WOMEN IN WELFARE EDUCATION
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It is ten years since the idea for the WIWE Journal was conceived, and eight years since the first edition appeared. We would like to thank all the women who have contributed over the past decade – previous members of the editorial committee, contributors and reviewers. The current issue provides an interesting insight into issues that are currently of great interest to welfare professionals as we settle into the 21st Century. A clear focus on self-reflection and analysis of our practice whether that be teaching, clinical, research or community development emerges from the collection assembled here. We start with a work that focuses on how social group work skills are learnt. Susan Gair and Rosemary Frangos place this issue in the context of changed content delivery modes and an acknowledgement of cultural diversity in helping styles. The authors reflect on how such skills can be taught in a way that is flexible, respectful, inclusive and relevant to North Queensland’s Indigenous student body and community.

In a substantial piece of research Jane Maidment further reflects on issues of teaching, this time in field practica. She describes the process undertaken to develop a framework which could assist teachers to understand and teach in the varied and unpredictable environments of field placements. The need to continually reflect on how teaching and learning occurs in the field is emphasized. The article following, by Cooper and Crisp, also tackles an issue concerned with learning in field education. The contribution of gender to placement outcomes is explored in a way which brings up the need for self-reflection and social constructions of masculinity. Such questions are of great interest to predominantly female professions.

Joanna Zubrzycki further explores the theme of what we bring to our work settings in a thoughtful article. Situating the issue not in education but in practice, the contribution of the critical use of self is explored. In particular the experience of being a parent is examined for its contribution to practice. Critical use of self is seen as aiding both practice and parenting in the self-reflexive practitioner. Nonie Harris explores the issue of the reflexive research practitioner in the context of researching with friends. Again the findings presented here reveal that practitioners do not quarantine off the ‘professional’ part of themselves, but that roles and experiences intersect and inform each other, this is particularly the case when an existing relationship pre-dates a professional one. This interesting work has far reaching implications for many practice situations.

The first contribution to the ‘Practice Notes’ section by Eileen Pittaway very firmly places social work practice in the here and now, dealing with the resettlement needs of refugees in Australia today. This paper returns us to some of the issues raised in the first article in this collection concerning the need to practice in ways which are respectful, inclusive and acknowledging of cultural diversity. Michele Harris and Ava Pauchard have written about their experience in running groups with women who have presented at mental health services. They have grappled with the challenge of the shifts in mental health orientation over the past decade and have challenged the bio-medical model of individual pathology by using a strengths based approach to empower women. Genevieve Rankin is an educator and committed activist with a longstanding involvement in opposing the nuclear reactor at Lucas Heights. In reminding us of the history of the reactor she also alerts us to the challenge to our rights of a facility which has both short and long term implications for the environment. Possibly more important however is that she brings up the question of the civil and political rights we have as citizens to resist government decisions which, in light of repeated evidence and public opposition are judged to be bad. She leaves us with a challenge, which daily confronts the activist practitioner, ‘what can you do’? Finally, as usual the Journal offers reviews of three recent texts of relevance to welfare professionals.
We would like to invite your continued support and contributions to maintain a quality publication which promotes the voices of women involved in welfare education.

Karen Heycox
Natalie Bolzan
Lesley Hughes
Fran Waugh
HONING SKILLS: AN EVOLVING MODEL FOR TEACHING WELFARE ‘SKILLS’ APPROPRIATE TO THE NORTH QUEENSLAND CONTEXT

Susan Gair and Rosemary Frangos

Abstract

Teaching interpersonal and group work skills has been an evolving process for the authors. Over several years we have recalled and reflected upon our experiences of teaching “skills” to on-campus and distance education student groups. Through this reflective process we sought to develop better ways of facilitating all students’ learning of relevant practice skills. Key components we wanted to see incorporated in our future “skills” teaching were i) use of flexibility in teaching modes to maximise opportunities for all students to learn appropriate skills for practice and ii) more emphasis on Indigenous helping styles in order that the skills curriculum was inclusive, respectful, and more relevant to North Queensland’s Indigenous student body and communities. This paper discusses the development and implementation of a model for ‘on and off-campus study’ that has served to progress this quest.

Our contexts - political, economic and cultural- as always, influence how we conceptualise our challenges and the ways in which we might act: how we structure our educational programs … how we teach our material and the content we focus on. (Fook, Jones and Ryan 2000,1)

To go beyond the tokenism that presently exists, every welfare/social work educator must begin to critically examine their own courses. (Lynn, Pye, Atkinson and Peyton-Smith 1990, 82)

Introduction

The authors have been involved in the teaching of interpersonal and group work practice skills to distance education (DE) and on-campus students for over a decade. In recent years we have reviewed, in an ongoing, informal way, both the content of the core skills subject in which we teach, and the advantages and disadvantages of the different modes in which it is taught. We were committed to facilitating rich learning for all students and to the acquisition of relevant skills for social work and welfare practice, particularly in the North Queensland and the broader Australian context. Critical reflection (Fook 1999, Lewis, 1998) upon the content of our teaching enabled us to admit that it reflected a narrow, culturally-biased view of relevant skills for practice, somewhat at odds with the cultural and socio-political analysis evident elsewhere in our programs.

Authors:

Susan Gair is a lecturer in the School of Social Work and Community Welfare, James Cook University, North Queensland, 4811. Australia. Tel 0747814892. Email: Susan.Gair@jcu.edu.au
Rosemary Frangos is a lecturer in the School of Social Work and Community Welfare, James Cook University, 4811, Australia. Email: Rosemary.Frangos@jcu.edu.au
We sought change for several purposes. With regard to the political context, we were operating
within a managerialist, economic rationalist climate, currently consuming higher education and,
which had translated into almost daily pressure on staff to use flexible, effective and efficient
means of education delivery (Davis, George and Napier, 1996). Notwithstanding the above, we
wanted a skills curriculum which facilitated enriched learning and which was more inclusive of,
more respectful of, and more meaningful to North Queensland’s Indigenous student body and
communities.

Appropriate, meaningful student learning was the outcome sought from this shared review
process. We were committed to the task and, upon reflection, we consider that we possessed
complementary skills which have assisted us to effect change through our collegial reflective
work together. We have been involved in teaching the ‘skills’ strand for over ten years. We both
have post-graduate qualifications in tertiary teaching. We are both non-Indigenous academic
women.

Context

The School offers two degree programs with a common first two years, followed by specialist
derg degree focus, across three campuses and one degree program (and the School is developing a
second) by distance education. Students in our degree programs are predominantly non-
Indigenous women and this may not be dissimilar to student bodies in other Australian welfare
studies programs (Lewis 1998; McCormack 2001). Across the three campuses a number of
subjects are taught in flexible delivery which is defined here as teaching with supplied materials
and on-campus tutorial support. The second year practice subject, Practice for Social Justice,
is a large subject which currently has two separate strands; a ‘values and ethics’ strand and a
‘skills’ strand. It is the “skills” strand which is the topic of this article. The skills strand
encompasses interpersonal communication and group work skills.

For many years the skills strand had been taught on-campus in a “weekly lecture plus weekly
tutorials” mode across two campuses. The distance education (DE) program involved the
students receiving printed material and attending a compulsory block-mode on-campus
workshop in Townsville for 6-8 days. The format of these workshops included lectures and
tutorials for individual skills and group dynamics. All modes incorporate experiential learning
as core practice for teaching helping skills (Tyson 1998).

Reflecting on our ‘skills’ teaching for improved learning

Newble and Cannon (1995) write that university teachers should be progressively evaluating
what they are doing and how the course design and plans are working out in practice. With
reference to social welfare educators, Fook (1999) and others call for critical reflection and the
development and implementation of inclusive practices (Lewis 1998; Lynn, Pye, Atkinson and
Peyton-Smith 1990). Regarding skills, Grace and Egan (1998,2) assert that
teaching practice skills has received very little direct attention in the literature,
apparently dragged along in the slipstream of the broader challenges and changes to
social work and social work education.

