternalism (Hardina, 2004; Reisch & Lowe, 2000). For example, Hardina (2004) points out that it is often optimal for community organizers to be members of the target community, which may blur personal and professional boundaries in practice. In many cases, friendships between constituent groups and the organizer may not be considered to be unethical, as they would be in a direct practice setting. Similarly, social workers engaged in macro practice may find that they are rarely able to clearly delineate between work and personal time, as they are members of the community in which they work, or are attempting to build more equitable relationships with clients than might be considered inappropriate in other practice settings (Hardina, 2004; Reisch & Lowe, 2000). Additionally, many macro practice social workers work outside the boundaries of traditional social service agencies. They may draw upon principles that, while closely aligned with social work practice (for example, the creation of equal partnerships between organizers and communities), are not specifically addressed in the *NASW Code of Ethics* (Carroll & Minkler, 2000; Hardina, 2013). Thus, macro social workers often are faced with ethical challenges that are imperfectly addressed by the *Code of Ethics*. As macro practice increasingly incorporates Web 2.0 technologies, the likelihood of social workers in these practice settings encountering ethical dilemmas increases. Specifically, many of

the issues that other researchers have identified as being endemic to use of Web 2.0 in macro practice (Gladwell, 2010; Mattison, 2012; Trippi, 2008) align closely with ethical dilemmas already encountered by macro social workers.

Five areas of concern emerge from literature examining Web 2.0 in macro practice: 1) the continued digital divide in the U.S., 2) questions of sustaining long-term connections and relationships, 3) potential loss of message control, 4) blurring of ethical and professional boundaries, and 5) constantly changing technology (Gladwell, 2010; Mattison, 2012; Trippi, 2008). Each of these issues can be directly related to ethical challenges faced by macro social work practitioners. Although NASW and ASWB (2005) call for social workers to adhere to the values and ethics of the profession in all areas of practice, including online, it is also likely that the authors of the ethical code or practice guidelines may not have anticipated many of the ethical challenges faced by social workers using Web 2.0. However, the omnipresence of Web 2.0 in macro practice and in both clients' and practitioners' lives also demands that social workers carefully reflect upon and adapt professional ethics to incorporate these new technologies.

6. Inclusion and Cultural Competence: The Digital Divide

The digital divide is defined as "the gap between those who can benefit from digital technology and those who cannot" (Smith, 2010). Social work ethics call for social workers to ensure clients' access to services, as well as to provide culturally competent, inclusive, and affirming services (NASW & ASWB, 2005; NASW, 2000). Thus, although use of Web 2.0 may make community involvement and advocacy available to some populations and individuals, it may make them less accessible for others. For example, older adults, non-English speakers, and people reporting a less than college education and lower incomes all have lower rates of Internet access than people who are younger, have higher

education or income levels, and report English as their primary language (Fox, 2011). Another large disparity exists for those living with a disability. Approximately 81% of adults use the Internet, however, only 51% of adults living with a disability access the Internet (Fox, 2011). It is important to note that the increased use of mobile technologies and smart phones have changed the “digital divide,” with young adults, those without college educations or with lower household incomes, and African Americans and Latinos all reporting higher rates of mobile phone use for internet access (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012). Marson (2009) also notes the limitations regarding bandwidth, as many communities still require dial-up services and are limited to the amount of data their computers can handle. Regardless, these disparities are concerning for using Web 2.0 as a social work practice tool, as much of the focus of community and policy practice is with those communities that traditionally have lower rates of access.

7. Sustainable Human Relationships

The NASW *Code of Ethics* places human relationships at the center of ethical social work practice (NASW, 2008). However, some social work researchers and practitioners question whether real, long-term relationships can be created when people do not meet face-to-face (Costello, Brecher, Smith, 2009; Csiernik, Furze, Dromgole, & Rishchynski, 2006). Can strong human relationships, a key social work value and EPAS competency (CSWE, 2008; NASW, 2008), be created online? In an editorial for the *Christian Science Monitor* (June 30, 2008), a senior campaign strategist with the Center for Community Change argued that organizing on the Internet is individualistic in its very nature and does not create the interconnected collective action of face-to-face organizing. Similarly, Gladwell (2010) argues that the relationships formed online do not translate to “real life” sufficiently to support the risk-taking necessary for activism. Simply put, critics of Web 2.0 as an organizing and advocacy

tool feel that it is not effective in building the meaningful sense of community needed to create social change.

Others contradict these concerns. As mentioned earlier, the USC Annenberg Digital Futures Project (2007) reported that online users value their online communities as highly as they value their real life communities. Certainly the events in Iran, Egypt, and Wall Street over the past several years have all supported the assertion that Web 2.0 technologies are changing the way that social change happens (Gaworecki, 2011; Rohlinger & Brown, 2009). Watkins (2009) reports that online activists during the 2008 election were highly engaged in non-online campaign activities as well. Rohlinger and Brown (2009) suggest that the Internet in general, and social media specifically, are an important “... democratic resource because it provides a free space for citizens to articulate their dissent in a less public way and cultivate oppositional identities, which, in turn, can provide a foundation for activism in the real world” (p.134). They go on to say that many individuals use online activities as a way to test ideas, build confidence, and experiment with activism, prior to carrying out the work in off-line settings.

Thus, concerns about the sustainability and “transferability” of web-based actions and groups are warranted, but the research is divided on the issue. The question remains as to whether online community practice can build long-term connectedness and communities or is only useful for quick issue response. Ethically, it seems clear that macro practitioners cannot rely on only online or only in-person organizing, but must engage all technologies for effective community practice. Watkins (2009) discusses the need for multiple contacts, posts, or interactions in order for social media to be effective. Relationship is not built through a single interaction or post or comment. Understanding and relationship are built over time and through multiple contacts and interactions, whether they take place on or off-line.

8. Loss of Control of Content and Privacy: Competence and Integrity

The social work values of competency and integrity both apply to the question of ownership of content in Web 2.0 settings (Mattison, 2012; ASWB & NASW, 2005; NASW, 2008). Often, ownership of the technology that supports Web 2.0 (i.e.: Facebook, Instagram, Flickr) activities lies with major corporations, institutions or governments, not with the individuals who create the content (Auer, 2011; Brotherton & Schneiderer, 2008). A macro practitioner may use social media to connect with their constituents; however, they may not have ultimate control over the method of delivery of the material or of the message and content itself. If material is posted to Flickr or YouTube, to whom does it really belong? Can it be reused or disseminated without permission? How can the authorship of a given statement be verified? What if the content is changed after it is initially shared, but the authorship is not changed to reflect this? If social workers are going to use social media to disseminate a message, they should be able to respond ethically and knowledgeably to both agency and client concerns about the issue addressed.

Additionally, there are ongoing discussions in social media about the expectations of privacy and ownership for uses of social media (Auer, 2011). For example, what are social media companies allowed to “know” about their users? Should advertisers be allowed to target their ads based on the information that social media users unwittingly provide? What about other stakeholders, such as potential funders for programs, advocacy targets, or members of the wider community? It is widely agreed that social networking sites make a great deal of personal information widely available, and that this information is often available well beyond an individual’s immediate social circle (Judd & Johnson, 2012). While some argue that online communities are essentially public arenas, without an expectation of privacy (Weeden, 2012), this is certainly not a universally accepted belief. If

social media platforms are used to disseminate information about community or social issues, what are the implications of participation for community members in other venues? For example, if an employee of a non-union workplace “likes” a union organizing website on Facebook, what are the possible implications for his or her employment? What are the parameters of individuals using workplace technology resources—email, computers, smart phones—to participate in community change efforts? Given that access to technology takes place outside of work hours, is an expectation of privacy when using workplace devices outside of work hours reasonable?

From an ethical standpoint, social workers are called upon to demonstrate competence in technology, regulation, and practice (ASWB & NASW, 2005). Thus, prior to engaging with Web 2.0 in their macro practice endeavors, social workers should be able to clearly inform potential clients about questions of technology use, ownership of material, and expectations of privacy. This can be challenging, given the constantly changing nature of the technologies, as well as the rarity of discussion of ethical issues and technology in social work education. Clearly, this is an area for further discussion and clarification, both in educational and practice settings.

9. Boundaries and Informed Consent

There is very little written on how the use of new technologies has created challenges around client boundaries or informed consent for social work macro practitioners. However, there is literature on how the use of Web 2.0 technologies by students have impacted students’ relationships and boundaries (for example, Judd & Johnston, 2012; Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2009; Watkins, 2009), as well as literature on clinical practice and the use of email or other Internet-based content (Mattison, 2012). Watkins (2009) discusses at length the way that digital technology is “blurring the line” (p.38) that traditionally separates teachers from their students. Certainly popular media is full

of warnings for technology users about editing the information they post in social media sites, as it may affect their professional trajectories. Social workers, especially those who identify as part of the “digital generation,” may be unaware of the depth of impact that a careless word or unedited video or photo posted on a personal website has on their professional identities (Judd & Johnston, 2012). For social workers, the next question is how does participation in Web 2.0 technologies change the relationship of social worker to client? In a community setting, how does it change the relationship among clients?

As macro social workers we may be engaging clients on personal issues but also on larger community issues. The boundary issues identified in Hardina’s (2004) discussion of the situational challenges of macro practice in the application of the NASW Code of Ethics are amplified in the social media environment. The ethics involved in maintaining appropriate boundaries with clients may become even more complex when new technologies are incorporated into the working relationship (Judd & Johnston, 2012). If practitioners maintain both a personal and a professional presence in online spaces, how are those identities merged and managed (Watkins, 2009)? The loss of anonymity and the direct and constant connections may make some macro social workers understandably uncomfortable and concerned about boundaries. Hardina (2013) describes the relationship a professional organizer has with a client as somewhere between “a professional relationship and a friendship” (p.38). If this is the case, then how do online personas and activities impact the client/social worker relationship for everybody involved? If relationships change face-to-face, what happens to online relationships (for example, someone is hired at a new agency, but maintains an online relationship through social media with previous community clients). Is it possible to stop being a social worker outside of work hours, if one has a distinctive online presence that incorporates a social work identity? How we manage those

boundaries may be clear face-to-face, but may shift when working on the web, where personal information seems limitless. It is critical that ongoing discussion and examination of the ethics of macro practice in a social media environment be incorporated into professional education and continuing education.

10. Technology Competence

A “healthy skepticism” exists among many social workers as to whether this technology should be relied upon as a social work tool (Dunlop & Fawcett, 2008; McNutt & Menon, 2008; Csiernik, Furze, Dromgole, & Rishchynski, 2006), perhaps due in part to its constantly changing nature. Certainly, training on its use and monitoring is not generally part of social work education (Giffords, 2009, Mattison, 2012). Additionally, Web 2.0 technology was not necessarily developed for use in macro practice and must be adapted and amended to fit social work’s needs. The ever changing nature of technology also creates some generational divides, with technology that seems new to faculty being out-of-date and even “passé” to students. Finally, little research has been done to show the effectiveness of technology as a tool for social work practice in general (Mattison, 2012), as well as macro practice specifically (McNutt, 2006). McNutt (2006) stresses the need for research and evaluation to investigate the application of Web 2.0 technology as evidence based tools. Mattison (2012) calls for increase of the evidence base in clinical uses for web-based technology; the authors would broaden this call to include macro practice as well. Certainly, it is difficult to claim competence, as called for by our professional ethics (NASW & ASWB, 2005; NASW, 2008), if the topic is rarely addressed in either professional education or the professional literature.

11. Implications and Discussion

As Hardina (2003; 2013) and Resich and Low (2000) have identified, macro practice social work may already demand a slightly

different interpretation of some key social work values and ethics than clinical practice settings. (Mattison, 2012; Judd & Johnston, 2012). Issues of competency, boundaries and privacy, building and maintaining relationships that are already complex in macro practice settings may be further complicated by the use of Web 2.0 technologies. However, it is clear that the integration of these technologies into practice is inevitable (NASW & ASWB, 2005; Giffords, 2009; Mattison, 2012). Therefore, it is time for the profession to begin to engage in a conversation about the ethical implications and dilemmas inherent in the use of these new technologies in macro practice activities.

Certainly, one area for improvement is in the integration of discussion of these activities into social work education—BSW, MSW, and professional continuing education. Rather than simply observing the explosion of Web 2.0 advocacy efforts, social work educators should work to integrate it into their classrooms and professional education activities. Like any new practice intervention, students benefit from training and discussion about the implications of the use of the tool. This may be particularly true of these technologies, as students' casual familiarity with them may mean a casual approach to their implementation without critical analysis, thoughtful planning, or strategic thinking (Judd & Johnston, 2012). Thus, social work education must begin to integrate the ethical and appropriate use of these tools.

Professional organizations have an important role to play in this work as well. The most recent guidelines by NASW and ASWB, while helpful, were published in 2005. Things have changed dramatically since then—Facebook was created in 2004, YouTube in 2005, the first iPhone was released in 2007—the list of innovations goes on. Clearly, the guidelines need to be updated to reflect the current environment. Additionally, we would echo Mattison's (2012) call for the professional organizations to develop more specific standards for online practice

methods, although we would broaden the call to be inclusive of all areas of social work practice. Expansion of our understandings of social work practice to include new technologies will help ensure that our use of these technologies remains within the boundaries of ethical practice.

Finally, there is a critical need for the creation of a greater base of research knowledge on the use of these new technologies in macro practice social work. As a baseline, a survey of practitioners on their uses of Web 2.0 technologies in macro practice modalities would help the profession gain a greater understanding of current levels of use and existing practices (Mattison, 2012). Beyond this, analysis of utility and efficacy of technology-driven interventions would allow for the development of a research base for practice, as well as theory development in this growing area of practice (Thyer, 2008). There is a need for the creation of an evidence base in macro social work practice in general (Thyer, 2008), and certainly our ethical commitment to competence demands that our research knowledge remain up-to-date with our practice methods.

In closing, it is clear that Web 2.0 is already an integral part of macro social work practice. Thus, the profession must understand how these increasingly common practice modalities can be practiced within our ethical guidelines. Although the ethical challenges raised by the use of Web 2.0 in macro practice may not be new ones, the use of technology does raise new questions for social work practitioners and educators to reflect on. There is a need to think critically about the strengths and limitations of applying new technologies to macro social work practice, in order to remain true to our profession's strong commitment to value driven ethical practice.

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Grade Inflation, Gatekeeping, and Social Work Education: Ethics and Perils

Gary Miller, MSW, M.A., Ph.D.
Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI
mille2gp@cmich.edu

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Abstract

The definition of grade inflation, its causes, and consequences are discussed. Although literature concerning grade inflation in social work education is sparse, there is enough evidence to conclude that grade inflation exists in social work education. The ethical imperative to fairly evaluate students and the role of gatekeeping are discussed.

Keywords: social work education, grade inflation, gatekeeping, professional ethics, competency

1. Introduction

As I recently finalized grades for three undergraduate social work courses, which involved converting points to letter grades, I was struck by the observation that over half of my eighty students received A/A- grades and only 6% received C+/C grades. No student received less than a C. After double-checking common grade descriptors and finding that a grade of A represents “outstanding”, “superior”, and/or “work that far exceeds expectations”, I wondered aloud, “Are the majority of social work students really outstanding or superior?” Or, alternatively, had I become complicit in grade inflation? I remembered that the only place where the majority of students are above average, much less outstanding, is Garrison Keillor’s idyllic Lake Wobegon, and then I knew.

2. Grade Inflation Defined

Grade inflation can be defined as “an upward shift in the grade point average (GPA) of students over an extended period of time” without

a corresponding increase in student achievement (Goldman, 1985, p. 98). The literature on grade inflation is disturbing. According to Rojstaczer (quoted in Epstein, 2010), the average GPA rose from 2.52 in the 1950’s to 3.11 in 2006-7, an increase of 23%. The modal grade today at colleges and universities is an “A,” accounting for 43% of all grades; in the 1940s, the modal grade was a “C” and “A’s” accounted for only 15% of all grades (Rojstaczer and Healy, 2012). As Carey (2011) succinctly stated, “Yes, there’s been grade inflation. A-minus is the new C” (para. 5). McCabe and Powell (2004) found that over half of the faculty they surveyed believed grade inflation existed in their institution. A similar result was reported by McSpirit, Chapman, Kopacz, and Jones (2000) in their survey of faculty at a Midwestern university. Interestingly, McCabe and Powell (2004) also found that the majority of faculty believed that grade inflation was an issue. However, the same faculty believed they did not inflate their grades even though 92% underestimated the actual grades they gave to students.

3. Possible Reasons for Grade Inflation

Some authors trace the beginning of grade inflation to the 1960’s when sympathetic college instructors allegedly gave students higher grades so they could keep their student deferments and avoid military service in the unpopular Viet Nam war (Rojstaczer and Healy, 2012; Perrin, 2009; Fajardo, 2004). Grades appeared to stabilize after

the war, but a second wave of grade inflation began in the late 1980s and has not subsided yet (Rojstaczer and Healy, 2012; Educational Policy Committee, 2000). Unlike the first wave of grade inflation in the 1960s, explanations of this new round of inflation are varied. However, two clusters or categories of reasons are represented in the literature on grade inflation:

1) Student-related factors – One reason that has been asserted is that college students today are smarter than those who have come before them. Logically, smarter students earn better grades. Standardized test scores, however, do not support this rather simple and elegant hypothesis. SAT scores rose only 1.6% between 1990 and 2010 (College Board, 2010). A recent report from ACT found that only 25% of all ACT-tested high school graduates met all college readiness benchmarks (ACT, 2011). Arum and Roksa (2011), using the Collegiate Learning Assessment, which is designed to measure critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and other higher-level skills, found that 45% of college students did not make any gains after two years of college and 36% made no gains after four years of college. Significantly, they found that students majoring in education, business, and social work made the least gains when compared with students in other majors. One-third of new teachers, in fact, failed a basic literacy test required for new teachers in Massachusetts (Miller and Slocombe, 2012).

However, Tucker and Courts (2010) state that students today may be more productive learners due to the immediate availability of technology that enhances study skills. These authors also state that today's students may be more focused on career-preparation and take more classes that match their talents, earning higher grades. Mostrom and Blumberg (2012) state that increases in GPAs over time may actually be grade improvement rather than grade inflation and cite factors such as more effective learning-centered teaching methods. However, even if the quality of students (or teaching) has risen, it has been argued that grading standards must be raised to reflect such an increase (Educational Policy Committee, 2000).

Another student-related factor deals with the reality that today's students have different attributes than students of twenty years ago. The majority of today's students are members of the so-called "millennial" generation. While many positive attributes have been associated with this cohort, millennials are believed by many to have a strong sense of entitlement (Alsop, 2008). Many parents and K-12 schools systems have been overly concerned with developing self-esteem in these students through a system that rewards students regardless of their performance (Miller and Slocombe, 2012; Fajardo, 2004). Some have even referred to millennials as "trophy kids", reflecting that many may have received trophies and awards just for "showing up" and participating in athletic or academic events (Alsop, 2008). It is not surprising then that 34% of a sample of college students believe they deserve "at least" a B if they just attend "most classes" in a given course (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, and Farruggia, 2008). Coupled with this strong sense of entitlement, millennials also view themselves as consumers of education rather than students responsible for their own learning (Rojstaczer and Healy, 2012; Cain, Romanelli, Smith, 2012). This sense of entitlement also leads to students demanding and badgering instructors for higher grades (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, and Farruggia, 2008). With such an entitlement and consumer perspective, students believe, on some level, they have entered a "buyer-seller" relationship with schools where classes are perceived as "purchased services," and good grades are an integral part of the transaction and not necessarily something to be earned (Tucker & Court, 2010; Lippmann, Bulanda, & Wagenaar, 2009; Marcus, 2000; Sacks, 1996). As Tucker and Court (2010) state, "The ideology of the student as a consumer has changed the power relationships within higher education, placing satisfaction higher than intellectual growth" (p. 48). As higher education has become more consumer-oriented, students feel more entitled, academic expectations have decreased, and grades have increased (Gentry, 2011).

2) Institutional-related factors – Needless to say, a consumer model of education cannot exist unless all parties—students, teachers, and administrators—agree to play the necessary roles in the “buyer-seller” relationship. While most higher education personnel would likely dispute that they play the role of a seller in the consumer model, few would dispute that a “business model” exists at all levels within universities that emphasize student satisfaction as a means of retaining students to achieve financial benchmarks. Hawe (2003) found that lack of administrative support was one of the two major reasons why instructors were reluctant to assign failing grades, and Stone (1995) postulates that enrollment-driven funding results in administrators supporting grade inflation on some levels to increase budgets. In addition, some authors have noted that professors have needed to become more like entertainers than educators to increase student satisfaction to support such a business model (e.g., Crumbley, Flinn, & Reichelt, 2010; Edmundson, 1997). One author even reported that his chairperson encouraged him to take an acting class to enhance student satisfaction in his classes (Sacks, 1996).

The most used measures of student satisfaction are student evaluation of teaching (SET). Although SETs are purported to assess instructors’ effectiveness, many see SETs purely as a satisfaction measure (e.g., Tucker & Courts, 2010). Although there continues to be controversy regarding the reliability and validity of SETs in assessing effectiveness (e.g., Wachtel, 1998), there is little doubt that SETs are widely used as summative evaluations for promotion and tenure for tenured and tenure-track faculty, and that they determine job security for non-tenure track instructors, who account for 68% of faculty appointments in higher education (AAUP, n.d.). Interestingly, a number of researchers have found evidence that adjunct faculty give higher grades than tenured and tenure-track faculty (Moore & Trahan, 1998; Sonner, 2000; and Boualem, Pariseau, & Quinn, 2005). While Wolfer and McNown (2003) and Gentry (2011) acknowledge

the possible use of SETs as a formative evaluative tool, they reject the use of SETs as a summative tool. Because SETs are used increasingly as a summative evaluation, there is now widespread speculation that many/some instructors are more lenient in their grading and/or engage in course “deflation” (i.e., “dumbing down” course materials and assignments) in an effort to increase their SET score. This has been referred to as the “leniency hypothesis” of grade inflation or the trading of inflated grades for higher SETs (Brockx, Spooen, & Mortelmans, 2011). The corollary to this is, of course, that rigorous graders are punished with low SETs from students. Germain and Scandura (2005) found students knowingly give good scores on SETs to instructors who give high grades. Love and Kotchen (2010) found the increased emphasis on SETs exacerbates grade inflation. Millea and Grimes (2009) also found expected grades are positively correlated with SETs. A survey by Crumbley and Reichelt (2009) found that when SETs were used as a summative evaluation tool, instructors may tend to “game the system” by easing or inflating grades or deflating course work. Crumbley, Flinn, and Reichelt (2010) refer to SETs as an “administrative control tool” that leads to “pandering” by faculty. Although Goldman (1985) and Crumbley, Flinn, and Reichelt (2010) fault institutions for their use of SETs, they call the actions of individual instructors who, in effect, trade higher grades for better SETs unethical. Crumbley, Flinn, and Reichelt (2010), pulling no punches, state: “A persuasive argument can be made that this increased use of SET’s for administrative control has caused grade inflation, coursework deflation, and a reduction in student learning as a result of unethical behavior of professors and administrators” (p. 187).

4. Grade Inflation in Social Work Education

The literature on grade inflation specifically in social work education is relatively limited, but there are anecdotal reports that imply some degree of grade inflation in social work programs,

following the general trends described earlier. For example, the University of Utah's student newspaper reported that in 2006 students majoring in social work had the highest GPA of any major, 3.74, compared to an overall campus GPA of 3.17 (Mayorga, 2007). The Indiana University School of Social Work stated it was "highly likely" there was grade inflation in their M.S.W. program when an evaluation of their M.S.W. curriculum was performed in 2009 (Ramsey, 2009). This was then identified by faculty as an important issue to work on. Kourilova (quoted in Tucker & Courts, 2010) reported that 79% of students at Louisiana State University received A's in the Spring term of 2008. Finally, according to data published on the web, the Registrar's Office at the University of Missouri reported that 73% of all grades given to social work students in the Fall semester of 2012 were A's (University of Missouri Registrar, 2013).

In addition to anecdotal reports, there are several empirical studies related to grade inflation in social work education. An early study by Hepler and Noble (1990) compared GPAs, GRE scores, and TSWE (Test of Standard Written English) scores of B.S.W. students to non-B.S.W. students seeking admission to a graduate School of Social Work. They found the B.S.W. students, when compared to non-B.S.W. students, had: 1) significantly higher GPAs; 2) significantly lower GRE scores; and 3) lower TSWE scores (although not significantly). After standardizing all GPAs, GRE scores, and TSWE scores by calculating percentile rankings, Helper and Noble (1990) concluded that B.S.W. grades overstated student ability, and they concluded grade inflation existed. As a result, the authors suggested that GPAs of B.S.W. students be mathematically "discounted" using standardized scores in the M.S.W. admission process. For example, thirty applicants were from one public university and their average GPA was 3.06. Their model adjusting for GRE and TSWE scores indicated the "discounted" GPA should actually be 2.43, a 20% discount or, stated differently, the grades were inflated by 20%.

In another study, Culver (2006) reviewed the transcripts of 163 B.S.W. students who graduated between 2000 and 2003. He found that approximately 40% of these students had a 3.75 GPA or higher in the social work major. The grades of these students in non-social work courses were lower than their grades in social work courses. Based on this data, Culver (2006) expressed concerns about grade inflation within social work.

