

# International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics

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# Contents

## Editorial

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 20th Anniversary Comments from our Editorial Boards<br><i>Stephen M. Marson</i>  | 5  |
| Commentary from Russia/Ukraine<br><i>Anonymous</i>   | 20 |
| Editorial: The National Clinical Social Work Examination - ASWB<br><i>Laura Groshong &amp; Kendra C. Roberson</i>  | 29 |
| Editorial: Constructing a Globalized Society Without Gender Binaries and<br>Comprehending Gender Variant Clients' Pronouns<br><i>Ray Mathew-Santhosham</i> | 32 |
| Editorial: Open Access – An Ethical Alternative to Use of Impact Factor When<br>Making Decisions About Journal Selection<br><i>Dawn Apgar</i>              | 40 |
| Is Working with the Taliban Ethical?<br><i>Rory Truell</i>   | 44 |
| Letters to the Editor<br><i>Stephen M. Marson</i>  | 52 |
| Changes at IJSWVE and Thank You<br><i>Stephen M. Marson &amp; Laura Gibson</i>   | 65 |

## Articles

- Internet Searching of Client Information by Social Workers: Reckless or Required in Today's Online Society? 67  
*Dawn Apgar & Thomas Cadmus*
- Professional Pledge in Social Work: Implications for Professional Identity and Value Integration 98  
*Neera Agnimitra & Seema Sharma*
- Equipoise: Ethical Considerations for Pregnancy Options Counseling 129  
*Jennifer C. Hollenberger & David K. Pooler*
- Feeling Competent isn't Enough: The Social Worker's Role in Creating Positive Space and Promoting Trans-Affirming Practices 142  
*Kristin Heffernan, Jason Dauenhauer & Nicole Cesnales*
- The Islamic Basis of Social Work in the Modern World 171  
*Abdulaziz Albrithen*
- Embracing Our Values: Social Work Faculty Progressivism in a Conservative World 194  
*Stephen W. Stoeffler, Brendan P. Young, & Michael W. Hassler*

## Forum

- Forum: Nothing Can be Changed Until it is Faced: Social Work's Licensing Justice Journey 220  
*Stacey Hardy-Chandler*
- Forum: Interpretation of the Canadian Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics as Penguin Comic 228  
*Jenna Horback*

## Book Reviews

- Yläanne, V. (Ed.). (2022). Ageing and the media: International perspectives. 230  
Policy Press.  
*Reviewed by Laura Gibson*
- Armstrong, L., & Abel, G. (Eds.). (2021). Sex work and the New Zealand model: 234  
Decriminalization and social change. Bristol University Press.  
*Reviewed by Peggy Proudfoot Harman*
- Rosignoli, F. (2022). Environmental justice for climate refugees. Routledge. 237  
*Reviewed by Stephen M. Marson*

## 20th Anniversary Comments from our Editorial Boards

DOI: [10.55521/10-020-101](https://doi.org/10.55521/10-020-101)

Stephen M. Marson, Ph.D., Editor

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I invited our Editorial Board, our Copy Editor Board, Policy Board, and our Book Review to comment on their experience and association with our journal. In the order I received them, here are their commentaries:

July 25, 2022, at 5:01 AM

I published my first peer-reviewed article in Volume 2 of the journal. I still remember well the professional workflow and the helpful feedback I received back then. Now, two decades later, I have the honor of being a member of the review board myself. The journal's mission is more relevant than ever, and the fact that it has been open access for 20 years shows how far-sighted the editors were even then.

Stefan Borrmann, PhD

University of Applied Sciences Landshut, Germany

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July 25, 2022, 7:16 AM

It has been my honor to serve on and support the publication of this journal for many years. Most recently, I have served as Editor of a Special Issue of this journal with a critical focus on Intercultural Relations. I have enjoyed further roles including serving on the Board of Copy Editors, Policy Review Board, and as a Book Reviewer. This journal brings new knowledge to the

social work profession throughout the year to help advance our profession from an inclusive perspective. Looking forward to continued service.

Veronica L. Hardy, Ph.D.

University of North Carolina at Pembroke, USA

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July 25, 2022, at 7:24 AM

What a pleasure to take a moment to reflect on my association with this journal. Since its beginning, I have had the opportunity to work with outstanding colleagues and scholars from around the world. The journal now finds itself truly having taken the international stage. Recent global health, political, and socio-economic developments have made its existence and presence more important than ever. One of the principal strengths and aims of this journal is not to present a singular set of ethical values for the social work field. Rather, it is to endorse and enjoy a diversity of approaches and perspectives. As our hopes and dreams evolve, may we rejoice in the effort to engage in meaningful and intellectually honest discourse.

Daniel Pollack, MSW, JD

Wurzweiler School of Social Work, USA

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July 25, 2022, at 12:21 PM

For two decades, I have been privileged to serve on this journal's editorial board. During this span of time, I have had a ringside seat to thoughtful manuscripts that demonstrate social workers' ever-increasing understanding of complex ethical issues. The *International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics* has been a critically important lodestar in our profession's determined efforts to examine its core values, complex ethical dilemmas, and ethics frameworks and protocols.

Frederic G. Reamer, Ph.D.

Rhode Island College, USA

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July 25, 2022, at 12:58 PM

I am happy to be part of the esteemed journal and I am associated with it since couple of years now. I believe that being an educator in social work, we have lots of constructive roles to play to work for the development of social work pedagogical literature worldwide and also help to develop more of indigenous social work models, theories, skills through evidence-based practice in our own country for the sustainability of our profession. I am also advocating for the indigenous literature more than a decade in India through writing and practicing.

Our role is to practice, protect and progress of our profession worldwide and our journal is the best medium for it.

I will be always with you all to perform my given responsibility for the success of the journal and I am sure we will work together for that.

I am always there, Prof Steve.

Prof Sanjoy Roy

University of Delhi, India

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July 25, 2022, at 3:11 PM

It has been my pleasure to be a volunteer from Canada with the (now) IJSWVE since 2014, first as a manuscript reviewer, then adding book reviewer to my interests. I have also had the pleasure of publishing 2 pieces in the journal, one on ethical decision making and the other on the ethics of public apology (which is currently very fitting, given the Papal apology taking place today at Maskwacis, Alberta, Canada, my nearest Indigenous relations). I am always learning from, and deeply appreciate, the connections made with ethics practitioners and scholars from around this big, beautiful, troubled world. Hai, Hai, Migwetch, Deepest gratitude,

Elaine Spencer, MSW, RSW, RCSW

Red Deer Polytechnic, Canada.

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July 25, 2022, at 6:44 PM

I am so happy to have been associated with this journal. As a social worker and educator from the global south who recently immigrated to North America, there is a lot for me to learn about the politics of knowledge generation and marketing, even in social work. I see very closely the implications of colonization in every social work literature that I studied as a social work student, and in that, I taught in India and Canada. Association with this journal helps me to learn more about scholarly discussions and share my experience and knowledge from a non-American/European perspective.

Baiju P. Vareed, Ph.D. RSW  
MacEwan University, Canada

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July 26, 2022, at 3:49 PM

My time on the editorial board of the Journal has been not only a key component of how I have given back to the profession of social work, but also a major contributor to my own continued development as a social worker and educator. The breadth of topics about which I've read during my tenure has expanded my knowledge and appreciation of the diversity in social work settings and has compelled me to examine what I thought were previously settled issues from different perspectives. Further, it was my relationship with the Journal that led me, with Steve Marson, to develop and edit the *Routledge Handbook of Social Work Ethics and Values*, featuring chapters from almost 80 social work scholars from six continents.

Dr. Robert McKinney, LICSW  
University of Alabama

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July 27, 2022, at 10:29 AM

I am grateful for the opportunities I've had to foster social work values and ethics through my association with our journal. Over the past decades,



ethics has become the increasingly central focus of my practice and studies. While helping colleagues write and publish their ethics scholarship, I've found the journal's international perspective valuable in my exploration of virtue ethics and in my own publications. I also have valued the connection with the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB)'s work since my interests in social work licensure and regulation, supervision, child welfare, social justice, and cultural competence have been grounded in ethics as well.

Anthony A. Bibus III, PhD, LISW  
Professor Emeritus

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July 27, 2022, at 2:23 PM

Although I've only recently become involved with the *International Journal of Social Work Ethics and Values*, my position on the board enabled the strengthening of my writing skills as well as become familiar with the world of academic publishing. Being an undergraduate student, I am eternally grateful for this opportunity to share my opinions and drawings on such a large scale in such an early phase of my career. Apart from appointing me to a policy board position, Dr. Steve Marson has played a pivotal role in refining my skills and bolstering my confidence as a researcher. Without him, none of this journal would be possible.

Ray Mathew, MSW Candidate  
The Ohio State University

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July 27, 2022, at 5:22 PM

I knew the *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics* was an idea that had to be put into action when Steve Marson and others approached me about it more than 20 years ago. I am honored to have been in on the ground floor of developing this ground-breaking publication as its first publisher from its inception in 2002 until 2012. Innovative in its electronic, open access format,

it added a much-needed platform for the dissemination of research and writing on the core issues of the social work profession. Keep up the great work, IJSWVE!

Linda May Grobman, MSW, ACSW, LSW

White Hat Publications, USA

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July 27, 2022, at 6:36 PM

My association with the IJSWVE started alongside my academic career - just over 20 years ago. It was the first journal that I was brave enough to reach out to and joined the editorial board as a voice from 'down under Australia'. I had an article from my thesis on ethical dilemmas in social work published way back in 2005, and over 20 years have reviewed close to 100 manuscripts. In my teaching of ethics, I set articles from IJSWVE for students, promote the journal at every opportunity, and love being part of the bigger social work ethics educator community. It has been a highlight of my professional career and I look forward to continuing on my association as the journal moves into the international sphere

Donna McAuliffe, Ph.D., Griffith University, Australia

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July 28, 2022, at 1:01 PM

During this modern age of massive social change, when the questions of moral values and ethical behaviors became so dynamic, *The International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics* introduced a platform where the important issues could be illustrated and examined. In a profession such as social work where action often takes place in ambiguous and ambivalent circumstance, the journal has brought light and dialogue that has helped its readers bring their own mind to our challenges. It has been one of my social work career's highpoints to be involved with the fine colleagues who have worked so diligently on our editorial and copy boards. I celebrate this anniversary and look forward to *IJSWVE* continuing this important work.

Ogden Rogers, Ph.D., LICSW, ACSW

Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin-River Falls, USA

July 30, 2022, at 8:02 AM

When I checked my records, I was surprised to find I have been associated with the Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics since 2009. Throughout my involvement it's been a privilege to read the many contributions from professionals and students highly motivated to contribute to best practice and important debates. It's been especially encouraging to see that in recent times the Journal has expanded its readership and contributors beyond the USA and global North in response to the urgent issues facing the world today.

Stephanie Maria Petrie, Ph.D., C.Q.S.W.

University of Central Lancashire, United Kingdom

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July 31, 2022, at 5:55 PM

I think I have been associated with the IJSWVE almost since its inception, and I believe that I was the only non-USA member (I'm Canadian) for a few years. I retired from professional practice in 2015 but have maintained my link through the Journal. It has been a great experience connecting with so many people around the globe who all share an interest in ethical social work practice.

Alison MacDonald, Ph.D.

Retired, Canada

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August 1, 2022, at 5:24 PM

I met Steve while serving on the exam committee for ASWB. He was/is a force to be reckoned with as he decided that I needed to participate in the journal. My efforts to convince him that I wasn't interested, nor did I have the skill set to do fell on deaf ears. Every reason for my not participating was met with a reason for me to do so. When he agreed to offer me ongoing assistance if I would serve, I then said yes.

It has been a very interesting 20-year association with the journal. Steve, true to his promise, has continued to be a source of support and computer help whenever I called upon to do so. Thanks, Steve, for your honoring that promise as I do know you have/are involved in a myriad of projects.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to read manuscripts submitted to the journal. Many of them have been excellent and very thought-provoking. As a clinician with many years of experience, my own practice has been enriched by what I learned from my review of the manuscripts. It has been a very rewarding experience serving on the board and I am delighted that I agreed to do so.

Barbara L. Holzman, LCSW,  
Phoenix, AZ

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August 3, 2022, at 1:08 PM

When I joined the department of Sociology, Social Work and Criminal Justice, I was nervous, green, and intimidated by this new environment. I had only worked in the non-profit public sector and my longtime dream was to become a member of academia at PSU.

My impression, academia would be extremely exciting in which one was free and encouraged to explore, discuss, debate, and enjoy the camaraderie of fellow travelers (i.e., "*There are those who seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge; that is Curiosity.*" [Bernard of Clairvaux](#), the last of Dante's spiritual guides).

When I arrived at Pembroke State University (now the University of North Carolina at Pembroke), I was extremely excited ... my dreams had materialized. I was so native! I found an entirely different world from the one created in my imagination. I quickly realized I was a simpleton among giants, who were talented, very gifted, and ambitious. I discovered academia was not nirvana! It was not much different from other aspects of society; ambition many times became a driving force that belittled (in my

opinion) the idealistic world I that imagined. Many appeared to be focused on self and success, and often to the detriment of collegiality, cooperation, and an active concern for others.

But met Steve Marson and Sherry Edwards. Immediately, Steve and Sherry (both social workers by the way), took me under their wing and provided the calm, nurturing environment needed for potential success. I had opportunities to engage and build potential collaborations as well as learn my new world. I grew to know and appreciate many other talented individuals in my discipline (i.e., sociology) and it was through them, I became more confident, calm, and resolute in that I deserve to be here in this brave new world.

So, what about IJSWV&E? This was one vehicle which helped me appreciate the talent, sustaining values and desire to move to something better in service to the profession and society at large. It provided an opportunity as well as a resource; the journal provided the vehicle and opportunity to keep up, appreciate, and revel in the contributions of others to the field, discipline and to humanity.

I am fortunate and will always be proud of my minor association with *The International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*.

Ottis Murray, Ed.D.

University of North Carolina at Pembroke, USA

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August 5, 2022, at 8:58 AM

This has been a fascinating trip and one that has enriched my professional life. It has been fascinating to watch this grow and develop and how its filled a real need in the profession. Steve's leadership has been a vital ingredient in making it the success it is today.

John McNutt, Ph.D,

Professor Emeritus, University of Delaware

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August 18, 2022, at 11:39 AM

In the face of all the challenges that are confronting our world today, I am privileged and honored to serve on the manuscript review board of *The International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*. Our social work profession is needed now more than ever, and the increasing divisiveness, violence, incivility, and disregard for others that permeates our society also has a ripple effect on our profession. The complexities of the issues that we face as a global society will be best served by always remaining true to our profession's six core values, namely: Service, Social Justice, Dignity and worth of the person, Importance of human relationships, Integrity, and Competence. *The International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics* is a reminder to address issues of profound impact on us all using a delicate balance of great heart combined with great thought.

Nina Esaki, PhD, MSW, MBA  
Springfield College, USA

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August 18, 2022, at 5:05 PM

La réflexion éthique fonde la pratique des Assistants de Service Social. Depuis toujours, s'interroger, analyser, partager sont les moyens de donner du sens à notre pratique, de la guider.

Mon engagement tant auprès de l'ANAS (Association Nationale des Assistants de Service Social) qu'auprès des étudiants en travail social, stimule et enrichit ma réflexion.

Auparavant, je consultais peu la revue, je l'avoue. Mais après avoir intégré le Haut Conseil en Travail Social, développé les liens avec les instances internationales du travail social, cette opportunité de participer aux travaux de la Revue internationale des valeurs et de l'éthique du travail social a été pour moi un moyen de donner davantage de sens à mon engagement et à ma pratique.

Le travail social est fondé sur des valeurs trop souvent malmenées au profit d'objectifs chiffrés à atteindre (Nombre de contrat RSA, Durée moyenne de séjour...et bientôt SERAFIN). Aussi, promouvoir l'éclairage de l'IJSWVE en France est un enjeu important car il permet de promouvoir la réflexion sur les enjeux du travail social du point de vue de l'éthique et des valeurs.

Parfois trop centré sur le faire, les dispositifs, l'urgence, par manque de temps, souvent, nous négligeons la prise de recul et l'analyse.

L'IJSWVE nous permet ce temps: prendre une distance nécessaire avec des problématiques que nous connaissons, nous aussi, mais qui sont analysées dans d'autres contextes, d'autres temporalités mais toujours en s'appuyant sur les valeurs du travail social.

Ainsi, cet éclairage international nous permet d'envisager autrement notre pratique et d'élaborer des réponses aux questions suivantes :

Quel est le sens de notre pratique ?

Quelle société contribuons-nous à construire ?

Que défendons-nous ?

Céline LEMBERT

Administratrice de l'ANAS

Numéro ADEL: 64 AO 1026 9

Association Nationale des Assistants de Service Social

Translation from French

August 18, 2022, at 5:05 PM

Ethical reflection underpins the practice of Social Service Assistants.

Questioning, analyzing, and sharing have always been the means of giving meaning to our practice, of guiding it.

My involvement both with ANAS (National Association of Social Service Assistants) and with social work students stimulates and enriches my thinking. Previously, I hardly consulted the magazine, I admit. But after joining the Haut Conseil en Travail Social, developing links with international social work bodies, this opportunity to participate in the work of the *International Journal of Values and Ethics of Social Work* was for me a way of giving more meaning to my commitment and my practice.

Social work is based on values that are too often abused in favor of quantified objectives to be achieved (Number of RSA contracts, Average length of stay...and soon SERAFIN). Also, promoting the lighting of the IJSWVE in France is an important issue because it promotes reflection on the issues of social work from the point of view of ethics and values.

Sometimes too focused on doing, devices, urgency, for lack of time, we often neglect taking a step back and analysis.

The IJSWVE allows us this time: to take a necessary distance with issues that we know, too, but which are analyzed in other contexts, other temporalities but always based on the values of social work.

Thus, this international perspective allows us to consider our practice differently and to develop answers to the following questions:

What is the meaning of our practice?

What society are we helping to build?

What are we defending?

Celine LEMBERT

Administrator of ANAS

ADEL number: 64 AO 1026 9

National Association of Social Service Assistants

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September 8, 2022, at 3:01 PM

Hi Steve,

It was around 8 years ago that I started copy editing for the journal. This was concurrent with the beginning of my graduate studies and was a great opportunity for me to learn more about academic writing. As I started editing, I quickly became interested in the subjects of the manuscripts, which often related closely to the methods in my academic discipline. Since that time, the journal has inspired me to pursue meaningful research projects that have real-world applications. I am so grateful for my experience, and excited to see what happens over the next 20 years.

Samantha Jo Cosgrove, PhD

Assistant Professor

Department of Technical Communication

University of North Texas

November 6, 2022, at 6:58 AM

It was an honour for me to be welcomed by the IJSWVE editorial board almost five years ago, after having considered the journal as a point of reference for the debate on social work ethics and values from all over the world. It is this ample approach that is special and appreciated. In becoming part of the board, I had the chance to appreciate the care, the



openness and frankness of the debate that was prompted by the editor in chief in some particular occasion, thus nurturing sharing and sense of community.

With gratitude, I wish a successful journey of the journal

Teresa Bertotti, Ph.D.

Social Work, University of Trento Italy

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November 6, 2022 at 11:21 AM

I am proud to say that in all my interactions with the *International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics* (and its predecessor), the Journal has lived up to the values that the profession of social work espouses.

- Integrity: Ensuring transparent, honest, and fair reviews of manuscripts submitted for publication.
- Accessibility: Offering free access to journal articles.
- Social justice: Providing support to authors whose first language is not English to ensure that their submissions can be considered on equal footing and encouraging exploration of how to address social injustices in all their forms.
- Human relationships: Facilitated important discussions among board members to consider key policy issues, trusting the power of the group to determine the best path forward for the journal.
- Competence: Ensuring that people with relevant knowledge and experience review particular manuscripts and maintaining a high level of scholarship.
- Dignity and worth of the person: Instilling policies that promote respect for the dignity and worth of all people, including the language and perspectives conveyed throughout the journal.

I truly look forward to the future of this journal, including continued creative explorations of ethical theory and practice.

Allan Barsky, JD, MSW, PhD

Professor, Florida Atlantic University

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November 6, 2022, at 9:02 PM

It is with pride and pleasure to have served on the Editorial Board of *The International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics* since 2007 and to have worked with such a committed and accomplished group of colleagues. The journal has established itself as a premier resource for social workers. The increase in the scope and variability of manuscripts published over the years is reflective of the journal's high caliber, growth, distinction, sustainability, and success!

Marian S. Harris, PhD, LICSW, ACSW  
University of Washington Tacoma, USA

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November 8, 2022, 11:45 AM

Having served as an Editorial Board member for more than half the journal's life, I appreciate the scholarship, connection with accomplished co-editors, and the opportunity to promote the career-long study of social work ethics and values. The fact that Steve Marson, one of the founding co-editors, is North Carolina-based enhanced my excitement about participating. The social work profession has an unprecedented opportunity to help our world acknowledge stark differences and maintain civility especially when we do not, will not, and cannot agree on specific positions. Ethics is an inherent component of social work practice, and I am grateful for the privilege of service.

Ravita T. Omabu Okafor, MSW, LCSW, North Carolina, USA

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## 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Comments from the Publisher

Congratulations to the founders and people that have worked to support the International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics. Happy 20th anniversary.

Social work has largely been built by volunteers who have shared their time and expertise in the interests of strengthening the profession locally, regionally and globally. Without such commitment there would not be an international social work profession. No-one else, no other body has acted or resourced the building of this worldwide profession, yet it is done because of significant contributions such as this Journal.

Social work ethics and values are now global, and each one of us in the profession can observe a practice setting in a country, culture and context, far from our own and say:

'I know what a social worker is doing. She is supporting self-determination. Now she is recognising the strengths of others and examining how a person's relationships support or hinder them. Now she is advocating for her employing service to become an environment that respects the dignity, rights and responsibilities of everyone'.

It is the values and ethics that are the glue that binds the profession. For many, if not all of us, they are a guide that helps us through complex challenges. They are more valuable than any single theory or model, as our profession's values and ethics can be used as lens for understanding all the circumstances we encounter.

So, thank you to all who have contributed to the existence of this journal. It is an important place for the profession to test ethical ideas, a place to examine if and how the profession's principles need to be amended or updated in this fast-changing world. Further, the Journal acts a reminder to all readers that social work is a principle-led profession.

Bravo to the editors, reviewers and contributors, happy 20th anniversary and IFSW looks forward to working with you in the decades to come.

Rory Truell, IFSW Secretary-General

## Commentary from Russia/Ukraine

DOI: [10.55521/10-020-102](https://doi.org/10.55521/10-020-102)

Author: Anonymous

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Editors' Note: Following is an anonymous commentary written by a friend of our journal. Anonymity is required as a safeguard for this person. Because of the political situation, it is not safe to include any names or gender identification. The author is a professor of human services in Russia but is Ukrainian. The person's family lives in Kiev and it is an emotionally troubling time for all of them. This commentary represents the first of two parts. The second half will be published in our next issue.

By Stephen M. Marson, Ph.D., Editor and Kathleen Hoffman, Board Member

### Angelina <sup>1</sup>

I fell in love with her immediately and with all my heart. It's impossible not to love her. If you knew her, you would understand – Angelina is smart, beautiful, talented, mischievous, active, resourceful, kind, caring – this is all about her, and at the same time, this is not all that can be said about how wonderful she is. This is someone who is just perfection itself, and do not think that this is flattery or exaggeration, no! This is the absolute truth. And Angelina is very dear to me. Let me explain why.

We met way back in our now-distant Soviet childhood. My dad and I came to Kyiv when I was seven years old, and I was immediately introduced

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<sup>1</sup> Hero names have been changed for security reasons

to this big friendly family: there were many generations, along with brothers and sisters. For a while I didn't get them straight, and I couldn't call everyone by name for some time. But I remembered Angelina right away. I remember how on a sunny June day we walked along Khreshchatyk, the central street in Kyiv. We held hands, two very small girls with bows in their hair, wearing beautiful silk dresses.

When they bought us ice cream (many Ukrainians remember what delicious ice cream they sold on Khreshchatyk: popsicles, varied scoops in all their glory, creme brulees), I looked at the sellers and pointed with my finger at the kind of ice cream I wanted. Angelina was willing to help, but she had large horn-rimmed glasses with thick lenses perched on her nose, and she could not immediately see what kind of ice cream they were selling. And so, having all stood in line, our adults bought us our chosen ice cream, and soon we were walking, completely happy, along the huge Khreshchatyk. People smiled at us, eating our popsicles on sticks. As I was walking next to her, I felt haunted by her glasses. It seemed to me that she needed help and protection, and I was ready to take care of her, help her. Still, as I walked beside her I couldn't understand: why would such a cheerful and beautiful little girl have these glasses, like my grandmother? It's seemed so unfair!

During the first month that we knew each other, we found lots of interesting things to do. We rode the elevators in neighboring buildings, and ran away from the yard to a phone booth – where we busily called various emergency services, excitedly describing imaginary accidents or fires nearby. Sometimes we called numbers at random, and even spending two kopecks on each call, just to talk to anyone who would pick up the phone. I remember once a big, rather frightening man chased after us when he realized what we were doing while we were occupying a telephone booth for so long. We raced out to a crowded avenue, and he was unable to nab us and perhaps punish us in front of people. All he could do was shake a finger at us before he turned around and left. Undeterred, we laughed heartily at his heaviness and clumsiness – having great fun after our narrow escape. Then we chased pigeons, climbed onto the roof through the door in the attic of a nine-story building, made gloves out of glue by smearing it on our hands

and letting it dry before removing the dried film, and catching cats on the street. We defied orders not to leave the yard and ran away to ride the subway. There was no end of the entertainment and fun Angelina came up with, day after day.

After my dad and I left for our home, in the Tambov region, I wrote letters to her. I wrote about my life, about school, about the weather we had, what interesting things happened, and how I missed her. When my mother, coming to visit my grandmother's house, where I mostly lived by then, would bring a letter from Angelina back at home, those were the happiest days. I opened her letters, first read each aloud to all the adults: grandma, grandpa, mom and dad, if he was also with us, and not at work, and they all listened attentively, smiled and sent greetings to Kyiv. And then, after lunch and dinner on those days, when I usually sat down to draw, I took her letter and began to reread it to myself, thinking about what I would write in response. In the summer, I was looking forward to my dad being freed from work for another vacation, so together with him we would go to Kyiv to visit my family. Several years passed, during which we became even closer to Angelina. And then her brother Bogdan was born, my cousin and my pride, who would become a talented musician who plays the clarinet and saxophone, writes music, and is a graduate of Kyiv Conservatory.

But not everything was smooth. Angelina had serious problems with her stepfather, who abused alcohol and sexually harassed her from an early age. This man was my own uncle, my father's brother and Bogdan's father. We only found out about this when Angelina became a teenager and informed her mother about what was happening. Then her stepfather began to beat her, apparently in retaliation for the fact that she had told her mother about everything. In the end, Angelina's mother drove him away in disgrace, breaking the marriage ties with this man.

But no one knows that after that I also kicked him out when he came to live with my father, citing the fact that he still had nowhere to stay. I write about it for the first time, in this article. My Kyiv family does not know what I told my parents: "Either he (this abusive uncle) or me. And if he doesn't get out of here immediately, then I'll leave the house." I told them what had

happened during those years, that he harassed not only Angelina, but also me. My father took him to their sister, my aunt, in the village. He lived there for a time, until he finally committed suicide by throwing himself under a train. Yes, I am willing to accept my part in this, but I could not do otherwise. I had worried about Angelina all these years, and yes, I wanted to take revenge on him, because it was very wrong to mistreat those who are weaker than you and are unable to answer you. I ask God to forgive me for my decision. In each letter, I tried to support Angelina and Bogdan, to write how much I missed them, but I thought that I could not help them at a distance. There seemed no way to protect her from her stepfather, a professional boxer who no doubt could have destroyed her health and even her life with one blow. Of course I was worried about Bogdan, too, who I felt about as a brother.

There was another disturbing moment. Both Angelina and I are “moon children”<sup>2</sup>, a circumstance that did even more to unite us, but also worried me. Once, when I once again came to visit Kyiv, Aunt Tanya, Angelina's mother, asked me to look after her because she had recently discovered her daughter on the balcony of her bedroom (their apartment in Obolon was located on the ninth floor). In a state of lunar sleep, she had climbed partly over the balcony to the ledge above the street. Aunt Tanya by some miracle at that very moment went into bedroom and saw that Angelina was standing on the ledge with one foot and was already moving her other foot there.

Her eyes were closed; she was truly asleep. Aunt Tanya was frightened, but she had the wisdom not to wake her up. Instead, she caught her by one leg and dragged her safely back onto the balcony.

Of course when I arrived I understood what Aunt Tanya was talking about, because from childhood I myself had suffered from moon sickness, and walked at night. Once my dad brought me back from the entrance, where I had opened the door and gone out in my nightgown, barefoot, in

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<sup>2</sup> Suffered from somnambulism in childhood and adolescence

20-degree frost. In another case, in a state of lunar sleep, with my eyes closed, I ironed my school uniform with a hot iron and went to bed in it, having oddly though to turn off the iron first. There were many other similar instances, although I think that many of them were never passed along fully to me. This was why my parents fell asleep only after I did, and locked the front door from the inside with a key which was then hidden.

And so, in my teens, when I once again came to Kyiv to visit, I heard from Aunt Tanya that Angelina also walked in her sleep. It really shocked me because the condition is rare. We slept together in her bedroom, where the balcony was located. We talked and listened to music, played cards, told jokes to each other, burned candles, ate Kyiv cake - it was pure happiness! I tried to never take my eyes off her, although I knew that in two weeks I would have to leave, and I wouldn't see her for another whole year. In that time, who knew what could happen? When it came time to go to bed, I said that I was too cold to sleep with the door to the balcony open, although it was July and actually very hot. But I looked at her – also seeing the full moon in the starry sky, and realized what it could mean for both of us. I was very worried that while I was sleeping, she would start walking in her sleep and fall off the balcony. I was responsible for her, not only because my aunt had trusted me but because I was older. The trick had an effect - Angelina closed the door to the balcony, covered me with a blanket and began to warm me, thinking that I was cold, clinging to me with her whole body.

In the morning I woke up realizing that I really was cold. My bedmate had wrapped herself in the blanket, completely pulling it off me, and her heels rested on the pillow next to me, not far from my nose. I tickled them, it was simply impossible to resist. She jumped up, and, realizing what was happening, immediately burst into laughter. The two of us woke everyone up that morning, and laughed at it all day!

## Chernobyl

So the years passed, and Angelina and I grew up. When I was in the 10th grade of a Soviet school, I remember how in May I stood at the window of



my classroom and looked at the snow. What? Snow in the month of May? When gardens grow and tulips and lilacs bloom? We were shocked. Teachers and students, transfixed at the windows, stared in complete silence and total fascination at the snow covering everything with large white flakes, enveloping the green grass that was already bordered with blossoming dandelions, daisies, flower beds and even asters. We had come to school in dresses and light summer shoes. In the Tambov region in May, at the end of the school year, it was about 20-25 degrees, and no one had expected to return from school ankle-deep in snow.

When I came home, my feet were cold and wet, since because of the light summer shoes we walked home almost barefoot in the snow. On television they reported about some kind of accident that had occurred in one of the districts close to Kyiv. I knew that my family lived in Kyiv, and since there was no accident reported there, I didn't worry too much. Well, we asked ourselves, do you think that some kind of factory or plant exploded, or is on fire? At the time, we did not yet know the significance of an accident at a nuclear power plant.

That day my mother came home from work very early. She was always anxious to make sure that I did not get sick with another disease, since I had had problems with rheumatism since childhood. As always, we had a good day, drank delicious Indian tea with sweets and halva at night and went to bed.

But during the night the doorbell rang, and there were several calls. I opened my eyes and looked into the darkness. My room was illuminated at night only by that notorious moon, which sometimes did not allow me to sleep peacefully at night. But not this time. The rain had not stopped yet, and the weather remained cold and overcast with clouds hiding the moon. Do you know the feeling when at night you are suddenly awakened by a loud knock on the door or a bell, and you understand that it is someone from outside is knocking or calling? You don't really understand what's going on, but you already know it's not good. My heart was pounding so hard it felt like it was going to jump out of my chest. Mom ran to the door and asked: "Who is there?" My breathing stopped. "Open up! An urgent telegram for

you!" I heard my mother fiddling with the lock to open the door, and then she turned on the light to read the text of the telegram. Noticing that I was no longer sleeping, she walked through the living room to my bedroom. "Sveta," she said quietly, "Angelina will arrive tomorrow." I asked for clarification. "Which one of them will come?" And my mother answered: "Angelina from Kyiv."

It was so unexpected that I immediately thought that something unusual and very bad had happened. I felt a strong premonition. Of course, I was always worried about her, a kind of worry that hovered in my subconscious. I still can't explain it; either the young woman who was as close as a sister to me always had a tendency to be mischievous and often took risks, or I already guessed about the inclinations of her stepfather and uncle. Or perhaps what I felt was the ability through a connection that I have to other living beings that opens an understand about where I am and where I need to go to be in the right place at the right time.

The morning, I went to my grandmother in the city. My mother and father lived in an urban-type settlement, and my grandparents, my mother's mother and father, lived in the city, 10 kilometers from us. I arrived at her place at noon Moscow time, and my mother went to meet the train from Moscow to the city station. Our city had no direct connection with Kyiv – we always traveled there via Moscow or via Voronezh. Angelina was traveling from Kyiv via Moscow.

Two hours later the doorbell rang. When I opened the door, Angelina was standing on the threshold, with my mom and dad. She and I hugged tightly and spent the next hour telling each other about everything that happened to us during the time we had been apart. We had a delicious dinner, and then had our tea. The adults in the hall turned on the TV. Angelina was sitting at a large table in my favorite place, where I drew and read books in the evenings. I was sitting on a large bed with a soft feather mattress, next to my grandmother, and my mother was sitting on the sofa with my father. I liked being with my grandfather, who went to a sanatorium because he was disabled. All his life he worked at a construction site as a foreman, building entire micro districts, and he was well known in

the city and respected. So I expected a pleasant evening with my family, solving crossword puzzles, board games and drinking tea together.

