December 1991

Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare Vol. 18, No. 4 (December 1991)

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The JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WELFARE is edited and published at the SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK, WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY, Kalamazoo, MI 49008.

It is sponsored jointly by Western Michigan University, the College of Health and Human Services, and School of Social Work.

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SPECIAL ISSUE ON
PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES IN SOCIAL WORK

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Introduction: Social Work and Philosophy

ROBERTA WELLS IMRE, COORDINATOR

Study Group for Philosophical Issues in Social Work

A journal issue unequivocally about philosophical concerns in social work is evidence of the recent progress we have made in the profession in recognizing the importance of philosophical commitments in social work activities. Awareness of the presence of these commitments and dissatisfaction with conventional social work resources for addressing them led to the organization of the Study Group for Philosophical Issues in 1985. The papers presented here have been contributed by members of this group, which is open to anyone interested in joining the conversation.

Social work has always been a complex profession. Throughout its history awareness of human need has consistently exceeded available resources for providing help. Modern manifestations of this dilemma can be seen in the suffering of the homeless and the mentally ill on our streets and in other public places, in the pain of neglected and abused children, and in the distress of so many other people in trouble of one kind or another. In such a world it is appropriate to ask why we should turn to a seemingly recondite subject like philosophy. The answer is that tacit as well as explicit philosophical commitments are integrally involved in everything that social workers do, not only in practice, but also in teaching and research. In addition, such commitments are present in how social workers see the society in which they work, and in how they define their role in this society. In all these areas philosophical commitments are inescapable but, like the air we breath, seldom noted. As with the air, however, when something goes seriously wrong a considerable amount of discomfort ensues.

We believe that something has gone seriously wrong in social work as a result of the failure to attend to these philosophical dimensions of professional activities. The need to understand how this failure came about, to identify the ramifications, and to consider possible remedies, constitutes the basis for the ongoing work of the Study Group for Philosophical Issues. This
concern is reflected in the content of the papers in this special issue. The papers represent a kind of manifesto. This is where we are; this is what needs to be done.

The Study Group officially began in May 1985 when several of us invited a few others, known to each other only through publications, to meet for a weekend to discuss common interests. We convened at our own expense in Connecticut at a retreat house, appropriately called the Mercy Center. Each of us had felt isolated and frustrated and were immeasurably heartened by the discovery that there were kindred spirits out there in the larger world. The fact that Goose Lane led to the Mercy Center on Neck Road made the name Goose Neck Group almost inevitable. Geography and zoology combined to provide a suitable metaphor for a group insistent upon sticking its neck out in the potentially treacherous and largely uncharted waters of philosophical discourse in social work.

To our regret the need to apply for institutional support necessitated a change to a less expressive but more dignified sounding title. For our first three years the renamed Study Group for Philosophical Issues was sheltered by the Rutgers University School of Social Work. When that support was terminated in 1988, sponsorship was accepted by the School of Social Welfare of the University of Kansas and the Smith College School of Social Work. Because of the chronic problem of limited resources, most of our gatherings have taken place in connection with the annual meeting of the Council on Social Work Education. Discourse continues throughout the year, much enhanced by the initiation of a newsletter last year by Stanley Witkin who now edits it from the University of Vermont. I provide overall coordination for our work. When Howard Goldstein, one of our charter members and an author of one of the articles in this journal, received the Adelphi University School of Social Work's Richard Lodge Prize this past April, we saw this honor as well deserved recognition of his personal achievements. In addition we also saw it as a confirmation of the growing importance of our work in which he has played such an important part.

In the history of social work there has been a dearth of articles on philosophy. When the word occurred at all in social work publications, it usually referred to rather amorphous
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general beliefs about human values, or was considered to reflect private personal commitments not generally viewed as a fit subject for professional discourse. Not too many years ago it seemed as if philosophical articles were routinely rejected by major social work journals. More recently there has been a veritable spate of such content, as can be seen in the reference lists following each article. Such apparent progress in terms of numbers, however, can be misleading. In the current literature certain themes occur repetitiously even though the vocabulary used has considerably expanded and now often includes references to words like paradigms, epistemological issues, and hermeneutic approaches. Use of terms like positivist, empiricist, or postmodernist, are now commonplace. But how much progress does all this linguistic expansion really represent in terms of philosophical understanding of this profession? This journal issue is a partial answer to that question.

Some of these articles were written five or six years ago when we first projected an edited book or a special journal issue. Others are more recent. However, they all have in common a concern about the need to become more sophisticated about our philosophical suppositions, to question our frequently tacit acceptance of the assumptions implicit in the intellectual heritage we bring to our work, and to explore new possibilities. The issues, present in all our professional activities, are epistemological, ontological, and moral, and point to the integral relationships between and among ourselves, our theories, our moral reasoning and emotional responsiveness.

The reader will find that the authors of these articles often seem to be arguing from a similar position, primarily postpositivist. Each, however, speaks about the meaning of these views from a particular, unique perspective. In our work we have become aware of the value in seeing similar content from a different angle, particularly in a complex subject area like this. We ask your forbearance when you find repetition here. There has been no effort to eliminate such repetition, nor to homogenize the presentations of the material. Experience tells us that some readers may find one article illuminating, while the same or similar ideas presented differently are experienced as impossibly obscure. Rereading this kind of material can often be
rewarding, even though most of us find it difficult to find the time to do this in a culture characterized by a need to hurry on to something else felt to be more urgent.

No claim of comprehensiveness is made for these articles. We are engaged in a continuous process of learning and finding new resources, some in disciplines never before considered relevant by social workers. We invite your participation and hope you will be inspired to add your own insights to the discourse. If you are stimulated, intrigued, or even just aggravated by these articles, we encourage you to correspond with the authors.

Themes

These papers are situated in a particular time and place. The issues addressed are in many ways defined by our culture and reflected in other areas of our social life. The authors argue from within the frameworks available, reflectively recognizing their inevitable involvement with the materials and not aspiring to a culturally valued but essentially unattainable detachment. In fact, in our eyes what has frequently been viewed as scientific detachment is a largely undesirable goal in much of social work. This issue is an example of the problems we are addressing. The amount of space devoted to discussions of science is a manifestation of the tendency, in our society and hence in academic social work, to value science, and often a particularly limited view of science, over all other ways of knowing.

While, as mentioned above, there is a good deal of overlap among these articles, they are arranged in an order designed to highlight certain critical and interrelated themes which reverberate in the content of all. In addressing science, and the preoccupation with becoming scientific in social work, the papers focus on the need to be explicit about what we mean by science, and to appreciate and seek ways to expand its contributions. Concomitantly, however, there is also a strong protest in the papers against the tendency in social work, as well as in the general culture, to view science as a substitute for humane understandings. The papers point toward the need to expand our view of scholarly inquiry to incorporate more content from the humanities in order to better understand the complexities
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of the human situation and the nature of our own work. Primary themes include the following: (a) Modern Science and Social Work—(1) the physical sciences and the human sciences; (2) paradigms, their manifestations and significance; (3) limitations and dangers of scientific technology; and (4) research in the human sciences. (b) The Relevance of the Humanities and the Necessity of Scholarly Inquiry of Different Kinds.

The Articles

We begin with Ann Weick’s article in which we are given an orientation to the history of science, and a discussion of Newtonian thought, the paradigm primarily adopted within social work research. This is compared with the different perspectives represented by relativity and quantum theory. She discusses Dilthey as a pioneer in early efforts to distinguish between the focus of the physical sciences and what he called the “human studies.” The discussion leads us to the importance of understanding, intentionality and meaning-making in human life, and introduces the subject of hermeneutics. These concepts are further developed and elaborated in subsequent papers.

The nature of paradigms and their influence can be seen to be a crucial issue in all of these articles and Glenn Haworth sorts through some of the rhetoric for us. Generally speaking, a paradigm is the conceptual framework within which thinking about the world is organized. Influential paradigms are part of our social history and incorporate certain assumptions about the world—assumptions which in turn determine how this world is to be studied. Much of the current criticism of the philosophy of positivism found in the literature stems from dissatisfaction with its underlying assumptions and particular paradigmatic view of the world.

The social work profession was slow in becoming aware of Kuhn’s (1970) pioneering work in the critical study of scientific paradigms, but we ultimately joined the discussion with arms flailing, as Haworth so clearly shows. There are of course risks attendant upon any effort to criticize a dominant paradigm, as belief in a particular paradigm tends to give a sense of security not readily surrendered. From its earliest days the Study Group
has been embroiled in the paradigm controversy in social work and most of us have not come out unscathed.

The Haworth article illustrates just how heated these discussions can become and suggests some of the reasons for this intensity. He continues a discussion started in the previous article regarding different paradigms in science. Readers who find the intricacies of this discussion overwhelming may find the last section of this article helpful. This illustration of what these paradigms might look like when applied to practice is enlightening. It is clear that there are indeed moral dimensions associated with how one acts in relationship to what is accepted as knowledge. Haworth’s observation that “social facts are socially created from disguised premises” will be echoed in subsequent articles.

Next Dennis Saleebey focuses on the ramifications of our acceptance of science in terms of a preoccupation with technological answers to human problems. He addresses the addictive aspects of this problem whereby technical expertise seems to promise professional acceptance and power, and individual fulfillment. The unrecognized costs of this fix include the loss of awareness of the poetic and artistic dimensions of human life, as well as a diminution of the sense of community, with its caring and concern for others. Saleebey encourages a critical examination of metaphors such as systems and targets and strategies. He directs attention to the possibilities and potentials of a “fusion of Eros and Techné.”

Some of the themes in the proceeding papers are also illustrated and elaborated in Edmund Sherman’s work on the use of interpretive approaches in social work. Noting the traditional use of hermeneutics in biblical interpretation, he shows how Dilthey expanded the approach to what he called the human sciences, which he considered to include his own discipline of history. In his studies Dilthey emphasized understanding history in terms of contextual meanings within which the participants are located. Sherman suggests that a history of the Charity Organization Societies viewed from such a perspective might restore a richness of understanding of our own heritage, and include understandings which have been obscured by interpretations made through the lens of modern attitudes and
conceptualizations. It is strongly suggested in Sherman's paper that a hermeneutic perspective applied to practice research would enable us to understand our work better because it allows meanings to emerge in ways largely precluded by conventional research approaches.

This article also notes the relevance of the philosophy of phenomenology to our work and calls attention to ways in which traditional case study methods in social work can be seen to include unrecognized phenomenological and hermeneutic perspectives. Sherman's own work with reminiscence and life review in older people as a meaning-making process is an example of how these ideas might look when incorporated into research studies.

In the next paper Jerome Sachs provides us with an illustration of a phenomenological study of what actually happens in practice. He utilizes a phenomenological analysis of the content of extensive interviews with social workers who are encouraged to explore what contributed to specific social work interventions. The complex meanings involved in these professional actions reflect salient concerns related to agency settings and the broader institutional context, as well as to the persons of the social worker and client. Out of this material Sachs also develops some important theoretical concepts which he has called "operational themes, therapeutic worth of the client, and operational dilemmas."

Howard Goldstein's discussion of qualitative research "as a mode of inquiry in its own right" follows. He joins Sherman and Sachs in seeing this kind of research as more congruent with actual social work practice than the more common quantitative approaches. He emphasizes the importance of seeing the role of the researcher as a reflective inquirer within a situation rather than a detached observer trying to see from the outside. This article is rich with insights gleaned from this kind of research as the author draws upon the work of his doctoral students in their explorations of what can be learned through such methods. A useful discussion of the kinds of discipline this research requires dispels the notion that such approaches are only a temporary substitute for a quantitative design once the problem is deemed to be more clearly defined. Goldstein describes
this research as taking place in a context of lives in process and incorporates narrative concepts in understanding "lived time" as a vital meaning making process in human lives—a concept also very much a part of Sherman's work.

In order to present the ideas found in these articles each author has had to attend to the limitations of the positivist position still so influential in academic social work. This perspective has made it difficult, sometimes impossible, for researchers and practitioners to communicate meaningfully. Limited resources of time, energy and money are wasted when conventional arguments take place within this framework. Changing this situation requires sophisticated study of the nature of science and its paradigms and the critical evaluation of the relevance of particular scientific techniques to social work. This theme is clear in these articles.

Another theme, and potential direction, also emerges in these discussions, however. Recognition of the limitations of science in providing an adequate framework for understanding the dimensions of what is most important in social work points toward the need for other resources. The cultural overvaluing of science, and the prestige and power associated with it, has led to an almost total neglect in our literature of appreciation for the insights to be found in the humanities. The result has been an imbalance in our approach to understanding of how we know about human life and what human beings need from each other. Too much has been excluded from our direct consideration. All of the articles so far discussed have in some way indicated this problem and, while focusing directly on science, technology, or research, have also drawn upon content from humanities disciplines. The next two articles focus more directly on some of this content and illustrate ways in which our understanding can be deepened by the use of these resources.

Drawing upon traditional philosophical content Gottschalk and Witkin analyze the influences in social work of definitions of rationality, particularly the differences between instrumental rationality which is concerned with efficiency of means, and substantive rationality which is concerned with valued ends such as human rights and social justice. Continuing the almost inescapable theme of the influence of science, they focus on the
Introduction

way instrumental rationality has tended to dominate as part of this cultural scientific orientation. They see a need for "a rationality of ends based on a social ethic consistent with social work values," and find in Habermas an emphasis on discourse appropriate to this effort. This article is an example of how some of these traditional resources of Western philosophy can be utilized to clarify the values and social consequences of social work practice.

A contrasting view is provided by Edward Canda in his article on transpersonal theory in which he questions the underlying assumptions of Western philosophical thought. He sees a need to look critically at the high value placed on rational, linear thinking, on personal autonomy as a developmental goal, and on the primacy of ordinary waking consciousness and the accompanying tendency to attribute abnormality to any other kinds of experiences. He discusses the different perspectives found in Eastern philosophies, as well as in some Western sources which are beginning to receive more attention. These themes emphasize holistic approaches, and an accrediting of other levels of experience including the mystical and various forms of spirituality. Feminist themes of relationship and connectedness as discussed by Gilligan and others are also identified by Canda as one of the streams of thought leading to an orientation to the world quite different from that of conventional Western philosophy.

Moving On

This collection has been born out of our concern for social work, our convictions about its importance and our uneasiness about its future. It is vital that the place of science in our culture and the reasons for our overzealous pursuit of scientific respectability in social work be understood if our values are to be preserved. In this preoccupation with science we have been neglecting other resources. A wealth of perspectives from the humanities awaits our attention and all that is required is the recognition of our need for this content and a willingness to engage the issues in a disciplined way.

In our culture social work is considered to be a practice, perhaps a professional practice. In general it is not viewed as
either a science in its own right or even a scientifically based practice such as medicine is usually deemed to be. On the other hand in the academic world it is certainly not accepted as a humanities discipline. Any claim we might have had to this designation has long since been sacrificed on the altar of science. It is past time we tried to recoup our losses.

For the most part we must approach other disciplines as outsiders. To access this content we need a new openness in our attitudes and a willingness to learn different disciplinary languages and conceptual frameworks. The nature of our work and our broad need also means that we often must cross and recross disciplinary boundaries in our search for understanding. This kind of interdisciplinary approach can be seen in some feminist thought. Feminist critiques of inherited traditions and their assumptions sometimes cause a shaking of the foundations and result in altered views of the world. Similar consequences might result from a new paradigm approach to social work research—an approach drawing upon the humanities and more concerned with meaning than technique. This may sound like a slippery slope, but in learning to traverse it we may well find ourselves. T. S. Eliot’s words from The Four Quartets are as appropriate now as we found them to be when we began in 1985:

We shall not cease from our exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time. (Eliot, 1943, p. 59)

References

The Place of Science in Social Work

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A narrow concept of science has reduced rather than enlarged the scope of human inquiry. This paper considers the principles of quantum physics and the philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey as two different ways of creating approaches to research more consonant with social work practice.

One of social work’s enduring traits has been its capacity for self-examination. In spite of the discomfort caused by these searching assessments, the profession has continued to ponder definitions of its work, its role and function, and the nature of its contribution to society. However, these attempts to contend with the image and substance of social work have not produced an intellectual rallying point for social workers, much less an interpretation for society at large. When such strenuous attempts do not meet with success, it is useful to take a longer look at the nature of the dilemma. For what beleaguer social work is an expression of a much larger process affecting all the social and behavioral science disciplines. Understanding the dimensions of the problem provides a window through which to see other more fruitful directions.

Put in its broadest terms, the problem centers on the place of science in social work. In recent years, this topic has produced a lively debate within the profession and has resulted in useful analyses of some of the dimensions of the issues (Saleebey, 1979; Heineman, 1981; Fischer, 1981; Gordon, 1983; Imre, 1984). This paper is an attempt to extend the discussion by examining two central issues. The first concerns the role of the classical scientific paradigm within a total scientific enterprise. This distinction will help us attend to shifts within the natural sciences which show that the model of science borrowed by the social sciences is not the only available choice. The second issue to be addressed is the more general problem of transferring a methodology from the realm of physical matter to the world of
living systems, specifically human systems. The social sciences grounded their enterprise on this translation and it is crucial that we examine the consequences of this choice. Both of these issues highlight different aspects of the same problem and, once addressed, lead to the consideration of a significantly different approach to social work inquiry.

The Scientific Heritage

Entertaining a discussion of the role of classical science within the scientific enterprise necessitates a view of a wide reach of history. While it is true that since the end of the Middle Ages the supreme arbiter of truth has been the scientific method, it is important to realize how dramatic was its appearance in the intellectually stultifying air of the Middle Ages. The dogmatic scholasticism of the medieval period prized reason, supplemented by faith, as the sole route to knowledge. Knowledge of the universe was gained by logically deducing first principles available through the light of rationality. Set within a theological superstructure, knowledge thus derived was monopolistic. Theological philosophers determined what was divinely ordained truth and, as the Inquisition demonstrated, the price for challenging that view of truth could be both severe and final.

The approach to knowledge which overturned medieval scholasticism has been properly called a revolution. Nothing could have formed a sharper, more radical contrast with reliance on pure reason than the method adopted by Newtonian science. Instead of logical deductions about the nature of reality, the new scientists went to Nature herself. It was experience, rather than reason, that emerged as the criterion of truth—not experience by itself but experience put to the test through experiment. If one wanted to know about the world, one looked at it, tested it, measured and remeasured it. In contrast to the dogmatism of scholastic philosophy, Newtonian science was democratic and antimonopolistic. Knowledge was not a private, protected industry but was open to anyone who could learn and apply the methods.

It is interesting to note that this fundamental difference in approach to knowledge and, ultimately, beliefs about what is true, was not radically different in all its assumptions. Both
scholastic theologians and Newtonian scientists believed that there was a fundamental law-likeness underlying the natural world. In spite of the different constructions about the origin of the laws, it was thought that unaided reason or the experiment could pry out of Nature her secret and enduring processes. Both systems relied on logic as the basic ground of analysis. For scholastics, it was pure logic; for Newtonians, it was logic as expressed in mathematics. The ability to convert observations into quantities and manipulate their relationships according to a logically pure system of numbers was an extension of the reliance on the logic of the scholastics. The difference for the new science was its reliance on empirical referents. As we shall see, it is this reliance on a particular interpretation of empiricism which is the core of the dilemma for social work and for the social sciences from which much of its knowledge derives.

The scientific revolution must unquestionably stand as an enormous step forward in humankind's attempt to uncover some of the mysteries of the natural world. Its methodology broke the chains of ecclesiastical authority by commandeering the sphere of material reality as the proper domain of science. The physical realm belonged to scientists and the metaphysical realm was left to philosophers and theologians. The world thus divided showed itself to be remarkably accessible to the proddings and calculations of scientific investigation. The methods of science, of putting nature to the test, came to be seen as the only way in which reliable knowledge could be produced.

In its own way, the scientific method and the world view from which it derived was thus not as removed from dogma as its early social science adherents might have liked. Science came to be thought of as not only the best way but the only way to understand reality. The belief in the methodological premises of scientific method as the surest approach to knowledge was most fully developed by the logical positivists of the early twentieth century and continues to be held by the scientific community at large and by the many whose opinions scientists influence. It was a belief that inspired budding sociologists and psychologists, as well as early social workers such as Mary Richmond, to fashion their disciplines in accord with these principles.
As is the case with any dominant world view, it is difficult to stand back from strongly shared assumptions and see them in a new light, much less to wonder whether other assumptions might be more advantageous. Yet it is only at the level of assumptions that profound change can be entertained. Once basic premises are agreed to, disagreements will be only about form, not about substance. And it is substance that must concern us. The substantive question is this: Is the methodology of physical science, as expressed by Newtonian physics, an appropriate one for the study of human beings?

The Problem of Translation

It is not difficult to understand the lure of Newtonian physics as the premier paradigm for the social sciences. The application of the scientific method yielded insights into the workings of nature that produced unheralded gains in knowledge in many fields. Technology became the prime tool for intervening in nature, whether it was put to the use of more accurate scientific predictions or of human comfort and well-being. The power and respectability of the method seemed to provide propitious ingredients for the emerging fields of social and behavioral studies and a proper antidote to their religious and metaphysical origins. However, in order to gain this respectability, social scientists had to adopt the assumptions basic to the Newtonian model.

If we examine the nature of the assumptions from which classical science derives, four characteristics can be identified. There is the supposition that there is an empirical world to be investigated, that the empirical world is law-like and ultimately deterministic: observed effects are due to prior and, in theory, identifiable antecedents, (Heron, 1981) that objective observation is possible and to accomplish this, human investigators must place measurement as a buffer between themselves and what they observe, and finally, that the process of observation or manipulation can be identified so that the results can be replicated. The method that flows from these assumptions is a logical extension: select aspects of the empirical world susceptible to measurement, construct a statement about the nature of their relationship, test the statement against reality, and draw a
conclusion about the posited relationship based on the results of observation. These elements form the methodology and the methods which social scientists adopted and sought to emulate.

A general way of understanding the problem caused by the translation of the physical science model to the social sciences is by considering the different kinds of knowledge with which each science deals. It is helpful here to draw on a distinction made by Wilber (1983) when he categorizes domains of knowing into sensory, mental and transcendental spheres. In the sensory domain lies all the knowledge theoretically admissible to scientific investigation because it is or can be reduced to physical and thus measurable dimensions. This is the domain carved out by the physical sciences and forms a major constituent of the empirical world. It is the world with which we feel most familiar, believing that our senses are the primary, if not sole, connection with all that can be known. But as Wilber points out, the domain of matter is only one of the routes to knowledge. There is a world of ideas, where mind and consciousness are central, and the transcendental level, where knowing is achieved by disciplines that go beyond matter and ideas. The fundamental flaw in applying the physical science model to human beings is in the form of a "category mistake" as Ryle (1949) first presented it or "category error," which is Wilber's (1983, p. 10) term. Each refers to an error in logic which occurs when the assumptions and methods of one domain, in this case sensory data, are applied to mental data. In order for the physical science model to be useful in the world of ideas, one must assume that thoughts, beliefs, values, attitudes and such are reducible to and legitimately explained by the assumptions underlying the material world.

This leap of logic is one which should trouble us more than it does. When it reaches an extreme position, as in behaviorism, there may be some objection to reducing all of human behavior to circuitry. But typically, the fault is thought to be with the method, not the methodology. The assumptions that human behavior can be meaningfully explained by isolating its constituent parts is as causally deterministic as the prediction about the velocity and position of a billiard ball, even if all would admit that a prediction in the former case would be staggeringly difficult, while in the latter actually possible.
The first effect, then, of the marriage of assumptions about the physical world and the human world is that human life can be made quantifiable. There is no question that human behavior is empirical if by that we mean that human beings can be observed in many of their complex interactions. But whether those observations can yield in any meaningful way to measurement is a matter of greatest importance. Certainly social scientists have been remarkably clever at developing concepts and constructs which have proxy measures. The commonplace concepts of social class, mental illness, and intelligence all have measures which purport to demonstrate their degree of presence or absence in a given situation. But there is a serious question about their utility. Blumer (1978) takes to task the procedure of operationalizing concepts, as occurs when a concept is given an empirical reference such as a test, questionnaire, or scale. Because of the diverse ways that an attribute like intelligence, for example, is displayed in human life, he calls it "ridiculous and unwarranted... to believe that the operationalizing of intelligence through a given intelligence test yields a satisfactory picture of intelligence" (pp. 33-34). By devising such limited proxies for complex aspects of human behavior, social scientists adhere to the form but do grave injustice to the substance.

The fact that human life has empirical, that is, observable dimensions, does not mean that our most important knowledge of it can be gleaned through the experiment. While the experiment is the sine qua non of physical science, in human life, the tracing of causal variables may be an exercise in futility. The methods invariably blot out the possibility that the richness, complexity and spontaneity characteristic of human interactions will be tapped. In the worst consequence of reductionism, human life is thought to be only what scientists construct.

In scientific inquiry, this attempt to reduce rather than enlarge the scope of human life is precisely the point at which most practitioners lodge their objection to the research paradigm. The goals of research appear to be antithetical to all that they experience in their daily work with people. While scientific energy is caught up in narrowing and quantifying the dimensions of human life, practitioners realize that it is the nonmaterial aspects of life which are the core of human drama. Feelings, attitudes,
beliefs and values all count for more and are infinitely less susceptible to quantifiable measure than are measures of temperature, velocity, color and mass.

The typical response to this dilemma takes two tacks. Either practitioners must be shown how they can adopt a more scientific stance in their work with clients or scientists must devise more valid measures of feelings, attitudes and beliefs. Neither position acknowledges the fundamental flaw in applying a physical science methodology to the human sphere. No amount of refinement in technique can override the existence of that flaw. Human beings do have physical properties but knowledge of those properties, even when developed in the most ingenious and sophisticated ways, does not exhaust what there is to know or what is most important to know about being human.

A New Physical Science Model

Having made this argument in the most stark way possible, it is now time to take a paradoxical detour: paradoxical because another argument will be made in favor of using a physical science model, albeit one with a very different form than its Newtonian predecessor. In order to justify this apparent contradiction, it is important to consider the role of theory in any human endeavor. Because none of us, except perhaps in earliest infancy, sees the world without some prior mental picture, theory can be thought of as a necessary and useful way to make sense of the world. It presents an "as if" picture—we behave as if the world conforms to the mental map we have constructed. This approach resembles Donald T. Campbell's "hypothetical realism," as discussed by Brewer and Collins (1981). The basic problem with any theory or map is that it becomes reified; by using the map, we come to believe that it presents the world the way it really is. It takes discipline and confidence to treat theory the way it must be treated: as a provisional, imperfect and occasionally useful way to package and repackage the continual blur of images and ideas that bombard us. The criterion of choice is whether a particular view allows us to capture the fullest possible expression of human life and whether the view
provides a good fit between what we experience as human beings and what the model describes.

There is an irony underlying the choice of a Newtonian model of the universe as the basis for social scientific endeavors. What social scientists are only now coming to realize is that the Newtonian model was not the only picture of the universe available for borrowing. During the early part of this century, developments in physics made it necessary to confront the limitations of the Newtonian paradigm. Einstein's theory of special relativity demolished the Newtonian principles of absolute space and absolute time by showing "that space-time and the laws of motion can be defined only by reference to an observer and his physical conditions" (Augros and Stanciu, 1984, p. 4).

