The mission of the Columbia Social Work Review is to provide a forum for the exchange of innovative ideas that integrate social work practice, education, research, and theory from the perspective of social work students. Founded by students at Columbia University School of Social Work in 2003 as the Columbia University Journal of Student Social Work, this academic journal provides an opportunity for students in the field of social work to share their unique experiences and perspectives with fellow students, faculty, and the larger social work community.
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Welcome to the Columbia Social Work Review! This year we are pleased to present our 11th edition of the Columbia University School of Social Work student journal. Over the last eleven years, students at CUSSW have been independently exploring questions that push the field of social work. This year’s edition is no exception, and is jam-packed with eight articles that delve into a particularly broad scope of social and economic challenges representative of those we face inside and outside of the classroom. We invite you to reassess our collective work and join with others to further explore creative and collaborative solutions.

CUSSW alumnus Eliza Ramos kicks off our journal by exploring the pervasive and systematic avoidance of discussing widespread psychosocial trauma in her article, “Crucial Conversations: Exploring Intergenerational Trauma in Post-Conflict Guatemala.” In “Effective Employment of Individuals with Mental Health Conditions: Harnessing National, State, and Local Efforts to Improve Outcomes in New York City,” World of Work student Camille Santisteven looks at improving employment outcomes of people with mental health conditions through employer awareness and stigma reduction. Next, Dominoe Jarvis proposes a call to action for the social work profession and explains why the profession is ideally suited to address issues of environmental justice in her article, “Environmental Justice and Social Work: A Call to Expand the Social Work Profession to Include Environmental Justice.” Elizabeth Estabrooks challenges social workers to examine their responsibility to groups whose voices have been silenced or stolen by trauma in her piece, “In Search of the Arc: The Path to Justice for Women in the Military.”

In “Suicide and Soul Wound: Stress, Coping, and Culture in the American Indian and Alaska Native Youth Context” Eleni Zimiles explores American Indian and Alaska Native (AI) youth suicide and argues that the definition of “soul wound” expand to include present stressors and coping mechanisms for youth that are characterized by a legacy of colonization and cultural oppression. With her article, “Technology’s Role in the
Nonprofit Sector: Increasing Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency through Technology Innovations,” Brianna Boles details the current technology landscape in nonprofits. Next, Susan L. Bryant uses a social work lens to explore the black woman’s internalization of European beauty standards through family, peers, the media, and society in her article, “The Beauty Ideal: The Effects of European Standards of Beauty on Black Women.” Finally, Jeffery Olin challenges the social work profession to explore its mission and perception in, “The Public and the Profession’s Perception of Social Work.”

We hope that you enjoy the eleventh edition of the Columbia Social Work Review!

Sincerely,

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Acknowledgments

The Editorial Board would like to thank the Columbia University School of Social Work students and faculty, especially our Advisory Board, for supporting the publication in its eleventh year and making it an integral part of the student experience at CUSSW. We are indebted to Kathleen Chiarantona, Editor-In-Chief from 2011-2012, for her continued support and unwavering dedication to our blind review process. We would also like to thank Alexis Wynne Mogul and Kathleen Chiarantona for their work copyediting. Additionally, we would like to thank Jenni Kurosman, Mary-Lea Cox-Awanohara, Jennifer March, and Dean Ann McCann Oakley for their administrative support to the Editorial Board. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the Columbia University Center for Digital Research and Scholarship for helping us develop and launch the comprehensive new Social Work Review website, where all articles can be digitally accessed.
Guatemala is a country fractured by years of sociopolitical conflict and instability. In the summer of 2011, I secured grant funding to implement supportive counseling and educational services, in conjunction with a local nonprofit organization, to help local children better understand and process the profound effects of the country’s civil war, which ended in 1996. Upon beginning this project, however, it became apparent that many of the children with whom I interacted had limited or no knowledge of the conflict. This article explores the pervasive and systematic avoidance of discussing widespread psychosocial trauma and the potential effects of this avoidance on parents, children, and the greater community. I compare these observations with existing social work and psychology research literature, drawing from the concept of intergenerational trauma, or the transference of trauma symptoms from parent to child. I then discuss whether the avoidance of trauma discussion with children can protect their psychological well-being and prevent the transference of trauma, or if such avoidance leads to increased risk of individual psychological impairment and cyclical community problems. Based upon this analysis, the article finally discusses implications for social workers confronting psychosocial trauma in post-conflict settings.

Guatemala is a country fractured by years of sociopolitical conflict and economic instability. In Huehuetenango, one of the country’s many small rural towns composed mostly of indigenous people, hundreds of bodies remain in mass graves as a haunting shadow of the massacres perpetrated during Guatemala’s civil war that ended in 1996. In the summer of 2011, I secured funding from the Davis Projects for Peace to implement an initiative to help Guatemalan children better understand and process the profound effects of the country’s internal conflict. Two colleagues and I facilitated a peace-centered curriculum for children ages 10
to 16 about the conflict; the local nonprofit organization Committees of Victims concurrently supported children’s parents who had lost loved ones.

It quickly became apparent that a significant barrier hampered effective implementation of our program: many of the children had limited or no knowledge of the conflict. Almost all of the parents, it seemed, had not disclosed the full details of their tumultuous histories. Observing interactions within the community, we noticed an absence of discussions about the conflict and its lingering effects. Although based on anecdotal evidence as a foreigner, my observations led me to believe that many children did not seem to receive any information about the civil war from either families or school.

This article reflects on my observations during the project and their potential implications. After providing a historical context and background of the initiative, the article then explores how the systematic absence of discussions of trauma can affect children, parents, and the greater community. The theme of inter-generational trauma, the transference of trauma symptoms from parent to child (Kellerman, 2001), will also be addressed. This article strives to explore whether the avoidance of discussing trauma with children protects their psychological well-being, or if failing to address trauma leads to an increased risk of individual psychological impairment and cyclical community problems. I will argue that social workers in post-conflict settings can assist families and communities in addressing traumatic experiences to facilitate the healing of a repressed or violent past.

Background

A History of Inequality

Guatemala’s instability reflects a complex history of violent conquest and inequality. During the Spanish conquest, many indigenous groups—mainly Maya populations—were forced off their ancestors’ land as the colonizers forcefully seized huge portions of the country’s arable land. The Spanish “exploited the indigenous labor force” for trade, setting into motion dimensions of
Crucial Conversations

ethnicity and oppression that still exist today (Viscidi, 2004). The indigenous population still accounts for the majority of Guatemala’s poorest citizens (Freedom House, 2012).

Democratically elected leaders in the 1940s and 1950s attempted to implement land, labor, and economic reforms to help the nation’s poor (Calderón, 2011). In 1952, the administration of Jacobo Arbenz enacted agrarian reform to expropriate idle land and distribute it to approximately 100,000 peasant families (WRITENET, 1995). Under intense lobbying pressure from United Fruit—a U.S.-based company and Guatemala’s largest landowner (WRITENET, 1995)—and in an era of fear of communism, the U.S. government approved a coup d’état in June 1954 to overthrow Arbenz, who was replaced by a military general (WRITENET, 1995; Calderón, 2011). The subsequent reversal of agrarian reform left Guatemala with greater inequality and the most skewed distribution of land in Latin America (WRITENET, 1995), setting the stage for the Guatemalan Civil War.

The Guatemalan Civil War

The Guatemalan Civil War began in 1960 and erupted over economic and social discord as some unrepresented indigenous Guatemalans joined guerilla groups to rebel against conservative and strict military governments. The Inter-American Human Rights Commission cited the era between 1970 and 1983 as “the worst for human rights violations in Guatemala…at least 50,000 people died in the violence and hundreds of thousands more were internally displaced because of systematic repression by the military” (Calderón, 2011).

In 1982, guerrilla resistance groups, consisting of mainly poor and indigenous Guatemalans, gained strength and support. The Guatemalan government retaliated, launching a counterinsurgency campaign against the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). The result was devastating: more than 200,000 people were killed during the conflict, with state forces responsible for 93% of those deaths, and 83% of the killed were indigenous (Guatemala Commission for Historical Clarification [CEH], 1999). As a result of this widespread violence, the United Nations
and other international actors brokered peace agreements between
the Guatemalan government and guerilla groups, signed in De-
cember 1996.

The Guatemalan government has since passed legislation
criminalizing ethnic discrimination and established institutions to
protect the rights of indigenous peoples (Freedom House, 2012).
However, due to economic circumstances and “lack of resources
and political will,” marginalization continues and legacies of the

Huehuetenango, Guatemala

During the government’s counterinsurgency campaign,
the bodies of hundreds slaughtered indigenous people of Huehu-
etenango were hastily buried in mass graves, where many remain
today. The horrific memories of the civil war and its human rights
violations are still fresh in the minds of many survivors. Accord-
ing to indigenous Mayan belief, a person must receive a proper
and dignified burial in a community cemetery to allow his or her
spirit to find peace (Palazuelos, 2010).

Motivated to help rebuild their country, some refugees
returned home and founded the nonprofit organization Equipo
Técnico de Educación en Salud Comunitaria (ETESC, Technical
Team for Education in Community Health). ETESC works to
help victims of the conflict in Huehuetenango bring closure to the
traumatic events through locating mass graves, uncovering and
identifying bodies, and helping families obtain death certificates
and conduct dignified burials (Palazuelos, 2010). Although sig-
nificant steps still remain in the effort to achieve closure for
many, these processes provides oppressed communities with an
opportunity to heal from the past.

Davis Projects for Peace Grant Implementation

Funding from Davis Projects for Peace enabled my in-
volvement with ETESC. ETESC planned to exhume 50 bodies in
mass graves during the war and assist families with dignified bur-
ial processes and memorial ceremonies. Concurrently, my part-
ners and I worked within five schools in three rural villages, conducting educational and psychologically supportive workshops, to help the children critically understand and process their country’s recent past. Groups of children ages 10 to 16 were led through historical storytelling, role plays, theatrical activities, and group discussions.

I learned that many children had limited knowledge of the conflict. They appeared to only partially comprehend that the burial ceremonies were in honor of their relatives; the children did not seem aware of the grim historical context associated with the deaths. In perhaps an effort to protect their children from their horrific memories of the conflict, many parents had chosen not to discuss the past. I also observed that this silence permeated the community. Within families, between adults, and among elder generations, it appeared to be mutually understood that the harrowing past should not be discussed.

Although parental avoidance seemed like a well-intentioned effort to shelter children from facing the traumatic past they had experienced, I feared this could cause unintended negative consequences for the children. Such silence has been shown to potentially affect children’s mental health, identity formation, and ability to form trusting relationships with their parents if the truth is uncovered in piecemeal form or far into the future (Coles, 2011). Furthermore, some parents still seemed to struggle through their own healing processes. It appeared improbable that families could fully heal from their own trauma while keeping the past hidden.

Avoiding Intergenerational Trauma

The Effects of Trauma

Trauma can be defined as sustained emotional distress following a disturbing experience (Coles, 2011). A traumatic event may be sudden or unexpected, shocking, a threat to life or bodily integrity, and/or invoke the feeling of intense terror or helplessness (4th ed., text revision, American Psychiatric Association, 2000). The result is behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and/or
physical difficulties directly related to the traumatic experience (Cohen et al., 2006). When a person experiences a traumatic event, he or she may develop Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a set of behavioral and emotional reactions to an extreme stressor (Appleyard & Osofsky, 2003). PTSD can entail persistent re-experiencing of the traumatic event, avoidance of stimuli associated with trauma, and physiological hyperarousal, all causing significant impairment to social, emotional, and occupational functioning (APA, 2000).

Moreover, studies of children exposed to orchestrated violence and war exhibit moderate to high rates of PTSD. Children have been shown to experience frequent headaches, disrupted sleep, altered memory performance, difficulties concentrating, trouble socializing, and loss of trust (Kinzie et al., 1989; Saigh, 1991; Schauer et al., 2004).

Vicarious, or secondary, trauma is the transmission of the effects of trauma from the primary victim to a secondary person (Coles, 2011). Although the secondary person does not directly experience the traumatic event, subsequent interactions between the trauma victim and secondary person lead to the development of similar trauma symptoms in both persons. Intergenerational trauma, also referred to as transgenerational or cross-generational trauma, refers to vicarious trauma from parent to child (Coles, 2011). Following circumstances of political violence, the psychosocial trauma experienced by one generation can often “pass” to the next generation (Weingarten, 2004).

Children of Holocaust survivors tend to absorb the psychological burden of their parents, thus causing the offspring to experience a form of trauma themselves (Kellermann, 2001). Trauma symptoms were transferred either through repeated narrative storytelling from parent to child, or through heightened stress levels and abusive tendencies of the parent as a result of trauma (Kellerman, 2001). Survivors of other conflicts, such as the Vietnam War and the Cambodian genocide of the 1970s, have also shown this kind of transference (Lin et al., 2009). Repeated narratives of traumatic events can perpetuate intergenerational trauma.

When trauma affects an entire community, a culture of silence can arise when community members avoid discussing the
trauma (Lin et al., 2009). Survivors of mass trauma often resist talking about their experiences, particularly with their children. Parents frequently avoid discussing their own traumatic histories to prevent re-experiencing the trauma and protect their children from psychological harm (Appleyard & Osofsky, 2003).

**Breaking the Culture of Silence**

In Huehuetenango, war-related conversations between adults in the community appeared to be short-lived and tense. Although negative effects of intergenerational trauma are well-documented (Gorden, 2011; Yehuda et al., 2001), research also demonstrates that discussing trauma can be therapeutic. Lin et al. (2009) studied Cambodian-American refugee families and concluded that educating children about socio-cultural trauma had a positive effect on fostering intergenerational communication and healing through narrative sharing. Similar results are cited in Somalia, Rwanda, Uganda, and other sites of forced migration and war (Schauer et al., 2004). Although comparing examples requires an understanding of cultural and societal circumstances, examining one context can provide applicable lessons to others.

Discussion of trauma may better enable children to understand their family’s past. Such dialogue helps youth integrate their family history into their overall identities and context in which they live, bringing meaning and healing into their lives (Hammack, 2010). Structured and developmentally appropriate discussion mitigates the risk of transmitting intergenerational trauma (Axelrod, Schnipper, & Rau, 1980). Sorsher and Cohen (1997) identified parent communication style as a crucial determinant in a family’s ability to adapt in light of a catastrophic or traumatic event. Measham and Rousseau (2010) found a positive relationship between family disclosures of war trauma to children’s play, a sign of psychological well-being. A strengths-based approach enables parents to serve an integral role in mitigating intergenerational trauma. Many of the parents in Huehuetenango survived years of conflict and violence, creating tremendous potential for them to engender resilience and coping skills in their children. Parents, as potential mediators between traumatic events
and children’s adjustment, deserve significant consideration in the healing process (Gewirtz et al., 2008).

