Research on Social Work Practice

Guest Editor's Foreword
Michael J. Holosko
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Guest Editor's Foreword

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There have been a series of significant, niggling questions placed at the feet of the social work profession that have had much to do with shaping its practice and professional identity in North America. The first was, Is social work a profession?—a question answered by the leading authority on professions at that time, Abraham Flexner, at the National Conference on Charities and Correction, an association of the Charitable Organization Societies and Settlement Houses in 1915. Based on the sociological traits of a profession, Flexner concluded that it was not, but it was an intellectual activity with a mediating function that linked individuals with social functioning problems to helpful resources. This issue triggered a debate about social work's professional status and identity, the likes of which had not been seen before. This debate is still apparent today, as *Research on Social Work Practice* published a special edition in 2001, edited by David Austin, that updated Flexner's concern.

The next niggling question, the subject of this journal, attempts to discuss, What is the definition of practice? By using Harriett Bartlett's 1958 working definition of social work practice, published by the National Association of Social Workers, this article similarly updates this current practice debate. It was not the intention of this special edition to rework the working definition of practice but to invite leading scholars and practitioners to respond to our definitional dilemma, that is, social work's long-standing inability to define itself in a way in which we are satisfied. Each lead author in this special edition has at least 25 years of practice and/or educational experience (and some have much more). They also have practice/educational experiences that span at least 16 different countries of the world. As a result, the international flavor of this special edition contains submissions from the United States, Canada, Hong Kong, and New Zealand. Marshall McLuhan's prophecy that we are "a global village," now literally hot-wired by fiber optics and satellites, is very apparent in this collection of articles. Also apparent is that our profession's persistent search for its identity is wrapped around a central core, and that core is a search for an acceptable definition of practice. Hopefully, these

articles will contribute to the assisting of both of these quests. But alas, I would prefer that you be the judge of that!

Research on Social Work Practice

Working Definition of Social Work Practice

Harriet M. Bartlett

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Working Definition of Social Work Practice

Harriet M. Bartlett
National Association of Social Workers

Social work practice, like the practice of all professions, is recognized by a constellation of value, purpose, sanction, knowledge, and method. No part alone is characteristic of social work practice nor is any part described here unique to social work. It is the particular content and configuration of this constellation which makes it social work practice and distinguishes it from the practice of other professions. The following is an attempt to spell out the components of this constellation in such a way as to include all social work practice with all its specializations. This implies that some social work practice will show a more extensive use of one or the other of the components but it is social work practice only when they are all present to some degree.

VALUE

Certain philosophical concepts are basic to the practice of social work, namely:

1. The individual is the primary concern of this society.
2. There is interdependence between individuals in this society.
3. They have social responsibility for one another.
4. There are human needs common to each person, yet each person is essentially unique and different from others.
5. An essential attribute of a democratic society is the realization of the full potential of each individual and the assumption of his social responsibility through active participation in society.
6. Society has a responsibility to provide ways in which obstacles to this self-realization (i.e., disequilibrium between the individual and his environment) can be overcome or prevented.

These concepts provide the philosophical foundation for social work practice.

PURPOSE

The practice of social work has as its purposes:

1. To assist individuals and groups to identify and resolve or minimize problems arising out of disequilibrium between themselves and their environment.
2. To identify potential areas of disequilibrium between individuals or groups and the environment in order to prevent the occurrence of disequilibrium.
3. In addition to these curative and preventive aims, to seek out, identify, and strengthen the maximum potential in individuals, groups, and communities.

Sanction (i.e., authoritative permission; countenance, approbation, or support). Social work has developed out of a community recognition of the need to provide services to meet basic needs, services which require the intervention of practitioners trained to understand the services, themselves, the individuals, and the means for bringing all together. Social work is not practiced in a vacuum or at the choice of its practitioners alone. Thus, there is a social responsibility inherent in the practitioner's role for the way in which services are rendered. The authority and power of the practitioner and what he represents to the clients and group members derive from one or a combination of three sources:

1. *Governmental agencies* or their sub-divisions (authorized by law).
2. *Voluntary incorporated agencies*, which have taken responsibility for meeting certain of the needs or providing certain of the services necessary for individual and group welfare.
3. *The organized profession*, which in turn can sanction individuals for the practice of social work and set forth the educational and other requirements for practice and the conditions under which that practice may be undertaken, whether or not carried out under organizational auspices.

KNOWLEDGE

Social work, like all other professions, derives knowledge from a variety of sources and in application brings forth further knowledge from its own processes. Since knowledge of man is never final or absolute, the social worker in his application of this knowledge takes into account those phenomena that are exceptions to existing generalizations and is aware and ready to

deal with the spontaneous and unpredictable in human behavior. The practice of the social worker is typically guided by knowledge of:

1. Human development and behavior characterized by emphasis on the wholeness of the individual and the reciprocal influences of man and his total environment—human, social, economic, and cultural.
2. The psychology of giving and taking help from another person or source outside the individual.
3. Ways in which people communicate with one another and give outer expression to inner feelings, such as words, gestures, and activities.
4. Group process and the effects of groups upon individuals and the reciprocal influence of the individual upon the group.
5. The meaning and effect on the individual, groups, and community of cultural heritage including its religious beliefs, spiritual values, law, and other social institutions.
6. Relationships, i.e., the interactional processes between individuals, between individual and groups, and between group and group.
7. The community, its internal processes, modes of development and change, its social services and resources.
8. The social services, their structure, organization, and methods.
9. Himself, which enables the individual practitioner to be aware of and to take responsibility for his own emotions and attitudes as they affect his professional functions.

Method (i.e., an orderly systematic mode of procedure. As used here, the term encompasses social casework, social group work, and community organization). The social work method is the responsible, conscious, disciplined use of self in relationship with an individual or group. Through this relationship the practitioner facilitates interaction between the individual and his social environment with a continuing awareness of the reciprocal effects of one upon the other. It facilitates change: (1) within the individual in relation to his social environment; (2) of the social environment in its effect upon the individual; (3) of both the individual and the social environment in their interaction.

Social work method includes systematic observation and assessment of the individual or group in a situation and the formulation of an appropriate plan of action. Implicit in this is a continuing evaluation regarding the nature of the relationship between worker and client or group, and its effect on both the participant individual or group and on the worker himself. This evaluation provides the basis for the professional judgment which the worker must constantly make and which determines the direction of his activities. The method is used predominately in interviews, group sessions, and conferences.

Techniques (i.e., instrument or tool used as a part of method). Incorporated in the use of the social work method may be one or more of the following techniques in different combinations: (1) support, (2) clarification, (3) information-giving, (4) interpretation, (5) development of insight, (6) differentiation of the social worker from the individual or group, (7) identification with agency function, (8) creation and use of structure, (9) use of activities and projects, (10) provision of positive experiences, (11) teaching, (12) stimulation of group interaction, (13) limit-setting, (14) utilization of available social resources, (15) effecting change in immediate environmental forces operating upon the individual or groups, (16) synthesis.

Skills (i.e., technical expertness; the ability to use knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance). Competence in social work practice lies in developing skill in the use of the method and its techniques described above. This means the ability to help a particular client or group in such a way that they clearly understand the social worker's intention and role, and are able to participate in the process of solving their problems. Setting the stage, the strict observance of confidentiality, encouragement, stimulation or participation, empathy, and objectivity are means of facilitating communication. The individual social worker always makes his own creative contribution in the application of social work method to any setting or activity.

As a way of increasing skill and providing controls to the activity of the social work practitioner, the following are utilized: (1) recording, (2) supervision, (3) case conferences, (4) consultation, (5) review and evaluation.

TEACHING, RESEARCH, ADMINISTRATION

Three important segments of social work, namely, teaching, research, and administration, have significance for the development, extension, and transmission of knowledge of social work practice. These have many elements in common with social work practice, but in addition have their own uniqueness and some different objectives.

Research on Social Work Practice

The History of the Working Definition of Practice

Michael J. Holosko

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The History of the Working Definition of Practice

Michael J. Holosko
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This article reviews the history of efforts to develop a comprehensive definition of social work practice, including the attempts by the Charity Organizational Societies and Settlement Houses, the scientific philanthropy movement, the Flexner conference, the Milford conference, the United Nations' survey, the Hollis-Taylor report, the 1958 working definition, the Boehm curriculum study, Barlett's analysis, the Madison meeting, the O'Hare meeting, the International Federation of Social Workers definition, and the Kentucky conference.

It is indeed a rather curious and embarrassing irony that after being in existence for some 400 years, the profession of social work is still seeking to define itself. Some have concluded that this definitional dilemma plagues the profession's ability to move forward with its purpose (Bartlett, 1958, 1970; Cheyney, 1923; Gordon, 1962). Yet, others are convinced that spending time on our definition distracts us from the study of what social workers actually do (Bitensky, 1978) and in this sense is a waste of time and energy. This journal assertively argues the former position and puts forward a series of selected articles that demonstrates the urgent need for a simple, clear, and meaningful definition that has application in today's ever-changing world. The assumption underpinning each article in this special edition of *Research on Social Work Practice* is echoed by Wakefield's (2001) statement at a recent conference on reworking the working definition of practice: "Social work's lack of a clear consensual foundation is unique among the professions, and I think, disastrous for social work's long term credibility and effectiveness" (p. 1).

The purpose of this article was not to redefine a definition of practice—as that has been tried unsuccessfully before. It was to take the "bird-in-hand" definition of social work practice, Bartlett's (1958) working definition, and

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have leading scholars and practitioners comment on its viability and relevance to the current practice of social work. This purpose then has two objectives. One is to rekindle the definitional flame and keep the issue alive to stimulate additional debate and discussion. Second, likened to the critical mass theory borrowed from physics, it is hoped this collection of articles can add yet another speck of dust, in this case, a critical knowledge speck, to continue to advance the need for a more meaningful and relevant definition of social work practice. Taken together, these objectives can be best summarized by William James (1906) in his classic essay on pragmatism as "seeking the difference that makes the difference" (p. 1).

MILESTONES IN THE HISTORY OF THE
WORKING DEFINITION OF PRACTICE

Just as the working definition itself cannot be discussed in any intellectual way without understanding its context, the history of the working definition has its own context. Two features that characterize its unique historical context include its resurfacing at different points in time in the history and development of the profession and major milestones. In regard to the former, as the profession evolved in North American society (from about the Industrial Revolution onward), different social, political, economic, and technological influences have significantly shaped social work's need to define itself. (see Albers, 2001; Ramsay, 2001, for excellent examples of these historical accounts). Like the Galapagos sea turtle surfacing for air to seek its path back to the island to breed, the quest for trying to find itself has almost become an immutable feature of social work (Albers, 2001) both in the practice worlds where it occurs and in the educational arenas where it is taught. That social work has not gotten very far in finding this essential concern should not be taken to mean that the hunt for a definition is therefore unimportant. Indeed, like the metaphoric sea turtle, many in the field believed and still believe that we, the profession, will find the island, nest, and hatch something that can give life to a renewed definition of practice. This was certainly Bartlett's (1958) vision when she offered her ground-breaking and seminal working definition. If it was not, she would not have written the subsequent *Common Base of Social Work Practice* (1970), which both incorporated earlier criticisms of the working definition and greatly expanded upon it. Indeed, social workers have struggled for years to define the profession and develop a conceptual framework that could "house" the core elements of the definition (Ramsay, 2001).

Major milestones of the history of the definition of practice will be summarized here in an effort to provide additional insights into social work's longstanding plight to define itself. These are not offered as all inclusive but as major bench marks. They also focus on North American milestones and exclude a discussion of social work's "formal birth" in Great Britain and adolescence in Germany (through Bismarck's national health insurance in 1883) prior to social work's arrival with the new immigrants and the Industrial Revolution in Canada and the United States. These milestones can be thought of chronologically as pre–working definition, the working definition and its fallout, and post–working definition. They will be briefly described in relation to their ongoing struggle to define ourselves.

PRE–WORKING DEFINITION

Charitable Organizational Societies and Settlement Houses

Both of these forms of social welfare were imported from the United Kingdom and marked the formal beginning of the profession and practice of social work as we know it today in North America. Both arrived before the turn of the century, espoused the essence of social reform, and were committed to principles of voluntary philanthropy and improving the conditions of the less fortunate in society (Austin, 1983). In the same time period, the actual term *social work* was coined by educator Simon Patten and was presumably applied to the friendly visitors and volunteers of the movement. This milestone laid an important foundation block about social work's altruistic motives, the acknowledgement of a concern for the misplaced values of individuals and societies, social justice and reform targeted primarily at poverty, and the problems of society and how they affected individuals. Social work's purpose clearly was to help those in need in whichever way it could, primarily through the provision of tangible resources (e.g. food, clothing, housing, and money). With this purpose established, these volunteers began to assert their methods of intervention, which were to help socialize people to function better in society.

Emergence of Scientific Philanthropy and Individual Problems

At the turn of the 20th century, voluntary philanthropy gave rise to scientific philanthropy as social reform shifted from a religious-based auspice to an educational one. With it came the 14-year debate (1909-1923) between

Jane Addams, a leader of the settlement house movement targeted at eradicating poverty, and Mary Richmond, who advocated social reform by providing services to individuals based on need, giving rise to casework as we know it today (Richmond, 1917, 1922). A shift in social work's thinking of the problems of society to problems of individuals created a schism in the profession that has persevered until today. In the early development of the profession and the emergence of formal social welfare organizations, the nature of comprehensiveness and interconnectedness of this duality was never fully explored or firmly rooted in a broad-based philosophical domain and practice orientation (Ramsay, 2001, p. 10). This milestone was significant in reaffirming the social conscience value of social work; defining casework methods with individuals, small groups, or families; acknowledging the role of empirical research in our methods of intervention; and, unfortunately, creating the longstanding polarizing practice schism between the dependency problems of individuals and problems of societies.

The Flexner Conference (1915)

In 1915, Abraham Flexner presented his analysis of the social work profession at the National Conference on Charities and Correction on the topic "Is social work a profession?" He concluded that it was an intellectual activity but not a profession, as it did not meet the core sociological traits of a profession. This conference squarely tabled issues about social work's purpose, knowledge base, sanction, and method. The issue of social work's professional status affecting its identity has been debated extensively since this conference (Austin, 2001). Austin (1983), in his earlier analysis of the Flexner conference, concluded that perhaps the greatest subsequent impact on the social work profession was Flexner's belief that a profession must have a "technique capable of communication through an orderly and highly specialized educational discipline" (p. 368). Given the diverse nature of social work, this was ostensibly not possible.

The Milford Conference (1929)

Convened between 1925 and 1929 to seek the common threads inherent in the various fields of practice, the Milford conference delineated the importance of balancing generic and specialized areas of practice. In an effort to answer whether social work was a disparate group with technical skills or a unified profession with integrated knowledge and skills, the numerous conference participants concluded that social work is one singular profession

with more similarities than differences among its specialties (Brieland, 1977). In addition to unifying the profession through the casework approach, their report, published as *Social Case Work: Generic and Specific* (American Association of Social Workers, 1935), indicated that the future of casework would be contingent on using the community and its resources, more research to make better casework decisions, and the defining role of the community agency itself (a major sanction for practice) in influencing social work practice.

Training for Social Work: An International Survey of the United Nations

The national survey paralleling one carried out in the United Kingdom (Younghusband, 1949) laid the foundation for ascribing social work activities or functions in the following three specific areas: palliative activity, protective and rehabilitative activity and preventative activity (United Nations, 1950). These activities, which formed the basis of "what social workers do," were anchored in the main objectives or purpose of social work: to assist individuals, families, and groups to perform an integrating function by bringing services together and to focus attention on problems that require remedial and preventive services. They also clearly spoke to where social workers do it or its sanction.

The Hollis-Taylor Report (1951)

The U.N. document served as the jumping-off point for the 1951 Hollis-Taylor report commissioned by the national Council on Social Work Education. The report both defined professional and nonprofessional activities and significantly affected curriculum development in undergraduate and graduate programs in Canada and the United States. The report, published as *Social Work Education in the United States*, fuelled the previously alluded to individual versus societal dichotomy about the purpose of the profession when it stated,

> The social work profession in the last quarter century has . . . to an increasing degree, concentrated on the improvement of the quality of individualized service. . . . The profession has accepted too little of a unified responsibility for appraising and improving social welfare institutions. (Hollis & Taylor, 1951, p. 142)

It also reaffirmed the profession's commitment to a more generic orientation to social work practice.

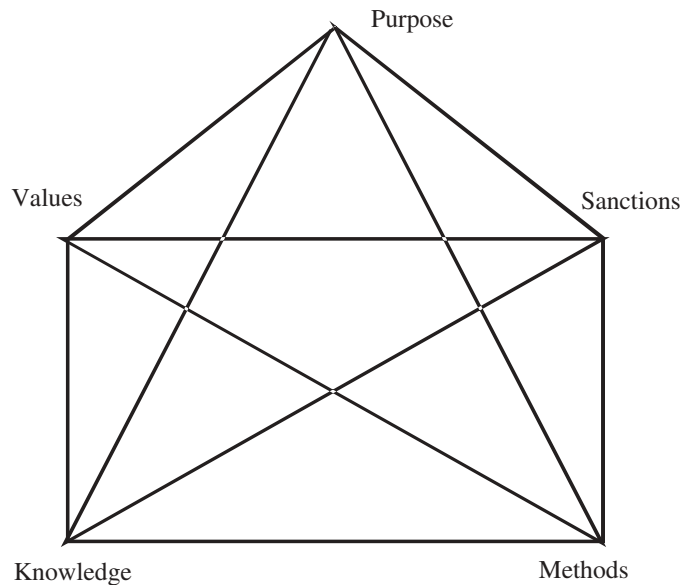### THE WORKING DEFINITION OF PRACTICE AND ITS FALLOUT

The 1958 Working Definition

In 1955, seven different and unique professional organizations joined together to form the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). These were the American Association of Social Work, the Association for the Study of Community Organization, the American Association of Medical Social Workers, the American Association of Psychiatric Social Work, the National Association of School Social Workers, the Association of Group Workers, and the Social Work Research Group. This diverse group banded together to advance the continuing effort to determine a single profession and to seek a common base of practice that applied to all activities and settings. As indicated by Delahanty (1961), the thrust of the NASW at this time was to

> increase the visibility, status and public image of social work,
> develop uniform professional standards and corresponding education and training that could facilitate mobility on a nation scale, and
> formulate social policy collectively and organize effective action to implement these policies. (p. iv)

One of the first tasks of the NASW was to define social work practice in a way acceptable to these seven subsumed organizations who had very different histories and views. As chairperson of its Commission on Practice, Bartlett guided the group toward the first working definition in 1956, revised in 1958. The definition was described as a constellation of value, purpose, sanction, knowledge, and method, and no part alone was characteristic of social work practice. It is the content configuration of this constellation that makes social work practice unique and distinguishes it from the practice of other professions (p. 35). This configuration can be illustrated as a pentahedral constellation, as in Figure 1.

To further clarify this working definition, Bartlett elucidated terms and asked questions about social work's purpose (why), function and services (what), methods and process (how), working relationship (with whom), sanction (under what authority), asperse and location (where), and points of intervention (when) (Delahanty, 1961). The definition, the commission's major product, was regarded by Bartlett (1961) as a "beginning formulation, which would grow in charity and change in scope as practice is better understood" (p. 21). Finally, the profession gave birth to a working definition of practice the likes of which had never before been seen. Many in academia and practice both applauded and lauded the initiative, but let us not forget that

Figure 1:   Core components of the 1958 working definition of practice.

until Bartlett's work, social work's identity and future was fraught with ambivalence at best and apathy at worst.

Boehm (1959) Curriculum Study

Under the auspices of the Council of Social Work Education, Boehm (1959) conducted a comprehensive curriculum study of social work that showed a great degree of consistency and agreement in relation to the working definition's goals and values of social work. Where Boehm's study differed was in operationalizing the activities of social work in various levels, which transcended fields: activities of individual practitioners, group workers, and community workers. Thus, Boehm claimed a broad-based orientation for social work that recognized the following five specializations: casework, group work, community organization, administration, and research methods. What he called the functions of social work referred to the enhancement of social functioning, including restoration of impaired capacity, provision of resources, and preventing social dysfunction (Boehm, 1959).

Boehm's work was significant in extending and corroborating the interrelat-
edness notion of practice between individuals and environment (not as inde-
pendent entities), in enhancing the thinking of practice activities and their
implications, and in promoting a shift in thinking toward the functional areas
of practice.

Bartlett's (1961) Analysis of Fields of Practice

In 1961, Bartlett put forward a significant document published by the
NASW as a primer that extended the working definition into frames of refer-
ence for analysis. This document basically forged an analytic framework to
continue the groundswell arguments previously offered regarding what is
social work practice and how is it practiced (Boehm, 1958). The framework
offered two additional frames of relevance to analyzing practice besides the
elements of the working definition. The first included the following five char-
acteristics parallel to the five core components of a field of practice: problem
or condition of central concern; symptom of organized services; body of
knowledge, values, and methods; sociocultural attitudes in society; and char-
acteristic responses and behavior of persons served (Bartlett, 1961). The sec-
ond frame of reference was called social work practice in any particular field
and included application of the essentials of social work practice and charac-
teristics of the resulting social work practice. Here, Bartlett acknowledged
the limitations of the original working definition and also built on the pur-
pose, function, activities, sanctioning, competence, and accountability of the
profession, having both more comprehensive and educational implications.

Critique of the Working Definition by Gordon (1962)

Gordon chaired the second Subcommittee on the Working Definition of
Practice of the NASW Commission on Practice. Its mandate was to use the
working definition as a frame of reference or work in progress to further
develop, clarify, and move the definition to the next operational level. Gordon
(1962) stated,

> Thus, while it might be useful for a working definition to classify a practitio-
> ner's actions as social work practice or not social work practice, it would have
> no theoretical potential until it could make some assertions about what social
> work practice is. (p. 58)

Gordon's critique operationalized the interrelatedness of the five core
components in the original definition, and by using the worker-in-action

model, it delineated a hierarchy to the working definition's components that was congruent with fundamental ideas of other professions (i.e., social work practice is the action of the practitioner directed to a purpose and guided by values knowledge and methods). He also argued convincingly that sanction is not a basic definer of social work practice as are the other elements in the definition, as it operates differently from them. It is interesting that his critique did not redefine but only reexamined the working definition in an effort to describe its elements more fully.

The Common Base of Social Work Practice

The culmination of the fallout activity surrounding the 1958 working definition was Bartlett's (1970) crowning jewel and final treatise on the subject, *The Common Base of Social Work Practice*. This text reflected her chief concern—"the lack of adequate words, terms, concepts to represent the important facets and components of the profession's practice as a whole" (Bartlett, 1970, p. 46). In an effort to advance the working definition toward a comprehensive professional model for social work practice, she expanded on a common practice framework that included the following three main components: a central focus on social functioning, a broad orientation to people being served directly or indirectly, and an interventive repertoire of professional interventions. She also framed the domain of social work practice squarely as the interdependence between person and environment. Thus was spawned the foundation of social work practice, the person-in-environment model related to social functioning. In moving her argument toward a common base for practice, Bartlett described the assumptive or underpinning scaffolding nature of social work as follows:

> It should be clear that in this approach the practice itself is not described as "generic." The common base of social work practice consists of concepts, generalization, and principles relating to knowledge, value and intervention, i.e., abstract ideas. Practitioners learn these "common elements" in school and apply them in professional practice. The base is not the doing but what *underlies* the doing. (Bartlett, 1970, p. 129)

In addition to this text operationalizing the working definition into a working model for practice, Bartlett's ability to constructively integrate earlier criticisms of the working definition should be noted. Some have argued that this text provided the profession with a much better notion of practice than did the original working definition (Ramsay, 2001). Also of significance in this text was her advancing the profession's thinking on fields of practice,

methods of practice, the role of theory, integrative thinking, intervention actions or elements, the assessment process, social functioning, the client-worker relationship, communication, professionalism, scientific methods, and the function of social work. All of these issues were intellectually threaded into the common base of practice and its person-in-environment common base.

POST–WORKING DEFINITION

The 1976 Madison Meeting

This meeting was specially called by the NASW to work on a conceptual framework for practice. It used the Milford conferences (1925 to 1929) as a model for questions to be asked and as a baseline for comparisons with previous explanations of social work (Ramsay, 2001). It sought to answer the ubiquitous question yet another time: "Is there a common conceptual framework for the social work profession?" (Briar, 1977, p. 415). In addition to keeping the definitional debate alive, surprisingly, very little of significance toward advancing the themes espoused by Bartlett, Boehm, and Gordon were offered at this conference. This was in spite of the fact that a number of leading social work educators and scholars were commissioned to both write and respond to the question previously posed. If anything, the complexities of the activities of social work tasks and functions, the importance of restoring psychosocial functioning, the purpose of social work framed in the current political context, the reiteration of the person-in-environment "in situation" model, and the reiteration of generalist practice as preceding specialized practice were tabled forthrightly at this meeting. The proceedings of this meeting were published in *A Special Issue on Conceptual Framework* (NASW, 1977).

The 1979 O'Hare Meeting

As a corollary to the Madison meeting, this meeting held at a Chicago airport hotel sought to continue working on the conceptual definition but had the added unifying agenda of seeking "real agreement on the purpose and objectives of social work" (Minahan, 1981, p. 5). Due to the rapid growth of social work in a variety of settings in North America at this time, part of its legitimizing process as a profession (tabled at this conference) was "to falsify the assertion that social work was not up to doing the hard conceptual work" (Albers, 2001, p. 2) needed to advance its status among the other helping

professions. Given these two underpinning themes of the conference, more advancement in terms of moving the working definition along were noted in the conference proceedings also published in *Social Work* in 1981. Particularly noteworthy in this definitional reiteration were the retaining of the core mission of social work to its poverty roots; the importance of values not only articulated for the profession but also for social institutions, agencies, and the services they provided; the anchoring of the person in situation in environment as the relationship focus of practice; acknowledging client-system change intervention; individuation of client-centered problems; identifying strategies to restore social functioning; expanding the sanction of social work practice domains; adding objectives to purpose, function, and methods; acknowledging a more global environment for practice; the judicious and more timely use of interventions and methods; and finally, the use of research and evaluation to direct and inform social work practice (Ramsay, 2001).

International Federation of Social Workers

As our global village became a reality with rapid advances in technology, the need for a definition of practice became apparent at the international level. In 1982 in Brighton, England, the International Federation of Social Workers passed a "world-around" definition approved by its 44 country members. As indicated by Ramsay (1988), who was the Canadian representative at this meeting,

> The dual purpose of social work was reaffirmed as was our commitment of an egalitarian, humanitarian, and scientific philosophy. Practice directed at interactions and transactions between people and their environment as the central focus of the profession was endorsed and the nature of general and specialized approaches was clarified. Global functions common to social workers were confirmed. It was quite obvious that this agreement emphasized the concept of the interdependence. For there to be a large scale acceptance of the definition by grass-roots social workers all over the world, there had to be a conceptual framework that clearly captured the interactional pluralism of our profession. (Ramsay, 1988, p. 71)

This transcending definition presented more as a paradigm for practice, and it has since been amended (International Federation of Social Workers, 2000) and can be found on the International Federation of Social Workers Web site (http://www.ifs.org). When one examines the updated definition, it is interesting that the concepts put forward by Bartlett, Boehm, and Gordon still form a large part of this recent globally accepted definition. In retrospect, then, one could argue that in the past 50 years, our profession has advanced

significantly but our definition of practice has not. The extent to which this is a good or bad thing is certainly one of the main assumptions of this special edition.

The 2001 Kentucky Conference

In February 2001, a conference convened at the University of Kentucky and hosted by the School of Social Work was held that "aimed toward a resolute definition of social work practice" (University of Kentucky, 2001, p. 1). Titled "Reworking the Working Definition," the conference sought to keep the definitional debate alive and presented a series of papers and responses to the papers that sought insights that would guide social work practice in the new millennium. It was particularly pleasing to read the scope and quality of submissions offered by conference participants. More impressive was the fact that the definitional issue was rekindled yet again as one of major significance to our professional identity, our practice activities, and the current reality of our practice world today. The timeliness of this special edition on the heels of the Kentucky conference seems indeed apropos.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Bartlett's (1958) scaffolding "Working Definition of Practice" is as important to our future survival as a profession as it was when it was first published in 1958. The series of milestones previously presented along a time line continuum from pre–working definition, to activities around the working definition, to post–working definition indicate that tinkering with the definition of practice is not only a vocational preoccupation of social work practice but also is imbedded as part of our profession's growth and development. Although these milestones revealed excerpts from the definition's history, they do not represent social work's overall rich practice history. It is argued then that our practice history has a core to it and that core is its quest for a definition of practice. Taken together, I believe that the subsequent articles in this special edition provide empirical proof of this contention.

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Gordon Versus the Working Definition:
Lessons From a Classic Critique

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The author critiques Gordon's influential analysis of the National Association of Social Workers' working definition of social work practice (WD). Gordon's critique contains well-founded objections leading to the elimination of the WD's method, purpose, and sanction components. However, Gordon's implied conclusion that social work can be defined by a broad value (i.e., self-realization) and a distinctive knowledge domain (i.e., social transactions) involves fundamental errors repeated in subsequent definitional attempts. Rather than being distinguished by a unique knowledge domain, social work, like other professions, must be defined by a value that is distinctive of the profession yet shared by all social work fields.