In 1998, during one of our staff reflecting/debriefing sessions, after a DE skills workshop, we
were reflecting upon our own teaching and learning from the workshop. We considered factors
such as the objectives, context, content, presentation and delivery, processes, and outcomes of
the skills component and the workshop (Newble and Cannon 1995,.88,89) and we compared the
workshop teaching experience to the weekly on-campus experience. What seemed most evident
to us was that DE students seemed to demonstrate enhanced student learning, when we
compared this teaching experience to the weekly on-campus experience.
One ready explanation for this difference was the workplace practice experience and abilities of many DE students. Yet we felt unconvinced that this provided a total explanation for differences between DE and on-campus students. We speculated that the DE model of a block workshop, plus printed materials supplied for workshop preparation, provided a unique, rich, intensive learning environment not duplicated in the weekly on-campus class format.

**Development and implementation of a new, trial model**

In 1999, we secured agreement from our Head of School and our colleagues to trial the DE mode of study for on-campus, Townsville and Mackay students enrolled in the skills subject. We experimented with this model over the following three years. The change of mode was particularly expedient at this time as this subject was offered for the first time to students at a satellite campus (Mackay) and it facilitated increased coherence of the subject between campuses.

Students were instructed to work independently through two workbooks developed by one of the authors (Rosemary). Information and exercises were drawn from a range of sources, primarily *Murri Way!* (Lynn, Thorpe, Miles, Cutts, Butcher and Ford 1998, discussed below), *Basic Personal Counselling* (Geldard 1998) and *Working With Groups* (Tyson 1998) which were set texts. Specific pre-workshop assessment was introduced in the form of assessable exercises in the workbooks to assist on-campus students who may be unfamiliar with independent study to prepare for the block workshop.

Two compulsory three-day block workshops were offered in Townsville and Mackay in the lecture recess and at the end of semester; one for group skills and one for individual skills. Further assessment was linked to these workshops. It included students videoing a role play demonstration of individual skills and completing an associated process report, which had been reintroduced into the assessment. Further assessment included writing reflective journals based on the group work component of the workshop. Journals had been an enduring component of the assessment of this subject. The workshops contained a mixture of lecture material, structured experiential exercises and supervised practice sessions. Student feedback was gathered at the conclusion of each workshop through an anonymous feedback questionnaire and a group discussion - the latter allowed for quite detailed expansion of students’ opinions.

This new model was moderately successful and student feedback was invaluable and encouraging. Students were positive about their experience of learning skills in this block mode and staff observation of student skill development was favourable. The timing and length of the workshops were sources of dissatisfaction for students. Students did not like the workshop in lecture recess however, on campus timetabling restricted room access at other times. There also was criticism about the amount of assessment, and the presentation of lecture material in the workshops which was considered to be too late to be appropriately utilised.

Noting these reservations we persevered with the same model the following year. We considered that it might take time for a different model of subject delivery to be accepted by students. However the workbook was modified into one volume to reduce a seemingly onerous workload for staff and students. We remained keen to continue with our process of reflection, development, implementation and review, in order to provide the most effective learning environment for students that we could provide. Reflecting on the second trial we acknowledged that student feedback about the late delivery of lecture material was pertinent, and together with our own observations about students’ engagement with the material, it indicated that a blend of “on and off-campus” study may well be most appropriate for our on-campus student group, rather than the DE model we had implemented in its entirety.

Consequently, in 2001, the model became eight weeks of on-campus lectures, one workbook supplied for students to work through during this time, and one intensive block workshop of four
days on completion of the lecture series. The workshop was entirely experiential and divided between individual and groupwork skills. Feedback from students and our own observations were united in assessing that this was the most successful model of teaching the ‘skills’ strand of the years we had been involved in teaching it.

While maintaining this approach with on-campus students, the challenge for 2002 is to make some modifications to the previous DE model, bringing it into line with our most successful model to date (as discussed above). A web-based weekly lecture program is being developed which will promote gradual assimilation of knowledge and allow future DE workshops to be entirely experientially based.

One bonus for students is that the flexible approach to delivering this subject at two campuses and in internal and external modes has produced some choice of workshop location for students living across the region.

Existing alongside and incorporated within this process, although discussed separately in this article, was the second aspect of our quest; to be more inclusive in our curriculum and more respectful of Indigenous ways of working, that is, to “Indigenise” our curriculum. In this quest we recognise there is not one definitive way of working. An associated recognition was the need to “Australianise” our curriculum (Brown 1988,12) through the use of Australian rather than imported resources and this is an ongoing parallel quest. After critically reflecting on the “skills” content of our teaching, it seemed most relevant, indeed imperative to us, that we undertake curriculum development which would enable us as teaching staff to move further away from a mono-cultural social welfare skills curriculum (Dominelli 1997, Galloway 1993) toward one which would “value Aboriginal and Islander and other marginal groups’ cultural resources and material experiences” (Nakata and Muspratt 1994, cited in Lynn, Thorpe, Miles, Cutts, Butcher and Ford 1998,83). We wanted to work towards a model which was more appropriate for Indigenous students and more relevant for all graduates entering the North Queensland community.

More centralised Indigenous content? : Considering the literature

We were interested in addressing locally what appeared to be a widespread deficit in national social welfare curricula. One of the authors (Susan) had attended a national direct practice skills workshop for social welfare educators in late 1998 in Melbourne which further highlighted for her the inadequacies in social work curriculum regarding Indigenous-appropriate subject content. Available literature offered a clear direction for change.

Authors of the unique, local publication Murri Way! (Lynn, Thorpe, Miles, Cutts, Butcher and Ford 1998) assert that while Australian tertiary education policies now actively encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in tertiary institutions, curricula of social welfare courses “strongly reflect(s) the models and value base of western society” (Lynn et al. 1998,1). Further, Lynn (2001,906) writes that “the amount of attention given to Indigenous practice in social work education and writing would suggest that it is at best perceived as marginal to the profession”.

Specifically, with regard to skills, Jessup and Rogerson (1999,168) assert that prevailing humanist approaches (‘applies … also to radical humanist [as opposed to poststructuralist] feminist and Marxist approaches’) “are based on the notion of a self-contained unified subject” (1999,168). This is contrary to our knowledge of Indigenous understandings. Further, they claim that skills are instruments of knowledge and that skills taught from a humanist body of knowledge “excluded other knowledge” (p171). Such a position (humanist) has been considered in the past to be ‘a-theoretical’ and ‘a-political’ (Fraser and Strong 2000,35).
Lynn, Pye, Atkinson and Peyton-Smith (1990, 78, 82) call for every welfare/social work educator to “critically examine” their courses and teaching and the methodology and skills of welfare/social work. In particular, Atkinson and Peyton-Smith ask “How are we to design a program which will work for Aboriginals and also operate effectively in a white society?” (Lynn, Pye, Atkinson and Peyton-Smith 1990, 84). They argue that “it is not acceptable to assume they (Indigenous graduates) will only be employed by black agencies” and they offer the view that both black and white perspectives must be incorporated into the course (1990, 85).

**Incorporating Indigenous content as core content**

*Murri Way!* is a publication based on North Queensland research which identifies specific local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helping styles. In 1999 when the first workbooks were in the planning stages, we decided to incorporate *Murri Way!* as central content in the skills strand and the workbooks were developed around this key publication. This content has remained central throughout this process of subject evolution and it seems to be a unique component of the skills strand we teach, as recognised by the 2001 AASW Accreditation Panel.