News was on TV, and then I heard that they were talking about Kyiv and the Kyiv region. We all froze and stared at the screen. We saw people running about in funny gas masks, with everything around clouded in smoke, and on the faces of men there was determination and concern. They were described as heroes who had saved people. I felt no surprise, because of course such people were brave. But then across the television screen came big trucks, and buses carrying crowds of people. They were stopped at some checkpoints, and for some reason people in white overalls were washing them with water from hoses. Now it felt strange – we had never seen such overalls before. Gradually, we all began to understand that something serious was happening.

Announcers in worried and serious voices reported that an explosion had occurred, and the resulting fire had not yet been extinguished. But after all, in the end, all fires are eventually extinguished, right? After the announcers finished speaking, the view of the screen turned to a large military helicopter. It flew over some large structure, from which the smoke was issuing, intending to dump water there and put out the fire. But suddenly I was seeing the helicopter blades become soft and deformed while in flight, above a large funnel that was producing the smoke. The helicopter tilted onto its side and collapsed right into the threatening funnel.

Someone screamed. It was my grandmother. She had survived the war fought when she was a teenager, when they were often bombed. A two-meter hole was dug near her house, and she jumped into it to hide from shells flying from the sky. She had described her experiences, including time spent in the shelter, when she raised her eyes to the sky, covered her ears with her hands and prayed. It helped keep her from going crazy. Sometimes she saw the stars and prayed to God while looking at them. And now, when something inexplicable happened, she cried out and said: “What a passion, Lord!”

I couldn't believe my eyes: the helicopter's blades had become soft like ribbons, they just drooped limply down, and then the helicopter fell! It just couldn't be, because it doesn't happen, you know? It suddenly dawned on me that something really terrible was going on. Not something that can scare you a bit when other people behave recklessly, not something that can change your plans for the future, and not even something that you or your family can somehow suffer from. No. It was a different situation – when the life of an entire country or people is in question. And it's just not clear: what's next? For the first time, we were faced with something that could forever change not only the lives of our family, but the lives of all the families we knew and even those who were not familiar to us. It was some kind of evil, from which emanated death and hell. I thought about all this at that moment and looked at my long-beloved Angelina. She sat silently at the table and carefully watched the news on TV. And I sat and thought: “God, what a blessing that she is here with me, safe! And even if something terrible happens in Kyiv, and she has nowhere else to go, she will stay here and live with me.”

Schools announced closings, and it was explained to us what an atom is, that it is dangerous, and shockingly, that the snow that fell in May was radioactive. We learned that the people who rushed in driving those emergency vehicles to put out the fire, and even those who were filming reports about the ongoing accident, were irradiated and now they were waiting for a painful death from radiation sickness. There was simply no cure for such a sickness. We considered them heroes because they had put out the fire, saving people at the cost of their own lives. We also learned that it would be impossible to live in the area where the nuclear power plant accident occurred for 200 years. It was a new reality that forever changed the face of the whole world and our lives.

(to be continued)

# Editorial: The National Clinical Social Work Examination - ASWB

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Clinical social workers are the largest licensed group of independent mental health psychotherapists in the country with over 315,000 LCSWs (Licensed Clinical Social Workers, see: <https://www.clinicalsocialworkassociation.org/Announcements>). All licensed clinical social workers must have a Master of Social Work degree; complete two-three years of supervised clinical practice experience; and subsequently pass the national clinical social work examination to become licensed in a given state and be qualified to practice independently. The importance of the national examination cannot be overestimated in terms of reaching independent mental health practice, which includes being able to assess and diagnose, provide treatment, and to bill 3<sup>rd</sup> party payors for psychotherapy services. Nonetheless, there has been some controversy about the use of the clinical examination in its current form.

The clinical examination was created in 1950 by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB, formerly AASWB); thereafter, states gradually began adopting clinical social work licensure which included requiring a clinical examination; all states had clinical social work licensure by 2004. Problems arose as states developed varying standards for supervised

practice. Educational standards shifted as well once schools of social work began offering online Master of Social Work programs. As a result of these disparate standards, reciprocity across states became more difficult. The 51 US jurisdictions created licensure laws and boards of social work with their own standards and rules. Nonetheless, the one constant for clinical social workers was the clinical examination, which was used nationally.

In July of 2022, ASWB issued a report about the pass rates for the clinical examination (and the other three levels of national examination) based on data from 2011-2021. The demographic data in this report was disturbing. See this data here: [2022 ASWB Exam Pass Rate Analysis for Social Work Licensing Exams](#). The data in these reports revealed significant demographic disparities in the ASWB exam pass rates by race, age, gender and whether English is a second language.

The reaction to this report has been swift and raucous. Clinical social workers have reacted with widespread condemnation of ASWB for withholding information about the pass rates and/or for appearing to be indifferent to the way that the clinical exam has yielded these disparate pass rates for BIPOC, older clinical social workers and those for whom English is a second language. Many of those who condemn the clinical examination disparities have called for the elimination of the examination. The Clinical Social Work Association (CSWA) does not agree with this position wholeheartedly. Having a national examination is essential to being a recognized mental health profession and eliminating it would undermine the recognition of clinical social work as an established and credentialed profession.

ASWB seems to have responded to the criticisms of the clinical examination pass rates and has issued a statement addressing their intent to improve the examination so that pass rates are more at parity across all groups. Their remarks are summarized here:

- “Continuing to evaluate all aspects of the licensing exam development process, beginning with an in-depth review of item generation, and then implementing a comprehensive, user-centered investigation of test-takers’ experiences.

- Offering a collection of free resources designed for social work educators to help them understand the exams and candidate performance so they can better prepare their students for the exams and to increase access to exam resources.
- Bringing a greater diversity of voices into the exam creation process through the Social Work Workforce Coalition.
- Hosting community input sessions to expand the range of perspectives involved in the creation of the next iteration of the exams.”

ASWB, which has new leadership as of 2022, should be given an opportunity to correct the inherent inequities exposed in the ASWB Clinical Examination process. Social Workers also have the right to hold ASWB responsible for these efforts and we as a profession must hold one another accountable to ensure adequate clinical preparation for the examination itself and to ensure an equitable exam experience that yields qualified clinical social workers.

We would be interested in your comments. Please send them to [wgroshong@clinicalsocialworkassociation.org](mailto:wgroshong@clinicalsocialworkassociation.org) and we will publish your comments in our next issue.

# Editorial: Constructing a Globalized Society Without Gender Binaries and Comprehending Gender Variant Clients' Pronouns

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Within the past several years, pronoun alternatives to the binary she/her and he/him have come to light in mainstream culture, yet many remain dumbfounded regarding the purpose, origin, and nuances of such alternatives. Operating in queer theory, social constructionism, and gender based oppression frameworks, social workers can piece together how our globalized society has reached a critical point in the institutional fight against stratifying gender binaries. Since the proliferation of gender binaries and oppressive policies is associated with western colonial legacies, social workers should heed the moral imperative to counteract binary ramifications through adaptive language and institutional efforts. Understanding the intricacies of how the gender binary was socially constructed can illuminate the undertaking of rebuilding a collective consciousness free from gender based hierarchy specifically targeting the transgender and genderqueer communities.



## Imagining a World Without Gender Binaries

As a first step of rebuilding gender variant inclusive societies we will employ a classroom tool introduced by my mentor and friend, Dr. Steve Marson, wherein we ask ourselves to imagine a world free from gender roles or in this case, the gender binary. It turns out we need not look very far into our imagination because a myriad of indigenous cultures around the world incorporate a gender spectrum into their language, norms, and values. Social workers are ethically obligated to maintain cultural competency which includes aspects of diversity related to gender expression. Across cultures subscribing to restrictive gender binaries we still find incongruences between gender roles and expression, contributing to the theory of social constructionism as opposed to biologically determined sex/gender. An intersectional lens enables us to consider how much of our global gender variance was wiped out by the colonial proliferation of eurocentric norms through targeted physical and institutional violence against those with liberated sexual and gendered expression due to their conflation with 'savage' cultures (Milanović, 2017). In the western world, seemingly new pronoun nomenclature is a reactionary development to global sexual liberation, however this cultural tool has existed in many indigenous ancestral worlds dating back to long before colonists began documenting western history. A socially constructed world without gender variation is, in comparison, more of a convoluted fantasy than the recent reclamation of language for gender expressive freedom.

## Pre-Colonial Legacy of Gender Identity in India

India, my own ancestral home, depicts a rich history of gender variance marred by colonial violence and sheds light on how a relatively simple change in language can go a long way to make clients and peers feel understood. "Koti " is a Sanskrit term which goes beyond the traditional binary to encompass several gender identities such as hijra, zenana, jogin,

siva-sati, and kada-catla koti. The meaning of these titles can be distinguished through a hierarchical structure based on a person's expression of religion, family patterns, idealized asexuality, physical appearance, and the self-perceived significance of an individual's corporeal form (Milanović, 2017). India's highly nuanced understanding of gender variance includes the cultural tools of language as well as social capital enabling all members across the gender spectrum to have a position in their societal structure. The liberated social context of gender expression in India was completely reorganized following the British imperial take-over which criminalized deviances from western norms of sexual acts introduced in 1872 through Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that was only repealed in 2018 (McNamara, 2018). Post-colonial India balances local and western ideals as the nation still mediates the physical and cultural consequences of imperialism.

### Internalized Shame as Motivation for Social Control

Using India as an example we can see how unadulterated gender expression can be transformed into explicit binaries through enforcing mechanisms of social control- although it once was liberated, the country is now facing similar controversy regarding LGBTQ+ issues to what we see in the western world. Due to its roots in body-based oppression, transphobia encompasses intersections of racism, settler colonialism, ableism, sanism, and ageism (MacKinnon & Coulombe, 2021). Transphobia and homophobia impede our ability to understand a client's self-actualized gender and sexuality. Sexual expression is reproduced through internalized shame resulting in a false consciousness holding everyone back regardless of our individual identities. In an effort to reduce social stigma surrounding gender variance, we must seek to understand those who normalize transphobic vigilantism and the motivations of the perpetrators. Although contemporary science and grammar renunciate the logic of a gender binary, much of the world holds theologically and culturally ordained gender roles (Baron, 2021). This

contributes to the dangerous belief that 'deviant' lives are deserving of contempt and violation of fundamental rights. In 2022, three Nigerians were convicted of homosexuality and now face stoning as a punishment of social control with the purpose of perpetuating shame and fear (Clark, 2022). Contrary to our false consciousness, gender unites us all as it is a social construction experienced across all dividing lines and even oppresses those who identify as cis men and women. By remaining curious about a client's experiences with gender, we are choosing to cohere a community founded on self-compassion rather than internalized shame.

## Hierarchy of Gender Identities

Studies examining the innate human desire to categorize and discriminate against those in our "out-groups" find that socially constructed hierarchies are from our brain's passive self-protection (Arnold, Mayo & Dong, 2021). However, using violence to extinguish minoritized people should be viewed as dangerous socially replicated vigilantism. In the United States, transgender individuals comprise only an estimated 0.6% of the population which excludes those 'in the closet' or who subscribe to a different gender non-conforming identity but still face transphobia (Baron, 2021). When a gender non-conforming person expresses gendered characteristics that do not align with a gender binary, they become a more likely target for harassment, beginning with the simple act of misgendering or disrespecting personal identifiers. When we consider how our social adherence to a gender binary predisposes transgender people to poverty, attempted suicide, and healthcare avoidance, the ethical mandate for social workers to legitimize a client's self-actualized identity becomes salient (MacKinnon & Coulombe, 2021).

Globally, contempt is not spread evenly across the entire LGBTQ+ community as the trans community specifically faces higher rates of violence (McNamara, 2018). Even within the LGBTQ+ community in-group members enforce their own hierarchies, pitting identities against each other

based on internalized heteropatriarchal biases. Contrasting models of gender hierarchy can be forced to co-exist in a given cultural space because subcultures may amalgamate with globalized or westernized cultures, causing greater difficulty for gender non-conforming people in navigating which spaces respect their authentic expression. We can construct a local cultural environment resembling a globalized conception of gender variance starting with the simple act of remaining curious about gender identities and corresponding pronouns we may not be familiar with. This endeavor goes hand in hand with being culturally competent regarding the heteropatriarchal and colonist legacy of the gender binary across the globe, such as the legal and linguistic history of gender variance in India.

### Linguistics as it Relates to Gender

Charles Dawson once stated that, "Language is the gateway to the human world...Language is far older than civilization," (Dawson, 1932). Language is older than civilization because its development catalyzed human connection and innovation. Because of the inherent power of language, we are ethically encouraged to conscientiously use our words to amplify respect towards the institutionally powerless rather than divide. In American history, and globally, the hegemonic interpretation of language was used to justify voter suppression based on the constitutional use of he/him (Baron, 2021). Language is highly adaptive as well as informative of our society. For example, the plural they/them was not added to the English language until the 9th century (Baron, 2021). The practice of creating new words and rewriting their meanings over time is essential to the development of culture. As human society evolves, the tools we use to interact with each other must also reflect this growth.

In western civilized history, nomenclature for people deviating from gender norms was initially pathologized as "Gender Identity Disorder," (Burdge, 2007). The World Health Organization still includes transsexuality and transgenderedness under mental illnesses, fortifying the argument

that despite recent visibility of the trans community, we still lack a world void of gender binaries (Milanović, 2017). The nature of social work calls for practitioners to directly act against the history of pathologizing queerness. For example, the field of psychology's use of the gender identity disorder diagnosis as a way to treat homosexuality with gender reassignment (Burdge, 2007). Disability justice frameworks assert, "prejudice against our differences in function and ability are predicated on how a society is organized to accommodate these individuals, not innate pathology,"(Baron, 2021). Discomfort with clinicians stemming from discriminatory stereotypes often prevent queer and gender non-conforming individuals from accessing care, leading to worse health outcomes compared to cis-heterosexuals and an increased likelihood of non-compliance. Therefore, it is imperative that social workers reorganize their practices to be culturally competent about, and radically accepting of, the gender non-conforming community.

## Conclusion

From an institutional or macro perspective, recent policy changes highlight how diversity and inter-relational inclusivity cannot be conflated as the implemented all-gender bathrooms and email signatures with pronoun preferences do not enable people to actively engage against gender-based assumptions. The "add diversity and stir," model lets many marginalized people fall through the cracks. In order for minorities to experience inter-relational safety, an institution's culture requires normative language and interactive changes rather than mere policy changes. These changes could resemble a deeper understanding of how to use she/they, he/they, or they/them pronouns which has received more cultural resistance than switching between binary pronouns.

Self definition is a pillar of social work ethics and values, protecting our clients from malpractice and bolstering their confidence as they step into a society not previously designed for them. With the purpose of navigating

professionalism, social workers should introspectively compare their authentic self with culturally prevalent gender stereotypes to further comprehend what their gender variant clients may be experiencing. Even if not queer identifying, our clients may be “gender murkey,” or questioning the way their gender is perceived and can be empowered with language to explore emerging socially constructed views of gender.

We would be interested in your comments. Please send them to [mathew.167@osu.edu](mailto:mathew.167@osu.edu) and we will publish your comments in our next issue.

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# Editorial: Open Access – An Ethical Alternative to Use of Impact Factor When Making Decisions About Journal Selection

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In 2020, Dr. Stephen Marson, the Editor of the Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, invited readers to express their views about the use of impact factor (IF) for promotion and tenure decisions. In his editorial on the use of IF, Marson (2020) concluded that the IF is such a weak measure of scholarly impact that it is unethical to employ it in decision-making. He criticized both the reliability and validity of the IF based on his own analysis as well as the empirical work done by Greenwood (2007). Marson (2020) concluded that universities that use IF in promotion and tenure decisions are subject to legal liability given that linkage of this metric to actual professional impact.

Despite the concerns raised, use of IF is still widely encouraged for faculty making publication choices (McKiernan et al., 2019). Citations of papers are greater in high-IF journals, perhaps because they are more often purchased by libraries, and are therefore more readily available to researchers, than low-IF journals. Having their work cited is important to faculty as they aim to boost their h-index, a measure devised in 2005, to



indicate scholars' impact and productivity (Hirsch, 2005). H-index is calculated using faculties' most cited papers and the number of citations that they have received in other publications. The h-index is not universally accepted without criticism (Bornmann et al., 2008) but is widely used in important and career-determining ways, with particularly important consequences for emerging scholars.

H-index correlates with success indicators such as winning the Nobel Prize, being accepted for research fellowships, and holding positions at top universities (Bornmann & Daniel, 2007). Tokar et al. (2012) argue that h-index is useful for comparing overall professional impact between faculty in the same or similar fields. Additionally, h-index is used in faculty hiring decisions to assess future scholarship potential as h-indexes should increase linearly over time. Thus, getting articles published in journals that yield a high number of citations is a priority for faculty as their h-index is an important metric used to assess their current and future productivity and influence within the academy. "Publish or perish," coined in 1932 (Coolidge, 1932), is still a harsh reality and way of life for today's faculty. Unfortunately, the pressure to publish can give rise to unethical research practices including salami slicing, plagiarism, duplicate publication, fraud, ghost authors, etc. (Rawat & Meena, 2014).

Into this mix has come the potential of open access as a means of increasing visibility; open access journals publish articles without a subscription barrier so anyone can access them. Such journals serve as an important outlet for faculty who want to increase their h-index as empirical data indicates that open access journals have significantly more citations overall compared to non-open access journals. In a landmark study conducted more than two decades ago, Lawrence (2001) found that, in computer science and related fields, the mean number of citations of non-open access articles is 2.74 while the mean number of citations of open access articles is 7.03, a disparity attributable to enhanced accessibility. A more recent study by Chua et al. (2017), encompassing multiple disciplines, found that open access journals have significantly more citations overall

compared to those that are non-open access (median 15.5 vs 12,  $p=0.039$ ), supporting the original work of Lawrence (2001). Interesting, however, was that IF did not correlate with citation frequency for open access journals in the Chua et al. study (2017). In contrast, IF did show moderate correlation with the number of citations for articles published in non-open access journals. Based on their empirical analysis, Chua et al. (2017) advised faculty to publish in open access journals, only considering those with high IFs when choosing to submit to non-open access journals.

Free online availability facilitates access in many ways and offers substantial benefits to science and society. The advent of open access publishing has allowed for unrestricted and rapid knowledge dissemination. For example, Lee and Haupt (2021) found that journals increased their open access publications, especially about research pertaining to COVID-19, during the pandemic. For researchers, open access dramatically reduces the hassle of obtaining permission to view the full text and dramatically extends the reach of journals beyond researchers in Western countries with well-funded libraries, to researchers working in low- and middle-income countries, and to people who are not researchers at all (Wyatt, 2019).

Dramatically expanding the reach of articles, through open access, beyond academics/researchers and to countries with fewer economic resources is consistent with the ethical mandate of the social work profession (NASW, 2018) and helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Having articles sit behind a paywall limits accessibility to those with institutional access and inhibits using the research to make continuing quality improvement in a timely manner.

While open access generates higher citation levels, use by faculty researchers to increase their h-indexes is not without ethical challenges. Beall (2016) highlights that the existence of 'predatory publishers' exploits faculty desire to get their research reviewed quickly and make it more accessible through open access. Unfortunately, individuals and companies use open access solicitations and venues to defraud authors and readers by

promising reputable publishing platforms but delivering poor quality, non-peer reviewed work. Predatory journals frequently have imaginary editorial boards, require substantial author payments, and are unclear about ownership of material and publication venues. Emerging scholars who feel the most pressure to publish and may be naïve to sound publication practices may be at increased risk for these unethical ‘pay to play’ practices. Unfortunately, the existence of predatory publishers undermines a legitimate trend toward open access by promulgating poor quality articles and studies, often published on temporary sites solely as a way to generate revenue from those pressured to publish.

Publication in open access journals should be considered by scholars who want to increase the impact of their work, to either assist with tenure and promotion or reach a broader audience. While open access journals also have IFs, these metrics are less relevant as they are not significantly related to citations. However, scholars choosing open access publication need to be discerning given the predatory practices mentioned. Faculty receiving email solicitations about open access opportunities should be wary, especially if they are unprofessional or contain grammatical errors. Faculty should choose to publish in known journals, seeking consultation from colleagues when writing for new venues or suspecting predatory practices.

Prior to the widespread use of the internet, IF served an important function as an indicator of quality. However, in an era where societal impact is driven by ‘influencers’ who use highly accessible online content to affect norms and attitudes, the saliency of the IF metric now appears artificial. The academy must consider changes in the ways in which people obtain and use information. While most scholars support making news and data more accessible, there appears to be some hesitancy to reexamine how impact is defined. Open access publication provides a means by which faculty can become ‘scholarly influencers’ independent of IF, with access to a larger audience and the power that comes with swaying the views of more readers who can significantly affect their chosen fields.

# Is Working with the Taliban Ethical?

DOI: [10.55521/10-020-106](https://doi.org/10.55521/10-020-106)

Rory Truell, IFSW Secretary-General

Truell, R. (2023). Is Working with the Taliban Ethical? *International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, 20(1), 44-51. <https://doi.org/10.55521/10-020-106>

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## Introduction

In February this year, IFSW visited Afghanistan at the request of the Afghanistan Organisation for Social Work. The visit coincided with global condemnation of the Taliban government's decision to temporarily ban girls and women from middle and higher education. In the weeks before the visit several large INGOs withdrew from the country, and during the time of the visit, the UN Deputy Secretary-General publicly announced that she did not like the Taliban and would separately hold private talks with the UN Security Council which potentially would increase the global sanctions against the country.

Judging from a few social media comments written by activists in the broader professional networks, the IFSW visit was seen by some as a reinforcement of the Taliban government's gender discrimination. The individuals further argued that no 'real social work' could be conducted in such a country.

While most, if not all IFSW member organisations, supported the visit, the activists' claims should be responded to as they question the ethics and principles of the social work profession, with a heavy accusation: That IFSW is now supporting the systematic oppression of girls and women.

## Why travel to Afghanistan

The IFSW visit to Afghanistan was triggered by The Afghanistan Social Work Organisation applying for IFSW membership. Three years earlier, ASO was formed during the time of the US backed government by the first ever group of graduate social work students. They wanted to make an impact on social development in their country and identified the need for a professional body to support trained and competent social professionals at the national level.

ASO members developed a code of ethics, a constitution, and strategies for building social work across the country. These were consistent with any national association of social work. They emphasised the profession's principles, human rights, professional conduct for their membership as well as the organisation's internal democratic procedures. The US-backed government subsequently recognised ASO as a professional body and placed their organisation on their register of professions.

After the withdrawal of the US army, the Taliban took control by military force, forming a new unelected government based on their understanding of Sharia law. As a result of ASO's advocacy, the new government also formally recognised the social work profession as an independent body based on the previous ethical code and statutes.

## Our initial observations

As the IFSW visit commenced, it was clear from the first sights of landing at the airport in Kabul that little infrastructure has been left behind by the US occupying forces. The tiny airport seemed more fitting to a rural country runway. The electricity in the small rundown building that operated as customs clearance wasn't working, requiring the manual filling out of forms to be done by torch light.

Against our expectations, entering out into Kabul's busy streets it could have been any of the less wealthy Middle Eastern countries. Men walked with sacks straddled over their shoulders on the way to market. Women

walked freely; the vast majority of them wearing a headscarf, and the occasional one in a full burka. The reality was substantially different to the expectations of international visitors. Each of us had been influenced by the global news and expected women in burkas to be only permitted out when accompanied by men. We also wrongly thought that women were barred entirely from the workforce, but at the airport, as well as the government offices, and the social services we visited, women worked in senior, practitioner and in administrative roles. They caught the bus to work like everyone else, went shopping, and either they or their husbands would collect the children at school.

Unemployment is extreme, however, for everyone. In one province we visited, Herat, 90% of working age adults were unable to obtain work. The previous occupying administrations had made no or little effort to build the political infrastructure necessary for economic development and the only viable industry that survived the last 25 years was the illegal manufacturing of opium and its distribution to Europe.

There is also the temporary ban on women working in INGOs and being able to access middle and higher education. This is real and has massive negative effects on the girls and women that can afford schooling, their families, as well as the social and financial economy. But asking social workers and members of the public what life is like under the Taliban government, they replied, 'It is the same as usual', as this generation has never known political freedom. 'The lack of work and absence of welfare systems', they report, is their main priority, 'as the long-term broken economy breeds other injustices.

Longstanding poverty is evident everywhere. The vast majority of the 80 million people scrape by. Children beg on the busy streets holding out their trembling hands in the -15C degrees cold, some in light shoes, others with bare feet, and all in substandard thin clothing.

## ASO and the current role of social work in social development

In its short years of existence, ASO has primarily focused on women's economic empowerment to support families and communities out of poverty. They have facilitated and continue to support over 8,000 women's cooperatives. This involves working with a community, family or families to develop social entrepreneurial businesses. The social workers help the communities to identify their strengths and assets and how these can be brought together to develop income that addresses the social challenges. In many of the examples, the cooperatives also set up schools or find ways for their children to attend an existing school programme.

ASO has also facilitated regular communication with the network of NGOs running throughout the country to share information and to act as one large group to influence social policy. These actions have started to gain traction with the new government and this year ASO has signed memorandums of cooperation with the Ministers of Health, Social Affairs and Labour which will ensure the NGO network is involved with the respective areas of government strategic planning.

Does this mean that social workers support the gender discrimination policies of the Taliban government? No! ASO and IFSW, for example, held an open press conference in Kabul which was covered by all the countries' main media. Social workers were explicit and clear that girls and women should have the same opportunities as boys and men to education and work. It was also clear that there are common areas of interest between social workers, the NGOs and the government – to work together in finding solutions to economic and social challenges. But absent in these proceedings and silent on these issues were the local UN agencies. There are many UN agencies housed in a compound in the outskirts of Kabul. They are caught in a dispute between the global geo-political actors and the Taliban government. This clash has led directly to the temporary banning of girls and women in middle and higher education, as well as women being prohibited from working in INGOs.

## Geo-political sanctions and ethical investment

The geopolitical use of economic sanctions lies at the root of a human rights challenge for us to consider at a global level. The dispute between the government in Afghanistan and the UN relates to the international community freezing and redirecting the Afghanistan government's bank accounts. The seized money is being transmitted to the local UN agencies who are not allowed to spend any of it on projects connected to the government. One example of a UN project that these funds were spent on, was a children's park, but this caused widespread frustration in the communities because the children still don't have adequate food and clothes.

The Afghanistan Government is angry about this situation and also with the UN led international sanctions that are driving tens of millions of people into further poverty. One Taliban minister told us of the high numbers of children that are dying at night from the cold and that they are found the next day partly eaten by wild animals. In their desperation to get their money back in order to start a process of social and economic development, the government's Supreme Leader announced prohibition of women in parts of public life. This was seen by the Supreme Leader as a bargaining tool, a tactical attempt to push the buttons of the UN, so that they would rethink returning the seized funds.

This situation reminds me of a question once put to Kofi Annan, a previous UN Secretary General. He was asked why so many governments in the African region fail after their countries had gained independence from colonisation. He answered that new governments in these situations were often formed by differing groups of freedom fighters. Their skill base involved fighting and the transition to political diplomacy and engagement is a challenging one. Annan argued that at these times, it was important for the international community to support that transition through investment and collaboration.

Yet, the geo-political environment of today has chosen another method, to completely close Afghanistan off to the rest of the world with



sanctions that prohibit trade, investment or cooperation. Consequently, the 80 million citizens are being punished because of the groups of ex-freedom fighters that have assumed power. The same geo-political environment also seems to have significantly influenced the global media, portraying Afghanistan, and its people in the worst possible light, wrongly informing the world that woman must wear burkas, or they will be beaten on the streets.

Each of the government Ministers that the IFSW team visited alongside ASO, spoke openly that they hoped the ban on women's participation in education would soon finish. Some commented, they hoped their daughters could resume their studies. Another said, 'we cannot run this ministry without women'. One said all peoples, men's and women's human rights should be equal under sheria law. The situation is not, however, something they are easily able to change as the decision is made beyond government.

The Ministers also showed a firm commitment to working with people locally and internationally to build the required systems for everyone's development. They said, they had limited experience in these processes and needed external advice.

### IFSW/ASO Social Work Action, being true to our principles

Shortly after the visit, the IFSW UN Commission [made a statement to a high-level UN meeting on human rights](#). The submission stated that all people have a right to development and that civil society and the UN needed to work together to develop new systems where sanctions did not undermine people's basic rights to health and wellbeing.

IFSW has acknowledged the skills that sit within ASO. They will not only be able to advise the new government, with the support of their local and international connections, on developing services for development, but in accordance with the profession's ethics and principles they will also be able, along with others, to hold the government to account and help nurture the government forward towards democracy and full respect of all people.

Another aspect of social work ethics and principles is challenging negative discrimination. In my experience, I find that social workers tend to think carefully about this in order to get the best result. As a profession practicing with people in complex situations, we have learnt that it is very rare to get a good outcome when telling someone: 'You don't like them, that they are 100% wrong, stupid and they and their view should not exist'. This is certainly not the way social workers proceed when working with a divided family or community. The result would be disastrous. Rather, social workers bring people together so that all people can be heard, and their rights balanced and respected. It is through this process that discriminatory behaviours are challenged, and rights realised.

Interestingly, this approach was echoed among leaders of global activism in last years' [People's Global Summit](#). They acknowledged that telling people they disagreed with, that they are wrong, only polarises the situation and potentially makes things worse. Using Donald Trump supporters as an example, they felt that a better approach would be to say: 'When you do or say these things, that affects me (us, or them) and I don't agree, we need to talk and find solutions we all agree with'. The global activists considered that these approaches, consistent with Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela (to name a few) to be the change that they themselves needed to take, in advancing a sustainable and fair world that we can all live in.

It is in this spirit that IFSW is taking action with the UN and the Taliban government. In other words, the change we seek includes the skills of engagement to build a vision and action towards all, contributing to everyone's rights.

It is hoped that the above information will provide more context for the social media activists that have condemned IFSW's involvement in supporting social work and people's wellbeing in Afghanistan. It is understandable that people join the meta-narrative of sanctions when they are only exposed to the images and worst betrayals of Afghanistan, along with the reality of the temporary bans on women. What can be forgotten however in that narrative is that there are 80 million people in the country.

People not dissimilar to those reading this article, but who live in a different country, a country at war for more than 40 years with an ongoing series of un-elected governments and now living with increasing poverty. They too, in accordance with the professional's international ethics and principles, also have rights; and we, the profession, have the obligation to support their rights, including their right to sustainable development.

# Letters to the Editor

DOI: [10.55521/10-020-107](https://doi.org/10.55521/10-020-107)

Stephen M. Marson & Donna DeAngelis, Editors

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1

**Replies to:** [Does Racial Bias Exist in the ASWB Social Work Exams?](#)

In the USA, the topic of the ASWB exams is *hotly* debated. Within social work discussion circles, I have never witnessed such overt anger. I found this display of emotions quite perplexing. The topic of these exams has been more emotionally charged than discussions regarding abortions. For full disclosure, I recruited faculty to submit letters to the editor. I made a concerted effort to encourage the angriest commentators to contribute to the discussion. My efforts failed. When I asked the three most angry activists why they would *not* submit their positions as a letter to the editor, I received no reply. Thus, there are no letters which *strongly* oppose the exam structure.

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

2

From: Anthony Bibus <[bibus@augsborg.edu](mailto:bibus@augsborg.edu)>

Date: Monday, August 22, 2022, at 3:05 PM

To: Stephen Marson <[smarson@nc.rr.com](mailto:smarson@nc.rr.com)>

Subject: Re: ["BPD-L"] Social Work Values and Ethics in Intercultural Relations

Steve,

Thanks for the useful, fun to read, and timely editorial essay, Steve! I have heard both professional and public members of Minnesota's licensing Board of Social Work who were Black make similar statements as your colleague said:

"The most devastating form of racism is creating a lower standard for African American students." In the discussions generated by assertions like these, I affirm my agreement with this view. Racism abounds when we assume a person from a specified group thereby cannot meet standards. And of course, standards themselves can be influenced by institutional racism. There be ghosts and dragons, as you have said.

(You probably meant "quantitative" right? in the following sentence at the start of the ASWB and Racial Test Bias section:

"Unlike in the academic setting, ASWB has always employed highly qualitative strategies to address institutional racism.")

*Tony*

3

From: Joel Fischer <jfischer@hawaii.edu>

Date: Tuesday, August 23, 2022, at 7:25 PM

To: <smarson@nc.rr.com>

Subject: Your racism editorial

Hi Steve: long time no nothing, yeah?

Well, I am reconnecting (I hope) to let you know your editorial was DYNAMITE!!

I have a small group of professors from all over the country with whom I communicate regularly who are all over this issue with extremely divisive accusations, full of blame.

I can imagine that similar attitudes might be pretty common in social workers all around the US.

So, I will attempt to find a way to send your editorial to my friends and acquaintances. I am certain you will have a major influence in changing the opinions of many people.

Great job!

*Aloha, Joel*

PS. If there's any chance you could email this editorial to me, it would greatly facilitate my efforts.

4

From: Diane Falk <Diane.Falk@stockton.edu>

Date: Wednesday, August 24, 2022, at 1:52 PM

To: "Steve Marson (smarson@nc.rr.com)" <smarson@nc.rr.com>

Subject: Does racial bias exist in the ASWB exam?

Hi Steve,

I found this to be a very helpful article. NASW-NJ has been hosting discussions among NJ social work program deans, directors, and related educators about this issue, and many have targeted the exam. I have sent your article to the NASW-NJ Executive Director, hoping that it will enlighten the discussion.

*Diane*

Diane S. Falk, Ph.D., LCSW

Professor Emerita of Social Work, Stockton University

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5

From: Patricia West-Okiri <Patricia.West@wnmu.edu>

Date: Tuesday, August 30, 2022 at 8:57 AM

To: Stephen Marson <smarson@nc.rr.com>, Chris Lloyd <ecloyd@ualr.edu>, Raymond Adams <dewayne234@gmail.com>

Cc: Shimon Cohen <shimonsocialwork@gmail.com>, 'bpd-l@list.iupui.edu'

Subject: Re: ["BPD-L"] Sign the petition: End Discriminatory Social Work Licensing Exams

Hi,

Here is just a guess in answer to how the exam *could* be biased even though the questions are not. On the exam, there are many "best choices" (lots of grey area...judgement-based questions). Correct answers are based on normed responses. Norming involves selecting the choices that most examinees make - so you are relying on the majority of exam-takers to choose what qualifies as "correct". Who takes the exam most often? That's going to be your reference group (the norm). So, might the exams be normed against a reference group that is not necessarily representative of BIPOC? It is highly possible. If so, someone who is not a member of the reference group may answer based on their perspective, culture, experiences, etc. as they select the "best choice" in each scenario, I mean, isn't that what we all do?

