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The views expressed by the authors are solely their own and do not necessarily reflect those held by the Editorial Board or Columbia University School of Social Work.

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In this issue of the Columbia University Journal of Student Social Work, the student Editorial Board presents articles that delve into the core meaning of social work. This year's authors reflect on their personal and professional identities, and the responsibility that emerging social workers have to continue to explore the limitations, benefits, and potential of this dynamic field.

In “Speaking Truth to Power: Interrogating the Invention of the Social Worker and the Client,” Tracee Worley examines the historical development of the role of social workers in the United States, and looks at the categorical representation of “social worker” and “client.” Worley challenges social workers to reexamine certain constructs around which social work can be based, as she explores the dynamics of power within the profession.

In “A Social Exclusion Perspective on Social Work in Latin America,” Andrea Laura Bacher suggests that framing social problems in Latin America within the context of social exclusion could pave the way for more effective solutions. As promoters of social inclusion, social workers are well positioned to address the deprivation and inequality that exists in the region.

Lauren Pesso describes her experiences managing part of a research study on sexual and gender-based violence, in “International Social Work in Practice: A Case Study From Northern Uganda.” She critically analyzes and reflects on the meaning of international social work, as she outlines how she integrated her social work training into her recent experience abroad.

The construction of a fence along the United States-Mexico border has complex historical, political, and social meaning. Jen Scott asks that social workers reflect on the human implications of this barrier, in “Fencing Fears: The United States Border Fence and the Responsibilities of Social Workers.”

In “Shifting from Social Service to Social Change,” featured authors Caroline Angle, Shira Jindal, and Alpana Patel recommend that a domestic violence agency re-center its focus to the community it serves. As part of Columbia University School of Social Work’s 2009 Capstone Project, authors examined information provided in a case study, combined perspectives from all four methods of social work that CUSSW has to offer, and ultimately came up with recommendations grounded strongly in social change.

The articles within this volume represent a wide range of social issues and ideological perspectives. The Editorial Board members commend the authors on their tremendous work, and hope that our readers are as inspired and challenged by their passion as we are.

Sincerely,
The Editorial Board
The Editorial Board would like to thank the Columbia University School of Social Work students and faculty, especially our Advisory Board, for supporting the Journal in its seventh year of publication and making it an integral part of the student experience at CUSSW. We are indebted to Laura Beckloff, Editorial Board Member 2007, for her continued support and unwavering dedication to our blind review process. We would also like to thank Cristiana Baik for the cover design and assistance with the layout. In addition we would like to thank Shana Spencer and Ann McCann Oakley for their administrative support to the Editorial Board throughout the publication process.
The development of a professional social work identity involves being socialized into the history, mission, values, and ethics of the profession—learning what social workers can say and do. This socialization also corresponds with a silence about the limits and philosophical extremities of the profession—what social workers do not, perhaps cannot, say. Drawing from social theorist Michel Foucault’s analysis of subjectivity, power, knowledge, and discourse, this article aims to articulate the limits of the social work profession. By examining the historical and contemporary invention of the “social worker” and the “client,” I challenge social workers to consider the work that must be conducted upon themselves.

For nearly 100 years, public debate has been circulating regarding the identity of contemporary social work. The nature of this debate is reflected in arguments concerning social work’s values, the relevancy of its knowledge base, and its professional status (Bitensky, 1978; Bar-On, 1994; Eaton, 1958; Flexner, 1915; Gibleman, 1999; Haynes & White, 1999; Risler, Lowe, & Nackerud, 2003). At the heart of this debate lay questions concerning epistemological, theoretical, and methodological challenges and opportunities for social work in the 21st century. What is social work? Is it a quasi-profession? Has professionalization privileged technique over social justice?

Michel Foucault (1984a) provides a strong starting point for examining these questions: “My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same thing as bad, if everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do” (p. 343). We always have
something to do. This is a positive position: not all social work knowledge and practices are bad, but they all can be problematized in an effort to expose their limitations and highlight their possibilities. From this position, social workers can grasp the nature of the debate by focusing on the dangerous potential of knowledge and practices rather than starting with the assumption that they are inherently good or bad. Moving beyond these moral categories, Foucault advises us to conduct a “critical ontology of ourselves” in which we analyze and reflect upon what we are in order to recognize the dangers of our conduct (Foucault, 1987).

In problematizing the origins of social work and the shaping of the social work professional identity, I argue that critical examination of knowledge production, subjectivity, difference, and power allow us to help “determine which is the main danger” (Foucault, 1984a, p. 343) in the creation of ourselves as professionals who help others in the name of social justice. By conducting a critical ontology of social workers, I will illuminate how particular “expert” and “client” identities, social relationships, and practices are made possible while others are excluded. It is in this space of social work discourse that potential “dangers” can be located: as social work produces knowledge, it necessarily blocks other ways of knowing and being. It is not my intention to provide a blueprint for alternative knowledge and practices; rather, by fostering a “limit attitude,” (Foucault, 1984b) I contemplate the historical and contemporary limits that have been placed upon social workers and interrogate them in an effort to establish the possibility of moving beyond them.

Shaping of the Social Worker Subject Position

Before interrogating how contemporary social work professional identities are constructed, let us first consider the historical origin of the social worker. In the early 20th century, economic depressions, the emancipation of slaves, and the explosion of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe to urban areas such as New York City, prompted an awareness of the need for social programs to assist millions of the poor and needy (Glicken, 2006). Social work as a profession began to take shape in the early 1880s with the formation of charity organization societies and settlement houses. Their objectives, to “repress mendicancy” and inculcate values such as “politeness, cleanliness, and independence” were met through a system whereby “friendly visitors” and settlement house workers (most of them middle and up-
Parton and O’Byrne (2006) observe that the growth and legitimization of social work was closely allied with modernist aims to develop rational forms of social organization, which reflected broader utopian goals for creating ideal cities with ideal citizens. The central focus of the modernist project was the classification of the population based on the scientific claims of the different “experts” of the new human sciences—particularly medicine, psychiatry, psychology, criminology, and social work. These “experts” theorized about the nature of human beings, their perfectibility, the reasons for their behavior and the order in which populations could be classified. In this sense, human qualities were conceptualized as measurable and “could be changed, improved, and rehabilitated” (Parton & O’Byrne, 2006, p. 39). It is in the modernist tradition that a new scientific education was introduced into universities in the United States. Operating under the assumption that scientific inquiry could be used to improve the human condition, professional schools of medicine, psychiatry, and law were established across the country. By adopting a scientific approach similar to the social sciences, social work found its home in the academy beginning with the first school of social work, the New York School of Philanthropy in 1904, later known as the New York School of Social Work in 1917, and finally becoming the Columbia School of Social Work in 1963 (Feldman & Kamerman, 2001).

A necessary element in reconstructing the invention of the social worker is the concept of discourse. Foucault (1980) defined discourses as “historically variable ways of specifying knowledge and truth—what is possible to speak at a given moment” (p. 93). Following Foucault, Margolin (1997) conducted a discourse analysis of early 20th century social work case records to demonstrate how social workers created and sustained themselves as well as others, primarily through the language of helping. By examining this language, we can observe how as the classification of populations into “allegedly universal moral categories” such as the “mentally ill,” “the criminal,” “the delinquent,” “the drunkard,” “the wayward woman,” and the “orphan” (Wagner, 1997) warranted the intervention of social workers. Margolin pays particular attention to this classification process, suggesting that it reflected the power interests of the middle-class: “social work stabilizes middle-class power by creating an observable, discussable, [and] write-about-able poor” (p. 5).

By inventing such categories, or what Foucault (1969) calls “sub-
ject positions,” social workers became judges of normality. Through their techniques of home visits, observations, and note-taking, a new figure arose that became the object of intervention, something to be reformed. Foucault (1977) maintains that: “We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the social-worker judge. It is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based” (p. 304). Most salient in Foucault’s analysis of the invention of subject positions is his notion of “power/knowledge relations,” in which he understood that it is impossible to think of knowledge outside of its connection to power. We know someone to be “delinquent” or “mentally ill” not because of traits that are inherent to those individuals, but, rather through the power of experts to conduct scientific research, distinguishing the deviant from the normal and the ill from the healthy. This process, in which the modern state confers power upon credentialed “experts,” allows for the creation of others as objects of knowledge. Who is defined as “expert” and who is defined as “other” is the result of a particular configuration of power/knowledge relations.