Regarding the delivery of the workshop content, we were committed to engaging Indigenous teaching staff in the experiential workshops wherever possible. Over the past several years there has been no full time Indigenous teaching staff in our School. Our interim strategies to counter this major deficit in our teaching staff have included employing a sessional Indigenous teaching staff member and implementing a revolving group format within the workshops. This has ensured that all students have been exposed to the Indigenous worker in the process of learning interpersonal and group skills for social work and welfare practice. Indigenous staff used a combination of experiential exercises including a consciousness-raising exercise based on storytelling and feminist ideology and video and personal demonstration of Indigenous styles of working. It seemed to us that employing Indigenous staff and including Indigenous content not only respects Indigenous styles of helping but alerts non-Indigenous students to culturally appropriate ways of working in North Queensland.

**Conclusion**

As non-Indigenous academic women with experience in teaching skills for welfare practice to a predominantly non-Indigenous, female student group in North Queensland we had a two-fold purpose informing the ongoing development of the skills subject. Firstly, we were seeking to use our past experience and critical reflection upon our own teaching to inform a new model of teaching “skills” to on-campus students. We sought to maximise opportunities for all students to learn relevant practice skills for the North Queensland context in a rich learning environment. Secondly, we wanted to move away from a mono-cultural approach to teaching skills to one more inclusive of, more respectful of, and more relevant to North Queensland’s Indigenous student body and communities. Overall, this is an ongoing process, where reflection and Indigenous and non-Indigenous student feedback will continue to guide our critical, reflective, tertiary teaching practices.
References


TOWARDS ENHANCEMENT OF PRACTICUM TEACHING AND LEARNING: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK TO INFORM SOCIAL WORK FIELD EDUCATION

Jane Maidment

Abstract
During 1996 eighty social work students and 130 field educators from New Zealand were surveyed about their experiences of the teaching during students’ first field placements. The sample was drawn from three schools of social work facilitating student placements with clients across nine broad types of client services. Ten percent of the total student and field educator sample were later interviewed about these experiences and the findings related to this research have been reported elsewhere (Maidment, 2000; 1999). During the course of conducting the research it became apparent that the practicum component of social work education was somewhat bereft of learning theory that could be specifically used to understand the unpredictable and varied nature of field education and the complexity of the student/supervisor relationship. Hence the development of a conceptual framework to both guide the research and later explain the findings on field teaching and learning became a major focus of the research. The following article traces the process used to develop a framework to understand the diverse nature of practicum education.

Introduction
This article is divided into three sections. It begins by reviewing the literature on experiential learning and learning in context as it applies to the practicum. Next, the process and rationale used to develop the theoretical foundations on which the field education research was based is explained. Finally, in light of the research results, ‘Towards enhancement of practicum teaching and learning’ is explained. This framework represents the synthesis of principles embedded in learning theory that in turn were reconceptualised in light of the experiences of students and educators in the field.

A review of learning theory as it relates to the practicum
Understanding the nature of experiential learning appeared to be the most obvious point to begin in terms of theorising practicum teaching and learning. Definitions of experiential learning include, “learning from experience or learning by doing” (Lewis and Williams, 1994, 5) where “learning focuses on authentic learning experiences as the necessary basis for meaningful skill acquisition and human development” (Jackson and MacIsaac, 1994, 22). Not surprisingly, the concept of ‘situated cognition’ is therefore integral to experiential learning, where “cognition is a social activity that incorporates the mind, the body, the activity, and the ingredients of the setting in a complex and interactive and recursive manner” (Wilson, 1993, 72).

Author:
Jane Maidment is a lecturer in the School of Social Inquiry, Deakin University, Pigdons Rd, Waurn Ponds, Victoria, 3217, Australia. Tel: 035227 2892. Email: jmmaidment@deakin.edu.au
The most formative writing on experiential education appeared early this century in the work of John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (1938), provided the rationale for out-of-classroom learning with an emphasis on using students’ past and current experiences to derive knowledge and develop skills in problem solving (Cranton, 1992). Other key concepts in Dewey’s work included an emphasis on democracy to promote quality human experiences, and the notion of continuity in knowledge development. In this context, ‘continuity’ refers to a process whereby past and current experiences are integrated and serve to prepare students for later experiential encounters, resulting in deeper and more meaningful learning encounters (Burns, 1995). From this perspective, education is therefore considered a lifelong social process, rather than a series of isolated, unconnected events.

Clearly the philosophical foundations of Dewey’s ideas are akin to a humanist approach to education. In keeping with this tradition student learning is legitimated both by using objective reasoning and by reflecting upon emotional responses to experiences (Crosby, 1995). Although Dewey’s original work was not focused on adult learning, the notions of using direct experience to facilitate learning and drawing on student past experiences as a resource for learning, are principles firmly embedded in adult education (Cranton, 1992). Not surprisingly then, experiential learning and adult education have a number of value positions in common. Both paradigms acknowledge the need for educational endeavours to be relevant to the learner, use activities adapted to suit individual learning styles, and promote student self-directed learning, where the ‘teacher’ performs more as a facilitator, coach or mentor.

More recently, the work of Donald Schön has provided an alternative frame of reference for understanding learning in applied disciplines (Schön, 1983; 1987). In particular, Schön challenges the imposition of theoretical paradigms to explain practice, using instead the term ‘professional artistry’ to articulate the process of decision making in practice (Schön, 1987, 22). He argues that it is through an amalgam of knowledge gained from past experiences, theory, and intuition, that workers make spontaneous decisions. This decision-making process cannot be explicitly attributed to any set of practice rules or guidelines. He maintains that workers use a process of ‘reflection-in-action’ where responses to new or unexpected situations are shaped on the spot by workers drawing from knowledge and past experiences. (Schön, 1983, 49-69). In this way, Schön argues, decision making in practice is not so much guided by positivist constructions of knowledge and theory, but rather through a blend of experience, knowledge, ideas and intuition. This paradigm was of particular significance for investigating the ways field educators’ work, in terms of understanding skill development and knowledge transmission in the field.

**Learning Theory and Social Work**

Social work has traditionally incorporated a practicum component in student education where ‘learning by doing’ has been the norm (Wijnberg and Schwartz, 1977). Using genuine practice experience has been the basis for learning in both the early ‘apprenticeship model’ of field education, and current practicum education, which also emphasises the use of critical reflection (Fook, 1999; Gould and Taylor, 1996). The difference between these approaches has been in the way the student and educator interact and use the experiences to learn. Whereas the apprenticeship model was focused on the student completing sets of tasks in the field in a way that was largely directed by the supervisor, current models of field education place emphasis on a collaborative relationship. Both the educator and student plan field experiences that will fulfil individual student learning needs and provide opportunities for critical reflection (Taylor, 1996).
Although the use of genuine experience is incorporated into both models, the process used to facilitate student learning differs. In particular, early ‘apprenticeship’ field education was not conducted in a way that reflected the democratic principles of experiential learning.

Considerable academic attention has been given to how experiential learning theory can inform professional education across a range of disciplines, including social work (Raschick et al., 1998; Cavanagh et al., 1995; Svinicki and Dixon, 1987). Applying an experiential approach to field education involves using methods such as structured observations of social work practice, audio and videotaping of student practice, student and field educator working together, and student presentations (AASWWE, 1991; Davenport and Davenport, 1988). In addition, inductive learning can be aided through the use of journals, concept maps, critical incident analyses, autobiographical work (Boud and Knights, 1996); role plays, simulations, and the making and analysis of process recordings (Papell and Skolnik, 1992). The aim of these methods is to facilitate student reflection on alternative views and assessments of situations, making professional judgements, and generating informed decisions.

However, on its own experiential learning theory did not adequately explain the opportunities to enhance or inhibit learning opportunities in the field. This research on field education needed to take account also of the impact made by micro and macro contextual influences on the experiences of both learner and educator during the placement. In order to incorporate an understanding of these influences on the learning transaction it was necessary to consider models of learning that accounted for the context in which the learning occurred.