One way to address this might be to change the way the exam questions are normed so that reference groups are more representative, though I am not sure how that might affect the validity and reliability of the exam overall.

As someone who works at a rural HSI, I often advised my students not to think about the questions from a rural or minority (most often their own) perspective, but as they are taking the exam, to channel their inner "city-dwelling mid-30's white woman" because this is the likely reference group based on the majority of test-takers. (Sorry if that sounds offensive to anyone! But this advice has helped many of my students to pass.)

Have a good day,

*Patti*

6

From: Andrew Fultz <fultza@nsula.edu>

Date: Tuesday, August 30, 2022 at 11:46 AM

To: "bpd-l@list.iupui.edu" <bpd-l@list.iupui.edu>

Cc: Shimon Cohen <shimonsocialwork@gmail.com>, Patricia West-Okiri <Patricia.West@wnmu.edu>, Chris Lloyd <ecclloyd@ualr.edu>, Raymond Adams <dewayne234@gmail.com>, Stephen Marson <smarson@nc.rr.com>

Subject: RE: ["BPD-L"] Sign the petition: End Discriminatory Social Work Licensing Exams

Good morning colleagues,

I want to first recognize that many have spoken honestly and intelligently on the topic of the inequities that exist in relation the licensure passage rates. I believe many of us see those inequalities as complex and derived from a system of privilege and social structure that has not supported or helped those most affected by the disproportionate passage rates, particularly Black social work students and professionals, and older students and professionals in this case as well. Those emails, twitter posts, podcasts, and correspondents have moved the discussion forward even in the moments of uncomfortable dialogue and silence. The responses by individuals who have chosen to speak as the empirical voice of reason challenging the claims of racism and inequality have spoken from their own perspectives. As noted in many of the articles shared in the petition and in other literature, these responses contribute to a long-standing issue many have with how the status quo is supported and how empirical science is used as a means of norming and providing objectivity while negating the need for changes. This has left many struggling to want to remain in the dialogue.

I believe we are at a time in our society where conversations on race, racism, power, oppression, inequality and similar topics (that are lived realities for many) are changing and have become even more difficult than we could have predicted 6-10 years ago. The conversation on the ASWB exam is a great example of this. I would challenge us all to read and reflect on the work of pioneers through the years as an example of how we should remain steadfast in our willingness to discuss these issues and allow our



perspectives to shift. I am thinking of the works of James Baldwin, bell hook, Kimberle Crenshaw, Audre Lorde and countless others who were writing on these topics from their own nuanced perspectives when it was not palatable to those with unchecked privilege and power. I say their names because they have impacted me personally. There are countless others who have written and spoken on these topics for years. Don't discount them because of a perception of a lack of empiricism. We would not have a profession if individuals did not question the status quo decades ago.

I think our discussions regarding the results by race and age are showing us where to grow as individuals and as a profession. The immediate reaction by many was to call out the effects of racism. Others retorted with affluence and poverty as the possible better correlates or avenues of scientific inquiry. I would challenge that we look at this non-dualistically and understand this as an example of how we are all looking at the same thing differently. Dualistic thinking leads us to a battle of "this versus that". This is how sides are formed in this type of dialogue. Non-dualistic thinking allows for opposite truths to exist in the same moment. I would challenge those on the dissenting side (of whether this is racism) that they have chosen to consider that affluence and poverty are the social manifestations of inequity and White supremacy that exists within our society. Those are two of many ways in which we can measure the effects of racism and disenfranchisement. They contribute to the overall effect of what we call racism. Borrowing the idea, you can argue that the better correlates are affluence and poverty, but do we not agree that those ultimately serve as mechanisms of inequality?

Why is it that people of color in our country are disproportionately negatively affected in relation to poverty, hiring rates, interactions with law enforcement, and even licensing pass rates in social work? Looking at the example given recently, students from affluent schools had better passage rates than those from less affluent schools of social work. Where does the disproportionality and disenfranchisement come from? What factors lead those schools to struggle for funding? Why do the other schools thrive? We can all imagine the various ways that schools in the top 10 have ascended to

that level. It isn't just the processes of White supremacy, norming, and power, or is it a multidimensional issue that we are dealing with here?

The point of this email is to say that dialogue is really difficult, but we have to be committed. We have to be willing to examine the status quo and know that we can never assume we have arrived when it comes to standards and means of licensure. We have to acknowledge and remember that we have a large number of young colleagues spending \$260 per test and more in the licensure process of each state who are being affected by an exam that is resulting in disproportionate outcomes for marginalized individuals. They have lost jobs after spending thousands of dollars to earn a degree from an accredited program. They have spent money on test preparation. With where we are in society today, we need a licensure process so that empower all students to effectively and competently work in their communities and have a means of financial stability. We also have to remember the importance of critical dialogue if we are to move forward together. Moving forward fractured is a risk I don't think we want to take. It is our responsibility to carry the load and do the work, however it is most effective for each person. I do not have all the answers to solve the problem, but collectively, if we will do the work, we can develop it together. I have seen critical ideas submitted already and others are formulating and preparing for more. We should support them and join them.

Sincerely,

*Andrew*

ANDREW J. FULTZ, MSW, LCSW

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(Preferred Pronouns: He, Him, His)

[fultza@nsula.edu](mailto:fultza@nsula.edu)

7

From: Katherine van Wormer <katherine.vanwormer@uni.edu>

Date: Tuesday, August 30, 2022 at 3:35 PM

To: Stephen Marson <smarson@nc.rr.com>

Cc: Shimon Cohen <shimonsocialwork@gmail.com>, "BPD-L@list.iupui.edu"

Subject: Re: ["BPD-L"] Sign the petition: End Discriminatory Social Work Licensing Exams

The problem is not in the individual questions but in the nature of standardized (multiple choice) questioning itself. No, the individual questions are not racist or sexist; they just do not measure what they are supposed to measure. The dilemma is there needs to be some kind of national testing for licensing purposes to enhance respect for the profession while at the same time the profession can't afford to lose some of its most valuable social workers who are from culturally backgrounds more closely aligned with the people they will be working with. On this listserv we can all agree on these points I think and, on the need, to find some other way to measure competence, perhaps using questions drawing on analysis of case histories or of writings on the workings (and failures) of social welfare programs. This discussion is important, and the focus should be on solutions. So, let's all put our heads together and come up with some workable suggestions. (I never used multiple choice questions in teaching social work and wasn't aware of any racial/ethnic differences in the results although the female students did better than male students on the whole.)  
*Katherine van Wormer*

Professor Emerita of Social Work

University of Northern Iowa

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<https://sites.uni.edu/vanworme/index.html>

co-author of *The Maid Narratives*

8

From: "Anderson, William A" <william.anderson@mnsu.edu>

Date: Friday, October 7, 2022 at 7:04 PM

To: Stephen Marson <smarson@nc.rr.com>

Subject: Re: ["BPD-L"] ASWB Exam Comments

The following comment was originally posted to the BPD listserv Thursday, October 6, 2022. The opinions are the author's and are not from any of the organizations mentioned.

The recent burst of interest in the ASWB exam has revealed a number of complicated issues and also some simplistic possible solutions. As one who was actively involved years ago in licensure (founding member of the Minnesota Board of Social Work) and ASWB (delegate and Board member), I would like to add some perspective. I have also been a social worker for more than 50 years (currently retired but still active as a volunteer) and have seen the changes that licensure has brought to our profession.

The development of professional social work has generated many benefits for all levels of social work practice, from the dramatic expansion of funding for clinical social work to the increase in employment for bachelor's level social workers with professional education. Many of my generation will remember when there was limited reimbursement available for clinical practice and when anyone could call themselves a social worker. Groups such as NASW and CSWE have played an appropriately self-serving role in this development through lobbying for licensure laws and creating a national system of educational standards recognized by those laws. The rapidly expanding role of ASWB as both the provider of national exams and the developer of model statutes and other resources for state licensure information has also contributed to this process.

The first issue that seems to come up in every discussion of licensure is the failure to see the difference between a professional organization (e.g., NASW) and a regulatory agency (state licensure boards and by extension ASWB). As a member of NASW for over 40 years I valued its provision of continuing education, its social change efforts and its creation of a

community of professionals. I was less enamored of its over-emphasis on clinical social work but that is the source of the majority of its members. Similarly, as one who has written or guided the writing of many CSWE re-accreditations, presented at multiple conferences and done a few site visits, I see the value of national educational standards, even if they are implemented in ways that sometimes have to respond to political realities and fear of lawsuits. Accreditation standards have been used as a lever by programs throughout the country to expand their resources and serve students better. Given the generally positive role of NASW and CSWE, it is not surprising that many folks seem to expect licensure boards to also be advocacy organizations for social workers, when in fact they are primarily tasked with restricting licensure to those who are qualified and confronting ethical lapses that threaten the safety of the public.

The use of a licensure exam is certainly not unique to social work and is part of the process of assessing qualifications in most professions and many occupations. What may be more unique is paying attention to and publishing data about passage rates (I recently asked several administrators of other health-related boards and they had not seen such data). The choice of exam type is a delicate balancing of validity and practicality – exams should be able to prove their connection to practice and should also be manageable in terms of administration and cost. Clearly the traditional multiple-choice format is a compromise, and one that academics are familiar with in their own practice. While I haven't seen any studies of the question, it does seem like the higher the student/faculty ratio is in a classroom the more likely that assessment will be done with easier to score devices. I personally prefer simulations and writing assignments, but if you put 40 students in my course (with no TA) I will move toward more easily quantified tools. Similarly, if Boards are testing tens of thousands of applicants per year there is almost no other option than so-called "objective" tests, both in terms of administration and especially cost – applicants already are faced with what they consider high licensing costs, imagine if they were paying for individualized simulations or other strategies that might be more valid (or might not).

Another argument I've seen is based on the idea that students have already completed an accredited degree so why should they also have to take a test. I'm presuming that no one wants to do away with CSWE accreditation even if it may also discriminate against people who are counseled out or have life experiences but can't afford college or who attend schools that don't offer the BSW or MSW (I had a spirited discussion once with a social sciences faculty member from a school with a fancy reputation who wanted to know why his students couldn't become licensed even though that school doesn't offer any social work degrees). It might be useful to reflect on how CSWE develops educational standards versus how ASWB develops test content domains. CSWE uses an elaborate committee process with input (opinions) from delegates to develop the standards which are then interpreted and implemented across departments and ultimately operationalized by faculty within their classrooms. ASWB uses a much more grounded process based on a job analysis where practicing licensees are surveyed about what they actually do and then trained item-writers create questions which reflect those activities; those questions are then reviewed by an exam committee and pre-tested and carefully reviewed for possible future use. As one would expect, all of the domains that ASWB assesses are part of an accredited program's curriculum but there is a value to having a national standardized test that is tied to practice rather than simply accepting that students from the wide variety of schools have the minimum knowledge, skills and values (KSV) that they need. I have no doubt that the ASWB exam development process is a lot more rigorous and concerned about diversity than what the vast majority of faculty use to measure outcomes in their classes.

Another challenge derives from the age old question of "what is social work"? I've seen this in two different manifestations: 1) does social work differ so much from place to place (CA to MS to ME) that there is no way to assess applicants that were trained for their school's unique environment?; and 2) does social work differ across target populations so much that there is no way to assess applicants with a standardized exam? Of course one could break this down even farther to differences in rural/urban or differences within minority populations. Even in heavily Caucasian

Minnesota there are pockets of cultural differences and then differences within subgroups with shared labels such as Black or Latinx. So if you are a graduate of an accredited program do we make the seemingly naïve assumption that you are qualified to work with any client population anywhere? Or, if you are a graduate of a program focused on urban Native American issues do we presume you are qualified automatically to relocate and be licensed to work with a completely different population? Or is it possible to identify a generic set of KSV's that define social work practice and then leave the specifics to advanced education and on the job training?

That last idea may in fact be a trick question; it is pretty obvious that whenever a default definition of a complex concept is proposed, it is often a white definition. States that don't want their children exposed to progressive ideas try to enforce traditional (i.e., white) reading lists and curriculum. States that want to discourage groups from voting propose restrictions on any radical new ideas like same-day registration or mail voting. Has ASWB gathered data from primarily majority practitioners and built an exam that discriminates against non-majority applicants? The recently released report from ASWB (see their website) suggests that there are many differences in performance across groups, schools, and regions. Is it ASWB's fault if applicants from regions that fund education better do better on the test? Or if some schools within a region that are better staffed or funded have students that do better? As any of us who have some language skills beyond English would attest, it is not that hard to get along in a second or third language, but it is very hard to take a multiple-choice test outside of your primary language. But wouldn't that be easy to remedy – why not offer the exam in every language that applicants request? Obviously because that would be extremely expensive and the act of translation can cause difficult validity questions. Who would pay for these additional expenses (it would not seem possible for the small pool of applicants to have to cover the cost)?

While I could discuss these issues for hours (and have), I'm sure I've passed most folks' email length tolerance so I'll wrap it up. The test results show disparities across race and age in particular and much smaller

disparities across gender. ASWB does everything that best practices in psychometrics suggest to reduce differential item impact. The test is the final stage in a long line of activities that are vulnerable to systemic racism, and may just be revealing the failures of our K-12 and collegiate educational systems. Jurisdictions that jump on this issue without much thought and simply throw out the exam requirement will make it impossible for their licensees to move across state lines as the vast majority of states will continue to recognize that social work licensure (like most everyone else) should require an exam. Students should hold their academic programs responsible for not adequately preparing them for the test, and programs should do more to prepare students. Often students have not had experience with multiple choice testing in their final years of schooling (spent in small methods classes and fieldwork) so schools should make sure they are prepared. We should expect that some percentage of applicants will fail the test, but we should not grow comfortable if the patterns of failure suggest problems in our educational systems.

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Professor Emeritus



## Changes at IJSWVE and Thank You

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

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In the last six months, we have had three clinical social workers who rotated off of our editorial board. Frankly, clinical social workers are difficult to locate and recruit. As a result, I emailed the Clinical Social Work Association, and they recommended [Chenita Rountree, DSW](#) (Candidate), [Laura Groshong, LICSW](#) and [Marie P. Cetoute, MSW, LCSW, BCD](#). Chenita is employed by the Department of Academic and Student Affairs at North Carolina State University. Laura is involved in private practice as a clinical social worker. In addition, Laura has had extensive experience as an editor for other journals and has published several articles and a book entitled *Clinical Social Work Regulation and Practice: An Overview*. Marie is employed by the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps in the Office of Refugee Resettlement. We are very fortunate to have Chenita, Laura and Marie on our editorial board. We hope to recruit more clinical social workers from Clinical Social Work Association. For our policy board, [Dawn Apgar, PhD, LSW, ACSW](#) was recruited to join us. She recently left social work practice to join the faculty at Seton Hall University where her areas of interest include technology, research and ethics.

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:

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# Internet Searching of Client Information by Social Workers: Reckless or Required in Today's Online Society?

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## Abstract

Telehealth and social media raise ethical issues for social workers, prompting the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) to revise ethical standards in recent years to address use of technology. Social workers are directed to avoid searching client information electronically but may do so with clients' informed consent. Professional technology standards and directives from NASW indicate that the information gathered on the Internet about clients is distinct from that obtained from clients directly. While internet searching of clients is widely used in business and other professions, its value in social work has been largely unrecognized. This article lends support for viewing internet information on clients as critical data that should be routinely gathered by social workers in many instances, justifying its importance in light of the ecological perspective which is the foundation of social work practice. Gathering internet information on clients is valuable to understanding people in their environments, as much of daily life now takes place in the digital world. Recommendations assist social

workers to responsibly engage in internet searching of client information so that it can be incorporated into social work's standard of care.

Keywords: Ethics, ecological perspective, technology, social media

## Introduction

Digital communication in social work practice has become increasingly popular and essential since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The United States, which already boasted high internet and social media usage, has seen a surge in internet use since lockdowns and stay-at-home orders were enacted in early March 2020 (De et al., 2020; Villanti et al., 2017; Walensky et al., 2021). Due to the highly contagious nature of COVID-19, physical distancing was deemed essential by health organizations, including the World Health Organization, to help limit its spread (Masters et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). Education, business, and social functions quickly transitioned online, greatly expanding the amount of time and ways in which Americans interacted with one another electronically (Koeze & Popper, 2020). While the actual effects of this enhanced screen time are unknown, there is little doubt that the transition of virtually all face-to-face interactions to online exchanges has resulted in dramatically more of daily life occurring in the virtual world (Geddes & Marsh, 2021).

The delivery of social work services also moved quickly online. COVID-19 resulted in feelings of loneliness and isolation in many Americans (Hwang et al., 2020), with greater interest in telehealth services as a way to address therapy and other needs in a safe and effective manner (NASW, 2020a). The rapid increase in online social work has challenged professionals to understand the implications of delivering services in new ways (Mishna et al., 2020). Even before COVID-19, there was a recognition that enhanced use of technology in practice posed certain ethical challenges for social workers that warranted additional guidance (NASW, 2017a). To provide direction, standards were incorporated into the profession's ethical code, particularly focusing on the challenges associated with using

technology in light of client consent, confidentiality, and professional boundaries (NASW, 2018).

Despite recognition of the importance of the online environment in the lives of most Americans and the advent of new ethical standards on use of technology, social work literature has not provided ample consideration of the use of client internet data to assist with implementing the generalist intervention model, specifically as it relates to the assessment of clients. Social work views clients' behavior in relation to its environmental contexts and the virtual world has become the setting in which the preponderance of individual interactions take place. The online presence of clients, as a rich context for assessment, has not been adequately explored in social work, though it is a widely published topic in other professions.

In its Code of Ethics, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) posits that searching or gathering information electronically on clients should only be done for "compelling professional reasons, and when appropriate, with the client's informed consent" (NASW, 2021a, p. 14). As all actions by social workers should be driven by the well-being of clients and for professional purposes, explicitly stating that the impetus for conducting internet searches on clients must be "compelling" indicates that accessing online data on clients is considered different than use of other available client information. Recently NASW released a directive that boldly recommended avoiding internet searching of clients completely, though there was a caveat mentioned under the directive about its allowance "to address safety concerns and/or as deemed clinically appropriate with client consent" (NASW, 2021b, para. 3). However, this communication raises questions about the sanctioning of internet searching as it clearly states, "with social media offering easy access to information, social workers should avoid using the Internet to search and gather information," citing the Code as justification for this recommendation (NASW, 2021b, para. 3). Viewing the gathering of internet information about clients as distinct from other client data available to social workers contradicts the ecological perspective and causes confusion for social workers given its widespread value for

obtaining critical therapeutic information by both clients (Morris et al., 2018) and practitioners (Pirelli et al., 2018).

This article challenges the position that internet searching of client information should be avoided, using scholarly literature to support its usage as a standard of care in today's digital world. Online posts and interactions by clients should be considered relevant in social work assessment as they represent modern day social exchanges that historically occurred face-to-face and were regularly used by social workers in their work. As clients increasingly spend more of their lives online, it is important for social workers to understand clients' virtual interactions, making internet searching not reckless, but required methods for gaining insight into client functioning and problems. However, internet searching of client information has ethical issues that must be considered, warranting the need for additional guidance in this area.

## Literature Review

The use of electronic equipment in the helping professions dates back to the late-1950s, with use of closed-circuit television for clinical teaching purposes (Wittson & Benschoter, 1972). However, the advent of the Internet and its proliferation in the 1980s and 1990s spawned new ways of incorporating technology into practice, with major social work organizations offering workshops and resources to assist practitioners with its use by the turn of the century (Marson, 1997).

Some of these organizations joined forces in 2005 to craft standards (which were later revised in 2017) to provide guidance to social workers in proper use of technology (NASW, 2017b). The standards, like the Code, state that internet searching of clients is permissible with their consent, but it posits that "client information discovered on the Internet using search engines is different from information that clients share directly with the social worker" (NASW, 2017b, p.39). This position is interesting given that the standards acknowledge that technology is a critical part of the clients' environment, therefore indicating that electronic communication should

always be considered. Absent from these standards are ways in which social media postings by clients and clients' presences in the virtual world can be competently incorporated into social work assessment, which is a likely need given that the Internet represents the largest repository of information available today.

Most social workers think that internet searching of client data has a place in practice, but are conflicted about its use (NASW, 2020b). Recent blog posts by social workers indicate disparate opinions with some expressing that it should be avoided and others feeling that it is a necessary part of their work (NASW, 2020b). One undergraduate student reported that her field instructor recommends internet searching only after meeting with clients first. Most posts indicate that internet searching is only permissible when clients are at imminent risk or that it is a gray area, with more guidance and discussion needed to help resolve ethical issues associated with its use.

The profession recently identified the most pressing societal issues in its Grand Challenges for Social Work and Society (Fong et al., 2018), with harnessing technology for social good identified as one of 13 key priorities. Social workers are challenged to use technology in new and innovative ways. It is time for the profession to examine the role of clients' public internet information in social work assessment given the importance of internet interactions in clients' daily lives. Searching for client information should be considered due diligence by social workers as part of a standard of care, rather than a practice to be avoided.

### Prevalence of internet usage in daily life

Internet usage is increasingly prevalent and found in all aspects of daily life. According to the Pew Research Center (2021a), internet usage in the United States has nearly doubled over the past two decades with almost 90% of Americans online today. Internet users include individuals in the harder-to-reach demographics, such as those making under \$30,000 yearly, adults over the age of 65, those living in rural areas, and those with a high school

education or less. The pervasiveness of the Internet is especially apparent when looking at the screen time of young children, which has raised concerns with parents, medical professionals, researchers, and educators (Park & Kwon, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2020). Children are beginning to use the Internet early in the life course, with research indicating that it may be as early as two years of age (Tena et al., 2019). Eighty percent of parents report that their children under age 12 engage with tablets and 67% use smartphones, of which 17% of children 12 and under have their own (Pew Research Center, 2020). Teenagers ages 13 to 17 spend roughly six and a half hours daily on social media while tweens spend slightly less (four and a half hours) (Joshi et al., 2019). The prevalence of internet usage has surged recently, with 60% more usage than pre-pandemic levels (De et al., 2020).

Much of internet usage involves socialization or the use of social media. In 2004, five percent of Americans used social media, whereas 72% of Americans use at least one social media platform today. Usage of specific platforms varies widely depending on age and gender (Pew Research Center, 2021b). As with internet access, social media usages rates have increased exponentially since 2004, when early social media platforms became immensely popular (Cuthbertson et al., 2015).

#### Technology's role in biopsychosocial well-being

Technology use has become ubiquitous to daily life biologically, psychologically, and socio-environmentally. While technology has always been used by medical professionals for diagnosis, treatment, and management of disease, it is now also used regularly by non-medical Americans to shape behaviors aimed towards better health. Cell phones and smart watches, for example, can track users' step counts, calories consumed, and sleeping patterns, as well as provide reminders to take daily medications (Haghi et al., 2017). Further, these devices have been used during the COVID-19 pandemic for contact tracing purposes by determining whether or not individuals have come into contact with those who have tested positive for the virus (Leslie, 2020).



Use of technology can also aid in the continuity of mental health services and facilitating lower-risk medical appointments, leading to better mental health outcomes (Kichloo et al., 2020). During COVID-19, mental health providers and medical doctors used secure online platforms, compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), to provide treatment to clients/patients (Calton et al., 2020). Applications, more commonly known as apps, continue to be developed to address mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety using cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) approaches, with research showing promise about their effectiveness (Marshall et al., 2019).

Technology is also increasingly being used for social interactions. Due to COVID-19, many gatherings are held virtually with the use of videoconferencing sites. Coworkers engage in virtual happy hours, children have virtual playdates, and families spend holidays together online in order to remain emotionally connected, but physically distant (Nguyen et al., 2020). Even pre-pandemic, technology was used by many to increase feelings of connectedness (Antonucci et al., 2017).

Every facet of individual functioning is impacted by technology for most Americans. Online interactions are central to biopsychosocial well-being, with the Internet serving as the environment in which critical aspects of daily living occur. If social work is to truly regard biopsychosocial functioning as important for diagnosing problems, it is necessary to include clients' online interactions in social work assessments; indeed, not to do so would be ignoring many of their behaviors in today's electronic world.

#### Racial and cultural differences in online usage

Social workers need to consider dimensions of diversity when examining online practices of clients. While social media usage is about the same across racial, ethnic, and cultural lines, there are differences in how social media is utilized. Some platforms are more preferred and are more widely used than others for certain groups (Krogstad, 2015). Marginalized groups are more likely than Whites to use social media for political reasons, getting involved in causes that are important to them, promoting social justice

issues, and connecting with politically like-minded individuals (Auxier, 2020). People of color also face more unique challenges than White individuals on social media. Cyberbullying has become a notable and worrisome phenomenon (Chan et al., 2021). Young people of color, specifically adolescents, have progressively been subject to racial discrimination through social media (Tynes, 2015). These distinctions are important as social workers consider the prevalence and types of online client information that may be available.

### Social work's unique focus on person in environment

The person-in-environment (p-i-e) orientation has been a hallmark of social work (Akeson et al., 2017; Cornell, 2006), with the profession distinguishing itself from psychology by considering the impact of environmental factors on behavior (Kondrat, 2013). The p-i-e framework helps social workers organize observations and develop intervention strategies by directing them to assess client functioning with context in mind.

In Germain and Gitterman's seminal work on the ecological perspective that served as the basis for the p-i-e approach, the environment is seen as dynamic over time, comprising both social and physical contexts. They posit that social assessments must include "dyadic relations, social networks, bureaucratic institutions and other social systems including the neighborhood, community, and society itself" (1980, p.137). The physical or built environment contains buildings, environmental factors and conditions, and even plants and animals that serve as potential influences on human behavior. In the last forty years, there have been dramatic changes in social, economic, and political systems, resulting from globalization, which have challenged social work practice to keep pace (Healy & Thomas, 2021). It is incumbent upon social work to revise definitions of environments to incorporate changes in systems that impact professional relevancy and incorporate innovations into foundational principles of the profession.

In recent years, social workers have considered how emerging societal trends affect practice (Nissan, 2020). The flexibility of the p-i-e perspective has been cited as beneficial, although it raises questions about the unique scope of social work practice (Hopps & Lowe, 2008). There is a paucity of research on exactly how or when innovation of social work practice perspectives is needed (Rogge & Cox, 2001), leaving practitioners with little guidance to help them adapt their day-to-day work to incorporate significant changes in the world over time.

Akesson et al. (2017) highlight the need for innovation in the p-i-e perspective to “broaden and enhance social work practice” (p.372). There has been a call for more scholarship on environmental issues (Coates, & Gray, 2012), with attention focused on how environmental conditions or events impact the profession on the mezzo and macro levels (Miller et al., 2012; Schmitz et al., 2012).

No scholarly articles were found in the social work literature that advocated for the use of client internet data in assessment despite clients increasing presence in this environment. Clearly the Internet serves as a rich contextual source in which to view client interactions and assess client behavior. The importance of the Internet to clients' daily life is supported by recent research that found that lack of long-term internet access would negatively affect people's lives emotionally (Grandhi et al., 2020). Study subjects commented that the Internet was their “world” (p.13) with them reliant upon it for all aspects of daily living. Internet interactions are viewed as integral to personal well-being, highlighting the importance of include them in any client assessment which is based on a p-i-e perspective (Karim et al., 2020).

### Internet searching in social work and allied professions

Despite scholarly articles written about ethical internet usage by social workers (Boddy & Dominelli, 2016; Reamer, 2014; Ricciardelli et al., 2020), the topic of using the Internet to gather client information is only the sole focus of academic publications in allied disciplines, such as psychology

(DiLillo & Gale, 2011; Kaslow et al., 2011; Kolmes & Taube, 2014). The lack of information available to social workers is surprising given the strong commitment of the profession to ensure the just treatment of clients and the competence of those entering professional practice (CSWE, 2022).

Without guidance, social workers are left alone to identify the conditions under which to use this technology ethically. One of the ethical issues when internet searching is the extent to which clients truly understand that personal data is publicly accessible on the Internet so that they know that it will be available to social workers and others (Vogelsoong & Nelson, 2019). The degree to which social workers should be complicit in practices that are not transparent to users is an ethical question that needs further consideration.

Another ethical concern arises if social workers learn and inadvertently disclose something they have gleaned from their searching before clients may be ready to do so. Such disclosure could irreparably damage the therapeutic alliance that has been built and lead to subsequent termination of clinical services. Further, information found online may be dated, inaccurate, and/or irrelevant to the client's presenting concerns. Lastly, practitioners can find that internet searching interferes with the therapeutic process, disallowing the client to practice vulnerability by opening up slowly and naturally within the confines of the helping alliance (Tapp, 2019).

The NASW Code of Ethics identifies internet searching as a privacy and confidentiality issue and dictates that the practice should be avoided unless for a compelling professional reason (NASW, 2021a). The standard clearly states that client consent should be obtained prior to electronic searches of client information, except in instances of danger to self or others. While there is consensus that internet searching raises additional ethical issues, the degree to which it should be avoided and not embraced as requisite in many instances of practice is debatable.

The American Psychological Association's (APA) ethical code does not address internet searching of clients (APA, 2017), but other work on the issue agrees that client informed consent should be obtained before conducting such searches (Chamberlin, 2010). Psychologists have generally regarded

electronic searching of client information benign and often helpful (Kolmes & Taube, 2014). Interestingly, psychologists appear more concerned with their own personal information being online and being unable to control what they self-disclose to clients. Clients often search the Internet for information on their psychologists and found the practice “neutral or treatment enhancing” (Kolmes & Taube, 2016, p. 153).

The American Counseling Association (ACA) and the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) also do not explicitly address client-targeted internet searching in their ethical codes (AAMFT, 2015, ACA, 2014); however, several ACA standards, namely those that specify that counselors must respect client privacy and request private information only when deemed beneficial, may be applicable to internet searching (ACA, 2014).

While there is much concern about internet searching of client information, research has found that obtaining internet information for clients can have therapeutic benefits. For example, Morris et al. (2018) examined the online resources and supportive services available to individuals whose parents have cancer, citing the value of internet searching for gathering critical information related to diagnosis and treatment. Additionally, the Internet has been found to be an effective way to connect those with similar interests or problems, serving as a great advocacy tool that can mitigate isolation that may be associated with diversity or difference (Bowen et al. 2017).

Medicine has struggled to understand the role of the Internet in the doctor-patient relationship. Research indicates that both the American Medical Association and the Federation of State Medical Boards' (FSMB) guidelines remain silent on the appropriateness of internet searching of patients, though it appears justified in certain circumstances (Baker et al., 2015). This lack of specific guidance resulted in coining the practice the “Google blind spot” (p.6) with agreement that decisions about searching for patient information should only be done after considering the intent of the search and how it impacts continuing treatment.

The Internet is often used by patients to gather information on their doctors, with little consideration about how such searching impacts practice. Research indicates that medical and other personnel have personal and professional data widely available (Mostaghimi et al., 2010). Additionally, ratings of doctors on review websites strongly influence individuals' perceptions of providers and their desire to use them for health care (Furnas et al., 2020). Instead of discouraging individuals from using internet searches to gather information about physicians, there has been enhanced advocacy to ensure that doctors are aware of their online presence.

While helping professionals have been somewhat reticent at times to use digital footprints of clients in practice, research shows that it is becoming increasingly more popular with the development of mental health applications to collect patient information for clinical purposes (Fisher & Applebaum, 2017). Interestingly, building and promoting an online presence is deemed desirable in other fields, with internet searching of people seen as essential for doing one's job responsibly.

In social work and allied professions, the potential benefits associated with internet searching indicate that it has a place in practice. However, the degree to which this tool is actually used is unknown, as it appears to be mired in ethical issues that are not found in some other professions.

### Internet searching in non-allied professions

Search engines are increasingly the doorway through which people access a nearly infinite amount of information, making them the world's most powerful gatekeepers (Vogelsohn & Nelson, 2019). While social work appears to view data on the Internet as private, literature in other fields views obtaining information via internet searching a "public service" (p.7). The Internet is seen as a way to enhance open access of information and making it more widely available. The Internet is essential to basic freedoms – including the freedom to speak and the freedom to know, with the United Nations calling for internet access as a basic human right (Article 19, 2021; United Nations, 2016). So public is online information that considerable

efforts have been made to educate the public about the availability and widespread use of it for malicious purposes (Ben-Hassine, 2021).

Internet searching for information on people is commonplace in many professions. In 2013, 35% of college admissions officers utilized internet searches of potential students including scouring social media profiles (Schaffer, 2013). Today, use of econometric data obtained from applicants' internet usage is used regularly in nearly all college admissions processes (Moody, 2020).

Internet searching is also commonplace in human resources, with professionals using data obtained online to make hiring decisions. In 2015, 84% of human resources professional utilized social media to find job candidates, with half of them indicating that that the content served as a screening tool of those candidates (Ruiz-Elejalde, 2016). In fact, in the business world, employees and applicants are counting on companies searching the Internet to find out more about them, leading them to boost their online presence and ensure up-to-date postings on professional social media sites (Ruparel et al., 2020).

Online searching is also used by political analysts and consultants to predict voting behavior (Smith & Gustafson, 2017) and gather information on opponents (Ogden & Medina, 2020). The impact of internet searching on American democracy has been widely acknowledged with internet information gleaned on candidates used in voter decisions (Richey & Taylor, 2018).

### Exemplars of Online Searching for Client Information in Social Work

There is strong support to regard the Internet as a vital client environment, making it essential to p-i-e assessments that are essential in social work practice. While commonplace in other professions, internet searching of client information has not been widely accepted in social work. Additionally, there is confusion about its appropriateness given recent NASW guidance stating that "Google searching clients" should be avoided (NASW, 2021b, para. 2), even though it is allowable, according to

professional ethical standards, for compelling reasons and with clients' permission (NASW, 2021a).

There are many instances in which internet searching of client information assists in assessment and subsequent treatment. All actions by social workers should be completed for professional reasons and with client consent, unless needed to avoid harm to self or others. It is unclear as to why internet searching is specifically called or identified as a practice that should be averted. The following examples demonstrate the merits of online searching of client information, supporting its usage in the future, as a standard of care.