In a separate but mutually-reinforcing occurrence, theorists studying the motion of subatomic particles discovered that the Newtonian laws of motion did not apply. In virtually every respect, the principles of the emerging theory contradicted those of the old: the coordinates of velocity and location of particles could not be used to predict motion because they could not be known simultaneously (Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle); (Pagels, 1982) the act of measurement, rather than being an objective manipulation by the investigator, was known to create the result achieved; and the apparent stability and mass of large elements of matter was counterposed by the constant activity, dynamism, and flux of subatomic particles.

The result of this theoretical blossoming were two radically different theories for two different levels of the material world. Quantum theory applied at the subatomic level, while Newtonian-classical theory described matter at the macro level. Particle theory did not overturn Newtonian theory but it did establish boundaries around its sphere of application. No longer was or is Newtonian physics the preeminent paradigm for understanding the natural world.

Because we are taking a metaphoric approach, concern lies not with the "truth value" of these theories within physics. Physicists, for their part, seem not to want to deal directly with the fact that the radical opposition of their two dominant models may be the edge of a paradigm shift. The luxury of being outsiders to physics allows us to pursue a borrowing strategy
in just the same way that social sciences originally did from
physics and as social work did from the social sciences. The
difference this time rests with our becoming more sophisticated
and discriminating borrowers. If the previous bout of borrow-
ing contributed to a fundamental rift between knowledge and
its application, would a more selective choice heal that rift? Let
us play out the elements of that question.

For reasons that are mostly understandable, the social sci-
ences until the last decade have been relatively untouched
by the ideas embedded in quantum theory. Although the basic
outline of the theory was put in place in the Copenhagen In-
terpretation of 1927 (Jones, 1982), the content of that theory,
unlike Newtonian physics, seems totally remote from human
experience. While most minds stumble when trying to imagine
something called an atom, it defies the imagination to consider
the realm of matter where particles whir in unpredictable ways
around the atom’s nucleus. Max Planck used the term “energy
packets” to describe the quality of quantum motion (Zukav,
p. 50). In this sphere, there is a dramatic departure from the
sensible world of solid, physical objects. Only through the co-
ordinates of mathematics and experimental measures can their
existence be ascertained; the one who measures is inevitably
intertwined in the effect produced.

It would be ludicrous to assert that theory about the behav-
ior of subatomic particles is in any way intended to describe
human behavior. Physicists would justifiably reject this idea,
just as they tend to scorn social science’s attempts to mimic
the Newtonian model in the human world. However, the scope
of metaphor allows a playful, less restrictive approach. In this
metaphoric mood, let us assume an “as if” stance and consider
how we would envision human behavior if quantum principles
were applied.

First, we would acknowledge that human behavior is set
within a web of relationships where dynamic interaction is a
key feature. It is not possible to isolate one element in the web
without disrupting the pattern or patterns in which it exists. Sec-
ondly, the nature of those relationships is not governed by de-
terminism. Human behavior is acausal, in the sense that human
action, except in the most narrow sense, cannot be predicted
from prior behavior. As in quantum theory, prediction is only possible for group activity, not for any individual within the group. Certainty, however tenuous, is cast in global terms. It leads to such generalizations as: Without water, humans will die; Given socio-cultural pressures toward marriage, most adults will marry. Such statements are interesting but intrinsically lacking in predictive power at the individual level. Probability theory reduces the range of error in prediction but it is devised for group, not for individual, data.

The third principle derived from quantum theory is, to put it in human terms, intersubjectivity. The web of relationships that characterize all human life is built on multiple, intersubjective realities. It is not possible for human beings to observe or manipulate their environment without being intimately tied to the "other." A belief in objectivity, of seeing human life "as it is," without confounding the observation with the person-as-observer, is untenable. No matter how sophisticated the measure, no matter how "nondirective" the listener, the interactive component must be assumed. What is being observed, at the very least, is the object plus observer.

The final and most subtle aspect of quantum theory is its air of mystery. While much is known about particle activity, there is a sense of incompleteness that goes beyond the usual limitations of method. Because it is so far removed from the world of solid, visible matter, the language takes a poetic and sometimes whimsical turn. Particles are identified as "bundles of energy" (Capra, p. 318), their movement is characterized as a "dance" (Zukav, p. 317); newly identified particles have been given the name "quarks"—an allusion to James Joyce’s _Finnegan’s Wake_ (Pagels, p. 226). From an outsider’s point of view, these descriptions capture a color and richness that applies in profound ways to human life. It is the dimension sadly lacking in the dreary, mechanistic nomenclature inherited from Newtonian science.

The most far-reaching effect of quantum theory is that it challenges the bastion of certainty held by classical theory for the past three centuries. The principles underlying conventional physics have not been disproved but the sphere of their application has been reduced. Instead of explaining the activity of all matter, they can speak to only part of it. The reminder implicit
in this shift is that Newtonian theory was not able to capture, even with its elegance and precision, all of the fundamental aspects of the motion of physical objects.

The importance of this for social sciences and for related fields such as social work is that theory, by its nature, is incomplete. What social science strived to adopt as its main metaphor, that is, the resemblance of the physical and human worlds, is seriously flawed. For the physical science theory from which it derived was necessarily limited. Its range of application took into account only certain realms of matter, leaving others unaccounted for. And it turns out that the realms left unaccounted until quantum theory emerged are precisely the areas with which human behavior has its strongest kinship.

What we see within the principles of quantum theory is a picture of a world which is the opposite of a mechanistic and lawful one. It is a world where chance operates, where constant change exists, where relationships are central. The observer is not in control of that which is observed; experimental manipulations can set certain activities into motion but the results are not wholly predictable. To turn this metaphor to the human scene, it depicts much of what we experience as the dynamics of human life: change, unpredictability, and lack of precise control.

So, in a profound way, the borrowing from the physical sciences, even if this is the course to be pursued, has been incomplete. Since the early part of this century, two metaphors have been available from the physical sciences represented by Newtonian and quantum theory. It can be said that social sciences chose the wrong metaphor, leading almost a century of social science theory to attempt to show that human beings are governed by the same laws that govern atoms and rocks. One can only imagine the different course of events if social scientists had been interested much earlier in considering how quantum principles could reveal fundamental aspects of the human condition.

**Different View of Empiricism**

Pursuing this different approach to physical sciences, as fruitful as it might be, is only one tack theoretical development might take. It seems obvious that choosing an approach which
draws us into a more profound understanding of human life is a key to our endeavors. What is needed is a theoretical world view that substantiates and draws out our intuitive collective sense about what constitutes human life. In order to develop the rudiments of this perspective, let us now turn to the ideas of a German philosopher named Wilhelm Dilthey whose life work was devoted to just these issues.

Dilthey, whose life spanned the years 1833-1911, had as a primary though by no means sole concern, the place of what he called human studies in the development of the sciences (Rickman, 1979). He lived and wrote at the time when the social sciences were trying to break away from their origins in theology and moral philosophy and develop identities which gained stature through an association with the physical science paradigm. August Comte, an acknowledged founder of sociology, coined the term “positivism” in an attempt to make sociology a “positive”, that is, precise science. As Ermarth (1978) notes,

The final task of science appeared to be the resolution of the complex patterns of human thought and activity into an order of laws derived from the hard stratum of simple fact. The new disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and physiological psychology applied these assumptions in a particularly uncompromising manner. (p. 72)

It was this reductionism to which Dilthey strenuously objected (Ermarth, 1978, p. 81).

In contrast to the extremes of positivism, it was Dilthey’s view that the study of human beings required a very different approach than that used for the physical sciences. The difference, as Rickman (1976) relates, came from Dilthey’s recognition that:

...the human world, with which the social sciences deal, differs significantly from the physical world which is the subject-matter of such sciences as physics, chemistry of biology. Human beings, unlike stones or trees, or even insects or guinea pigs, reflect on what they do. They interpret the situations they are in, set themselves deliberate aims and plan for the future, communicate with
each other, adopt conventions and follow traditions; we cannot
study man without taking these into account. (p. 6)

What was needed in order to study "the problem of living as
a human being in the human world" was the "building up of
a comprehensive, coordinated body of knowledge about man"
(Rickman, 1976, p. 25).

Dilthey's goal may strike us as being completely transpar-
ent and commonplace. What could be more obvious than the
observation that human beings are not entirely or even primar-
ily explainable by reference to their physical aspects? And yet
when one considers the thrust of most social science research
during the past century, we see that it is precisely upon these
aspects that attention has been devoted.

The genius of Dilthey was in his resolute resistance to falling
prey to an old dichotomy of body-mind. Although he was open
to and influenced by other major thinkers of his day, he did
not revert to the idealism which was a strong strain in Ger-
man philosophy in his time. Instead, he conceived a study of
human life that was grounded in experience, that is, in em-
pirical data, but which avoided "an emasculated, metaphysical
construction of experience in terms of sense data" (Rickman,
1976, p. 21).

The distinction he makes between knowledge that comes
from sensory data and that from "lived experience" is cru-
cial and instructive. The physical sciences elevated knowledge
derived through the physical senses as the preeminent route
to reliable knowledge. The only other choice as conceived
by philosophers was the route of pure reason. The old division
between empiricism and idealism was so constructed. What
Dilthey offered was a middle ground by focusing on the special
nature of human experience. There were, he claimed, two dif-
ferent modes of experiencing reality: "inner lived experience"
and "outer sensory experience." It is the "lived experience"
which is the empirical base for the human sciences. In con-
trast to the natural sciences which "build their constructs and
laws upon abstractions from sensory experience," human be-
ings "have an awareness of things and ourselves which is
immediate, direct, and nonabstractive. We 'live through' life
with an intimate sense of its concrete, qualitative features and
myriad patterns, meanings, values and relationships” (Ermarth, 1978, p. 97).

His point is an interesting one. Perhaps because of the influence of the physical sciences, we treat information about the physical world as though it is more real and apparent than any other sphere of life. What Dilthey offered was a very different perspective: that the physical world is more remote than is the world of our human experience. In Dilthey’s words, “Nature is alien to us. It is only an externality, not an inner reality. Society is our world. We experience sympathetically... the interaction of social forces with all the power of our whole being, because we have within us the conditions and forces which make up the social system” (Ermarth, 1978, p. 98).

Dilthey’s view leads us to distinguish kinds of knowing. To know a rock is a different kind of knowledge than knowing a human being. In the physical sciences, it is sufficient to analyze the constituent parts of an object such as a rock or tree in order to claim that one knows what it is and how it functions. In human studies, knowing a human being is infinitely more complex and, paradoxically, familiar and mysterious in equal parts. There is a way in which a smile is perceived that makes it immediately understood, although other counter-clues may make us distrust its meaning in a specific situation. Eyes which look angry or bored, a body held rigidly, a mouth that returns too quickly to a tense line all belie the friendly meaning of a smile. It is the interpretation of meaning in all these myriad ways that forms the nature of the special challenge of inquiry in human studies.

By making the distinction between lived experience and sensory experience, Dilthey liberated for inquiry a part of the human world which science had steadfastly ignored. As Ermarth (1978) observes,

mental phenomena are, to be sure, accompanied by physical processes, but the former cannot be reduced to or explained by the latter. . . . A true psychology of experience discloses complex mental phenomena such as the consciousness of self and others, of memory and expectation, of duty, sympathy, and a special kind of freedom—for all of which there are not verifiable physiological correlates. (p. 171)
The task of understanding these complex human processes formed the core of his methodology of inquiry. His emphasis on “verstehen” (understanding) “is the one essential part of the methods of human studies which differentiates them from the sciences” (1979). Dilthey’s central strategy for understanding human life was hermeneutics*, a concept he revived from classical Greek, meaning the art or method of interpretation. The method of hermeneutics was adopted by Heidigger in his development of phenomenology (Rickman, 1979, p. 17). An important part of Dilthey’s work was devoted to developing principles of inquiry which would lead to a disciplined approach to the study of meaning as it was reflected in human social life. It did not, as some current efforts do, emphasize linguistics as the main route to this understanding. If anything, it was based on the notion that “everyday understanding is natural, familiar... a largely tacit process of interpretation.” Understanding is already a natural part of the human repertoire. In Dilthey’s words, understanding can be seen “as the knowledge of that which is already known” (Ermarth, 1978, p. 248).

What this view conjures for us is an approach to the human world which strives to make more explicit the meanings of human activities which are already known by us in a tacit way. This type of knowledge is developed by Michael Polanyi (1958, 1966) and its relevance for social sciences developed by Imre (1985). In contrast to the approach we must take with the physical world, which is not like us, approaching the human world can be done with the comfort of familiarity. We already have a rich array of meanings and understandings about what constitutes life for us. The goal of human studies is to open ourselves more generously to a disciplined study of this multitude of facets which composes our social-human world. As Dilthey’s (Rickman, 1976) writings suggest,

We must start from the richly varied experience of normal mature observers who see trees in bloom, talk to other people, read newspapers, enjoy poetry and music, play chess, worry about the future, remember past holidays and resent noisy neighbors... This

* Editor’s note: See discussion of hermeneutics in Sherman paper in this volume.
complex experience which makes up life is the basis of all science and study of the human world... (p. 21)

The principles implicit in his approach to method are not fully developed. It is acknowledged that the elements of inquiry such as "observing, logical reasoning, comparing, classifying, abstracting, as well as framing and testing hypotheses or analyzing by means of statistical techniques, are used just as much in the human studies as in any other science" (Rickman 1979, p. 144). In spite of the fact that he identified "lived experience" as the domain of human studies, he saw this experience and sensory experience as "two sides of the same experience (which is) viewed from different vantage points" (Ermarth 1978, p. 103). However, the empirical data must, in the human domain, constantly be tested against understanding. It comes ultimately to a question of meaning—of understanding what is observed within a context of human meaning.

He was critical of the role theory and hypothesis-testing often played in the social sciences. Too often they are mental constructions which have nothing to do with the phenomena they purport to explain. This very argument is now being raised again in social sciences by writers such as Herbert Blumer (1978), known for his development of Symbolic Interactionism, when he notes that "the broad arena of research inquiry in the social and psychology sciences... instead of going to the empirical social world in the first and last instance, resort... to a priori theoretical schemes, to sets of unverified concepts and to canonized protocols of research procedure" (p. 34). Dilthey was not opposed to theory but he cautioned that "hypotheses and explanations must be postponed until the most careful observation and description of experiences have been accomplished" (Ermarth 1978, p. 174). Instead he proposed a "preliminary question or framework which sets the terms of the inquiry without predisposing the results; this kind of preliminary orienting 'thesis' is essential to all inquiry..." (Ermarth 1978, p. 175).

Although his writings and their analysis could be more comprehensively presented, Dilthey's basic goal and the steps he took toward achieving it offer an interesting and different panorama for approaches to human inquiry. Human beings are not, as the natural science and social science derivatives
have argued, merely physical entities, governed by discoverable physical laws. Humans are also and predominantly psycho-social beings whose "world of mind is not... directly observable; (whose) purposes, values and norms cannot be seen" (Rickman, 1979, p. 66). In order to approach this world of mind, there must be a method of inquiry which allows this world to reveal itself. What is needed is precisely what Dilthey recommended, a strategy of inquiry which combines a method of interpretation with empirical method. If human beings are mind and matter, as our dualistic conventions have conceived it, then there must be disciplined ways to learn about both spheres on their own terms. Reducing mind to matter or absorbing matter into mind does not do justice to the complexity where there is both-and rather than either-or.

Human Inquiry and Social Work

The place of social work in meeting this challenge is much more central than might be guessed. If the nature of the dilemma has been accurately stated, then the social sciences have provided an incomplete foundation for a knowledge base for practice. To the extent that social science theories have relied too exclusively on conceptions not firmly grounded in the world of human experience or have tested theory according to research canons derived exclusively from deterministic assumptions, they have provided misleading or erroneous information about human life. If social workers have often felt alienated from and confused by the welter of explanations about human beings, their sense has been well-justified. Theories from which social work has borrowed have not fit the complexity, mystery, and richness which social workers encounter in their own lived experience and in their practice with people. This sense of alienation from the research enterprise and its products is not an inevitable state of affairs. Joining research and practice under a common goal, governed by similar principles, is one way to assure that the development of knowledge receives the broadest possible consideration.

The goal which bridges the apparent gap between research and practice is the search for understanding and, more specifically, meaning. In both research and practice, there is a
disciplined attempt to discover the nature of the human phenomenon being presented. It is also important to note, however, that the usual linear strategy which typically is presented as the ground for the parallel structure of research and practice (Siegel, 1984) is not the appropriate path. The rationalist problem-solving approach imposes a structure on human situations which graphically demonstrates the effect of applying a preconceived strategy to a human situation. Believing that there is a problem, that the cause of the problem can be ascertained, and that knowing the cause allows for a plan of intervention all speak to a mechanistically-oriented approach to knowledge.

If we are to give full credence to the special character of human life, the search for meaning becomes central. The element that makes this search mysterious is that we cannot assume that the meaning of any event is totally or even mostly apparent. For example, we know that the birth of a child is generally laden with positive meaning. It is seen as an occasion of joy and celebration. But we cannot automatically assume that the event has that meaning in every individual situation. In a way not unlike the strategy employed by quantum physicists, the range of probabilities for a particular result can be calculated. What cannot be predicted is the particular result in a particular case. It is the combination of searching our broad human patterns while noting unique individual expressions which characterizes the knowledge-seeking enterprise. Thus, there will be continued efforts to document broad patterns within society, as well as a study of the ways in which people live out and change these patterns.

Although the outlines of new strategies of inquiry are still being formulated (Reason and Rowan, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Gergen, 1985), it is possible to indicate some of the principles that serve as guidelines. In keeping with the proposed connection between research and practice, it is useful to see that the principles are common to both research-based and practice-based approaches to knowing. The first principle asserts that human experience is uniquely characterized by the presence of meaning, which gives structure and significance to human life events and processes. The discovering and uncovering of meaning is the primary goal of knowledge-seeking in the human
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sphere. This goal makes several assumptions about its focus. Human beings are able to create collective meanings for shared experiences, in addition to constructing individual meanings which are varied and idiosyncratic. The collective experience establishes broad patterns or parameters of meaning but the meaning of experience on the individual level can never be assumed. It is also taken to be true that meaning changes over time and is thus capable of being reconstructed. (The process of this reconstruction is one of the central issues of inquiry, for it refers to a fundamental process of how people grow and change.) A third element is that people know the meaning of life events and processes, even though that knowledge may be tacit, that is, hidden from their conscious thought. The fact that they understand but do not know, to use a distinction Dilthey makes, leads to the goal central to both research and practice, that is, to make more clearly known what is, at some level, already understood.

The process at the heart of both research and practice is the relationship. In contrast to the traditional convention of maintaining objectivity, the approach proposed here denies the possibility of objectivity in the human sphere. Rather than attempting to create false circumstances where personal influence (ideas, attitudes, theories) are not thought to affect the outcome, there is the assumption that all interaction among human beings has intersubjective dimensions. Instead of trying to negate these aspects, an attempt is made to develop them in a conscious and intentional way. In the practice arena, it is returning to an old-age principle of social work: the conscious use of self in relating to another human being or, to put it even more colloquially, the use of the relationship as the medium for change. What this attention on relationship recognizes is the dynamic and inevitably creative, that is, nondetermined, nature of human interchange. What, we might ask, are the qualities of a relationship that are most conducive to people uncovering the meaning of their life experience? In asking such a question, we see also that the source of knowledge is not primarily the practitioner's or researcher's. This approach assumes that each person is her or his own source of knowledge and is the only one to determine its meaning. The relationship, then, is not governed by power
principles built on knowledge monopolies. The knowledge and experience of the researcher or practitioner comes to bear in creating a loose but purposive structure of the inquiry and by creating a conducive human environment for the enhancement of understanding and the discovery of meaning.

A point must be made about the context within which interpretation takes place. It is worth returning to Dilthey here in order to underscore his emphasis on historicity. An important aspect of collective shared meanings comes from life events shared by people during certain times in society. He did not consider this in a causal but rather contextual way. In fact, we would argue that life events are acausal—that it is neither pertinent nor possible to trace antecedents to current phenomena. However, it is worthwhile to acknowledge seriously the cultural-social influences in people's lives. Dilthey saw the individual as "simultaneously an element in the interaction of society—a crossing-point of the various systems of interaction who consciously and deliberately reacts to their influence—and also a contemplating and investigating intelligence" (Rickman, 1979, p. 153). One might note how eloquently this captures social work's "person-in-environment" concept. This understanding led Dilthey to emphasize the historicity of human society and to consider as a separate category the shared meanings that are expressed as ideologies and the institutions to which they give rise.

A final aspect which must be noted in approaches to human inquiry is the issue of methods. Here, not surprisingly, we find that methods of inquiry are not categorically different from those already employed in studies of the natural world. As we have seen, it is the methodology, that is, the collection of assumptions about the nature of knowledge and inquiry, that is crucial. Methods are always in service to these basic assumptions. We find, then, that reliance on careful observation is as much a part of human studies as it is of the natural sciences. But rather than examining single variables, an attempt must be made to discover broad patterns of human activity. The focus of such examination can be aided by a change in terminology. Rather than looking at behavior, which implies a discrete and measurable entity, Dilthey suggested the word "expressions" to
capture the various ways in which mental content is made observable (Ermarth 1978, p. 273). The process of communication emerges as a central expression of what we observe and what meaning we attribute to it.

The overall direction of these principles is toward a qualitatively different sort of inquiry. Whether in research or practice, there is a sense of respect for mystery and uncertainty, a provisionality and tentativeness about what is known, a reliance on each person as the final arbiter of the meaning of his or her own experience, and a newly awakened curiosity about the panoramic world of mind. For many complex reasons, Dilthey, who was called the pioneer of human studies, has not had many settlers in his territory. In large measure, it is the false allegiance to natural sciences which has so limited our vision of what is possible. If, in social work, that model has not served us well, how much better it would be to strike out in pioneer fashion for our own purposes.

We can, of course, choose to wait until a new methodology is developed in the social sciences and comes to us whole cloth. There are efforts in psychology and sociology to come to terms with the limitations of a model cast in the image of the physical sciences. As an alternative to this wait-and-see posture, we can join in the rudimentary but nonetheless vigorous efforts to create an approach to inquiry more suited to our understanding of the human world. Social work can use its foundation as a practicing profession to keep these efforts grounded in the lives of real people, so that the unfortunate division between knowing and valuing, between measurement and meaning, can finally be laid aside. By engaging the human world in all its richness and mystery, we can acknowledge the qualitative aspects of life within a systematic approach to inquiry. To begin our work from a place where knowledge and values join would be an incalculably strong footing for these new explorations.

References


Disagreements about knowledge generation and application in social work are examined from a paradigmatic level to try to account for the moral indignation often accompanying the disagreements. The positivist paradigm with its pervasive influence on social science inquiry has been challenged in recent times by a more relativistic, interactive, consciousness based paradigm. The problem of "standardizing Intersubjectivity", and the process of "Inversion of Mastery", are used to examine the paradigm differences. The positivist’s accusation that the newer paradigm advocate is "irresponsible", and the rejoinder that positivism contributes to a "damaging hoax" on humankind are the crux of the moral heat of the conflict.

In recent years some different ideas about knowledge, research, and practice in Social Work have been struggling to be heard and meeting resistance. To add to the struggle in a 1984 article, I attempted to cover a number of converging ideas as a possible contribution to new thinking. While reviewing the social work literature on the debates about knowledge, scientific method(s), empiricism, etc., it was obvious that each side in the debates carried a barely controlled undercurrent of exasperation at the wrong-headedness of the other camp. I suggested that “Challenges to these intuitive givens [paradigmatic assumptions] are sources of considerable anxiety, and conflicts often include moral overtones” (Haworth, 1984, p. 354).

One particular conflict was between Fischer and Gordon regarding whether social work has a paradigm, and if so, whether it resulted from revolution or evolution (Fischer, 1981; Gordon, 1983). The squabble generated the following:

Gordon’s response consists mainly of a plethora of periphrastic platitudes, a gallimaufry of obfuscations and misunderstood
quotes taken out of context, a hodgepodge of inconsistencies and non sequitors, a mish-mash of outdated conceptions, a grab bag of unsupported speculations, and a hugger-mugger of self-serving self-references. Other than that, Gordon's response was excellent (Fischer, 1984, p. 71).

Because I was trained in science- not rhetoric or innuendo- it is a bit difficult to respond to Fischer's blast at me and my article, "Social Work Revolution or Evolution?" I do not need much valuable space in SOCIAL WORK to respond, because Fischer's statement in this issue does a pretty good job of exposing his techniques against which I inveighed in my criticism of his original article. I must have successfully unveiled the real Fischer or he would not have tried to hide behind such unrestrained verbal abuse, name-calling, and general lashing out to redefine the issues in a way that attempts to put his ideas in a better light (Gordon, 1984, p. 74).

The delicate interchange is particularly interesting since the combatants both, perhaps of different generations, represent the same paradigm.* One can imagine that "heat" if they really disagreed with each other! The paradigm in question began to "revolt" or "evolve" out of the hard sciences in the 1930s, but is still alive in social science for some reason. By contrasting the consequences of an emerging paradigm with the established belief system I try to account for some of the heat of a moral nature generated by the conflict in world views held by sincere people, all claiming to be reasonable and scientific.

The Paradigms

One way to approach this phenomenon is to contrast the conflicting positions on the place of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in knowledge. But first, a brief look at the paradigms is necessary. The positions have no high consensus labels, but generally they represent two scientific heritages. The older, traditional view, which I refer to as Positivism, still carries the image of a Newtonian universe (deterministic and mechanical) and Cartesian dualism (mind-matter separation) into social inquiry. This positivist view is deeply embedded in our culture as synonymous with Scientific Method. The emerging naturalistic,

* The title of the present paper is prompted by the story of two Hollywood tykes arguing, "My dad can beat your dad," . . . "Oh yeh, your dad is my dad."
or New paradigm poses a very different reality including relativity, the inseparability of the data from the consciousness of the investigator, and a nature based on information generating processes.** It derives its appeal for those open to the view by appearing to account more satisfactorily for much more human experience. It is not my purpose to recount all the details here, but rather to account for the profound distress the conflict creates.

Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity

As human attempts to understand nature moved from reliance on the authority of revelation, tradition, and political power to basing understanding on the experience of the senses, certain problems became critical and are still with us. The experiences had to be ordered by the individual (subjectivity) and communicated to others for confirmation (intersubjectivity). Accompanying this beginning of modern science was a further institutionalization in Western thought of a belief in the separation of Mind and Matter (Descartes). The problem of knowing was cast in the form of a private entity (mind) taking in the meaning of sensory information from external public entities (matter), and somehow sharing it with a community of minds.

Subjective report has always been suspect in human interaction due to the hidden private nature of its origin. People lie to each other, and themselves, to attain many social and personal ends. Disagreements occur that can often only be reconciled by coercion of various sorts. In science disagreements were not, and are not, generally seen as lies, but as problems in human perception. Even as instrumentation evolved to extend the human senses, the problem of disagreement in subjective report could not be technically overcome. Consequently, much effort has gone into searching for procedures for reconciliation of experiential differences that avoid the earlier coercions of power relations. These attempts have tended to follow a logic that gives primacy to "objects" that are experienced as

** In "The future of social work research," Pieper (1985) suggests calling this newer position the "Heuristic Approach". My preference is to resist any particular short hand reference in favor of requiring each of us in the controversy to explain what we mean as often as possible.
occupying space and time, and seem to have a separate "out-thereness" aspect. Somehow it seemed that we should be able to construct "objective" standards that reflect the real dimensions of nature around which "intersubjectivity" could be standardized (see Sampson, 1981, for further development of this idea). The idiosyncracies of subjectivity were felt to be controllable by a language of analysis, measurement, and quantification that was free of any particular everyday cultural language. These procedures have worked so well in some areas of investigation that scientific method came to be seen as a route to knowledge that could by-pass subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

There have always been enough anomalies and residual problems to keep most serious scientists from a complete acceptance of a reality of "objectivity", even though it is often seen as a desirable aspiration. Particularly in physics, the hardest of the sciences, the success of the procedures became their own downfall. The extension of human curiosity and instrumental intrusion into nature led to a confrontation with the impact of both the instrumentation and the curiosity. The objective measures eroded the view that the world is made of objects, in favor of a view of nature as fields of energy and information "potential". As a result certain aspects of the investigator's subjectivity had to be reconsidered.