Black, Apgar, and Whelley (2010) surveyed 71 deans and directors of accredited graduate social work programs in the United States about grades and grade inflation in their programs. They found that 61% of the respondents identified grades and grade inflation as problems in their programs, and 44% were attempting to develop strategies for dealing with it. The three major factors that influenced grading and grade inflation, according to the respondents, were student evaluation of teaching, avoiding confrontation with students over grades, and the student-as-consumer mentality (Black, Apgar, & Whelley, 2010).

In a more recent study, Deitsch and Van Cott (2011) examined grades in 26 introductory courses for the Fall semesters of 1990 and 2009 at Ball State University (Muncie, Indiana). They compared the grade point averages and the percent of A and B grades for each course for the two time periods. While noting that the GPA and the percentage of A and B grades increased in 23 and 24 courses, respectively, the GPA and the percentage of A and B grades increased the most for the Introductory Social Work course. The GPA for this course rose from 2.46 in 1990 to 3.20 (a 30% increase) and the percentage of A and B grades rose from 43% to 84% (a dramatic 95% increase).

In another recent study, Sowbel (2011) examined grading of social work students in field placement, the "signature pedagogy" of social work education. Noting that very few students seem to do poorly in field and few are screened out of social work programs due to poor performance

in field, Sowbel (2011) compared traditional grading with an alternative grading scheme, vignette matching evaluation (VME) developed by Bogos et al (2004), for 154 social work students in field placement. VME uses a set of 20 prepared vignettes of students interacting with clients that are given to field instructors who are asked to read each vignette and then select the one that best exemplifies their student. Sowbel (2011) found that the traditional grading methods identified 4% of the 154 students as “problem students” in field, but the VME method identified 27% as problematic. Sowbel (2011) concluded that “this result supports previous assertions by field faculty that there is a general trend toward inflated field ratings regardless of the measure used” (p. 373). As field typically accounts for a significant portion of the social work curriculum, inflation in this area is especially significant.

5. Consequences of Grade Inflation

Social work educators should be concerned about inflated grades. When inflated grades are given, students are not challenged to do their best work. If average or above-average work receives an A grade, there is little motivation to strive to excel and be the best possible student. Students may come to believe there is little need to prepare for class, read required or optional readings, or study. Arum and Roksa (2011) report that social work and education students spend 17% less time per week studying than college students in general (10.6 hours/week vs. 12.4 hours/week). Miller and Slocombe (2012) note that grade inflation contributes to students’ beliefs in their intellectual superiority, resulting in graduates unprepared to deal with the realities of work environments. Similarly, Lippmann, Bulanda, and Wagenaar (2009) state that grade inflation fosters and reinforces an inflated perception about one’s knowledge, skills, and competencies. For social work students, the result can be the mistaken belief that the profession of social work is “easy” and that work with client systems requires little preparation and effort. Learning theory predicts

that when mediocre preparation and effort is rewarded with above average or better grades, this behavior likely will generalize to other settings, including practice settings, after graduation. This can place vulnerable client systems at risk and potentially lead to harm to those vulnerable client systems.

6. Normative Ethical Theory and Grade Inflation

Normative ethical theory concerns itself with explaining the morality or the rightness/wrongness of specific actions. Three somewhat competing major theories are associated with normative ethical theory: consequentialist ethics, deontological ethics, and virtue ethics. Consequentialist ethics focuses on the outcomes of a specific action before determining whether the action is morally right or wrong; if the outcome is a good one such as benefiting others in some fashion, the action can be called morally right or ethical (Sinnot-Armstrong, 2012). Related to this theory is Mill’s Principle of Utility, which states that an action that brings the greatest good or happiness to the greatest number of people is the most moral (Connolly, Keller, Leever, & White, 2009). The consequentialist perspective would require the knowledge of or the ability to predict the outcomes of grade inflation before pronouncing grade inflation as either ethical or unethical. As there can be multiple outcomes (e.g., students are happy and achieve their goals, instructors receive positive evaluations, students’ future job performance is compromised, future clients are negatively affected, etc.), the Principle of Utility is needed to identify whether the greatest good is achieved by giving inflated grades. An obvious problem with this approach is that many possible outcomes occur in the future and thus are not predictable with any certainty so a complete analysis of outcomes is unobtainable (Bowen, 2004).

Deontological ethics (sometimes referred to as Kantian ethics after its founder, Immanuel Kant) focuses solely on the action itself and not the

consequence of the action or the intent of the actor (Koehn, 1995). Deontological ethics represents a universal, absolute, and “moral law” perspective as specific actions are deemed as always right/good or always wrong/bad regardless of their intent or the consequences they produce. The details of a situation, cultural factors, and other contextual variables are considered irrelevant (Connolly, Keller, Leever, & White, 2009). Under this theory, for example, lying is always wrong. Consequentialist ethics, on the other hand, would evaluate the outcome of a specific lie before determining whether the lying was right or wrong; this is an “ends may justify the means” perspective. In the deontological ethics approach, since a given action is always right or wrong, a duty or “categorical imperative” is created either to perform or not to perform a specific action. Standards of behavior and codes of ethics are often manifestations of deontological ethics (L’Etang, 1992). This perspective likely would consider grade inflation as morally wrong or unethical as it is an unfair misrepresentation or a lie about students’ academic abilities. Deontological ethics would demand that students always be assessed on their demonstrated abilities regardless of other factors or issues that may impinge on students. Significantly, the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (1996), states, in a deontological fashion, that social work educators must “evaluate students’ performance in a manner that is fair and respectful” (Standard 3.02b).

Virtue ethics takes a much different approach and focuses on the individual who performs a specific action rather than the action itself. This approach de-emphasizes outcomes and the duty to adhere to an absolute standard of behavior (Axtell & Olson, 2012). It focuses on whether the individual agent is expressing good character or virtue in their action (Garrett, 2005). As Garrett (2005) explains:

An act or choice is morally right if, in carrying out the act, one exercises, exhibits, or develops a morally

virtuous character. It is morally wrong to the extent that by making the choice or doing the act one exercises, exhibits, or develops a morally vicious character. (para.18)

According to Hursthouse (1999), moral virtues are “character traits that dispose one to consistently act, think, and feel in certain ways and thereby consist of prescriptions for action” (p. 36). Virtues are not inherited, but are learned and developed over time and, according to Aristotle, are necessary to lead a good life (Koehn, 1995). For this reason, virtue ethics theory maintains that individuals have a moral responsibility to develop virtuous character, and “right actions” are defined as what a person with a virtuous character would do (Burnor & Raley, 2011). According to several authors (e.g., Burnor & Raley, 2011; McBeath & Webb, 2002; Gardiner, 2003), virtue ethics, contrary to the other theories discussed, allows flexibility and a wide range of right actions after situations are assessed. However, in any given situation, it is possible for a conflict in applicable virtues to develop. The conflict can be resolved by using a mediating virtue, practical wisdom, which enables the individual to weigh the demands of all the competing virtues and take action (Greco & Turri, 2011).

In the view of the virtue ethicist, grade inflation cannot be deemed ethical or unethical without examining the motives of the teacher or instructor and uncovering the virtue or vice underlying the act of grade inflation. As confusing as it sounds, grade inflation by teacher A may be ethical and the same grade inflation by teacher B may be unethical according to this perspective. For example, teacher A may assign a higher grade to a student than deserved based on the virtue of compassion (i.e., to assist the student in realizing a life-long dream), which makes the act ethical whereas teacher B assigns a higher grade than deserved based on the vice of greed (i.e., seeking better evaluations to receive a promotion), making

the act unethical. When virtues conflict (e.g., the virtues of compassion and integrity) when deciding what grade to give a student, the virtue of practical wisdom or reasoning must be used to resolve the apparent ethical dilemma and decide on the action to be taken (Earle-Foley, Myrick, Luhanga, & Yonge, 2012). Clearly, the virtue of practical wisdom or reasoning is a critical mediating necessity. While the virtue ethics approach is appealing as prescribed actions are not called for, it is often difficult for individual actors, much less observers, to understand their true motives for their actions. In the case of grade inflation, this approach does not seem to give general guidance on whether grade inflation is ethical or not; rather the answer becomes, “it depends.”

7. Recommitting to Gatekeeping

Although the ethics of grade inflation are not clear, social work educators must act as gatekeepers to minimize the number of unprepared, but possibly overconfident, graduates entering practice environments. Social work educators have to do so in order to protect society and the profession (Younes, 1998) as well as vulnerable clients. As stated above, they must “evaluate students’ performance in a manner that is fair and respectful” (National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics, Standard 3.02b, 1996). Although the term “fair” can be ambiguous, in this context it must be interpreted to mean “valid” and “accurate.” Black, Apgar, and Whelley (2010) note the irony of grade inflation in social work education and state: “Furthermore, overestimating academic performance in a profession that holds self-awareness as sacrosanct is paradoxical and counterproductive” (p. 19). Although college faculty, in general, often feel uncomfortable with and adverse to their role as gatekeepers, it is part of an implicit social contract with society (Goldman, 1985). Society expects and demands faculty to be gatekeepers in order to protect citizens. Goldman (1985) believes grade inflation subverts gatekeeping and states:

But it *is* our job to identify, as best we can (and we are certainly imperfect), those who are fit for particular occupations or social roles. The health and well-being of our society depends on our success. We have accepted the social function of certifying competence ... social reality requires (though perhaps not quite so much as we have believed) that we award certificates and degrees which reflect the level of competence necessary to do the job. Grade inflation has blurred important distinctions, has made everyone appear above average, and has led many citizens to suspect incompetents have been turned loose in the marketplace. (p. 109)

Social work has emphasized the importance of gatekeeping since its beginning as a profession (Moore and Urwin, 1991). The Allenberry Colloquium on undergraduate social work education held in 1971 reaffirmed that undergraduate educators must be gatekeepers for the profession and must screen out students who are not competent for social work (Feldstein, 1972). Several more recent articles have called for social work educators to reinvigorate their roles as gatekeepers (Younes, 1998; Reynolds, 2004; Sowbel, 2012; Whelley & Black, 2012). It is interesting to note that with the exception of Reynolds (2004), these articles focus on students’ emotional issues and/or problematic behaviors, not academic performance, as possible reasons why social work students should be screened out of social work programs. However, Moore and Urwin (1991) have identified grades as the first of five areas that should be of specific interest to gatekeepers. The lack of interest in academic performance in the literature suggests that grade inflation has kept grades so skewed that gatekeepers see little reason to focus on grades.

There are challenges and dilemmas in gatekeeping for social work educators. Reynolds

(2004) and Whelley and Black (2012) both note that social work programs need to attract and retain a sufficient number of students to maintain faculty and to survive as external resources dwindle. Therefore there can be implicit pressure to give inflated grades and retain marginal students, which is contrary to the purpose of gatekeeping. This is a macro-level application of the leniency hypothesis of grade inflation discussed earlier. Younes (1998) and Sowbel (2012) state that gatekeeping may also be perceived by social work educators on a personal level as antithetical to basic social work values. Younes (1998) notes an apparent conflict between gatekeeping and the ethical obligation of faculty to respect students' self-determination to become social workers. Gatekeeping can indeed deny the attainment of an important goal of students, becoming a social worker. This can become an ethical dilemma for the social work educator: respect self-determination of students versus protect vulnerable client systems and the larger society. Sowbel (2012) states that social work educators, who are trained in the strengths perspective, naturally focus on students' positive qualities. When students' academic achievements are subpar or low, other non-measurable factors such as degree of effort, overcoming personal or familial tragedies, or tackling challenging life experiences become the focus. From a strengths perspective, a grade thus may represent a combination of factors and much more than academic achievement. This is an example of what Allen (2005) calls a "merged judgment" grade, a grade that represents a "hodgepodge" of factors. Allen (2005) argues that grades should not represent a combination of factors, but must represent a single construct, academic achievement, in order to be valid and useful to the various audiences that use grades for decision-making purposes. An important component of Allen's argument is that external audiences will not understand the various factors that a merged judgment grade represents and wrong conclusions will likely result.

8. Conclusion

There is little doubt that grades for social work students are very high and, in some cases, are the highest in their respective universities and colleges. The reasons for this are probably many interconnecting factors including student, faculty and institutional variables as highlighted in this article. Regardless of the reasons, however, social work educators have an ethical imperative to fairly and accurately evaluate students' performance in order to protect society and students' future clients. While social work educators, like all educators, dislike and dread giving poor grades to students who may have many other strengths, their role as a gatekeeper to the profession demands that they do so. Professional disciplines such as social work must fulfill their implied social contract with society: they must train their own and assure competence and quality. If we do not keep our end of this social contract, the future of our profession is grim. As Reynolds (2004) so succinctly states, "Social work educators have stressed that the life of the profession is tied to whom we select to enter our profession and provide services to clients. This is an awesome responsibility ..." (p. 29). As much as it may pain us, we no longer can reside in Lake Wobegon.

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Guidelines for Social Workers' Use of Social Networking Websites

Donalda Halabuza, Ph.D., MSW, RSW
Faculty of Social Work, University of Regina
Donalda.Halabuza@uregina.ca

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Abstract

This article outlines some of the ethical dilemmas that may arise for social workers who use social media and maintain blogs. Some of these ethical concerns include boundary violations, dual relationships, breaches of privacy, and confidentiality. Guidelines on how to address and reduce these concerns are included.

Keywords: ethics, social work, social network, Internet, guidelines for social workers

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of social media has fundamentally changed and revolutionized the way people manage information about their personal and professional lives (Garner & O'Sullivan, 2010; Giffords, 2009). There has been a substantial increase in the use of Internet communication using social media, including blogs, and an increase in the number of social networking sites available for use. A recent survey indicated that about 10% of adults and 14% of adolescents use personal online journals or blogs, and 47% of adults and 73% of adolescents use social networking sites (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). In June 2011 it was estimated that there were over 500 million users of Facebook (Facebook, 2011) and the popularity of social media is expected to heighten (Tunick, Mednick, & Conroy, 2011). Social workers are not immune from the use and influence of social media and the

Internet. Social workers use the Internet to access research, collect data, provide online counseling, provide social support to a variety of groups, and advocate for social justice concerns. It also has the potential to help human service organizations raise funds (Giffords, 2009). Many social work students have social media sites, leading to concerns for social work educators on how to educate students on the risks of social media and encourage their responsible use of it, emphasizing the need for university policies for students' online behavior (Judd & Johnston, 2012).

There is increasing literature on the potential for ethical dilemmas for social workers who use blogs and social media sites (Duncan-Daston, Hunter-Sloan & Fullmer, 2013; Giffords, 2009; Kays, 2011; Judd & Johnston, 2012; Nye, 2011; Young, 2009), psychologists (Lehavot, Barnett, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010; Tunick, Mednick, & Conroy, 2011), medical doctors (Brown, 2010; Garner & OSullivan, 2010; MacDonald, Sohn, & Ellis, 2010), nurses (Halle, 2012; Thompson, 2012), and other professionals such as psychiatrists (Luo, 2009). Because social networking sites and Internet communication is increasingly used by social work students and social workers, especially those in earlier stages in their careers, it is recommended that social workers acquire the skills and knowledge to ethically use websites so that ethical standards for competent service are maintained (Giffords, 2009; NASW, 2005).

In recent studies on doctors in training it

was found that 10% did not use privacy settings, 96% used their real names, and 19% accepted friendship requests from people they did not know well. In addition, 52 % reported that they had seen unprofessional photographs of their colleagues on Facebook, including pictures of excessive drinking or various states of undress, and discussions of clinical experiences with patients (Garner & O'Sullivan, 2010). Another study on medical students showed 63% had privacy settings enabled; 75% revealed personal information including interests (22%), phone numbers (17%), religious views (16%), political views (13%), or membership in potentially offensive group behavior such as "perverts united" (22%). Some of those in the study said they used offensive language such as swearing (6%), discussed plans to drink or be hung over (11%), and engaged in silly humor over topics such as nudity or cross dressing (6%) (MacDonald, Sohn, & Ellis, 2010). Surveys on psychology students has shown that the majority participate in online social networking (between 77-81%) with 15-40% choosing not to implement strict privacy settings, 67% used their real name and 37% included personal information that they did not want their clients to see (Lehavot, Barnett, & Powers, 2010). It has been found that unintentional disclosure is inevitable with the ease of access permitted on the Internet (Taylor, McMinn, Bufford, & Chang, 2010). In a more recent survey on psychologists it was found that 65% participated in social networking sites and 9% maintained blogs. Nearly half of those reported that they posted material that they would not want their clients to see (Tunick, Mednick, & Conroy, 2011). In this study 98% of those using social media reported having privacy restrictions, yet 24% had been approached to be virtual friends by clients. It was also reported that 32% of the respondents reported reading client social networking sites and blogs, and 16% did so without the consent of the client. Thirty-five percent addressed concerns about Internet privacy with underage clients. This has led to the coining of the term e-professionalism, describing a new

facet of professional behavior and communication in the digital era and the need for guidelines around professional and ethical behavior (MacDonald, Sohn, & Ellis, 2010).

Ethical problems posed for social workers and students using social networking websites and blogs include inappropriate boundaries between personal and public lives, violation of ethical codes of conduct such as confidentiality, privacy breaches and dual relationships, and conflicts of interests. Others have suggested that social media has implications for identity formation in young social workers, leading to increased responsibility for social work educators in educating students on the ethical and professional pitfalls of social media (Kays, 2010; CASWE- ACFTS, 2012; Duncan-Daston, Hunter-Sloan, & Fullmer, 2013; Judd & Johnston, 2012). Social work educators have a dual responsibility for socializing students to the professional norms and educating them in relevant knowledge, including the online presentation of self that can have implications for their professional roles (CASWE-ACFTS, 2012, Sec. 2.44, 2.4.6; Judd & Johnston, 2012). Social networking sites also have the potential for benefits by promoting their organizations (Kays, 2011) and providing the capacity to engage in advocacy. Other benefits include obtaining ongoing education, engaging in professional networking, obtaining support, collaborating, and providing therapy (Giffords, 2009; Reamer, 2012). In addition, for many social networking is a primary means of maintaining communication and relationships with current colleagues, family, and friends (Kays, 2011). Because of the ethical and professional implications of misuse of social media it is important that social workers become aware of the risks and ethical dilemmas of using social media websites as well as how to protect their professional reputation and avoid ethical conflicts. Simply not using social media or heavily restricting its use by social workers and social work students is not a palatable option because social media has become an integral part of how younger generations of professionals and students

communicate and stay connected (Brown, 2010; Giffords, 2009; Kays, 2011).

2. What is Social Media?

Social networking sites (SNS) are part of Web 2.0 technology and contain user-generated content provided for finding social relationships. Web 2.0 technologies contain sites such as Flickr, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn (Giffords, 2009). These sites are characterized by dynamic communication through computer mediated interactions in which participants share personal information and photos, and exchange thoughts and feelings. SNS provide opportunities for searching for and finding “friends,” either in the Facebook meaning of the term or making different contacts with acquaintances from other areas, and chatting about their activities, thoughts, and emotions. SNS facilitate joining any number of online groups (MacDonald, Sohn & Ellis, 2010). Social media provides for quick informal and informal collaboration with a number of people simultaneously.

It has been suggested that virtual communication erodes elements of responsibility, accountability, and trust in traditional professions (Garner & O’Sullivan, 2010). When people communicate online social norms are absent due to the lack of visual cues, and communication occurs during the writer’s own time (Garner & O’Sullivan, 2010, p.112; Bradshaw & Saha, 2010). The lack of social norms in social networking sites allows for misuse, such as bullying, harassment, and posting critical comments about others who are not able to defend themselves (Bradshaw & Saha, 2010; Tunick, Mednick, & Conroy, 2011). The lack of norms for web communication opens the door for abuse of personal information by others or posting derogatory information that could potentially lead to a backlash (Rodrigues, 2010, p.238). Social media alters the social dynamics in the formation of social relationships since anyone, regardless of income, social location, or societal status, has access to the Internet simply by having

an available computer with Internet access.

Facebook is a common social networking site. It was established in 2004 (Facebook, 2009) and registered users can choose to join one or more “networks” and by mutual agreement become “friends” with other members who ask to join. Facebook offers a number of features such as the opportunity to post pictures, search for and find people who are designated as “friends,” chat and comment on activities, share plans, thoughts, emotions, and join any of thousands of online groups. Facebook has become a central component in how students communicate, share information, and network (Bradshaw & Saha, 2010). Facebook information can be accessed by large numbers of unintended people and material can be viewed out of context and worse, in the future, even after an account has been deactivated or material removed (MacDonald, Sohn & Ellis, 2010). Thus, material posted on Facebook is not private even though this may have been the intention of the user. Pictures posted on Facebook accounts can be copied or “tagged” depending on the privacy settings chosen by Facebook users and sent to other “friends” without knowledge or consent of the user (Strahilevitz, 2010). This allows for personal information to become widely available without the control or even the knowledge of the user. In addition, the user has no knowledge of who tagged his or her personal information and where it will be posted, making it available to other users of Facebook who perhaps would not be intended to see it. This raises concerns about privacy and blurs boundaries between personal and professional identities for users of social media.

2.1 Boundaries

Personal information that is “tagged” by others and posted on other websites where privacy settings are not secure blurs the distinction between what is private and what is public. In the digital world of social media boundaries between private lives and professional practice become unclear (MacDonald, Sohn, & Ellis, 2010, p.806). Information intended only for

family or friends could be accessible by clients or employers. For social workers this means that personal information could be accessible to clients and others at any time depending on the privacy settings of the user and the privacy settings of those admitted as “friends” (McDonald, Sohn, & Ellis, 2010; Tunick, Mednick, & Conroy, 2011). Blurring of private and public boundaries can give rise to a number of risks such as erosion of the public’s trust in the social work profession, employment offers withheld, or breaches of ethical codes (Young, 2009). This can occur if the information posted contains inappropriate photos of nudity or excessive alcohol use, offensive language and gestures, rude humor, and complaints about clients, colleagues or employers as was found in research on medical students (MacDonald et al., 2010).

In addition to concerns about the type of information posted, the Internet has no expiration date, and virtually anything that is posted could remain visible indefinitely and could be discovered at any time by anyone. Facebook and other social networking sites were developed with the goal of sharing information rapidly. Therefore an underlining assumption is that all information posted is done with the intention of sharing it with others. Even momentary comments and thoughts that are fleeting may be posted and thus available to others in the future. This is especially important for the newer generation because children born in the twenty-first century could conceivably have their entire life documented online in digital formats (Bradshaw & Sara, 2010). It is recommended that social work students and professionals use thoughtful reflection about potential ethical dilemmas that may arise from the type of information posted and the degree of self-disclosure, given the relative permanence of online content (Tunick, Mednick, & Conroy, 2011).

2.2 Privacy settings

To the extent that a user has control over his or her network profile it is possible to maintain privacy. But privacy controls can only be effective

in the context of robust competition in the market for social networks (Rodrigues, 2010). Even though, “Facebook users have the ability to limit profile visibility to certain networks of friends, and users can control the display of individual messages ... the social network retains access and certain rights to use this information” (Rodrigues, 2010, pp. 240-241). Over time there can be no guarantees that information posted on Facebook or other social media websites will remain private. Users of social media can set their privacy settings to allow access to other members of the network or set tight privacy controls allowing only those admitted as “friends” to access their account. Many users disclose vast amounts of information while others tend to disclose information in a limited fashion. Material posted on Facebook is public in the sense that it is no longer under exclusive control of the individual, but at the same time the entire world does not have access to this information (Rodrigues, 2010, p.240). Social networking sites tend to default towards inclusion and details of privacy settings are complex (Lou, 2009; MacDonald et al, 2010; Tunick et al, 2011). A key concern for social workers is that information posted on Facebook is no longer private, but in the public domain, allowing information to be accessible to clients and others even though the social worker does not accept clients as friends in the social media sense. Boundaries may be blurred when clients read personal information about their social worker. Because social networking sites allow members limited control over who will eventually be able to see material that they post at any given time, clients, employers, and colleagues may learn information about social workers that could compromise their professional relationships and negatively affect the social worker’s reputation and the profession of social work.

2.3 Ethical dilemmas associated with the use of social media

The explosion of social networking sites has changed the way people connect with

each other, collaborate, and live their daily lives (Parrish, 2010). Suggesting that social workers should be prohibited from participating in social networking sites is naive and unrealistic in context of society's increasing reliance on the Internet (Tunick, Mednick & Conroy, 2011, p.444). This means that social workers are individually responsible for maintaining careful awareness of possible ethical dilemmas when participating in social media (Kays, 2010).

The norms for the profession of social work are to strive to provide services in an objective, impartial, and respectful manner, ensuring that clients' interests are first (*Code of Ethics*, CASW, 2005). One of the values of the profession is integrity in professional practice, which is further elaborated on in the *Canadian Guidelines for Ethical Practice*. The guidelines state that social workers are to establish the tenor of professional relationships by establishing appropriate professional boundaries, declaring conflicts of interest, avoiding dual and multiple relationships with clients, avoiding romantic and sexual relationships with clients, and not exploiting professional relationships (CASW, 2005). At present there are no clear ethical standards that apply to social workers' use of social media in Canada or the United States (CASW, 2005; NASW, 2008). Social workers are faced with a multitude of new ethical dilemmas caused by interaction with technology. In the absence of clear standards and guidance, social workers are individually responsible for anticipating ethical implications and consequences of social media, unless there are workplace policies governing social media.