**The Long-Term and Societal Effects of Silence**

Along with interpersonal and psychological effects of avoiding these conversations, long-term and societal implications must be considered. Younger generations can seize this opportunity to learn from the past, for lack of knowledge may perpetuate a cycle of conflict. Even though educating children about conflicts may endanger their immediate well-being, the true risk may be not to educate future generations about the past.

Even now that the war has ended, discrimination and violence toward indigenous Guatemalans persists (Amnesty International, 2011). Children and subsequent generations may unknowingly carry on this discrimination; opening up a dialogue about the conflict and its implications is vital in the movement towards reconciliation and sustained peace. A culture of openness could decrease the prevalence of discrimination as people learn to see the indigenous and elderly as strong and courageous survivors. The next generation could create measures to ensure prevention of future conflicts. Discussing historical events enables survivors and families to therapeutically acknowledge the intergenerational effects that continue to be felt. Societies “…can learn to change for the better in the future [as] the pain and shame of genocide becomes clearer for all to grasp” (Lin et al. 2009, p. 197). By avoiding crucial conversations, a society may not be able to integrate trauma in a meaningful way and wounds may not be healed. The next generation—and the future leaders within its ranks—cannot learn from the past if these discussions do not take place.

**Implications for Social Workers in Post-Conflict Settings**

Avoiding conversations about past trauma may also impede positive family and identity development. The key, then, to helping parents and children process the past, is understanding when and how to discuss the past constructively—in a way that mitigates potentially harmful effects both of the trauma itself and
the discomfort surrounding disclosure. Measham and Rousseau (2010) argue that the timing and manner in which the trauma is disclosed are also linked to children’s well-being. There are ways to conduct crucial conversations in a manner that strengthens the parent–child relationship and the mental health of both parties; narrative building and psycho-education are among the proven methods (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; Weingarten, 2004). Parents who struggle with mass trauma can grow in awareness of these healing methods and feel empowered to have sensitive discussions in a beneficial, nonharmful way.

As social workers, we can aid families in fostering crucial conversations. First, the social work community must cultivate the skills to understand the intergenerational effects of mass trauma, where the transference of trauma can be mitigated, and specific interventions. Social workers must also appreciate the mechanisms through which parents and children are exposed to the effects of political violence. We can play an integral role in helping clients understand the importance of mourning the pain and losses suffered by previous generations. Individual, familial, and societal acknowledgement and integration of the past are steps towards a peaceful future (Weingarten, 2004).

The helpfulness of trauma disclosure as part of the healing process depends on culture and context (Measham & Rousseau, 2010), so social workers in cross-cultural contexts must first strive to listen to locals and appreciate their social location within the broader context. Gray and Allegritti (2003) argue that for cross-cultural social work to take place, the first step must be extensive dialogue between cultural groups on appropriate practices, recognizing that approaches to social work and to grieving differ across cultures. Cross-cultural social work is predicated on two interrelated ideas: first, the interests of local practitioners and communities are integrated into all interventions and treatment plans, and second, local practitioners and clients should take the lead. In the case of the Guatemalan civil war, cross-cultural social work would begin by a discussion on people’s experiences today and during the civil war.

Furthermore, increasing the capacity of local communities to be their own agents of change and healing can allow families to
rebuild in their own manner. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) cites a culturally sensitive approach as one “based on respect for and inclusion of their [indigenous peoples’] world-views, perspectives and experiences” (Secretariat of the UNPFII, 2008, p. 41). The UNPFII recently called for full inclusion of indigenous populations in the designing, implementing, and monitoring of all programs that affect them (UNPFII, 2005 via Secretariat of the UNPFII, 2008). Some of their examples can serve as learning opportunities for others. Niños, Familias, y Educación Primero (NFEP, Children, Families, and Education First) in Guatemala and Peru has demonstrated success in creating workshops that enable local educadores to lead therapeutic sessions in their own communities (Roberts, 2010).

During my time in Guatemala, I could not help but think of the irony of my presence as a U.S. citizen attempting to educate and rebuild a community that has been affected by the actions of my government. This realization was humbling. Cross-cultural social work practice goes beyond understanding the relevant literature—it is a personal and political endeavor. Crucial conversations in post-conflict Guatemala are just one example in which locally driven cross-cultural social work can be a supportive part of the healing process.

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Crucial Conversations


Ramos


Crucial Conversations


Effective Employment of Individuals with Mental Health Conditions: Harnessing National, State, and Local Efforts to Improve Outcomes in New York City

Camille Santistevan

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), 60% to 90% of individuals with mental health conditions are unemployed. Employer stigma toward hiring people with mental illness, a lack of local-level professional coordination, and ineffective legal mandates have all contributed to overwhelmingly employment for many qualified individuals. Employment outcomes of people with mental health conditions may be improved with a two-part, local-level employer awareness and stigma reduction campaign coordinated by social workers and other professionals. This article explores prior and ongoing efforts at the national, state, and local levels, and argues that New York City is a prime location to pilot an employer awareness campaign. Recommendations include details for launching such a campaign by building organizational partnerships to harness existing resources.

Over the past three decades, people with disabilities and their advocates have lobbied for increased access to services and legal protections in the workplace. Despite the wide range of programmatic responses and the passage of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, 60% to 90% of individuals with mental health conditions are unemployed, increasingly with the severity of their conditions (ADA, 1990; NAMI, 2010, p. 1). The ADA guarantees equal employment opportunity for individuals with physical or mental disabilities and requires that employers use nondiscriminatory hiring practices and make workplace accommodations for qualified workers. The lack of coordination between social workers and other professionals—such as vocational counselors, mental health practitioners, policy makers, and disability advocates—has contributed to high rates of unemployment and may explain why overriding stigma among employers remains a significant barrier to employment for individuals with...
Effective Employment of Individuals with Mental Health Conditions

mental health conditions. This is no small matter; approximately 25% of the working age population experiences a mental health condition over the course of a year, causing an indirect cost of 79 billion dollars of lost productivity (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999).

This article is a comprehensive analysis that can serve as the foundation for a future mental health awareness and stigma reduction campaign targeted at local employers in New York City. I will begin by defining “mental health condition” and describing the importance of work for individuals with mental health conditions. Next, I will describe the strengths and shortcomings of the national response to the issue of unemployment of people with mental health conditions by reviewing the implementation and outcomes of the ADA and employee assistance programs (EAPs). I will then review programmatic responses in New York City by defining and describing the history of the Supported Employment (SE) movement and highlighting examples of two local direct-service SE program models: Personalized Recovery Oriented Services (PROS) and Young Adults Work Opportunities for Rewarding Careers (YA WORC). Lastly, I will argue that New York City can maximize the success of SE services by launching a targeted awareness and anti-stigma campaign directed at local employers by using resources from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA’s) state-level anti-stigma initiative. To achieve better employment outcomes, all stakeholders must engage in coordinated campaigns to educate local employers about the prevalence of mental illness and their obligation to accommodate current employees and qualified candidates.

Defining Mental Health Condition in the Context of Work

For the purposes of this article, an individual with a mental health condition is a person with a psychiatric impairment that disables his or her everyday functioning and may prevent him or her from completing essential work tasks (MacDonald-Wilson et al., 2011). This definition will encompass the broad spectrum of mental health conditions from minor disorders to severe and per-
sistent mental illness. Recent legal actions have constricted ADA protections to only include severe mental illnesses that are not controlled by medication. However, most vocational rehabilitative services are offered to individuals who may or may not be symptomatic or may not be on medication for mental illness.

The Importance of Work

Decades of research have shown that with proper support services, employment can be an effective component of treatment for people with mental health conditions (Akabas, Gates, & Orans-Sabia, 2006; Bond, Resnick, Drake, Xie, McHugo, & Bebout, 2001). Work allows a person with a mental health condition to become financially independent and can improve the nonvocational realms of an individual’s life. The individual may learn to manage personal finances; live independently; and create meaningful, lasting relationships (Akabas et al., 2006). The type of employment also matters—in one study, people with severe mental illness placed in integrated, competitive employment as part of a vocational rehabilitation program showed higher rates of self-esteem, symptom improvement, and quality of life compared with groups receiving sheltered work, minimal work, or no work (Bond et al., 2001). Integrated, competitive employment refers to jobs in settings with other nondisabled employees that pay at least minimum wage and may be more beneficial than sheltered employment. The primary components of competitive employment include: socialization, routine and structure, and change in role status from unemployed to competitively employed. These components may all work together to explain better employment outcomes.

Additionally, surveys have consistently shown that people with mental health conditions strongly desire employment and believe that they can work in competitive settings (Cook, 2006; NAMI, 2010). A recent study of 20 high-functioning individuals with schizoaffective disorder and schizophrenia found that work was a crucial factor in supporting symptom management (Saks, 2013). One subject in a focus group explained, “Work has been an important part of who I am...[w]hen you become useful to an
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organization and feel respected in that organization, there’s a certain value in belonging there” (Saks, 2013, para. 10). The subject also reported working overtime because her job distracts her from her symptoms (Saks, 2013).

The National Response

The American with Disabilities Act (ADA)

At the national level, legislators have acknowledged the benefits of work for individuals with physical or mental health conditions by passing the ADA. The protections of the ADA were intended to safeguard the civil rights of people with physical or mental disabilities and to improve the poor employment rate of this group. Surprisingly, the ADA actually led to negative employment outcomes for many. For example, the employment rates of men with disabilities fell more than 7% within the first 5 years after the passage of the ADA. Employment rates declined because of the perceived costs that employers incur when they hire a person with a disability (DeLeire, 2000). However, a report by the Job Accommodation Network showed that the median cost to accommodate an employee with a disability was only $500, and 51% of accommodations actually had no cost (DeLeire, 2000). As a result, the perceived costs of employing people with disabilities may prevent employers from hiring, even though the actual cost is minimal or zero.

Furthermore, protection under the ADA requires disclosure, but people with mental health conditions may be apprehensive to discuss their condition with an employer. Their conditions are invisible, making disclosure potentially more complicated than revealing a physical condition (MacDonald-Wilson et al., 2011). These concerns are not unwarranted; numerous studies have shown that employers consistently rate individuals with psychiatric disabilities lower than people with physical disabilities when all else is equal (Dalgin & Bellini, 2008; Cook, 2006). In a national survey, 32% of people with mental health conditions who disclosed their condition to employers reported negative employment outcomes, including hiring discrimination, firing, lower
Individuals with mental health conditions are often unaware or confused about their rights in the workplace. They may not understand the various ways in which they can strategically time their disclosure, limit disclosure to certain individuals, or limit the amount of information shared (MacDonald-Wilson et al., 2011). Recent legal actions may also undermine the ADA protections for people with mental health conditions. The United States Supreme Court recently ruled that ADA protections do not apply to workers with conditions that “are not central to most people’s daily lives” (Cook, 2006, p. 1396) or that can be “controlled by medications” (Cook, 2006, p. 1396). Additionally, claims filed with the Equal Opportunity Commission—the entity that oversees ADA compliance—are usually considered low-priority if the claimant has a mental health condition (Paetzold, 2005). These low-priority cases made up one fifth of the cases that went to trial in 2004, and 76% were ruled in favor of the employer (Cook, 2006). Employers’ misperceptions of the ADA and subsequent stigma demonstrate how ignorance continues to prevent positive employment outcomes for people with mental health conditions, despite legal supports and the economic benefits for businesses and society.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

Another national response has taken place via large organizations that have developed EAPs to mitigate the costs of their employees’ untreated health and mental health conditions. These organizations recognize that they can save money and proactively support their employees by providing flexible scheduling, time-limited therapy, substance abuse counseling, and paid personal days off from work. The costs seem well worth it—a 2010 Harvard Business Review article found that EAPs lead to lower healthcare insurance costs, greater productivity, and higher morale among workers (Berry, Mirabito, & Baun, 2010). Most EAPs, however, are only available in large organizations, because small business owners believe they cannot afford such programs. Small business owners are also exempt from the ADA—
businesses with less than 15 employees do not have to comply with ADA provisions. (NAMI-NYC Metro, n.d).

**Local Programmatic Responses in New York City**

**Supported Employment (SE)**

New York City is a prime example of a targeted, local effort to improve employment outcomes of people with mental health conditions. The SE movement began in New York City at the Fountain House, a community-based mental health organization that used a work-ordered day to help formerly institutionalized patients adjust to community living (Bond & Jones, 2005). Several decades later, seven main SE principles now serve as a foundation for many of today’s direct-service employment programs: (1) services should be integrated, (2) work is an individual choice, (3) ultimate goal is competitive employment, (4) job-search and placement begins immediately, (5) job choices are determined by clients’ preferences, (6) on-going support is available, and (7) clients are provided benefits counseling (Bond & Jones, 2005, p. 375). The success of the SE model of service has been demonstrated in several studies, and outcomes are markedly better than alternative programs (Bond & Jones, 2005; NAMI, 2010). The city’s Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) have funded vocational programs for adults and adolescents that are based on SE principles.

**Personalized Recovery Oriented Services (PROS)**

The New York State OMH’s PROS program is one example of a direct-service, integrated rehabilitation program founded on SE principles that combines clinical treatment with vocational rehabilitation. PROS centers use comprehensive, ongoing assessment to adapt the program to any client’s needs through peer support, skill development, and intensive, goal-oriented rehabilitation (Office of Mental Health, 2009). The overarching goal of PROS is to “improve functioning, reduce inpatient utilization, reduce
emergency services, reduce contact with the criminal justice system, increase employment, attain higher levels of education, and secure preferred housing” (Office of Mental Health, n.d., para. 27).

**Young Adults Work Opportunities for Rewarding Careers**

Young Adults Work Opportunities for Rewarding Careers (YA WORC) is another example of a local level SE program model in New York City that seeks to ameliorate the disheartening employment statistics for young people with mental health conditions. This model is currently being implemented at several nonprofit agencies that operate DOHMH’s Adolescent Skills Centers—community-based mental health centers that serve people between 16 and 23 years of age. The YA WORC program consists of three components that are derived from SE principles: (1) comprehensive initial assessment to determine vocational and nonvocational barriers to employment, gaps in functional capacity, and possible workplace accommodations; (2) Career Club, a peer support group with a structured curriculum that provides ongoing support throughout the job process; and (3) the development of a labor market strategy, which requires the agencies to consider employers as equal and primary clients (Akbas, et al., 2006). The YA WORC model acknowledges that partnerships between agencies and potential employers must be made before the job placement process begins so that the agency knows how to best prepare clients for these particular workplaces.