### Assessing risk

#### Example:

A social worker at a homeless shelter receives a referral for a person who has recently been arrested for several high-profile felonies. When the social worker meets with the individual, they do not provide information about the nature of the offenses. The social worker is unclear if the person would be appropriate for housing in the shelter given that it is communal living. The individual has a place to stay temporarily so does not need housing today but would like to get into the shelter quickly as they are not getting along with those with whom they are temporarily living.

This situation does not meet the criteria of imminent risk, but certainly may be one in which a social worker would benefit from collecting additional information on the nature of the mentioned offenses in order to assess whether there would be safety concerns if the individual were to live at the shelter. With the person's permission, searching the Internet would likely yield information (i.e., newspaper articles) on the recent arrests. While the safety of others at the shelter may be considered compelling, internet searching is not the only way in which information on these arrests can be obtained as there is more traditional methods of information gathering, such as contacting local authorities.



## Gathering collateral information

### Example:

A social worker at a substance use treatment program receives a call from a client's family stating that the client has relapsed. The family reports that there are public pictures on the client's social media account of them using illicit drugs. The client vehemently denies that these pictures exist and that any drug use has occurred. The social worker has a consent form signed by the client allowing the social worker access to "all available information which is needed in the assessment and treatment" of the client's substance use disorder.

Others, such as family members, often serve as collateral informants to help validate, or potentially refute, client information. Such collateral information is important when clients are not able to provide needed data themselves and/or there is a question about the reliability of material collected from clients. Internet searching of clients is viewed by 65% of forensic practitioners, including social workers, as an important source for collateral information (Pirelli et al., 2018).

The consent form obtained from the client covers looking at the social media posts, but the social worker may be confused about accessing this information given the current standard in the Code of Ethics (2021a), questioning whether it is compelling, and the consent is informed given the broad nature of the form's wording.

## Observing online socialization

### Example:

A mother and her teenage son seek services from a social worker due to the son's recent concerning behavior. The son has always had a group of good friends and done well in school, but his grades have declined and his behavior has become increasingly more erratic. His mother reports that he is interacting with others solely online. He complains that his mother is overprotective, that he has "nothing to hide," and prefers online interaction because he is an active blogger on issues that are important to him. The mother reports that the son has been

increasingly fascinated with conspiracy theories. The mother and son both ask the social worker to look at the blogs to provide an opinion about whether there are any concerns.

In this scenario, both the mother and son want the social worker to examine blogs to determine whether their influence is maladaptive or not. As social media is often used a tool in the spread of disinformation and conspiracy theories (Colliander, 2019), it is beneficial for the social worker to explore the son's social media usage to see if he is promulgating and has an unhealthy interest in content of concern.

The Internet plays an important role in socialization for most Americans. In order for social workers to adequately understand connections with others, it is important to observe these relationships in the environment or context in which they occur—the Internet. Interactions with others on blogs or social media platforms can identify interests of clients, as well as other meaningful client information, such as insight, acceptance of others' feelings, perceptions regarding locus of control, etc.

The Internet provides written and/or graphic data that social workers might not otherwise have, as it memorializes thoughts, interests, etc. that clients express in interactions outside of social work interviews. Online client posts contain rich assessment material about clients' proclivity to use true versus strategic self-presentations online, the latter of which is linked to lower self-esteem (Jang et al., 2018). Using all available data when working with clients to identify problems and develop plans for resolving them is important and treating information obtained via the Internet as uniquely private may make social workers reluctant to use it even with client consent.

### Identifying impaired clients

Example:

A hospital social worker needs to gather information about a woman who has been brought into the emergency room after being found lying on a sidewalk. Her condition is not life-threatening, but she is disoriented and incoherent. She has documents with some identifying information

but is not able to identify her address or the names of family or friends. She is stabilized medically, so will need to be discharged with an appropriate plan of care.

The ability of the woman to consent to the Internet search is questionable given her mental state. While the police can be called, the Internet may provide valuable information about her identity, assisting the social worker with discharging planning. Presenting information obtained from internet searching may help orient the woman, as well as provide important data to identify family or other supports. There is no danger to the woman at this time but understanding more about her life circumstances would greatly expedite her leaving the hospital to a more suitable setting.

There are many additional instances when internet searching of client information might be considered to be appropriate, but these exemplars illustrate instances in which this action is not only justifiable, but benefits the client, making it consistent with a core value of the profession. Online communication is critical within all life domains and while people are sharing information more publicly online than ever before, social work appears apprehensive about using this online data. The dearth of scholarly literature on this topic raises the question of whether social work is engaging in an ostrich syndrome, by either discouraging its usage overtly or covertly by identifying client information discovered consensually online using search engines as different from information that clients share directly. Social work, like its allied professions, must be ready for major changes in the way information is collected and used for helping. Internet data are social artifacts of clients' interactions in their online environment. Social workers can ethically and responsibly use this information, though further support and guidance will be needed.

## Implications

Internet searching of client information, like all actions done by social workers, should be for professional reasons and with client consent, when possible and appropriate. However, there remains ambiguity concerning the appropriateness of conducting internet searches of clients as part of professional social work practice. Additionally, there is a lack of resources to assist social workers in how to responsibly use data obtained from internet searching as part of social work assessments. Failure to use internet data about clients as a standard of care does not consider the importance of the virtual world in today's society and is not consistent with the p-i-e perspective. Internet searching should not be avoided, but instead embraced as a way to access comprehensive information that can be used to assess and treat clients more effectively and efficiently. Historically, social workers have been able to navigate complex ethical issues and those raised by internet searching are not unsurmountable. To increase the competence of social workers in navigating the ethical challenges associated with using online client data and build support for its routine use in biopsychosocial assessment, the profession must proactively develop additional guidelines that assist in using this new type of information effectively and ethically.

Technology affects almost all aspects of daily life. The Internet serves as a context for human behavior, and professionals should not deviate from their ethical values and principles when using it in that capacity. Revisions made in 2017 to the NASW Code of Ethics go beyond simply getting clients' consent for internet searching by stating that it should be avoided unless social workers can justify its use for "compelling" professional reasons (NASW, 2017a). This overly restrictive stance is not consistent with the notion that online activities of client are part of the p-i-e perspective and that use of technology should not be treated with different ethical or moral professional standards (Johnson, 2001).

Social work's strong focus on client protection has resulted in a hesitation to embrace the opportunities that the Internet provides for gathering client information. Online information is publicly available and

social workers should not restrict their assessments to only information in the physical world.

Internet searching is commonplace in many other professions. The vast majority of social workers entering the field have used internet searching in their professional training as a primary method for gathering information. Instructing these social workers that this valuable data gathering method should be limited or avoided is antithetical to what they have been consistently taught. A more constructive approach would be to teach students about the responsible use of this practice by incorporating it into social work undergraduate and graduate curricula.

In consideration of the professional values of social work, internet searching of client information should include the following guidelines:

1. Social workers should have a policy about their use of internet client information, which includes the parameters (scope, time period for which data is collected, etc.) of searches.
2. Social workers should be aware of the policies of their employers regarding internet searching of client information and ensure that these policies are consistent with their own practices, as well as the ethical principles of the profession. In instances in which employers' policies are not consistent with their own practices and ethical standards, social workers should advocate to rectify discrepancies to ensure greater adherence to professional values.
3. Social workers should provide clients with copies of their own search policies, as well as copies of their employers' search policies, when applicable. These policies should be provided prior to the commencement of services and be posted publicly on websites whenever possible.
4. Social workers should obtain clients' informed consent prior to doing internet searches, except when such searches may be needed prior to obtaining consent to prevent danger to self and/or others.

5. Social workers should consider the intent of internet searching of client information, doing so only for professional purposes.
6. Social workers should erase their search histories if internet searching of client information is done on shared computers.
7. Social workers should anticipate how obtaining internet client information affects current and future treatment and the social worker–client relationship.
8. Social workers should never deceive clients (such as by gaining access to private, password-protected information under false pretenses) in order to gather their electronic information for professional purposes.
9. Social workers should provide clients with information gathered via the Internet and allow them the opportunity to validate and discuss it.
10. Social workers should document the sources of internet information gathered and clearly delineate which information was obtained from internet versus other sources.
11. Social workers should be explicit about their use of and reliance upon any data gathered via the Internet when using it in assessments and/or reports.
12. Social workers should recognize racial and/or cultural differences in online usage that may impact availability and types of online data available on clients. Social workers should realize that social media has been used to discriminate or threaten people based on diversity and difference. Social workers should advocate for the removal of harmful material against others based on race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc. that is discovered when doing internet searches.
13. Internet sites from which data were collected should be appropriately referenced.

14. Social workers should protect the identity of others unless there are threats of harm when gathering or reporting client information obtained from the Internet.
15. Social workers should educate clients about privacy and other concerns associated with their online information and take steps to assist clients to address any concerns that they have about their digital footprint.

While it is prudent to have professional concerns about the implications of internet searching for client information, the profession should not shy away from gathering and using electronic client information in its practice. Additional research is needed to identify situations in which such data collection can be useful. Social work should join with allied professions, such as medicine, counseling, and psychology, who are also wrestling with similar ethical concerns. Social work curricula should engage students in discussions about how to operate effectively and ethically in today's digital world. Additional training is needed for social work practitioners whose education did not include internet usage in the problem-solving process.

The question about whether internet searching of client information is reckless or required is not easily answered. With additional guidance, irresponsible practices can be avoided, but the profession is far from ready to embrace this new form of data gathering as a universal standard of care. Futurist thinking requires innovation and acceptance of new ways of practicing. It is important for social work not to avoid these changes. The reasons for collecting client information on the Internet are compelling. Luckily, there is no profession better suited than social work to navigate the ethical complexities associated with responsible usage of this practice. It is the profession's historical roots in fairness and justice that will help to guide social work in the future use of this valuable digital tool.

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# Professional Pledge in Social Work: Implications for Professional Identity and Value Integration

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## Abstract

The social work profession lays a strong emphasis on internalizing and reinforcing core social work values and ethical standards in order to create a cadre of social workers who can withstand the criticalities of any crisis and commit themselves to firmly stand with those whose survival and well-being is fragile and “on the brink”. The performance of this role not only requires a dynamic and contextual knowledge base and evolving skills set, it mandates a deep rooted acquiescence with a fundamental set of values that shape the profession’s vision and mission, and establish the goals and priorities of the practitioners. The transition from an entry level neophyte to a competent social work professional entails a journey which is characterized by the assumption and bolstering of a professional persona that grounds the incumbent within the functional niche of social work. The present paper looks at the integration of a social work pledge as a viable means for social work incumbents to establish identification with social

work values, don a professional identity, and assimilate with professional peers. It looks at the existing practice of pledge taking by highlighting the experience of a distinguished school of social work. It envisions the 'pledge' and the tradition of 'taking the pledge' evolving as a strong and more universal medium for creating an emotional connect of social work students with the value driven profession of social work.

Keywords: Pledge, values, ethics, social work, profession

Human services are performed by distinct professions which respond to human needs and human problems. The Library of Congress of the United States of America defines human services as incorporating "the various policies, programs, services, and facilities to meet basic human needs relating to the quality of life, such as education, health, welfare" (Barnetz & Vardi, 2015, p. 68). Zins (2001) characterized human services as "social services designed to meet human needs that are required for maintaining or promoting the overall quality of life of the prospective service populations" (p.7). He differentiated human services from the occasional and sporadic help given by family members, friends, or "good Samaritans", in that they construed institutionalized systematic services. In a proposed definition of human services, Kincaid (2009) postulated that human services were grounded in an integrated interdisciplinary knowledge base, and they endeavored to "facilitate client self-determined systemic change at all levels of society; personal, interpersonal, small group, family, organizational, community, and global" (p. 20). A comprehensive definition of human services as a field of knowledge was provided by the National Organization of Human Services (NOHS) wherein broadly speaking, human services strive to meet human needs through an interdisciplinary knowledge base, as they focus on prevention and remediation of problems, while being committed to improving the overall quality of life of service populations (NOHS, n.d. a). As can be gleaned from the above, while human services pertain to a more generalized field, 'helping professions' construe distinct and more specialized professional realms. With human service at its core, the helping profession of social work advocates for social justice for

both individuals and vulnerable populations and fosters social change. Its primary mission centers on the enhancement of human well-being, as it strives to help meet the basic and complex needs of all people, with particular focus on those who are vulnerable, oppressed and impoverished.

Practice in social work and human services posits complex and challenging issues that require careful thought and engagement to provide appropriate assistance. The values and ethics of those providing the services become central to the performance of their role and the choices they encounter in practice, more so in contemporary plural societies (Hugman, 2013). Values resonate as a core component of human service, and values training emerges as an integral component of the training of human services professionals. The “Ethical Standards for Human Service Professionals” adopted in 2015 (NOHS, n.d. b) draw focus on values being core to human service. Human service workers are characterized by an appreciation of human beings in all of their diversity as they offer assistance to their clients within the context of their communities and environments. The Preamble of the Ethical Standards affirms that human service professionals and those who educate them foster and integrate the unique values and characteristics that underlie human services. In doing so, they uphold the integrity and ethics of the profession, promote client and community well-being, and enhance their own professional growth. The core values include: respecting the inherent dignity and welfare of all people; promoting self-determination; honoring cultural diversity; advocating for social justice; and acting with integrity, honesty, genuineness and objectivity. These values reflect universal relevance and synergize with the context in which any human service professional is expected to function. Different human service professions also have their own distinct values frameworks. The National Council for Human Services charted out detailed standards encompassing the obligations of human services professionals in six domains: towards the client, the community/society, colleagues, the profession itself, the employing organization, and themselves (NOHSE, 1996). Human service professionals are expected to follow these standards in their ethical and professional

decision making. Professional obligations based on ethical standards are encapsulated in the codes of ethics of professions.

Needless to iterate, a core value framework embedded within teaching, research and practice is the fulcrum on which the human service profession of social work rests. Social work values reflect the profession's guiding philosophy of advancing human welfare, as well as its commitment for ensuring that social workers across the globe remain strongly united with common belief systems and are guided by professional commitments and ethical standards. Values in social work are informed by the pursuit of social justice, productive human relationships, human rights, and best practice (IFSW, 2014). They mark the 'tilt' of the profession towards certain desirable and envisioned ends.

### The professionalization of social work: value base of practice

Since its beginnings in the last third of the 19th century, the drive to attain professionalism and a professional status for social work was strong in many countries, including India. A profession is defined by certain core attributes, within which 'professional values' or 'code of ethics' figure prominently. Greenwood (1957), one of the earliest proponents of the 'attributes approach' to professionalization, highlighted five critical attributes of a profession as being: a systematic body of theory; professional authority; sanction of the community; professional culture; and a regulative code of ethics. The acknowledgement that professional values pertaining to a "particular grouping and ordering of values within a professional context" (Congress, 2010, p. 19) are the cornerstones of the social work profession gained prominence as early as 1915, when in his address to the US National Conference on Charities and Corrections, Abraham Flexner posed the basic question: "Is social work a profession?" He went on to announce that to be a profession, social work needed, among other things, a professional code of ethics. This address initiated a process for creating a professional ethical system for social work (Gray & Webb, 2010). In one of the earliest works on the exposition of social work as a profession in India, Nanavatty (1952)

articulated the need for ‘professional consciousness’, or a sense of belonging or brotherhood arising from a shared philosophy of service to humanity being inculcated among the newcomers to social work. According to Nanavatty, ‘professional consciousness’ also implied “loyalty to one’s own profession.... and willingness to carry out one’s responsibilities with a high standard of service” (p.165). Fostering high standards of service based on social workers’ “willingness to abide by professional ethics, emanating from the profession’s philosophy of work and a sense of direction and of values” (p. 165) constituted the envisioned ideal for the Indian social work profession. That social work is not value-free and “values imbue everything that is done in social work and the entire practice of frontline delivery of services and practice interventions” (Gray & Webb, 2010, p.7) has remained integral to social work practice ever since.

The obligation of any profession to articulate its basic values, ethical principles and standards finds manifestation in its code of ethics. Much of the progression towards the development of a code of ethics for social work transpired in the West. Mary Richmond provided an experimental Code of Ethics in 1920. This served as the foundation for social workers seeking social justice and equality for the vulnerable and oppressed populations (Reamer, 2006). After the formation of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in 1955, a simple code of ethics was adopted in 1960, followed by a more comprehensive code of ethics in 1979. Subsequent revisions were made to incorporate new components of social work practice. The most recent version of the code of ethics was adopted in 2017, and it has been used as a model for social work practice across the United States and worldwide. (Another update in the code has been undertaken in 2021 to address the importance of professional self-care in challenging workplace climates and exposure to trauma and revisions to standards for cultural competence.) The code of ethics is relevant to all social workers regardless of their professional functions, the setting in which they work, or the populations they serve. It identifies core values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence on which social work’s mission is based. It also summarizes the

broad ethical principles that reflect the profession's core values and establishes a set of specific ethical standards that can be used to guide social work practice (NASW, 2021).

Values and ethics have special significance in these late modern times. As social workers are being called upon to deal with a complex range of issues, they often confront difficult ethical dilemmas in a practice context riddled by rapid change (McAuliffe, 2010). In such a frame, they need to have "robust, rigorous and efficient ways of making ethical decisions" (ibid. p.74). Gray and Webb (2010) lament that although extensive trappings of "rational choice prevail within the codes of ethics, codes of conduct and ethical decision making frameworks" (p.17), these are bereft of their moral and philosophical underpinnings, as moral philosophy seems to have disappeared from the social work curriculum. Congress (2010) has also highlighted that despite several attempts to make the code of ethics more easily translatable to professional practice, most remain general statements or principles. She quotes Banks (2006) in asserting that most codes are "principle based, rather than character based" (p. 25). This constraint may stem from the fact that in most educational contexts, social work values have been narrowly defined and have been restrictive in terms of the diversity of perspectives they encapsulate. They are also articulated in a rather "formulaic manner" at the level of practice, as a select set of perspectives, which seem to be in vogue at the time (Gray & Webb, 2010). Social work students and practitioners often receive sparse training for resolving ethical dilemmas, especially those arising from a clash of values or from their own beliefs.

The professional values, ethical standards and ethical principles of social work which have found acceptance across the world have of late been criticized for being West-centric. There is an increasing demand to make space for ethics and values which are localized and indigenous to the native contexts. The current focus on anti-oppressive practice demands that students be prepared to respond to the needs of diverse and distinct indigenous groups, for whom the much prescribed dominant Western worldview is not relevant, and what is needed is an alternate value

perspective (Gray et al., 2008). Anti-oppressive social work has found an echo in developing countries, which find case work and individualized social work and their accompanying values set of limited relevance (Grey & Fook, 2004).

Within the specific context of India, Weiss-Gal and Welbourne (2008), in a cross national study, highlighted the lack of a single, formal, nationwide code of ethics in India. A few social workers' associations, such as the Bombay Association of Trained Social Workers, had in fact sought to develop a nationwide ethical code, but it had not been possible to unite all professional groups with one shared code of ethics. The study also questioned the thoroughness of the integration of the ethical strictures represented in the codes in the day-to-day practice of social workers. It proposed that a lack of internalization of values and ethics could emanate from social workers' unfamiliarity with the code or lack of training to apply the values and ethics, or inability to adhere to the code within their contexts, all of which eroded the accountability of the profession. On a positive note, Weiss and Welbourne (2008) concluded that despite the uneven progress of social work professionalization in the set of countries under consideration, for all of them, the aspiration to achieve professional status was strong, and it acted as a powerful motivating force behind the development of professional organizations, professional ethics, and professional knowledge.

In India, a draft 'Declaration of Ethics for Professional Social Workers' was prepared in the mid-nineties by the Social Work Educators' Forum (SWEF) at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, the first school of social work in India. As per its Preamble, the Declaration was "intended to serve as a guide to the members of the social work profession" and ....was "rooted in the contemporary social reality which has a historical background and in the framework of humanistic values, based on the intrinsic worth of all human and non-human life" (TISS, Social Work Educator's Forum, 1997, p. 336). The Declaration provided general ethical principles to guide conduct with respect to self and the profession, work with the marginalized and other people in need, the society and the state, co-workers, employing



organizations and social work education and research. However, apart from the fact that the Declaration tried to codify the ethical obligations of social workers, it did not find universal acceptance by social work educators and practitioners.

Subsequently, in 2015, a “Code of Ethics for Professional Social Workers in India” was developed by the National Association for Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI). In framing its Code, NAPSWI acknowledged reference to sections from the Code of Ethics developed by professional associations of social workers of other countries, notably the U.S, U.K, Canada, Australia, Singapore and Switzerland. According to the NAPSWI document, a code of ethics issued by a professional body is of the nature of a policy statement, and even a form of legislation within the closed group of professionals. This was done to create a binding on its stakeholders, resulting in specific sanctions for the violation of the code. It was expected that the “adherence of such code of conduct shall lead to a higher standard in professional education, training and practice with equally high professional accountability” (NAPSWI, 2015, p.3). However, this Code of Ethics has also not been universally acknowledged by the entire social work fraternity across the country.

Thus, we see that there is yet much ground to be covered when it comes to evolving and accepting a universal and contextual code of ethics for social work practice. At the same time, there is widespread recognition that the profession must reaffirm its distinct presence in established domains of practice and stake claim in newer realms that envisage a functional niche for social work. There is also a concerted movement towards the creation of a national regulatory body viz. a national council for social work. Under the circumstances, the imperatives for social work to firm up its professional identity are all too obvious.

### The pledge and oath: meaning and significance for professions

As per the Cambridge Dictionary, a pledge is “a serious or formal promise or something that you give as a sign that you will keep a promise” (Cambridge

University Press, n.d). The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English furthers the definition when it says that a pledge represents “a serious promise or agreement, especially one made publicly or officially” (Bullon, 2008). Professional pledges often take the form of ‘oaths’. The Merriam Webster.Com Dictionary qualifies oath as “a solemn usually formal calling upon God or a god to witness to the truth of what one says or to witness that one sincerely intends to do what one says” and as “a solemn attestation of the truth or inviolability of one's words”(Merriam Webster Inc., n.d). Oaths have “public, as well as private implications; transcend both the swearer and the observer(s) who witness the oath-taking; involve the personhood of the oath-taker; and prescribe consequences that arise from the failure to fulfill the oath” (Theunissen, 2008, p. 56). An oath may be regarded as a very special kind of promise. It transcends time and geographical boundaries in the process of uniting people. Oaths thus bind people to a particular community as they connect the viewer, and speaker with those who had come before and those who will come after through a defined ceremony (Sunstein, 1990). Quoting Austin (1970), Sulmasy (1999) says that both oaths and promises are “performative utterances” (p. 331) and by virtue of the fact that they do not operate in private domain, such public utterances have a powerful hold on the participants who are less likely to violate it (Sunstein, 1990). Consequently, professional oath contributes towards enhancing professionalism and creating greater conformity to professional standards (De Bruin, 2017).

De Bruin (2017) also qualifies oaths as being stronger than promises in terms of the obligations they impose on their incumbents; the moral compulsion they carry; and the additional formal and substantive conditions they incorporate. Oaths are

generally distinguished by their greater moral weight compared with promises, their public character, their validation by transcendent appeal, the involvement of the personhood of the swearer, the prescription of consequences for failure to uphold their contents, the generality of the scope of their contents, the prolonged time frame of the commitment, the fact that their moral force remains binding in spite of

failures on the part of those to whom the swearer makes the commitment, and the fact that interpersonal fidelity is the moral hallmark of the commitment of the swearer (p.329).

Finally, oaths are generally not contractual in a legalistic sense, but represent a relational commitment to the personhood of those toward whom the oath is directed. As such, an oath uses a higher form of ethical or moral authority than implied by a commitment or promise, and therefore, represents a higher level of obligation on the part of the practitioner. A distinction also needs to be drawn between 'oaths' and 'codes'. According to Sulmasy (1999) codes are collections of specific moral rules, and not performative utterances. They do not signify future intentions, nor do they impose a personal obligation of adherence on the one who is enjoined by the code.

Many professional groups "swear an oath on the basis of legal privilege or, alternately, on the basis of ancient tradition" (Theunissen, 2008, p. 56). De Bruin (2017) considers professional oaths as being the most dated form of ethics management. Deriving their significance from the social function that the profession is ordained to perform, they often represent "promises made during public ceremonies that exhort the oath-takers to act in ways that are consistent with professional standards" (p.1). If carefully designed, they "foster professionalism, facilitate moral deliberation, and enhance compliance with professional standards" (ibid).

Medical practitioners rely on ancient tradition for the swearing of a common oath. The Hippocratic Oath is perhaps the oldest oath which goes back to the time of Hippocrates of Kos (c. 400 BCE). The oath represents a sacred bond between caregiver and patient, and upholds the obligation of the medical practitioner based upon the ethics affirmed in the text and voluntarily assumed by him/her. Kass (1983), maintained that being a medical 'professional' was a matter of ethics which necessitated dedication to a way of life, in the service of others and to serve some higher good. The oath and the pledge are reminders to the medical profession of their

responsibility to their patients. All modern medical oaths follow the essence of the Hippocratic Oath.

Nursing also has a long history of oath taking by its incumbents. The Nightingale Pledge, named in honor of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, is a modified version of the Hippocratic Oath and was initially created in the year 1893. This pledge represented a statement of the ethics and principles of the nursing profession in the United States. In 1935, a revision to the pledge was made. In the more recent years, many nursing schools in the U.S have made changes to the original or 1935 versions to promote a more independent nursing profession, with its own distinct ethical standards. The oath is often administered at graduation ceremonies wherein nurses take a pledge to do their best for their patients. Even in India, in many schools of nursing, probationer nurses recite the 'Florence Nightingale Pledge' to dedicate themselves to the profession. The American Psychotherapy Association has also adopted a pledge to uphold the ethical standards of practice of psychotherapists (American Psychotherapy Association, n.d). Many other professions including teachers (Heiderscheidt, 2003), lawyers (Bar Council of India, 2021), pharmacists (Indian Pharmaceutical Association, n.d), and library staff (American Library Association, 2017) have also created their own pledges which are administered either at the time of their entry into professional education or when they graduate.

A question that arises is, if oaths are neither a universal endeavor nor do they construe a legal obligation, and if they do not even guarantee morality based on the ethical standards underlying them, then why do professionals such as doctors take an oath? Sriharan et al. (2001) shared the results of a working party of the British Medical Association in 1992, which found that the affirmation can strengthen a doctor's resolve to act with integrity in extreme circumstances. This group recommended that medical schools should incorporate medical ethics into the core curriculum, and all medical graduates should make a commitment, by means of affirmation, to observe an ethical code. With increasing complexity of health care arrangements and interagency collaborations, and with public confidence

in doctors being on the decline in the U.K, the medical profession was forced to re-examine its core values. Under such circumstances, for newly qualified doctors to freely declare their intentions to act ethically and professionally proved popular for those who placed themselves in their care, and for the community at large. Based on a review of literature on medical oaths, Theunissen (2017) found that despite scarcity of evidence, many authors had elucidated a reliance on the practice of professional oaths for the formation of professional identity for a physician and for the development of ethical medical practice.

In the overall context, Scheinman et al. (2018) reported that professional oaths performed several purposes. First of all, they helped in connecting the takers of the oath with the legacy and traditions of the profession, and instilled in them a sense of obligation to uphold this heritage. Further, recognizing and embracing the obligations iterated in oaths contributed to professional identity formation in the oath takers. Oath taking also signified voluntary acceptance of a code of ethics, and thereby acted as an acknowledgment to society that the profession was guided by a common ethical code. As with other public rituals, like singing the national anthem, the recital of an oath in unison served to bind participants as a group, and to other professionals in their domain. And depending on how it was presented and contextualized, the ceremony of oath taking tended to distinguish the professionals from others and helped bind them together through recognition of common obligations.

## Methodology

The present article is based on the analysis of secondary data obtained from Delhi School of Social Work at the University of Delhi (hereafter referred to as the School). The annals of the School were perused to explore the background and context of the two pledges that had been conceived at different points in the history of the School. These pledges were analyzed within the milieu of the socio economic and political contexts of the times in which they evolved, in order to understand the discourse surrounding them.

The aim was also to gauge the thrust of the pledges; decode the social work values being communicated through them; and to connect them with the prevailing definitions and scope of the social work profession. An analysis of student journals written by social work students during a formal orientation programme helped assess students' response and feedback on the pledge and the pledge taking ceremony, which was a part of the programme. The journals were thematically analyzed to comprehend the responses of the students towards their entire experience of pledge taking. The analysis of these two sets of data aided the authors to build the arguments set forth in the paper.

### Social work professional pledge: Indian context

A reference to oaths taken by medical and nursing professionals becomes significant for social workers, as both medicine and social work are deemed exemplars of human service professions. Social work can benefit from the appropriation of the same tradition of such other human service professions that have effectively used a professional pledge or oath to internalize the core values set in their constituents, including faculty, students and practitioners. A professional oath for social workers can provide a sound ethical grounding in: service and commitment; social and economic justice; human rights; respect for the dignity of the clients, their distinctness, abilities and rights. Nathanson (2003) argued that the ethical component of practice was based on the principles and core values of the profession, and constituted an integral part of all practice, like medicine. Ethical practice was a core function of the social work practitioner, and the use of an oath affirmed adherence to a set of rules, principles and values between the practitioner and society. Further, ethical issues were not "add-ons" to professional practice; rather they were the foundational core to all professional decisions, just like those in the medical realm. An increasing focus on ethics sensitization and training in social work professional education underscores the imperative to consistently instill ethical thought into practice. Viewed from this perspective, a professional oath can operate

as an important means to integrate an ethical stance as a central pillar of social work practice. It portends the potential of arousing the much needed ethical consciousness among budding social workers; deepening their sense of bonding, loyalty and duty to the profession and to the client groups; fostering professional competency; and helping to maintain the highest ideals and attributes of professional practice.

At this point in time, there is no universally accepted oath that finds prominence in professional social work education and training in India. Even outside of India, few schools of social work in the United States, Canada and South Africa have been known to have pledge-taking ceremonies. There are some documented illustrations of self-devised and voluntary pledges undertaken by students at some schools of social work. In India, the 'Declaration of Ethics for Professional Social Workers' by TISS (TISS, Social Work Educator's Forum, 1997), did take the form of a pledge and encapsulated an articulation of the value framework of social work. However, being too lengthy, it was not pragmatic for the Declaration to be used as a pledge or an oath for Indian social workers. The founding fraternity at Delhi School of Social Work, which was the second school of social work to be established in the country, did recognize the need to institute a pledge for its social work class in its formative years. The initial pledge was replaced by another one, which aligned better with the changing paradigm and thrust of professional social work in the country.

### *The tradition and practice of a social work pledge at a school of social work*

The pledge at the School has a unique place in the history of the institution which was established in 1946. During the foundational years of the School, the faculty recognised the need to facilitate student's recognition of social work convictions and convert them into the semblance of a pledge in order to create a connect between the student trainees and their envisioned mission as social workers. However, the pledge remained specific to the School.

It was in the year 1947, during the post partition violence that Mahatma Gandhi had shifted to Delhi, and was pleading for non-violence among the two religious communities. He was keeping a close watch on the work of volunteers who were working to assuage the wounds of the people who had been suffering the immensely adverse impact of this cleavage that had carved the nation into two parts. The students of the School were working on the ground, and Gandhiji was cognizant of their efforts. On the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's birthday on 2nd October 1947, the students wanted to give him a unique gift. The then principal of the School, Ms. Elmina Lucke, suggested that they individually write and dedicate three personal convictions to the Mahatma. That year the School had enrolled 19 women students. They all wrote their convictions and presented them to Gandhiji. Ms. Elmina Lucke blended the convictions of the students into one cohesive pledge which was also presented to him on his birthday. This is how the formative pledge of the School came into being. It was framed by all the students of that time and reflected their convictions as social workers. (Mahatma Gandhi was highly appreciative of their gift, and invited the students for interaction during his evening prayer time.) The original pledge was made more compact in 1948, and this evolved as the first formal pledge of the School. Thereafter, it became a practice for all neophytes to receive this first formal pledge during their investiture into the master's programme in social work at the School. This pledge was traditionally written on khadi paper, symbolizing the value that Gandhiji ascribed to khadi, and it continued to function as a much-cherished guidepost to the social work till the year 2007-08. It is reproduced in Appendix A.

The simplicity and the earnestness of purpose of the oath taker/holder that is reflected in the first pledge adopted by the School are striking. In the context in which this pledge evolved, Gandhi's spirit of service had come to occupy primacy. Faith in the highest virtue of 'service' to humanity, and belief in the predominance of duty as Gandhi's core postulates underlay the essence of this pledge. The pledge was clearly seen to uphold the value of service to humanity, and especially to those who were rendered weak or were in distress. Non-discrimination in rendering service



to all who needed them was the hallmark of such service, which if undertaken with love, patience and conscious intent, had the capacity to heal pain, suffering and ill-will. Additionally, the formative years of social work in India continued to draw from the cultural context of 'service' and 'welfare.' The awakening of a sense of social concern and an orientation to helping others in need permeated the spirit of the first pledge.

The pledge recognized compassionate service; kindly disposition and sympathy (as against social work's contemporary focus on empathy) in engaging with the lives of the vulnerable and those who deviated from normative prescriptions. The recognition of dignity of all human beings and of their inherent ability to create change in their thinking and behavior formed the edifice of social work. Loyalty to all those who served the profession, and with all those who served the nation and its people was also extolled. Being a pledge, persistence and perseverance in working towards the goals of social work was emphasized. The sentimental value of this pledge was so immense that it continued to imbue the spirit of the School for a long period of time.

It was only much later that a new School pledge took form. This pledge was written by the faculty and formally introduced in the School in the year 2007-08. This pledge added to the present day foundation for the professional conduct of social workers. As has been highlighted above, a gap of more than six decades separated this pledge from the original pledge. There was thus, perceptible difference in not only the focus of the two pledges, but also the way they respond to, and echo, the larger social narrative. The present-day pledge is attached as Appendix B.

The second pledge reflects the significant shifts in social work: from welfare to development and subsequently to social justice and human rights paradigms in social work discourse. During the last six decades, socio-political and economic churning across the globe has led to significant transformations. Human misery emanating from poverty, livelihood loss, wars and civil strife, climatic changes, terrorism, and religious and ethnic conflicts, have pushed a multitude of individuals, groups and communities to the margins. Most significantly, globalization has posed several

challenges for the profession, as rural and urban poor, homeless people, malnourished children, women, dalits (lower castes), tribals and sexual minorities have borne the worst negative fallout of the enhanced emphasis on economic growth (Nadkarni & Joseph, 2014). These challenges have brought forth a powerful discourse built on the edifice of social justice, equality, human rights, democratic participation and the dignity and worth of individuals and groups, which was echoed at diverse national and international platforms.

