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Professionalism and Social Work Education: Substance and Structure

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at effects of the quest for "professional identity" upon social work education and practice. Professionalization in social work is seen as consisting of two major components: concern with producing effective service for clients and concern with gaining autonomy. The impact of these two goals, and the tension between them, is discussed in relation to social work knowledge-base expansion in the 1950's, and developments in the history of undergraduate social work education.

Achievement of full professional status—to social workers this has often appeared to be the ultimate in occupational goals. Much of social work's educational and organizational history can best be understood in light of attempts at professionalization (Lubove, 1969; Woodrofe, 1968). Yet professionalism is a two-edged sword, bearing potential not only for increased responsibility to the public but also for increased rigidity and monopolistic patterns of service. In their relationships with physicians and others, social workers have recognized this duality, on the one hand envying the physician's autonomy, but on the other criticizing the tendency to limit effective medical treatment to particular socio-economic groups. Social workers need to turn this critical approach to analyzing their own patterns of professionalism. The following paper looks at several developments in social work education and knowledge-building and interprets these in the context of an increasing move toward professionalism, a move stressing both autonomy and service to clients. A major question underlying this work concerns the extent to which emphasis on professional autonomy and control may undercut responsible delivery of services.

Any discussion of professionalism and social work raises a number of serious questions. Predominant among these is the perennial query: "Is social work a profession?" and its corollary, "Can social work ever become one?" Conflicting assessments of the field's status have poured forth since Abraham Flexner's famous negative judgment in 1915. In
recent years, social work has been called a semi-profession (Carr-Saunders, 1936; Etzioni, 1969, xiii-xvi; Toren, 1972, 37-48), a middle-level profession (Marshall, 1965), and an emerging profession (Hughes, 1973). Some have granted it full professional standing (Greenwood, 1957; Meyer, 1959). For those who hesitate to call social work a full-fledged profession at present, the question of whether and how the field can achieve that status remains an open one. Students of professionalism as a general movement continue to question the limits of the phenomenon (Wilensky, 1964; Goode, 1969). Some scholars view with skepticism the attempt by social work and other groups to achieve professionalism through careful following of prescribed steps, such as those implied in Greenwood’s list of attributes of a profession (Greenwood, 1957; Goode, 1969).\(^1\) Amitai Etzioni writes that pursuit of the professional title is an unrealistic goal for social work. Lacking extensive training, full autonomy, and a highly specialized body of knowledge, social workers, he argues, would do well to maintain the middle ground of semi-professional status (1969, vi-xvi).

Judgments about social work’s position on the professional ladder proceed on the assumption that the concept of professionalism has been uniformly defined and verified. Such, of course, is not the case. The literature abounds with different visions of the nature of the beast. Descriptions of the "essential attributes of a profession" read like recipes for an authentic chili, with each cook compiling his or her own list of ingredients. The lists may overlap, yet each has some "special touch" to add uniqueness (see discussion in Moore, 1970, 4-22; also Schein, 1972, 8-9). While it becomes tempting to abandon the concept altogether, we agree with Moore and Etzioni that a shared belief in the existence of something called "professionalism" continues to affect the behavior of occupational groups. As Etzioni notes, "although the borderlines are not sharply delineated, the parties involved are not prevented from recognizing those who are manifestly... on one side or another (1969, vii)."

Certainly social work has had a long history of concern over which side the group is on. A rhetoric of professionalism has surfaced repeatedly in social work writings, and the title "professional," while sometimes a vague one, has nevertheless symbolized power and excellence.\(^2\) Because social work has itself made continual reference to the phenomenon of professionalism, it makes sense to look to the concept in interpreting various social work actions. We can try to ascertain whether certain social work activities arise out of a quest for a "professional identity" and we can begin to explore the meaning of that quest for social work education and practice.
We are faced, then, with the need to create a working definition of the concept "professional." This paper will focus not so much on professionalism, a static state, as on the process of professionalization, or movement toward an ideal goal. Unfortunately, little empirical work exists to delineate precisely what social workers see as the essential elements of the goal. We must therefore rely largely on inferences regarding the characteristics of the goal based on analyses of social work literature and action.

Drawing on the work of Eliot Friedson (1971) and Jeffrey Berlant (1975), and building on knowledge of the nature and development of the field of social work, we will stress two major factors in the search for professionalism: (1) Concern with gaining autonomy, or control over the content, definition, and practice of one's work and (2) Concern with producing a high level of objective and dedicated service to clients. The appropriateness of these concepts as major elements in social work professionalization may be gauged, in part, through their usefulness in interpreting specific trends in social work educational and organizational growth. But final definitive statements as to whether social workers view autonomy and service as the key factors in professionalism, and whether they have pursued these goals for the sake of becoming more professional, shall remain dependent upon further research. For the present, the use of these two concepts constitutes a working hypothesis about the key factors in the professional development of social work.