**Situating Learning in Context**

While considerable attention has been paid to creating physical environments conducive to the enhancement of adult student learning (Vosko and Hiemstra, 1988; Fulton, 1991), and to the notion of self-directed learning (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991), the social context in which adult learning takes place has largely been ignored (Brookfield, 1984; Boud and Walker, 1998). Walker and Boud account for the impact of context on the teaching and learning transaction in their model illustrated in Figure 1 below.

![Figure 1. Influence of Context on Teaching and Learning](image-url)
Boud and Walker (1998:202) contend: “Understanding context is always hard-won and there are always multiple readings of what it might be”. In their model of practicum learning, they distil the elements that, throughout the placement, impact on the interchange between the student and the learning milieu. It is the interaction between the learner and the learning milieu that creates the learning experience. Milieu is defined in the following way:

> The milieu is much more than the physical environment; it embraces the formal requirements, the culture, procedures, practices, and standards of particular institutions and societies, the immediate goals and expectations of any facilitator, as well as the personal characteristics of the individuals who are part of it. (Boud and Walker, 1990, 65)

The concept of milieu in Boud and Walker’s model therefore equates with the context in which practicum learning takes place. The experiences, values and intent that the learner brings to the educative encounter are central to the ongoing nature of the interaction between the learner and the milieu. In this way, the model reflects Gardiner’s contention (1989, 59) that, “to understand the relationship between teaching and learning, and the influence of context, it is necessary to look closely at learners’ perceptions of the learning task in a particular context, and their conceptions of the learning required to accomplish it”.

In addition, the learner on placement needs an understanding of agency history and formal and informal power dynamics in order to appreciate the milieu in which the learning encounter is taking place. The prevailing ideological positioning of the agency within welfare provision will also impact on the student learning experience, as will agency responses to issues of class, gender and ethnicity. Within the milieu, the student interacts with the learning experiences via processes of ‘noticing’ and ‘intervening’ (See Figure 1).

‘Noticing’, which can occur on a number of different levels, is both an activity and a measure of the degree to which the student engages with the learning milieu. Conscious use of noticing involves the student developing particular skills and strategies in order to become more fully involved in the teaching and learning interchange (Boud and Walker, 1990).

‘Intervening’ refers to action by the student, within the learning situation, which affects the learning milieu or the learner. Such actions may include either conscious or subconscious responses to some feature of the learning milieu (Boud and Walker, 1990). Intervening with the milieu involves the learner in extending and testing his/her understandings, and enables the learner to explore more about the events that have been ‘noticed’ (Boud and Walker, 1990). The degree to which a learner intervenes with the milieu is affected by a number of conditions including the learner’s level of confidence, experiences in past learning situations, and degree of motivation to learn. Conscious or subconscious conditioning may prompt intervening by the learner.

The facilitator (field educator) has a role in preparing the learner for his/her interactions with the milieu with regard to skills and strategies. Due to the dynamic nature of the placement context, not all encounters between the learner and milieu will occur in a planned way. Unexpected opportunities and learning events are likely to occur.
The model illustrated in Figure 1. incorporates three phases to practicum learning — preparation for the placement, actual placement experiences, and reflective processes (Walker and Boud 1994, p. 8). As noted above, the field educator has a role in preparing the student for his/her exposure to the interaction with the milieu. However, Walker and Boud situate the learning within the wider realm of milieu, suggesting that the student, school and agency, as stakeholders in the placement process, all have a part to play in preparing for the placement learning encounter.

The second phase of the model incorporates the student encounter with the learning milieu, namely experience. This is a dynamic process, characterised by the student noticing and intervening with elements of the placement milieu. The third phase incorporates the reflective process whereby the learner’s assumptions and prior experience are drawn out to inform the creation of new understandings about the learning experience. Such reflection may occur before or after the learning experience. Most recently considerable attention has been given in the literature to exploring ways in which to facilitate learning for social work students using critical reflection (Fook, 1999; Gould and Taylor, 1996).

The macro influences on practicum teaching and learning have been identified and discussed by Boud and Walker (1998), Taylor (1997), and Shardlow and Doel (1996), among others. These authors note that field education programs are strongly influenced by macro and micro contextual features that affect educator and student relationships, agency structure and policy, as well as the content and process used to teach the social work curriculum. Together, these factors shape the delivery of field education and constitute the complex context in which the teaching and learning encounters exist. Context, therefore, is defined as the micro and macro milieu in which field education takes place. Boud & Walker explain the notion of context in the following way:

The context to which we are referring is the total cultural, social and political environment in which reflection takes place. This broader context is so all pervasive that it is difficult to recognise its influence. It is, however, mirrored in and is in turn modified by particular local settings within which the learning occurs: the classroom, the course, and the institution…. The learning milieu, as we conceived of it then (1990) represented the totality of human and material influences which impinge on learners in any particular situation. These include co-learners, teachers, learning materials, physical environment and everything that was to be found therein. Whilst these influences are undoubtedly important and provide some key resources for change, a conception of milieu which focuses on these alone is far too limited to describe adequately the context of learning and its effects. Context is perhaps the single most important influence on reflection and learning. It can permit or inhibit working with learners’ experience. (Boud and Walker, 1998, p. 196)

Thus in order to formulate a theoretical framework to guide the research on student and field educator practicum teaching and learning experiences, a synthesis of the principles inherent in experiential learning theory and learning in context was required. A deconstruction of this synthesis follows.
Learning from Experience in Context

Clearly, either experiential learning theory or ‘learning in context’ could be used to interpret field learning in social work. However, each offers a single unique perspective that is missing from the other, and critical to field education. Although genuine workplace experiences are part of experiential learning, this paradigm also incorporates the use of simulated activities to stimulate new thinking and learning. In field education this would include the use of role-play and video work to introduce different aspects of learning in an incremental way. Boud and Walker’s model does not focus on these types of organised learning opportunities. Learning in their model is situated entirely within the realm of genuine experience, and does not incorporate simulation. However, Boud and Walker’s interpretation and incorporation of environmental influences is broader than the immediate physical work space that has become the focus of experiential learning. Within their model, facilitating student understanding of both micro and macro socio-political influences that impact on workplace practice is integral to the learning process. Students are encouraged to engage with, reflect upon, respond to, and intervene at both micro and macro levels of the milieu in which they are placed. This aspect of the Boud and Walker’s model is particularly relevant for teaching social work. Developing students’ knowledge and understanding of the wider social, cultural, political and economic factors that impact on practice is an essential part of social work education. In this way the notion of student engagement with the milieu serves two functions. It challenges students to examine their own personal values, as well as to carry out practice interventions that are informed by a political analysis.

Table 1. Outlines the distinguishing features of experiential learning and Boud and Walker’s model of learning in context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Experiential</th>
<th>Learning in Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theoretical Orientation</strong></td>
<td>• Humanist</td>
<td>• Cognitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Participants</strong></td>
<td>• Learner, facilitator, peers and staff</td>
<td>• Learner, facilitator, peers and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environment</strong></td>
<td>• Learning facilitated through introducing student to new environment, real or created</td>
<td>• Learning is embedded within all interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Student engagement with the milieu central to learning process. Milieu includes both micro agency and macro socio-political environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Activity</strong></td>
<td>• Emphasis on practical activities and concrete learning</td>
<td>• Focus is on getting student to be consciously aware of using processes of ‘noticing’, ‘intervening’ and ‘reflecting’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reflection used to consider practice experiences in order to improve future practice outcomes</td>
<td>• Reflection used to shape understanding and challenge personal values</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although this discussion has so far noted the differences between experiential learning theory and ‘learning in context’, it must be noted that both paradigms have a number of features in common. Both are focused on teaching and learning, both acknowledge the importance of the student/educator relationships and the impact of significant others on the learning encounter, and both take account of environmental influences on the teaching and learning encounter, although in different ways. Through a process of integrating experiential learning theory with ‘learning in context’, I devised three central constructs that were used as the framework to analyse and interpret field learning during the research. This new framework — ‘Learning from Experience in Context’ — is depicted in Figure 2.