2.4 Professional boundaries and privacy settings

When social workers maintain social media sites, there are ethical and professional dilemmas that may arise particularly around client-social worker boundaries (Kays, 2010; Duncan et al., 2013; Judd & Johnston, 2012). The maintenance of clear boundaries is important to avoid exploitation

of the client and to ensure that the professional relationship serves the needs of the client (*Guidelines for Ethical Practice*, CASW, 2005, Sec.2). The responsibility for establishing the tenor of professional relationships lies clearly with the social worker. It is important that social workers carefully consider the degree of self-disclosure in their postings on social media. In practice, when self-disclosure is used it must be based on the client's needs and in his or her best interests (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2009).

Establishing and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries is particularly difficult when social workers do not know who will eventually gain access to their personal information. As with other professionals, social workers need to consider the relative permanence of online content and the potential for interpersonal, professional and/or legal ramifications that this may cause (Landman, Shelton, Kauffman, & Dattilo, 2010; Tunick et al., 2011). The use of Facebook and other social networking sites involves making associations with a variety of people who ask to be "friends" as well as with others who are unintended (Light & McGrath, 2010, p.307). Social media sites are designed for social communication and thus lean towards making information available to the wider public whenever privacy policies change (Rodrigues, 2010) which makes it more difficult to control which people will have access to personal information posted on social media sites, even when using secure privacy settings. It has also been noted that unintentional disclosure is inevitable with the ease of access permitted on the Internet (Taylor, McMinn, Bufford, & Chang, 2010). Studies on medical students found that they posted photographs of users drinking alcohol, intoxicated, or in various states of undress; information about clinical experiences with clients; and the reality of membership in groups with offensive names that were accessible to the public and unprofessional (Garner & O'Sullivan, 2010; MacDonald et al, 2010). Based on research with psychologists, approximately 24% had clients

approach them to become “friends” on Facebook even when 98% of those surveyed stated they had secure privacy settings (Tunick, et al., 2011). Similarly, if and when clients gain access to online personal material about their social workers it can compromise professional boundaries and alter professional relationships. Taylor et al., (2010) have therefore recommended that it is important to exercise control over the type of information posted and use high privacy settings. It is also suggested that social workers consider the use of pseudonyms if websites are used primary for communicating with family and friends.

It is important that social workers who use social media are careful in implementing secure privacy settings, intentional about the information posted, and vigilant in checking the privacy settings on a regular basis to prevent boundary violations that may affect professional relationships (Tunick et al., 2011). It is important to maintain appropriate boundaries so that impartial judgment can be used in ways that meet the needs of the client. It is particularly difficult to determine what represents appropriate behavior with online social communities and interactions on social networking sites because of the absence of visual, auditory and tactile cues (Judd & Johnston, 2012).

3. Professional Integrity and Dignity of the Profession

The fundamental importance of Codes of Ethics is protection of the public by promoting trust in the profession. Honesty and trustworthiness form the foundation of ethical practice. If the general public, including social work clients, has access to personal information that is derogatory or photos that are inappropriate it will affect the reputation of the professional who posted the information and subsequently it could negatively affect the public's perception of the profession as a whole (Garner & O'Sullivan, 2010; MacDonald, Sohn, & Ellis, 2010). This can result in a loss of trust in the profession of social work. It is difficult to maintain separate boundaries between personal and professional identities

when using social media. Because boundaries between personal and professional lives overlap in the virtual world, the manner in which social workers and social work students present on the Internet becomes one of representing themselves professionally, even though this may not have been the intention (Judd & Johnston, 2012). It also could be interpreted as representative of the profession. Thus, when statements are posted that could bring disrepute to the profession, it could be considered an ethical breach. “Social workers are obligated to ensure that no outside interest brings the profession into disrepute” (CASW, 2005, Sec. 7.1.8). It is therefore suggested that professionals engage in thoughtful reflection prior to posting their views and beliefs, and exercise careful decision-making about the potential risks of self-disclosure.

It is equally important that social workers become aware of the range of privacy settings on their social media site and remain vigilant in adjusting their privacy settings because these settings change over time and lean towards inclusiveness. Setting privacy settings to ensure maximum privacy requires ongoing attention and is complex (Luo, 2009). Facebook's privacy policy contains distinct privacy options for each site feature and is regularly updated and changed (Facebook, 2010). Should the matter of social websites arise in professional practice, social workers need to be open and transparent in their discussions regarding use of social media with employers and clients. It has been suggested that professionals proactively discuss their social media use and advise their clients of their policies (Tunick, et al, 2011). This policy could include clear statements stating that you refrain from accepting “friend” requests from current or past clients, regardless of the circumstances (Luo, 2009).

4. Privacy and Confidentiality

Similarly if there is a reason to review client social media sites, the reasons must be openly discussed with the client and informed consent must be obtained. “Social workers

limit their involvement in the personal affairs of clients to matters related to the service being provided.” (Sec. 1.14, CASW, 2005). Viewing client information on social websites without their consent violates the privacy and autonomy of clients (Young, 2009; Tunick et al., 2011). Failure to obtain consent can jeopardize the professional relationships social workers have with clients by creating distrust in not respecting the privacy of their clients. It can also affect the reputation of the social worker, blur professional boundaries, and even reveal criticisms of the social worker, which would create tensions in the professional relationship (Tunick, et al, 2011). Viewing client sites without consent can create additional ethical dilemmas if information on client sites raises concerns about client safety or the safety of others. It is unclear what obligations exist for follow-up action in these situations (Young, 2009, Zur, 2010). Social workers are obligated to report harm that is done, particularly to vulnerable members of society (*Guidelines for Ethical Practice*, CASW, 2005, Sec. 1.6.). This places the social worker in an ethical dilemma if information has been uncovered through unethical practices of checking clients' social media sites. From a survey on psychologists it was found that approximately 16% accessed client information without consent, with 8% of those finding concerning information (Tunick, et al., 2011). General concerns were no privacy restrictions, revealing too much personal information, and including inappropriate photographs. Professional obligations are ambiguous if the social worker did not have prior consent to access the client's personal social networking website. This aspect may become particularly important if clients are youth or children who may be targets for online bullying or may be bullying others. If children are the clients, obtaining informed parental consent is also required. If possible, content could be reviewed together so that concerns can be openly discussed. This is particularly important in situations of cyberbullying. Educating young clients about potentially dangerous risky behaviors

on the web is consistent with the ethical duty to protect clients from harm. Other times, clients may not grasp the potential dangers associated with social media or the effects of having open privacy settings (Tunick, et al., 2011). It is important to promote safe Internet behavior with clients, especially youth and children, including helping them develop exit strategies.

4.1 Confidentiality

It is important that users of social media not post information that is the product of another unless they are given informed consent because once the information is shared, it may be impossible to retract (Parrish, 2010). It is also the responsibility of social networking users, including professionals, to determine the authenticity of a person before allowing a person access to personal information. When sharing information on social networking sites it is important to consider not only the privacy settings of one's personal information, but also the privacy of the information of others who have access to information being shared. Careful self-monitoring is required when sharing information on social networking sites so potentially confidential information about clients is not disclosed. Posting information about professional practice experiences could potentially identify clients and would be considered a potential breach of confidentiality even when names are not used.

It is important that when social workers or social work students use social media sites there is careful self-monitoring so there is no discussion of current or past cases on the internet, even when the identity of clients is not provided.

5. Potential for Dual Relationships

An ethical dilemma can occur when clients ask to become “friends” or join the social worker's social networking sites. These ethical concerns are in regard to blurred boundaries and dual relationships. Having an online social media relationship with current or former clients can breach privacy and confidentiality because the

content may be available to others to read. In addition, it constitutes a dual relationship. "Dual or multiple relationships occur when social workers relate to clients in more than one relationship, whether professional, social or business. Dual or multiple relationships can occur simultaneously or consecutively" (CASW, 2005, p.12).

Dual relationships are not inherently harmful but it is the responsibility of the social worker to evaluate the impact of these relationships on the client (CASW, 2005, Gripton & Valentich, 2003). Gripton and Valentich (2003) suggest social workers evaluate the risks and benefits of dual relationships based on client vulnerability, power differences, risks for the client, risks for the social worker, benefits for the client, and benefits for the professional. Clarity of professional boundaries needs to be carefully considered and discussed with the client at the onset of the professional relationship. Thus, while being admitted as a "friend" to a client's social media site may serve some benefits, it is also important to consider the risks, such as blurred boundaries, dual relationships, and breaches of confidentiality.

6. Conclusions

This article has summarized ethical concerns that may arise for professionals who use social networking sites. Similar concerns exist for social workers and social work students who use social media sites. Ethical concerns exist around blurred boundaries, boundary violations, dual relationships, conflicts of interest, privacy and confidentiality, and implications for trust in the professional relationship. Loss of trust in the profession of social work and additional dilemmas may occur should information on client sites be discovered when such sites were accessed without prior consent.

In absence of ethical guidelines for practice, it is recommended that social workers use high privacy settings; remain vigilant in adjusting their privacy settings; use pseudonyms; engage in careful consideration of materials posted; not

access client sites or Google clients without prior informed consent and with clear reasoning as to how this applies to the services provided by the social worker; avoid discussion of professional practice on websites that could potentially reveal the identity of clients and that could negatively affect the reputation of the social worker; develop clear policies that are proactively explained to clients and employers alike about not accepting "friend" requests from current or past clients; and exercise careful self-reflection on the appropriateness of information posted. Finally, social workers should carefully consider and anticipate ethical and legal implications of material posted.

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Father Involvement and Child Welfare: The Voices of Men of Color

Kilolo Brodie, MSW, Ph.D. – Assistant Professor
California State University Stanislaus – Department of Social Work
kbrodie1@csustan.edu

Natasha Paddock, MSW
National Association of Social Workers, California – Region C Director
npaddock1@icloud.com

Christa Gilliam, MSW
Doctoral Student, Morgan State University
christa_countee@yahoo.com

Jackelin Chavez, B.A.
MSW Student, California State University Stanislaus
jchavez10@csustan.edu

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Abstract

This study conducted focus groups with fathers from underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds residing in the San Francisco Bay Area in order to explore (1) the level of involvement with their children, and (2) their experiences with social workers. Unintentional bias can inadvertently affect paternal involvement and create ethical concerns in child welfare case management.

Keywords: Biases, ethical dilemmas, child welfare, fatherhood involvement, focus groups

1. Introduction

When involving fathers in child welfare matters, it is important to understand the role gender plays in a father's relationship with his children. Regardless of race, men are often viewed as ineffective and unimportant parents (O'Donnell, 2001; Greif et al., 2011; Coakley, 2013). In many

case-management instances, the value of fathers has been marginalized by patriarchal beliefs that a man's sole responsibility to his family is financial with no direct impact on the social and emotional outcomes of his children (Black, Dubowitz, & Starr, 1999; O'Donnell, 2001; English, Brummel, & Martens, 2009). As a result, many men have been conditioned to believe that if they cannot contribute to their children financially, then their presence is not warranted (Greif et al., 2011). Research studies have been scant with regard to father-child relationships and their value in the greater context of the family unit.

1.1 Maternal Influence

The ability to co-parent with the mother(s) of his children is crucial to a father's level of commitment to his parenting obligations. A mother can be the single most determining factor in promoting a father's relationship with their

children, or conversely, a significant hindrance. A positive relationship between a mother and a father may encourage the man's confidence in his role as a father (O'Donnell, 2001; McRoy, 2008; Grief et al., 2011). Adversely, a negative relationship may obstruct a father's participation in his child's life. It can be argued that a mother's role is sometimes that of a gatekeeper when it comes to sharing information, such as the father's whereabouts or offering identifying information for paternal relatives when child protective services is involved (Black, Dubowitz, & Starr, 1999; National Fatherhood Initiative, 2009; O'Donnell, 2001; Grief et al., 2011). As a result, this lack of communication can have a critical impact in child welfare as it potentially restricts access to extended relatives for kinship placement options if out-of-home care becomes imminent. Excluding certain family members as possible caregivers can pose ethical concerns for social workers regardless of whether the exclusion of certain kinfolk was intentional. Child welfare workers are trained to be prime advocates for children in the system. According to federal and state policy, worker advocacy should include a balanced exploration of efforts to locate kin for children who are unable to live with their parents (California Department of Social Services, 2010). Kinship care not only reduces the trauma of separation for children, but also provides them with a connection to someone who is likely knowledgeable about their family heritage and culture (California Department of Social Services, 2010).

1.2 The Social Workers' Role

In addition to the maternal parent affecting paternal involvement, transference and counter-transference issues of the child welfare worker can largely contribute to worker bias. Racial stereotypes, social class, and differences in educational background can result in flawed decision-making on the part of child welfare workers based largely on a lack of knowledge or overgeneralization when working with families, in particular, families representing ethnic

minority backgrounds (McRoy, 2008; Curtis & Denby, 2011; Lefkowitz, 2011). Unintentional bias can inadvertently affect the level of paternal involvement in child protective service cases due to differential service provisions that are offered (McRoy, 2008). This kind of unfair treatment in case management creates an ethical dilemma...how can social workers truly operate in the best interest of children when unresolved personal issues have such an ability to overtly and subconsciously impact case plan outcomes?

2. Mandated Guidelines

2.1 Benefits of Paternal Engagement

Father involvement can provide access to social workers knowing a child's early developmental history, genetic background, and existing kinship networks (Black, Dubowitz, & Starr, 1999; O'Donnell, 2001; English et al., 2009; Grief et al., 2011) – all of which are pertinent elements in effective case management. Promoting fathers may decrease the high number of African American children in the foster care system, for example, by expanding paternal placement options and generating a more complete composite of the child's family medical history. A lack of this kind of balanced (paternal and maternal) information does not serve the best interest of the child. Fatherhood inclusion strengthens concurrent and permanency planning efforts – which is a federal provision under the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (English et al., 2009; Curtis & Denby, 2011).

2.2 Child Welfare Compliance

The nature of social work practice can be challenging and leave room for unintentional bias, which poses an additional threat to fathers who have children in the child welfare system. There are mandates in place which state that child welfare practitioners must operate from a family-centered perspective, implying minimal value judgment and limited subjectivity (O'Donnell, 2001; English et al., 2009; Curtis & Denby, 2011). However, rarely is the father considered the focal

point in child welfare case management. Often times, parent involvement is limited only to the mother and emphasis is placed on reestablishing the mother's relationship with the child (Coakley, 2013). In a system that is primarily focused on the mother, it is quite possible that fathers are left to question where they fit in the equation. Ethically, this is not appropriate – even if fathers' exclusion is done inadvertently and without deliberate intention. The recognition of a significant lack of father involvement, in general and in child welfare, undoubtedly contributed to the establishment of fatherhood initiatives to ensure best practice (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

Including the biological father should be a child welfare mandate, but endeavors to regularly solicit their participation many times is near the bottom of the long list of case management priorities (English et al., 2009; Greif et al., 2011). Despite the functionality of nontraditional families, research indicates that children need both a mother and a father to contribute to their emotional, psychological, and social development (English et al., 2009). Fathers contribute to their children's psychological and emotional growth when fathers are accessible, responsible, and invested in the well-being of their children (Cabrera, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007; Black, Dubowitz, & Starr, 1999; O'Donnell, 2001; English et al., 2009; Greif et al., 2011). Evidenced-based research confirms that paternal involvement is essential to child development. If fathers play a valuable role in their children's development, it begs the question as to why there are so few fathers involved in child welfare.

There continues to be a drastic increase in the number of children residing in fatherless households (O'Donnell et al., 2005). According to 2009 U.S. Census Bureau data, the highest ethnic group of children living in father-absent homes are African American at 64% (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2009). Having fathers as active participants in a case plan could likely avert the succession of absentee fathers and lessen perpetual cycles of single-mother households – a

highly visible family paradigm within the child welfare system. Social workers have a prime opportunity to promote positive images of single parents and their ability to co-parent. It is believed that the collaboration of decision-making and a supportive partnership, or co-parenting, is an important aspect of family life (Black, Dubowitz, & Starr, 1999; O'Donnell, 2001; Hines, Lee, Osterling, & Drabble, 2006; Bronte-Tinkew & Horowitz, 2010). By supporting the notion of dual-parenting, service providers can help diminish the marginalized parental role that some fathers may face. Promoting fathers could potentially decrease the exceedingly high number of (African American) children who enter the foster care system by supporting parental models, such as co-parenting, and more aggressively facilitating fathers' full inclusion and participation in case planning (American Humane Association, 2013; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

3. Relevant Theoretical Frameworks

3.1 Family Systems Theory

Family systems theory should be considered as a basis for understanding the importance and value of father involvement. Within the context of family, a father's role is critical to establishing and maintaining the structure of the unit. This theory views the family as an emotional unit that is complexly interconnected (Franck & Buehler, 2007; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008). A family systems perspective must be taken into account when discussing a father's role not just in relation to his child but also in relation to the child's mother (Franck & Buehler, 2007). As such, the mother–father dyad, the father–child dyad, and the mother–child dyad are critical subsystems, because each structural relationship has a direct and indirect influence on the others (Franck & Buehler, 2007). Family systems theory articulates the importance of co-parenting; the theoretical framework applies whether or not the biological father lives in the home with the mother and the child. Emotional issues and conflict are an integral part of a family's

development and how that family interacts within their environment (Coakley, 2013). Removal of the father, or exclusion of his involvement, challenges the family's structure and, likewise, the return of the father to a family that is not intact requires support in order to assimilate the unit back into its optimal level of functioning (Coakley, 2013).

3.2 Empowerment Perspective

As a way to actualize paternal involvement and to ensure greater representation of fathers in the child welfare system, the empowerment perspective is another framework from which to build. The empowerment perspective has a "...dual focus on people's potential and on political/structural change" (Lee, 1996, p. 219). Although empowerment is a concept that can mean different things to different people, at its core lies the ability to build on strengths and work in partnership rather than in conflict [with fathers] (Connolly & McKenzie, 1999). Some of the basic assumptions about the empowerment approach are that (1) people are fully capable of solving problems and analyzing the institutional oppression causing these problems, and (2) [workers] are able to strengthen internal resources and work collaboratively with individuals, groups, and communities to change oppressive conditions (Lee, 1996). These tenets should mirror the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of social workers who engage families in resolving child welfare dilemmas.

Knowledge of the history of disenfranchised populations and an understanding of how to create systemic change is a process within itself. Underrepresented groups, some of which have adapted to the structure of domination, have often become resigned to it and are inhibited from waging in the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires (Friere, 2002). The result of empowerment is that there is equal opportunity and access to resources for people who are poor, oppressed, and stigmatized (i.e., fathers involved in the child welfare system). In the empowerment perspective,

power is present at three levels – personal (feelings and perceptions regarding the capacity to influence and resolve one's own problems); interpersonal (experiences with others to facilitate problem resolution); and environmental (societal institutions can facilitate or thwart self-help efforts) (Pillari, 2002, p. 13). An understanding of these components is needed to assist workers with a means to empower fathers and actively involve them in social service case management. Receiving input from men who are fathers with children in the child welfare system is essential, especially hearing the voices of fathers from non-White ethnic backgrounds as their children are impacted the most in terms of foster care rates (McRoy, 2008; United States Government Accountability Office, 2007).

4. Methods

4.1 Research Design

In order to gain firsthand knowledge and information from the perspective of fathers, these researchers conducted an exploratory/descriptive study and employed a qualitative research design. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe fathers' views on their level of involvement with their children, and their experiences with social workers. It was important to have men of color articulate their perceptions of paternal involvement, and to capture the sentiments of these fathers regarding their interactions with social work case managers. The two research questions guiding this study were: (1) *How are fathers involved with their children?* and (2) *How do fathers describe their interactions with social workers?* Focus groups were used in this study to address these research questions.

4.2 Instrumentation

Regarding construction of the focus group questions, face validity and content validity were determined based on input from those familiar with social work practice and research methodologies. Feedback was obtained from managers of child welfare organizations, child welfare staff persons,

and social science researchers in formal meetings and through structured conversation and dialogue. In conjunction, a review of the literature provided credence to the appropriateness of the two overarching research questions which addressed father involvement and social worker interaction (Bronte-Tinkew & Horowitz, 2010; Coakley, 2013; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010; English et al., 2009; Greif et al., 2011; Hines et al., 2007; National Fatherhood Initiative, 2006; O'Donnell et al., 2005). These research questions guided the development of probing questions used in the focus groups. Specifically, the probes were designed to elicit fathers' opinions about: co-parenting, child support, visitation, discipline, societal expectations of fathers, and how they felt they were treated by social workers.

4.3 Sampling

Since the number of African American children in foster care is still disproportionate to their number in the general population, and they are adversely impacted more than any other ethnic/racial group in child welfare, these researchers primarily sought to highlight the voices of African Americans. Due to the marginalization of many fathers in the child welfare system, this study used purposive sampling to recruit male participants. The sample consisted of 37 fathers over the age of 18 involved in parenting classes at a community-based organization in the San Francisco Bay Area of California. The majority of fathers represented in this sample were African American (n=31). The other focus group participants were Latino (n=2), Asian (n=2), Middle Eastern (n=1), Pacific Islander (n=1), Latino & African American (n=1), and one declined to state his race/ethnicity but did clarify that he did not classify himself as being White, Anglo, or Caucasian.

5. Results

Two qualitative themes emerged from the focus groups: "environment" and "culture". In relation to the *environment*, participants

described a disconnect between their day-to-day life encounters and workers' inability to relate due to cultural backgrounds. The participants shared some of the regular occurrences in their neighborhood that involved physical safety as a concern (e.g., shootings and robberies) and housing-related issues, for example. According to the participants, these types of circumstances in their immediate surroundings did not elicit an empathic response from social workers. The men revealed that social workers often deemed them ineligible for certain local resources (e.g., housing vouchers). The fathers commented that it seemed as though mothers were always given precedence. The participants did not believe there was uniformity in the types of community services offered to them versus women.

As the term *culture* can involve many facets, in this study, culture appeared to be associated the most with prescribed gender roles and socioeconomic status (SES). According to the male participants, female social workers were unable to relate to the struggles and challenges faced by fathers from disenfranchised backgrounds. Participants expressed a lack of compassion by the social workers they had involvement with. The daily obstacles encountered by participants living in low income areas seemed to create additional barriers where inaccurate assumptions perpetuated miscommunication between the fathers and their social workers.

5.1 Father Involvement

The focus groups also captured responses related to the men's perspective on their level of engagement with their children's social activities, the degree to which paternal relatives were involved, and the general public's opinion of fathers who are from ethnic minority backgrounds. There can often be a strain between the maternal and paternal sides of a child's family regardless of whether or not the biological parents are together as a couple. The participants did not describe any discord between their relatives and the family members of the mother of their children.

Comments indicated that paternal relatives were regularly involved in their children's social events (i.e., birthday parties, school activities, and sporting events).

Not only were the responses resounding in agreement that society expects them to be active fathers, but the participants felt they should equally share in the daily responsibilities associated with raising their children. These researchers wanted to understand the participants' definitions of co-parenting. Most described co-parenting as all responsibilities evenly divided between the parents. It appeared that the majority of the participants had lived with the mother of their children at some point. However, many of the participants were confident they could raise their children without living under the same roof as the mother of their children.

Among other focus group responses, there was an apparent division between those who consistently had conflict around where the children lived, how both parents spent money (or did not spend money) on their children, a visitation schedule, and child support. Two of the four focus groups expressed no issues or concerns related to the aforementioned areas; whereas the remaining half described constant discord with the mother of their children. Several of the male participants stated they made important decisions with the mother of their children quite frequently. Discussions with the children's mother related to academic progress varied as did conversations about appropriate methods of discipline. There did not appear to be regular communication between the parents regarding these two specific issues – progress in school, and the best way to correct their child's unwanted behavior.

5.2 Interaction with Social Workers

The focus groups concluded with a discussion related to the participants' experience with social workers. Roughly half of the participants indicated they had not worked with social workers in the past. This information seemed in contrast to the stories that many of the

men shared. Several described having supervised visitation and sessions with a "therapy counselor", but verbalized that they had no dealings with a social worker. Granted, a paraprofessional, college intern, or psychologist may have facilitated the counseling sessions and the monitored child visits, but the participants did not differentiate the professional's academic background or field of study. The focus group members may not have been aware that someone referred to as a case manager, therapist, eligibility worker, mental health clinician, group counselor, or child welfare worker are positions commonly held by someone with an academic degree in social work, or are titles that may be considered synonymous with the role of a professional social worker. Nonetheless, of those who recognized dealings with social workers, they primarily described unequal treatment when compared to the mother of their children. There was an almost even division between fathers who felt important, respected, and valued by their social workers, against those who did not. Additionally, for the few participants who had worked with male social workers, none of them described their experience as having been significantly different than with female social workers. Collectively, the focus group members did not think the gender of the social worker really mattered. Participants noted comments, such as, "the courts are biased against men", and "it doesn't matter if [the] worker is a man or a female, they still are *the system*."