Keywords: social work; definition; conceptual foundations; values; knowledge base

I approach the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW, 1958) working definition (WD) of social work practice indirectly in this article by assessing William Gordon's (1962, 1965) classic critique of the WD. Where did Gordon's critique go right and wrong, and what has been its impact? A close critical scrutiny of Gordon's critique will hopefully yield lessons useful in formulating an improved definition.

INFLUENCE OF GORDON'S CRITIQUE

The NASW was founded in 1955, and a Commission on Social Work Practice was immediately formed with the mandate to work toward improving the quality and effectiveness of social work practice. One of the commission's first actions was to form a subcommittee charged with formulating a definition of social work practice that both identified what was common to fields of social work and what distinguished social work from other

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professions. The resulting definition was published in *Social Work*. Gordon's (1962) critique, which was the report of a subsequent subcommittee chaired by Gordon that was charged with further examining the proposed definition, was published a few years later.

Gordon's (1962) critique was generally accepted as the definitive comment on the WD and was widely seen as a devastating blow. It single-handedly persuaded the profession that the WD was inadequate and that the profession's conceptual foundations remained insecure. It also shaped further definitional efforts. When almost a decade later, Bartlett (1970), in her important monograph on the foundations of social work, summarized the reasons for rejecting the WD, they were straight out of Gordon's critique. She acknowledged that Gordon's critique had been accepted by the commission, was "basic for the thinking in this monograph" (Bartlett, 1970, p. 128), and had set much of the agenda for further definitional efforts. Bartlett's monograph was in turn the progenitor of current ecosystems approaches, so the critique's influence is still being felt.

I offer below a more mixed judgment than is usual regarding Gordon's critique. I argue that it did contain some fundamental and correct objections to the WD that had a positive effect on subsequent definitional attempts. However, I also argue that Gordon's objections and the conclusions he drew from them were flawed in significant ways that influenced the field's efforts in unfortunate directions, to some degree neutralizing the critique's beneficial impact.

"SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE" VERSUS "SOCIAL WORK"

An initial comment by Gordon (1962) might be interpreted as an objection to the WD but is a red herring: "For reasons both practical and theoretical, the commission deliberately chose to define social work *practice* rather than *social work*. . . although it might have seemed logical to define *social work* before its *practice*" (p. 3). It would be problematic if the WD defined social work practice circularly in terms of social work. But, in defining social work practice, the WD refers to specific values, knowledge, and so forth and not irreducibly to social work. As long as such circularities are avoided, a definition of social work practice is in effect a definition of social work, for social work is just a profession devoted to social work practice. Gordon here pointed to a distinction without much of a difference.

WHAT SOCIAL WORK IS VERSUS
HOW TO RECOGNIZE SOCIAL WORK

Gordon (1962) objected that the WD "tells how to *recognize* social work practice, but not what social work practice *is*" (p. 4). He focuses here on the use of *recognize* in the very first sentence of the definition: "Social work practice, like the practice of all professions, is recognized by a constellation of value, purpose, sanction, knowledge, and method" (NASW, 1958, p. 5).

Gordon was correct that just having a way of recognizing social work practice does not necessarily tell you what social work practice is (i.e., the features that make it social work). Humans can be recognized by looking for featherless bipeds, but that is not what makes someone human; wedding rings might be a reliable way to recognize married people, but wearing a wedding ring is not what makes someone married or what defines being married. Researchers similarly distinguish the nature of an inferred construct from reliable indicators of the construct.

Although the distinction makes sense, Gordon's application of it is misguided. The fact that the WD attempts to offer a way of recognizing social work practice does not preclude that the intent is to say what social work practice is. Knowing what makes something social work is one way to recognize social work. The WD's first paragraph makes it clear that this is the kind of recognition the WD is intended to provide: "It is the particular content and configuration of this constellation which makes it social work practice" (NASW, 1958, p. 5). The WD's goal is to recognize social work practice on the basis of an account of what social work practice is, not on the basis of superficial properties. Thus, this objection is based on an uncharitable misreading of the WD.

The WD pursues the definition of social work in a classical manner, stating five individually necessary and jointly sufficient criteria (see Holosko, 2003 [this issue], Figure 1). The first paragraph states,

> No part alone is characteristic of social work practice nor is any part described here unique to social work. It is the particular content and configuration of this constellation which makes it social work practice and distinguishes it from the practice of other professions. The following is an attempt to spell out the components of this constellation in such a way as to include all social work practice with all its specializations. (NASW, 1958, p. 5)

These sentences assert that all five components are necessary for social work and that the presence of all five components is sufficient to distinguish social work from other professions.

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE COMPONENTS OF THE WD

Each of the WD's components contains several subcomponents, so the WD is quite long. (Actually, saying the WD is "quite long" is like saying Cyrano's nose is "rather large.") Gordon (1962) objected that the relationships among the components are not explored:

> The components, value, knowledge, method, sanction, and purpose—appeared to stand separate and equal to each other, held together only by the assertion that all must be present in some degree for the practice to be considered social work practice. To take on any theoretical potency, the elements in a conceptual model must have propositions stating the relationships existing between them. (pp. 4-5)

Strictly speaking, the objection is incorrect. There is no reason why a definition in terms of individually necessary and jointly sufficient criteria requires an account of the relationships among the criteria. If one defines "bachelor" as "unmarried adult male," one does not have to present a theory of the relationships among the components. But Gordon's real point is not that definitions in general require such an account but that in the particular case of the WD, the failure to analyze such relationships is problematic because such analysis reveals that all five components are needed in the definition. Gordon argues that certain of the components are reducible to others or are inessential for other reasons and hence can be eliminated. Gordon thus confronts one of the WD's fundamental weaknesses, namely, its sprawling, grab bag inclusion of features without any systematic examination of what is conceptually basic.

ELIMINATION OF SANCTION

Gordon (1962) argued that sanction is not a proper part of the profession's definition:

> "Sanction" in the above frame of reference for social work practice does not appear to be an essential *definer* of social work practice. While one might choose to say that interventive action guided by purpose, value, knowledge, and technique is not professional practice unless it is authorized by society and legitimated through law, agency, or professional organization, the action itself cannot be distinguished from unsanctioned action. . . . From this viewpoint, there may be "sanctioned" or "unsanctioned" social work practice just as we say there may be legal and illegal practice of medicine, law, or some other profession. (p. 12)

That is, just as individuals can practice medicine without a license or teach illegally in repressive societies, they can perform social work interventions without social sanctions. Indeed, there were social workers before there were such sanctions. So, the WD's inclusion of sanction was an error.

ELIMINATION OF METHOD

From this point forward, my account of Gordon's (1962) critique becomes a bit interpretive. Although Gordon's arguments clearly imply further reductions in the WD beyond sanction and his own later statements of social work's definition are consistent with this reading, Gordon never explicitly draws the eliminative conclusions I will attribute to him. Indeed, he seems to suggest at times merely reshuffling the remaining four components and even expanding the WD in textbook-like fashion to "include under 'knowledge' a wide range of [scientific] propositions with respect to their degree of verification" (p. 10), thus providing "the *means* to this [value] outcome . . . in various stages of testing" (p. 9) and making the WD much more than a definition.

Regarding the definition of social work, however, Gordon's (1962) arguments supported a very different approach. Gordon further suggested the eliminability of the technique (or method) and purpose components of the WD.

> *Social work* practice reside[s] in the *purposes* for which the action is taken, the *value-knowledge*-determined perception of the situation toward which action is directed, and the patterning of the action by such *techniques* are available to guide it. Since purposes are largely set by values and techniques are derived from knowledge, the most obvious implication of this formulation is to place much more emphasis than before on the values and knowledge on which practice (interventive action) is based. (p. 12)

I first consider method, which is defined by the WD as a systematic approach. Gordon argued that neither the sheer systematicity of intervention nor the content of methods (including subcategories such as techniques, type of intervention, or instruments used) contain anything distinctive of social work. Gordon is surely correct that methods, which differ across time and fields, cannot be part of the profession's definition. Moreover, as he noted, techniques are generally derived from broader knowledge. Reducing technique to knowledge, Gordon concluded that knowledge is essential to the definition, a point to which I return later.

THE KNOWLEDGE-DOMAIN COMPONENT

Gordon's claim that knowledge is essential to the definition may seem puzzling because the arguments against the technique component can be equally directed at knowledge. The theories and beliefs on which professional practice is based change over time and vary by field. Thus, the specific content of the knowledge base cannot be a defining feature of a profession.

However, Gordon (1962) did not have in mind specific theories. Rather, *knowledge* refers to the domain of social work knowledge. He considered the knowledge domain to be part of the definition of professions and disciplines in general:

> All professions, and in fact all sciences, limit themselves in expertise (from the point of view of knowledge and technique) to some part or piece of the reality world—lawyers to law and legal phenomena, astronomers to extra-terrestrial phenomena, biology to life phenomena, and so on. (Gordon, 1962, p. 12)

This approach escapes the problem of incorporating specific theories into the definition. Whatever theories are dominant, it remains true that biology is the study of life, physics is the study of the physical universe, and so forth.

Gordon (1965) identified social work's knowledge domain as social transactions.

> The central phenomenon of social work science is "social transactions," or the action interface between people. . . . Theoretical interest would attach to *the relationship between the quality and the amount of this transaction and its effect on human realization* on the one hand, *on the nature of the social environment* on the other. (p. 38)

The knowledge domain, according to Gordon, distinguishes social work from other professions. I will return to this claim about the knowledge domain later.

ELIMINATION OF PURPOSE

As noted, Gordon (1962) implied that value is primary and purpose eliminable: "The general purpose of social work practice . . . appears to be to achieve the desirable outcome stated by the value assumption (maximum self-realization and contribution to others)" (p. 9). He noted that more

immediate goals of intervention vary across fields and settings but are always a means to achieving the overall purpose, which is to realize the value. This runs contrary to the common practice of identifying the nature of the profession with its purpose. But his point is sound; the purpose of each profession is to pursue a valued goal (e.g., health, legal justice, spiritual peace, and education), so stating the value and stating the purpose are redundant.

Gordon has relatively little to say about the WD's statement of social work's purpose other than that it is reducible to value. But the statement of purpose warrants examination.

> Purpose: The practice of social work has as its purposes:
>
> 1. To assist individuals and groups to identify and resolve or minimize problems arising out of disequilibrium between themselves and their environment.
> 2. To identify potential areas of disequilibrium between individuals or groups and the environment in order to prevent the occurrence of disequilibrium.
> 3. In addition to these curative and preventive aims, to seek out, identify, and strengthen the maximum potential in individuals, groups, and communities. (NASW, 1958, p. 5)

The first two purposes are the resolution and prevention of problems due to disequilibria between individuals or groups and their environments. Such disequilibria are thus identified as social work's distinctive domain of intervention with respect to amelioration and prevention of problems. The third purpose, that social work aims to "strengthen the maximum potential in individuals, groups, and communities," is another way of saying that a purpose is self-realization, which is redundant with one of the WD's listed values. As we shall see, Gordon ultimately embraced self-realization as the basic value of social work practice.

The WD's claim that social work's purpose is curing and preventing problems due to disequilibirium is based on the unwarranted assumption that all problems of concern to social work are due to states of disequilibrium. Many systems in stable equilibrium are problematic and are proper targets of social work intervention. Often, addressing a problem involves giving up a current equilibrium and suffering a period of disequilibrium that allows one to achieve a less problematic equilibrium. Relationships between oppressor and oppressed, abuser and abused, poor and affluent, or the homeless mentally ill and local authorities can reach a stable equilibrium that is unjust or unacceptable and seriously problematic for a variety of reasons, and intervention may require upsetting that equilibrium. Clinical intervention, too, often upsets a problematic equilibrium developed between patient and environment (e.g., one aimed at avoidance of anxiety) or between members of a family. The

frequent need to create disequilibrium where there is an unacceptable equilibrium is one reason that both individual and social change is so difficult and painful. So, the WD's curative and preventive purposes are much too narrow, eliminating many essential social work concerns about problems not stemming from disequilibrium. It is also much too broad, because not all problems arising from disequilibria are social work concerns. There are states of disequilibrium that are most appropriately dealt with by doctors, lawyers, politicians, the military, and so forth.

It should be noted, however, that one of the basic assumptions underlying the disequilibrium definition is found in Gordon's work as well as in most major definitional attempts since, from Bartlett's (1970) focus on social interaction and the balance between coping resources and environmental demands to Meyer's (1983) ecosystems concept of circular transactions between individual or group and environment. This basic assumption is that the domain of social work has to be some form of interactional (or "transactional") relationship between the individual or group and the environment that is not solely within the individual or the environment. Disequilibrium has this property; it is a relational concept not within the individual or the environment. Bartlett (1970) noted that this idea was implicit but not really developed in the WD and in Boehm's (1958) important contemporaneous contribution defining social work as concerned with social functioning, and that Gordon was the first to make the assumption explicit and thus was the progenitor of later definitional attempts: "William E. Gordon took the first step in linking 'coping capacity' and 'environmental demand' within a single concept through the idea of 'match or mismatch' between capacity or demand" (Bartlett, 1970, p. 99). Unfortunately, despite some improvements on the WD's disequilibrium definition, the entire tradition from Gordon to Meyer falls prey to similar errors as did the WD, including excessive narrowness and excessive broadness (Wakefield, 1996a, 1996b). Gordon's critique, I argue later, was instrumental in perpetuating this error. However, for now, I simply conclude that Gordon was wise to ignore the disequilibrium aspect of the WD's statement of purpose. He considered the remaining purpose, self-realization, under the category of values, where it also appears.

REDUCTION TO ONE VALUE

Gordon's arguments succeed in reducing the WD's components to two: knowledge and values. So far, we can agree: The other three elements were indeed superfluous and the WD ungainly and bloated as a result, making it all

but unusable. (Would anyone answer a cocktail party query of "What is social work" by reciting the WD?)

Equally important is Gordon's argument that there need be only one value appearing in the definition. The WD offers a list of six values, and as Gordon lucidly observed, it is mostly not a list of values at all but rather a list of factual truisms (e.g., "There is interdependence between individuals in this society. . . . There are human needs common to each person, yet each person is essentially unique and different from others," NASW, 1958, p. 5). Gordon (1962) noted,

> The distinction between the *value* assumption and the propositions purporting to be *knowledge* was not clear. Therefore, for the purpose of this re-examination, it was decided to restrict 'values' to those assumptions concerning what is desirable and right for man. (p. 8)

But this point about the confusion between fact and value (which is the most commonly cited point from Gordon's critique) can be taken only so far. Most of the truisms are easily translatable into values (e.g., the factual claim that the individual is the primary concern of this society translates into society ought to be primarily concerned about the well-being of individuals). In the end, the problem with the values list is not so much the obvious confusion between facts and values but the inadequacy of such a long list of actual or potential values.

More importantly, then, Gordon (1962) argued for a pared-down list, noting that many values are instrumental means to the achievement of a single overarching value:

> Relatively few truly basic value assumptions exist, and many so-called values are logically deduced from one basic value assumption. . . . The most nearly primary and ultimate value in social work seems to be that *it is good and desirable for man to fulfill his potential, to realize himself, and to balance this with essentially equal effort to help others fulfill their capacities and realize themselves*.
>
>   If this proposition is taken as a primary value, many other assertions frequently referred to as "values" in social work become statements of conditions and ways assumed to facilitate the primary value of man's self-realization. . . . For example, the assertion (Value 6) that "society has a responsibility to provide ways in which obstacles to self-realization can be overcome or prevented" is directly deducible from the primary value stated above and the generally known fact that conditions that exist in society have a great deal to do with how far individuals can experience self-realization. Making the distinction between a value assumption as a desired outcome for man and a putative knowledge assumption concerning how to achieve that outcome seems to provide a better

separation between *value* and *knowledge*, the latter being used in the sense of generalizations capable of being tested against data. (pp. 8-9)

Gordon thus translated subordinate values into factual assumptions about how to achieve superordinate values. Similar reasoning led Socrates to conclude that there is only one value, "the Good" or "Happiness," at which all desires are aimed, with all other values being means to that end (e.g., we value medicine because it brings health, and we value health because it brings happiness).

But the philosophical issue of one or many values is not really the concern here. Gordon's point can be considered a more practical one; in fact, professions are generally defined primarily in terms of one central value, not many. Thus, medicine seeks health, teaching seeks education, the clergy seeks spiritual peace, and law seeks legal justice. If the definition of social work follows the model of other professions, then there will be one value that expresses the distinctive purpose of the profession. Other values will either be more general values that regulate all professions (e.g., well-being or self-determination) or subsidiary values that are instrumental in realizing the profession's primary value (e.g., a good therapeutic relationship or availability of social support). As an operational assumption regarding how professions are defined, it seems safe to hypothesize that there is one value distinctively associated with social work.

Elsewhere (Wakefield, 1988a, 1988b), I argued similarly that the profession is defined by one value, which I dubbed its "organizing value" because pursuit of this value is the ultimate regulator of the profession's activities. Although this is my language (not Gordon's), I use it later to refer to the one value Gordon believes should appear in social work's definition.

Before further examining Gordon's conclusions, it should be acknowledged how much Gordon accomplished in his brief critique. In response to the promiscuous WD, Gordon offered a principled argument for a leaner and logically more coherent approach that eliminates extraneous and redundant features. Gordon's critique put a stop to the WD's excess; no subsequent definition has remotely approached the complexity, length, and obscurity of the WD.

OVERGENERALITY OF THE PROPOSED DEFINING
VALUE OF SELF-REALIZATION

As noted previously, Gordon (1965) concluded that social work's organizing value is self-realization:

> *Maximum realization of each individual's potential for development through-*
> *out his lifetime* is a basic value that seems to meet the criteria above. As a value
> it may be treated as an unconfirmable assumption that it is "right" and "good"
> for each individual to continue to develop, grow, unfold, and attain the greatest
> possible elaboration of his "humanness" in his lifetime. (p. 38)

This is a remarkably broad value. In selecting it, Gordon addressed the
need for a value that is shared by all the fields of social work practice and thus
could bring social work's bewildering diversity under one definitional um-
brella. He took the obvious course of selecting a value so broad that all fields
pursue it. The problem is that all human striving is a means to self-realization
in one form or another; medical and religious interventions, for example, are
no less concerned than social work interventions with the individual self-
realization.

The selection of such a broad value was a pivotal step in Gordon's analy-
sis. In effect, he gave up the hope of identifying an organizing value that is
both general enough to encompass all of the diverse fields of social work and
yet specific enough to distinguish social work from other professions. The
value element thus became relatively meaningless as a definer of social work;
one might as well say that social work strives for human betterment, happi-
ness, or "the Good." The value has no specificity to social work and thus
merely indicates that social work is supposed to do good things, like all pro-
fessions and all morally acceptable actions. This has the important conse-
quence that the component that distinguishes social work from other profes-
sions has to be sought elsewhere. Gordon seeks it in the knowledge domain of
social transactions.

INADEQUACY OF THE PROPOSED
KNOWLEDGE DOMAIN OF SOCIAL TRANSACTIONS

As we saw, Gordon proposed that social work is distinguished from other
professions and disciplines by the knowledge domain of social transactions
and, specifically, by the study of the impact of social transactions on self-real-
ization. An obvious objection is that many other professions, disciplines, and
occupations are concerned with the same knowledge domain. For example,
certain branches of sociology and psychology seem to study social transac-
tions. Gordon (1965) addressed this objection as follows:

> Knowledge pursued and formulated along the feedback lines of social func-
> tioning to the individual and to his environment is a neglected area of inquiry

largely untouched by psychologies and sociologies that are intent on explain-
ing the causes of social functioning rather than its consequences. (p. 39)

Gordon argues that although sociology and psychology study the causes
of social transactions, these disciplines have neglected the study of the effects
of such transactions. However, the fact that sociology and psychology have
neglected an area of inquiry does not at all imply that it is not within their do-
main. In any event, it would seem that any such neglect was temporary (if it
ever existed) because the study of the impact of social transactions on indi-
viduals, ranging from cognitive to health outcomes, is now a central part of
social psychology and sociology. Both disciplines would protest that such ef-
fects are squarely within their domains, and historically, this is so.

Perhaps the problem is that Gordon overreaches in attempting to use
knowledge domains to distinguish not just one profession from another but
also professions from academic disciplines. This seems hopeless from the
start. For example, medicine and human biology have much the same knowl-
edge domain but are totally different disciplines because their organizing val-
ues differ; biology seeks knowledge in its own right, whereas medicine seeks
to apply biological knowledge to the pursuit of health. Thus, Gordon's
appealing claim (quoted earlier) that knowledge domains alone define aca-
demic disciplines is mistaken. Academic disciplines are partly defined by
their pursuit of the valued end of knowledge, and within this assumed value
frame, it is then possible to define each discipline by specifying the domain of
knowledge (e.g., knowledge of life or knowledge of extraterrestrial phenom-
ena, to use Gordon's examples) with which it is concerned. It is only because
the value component of such definitions remained submerged and implicit
that Gordon's argument seemed plausible.

In light of these considerations, Gordon's idea might be charitably rede-
veloped as follows: Academic disciplines are defined by a broad, overarching
value of knowledge that they share as well as by a specific domain of study
that distinguishes one discipline from another. Similarly, there is one broad,
overarching value, pursuit of self-realization, that is shared by all profes-
sions. The professions as a whole are distinguished from academic disci-
plines not by domains but by this different overarching value. However, like
the academic disciplines, the professions are distinguished from one another
by the different domains (e.g., social, physiological, mental) in which they
pursue their shared value.

Unfortunately, for three reasons, this appealing way to try to save
Gordon's knowledge-domain account of the professions cannot be correct.
First, there is often more than one profession concerned with a given

knowledge domain. For example, the social-transaction domain is not suffi-
ciently specific to distinguish social work from an enormous number of occu-
pations concerned with various aspects of social interaction, ranging from
politicians and management consultants to schools of etiquette and social
directors. Similarly, medicine cannot be the general pursuit of human self-
realization based on the study of the human body because there are many
nonmedical professions or occupations that pursue self-realization based on
knowledge of the functioning of the body, such as athletic coaching and
weight-loss clinics. Rather, medicine pursues the more specific valued out-
come of health. Similarly, the mental health professions cannot be defined as
pursuit of self-realization within the domain of the mind because many other
occupations are concerned to affect self-realization through knowledge of
the mind (e.g., transcendental meditation and various self-improvement
courses); the mental health professions pursue the more specific valued end
of alleviation of mental disorder.

Second, like the WD's "problems arising from disequilibrium," Gordon's
"effects of social transactions" is too broad a domain to define social work.
Medicine is concerned with the physiological or epidemiological impact of
social transactions, lawyers with the legal implications of social transactions,
and so forth.

Third, unlike the academic disciplines that are by definition concerned
with a certain knowledge domain, professions can change their domains over
time if that is useful in the pursuit of their organizing values. For example,
when Freud's investigations convinced the medical community that hysteria,
which had been considered a neurological medical problem and treated as
such, was in fact psychogenic and best treated by attention to the mental and
social domain, psychiatrists became trained in and started dispensing psy-
choanalysis rather than physical-domain treatments. Social workers have
similarly adopted approaches that involve knowledge domains other than the
social transactional, such as genetic analysis of family background and psy-
chotherapy, whenever it seemed useful for pursuing their distinctive
concerns.

So, the analogy between academic disciplines and professions just does
not hold up. Professions are defined not by a specific domain of knowledge
that is the basis for their pursuit of a general shared value such as self-realiza-
tion but rather by a more specific organizing value that defines each profes-
sion (for medicine, health; for law, legal justice; and so forth) and that they
pursue by all means possible within their mandate.

Thus, the knowledge domain simply cannot do all the definitional work
that Gordon requires of it; in particular, it cannot make up for an overly

general organizing value. Gordon's analysis thus represents a basic error that in my view has had negative effects on subsequent social work foundational theory. It leads, for example, to the sort of approach taken by the ecosystems perspective, which I have criticized elsewhere (Wakefield, 1996a, 1996b). Meyer's (1983) argument is that values alone do not sufficiently define social work, so we need some additional perspective, which essentially comes to a knowledge domain or a theoretical approach to define social work. The values then effectively drop out entirely, and social work is defined as concerned with circular causal processes constituting transactions between individuals or groups and their environments, essentially the same conclusion at which Gordon arrived. But this approach is doomed, in my view, because a profession cannot be defined simply by a knowledge domain or theory or perspective; rather, it must be defined by a value. Theories come and go; social work problems may or may not be analyzable in terms of circular causality, but they are still social work problems.

I conclude that despite its many merits, Gordon's critique led social work theoreticians into a conceptual cul de sac, searching for a defining knowledge base (or theory or perspective) that does not exist. Rather than paring down the WD's list and resting content with knowledge and value as defining components, an alternative would have been to reject the WD's assumption that self-realization is the most specific value uniting social work fields and to search for a more specific defining value. It is a reasonable default assumption that the social work profession, like other professions, has a definition in terms of a value that is simultaneously general enough to unite it and specific enough to distinguish it. Because neither the WD nor Gordon's critique attempted to identify such a value, they were ultimately barren as attempts to define social work.

Gordon's critique removed many of the obstacles to conceptual progress that had been erected by the ill-conceived WD. But, although Gordon led us out of the conceptual wilderness of the WD, in my view, his critique pointed us in the wrong direction and thus did not allow us to reach the conceptual promised land of an adequate definitional foundation for social work. Due to the broad influence of Gordon's critique, its conclusions have become the field's assumptions, and its flaws have become the field's flaws. Thus, in addition to correcting many basic errors in the WD, Gordon's critique must also be counted as one of the historically most important if inadvertent obstacles in the search for an adequate conceptual foundation for social work, which Gordon so ardently sought.

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Defining Social Work: Does the Working Definition Work Today?
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Defining Social Work:
Does the Working Definition Work Today?

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The components of the working definition's constellation that makes up social work practice are examined. This article suggests that the working definition, as stated, is not appropriate today. It is suggested that it is not the knowledge and methods of social work practice but the values and purpose underlying social work that define it. It is emphasized that the definition of social work should be inclusive of different attitudes and opinions, yet limited, avoiding the incorporation of other problem issues. Furthermore, it is suggested that the definition, if inclusively stated, can remain constant through time and environment. It is also suggested that alternatives have been offered that may be more appropriate in the current environment of global awareness and sensitivity. More inclusive statements, although allowing for growth and change in the profession, do not necessitate change in the definition itself.

Keywords: social work definition; values; purpose; knowledge; practice

The working definition, as stated by Bartlett (1958), describes a constellation of values, purpose, sanction, knowledge, and method that makes up social work practice. She stated that

> no part alone is characteristic of social work practice nor is any part described here unique to social work. It is the particular content and configuration of this constellation which makes it social work practice and distinguishes it from the practice of other professions. (p. 5)

In this article, each of the components that make up this constellation as identified in the working definition (Bartlett, 1958) is examined for applicability and appropriateness today.

COMPONENTS OF THE WORKING DEFINITION

Values

The working definition suggests that "certain philosophical concepts are basic to the practice of social work" (Bartlett, 1958, p. 6). The definition identifies six values that are interrelated. At first glance, the first two values seem hardly debatable. However, there are some issues here. Social work is not only practiced in this society, to which these values refer. It is a reasonable assumption that the working definition was restricted to the United States based on these statements and on the fifth value, which particularly refers to democracy, something that is not a global political practice. It is important to distinguish between the values of social work and the values of any particular society. Because the practice of social work is not restricted to any particular society, neither should be the definition. Any discussion on the definition should be applied to social work only, which therefore begs the question of whether these social work values are globally applicable.

Thus, the questions become whether globally, individuals are the primary concern and are they interdependent? It is certainly true that some social systems are more individualistic, whereas others are more communal, and it can be argued that an individualistic system is better than a communal one or vice versa. In addition, it can be and certainly has been debated whether social work should be approached from an individual level, a societal level, or a balance of the two. However, whether the good of each individual or the good of the majority in a community of individuals is of concern, the underlying unit remains the same. Therefore, whether individualistic or communal, the underlying concern of each system (or each social work approach) is directed toward the individuals in that system. In addition, although the level of interdependence may be debatable in any system or approach, it is recognized that individuals are interdependent (i.e., affected by one another) to some extent. In conclusion, the authors would argue that these values, freed from restriction to this society, are acceptable.

The third value, they have social responsibility for one another, may be globally problematic if considered from the standpoint of a societal value. However, as social work is inherently the involvement with people, this value hardly seems debatable if considered strictly from the definition of social work practice.

A problem with the fourth value, there are human needs common to each person yet each person is essentially unique and different from others, was identified by Gordon (1962). He made an important point that values should be distinguished from knowledge. Values are assumptions that cannot be

scientifically proven or disproven. He therefore restricted values "to those assumptions concerning what is desirable and right for man" (p. 8). Based on this idea, Gordon suggested that both the fourth and sixth values stated in the working definition are better seen as knowledge, which can be debated or empirically tested now or in the future. He suggested that the fourth value has essentially already been scientifically proven. The sixth, society has a responsibility to provide ways in which obstacles to this self-realization can be overcome or prevented, he suggested is essentially about how to achieve what is desired and right for humans. How to achieve the desired end is more about knowledge and methods and is open to debate. If Gordon's arguments are accepted, only one value is left to examine.