The framework ‘Learning from Experience in Context’ is made up of three main components. These are experiential learning theory, the model of learning in context, and the three constructs: Contextual Influences, Teaching and Learning Transactions, and Relationships. This model of understanding the process of field teaching then underpinned the research into field education. These three constructs are now discussed and specific examples of how they were used to inform the field education research are explained.

**Contextual Influences:** This construct refers to the workplace environment in which the student placement took place, but also encompassed the wider political and social milieu in which social work is delivered. Context therefore referred to cultural norms both in the agency and in its external environment.

Hence for the purposes of the research ‘context’ was examined from a macro socio-economic and political perspective, noting how these factors influenced the daily practice and organisation of social service delivery in New Zealand. In this regard two macro contextual influences were of particular importance. These were the commitment to bi-culturalism in social work practice and education, and the impact of the neo-liberal ideology on the delivery of welfare services. Together these macro contextual influences had considerable impact on how students and educators understood and carried out the teaching and learning tasks during the placement. These influences were evident in student and field educator comments …
It was different for me. I was bogged down with a lot of work and so I approached the University thinking that students would be quite cheap labour, I mean to be honest about it . . .

(Huia, Field Educator, School B)

It’s not straightforward. The resources are just not there. You might have well-meaning field educator, but because of her workload and agency restructuring and development, the environment is just not too conducive for learning.

(Harry, Student, School A)

An ongoing problem is work pressure. That’s a biggee. When you’re a social worker you have to be available to clients and students do take a lot of intensive time. I don’t tell my operations manager about the amount of time I spend with student, you know she’d be pretty upset . . . I have to justify the time I spend on the student to the management, who have a great deal of difficulty getting their heads around the fact that social workers need supervision and so you know why should I be spending time with this student whose not actually paying us?

(Ilene, Field Educator, School C)

Pani, a Maori student, expressed how working in a Maori agency with a Maori kaupapa helped her learning. The presence of the Kaumatua and Kuia' ensured that the spiritual dimensions of addressing Maori health were not forgotten.

They (the agency) have a Kaumatua and a Kuia there and I believe that having that within a Maori mental health system does do quite a bit . . . it has meaning for how we operate and how we think if we have a Kuia and they are kind of soothing, a calming force in themselves and they are good, they are worth their salt, they are knowledgeable and wise and you know you’re working in a Maori Kaupapa’ therefore you don’t step out of that and they make sure of that so that things are also kept in the spiritual dimensions of things Maori and are kept on an even keel.

(Pani, Student, School B)

The Teaching and Learning Transaction: This was the second construct derived from the synthesis of experiential learning theory with Walker and Bouds model of learning in context. Both experiential learning and the model of ‘learning in context’ are concerned with the processes of facilitating learning. This focus is in keeping with the principal aim of the research — which was to discover teaching and learning strategies that enhanced student learning in the field. The notion of ‘transaction’ was developed in recognition of the fact that both concrete activities and reflective processes contribute to learning in the field. The term ‘transaction’ acknowledges too that students, workers, educators and clients in the practicum are involved in a system of mutual exchange, and that learning is embedded in all interactions including those that are both positive and negative (Galbraith, 1991). Students and educators commented on these transactions in the following ways…
It’s (being an educator) been an interesting process for me. It’s been a useful opportunity where a student makes me think, question and examine my practice and makes me relate it back to theory in a way that I wouldn’t do if I weren’t being called to account for why I did something. So unquestionably I have found it an exercise that, whilst it’s been demanding, has had some clear spin-off benefits for me that’s contributed to the analysis I attach to my practice and that’s been really useful.

(Alan, Field Educator, School A)

A lot of learning came out of some negativity, actually there were quite a few negative experiences for me with a lot of learning. I learnt about myself during that placement. I found I had a problem as far as assertiveness goes and the hours of my work were never really contracted. I would be working until fairly late in the evening sometimes because I wasn’t able to stand up and say, well it’s time to go. I had to start to draw some boundaries for myself and I found that quite difficult, but I did manage it. I sort of negotiated with her that I would be leaving at a certain time and I stuck with that. So that to me was quite a strong learning curve.

(Ann, Student, School B)

I think a (learning) moment was my first introduction to one of the bi-lingual workers and my natural reaction was to shake her hand, but she withdrew her flesh up her sleeve and told me it was not appropriate for her to touch me, and I was immediately confronted with different cultural expectations. You know, like I was in a lift with some clients and when it opened I stood back to let them go out first, but in their culture the males go first, not the females. So those situations really bring home to you that you’re there to learn.

(Harry, Student, School A)

In understanding student learning, one of the most helpful frameworks I was able to identify came out of research conducted in the 1980s, in which students’ ‘deep’ or ‘surface’ approaches to learning could be differentiated (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983). As with the Walker and Boud model, the notion of student intent is integral to how learning occurs. Students interested in understanding ideas and delving for meaning approached subject content using a critical analysis. Entwistle and Ramsden classified this as characteristic of a ‘deep’ approach to learning (1983). Where the student intention was to ‘cope with course requirements’, the process of learning tended to be fragmented and characterised by rote learning and lack of reflection. This is where ‘surface’ learning occurred (Entwistle, 1997). Although this type of categorisation on its own is an oversimplification of learning (Cooper, 1994), proponents of adult education acknowledge these dichotomous approaches: “A concern with meaning and understanding is (thus) central to an experiential conception of the teaching and learning process, for the gap between reproduction and understanding represents a quantum leap in the quality of what has been learned” (Hounsell, 1997, 240). Hence the concepts of deep and surface approaches to learning were integral to understanding the nature of the teaching and learning transaction between the student and field educator. Both surface and deep approaches to learning were evident in student comments about their placements…

Surface Approaches…
A lot of learning was ‘by example’. I would just sit and watch her do the things. That was the main technique used…Initially it was good, because for the first couple of weeks it felt appropriate sitting back and observing before I tried to work with clients. It was useful, but after that it would have been good to move on to something a little meatier…

(Claire, Student, School C)

I was at (name of agency) I wasn’t given anything (direction). I just walked in there. I was there for a specific reason, to set up um a support network for women living in violence and um I basically wasn’t given anything, I just walked in there and [was] told to do it. So I was given nothing, absolutely nothing, just told to go out and do this, this is what we want, this is how we intend to run it. . . I didn’t get anything in terms of fieldwork supervision and there were no models to work from. . .

(Fiona, Student, School C)

Deep Approaches...

He (the educator) challenged me. I remember one example, I sat down and I said “I’ll just tell you what happened with this client” and I was reading it out, and he said, “Why are you actually telling me this?” and I said, well I just thought you’d want to know. And he said, “So you actually haven’t got an issue that you want to discuss about this?” No actually I just thought that you’d want to know since I am your student. You know in a way he was fishing me to develop confidence, to know that I don’t have to tell him everything any more. Only when the time comes when I need him specifically.

(Tanya, Student, School A)

She (the field educator) would look at situations and say, “Well look at the learning that has come from that” rather than the other way around of say having a learning need and imposing it on to the situation. She would look creatively at what was taking place and we would analyse the organisation skills I might need to complete the task. . . So rather than imposing her learning methods on what I was doing, she was looking at what I was doing and looking for the learning in that.

(Karen, Student, School A)

The third construct to emerge from blending experiential learning theory with the model for learning in context, as seen in Figure 2, was ‘relationships’.