Twentieth century physics is the story of the reluctant movement from the classical mechanistic world view to the startling implications of Quantum mechanics. The "Copenhagen solution" of Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg brought several aspects to awareness (Capra, 1975). For one, the instrumentation of investigation produces data by interaction, not objective observation. And even more sobering, the instrumentation is guided by human curiosity and consciousness. That is, unless a human being asks a question and there is enough group consensus that the answer would have value, scientific investigation does not take place. No matter how much we pretend otherwise, subjectivity and intersubjectivity precede investigation as well as influence the perception and interpretation of data, and the choice of what to study is a value choice.

The remarkable success of scientific method in many areas has reinforced the belief in objective discovery. However,
as one's thinking moves away from the assumptions of an objective discoverable reality to more plausible views of a constructed, or created, reality the account of how science succeeds changes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, chap. 3). The language of quantity and measurement seems to work on information that does not seem to be initially organized by human linguistic structures (perhaps the information that preceded our species' conscious existence, that we experience as light, sound, motion, etc., before we give them names). The subjective invention of "variables" can be constructed linguistically and used to organize the processes of observation and measurement. The procedures then create the existence of the variable by a response. If the response produces an outcome deemed valuable by the community it is felt that a "discovery" has been made. Under these conditions an investigation can produce a nonvalued result and be considered "wrong". Since the data have not, as far as we know, interpreted the measurement procedures, further investigation can be pursued to seek valued findings without doing great harm. For instance, light apparently does not care whether we set up apparatus to measure it as a wave phenomenon, or a particle phenomenon. It accommodates both, and goes on doing whatever it does. Light suffers little damage even though the reputation of one of the researchers may.

However, if the phenomenon being measured is already the product of interpersonal, intersubjective, and linguistic organization (society, personality, culture, science, etc.), we enter a realm where the data are not only generated and organized by a response to the measurement procedures, but by an interpretation of them. The inseparable involvement of the physicist's consciousness and actions in the generation of his findings becomes confounded even more in the human sciences where the data source is essentially another investigator.

Both paradigms need to standardize intersubjectivity in some way. The positivist relies on the notion of a reality external to the observer that is independent of the observer's subjectivity. In seeking order, the array of subjective variations in report become statistically reduced to create a hypothetical structure that is assumed to be the best estimate of the underlying reality and can serve as an external standard to appeal to for agreement.
The new paradigm advocate tries to standardize intersubjectivity by appeal to shared value commitments. The variations in subjective experience are not seen as imperfect perceptions of a common structure, but as the reality of human existence. The new paradigm view is that there is no mechanical causal connection between social events, that continuity and meaning are intersubjective agreements. Value is attached to consciousness of this process and the responsibility for its outcome.

Inversion of Mastery

The apt phrase "inversion of mastery" is used by Edward Sampson to refer to the consequence of the uncritical use of the traditional paradigm as a guide to psychological investigation (Sampson, 1981). The process works something like this. The commitment to objective observation tends to focus on the repetitive and apparently stable processes of nature which are then named and the names reified into "structures", or Platonic "essences", or "laws". These intersubjectively named regularities are defined as transcending any particular event. Based on these assumptions some of nature can be manipulated by human efforts and the outcomes give a sense of mastery, in that we seem to have approximated portions of natural processes sufficiently to predict and control them, at least in the short run. As noted above, nature responds to these manipulations, but doesn't interpret them. For instance, nature doesn't seem to care if we convert all the information that is in material form on earth into energy by the magnitude of a mind-boggling constant squared (E=MC^2). Fortunately for human beings, so far these reactions have had some self-limiting aspects. However, the earth could very easily respond to our tinkering by conditions lethal to human life, and indeed seems to be doing so. Yet the heady feeling of understanding the underlying laws, or causes, of certain regularities and the attendant technical mastery is very difficult for humans to resist, even if deadly.

When science has focused on human action the same aspirations of mastery through prediction and control have prevailed. However, as stated above the subject matter is already a secondary ordering of information by human intersubjective
processes, even though the senses seem to be taking in information about structures that precede the individual investigator. These social inventions do persist beyond the experience of individuals, but they only exist through the participation of individuals. The proposing of variables and their measurement has tended to follow theories based on the traditional model of seeking underlying causes for human events that are universal, context-free, and beyond human choice.

Instrumentation also tends to be regarded as mechanical extensions of the investigator’s senses. However, these instruments are communication devices that not only demand response, but also elicit interpretation (for example: a Questionnaire item; I believe in life after death—SA, A, MA, MD, D, SD. “What does that mean? I have no idea, I’m not sure there is life after birth yet! Let’s see, the guy who asked us to do this looked nice enough—a little shy and pious perhaps. I’ll bet he wants me to agree with the statement, and since there is no neutral point on the scale, I’ll help him toward his M.A. degree with a “Mildly Agree”). The process may be harmless enough with college sophomores in Psychology classes where the only thing at stake is credit for class participation, although the published results could have some influence.

When the instrumentation is aimed at information related to life chances of individuals and groups the outcome can be, and is, very dangerous. Sampson argues that the assumptions we accept to scientifically validate the measurement of individual variations are the very assumptions that are used to socially construct and institutionalize the inequalities that the social scientist is called upon to study. At any particular time social order is maintained by, and maintains, individuals locating each other in social roles and relationships to which they attribute substantive reality. He notes that

...the building blocks of positivist empiricism, truncated subjectivism, and abstracted individualism on which psychology’s deep structure is based contribute to societal reproduction and are primarily ideological in their function. Insofar as the existing socioeconomic and sociocultural system generates the necessary domination of the many by the few, psychology’s role is to help foster the very self understandings that reproduce both the
underlying system and its accompanying system of domination and unfreedom. (Sampson, 1981, p. 131)

Briefly, these terms refer to interlinking influences. The adoption of the traditional scientific paradigm by psychology gives primacy to data directly available to the senses (positivist empiricism) and leads to considering current categories of social construction as universal "givens" of nature. The consequent neglect of sociohistorical processes tends to focus attention on internal causality residing within the individuals being scientifically analysed. The result is that "psychology's subjectivism is truncated in that it places a main burden on the mentation of the individual; the material reality enters the equation, but only in terms already processed by the actor's meaning endowing capacities" (Sampson, 1981, p. 88). The final link, abstracted individualism, refers to the support of an exaggerated illusion of autonomy and independence, or the American belief in "self-efficacy". This all too easily supports translating system inequality into individual deficit. Therefore, when psychology addresses the problems of social justice it contributes to the processes of social control and the perpetuation of the status quo.

The positivist paradigm has led the behavioral and social scientists to treat the social constructions in the same way that Newtonian physicists approached nature. That is, the current social taxonomies are accepted as "givens", to be analysed, measured, and accounted for by principles that cannot include human consciousness and choice (except as illusory manifestations of a more material causal order).

Stephen Jay Gould (1981), in THE MISMEASURE OF MAN, traces the devastating history of use of scientific method to classify and order groups of people in American society. From the measuring of skulls and bodies to I.Q.s, a hierarchy of group relations has been maintained that curiously supports the very tenets of a capitalist economy, its competitiveness, and the institutionalized inequalities that are needed to make it work. Of particular potency is the American conversion of Binet’s early interest in testing children for educational planning into the measurement of some innate capacity called Intelligence. The logic of quantification and discovery diverted attention away from the situational and interactive nature of the testing itself.
My Paradigm Can Beat Your Paradigm

(and overpowered the critics in the process). Even more significantly, the loop back to the institutionalizing of the findings into subtle, and not so subtle, social expectations was obscured.

This means-ends division, or more correctly, the unquestioning acceptance of ends followed by the technical pursuit of means, is also central to the classification of many human problems. The utility and morality of locating the source of bothersome behaviors within the individual does not receive much cultural or professional skepticism. Rather, attention is directed to the construction of correct classification schemes, and the procedures for the correct assignment of individuals to the categories (the recalcitrance of some of these problems is shown by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual beginning to develop sequels with Roman numerals at almost the rate of "Rocky" movies). The declared goals of "treatment", or some matching of talents to social tasks in the case of intelligence testing, are subverted by more potent processes of social control and maintenance of the historically developed inequalities. In other words, the categories of outcomes of social processes are studied, described, and explained in such a way as to imply that the outcome "variables" were there at the beginning and "caused" the events to come about in some inevitable fashion.

A central point they [Critical Theorists] derive from the story is the deceit of the human mind that results as people seek to conquer nature by first conquering what is nature in themselves: this is the dialectic of enlightenment. The forces marshaled to master nature turn about and become the forces in whose name the mastery of nature was itself sought. Horkeimer and Adorno see the subject seeking to govern the object (nature) and in this very process being swallowed up and destroyed. The identity between subject and object eventually destroys the subject itself. The dialectic represents the process whereby what begins affirmatively as the conquest, administration, and technical control of nature ends up creating just its opposite- namely, self-understandings from the viewpoint of technical control. The result is a technocratic consciousness or instrumentalized rationality in which the core of domination is both contained and concealed (Sampson, 1981, p. 64).
The Judgments

Whence comes the moral indignation when someone gives an account for a social phenomenon that does not match our own account? We are just beginning to recognize the embeddedness of our observations and conclusions in powerful beliefs that give order to our group and individual existence. These belief systems (paradigms) offer proof of truth, or trustworthiness, of conclusions only within themselves. When the arguments of a paradigm are taken to another paradigm for consideration they inevitably encounter judgments of falsity. To decide between paradigms requires a transcending paradigm which is never clear. Consequently, a sort of dialectic goes on historically. At present it seems that the thesis of positivism in social science is being challenged by the antithesis of new paradigm stirrings that cannot be dismissed quite as easily as before. If a synthesis is possible it is not likely to emerge immediately. As mentioned in the above quote Critical Theory has some possibilities, but that discussion is not my purpose here.

The judgments I am concerned with are the ones based on disagreements over the correct path to knowledge, and the consequences of the kind of knowledge produced for improving our understanding of the relation between knowledge and practice in social work. The issues of intersubjectivity and inversion of mastery can get at the nature of these judgmental conflicts. From the positivist heritage these issues tend to be seen as nonexistent or amenable to technical solutions. The belief in an orderly, deterministic, measurable reality underlying human action promotes the value of finding out what that order is, and controlling it. For this process to work, the generating of the data must be seen as "discovery" of the external reality by imperfect human perceivers (certainly not as the inversion of mastery). The tendency for holders of the traditional view is to see the advocate of a constructed, relativistic, descriptive, value-oriented scientific paradigm as being irresponsible. That is, by questioning the pursuit of objective causal knowledge the new paradigm advocate is accused of depriving people of tools for handling their anxiety and their unpredictableness to each other—of leaving them ungrounded and floating, without solid anchors.
The accusations going the other way are the mirror image in a sense. If nature is seen as flux ordered by information of which human consciousness is inseparable, then positivism is seen as perpetrating a very damaging hoax on humankind. By engaging in transactions that claim to discover causal explanation (or probabilistic correlations, which are even more mystifying), the "outcomes" of the human pursuit of order are interpreted as the cause of the pursuit. This somewhat enigmatic statement also relates to an earlier suggestion that social structures require participation for existence and maintenance. We precipitate out artifacts to remind ourselves; such as, codes, costumes, buildings, implements, recorded traces of prior events, etc. However, these guide-posts mean nothing without current actors giving them expression. Using these guides we constantly create and recreate our society. The spillage and surplus activity in this process must be accommodated.

Collectively we organize and maintain all sorts of reciprocal roles and definitions to deal with actions judged to be threatening to social order and meanings (an arena where social workers often find themselves). Historically our society has defined many of these categories for classifying deviant behaviors and the response to them as medical-like problems. Confusion results between beliefs that the behavior is a manifestation of an invading agent in the human being versus somewhat older beliefs attributing the behaviors to deliberate choice or evil. The problems are studied from a perspective that includes neither choice, nor evil in human affairs. Hence, the positivist's explanations lose the social history and creative interactions of the definitional processes, and focus on perceived characteristics of the already identified individuals. Commonalities are stressed, measured, and names given to variables which then become explanations for why the individuals are in their social positions. The causes, due to the guiding paradigm, are located beyond the control of the individual actor. Not inconsequentially, the reciprocal role of expert treater gets created and maintained. Rather than knowledge freeing humans to recognize and assume responsibility for creating more humane relationships and institutions, the status quo tends to be reinforced by scientific support. Human anxiety may occasionally
be relieved by an illusion of causality and control, but at the
price of human freedom and creativity. Therefore, the new para-
digm believer develops strong feelings of indignation at the
continued unquestioning use of the traditional methods.

Brief Illustration of Paradigms in Action

How might the conflict look in “clinical” practice? Imagine
two social workers, similarly licensed and proclaiming the same
set of abstract values, but different in their paradigmatic stances.
Dick is basically a positivist, while Jane is attracted to the new
paradigm. The controversy is often cast in gender metaphors
which relate positivism to male dominance and intellectual mas-
tery, and female nurturance and emotional understanding are
equated with the new paradigm stance. I acknowledge some
usefulness to these formulations and hence name my workers
accordingly.

The sociohistorical processes that influence a person to be-
come a “client” in contact with a “helper”, and policies and
structures that locate them in the same place whether it be an
agency, private practice, or some other auspice, will be of very
different concern to the two workers. Dick is more likely to
see all this as “natural”, since his belief system is more closely
related to the social structure that has generated the whole prob-
lem definition/helping situation. His value based task of re-
lying to the client as possessing “dignity”, with perhaps even
goals of “empowerment”, etc. will be seen as problems of “tech-
nique.” Jane will find the situation much more problematic. For
her the processes are very much a part of subtly defining the
“problem” as personal failure or moral defect. Such definitions
make dignity and empowerment doubtful, if not absurd goals.
The process must somehow be countered by liberating aware-
ness on the part of Jane and her client.

Once the client and worker are in social contact, some sort
of “assessment” is mandated in order for contact to continue
(both paradigms are trying to shed some of the medical-like
trappings of “diagnosis”). Dick will essentially ask the client to
hold the problem in abeyance while information is gathered to
locate the problem in some classification scheme of problems. In
attempts to standardize practice delivery the scheme more and
more in use is the APA Diagnostic and Statistical Manual in its most current form. Much of the information gathered, with the client's participation, will be defined as "objective", whether it be self-report, responses to tests, physical examinations, etc. The material will tend to be organized in such a way as to locate the "cause" of the problem in the biography of the client, even though the rhetoric involves social "factors," or an additional "axis," or two in the manual. In any case the material will tend to be treated as additive and linear. All this must take place before "intervention" can be planned and executed.

Jane, on the other hand, would find all this distressing for a number of reasons. First, a human being, particularly one who is hurting or confused, cannot be asked to wait for some impersonal procedures to be performed, before "real" help is offered. Second, all human communication and action is seen as "intervention," and the pretense of "objective" measurement will be given subjective meaning by the client. Consequently, Jane will focus on the person's biography, but also as much, if not more, on the client's current action world and the subjective interpretation of it, particularly on what is happening in the helping process. As does Dick, Jane will locate the client's problem in the classification scheme, but the process will be different. Dick is likely to present the category chosen as a description of reality, to which the client belongs. Jane is likely to present the information as a judgment that had to be made in order for help to be attempted under current practices. "Solving the client's problem" may not have much to do with the description contained in the category. The current efforts at behavioral description, rather than etiology, in DSMIII onward are attempts to standardize classification across theoretical differences. However, it would not be unlikely that Dick and Jane could choose different categories to label the same client. Dick would emphasize the importance of accuracy of diagnosis, while Jane would be more concerned with managing the meaning of a designation of "mental disorder" in the client's life situation.

Intervention will also be different. Dick will proceed on the assumption that a direct causal connection can be made between the interventive acts and desired outcomes, dictated by the problem assessment. Jane thinks she has been intervening
all the time, perhaps even before the client showed up through whatever she has been thinking that could possibly question the established practices. Her efforts to help are more likely to focus simultaneously on the client's subjective meanings and the social context that defines the client's problem.

When these two workers encounter each other to discuss practice, conflict is likely to be high regarding preferred theories and practice modalities. Covertly, or overtly, implications of doubtful moral action are likely to be present. Jane stresses the meaning to the client of the processes that are being imposed in the name of helping, and for her the measurements and judgments are mystifying and degrading to the participants, and perhaps are a continuation of the very social interactions that precipitated the client's problem. Dick counters that these measurements and judgments are scientific (and that the client's "reactivity" can be technically controlled or ignored), and that Jane is irresponsible in not manipulating the client into formulas for objectively assessing and managing one's life. Jane continues to argue that essentially mechanical explanations and problem solutions further remove people from experiencing and responsibly defining their own lives. She stresses that the separation of people from their experiences is supported by the promise that structures for understanding and control do objectively exist, when according to the new paradigm they do not, and this is the damaging hoax.

Conclusion

This paper is obviously written from a new paradigm position, otherwise the presentation would be very different, or not made at all. "Normal" social scientists working within an established position do not raise questions about underlying assumptions, but tend to judge each other in terms of technical efficiency in carrying out the paradigmatic implications. The challenging suggestion that that positivist system of knowledge production is flawed by being caught in the circular tracing of social footprints and the perpetuation of social inequality through scientific justification, prompts indignation from believers. These persons who have experienced their careers and life
meanings as being validated in the traditional process do not take kindly to having their activities defined as harmful.

A part of the positivist paradigm is the belief that continued empirical investigation will eventually resolve knowledge differences—so, what's the big fuss? To argue this position another assumption is necessary which separates is from ought, and makes facts more fundamental than values. It is this fact-value separation that is challenged by the new paradigm. The argument is that social facts are socially created from disguised value premises, and that a human science is needed to make that process conscious and visible.

Another complication in the conflict of views is that at this historical time in our culture the new paradigm adherents have almost inevitably shared the positivist world view in socialization and education. Consequently, some sort of transformation or revolution has taken place in their thinking. Like most converts who survive the upheaval of previous beliefs, they become excited over new ways of seeing and express impatience with those who remain entrenched.

The conflict could perhaps be defined by some as inconsequential if only the philosophical differences about knowledge were being argued. However, in a helping profession such as social work, human lives are "intervened" in with outcome goals stated in value terms. When each side translates their version of knowledge into action, it is then that the counter charges of irresponsibility and damaging hoax gain their moral quality as accusations of harming people.

References


Social work, like other professions, seeks a jolt of technology and technical sophistication into its theoretical and practical repertories. Such efforts have, thus far, ignored the considerable ethical and axiological freight that "Techne" brings with it. Ironically, many of the implicit values of techniques subvert the unique and defining values of the social work profession. This paper offers a cautionary note and a prescription for avoiding the "technological fix."

Social work, like most professions, seeks a rush of science and technology into its bloodstream. Since the late sixties there have been persistent, increasingly strident, and thoroughly argued pleas for the fashioning of an empirical (read: wrought of scientific methodology) basis to both understanding and helping (Briar, 1980; Fischer, 1981; Hudson, 1982). Such plaints are not unusual in a society that, though it may misunderstand it, fawns over "Science"—with a big S. Some years ago, C.P. Snow (1964) wrote of the two cultures of the Western world, Art and Science, and the paradigmatic clash between them. More recently, Jacques Barzun (1964) has suggested that our cultural world has but a single guiding paradigm—Science. As a culture, and within most of our social institutions, we have become slavishly devoted to the ideologies and myths, the boons and bounties of Science and offspring, technology. We worship abjectly and daily at the altar of Science. Whether designing a nuclear holocaust or unraveling the psychic skeins of love, we turn to Science as the way to know and to technology as the way to do. The professions most visibly bound to Science are the most revered. Professions that in the public mind are not covered under the canopy of Science scurry to seek its shade.

What does an allegiance of this sort to what we understand as science mean? There is a single science, and it is both method
and methodology (that is, it is both a way to understand and
discover, and a philosophy of discovery). In the social sciences,
and in the social work profession in particular, the advocates of
a more empirically funded body of knowledge and technique,
the version of science that is usually proposed is positivist.
The positivist position has two apparently implacable dicta: all
propositions regarding the nature of the universe must be re-
ducible to statements describing hard data (data that are observ-
able, first, and second, capable of being reduced to numbers);
and general propositions about the nature of the universe must
be developed through the process of inductive inference and
that means, in essence, inference from observable data (Over-
ton, 1984). While many apparently are shying away from this
hard position, in one form or another it still separates the ad-
vocates of empirically-derived, technologically sound practice,
from those who are more circumspect about that possibility.
Walter Hudson (1982) puts it bluntly: "Constructs that cannot
be defined, operationalized, and then measured are mentalisms
that are useless to an understanding of the world in which we
live" (p. 256).

Technique, it is assumed, rather than ideology, philosophy,
intuition, artistry, empathic grasp, dialectical exposition, or dia-
logical exploration will become the hallmark of practice. While
widely considered to be a creation ultimately traceable back
to theory, techniques have many parents and, in the end, are
merely means to be judged by their effectiveness. The scientific
approach to practice is nearly willing to abandon theory in the
service of developing these means of intervention:

Thus, practitioners can have available to them a body of specific
techniques to apply with their clients, based on a careful assess-
ment of the client, situation, and problem. That the techniques of
intervention will have been selected, if possible, because of their
demonstrated effectiveness also suggests that their use will lead
to the increased probability of successful outcome. (Fischer, 1981,
p. 203)

Conceivably, a practitioner might author an eclectic hodge-
podge of techniques that bore little ethical, theoretical, or con-
ceptual relationship to one another or to any coherent body
of knowledge solely because they were "validated" empirically and known to "work."

This view of science presumes that the world operates lawfully, and that, though elegant, the world is essentially simple and straightforward in its operation. The firmest barrier to a more complete understanding of the world, human and nonhuman, is the failure of craft: that is, the correctable lack of better instruments and methods of discovery. Beneath these assumptions lies a more durable one—Science will save us. However, there are developments in the "harder" sciences that suggest these assumptions are embarrassed by a number of factors, from the inevitable influence of the observer to puzzling gaps and changes in the appearances of the material world. Even for a human brain to know, say the structuralists of neuroscience, there must be the systematic destruction of a certain amount of data and input in order for the brain to categorize and to hierarchically arrange information so that it can be at all useful. The fact that the brain is able to do this is nothing short of a miracle, but it speaks to the fact that even at the level of the sense organs, "interpretation" is going on (Stent, 1976; Gazzaniga, 1988).

The methods of science, it is thought, and the techniques derived from them carry no implicit or important meaning, have no substantial or measurable ethical freight (Hudson, 1978). Whether one proceeds through a controlled experiment or an in-depth interview to discover some aspect of the world, the only question is how powerful is the method in eliciting answers, solving problems, and accumulating data?

Some argue that the distinction between knowing and doing, between assessment and intervention, will disappear as our science becomes more effective and our practice becomes more empirically accountable. In a sense, every encounter with a client, every planned change in agency will be an experimental space in which the demeanor and method of scientist resemble, if not being epistemologically the same as that of the practitioner (Seigel, 1984).

These, then, are some elements of our current faith in science and technique. To put the central issue—should technique (or technology) be the centerpiece of social work practice?—in
larger compass, Jeffrey Record (1980), a senior fellow at the Institute for Policy Analysis in Washington, DC, desairs of the trend he sees in the service academies. The current focus of the academies, he observes, is on the strategies and logistics of developing and deploying various destructive and defensive technologies. Thus, warfare is an endeavor solely informed by science and is regarded as only technically (not morally, philosophically, or geopolitically) problematic. Our ability to conduct war and to defend ourselves improves, it is believed, only as our technology improves.

This rationalization or 'scientification' of warfare breeds a disconcerting hubris in its practitioners because it de-emphasizes, if it does not altogether deny what is called 'His sacred majesty, Chance'—whimsy, the irrational or unpredictable event or circumstances, Fortuna—in shaping victory or defeat on the battlefield. It is an hubris that disregards the elder Moltke's (A Prussian field marshal and brilliant tactician in the 19th century - D.S.) wise caution that 'no plan of operations can look with any certainty beyond the first meeting with the...enemy because it cannot govern the independent will of the opposing commander.' The study of history, by contrast, is a humbling experience; the historical record bulges with one aborted attempt after another by the best and the brightest to identify, assemble, and manipulate the ingredients of military triumph. (Record, 1980, p. 19)

The current situation in the Persian Gulf certainly exemplifies the clash of technical hubris and persistent contingency. I do not mean to draw too strained an analogy between the fortunes of war and the vagaries of social work practice. The point is merely this: fascination with technique frequently has the effect of driving out other facets of an activity or endeavor whether they are the considerations of history, the complexities of human nature, the ebb and surge of passion; the chastening and executive powers of intuition and philosophy, or the energies of the sensual.

The Risks of the Technological Fix

The social work profession wants a fix: a sanctifying jolt of technology into the marrow of the profession; a fix that, like all fixes, can enhance the sense of power and control, inflate
the self-image, and obliterate the nagging confusions and tensions of reality. As with every fix, the threat of addiction always looms, inviting both the subversion of judgment and the corrosion of values. What, specifically, are the risks of the technological fix?

Jacques Ellul (1965) argues that "...a principal characteristic of technique is its refusal to tolerate moral judgments" (p. 97). Ellul here is exposing the implication that technique is value-free. Enthusiasts of technique claim that other than the pursuit of effectiveness and efficiency of application, technique is an ethical neuter. Likewise, questions of good and evil, right and wrong, truth and falsity—any moral desiderata—lie well beyond the interest of technique. Thus, given the validation of a technique, that is to say, insurance that the technique works, its application then becomes a foregone conclusion. But techniques do have considerable ethical and political heft, and each technique insinuates something about human nature and the human condition. The leucotomy works, electro-convulsive therapy works, the phenothiazines work, but each demands a particular posture and attitude in the minister, supposes something about the state and worth of the recipient, and its effects can never be fully accounted for (Cohen, 1988). The fact that a technique works seems to absolve the user of moral choice and suggests that, after a time, the technique takes on its own life, invoking what Ellul (1965) has called the "automatism of technical choice" (p. 79). Because it exists, because it works, it must and will be used, value questions and dilemmas preempted.