Before proceeding, further specification of the concepts of "autonomy" and "service" will be helpful. Friedson has described the basic principle in professionalism as the professional's authority over his own work. "Professionalization," Friedson writes:

might be defined as a process by which an organized occupation, usually . . . by virtue of making a claim to special esoteric competence and to concern for the quality of its work and its benefits to society, obtains the exclusive right to perform a particular kind of work, control training for and access to it, and control the right of determining and evaluating the way the work is performed (1971, 22; see also Toren, 1972, 65).

This emphasis on a profession's collective control over the nature of and access to its work has a parallel in the stress on the authority of the individual professional, as described by Greenwood and others (1957, 429-30). A frequent expression of this individualized aspect of professional autonomy can be found in the literature on social workers' roles in bureaucratic work settings (see, e.g., Vinter, 1959; Engel
and Hall, 1971). Some basis for the claim that acquisition of autonomy on an individual and collective level plays an important role in social workers' professional self-image can be found in Clearfield's report (1977) on a study of NASW members, which found attitudes toward professional autonomy to be a crucial element in shaping professional self-images.

In his analysis of the medical profession, Berlant carries the autonomy concept one step further, seeing the basic aim of professional organization, in medicine at least, as the creation of an outright monopoly over practice (1975, 3-5). Yet this image of the nature of professionalization, though powerful, seems rather one-sided, positing as it does a single motivation--desire for control--to account for a variety of behaviors. In order to help explain why individuals seek professional careers, why they remain in them despite various demands on time and energy, and why society as a whole affords prestige to professionals, we need to turn to additional elements in the concept of professionalism, particularly adherence to a service ethic.

Weber's idea of profession as "calling" serves as one explanation of why professions have been granted a status unique from that of other occupational groups. One might question whether this dedication to service derives simply from the personal make-up of individual actors, or whether such "dedication" exists as a collective rationalization for seeking power. Yet the familiar descriptions of social work as a "value-identified endeavor" based on beliefs in democracy and the dignity of mankind suggest the existence of a formalized collective commitment to the concept of service (see, e.g., Konopka, 1963; Rapoport, 1960; Bartlett, 1970). In his history of social work professionalization, Roy Lubove notes:

The ideal of disinterested service was probably the most powerful self-image and symbol in the culture of social work, serving as an important ego support to compensate for the low pay and prestige (1969, 122).

In support of this idea, one study of social work practitioners and students found that respondents tended to rank social work high in terms of ability to help people and to identify their work situation in terms of service (Bucklew and Parenton, 1962).

Strivings toward goals of responsible service and increased control over practice thus constitute, it can be argued, the chief components in the professionalization process of social work. Such strivings, however, often conflict with one another in practice. Attempts at controlling access to social work practice can decrease the quality of
effective service, as the paraprofessional movement argued in the 1960's. On the other hand, for example, an endeavor to improve service through interdisciplinary teamwork can undercut a profession's control over an exclusive area of service. In fact, such conflict seems to lie at the very heart of the professionalization process. The presence of these contradictory goals helps explain some of the difficulty in the definitional exercise. What appear to be conflicting descriptions of professionalism may simply be portrayals of different sides of a complex whole.

Our model of professionalization, then, presents a basic tension, with some elements leading toward efforts at tight professional control of practice, and others conveying concern with the appropriateness and effectiveness of service. Using this model, we will look at social work's involvement in the professionalization process in two key areas: (1) the development of an exclusive knowledge base and (2) control over access to practice through the process of professional education. We will concentrate on selected case histories in each area, looking first at the expansion of the social work knowledge base in the '50's and second, at shifts in policy regarding undergraduate social work education from the '40's to the present.

Attempts to Expand the Knowledge Base: Social Work and Social Science in the 1950's

Social work approaches to the development of its knowledge base can be analyzed in terms of a quest for professional autonomy as well as a concern for increasing the effectiveness of practice. Examples can be found which illustrate the field's attempts to achieve control over an exclusive body of knowledge. As we will see, even when building on the social sciences and liberal arts, social workers have sometimes been reluctant to acknowledge their debt and quick to cast themselves as sole arbiters of the appropriateness of particular theories. At the same time, however, it is clear that social work has engaged in a search for deeper understanding of human behavior and social conditions in part to provide more effective help to people in difficult situations. Both goals--increased autonomy and more effective service--seem necessary components in understanding social work's attempt in the 1950's to expand the knowledge base through inclusion of insights from the social sciences.