6. Implications

This article has implications for child welfare practice, social work education, and future research studies. In relation to practice, the findings suggest that social workers should continually communicate and maintain connections with paternal relatives. The relationship with the fathers in this study and their extended family was resoundingly strong. Although a case file may initially have limited information on the whereabouts of a father, or written information about the father that is less

than positive, there exists an ethical responsibility to diligently search for and actively include fathers in the case planning process. This type of effort could mean having face-to-face contact with known collateral contacts versus communicating with them via mail or by telephone to ascertain any possible new developments regarding the father. The goal is to maximize key social work principles – rapport building and engagement (Zastrow, 2008). For a paradigm shift to occur, a higher value must be placed on fathers.

The professional training of child welfare workers can occur on the job and through facilitated in-service workshops. However, it is often learned in a formal academic setting. Regarding social work education, a keen understanding of empowerment and the family system requires viewing this dynamic exchange within an environmental context. The worker's behavior interacts with the behaviors of the parents and both influence each other. It may be difficult for emerging practitioners to recognize the impact that a worker's values can have on case outcomes. According to Sheafor and Horejsi (2006), "the worker brings unique personal characteristics to the change process when working with clients" (p. 13). This notion is why it is important to critically explore interpersonal underpinnings and biases in an academic setting where faculty support is available (e.g., field instructors, professors, and academic advisors).

It is exceedingly important for social work educators to assist students in achieving a high level of self-awareness. This is a key skill required for a competent social worker (Zastrow, 2008). Guiding students to a place where they can critically reflect on their biases is helpful to their learning of how to be ethically responsible social workers. Students' interpersonal reservations or, in more colloquial terms, "baggage", can hinder progress when working with parents, namely fathers, on their caseloads. Without astuteness to the self-reflection process, it will be very difficult for a practitioner to empathize with a father's situation or be able to understand what that father

may be thinking and feeling (Zastrow, 2008). Content areas within the social work curriculum (especially generalist practice, field practicum, and human behavior and the social environment) provide a setting and context for depth of personal and professional discovery.

Future studies should focus on involving fathers from ethnic minority backgrounds as these men tend to be excluded in research, yet are often active in the lives of their children whether the system has knowledge of their involvement or not. Focusing research on strategies that specifically highlight the value of fatherhood engagement could prove beneficial in the way public child welfare cases are managed. A paradigm that embodies the best mode to achieve research inclusive of fathers from racially underrepresented backgrounds is by way of participatory action research (PAR). PAR creates a partnership with the key stakeholders (fathers of color) to create joint ownership of the research methodology (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). The traditional experts (social science researchers) would redefine their role as that of partners or consultants (Fleras, 1995). Friere (2002) postulates a strong viewpoint that mirrors the values of PAR, which is "faith in people is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue" (p. 90). To dismantle barriers to communication, one must have confidence that, with appropriate tools and support, even the most disenfranchised persons have the ability to contribute to and ultimately create thorough research studies of sound quality.

In concert with the PAR model, qualitative studies can offer a platform for fathers who feel marginalized and provide a semi-structured opportunity for expression. Some of the male participants in this study felt that their value and worth had been demeaned by society and many governmental institutions. An open forum in a research setting may facilitate stronger communication and understanding between social service workers and fathers from a mid-to-low socioeconomic status. Additionally, focus groups could allow for increased knowledge and sharing

of what a child welfare worker's role is – to empower and support the family system.

7. Conclusion

Paternal involvement, in addition to worker introspection, provides a foundation for equitable child welfare case management. Although federal legislation has been enacted to assist agencies and their workers with addressing parental participation and the racial disparities that directly affect foster children, the enforcement of these laws can be more stringent, thus strengthening accountability. One particular strategy could be for individual states, counties, and local foster family agencies to mandate a minimum number of trainings for novice and experienced workers on the topic of fathers and to promote arenas for continual self-reflection that thwart instances leading to worker bias. Trainings have the capacity to build awareness among staff regarding how to be more inclusive when working with fathers of diverse ethnic backgrounds and can help create cultural shifts in an agency's climate. Being a critical thinker about biases and its influence on case management should be a paramount expectation of any trained social worker.

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Toward a Context-Specific Definition of Social Justice for Social Work: In Search of Overlapping Consensus

Janice A. Gasker, DSW, LCSW
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania
gasker@kutztown.edu

Alice C. Fischer, A.B.
Bryn Mawr College
afischer@brynmawr.edu

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Abstract

While the quest for social justice binds social workers to a common cause, its equivocal vision undermines unity and provokes inefficient—and even contradictory—practice. This paper sheds light on the intersection of widely-accepted social work tenets and multidisciplinary perspectives on justice and social responsibility. In so doing, it provides a theory-driven method for social workers to incorporate client voices into context-specific definitions of social justice.

Keywords: social work values, social justice, Capabilities Perspective

1. Introduction

There is a compelling call in social work to strive toward social justice (McLaughlin, 2011; CSWE, 2008; NASW, 2008; Lundy & van Wormer, 2007; Marsh, 2005; IASSW, 2000). This call is directly driven by the profession's mission to forward "individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society" (NASW, 2008, p. 1). Such a clear, uniform focus appears to bode well for the profession to make a unique and remarkable impact on societal conditions as well as human functioning. However, meaningful practice efforts are driven by presumptions about

the meaning of social justice and its remedies. Such presumptions are often inconsistent among social workers, and that inconsistency has been a long-lamented barrier to progress toward a just society (Solas, 2008; Banerjee, 2005; Barry, 2008; Reisch, 2003; Caputo, 2002; Saleebey, 1990; Hodge, 2010). Social workers with differing ideas about the nature of social justice (and the role of the state in its achievement) may at best dilute their own efforts and at worst strive for change at cross purposes (Bonnycastle, 2011; Granruth, 2009; Reichert, 2001; Strier & Binyamin, 2010; Thyer, 2010). Indeed, there is potential to weaken the profession's attention to this core value (Nichols & Cooper, 2011; Chu, Tsui, & Yan, 2009; Reisch, 2002; Olson, 2007). In short, social work practice, policy and education all suffer in the "absence of conceptual or historical clarity or agreement" on the definition of social justice (Reisch, 2002, p. 349).

To respond, this paper takes one step toward achieving conceptual clarity by addressing a specific gap in the social justice discourse. It responds to the professional blur that exists in the face of theory: social workers have widely drawn on established justice theory but have seldom made focused attempts to explicitly tie elements of established theories to the mission, values and principles of the social work profession.

2. Method

This paper reviews multidisciplinary theories related to justice and social responsibility from an overarching constructivist paradigm. Relevant theories were identified as they emerged in a review of juried social work literature. The literature was located via a search of Social Work Abstracts (June 2012) with “social justice and social work” as key terms in abstracts from 2009-2011. Once sorted by relevance, articles were sorted by date published, with articles selected from 2009-2011. Additional peer reviewed social work literature was located in iterative fashion as sources were referenced in the selected articles. To identify theories of justice, content analysis was conducted within article abstracts to identify a kind of quota sample as described by Ruben and Babbie (2010) in which one attempts to identify representatives of all participant categories. This sampling technique revealed a number of theories of justice. A limitation of the study is that the purposive nature of the sampling method undermines its generalizability.

Once identified, theories of justice were reviewed in seminal forms in the context of a number of what were deemed to be the most authoritative statements of social work perspectives available. Specifically, the context of social work knowledge and values was gleaned from the content analysis for the term “social justice” within relevant portions of the following documents published by the profession’s most widely subscribed organization, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). NASW documents referenced include the *Code of Ethics* (2008), the *Social Work Dictionary* (2003), *Encyclopedia of Social Work* (2012), and *Social Work Speaks* (segments online) (2000). In addition, since there is a single body in the US that certifies social work accreditation in education, the Council on Social Work Education’s *Educational Policy and Standards* (CSWE’s EPAS) is considered here to be an authoritative source (CSWE, 2008). Initial analysis of justice theories was conducted in an iterative fashion using the techniques of grounded

theory (Corbin & Straus, 2008), revealing several relevant themes that were the subject of content analysis in the remaining documents. A codebook was developed as described by Silverman (2006) in which the themes could be tracked for their appearance in the documents. We reviewed many of the documents collaboratively, with some independent review and comparisons serving as checks of inter-rater reliability. Findings related to the meaning of theoretical concepts were triangulated via cross checks within seminal works using the indexes and reviewing selected passages for consistency with our interpretation. The search and find function of Word was used where electronic copies of documents were available.

This work has serious limitations. It is more than possible that influential theories of justice were inadvertently passed over. In addition, the volume and the nature of data analysis attempted here in light of space limitations demands a somewhat cursory review; identification of overlapping elements is preliminary.

Social justice must be understood in its socio-politico-cultural-spiritual context (McCormick, 2003). In an extensive review of the literature, Hodge (2010) points out that oppression itself is a force that changes as power shifts, and that over time, social workers have developed conflicting definitions of social justice that have occasionally blunted the voices of marginalized populations. This being the case, it makes sense that social work has not committed to a static definition of social justice. We would postulate that there might be a middle ground between absolute relativism and absolutism. It is the purpose of this article to examine relevant theory and carry forward the process of clarifying social justice for social workers. Awareness of a variety of perspectives on social justice will inform effective practice.

3. Findings

3.1 Theory Grounded in the Data

Several overlapping conceptual elements emerged from the analysis of justice theories in

the context of social work sources, suggesting a pattern based on a logical extension of Rawls' notion of the "ideal overlapping consensus" (Rawls, 1982). Overlapping consensus in Rawls' theory of justice refers to the potential for a "pluralism of ...incompatible yet reasonable, comprehensive doctrines" to come together through the identification of commonalities to create political justice (Rawls, 1993, p.11). The logical extension of this idea suggests that an overlapping consensus can be identified among elements of social work tenets and accepted definitions of concepts like social justice. An "overlapping element" was operationalized as a concept present in a theory of justice and supported in the definition of social justice in at least two of the authoritative social work sources while being contradicted by none.

The identified themes were human rights, relationship and redistribution. Two of these were ultimately confirmed to be overlapping elements while the third was ultimately eliminated: it was contradicted in a professional authoritative source. Surprisingly, human rights emerged as incongruous with the criteria established for overlapping elements in a social work definition of social justice. (See Table 1.)

4. Human Rights

Given its ubiquitous references in social work literature and justice theories, it might be suggested that the conceptual umbrella for this discussion is human rights. Social work has for some time considered the quest for human rights to be at the foundation of social justice (Reichert, 2001; Chu, Tsui, & Yan, 2009; VanSoest, 1994). Social justice has been linked with human rights in professional literature, in NASW policy statements, i.e. online segments of *Social Work Speaks* (2000), in the *Social Work Dictionary* (2003), the *Encyclopedia of Social Work* (2012), and in the educational standards set forth by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2008). For the social worker, it seems that the universal assurance of human rights may be the goal toward which all conceptions of justice strive.

According to a statement from *Social Work Speaks* (2000) available on the NASW website, human rights "encompasses social justice, but transcends civil and political customs, in consideration of the basic life-sustaining needs of all human beings, without distinction" (NASW, 2000). In peer reviewed literature, the notion of human rights has been pervasive, although its definition has varied to include resources that are needed to prevent shortening a person's

Table 1: Themes from Justice Theory in Social Work Sources*

Theme	Code of Ethics	Social Work Dictionary	Encyclopedia of Social Work	Social Work Speaks	CSWE's EPAS
Human Rights	N/A	S	N/A	C	S (limited)
Relationship	S	S	N/A	N/A	S
Redistribution	S (limited)	N/A	S (limited)	N/A	S

*Key: S=document supports the theme for social work practice; C=document contradicts the theme for social work practice; N/A=no mention or ambiguous support in the source document

life (Braybrooke, 1987), to provide access to goods that include resources to plan for the future and fulfill one's purpose and capabilities (Gewirth, 1978), and to create the state of "being human" (Beverly & McSweeney, 1987). Most definitions build in some way on the relatively comprehensive, widely accepted *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations, 2011), that posits that all individuals should be entitled to dignity in the form of the basic legal, social and economic rights conceptualized as equality, liberty, security and freedom. According to the declaration, the common standard for all humans is access to these rights without discrimination based on "race, sex, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status" (United Nations, 2011, Article 2, para. 1). Of the *Declaration's* 30 articles, one of interest to social workers is Article 25, which calls for "necessary social services" as part of human rights.

NASW sends a mixed message related to human rights. On one hand, the official policy of the social work profession in the US endorses the human rights outlined in the United Nations document and places human rights at the very foundation of practice:

Human rights and social work are natural allies...NASW endorses the fundamental principles set forth in the human rights documents of the United Nations. These include, inter alia, those expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: the right to a standard of living that is adequate for the health and well-being of all people and their families, without exception, and the essential resources to meet such a standard; the right to adequate food and nourishment; the right to adequate clothing; the right to adequate housing; the right to basic health care; the right to an education; the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability,

widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood beyond one's control; the right to necessary social services; and the right not to be subjected to dehumanizing punishment...the civil and political rights of all people, including indigenous populations... that the rights of people take precedence over social customs when those customs infringe on human rights...[and] that women's rights are human rights. (NASW, 2000, Policy Statement, para. 2-4).

Following this ringing endorsement, however, NASW becomes much less clear. The same policy statement provides the following caveat: "Although individual social workers, the International Federation of Social Workers, the International Association of Schools of Social Work (United Nations, 1993), and NASW's 1990 International Policy on Human Rights have all acknowledged the importance of a global human rights perspective, the fact is *the profession does not fully use human rights as a criterion with which to evaluate social work policies, practice, research, and program priorities*" (NASW, 2000, para. 9, italics added). The meaning of "a global human rights perspective" is unclear. A word search of the NASW Code of Ethics reveals that the phrase "human rights" does not exist in the document (2008).

The meaning and commitment to human rights is perhaps less ambiguous but certainly less ambitious in social work educational policy. While the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) provides latitude for educational programs to establish their own identities, it does provide identification of minimal elements of human rights and a requirement that all social work graduates recognize that: "[e]ach person, regardless of position in society, has basic human rights, such as freedom, safety, privacy, an adequate standard of living, health care, and education" and that "[s]ocial workers recognize the global interconnections of oppression and

are knowledgeable about theories of justice and strategies to promote human and civil rights” (CSWE, 2008, p. 5).

In conclusion, it appears that human rights cannot be identified as part of a concrete conceptual foundation on which social work can build knowledge of social justice. It seems the most that can be said is that the profession is moving toward a making a commitment to some set of human rights, an articulation that would likely include such concepts as freedom, safety, an adequate standard of living, health care and education. Professional will appears to be strong toward such a commitment, as evidenced by the policy statement that notes “[where] there is a serious questioning of the responsibility of society to ensure that peoples’ civil, political, cultural, social, and economic needs are met, social workers should be absolutely clear about where they stand” (NASW, 2000, Policy Statement, para. 2-4). Yet the situation is such that the same policy statement reveals a lack of progress: “NASW supports the *adoption* of human rights as a foundation principle upon which all of social work theory and applied knowledge rests...[italics added]” (para. 5). The most current available version of the *Social Work Encyclopedia* entry on human rights (Wronka, 2012) echoes this exact phrase related to the future adoption of human rights as a foundation principle in social work. It is not surprising that a social worker might wonder “How can we reconcile traditional ideas of social justice with the emerging interest in human rights?” (Reisch, 2003, p. 348). The analysis below reveals that the answer to this question lies in a comprehensive understanding of theories of justice along with a commitment to the value of self-determination.

5. Theories of Justice

5.1 Overlapping Elements

Two basic tenets emerge from consideration of both justice theories and social work practice: relationship and redistribution. The intersection of relationship and redistribution in contemporary theories of justice within the context

of social work authoritative sources are presented together from utilitarian, conservative and liberal egalitarian perspectives.

6. Relationship and Redistribution

Many theories of justice, including those considered here, hold that justice occurs in relationship and is the calculation of who owes whom what and how much. Whether the calculation of that debt is based on “need, merit, contribution, talent, or some mixture thereof,” differs, and that debt can only be reconciled once individuals determine who they are to each other, or what “right relationship” might look like (McCormick, 2003, p.8; Finn & Jacobson, 2003).

What might be called meta-theories of justice include considerations of relationships and debt in some form. These fundamental considerations have led to many theories: they are often characterized as falling into one of three broad categories.

7. Perspectives on Justice

Three major perspectives, or what Rawls (1993) would call comprehensive doctrines, of justice are considered below. Each of these doctrines examine the meaning and significance of justice, as well as how just behaviors are identified, created and carried out. As suggested above, it might be said that a central question among these perspectives is that of a society’s perception of the relationships between its members. In other words, these perspectives consider what each member of a society is perceived to owe the other; individuals whose debts are cancelled out may be considered to be in “right” (or just) relationships (McCormick, 2003; Poe, 2007). Primarily, then, right relationships might be thought of as concerned to a great degree with resources and their distribution within the society.

8. Utilitarian perspectives

According to utilitarian perspectives of justice, justice consists of action that produces the greatest good for the greatest number of people,

where “one person’s happiness...is counted for exactly as much as another’s” (Mills, 1956, cited in McCormick, 2008, p. 14). The operant term above is *action*. Mills, an influential utilitarian theorist, suggested that the ideal of common interests is not an automatic, peaceful development in society. Instead, a “harmony of interests” had to be created through purposeful reform (Mills, 1956). Neo-Marxist thought builds on this utilitarian theory of holistic social equality through the articulation of the idea that selfish and aggressive competition causes social and economic injustice (Wright, 1978). The emphasis in utilitarian justice lies on social equity, not individual equality. In other words, the focus is on recognizing that the playing field is not level and expecting the privileged to work to smooth it. Regarding relationships among people and the distribution of their resources, the utilitarian perspective assumes an ideal encompassing unconditional, unmitigated responsibility of Marx’s “haves” toward equity in outcome for the “have nots.”

Likewise, action and unconditional advocacy seem to come together in the *Dictionary of Social Work* definition of social justice: “...an ideal condition in which all members of a society have the same rights, protections, opportunities, obligations and social benefits...[it] entails advocacy to confront discrimination, oppression, and institutional inequities” (Barker, 2003, p. 405). However, the *Dictionary* goes on to suggest that to achieve this inclusive equity, the social worker is likely to view individual equality and freedoms to be to a degree sacrificed in the unbounded redistribution of resources for the greater good (Barker, 2003). The *Code of Ethics* is similarly cautious in its support of radical equity at the expense of equality: while the ethical principle “Social workers challenge social injustice” states unambiguously that social workers “pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people,” it also suggests that the social worker’s social change efforts should be much

milder than radical redistribution, providing such examples as: “[to] seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity...[and] ensure access to needed information, services and resources” (NASW, 1996, p. 5). To this point, philosopher Bernard Williams observed utilitarianism’s failure to realize personal integrity, where an individual’s life and actions are his own. A similar observation has been noted by Nussbaum, (2011) who goes on to suggest that individual agency--one might call it empowerment--is a central tenet of social work (Nussbaum, 2011).

It is clear that relationship and responsibility figure significantly in social work depictions of social justice. However, the radical redistribution of resources that is commonly considered to be consistent with utilitarian theories of justice appears to be contradicted in the *Code of Ethics* and will not be considered to be a common element of a social work definition. Consequently, social relationship based on the unconditional responsibility of some members of society toward others is incongruous with social work tenets as well; this type of relationship inhibits basic equality and empowerment.

9. Conservative perspectives

Equality, freedom and an inherent respect for individual empowerment are the central concerns of the conservative perspective on justice. It has been suggested, however, that some NASW publications have specifically identified conservative political thoughts to be in opposition to the obligation of social work to advance social justice (Thyer, 2010). This is likely due to conservative advocacy that centers on limiting federal services, like the development of a welfare state, because those who are taxed to distribute their earnings to others are not considered to be free. Thus, in the conservative view, income redistribution, especially as mandated by government, is not socially just. Conservatives also argue that federal welfare programs perpetuate social inequality by inadvertently perpetuating

dependence on government services—which are costly to the taxpayer. On the other hand, Thyer (2010) makes the case that conservative ideology is not necessarily in conflict with social work values, stating “conservative social workers believe that adhering to their principles results in a more socially just world via the creation of more socially just programs and policies” (p. 272). Conservative ideology does not avoid remedies for social ills, but rather reliance on the for-profit and voluntary sectors for those services. Since the radical, systematic redistribution eschewed by conservatives appears also to be contradicted in social work’s authoritative documents, the fundamental question for social workers to consider is whether the conservative ideology values relationship and social responsibility (i.e. redistribution) as these are expressed in the profession’s authoritative documents.

Of primary importance is the question of responsibility for redistribution. While a conservative argument that “equitable distribution” may violate social justice for the “forgotten men and women” whose goods are distributed, CSWE standards emphasize the need for “society” to redistribute:

Each person, regardless of position in society, has basic human rights, such as freedom, safety, privacy, an *adequate standard of living, health care, and education*. Social workers recognize the global interconnections of oppression and are knowledgeable about theories of justice and strategies to promote human and civil rights. Social work incorporates social justice practices in organizations, institutions, and society to ensure that these basic human rights are distributed equitably and without prejudice (CSWE, 2008, p. 5, emphasis added)

Additionally, the profession’s mission to “help meet the basic human needs of all people”

(NASW, 2008) directs our attention away from those whose income and influence is most likely to be redistributed through social justice practice and toward those who may need help in acquiring basic human needs. However valuable the conservative argument may be, its emphasis on social relationships built primarily on freedom rather than responsibility seems to be at odds with the social work mission, values, and educational standards.

10. Liberal egalitarian perspectives

Based on these analyses we can conclude that neither utilitarian nor conservative perspectives on social justice are consistent with social work authoritative documents. Instead, social work has looked to liberal egalitarian models of justice. The *Encyclopedia* suggests that of the various theories of justice, the liberal egalitarian model, particularly as articulated by Rawls, has appealed to social work for its focus on redistribution as a moral obligation in the context of individual equality in basic rights and opportunities (Finn & Jacobson, 2012). In fact, Rawls is widely considered to be one of the most influential theorists in social work (Banerjee, 2005; Reisch, 2002; VanSoest, 1995). His liberal egalitarianism centers on the concept of the social contract in which fair terms of social cooperation are agreed to by free, equal citizens. For Rawls, the social contract can be developed only under “appropriate conditions... [where] free and equal persons must have equal bargaining advantages [and]...threats of force and coercion, deception and fraud cannot be present“ (Rawls, 1982, p. 52). Put simply, a definition of “justice as fairness” is a social contract in which individual rights and protection of the marginalized are both prioritized. Fundamental questions like responsibility for environmental protection in a free society will occur within an “overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines” (Rawls, 1982, p. 182). In modern democracy, pluralism, in terms of what free and equal citizens regard to be fair terms of social cooperation, naturally

develops. For Rawls, these comprehensive doctrines tend to be reasonable and consequently an overlapping consensus may be identified in which a social contract is developed where political conceptions are shared. In a revision of his seminal work, Rawls (1993) focused on the political, stating that a theory of justice is unworkable without “the structure and content of a political conception [i.e. government] that can gain the support of an overlapping consensus” (p. 11).

Social work has embraced the Rawlsian conception of justice, probably because of his basic principle of redistribution known as the Difference Principle (Banerjee, 2005). The difference principle is built on the ideal that government provides a scheme of equal basic liberties, but any social and economic inequalities are to be “to the greatest benefit to the least advantaged” (p. 45). However, the fit between the theory and social work values seems less ideal under scrutiny. Rawls has been seen to be at odds with social work values in that those who are most in need seem to be entirely outside his concern. Persons who do not contribute, who have not been able to participate in the provision or development of commodities (i.e. adults who are unemployed), have no claim on community resources. Thus, his is a theory of distribution, not of allocation (Banerjee, 2005). Given social work’s mandate of concern for all people, what is surprising is the lack of critique of Rawls as his work continues to be used, at times almost exclusively, to support social work practice and policy analysis (Banerjee, 2005; Reisch, 2002).

11. Capabilities perspective

One reason Rawls does not attend to those who do not contribute to the development of commodities is ironically that he is concerned with “fairness,” (Rawls, 1982). Sen (1992) has recognized that all theories of social justice are concerned with the equal distribution of something: to the conservative, liberty; to the utilitarian, utilities, or resources; to the egalitarian, welfare. According to Sen, each of these

approaches contains a fatal flaw due to the simple fact of human diversity: “It is precisely because of such diversity that the insistence on egalitarianism in one field requires the rejection of egalitarianism in another” (Sen, 1992, p. xi). Sen’s (1992) suggestion to amend theories on social justice is to account for individual capabilities as well as the impact of individual values on the achievement of those capabilities. Thus, Sen’s Capabilities Perspective highlights two significant factors: the importance of human diversity and empowerment, two concepts consistent with the social work core value related to the dignity and worth of individuals (NASW, 2008, p. 5).

Building on Sen’s seminal work, Nussbaum (2011) maintains that the Capabilities Perspective must be extended to basic needs for all people and beyond basic needs into a consideration of the nature of a life with dignity. As a theory of justice, the Capabilities Perspective is consistent with all-inclusive service to others: its egalitarian focus on justice as fairness is tempered by obligation with special consideration of dignity and worth. Human dignity and worth are central to determining quality of life, or more basically, the Capabilities Perspective’s recurring mantra “what each person is able to do and to be.”