The pursuit of technique also obscures the importance of practice. Christopher Lasch (1984), in discussing what he believes is our cultural confusion between practice (in the Aristotelian sense of the development of character, the quest for a higher moral standard of action, and the elaboration and teaching of the virtues specific to various forms of practical activity) and technique (which concerns itself exclusively with the means to given ends), puts it this way:

As work and politics lose their educative content and degenerate into pure technique, the very distinction between technique and practice becomes incomprehensible. Industrial societies have almost completely lost sight of the possibility that work and politics
can serve as character-forming disciplines. These activities are now understood as means of satisfying material needs. Moral ideas, meanwhile, lose their connection with practical life and with the virtues specific to particular practices and become confused instead with the exercise of personal prejudices and tastes, which can neither be justified nor explained and which should therefore not be regarded as binding on anyone else. (p. 255)

How does this apply to social work practice? The problems that people bring to social workers are often problems of belief, conscience, will, and knowledge and they occur in a particular, though often unclear or confusing, sociopolitical context. To make people “feel” better, or more assertive, or less tense, or more happy, and to have the techniques for doing that, without addressing the demands of “praxis” (What knowledge is critical to my understanding, the articulation of my beliefs and intentions? What do I need to do in order to further my involvement in resolving the moral, political, and personal issues and questions of my life?) is to merely dabble in the possibilities of character and action. It may even encourage mindless adjustment to a larger, more profound context for being. To teach, say, social service workers techniques of stress management is not an immoral thing to do. But to do it without addressing the ethical, political, and social issues which in a public bureaucracy breed “burn-out,” turnover, and discouragement is to thwart the possibility of collective action, and the development of the virtues needed to confront the burdensome realities of bureaucratic employment (Galper, 1980).

The employment of technology and technique in human affairs also may be based upon a distortion of the nature of human experience in the world. They assume degrees of standardization and predictability that may apply only to the most surface conditions of human behavior. The practitioner, too, may have to assume simplicity and ignore the more subtle and contentious elements of human activity. Our hunger for new techniques may, in part, be based on the very fact that they can be counted on to “banalize” human life. Problems of sexuality, child discipline, eating, working, maintaining a family, for example, become merely mechanical difficulties to be tuned up through some esoteric fiddling. Purely technical intervention literalizes
the metaphor of the machine just as the narrow and “enclosing framework” of technical application preempts the consummate human attributes—consciousness, conscience, desire, and intention. Reducing the marital relationship—its snags, tangles, and ineffabilities, its moments of divinity and despair—to a contract in which each partner plies the other with contingent positive reinforcement seems to assume that marriage, when it falters, suffers from a thoroughly correctable technical defect and that one marriage is pretty much like another. Marriage then is not a problem of being, of inadequate poetry (enhancing visions, symbols, and words), of failed virtue (not to know what to believe or do) but rather a mechanical one: somehow the engine of the marriage has developed a disconcerting ping. Perhaps it requires a clinical “Mr. Goodwrench.”

Ivan Illich (1977) in his bitter critique of the professions and the medical establishment in particular, describes the ultimate effects of professional “intervention” or technique as “disabling,” leaving us unprepared to understand and cope with the pains and tribulations that life brings; even unable to recognize or express organismic Joy. Through appropriation by the professions expectable human experiences of challenge, passage, and transformation have been removed from our aegis and can no longer inform, heal, or strengthen us. They have been converted to problems to be solved by an expert.

As the professions have burrowed their way into our economy, philosophy, and our psyches, we have, as a society, become devoted to what Illich (1977) labels staple-values as opposed to use-values. Staple-values circumscribe the consumer role and encourage us to suspend our own knowledge, interest, and motivation so that we may purchase what we need, for example, to chase the blues away, bring the centrifugal family back together, mourn and grieve for a deceased loved one. To a significant degree, such purchases are intended to rid us of the pain and confusion, the anguish and ambiguity of such mundane crises. Use-values, on the other hand, flow from active doing and seeking. They yield a system of meaning and technique that grows out of individual and collective intention, resolve, and action in meeting and solving problems. For use-values to flourish there has to be teaching, an intergenerational
context in which to learn about the tools of life and the lessons and virtues extracted from those tools. A couple’s desire for a natural childbirth experience may not just be a reaction against the risks of a hospitalized, benumbed, less involved birth, but also an implicitly correct sense that to involve oneself in this most common and remarkable human event, to return some degree of control and responsibility to the self, bodes well for the development of this child and the evolution of this family (Illich, 1976).

The seepage of technology and technique into the wellspring of our culture also contaminates the poetic appreciation of life. As Barrett (1979) has suggested, in a society dominated by technicians and obsessed with technique, the technician runs the poet out of town on a rail:

If the poetry does not touch the daily round of existence somewhere or other, then we ourselves have become homeless on this earth. The figure of the poet thus represents a dimension of our human being, the loss of which would leave civilized man a cripple. What is the difference between a poet and a technician? The poet walking in the woods loses himself in the rapture of its presence; the technician calculates the bulldozers that will be needed to level it.

Barrett does not, nor do I, advocate somehow ridding ourselves of the technician so that we can unembarrassedly enjoy the fruits of Erato. But there is a sense in which the idea of technology and the reality of technique crowd out other experiences of the situation, other possible meaning to be found in or placed upon it.

In the field of practice, what technology stanches is artistry, that kind of knowing and doing based upon sensual involvement, tacit appreciations, spontaneous re-visions and "presence." As Donald Schon (1987) puts it:

In the terrain of professional practice, applied science and research-based technique occupy a critically important though limited territory, bounded on several sides by artistry. There are an art of problem framing, an art of implementation, and an art of improvisation—all necessary to mediate the use in practice of applied science and technique. (p. 13)
Finally, technology and technique are inherently conservative. Almost always controlled, shaped, and implemented by those with superior economic, social, and political power, technology is also conservative in that it can subvert human freedom—the exercise of choice, moral intention, the urge to autonomous action. It does this in two ways. First, the guiding assumption of much technological development is that the exigencies of life eventually can and should be tamed by technique. We shall overcome psychic malaise, not through personal or collective craft or action, but through the passive reception of regimen, tool, or intervention. This orientation undermines the basis for social and political change: individual and group awareness of the context from which problems arise; understanding or seeking out the precise relationship of private troubles to public issues; and translating this critical consciousness into some sort of personal or collective project. As Guba and Lincoln (1989) say of positivist science "...facts are heavy-laden, ...exist within some value system and...are embodiments of a value system" (p. 123). The values embodied by empirically-based technical artifacts are inherently institution preserving and non-subversive (Jacoby, 1987).

Secondly, technological development and the reliance on technique erode the possibility of commitment and choice by touting bogus individualism above all over values—an individualism of desperation, detachment, and illusion beset by a siege mentality.

Confronted with an apparently implacable and unmanageable environment, people have turned to self-management. With the help of an elaborate network of therapeutic professions, which themselves have largely abandoned approaches stressing introspective insight in favor of 'coping' and behavior modification, men and women today are trying to piece together a technology of the self, the only apparent alternative to personal collapse. (Lasch, 1984, p. 58)

Technology preserves the status quo by playing to and boosting this ersatz individualism at the expense of community, interdependence, cooperation, collective will, political knowledge and action, not to mention self awareness (as opposed to self-manipulation), all of which are necessary conditions of change.
After all, if the common conditions of one’s life are such to have elevated the blood pressure menacingly, why bother to ask questions or to engage others in the possibility of reform or action? A pill, a run at the biofeedback machine, building a stress management regime are easier, not to mention more immediately gratifying. The pernicious or malignant social conditions will remain to nettle us, others, and succeeding generations, but our pressure is down to a swell 120/70. We won’t, I think, ask the questions we should about an environment or lifestyle that can kill.

Altering the Social Work Profession’s Consciousness

The desire of the profession of social work for the fix, and the jolts it has already received, have moved it some distance away from its central missions and beliefs. Veins throbbing with the need for a hit, the intensifying of the craving for scientific respectability and technological facility, will send social work careening away from the core of its concerns so that fifteen years hence we may not even recognize it, transformed so radically by clinical-technical debauchery (Lloyd, 1984). The profession may become partners to what Hampden-Turner (1970) calls the “cryptoconservatism” of technology (pp. 303-347). The symptoms of our addiction are prodromal, perhaps, but highly visible:

- The waning of concern for the poor, the disreputable, the oppressed, the disenfranchised.
- A continuing thirst, hard to slake, for professional respectability, that is to say, more Ph.D.s, more “science,” more technique, more clamoring for “accountability,” more alliances with the established professions, and a continuing dalliance with the medical-technical model of practice.
- Amnesia for the progressive roots of the profession and the implicit radical agenda suggested by social work values (e.g., social justice).
- A knowledge base, that by implication or actual statement, encourages the antic “psychologizing” of human problems and predicaments.
- The expansion of private sector practice.
Technological Fix

- The rapid growth of industrial (read: corporate) social work practice and the increasing growth of medical social work practice.
- The spread of credentializing movements and legislation as the primary political interest of the profession.
- The enthusiastic brandishing of "symbolic science" (e.g., single subject design) as a mode of practice or the possibility of the wedding of researcher/practitioner roles.

The symptoms are becoming more pronounced, the addiction nearly established.

The Fusion of Eros and Techne

One should not stand, curmudgeon-like as a cantankerous foe of technology, deluded by a romantic memory of a past that never was, afraid of a future that is unformed. Technology and technique have always been a part of humanity's creations, stemming from curiosity or challenge, empowered by vision, and articulated by toil and test. But they also have been more or less under the control of their creators, intended to serve the cultural and human values of the moment. In our time, technology has outstripped our efforts to make it serve us, its own prepossessing sway replacing more humane philosophies and practices.

It is within the power of technology and technique to suppress the sensual. Norman O. Brown (1959) argues that technology originates from only a part of the human experience—the anal. The oddity of the psychoanalytic lexicon aside, Brown's thesis is important. The anal character (formed during unceasing struggles for control during early childhood—often over control of one's very body) is fascinated with control, possession, power, the machine and the lifeless. Anality opposes eros, the urge to life, the energy of the sensual and organismic. Like all instinctual strivings, anality has become institutionalized, suffused into the infrastructure of social institution and ideology. It is technology, more than anything else, that breathes life into the anal possibility because it provides tools for ignoring the "mess" of life, for channeling and restraining unpredictable surges of human passion, for detaching ourselves from the frivolous play of chance as well as the idiosyncrasies of our
neighbors, and for accumulating goods and power in the interest of maintaining control. The tools may be inanimate but they are powerful enough to deliver eros to the subterranean realm of fantasies, wishes, and dreams, and eventually, to distort its very nature (Berman, 1989).

As Morris Berman (1989) suggests, unless technology is under the control of, or fused with, the sensual and resonant, its contribution to humanity will, at best, be merely accidental and, at worst, out of our hand and destructive. In the end, our individual and political wills begin to sag under the weight of technique and technological growth.

For social workers, the fusion of Techne and Eros means that we should not be beguiled by technique. Because it “works” is always a feeble reason for employment. Social workers must begin with the human condition, as it is and as it might be, and identify with the insistent and the inchoate urges and passions of those they serve. To invigorate the experience of life, to enhance intention and will, to assist in the politics of struggle, to align with the power of eros is social work’s mission. If technique and technology further that agenda, so be it. But if any given technique rationalizes and extends oppression, denies the reality of individual or collective meaning, obscures reality, suppresses tacit knowledge and artistry, then the fact that it works is bane not boon.

The visible source of eros is care. “Care,” says Rollo May (1969), “is a state in which something does matter; care is the opposite of apathy. Care is the necessary source of eros, the source of human tenderness” (p. 286). Further, “It is a feeling denoting a relationship of concern, when the other’s existence matters to you; a relationship of dedication, taking the ultimate form of being willing to get delight in or, in ultimate terms, to suffer for, the other” (May, 1969, p. 300). Without care, its giving and receipt, we wither and die, physically, maybe; ontologically, certainly. Without care, passionate energy cannot be harnessed in the service of will—of doing, effecting, creating with purpose and sensation. Technique is merely tool, a device of our caring. As social work moves to emulate other professions, it is in danger of spitting out its own sweet moral core for the bitter rind of technical facility and social approbation.
The desire for the technological fix comes primarily from the academy, not the agency. But rest assured that the urge will gradually spread to the profession as a whole. Whether practitioner or academe there are some guidelines for the fusion of Eros and Techne.

The social work profession should consider abandoning the Positivist paradigm of knowledge development and employment (Pieper, 1985; Haworth, 1984; Saleebey, 1979; Goldstein, 1987; Weick, 1987). The history of this world view is the history of attempts to control and alter nature, both conceptually (objectivity, operationalism) and actually (technological mastery, technique). Since Thomas Kuhn (1970) wrote *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, there has been a gradual widening of the way in which we regard scientific knowing and doing (Capra, 1982; Guba, 1990; Rosaldo, 1989). The activity of science is the conscious creation of visions and images of the forms of nature so that the world will have meaning for us. We debate over particular constructions, but the core issue is how much experience and energy any given image inspires in us (Barrett, 1979). Let us give vent to the proposition that the core human activity is to give meaning to the inner and outer world (Bruner, 1990). To do so in a way that invigorates, appreciates, and enhances, and does not oppress the object of our interest, is a signal mark of caring, of empathy (Rifkin, 1985). Since the methodological axis around which social work turns, is caring (Perlman, 1989) our singular methodological charge is to understand and be astute about what caring is or might be, how it may appear, what forms it takes, what to care about, and how care, in any individual case (of policy or practice), can be transformed into action (Morris, 1978).

Technology and technique must always be subordinated to caring, the moral and ethical energies of the profession, and to fuller sensual involvement in the helping. Any technological scheme that expels caring must be immediately reevaluated and, perhaps, surrendered. Certain versions of behavior modification make some social workers edgy. Why? It may be that these techniques appear to crowd out caring. Thompson (1978) says it incisively (though he is speaking of the quality of Skinnerian science and not derived practices): "...the science of
Skinner bears the same relation to the scientific tradition as the Inquisition does to morality" (p. 91). Thompson means to counterpose the antic power of technique and the requirements of moral caring. In characterizing the "true" nature of professional practice, Donald Schon (1983) observes:

In the varied topography of professional practice, there is the high, hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique, and there is the swampy lowland where situations are confusing 'messes' incapable of technical solution. The difficulty is that the problems of the high ground, however great their technical interest, are often relatively unimportant to clients or the larger society, while in the swamp are problems of greatest human concern. (p. 42)

Technique thrives, in part, on the power inequality between the user and the recipient. Caring, on the other hand, assumes equality and a degree of psychosocial intimacy. Caring is, thus, profoundly democratic, an act of faith in the face of ambiguity, bureaucratic iniquity, and human frailty. Here one trembles with the meek rather than consorting with the powerful.

It is also time to amend the metaphorical language of technology rampant in the social work profession. Propelled by aspirations to professionalism, the search for scientific authority, and the mushrooming therapeutic enterprise, these metaphors, upon examination, reveal an attitude that runs directly counter to caring. 'Client system,' 'target populations,' 'intervention strategies,' and the like are characterizations of aspects of assessment and helping that are neither particularly accurate nor especially humane in their implication. Of the same ilk as bureaucratic, they are laughable because of their semantic arrogance but dangerous because they tend to disguise pain and suffering, stifle sensuality, and thwart intellectual grasp. They move us a step away from the humanizing of our concern and effort. Szasz (1978) refers to a similar "debauchment of the language of healing in the service dehumanizing and controlling persons by technicizing and therapeutizing personal relations" (p. 208).

The fusion of Eros and Techne turns out to be, in the individual case or the collective consequence, the unleashing of "desire" (passion, sensuality, organismic energy) in the service
of project (doing toward imagined or unimagined ends; the transformation of the self in action or interaction). "Care," argues Joel Kovel (1981), "becomes transcendent because, by affirming the indestructible value of the individual, it also criticizes the world according to whose standards she/he is wanting and so points the way toward its transformation" (p. 249). But "...care is noninstrumental: it is posited as an end in itself, not as the adjunct to some organizational purpose. The harsh reality is contained in the paradox that care must remain humble and... shortsighted if it is to be authentic" (p. 250).

To put it in the strongest possible way, the utter reliance on technique and method can only mute Eros, not unleash it toward intention, commitment, and transformation. Rollo May (1969) makes the point:

...there comes a point...when the cult of technique destroys feeling, undermines passion, and blots out individual identity. The technologically efficient lover, defeated in the contradiction which is copulation without eros, is ultimately the impotent one. He has lost the power to be carried away; he knows only too well what he is doing. At this point, technology diminishes consciousness and demolishes eros. Tools are no longer an enlargement of consciousness but a substitute for it and, indeed tend to repress and truncate it. (p. 96)

Techne must help clarify our experience, focus our passion, and assist in the provision of meaning to our efforts in the real world. If it cannot, then it may be time to redefine what it means to be a "professional" social worker.

References


There has been a growing dissatisfaction with the apparent dominance of quantitative empirical approaches to the social sciences in general and to social work practice research in particular. This paper suggests an alternative or complementary approach which is based on modern hermeneutics, the science of interpretation. These interpretive methods are discussed in terms of their more promising applications to select areas of social work practice and research.

There has been a growing restiveness with the evident prevalence of quantitative empirical methodology as the norm for scholarship in the social sciences. An article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, entitled "Questioning the Science in Social Science, Scholars Signal a 'Turn to Interpretation'" made the following point:

A growing number of scholars in anthropology, economics, history, political science, and sociology are questioning just how scientific the social sciences can and should be. They are using such words as "interpretation," "hermeneutics," and "rhetoric" in calling for a new mode of inquiry that draws as much from the humanities as from the natural sciences, if not more (Winkler, 1985, p. 5).

This "turn to interpretation" seems to have been most extensive and successful in anthropology, where Clifford Geertz's (1983) interpretive approach has had a major impact. This is perhaps understandable in light of the fact that qualitative research methodology has not been eclipsed by quantitative (i.e., statistical) methods to the same extent in anthropology as it has in the other social sciences. In psychology, on the other hand, it has been over 20 years since Amadeo Giorgi (1970) called for
a focus on *meaning* rather than *measurement* in that discipline. Yet, psychology remains overwhelmingly quantitative in orientation, if one is to judge by its leading journals. Still, there is movement in that field as well as sociology, and even in education, with respect to the application of interpretive methodology to practice as well as research concerns (Darroch & Silvers, 1962; Reason & Rowan, 1981).

There has been not only a call for "new paradigms" for research and knowledge-building in the social sciences, but there has been increasing reference to "human" science as opposed to "behavioral" or "social" science approaches. The latter two are seen as following the predominant paradigm of the natural sciences in their emphasis on experimental and quasi-experimental methods to yield quantified behavioral measures that are more appropriate for the study of animals (e.g., the old "rat vs. humans" debate in psychology).

There has been a similar call for alternative paradigms in social work research and scholarship in response to the heavy emphasis on quantified empirical studies in the professional journals (Heineman, 1981). This paper is an attempt to offer one alternative methodology for the development of social work knowledge in the context of both practice and research. These methods are not intended to replace the objectivistic empirical methodology but rather to supplement, or even complement, that methodology by providing a perspective on the experiential, subjective, and meaning side of the social work equation. Thus, it is intended to fill in the experienced (internal, subjective) dimension of the observed (external, objective) configuration we refer to as person-problem-situation. Although these interpretive methods, called hermeneutics, have some promising new applications in social work practice and research, it will become evident that some of these methods have in fact been applied in social work practice for quite some time. Much of this application has been implicit, and it is hoped that what follows will help to explicate this.

**Interpretive Methods: Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics can be most simply defined as "the science of interpretation" (Webster's, 1983, p. 851). It was originally
applied to the interpretation of the Scriptures, that is, exegesis or finding the meaning of the words, phrases and passages of the Bible and explaining them to others. Hermeneutics has been and continues to be taught in many theological schools. However, in most recent usage the meaning of the term hermeneutics has been broadened, largely as a result of the highly influential work of Wilhelm Dilthey at the turn of this century. He used the term hermeneutics to denote "... the discipline concerned with the investigation and interpretation of human behavior, speech, institution, etc., as essentially intentional" (Dilthey, 1979, p. 136). It was Dilthey who proposed the use of the term "human sciences" so as to distinguish them from the natural sciences. He proposed this not only because of the fundamental difference in the perspectives of the two kinds of sciences, whereby the natural sciences use an external (i.e., objective) perspective and the human sciences use an internal (i.e., experiential) one, but also because humans are essentially "intentional" (purposeful and determining) rather than simply reactive (determined) as are animals. Thus, he clearly eschewed the thoroughly deterministic bias of most modern behavioral sciences. Further, he felt that the supreme category of the human sciences is that of meaning, so he obviously opted for meaning over measurement in the study of human behavior.

Dilthey was most influential in historical research, but it should be evident from his broadened definition of hermeneutics that its methods could have application in anthropology, psychology, and sociology, as well as other fields. To focus on historical research for the moment, his approach emphasized the "reliving" or entering into the subjective, experiential worlds of those who lived and originally wrote about the historical events under study. Furthermore, in reading historical (or any other) texts the words in a sentence had to be understood in terms of their total context. There was a whole/part relationship in which parts could not be understood independently of the whole (i.e., total context). Dilthey saw that the same whole/part relationship existed in the social world generally, so that in order to interpret the social world it was necessary to develop methodical rules to systematically take this relationship into account. While attempting to develop this methodology Dilthey
became aware that "... there are no absolute starting points, no self-evident, self-contained certainties on which we can build, because we always find ourselves in the middle of complex situations in which we try to disentangle by making, then revising, provisional assumptions" (Dilthey, 1976, p. 11). Thus, his methodology of hermeneutics moved in a circular and iterative fashion toward an increased understanding of the phenomenon under study. This general strategy became known as the "hermeneutic circle," and it has been the centerpiece of hermeneutics ever since. In reality this "circle" is more like a spiral in which each movement from whole to part and back increases the depth of understanding.

The actual experience of understanding which is inherent in the concept of the hermeneutic circle is a common one in social work practice. Most practitioners have experienced the process of going from the whole (total context of person-problem-situation) to parts (aspects of the problematic siltation as experienced and described by the client) and then reinterpreting the whole on the basis of this information. Obviously, the process does not end there but continues on in the iterative way described by Dilthey. This is apt to be the actual, though implicit, process of understanding what is gained in taking a case history or in hearing a client's "story," as will be discussed next.

Interpretive Methods for Social Work Practice

One of the best descriptions of a hermeneutical approach to social work practice has been provided by a British social worker, Michael Whan (1979). He conceives case narrative to be a central element in direct social work practice, and he contends that the social worker's task in relation to narrative is to enable clients to develop a sense of "their own story." He notes that the importance of such narratives for practice can be comprehended when we consider children who have dislocated life histories because of disrupted or incomplete families, multiple placements, and so on. Practice with such children has shown that they need special opportunities to describe their experiences and impressions in order to sort them out and reassemble them into some kind of meaningful whole. Whan goes on to say, "This whole is their story" (1979, p. 486).
It is noteworthy that Whan refers to the "whole," for in practice this whole eventually becomes the client's story as arrived at by the circular or spiral-like process of the hermeneutic strategy. The initial narrative of the client at intake is first heard by the worker in its totality, then this is related to the parts (aspects described by the client) in the continuing narrative during subsequent contacts. The interpretation of the whole changes in the process and forms the basis for understanding and making sense of the parts yet to come in the ongoing narrative.

The story is not only a definition of the events the client describes but is also an event in itself. That is, the story is told in an ongoing relationship as it unfolds and changes. Now, this dialogic process and relationship between client and worker is obviously beneficial and even therapeutic in its own right. This has been variously referred to as "the healing dialogue in psychotherapy" and "the heart of the helping process" (Friedman, 1985; Perlman, 1975). It should be added that this relationship allows for a mutual process of interpretation and understanding of the client's story. This mutuality is central to the hermeneutical approach to case history, and it is one way in which this approach differs from much current and past social work practice.

Client narratives and case histories have, of course, always been open to interpretation, and social workers have always engaged in such interpretation. Workers sometimes engage in it explicitly on the basis of some theoretical practice framework (e.g., psychodynamic, behavioral, etc.) or implicitly on the basis of a "seat-of-the-pants" or personal "common sense" framework. However, the hermeneutical approach requires that the worker initially abstain from interpretations based on such preexisting frameworks. The worker needs to hold these preconceptions in abeyance and hear the client's story openly and emphatically so as to understand the way in which the client subjectively experiences it. Now, despite much current practice emphasis on empathy and listening skills, the hermeneutical approach is still somewhat different in that it takes this experiential data as data, not simply as a way of relating. There is a conscious effort not to extract from and objectify (to later quantify) these data as would happen in behaviorally-oriented practice.
Nor would there be an attempt in the course of the narrative to make sense of the client's story on the basis of a preexisting theoretical framework (e.g., ego-psychological, object-relations, family structural, etc.). There is an attempt to remain open and experience with the client so as to better understand with the client.

Now, this is not based on a naive type of empathy, nor is it based on intuition:

We do not directly invite another person's subjective experiences, but we intentionally (in the phenomenological sense) grasp them because we assume that facial expressions and gestures are a "field of expression" of inner life. In face-to-face interaction we sense that the other person's stream of consciousness is flowing in a manner temporally parallel with our own, and as we interact with the other person our experiences become interlocked. In these "we-relationships," one person comprehends (versteht) the other person's subjective meaning. Such comprehension is different from the comprehension of objective meaning, which focuses only on the meaning of the context of what is said instead of why this particular person has made this particular statement at this particular time (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 209).

This reference to "the phenomenological sense" needs some further elaboration. Some of the most important methodological work in modern hermeneutics has been done by phenomenologists. One of the most influential of these has been the German philosopher, Hans Georg Gadamer (1984). His hermeneutics have been described as "the understanding of life-experiences as they are given in linguistic expression" and as "the method of empathic understanding". (Howard, 1982). Gadamer's hermeneutics seem to this author to be particularly relevant for clinical social work practice and could have considerable potential for enhancing the heuristic value of empathy. The French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur (1981) has also been a major figure in the development of what has been called "hermeneutic phenomenology" (Ihde, 1971). His work seems particularly promising for moving hermeneutic understanding from the immediate practice arena into the research and knowledge-building realm.

Phenomenology, as the modern school of philosophy founded by Edmund Husserl (1970, 1977) represented an attempt
to develop a method that avoids preconceptions by focusing purely on phenomena themselves and describing them. Anything which is not immediately given to the person’s consciousness is excluded. This method also begins by looking at phenomena as wholes (holistically) rather than as parts (analytically) in order to discern patterns among the parts. It can be seen from this that the subjective and experiential dimensions of modern hermeneutics, as well as the holistic initial phase of the hermeneutic circle, have been strongly influenced by phenomenology.

So far this discussion of the application of hermeneutical and phenomenological methods to practice has dealt with case history and narrative. There are also certain intervention approaches in current social work practice for which hermeneutic methods are particularly promising. Among these approaches are crisis intervention and the more recent cognitive approaches. In crisis intervention theory the meaning of a critical event for a person or a family is a major determinant of the nature and outcome of the crisis itself (Hill, 1965). It is essential that the worker deal not only with the coping capacities and resources of the client but to help the client make sense or meaning out of the event within the whole context of the client’s current life situation. Clearly, the hermeneutic strategy described above has particular relevance for helping the client with this meaning dimension of the problem.

Cognitive practice theory also focuses on the meaning of events and experiences in the lives of clients. Much of the therapeutic work in this approach consists of understanding and then helping the client deal with the factor of subjective meaning, which mediates the behavioral and emotional outcomes in the client’s life (Beck, 1976). Here, again, the potential contribution of hermeneutic interpretive method should be apparent. This has in fact been done and reported very effectively by Howard Goldstein and his colleagues in their social work practice with various client groups (Goldstein, 1984). In describing this approach, they allude to “the interpretive functions of mind or schema,” and state that “it is this cognitive function that makes ultimate sense of and imputes meaning to experience” (Goldstein, 1984, p. 292). The author of this paper has also
used this approach in social work practice with elderly clients in various community and agency settings (Sherman, 1981, 1984, 1985, 1991). It has particular relevance for the use of reminiscence in helping older clients tell their life story and to work on unresolved issues in the life review process of old age.