The fifth value specifically refers to a democratic society. Again, it must be stated that the definition of social work cannot be ethnocentric and must be separated from values of any particular society. Therefore, does the value of the realization of the full potential of each individual and the assumption of his responsibility through active participation in society apply to social work globally? We argue that excluding the male-biased language, it is. As previously stated, how this might be done is unsettled. Nevertheless, despite the kind of systems in which individuals reside or what kind of social work approach is used, social work is about individuals maximizing their potential through active participation in systems larger than themselves. Consequently, this value appears to be applicable.

Purpose

The working definition identifies "purpose" as part of the constellation that makes up social work practice. This purpose appears to focus on the disequilibrium between the individual and the environment and to maximize the potential in individuals, groups, and communities (Bartlett, 1958).

Although this part of the working definition does suggest that both the individual (or group) and the environment are important, it appears to more specifically address work on the micro level. Although it may have been unintended, this part of the constellation appears to neglect fundamental changes to systems and society. The purpose of social work should, at least, equally address changes in systems and society to better meet the needs of individuals, groups, and communities.

This can be seen as related to Gordon's (1962) arguments about the short- and long-term goals implied by the purpose of social work. He stated that the purpose of social work relates directly to the values and knowledge of the profession. Although long-term goals would be defined through the values of

the profession, the short-term goals would depend more on knowledge and would vary along fields of practice.

> Therefore, the purpose of social work, when expressed as the goals of practice, related on the one hand to the value assumptions by which outcomes are judged to be desirable, and on the other hand to the knowledge of the situations or processes intervened in that determine which proximal goals will facilitate the general purpose, that is, to facilitate the self-realization of individuals and their contribution to the realization of others. (Gordon, 1962, p. 10)

Although Gordon's (1962) argument that both long- and short-term goals are appropriate to social work is valid, it appears problematic to address short-term goals in the working definition because of the wide range of fields of practice and methods. However, it also seems obvious that according to Gordon, short-term goals are intended to affect long-term goals. If this is in fact true and we agree that the long- term goals of practice are directly related to the value assumptions, then it would appear appropriate to suggest that the purpose of social work in the working definition should be restricted to bringing about the value assumptions. Gordon defined the following as the general purpose: "The general purpose of social work practice—in the sense of what it is to accomplish—appears to be to achieve the desirable outcome stated by the value assumption" (p. 9).

In summary, it appears that the purpose of social work should be to bring about the ultimate goals of social work based on the value assumptions, which are more inclusive of both streams of social work, individual and environment, as well as of all the range of practice fields. Consequently, this aspect of the working definition appears to be lacking.

Sanction

The working definition includes sanction as part of the constellation that makes up social work practice and identifies three sources from which it can come, including governmental agencies, voluntary incorporated agencies, or the organized profession. This idea is misplaced in the definition of social work. Gordon (1962) stated that "sanction classifies one of the conditions under which the action occurs, but it does not influence the action itself" (p. 12). He then went on to suggest that there may be sanctioned or unsanctioned social work practice. For example, the organization of service recipients to effect change may not be sanctioned or may even be discouraged by the target system; however, such direct action techniques have certainly been used by social workers. Perhaps many social workers will argue that social

work should be sanctioned. Sanction may change the action of a particular social worker in a particular situation or may make such action relatively difficult or easy; however, it does not in and of itself change the actions of social work in general.

This issue appears entwined with the issue of social work as a profession. The argument about whether workers should be licensed, who should practice social work, and how educational experience should affect levels of practice is an argument about the "profession" per se. Professionalism includes aspects about the legitimacy of social work practice, the accountability of social workers, and the status of social workers among others, but these are separate from the definition of social work practice itself. We cannot ignore the ethnocentricity of this issue; social work does not occur in the vacuum of the United States. Many areas and methods of social work practice may be sanctioned in other nations as well as this one; however, this is not globally consistent. The "sociopolitical and economic environment" not only affects "the goals, priorities, targets of intervention, and technologies and methodologies of the social work profession" (Gibelman, 1999, p. 299) but also the sanction received for these areas. Gibelman (1999) went so far as to argue that "social work simply does not exist or is not allowed to exist in some societies in our modern civilization because there is no sanction to address societal incongruities" (p. 303). Although the issue of whether social work is a profession (Flexner, 1915) may be an important one, it should be distinguished from the issue of the definition of social work practice. Therefore, the inclusion of "sanction" in the working definition does not work.

Knowledge

The working definition includes knowledge in the constellation that makes up social work practice. Bartlett (1958) stated that social work knowledge is not unique to social work: "Social work, like all other professions, derives knowledge from a variety of sources and in application brings forth further knowledge from its own processes" (p. 6). The working definition addresses social work knowledge in a broad and generalized way, including issues of human development, communication, community, organizations, group processes and effect, the psychology of giving and taking, effects of societal characteristics, interaction between individuals and groups, and practitioner self-awareness. It addresses the two main streams of social work, including both knowledge about the individual and knowledge about the environment. Although the working definition's component of knowledge appears inclusive, drawing from a variety of disciplines and areas, its vagueness allows for further development and change of specifics.

Gordon (1962) emphasized an important point about knowledge and the definition of social work. He suggested that knowledge should be carefully separated and clearly delineated from values.

> A revised working definition should include under "Knowledge" a wide range of propositions with respect to their degree of verification, but also should exclude all assumptive propositions that are governed by preference rather than by scientific necessity. (p. 10)

As previously stated, Gordon identified specific values that would be better understood as knowledge.

Overall, the inclusion of knowledge in the working definition's constellation that makes up social work seems appropriate. Although it acknowledges that social work knowledge is not unique to social work, it identifies broad areas and sources for knowledge to be drawn and emphasizes that knowledge is used toward effective practice. The broadness or vagueness of the statement allows for the continued development of the specifics. Consequently, this part of the working definition appears appropriate.

Method

Bartlett (1958) identified that the working definition's constellation is composed of methods that include work with the individual and the environment. She suggested that social work method "facilitates change: (1) within the individual in relation to his social environment; (2) of the social environment in its effect upon the individual; (3) of both the individual and the social environment in their interaction" (p. 7). The working definition goes on to identify that social work method includes techniques or tools and skills or the effective use of knowledge. The working definition's description of method, like that of knowledge, is broad and vague enough to allow specific methods to develop and change as the profession's knowledge does so. Consequently, this part of the constellation is acceptable.

DISCUSSION

The working definition, as reported to us by Bartlett (1958), is lacking and inappropriate in parts. In that particular form, it does not work. However, it does appear to capture the basic tenets of social work. The values and purpose should be revised to be more globally conscious and inclusive of both individual and system (environment) work. The knowledge and methods are

sufficiently broad and vague to capture the complexity of the work while allowing the specifics to develop and change. Although it may be appropriate for knowledge and methods to develop and change as we learn more about humans and effective methods of change (whether individual or system), it appears debatable whether the definition itself should do so.

Bartlett (1958) stated that

> the concept of a working definition that is definitely intended to keep growing is also helpful because we can feel less critical and concerned over its early inadequacies. Also, it can more easily respond to growth and change in the profession and the surrounding society. (p. 8)

Gibelman (1999) examined the history of the profession in relation to its identity and suggested that the definition changed over the years depending on the relative power of particular social work camps and the political environment in which social workers operate. However, she suggested that this flexibility might be seen as a strength rather than as a problem. "Rather than our lamenting the lack of a durable definition of the profession, its practice, and its boundaries, the periodic re-examination of such definitions should be seen as a positive reflection of a changing profession responsive to its environment" (Gibelman, 1999, p. 308). She suggested that "debates about the appropriate direction and emphasis of the profession will continue to be waged" (p. 308) but that the

> nature of self-exploration within the profession . . . includes consideration of the extent to which the profession defines itself or is defined, by default, by external events and influences. It further includes consideration of the social environment at any given point and the particular way in which social work and the social environment coalesce or conflict. (p. 308)

It might be questioned whether the definition itself should or must ebb and flow with the coming and going of the political realities or with the relative popularity or influence of conflicting segments within social work. It is arguable that the values and purpose of social work should remain the same, despite the kind of society or area of practice in which it operates. Although it is possible that the authors of this article disagree on how social work values should be achieved, perhaps we can agree on what those values are. These authors would argue that although some of us may be oriented toward individual practice and others toward system change, the values of our work remain the same. Whereas some of us may employ the methods of clinical practice and others community organization, the values of our work remain the same. And although some of us may believe in market-driven economies and others

be wholly opposed to them, the values of our work remain the same. Gibelman (1999) seemed to support this argument when she suggested that "social work is committed to and incorporates in it a strong value base that has been remarkably consistent over time" (p. 308). She suggested, in fact, that "common to all these definitions is the focus on both the person and the environment; this duality and the interaction between them constitutes the special purview of the profession and makes it distinct from other helping professions" (Gibelman, 1999, p. 300). Although our knowledge base may have increased dramatically, and as a result, our methods developed or changed since the working definition was first written, our values continue to be based on human dignity and rights.

Certainly, our profession is not unique in its internal disagreement about course and emphasis. "Specialists in a profession are typically able to co-exist, as evidenced by the multiple fields of practice represented through the American Medical Association, American Bar Association, and the National Education Association" (Gibelman, 1999, p. 302). The medical profession, for example, has practitioners who focus on prevention and practitioners whose emphasis is disease. Individuals' environments, cognitions, and feelings have had relatively less or more influence on particular medical practitioners or at different times within the profession. Some doctors use Eastern methodologies in their practice, whereas others reject them. Some medical professionals participate in political activism, whereas others focus on individual practice. Despite these differences, the medical profession remains united under the domain of health. "Such disparate interests within these professions do not negate the unifying identification as physician, lawyer, or educator" (Gibelman, 1999, p. 302). These authors argue that the same should be true for social workers. Although we may be an incredibly diverse profession with many different attitudes, opinions, and cultures represented, our values are what remain consistent and serve to unite us under the domain of the intent for well-being of individuals and society.

ALTERNATIVES

Having examined each of the individual components offered by the working definition and the question of whether the definition should essentially change over time, it seems reasonable to discuss whether the working definition best states the definition of social work. Other authors have offered alternatives that may be more encompassing or better formulated. For example, the National Association of Social Workers has continued to work toward a viable definition during the years following its initiation of the working

definition. The current code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (1996) stated that,

> The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living. (p. 6)

This excerpt appears to be inclusive of both streams of social work, individual and environment. It appears to address the ultimate value addressed earlier, that is, the well-being of all people. The code goes on to identify other core values, including service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. This appears to support the authors' contention that knowledge and methods are directly tied to values and are part of the definition. Gibelman (1999) reviewed this and many other alternatives offered during the years and found a "remarkable consistency to them." Despite their differences, she suggested that most reflected a dual concern with the individual and the environment.

Perhaps considering alternatives from social workers outside the United States will offer additional guidance to the global applicability of the definition. The British Association of Social Workers (1996) and the Australian Association of Social Workers (1999), among others, state similar concepts as those of the National Association of Social Workers (1996) of value and purpose and the use of knowledge and methods in their codes of ethics and statements of purpose. However, as an example, consider the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). As an international organization, the IFSW must consider the perspectives of social workers from multiple countries and cultures. The executive committee alone has representatives from Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Ireland, Israel, Kenya, Mauritius, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, and Zimbabwe. A short and simple definition of social work is offered by this organization.

> The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. (IFSW, 2000, p. 1)

This definition appears to identify the constellation components addressed in the working definition, is inclusive of both the individual and the environment, and can be applied globally without regard to economic, political, or cultural systems. The IFSW (2000) went on to state that

> social work in its various forms addresses the multiple, complex transactions between people and their environments. Its mission is to enable all people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives, and prevent dysfunction. Professional social work is focused on problem solving and change. As such, social workers are change agents in society and in the lives of the individuals, families and communities they serve. Social work is an interrelated system of values, theory and practice. (p. 2)

The values, theory, and practice of social work are explicated by the IFSW in an inclusive and sensitive way. Values are "based on respect for the equality, worth and dignity of all people" (IFSW, 2000, p. 2). Theory can be seen as equivalent to the knowledge component of the working definition (Bartlett, 1958). "Social work bases its methodology on a systematic body of evidence-based knowledge derived from research and practice evaluation, including local and indigenous knowledge specific to its context" (IFSW, 2000, Theory section, para. 1). Finally, under Practice, the IFSW identified what can be seen as methods in the working definition. "Social work utilizes a variety of skills, techniques, and activities consistent with its holistic focus on persons and their environments" (IFSW, 2000, Practice section, para. 1).

Although certainly not exhaustive, this review of alternatives to the working definition (Bartlett, 1958) demonstrates that an inclusive, stable definition can be achieved. The basic tenets of value, purpose, knowledge, and method can be applied in a globally sensitive manner, uniting social workers as well as providing for diversity of attitudes, opinion, culture, and systems.

CONCLUSION

In summary of the analysis of the individual components making up the constellation of the working definition and subsequent alternatives, the following ideas emerge. Values are assumptions of the profession about what is right and good for humans. The purpose of social work is to work toward the achievement of those values. Knowledge informs us about the nature of humans and the best ways to achieve our purpose. Methods are informed by this knowledge, and social workers employ them to achieve our purpose. Finally, sanction is misplaced in the definition. Therefore, the purpose, knowledge, and methods of social work are interrelated and all derive from

the basic values of the profession. Consequently, it can be argued that it is not the knowledge or methods that make our profession unique but the purpose, based on particular values, to which they are employed. It is not what we do that makes us unique but why we do what we do. Nevertheless, if stated broadly, knowledge and methods remain useful in the definition. Their inclusion emphasizes that efforts toward the achievement of values are informed, as much as possible, on what works.

Although the basic tenets of the working definition as identified by Bartlett (1958) seem appropriate, the manner in which they are explicated is exclusive, ethnocentric, and lacking in places. Alternatives have been offered by other authors that may be seen as more appropriate in the current environment of global awareness and sensitivity. These more inclusive statements, although allowing for growth and change in the profession, do not necessitate change in the definition itself.

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A Client-Focused Definition of Social Work Practice
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A Client-Focused Definition
of Social Work Practice

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The 1958 working definition of social work practice highlights past and current paradoxes, competing interests, confusions, and mystifications in social work. Outcomes are not mentioned in this definition, reflecting the lack of attention to describing variations in services and their outcomes. This, as well as not clearly distinguishing between objectives selected based on what is good for society and what is valued by individual clients, reveals this definition not to be client focused. The definition downplayed social control functions of social work and controversies concerning how problems are defined. A definition that encourages practitioners to focus on their key responsibility—providing services most likely to help clients attain goals they value while considering others' interests—is needed. Current interest in describing variations in practice and their outcomes, attending to populations and individuals in the distribution of scarce resources, and increased Internet access to practice- and/or policy-related research findings may encourage such a definition.

Keywords: *ethics; client outcomes; professions; evidence-based practice*

Harriet Bartlett (1958) suggested that it is the particular "configuration of value, purpose, sanction, knowledge, and method" (p. 5) that makes social work practice and distinguishes it from the practice of other professions. We were asked to consider whether her definition "works" in view of current realities. Current realities include the nature of social work practice today, what is written about it in professional literature and other sources such as newspapers, and external circumstances including changing demographic, employment, and funding patterns and changing standards of practice in other professions (e.g., evidence-based practice). Realities include the following:

1. Social work practice is varied.

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2. There is an overlap between the problems social workers address and the knowledge, skills, and values they use with other professions and with nonprofessionals.

3. The problems clients confront are influenced by political, social, and economic factors.

4. The profession of social work claims special expertise to address a broad range of client outcomes.

5. There are large gaps between claims of effectiveness (see Number 4) and evidence for such claims. In fact, there is counterevidence, as illustrated by mandated receivership of child welfare services in many U.S. states. There has been little rigorous critical appraisal of variations in social work practices and their outcomes (e.g., do they do more good than harm?); thus, most services social workers provide are of unknown effectiveness. Good intentions are relied on as indicators of good outcomes.

6. There is no evidence that social workers possess knowledge of unique value in relation to attainment of many outcomes compared with nonprofessionals (e.g., see Christensen & Jacobson, 1994; Dawes, 1994).

7. Purchase of services is not evidence based (e.g., based on demonstrated effectiveness and efficiency of services selected).

8. Exposés of social work practice and policy by journalists are common (e.g., Roche, 2000).

9. Social work is a gendered profession composed mostly of women.

10. Vague outcomes are pursued, such as social justice.

11. There is increasing emphasis on managed care in the helping professions.

12. Licensing and accreditation bodies such as the National Association of Social Workers and the Council on Social Work Education rely on surrogates of competence and high-quality professional education, such as diversity of faculty and size of faculty, degrees, and experiences.

13. There is increasing emphasis on transparency of what is done to what effect in professions such as medicine and on evidence-based practice: "the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual [clients]" (Sackett, Rosenberg, Gray, Haynes, & Richardson, 1996, p. 71). It involves "the integration of best research evidence with clinical expertise and client values" (Sackett, Straus, Richardson, Rosenberg, &, Haynes, 2000, p. 1). Involving clients as informed participants is emphasized (e.g., see Edwards & Elwyn, 2001; Entwistle, Sheldon, Sowden, & Watt, 1998).

14. There is increasing access to Internet sources that critically appraise practice- and policy-related research findings (e.g., http://www.cochraneconsumer.com), including sources designed to enhance critical appraisal skills (e.g., http://www.phru.org.uk/-casp/resources/index.htm).

15. Standards are lower today for student admission to social work programs and for student evaluation (grade inflation).

16. There are large gaps between professional rhetoric regarding the importance of attending to environmental factors related to personal problems and what is done in everyday practice; social workers have joined the psychiatric bandwagon in the medicalization of personal and social problems.

17. Clients are typically not informed regarding the evidentiary status of recommended services (e.g., that there is no evidence that these are effective or do

more good than harm) or involved in designing, conducting, and interpreting critical tests of the effectiveness of social work services.

18. There seems to be an inverse correlation between growth of the profession and problems solved.

Does Bartlett's (1958) definition work in view of these realities and, if so, for whom and in what ways—for clients (e.g. to maximize the likelihood of receiving effective, efficient, and ethical services), for social workers (to honor obligations described in our code of ethics), for the public in understanding what social work is all about, for taxpayers (getting value for money), or for the profession (e.g., to maintain and expand turf or to clearly describe goals and values)? Interested parties that may lose or benefit from certain definitions include other professional groups from which we hope to distinguish ourselves, legislators and philanthropic groups from which we hope to gain funds, potential students whom we hope to recruit, and clients whom we hope to entice and help. Different definitions may yield different costs and benefits (e.g., better and more students, more funds, and more status). One reason for defining social work practice is to demark social work from other professions and groups that compete for the same clients (e.g., see Abbott, 1988; Friedson, 1986), allowing it to maintain and expand its turf. The more distinctive (e.g., low cost) and valuable a profession sounds, the more it may guard and expand its turf. The more lofty and praiseworthy a definition sounds, the more others (particularly those with money such as legislators) may be impressed and promote and contribute to the maintenance and expansion of the profession. This is one source of the aspirational nature of social work definitions. The vaguer is the definition and the less transparent is what is done and to what effect, the more flexible are the boundaries of tasks social workers may assume and the easier it is to assert success because no one knows what has been sought or achieved. Given that social work has expanded during the past decade in numbers of social workers employed, programs funded, and professional schools offering degrees, this function has been served. This is true although there is no evidence that services do more good than harm or that educational programs prepare social workers who offer services most likely to achieve outcomes clients value at minimal cost and harm.

Another reason for defining a profession is to help potential users of a profession's services to understand what people in a profession value, do, and achieve and to help both clients and professionals to select efficient, effective, and ethical services. This does not seem to be the key reason here because there is little clear description of variations in services provided and their outcomes. A related reason is to describe a profession's mission and the methods

likely to achieve it so that maximum progress can be made in desired directions (i.e., solving problems). Nor does this seem to be the purpose because of the reason previously described and because the mission (e.g., to foster social justice) is vague, hindering description of progress. Indeed, there seems to be a negative correlation between expansion of the profession and problems solved.

VALUE, PURPOSE, AND SANCTION: OBSCURED CLASHES BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND "SOCIETY"

Bartlett's (1958) definition illustrates two features common to social work throughout its history: the pursuit of vague, idealized purposes (e.g., "to seek out, identify, and strengthen the maximum potential in individuals, groups, and communities," p. 6), and obscuring who (e.g., the individual or representatives of "society") is to decide on what outcomes to pursue (e.g., indicators of maximum potential), how to pursue them, and what criteria to use to make these decisions. (Gordon, 1962, accurately noted that some items included under value in the 1958 statement, such as "There is interdependence between individuals in the society," are matters of empirical investigation, not of value.) Bartlett suggested that "an essential attribute of a democratic society is the realization of the full potential of each individual and the assumption of his social responsibility through active participation in society" (p. 6). Such definitions are aspirational, idealized, religious-like descriptions of deepest hopes. How would one know when full or maximum potential is reached? We could never arrange all environments in which all potentials could flower in a lifetime, even if we had the resources required to do so, and it is not in social work's power to achieve these aims.

Social work has long promised what it cannot deliver in vague terms (e.g., erase poverty). Some may object: "What's the harm?" or "Isn't this a good goal to pursue?" Advantages of idealized definitions include offering hope and inspiration to both clients and professionals. Potential harms include misleading clients, funding bodies, and social workers by encouraging them to believe social workers have powers they do not possess, and distracting them from the pursuit of attainable goals such as decreasing avoidable miseries and arranging a just distribution of scarce resources by fully funding services known to be effective with money saved by not funding services found to be ineffective or harmful. Such definitions distract attention from clearly describing problems of concern to clients and discovering their prospects for resolution. Grandiose promises may yield adverse outcomes such as burnout resulting from the pursuit of unattainable goals and other dysfunctional

responses, such as ritualized "services" (those offered although there is little likelihood they will help clients). Idealized, vague definitions create a gap between what is promised and what can be delivered that may undermine social work's credibility in the eyes of social work's many constituencies, and given the trend toward greater transparency of what is done to what effect in the helping professions, this is likely to be an increasing danger. Popper (1994) suggested that we should focus on minimizing avoidable suffering and argued that there is likely to be agreement on what this is. He (as well as others) argued that pursuit of grand social aims such as social justice is ill-advised because what may be justice for some may be injustice for others (i.e., result in imposing unwanted circumstances on some). An idealized view of social work practice is also reflected in the little attention given to errors, mistakes, and accidents that may negatively affect clients, some (or many) of which may be avoidable. Bartlett (1958) suggested that "the individual social worker always makes his own creative contribution in the application of social work methods to any setting or activity" (p. 8). There is no recognition that this creative activity may do more harm than good. Rather, there is a serene assertion (without foundation) of beneficence and good intent with little attention to related evidentiary issues.

An idealized, broad, vague role of "society" is posed in this early statement: "Society has a responsibility to provide ways in which obstacles to this self-realization (i.e., disequilibrium between the individual and his environment) can be overcome or prevented" (Bartlett, 1958, p. 6). (Some would argue that life itself consists of restoring a balance when disequilibriums occur.) How far can this responsibility be exercised against the individual's consent (e.g., consider involuntary commitment)? Who is to say what a disequilibrium is? Who is to say what is "maximal potential" and of what our "social responsibilities" consist (representatives of social institutions or the individual)? The very first statement in Bartlett's (1958) article is, "The central responsibility of a profession is to maintain and promote in all possible ways the effectiveness of its service to society" (p. 3). Notice the appeal to society, not to clients. Social control functions are integral in this appeal (e.g., consider child protective services, efforts to "adjust" how women in settlement houses dressed, such as not to wear "babushkas," and involuntary commitment). Of what does society consist if not the social institutions and related policies and legal regulations for dealing with the dependent, the troubled, and the troubling?

Society is composed of people who make decisions about what is good and what is bad, what to praise and what to punish, what to give and what to deny, and what is healthy and what is not. These decisions are reflected in social welfare institutions. Szasz (1994) argued that the helping professions

mainly function to handle problems that arise in all societies regarding the dependent, the troubled, and the troubling. Based on a review of case records from 1859 to 1970, Margolin (1997) suggested that social work has been involved in judging and evaluating clients since its inception and that an ever-changing variety of strategies is used on the part of social workers to kid themselves that they are helping and serving when indeed they are judging and evaluating. Thus, although idealized definitions sound benevolent, they hide a troubling latitude of discretion as well as of unwanted and unacknowledged value judgments and intrusion (coercion and manipulation) into clients' lives. Denial of social control functions and reluctance to acknowledge the lack of evidentiary basis for professional services seems to result in a number of unfortunate effects for clients, such as ignoring informed consent requirements.

Definitions of social work practice based on the institutions in which social workers are employed, such as child welfare departments and public welfare agencies, are more suggestive of the social control functions of social workers. Bartlett's (1958) description of sanctions included "governmental agencies authorized by law, voluntary incorporated agencies and the organized profession." Governmental agencies authorized by law as well as voluntary agencies "have taken responsibility for meeting certain of the needs or providing certain of the services necessary for individual and group welfare" (p. 6). Criteria used to decide what is necessary for individual and group welfare are not described, allowing hidden value judgments that may be imposed on clients. Pursuit of "maximizing potential" may focus on change that fits the values of these authorities. Social control functions in social welfare institutions range from the obvious (involuntary commitment) to subtle manipulation (e.g., encouraging clients to view certain behaviors as dysfunctional when such judgments are arbitrary value judgments; e.g., see Margolin, 1997; McCormick, 1996).

CONFUSION, CONTRADICTIONS, AND MISLEADING DIRECTIONS

Reflective of modern-day practices in Bartlett's (1958) statement are gaps among values promoted, knowledge viewed as valuable, and methods emphasized. Certain values are missing, such as the value of nonmalfeasance—not harming in the name of helping. Although there is an emphasis on the importance of considering interrelationships between individuals and their environments in the section on knowledge, this is not complemented by such an emphasis in the section on methods. Only 1 of the 16 techniques (Number 15) Bartlett listed concerns the environment: "Effecting change in immediate

environmental forces operating upon the individual or groups" (p. 7). The relationship between social workers and clients is selected for special attention. Findings that nonprofessionals are as effective as professionals in helping clients achieve a wide range of outcomes suggest that relationship factors are important (e.g., see Christensen & Jacobson, 1994; Dawes, 1994). However, this research also suggests that professional training is not needed to successfully pursue many outcomes of interest to social work clients. Thus, if there is a central core in social work, an argument could be made that much of this core is shared by other helping professions as well as by nonprofessional helpers. (This does not mean that social workers may not possess specialized knowledge in some areas that contributes to success and does not mean that professional education is required to develop such special knowledge and skills.)

There is a contradiction between the emphasis on relationships between individuals and their environments and the emphasis on use of self as a key method social workers employ. This contradiction remains today. In the Purpose section, Bartlett (1958) emphasized helping "individuals and groups to identify or minimize problems arising out of disequilibrium between themselves and their environment" (p. 6). Yet, in the Method section, we find that

> the social work method is the responsible, conscious, disciplined use of self in a relationship with an individual or group. Through this relationship the practitioner facilitates interaction between the individual and his social environment with a continuing awareness of the reciprocal effects of one upon the other. (p. 7)

The latter statement also illustrates empirical questions stated as assertions, a common practice today in social work publications. That is, relationships are claimed as established rather than suggested as possible and in need of critical testing.

Because it is the first word in social work, one would think a great deal of attention would be paid to the social; however, the social is often forgotten in everyday practice. Knowledge in environmental psychology and applied behavior analysis is routinely ignored. Social work has allowed psychiatric views to chip away at social work's historic concerns with interrelationships between behavior and the environment. Many social workers have embraced a psychiatric approach to problems in living (e.g., viewing drinking problems as "brain diseases") and given that they are the main providers of mental health services in the United States, this has a significant impact on clients, for example, overlooking options for altering environmental contributors. The social gets little attention in this biomedicalization of personal and social problems (e.g., see Kutchins & Kirk, 1997). Indeed, one could argue that

many social workers fly under a false flag; they call themselves social workers but in large part are psychiatric workers. There are, of course, many exceptions. Orchestrating many different services to meet the needs of a client, family, group, organization, or community has been a claimed strength of social work. If social workers are to be effective, efficient, and ethical orchestrators of resources, they must use a contextual view to understand problems and their prospects for resolution, drawing on research findings that may decrease uncertainty about how (or if) a problem can be successfully addressed.

