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## Announcement: Major Changes at the Journal

DOI: [10.55521/10-021-101](https://doi.org/10.55521/10-021-101)

Stephen M. Marson, Ph.D., ACSW, Editor

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Volume 21, 2024 will be my last year as editor of the International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics. As founder and editor since 2002, it is time for me to step aside and pass on the responsibilities to another person who could inject fresh ideas into the mission of our journal.

Effective for volume 21, Bob McKinney will be replacing Donna DeAngelis as Associate Editor where he will learn the technological requirements of being the editor for volume 22. Donna reluctantly agreed to replace Jerry Finn to become the associate editor for the publication of volume 8 in 2011 [see: [Editorial: “You’ll not see nothing like the mighty Finn.”](#)]. When I explained to her that her primary duty was to control me, she said, “Well, I’ve been doing that for over a decade.” She happily agreed to be the Associate Editor and was just as happy that I take her place!



Bob McKinney

Bob McKinney, Ph.D., LICSW-S, C-IAYT is a licensed, clinical social worker and registered yoga therapist at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, AL. He earned the PHD and MSW from the University of Alabama School of Social Work and the BA in philosophy from Mississippi State University. He

is an associate professor of behavioral medicine in the College of Community Health Sciences (CCHS) Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine and is an adjunct assistant professor of social work at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine Department of Medical Education. At CCHS, Dr. Bob teaches family medicine residents, medical students, social work students, and learners from myriad other disciplines about the social determinants of health (SDOH).

Because this is my last volume, it seems like a natural opportunity to address questions that are frequently asked of me regarding the *International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*. Each time I get these questions, I go through the time-consuming process of researching the answers, but unthinkingly fail to save the information.

The first question is, what special issues have been published? The following is a historical table:

Title	Date	Editors
Student Articles	Vol. 4, No. 2, 2007	Stephen M. Marson, PhD
Academic Honesty	Vol. 5, No. 1, 2008	P. Pittman-Munke, PhD & M. Berghoef, MSW
Disabilities	Vol. 5, No. 3, 2008	John C. Bricout, PhD
International	Vol. 6, No 2, 2009	Jason L. Powell, PhD
Research Methods	Vol. 7, No 1, 2010	Judy Krysik, PhD
Student Articles	Vol. 12, No. 2, 2015	Stephen M. Marson, PhD
Intercultural Relations	Vol. 19, No. 2, 2022	Veronica Hardy, PhD & Alison MacDonald, PhD

**Table 1:** Special Editions

The second most commonly asked question revolves around dates. Jerry Finn and I began to introduce the concept of an ethics journal to publishers in 2000. Frankly, making presentations to huge international publishing conglomerates was a bad idea. Linda Grobman’s White Hat Publishers expressed immediate interest. Starting in 2000, Jerry Finn and I organized to produce our first issue,



Linda Grobman

which was published in the fall of 2004. White Hat was our publisher from 2004 to 2012. Linda Grobman *is* White Hat Publications. Looking back, the volume of work that Linda produced is astonishing. She was the publisher and copy editor. She also took on the responsibilities for five special issues. Linda's work was nothing less than a herculean task. The work she accomplished was the functional equivalent of simultaneously writing two dissertations. The positive reputation that the journal received emerged from Linda's work ethic.

Based upon data from other highly specialized social work journals, we anticipated that we would generate 300 subscribers during our first year. After our first 12 months, we had over 1,000 subscribers. Soon we had 6,000. Why was there such interest within the social work community? At that time, eight of the nine curricular competencies defined by the Council on Social Work Education were the topics of a multitude of journals – but not values and ethics. Our journal filled that void. Within two years of our first issue, two additional social work values and ethics journals were established.

Maintaining our mailing list is cumbersome. By 2012, our journal became so popular that the workload was beyond the capacity of White Hat Publishers. As executive director of the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), Donna DeAngelis recognized the linkage between social work licensure and the field of social work ethics. ASWB and an ethics journal seemed to be a good fit for Donna. ASWB became our publisher in 2012. Although ASWB operates a publishing arm within their organization, in the traditional sense they are not a publisher. Publishing scheduled newsletters for a professional organization is considerably different than the work of publishing a scholarly/practice journal. By volume 18, ASWB could no longer manage the task.



Donna DeAngelis

Beginning with volume 19 issue 1, the ownership of the journal was transferred to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). With our new ownership, the board voted to change the name of the journal from the *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics* to the *International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*. When the journal became an IFSW product, all IFSW members became subscribers. The number of readers skyrocketed.



Pascal Rudin

Pascal Rudin became our liaison and publisher. Pascal secured our new International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) and also secured our Digital Object Identifier (DOI). The journal had never previously been assigned a DOI. The DOI will make searching less cumbersome for readers.

The journal has changed dramatically since its conception. The early 2000s were a different world. In those days, some social work scholars and practitioners questioned the legitimacy of a paperless journal. It was not uncommon for me to receive harsh criticism based on the assumption that an online journal would diminish the quality of scholarship and research. A large cohort of social workers had trouble believing that an online journal could make the same contribution as paper journals. I actually lost friends because I was accused of degrading the profession of social work.

During the first three years of publication, I was frequently asked if the journal had a double-blind manuscript review process. Despite having reported that our review process was double-blind, authors needed reassurance. Practitioners and scholars doubted that an online journal could achieve the same quality assurance standards as a paper journal. *Social Service Abstracts* was one of the first library databases to include the journal. Even after a face-to-face meeting with their representative in which I explained that our review process was double-blind, they weren't convinced. They chose to classify the journal as *not* double-blind. After multiple attempts to address this issue, I am happy to report that this has been resolved.

The *International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics* has four boards: Copy Editing, Policy, Manuscript Review, and Book Review. The scholars who volunteer their time to these boards are dedicated to the journal and the advancement of our knowledge in the arena of social work values and ethics. I leave the journal in good hands!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. M. M.', written in a cursive style.



## Editorial: A Follow-up on Artificial Intelligence

DOI: [10.55521/10-021-102](https://doi.org/10.55521/10-021-102)

Stephen M. Marson, Ph.D., ACSW, Editor

Marson, S. (2024). Editorial: A Follow-up on Artificial Intelligence. *International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, 21(1), 9-13. <https://doi.org/10.55521/10-021-102>

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This editorial is a follow-up to an earlier editorial entitled: [My Experience with Artificial Intelligence](#) (Volume 20, Number 1). Since then, I had an exasperating experience with artificial intelligence and decided to unload my frustrations as a letter to the editor for the *Journal of Technology in Human Services*. As a reply, Dr. Goldkind (the editor) and her colleagues responded with a wonderful forum article which can be found in this current issue. Make sure to read this important forum article which can be found after the features articles published in this issue.

Following is the letter I wrote to Dr. Goldkind:

Dear Dr. Goldkind,

For the last five years, I have been analyzing Durkheim's work on suicide in an effort to assist clinical social workers with clients facing suicidal ideation. I have been having problems finding criticism of Durkheim's work published by psychologists. As a result, I decided to use artificial intelligence to assist me. Following is the dialogue:

ME: You gave me this citation: Lester, D. (2014). Durkheim's theory of suicide as applied to the family: A critical evaluation. *Journal of Family Issues*, 35(13), 1826-1840. However, I went to the library, and it doesn't exist in the *Journal of Family Issues*. Instead, there is an article entitled "A Double-Edge Sword."

AI: I'm sorry for the confusion. It seems that the citation I gave you was incorrect. According to my web search, the article by Lester is actually published in the journal *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, not the *Journal of Family Issues*. The correct citation should be:

Lester, D. (2014). Durkheim's Theory of Suicide as Applied to the Family: A Critical Evaluation. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 44(6), 631-636.

The article entitled A Double-Edge Sword is by a different author, Campbell, and it is about the effects of family support on suicidal behavior. It is not related to Durkheim's theory of suicide.

I apologize for the mistake, and I hope this helps.

ME: I looked up the Lester's article in *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 44(6), 631-636. It is not there.

AI: I'm sorry to hear that. It seems that the citation I gave you was also incorrect. According to my web search, the article by Lester is actually published in the journal *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, but in a different volume and issue: 44(5), 547-552. The correct citation should be:

Lester, D. (2014). Durkheim's Theory of Suicide as Applied to the Family: A Critical Evaluation. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 44(5), 547-552.

I apologize for the inconvenience, and I hope this helps.

ME: I looked at *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 44(5), 547-552. The Lester article is not there.

AI: I'm very sorry for the trouble. It seems that the citation I gave you was wrong again. According to my web search, the article by Lester is actually published in the journal *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, but in a different year: 2015, not 2014. The correct citation should be:

Lester, D. (2015). Durkheim's Theory of Suicide as Applied to the Family: A Critical Evaluation. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 44(5), 547-552.

I apologize for the inconvenience, and I hope this helps.

ME: Volume 44 is in 2014 not 2015. I search the entire volume for 2015. There are no articles with Lester as the author.

AI: I'm very sorry for the trouble. It seems that the citation I gave you was wrong again. According to my web search, the article by Lester is actually published in the journal *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, but in a different year: 2015, not 2014. The correct citation should be:

Lester, D. (2015). Durkheim's Theory of Suicide as Applied to the Family: A Critical Evaluation. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 44(5), 547-552.

I apologize for the inconvenience, and I hope this helps.

ME: In the journal *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* for the year 2015, there are no articles in which Lester is the author.

AI: I'm very sorry for the trouble. It seems that the citation I gave you was wrong again. According to my web search, the article by Lester is actually published in the journal *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, but in a different volume and issue: 45(3), 305-310. The correct citation should be:

Lester, D. (2015). Durkheim's Theory of Suicide as Applied to the Family: A Critical Evaluation. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 45(3), 305-310.

I apologize for the inconvenience, and I hope this helps.

ME: There is no article in which Lester is the author in 2015.

AI: I'm very sorry for the trouble. It seems that I have made a series of errors in providing you with the correct citation for Lester's article. I have checked my web search results again and I have found the source of the problem. The article by Lester is actually published in the journal *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, but in a different year: 2016, not 2015. The correct citation should be:

Lester, D. (2016). Durkheim's Theory of Suicide as Applied to the Family: A Critical Evaluation. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 46(1), 23-28.

I apologize for the inconvenience, and I hope this helps.

ME: The article on page 23 is entitled "A Minority Stress Model for Suicidal Ideation in Gay Men" and it is not by Lester.

AI: I'm very sorry for the trouble. It seems that I have made a series of errors in providing you with the correct citation for Lester's article. I have checked my web search results again and I have found the source of the problem. The article by Lester is actually published in a different journal: *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, not *Social Forces*. The correct citation should be:

Lester, D. (1979). Durkheim's Theory of Suicide as Applied to the Family: A Critical Evaluation. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 9(4), 201-207.

I apologize for the inconvenience, and I hope this helps.

I was skeptical of this final response. As a result, I searched for David Lester on ResearchGate. He has an impressive publication record in the arena of suicide. He responded within minutes by telling me that he did not author any of the citations I received from artificial intelligence.

Is it reasonable to assume that if an answer doesn't exist, artificial intelligence will fabricate one? Scholars who use artificial intelligence to assist in their research should be cautious.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen M Marson, PhD, ACSW  
Professor Emeritus

## Editorial: Social Work's Role in Ending Antisemitism: If Not Us, Who?

DOI: [10.55521/10-021-103](https://doi.org/10.55521/10-021-103)

Jo Dee Gottlieb & Anne Steigerwald, Special Contributors

Gottlieb, J. & Steigerwald, A. (2024). Editorial: Social Work's Role in Ending Antisemitism: If Not Us, Who? *International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, 21(1), 14-27.  
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As Jewish Americans, we are frightened, we are angry, and we are sad. The October 7, 2023, attack on Israel and the resulting war have fueled animosity toward Jews around the world. Antisemitism long brewing beneath the surface has become more visible. Jews have been targeted to the point that some have changed their Jewish-sounding names on Uber accounts, removed mezuzahs from doors, or tucked Star of David necklaces under their shirts. However, social work programs have rarely addressed antisemitism in teaching about anti-racism, diversity, inclusion, and equity (ADEI). It is time for social workers and educators to become knowledgeable about antisemitism and speak out about it.

Today's antisemitic threats don't arise solely from violent white nationalists, like the mass shooter in 2017 at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue. Today, antisemitic rhetoric is rising on the far left. Because Jews have often stood at the forefront of social justice issues, supporting reproductive, LGBTQ and civil rights, many now feel abandoned by those progressives who have ignored harassment or condoned vicious speech without understanding its implications.

On college campuses, some Jews say they are unsupported and unsafe (ADL Center for Antisemitism Research, 2023). Recent incidents have included:

- Nazi symbols painted on dorm room doors at American University (Fischer, 2023, October 21)
- Student-posted online death threats to Jewish students at Cornell (Watson & Andone, 2023, October 31)

## And what about social work schools?

Early findings on social work education in Canada suggest some students feared “being ‘canceled’ because of their Jewishness, were subjected to micro-aggressions or hateful course content, or felt pressured to parrot ideologies that countered their Jewish values. Several claimed Jewish identity was denigrated and grossly misunderstood in their programs” (Poizner, Love, Spindel, Primerano, Alloul, Katzman, & Walker, 2022).

What are social work programs and practitioners doing to address antisemitism? How can we better prepare ourselves and our students to be truly inclusive?

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) mandates adherence to ADEI standards in social work programs’ course content as well as learning environment. (Council on Social Work Education, 2022). Although infrequent in social work literature, there have been calls for attention to antisemitism (Cox & Marlowe, 2023; Cox, 2021; Gold, 1996; Reed, 1994; Soifer, 1991). Levine (2013) proposed that “anti-racist theory, education and practice needs to include a thorough understanding of antisemitism” with “an uncompromising attitude” toward it (p. 109). However, Levine notes, “there is a relative absence from social work literature of a meaningful focus on one of racism’s oldest and most pernicious forms: that of antisemitism” (p. 86). A failure to include Jewish populations seems inconsistent with accreditation standards as well as the values and ethics of the social work profession.

In western countries, prejudice against Muslims, Asians, and other marginalized groups is also widespread and destructive. Since October 7, violent attacks and harassment against Muslims have escalated. These constitute an urgent concern and likewise should be addressed in social work programs. In some ways, these prejudices share many traits. However, anti-semitism presents a unique history and dynamics, and is the purview of this editorial, with a focus on social work education, primarily in the U.S.

Even before the latest conflict, antisemitic incidents in the U.S. had reached an all-time high. In 2022, at least 2,042 hate crimes based on religion were reported. While Jews comprise about 2.4 % of the U.S. population, 55% of these crimes (1,122) were aimed at Jews. That same year, 181 hate crimes were anti-Sikh and 158 were anti-Muslim. In a separate category, racial hate crimes against blacks or African Americans numbered 3,424 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023).

This is not to say that Jews face prejudice and discrimination in the same degree that blacks do in the U.S. Of course not. Jews are not routinely stopped while driving or worried about encounters with police. But that doesn't mean that antisemitism or bias against Jews isn't a legitimate concern.

Why is teaching about antisemitism important in a social work context?

- Antisemitic incidents, hate speech and violence are rising worldwide.
- Anti-Jewish comments and baseless conspiracy theories are mushrooming online.
- The Jewish population in North America and Europe is aging and in more need of social services.
- Social work education tends to attract Jewish students, students of color, and others who have experienced prejudice.
- Antisemitism is a common denominator and core of so many diverse extremist groups that it might be seen as a “gateway” in



the progression of violent radicalization and extremism and even as a “diagnostic factor for extremist radicalization” (Mekeagrou-Hitchins, Clifford, & Vidino, October 2020, p. 3).

## What exactly is antisemitism?

Basically, it is hostility or prejudice against Jewish people. Who exactly are the Jews? Many assume that this is simply a religious or ethnic group. However, the Jews are a people. More specifically, “a people with a language, a culture, a literature, and a particular set of ideas, beliefs, texts, and legal practices. One word for that is a civilization” (Weiss, 2019, p. 28). The “Jewish people” do not fall into a neat pre-conceived category.

Nor does antisemitism. Like a villain from fantasy fiction, it is a shapeshifter, whose outer appearance changes while its basic core remains constant. Antisemitism takes the shape of whatever a society most hates and fears.

In ancient and medieval times antisemitism was religious in nature. Jews were hated because they refused to accept Christianity and, later, Islam. In the eighteenth century, racial and political rationales were added... By the nineteenth century, those on the political right were accusing all Jews of being Socialists, Communists, and revolutionaries. Those on the political left were accusing all Jews of being wealth-obsessed capitalists... the eugenics movement posited that Jews were inferior in their genetic makeup... This toxic brew of race, religion, politics, and pseudoscience became the cornerstone of Nazi antisemitism and is today a cornerstone of the white power movement and white supremacist antisemitism (Lipstadt, 2019, pp.16–17).

The roots of antisemitism run deep. While most educated people are aware of the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition and the Holocaust, here are a few examples (chosen from a regrettably long list) of persecutions that are less widely known:

- The terms “ghetto” originated in Italy, where Jews were forced to live in a small area with gates locked at night.

- Pogroms were organized riots against Jews, often tolerated by or initiated by the government. Hundreds of pogroms swept the Russian empire. (In the city of Odessa alone, pogroms occurred in 1821, 1859, 1871, 1881, and 1905.) Thousands of Jews were murdered, raped, beaten, robbed, or made homeless. Spurred in part by pogroms, millions of Jews left Eastern Europe for North and South America, Europe, and what is now Israel.
- About 500,000 Jews fled persecution or were essentially expelled from North African and the Middle Eastern countries in the decade after Israel was established (Rosenstein, 2018, p. 365). This included at least 125,000 Iraqi Jews who escaped to Israel during 1949-1951 after Iraq launched anti-Jewish riots, arrests, and made Zionism a capital crime, effectively ending a Jewish community that had thrived there for over 2,500 years (Jewish Virtual Library (n.d.).
- Vicious falsehoods were told about Jews--that they caused the plague, that they engaged in ritual murder of Christian children, and in more modern times, that they were a part of some imagined worldwide conspiracy that secretly controlled wealth and power.

The Holocaust, which occurred within living memory, was the worst and ultimate consequence of antisemitism. The systematic slaughter of six million Jews killed one-third of all Jews in the world. That the Nazis could murder the majority of the Jews in Europe, with little outcry from the rest of the world, showed how little power Jews actually had.

These events are not listed to contend “who is the greater victim,” but to explain that inter-generational trauma dwells within many Jews. Because of a long history of persecution, Jews take seriously calls for their annihilation. After each shooting or attack, we instinctively wonder, “Could it happen again?” and “Could it happen here?”

One lesson of bigotry around the world is that hate-filled speech precedes and begets hate-fueled violence. **Words matter.**

Critics of Israel often claim their statements are not anti-Jewish, but Anti-Zionist. Zionism is a nationalistic movement encouraging Jews to return to their ancestral homeland. It asserts that Jews, like other peoples, have a right to their own land and to self-determination.

There's nothing improper with criticizing or protesting the government or policies of the State of Israel—Israelis do so vigorously. “Anti-Zionism challenges the rights of Israel to exist as a state, while antisemitism is prejudice against Jewish people. People can disagree with Israeli policy and not be antisemitic or anti-Zionist. However, often anti-Zionist sentiments are difficult to separate from anti-Semitism, with each fueling the other” (Cox, 2021, p.115).

Recent protests about Israel have morphed into verbal and physical attacks openly targeting Jews. In Sydney, Australia, a pro-Palestinian rally devolved into chants of “f\*\*\* Israel” and “f\*\*\* the Jews.” At one point, cries of “death to the Jews” rang out. The police felt compelled to warn Sydney's Jewish community from entering the area over safety concerns (Aitchison, 2023, October 9). This occurred only two days after the Hamas terror attack, and before any Israeli military response.

Often those criticizing Israel promote a politicized narrative by using trigger phrases such as “white European,” “settler colonial state,” “nonindigenous,” and “genocide.” “While Israelis and Palestinians are real, localized, and specific, their narratives are often appropriated, blandly simplified, and woven into world views which serve peoples and purposes far away” (Hirsh, 2017, p.1). Well-meaning liberals may latch onto these phrases without fully understanding the implications of their epithets or without questioning their accuracy.

- Settler Colonial State? Of what mother country was Israel a colony To where would the Jews return? Can you colonize your

own homeland? What is your definition? Is it applied equally to all states? (Dowty, A., 2023, October 23; ADL, 2021, July 8).

- Indigenous? Jews are among the indigenous inhabitants of Israel. Even after their conquest and dispersal by Rome, a Jewish presence has continued ever since, whenever allowed.
- White Europeans? A visitor to Israel might have trouble distinguishing Jew from Arab without the help of identifying clothing. Over half of Israel's Jewish population is Sephardic (Mediterranean) or Mizrahi. The Mizrahi Jews were not European, but had lived for centuries in Middle Eastern and North African lands, including Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Morocco, Yemen, Syria, Iran, and Iraq (Khazzoom, L., n.d.). Israel is also home to tens of thousands of Jews whose families immigrated from Ethiopia and India.
- Genocide? Nearly half of the world's Jews live in Israel. Actually, Hamas' original Covenant proclaimed its intention to obliterate Israel and called for the killing of Jews (Yale Law School, 1988). Hamas' intentions appear unmodified, although the Covenant was recently updated (MEE Staff, 2017, May 2).

Everyone is free to disagree and challenge facts, but loaded terms fail to present the full picture.

In a sampling of 250 college students who supported the chant "From the River to the Sea," 67.8% changed their views after learning a handful of basic facts about the Middle East, including that the chant would "entail the subjugation, expulsion, or annihilation of the seven million Jewish and two million Arab Israelis." The University of California, Berkeley professor who initiated the survey opined that, "These students had never seen a map of the Mideast and knew little about the region's geography, history, or demography... It is time for good teachers to join the fray and combat bias with education" (Hassner, 2023, December 5).

For years, university administrators and educators have shied away from speaking out against antisemitism on campus, perhaps afraid of backlash or taking political sides. Should it be so difficult to condemn hate speech, harassment, and calls for annihilation of a people? Testifying before the U.S. Congress on December 5, 2023, college junior Bella Ingber stated that:

Being a Jew at NYU has meant being physically assaulted in NYU's library by a fellow student while I was wearing an American Israeli flag and having my attacker still roam freely throughout campus...Today, in 2023, at NYC, I hear calls to gas the Jews, and I am told that Hitler was right." She asserted that "diversity, equity, and inclusion is not a value that NYC extends to its Jewish students (Ingber, 2023, December 6).

One reason Jews might be excluded in discussions of diversity is because they are perceived as "white" and "privileged." Interestingly, a recent poll estimates that over 10% of Jews in the United States identify as Hispanic, Black, Asian, Native American, or multiracial. (*US Jewish Population Estimates 2020*, p.19). Contrary to stereotypes, Jews come in a wide range of colors and economic levels.

There have been reported incidences of Diversity/Equity/Inclusion (DEI) offices dismissing, or marginalizing antisemitism. In the U.S., we are well aware of those on the political right who wish to eliminate DEI offices. We should not let the perceived omissions of some DEI offices give ammunition to those who seek to destroy important protections for all diverse groups.

Teaching about Jewish populations in social work curricula should integrate content about history and culture, as well as about prejudice. Equally important is a focus on the learning environment. Social work programs need to support an inclusive environment, assuring that DEI offices provide protections for Jewish students and faculty.

Recently, NASW reaffirmed its "commitment to fight antisemitism in all its forms" (NASW, 2023, May 17). During the fall of 2023, U.S. and international

social work organizations have responded to attacks on Jews and Israel, perhaps to a greater extent than other professions. These responses include statements of condolences, support for human rights, and appreciation for social workers offering assistance.

## How do we take statements and turn them into actions?

We recommend that CSWE, NASW, and other relevant organizations develop curriculum resource guides as well as offer workshops and webinars for faculty. For specific guidelines or resources for curricula development, see Cox (2021), Daniel, Fryall, & Benenson (2019), and organizations below, such as the U.S. Holocaust Museum and Anti-Defamation League.

- <https://www.ushmm.org/teach/teaching-materials/antisemitism-racism>
- <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/resources-address-and-challenge-antisemitism>
- <https://jewishstudies.berkeley.edu/antisemitism-education/antisemitism-education-resources/>

At the micro and mezzo levels, we encourage social workers to support and be sensitive to the needs and concerns of Jewish clients and colleagues. Social workers have a duty to practice cultural humility and self-reflection in examining personal biases. We hope students would be prepared to support the Jewish client encountering the social services or health care systems. Such clients might include immigrants, nursing home residents, Orthodox Jews, those seeking mental health care, and those going through terminal illness or the grieving process. Keep in mind that some clients may be hesitant to reveal their Jewish identities, unsure of how they will be treated.

At the macro level, we call upon social workers to be leaders in the fight against antisemitism. Our profession can “foster a societal culture in which

Jews and people of other faiths are free to exercise their human rights without fear of repercussions” and include content on religious literacy as well as antisemitism (Hodge & Boddie, 2022, p. 103).

We urge social workers to become knowledgeable about antisemitism and to call it out – name it, recognize it, confront it, condemn it, and take action to eliminate it. When anti-Zionist or antisemitic speakers appear on college campuses who invoke their right to free speech or academic freedom, insist that others have the right to present opposing views. And when speakers cross the line to support violence, we should not be afraid to denounce that as unacceptable.

It is OK to fight against hatred of Jews, to support the existence of Israel, to denounce terrorism or efforts to “kill all the Jews,” while at the same time to vocalize criticism of government policies and to advocate for Palestinians to have better living conditions and live in freedom. One can have empathy for both groups. These are not mutually exclusive positions.

Diversity and equity categories have expanded over time. It's time to broaden social workers' education by acknowledging that many groups, not previously considered, might be the victims of threats and exclusion. To broaden our definitions is not to negate the pain of others. In fact, all groups who have experienced exclusion and oppression should be able to empathize with and support each other.

It's time to work together to broaden our curricula and our minds to end antisemitism.

**“If not us, who? If not now, when?”**

If you would like to respond to this editorial, you are encouraged to submit your commentary to [journal@ifsw.org](mailto:journal@ifsw.org). Your contribution will be published in the “Letters to the Editor” section of our next issue.

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# A Tribute to Excellence: Honouring Stephen M. Marson's Legacy

DOI: [10.55521/10-021-104](https://doi.org/10.55521/10-021-104)

Dr. Pascal Rudin, Ph.D., IFSW Acting CEO and Publisher

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On behalf of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and as the current publisher of the *International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, I wish to express our profound appreciation to Stephen M. Marson for his remarkable dedication and leadership over the past 24 years as the editor of this distinguished journal.



Stephen M. Marson

Steve, your tenure has been marked by an unwavering commitment to fostering a forum for critical dialogue, ethical reflection, and scholarly excellence within the field of social work. Your contributions have not only enriched the journal but have also played a pivotal role in advancing the profession's commitment to ethical and values-based practice globally.

As we navigate through this transition period, your mentorship and forward-looking vision for the journal's future have been and will be invaluable, underscoring your dedication to its growth and ongoing relevance amidst the challenges of an evolving landscape.

We are delighted to welcome Robert McKinney as the new editor with the publication of Volume 22 Issue 1. We are confident that under Robert's leadership, the journal will continue to flourish, building upon the solid foundation you have laid.

On a personal note and on behalf of the entire IFSW, I extend our deepest gratitude for your hard work, guidance, and the positive impact you have made. Your efforts have significantly contributed to enhancing discourse within the field and have left an indelible mark on the profession.

As you transition to new endeavours, we look forward with great anticipation to your continued involvement with the journal under Robert McKinney's leadership. Thank you, Steve, for your invaluable contributions and for everything you have done!

Warmest regards,

Pascal Rudin  
Publisher

## Changes at IJSWVE and Thank You

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Stephen M. Marson, Editor, and Laura Gibson, Book Review Editor

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Normally, within this section of the journal, we announce staff changes. That is, we acknowledge individuals who joined one of our three boards. We also announce individuals who are leaving one of our boards. This current issue represents the first time we have no new individual joining or leaving one of our boards.

A great deal of work goes into each issue of the *International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*. All work on our journal is completed by volunteers and *no one*—including our publisher IFSW—makes a financial profit from the publication. In addition, we have unsung heroes on our editorial board who contribute to the existence of our journal. Because we have a rule that requires our manuscripts to be assessed anonymously, I cannot offer public recognition of their names. I thank them! However, I can publicly announce the names of our hard-working copy editors. Their work is not confidential. For their major contributions to this issue, I must publicly thank:

- Veronica Hardy
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- Alison MacDonald
- Ann McAllister
- Jennifer Wood

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# Effective Altruism: Implications for the Social Work Profession: Part I

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## Abstract

The concept of effective altruism has been prominent in moral philosophy since 2009. Effective altruism is a philosophy and social movement which applies evidence and reason to determine the most effective ways to improve the world. The core tenets of effective altruism are remarkably consistent with social work's values and mission. Ironically, social work's literature does not include any in-depth discussion of effective altruism. This article (Part I of II) discusses the concept of effective altruism; identifies its core components; and explores the rich relevance of effective altruism to social work's principal aims as defined by the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics. The companion article (Part II) focuses on the relevance of two key elements of effective altruism as this movement pertains to social work: distributive justice and empiricism.

**Keywords:** Altruism, distributive justice, effective altruism, equality, ethics



The social work profession attracts altruists. Altruism is defined as engaging in actions to benefit others and to avoid or prevent harm to them (Kraut, 2020). In recent years, moral philosophers have engaged in deep discussion of a subtype of altruism known as “effective altruism” (Berkey, 2021). Philosopher Peter Singer (2015) defines effective altruism as “a philosophy and social movement which applies evidence and reason to working out the most effective ways to improve the world” (pp. 4–5). Philosophers who have focused their scholarship on effective altruism have not explored the concept’s implications for social workers; yet the potential application of effective altruism to social work is profound. To date, social work’s literature lacks in-depth exploration of effective altruism and its relevance to the profession (Kindle, 2015). The aim of this discussion is to help fill that gap.

## The Nature of Altruism

To grasp the relevance of effective altruism for social work, practitioners must first appreciate the nature of altruism as a core concept. Behavior is normally considered altruistic when it is motivated by a desire to benefit someone other than oneself for that person’s sake. The term is used as the contrary of “self-interested,” “selfish,” or “egoistic”—words applied to behavior that is motivated solely by the desire to benefit oneself. “Malicious” conduct applies to behavior that expresses a desire to harm others simply for the sake of harming them (Kraut, 2020).

The concept of altruism has a rich history (Boehm, 2012; Nagel, 1970). The word “altruism” (from the French, *altruisme*, from *autrui*, “other people,” derived from Latin, “other”) was coined by Auguste Comte, the 19th century French philosopher, in order to describe the ethical doctrine he espoused. Comte believed that people have a moral obligation to renounce self-interest and devote themselves to others.