Interpretive Methods for Social Work Research

Roberta Wells Imre (1982) in her book, Knowing and Caring: Philosophical Issues in Social Work, has claimed that current efforts to establish a scientific base for social work on logical positivism and the empirical methodologies borrowed from the natural sciences has eroded the caring element in social work practice. For one thing, the process of objectification in the scientific paradigm has made clients and their problems into objects for study in a way which has served to extrude the caring element. The interpretive method of hermeneutics as described above very consciously attempts to avoid this trap contained in the objectifying aspect of the positivist thesis. It would not be too much to say, as one writer has, that “contemporary hermeneutics sets the positivist thesis on its "head" (Howard, 1982).

Imre contends that in academic social work circles there is a prevailing “tendency to consider knowledge to be only that which can be known through empirical science,” and proposes that we should attempt an approach to social work knowledge that emphasizes “the integral relationship between the person who knows and that which is known” (Imre, 1982, p. 1). The remainder of this section will be devoted to ways of knowing and methods for pursuing social work knowledge which take this integral relationship into account.

Case Study Method

The case study is an old and formerly valued social work method for the study of individuals, families, groups, agencies, programs, communities, and so on. Case studies were commonly seen in social work journals of the past but they have been almost entirely displaced in the last two decades mostly by quantitative empirical studies which are now seen as, more legitimate knowledge-building contributions to the literature.
Interpretive Methods

There are some social work researchers and scholars who claim that the case study method is still viable. William Runyan (1982) contends that the case study is probably the most effective single method to describe the experience of a single person in order to develop "ideographic interpretations" and explanations of that experience, not only for intervention or action purposes but also for knowing more about such experiences. He goes on to indicate that the case study method has been the most prevalent and productive approach to clinical research outside as well as inside social work, so that much of the knowledge common to most clinicians was discovered by it.

"Idiographic" method means simply to study and describe things individually, and it stresses uniqueness and variability in single cases rather than attempt to generalize to many cases. Now, most current empirical research, even in clinical social work practice, tends to utilize representative samples of individuals drawn from a population of interest for the purposes of making generalizations about intervention in that population. This type of methodology, called "nomothetic," is currently seen as the legitimate form of knowledge-building in the behavioral sciences. Kerlinger (1973) maintains that this is so because nomothetic means law-making, that the basic purpose of nomothetic research is to set up general laws, and that this generalizing purpose means its "results are always statistical."

Now, there has been an attempt to utilize single-case (N=1) statistical studies in recent clinical social work research, and this is indeed an idiographic method of study. However, it has not had any knowledge-building impact, and its primary rationale has been to objectify (i.e., quantify) outcomes for the purposes of evaluation and accountability. In all fairness, the proponents of this methodology would not be apt to claim that it is knowledge-building in Kerlinger's sense, but even in the idiographic sense it does not meet Imre's criterion that there be an "integral relationship between the person who knows and that which is known." Although such a practitioner-researcher might claim that the client has an integral part in determining and counting the overt and covert behaviors that are important for the clinical problem presented, it is precisely because such (measurable) behaviors are deemed by the worker to be the
supreme category for both knowing and acting that there is no such integral relationship present.

Other Methodological Proposals

A number of new qualitative research methods are being developed in the human sciences which attempt to capture the essential experiential dimensions of a study problem by including the subject or person studied as an integral participant in the research process. (Elden, 1981; Heron, 1981). Some of these new qualitative methods have immediate clinical practice as well as research applications, so there might be a tendency to utilize them only within the confines of one's own professional practice. It is essential that any new insights gained from the application of these methods be brought into the general arena of research and knowledge-testing in social work. This may mean being willing and able to quantify some of what we have found with our qualitative and interpretive methods. Eugene Gendlin, for example, did this with his experiential methodology when he and others at the University of Wisconsin developed and tested an Experiencing Scale which was then applied systematically in a series of practice research studies (Gendlin & Tomlinson, 1965; Klein, Mathieu, Gendlin & Keisler, 1970; Klein, Mathieu-Coughlan, 1984). They not only found the Scale to be consistently and highly reliable but that it also showed a significant difference between more and less successful treatment cases as well as between more and less seriously disturbed persons in treatment. This author has used Gendlin's method of "experiential focusing" in an empirical study which tested the use of group reminiscence to enhance the social and emotional functioning of certain elderly persons in community settings. The practice method of experiential focusing and the research method of the Experiencing Scale both showed promising relationships to other variables of adjustment, morale, and coping (Sherman, 1987).

One other method of social work research and scholarship which has been sadly neglected of late and which can benefit greatly from interpretive methods is social work history. Dilthey contended that the interpreter in the historical sciences is part of the historical flow he or she is attempting to understand. It
is extremely important, then, in reading and interpreting the historical materials, texts, and narratives that the researcher be aware of how his or her own place in the flow of history from the point in time of interest to the present. Furthermore, every effort needs to be made to immerse oneself in the sense of the time and place under study so as to get feel for the experience of living and acting in that place and time. So much of what has been done in histories of social work has shown a tendency to read and interpret practices and policies about the social work past from the perspective of present or recent history. For example, a current history of the Charity Organization Movement is apt to reflect a type of social welfare thinking that was formed and influenced by events of the 1960s and 70s. This can serve to lose or distort much of the texture, richness, and understanding of the nature and spirit of that movement in the social and cultural context in which it was developed, lived, and experienced. Needless to say, interpretive methods could prove to be an antidote to this tendency and could serve to enrich our understanding of much valuable social work history.

Finally, it is important that we get on with the business of applying these interpretive methods in both practice and research. There has been a great deal of criticism of the dominant empiricist paradigm in social work, so what is needed now is a vigorous and systematic development, description, and application of the alternative or "new paradigm methods" to current social work practice and scholarship. Some of the interpretive methods described here have been applied in very few instances, and these limited efforts are in new and highly formative stages. It is crucial, therefore that those of us who are attempting to apply these methods make a concerted effort to disseminate reports of our efforts and findings in the social work literature.

References


Meaning and Motivational Complexities of Practice Interventions

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Social phenomenological theory and methods are used to uncover, examine and understand the complexity of meanings and motives which precipitate social work practice. The meanings and motives were coded into five categories; worker, client, agency, other institutions, and non-institutional meanings and motives. In addition, three theoretical concepts, operational themes, therapeutic worth of the client and operational dilemmas were developed and explored.

Social work interventions are a type of social action in which are embedded a complex variety of motives and meanings. As defined by Max Weber, social action is that action which . . .

by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual, takes account of the behavior of others, and is thereby oriented in its course . . . In "action" is included all human behavior when and insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it. Action in this sense may be either overt or purely inward or subjective; it may consist of positive intervention in a situation, or of deliberately refraining from such intervention, or passively acquiescing in the situation. (Weber, 1957, p. 88).

"A failure to recognize and acknowledge this complexity can lead to oversimplified views of the process [of social work] and this in turn can have the effect of changing what is being studied" (Imre, 1985, p. 146). Using the data gathered in a previous study (Sachs, 1987) this paper aims at revealing this complexity. In addition, the practice implications and theoretical conceptual categories which have been developed are presented.

From 1983 to 1987 a social phenomenological study (Sachs, 1987) was undertaken aimed at discovering the precipitates of the practice interventions of social workers. Using Flanigan's (1954) critical incident technique, 23 M.S.W. social workers in
8 fields of practice were asked to write down one effective, one ineffective and one typical intervention they recently made with their clients. To get at the precipitates, i.e., the motives and meanings of the interventions, the workers were also asked to record what they thought influenced their making each intervention. Within a week of collecting the written reports the researcher followed up with a phenomenologically based interview in which workers were asked over and over and then again and again what else they thought might have influenced their making their interventions. All interviews were taped and lasted between one and three hours.

Phenomenology begins with the strangeness of experience.... It involves a radical stance, a remarkable way of looking at things. That experience cannot be taken straightforwardly, that it is to-be-understood, introduces a mode of reversal into the ordinary and unreflective acceptance of the mundane course of affairs: a philosophical turn of mind signifies a shifting of perspective from simple placement in the world to wonder about it aslant. (Natanson, 1978, pp. 182, 184)

Through this methodology the workers' previously constructed taken-for-granted world became something for them to question.

The taken-for-granted is always that particular level of experience which presents itself as not in need of further analysis. Whether a level of experience is thus taken for granted depends on the pragmatic interest of the reflective glance which is directed upon it and thereby upon the particular Here and Now from which that glance is operating. To say that some content of consciousness is thus taken for granted still leaves open as to whether any kind of existence or reality is credited to that content, i.e. whether it is given in acts of positional or neutral consciousness. Nevertheless, a change of attention can transform something that is taken for granted into something problematical. (Schutz, 1967, p. 74)

This mode of inquiry is, of course, not totally new to social work. In one or another modified forms workers, in acts of self-reflection or with their supervisors, examine their work with clients in this way. The intensity and rigor of phenomenology, however, does add a deeper dimension to what has been an
important, but too often prematurely dropped, element of in-
quiry into the complexity of the meanings and motives of prac-
tice. "Serious study," to quote Paulo Freire (1985), "requires not
merely critical penetration into . . . basic content but also pen-
etration into an acute sensibility, a permanent intellectual dis-
quiet, a predisposition to investigation."

It is to the complexity of the meanings and motives of an
intervention of one worker with her client that attention is now
turned recognizing that even deeper complexities would have
been uncovered had the investigation been continued. The data
which were gathered from this worker will be used simulta-
neously (a) as exemplars of selected categories and theoreti-
cal concepts which were developed, (b) in juxtaposition to data
from other workers to make a special point about a theoretical
concept, and (c) as a starting place to make comments about im-
lications for practice. The basic methodological grounding for
this approach owes much to Glaser and Strauss' (1967) work on
grounded theory and especially their discussion of the methods
of constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling.

The Worker, the Client, and the Intervention

Judy, the worker, was a 37 year old single white Jewish
woman. She had worked for seven years, since her graduation
from social work school, on the Neurological unit of a major
non-profit hospital.

Bill, the client, was a 29 year old single Black Muslim man
who had become quadriplegic as a result of an accident which
took place while he worked as a judo instructor. The worker
had been seeing the client for five months before she made
the following intervention which she wrote in her preinterview
report:

Asked 29 yr. old Black quadriplegic man if "chest pains" he was
experiencing was related to his feelings re: upcoming (next day)
transfer to a chronic rehabilitation facility-

Analysis of the Meanings and Motives of the Intervention

In her written and verbal report Judy was able to identify
over one hundred different precipitates of this practice inter-
vention. These and the precipitates of practice of other workers were coded into five major categories: meanings and motives of practice related to the worker's experiences of (a) the worker (or self), (b) the client, (c) the agency, (d) institutions other than the workers' agency, and (e) noninstitutional forces such as family and friends.

In addition, three higher level theoretical concepts, operational themes, therapeutic worth of a client, and operational dilemmas emerged as the data were examined. It is important here to underline the inductive nature of this method of category and theory development and to recognize that other conceptualizations are possible. Nevertheless, the concepts and categories were developed from and had to fit and work with the data.

By "fit" we mean that the categories must be readily (not forcibly) applicable to and indicated by the data under study; by "work" we mean that they must be meaningfully relevant to and be able to explain the behavior under study. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 3)

Selected examples of the above categories of meanings and motives are presented below. Each set is followed by commentary relevant to selected theoretical and practice issues.

**Meanings and Motives of Practice Interventions**

**Related to the Worker's Experience of Herself**

Judy reported the following things about herself (the worker) which influenced the intervention she made. All examples presented in the paper are transcribed verbatim from Judy's written report or the taped interview.

(a) . . . also pressures within me where I knew the work I still had to do with this kid and the short amount of time I had left within which to do it.

(b) Uh it also came out of my own feelings, I wanted to know that I had really done everything that needed to be done . . . to help. Also me feeling that I had done a complete job. I mean there were some of my needs there that I had really done the right thing for this kid.

(c) I'm a fairly direct person, um, especially with my patients. . . . No hidden agendas [a] social work value, although I guess it's also consistent with my personality.
(d) I have to say Bill Schwartz [her professor] was probably one of the more direct people I’ve ever worked with in my social work education and I guess almost from day one he taught me, you know, don’t hide behind, if you have something on your mind lady, say it, cause you’ll get into more trouble from what you don’t say to a patient than what you do.

(e) I knew something was going to come up the day before he was going to transfer, not only because it would hurt him, because it always does. Seven years of working with neurosurgery patients.

(f) I would say that in my life there have been times when I’ve had hard times with separations, but I’ve also come through them all.

(g) They do teach it in school all the time that people need to separate, you know that in your relationship with a client, patient, you know that you have a beginning, middle and end, just like you have in an interview. Um, but it’s more than that, uh, it wasn’t just to do separation because the book said to do it. It was because I really believe in it.

Comments

(a) From Judy’s comments related to this category the complex interplay of meanings and motives which precipitate a practice intervention can begin to be observed. Judy’s feelings, values, life history, practice experience, formal knowledge, internalized mentors, and concerns about how she would see herself were each partial precipitants of the intervention.

(b) The content of the intervention as well as the content of many of the influences on practice which Judy described had to do with the interrelated themes of termination, separation and loss. The concept of operational theme (Sachs, 1989) was developed when it was observed that workers write and talk in metaphors or use words that repeat themselves over and over again often with high emotional intensity. The content of these themes vary from worker to worker. The force which a particular theme exerts on a particular worker’s practice, however, is consistently powerful. For example, Judy’s operational theme of loss sensitized her to Bill’s imminent termination. The theme also partially precipitated the other two interventions.
she reported and was probably a major reason she selected the unit she worked on. As she noted, "the unit and I are well suited."

It is useful for workers and supervisors to identify operational themes as one means to better understand a worker's practice. It is important to observe the practice situations in which an operational theme may be functional and in which situations it may be problematic. For example, another worker's operational theme, his need to maintain personal boundaries, precipitated his yelling and screaming hysterically at one of his clients who invaded his boundaries.

(c) Alfred Schutz (1967), the social phenomenologist, noted that all social action, which includes social work interventions, can be reduced to two types of motivational contexts. These are the social actor's in-order-to-motives and the social actor's because-motives.

In-order-to motives relate to the future and are inherent in what phenomenologists (Husserl, 1967; Schutz, 1967) call a project, i.e., a plan of action which is already more or less preconceived or fantasized by the social actor. For example, Judy's wish to do a complete and full job of terminating would be an in-order-to-motive.

Because-motives, on the other hand, have to do with a social actor's past experience in the world. They "explain the project in terms of the actor's past experience" (Schutz, 1967, p. 91). For example, Judy's education and training dealing with separation, as well as her operational theme related to termination, separation and loss would be because-motives which, in part, precipitated her intervention.

Ultimately, all categories of motives for a worker's intervention can be reduced to a set of because-motives related to a worker. All the categories of meanings and motives described in this paper were mediated through a worker. They were experienced by a worker, interpreted by a worker and given meaning by a worker. The workers reported their experiences to the researcher and it was from these reports that categories were developed.
Meanings and Motives of Practice Interventions  
Related to the Worker’s Experience of the Client

(a) Patient had a history of using symptom-focused complaints/concerns to express his anxieties and feelings. . . . Despite patient’s history of symptom-focused behavior, he was often able to utilize direct approaches (or possible interpretations) to explore concerns further - He was a bright, sensitive and quite self-aware young man.

(b) The chest pain was symbolic of the heart ache he felt re: leaving all of us - it was not only anxiety related.

(c) The look I saw on his face the day before, you know, when we were talking about the fact that he would be going.

(d) One of the things I also felt was that the strength of the relationship and the trust that we had for one another was that, even though it might be risky and he might deny it, it wasn’t going to damage my ability perhaps to go at it from a different way if I had to, and then alright it might take longer. We may not do some of the other things I wanted to do with him. But those other things were secondary in comparison to really getting to talk about some of his feelings about the leaving.

(e) I guess I wanted to help him to leave so that he wouldn’t be angry at us and feel like he was being kicked out in any way because he was not. But I wanted him to have nice feelings about us but still not be infuriated, you know.

(f) Because I really felt like my job was to help him be ready for the next step . . . , to make a nice adjustment . . . at the new place.

Comments

(a) All the workers who were interviewed were sensitive to their client’s feelings. Workers wanted their clients to experience and/or talk out their feelings of loss, hopelessness, fear, frustration, anger etc.

Client anger, however, was the most discussed emotion and the one which many workers appeared to have the most difficulty with. This was particularly true when a client’s anger was directed at the worker or her agency. Judy, for example,
didn’t want Bill to be angry at her. She preferred him to have “nice feelings.”

Angry feelings were seen by many workers, including Judy, as dangerous. They might be displaced or “acted out.” Judy was concerned that if termination was not worked through that Bill would get angry and would create problems for himself (and guilt for her) if he acted out his anger at the rehabilitation agency: “I mean, let me tell you, the fastest way to alienate people when you first come into a new hospital is to be angry and he would have acted it out.”

For most workers anger was to be reduced or gotten rid of. If the clients did not get rid of their anger they would often be negatively labelled as resistant, defensive, or hard to reach. The exceptions to this were workers whose operational theme related to assertiveness/aggressiveness and/or workers who had a solid theoretical framework from which they could work with a client’s anger. The first group saw anger as understandable, to be encouraged and as healthy. The second group of workers saw anger as something to be understood, explored and interpreted. For example, one worker wanted her depressed client to express his anger at her because she believed the roots of his depression lay in his repressed anger.

Schools of social work and supervisors would do well to pay more attention to this powerful emotion which workers, agencies and clients too often wish to surpress or keep under repression.

(b) Judy’s description of Bill as a bright, sensitive, self aware young man who was open to insight are examples of a few of the properties which emerged in relation to the theoretical concept therapeutic worth of the client (Sachs, 1989). Once calculated the therapeutic worth of a client is predictive of the kind and quality of care that a worker will give to a client. It influences the amount of time a worker is willing to spend with a client, and thoughtfulness and sensitivity a worker shows to a client, and a worker’s willingness to go out of his/her way for a client.

Several factors are useful in calculating a client’s therapeutic worth. (1) The extent to which a worker experiences a client
as engaged in and motivated for treatment. The greater the motivation the higher a client’s worth. (2) The extent to which clients display gratefulness for the workers’ help. The more grateful clients are the higher their worth. (3) The client’s degree of deprivation or difficulty. The greater degree of deprivation the greater the client’s worth. (4) The length of time a client has been seen by a worker. The longer the time the higher the worth. (5) The degree to which clients direct anger at a worker or the agency. The greater the anger the lower the client’s worth. (6) The extent to which a client is an object of positive worker identification. The more a worker is identified with a client the greater the client’s worth. (7) The age of a client. Younger clients generally had higher therapeutic worth (Sachs, 1989).

Bill had high therapeutic worth for Judy. “I like this kid... who has tried so damn hard all his life.... He was working his way off welfare.... He was a wonderful treatment case... because he was so emotionally available.”

But Judy also had clients who had low therapeutic worth for her. “I have had dirt balls... you know I mean drug abuser types... and I have to tell you that even though I lay out the things that are available and I try to help them get it, without their cooperation, and they don’t sustain any kind of cooperation, and they’re real sociopaths you know.... I’m not going to keep knocking my head against the wall.”

Therapeutic worth can, however, be calculated differently by other professionals (Glaser and Strauss, 1964, 1967). For example, Judy described one doctor on her service who talked about Bill as a talking head and wondered whether they should resuscitate him the next time he needed it.

Therapeutic worth is a powerful concept which defines the kind and quality of treatment that will take place. Faculty, and supervisors as much as workers develop calculi for a client’s therapeutic worth which are then used to determine treatment modalities, how well or poorly a client will be treated and on some occasions whether a client will be treated at all. In a field that prides itself on delivering services to those most in need it is important to understand the calculations that go into the delivery of services.
Ricoeur's (1970) work on hermeneutics and interpretation is highly relevant to this study. He points out that "all behavior is multiply determined" (p. 348). In addition, behavior as a symbol is overdetermined. Similarly, any precipitate of behavior, e.g., a worker's values, knowledge, feelings, or the value she or he places on a client are overdetermined and therefore subject to a variety of plausible interpretations. This is why the same report of a worker about what influenced a practice intervention could be coded into more than one category. It was not the mutual exclusivity of data interpretation and coding that was observed, but the rich, complex, overdetermined and multifaceted nature of the human lives and behavior of social workers that emerged. For example, Judy's statement, "I knew he trusted me enough to be willing to share and explore feelings directly," could be and was coded both under a worker's knowledge of the client and the client's feelings about the worker. No doubt other codings would be possible.

Meanings and Motives of Practice Interventions Related to a Worker's Experience of the Agency

Under this category were coded precipitates of practice that related to an agency's goals, functions and purposes, the agency's policies, different agency structures, the worker's supervisor, other staff, and other client's in the agency.

(a) Staff [nurse] had already tried "indirect" approaches (blood gases, listening to heart, pulse and respiration checks, [as] explanations of possible causes [of chest pains].

(b) I was also responding to the nurse who was saying, "what am I going to do, what am I going to do." He's starting to have chest pains....

(c) Once someone is no longer acute...one works on discharge.... I mean people would say, O.K. when is he going...? I also know that some of when they say, where's he going, very often doesn't have to do with this patient so much as it might have to do with other pressures elsewhere on the floor.

(d) Directness...fits, I have to say, with the hospital style...and doctors are direct.
(e) ... and he had some ties to some of the staff members here, some of the nurses in particular that were so very strong that he had this place built up as the only place that he could get, help him with anything. And quite frankly we had reached the limit a couple of months ago of what we really could help him accomplish.

Comments

(a) Judy was aware of but appeared less influenced by her agency's policies and structure than most workers interviewed. She was one of the few workers who actively "worked the system" for the benefit of her clients. The reasons for this appeared related to her intensely held personal and professional values which were in the direction of independence and control over one's life. When the doctors and other staff on the unit asked her, "when is he going" she described herself replying "that he could go now, but he's likely to spike a fever and be back tomorrow," i.e., she invoked one agency policy "don't compromise a patient's health" against another agency policy "discharge when no longer acute."

Other workers interviewed were less gutsy. They feared for their jobs and followed agency policy even when they knew it was clearly against a client's interests. For example, a child care worker would not refer her client to a better group home because it was agency policy to refer only to group homes within the agency.

(b) Workers were uniform in their belief that their agencies had too few workers, who had too little time, to see too many clients. Judy felt she would have no time to follow up her work with Bill when he went to the rehabilitation agency. As a result she felt she needed to ask an interpretive question rather than explore his symptoms as she usually did. She needed to quickly terminate rather than take the time both she and he needed. The theoretical concept operational dilemma has been developed to better understand and clarify this type of situation.

Operational dilemma refers to the more or less difficult, conflictual, contradictory, ambiguous, ambivalent and problematic choices workers are faced with in the performance of their work. Operational dilemmas are ubiquitous to the practice of social
work and there has already been much written about them. Lowenberg and Dolgoff (1982) developed a comprehensive set of categories which described professional dilemmas and Ohlin (1958) did work related to the responses that workers made to the dilemmas they faced in probation and parole.

The tremendous variety and variability of intrapersonal, interpersonal and institutional forces which precipitate, motivate and give meaning to a practice intervention are the seeds from which operational dilemmas grow. The variety and variability of practice precipitates create a series of dialectics for workers which are compromised in their interventions and often remain unresolved. Compromised here means that an intervention, like a dream symbol or a symptom, is often the result of a conflict but contains embedded within it the roots of that conflict. For example, a social worker who worked for the Fire Department routinely told his clients not to tell him that they used drugs since it was his agency’s policy that he report illegal drug use. Compromised in this intervention is the agency’s policy on drug use, his professional value about maintaining confidentiality, and the firefighter’s work culture which holds that you don’t rat on your fellow workers. The essential conflict for this worker, however, remains unresolved and he must deal with his dilemma over and over again as he meets new clients.

Two measures of operational dilemmas are suggested which might be predictive of the degree of stress, tension, anxiety, and alienation workers are likely to experience on the job. The first measure is the degree of conflict among the precipitates of a practice intervention. The second measure is the value which a worker places on a particular precipitate of practice.

Workers need understanding and guidance from faculty and supervisors to identify, possibly resolve or learn to live with the operational dilemmas they face. The phenomenological methods used in this study may be one useful tool to begin this process.

Meanings and Motives of Practice Interventions Related to a Worker’s Experience of Institutions other than the Agency.

Judy reported general examples of precipitates in this category.
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(a) Patient due to transfer next morning and I felt he needed to work through feelings related to separation from staff that had “saved his life” and literally met every care need for past 5 months- Chronic facility gave us 24 hours to do this in!

(b) I was very concerned about his ability to make a connection to people there and utilize the services they had to offer.... It was crucial because.... when you go to those chronic rehab facilities, they do not always have the perseverance and the resources that our particular neurological service has to really pull people through and they just might dump him in the back and leave him there forever.

(c) I mean it’s usually not a problem [pressure to discharge], but it might come from some utilization review committee getting on some doctor’s case.

(d) Their chronic rehab is damn good.... and maybe they will get him vocational rehabilitation and maybe teach him something like computer programming or something that can be done with mouth control.

(e) With a chronic institution the waiting lists are very long.... a year or two years.... When this kid first heard it could take up to a year before he went to rehab, he went into a two week long funk, severe depression.

Comments

(a) One concern for many workers who refer a client to another agency is whether or not the match will take. Judy’s intervention was, in part, motivated by her wish to help her client act in a way that would insure his being received well by the staff of the other agency. She didn’t want the termination process to generate anger that might be “acted out” at the rehabilitation agency.

Other workers were more concerned with protecting their relationship with the agency to which the referrals were made. A settlement house worker, who did job development, was not going to “ruin [her] relationship with a corporation by sending them someone who [she] believed was not going to work out.”

(b) The monitoring agency mentioned by Judy in her report was the utilization review board which wanted patients to be discharged in a timely fashion. The review board though having
little, if any, impact on Judy's intervention with Bill does, of course, have an increasingly powerful impact on medical social workers' work with clients.

Monitoring agencies could be the decisive force which precipitates a worker's practice. An arbitration judge, for example, demanded that an industrial social worker write a letter indicating that her client was attending sessions or he would rule in favor of the employer and the client would lose his job. The worker, who preferred to work slowly with clients who had sporadic attendance, felt obliged to follow the judge's demands. With much anguish she informed her client that "[he] had to come to sessions every week or else...!"

The above example of an operational dilemma raises the question whether social work can be done in certain settings. In industry or the field of corrections social control functions may be so powerful an influence in precipitating practice that central social work values such as client self-determination are compromised beyond repair.

Meanings and Motives of Practice Interventions Related to a Worker's Experience of Noninstitutional Forces.

The precipitates of practice which Judy reported in this category related to the client's family and her own mother.

(a) Long ago worked on discharge plans... with family.

(b) The fastest way to alienate people when you first come to a new hospital is to be angry and he would have acted it out... I know from how he and his family started to act with us in the beginning. They were infuriated with all of us.

(c) My mother used to always say, "never go to bed angry, you always have to make up," O.K., before you know. It was like forbidden. No matter what your feelings were, you had at least give the kiss good night and make up... There's a piece of that that I think is operating here and that is I really believe in process and working through things and seeing issues to their completion.

Comments

(a) Judy saw the family's potential for anger as a threat to the overall course of treatment. It was another factor in her
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asking an interpretive question that might open a discussion of angry feelings related to termination rather than exploring Bill's symptoms.