The social work/social science relationship has fluctuated a good deal over the years. A period of mutual involvement at the turn of the century gave way to a rift between the two in the following decades. A brief rapprochement flowered in the late 1920's, characterized largely by attempts at sharing in the research process. This tentative
relationship dissolved again in the '30's, and social work interest in
the work of social scientists lay dormant until the early 1950's. From
the 1920's on, social workers drew heavily upon psychology, particularly
the Freudian school, in formulating their knowledge base and practice
skills. Stress on individual pathology waned somewhat during the Depres-
sion years, but reappeared in force in the 1940's (Pankin, Leighninger,

In the 1950's, however, social workers turned once again to the theories
of social scientists--particularly anthropologists and sociologists--for
insights helpful to practice. This renewed interest in the social
sciences emerged in a variety of ways. Articles discussing applications
of social science knowledge to practice began to appear regularly in
the social work journals, along with pieces on the most desirable shape
of the scholar-practitioner relationship (see, e.g., Maas, 1950; Coyle,
1952; Pollak, 1953; Greenwood, 1955). The graduate schools of social
work at Columbia, Case Western Reserve, and Michigan launched major cur-
criculum and research projects exploring the usefulness of social science
type and research findings to social work education. These projects
were financed by the Russell Sage Foundation, which had recently ex-
pressed a renewed commitment to supporting work on the applications of
social science knowledge to the field of social welfare (Russell Sage
Foreword). Finally, interest in a more scientific social work research
materialized in the 1950's, finding organizational expression in the
formation of the Social Science Research Group in 1949. Whereas earlier
social work research had concerned itself primarily with descriptive
treatment of agency programs, the new thrust stressed analyses of social
work treatment techniques and outcomes, based on the methodological
tools of the social sciences (Greenwood, 1957; Social Work Research
Group, 1955).

What factors lay behind this enthusiasm for the social sciences? The
answer seems to relate to a large part to social work's ongoing concern
with the professionalization of its calling. This concern seemed
especially pertinent in the post War years. Social work had by then
achieved some consensus on goals and on the methodologies for pursuing
them. The Milford Conference of 1929 had helped define a common,
generic base to case work practice. Development of two-year graduate
programs based on an increasingly standardized curriculum further
attested to developing cohesion in the field. The New Deal and World
War II had promoted greater public acceptance of social welfare pro-
grams as a part of national and local governmental policy. Expanded
social services on both the public and private levels promised increased
employment opportunities for returning World War II veterans, and
social work graduate enrollments began an upswing in the late '40's and early 50's.

Social work had achieved a measure of stability which enabled it to turn more purposefully to occupational identity-building after the war (Perlman, 1949). The years 1948-1960 witnessed a series of milestones in professional growth: formation of the NASW in 1955; merger of two accrediting bodies into a single organization, the CSWE, in 1952; recognition of the sub-specialties of community organization, group work, and research as legitimate segments of social work practice; and creation of a number of doctoral programs. Reflecting back on this period in 1959, Helen Harris Perlman noted "the accelerated push in the past decade to find social work's specific identity and to shape its educational content to that identity" (409-11). This professional identity was to be posited upon both a continued commitment to service in the area of human relationships and a socially-sanctioned right to deliver that service. Use of social science knowledge was to appear to social workers of the 1950's as particularly helpful in both areas.

Arguments regarding the service ideal emerged frequently in the discussion of the merits of a social science theoretical framework for social work practice. A number of social work writers and educators expressed increasing dissatisfaction with what they saw as social work's long-term infatuation with the tenets of psychiatry. These writers saw the "social science approach" as a chance to channel both problem formulation and resultant practice away from a stress on individual pathology and towards recognition of the broader social constructs affecting individual behavior (Kadushin, 1959; Towle, 1955).

The shape of this more effective social work practice, informed by social science insights, was conceptualized along two different lines. One trend of thought emphasized a broadening of the ways in which social workers defined client problems. Speaking for what might be termed an "expanded diagnosis" approach, social work educators such as Perlman (1957, 6-7), Gordon Hamilton (1952), and Florence Hollis (1964, 11) suggested the incorporation of social science materials into a larger view of the client-in-his-situation. Charlotte Towle noted the "distortion of social work practice" which resulted from absorption in a psychiatric orientation, and pointed approvingly to the more comprehensive point of view afforded by a renewed look at the social sciences (1955). Clients could be seen, for example, in terms of their social roles and cultural backgrounds, as well as early family relationships (Perlman, 1965; Fenlason, 1950: CSWE, 1955). Addition of the knowledge of sociologist, anthropologist, and other social scientists would thus provide a needed antidote to a two-narrow stress on individual pathology. Presumably, this broader definition of problems would lead to more
appropriate service to clients.