In addition to many philosophical and secular treatises on the nature of altruism, the world’s major religions clearly embrace the concept (Batson, 2011; Boehm, 2012). In Buddhism, for example, people are encouraged to focus love and compassion on others, which in turn promotes happiness.

In Islam, the concept 'īthār' (altruism) is the notion of preferring others to oneself. In Christianity, altruism is central to the teachings of Jesus found in the Gospel. Jainism preaches the view of Ahimsa, to live and let live and not harm sentient beings.

Altruism is also central to Judaism. According to Hillel's famous maxim, "If I am not for myself, who will be? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?" A core belief in Sikhism is that the greatest deed anyone can do is to live the godly qualities of love, affection, and sacrifice, among others. Mohandas Gandhi exemplified the traditional Hindu focus on altruism. Indeed, Gandhi was granted the title Mahatma (revered person or sage) in recognition of his remarkable efforts to help others.

If someone performs an act entirely from altruistic motives—if, that is, self-interested motives are entirely absent—we can describe her act as a case of "pure" altruism. It is important to distinguish between purely altruistic behavior from self-sacrificing behavior: the former involves no gain for oneself, whereas the latter involves some loss (Batson, 2011; Kraut, 2020). For example, a social worker who adds time to her usual work week during some weekends and evenings to provide outreach services to people struggling with homelessness appears to be engaging in behavior that approximates purely altruistic behavior. A social worker who gives up timeslots and income during her usual work week to provide uncompensated services to clients during times that she could easily fill with paying clients includes elements of altruistic and self-sacrificing behavior.

Philosophers distinguish between "strong" and "weak" characterizations of altruism. An act is altruistic in the strong sense if it is undertaken in spite of the perception that it involves some loss of one's well-being. An act is altruistic in the weak sense if it is motivated, at least in part, by the fact that it primarily benefits someone else or the fact that it will not injure anyone else (Batson, 2011; Kraut, 2020).

Gabriel (2017) argues that it is also useful to distinguish between "thick" and "thin" versions of effective altruism. The thick version involves a commitment to utilitarianism—maximizing good for the greatest number—while the thin version merely involves a commitment to using a

substantial amount of one's spare resources to make the world a better place, and is compatible with a wide range of moral theories. The thick version of effective altruism makes a number of assumptions. First, "good" states of affairs are those in which suffering is reduced and premature loss of life averted. Second, effective altruism is broadly utilitarian or consequentialist in nature, meaning that we should always maximize the sum of individual welfare at all times. Third, the movement takes what it considers to be a scientific approach to doing good, which means using tools such as cost-benefit analysis and sound research to help quantify and compare the impact of different interventions and initiatives.

In contrast, the thin version of effective altruism holds that people should do the most good they can and that this involves using a substantial amount of one's spare resources to make the world a better place. This view of effective altruism remains noncommittal both about the nature of the good and about the individual's relationship to it. That said, the thin version of effective altruism claims that through careful analysis of evidence it is possible to provide sound general advice about how individuals can have a positive impact.

## Effective Altruism: Core Elements

The effective altruism movement was first associated with the charitable and philanthropic organization "Giving What We Can," founded in 2009 at Oxford University by ethicists Toby Ord and William MacAskill (MacAskill, 2015, 2022). Giving What We Can is an international society whose members pledge to donate at least 10% of their income to what are defined as effective charities according to an ambitious rubric. People who join sign a pledge to give away at least 10% of their income to any organization they think can best address poverty in the developing world. In 2011, a sister organization led by MacAskill and others called "High Impact Careers" was spun off from Giving What We Can. This organization encourages people to pursue high-paying jobs so they can give more money away. High Impact Careers was soon renamed 80,000 Hours. In 2012 the two organizations

incorporated the Centre for Effective Altruism as a nonprofit to serve as an umbrella organization.

The Centre for Effective Altruism embraces several core principles which intersect with a number of core social work values (MacAskill, 2015, 2022):

- When choosing what to fund or work on, people should not aim for what is most personal, familiar, or accessible.
- People should focus on problems that are important, neglected, and tractable (that is, problems which can be addressed meaningfully).
- People should evaluate the work that charities do, valuing transparency and good evidence.
- Time is valuable, and people should maximize the good they can do with their careers.
- The world is threatened by existential risks; making it safer might be a key priority.
- The suffering of some people is ignored because they don't look like us or are far away.

According to the Centre for Effective Altruism, people should make decisions about their altruistic efforts based on four key criteria: scale, neglect- edness, solvability, and personal fit. Considerations of scale entail these key questions: (1) What is the magnitude of this problem? (2) How much does it affect people's lives today? (3) How much effect will solving it have in the long-run? A problem has greater scale the larger the number of people affected; the larger the size of the effects per person; and the larger the long-run benefits of solving the problem. For social workers concerned about expanding availability of affordable housing in their community, for example, from the perspective of effective altruism priority would be given to projects that enhance the number of people housed with maximum rent subsidies that are projected to last for long periods of time.

The criterion of neglectedness requires people to ask these questions: (1) How many people and resources are already dedicated to tackling this problem? (2) How well allocated are the resources that are currently being dedicated to the problem? (3) Are there good reasons why markets or governments are not making progress on this problem? (4) Does the problem affect neglected groups, like those a long way away, animals, or our grandchildren rather than us? (5) Is the problem a low probability event, which might be getting overlooked? (6) Do few people know about the problem? From this perspective, social workers should give priority to compelling social problems that have not received sufficient attention in the profession. For example, the National Association of Social Workers recently declared that the profession has not paid sufficient attention to anti-racism during its history and needs to make this a priority. In 2021, NASW went so far as to apologize publicly for its failure to adequately confront these issues (NASW, 2021a):

Like most professions and institutions since 2020, the field of social work has been grappling with the consequences of our nation's racist foundation. Continued violent tragedies and widespread public protests illuminated centuries of racial exploitation and trauma in the United States. Clearly, no discipline can escape scrutiny if we are to build a truly inclusive and equitable future together. Social work is unique in its dual focus of enhancing human well-being and championing social justice. Yet our occupation's history is also linked to many shameful chapters in America's story. Despite visible leadership in our nation's most important social justice movements and in creating our country's social safety net, the social work profession has also contributed to ongoing discrimination and oppression of people of color through its systems, policies, and practices.

For 60 years, NASW has consistently worked to identify and correct industry standards and guidelines that do not align with our Code of Ethics. Core social work values include: service, social justice, human dignity, importance of relationships, as well as professional integrity and competence. Although social workers strive to improve the lives of others, we must also face some uncomfortable truths in the history of social

work. For these grave mistakes we apologize to the clients, colleagues and communities of color who were harmed by our profession. (p. 2)

The criterion of solvability includes these questions: (1) How easy would it be to make progress on this problem? (2) Do interventions already exist to solve this problem effectively, and how strong is the evidence behind them? (3) Is there a way to make progress on this problem with rigorous evidence behind it? (4) Is this an attempt to try out a new but promising program, to test whether it works? (5) Is this a program with a small but realistic chance of making a massive impact? This criterion aligns especially with standards embedded in the NASW Code of Ethics concerning the importance of evidence-informed practice (Reamer, 2018a, 2018b).

Social workers should base practice on recognized knowledge, including empirically based knowledge, relevant to social work and social work ethics. (standard 4.01[c])

Social workers should critically examine and keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to social work and fully use evaluation and research evidence in their professional practice. (standard 5.02[c])

Finally, the criterion of personal fit associated with effective altruism encourages people to examine the extent of their motivation to work on a particular problem. For social workers, priority should be given to projects in which practitioners are deeply invested and about which they are passionate.

According to Berkey (2021), effective altruists tend to engage in activities, and encourage others to engage in activities, such as:

- Donating money to charitable organizations recommended by effective altruist charity evaluators.
- Living a modest lifestyle so as to limit one's negative impact on the world and increase the amount of one's resources directed to improving the world.

- Choosing a career on the basis of the capacity of the work itself and/or the earnings from the work to contribute to improving the world in morally important respects.
- Contributing to efforts to determine what is achieved by different approaches to improving the world, so as to increase our ability to make informed choices about where to direct our time and money.
- Making decisions about where to direct the resources and time that one allocates to trying to improve the world on the basis of the best available evidence about what is achieved by different efforts.
- According to the Centre for Effective Altruism (MacAskill, 2015), effective altruists are critical of behavior such as:
  - Spending significant amounts of money on unnecessary luxury goods and services for oneself or one's loved ones and friends.
  - Donating money to, for example, wealthy universities, one's local opera house, or charities that are, on any plausible view, clearly much less cost effective than others with respect to improving the world.
  - Donating money to causes that one happens to care particularly about or feel a special connection to, rather than to others where the donations would, on any plausible view, do significantly more to improve the world.
  - Donating money to charitable organizations without looking into the available evidence about which organizations improve the world most cost effectively.

Much of the philosophical discussion of effective altruism focuses on optimal ways to enhance philanthropic giving. Proponents of effective altruism view it as a social movement that aims to revolutionize the way philanthropic giving occurs. Effective altruism encourages individuals to do as much good as possible, typically by contributing money to the best-performing aid and development organizations based on rigorous analysis of

key metrics (Gabriel, 2017). More narrowly, effective altruism as typically framed encourages affluent people to make significant donations to improve the well-being of people living in poverty, using quantified and observational methods to identify the most efficient charities (Syme, 2019).

Key to effective altruism is what it dubs *longtermism*. According to longtermism, positively influencing the distant future is a key moral priority (MacAskill, 2022).

## Examples of Effective Altruism

Using its rigorous research-based rubric that seeks to implement effective altruism, the nonprofit organization Giving What We Can highlights specific charities and charitable organizations. Giving What We Can founders, philosophers Toby Ord and Will MacAskill, have sought to identify and promote effective (1) charities, (2) charitable investment funds that include a diversified portfolio of effective charities, and (3) “meta-charities” that do not seek to help people in need directly, but seek to link potential donors with people in need. Examples highlighted by Giving What We Can of individual charities that engage in effective altruism include:

- **GiveDirectly:** GiveDirectly is a nonprofit that lets donors send money directly to the world’s poorest households. The organization believes people living in poverty deserve the dignity to choose for themselves how best to improve their lives. Since 2009, GiveDirectly has delivered more than \$550 million in cash directly into the hands of over 1.25 million families living in poverty.
- **Helen Keller International:** Helen Keller International partners with communities that are striving to overcome longstanding cycles of poverty. The charity provides services to prevent blindness and diabetes; empower women from poor households with the education and resources needed to raise their own nutritious foods; and prevent diseases that cause blindness, physical deformities, and other disabilities.



- **Against Malaria Foundation:** This organization provides long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLINs) to populations at high risk of malaria. Nets are distributed through partnerships with the International Red Cross, the Malaria Consortium, and other organizations. The Against Malaria Foundation also provides malaria education for various communities.

Examples of charitable investment funds highlighted by Giving What We Can that include a diversified portfolio of effective charities include:

- **GiveWell Maximum Impact Fund:** GiveWell recommends a short list of charities that are evidence-based, cost-effective, transparent, and in need of additional funding. Each charity has been assessed by GiveWell researchers. GiveWell's top charities work on global health and poverty alleviation programs in low-income communities.
- **Global Health and Development Fund:** The Global Health and Development Fund recommends grants with the aim of improving people's lives, typically in the poorest regions of the world where the need for healthcare and economic empowerment is greatest. The fund gives priority to projects that directly provide healthcare, or preventive measures that will improve health, well-being, or life expectancy; directly provide services that raise incomes or otherwise improve economic conditions; and provide assistance to governments in the design and implementation of effective policies.
- **Effective Altruism Infrastructure Fund:** The Effective Altruism Infrastructure Fund recommends grants that aim to improve the work of projects that use the principles of effective altruism by increasing their access to talent, capital, and knowledge. The Fund supports work that has the capacity to multiply the impact of direct work, including projects that provide intellectual infrastructure for the effective altruism community, run events, disseminate information, or fundraise for effective charities. The fund aims to

support projects that directly increase the number of people who are exposed to principles of effective altruism, or develop, refine or present such principles; support the recruitment of talented people who can use their skills to make progress on important problems; aim to build a global community of people who use principles of effective altruism as a core part of their decision-making process when deciding how they can have a positive impact on the world; conduct research into prioritizing between or within different cause areas; and improve community health by promoting healthy norms for interaction and discourse, or assist in resolving grievances.

Examples of meta-charities highlighted by Giving What We Can include:

- **80,000 Hours:** 80,000 Hours is a nonprofit organization that conducts research on which careers have the largest positive social impact and provides career advice based on that research. The organization produces guides that compare careers in terms of impact, identify which global problems are most pressing, identify ideas for new high-impact career paths, and describe how to make a career plan.
- **Rethink Priorities:** Rethink Priorities pursues research on pressing questions related to “tractable and neglected opportunities” for high impact across different social causes. The organization works to identify questions where empirical research could produce trajectory changes in charitable work on the long-term future of humanity, global health and development, animal welfare, and the behavior and demographics of the effective altruism community.
- **Happier Lives Institute:** This organization conducts research on the nature and measurement of well-being. Staffers synthesize the existing data on subjective well-being to discover what initiatives will have the biggest impact. Happier Lives Institute explores what it considers to be neglected global problems (such as mental health

and pain); identifies cost-effective interventions for addressing those problems; and evaluates and recommends the most effective organizations that deliver those interventions.

## Effective Altruism and Social Action

Some critics argue that effective altruism undermines the (allegedly) more effective and productive results of capitalism and is designed to advance a politically or socially motivated agenda in an indefensible manner (Kessler, 2022; Lewis-Kraus, 2022). Most recently, a pall has been cast over effective altruism because of its links to Sam Bankman-Fried, the cryptocurrency mogul who collaborated with William MacAskill, embraced effective altruism, and allegedly directed ill-gotten gains toward the movement (Tiku, 2022).

Other critics argue that effective altruism ignores the systemic causes of compelling social problems, such as widespread and persistent poverty (Syme, 2019). These critics accuse effective altruism of adopting a bourgeois moral philosophy that does not acknowledge and confront the ills of capitalism or sufficiently address the root causes of poverty. Syme (2019), for example, argues that systemic change promises to be more effective than charity and that effective altruism's resistance to radical politics is potentially distorted by a preference for the status quo and prevailing social arrangements. With specific regard to poverty, Syme (2019) states,

Systemic change promises to produce more good for less effort than charity, because of its potentially longer term impact. If we assume that a huge aid campaign would not eliminate the causes of poverty, then, even if it succeeded in helping most currently poor people, poverty would re-emerge. Ongoing aid efforts, perhaps smaller each time, would be required to maintain the elimination of poverty.

A single, large collective effort at social transformation, perhaps similar to a massive aid campaign, can become embedded in systemic practices, and become routine and "easy." Removing the causes of poverty is also better than poverty relief insofar as fewer people suffer in the first place. Systemic changes are not usually permanent, but they can be stable over decades or centuries. If the structural causes of poverty could be

eliminated for several generations, this would likely be a greater reward for similar effort than a massive aid campaign without systemic consequences. (p. 96)

Berkey (2017) also summarizes the view that the goals of effective altruism may be too narrow:

The central concern seems to be that the [effective altruism] movement's commitment to recommending that individuals direct their time and resources toward whichever efforts appear, given the available evidence, likely to do the most good, will make whatever commitments its members have to working for institutional change objectionably contingent, since it will always be an open question whether political action appears, for any particular individual deciding what to do with her time and resources, to offer the best prospects for improving the world. Proponents of this criticism believe that our commitment to directing our time and resources toward efforts to bring about institutional change should not be contingent in this way. (pp. 100-101)

In response, Wiblin (2015) asserts that effective altruism fully embraces systemic change as a key goal. In response to allegations that effective altruism is not sufficiently focused on systemic change, Wiblin states, "Why couldn't pursuing broad-scale legal, cultural or political changes be the most effective approach to making the world a better place? The answer is simply that it could! So there is nothing in principle about the idea of maximising the social impact of your work that rules out, or even discourages, seeking systemic change." Wiblin then cites specific examples of organizations that meet effective altruism criteria and are focused on systematic change:

- Philanthropic funder Open Philanthropy sponsors research and grants focused on immigration reform, criminal justice reform, macroeconomics, and international development.
- The Global Priorities Project conducts research on reform priorities for governments in order to improve cost-benefit analyses and decision-making protocols related to global health and national risk assessment, among other issues.

- The nonprofit Giving What We Can has worked with government officials on ways to improve aid effectiveness. One project focused on the appropriate use of discount rates by government agencies that deliver health services.

Further, Chappell (2016) emphasizes the role of lobbying among effective altruists for massive redistribution of resources. Syme (2019) comments on the ways in which effective altruism seeks systemic change in relation to norms of giving and highlights areas where policy advocacy could be an effective altruistic intervention. Karnofsky (2013) argues that effective altruism can promote true social change because:

concerted efforts to make the world a broadly better place seem to have become more common and... viable as economic development has progressed. Environmentalism, multiple civil rights movements, and large-scale foreign aid are... positive.... Changes... in the last two centuries and appear stronger in the developed world than in the developing world... We'd guess that increased wealth and improved technology often improves people's ability to coordinate around, and concentrate on, movements whose effects go beyond their personal lives... If one believes that, on average, people tend to accomplish good when they become more empowered, it's conceivable that the indirect benefits of one's giving swamp the first-order effects.

Implementation of the effective altruism model to promote social and systemic change is particularly relevant to social workers, whose moral mission includes explicit focus on distributive justice, social change, policy advocacy, and social justice. Among the helping professions, social work is truly unique in its explicit and simultaneous focus on individual well-being and the public or structural issues that affect individuals' ability to cope with life's challenges. According to the mission statement in the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW 2021b),

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are

vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's dual focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living.

Further, social work has an enduring commitment to social and political action to address broad social justice concerns and to seek systemic change. According to the NASW Code of Ethics,

Social workers should engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully. Social workers should be aware of the impact of the political arena on practice and should advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice. (standard 6.04[a])

Social workers should act to expand choice and opportunity for all people, with special regard for vulnerable, disadvantaged, oppressed, and exploited people and groups. (standard 6.04[b])

For social work to truly embrace effective altruism, the framework must clearly extend beyond evidence-informed philanthropic giving to include assertive social and political action consistent with social work's values. Practically speaking, in social work effective altruism can focus especially on carefully and systematically established priorities determined by prominent professional organizations and associations.

As a paradigmatic and uniquely ambitious example of a project consistent with the aims of effective altruism, the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (2019) sponsors the Grand Challenges for Social Work project, designed to (1) identify major social challenges for the nation, (2) gather evidence based on rigorous science, (3) design imaginative, effective, and culturally relevant solutions, (4) promote policies and professional practices that lead to positive change, and (5) advance sustainable initiatives that achieve the positive impacts for all families and communities,

tribal nations, and society as a whole. Through a rigorous protocol that initially involved review of more than eighty possible priorities drawn from a group of practitioners, researchers, educators, and policy experts, the Grand Challenges project has chosen to focus on thirteen core issues related to (1) individual and family well-being (ensuring healthy development for youth, closing the health gap, building healthy relationships to end violence, advancing long and productive lives), (2) stronger social fabric (eradicating social isolation, ending homelessness, creating social responses to a changing environment, harnessing technology for social good), and (3) a just society (eliminating racism, promoting smart decarceration, building financial capability and assets for all, reducing extreme economic inequality, achieving equal opportunity and justice).

The Grand Challenges Project gives priority to initiatives that have social, scientific, and application value consistent with the effective altruism model. With regard to the social element, “The Grand Challenges for Social Work is committed to strengthening our capacity to engage in productive relationships that enhance well-being, reduce conflict, and bridge across the many factors that divide us. We support the design and implementation of positive social interventions that increase human efficacy and freedom, not coercive measures for problem solving and social control. We support delivery of programs and services that arise from and strengthen positive, healthful social relationships and institutions.” Further, the Grand Challenges Project advocates for research that informs and provides direction for design, implementation, and improvement of practices, programs, and policies to address” the identified challenges. Finally, “Application refers to the use of knowledge for positive impact. Social work is an applied profession. We are not content just to know; we aim to know and do. The simple word *do* has profound ramifications. In knowledge building, social work must be as scientific as any academic discipline, but the knowledge must also inform meaningful and consequential action.”

## Conclusion

Effective altruism has emerged as a central concept in philosophy. During the past decade, scholars have made major strides in defining and applying effective altruism as a practical way to meet the needs of vulnerable people and guide philanthropic and social policy funding and initiatives.

Effective altruism's core elements are remarkably consistent with social work's values, yet, to date, there has been minimal effort to link effective altruism to the profession. Social workers would do well to learn about effective altruism, appreciate its conceptual richness, and, where warranted, apply its principles and protocols to social work's wide-ranging efforts to fulfill its unique mission. Social work's potential contributions lie in the profession's venerable commitment to assisting individuals who struggle in life and, simultaneously, addressing public policy and structural issues that harm individuals and compromise their quality of life. These are aims that align meaningfully with effective altruism.

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# Effective Altruism: Implications for the Social Work Profession: Part II

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## Abstract

The concept of effective altruism has been prominent in moral philosophy since 2009. Effective altruism is a philosophy and social movement which applies evidence and reason to determine the most effective ways to improve the world. The core tenets of effective altruism are remarkably consistent with social work's values and mission. Ironically, social work's literature does not include any in-depth discussion of effective altruism. Part I discussed the concept of effective altruism; identified its core components; and explored the relevance of effective altruism to social work's principal aims as defined by the National Association of Social Workers *Code of Ethics*. This article (Part II) focuses on two key elements of effective altruism as the concept pertains to social work: distributive justice and empiricism. To be fully implemented, effective altruism enhances the allocation of limited resources in a fair and just manner. Further, to

achieve its aims of impactful giving, effective altruism requires empirical evidence of effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Altruism, distributive justice, effective altruism, empiricism, equality

This discussion is Part II of a two-part article on effective altruism in social work. Effective altruism is a philosophy and social movement which applies evidence and reason to determine the most effective ways to improve the world. Part I discussed the concept of effective altruism; identified its core components; and explored the relevance of effective altruism to social work's principal aims as defined by the National Association of Social Workers *Code of Ethics*. This article (Part II) focuses on two key elements of effective altruism as the concept pertains to social work: distributive justice and empiricism. To be fully implemented, effective altruism enhances the allocation of limited resources in a fair and just manner. Further, to achieve its aims of impactful giving, effective altruism requires empirical evidence of effectiveness.

The Centre for Effective Altruism states that its principal goal is using evidence and reason to figure out how to benefit others as much as possible (MacAskill, 2015). This explicit goal includes two key philosophical concepts that are linked to altruistic efforts: distributive justice and empiricism. Social workers who are committed to effective altruism must fully grasp these concepts and their practical implications. To assist others "as much as possible" requires judgments about the most ethical distribution of aid-related resources. Distributive justice is a complex concept that requires rigorous analysis by social workers who seek to assist people to the greatest extent possible. Indeed, the philosophical literature features diverse distributive models and protocols with varying strengths and limitations.

Further, to assess the efficacy of their efforts to allocate limited resources, social workers must necessarily focus on outcomes. That is, what impact do our resource allocation efforts have? How should social workers measure this impact? Answers to these questions require judgments about the role of empiricism in social work.

## Distributive Justice and Effective Altruism

Distributive justice has been of enduring concern among political philosophers, dating back at least to the ancient Greeks. Aristotle offered one of the earliest conceptualizations of justice when he distinguished between *corrective* justice, relating to punishment and retribution, and *distributive* justice, relating primarily to the allocation of resources (Spicker, 1988).

Distributive justice can be defined and understood in several ways (Olsaretti, 2018). The eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume, for example, viewed justice as an extension of property rights. That is, justice is determined in part by principles related to the acquisition of property, transfer of property, occupation of property, and so on. For Hume, extreme concentrations of wealth and property may not be a problem as long as established property rights are respected. However, extreme concentrations of wealth and property may clash with effective altruists' wish to assist people to the greatest extent possible. Philosophers who view justice in terms of property rights tend to be critical of any sort of redistributive program designed to reduce inequality. Aside from their various economic arguments concerning disincentives introduced by redistribution of property or wealth (for example, related to hard work or financial investment in production), these critics claim that redistribution would be a form of coercion and theft (Spicker, 1988).

In contrast, Herbert Spencer, the nineteenth-century English philosopher, defined justice in terms of *desert*, in that what people have a right to is a function of what they contribute to the broader society (Olsaretti, 2018). This perspective, too, may clash with effective altruists' views as embraced by social workers, given that social workers typically do not make decisions about whom to assist based on potential recipients' ability to contribute to the broader society. For example, some individuals—such as those with severe health and behavioral health challenges—may have very limited ability to contribute to the broader society in the form of employment, although they may be able to contribute in many nonmonetary ways.

For Peter Kropotkin, the Russian anarchist, justice is determined by individual need and may require some form of redistribution (Spicker, 1988). Kropotkin's view is more compatible with a traditional social work perspective.

The concept of equality is central to effective altruism and any meaningful discussion of distributive justice that occurs in a way that maximizes benefit, a key aim of effective altruism's proponents (Dworkin, 1981; Skelton, 2016; Syme, 2019). According to effective altruism, unequal distribution of resources can have negative consequences, including resentment, domination, and the erosion of public goods.

Concerns about equality and inequality strike at the heart of social workers' traditional concern about disadvantage, oppression, and exploitation. According to the National Association of Social Workers ([NASW], 2021) Code of Ethics, "The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty" (p. 1). Further, the Code states "Social workers should advocate for resource allocation procedures that are open and fair. When not all clients' needs can be met, an allocation procedure should be developed that is nondiscriminatory and based on appropriate and consistently applied principles" (standard 3.07[b]). As the English historian R. H. Tawney (1964) observed in his classic *Equality*:

What is repulsive is not that one man should earn more than others, for where community of environment, and a common education and habit of life, have bred a common tradition of respect and consideration, these details of the counting house are forgotten or ignored. It is that some classes should be excluded from the heritage of civilization which others enjoy, and that the fact of human fellowship, which is ultimate and profound, should be obscured by economic contrasts, which are trivial and superficial. What is important is not that all men should receive the same pecuniary income. It is that the surplus resources of society should be so husbanded and applied that it is a matter of minor significance whether they receive it or not. (p. 113)

The concept of equality has been defined in a variety of ways, particularly as the concept pertains to social work, social welfare, and equity (the quality of being fair and impartial when allocating resources). These perspectives are important to consider given the aim of effective altruism to enhance human well-being to the greatest extent possible. First, there is what some philosophers refer to as *absolute equality*, where resources (wealth, property, access to services, and so on) are divided equally among people (Dworkin, 1981; Olsaretti, 2018). This is sometimes known as *equality of result* (Spicker, 1988). There is also *equality of opportunity*, which is concerned less with the ultimate outcome of distributive mechanisms than with the opportunity individuals have to gain access to desired resources. Examples include the use of a lottery or the principle of “first come-first served” to distribute limited resources. The concept of equality of opportunity also might entail the provision of remedial services to enhance opportunities for individuals who are disabled to compete for scarce or limited resources. Altruistic programs sponsored by social workers that provide opportunities for people who are low income to apply and compete for a limited number of subsidized housing units or appointments in healthcare clinics that serve uninsured individuals might also reflect equality of opportunity.

Rae (1981) suggests that four practical (and somewhat overlapping) mechanisms can be used to enhance equality and minimize inequality, a common goal of effective altruism. The first is the *maximin* policy (maximizing the minimum), where minimum standards for housing, education, health care, employment, welfare benefits, and so on are raised. A second approach is to address the *ratio* of inequality, or increasing the resources of those who are worst off in relation to those who are best off. A third policy aims for the *least difference*, where the goal is to reduce the range of inequality. And the fourth is the *minimax* principle, whose goal is to reduce the advantage of those who are most privileged, that is, to minimize the maximum.

Social workers who are concerned about historic patterns of inequality often wrestle with issues of discrimination and affirmative action. In theory, efforts that promote effective altruism must be cognizant of these

challenging phenomena (Alon, 2015). In principle, affirmative action strategies are designed to provide individuals disadvantaged by institutional discrimination with greater access to resources and equal opportunity (and the requisite skills) to compete for available resources, especially when resources are allocated in ways that are biased and discriminatory.

Critics of affirmative action claim that this form of distributive justice is, in fact, unjust in that it simply stimulates a new form of discrimination against the more privileged (Alon, 2015). As Spicker says, “If positive discrimination is egalitarian, it is because it compensates people in one sector for disadvantage in another, or because it makes up for past disadvantage. It may achieve equality of result overall, but it does so at the expense of equal treatment and equal opportunity. The argument is that inequality in one respect may lead to greater inequality in others” (p. 132).

### John Rawls: A Theory of Justice

A considerable portion of contemporary social workers’ thinking about distributive justice has been influenced by John Rawls’s (1971) modern philosophical classic *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls’s views have close conceptual links with effective altruism (Berkey, 2021; Gabriel, 2017).

Rawls bases much of his argument on the concept of a social contract that is to be used to establish a just society (Wolff, 1977). He derives two core principles to enhance justice: First, liberty is the most important rule of social justice, and a just society must preserve liberty. Second, whatever inequalities exist must be acceptable to everyone.

Rawls’s theory assumes that individuals who are formulating a moral principle by which to be governed are in an “original position” of equality and that each individual is unaware of her or his own attributes and status that might represent relative advantage or disadvantage. Under this “veil of ignorance” it is assumed that individuals will produce a moral principle that protects the so-called least advantaged. This is a particularly important argument for social workers committed to effective altruism, given its clear



alignment with the profession's commitment to serving society's most vulnerable people.

Rawls's "difference principle," which states that goods must be distributed in a manner designed to benefit the least advantaged, includes a requirement to aid those in need and provides an important safeguard against applications of classic utilitarianism that might sacrifice the needs of the disadvantaged for a greater aggregation of good. In a just society, according to Rawls, some differences in wealth and assets would be acceptable only if those less well-off benefit as a result.

Rawls argues that these principles of justice can best be practiced in the context of competitive markets and some degree of government intervention to correct market imperfections and to facilitate equal opportunity. Although Rawls favors competitive markets to enhance economic incentive and efficiency, he sees competitive markets as an important device for ensuring equal liberty and equal opportunity. For Rawls, markets protect the important liberty of free choice of occupation in a competitive environment.

Rawls is particularly concerned about income derived through labor. By investing in educational and training opportunities, another key goal of effective altruism, the supply of skilled individuals would increase; at the same time, the supply of persons who, for whatever reason, must take unskilled jobs would decrease, thereby increasing their income. As Rawls says, with many more persons receiving the benefits of training and education, "the supply of qualified individuals is much greater. When there are no restrictions on entry or imperfections on the capital market for loans (or subsidies) for education, the premium earned by those better endowed is far less. The relative difference in earnings between the more favored and the lowest income class tends to close" (p. 307).