Other workers, however, saw the family or friends of their clients in other ways, e.g., as cotherapists, advocates. They were important support systems which could decide a treatment intervention. A worker in a mental hospital was willing to discharge one of her patients because she knew he had a girlfriend who he would live with and who would take care of him.

(b) In Judy's comment about her mother the early meanings of her feelings about anger and separation may be seen. A psychoanalyst might label this the countertransferential element in the precipitation of a practice intervention. It is sufficient for our purposes to suggest that it is another element in the complexity of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social institutional forces from the past and present which interact at the psychosocial interface to precipitate worker interventions with clients.

Summary, Limitations and Conclusion

Social phenomenological theory and methods were used to uncover, examine and understand the complexity of meanings and motives which precipitate social work practice. The meanings and motives were coded into five categories; worker, client, agency, other institutions, and noninstitutional meanings and motives. In addition, three theoretical concepts; operational themes, therapeutic worth of the client and operational dilemmas were developed and explored. Phenomenology is well suited as a research tool to help social workers explore and understand their practice. In this method workers are asked to evaluate the objectivity or a claim to knowledge according to their reflexive self-related understanding of the basic features of social interaction and human communications as well as their common-sense knowledge of cultural meanings. The positivistic approaches promoted a normative conception of objectivity; the alternatives support an interpretive one. (Johnson, 1975, pp. 209-210)

Phenomenological theory and methods are not, however, a panacea. Judy barely examined the meanings that race, religion
and gender had for this intervention. In addition, it was only after reviewing the transcript of the two and a half hour interview that the researcher recognized that Judy often referred to this 29 year old black man as "kid." Perhaps it was only the need for more time, or the unphenomenological presumption that they had meaning, but the possible influence and meanings of these factors were not explored. Quantitative theory and methods should not be abandoned. As Bateson (1979) expressed it, "two views are better than one."

Judy's reflections on the process supports the usefulness of this research method and its implications for practice. She will have the last word.

It was good because it gave me a chance to be a little more reflective and gain a little more closure. It made what is generally a chore, O.K., something that I could really use and rethink my practice and stuff like that. I could sit and do something like this and think for hours and keep coming up with new stuff and new values. I think how close the mesh is between what my personal issues are and the issues my particular service has and maybe why I self-selected this service to begin with, where I wanted to, you know. I think that that has crystalized or conceptualized even more finally as a result of this. I'm not new, but I do think that I'm always growing and always changing and in that sense this is very helpful. It's been fun for me.

References

Meaning and Motivational Complexities


Qualitative Research and Social Work Practice: Partners in Discovery

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The methods, outcomes and distinct characteristics of qualitative research are presented to establish the relevance of this mode of inquiry for research in social work practice. The phenomenological foundations are outlined and the various methods including ethnography, participant-observation and life history are illustrated by the use of an array of qualitative research projects. The same studies also disclose the forms of knowledge generated by qualitative research relative to the importance of values, ethics, culture, spirituality and aesthetics.

A survey of social work research literature for information about qualitative methods would turn out to be a brief venture. Even among the few references that might be located, one would not uncover a wealth of information. First, it would be found that discussions of the strengths and weaknesses of this method are somehow locked into a continuing and peculiar debate about the scientific foundations of professional research. The casual inquirer might be entertained by the volume of passion in the polemics generated about an otherwise neutral topic.* Or the reader might be impressed with the erudition of the various antagonists in this controversy and may learn something about "heuristic paradigms," "epistemological foundations," and other rare concepts. But little information about practical applications would be gained.

An occasional article might indeed say something informative about possible uses of qualitative methods. But at least in one instance, an apologetic tone is heard in, the author's confession that "the concept of qualitative methodology is still evolving" and that these methods "have in common their nonreliance upon quantified measures of statistical analysis" (Reid and

* Editor's note: See Haworth article in this volume
Davis, 1987). Whether these statements are indeed valid, the curious reader is again detracted by having to grapple with comparisons between methods—comparisons that I will show are misleading.

To the extent that this debate creates a forum in the journals of the profession, it is useful: a much-needed arena is opened where certain provocative and probably unresolvable questions about inquiry and knowledge might be aired in scholarly ways. I say "probably unresolvable" advisedly since, at the root of the controversy, one finds competing allegiances to one version of reality or another—to ideologies of scientism or humanism, objectivism or subjectivism, positivism or phenomenology or other opposing forms. Beyond the values of a scholarly forum there is not much reason to hope for much more than tolerance of, if not respect for, these well-nurtured differences.

Research of any kind is a means, not an end in itself. It may be seen as a set of procedures, a device used to discover, reveal, define, explain or in other ways increase knowledge and comprehension. Thus, we must be wary of putting the proverbial cart before the horse—that is, allowing our preferred method to determine not only how we approach the problem we wish to study but how we define it in the first place. If we are in fact either unaware of alternative approaches or driven by a commitment to a singular methodology, we may very well wind up warping the problem to get it to fit the method—or, as sometimes happens, entirely dismiss the research question because of the limits of the research tools we have available to us.

The intent of this article, therefore, is to cast more light on the nature of qualitative research as a mode of inquiry in its own right. The reader familiar with the principles and methods of social work practice will, I believe, detect a reasonable kinship between practice and this form of research: variations of the qualitative methods of participant-observation, in-depth interviewing, and life-history gathering are commonly used by social work practitioners in their work with clients, although, to be sure, for different purposes.

Similarly, just as the principles of social work practice are best understood not as abstractions or a set of free-standing techniques but as a dynamic in the dialogue of helping, the
methods of qualitative research become more understandable when their applications can be demonstrated. Thus, in this overview a case study format will be used, drawing from illustrations of representative types of qualitative research. References are offered to direct the inquisitive reader to a more comprehensive literature concerning specific approaches in this form of inquiry.

What is Qualitative Research?

The risk in attempting to define qualitative research is to consider it as the opposite of quantitative research; doing this distorts and confuses both methods. Although naturalistic or qualitative methods have considerable status in sociology and anthropology, as already mentioned, they receive scant notice in the literature of social work. For this reason, I will offer a working definition of the method, its underlying principles and the major modes of inquiry that constitute this form of investigation. In the lengthier section that follows, I will attempt to give life to the major qualitative procedures by drawing illustrations from a variety of types of social work research projects.

A basic definition of qualitative research is suggested in the subtitle of Filstead’s book (1970) on qualitative methods: “First-hand Involvement with the Social World.” “Firsthand” connotes the context of investigation, the immediate, on site setting where qualitative methods are employed. “Involvement” refers to the actual participation of the researcher in the social world that is being studied; the researcher is not a detached or dispassionate observer but is in and becomes an active part of the event that he or she is investigating.

In some instances, qualitative methods have been underrated by being typified as “exploratory” or “prescientific” and therefore recommended when too little is known about the question at hand to formulate the hypotheses required for more “rigorous” forms of research. A more enlightened definition, however, would accent the unique power of this method to reach beyond mere description and to discover and explain the meanings and intentions that shape the nature of human and social conduct. In Geertz’s terms, this approach involves the search for and analysis of “the symbolic forms—words, images,
institutions, behaviors—in terms of which, in each place, people actually represent themselves to themselves and to one another” (1983, p. 58).

Although selected instruments and questionnaires may be used for data collection, the principal medium for analysis and interpretation is the reflective mind of the researcher. Within the scientific canons of objectivity, this may seem to be a heretical position. Yet, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, pp. 14–15) put it, the common-sense fact is that we are part of and cannot escape from the social world we wish to study. There are no external, absolutely conclusive standards with which to judge the social phenomena under scrutiny. Thus, we must work with what knowledge we have but with a willingness to subject that knowledge to systematic inquiry and careful reflection where there is a hint of doubt or error.

Thus, the findings generated by the use of qualitative procedures do not pretend to be absolute, conclusive or, for that matter, necessarily replicable. The human circumstances that are the focus of study are in constant process of emergence and change; for that matter, they may shift by a few degrees because of the presence of the researcher. Second, the research intent is not to test or prove some preliminary assumptions about the question. Its purpose is to discover, explain or interpret or to fashion a more systematic way of understanding what, at the outset, appears to be an obscure, perhaps ambiguous human event or situation. A final reason is a comment on good research: better questions are as desirable a result as good answers. Given the unpredictable qualities of the human state, new discoveries will allow us to be a bit more intelligent about the questions we ask in the next phase of research.

In effect, this mode of research may enable us to do, to engage in practice, more knowledgeably. But its special character also enables us to know in a more profound way. The talent of social work is not solely technical: it is, as well, artistic and philosophic. Entry into the complexity of the human situation may be eased a bit by what we do know; at the same time, we quickly learn that the peculiar dilemmas and moral questions we encounter call for fresh and creative ways of understanding.
The openly subjective character of the qualitative method may invite charges of "researcher bias" and "lack of rigor." Bias in some form is evident in all forms of social research: the researcher's preconceptions, personal aims and values are bound to be influential, as they are often the compelling motives for undertaking the research project in the first place. Because of these subjective elements, the question of rigor in qualitative research is treated very seriously. Vigilant reflection is required as the researcher must be alert to the extent to which his or her perceptions and interpretations reasonably correspond with what is actually going on "out there."

The rationale for this definition of qualitative research derives from the following underlying principles. (a) Reality is a construct and not an objective fact. In the course of daily living, people shape their respective realities to make sense of and give order to their experiences (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). These constructions may take myriad forms. Cognitive style or how one thinks, perceptions of previous experiences, acquired learnings, one's values and beliefs, and the felt influences of environment and culture are just a few of the interplay of forces that shape one's constructions. (b) In phenomenological terms, this personal construction is called one's natural attitude—the unquestioned definition (either individually held or intersubjectively shared) of aspects of the world as they appear to the person. This attitude is a focus of qualitative inquiry. (c) The processes of inquiry should be acutely responsive to the person-in-the-situation and involve forms of conversation, dialogue, involvement and observation. In important ways, the research enterprise is a collegial enterprise in which the researcher joins with respondent(s) in the effort to discover meaning in and to make sense of the experiences in question. (d) The research effort needs to be flexible and creative. Advance thought and planning must be thorough but not rigid; when unpredictable events arise or new knowledge is forthcoming initial plans or previous conceptions may require modification.

These principles are expressed in the range of procedures or plans of action subsumed under the banner of qualitative research. For our purposes, and because of the limits of space, two major sets of procedures—ethnography and life histories—will
be described using sketches of selected qualitative case studies in social work.1 In the section following, we will consider examples of the particular types of knowledge and understanding generated by these methods.

**Ethnography**

Broadly speaking, ethnography refers to the entry of the investigator into the action of a social field or situation to search out understanding and meaning of behaviors and attitudes. The field may be characterized by its cultural, national, or ethnic character and/or people engaged in particular activities, roles, relations or circumstances. Expansive as ethnography is, a number of examples are required to illustrate just a slice of its range and diversity.

Kassim's study (1988) involved the question of the influence of Indian culture on social casework. The author was aware that the education of social workers in India generally was based on British and American models; practice, however, was responsive to specific problems and attitudes indigenous to the Indian culture and society. To discover if and how Eastern and Western ideas were bridged in practice, Kassim queried twenty six students and employed workers. Because of the many facets of the question, a variety of methods were used: a *structured questionnaire* gathered pertinent demographic information; an *interview guide* elicited individual's views on religion, education, and socio-cultural factors; and a set of *critical incident case studies* invited the respondents to comment on how they would deal with some typical examples of family and personal conflicts that might be found in the Indian community. Unexpectedly, Kassim found that the workers innovatively and imaginatively bridged some sharply contradictory concepts—for example, what they had learned in their education about the Western value of self-determination and what they personally knew about Indian beliefs in fate and karma. As one respondent put it, "I tell my clients that although their illness is governed by fate, there is still something productive they can do in the meanwhile." In subtle and informal ways, casework teachers were seen as mentors who enabled students to weave together the two divergent systems of belief and thought in useful ways.
Sun's study (1987) focused on relations between culture and social problems specifically concerning Chinese parents of problem adolescents in Taiwan. The researcher was curious about the growing social problem of juvenile delinquency in Taiwan. Uncertain whether Western theories offered a pertinent explanation of this novel problem, Sun decided to search for insights that might be found in parents' own "definition of the situation"—their explanation of the meaning and cause of their children's troubling behaviors. Documenting the social and cultural context, Sun used the method of participant-observation, spending extended periods of time gathering impressions of neighborhoods, schools, homes, and the patterns of interactions of fifteen families. A loosely structured, open-ended interview guide was then used to gain the parents' perceptions of the cause of and the source of responsibility for their children's difficulties. Among other findings, Sun's doubts about the irrelevance of Western delinquency theories for the Taiwanese culture were confirmed. Within the bounds of her study, she found that Taiwanese culture comprised three familial subcultures: the traditional family that clung to ancient Chinese beliefs about parent-child relations; the modernized family that aspired to assimilate Western notions of child rearing; and the family in transition, caught between the ancient and modern. The first attributed the problem to the disobedient child; the second assumed blame as parents who "hadn't got it right yet"; the third group were confused and uncertain.

Taylor's study (1983) of discharged mental patients living in a half-way house shows that the ethnographic method is equally pertinent to the investigation of seemingly "alien" groups or cultures in our own society. Since relatively little was known about the lives of people in such transitional circumstances, ethnography, in this instance, required almost total immersion of the investigator in the life circumstances of these people. Participant-observation in this instance took the form of Taylor's residence in the half-way house for a five week period where she openly identified herself as a researcher. In addition to constant observation and note-taking, the researcher used both structured and unstructured interviews, questionnaires, census taking, and the mapping of psychosocial networks to gain as
rounded a picture as possible. A rich array of findings included the confusion about *time* as a governing force in her respondents' difficulties in adapting to the community. A sense of "futurelessness," spawned by controlled institutional life carried over into their aimless and pointless existence in the half-way house and in the community where it was located.

Bohnengel's medical field study (1982) centered on a group of renal patients selected for kidney transplant surgery. She wished to determine their styles of coping with a medical problem over which the patient has little control over its progress and outcome. Research was an extended process, beginning with the patient's notification that a kidney was available and their anxious wait for cross-match results and ending with discharge from the hospital some time after transplant surgery. At crucial points in the course of treatment, the investigator began her inquiry with a simple question, "How is it for you?" to elicit the fluid meanings patients gave to their changing experiences. Redefinition of their reality by the patients was an ongoing process. And the struggle to ground their experience in something dependable became especially poignant at the point that the patient had to face (and some did not) a startling fact: no one could predict whether the transplanted kidney would take and therefore what life after surgery might be like. The study generated a diverse and fascinating array of patterns of adaptation as patients tenaciously and creatively attempted to find meaning in and surcease from their plight.

Also within the realm of medical care, but with an interest in caretakers' participation, Rottman (1985) sought to determine whether parents of premature, extremely low birthweight babies were capable of making ethical choices in decisions bearing on the lives and treatment of their newborn. The exceptional nature of the neonatal intensive care unit required many months of preliminary observation of (a) the unit's medical and nursing procedures, (b) the patterns of the visiting parents, and (c) the styles of interactions that developed between parents and their infants and between parents and staff. Once she gained some impressions of the ethos of the hospital unit, Rottman could then devise appropriate guiding questions. She waited for timely opportunities to talk with these parents, sensitively taking account
of their readiness to reflect on and talk about their crises. Irrespective of their diverse cultures and backgrounds, parents generally were well-equipped to participate in serious decision making; unfortunately, medical protocol, the ambiguities of informed consent and other factors militated against active participation. Unexpectedly revealing were the oblique and subtle things parents needed to do to establish a bond with their frail infants including the names they bestowed, tokens, poetry, and prayer.

Urda's action research (1984) was more concerned with how things work than with problems of living. Her research centered on generating knowledge and building theory about the ending phase of the small group experience. Urda focused specifically on twelve task-oriented groups including boards of directors, staffs and committees in a variety of settings. Participant-observation placed her in the flow of events including premeeting activities, interventions, interactions, the task process and closing. A questionnaire gathered demographic information about the group members as well as self-reports of the group experience and the closing phase. Urda discovered certain patterns in the ending phase of groups but also found that each member's need for confirmation and feeling of self-worth transcended the importance of the task the group was designed to accomplish.

Life Histories

A second method of qualitative research involves the collection of self-reports or personal narratives that build into a type of life history. The medium of research in this instance is conversational discourse (which may be entirely open-ended or focused by an interview guide, depending on purpose or the nature of the circumstances). The respondents are invited to tell their stories about their lives or specific events and experiences they have encountered. The study is a search for themes, plots, and patterns in these stories and the meanings respondents attribute to them.

Hilbert's study (1986) illustrates how life histories can illuminate the diverse meanings people give to a shared momentous or tragic event (in this instance, the Vietnam war).
Although the veteran has been the focus of much empirical research, little was known about the subjective meanings of the war experience held by the veterans themselves (other than what can be found in autobiographies and novels). Of special interest to Hilbert was how the veterans in his sample interpreted the Vietnam experience in narrative and metaphor and how this portrayal affected versions of both their pre-war and their postwar lives. Lengthy discussions were held with eighteen veterans in a variety of familiar settings—homes, offices and coffee shops, for example. Hilbert's findings essentially controve red the tendency to see the effects of the war experience in linear, cause-effect terms. The variety of meanings revealed by the study and their linkages with pre- and postwar factors point to the need to set aside our preconceptions and hear the veteran's (or any client's) story as it is told and in terms of its own meaning.

In contrast with the exploratory breadth of Hilbert's life history approach, Kunin's (1985) study concentrated on a specific life experience—namely, what it meant for one's life to seek and receive therapeutic or counseling services. Fifteen clients of a community mental health center willingly responded to the opportunity to tell about being a client and what it meant to them. In minimally structured and lengthy interviews that began with the open question, "What made a difference for you?" they offered rich impressions of painful events that led to their seeking help, the conditions of the helping experience that they believed made a difference in their lives, and how they thought these changes might affect their futures. In significant ways, their interpretations of the helping process contrasted with the received professional view of therapy. For example, the importance of the "presenting problem" (whether, for example, divorce, depression, or career) is secondary to a sense of low self-esteem accompanying feelings of failure about not managing life's problems. The respondents had little awareness of or interest in the therapist's methods or theoretical orientation: what counts is the client's impression that the therapist cares and conveys the belief that the client is indeed worthwhile. As this impression is internalized by the client, he or she gathers strength to "take charge" of life. A successful termination does
not imply the problem is solved; rather, the client feels empowered to resume control and responsibility.

King's life history study (1985) centered on modes of life adaptations to a particular physical condition. The inquiry involved congenitally blind adults' versions of their sexual development, taking into account the assumption that vision is one of several senses involved in sexual development. Not knowing what to expect, King properly avoided warping the inquiry by formulating preliminary questions. Instead, the dynamics of open group discussion and interaction were used as the medium for sparking memories and sharing experiences. Depending on the degree of sight impairment, the respondents' experiments and discoveries took a variety of forms: some reported learning about the opposite sex by close scrutiny of magazines such as *Playboy*: others relied on tactile investigations. The pivotal finding was that sexual adaptation was a part of a general adaptation to blindness and that its success often had to do with whether respondents had the benefits and guidance of a caring mentor (usually not a family member) in their young lives.

Despite the diversity of qualitative modes of inquiry, they share common pursuits: to bring to light new knowledge about obscure or enigmatic social phenomena; to enrich and sensitize our work with problems of living; and, if possible, to discover and generate what Glaser and Strauss (1967) call *grounded theory*.

Such theory is systematically derived from (or grounded in) real-life data in contrast to theory that is logically deduced about human events. Drawing from Bruner (1986), the former might be considered "bottom-up" theory built from the morsels of lived experience, whereas the latter is "top-down," based on *a priori* abstractions about life experience.

This does not mean that qualitative research is practiced in a theoretical vacuum. In the examples noted, the researchers did not ignore available knowledge and research. Like many practicing social workers, these researchers used available knowledge mainly as informative maps of the terrain to be explored rather than as a recipe to be followed to the letter or to be tested in some way. Urda, for example, relied on gestalt theory to organize her thinking about the organicity of the small group in general but carefully balanced these views against the data.
emerging from her groups. King found the theory of personal constructs helpful for thinking about the way people fashion their individual realities; at the same time, she did not allow the theory to obscure what emerged in her respondent's own constructions and meanings. Others saw symbolic interaction theory as a useful means for gaining an orientation to the interpersonal exchanges that occur among people.

The Outcomes of Qualitative Research

The findings of qualitative research often are compelling and sometimes startling since they capture the unforeseen, often overlooked, and cryptic minutiae that, in inexpressible ways, contribute to the spirit and vigor of living. The research endeavor, not constrained by a host of controls or presumptions, invites the event in question to unfold naturally. The inquiry is open and responsive, resisting the tendency to screen out what may at first seem irrelevant. As already indicated, it is natural attitude that is the focus of inquiry.

Because of its ample and inclusive boundaries, it is likely that the researcher will amass a diverse and seemingly baffling assortment of data: these include material directly gathered as well as related incidental data in the form of personal field notes and journals, memos, and observations. Because of the rich quality and depth of the information subject to careful analysis, samples are comparatively small. Although claims cannot be made about generalizability or representativeness, the insights gained from careful study of the more obscure and elusive human perspectives produces its own brand of persuasive and fertile knowledge.

The following categories are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive or discrete.

Ethical and Moral Dilemmas

Once people are asked (even in ordinary discourse) to report on their lives and problems of living, it is quite likely that we will find their narrative shot through with moral doubts and questions. For example, in Kunin's study of clients' reflections on treatment, the moral equation of their problems was evident in the way they framed their problems: a sense of moral failure
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attended their inability to manage their lives; a feeling of moral strength embellished their feeling that they had made progress. In the Vietnam veteran study, the subtle but pernicious feelings of moral anguish about killing and the war itself often transcended the more apparent traumas of war. Even in the renal transplant study, patients caught in the hiatus of uncertainty about their futures, turned inward or toward a divine being to question their "goodness" or whether they deserved special consideration.

Value Questions and Conflicts

Qualitative studies often verify the centrality of values in human action and intention. Equally important, these studies show that values neither fall into neat categories nor measurable distributions. Kassim's study of social work in India, for example, shows that competing cultural values can coexist and even be resolved in confounding and imaginative ways. As Urda discovered in her study of task-oriented groups, what may appear to be an obvious, accepted value may, on inspection, turn out to be a nominal social convention. The expressed commitment of members to the group's task was overshadowed by personal values concerned with preservation of self-esteem and opportunities for self-expression. And without exhausting the examples of the vagaries of values, Hilbert's study of veterans cautions us that some personal values are not necessarily enduring; they are vulnerable to catastrophic events that may drastically alter one's priorities.

Spirituality

Apart from manifest religious beliefs and identifications, the deeper spiritual dimension of persons' lives often is inarticulate and therefore difficult to discern. The qualitative researcher frequently depends on metaphoric and symbolic behaviors to unveil the cardinal role of faith and dependence on the divine particularly when one faces calamity, anguish or loss of control. The narratives of parents of premature children in Rottman's study suggested how faith in a greater power helped these parents redefine the devastating crisis, discover new meanings, and thereby find dependable support for their endurance. Likewise,
Bohnengel found that renal patients, caught in the darkness of uncertainty about whether their bodies would accept or reject the transplant, relied on creative notions of a divine purpose—beliefs that transcended the conventional supports of formal religions.

Aesthetics

The importance for one’s well-being of the presence or absence of beauty, harmony and balance is scarcely mentioned in social work literature and theory. Yet, as some of these studies show, the human narrative often is colored and enriched by allusions to the aesthetic side of the routines of living. In Rottman’s work, parents needed to meliorate the sterile, technological environment of the neonatal intensive care unit by decorating and brightening the bare isolettes of their babies in delicate and touching ways. Members of down-to-earth, task-oriented groups used various symbolic terms to depict the harmony and balance of a positive group experience. And many of the Vietnam veterans would temper their memories of the horrors of the war with gentler images of the tranquillity and beauty of the tropical wilderness.

Just we find that the products of qualitative research alert us to the inner world of subjects, they have much to say about the imaginative and complex styles people rely on in approaching the more active tasks of living. Creative improvisation may be evident in how they define themselves, explain and cope with their predicaments, and otherwise manage their lives.

Identity and Culture

Kassim’s investigation of social work in India and Sun’s study of delinquency in Taiwan suggest that culture is not an isolated variable or a direct cause of certain behaviors. Culture may be a force to be reckoned with, a part of the tension and imbalance arising when people struggle to integrate changes in or between contradictory cultural expectations. For example, with their identity at stake, a few Taiwanese parents struggled to cling to traditional values in a society undergoing rapid change, whereas others pursued modern practices in the same society.
that has not entirely given up its traditions. Examples of *passivity* or *resignation* abound in Taylor’s account of discharged mental patients who allow themselves to be defined by society and therefore, without resistance, slide into membership of a deviant sub-culture. On the other extreme are some of the veterans in Hilbert’s study who aggressively defied the brand that society attempted to impose on them. And in various positions along this continuum, King’s congenitally blind respondents indicated that impairment was not necessarily the major force defining their identities. Family values and pride as well as the presence or absence of a mentor had a place in the shaping of a personal self-image.

*Adaptation and Coping*

Studies of people’s lives confirm that in everyday living people do retreat to familiar patterns to accommodate to or attempt to overcome adversity. But these patterns are not necessarily fixed; creativity in redefining crises allows for imaginative solutions to them. In Bohnengel’s search for definitive patterns in the course of patients’ adjustments to the transplanted kidney, she found some radical transformations in patients’ perceptions of bodily changes, hopes and expectations, and their feelings about their control over their lives and bodies. The ability to reorder and reappraise one’s definition of the situation also is poignantly evident in the narratives of the Vietnam veterans. Many of their stories reveal how noxious and disabling episodes were transformed into symbols of resiliency and strength, proofs of the ability to endure and gain pride and wisdom.

*Life in Process*

The researcher as a participant and observer has a first-hand view of life in progress and interaction rather than life as a series of static episodes. This was evident in many of the studies: in the peculiar ways that supportive networks evolved among former mental patients in their half-way house; how closure in task-oriented groups unfolds out of the quality of certain antecedent conditions; and how people develop their social roles as, for example, patients, parents, and help-seekers.
Important in the processes of living is the person's perceptions of lived time. In contrast to measured time or a chronological rendering of events, lived time refers to the way individuals reconstruct the past by arranging life events in certain sequences and periods to explain their conceptions or understanding the "hows" and "whys" of their present reality. The story that is fashioned not only creates order out of chaos but also gives meaning to existence. In a positive sense, Kunin's study shows how counseling enables clients to edit and rework their lived histories and thereby devise a more productive and adaptive version of their current worlds. In starker terms, Taylor found an absence of meaning in mental patients' attempts at survival since their jumbled past deprived them of working explanations of life as it is, thus leaving them with a view of the future as aimless.

Implications for Social Work Practice

The conception of the practitioner-researcher has long been a hope and vision of the profession. But the expectation that the typical worker should be able to contribute to the profession's knowledge base has not been realized. This failing is due, I believe, to the standard requirement that the worker learn to rely on objective quantifying devices to describe and measure the real-life, subjective, and narrative qualities that characterize the helping event. Such an effort turns out to be as rewarding an enterprise as the attempt to determine which of Shakespeare's sonnets are the most romantic by counting the frequencies of the poet's use of the word "love."

Qualitative research is not only pertinent to the study of practice but is in harmony with the principles and talents of practice. As such, they are mutually reinforcing: the development of the research skills and artistry involved in interviewing, participant-observation and history gathering can be translated into their counterparts in practice. Home visits or community studies, for example, can be enhanced by skills of participant-observation. Reciprocally, the practitioner's interpersonal skills and sensitivities can help ensure that research techniques will be used in prudent, respectful and empathic ways. The correspondence of these methods therefore offer some promise for
merging the researcher-practitioner roles in a more consistent and coherent fashion.