Empirical and conceptual matters seem to be confused in Bartlett's (1958) concern with "the inability of the profession to state clearly what knowledge, skills and values are needed by every social worker for basic competence in practice" (p. 4). Pursuit of this aim requires empirical investigation of the relationships of knowledge and skills to attainment of certain outcomes. Bartlett highlighted "the lag in study of practice" (p. 3). She suggested that "building of a professional curriculum program . . . should rest upon understanding of the basic knowledge, values, and skills essential for competent practice" (p. 3). Did she mean identification via empirical research? ("Understanding" may stop at the conceptual or consensual level of analysis, unaccompanied by description of empirical relationships found among certain values, knowledge, skills, and outcomes sought.) If so, we still do not have this information after 60 years. Social work has preferred the method of opinion polls (agreement that a given competency is important often stated so vaguely that what is referred to is unknown). Time and money are spent on seeking people's opinions about what works and then calling these "empirically derived competencies." We have not described variations in practices and related outcomes. What information we do have suggests an overlap between professionals and nonprofessionals in skills used and outcomes attained.

Bartlett (1958) discussed the role of research in defining social work practice, at many points suggesting its importance in exploring "what has been accomplished and where gaps exist" (p. 5). She emphasized that "this means looking at what professionally trained social workers are doing" (p. 8); I would add, to what effect? She suggested studying only what "professionally trained social workers are doing" (p. 8) and recommended postponing study of the "untrained worker." What we need are comparative studies of these two groups to identify what may be unique competencies and successes of social workers. Clients are an absent voice in who should be involved in research efforts. "To do all this, professional social workers and research experts must work together" (Bartlett, 1958, p. 9). To see how much things are changing regarding this, see Hanley, Truesdale, King, Elbourne, and Chalmers (2001).

Bartlett (1958) suggested that one major obstacle to movement in the practice area seems "to have been the lack of any comprehensive scheme by which practice could be analyzed" (p. 3).

> It will be necessary to develop from the working definition of practice a conceptual scheme for classification of conditions (problems) encountered and services rendered in social work practice. Then, and only then, say the research advisors, can adequate research designs for the study of practice be formulated. (p. 9)

(Note again the ignoring of outcomes.) She suggested that "a major obstacle to movement in the practice area seems to have been the lack of any comprehensive scheme by which practice could be analyzed" (Bartlett, 1958, p. 9).

There is a concern with the need for development of research instruments to assess outcome in this early discussion. Clients have real-life problems; we can identify specific subjective and objective indicators of clients' unique goals and track them to determine if hoped-for outcomes are attained and to what degree. We do not need research instruments to evaluate progress, and clear description of problems, related outcomes, and service methods does not have to await the development of a classification scheme. This same kind of distracting argument can be seen today. For example, one objection to the use of client-oriented indicators of high-quality professional education is that we do not know how to measure outcome. Maybe if we involved clients in our deliberations, they could help us out here.

CLIENT-FOCUSED DEFINITIONS

I suggest we use a definition of social work that reflects guidelines in our code of ethics, in which services to clients are emphasized, and that we can be most attentive and faithful to our code if we adopt a client-focused, outcome definition of social work practice. Bartlett's (1958) definition does not work, especially for clients. Little attention is given to key ethical issues of beneficence, nonmalfeasance, and autonomy. Autonomy issues are hidden in appeals to society. Just as we have found harm in other professions such as medicine and dentistry, harm also occurs in social work, perhaps most often by ignoring programs that have been found to help clients and using ineffective services instead. Consider, for example, research by Blenkner, Bloom, and Nielsen (1971) indicating that intensive case management increased mortality of nursing home residents compared with the usual procedures. A number of critical appraisals of social work services show that services we

think are effective are really not (e.g., see Meyer, Borgatta, & Jones, 1965; Schuerman, Rzepnicki, & Littell, 1994).

Idealized definitions appealing to society's obligations threaten client interests by their vagueness, impossibility of fulfillment, and hiding of coercive and manipulative aspects of social work practice (e.g., imposing values regarding what is healthy and what is not; e.g., see McCormick, 1996). They discourage careful evaluation of service outcomes, including the possibility of harming in the name of helping, which is also a threat to clients. Vague definitions of social work involving grandiose claims and aims (e.g., we alone cannot attain them) put clients last rather than first in that false promises are made and we are distracted from pursuit of achievable outcomes. Vague, grandiose definitions also harm social workers and the profession by decreasing opportunities for successful problem resolution. Definition by sanction reflected in place of employment (e.g., public agencies authorized by law) ignores client interests if there is no focus on provision of effective, efficient, and ethical services. Bartlett's (1958) statement contains no mention of client outcomes and the importance of discovering what they are. Indeed, an outcome focus in medicine is only recent (e.g., see Sharpe & Faden, 1998). We see in the Knowledge section "the social services, their structure, organization, and methods" (Bartlett, 1958, p. 7); outcomes are not included. A client-oriented outcome definition would go something like this: Social work practice consists of helping clients achieve outcomes they value via provision of effective, efficient, and ethical services. It makes "conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about clients," involving clients as informed participants (Sackett et al., 1996, 2000).

Client-focused definitions of social work practice encourage us to honor our values and codes of ethics in coercive as well as voluntary settings (e.g., regarding informed consent and competent practice). They highlight obligations to integrate practice- and policy-related research findings when making decisions that affect clients' lives, especially in coercive situations in which clients are reluctant actors. For example, what percentage of parent-training programs provided to parents involved in child protection agencies are those most likely to result in hoped-for outcomes as demonstrated by rigorous research? Even if this is as high as 25% (unlikely), we are not being faithful to our code of ethics (i.e., to offer competent services). Clients have the right to know the evidentiary status of services they are offered. Outcome-oriented definitions suggest how to solve the generalist-specialist problem—by encouraging rigorous research (not opinion polls, as is now the custom) designed to discover the values, knowledge, and skills required to provide effective, efficient, and ethical services in different areas of practice.

Client-oriented definitions encourage us to attend to beneficence, nonmalfeasance, and autonomy. Such definitions should encourage social workers to find out, via rigorous appraisal, (a) if services do more good than harm, (b) if services are efficient in terms of cost and effort, (c) if ethical obligations to clients are honored in deed as well as intention (e.g., informed consent), (d) if avoidable mistakes are minimized within comprehensive risk-management programs (e.g., see Gambrill & Shlonsky, 2001), (e) if judicious use is made of nonprofessionals when such individuals provide as good or better services compared with professionally trained social workers, and (f) if there is a reasoned distribution of scarce resources (e.g., harmful services are not funded, services of unknown effectiveness are not funded unless they are being investigated within a rigorous research design, and programs found to help clients are fully funded, allowing their implementation at a level that maximizes the likelihood of achieving hoped-for outcomes; e.g., see Gray, 2001). The absence of such information reveals definitions of social work to be non–client focused.

Bartlett (1958) noted "the lag in the study of practice" (p. 3). Social work has in large part ignored such study. What is needed is the study of practice and its outcomes in relation to available research findings regarding what services have been found to be effective, efficient, and ethical. Counter to Bartlett's suggestion to postpone studies of the untrained worker, what is needed is to discover the unique competencies of trained social workers (if any) compared with untrained people in relation to outcomes attained. Indeed, it seems that there is a profound scrutiny phobia in social work: an aversion to clearly describing what social workers do and to what effect as well as to clearly describing gaps between what research findings suggest is effective in relation to given hoped-for outcomes and what services are used in everyday practice. Other reasons for avoiding transparency (clearly describing variations in services and their outcomes) might include a basic lack of empathy for clients or caring more about jobs and expansion of services than about discovery whether services do more harm than good and hinder rather than foster a just distribution of scarce resources. Yet another reason may be because professional education programs discourage transparency of what is done and to what effect (e.g., by their absence of critical appraisal of popular definitions of problems and how they may be minimized). For example, we find no courses in social work on social work ignorance.

Client-focused definitions decrease the danger (especially from the client's perspective) of relying on good intentions rather than good outcomes when selecting services and encourage honesty when services and outcomes are imposed on clients. They will hopefully discourage past and current interrelated tendencies to hide the social control functions of social workers

employed in social welfare institutions to pursue unattainable goals. These tendencies result in lost opportunities to empower clients by drawing on practice-related research findings to pursue valued outcomes that are attainable. They disempower clients. Service to clients is emphasized in our code of ethics, as is the importance of competent services drawing on practice- and policy-related research findings. Yet, research suggests that social workers rarely draw on practice-related research findings, rarely honor ethical requirements (e.g., to accurately inform clients about the costs and benefits of recommended services as well as of alternatives so that clients are involved in decisions as informed participants), and often ignore client goals.

SUMMARY

Bartlett's (1958) statement almost a half of a century ago is a reflection of the paradoxes, confusions, contradictions, missed opportunities, and mystifications we see in social work today. These include (a) the lack of match between values, knowledge, and skills claimed to be important and actual practice (e.g., claims to focus on client-environment interactions but often neglecting them in everyday decisions); (b) idealized, vague goals that deflect attention from what is or could be done by social workers and to what effect; (c) absence of a client voice; (d) downplaying social control functions; (e) ignoring the possibility of harm in the name of helping; and (f) ignoring unjust distribution of resources while claiming to value social justice (i.e., funding services that are harmful or of unknown effectiveness, limiting opportunities to fully fund programs found to help clients). Bartlett's emphasis on the importance of studying practice (and, I would add, its outcomes) has not been heeded. Bartlett suggested that

> the primary goal [of analyzing social work practice] is not to improve the status of social work (although this will be a side product), but to enable its members to render better service because of their increased competence, clarity, and security in their functions. (p. 8)

Client-focused definitions should contribute to clients', social workers', and the profession's interests. For example, if social workers can demonstrate that they provide services that are more effective, efficient, and ethical compared with those of nonprofessionals and other professionals, they will compete favorably for resources and gain the benefits of satisfaction with a job well done based on real-life findings rather than on wishful thinking. A client-focused definition intertwines ethical, evidentiary, and application is-

sues. It encourages us to attend to discrepancies among what is needed to attain hoped-for goals, what resources are available, and what is drawn on and created.

The future offers opportunities for making "the social" more than a token. Social workers do not have the resources needed to address many of the problems they are asked to tackle. They could take advantage of their everyday practice experiences to gather data that would clearly reveal the gaps between what is needed, what is available, and what is offered. Publication of such data could be routine for each agency, and such data could be collated by professional organizations such as the National Association of Social Workers and the Council on Social Work Education in a yearly "state of the gap" report.

If the definition of social work influences the quality of services clients receive, spending time to craft such a definition would be a worthwhile endeavor. Let us create a definition of social work practice that shows we care about clients in deed as well as word.

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Research on Social Work Practice

Transforming the Working Definition of Social Work into the 21st Century

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Transforming the Working Definition
of Social Work Into the 21st Century

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Still in its organizational infancy, the National Association of Social Workers' working definition was a groundbreaking contribution to the evolution of social work in the 20th century. As a forerunner to Bartlett's common base of social work, the profession was defined by the following five core components: value, purpose, sanction, knowledge, and method. Transforming the definition to 21st-century relevancy is the subject of this article. Ontological and practice issues are discussed in relation to transformational underpinnings that would evolve social work from its mechanistic and entity-centered roots associated with pre-20th-century science to the organic and relationship-centered discoveries of 20th-century science. An organizing framework is proposed that will transform the common base of social work to a new common whole of social work.

Keywords: social work; definition; transformation; conceptual framework; common whole

Katherine Kendall, honorary president of the International Association of Schools of Social Work, connects the professional beginnings of social work with Octavia Hall in the United Kingdom and the founding of the first Charity Organization Society in 1869 (Kendall, 2000). By the early part of the 20th century, Charles Loch, who for almost 40 years had served as "secretary and guiding spirit of the [Charity Organization Society]" (p. 32), saw the need to develop a more disciplined approach to social work's "spirit of philanthropy" (p. 38) foundations and "looked to science to help direct it more effectively" (p. 38). Adding science from his perspective would help the profession articulate a definite social purpose, recognize common principles, adopt a common method, appreciate the importance of self-discipline, and introduce higher education training. Almost 100 years after its professional beginnings, Harriet Bartlett, who had earlier chaired the committee responsible for the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (1958) "Working

Definition" was concerned that the profession had yet to articulate "adequate words, terms, concepts to represent the important facets and components of the profession's practice as a whole" (Bartlett, 1970, p. 46).

As 1 of 10 presenters at the 2001 Kentucky Conference, "Reworking the Working Definition," I argued there was insufficient information in the original Working Definition statement to appreciate why the five components (value, purpose, sanction, knowledge, and method) were selected and articulated as they were (Ramsay, 2001). The definition statement did not show or describe how, as it claimed, the five components could be networked into an interconnected constellation depicting the whole of social work practice. The statement suggests the possibility that two quite different ontological views of "what reality is" had been used to underpin the development of the working definition. The purpose component referred to "disequilibrium" (NASW, 1958) as an obstacle to self-realization, suggesting that its content would fit with the mechanical and orderly worldview of modern science that was dominant between the 16th and 20th centuries. The statement in the knowledge component that "knowledge of man is never final or absolute" (p. 7) fits well with the beginnings of postmodern science discoveries in the early decades of the 20th century that were to pave the way for an organic and complex worldview of human social functioning to emerge. From these conflicting content observations, I concluded that important ontological issues may not have been sufficiently discussed in the lead up to the published statement.

The Kentucky paper discussed how the tenets of a mid-century conceptual framework, articulated by Bartlett (1970) as a three-component (triangular) "common base of social work," could be transformed to a four-component (tetrahedral) "common whole of social work" framework. I concluded with a list of traditional issues that needed to be examined based on my presentation, my responder's paper (Evans, 2001), and papers of the other core presenters (Albers, 2001; Greene, 2001; Weick, 2001; Wakefield, 2001). In this article, these issues are compared with a list of transformational concepts that need to underpin a reworked definition statement that would bring it in line with and complementary to a comprehensive common whole conception of social work. The adoption of these concepts should also lead to a reworked definition statement that will complement the recently updated international definition of social work approved by the International Federation of Social Workers in 2000 and endorsed by the International Association of Schools of Social Work in 2001 (see the appendix).

The objective of this article is to further the critical discourse on words, terms, and concepts to represent the whole of social work in a definition statement. As the 21st century unfolds, we are reminded that this discourse began as far back as the Milford Conferences in the third decade of the past century.

These meetings on the common method of social casework were followed by several milestone meetings, including NASW meetings culminating in the working definition and two special conceptual framework meetings, one in 1976 in Madison, Wisconsin (NASW, 1977), and the other in 1979 at Chicago's O'Hare Airport (NASW, 1981). Continued discourses of this kind were minimal until their rejuvenation at the Kentucky Conference in 2001. The lists are presented in Table 1 and discussed in the body of the article.

INDIVIDUAL-COLLECTIVE PRIMACY

The value component of the working definition identifies the individual as the "primary concern of this society" (NASW, 1958, p. 5). Because there is no qualifier in the working definition statement, it is assumed that society meant society in a global sense. This would imply that all social workers in the world have a common value base that is individual centered. Interdependence between individuals was acknowledged, but there was no hint that interdependence should be the primary concern of society that would give the profession a common relationship-centered value. Instead, individuals were seen to be "essentially unique and different from others" (p. 5), and society had an obligation to help individuals overcome or prevent obstacles that got in the way of this (unique and different) self-realization. Apart from being a value that is not universal across all subsets of global society, having a primary concern for the individual does not acknowledge the deep and reciprocal interconnectedness between "individual freedom and collective need" (Briggs & Peat, 1989, p. 165). This suggests that social work should transform its primary concern from the individual to the individual-collective unit. Complexity sciences have discovered the cosmic nature of coevolution "where both large and small scales emerge as aspects of one totally interconnected system" (Briggs & Peat, 1989, p. 164). The significance of this for social work is the awareness that the more we give primacy to the individual, the more we have to pay attention to the individual and his or her relationship to the environment (i.e., the collective). Lynn Margulis, who was an early proponent of deep interconnectedness with her controversial but now accepted theory of symbiosis, continues to support the growing awareness that "all life is directly or indirectly connected with all other life" (Margulis & Sagan, 1997, p. xxii). This challenge to our view of individuality as an independent entity and fundamental reality continues to open the door for social work to understand individuality at its roots to be "a cooperative venture" taking us to a new kind of holism that "will resolve the apparent conflict between individual freedom and collective need" (Briggs & Peat, 1989, p. 165).

TABLE 1: **Working Definition: Traditional to Transformational Concept and Foundation**

Traditional Concept	Transformational Concept
Individual	Individual-collective
Divided whole worldview	Undivided whole worldview
Equilibrium functioning	Far-from-equilibrium functioning
Self-determination	Codetermination and/or self-organization
Linear causes	Nonlinear patterns
Dichotomous opposites	Complementarity principle
Dual purpose	Unifying purpose
Person-in-environment domain	Person-environment-network domain
Entity-centered change focus	Relationship-centered change focus
No common organizing framework	Common organizing framework
Common base of social work	Common whole of social work

DIVIDED-UNDIVIDED WHOLE WORLDVIEWS

An extension of the value that each individual is "essentially unique and different from others" (NASW, 1958, p. 5) is the worldview that all entities exist independently in space and time. This view is deeply rooted in modern science and the assumption of a clockwork universe. It provided the foundation for the science of objectivity, known as positivism and empiricism, that "requires an absolute separation between the observing subject and the observed object" (Frattaroli, 2001, p. 168). The medical model that social workers are fond of criticizing is grounded in this view, yet there is much about social work that is guided by the same divided whole worldview. This identification with a divided worldview is quite understandable, given that the context of its beginnings was rooted to the Cartesian paradigm and its mechanistic metaphor as the exemplar for discovering truth. Truth proof (often described as a known reality) was equated only with the observable and measurable. David Bohm's (1983) work on wholeness provides an understanding of just how pervasive the divided whole view has been in the Western world. Beginning with the atomic theory of Democritus more than 2,000 years ago, this view was gradually transformed to mean that "the whole of reality is actually constituted of nothing but 'atomic building blocks,' all working together more or less mechanically" (Bohm, 1983, p. 8). From this came the notion that a whole could be analyzed and understood as the additive sum of its separate parts, scientifically known as reductionism: "The whole weight of science was eventually put behind this analytical and fragmentary approach to reality" (p. 9). The divided whole view fostered the

widespread practice of dividing the arts, sciences, professions, and most other forms of human work into specialties, each considered separate and different from the others. Fragmentation reflected the way society in general had developed by being "broken up into separate nations and different religious, political, economic, racial groups" (p. 1). The fragmentary view also reflected the way individuals were divided into separate parts based on different aims, ambitions, loyalties, and so forth.

These often conflicting divisions and judgmental categorizations made it easy for some groups to actively exploit others. The legacy of this view is still prevalent, witnessed by widespread and exclusionary distinctions between people (race, nation, family, profession, etc.) that often preclude members of these groups from working together for the common good. The problem associated with the divided whole view is not so much the worldview itself but the pervasive domination that it has acquired regarding our understandings of what is reality. Dividing is convenient and useful in practical, technical, and functional activities. It is problematic when it becomes the dominant worldview, making reality appear to consist of separately existent fragments that are described as if they are dichotomous opposites. Bohm's (1983) concept of "undivided wholeness" reflecting a deeply interconnected universe represents the kind of worldview transformation that social work needs to make if it wants a reworked definition free from a fragmentary and dichotomous opposite notion of reality. Transforming to this worldview would help the profession adopt a "synergetic" perspective, known as an "exploratory approach of starting with the whole, based on a generalized principle of synergy that the behaviors of whole systems are unpredicted by the behavior of their parts taken separately" (Fuller, 1975, p. 13).

EQUILIBRIUM—FAR-FROM-
EQUILIBRIUM FUNCTIONING

The working definition is explicit about "disequilibrium" (NASW, 1998, p. 6) as an undesirable social functioning state and its unstated corollary that equilibrium is the desired state. The purpose component states that the purpose of social work is "to identify and resolve or minimize problems arising out of disequilibrium between themselves and their environment" (p. 6) and to "identify potential areas of disequilibrium . . . to prevent the occurrence of disequilibrium" (p. 6). The idea of balance and stability as the desired marker of healthy social functioning is rooted to a mechanical worldview that sees novelty, robustness, flexibility, and loss of control as something to be avoided.

Maintaining this view of equilibrium will trap social work into a continued way of thinking about living systems that was refuted by postmodern science at the turn of the 20th century. Although a new understanding of equilibrium dynamics was known at the time of the working definition, a full appreciation of this knowledge has only become apparent in the past 40 years with advances in chaos theory and other complexity sciences. Margaret Wheatley (1999) provides a good sense of how equilibrium should be understood in social work from the aspect of leadership and new science, as follows: "Equilibrium is neither the goal nor the fate of living systems, simply because as open systems they are partners with their environment" (p. 78). Much of this new understanding of equilibrium dynamics comes from the Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine and his discoveries of how "chaos gives birth to order" (Briggs & Peat, 1989, pp. 134-135). Prigogine discovered that far-from-equilibrium states best represent the conditions of health and well-being. Near- and close-to-equilibrium states are obstacles to self-realization in the working definition sense or to self-organization in a complexity science sense. Self-organization within a far-from-equilibrium context shows that "systems don't just breakdown, new systems emerge" (p. 136). Transforming to this understanding of equilibrium dynamics will allow the development of a definition that recognizes the constant of change in healthy systems so that they can actively exchange with their environments, "using what is there for their own renewal" (Wheatley, 1999, p. 78).

SELF-DETERMINATION—
CODETERMINATION AND/OR SELF-ORGANIZATION

Although self-determination is not specifically addressed in the working definition, it is a longstanding instrumental value of the profession that is grounded to the core value of the individual being the primary concern of society. With little or no critical reflection, social workers are generally outspoken advocates of the right of individuals to "express their own opinions and to act upon them" (Zastrow, 1999, p. 40). Client self-determination is said to flow from the logic of the profession's primary value and belief in the inherent dignity of all individuals. The logic of self-determination also comes from the mechanical worldview that all things and individuals exist independently in space and time. This would support the literal interpretation of individuals' independent right to express an opinion and to act on it, irrespective of how it might harm or benefit others. However, the literal interpretation of self-determination is seldom, if ever, the complete explanation of the

principle. The rest of the explanation is usually something along the line of "as long as by doing so clients do not infringe on the rights of others" or "they should be permitted to determine their own lifestyles as far as possible" (p. 40). These caveats also signal that social work does not stand as firmly on the self-determination value as it has claimed for more than a century. The acknowledgment of interconnectedness with others is inherent in the way we qualify our belief in absolute self-determination. However, even in the use of qualifying caveats, we are still inclined to support the notion that the facilitation of self-determination leads to desired social functioning states of self-sufficiency and self-reliance. A divided whole worldview grounded to an assumption of independent entities and the promotion of independence is difficult to purge, even with the principle that "social work is a cooperative endeavor between clients and workers (client participation)" (p. 40).

The challenge is made no less difficult with a method component emphasis in the working definition that says "the practitioner facilitates interaction between the individual and his social environment with a continuing awareness of the reciprocal effects of one upon the other" (NASW, 1958, p. 8). Any effort to transform self-determination to a concept that reflects the reciprocal effects between self and others must involve a worldview transformation as well—divided whole to undivided whole and the assumption of interdependence between all entities. A "quick fix" to the self-determination dilemma is resolved by making a new word with the prefix *co*. By adopting the word *codetermination* as one of its core instrumental values, social work would have to shift its primary concern from the individual to the interdependence of individuals in society. This, in turn, would allow the profession to embrace the importance of the individual being able to make his or her own choices and decisions with full awareness of this same right for others so that both behave in ways that will not infringe on the rights of the other. A more advanced evolution would see the profession replace the right to self-determination value with the right to self-organization or self-making, as they are understood through the work of Maturana and Varela and their concept of autopoiesis (as cited in Capra, 1996). *Auto* means self, referring to the autonomy of self-organizing systems, and *poiesis* means making, referring to the continual making of new relationships within an interactive network. Transformation to the self-organizing concept would evolve the profession to the inherent nature of nonlinear interconnectedness of all components in social systems. Social workers would be able to actively facilitate self-organizing emergence in the direction of far-from-equilibrium social functioning and advocate for individuals and the societies in which they live to jointly assume their collective responsibilities to all citizens.

LINEAR CAUSES—NONLINEAR PATTERNS

Social work has had a long and uneasy affiliation with linear cause-and-effect methods. These methods are generally associated with positivism and empiricist science and an emphasis on using evidence-based research to guide our understanding of human development, social dynamics, and implementation of practice interventions. Linear relationships are usually assumed to be proportional between cause and effect. For example, minimal or large study input will result in minimal or large passing grades. Huge efforts by a social worker will result in huge improvements in social functioning, and so forth. The working definition was not aligned with this understanding of cause and effect. It stated in the Knowledge component that "knowledge of man is never final or absolute . . . and [a social worker] is aware and ready to deal with the spontaneous and unpredictable in human behavior" (NASW, 1958, p. 7). This suggests an alignment with postmodern science and a need for social workers to be guided by nonlinear pattern dynamics where "a small change in one variable can have a disproportional, even catastrophic impact on other variables" (Briggs & Peat, 1989, p. 24).

DICHOTOMOUS OPPOSITES—
COMPLEMENTARITY PRINCIPLE

It is noteworthy that the working definition did not evolve the Method component from a dual purpose or focus perspective, which was common during the first half of the 20th century. Although the concept of method was defined in a footnote as "an orderly systematic mode or procedure" (NASW, 1958, p. 8), social work method was more elaborately defined as social workers' conscious use of self in relationship with others to facilitate interactions and change with their social environments. Change in this facilitated process had three dimensions: "within the individual in relation to his social environment, of the social environment in its effect upon the individual, and of both the individual and the social environment in their interaction" (p. 8). Had this component been grounded to the dual-focus perspective, the statement would have focused on facilitating change to the person or the environment and compatible with the divided whole view, which is grounded to a binary, dichotomous, opposites (either/or) view of reality. It would also have reflected a worldview that the three-dimensional nature of the space we occupy is objectively separated from the observer that occupies a place in the same space. Such a view would also have directed social workers to accept the belief that scientific observers can objectively measure, compare, control,

and ultimately understand everything according to mathematical laws without observer interference or bias. These views are generally associated with Rene Descartes's mechanistic "truth" of mind-body separation in which skepticism concerning everything but the objective observers applied. The legacy of this dichotomous opposite perspective is evident in social work from its earliest conflicts between "settlement" work and "social" work (Kendall, 2000).

A closer look at the Method component suggests the developers either explicitly or intuitively understood Bohr's (1963) principle of complementarity and wrote the component to help social work shift from the dichotomous opposite bias of a binary approach to a perspective that embraces the interactive complementarity of opposites. In essence, Bohr's principle states, "Every scientific observation is really a participant-observation—an interaction between the observer and the observed that changes the state of the observed in the very act of observing it" (Frattaroli, 2001, p. 146). Fuller brought the intellectual understanding of the complementarity principle to a practical level (Applewhite, 1977). Because we know that what is observed (three-dimensional space) cannot be independent of the observer, the observer represents an additional dimension, making all observed realities minimally four-dimensional and always influenced by the observer.

Frattaroli (2001) referred to another aspect of Bohr's principle that "science has precisely two particular ways of looking—*analytical* and *synthetic*—that produce two very different types of [four-dimensional] observation" (p. 152). The analytical observer divides problems into their constituent parts to provide understanding of their discrete contributions to the whole problem. The synthetic observer recognizes complex interactive patterns of constituent parts with the whole always greater than the sum of the behaviors of its parts. These apparently mutually exclusive views, however, are complementary and coexist. Thus, Bohr's principle permits a better understanding of the misleading messages embedded in declarations that social work has a dual purpose or dual focus or in statements that describe dichotomous methods, such as micro and macro, to be mutually exclusive and separate from each other in their applications.

DUAL PURPOSE—UNIFYING PURPOSE

At the turn of the 20th century, social work had a dual-purpose identity calling for specialized attention to social reform and the provision of personal

social services. The complementarity of these dual specializations, as suggested by Bohr's discovery, was never fully explored in the context of social work's person-in-environment domain of practice. Instead, the assumed nature of mutual exclusivity of these dichotomous methods led to the establishment of separated specializations that dominated most of the 20th century. Although it is refreshing that the Purpose component is silent on the dual-purpose question (suggesting that the developers had moved beyond the legacy of Cartesian dualities), this silence did little to advance the unified nature of social work purpose. Had the developers been aware of plurality of oneness, a minimum of two (Fuller, 1975), they could have articulated the unified purpose of social work as two complementarity elements: one addressing social reform and the other the need for personal social services.

PERSON-IN-ENVIRONMENT AND
PERSON-ENVIRONMENT-NETWORK DOMAINS

Although the working definition does not address the general domain of social work, American pioneers such as Richmond and Addams were advocates of a person-environment interface context for social work and also experienced conflicts over the priority target of intervention: person or environment. I credit Bartlett (1970) in her classic *Common Base of Social Work Practice* for the clearest declaration of social work's domain of practice in which three key concepts (person, interaction, and environment) were configured into the widely known phrase *person in environment*. The central focus of social work practice was the interaction between person and environment situations, but she did not declare the uniqueness of social work to be this relationship-centered focus. The simplicity of the triangular person-in-environment constellation understates the number and complexity of the dynamics involved in social functioning. If this construct were critically examined within the context of postmodern science, social workers would discover that networks and relationship patterns provide a more holistic description of social functioning. With this in mind, it may, therefore, be of great value for social workers to critically explore a new construct using the concept of person-environment networks. The person-environment networks domain as a four-dimensional converging and diverging system would provide a holistic context to depict the complementarity of entity-centered and relationship-centered activities in social work.