**Recommendations for New York City**

While PROS and YA WORC are strong examples of SE programs and are effective at preparing their clients for employment, a major shortcoming of both models is their failure to aggressively address existing employer stigma in the hiring process and within the workplace. The YA WORC model minimally addresses discrimination by requiring providers to establish relationships with employers, but it ultimately underestimates the power of stigma during the employment process. Both models
assume that people with mental health conditions are willing to disclose their conditions and that employers are willing to hire a person who discloses.

Earlier attempts to mitigate stigma have been launched primarily at the state level. In 2003, SAMHSA piloted a broad anti-stigma effort in eight states, called the Elimination of Barriers Initiative. SAMHSA produced two publications during this initiative: (1) a toolkit entitled, *Developing a Stigma Reduction Initiative* (SAMHSA, 2006); and (2) a booklet for employers called, *Workplaces That Thrive: A Resource for Creating Mental Health-Friendly Work Environments* (SAMHSA, n.d). The success of the initiative in reducing stigma is unknown, because the final evaluation of outcomes is not available. However, research on public service announcements about mental health conditions suggests that social marketing campaigns are more effective when focused on local groups (Corrigan, 2012). Thus, these publications can be better used in local-level campaigns designed to increase awareness about mental health conditions, reduce employer stigma, and improve outcomes of workers with mental health conditions.

In New York City, DOHMH can use SAMHSA’s materials to address employers’ knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors regarding mental health conditions and increase awareness of existing vocational programs, such as PROS and YA WORC, which are available to employers to support workers. DOHMH can also use the Community Health Survey database, EpiQuery, to prioritize the neighborhoods that are most in need of anti-stigma employer interventions. For example, an EpiQuery analysis showed that an estimated 34% of people in the Bronx who are not in the labor force reported a history of depression in 2010 (DOHMH, 2012). DOHMH can conduct organizational needs assessments using surveys, focus groups, interviews, and observations at each PROS and YA WORC center to verify the data found using EpiQuery and gather additional qualitative details about employer stigma and other barriers to employment in each agency’s catchment area.

After identifying the areas of highest need, DOHMH can establish coalitions consisting of representatives from the follow-
ing organizations, as relevant to the particular locations: (1) PROS centers, (2) YA WORC centers, (3) community-based mental health centers, (4) hospitals with mental health inpatient and outpatient services, (5) professional associations of clinicians, and (6) local-level chapters of advocacy organizations such as NAMI-New York City Metro. Next, the coalition can develop a unique, culturally competent marketing plan, targeted at local employers near PROS or YA WORC centers, that include messaging strategies, communication approaches, outreach materials, an implementation strategy, and an evaluation plan (Kotler & Lee, 2008). During this stage, it is essential that the materials are contextually appropriate—a marketing plan created to reach a large corporate employer in lower Manhattan will likely not have the same impact on a small business owner in Queens. If the pilots are successful, different coalitions can be organized by borough or county to develop anti-stigma campaigns targeted at employers in their neighborhoods, using the boundaries of their catchment areas to create lists of employers to target.

Conclusion

The consequences of failing to address unemployment of people with mental health conditions are critical. New York City is strikingly close to increasing the employment outcomes of its residents living with mental health conditions; however, federal legal protections, existing workplace supports such as EAPs, state-level public awareness campaigns, and the city’s strong history of SE programming can only go so far. Social workers and other professionals that serve this population must work together to create targeted, local anti-stigma campaigns to change the beliefs and behaviors of employers toward individuals with mental health conditions. This article contributes to the effort by compiling existing resources and recommending new and more effective local campaigns in New York City. Professionals working in the mental health field in New York City must unite to eliminate the stigma faced by people with mental health conditions in the workplace.
Effective Employment of Individuals with Mental Health Conditions

References


Effective Employment of Individuals with Mental Health Conditions


Environmental Justice and Social Work: A Call to Expand the Social Work Profession to Include Environmental Justice

Dominoe Jarvis

“What we are doing to the forests of the world is but a mirror reflection of what we are doing to ourselves and to one another.”
— Mahatma Gandhi

Concern for environmental justice has increased in recent decades. Although the environmental justice field is closely linked to social justice, the social work profession has yet to gain a substantive involvement in environmental justice efforts. This article is a call to action for the social work profession and explains why the profession is ideally suited to address issues of environmental justice. It examines how issues of environmental injustice, such as the location of industrial waste facilities in predominantly minority communities, often affect those people who are most afflicted by other forms of injustice. A review of recent literature explains how the social work profession can shift its framework and make important connections to environmental justice. This article also discusses three recommendations for the social work profession to become involved in environmental justice.

The Critical Need for Social Workers in the Environmental Justice Field

In recent decades, there has been a growing concern for environmental justice. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) definition of environmental justice establishes it as a social justice issue: environmental justice is “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, sex, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” (U.S. EPA). Social work has a realistic and evidence-based understanding of social justice as well as a commitment to serve society’s most vulnerable populations; however, the profession has yet to gain a substantive in-
volvement in environmental justice efforts. The social work profession has been slow to respond to environmental concerns and to the devastating effects of environmental injustice on the health of individuals and communities served by social workers, specifically minority and poor communities.

Environmental destruction and devastation are carried disproportionately by disadvantaged and marginalized groups (Gray & Coates, 2012). In failing to gain a considerable presence in the environmental justice field, and by not taking advantage of the opportunity to grasp environmental justice as a legitimate professional identity (Kemp, 2011), the social work profession is neglecting its ethical responsibility to the individuals it serves. As part of the profession’s ethical principles, social work is responsible for helping those in need, addressing social problems, and confronting social injustice (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008). It is imperative and relevant for the principles of social work to extend to environmental justice through social work’s commitment to vulnerable individuals and communities.

Forming multidisciplinary partnerships is an important and effective step toward achieving environmental justice. A diverse group of professionals—such as engineers, scientists, business people, urban planners, and those in the legal profession—has focused heavily on environmental concerns within its practice. Mainstream social work, however, has concentrated acutely on social issues and has been disconnected from topics concerning the natural and physical environment (Coates, 2005). Social work often involves inclusive, multidisciplinary efforts to solve problems within communities and to address social justice and, as a result, is well suited to take on a participatory role in the environmental justice movement (Freisthler & Crampton, 2009; Schmitz, Matyok, Sloan, & James, 2011). Yet, the social work profession is missing an important opportunity to close the gap between social and environmental justice concerns and to be recognized as a profession that is nondiscriminatory when it comes to the social justice issues it supports and pursues. Social workers can lend critical support to environmental justice work and the time has come for the social work profession to realize its poten-
tial to make a significant difference in the environmental justice field. Social work education must contribute to the available scholarly research and connect social work’s long-established social justice values and commitments with environmental justice issues (Jones, 2006).

This article explains why the social work profession is ideally suited to address issues of environmental justice. First, it will examine how issues of environmental injustice, such as the location of industrial waste facilities in predominantly minority communities, often affect those most afflicted by other forms of injustice. Second, the article will review recent literature that explains how the social work profession can shift its framework and make important connections to environmental justice. Lastly, as a means of incorporating environmental justice into the field of social work, the article offers three recommendations for current and future social workers.

**The Inequitable Distribution of Environmental Burdens**

Various studies and literature indicate that environmental pollution disproportionately affects minority and low-income populations (Arora and Cason, 1999; Bullard, 1990; United Church of Christ, 1987). Minority and poor communities bear the burden of environmental problems that are forced upon them by decision makers and more empowered communities that subscribe to the notion of ‘not in my back yard’. According to Besthorn and Saleeby (2003), this inequality in healthy environments “results in the further marginalization of already disenfranchised people” (p. 9). A 2005 government research project concludes that African Americans are nearly 80% more likely to live in close proximity to hazardous pollution sites than white Americans (Associated Press, 2005). African Americans are not only exposed to a disproportionate amount of pollutants from industrial facilities but also suffer from higher levels of lead poisoning, a by-product of living close to industrial facilities (Adeola, 1994; Jones & Rainey, 2006). Research has shown that exposure to these pollutants is connected to diseases such as asthma and cancer (Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). Locally
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unwanted land uses (known as LULUs), such as waste facilities and industrial disposal sites, disproportionately affect minority and poor communities throughout the country (Mohai & Saha, 2006). The locating of LULUs near minority and poor communities is evidence that land-use decisions favor those with more political and economic influence.

An example of environmental injustice can be found in New York City within walking distance of the Columbia University School of Social Work. The North River Wastewater Treatment Plant, located in a predominantly minority and low-income neighborhood in West Harlem, is a sewage treatment facility that was engrossed in controversy during its decades of planning and even after its completion in 1986. The sewage treatment facility was originally planned to be built near 72nd street, on the Upper West Side. Due to a decision by the New York City Planning Commission, the facility was relocated to 137th Street in West Harlem (Miller, 1993). The proposed site for the facility was relocated from the affluent Upper West Side community to West Harlem because it was considered “incompatible” with development plans for the Upper West Side (Miller, 1993, p. 709). The coalition that opposed the plant at 72nd Street was better funded and better able to lobby the city’s decision makers than those who opposed the plant in Harlem. The West Harlem community was outraged that a waste treatment facility would be located so close to their homes and schools, yet the facility would be built regardless of disapproval and protest. As a limited compromise, the City built Riverbank State Park, a twenty-eight acre park on top of the sewage facility (Miller, 1993).

The Riverbank State Park was built as “a mitigation measure” (Miller, 1993, p. 711) to compensate residents for the wastewater treatment facility being built in such close proximity to their homes. Residents soon began to experience foul odors coming from the waste treatment site (Severo, 1989). While the residents of West Harlem received a new park, they were plagued by a waste treatment facility nearby that affected their daily lives. At 72nd Street, the original proposed site for the facility, there are now thousands of units of additional luxury housing and acres of additional parkland. The more affluent community of the Upper
West Side were presented with increased housing and improvement to their parkland, while the poorer neighborhood of West Harlem received parkland in exchange for having an odorous facility in their neighborhood. In this particular case, social workers could have helped the West Harlem community mobilize and take action to amend this environmental injustice. Social workers can use their knowledge of advocacy and community organizing to help individuals and communities facing similar situations.

**A Shift in the Social Work Framework to Include Environmental Justice**

Social work has always been concerned with contemporary social issues and has continually shifted to address and meet the needs of vulnerable people. Realizing that the profession needed to adapt to better serve clients, Mary Richmond pioneered the social work practice of visiting clients in their home environments. She recognized the physical environment as significant to social work, but only in connection to poverty (Richmond, 1922). The social work profession has evolved tremendously since Richmond’s time and has adapted to address the current needs affecting the many populations served. Richmond’s practice of visiting clients in their home environment can be viewed as an early approach to the person-in-environment perspective. Today, social work maintains a strong emphasis on the person-in-environment perspective, which considers individuals as active participants in a larger social system. Yet the perspective maintains a narrow definition of “environment” that includes the social but disregards the natural environment. Excluding the natural environment has perhaps contributed to the profession’s slow involvement in environmental justice. In order to gain substantial involvement in the field of environmental justice, it is imperative that the profession broaden its definition of the person-in-environment perspective to encompass the physical and natural environments.

While social work’s practicing professionals are aware of the importance of environmental issues, this has not affected their practice. Marlow & Van Rooyen (2001) embarked on an exploratory study aimed at raising the awareness of environmental issues
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with social workers and to begin to develop a framework for social work interventions that are environmentally related. The study asked participants, social workers in both the U.S. and South Africa, about their personal concern for the environment and the inclusion of environmental issues within their practices. The study found that 92.8% of respondents described environmental issues as personally important, but only 43.2% actually addressed these issues in their practice (Marlow & Van Rooyen, 2001). Perhaps it can be deduced from this study that social workers are aware of environmental issues, but tend to concentrate on the social environment and may lack the training to include environmental concerns into their professional identities. Social workers are adept in responding to social justice issues and will be better prepared to address issues of environmental justice after receiving specific training through social work curricula. Changes in social work curricula to include the natural environment are essential in establishing the social work profession in environmental research, policy, and practice.

It is necessary for the contemporary social work profession to acknowledge the consequences of environmental injustice on vulnerable populations (Miller, Hayward, & Shaw, 2011) and begin to engage in such work, which may lead to a better understanding of the disproportionate effect that environmental degradation has on minority and poor communities. In building research and knowledge about the need for social work’s involvement in addressing environmental concerns, it is imperative that social workers “include an analysis of the tensions between racism, classism, environmentalism, and economic development” (Furman & Gruenwald, 2004, p. 48). The question in implementing this suggested change to the profession is whether social work will remain committed primarily to the social needs of marginalized populations or heed environmental justice considerations to diversify its commitments and embrace issues that arise from environmental injustice (Gray & Coates, 2012). The challenge to include environmental justice as part of the profession’s social justice framework is necessary, overdue, and one that social workers should actively pursue in order to maintain relevancy within the field of social justice.
Conclusion

At present, there is a deficit in the current social work education and scholarship in addressing the nexus of environmental justice, social work, and social justice. While there is a growth in awareness of environmental justice, the topic is still under-acknowledged in the social work profession, and there is a lack of available information on the important role and involvement of social work in environmental concerns. It is therefore crucial for social workers, current and future, to start addressing environmental inequality endured by the individuals the profession serves.

As a profession that is focused on social justice principles, it is necessary that social work include environmental concerns in its areas of practice. Through exploring and incorporating environmental justice in their practices, social workers can begin to help the people they serve by broadening their understanding of environment to include not just the social, but also the natural and physical environment. First, it is important that social work courses and field education offer students the opportunity to study the nexus between environmental justice and social work (Dewane, 2011). This is necessary for the future of the profession if social work is to become involved as a serious participant or leader in environmental justice. Second, shifts in practice, training, and interventions will be necessary before implementing environmental justice content into graduate social work curricula (Freisthler & Crampton, 2009). Shifts can begin through collaborating with other disciplines to achieve a clear understanding of environmental justice content and allowing the profession to incorporate multidisciplinary ideas. Third, further research into environmental justice, the effects it has on marginalized populations, and the beneficial involvement of social workers is necessary.

Environmental justice is an interdisciplinary field in which social work has been slow to enter. By acknowledging and engaging with the multidisciplinary culture of environmental justice, social work can become more substantial and comprehensive (Hoff, 2003). Social work research can also bring new ideas to the
field of environmental justice and, likewise, can learn from other disciplines that have already established themselves within the field. Incorporating knowledge from other disciplines will allow social work to evolve and determine responses to the present issues pertaining to the environment and its effects on individuals. The profession’s responsibility remains to serve the interests of its clients, who are adversely affected by their environments. Social work has the potential to shape and improve the environment and to become not only an active participant in discussions on environmental justice, but also a leader in the environmental justice movement.