In more instrumental terms, qualitative methods are useful for single case, longitudinal and follow up studies. For example, in addition to learning something about the frequency or types of changes of certain behaviors, qualitative methods would help sort out important personal themes and transactions that could be followed over the course of several interviews or family meetings. Such knowledge would explain and enrich understanding of the workings and processes of change. Likewise, a worker might infer that some common characteristics are shared by a cohort of clients. These themes or patterns also could be traced across the board and/or longitudinally over the course of service. And open-ended follow-up interviews (as illustrated by Kunin’s study) can evoke some revealing reflections on the meaning and qualities of the helping process. Not the least, a valuable dividend of these efforts would be the refinement of case recording (a fading skill) for current or future research purposes.

The ultimate beneficiary of qualitative research is the domain of social work practice wisdom, the organic base of professional proficiency and accountability. Far more than just knowledge and skill, practice wisdom embodies the union of a heritage of ideas, ethics and values, experiences of success and failure, and the processes of reflection in action. It is this sense of organic wholeness that qualitative forms of inquiry strive to advocate and support.

Finally, there are certain pleasures in doing qualitative research. For those who have not settled for specific schools, frameworks, models, or methods of practice, the spirit of qualitative inquiry stirs wonder and curiosity. It assures that practice remains robust and open-ended, always alert to fresh insights and discoveries.

References


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Notes

1. Among other variations of qualitative methods are those that are unobtrusive; that is, they involve methods of lesser impact on the social world studied. They include content analysis of personal or public documents, historical manuscripts, and observations or audio or visual recordings of events.
Rationality in Social Work: A Critical Examination

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This paper critically examines the definitions and criteria for rationality in social work in light of western philosophic tradition. Rationality in social work is seen as instrumental (means-oriented) and individualistic rather than substantive (ends-oriented) and social. A set of criteria which expand the basis for making rationality claims in social work is suggested. These additional criteria aim to serve the valued social justice ends of social work practice.

The emergence of social work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be understood as a systematic, secular approach aiming to reduce individual suffering and enhance human welfare. Social work is systematic in the sense that it seeks to maximize efficiency and effectiveness; it is secular to the extent that it was (and continues to be) inspired by the emerging social sciences (Axinn and Levin, 1975; Becker, 1952; Pearman, 1973). The above claims are justified, as was the development of the profession itself, by the assertion that social work is grounded on rational knowledge (cf. Leiby, 1987). Human suffering has specific, identifiable causes that can be eliminated through effective intervention (Orcutt, 1990).

* Order of authorship was randomly determined. An earlier version of the paper was presented at the Philosophical Symposium of the Annual Program Meeting, Council on Social Work Education, Reno, Nevada, March, 1990.
The ideal of rationality goes back at least to the ancient Greeks whose view of reason is embodied in Socrates' famous dictum that "an unexamined life is not worth living." Basically, this meant two things: that reasoning and deliberation are the keys to understanding how to live a worthwhile life, and that a life of reason is the very best kind of life (Nathanson, 1985).

In modern times the rational ideal has come to be associated with science, particularly the methods of science. The emergence of the social sciences, medicine and industrial technology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries helped to forge the belief that scientific knowledge and methods could serve as standards for rational thought and action. In social work, this merging of rationality and science was first embodied in the model of "scientific charity". Leiby (1987) writes that for social workers being scientific "meant that helpers should base their efforts on the facts of the situation (they were busy fact collectors) and that helping should be rational, with a clear idea of means and ends" (p. 764). This presumption of a rational practice has served as part of the bedrock of the social work profession.

Despite the importance of rationality to social work, there are few critical examinations of the meaning of rationality and its implications for social work practice. This paper attempts to initiate such an examination. In our view, the dominant conception of rationality that has evolved in the modern western world, especially in the social sciences, is based on efficiency of means rather than the value of ends, and an individualist rather than a collective or societal orientation. The implications of this conception of rationality for social work practice is discussed. The paper concludes with an analysis of a rationality of ends and a proposal for the development of social criteria for rationality within social work.

The Meanings of Rationality

The word rationality is etymologically linked with the words reason and reasoning, i.e., thinking. In common usage, rational actions are those performed for good or adequate reasons. What counts as good or adequate, however, has been subject to a range of interpretations.
In seventeenth-century Europe, the "Age of Reason," claims about the superiority of knowing through reason came into conflict with notions of knowledge based upon authority or tradition. The rational ideal of the seventeenth century resembled the mental reconstruction of the universe as a giant, smoothly running machine, e.g., a clock (Descartes, 1948). The new rational science (i.e., knowing) particularly as enunciated by Sir Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes, sought and gained ever increasing legitimacy in its attempt to define and explain human experience in terms of complex causal chains. Only in the twentieth century with the rise of relativity theory, the Heisenberg principle of indeterminacy, and quantum mechanics, did physical scientists and others begin to challenge this essentially mechanical concept of rationality (Capra, 1982).

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially as a consequence of the many practical successes of modern technologies, the rationality claims of science gained enormously in their political legitimacy. The economic achievements associated with technologically based industry provided enormous political support for the scientific enterprise (Gagnon, 1990). The image of a science characterized by political neutrality, disinterested objectivity, a commitment to dispassionate, detailed observation, and constant demands for verification became the paradigm for rational knowing. This understanding of science has been idealized, even as it has remained the subject of continued philosophical questioning (Diesing, 1982; Raskin and Bernstein, 1987; Witkin and Gottschalk, 1988).

Consistent with the scientific ideal, human nature itself began to be viewed as nonrational and amoral. According to Morawski (1986) these changes in the conception of human nature "formed the very rationale for the expedient construction of social science because, given the limits of morality, religion, and philosophy, scientific rationality appeared to be the only guarantee of social order" (p. 51). Thus, the social sciences sought to emulate and benefit from the allegedly more objective physical sciences.

The sociological discussion of rationality was framed, in large part, by Max Weber (1968) in his discussion of social action. While Weber's use of the word "rational" varied (Brubaker,
1984), his primary definition of rationality (or rational action) proposed the distinction between Zweckrational, usually translated as purposive or instrumental rationality, and Wertrational, value-laden, substantive rationality. Instrumental rationality is associated with the selection of correct means for the attainment of calculated ends, and substantive rationality with action in accordance with valued ends (independent of its prospects of success). The overarching trend of modernity, according to Weber, has been in the direction of subjecting ever greater aspects of life to the kinds of calculation which are demanded by instrumental rationality. Efficiency and effectiveness increasingly become the criteria for determining rational thought and choice (see also, Mannheim, 1936). The model for such choices is the idealized market, the "most impersonal" of all social relationships (Weber, 1968, p. 636). For Weber (1964), bureaucratic social organization served as the institutionalized expression of instrumental rationality by structuring behaviors and roles within organizations with the goal of maximizing desired outputs.

Weber (1968) warned that an extreme, narrow and exclusive implementation of instrumental rationality can lead to the construction of an "iron cage of rationality." Under such circumstances the interpretation of human action is reduced to that of automatons. Similarly, Simon (1957) viewed the pervasiveness of instrumental rationality in modern society as a sort-of-disease.

Proponents of instrumental rationality are critical of action based on values (substantively rational action). In an oft-quoted statement, the eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume (1911) proclaimed that "reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of passions." What Hume meant was that reason (rationality) could only be employed to achieve desired ends ("passions"); the ends themselves are chosen extrarationally. Rationality is concerned solely with what must be done in order to achieve a particular end irrespective of what that end might be. Such logic allowed Hume (1911) to state that "it is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger."

This belief that there are no rational criteria for choosing ends has led to charges that substantive rationality invites
Rationality and historicism (Mannheim, 1936). There appear to be no clear and objective criteria for distinguishing between rational and irrational ends because what is good and desirable in one social setting is not the same in another. Under these circumstances, substantively rational action may become that which reaffirms socially established norms and values. Dramatic illustrations of this position are seen in varieties of twentieth-century romantic absolutisms such as extreme nationalism, racism, and dogmatic political ideologies. National Socialism (Naziism), for instance, sought to provide a single and allegedly rational standard of thought and action for the German Volk.

Because the kind of certainty and the sense of security that was once offered by tradition is no longer easily available in the modern, secular world, a demand for a kind of "rational uniformity" has emerged (Gerth and Mills, 1953). Rational uniformity demands of each actor maximal conformity with societal norms in the interest of survival and mutual benefit. This kind of substantive rationality readily becomes synonymous with the often arbitrary dictates of established power, sometimes even when that power has the appearance of benevolence (Gross, 1982).

The members of the Frankfurt school of "critical theorists," most of whom had personally experienced and suffered under the Nazi regime, were acutely aware of the limitations and the dilemmas associated with both instrumental and substantive rationality. For instance, Marcuse (1964) and Habermas (1971) view "purposefully rational" (instrumental) thought as a politically potent approach toward social domination and as having the value laden human purpose of gaining ever increasing control over nature. They interpret the purposefully rational relationships of technical production, as found in the factory or in the bureaucratic work place, as the dominant metaphor for all "rational" human interactions in the modern world. Thus, rationality is understood to perpetuate the domination and oppression of those who are relatively powerless. In short, definitions of rationality are seen as serving political ends.

According to this view, the priority granted to instrumental rationality, and expressed in traditional social science, has fostered a conceptual orientation that invites mechanistic thinking.
Such conceptualizations permit humans to be thought of as objects. Considerations of human initiative, will and desire, social creativity, meaning construction, and most importantly, human liberation are subverted because they are beyond the purview of instrumental rationality (Dallmayr, 1981).

To counter these trends, Habermas (1971) suggests promotion of human understanding through the establishment of shared meanings, rather than social control, as an alternative purpose of the social sciences. In the interactional realm, rationality can only emerge as a result of discourse within what Habermas calls, an "ideal speech situation". This is a situation in which, ideally, all forms of inequality resulting from power differentials among actors are eliminated. The goal becomes mutual understanding among thinking, feeling and acting human beings within the context of a just social order that aims for coherence. Rational action, from this perspective, is that which promotes the ends of human equality and social justice (White, 1983).

The multiple meanings of rationality—and especially Weber's distinction between instrumental and substantive rationality—have important implications for social work. As a profession anxious to demonstrate its claim to a scientific (rational) foundation, social work has been influenced strongly by the standards of instrumental rationality. This influence has contributed to a focus on method, rather than social theory or values.

Social Work and Rationality

Within contemporary social work this conception of rationality is seen in attempts to extrapolate methods of research to practice, or what Schon (1983) calls "rational technology." From this perspective, issues of efficiency and effectiveness are the primary determinants of action. Rational technology in social work is illustrated by a popular version of the "problem solving process," a series of sequentially ordered activities designed to culminate in the resolution of a specified problem. The steps of this process are considered analogous to the activities of (scientific) researchers in their pursuit of truth. The process is claimed to be rational, relatively objective and atheoretical (Bunston, 1985). Ideally, social work practice should be
structured to conform to this process and practitioners should follow the steps of the problem solving process in their work with clients (Grinnell, 1988).

Grinnell and Siegel (1988) define the problem-solving process as "a rational, orderly, planned, systematic series of steps directed toward a goal" (p. 17). This implies that what is rational is the process of reaching a goal rather than the goal itself. This position is echoed by Smith (1988) who, in a discussion of research problems and goals, concedes that "unfortunately, there is not a single rational process by which we can select a specific problem area for study" (p. 93). In other words, the selection of problems and goals is extrarational; only the methods for solving problems or reaching goals are based on rational criteria.

Claims that the problem solving process is rational are based on its systematic quality, presumed effectiveness and similarity to empirical research. While problem selection and goals are integral phases of the problem solving process, their rationality is a by-product of their "fit" with the process, i.e., their facilitation of effective problem solving. For example, the evaluation of a goal is based primarily on whether it can be measured easily rather than on its worth. In other words, the rationality of the problem-solving process has more to do with form than substance. Bunston (1985), for example, emphasizes operationalization and specificity in problem assessment and setting objectives, two steps in his version of the problem solving process. Thus, a problem or goal stated in a form that does not conform to the requirements of the problem solving process is, ipso facto, not rational. This limitation is acknowledged implicitly by Hallowitz (1979) in his discussion of problem solving theory in social work:

...there are two kinds of problem solving work: that which is overt, tangible and conducive to rational solution; and that which is intangible and subject to the coming-to-grips with, and resolution of, inner conflicts and resistances toward achieving maturational growth and change (p. 95).

Recognition of only "rational" problem solving leads practitioners either to ignore other types of problems or transform them
to fit the dictates of their model (cf. Wood, 1990). Defining problems and formulating goals in accord with their conformity to the dictates of a method, makes the method itself a constituent of the ends. The rationality of ends, to the extent they are rational, is dependent on their fit with the problem solving method (i.e., means). Thus, instrumental rationality determines substantive rationality.

Towards a Rationality of Ends

Equating rationality with a particular method, as in the problem solving process, deemphasizes the importance of ends and restricts their range. For instance, if the requirements of the problem solving process restrict problems to overt, "countable" behavior, then the range of human experience that can be addressed by practitioners is severely truncated. Conversely, if goals (ends) are primary, then the means for achieving them will have to be adapted to their requirements. An analogous situation in education is the application of a generic method of instruction to all students versus the development of individualized learning goals. Theoretically at least, the latter approach should lead to a greater variety of methods and goals.

A rationality of means is cognitive; it deliberates about matters of information. A rationality of ends is evaluative; it is concerned with matters of value (Rescher, 1988). A rationality of ends is concerned with how people ought to act or reason rather than how they do act (Nathanson, 1985). From this perspective, if an individual's goals are inappropriate, then even the most efficient means to that goal cannot rescue him or her from irrationality. This position does not deny the importance of means, but rather elevates the importance of ends.

The instrumental rationality of science contrasts with that of social work which, at least in its rhetoric, claims to be "goal-driven," that is, not based on a particular method, but on value-laden ideals about human rights and social justice. While the choice of ends does not have to be "some kind of blind existential leap into the darkness" (Anderson, p. 10) an immediate problem is to come up with acceptable, rational criteria for determining ends. The philosopher Nicholas Rescher (1988)
suggests two such criteria: (a) whether the ends are cost-beneficial, and (b) whether they are in the best interests of the individual.

The criterion of cost-benefit asks: Are the ends worth the expenditures of the means? From this perspective, a rational analysis of ends includes an assessment of their true value and an appropriate balancing between costs and benefits.

In a strict economic sense, a cost and benefit analysis makes sense. One does not spend $1000 to earn $100. However, in many situations costs and benefits are not as easily defined. For example, how does one equate the psychological costs associated with a particular action with the material benefits an individual might achieve from completing a task? Or how does one calculate the cost-benefit ratio in adult, intimate relationships in which outcomes for one's actions may depend not only on direct benefits to one's self, but on the other's outcome as well (cf. Kelley, 1979)? In many such instances cost-benefit ratios could only be calculated after the action had been completed and the goal reached. At best, one could say that an individual has rationally chosen a goal (in the cost-benefit sense) if he or she believed that the benefit would outweigh the cost.

Rescher's (1988) second rationality criterion for assessment of ends is that a goal must be in the individual's best interest. "Best interest" in this situation is defined as that which a person ought to want. What someone should want is determined by three subcriteria: (a) general human needs such as health and companionship, (b) the demands of one's role such as parent or social worker, and (c) by individual want-related interests. A want-related interest, according to Rescher, is rational only if it can be subsumed by a universal interest. For example, we want to publish this paper because, among other things, it will enhance our feelings of competency and enhancing feelings of competency is in anyone's interest, In other words, one engages in a regress of reasons (why does X want A?) until one reaches a universal desideratum, something everyone, not just X, would want.

These three parts of the "best interest" criterion for choosing rational ends have implications for social workers. The notion of common needs is relatively unproblematic. There is rarely
any conflict when social workers pursue ends that meet basic human needs such as food and shelter. However, rational action based on social workers' role demands may conflict with the role demands and interests of the individuals they serve. For instance, it is in social workers' interests to have cooperative clients; however, it may be in individuals' interests to resist what they consider to be an unwanted intrusion into their lives. In a sense, social workers want the individuals they serve to subsume their individual want-related interests to the requirements of their role as a client, a role largely defined by professionals.

As representatives of a professional group, social workers may view themselves as having an obligation to pursue goals consistent with the broad mission of the profession. In some cases these social goals may conflict with the individual goals of clients. For instance, social workers may find that their concern for the welfare of the community conflict with the individual self-interest of clients. Since individual preferences in themselves are not necessarily rational, there is no compelling reason for social workers to accept all client goals. And given the asymmetrical power relationship between workers and clients, it is the social worker, not the client, who decides on the rationality of the client's goals (i.e., whether they are in the client's best interests) (Martin and O'Connor, 1989).

The conflicts depicted above are difficult to resolve because each position, depending upon one's focus or model of rationality, can be portrayed as rational. The inability of purely rational criteria to adjudicate rationality claims stem in part from the ethical presuppositions that underlie different models of rationality. For instance, the model described by Rescher implies that individual wants are more important than group wants. Other models of rationality are linked to utilitarianism, the greatest good for the greatest number (Kent, 1986). Thus, judgments about which ends are more rational are often implicit statements about the moral desirability of those ends.

Social workers operate within a prescriptive moral context; they need always be concerned about the effects of goals on others. A parent who starves his child because he determines there is not enough food for both of them would invoke the
moral assault of social workers. (This example also illustrates how an action could be considered rational, in the sense of being in the individual's interest, but immoral.) Less obviously, when social workers judge some ways of acting as rational and other ways as irrational, they often are making moral distinctions between "good" and "bad" ways to act. For instance, morality disguised as rationality sometimes is found in practice situations where clients' actions are considered rational when they conform to certain moral precepts of values. Since most situations will involve a blending of rational and moral elements, the critical assessment of ends must meet criteria for rationality and morality.

Social workers are not only interested in individual benefits, but in the collective (i.e., societal) good. In our view, a basic limitation of Rescher's (and others') criteria of rationality is that they are based on what is good for the individual. This view has been associated with a utility maximizing model of rationality whereby a person is acting rationally if he or she acts to maximize his or her utility (i.e., ends). A major limitation of this model is its inability to explain adequately why people would ever rationally engage in collective action for the common good, also known as the "free rider" problem. Simply stated, if an individual believes that the contributions of others will be sufficient to a desired end (e.g., a clean environment), then his or her efforts would be wasteful. However, if all individuals think this way (that is, act rationally), no one will benefit (Holmstrom, 1986).

While the individual perspective has gained prominence in western society (Gauthier, 1975), it is not the only perspective from which to understand rationality. If, for instance, the individual is viewed as primarily social in nature and interdependent with other people rather than independent, an alternative view of rationality emerges. This view sees rational ends not only in terms of individual interests, but as a "feature of society" (Holmstrom, 1986, p. 69).

This social perspective suggests a third set of criteria for rational ends. These criteria derive from traditional economic theory and have been applied in planning theory (Mayer, Moroney, & Morris, 1974). An end may be viewed as substantively
rational if it (a) produces desirable public goods, (b) reduces negative externalities, or (c) produces merit wants. We will review each of these categories separately.

Public goods are desirable human benefits which are indivisible. Clean air, safe streets, and public parks, although generally desired by individuals, can be achieved and maintained only by collective action. One person cannot have them if all do not have them; only informed and concerted effort can produce them. If they are subdivided they cease to meaningfully exist. Social workers' commitment to racial equity and sexual equality, the promotion of public health measures and the concern for community (not only community based) mental health activities fall into this category.

Negative externalities are the indirect and usually unintended side effects of the actions of individuals or groups pursuing their self-interest. Factories create wastes, mental hospitals add to the numbers of homeless, some types of social benefits increase dependency, overuse of scarce resources now, will produce privations in the future. A concern for the reduction of negative externalities requires not only focus on the goals of action, e.g., the protection of children from abuse, but also on its side effects, e.g., possibly excessive governmental intervention in the lives of families.

Merit wants are perceived needs of society which are not desired by any individuals, sometimes even opposed by individuals. Yet all people ought to want them because they will benefit the whole. Tax increases, sewage plants, and the construction of half-way houses in residential neighborhoods are the kind of actions that fall into this category.

What all three types of collective goods have in common is that they are not the sum nor product of individual desires, They give expression to essentially social concerns from what might in brief be called an ecological perspective. They represent criteria for substantive rationality because a failure to consider them, in the moderate or long run, leads to a contradiction inasmuch as they make the social survival of human beings an impossibility.
Conclusion

We have proposed a series of criteria for rationality in the selection of ends for social work action. We propose these criteria with the aims of expanding the basis for making rationality claims and to reestablish social work's important and essential relationship to valued ends. In our view the rationality claims of social workers need not (and should not) depend on method-driven models of rationality derived from traditional science, but on a rationality of ends based on a social ethic consistent with social work values. Adopting such a model of rationality encourages analyses of how society itself fosters or impedes rationality.

Habermas (1979) has suggested that rationality of the sort that we are seeking can emerge only as a result of discourse. Thus, this effort to establish criteria for substantively rational action in social work is only a beginning. For instance, we have not suggested a way in which the variety of criteria might be rank ordered and prioritized. What ends shall be selected when the application of the criteria appears to be in conflict? These and other questions require further analysis and development.

Finally, if social work is to be serious about its commitment to human welfare, its rationality claims must go beyond matters of form or individual preference to broader issues of social concern. For instance, social workers' understanding of rational ends must extend to a consideration of how their actions affect the least well off in our society (Rawls, 1971). Social work goals must be assessed relative to their ability to emancipate people from the restrictive social arrangements that make both instrumental and substantively rational action difficult. A renewed interest in professional goals and a rebalancing of emphasis from instrumental means to valued ends, can facilitate constructive dialogue and more meaningful claims to rationality.

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Rationality


East/West Philosophical Synthesis in Transpersonal Theory

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Transpersonal theory is a perspective on human behavior and development that synthesizes philosophical and scientific insights from Eastern and Western traditions of thought. This article presents challenges from transpersonal theory to ethnocentric limitations of conventional developmental theories in social work. Three fundamental philosophical assumptions of conventional theories are critiqued: that linear, rational thinking is the standard for optimal cognitive development; that autonomy is the standard for psychosocial maturity; and that ordinary waking dualistic consciousness is the standard for normal mental operation. Limitations of transpersonal theory are also examined. Based on the challenges and insights of transpersonal theory, suggestions for innovation in teaching and philosophizing about human behavior in social work are offered.

The profession of social work commonly espouses a commitment to understand and respond to human diversity in a culturally-sensitive manner (DeVore and Schlesinger, 1987; Lum, 1986). However, human development theories prevalently taught within Human Behavior in the Social Environment (HBSE) courses are constrained by Euro-American philosophical and cultural assumptions. For example, Erikson, Piaget, Kohlberg and related theorists are all white Euro-American males who have expounded theories of development that are culturally bounded (Longres, 1990). Their cultural conditioning and research approaches predispose them to evaluate human behavior according to standards of autonomy, rational thought, linear development, and dualistic (subject/object dichotomy) world view. When this culture-bound developmental perspective is taught to Euro-American students without significant alternatives, students can easily become myopic, since the perspective is likely to be consistent with their own cultural conditioning. The situation becomes like the Korean proverb
about a frog in a well—the naive frog is certain that it understands the whole world. When this perspective is taught to minority and international students, their own understandings of human behavior may be neglected or derided. If we are truly to understand the diverse world of human behavior, it is necessary for us to get out of the well.

Transpersonal theory attempts to transcend "the well" of ethnocentric conceptions of human development by synthesizing philosophical and scientific insights from Eastern and Western traditions of thought. Although many of these theorists are Euro-American white males, they attempt to transcend their own cultural constraints by drawing upon insights from Hindu Vedanta, Buddhism, shamanism, and other mystical (i.e., rooted in spiritual experience) philosophies (Underhill, 1961; Woods, 1980). The assumptions of these philosophers provide contrast and alternative to the Western secular academic assumptions that limit conventional developmental theories in HBSE courses. They also provide rich possibilities for articulating an holistic, post-positivistic perspective for social work in general.

In the following discussion, major transpersonal theoretical concepts will be introduced through a critique of three developmental assumptions that are commonly taken for granted in HBSE content. These conventional assumptions have been selected for critique because they are pervasive and fundamental. These assumptions are that: (a) Linear, rational thinking is the standard for optimal cognitive development. (b) Autonomy is the standard for psychosocial maturity. (c) Ordinary waking consciousness is the standard for normal mental operation. Suggestions for innovation in teaching and philosophizing about human behavior in social work are presented.

**Historical Background of Transpersonal Theory**

Transpersonal theory is an outgrowth from humanistic psychology (Boucouvalis, 1980; Vich, 1990). Humanistic psychology developed in reaction to the environmental determinism of behaviorism and the psychodynamic determinism of Freudianism. In the 1960s and 1970s, humanistic psychological research began to emphasize distintively human functioning, especially
optimal functioning, such as creativity and peak experiences. Many humanistic psychologists, such as Maslow (1970), came to the conclusion that spiritual issues of meaning and purpose, and experiences of transcendence of ego-boundary through love and mystical communion, represent the highest reaches of human nature and deserve to be studied in their own right. Thus, transpersonal psychology is described as the "fourth force" of psychology (Maslow, 1969). The principal predecessor of this recent trend was Carl Jung (Campbell, 1971). His ideas have become influential in contemporary transpersonal theory. The term transpersonal refers to the experience of transcending the boundaries of personal, individual self-identity. Since conventional Western psychology did not offer adequate concepts and frames of reference to describe this, the language and ideas of mystical philosophies and religiously based psychologies have become important sources for transpersonalists. Transpersonal thought now extends beyond psychology; it has become a transdisciplinary theoretical perspective on human behavior and development (Washburn, 1988).

Linear/rational Thinking as the Standard for Cognitive Development

Piaget's (1970) influential cognitive development theory posits a series of stages through which a person with adequate neurological capacity progresses. This progression occurs through the elaboration of increasingly comprehensive and sophisticated thinking strategies in response to challenges of new experience. The highest stage, which many adults do not reach, is called formal operational thought. This stage emphasizes the ability to engage in logical thought with completely abstract concepts. Kohlberg (Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer, 1983) extends this model to moral development; Fowler (1981; 1982) extends it to faith development. Implicit in this view is an emphasis upon cognition as central to development (in contrast to feeling or intuition). Further, the type of thought emphasized follows the Aristotelian and rationalist standards of linear rationality (e.g., deduction or induction), causality, and mutual
exclusivity of opposites. In social work literature, this type of thinking has been criticized as inadequate for its allegedly male perspective bias (Davis, 1985) as well as its philosophical and scientific reductionism and simplification (Haworth, 1984).

Transpersonal theorists contend that linear, rational thinking is a useful but limited type of mental operation. They identify four ways in which this type of thinking is surpassed. First, in agreement with the objections of feminists and postpositivists, they assert that holistic, integrative thinking is essential. Wilber (1979, 1983) postulates that proficiency at holistic thinking and envisioning occurs in some adults in a stage subsequent to formal operational thought. This is a transitional stage to fully transpersonal experience. For example, holistic and systemic models in social work emphasize understanding of the person in context of interconnections with the environment. An individual cannot exist as an isolate, but only in relation and in process. This is similar to a basic premise of Buddhist philosophy that no thing is self-existent, but rather is mutually constructed and co-originated with every other thing (DeBary, 1969).