ENTITY-CENTERED AND
RELATIONSHIP-CENTERED FOCUS

The mechanical worldview contributed a building block approach to social functioning consisting of discrete entities. Everything, therefore, became "something centered," and social work followed the trend as revealed by entity-centered methods: client centered (Rogers, 1951), task centered (Reid & Epstein, 1977), family centered (Hartman & Laird, 1983), people centered (Cox, 1998), and so forth. Yet the new science has found that there are no building blocks or discrete units; there are only relationships. Fuller (1975) conceptualized it nicely: The existence of self and otherness entities depends on their relationship to one another. Social work claims to be relationship centered, with its domain focus on interactions and a strong allegiance to coempowerment attributes of the professional-client relationship, but it is weak in having a clearly demonstrated model to implement this claim. With the aid of a holistic model, social workers can learn how to focus on the intangible (relationship-centered interactions) and work through the tangible (entity-centered person and environment targets). For social work to fully transform to a relationship-centered profession, social workers would need to become more familiar with the relationship discoveries in quantum science and their links to four-dimensional system constellations. Instead of remaining tied to the entity-centered legacy of a mechanical building block view, a new view will be fostered that is more akin to a web of "dancing relationships" between the constituent elements of a unified whole (Capra, 1996).

NO COMMON ORGANIZING FRAMEWORK
OR COMMON ORGANIZING FRAMEWORK

The working definition is not grounded in a common organizing framework, although its five components could be displayed or described holistically as a "pentahedral" constellation (see Holosko, 2003 [this issue]). The definition highlights the entity nature of each component in keeping with the building block view of the world. The proposed geometrical thinking framework (Fuller, 1975), therefore, offers social work the potential of a common organizing framework. It is based on discoveries that whole systems in nature are tetrahedral in dimensionality and that anything less is not whole. That is, a minimum whole system framework is a constellation of four entities interconnected by six relationships representing nature's minimum "set of elements standing in interaction" that constitutes a whole system. A tetrahedral system provides a geometric way of thinking in which the basic properties of

the system are invariant (do not change) when undergoing transformations. Users of this system can be taught to recognize, quantify, qualify, and evaluate any discrepancies in the elements and interrelationships of a system. It must also be recognized that Fuller (1975) was able to produce geometric artifacts of the quantum discovery that there are no solids or "basic building blocks" but only energy events and relationships. All energy events, regardless of physical embodiment or entity identification, are held together by sets of interconnected relationships. As a result of these observations, Fuller was convinced that solving complex human problems required that the emphasis had to be on relationships. The relationship-centered and unfolding complexity nature of a minimum whole system, therefore, offers social work the basis for a common organizing framework that is invariant to the influences or articulations of political variances, academic fashions, and multiple theoretical perspectives.

COMMON BASE OF SOCIAL WORK
OR COMMON WHOLE OF SOCIAL WORK

Bartlett (1970) developed the common base of social work to house the working definition. She identified a two-dimensional base of three components: a central focus on social functioning; a broad orientation to people being served, directly or indirectly; and a repertoire of professional interventions. She described the importance of professional use of self in practice but did not give it the status of a core component. By recognizing the professional use of self as a core component, the common whole of social work begins to take shape. Using a minimum whole system constellation as a common organizing framework, the following four common components can be articulated: (a) domain of practice, (b) paradigm of the profession, (c) domain of social worker, and (d) methods of practice (Ramsay, 2001). Domain of practice includes the social functioning focus generally described as social work's person-in-environments area of practice. Paradigm of the profession includes Bartlett's broad orientation toward people being served, and identifies social work as a community of likeminded people with a shared understanding of the profession and how it is practiced. Domain of social worker includes the social worker's own person-in-environment system and its impact on the practice of social work. Methods of practice identifies the professional interventions and particular modalities of practice that are informed by multiple theoretical perspectives and "evidence-based" knowledge. This constellation of interconnected components transforms Bartlett's common base conception to the four-dimensional conception of the common whole of

social work that can be unfolded to represent the world around cultural complexity and diversity of social work.

Transforming the working definition to be complementary with a new common conceptual framework will, therefore, be a giant step toward the fulfillment of Bartlett's (1970) dream. She had hoped that graduates would one day leave schools of social work with "an initial grasp of social work's full scope and content" (p. 83).

APPENDIX
International Federation of Social
Workers Definition of Social Work

DEFINITION

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships, and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Using theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

COMMENTARY

Social work in its various forms addresses the multiple, complex transactions between people and their environments. Its mission is to enable all people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives, and prevent dysfunction. Professional social work is focused on problem solving and change. As such, social workers are change agents in society and in the lives of the individuals, families, and communities they serve. Social work is an interrelated system of values, theory, and practice.

Values

Social work grew out of humanitarian and democratic ideals, and its values are based on respect for the equality, worth, and dignity of all people. Since its beginnings more than a century ago, social work practice has focused on meeting human needs and developing human potential. Human rights and social justice serve as the motivation and justification for social work action. In solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty and to liberate vulnerable and oppressed people to promote social inclusion. Social work values are embodied in the profession's national and international codes of ethics.

Theory

Social work bases its methodology on a systematic body of evidence-based knowledge derived from research and practice evaluation, including local and indigenous knowledge specific to its context. It recognizes the complexity of interactions

between human beings and their environment and the capacity of people both to be affected by and to alter the multiple influences on them, including biopsychosocial factors. The social work profession draws on theories of human development and behavior and social systems to analyze complex situations and to facilitate individual, organizational, social, and cultural changes.

Practice

Social work addresses the barriers, inequities, and injustices that exist in society. It responds to crises and emergencies as well as to everyday personal and social problems. Social work uses a variety of skills, techniques, and activities consistent with its holistic focus on persons and their environments. Social work interventions range from primarily person-focused psychosocial processes to involvement in social policy, planning, and development. These include counseling, clinical social work, group work, social pedagogical work, and family treatment and therapy as well as efforts to help people obtain services and resources in the community. Interventions also include agency administration, community organization, and engaging in social and political action to affect social policy and economic development. The holistic focus of social work is universal, but the priorities of social work practice will vary from country to country and from time to time depending on cultural, historical, and socioeconomic conditions.

NOTE: This international definition of the social work profession replaces the International Federation of Social Workers definition adopted in 1982. It is understood that social work in the 21st century is dynamic and evolving and therefore no definition should be regarded as exhaustive. It was adopted at the International Federation of Social Workers general meeting in Montréal, Canada, in July 2000, and endorsed by the International Association of Schools of Social Work in 2001.

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Research on Social Work Practice

Bartlett's Definition of Social Work Practice: A Generalist Educator's Perspective

Joanne C. Turner

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Bartlett's Definition of Social Work Practice: A Generalist Educator's Perspective

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The purpose of this article is to comment on the contemporary relevance of Harriet Bartlett's 1958 article and definition of social work practice from the perspective of a BSW generalist-based educator. As with other commentaries in this edition, there is agreement that Bartlett's paradigm gives us the structure from which a definition can be built, but as she points out, because of the dynamic nature of the profession, its definition is always in process and hence never finalized. Some of the external factors and internal changes that have taken place in the profession since Bartlett's time are identified. An overall criticism of Bartlett is that she, as do the generalists, tends to view social work practice from a problem-solving approach rather than a more contemporary, holistic growth-oriented perspective.

Keywords: education; social work; generalist

The purpose of this article is to comment on Harriet Bartlett's 1958 definition of social work practice as to its relevance in the year 2003. The approach taken is that of a director of a BSW program mindful of the ongoing need to maintain a goodness of fit between the practice realities of the profession and the academic rigors of the curriculum.

Thus, from an educator's perspective in this era of postmodernism—aware of the prescribed undergraduate North American accreditation standards pertaining to a generalist's perspective and the responsibility to advance the profession's body of knowledge—one must always be concerned about the graduates we are producing and the reality of our expectations of them as they commence practice with a baccalaureate (usually the BSW) degree.

In this article, the description of practice will be based on commonly understood generalist concepts. This is presented with the awareness that the BSW is the first professional degree and that large numbers of social workers

have progressed on to master's- and doctoral-level work in which other defi-
nitions of practice may be pervade.

A GENERALIST PERSPECTIVE

Before one can discuss Bartlett's definition in this context, it will be help-
ful to provide some background regarding the conceptual base required for a
new BSW graduate practicing from a generalist orientation.

The literature on generalist practice from authors such as Landon (1995)
and Johnson (1992) reminds us that generalist practice is frequently
described as grounded in general and social systems theory, influenced by the
later ecological approach of the life model (Germain & Gitterman, 1980).
This approach often includes some form of problem solving as well as other
types of intervention applicable to all levels of client systems.

Earlier, several noted social work educators from the 1960s and 1970s
contributed to a growing body of knowledge of generalist practice. Landon
(1995) pointed out that

> The specific generalist conceptualization also owes a major cognitive debt to
> the central idea first proposed by Schwartz in 1961, that social work practice is
> in fact a matter of mediation between systems. (p. 1102)

Also, in the late 1960s, Johnson reminded us that the assumptions of hu-
man competence were strongly influenced Perlman's work and that human
problems were viewed by Perlman as a natural part of life, hence not always
pathological. This concept was an important foundation for her problem-
solving paradigm and emphasized the social functioning focus of social work
intervention.

> By the early 1970s, a social work practice was emerging in which a general the-
> ory base was used for the original response to need and for the assessment of
> the client in the situation. Then, using a relationship developed in the process,
> an intervention based on one of the more specific approaches was chosen from
> the intervention repertoire. . . . The essence of generalist practice began to ap-
> pear. (Johnson, 1992, p. 30)

Landon (1995) then described the next steps in generalist thinking:

> In the quest for a theory for this broad practice base, social work education
> adopted notions from general and social systems theories and ecological think-

ing to undergird the foundation for all practice. Also, some form of the problem-solving process supplanted the earlier clinical model of diagnosis, treatment, and evaluation as a longitudinal paradigm for conducting practice with the various sizes of client systems. (p. 1102)

Johnson's (1992) summary connected past and current trends in the development of generalist concepts. She noted,

> Generalist practice, then, reflects the evolutionary response over the past century to societal concerns and needs and to events and thinking. Generalist practice reflects the theoretical heritage of the profession: assessment, person in situation, rehabilitation process, and intervention. Social work is an ever-changing and ever-developing professional endeavor. However, its strong emphasis on assessment, a concern for intervention through working with rather than do to or for a client, its emphasis on the person in the situation, the importance of rehabilitation, and the concern for the process of practice all remain at the heart of social work practice today. (p. 33)

With current professional emphasis on accountability, overall responsibility to evaluate all of these components is an additional requirement.

In this brief review, it is noted that the potential danger of viewing every human condition as a problem to be solved was never widely acknowledged in the enthusiasm for this new broad practice base.

POSTMODERN THINKING

In the past few years, the postmodern perspective has become more prevalent, raising questions about the fit (or lack of fit) between generalist thinking and these new concepts. In this author's view, the two constructs are compatible if the generalist practitioner incorporates the postmodernist constructs of awareness of the "contexts in which knowledge is constructed and communicated" (Sands, 2001), becomes knowledgeable regarding the norms of the agency, the roles and functions of the staff, and the realities of small and large systems within which clients function, and recognizes the need at times to deconstruct the narrative to give voice to the victims of oppression. Ideally, the BSW graduate could demonstrate the qualities of both "artist and scientist, the postmodern . . . social work practitioner constructs meaning to help clients construct which is meaningful to them" (Sands, 2001, p. 23). Hence, both paradigms once understood and incorporated into practice can serve as useful practice knowledge for the entry-level practitioner.

THE CANADIAN EXPERIENCE

As baccalaureate programs in social work were developed in Canada in the 1970s, they were strongly influenced by their American colleagues. The U.S. Council on Social Work Education in 1984 identified generalist education as the definitive model for undergraduate social work education. Its counterparts to the north, The Canadian Association Schools of Social Work (CASSW), adopted the same generalist model and schools and faculties of social work developed their curricula, which included foundation courses consisting of the knowledge, values, and skills required for generalist practice at multisystem levels.

HARRIET BARTLETT'S DEFINITION

The impetus for this early work came from Bartlett's (1958) expressed dismay about the lack of a conceptual scheme for consistent thinking about practice. She proposed in her article (on the definition of social work practice) that the best starting point may be to examine the current trends or issues that concern practitioners and influence the nature of their day-to-day practice.

Looking at this starting-point approach in the year 2001, some of the areas that come to mind involve the administrative and theoretical emphasis on short-term treatment in contrast to the more traditional psychotherapies of an earlier period, the emergence of managed care as a major component of social work service, particularly in North America, and the concern around professional boundaries in areas such as case management. (Interestingly, social work is not the only profession that claims expertise in case management. In fact, that function has been taken over in numerous Canadian hospitals, primarily by the nursing profession).

In addition, the field of child welfare has become of major concern in North America in recent years as more and more instances of child abuse and neglect have been made dramatically apparent by a series of very tragic child deaths throughout the continent. As a result, a series of new initiatives in both the public and private spheres has been undertaken to improve and strengthen this critical field of service.

Globalization has become another concept that must be incorporated into issues facing social workers. As this trend spreads in both economic and political terms across our world, it has implications for every profession, including our own, especially if it is viewed as an opportunity to facilitate

dialogue between people of different countries and shared understanding of diverse cultures.

Another one of Bartlett's earlier statements regarding the responsibility of any profession concerned the need to serve the public domain. As social work educators who share that responsibility, it seems fairly obvious that the schools and faculties of social work are positioned to be able to provide leadership to professional thinking and to be major players both in defining a working definition and in describing the major competencies of effective social work practice.

Bartlett's article raised a fundamental issue regarding a difficulty in clearly defining the basic knowledge, skills, and values needed by members of the social work profession to achieve basic minimal level or competencies. She worried that even if the profession reviewed existing major studies and compared results, as well as identified gaps and set priorities, this still would not provide a definitive working definition. Yet, recognizing the need for some type of practice base, she developed a working definition of social work practice that she saw as tentative, subject to ongoing revision and refinement, essentially a work in progress.

OTHER VIEWPOINTS

Other authors, such as Gibelman (1999), have added new and broader concepts to Bartlett's description of the essential components of a working definition. They suggested that social work and social work practice are significantly defined by social work's place in a larger social environment at specific points in time. That is, external forces have played a larger role in defining the boundaries of social work and shaping the nature of practice more so than internal professional forces and choices, such as those described by Bartlett.

> The relative influence of internal (profession specific) versus external (societal) forces in defining social work may be idiosyncratic to particular times, but their dynamic interaction provides the context in which the growth and development of the profession can be understood. (Gibelman, 1999, p. 299)

This is an interesting mixture of ideas and I think in reality, probably some middle ground here would be closer as to how we would currently view the definition of BSW social work practice in the present day.

Gibelman (1999) argued that a periodic debate about what constitutes the social work profession and its practice is seen in her eyes as both appropriate

and positive because it signifies an awareness that social work practice is a
dynamic force and it evolves to respond to and address the needs of a chang-
ing world. Therefore, continuing efforts to define practice are essential if, as
she suggests, the profession is to exert greater influence in identifying its own
view of the world. Thus, she argues for a proactive rather than a reactive
stance in which future definitions of social work practice are seen as the result
of informed decision making by all components of the social work profession
rather than only reacting to external forces in the environment dictating the
boundaries of our practice.

William Gordon, critiquing Bartlett's definition in 1962, agreed that the
components she defined—namely values, knowledge, method, sanction, and
purpose—were necessary but argued further that the relationships existing
between them must be clarified.

Gordon (1962) proposed that the key ingredient is the action of the social
worker in practice integrating all the components.

> Action of the worker is, therefore, the stuff of practice. The values, knowledge,
> and methods that can be marshalled to guide the worker's action, together with
> purposes towards which the action is directed and the sanctions under which it
> occurs . . . affect and determine this action and presumably cause it to be differ-
> ent from any other actions. (p. 5)

THE DEFINING SYSTEMS OF PRACTICE

Accepting these arguments that practice is defined by a broad spectrum of
internal and external factors and their interaction, let us now review some of
the current systems that interact and influence contemporary social work
practice at the BSW level.

1. At the practitioner level, as a social worker becomes more experienced, new
   knowledge, new techniques, new approaches emerge that we tend to identify
   as so-called practice wisdom. Such knowledge does not always become part
   of our written knowledge base yet can be a major influence on practice.
2. The profession resides in a sociopolitical bureaucratic system that also shapes
   its practice. Examples of this are as follows: local, regional, and international
   codes of ethics; accreditation processes for schools of social work and com-
   munity agencies such as family service and mental health; the internal disci-
   plinary machinery of regulatory bodies; and through the numerous informal
   influences that legitimize and challenge such boundaries.
3. The profession is also defined by the academic research arm within which
   scholars engage in an ongoing process that examines, explores, refines, devel-
   ops, and expands the bodies of knowledge and theories that drive the profes-
   sion, and evaluates the effectiveness of its practice.

4. The body politic defines the profession through a myriad of state, provincial, and national legislative processes specific to social work and legislation applicable to accountability toward protection of the public. An example of this is found in the recently proclaimed legislation for social work licensure in Ontario that defines social work practice in a precise and detailed manner.

5. Society also defines practice through its expanding expectations of the profession of social work; for example, private practice developed because certain groups of clients sought it. As well, the role of the social worker evolves as new psychosocial problems emerge, such as post-traumatic stress disorders, now recognized as a mental health issue and listed under the DSM classification.

Thus, practice is defined minimally at two different levels, conceptual and operational. At the conceptual level, Bartlett's definition can generally be applied to all professions. At the operational level, practice is viewed as dynamic, evolving in precise concepts (constructs) constantly tested and refined in both a conceptual and experiential manner through practice, research, societal expectations, cultural, national, and political influences. Thus, social work, as all professions, needs to respond to a broad spectrum of intersystemic tension.

In summary, North American social work as a long-established human service profession emanating within a sociopolitical perspective defined itself internally through its own internal structures, its educational institutions, professional organizations, and its network of service providers. Although this definition may or may not equate how it is defined by external social subsystems, Gibelman (1999) argued that it is the dynamic interaction of internal professional forces versus external societal pressures that provides the context in which the growth and development of the profession can be best understood.

HARRIET BARTLETT: A CRITIQUE

As a profession, we all owe a large debt of gratitude to Harriet Bartlett for her seminal work in attempting to define professional practice and in drafting one of the earliest definitions of practice. Bartlett's contribution included all of the elements of practice and how to recognize practice. She stressed that all the components must be present and viewed them as separate but equal. She did not discuss the specifics of what practice actually consists, nor the relationship between the different elements. However, her section on "Method" included some astute comments. In addition to the need for systematic observation, assessment, and action plan she stressed the need for an ongoing evaluation of both the nature and effect of the relationship between the client and

the worker. Furthermore, she argued that this evaluation provided the basis for professional judgment by which the worker determined the direction of the intervention.

There are so many ways in which the profession has changed and evolved since 1958, and these must be taken into account in revisiting Bartlett's work in 2001. We must note that originally Bartlett's article was written for the American National Association of Social Workers and at a time when the BSW was the modal degree for practice. Thus, any current definition must have a much broader scope that includes all levels of university preparation.

It must also include an international perspective that encompasses social work in every type of society from industrialized global postmodern economies to struggling Third World realities. This also affects our traditional value that social work needs to be practiced in a democratic society. A more contemporary position would be that the value base of social work is a commitment to social justice in which people have the right to develop their potential and have the opportunity to do so. We must also be aware that in today's world, social work is practiced effectively in many nondemocratic countries.

As we move into the new millennium, the scope of practice is much broader than it was 40 years ago, when Bartlett developed her definition that appears to be primarily oriented to work with individuals and groups. Other methods concerning dyads, families, and communities are rarely mentioned. Her view of problem solving is narrower than the generalist approach, which states it can be utilized with any type of system. Neither does she mention race nor ethnicity in any of the knowledge bases but incorporates them incorrectly under the generic term of "culture."

In terms of the theoretical base, 40 years ago, practice was defined in broadly functional or psychodynamic terms with some beginning influence of other theories such as general systems being introduced through the work of Gordon Hearn. These theories by themselves have proven to be much too narrow for current practice. At present, we need to practice from a multitheoretical base that involves a large number of theories. This requires that we all keep up with an expanding theory base. The challenge now is not to be an expert in every theory and thought system but to know the potential of each and how to find a particular theoretical approach and method when such an approach seems appropriate, given the needs of the client, the resources of the community, and the mandate of the agency. This reflects, in a sense, the true art of practice.

One section of Bartlett's definition that I found perplexing was her perception that teaching, research, and administration were designated as separate fields of practice, not to be included under the conceptual umbrella of general

social work practice. As an educator, my view of the teaching of all social work methods, knowledge, and skills is that education, research, and administration should be included in any generic description of social work practice.

Bartlett did understand the concepts of growth and development as they applied to any profession and recognized that the definition must allow for the evolution of new knowledge and methodologies with a continual rebuilding and refining. She hoped that her definition would become outdated and that we would continue to build toward more comprehensive definitions of practice. She was also wise enough to realize that the task would never have an end and stressed the need for professional associations to play an ongoing role in the continuing task of defining social work practice.

As Bartlett predicted, we do not have a definition of social work practice that applies across all fields, all methods, all systems, all theories, and all political institutions. As Gordon subsequently pointed out, the real strength of Bartlett's working definition was as an organizing frame of reference and the starting point from which we have continued the ongoing task of defining and redefining social work practice.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the main criticism of Bartlett's definition of practice that also can be applied to much of the generalist literature is that it still presumes a very narrow problem-solving approach to practice. Most helping professions such as medicine and nursing have moved on from this approach. Over time, they now have set their goals on the fostering of overall individual and community health, not just the treatment of illness or the solving of specific problems. Social work once aspired to this health and development goal but for a time allowed it to be overridden by the allure of an individual problem-solving approach.

It is time to leave Bartlett behind and move on to a much more holistic approach to practice that aspires to the attainment of the highest possible level of psychosocial functioning for all. Some interventions will, of course, include problem solving. Many more will include a broad range of other strategies to achieve the goals of healthy development of individuals, groups, families, communities, and societies through the development of societal conditions that will facilitate such optimum growth. As we move in this direction, inspired by Bartlett's paradigm, we will need to greatly expand the current parameters of generalist social work practice.

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Research on Social Work Practice

A Generalist Working Definition of Social Work: A Response to Bartlett

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A Generalist Working Definition of Social Work: A Response to Bartlett

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As a profession, social work is still in its formative stages as the continued discussion in this special edition journal over the working definition of social work indicates. This article identifies the need for a practical definition, reviews the history of the debate, and suggests a generalist definition with implications for practice.

Keywords: *social work generalist; definition of social work*

Ever since social work began to evolve as a distinct profession, its definition has been debated. There is a basic need for a practical definition to better explain the profession to itself, the public, and policy makers. Central to a definition, as Bartlett (1958) noted, are the core ingredients of values, purpose, sanction, knowledge, and method. This article will continue the discussion from a generalist perspective. After a brief historical overview of the debate, the Bartlett components of a working definition will be examined from this perspective.

THE NEED FOR A PRACTICAL DEFINITION

What is needed for the profession to define itself in a practical, common-sense, and understandable manner to the general public? Picture a newly declared bachelor of social work student returning home at Christmas break to explain to her parents her new chosen profession. Discussion of systems, relationships, linkage, and other terms heavy in jargon will fail to impress her parents, particularly when she states she will be making far less money than other public servants. Certainly, the strength of social work is its ability to

work with multiple-sized systems using a variety of tools, based on theory from numerous other disciplines. Yet, this does little to clearly explain to the general public the role of the social worker.

An additional complication is that social work is one of the few professions that provides a service not to those who pay for it but to those who are in fact often unable or incapable of paying for service. Thus, the consumers of the service, although often enthusiastic in their praise of the social worker's practice efforts, have little impact on the definition of social work practice or payment for such services.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

As Bartlett so accurately observed, to understand social work practice in its full scope is to be overwhelmed (Bartlett, 1958). And although today we are not forced to include the political aspect of pleasing seven national practice associations (which subsequently formed the National Association of Social Workers in 1958), one is struck by the similar current challenges of defining social work. No in-depth definitional study of social work has occurred since the Bartlett and Gordon work of the late 1950s.

One approach, the generalist, has received perhaps the most attention and study. The Council on Social Work Education since 1974 required generalist practice content in the baccalaureate and graduate curriculum. Generalist social work grew from the dual purposes reflected in the Charity Organization Societies and the Settlement House movement that focused on the individual in the environment and social justice, respectively. The first approach, as delineated by Mary Richmond (1917), was the "betterment of individuals or families, one by one" (p. 25). Although allowing that individual and mass betterment were interdependent, her seminal book *Social Diagnosis* is a detailed casework manual (Richmond, 1917).

The second approach reflected more holistic social reform and social action efforts as found in the Settlement House movement. Each approach addressed the two key elements of the competencies of social work, work with individuals and families and social reform efforts requiring group work and community organization knowledge and skills.

The social revolution of the 1960s produced marked changes in the emphasis of social work practice. The civil rights movement, war on poverty, and other movements forced the question of effectiveness and ethics of the clinical focus on the individual practiced by most social workers during this time. Generally, the profession acknowledged these failings and returned to its social reform roots—at least at the policy level. The ongoing conflict

between bureaucratic organizations in which 90% of all caseworkers practiced and the professional model raised the importance of advocacy as an ethic. Adherence to professional standards and ethics, which were in the client's best interest, sometimes clashed with the agency's procedures and policies, thus helping to further define social work as a profession (Clark & Arkava, 1979).

Sparked by this reexamination, social work began to change in practice and service agencies. Even the Community Service Society of New York moved from the premiere clinical family service provider to experimental policies that would reduce poverty through such efforts as neighborhood service centers (Schorr, 1997).

The discussion of the duality of the profession continues. Gilbert and Specht (1974) argued for a return to casework and a balance between social work and social welfare. Schwartz discussed "service" and the "movement" (Clark & Arkava, 1979), and Richan and Mendelsohn (1973) proposed a radical redefinition of social work and schools of social work.

Intertwined with the dual-purpose debate during the past century has been the interest of social work as a profession. From Flexner's (1915) assertion that social work was a semiprofession to the need to be recognized by other helping professionals, such as psychiatrists and physicians, the definition of social work has reflected the pursuit of acceptance as a profession. Whatever helped to increase the status of social work as a profession was viewed as attractive, including a push toward scientific specialization.

Specialization resulted in narrower areas of expertise and smaller client systems. More specific technique-oriented specialized interventions are now organized as direct practice and administration, often with subgroups by client issues, such as mental issues, child welfare, or school social work. The second year in most master's of social work graduate programs offers students up to five areas of specialization. Projections of the future of social work in the 1970s stated that social workers would encounter widely diverse agencies whose needs could not be met through a generalist approach (Briar, 1974).

And into the 1980s and 1990s, the search for a unifying conceptualization for the full profession continued, with social work education taking the lead. As BSW programs were formulated as generalist (as defined by each university) and MSW programs were as well, with the first year being generalist and the second year of specialization, the debate continued. Just as in Bartlett's day, the issue of what is competent social work practice still plagues us.

What are the knowledge areas, the skills, and the values needed by every social worker for basic competence in practice? Certainly, the generalist approach is a move in this direction. The competencies of a generalist were

defined by the landmark Baer and Federico study (1978). These competencies are widely utilized by educational programs in defining generalist social work. Briefly stated, they are:

1. The ability to identify and access situations where the relationship between people and social institutions need to be initiated, enhanced, restored, protected, or terminated.
2. The ability to develop and implement a plan for the well-being of people based on problem assessment and exploration of attainable goals and available options.
3. To enhance the problem-solving, coping, and developmental capacities of people.
4. The ability to link people with systems that provide them with resources, services, and opportunities.
5. To intervene effectively on behalf of populations most vulnerable and discriminated against.
6. The ability to promote the effective and humane operation of the systems that provide people with services, resources, and opportunities.
7. To actively participate with others in improving systems that are responsive to consumers of the services.
8. The ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention.
9. To continually evaluate the social worker's own professional growth and development.
10. The ability to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession through ethical practice. (pp. 12-13)

WORKING DEFINITION COMPONENTS

Bartlett (1958) identified five components as a contextual framework in her working definition. These are values, purpose, sanction, knowledge, and method. Of these, a new working definition addresses major changes in purpose, knowledge, and method. Although values today are more consumer-based and the sanction of social work is apparent through licensure in all 50 states in the United States and 10 provinces in Canada, there is little new to discuss regarding these.

PURPOSE OF SOCIAL WORK

Just as Bartlett utilized the concept of overcoming life tasks to describe social work, Pincus and Minahan (1973) viewed the purpose of social work as being "concerned with the interactions between people and their environment" (p. 9). Later, Specht (1972, 1979) argued that activism and political

action have diluted the pureness of the profession of social work. Beginning in the 1970s, the Community Service Society of New York (the largest organization of its kind), viewed as the vanguard of professionalism, raised serious questions about the effectiveness of office-based counseling services (Schorr, 1997). The shift by the Community Service Society to community-based storefront services came only after a serious and difficult debate among board members and agency staff as to what this constituted, vis-à-vis the definition of social work practice. Ultimately, one could hold that the definition of social work should be in its effectiveness with the client populations it purports to serve.