Relationships: This construct was derived out of recognition that multiple stakeholders have an investment in the placement process. Complex connections exist between schools, students, educators, agencies and the wider community. While these multi-layered connections are acknowledged within both Boud and Walker’s model, and experiential learning theory, the part they play in influencing the quality of the learning experience was integral to understanding how field education could be enhanced. For the purposes of the research the notion of relationship was addressed on two levels. The first level to be addressed was the relationship between of the student and the educator. This relationship was considered to have a major bearing on student learning during the placement The second level of ‘relationship’ that needed to be taken into account was the formal and informal network that exists between the network of stakeholders involved in the placement process. These relationships in turn extended beyond
those parties immediately involved in the practicum, to include ‘significant others’ such as the professional association, employers, funding providers and family networks. The broad and complex nature of relationships that influenced student and educator teaching and learning processes were evident throughout the research…

I think it’s important to say that if the people involved like the fieldwork co-ordinator, my supervisor, my employer, and the agency manger (placement agency) hadn’t all had an attitude of flexibility and trust, I suppose you know the trust that I was actually getting on with it (the research) and I wasn’t doing nothing. . . What I am trying to say is if people around me hadn’t had that trust that flexibility the whole thing would have been a nightmare for me as a student and I can’t see how I could have at the end of the day gone to lectures, done a placement and held down a job. I don’t see how that would have been possible if the placement hadn’t been one that had all those things built into it. I couldn’t have met all the needs and expectations that had to be met and I probably wouldn’t have learnt as much as I might have got so demoralised that I would’ve pulled out.

(Karen, Student, School A)

I think I am accountable to my employers first, to the practice. If they were to come and say to me Lucille, this is just too awful (student practice), this is terrible and we’ve had complaints from this client or that client, then the placement would most definitely end.

(Lucille, Field Educator, School A)

Her (the field educator’s) willingness to talk about herself and her life and her family and her experiences at school and experiences in social work, her life experiences generally really helped. She wasn’t much older than I was and some of her disasters, yeah it was really good to hear about people’s disasters, it just makes you feel more human.

(Mandy, Student, School B)

The discussion so far has provided an explanation of learning theory, the theoretical paradigms used to guide the research, and the specific constructs distilled out of these paradigms that were subsequently used to examine social work field education. The final section of this article explains the emergence of a learning paradigm through the research process, which can be used to explain practicum teaching and learning. ‘Towards Enhancement of Practicum Teaching Learning’ is a framework that was derived out of the synthesis of existing learning theory with the research findings related to each of the above three constructs.

Towards Enhancement of Practicum Teaching and Learning

It was possible to identify two trends within the research findings that had implications for informing practice and theory development specific to social work education. Firstly, both students and educators were part of an evolving process of redefining their identities through the activity of field education. During the field placements students were involved in the process of establishing a social worker persona, while their supervisors were learning to become educators. Secondly, both students and educators equated quality of learning with the degree to which they felt immersed, excited and intrigued by the learning process. In light of these findings, I revisited the three constructs used to examine social work field education, and reconceptualised these into a framework (See Figure 3). ‘Towards Enhancement of Teaching
and Learning’ shows how the process of learning can be understood in the field, and helps explain why some students and educators are able to develop meaningful learning relationships, while others are not.

The notion of deep and surface approaches to learning is incorporated into this model to illustrate the differing levels of engagement with the learning process that students and educators had. These approaches were first discussed earlier in the article and refer to the extent to which learners adopt a critical stance in relation to their learning, question and reflect upon their personal understandings and actively seek out new learning (Entwistle, 1997). Both students and educators in the research identified these attributes as making a significant contribution to the quality of the learning experience in the field. The notion of surface and deep approaches to learning was therefore incorporated into the model as it was found to have significant bearing on the teaching and learning outcome.

Context, the teaching and learning transaction (pedagogy), and relationships were the three constructs used to inform this research. In Figure 3, these constructs are illustrated on a continuum where the approach to field education is an amalgam of the three, spanning from surface to deep approaches of learning. From the research findings it was possible to identify individual students and educators who were positioned at different points of the continuum for each of these constructs. So what does this mean for understanding practicum teaching and learning?

If we accept that both students and educators were engaged in a reciprocal learning process,

![Figure 3. Towards Enhancement of Practicum Teaching and Learning](image-url)
there is no guarantee that both parties would be positioned at the same point of any continuum at the same time. For example, a student may neither acknowledge the contextual influences on practice, nor use a task-focused approach to learning yet acknowledge and value difference. This same student may have had a field educator who examined and integrated the contextual influences into the placement learning, but used a reactive approach to teaching and had a limited understanding of points of difference. In this way, the teaching and learning encounter between student and educator is significantly influenced by individual positioning on each continuum. Within the practicum, both student and educator are moving towards the construction of a new professional self: the student as social worker, and the social worker as educator. The interaction between student and educator is dynamic and fluid, and individuals may move backwards and forwards on each of the continua in response to stressors, feedback and incidental, unplanned events.

Ideally, to ensure quality practicum learning, students and educators would adopt a deep approach to field education on each of the three continua. However, this could only happen where both parties have experienced and integrated a reflexive approach to living and learning into their personal and professional lives. The developmental process used to facilitate a deep learning approach is gained through the experiential transaction, which is then subjected to critical reflection. In this way, both students and educators gain new insights and understandings of their developing roles.

The framework, ‘Towards Enhancement of Practicum Teaching and Learning’, explains the parallel learning process for both educators and students, and shows why and how supervisor and student dyads ‘connect’ better in some placements than in others. Its development is significant for social work in two ways. Firstly, it provides a model, specific to social work field education that helps explain the nature of the teaching and learning process for both student and educator. In this way, its development goes some way towards addressing the current theoretical void in practicum education. Secondly, it is a model that both students and educators can actually use to trace their engagement in the educational encounter in order to identify specific areas that may need further development and attention during the placement. The framework provides a ‘map’ to help students and educators understand differences in their own personal approaches to the teaching and learning encounter. It can be used as a tool for addressing both difference and conflict in style and ideology within the supervisory relationship. ‘Towards Enhancement of Practicum Teaching and Learning’ therefore makes a contribution to understanding field education at both a theoretical and practical level.

Summary
This article provides an illustration of how learning theory in social work education can emerge and is developed using an iterative qualitative research process. The model developed articulates a theoretical framework for learning specific to social work and situated within the daily teaching and learning transactions that occur between students and educators. Still it is just a beginning. The challenge remains for social work as a discipline to continue to build upon existing theoretical foundations to create its own unique paradigms that help explain, inform and guide this under-theorised area of social work education.
References


GENDER DIFFERENCES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES:
DOES GENDER MATTER?

Lesley Cooper and Beth R Crisp

Abstract
Student placement outcomes were examined using archival data from a field education program on the gender of both students and supervisors to test the hypothesis that gender is a predictor of placement outcome. The results of these analyses suggest that whilst the supervisor gender is not critical, the student gender is a significant predictor of placement outcome. As male students are more likely to encounter placement difficulties than female students, inquiry into the student’s concept of masculinity is proposed as a way to assist male students in field education.

Introduction
One prominent theme emerging from recent social work writing about race, culture and gender is the concept of difference. In the United Kingdom, attention to anti-oppressive practice has focused on gender and race differences with clients and on students as part of their learning processes. Anti discriminatory social work practice theory has forced educators to examine their response to stereotypical assumptions about different categories of people - clients, students and supervisors.

There is increasing evidence that some mainstream practitioners and supervisors actively discriminate against particular groups (O’Neill 1995). Educators are examining socially structured differences including gay/straight; disabled/able-bodied; male/female; coloured/white; and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal. Examining biases in these relationships can lead to an understanding of the impact of differences on factors such as access to services, life chances, pedagogical approaches and learning outcomes.