The two primary capabilities in this approach are internal capabilities and combined capabilities. Internal capabilities are traits and abilities that are developed in relation to the social, economic, familial and political environment. Examples include: personality, intellectual and emotional capacities, health, learning, skills and perception. These capabilities constitute primary and secondary socialization in addition to innate characteristics and make up a person’s individuality. While these are important to an individual’s development, the real source of justice and human dignity comes from combined capabilities: internal capabilities plus the social, economic, familial and political environment. Through combined capabilities, individuals can use internal capabilities within specific contexts to develop to what they identify to be their fullest

potential. The concept of combined capabilities provides a measure of government responsibility. It is the responsibility of any just government, according to Nussbaum, to provide individuals access to these capabilities; that is, governments' responsibilities go beyond removing barriers to opportunity and instead actively guarantee access to opportunity (Nussbaum, 2011).

A society may encourage the development of internal capabilities but at the same time limit combined capabilities--an example of this would be a society that prepares people to be good voters, but denies them legal rights to participate in politics. Similarly, "social, political, familial, and economic conditions may prevent people from choosing to function in accordance with developed internal capabilities" (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 30). While social, political and economic conditions may temper the choices individuals make about using their capabilities, the very fact they have agency is important.

The focus is on choice or freedom, holding that the crucial good societies should be promoting for their people is a set of opportunities, or substantial freedoms, which people then may or may not exercise; the choice is theirs. The society thus commits itself to respect for people's power of self-definition and ascribes an urgent task to government and public policy to improve the quality of life for all people as defined by their capabilities. As a result, the Capabilities Perspective's relativism stresses choice for the individual, a primary focus of the social work profession that Rawls overlooks. Self-definition and choice in the context of relationship requires equality in communication: one has to express one's choices in an atmosphere conducive to dialogue.

The importance of human relationship is identified in the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) as a core professional value. Moreover, relationship is conceptualized as a vehicle for change, with practitioners engaging others as "partners in the helping process," (NASW, p. 6). Thus, partnership as a fundamental characteristic of relationship;

partnership implies relationship among equals. *The Social Work Dictionary* (2003) also presents the theme of relationship as indispensable along with mutuality as an inseparable component. The definition of relationship states that relationship is in part a "mutual emotional exchange" and that it is necessary to "create the working and helping relationship" (Barker, 2003, p. 365). Mutuality forms a central role in the social work conception of "right relationship."

For both Sen and Nussbaum, equal access to capabilities is paramount to social justice, and the recognition of agency and individualism carries over into welfare policy. The Capabilities Perspective sees poverty as deprivation of capabilities and holds government accountable in distributing resources:

People have differing needs for resources if they are to attain a similar level of functioning, and they also have different abilities to convert resources into functionings. Some of the pertinent differences are physical: a child needs more protein than an adult for healthy physical functioning, and a pregnant or lactating woman needs more nutrients than a nonpregnant woman. A sensible public policy would not give equal nutrition-related resources to all, but would (for example) spend more on the protein needs of children, since the sensible policy goal is not just spreading some money around but giving people the ability to function (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 57).

As suggested in the quote above, individual needs are a major priority; they do not determine access to resources--everyone should have access. This universal access departs from Rawls: where he rejects those that do not contribute to society (e.g. adults who are unemployed) capability perspectivists give voice to them and recognize

their equal qualification for and different use of resources--without a value judgment (Nussbaum, 2011).

Content analysis of authoritative documents in social work reveals congruence with this theory. The *Encyclopedia of Social Work* points out that Morris (2002) and others have recognized the empowerment focus inherent in the Capabilities Perspective. The *Code's* conceptualization of relationship as partnership and mutuality is a clear connection (NASW, 2008). Likewise, the *Dictionary's* call to advocacy toward inclusive equity tempered by concern toward individual equality and freedoms speaks to the need to recognize diversity when considering response to need (Barker, 2003). Taking together social work tenets with the principles of the capabilities perspective reveals particular qualities of relationship and redistribution to be overlapping elements in a social work-specific definition of social justice.

These two overlapping elements suggest that for social work, social justice requires relationships based upon unconditional responsibility tempered by protection of each person's capabilities. Thus, redistribution is conditional but not judgmental. Each person, regardless of the perceived value of his or her contributions to society, is to receive the resources needed to meet what he or she believes to be their fullest potential. All are responsible to contribute resources, but not to the extent that their own capabilities are blunted. One's responsibility to others is universal, yet finite. It ends, not where the other person's social contribution ends, but where one's own needs are not met.

The identification of these two essential elements holds a number of benefits for the profession. Relationship and redistribution as they are conceptualized here can initiate a generic base for the beginnings of a shared understanding of social justice that can apply in various practice settings. First, social work tenets and the Capabilities Perspective share the conviction that redistribution of resources is necessary, albeit

tempered by concern for the empowerment of both the giver and the receiver of the resources. In addition, it is clear that relationship is central to a social work understanding of social justice. Interaction, in the context of relationship, may be used to conceptualize justice (Dessel, 2011). Relationship that is mutual suggests the importance of pluralism in identifying local meanings of justice as it is conceptualized by vulnerable populations as well as other groups. The mindset behind the acceptance of this potential has been called "epistemic pluralism" (Hodge, 2010, p. 202). As Olson (2007) suggests, a just world is created when the voices of many groups share dialogue, claims to truth are open to interpretation, and the dialogue between members of communities can transform communities and make the "just world become that much more visible" (p. 56).

12. Discussion: Moving Forward

There is little doubt that a static definition of social justice will not serve to meet its own ends. Further, this work has demonstrated that current authoritative documents in the profession of social work do not fully support a single utilitarian, conservative or egalitarian/Rawlsian perspective of justice. It is important to emphasize that the individuality and environment-specific components of the Capabilities Perspective meet the necessity for flexibility in social work practice. However, an understanding of all of these conceptualizations of justice is necessary for context-specific practice to occur.

This understanding may drive practice, research and policy development that focuses on seeking out the views of representatives of all groups as a method for understanding social justice in a given setting (Solinger, Fox & Irani, 2008). As Strier and Binyamin (2010) have suggested, knowledge about oppression should come from dialogue between workers, clients and others, with "the epistemology of anti-oppressive knowledge grounded on the recognition of practice and experience as main sources of knowledge

development” (p. 1971). As voices are only heard through engagement, the concept of mutual relationship reminds practitioners that a static definition of social justice superimposed on a practice setting is as intrusive as imposing any other value.

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Social Work and Social Media: Reconciling Ethical Standards and Emerging Technologies

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Kimberly Strom-Gottfried, Ph.D., LISW
School of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
stromgot@email.unc.edu

Mary Shannon Thomas, MSW, LICSW
Eliot Community Human Services, Lexington, MA
mthomas@eliotchs.org

Hillary Anderson, MSW, LCSW
heanderson02@yahoo.com

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Abstract

The rapid and pervasive arrival of online networking through blogs, chatrooms and sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn create unique challenges in the application of familiar ethical concepts. Client privacy, professional boundaries, social worker self-disclosure, conflicts of interest, and informed consent all take on new forms and complexities in light of technological advances. This article introduces the prominent features of social networking and the ethical tensions they can create for helping professionals. It concludes with guidance on translating clinical and ethical standards for a changing electronic environment.

Keywords: ethics, social networking, Facebook, confidentiality, self-disclosure, boundaries, conflicts of interest, online, privacy, social work

1. Introduction

Networking is a familiar concept to social workers and other professionals. Historically,

individuals have used their colleagues, alumni associations, and social circles to share personal news and ideas, show photos of vacations and life events, organize around shared interests or causes, and seek assistance with job searches or problem-solving. The rapid and wide-ranging emergence of online networking (ON) has taken personal networking to a broader and potentially more complex level. This presents an array of challenges as individuals navigate the etiquette of using these venues in their private lives to share information, connect to people with like interests, and seek support and advice. The professional challenges of ON are also profound. Suddenly personal and professional data, opinions, problems, and experiences can be spread more rapidly and more widely. Once shared, such information may take on a life of its own, and be difficult if not impossible to erase, even if harmful or untrue (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Yet the vastness of online networks can yield positive results that are constructive for

social work practice. For example, an expert in domestic violence may be able to link research findings to a breaking news story through a blog, thereby increasing professional and public understanding of the issues involved. A clinician in a remote region may pose an ethical or clinical dilemma and receive immediate and varied perspectives for resolution. A caseworker in need of resources may post the request on Twitter.

Conversely, online networks can pose vexing problems—a query about addressing a difficult clinical issue may reveal too much client information or result in sarcastic, unhelpful, or even harmful suggestions. A blog posting may incur the ire of an employer who finds the worker’s perspective on a social issue at odds with the agency’s views. Further, ON increases the social worker’s visibility and exposure, and also that of his or her clients. Should professionals “friend” clients, former clients, or supervisees? Should organizations “Google search” prospective employees, clients, or interns? How should practitioners handle information learned through online contacts with students, clients, or supervisees?

Clearly, the emergence of ON demands renewed attention to long-held ethical standards on confidentiality, conflicts of interest, competence, and professional boundaries. This article reviews the features of common forms of ON and identifies areas where ON can create tension with prevailing ethical standards. The article distills the extant literature and concludes with recommendations for professionals in direct and administrative roles to effectively and ethically engage in ON.

2. Understanding Online Networking

Building on traditional forms of networking, ON includes a variety of methods by which people can electronically share information, opinions, music, photos, interests, articles, and other content. Some forms of ON are monitored or screened; a Twitterer or blogger can decide who will receive his/her posts, access to Facebook statements or photos can be limited to approved

friends, consumer feedback can only be posted by people who register with the particular site. Other sites and individuals may allow open or anonymous access to the material posted. The number, type, features, uses and misuses of ON are exponential. However, certain forms are well-established, with durable features and predictable applications and problems. Facebook, blogs, Twitter, YouTube, podcasts, and rating sites, and their salient features, are discussed below.

2.1 Facebook

Arguably the best-known and most used of a variety of social networking sites, Facebook has over 1 billion users worldwide, at least half of whom log on in any given day. Once registered, Facebook users seek out others to “friend” and respond to “friend requests” by “confirming” the request, or “ignoring” (rejecting) it. Confirmations are relayed to the new friend while rejections are not. Once registered, users can post information to their profiles, including birthdates, relationship status, religious or political affiliations, interests, favorite books, movies, music genres, etc. Users can play games (such as Candy Crush or Bingo Bash) that facilitate interaction with other gamers. They can also sign petitions, post pictures, offer status and location updates, follow causes, organizations or products they endorse, and register opinions on an array of issues large and small by signaling whether they “like” it.

In 2012, Facebook reported that the site was processing more than 500 terabytes of data each day. As a point of comparison, the printed collection of the Library of Congress amounts to about 10 terabytes (Costine, 2012). Other ON sites may be more narrowly targeted (Myspace has been rebranded as a site for musicians to share music, LinkedIn targets professional networking, CaringBridge coordinates information sharing for people who are ill) though they offer similar features and controls.

Public agencies, nonprofits, hospitals, universities, and foundations often have Facebook pages to attract “friends” and “fans” to their

services or causes. These are part of integrated marketing strategies, linked to the organization's website and other ON activities, intended to familiarize the public with issues, cultivate donors, rally advocates, generate good will, broadcast positive stories, and attract referrals, applicants, employees, and volunteers (Satterfield, 2006).

2.2 Blogs

Short for "weblogs," blogs are analogous to op-ed pieces found in the traditional newspaper; video blogs are referred to as "vlogs." Bloggers write recurring or occasional posts on topics of interest. Blogs encompass the fields of health, travel, politics, entertainment, sports, business, and an array of other topics. Posts can be spurred by breaking news, frequently asked questions, gossip, emerging research findings, or a simple opportunity to keep an issue or entity in the public eye. Organizations may sponsor blogs to assure regular posts on issues or services. Individuals may blog about their personal interests (French cooking, a trip, the joys of parenting, progression of an illness) and professional experiences (career transitions, life in graduate school, working with people who are homeless). Access to blogs may be limited by the author, or made available for posting to other ON sites. Additionally, comments in response to blog posts may be monitored, unmonitored, anonymous, or identified. Commenters may also engage with each other, resulting in a conversation of sorts called a "thread."

2.3 Twitter

Twitter is a site for "microblogging." It has many of the same features and uses as a blog, but posts (known as "tweets") are limited to 140 characters. Twitter users may limit their followers, accepting only those they know. Others, like celebrities or public officials, may automatically allow anyone who wishes to "follow" their posts. As with friends on Facebook, some people seek prominence in accumulating as many followers as possible. Some tweets are insipid ("I ate risotto

for dinner"), some are adept at rallying activists ("Call your Senator about amendment X. They will be voting today and we need your support"), and others make information distribution viral and uncontrollable ("I just got a lay-off notice and more are to follow" or "Jeff and I were just in a car accident and he's injured"). A popular feature of Twitter is the ability to "retweet" information. This involves taking a user's original message ("Call your Senator about Prop X!") and reposting it through another user's Twitter feed. The "retweet" is a popular tool for making something viral, as it allows for increased circulation of the original poster's message. This has been particularly effective when a celebrity or other known figure chooses to retweet information from an average user, as it exponentially increases the possible number of readers beyond the original poster's own followers.

2.4 YouTube

YouTube is the best known of a variety of video sharing services. Like blogs and Twitter, YouTube facilitates the sharing of user-generated content or consumer generated media (CGM), in this case, video, rather than written material. Users can provide links to other videos (clips from television programs, sports highlights, concerts, lectures, home movies), share videos and links they have received, and rate and comment on those posted. A quick scan of YouTube reveals the breadth of video content, from archives of historic world events, to bulldogs on skateboards, to spring break revelry. Videos may be carefully scripted and constructed or shot with a cell phone unbeknownst to the subjects involved. They can be used to entertain, educate, humiliate, expose, or incite action (in response to election fraud or patient maltreatment, for example). YouTube videos can also be used for education—demonstrating the features of mania or the steps to repair a faucet. YouTube is searchable by key words and objectionable content can be addressed via a "flag" option on the site that alerts YouTube to content that violates the "Community

Guidelines.” Content that is deemed pornographic, too violent, or abusive to people or animals is considered inappropriate for the site (Google, n.d.).

2.5 Podcasts

Podcasts are audio or video files that are stored and distributed episodically or on request. For example, radio or television programs may be saved and reviewed as podcasts, as can lectures from faculty, agency information sessions, staff development workshops, or consumer education about medications and services, etc. Through devices such as the iPod and smart phones, podcasts are easily transportable, allowing users to listen to content while traveling, waiting in line, working on other tasks, exercising, or just tuning in incrementally whenever time allows. Some journals and professional associations offer continuing education credits for listening to relevant podcasts and correctly answering a handful of post-test questions. A disadvantage of archived material is that the content may be dated, leading users to cite examples, quote research findings, or utilize intervention techniques that have since become discredited or obsolete.

2.6 Rating sites

ON creates abundant opportunities for accountability as archived statements may be retrieved and compared when an individual takes on a new role or when novel issues emerge. Online sites also facilitate consumer-generated critiques, through community bulletin boards and specific sites such as Rate My Professor, Angie’s List, Yelp, and Rate My Treatment. Each of these venues uses particular systems to allow users to evaluate services, products, and providers through rating scales (accessibility, service, price, easiness in grading, “hotness”) and open commentary. Sites are frequented by past users who wish to share positive or negative feedback and by prospective users who want input in selecting services or in preparing for those to whom they have been assigned. While sites typically require free registration for access, ratings are

usually anonymous, and thus may draw extreme or derogatory posts. Likewise, ratings may be skewed by users who are themselves the subject of the evaluation (the agency whose workers go online to give the agency high marks) or by those whose experiences are particularly positive or negative, thus warranting the time and effort to offer feedback. Such sites typically offer space for subjects to dispute ratings or comments, though the energy and attention required to do so may not mitigate damage done by the post, whether true or not.

The salient feature in all forms of ON is the presence of *latent ties* (Haythornthwaite, 2005). Concomitantly the greatest risk and benefit of ON, networks grow exponentially once one person’s friends are linked to their friends and the friends of friends (FOFs). This spider web of contacts is part of the power of ON in getting the word out, expanding the reach of organizations and individuals beyond a narrow circle of known contacts, supporters, colleagues and customers. Digital channels such as Twitter and Facebook are credited for assisting the Arab Spring as activists were able to rapidly disseminate plans and photos, coordinate activities, and communicate with the globe (Wolman 2013).

For better and for worse, imbedded in these latent networks may be individuals for whom the original information was never intended. An appeal for a kidney transplant makes its way to a match, who might not have heretofore considered organ donation. A faculty member’s complaint about his class makes its way to the students’ parents via friends of his friends on Facebook. A clinician’s vacation video may trouble her clients and supervisors alike. A clip from a podcast lecture on genetic testing and fetal selection may raise the ire of disability rights groups and anti-abortion activists, generating intense commentary and criticism for the speaker, who is at a loss for individualized avenues of clarification.

Not only is the breadth of exposure a feature of ON, but so is its speed. Videos, stories, and posts that are salacious, heartrending, or humorous may “go viral” and be widely

distributed through an array of media such as email and text messages. Such efficiency can be essential when rallying supporters to resist budget cuts or program changes, when raising matching funds by a deadline, when calling for a public demonstration, or when sending emergency alerts on hurricanes, shooting incidents, or other community emergencies. Viral stories can also create social capital by fostering conversation around the proverbial water cooler, even if the shared experience is as banal as a dancing baby video or as sobering as footage from a plane crash. On Twitter in particular, commentary is often concurrent with the event being reviewed. This can be advantageous (as when Twitterers check facts as statements are made in a presidential debate) or amusing (as when fashion commentary is provided during a televised awards ceremony). Rolling commentary can be destructive, as well, in the form of “tweckling” (Parry, 2009) when audience members tweet among themselves about the shortcomings of their presenter.

A third feature to consider in evaluating ON is the nature of impression management. Individuals exist in private, personal and public spheres, with each domain demanding successively greater exposure to those outside the individual. The same is true of organizations. Typically, individuals and organizations censor the information that is shared among the three levels, differentiating between those things that stay “within the family” from those that are shared with a circle of trusted others and those that are made public. Particularly with their “public selves,” individuals and organizations are mindful of the images they construct and the messages they send and craft their messages accordingly—in their advertising, communications, dress, and so forth. The anonymity, democracy and spontaneity of electronic communication may lead to “online disinhibition” in which users are less discreet than they would be in face-to-face transactions (Suler, 2010, p. 31). Conversely, users may also become hyperaware of their communications and take image-crafting to the extreme, becoming

deceptive in the online personae they construct. In creating a profile, the user can literally “type oneself into being” (Sundén, 2003, p. 3). Younger users may deliberately create images that are more edgy, sexy, or threatening than they are in real life. Bloggers may become more provocative to draw in readers or encourage re-posting. Professionals may overstate their services and efficacy.

Beyond distortions in the public image, ON blurs the boundaries between the private, personal, and public spheres. Information intended to be kept “in house” such as a program’s financial problems or a glitch in patient care can suddenly be released to the media and the blogosphere with the click of a mouse. Videos from the New Year’s Eve party or photos from the staff retreat may surface in social networking or other content sharing sites. Opinionated blogs written during college are examined as part of the hiring process for a new administrative or clinical position. The issues that can emerge when information intended for one context or sphere arises in another leads to the fourth and final consideration in the use of ON, the truncated nature of the communications involved.

While some ON communications may occur in “real time” through tweets or chat rooms where individuals exchange information as if in live conversation, most ON is asynchronous and messages may be received at a different time and in different circumstances than when they were sent. Further, ON messages are often offered without benefit of tone or context and are thus exceedingly vulnerable to misinterpretation. Consider the university professor whose Facebook post, “Had a good day today, didn’t want to kill even one student. :-)...” resulted in sanctions, suspension, and shunning from students and colleagues (Miller, 2010). Even with a smiley emoticon, the message lacked any associated tone of fatigue, irony, humor, or discouragement that might have blunted the message. It was circulated outside a circle of friends who would typically charitably consider the source, and it was interpreted in a climate of heightened sensitivity

as a result of acts of campus violence both by and toward faculty. Messages such as this, when communicated, don't simply evaporate into the air, but live on indefinitely online, allowing the damage to accrue. And, beyond the mere absence of context, the abridged nature of ON communications (chats, posts, comments, tweets, etc.) creates hazards of superficiality, insensitivity, and incivility as perspective and detail are lost (Suler, 2010).

Clearly, even when ON is used as intended, the various forms offer both opportunities and perils for professionals and organizations. In the context of ethical standards, ON and the associated features have particular implications for client privacy, professional boundaries and informed consent.

3. Privacy

The assurance of privacy is fundamental to the helping relationships in social work and other professions. The conditions for maintaining client privacy are typically spelled out in initial sessions and informed consent is obtained to indicate that the client understands the scope of confidentiality. These limits vary somewhat by settings, state statutes and licensure standards, but generally they permit disclosure of information if needed to obtain payment, assure the safety of the client or another person, or address suspected child abuse. The NASW Code of Ethics also suggests that clinicians limit the amount of information they seek from clients to that which is necessary for service provision. And, when services are provided to clients in groups or family services, professionals should inform members of the expectations about keeping confidentiality, while recognizing that they cannot "guarantee that all participants will honor such agreements" (NASW, 2008, 1.07.f).

Social workers are also admonished to avoid disclosing identifying information when discussing clients for consultation, teaching, or training purposes "unless the client has consented to disclosure of confidential information" (NASW, 2008, 1.07q). "Identifying information" goes

beyond revealing the client's name or image; people may also be identified by location, occupation, age, ethnicity, or salient case features.

The emergence of ON creates a number of implications for upholding privacy standards. Participating in clients' social networks, as a Facebook "friend," Twitter "follower," or CaringBridge "supporter" exposes the social worker to information the client may not intend to share or that the professional is ill-equipped to address. For example, party photos may demonstrate a client's failure to maintain sobriety, or "status updates" may reveal truancy. If a client posts about despair, acute illness, or suicidal intent on a Friday evening, what is the professional's obligation and process for responding? Similar challenges arise when relating via ON with former clients. What if the worker only occasionally checks ON sites? Has the client or former client been led to believe that there will be ongoing connection and the sites can be used as a way to reach out to the therapist outside service hours? Online relationships among members or among a group or therapeutic community may affect group dynamics, client vulnerability and the emergence of destructive sub-groups.

How should information received through ON (whether shared by the client intentionally or inadvertently) be addressed in treatment (Grohol, 2008; Guseh, 2009)? Some proponents of ON relationships with clients suggest that the more information received, the better that services can be delivered, and that ON can be used to detect unmet needs, treatment noncompliance, or fraudulent receipt of benefits. Whatever advantages are accrued by such knowledge, they come at the expense of obscuring the social worker's role (detective or counselor?), eroding the trust that is essential for client change, and damaging the integrity that is at the core of social work values. This may pose a particular challenge if the information gleaned through ON is incongruent with the client's reporting to the social worker. A client who is working on recovery from substance abuse and who reports sustained

sobriety may well be taken at his or her word; but if the same client posts a status or sends a Tweet that indicates use or abuse (“OMG, so high right now #chronic#420#blazeit”), which report has more validity?

A similar challenge exists for employers who use ON sites as a form of screening for prospective employees (Jones, Schuckman & Watson, n.d.). Employers may argue that Google or Facebook searches are analogous to background checks and that they constitute efficient and prudent steps in employee selection. However, ON searches may violate nondiscrimination protections in hiring, yield information involving mistaken identities, or convey erroneous and irrelevant information (Clark, 2010).

Workers who use ON to connect with friends, seek consultation, blow off steam, advertise their programs, or expand public understanding of social problems may put clients' privacy and dignity at risk by sharing information that is too detailed, is inappropriate for the venue, or which reflects negatively on the social worker, the profession or the work setting.

While professionals may be tempted to refute unflattering, inaccurate, or distorted information online, it can be difficult to do so without appearing overly defensive and effectively bringing additional attention to the dispute. The protections for client and employee privacy apply even when there may be ON provocation by a terminated worker or another disaffected critic in an ON rating service, blog commentary, or networking post.

4. Professional Boundaries

Boundaries refer to the norms that protect, ground, and guide the helping relationship. They mark a social, physical, and psychological space around the client that is protected from inappropriate intrusion by the social worker. Boundaries help assure the client that actions or expressions by the social worker are made in the client's interest and for the benefit of the services being provided, not for the social worker's social, financial, or sexual needs. Boundaries can be

exceedingly complex, with variations in norms across cultures, geographic regions, practice settings, and populations served. “Boundary crossings” indicate deviations from standard practices, but are typically benign when done in the client's interests and without adverse effects and are therefore not inherently unethical (Reamer, 2001). In the wrong context or with the wrong client, however, even simple boundary crossings may represent problematic conflicts of interest or create the first step in a “slippery slope” toward boundary violations and client exploitation (Epstein & Simon, 1990).

The NASW Code of Ethics cautions practitioners to avoid or address potential conflicts of interest by taking “reasonable steps to resolve the issue in a manner that makes the clients' interests primary and protects clients' interests to the greatest extent possible” (NASW, 2008, 1.06a). Certain conflicts of interest, such as sexual relationships with clients, former clients, supervisees and others, are expressly prohibited, and social workers are further cautioned to avoid business, professional, or social relationships with clients and former clients due to the risk of harm or exploitation. Ultimately, the social worker bears the responsibility for “setting clear, appropriate and culturally sensitive boundaries” (NASW, 2008, 1.06c).