As social work evolved from the voluntarism of friendly visitors and settlement house workers into a full-fledged profession with a distinctive value base, body of knowledge, and method for training, several authors argue that it has matured from its preoccupation with the morality of the poor to having a keener appreciation of the limits of science and its ability to respond to complex societal problems (Feit, 2003; Gibelman & Schervish, 1997; Levy Simon, 1994; Reisch & Andrews, 2002). The last 20 years have witnessed considerable scholarly and practice activity focused on empowerment, the strengths-based perspective, cultural competence, evidence-based practice, and person-in-environment considerations. The emergence of this knowledge base, transmitted systematically through formal education in schools of social work, gives shape and meaning to our self-fashioning as experts, both individually and as a professional collective. How are our subject positions shaped today? Has the way we imagine ourselves as “experts” changed from the modernist goals of moralizing the poor and deviant?

The Code of Ethics: How Social Workers Imagine Themselves and Who They Serve

Since the 20th Century, codes of ethics have been central aspects of professions (Banks, 2006). Banks suggests that codes of ethics establish guidelines for professional behavior, contribute to the professional status of an occupation, establish and maintain professional
identity, explain the moral stance of a profession, and protect clients from harmful activities (Banks, 2006, p.44). Given the importance of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics in guiding professional behavior, it is a key document for analyzing how contemporary subject positions of both social worker and client are formed. The Code includes four major sections. The first section, the Preamble, summarizes social work’s mission and core values and sets forth several key themes to practice, including service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (NASW, 1996). As the Preamble lays out the framework for the rest of the Code of Ethics, it is a good starting point to conduct a discourse analysis to investigate how social worker and client subject positions are constituted:

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession’s focus on individual wellbeing in a social context and the wellbeing of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living. Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients. “Clients” is used inclusively to refer to individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice. These activities may be in the form of direct practice, community organizing, supervision, consultation administration, advocacy, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education, and research and evaluation. Social workers seek to enhance the capacity of people to address their own needs. Social workers also seek to promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities, and other social institutions to individuals’ needs and social problems (NASW, 1996).

The concept of discourse is central to analyzing the subjectivities that are expressed within the NASW Code of Ethics. By paying particular attention to the representation of worker and client subject positions in the code, it becomes apparent that these positions are constituted through dualistic categories such as: privileged/oppressed,
financially stable/impoverished, unlimited technical knowledge/limited individual capacity, strong/vulnerable, powerful/powerless, and worker/client (one who does not ‘work’ on society, but on whom society and the social worker works). Within these dualisms, social workers are always fixed to the positions on the left and clients on the right. Furthermore, this mode of representation fails to acknowledge the complex individual and collective histories that exist within each category.

To illustrate how these categories constrain the articulation of the whole self, consider the complexities inherent in my own formation as a social worker. According to the Code of Ethics, I fit the description of someone in need of the help of a social worker. I grew up as what could be categorized as “disadvantaged:” an African-American youth living in a low-income, single parent family. Growing up in the economically blighted community of West Oakland, California during the early 1980s, my family was intimately affected by the high rate of poverty, crime, and the crack epidemic. Terms such as “crisis,” “at-risk,” and “marginalized” could be used to describe the conditions I faced, yet, within the logic of the Code of Ethics, in becoming a social worker, I must disengage with this experience, as the oppositional subject positions do not allow for being both the social worker and the oppressed. Some may argue that rather than disengage with the experience of oppression, I could use this common experience to enhance my connection to the communities in which I work. Such sentiment constitutes a further danger, as it masks the power I wield as a social worker over my clients. Hence, in the social work context, my experiences beyond the practice setting are dislocated at worst or used to manipulate my power at best.

The disempowering effects of the oppositional constitution of social worker and client identities is particularly problematic, given the profession’s stated commitment to social justice. Although the Code is intended to position social workers to challenge social injustice, the oppositional constitution of worker and client leaves little room for dialogue among equals, insofar as it assumes that social workers and clients do not exist in equal social worlds and that clients are dependent on the work that will be conducted upon them to become empowered. Within these categories, there is neither reciprocal interaction nor a space where the social worker is on equal status with the client. In naming clients as objects of intervention, help can never flow both ways, and if it does, it is neither acknowledged nor codified within the Code of Ethics. The danger in this assumption is that, rather than enable a politics of social justice, oppositional categories foster
a politics of domination, as “privileged” professionals make claims on behalf of “oppressed” groups. The placement of the social worker subject position as the helper, the powerful, and the invulnerable, fundamentally contradicts the pursuit of social justice; by beginning our work in a space of inequality, we effectively foreclose the possibility of moving toward equality.

Conclusion: Speaking Truth to Power

Conducting a critical ontology of social worker and client subject positions is not about what is good or bad more than it is about an awareness of the limits of the social work profession. The aim of such a task is to unmask the forms of knowledge by which we construct ourselves as “experts” and by which our “clients” are objectified; the interventions that operate upon them; the judgments, decisions, and forms of authority to which they are subject; and the types of relationships to which they are drawn into, with us as social workers.

By engaging in this critical ontology, my purpose is to articulate that the consequences of our expertise cannot be acknowledged while our professional identities are being formed. Foucault (1977) argues that for any discipline to exist and have a piece of knowledge, there have to be certain things that go unsaid: “There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (p. 27). I argue that in order to be aware of the main danger, it is critical to speak truth to these silences. Social workers must not only acknowledge that the historical invention of the social worker and client are tied to certain moral imperatives, but that the present invention is also rooted in oppositional identities that are fixed in a relationship, which is fundamentally hierarchical, oppressive, and unequal.

Speaking truth to the power of the social worker identity requires that we do a kind of ethical work on ourselves by “shaking up habits, ways of acting and thinking, of dispensing commonplace beliefs, [and] of taking a new measure of rules” (Foucault, 1991, p. 11-12). Such ethical work pushes us beyond the limits of the NASW Code of Ethics and allows us to confront those things that cannot be said. The stakes are high: if we chose to work at the center of our subject positions as experts we run the risk of becoming uncritical and placing ourselves in a struggle against our clients and their realities, even if we believe that struggle is toward equality. However, working at the limits of ourselves stipulates that we work at the frontiers of what a social worker is, working from a place of vulnerability. It is through working at limits
that I have come to realize that in order to transgress oppositional categories, it is necessary to suspend a preoccupation for the care of the other (i.e., vulnerable, oppressed, powerless individuals) and focus on the care of the self.

References

A Social Exclusion Perspective on Social Work in Latin America

ANDREA LAURA BACHER

This paper explores the relationship between social work and social exclusion within the context of poverty as capability deprivation. It suggests that a social exclusion perspective could be relevant and useful to social work theory and practice in Latin America. The Chile Solidario Program is used as an example of a social program that incorporates a social exclusion perspective and in which social workers play a vital role in promoting social inclusion.

A Context of Exclusion

In Latin America, 44% of the population live in poverty, 60% of children live below the poverty line, and nearly 20% of young people are unemployed (Kliksberg, 2005; Inter-American Development Bank [IADB], 2008). A major cause of poverty is inequality. While the richest 10% possess 48% of the regional income, the poorest 10% possess 1.6% (Kliksberg, 2005; IADB, 2008; IADB, 2003). Latin America has the most unequal income distribution in the world, and these inequalities are exacerbated by the exclusion of minority groups that are discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, race, gender, physical disability, and geographic location. In spite of the variations across Latin American countries, many actual problems of deprivation are widely shared across the region. Latin America has great economic potential, and is ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse; a diversity that could be a major asset in the process of constructing an inclusive society. However, the entire region must overcome a long history of exclusion that has left societies unequal, divided, and blind to diversity’s riches.

The 1980s and 1990s were periods of profound transformation in Latin America. Neoliberal reforms applied in most countries in the
region changed the existing “intervening” states into “minimal” states. Active strategies to downsize the state caused accelerated privatization policies, elimination of public institutions, and reductions of personnel in the public sector \(^2\) (Carlson & Paine, 2002). One of the consequences of these policies was the deterioration of the notion of state as representative of collective action (O’Donnell, 1993). These policies also had a huge impact on many economies in the region and worsened poverty and inequality. As Stiglitz described it, “growth under liberalizations is just over half of what it was under the old pre-form regime...Where growth has occurred, the benefits have accrued to those at the upper part of the income distribution…” (2003, p. 230).