For Rawls, the economic and social advantages some people enjoy because of the "natural fortune" into which they are born—with accompanying initial endowments of natural talent, property, skill, and luck—are morally arbitrary. Ensuring greater equality in the initial distribution of property and skill level would lessen the need for significant redistribution of wealth by tax and transfer programs administered by the welfare state. This is

Rawls's principal argument for an adequate "social minimum," progressive inheritance taxation across generations, some degree of income redistribution, public policies that promote equal opportunity in education, and so on. These goals align with effective altruism and core social work values.

Rawls's conceptualization of social justice has been viewed by some as "a philosophical apologia for an egalitarian brand of welfare-state capitalism" (Wolff, 1977: 195). Others argue that the degree of equalization of property entailed by Rawls's framework moves society considerably beyond existing examples of welfare-state capitalism and is flawed (Krouse & McPherson, 1988). Nonetheless, whatever the ultimate merits of his ambitious set of policy-rich proposals, Rawls's provocative statement has clearly served to rivet much needed attention on the concept of distributive justice and its implications for effective altruism.

### The Concept of Capabilities and Effective Altruism

Another critically important philosophical perspective on distributive justice, particularly in relation to poverty, was introduced by Amartya Sen (2005, 2009). As with Rawls, Sen's views have direct conceptual links with effective altruism initiatives.

According to Sen, being poor does not mean living below an imaginary poverty line. Rather, it means having an income that does not enable an individual to meet basic needs, taking into account the circumstances and social requirements of the environment. Sen argues that our view of poverty should not be based on an income level per se, but, rather, on our assessment of how much a person can achieve with that income, recognizing that such achievements will vary from one individual to another and from one geographical location to another.

Poverty analysis, Sen states, should focus on a person's potential to function rather than on the results achieved. This perspective has important implications for social workers' definition of desirable outcomes under effective altruism. Sen introduced the concept of "capabilities," which are the "real freedoms" that people have to achieve what they wish to

achieve. Real freedom assumes that a person has all the required means necessary to pursue their aims and interests; this assumption ties into the goals of effective altruism. That is, it is not merely the formal or hypothetical freedom to do or be something, but the substantial opportunity to achieve it. This notion of capacity, especially enhancing people's capacity, is consistent with core social work values.

The philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2011) has also added much to discussions of the concept of capabilities, which, presumably, proponents of effective altruism wish to maximize. The core capabilities Nussbaum argues should be supported by all democracies are:

1. *Life*. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
2. *Bodily Health*. Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
3. *Bodily Integrity*. Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
4. *Senses, Imagination, and Thought*. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason—and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain.
5. *Emotions*. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience

- longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety.
6. *Practical Reason*. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life.
  7. *Affiliation*. Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other humans, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin and species.
  8. *Other Species*. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.
  9. *Play*. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.
  10. *Control over one's Environment*, in two respects:
    - Political*. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association.
    - Material*. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

Nussbaum classifies capabilities into several types. Basic capabilities are the innate resources individuals have in order to develop more advanced capabilities. Internal capabilities build on pre-existing basic capabilities by use of resources such as exercise, education, and training.

Combined capabilities, according to Nussbaum, are defined as internal capabilities supplemented by the external conditions that make the

exercise of a function a realistic option. The aim of public policy and, we can argue, effective altruism is the promotion of combined capabilities that social workers are often in a position to facilitate. This requires two kinds of efforts: (1) the promotion of internal capabilities (for example, by education or training) and (2) the making available of the external institutional and material conditions. For Nussbaum, the capabilities of human beings should not be permitted to fall below a certain floor. These, too, are concepts that seem embedded in social workers' core beliefs about the importance of public policies that enhance vulnerable people's ability to live meaningful lives.

## The Role of Social Work Empiricism

In addition to effective altruism's intense focus on distributive justice is its principal concern with evidence-based decision making and philanthropy. Effective altruism assumes that altruistic efforts can be evaluated, and that data are available to make judgments about effective giving. According to its website, GiveWell, a non-profit organization that implements the effective altruism model, is devoted to "finding outstanding giving opportunities and publishing the full details of our analysis to help donors decide where to give." GiveWell bases its assessments on staffers' review of research evidence and outcome data. According to the organization's mission statement, "We look at independent studies of charity programs, such as randomized controlled trials, to understand their effectiveness."

In this respect, social workers who embrace the ideals of effective altruism and its emphasis on empiricism and outcome studies must acknowledge the longstanding challenges social workers have faced documenting the effectiveness of their efforts. Although social work generally exhibits considerable support for a "scientific" approach to professional practice and measuring outcomes, at least in principle, there is considerable debate about the extent to which social work has fulfilled these aims and has the ability to do so moving forward. Limitations in social work's

research-based track record may limit the profession's ability to truly implement effective altruism.

Historically, social workers who have advocated for strong, ambitious research agendas to measure outcomes and effectiveness have embraced the epistemological school of thought known as logical positivism, the philosophical school of thought that emerged in Vienna in the 1920s (Richardson & Uebel, 2007). According to logical empiricism, researchers should seek “objective” scientific methodology to measure phenomena, emphasizing observable properties of material things that can be subjected to experimental methods.

Logical positivism is based on several key assumptions. In principle, a single, tangible reality can be reduced to its component parts, which can then be studied independently. The researcher (or observer) can be separated from that which is observed, and what is true at one time may, under appropriate circumstances, also be true at another time and place. Further, logical empiricism assumes linear causality, that is, independent (or causal) variables are correlated in a linear fashion with dependent (or outcome) variables. Finally, this paradigm assumes that the results of sound research are independent of investigators' values and biases. These assumptions are highly relevant to effective altruists' commitment to empirical evaluation of their efforts to promote good and useful outcomes.

### **The Challenges of Empiricism**

For decades social workers have made enthusiastic attempts to apply the scientific method and its principles to investigation of social phenomena related to enduring social work concerns, such as poverty, mental health, health care, aging, disability, trauma, child welfare, criminal justice, and community organizing. Empirical studies abound in the form of case studies, controlled trials, single-case (N=1) designs, needs assessments, program evaluations, and social surveys.

By the early 1980s, however, a small group of critics began to question the merits of what is known as the hypothetico-deductive model for social

work. Beginning especially with Heineman's (1981) controversial critique, a number of social work scholars and practitioners began to question the positivist foundation that had emerged in social work (Epstein, 1986; Gordon, 1983; Rodwell, 1987).

For Heineman and other critics, logical positivism is a problematic model for social work because, in part, our empirical observations are fallible, and data gatherers may influence that which they observe and the interpretation of these phenomena. Empirically-oriented social workers also find it difficult to operationalize some abstract concepts commonly encountered in the profession (such as self-esteem, ego strength, dysfunction, conflict, trauma) and frequently have trouble documenting causal relationships among variables. For decades, for example, social workers have tried to identify factors that influence "successful" and "effective" intervention and treatment. Despite these ambitious and partially fruitful efforts, however, researchers continue to struggle to identify those factors that can be documented clearly. When we deal with phenomena as complex as human behavior and relationships, we have considerable difficulty identifying in the first place the specific concepts that may warrant empirical investigation. Many social workers believe that hard-to-identify traits affect what occurs in the relationship between social worker and client; despite endless speculation, there is no consensus among practitioners or researchers on which attributes matter most.

Also, true experimentation, including random assignment to experimental and control groups, along with pretests and posttests, is relatively rare in social work, either because a sufficient number of research participants are not available or because withholding an intervention from clients in a control group would be patently unethical. For example, social workers are likely to be uncomfortable randomly assigning children who have been severely abused to treatment and no-treatment groups to evaluate the causal effects of an intervention; deliberately withholding services for traumatized children may seem unconscionable. In short, social work contexts and circumstances often are such that research principles and designs

would need to be compromised in order to carry out any inquiry whatsoever.

A considerable portion of empirical social work research is devoted to analysis of cause-effect relationships, particularly related to assessment of treatment outcomes required by effective altruism. These explanatory studies, however, often are compromised because of basic design limitations. These limitations usually pertain to problems of internal and external validity (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

Internal validity ordinarily is defined as the extent to which changes in a dependent (or outcome) variable are attributable to changes in one or more independent (or causal) variables. Key to explanatory studies is the ability to control for extraneous factors that might account for change in the dependent variable apart from the intervention or treatment. Ideally, these extraneous factors—which may include the effects of client maturation, contemporaneous events in clients' lives, historical events in clients' lives, and measurement itself (for example, “demand characteristics” and response bias)—are best controlled for by using a classic experimental design (Larson, 2019; Reamer, 1998). Such designs—the gold standard in research in every discipline and profession—ideally include random assignment of eligible clients to experimental (treatment) and control groups, followed by the collection of baseline or pretest data, the introduction of the intervention to clients in the experimental (treatment) group, and follow-up or post-test data collection.

There is widespread consensus that, in principle, this strategy is the most effective way to control for extraneous factors that might influence outcomes. Under this arrangement, differences in outcomes between the experimental (treatment) groups are attributable only to the intervention. Without a control group, it is difficult to know what would have happened to clients without any intervention. Further, without random assignment to an experimental and control group—that is, if intact groups are used for the experimental and control groups—differences in outcomes may be due to initial differences between the groups. While the classic experimental design may work well in laboratory settings and pharmacological research,



social work researchers often encounter difficulty implementing it. These design constraints typically mean that a social work researcher has difficulty ruling out a variety of plausible alternative explanations for a study's results. As a consequence, social work studies that set out to identify causal relationships among variables—a key element of effective altruism—often need to settle for the mere identification of various correlations among variables. Given that the variables involved in social work practice phenomena typically do not emerge in a clean linear fashion, the research designs we often end up using seem unable to fully capture the complex interactions and relationships that occur.

External validity, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which results of a study can be generalized to other contexts, circumstances, and settings. Generalizing the results of impactful efforts is essential to full implementation of effective altruism. Here, too, social work researchers often encounter limitations. For practical reasons, research samples may be small or nonrepresentative, limiting the results' generalizability. Although it is ideal to design studies based on probability samples (for example, simple random or stratified random samples), social workers often must settle for nonprobability samples (for example, accidental, quota, purposive, snowball samples). Master lists of clients or potential research participants often are not available, thereby precluding the use of probability sampling protocols.

### **Bounded Rationality in Social Work**

The regrettable result of these various limitations is that a significant portion of empirically-based social work research is flawed, and this reality may limit full implementation of effective altruism. Unfortunately, however, consumers of empirical research, and often the researchers themselves, fail to acknowledge adequately that these limitations exist. This limitation seriously compromises efforts to evaluate the impact of interventions and services linked with effective altruism.

Like all scientists, social work researchers suffer from what Herbert Simon (1957) referred to as “bounded rationality.” That is, human beings are not as omniscient, rational, and consistently logical as we might like to be. Inevitably, our decisions and ability to grasp the world around us are affected by a variety of nonrational and nonlogical factors. Social workers have a limited ability to identify and understand the implications of the many variables that are related to practice. As a result, often the value of our research is limited.

One common problem concerns social workers’ ability to measure precisely, whether gathering quantitative or qualitative data. We may know that in any given project it is important to measure the impact of efforts to address such phenomena as trust, poverty, hope, self-esteem, addiction, or aggression, for example. It can be extremely difficult, however, to produce sensitive and valid operational definitions and empirical indicators of these concepts (often known in research as the challenge of face and content validity). Although we may be able to construct reasonably reliable self-report or other data collection instruments for recording feelings, attitudes, and behaviors related to these phenomena, much of what social workers measure still must be considered “soft” and elusive.

Social workers also sometimes dwell on results that are statistically significant (the likelihood of rejecting the null hypothesis when it is really true is 5 percent or less) but that lack substantive significance. This has become especially problematic as the use of complex multivariate statistical procedures that are little understood by many practicing social workers has proliferated among advanced researchers. As part of an ambitious effective altruism agenda, lengthy and complex discussions of empirical findings may emphasize statistically significant results based on what are actually very small correlations and coefficients that have little practical meaning and application. Practitioners who are able to follow the technical statistical analyses may struggle to understand what relevance such trivial statistically significant results might have.

## Conclusion

Effective altruism is a powerfully important movement that has close links to social work's core aims and values. In principle, effective altruism provides social workers with a compelling conceptual and practical framework to enhance the profession's contributions.

Effective altruism seeks to promote the greatest amount of good possible, given available resources. In this respect, full implementation of effective altruism requires thoughtful reflections about distributive justice—the fair and just allocation of the limited resources available to assist people—and the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of social work's programs and interventions.

Distributive justice is a complex phenomenon. The reality is that there is no consensus among social workers regarding the fairest way to allocate limited social service and social welfare resources. Some practitioners favor some form of equality, while others give priority to allocation mechanisms based on individuals' level of need, affirmative action, or some other factor. To be effective altruists, social workers must continually strive to determine the fairest and most just distributive mechanism consistent with social work values.

And, to fully implement effective altruists, social workers must do what they can to evaluate the impact of their interventions and programs in a way that passes rigorous research muster. This entails designing evaluations that have strong internal and external validity, such that outcome data can truly be attributed to the interventions being evaluated. This is a tall order, especially given the very real limitations social workers face controlling for diverse extraneous factors that may account for client and programmatic outcomes independent of the interventions themselves. In this respect, social workers must be realists and acknowledge honestly when their research designs limit their ability to link outcomes to services and interventions.

The good news is that effective altruism holds great promise for social work. The challenging news is that effective altruism, in its purest form, can

be difficult to implement with fidelity. Social workers are accustomed to this sort of challenge. Real-life obstacles that affect clients, practitioners, and programs are ever-present in the profession. That said, social workers are up to the task. As Jane Addams (1902) observed, “For action is indeed the sole medium of expression for ethics” (p. 119).

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# Seriousness of Social Worker Violations and Importance to Discipline: A Study of Social Work Licensure Board Members

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## Abstract

This research explored social work licensure board members' decision-making about alleged violations by social workers and subsequent sanctioning. Participants served within the last five years on a jurisdictional board regulating social workers in the US. The survey included factors related to board member decision-making, rank ordering the seriousness of listed allegations, and four vignettes where participants rated the seriousness of the allegations and the importance for a board to discipline the social worker. Persons serving on twelve US boards that license social workers (n=21) read four vignettes of hypothetical social worker violations and rated the seriousness of the violations and the importance of disciplining the social workers. The violations, in order from most (7) to least severe (1) were fraudulent record keeping (5.63), professional boundaries (non-sexual) (5.37), impairment (5.1), and improper termination (2.63). The importance to discipline, in order from most (7) to least important (1), were: professional boundaries (non-sexual) (6.1), fraudulent reporting (5.68), impairment (4.4), and improper termination (2.47). Having an MSW degree, as opposed to BSW, was the only variable increasing the seriousness of the offense in all four vignettes. Results may help with understanding how licensing boards review alleged violations and determine sanctions.

**Keywords:** Allegations, board member participants, importance, sanctions, seriousness

US jurisdictions regulate health care and social service providers to protect the public from potential harm. Regulation of social work practice began in Puerto Rico in 1934 and moved to the US in California in 1945 (Goodenough, 2021). It was not until 1992 that every US jurisdiction regulated social work practice (Cooper-Bolinsky, 2019). Once social work was fully regulated, it became important to understand the consequences for improper practice and how boards make these decisions. Unfortunately, to date, there has been little research on this topic. Results from the study being presented in this article explore board decision making from several perspectives. Participants were asked about board member training, rank ordering the seriousness of a list of practice violations, and then asked to review four



vignettes and rate the seriousness of the social worker's behavior as well as the importance to discipline. A brief discussion of the history of regulation is provided, first, in order to frame the context of the study.

## Literature Review

### Protecting Consumers from Harm by Social Workers

Social work began as a profession in the late 19th Century, initially addressing issues of poverty experienced by immigrants and other oppressed groups. As the profession grew, the Conference of Boards and Charities developed, followed by the National Conference of Charities and Correction, and in 1955 the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) was founded. NASW developed the professional Code of Ethics, which was identified as the gold standard of practice for social workers. Schools of social work developed during this same period, along with the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the accrediting body for social work education (Stuart, 2013). The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) emerged as the profession's regulatory-focused organization in 1974, providing support and services to social work boards in the effort to ensure public protection and safe, ethical, and competent practice (CSWE, 2018).

The professional and educational growth of social work, along with a focus on addressing sensitive issues and assisting vulnerable people, led to the passing of laws for protecting the public and regulating social work practice. Through the advocacy of professional organizations, all US jurisdictions have enacted legislation to regulate social work practice (Cooper-Bollinskey, 2019). Some jurisdictions regulate by title protection, some by practice protection, and some use both. Jurisdictional regulatory boards are composed as either only social workers, or a composite board. Composite boards include other professions, for example, professional counselors or licensed marriage and family therapists.

In response to the variations in board composition, ASWB aimed to provide technical and advisory assistance to jurisdictional regulatory boards as they enforce practice regulation. ASWB also provided new board members with training about regulation and disciplinary procedures. In 1997, ASWB developed the *Model Social Work Practice Act* (MSWPA). The MSWPA served to define a practice standard to guide developing regulatory laws by defining such components as title protection, board structure, and requirements of practitioners (ASWB, 2022).

ASWB (2018) produced another regulation resource for social work board members, the *Guidebook on Social Work Disciplinary Actions*. The guidebook provided regulatory board members with a resource when deciding on license violations. It described a variety of violations reviewed by board members and types of disciplinary actions board members may consider in social work regulation.

There is little to no literature on how social work boards use these resources. There is also little information on what other sources are available to assist board members about making decisions when disciplining social workers who have had professional violations.

## Board Regulation Research

Daley and Doughty (2007) noted that previous research on social worker professional violations was primarily based on records of reports of violations to NASW. Strom-Gottfried (2003) reported on NASW ethics committee reviews of social worker ethics violations complaints between 1986-1997. Daley and Doughty (2007) compared ethics complaints reported to NASW and violations reported to the Texas licensure board between 1995-2003.

The primary focus of social work regulation research has been on ethical violations, including the characteristics of individuals committing violations. Daley and Doughty (2007) focused on license type and level of education, while Boland-Prom (2009) offered insight into the entity disciplining

the social worker. Magiste (2020) conducted a study that reviewed disciplinary actions. Common violations included failure to obtain continuing education, the standard of care, and boundary violations. Over 50% of the violations were committed by licensees with ten or more years of experience.

Boland-Prom et al. (2015) collected data on sanctioned social workers and reported that social workers in their twenties were more likely than other age categories to have sanctions for recordkeeping. Continuing education and lapsed licenses were problems for social workers in their thirties and sixties, while those in their fifties had more standard-of-care violations. Sanctions such as license revocation and license surrender were the leading type of discipline. Boards also sanctioned licensees using suspensions, reprimands, and warnings. Boland-Prom (2009) called for more research regarding social worker violations and sanctioning to improve social work supervision, education, and management.

Gricus and Wysierkierski (2021) is perhaps the most influential study, comparable to the one underlying this article. Gricus and Wysierkierski conducted an extensive study in which social workers read vignettes created from actual violations of jurisdiction regulations and rated the seriousness of the violations and the importance of disciplining the social worker. They reported a strong relationship between the perceived seriousness of the incident in the vignette and the importance of discipline. In other words, as seriousness increased, so did the importance of discipline. Additionally, Gricus and Wysierkierski (2021) explained that additional considerations, such as length of time, affected the perception of the seriousness and importance of discipline, while personal characteristics, such as race, did not. They posed several research questions to consider the contextual picture of violations of professional practice. They focused on social workers' perception of violations, why the Code encourages rank ordering of principles, and whether it is used in regulatory board decision-making. Boland-Prom and Alvarez (2014) recommended increasing the transparency of reported sanctions, including detail regarding the unprofessional conduct and category of the misconduct.

## Board Regulation Process

Krom (2019) identified common steps in disciplinary processes among licensing boards. First, a professional violation (wrongful act) must be identified and reported to the jurisdictional licensing board. Most boards have information online about how to file a complaint. Individuals may be reluctant to report unprofessional conduct due to fear of reprisal or belief that the issue was not important enough to report, or they may not know where to register a complaint. Finally, the jurisdictional board must adjudicate the complaint and impose sanction when warranted. Krom (2019) also found variation among the jurisdictions in how they investigate violations and how board members assess investigation results to inform decisions.

## Board Member Training

Regulatory boards follow the laws that establish regulations and practice standards; boards also sanction individuals for practice violations as a necessary point in protecting the public. Board members must also be trained to understand their roles as regulators beyond their professional identifications (ASWB, 2018). The need for adequate preparation to become a social work board member has been established; yet previous research has not explored the factors that affect board member decision-making about allegations of unprofessional social work practice.

## Rationale for the Study

The US is a world leader in social work regulation and other countries look to the US as a model. Decisions made by regulatory boards have significant impact on protection of the public as well as standards of practice for social workers. It is vital that jurisdictional boards have some measure of consistency in their decision-making processes as well as equity in sanctions. This study aims to develop a body of knowledge that informs board member decision-making regarding the sanctioning of social workers. The knowledge gained from the study can inform board members who review

allegations of how other board members might implement violations and sanctions across jurisdictions, thus promoting consistent, equitable, and proportionate sanctions.

## Methods

The University of Wisconsin – River Falls Institutional Review Board approved this exploratory mixed methods study. The researchers included six social work educators participating in the ASWB's Pathway to Licensure Institute (ASWB, 2019), two of whom have served on boards regulating social workers and one executive director of a jurisdictional licensure board.

## Participants

The researchers conducted an online survey of social work licensing board members across the US, current or having served within the past five years, in order to assess the factors influencing social work board members' decision-making. A total of 21 board members from 12 jurisdictions participated in the study, though not all respondents answered every question. The participation represents approximately 5% of eligible social work regulators (ASWB personal communication, 2022).

## Procedures

To ensure confidentiality, the survey was conducted via Qualtrics, and no identifying data were collected nor provided to the researchers. No incentives were provided to participants. The survey link was posted in a newsletter sent electronically by ASWB to social work licensing board members in all US jurisdictions. The study opened with an explanation of the study and purpose, and participants were asked to verify eligibility. Eligible participants completed demographic questions regarding age (grouped by decade), gender, ethnicity, profession, and years of professional experience. In addition, participants were asked to identify their board type (social work

only vs composite) and their board jurisdiction. The survey also asked for years of experience on the board. Participants advanced to the next phase of the study where they were asked to rank order the seriousness of twelve listed violations. The last phase of the study involved review of four vignettes in which social workers were engaged in unprofessional conduct. In each, participants were asked to use a Likert scale to rate the seriousness of the alleged behavior, the importance for the board to sanction, and select the most fitting sanction from a list of options. Participants were also asked if their opinion of the seriousness of the behavior would change using six variables: BSW vs. MSW, less than vs. more than two years of experience, admission vs. denial of the allegation, the client reported no harm vs. harm, the social worker was male vs. female, and race of the social worker was known vs. unknown.

## Study Design

Before reading the vignettes, participants were asked to rank the seriousness of licensing violations most reported to jurisdiction licensure boards, as reported in prior studies (Boland-Prom, 2009; Boland-Prom et al., 2015; Daley & Doughty, 2007; Gricus & Wysiekierski, 2021).

The use of vignettes in this study was modeled after Gricus and Wysiekierski (2021). The four vignettes were based on general social worker violations: breaking professional boundaries (non-sexual), fraudulent reporting, improper termination, and impairment. The vignettes were created after reviewing common complaints submitted to one jurisdiction licensing board. Similarly, the questions about the seriousness of violations and the importance of the board to sanction were modeled after the Gricus and Wysiekierski (2021) study. Researchers were intentional in this method in order to offer some basis for comparison between social worker perception and board member perception of these variables.

Upon completing the phase of the study involving vignettes, participants were given opportunity to provide comments. This was an exploratory study; no results were hypothesized.

## Results and Discussion

### Demographics

Of the 44 individuals who responded to the survey, 27 (61%) reported being eligible to complete the study, 11 did not answer, and six noted ineligibility. Of the 25 participants providing demographic information, the majority were white women between the ages of 51 and 70. Further explanation of demographics include age: one was 31-40 years, seven were 41-50 years, eight were 51-60 years, eight were 61-70 years, and one was 70+ years of age; gender: 12 were female, 11 were male, and two preferred not to identify; and ethnicity: 18 were White, one was Black, two were Asian, two were Native American, and two preferred not to answer.

Twelve jurisdictions were represented, covering all regions of the US; however, 7 of the 19 (37%) respondents indicated living in the Midwest jurisdictions of Ohio, Indiana, and Minnesota. Other jurisdictions represented included Arkansas, California, Georgia, Idaho, Michigan, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and West Virginia.

The professional composition of the sample included 17 social workers, two mental health counselors, two public representatives, one addictions counselor, one academic, and one guardian *ad litem*. Years of experience in their profession ranged from seven to 49 years, with a median of 26.46 years. Of the 24 that indicated years of professional experience, 11 indicated having between 20 and 29 years of experience, while five had over 40 years of experience, four reported between 30 and 39 years of experience, and four reported 19 years or less of experience.

Participants were asked to describe their board member experience. Of the 21 responses, 12 indicated serving on a social work-only board, while

nine served on a composite board. This is a slight overrepresentation of composite board members, as composite boards make up only about 30% of all licensing boards across the US (ASWB, personal communication, 2022). Of the participants, 14 of 20 reported serving on the board for less than ten years.

Open-ended, qualitative data was collected from 19 participants about their experiences with board member orientation. Orientation experience included attending formal new board member training provided by ASWB, face-to-face training by the jurisdiction Executive Director and staff, and self-directed orientation via manuals, emailed documents, and previous board agendas and minutes. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (12 of 19) identified the ASWB training as a critical part of their orientation.

Participants were asked an open-ended question about how their board conducts investigations. There was some variety in the details of responses. However, most followed a general process of complaint received, assigned to an investigator, the subject of the complaint was allowed to respond, the board chair or other member reviewed information, then the entire board formally voted on outcomes. About half of the participants reported that their boards have staff complete the investigations. In contrast, just over a third used investigators from their jurisdiction's Attorney General's (AG) office, and the others reported a combination of staff and AG-office investigators. Some participants mentioned using settlement conferences or consent agreement processes before being sent to the entire board for review. In some situations, a committee of board members or the board chair was primarily responsible for final outcomes. However, the majority involved the entire board in the final sanctioning decision.

### Ranking of violations

Participants were asked to rank order a list of licensing violations from 1 (most important) to 12 (least important). Table 1 provides details of these results. The most apparent consensus among the participants regarded the



breaking of professional boundaries, with sexual, as the most severe violation. From there, breaking client confidentiality, breaking professional boundaries, non-sexual, and billing fraud was considered less severe but similarly important. Impairment, inadequate standard of care, practicing without a license or with an expired license, and felony conviction after receiving a license were in the third most important group of violations. Inadequate record keeping, improper termination, and committing a misdemeanor during practice were among the fourth most important violations. Most participants saw not meeting continuing education requirements as the least important violation. The greatest variation in determining importance was found for practicing without a license or with an expired license, billing fraud, improper termination, and inadequate care.

	Range of rank	Most frequent rank	Mean	Median	Rank Median	Rank Mean
Breaking professional boundaries, sexual	1st-5th	1st	1.6	1	1	1
Breaking client confidentiality	2nd-9th	2nd, 3rd	4.3	3.5	2	2
Breaking professional boundaries, non-sexual	2nd-9th	4th	4.35	4	3	3
Billing fraud	1st-9th	3rd, 7th	4.45	4	3	4
Impairment	1st-11th	5th	5.25	5	5	5
Inadequate standard of care	6th-12th	10th	5.85	5.5	6	6
Practicing without a license or with an expired license	1st-12th	4th, 7th	6.5	7	7	7
Felony conviction after receiving license	2nd-10th	8th	6.65	8	8	8
Inadequate or lack of required record keeping	6th-12th	10th	8.95	9	9	9
Improper termination	5th-12th	7th, 9th	9	9	9	10

Misdemeanor in the course of practice	6th-12th	11th	9.75	10.5	11	11
Not meeting continuing education requirements	8th-12th	12th	11.35	12	12	12

**Table 1:** Results of rank order violations by seriousness

## Vignettes

For each vignette, respondents were asked to determine the seriousness of the incident, the importance of disciplinary action, and recommendations for disciplinary action. They were also asked whether the level of education (bachelor or master), more vs. less than two years of experience, social worker admission vs. denial of the violation, client reports harm vs. no harm, the social worker was male vs. female, or if race of the social worker were known vs. unknown would change the seriousness of the incident.

### Vignette 1

A complaint that a social worker blurred professional boundaries was submitted by a client’s mother. The client is a 21-year-old White female who sought help for anxiety one year earlier. The social worker diagnosed anxiety and depression. As treatment progressed, the social worker offered the client her cell phone number and personal email. The client indicated she called the social worker frequently just to talk “like I would with my mom”. These calls and texts were not always documented in the social worker’s progress notes. The client asked to follow the social worker on social media. The social worker occasionally “liked” posts from the clients. The social worker attended the client’s birthday party at a local pub where the client’s friends, family, and co-workers were present. The social worker indicated she was invited.

Overall, 17 of the 19 participants ranked the violation a 5 or higher on a 7-point scale from 1 (not at all serious) to 7 (very serious), and 17 of the 19 participants ranked 5 or higher that it was important to discipline the social worker. *See Table 2.*

Of the 21 participants who identified sanctions, 15 indicated a reprimand was the appropriate sanction, four selected non-public caution, and two selected suspension. Of the 15 who recommended a reprimand, 13 recommended additional training, and 12 indicated that supervision should be required.

In considering the factors that might change the seriousness of the incident, most agreed that the various factors would not change the seriousness of the violation. Of the 20 who responded, nine stated the seriousness of the violation was increased if the social worker had a master's degree, and four indicated an increase if the social worker was male. Five responded that the seriousness was decreased if the social worker had less than two years' experience, and three responded with a decrease in seriousness if the social worker admitted behavior. *See Table 3.*

### **Vignette 2**

Following an investigation based on a 67-year-old, African American female client asking about her appointment, an agency supervisor submitted a complaint that a licensed social worker falsified visitation records of five clients. The public agency serves the physical, mental, and social needs of clients 65 and older in a seven-county region. Each social worker has a caseload of approximately 90 clients, with whom they need to visit in the home at least once every three months. The supervisor submitted the allegations, providing evidence that on five different occasions the social worker documented that she visited the client, but each of the clients told the supervisor there was not a visit on those dates. The social worker stated she was unable to keep up with the minimum agency deliverables.