Online interactions with clients inherently carry a risk of boundary crossings and, ultimately, harmful violations. A social worker who, through Twitter or Facebook, learns unnecessary details of a client's workplace or personal life may have difficulty keeping those details from impinging on the helping relationship. Extraneous information revealed through ON contacts may affect the social worker's objectivity, causing him or her to judge the client more favorably (or harshly) than the case itself suggests. Innocuous references to hobbies in online profiles may derail the focus of services when shared interests are discovered and discussed. Should that discussion lead further to a suggestion for the worker and client to join one another in golf, political action, scrapbooking, or

whatever the shared interest is, the boundary is thus clearly breached.

The challenges in boundary maintenance exist with relationships beyond the client-worker dyad. Social workers who serve as instructors, administrators, and supervisors may enjoy genial relationships with students and staff, but the added dimension of ON relationships can affect the ability of each to carry out their professional responsibilities. Supervisees or students may be intimidated by the power differential when presented with a request to friend or follow a superior. ON relationships may reveal information that adversely affects the primary relationship—the supervisor is upset by a radical blog the employee writes, or the faculty member is disturbed by salacious comments a student posted on Twitter or Facebook. The NASW Code of Ethics stipulates that supervisees should be evaluated in “a fair and considerate manner and on the basis of clearly stated criteria” (NASW, 2008, 3.03). It can be difficult enough to attain objectivity in appraisals of students or staff without the issues being clouded by inapplicable information.

5. Professionalism

Professionalism is a broad concept. It includes specific standards and expectations, such as those embodied in a code of ethics, but goes beyond particular behaviors to suggest broader qualities of character such as trustworthiness and integrity. The actions of the individual social worker reflect not only on him or her, but on the profession of social work. Thus, ethical standards that regulate the way one treats his or her colleagues, responds to public crises, addresses personal impairments, or advocates for social policies may all be seen as elements of professionalism. Other standards specifically address the way social workers’ behaviors reflect on the field and on their work (NASW, 2008).

- Social workers should not permit their private conduct to interfere with their ability to fulfill their professional responsibilities (4.03).

- Social workers should work toward the maintenance and promotion of high standards of practice (5.01a).
- Social workers should uphold and advance the values, ethics, knowledge, and mission of the profession. Social workers should protect, enhance, and improve the integrity of the profession through appropriate study and research, active discussion, and responsible criticism of the profession (5.01b).
- Social workers should make clear distinctions between statements made and actions engaged in as a private individual and as a representative of the social work profession, a professional social work organization, or the social worker’s employing agency (4.06a)

Aligning ON activities with the precepts of professionalism can present particular challenges. ON relationships reveal information about social workers to clients, supervisors, the public, and other audiences with whom they interact electronically, and therefore these communications fall into the realm of self-disclosure (Taylor, McMinn, Bufford, & Chang, 2010). Self-disclosures in practice can enhance the professional’s credibility, normalize client experiences, and convey authenticity on the part of the social worker (Farber, 2006). However, they are not without risk. Self-disclosures can divert the therapeutic focus, blur boundaries, create distress or disillusionment in the client, and lead to role reversal, placing the client in the role of caregiver (Zur, 2008). ON self-disclosures contain further risks in that they prohibit the professional from knowing the recipient of the information and appraising how the information is received, diminishing intentionality, which is at the core of proper self-disclosure (Taylor et al., 2010).

Clearly, indiscreet photos and statements, such as those of medical students posing with “their cadavers,” reflect negatively on all involved

and perhaps reveal poor judgment on the part of those who posed for, posted, and distributed the photos (Heyboer, 2010). This can serve as an example of how a harmless, if crude, tradition once shared only among the students involved can go viral in the age of electronic distribution.

Yet, even fair, benign, and constitutionally protected statements may suddenly turn into a nightmare when critical comments about legislation create a backlash or when private activities, personal opinions, and affiliations raise questions about one's integrity, judgment or character. In these instances, the "eyes of the beholder" determine the ethics of the behavior. Such innocuous-yet-problematic ON activities might occur when:

- A social worker is "tagged" (identified) in bathing suit pictures from a cruise that are posted on social networking sites.
- A clinician blogs, tweets, or posts comments that are critical of agency policies.
- A social worker is listed as a donor to a group opposed to causes aligned with social work values.
- A professional posts, forwards, or "likes" a cartoon that mocks the intellect of the President.

Some would suggest it is unfair to require professionals to censor their private activities in order to avoid any possible offense or misunderstanding. The counterpoint is that in an ON age, no behavior is truly private as norms change, technology advances, and security erodes (Rosenblum, 2007). Others would further suggest that social workers, teachers, and other professionals depend on their reputations and the esteem in which their fields are held and therefore must conduct themselves in line with a higher standard than the general public.

How, then, can social workers and other professionals navigate these and other ambiguities of practice in an ON era? Numerous individual and

organizational strategies exist, including the use of clear policies, consultation, and informed consent.

6. Recommendations for Ethical ON Practices

As part of professional development, social workers and others must become familiar with the forms and functions of ON and consider the implications for their own privacy and that of their clients (Reamer, 2009; Taylor et al., 2010). Professionals are admonished to place the client's interests and thus the helping relationship foremost in their considerations, which now encompass online activities. This suggests that caution and restraint should guide the participation in ON venues and conversations. The news is replete with cautionary tales of doctors, teachers, police officers, and others whose work and careers have been harmed by an ON incident (Beck, 2013; Decker, 2012; Gordon, 2012; Shapira, 2008). Environmental scanning of the media and professional literature can uncover heretofore unexpected ON opportunities and hazards and thus help in crafting policies around them (Tariman, 2011).

The boundaries professionals ultimately set, on the continuum from no voluntary ON presence to active participation, will likely depend on the age of the worker, the norms of his or her region, culture, and practice setting, and his or her own level of interest in ON. Nonetheless, competent practice will require articulation of the effects of various ON choices on his or her practice and clients, then aligning policies and practices with those decisions.

Individuals and organizations can use handouts and web postings to articulate their policies about such requests as "friending" online, much as they do policies on exchanging gifts. Informed consent conversations can explain and reinforce these stances. A general discussion at the outset of service, explaining that the social worker or agency does not permit online relationships, is less loaded and painful than stating this when a client or former client requests such a link and is hurt or confused by the refusal.

For clinicians who are active in ON,

conversations and written materials might elaborate the boundaries between comments on blogs and other media and other professional activities, including helping relationships (Kolmes, 2010). For example, “I am active in health issues involving infertility, and you may see me online or in the news commenting about those challenges. When I do that, I am speaking about infertility in a general fashion and out of a personal interest. That is not intended to be a substitute for the one-on-one work we will do and I never use information from my cases in my online work.” ON-active professionals might issue similar disclaimers as part of their ON postings too, so that consumers of information in any venue understand the intent and limits of the information shared (Crystal, 2009).

The actual crafting of an individual or agency policy on ON activities requires conversation and consultation. As discussed earlier, ON has many constructive uses. It is also a widespread way for people to learn, communicate, and share. Avoiding ON entirely is both unwise and impossible for contemporary service providers, yet each will have to decide how, where, and how much to engage in ON. Education and consultation with other agencies, professional membership organizations, governing bodies, and legal experts will help identify the hazards and opportunities different ON strategies will have for a given organization or individual (Behnke, 2008).

Crafting and implementing resulting policies requires ongoing conversation among staff and management as the nuances and implications of policies are revealed. For example, how will the organization respond if YouTube videos are posted of an employee’s New Year’s Eve revelry or an expletive-spouting sports spectator? How will a social worker deal with a highly critical comment about his or her services, posted on a public website? How will the agency handle “trolls” or other forms of ON confrontation attacking the organization’s mission or clientele? What are the proper forms of advocacy using the agency’s site on Twitter, Facebook, or the web? Is anything out of bounds or in poor taste?

Ongoing discussion and staff development activities are needed to effectively operationalize policies and practices and address emerging ON issues. Sensitive supervision is required to assist workers in navigating the boundaries and managing the transference and countertransference that will arise with novel ON interactions. Individual self-restraint is required to consider, before hitting the “send” button, how a comment, photo, re-tweet, or article might be viewed by a patient, board member, colleague or supervisor. Applying the principle of publicity (“Am I willing to stand behind this statement or action?” “Am I comfortable with others knowing this is what I did?”) or envisioning that anything posted online may be read by a client, employer, or loved one will provide measures for evaluating the wisdom and intentions of actions online (Landman, 2010).

7. Conclusion

Although novel ON opportunities and challenges will emerge as technology evolves, the past decade has provided a glimpse into the promises and pitfalls for users in the general public and in professional roles. Swift, broad, and enduring communications have enabled immediate and diverse dissemination of vital information about missing persons, breaking news, hazardous weather, and even political revolution. They have also led to unanticipated phenomena such as cyberbullying, Wikileaks, Second Life gaming, and “catfishing,” or the practice of creating false online identities for the purpose of engaging others in fraudulent online relationships (Hill, 2013). Amid the strengths and weaknesses of technology, a digital divide essentially marginalizes those without access or capacity to take part in an online world.

Effective contemporary social work practice requires a working understanding of online activities and implications, both in the lives of clients and in the delivery of services. Each variant of ON offers opportunities for improving social work practice through enhanced access, education, advocacy, and communication. Similarly, if used improperly, each can create tensions or outright

violations of ethical standards. Knowledge, transparency, consultation, and discussion provide avenues for helping professionals and their employers to discern the differences and make proper use of ON developments. Professional organizations can assist in crafting guidelines for members on online activities that are incompatible with effective and ethical service delivery. Colleges, universities, and continuing education programs can encourage education and dialogue about acceptable uses of ON in practice. Research can elucidate the implications of ON strategies on practice and on particular professions, and articulate best practices for ON use.

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Infusing a New Ethical Decision-Making Model Throughout a BSW Curriculum

Connie M. Fossen, MSSW, Ed.D.
Viterbo University, La Crosse, WI
cmfossen@viterbo.edu

Jennifer I. Anderson-Meger, MSSW, DSW
Viterbo University, La Crosse, WI
jimeger@viterbo.edu

Debra A. Daehn Zellmer, MSW
Viterbo University, La Crosse, WI
ddzellmer@viterbo.edu

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Abstract

Will BSW graduates be able to make ethical decisions in practice? This article describes the research, selection and implementation of an ethical decision-making model infused in a BSW curriculum. Informed by Program assessment data, a two-year implementation process is described, including sample course units, learning activities and teaching strategies.

Keywords: Ethical decision-making, teaching ethics, teaching values, curriculum design, undergraduate social work education

1. Introduction

The 2008 Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Education Policy and Accreditation Standards focuses on developing student competencies for generalist social work practice. Competency in the application of “social work ethical principles to guide professional practice” is demonstrated in social workers who:

- recognize and manage personal values in a way that allows professional values to guide practice

- make ethical decisions by applying standards of the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics
- tolerate ambiguity in resolving ethical conflicts
- apply strategies of ethical reasoning to arrive at principled decisions (CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, 2008, E.P. 2.1.2)

Under the previous 2001 CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards that were curriculum driven, the Social Work Program used data from Field Instructor evaluations, alumni self-assessment and employer surveys to evaluate the accomplishment of the Program objective related to values and ethics in social work practice. Analysis of this data suggested this Program objective was being met. With the current CSWE Education Policy and Accreditation Standards’ (2008) focus on demonstrating competencies, course embedded measures were added to the Program assessment protocol. After this assessment change a different picture of students’ ability to use an ethical decision-making model appeared. BSW seniors

in their Capstone Seminar were asked to resolve macro level ethical dilemmas presented in their field practicum. Students struggled with the ambiguity of organizational ethical dilemmas and were unable to articulate the strategy they had been taught or to apply ethical principles to come to a reasoned decision. On a rubric designed to measure the application of ethical decision-making, students did not meet Program assessment benchmarks. Informed by this Program assessment data, the Program faculty embarked upon a two-year process to adopt an ethical decision-making model that baccalaureate students could readily comprehend and apply as entry level social workers.

2. Review of the Literature

A search of the best practices in teaching values and ethics was completed, beginning with a review of theories that inform ethical decision-making. Kohlberg's developmental theory on moral thinking (Kaplan, 2006; Sanders & Hoffman, 2010) describes a stage model focused on how ethical sensitivity and moral judgment develops. Conventional thinkers have a moral certainty based on the conviction that following the letter of the law will lead to moral decisions. For students at this stage of moral development, legal mandates, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (2008), and agency policy become "rules" to follow. In contrast Kohlberg suggests that post-conventional thinkers consider multiple morally relevant factors to determine the best course of action. Kohlberg cautions that following rules may not always result in the best ethical decisions. Finally, Kohlberg suggests that many individuals never advance beyond conventional thinking or develop the understanding that moral decisions require consideration of multiple complexities (Kaplan, 2006; Sanders & Hoffman, 2010).

Neo-Kohlbergian theory (Kaplan, 2006) describes moral development that occurs through experience and knowledge, a process which leads the individual to a more developed schema over time resulting in moral reasoning with increased complexity. Gilligan (2005) adds that moral

decision-making involves an inter-relational emphasis and that the "ethic of care" becomes crucial in the ethical decision-making process.

Vygotsky postulates a sociocultural theory of learning that emphasizes the importance of culture, history and social factors on learning and decision-making (Tudge & Schrimsher, 2003). This learning theory supports the idea of scaffolding that moves the learner to ever increasing levels of complexity. The zone of proximal development, the space where the student is currently and where the student can achieve with guided instruction, is an important concept to the development of ethical decision-making (Tudge & Schrimsher, 2003).

The review of the literature also included a search for successful methods of teaching ethics and ethical reasoning. Ethics education requires reflective engagement and reiterative process, not just memorization without application. The pedagogies suggested are service learning, reflective journaling, case studies, discussion, dialogue and practice over time (Gray & Gibbons, 2007; Harrington & Dolgoff, 2008; Kaplan, 2006; Sanders & Hoffman, 2010). The literature is mixed on the advantage of a stand-alone ethics course versus an integrated or infused curriculum (Kaplan, 2006; Sanders & Hoffman, 2010).

Many authors have proposed models for ethical decision-making (Abels, 2001; Dolgoff, Lowenberg, & Harrington, 2009; Linzer, 1999; Reamer, 2006; Rhodes, 1991; Strom-Gottfried, 2007). Both rational and reflective models of ethical decision-making frameworks exist. The rational or process models are linear structures with a logical sequence of steps from the identification of issues to the resolution of the ethical dilemma (Gray & Gibbons, 2007; McAuliffe & Chenoweth, 2008). Rational frameworks vary in complexity from practical step models to more complex multi-leveled models which incorporate a screening process based on ethical principles and rules. The reflective models include intuitive as well as rational components; for example, the feminist approach acknowledges issues of power and relationships as well as the

feeling process in making decisions (Gray & Gibbons, 2007; McAuliffe & Chenoweth, 2008). While each model has strengths, many models present complexities and levels of cognition that exceed the developing critical thinking skills of undergraduate social work students, leaving them with only a rudimentary understanding of ethical decision-making and few actual skills in utilizing and applying the process to actual social work practice experiences (Abrami, et al., 2008; Gibbons & Gray, 2004; Paul, 2006).

The ETHIC Model (Congress 1999, 2000) was selected as the most appropriate model for

BSW students because the concrete sequential steps provide an easy-to-remember framework. Congress (1999) first developed the ETHIC Model to help social workers make ethical decisions as quickly and effectively as possible. The original Model includes an emphasis on values, the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) and the context of social work practice (Congress, 2000). In 2009, Congress added the Advocate step to the Model (Table 1) to expand the focus on oppression and the search for social justice in ethical situations (personal communication, E. Congress, 2009). Table 1 outlines the Congress (2009) Model of ethical

Table 1 ETHICA Model and Program Redesigned Model

ETHICA Model (Congress, 2009)	E T H I C S-A Model: Redesign for enhanced teaching and learning.
Examine issue and dilemma.	Examine the situation—determine if this is an ethical dilemma. Examine values—personal, societal, agency, client and professional values.
Think about values--personal, societal, cultural, agency, client and professional.	Think about ethical issues, principles, standard laws or policies that apply to this ethical dilemma.
Hypothesize possible scenarios and consequences of different decisions including the role of advocate.	Hypothesize all possible decisions or options.
Identify who will benefit or be harmed with a commitment to the most vulnerable.	Identify consequences of each possible decision or option.
Consult with supervisor and colleagues about possible ethical choices.	Consult with supervisor and colleagues about ethical choices. Select decision or ethical action and get support.
Advocate within agency, social work community, local, state and national.	Advocate for change on appropriate system level. Document both decision-making process and ethical decision. Legal scan: is the process and decision ordinary, reasonable, and prudent?

decision-making and the subsequent changes the Program faculty made implementing the Model in the BSW social work curriculum.

The original ETHICA Model (Congress, 2000, 2009) was changed based on faculty and student feedback. The Social Work Program faculty redesigned the original ETHICA Model (Congress, 2009) to become the ETHICS-A Model. The 'Select and Support' step was added to make students conscious of the final decision step and the need for support after the decision is made (Table 1). A documentation section was added to the end of the Model based on the advice of a social work attorney to assure that the decision-making process is legally sound (NASW-MN Ethics Committee, 2009). Changes were made to the wording of the steps and further development of the questions posed in each step to improve the clarity in teaching the Model to BSW students. The redesigned ETHICS-A Model was presented to social work educators and practitioners, resulting in additional changes that improved the teaching-learning process.

The teaching and learning of the ETHICS-A Model includes a series of questions at each step that presents the basic concept and then encourages the student to examine the complexity of the ethical situation from a variety of perspectives. These questions become a guide that teaches the student to use the steps or rules as a conventional thinker in actual social work practice. Further, the scaffolding of questions poses simple to more complex concepts which encourage post-conventional thinking about multiple relevant factors.

3. Method

The Program faculty determined that infusing ethics content into several social work practice courses would be preferable to a stand-alone ethics course. This would allow for a reiterative process, reinforcing concepts and scaffold learning activities in order to encourage more complex ethical thinking over time. The process of curriculum immersion began by the identification of the ethical concepts of values, boundaries, and the NASW Code of Ethics (2008)

as crucial foundation knowledge. Next, the teaching strategies of case and service application, in-class discussion, and written reflection were selected to facilitate the acquisition of the core concepts. Finally, the content and process of ethics learning was infused into selected social work courses. Each course contained one or more core concepts with each course building upon the previous with some reiteration of content or teaching strategies.

Table 2 outlines the courses in the Social Work Program where the ETHICS-A Model is taught. Each course contains aspects of the ethical decision-making process that builds upon the previous course in depth and complexity. In each course the Model is taught at a particular system level (micro, mezzo or macro) that coincides with the course content. Students are able to develop a systematic approach to using the ETHICS-A Model in multiple contexts and situations. Table 2 highlights the ethics instruction in each course followed by instructional details.

Table 2 Curriculum Sequence of ETHICS-A Model

Course	Level	Ethics Concept	Learning Activities
Introduction to Social Work	First Year or Sophomore	Introduce NASW Code of Ethics.	
Social Work through Service Learning	Sophomore	Personal v. professional value identification. Personal v. professional values. Cross-cultural value identification. NASW Code of Ethics, focus on dual relationships. Introduce ETHICS-A Model and practice Examine and Think steps.	Small group exercise. Large group discussion. Small group exercise Written case application. Boundary self-assessment Cross-cultural case application Small group exercise
Practice I: Individuals and Families	Junior	Entire ETHICS-A Model	Group exercise and student presentation of ETHICS-A Model use in case.
Practice II: Groups and Communities	Senior	Community ethical dilemmas.	Group exercise, use of ETHICS-A Model.
Senior Capstone	Senior Concurrent with Field Education Practicum	Organizational ethical dilemmas Ethical Decision making in actual practice situation.	Case study exercise from organizational perspective. Written ETHICS-A Description paper.

National Association of Social Workers (2008)

4. Introduction to Social Work: Managing Personal and Professional Values

The NASW Code of Ethics (2008) is presented to students in the first course in the major, Introduction to Social Work. Students read about professional values in the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) preamble and also identify important personal values. The instructor provides examples of professional social work values and facilitates a small group discussion of value laden cases. Students use small group discussion to discern the difference between personal and professional values

apparent in the actions of social workers in the case situations. Finally, the instructor poses more complex questions regarding the overlap of personal and professional values in client-social worker interactions. For example, “Does a social worker ever disclose personal values to a client?” This question provides an opportunity for students to think more deeply about their own beliefs and about the boundary between personal and professional obligations. Five strategies are shared to encourage students to continue their own value clarification in light of the professional values of social work (Roeder, 2009). Table 3 details the learning activities in this course.

Table 3 Introduction to Social Work: Managing Personal and Professional Values

Pedagogy	Course Activities
Before class read	The Preamble and Purpose of the NASW <i>Code of Ethics</i> in your text. Write two important personal values you hold and bring to class.
In class short lecture	Values defined: In social work values are “what is considered right.” Present the professional values of social work.
Small groups case study	What were the personal values of the individuals in the case? What personal values do you think the social worker held? What values of social work were evident in the social worker’s interactions in the case? Name the professional value and provide an example from the case to illustrate that value. What values of social work were not evident in the case? What do you think were the barriers that kept the social worker from putting this value into practice? What would you have done differently?
Class Discussion	Each group reports their case and identifies personal and professional values.
Values: Critical thinking activity	Instructor poses questions and responds to student ideas. Each group reports their case and identifies personal and professional values.
Resolution strategies	<i>Challenge yourself</i> to use your current level of competence and capability. <i>Enhance your education.</i> Focus on the mission and purpose of social work while obtaining additional education to work with value conflicts. <i>Consider training</i> to serve clients with diverse values. <i>Seek in-agency or solicit out-of-agency consultation.</i> Use expertise of colleagues and supervisors to develop value-based skills. <i>Consider therapeutic intervention.</i> Explore the practice and personal challenges that prevent you from serving clients to gain resolution. <i>Provide a referral.</i> It may be in the client’s best interest to provide a referral to allow access to needed services. (Adapted from Roeder, 2009)

5. Social Work through Service Learning Course

Values, boundaries, and the ETHICS-A Model are units of study in the second course in the major, Social Work through Service Learning. The ETHICS-A Model was added to existing units in this course to provide students a decision-making process to resolve value and boundary dilemmas. The value clarification questions used in the Introduction to Social Work course

are purposefully repeated in the first unit in the Service Learning course, with a case that adds the dimension of cultural difference and an ethical dilemma to value identification. In this complex exercise students are actually completing a value assessment of all the diverse individuals in light of ethical concerns--the same process employed in the Examine step of the ETHICS-A Model.

Table 4 details the values case application exercise in the Service Learning course.

Table 4 Service Learning Course: Personal and Professional Values in Cross-Cultural Practice

Pedagogy	Course Activities
Before class read	Congress, E. P. (2000). What social workers should know about ethics: Understanding and resolving practice dilemmas. <i>Advances in Social Work</i> , 1(1), 1-25. Una Rosa case in Rivas, R., Hull, G. (2004). <i>Case studies in generalist practice</i> . 3 rd . Ed. Belmont, CA: Brooks Cole.
In-class short lecture	Discuss the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) Professional values and preamble statement.
Small group case study	What are the personal values of Una Rosa? What personal values do you think the social worker held? What values of social work were evident in the social worker’s interaction with Una Rosa? a. Provide a case example to illustrate the social worker’s values. b. What values of social work were not evident in the case? c. What do you think were the barriers that kept the social worker from putting this value into practice? d. What would you have done differently?
Discussion	Share your small group value discussion with class.
Short Lecture	What is an ethical dilemma? Using the Una Rosa case, instructor assists students in understanding that this situation poses more than an ethical question and is an ethical dilemma.
Small Group	Use the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) to respond to Una Rosa’s request for friendship after the end of a professional relationship.

Boundaries are the second unit in the Service Learning course presented through reading, self-assessment, and in-class activities. The students complete a boundary self-assessment (Corey & Corey, 2003) followed by an instructor-facilitated discussion of boundary crossing, bartering, gifts, improper requests, sexual attraction, and boundary violations. This lively discussion is grounded in the concepts of professional values, cultural competency, and the NASW Code of Ethics (2008), especially dual relationships in Standard One of the Code. Again

an applied teaching strategy of case application is used to identify ethical issues inherent in the dual relationship case situations. Often the greatest learning occurs as students attempt to justify their answers to the challenging questions that follow each case using the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) standards. This boundary exercise (Table 5) replicates the process students will use in the Think Step of the ETHICS-A Model, using the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) standards as well as ethical principles, laws, or policy to inform the decision-making process.

Table 5 Service Learning Course: Professional Boundaries

Pedagogy	Course Activities
Before class read	Chapter 10: Managing Boundary Issues From Corey, M., Corey C., (2003). <i>Becoming a helper</i> . (4 th ed.) Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Thomson Learning.
Complete boundary self-assessment, Corey page 254-255 and bring your answers to class.	Which item on the assessment gave you pause? Which item is a new idea to you? Which item do you have questions about?
Review PowerPoint slides	Managing boundaries and dual relationships.
Instructor facilitated class discussion	From your self-assessment identify a boundary issue of concern to you. What is the ethical issue of your boundary concern? What do you think is the professional response to that issue? What is your personal response to this boundary issue?
Small group case study	Identify the boundary issue in the case study. Use the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) Dual Relationship section to devise a response to the case. Prepare a summary for class discussion.
Class Discussion	Each group reports their case and identifies boundary issue and ethics informed response.