As a result of the policies implemented in the region during the 1980s and 1990s, the salaries, working conditions, and career prospects of social workers have deteriorated (O’Donnell & Tokman, 1998). The professional identity of social workers in Latin America started as health workers (Velez, 2003; Alayon, 2005). The first school of social work, the School of Social Service, was established in Santiago, Chile in 1925 by the physician Alejandro del Rio. The second school of social work in the region was founded in Argentina in the early 1930s. It was connected to the School of Medicine at the University of Buenos Aires, and it followed the European idea of using “hygiene visitors” as auxiliaries for doctors. Since then, the social work profession in Latin America underwent various paradigm changes that weakened its identity. First it was influenced by a philanthropic and moralizing tone; then, it was focused on integrating social science epistemology, and after that, it went through a re-conceptualization process. The profession has been struggling to find a place for itself since 1925 (Parada, 2007; Velez, 2003; Alayon, 2005; Healy, 2001). Presently, there is a need for social workers in Latin America to renegotiate the profession’s position and its specific role through the use of new frameworks or perspectives that can inform both the theory and practice of social work.

This paper suggests that a social exclusion perspective could be valuable in analyzing and influencing social work theory and practice in Latin America. It explores the relationship between social exclusion placed in a broader context of the idea of poverty as capability deprivation \(^3\) and social work. The emphasis is on the relevance and usefulness of a social exclusion perspective for social work theory and practice.
A Social Exclusion Definition

The present debate on social policy in Latin America hinges on the issue of social inclusion and exclusion. According to the last IADB Report on Economic and Social Progress (2008), social exclusion is the most dangerous threat facing democracy in Latin America. Politicians and policy analysts mention the fight against social exclusion as the main objective of development and substantive democratization in the region (IADB, 2008).

The term social exclusion was first coined in France in 1974 by Rene Lenoir to identify and refer to the “excluded”, including the “mentally and physically handicapped, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, substance abusers, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households, marginal, asocial persons, and other social misfits.” Since Lenoir, there have been major advances in the literature on social exclusion, and the concept has acquired various definitions. This paper uses Amartya Sen’s definition of social exclusion, which considers social exclusion by placing it in a broader context of the idea of poverty as capability deprivation (2000). This definition is particularly suitable for Latin America because there is general agreement that social exclusion contributes mainly to the analysis of poverty and marginality (Faria, 1995; Rodgers et al., 1995). Faria (1995) argues that social exclusion’s usefulness stems from its potential as a way of integrating poverty, deprivation, and lack of access to goods or assets into a single framework. Sen examines the term by placing it in the broader context of poverty understood as the lack of capability to live a minimally decent life. He defines social exclusion as “…constitutively a part of capability deprivation as well as instrumentally a cause of diverse capability failures” (Sen, 2000).

Social Work and Social Exclusion

Previous authors who have analyzed the relationship between social work and social exclusion have focused on the strong and natural intuitive appeal of the idea that a concern with social exclusion is embedded in the guiding principles of the social work profession (Sheppard, 2006; Smale, Tuson, & Statham, 2000). In a broad sense, social work’s mission is to increase opportunities for excluded populations. Social work is arguably founded on notions of social exclusion and inclusion. In spite of its recent origin, the term social exclusion can
give expression to some of the major issues, which have been, and continue to be, of concern to social workers. But what is the specific aspect of social exclusion that is useful for social work? Is social exclusion merely a relabeling of already known notions and concepts?

Social exclusion theory is adaptable, and it may be tempting to characterize every deprivation as a case of social exclusion. Does the concept add anything that we would not know or recognize without a social exclusion perspective? What is the specific relevance or new insight provided by the idea of social exclusion for the social work profession? What aspects or characteristics of a social exclusion perspective may be considered relevant for social work? Does it contribute to our understanding of the nature of poverty, or in identifying causes of poverty that may otherwise be neglected?

Described in this paper are the characteristics of the social exclusion approach which, placed in the context of poverty as capability deprivation, make it a valuable and useful concept for social work. One of the main characteristics of the social exclusion approach lies on its specific emphasis on the relational features in the deprivation of capability or lack of freedom to lead the life an individual values. Following Sen, the main attribute is that social exclusion literature provides a central role to relational connections. This feature is applicable for social workers in informing the theory and practice around relational connections and more fully understanding the person-in-environment transactions taking place at various systems levels that lead to capability deprivation. The relational aspect of social exclusion can also shed light on the multidimensionality of the experience of poverty.

Social exclusion is constitutively a part of capability deprivation. This is relevant in the sense that being excluded can sometimes be a deprivation, and it can be of intrinsic importance on its own. For example, not taking part in a community, not being able to relate to others, and not having social connections, can directly impoverish a person’s life (Sen, 2000). These are losses on their own, independent of whatever further deprivation they may generate. Social work has an important role in understanding social exclusion as constitutive of capability deprivation and in presenting possible ways in which it can be addressed. The profession recognizes the importance of the dignity and worth of all members of society and their equality as humans, as well as the right of every individual to participate in the community. Being excluded from society can affect people’s well-being in several respects, including mental health and ability to feel empowered.
Working in the different fields of practice and with different methods of intervention, social work has the knowledge-base to recognize and address the intrinsic importance of social exclusion and its effects, as well as recognizing external factors leading to exclusion and working to change them.

Social exclusion is also an instrumental cause of capability failures (Sen, 2000). Exclusion from social relations results in other deprivations, which further limit opportunities. When a deprivation has instrumental causes, it is useful to use the perspective of social exclusion to analyze whether the causal process can be better understood by invoking the idea of exclusion. For example, to be excluded from the formal labor market, which is not intrinsically damaging, can effect the opportunity of having social protection, which may lead to insecurity, poor health, or income poverty. This example has particular relevance for Latin America, where social protection is inconsistent, and where many informal-sector workers do not have health protection, which causes wide-spread feelings of insecurity (Tokman, 2007). Entry into the formal employment sector can open the door to social and economic citizenship, which in turn, is a prerequisite for belonging and being integrated in society. Understanding the causal processes leading to capability deprivation is relevant for social work to analyze the dynamics and interplay of the different factors affecting the interaction of the individual and the environment, and it can also inform policy decisions to improve the conditions of excluded groups.

A social exclusion perspective can enrich the practice and theory of social work at various levels. A vital interest in the issue of social exclusion for social workers must be focused on policy issues and on research which can lead to taking action. The challenge for social workers includes not only gaining a better understanding of the diverse phenomena of deprivation and poverty but also improving the conditions of clients; enhancing developmental, problem-solving, and coping capacities; contributing to the development and shape of social policy; and responding to the levels of social exclusion by introducing change and promoting social inclusion.

Strengthening Social Policies and Programs: A Role for Social Work?

Some governments in Latin American countries are making important efforts to implement innovative programs to promote social inclusion and the integration of excluded peoples, and have placed
the issue of confronting social exclusion at the top of their priorities. Such programs include Zero Hunger in Brazil, Heads of Households in Argentina, National Front Against Hunger in Guatemala, and Chile Solidario in Chile. Now there is an unprecedented opportunity for Latin American social workers to contribute to the design and implementation of social policies and programs aimed at fostering social inclusion. This does not mean, as Parada (2007) states, that social work will be “…simply a discipline in charge of the operationalization of implementation of state policies” (p. 566), but rather, it is an opportunity for social workers to both engage in a process prioritizing social issues that can bring change and provide their knowledge in understanding social exclusion and working toward an inclusive society.

Chile Solidario: An Illustration

Established by the Chilean government in 2002, Chile Solidario is a program of social protections for families in extreme poverty that combines aid and skills development in an integrated approach (Ministerio de Planificación Nacional y Política Económica [MIDEPLAN], 2002). The program acknowledges the distinction between the constitutive and instrumental aspects of social exclusion, which is evident in that its main objective is achieving social inclusion of poor families by integrating them into the public network of social services. The goal of this system was so that families would be integrated into their local surroundings and into existing social networks with an income above the line of extreme poverty (World Bank, 2004). The current aid approach of the program is to offer cash benefits and cash subsidies for participating families, as well as personalized psychosocial support for two years through the Puente Program as an effort toward social inclusion.