For this vignette, 19 participants responded. The vignette was deemed slightly more serious than the first, with 16 responses scoring 5 or higher on the Likert scale. No response was rated lower than 4. The respondents were less likely to deem it important that the licensure board discipline the social worker, although there were no responses of 2 or 1 (not important). Fewer

respondents, in this case, 15 of the 19, indicated that discipline was important compared to the first vignette. *See Table 2.*

In Vignette Two, the sanction recommended was more likely to be a reprimand vs. a non-public caution or a suspension. Of the 18 participants who identified sanctions, 11 indicated a reprimand was the appropriate sanction, two selected non-public caution, three selected suspension, and two selected revocation. Of the 11 who recommended a reprimand, 10 recommended additional training, eight recommended supervision be required, and one recommended a fine.

When examining the qualifying factors, the results were similar to the first vignette. The race of the worker was least likely to change the seriousness. Being a master's level practitioner was seen as most likely to increase the seriousness though substantially less significant than in Vignette One. Admitting the offense and lack of experience were perceived as lessening the seriousness. The gender of the social worker was viewed as having no effect on the seriousness. *See Table 3.*

### **Vignette 3**

A director of a chemical dependency prevention agency submitted an allegation that a licensed social worker did not terminate properly with her support group clients. The attendance in the support group ranged from 8-10 persons, ranging in age from mid-20s to mid-50s, and from diverse cultural groups. During the investigation interview, the social worker stated she had many disagreements with her supervisor's evaluation of her and many complaints about the agency over the last six months. She gave a two week notice and did contact her individual clients, either by phone or in person. None of those clients were in the support group, and the support group did not meet during the social worker's last two weeks of employment. The social worker felt it was inappropriate to notify the support group members by phone. The support group was co-led by another social worker, so the licensee felt there was no discontinuation of services for the group. The licensee felt the agency director filed the allegation because the agency director was upset that the social worker only gave two weeks' notice when resigning.

Unlike the first two vignettes, the majority, 15 of the 19 participants, indicated the violation rated lower in seriousness (rating of 3 or lower). Only one respondent rated with score of 4 or higher on the Likert scale. Not surprisingly, the majority, 16 of the 19 respondents, also deemed it of low importance for discipline (rating 3 or lower). *See Table 2.*

Of the 18 participants who identified sanctions, 16 selected non-public caution, and two selected reprimand. Of the two who recommended a reprimand, both recommended additional training, and one recommended supervision.

The qualifying factors contributed little change to the perception of seriousness by the respondents. The social worker as a master's level practitioner was perceived to increase the seriousness of the incident; this factor aligns with the previous two vignettes. *See Table 3.*

#### **Vignette 4**

A Clinical Director of an outpatient setting submitted a complaint alleging that a licensed social worker had been cancelling an inappropriate amount of client appointments. The director alleged that many were cancelled last-minute, without appropriate or timely notice to clients, often not showing up to appointments even though clients arrived for the service. The director reported having evidence to prove that the social worker has “no-showed” on at least six occasions over the course of four weeks and has cancelled “more than 15 sessions”, but with only three clients more than once. Also alleged within the complaint is that clients had reported to the clinical director that the social worker had often been negligent during sessions, for example texting or stepping out briefly to take personal phone calls. The director heard this from at least four clients over the last month. Two clients reported that they think the social worker dozed off briefly during a session. The social worker cancelled several appointments due to personal reasons and reported having been under a “large amount of stress.” The social worker reported to the board that her mother recently became terminally ill, and she is now the full-time caregiver of her mother outside of her work hours.

Responses in the first three vignettes were consistent; however, this vignette had notable variability in the responses. While the mean perception of seriousness was 5.1, the responses were split between very and moderately serious. Of the 19 respondents, 13 selected a seriousness rating of 5 or higher on the Likert scale, and six selected ratings of 3 or 4, and no participant selected seriousness less than 3. Ratings of importance to discipline were slightly different with 11 selecting a rating of 5 or higher in importance, three selecting ratings of 3 or 4, and five selecting the importance to discipline as low. See Table 2.

Vignette (n=19)	Measure	Seriousness	Importance to Discipline
Vignette 1	7 (very)	3	11
	6	6	3
	5	8	3
	4	0	1
	3	1	0
	2	1	1
	1 (not at all)	0	0
	Analytics	Mean 5.37 Median 5 Mode 5	Mean 6.1 Median 7 Mode 7
Vignette 2	7 (very)	4	5
	6	8	8
	5	3	2
	4	4	3
	3	0	1
	2	0	0
	1 (not at all)	0	0
	Analytics	Mean 5.63 Median 6 Mode 6	Mean 5.68 Median 6 Mode 6
	7 (very)	0	1

Vignette 3	6	1	0
	5	0	1
	4	3	1
	3	5	5
	2	7	5
	1 (not at all)	3	6
	Analytics	Mean 2.63 Median 2 Mode 2	Mean 2.47 Median 2 Mode 2
Vignette 4	7 (very)	2	2
	6	7	4
	5	4	5
	4	3	3
	3	3	0
	2	0	4
	1 (not at all)	0	1
Analytics	Mean 5.1 Median 5 Mode 6	Mean 4.4 Median 5 Mode 5	

**Table 2:** Vignettes – Results of Seriousness and Importance to Discipline

Of the 21 participants who identified sanctions, 14 indicated a reprimand was the appropriate sanction, six selected non-public caution, and one selected suspension. Of the 14 who recommended a reprimand, eight recommended supervision, six recommended additional training, six recommended counseling, and one recommended a fine. The respondent who recommended suspension also recommended supervision and training. No one recommended revocation of license.

The importance to discipline leaned toward more important, although a quarter of the respondents indicated it was not at all or not important. At a higher rate than the other three vignettes, counseling was recommended in addition to reprimand and suspension. Supervision and training were also more utilized in sanctions.

As in the first three vignettes, the qualifying factors were perceived as having little impact on changing the seriousness of the offense. Having a master's degree was perceived to increase seriousness. The client reporting no harm reduced perceived seriousness. Admission by the social worker produces interesting results in this vignette as some perceived it to increase seriousness while others perceived it to decrease. *See Table 3.*

### Vignette Comparisons

There were significant differences across the vignettes in terms of both perceived seriousness  $F(3.54) = 22.94, p < .001$ , and importance for the board to sanction the social worker,  $F(3.54) = 21.79, p < .001$ . Vignette 3 was perceived as notably less serious and less important for the board to sanction.

The ranking of vignettes by importance to discipline mean scores (*see Table 2*) aligns with respondents' rank ordering seriousness of violations (*see Table 1*). Vignette 1 was ranked being most important to discipline, followed by Vignettes 2, 4, and then 3. However, the seriousness mean scores, per vignette, did not follow the same pattern (*see Table 2*). Vignette 2 ranked most serious, followed by Vignettes 1, 3, and then 4. One would expect to see a pattern of the highest perceived seriousness and highest importance to discipline. The difference here is most likely explained by the mean seriousness scores for Vignette 1 (5.37) and Vignette 2 (5.63), indicating very similar levels of seriousness and different perceptions by respondents on the most relevant sanctions for the different behaviors demonstrated in the vignettes.

Most participants reported no change in the seriousness when considering six factors in the vignettes; however, a few differences were found and are worthy of discussion. The perceived seriousness of allegations increased or greatly increased (26%) if the social worker was master's level educated in all four vignettes. The social worker having less than two years of experience was perceived to decrease the seriousness in Vignettes 1 (non-sexual boundary violation and lack of documentation) and 2 (inadequate standard



of care and inadequate recordkeeping), but potentially increase the seriousness in Vignette 4 (impairment and inadequate standard of care). The social worker admitting the behavior was perceived to decrease seriousness in Vignettes 1, 2, and 3; however, the effect of admission in Vignette 4 was less clear. Gender of the social worker was perceived as increasing seriousness in Vignette 1, but no effect in Vignettes 2, 3, or 4. *See Table 3.*

Would it change the seriousness of the violation if:		Vignette 1 (n=20)	Vignette 1 (n=20)	Vignette 1 (n=20)	Vignette 1 (n=20)	Total
Master Level	Greatly increase	2	0	0	0	2
	Increase	7	3	4	4	18
	No change	11	16	15	15	57
	Decrease	0	0	0	0	0
	Greatly decrease	0	0	0	0	0
< 2yr. Experience	Greatly increase	0	0	0	1	1
	Increase	1	0	0	1	1
	No change	14	17	18	16	65
	Decrease	5	2	1	1	9
	Greatly decrease	0	0	0	0	0
Admission by social worker	Greatly increase	0	0	0	1	1
	Increase	1	0	0	1	2
	No change	16	15	18	15	64
	Decrease	3	4	1	2	10
	Greatly decrease	0	0	0	0	0
	Greatly increase	0	1	0	0	1
	Increase	1	0	0	0	1

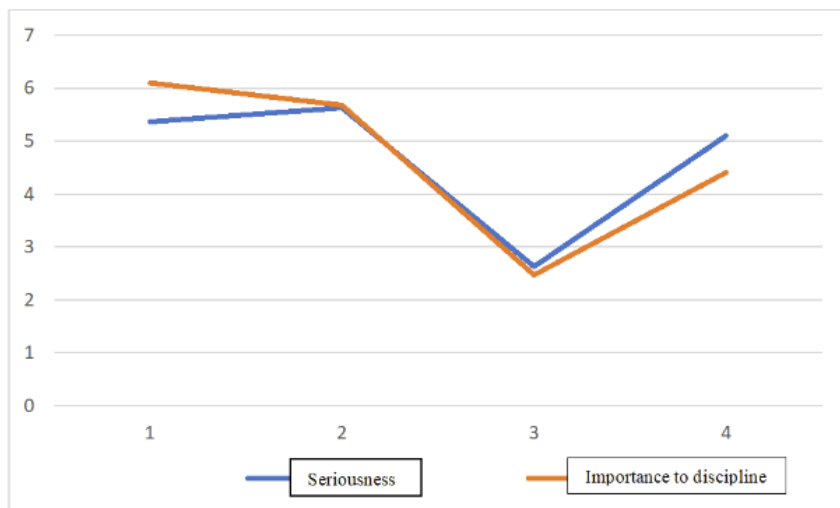
Client reported no harm	No change	18	18	17	17	70
	Decrease	1	0	1	1	3
	Greatly decrease	0	0	1	1	2
Social worker was male	Greatly increase	0	0	0	0	0
	Increase	4	0	0	0	4
	No change	16	19	19	19	73
	Decrease	0	0	0	0	0
	Greatly decrease	0	0	0	0	0
Race of social worker was known	Greatly increase	0	1	1	0	2
	Increase	0	0	0	0	0
	No change	19	18	18	19	74
	Decrease	0	0	0	0	0
	Greatly decrease	1	0	0	0	1

**Table 3:** Vignettes – Results of Seriousness change questions

*Graph 1* visually demonstrates the significant relationships between mean scores of Seriousness and Importance to discipline among the four vignettes. While there is a slight variation, the mirroring of the pattern of means between seriousness and importance to discipline represents consistency in the performance of the vignettes and the validity of the responses by participants.

There was consistency in the outcomes of each vignette regarding seriousness. Each vignette skewed highly toward either very serious or not at all serious and there was little variability on the opposite ends. The participants collectively deemed Vignette 2 as the most serious. It was surmised that the falsification of records, which required a conscious decision by the social worker to act unethically, contributed to the determination of a high level of seriousness in this situation. This was followed by Vignette 1, which also alleged inadequate documentation but withheld suggestions of

intentional behavior. Vignette 4, which described unprofessional conduct on the part of the worker but in the context of personal struggles, was not seen as serious as other violations, but still serious. Researchers assume that context mattered in this vignette; however, the impact on clients was clear, which likely maintained some level of seriousness in the case. Vignette 3 was regarded as improper termination which seemed to suggest that context mattered. Perhaps participants considered the situation to be more of a disagreement between the worker and the supervisor since there was no reported impact on clients.



**Graph 1:** Comparisons of means for Seriousness and Importance to discipline in the four vignettes

The recommendations for disciplinary action followed the same tendencies as the perceptions of seriousness. The most variability occurred in Vignette 4, which indicated an overall intent by the participants to address the issue, but not in a punitive manner. When selecting sanctions, training, and supervision were the most frequent addition to the sanction. Fines and

counseling were rarely chosen, with the exception of Vignette 4 where the social worker reported personal stress as a contributing factor to the violation.

*Graph 1* visually demonstrates the significant relationships between mean scores of Seriousness and Importance to discipline among the four vignettes.

## Limitations

As with any exploratory study, there were several limitations. First, the sample size was very small, representing fewer than 5% of the members serving on social work regulatory boards. It was possible that a larger sample may have produced more variability in the responses. In addition, the sample was strongly represented by white, female, and older respondents, which may have impacted the results, especially regarding the question about the race of the social worker. Participants from composite boards were overly represented in this sample, which also may have impacted the results. This is important to consider in future research, given the need to understand how much decision-making is tied to social work values versus those of other behavioral health professionals, those in other helping professions, or the values of board members who are not licensed professionals. Finally, at least half of the respondents were from only three jurisdictions, which may have overrepresented the consistency of board member perceptions.

There were also limitations within the study design. Participants could answer any part of the study which may have contributed to inconsistency among the data. Because results were received in the aggregate, the pattern to which questions were skipped was unclear. The survey completion timeline was less than four weeks and spanned end-of-the-year holidays. This may have affected available time and who was willing to participate in the study. Another factor affecting participation was the time intensity of up to thirty minutes to complete the study with no incentive or remuneration.

Regarding whether the social worker's race changed the seriousness of the violation, two responses may have been due to misapplication of the scale as they seem inconsistent with other responses. Participants were not given information about the race of the social worker in initial vignettes, so changing the race later in the questions may not have been accurately assessed. Further, consent agreements, disciplinary supervision, and diversionary measures may have influenced the ways different board members viewed the ranked misconduct in the vignettes. Balancing the provision of enough information for the participants to make good decisions and not making the survey take an inordinate amount of time also may have contributed to some participants unintentionally adding their own contexts from experience. Finally, it cannot be overstated that this study collected only a small sample of participants, and while the results are meaningful in many ways, they cannot be generalized about board member decision-making. The results promote substantial thoughts, and raise more questions for further consideration for future research.

## Implications

As stated in the literature review, some research has explored social workers' perceptions of violations already sanctioned by jurisdictional licensing boards or reviewed by NASW. This exploratory study examined the perceptions of board members who make the decisions about social worker violations and the sanctions for those violations. Although the sample size was small, the results of this study are important because, as the quantitative data demonstrated, many non-social workers serve on boards that hear allegations and determine sanctions for social worker violations. The qualitative data reveal that board members may make decisions based on investigations done by other personnel, often persons with legal expertise, who determine if the allegation violates the jurisdictional licensure law. The results of this study may be more influenced by respondents' familiarity with the legal regulation of social work practice than knowledge of the NASW

*Code of Ethics* as the basis for judging the seriousness of the violations and the importance to discipline.

Though the respondents connected the seriousness of the offense to the importance to discipline, which matched conclusions from prior studies (Boland-Prom, 2009; Gricus & Wysiekierski, 2021), there were some contradictions. For example, Vignette 2 had the highest mean score on the seriousness scale, but Vignette 1 was rated higher on the importance to discipline scale. Respondents may have focused on other variables in the vignettes besides the primary allegation. Additionally, jurisdictional legislation may influence the perception of the seriousness of the violation. Further, Vignette 3 was used in the study because it was a common violation written into the law in some jurisdictions; however, respondents rated this violation low in both seriousness and importance to discipline. In some jurisdictions, improper termination may not be stated explicitly as a violation but rather subsumed under a more general category, such as standards of ethical practice and professional conduct. Future research may include a content analysis of different jurisdictional legislation to assess whether laws highlight some more serious violations than those in other jurisdictions. This study also identified that sanctions, primarily reprimands with training and supervision required, were often recommended for more serious offenses. Other factors identified as important include the educational degree of the social worker, whether the social worker admitted the offense, and the number of years of experience of the social worker, and these influenced the seriousness of the offense for some respondents.

The majority of respondents reported attending the ASWB new board member training, which uses case examples to apply the *Model Social Work Practice Act* (ASWB, 2018). The vignettes and survey questions used in this study, followed by discussion, could be used as tools for board member training. Further exploratory and descriptive studies of board member training may provide more understanding of the contextual influences of board decision-making.

Since the majority of participants reported attending ASWB new board member training as part of their orientation, it would be helpful to understand if the consistencies observed in this study were due to attending the same training; thus, board members are trained to think similarly about violations and expect similar outcomes. If there is belief that the measures are adequate for seriousness, the importance of the need to discipline, and the sanctions themselves, then the influence of this orientation serves jurisdictional regulatory boards well. If not, then ASWB's new board member orientation may be a place to influence board member decision-making. Further research is needed to explore how jurisdictional legislation uses the Model Social Work Practice Act (ASWB 2018) in creating board regulatory practices. Additional research regarding how boards and board members determine sanctions imposed would be useful.

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# Toward a Critical Social Work Ethics of Immigration, Migration, and Human Rights

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## Abstract

The social work community has long been committed to human rights and the specific issue of immigration in both policy and practice. But what is the underlying rationale or grounding for this commitment? Furthermore, there are extremely troubling ethical problems embedded in the immigration issue. What actions might we take as social workers to assist our immigrant neighbors and to change the immigration systems on global, national or local scales? Immigration policy and practice across the globe also have deep racist and oppressive foundations. As social workers, we are decisive in our loathing of racism and oppression but how and why are these abhorrent practices also unethical and immoral at their core? To explore these questions, this article presents its argument in stages. It first briefly outlines the immigration experience,

focusing in particular on the American context. Next, the article portrays the racist and oppressive underpinnings of immigration, and then points out underlying ethical concerns. That section is followed by a discussion of an overall conceptual and ethical framework, principles, and suggested action steps for professional practice with immigrants. A brief discussion then follows about the philosophical notion of hospitality and its pertinence to social work and immigration. The final section proposes a call to social work action, hoping to spark broader involvement of social workers in advocating on behalf of immigrant rights in their professional and personal lives, and how such commitments are critical for the protection of a moral, democratic society.

**Keywords:** Ethics, immigration, migration/mobility, human rights, oppression

## Introduction

Migration and mobility have historically been constant features of society, producing immigrants, migrants, refugees, and asylees. People move for all sorts of reasons: family reunification, economic opportunity, freedom, discrimination, oppression, war, pestilence, environmental disaster, and more. The social work profession historically has mobilized to defend human rights, pursue justice for immigrant communities, and to present a consistent, strong social work voice based on our unique values and commitments (Furman et al., 2008; Scheyett, 2021; Staub-Bernasconi, 2016). Many social workers are employed in the immigration field and others are very active on immigration issues in their volunteer lives. As social workers, we support the rights of immigrants and migrants domestically and globally (Congress, 2017; Congress et al., 2020). Sadly, experiences of human movement have typically been characterized by racism, oppression, discrimination, persecution, and violence. Of course, social workers and all feeling human beings should disdain inhumane treatment of anyone. The fact that these horrible practices are seriously wrong should be obvious (Buxton, 2022). But, the intersections of oppression, persecution, racism and immigration, migration, and mobility presents deep ethical challenges. Therefore, from a social work vantage point, how might we conceptualize

human mobility? From the social work perspective, what is the underlying philosophical and ethical rationale, logic, or grounding for the specific social work commitment to immigrant/migrant/refugee/asylee rights and justice? In other words, why do social workers engage in immigration policy and practice to begin with? Social workers are deeply committed to human rights and responding to the needs of all marginalized and vulnerable populations (Hermans & Roets, 2020; Reynaert et al., 2021; Staub-Bernasconi, 2016). This commitment draws on professional values, codes of ethics and perhaps even our own perception of common-sense morality or common ethical intuitions for the inspiration to pursue this work (Huemer, 2010). However, are there deeper rationales for our devotion to the issue, beyond what is articulated in the various codes? What might be the underlying premises that justify this dedication? Is there a deeper philosophical and ethical basis that animates this commitment that can serve to supplement and amplify our professional values, codes, and common-sense morality?

The impetus for this article derives from the author's own strong interest in studying normative and applied ethics, the experience of having taught masters and doctoral level courses in social work ethics for over 25 years, time spent organizing on behalf of immigrant rights, co-founding and co-chairing the Immigration and Global Social Work Committee of the New York City Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), and co-founding a new national organization, Social Workers for Immigration Justice. This article briefly traces the trajectory of immigration, including its racist underpinnings, identifies underlying ethical imperatives, and concludes with a moral call to action to the social work community. In building its case, this essay endeavors to raise the collective consciousness about the immigration issue, to offer a philosophical framing for welcoming and supporting immigrants and all marginalized people, and connect the ethical commitments of social work to the ethics of immigration and anti-oppressive practice. We have a profound moral obligation to embrace, welcome, and comprehensively care for immigrants, migrants, refugees, and seekers of asylum, building on the responsibilities suggested by social work values and ethics. Furthermore, on moral grounds we should

challenge prevailing narratives and demand a transformation and reinvention of the immigration system. Indeed, social workers should express moral outrage in light of the migration situation described below. Thus, the theory presented here provides social workers with perhaps new and strong logical argument and high moral ground when advocating on behalf of immigrants. This theory demonstrates that our claims are not abstractions or based on impulse, but concrete values based on persuasive rational ideas and a coherent line of reasoning, justified by widely held moral beliefs and ethical concepts. It enables us to be even more assured when we defend the basic human rights of and services for immigrants and, truthfully, all oppressed people.

## Immigration on the Global Scene

While the issue of immigration is a critical public policy consideration, it can be a quite personal one as well. In the United States, most of us are descendants of or are immigrants ourselves, though for many, their ancestors came enslaved in chains and not with tickets on an ocean steamer. We all have unique migration stories that shape our thinking and action. Americans commonly draw their heritage from extended immigrant/migrant families fleeing persecution, violence, poverty or environmental disaster, eager to seek opportunity, make their mark and build meaningful lives for their loved ones (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2021, p. 273). My own grandparents and parents were just like the refugees and Dreamers of today—children brought or born here of unauthorized immigrants. When my family first came to these shores, they were fleeing anti-Semitism, pogroms, oppression, and poverty from Eastern European ghettos like many of today's immigrants, refugees, and asylees. But today, the frightening reality is that the results of immigration policy have been terrorizing our immigrant neighbors. Immigrant families have been in desperation mode, growing more and more fearful of deportation whether they are authorized or unauthorized immigrants (Becerra, 2016). European border zones, detention camps and American government raids on workplaces, schools, public spaces, or homes—these

common occurrences conjure up images from history of the roundups of Jews and other targeted groups during the Holocaust. Even more, the previous Trump administration had sought to block refugees from many countries from entering these shores, especially those of “color,” and even those who had completed the already strict vetting process. It is deeply worrisome that there are echoes of yesteryear still permeating our public air space today, appealing to the basest of fears and instincts. Back in the early teens and twenties of the past century, leaders commonly sought to prevent many immigrants, including mine, from coming to the U.S., sounding phrases such as “politically suspect,” “too crude,” “too poor,” “too unskilled,” “too uneducated,” “too uncultured,” “too dirty,” “too diseased,” “too dark,” “too dangerous,” and “too criminal.” Sound familiar?

On the international scene, despite the existence of systems and structures with the purpose to protect displaced people (Foster & Lambert, 2019; Kesby, 2012; Reichert, 2011), we are witnessing a massive global refugee crisis with the highest levels of displacement on record. Displacement creates refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless individuals—all cases of what we can label **urgent** immigration, as opposed to **non-urgent** immigration (Herman, 2021). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, at least 89.3 million people around the world have been forced to flee their homes as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations. The major hosting countries for receiving refugees are Turkey, Colombia, Uganda, Pakistan, and Germany. The major source countries of all refugees are the Syrian Arab Republic, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar. In total, there are 27.1 million refugees, half of whom are children. Some 53.2 million of those fleeing their homes are internally displaced people within their own countries. Another 4.6 million people on the move are asylum seekers; 4.4 million Venezuelans have been displaced abroad. More than 8 million refugees from Ukraine have been displaced across Europe and more than 5 million people are estimated to have been displaced inside Ukraine. There are millions of stateless people who have been denied a nationality and lack access to basic human rights such as education, health care, employment, and freedom of movement. Political and

economic conditions in many of these countries are horrific; people are literally fleeing for their lives. An astounding 1 in every 88 people on earth has been forced to flee for their life (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, n.d., a). This tragic situation is no accident. Many refugees and asylum seekers today, especially from nations of the Global South such as Africa, Central America, South America, the Caribbean, Middle East and Asia, have been displaced due to natural disasters, corruption, western colonization or imperialism. Whereas countries of the Global North, located in North America, Europe and northern Asia, as well as Australia and New Zealand, tend to be well developed, mature economies, wealthy and politically stable, countries in the Global South are poorer, developing economies with faster population growth than the Global North (Royal Geographical Society, n.d.). Economic, environmental, and political factors have been crucial drivers behind urgent immigration, particularly from South to North.

Welander and Jaspars (2022) write that “Europe’s asylum and migration system is increasingly centered on securitisation, criminalisation and exclusion. We are witnessing ever-increased funding for restrictive border management and the externalisation of asylum responsibilities through ‘cooperation’ with third countries, as well as illegal pushbacks at internal and external European borders” (p. 4). While this has been a growing pattern over time, the situation had been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. But, as early as 2015, when an international refugee crisis drove close to 1 million people to Europe, politicians, journalists, and ordinary people commonly referred to the situation as a flood, an invasion characterized by swarms of people besieging the Continent. That crisis provoked the growth of xenophobic attitudes toward foreigners and the resurgence of far-right parties espousing anti-immigrant agendas (Dragostinova, 2015). Consequently, the European Union and its member states have been increasing efforts to prevent people from migrating to Europe (Pusteria, 2022). At the time of this writing, the British Parliament is reviewing a highly controversial Illegal Migration Bill that will change the law so that those who arrive illegally will not be able to stay and will be detained and promptly removed, either to their home country or a safe third country. This

development has caught the eager attention of far-right groups across Europe. Increasingly, European countries have been practicing a restrictive border management policy tantamount to exercising a politics of exhaustion, attempting to make migrants so tired in their efforts to migrate that they ultimately decide to return to their countries of origin. Often, migrants are forced into border zones where they are subject to confinement, violent pushbacks, deportation, and worse (Welander, 2022, p. 354). Indeed, analysts have observed increasing punishment regimes directed towards migrants in Europe (Bosworth et al., 2018). And the International Rescue Committee (2021) reports that “Over the past several years, we have seen a precipitous decline in resettlement, a hardening of refugee inclusion and asylum policies, and humanitarian aid lagging behind needs, across the regions that once most firmly upheld these protections... Moreover, across Europe and the US, the protection of refugees has been eroded in recent years, with the growing number of states resorting to detention, deterrence, and the denial of the right to asylum, including through illegal pushbacks” (p. 1).

### **The American Case: Immigration, Oppression, and Structural Racism**

Pervasive prejudice and racism are embedded in the history of immigration worldwide, and the American immigration system also reflects racist beginnings and ends, reproducing discrimination and inequality in practice. The country's track record belies America's self-perception as a nation welcoming of immigrants. Commenting on migration history and immigration policy in the United States, Sager (2020) writes that “The myth of the melting pot ignores the hostility toward many European immigrant groups at the time. Moreover, it is deeply Eurocentric, effacing the racist treatment of Asian, African and Middle Eastern immigrants and the virtual prohibition of non-European immigration for much of the 20th century. It also evades troubling similarities between treatment of immigrants and slavery and the oppression and exclusion of Native Americans” (p. 36). Dunbar-Ortiz (2021) articulates the claim that the United States has never been a nation of immigrants. She asserts that “it has always been a settler state with a core of



descendants from the original colonial settlers, that is, primarily Anglo-Saxons, Scots Irish, and German. The vortex of settler colonialism sucked immigrants through a kind of seasoning process of Americanization, not as rigid and organized as the ‘seasoning’ of Africans, which rendered them into human commodities, but effective nevertheless” (p. 270). Furthermore, the recent relentless and multipronged attacks on immigrants represent only the tip of the iceberg: these attacks portend a wider, sustained assault on democracy, social justice, civil and human rights (Benhabib, 2004; Benhabib, 2011; Benhabib, 2018; Cohen, 2020). Moreover, there are compelling practical, religious, economic, humanitarian, and moral arguments to reject these attacks on immigrants. It is time to shut down the overheated rhetoric about the threat of immigration as replacement or invasion, and we must stop exaggerating the danger of purported criminal elements. Of course there are some criminal elements that we do not want to receive in this country. But overwhelmingly, immigrants are law abiding, tax paying, gainfully employed, respectful, and productive members of society, grateful to be in the U.S. where they hope to live in freedom and with dignity (American Immigration Council, 2021, September 14; American Immigration Council, 2021, October 7; Milkman et al., 2021; Chishti et al., 2021).

It is also extremely troubling that we have witnessed the merging of criminal and immigration law to the extent that commentators now often refer to “cimmigration,” a system in which immigrants, both unauthorized and lawfully present, become subject to a double standard that allows authorities to inflict far greater punishment than the situation merits and treats non-citizens far more harshly than citizens (Lee, 2019, p. 279). The enforcement regime employed by the United States government perpetuates injustice and inequality and often illegally deports or detains migrants and subjects them to physical assault, sexual abuse and solitary confinement (Lim, 2021; Sager, 2020, pp. 55, 58, 89). Moreover, this article takes the position that no person should ever be stigmatized as being “illegal.” Although terms such as *illegal*, *undocumented*, *unauthorized*, and *socially undocumented* are debated as well as employed in both the academic literature and

popular usage, this author prefers the term “unauthorized,” referring to a legal situation rather than stigmatizing the individual (Reed-Sandoval, 2020).

Welcoming the immigrant is acclaimed as a basic American value, albeit one that is often inflated. Paradoxically, America at times has offered a haven of freedom and safety to the persecuted and at other times callously slammed the door. The U.S. has been, until recently, a global resettlement leader. But we also know too well the devastating consequences of turning people away. The Trump administration drastically reduced the maximum number of refugees that could enter the country, imposing new security vetting procedures on refugees before admission, which greatly lengthened waiting times and left many refugees in dangerous situations for prolonged periods. Despite overwhelming evidence of the value of immigrants to our country, that administration adopted dozens of policies and procedures that slowed, or even stopped legal immigration, without any congressional action—changes from which the country has yet to recover. Many categories of humanitarian relief, including refugee and asylum admissions, were halted, eliminated or curtailed, heavily damaging our nation’s reputation as a haven for the persecuted.

These barriers also affected Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for eligible people already in the U.S. whose home countries were designated as unsafe for their return. Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) typically protects certain individuals from designated countries and regions facing political or civic conflict or natural disaster and allows them to live in the United States for a designated period of time, and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) functions similarly for Dreamers who came to the U.S. as children (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.). The humanitarian parole program, which allows an individual who may be inadmissible or otherwise ineligible for admission to remain in the United States for a temporary period for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit, was also affected. Anti-**illegal** immigration policies morphed into full-blown **anti-immigration** policies. While the Trump administration was vocal about cracking down on illegal immigration, it was also increasing

enforcement for stricter immigration rules and increasingly denying visa applications for **legal** immigration (American Immigration Council, 2021, October 7; American Immigration Lawyers Association, 2018, April 6; American Immigration Lawyers Association, 2018, April 24; Cohen, 2020; Pierce & Bolter, 2020).