A second approach, more fully articulated in the 1960's, but emerging in the preceding decade, stressed social action and evaluation of social welfare programs as legitimate professional roles. Bisno's much quoted essay, "How Social Will Social Work Be?" appeared in 1956, while other writers, including Eveline Burns and Joseph W. Eaton, reiterated the theme of a renewed concern for social work involvement in the development of social policy (Burns, 1958; Eaton, 1956). Social science findings relating to power, social stratification, community development, and social change were seen to constitute important sources of knowledge for the development of these social action and social policy approaches (Hartford, 1958; Wootton, 1959). Educators called for increased social science content in the community organization sequence, and proponents of social action approaches saw such action as grounded in the "theoretical formulations drawn from the basic sciences concerning the nature of social change" (CSWE, 1961; Beck, 1959, 213; Ohlin, 1958; Kogan, 1960, 65).

Social science insights, then, could contribute to improved service, both by fostering more comprehensive problem diagnosis and by strengthening attempts to engage in social action and social policy activities. As Perlman wrote, "we reach out avidly /to social science/, eager to know better in order to do better" (1965, 175). Such arguments regarding the importance of social science knowledge for improved service to clients were expressed openly at social work conferences and in the professional literature in the '50's. On a more subtle level, arguments were also being made regarding the role of social science knowledge in contributing to the increased autonomy and status of the profession. As Greenwood (1957), Meyer (1959), and others explained, social work could not become fully professional until it had developed a specialized base of knowledge. A major contribution of social science in this respect lay in its ability to lend the aura of science to the collective wisdom of social work practitioners. As Arlien Johnson told the National Conference of Social Work in her 1947 Presidential Address, all professions are "forced to use the scientific method of analysis and thought . . ." (308). This perception of the importance of a scientific orientation to social work professionalization was later summarized by Meyer:

Social work is not entirely at liberty to choose whether it will base its claim to professional standing on a body of scientific knowledge. So pervasive is public insistence on science that social work will almost surely have to support its claim to a body of fundamental knowledge by appeal to science (1959, 328-9).
The idea that adoption of social science approaches would be particularly helpful in producing the knowledge base requisite to full professional status reflected prevailing belief in the empiricist, natural sciences model as the basis for theory-building in the academic and professional worlds. For social workers, "being scientific" had at one time meant systematic organization of the charity process, and at a later date, adherence to the Freudian version of a science of human behavior. By the post-war era, the increasing sophistication and visibility of the empirically-based social sciences offered a new model for scientific excellence, and new criteria by which to measure the quality of social work's knowledge for practice (Hinkle and Hinkle, 1954; Germain, 1970; Eaton, 1959).

The growth of interest in strengthening the research component in social work constituted a major thread in this push for scientific knowledge base expansion in the '50's. Such a research component was conceived along the lines of a social science model of fact-finding and theory-building. In discussions with each other regarding promotion of such research, members of the Social Work Research Group emphasized the need to employ social science methodologies in problem formulation, data collection, and analysis (SWRG, 1955; Hoffman, 1956). Yet the discussion of social work research reveals another trend in the thinking about the social science/social work relationship--a strong emphasis on the social work initiative in utilization of social science tools and findings. Social workers were to play the dominant role in the borrowing of concepts and methodologies, rather than acting as passive recipients of knowledge developed by others (Lourer, 1955).

As an expression of such concerns about intellectual autonomy, the Social Work Research Group stressed the importance of establishing a research program which would concentrate specifically on social welfare problems, the needs of social work agencies, and the effectiveness of social work treatment skills (SWRG, 1955, 3; Klein, 1951). The Research Group's members periodically regretted the field's need "at present" to rely on the methodologies of the social sciences, and even "to borrow . . . its personnel" (SWRG, 1955, 12). In an article on social work research and scholarship, Isaac Hoffman (1956) acknowledged social science as a "possible source" for social work knowledge, but a source which must be "critically examined." As the Social Work Research Group Report of 1951 exclaimed, the question

"Is there anything unique, unborrowed in social work?"
has been raised in our group and some seemed stumped for an answer, although others contend that in our practice and processes there are unique elements and it is a problem for research to pull them out (12).
This statement succinctly expresses the social work dilemma vis-à-vis the social science disciplines: how can an applied field broaden its scientific base of practice through integration of knowledge from other groups, while at the same time maintaining its own identity? How does one put forth a claim for professionalism based on a more sophisticated, yet shared, rather than exclusive, fund of knowledge?

Social work educators raised similar questions in their study of how best to utilize the social sciences in building the professional curriculum. In a comprehensive CSWE-sponsored report on such curriculum expansion, Grace Coyle (1958) underscored the issues of relevance and exclusiveness in knowledge-base development. Applied fields face special difficulty in selecting knowledge for practice; Coyle felt they must either choose among theories already partially digested and transformed by other applied groups, such as psychiatry, or they must turn to the original sources of theory and knowledge, the academic disciplines, and effect their own transformations. Coyle's rejection of the first approach stemmed in part from a desire to create a more independent stance for social work, lessening its reliance on psychiatry. But in choosing the second task, Coyle expressed a number of concerns regarding the knowledge-borrowing process, including the "fundamental" question of who should teach social science concepts in schools of social work. Devoting a whole chapter to the matter of coordination and presentation of knowledge, Coyle concluded that social work educators should take major responsibility for dealing with social science material, either teaching such content themselves, or at least coordinating and directing its presentation by others (50-58).