The program also takes into account the instrumental aspects of exclusion, by recognizing that exclusion from active citizenship can lead to other deprivations, further limiting opportunities for employment and access to education. For this, the program provides psychosocial support and participants also gain access to social promotion programs, including educational vouchers and labor benefits. Chile Solidario is innovative in understanding social protection as a central part of development and as an important instrument for freedom.

Social workers are presently playing a crucial role in this program (Saracostti, 2008). Using a social exclusion perspective, social workers are involved in direct practice, community intervention, and macro
policy practice. Social workers go door to door and invite poor families to participate in the program. If the family chooses to participate, the social worker helps them to identify their health, education, employment, housing, income, family life, and identification needs. The household and the social worker create a strategy for how these needs will be met and how progress will be monitored. At the community-intervention level, social workers are involved in coordinating an action network that supports the work of each family. At the macro level, social workers are involved with the Ministry of Social Planning in overseeing the program’s progress and its design. Social workers and Latin American policy makers can be encouraged by this example and consider the role of the social worker as strategic in understanding social exclusion while also relating this understanding to their knowledge and skills in promoting social inclusion.

Conclusion

A social exclusion perspective is both relevant and useful for social work theory and practice. At present in Latin America, there is a need to fill the important role of implementing active and efficient social policies and programs which can alleviate poverty and exclusion. Latin American social workers could be involved in strengthening these actions by contributing and engaging in a process aimed at social renewal and the attainment of inclusive societies, states, and countries.

Social workers can play a vital role in Latin America using a social exclusion perspective to understand the relational features in the experience of poverty, the intrinsic importance of exclusion, and the nature of social exclusion as an instrumental cause of capability failures. Relating this understanding with their knowledge, social workers would improve the community work, research, and influence policy issues at the macro level. In this sense, social workers can make significant and valuable contributions to social change and build more inclusive, stable, safe, and accepting societies that respect diversity and equality of opportunity for all.

Notes

1 In this paper I define Latin America to include the parts of the American continent where Spanish or Portuguese is the main national language (that is, Mexico, Central, and South America, including some countries in the Caribbean).
2 The capability approach is a framework for evaluating and assessing social arrangements, standards of living, inequality, poverty, justice, quality of life, and well-being. According to Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, poverty must be seen as “the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of income.” The capabilities a person has according to Sen are, “the substantive freedoms he or she
enjoys to lead the kind of life she or he has reason to value” (1999, p. 87). Sen argues that a person’s freedom to live in the way one would like has intrinsic value and is therefore constitutive of the person’s being. The individuals’ capability of choosing and discriminating among possible livings is as valuable as the achieved functionings (“doings” and “beings”).


4 Subsidio Único Familiar to minors below 18 years old, subject to school assistance; Pension Asistencial for people over 65 years of age, subject to periodic health controls, Pension Asistencial for disabled persons who are heads of households, subject to periodical health controls, Pension Asistencial for people with mental disabilities, Subsidio al Consumo de Agua Potable, covering 100 percent of water bills for up to 15 cubic meters of monthly consumption for connected families.

References


International social work is gaining recognition as a distinct field of study and practice, and in this process, its meaning continues to be delineated. In this paper, I describe a series of experiences during a summer field practicum coordinating the final phase of a year-long qualitative research study on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Lira, northern Uganda. While not a conclusive statement on the nature of all international social work, this paper presents personal experiences to illustrate how the psychosocial skills, practices, and theory of the social work profession can lend themselves well to the emotional and managerial demands of international work in a post-conflict, developing country context.

In the summer of 2008, following my first year of graduate social work studies, I was hired to coordinate the third and final phase of a year-long qualitative research study in Lira, northern Uganda. Undertaken collaboratively between an American university and a prominent international nongovernmental organization (INGO), the study aimed to explore adolescent girls’ experiences of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and to assess relevant support structures in the context of conflict and displacement. Since the early 1980s, civil conflict ravaged northern Uganda, killing thousands and leaving more than 1.8 million people displaced (Integrated Regional Information Networks [IRIN], 2007; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2008). Rape and forced marriage were systematically and widely perpetrated as war tactics, and domestic violence increased due in part to the destruction of many traditional family and community support mechanisms (Annan, Blattman, Carlson, & Mazurana, 2008; Olara, 2004; Patrick, 2005). Despite recent improvements in security that have enabled
many of those who were displaced to begin returning to their home villages, multiple forms of SGBV remain commonplace (IDMC, 2008; IRIN, 2007).

My task in Lira was to supervise four Ugandan research staff in conducting and recording the final round of interviews with study participants. All interviewees were adolescent girls who had been displaced by the region’s civil conflict, and half were known survivors of SGBV. I came to the position with previous work experience in Uganda, a background in international public health, and a recently completed social work field placement in domestic violence. While I hoped the summer job would allow me to draw on my earlier professional work while providing hands-on management experience, the opportunity also unexpectedly helped clarify what “international social work” could mean for me in practice. In this paper, I present examples from my experiences in Lira to illustrate how the psychosocial skills, practices, and theory of social work can lend themselves well to the emotional and managerial demands of international work in a post-conflict, developing country context. Looking at my role primarily as one of “helper” in facilitating the completion of a study, I organize this discussion according to the three key phases of the helping process – beginning, middle or work, and ending phases – described in direct social work practice literature (Birnbaum & Cicchetti, 2005; Hepworth et al., 2006).

The Beginning Phase: Exploration, Engagement, and Planning

What is International Social Work?

As I entered graduate school, I was particularly interested in exploring the integration of social work into the international development and humanitarian fields. While much has been written on the subject, the definition of “international social work” continues to be debated. The International Federation of Social Workers (2000) suggests that the social work profession “promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being.” Within this broad understanding of the profession, definitions of international social work range from a set of specific skills and knowledge, to intercultural exchanges between social workers, to a more general global awareness within the profession (Healy, 2001; Midgley, 2001). Activities can include engaging with international populations domestically, conducting international development work, creating exchanges through international professional journals and meetings, and adapting interventions cross-culturally (Healy, 2001; Midgley, 2001).
Cox and Pawar (2006) build on these definitions by emphasizing the importance of promoting social work education and practice around the world to establish an integrated international profession that can respond appropriately and effectively to ongoing global challenges.

Caragata and Sanchez (2002) suggest that international social work remains largely in the domain of academia, noting that few of the posts within international development agencies are filled by social workers. However, many of the needs identified in the Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, for instance, point to the strengths of the social work profession, including provision of basic psychosocial services, security measures, and specialized mental healthcare when necessary (Inter-Agency Standing Committee [IASC], 2007). In the sections that follow, I draw on my experiences working with a research team – albeit distinct from strict development or humanitarian work – to contribute to the broader discussion of the meaning and relevance of international social work.

Being Where the Staff Are

I arrived in Lira enthusiastic to meet the research staff and begin our work together. We had only six weeks, and since the staff had all worked on earlier phases of the study, I expected that we could start quickly. Due to funding cuts, however, the INGO had recently laid off three of the four team members. Resources were secured to hire them back as consultants, but only through the duration of the study. At our first meeting, staff were reluctant to engage in discussions about anything but their grievances. They objected to how their terminations were handled, demanded higher salaries, and revealed little interest in introducing me to their earlier work.

In social work, the maxim “being where the client is” implies that a social worker must be attuned to a client’s concerns, expectations, life situation, cultural background, and psychological state, and adjust interventions accordingly (Goldstein, 2001). In some cases, this means addressing immediate matters before more substantive work can occur. Still jet-lagged and having spent weeks preparing for our early meetings, I was admittedly frustrated by how my work with the research team was beginning. Recognizing that to push forward with my own agenda would be both unwise and unsuccessful, though, I tried to “be where the staff were.”

We spent much of our first day together processing what had gone wrong in the past. Given the opportunity to talk openly, some staff eventually began to share deeper issues that were fueling their resentment.
Some of the staff admitted that they felt they had not been offered sufficient input into or ownership over earlier research phases, pointing to the fact that previous interview transcripts were locked in a room they had no access to. Others felt that concerns they had raised to previous staff in my position had not been sufficiently addressed. Taking the time to be where the staff were initially helped me better understand their concerns and expectations, and allowed us to begin to address some of the issues that we had control over. Collaboratively, we established guidelines for how we would work together (including how data would be stored and shared among us); developed contracts specifying expected roles, tasks, and salaries; and agreed to air work-related concerns when they arose. Though time consuming and seemingly slow moving, being where the staff were during our early meetings helped us address underlying concerns, set a precedent for tackling future problems, and helped us arrive at a place where we could move forward with our principal work.