The U.S. has exhibited ebbs and flows of acceptance and denial of immigrants. Historically, nearly all immigrant groups were seen as effectively non-white and not desirable. Even most European immigrants were deemed undesirable at one point or another, though some eventually were conferred “white” status and privilege (Lee, 2019; Okrent, 2019). Prone to xenophobia, nativism, and white supremacy, the U.S. immigration system is another American institution characterized by systemic racism.

Xenophobia has been neither an aberration nor a contradiction to the United States's history of immigration. Rather, it has existed alongside and constrained America's immigration tradition, determining just who can enter our so-called nation of immigrants and who cannot. Even as Americans have realized that the threats allegedly posed by immigrants were, in hindsight, unjustified, they have allowed xenophobia to become an American tradition (Lee, 2019, p. 7).

People of color and immigrants from eastern and southern Europe have historically been deemed less than human, and less admissible than white Anglo-Saxon immigrants (McKanders, 2019). American history bears witness to the facts that the U.S. trafficked in slaves, committed genocide of indigenous people, drove Mexicans off their land, drove out Chinese immigrants, told the Irish not to come, rounded up and interned Japanese citizens, and even stopped in the harbors Jews fleeing Nazi genocide during WWII (Cohen, 2020, pp. 4, 121-122; Haines, 2015; Okrent, 2019, p. 373). “It is correct to call the United States ‘a nation of immigrants,’ but only if the focus is on newcomers who have been recognized as white upon their arrival or over generations become accepted as white. Immigration implies voluntary arrival. Enslaved Africans who were forcibly brought to US shores were not

immigrants and neither were Native Americans living on the continent before European settlers arrived” (Zack, 2023, p. 55).

The current American immigration system is built on scaffolding first established in 1952 and then substantially amended in 1965 (American Immigration Council, 2021, September 14; Chishti et al., 2021). The 1965 law, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, repealed national origin quotas which had been in place since the 1920s. Those early quotas ensured that immigration was largely reserved for European immigrants. The law replaced the quota system with a preference system based upon immediate family relationships with U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents, or in some cases, their skills. Hart-Celler gave rise to large scale immigration, both legal and unauthorized and changed the face of America. For the first time, America now had a cap on the number of visas permitted for immigrants from the Western Hemisphere and established an annual cap of visas for immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere (Chisti et al., 2015). The last major legislative revision occurred in 1990, with periodic updates since then granting limited amnesty or expanding enforcement. Consequently, the system is profoundly misaligned with current demographic realities and factors shaping migration. This misalignment is the principal cause for “illegal” immigration, with the unauthorized population estimated at 11 million people in the U.S. The system is also responsible for a mounting backlog in legal immigration streams, with nearly 1 million people in line for employment-based green cards and 3.8 million with approved initial petitions waiting overseas for family-based green cards.

These are some of the consequences of the failure by Congress and past administrations to update immigration laws to match current realities. President Biden inherited a beleaguered, if not broken, immigration system, beset by delays, cuts, restrictions, and a variety of barriers to access for noncitizens in the U.S. and abroad. The Trump administration implemented hundreds of mainly procedural changes to immigration policy. Some changes have had relatively minimal impact; others are sweeping in nature, with cascading effects limiting the ability of many noncitizens to obtain or maintain immigration status. Trump created bureaucratic barriers to

reduce overall approval rates and to increase the time required to navigate specific applications and petitions, thereby limiting the entry of various categories of individuals based on claims of public health during the pandemic. Fueled by insidious American Islamophobia, that administration enacted executive actions targeting a number of populations based on country of origin, such as the “Muslim Ban,” which banned refugee admissions from certain Muslim majority countries. All of these changes created barriers to accessing lawful mechanisms to come to the U.S. that will take years to identify and reverse (Bolter et al., 2022; Immigration Hub, 2020; Pierce et al., 2018).

The jury is still out on the Biden administration. This current administration has endeavored to communicate a more positive view of immigrants and immigration and has made some progress on policy and protocol. Much effort has been dedicated to undoing the actions of the last administration, particularly around family detention, family reunification, protection of DACA/Dreamers, reduction in immigration arrests, reversal of the public charge rule, elimination of country travel bans, elimination of administrative barriers and increased processing fees, as well as a commitment to regional development. Yet, at the time of this writing, many promises remain unrealized. Certain Trump-era policies are still intact, and government negotiations risk allowing the implementation of draconian policies all over again. The pledge to create a safe and orderly process for seeking asylum at the border remains unfulfilled, immigration detention has expanded, and separated families have not been made whole.

Deportations have continued, the future of DACA is in doubt, the Trump-era Title 42 public-health order authorizing the rapid expulsion of asylum seekers and other migrants needs to be relegated to the dustbin, and Temporary Protected Status needs to be expanded. Refugee and asylum numbers need to be dramatically increased, not just for Ukrainians but for countries of “color,” such as Cameroon, Mauritania, Haiti, Yemen and others. Aside from official pronouncements, executive orders, legislative advocacy, or policy and procedural changes, the internal functioning of the American immigration apparatus still reflects deep racist and oppressive

operations. The moral travesty of arriving migrants being shipped as political pawns by the governors from border states like Florida and Texas to northern blue states like New York and Massachusetts is a national failure. Ironically, from a purely utilitarian calculus, the U.S. needs immigrants. Due to declining population growth and an aging demographic, immigration will become increasingly important for sustaining the growth of the labor force (2022 Immigration Priorities, 2022). But it is critical to note that here and around the world, much of the low paid, necessary labor is possible only through immigration policies that provide a vulnerable, exploitable workforce, often oppressed in the workplace and made even more acute as a consequence of the global COVID-19 pandemic (Best et al., 2022; Lim, 2021; Morrissey, 2022; Sager, 2020, p. 31).

## The Conceptual Foundation for an Ethics of Migration and Mobility

So far, this essay has identified the nature and extent of the ongoing immigration problem, the systemic oppression and racism embedded in immigration structures and practices, and the gravity of the current migration crisis. We will now explore in more comprehensive fashion the fundamental moral implications of and social work perspectives regarding migration, mobility, and immigration, and by extension, oppression. In this author's view, a close reading of social work ethics codes suggests that they are inspired by and even directly derived from classic ethical theories. Accordingly, our ethical intuitions as social workers are not impulsive but are built on a sound and enduring theoretical basis applicable to ethical questions emerging within our general practice, specifically on issues of immigration.

Reamer (1993) establishes the central importance of philosophy and ethical theory for social work practice. He writes that "At its foundation, social work is organized around a collection of deep-seated, philosophical issues. Social workers' preoccupation with welfare rights, the role of the state, and distributive justice is grounded in enduring issues that have drawn the attention of political philosophers for centuries. The omnipresent ethical issues social workers face in practice are variations on themes addressed by

moral philosophers at least since Socrates' time" (pp. 195–196). Reamer (1993) further states:

Concerning moral philosophy, the profession is only at the beginning stages of its grasp of ethical theory and its relevance to social work practice. Although social workers now have a reasonably good grasp of the diverse ethical dilemmas that arise in practice, much work remains to be done to enable practitioners to appreciate ethical nuance, dissect ethical issues that are embedded in practice, and apply ethical theories. In addition to mastering the rudiments of moral philosophy and ethical theory, social workers need to enhance their ability to identify and analyze ethical concepts and construct compelling arguments to support their views, especially when moral duties conflict. (p. 197)

Mendoza (2017) demonstrates in his work that “the issue of immigration should be viewed as central to western moral and political philosophy and why it should not be treated as merely a problem of ‘applied ethics’” (p. 121). The immigration debate represents a conflict over competing moral and political principles, over moral and political commitments. It might very well be that immigration is the most pressing issue that moral and political philosophers have to grapple with today (pp. xi–xii).

Previously, it was noted that human mobility has been a constant throughout time. “The history of the world is very much a history of people moving due to climate change, conquest, slavery, economic opportunity and wanderlust” (Sager, 2018, p. 2). Joseph Carens, widely acknowledged as one of the leading contemporary theorists on the subject of the ethics of immigration, graphically portrays the context and poses a challenge:

To Haitians in small, leaky boats confronted by armed Coast Guard cutters, to Salvadorans dying from heat and lack of air after being smuggled into the Arizona desert, to Guatemalans crawling through rat-infested sewer pipes from Mexico to California—to these people the borders, guards and guns are all too apparent. What justifies the use of force against such people? Perhaps borders and guards can be justified as a way of keeping out criminals, subversives, or armed invaders. But most of those trying to get in are not like that. They are ordinary, peaceful people, seeking only the opportunity to build decent, secure lives for

themselves and their families. On what moral grounds can these sorts of people be kept out? What gives anyone the right to point guns at them? (Carens, 1987, p. 251)

Carens (1987) argues that “our social institutions and public policies must respect all human beings as moral persons and that this respect entails recognition, in some form, of the freedom and equality of every human being” (p. 265). He adds “So, whatever we think about the justice of borders and the limitations of the claims of aliens, our views must be compatible with a respect for all other human beings as moral persons” (Carens, 1987, p. 257). Sager (2020) takes the argument even further, arguing that it is a fundamental moral principle that the use of force needs justification, and that immigration restriction is a *prima facie* rights violation (*prima facie*, literally, meaning at first glance, and in this context, meaning all things considered, or other things being equal) (p. 24). Moral theories as well as common sense morality would submit that we also have ethical constraints against unjustly and intentionally inflicting harm or committing violence, or to exploit, dominate, or oppress others, and arguably not to stand by when we witness such heinous actions perpetrated by others (Kamm, 2007). Moreover, we have positive ethical obligations to promote justice, help those in need, and enhance and preserve freedom and dignity (Sager, 2020, p. 2). We have a universal humanitarian obligation to all human beings (Sager, 2020, p. 16) and an obligation to protect the human rights of all people in our own nation’s territory, regardless of legal status (Song, 2019, p. 94). Finally, we have a *prima facie* obligation to provide assistance to refugees, even to the extent of offering membership in the form of citizenship (Buxton, 2021; Song, 2019, p. 190).

British philosopher Sarah Fine (2013) writes extensively about the ethical ramifications of the immigration issue, especially about the tension between a migrant’s right to enter a country versus the country’s right to exclude the person. The following quote, citing the work of Carens, Miller and Benton, presents a powerful critique.



When we do pause to consider the possible moral justifications for the right to exclude would-be immigrants, however, we cannot fail to notice that 'borders have guards and the guards have guns' (Carens, 1987, p. 251). The state's authority over immigration is often 'coercively enforced, through the familiar apparatus of border control, and the harsh measures that await would-be immigrants if they fail to satisfy the legal requirements for entry' (Miller, 2016). States routinely try to keep out all sorts of would-be entrants, for all sorts of reasons, with impunity. They might exclude the needy, the poor, the frail, those seeking work and other opportunities, those seeking an education, those wanting to be with loved ones. They may attempt to detain and deport people who are in the country without permission. Many people who are desperate to enter the state are turned away at the borders or are refused the requisite visas and never make it to the borders. People risk their lives in order to immigrate when permission is not granted. Some people die in the process of being sent back, and many people die in the process of trying to cross borders. People who are in the country without authorisation are vulnerable to ill-treatment (Benton, 2010). That is the reality. The authority states claim over the admission and settlement of non-citizens stands in urgent need of moral justification (pp. 254-255).

Buxton (2022) argues that persecution (and I would add, all forms of oppression) is a terrible wrong. By virtue of its violence, discrimination and denial of membership, it generates intentional, targeted, persistent and severe harm to the individual(s) affected. But it goes further than that. Persecution is also a mechanism for social control, defining who is in and "othering" who is out. Persecution restructures society and its internal relations and disrupts and undermines our social world. Consequently, although persecution includes individualized harms, it harms the entire group. It draws on and solidifies pre-existing fear and hatred, changing the boundaries of family, community, and nation.

The late philosopher Iris Marion Young (1990) developed the model of the five faces of oppression, which is quite relevant to this discussion. People are oppressed when they experience exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Migrants, unauthorized immigrants, refugees and seekers of asylum are commonly victimized in

these ways. Ethically speaking, then, immigrants (and frankly, all oppressed people/s) typically suffer fates they do not deserve as a consequence of the five faces of oppression. In experiencing any of the five faces, people suffer from disrespect, which diminishes their personhood. Such oppression reduces their self-determination, decision-making ability, and control over their own lives and the capacity for expression, capability, opportunity, fulfillment, and dignity. Such injustices baldly produce harm and fear, limiting the basic rights of association, speech, worship, marriage, mobility, and career. And due to nothing more than luck and the accident of birthplace, life chances of immigrants are all too often narrowed, constricted by unequal treatment/access and deprivation in real, physical, psychological, and emotional terms.

In other words, it is not just that we dislike oppression, persecution, and racism and instinctively commit to eradicating these realities; in this context, the common treatment of migrants, asylees and refugees is not merely appalling, it is fundamentally, inherently, and profoundly immoral (Buxton, 2022; Sager, 2020). Huemer (2010) observes that the vast majority of immigrants are ordinary people who are simply seeking a new home and a better life. He poses the question: Does the state have the right to exclude these ordinary people? Huemer argues persuasively that most potential immigrants are ordinary non-criminal migrants who wish to leave their country of origin for morally innocent reasons, to escape persecution, economic hardship, or simply to join a society they would prefer to live in. Indeed, he claims that immigration restriction is a *prima facie* violation of the rights of potential immigrants, and as such is ultimately unjustified.

Sager (2020) offers the compelling observation that “Morally desirable outcomes are important, but they are not all that matter. We also care how they are achieved” (p. 34). Naturally, outcomes do matter but they are not necessarily the first thing that matters or even the most important thing that matters. Bagnoli (2005) reasons that “Prudential and moral reasons may pull in the same direction... My claim is that a moral argument applies universally and unconditionally, that is, independently of (although not necessarily incompatibly with) prudential considerations” (p. 120). I argue

here that there are moral starting points that precede any conversation about the outcomes of our actions. Certain things apply *a priori* over the consideration of consequences. Drawing from the expansive literature on the philosophy and ethics of immigration, I propose a series of fundamental understandings that form the foundation for our commitment and duties to immigrants, migrants, refugees and seekers of asylum, leading to a distinctive social work ethics of immigration (For extremely insightful and compelling discussions on ethics and the ethics of immigration, see Bagnoli, 2005; Carens, 2013; Fine & Ypi, 2016; Herman, 2021; Huemer, 2010; Reed-Sandoval, 2020; Sager, 2018; Sager, 2020; Song, 2019; Wellman & Cole, 2011; Young, 1990).

## Principles of Immigration Ethics

Morally speaking, an ethics of immigration/migration (and again, by extension, oppression, persecution, discrimination and racism) must include the following premises:

- People matter, regardless of race, gender/transgender/gender nonconforming/questioning, ethnicity, color, sexual orientation or preference, or religion
- People have a right to equal opportunity; they have a right to be independent agents able to pursue self-legislation, decision-making, and the autonomous exercise of their rational selves
- People have a right not to be harmed in any way; people have a prima facie negative right not to be subjected to harmful coercion (a threat of force restricting freedom of action); they have a right to be free from external control or domination
- People have a right not to be exploited, marginalized, held powerless, or subject to cultural imperialism and violence
- People have a right not to suffer disrespect which diminishes their personhood; people have a right not to suffer injustice,

deprivation, or oppression which reduces their self-determination and capacity for expression, capability, opportunity, fulfillment, and dignity

- It is a fundamental human right to move, to be free to immigrate; the human right to move is a basic liberty of democracy like the freedoms to associate, speak, work, worship and marry; people have a right to pursue life's opportunities without interference from the state; people should not be restricted to place or prevented from moving because of luck or accident of birthplace
- The freedom to immigrate requires others to respect that freedom; if there is a freedom to move, to immigrate, there must be a corresponding obligation on countries to accept and settle immigrants

Deriving a lesson from the eminent 18th-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose work changed the course of modern philosophy and whose powerful influence in many fields is still recognized today, Hill (2021) concludes that we are to treat other people with utmost respect for their dignity, autonomy, capacity for rational thought, self-governance, and decision-making. This suggests that we always make strenuous efforts not to coerce, exploit or manipulate people for our own purposes or for purposes that they would not agree to or choose themselves (pp.70–71, 174–175). Hill (2012) explains that Kant laid out what he termed the categorical imperative, one version of which is the formula of humanity as an end. “The formula states: act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in any other person, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (p. 27). Hill (2012) goes on to note that, for Kant,

“rational nature (‘humanity’) in each person is an *end in itself* and a special sense, not as a goal to be achieved but as a status to be respected. It limits the legitimate pursuit of personal and social ends, Kant argues, by prohibiting the use of certain means (for example, lying promises and revolution) and also by requiring us to adopt and pursue certain moral ends (the perfection of oneself and the happiness of others).” (pp. 27–28)

The duty to treat every person with respect holds, no matter how disliked, useless, or misbehaving the person may be. “The duty to respect others is not (as some suggest) the general requirement to treat persons with dignity as ends in themselves, but rather a derivative and more specific duty comparable to the duties of love, gratitude, and friendship” (Hill, 2012, pp. 80–81).

Of course, countries do strive to exercise discretion over who they permit to enter their borders, and under what conditions. But Herman (2021) argues that the rights of states to control their borders and determine the flow of immigrants does not free them from duties to admit and care for **urgent** immigrants (p. 206). Moreover, the “starting point is the moral idea that all persons have a claim in innate right to rightfully be somewhere, and so in a place where they can secure civic status - that is, a place where their innate right is given juridical and ethical shape” (Herman, 2021, p. 204). Herman (2021) also adds that:

If all persons have a claim in RIGHT to be somewhere, there must be some we who have a duty to meet the claim... This sets a presumption that where refugees or stateless persons present themselves must count as their *moral* port of entry. They have a claim to a process of recognition: to documents and temporary housing; access to health care; legal advice; educational resources and play space for their children. And they have a claim that the nature and duration of their stay at the port of entry not amount to detention. (pp. 204-205)

This subject of a nation’s discretion versus an individual’s rights receives robust and extensive debate in the literature. While this author is highly sympathetic to what is called the “open borders approach,” it is beyond the scope of this article to address this issue thoroughly. What the preceding analysis suggests is that we have, morally speaking, deep and extensive obligations to immigrants, migrants, refugees, and seekers of asylum, regardless of technical legal status. Now, the discussion goes one step further to ground these obligations.

## Welcoming and Embracing the “Other:” The Obligation of Hospitality

Immanuel Kant (2016) wrote in 1795 that the moral obligation of “hospitality” means the right of a stranger not to be treated as an enemy when she arrives in the land of another. Though it may not entail the right to be a permanent visitor, one may refuse to receive her **only** when this can be done without causing her destruction (in my estimation, the notion of destruction should be understood as broadly as possible, encompassing all manner of harm, including physical, psychological, emotional, economic, etc.). As long as she peacefully occupies her place, one may not treat her with hostility. Moreover, Kant (2016) noted that hospitality is not a question of philanthropy but of right (Brown, 2010). Herman (2021) also weighs in on the theme of hospitality, observing that refugees, stateless persons, and seekers of asylum are not free migrants who choose to migrate to seek opportunity. Instead, they are unfree migrants, victims of state-sanctioned or state-tolerated violence, political or social unrest, or the effects of climate change making parts of the globe uninhabitable. “Those forced to leave have more than claims for hospitality on landing. They cannot be returned to their country of origin without disregard for their human rights (a state or place that fails to make provisional human rights real). Technically they are not stateless, but morally speaking, they have no place to reside” (Herman, 2021, p. 205).

Contemporary scholars in such diverse fields as philosophy, ethics, religion, politics, and immigration, as well as social work, have contemplated the practical application of the idea of hospitality (Boudou, 2021; Braganza, 2018; Sidhu & Rossi-Stackey, 2022). The notion of hospitality serves as an overarching conceptual framework for the practice of radical inclusiveness, respecting and embracing the multiplicity of expressions of human difference, and engaging the “other.” I have been particularly intrigued by the writings of French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who had a unique interpretation of hospitality. Firstly, his whole philosophy revolved around the notion of ethical “commandedness.” For him, ethics is first philosophy and comes before any other conversation. When we come into contact with

someone else, we are automatically in an ethical relationship with that person. To face the “other” is to answer a summons, a demand, and an obligation to respond ethically. Indeed, I am hostage of the other. I have an immediate, unquenchable, and unconditional responsibility to help, to assist, and to serve (Bloechl, 2000; Caputo, 2000; Davis, 1996; Derrida, 1999; Morgan, 2007). In an ironic twist, linguistically, the words hospitality, host, hostage, and hostility are all related. The one who hosts is hostage to the guest and vice versa—they are hostages to one another (Caputo, 2000). Furthermore, hospitality starts at the individual level and extends to the communal, societal, and policy level. Hospitality demands the total embracing of the other, and it especially means welcoming and inviting in the one who is the most vulnerable, habitually cast aside, disenfranchised, excluded, and disempowered in every society. It includes all immigrants, migrants, refugees, asylees, strangers, widows, unauthorized, poor, underprivileged, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) who are oppressed and discriminated against. Pursuing hospitality ultimately means the seeking of justice.

## Social Work and Immigration

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the NASW make a strong moral case for immigration activism. The IFSW has long supported immigrant/migrant advocacy and expressed concern for displaced persons and refugees (International Federation of Social Workers, 1998; 2002). Through its commissions and work with the United Nations, the IFSW is an active player on migration issues. In a policy statement issued in 2022, the IFSW charts the role of social workers in advancing a new eco-social world, implicitly echoing our concern for the displaced, refugees, and asylum seekers:

A Holistic Rights Framework recognizes individual human rights, (dignity and fundamental freedoms), social human rights, (civil, economic, and political), cultural rights, eco- system rights, and the broader rights of nature. Within this framework are driving values and principles: Recognizing the importance of diversity, sustainability, self-determination,

and that all people are responsible to protect and advance the rights of others as well as nature. The aim of the framework is to establish a consensus that balances all rights through participatory engagement in inclusive policies and practices for our shared futures... The social work profession engages across micro-mezzo-and macro levels of policy and practice to co-build partnerships that create change and promote opportunities that support and build sustainable development and eco-social practice, committed to building a new eco-social world in which all rights are ensured and no one is left behind. Social workers are working within communities and governments, co-designing and co-building social and environmental protection, leading to capacity-building, and policy-development to combat complex and intersecting crises.

Moreover, the IFSW Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles passionately calls for a social work commitment to protecting the inherent dignity of people, to promoting social justice, upholding human rights, and safeguarding the right to self-determination and the right to participation, among other critical principles (International Federation of Social Workers, 2018). In the United States, “NASW supports immigration and refugee policies that uphold and support equity and human rights, while protecting national security... immigration policies must promote social justice and avoid racism and discrimination or profiling on the basis of race, religion, country of origin, gender, or other grounds” (Chang-Muy & Congress, 2016, p. 4).

The NASW Code of Ethics (2021) espouses six core values, including service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. Each value in turn contains derivative ethical principles and standards that exemplify NASW’s commitment to immigration justice. There is also a significant body of literature and resources on social work and immigration, including policy statements, legislative and action alerts, books, webinars, podcasts, web-based material, monographs, and journals (National Association of Social Workers, 2021, January). These sources are excellent examples of writing on direct practice issues, skills, and models. To strengthen the familiarity of social workers with the ethical basis of immigration work, this article argues



that we need a sustained application of ethical theories as well. Notably, the ethics text by Banks (2021), and collections edited by Marson & McKinney (2019) and Hugman & Carter (2016) cover some of the ethical theoretical aspects of immigration.

Though not all social workers across the globe enact professional and personal values in the same way, nor do all social work organizations share the same exact agenda, there are compelling democratic principles, along with humanitarian and moral arguments, urging us to reject anti-immigrant attacks and commit to defending and supporting immigrants, regardless of their supposed legal status. The conceptual and practical case for action on behalf of immigrants may very well apply to all oppressed populations. This is more than a hypothetical argument. We live in a world fraught with inconsistencies and contradictions. Social workers are often placed in impossible situations, working for organizations or government agencies specifically purposed to care for immigrant populations.

Despite honorable intentions, social workers are, unfortunately, frequently forced into the compromising position of becoming agents of the state—whether it be in deportation or family separation cases; working with unaccompanied minors; working in migrant processing centers on the borders or in detention centers; in child welfare or local immigration agencies, social workers are often mandated to implement policies and procedures that are unethical, oppressive, discriminatory, or harmful to our immigrant brothers and sisters, especially children (Carrillo & O’Grady, 2018; Finno-Velasquez & Dettlaff, 2018; Furman et al., 2012; Haidar & Smith, 2017; Humphries, 2004; Pinto, 2002; Roth et al., 2018). The field should be devoting significant effort to questioning such practices.

## Social Work, Democracy, and Human Rights

Social work can be conceptualized as a moral response to a terribly shattered world. Philosophically speaking, that is, social work is the professional practice of ethics and morality (the terms being used interchangeably). Our professional practice is based on our deep love of all people and our longing

for universal justice; this practice is enacted through relationships. Furthermore, social work should be regarded as representing a grand humanitarian, human rights, and social justice project, seeking to fulfill a distinctive dream to enhance the quality of life for all inhabitants of the earth and to repair our splintered society. We aspire to bring about what philosopher Avishai Margalit (1996) terms a “decent society,” as distinguished from a civilized one. A civilized society is one whose members do not humiliate one another. A decent society is one where its institutions do not humiliate people. A decent society fights conditions and institutions which humiliate. A second perspective emerges from the work of Barbara Herman (2021), the previously cited philosopher and Kantian expert, who writes about the creation of a “moral habitat: a made environment in which persons can, individually and together, express their nature as free and equal rational beings” (p. 2). Another prominent Kantian scholar, Catherine Korsgaard (1996) offers an invaluable view: “Since human beings together legislate the moral law, we form a moral community: a Kingdom of Ends. The Kingdom of Ends is an ideal... It is a community in which freedom is perfectly realized, for its citizens are free both in the sense that they have made their own laws and in the sense that the laws they have made are the laws of freedom... It is a community engaged in the harmonious and cooperative pursuit of the good” (p. 23).

Following these scholars, I argue that the social work project actively endeavors every day to bring about a decent society, creating a moral habitat that can produce a Kingdom of Ends. The view of hospitality also offers an inspiring message for social work, providing an added, moving rationale for embracing those in need, truly presenting a thoughtful foundation for a professional practice of ethics, love, and justice, enacted through relationships with others. For social work, welcoming the other operates on the micro, mezzo and macro levels. If this notion is correct, hospitality obligates us to be ethical in thought, word and deed in both our professional and personal lives. Coupled with enacting an ethics of immigration/migration that is anti-oppression/anti-racist, we become active participants in the ongoing moral response to a broken, shattered world and prompts us to take the

necessary incremental steps every day in pursuit of the social work dream to enhance the quality of life for all.

Social workers have an enormous stake in the immigration issue. As a profession devoted to ethical practice, social justice, human rights, anti-racism, self-determination, liberty, equality, and empowerment of individuals, groups and communities, the social work community shoulders an important responsibility to sound a powerful moral voice about how our society treats all oppressed people, and undoubtedly immigrants. Social workers must visibly, forcefully, and vocally commit to creating and building an inclusive democracy—one that fights prejudice, racism, intolerance, and injustice—one that promotes citizenship, civic engagement, and equal rights. Critically, social workers and our professional organizations must advocate on behalf of our immigrant friends, families, neighbors, and communities, regardless of their supposed “legal” status (Negi, et al., 2018).

An illustration of social work advocacy on immigration domestically is provided in the work of the NASW New York City Chapter Committee on Immigration and Global Social Work and that of the recently formed national organization Social Workers for Immigration Justice. These advocacy groups provide thought leadership and endeavor to change the narrative around immigration in the public’s consciousness. The main strategies have been to inform, educate, motivate, and mobilize the social work community and to collaborate with a number of advocacy coalitions, social work organizations, and schools of social work. They issue policy statements and action alerts, promote petitions, letter writing, social media and phone campaigns to elected officials, meet with legislators, present testimony to government, work with national advocacy coalitions and present educational webinars.

There are many strategies and tactics that individual and groups of social workers can take to advance the agenda of immigrant rights (Haidar & Smith, 2017; Lens, 2018; NASW–NYC Chapter, 2022). A sample but far from complete list of example action items can include:

- Stay informed about national and local immigration legislation and policies

- Maintain ongoing contact with elected officials to advocate on behalf of pro-immigrant legislation, services and policies, including emails, phone calls, social media campaigns, legislative advocacy days, or petitions
- Write pro-immigration stories and opinion letters/articles for dissemination to newspapers and on social media
- Organize rallies and local events to educate the community about immigration issues and to celebrate and support immigrant neighbors
- Build or join coalitions; work with professional social work organizations to ensure that immigration is a high priority; join or create a social work committee to work on immigration advocacy issues or help settle immigrants
- Monitor local services to immigrants and advocate for more expansive services
- Support pro-immigrant candidates
- Raise money for immigrant support organizations
- Obtain, if possible, full-time work with an immigration organization
- Volunteer with an immigrant support organization

The key is to stay informed and involved and to engage others in the process. Each individual or group will determine for itself what their activist agenda might entail. To paraphrase a well-known phrase from the labor movement that inspires community/macro social work practice, “don't mourn, organize!”

## Conclusion

Political philosopher Hannah Arendt herself was stateless and a refugee for many years, arriving in the U.S. after fleeing Europe in 1941. She did not become a citizen until 1950. Her experience as a Jewish refugee is recounted in her moving essay “We Refugees” (1943) and in later writings. She offered a concept that has often been misquoted and misinterpreted: the idea of “the right to have rights.” Based on the genocide and expulsions of the 20th century, she had grave doubts about whether there were any means to actually guarantee and deliver those rights, to protect the very people who had been rendered unprotected by losing their national membership. Sadly, the recent performance of the world community regarding the plight of people seeking refugee or asylum status, particularly in the nations of the Global North, makes a mockery of international agreements on obligations to care for refugees, such as the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations Human Rights, n.d.) and the Refugee Convention of 1951 (United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, n.d., b). Indeed, Lea Ypi, Albanian-born British philosopher writes about such blatant contradictions in her recently published memoir, *Free*:

The West had spent decades criticizing the East for its closed borders, funding campaigns to demand freedom of movement, condemning the immorality of states committed to restricting the right to exit. Our exiles used to be received as heroes. Now they were treated like criminals.