Next the ETHICS-A Model is presented to students in the third unit of the Service Learning course (Table 6). The Una Rosa cross-cultural case (Rivas & Hull, 2004) used to identify values in the first unit is now the focus of a decision-making process applying the ETHICS-A Model. Because the values and ethical concerns were already identified, the students are able to use this basic assessment to think critically through the more advanced questions in the Examine and Think Steps of the ETHICS-A Model. Thus, the scaffolding process of simpler to more advanced

critical thinking is employed through the value, boundary, and ethics case application exercises in this course. Students begin this course reviewing personal versus professional values and end the course applying the first two steps of the ETHICS-A Model to a fairly complex cross-cultural and boundary case. Table 6 describes the questions posed at each step in the ETHICS-A Model.

Table 6 Service Learning Course: Introduction ETHICS-A Model

Step	Corresponding questions
<p>Examine Step Determine if an ethical dilemma. Identify the relevant values.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is it a practice concern or ethical dilemma? ○ What exactly is the situation? What are the known facts? ○ Are the pressing issues ethical, moral, legal or a combination? ○ Who are all the players and their roles, and how are they affected? ○ What values help in understanding the context of the situation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the Social Worker’s personal values that apply to the situation? • What are the client values? • What cultural values could impact the situation? • Which social work professional values relate to dilemma? • What are the agency values?
<p>Think Step Consider ethical issues, principles, standards, laws or policies that apply to this ethical dilemma.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Describe, in writing the ethical dilemma. ○ Who could be harmed in this ethical situation? ○ What is your professional power in relation to client? ○ What are the specific areas of ethical conflict? ○ Which standards in the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) apply? ○ Which federal, state, and local laws may impact the ethical dilemma? ○ What written or unwritten agency policies or practices pertain to this situation?
<p>Hypothesize Step Specify all decisions or options.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are all the reasonable and possible ethical choices or actions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List all possibilities as a visual description of actions provides a different level of cognition to decision-making process. • Choosing not to act is a legitimate choice. ○ What have other people recommended?
<p>Identify Step Pinpoint consequences of each possible decision or option.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In the short and long term, what is the impact of each option on employers, clients, social worker, society, self, practice settings, the profession, and license boards? ○ Who will benefit or be harmed the most, the least? ○ What are the consequences in terms of finances, legality, emotionality, colleagues, self-esteem? ○ What are the dissonance and ambiguity of the ethical situation?
<p>Consultation Step Confer with supervisor and colleagues about ethical choices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What did your supervisor advice in this ethical situation? ○ What new information, different perspectives or additional options were gained from colleagues while maintaining confidentiality? ○ Would a case conference be appropriate in this ethical situation? ○ Could an ethics committee assist in a multidiscipline ethical situation?

(Continued)

Table 6 Service Learning Course: Introduction ETHICS-A Model (continued)

Step	Corresponding questions
Select action and get Support Step Make decision or choose ethical action and seek support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are the reasons for or against each course of action? ○ Which option is selected that is the ‘least harmful’ action for each party involved? ○ Which option assures the rights of the most vulnerable? ○ Where can you secure support from colleagues, consultation, ethics codes, licensing, literature, or evidence-based practice?
Advocacy Step Take action for change on appropriate system level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does this ethical situation indicate the need for change within the agency, within the social work community? ○ Is change required of local, state, or national policy or laws? ○ What is your advocacy role now that you understand this ethical dilemma?
Document Step Write the decision-making process and action taken.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What was the process used to determine ethical decision? ○ What was the rationale for the ethical action taken? ○ When and whom did you consult?
Legal Step Scan decision-making process for legal standards of ethical practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is the decision prudent: a careful, cautious “do no harm” choice? ○ Is the decision reasonable: the result of a conscious, thoughtful, planned and deliberate process? ○ Is the decision ordinary: what an average practitioner would do using the NASW Code of Ethics (2008)?

6. Practice I: Micro Case Application of ETHICS-A Model

The next course in the sequence of learning ethical decision making is Social Work Practice I: Individuals and Families. The focus in this junior level course is the use of the ETHICS-A Model to make a practice decision (Table 6). Students review the ETHICS-A Model previously learned in the Service Learning course. Next, in small groups students apply the Model to make an ethical decision in a domestic violence and child abuse case. To allow students the time to use all of the steps in the ETHICS-A Model, the ethical dilemma is identified for each group. The roles of the three social workers in the case are quite different, providing students the opportunity to make an ethical decision from the perspective of the worker’s particular agency – a domestic-violence,

child-protection, or mental-health agency (Thomlison, 2010). As each small group reports in class their ETHICS-A Model process and final ethical decision, students learn the variety of ethical actions that could be made in the same case situation. Students’ ability to understand differing agency values, varied professional perspectives, and unique client obligations is the expected outcome in this ETHICS-A Model exercise. Table 7 details the three different social work roles and the identified ethical dilemma in this case exercise.

In the Practice I course the ethics unit is taught at the end of the semester after students complete a four-hour social worker shadow and two days volunteering in a local homeless agency. Practicing the ETHICS-A Model after these actual community experiences gives students a reality context in which to ground their decision-making process.

Table 7 Practice I: ETHICS-A Micro Case Application

Read Case Study Jeanine pp. 190-191 in Thomlison, B. (2010). *Family assessment handbook* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson.

Case # 1: You are the social worker at the domestic violence agency that assisted Jeanine in filing a restraining order after she entered the shelter. As a social worker in this agency you are obligated to serve Jeanine and her son, Ryan. Child Protection Services has filed a petition to remove Ryan from his mother and place in foster care. Jeanine has asked you to assist her in preventing this placement. You determine that an ethical dilemma exists between your responsibility to serve Jeanine and protecting Ryan.

Case # 2: You are a social worker in Child Protection Services who completed the investigation regarding the safety of Ryan. After consultation with your supervisor you filed a petition to remove Ryan from his mother's care to protect him from the effects of witnessing the domestic violence between his parents. In consultation with the domestic violence shelter you learn that Jeanine has filed a restraining order against her husband Rick and is cooperating with services in the agency. Jeanine asks you to allow Ryan to remain with her at the shelter until she can establish a home for the two of them. You determine that an ethical dilemma exists between your responsibility to Ryan's safety and providing supportive services to his mother.

Case # 3: You are a social worker at the community mental health center. You have completed an assessment of Rick, who voluntarily came to the center seeking services for domestic violence. Upon the recommendation of his attorney, Rick is seeking services to prevent prosecution from the domestic violence charges. You are impressed with how open and honest Rick was during the assessment as he took partial responsibility for the violence in the family. However, you are not sure if you believe that Rick is motivated for treatment or if he is attempting to circumvent the legal consequences of his situation. As a social worker you determine that an ethical dilemma exists. You are concerned that if you provide services to Rick and he escapes prosecution and later abuses his wife you may be responsible. Yet you believe everyone deserves the opportunity to change.

Large Group presentation of case decision

Each group explains the **process** used to reach an **ethical decision** in the case. (Adapted from Thomlison, 2010).

7. Practice II: Community ETHICS-A Case Application

Practice II: Groups and Communities, a course taken during the senior year, focuses on ethical dilemmas and decision-making at a macro level. Students learn more about the NASW Code of Ethics, particularly our ethical responsibility to the Profession and the broader society (2008).

Students use the ETHICS-A Model to reach an ethical decision in a community-focused case study. Through discussion and case application, students learn that ethical decisions involve multiple constituencies and contexts in macro situations. By this time students have been exposed to the ETHICS-A Model in multiple courses, applying the Model at micro, mezzo and macro system levels.

Table 8 Practice II: ETHICS-A Model Community Practice

Pedagogy	Course Activities
Before class read	Read the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) with attention to Standards 5 and 6.
In class short lecture	Discuss the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) concerning ethical responsibility to the profession and society.
Small group case study discussion	Use the ETHICS-A Model to come to an ethical decision in the case. Share small group decision-making process.
Short lecture	Discuss the social justice implications of each macro ethical decision.

8. Senior Capstone Course: ETHICS-A Model in Organizational Practice

Ethical practice in organizations is the focus of the Senior Capstone course completed concurrent with Field Education. Mid semester the ETHICS-A Model is reviewed with eye rolling and student comments like “not again.” However, a case discussion of a medical social worker in an ethical bind among the physician, the hospital administration, and her client brings to light the Advocacy step of the ETHICS-A Model. This challenging case includes information about the impact of power differences in ethical decisions and the use of an Ethics Committee to assist in life-threatening situations. As students are immersed in their field practicum by mid semester, the realization that ethical advocacy on behalf of a client may result in organizational change is the intended outcome of this case application.

After the in-class organizational ethics application, students are asked to identify an

actual ethical dilemma in their field agency, to use the ETHICS-A Model to come to a decision, and to detail their process and resulting ethical action in an ETHICS-A Description Assignment. Capstone faculty assesses the student’s ethical decision-making process using the following rubric (Table 9).

9. Findings and Discussion

The best practice of teaching ethics suggested service learning, reflective journaling, case studies, discussion, dialogue, and practice over time (Gray & Gibbons, 2007; Harrington & Dolgoff, 2008; Kaplan, 2006; Sanders & Hoffman, 2010). The Service Learning course provides the foundation of values, boundaries and ethical decision-making in three course units. In addition to case applications in the content areas, students participate in 25 hours of volunteer service in a human service agency. Students journal about their service and integrate that experience with self-selected course concepts. Many students

Table 9 Senior Capstone: ETHICS-A Description Assignment rubric

Elements of Ethical Decision Making Process	5= exemplary 4= very strong	3= good 2= develop further	1= unacceptable
<u>Examine</u> relevant personal, societal, agency, client and professional values. Pressing issues, questions and facts identified.	The description clearly represents a detailed description of the values, perceptual lenses, assumptions of the case participants, pressing issues, facts, agency, society and professional values.	The description represents a description of the values, perceptual lenses, assumptions of the case participants, pressing issues, facts, agency, society and professional values.	The description does not convey an understanding of key value issues.
	5 4	3 2	1
<u>Think</u> about which standards in the Code of Ethics apply to the dilemma. Include relevant laws or agency policies. Describe the ethical dilemma.	The student clearly identifies and thoroughly explains the NASW ethical standards that pertain to the ethical dilemma. Comprehensive description of relevant laws or agency policies identified that have impact. Clear description of dilemma.	The student identifies and explains the NASW ethical standard (s) that pertain(s) to the ethical dilemma. Relevant laws or agency policies identified but not discussed in detail. Description unclear.	No mention of NASW standards, laws, agency policies.
	5 4	3 2	1
<u>Hypothesize</u> about possible ethical choices or actions.	There is a written list of reasonable and possible choices or options. Comprehensive description of ambiguity in the situation.	Some possible choices or actions listed. Moving toward a decision before all choices fully explored.	Decision made without consideration of possible actions.
	5 4	3 2	1
<u>Identify</u> the consequences for each choice or action.	The student clearly identifies and thoroughly explains each of the possible options with pros and cons. The student comprehensively discusses possible results of various options. The student clearly describes who or what will be harmed and benefited in each possible action.	The student identifies and explains each of the possible options with pros and cons. The student identifies possible results of various options. The student summarizes who or what will be harmed and benefited in some of the possible options.	Little description of consequences of various options.
	5 4	3 2	1
<u>Consult</u> with supervisor and colleagues about possible ethical choices.	Description provides comprehensive supervisor perspectives, colleague opinions, or other knowledgeable individuals. Comprehensive limitations and strengths of consultation process discussed. Description of how to best get beyond “blind spots” is present.	Description identifies basic supervisor perspectives, colleague opinions, or others. Basic limitations and strengths of consultation process discussed. Some description of how to best get beyond “blind spots” is present.	Description does little to include the potential consultants or skips over this step.
	5 4	3 2	1
<u>Select</u> action and get support.	Description clearly identifies the most appropriate action in the case situation. Decision includes description of prudent, thoughtful, professional and reasonable elements of case.	Description identifies action but without supporting ethical principles. Decision includes some description of prudent, thoughtful, professional and reasonable elements of case.	Description does little to clarify the end decision or additional elements.
	5 4	3 2	1
<u>Advocate</u> within agency, community, local, state, or national venue.	Description identifies multisystem levels of advocacy related to ethical dilemma.	Description identifies basic advocacy possibilities.	Description does little to address advocacy actions
	5 4	3 2	1
<u>How prepared</u> were you to use the Ethics-A Model in organizational practice?	Very prepared, model works well in organizational ethical issues.	Less prepared. Less clear regarding model use in organizational practice.	Not prepared, unsure of how to adapt model to organization
	5 4	3 2	1
			Total

choose to write about values or boundaries in their Integrative journals. For example, a student early in the semester wrote this:

Keeping the drop-in center open shows the professional values of self-worth and dignity. They [the agency] put their clients' best interests first so they have a safe place to go where they won't feel alone in the recovery process. I sat and listened to one man talk for over two hours because that is what he needed. This was a humbling experience for me and when I was done, I felt good. I had listened with an attitude of dignity and respect and hopefully made him feel a little better that day.

The student's ability to 'see' the values of social work in community programs and in their own volunteer experience may assist students in learning how value-based practice will inform the ethical decision-making process. However, in this sophomore-level course students rarely reflected in their journals about ethical issues or concerns. Faculty realized that students at this level may not have the ability to identify ethical concerns in their volunteer experience. This experience mirrors the literature findings that sophomores may be more concrete thinkers and will develop the ability to recognize ethical issues with additional course content and guided practice.

During the implementation of the ethics curriculum, faculty found that moving to the next level of complexity in processing ethical decisions often requires the instructor to use additional class time. Though practiced in previous courses, the Examine and Think Steps are complex and students often struggle to identify exactly what is the ethical dilemma. After a 60-minute group discussion of the Examine Step, the Practice I case application was changed to state the ethical dilemma (Table 7). The small groups were then able to complete the entire ETHICS-A Model

case application in one class period. Further, the Practice I ethics unit was moved from the beginning to the end of the semester after students completed several community experiences. Based on the case application results, it was clear that students required some agency experience to complete the complex ethics practice case.

With any curriculum change, ongoing formative and summative assessment informs the teaching-learning process. End-of-semester course evaluations indicated modifications to the ethical decision-making teaching in individual courses. For example, the students in the Service Learning course expressed being overwhelmed using all standards of the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) to inform the Una Rosa case application (Rivas & Hull, 2004). Consequently, the focus changed to Standard One, specifically dual relationships in subsequent semesters (NASW, 2008).

Summative assessment is planned using the Senior Capstone Ethics Description Assignment as a course-embedded measure. The 2012 class completed the infused ethics curriculum and met the global bench mark for ethical competency as defined in the CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, 2008, E.P.2.1.2. In this first group, 80% of the students achieved a score of 80% or better on the Ethics Description Assignment. In 2013, rather than a global bench mark the four ethics practice behaviors will be assessed in the Ethics Description Assignment. The opportunity to compare 2012 data with subsequent classes will help Program faculty understand if BSW seniors are able to make ethical decisions in practice.

10. Conclusion

The instructional methods employed in teaching the ETHICS-A Model mirrors suggested theoretical and pedagogical teaching models from the literature. Students move from concrete thought process to more sophisticated abstract thinking through each course in this ethics-infused curriculum. The NASW Code of Ethics (2008) and redesigned ETHICS-A Model (Congress, 2000) are

applied at multiple system levels to demonstrate application of ethical decision-making in generalist practice. The teaching process reiterates concepts from course to course to foster concrete learning of the decision-making “steps.” Once students learn the basic steps of the ETHICS-A Model they are able to conceptualize when the questions in each step may or may not be applicable to particular practice situations. The teaching strategies across courses emulate the scaffolding and zone of proximal development models from Vygotsky (Tudge & Schrimsher, 2003).

Teaching ethical decision-making to undergraduate social work students is critical in light of the complex practice environment graduates are entering. Through careful attention to ethics instruction and multiple practice opportunities, students can develop decision-making strategies that will be regularly used in practice situations. Students’ cognitive decision-making state and environmental context (student background, previous education and prior experience) will impact the students’ ability to master ethical decision-making successfully. By utilizing a developmental values and ethics curriculum, ethical competency can be accomplished at the undergraduate level.

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Book Review

Callus, A. (2013). *Becoming self-advocates: People with intellectual disability seeking a voice*. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang.

Reviewed by Laura Gibson, Ph.D., LCSW, Assistant Professor of Social Work
Brescia University

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Dr. Anne-Marie Callus is a faculty member at the University of Malta. Her research interests include disability studies and self-advocacy for people with disabilities. She was formerly the executive director of the National Commission Persons with Disability.

Dr. Callus introduces the concept of disability and analyzes how the label of “intellectual disability” is socially constructed. She discusses the social model of disability, which distinguishes the bodily impairment from the degree to which that impairment excludes one from social life. She contrasts this with the individual model, which views disability as an intrinsic part of a person who is unable to adapt to the environment, and it is consistent with the medical and charity models. The individual model explains that society provides services to people with disabilities either as an attempt to rehabilitate them or out of kindness. The social model, on the other hand, means that services must be provided within the context of the environments in which people live on a daily basis and must challenge the barriers that exist within those environments.

The author discusses her research from her involvement with the Kummissjoni Nazzjonali Persuni b'Dizabilita, translated as National Commission Persons with Disability, and its Consultative Committee (KCC), which was made up of a dozen people with intellectual disabilities. She used a qualitative methodology of participant

observation, structured and semi-structured interviews, minutes of monthly meetings over a period of two years, as well as analysis of various documents. She adopts a social constructionist view, which recognizes the role of language, labeling, and identity in the subjective experience of reality. She provides a context by presenting an historical view of intellectual disability from the 1940s to the present and the development of the self-advocacy movement, beginning in Sweden, within the United States and the UK, and more specifically, in Malta.

Dr. Callus discusses the experience of offering a course to individuals with intellectual disabilities to teach self-advocacy and public speaking skills, and the resistance she witnessed from some in the disability community. She continually faced a “gatekeeping” issue in the process of inviting and engaging members. Gatekeepers were parents, caregivers, and service providers who exerted control over the information given to consumers in an effort to protect them and that simultaneously disempowered them.

The KCC members are introduced, and many excerpts of conversations and interviews are included to demonstrate the restrictions placed on their lives through the structures of society and well-meaning caregivers. She describes the process they went through as they developed self-advocacy skills. The concept of help is explained in terms of the dynamic that can sometimes

increase dependency when it could, instead, be used as a way to facilitate autonomy, self-determination, and interdependence.

The concept of labeling is discussed at length, and the label of “intellectually disabled” is at first rejected by the persons who try to distance themselves from the negativity and stigma of it. Yet, ironically, it is this rejection of the label that is also an obstacle to their development as self-advocates. To be strong self-advocates, they came to reclaim the label in a new way, imbued with the meaning they, themselves, gave to it. They came to develop a new identity, with impairment viewed as a positive attribute.

I found the frequent use of the term “disabled persons” to be distracting and in contrast to my own preference to use person-first language. Interestingly, there is also a discussion within the

KCC committee meeting of the use of language, in which group members are asked to express their agreement or disagreement with various terms. The group disagreed with the term “disabled,” and there was not a clear consensus about the term “person with disability;” however, the group approved of the term “person with intellectual disability.” Regardless of word choice, the author’s passion for empowering this population and helping them to participate more fully in every aspect of their lives is quite evident.

Readers in other countries may have already experienced some of the things discussed in this book, especially those who work within consumer-driven agencies. The author tells the story of how self-advocacy developed in a specific setting within a particular cultural context (Malta). I would recommend this book to anyone who might be able to apply the lessons learned to their own settings.

Book Review

Krason, S. M. (2013). *Child abuse, family rights, and the child protective system: A critical analysis from law, ethics, and Catholic social teaching*. The Scarecrow Press, Inc.: Lanham, UK.

Reviewed by Wayne C. Evens, Ph.D.
Bradley University

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Dr. Stephen M. Krason (editor) is a professor of political science and legal studies and chair of the department of humanities and Catholic social thought and legal studies at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. He earned a J.D. and an M.A. and Ph.D. in political science from the State University of New York at Buffalo. He also holds an M.A. in theology-religious education from Gannon University. He has published several articles and books related to Catholic social thought and the Constitution and law. He co-founded the Society of Catholic Social Scientists. He has been an active attorney on behalf of home schooling parents who have been accused of child abuse and neglect.

The book is a critique of current child welfare law and practice. Much of the argument is an assertion that the child welfare system violates parents' constitutional rights and harms children by violating the sanctity of the home.

“The Mondale Act and its aftermath: An overview of forty years of American law, public policy, and governmental response to child abuse and neglect” (Stephen M. Krason) reviews the history of the development of the child protective system (CPS). It argues that CPS and the related laws and policies are “deeply troublesome.” The author points out that mandatory reporting laws led to a massive increase in reports, which does not necessarily indicate a massive increase in actual abuse and neglect. Several cases where clearly the system damaged innocent people are cited.

The major critiques are that a) definitions of abuse and neglect are too vague, giving CPS workers wide latitude in what they choose indicate as abuse and/or neglect; b) it is too easy to report, as anyone can provide a report with little evidence; c) mandatory reporters are in a position where it is better to report on little evidence rather than risk not reporting, and d) workers are required to investigate even when it is clear no abuse or neglect has happened. Further, workers can be held liable if they do not remove a child who is subsequently harmed, but have very limited liability if they remove a child with little evidence. The author argues that accused parents are denied constitutional rights.

The chapter discusses several cases where rights have been clearly violated in the absence of evidence. It focuses on cases handled by the Home School Legal Defense Association in which parents were accused simply because they chose to home school their children. The author proposes that constitutional rights should apply in child welfare.

“The family and parental rights in light of Catholic social teaching and international human rights law: A convergence” (William L. Saunders). This chapter cites the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and various Catholic documents, especially *Rerum Novarum*, to establish, “This brief review of *Rerum Novarum* establishes the following principles, relevant to our evaluation of the CPS: 1) the family predates the State and society, and is

founded upon marriage; 2) society and the State are obligated to support, and not to undermine, the family; 3) parental authority is fundamental and the State may not displace it; and 4) there are limited situations-defending basic human rights-in which State intervention is appropriate” (p.92). The conclusion is that the State should exercise limited and controlled intervention and should not undermine parental authority.

“Child protective services and police interference with family relations: A constitutional perspective” (Michael E. Rosman). This chapter deals primarily with cases where police or CPS workers remove children without court involvement. It argues for stronger constitutional protection and better court supervision in these cases.

“Fourth amendment litigation in CPS cases” (James R. Mason III). This chapter addresses primarily homeschooling cases and the right of parents to refuse workers or police access to their home. It notes that the Supreme Court has not ruled on fourth amendment rights in child protective cases. It argues that these rights should be extended to parents.

“The effects of family structure on child abuse” (Patrick F. Fagan, Anna Dorminey, and Emily Hering). Several studies of the correlates of child abuse and neglect from around the world are reviewed to conclude, “In his article in this collection, Stephen M. Krason states that a strongly-held view of those in the child protective system is that all parents are potential abusers. The data that we have recounted in this article shows, to the contrary (emphasis in original), that the incidence of child abuse strongly correlates with disrupted and disturbed families and that intact marriage is protective against it (p.197).”

“Dilemma by design: Child welfare policy and ethical problems at the frontline” (Ruth A. White). This chapter, using the concept of “street level bureaucrat” (Lipsky, 1980), examines some of

the ethical dilemmas faced by CPS workers.

The argument is that workers lack the resources required to meet the needs of families and, therefore, will always be engaging in a system filled with dilemmas.

Overall, the book seems to be an argument for more stable, nuclear families. It supports limited State interference in families and in parenting practices. Many authors have critiqued CPS (Downs, Costin, et al., 1996; Drake, 1996; Feld, 1999; Jamieson, 1999; Lieberman, Hornby & Russell, 1988; MacEachron, Gustavsson, & Cross, 1996; Nybell & Gray, 2004; Usher, Wildfire, & Gibbs, 1999; Wells & Tracy, 1996). Each author has a proposed a solution or set of solutions. Some authors propose a return or redevelopment of the nuclear family. However, there has never been a time when the majority of families were, in fact, nuclear (Coontz, 1997; Coontz, 2000). The juvenile court, which spawned the CPS was built on contradictory logics (Feld, 1999). It is supposed to enforce law and keep the community safe; it is also supposed to provide social services to improve disrupted and/or disruptive families. As Stryker (1994) has argued, systems built on contradictory logics tend to de-legitimize themselves. Almost from its beginning, there have been critiques and proposals to improve the court and the CPS. As Dziech and Schudson (1989) state, no one is satisfied with the current system, but no one has come up with a better proposal. In this reviewer’s opinion, a better approach would be to accept that marriage and family practices have changed; that in some cases child abuse and neglect are criminal and should be treated as criminal. In other cases, child abuse and neglect are clinical issues and should be treated as therapeutic concerns. In all cases, what is needed is a deeper, more open analysis of the issues and the exploration of novel and potentially effective approaches.