The Work Phase: Implementation and Goal Attainment
Self-care and Staff Well-being

The methodology used in our study involved traveling long distances – often by a combination of car, bicycle, and foot – to conduct extensive interviews with adolescent girls affected by conflict and SGBV, most of whom had recently left internally displaced person camps to resettle in remote villages. Interviewees were also facing a number of other difficulties: most were not in school because their families could or would not pay their school fees, many were having difficulty feeding their own young children because of a recent drought, and some faced ongoing domestic abuse. A smaller number of the participants were suffering from serious psychological distress or medical conditions, including HIV. Though safety in northern Uganda had significantly improved by the summer of 2008, rumors of re-insurgency were not uncommon. At times the researchers and I were left feeling powerless against these considerable systemic obstacles.

To prevent burnout and the vicarious trauma that can result from exposure to such difficult circumstances, social work promotes the importance of maintaining staff wellness through a combination of self-care and organizational responsiveness (Clemans, 2004; Pross, 2006). Given the challenging context and content of our study, the research staff and I established a plan to regularly check safety updates, set a norm that no one would travel to a place where they
felt unsafe, and agreed to the importance of establishing a work/life balance. In my own experience working at an agency serving domestic violence survivors, I had also found group debriefings valuable for reflecting on the emotional nature of the work (Clemans, 2004). Some of the research staff also suggested such debriefs, so we agreed to meet periodically as a group to express and share our experiences (United Nations High Commission on Refugees [UNHCR], 2001). Doing so was helpful, enabling us to discuss the importance of establishing boundaries with interviewees despite our natural desire to assist them beyond our means, and to reflect on what we could do. Together we developed a list of interviewees with acute needs, should discrete funding become available to assist them; identified referral sources including free or low-cost HIV services, village-based social workers, and a regional hospital with a psychiatrist on staff; and we brainstormed ideas for more sustainable programs that could address the needs of study participants.

Supportive Supervision

Social work also places importance on individual supportive supervision, in which a supervisor is concerned with decreasing job-related stress, and enhancing skills, knowledge, and positive attitudes toward work (Coleman, 2003). Such supervision, offered in a culturally appropriate manner, might have been useful for the research staff whose jobs required intimate conversations with SGBV survivors, and who had themselves lived through the region’s conflict. Given the complexities of managing a team from a different culture, working for the first time in a post-conflict setting, and hearing daily stories of significant trauma, I certainly would have benefited from supportive supervision as well. Unfortunately, such support was not available within the context of our study or in the INGO partner office more broadly.

Promoting Critical Reflection

As I reviewed interview transcripts from earlier research phases, I noticed that the researchers often seemed to stifle or overtly direct interviewees’ responses. Researchers tended to rely on close-ended questions, leading interviewees to stop when they might have had more to say. They also stacked questions, making it difficult for interviewees to know which to respond to first and they frequently revealed their own personal feelings about an issue, potentially hindering in-
terviewees from sharing their own experiences and perspectives. Process recordings, which require students to reflect critically with a trained supervisor on interactions with clients, are an important aspect of social work training (Neuman & Friedman, 1997). I found that adapting the process recording tool was also helpful in working with research staff to improve data collection. The researchers and I reviewed their earlier interview transcripts together, exploring why they might have asked a question in a particular way, what the implications might be for interviewees’ replies, and how they could support more free-flowing interviewee responses. In some cases, I learned that cultural norms dictated the interviewing style that a researcher had chosen. In others, by dissecting and analyzing their communication through this adaptation of a simple social work learning tool, the research staff seemed to become more aware of their own roles in shaping interviewee responses. Eventually, this practice helped improve the data that we collected and, more importantly, created a space for interviewees to more freely share their stories.

The Ending Phase: Termination

Given the emotional content of their discussions and the fact that our research involved intense contact and disclosure over an extended period of time, many of the researcher/interviewee relationships had become quite close (Bordeau, 2000). One interviewee had named her daughter after a research staff member, others had invited researchers to their wedding ceremonies. The research staff similarly shared that they had become attached to the interviewees and felt guilty about leaving them once the study ended.

Bordeau (2000) suggests that the sensitive nature of some qualitative research can contribute to many of the same dynamics of a therapeutic relationship. In direct social work practice, termination refers to the process of formally ending a social worker/client relationship. Ideally, this process recognizes that separation involves mixed feelings for both social workers and clients, and helps prepare clients for a future in which the gains from the social work relationship will be maintained (Hepworth et al., 2006). While not required as part of the study, facilitating appropriate and meaningful termination between researchers and interviewees seemed important given that we were conducting the final phase of a year-long study, during which close relationships had developed.

Early on, the research team and I began to discuss how interview-
ees and the staff themselves might feel about and react to the study ending. As a result of these discussions, we added space at the end of our interview guide for researchers to share what they had gained from the year-long process, as well as explicit questions to allow interviewees to discuss their feelings about ending. Some interviewees chose not to use this time, but others shared many feelings, including sadness, disappointment, contentment, or hope for the future. To address some of these feelings and draw on a strengths perspective, which asserts that the strengths and resources of people in their environments rather than their problems or deficits should be the focus of the helping process, we also devoted time to helping interviewees identify strengths and supports that they could call upon after the study was over (Chapin, 1995). Combined, these efforts helped us actively prepare for and make more meaningful the study's inevitable ending.

Recommendations

Though neither a statement on what all international social work is or should be, nor a complete description of my work in Lira, I have sought to provide just a few examples of how social work tools and frameworks influenced my efforts to facilitate group cohesion, problem-solving, and the completion of research in an international context. In hindsight, I might have applied lessons from social work even further; facilitating, for instance, more explicit group discussions about how individual, cultural, and social power dynamics affected my relationship – as a white supervisor from an American university – with the Ugandan research staff, as well the relationships of interviewees – mostly poor with limited formal education – with the university-educated researchers (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005).

More than any academic exploration of international social work could, reflecting on both what I did and what I might have done differently in Lira has helped me clarify the potential that social work has to contribute to both the managerial and technical aspects of work in an international context. To further move international social work from an academic debate to a more recognized and relevant field of practice, a combination of action, promotion, and education is needed (Cox & Power, 2006). When appropriate, traditional social work interventions, tools, and methods of supervision can be thoughtfully adapted to new professional and cultural contexts. Social workers currently in the humanitarian and development fields should do more to articulate and promote the advantages that our professional training brings to bear. Social work schools and professional associations must offer more international field practica to help students and
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recent graduates learn to apply the skills gained from courses and domestic fieldwork. Though neither academic study nor short-term practicum opportunities alone can ensure culturally sensitive, high quality, and locally appropriate international efforts, such opportunities have the potential to considerably benefit students, the social work profession, and the international community more broadly.

Notes
1 Throughout this paper, “study participants” and “interviewees” are used interchangeably.
2 The IASC issued these draft Guidelines in 2007 with the stated goal of enabling humanitarian actors to “plan, establish and coordinate a set of minimum multi-sectoral responses to protect and improve people’s mental health and psychosocial wellbeing in the midst of an emergency” (IASC, 2007, p. v).

References


Fencing Fears: The United States Border Fence and the Responsibility of Social Workers

JEN SCOTT

The October 2006 Secure Fence Act permitted the construction of over 700 miles of double reinforced fence along the United States-Mexico border. While perhaps not the one intended, the fence is having an impact: the death of migrants attempting to cross the border has increased and the construct of “illegality” is being reified, heightening the insecurity of individuals who live in the U.S. with illegal or undocumented status. In addition, the fence can be understood as a statement of exclusion that leads to the further erosion of societal unity among the people who live within the U.S. borders. This paper contextualizes the political discourse that presumes that the construction of a wall is a viable solution to national concerns about migration and security in the history of cross-border migration and legislation. In so doing it analyzes the fence by delineating its effects on undocumented migrants and the power imbalances already evident within the larger U.S. society. Finally, it concludes by asking social workers to act in accordance with their obligation to promote social justice.