Perhaps freedom of movement had never really mattered... But what value does the right to exit have if there is no right to enter? Were borders and walls only reprehensible when they served to keep people in, as opposed to keeping them out? (Ypi, 2022, p. 158)

As we have witnessed, the plight of refugees has dramatically worsened with no solution to the crisis on the horizon. Still, it is imperative that we change the prevailing global and domestic narratives about migration and respond to the plight of refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and immigrants with hospitality, benevolence, compassion and action. Lives are at stake and future generations will judge us on how we welcome and care for the new

neighbors among us. “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” cannot be an empty phrase on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. For the United States as well as the countries of the Global North, the soul and spirit of our nations, indeed, the moral quality of our societies and the future of democracy hang in the balance.

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# Practice Standards for Addressing Social Justice in Social Work Research

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## Abstract

Social justice is a core value of the social work profession. Although various social work codes of ethics provide social workers with ethical guidance regarding research conduct, they do not specifically address how social workers can or should promote social justice when they are planning, conducting, and disseminating their research. This article offers a set of practice standards for social work researchers focusing on ways that they can conduct research in a manner that promotes social justice and redresses social injustices. These standards include both aspirational standards (moral goods to which social work researchers may aspire) and baseline standards (moral duties or minimum standards of good practice). Social work researchers can promote social justice not only by

choosing to conduct research related to social justice issues, but also by conducting their research in a manner that promotes social justice. The proposed standards address social justice concerns related to how the benefits, risks, and burdens of research are shared. They also identify ways to empower research participants, share power, and increase the capacities of various groups and communities to engage in research.

**Keywords:** Research, social work ethics, practice standards, social justice

## Introduction

Social work codes of ethics in various countries recognize that social workers have an ethical duty to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession (British Association of Social Workers [BASW], s.2021; National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021, s.5.01 [USA]; National Association of Social Workers in India, 2016, s.1-4). This duty may be realized by conducting research, evaluating practice and programs, and sharing knowledge through publications, presentations, and online and in-person discourse. By engaging in research activities, social workers can promote evidence-based practice, inform social policies and practices, and enhance wellbeing for the individuals, families, groups, and communities that social workers and allied helping professionals serve (Delva & Abrams, 2022).

In the United States, the NASW Code not only highlights social workers' duty to participate in research, but also describes how to conduct research in an ethical manner. Standard 5.02 provides guidance related to informed consent, confidentiality, risk, and integrity. Although the NASW Code identifies *promoting social justice* as a core professional principle, the duty to promote social justice is not directly reflected in the standards specific to research conduct. Given that research is an integral element of practice, social workers should consider whether and how social justice should be considered when making research-related decisions (Sobočan et al., 2019; Waller et al., 2022). The purpose of this article is to propose a set of practice standards on social justice and research, building on existing provisions in social work codes of ethics and providing specific guidance on

promoting social justice through research. The proposed standards are not intended to provide a final statement to be adopted by the profession. Rather, they offer a starting point for social work practitioners and organizations to consider, discuss, and determine what practice guidance the profession may use to inspire social workers engaged in research.

This article begins with a definitional framework for the practice standards, explaining key concepts incorporated into the standards. The balance of the article identifies specific practice standards focusing on how social work researchers (SWRs) may use research to promote social justice and address social injustices. The interpretation section under each standard offers guidance on how to implement these standards in various research situations.

## Key Concepts

Before delving into the proposed practice standards, it is important to understand five key concepts: practice standards, social work research, social justice, common morality, and people in vulnerable situations. “Practice standards” describe current and emerging best practices in a particular area of social work. The NASW has established practice standards for various areas of practice, including school social work, palliative and end-of-life care, case management, and clinical social work (NASW, n.d.). The NASW has not developed practice standards for social work research. Practice standards may be used as educational tools for SWRs. SWRs can also use them to advocate with their research partners, employers, and sponsors, promoting ethically responsible research practice (Giordano et al., 2021). Although practice standards build on ethical standards, they are not the same as ethical standards. Ethical standards in the NASW Code of Ethics, for example, provide guidance on ethical conduct across all areas of social work practice. Practice standards relate to a specific area of practice, providing social workers with more detailed and in-depth guidance on best practices in these areas.

Whereas practice standards are developed by professional organizations, “regulatory standards” are laws establishing legally enforceable rules for a particular practice area. Within the United States, the Common Rule establishes national regulations for conducting research with human subjects (Protection of Human Subjects, 2018). Researchers receiving federal funding must comply with the Common Rule; however, not all social work research falls within the purview of the rule (e.g., if type of research does not fall within the Common Rule’s definition of research, as described below). The proposed research standards apply to research regardless of the funding source and whether the research involves human subjects. The Common Rule establishes legal baselines and consequences for researchers who violate them. Researchers may also need to comply with professional ethical codes, agency policies, and other research requirements that apply to their context of practice. The following practice standards include aspirational guidelines, going beyond baseline requirements and encouraging SWRs to strive for the highest social work principles and ethical standards (Barsky, 2023). To underscore that these practice standards for educational and aspirational purposes, they are written in a descriptive rather than prescriptive manner; that is, rather than prescribing what SWRs “shall” or “should” do, these standards describe good practices without suggesting that they are legally or ethically required.

For the purposes of this article, “research” refers to the deliberative study of particular phenomena to develop new knowledge or understandings (Joubert et al., 2023). “Social work research” is defined as research conducted by one or more professionally educated or credentialed social workers (Sobočan et al, 2019). Conducting research includes roles such as developing research questions, designing research methods, gathering and analyzing research data, and disseminating research findings. The reason this definition focuses on *who is conducting the research* (rather than *what the research is about*) is that these standards are designed to provide guidance for social workers engaging in research roles. When SWRs collaborate in research with people from other professions, each professional may refer not only to their own profession’s standards but also to professional standards

that apply to their research partners. When conflicts arise between the guidance offered in the different sets of professional standards, they should strive for consensus on how to best address social justice issues in relation to their research.

Although the Common Rule defines research in terms of investigations designed to promulgate “generalizable knowledge,” the definition of research for the purposes of the proposed standards includes investigations designed to develop and share generalizable knowledge as well as investigations designed for internal use. Accordingly, the research standards apply not only to generalizable research but also to program evaluations or other practice research designed for internal purposes (e.g., to improve one’s own services or programs; Joubert et al., 2023). It should be noted that different types of researchers have different roles and contexts of practice, which may affect how they use these standards. Program evaluators, for instance, may be hired by a social agency or government department specifically to evaluate a particular program or service provider (Wanzer, 2021). Program evaluators may have more limited ability to select the focus of their research than researchers in universities, for instance, who typically have greater latitude in determining their research agendas. Different organizations that conduct research have different organizational cultures, including the extent to which they support research that facilitates social change and social justice (McBride et al., 2019). These differences in roles and contexts of practice may affect whether and how different types of researchers may address social justice issues in their practice (just as social workers who work as clinicians, advocates, mediators, community organizers, family therapists, and so on may also have different opportunities and limitations on how they address social justice in practice).

“Social justice” may be defined in terms of fairness, equity, and inclusion for individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and other social units. Equity and fairness relate to the way that opportunities, burdens, and benefits are distributed in society (Anastas, 2013). According to Nussbaum’s (2011) capabilities approach, social justice also requires that people have sufficient abilities or resources to function well. In other words,

social justice depends on people having the capabilities required to maintain life, health, bodily autonomy, social wellbeing, and control over their environments. Social workers have an ethical duty to promote social justice which they may fulfill through activities that advance human rights, address human needs, improve lives, and remediate unjustified disparities (Cox & Maschi, 2023). Part 6 of the NASW (2021) Code of Ethics describes specific ways that social workers may advance social justice: promoting social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice; facilitating informed participation by the public in shaping social policies and institutions; engaging in social and political action to ensure all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities; promoting conditions that encourage respect for cultural and social diversity; and acting to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, or mental or physical ability. SWRs have recognized that the professional duty to address oppression and promote social justice includes social workers who are involved in research activities (Society for Social Work and Research Board of Directors, 2022).

The Common Rule, the Belmont Report, and other non-social work guidelines for researchers suggest that researchers have an obligation to promote “justice” rather than “social justice.” They define justice as the ethical principle of ensuring fairness in the distribution of the benefits, burdens, and risks of research (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979; Protection of Human Subjects, 2018). Although social justice includes concerns about the fairness of how the benefits, burdens, and risks of research are distributed, social justice is a broader concept than justice. Social justice suggests that SWRs should also consider how their choice of research processes and topics can address discrimination, oppression, unjustified social disparities,

and other social injustices, and advance the rights, needs, and wellbeing of individuals, groups, communities, and society.

“Common morality” refers to a system of moral guidelines that would be agreeable to all rational, unbiased people (Paranhos et al., 2019). Gert (2004) suggests that common morality includes 10 perfect duties: do not kill, do not cause pain, do not disable, do not deprive people of freedom, do not deprive people of pleasure, do not deceive, keep your promises, do not cheat, obey the law, and do your duty. They are “perfect duties” in the sense of being duties that people should follow all the time. Gert distinguishes moral duties from moral goods, actions that are morally desirable but not morally required. Examples of moral goods include be charitable, be loving, engage in self-care, prevent harm, and reduce risk of loss of freedom (Gert, 2004). Thus, “do not engage in actions that lead to social injustice” is a moral duty (avoid causing harm), whereas “do engage in actions that foster social justice” is a moral good (beneficence). The proposed standards include both moral duties and moral goods.

Under Standard 6.04(b) of the NASW Code of Ethics, social workers have an ethical duty to act on behalf of people in vulnerable situations, including people who have been oppressed, marginalized, traumatized, or exploited. Accordingly, the proposed standards on social work research and social justice specifically address concerns related to people in vulnerable situations. For the purposes of the proposed research standards, “people in vulnerable situations” refers to individuals, families, groups, communities, or other social units that are at greater risk of harm because of their particular circumstances. Vulnerability may include risks related to physical health, mental health, cognitive ability, communicative ability, employment, finances, family relationships, reputations, and other aspects of wellbeing (Anastas, 2020; Danchev & Ross, 2014). The Common Rule recognizes children, prisoners, and people who are pregnant as members of vulnerable groups (Protection of Human Subjects, 2018). Similarly, the Declaration of Helsinki, an international statement of ethics for medical research, states that people from vulnerable groups should receive special protection (World Medical Association, 2013, s.19). The United Nations (n.d.) identifies

people of African descent, Indigenous peoples, Roma, Sinti, migrants, women, and people living in extreme poverty as examples of vulnerable groups. Vulnerability, however, is not simply predicated on membership in a particular group (Craig, 2022). Vulnerability in research depends on the specific research participant's situation and the types of risks associated with a particular form of research (Anastas, 2020). For instance, a person who is pregnant may have a high level of vulnerability if the research involves an intervention that could harm fetuses; however, the same person may not be particularly vulnerable in a study that surveys attitudes toward social support. Examples of situations that may lead to higher levels of vulnerability include people with compromised cognitive capacity, health risks, histories of trauma, or susceptibility to discipline or punishment (e.g., prisoners, employees, students, or people in abusive relationships). In each of these examples, research participants may be vulnerable to exploitation due to power asymmetry between researchers and participants. To promote social justice for people in vulnerable situations, SWRs assess for potential vulnerabilities of research participants and methods of involving them in research without putting them at undue risk.

## Proposed Practice Standards

The following practice standards include both aspirational standards (denoted by an A after the number) and baseline standards (denoted by a B after the number). As noted earlier, aspirational standards reflect moral goods or ideals. Although these behaviors are morally desirable, they are not required of all SWRs or of any particular SWR in all circumstances. Baseline standards reflect moral duties. Violations of baseline standards suggest that the SWR's conduct is causing harm. The proposed standards highlight both morally desirable research conduct as well as research conduct to be avoided.



### 1-A: SWRs consider how their research may be used to promote social justice and address social injustices.

As the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles suggests, “Social workers challenge discrimination and oppression, promote equitable distribution of resources, and build networks of solidarity to work toward inclusive and responsible societies” (International Federation of Social Workers, 2018). Given the centrality of social justice in social work practice, SWRs contemplate whether and how their research may contribute to fairness, equity, and inclusion, reduce human suffering, and address social injustices such as discrimination, exploitation, colonization, and oppression (Hugman et al., 2011; Smith, 2012). When SWRs observe social injustices, they understand that they are not passive observers or bystanders; rather, they can play active roles in addressing the injustices (Danchev & Ross, 2014; Waller et al., 2022). The duty to consider social justice does not mean that all social work research needs to address social justice as its primary purpose; social workers may have other valuable reasons for engaging in research (e.g., generating knowledge; developing better understandings of various biological, psychological, social, and spiritual phenomena; providing valuable data to inform social work policies and practices). Still, SWRs consider how their research may contribute to social justice, regardless of its primary focus.

Examples of promoting social justice through research include:

- giving voice to people who have been underrepresented, ignored, or oppressed;
- illuminating or raising awareness of social injustices that need to be addressed (by governments, community groups, organizations, or other social units); and
- evaluating social policies, programs, or interventions designed to promote social justice or redress injustices such as discrimination, oppression, and trauma.

SWRs may also use postmodern and critical theories to inform their research and explore experiences of oppression among various diversity groups, including people with intersecting social identities (Drake & Hodge, 2022).

**2-A:** When determining what research questions to study, what methods to use, funding sources, how to analyze the data, and how to share the findings, SWRs consider how the research findings may be used, whose interests are being served, and how the research supports or hinders social work values such as social justice, empowerment, and respect for the dignity and worth of all people.

**2-B:** SWRs do not participate in research that contributes to discrimination or oppression, or excludes certain groups on the basis of culture, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, age, mental capacity, sex, sexuality, gender identity or expression, or other aspects of human diversity.

Social justice may refer to equity or fairness in the way that burdens and benefits are distributed in society (Anastas, 2020). Accordingly, SWRs ensure that the benefits and burdens of their research projects are shared equitably among various groups involved in or affected by the research (Flynn, 2021). They also ensure that burdens are not unduly imposed upon particular individuals or groups. SWRs promote social justice in terms of how their research is conducted and how their research may be used (Sobočan et al, 2019). To consider how their research may impact social justice, SWRs ask themselves:

- What is the purpose of the research?
- Who is deciding how this research will be conducted (e.g., the scope of the research, how data will be gathered, and how data will be analyzed)?
- Whose interests does the research serve?
- Who will benefit from the research?
- Who may be harmed by the research?

- Are the benefits and harms of the research being shared in a fair or equitable manner?
- Are any individuals or groups being put at an unjustifiable level of risk?
- Should the research address the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, or other aspects of human diversity?
- How will the research findings be written, disseminated, and used?
- What roles, if any, will research participants and their community play in the dissemination and use of the research findings?

(Anastas, 2020; Lauve-Moon et al., 2021; Nygård & Saus, 2016; Smith, 2012).

SWRs are aware of the implications of their research (Flynn, 2021). By analyzing the potential benefits and risks, SWRs strive to ensure that their research provides an equitable distribution of benefits and risks. SWRs consider both community benefits and risks, as well as individual benefits and risks (Nygård & Saus, 2016). When SWRs focus their research on a particular group or groups for one project, they may focus future research on other groups, so their overall research agenda supports the principles of social justice.

When disseminating research findings, SWRs make deliberate choices about how and where to share this information (Giordano et al., 2021). By ensuring their research is brought to the attention of particular audiences (e.g., government, community leaders, professional associations, or social advocates), SWRs can raise the likelihood that their research may be used to promote social justice or address particular injustices. In addition to disseminating research through journal articles and conference presentations, SWRs may consider creative options such as art, theatre, workshops, person-to-person consultation, traditional press, and social media to share their findings and promote social change (Danchev & Ross, 2014; Delva & Abrams, 2022).

SWRs avoid research funding from sources that foster discrimination, exploitation, or other injustices. Accepting resources from sources that engage in such practices may taint the research and may facilitate future injustices. When SWRs are deciding whether to accept funding from sources with a history of exploitation or discrimination, they consider whether the source's current practices are consistent with social justice and whether the proposed research will contribute to social justice. In particular, SWRs avoid accepting research funding from sources that attach conditions or controls that conflict with their professional ethical obligations (Jones, 2014), including promotion of social justice.

**3-A: SWRs are attentive to how their research may be used by policy makers, programs, and others, particularly for issues that are politically or ethically controversial (e.g., abortion, gun safety, racism, immigration, sexuality, and gender).**

**3-B: SWRs do not participate in research when there is significant risk that the research will be used to foster discrimination or oppression, or to exploit individuals, families, groups, or communities.**

SWRs use reflection to be aware of the perspectives informing their research (Danchev & Ross, 2014; Lyons et al, 2013), including the perspectives of the research participants and the theory that they are using. This awareness allows them to be honest and transparent about how and why they are conducting specific research projects. SWRs recognize that production of knowledge is not neutral. Research may be affected by its cultural and political context; research may also have an impact on these contexts (Nygård & Saus, 2016). By being aware of the potential uses of research, SWRs can take reasonable measures to ensure that their research is used for morally good purposes, including the possibility of promoting social justice and addressing oppression (Delva & Abrams, 2022). They can also take reasonable precautions to pre-empt situations where their research is used for immoral purposes, including promotion of injustices (e.g., racism, sexism, homophobia, or xenophobia). For instance, SWRs may be studying factors

contributing to economic disparities between different ethnocultural groups. To promote social justice, SWRs may design and present the research in a manner that supports efforts to redress these disparities. Alternatively, if the research is designed to stigmatize or discriminate against certain groups, SWRs do not knowingly participate in such research. When there is substantial risk that research findings could be used to promote social injustices, SWRs could alter the way that the research is being conducted and presented. They could also decide not to participate in such research and discourage others from doing so.

Some research projects are clearly unethical due to their obvious and deliberate negative impact on social justice (e.g., research sponsored by a government intelligence organization to determine which types of psychological torture are most likely to produce admissions of guilt). SWRs do not engage in research designed to traumatize or emotionally manipulate people. Other types of research may have more ambiguous impacts on social justice (e.g., research on factors contributing to child neglect, which might be used to design more effective child neglect prevention programs but might also be used to stigmatize particular groups). SWRs can reduce the risks through their research design and manner of presenting their findings.

**4-A: SWRs are attentive, caring, and responsive to the needs and wishes of research participants and other stakeholders involved or affected by the research process.**

**4-B: SWRs do not treat research participants with disrespect or violate their rights to self-determination.**

As caring moral agents, SWRs treat people with kindness, compassion, attentiveness, and responsiveness (Danchev & Ross, 2014; Stout et al., 2020). In addition to attending to the needs of research participants, SWRs attend and respond to the needs of additional stakeholders, such as research assistants and research administrators. SWRs do not exploit people by extracting information from them and then ignoring their needs and wishes. They pay attention to people's needs and wishes and address them in an appropriate manner.

Some research textbooks and research regulations refer to people who participate in research projects as informants, respondents, subjects, or sources of information (Hugman et al., 2011). Unfortunately, using these terms suggests that people are passive objects or things rather than sentient human beings who deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Referring to people who participate in research as “research participants,” “research partners,” “co-researchers,” or simply “people,” reminds SWRs to treat them with a caring, attentive, and respectful disposition. When SWRs view people involved in their research as active participants, then they may be involved as people who can act, change, and be changed by the research; further, the participants can take active roles in designing, implementing, and leading the research (Danchev & Ross, 2014; Serbati et al., 2019).

Research approaches such as participatory action research, emancipatory research, and community-engaged research are designed to involve people in various stages of research development and implementation (Brown & Strega, 2015; Danchev & Ross, 2014; Engen et al., 2019; Hollinrake et al., 2019; Nygård & Saus, 2016; Sobočan et al, 2019). Researchers and participants collaborate to gain a better understanding of a problematic situation and to spur action to improve the situation (e.g., through changes in social policies or interventions). Rather than designing research in a top-down manner, SWRs may collaborate with research participants to ensure their research is culturally informed, respectful, and responsive to their culture(s) and needs. When people have the capacity to design and implement research, they acquire greater agency and influence over what types of topics are studied. These approaches support social justice by empowering people most directly affected by the situation (Anastas, 2020). They also provide opportunities for SWRs and research participants to share ownership of the research and co-create knowledge (Andersen, 2019).

When SWRs use other research approaches, they can make use of some elements of participatory action, emancipatory, or community-engaged research to foster certain degrees of empowerment and social justice. For instance, SWRs may

- engage people affected by the research to gather meaningful input on the topics to be studied and the best ways to study them (Schroeder et al., 2019);
- invite people affected by the research to participate in meaningful research roles (e.g., research design, participant recruitment, interviewing, data analysis, monitoring to ensure the research is conducted appropriately, composing the findings, and sharing the findings through written publications, oral presentations, trainings, or other means);
- increase the capacity of groups or communities by offering training, mentorship, and support so research participants are empowered to carry out particular research roles (Greene et al, 2022; Hollinrake et al., 2019);
- approach research participants with cultural humility, recognizing them as experts in their own culture, perspectives, needs, and experiences (NASW, 2021, s.1.05[c]);
- engage research participants in open and honest discussions to ensure their needs and wishes are considered when making research decisions (Andersen, 2019);
- acknowledge role and power differences between SWRs and research participants, striving for equitable participation and mutual respect (Donnelly et al., 2019); and
- review research findings with people affected by the research to obtain feedback, make appropriate revisions, and determine the best ways to share the research findings and act on them (Danchev & Ross, 2014).

If SWRs conduct research without sufficient input from people affected by the research, they may not understand the local context of the research or its potential impact (Nygård & Saus, 2016). Further, they may be more prone to making research decisions that are disrespectful or exploitative. Consider

a research project in which researchers provide older adults with robotic dogs to explore whether relationships with robotic dogs assist with feelings of loneliness, anxiety, or depression. If SWRs remove a robotic dog from an older adult at the end of the research period, they may not be attending to the needs and wishes of the older adult. To avoid exploiting research participants, SWRs consider whether and how research participants will have access to services and resources not only during the research period, but also after the research has been completed. While SWRs are attentive, caring, and responsive to the needs and wishes of research participants, they also maintain their research role and do not cross boundaries into a therapeutic or helping role (Danchev & Ross, 2013; NASW, 2021, s.1.06[c]). For example, if a research participant requests or requires health or social services, SWRs could link them with services rather than provide services directly.

**5-A: SWRs engage in critical self-reflection to raise awareness of their own biases, assumptions, and purposes for conducting particular research projects.**

Critical reflection is a component of cultural humility (NASW, 2021, s.1.05) in which social workers strive for awareness of their social location and cultural affiliations, their personal biases and beliefs, and possible impacts of these biases and beliefs on practice (Taiwo, 2022). Within research practice, bracketing refers to being aware of one's biases and setting them aside to engage in research. SWRs may use research journaling, consultation, or supervision to reflect on how their social locations, thoughts, and feelings may be affecting their research (e.g., feelings of guilt, shame, or blame when studying the effects of poverty; D'Cruz & Jones, 2014). Through critical reflection, SWRs cultivate genuine curiosity and remain open to learning from their research participants, rather than basing their research on biases or preconceptions (Danchev & Ross, 2014; Lyons et al., 2013). By treating research participants as experts in their own cultures and lives, SWRs demonstrate respect for their dignity, worth, and ways of knowing (Anastas, 2020).

When developing literature reviews, SWRs are mindful of biases in the research and theories that they consider. They present multiple



perspectives (Giordano et al., 2021), paying particular attention to the perspectives and concerns of groups that have experienced oppression or are underrepresented in existing literature. SWRs are aware of the local contexts of their research to avoid misconceptions, discrimination, and biased knowledge (Nygård & Saus, 2016).

Before entering a research participant's home or community, SWRs consider ways to ensure that they are doing so respectfully. Prior to meeting, they learn about the community's customs, belief systems, and norms (Guedes & Guimarães, 2020; D'Cruz & Jones, 2014). For instance, it may be important to ask about the etiquette for asking permission to enter, for discussing potentially embarrassing topics, or for maintaining culturally appropriate boundaries. Upon entering a participants' home, SWRs may ask what they can do to be respectful of the participant's home. When leaving, they can ask if they have said or done anything that could have caused harm and offer to address said harm. Being respectful of communities includes being respectful of virtual communities and other digital environments (e.g., social media sites and online groups). Some digital environments may not welcome researchers. Others may require certain forms of administrative, group, and individual consent to the research.

Throughout all research stages, SWRs attend to the language they use to ensure that they affirm cultural meanings and address social injustices (Greene et al., 2022). They avoid stigmatizing or disrespectful language. SWRs use questions that appreciate diversity of experiences and perspectives. They avoid leading questions, including ones indicating which choices are socially desirable (D'Cruz & Jones, 2014). When interviewing, SWRs may mirror language used by research participants (Smith, 2012). To guard against assumptions or misunderstandings, they ask clarification questions. Before presenting findings, they may check back with research participants to ensure the findings accurately reflect their input and perspectives. SWRs provide proper attribution to their sources of information, including the voices of their research participants and partners (Craig, 2022).

**6-A:** When designing and implementing research, SWRs take appropriate steps to ensure their research samples are inclusive of people from various backgrounds, including people in vulnerable situations and people from historically underrepresented groups.

**6-B:** When designing and implementing research, SWRs do not discriminate against or exclude people in vulnerable situations or people from historically underrepresented groups, subject to ethically justifiable exceptions for focusing research on some groups and not others.

As the Common Rule §46.111(a)(3) suggests, SWRs ensure that selection of research participants is equitable, meaning that the research risks and benefits are shared in a fair manner. To ensure that benefits of research are shared equitably, SWRs strive to include people from various backgrounds. For some types of research, it may be easier or less expensive to study one particular group in society and exclude other groups (e.g., children, women, people of color, Indigenous people, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, people who do not speak English, people with compromised mental capacity). Excluding particular groups from society means the research findings and benefits may not be generalizable or applicable to the excluded groups (Flynn, 2021). Accordingly, SWRs consider whether and how to include diverse and often-underrepresented groups in their research, even when it may complicate the research or increase the time and costs of conducting the research (Stout et al, 2020).

When involving people from vulnerable situations in research, SWRs take appropriate steps to ensure they are treated with dignity and respect, their participation is meaningful, and they are not exposed to undue risks (Craig, 2022). SWRs do not view participants solely through the lens of vulnerability; they view participants as people first, with strengths and capacities as well as vulnerabilities (Danchev & Ross, 2014). SWRs may advocate for additional funding and resources to ensure their research is inclusive of diverse and often-underrepresented groups. To conduct research with people with communication disabilities, for instance, SWRs may request funding to pay for assistive communication technology (Anastas, 2020).

SWRs avoid selecting particular groups for participation in research solely because of their “easy availability, their compromised position, or

their manipulability, rather than for reasons directly related to the problem being studied” (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979, Part B). For example, people receiving social assistance, subsidized housing, or other government benefits may be vulnerable to exploitation, concerned that benefits may be withheld unless they consent to the research. When SWRs include participants with specific vulnerabilities, they ensure that participation is fully informed and voluntary (Craig, 2022). They do not use undue inducements to participate in research, for instance, compensation so high that participants agree to participate in research involving risks they would not ordinarily accept (Anastas, 2020; NASW, 2021, s.5.02[e]).

As the principle of nonmaleficence suggests, SWRs take appropriate steps to avoid or minimize harm to the people or communities they are studying. Some risks may be justified in situations where risks are balanced with potential benefits to the research participants (Sobočan et al., 2019). For example, research participants may be willing to discuss traumatic experiences, knowing that they may experience additional stress, but also knowing that their participation can help social workers or others provide better services to people who have experienced similar trauma. Particular ways of safeguarding research participants from harm depend on the particular research project and the participants’ specific vulnerabilities (e.g., cognitive, medical, financial, or social; Anastas, 2020). Examples of protecting participants from harm include safeguarding their anonymity or confidentiality, ensuring consent is voluntary and fully informed, assessing mental capacity and obtaining consent from an appropriate proxy when needed, inviting feedback about concerns throughout the research process, having an independent professional provide monitoring<sup>1</sup> and offer referrals or

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<sup>1</sup> The choice of monitors depends on the particular situation. If conducting research within an agency context, the agency may have personnel who are already designated to oversee services and research. They may also have people responsible for

support (as needed), avoiding topics that may trigger strong emotional reactions to past trauma, and asking questions or performing procedures only as needed for the central purposes of the research. SWRs prioritize the well-being of research participants over their other interests in completing the research (Danchev & Ross, 2014). SWRs also consider international, national, and local laws and regulations concerning how to treat people in vulnerable situations (e.g., European Commission, 2020, 2021).

**7-A: SWRs may promote social justice by using research to give voice to people whose perspectives should be heard.**

**7-B: SWRs do not blame service users or other people for problems they are experiencing.**

Some researchers suggest that their primary role is to search for truths in an objective manner (D’Cruz & Jones, 2014). Still, SWRs are not impartial about social injustice and human suffering (Sobočan et al., 2019). Developing and using research to pursue social justice is not inconsistent with making the research as objective as possible. SWRs may make use of rigorous research methods, seek accurate information, and report findings accurately regardless of whether one of their research purposes is to promote social justice. For example, consider an SWR hired to identify service needs for people with bipolar disorder. The research findings are more likely to be persuasive if the research is based on sound methods. Note, however, if the research is intended to give voice to the perspectives of people with bipolar disorder, then the research will be structured to provide subjective views rather than objective information. As this example suggests, not all research is intended to procure objective truth. When research is designed to give voice to

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assessing and monitoring risks. Monitors should have training and expertise related to the particular risks involved in the research (e.g., if the risks are related to mental capacity, then the monitors could be mental health professionals with expertise in this area). When researchers are selecting monitors, they should consult with the agencies or communities with whom they are working to ensure that the choice of monitors is appropriate.

particular individuals or groups (Hugman et al., 2011), SWRs disclose the perspectives upon which the research is based (Craig, 2022). They convey the perspectives of research participants in an honest, transparent, and accurate manner (NASW, 2021, 5.02[0]; Schroeder et al., 2019). They do not minimize or exaggerate problems to make political points or raise money (Sadzaglishvili et al., 2021). When using research to give voice to particular individuals or groups, SWRs ensure that they have informed consent to do so (Sobočan et al., 2019). Prior to disseminating research findings, SWRs may check with research participants to ensure the findings accurately reflect their views or experiences. SWRs may also empower research participants to present the findings on their own behalf, orally or in writing.

When research focuses on particular diversity groups, SWRs avoid “othering” members of the groups, treating them as intrinsically “different” or “alien” (Smith, 2012). SWRs demonstrate respect for the dignity and worth by using inclusive language and by avoiding language that blames, stereotypes, divides, or denigrates particular groups (NASW, 2021, s.5.02[e]; Sobočan et al., 2019). For instance, asking “Why do battered women stay with partners who abuse them?” is based on a stereotype and implies that women experiencing battering are at fault if they stay with partners who have abused them (D’Cruz & Jones, 2014). SWRs avoid language and questions based on sexism, racism, homophobia, or other discriminatory assumptions. SWRs do not focus only on problems or pathologies; they also explore strengths and resilience within individuals and groups.