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Book Review

Wolfer, T.A., Franklin, L.D., & Gray, K. A. (2013). *Decision cases for advanced social work practice*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Reviewed by Summer G. Stanley, Ph.D., LCSW
The University of North Carolina at Pembroke, Pembroke, NC

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Terry A. Wolfer is professor at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, S.C., where he teaches social work practice and evaluation methodology courses in the College of Social Work. He is a recipient of the Distinguished Recent Contributions in Social Work Education Award from the Council on Social Work Education. He is the co-author of six collections of decision cases. The decision cases, which he writes based on in-depth interviews with social workers regarding real cases in practice, promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills in social work students.

Lori D. Franklin is a licensed clinical social worker and clinical assistant professor at the University of Oklahoma in the Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work where she teaches at the Schusterman Center in Tulsa, OK.

Karen A. Gray is an associate professor at the University of Oklahoma in the Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work where she was the 2010 field instructor of the year. With a practice emphasis on communities and organizations, her scholarship, teaching, and service agenda center around social work practice in the pursuit of social justice.

Decision Cases for Advanced Social Work Practice is a collection of decision cases designed to promote discussion and critical thinking among social work students and new social work

graduates. The book begins with brief notes to instructors and students. For instructors, the author offers a website with teaching notes that are designed to help in selecting cases for class use and leading class discussions. For students, the authors offer some explanation on the purpose and design of the cases. The authors then provide an "Introduction to the Cases" through which they differentiate decision cases from other types of cases used for educational purposes, describe the learning outcomes that can be expected from the use of the cases with social work students, and provide a helpful chart that allows the reader to cross-reference each case with a particular setting, client system, population at risk, ethical issue, and technical knowledge.

Each chapter in the book is composed of a decision case, which begins with some background information about the agency and an introduction to the social worker. The cases then move into a presentation of a particular client system and situation the social worker is facing. For example, the case in Chapter 1 examines a social worker in an inpatient mental health setting who works with both individual and family systems as she attempts to address the needs of an elder female patient who is a racial minority affected by both poverty and mental health issues. Through her work, the social worker must take into consideration multiple ethical issues, such as client competence, the client's right to self-determination and autonomy, informed consent, confidentiality, and quality of

life as she attempts to apply various technical knowledge regarding discharge planning and legal issues in her effort to reach a resolution regarding what is in the best interest of the client.

Subsequent chapters involve social workers in case settings such as schools, an outpatient medical clinic, a university campus, an international adoption agency, child protective services, and a hospice, working with client systems from individuals and families to groups; supervisees and colleagues; and organizations that represent at-risk populations like children, elders, women, people with mental, physical, and developmental disabilities, veterans, and trauma survivors. Social workers in each case demonstrate technical knowledge specific to their practice settings as they face a wide array of ethical dilemmas covering issues such as duty to warn and/or protect, self-determination, confidentiality, professional collegiality and competence, and colleague impairment.

As both an instructor and a clinical supervisor, I concur with the authors that these cases can promote reflection and discussion that will help social workers who are new to the profession develop professional skills and judgment. A particular strength of this book is that the decision cases, based on field research with professional social workers, most of who were at the beginning of their careers, are realistic and confront a wide variety of issues and challenges social workers often address in the field. The cases are not only longer and more complex than the traditional “vignettes” commonly found in social work textbooks, but also do not provide an answer regarding how the social worker should respond. Conversely, the cases leave the reader with the challenge of deciding how to best proceed in a challenging, and sometimes controversial, situation, therefore prompting deep discussion of challenging issues and potential resolutions.

While the authors specify the cases are written in the context of advanced practice settings and targeted towards graduate students or recent graduates of a master’s program, many of the practice settings, client systems, and ethical issues covered in the cases are likely to be encountered by undergraduate students and bachelor level social workers as well, specifically in rural areas where master’s degrees may not be required of social workers in settings such as schools and hospices. Therefore, I believe these cases can be utilized with undergraduate students and recent graduates of bachelor’s social work programs as well.

As designed, this book should have a positive impact on students’ and beginning social workers’ decision-making skills as they exercise their professional judgment in reaching a case decision. Overall, the cases require students to apply the social work knowledge they have accumulated throughout their social work coursework, analyze various possibilities regarding the “next steps” they should take as a social worker, and evaluate the possible outcome of their choices. Because the cases are open-ended and not tied to any specific theories or intervention approaches, students and instructors have the flexibility of drawing from a variety of theories or interventions. As a result, instructors may choose to assign readings related to a specific practice or theory to supplement the decision case.

Book Review

Rosenberger, J. B. (Ed.). (2014). *Relational social work practice with diverse populations*. New York, NY: Springer.

Reviewed by Ann M. Callahan, Ph.D., LCSW, Associate Professor of Social Work
Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN

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The use of “her” as the dominant pronoun in this book reflects the importance of marginalized clients who stand to benefit from the application of relational social work. The book’s purpose is to demonstrate how relational social work can be employed with traditionally marginalized populations. Relational attunement and maintenance as part of relational social work are particularly important when trying to create a therapeutic safe space for minority clients.

Relational social work blends the social constructivist and psychoanalytic approaches. This blend is reflected throughout the text by the use of psychoanalytic terms such as corrective experience, transference, countertransference, holding space, and therapeutic alliance as well as self-in-relation, empathic attunement, cultural alignment, and co-construction of meaning that are more social constructivist in nature. The authors suggest that relational social work can be used with other approaches such as solution-focused therapy.

Astute self-reflection and expert supervision are required to help the social worker manage issues of transference and countertransference. This involves the co-creation of a therapeutic space where a client and social worker can address issues that emerge through the process of relating. This therapeutic relationship becomes an “internalized working model for the client’s life with others” (p. 100). As such, in relational social work, the

therapeutic relationship is the central intervention used to facilitate healthy functioning.

To further explain the application of relational social work, this book is divided into five parts. The focus of the first part is to detail the theoretical foundation of relational social work. Parts two and three demonstrate how relational social work may be used with clients based on race/ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. The last part addresses the use of relational social work to assist clients with significant life-altering event, such as release from prison, return from combat, and homelessness.

The use of an edited book is ideal for this subject. Each chapter has a consistent framework. Variation in author and client population creates the space for a slightly different description and application of relational social work. As a result, the reader is able to intellectually engage with the authors as they co-create in the definition of relational social work. This process was facilitated by case examples and questions about the content at the end of each chapter.

Hence, the authors do an excellent job in demonstrating how to apply relational social work; however, there are some technical and conceptual weaknesses that should be noted. Some conceptual weaknesses of the book will be reviewed given the implications for social work practice. Central to these concerns is the lack of discussion about the

limits of relational social work, role of self-care, and ethical risks associated with heavy reliance on the therapeutic relationship as the mode of intervention.

Relational social work seems to be more emotionally intimate than traditional approaches, but such intimacy carries with it ethical risks that could potentially violate client psychological safety and threaten professional self-care that leads to burnout. For example, does increased subjectivity associated with relational social work interfere with clinical judgment? Does it lead to inappropriate expectations for the relationship during and/or after treatment or the experience of secondary trauma among relational social workers?

Curiosity about a client's experience is also a key feature of relational social work, but such questions potentially shift the burden of educating the social worker about client diversity to the client. What if a client does not want to assume the responsibility for sharing personal experience of being a minority to educate the social worker? Hence, the book needs more exploration on ways to ensure that operating from a position of "not knowing" does become another expression of power and privilege.

Although the authors suggest that relational social work could be applied with other treatment approaches, case studies are not provided beyond direct application of relational social work to delineate an eclectic approach. How might therapeutic issues, like sexual abuse, be treated with relational social work? The limits of relational social work are not detailed in the book either. For example, are there some clients who are not likely to be responsive to relational social work due to having a personality or psychotic disorder?

It is clear that the recognition of such treatment issues relies heavily on keen insight and supervision. Given the centrality of the therapeutic

relationship, limits in these critical areas may limit treatment effectiveness and even cause unintentional harm to clients. Therefore, the book needs to more fully address the challenges associated with applying relational social work. It would also be an interesting to further explore the importance of relational social work in non-clinical roles with clients, like providing case management.

Despite such criticism, this book still makes a strong argument for the power of relational social work. It is an excellent resource for more sophisticated application by experienced social workers. Future editions of this book could easily address the issues above as well as expand with more chapters on application with diverse populations (e.g., older adults) and to address other life-altering experiences (e.g., natural disasters or the end-of-life). Minor edits could enhance the overall presentation and utility for graduate social work students.

Book Review

Landale, N. S., McHale, S. M., & Booth A. (Eds.). (2013). *Families and child health*. New York: Springer.

Reviewed by Herbert I. Burson, Ph.D., LGSW,
MSW Program Director and Assistant Professor of Social Work, Troy University

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This work is one in a four-volume series from the National Symposium on Family Issues, held annually at Penn State University. Sponsored by the University's Colleges of Liberal Arts and Health and Human Development, and the University's Population Institute, the symposium is an interdisciplinary conference bringing together scholars in the field of family issues who present and critically analyze research related to family well-being.

The editors, all faculty from Pennsylvania State University, include Nancy Landale, Ph.D., liberal arts research professor of sociology and demography; Susan McHale, Ph.D., director of the Social Science Research Institute and the Children, Youth, and Family Consortium and professor of human development; and Alan Booth, Ph.D., distinguished professor of sociology, demography, and human development and family studies.

Each of the editors brings extensive and diverse experience to bear on the topic. Dr. Landale's research includes works on immigration and its impact on families, while Dr. McHale has focused on the relationship between family dynamics and youth development. Dr. Booth, co-organizer of the annual symposium since 1993, has published more than 100 articles and 4 books and has edited 16 works on family issues.

Families and Child Health contains 16 chapters covering the categories of 1) Bio-Social Influences on Early Childhood Health; 2) Role of Family Dynamics in Children's Health; 3) Link to the Social Environment Through Families; and 4) Impact of Social Policies and Programs on Children's Health. As is evident from the category headings, this volume is consistent with a social work approach to the issues covered, as it follows the biopsychosocial assessment model, including analysis of the impact of social policies on the well-being of children and families.

It also contains chapters devoted to the needs of diverse populations and the impacts of policy on populations at risk, addressing issues of race, gender and social class. The emphasis on health disparities is particularly appropriate for social work. Of special interest in this work, and a significant contribution to the literature, is its devotion to a section on workplace issues and the effects of workplace policies on the health and well-being of children and families.

This work would be useful in courses on health disparities, the effects of social policies and their impacts on child health, and on direct practice with children and families. Both academics and practitioners would find its content useful in evaluating and implementing effective interventions for the problem of child health

Book review: *Families and child health*

across populations and cultures. It is a valuable work, particularly for graduate level education.

While *Families and Child Health* does not devote specific chapters or sections to social work values and ethics, the issues covered in the

volume address ethical issues with which social workers must grapple in day to day practice. It also presents challenging questions and much needed suggestions for solutions to the problems experienced by children and families and their impacts on child health.

Book Review

Robila, M. (Ed.). (2014). *Handbook of family policies across the globe*. New York, NY: Springer.

Reviewed by David H. Johnson, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Social Work
Millersville University of Pennsylvania

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In this edited volume comprising 29 chapters and divided into seven parts corresponding to six inhabited continents plus an introduction, Editor Mihaela Robila largely lives up to the promise of the volume's title, bringing a global perspective to the history, politics, process, and outcomes of family policies in 28 countries. Each chapter is written from the perspective of scholars presumably chosen for their expertise in the family policies in the subject country.

In the introductory chapter, Robila lays out the expectations of each chapter for the reader, defining family policy as "government activities that are designed intentionally to support families, enhance family members' well-being, and strengthen family relationships" (Robila, 2014, p. 3). She offers that each chapter will provide "historical, cultural, and socioeconomic context on families and family policy development," (p. 3) as well as a review of the particular family policies of each country. Marriage, child-rearing, work-family balance, support for families at risk for poverty, families with disabilities, those with elder family members, parental leave policies, and policies surrounding domestic violence are among the types of family policies addressed in the various chapters. The book promises to address the policy processes including policymaking, implementation, and evaluation. The extent to which this is successful, however, seems to vary from chapter to chapter as one might expect in an edited volume of such ambitious scope.

What strikes this reviewer as particularly helpful about this resource is the balance that Robila has struck in the selection of countries for inclusion. Many, but not all, of the usual industrialized nations are included (e.g., United States, Russia, Japan, Germany, Italy, and Canada), but while some of the British Commonwealth and former Commonwealth nations (e.g., Australia, Canada, Ireland, and India) are included, the United Kingdom itself is not included. The notable social welfare states of Norway, Sweden, and Iceland are all covered, as one would expect, but so are the surprising entries for Moldova, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Turkey, and Taiwan. This provides, it seems to me, a more balanced view of the political and sociocultural factors that so strongly influence policymaking and policy implementation.

The chapters are interesting and readable. The language, for the most part, is accessible for students while still being useful for the advanced scholar. These are important attributes in a reference resource and are often difficult to achieve in the same volume. Robila has skillfully and artfully managed the balance with her cadre of authors.

The volume could be improved by either strengthening the index topically or providing a set of comparative tables by policy topic. As it is now, a scholar wishing to look, for example, at policies concerning financial support for paternal leave would have to examine each chapter. There is a topical entry for "paternal leave" in the index,

Book review: *Handbook of family policies across the globe*

but it shows only “Moldova and South Korea” as entries. Other countries would include fathers under “parental leave.” A table or set of tables comparing policy structures or otherwise assisting the researcher to access the material would enhance the value of this volume exponentially. Perhaps the reader of this review will find this criticism so minor as to discount it as more reflective of the reviewer’s own laziness, and that characterization may have its merit.

In the final analysis, this handbook is exactly what it promises: a handbook – that is, a reference

source or resource – of family policies across the globe – that is, taking a balanced sample of large and small, industrialized and developing nations on every inhabited landmass. It places these policies in their proper historical, political, and cultural contexts, follows the policy processes from idea to implementation to evaluation, and recommends improvements. Its usefulness for scholars and students of international family policies is unquestionable.

Book Review

Matto, H., Strolin-Goltzman, J., & Ballan, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Neuroscience for Social Work: Current research and practice*. New York: Springer.

Reviewed by Peggy Proudfoot Harman, Ph.D.
Marshall University

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As social workers, we continually use hierarchical and exploratory heuristics in our quest to evaluate and intervene in the human condition. As practitioners, we regularly apply the concepts of micro, mezzo, and macro system analysis along with other schemas such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to assess our clients and client systems. Our quest is to accurately evaluate those who seek our services so that we can help the client system move forward toward a more healthful and robust existence. Our social work skill sets and nomenclature are rife with terminology and guides driven from every aspect of human nature. Primary among those guides is the "Biopsychosocial Model," which social work has used since the 1950s. Ethically, it is extremely important that we adhere to evidence-based practice, which includes keeping current on the latest research with which to help our clients.

The 21st century has seen incredible discoveries in understanding environmental impacts on the brain, which ultimately affects human behavior. This understanding has altered social work's Biopsychosocial Model to include a neurobiological perspective. To ignore these discoveries and the ability to literally look inside the brain for clues to the environmental impact on human behavior would be to shortchange our clients. For social workers to remain true to ethically driven evidence-based practice, we must continually search out cutting-edge assessment, prevention, intervention, and research protocols.

Matto, Strolin-Goltzmann, and Ballan have skillfully assembled a unique cadre of authors from a vast variety of social work fields to look into the issues associated with neurobiology and human behavior from many aspects of life span development.

From this text's Foreword to the last chapter "Adult Criminal Justice System," written by Elizabeth D. Hutchison, I found this book to be a superb academic text useful for teaching social work practice and as a fine contribution in the quest of professional growth as practitioner and supervisor. *Neuroscience for Social Work: Current Research and Practice* provides the well-seasoned social work practitioner much-needed tools to better understand the issues facing many of our clients. The chapters are written by professional social workers who understand the dynamics of social work practice and who have thoughtfully researched cutting-edge techniques in neurological medicine. The authors carefully consider the connection of neural circuitry development and functions to social work assessment, prevention and intervention modalities. Each chapter provides a guide to the neurobiological relationship with each developmental, behavioral, or life span topic; case study examples for application; and a discussion of ethical considerations inherent to each issue.

The editors initiate the concept of neuroscience in social work practice by incorporating a dialogue

between a social worker and a molecular scientist on brain chemistry and brain development, and the interplay between the brain and the environment. This clever utilization of dialogue to highlight the relationship of environmental stimuli, neural chemical reactions, and brain development is an excellent vehicle to capture the reader's interest.

The entire text is full of practical information too voluminous for this review; however, of particular interest is the article by Gerdes, Segal, and Harmon who provide a conceptualization of empathy and a technical look at the neural-architecture of empathy. The authors look at how "our brains mediate the subjective experience of empathy" (p. 33) and discuss exercises that can elicit empathetic responses from our clients, as well as how social work practitioners can effectively cultivate the use of empathy for successful client interventions.

Rosemary L. Farmer looks at research on "visuomotor neurons" (p. 37) and their effect on learning via imitation of others. Farmer discusses "mirror neurons" in the context of the brain's reaction to perceived intentions of others and the connection to the development of empathy. Farmer shows us how "mirror neuron" research provides an opportunity for a neurobiological view of brain activity during behavioral interactions.

One of the most important aspects of this text comes from the input of exceptional social work practitioners and academics. These authors provide insight about the use of neuroscience to enhance understanding in areas such as the impact of violence and aggression on the brain and subsequent issues on child development, traumatic brain injuries and their effect on military families, and working with those experiencing developmental disabilities.

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) outlines the use of neuroscience in trauma-informed social work education and encourages

the understanding of how neurobiological connections such as memory, cognitive attachment, and long-term somatic responses affect human stress and survival responses. CSWE's stance on addiction and fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) includes the application of neuroscience in assessment and intervention. This text provides social workers with a well-rounded overview of neuroscience applications on a multitude of client issues. The authors and editors provide the reader with material that can truly change the way social workers practice. The chapters motivate consideration of the opportunities for our clients' positive adaptation and recovery based on the inclusion of neuroscientific applications.

I strongly encourage social workers in all facets of practice to read this fine work. Further, I recommend *Neuroscience for Social Work* as a reference text along with other classic mainstays in the well-versed social work practitioner's library.

Book Review

South, J., White, J., & Gamsu, M. (2013). *People-centred public health*. Evidence for public health practice series. Great Britain, Policy Press.

Reviewed by J. Porter Lillis, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, University of North Carolina at Pembroke

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In *People-Centred Public Health* (2013), the authors present a comprehensive overview of the importance of volunteers, or “lay health workers,” and peer-based interventions for public health in the 21st century. The book uses current research and findings drawn largely from the United Kingdom where each author works in facets of public health related to citizenship and engagement. The themes and issues can be generalized to other countries, social welfare or not. It is also a short critical analysis of current policy.

In the first chapter, the authors give a brief introduction to the issues associated with volunteering in public health. These include terminology, scope of practices, challenges to participation, and issues associated with different types of volunteering. They lay the groundwork for the importance of having lay persons working as volunteers in community health projects, both for the recipients and the professionals involved, as well as for the volunteers themselves. They briefly introduce the current policies and the burgeoning data on how vital volunteer and peer-based approaches are for a multidisciplinary public health workforce.

Chapter 2 is devoted to policy context and how the shifts between conservative and liberal political perspectives impact public health policies and funding. It examines the current state of volunteering in England and the significance that volunteering has for the individual, as well as the

community. With retrenchment, shifting political values, and an aging population, volunteering is becoming increasingly important. However, this is occurring at a time when the government evaluates success by a medical model of health rather than a social model of health. The policy conflicts that these produce are explored.

Chapter 3 examines the history and current state of lay health workers in the global south, North America, and the U.K. Traditional top-down models, as well as a few bottom-up programs, are considered. Different levels and types of lay health workers are examined.

Chapter 4 provides the authors’ “main justifications” for ordinary citizens to participate in public health programs as volunteers. They present six reasons for engaging members of the public in program delivery and discuss them as they relate to theory, research, and practice. After discussing the benefits and value of lay health workers, they briefly consider some of the drawbacks. Issues surrounding evidence-based practice, as well as moral and ethical arguments, are explored.

Chapter 5 is about the volunteers themselves. It explores why people choose to volunteer and the barriers and rewards for volunteering. The authors provide compelling arguments for the skills and qualities a member of the community can bring, as opposed to an outside professional. The positive outcomes for volunteers are thoroughly reviewed.

Chapter 6, 7, 8, and 9 are case studies of interviews with lay health workers and service users in four different public health projects. The authors use these to supplement and provide examples for the arguments they have presented. The interviews and anecdotes provide a “real world” feel for the experiences of those on the ground and the challenges volunteers and volunteer groups face.

Chapter 10 examines how a health improvement program should be commissioned, implemented, and delivered utilizing volunteers and members of the public in health improvement programs. The authors advocate that the proper use of community members is necessary to have a holistic or “whole-system” approach. With sufficient funding and proper management, which the authors argue are often forgotten in programs utilizing volunteers, lay health worker programs will not only be successful, but thrive, even in economically disadvantaged areas.

Chapter 11 addresses the most common myths and arguments against lay health workers and the importance of active citizenship in health. The four basic categories of arguments are answered one by one: (1) Lay workers are a diversion from the real issues; structural inequalities should be addressed first, (2) Lay workers are not as safe or competent as professionals, (3) Lay workers should be paid if they are working, but volunteers are taking paying jobs from real workers, and (4) It sounds good, but where is the evidence? The ideological perspectives on volunteering from both sides of the political divide are examined.

Chapter 12 is a summary of the major ideas of the book. The authors then provide their own “manifesto” for a “citizen-centred public health system.”

The authors set out to “challenge traditional ideas on lay engagement and present fresh perspectives on why and how public health can successfully

harness people power” (p.179). The authors point out repeatedly that health is an outcome of social position. Through well-funded and managed lay health workers, and an engaged community and engaged local leadership, health issues can be addressed at the individual level for the recipient, meaning that the volunteers themselves will benefit from their engagement. If these are occurring whilst structural issues are being addressed by politics, the community will do better overall. The book does what the authors set out to do; the arguments are specific and precise, the examination of the current literature and findings are based on social welfare and public health programs in the UK and elsewhere, and it is well-presented and accessible to lay persons and academics alike.

The book is organized to provide the thesis, arguments with supporting data, and conclusions in an orderly format. Four of the chapters to support the authors’ thesis are case studies. That, in addition to the provided glossary, informative tables and figures within chapters, and key points at end of each chapter, make this a fantastic short or supplemental textbook for students in social work, social policy and the like. The book does analyze the political milieu and utilize case studies primarily from the UK, but the overall thesis is generalizable. The book would be a great tool for those wishing to have a greater understanding on the issues on volunteering, lay health workers and citizenship and engagement as they pertain to public health.

Book Review

Roy, R. N., Schumm, W. R., & Britt, S. L. (2014). *Transition to parenthood*. New York, NY: Springer.

Reviewed by Rasby Marlene Powell, Ph.D.
University of North Carolina at Pembroke

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Although researchers and family professionals have had no problem finding books on pregnancy or parenting, finding information about the transition to parenthood required compiling literature from multiple places until the publication of this book. Through their combined expertise, the authors provide the reader with a comprehensive look at this important phase of parenting. Dr. Roy specializes in the study of the transition to parenthood. Dr. Shumm co-developed the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale and teaches family courses. Dr. Britt's expertise is in family economics and finances.

The authors ground the reader by presenting foundational information first and then addressing specific phases of the transition to parenthood. First, they cover the history of fertility in the United States. Next, they discuss the various theories used to analyze families and parenting. The next few chapters focus on issues such as voluntary versus involuntary childlessness, family roles, and parental demographics. Chapter 6 discusses prenatal and postnatal expectations as well as unfulfilled expectations. Chapters 7 and 8 focus on relationship maintenance and the cost of raising a child. Chapter 9 addresses the difficulties parents face when they have children with special needs. The concluding chapter evaluates various parenting programs and intervention programs.

This book delves into areas that highlight the complexity of the transition to parenthood. For example, they address the emotional and financial toll that fertility treatments or adoption can take on parents. They also cover the differing experiences of working class versus middle class mothers in terms of support networks and expectations about parenthood. Their discussion of expectations outlines both prenatal and postnatal expectations and some of the consequences of unfulfilled expectations. They explain how to recognize when a marital or couple relationship is faltering and provide strategies for dealing with the inevitable stress that comes with partnerships. Their coverage of the transition to parenthood with a special needs child not only illustrates the daily stress involved but also highlights the unique joys that the parents experience. Their evaluation of parenting programs includes detailed information as well as contact information for multiple family support programs.

I strongly recommend this book to anyone who studies or works with families, especially during this critical phase of parenting. This book would make an excellent text or supplement to undergraduate or graduate courses. Because the authors cover the transitional phase for new parents ranging from single mothers to married couples to adoptive parents, the reader gains an

Book review: *Transition to parenthood*

understanding of the complexity of the transition to parenthood. The only possible complaint that some readers may have is that there is almost an overwhelming number of statistics in some of the chapters. However, I suggest that the

statistics provide the reader with a much deeper understanding of the many factors involved in transitioning to parenthood. Overall, this book certainly meets its goal of filling the gap in the literature.