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References


In Search of the Arc:  
The Path to Justice for Women in the Military

Elizabeth Estabrooks

“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”—Martin Luther, King Jr., 1967

“No, no, we are not satisfied and will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.”—Martin Luther, King Jr., 1963

Over the past two decades, the epidemic of sexual assault (assault, rape, and harassment) in the U.S. military has garnered increasing media and legislative attention. While activists and survivors have achieved some successes in achieving the passage of stronger policies that address military sexual assault, many of those changes are recent, and much work remains to be done. This paper examines the growth of a social movement over 22 years and seeks to determine how the social movement against military sexual assault contributed to the Department of Defense’s shift from promises to action. I challenge social workers to examine their responsibility to groups whose voice has been silenced or stolen by trauma.

Although sexual assault, rape, and harassment in the U.S. military have only come into sharp public focus in the past year, these crimes have grown steadily over the last two decades. This increase has incited the Department of Defense (DoD) and U.S. Congress to pass zero-tolerance policies, commission studies, convene task forces, and hold hearings. Nevertheless, the rate of military sexual assault (MSA) has risen annually since 1991, growing to such alarming numbers that it is now commonly described as an epidemic (Kitfield, 2012; Slaughter, 2010).

From 1991 to 2011, responses to MSA by Defense Secretaries Donald Rumsfeld and Robert Gates led to many promises but little change. Incidents were met with massive media coverage, but public attention repeatedly waned between each succes-
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sive outrage. In January 2012, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta’s press conference included familiar promises, which, although similar to those of his predecessors, laid the groundwork for change.

Later that spring, Secretary Panetta viewed *The Invisible War* (2012) a powerful documentary portraying the lives and stories of MSA survivors. With unflinching honesty, this documentary tells the story of MSA survivors and provides damning evidence of the U.S. military’s failure to address sexual assault within its ranks. Two days later, Secretary Panetta, under mounting pressure from advocacy groups and members of Congress demanding codification of stronger policies, took concrete steps to move toward protecting service members against MSA. Following decades of little policy change around sexual assault in the military, the DoD appeared prepared to enact lasting measures.

This paper seeks to determine how the social movement against MSA contributed to the DoD’s shift from promises to action. I will outline the scope of the problem of MSA and briefly review the major public events from 1991 forward, then analyze these events in relation to efforts by activists and organizations, striving to answer the question: *What was the tipping point that brought the issue into full view of a nation in a way that catalyzed policy change?* Movements such as this one develop in response to the need of a group or population whose voice has been silenced or stolen. I posit that advocacy is a tool that social workers are obligated to use in our efforts to help individuals, groups, and communities regain their power.

**Until Justice Rolls Down Like Water: Problem Background**

According to the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) (2012), the most recent report on MSA states that there were 3,192 reported MSAs in 2011 in all branches of the military, a 1% increase in overall reporting from 2010. A 2003 survey conducted by Veterans Affairs found that 30% of female veterans experienced sexual assault during military service. Of this group, 14% had been gang raped and 20% had been raped more than once (Hansen, 2005). Given estimates that ap-
proximately 84% of civilian and military rapes go unreported, SAPRO (2011) concludes there were close to 19,000 MSAs in 2010.

Hansen (2005) reports that the prevalence of sexual assault was three to ten times higher for females serving in the armed forces than in the general population. Estimates of prevalence are in the range of 23% to 33%, and military sexual trauma is more associated with PTSD than any other form of trauma, civilian or military (Himmelfarb, Mintz, & Yaeger, 2006).

A 2011 Women’s Research and Education Institute chronology identifies 1979 as the starting point for military guidelines covering sexual harassment. However, there is no mention of MSA until 1991 when the media broke the Las Vegas Tailhook Convention story, where 83 females and 7 males were victims of sexual assault by more than 100 Navy and Marine Corps aviation officers.

The Tailhook incident was the first highly publicized U.S. MSA scandal. What followed was months of front-page headlines and nightly news reports that shocked the nation, building the case that military women were unsafe from our men in uniform. The DoD, forced to answer to the taxpayers, was spurred into action. Between 1992 and 2003, there were 18 different task forces, reports, and committee hearings on sexual assault, discrimination, and gender-related issues in the military (Hansen, 2005). Kitfield (2012) summarizes the most widely publicized events of the past 22 years:

- 1996: U.S. Army Aberdeen Proving Ground
- 2008: U.S. Marines, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri
- 2012: U.S. Marine Barracks, Washington DC
- 2012: U.S. Air Force Lacklund Air Force

1 Twelve Army officers charged with sexually assaulting female trainees
2 12% of female graduates reported having been victims of rape or attempted rape, and 70% said they had been sexually harassed
3 Nineteen non-commissioned officers were charged with various harassment and assault charges against trainees
4 Nine women, including 2 civilians, report sexual harassment, assault and rape from 2009 – 2010
5 Thirty-two trainers identified in cases of sexual assault or misconduct with 56 female and 3 male trainees (Christensen, S. 2013)
In November 2003, Congress directed then-Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to commission the Defense Task Force on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies, which subsequently reported that sexual assault and harassment was military-wide and not limited to the academies. The report’s recommendations included instituting training programs, recruiting more (including higher-ranking) women, and revising the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) to address sexual misconduct. Yet without proper guidance for implementation and no apparent follow-up from the DoD, the recommendations or enactment, implementation did not occur (Lancaster, Jones, & Lipari, 2005).

In February 2004, Secretary Rumsfeld commissioned the Task Force on Care of Victims of Sexual Assaults. The Task Force made more recommendations and spawned yet another task force called the Joint Task Force for Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, “… designated as the single point of authority to provide direction, a centralized approach, and overarching guidance to sexual assault prevention and response” (Lancaster, Jones, & Lipari, 2005, p. 6). Multiple recommendations and policies were born from the Joint Task Force, yet more than a decade after Tailhook, there remained little measurable progress. The military’s own misogynistic culture, which displays continuing hostile and sexist attitudes toward women (Hansen 2005), may well have impeded its progress in policy change and implementation regarding MSA.

As the U.S. presence in Iraq and Afghanistan advanced, the U.S. Army faced an ever-growing need for recruits and began to relax recruitment standards in order to meet “manning” needs. Without addressing clear concerns on the problem of MSA, this relaxation of standards allowed waivers for recruits with criminal records. According to Lieutenant James McConico (2009), a 2007 report identified an increase in criminal waivers by 38% from 2001 to 2007. Stande, Merrill, Thomsen, Crouch, & Milner (2008) report that a Naval Health Research Center survey indicated as many as 15% of incoming Navy recruits had either committed or attempted rape prior to recruitment. The 2011 SAPRO Report shows a continued increase in MSA and that repeat of-
fenders commit 90% of all assaults (2012). Did the relaxation of recruitment standards, allowing sex offenders into military ranks, correlate with the increase in the rate of sexual assault? This is an area for further study in order for policy makers to understand the need to implement and uphold stronger policies related to MSA.

The Long Arc Bends

While the struggle for justice has been difficult, movement allies have spread across the country, from local communities to congressional halls. As with all the congressional Caucuses, the Caucus for Women’s Issues (the Women’s Caucus) works to address and influence legislative matters (U.S. Legal, 2013). The Women’s Caucus has focused on issues related to women and girls since its inception, and the 108th Caucus (2003–2004) continued that legacy by participating in special congressional Women’s History Month activities. One activity was a hearing on MSA, followed by a report of findings to Secretary Rumsfeld. Shortly after, the House passed an amendment, championed by the Caucus, requiring the Pentagon to adopt policies responding to MSA (Slaughter & Capito, 2005). In September 2004, The Women’s Caucus met with DoD officials, and again in December with Pentagon officials, regarding the development of policies on MSA (Slaughter & Capito, 2005).

In 2005, Representative Loretta Sanchez (D-CA), made another request for a report from the Armed Services Committees, demanding a change in the sexual assault definition to bring the UCMJ in line with federal and state sexual assault laws (Snowden, 2005). When that request failed to bring results, she introduced the first bill to change MSA laws. Although the bill did not pass, it opened the door for the ongoing introduction of relevant legislation by other congressional leaders, including Congresswomen Nikki Tsongas (D-MA), Jackie Speier (D-CA), and Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) (Snowden, 2005).

As the 21st century got underway, the number of women in the military grew, paving the way for a challenge to DoD policies that silenced victims and did nothing to address MSA. While survivors told their stories publicly and privately, the DoD found
itself under pressure not only to provide answers, but to effect change. Katzenstein (1998) states, “feminist organizing (in its most adversarial and even sometimes in its more accommodative form) does seek to transform the world” (p. 6). Feminist organizers collaborated with existing sexual assault advocates and organizations (e.g., the Rape Abuse and Incest National Network [RAINN]) and founded new organizations, such as Service Women’s Action Network (SWAN) and Protect Our Defenders, launching a campaign born of injustice, coupled with a desire to bring justice and protection related to MSA.

From the Dreams of Many, One

Over the next decade, advocates and activists coordinated efforts, formed new entities, collaborated with state and national nonprofit organizations, forged professional relationships, and partnered with politicians as allies for change. Their fight was strengthened through the added efforts of politically powerful and influential national veterans’ organizations (e.g., The American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Vietnam Veterans of America) that have relentlessly campaigned for policy changes to address MSA and military sexual trauma.

Movement participants used a broad repertoire of political actions, media coverage, and public awareness building, regularly speaking before Congressional and Committee hearings, demanding policy change to protect active duty service members and address the needs of veteran survivors. Stories from victims and survivors informed politicians and the public that perpetrators had not been held accountable while victims were silenced, punished, discharged, and disgraced, and it became known that veteran survivors are denied benefits (“Military Sexual Assault Litigation,” 2011; Anonymous, 2011; Bhagwati, 2010; U.S. Fed News, 2004). The voices of survivors-turned-activists were heard in congressional chambers, the public square, university classrooms, and on the big screen.

The movement strategically used both traditional and social media to provide a platform from which survivors’ voices have traveled across the world as they live their version of soldier
up—telling the most deeply painful personal stories. In March 2007, Helen Benedict published “The Private War of Women Soldiers” in Salon magazine. Documentary filmmakers Dick Kirby and Amy Ziering, influenced by Benedict’s (2007) article, produced the *The Invisible War* (2012), which became a touchstone in Panetta’s challenge to the status quo. In less than a decade, the efforts of a small group of women had grown into a social movement, the voices of many joining to become one solitary force with a singular goal: safety and justice relating to MSA.

**A Bend Toward Justice**

Although the arc was beginning to bend toward justice, its progress was slow. There was a need for a catalyst—a tipping point—to bring about effective change. By 2011, advocacy had influenced some change, including requiring treatment of sexual assault patients as emergencies in military medical facilities and enhancing training for key personnel (including leaders, victim advocates, and law enforcement) (SAPRO, 2012). Still, these changes lacked substance and real protection. Military rules for reporting up the chain of command remained in place, victims continued to be re-victimized by the military system, and sexual assault trainings were questionable (“Military Sexual Assault Litigation,” 2011). It is not surprising, then, that in this climate, MSA continued to occur at alarming rates. Nevertheless, the movement for justice marched forward, and between 2011 and 2012, a confluence of three important events occurred to deliver the perfect political opportunity structure for substantive change:

1. In February 2011, attorney Susan Burke filed a Federal lawsuit against the Pentagon on behalf of 15 female and 2 male MSA active-duty and veteran survivors (Parker, 2011). The lawsuit named then Defense Secretary Gates and former-Secretary Rumsfeld, accusing them not only of allowing a culture of sexism and misogyny and of failing to implement regulations, but also of “prevent[ing] various programs from being fully implemented” (“Military Sexual Assault Litigation, 2011”, p. 33).
2. On July 2, 2011, President Obama appointed Leon Panetta Secretary of Defense. In January 2012, Panetta gave his first press conference on the topic of MSA, discussing new DoD reforms on sexual assault being implemented, reforms that advocates and their allies had requested for years (Hynes, 2012).

3. On April 14, 2012, following a viewing of *The Invisible War* (2012), Secretary Panetta met with Congresswomen Sanchez and Tsongas and held a press conference, announcing immediate implementation of additional MSA policy changes (Kitfield, 2012). These policy changes included the removal of reporting sexual assault from the chain of command, the establishment of special victims units, and the enhancement of training programs (Kitfield, 2012).

There is hope that Secretary Panetta’s policy changes will decrease the rate of MSA and provide redress for those who experienced any form of MSA. Nevertheless, policies alone will not make real changes in MSA. Successful change must be systemic and delve into the culture of the military and dismantle the old patriarchal, male-centric attitudes that disdain and denigrate women (Flood, 2011). A military that breeds violence against women is a military not only of little moral value in the eyes of the world, but also one that cannot be trusted.

**And Righteousness Like a Mighty Stream**

This examination of the movement’s 20-year timeline illustrates how far it has come. However, much remains to be done to ameliorate the injustices experienced by thousands of MSA victims. Efforts must be undertaken to adopt strong policies and to alter the culture surrounding sexual assault in the U.S. military. President Obama, in his April 4, 2008 speech commemorating Dr. Martin Luther, King Jr., stated, "Dr. King once said that the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice. What Dr. King also knew was that it does not bend on its own. It bends because each of us puts our hands on that arc and bends it in the direction of justice" (The American Presidency Project, 2013). We
are witnessing the bending of the arc by the hands of those who have experienced egregious injustice and by those who would see it replaced with the safety and justice to which our uniformed service members are inherently entitled.

Should the DoD choose to further commit to reducing sexual assault in their ranks and make justice for victims a priority, eventually the military may become a place where our nation’s defenders no longer must protect themselves from their fellow soldiers. Until then, responsibility for change is shared among health and human service workers, medical personnel, and social workers. Given the multitudes of victims and survivors in military and civilian populations, we must recognize that there is a statistical probability our professional work with the military will include sexual assault survivors. Ethics require us to do no harm, and as a profession, achieving this means improving our knowledge around sexual assault. It is incumbent upon us to do our part in applying our hands to the bending of the arc toward justice, for if not us, then who?

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Suicide and Soul Wound: Stress, Coping, and Culture in the American Indian and Alaska Native Youth Context

Eleni Malka Zimiles

Suicide, the second leading cause of death for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI) youth ages 15 to 24, raises a critical issue for social work research and practice. This paper argues that AI youth suicide is a contemporary manifestation of “soul wound” and expands the definition of soul wound to include present stressors and coping mechanisms for youth that are characterized by a legacy of colonization and cultural oppression. While AI youth come from diverse communities, this paper will demonstrate the importance of examining youth suicide as part of the overall AI experience in the United States. Using an indigenist stress process model framework, it will subsequently examine four forms of stressors informed by the marginalization of the AI population: psychological strains of historical trauma, environmental stressors, quotidian stressors arising from socioeconomic factors, and adversity from personal and relational role conflicts. AI youth mediate these stressors through coping mechanisms around social support and collective mastery. This paper will conclude with a call to develop an anti-oppressive, culturally relevant social work practice that supports meaningful identity development and collective efficacy.