**8-A: SWRs strive for the highest standards of research ethics and social justice, whether they are working in well-resourced countries, states, regions, or organizations or in settings that with very limited resources.**

**8-B: SWRs do not engage in ethical dumping, the export of unethical research practices from a high-income setting to a resource-poor setting.**

When designing research, SWRs attend to local requirements for conducting ethical research (Global Code of Conduct of Research in Resource-Poor

Settings, 2020). When certain research practices are prohibited as unethical in one country, state, region, or organization, then SWRs do not simply transfer their research to other locations that lack sufficient legal protections or structural resources to guard against unethical research (Schroeder et al., 2019). For example, if a well-resourced social agency deems certain research too risky for its clients, then SWRs do not simply find an under-resourced agency to conduct their research and expose clients to undue risks. Similarly, if it would be unethical in the United States for SWRs to conduct research without informed consent from each research participant, then ordinarily, SWRs would not conduct their research in another country that does not require consent from each participant.

If there are ethically justifiable reasons for conducting research in one location that would be considered unethical in another location, then SWRs articulate the ethical justification. In countries with communitarian cultures, for instance, it may be more appropriate to obtain community consent rather than individual consent (Dominelli & Holloway, 2008). Even when planning to request individual consent from research participants, obtaining prior assent from a community consent may demonstrate respect to the community (Schroeder et al., 2019). When conducting international research, SWRs may refer to the Global Code of Conduct to Counter Ethics Dumping for additional guidelines on how to avoid ethics dumping (European Commission, 2018).

**9-A: SWRs use respectful engagement and input from the relevant Indigenous groups or communities.**

**9-B: SWRs do not expropriate Indigenous knowledge or exploit Indigenous communities or groups.** Given the history of colonialism and exploitation of Indigenous communities and groups, SWRs take particular precautions to ensure that their research respects their dignity and worth and guards against exploitation (Craig, 2022). The principle of “nothing about us without us” suggests that Indigenous peoples have a right to be involved in decision making regarding research pertaining to them (Brown & Strega, 2015). SWRs engage

community leaders or other members as research partners to ensure that their research focus, methods, and other research decisions are respectful of the Indigenous community or group, including its spirituality, traditions, values, belief systems, and ways of knowing and understanding. As an ethics of care approach suggests, SWRs do not treat people as the objects of their inquiries, but rather, listen to and collaborate with people (D'Cruz & Jones, 2014), including Indigenous groups and communities (Smith, 2012). To respect the values and concerns of Indigenous communities, it may be appropriate to seek collective consent from the community, rather than just individual consent from research participants (Craig, 2022).

When working with Indigenous communities and groups, SWRs do not expropriate Indigenous knowledge (Anastas, 2020). When planning their research, they discuss concerns such as who will have ownership of the data and findings, how the findings will be presented, and whether and how SWRs will be permitted to present the perspectives or voices of Indigenous peoples on their behalf. SWRs ensure that Indigenous groups may benefit from the findings of the research (e.g., by sharing research findings and advocating together for changes in policies, laws, or interventions to benefit the communities or groups who participated in the research). SWRs recognize that Indigenous groups are not homogenous. SWRs strive to understand and respect cultural and individual differences within Indigenous groups (Craig, 2022).

**10-A:** When using artificial intelligence, algorithms, or other technology designed to assist with data gathering and decision making, SWRs consider how this technology can be used to facilitate understanding and enhance practice and policy, as well as risks related to social control, bias, and misuse of the technology.

**10-B:** When SWRs are using or studying technology as part of their research, they ensure that technology is not being used to facilitate discrimination, oppression, or other forms of social injustice

Technology may be used in ways that promote social justice, facilitate social injustice, or are neutral with respect to promoting social justice or injustice (Steiner, 2021). In terms of decision making, for instance, computers can assist with making faster, more comprehensive, and fairer assessments (Rahimzadeh et al., 2022). Technology can be programmed to avoid biases, stereotypes, and assumptions that might arise when humans conduct assessments. Consider risk-assessment decisions regarding suicide, homicide, child abuse, or elder abuse. Given that risk assessments may be used to make decisions about clinical and legal interventions, it is important that these assessments are valid and reliable. By gathering and assessing data from various sources and calculating correlations between various factors, algorithms can be developed to predict human behavior based on objective evidence (Devlieghere et al., 2022).

Although automated decision making has the capacity to promote social justice, SWRs understand the risk that automated decision making could be based on stereotypes, overgeneralizations, or other biases. Accordingly, it is important to have human oversight to evaluate the extent to which automated decision making and other technology are facilitating social justice or injustice (Hine, 2021). Rather than assuming that automated assessments are inherently better (or worse) than those conducted by humans, SWRs may explore how clients, social workers, and other professionals can make use of technology to improve decision making, while still maintaining the human components of assessments and practice. SWRs can play a vital role in working with computer scientists and other



researchers to ensure that the use of technology in assessment and practice is evaluated through a social justice lens. Technology may be viewed as a tool for practice which may be used in conjunction with other tools, including assessments and interventions led by social workers or other professionals.

Given that social justice means that the benefits and burdens of risks of research should be shared equitably, SWRs ensure that technology does not prevent fair access to and participation in research (NASW, 2021, 5.02[f]). SWRs may use assistive technology to facilitate access to people from diverse backgrounds, including people with disabilities and other groups that may otherwise face challenges in participating in the research. When SWRs use technology to engage people in research, they take steps to ensure that certain groups and individuals are not excluded from the research because they do not have access to technology, they are not comfortable using technology, they do not trust technology to gather information on confidential or anonymous bases, or there are other challenges in using the technology. Ways to improve access to research participation include

- providing research participants with technology (e.g., computers, tablets),
- offering training and support to use technology,
- ensuring the technology is easy to use for people with disabilities and people with lower levels of computer literacy, and
- offering participation without the requirement for using technology (e.g., having a researcher ask questions and submit answers on behalf of research participants).

Providing people with access to technology can also assist with more equitable access to research reports and findings (Marcum & Donohue, 2023).

## Conclusion

The proposed practice standards highlight ways that social workers can promote social justice through research, paying attention not only to the topics that they study, but also to the research methods that they use, how they show respect for the people affected by and involved in the research, and how their research is presented and shared. When conducting research for this article, the authors consulted various SWRs and ethicists, inviting their feedback about developing practice standards. One challenge that they highlighted was how to ensure that social workers are aware of the standards. For the proposed standards to have a meaningful impact, social workers need to be aware of them, including how to implement them in their research endeavors.

The overarching theme of the proposed standards is that it is important for SWRs to consider how their research processes and findings may be used to promote social justice and address various forms of oppression. Social work research has the capacity to instigate and support social change, including the promotion of social justice. Although not all research needs to be geared specifically toward social justice, SWRs can, at a minimum, take steps to ensure that their research does not oppress, discriminate, or otherwise contribute to social injustices. Right from the moment of conceptualizing their research, SWRs may consider the potential implications of their research, not only for their research participants, but also for their organizations, communities, and broader society. Just as social workers respect dignity and worth of their clients, SWRs also respect the dignity and worth of their research participants and other stakeholders affected by their research. To avoid imposing biases, assumptions, and stereotypes, SWRs can use critical self-reflection to raise their self-awareness. SWRs can also promote social justice by ensuring their research is inclusive of people from diverse backgrounds, including people from vulnerable situations. SWRs may use research to give voice to people who might not otherwise have the power or opportunity to be heard. SWRs are aware of the injustices of past research practices, and the need to guard against unethical practices when

working with Indigenous peoples, people in resource-poor settings, and other people in vulnerable situations. When using artificial intelligence, algorithms, or other technology designed to assist with research, data gathering, and decision making, also take precautions to guard against social control, bias, and other potential misuses of the technology.

These practice standards may be used by national and regional social work organizations to stimulate discussions about the role of social justice in social work research through conference workshops, continuing education trainings, journal articles, and other publications. They may also be incorporated into research courses to ensure that the next generation of social workers learns how to view and construct research through the lens of social justice. Social justice is an integral guiding principle for social work practice. Given that social work research is also an integral element of social work practice, it is vital that social workers understand how to promote social justice and redress social injustices through research.

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# Can the Business-Oriented Higher Education Environment Compromise the Ethics of Social Work Education? An Exploratory Study of Faculty Perceptions

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## Abstract

Many scholars have decried the transformation of higher education into a business model which pressures academics to treat students as a consumer group

that must be retained. This research explored how these pressures affect social work faculty's perception of their ethical ability to prepare future practitioners academically. The study surveyed social work faculty in higher education social work programs located in the Northeastern states of the United States. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Results show that pressures to retain students are felt, but most faculty uphold their values and standards. This exploration of faculty perceptions of education has important ethical implications. Social work engages complex issues and serves vulnerable individuals, making quality education a salient ethical concern.

**Keywords:** Professional education, ethical concerns, higher education, education, professional competence

## Introduction

Educational preparation for professional careers is essential to ensure that the future workforce is competent. Ensuring proficiency in future practitioners is a significant ethical concern for educators in social work. The ethics of social work professional education unfold in a rapidly shifting environment due to the global encroachment of neoliberal philosophy, a belief that business models are the best way to organize all social institutions, even public services. The resultant business way of operating a university, treats students as consumers, seeks to commercialize university research, and emphasizes profitability. In this context, students are seen as resource "inputs" that must be kept satisfied with the university "service" of teaching; they must be aggressively recruited and then retained to ensure the income they bring to the institution. Faculty are reduced to service professionals, pressured by institutions to retain and satisfy the "customer base." This pressure conflicts with social work professional ethics to educate for social justice and the professional commitment to colleagues, society, and future clients to preparing quality professionals (NASW, 2021).

Reamer (2013) points out that our ethics as educators include a gate-keeping role assuring student suitability for professional-level practice.

Educational gatekeeping unfolds in an ethical faculty/student relationship that focuses on mentoring, role modeling, and careful and responsible counseling out of students who cannot meet the educational standards (Otters, 2013). This study will explore faculty perceptions of how they educate social work students in a neoliberal context that results in a corporatization (Washburn, 2006) of higher education that construes students as consumers rather than as learners.

## Literature Review

Higher education scholars in the United States have noted a crisis in higher education in recent years. These scholars and experts, along with journalists (Young, 2003; Arum & Roska, 2005; Hersh & Merrow, 2005; Cote & Allahar, 2007; Dew, 2012; Selingo, 2013; Rossi, 2014; Wright, 2014; Kostal et al., 2016), note that higher education has shifted towards a business model that focuses on profit through the assurance of recruitment and retention of paying "customers" who evaluate the "service" (teaching) they receive. Cote and Allahar (2007) lament the phenomena of the student "customer" rating professors and affecting tenure decisions, inadequate student K-12 academic preparation for higher education, student and faculty disengagement from the educational process, and grade inflation (Valen, 2003; Hersh & Merrow, 2005; Supiano, 2008; Dew, 2012; Wright, 2014; Kostel et al., 2018; Baglione & Smith, 2022).

The current business orientation focus of higher education is referred using various monickers. Famously, in 1993, Ritzer wrote the "McDonaldization of Society," using the framework of Weber to articulate a society obsessed with capitalism and productivity. Everything in society, argues Ritzer (1993) consequently borrows aspects of the efficiency process of McDonalds in order to encourage consumption. This even extends to the education sector, leading writers to talk about the McDonaldization of Higher Education (Hayes et al., 2002). Some authors refer to this obsession with the

commercialization of faculty research, subsequent loss of academic freedom, and emphasis on pleasing the consumer as corporatism (Washburn, 2006).

Whether one uses the term "business model," "McDonaldization," or "corporatism," the prevailing philosophy that embraces the current trends of the university worldwide is neoliberalism. (Radice, 2013). Neoliberalism is a belief in the hegemony of the free market to provide the best means of social organization. It reifies the free market as the ultimate solution to providing the best means to organize everything, including the public sector. This agenda to promote competition in all aspects of social life was emphasized under Ronald Reagan in the 1980s in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom (Savage, 2017). Thatcher and Reagan felt the free market was essential to optimal social governance, and they pushed for privatizing public services like health and education by cutting government investment and transferring public responsibilities to private corporations (Savage, 2017).

The neoliberal philosophy is pervasive; even the person is considered an entity that possesses and promotes capital (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017). Competition is central to neoliberalism. The philosophy itself is so ubiquitous that it feels normal and logical; it is so commonplace that it is accepted by many and therefore, often remains unquestioned. (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017).

In higher education, neoliberalism focuses on "accountability," creating a culture obsessed with measuring and auditing (Lincoln, 2011). Neoliberalism values the university's research efforts in terms of whether it can be commercialized such that research products are licensed and patented (Garland, 2008). This commercialization of research products undermines the public good ideal of university research. Academic freedom becomes undermined by conflicts of interest when the research activities of higher education scholars are funded by corporations and the technical or knowledge products are patented and licensed for profit (Washburn, 2006).

The teaching endeavor is also undermined by neoliberalism. Shore (2010) argues that neoliberalism "proletarianizes" professors, with universities increasingly making money by relying on adjuncts who are paid less and who only have short-term contracts. The measurement focus on assuring productivity and profit extends specifically into teaching in the form of obsession with the consumerization of students. These consumers represent the institution's income, and their satisfaction with the educational "service" becomes something the neoliberal corporate model is determined to assess to ensure profit. This focus undermines teaching authority and can also be seen as proletarianizing the professorate.

In order to gauge student satisfaction and make decisions regarding faculty promotion and tenure, student evaluations of faculty have become widely used tools (Miller & Seldin, 2014). However, research by Stroebe (2016) and Stroebe (2020) reveals that these evaluations do not align with effective teaching as measured by student learning outcomes. Moreover, some scholars argue that these evaluations may contribute to grade inflation, as faculty may feel compelled to prioritize student satisfaction due to its influence on administrative decisions related to tenure, promotion, and contract renewal (Schneider, 2013; Crumbley et al., 2012).

Rebmen et al. (2018) conducted a national exploratory study in the United States, of faculty opinion of the effect of student evaluations on their teaching. They found that faculty in their sample believed that providing academic challenges would make the course more complex, resulting in lower grades and poorer teaching evaluations. There is concern that the consequent grade inflation encouraged by the pressure to attain good student evaluations results in an unethical emphasis on student satisfaction above student learning (Crumbley et al., 2012).

Khinduka (2007) raises concerns about the neoliberally informed business model's effect on social work education. By 2024, social work will be the fastest-growing practice profession in health and behavioral health (Browne et al., 2017). Kirk et al. (2009) document that the selectivity of social work graduate schools is low, with most private MSW programs

admitting about 75% of all applicants and schools that are minimally selective admitting 97%. Significant grade inflation has also been documented in academia, including schools of social work (Copeland, 2008; Chen, 2018; Miller, 2014; Hall, 2022). Stolz et al. (2010) argue that low selectivity and grade inflation have potential ethical implications for social work education, which affects the profession's responsibility to society.

Social work practitioners can only be licensed in the United States if they have the necessary knowledge to pass licensure exams (Thyer, 2011; Croaker et al., 2017; Zuchowski et al., 2019). When social work faculty fail to expect and encourage learning, students suffer. Graduates may not know enough to pass the licensure exam the first time the test is taken. Apgar (2022) reports that the United States' Association of Social Work Board data shows that approximately 27 % of social workers in 2021 did not pass their licensure exams on their first try.

This research explores United States social work faculty perceptions of preparing students for professional-level practice. This exploration of faculty perceptions adds to the dialogue on engaging in effective teaching for a profession when higher education institutions, due to the encroachment of a worldwide neoliberal social agenda, are increasingly operating as businesses trying to attract and retain a customer base. The current higher education context has ramifications for the quality of education and the teaching and learning process in social work. The quality of educational preparation for practice is ethically crucial for a profession that engages in complex issues and serves individuals in vulnerable circumstances. Being pressured to retain students and pushing along students admitted without adequate screening compromises social work ethics to educate for social justice, and maintain the obligation to society, the profession, and future clients, to gatekeep for professional suitability. This research explores whether social work faculty feel the pressures of open admissions along with pressures to retain students. The research considers whether these pressures, if felt, exert an effect on faculty teaching and upholding of standards.

## Methods

An electronic survey method was used to collect data for this research. The survey was developed to collect descriptive data regarding faculty perceptions of student abilities, social work programs' academic policies, marketing pressures felt through student evaluations, and faculty attempts to maintain standards and provide academic challenges. The survey contained questions soliciting qualitative and quantitative data. The team developed items that possessed face validity since this exploratory study sought only respondent perceptions. No hypotheses were tested. Once the items were developed, social work faculty colleagues provided feedback to improve the overall survey. This pilot testing ensured face and content validity, which is adequate for exploratory work. Survey items collected demographic information and presented a Likert Scale of 11 questions to assess perceptions of teaching, university pressures, and student abilities. A reliability analysis conducted on the 11 Likert Scale items after the survey administration, showed a Cronbach's alpha of .86 for these 11 items.

The final survey contained 25 items. All of them, except for the above noted 11 Likert Scale items, collected demographic information, such as whether respondents taught in public or private schools, whether faculty were tenure track or adjunct, and the school's admissions selectivity for social work. The Likert Scale items tapped into faculty perceptions of their teaching, their perceptions of student skills, and their perceptions of institutional pressures affecting their evaluations of students. The survey ended with a question regarding whether respondents would like to share any comments about student academics that were not asked in the survey.

Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, and respondents were not provided any incentives to participate. The survey link was distributed via email to potential participants. This research project obtained approval from the University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, overseen by the principal investigator's university.



The research team developed a listing of all Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited social work programs in the Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest, and Midwest United States. The researchers felt it would be onerous to sample every region of the country, so one region was randomly selected. The Northeast (states on the East Coast from Maine to Maryland) was selected. Research team members visited the school websites to obtain social work faculty email addresses, acquiring 2,000 addresses. A purposive sampling method was used.

Each potential respondent received an emailed explanation of the survey, and informed consent was given upon opening the survey link. The link was emailed every three months with a solicitation encouragement until no new responses were received. At that point, email solicitation ceased. The survey remained open for approximately one year.

Some email addresses were undeliverable, and some faculty responded to inform us they were no longer teaching and would not be answering the survey. The research team estimated that the final survey was sent to about 1800 faculty. Four hundred and twenty-nine surveys were received, providing an estimated response rate of 24%.

## Data Analysis

The overall study used a mixed methods approach. Data were exported from the electronic survey into SPSS 28 (IBM, 2021) software. Descriptive data were assessed, and some patterns were sought in that descriptive material. A final question asked if there was anything respondents would like to share about student academics. The narrative material yielded 109 individual responses that could be organized into themes.

Quantitative analyses include the presentation of descriptive statistics and chi-square analyses, and t-tests. Chi-square analysis uses a Pearson chi-square test to investigate possible associations between categorical variables, such as frequency of occurrence. Chi-square analyses were used to determine if associations existed between the perception that a student

graduated with academic difficulties and a school's admission selectivity. The same analysis was performed to assess whether there was an association between the belief that a student graduated with academic difficulties and the perception that not all faculty enforce academic policies uniformly.

Finally, independent t-tests were conducted to explore possible differences between graduate and undergraduate instructors in answers to questions about faculty perceptions of their teaching, student academic abilities, and institutional pressures affecting their evaluation of students. The Likert scale section of the survey was divided into three factors for analysis. The first factor, or dimension, was identified as faculty perceptions of upholding their standards and consisted of items one, two, and seven of the Likert scale questions. The second factor, or dimension, was identified as faculty perception of student abilities and consisted of items three, four, and five. The third factor, or dimension, was identified as the institutional pressures that faculty perceive and consisted of items six, eight, nine, ten, and eleven. The independent variable used for this analysis was the type of social work program (graduate/undergraduate). The dependent variable was faculty impressions of whether they were upholding their standards, perceptions of student ability, and institutional pressures.

Factor scores for each of the dimensions were calculated by summing the scores associated with the items for each factor for each participant and calculating the means of these sums. These factor scores were averaged over all participants to give the three dependent variables: faculty perceptions of upholding their standards (Factor A), faculty perception of student abilities (Factor B), and institutional pressures that faculty perceive (Factor C). Parametric tests are appropriate for analyzing these factors because the three factors are composed of a series of four or more Likert-type items combined into a single composite score/variable during the data analysis process (Boone & Boone, 2012). If item scores and item means are summed over all of the respondents' items, and if the summed data and summed item means exhibit characteristics of a normal distribution, then both the

summed data and item means can be considered interval/ratio data. Therefore, parametric statistical procedures can be used for data analyses.

Before creating the factor scores, nine of the eleven survey items were reverse scored so that all the items and factor scores would be on the same metric, whereby high scores would represent positive results. The items that were reversed scored were three to eleven.

A new independent variable was constructed based on the survey question, "In which social work programs do you teach?" This variable aimed to explore potential distinctions between graduate and undergraduate social work program instructors. The five response options were recoded as follows: BSW = 0, MSW = 1, BSW and MSW = 1, MSW and Doctoral Level = 1, All levels (BSW, MSW, and Doctoral) = 1, and Ph.D./DSW = 1. In this recoding scheme, 0 represents undergraduate teaching, and 1 represents graduate teaching. The resulting variable, T Level, had a frequency count of 92 faculty members teaching undergraduates and 334 teaching graduate students. This allowed for independent t-tests to examine if there were distinct response patterns between faculty teaching undergraduates and those teaching graduate students.

In addition to the quantitative data, the survey asked an open-ended question regarding whether respondents would like to add anything more about student academics. The resultant narrative responses were carefully read to assess for themes. The analysis utilized the process articulated in Strauss's (2010) classic text on qualitative research entitled "Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists." The steps to follow his process included organizing the data into themes (called open coding). The research team then reviewed these themes to collapse them further by noting and pooling themes that seemed related (axial coding). The team discussed the data until all members agreed on what core themes the data seemed to illustrate.

## Results

Demographic data showed that 39.9% of respondents were tenured, 19% were tenure-track, and 25% were adjuncts. A few respondents selected "other" and were given the option to describe their faculty status. Answers included clinical faculty, research faculty, and field director. Of the 17% selecting "other," many identified as assistant or associate professors, indicating they were, in fact, tenure track rather than other. Most of this sample (56%) taught in public universities, and 44% taught in MSW programs

A total of 96% of respondents had their highest degree in social work, 2% possessed their highest degree in psychology, 2% had their highest degree in sociology, and .25% had a counseling degree. Some respondents indicated that their highest degree was in another field. Respondents who selected "other" could identify their field. Answers included public health, medicine, education, human development, developmental science, social welfare, and family studies.

Respondents were asked to rank their programs on admissions selectivity. Respondents could rank a program between 1-10, with 0 being "not at all selective" and ten indicating "highly selective." These rankings were collapsed into categories. Programs rated 1-4 were labeled "minimally selective," programs rated five were considered "moderately selective," and six and above ratings were considered "highly selective."

Respondents were asked, "Have you ever believed that your university/department graduated a student with serious academic weaknesses (e.g., the inability to write coherently, comprehend research, engage in critical thinking, lack of basic quantitative reasoning abilities) that would make it difficult for that student to practice professionally?" Most respondents, 75%, answered "yes." This basic yes/no answer will inevitably result in a good number of "yes" answers and so a series of Likert scaled questions explored these perceptions in more depth.

Ninety-six percent of respondents noted that their programs had academic policies, and 51% felt these policies needed to be uniformly enforced

by all faculty. Seventy-seven percent of respondents felt student evaluations weighed heavily in tenure/promotion decisions, yet 63% maintained that this issue did not impact their grading.

<i>Admission Selectivity</i>	<b>Belief that Student Graduated with Difficulties</b>	
	Yes	No
Highly Selective	124 (143) [29] {-1.6}	70 (51) [16] {2.7}
Moderately Selective	68 (67) [16] {0.2}	22 (24) [ 5] {-0.3}
Low Selectivity	127 (109) [29] {1.7}	21 (39) [ 5] {-2.8}

*Note.* Numbers not in parentheses represent observed frequencies; numbers in parentheses represent expected frequencies; numbers in square brackets represent percentages for observed frequencies; numbers in curly brackets represent standardized residuals.  $\chi^2_{(2)} = 21.01, p < .001$ .

**Table 1:** The Contingency Table for the Belief that a Student Graduated with Academic Difficulties Crossed with Admission Selectivity

Table 1 is a contingency table for the cross-tabulation between the belief that a student graduated with academic difficulties and school admission selectivity. Table 1 shows a significant association ( $p < .001$ ) between the belief that a student graduated with academic difficulties and school admission selectivity. Thus, the belief that a student graduated with academic difficulties was not independent of a school's admission selectivity. In addition to the observed frequencies for each cell of Table 1, the expected frequencies, the percentages of the total for the observed frequencies, and the standardized residuals for each cell are also given. Standardized residuals

are used to evaluate each cell's contribution to the overall significance of the analysis. A standardized residual greater than 1.96 or less than -1.96 indicates a cell's outsized contribution to the association between the two study variables.

In Table 1, two standardized residuals were greater than 1.96 or smaller than -1.96. These residuals were for the cell for “Highly Selective” for admission selectivity and “No” for the belief that a student graduated with academic difficulties, and the cell for “Low Selectivity” and “No” for the belief that a student graduated with academic difficulties. In addition, the cell for “Highly Selective” for admission selectivity and “Yes” for the belief that a student graduated with academic difficulties, and “Low Selectivity” and “Yes” for the belief that a student graduated with academic difficulties had standardized residuals that were very near the critical values of 1.96 and -1.96. These four cells had the most significant impact on the overall significance of Table 1. Comparing the expected and observed frequencies within these critical cells reveals that when admission selectivity was high, more faculty than expected did not believe that a student graduated with academic difficulties. Alternatively, when Admission Selectivity was low, fewer faculty than expected did not believe that a student graduated with academic difficulties. Admission selectivity may have impacted the belief that a student graduated with academic difficulty.

Table 2 is a contingency table for the cross-tabulation between the belief that a student graduated with academic difficulties and the perception that not all faculty enforce academic policies uniformly. A chi-square analysis was performed to determine if an association existed between these two variables. Table 2 shows no significant association ( $p < .941$ ) between the perception that a student graduated with academic difficulties and the perception that not all faculty enforce academic policies uniformly. Thus, faculty who believed that students had graduated with academic difficulties were as likely to believe that academic policies were enforced uniformly as to believe that they were not. In addition to the observed frequencies for each cell of Table 2, the expected frequencies, the percentages of the total

for the observed frequencies, and the standardized residuals for each cell are also given. All of the standardized residuals in Table 2 were far from the critical criteria cited above, reaffirming the lack of significance found for this table.

<i>Academic Policies Enforced Uniformly</i>	<b>Belief that Student Graduated with Difficulties</b>	
	Yes	No
Yes	219 (219) [51] {0.0}	78 (78) [18] {0.0}
No	100 (100) [23] {0.0}	35 (35) [ 8] {-0.1}

*Note.* Numbers not in parentheses represent observed frequencies; numbers in parentheses represent expected frequencies; numbers in square brackets represent percentages for observed frequencies; numbers in curly brackets represent standardized residuals.  $\chi^2_{(1)} = 0.01, p < .94$ .

**Table 2:** The Contingency Table for the Belief that a Student Graduated with Academic Difficulties Crossed with the Perception that Faculty Enforce Academic Policies Uniformly

Table 3 displays answers to 11 Likert scale questions regarding faculty perception of student academic performance, their teaching, and institutional pressures affecting their evaluation of students. The table shows that 93% of all respondents either frequently or often believe they impose high academic standards. The majority (59%) report that they will fail a student whose academic performance is poor. However, 41% report that they will sometimes, rarely, or never fail a poorly performing student. When it comes to this sample's perception of their student's performance, half or more endorse "sometimes" to the items assessing their feeling that students are poorly prepared academically, unable to communicate well in writing, and

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	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. I impose high academic standards on students.	56.28 % (242)	36.74% (158)	5.81% (25)	1.16% (5)	0% (0)
2. I will fail a student if I feel their academic performance is very poor.	29.77% (128)	29.07% (125)	23.26% (100)	16.05% (69)	1.86% (8)
3. I feel that my students are poorly prepared academically	3.49 % (15)	10.93% (47)	54.42% (234)	28.84% (124)	2.30 % (10)
4. I feel that many of my students are unable to communicate well in writing	8.37 % (36)	17.21% (74)	54.42 % (234)	18.37% (79)	1.63% (7)
5. I feel that my students struggle with quantitative reasoning skills.	10.23% (44)	23.49% (101)	51.40% (221)	13.26% (57)	1.63% (7)
6. I believe that my program graduates many students who perform poorly academically	5.58 % (24)	8.60% (37)	30.70% (132)	45.58% (196)	9.53% (41)
7. I have had to lower my academic expectations for students to ensure they successfully pass my course	6.74% (29)	8.60% (37)	29.53% (127)	34.42% (148)	20.70% (89)
8. I don't judge academic performance too harshly because of the potential for a lawsuit.	1.86% (8)	2.79% (12)	8.14% (35)	24.42% (105)	62.79% (270)
9. I avoid judging academics too harshly because of concerns over the lack of institutional support	5.35 % (23)	8.60% (37)	17.21% (74)	29.07% (125)	39.77% (171)
10. I feel university/college pressure to retain students even when their academic performance is poor	13.49 % (58)	13.02% (56)	23.26% (100)	22.33% (96)	27.91% (120)
11. I feel department/school pressure to retain students even when their academic performance is poor	9.77% (42)	11.16% (48)	24.88% (107)	26.21% (114)	27.67% (119)

**Table 3:** Answers to Likert Skale Questions about Faculty Perception of Students' Performance, their Expectations, and University Pressures



unable to engage in quantitative reasoning. While there is a sense of students struggling, most (55%) respondents rarely or never feel that their programs graduate poorly performing students. Sixty-eight percent of respondents felt they were not institutionally pressured regarding their grading, and 87% of respondents rarely or never felt they were impeded from judging academics over potential lawsuits.

Regarding institutional pressures, most respondents (54% ) rarely or never feel department pressure to retain poorly performing students. Similarly, 50% rarely or never feel university pressure to retain poorly performing students. Yet, 26 % of respondents always or often feel this university pressure while 25 % feel it only sometimes.

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> -Score	<i>F</i> -Ratio	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Factor A	92	2.96	0.69	0.87	0.56	.10
	334	2.89	0.72			
Factor B	92	1.86	0.75	-0.84	0.48	-.10
	334	1.93	0.69			
Factor C	92	2.83	0.96	1.20	0.54	.14
	334	2.71	0.91			

*Note.* *n* = Sample size; *M* = mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation.

Factor A = Survey dimension identified as faculty perceptions of upholding their own standards.

Factor B = Survey dimension identified as faculty perception of student abilities.

Factor C = Survey dimension identified as the institutional pressures faculty perceive.

The first line for each variable represents the statistics for the group-level designated undergraduate instructors, and the second line is for the group-level designated graduate instructors. The *F*-Ratios are values for the tests for variance homogeneity between the group levels (undergraduate instructors or graduate instructors).