KNOWLEDGE

The Role of Theory

If one uses theory, particularly in the assessment phase, to order the facts they have collected or to make sense out of the information that the worker knows, then clearly theory is critical to social work practice. Much effort has gone into recognizing the need for research on social work practice. We need the same effort in the area of developing social work theory as a basis for practice.

Even some of the most thoughtful social work educators, practitioners, and/or researchers fail to recognize the different levels of theory, ranging from specific practice theories to general or grounded theories. For instance, a study of generalist social workers in practice (Hoffman & Sallee, 1990) found that whereas practitioners were able to clearly identify the roles, functions, and activities that they undertook, their understanding of theory—as a reason for why they did what they did—was severely lacking. Their definition of theory ranged from techniques, psychological methods, to very broad general theory, such as general systems theory. The generalists knew what to do in practice, but not why they were doing it.

The generalist problem-solving process has evolved from working with individuals, families, groups, and communities to a process that is applied to multiple system levels. This process, loosely based on the scientific process, begins with identifying an area of concern often brought by the consumer, to collecting information, analyzing it, developing a plan, implementing the plan, and finally evaluating to determine the success of the intervention. This process can be applied in working with an individual and to working with a neighborhood or community (Hoffman & Sallee, 1994).

Method

The method of social work practice has evolved since Harriet Bartlett's time to include the conceptual approach of direct and indirect services. Other approaches have been specific to service systems, such as mental health, child welfare, or social work, for example. However, the method of practice growing out of the Baer and Federico study (1978) and the Council on Social Work Education (1984) requirements included a generalist approach. Although there have also been efforts to include advanced generalists, that discussion will be left to other writings (Landon, 1995).

There are generalist roles and skills that flow from the definition of generalist social work. For example, the social broker role is that of linking the consumer with the most appropriate service and is sometimes related to information and referral. This role includes the ability to access resource systems, link clients with agencies, and provide follow-up (Hoffman & Sallee, 1994).

Competencies

Competencies of generalist social workers include a set of skills, from a strengths perspective, oriented toward major units in our society. These competencies, adapted from family preservation practice (Ronnau & Sallee, 1992), reflect generalist values and principles. A competent generalist social worker abides by the following tenets:

1. Frames problems in solvable, acceptable ways and employs techniques and skills that build on each client system's unique strengths and motivates systems to attain self-sufficiency.
2. Engages individuals, groups, families, agencies, and other community services in genuine partnership and teaches skills necessary to attain the client system's goals.
3. Understands, respects, and practices within the client system's cultural, experiential, and historical context as the framework for social work practice.
4. Is knowledgeable, respectful, sensitive, and responsive to issues of human diversity.
5. Integrates and applies the values and techniques of social work service and practice, based on a commitment to the core belief in the importance of the client system.
6. Joins in partnership with the client system to facilitate its empowerment by utilizing the generalist social work change process and its values to enable the client system to meet its goals.

Implications for Practice

A definition of social work based on generalist values has major implications for how we practice social work.

Accept clients as partners. Social workers need to become team members with families, individuals, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers need to share, as we expect the client systems to share. Through social work's history and development as a profession, the client was not viewed as expert in any manner. Yet, of course, they are.

Do what is necessary. Social work needs to recognize that providing basic needs, a clean environment, and safe communities may be as critical to consumers as providing therapy. We need to overcome the fear of clients becoming too dependent on us and focus on building empowerment strategies into our work. We need to focus on assessment, not diagnosis and labeling, and we must learn to again work comfortably in the consumer's environment rather than just our own offices.

Use natural systems. Greater use must be made by social workers of informal natural support systems in work with individuals, families, and communities. Agencies do not always have the answers and solutions. We must provide innovative practice in the community and become helpful allies, not only with individuals but with policy makers as well (Sallee, Lawson, & Briar-Lawson, 2001). Generalists must learn to be effective at changing bureaucracies and ensuring that they are more consumer oriented.

CONCLUSION

Social work as a profession is still in its formative stages as this continued debate on its definition clearly indicates. Emerging from a two-pronged approach—intervention with individuals and at the community level—social work is now a recognized and licensed profession. Ultimately, one could argue, as Richmond (1917) did, that the profession of social work is defined every day in hundreds of thousands of ways by individuals with the title of social worker by who they are and what they do. For social work is an art as well as a scientifically based profession.

The definition of social work from a generalist perspective is "enterprises that link people together, bridging their differences, and working through

their conflicts" (Hoffman & Sallee, 1994, p. 324). Social workers facilitate change with multiple systems in various sizes from work with individuals to communities. Society needs a "utility worker" (Ripple, 1974) with a set of flexible skills and roles to address the challenges of poverty, diversity, illness, and violence that confront us. Social workers must not only pull cars from the ditch one at a time but also be able to repair the ditch. Returning treated individuals to the same environment with the same systemic problems does not work and is unethical. Change in all size systems is necessary. Change is the essence of social work.

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Toward a Definition of Social Work Practice: Reframing the Dichotomy

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Toward a Definition of Social Work Practice: Reframing the Dichotomy

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The nature of social work practice is explored, and whether a definition can be achieved that is inclusive of all social work practitioners. Several sources of difficulty in achieving an inclusive definition are presented, such as the profession's history, the range of social work jobs and the different settings. The original definition of social work practice was conceived as a work in progress. There is no reason to believe that a uniform definition will be achieved, if we continue to view social work in a dichotomized manner, i.e., direct and indirect services, and clinical and administration. Reframing the definitional search is presented from the vantage point of the reality of one's job, where direct and indirect tasks and responsibilities are inherent in every social work job. It is the emphasis, focus, and amount of these responsibilities that differs by level. Thus, social work practice remains as a work in progress.

Keywords: *social work practice; definition of social work practice; job title; direct clinical or treatment tasks; indirect management or administrative tasks*

This article explores the nature of social work practice as the profession of social work continues to grapple with its own definitions. For many years, social work has tried to arrive at a definition of social work practice applicable and relevant to its different types of professionals and the diverse settings in which they work. In North America, what social workers do on a daily basis has shifted and changed with the economical, social, and political times, adding to this definitional uncertainty. The purpose of this article is to explore the complexity of social work practice, the sources of this complexity, and to determine if the spirit of a working definition first proposed almost a half century ago is still viable today.

One of the more salient issues here is whether a definition of social work practice can be achieved that is inclusive of all its practitioners. Social work

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practitioners hold many different jobs, ranging from working directly with individuals, small groups, families, and community organizations, to that of supervisor, unit director, manager, administrator, evaluator, planner, researcher, consultant, and politician. This extremely wide range of occupations is complicated further by the large number of diverse settings that employ these different types of practitioners.

Some authors have provided a historical perspective that is enlightening. The National Association of Social Workers, our single practice organization, was formed in the early 1950s when practitioners from all fields came together (Bartlett, 1958; Berkman & Carlton, 1985). Since their inception, a major task was to establish "a guiding concept of social work practice" (Gordon, 1962, p. 3). At that time, social work practice was viewed as a constellation of values, purposes, sanctions, knowledge, and method, and the notion of a working definition was born.

The working definition of social work practice was, therefore, conceived as a work in progress. Gordon (1962) noted that the original constellation of components "tells how to *recognize* social work practice, but not what social work practice *is*" (p. 4). He asserted that a definition of practice would offer no theoretical potential until it could provide some insights about what social work practice is. Shulman (1999) provided a succinct overview of the evolving state of social work practice theory from a prescientific stage in its formative days to the current and early phase of a scientific stage, thus illustrating that the development of social work practice has continued to evolve since the late 1950s and remains a work in progress.

The combined complexity of types of social work job and different settings is a source of inherent strain within the profession and complicates arriving at a consensual working definition of social work practice. Shulman (1999) noted that the social work profession has not yet developed an integrated, method-focused, empirically based theory of practice (p. 9), despite the fact that several authors have offered practice definitions over many years. In addition, Smalley (1961) addressed an issue of inclusion of one's social work job by raising the question whether community organization is social work practice, and she quoted Pray who, in 1949, felt strongly that community organization practice is indeed social work practice. Similarly, Dudley (1958) raised the issue of whether social planning is part of social work and viewed social planning within the traditional social work framework. Thus, the issue of certain jobs being included in the concept of social work practice remains unsettled.

Some authors have tended to view practice from a narrower, primarily clinical perspective. For example, Thyer and Wodarski (1998a, 1998b), in their two-volume text on an empirical basis on social work practice,

addressed client disorders and factors affecting clinical problems and intervention. Bloom, Fisher, and Orme (1995) addressed ways to measure client outcomes only in direct service encounters.

Other authors have tried to bridge the definitional complexity by calling attention to the need to incorporate the notion of people in an environmental context. Schwartz (1961), in his definition of social group work practice, made it clear that the helping process occurred within the context of an agency hospitable to client need. Hearn (1969), in applying the general systems approach toward a holistic conception of social work, stated that one must focus simultaneously on both people and their respective "systems." Several authors have continued this "bridging" theme in their work by incorporating person and environment as essential to defining practice (Germaine & Gitterman, 1980, 1995; Hoffman & Sallee, 1994; Pincus & Minahan, 1978).

The person-environment practice incorporated a strong environmental contextual component. Kemp, Whittaker, and Tracey (1997) noted a clear emphasis on mastering both environmental challenges and their resources and stressed the importance of environmental intervention as "a critical and historically significant, but long-neglected, construct in social work practice and theory" (p. 3). This perception takes into account that a source of clients' problems could be induced by environmental factors, such as layoffs, downsizing, police conduct, and so forth, and the choice of intervention must flow from an assessment of the entire situation within this context.

It is interesting to note that some authors have reached for a definition of practice emanating from the interactional perspective of "the helping process" (Schwartz, 1961; Shulman, 1999). For these authors, mediation and interaction are central to an understanding of the processes whereby one seeks help from an agency receptive to that need (i.e., each needs the other). The worker is a third element or partner in this mutual relationship as each side reaches out to the other. The most salient point in this perspective is the requirement that clients have a felt need to seek service, and the need could be preventive as well as a problem and/or pathological. It is this felt need that distinguishes a social worker's engagement with clients, and it is not present in nonclinical activities.

The generalist model of social work practice has been helpful in operationalizing the so-called bridging theme. Practitioners are expected to help clients address problems at all levels (i.e., in the context of their environment) (Johnson, 1998; Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 1993). From this conceptualization of practice, person in environment and interaction are central to determining a point of intervention and a course of action (Shaefor & Landon, 1987).

The generalist perspective has been a springboard for demonstrating how practice can be applied to several methods of practice. Marlow (1993) applied the generalist perspective to research methods, Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2001a, 2001b) connected it to organizations and communities and supplied a workbook for students to learn how to make practical applications. Key to Marlow's framework was that research is viewed from an agency base because that is where social workers are employed. Wodarski (1997) similarly proposed a notion of competency-based agency practice being instituted more frequently in social service departments in response to the growing demand for accountability.

As one reviews this body of literature, it seems reasonable to conclude that definitions and the common understanding of social work practice have had the effect of dichotomizing the profession. For instance, the usual way to categorize practice is clinical or management/administration, practice versus research, direct or indirect service, or micro, mezzo, and macro practice. Indeed, Haynes (1998) summarized the 100-year debate about purpose in social work in a straightforward dichotomy—social reform versus individual treatment.

Categorizations of practice are usually based on the concept of help or client need. On one hand, clinical, direct, micro, mezzo, and macro tend to mean practice that involves a client or clients in need dealing directly with or having face-to-face contact with workers. Management or administration and indirect service are seen as supporting the direct service with clients in the sense that these practitioners (i.e., administrators, directors, unit supervisors, evaluators, and so forth) do not see clients on a regular basis. In this context, social work personnel in planning, program evaluation, policy development, consultation, financial management, and so forth are usually seen as nonclinical.

There is no reason to believe that a uniform definition of social work practice will be achieved if we continue to view social work in the same way. Definitions that work will be useful only to one's reference point, whether it is clinical or managerial. In other words, definitions work well for some social workers and not for others. This outcome becomes a stark reality in the licensing of social workers. Some U.S. states mandate a background in clinical coursework for licensure and do not acknowledge other social workers having appropriate course content for licensure.

The evolution of theory, which informs work with clients, has been necessary and marks a cornerstone in the development of social work as a profession. There is also a maturing of the field as seen in the inclusion of empiricism to guide direct work with clients. The emphasis on practice research,

program evaluation, and evaluating one's practice in social work education has contributed significantly to this effort.

However, there is virtually no room in this context for social workers who are employed as planners, researchers, evaluators, consultants, and so forth. It is assumed that their work is managerial or administrative and, therefore, out of the realm of so-called real practice.

It appears that there is need for the profession to reach a decision regarding its nonclinical personnel. Is there room for them to be included in the definition of practice, or should future definitions of practice continue to exclude them? If they are to be included, then some of the assumptions on which definitions are based would need to be revised. For example, one could assume that the jobs held by social workers include both clinical and nonclinical components.

REFRAMING THE DICHOTOMY:
THINKING OF AN OCCUPATIONAL CONTINUUM

The time seems appropriate to suggest another way to examine social work practice. Reframing this search is likely to yield some different and refreshing perspectives. Attention is now focused on exploring practice from the vantage point of the reality of one's job (i.e., what social workers are likely to do is a rationale of their organizational positions). As Landon and Feit (1998) noted, "these 'all or none' distinctions between worker and administrators simply are no longer valid, if indeed they ever were. The practice responsibilities of social work professionals are not distinct and separate entities" (p. 37). Similarly, Wodarski (1997) pointed to the challenge in curriculum planning of differentiating among the objectives for each level of job specification and defining the appropriate relationship among them (p. 184).

The cornerstone of this different perspective is that both direct and indirect tasks and responsibilities are inherent in every social worker's job, regardless of setting and organizational position (or job). Although tasks change, what one does shifts by position and setting (Landon & Feit, 1998). The major difference is the emphasis placed on each task and responsibility at each level. In other words, every social worker is expected to do research, keep records, evaluate practice, plan activities, and understand the relationships between policy, practice, finance, and so forth. What differs are the types of activities appropriate to one's functions, the related tasks, and emphasis on certain responsibilities.

In this more interactive practice framework, the definitional distinctions and resulting dichotomization previously discussed do not mean assigning

administrative responsibilities only to persons holding administrative positions and vice versa. Indeed, the position taken here is that administrative or clinical activities are required at all organizational levels and are a part of every worker's job responsibility. Each level has both clinical and administrative responsibilities. It is the emphasis, focus, and amount of these responsibilities that differs according to organizational level.

Differences emerge when one views job requirements on a continuum. For example, a clinician would be expected to spend a considerable amount of time working with clients in the helping process while also completing a number of managerial tasks, such as recording and data collection. A line supervisor would be expected to spend more time assisting his or her workers in the completion of their tasks and increasing the percentage of time devoted to managerial and administrative tasks, while being knowledgeable about the helping process so as to assist, develop, and evaluate workers.

A delineation of managerial task requirements by organizational position was articulated to distinguishing between program management and clinical management (Feit, 1982). A subsequent delineation of principal managerial or administrative tasks by typical organizational position in relation to social work was presented some 20 years ago (Feit & Landon, 1982). For example, direct service personnel in relation to clinical work may be expected to (a) write client progress notes, (b) write agency reports on service, (c) prepare client summaries, (d) evaluate one's own practice, (e) seek ways to improve interpersonal skills, (f) attend meetings, (g) present cases at staff meetings or case conferences, and (h) gather data for supervisory or management needs; and in regard to program management may be expected to (a) manage case load, (b) participate in agency evaluation or research studies, (c) participate in external public relations as assigned, (d) complete required program reports, (e) propose new services or suggest ways to improve existing services, (f) evaluate their own practice, and (g) participate in case presentations.

This delineation is intended to illustrate the point that at every organizational level, one is expected to perform clinical and managerial tasks and responsibilities. It is or should be clear that the largest percentage of direct service workers' effort is devoted to performing clinical tasks and responsibilities, yet to be successful, one must address other program requirements.

As one becomes a supervisor in the organizational hierarchy, the job itself naturally changes as does the nature of program management responsibilities and related administrative tasks. For example, one must now evaluate worker performance, help workers manage their cases, supervise the activities of workers, hold staff meetings, prepare reports about the activities of a group of workers as well as noting unusual individual performances, call attention to

gaps in service, help design and implement new services to modify existing services, and communicate administrative and policy changes to staff. These are tasks that are not normally addressed when working directly with clients. Furthermore, for many, they are tasks that are new to them and for which they are often ill prepared. As a supervisor, the concept of task group and application of related skills becomes an additional and prominent factor in effective performance. For example, they must understand how staff groups operate, how labor is divided among workers, how to supervise and motivate different types of workers, and how to group data based on single cases so that decisions can be made that often involve policy considerations. Basically, a supervisor has started the transition from a direct service provider to thinking administratively about direct service, yet maintaining a strong treatment orientation.

At the next level, as a departmental or program director, one is further removed from direct contact with clients and one organizational level closer to top management. They are usually members of an executive's immediate management team and view organizational issues accordingly. Yet the primary focus of their work is internal and related directly to development of clinical effectiveness and the translation of organizational issues to direct service issues or vice versa. Department directors are expected to assume greater administrative and managerial responsibility, accountability, coordination, authority, and to provide leadership and direction to their subordinates.

At the top administrative level, one must be concerned with the increasing accountability requirement and complexities of managing human service programs demanded by both funding agencies and the public, as well as understand the application of new technologies that may have only an apparent indirect bearing on clinical practice. Indeed, as requirements and knowledge increase in an extremely wide range of administrative areas, more pressure is placed on administrators and managers to understand treatment itself and how it is related to the growth of administrative job responsibilities.

The concern for treatment—understanding the helping process with its nuances and special requirements—may easily be overlooked in this explosion of administrative knowledge. This is a situation that human service administrators and those who teach administration must guard against. In essence, in the necessary rush to acquire technical competence, one must never lose sight of its relationship to human need and client service. Top administrators can be seduced quite easily into designing elaborate and technically exquisite information systems or program plans while not consciously addressing the key question of how they will affect staff performance and client service. Treatment issues are a necessary and integral part

of the social work nonclinical and administrative knowledge base, but with the tremendous amount of new material needed to be learned to survive in the political and funding arena, it is easy to understand a commonly held perception that to be an administrator is to forget about clients.

There is no doubt that some practitioners are at the extreme end of the work task continuum. There are clinicians so engrossed in their work with clients that they do not recognize nor understand the practice of a unit director or administrator. Likewise, there are administrators so wrapped up in their work that they do not fully understand nor appreciate the helping process. Regardless of their perceptions, it remains that a part of their job requires understanding and tending to other tasks. For example, an administrator must understand the helping process, for it is the essential product of social work enterprise that is needed to determine unit cost, the extent and length of treatment, and so forth.

In summary, the field of social work appears to be at a crossroads of its development. Definitions of practice are based on its clinical aspect or direct work with clients, which excludes other nonclinical or upper level management personnel. This separation was viewed as a false dichotomy in this article, and it was suggested that social work reframe the issue by placing emphasis on the reality of one's job (i.e., each job entails both clinical and nonclinical tasks that differ according to level responsibility and type of organization). In this context, the spirit of a working definition remains intact because social work practice is a perpetual work in progress.

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Research on Social Work Practice

The Working Definition of Social Work Practice: Does it Work?
Donald R. Leslie and Rosemary Cassano

The online version of this article can be found at:

The Working Definition of
Social Work Practice: Does it Work?

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This article explores the impact of the working definition of social work practice first articulated almost one half century ago. Its influence on both beginning and advanced levels of practice is considered. This consideration is examined in the contexts of social work education and professional identity. The authors conclude that the working definition has assisted in the development of clear and consistent theory underpinning generalist social work practice. On the other hand, the authors conclude that it has weakened social work's professional identity, thus reducing social work practice effectiveness in the Canadian environment.

Keywords: *definition of social work; practice; generalist; social work education; advanced practice; social work profession; Bartlett*

Has the working definition of social work practice been effective in promoting the successful development of the social work profession in Canada? The answer is a resounding yes and no. It has proven to be a useful and necessary foundation for the development and articulation of social work practice theory and its teaching. On the other hand, as this article will also argue, it has also led to an increased vulnerability for social worker's professional identity and weakened the ability of Canadian social workers to practice and become educated effectively.

Certainly, Bartlett's articulation of the constellation of five practice elements and Gordon's subsequent refinement of their interactional relationship has led to the development of an overarching theoretical approach to social work practice (Bartlett, 1958; Gordon, 1962). The nature of the working definition and its theoretical implications greatly influenced the quest for such an approach and thus contributed to the development of generalist practice. This practice method adopted general systems theory and an ecological approach

as its theoretical underpinnings and finally provided a consistent and inclusive model congruent with the working definition of social work practice.

BEGINNING SOCIAL WORK

One of the most popular beginning baccalaureate (BSW) social work texts in Canada is that of Johnson, McClelland, and Austin (1998). Although these authors acknowledged that there is no one universally accepted definition of generalist social work practice, they do provide the following description of generalist practice:

> A generalist approach requires that the social worker assess the situation with the client and decide which system or need is the appropriate unit of attention, or focus of the work, for the change effort. As the unit of attention may be an individual, a family, a small group, an agency or organization, or a community, the generalist approach emphasizes knowledge that can be applied to a variety of systems. (p. 1)

In going on to discuss the perspectives of generalist practice, the working definition's core five elements of practice emerge as cornerstones of the approach. For these authors, and for others, the working definition's constellation of values, purpose, sanction, knowledge, and method are seen in dynamic relationship and remain as core concepts of generalist practice (Locke, Garrison, & Winship, 1998; Miley, O'Melia, & Dubois, 1998; O'Neil McMahon, 1996). Although this has undoubtedly assisted the profession in developing its own systematic organization, it has also proven to be a two-edged sword.

The adoption of the generalist practice method has revolutionized social work education, particularly at the baccalaureate level. A review of BSW programs in the 30 schools of social work in Canada shows that 21 explicitly list their programs as generalist approaches, 7 more can be interpreted as generalist programs from their program descriptions, and the remaining 2 programs were not classified as no program description was provided (Canadian Association of Social Workers [CASW], Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work [CASSW], Canadian Committee of Deans & Directors of Schools of Social Work [CCDDSSW], & Regroupment des unites de formation universitaire en travail social [RUFUTS], 2000). From this, it can be seen that the generalist practice model is virtually universal in formal Canadian university social work education. This universality both supports the importance of the development of this theoretical approach and raises concerns about its impact on the profession.

The generalist practice method has provided a legitimate framework for the inclusion of empirical knowledge and theoretical concepts from other disciplines to be incorporated into the social work education process. Although this is not a new phenomenon in social work (Flexner, 1915), it has contributed to the increased focus on problem- or population-relevant knowledge and course offerings. It can be argued that this shift in focus has raised the quality of knowledge taught in such courses, but it can also be argued that it has inadvertently reduced the emphasis placed on social worker training in terms of use of self and application of the art of social work practice.

In Canada, this situation is further exacerbated by the increased number of nonsocial work Ph.D. faculty teaching in social work programs. This has come about as more social work academics have been attracted to other disciplines to undertake doctoral training because of particular problem foci and because Canadian universities have been slow to develop social work Ph.D. programs. This has occurred despite the shift toward requiring a Ph.D. as a basic standard for university teaching. The outcome of this trend has had the impact of both increasing the reliance on problem- or population-oriented knowledge and has weakened professional social work identity within the academic arena. More and more BSW students are left to find their social work identity and practice skills in the health and human service organizations in which they work or are placed.

A recent review of the state of social-work-specific knowledge in the literature would seem to support this assertion. Thyer (2002) concluded that it is not possible to develop discipline-specific knowledge for social work and that it is a mistake to undertake the effort. Instead, our profession should focus on interdisciplinary collaboration aimed at solving psychosocial problems. Although this is not identified as a threat, it can be seen as a weakening of social work professional identity. It is this weakening of identity, along with a lack of development of practice art(s), that creates the so-called second sword edge. The reliance on social service agencies for identity development and practice training makes the social work profession vulnerable to developing a lack of competence and professional confidence.

The organization's culture and philosophy may or may not clearly incorporate social work values and purpose in a manner consistent with the profession. This is particularly problematic where the organization is multidisciplinary in nature or where social work is a secondary service. The policies, procedures, and even treatment methodologies of the agency can be substitutes for sound social work practice (Holosko & Leslie, 1998). The social worker's identity and practice methods are thus associated with and

determined by the particular problem or population appropriate to the agency. Although this may not result in poor client service, it does produce a narrowed and weakened professional identity.

In this way, the knowledge base and practice methods are significantly influenced by particular agencies and their problem or population foci. Of more importance is the impact of the organization on social work values and purpose. Although the purpose and values of social work are clearly and consistently taught in schools of social work, they are learned and internalized through application in social work practice. Again, this practice learning takes place in agency settings. Organization development principles indicate that organization mission and service programs are strongly influenced by agency funders (Hasenfeld, 1983; Skidmore, 1995). Because it is the mission that allows the organization to be established and to survive, the influence of these funders cannot be ignored. This is particularly true because the mission also allows the organization to establish its mandate or sanction. Furthermore, this element, sanction, is one of the key elements in the working definitions' practice constellation. It is also clear that the organization sanction or mandate influences the interpretation and implementation of purpose and values. Therefore, the social worker affiliated with the agency is also influenced in their interpretation of values and purpose even as it applies to the social work profession.

The influence on values and purpose, and the impact of organizations on knowledge and methods, are of serious concern in Canada. The structure of the Canadian Social Welfare system involves a predominance of government, or government and nonprofit organization partnerships, delivering the required services (Holosko & Leslie, 2001). Unlike the United States, Canada does not possess an independent and self-sufficient nonprofit sector. This situation, in which government either controls services by their direct provision or by influencing service delivery through control of funding, results in a virtual co-opting of all major social welfare services. However, this monopoly over social welfare services, through the mechanisms described above, also allows the Canadian government an inappropriate sphere of influence in the professional practice of social work in Canada. Although the working definition of practice cannot be blamed for causing this problem, its effect of weakening the social work identity has contributed to the profession's increased susceptibility to government and organization influence and control. The working definition has not functioned in social work's best interest in Canada and has thus undermined social work practice itself.

ADVANCED SOCIAL WORK

In Canada, specialization in social work practice has been approached in various ways. Similar to the United States, fields of service, methods of practice, social problems and related populations, as well as direct and indirect practice approaches all have been used as ways of operationalizing specialization (Bartlett, 1961; Pinderhughes, 1995; Specht, 1988). The most recent form of specialization to be identified is advanced generalist practice (Landon, 1995).

Specialization occurs at the graduate level in Canada, and most MSW programs are considered to be the second professional degree. A 4-year BSW degree is the usual admission requirement. The majority of MSW programs offer specialization by social problems and related populations, advanced generalist practice, or fields of service. A very small number offer specialization by methods of practice (Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work [CASSW], 2000).

A review of MSW programs in Canada indicates that social workers are offered opportunities to develop in-depth knowledge related to "what is being intervened in." These programs appear to have formulated a solid response to Gordon's (1962) question, "What kind of situation prompts the question, 'Is there a social worker in the house?'" (p. 12). There is a concern, however, regarding the extent to which these programs equip MSW graduates with intervention knowledge that enables them to act knowingly and effectively. Bartlett (1958) had stated earlier that "competence in social work practice lies in developing skill in the use of the method and its techniques" (p. 7). To what extent do these MSW programs in Canada equip their graduates for the practice of social work regardless of how they choose to operationalize specialization?

In 1998, Holosko and Leslie addressed the longstanding gap between social work education and social work practice in Canada. They concluded that "the structures to inculcate experienced practitioners into higher education institutions in Canada are few and far between" (Holosko & Leslie, 2001, p. 204). The major requirement for faculty in Schools of Social Work in Canada is the Ph.D degree, sometimes not even in social work. These faculty have had little or no practice experience in social work. There is no requirement for them to affiliate with any professional social work association or regulatory body for social work. Some professors have indicated that regulation is an attempt to control and could impinge on their academic freedom. Furthermore, regulation does not pertain to professors as students are not clients (MacKenzie, 1999). The Standards for Accreditation for MSW programs, which constitute the second professional degree, allow for MSW

programs with no practicum component (CASSW, 2000). Under these circumstances, it is understandable how practice is de-emphasized and in-depth knowledge regarding what is being intervened in becomes the major focus in most MSW programs in Canada. Obviously, one expects advanced knowledge regarding what is being intervened in from MSW graduates. One would also expect advanced knowledge, however, which is focused on how to intervene.