IN OCTOBER 2006 THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS PASSED legislation that symbolically defines its current policy with regard to the country’s southern neighbor. The Secure Fence Act permitted the construction of over 700 miles of double reinforced fence along the U.S.-Mexico border (Secure Fence Act, 2006). This policy was not a deviation from the norm: some form of border policing has been in place since the creation of the Border Patrol in 1904. The official “birth” of the modern fence can be traced to 1990, when the U.S. Border Patrol began constructing a barrier known as the “primary fence” on the California border (Nuñez-Neto & Garcia, 2007). The first 14 miles of
fence, completed in 1993, served as the “model” for the current fence project (Nuñez-Neto & Garcia, 2007). The latest construction strategy, the Southwest Border Fence Project, is part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Secure Border Initiative that committed to completing 670 miles of fencing by December 2008 (DHSb, 2008). Spanning the borders of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, much of the planned fence construction has been completed. Further plans include building through a number of major towns and across American Indian Nations, restricting rights previously protected by both the U.S. and Mexican governments (Seper, 2008).

Policies regarding fence construction and other forms of increased border enforcement have resulted in excessive spending and negative consequences for the people on either side of its boundaries. Under the Secure Border Initiative, the Department of Homeland Security spent an estimated 625 million USD on 215 miles of fencing (Government Accountability Office 2002, a). Studies estimate that there have been between two and three thousand deaths along the U.S.-Mexico border since 1995 (Rubio-Goldsmith et. al. 2006, 2007; GAO, 2006). Reports show that deaths along the border have doubled since 1995 (GAO, 2006) and in 2005 a record 472 deaths were reported (Nuñez-Neto, 2008). Deaths along the border are predominantly due to conditions resulting from increased environmental exposure, including hypothermia and heat stroke, as migrants have been “funneled” into harsher terrain due to stricter U.S. immigration policies (Rubio-Goldsmith et al., 2006, 2007; GAO, 2006; Cornelius, 2001).

While a complete historical analysis of U.S. immigration policy is beyond the scope of this paper, it is necessary to contextualize the problematic political discourse that presumes that the construction of a wall will resolve the complexities of migration and nationalism. This paper examines the fence from historical and legislative perspectives, analyzes its effects on undocumented migrants, offers a connection between the construction of the fence and power imbalances evident within the larger U.S. society, and asks social workers to act in accordance with their obligation to promote social justice.

United States - Mexico Border: History and Migration

The region of the US-Mexico border has a complex territorial history. Originally owned by several Native American Nations, after over 300 years of wars and purchases involving the U.S., Spain, and Mexico, the border was firmly established at its current location in 1853.
Initially, the U.S.-Mexico border was poorly demarcated, sporadically policed, and easily traversed by migrant workers (Massey, 2002). As it has become more “solid,” a complex interplay of socioeconomic and political forces on both sides of the border has come to shape who is and is not allowed to move across it freely. Over time, the border has essentially come to represent the dividing line between the demand and supply sides of an international labor market.

Until immigration policy dramatically shifted in 1986, immigration from Mexico to the U.S. reflected (or at least did not overtly prohibit) a pattern of circular migration. A variety of push and pull factors, linked to the economies of both states, influenced waves of migration during this period. Mexican workers migrated, legally or otherwise, to the U.S. for temporary work and then returned home (Massey, 2002). Migrants would fill U.S. labor needs for a period of time, but did not settle permanently in great numbers (Massey, 2002). Laborers experienced cycles of both active recruitment from employers and active deportation from the U.S. government on several different occasions. Various legal mechanisms, including guest worker programs, have facilitated this circular migration. The most well known, the Bracero program, began in 1942 and provided temporary visas to agricultural workers. Highly contested due to reports of civil rights violations by U.S. employers, this program was repealed in 1964. While the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965 provided few legal mechanisms for temporary work, circular migration continued unabated (Massey, 2002).

The passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) disrupted the characteristic pattern of temporary migration. The law discouraged immigrant outflow by promulgating policies of increased border security, fences, and actual or promised pathways to legal status (Massey, 2002). By coupling amnesty policies with increased impediments to entry, the IRCA essentially made it more beneficial for undocumented immigrants to stay in the U.S., since reentry became more costly (in terms of money, time, and/or security). Additionally, a precedent that continued residence could potentially result in the granting of amnesty and legal resident status was set. Possibly for these reasons, many migrants who would have returned home for temporary vacations began to take up permanent residence in the U.S. After 1986, substantial growth in the undocumented population began to be seen (Passel, 2005).

There were also other factors that led to an increase in undocumented immigration in the 1980s, including the collapse of the Mexican
Peso and the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Massey, 2002). A significant challenge presented by NAFTA is its failure to loosen restrictions on the movement of labor despite relaxing the movement of capital and goods across the border (Massey, 2002). Little has been done to address the facts that the economic and social conditions of the U.S. and Mexico are still widely disparate, and that no viable system that permits sufficient or unrestricted movement of labor across the border has been implemented. Thus, in response to the persistent high demand for labor by the U.S., and Mexico’s willingness to supply, undocumented migration has continued. Recent increases in barriers to entry, including the border fence, have only resulted in fewer immigrant departures. As of 2006, there are approximately 11.1 million undocumented people estimated to be residing in the U.S., a number that appears to be steadily growing (Passell, 2006).

Border Fence “Justification”

Supporters of the border fence justify its construction with two main claims. First, that it is necessary in order to curb the flow of undocumented immigrants, and second, that it will prevent terrorism. The actual impact of the border fence, however, is more accurately seen in the increased death rate of migrants attempting to cross the border; reinforcement of the construct of “illegality”; and heightened insecurity of the large population of families and individuals who live in the U.S. with undocumented status.

While reports from the border patrol and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) often claim that their border enforcement efforts have been somewhat successful in curbing the flow of undocumented migration, the number of undocumented immigrants entering the U.S. has increased (Ackleson, 2005). Whereas in the 1980s, approximately 130,000 undocumented persons arrived per year, in the period from 2000-2004, the number of yearly new arrivals was estimated to have increased to around 700,000 (Passel, 2005). Similarly, the trends in apprehensions of undocumented migrants found crossing the U.S.-Mexico border—the measure DHS uses to estimate undocumented migration—do not necessarily connect construction of the fence to decreased migration.

Despite ongoing border fence construction, the number of apprehensions has generally increased steadily, only showing signifi-
cant drops during three periods: from 1996 to 1997, 2000 to 2003, and recently, in 2006 (DHHSOIS, 2006, 2008). These periods of decreased apprehensions coincide with other events: the initial passing of the new immigration law in 1996, the attacks of September 11th and subsequent economic downturn, and the burst of the housing bubble and subsequent global financial crisis. Given that undocumented migration began to increase steadily in-between these two downturns despite the continued construction of the fence, it would be short-sighted to conclude that the fence caused them.

Proponents of the border fence assert that it is a necessary precaution in the war on terror. Supporters might argue that this is demonstrated by the fact that there have been no terrorist attacks on the U.S. since September 11, 2001. Yet in order for a claim that construction of the fence is necessary for the prevention of terrorism to hold, a connection must be made between the fence and the absence of terrorism. However, no such connection exists. Construction of the modern fence began in 1994, well before the terrorist attacks in 2001. Additionally, the majority of hijackers involved on September 11 held doctored passports and visas, and none entered the U.S. by crossing the southern border illegally (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks on the United States, 2004). Finally, if the illegal entry of terrorists via land borders was a legitimate concern, there would be similar anxiety and advocacy for fence construction on the Northern border with Canada. Instead, the Northern Border Project consists of minimal surveillance initiatives and no significant fence construction (DHS, 2008).

**Immigration Legislation**

Comprehensive immigration reform that both provides for the large undocumented population currently residing in the U.S. and creates a legal means by which future U.S. labor demands can be met is desperately needed. Recent legislation, however, has predominantly focused on increased enforcement of border and labor laws and deterrence strategies, including the border fence. Two legislative proposals that were recently passed, the REAL ID Act of 2005 (H.R. 1268) and the Secure Border Fence Act of 2006 (H.R. 6061), focus on “securing” the Southern border as the means of controlling illegal migration. The REAL ID Act grants the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) the power to waive certain laws that interfere with the construction of physical barriers at the border, and waives the govern-
ment from compliance with previous regulations imposed to protect environmental and indigenous rights. The Secure Border Fence Act, essentially an extension of many of the components of the REAL ID Act, authorized construction of 700 miles of double reinforced fence, security cameras, lights, and other measures to be used in order to protect and defend the Southern border (H.R. 6061).