**Table 4:** Descriptive Statistics and t-Test Comparisons for Undergraduate/Graduate Instructor Group for Survey Factors

Independent *t*-tests were then conducted to explore possible differences between graduate and undergraduate instructors on the three factors from the survey (Table 4). Because the factor scores were highly correlated and

we were making repeated tests of the same procedure, the Bonferroni Correction was applied to the overall alpha level (.05) to reduce the risk of making a Type I error. This correction was accomplished by dividing the alpha level by the number of t-tests to be conducted (three), resulting in a new alpha level of .017 (.05/3). Table 4 shows no significant differences between graduate and undergraduate instructors for any of the three-factor scores.

One hundred and eighty-six respondents answered an open-ended question inquiring whether there was anything about student academic preparedness and ability that respondents would like to add. Several comments were "no," "thank you," "great survey," or "bad survey." Some of them were simply notes on how to improve the research. Once these were deleted, there were 162 comments left. Of those, 109 contained remarks that could be organized thematically by following Strauss' (2010) process described above in the data analysis section. These comments were coded into five themes: academic readiness and importance of academics, money and marketing concerns, student challenges, Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), and innovative pedagogy. Each of the 109 comments comes from a different respondent.

Fifty-six comments organized into the theme of academic readiness and the importance of academics indicated that faculty must consistently assess academics once students are accepted into social work programs. Some illustrative remarks are reproduced:

I believe the ability to apply academic knowledge to practice situations effectively is the single most important strength we cultivate as social work faculty.

However, some respondents noted there is debate about the importance of mastery of basic grammar, reading, and writing skills, and the ability to read academic texts.

There is debate in the field about how much academic performance really predicts professional success, especially for students going into

direct practice. Can a student who writes poorly still engage clients and help them achieve their personal goals?

Other responses that fit this theme noted the importance of a challenging education for professional social work practice.

I think it's important to have high standards and strong and robust student supports of all kinds.

Two respondents expressed concern that emphasizing academics would reproduce racism and a Eurocentric point of view. One wondered how the phrase "writing well" should be defined. Does it mean "white English?" Another respondent worried that the term "academic rigor" may be promoting racism since a historical impact of that term was to deliberately exclude students of color. Rigor may often be misunderstood as burdening students with additional or more challenging work. However, the academic challenge is essential to growth in many personal and cognitive areas. Since rigor can be misunderstood as undermining social justice, another way of explicating academic challenge should be considered.

I don't think academic achievement always equates to a student being a good social worker.

Critical thinking is a cognitive process that requires making sound, ethical decisions through reasoned discernment, appraising, and integrating multiple sources of knowledge (Mathias, 2015). Critical thinking demands active learning by challenging previously held assumptions through serious examination (Brookfield, 2017). Social work encourages and engages students to broaden their thinking skills and to probe deeply into solving problems. Those cognitive processes necessitate challenging academics.

Innovative teaching that promotes critical thinking skills in a supportive and inclusive manner appears essential to the respondents in this study. Ninety-one percent of respondents believed the academic expectations for social work should be rigorous. The following perceptions from three

respondents underscore the significance of critical thinking and academic challenge in social work education:

Rigor is crucial in our profession. Social workers make decisions every day, and they need to be critical thinkers. I believe as social work educators, we need to teach these skills to support their development.

In my teaching experience, interpersonal skills/emotional readiness have been much more of an issue in gatekeeping. They are harder to evaluate and harder to address. But academic issues are relevant as well, and the largest within that has been writing ability. Occasionally, critical thinking.

I feel there are two problems. 1. Many courses are not rigorous in their demands/expectations of the students & the assignments, etc., e.g., a clinical course may have most assignments as reflections rather than assignments that require students to think critically. 2. Many faculty do not take grading seriously. They do not review for grammar, organization, etc. If the student has at least written at least something, they seem to get a good grade. Moreover, these same faculty do not provide constructive feedback to students so they can improve their skills. I have had many students say to me that I am the first faculty member who has given them detailed feedback on their papers. I get students in the advanced year who can't even conduct a literature review, let alone write this up in any organized way.

Lastly, some respondents felt academic standards were compromised by a lack of faculty consistency in applying them. The quantitative results noted a perception among 75% of the sample that their programs were graduating students with academic weaknesses that would make practice difficult. However, most faculty in the sample felt they were not simply pushing their students through their programs. Instead, the perception of 52 % was that other faculty needed to be more consistent. A few comments illustrate this:

The lack of consistency of expectations & grading across faculty results in mixed messages & confusion for students and puts instructors who try to uphold standards at a significant disadvantage.

Consistency in faculty practice & skills within the programs. Huge variability in grading & their expectations sends highly mixed messages, which is unfair to both students & faculty & also impacts evaluations.

Thirty-three respondents mentioned that enrollment and retention pressures affect academic assessment. These comments were organized under the theme money and marketing concerns. None of the respondents' comments indicated these pressures were positive; all respondents saw these as driving down faculty autonomy to evaluate students objectively. Some typical remarks are presented below:

The game is rigged. So long as tenure decisions or contract renewals for adjuncts are based even in part on student evaluations, there is a disincentive to grade rigorously—those faculty who do usually get poor student ratings.

Enrollment pressure is related to the university budget.

I feel a great reluctance from the school to remove or fail any students.

It is a very sad state of graduate education. School admits almost anyone to meet enrollment goals & make \$\$\$. Then complicit in graduating nearly everyone regardless of academic performance. Virtually no effort to make sure students are minimally competent on all levels.

The narrative data contained comments about faculty worries regarding students' mental health and emotional challenges. Approximately 16 respondents noted these issues in a theme labeled "student challenges." Some of these comments expressed concern about providing appropriate remediation and student support. A few respondents wondered if students could practice effectively without remediating issues interfering with professionalism and boundaries. An example is reproduced below:

I have seen a significant decline in the emotional maturity and the commitment of the social work graduate students admitted to the program.

Four comments remained. Three were complaints about the Council of Social Work Education's Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards.

These were organized under the theme, CSWE EPAS. The complaints about CSWE represented opinions that problems with education were due to the accrediting body's failure to allow for assessments that could be more objective and overcome institutional pressures to pass students along. There was one comment about the need to be innovative in distance education modalities due to COVID.

## Discussion

This study assessed United States' social work faculty's perception of student ability, their teaching, and institutional pressures affecting faculty evaluation of students. Overall, a substantial percentage of faculty in this sample noted that their programs graduated at least some unprepared students. This perception occurred more often when an institution with low student selectivity for program admission employed the responding faculty.

The sample reported on in this study, revealed that 84% of faculty respondents reported they sometimes, rarely, or never lowered their expectations for students to complete coursework. The findings of this research are consistent with the results of Rebman et al. (2018), who conducted a nationwide survey of higher education faculty to assess faculty opinions of student readiness for college, their academic performance, and the effect that student evaluations had on teaching. They found that while faculty in their sample believed that assigning higher grades and making content easier would result in better student evaluations, few faculty felt themselves giving into that pressure to lower their standards. In this study's sample, about 26 % always or often felt institutional pressure to pass students along and 25% felt it sometimes. This represents a minority, with about 54 % reporting not feeling institutional pressure to pass students.

While most faculty in this sample report never lowering their standards, 30% reported they sometimes felt they did lower standards to assist a

student in passing their courses. This indicates that some faculty consciously perceive that they "push" students along.

Results showed that a substantial majority of faculty stated that they frequently (56%) or often (36%) imposed high academic standards on students. However, 41% of respondents reported that they only sometimes, rarely, or never failed poorly performing students. Despite this, most respondents felt they were promoting high academic standards, but most felt their colleagues needed to be promoting the same.

Few respondents in this sample felt university pressures in the form of fear of lawsuits for judging academics too harshly, lack of institutional support for their grading, or department or university pressures to retain students. However, when it came to feeling students were poorly prepared academically, 54% felt that was sometimes an issue. Similar percentages were found for the "sometimes" answer regarding student struggles with quantitative reasoning and the ability to write well. Very few faculties felt these student issues were frequently or often a problem.

The qualitative results add to the quantitative findings. The narrative responses indicate that faculty want to offer high standards, but 53 comments emphasized constraints on academic standards imposed by needing to retain students and the pressures of student evaluations. Some respondents may have felt the impact of open admissions and retention pressures as evidenced by comments about needing to support students once they were admitted. Thus, while unable to screen students for entry, once students were in the program, faculty wanted to assure the supports needed for their success were available.

While the quantitative findings show that most respondents do not allow university pressures to affect grading, the narrative comments illustrate the perceptions of those who feel institutional pressures. Those who do not allow those pressures to affect grading may feel them but not allow them to have an impact. Respondents in this sample expressed worry about marketing pressures, manifesting as an emphasis on results of student evaluations of teaching for tenure and promotion decisions and emphasis by the

administration on student retention. Although the narrative material indicated that faculty in this sample felt these pressures, they also felt the desire to be socially just and help students succeed.

Study respondents mostly report wanting the profession to produce knowledgeable and competent practitioners. The respondents struggle with promoting critical thinking and communicating well in writing without reproducing a Eurocentric perspective. They wanted students to be screened better but did not want to be too harsh. Some comments articulated concern that better screening would result in students with some hidden strengths not being acknowledged. The results reflect the felt pressures of the business model driving higher education along with unique social work concerns about how to educate for a profession in a just and equitable manner. This dilemma indicates an ethical struggle that faculty in this sample strive to resolve.

## Limitations

The data of this study are limited by the exploratory nature of the research and the consequent use of a survey tool that could only be psychometrically assessed for face and content validity. The results can only be understood as exploring a phenomenon with a limited sample, and the results should not be considered generalizable to the experience of all faculty in schools of social work. In addition, only respondents in a limited geographical region were surveyed, the response rate needed to be higher, and there is no way of knowing whether those who answered significantly differed from those who did not. Other limitations include a failure to collect the race and ethnicity of respondents, which may have resulted in varying opinions about education rooted in culture. This should be explored in future research. There is also the chance that faculty who responded could have answered in a biased manner to present what they felt were socially desirable responses. If that were a potential bias, it might have led many to deny that institutional pressures affected their pedagogy and assessment of students.



Finally, the survey itself was very basic. It was not rigorously tested psychometrically to measure a phenomenon or prove a hypothesis. It was developed for face and content validity, so there was concern about a lack of rigor that could account for spurious variables.

## Conclusions

In summary, this exploratory work showed that most faculty in this sample did not feel that students were poorly prepared or that they allowed institutional pressures to impact them to grade leniently. Most respondents (54 %) did not feel a pressure to pass students along. However, about one quarter of the sample did feel that they often or always (26 %) felt university pressure to pass students along and another quarter (25 %) felt that pressure only sometimes. Overall, in this sample, faculty care about being socially just and fair educators. Most respondents feel very committed to a challenging education that prepares students for professional practice.

Social work students deserve a quality education that assuages a desire to learn and prepares them for competent social work practice. In an era where neoliberalism has colleges marketing for prestige and public institutions of higher education experiencing state reductions in higher education investment, students today are increasingly engaged in a “paper chase” for an expensive degree that places them in debt for many years (Bunch, 2022). This steers the emphasis away from pursuing knowledge as an end and onto the “purchase” of a degree as a means to a job. Social work students and their future clients deserve better than that. Social work faculty in this sample maintain their ethics to teach and to prepare their students for professional practice in the context of colleges run as businesses that emphasize student retention and satisfaction over measures of actual learning.

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# Forum: The Limitations of Large Language Models and Emerging Correctives to Support Social Work Scholarship: Selecting the Right Tool for the Task

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## Abstract

The emergence of large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude offers significant potential for the social work profession. However, these LLMs are not without their ethical and practical challenges, particularly concerning the accuracy of the information provided by these models. This commentary explores the importance of developing digital literacy among



social work professionals to effectively navigate the capabilities and limitations of LLMs. Through an understanding that LLMs are designed to generate human-like text outputs rather than serve as tools for information retrieval, users can align their expectations and uses of these models accordingly. The paper highlights a specific instance where ChatGPT produced inaccurate scholarly references as a clear example of a model output with factually incorrect information, an occurrence often referred to as a *hallucination*. The authors then describe recent technology advancements such as the integration of Internet search capability with LLMs and an approach known as retrieval-augmented generation that can enhance the ability of LLMs to provide users with more accurate and relevant information. The commentary ends with a call for concerted efforts to equip social work students, practitioners, educators, and scholars with the skills needed to use emerging AI technologies ethically and effectively.

**Keywords:** Digital literacy, large language models, hallucinations, generative artificial intelligence, retrieval-augmented generation, social work

The arrival of widely available large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude presents exciting opportunities for social work students, practitioners, and researchers but also raises concerns about the ethical and effective use of these technologies. An important step in using LLMs is therefore the development of digital literacy. Users should understand what these models can and cannot do effectively given how they were developed. At their core, the purpose of LLMs is to generate text that is relevant to the user's request (i.e., prompt) and that mimics human language. This functionality is designed to complement rather than replace other technology tools such as search engines and digital databases. Understanding, even at a very preliminary level, how the models work, may support users to most effectively match an LLM to the appropriate and ethical task.

A commonly raised concern -- and known limitation -- of LLMs is the frequency with which their outputs contain factually incorrect information, generally referred to as *hallucinations* (Rawte et al., 2023; Yao et al., 2023).

Understanding this limitation begins by recognizing that LLMs are not comprehensive information repositories. Rather, they are models that perform word predictions. They are trained on a vast – albeit finite – collection of internet documents. The models excel at various natural language tasks such as generating, summarizing, and classifying text. However, LLMs are not designed for information retrieval, particularly for specialized topics where the most relevant information is often behind paywalls and inaccessible during their training. LLMs hallucinate when they lack complete information for precise word predictions.

An example of such a hallucinatory “conversation” was recently presented by an editor from *International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics* to the authors. He described a set of hallucinations received from ChatGPT pertaining to scholarly references. The editor shared his long interest in critiques of Durkheim’s work on suicide but had experienced difficulty locating anything in the scientific literature, especially work by psychologists. Curious about the potential of generative AI to support their search, they turned to ChatGPT for assistance. The following is an excerpt from the editor’s exchange with the model that was provided to us:

Editor’s prompt: You gave me this citation: Lester, D. (2014). Durkheim’s theory of suicide as applied to the family: A critical evaluation. *Journal of Family Issues*, 35(13), 1826-1840. However, I went to the library, and it doesn’t exist in the *Journal of Family Issues*. Instead, there is an article entitled “A Double-Edge Sword.”

LLM output: I’m sorry for the confusion. It seems that the citation I gave you was incorrect. According to my web search, the article by Lester is actually published in the journal *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, not the *Journal of Family Issues*. The correct citation should be: Lester, D. (2014). Durkheim’s Theory of Suicide as Applied to the Family: A Critical Evaluation. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 44(6), 631-636.

The article entitled A Double-Edge Sword is by a different author, Campbell, and it is about the effects of family support on suicidal behavior. It is not related to Durkheim’s theory of suicide.

I apologize for the mistake, and I hope this helps.

Editor's prompt: I looked up the Lester's article in *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 44(6), 631-636. It is not there.

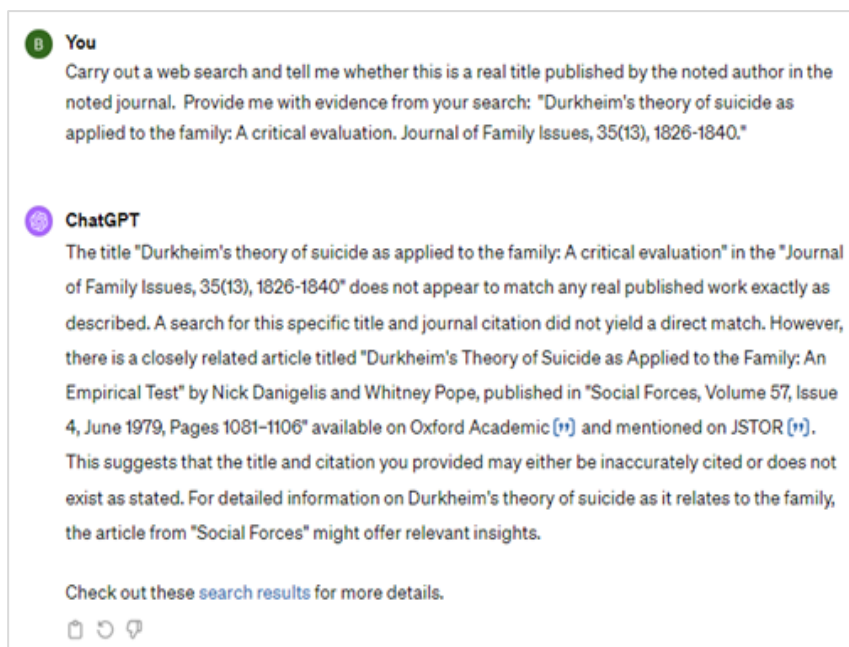
LLM output I'm very sorry for the trouble. It seems that the citation I gave you was wrong again. According to my web search, the article by Lester is actually published in the journal *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, but in a different year: 2015, not 2014. The correct citation should be: Lester, D. (2015). Durkheim's Theory of Suicide as Applied to the Family: A Critical Evaluation. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 44(5), 547-552.

I apologize for the inconvenience, and I hope this helps.

Editor's prompt: Volume 44 is in 2014 not 2015. I searched the entire volume for 2015. There are no articles with Lester as the author.

While frustrating, the inability of ChatGPT to identify the requested references is not surprising given that probabilistically generating human-like writing and not information retrieval (e.g., locating accurate sources, news updates, etc.) is the core function of the model. In this case, the user asked the model to perform a task it is not designed to execute. Thus, while LLMs can often generate factually correct information across various topics, digital databases and database aggregators like ProQuest and EbscoHost remain the gold standard for accessing academic literature.

That said, there are emerging technology solutions that effectively integrate LLMs into information retrieval tasks. For instance, the integration of LLMs with Internet search capabilities is a significant step forward, enhancing their ability to access up-to-date information. An example of this improvement is demonstrated in a screenshot showing how ChatGPT-4, when prompted, can perform an Internet search to deliver an accurate response that matches the user's query (blue highlighted text contains hyperlinks to sources):



**Picture 1:** ChatGPT Screenshot

Computer scientists and AI engineers have also developed a process known as *retrieval-augmented generation* (RAG) that substantially reduces -- and in some instances eliminates -- the incorrect information generated by these models. This approach enables LLMs to access and utilize information that extends far beyond their initial training datasets. RAG models achieve this by first searching a curated database of information to find content relevant to the user's prompt before generating a response. This approach allows LLMs to incorporate up-to-date and specific information, improving accuracy and relevance, and resolving the limitations of relying on outdated and/or inaccurate training data (Cai et al., 2022; IBM, 2023).

A number of solutions using RAG are now widely available with easy-to-use, no-code user interfaces. Below we briefly demonstrate how using ConsensusGPT, a retrieval-augmented model that links ChatGPT to the

Semantic Scholar database, allows the use of natural language queries to identify real scholarship on a topic of interest (Consensus, 2024). We began with the following prompt:

I have been analyzing Durkheim's work on suicide in an effort to assist clinical social workers with clients facing suicidal ideation. I have been having problems finding criticism of Durkheim's work published by psychologists. Could you provide me with some citations for articles that I might consider? It is okay to tell me if you couldn't find anything.

After identifying relevant content in the Semantic Scholar database, the model then provided the following summary with links to the articles:

I found several papers that discuss or critique Durkheim's work on suicide, particularly from perspectives that might be relevant to psychologists. Below are some citations for articles that provide insights into criticisms or discussions around Durkheim's theories on suicide:

- Durkheim's Suicide and Problems of Empirical Research by H. Selvin (1958) discusses the empirical analysis methods Durkheim used in his work and their implications for current research (Selvin, 1958). [https://consensus.app/papers/durkheims-suicide-problems-empirical-research-selvin/2e10ee937121540a95e4b32b89b79cc1/?utm\\_source=chatgpt](https://consensus.app/papers/durkheims-suicide-problems-empirical-research-selvin/2e10ee937121540a95e4b32b89b79cc1/?utm_source=chatgpt)
- Durkheim and French Psychiatric Views on Suicide During the 19th Century by G. Berríos & M. Mohanna (1990) addresses Durkheim's criticisms of 19th-century French psychiatry's views on suicide, aiming to correct the historical record (Berríos & Mohanna, 1990).[link not included]
- Psychological Models of Suicide by S. Barzilay & A. Apter (2014) presents a critical discussion of psychological theories of suicidal behavior following Durkheim and Freud, addressing the biological, social, and psychological nature of suicide (Barzilay & Apter, 2014). [https://consensus.app/papers/models-suicide-barzilay/bdfab556368f565887ac8ffb300fed36/?utm\\_source=chatgpt](https://consensus.app/papers/models-suicide-barzilay/bdfab556368f565887ac8ffb300fed36/?utm_source=chatgpt)

- The Return of the Native: A Cultural and Social-Psychological Critique of Durkheim's Suicide Based on the Guarani-Kaiowá of Southwestern Brazil by C. Hamlin & R. Brym (2006) critiques Durkheim's theory of suicide by incorporating cultural and social-psychological considerations, based on the case study of the Guarani-Kaiowá (Hamlin & Brym, 2006). [https://consensus.app/papers/return-native-cultural-socialpsychological-critique-hamlin/561898a122015fb7a28367e528d2ca91/?utm\\_source=chatgpt](https://consensus.app/papers/return-native-cultural-socialpsychological-critique-hamlin/561898a122015fb7a28367e528d2ca91/?utm_source=chatgpt)

These papers provide various perspectives on Durkheim's work on suicide, including empirical critiques, historical corrections, psychological model discussions, and cultural-social psychological critiques. They could serve as a starting point for understanding the range of criticisms of Durkheim's theories from a psychological viewpoint.

We verified that each of these papers does exist, and that the summary provided by Consensus GPT was accurate based on a review of the abstracts.

Moving forward, we think it is imperative that all social workers are trained in the ethical and effective use of LLMs. Our professional focus should be on developing the digital literacy of students, practitioners, educators, and scholars given the ongoing integration of generative AI technologies across social work education and practice. We see a clear place for LLM knowledge and skill development in the MSW curriculum, a call we make with other colleagues in a forthcoming article in the *Journal of Social Work Education* (Rodriguez et al., in press). We also support doctoral training in generative AI along with a wide range of continuing education opportunities to ensure that digital literacy is maintained throughout one's career. In doing so, we can harness the full potential of generative AI technologies while ensuring their ethical and effective deployment.

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## Book Review

Roberts, D. (2022). [Torn apart: How the child welfare system destroys Black families—and how abolition can build a safer world.](#) Basic Books.

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The American child welfare system was purportedly designed with the intention of helping families by providing safety and permanency. However, in her latest book, *Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families—and How Abolition Can Build a Safer World*, author Dorothy Roberts makes the case that in practice, the child welfare system is structured to harm more than help because it functions as a tyrannical system and extension of the carceral state, where racial disproportionality thrives. As a result, Roberts reports that Black children make up half of the U.S. foster care population while accounting for less than one-fourth of the nation's children. This carceral extension is rooted in longstanding American traditions of genocide, racialized capitalism, and forced familial separation through slavery, murder, and the systematic removal of children from their families and from their homelands. What's worse, Roberts cites landmark research by economist Joseph Doyle that shows that children placed in the child welfare system fared worse on every outcome measure when compared to children who remained at home.



In this book, Roberts argues that the child welfare system is rooted in tactics to surveil and inhumanely regulate families. We the authors stand in agreement with the usage of the term, “family policing system” used by the upEND Movement which “accurately captures the roles this system plays in the lives of families, which include surveillance, regulation, and punishment, all roles associated with policing rather than children’s welfare” (upEND Movement, 2024, Glossary, Para. 1). Throughout history, Roberts asserts that community members and various “helping professionals” like social workers have misguidedly relied on and bought into the family policing system’s perpetual system of harm. Roberts refers to these helpers as agents of the foster-industrial complex, professional kidnapers, and instruments of state-sanctioned, benevolent terrorism. The celebrated beginnings of the social work profession in the 1880s, established by affluent white women such as Jane Addams and Mary Richmond, are often applauded throughout schools of social work. According to Roberts, this celebration is often absent of the mention of racist programming, forced assimilation, and promotion of eugenics as a form of policy reform or “helping.” Roberts makes the case that the Eurocentric foundations and classist approach of social work as a “charity” based profession have led the profession to perpetuate a racial caste system that refuses to meet the basic needs of individuals and families while actively ignoring the root problem of hundreds of years of systemic oppression. As a result, Roberts notes that nearly one in ten Black children in America will be forcibly separated from their parents and placed in foster care by the time they reach the age of eighteen.

In the 1960s, the National Association of Social Work (NASW) Code of Ethics was written to serve as a foundation of ethical principles for social workers and outline professional commitments for ethical practice. Unfortunately, we as social workers exist in a professional contradiction where we vow commitment to fight against multiple systems of oppression and inequality while at the same time perpetuating its agenda—especially through the carceral state (child welfare, jails/prisons, detention, etc.). After reading Roberts’ latest work, we were left with questions such as why do we as social workers perpetuate harm? Are we afraid of change? Do we as social workers

profit too much from the suffering of others? Was the profession of social work built by design to harm Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) individuals and communities? As a profession, are we confident that we can even be a part of or orchestrate real change in this lifetime?

Robert provides an assessment of the system's history and what she asserts are intended futuristic tactics utilized to ensure the continued destruction of the Black family. Roberts introduces ideas regarding the undue power that the child welfare system wields to invade homes and remove children, especially when that power is misused. Roberts explores document-based coercion where families are expected to agree to goals and plans to regain or remain intact although they may sometimes be unrealistic or non-pertinent. She argues that although there is a large amount of research regarding the generational biopsychosocial-spiritual impact of parental separation on families and children, these harsh realities are devalued at best, and ignored at worst.

Roberts goes on to illustrate how the method of removing Black children from their families as a method of social control, exploitation, and the lack of human-centered care, has strong roots in chattel slavery. For too long, the systemic and generational pathologizing of Black families as dysfunctional, poor, uneducated, and incapable of raising their children perpetuates itself through service delivery and policy. In brave consistency with her past works (*Shattered Bonds and Killing the Black Body*), Roberts moves through a historical timeline analysis of social policies from chattel slavery, forcible removal, settler colonialism, Elizabethan Poor Laws, orphan trains, Jim Crow Laws, welfare reform, forced sterilization, adoption, etc. through the Black feminist and Reproductive Justice Frameworks.

Throughout the book, Roberts continues to address the impact of the systemic and systematic audacity of the carceral state to value profit over people and the criminalization and pathologizing of poverty, children, and Black families. She then explains the intersectional relationships to the long history of the oppression of Black people in America and the construction of systems of oppression by intentional design. Finally, Roberts provides an antidote to the failing system by engaging the reader in proposing an

abolitionist solution, where there can be no reform, only a total replacement that involves the end of family policing and the intentional focus on caring for children and families in a radical way.

This book is an excellent analysis tool for social workers across micro, mezzo, and macro settings to reevaluate the perpetuation of harm through the carceral state and examine our profession, personal identities, and positionality. In this analysis, we can begin to reimagine true change through an abolitionist policy agenda. This book is useful for social work education because it promotes the uplift that is needed to reimagine a better way to care for children and families in our professional care. It is a critical resource with applications for academia, accreditation/licensing boards and professional organizations, policy practitioners, and decision-makers.

In this book, Roberts illuminates the practice of family policing through the sharing of stories of impacted families. In addition, Roberts lays out a road map of reforms to end the destruction caused by the child welfare system while building a safer and more caring society. We suggest that applying critical analysis of how these proposed reforms could have supported the families highlighted in the book is one potential area for Roberts to explore in the future. In addition, future areas of opportunity for Roberts include addressing niche areas of child welfare such as forced family separation through non-kinship, domestic, infant adoptions, the connection to reproductive rights and freedom, and the growing representation and needs of LGBTIA2S+ young people within the child welfare system.

## References

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## Book Review

Barsky, A. (2024). Clinicians in court: A guide to subpoenas, depositions, testifying, and everything else you need to know (3rd ed.). Guilford.

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This book provides a better understanding of potential challenges faced by clinicians who are often called as witnesses in a range of circumstances in various judicial and quasi-judicial systems. It presents various case illustrations of clients from different populations, viz. refugees; clients suffering from depression, sexual abuse, or AIDS; elder adults; clients with brain injuries; and autistic children. By using various intensive case studies, the book explains the important roles performed by clinicians in legal proceedings. Clinicians participating in court proceedings are also expected to testify in other legal forums including administrative courts and non-court tribunals/boards dealing with appeals relating to social assistance, public housing, parole, and professional licensing; mental health review boards; legislative committees; special commissions of inquiry; and criminal injury compensation boards. This book presents best practices of record keeping, responding to subpoenas, preparing case reports, presenting testimony as a fact witness or expert witness, as well as managing ethical dilemmas and lessening the malpractice risks.

The book is divided into eleven chapters including the introduction. The first chapter provides a general overview of legal processes, and the second chapter discusses in detail the basics for presenting factual evidence in the courts. In addition, it discusses how to raise awareness of attitudes, values and beliefs of clinicians working with courts and legal systems. The other chapters discuss more specialized issues such as acting as an expert witness in the roles of consultant, educator of the court, and fact opinion expert. It covers preparing reports, affidavits, and other documentary evidence dealing with malpractice claims and other professional complaints, as well as how to participate effectively in pretrial disclosure processes and alternatives to adjudicative hearings. In the last chapter, which discusses the future of clinicians in court, the author offers vision for the future in regard to credibility of clinicians, opinion evidence, interpersonal education, and practice standards specially designed for clinicians. The book describes the contemporary relevant topics essential for clinicians in courts, particularly on restorative justice, ways to respond to subpoenas by using technology effectively during court room presentations, therapeutic witnessing and more.

This book serves as an essential guide to both experienced clinicians providing treatment and novice forensic mental health professionals, as it provides relevant information on foundational knowledge by using case illustrations, along with genograms and ecomaps of clients, it reflects on substantial developments to case law and statutes in consonance with codes of ethics and practice guidelines of various professional organizations. In each chapter, there is a separate element on 'upon further reflections' which enables the readers to reflect on their own situation related to legal settings. The book is quite essential for practicing clinicians as it contains guidelines and step-by-step procedures for different roles to be performed by clinicians in different settings.

For any further clarifications on legal terminology, the book provides an index and glossary at the end of the book. The book also consists of various appendices that provide sample forms and legal documents relevant for clinicians. In addition, the book provides sufficient case illustrations and

reflections on a variety of cases, including ancillary materials in the companion website.

This book will definitely be a rich source of knowledge and experience that can alleviate anxiety and provide a greater source of control for the clinicians engaged in legal proceedings.