On December 21, 2012, members of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation gathered for a candlelight vigil outside the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center in Rapid City, South Dakota. Bringing pause to the Lakota Nation Invitational Tournament of the same night, the vigil aimed to create awareness of and demand attention to the youth suicides of Pine Ridge. Three years earlier, South Dakota State Senator Theresa Two Bulls declared a State of Emergency when the suicide rate of the area reached over 10 times the national average. One hundred and twenty years earlier, the Massacre of Wounded Knee took place at Pine Ridge, where soldiers of the U.S. 7th Cavalry Regiment killed over 150 Lakota Sioux. From the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota,
to the Mescalero Apache Reservation in New Mexico, to the Northern Plains of Alaska, American Indian and Alaska Native (AI) youth navigate a complex web of history and reality.

Suicide, the second leading cause of death for AI youth ages 15 to 24, raises a critical issue for social work research and practice. The alarming constellation of AI youth suicide statistics complicates and problematizes current operational understandings of suicide in the U.S., highlighting the fundamental role of cultural marginalization in self-injurious behavior. Suicide, defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; 2012) as a “death caused by self-directed injurious behavior,” is largely regarded by the mental health profession as a complication of a psychological disorder (Oquendo, Baca-Garcia, Mann, & Giner, 2008, p. 165). This individualistic and pathological perspective ignores the socio-political and cultural dimensions of youth suicide. This paper argues that AI youth suicide is a contemporary manifestation of “soul wound” (Walters & Simoni, 2002, p. 520). Native scholars (Brayboy, 2005; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Walters & Simoni, 2002) describe soul wound as the accumulation of unresolved grief stemming from colonization. Using Pearlin and Skaff’s (1996) stress model within an indigenist framework, this paper expands the definition of soul wound to include present stressors and coping mechanisms for youth that are characterized by a legacy of colonization and cultural oppression. Understanding suicide as an expression of soul wound captures the complex relationship between the private and public spheres, allowing for an acknowledgement and opportunity to engage with the deep imprint left on a person and community by our historical narratives.

Although AI youth come from diverse and distinct communities, the paper will demonstrate the importance of examining youth suicide as part of the overall AI experience in the U.S. Using an indigenist stress process model, the paper will subsequently examine four forms of stressors informed by the marginalization of the AI population: psychological strains of historical trauma, environmental stressors, quotidian stressors arising from socioeconomic disparities, and adversity resulting from personal and relational role conflicts. Next, the paper will explore how AI
youth mediate these stressors through coping mechanisms around social support and collective mastery—the ability of youth to understand their ability to confront hardships and marginalization. In conclusion, the paper will demand the development of an anti-oppressive, culturally relevant social work practice that supports meaningful identity development and collective efficacy.

Who Are American Indian and Alaska Native (AI) Youth?

The AI youth behind the statistics come from a heterogeneous population comprising distinct tribes across the U.S. In the 2010 Census Bureau results, 5.2 million people identified as American Indian/Alaska Native (Norris, Vines, & Hoeffel, 2012). There are currently 565 federally recognized tribal nations across the country, and another 200 recognized within individual states (Kenyon & Hanson, 2012). The majority of AI communities live on federal- and state-recognized reservations and in low-income sections of metropolitan areas across the U.S. (Freedenthal & Stiffman, 2004). Such diversity manifests in dynamic cultures experienced uniquely by individuals and groups of different geographic and historical landscapes.

Current AI youth suicide statistics comprise a birth cohort of the current adolescent and young adult generation ages 15 to 24 that spans the distinct tribal nations. Census figures estimate that there are over 1.1 million AI people between the ages of 15 to 24, making up approximately 20% of the total AI population (Dorgan, 2010). While the AI youth population is a small percentage of the overall population in the U.S., they are overrepresented in the welfare system. AI children constitute 1% of the U.S. child population; however, they make up 2% of children in foster care, and over 50% of the children in foster care in select states (Lawler, Laplante, Giger, & Norris, 2012). Living in communities with chronically underfunded federal programs, AI youth live in households with an income less than half the national average and often without healthcare coverage. The disproportionate challenges experienced by the AI youth population due to conditions of poverty necessitate the attention of the social work profession.
Defining an Indigenist Stress-Process Model

The conjunction of a stress-process model and a critical indigenist framework allows for an anti-oppressive, strengths-based analysis of cultural identity and realities in relation to stressors and mediators experienced by young people. The stress process model, first introduced by Pearlin, Menaghan, Liberman, and Mullan (1981), contextualizes varying life strains in a movement between exposure, mediators, and outcomes. Compared with an event produced from a single pathway, suicide sits within a more holistic and heuristic framework. Differentiating between stressors and coping mechanisms, the model highlights the complex interactions between converging life dynamics.

The danger of studying suicide as an outcome of stress exposure and response is the heightened possibility of oppressive, deficit-based analyses of cultural structures and human agency, particularly in application to ethnic minorities (Stiffman, 2007; Walters & Simoni, 2002). As stressors are “traced to the very boundaries of societies, their structures and cultures” (Pearlin et al., 1981, p. 338), they can quickly slip into analyses of pathologies or cultural essentializations, instead of being placed within distinct socio-political and historical contexts. Walters and Simoni (2002) suggest applying an indigenist perspective on stress-coping studies of populations to “acknowledg[e] the colonized or fourth world position of Natives in the United States and advocat[e] for their empowerment and sovereignty” (p.520). This perspective recognizes that indigenous populations have been targeted by federal policies embedded in imperialism and “intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429). The indigenist framework orients its analysis within Tribal Critical Theory. Evolving from Critical Race Theory work, Tribal Critical Theory places the connections between colonization and contemporary experiences of socioeconomic and political marginalization at the center of its analysis (Brayboy, 2005; Yosso, 2005). Using a critical indigenist paradigm to re-frame the analysis of the stress-process model allows for a deeper analysis of the intimate relationship between suicide and soul wound.
The Stress Universe

Stressors, according to Pearlin and Skaff (1996), are events, conditions, challenges, or experiences that adversely affect an individual or group’s interactions with their environment, their understanding of self in relation to community, and their strategies for everyday life. Within the realities of AI youth, stressors are multi-layered and interconnected. The following analysis looks particularly at how indigenous cultural identity and experience characterize the “stress universe” (Walls & Whitbeck, 2011, p. 417)—the amalgamation of primary eventful, ambient, and quotidian stressors, as well as secondary “role strain” stressors (Pearlin & Skaff, 1996, p. 239). Examining the various stressors within the stress universe facilitates an analysis of how cultural marginalization informs and produces multiple life strains.

Pearlin and Skaff (1996) define eventful stressors as unscheduled life events that cause adversity in an individual’s life. At the core of culturally influenced eventful stressors for AI youth is historical trauma. Historical trauma, as defined by Braveheart (1999), is the “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations emanating from massive group experiences” (as cited in Walls & Whitbeck, 2011, p. 416). Youth experience historical trauma as a chronologically nuanced example of Pearlin and Skaff’s (1996) “nonegocentric” (p. 240) eventful stressors. While past colonization of AI lands, subsequent tribal displacement, and punitive federal policies of cultural repression were not directly experienced by present day AI youth, the effect of such trauma from their ancestors, families, and communities remains strongly felt. A process that “extends through time” (Pearlin & Skaff, 1996, p. 239), stress spans across historical generations. Inherited collective experiences and narratives derived from a deep legacy of colonization influence youth’s individual exposure and reactivity to stress (Ong, Burrow, & Fuller-Rowell, 2009). In a study conducted by Walls and Whitbeck (2012), AI youth reported daily thoughts of historical and cultural loss. The events of European-American imperialism created a status of disequilibrium, which led to an extended “period of readjustment during which the system strug-
gles to reestablish a homeostasis,” (Pearlin, 1981, p. 339). Such events left young people vulnerable to secondary stressors and stress proliferation, where the strains from multiple stressors accumulate to produce more drastic effects.

Historical trauma refers to primary psychological stressors related to legacies of colonization; however, AI youth also directly experience a host of environmental stressors defined by Pearlin and Skaff (1996) as chronic “ambient strains” (p. 241) arising from years of federal neglect and abuse. Current figures cite 28% of AIs living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (2012), an estimated 33% of all AI individuals are without health insurance and are entirely reliant on Indian Health Services (IHS), one of several chronically underfunded programs established as part of the federal government’s trust responsibility to protect AI treaty rights, lands, and resources (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2013). As members of the U.S.’s poorest population of color, AIs are at a greater risk for psychological distress due to heightened exposure and reactivity to environmental stressors (Ong, Burrow, & Fuller-Rowell, 2009). AI communities have an overall lack of ready access to healthcare services, full-service grocery stores, resourced schools, recreational facilities, and other amenities (Fleischhacker et al., 2012). These deficiencies in social infrastructure foster disheartening realities of soaring crime rates, high rates of substance abuse, extreme prevalence of obesity, and other stressors involving and/or affecting young people.

Social and economic disparities produce adversity in AI youth’s daily strategies and routines, labeled by Pearlin and Skaff (1996) as “quotidian stressors” (p. 241). Depending on their particular locale, young people may confront challenges on a regular basis, such as getting to school, feeling safe at home and in their neighborhood, obtaining access to necessities such as food, and participating in enrichment and/or support services. Socioeconomic disadvantages manifested in the local neighborhood affect the everyday levels of functioning and satisfaction of AI youth (Silmere & Stiffman, 2006). Increased neighborhood instability and material deprivation contribute to depression (Matheson et al., 2006). These hardships look different within each distinct
community due to local manifestations of poverty. The disparities realized within daily life are the social determinants of youth’s stress exposure, reactivity, and their ultimate health outcomes.

Historical trauma and socioeconomic disparities intersect with adolescent development processes to produce “role strain stressors” (Pearlin & Skaff, 1996), which are defined as strains arising from the demands of one’s individual status and relationships. A fundamental element of adolescence is the formation of a self-identity and recognition of role expectations within varying environments (Wexler, 2009). AI youth struggle with the process of self-actualization in the face of cultural loss and discrimination.

Multiple scholars have documented the struggle youth undergo as they encounter cross-cultural contradictions between the normative values of their tribal cultures and those of the dominant European American society (Brayboy, 2005; Johnson & Tomren, 1999; Kenyon & Hanson, 2012; Walters, 1999; Wexler, 2009). Public schools and wider communities outside of reservations expose young AIs to systems of Eurocentric knowledge that devalue general tenets of indigenous beliefs, such as the dominance of individualist over collective modes of thinking and the depreciation of holistic conceptions of health and well-being (Kenyon & Hanson, 2012). These experiences of cultural disconnection strain relationships between youth, older family members, and non-AI peers, ultimately nurturing internalized oppression and hindering positive notions of self-worth and support.

Between childhood and adulthood, Eurocentric and Native contexts, AI youth find themselves within a fragile and complicated web of expectations. Role strain stressors arise from the biological and cultural liminal spaces that youth occupy. Struggling to balance opposing systems of knowledge and visions of success, youth become vulnerable to a cultural anomie, a loss of a sense of personal identity and life purpose (Johnson & Tomren, 1999; Walters, 1999). Self-incoherence leading to relational conflicts establishes cultural identity as a burden and source of overall life dissatisfaction and disappointment (Pearlin & Skaff, 1996; Wexler, 2009).
Healing Soul Wound: Developing Meaningful Coping Strategies

Individuals and communities operate numerous interdependent and multidimensional coping mechanisms to navigate the stress universe. The stress process model identifies coping as an individual’s cognitive ability to adapt to adversity (Pearlin & Skaff, 1996). Social support and mastery are two crucial mediators for young AI individuals in moderating the experience of soul wound stressors. “Shaped by the values the person holds as a consequence of social group membership” (Pearlin & Skaff, 1996, p. 242), coping repertoires are intimately intertwined with the social fabric of many collective-oriented AI communities (Brayboy, 2005; Wexler, 2009). Successful mobilization of community resources and cultural capital is crucial to cultivate relationships and structures that encourage positive identity development and tribal unity.

Coping as a “management of meaning” (Pearlin & Skaff, 1996, p. 242) must rely on building a relevant and coherent cultural identity that reinforces agents of social support. Scholarship around the development of AI youth identity documents how relationships with extended kin networks led youth to actively find ways to integrate AI identity into their lives, using indigenous values, traditions, and spirituality as positive sites for incorporation (Lucero, 2010; Strickland & Cooper, 2011). Youth narratives around cultural ceremonies and conversations with relatives facilitated the development of a meaningful identification with their tribal nation and the AI community at large.

Having a strong connection to cultural identity, particularly within a framework of one’s network, returns power to the individual and community at large. Pearlin and Skaff (1996) describe this “global sense of control” as “mastery” (p. 243), a crucial mediator for harmful stress exposure. While mastery refers to the individual youth’s ability to understand their competence in facing difficult situations and internalized oppression, it also holds a strong potential for the tribal community in building collective efficacy. In building strategies for suicide prevention, it is essential to capitalize on the collective orientation of AI commu-
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nities. For many suicide prevention programs in the U.S., the emphasis is on individual power and a singular sense of future (Gould & Kramer, 2001). Strengthening AI identity through collective meaning-making and management can communicate “an empowered and empowering image of Indianness, and provide Native Americans, particularly Native youth, opportunities for action and participation in the larger Indian cause [toward self-determination]” (Wexler, 2009, p. 267). Revitalization and resistance movements such as the Keetowah Society and the Red Power movement have provided tribes with a vehicle to combat cultural subjugation and to participate in linking historical and contemporary experiences of AI peoples (Walters, Simoni, & Evans-Campbell, 2002; Wexler, 2009). Community mastery cultivates a rich and nuanced cultural experience that utilizes multigenerational realities and manifestations of cultures, and supports an individual sense of purpose and life-satisfaction.