The latest global definition of social work reads:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels (IFSW, 2014).

As the social work profession in India has endeavored to respond to the critical challenges, it has redefined its contours by adopting the global definition of social work, and contextualizing it within the indigenous frame. Analysis of the present pledge shows that it has not only imbibed the global definition in letter and spirit, but has gone much beyond. It portrays the paradigmatic shift in the stance of the profession in a very discernible manner. Core attributes of social change, solidarity and social cohesion, diversity, justice, empowerment, liberation and human rights are pervasive in the pledge, just as they are in the definition of social work. The pledge even goes beyond the definition when it brings to fore the manner in which institutions with which professionals engage must be managed. It also recognizes the obligations and rights which are mandated by the Constitution of India.

The pledge can be seen to cover three main aspects permeating the profession. First, the professional self; second, the institution/s with which

the profession is associated; and third, the constituencies with whom the profession engages and its associated ethos. The pledge acknowledges that as individuals, social workers may have their own biases and prejudices. However, as responsible human service professionals, they must question their own biases, process them and confront them. The social workers' ability to critically interrogate their own beliefs and value systems enables them to be open to the acceptance of the diversity of opinions, views, beliefs and value systems around them. It also enhances their ability to take concerted positions on issues, especially those that do not correspond to their own beliefs and values sets. The pledge nudges the professionals to challenge the confines of their secured life, and the narrow belief systems that they may have embraced on account of the distinctness of their socialization and lived experiences.

The pledge also urges social workers to critically reflect upon social institutions and structures, in order to strive for social change aimed at equality, human rights and social justice. It prompts them to transform institutions into dynamic spaces for action for social change. As social workers, they are expected to augment the transparency and accountability of the institutions to various stakeholders, and at the same time work towards enhancing the knowledge base on which the profession rests. The issues and challenges confronting society find manifestation in the pledge as it exhorts the professionals to stand 'with' and 'for' those who are marginalized or oppressed and who face systematic institutional biases. It expects social workers to participate in the protection of peoples' right to freely express themselves; a right which is also constitutionally protected. Reaching out to people holding diverse views so as to engage them in meaningful dialogue is crucial, as it not only enhances social solidarity, but also ensures participation of those who are peripheral to mainstream discourse.

Above all, the pledge acts as a reminder to social workers that they are professionally bound to promoting equality and diversity; working towards ensuring justice to all; and resolving differences through reconciliation. The focus of pledge is on an inclusive struggle to promote a life of dignity for all,

irrespective of religion, ethnicity, culture, group or community. As an instrument of positive change, the professional is encouraged to act in an ethical manner and with conviction arising out of critical understanding, passion and perseverance, while at the same time maintaining honesty and humanity. In no uncertain terms, the pledge serves as a beacon, a symbol, that unites students, teachers and future social workers in their professional commitment.

### Inculcating professional ethos amongst social work students through the Pledge

It is pertinent to note that although the value framework that social work upholds is core to the professionalization of its constituents, the integration of professional values seems rather elusive and difficult to implement during professional education and training. To help the diverse group of students appreciate the imperatives of identifying and absorbing the fundamental values and engaging with the ethical and philosophical positions which will inform their work and competence as a professional is by no means a simple process, or even a mechanical one that can be achieved through simple classroom instruction or field supervision. Multifarious and ongoing ways to engage with the teaching and integration of values and ethics are necessary to prepare practitioners who are well grounded in values-based practice. While the cognitive and practical elements of learning are crucial, they are not sufficient; rather, it is the emotional components that are indispensable if we are to emphasize that social work is, above all, a genuine human encounter. The use of a pledge (or alternately a professional oath) is one such viable medium to build commitment for the assumption of the roles, responsibilities and obligations of the social work profession.

For the past eight years, the new batch of students take this pledge in a symbolic ceremony on the first day of a carefully designed, formal orientation programme. The background to the Pledge is created by the rendition of a well-known devotional song treasured by Mahatma Gandhi

called *Vaishnava Jana to* <sup>3</sup>. This famous song radiates the core professional social work values of empathy, honesty, dignity and worth of individuals, equality, selflessness, and also controlled emotional involvement. The attributes of

creating an empathetic connect with people; possessing egalitarian thoughts and action; developing acceptance and non-judgmental attitude; shedding bias and prejudice; rendering service with humility; reinforcing gender equality and ethical conduct; integrating an abiding faith in truth and justice; and choosing to tread the challenging path of service with the single minded focus on vision and mission are amply revealed by Mahatma's most favourite bhajan (Agnimitra & Sharma, 2020, p. 6).

The pledge taking 'candle light' ceremony starts with a student of the senior batch passing on the flame of a lit candle to the chain of students of the newly admitted batch. All the students collectively and publicly, in the presence of the faculty and staff of the School, then recite the pledge with lit candles in their hands creating an emotionally palpable ethos of committed human service. This symbolic ceremony has evolved as an important medium for connecting the neophytes with the ethos of social work through an oath of allegiance to its cherished goals and values. An analysis of the learning journals written by students of two successive batches, who recorded their experience, reflection and introspection about the two weeks long orientation to social work, revealed a discernible acknowledgement of the impact that the pledge ceremony creates for them in apprising them

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<sup>3</sup> *Vaishnava Jana to* was one the most favorite hymns of Mahatma Gandhi. The hymn underscores the qualities of a good human being and it was regularly sung at Gandhi ashram. The hymn can be accessed at [https://www.indembassybern.gov.in/docs/Lyrics%20of%20Vaishnav%20Jan%20To%20bhajan\\_23052018\\_111927.pdf](https://www.indembassybern.gov.in/docs/Lyrics%20of%20Vaishnav%20Jan%20To%20bhajan_23052018_111927.pdf)

about the professional ethos of social work, its values framework and expected professional roles and obligations. A student wrote,

Although I had joined social work in the hope of a prospective career, I had little idea about what exactly professional social work was! I only knew that it was about helping people. However, when we collectively read out the social work pledge, it was a moment of reckoning for me. The pledge apprised me about what social work was; who it serves; what principles I am expected to follow; and what my forthcoming role would be! But I was also a little intimidated by the responsibility that seemed to be placed on me!

Another student reflected on the validation that the pledge provided for her choice of social work. She wrote,

I am not a very emotional person, yet the 'pledge' and the manner in which the pledge was read out by us was a moment like no other! I was emotionally moved, beyond words! It struck me that I had entered a space which held immense expectations from me.... Although I did feel quite intimidated by what I was expected to do from hereon, it was almost as if I found a reason to be here, and a justification to convince my own self that this was why I had chosen social work.

Many students were moved by the professional ethos that emanated from the pledge. The pledge emphatically lays down the responsibilities and expectations from the budding professionals. In fact, it even urges them to go beyond those iterated within it. When the neophytes take this pledge in public, in the presence of the senior batch, faculty and staff, it reaffirms their conscious intent to enter the realm of committed human service and join the league of social work professionals. This articulation builds moral pressure on them to live up to the mandate of the profession that they have publicly endorsed. Some students did admit that the pledge had created for them moral benchmark. This was distinctly captured in the following narrative,

I did not know that social work had such a distinct set of virtues that every social worker was expected to develop. I went home and read the pledge once again. It was all about me and what I was expected to do

from hereon. I became aware that I had to work on myself if I was to really become all that I was pledging for!

Yet another one acknowledged,

After the pledge I realized that social work is ethical, and social workers have to become ethical. There were so many values that were present in the pledge like compassion with thoughtfulness, conviction, passion, honesty, perseverance, humanity, inclusion, and acceptance. Social work is certainly not everyone's cup of tea... I hope that I can develop all these and really serve people with the right spirit and devotion.

Reflections in learning journals also revealed the essence of the emotional impact that the pledge ceremony evoked. As one student recorded,

I got goose bumps while we all recited the pledge together, with the flame of the candles illuminating our faces in the dark auditorium. Each word of the pledge and what it represented for us as future social workers was so beautifully written! I immediately got connected to social work in that moment.

Yet another neophyte was bewildered by the cohesiveness and connection that was felt by members of gathering as the pledge was given. He wrote,

I was so surprised to see each member of the teaching faculty and senior class reciting the pledge with us, with so much passion, devotion and sincerity. It was almost as if the pledge had connected all of us. We were all aspiring to become social workers. And then in the end, as all our lit candles stood huddled together, I could not locate which one was mine. They all looked so beautiful...shining together. This was all so unexpected. I have been to two higher education institutions earlier, but had never felt such vibes.

Sunstein (1990) articulated that the public rendition of a pledge manages to create vertical and horizontal connections as the viewers and speakers are bound together in the embrace of a shared vision, mission and values. The imperative of this symbolism and culminating practice is integral to professional practice in a country as diverse as India. As a microcosm of the

nation, neophytes from diverse social, cultural, regional and religious backgrounds and ideological positions converge in the School to achieve their common aspiration of doing social work. The collective rendition of the professional pledge subsumes some of this diversity into a shared iteration of common professional roles and expectations. In the words of another student,

As we formed a human chain and started passing on the light of our candles to each other, what struck me was how our identities; be it gender based, or coming from different corners of the country, with different backgrounds, and speaking different languages just shrunk! We were all connected like beads in a string. The ceremony united all of us so beautifully. What stood out was only one thing... our common desire to become social work professionals!

And yet another one wrote,

I shall never forget the pledge taking ceremony in my life. It brought tears in my eyes. I will always cherish it and will be reminded of it each day! What an inspiring way to begin my new journey as a social worker!

Another comment that stood out was by a student who wrote,

I am so glad that I found my true calling in life. As I took the pledge, I knew instantly, that this was truly where I belonged! And I thanked my parents for standing with me in my choice! They would be so proud of me...

The public articulation of the pledge also has the potential of bringing to fore the personhood of those groups and communities who belong to diverse castes, regions and religions, some of whom have been marginalized, their voices silenced. It helps to create connection of the aspiring social worker with the people belonging to such communities, exhorting them to share their struggles and challenges. As a student articulated,

The pledge was like an entire orientation to social work. As I recited the pledge, I became aware of my role as a social worker and whom I have to



stand for! And in the end when we said...this is the least that I pledge for, I became aware of the huge sense of responsibility that I had just taken upon myself! I hope I can fulfill this responsibility well.

## Conclusion

The authors are of the firm conviction that in view of the increasing complexity of issues confronting the social work profession in these confounding times, an unequivocal focus on values inculcation is critical. Social workers are increasingly being called upon to perform many complex tasks involving complicated human interactions. They often confront a plethora of competing values in trying to take the right decision about how to intervene in any given situation. Over the course of their practice, they also face a wide range of ethical issues and dilemmas that are difficult to resolve. On account of these, social work education has to be adequately invested in rigorous and systematic values training, with resolute thrust on the internalization of values and ethics among social work incumbents. Additionally, there is dire need for social work to consolidate and reflect on its professional identity and relevance. Facing competition from other disciplines, even in those domains which have traditionally been its core practice areas, social work in India is increasingly aware of the need to 'become more visible'. Based on their experiences as faculty in a school of social work, the authors propose the institutionalization of a social work pledge articulating the ideals of the profession and associated professional obligations. This may be a crucial step in grounding the newly recruited incumbents in the professional ethos. As a profession that intensively engages with human beings, a pledge, delivered in a solemn manner can generate a consciousness of the sense of responsibility and ethical conduct that social workers must imbibe right from when they step into the professional fold.

The pledge could emerge as a locus and binding force around which social workers can acquire a collective professional identity. A pledge that recognizes the local context and gives space to values and issues emerging

from the grassroots can help overcome the emergent challenges and redefine the contours of this profession. It also presents an opportunity to foster a professional and public understanding of the values that social workers share with the groups and communities they serve. Whether it is a universal pledge, or one that is distinct for an institution, it can enable social workers to extend social work 'virtues'. Illustrations of students' reflections on pledge-taking provide evidence that the experience helped them to connect with the legacy of the profession and made them appreciate the immense responsibility that the profession bestowed on them. Recognition of professional obligations in the pledge contributed to their professional identity formation. Such public rendition of the pledge not only reinforces the spirit of voluntary acceptance of the code of ethics, it also acts as a reaffirmation to the larger society that the profession is guided by an ethical code (Scheinman et al, 2018). The symbolism of an investiture ceremony to be institutionalized in schools of social work can aid the neophytes to amalgamate the spirit of human service; evolve the coveted professional consciousness; and embrace the social work professional mantle more readily and effectively.

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## Appendix A: The First Pledge

I shall serve to the best of my ability the depressed, the disabled and the needy

I shall serve all equally and I shall try to develop such judgment and affection and patience that my service will heal ill feelings and distress

I pledge myself to compassion and words of kindness and friendly sympathy that will enter into the joys and sorrows of all who are needy or afflicted or erring

I shall never lose my faith in the value of every human being and their capacity to change ways of life and thinking

I pledge to work for loyalty within my professional group. I shall work also for extension of such loyalty to all men and women who have the responsibility of serving my country and my people

I shall look not back but forward until the goal is reached

Let me serve my fellow beings. That is all I ask.

## Appendix B: The New Pledge

I shall self-reflect to examine my own biases, clarify my beliefs and take stances.

I pledge to step out of my area of comfort so I may meet people, listen to their lives, grow and be open to their full harmony

I pledge to be critical and ask questions in order to cast doubt, inquire and prompt social change  
For myself and my colleagues in profession, I shall strive continuously to advance knowledge about people and issues

I pledge to contribute towards turning our institutions into genuinely transparent, accountable and fair communities of action.

In solidarity with those who have been forced to silence, I promise to defend freedom of expression, to being open always to dialogue and listening

I shall be consciously inclusive towards all people and act to promote diversity, equality mutual respect, justice and reconciliation

To marginalized people from different ethnicities, religious cultures, groups and communities, I give promise to walk in arms in their struggle for life and dignity

From this day I am aware that I am a part of community of change agents

I thus pledge to act ethically, in compassion with thoughtfulness, conviction, passion, honesty, perseverance and humanity

This is the least I pledge for ...



# Equipoise: Ethical Considerations for Pregnancy Options Counseling

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## Abstract

Pregnancy options counseling is an intervention that supports individuals who are struggling with making decisions related to an unintended pregnancy and typically occurs within medical and social service agencies across the United States. This intervention is important, as nearly 50% of pregnancies in the United States are unplanned or unintended. While little information is presently available on how pregnancy options counseling is practiced across settings, there are likely many opportunities where ethical dilemmas arise for the counselor. This paper will introduce pregnancy options counseling within medical and social service settings and identify ethical considerations for social workers and other helping professionals. The paper ends with a focus specifically on equipoise as a state of being.

Keywords: Pregnancy options counseling; unplanned pregnancy; social work ethics; social work in health care; clinical social work; reproductive decision making

Pregnancy options counseling is an intervention that is often used to reduce anxiety and assist with concerns and decision-making that may arise with individuals experiencing an unintended pregnancy. Presently, pregnancy options counseling is utilized in multiple types of settings, including medical clinics, human service organizations, adoption agencies, and faith-based pregnancy resource centers (Berglas et al., 2018; O'Donnell et al., 2018). A woman who experiences an unplanned pregnancy, likely, will take a pregnancy test at one of the agencies listed above and then have the option to receive pregnancy options education or counseling pending a positive result. In other instances, she may take a home pregnancy test, receive a positive result, and then seek organizations where they are able to discuss her options and provide support and resources. This intervention is important as almost half of pregnancies in the United States are unintended (Finer & Zolna, 2016).

Pregnancy options counseling offers a unique opportunity for social workers, mental health, and other health care providers to engage and assist women during an unplanned pregnancy situation. Ideally, pregnancy options counseling provides ethical, unbiased, and non-directive, patient-led counseling to pregnant patients, and their partners and/or families, who need support processing and discussing their ideas and emotions related to their unintended pregnancy (Berglas et al., 2018; Madden et al., 2017; Moss et al., 2015; Simmonds & Likis, 2005; Singer, 2004). Pregnancy options counseling, ultimately, should assist the patient in making a pregnancy resolution decision. Pregnancy resolutions are typically defined as the following: continuation of pregnancy and parenting, continuation of pregnancy and forming an adoption plan (including kinship care), or ending the pregnancy through an elective abortion (i.e., medication abortion or surgical abortion). About 40% of unintended pregnancies will end in abortion, approximately one-percent will result in adoption placement and roughly 50% will resolve in continuing the pregnancy and then parenting (CDC, 2014; Finer & Zolna, 2011; Moss et al., 2015).

## Pregnancy Options Counseling and Social Work Ethics

The National Association of Social Work's (NASW) *Code of Ethics* (2021) identifies *Self-Determination* (1.02) and *Informed Consent* (1.03) as important factors to consider in social work practice. Self-determination provides individuals choice in their own decision making and the *Code* (2021) empowers social workers to encourage patient self-determination, while also respecting their rights and empowering patients to pursue their goals (Hollenberger & Yancey, 2021). Pregnancy options counseling inherently promotes self-determination of patients; simultaneously, pregnancy options counseling also necessitates the inclusion of Informed Consent. Informed Consent ensures patients are fully educated and advised about potential interventions and treatment. In their paper reflecting on pregnancy options counseling, faith and policy, Hollenberger and Yancey (2021) note *The Code* (2021) guides “social workers to provide services to patients on valid informed consent and then states social workers should use clear language to inform of purpose and potential risks and limits, relevant costs, alternatives, patients' right to refuse or withdraw consent, and the time frame covered by the consent and create an environment where patients have the ability to ask questions” (p. 5). The ethical principles introduced here are nested in the social work value of the dignity and worth of the person and highlight the importance of human relationships. When integrated in practice these are the ethical building blocks of achieving competence.

## Ethical Considerations for the Pregnancy Options Counselor

Pregnancy options counseling, like many health care interventions, has the potential to be complicated for the counselor, specifically as it relates to ethics and ethical dilemmas. Competing values, goals, agendas, and needs coupled with a patient's vulnerability can create a messy and complex decision-making process that can range from leaving a patient satisfied with her choice to her feeling exploited, manipulated, or even coerced. Given

this, this paper seeks to address some of the salient factors and concerns that a pregnancy options counselor will have to manage to provide the best care for their patients.

We suggest that counselors providing effective, competent, and ethical pregnancy options counseling should be in an ongoing process of examining, reflecting on, and deconstructing their own motivations for engaging in this important work with patients. The paper will end with a focus specifically on equipoise and describe how equipoise as a state of *being with* patients may create the safest spaces for individuals to make informed decision about their pregnancies.

The concept of equipoise originates in the medical field, and describes when researchers or medical professionals experience a genuine state of uncertainty about the superior option when there are several viable treatment options (Dahlen, 2021). It is often described as a clinical treatment feature when healthcare providers are in the position of influencing a patient decision where there are collaborative decision-making options available (Politi et al, 2021). Dobkin and colleagues (2013) describe pregnancy options counseling as an example of healthcare equipoise because there are two (or more) clinically sound approaches a client can choose. To better situate the meaning of this term where a pregnancy options counselor would find it useful, we turn to Motivational Interviewing training where clinicians are taught that equipoise is placing oneself in a neutral position when there are value laden decisions with moral dimensions about which the clinician may have a strong preference. A state of equipoise is sought to prevent steering a client in a particular direction (Forman & Moyers, 2021). Equipoise is achieved when the worker uses their power to create an environment where the patient has freedom and safety to explore their own desires and options without pressure to make a specific choice.

## Agency Goals and Values

Counselors engaging in pregnancy options counseling will work at a variety of agencies with differing agendas and goals undergirded by different values. Commonly, pregnancy options counseling is provided by physicians in outpatient medical settings, by adoption professionals working with adoption agencies, by professionals in faith-based pregnancy resource centers, and by health care providers at women's health clinics or abortion clinics. It is important to note that organizations may refer to pregnancy options counseling as pregnancy options education, however *pregnancy counseling* or *abortion counseling* are not synonymous terms with pregnancy options counseling/education. Counselors ostensibly self-select an organization that has a closeness of fit with their own personal values. But even so, organizations and organizational leadership may create an environment in which a worker feels pressure to direct or guide a patient toward a particular outcome. This can potentially occur across the spectrum of places where a helper can work or at any agency which provides options available to a patient. It is important for counselors to engage in a high level of critical thinking and reflexivity, and work toward personal objectivity by centering their patients' needs, wants, wishes, and values during the time they spend together, and to do this regardless of the context in which workers find themselves. Two important questions counselors must ask themselves are "can I functionally isolate my patient from my agency's values," and "can I support a patient no matter their choice?"

## Personal Values

Personal values often guide our choice of occupation and where we choose to work. These values have been inculcated through multiple pathways across the lifespan including by authority figures (parents), teachers, media/social media, politicians, religious institutions/leaders, books, sacred texts, as well as neighborhoods, communities, and regional culture, among many others. Given this complex set of beliefs and values, pregnancy

options counselors may be uncomfortable with or express bias toward patients' decisions to either continue or terminate unplanned pregnancies (Dobkin et al., 2013; Singer, 2004). In her influential article on options counseling technique, obstetric nurse Janet Singer (2004) reminds health care providers of the need to understand and accept a woman's pregnancy goals even when they conflict with their own values. Singer (2004) suggests that pregnancy options counselors provide non-judgmental and non-directive care by, ideally, showing "disinterest" in the pregnancy decision (p. 236). Pregnancy options counselors should also explore and reflect on their own values surrounding reproductive decision making. Again, reflexivity, self-awareness, and enough safe space to examine "why" the counselor has chosen a certain type of work or agency setting are critical to the counselor being as objective as possible.

## Competency

Presently, across healthcare and social service settings, there is little research on pregnancy options counseling interventions and techniques. Pregnancy options counseling is considered a best practice and is noted as a vital skill for all physicians who treat women of childbearing age (Lupi et al., 2016). In medical schools across the nation, medical students are expected to show competency in this intervention before graduation and are evaluated in their competency through objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) (Lupi et al., 2016, 2017). At the time of this paper, however, no scale has been found to measure the competency of pregnancy options counseling of those working in social or human services settings. Because counselors are providing time-sensitive information and interventions with women who experience an unplanned pregnancy, it is important that counselors provide counseling competently, which includes the need to be aware that women may encounter political, social, and economic challenges when making decisions about their unplanned pregnancies (Dobkin et al., 2013). Additionally, counselors need to be aware of and provide accurate pregnancy options information related to abortion,

adoption, and parenting, including policies that may impact each decision. Doing such aligns with the *Code of Ethics*, which provides professional guidance on the importance of competence and the social worker's need to develop their knowledge and skills (NASW, 2021).

## Potential Ethical Dilemmas in Pregnancy Options Counseling

The ethical principle of self-determination is important for health care professionals across disciplines, especially social work, and may often be a source of dilemma and value conflict; there are, however, other potential situations that could create tensions within the pregnancy options counseling setting which we discuss next.

### Religious and personal value conflict

Sometimes the counselor's values, whether named as personal or religious or some combination thereof, are in direct conflict with, or even opposed to, what a patient wants. Providers of pregnancy options counseling (e.g., nurses, social workers, physicians, etc.) may experience their own responses and feelings when counseling women with unintended pregnancies. It would not be uncommon for a counselor to feel deeply conflicted about patient's pregnancy choice, or for the counselor to feel complete agreement. Personal feelings must be examined, internally acknowledged, and then isolated or managed so they do not impact a patient's ability to freely make an informed choice. In an effort to assist professionals with this particular ethical dilemma, Simmonds and Likis (2005) list several resources to encourage providers to be self-reflective in their practice settings. For example, when counselors find their personal values and professional responsibilities are not reconcilable, the patient's concerns should be prioritized so that they receive ethical, comprehensive options counseling through another provider or setting entirely (Simmonds & Likis, 2005).

## Fetal development

Providing fetal development information and offering ultrasound to ambivalent clients has been a source of contention in the current policy landscape surrounding reproductive health. There are presently variations in this practice as some healthcare and social service agencies are not providing fetal development information to individuals facing an unplanned pregnancy and others are, as guided by state or organizational policies, or even a patient's request for more information as it relates to gestational age and development. This could become an ethical dilemma for the counselor who believes the patient should fully know and understand fetal development prior to making a pregnancy decision. Additionally, if the client refuses the information, the counselor may feel the client does not have all the information needed to make an informed choice. On the other hand, providing fetal development information to client's (including ultrasound) is often dictated by agency or state policy. In this situation, clients may refuse information, which also creates an ethical dilemma for the pregnancy options counselor.

The decision of the counselor to provide information related to a pregnant person's fetal development is one example of a potential dilemma in practice and ought to be ultimately driven by standards of informed consent, as opposed to other external forces, like agency and state policy. For social workers, providing informed consent is an ethical principal in the *Code of Ethics* (2021) and practioners, and researchers alike, need to determine what information is helpful for a patient's decision-making process.

## Rape related pregnancy

Unfortunately, rape and sexual assault will be experienced by approximately 18% of women in the United States; 5% of these sexual attacks will result in pregnancy (Perry et al., 2015). While rape related pregnancy commonly ends in pregnancy termination, women may experience ambivalence in decision-making, may have a moral opposition



to abortion, or may be emotionally connected to their abuser, which makes pregnancy decision making challenging. In these situations, providers need to provide timely, unbiased, education to women.

## Equipoise

Whether or not a standardized way to deliver pregnancy options counseling is developed, the heart or *spirit* of effective counseling should always be deep engagement with a patient which centers the patient's experiences, needs, wishes, and wants. This sounds like it might be easy but holding the major factors we discuss in this paper in tension with being fully present with a patient can potentially be a challenge when doing pregnancy options counseling. There are several ways to think about what it means to work with women making decisions about pregnancy to achieve equipoise. First, to achieve equipoise a counselor must keep in mind that any person seeking support or help during an unplanned or unwanted pregnancy is vulnerable. Vulnerability does not mean weak or without power, it simply means they are at high risk to be coerced or even injured by a person or agency because of the magnitude of their present need and the power or influence that the agency or the person representing the agency wields. Given the vulnerability inherent in the situation, the counselor should take appropriate steps to know the patient. What a patient needs and wants should be more important, by far, than any agenda or goal of an agency. This is reiterated here because this field of practice is comprised of agencies with strong underlying value assumptions embedded in the culture that workers routinely navigate. There are ample anecdotes of workers feeling pressure inside of organizations to guide patients toward certain outcomes.

Second, the way to know the patient is to approach the relationship with curiosity and empathy. Curiosity is diametrically opposed to judgment. Curiosity seeks to know more about the patient's lives, their stories, and how they got to where they are. It avoids assumptions and judgements. Empathy assumes, if anything, that there is a compelling and likely complex reason why the patient is in her current situation. It approaches the patient with a

deep interest in what her life is like and what the decision she is facing might look like through her eyes.

Third, to achieve equipoise, the counselor must trust the patient and assume that patients are capable of making decisions in their best interests. This is necessary because it assumes the client is the expert (not an agency or a particular moral outcome) and is consistent with the ethical standard of self-determination. Without such an understanding, the counselor is at risk to persuade, fix, talk into, or talk down to patients. The counselor should fully humanize the patient and recognize that being human involves choosing, to the fullest extent possible, what their life will look like.

Fourth, the counselor may be an *expert* or have specialized knowledge, but this *expertise* should be offered with caution and with the patient's permission. Expert knowledge and information should help the patient learn about all the available options, what accessing them would look like, and to the extent possible, a calculation of the risks and benefits as seen through the patient's eyes. Projections of a certain future outcome based on a patient's potential choice should never be made by a counselor and cannot ethically enter the equation. If patients are concerned about how their choices would affect them, the counselor should help them explore what this means for them. Asking probing questions and maintaining a curious stance is a way of showing interest in a patient and investing in them without being invested in what they choose to do.

As the practice of pregnancy options counseling evolves and research expands, we propose that equipoise or achieving a balance of power with a patient who is facing an unintended pregnancy is at the heart of effective and competent practice, and it should characterize the way a counselor approaches a relationship with a patient. Specific questions and techniques may be found to be effective and useful in the future, but in the meantime a patient-centered approach in a complex and very value-laden health context is, what we believe, the best approach to serving patients.

When counselors have strong reactions to the choices patients are considering, or experience strong urges to steer their clients, these may be signs that significant additional work needs to be done to achieve equipoise.

We hope this paper is a necessary push for important conversations around power, vulnerability, and self-determination in pregnancy options counseling, but specifically to invite deeper reflection and self-awareness among those who do this work and those who are being trained to work in this field.

## Conclusion

Social workers play a vital role in the health care settings and social workers who provide pregnancy options counseling within the medical setting need to be aware of ethical dilemmas that may arise when working with patients who experience unplanned pregnancies. Social workers, and other professionals who provide this intervention, should work to ensure patients receive adequate education on their reproductive options while learning to effectively navigate ethical dilemmas that could arise.

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# Feeling Competent isn't Enough: The Social Worker's Role in Creating Positive Space and Promoting Trans-Affirming Practices

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## Abstract

Both the physical environment and cultural climate of a human service agency can prevent individuals from obtaining services. As such, it is important for health and social care service agencies to develop positive spaces that affirm individuals' identities. This cross-sectional study explores master's-level social work (MSW) practitioners' perceptions of competence and comfort in working with persons who identify as transgender and highlights ethical and cultural

considerations that impact service participation for transgender and nonbinary persons. Surveying a national sample of MSW level practitioners, we explore practitioners' 1) education, training, competence, and comfort of social workers when working with transgender persons; 2) perceptions of artifacts used as part of the culture of their agencies (e.g., language on intake forms, brochures, pamphlets, and wall art); and 3) awareness of organizational, state, and federal policy pertaining to persons who identify as transgender. Based on our findings, we suggest that social work agencies and the social workers within them need to take a leading role in assessing their agency's culture to ensure that they are providing a safe space for transgender, nonconforming clients and employees. Additionally, social workers should continually assess their competence and ability to provide trans-affirming services and practices using validated standardized tools.

Keywords: Transgender, nonbinary, gender non-conforming, transgender nonbinary (TNB), environmental culture, trans-affirming social services, social work, positive space

## Introduction

The term *cisgender* refers to individuals whose gender identity aligns with the social expectations associated with their sex assigned at birth, while the terms *transgender* and *nonbinary* refer to individuals whose gender identity does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender, or “trans”, is an umbrella term encompassing an inclusive array of gender identities and expressions. It includes those who medically transition and identify within the masculine/feminine binary while also encompassing those with more fluid or expansive gender identities outside of this binary (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Budge et al., 2014; Davidson, 2007). While this paper has adopted the term transgender nonbinary (TNB) or transgender, this does not imply that this group is homogeneous. Persons who identify as TNB have many identities and ways of describing themselves. As such, one cannot make assumptions or believe they understand an individual or their needs based on the category they ascribe to or identify with. That said, we

recognize that the population of people who identify as TNB in the United States is growing, as is the importance of understanding the knowledge and preparedness of social workers and agencies to serve this population.

Herman et al. (2017) found that between 0.6% to 3.0% of adults and approximately 0.7% to 3.2% of persons under 24 years of age identify with a TNB identity in the U.S. The 2015 Report of the United States Transgender Survey (USTS) found that over one-third of those who participated in the study embraced a nonbinary gender identity (James et al., 2016), and Flores et al. (2016) estimated that there are more than 1.3 million transgender people in the U.S., which accounts for approximately 0.58% of the population. What is important to understand is that as the number of individuals who identify as TNB increases, likely so will the number of those seeking transgender-related services, which range from case management to counseling from both social workers and mental health counselors (Austin, 2018). However, finding trans-affirmative services is not always easy.

According to Austin (2018), "affirmative care refers to a non-pathologizing approach to practice which accepts and validates all (binary and nonbinary) experiences of gender" (p. 75). The term *affirmative care* also appears to be the term of choice in the U.S. literature specific to social work, counseling, and some educational literature when referring to individual practitioner practices that help create positive and inclusive spaces for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people (Biaggio et al., 2003; Bridges et al., 2003; Crisp, 2007; Mottet & Tanis, 2008). Leland and Stockwell (2019) also argue that affirmative practices encompass organizational policies and procedures that operate at the macro level. Yet, the term affirmative care is most often applied to individual practices and, as such, can miss the broader structural practices or overall organizational culture encompassed in the term *positive space*. The term positive space has been adapted in much of the Canadian literature. According to the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) (2011):



Positive space refers to an agency that is open and welcoming, as well as equitable and accessible to persons of all sexual and gender diversities, both to clients and employees of the agency. The term also refers to an agency in which all staff have been trained to understand the issues around sexual and gender diversity and are familiar with human rights, diversity and resources. (p. 33)

From a social work perspective, creating positive spaces reflects the importance of affirming the human rights and self-determination of TNB people while also challenging organizational cultures that render TNB persons invisible (MacDonnell & Daley, 2015). This paper also argues that it is important for service agencies to develop positive spaces in which to develop affirmative practices because both the physical environment and cultural climate of a social service agency can prevent individuals from obtaining services (Stotzer et al., 2013).

Less research has looked at the physical environments of health and social care agencies and how environment can influence the wellbeing of persons who identify as TNB, with the exception of services set up directly to engage LGBTQ+ communities. These specialized agencies, by and large, pay attention not just to their physical location within the community, but to the physical space in which they operate and to the way they deliver gender-affirming care. Many of these agencies send clear messages of inclusivity through their mission statements, allowing persons to know in advance that they specialize in services for LGBTQ+ communities. They offer visual imaging through artwork, pictures on their brochures, reading material for guests to peruse and often use inclusive language in their materials for intakes and assessments as well as in signage and through verbal communication (McLain et al., 2016).

## Challenges finding gender-affirming care

Persons who identify as TNB face many challenges to finding gender-affirming care provided in a positive space, other than with agencies specifically set up to serve these populations. While movements to rectify this issue have begun (see the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association [GLMA] and the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2014), much more work is needed as demonstrated via research that shows that persons who identify as transgender are at an increased risk of negative physical, emotional, and social health outcomes due to social stigma (Bradford et al., 2013; Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2011; Grant et al., 2011; James et al., 2016; Testa et al., 2012). Additionally, Mongelli et al. (2019) found that persons who identify as a sexual minority face higher rates of mental health issues compared to those who identify as cisgender (a term often shortened to *cis*). Furthermore, Klien et al. (2018) found that services meant to dissipate the effects of transphobia, racism, and poverty may actually contribute to discrimination and the negative psychological, social, and health-related outcomes associated with minority stress. The theory of minority stress posits that higher rates of emotional and psychological stress among LGBTQ+ populations relative to their heterosexual peers is the result of stressors unique to sexual and gender minorities (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Meyer, 1995, 2003).