Several policies aimed at addressing undocumented immigration have since been proposed in Congress, though none of them garnered sufficient support to become law. Comprehensive Immigration Reform bills have been proposed both in the Senate (as S. 1033, S. 2611, and S. 1348) and in the House of Representatives (as the Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, the Secure America through Verification and Enforcement [SAVE] Act of 2005 and 2007, and the STRIVE Act of 2007). Despite their inclusion of some provisions for undocumented individuals and temporary work visa programs, they all propose considerable increases in funding for Secure Border Initiatives, in other words, for increased fencing along the southern border.

Impact of the Border Fence

The gravest consequences of the fence are felt by those attempting to cross the border. Construction of the border fence has funneled migrants into dangerous terrain, resulting in a dramatic increase in deaths along the border due to environmental exposure (Rubio-Goldsmith et al., 2006; Nuñez-Neto & Garcia, 2007; Ackleson, 2005; Cornelius, 2001; Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2006). A 2006 U.S. Government Accountability Office report indicated that the annual number of deaths of undocumented migrants along the border has doubled since 1995 (GAO, 2006). The same report estimates that there were over 2,000 deaths between 1998 and 2004, and a 29% increase in the number of deaths in this period (GAO table page 42, 2006).

The construction of the border fence also impacts the undocumented population by reinforcing the social construct of “illegal” status. Being illegal is not an inherent personal quality; it is a status resulting from a combination of immigration laws and economic opportunities. Though some assert that those with “illegal” status are by nature more criminal because they arrived in the U.S. without authorization, undocumented people currently living in the U.S. have
not been found more likely to commit crime than the documented citizen population (Rumbaut et al., 2006). Evidence indicates that the undocumented population contributes substantially to the U.S. economy despite the fact that they are granted limited access to its resources. It is estimated that undocumented immigrants pay 80,000 USD more in taxes per capita than the amount needed to cover the costs related to their use of government benefits (Smith & Edmonston, 1997). These tax payments come from a combination of sales and property taxes, and “voluntary” income tax payments through Income Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITNs) (instead of Social Security Numbers), which require immigrants’ employers to make mandatory deductions from their pay (Smith & Edmonston, 1997). Additionally, workers who use false Social Security Numbers, largely undocumented immigrants, are estimated to contribute 7 billion USD to Social Security and 1.5 billion USD to Medicare (National Council on La Raza, 2008).

Despite their significant economic contributions, undocumented immigrants face significant difficulties in the U.S. They are denied access to the majority of benefits that are afforded to documented residents and citizens. Undocumented immigrants are ineligible for the majority of government benefits—public school education and Emergency Medicaid being the sole exceptions (PROWRA, 1996). Though they may have the capacity and training, as a result of their status, undocumented immigrants are often prohibited from obtaining high skills jobs and thereby precluded from obtaining higher economic status. A final impact of the fence is that in reinforcing the construct of illegality, it furthers the reality that life as an undocumented immigrant in the U.S. means living in a state of perpetual awareness, if not fear, of detection and deportation. This is due to the reality of the U.S. immigration and deportation system as it now operates. In 2007 roughly 29,786 immigrants were detained by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) daily (ICE, 2007).

A Call to Action for Social Workers

Social workers, as professionals bound by a Code of Ethics, are obliged to take action on problems created by the fence. Specifically, the core social work values of social justice and respect for the dignity and worth of every person drive this obligation. The value of social justice requires that “social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of
people” (NASW, 1996). Respecting the dignity and worth of the person means that social workers are obligated to “promote clients’ socially responsible self-determination” (NASW, 1996). These values provoke questions with regard to the fence. Does the border fence serve to promote social change and break down barriers that create vulnerable and oppressed groups, or does it reinforce further oppression and the vulnerability of a certain group of individuals? Likewise, does the border fence respect an individual’s right to determine what is right and necessary to best promote his or her survival and that of his or her family?

The Code of Ethics highlights that “social workers should engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully” (NASW, 1996). As the border fence does not grant all people equal access to resources, then, as the Code of Ethics asserts, social workers should be expected to address this through social or political action. For those living closer to the fence, it is possible to become involved in efforts to directly prevent more deaths along the border. Many agencies and faith-based organizations on both sides of the border currently offer relief to border crossers. Policy advocacy provides another avenue for engagement, as immigration and unnecessary death on U.S. soil are national issues that all representatives can be pressed to notice. If nothing else, on a personal level, education of friends and neighbors with regard to the border fence can help create national awareness about the issues that the fence generates. Social workers cannot “sit on the fence.” They must instead consider their ethical obligations in addressing the immensely complex reality of undocumented migration from Mexico to the U.S.

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Shifting From Social Service to Social Change

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Casa de Esperanza (Casa) is an influential domestic violence organization in St. Paul, Minnesota. Upon examining the changes that have occurred within the organization since its inception, we have struggled with returning to the original mission of addressing domestic violence only in the Latino/a community or remaining an agency that serves women from diverse backgrounds. Casa has decided to remain an organization dedicated to serving women from diverse backgrounds, but will now place the community, rather than the individual, at the center of the organization. Within the next ten years, Casa will shift from providing direct social services to working toward broader social change. Specific changes include phasing out direct services, mobilizing communities to fight violence against women as it intersects with other forms of violence, and advocating for legislative change.

As part of the Integrative Capstone Project at Columbia University School of Social Work (CUSSW), we were assigned to evaluate a modified case study of Casa de Esperanza (Casa). Casa is an existing domestic violence (DV) agency located in St. Paul, Minnesota, that was struggling with the decision to either return to its original mission of addressing DV in the Latino/a community or to remain an agency dedicated to serving women from diverse backgrounds. All information regarding Casa in the paper is based solely on information provided in the case study (Casa Esperanza, 2009). This paper presents the changes that we propose the agency make, and is written from the perspective of Casa as it is embarks on implementing these changes. In reality, none of the proposed changes have or will be implemented.

From its inception, Casa was guided by the mission to eliminate violence against women in the Latino/a community. In spite of this initial target group, increasingly diverse groups of women have sought our assistance. Upon analyzing data from organizational focus groups and surveys, our stakeholders have determined that gaps in services
provided by other organizations in the St. Paul, Minnesota area have positioned us to respond to the unique needs of women of color (Casa Esperanza, 2009). We have, therefore, decided to expand our focus in order to respond to women from all backgrounds, particularly women who are marginalized due to poverty, poor education, language barriers, and a fear of deportation, all of which increase the barriers to finding effective services (Women of Color Network, 2006).

Our first priority is to re-conceptualize the women we serve as the center of our organization, what Smith (2006) refers to as “re-centering.” Re-centering involves analyzing and organizing against DV in the context of its multiple layers of violence against communities of color (Smith, 2006). We aim to reject the mainstream concept of feminism that was created in response to the circumstances and needs of white women, and upon which DV organizations are often modeled.

By placing women of all backgrounds at the center of our organization, we are compelled to re-examine the division between social service and social change. According to Kivel (2007), social service work addresses the needs of individuals who have experienced violence, while social change work addresses the root causes of violence. Although we understand the need to provide direct social services, especially for those in crisis, we do not believe that these social services alone will eliminate violence against women. By working toward social change, Casa can help women challenge societal notions of violence rather than simply managing the individual trauma of DV.

The historic prioritizing of the individual over the community in traditional DV models has proven inadequate (Crenshaw, 1993; Bierra, 2007). Casa is committed to resisting and confronting all violence and oppression, including, but not limited to, racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and ageism. Intra-organizationally, we will adopt antioppressive language that brings attention to issues of power and privilege with our employees and clients, as well as with our stakeholders, funders, and other agencies with whom we collaborate. For instance, for as long as we continue to provide direct services, we will no longer assume that clients identify with traditional binary gender norms. Instead of asking whether clients are male or female on our intake forms, we will ask clients how they define their gender. The goal of this change is to avoid re-victimizing clients and to respect each client’s personal identity. In an effort to reorient and reorganize our focus to social change, our major recommendation is to place the community, rather than the individual,
at the center of our anti-violence work. Our revised mission statement and vision to reflect our focus on social change are as follows:

Mission Statement: The mission of Casa de Esperanza is to mobilize our communities to create a society founded on respect, equality, safety, and justice; a pursuit that requires the eradication of violence against women.