Conclusion

Today, AI communities are actively engaging in grassroots-based suicide prevention measures. It would behoove social workers to connect with this work and reflect on how suicide and soul wound affects praxis with youth. Ultimately, this analysis calls for the development of anti-oppressive, culturally relevant programming that mobilizes the necessary resources to mediate stress exposure. These programs must mediate youth realities of historical trauma, social disparities, discrimination, and bicultural liminality through a cultivation of meaningful identity development and a celebration of individual and collective mastery. Understanding suicide as a contemporary expression of soul wound relocates the phenomenon beyond an individual pathology and into a broader, more complex schema. With an eye on the individual in relation to systems, social work benefits from an engagement with the realities of soul wound, allowing for a richer practice able to traverse past, present, and future socio-political narratives.
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Technology's Role in the Nonprofit Sector: Increasing Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency through Technology Innovations

Brianna Boles

Increasing technology uptake in the nonprofit sector will allow nonprofit organizations and social workers to provide more effective services through improved work processes. The following paper will discuss how these processes (service delivery, fundraising, and outreach) are carried out in the nonprofit sector given the current technology landscape in nonprofits. I will provide background information about innovations such as cloud computing systems, social media, and mobile technologies that should be incorporated into the nonprofit sector in order to improve the quality of services and work processes. An overview of the barriers that nonprofits face, such as lack of knowledge, lack of resources, and demands by funders, will explain the challenges accompanying increased technology uptake. The final section provides a method to overcome obstacles, allowing the optimal integration of technology into the nonprofit sector.

Social workers prioritize the needs of others before their own, devoting time and resources to offer services that improve the lives of individuals, organizations, and communities. Technology integration in the nonprofit sector provides an enhanced method for social workers to improve the quality of their services and make their jobs more effective. For example, customized mobile applications for nonprofits could offer social workers the opportunity to conduct fieldwork and to access agency information confidentially and safely off-site. Database software also provides a method for social workers to collect and analyze data while reporting outcome requirements to funders. Although nonprofit organizations incorporate technology functions into their day-to-day work, there still remains untapped potential. Nonprofits have the ability to implement technology innovations progressively, in order to improve service delivery, fundraising methods, and outreach tactics. The following article will discuss the technology

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gap in nonprofit organizations, innovations that will allow nonprofits to optimize technology uptake, and an explanation of the barriers preventing the incorporation of technology into organizational operations. The final section demonstrates why collaboration and education initiatives are necessary to overcome challenges so that nonprofits and social workers can benefit from technology’s offerings.

**Background**

Nonprofits have the opportunity to benefit from emerging technologies such as cloud computing systems, social media, and mobile technology in order to increase the quantity of clients served and improve service quality. Cloud computing, also known as “the cloud,” refers to applications, services, or software offered over the Internet instead of requiring direct connection to a server (NTEN & Idealware, 2012). Nonprofits can use cloud technologies to improve internal communications among staff members (with e-mail and collaboration software) and to store information (with office software and data backup). Cloud technologies reduce the cost of services and the time it takes to communicate information.

Social media is a unique cloud solution in that it improves external communications, such as stakeholder engagement, in nonprofit organizations. Social media is an online platform communication tool that includes channels such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Pinterest. The purpose of social media is to allow people to connect and interact with each other using the Internet. Because nonprofits connect people to services and provide resources to strengthen communities, social media is a method for nonprofits to convey their purpose and recruit stakeholders. Stakeholders are individuals who have an interest or stake in the organization, and may include volunteers, donors, and service users. The Pew Research Center Internet & American Life Project found that in 2012 alone, 69% of adults across gender, race/ethnicity, and income groups in the U.S. used social networking sites (Smith, 2012). As a result of steady growth, social media networks are increasingly important tools for nonprofits to
raise awareness and conduct outreach.

Mobile technology refers to an array of cellular communication technology, such as smart phones (cellular phones with Internet access), mobile applications or apps (software units available for download on smart phones with specific functions), and tablets (mobile computers that are typically operated by touch screen) (Techopedia, 2012; Techterms, 2011). Nonprofit organizations can use the versatile functions of mobile technology to fundraise and generate interest in their missions and social causes. Given that nearly half of cell phone users own smart phones, one in three American adults downloads apps to cell phones or tablets, and one in ten adults makes charitable contributions using text messaging, there is a large market of potential stakeholders available to nonprofits (Smith, 2012). The offerings of mobile technology have the potential for nonprofits to provide services to clients, fundraise, and—in addition to social media—raise awareness and conduct outreach. In an increasingly digital age, nonprofits and social workers use technology on a daily basis, yet they do not optimally benefit from the technology innovations available.

Technology Potential in the Nonprofit Sector

Technology innovations in the realm of mobile, data, and cloud-based solutions provide nonprofits with the opportunity to reduce the time and cost it takes to effectively deliver services, fundraise, and engage stakeholders.

Service Delivery

Nearly all nonprofits use information technologies to provide services to clients (Johns Hopkins, 2010). Current information technologies that most nonprofits use for program and service delivery include websites, e-mail systems, and databases (MAP & Idealware, 2012). Yet mobile technologies and software systems, which would allow social workers to improve communications with clients and access agency information off-site, are used by few nonprofits. Only 35% of nonprofits use mobile tech-
nologies such as smart phones, personal device assistants (PDAs), and mobile applications to track clients, and only 40% of those users collect data while in the field with clients (MAP & Idealware, 2012). Even fewer nonprofits, less than 20%, use tracking software systems that would allow them to record outcome data for client and volunteer management (NPower & SBC, 2009). Although nonprofits integrate basic technologies into program areas to serve clients, the degree to which updated technologies are incorporated should be re-evaluated for improvement.

A combination of data and mobile solutions would allow social workers to provide services more quickly and reach more users. To overcome the challenges that social workers face when traveling in the field, NP\textit{ower Technology Guide for Nonprofit Leaders} (2011) suggests syncing portable devices to office databases. Data could be accessed off-site through server software, which would save social workers time from having to go back to their sites and reduce translating paperwork and notes into agency-based computers. To meet funders’ requirements, which depend on results-driven service delivery to inform decision making, a secure database with outcome tracking software would allow nonprofits to measure inputs (the expected goal, pre-intervention) and outputs (the actual goal, post-intervention) (NPower, 2011). As a result, nonprofits would have an easier time reporting client outcomes to funders. Using data and information to inform programmatic and service delivery practices is essential to providing scalable services to clients. From a national sample of nonprofits, half of the nonprofits that did not define a plan for measuring the success of a program also failed to track data about outcomes of clients and stakeholders (NTEN & Idealware, 2012). This demonstrates how the absence of a plan to measure program successes is a potential reason for nonprofits’ failure to adopt technologies.

\textbf{Fundraising}

To drive fundraising efforts, most nonprofits rely on foundation proposals, special events, major gifts, direct responses via mail, board support, and online giving (AFP, Blackbaud, Camp-
The only type of fundraising to grow consistently is online giving, which increased between 51% and 88% each year between 2002 and 2011 (AFP, et al., 2012). Additionally, more nonprofits should target individual contributions, given that 75% of the funds nonprofits received in 2011 were from individual donors (Rebecca Gordon Group, 2011). Despite a growing market, limited numbers of nonprofits use Facebook advertising for fundraising and individual giving purposes (NTEN, Common Knowledge, & Blackbaud, 2012). Data show that only 3% of nonprofits are fundraising, and receiving less than $10,000 in annual donations, on Facebook (NTEN & M+R Strategic Service, 2012). Although growing numbers of nonprofits tap into social media sites, they are not maximizing Facebook’s fundraising functions.

Mobile technologies, specifically applications and text messaging functions, are a missed fundraising opportunity for nonprofit organizations. Text-to-give campaigns have become increasingly popular channels for donors to contribute to causes. Text-to-give campaigns require donors to text a keyword to a code in order to quickly make a $5 to $10 donation (Idealware, 2012). Because not all cell phone users prefer to use the text messaging feature of their cell phones, smart phone applications are another way for cell phone users to donate to causes. Examples include the “iKettle” app from Salvation Army, which allows users to set up their own fundraising campaigns (Idealware, 2012). When using apps to solicit donations, organizations are provided with immediate receipt of the donation, and users can donate any amount, instead of a limited donation of $5 to $10 dollars through text messaging (Idealware, 2012). Mobile capacities offer nonprofits an effective way to generate donations while engaging with stakeholders.

**Outreach and Engaging Stakeholders**

Most nonprofits use social media to generate awareness about their cause-driven work and its impact in the community. Nonprofits appear to understand the usefulness of Facebook to
increase engagement and outreach to more constituents: 80% of nonprofits believed Facebook provided stakeholders with more information and generated more awareness (Idealware, 2011). Although nonprofits actively use Facebook to engage donors, fewer nonprofits use mobile phones for outreach and awareness (Branded4 Good, 2012; MAP & Idealware Survey, 2012).

Mobile functions that allow nonprofits to reach more consumers include the development of mobile websites and smartphone applications. Prior to implementation, however, nonprofits should first assess whether mobile technology fits into their organizational objectives (Idealware, 2012). If organizations find that their stakeholders regularly use cell phones and can be effectively engaged through that method, then nonprofits may benefit from integrating mobile technology into practice. A potential strategy for a nonprofit could be to develop a website that can be accessed on mobile devices and incorporate techniques such as highlighting key messages, keeping content organized and interactive, and using videos, larger pictures, and text with less content (Branded4 Good, 2012). In addition to providing better services to clients and increasing fundraising efforts, integrating mobile technology into operations will allow nonprofits to build a stronger community base and foster better interactions with donors.

**Barriers to Technology Uptake**

Although a large market of technology users exists, nonprofits do not experience the same high levels of technology uptake and integration. An abundant need for technology is present in the nonprofit sector as a way to develop efficient and effective operational functioning. To integrate technological innovations and improve service delivery, it is critical that organizations overcome their lack of funding and resources, as well as the barriers posed by funders.

**Knowledge and Expertise**

A survey of 10,500 nonprofits, charities, and NGOs found
that 60% claimed lack of knowledge is the single greatest barrier to new technological advancement adoption (TechSoup Global, 2012). Another study found that education was needed to teach nonprofits how to bridge social impact missions with technology innovation, identify the causes and effects of tech investments that lead to intended social impact, and train staff in mobile strategies (Gahran & Perlstein, 2012). Although nonprofits attempted to train employees, several impediments occurred, including resistance to change at all levels of staff, the absence of a training plan, and challenges to develop a training to meet an array of staff needs (NTEN & The Nonprofit Times, 2011).

Resources

Resource shortages also explain nonprofits’ inability to integrate advanced technologies into operations. To improve technology uptake, nonprofits must, in addition to seeking education, collaborate across sectors to better manage and acquire new resources. Three causes of reduced resources include more competition from other nonprofits to provide services, increased requirements from funders to provide outcome and other data reporting, and increased regulatory mandates (NPower, 2011). Additionally, the top three resource shortages nonprofits faced were lack of funds, time, and IT staff (Johns Hopkins, 2010). Half of nonprofits reported a shortage of IT staff (NPower & SBC, 2009) and two-thirds of respondents in a different survey reported no in-house IT staff (Johns Hopkins, 2010). Technology spending is also reportedly a small proportion of nonprofits’ annual budgets, averaging less than 4.2% (Johns Hopkins, 2010). TechSoup Global and Techsoup.org’s (2012) survey supported this claim: respondents reported cost as the second greatest barrier to cloud computing technology adoption. In particular, key challenges for nonprofits to develop and sustain innovations are the lack of much-needed resources such as growing capital and the tendency of foundations to encourage innovations but not sustain support for them.
Funders

Funders are challenged in similar ways as nonprofits, because they must remain informed of the fast-paced technology landscape and become educated on the potential impacts of technology in nonprofits (Gahran & Perlstein, 2012). As a result, many funders have limited expertise and knowledge of the role of technology in serving clients and improving operations. After interviewing 41 funders and 13 nonprofit technology service providers, Gahran and Perlstein (2012) found that funders do not know about the benefits of technology trends, and therefore do not develop technology-funding plans. Additionally, funders are faced with competing funding priorities and lack of clarity about how organizations will use technology for social impact outcomes (Gahran & Perlstein, 2012). Although funders struggle to understand the technology landscape of nonprofits, agencies must also comply with complicated funder requirements that quantify the impact of services (NTEN & Idealware, 2012). Nonprofits faced roadblocks when they attempted to demonstrate assets to funders, including proving positive impacts on communities served by a program and tracking funding sources and program allocations for various funders and regulators (NPower & SBC, 2009). Nonprofits struggle with data collection, analysis, and strategy in order to achieve funders’ measurement standards, because the process is time-consuming, expensive, skill-based, and difficult (NTEN & Idealware, 2012). Overall, nonprofits face significant challenges, such as lack of education and resources coupled with limited funder awareness, in the face of technology innovation implementation. In response to a complex technology landscape that prevents organizations from optimizing technology’s offerings, collaboration across sectors provides a solution.

Bridging the Gap

To improve the quality and quantity of service delivery to disadvantaged populations, nonprofit organizations should integrate technological advancements into current practice. To address the barriers previously mentioned, and to strengthen the role
of technology in the nonprofit sector, FEGS Health and Human Services System, one of the largest nonprofits in the U.S. serving over 100,000 New Yorkers annually, proposed a new initiative. Center4, a method to increase technology uptake, will provide a collaborative space for nonprofits, technologists, social entrepreneurs, and funders to address technology needs in the nonprofit sector. Center4 will engage nonprofits to raise concerns about the barriers faced in the field, so that technologists, social entrepreneurs, and funders will collaborate with nonprofits to develop innovative and efficient solutions. The generation of new ideas will help nonprofits incorporate innovative technologies into the social service sector (A. Keefe, personal communication, December 6, 2012).

Center4 will accomplish its objectives with two education tracks, programs, and events. The first education track will target nonprofit executives to identify technology issues in the nonprofit sector and assist them to select and apply technology solutions to solve problems. The second track will be for IT professionals to address technology issues faced by nonprofits, learn about new and emerging technologies, and share problem-solving experiences in the nonprofit sector. Center4 will host programs to accomplish these goals, with informational sessions, problem-solving sessions, and nonprofit specialization sessions for each track. The expected outcome of providing education is to increase nonprofits’ technology uptake and increase expertise and understanding of IT solutions for challenges. Center4 will also host community events, such as hackathons or competitions, for technologists to target needs voiced by nonprofits. During hackathons, technologists will form teams and match their interests and qualifications to nonprofits’ needs. Teams will have a time frame to produce a corresponding technological solution, including a mobile application or software. Center4’s role will be to convene these various sectors so that nonprofits can understand the breadth of technology’s capabilities and implement solutions into operations. Center4’s function as a bridge, connecting nonprofits and technology, will enable nonprofits to provide better services that target the social issues they seek to ameliorate (A. Keefe, personal communication, December 6, 2012).
For example, to address the social problem of homelessness, Center4 could develop a mobile application for social workers and service providers to become aware of empty spaces in shelters, transitional housing, and permanent housing locations. Social workers would be able to respond to openings and to ensure that homeless individuals are directed to open spaces. This same concept of match availability of services to clients in need could be tailored to domestic violence shelters, to match open beds to women and children in need. The goal of applying technology developments to social issues such as homelessness and domestic violence is to increase the number of individuals connected to services. In this way, technology functions to strengthen the capacities of nonprofits.