Some of the stress affecting persons who identify as transgender stems directly from *cisnormativity*—the belief that cisgender identity is the norm or that all people are cisgender. Another form of minority stress has been linked to *heteronormativity*, a term “that describes the hegemonic normalizing of heterosexuality” (Buddel, 2011, p. 133). Such beliefs systematically marginalize transgender identities (Bauer et al., 2009), and perceived discrimination, along with underutilization of needed mental health care services, is a significant risk factor for mental health disorders (Burgess et al., 2007; Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2013). Such perceived discrimination has also been identified as a form of anticipated stigma,

which refers to an individuals' expectation of having a stigmatizing experience as well as the belief that others assign negative attributes to them (Teh et al., 2014). Persons who internalize transphobia may experience psychological distress and depression (Breslow et al, 2015), and high levels of internalized transphobia are associated with an increased likelihood of attempted suicide (Perez-Brumer et al., 2015).

### Social work education

According to the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE, 2022) Competency 3 and the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) Code of Ethics Standard 1.05 (NASW, 2017), social workers are expected to be educated regarding the impact of marginalization related to gender identity and expression. But what happens when this information is not included in their formal education? There is a plethora of research suggesting that TNB issues are largely absent from social work education (Austin et al., 2016; Hoff & Camacho, 2019; Erich et al., 2007; Martin et al., 2009). This means that as social workers graduate with a master's degree in social work (MSW), they may be uninformed or, worse, biased against persons who identify as TNB (Erich et al., 2007; Floyd & Gruber, 2011; Logie et al., 2007). Austin (2018) suggests there is a dearth of expertise specific to gender diversity and transgender issues among social workers, noting that associated content in MSW programs is lacking. A recent study found MSW students reported that their coursework and field placements did not prepare them for social work practice with persons identifying as transgender (Hoff & Comacho, 2019). Research has also found that a lack of trans-affirmative social work education and training negatively affects student attitudes toward members of the transgender community (Floyd & Gruber, 2011).

## Social service agency culture

While there is a scarcity of research on discrimination experienced within agencies that employ social workers, persons who identify as transgender have reported experiencing discrimination within social-service settings (Austin et al., 2016; Kenagy, 2005; Minter & Daley, 2003; Stotzer et al., 2013). Much more research, however, has been conducted on discrimination in the health care and medical fields. Health care research is inundated with examples of discrimination. Stotzer et al. (2013) reviewed the literature and found:

- 1) experiences with discrimination or outright rejection from services;
- 2) provider insensitivity or poor treatment while receiving services;
- 3) problems or concerns with physical environment or 'climate' of social service agencies;
- 4) difficulty with availability of and accessing appropriate services; and
- 5) a lack of cultural competence in regard to transgender issues. (p. 67)

In many instances, TNB people have to educate their providers about the medical and emotional needs specific to TNB individuals and to correct misinformation (Jaffee et al., 2016).

According to Kattari et al. (2019), in order to provide trans-affirming care, practitioners need to be able to critically assess the current resources available for TNB individuals within the agencies where they work and to understand any gaps in the resources and support available. With the growing number of persons identifying as TNB, social workers should be aware of the resources available to clients as well as the existence of policies specific to persons who identify as transgender both within their agency and in the larger community. A lack of knowledge about agency, local, or federal policy regarding persons who identify as transgender may be related to an absence of agency artifacts that display TNB persons or use TNB language.

The lack of such artifacts may demonstrate limited open dialogue at an agency with regard to TNB issues, which may further support cisnormativity. Bauer et al. (2009) have identified how cisnormativity

fosters the erasure of TNB persons within health care settings, specifically in the domains of informational systems and institutional policies. Lack of provider knowledge about transgender peoples' health needs and organizational policies that are not affirming of transgender identities is a form of structural stigma (Kcomt et al., 2020). A lack of trans-affirmative discourse at an agency as well as a lack of visibility of trans-identifying people within an agency can have negative effects for TNB persons. In a small qualitative study exploring the experience of 13 TNB youth and young adults, Austin (2016) describes that participants who saw their own lives represented in others often experienced this as liberating.

A cisnormative agency culture perpetuates the invisibility of transgender identities and experiences (Bauer et al., 2009) and often means that services are organized around the assumption of cis service use (Pyne, 2011). The artifacts at an agency produce knowledge and information about services while setting norms for an organization's culture. Artifacts used to welcome clients and help them feel supported within an agency can reinforce cisnormative and heteronormative culture when they are not TNB inclusive. Such artifacts may include an agency's mission statement, informational brochures or other reading material, and decorative art on waiting room walls. Reading materials, symbols, and signs that specifically spell out the organization's attitude about the importance of respect for all people as displayed in their waiting room can help clients, their families, and employment applicants feel welcomed (Mallon, 1999).

Language used within an agency is another artifact that can systematically discriminate or make a person feel unsafe. Health research has demonstrated the importance of adjusting client intake forms at the systems level to incorporate gender neutral terminology and the use of preferred names and pronouns, which arguably applies equally to social and mental health settings (Baldwin et al., 2018). Using a person's correct pronouns can help alleviate feelings of discomfort. Equipped with knowledge of the needs of persons who identify as transgender, social workers could play a pivotal role in advocating for trans-affirmative

resources and supports (Collazo et al., 2013). Social workers working with TNB clients need to be familiar with local resources and policies (Kattari et al., 2019) and be up to date and comfortable using language that incorporates TNB persons.

Based on the available literature, current social work education programs may not be adequately preparing future social workers to work with TNB populations. Even less is known about the education and training that happens post-graduation. Are MSW practitioners getting training at their place of employment, and, if so, are they finding these trainings useful? If social workers do not have formal education or post-graduation training specific for working with persons who are transgender, they may not know how to engage with, advocate for, and refer persons to appropriate resources when needed. These questions and subsequent research findings coincide with the *IJSWVE's* mission to examine social work practitioners' decision-making in context of their agencies' program development, which should always be guided by social work values and ethics.

This present study explores master's-level social work practitioners' perceptions of competence and comfort when working with persons who identify as transgender. It also explores if, and when, practitioners received education and training to work with this population and their knowledge of policies specific to persons who are transgender. While there has been a surfeit of research exposing gaps in the social work higher education curriculum addressing TNB content (Hoff & Camacho, 2019; Martin et al., 2009), less is known about post-graduate training and how this may influence a person's feelings of competence to work with TNB persons. What we do know is that even well-intentioned clinicians who seek to affirm persons who are transgender can unintentionally reinforce socially sanctioned cisgender norms and systems (Benson, 2013). This is why it is important to understand not only how confident and comfortable MSW practitioners are working with persons who identify as transgender, but also to understand if the agencies where they work provide affirming

transgender cultures through the agency's artifacts, such as the verbal and written language used or displayed within the agency.

## Methods

A cross-sectional electronic survey collected information between September 2020 and February 2021 from persons who work in mental health settings. This paper uses a subset of the data from those participants, specifically all those who identified as MSW practitioners. This study reports on data that explored 1) participants' knowledge of working with persons who identify as transgender and 2) the culture of the agency in which they worked to understand if it cultivates a gender-affirming culture. The study was reviewed and approved by the authors' institutional review board (IRB) prior to data collection.

### Participants and procedure

Participants were recruited and sent an invitation to complete an electronic survey developed in Qualtrics. Participants were identified through two different sampling frames. The first contained a list of 2,000 randomly selected members of National Association of Social Work (NASW) who work in mental health. This list was obtained from InFocus Marketing, a data management company employed by NASW. In order to use this sampling frame, the study underwent a second independent review through NASW and paid a fee of \$990 for one-time use. InFocus conducted the random selection of participants and sent out the survey on our behalf. Due to financial limitations, it was not feasible to send a second email. The InFocus invitation yielded 121 responses—77 responses from persons who declined and 44 responses from persons who agreed to participate. Due to the low response rate from emails sent by InFocus Marketing (2%), we also used a list of 1,743 social work alumni who had graduated from the authors' institution between 1973 and 2019. This email yielded 128 responses, 46 of which indicated consent to participate. However, four of those who had

agreed to participate never filled out the survey. This resulted in a total sample of 85 participants working in 21 different states within the U.S.

Our sample included predominantly white (79%,  $n = 59$ ), cisgender women (32%;  $n = 23$ ) identifying as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) ( $n = 26$ ) with 15 years in the field. Over half of the respondents reported working full time ( $n = 56$ ) and 45 reported being married or in a domestic partnership.

### Survey design & measures

The majority of the survey questions, outside of those specific to demographics, used a five-point Likert scale, asking respondents to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with specific statements.

#### Education, training, competence, and comfort

We asked a series of questions to better understand if the participants had received training and, if so, when they had received it (i.e., during their MSW education, post qualifying at their agency, both, or never received training). We also asked them how helpful they thought the training was, if they felt competent to work with persons who identified as transgender, if they thought more training would be beneficial, and, finally, if they felt comfortable working with persons who identified as transgender.

#### Perceptions of agency artifacts

To better understand if the participant's agency had a culture that affirmed transgender identity, we asked four questions with five-point Likert scale response options (strongly agree—strongly disagree). Specifically, we asked participants how strongly they would agree that 1) they regularly used gender-affirming language, such as pronouns, to introduce themselves; 2) the agency intake forms include TNB language; 3) the brochures and pamphlets used to disseminate information about the agency depict pictures of TNB persons; and 4) the décor or wall art at the agency is sensitive to TNB persons.



### Policy awareness

We asked three questions to better understand participants' awareness of policies specific to persons who identify as transgender. These questions were also answered using a five-point Likert scale indicating their level of familiarity (extremely familiar—not familiar at all). We asked about familiarity with their agency's policies, local government policies, and federal policies. For example, to measure respondents' familiarity with agency policy, we posed the statement: "I am familiar with any of my agency's policies pertaining specifically to transgender persons."

## Data Analysis and Results

SPSS version 25 was used to analyze the data for this study. Descriptive statistics are reported in the sections that follow.

### Education and post-graduation training

Analyses revealed that 26% ( $n = 22$ ) of our sample reported that they only received education and training to work with TNB individuals during their MSW studies and 20% ( $n = 17$ ) of participants indicated that they had received education during their program and post-graduation at their agencies. There were 42 (51%) respondents who indicated that they only received training after they graduated from their MSW program while the remaining respondents indicated that they had never received any formal education or training to work with this population (8%,  $n = 8$ ). Of those who reported having received training specific to TNB persons, 35 indicated that their education and/or training was only moderately ( $n = 12$ ), slightly ( $n = 14$ ), or not useful at all ( $n = 9$ ).

When asked if they felt adequately trained to work with persons who identify as transgender, of those that responded ( $n = 79$ ), a small percentage felt extremely adequately trained (20%,  $n = 16$ ). Most participants indicated that they felt somewhat adequately trained (39%,  $n = 35$ ) though some indicated indifference about the effectiveness of their training, feeling

neither adequately or inadequately trained (15%,  $n = 13$ ). There were also three participants who felt they were somewhat inadequately prepared and one who felt extremely unprepared.

When asked if they would benefit from further training, the majority of the respondents felt that they would either strongly benefit (36%,  $n = 32$ ) or somewhat benefit (33%,  $n = 29$ ). There were three people who did not believe that they would benefit from training on how to work with persons who identify as transgender.

### Comfort and competence

Most participants reported feeling confident in their professional competence to work with persons who are transgender. The majority of the respondents answered positively; 21% ( $n = 19$ ) reported feeling strongly that they were competent or somewhat confident (52%,  $n = 46$ ). In terms of comfort level, however, the majority reported they did not feel comfortable working with persons who identify as transgender. Over half indicated that they were extremely uncomfortable (60%,  $n = 54$ ), while 17% ( $n = 15$ ) indicated that they were somewhat uncomfortable. No one answered that they were extremely comfortable working with persons who identify as transgender.

As displayed in Table 1, when asked how frequently they worked with or saw clients who identified as transgender, nearly one-third responded “never” (31%,  $n = 24$ ), while 26% ( $n = 20$ ) reported “at least once a month.”

To better understand these findings, we also ran a correlation coefficient to see if there was a relationship between how frequently a social worker sees or meets with a persons who identify as TNB, their comfort to work with, and their feelings of competence to work with persons who are TNB. Confidence in one's competence to work with persons who identify as TNB was positively correlated with comfort  $r(75) = .571$ ,  $p = .000$  while frequency of seeing persons who identify as TNB was positively correlated with comfort  $r(75) = .239$ ,  $p = .38$ . So the more often a practitioner saw TNB

clients, the more comfortable they reported begin when working with these clients.

|   | %  | n  |
|---|----|----|
| 1. In your practice, how often do you work with or see transgender clients? |    |    |
| Never   | 32 | 24 |
| Less than once every 3 months   | 21 | 16 |
| At least once every 3 months  | 7  | 5  |
| At least once a month   | 26 | 20 |
| At least once a week  | 15 | 11 |

**Table 1:** Practice with Transgender Clients

### Agency artifacts: language, forms, and decorations

Regarding transgender-affirming language, the majority of practitioners stated that they did not regularly use language such as introducing themselves using their pronouns to allow their client to know that they are transgender friendly (53%;  $n = 40$ ). Gender-friendly language in practice was regularly used by 23% ( $n = 18$ ) of the practitioners.

Respondents were asked if they agreed that their intake forms used gender-affirming language. The majority strongly disagreed (22%,  $n = 20$ ) or somewhat disagreed (28%,  $n = 25$ ) with this statement. Only 6% ( $n = 5$ ) of the respondents strongly agreed that their agency's intake form used gender-affirmative language.

When asked if they agreed that their agency's pamphlets or brochures were TNB representative and if the pictures or images displayed at the agency represented TNB persons, most respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement (40%,  $n = 36$ ), fewer strongly disagreed (8%,  $n = 7$ ) or somewhat disagreed (15%,  $n = 13$ ). Ten percent ( $n = 9$ ) strongly agreed with this statement. The results regarding the question about the agency's wall décor representing images of TNB persons was very similar. Nearly half of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this

statement (45%, n = 40), while a smaller number strongly disagreed (11%, n = 10) or strongly agreed (10%, n = 9).

## Policy

When asked about their familiarity with policies specific to TBN identities at the agency where they work, only 9% (n = 8) of our sample were extremely familiar, while 25% (n = 22) indicated that they were not familiar at all. Other participants' knowledge of policy ranged from very familiar (7%, n = 5) to moderately familiar (19%, n = 17) to just slightly familiar (23%, n = 20). There were 17 respondents who did not answer this question. Slightly more practitioners said they were familiar with state and federal laws pertaining to transgender persons (see Table 2).

|   | %  | n  |
|---|----|----|
| 1. How familiar are you with state laws pertaining specifically to transgender persons?   |    |    |
| Extremely familiar  | 13 | 10 |
| Very familiar   | 21 | 16 |
| Moderately familiar   | 39 | 29 |
| Slightly familiar   | 21 | 16 |
| Not at all familiar   | 5  | 4  |
| 2. How familiar are you with federal laws pertaining specifically to transgender persons? |    |    |
| Extremely familiar  | 15 | 11 |
| Very familiar   | 20 | 15 |
| Moderately familiar   | 43 | 32 |
| Slightly familiar   | 15 | 11 |
| Not at all familiar   | 7  | 5  |

**Table 2:** State/Federal Policy Awareness

## Discussion

As in previous research, a large number of respondents indicated that they had not received education specific to transgender identities while studying for their MSW (Hoff & Camacho, 2019; Martin et al., 2009). Many, however, had received some sort of post-qualifying training at their agencies. A small number of participants felt indifferent about their training—neither adequately, nor inadequately trained; an even smaller number said they felt inadequately trained. Over half of the respondents indicated that they felt they were adequately or somewhat adequately trained to work with persons who identify as transgender, yet the majority felt they would benefit from additional training. One of the most perplexing findings in this study is the number of persons who felt competent, but uncomfortable working with TNB persons. Over half indicated that they were extremely uncomfortable working with persons who identify as transgender. This finding is very concerning, and more research is needed to better understand this result. If someone is uncomfortable working with a person who identifies as TNB, consciously or not, this could play out in how they interact with, and what services they offer, a person who identifies as TNB. Not surprising, the more a practitioner worked with transgender persons, the more comfortable they felt. However, there was not a statistically significant relationship between frequency of working with TNB clients and confidence in one's competency to work with this population.

The U.S. social work profession is officially committed to advocating for social, economic, and environmental justice for persons who identify as TNB. Social workers cannot strive to build inclusive work settings if they themselves feel uncomfortable working with persons who identify as transgender. Additionally, CSWE's 2022 Educational Practices and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) requires U.S. social work programs to teach students to recognize institutionalized oppression and to reflect on and correct the impact of personal bias (CSWE, 2022). Gaining a better understanding of why some social workers believe themselves to be

competent to practice with TNB persons yet are uncomfortable doing so should be a priority moving forward.

Additionally, in order to normalize and create inclusive work settings, or positive spaces, social workers could adapt gender-affirming language and advocate that such language be incorporated as an artifact of the agency. In fact, social workers are in a prime position to educate their colleagues about the importance of incorporating artifacts that are representative of sexual minorities within the language and décor of the agencies in which they work. This would help to build positive spaces in which to practice trans-affirming social work methods. Ensuring that artifacts within an agency are representative of TNB persons will help to shape a safer climate or organizational culture through normalizing such representations. While social workers may not always be in administrative positions where they have the power to enforce institutional policies that reinforce trans-affirmative norms, they should be able to foster dialogues with their supervisors regarding the importance of developing such practices at their agency. It appears as if social workers may not necessarily be guilty of explicit oppressive behaviors or beliefs, but rather may be complicit in helping preserve cisnormativity via their indifference to trans representation within their agencies' artifacts.

The respondents in this study showed indifference when asked if their agency used nonbinary or gender affirming language for themselves as well as on the agencies' intake forms. When asked if they agreed that their agency had images representative of differing sexual orientations and gender identities on agency pamphlets and incorporated into the décor, many left this question blank or indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Close to half indicated that they did not agree or disagree with these statements. So, either they are unable to assess whether the artifacts are representative, they were not willing to give a definitive answer to questions specific to the different artifacts used within their agencies, or it may be that they did not understand the questions asked.

There were also many participants who were unaware of policies within their own agency pertaining to persons who identify as transgender. Social workers have a responsibility to advocate for equal protections for persons who identify as TNB—not just at the state and federal level but within their own agency (Morrow, 2004; NASW, 2017). In order to advocate, they first need to be aware of current policy and practices. Interestingly, many of the respondents were more familiar with state and federal policies regarding TNB identities than agency policies.

### Limitations

The results of this research study need to be considered in light of several important limitations, the first of which relates to the low response rate. While the NASW membership list is often considered a primary resource of master's-level social workers, access to these members is cost prohibitive. While the authors would have preferred to send follow-up and reminder email requests to members to improve the response rate, we could not get institutional support to pay the nearly \$1,000 fee to send emails to a selected portion of the membership list. This led us to contact social work alumni from our own institution, which resulted in a higher, but still limited, response rate. Thus, those who did participate in this study may not be representative of the NASW membership, most being alumni from one academic institution who work in mental health fields. A number of respondents who did agree to participate either did not answer any questions or skipped several questions; this could also be reflective of practitioners' discomfort with, or lack of interest in, sharing perspectives on serving people who identify as transgender. Future research on this topic may benefit from smaller selective targeting of various agencies in a geographic area as well as from the use of qualitative methods (e.g., focus groups, interviews) to gain a deeper understanding of perspectives on education, training, and organizational culture as it relates to TNB service provision.

## Implications for Social Work

In conclusion, ensuring inclusive and affirmative social and emotional health care environments means assessing service providers' knowledge of and cultural competence to provide gender-affirming services as well as assessing the environment in which services are provided. Agencies' artifacts should be welcoming and supportive of gender-diverse populations. Social workers need to be aware of their own personal beliefs about gender identities and to understand how the structural as well as procedural aspects of their agency can stigmatize TNB persons.

We recommend that in order to be culturally competent, social work practitioners need to adopt a policy of practicing cultural humility, which incorporates a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). With regard to organizational culture, which includes observed language, customs, traditions, espoused values as well as agency artifacts (Schein, 1988), we argue that it is important for agencies to use a range of artifacts along with their policies and procedures to promote safe spaces and trans-affirming practices. It is important to remember that identities, in part, are shaped by environments that support, discourage or maintain them (Stewart & McDermott, 2004). Studies have shown that persons who are able to live according to their gender identity experience, via their transitioning experience, improved psychological well-being (Riggs et al., 2015; Verbeek et al., 2020). Having one's gender affirmed by others may lead to lower rates of depression (Nuttbrock et al., 2012) and higher rates of well-being (Verbeek et al., 2020). Moreover, there is a growing body of knowledge to support the idea that immediate social environment factors most impact the health and well-being of persons who identify as transgender (Nuttbrock et al. 2012).

One possible strategy for normalizing TNB identities in non-specialized LGBTQ agencies is to borrow practices that have been found to be successful in these agencies. This means integrating TNB identities into the agency's artifacts, such as mission statements, intake/assessment



forms, informational brochures, pamphlets, and wall decorations. This integration should also permeate the language practitioners use to identify persons, such as the use of their preferred pronouns and preferred names. “Language, therefore, is central to the development of tactics that challenge cisnormativity” (Borba & Milani, 2017, p. 17). While it is important to remember that the person who speaks can carry power to persuade a person, it is equally important to remember that language and words in and of themselves have power. The words practitioners use within an organization to talk to or about people, their situations, and the services they need can perpetuate inequality, having stigmatizing effects (Heffernan, 2006; Vojak, 2009). Implementing procedures and policies that help in moving away from accepting cisgender as the norm is important to creating a safe space for clients.

Additionally, agencies need to be committed to helping their practitioners develop cultural competency. This requires continued commitment to self-assessment and extensive change in agency culture to encourage trans-affirming practices. One possible way to achieve this is to use a self-assessment tool to cultivate affirming practices with transgender and gender-nonconforming (TGNC) persons such as the TGNC Affirming Clinical Skills Self-Assessment (TGNC-ACSSA) (see Leland & Stockwell, 2019). This tool is designed for self-reflection, providing a clear representation of areas for growth “at both the individual and the organizational levels, specific to those who work in the field of applied behavior analysis” (Leland & Stockwell, 2019, p. 822). For those working in case management using a generalist approach to change, Leung and Cheung (2013) developed the Attitudes, Skills, Knowledge (ASK) scale to measure cultural competence. This scale has a long 97-item version and a short 24-item version, and was originally developed and tested for reliability and validity with child welfare case managers (see Leung & Cheung, 2013). More recently Cheung and Leung (2020) have proposed using this scale in broader social service settings as a self-assessment tool to help develop steps for helping workers develop cultural competence.

Social workers have an ethical responsibility to ensure that they are culturally competent (NASW, 2017). They are in a unique position to act as leaders, assessing and reflecting on their own cultural competence as well as that of their agencies and acting as change agents when necessary. Social workers have a duty to ensure that the availability of a full range of appropriate services, directly and indirectly, are being provided in a safe space. This should not be viewed as a static, “one-and-done” assessment; rather, procedures for continual assessment should be incorporated into an agency’s diversity statement, using measurable goals to assess progress toward providing positive spaces and using trans-affirmative practices.

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# The Islamic Basis of Social Work in the Modern World

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## Abstract

Historically, social work existed in communities for charity and philanthropic purposes. There is a congruence in the quality of social work in all cultures. More recently, scholars and practitioners have explored questions of diversity that question universal constructions of social work and social work ethics. Up until now, there is no conclusive evidence that the theoretical frameworks of social work vary in different societies or among religious groups. Some authors write about social work and Islam. Some writers have illustrated that social work values and principles differ with various cultures or religions. Broadly, social work values and principles are global. There is no conflict between social work and Islam or Arabic cultures. The article goes beyond the cultural considerations of social work practice. It tries to investigate the reasons behind writing social work from an Islamic point of view. The author will focus on ethics and values, analyzing perspectives from the social work literature. The conclusion formed at the end of the article is that, despite what some may view as antagonism, there is ultimately no conflict between the values of social work and the values of Islam.

Keywords: Service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, competence

## Introduction

The Charity Organization Society, founded by Helen Bosanquet and Octavia Hill in 19th century London, was a groundbreaking organization in social theory. Its existence led to the birth of social work as a recognized profession. Back in the 19th century, social work started with practices related to poverty resulting from the social effects of the Industrial Revolution (Pierson, 2011). In America, contributions of social work as a profession in fields such as poverty were exemplified by leaders such as Jane Addams who founded the Hull House in Chicago, and the social welfare state developed by William Beveridge (Pople, 2018). From the beginning of social work as a profession, the development of the field has been ongoing. The results of this constant evolution are the methods, approaches, and models used by social workers today.

In 1893, a movement emerged urging the preparation of social workers as qualified practitioners. The goal was for these future social workers to gain the ability to understand and deal with various social problems such as the orphaning of children, domestic abuse, and other such ills. At the First National *Conference of Charities and Corrections* held in Chicago, Anna Daves presented a paper calling for serious consideration for the formal preparation of social workers. The Charity Organization Society of New York opened the first school for social work in 1898. In 1917, social casework existed wherein the efforts of Mary Ellen Richmond had a great influence on the development of the systematic method. This method can be seen in Richmond's book "Social Diagnosis." For the method of working with groups, social group work was also developed by Richmond in 1923 after she observed individual service clients from the perspective of their membership in a group. This proved the importance of studying the psychology of small groups. In the 1930s, Grace Longwell Coyle wrote "Social Process in Organized Groups." This book significantly contributed to formulating work with groups as a method of intervention. At the National Conference of Social Work of 1935, "W. I. Newsletter" presented a paper entitled "What Is Social Group Work." The paper recognized community

organization as a third method of social work practice. The schools of social work began teaching the concept of community organization in the academic year 1936. Later in 1946, the Association of the Study of Community Organization (ASCO) was organized at the National Conference of Social Work in Buffalo, New York. In 1970, Jack Rothman developed three basic models of community organization: a) locality development, b) social planning, and c) social action (Albrithen, 2010).

The evolution of social work in the Arab world followed the same path as many other societies. The socio-economic transformation of society forced social workers to respond to current conditions to best serve those in need. The political upheaval of the mid-20th century provides a historical perspective to understand and contextualize this transformation, perhaps the most significant being the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, led by the “Free Officers.” Socialism’s advance coalesced with the rise of Arab nationalism amongst the masses and ushered in remarkable changes that are still being discovered and recognized in their full potential. It would be a grave mistake to underestimate the political consciousness that underpinned this act of resistance on the part of the Arab people. Some scholars see this revolt against colonialism as a part of historical developments going back to the French Revolution of the 18th century. The nationalism that moved the French people to liberate themselves is the same nationalism awakened in colonized Arab countries (Ajoba, 1990).

The Arab people sought the application of social work in consideration of its cultural practices and social values. While working in Latin American societies, U.N. specialists had developed an approach to social work that emphasized national sovereignty and freedom from political and economic subordination. This concept influenced the establishment of the centers in local communities.

In 1975 a movement to apply Islamization in the social sciences began, including the field of social work. It was a period that indicated the beginning of the construction of curricula, collection of pedagogical resources, and reference materials firmly rooted in Islam and its teachings. In 1977, the first World Conference of Islamic Education was held in Mecca.

It was a culmination of the foundation built by Islamic educators and social workers who were seeking methods to make the field more responsive to the needs and desires of their nations. This monumental conference was swiftly followed by a second gathering in Lugano, Switzerland entitled the First International Symposium on Islamic Thought. Only five years later, in 1982, a second global Islamic educators conference was held in Islamabad, Pakistan. Dr. Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi's presented findings that proved to be an invaluable contribution to the primordial stages of constructing an Islamic basis for modern social work. This desire to establish the teachings of Islam at the heart of the social sciences and humanities has had a strong hand in molding the movement's policies and regulations. However, it is important to recognize that this move towards examining and developing the interconnections between religion and social work is not unique to the Islamic world. The trend is to be found in Western contexts as well. Writers such as Gisela Konopka (1910 -2003) and Felix Biestek (1912 – 1994) both connected social work with a higher spiritual purpose and positioned social workers as servants of God whose responsibility was to aid and uplift humanity in an act of brotherhood.

Of course, there were shades of variation among scholars, writers, historians, and other academics in their collective call for Islamic rooting. Several have called for the complete rejection of the entire social work canon and the recreation of all social work knowledge based on an Islamic perspective (e.g., Ragab, 1996). Others took a more open-handed approach, believing that certain aspects of established social work knowledge are universal and thus useful for all societies. Others agreed with the former, arguing that because the scholarship is contaminated, it is inherently antagonistic to Muslim societies. These scholars insist that social work be reconstructed in the spirit of Islam (e.g., Bashir, 1991). Others view that the reconstruction of the knowledge base utilizing the "Islamic methodology" should be followed by new Islamic theories (e.g., Cubari, 1985), and others believed that this should be administered beyond social work to extend to societal welfare and the humanities overall (e.g., Farooqui, 1997).

Authors such as Zidan (1985) and El-Sanhuri (1988) called for Islamic rooting and dedicated their careers to replacing long-established social work ethics with ethics based on an Islamic perspective. Contrary to this, other writers such as Al-Krenawi & Graham (2003; 2001; 1999; 1997; 1998), Al-Krenawi (1996), Al-Krenawi, Graham, & Al-Krenawi (1997), Al-Krenawi & Lightman (2000), and Al-Krenawi & Jackson (2014) documented their professional involvement in social work practice with various societies, an example being the Bedouins in the Levantine region. An awareness of various cultural behaviors, rituals, and practices such as polygamy, blood feuds, cultural mediation, and internal conflict resolution, gave the writers a real-world conception of social work that is responsive to the local people because of its cultural perspective. The contributions to the field of social work made by Al-Krenawi, Graham, Lightman, and Jackson should serve as important resources to aspiring social workers, readers, and academics interested in the social sciences and all those interested in pursuing a life of promoting societal welfare with a cultural outlook.

This study is descriptive research using existing literature to analyze the Islamic basis of social work. The following section will illustrate opinions that go beyond cultural considerations of social work practice.

## Islamic Fundamentalist Arguments Against Social Work

There are some common themes that appear in the writings of Islamic scholars. Writers like Meziane (2008), Ragab (1991; 2000), and Almesseiry (1993) focused on atheism, secularism, and materialism and held these against the pioneering sociologists. Looking objectively at the works of these pioneering social scientists, one would acknowledge the usefulness of these theories. These theories help analyze Islamic societies and solve social ills, including those in Muslim communities. For example, understanding the history of the European church and how it maintained its control over society and considering the context of the emergence of these schools of thought can give one a better understanding of the subject matter. Current

western sociologists do not share the same vision toward secularism which means not all theories that come from the West should be rejected outright.

Writers like Ragab (1993a; 1991), Yunus (1991), and Anwar (1997) tried to combine social sciences with religious sciences in their works to prove that it is a worthwhile endeavor to consider other visions in the field of social work. Nonetheless, while social work theories may not be “perfect” these theories and their application have produced positive results proving extremely useful for the larger fabric of society.

From the perspective of scholars such as Ragab (1996), Zidan (1991), Al-Dabbagh (1994), Yunus (1993), and Mukhtar (1991), social work has been facing many crises. These crises began at an early stage in the profession and put into question the effectiveness of the social work practice. Nevertheless, social work successfully addresses many social issues and problems. If there are some failures in solving social problems, this should not result in disregarding social work as a profession. At times, there are outside circumstances that mitigate its effectiveness. Some examples of this are scarce resources, social policy and its implementation.

Some writers like Barise (2005), Abdul Latif (1993), Bashir (1991), and Zidan (1993) argued that some human theories and models of social work practice are useful (e.g., behavioral theory, crisis intervention, problem-solving model), but other models and theories (e.g., Darwinism, psychoanalysis) should be evaluated and live up to Islamic knowledge and standards. This indicates that their ideas have been influenced by other theories and outside perspectives. Social work is built on the experiences of practitioners and empiricism. In social work, professionals must consider the cultural aspects of the clients and the salient points under the prevailing Social Work Code of Ethics.

Writers like Farooqui (1997), Ragab (2000; 2016; 1993b), Abdulhadi (1988), Sadek (1991), and Gubari (1985) stated that without an Islamic orientation to social work, the profession is not relevant to Muslim societies. As a result, social work will continue to be of questionable relevance and lose its expected positive role in Muslim society. It will also continue adopting literature espousing various theories without complete awareness of the



nature of the ideological and cultural differences between Western and Islamic societies. This may result in stunted growth and a lack of progress in the field. Some authors contend that an Islamic orientation of social work practice should start with a firm knowledge of Islam. It would then result in the blossoming of Islamic methodology in social work. Nonetheless, this perspective calls for building or developing new methods and approaches in social work; however, it might be worth considering that social work developed from practice and not from any philosophical perspective or deductive theory. The most important factor in professional development is the practice aspect of social work. This is true, regardless of location, benefactors, or beneficiaries of social service.

With all those criticisms from Islamic fundamentalists, the question remains of the value of social work. The fundamentalists generally see that current social work has imperfections in its theoretical, practical, and ethical sides. They criticize the profession as suffering from an identity crisis. Even more and without evidence, they believe that social work leads to the deterioration of their clients (i.e., negative outcomes of social work practice). If so, how can social work be reformed or surrendered since the core (not the branch) is ailing? What can be said here is that the problem is in the narrow perception and eclectic approach that focuses solely on the negative. While some authors have questioned the effectiveness of social work (Fischer 1973), this does warrant ignoring other studies that prove the effectiveness of social work practice. Also, the insufficiency of the profession does not mean to conclude its failure totally and asserting that success can only be achieved through Islamization. Although the call of Islamic rooting has existed for a half-century, there is no real action and actual contributions on the ground.

The varied social theories focused on the core values of social work, and its compatibility with Islamic values that go beyond cultural considerations in social work practice will be discussed at length in the next section.