Much social work literature has emphasised student supervision as predominantly educative and supportive, demanding sustained interaction and concentrated introspective personal relationships. In contrast, anti-discriminatory practice focuses more explicitly on power as a key factor in the supervisory relationship. Formal power resides with the supervisor because of their expertise, status and evaluative role. This dimension is acknowledged in most supervisory approaches. Power also comes from informal power determined by variables such as race, gender, class, age, sexual orientation and other abilities (Brown and Bourne 1996). The student and supervisor relationship is an ideal place to examine the extent to which gender differences impact on learning outcomes.

Authors:
Lesley Cooper is on Associate Professor, School of Social Administration and Social Work, Flinders University of South Australia, GPO Box 2100, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia 5001. Email: Lesley.Cooper@flinders.edu.au.
To whom all correspondence should be addressed.

Beth R Crisp
Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Glasgow, Lilybank House Bute Gardens, Glasgow G3 6TT, Scotland
Gender sensitive supervision

Gender is a major division in our profession and in the workplace yet the supervisory system has largely escaped scrutiny in the social work literature. Differences might be expected to occur in patterns of communication, male approaches to intervention and the closeness of the relationship between supervisors and supervisees (Crespi 1995; De Lange 1995). In a small qualitative study, Conn (1993) examined gender differences in the organisational and professional system. She noted differences in the way men and women, at senior and middle management described their roles in the supervisory process. Although professionals thought about the impact of gender in the client system, they almost ignored the impact of their gender in the supervisory system itself.

Although all of them thought that at times their work was influenced by their own gender, and understanding of gender related roles and behaviours, they did not think this was seen as part of the supervisory task. (Conn 1993, 47)

Reviewing several publications on women in social work, Brown and Bourne (1996) extrapolated that a male dominated culture influences supervisory styles, resulting in the disempowerment of women. Such disempowerment influences women’s professional identity. If these supervisory styles are also evident in student supervision, we might expect that the male supervisor and female student combination would result in poor learning outcomes for women. McMaster (2000) presents an alternative view based on anecdotal evidence. In their field education experiences as part of social work education, McMaster notes that male social work students frequently have difficulty. He speculates that gender is at the core of such difficulties although he does not attribute these difficulties to the supervisor’s gender but to concepts of masculinity held by the student. Success in working closely with their supervisor and passing field education largely depends on the student’s construction of masculinity and the extent to which their views determine expectations and entitlements in work with others. Despite a growing awareness of gender based pairings and inadvertent gender stereotyping in supervision, gender based supervisory approaches have largely been ignored.

Student and supervisor pairings

In field education a wide range of combinations and pairings of students and supervisors is possible. For example, it is possible to have a male supervisor/female student and vice versa; Asian supervisor/Caucasian student; and so on. These examples of pairings provide only for a dichotomous view of relationships. In reality, multiple oppression exists so that a student may be a woman of colour, of a particular ethnic group and be in poverty. Whilst social work education has not extensively examined the impact of these learner/supervisor pairings on student learning outcomes some preliminary research finding are revealing.

Behling, Curtis and Foster (1989) examined sex-role combinations on the evaluation of students’ field education outcomes. Their findings revealed that same gender combinations of students and supervisors were more positive for learning outcomes than different gender combinations. It is not surprising that the worst learning outcomes occurred with male supervisors and female students. Thyer, Sowers-Hoag and Love (1989) came to similar conclusions although they suggest their findings are more ambiguous. Differences can be amplified when race and gender are combined with supervisor/learner pairings (see Brown and Bourne 1996, 39).

The consequences of different gender, learner and supervisor arrangements are worth exploring as part of developing better educational and management practices in field education. Bernard and Goodyear (1992) suggested that female students may not think that their male supervisor is taking issues seriously and that a male supervisee expects his female supervisor to be more nurturing. On the other hand, Shardlow and Doel (1996, 17) illustrated the problem by referring to a female student with a male supervisor. A female student may enter placement feeling less
powerful in social transactions than men, discriminated against by social structures or denied access to various commodities because she is a woman. These feelings may be reinforced with a male supervisor. On the other hand, it is also acknowledged that a female supervisor with a male student may be able to provide a beneficial consciousness raising learning environment for the student (Humphries, Pankhania-Wimmer, Seale and Stokes, 1993).

This paper reports on our exploratory study in which we sought to examine the impact of gender on learning outcomes in field education placements. Using archival material held by the School of Social Administration and Social Work at Flinders University, Adelaide, we were able to explore placement outcomes in relation to the gender of both the student and supervisor, and by whether the supervisory relationship involved a same or mixed gender pairing.

Social work is a feminised profession. The percentage of male enrolments range between 19 percent to 30 percent dependent upon the year of enrolment (Blanchard et al, 1994.) The gender distribution of South Australian social workers has previously been found to be similar to the national average (Healy 1982) and Flinders graduates have been previously found similar to social work graduates from other schools on a range of variables (Lindsay 1989).

**The field education program**

The Australian Association of Social Workers requires that all students be supervised by a qualified social worker with more than two years experience (AASW 2000). Students at Flinders University are required to compete two placements (60 days and 80 days) over the two year full-time course leading to a Bachelor of Social Work qualification. In exceptional circumstances, including those when students are unable to satisfactorily complete a placement for reasons beyond their control (eg ill health, lack of suitable learning opportunities), or after having failed a placement, subsequent placements may be undertaken. Supervision is provided through voluntary arrangements, based on individual commitment and is added to an existing agency workload. There is little formal recognition of the supervisor role professionally, educationally or industrially (Gordon 1994). Training provided to supervisors is through a two-day voluntary workshop with ongoing supervision training for both new and experienced supervisors. There is no formal evaluation of supervisory performance by either the students or the faculty’s staff.

Students in field education are required to achieve particular competency standards. Prior to the mid-placements, students submit evidence of their achievements to faculty staff for review and feedback. This is followed by an agency visit where students are formally assessed to determine if social work competency standards have been achieved. During this visit, learning difficulties between the student and the supervisor may emerge. If students are not achieving some of the required standards at mid-placement or if there are interpersonal difficulties impacting on student learning, faculty closely monitor the student’s work and provide remedial assistance to ensure achievement of placement standards.

**METHOD AND RESULTS**

The five consecutive cohorts of students from the School of Social Administration and Social Work, Flinders University who undertook their first practicum between 1992 and 1996 were analysed for this study. The cohorts were followed until 1998. A search of the school’s archives identified a total of 541 placements, which were undertaken by 277 students as meeting these criteria. For each of these placements, a three-way classification of the learning outcomes was adopted:

The student failed to achieve placement standards.

At mid-placement there were problems identified which required follow up by university staff, either because the student had not achieved some standards at mid-placement, or there were difficulties in the placement which may preclude the student achieving the required standards at the end of the placement. These students achieved all standards at end of placement.
The student achieved all standards at mid-placement and end of placement and no major difficulties were identified at mid-placement.

For each placement, the gender of both student and primary supervisor were recorded, together with the learning outcomes. One further variable concerning whether the student-supervisor relationship was of same or opposite gender was computed from the recorded data items. In addition to gender and learning outcome variables, it was hypothesised that professional socialisation may be just as important a predictor of whether students have difficulties in achieving placement standards, such that one might expect students on their first placement to experience more difficulties than students on a subsequent placement irrespective of their gender. Thus placements were coded as being a first placement, second placement or a third or subsequent placement. Finally, as there were major changes in the field education program over the study period, the calendar year in which the placement was undertaken was also recorded. Table 1 provides a summary of each of these variables.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>TABLE 1. SUMMARY CHARACTERISTICS OF PLACEMENTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Placement Characteristic</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gender of student</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gender of supervisor</strong></td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gender of student and supervisor</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>First</td>
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<td>Second</td>
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<td>Third or subsequent</td>
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<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning outcomes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student achieved all field education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>standards and no problems were identified at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mid-placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At mid-placement there were problems identified but students achieved all standards at end of placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student failed to achieve standards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As very few students had failed placements, cases with this learning outcome were combined with those in which students experienced difficulties for the subsequent data analyses. Chi-square tests were then undertaken to establish whether or not placement difficulties were associated with any of the other variables which were presented in Table 1. The results of these analyses are summarised in Table 2 which reveals problematic placements as more likely to involve male than female students, a difference between the gender of student and supervisor compared with same-gender pairings and be a first placement rather than a subsequent one. There was however, no evidence that difficult placements were associated with either supervisor gender or the calendar year in which the placement was undertaken.