Emphasis on control of the selection and integration process was clearly expressed by others in social work education circles. A workshop report at the 1952 meeting of the American Association of Schools of Social Work, for example, discussed the use of content from other disciplines, and concluded that social work alone should be responsible for the integration of outside material into its educational programs (AASSW, 1952, 14-15). Planners of the doctoral programs in social work education reflected similar concerns, with Towle stressing the advanced learner's need for "identification with mentors in his profession" as a reason why social workers should teach social science material on the doctoral level (CSWE, 1953, 26-32). The idea of social work's responsibility for choosing social science concepts and shaping them to the field's own purpose gradually became institutionalized in the designation of "human growth and behavior" as a required graduate curriculum area, in which courses were to be coordinated, and generally taught, by social work faculty (Hollis and Taylor, 1951, 239-47; Kendall, 1955, 24-26; Boehm, 1959, I:4-13, VI:34).
Social work, then, was to assume an active role in the choice and utilization of social science concepts. Using a telling analogy, Meyer wrote:

> Like medicine, social work will have to ask its own questions of the social sciences, and it will have to choose what is appropriate knowledge from the viewpoint of its own professional objectives (1959, 329).

Stress on "relevance," "appropriateness," and "coordination" of social science knowledge for practice were on one level reasonable expressions of concern regarding the utility of such knowledge. Yet proposals for making social science material more useful through coordination and translation at times seemed to constitute tactics in a struggle to carve out an exclusive and esoteric set of facts and theories. The social sciences offered a needed aura of scientific respectability to a profession in search of a knowledge base. Yet the borrowed knowledge had to be made "one's own." As Alfred Kahn observed in 1954,

> Social work . . . must formulate and test its own knowledge . . . supplementing it with critical use of social science knowledge, or it must surrender its professional functions to new and more rigorous disciplines, thereby abandoning the hopes of obtaining full professional status for the field (1954, 210-11).

In the process of "making over" the borrowed knowledge, however, distortions could occur. Stress on "the scientific approach" as the key to professional respectability could lead to emphasis on the outward trappings rather than inner substance of social science material. As Robert Vinter noted,

> We often seem to use new words to convey old meanings, giving us only a veneer of "scientism" . . . Much of the value of these concepts is lost because of our preference for the connotative rather than the denotative meanings of the terms employed (1962, 12).

Similar difficulties could arise when social workers translated their concern for maintenance of the profession's autonomy into attempts at control over presentation and use of social science material and methodology in the classroom and research settings. Social work educators often lacked the background for in-depth presentation of social science knowledge (Coyle, 1958, 50-58). Moreover, since the full implications and underlying assumptions of various social science
theories were not always understood, social workers ran the risk of sim-
plistic and superficial attempts at theory application.  

How then could a practice field like social work build a meaningful
knowledge base which allowed it to lay some claim to a particular exper-
tise? The answer becomes easier if one worries less about the need for
exclusivity of knowledge and concentrates more on developing knowledge
for service to clients. The latter motivation seems to emerge in the
argument, occasionally heard in the late '40's and the '50's, that
social work has the responsibility "to test social science knowledge to
see how well it applies in everyday life" (Johnson, 1947, 300). Active
testing, monitored application, and subsequent modification of social
science constructs thus provide an alternative model of professional
knowledge-building, one with a clearer claim to concern for adequate
service.

Tension between service and autonomy was of course not resolved during
social work's knowledge-building efforts in the 1950's. Recognition
of the importance of the two motivations seems, however, a necessary
component in understanding social work's renewed interest in the social
sciences. Similarly, these two facets in professionalization help to
explain developments in undergraduate social work education. Such de-
velopments are best viewed within the broader context of social work's
increasing attempts at professional gate-keeping, or control of occupa-
tional access.

Undergraduate Education: Control of Access to the Field

Access to the practice of social work has long constituted a sticky
problem for the field. Having developed initially on a volunteer basis,
social work continues to espouse such non-technical skills as warmth
and understanding as part of the practitioner's repertoire. Due in part
to its tradition, in part to the nature of its job, social work has not
yet won public acceptance of the necessity of specialized training for
its particular tasks. Throughout its development, social work has been
characterized by a division between "trained" and "untrained" workers.
The practice of labelling by work setting has resulted in use of the
same title,"social worker," for the general Liberal Arts B.A. receipent
working in a public welfare department as for the MSW practitioner in a
family service agency.