## An Examination of the Key Principles of Social Work from an Islamic Outlook

This section is most concerned with the evaluation of the core values of social work (NASW, 2017; BASW, 2014; CASW, 2005; AASW, 2010) (i.e., service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, competence) from an Islamic perspective to uncover any possible conflict between these values and the teachings of Islam.

Patel et al (1998, p. 199) identify five core Islamic values: (1) emphasizing the well-being and welfare of the community, (2) all people, men and women, are regarded as equal, (3) there is a relationship between individual freedom and the community's obligations to the individual, (4) conscience and conformity dictate the individual's sense of responsibility and obligation, and (5) consultation between people in relationship building.

The first and perhaps most central value of social work is "service." The most basic definition of service is the requirement of social workers to help those in need of assistance and alleviate societal ills in the most efficient way possible. This excludes all personal motivation. Islam is highly conscious of human need, including the need for social support. Monasticism has no place in Islam as Muslims are taught to enact their religious teachings in day-to-day life where it is arguably most significant. Self-sacrifice, a recurring phrase found in Islamic texts, is a fundamental proposition that is fostered by Islam in relations between people. It is affirmed by Islam that the solution to the problem of achieving progress lies in self-sacrifice and that all peoples benefit from this act. It is also encouraged by Islam for everyone "to make use of all their effort and energy in service to the society and the community that they belong to" (Chaney & Church, 2017; El Fadl, 2015; Stefon, 2009; Watt, 2008; Akgunduz, n.d. Lammens, 2013; Sardar, 1984).

As maintained by an Islamic outlook, service constitutes charity and philanthropy, which are important aspects of Islamic practice. As it has been stated previously, the elemental feature of social work is derived from the charity where early humanitarians provided goods and services to those suffering under the crushing weight of poverty, war, and natural disasters. This ethos is echoed in Islam as charitable workers and collective efforts in alleviating the suffering of the poor, the orphans, and those in need are highly esteemed (Wolf, 206; Pring, 2016; Turker, 2016; Curiel, 2015; Rippin, 2012; Lammens, 2013; Hodge, 2005; Nasr, 2003; Farah, 1987). Islam is a way of life and not just a religious ritual that must be practiced. The meaning behind this is that the comprehensiveness of Islam does not include contributing to charitable activities only, but also provides remedies for worldly problems, hardships, and challenges (e.g., Islam calls for reconciliation, respect for adults, respect for the wife, truth in speaking and acting, and calls to avoid exploitation, and not prioritizing the interests of the individual over the interests of society). Moreover, Islam contains protective methods that prevent problems and disasters (e.g., prohibitions against begging, environmental destruction, waste of water, depletion of land, emphasis on cleanliness, goodwill in others, ties of kinship, and love and the desire for the good of others).

In consonance with the above assertion, a common denominator between Islam and social work is charity. Thus, based on this common thread between Islam and social work, there seems to be no necessity or logical reasoning to reconstitute this merit since it is harmonious with Islam and its most important teachings.

The second value to be discussed is that of social justice, which defines social workers as agents of progress who protest against social injustice, oppression, and exploitation. They have a keen focus on the afflictions caused by poverty, discrimination, unemployment, abuse, and other forms of inequality.

From an Islamic frame of reference, justice connotes moral uprightness rooted in ethics, natural and societal law, religion and rationality, equity, and fairness. It is the giving of equal and honest

treatment to all members of society. Ultimately, the goal of social justice is the creation of a just society where all members are treated with dignity. Indeed, Islam extends justice to all regardless of social standing and promotes the upholding of social justice for men, women, and children, including non-Muslims and non-relatives, especially neighbors, orphaned children, and the needy.

Islam confers various meanings to the phrase social justice. They are as follows: a) allotting every individual with what is naturally owed to them as a member of the society, and b) providing fundamental needs for human beings, such as food, clean water, and stable housing in a way that preserves their honor and integrity, c) dispensing all benefits created by the masses in society to individuals in a fair way, and d) safeguarding equal opportunities and ensuring the accessibility of important services, such as health and education, to all.

Social justice, an inherent call for equality, is a key tenet in Islamic belief and thought. In Islam, equality stems from conscience and is protected by legislation. It is the basis of peace, solidarity, and harmony between human beings. A second core aspect of social justice is “mutual guarantee,” which calls for regulating social relations at all levels and spheres of society: a) between the individual and their family, promoting unity and facilitation; b) between the individual and the larger community and the consolidation of public and private interests; c) between societies, supporting harmonious relations and trade; and d) between generations, implying a oneness in destiny (Qutb, 2000).

The best illustration of social justice can be found in *Zakat*, which is the fourth pillar of Islam. *Zakat* is defined as giving away a proportion of one’s wealth annually for the well-being of those in need and the overall Muslim community. It is considered one of the most important obligations to fulfill as a Muslim and is in direct support of those in need.

Security, peace, and justice are three aspects that are related and complementary to each other, or one can be the result of the practice of the other. By avoiding oppression, unfairness, and inequality one achieves justice, and as justice prevails peace and safety prevail. These basic pillars

represent points of convergence and compatibility between Islam as a religion and social work as a profession.

In sum social justice is a key aspect of both Islam and social work. Notwithstanding the higher and all-encompassing spiritual meaning of social justice in Islam, it is a critical value in social work. There is no conflict or disagreement between the two.

The third principle of social work is dignity and worth of the person. It is required within social work practice that social workers are to respect and honor the inherent human dignity and value of every person, regardless of social standing. Practitioners are to treat their clients in a sympathetic and dignified manner, respecting cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity.

Islam posits liberty as a universal value owed to every human being. However, the freedom of the individual must not be a source of social decay or corruption as the well-being of the entire community must be considered above a single person (Chane & Church, 2017; El Fadl, 2015; Lammens, 2013; Stefon, 2009; Watt, 2008; Sardar, 1984). Still, there are numerous Islamic principles that emphasize the value of dignity and individual worth such as:

- a. Islam promotes human dignity and struggles against socio-economic injustice,
- b. Islam places a high value on human life, health, and overall prosperity
- c. Islam places significant weight on the care and protection of the elderly, the disabled, the orphaned, and the sick and expresses this act as an obligation
- d. Islam accentuates the sanctity of human life by making the saving of just one individual life equal to that of saving the entirety of the human race
- e. Islam argues that achieving good health is a prerequisite for holistic human development
- f. Islam views education and the constant expansion of the pool of human knowledge as important to overall societal development

- g. Islam observes the spiritual realm to be a very crucial area for human development and seeks to enhance the relationship with the Creator and that between other fellow human beings and there is a need to fulfill certain social responsibilities)
- h. Islam emphasizes fulfilling all social and ethical responsibilities for a harmonious and holistic development of the human spirit
- i. Islam requires that society must provide equal opportunities for all peoples to develop and realize their potential for greatness and use that greatness for the ultimate benefit of society.

Islamic teachings about inherent self-worth and human dignity entail many tenets and varied understandings, such as personal dignity, group dignity, and societal dignity, the environment included. According to this outlook, there is no contention between Islamic social doctrine and social work values.

The fourth tenet of social work is the importance of human relationships. It is a requirement for social workers to be cognizant of the central importance of social relationships. It is also important to recognize that quality of life is advanced through social change. People are social beings who need interaction with one another to survive, develop, and fully achieve their potential. The importance of the individual is found within the larger societal structure they find themselves in. Society is not allowed to mistreat the individual. The individual is to respect the social doctrine to ensure the rights and well-being of all members of society. Thus, both the individual finds personal peace and fulfillment while the society is orderly and able to fulfill its purpose of protecting and providing institutions for development (Chaney & Church, 2017; El Fadl, 2015; Lammens, 2013; Murad, 2005; Sardar, 1984; Stefon, 2009; Watt, 2008). Islamic doctrines demand that its adherents be honest, morally upright, humble, kind, and open-minded. Corruption and malevolent behavior are to be repelled with righteousness, forgiveness, and regulation of emotions such as wrath and greed.

Cooperation between people to achieve a higher common good such as helping those in need is highly encouraged in Islam. Religion views cooperation between people as a means of assuring the overall development of human society. The benefit of this development is the possibility of a comfortable, meaningful life. *Ihsan* is instituted by Islam to mean acting virtuously towards others. This creates beauty, strengthens brotherhood, and enriches the overall quality of human existence here on earth. *Rahmah* is an additional terminology meaning mercy. The concept of mercy can refer to a variety of meanings including feelings of love and tenderness, tolerance, and acceptance. As a result, *Rahmah* is best exemplified through displays of devotion, affection, and generosity towards others. In addition, acts of self-restraint and fortitude in times of trial and tribulation function alongside maintaining an accepting, forgiving nature in the face of others' aberrations.

Islam is based on the principle of good character in words and actions for all people and is linked to the principle of integrity and truth in faith. Religion in the Islamic view has three dimensions: Islam, *Iman*, and *Ihsan*. *Ihsan* signifies the cultivation of inner faith (*Iman*). Its purpose is to regulate human relations between all people, including relatives and members of the same family. It is a sense of social responsibility borne from religious convictions. *Ihsan* also ensures positive relationships and the promotion of kindness, gentleness, kindness, and cheerfulness among people. *Islam* represents a religion of brotherhood among human beings, without distinction between their races, colors, or ethnicities.

To summarize from the discussion above, both social work and Islam acknowledge the value of relationships between human beings. There is no conflict between the two.

The fifth tenet of social work is known as integrity. This value demands social workers to behave in a trustworthy manner. Honesty and ethical behavior are part of the dignified Islamic personality. Social workers are to be honest, and fair in their interactions with the public. They are also to be punctual for their sessions out of respect for their client. Honoring confidentiality, contracts and agreements, boundaries, and maintaining

established commitments is also a part of the concept of integrity. Integrity is part of the social, legal, and religious duty of every human being in a society.

From the Islamic outlook, integrity is the diplomatic code that serves as the foundation for human ethics. Virtues such as compassion, reliability, respect, trustworthiness, kindness, wisdom, loyalty, and impartiality are the core principles of integrity. In full measure, the person must manifest these virtues internally in their personhood and externally in their day-to-day life. Islam views integrity as an ongoing commitment in both spoken word and action.

Islam urges integrity in everything (in speeches and actions). Religion emphasizes staying away from indecency, envy, and malice. Also, from an integrity perspective, Islam forbids lying and perjury. Islamic integrity means purifying the heart from all personal ills. These ills include hating and belittling others, especially the helpless, minors, strangers, uneducated, weak, or poor. All these worthy meanings of integrity are encouraged by social work.

As evidenced above, there is a broad approach to the concept of integrity within the realm of Islamic doctrine. However, despite this variety within the religion, integrity under Islam is in accord with the responsibilities placed on social workers. The Social Work Code of Ethics requires its workers to be honest and forthright beyond their profession and throughout their personal lives, which is also espoused in Islam.

The sixth value of social work is competence, which according to the social work ethical code emphasizes ongoing professional growth and development. As experts in their field, social workers are expected to contribute to the expansion of the pool of social work knowledge.

Competence is defined as the ability to perform certain roles and complete certain tasks in a given position. Competence also includes the integration of a wide range of knowledge, specialized skills, an awareness of a wide range of attitudes, techniques, methods, theories informed through practice, personal values, and the power to build one's knowledge and skills through experience (Bartram & Roe, 2005).



The purpose of Islam and its teachings can be applied to various aspects of life. Honesty is also an obligation in Islam and an important act of forthrightness is assigning appropriate duties to qualified individuals with the competence to complete the given tasks. Trustworthiness combined with experience through wisdom is a prerequisite of competence.

There are limited definitions of competence in Islam, while there are analogies to other values such as social justice, community service, preservation of dignity, individual worth, the importance of social relationships, and integrity. There is also an emphasis on social obligation, duty, and leadership. Nevertheless, the concept as understood in Islam is in accord with the value of social work.

## Conclusion

The most significant cultural tenet of Islam is also the most effective support for universally held ethics and values. Ethics in Islam presents a holistic view of all that concerns humanity. Contrary to what some may believe, Islam is not contradictory to facts and theories developed and confirmed through the scientific method, be they emergent from non-Muslim societies or introduced through non-Muslim academics (Al-Aidros, Shamsudin, & Idris, 2013). Islam is not in conflict with social work or any profession whose goal is establishing peace and unity.

Some commonly accepted principles in Islam affirm the close connection between social work, Islam, and human rights. Some examples are as follows: a) the right to life, b) the right to economic, social, and legal justice, and c) equality as the basis of social relations between human beings, d) the right to secure life and possession of the property, e) the conservation of honor and integrity, and f) the rights of civilians. In general, there is a precept in Islam that Islam is rational and sustainable at all times, in all regions, nations, and peoples, which is evidence of Islam's tolerance for all that is not prohibited in the religion. As Islam spread to all corners of the globe, the knowledge it presents accommodates the knowledge produced by other cultures, including its societal ethics and values. An overwhelming

amount of hard and soft scientific techniques, skills, and values are not expressed in Islam. Even so, these techniques, skills, and values are recognized as applicable to all human beings and their environments.

Through interrogating the history of social work, it is evident that the profession developed with an ethical framework in mind. The ethical goals of social work have existed through its ongoing progress for more than one hundred years. The invaluable central tenet of social work affirms that the profession is firmly based on ethics. If social workers are to abandon these ethics in their service to humanity, the profession will deteriorate and eventually no longer exist.

The foundation of social work as a vocation extends back to the earliest social welfare practices, such as feeding the poor and sheltering orphans. This practice has been established from the outlook of charity and philanthropy being for the good of the total society. Indeed, the origins of social work remain at its core, despite the emergence of modern social theories and scientific models which aid its progress. These values and ethical principles and practices have been recorded and are a part of the general tendency of humanitarians. The moral regulations of social work comply with varying religions and cultures while possessing little if any conflict with Islam, known for its promotion of peace, dignity, health, and prosperity for all human beings. Noted experts have illustrated those aspects demonstrating the agreement between the religious teachings of Islam alongside other belief systems and the values of social work (Canda & Furman, 2009; Albrithen, 2017).

Despite Western epistemology still influencing social work in the Muslim world, there is a powerful undercurrent of Islamic beliefs and thought that continues to shape social work knowledge and practice in these societies. By and large, there is no antagonism between Islam and social work. Consequently, sensitivity to cultural considerations from a social work standpoint does not imply that social work practice in the Muslim world differs from any other society. From a moral and ethical perspective, social work is a universal profession. The core values of social

work can and should be taken into consideration by all nations interested in furthering social development.

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# Embracing Our Values: Social Work Faculty Progressivism in a Conservative World

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## Abstract

Social work faculty have an ethical imperative to engage in policy and political practice. While the literature indicates that a progressive-liberal tradition exists within social work, few studies have specifically looked at faculty political inclination and even less at their social welfare policy preferences. This descriptive study used an online survey to look at the party affiliation and political ideology of United States (U.S.) based social work faculty and the influence that these have on the social welfare policies faculty prefer. The study finds that U.S. based social work faculty are affiliated with the Democratic party (78.1%) and on the liberal side of the political continuum (86.4%). Descriptive statistics show that, overall, the social policy preferences of American social work faculty reflect the progressive paradigm more than the restrictive

paradigm ( $M = 6.06$ ,  $SD = 1.23$  for progressive items and  $M = 2.63$ ,  $SD = 1.54$  for restrictive items). Multivariate regression analysis results indicate that political ideology is the strongest predictor of social welfare policy preferences among study participants ( $\beta = .307$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The implications of these findings for social work education, including the alignment of a progressive ideology with social work values and ethics, are discussed.

Keywords: Political ideology, social work values, social work faculty, policy preferences, pedagogy

## Introduction

America is politically divided. In response to the murder of George Floyd, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has amplified the message that “Social Work is Political” and that “there is no such thing as a non-political social worker” (NASW, 2020). The current political divide, and the call to action from NASW, raises the question: on which side of the divide do social workers fall and what role should social work education play in advancing political themes? The literature indicates a history of progressivism shared by both social work practitioners and students (Gasker & Vafeas, 2003; Murdach, 2010). However, there is a dearth of research into social work educators' policy preferences (Castillo & Becerra, 2012; Weiss et al., 2002). Thus, this study explores the political affiliation and ideology of social work educators, and the impact of faculty political ideology on social work education, social work practice, and social work identity.

Determining the political ideology of social work educators is particularly essential given the political climate. Currently, attempts are underway within state legislatures to pass laws, under the guise of fostering intellectual freedom and limiting indoctrination, that request faculty and students to identify their political beliefs (Andrade, 2021). As Wehbi and Turcotte (2007) note: “...whereas alternate perspectives may have been tolerated at one point in time, changes in the broader context, including the growing privatization of social services and the growing dominance of neoliberalism on a world-wide scale, are increasingly making dissent a more

challenging endeavour” (para. 5). Thus, determining social work educators’ ideological perspectives will assist in preparing social work education to address the existential threat to academic freedom in the political and social climate.

Education itself is a political act, and, by nature, is not politically neutral (Freire, 1970). Additionally, social workers, and thus social work educators, are ethically obligated to engage in political practice. The NASW Code of Ethics ethical standard 6.04 Social and Political Action demands practitioners to advance policies that address social justice and meet basic human needs (NASW, 2021). The NASW Code of Ethics also outlines six core values for social work practitioners, ensuring that the social work profession is a values-based profession. Concurrently, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) require that students are competently prepared to engage in policy practice (CSWE, 2022). It is therefore incumbent on social work educators to regularly challenge students to explore political and policy themes, which are significantly impacted by value systems and ideology.

Given the cultural and social implications of an educator’s ideology, and the limited knowledge base in the literature, this descriptive study seeks to address the following questions: what are the political affiliations and political ideologies of social work faculty, and what impact do they have on social work faculty policy preferences? To address the identified questions, an online population survey of educators was completed.

## Literature Review

### Ideology

Ideology is a “fairly coherent and comprehensive set of ideas that (1) explains and (2) evaluates social conditions, (3) helps people understand their place in society, and (4) provides a program for social and political action” (Ball & Dagger, 1995, p. 9). These four functions combined move beyond ideas and beliefs to guide political, social, economic, and educational policies (Ball &

Dagger, 1995; Gutek, 2010). The conservative-liberal ideological continuum is a common way of thinking about how people should be served by social welfare programs (Jansson, 2011). Contemporary conservative ideology is characterized as being reluctant to change, thriving on tradition (Gilbert & Terrell, 2010), and viewing people as being quite capable of taking care of themselves (Abramovitz, 2021). Present-day liberal ideology is characterized as being open to change, progressively looking for solutions (Kirst-Ashman, 2013), and viewing the government as the best mechanism for providing services and opportunities (Abramovitz, 2021).

### Political Ideology and Affiliation in Social Work Literature

Studies into social work and politics in the United States (U.S.) have typically centered around the rates and types of political participation among social work practitioners and social work students. In fact, the literature has identified that social workers are more politically active than the general population and tend to participate in political activities that require lower levels of political engagement, such as voting (Domanski, 1998; Ezell, 1993; Felderhoff et al., 2016; Hamilton & Fauri, 2001; Mary, 2001; Ritter, 2007; Rome & Hoehstetter, 2010; Wolk, 1981). However, there is a subset of political social work literature that has explored the political ideology and policy preference of social work practitioners and students. Studies regarding U.S. based practitioners' ideology and political affiliation find that social workers tend to identify within a liberal-progressive paradigm and are largely affiliated with the Democratic Party (Ritter, 2007; Rosenwald, 2006; Smith-Osborne & Rosenwald, 2009; Stoeffler et al., 2021).

Similarly, studies into American social work student ideology and affiliation find that social work students tend to identify within a liberal-progressive approach (Ringstad, 2014), especially if their primary interest is in poverty (Stoeffler et al., 2021). While students tend to start slightly more conservative, through the process of social work education and field experience, their views become more liberal (Castillo & Becerra, 2012; Cryns, 1977; Perry, 2003; Schwartz & Robinson, 1991). However, there is a body of

literature that argues that social work education must prevent marginalizing students identifying within a conservative paradigm (Framm & Miller-Cribbs, 2008; Lerner, 2020), a notion that is explored in greater detail in the implications section of this paper.

While the referenced literature related to social work students and practitioners finds that social workers identify as progressive, there is limited literature related specifically to the political leanings of social work faculty. In fact, Mary's (2001) is the most recent study to specifically address political ideology of social work faculty and finds that faculty support a social reform perspective for social policy and overwhelmingly disagreed that effective social work requires social workers to remain non-partisan. Although there is limited data regarding social work faculty's political leanings, the literature related to political ideology and affiliation among all academics find that academics increasingly lean left (Abrams, 2016; Langbert et al., 2016). However, the limited and dated research specifically regarding the political ideology and political affiliation of social work faculty requires reappraisal to see if the trend among faculty in general is indicative of social work faculty. While social work students, social work practitioners, and faculty in higher education typically align within a progressive paradigm, the institution of higher education is structured differently. Traditionally, theoretical perspectives and pedagogy utilized in social work education tend to arise from a conservative paradigm (Robbins et al., 2019). Similarly, higher education, while typically perceived as a liberal institution, also tends to be structured in a neoliberal and conservative manner (Carey, 2021; Schraedley et al., 2021). For example, institutions of higher education tend to operate in a self-serving fashion to maintain student enrollment, appease donors, and perpetuate administrative and faculty hierarchies. Both social work education and the academic institutions in which social work education occurs have a conservative nature that runs counter to the progressive ideology that is typically expressed by social work students and social work practitioners. It is anticipated based upon the above stated literature that social work faculty will identify as liberal-progressive and support progressive policies. However, without additional study, it is

impossible to determine where social work educators are currently positioned on this progressive-to-conservative spectrum.

### Social Welfare Policy Preferences

Social policy preferences are of immense importance, as a nation's economic system and social safety net are among the greatest factors in determining the amount of poverty in a nation (Rainwater & Smeeding, 2003; Rank, 2021). While a liberal-progressive slant to policy positions exists for students and practitioners, there are relatively few studies that have examined policy preferences, and the evidence has not always been definitive (Weiss, et al., 2005). Social work students have shown support for a welfare-state, but the level of support has varied from middling to committed (Weiss, et al., 2002).

### Methods

A list of all the accredited social work programs in the United States was obtained from the CSWE website. Every program webpage was searched to acquire the names and email addresses of all the full-time social work faculty. An email invitation was sent from the first author explaining the survey and welcoming participation through the survey link. To increase the participation rate, two subsequent emails were sent at two-week intervals. This study also received approval by the Institutional Review Board of the first author.

### Data Collection

Participants completed an online survey containing a demographic questionnaire and the Welfare Policies Questionnaire (Bullock, et al., 2003). Excepting the items on the demographic questionnaire, questions used a seven-point Likert scale with participants rating their level of agreement with each statement using “1” to indicate strong disagreement and “7” to indicate strong agreement.

## Instruments

A demographic questionnaire collected participant information about full-time faculty status, current position/title, participant age, gender, race/ethnicity, political affiliation, political ideological identification, income level, number of years of faculty service, primary practice areas of interest, primary areas of teaching interest, state social work licensure status, NASW membership, geographic region of their institution, context of their institution, level of religiosity, personal experiences with poverty, and professional activities. The demographic questions served as the independent variables. This study also used the 21-item Welfare Policies Questionnaire (Bullock, et al., 2003), which is “constructed to assess support for progressive and restrictive welfare policies” (p. 42). Progressive policies advocate for improvement or reform as opposed to restrictive policies that seek to maintain the status quo or limit or reduce the application. These items served as dependent variables.

## Data Analysis

SPSS (v.22) was used for data analysis. Descriptive univariate analysis calculated means, standard deviations, and ranges for each variable. Principal components factor analysis was conducted and Cronbach’s alpha was calculated to ensure the items fit together in the same manner as in Bullock, et al. (2003). Pearson’s *r* correlational analysis was used to determine the relationship between variables studied. Independent variables significantly correlated with the dependent variables were included in the regression analysis. The first regression analysis showed that many of the coefficients were not significant. After removing coefficients that were not significantly associated, regressions were conducted on the remaining variables.



## Findings

### Sample demographic characteristics

1,037 full-time faculty members (72.8% women, 26.4% men, 0.4% other, 0.4% no response) of CSWE accredited social work programs participated in this study. This constituted a 17.8% response rate of the 5,810 surveys sent. 74.9% were White (Non-Hispanic Caucasian), 12.1% were African American/Other Black (Non-Hispanic), 5.3 % were Latino/Hispanic, 3.9% were Asian American or Pacific Islander, 1.3% were American Indian/Native American, and 2.5% identified as other groups/unknown. 86.4% self-identified as being on the liberal political ideological continuum (30.3% extremely liberal; 45.1% liberal; 11.0% slightly liberal), 9.4% identified as moderate, middle of the road, and 4.2% were on the conservative political ideological continuum (0.1% extremely conservative; 1.8% conservative; 2.3% slightly conservative). 78.1% affiliated with Democrats (70.2% Democratic; 7.9% lean Democratic) and 3.5% with Republicans (2.0% Republican; 1.5% lean Republican). 11.1% had an affiliation as Independent, and the remaining 7.2% chose other.

### Factor analysis

The factorability of the 21 items in the Welfare Policy Questionnaire (Bullock, et al., 2003) was examined. The items grouped into two factors, progressive and restrictive, and factor analysis loaded the same as in the Bullock, et al. (2003) study, further demonstrating the usefulness of this instrument in measuring social policy preferences. In the Bullock, et al. (2003) study the Cronbach's alpha was .79 for the progressive subscale and .84 for the restrictive subscale; in this study they were .89 and .85 respectively.

## Means comparison

### Welfare policy preferences

The study participants (social work faculty) strongly favored progressive over restrictive welfare policies. Participants agreed with all twelve of the progressive items and disagreed with all nine restrictive items. Table 1 shows the mean scores for each item.

| Items   | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|------|----------------|
| <b>Restrictive Welfare Policy Preferences Items (<math>M = 2.63, SD = 1.54</math>)</b>  |      |                |
| If welfare recipients receive 3 warnings or sanctions for not following the rules or taking their caseworkers advice, they should be removed from the welfare rolls (i.e., "three strikes and you're out"). | 2.57 | 1.51           |
| Fingerprinting welfare recipients is a good idea because it might help reduce fraud.  | 2.18 | 1.61           |
| It is a good idea to put a 5-year lifetime limit on receiving welfare benefits.   | 2.35 | 1.53           |
| *No time limits should be placed on the receipt of welfare benefits. People should be allowed to receive assistance for as long as they need to.  | 3.16 | 1.84           |
| If welfare recipients don't participate in job training programs their benefits should be reduced.  | 3.44 | 1.63           |
| If children in welfare families do not go to school regularly, their benefits should be reduced.  | 2.66 | 1.67           |
| Anyone convicted of a drug-related crime should never be eligible to receive welfare benefits.  | 1.74 | 1.25           |
| People should only be allowed to receive welfare for two years.   | 1.59 | 1.11           |
| After being on welfare for 2 years, recipients who cannot find jobs should work for the government to get their benefits.   | 3.97 | 1.70           |
| <b>Progressive Welfare Policy Preferences Items (<math>M = 6.06, SD = 1.23</math>)</b>  |      |                |
| Welfare recipients should be able to receive welfare benefits while attending a four-year college program.  | 6.17 | 1.12           |
| The federal government should guarantee an income above the poverty level to every person who wants to work.  | 5.75 | 1.43           |
| While on welfare, recipients should receive free daycare for their kids and this service should be continued after the primary caregiver is employed full-time until the family is financially secure.      | 5.96 | 1.25           |
| Welfare recipients should receive free medical care for themselves, and their kids and this service should be continued after employment is found until the family is financially secure.                   | 6.12 | 1.15           |
| The federal government should guarantee a job to every person who wants to work.  | 4.94 | 1.71           |
| For welfare reform to work, the minimum wage should be increased enough to lift a family of four out of poverty.  | 6.25 | 1.19           |
| *Welfare benefits should be completely eliminated.  | 6.78 | 0.78           |
| Welfare benefits should be adjusted each year to keep up with increases in the cost of living.  | 6.01 | 1.29           |
| Welfare recipients should be able to access education and job training free of charge.  | 5.88 | 1.33           |
| To prevent poverty, universal health insurance and other basic necessities should be provided to all working people.  | 6.42 | 1.12           |
| *Welfare should not be available to single, teenage mothers.  | 6.46 | 1.25           |

Note: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Somewhat Disagree; 4 = Neither Disagree nor Agree; 5 = Somewhat Agree; 6 = Agree; 7 = Strongly Agree  
 Note: Disagree  $\geq 3.99$ ; Agree  $\leq 4.00$  \* items are reverse scored

**Table 1:** Mean scores for welfare policy questionnaire items

## Multivariate regression analyses

### Restrictive policy preferences

The results of the regression to predict restrictive welfare policy preferences revealed seven predictors that explained 16.2% of the variance ( $R^2 = .162, p < .05$ ). It was found that the participants' absence of a liberal political

ideological view significantly predicted restrictive social policy preferences ( $\beta = -.260, p < .01$ ), as did racial and ethnic category (White) ( $\beta = -.115, p < .01$ ), primary teaching interest in field ( $\beta = -.115, p < .01$ ), primary practice interest in poverty ( $\beta = -.113, p < .01$ ), participating in advocacy ( $\beta = -.079, p < .01$ ), and primary practice interest in international social work ( $\beta = .70, p < .05$ ). Political affiliation (Democratic) did not significantly predict restrictive social welfare policy preferences ( $\beta = -.065, p > .05$ ).

### Progressive policy preferences

The results of the regression to predict progressive welfare policy preferences revealed six predictors that explained 16.5% of the variance ( $R^2 = .165, p < .05$ ).

| Variable                     | B     | Standard Error of B | Beta    |
|------------------------------|-------|---------------------|---------|
| Restrictive Policy           |       |                     |         |
| Race/Ethnicity               | -.269 | .076                | -.115** |
| Political Affiliation        | -.161 | .089                | -.065   |
| Political Ideological View   | -.770 | .107                | -.260** |
| International Social Work    | .203  | .094                | .070*   |
| Poverty                      | -.262 | .076                | -.113** |
| Field                        | .277  | .077                | -.115** |
| Advocacy                     | -.157 | .066                | -.079** |
| Progressive Policy           |       |                     |         |
| Political Affiliation        | .203  | .088                | -.082*  |
| Political Ideological View   | .898  | .105                | .307**  |
| Developmental Disabilities   | -.336 | .125                | -.086** |
| Violence Prevention          | .356  | .100                | .113**  |
| South                        | -.255 | .073                | -.113** |
| Member of Board of Directors | -.103 | .065                | .051    |

Note:  $R^2 = .162 (p < .05)$  for Restrictive Policy.  $R^2 = .165 (p < .05)$  for Progressive Policy. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table 2:** Multiple regression analyses predicting support for welfare policies

It was found that participants' political ideological view (liberal) significantly predicted progressive social policy preferences ( $\beta = .307, p < .01$ ), as did primary practice interest in violence prevention ( $\beta = .113, p < .01$ ) and political affiliation (Democratic) ( $\beta = .082, p < .05$ ). Having the institution located in the South ( $\beta = -.113, p < .01$ ), primary practice interest in developmental disabilities ( $\beta = -.086, p < .01$ ) and being a member of a board of directors did not significantly predict progressive social policy

preferences ( $\beta = -.051, p > .05$ ). Table 2 above shows the multiple regression analyses predicting welfare policy preferences.

## Implications for Social Work Education

The presenting study posed the following questions: what the political ideology and political affiliation of social work faculty are, and what impact political affiliation and ideology have on social work faculty policy preference. In addressing the first question, this study reveals that social work educators overwhelmingly identify within a liberal-progressive political ideology paradigm. Confirming that social work faculty are politically progressive, and that this progressive ideology strongly impacts policy preference, has resounding impact for social work education.

Namely, knowing that social work educators identify as liberal-progressive, this article argues that social work academia should take two key steps. Primarily, social work academics should embrace progressivism. Embracing progressivism includes preparing for any educational threats to academic viewpoints, ensuring that social work values and ethics are upheld in the classroom, and unapologetically including progressive theory and pedagogy. Additionally, social work educators should consider the approach employed while embracing a progressive viewpoint. Particularly, educators should not operate in a pedantic manner, should shy away from “group-think,” and should avoid hyper-partisanship. While these two implications appear at odds, they are both essential for understanding the identity of social work education and ensuring that social work values are upheld.

## Embracing Progressivism

### Prepare for Existential Threats

Establishing that social work educators maintain a liberal-progressive stance has implications for understanding and protecting social work academics' overall identity. As noted, the current political landscape is

weaponizing education as part of a culture war (Fischer, 2022). While the political discourse around education is primarily within the context of K-12 schools, educators in higher education must prepare to have their pedagogy and curriculum criticized. The threat comes from the political right, whose viewpoints contrast with those of liberal progressives. Thus, social work educators must prepare for any existential threats posed by policy stances that aim at suppressing liberal-progressive ideals.

Therefore, the first step in preparing for the threat to social work educational values includes identifying that the threat exists. Movements to register political preferences of professors (Guzman, 2021), limit the discussion of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and implicit bias (Bernstein, 2022), and eliminate discussions of LGBTQ+ rights (Schwartz, 2022) are antithetical to social work. Thus, social work academics need to advocate against any policies in federal, state, and local governing bodies that stand in opposition to the values of the social work profession, particularly any policies that suppress educating in an inclusive and supportive manner.

For example, Florida's recent enactment of the Stop WOKE bill, legislation developed under the guise of preventing indoctrination, calls for neutralizing discussion around race, prejudice, and America's history of slavery in K-12 education (Anderson, 2022). The Stop WOKE bill has faced challenges in the American judicial system, which can provide educators a road map for fighting against unjust educational policies through legal and judicial action. However, it is possible that future legislative efforts will have a chilling effect on pedagogy and content central to social work values and ethics. Thus, social work educators should prepare for civil disobedience when state laws conflict with the values and ethics of the social work profession. Educators must also ensure that academic freedom is not merely an ideal but a practice within their departments and institutions which will enable professors to maintain fidelity to their own guiding principles.

### *Maintain Social Work Values*

Through adequate preparation against existential threats to a liberal-progressive stance, social work educators can maintain social work values

throughout social work education. As a values-based profession, social workers are called to adhere to six core values: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (NASW, 2021). While these values are not exclusively progressive, components of these values, such as focus on knowledge of systems of oppression, opposing discrimination, and respect for culture and ethnic diversity, are in direct conflict with current political movements to eliminate pedagogy geared towards addressing topics of diversity.