The lack of education for advanced practice in Schools of Social Work in Canada appears to have several consequences. The first consequence is that those students who are in an MSW program with a practicum learn about practice in their specialization in their field placement agency. This fosters identification with an agency and/or a client population as opposed to identification with social work. Furthermore, subsequent to graduation, social workers frequently turn to adjacent professions who have not abandoned the teaching of intervention. Such training is usually located outside universities and found in private institutes or associations. Although many of these associations are multidisciplinary, they can hardly be described as fostering the development of knowledge for the practice of social work. The failure of Schools of Social Work in Canada to provide substantive practice knowledge has been made explicit in the findings of a recent study (CASW, CASSW, CCDDSSW, & RUFUTS, 2000) of the social work occupation in Canada:

> Education and training for social workers doesn't meet the street needs of today. . . . Employers generally find that new graduates lack specific service skills that would allow them to move quickly into being effective workers. There is some sense that college certificate and diploma graduates are more prepared for the jobs they acquire than those from university programs. (p. 4)

Where does the professional association for social work in Canada fit into this picture? The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) was founded in 1926, and in 1975 adopted a federated structure. The CASW became a national association of provincial associations. Social workers hold direct membership only in their provincial associations and are automatically affiliated with the CASW because of its federated nature. This differential structure was seen as necessary because of the uniqueness of each province and its advocacy and organizational issues (Foley, 1999). The downside of this federated structure is that the CASW, unlike the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), does not have a strong national presence, and its ability to influence is compromised even though the CASW does appoint one of its members to the Board of Accreditation of the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work. Furthermore, in Canada, only 7 of 10 provincial pro-

fessional associations are responsible for the regulation of the social work profession. In British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, and Ontario, the regulatory body is separate from the professional associations.

In Canada, there is a paucity of other professional associations specifically for social workers. The majority of professional associations are multidisciplinary in nature. In Ontario, associations exist for marriage and family therapy, group therapy, play therapy, art therapy, managers in nonprofit organizations, planners, and so forth. Undoubtedly, social workers gain valuable knowledge through their affiliation with these associations. However, these associations do not focus on the development of practice knowledge specifically for social work. They do not provide the means to accomplish social work practice that (Gordon, 1962)

> is interventive action directed to purposes and guided by the values, knowledge and techniques which are collectively unique, acknowledged by and identified with the social work profession. (p. 11)

Another set of factors influencing education for specialization in social work practice pertains to the role of government. All universities in Canada are publicly funded. All universities are accountable to the branch of government (usually provincial) that funds them. In most provinces, this means that university programs undergo periodic appraisals by government. In Ontario, committees under the auspices of the Ministry of Colleges and Universities conduct appraisals of both undergraduate and graduate programs in social work. Most members of the committee that oversees the appraisals are academics outside of social work. This is rationalized on the basis that all university programs must meet basic academic criteria. These committees have the power to recommend program continuance/discontinuance. A recommendation of discontinuance means a withdrawal of government funding and program closure. Needless to say, most Schools of Social Work are highly motivated to meet the criteria recommended by these committees, composed mainly of academics outside social work. Although Schools of Social Work in Canada also undergo accreditation for BSW and MSW programs by the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work (Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work [CASSW], 1999), its power pales when compared to that exercised by government appraisal committees.

As outlined earlier, in Canada, there is a close relationship between the government, social welfare, and social work as the government funds the great majority of social programs. In the past, social work was able to influence government with regard to social programs and social service delivery (Drover, 1998). The recent neoconservative government agenda, however,

has seen programs at the federal, provincial, or local levels disappear (Holosko, in press). Social work appears to have become marginalized in Canada's evolution. In addition, agencies compete for the so-called one pot government funding that is available for all social programs. Once awarded funding, these agencies find themselves presented with prescriptions as to what the components of the service must be and the methodology that must be utilized to deliver the service. An example of this occurred in Ontario with the Early Intervention Program for Child Witnesses of Women Abuse, which prescribed intervention using a psychoeducational model delivered through groups led by two staff. In addition, the number of group sessions was prescribed as well as what was expected to be covered in these sessions (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2000). It appears that the practice of some professionals is tightly controlled and prescribed by government. This contradicts Gordon's (1962) statement that "sanction classifies one of the conditions under which the action occurs, but it does not influence the action itself" (p. 12). Is deprofessionalization the next step?

In Canada, the working definition of social work practice has fostered the development of specialists who possess an in-depth knowledge pertaining to what is being intervened in. Most likely, today's graduates are better prepared in this area than ever before. It appears, however, that intervention knowledge has been compromised. There is a need for the social work academic community to heed research findings that "indicate a substantial gap between the demand side, the skills and knowledge that are called for in employees, and the basic preparation provided at the postsecondary level" (CASW, CASSW, CCDDSSW, & RUFUTS, 2000, p. 4).

CONCLUSION

The working definition of social work practice has made a contribution by allowing the profession to develop a clear and consistent theoretical foundation for social work practice and education. However, viewed in the Canadian context, these very improvements have increased the profession's vulnerability by weakening the social worker's identification with the profession.

At both the beginning and advanced levels of practice and education, this weakening of professional identity has potentially serious implications. The lack of professional affiliation, the failure to develop and teach specific social work knowledge, and the development of problem- or population-foci for practice and education are all difficulties, in part, at least, traceable to the impact of the working definition. This has lessened the ability and resolve of social workers to counterbalance government control in both the social

welfare system and in the social work profession. In the Canadian context, the working definition of social work practice can be seen as a necessary but insufficient step in ensuring the effective development of the social work profession.

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Research on Social Work Practice

The Working Definition of Social Work Doesn't Work Very Well in China and Malaysia
Leon C. Fulcher

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The Working Definition of Social Work
Doesn't Work Very Well in China and Malaysia

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Western cultural assumptions underpin the working definition of social work and contemporary social work theory. Four themes that affect the working definition of social work are highlighted from comparative research carried out in the People's Republic of China and Malaysia. Working hypotheses are offered about how each comparative theme might affect how well the working definition of social work works.

Keywords: *cross-cultural social work; non-Western approaches; international social work; Asia-Pacific social work; comparative research; ethnographic research methods; ethnocentrism*

> Tihei Mauri tupu Mauri ki te wheiao ki te ao marama
> Tihei Mauri Ora!
> Kia ora tatau, e hui hui nei
> E nga Rangatira, e Kui ma, e Koro ma.
> Hei nga Hapu awhi Whanau, awhi Tamariki, awhi mokopuna
> Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.
>
> —A Maori greeting

Much of the theory that informs social work practice in the Western world, and hence our professional working definitions, has been shaped by Euro-American concepts, worldviews, and "taken-for-granted" assumptions that are grounded in Judeo-Christian traditions of scholarship and knowledge acquisition (Hudson & Nurius, 1994; Payne, 1997). Advances in mass education, technology, written knowledge, educational curricula, and teaching methods have largely developed from this pervasive Western tradition and have been exported throughout the world via economic trade, globalization, and international scholarly exchange (Saul, 1997). As found in the Maori

greeting above, acknowledgement is given to specific cultural traditions, to ancestors and elders—both female and male—who fulfilled social work or child and youth care roles with families the world over. Those traditions are critical to a beginning understanding of how the working definition of social work—so much taken for granted in Western countries—may be different in the People's Republic of China or the Islamic society of Malaysia. With an economic mass of 200 million Malay-speaking people in the southern Asia-Pacific region, and with more than 1.27 billion people spread across the People's Republic of China, it is timely for Western scholars to review their working definitions of social work.

It is important to acknowledge that many positive outcomes have been achieved through East-West exchanges (Irwin, 1996), but one needs to also remember that ancient cultural traditions with different "taken-for-granted" assumptions exist in China (Ropp, 1990), as well as in Malaysia (Noor & Azaham, 2000).

TAKEN-FOR-GRANTED ASSUMPTIONS IN WESTERN WORKING DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL WORK

Of scholars writing outside that Western tradition, Freire (1990), Mulitalo-Lauta (2000), Stewart (1997), Vercoe (1998), and Yahya (1994), among others, have shown how cultural assimilation and transformation through education have been carried out through the work of early missionaries and teachers since the beginnings of cross-cultural contact. In examining problems of child and youth crime in the urban centers of Nigeria and Papua New Guinea, Ibeabuchi (1986) and Sali (1996) showed how colonization and the establishment of a cash economy contributed to rural-urban migration while eroding the social controls embedded within traditional culture. In this regard, Ibrahim (1998) highlighted processes of "cultural contestation" that have mediated the identities of citizens in a changing Malaysian society. In many countries like Malaysia and China, social networks and cultural traditions, rituals, and activities among peoples have become fragmented through pressures of colonization. New social networks become established in the cities, whether through kinship, shared religious and cultural practices, or new relationships formed through work, family, and peer group activities. It is important to remember, however, that many of those whom social workers encounter as clients are "not likely to have strong links with their ethnic community of origin" (Ely & Denney, 1987, p. 15).

Children and families in need of services are commonly offered shelter and nurturing care, special education, treatment of diagnosed health

conditions, or supervision of troublesome behavior, often without conscious thought given to the influence of culture or the cultural identity of the person(s) delivering those services. Instead, service outcomes are monitored and evaluated as individual units of service measured in a time-by-cost equation (Knapp, 1984; Wistow, Knapp, Hardy, & Allen, 1994). That cost-benefit equation reflects a variety of taken-for-granted notions about how Western social work and social care services have been shaped and defined by marketplace economics (Saul, 1997). In cultural traditions where family has different meanings from traditional Western concepts, the potential impact on social work practice has been profound (Shook, 1985). It is surprisingly difficult for some Western readers to accept that theories of child development, mental health care, and social services delivery have been used deliberately or otherwise to control the behavior of some cultural groups more than others (Fulcher, 1998; Khan, 1982).

Payne (1997) went some way toward acknowledging the dominant influence of Western thinking on modern social work theory and, hence, the working definition by identifying three arguments that are significant in the way each emanated from non-Western sources. First, societies may hold values and cultural traditions that are incompatible with Western social work theory. Second, some societies face different problems and issues that are not readily explained by Western social work theory. Third, Western social work and developmental theory have been used over the years to maintain structural disadvantage in some communities through cultural assimilation or colonization of ideas and social traditions. This was graphically demonstrated in New Zealand when Western psychological theories provided justification for the prevailing government to address "deficits in the Maori character structure" (Stewart, 1997, p. 84).

When used as a conceptual foundation for the working definition of social work used in this article, Payne's (1997) examination of modern social work theory dismissed these foregoing arguments as being "not wholly convincing," giving four reasons for such a conclusion (p. 11). First, countries these days are "ethically[1] and culturally pluralist." Second, cultural imperialism and colonial history are not monolithic and all-powerful. Third, evidence shows that useful mutual exchanges have been achieved, and everyone benefits from social development initiatives. Finally, there was an international infrastructure of social welfare organizations that embrace an eclectic range of approaches, including social development models relevant to developing countries (pp. 11-13). In claiming "to reflect worldwide literature and developments as far as they are available in the literature," Payne reinforced a Judeo-Christian scholarly tradition when asserting that "if this policy were widely followed, non-Euro-American models and ideas might increasingly

influence the world social work literature" (p. 13). Such a statement ignores the many ways in which global publishing and the mass media are dominated by Euro-American interests, and the influence of globalization on social work policies and practices beyond the so-called "developed world" (Dominelli, 1988, 1997).

To summarize, the working definition of social work used in this article builds from the social constructionist orientation argued by Payne (1997) that

> social work is socially constructed through interactions with clients because they themselves become defined as clients by social processes, through its formation as an occupation among a network of related occupations, and through the social forces which define it through its organizational, agency and social contexts. (pp. 24-25)

Writing from an alternative cultural context, Kee (2000) promoted the idea that the working definition of social work needs to be culturally appropriate and responsive to help seeking in moment-by-moment encounters with clients, arguing that

> social work practice is a journey, not a destination we reach once and for all. The guiding posts for this journey, however, are the principles of wholeness as opposed to fragmentation, harmony as opposed to conflict, liberation as opposed to oppression, creativity as opposed to destruction, peace as opposed to violence. (p. 303)

These are the principles and values that underpin the working definition of social work used in what follows.

FOUR COMPARATIVE THEMES THAT
IMPACT ON A WORKING DEFINITION OF SOCIAL WORK

While undertaking cross-cultural research into social work/child and youth care services, policies, and practices in Malaysia and China, the author was guided by principles of continuous comparative analysis proscribed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). One had to resist temptations to evaluate food, domestic arrangements, services, or practices as being better or worse than those to which we have grown accustomed. It was important to explore similarities and differences in child or youth care practices, and what historical or cultural explanations might be necessary to understand and account for these in the local or regional dialect. As one rudiment of good qualitative and quantitative research involves identifying potential research questions that arise

out of fieldwork, in the author's case in Malaysia and China, four comparative themes are identified below with working hypotheses about how each theme might affect the working definition of social work.

Communication and Conceptualization Using Visual Syntax and Word Pictures as Compared With Audio Syntax and Models

The reader is invited to consider the ways in which children learn language and the formal teaching they receive about the use of language in both oral and written forms. In Mandarin Chinese, important sound differences make the very same words become either "May I interview you?" or "May I kiss you?" One can see then how the working definition of social work needs to be considered very carefully in cross-cultural situations. The Western reader is reminded that the profession of clinical psychology did not gain formal recognition in China until the early 1990s. It is also worth noting how each Chinese child, like Western children, starts learning language through repetition and identification of sounds. But Chinese children quickly move on to a written language that involves word pictures and a visual syntax. This contrasts with the audio syntax and phonetic pronunciation used in language teaching with Western children. It can be seen how Chinese children and young people learn to conceptualize in word pictures whereas Western children and young people are seemingly more auditory and learn to think in conceptual models. A hypothesis highlighted by this first comparative theme might be as follows.

> *Hypothesis 1:* Differences in approach to language acquisition and problem solving pose challenges for the working definition of social work.

Ethnography as the Research Method of Choice Instead of Stratified Random Surveys or Focus Groups

While attending the Canada-China Collaborative International Symposium on the Future of Social Work at Beijing in June, 2000, it was interesting to hear educators and scholars from across China speak about their educational mandates, teaching challenges, and methods. One feature highlighted in these discussions concerned the way in which the teaching of social research in Chinese University Sociology and Social Work Departments builds from ethnography and then moves to social surveys. It is more common for Western social work schools to teach briefly about single subject design and then move quickly to the use of stratified random surveys or focus groups required in so-called real research. Any working definition of social work in China will be influenced by the way questions are framed, whether

because of the choice of research methods or through socialization about the way questions are asked in China. Paradoxically, this is all being written while the Western media dissected a U.S. presidential election in Florida in which every sampling procedure in the book failed to project a winner in the race for the White House. A hypothesis highlighted by this second theme might be as follows.

> *Hypothesis 2:* Normative methods of social inquiry shape the working definitions of social work in different ways.

Dual Legal Systems for Islamic and non-Islamic Citizens of Malaysia as Compared With Single Judiciary Western Systems

Comparative social work research in Malaysia quickly highlights a third theme of difference concerned with the working definition of social work in that southeast Asia nation. The State of Malaysia was established in 1957 after many years of British and European colonial influence. The establishment of Malaysia as an Islamic nation confirmed acceptance of an earlier form of colonial influence involving the teachings of Islam, exported beyond the Middle East to the Malay Peninsula and down the Malay archipelago of Indonesia. These dual colonial influences of Islam and British/European administration of community and economic life present important challenges to any working definitions of social work in Malaysia. Many of the same issues would apply for Indonesia. Challenges to the working definition of social work are further compounded by a dual legal system operating for children, young people, and families in Malaysia, one legal system for the followers of Islam and another legal system for non-Muslim Malaysians (Fulcher & Mas'ud, 2001). A hypothesis highlighted by this third theme is as follows.

> *Hypothesis 3:* The working definition of social work is shaped by legislation and institutional structures established and maintained by governments and religious bodies as daily facets of community life.

Cultural Traditions and Indigenous Practices Compared With Empirically Tested or Policy-Driven Interventions

A final comparative theme was highlighted through encounters with *adat*, or customs and cultural traditions of the indigenous peoples of the Malay Peninsula and Borneo. Northern Borneo is now recognized as Sarawak, one of Malaysia's largest and most culturally diverse states that borders the

Indonesian state of Kalimantan along the highlands interior. Sabah is the other state in North Borneo where Malaysia's eastern borders touch both the Philippines and Indonesia. Cultural traditions of the Malay peoples, and of the Iban, Bidayuh, Kayan, and other clan groups indigenous to the Island of Borneo, still heavily influence contemporary family, clan, and community life. Cultural contestations between indigenous cultures, Malay, Islam, Chinese immigrant cultures, Tamil Indian traditions, biomedical expertise, and information technology all challenge the working definition of social work played out in Malaysia at the start of a new century (Ibrahim, 1998). In one of the places in the world where someone with connections can arrange an adoption by purchase, comparative research requires reflection on the working definition of social work. It is interesting to note how principles of individuality, self-determination, confidentiality, and human rights—all features of a Lao Wai working definition of social work—were inspired by Beistek's confessional and the religious-humanist foundations of clinical casework in the West (Payne, 1997). Western working definitions of social work have not worked very well in Malaysia or the Peoples' Republic of China, even though welfare officers or civil affairs cadre carry out many of the same tasks in these countries. A hypothesis highlighted by this fourth comparative theme is as follows.

Hypothesis 4: Responsive social work requires a working definition which is highly sensitive to cultural variation.

SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL WORK IN CHINA

Peking University Scholar Ma Fenzhi (Ma, 1996) traced the emergence of contemporary social work in China from 1980, "when the country broke its mono-planned economy and began to move to a market economy, a transformation that caused new social problems" (p. 251). Ma Fenzhi claimed that in China, social work is the focus of the following three levels of activity:

- in grassroots communities;
- in the management and administration of social work services; and
- in the central administration and development of national social work policy.

Ma Fenzhi highlighted "an inner logic of partnership" between the government of the People's Republic of China and the colleges engaged in professional social work education and training (pp. 250-251). That inner logic was

reaffirmed by Mok and Liu (1999) in a review of market socialism and the quest for a welfare model in China. Ngai (1996) also drew attention to how the redevelopment of Chinese social work education shows a "positive view of the CCP toward social work, a profession once regarded as evil and subjected to ideological suppression" (p. 297).

The emergence of social work as a professional-occupational identity has resulted from government's strategic policies aimed at providing urban community services, promoting self-reliance projects in the rural areas, and supporting both government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to provide individual and group services for different social groups (Ma, 1996, p. 252). As Mok and Liu (1999) noted,

> Socializing social welfare emerged in response to the new social needs and social problems. It was intended to dispel people's discontent, resolve internal contradictions, and ensure a socially and politically stable environment for economic reform, and to serve the newly adopted market socialism. (p. 145)

In 1998, the number of grassroots-level personnel working for the Ministry of Civil Affairs alone totaled 2.5 million workers, 90% of these being Party members, who performed tasks to support a national population of 1.2 billion people (Wang Lai-zhu, personal communication, November 1998). When taking account of the numbers of health, rehabilitation, and industry social workers, along with the cadre employed by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, one begins to appreciate the magnitude of challenges facing the development of social work in China for the 21st century.

European readers were offered glimpses of child welfare practices in central China, where government worked with NGOs to rebuild children's welfare homes in four provinces after the devastating Yangtze River flooding of 1998. McMillan (2000) reported positive images about collaborative work carried out "between the Chinese government and international NGOs directed toward improving the quality of services provided for the many abandoned children living in welfare institutions in China" (p. 4). As a trainer for the Civil Affairs Bureau aimed at developing systems and practices appropriate for working with children in small group settings, McMillan (2000) noted how,

> In China, child care workers are exclusively women who are not required to hold any qualifications. They are subject to poor work conditions and low pay, even by Chinese standards. The residential facilities tend to be massively underresourced. . . . Obviously, there are differences. In China, some of our ideas are not transferable at this time. Some practices go against the grain of everything we are trying to understand or challenge in our own system. . . . The

concept of institutionalisation is not challenged and there is difficulty believing this could possibly have an adverse effect on the lives of children in care. (p. 4)

This Western writer spent 2 months living and working with grassroots workers of child welfare services in central China. Initial conclusions (McMillan, 2000) to be drawn were that

The problems and responses to China's abandoned and disabled children needed to be understood within the context of China's cultural, sociopolitical, and economic circumstances, and also take account of its recent and past history. Moreover, the underreporting of positive changes and progressive projects carried out by the government in collaboration with NGOs such as Save the Children's Fund compounds a negative image sadly reinforcing an unrealistic notion that nothing changes in China. (p. 4)

Glimpses of grassroots practice such as these serve to emphasize the magnitude of challenges facing the working definition and development of social work in China for the 21st century. Mok and Liu (1999) clarified that *socializing social welfare* was "not just a slogan but an important concept with significant policy and practice implications" (p. 145) in China. *Socializing social welfare* refers to all activities aimed at meeting the urgent needs and solving the more serious problems of the masses in their daily lives through mobilization of people's power and community resources (Wang & Bai, 1996). Mok and Liu (1999) noted how "social welfare is considered not the sole responsibility of the government, but a duty of every member, every organization, and every sector of the community" (p. 145). A working definition of social work implies that "the provision of social welfare should be by the community, with the community and for the community. The role of the government is to encourage and support this new concept of social welfare" (p. 145).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, few alternatives are available for China or Malaysia but to shape their own working definitions of social work without relying too heavily on Western social work theory. Baba (2000) and Kee (2000) both offered substantive justification for distinctive cultural pathways for the development of social work and the refinement of working definitions of social work in Malaysia. Western definitions and social work theory may offer comparative reference points that promote critical debate, but without indigenous definitions and theories that inform Chinese and Malaysian social work, there will be little future for an aspiring social work profession in those

countries as the new century unfolds. It is also the basis for the claim that the working definition of social work does not work very well in China and Malaysia. Much greater consideration is required about how culture influences both help giving and help receiving among peoples in non-Western cultures (Kee, 2000).

Western social work thinkers and scholars (Wing, 1988) may be aware of how the ancient Chinese strategist Sun Tzu placed great emphasis on the idea of situational positioning, claiming this to be the most formidable strategic maneuver.

> Sun Tzu believed that every situation and its potential transformations could be analyzed so that clever positioning would capture the advantage through reference to the Six Tao of Situations—smooth, entangled, indecisive, narrow, obstructed, and distant. (p. 126)

The strategic advice (Wing, 1988) was to

> Challenge when the position is Smooth; do not challenge when the position is Entangled; Confront when the position is Indecisive; Pursue only when a Narrow Position is empty; occupy or empty an Obstructed Position; and do not challenge from a Distant Position. (p. 127)

One can see how the working definition of social work is very closely interwoven with each of Sun Tzu's ancient Six Tao of Situations. His *Art of Strategy* concluded with an examination of "intelligence-gathering techniques that might curb costly mistakes and human suffering, describing five types of information gathering" (Wing, 1988, p. 162). Each type of information in Sun Tzu's "Divine Web" of understanding is fundamental to "Good-Enough Social Work" practice and will be required in the development of social work research and practices in China and Malaysia for the 21st century (Wing, 1988).

- "Local information" is obtained from social workers and social work managers in the vicinity as well as in the regions.
- "Inside information" is obtained from those engaged in local neighborhood organizations and community decision making.
- "Counter-information" is presented through pressure groups and organizations that may conceal or distort activity.
- "Deadly information" may be circulated in the form of rumor, gossip, defamation, or labeling.
- "Secure information" may disrupt the priorities of one group or another in government bureaucracies and nongovernmental organizations. (p. 162)

Important theoretical, organizational, and methodological issues will be highlighted with the emergence of a new working definition of social work and the development of Chinese and Malaysian social work theory and research over the next decade. Although scholarly exchanges with the West may help stimulate a professional practice and research agenda, nothing will replace a decade of direct financial investment in personnel and training to address social development challenges that confront these two countries in the months and years ahead.

Nga reira, in closing, *tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa*, thank you for giving consideration to these thoughts.

NOTE

1. At the International Colloquium on the Future of Social Work in China (in Beijing, 2000), Malcolm Payne confirmed this should be "ethnically" and not "ethically" as found in both editions 1 and 2.

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Research on Social Work Practice

Resource and Educational Empowerment: A Social Work Paradigm for the Disenfranchised

Charles O'Brian

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Resource and Educational Empowerment:
A Social Work Paradigm for the Disenfranchised

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It is unfair to criticize a set of principles written at a different time and a different place. However, a reflection with the advantage of 40 years of hindsight gives us an opportunity to examine Harriet Bartlett's working definition of social work practice. It is important to understand the times in which this definition emerged and the context of history and social change that influenced her proposal. There are lessons to be learned for those trying to understand the social work mission in our own current troubled times, in various countries of the world.

In 1958, the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union was well entrenched in the psyche of all Americans, and the United States, like today, had the certainty that their system of government and way of life was not only right but a model for the rest of the world. The rights of the individual, above all else, were the paramount consideration. While ignoring the rampant civil and human rights abuses in parts of their own country, it appeared thus that the so-called right way was the American way. The country was hardly aware of the Civil Rights movement, and the radical anti-government protests against the war in Vietnam that were just around the corner. In reading Bartlett's seminal definition, one gets no hint of the turbulent social times that lay ahead for all North Americans.

It is, therefore, not surprising that at a time of perceived relative stability, thoughts turned to the education of workers and the growth of professionalization. In the commercial world, it was not enough to know how to conduct business or experience working in a firm; one had to get a degree to be legitimately accepted. The expansion of the MBA degree began, and so

followed social work. Professionalization meant that it had to be identified as a discipline in its own right, with values, core beliefs, concepts, and methods all basic requirements, if it was to take its place alongside the other helping professions.

If the move to professionalization preoccupied social workers, was it at the expense of ignoring serious social issues? Bartlett (1958) acknowledged that the social work profession had often been in the position of taking action after problems had reached an acute state. As she stated, "social, economic, and political trends are of major importance in influencing the development of social work practice" (p. 9). However, the only social issue she identified as a perceived problem was one of the rising numbers of working mothers. She seemed unaware that in many minority communities, particularly African American, most mothers had to work, not for personal fulfillment but for their family to survive.

It is the contention of this article that it is the professionalization of social work practice that has contributed to social workers becoming more mired in the so-called small picture. For many in the developed—and more so in the developing—world, there are big social issues that have to be addressed. Many people—particularly women, children, and the elderly—live in a constant state of vulnerability in which traditional casework provides scant protection. Those involved in responding to these issues have to go beyond individual need and look to provide community solutions. In search of these solutions, social workers have to go beyond the traditional social work paradigms and learn to think outside the box.

THE VALUE BASE

Social work has developed around two value bases. Lynn (1999) identified these as "personal caring" and "social justice." Whether to focus on helping people with their individual concerns or to work for community change has created tensions when social workers have chosen one of the two paradigms they favor. The social worker as facilitator of change or agent of social control epitomizes this struggle for social work identity. The counseling approach, which is the essence of social care, explores how it can help people move from dysfunction to functioning. It has also been viewed as merely serving as a vehicle to get the poor and disadvantaged to cope with life difficulties, which are arguably caused by the larger socioeconomic system beyond their control. Emphasis is placed on clients coping with rather than controlling their environment.

On the other hand, social advocacy and activism, which aims to empower communities to take charge of their lives, lays itself open to the criticism of politicization of the helping process and uses clients as unwitting participants in the professional's personal political agenda. Lynn (1999) explored the idea that although the twin paradigms of personal caring and social justice can conflict, as ideologies often do, personal caring and social justice are integral parts of the helping process and are inexorably intertwined.

It is the so-called social work methods, which have developed around interventions with individuals and families that have captured most attention in our profession. Social work has become laden with theories in its efforts to be seen as a profession that can rank alongside the established ones. The search for specialized knowledge and skills, which only social workers claim to have, has been a frustrating one (Kentucky Conference, 2001). I used to work in a multidisciplinary in-patient psychiatric unit for adolescents in England. The team was made up of doctors, nurses, teachers, and social workers. We all took part equally in the treatment program, and an outsider would have been hard-pressed to identify our individual professions. However, it was only the social workers who did not have a specialized function. The doctors could prescribe drugs, the nurses could administer them, and the teachers were licensed to teach. The arguments for a problem-specific rather than a discipline-specific profession were compelling in this example.

The proliferation of theories and methods stemmed from the psychodynamic roots of counseling, its elder sibling therapy, and a quest for new explanations to inform practice. The popularity of family therapy is a good case in point. It seems that every few years, a new theoretical construct has to be adopted to keep the movement alive. Some of the current writing on postmodernism and its claimed relevance to family therapy would challenge the most theoretically retentive among us to make any connections with the real world. More than 40 years ago, Barbara Wooton (1959) alerted us to the danger of taking many of these theories very seriously:

> Modern definitions of social casework, if taken at their face value, involve claims to powers which verge on omniscience and omnipotence: one can only suppose that those who perpetuate these claims in cold print must, for some as yet unexplained reason, have been totally deserted by their sense of humour. (p. 16)

Over the past two decades, social work has had to adapt to new pressures brought about by the change in focus of state agencies from providers of services to a more managerial and coordinating role, all over the globe. In the United Kingdom and elsewhere, the management function of social work has

become predominant as practice has changed from casework to care management. The social worker has become more of a gatekeeper and evaluator of services rather than providing them directly.