**Conclusion**

Nonprofit organizations must leverage technology to improve how clients receive services and how social workers deliver them. Technology integration provides a method for nonprofits to achieve better service delivery, fundraising, outreach, and communication outcomes. Social workers benefit from technology uptake in the nonprofit sector with reductions in the time it takes to complete services and the cost of conducting them. By becoming educated on technology’s potential to reach more clients, advocating for the creation of joint innovations such as Center4, and initiating collaboration with donors and the private sector, barriers can be overcome and social impact can be strengthened. Overall, the advocacy and social justice efforts of social workers can contribute to the expansion of technology in the nonprofit sector.

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Technology’s Role in the Nonprofit Sector

The Beauty Ideal: The Effects of European Standards of Beauty on Black Women

Susan L. Bryant

Black women are particularly vulnerable to the effects of European standards of beauty, because these standards emphasize skin colors and hair types that exclude many black women, especially those of darker skin. Using a social work lens, this article explores the black woman’s internalization of European beauty standards through family, peers, the media, and society, and the related outcomes of this internalization on self-perception, academic achievement, sexual behavior, employment, marital status, and mental health. A review of the research indicates that European standards of beauty can have damaging effects on the life trajectories of black women, especially those with dark skin, primarily in the form of internalized self-hatred. Suggestions are made for social work practitioners to address the effects of these internalized European beauty standards among black women through programming and clinical practice.

“What shall I tell my children who are black? Of what it means to be a captive in this dark skin. What shall I tell my dear ones fruit of my womb, of how beautiful they are where everywhere they are faced with abhorrence of everything that is black...?”—Margaret Burroughs, 1968

Kenneth and Mamie Clark published one of the earliest studies on the effects of skin color and self-perception among black children (Clark & Clark, 1947). This study, now referred to as the “Doll Test” (ABC News, 2006) and made famous by the landmark case of Brown v. Board of Education, illustrated how black children were negatively affected by European standards of beauty (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992; Taylor, 1999). The European beauty standard is the notion that the more closely associated a person is with European features, the more attractive he or she is considered; these standards deem attributes that are most closely related to whiteness, such as lighter skin, straight hair, a
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thin nose and lips, and light colored eyes, as beautiful (Taylor, 1999). In 2005, 58 years after the initial study, Kiri Davis, a 16-year old student, recreated the experiment in a video documentary. Her findings suggest that the negative effects of these racialized standards of beauty are still pervasive today (ABC News, 2006).

The detrimental effect of these European beauty standards on black women is a societal issue that is often unaddressed on a multisystem level. Black women today are subjected to incessant messages about European ideals of beauty through family, peers, partners, the media, and larger society. If young black women stand in contrast to what society dictates as attractive, they may find it difficult to grow to accept themselves. As a result, the internalization of racialized beauty standards can perpetuate into a lifelong, intergenerational culture of self-hatred (Hunter, 1998). The research discussed in this article serves as a guide to recognize and identify how these standards of beauty can negatively affect the life course of black women, the context in which the impact is felt, and the implications for social work practice and policies.

The “Doll Test”

Clark and Clark (1947) conducted an experiment with 253 black children between the ages of three and seven at nursery and public schools in Arkansas and Massachusetts. The children were shown two identical dolls, one black and one white. Approximately two-thirds of the children indicated that they liked the white doll better, in spite of their own skin color (Clark & Clark, 1947). When Kiri Davis recreated this experiment in 2005, her results showed that 16 of the 21 preschool-aged black children involved in the experiment still chose the white doll (ABC News, 2006). When asked to show the doll that “looks bad” (ABC News, 2006, para. 12), one subject—a black girl—chose the black doll, but when asked for the doll that looked like her, the girl first touched the white doll and then reluctantly chose the black doll (ABC News, 2006).
Between 1947 and 2005, the findings of the doll study did not change, suggesting that this internalization of self-hate among black children based on European beauty standards still exists and has not been adequately addressed. A closer look at the literature indicates that this self-hatred permeates throughout the life course, is passed through generations of black women, and is rooted in early childhood interactions with both the immediate environment and the social sphere (Robinson-Moore, 2008).

**Family Context: Outcast by Kin**

As a primary component of a child’s early and immediate environment, family is often the biggest influence on a child’s life. Family helps shape a child’s ideals, including what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable in terms of beauty (Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Hutchinson, 2007). Raskin, Coard, and Brelan (2001) asked college students in the northeast, between the ages of 17 and 41, about the effect of skin color on their racial identity. The findings showed a significant relationship between one’s attitudes toward his or her own skin color and the skin color that was idealized by their family members. While lighter skin was positively related to higher levels of pride in racial identity, darker-skinned individuals reported lower self-esteem (Raskin et al., 2001).

**School Context: Assimilation for Success**

The educational system reinforces the messages surrounding skin color that are learned within the family and further encourages young black girls to internalize beauty standards that emphasize lighter skin. Umberson and Hughes (1987) found that people deemed attractive by society are given more professional and social opportunities from childhood through adulthood, thus giving lighter-skinned black women greater access to success than darker-skinned black women. If society rewards lighter-skinned black women with more opportunities, dark-skinned black women may be set up for failure from childhood (Robinson-Moore, 2008).
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Socio-cultural standards of beauty and attractiveness play a significant role in academic achievement. Holcomb-McCory and Moore-Thomas (2001) investigated the links between skin color and school engagement and found that black adolescent females whose hair and skin color were most unlike those of white females were often alienated from others at school and in social settings. This social isolation resulted in lower levels of academic achievement and higher high-school dropout rates among black adolescent females (Robinson-Moore, 2008). The lower levels of academic achievement among darker-skinned black girls can ultimately lead to reduced employment outcomes as adults, illustrating how skin color alone can shape the life trajectory of black girls and women (McAdoo, 1997).

Media Context: Shades of Risk

In addition to the beauty standards perpetuated by the family and education system, the media also play a significant role in furthering these standards. Gordon (2008) notes that black children are particularly vulnerable to media portrayals due to their higher rates of media consumption. In a sample of 176 black girls ages 13 to 17, Gordon (2008) examined associations between the amount of media that black girls’ consume—particularly media containing sexual images—and their focus on beauty and appearance. Gordon (2008) found that black girls strongly identified with black music and television and that hair texture and skin tone were central in many of the girls’ descriptions of the images that they were shown. The study’s results suggest that exposure to and identification with portrayals of black women as sex objects contribute to the emphasis that black adolescent girls place on appearance in their own lives (Gordon, 2008). Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, and Jackson (2010) found a positive relationship between stereotypical images of black women, racialized beauty standards of light versus dark skin, and sexual risk, such as early onset of sexual intercourse or unprotected sex (Townsend et al., 2010). These studies suggest that black girls with darker skin may be more vulnerable than their lighter-skin peers to negative messages from the media about
their physical appearance and attractiveness, which can lead to long-term risky behaviors.

**Employment Context: Hired by Hue**

After a childhood of potential academic challenges and internalized negative self-perceptions derived from familial and media messages, a darker-skinned black woman reaching adulthood faces significant barriers to her employment prospects if she is deemed less attractive and inferior to a lighter-skinned black woman (Robinson-Moore, 2008). Black women who do not meet the established standards of European beauty are more likely to be unemployed than those who have more of the preferred European physical characteristics (Robinson-Moore, 2008). Aschenbrenner (1975) studied black families in Chicago and found that poor women were more likely to have darker skin than women of higher economic status. Similarly, Umberson and Hughes (1987) found that attractiveness bias “interacts with employment status” (p. 231), because attractive people are more likely to be hired and given further opportunities to obtain higher employment and education. Thus, if lighter skin is considered to be most attractive, then darker-skinned black women may be more likely to be under-educated, under-employed, and poorer than lighter-skinned black women (Robinson-Moore, 2008), which can have significant negative implications throughout the life course.

**Spousal Status: The Color of Matrimony**

In addition to employment, romantic relationships can be another major area of black women’s adult lives that are affected by European standards of beauty. Social work theory dictates the importance of human beings forming intimate and loving relationships; failure in intimacy results in loneliness and isolation, which may be prevalent for black women of darker skin (Hutchinson, 2007). Ross (1997) explored the relationship between skin color and the dating preferences of black college students and found that males were more likely than females to prefer dating and marrying people with light skin.
Similarly, Raskin et al.’s (2001) study analyzed the effect of skin color on college students’ racial identity and dating preferences and concluded that lighter-skinned black women are considered a “prize” (p. 2271) among black men who recognize that there are economic and social advantages to having a light-skinned wife, such as greater social acceptance and subsequent employment outcomes (McAdoo, 1997). In general, men of any skin color with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to marry a light-skinned woman (Hunter, 1998). Darker-skinned black women, as a result, are the least likely of all black women to be married (Robinson-Moore, 2008) and thus the least likely to have the economic security of a two-income household, further exacerbating the previously addressed negative economic effects of their poor employment prospects. Raskin et al. (2001) did not specifically address non-heterosexual couples, so further research would be required to address the skin color preferences of individuals of other sexual orientations.

Psychological Outcomes: The Ripple Effect

The negative effects that European beauty standards can have on employment and marital status can translate to the poor mental health of black women in adulthood. The social work lens aims to help people alleviate stress by understanding the impact that multiple oppressions can have on one’s life (Hutchinson, 2007; NASW, 2012). The combination of lower academic achievement, fewer employment opportunities, and limited marital options, compounded by familial and media-perpetuated messages, can lead to both a negative self-perception of the darker-skinned black woman and difficulty coping with the outcomes she can expect for her life course. Hall (1995) summarizes the long-term mental health issues that black women may encounter. Because black women, especially dark-skinned black women, deviate furthest from European beauty standards, they are more likely to experience self-hate, distorted body image, depression, and eating disorders (Hall, 1995). They are also likely to suffer feelings of inadequacy and report emotions of anger, pain, and confusion toward traits such as skin color and hair. Many black women
carry this internalized shame and self-hatred of their appearance from adolescence into adulthood. Ultimately, these internalized feelings can be significant risk factors for depression in black women (Hall, 1995).

Keith, Lincoln, Taylor, and Jackson (2010) evaluated the direct and indirect effects of skin tone and discrimination on depressive symptoms and suggested a link between discrimination and emotional well-being that is especially salient for black women. Due to their physical attributes and associated socioeconomic factors, such as employment and income, black women are at a greater risk for emotional difficulties, as they may experience more stressful conditions depending on their skin tone. Depressive symptoms related to internalized feelings about skin tone may ultimately depreciate feelings of self-worth over the life course of black women (Keith et al., 2010).

**Implications for Social Work Practice**

A review of the research suggests that, based on the preferences demonstrated by their family, peers, potential partners, employers, and greater society, black women today may still feel pressured to choose the white doll. The individuals affected most are the dark-skinned black women who deviate furthest from European standards of beauty. Society’s acceptance of European standards of beauty at the expense of those who do not meet them can have pervasive and devastating consequences for dark-skinned black women throughout the life course. How can professionals in the social work field recognize and address the dark-skinned black woman, who is grappling with repressed self-hatred?

The research suggests that oppressive beauty ideals are ingrained into the institutional racism and sexism of American culture. Adjusting policies at the national and state level are necessary to address this issue at a macro level, and social workers in administrative and policy-focused positions can play integral roles in this work. Yet, because this issue is so entrenched in the communities of these black women, much of the work must be accomplished by social workers on the ground level through pro-
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gramming and clinical practice.

Clinicians and program administrators who work with black women should be aware of the risk factors that these women face across their life course and should be educated on the available resources designed to serve this population. Social workers are trained to recognize the forces within dominant culture and society that affect the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of marginalized individuals and should use this knowledge through their work with this population (Cooper, 1998).

There are programs currently in place, such as The Beautiful. Project (The Beautiful. Project, 2012), Black Girls Rock! Inc. (Black Girls Rock, Inc., 2012), and Sisterhood Agenda (Sisterhood Agenda, 2012), that are geared towards the self-knowledge and self-development of black girls. Black Girls Rock! Inc. is a nonprofit youth empowerment organization established to promote the arts through mentorship and leadership development, and encourage a dialogue about the ways women of color are portrayed in the media (Black Girls Rock!, Inc., 2012). The Beautiful. Project uses photography and reflective workshops to give young black girls an opportunity to confront both positive and negative portrayals of black girls and women in the media and in their communities, and seeks to influence the way black girls see the world and the way that the world sees black girls (The Beautiful. Project, 2012). Sisterhood Agenda is a nonprofit that empowers women and girls through sisterhood, self-knowledge, self-development, and self-esteem (Sisterhood Agenda, 2012). There is a necessity for more programs such as these that recognize the unique needs of this population and focus on attending to these needs through dialogue and empowerment.

On a direct practice level, social work clinicians working with young black female clients should create a therapeutic relationship that provides positive reinforcement and helps these young women to realize their beauty and to value their own self-worth by using a strengths-based empowerment approach (Paniagua, 2005). Empowerment is an important approach to therapy with clients from any racial background, but it is especially important in the case of black clients because of the long history of oppression experienced by members of this group.
In the assessment and treatment of black women, it is important for the clinician to discuss possible racial differences between the client and clinician, explore the client’s level of acculturation to the European beauty ideal, and to avoid offering generalized explanations for problems. Incorporating family counseling may be useful in exploring the role the client's family plays in managing the issue (Paniagua, 2005). It is important that the therapist avoid any suggestion (either stated or implied) that the client likely comes from a disorganized, unstable, and psychologically unhealthy family. This stereotype does not take into consideration the extent to which factors such as the involvement of the extended family, nontraditional roles of family members, strong religious orientation, or strong emphasis on the value of education, may be strengths of a black family. Therapists should emphasize these strengths to encourage and support their client’s participation in therapy (Paniagua, 2005).

It may also be important to include religious institutions in this process, because for many black women, religious communities are an important part of the extended family. The involvement of religious communities may be particularly important in treating black women, because they tend to be more involved with religious and spiritual activities than black men and view these communities as a source of economic and emotional support (Paniagua, 2005).

Empowering dark-skinned black women with these programs and interventions can help reinforce the notion that all black skin tones should be part of the established beauty standard. Through addressing the young black women’s negative self-perception and how it affects an individual’s daily life, social workers may be able to decrease the risks that these young women face across the life course and promote positive life outcomes and self-development.