Fortunately, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is affirming the need to incorporate diversity within curriculum. In fact, the 2022 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) consistently demand that social work programs address anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice when preparing future social workers (CSWE, 2022). The incorporation of a significant emphasis on anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices in social work education accreditation documents is in direct contrast to the efforts proposed by governing bodies to silence these liberal-progressive ideals in classrooms. Thus, social work education must maintain a steadfast commitment to these ideals and oppose any movements that challenge to silence these critical components of the social work curriculum. Additionally, programs and educational institutions must evaluate how their own missions align with these inclusive ideals.

#### *Incorporate Progressivism and Diversity in Theory and Pedagogy*

As social work educators begin the process of embracing a liberal-progressive viewpoint and adhering to the charge of incorporating anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices in curriculum and courses, educators must reflect on the current theory and pedagogy that are implemented in the classroom. Historically, theoretical perspectives discussed in social work courses are centered in a conservative paradigm (Robbins et al., 2019). For example, many key theoretical perspectives utilized in social work education, such as those of Freud, Piaget, and Erikson, are from a traditional male and Euro-centric worldview. In fact, social work theoretical and pedagogical approaches "...have a long history of engaging in practices that

are racist and that perpetuate white supremacy” (Yearwood et al., 2021, p. i). Thus, social work educators must reappraise their own practices by intentionally incorporating diverse theoretical perspectives and incorporating pedagogy that is responsive and sensitive to the diverse needs of social work students.

### Considerations When Embracing Progressivism

While some may misconstrue the argument for social work educators to embrace their ideology as a form of advocating for liberal-progressive indoctrination (Will, 2007), a critique often launched at the academy, this article is not that. In fact, it is essential for educators to expose students to various perspectives for students to fully identify their own worldview. However, during this politically divisive time, it is disingenuous and dangerous for educators to appear neutral in the face of significant economic, social, and human rights upheavals.

Thus, this article contends that embracing progressivism will ensure that liberal-progressive ideals are not silenced, which will enable social work educators to maintain fidelity to the values of the social work profession. Yet there are several considerations that social work educators should examine while embracing a progressive ideology. Namely, social work educators must meet their peers and students where they are, guard against the concerns of groupthink, and prevent the profession from being co-opted by partisan politics.

### Meeting Others Where They Are

In the process of fully embracing progressivism, social work educators run the risk of appearing self-righteous, which can prevent students from engaging in course discussion that appears politically divisive. Therefore, educators must take steps to avoid presenting liberal-progressive viewpoints in a manner that falls into the academic know-it-all trope. Additionally, social work literature identifies a concern for alienating students who come from a conservative perspective (Framm & Miller-Cribbs, 2008; Lerner, 2020). Thus, educators must uphold the learning

process as a journey of student discovery and not a soapbox for professorial pontificating. However, creating a space for students to explore various political viewpoints does not absolve educators from challenging viewpoints that are counter to the ethical mandates and values of the social work profession.

Fortunately, social work education is already familiar with the concept of preparing practitioners to meet clients where they are. Thus, social work educators can utilize lessons from the person-in-environment (PIE) approach to work with students, colleagues, and the larger community who may hold viewpoints antithetical to progressivism and social work values (Gitterman & Germain, 1980). Utilizing PIE in conversations around progressive topics within classrooms will enable social work educators to explore the diversity of student viewpoints while also allowing students a space to embrace progressive concepts. This in turn will enable educators to encourage students to think critically and reflectively about their political ideology, the profession's values, and the impact these ideologies and values have in the learning process (Rosenwald et al., 2012).

If embracing social work values is fundamental to becoming a social worker, one must consider the responsibilities of the social work academy when a student fails to do so. Clearly, this question is a controversial one, as it suggests that running afoul of the thought police could result in academic dismissal. Yet, if social work is more about its unique perspective than it is about the tools that it often appropriates from other helping professions, then the way social workers think, the positions they hold, and the prejudices they maintain should be considered in schools of social work, despite the grades achieved.

Consider the example of a MSW student who was taught by one of the authors. During the course, the student disclosed to the class that she would not work with LGBTQ+ people, as she believed them to be psychologically and morally damaged. In addition, she said that, if she was forced to work with them, she would try to encourage them to change their behaviors. This student was an academically high achieving student. However, her values were inconsistent with social work. If being a social worker means



supporting the value, dignity, autonomy, and agency of LGBTQ+ clients — as is done with every other person—can someone be, or should someone be permitted to be, a social worker if they embrace values and positions to the contrary? Certainly, every student engages in a process of evolution. That is the very purpose of social work education. However, the profession —and the social work academy—must determine when the formal educational process has ended, and the gate-keeping responsibility begins. In this challenging time, when schools of social work confront reduced enrollments and economic pressures, the academy must act courageously and place the development of social work values, and the adoption of a social work identity, above the enticement of a fuller classroom.

#### Guarding against Groupthink

While educators should embrace progressivism, they should also remain open to diversity of thought. Failure to explore other viewpoints can lead to groupthink, the blind allegiance to a predominant perspective, which can have an adverse epistemic effect on social work thought (Hahn et al., 2020). Educators risk operating within an echo chamber, discouraging viewpoints grounded in facts.

As noted, the social work profession has a history of supporting oppressive systems (Yearwood et al., 2021). Operating with a groupthink mentality prevents social work educators from reappraising the profession's role in perpetuating unjust ideologies and reconciling the profession's history with its current ethical mandates and values. Thus, embracing a progressive viewpoint does not mean minimizing diversity in discourse, but rather, provides an opportunity to explore various viewpoints and to find areas for commonality and growth, a liberal-progressive ideal in its own regard.

#### Progressivism Not Partisanship

Social work educators are beholden to social work values and not the value system of any one particularly political party. It is important that social work educators embrace progressivism and not partisanship. Progressivism is support and advocacy for social reform while partisanship is strong

adherence to a particular political party. Political party platforms can and often do change. A classic example is how the Republican party was initially liberal, focusing attention on the federal government's role in ensuring social justice through expanded power, while the Democratic party was conservative; however, between the end of the Civil War and 1936, the parties gradually switched positions (Wolchover & McKelvie, 2021).

While social work educators currently tend to identify with the Democratic party, components of the party's political platform could directly conflict with social work values. Research demonstrates that political ideology is central to both attitudes and behaviors towards human rights and social justice, with liberal-progressive showing decidedly more support (Braun & Arves, 2017). Thus, the salient matter is to adhere to a liberal-progressive ideological perspective and the social work value system, not necessarily to one political party. To avoid confirmation bias and blind partisanship, social work educators need to evaluate the values system within political parties and continue to advocate for policies and platforms that align with the values of the social work profession.

## Limitations

The data used are from a larger nationwide online survey in the Fall of 2014. Americans have grown more politically divided in the years since the data was collected (Dimock & Wike, 2020), and it is likely that the results would be even more skewed if the survey were conducted today. A study of this nature will always demand constant reappraisal.

The entire population of full-time social work faculty at CSWE accredited institutions is the target of the study. This population was relatively small and could be identified, constructed, and surveyed. Reliance on websites being current may have caused some full-time faculty to not be identified and included. Self-selection was the final sampling determinant; thus, the findings cannot be generalized beyond the scope of the sample. Additionally, there is always a possibility of social desirability bias associated with self-report.

While the study's findings may inform the pedagogy of social work schools in the U.S, the findings and implications may have little relevance beyond the American experience. Though dramatic political division is hardly unique to United States, the two-party system, unlike parliamentary structures, tends to define issues in binary ways. Thus, the two-party system enhances the likelihood that one party—such as the Democratic Party—will adopt positions on various social issues that align with social work values.

Additionally, the current political times are unprecedented in the United States, especially with respect to the degree of vitriol. In years past, some welfare programs (e.g., Head Start) would have garnered bipartisan support. But in this age, support for such programs is an indication of one's liberal-progressive agenda, and sometimes the social issue, experience, or movement becomes a target of hostility or violence. Finally, one must not assume that the American social work experience is like that found in other countries. While global social work practice shares common beginnings in both the charity organization society and settlement house movements, over the course of the twentieth century, social work in each country has become a unique entity, fundamentally shaped by its culture, environment, history, politics, resources, and challenges. Thus, future research should address the limitations of this study by using stronger sampling methodologies, stronger research designs, and an exploration of faculty political ideology outside of the U.S.

## Conclusion

Social work faculty identify as liberal-progressive in their ideology, and this identification predicts their firm support of progressive social welfare policies. Future research must move beyond this description of the nature and impact of ideology on policy preferences to how the findings translate into pedagogy and teaching philosophy. A roadmap is given for social work faculty to embrace their liberal-progressive identity, which is grounded in the profession's ethical mandates and values.

Many of the practice activities aligned with social work values and ethics (e.g., feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and imprisoned, etc.) are good in themselves, and in many instances, universally and historically regarded as such. Other professional considerations are based in science (e.g., support of LGBTQ+ rights, condemnation of conversion therapies, etc.). Therefore, the political quality of these considerations may have little to do with the issue at hand, but with how the issue is defined and used by each side. This phenomenon suggests that these issues are not innately partisan, and only the political winds have made them so. Consequently, when social work educators take positions to support the poor, discriminated, and marginalized, positions demanded by social work values, they must do so despite the appearance that the individual, department, or profession is acting in a partisan fashion. Maintaining neutrality risks collaboration with discriminatory and oppressive practices. Therefore, actions must be bold and unequivocal.

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# Forum: Nothing Can be Changed Until it is Faced: Social Work's Licensing Justice Journey

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## Abstract

Disaggregated pass rate data for the social work licensing exams has revealed gaps in pass rates between racial, ethnic, and age groups. ASWB is committed to collaborating across the social work profession to find systemic solutions that are grounded in social work values.

Keywords: ASWB, licensing, social work exams, content validity, professional competence

Licensing—in any profession—serves two primary functions: ensuring that practitioners can practice competently and providing recourse to the public when questions of competence or ethical behavior arise. Social work licensing exists to protect public health and safety. Like the profession's code of ethics, it is rooted in the six core values of social work: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence.

Licensing helps equalize the power in the practitioner–client system, holds social workers accountable for their integrity and competence, and reflects the profession's commitment to the dignity and worth of the people served. Fundamentally, social work licensing is a force for social justice.

Licensing also reflects social work's status as a *profession*, not just a job. Professional licensing acknowledges that employing social work approaches, methods, and tools requires specialized knowledge, education, and skill. Regulation of the field reflects the government's recognition that social work impacts public health and safety and should be guided by the standards that define the profession.

## Facing it

In 2021, ASWB's Board of Directors made the groundbreaking decision to analyze and report disaggregated data on pass rates for the social work licensing exams, including a 10-year analysis report and additional information broken down by state, province, territory, and social work degree program.

In publishing these reports, ASWB became the first organization to publish disaggregated pass rates for any health or human services field and one of the few regulatory associations to share this level of descriptive data. Publishing disaggregated information about pass rates prompted a profession-wide reckoning, and the conversations around the data have been as illuminating as they are difficult. But these conversations are necessary if there is to be constructive dialogue across all sectors of the profession toward addressing the issues raised by these disparate outcomes.

We knew that this data—showing lower pass rates for Black test-takers, older test-takers and those for whom English is not a first language—would be met with a range of responses including anger, disappointment, and sadness. These are appropriate responses to injustice. Nonetheless, disclosure of this data is critical to equitably serving the social work profession and improving the licensure process. As social workers, we

know this pattern is all too familiar in a society where racism, oppression, and white supremacy are embedded in every system and institution. Social work, of course, is not immune.

Criterion-referenced competence measures are part of the entry-to-practice requirements across professions in the United States—from physicians and attorneys to architects and engineers. But it is social work—a profession in which women and historically marginalized populations are represented at relatively high levels—that has been targeted by calls to remove exams from licensure requirements. These efforts, some coming from within social work itself, could have many unintended consequences, including calling into question our very status as a profession and threatening justice-based workforce values such as pay equity and parity.

Every candidate enters the testing room bringing a unique history, a differing educational background, and varying degrees of privilege. For most, the exam is the finish line on the journey to licensure. But each candidate arrives at that finish line having traveled a different path. For some candidates, the path is smooth and level. For others it is fraught with hurdles, barriers, and threats—uphill the entire way.

## Changing it

ASWB is committed to working to narrow the gaps in pass rates, but in the context of systemic inequities, solutions will come only from concerted, long-term effort across all sectors of social work. The regulatory community is already taking action to conduct more in-depth research, review our administration policies, explore new ways to measure competency, and offer new resources to candidates and educators. But a sustainable impact on these vast systemic injustices will not happen through our actions alone. Collectively, social work has the tools to close the gaps reflected in the pass rate data.

## Applying systems thinking to systemic problems

Long before the licensure process is initiated, aspiring social workers bring greatly varying levels of life experience to their first day of social work class. Preparation typically includes earning a degree from an accredited institution—including coursework, practicum placements, and learning assessment. It may also require postgraduate supervised experience which also varies greatly in quality and depth.

Social workers know that Black, Indigenous, and Latino social work students often share experiences of the harms of racism and white supremacy in their lives; these forces have distorted the history and structure of educational institutions, disenfranchising countless people all along the micro, mezzo, macro continuum.

Instructional design research refers to *cognitive load* as the working memory that our minds use as we navigate the world. I would suggest that when considering our pervasive societal ills, we should consider *psychosocial load* as well. By this, I mean the effects of factors such as chronic anti-Blackism, socioeconomic gaps (e.g., Black social work students graduate from educational programs with significantly higher loan debt than any other group.), and other destructive dynamics that affect candidates disproportionately along their path toward licensure <sup>4</sup>. Reducing the impact of the psychosocial load that candidates carry to the licensure process is well within the field's collective capacity.

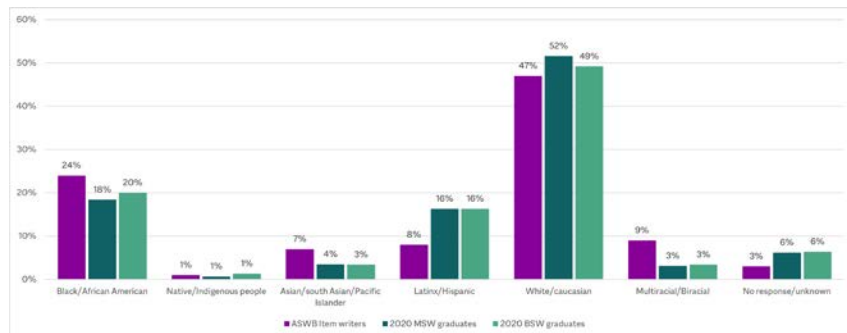
## Embedding diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in every part of a system

Welcoming historically marginalized people to the table is critical whenever important decisions are being made. But that inclusion alone is not enough to eliminate disparities. ASWB has, for decades, selected item writers and Examination Committee members who represent racial, ethnic, and

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<sup>4</sup> [The-Social-Work-Profession-Findings-from-Three-Years-of-Surveys-of-New-Social-Workers-Dec-2020.pdf](#)

practice setting diversity. In 2022, the pool of item writers closely mirrored the population of graduates from MSW and BSW programs as reported in 2020 *Statistics on Social Work Education in the United States* <sup>5</sup>.



**Figure 1:** Population of graduates from MSW and BSW programs

ASWB employs robust antibias measures with extensive psychometric tools, working with a diverse group of practicing social workers at every stage of development and eliminating any question that shows signs of bias. Despite those efforts, disparities persist. Prioritizing equity in any process is vital, but it is not sufficient to ensure equal outcomes.

ASWB continues to evaluate the processes and tools we use to mitigate problems in the short term and as a means of promoting accountability for the long term.

### Progress through strengths-based interventions

As social workers, we know that approaching a challenge through a strengths-based perspective makes positive outcomes more likely. We need

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<sup>5</sup> Council on Social Work Education. (2021). *2020 statistics on social work education in the United States*. <https://www.cswe.org/research-statistics/research-briefs-and-publications/2020-annual-statistics-on-social-work-education>



to investigate the characteristics of successful test-takers across states and provinces, schools, regions, ages, and ethnicities in order to generate meaningful data and learn lessons that can be applied broadly.

Working with experts at the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO), ASWB is conducting qualitative research on social workers' experiences with licensing. We are listening to and learning from those who are successful on the exams as well as those who are not. We anticipate that this qualitative research will complement the quantitative data provided by the pass rate analysis, and we will report on our findings when the work is complete.

### Accountability: Changing what we face

By publishing disaggregated data and committing to annual updates, the social work profession, including social work regulation, can be held more accountable for progress in closing the gaps in the pass rates. Meanwhile, we are already making changes to the testing experience and exploring changes to the exam itself. Changing assessment tools alone, however, will not bring parity to the profession. Unless and until we ensure that candidates have substantially similar experiences throughout their respective paths, the finish line will remain elusive for many.

ASWB continuously evaluates the candidate experience and recently implemented modifications to exam procedures to streamline the process of sitting for the licensing exams, reduce test-taker anxiety, and lessen the psychosocial load on candidates. We have also made new resources available at no cost to social work educators.

In addition, ASWB began a pilot program in January 2023 to offer free access to a specialized program for test mastery to social workers who are unsuccessful in passing an exam. This program, developed and operated by an independent firm, includes an individualized assessment and a personalized report with information and insights test-takers can use to prepare for and perform as well as possible on their exam retake. We look

forward to hearing more from those participating in the program to understand its impact.

### Forward progress: Working to solve complex, long-term problems

ASWB is creating opportunities for independent research to inform regulatory administration and deepen understanding of how to ensure greater equity within the profession's systems, including competence measures. A request for proposals for funded research will be issued in March 2023.

We are working with experts in assessment and testing to explore various ways that social workers can demonstrate their competence prior to entering practice. Such alternative approaches could prove more equitable, but research into these assessments is somewhat thin and progress will not be immediate. Moreover, with more than 60,000 licensing exams given every year, any new assessments must work at scale and be administered objectively. They must also be statistically reliable and valid.

ASWB is committed to helping find better ways to measure competence as a vital part of regulation. Social workers should be required to demonstrate their competence, just as other professionals must demonstrate before they are trusted with the public's safety and well-being.

### The journey ahead

Experience has taught me that when an organization does groundbreaking things, it can encounter rough terrain, but new opportunities are also unearthed. ASWB is embarking on this justice journey for the long haul and is committed to forwarding progress through partnership and collaboration.

Social work, as a profession, is not perfect. Its history is grounded in some of the same inequities that exist throughout our society. But given our core values, it is fitting that social work is now among the first professions to openly address the disparities in testing outcomes. As James Baldwin said,

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

Lasting change—if it is to happen for an individual, a community, or a society—takes time, collaboration, and commitment. We at ASWB are continuing our quest to not only face change head on, but to lead meaningful change effort. We invite the rest of the profession to join us on this journey.

# Forum: Interpretation of the Canadian Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics as Penguin Comic

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## Introduction

I am a student in my first year at the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada. The inspiration for this comic series came about through taking my first social work university course. We studied the Canadian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2005) and were challenged to create a relatable interpretation of this Code of Ethics in whatever form of expression inspired us. My goal in creating this comic was to highlight real life examples of how to implement those ethics in social work practice. I chose penguins for their universal appeal and humorous effect, to soften the approach to a very serious topic.

My hope is that this comic will make you smile and introduce the Canadian Association of Social Work code of ethics to those who have yet to read it. Please enjoy!

**[Please find the comic as a separate file here \[PDF, 27.8Mb\]](#)**.

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CASW Code of Ethics. (2005). Canadian Association of Social Workers.

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## Book Review

Ylänne, V. (Ed.). (2022). [Ageing and the media: International perspectives](#). Policy Press.

DOI: [10.55521/10-020-117](#)

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This edited book is part of a larger collection, the *Ageing in a Global Context* book series, which seeks to influence research and policy; respond to the globalization of our world and subsequent transnational migration; and encourage new approaches to global aging across disciplines.

Ylänne introduces the text by framing the relationship between social discourse and the media as a reciprocal one: Representations of aging in the media reflect the attitudes and beliefs of society but also contribute to the social construction of meaning. Media producers have the power to influence, reinforce, or challenge ageism. This book addresses the intersectionalities of ageing with gender identities, cultural identities, nationalities, mental health, persons with LGBTQ+ identities, and persons in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, to name a few. Authors explore not only how older adults are represented in the media, but how those older adults relate and respond to those representations. Authors explore the images and text of news coverage, magazines, fictional contexts, digital communications, and graphic novels. Research from Northern Europe, North America, South America, Asia, and Africa is presented.

Loos et al. pointed out that the concept of successful aging is likely understood differently by different cultures and nationalities. Early in the book, I found it necessary to re-examine my own understanding of “successful ageing.” I learned that this concept is misleading because it portrays a model of aging that is not attainable by many people, and it implies that people are responsible for their own ageing. Consequently, people who are not able to age “successfully” must by logical extension, be failures at it by making the wrong choices. For example, Castro reported that Brazil’s advertising industry promotes the responsibility of older adults to “choose” not to age by buying certain anti-ageing products.

Higgs and Gilleard discuss the media in the UK and explain a tendency to divide older adults into two categories: third age and fourth age. The third age is comprised of the baby-boomer cohort that is healthy, active, physically fit, engaged in consumerism, and resistant to aging. This contrasts with the fourth age, who are seen as the inevitable “others” (p. 206) who are in decline, frail, chronically ill, dependent, and in need of care. Loos et al. examined images on the websites of public organizations in Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden. They tended to portray third age people as healthy and active. Sweden portrayed fourth age people slightly more often as being frailer and more dependent. The authors suggested that this could have been because the websites were intended for different audiences, with the former addressing organizations that are financed by membership (trying to market an attractive image) and the latter addressing the general public and potential care workers (trying to show that older people are well cared for).

I particularly enjoyed reading about the linguistic choices and linguistic analyses presented. For example, in Ylänne’s review of the literature, a study discussed an analysis of newspaper headlines that referred to older adults in some way. The researchers found that in the headlines, the older adults were in a passive role and were usually the object of action by others (such as government, care agencies, or a virus). Seldom were they referred to in an active voice, being the people doing the action. When they were, they were described as “exceptional heroes” (p. 42). Chen

and Huang's review of Taiwanese newspapers identified use of language such as 'unable to,' "fail," and actions such as standing, walking, or lying down, were said to "limp, falter, behave in an absent-minded manner, or simply be 'spaced out.'" (p. 65). Language is a powerful and symbolic representation of our often-unacknowledged beliefs and attitudes.

In Canada, Hurd and Mahal found that a sample of newspaper and magazine articles revealed three themes: "silencing" LGBTQ+ older adults by quoting experts rather than quoting the words of the people being discussed, characterizing older LGBTQ+ persons as victims of institutional discrimination, and elevating LGBTQ+ older adults in before-and-after stories to the status of extraordinary, in prevailing over discrimination. Similarly, Loos et al. found that in the U.K., following the passage of legislation to promote inclusive design and make web pages more readable, there was a trend toward using more text and icons and fewer pictures. The unintended consequence of fewer pictures of older adults resulted in "erasing" them from visual imagery of public organizations (p. 208).

Ratzenböck researched women's participation with information technologies in Austria and found what was termed a "double logic of care" (p. 192). Women reported either using information technology to care for others, or reported that they were too busy caring for others to use information technology. In Canada, Sawchuk interviewed women who indicated that magazines intended for women were almost always intended for younger women, and they read the publications selectively so as to make them relevant to their lives despite the audience to which they were marketed.

Dalmer and Cedeira Serantes examined five titles of graphic novels from several countries. They found that the stories revealed a rich perspective of later life; explored a variety of themes; and contained characters reflecting multiple ethnicities, gender orientations, and life situations. This approach challenges the problematic and common tendency to rely upon binary categories of people.

Overall, I enjoyed the book and learned a lot. Two strengths of the book stand out. First, contributors represented different disciplines, interests,



and nationalities. For example, they included a social worker in Ghana whose interests are in women's empowerment and mental illness stigma, an associate professor in Taiwan whose interest is in gerontological sociolinguistics, and a data-set coordinator from Austria whose interest is in older adults in a digital media environment. Contributors were impressively talented and diverse. Second, each chapter is heavily cited and provides not only support for academic assertions, but sources for additional study. The book is interesting, but not an easy read. It would be an excellent text used at the graduate level for disciplines of social work, sociology, or media communications. I think undergraduate students would struggle getting through the book. It would also be an excellent resource for someone doing dissertation research in this area.

## Book Review

Armstrong, L., & Abel, G. (Eds.). (2021). [Sex work and the New Zealand model: Decriminalization and social change](#). Bristol University Press.

DOI: [10.55521/10-020-118](#)

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Often, the terms sex work and human trafficking are directly associated by those who have not read or engaged in the discourse on these issues. In my case, I have neglected these issues for many years. As a social worker and social work educator, I have delved deeply into the issue of human trafficking in fits and starts depending on the immediate focus of my work. As a young social worker working with adolescents in the juvenile justice system, issues of sex work and sex trafficking would often surface. These juveniles were always poor and disenfranchised and often had been trafficked by their own families. I equated sex work and sex trafficking without any evidence. Approximately 15 years ago I began seeing feminist literature considering sex work as a commercial endeavor (Duggan & Hunter, 2006) and pointing out the differences between the two. This research had the power to properly inform sex trafficking and sex work policies, which are usually ideologically driven. Although the literature was robust with feminist discourse on sex work, researchers were often poor activists for policy changes based on their studies. However, this work provides a vigorous look at the impact of the Prostitution Reform Act (PRA)

legislated in New Zealand in 2003. The book discusses the decriminalization of sex work and explores the viability of the law in other countries.

Armstrong and Able (2020) provide a powerful compendium from a variety of researchers studying sex work, most notably from the perspective of the sex workers themselves. The edited work succeeds in providing powerful arguments for legislative changes involving sex work and provides an evaluation of New Zealand's Prostitution Reform Act (PRA) of 2003. The initial three chapters provide the foundation for the reader to consider the history of sex work from social and political perspectives incorporating public health, gender studies, criminal justice, and advocacy. In Part 1 of the book, the editors select research contrasting the problems encountered by sex workers before and after decriminalization of sex work and provide research focused on the future of sex work. Chapter Two highlights the creation of the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective with very detailed notations about writing the bill for the PRA, changes and amendments, and how the bill was implemented. Part 2 looks at the disenfranchisement and underrepresentation in the literature of diverse sex workers such as transgender and migrant workers, investigating the impact of being outside of the protection of the law. Part 3 includes a collection of robust feminine discourse focusing the observations of sex workers who discuss the stigma associated with their work.

Chapter Three discusses the relationship of sex work and sex work activism and Chapter Four discusses trans sex-workers' thoughts and experiences working under decriminalization. Gilmore recognizes the advantages of decriminalization but maintains that there continues to be a great amount of stigma and fear of the police within the community. Chapter Five focuses on Section 19 of the PRA, discussing how migrant sex workers are being placed in harm's way because of being denied protections of the PRA. The authors maintain, "some sex workers benefit from the protections of the PRA while others work in a precarious situation that places them at risk of harm" (p. 114). Chapter Six is focused on the clients of sex workers and the power they hold. The book continues thematically focused on the clients of sex workers, discussing boundaries and services.

Finally, drawing on interviews with sex workers, a discussion using media narratives shows how stigma is experienced by sex workers. The public's perception and acceptance of sex workers is introduced with thoughts of how to mitigate issues and improve relationships among various groups. Through a careful review of the literature Armstrong and Able connect themes, define the differences between sex work and sex trafficking, and define what decriminalization of sex work means. As such this work is an excellent influence on creating meaningful legislation around sex work, which will ultimately impact a decline in sex trafficking. Armstrong and Able clearly show that when the public conflates sex trafficking with sex work, unintended individuals who are being trafficked are traumatized by prosecution in addition to the trauma of being trafficked.

I learned a great deal from this work. This book is an excellent resource for those in social work, public health, criminal justice, and any social science. The research presented in this work provides excellent information on an international scale for both direct practice and policy practice professionals. It highlights the effects of decriminalizing sex work on many levels, including the occupational health and safety of sex workers and those who are sex trafficked.

I recommend this book for all social work students. This book will be recommended as required reading for the Marshall University social work course on Human Trafficking.

## Reference

Duggan, L., & Hunter, N. D. (2006). *Sex wars: Sexual dissent and political culture*. Routledge.

## Book Review

Rosignoli, F. (2022). [Environmental justice for climate refugees](#). Routledge.

DOI: [10.55521/10-020-119](#)

Reviewed by Stephen M. Marson, PhD, ACSW; Editor, IJSWVE

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*Environmental Justice for Climate Refugees* is not a book for everyone, but a readership *does* exist. Because budding social work students who have a passion for macro intervention are emerging, we are beginning to see a growing interest for the humanitarian consequences of climate change. The intervention at this level does not fall within the purview of clinical social work. Rather the content within this book falls into the lap of macro social workers who envision their intervention on a global basis rather employing concepts like municipality. Among Americans, we are witnessing an increasing interest in international social work where the client system is not an individual (with a psychiatric diagnosis), but rather the client system is humanity itself.

How can a practitioner make enough money to survive within the field of environmental social work? The answer to that question lies within the material presented in Rosignoli's book. Money has been trickling into environmental studies — engineers and statisticians are followed by a wide range of natural scientists. Rosignoli gives a road map of how macro social work will become involved in the action. Here is the challenge: Rosignoli makes us realize that the social sciences must become embedded in environmental interventions at this early stage. Otherwise, the foundation

for intervention will become unmanageable, like too many other international humanitarian projects.

This is *not* a book for clinical social workers. Nor is it a book for community organizers who envision their intervention on the community level. In Chapter 1, Rosignoli makes it abundantly clear that there is no universal definition for the central concept housed within this book. On pages 3–6, we see 21 different definitions for the central concept, none of which has reached the point of universal acceptance. They are as follows:

|                                 |                                   |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Ecological Displaced Persons    | Environmentally Displaced Persons |
| Ecological Refugees             | Climate Displaced Persons         |
| Economic Refugees               | Environmental-displaced Persons   |
| Environmental Refugees          | Climate Change Migrants           |
| Environmental Migrant (1)       | Disaster Displaced Persons        |
| Environmental Displaced Persons | Climate Displacement/Displacee(s) |
| Ecomigrants                     | Survival Immigrants               |
| Environmental Migrant (2)       | Climate Immigrants                |
| Climate Change Refugees         | Climate Exiles                    |
| Displacees                      |                                   |

**Table 1:** Definitions of the central concept housed within this book

None of these terms precisely share the identical definition. No big deal? Yes, it turns out that the lack of consensus is extraordinarily problematic for two reasons.

First, social workers are intimately familiar with the concept of “multicultural.” The term is used and understood among social workers within their geographical catchment area. Every country has a multicultural citizenry. However, on an international level we lay witness to “hypermulticulturalism.” The multicultural problematic issues within a single country are child’s play when compared to global interaction from a much greater range of ethnic identities. Where can we witness the hypermulticulturalism dilemma? After World War I, our global community faced a disastrous problem of material and estate loss among an

extraordinarily diverse population with no home nor homeland. The League of Nations <sup>6</sup> began to work on this problem in 1918. But why worry about the “refugees”? The social worker’s answer would be to rely on the basic professional values. However, the real world is not comprised entirely of social workers. Rosignoli clarifies that international policy **is not** formulated on a humanitarian basis. An internationally accepted, legally binding statement in 1951 was forced to be developed and adopted by the United Nations because of the recognition that refugees have emerged into a permanent “structural and global phenomena.” In addition, we see a conflict between economic greed and the value of human life.

Second, the topic of refugees is an historical nightmare that is constantly tied up with an unbelievable bureaucracy. Why? The answer lies within hypermulticulturalism. The vast amount of difficult, unsuccessful, and incomplete work completed by the League of Nations and the United Nations was conceptualized to create “peace and stability.” It was an effort to reduce tensions among nation/states. An absurd example is the international case of [Iaone Teitiota v. New Zealand](#), which addressed the needs of a citizen from the Republic of Kiribati. Due to climate change, the island is slowly sinking into the ocean, and Iaone Teitiota applied to New Zealand for refugee status. However, in accordance with international law, the *defined* criteria for refugee could not be met. Teitiota was not facing man-made danger, violence, or political threats. Within international law (going back to the importance of defining terms), refugees who emerged as a result of climate change are not protected by any international refugee statute.

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<sup>6</sup> Young readers are not likely to be familiar with the League of Nations. Established in 1918, the League of Nations was the precursor to the United Nations. The League was established out of the rubble of World War I – “the war to end all wars.” The primary mission of the League was to solve disputes between nations before warfare could erupt. The violence that emerged from the actions of Germany, a League member, caused the collapsed of the League. The United Nations emerged from the rubble of World War II.

International attitudes are changing. In accordance with the United Nations' [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) (GCM) of December 10, 2018, all known dimensions of international migration are addressed in a comprehensive manner. However, in 1951, the international position in formulating a comprehensive approach was assumed to be successfully and finally resolved. It was not. Time will tell if the new approach, GCM, has successfully weaved through the complexities of hypermulticulturalism.

Rosignoli has anticipated my concern with hypermulticulturalism. Will GCM emerge as a success? In Chapter 3, Rosignoli begins to weave through the theoretical failures addressed in the earlier parts of the book. Keep in mind, *Environmental Justice for Climate Refugees* is an important but extraordinary difficult book to read. I do believe that the typical MSW student would become frustrated with it. To comprehend the profound meaning of the book requires a graduate school status *but with* an intense interest in international or global social work. Without this prerequisite, the book will be unmanageable.

For the past seven years, I have been conducting research with and for internationally known mathematicians, statisticians, and engineers regarding climate change. We are beginning to tackle the concept of "climate injustice," and these mental gymnastics are a Herculean task. Once again, I identify the issue of hypermulticulturalism as our dilemma. In her last chapter, Rosignoli effectively addresses the process of defining "climate injustice" by dissecting it. She lays out three separate components of it. Her successful mental gymnastics deserve an Olympic gold medal. Her work will be an asset for decades.

In the end, I must note that this is a very difficult book for any macro social worker who is not intensely passionate about climate change and global warming. Another prerequisite for reading this book is an understanding of how the United Nations functions. Readers must comprehend and appreciate implications of hypermulticulturalism. For graduate MSW and Ph.D. students, I would strongly recommend that



Rosignoli's work be required reading for any social work course that focuses on international issues and/or global analysis.

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