O'Neill (1999) described of the extraordinary metamorphosis of British social work that has led to its bureaucratization. She examined further some of the negative influences on social work practice brought about by the heavy demands of its main occupational focus, child protection work. With social workers often in the cleft stick of public opinion and statutory requirements, there is a great pressure to retreat into defensive practice. Howe (1992) argued that there is always some detail of procedure, policy, or guideline that a practitioner can be shown not to have observed. Walker (2001) claimed that the language of risk has taken over from that of need and welfare in the literature on personal social services: "The monitoring, assessment, and analysis of risk is becoming the organizing principle in agencies" (p. 38).

When professional judgment becomes circumscribed heavily by regulation and guidelines, the social worker's role is somewhat different than ones that are based on the two values of personal caring and social justice. A third value base appears to have emerged that we might call *resource and risk management*. Formed by combining concepts from resource management and distribution with current ideas from the financial and business world about quality and effectiveness, emphasis is placed on meeting the needs of customers and stakeholders. Where our clients (of old terminology) fit in this mix is less certain.

For instance, in Hong Kong, social workers are often involved in needs assessments of persons who apply for a place in a Care and Attention Home for elderly persons. Now this is a limited resource and one that is much sought after, so the social workers have to ensure that only suitable candidates are recommended for a place. Forgive the caseworker in me, but take the case of Mrs. Chan, 80 years old, and living in public housing, in Hong Kong, with her son, daughter, their children, and a new baby. Seven people live in two rooms. Mrs. Chan has become increasingly dependent, and her medical needs are increasing. However, the family is not able to pay her much attention, and she languishes on her bed for most of the day and struggles to the doctors occasionally.

The social worker completes the complex bureaucratic procedures and recommends Mrs. Chan for admission to a Care and Attention Home. The recommendation is accepted, and Mrs. Chan is put on the waiting list. She will be on it for at least 2 years until a place becomes available. What, then, is the social work task with her and her family? Simply put, it is to help them to cope with a situation that is not going to get any better in the foreseeable future.

This begs the question of this entire special edition journal: How should social work be defined for the new century? Cooper and Lousada (1996) wondered whether there is a universal set of core beliefs that social workers hold. In the places where professional social work has originated, it is my belief that it is this third paradigm that will become dominant increasingly. In a world in which the welfare system is shrinking and social workers have to concentrate on their statutory functions or in rationing services whither personal care and social justice.

Rothman (1985) contended that most professional social workers are reluctant activists at best. He pointed out the ethical difficulties in being a revolutionary and an employee at the same time. Bartlett's working definition is for the educated professional. However, social work has attracted largely the middle class for whom a college education is more accessible. By nature, this group is going to be less radical.

The development of casework into therapy has given social workers a role in the growing private sector. Private practice is probably more attractive than working in underfunded and pressurized public agencies. An expanding sector is that of Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs). It is interesting to note that EAPs favor a brief therapy model as their intervention of choice not because of its therapeutic efficacy but because its 8- to 10-session model fits nicely into a managed health care provision.

More direct services are being offered by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), but these are often run by agencies whose value systems are idiosyncratic and may come into conflict with those of traditional social work. Currently, in both the United States and United Kingdom, the government is interested in expanding the role of religious organizations in the provision of welfare services.

Working at the Margins

I believe that in the new paradigm, social work must be about working at the margins. The margins between the world in which most of us live, in which we get by—more or less—in what is called functioning and another in which people struggle to make something out of a life fraught daily with difficulty and hardship. This world can be a frightening and dangerous place, and it is populated by people for whom the day-to-day resources, personal safety, and contentment—that most of us take for granted—are always out of reach. To label these people as dysfunctional is a trap that we have fallen into far too often. People who live in tenements, in extreme poverty, and under tremendous stress have to develop coping methods at which we can only marvel.

Living on the streets in subfreezing temperatures requires resources that would defeat most of us.

We take for granted having shelter, food on the table, living without violence, with love and affection, with appreciation, and with the opportunity to lead a productive life. For the people who social workers have traditionally served, the gap between their life and this one can seem like a giant chasm—a veritable Grand Canyon of unobtainability, if you like. Social work had its origins as a profession in the settlement-house pioneer work that was done in helping people and communities to cross this great divide. With our growing interest in theories, techniques, a desire to quantify, to manage, and our constant struggle to prove that what we do is worthwhile, have we lost sight of our roots and how they should define what we presently do as social workers?

So, what about social justice? Hawkins, Fook, and Ryan (2001) posed the question that if social work is a profession founded on principles of social justice, to what extent do our practices match our principles? Their research examined how social workers talk about their practice and whether the terminology they used reflected social work ideals. They compared the language social workers used and compared it with language associated with a social justice framework. They conducted two studies. One was a longitudinal study that followed a cohort of social workers for 5 years, from the beginning of their 2-year course of study at an Australian university to the end of their third year of practice. The other involved 30 experienced social workers in practice. All participants were interviewed and asked to respond to various practice vignettes. Both groups used very little social justice terminology other than words such as *empowering* and *empowerment*. The terms, which were commonly used, were those such as *counseling*, *family therapy*, *isolation*, *assessment*, *resources*, *strategies*, and *negotiate*. They pointed out that if we want social work, as a profession, to pursue principals of social justice, then we need to be able to conceptualize our practice in these terms as a start. These findings echo Schriver (1990) in his essay on the prewar social activist Harry Lawrence Lurie. Shriver's conclusion was that, as in Lurie's day, social workers were uncertain and timid about the roles they should play. The lure of psychotherapy, primarily of benefit to the privileged, "offers an irresistible attraction to social workers" (p. 104).

The professionalization of social work has been exported all over the world. University courses in social work are present in almost every country. Similarly, there are registration boards, qualifications, or governmental and nongovernmental agencies with requirements for training and who influence curriculum. Research proliferates as social work strives to take its place at the alter table of the social sciences and be taken seriously as an academic discipline.

Statutory requirements within which social workers have to work have multi-plied exponentially. How does this export match needs in the world beyond the West?

A NEW PARADIGM

In the developed world, parents are concerned that their uncontrollable children suffer from Attention Deficit Disorder. In the rest of the world, parents are concerned about how they will feed their children tomorrow. In the developed world, men are concerned that the demands of their careers nega-tively influence their relationships with their families. In the rest of the world, men are glad to have back-breaking, health-impairing, and exhausting work that leaves them no time to consider the luxury of family relationships. In the developed world, women are concerned with fulfilling themselves in their jobs and personal life. In the rest of the world, women are at the bottom of the pile, often violated and have little or no say on the decisions that affect their daily lives. What has any of this got to do with social work?

This is what it has to do with it. The very milieu in which social work first emerged existed in the developing world. Social concerns come in a very poor second place to the demands for economic development. But can social work get back to its roots to work in these areas? Can it base its impact in terms of real social justice? My assertion is that it can but has to develop a new paradigm in which to work. Tesoriero (1999) wondered whether social work can contribute to social development into the new millennium. His thesis was that although social work ought to be able to contribute to social develop-ment, the neoliberal agenda has replaced the common good with economic and individual achievement. He argued that social work needs to move away from managerial and market paradigms and align itself once again with the marginalized and disadvantaged. He advocated processes that enable new partnerships.

The status of social work as an academic discipline is not a debate for this article. Ours is a profession that has borrowed widely from the social sciences and medicine. Leighninger (1987) examined the uneasy historical relation-ship between sociology and social work. She wrote about social workers' search for a new all-inclusive theoretical framework to form a base for auton-omous professional practice.

This search for a grand theory for social work has served to shape our views so that we see people too readily in terms of pathology or dysfunction.

Our views of communities and societies are also colored similarly. Perhaps our theories have taken too much from sociology and psychology and not enough from economics and education. Let me elaborate here. Both psychology and sociology attempt to explain persons or societies ills. They offer us theories to help explain people's functioning or lack of it in a society, which has inherent defects and injustices. True enough. But if we are to adopt the principles of social justice, we have to look beyond defects and see how we can facilitate change so that people can start to live better lives. Economic considerations are becoming more part of the social work function but only in the role of risk and resource manager, as was discussed above.

Financial concerns have always been at the heart of the social worker-client relationship. Most of the people we have worked with need cash more than therapy. It has usually been easier to organize giving them therapy or counseling. How many times has a client come to see a social worker with housing, financial, and other needs and been offered "support" and the opportunity to "ventilate" their feelings. Of course, social workers also feel powerless in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. This is no less true, in fact doubly so, in countries that are in the throes of economic development.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed is a book that influenced many social workers involved in community work. Written by Paulo Freire (1972), it argued that large sections of the world's population are disenfranchised. The dominant philosophy in society serves to marginalize people. This led him to develop radical and controversial educational programs. His notion was that traditional hierarchical education serves to maintain hierarchies and divisions between people. The acquisition of knowledge serves to move certain people toward better positions in society but does little to break down the barriers. He advocated an educational process that liberated, and the educator acts as a facilitator for people to acquire the knowledge that they will find useful in their lives. This reframes education as a process and a dynamic dialogue rather than a passive process.

Money and education can empower disadvantaged groups. After studying many innovative programs being offered in the developing world, I would assert the need for a new paradigm for social work, one that offers disenfranchised and disempowered groups the opportunity, by small changes, to gain greater control of their lives. I refer to this new model as *resource and educational empowerment*.

Rather than a theoretical discourse explaining this new paradigm, let us see how it works in practice. *The State of the World's Children 2000*, UNICEF's (2000) annual report, asserts that the past decade has seen an

undeclared war on women, adolescents, and children. The report claimed that poverty, conflict, chronic social instability, and preventable diseases such as HIV/AIDS threaten their human rights and sabotage their development.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In every country in which reliable national studies have been conducted, results have indicated that between 20% and 45% of women have been assaulted by an intimate partner. This is a pandemic that receives minimal attention. It is also likely that the problem is underestimated because women fear reprisals for betraying family secrets or feel themselves that they have done something wrong and deserve a beating. The issue has largely been condoned, sanctioned, and ignored by society. The saying "the rule of thumb" comes from medieval law, which limited the size of the rod with which a man could beat his wife to thus being no bigger than his thumb.

The World Health Organization reports on a number of projects around the world addressing this issue. There are support groups in Argentina in which women can share experiences; women's police stations in Latin America and in a number of Asian countries that provide a concerned local response to crimes against women; courses in nonviolent parenting and conflict resolution, for adults and children, in Jamaica and Canada; legal literacy programs and free legal advice encouraging battered women to press charges in Uganda; safe houses and shelters for women leaving abusive partners in Egypt, Paraguay, and Hong Kong.

MANAVA is a community organization founded in 1985 in the United States by a group of South Asian women. Set up to serve the needs of women from a South Asian background suffering from domestic violence, it offers a range of services from safe houses to community education. Every year, MANAVA sponsors one women-focused and women-led project in a South Asian country. Some of these are women's shelters in Bangladesh and India, financial assistance for women activists in India, training projects and vocational training.

Its current project is a legal clinic for women in Calcutta, India. MANAVA is assisting the National Federation of Indian Women in fund-raising for a sorely needed service. Poor women are deprived of their legal rights routinely. The law is technical, and it is prohibitively expensive to get proper legal counsel, which makes its remedies inaccessible. The clinic will provide legal education to women, sensitivity training for lawyers on gender issues in cases of abuse, an opportunity for women to consult with lawyers, and pro bono attorneys for women.

CHILDREN AND WAR

Since the end of World War II, there has been constant armed conflict in some parts of the world. Children have suffered greatly as frontline combatants and as the victims of violence. In the decade since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, more than 2 million children have been killed and more than 6 million injured or disabled in armed conflicts. Helping children and communities to cope after the end of conflict is a pressing social need.

As in many other conflicts, there were many children orphaned in Angola. In this country, savaged by decades of conflict, social service resources were virtually nonexistent. In Huambo province, teenagers were offered the chance to build their own homes. They were provided with land and, with the assistance of experienced builders, constructed their own homes. The building materials were provided by Save the Children Fund, a leading international NGO. The young people were also given basic household equipment.

In one year, 50 houses were built before conflict erupted again, severing contact with these young people. However, when it became possible to visit them again, they had survived the period of conflict extremely well. They had managed to establish small businesses, had maintained their own houses, and were coping independently.

Tolfree (1995), in contrasting this project with others elsewhere that were not as successful, concluded that the success of the Huambo project was due primarily to the high investment that the young people were able to make in their own future. They had a high degree of involvement and commitment to the planning and building of their own houses. Other projects examined were those that put young people in hostels. These did not work very well as they seemed to exchange one form of institutionalization for another.

A BANK FOR THE POOR

Bangladesh has been a longstanding international laboratory for social aid experiments. Every international aid organization has had a presence there at some time or the other. Despite a modest growth in per-capita output, income distribution has become more unequal, and poverty, landlessness, and unemployment have increased. Five years ago, the richest 5% of the population earned 18 times more than the poorest. Today, it is 30 times more. So despite some of the gains of traditional social aid, the situation for women has improved broadly, what other ways can be used to empower the disenfranchised.

The Grameen Bank has gained international recognition with the inception of micro credit. This involves making small loans to people who have no formal credit worthiness and thus enabling them to start up small businesses. The system has been exported to other parts of the world, particularly to the United States where minority customers, with no chance of getting a loan, have been able to get started. This is indeed a rare example of the usual globalization process reversed. One of the methods to help customers not to default is to group borrowers together to support each other to make their loan repayments. The method of setting up self-help support groups is one that will be recognized by social workers. This economic intervention enables people to start to become self-sufficient. This often leads to employment opportunities for others with the resultant benefits.

CONCLUSION

Projects such as these combine education and financial resources with traditional social work methods to provide a vital social service. However, they are small in focus and aim to develop people's self-reliance and their taking charge of their lives. But are they social work? Should social work direct its efforts primarily toward the poor and disenfranchised or to those who would benefit most from intervention? This is an old debate but a specious one because the two requirements are not mutually exclusive. If social work cannot help the poor and disenfranchised to benefit most from its intervention, then what is it really about?

Bartlett's well-intentioned desire to professionalize social work has helped to divert us from this task. It leaves social workers on the margins of the world in which they should be working. Professionals know best. Well often they do not.

Is there more to social work than techniques and a set of skills? More even than a body of knowledge? Yes, there is. We will find it in our daily struggles on behalf of people who are voiceless, marginalized, and betrayed by the vision of a united shining world. A world that promises much but delivers little. However we define social work, these are the people who we should be doing it with.

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Research on Social Work Practice

A New Working Definition of Social Work Practice: A Turtle's View
Bruce Bidgood, Michael J. Holosko and Laura E. Taylor

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A New Working Definition of Social
Work Practice: A Turtle's View

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The authors summarize the conclusions provided by the contributors to this special issue examining the definition of social work practice. Prior definitions, including Bartlett's, have proved to be inadequate. Suggestions for developing an improved conceptualization of social work practice are provided.

Keywords: social work; working definition; practice

The invited contributors to this special edition were asked to review Bartlett's (1958) "work-in-progress" definition of social work and represent a diversity of interests as social work educators, administrators, practitioners, researchers, and policy makers. Their task has been to determine whether this definition—the starting point of all definitional debates for social workers—is relevant for social work in the 21st century. In the metaphor of the first contributor, what does the Galapagos sea turtle observe as it surfaces to ascertain its course on the return to the ancestral breeding grounds? The authors and you the reader are now challenged to synthesize, integrate, and eschew the essence of the conceptually thorough, cogently developed arguments of these contributors. The contributors' arguments around the tenability of the working definition are summarized around the following four recurrent themes: (a) the changes in social work practice; (b) the professional issues such as professional identity, education, practice models, and credentialing; (c) globalization and its effects on social work in the 21st century; and (d) the client-focused/consumer perspective of social work practice.

CHANGES IN SOCIAL WORK
PRACTICE/ENVIRONMENT

Bartlett's (1958) working definition emphasized the dual focus of the social work profession and person in environment, and the contributors note that the social and practice environment has changed dramatically over the past five decades. Her work was influenced by American sociopolitical values of the post–World War II era, the fabulous '50s, the cold war, and the McCarthy scare. The nuclear family, the stay-at-home mother, and the go-to-work father were idealized in shows such as "Leave it to Beaver" and "Father Knows Best." More significantly, Bartlett wrote before, or at the beginning of, some of the major social and human rights movements and milestones of the 20th century: school desegregation, Civil Rights, women's equal rights, Aboriginal rights, and disability rights movements, deinstitutionalization, community mental health, and store-front outreach social services. Bartlett's definition also predates many of the major social problems we face today: human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and AIDS, the drug culture and the war on drugs, the war(s) on poverty, an aging population, the breakdown of the nuclear family, the urbanization of North America, the dismantling of the social welfare system, and the problems of literacy, youth alienation, and safety affecting our educational systems. The definition was written before the impact of the war on Vietnam, the aboriginal uprising at Oka, Ontario, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the cold war, and the advent of free trade and globalization. Bartlett's work also predated the technological revolution: computers, VCRs, bank-machines, cell phones, instant replay of news events, and the global information highway—the Internet—did not exist. Bartlett's world had emerged from World War II "victorious, happy, and glorious." Subsequent events have shaken the world environment to its very core: the wonder and discoveries of men and women in space, assassinations of world leaders, global climate changes, the vulnerability of the world economic market, an increasing polarization of wealth between haves and have-nots, the dissolution of nation states, and ongoing armed conflicts between countries—and, closer to home, school children shooting classmates, the bombing of Americans by Americans in Oklahoma City, the devastation of large airplane crashes, hijackings, hostage takings, flight disasters caused by terrorists, and worldwide terrorism culminating in September 11, 2001, a new North American date of infamy.

The very nature of social work practice has evolved over the past 50 years. Social work practice at the time of Bartlett's writing was divided primarily into casework and group work. As Sallee (2003) reminds us, community work did not reenter the social work perspective until the 1960s, when the

spirit of social reform and the advent of the Peace Corps encouraged social workers to return to their settlement house roots. Social work education relied largely on texts by Charlotte Towle (1957, 1959), Annette Garrett (1954), and Gordon Hamilton (1938, 1946, 1965). Hollis's (1964), and Perlman's (1957) frameworks were being developed, Greenwood had just refuted Flexner's argument on social work's status as a profession, and Biestek (1957) had just formulated principles that would become a foundation in social casework. Systems theory, ecological perspectives, and generalist practice had not yet been developed in social work.

The contributors have identified an array of additional substantive changes in the practice environment subsequent to Bartlett's (1958) definition, including the following: a blurring of professional boundaries and an increase in competition between professions; the development of managed care; an increased emphasis on case management; the growing popularity of solution-focused, short-term treatment; and a dramatic increase in public attention on child protection and child welfare services. Turner (2003) suggests that postmodernism has resulted in an awareness of context of knowledge construction pertaining to communication and the norms of agencies and the deconstruction of narratives to give voice to victims of oppression. She argues that we need to integrate postmodernism into both social work practice and a practice definition.

Gambrill (2003) focuses on the new expectations of social work practice in relation to clients. Social workers claim expertise over a wide range of client problems that, in turn, are influenced by social, political, and economic factors. She notes large gaps between claims of effectiveness and evidence-based practice and the fact that there is no evidence of special unique knowledge in relation to outcomes of social workers when compared to nonprofessionals. She points out that a competent and ethical social work must now consider the following: an increasing emphasis on transparency and evidenced-based practice, clients who are not typically informed about the evidentiary base of practice particularly on issues of purchase of nonevidence-based service, exposés of social work practice in media, the impact of the Internet, and gaps between the rhetoric of environmental issues and social justice and achieved outcomes.

PROFESSIONAL ISSUES

The contributors suggest that the major professional issue that postdated Bartlett's definition is the adoption and domination of the generalist practice model. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) made the generalist

model compulsory in all undergraduate social work education in 1974, followed shortly thereafter by the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work (CASSW). The generalist model has been carried into the first year of some MSW programs, whereas other graduate schools have adopted the advanced generalist practice model. Sallee argues that the generalist problem-solving process holds promise of resolving the endemic dual focus of the profession and should supplement the knowledge element of a working definition to redress social workers' historic ambivalence toward theory. The author asserts that the generalist perspective holds specific prescriptions for a working definition of social work practice including the following: a greater degree of reciprocity between clients and social workers, an expanded intervention repertoire, and greater use of informal and natural helping systems.

Turner holds that Bartlett's definition does not do justice to the generalist model's concepts of holism and has an overly narrow theoretical base and view of the problem-solving process. She objects to the separation of research, teaching, and administration as distinct from the practice of social work. Both Turner and Sallee note a growing dissonance between generalist education and social work practice. Turner argues that because contemporary social work practice is dynamic, subject to intersystemic tension and external pressures, definitions must reflect the systems influencing BSW practice: new knowledge and techniques, sociopolitical bureaucratic systems, and society's expectations.

Leslie and Cassano (2003) hold that the working definition of social work practice was the genesis of the current popularity of the generalist model and has a had variety of deleterious effects for the profession, including: an erosion of professional identity; a weakening of practice arts and social-work-specific knowledge; a devolution of responsibility for training and professional identity development from schools of social work to social agencies; gaps between social work education and social work practice at all levels of education in Canada; and a lessening of the resolve of social workers to oppose governmental control in social welfare and the profession.

Gambrill argues that there is an inverse relationship between the growth of the profession and the problems solved by practitioners, and she is concerned about lower standards for social work education. She points out that any definition of practice is associated with specific benefits and losses for the parties with vested interests in social work. She holds that Bartlett's definition has primarily advanced the cause of professionals and educators as evidenced by the dramatic increase in the number of practitioners and social work students. Gambrill, O'Brian (2003), and Turner all address issues of professional boundaries and interprofessional competition now existing around roles and functions particularly in relation to managed care and case management area.

They also identify the need to consider practitioner credentialing or licensing as these currently affect the profession and clients in any definitional discussion.

Feit (2003) suggests that practice no longer maintains clear-cut divisions between frontline, administration, and research and it is time to end the false dichotomy between direct and indirect practice. He argues that the working definition of practice often excludes social planners, researchers, evaluators, consultants, nonclinical personnel, and those in managerial or administrative roles. He believes a new definition must redress this omission.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE NEED
FOR A CULTURALLY SENSITIVE DEFINITION

The contributors acknowledge the impact of globalization on the practice of social work. Fulcher (2003), O'Brian, Turner, and Risler, Lowe, and Nackerud (2003) argue that as a cultural artifact, the Bartlett definition is ethnocentric and lacks sensitivity to issues of race, culture, and diversity. Risler et al. cite terms such as "this society" and "democratic" in the value statements of the definition as culturally narcissistic because social work is practiced in many nondemocratic societies. In addition, Fulcher and O'Brian argue that many of the practice methods that dominate Western social work are alien, unacceptable, and ineffective in other countries, particularly Third World countries. Ramsay's (2003) attempt to distill the working definition into specific practice constructs also underscores the importance of using culturally sensitive terms and concepts that can serve to anchor the definition in a more globally appropriate fashion.

Fulcher, whose critique is based on international research in Malaysia and the People's Republic of China, argues that a working definition of social work needs to consider that diverse cultural values, traditions, and assumptions—particularly those of indigenous peoples—affect child development theories, mental health care, and the delivery of social services. These views and values may be incompatible with Western social work theories. Fulcher suggests that differences in approaches to language acquisition, problem solving, education, social enquiry, legislation, religious structures, and information types across cultures also impact on definitional development. He notes that definitional issues and scholarly exchanges will not replace the need for direct financial investment in personnel and training of social workers in underdeveloped countries. Fulcher suggests to the reader that the "one-size-fits-all" definitional approaches will not prove useful in the development

of the social work profession in non-Western cultures in which the cultural aspects of help giving and help receiving need to be considered.

In undertaking this synthesis, we note that few if any previous definitions have captured the values or traditional teachings of the Aboriginal peoples of North America or, as the contributors point out, reflect cultural sensitivity to the diverse populations social work now serves in either the Eastern or Western, indigenous or nonindigenous, developed or developing world.

CLIENT/CONSUMER-FOCUSED DEFINITION

The voices and interests of consumers are not well represented in the working definition of social work practice. Gambrill suggests that the definition's vague and aspirational goals deflect attention from questions surrounding client self-determination, the social control function of the profession is obscured, and the evidentiary basis of services is not recognized. She suggests that the ethical imperatives of beneficence, nonmaleficence, and autonomy replace the purposes identified by Bartlett. Wakefield (2003) points out that the working definition lacks a specific value to guide the profession in its work with clients.

Turner, Sallee, and Gambrill all argue for a greater definitional emphasis on outcomes, research, and evidence-based, client-focused practice.

O'Brian argues for a particular emphasis on the marginalized and disadvantaged, the traditional clientele served by the social work profession. He suggests expanding the social work value base of personal caring and social justice to encompass resource and risk management and encourages social work to adopt a definitional model based on resource and educational empowerment in response to the differing conditions, aspirations, and realities of the developed and developing world. He emphasizes the need to move beyond the paradigm of "professional as expert" and "think outside the box." Both O'Brian and Gambrill are critical of social work's rhetorical claims to social justice and call for the use of practice language matching the commitment to social justice claimed by the profession.

Social work practitioners, educators, researchers, policy makers, administrators, and the reader undoubtedly would also suggest that if a new working definition of social work is to be constructed, this definition should reflect the different paradigms that the social work profession now embraces. These would, at the very least, include the following: feminist perspectives, strengths perspectives, empirically based practice, redistributive social justice, collaborative community development, and advanced generalist practice perspectives.

DOES THE DEFINITION STILL WORK?

Does Bartlett's working definition of social work practice still work? The editor's query has been answered with a resounding no. In the words of the contributors:

- "the working definition . . . is not appropriate today" (Risler et al.);
- "It is time to leave Bartlett behind and move on" (Turner);
- "Bartlett's definition does not work, especially for clients" (Gambrill);
- "[Bartlett's definition is an] . . . ill-conceived working definition" (Wakefield);
- "the profession [needs] to define itself in a practical, common sense, understandable manner to the general public" (Sallee);
- "Bartlett's well-intentioned desire to professionalize social work has helped divert us from the task" [sic of helping the poor and disenfranchised] (O'Brian);
- "Without indigenous definitions and theories . . . there will be little future for an aspiring social work profession" (Fulcher);
- "The working definition . . . can be seen as a necessary but insufficient step in ensuring the effective development of the social work profession" (Leslie & Cassano).

The authors tend to concur, however, that there is merit in current efforts to define social work practice: "The spirit of a working definition remains intact because social work practice is a perpetual work in progress" (Feit). Ramsay's work on the conceptual scaffolding necessary to anchor any definition is a step in this direction.

The contributors provide a variety of useful references that may serve as cornerstones for a new working definition of social work practice, including: (a) Gordon's (1962) landmark critique, (b) a generalist practice working definition, (c) the Codes of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers and the International Federation of Social Workers, and (d) a consumer-focused working definition. The authors also articulate the following series of prescriptive elements for a present-day working definition that should: (a) be global in its application and more specifically culturally sensitive to the needs of the developed and developing world; (b) be holistic and client focused; (c) reflect the Code of Ethics and the value bases of the profession; (d) permit diversity of practice focus and social work functions at all levels of practice; (e) encompass generalist practice perspectives; (f) focus on resource and educational empowerment; (g) focus social work practice on marginalized peoples; and, finally, (h) use language and rhetoric that reflect the profession's purpose of social justice and change.

The contributors also provide some strong cautionary words of advice to those who would create a new definition. O'Brian calls for a definition to return social work to its historical mission and mandate—those who are marginalized and voiceless and who have been betrayed by a world that "promises much but delivers little." Sallee suggests that the profession is defined everyday "in hundreds of thousands of ways by individuals with the title of social worker by who they are and what they do". Gambrill, Wakefield, and Ramsay warn and challenge those who would create a new definition that the exercise must improve services to clients so as to be worthwhile. Finally, Leslie and Cassano remind us of the pervasive and enduring legacy of definitional efforts as the construction of the Bartlett working definition wedded the profession to the generalist practice model. As implied by Wakefield, Ramsay and Leslie and Cassano, we should be careful in what we wish for—if Bartlett is any example, a definition once created is not easily destroyed and will guide the profession of social work for many years.

CONCLUSION

The contributors to this special edition acknowledge Bartlett's (1958) working definition of social work practice as the cornerstone of social work's ongoing effort to define its unique identity. Given the extensive changes in both our world and our social work practice realities, it is remarkable that the contributors agree that most of the core components of Bartlett's definition could, with some reworking, be maintained. This is a striking testimony to Bartlett's ability to capture the essence of social work of her time. The longevity of the definition speaks to her conceptual clarity and foresight, and the care that must be taken in crafting a so-called definition for the ages.

This article concludes (as we hope the reader does) that a search for a new working definition of social work is timely, necessary, and justifiable.

> *The sea turtle has returned to find the historic breeding ground (Working Definition) has been irreversibly changed by the forces of nature (changing practice climate and methods) and is no longer a suitable location for the reproduction of the species (source of professional identity and professional culture).*

The profession must now choose whether to cling to our historical definition or, armed with the knowledge accumulated from almost 50 years of definitional efforts, to embark on a new working definition of social work practice. It is time to begin the search for a new island!

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