Guiding Principles: (1) We serve women from diverse backgrounds that seek safety and protection from domestic violence; (2) we put women at the center of our organization, taking into account the complexities of gender-and sexuality-based violence as experienced by communities of color; and (3) we are an organization dedicated to social change, complemented by sustainable social services.

Organizational Changes

In order to develop an organizational structure that prioritizes survivors as potential community organizers, Casa will reconceptualize our organizational chart to reflect Helgelsen’s (2005) web of inclusion, an integrated and organic structure that places leadership at the center of an interconnected web. We aim to disrupt hierarchical boundaries between Casa’s staff and constituents by developing leadership among our constituents, hiring constituents as interns and staff, placing constituents on the Board of Directors, and organizing regular community gatherings to facilitate community building among various stakeholders. We are not suggesting the dissolution of all boundaries between staff and constituents. We acknowledge that staff must maintain some level of institutional power in order to effectively organize. However, we are developing an organizational structure in which our constituents feel empowered to become an integral part of organizational change (Bierra, 2007).

Restructuring our organization to become more integrated within our community will also require a number of human resource changes. Our staff must begin to reflect the diversity of the communities we serve with regard to race, gender, culture, language, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, and ability. A recruitment committee consisting of community members and volunteers will be central to our recruiting, hiring, evaluation, and retention processes (Fong & Gibbs, 1995). Before recruiting new staff, job descriptions must be reviewed, evaluated, and re-written to include the ideals of our new mission. Casa must implement activities to incorporate new
staff members into an environment in which they feel comfortable working with existing staff (Mor Barak, 2000). Evaluation of workers will be expanded to include feedback from other staff, survivors, and the broader community. Russo (2001) notes that the professionalization of DV work has encouraged a hierarchical organizational structure within agencies, resulting in services that are provided by individuals who are increasingly removed from the violence and grassroots activism that initially spurred the DV movement. Casa has been deeply impacted by the professionalization of our once community-based origins, and now aspires to shift away from such hierarchical leadership.

We must reorganize our budget and diversify our funding sources. Currently, 80 percent of our budget comes from state and federal revenue to provide social services (Casa Esperanza, 2009). The majority of government funding available is specifically for direct services. Within that constraint, we are unable to serve women who do not have legal residency as our funding requires proof of legal residency or citizenship for each individual we serve. We cannot rely on these funds as we transition to a social change organization. We aim to reduce our dependency on government funding by half over the next five years. Our revised fundraising plans include implementing small- and large-scale fundraising programs, fostering individual community-based donors, soliciting foundation funding from progressive sources, and applying for a broader range of federal and state government grants, including funding to work with individuals who are undocumented. In order to incorporate all of these fundraising activities, the development department, which includes representation from Casa’s community constituents, must be strengthened. Fundraising efforts should be tied into community organizing strategies. Outreach should pursue both diverse communities and political, philanthropic, religious, and educational leaders.

We must re-brand and communicate our new identity to our stakeholders. Following Kotter’s (1996) process of change theory, we will anchor our new mission and vision within the agency’s culture by forming a Community Collaboration Board of three to five community stakeholders. The board will communicate our mission and vision internally (stakeholder meetings, staff development) and externally (annual reports, direct mail, email, newsletters, and media communications). Institutionalizing these innovative approaches into Casa’s organizational culture will ensure that the new mission and vision are fully aligned.
Micro-Level Changes

Casa’s programs will continue in the short-term to include comprehensive case management in which survivors are provided with shelter, information, and referrals to legal and medical services as well as public benefits. We envision a gradual phasing out of a significant portion of our direct services over the next five to ten years. Sokoloff and Pratt (2005) argue that the DV shelter system is often modeled similarly to the prison system. Women’s activities are monitored and policed, and they are cut off from their friends and families. Sokoloff and Pratt write, “The shelter system mirrors the abusive patterns of control that women seek to leave in battering relationships and isolates women from their communities” (p. 145). We will continue in the short-term to conduct a needs assessment to ensure that we are addressing the needs of survivors by utilizing an empowerment approach to our direct services.

To align services with Casa’s revised mission, we will use as the primary practice modality a constructivist empowerment approach asserting that women are the experts in their own lives (Peled, Eisikovits, Enosh, & Winstok, 2000). Advocates will be trained to defer to the choices that women make with respect to whether or not they leave abusive relationships and to focus on helping women gain resources and support. Shelter care will be phased-out over the next five to ten years and the continued need for shelter care will be addressed through capacity building with other DV organizations that serve women in the St. Paul area.

Mezzo-Level Changes

Historically, violence against women has been viewed as a private issue and women alone have been held accountable for protecting their children and rebuilding their lives. Violence is a public issue that the entire community must be responsible for eradicating. Sustainable violence prevention is contingent on a community’s willingness to challenge normative behaviors and attitudes. Therefore, we are pursuing community organizing as the focal point of our struggle against DV (Bowen, Gwiasda, & Brown, 2004). Such an approach operates across underlying systemic issues that create inequalities in the distribution of power and resources that directly contribute to violence against women (Crenshaw, 1993).
To begin this process, we will conduct a thorough needs assessment of our community’s understanding of DV and its ability to respond to it. Following Hardina (2002), we will conduct semi-structured interviews and focus groups. These interviews will assess community resources, as well as community members’ understanding of the nature, causes, and potential responses to violence against women. Focus groups will include women who have previously sought services for DV, and service providers and professionals in allied areas, such as the family and criminal court systems, hospitals, and schools. We will also involve stakeholders such as representatives from the media, local businesses, academics, and representatives from other groups who have not traditionally been active in the anti-DV movement.

Following an analysis of the needs assessment, Casa will mobilize toward community activism. Community outreach programs should be expanded to include programs for children, adolescents, women, and men about issues of DV. Community organizing efforts will be two-fold. The first strategy is to raise awareness within communities about violence towards women, its intersection with other forms of violence, and the impact DV has on individuals, families, and communities. The goal of this strategy is to break the silence and stigma surrounding DV and underscore that this is not just a “women’s problem” but a human rights issue that affects and oppresses all of our communities.

The second strategy is to organize around specific community issues that hinder DV survivors and communities at large from overcoming cycles of violence. Housing, financial security, and immigration are significant concerns. Casa intends to address these issues through building coalitions with other anti-DV, human rights, and anti-oppression groups to spread awareness about these rights to members of the community. We will facilitate letter-writing campaigns, protests, rallies, and meetings with legislators and executive directors of non-profit organizations to bolster support. We will have a visible presence at community events, and we will provide educational awareness through public service announcements, radio and TV interviews, as well as presentations at schools, adult education centers, and community centers.

Macro-Level Changes

In order to complement our community organizing approaches and to promote larger, systemic change, Casa will join the movement that reframes DV as an international human rights issue. We will advocate for legislative changes that push beyond the current
limits in U.S. policies. The goal is to connect individually experienced DV to community violence, state-led violence, and other systems of oppression that perpetuate violence (Bettinger-Lopez, 2008).

Casa will unite with other human rights coalitions. In doing so, we will draw on our strengths and local experiences to inform national and international strategies for combating violence against women. We will also assist in leveraging the work of local, national and international organizations to bolster media coverage, educational outreach, and policy changes.

Casa will benefit from and contribute to advocacy efforts focused on social change at the individual, local community, national, and international levels. By connecting women’s experiences with DV at the local level to broader systemic issues, the injustices faced by the women we serve becomes the basis for bringing impact litigation, developing testimony for congressional hearings, lobbying for legislative change, and highlighting the systemic issues that exacerbate violence against women.

Conclusion

The challenge Casa faces with regards to leadership in the field of DV prevention lies in balancing the constant demands of direct social service provision with the rapidly changing macro-level contexts. We have provided a framework for implementing changes at each of the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of social work services. Reconsidering and restructuring Casa’s mission will enable us to create an organization that truly addresses violence against women as it intersects with other forms of violence and impacts communities. Community organizing to end DV entails active participation and the articulation of the clear message that all people have the responsibility to end violence (Hart, 1995). By transforming from a social service to a social change organization, we can empower our community to eliminate violence against women.

References


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