A major thrust of professionalization, then, has been the effort to dis-
tinguish the "social work professional" from the "untrained" employee
of a social welfare program. While attempts at definition and labelling
of the professional social worker have most generally characterized
this process, social work has moved in recent years toward a more active
program of controlling access to practice. This movement, with its interest both in service and increased autonomy, has helped shape the development of undergraduate education for social work, as we will see in the following analysis.

The status of undergraduate education for social work has varied widely over the years. B.A. level training has been seen not only as general educational enrichment, but also as "pre-professional" preparation for graduate school and as professional training for practice. The history of the organized profession's relationship to undergraduate programs and courses dealing with social work content presents an interesting picture of attempts at identity-building and boundary-setting. In addition, this history illustrates the influence of external forces, such as the job market, on the creation of professional identity.

Although professional training on the graduate level has until recently been the general rule in social work education, undergraduate social work courses have been around since at least the 1930's (Spencer, 1949, 176). Through the '30's and early '40's, however, official accrediting policy, as enforced by the American Association of Schools of Social Work, was based on the assumption that only graduate education could qualify as professional education. In 1942, a challenge arose to this policy with the formation of the National Association of Schools of Social Administration. NASSA membership consisted primarily of representatives from institutions in the South, Midwest, and West, particularly from state land grant colleges, where undergraduate social work programs had been formed largely to meet growing personnel needs in the public social services (Tascher, 1949, 3-10; Spencer, 1949).

The NASSA defended undergraduate programs as legitimate sources of preparation for professional practice, and the countered AASSW's refusal to accredit such programs by initiating an accrediting system of their own. NASSA programs had developed, at least in part, to answer state agencies' needs for training for social service workers, and it was clear in the 1940's, as it is today, that Master's level programs could not produce enough personnel to fill all social work positions. NASSA leaders argued that their undergraduate programs were meeting client and community needs through understanding of public welfare issues at local, often rural, levels (NASSA, 1948). Thus the dilemma faced by professional social work, and particularly by the AASSW, lay in meeting the demands for improved service without undergoing what was sometimes seen as a "watering down" of the carefully-built image of social workers as highly trained and specialized individuals.

In this clash between the service ethic and social workers' identity as skilled professionals, the proponents of higher and more specialized

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levels of training won out. After several years of conflict, NASSA and AASSW came together in a new federation, the National Council of Social Work Education, which initiated a major study of all levels of social work training for the purpose of arriving at a comprehensive educational policy for social work. The resulting Hollis and Taylor report recommended the recognition of graduate social work education as the sole professional level of training, relegating undergraduate programs largely to the preprofessional realm (1951, 187-202). The Council on Social Work Education, formed out of the National Council in 1952, solidified this move by limiting formal accreditation to graduate programs. The existence of undergraduate programs was seen as desirable but not essential to the building of a social work profession. The fact that graduate education could not hope to fill all needs for social welfare personnel seemed less important than the development of a more selective, highly-skilled group which could more easily make a claim for professional autonomy.

The next major social work educational policy statement, the CSWE-sponsored Curriculum Study of 1959, reinforced the decision to view Master's level training as the major criterion for professional practice. B.A. level social service workers, whether they had had social work courses or not, were still viewed as semi-professional. Yet undergraduate programs continued on the scene, and underwent a dramatic upsurge of growth in the 1960's (Merle, 1967). As in earlier years, at least part of this growth could be attributed to employment needs in the social welfare arena. War on Poverty programs had created both the demand for more human service workers and the rhetoric to justify employment of non- or paraprofessionals. Social welfare administrators and planners, and the paraprofessionals themselves, called for an educational credentialing system which would recognize experienced workers who lacked formal training for their jobs. This movement helped create a climate favorable not only to creation of AA Human Service degrees, but to expansion of B.A. social work programs as well. In general, the market conditions for B.A. level social workers were good. Since the number of MSWs continued to fall short of manpower needs, B.A. social work programs multiplied to fill the gap.

Social work educational policy makers thus faced somewhat the same dilemma in the '60's as did their predecessors in the 1940's. B.A. programs exhibited high levels of growth and visibility, and expanded public services called for increased personnel. This time however, a new and different task was undertaken—a conscious effort to reach down and "professionalize" the baccalaureate level of social work practice, rather than ignore it. Our explanations of the forces behind this approach must be speculative since comprehensive data on internal policy
making in the CSWE and on the influence of specific social work educators and the NASW is lacking. No doubt the general political climate of the late 1960's, as well as the attacks on social work professionalization emerging from within the field, both played a part in persuading professional leaders to abandon the policy of exclusivity in credentialing social workers (Richan and Mendelsohn, 1973; Specht, 1972). Given the atmosphere of the '60's, and social workers' commitment to service, it had become harder to explain away the argument that since the majority of social work jobs were being performed by non-MSWs, the profession had an obligation to provide training for adequate performance at this level of practice.\(^{10}\) Professional education for B.A. workers would signify concrete commitment to improving social service delivery in the public sector.\(^{11}\)