Second, some transpersonalists, most notably the Jungians, emphasize that rational thinking does not make a whole person. Rather than using the hierarchy image of stepwise development, they use the image of completion and expansion of self. Thus, the whole person grows in a continual process of reconciling and integrating the contrasting psychological functions of thinking, feeling, sensing, and intuiting, as well as other complementary psychological characteristics (Campbell, 1971). Such wholeness is reflected in Hindu and Buddhist religious mandala paintings, hence Jung appropriated the word “mandala” to name the symbols of wholeness depicted in many forms of religious and psychotherapeutic art (Jung, 1959).

Third, human development can transcend both rational and integrative thought and experience. In Wilber’s (1980; 1983) and Ajaya’s (1983) schemes, cognitive development beyond the holistic/systemic enters the realm of transpersonal psyche, what Jung called the collective unconscious and what Assagioli (1976) called the transconscious. A person proficient at this level is described as able to integrate insights from panhuman symbolic
themes of meaning, called archetypes, as well as religious revelations and extra-sensory perception. Grof (1988) offers a compendium of such clinically observed experiences.

Fourth, optimal human development is recognized by transpersonalists to transcend all forms of dualistic consciousness. Even the realm of archetypal experience assumes that there is a subject (an ego) experiencing an object (an archetype). Systemic analysis assumes the fundamental reality of things in relationship, pattern, and process. Beyond the systemic and archetypal modes of consciousness is a way of experiencing that transcends the fiction of separate selfhood altogether. Swami Ajaya (1983) refers to this as unitary consciousness, the highest attainment in Vedanta. The person who is proficient at this level realizes that the beginning and end of development are really the same. The life course of developing from dualistic consciousness to nondualistic consciousness is actually a process of realizing what was fundamentally real and true from the beginning. Only the perspective has changed.

In this view, subject, object, and interrelation only exist as epiphenomena of dualistic consciousness. Existentially, we deal with distinctions. Essentially there are no distinctions. Even to posit contradiction between distinction and nondistinction is an error. This is why some forms of Buddhist philosophy view clinging to any names, forms, or philosophical postulates as an obstacle to enlightenment (Murti, 1980). This level of attainment is rare, but it is possible nonetheless, according to the transpersonalists. Indeed, their teleology posits this awareness as the goal of complete human development.

Transpersonalists who adopt a primarily Buddhist/Vedantic philosophical vantage, such as Wilber and Ajaya, posit a radical elimination of all distinctions at this level. Transpersonalists who adopt a primarily Judeo-Christian vantage, such as Washburn (1988), posit a complete reconciliation of opposition between self and the "Dynamic Ground" of reality while retaining an ontological distinction between them. From both vantages, rational and integrative ways of experiencing the world are incorporated and subsumed within the highest level of transpersonal consciousness.
Individual Autonomy as the Standard for Development

Erik Erikson's (1980) psychosocial development model, and similar stage theories by Levinson (1978) and other conventional theorists commonly appropriated in social work (Brennan and Weick, 1981; Erickson and Martin, 1984) portray individual development as a course of autonomous ego formation. These models follow the Freudian assumption that the neonate is psychologically undifferentiated from the nurturing environment. Gradually, self-awareness forms. The child increasingly asserts independent initiative. Separate identity is firmly (often defiantly) established in adolescence. From this point, one needs to establish mature relationships. Similarly family systems theorists emphasize the importance of avoiding enmeshment and codependency (Barnard and Corrales, 1979; Wechter, 1983). Therefore, it is often assumed that people who do not separate their understanding of self and self-needs from their connection with others are having a developmental problem. From these conventional perspectives, people who report spiritual experiences of dissolution of ego boundaries or fusion with the universe are likely to be considered to suffer from a pathological regression to infantile dependency or ego boundary maintenance problems (Freud, 1989).

As Gilligan (1982) and Randour (1987) have pointed out, the theme of autonomy seeking to balance with intimacy is not compatible with the psychological and spiritual experience of many women, who might rather emphasize a developmental theme of connectedness seeking to balance with autonomy. Likewise, Eastern philosophies refute autonomy as a norm. For example, Tu (1989) and Kalton (1988) point out that Confucianist developmental theory views the interdependency of individual identity and community membership to be natural and morally correct. Thus, for an individual to assert his or her own desires in disregard for social commitments would be narcissistic, immoral, and immature. As the anthropologist Hall (1977) observes, community-defined identity (rather than individualist identity) is common beyond Euro-American cultures.

Further, transpersonal theory embraces the mystical assertion that autonomous self-identity itself is a delusion. In Buddhist terms, entities are void, not self-existent. They are marked
by co-origination and co-dissipation. In so far as human beings must deal existentially with the experience of separateness, the ideal is one of harmony and complementarity (including harmony with opposition and conflict). Transpersonal theorists emphasize the risk of narcissism in individualism, whereas the conventional theorists emphasize the risk of pathologic fusion in unitive mystical experiences.

Wilber (1983) criticizes a serious theoretical and therapeutic problem, called the pre/trans fallacy, that emerges from the Freudian heritage of the autonomy assumption. This is the diagnostic error of confusing pre-egoic fusion (e.g. infantile symbiosis) with trans-egoic transpersonal experiences (e.g. unitary consciousness). Conventional developmental theory makes no distinction between these, so it cannot distinguish between a spiritual growth crisis, in which the person breaks through the ego boundary to transpersonal levels of awareness, and a psychotic episode that reflects ego boundary confusion or regression (Bragdon, 1990). Failure to make this distinction can result in the punishment and pathologizing of people who are striving to actualize their fullest human potential. The difficulty of differentiating these types of experiences is compounded by culturally and spiritually variant assumptions about the nature of reality, which often go without examination in clinical diagnostic interviews. However, insights from transpersonal and transcultural studies are being applied in recent efforts to address this challenge (Canda, 1988a).

Ordinary Waking Consciousness as the Standard for Mental Functioning

Conventional developmental theories reveal a bias in favor of ordinary waking consciousness as a standard for normalcy, both by commission of faulty assumptions and by omission of important human behavior information. As the preceding discussion indicated, developmental theories stemming from both Freudian and Piagetian heritages commit the error of assigning so-called altered states of consciousness to irrationality or psychopathology. This seems reflective of a general Western cultural bias, since surveys of world cultures document that most cultures recognize various types of dreams, visions, trance
states, and transcendental modes of consciousness to be normative and extremely important (Achterberg, 1985; Bourguignon, 1976 and 1979; Kleinman, 1980).

Conventional theories also commit the error of omitting these altered states of consciousness from serious consideration. The developmental schemes rarely mention such modes of experience, outside the context of developmental problems. Thus, with regard to these aspects of human experience, the theories are superficial and scant.

Transpersonal research into consciousness has reaffirmed traditional mystical assertions that diverse states of consciousness are available as positive resources for human growth and insight. Research areas include meditation, voluntary control of autonomic functions, psychotropic and psychedelic drug therapy, and crosscultural studies of trance and ritual healing (Grof, 1980; Grof and Halifax, 1977; Keefe, 1986; Lukoff and Lu, 1988; Masters and Houston, 1966; Pelletier and Garfield, 1976; Roberts, 1989; Tart, 1975). Of course, Jung, as a predecessor of contemporary transpersonalism, emphasized the healing and transformational forces inherent in the collective unconscious, as revealed by dreams, visions, and therapeutic techniques such as active imagination (Dalby Clift and Clift, 1984). Another early forerunner of transpersonal psychology, William James (1985), documented a wide variety of growth promoting religious experience.

Grof’s (1988) typology of clinically observed transpersonal experiences include visions that relate symbolically and literally to visionary re-experience of birth as well as transpersonal experiences, such as experiential mergence with other beings, extrasensory perception, contact with spirits and divinity, and cosmic consciousness. In such experiences, it is often difficult to verify by scientific standards whether their internal subjective components are valid. However, this conventional standard of validity is itself questioned by transpersonal theorists. At the very least, these experiences have the status of reality in the psyche (that is, experiential, phenomenological reality) as Jung pointed out. Further, there are externally manifest components of these experiences that can be confirmed, for example, physiological changes as correlates to consciousness change and
psychosocial functioning improvements in response to integra-
tion of peak experiences. Therefore, these experiences deserve
further study as possible strengths and resources to be consid-
ered in social work practice.

Transpersonal theorists make a further refutation of waking
consciousness as a norm on philosophical grounds. As previ-
ously discussed, conventional cognitive theorists usually de-
scribe the cognitive activity of people in the waking state in
dualistic and egoic terms. Yet, transpersonal theorists operate
from a premise that dualistic thinking is limited in usefulness,
and when engaged in exclusively, is deluded. Indeed, to make
dualistic consciousness the norm is to set up prejudices and
barriers against people attaining their highest potential.

Cautions about Transpersonal Theory

Transpersonal theory requires further refinement in order to
become a comprehensive and adequate transcultural perspec-
tive on human behavior. In its present forms, it is most useful
as counterpoint to conventional theory. There are several limi-
tations that need to be considered when using it for social work
purposes.

First, transpersonalists accept many of the assumptions of
conventional developmental models up to the transpersonal lev-
els of development. Their main contention with conventional
theory is that it does not go far enough. Thus, many objections
to conventional theory pertaining to culture, gender, and other
biases apply to transpersonal theory up to the transpersonal
levels (McDonald, 1989).

Second, the structural stage theorists, most prominently
Wilber, use a hierarchical model of stepwise development that
runs the risk of being self-serving. That is, the highest level of at-
tainment coincides with their own views of what is best, most
mature, most civilized, most spiritually aware. Conveniently,
that places everyone who disagrees at a lower level of devel-
opment (Tomecek, 1990). This condescension is very evident in
Wilber's (1982) attempt to apply his theory to social develop-
ment, in which he places shamanistic cultures at a low level of
development. Wilber bases this on allegations that they do not
emphasize unitary consciousness and also that they mistakenly
believe their own psychological projections to be spirit entities. However, in the views of traditional Native American spiritualities, the spirit world is real and has practical importance for daily life (Black Elk and Lyon, 1990; Lame Deer and Erdoes, 1972). It is also the case that "unitary consciousness" is not regarded universally as the epitome of human development; to impose that standard on all people may be a form of religious imperialism.

Third, many transpersonal theorists, such as Wilber and Washburn, base their developmental models primarily on intellectual analysis, interpretations of philosophical texts, and their own spiritual experiences. These are valuable. However, with the exception of clinical case studies, serious systematic empirical research, whether experimental, qualitative or quantitative is in an early stage (Lukoff and Lu, 1988; Lukoff, Zanger, and Lu, 1990). Further research is necessary to overcome the inheritance of theoretical biases from their conventional and philosophical sources. It is also necessary to examine the accuracy and applicability of the models to people of diverse spiritual perspectives and cultural backgrounds.

Fourth, Eastern and Western scientific and philosophical ideas are sometimes mixed together without sufficient regard for their original and precise context-specific meanings. Complex and contrasting Eastern and Western philosophies are sometimes over-simplified. Future work in East/West philosophical dialogue needs to be conducted in order to carefully re-examine the intellectual and mystical bases of transpersonal theory.

Finally, the macro socio-political and ecological implications of transpersonal theory need to be further developed. This has not been a strong emphasis in the transpersonal psychological work, but some work is beginning in the field of psychological theory and ethics (Fox, 1990; Seed, Macy, Fleming, and Ness, 1988).

Implications for Education

In the classroom as well as in scholarly dialogue, conventional and transpersonal theories can be placed in dialectic relation to each other in order to provide breadth and diversity of
perspectives. Developmental models of Wilber, Jung, Washburn, and Grof are easily available and they are having a broad public impact through transpersonal and so-called New Age publications. Students need to be familiar with them as an aspect of popular culture that clients with strong spiritual concerns are likely to be aware of. Students also need to grapple with the challenges transpersonal theory presents to the biases of conventional theory. Further, transpersonal theorists are progressing in an effort to develop assessment standards and helping strategies and techniques that can be applied in clinical practice with persons who deal with transpersonal experiences.

Transpersonal theory challenges students to identify the limits of their understandings of human behavior and to grow beyond them. It raises profound and practical questions regarding the development of spiritually and culturally-sensitive practice (Canda, 1988b). This requires more than just a cataloguing of alternative ideas in the classroom. A comparative method of teaching and dialogue that focuses on existential (not just intellectual) self-clarification and mutual understanding is necessary to explore these limits and their implications for practice (Canda, 1989; Krill, 1990). How do the students' own philosophical, religious, and political views relate to the various developmental theories? How do their own developmental experiences of relationships, cognition, and altered states of consciousness bear on their evaluation of these theories? How can they weave together a usable and coherent conceptual framework for practice, drawing on the insights of diverse models of development?

Implications for Philosophical Innovation

Transpersonal theory can facilitate current philosophical efforts to develop meaningful alternatives to positivistic and reductionist thinking in social work. Transpersonal theory counters the egocentrism of developmental theories that assume the individual is the primary unit for understanding of human behavior. It counters the ethnocentrism of developmental theories that are limited to linear thinking and dichotomous conceptual categories.
Current social work philosophical writings emphasize the importance of holistic understandings of human behavior (Imbrogno and Canda, 1988; Imre, 1984; Saleebey, 1989; Weick 1987 and 1990; Weick, et al., 1989.). From the transpersonal view, this is a significant advance beyond reductionist understandings. However, while these versions of holism transcend reductionism, they rarely consider options beyond dualism. Hence scholarly debates occur from opposite sides of polarities: positivist versus postpositivist; atomistic versus holistic; quantitative versus qualitative; absolutist versus deconstructionist; male voice versus female voice; strengths perspective versus problem focus. The transpersonal perspective offers many insights that support efforts to reconcile these opposites. It also suggests many non-Western philosophical perspectives that have long existed as viable alternatives to reductionism and dualism.

Transpersonal theory also challenges philosophical and empirical inquiry to extend beyond a focus on processes, patterns, and relationships between individuals and the external social environment. Holistic understanding of human behavior needs to include the inner realms of experience, such as the phenomenology of consciousness, as well as the mutual interdependency between human consciousness and the external environment. Further, social work philosophy needs to begin considering the implications of nondualistic consciousness. It may be worth examining the claims of current transpersonal theory, and many mystical traditions, that unitary consciousness is the foundation for reconciling dichotomies, including the dichotomy between philosophy and service (Patel, 1987).

In summary, transpersonal theory attempts to synthesize insights from Eastern and Western philosophical and scientific perspectives in order to present an holistic and nondualistic understanding of human development. Its contrast to conventional American social work assumptions poses major challenges for teaching, philosophizing, and practice. Perhaps an exploration of its insights and limitations can assist philosophers of social work to transcend the dichotomous thinking that remains from the positivist/materialist heritage.
References


East/West Synthesis


Notes

1. Both Kohlberg and Fowler speculate on the possibility of people transcending dualistic moral thinking and achieving an awareness merged with God or the universe. Fowler also believes in the possibility of God intervening in the developmental process at any time. Kohlberg and Fowler regard nondualistic consciousness as very rare. Since this transpersonal aspect of their theories is barely addressed in social work literature, this discussion does not examine it. For example, see the accounts of human development in the recent texts by Longres (1990) and Pillari (1988).
LETTERS

WHEN IS STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE MEANINGFUL?: A COMMENT ON WEINBACH.

Robert Weinbach (1989), in the March issue of the *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, published a paper which aimed to guide professionals not entirely au fait with statistical analysis as to the meaning, in practical terms, of "statistical significance".

In his article Weinbach cautions that although research findings may be statistically significant, one must be able to assess "whether a finding is of sufficient importance to incorporate into one's everyday decision making . . . whether a statistically significant relationship between variables is meaningful for them" (p. 32), and later that "a statistically significant relationship is a mathematical determination based upon nothing more than the laws of objective probability" (p. 33).

In response, it is my contention that objectivity is the foundation of scientific enquiry. The idea of statistical analysis of data is to provide an *objective* method of evaluating that data. A statistically significant result indicates that the relationship between two variables is a powerful relationship attributable to more than mere chance. A relationship between variables is either statistically significant or it is not — there is no place for subjective interpretation in scientific analysis. If you disregard the objectivity of scientific analysis in favour of subjective interpretation then where does science have a place?

Weinbach later provides an example of making a decision on whether to implement a new treatment approach (p. 35) and discusses the concepts of "importance" and "relevance" of research findings for particular agencies. Personal interpretation of importance and relevance is fine and naturally one will consider the many practicalities of implementing new procedures. This practical evaluation, however, should not cloud the fact that a statistically significant finding in a well-controlled study is precisely what the name suggests — significant. It is important that the issue is not confused — subjective consideration of importance, relevance and applicability is commonsense, but does not take away from the significance of the objective finding.
(the statistically significant finding) regardless of whether one decides to apply these findings. Therefore, a statistically significant finding is powerful enough to potentially be applied to any agency, but the individual agency will decide whether it has relevance and applicability for them depending on the nature of the research (a statistically significant relationship between two variables in animal behavior research will likely have little direct relevance in human services, yet this does not delete from the strength of the relationship between the variables studied).

Another point made by Weinbach (p. 36) is that "a relationship between variables can easily be significant with large samples". This is so and is because a finding that is consistently found within a large sample of people is more reliable than that found in a small sample as it is a more reliable representation of the situation among the population as a whole. An additional related point that should be made is that statistically significant relationships yielded with small samples are generally even more significant (and reliable) with large samples.

Weinbach rightly suggests that practitioners should have access to details such as sample size, percentage differences and correlational values from published research. To the author's knowledge, very few refereed journals claiming to publish scientific material would publish research reports without including (or offering access to) such vital information.

Finally, Weinbach states the obvious (p. 37): "Research utilization occurs best when it entails a practical mix of knowledge of the scientific method and sound practice judgement." — naturally!

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A RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR MCGUIRE’S COMMENTS

Apparently, my reference to “nothing more than the laws of objective probability” in my March, 1989 article provoked a response of concern from Professor McGuire. I will not argue against objectivity as an important characteristic of science and did not do so in my article. However, I will again assert that such factors as practice experience (which is largely subjective) must have a place in the decision as to whether statistically significant relationships between variables are worthy of implementation and, in some cases, even of publication.

The point that I was making, that we sometimes make too much of statistical significance and fail to recognize its limits, is illustrated by McGuire’s letter. He states that “A statistically significant result indicates that the relationship between two variables is a powerful relationship attributable to more than mere chance.” Not necessarily! First of all, statistical significance and the strength of a relationship between variables are quite different matters. For example, reference to a table of the critical values of $r$ will show that, with a sample size of 92, statistical significance at the .05 level (one-tailed) can be achieved if the actual correlation is only .1638. In this example, less than three percent of the variation in one variable can be attributed to the variation in the other ($r^2$). That is not a powerful relationship between the variables. Is it truly “significant” i.e., important or substantive in a scientific sense? Probably not. Surely, other relevant variables must exist which would correlate more strongly with either variable. Other statistical tests and other data could illustrate the same point.

Use of overly powerful (as in “statistical power”) methods of data analysis (most frequently by the use of a sample that is excessively large) can mistakenly lead one to jump to the conclusion that a finding is truly “significant” just because statistical significance can be demonstrated. A sample can be “too large” for a given test; its use can produce erroneous conclusions, unless a researcher clearly understands the meaning and limitations of statistical significance.
Statistical significance suggests only that one is reasonably safe (95% so in the case of .05) in rejecting the null hypothesis and in concluding that variables are truly related within the population from which a sample was drawn. An apparent relationship between the variables is likely to be the work of chance. It does not, however, say anything about the strength of the relationship between them. A misunderstanding of this fact can lead one to erroneous conclusions. One sometimes seen in the literature goes something like this:

"A statistically significant relationship at the .05 level was found between variables A and B. Statistical significance at the .01 level was demonstrated between variables A and C. The researcher notes that the relationship between A and C is five times as strong as the relationship between A and B."

No! The researcher has learned that both relationships are probably real ones within the population. Also, he or she is five times more likely to make a Type I error in concluding that A and B are related than in concluding that A and C are related. That is all that can safely be said.

It also should be noted that other factors, most notably measurement bias and the effects of other variables can produce a statistically significant relationship when, in fact, variables really are unrelated within the population. McGuire acknowledges the importance of addressing these factors in his reference to "a well-controlled study." But his conclusion that "a statistically significant finding in a well-controlled study is precisely what the name suggests — significant" goes too far. A finding of statistical significance may or may not be suggestive of a relationship between variables that is "powerful enough to potentially be applied to any agency" as he states. Statistically significant relationships, as I have noted and illustrated, can be quite weak.

Finally, my experience with the professional literature (mainly American, social work) suggests that many professional journals either do not receive or have a tendency to edit out critical methodological description such as percentage differences and actual correlation values. Obviously, Professor McGuire’s experience has been quite different. Perhaps, some cultural or
semantic differences also may help to explain our disagreement around the meaning of the word significant and its relationship (or non-relationship) to statistical significance. I appreciate his interest in my article and the opportunity to further expand on the points that I was attempting to make.

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ERRATA

A number of typographical errors appeared in the article written by Uri Aviram entitled "Mental Health Policy and Programs in Israel: Trends and Problems of a Developing System." *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, XVIII, (2), pp. 89-126. The errors are not the fault of the author and the Journal takes responsibility for them.

2. P. 95, paragraph 3, line 3: Substitute members for member.
3. P. 97, Table 1, row pertaining to First Admissions. See Table 1 included in Errata.
5. P. 99, line 6: Substitute was for were.
6. P. 102, second paragraph, line 12: Substitute vary for varies.
7. P. 103, line 1: Substitute show for shows.
8. P. 104, line 4: Delete;
9. P. 105, line 1: Insert be . . . other approaches seem to be expanding.
10. P. 105, third paragraph, line one: Substitute was for were.
11. P. 107, footnotes in tables: ²In addition, 6 clinics’ branches; ³In addition, 2 clinics’ branches; and 1st line after the Table: Substitute was for were. The sentence should be: The total number of beds was.
12. P. 110, line one: Substitute modes for mode.
13. P. 111, line 4: The word national should be capitalized—National Insurance Institute.
14. P. 111, line 5: Mental Health Services of the Ministry of Health; line 16 from bottom: Substitute Mental for National. The sentence: The interest and activities of the Mental Health Services.
15. P. 116, (TABLE 6). For the item Psychiatric hospitals insert (+) in front of 3.4%. Should be (+) 3.4%.
16. P. 119, section subhead: Dominance of the Mental Hospital in Inpatient Services. should be . . . and Inpatient Services.
17. P. 120, third paragraph, line 6: Substitute They for The.
18. P. 121, line 12: Insert of in ...structure of the mental health...
19. P. 122, second paragraph, line 4: Substitute are for is.
### Table 1

**Inpatients and Day Patients in Psychiatric Care Facilities in Israel: Numbers and Rates of Resident Patients and Admissions in Selected Years: 1948–1988**

<table>
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<td><strong>Absolute numbers</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Inpatients</td>
<td>1197</td>
<td>4188</td>
<td>8038</td>
<td>8925</td>
<td>7036</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day Patients</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>896</td>
<td>1220</td>
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<td><strong>During the year</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Admissions for Inpatient Care</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>10577</td>
<td>12995</td>
<td>11035</td>
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<td>Readmissions</td>
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<td>2026</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>8139</td>
<td>8102</td>
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<td><strong>Rates per 1000 population</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Inpatients</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
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<tr>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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</table>


2 From 1970 numbers do not include mentally retarded.

3 Some figures are based on estimates.

4 Some figures are based on estimates.

climb and peaked in 1978, with close to 9000 resident patients. By the end of 1988, the number dropped roughly 20% (7000). There is a similar trend of decline in the number of psychiatric beds. The trend of decline was a modest one at the beginning of the period, accelerating to an average of 4% decline per year.
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SPECIAL ISSUES OF JSSW FOR THE CLASSROOM

PROSPECTS FOR WELFARE REFORM
VOLUME XVI, NUMBER 2, JUNE, 1989

This Special Issue should be very useful in undergraduate or graduate courses dealing with Social Policy, Inequality, Poverty and Income Maintenance. It contains eleven articles and a book review which provide historical background to the present welfare situation, criticism from several political perspectives, and case studies on particular welfare problems. The authors represent a wide range of disciplines: Economics, Political Science, History, Sociology, and Social Work.

THE TRULY DISADVANTAGED: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS
Volume XVI, Number 4, December, 1989

Everyone concerned with poverty, inequality, and racism in the United States must deal with the work of William Julius Wilson. There is no scholarly work more central to our debates about the creation of the "underclass" than Wilson's book The Truly Disadvantaged. His bold analysis and policy recommendations have commanded widespread attention.

Robert Newby has assembled an impressive group of scholars to offer a comprehensive appreciation and critique of Wilson's work. The Special Issue includes contributions from Andrew Billingsley, Edna Bonacich, Carole Marks, Bonnie Thornton Dill, Ralph Gomes and Walda Katz Fishman, Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven, James Geschwender, and a response by Wilson himself. It is the best single source of analysis of Wilson's research and policy recommendations so far available, and has been adopted for classroom use at institutions such as Bryn Mawr College, Georgia State University, and SUNY-Plattsburg.
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*** THANK YOU ***
INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUTHORS
(Revised December, 1987)

JSSW welcomes a broad range of articles which analyze social welfare institutions, policies, or problems from a social scientific perspective or otherwise attempt to bridge the gap between social science theory and social work practice.

Submission Process. Submit manuscripts to Robert D. Leighninger, Jr., School of Social Work, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 49008. Send four copies together with an abstract of approximately 100 words. Include a stamped, self-addressed postcard if you wish acknowledgement of receipt. Since manuscripts are not returned by reviewers to the editorial office, the editorial office cannot return them to authors. Submission certifies that it is an original article and that it has not been published nor is being considered for publication elsewhere.

Reviewing normally takes 60 days but can take longer in the event of split recommendations. Things move more slowly at the end of semesters and during the summer. Authors should feel free to write or call the editor if they feel an undue amount of time has elapsed.

Preparation. Articles should be typed, doublespaced (including the abstract, indented material, footnotes, references, and tables) on 8 1/2 x 11 inch white bond paper with one inch margins on all sides.

Anonymous Review. To facilitate anonymous review, please keep identifying information out of the manuscript. Only the title should appear on the first page. Attach two cover pages that contain the title, authors, affiliations, date of submission, mailing address, telephone number and any statements of credit or research support.

Style. Overall style should conform to that found in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Third Edition, 1983. Use in-text citations (Reich, 1983). (Reich, 1983, p.5). The use of footnotes in the text is discouraged. If footnotes are essential, include them on a separate sheet after the last page of the references. The use of italics or quotation marks for emphasis is discouraged. Words should be underlined only when it is intended that they be typeset in italics.

Gender and Disability Stereotypes. We encourage authors to avoid gender restricting phrasing and unnecessary masculine pronouns. Use of plural pronouns and truly generic nouns ("labor force" instead of "manpower") will usually solve the problem without extra space or awkwardness. When dealing with disabilities, avoid making people synonymous with the disability they have ("employees with visual impairments" rather than "the blind"). Don't magnify the disabling condition ("wheelchair user" rather than "confined to a wheelchair"). For further suggestions see the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association or Guide to Non-Sexist Language and Visuals, University of Wisconsin-Extension.

Processing Fee. The increased cost of typesetting has made it necessary to charge a processing fee of $35 to authors who are accepted for publication. You will be billed at the time of acceptance.

BOOK REVIEWS

Books for review should be sent to Shimon Gottschalk, School of Social Work, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida 32306.