Conclusion

Clark and Clark (1947) and Kiri Davis demonstrated that the internalization of racial beauty standards is a societal problem that begins in childhood and has a significant impact on the self-
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perception and self-worth of black girls and women throughout the life course. Not only are black women negatively categorized by society for both their gender and race, but they can also be subjugated within their own communities. This article aims to bring awareness to an issue that, if properly addressed, could positively affect the life trajectories of young black women. The self-hatred of black women based on European beauty standards is not commonly acknowledged in social work conversations or practice. Black women need to be empowered so that they can protect themselves against the negative messages that they receive from their environment. Social workers have a unique opportunity to bring voice to their clients, break the cycle of internalized self-hatred in the black female community, and help create a new definition of beauty.

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The Public and the Profession’s Perception of Social Work

Jeffrey Olin

The social work profession has long been concerned about its mission and perception. The two interests go hand in hand, because to have an effect on how we as social workers are viewed, we must be self-aware about who we are and what we do. This paper will address how social work periodically reflects upon and re-assesses its purpose because of internal considerations, such as the profession’s ethics, and external forces, including the job market and public perception. Some of the research conducted over the years into public perception of social work—as well as that of our clients—will be presented and compared. In addition, I review how the media have portrayed the field, and how we as professionals have marketed ourselves. Finally, some suggestions will be offered, which can be applied at various levels, including direct practice, program development and evaluation, administration, and branding of the profession as a whole.

When counterterrorism police officer Lawrence DePrimo bought boots for a homeless man in November 2012, the New York Police Department (NYPD) posted a photo to its Facebook page. The photo elicited a significant response to NYPD’s new online presence, and shortly thereafter DePrimo appeared on the “Today” show focusing on his heroism and humanity (Bell, 2012; Goodman, 2012). The tourist who took the photo works in the communications department of the Pinal County Sheriff’s Office in Phoenix (Ruelas, 2012). This was self-promotion to some extent, but the action and response demonstrates a profession re-evaluating its mission as well as seeking to enhance its image. Social workers serve the homeless population but are rarely featured on national television. We can learn from this story on two counts: by growing in awareness of our mission and by learning how to influence the public perception of social work. Many children look up to police officers or firefighters, others strive to become doctors or lawyers, and some endeavor to follow in the footsteps of a teacher; few children, however, aspire
to be social workers. Culture and gender (Liben, Bigler & Krogh, 2001) and public image and prestige (Auger, Blackhurst & Wahl, 2005) influence desirability of a particular career. The perception of social work is therefore important in attracting highly committed, professional individuals. We must first determine if control over our profession’s image lies more firmly in the hands of social workers or in other outlets like the media. Ultimately, “the image of social work” is not simply a cosmetic matter: A positive image is important to the vitality, effectiveness, acceptance, and funding of the profession. “The more that social work is perceived positively, the more likely it is to gain support for its programmes, to have its services utilized, to maintain morale, to attract recruits and to have its voice heard” (Kaufman & Raymond, as cited in Reid & Misener, 2001, p. 194). This article will review how the social work profession has reflected upon its mission and perception, consider some of the research into public perception of its work and clients, examine media portrayal, and look at how social work has marketed itself. I will conclude with some suggestions for the profession that can be applied at multiple levels, including direct practice, program development and evaluation, administration, and branding of the profession as a whole.

The Importance of Defining Social Work

Social work’s concern for its image must begin with a clear understanding and definition of its role and mission (Corvo, Selmi, & Montemaro, 2003). Since its inception, social work has been concerned with “how it is defined, practised and perceived,” undergoing many evolutions that have shaped how it is viewed (Staniforth, Fouché, & O’Brien, 2011, p. 192). Social workers’ activities include “direct practice, community organizing, supervision, consultation administration, advocacy, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education, and research and evaluation” (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008, Preamble). Defining parameters of social work potentiates artificial limitations on the profession (Gibelman, 1999).

In addition, professionals vary across qualifications, ex-
perience, and training levels. The Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed that 70% of social workers in the U.S. either had no college degree (27.9%) or a degree in a field other than social work (44%) (Gibelman, 2000). Many workers without a social work degree—or any degree at all—find a place in the field because of needs for staff or population-specific expertise. Consequently, “in the public mind, all social workers are lumped together – credentialed or not” (Gibelman, 2000, p. 466), which can perpetuate misinformation.

External factors like the job market or the political atmosphere force our profession to evolve, leading to disparate understandings of social work’s identity over time (Gibelman, 1999). Sometimes, mid-career social work professionals can lose sight of their original purpose. Passion and ideals are constrained by the resulting stress of unmanageable responsibilities, low wages, and little recognition from others.

Professional Self-Awareness and Its Relationship with Public Perception

The social work mission changes over time to meet evolving global needs and establish purpose (Baron, as cited in Gibelman, 1999). Consequently, two somewhat opposing pressures emerge: (a) fidelity to the core values of empowering vulnerable and oppressed populations considering their environmental influences, and (b) openness to the fluidity and dynamic change inherent within “the expansive and expanding boundaries of social work and the difficulty in providing succinct, encapsulated descriptions of a complex and multifaceted profession” (Gibelman, 1999, p. 301). Staniforth, Fouché, and O’Brien (2011) argued that social workers throughout all levels of organizations should engage in critical reflection. They should practice self-awareness about the field’s evolving mission, have vigorous discussions about it in supervision and at conferences, and pursue it in research and writings. They contend that all professionals “can sit within a practice framework which holds social justice as an overarching principle” (p. 194). Operating under common ethical principles to promote society’s general welfare, empower people
and communities, and positively affect the social environment, social workers must evaluate performance internally, debate the aim of the profession, and externally assess how the public perceives their work.

Silverman (2012) reflected that without self-awareness of our own profession, mission, and professional identity, how can we presume that others will understand us any better? Internal exploration of how the field should outwardly present itself is complex because of pressures to serve clients and communities while maintaining confidentiality. Yet perception affects financial support of programs and efficacy of our work. A conflict emerges over who defines the social work brand: social workers, the public, and/or the media. When social workers abdicate their responsibility, it allows others to control their image.

Assessment of the Public’s Perception

The social work profession wants public perception of its mission to align with its core values. Despite the profession’s regard for its self-image, there have been few comprehensive efforts to survey public opinion. Condie, Hanson, Lang, Moss, and Kane (1978) described early surveys that found little consensus about the role of a social worker, but that “a vaguely negative connotation of social work seems to have been the stereotype” (p. 47). Only 6% of respondents perceived social workers as “sources of help for emotional problems,” compared with 28% for religious leaders, 26% for psychiatrists, 22% for physicians, and 11% for psychologists (Condie et al., p. 51). Positive takeaways included an understanding that social workers were more than just caseworkers and showed care for all populations regardless of income level.

LeCroy and Stinson (2004), recognizing changes in social work practice in the 25 years since Condie et al.’s (1978) research, sought to reassess public perception. The authors reasoned, “if the general public is confused, uninformed or even hostile toward social work, the profession is less able to fulfill its mission of helping those in need” (LeCroy & Stinson, 2004, p. 164). Finding only limited recent studies, they executed a nation-
wide survey to assess public sentiment toward social work. They discovered that the public associates social workers with frequent media stories reporting children being taken from their parents, indicating little change since Condie et al.’s (1978) study about the role of social workers. Strikingly, almost 1 in 5 respondents believed the stereotype that “social workers take advantage of the government” (LeCroy & Stinson, 2004, p. 169).

Dennison, Poole, and Qaqish (2007) explored what incoming college students from various courses of study thought about social work. The authors were curious to learn if the students, though smaller in number and younger than those previously surveyed, reflected more current views of the profession. Significantly, students did not completely understand the range of social work activities or the levels of training needed.

Zugazaga, Surette, Mendez, and Otto (2006) described a study, commissioned by the NASW, which investigated how the public viewed the profession. Participants had little direct experience with social workers; their perception of the field was shaped predominantly by the media. They associated social workers with child welfare, the government, and the poor or underprivileged. They had an altogether positive regard for the profession despite the prevalence of negatively portrayed child welfare cases.

Fall, Levitov, Jennings, and Eberts (2000) presented five case histories of individuals with mental health or relationship challenges to a group of subjects who ranked their confidence in a range of clinical professions. Participants consistently expressed a low level of confidence in social workers, almost always by a substantial margin. Hodge (2004) discovered how the public might be confused, because the “social worker” title can be purported by a doctoral, master’s or bachelor’s degree in social work, or another degree entirely. If the public is only moderately aware of what social workers do, its hazy perception of social workers is worsened by association; Trattner (as cited in Tirado, 2006, p. 27), states, “social workers, through no fault of their own, are disliked by the public because they work with (or are perceived to work with) people in society who are feared and/or despised.”

The limited research conducted shows that the public often takes a polite view of social workers because of the belief that
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compassionate work is being done. However, there are also common negative perceptions: (a) an overall ignorance of the extent of social work’s mission (often thought to be predominantly child welfare); (b) a lack of understanding of what social work roles include (often perpetuated by the profession’s lack of clarity); (c) a negative view of social workers’ competence when compared to similar helping professions; and (d) an unfavorable view of some client populations with which social work aligns itself.

Media Portrayal of Social Work

Much of the public does not interact directly with social workers, so a large part of the profession’s perception is attributable to depiction in the media. Zugazaga et al. (2006) discovered that most social workers believed the media cast a negative image on their profession. Freeman and Valentine (2004) examined American movies from 1938 to 1998 with a “social work” character. Twenty-nine of the 44 movies focused on child welfare. Most social workers were women, white, middle-class, and incompetent. They were caretakers in a subordinate position of authority and served as a buffer between oppressed groups and their oppressors. Many characters had sexual relationships with a client. Overall, the characters reinforced rather than challenged the status quo (Freeman & Valentine, 2004).

Gibelman (2004) reviewed three “social work” television characters in the 1990s–2000s. She observed that without consultation from social work professionals, characters reflected no social work education, questionable ethics, and made a mockery of the profession. She argued that in shows featuring lawyers and hospitals, professional qualifications were clearly emphasized, even if their moral character sometimes was suspect. However, social workers were portrayed as “uneducated and bumbling, if not outright laughable” (Gibelman, 2004, p. 332), reinforcing stereotypes and denigrating social work. She concluded, “We should be getting the message. Television is not kind to social workers” (Gibelman, 2004, p. 331).

Although a survey of 60 newspapers and 399 articles over a 4 1/2-year period by Reid and Misener (2001) demonstrated a
largely positive image of social work, they concluded that more could be done. The positive stories portrayed social workers as experts, described program innovations and interesting direct practice work, and demonstrated the potential impact of positive publicity.

**Opportunities for Enhancing the Public’s Perception of Social Work**

If perception does not match the profession’s stated mission, social workers must learn how to influence public understanding. “Social workers themselves are best suited to enhance the public’s knowledge and opinions about the profession…[because] no one else is likely to step forward” to do so (LeCroy & Stinson, 2004, p. 174). In 2005, the NASW set out to raise the public’s esteem of social work given the stereotypes the profession had endured (NASW, 2004a). This goal, developed in concert with the 50th anniversary of the NASW’s founding (NASW, 2004b), spurred an advertising campaign to increase awareness, which included magazine and newspaper ads, press releases, appearances on radio and television programs, and a new website. Moreover, the campaign stimulated efforts to engage social workers in the topic of effecting change in social work’s perception.

Murdach (2011) cited Mary Richmond’s classic *What is Social Case Work?* and Richmond’s biography of early social workers as efforts to develop public appreciation of social work (Murdach, 2011, p. 92). Reid and Misener (2001) suggested that social workers learn how to place stories in the media; furthermore, collaboration between social work and journalism schools could provide social workers with strategies, resources, and contacts to produce more positive portrayals. “[S]uch initiative can be directly tied to an important social work function—to educate the citizenry about the needs of its clientele” (Reid & Misener, 2001, p. 200). Then, not only does social work’s image improve, but the needs of clients are highlighted and stigmatizing myths about certain populations and issues can be dispelled.

As social workers, we can view efforts to increase self-awareness and enhance positive public perception as a service to
self and clients, not an additional burden. This effort can allow for reflection on our original motivation for becoming a social worker and open up a variety of opportunities for intervention.

Learn how you can broadcast your work. Be mindful of doing so in a way that does not glorify yourself or jeopardize confidentiality, but calls attention to the empowering work of your organization. Research local media and develop contacts across various media outlets. Then, learn how to prepare a press release, place an Op-Ed, or appear on a local radio or television show. Learn from social media experts how your organization can publicize its work through the ever-changing world of social media. Most importantly, consider internal and external collaboration, recruiting assistance from the NASW if necessary; advocate for the importance of these efforts in your organization even if you are not the individual to complete the tasks.

Tower (2000) provided the clearest mandate for action: “[S]ocial workers are responsible for debunking myths when the public is misinformed about the profession and the people served by it” (p. 575). She helped create a Social Work and the Media course at the University of Nevada, Reno, that taught students about the film production process; students eventually developed documentaries to air on local television and public broadcasting stations. She argued that social work students and professionals need to learn how “to shape the public image of social work through effective use of popular media” (Tower, 2000, p. 575). College and university programs can offer similar elective courses intended to produce documentaries.

Another perception-changing and image-enhancing possibility is interdisciplinary collaboration where social workers partner with other professions to serve a common population. Cacciatore, Carlson, Michaelis, Klimek and Steffen (2011) presented an innovative intervention in which social workers formed a crisis response team to assist a municipal fire department. Social workers served in a direct practice trauma intervention role either with the public or the first responders, allowing for direct engagement with individuals who normally would not interact with social workers.
Conclusion

Returning to the example of Officer DePrimo, there were two resounding outcomes: (a) police officers and the public reconsidered the role of police officers, and (b) public perception improved. Perhaps a few well-placed stories of social work in action could attract the same self- and public awareness of professional mission and image-bending attention that the DePrimo case did for the New York Police Department.

The social work field must regularly reflect on its purpose, assessing how its programs and efforts serve clients and communities. Gibelman (1999) suggested that we should not lament “the lack of a durable definition of the profession, its practice, and its boundaries,” (p. 308). Instead, she reasoned that periodic re-examination reflects positively on the profession’s ability to respond to changing environments. However, becoming more self-aware about our mission is not sufficient. We must engage with society and culture to reflect on our image. When our efforts are poorly received or misconstrued, we must attempt to shift those views. Tower (2000) exhorted us: “The image problem is real… and social workers should be concerned. Educators who are not convinced that an image problem exists need only ask students if someone close to them disapproved of their decision to enter the social work profession” (p. 584).

Finally, taking an active approach and defining our role is better than allowing others to speak for us. As one of the taglines from the NASW 2004 campaign proclaimed, “Social workers: If you don’t tell your story, who will?” (NASW, 2004a).

References


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