As an initial step in recognizing the legitimacy of undergraduate social work preparation for practice, the CSWE initiated undergraduate program approval in 1971, for programs declaring "preparation for practice" as their primary educational goal (CSWE Guidelines, 1967). Three years later, the CSWE approval system had blossomed into a full accreditation program, accompanied by the important NASW decision to admit B.A. graduates from CSWE-accredited programs to associate membership (Gurin and Williams, 1973). Thus twenty years after the Hollis and Taylor report, the profession had reversed itself on the issue of defining the beginning level of professional practice.

At first glance, this reversal in policy appears to signify the importance of the service ethic and a more flexible attitude toward credentialing as crucial factors in the change. Upon closer look, however, one finds an abundance of evidence of the workings of the counter pressure for increased professional autonomy and gate-keeping controls. Unlike the knowledge-building situation in the '50's, where service ethic and autonomy urges seemed more evenly matched, here the desire for professional autonomy seems to have gained the upper hand. Important clues in this process are the growing stress on the importance of early student application to undergraduate programs, the emphasis on autonomous social work departments separate from undergraduate social science programs, and a CSWE promoted curricular movement away from the liberal arts and social science base of such programs. The increase in "professional courses" has been paralleled by a weeding out of the more liberal arts-oriented programs, and by a growing tendency to view undergraduate social work education as the most desirable background for graduate social work training (Leighninger and Leighninger, 1978; CSWE House of Delegates, 1976). These developments have been accompanied by an increased interest in encouraging state civil service systems to restrict their B.A. level social work jobs to graduates of accredited undergraduate

All of these moves can be viewed, at least in part, as workings out of the goal of building professional control. The role of social work education in the professionalization process has, of course, been analyzed before. Generally, however, this role has been described as that of socializing agent and inculcator of professional attitudes and values (see, e.g., Judah, 1976; Hepworth, 1976). Less attention has been paid to social work education as a means of controlling access to the field. Here the growing importance and standardization of undergraduate social work education plays a crucial role. The more successful the field is in legitimatizing undergraduate education as a major means of entry into practice and the desirable background for graduate school, the tighter will be social work's control over access to the profession.

Howard S. Becker has noted that an occupation's movement toward professionalization often includes an increase in the length of time required for training, the creation of pre-requisite courses needed to enter the professional school itself, and in general, a pushing back of the age and point in school at which a person must declare his or her career intentions (1961, 6). Social work appears to be following this pattern, with a process of selected admissions to undergraduate programs being encouraged by CSWE at the college junior level or earlier (Guidelines, 1974, 3), and a growing acceptance of the accredited BSW program's curriculum as base level content required for advanced graduate work, paralleled by the movement toward advanced standing in MSW programs for BSW graduates. While restriction of MSW programs to B.A. social work students was rejected by the CSWE House of Delegates in 1976, that same body approved a proposal to base admission to the advanced (second year) portion of an MSW program on mastery of base level educational content "to be achieved either in an accredited B.A. social work program or on the graduate level" (CSWE House of Delegates, 3, stress mine). Advanced standing, a form of preferential treatment, is thus made more accessible to BSW students than to applicants from the social science areas, which have traditionally fed into social work graduate programs. With these changes, the profession seems to be moving toward an increased gate-keeping function, starting as early as the sophomore level in college, and moving up through the graduate program.

Another avenue of potential for increased professional control lies in the establishment of independent auspices for social work programs in the undergraduate institution. In recent years, such programs have moved steadily out of sociology and other parent departments. Between 1962 and 1976, CSWE-sanctioned programs in social science departments dropped from 82 to 42 percent; those in autonomous departments of
social work rose from 5 to 33 percent (Weed and Bromley, 1978). While no doubt motivated in part by the felt necessity to negotiate for scarce resources and to achieve academic recognition from the university, the move toward autonomous departments seems also to reflect desires for close control over curricular matters and differentiation of social work education from preparation in the social sciences.

The attempt to distinguish social work from social science and to achieve close control over the undergraduate professional knowledge base emerges clearly in BSW curriculum patterns since 1967. At that time CSWE visualized undergraduate social work courses as a small core built on a liberal arts base, including "in-depth" work in at least one of the social sciences (Pins, 1968, 14-15). Present policy and accreditation practices, however, call for a greatly enlarged core and stress inclusion of material in the social science-based areas of human behavior and social environment, either taught directly by social work faculty, or "integrated" by them into the social work curriculum (CSWE Guidelines, 1974). Average credit hours of required social work courses have steadily increased; credit hours required in social science courses have decreased (Leighninger and Leighninger, 1978). These changes are indicative of a trend to move undergraduate social work education away from the liberal arts/social science base and to refashion it as an autonomous professional training sequence.

Final evidence of an attempt to incorporate undergraduate social work education into a system of professional autonomy can be found in the growing power of the CSWE accreditation system to weed out "undesirable" programs. In 1975-76, the first year of operation of that system, 26.8% of all previously approved programs were denied accreditation; for programs new to CSWE the rejection rate was 47% (Social Work Education Reporter, 24:21, May, 1976). Responding to those social workers apprehensive about an increase in B.A. programs, following establishment of the accrediting system, Ralph Dolgoff of the CSWE staff noted the "natural braking of the more stringent accreditation process which has already begun" (1975, 13). It is difficult to ascertain at this point just what kind of programs are being denied official recognition. Yet the following statement made informally to the author by a social work educator knowledgeable in CSWE policy aims may be instructive as to underlying goals: "Those three person departments can't last--after all, you can't have a small law school."

Of course, interest in larger, more autonomous undergraduate social work programs, with distinct curricula of their own, should not be interpreted only in terms of a thrust toward professional control of social work practice. Current changes in undergraduate social work education
are supported by arguments that these changes produce a better selection of students and improvements in program curricula and structure, which lead to a more effective education for entry level practitioners. This improved training, it is argued, yields a more competent practice, or better service to clients. In addition to the profession's own internal concern with the service ethic, many external factors influence the particular development of social work educational programs. Changes in social welfare provisions, fluctuations in the job market, agency interests, pressures from minority groups, and forces within the university all help to shape the actual form and content of undergraduate programs. Nevertheless, our analysis suggests that professional urges for autonomy and control of access to practice have been a major factor in undergraduate social work educators' concern with selectivity of students, separation of programs from other disciplines in both a structural and intellectual sense, and tighter links with graduate education and the job-credentialing process. Viewed separately, these changes are not necessarily dramatic ones; taken together, they constitute a more striking pattern best explained in terms of attempts at professional identity-building and control.

Conclusion

We have proposed, then, that much of social work's educational and knowledge-building activity can be understood in light of a general movement toward professionalism. This professionalization has been shaped by two dominant goals—improved service and greater autonomy—and by the tension between these goals. In making this argument, we have not intended to deny the importance of external factors in the professionalization process, including public perceptions of the pre-requisites of professionalism and the influences of the larger system of social welfare. In general, these external factors appear to have been more salient in the case of undergraduate educational development, where more is at stake regarding public policy and employment practices, than in the relatively more remote and theoretical realm of knowledge-building for practice. In both knowledge-building and educational activities, however, responses to external factors have been developed within a framework of concern for professional identity and commitment to service. The tension within this framework has important implications for social work practice. In particular, over-emphasis on autonomy can create the kind of professional monopoly which undercuts flexible and effective service delivery. One way to lessen this danger is to continue to analyze and evaluate the conflicting motives underlying moves toward professionalism, and to scrutinize the results of their translation into social work education and practice.
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REFERENCES

1. The NASW, in its promotional literature recruiting membership, bases its arguments directly on the idea that the existence of the organization constitutes one of the major criteria for professionalism, according to Greenwood’s list (NASW membership solicitation letter, January, 1977).

2. See, e.g., Bartlett (1951, 173); Milford Conference (1929); Meyer (1976, 1-3); Towle (1952). This is not to say, however, that the drive for professionalism in social work has not had its critics, notably in the 1960’s. See discussion, e.g., in Specht (1972) and Richan and Mendelsohn (1973, 6-56).

3. But see Clearfield (1977) for a start in this direction.

4. Although there was some interchange between social workers and economists in the 1930’s.

5. Kadushin (1959, 62) argued along similar lines, asserting that social work’s attempt to establish uniqueness served as partial motivation for the turn to the social sciences.

6. See also Eaton (1956, 23); Towle (1954, 15-32); Hamilton (1952, 323).

7. Social work’s use of role theory seems a good example (see Vinter, 1962); the contemporary use of systems theory suggests similar problems (Robert Leighninger, 1977).

8. Note that "preprofessional" meant preparation for graduate education.

9. The NASSA was given responsibility for developing an Undergraduate Division within the CSWE, but NASSA leaders do not appear to have been active in CSWE after 1952.

10. Other contributing factors may have included the gradual drying up of federal funds for social work education on the graduate level.

11. The emergence of a competency-based educational movement in social work, particularly on the undergraduate level, can be taken as another bit of evidence for commitment to accountability and the service ethic (see, e.g., Arkava and Brennen, 1976).
12. Some movement has been made toward assessing the relationship of social work education to competency in practice (Arkava and Brennen, 1976), yet so far the issue of competence has been more a matter of rhetoric than of careful study.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