**TABLE 2. KNOWN PLACEMENT DIFFICULTIES BY PLACEMENT CHARACTERISTICS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement Characteristic</th>
<th>Known difficulties</th>
<th>No known difficulties</th>
<th>Statistical test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of placements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender of student</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\chi^2 (1) = 8.58, p &lt; .01$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>92.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender of supervisor</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\chi^2 (1) = .40, n.s.$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8.22</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender of student and supervisor</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\chi^2 (1) = 4.24, p &lt; .05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Placement number</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\chi^2 (1) = 4.75, p &lt; .05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second or subsequent</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>93.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year undertaken</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\chi^2 (1) = .88, n.s.$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>87.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>90.9</td>
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<td>1995</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>9.8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The three variables which individually had been found to be associated with placement difficulties (gender of student, gender of student and supervisor, and placement number) were then entered into a step-wise logistic regression analysis to establish which, if any, remained significantly associated with the known presence of major difficulties (known difficulties = 1, no known difficulties = 2), when other factors were taken into account. The results of this analysis, which are presented in Table 3, reveal the gender of the student and whether they are undertaking a first or subsequent placement, are jointly predictive of placement difficulties. In particular, male students were 2.44 (1/0.41) times more likely to experience placement difficulties than their female counterparts, and students on their first placement were 1.96 times more likely to have difficulties than students on subsequent placements.

### TABLE 3. STEP-WISE MULTIPLE LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS WITH KNOWN PLACEMENT DIFFICULTIES AS THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order entered</th>
<th>Attributional Dimension</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
<th>95% C.I.</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gender of student¹</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.22–.75</td>
<td>.0039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Placement number²</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.07–3.58</td>
<td>.0289</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Female = 1, Male = 2  
² Second or third placements = 2

### DISCUSSION

Like Lloyd and Degenhardt (1996) and McMaster (2000) who found the non-completion rate in placements to be far higher among male than female students, our findings lend support to the proposition that the gender of the student is a significant predictor in placement outcome. Students completing their first placement were also more likely not to achieve field education standards. The results of this study provide no evidence that the gender of the supervisor contributes to placement outcome. Nor was there any evidence that mixed gender student and supervisor pairings lead to poor learning outcomes.

One should not discount the possibility that the findings reported here are an artefact of the methodologies employed in collecting and analysing the data. The use of archival data restricted our analyses to variables which could be extracted from information collected as part of the management of a field education program and may well have excluded more salient factors which impact on learning outcomes. While the supervisory relationship is not supposed to be a therapeutic one (Gardiner 1989), the intimate and interpersonal nature of the supervisory relationship is not dissimilar from the verbal articulation and insight required of clients in psychotherapy and reference to literature from psychotherapy may shed light on these findings. The inclusion for example, of additional variables may override the importance of gender as a predictive factor of placement outcome (Howard, Orlinsky and Hill, 1970). Whether the effect of supervisor gender would become significant when qualified by the supervisor’s experience is a further possibility (Hill 1975).

Clearly, further research is needed to understand the impact of gender in field education, and the results of this exploratory study contribute to a rationale for developing a more
comprehensive prospective study in which a wider range of factors which potentially influence placement outcomes could be examined. Prior to undertaking such a study, focus group interviews with students and supervisors would hopefully not only shed light on the current findings but produce hypotheses about placement outcomes which could be tested on one or more cohorts of students from one or more university field education programs.

In the meantime we are left with the finding that male students are more likely to have difficulties on placements than are female students. As convenors of field education programs it has been our experience that issues of gender in field education receive scant, if any, attention in either the training of new field teachers or in the preparation of students for their placements. In light of such experiences, McMaster (2000) has proposed that male students may benefit from an inquiry into their concepts of masculinity and their impact on the learning relationship and workplace. According to McMaster, this inquiry would invite responsible male behaviour in supervision and provide a framework to map gender issues within the supervisory relationship. However, whether such an approach would have helped the male students in our study who had placement difficulties is unknown, and alternate strategies to assisting male students may also need to be developed.

In summary, whilst gender is a core issue in field education, different gender pairings do not seem to lead to student failure. Male students do experience difficulty in field education, irrespective of the gender of their supervisor and strategies to address this issue should be considered as a matter of urgency.

References


EXPOSING THE INTERSECTIONS OF SELF, PRACTICE AND EDUCATION: SOCIAL WORKERS AS PARENTS, EDUCATORS AND PRACTITIONERS

Joanna Zubrzycki

Abstract

Exposing the intersections of self, practice and education involves an examination of the critical use of self. The use of self has been variously identified in the literature as an aspect of practice impacting primarily in the areas of interpersonal helping. Writers such as Rossiter (1995) and Fook (1999) argue that the use of self and the skill of reflective thinking needs to feature strongly in social work education that is influenced by a critical perspective. This article reports on research conducted with a group of Australian social workers who are parents. The research participants identified, through group and individual interviews, that parenting experiences are a positive adjunct to their practice. They also reveal that the experience gained from professional practice can in turn enhance their role as parents. The experiences of the social workers involved in this study not only highlight the strengths of self-reflection in practice but also importantly expose the many dimensions of the use of self. Drawing upon the experiences of practitioners needs to be regarded by social work educators as a rich source of knowledge about the use of self in social work.

Introduction

When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing (Rich, quoted in Rosaldo 1989, ix).

Social work educators are fundamentally concerned with ensuring that students are trained to become competent and professional practitioners. The focus of educational programs is the achievement of a dynamic balance between theoretical and skill development. The mirror image that is reinforced by this educational paradigm, that overarching description which Rich (1989) identifies as potentially alienating, is the positioning of the personal context of the social worker. Hence the mirror, the educational and professional context of practice, often does not reflect social workers as individuals whose professional practice is strongly informed by their personal constructions of meaning. The creative potential of these constructions of self are not fully explored in the social work literature, the discourse one of caution rather than possibilities.

According to educationalists informed by critical and postmodern theories, the development of skills in critical self-reflection in social work is fundamental to all areas of social work practice (Fook 1999, Jessop and Rogerson 1999). While the process of critical reflection reveals the use of self as a dynamic and integral aspect of professional practice there is a paucity of research on the construction of the self to support this educational paradigm.

Author:

Joanna Zubrzycki is a lecturer in Social Work at the Australian Catholic University, P.O. Box 256, Dickson, ACT, Australia. Tel: 0262091159. Email: J.Zubrzycki@signadou.acu.edu.au
The purpose of this article is to present the findings of a qualitative research study that reveals the complex interactions of the personal and professional self in practice. The study documents the stories of social workers who are parents and reveals that these practitioners feel silenced within the profession about their practice experiences. They identify the boundary between the personal and professional self as permeable and multi-dimensional, with their practice both influenced by their parenting experiences and informing their parenting roles. This has important implications for social work education because it identifies that the separation of the personal and the professional is not one-dimensional. Social work educators who recognise this aspect of practice are more likely to ensure that they teach the use of self from an informed perspective. Such a perspective also reinforces the need for educators themselves to incorporate their self into the teaching process as an important tool to role model a multidimensional personal-professional identity (Kapf 1997).

The rationale for choosing the area of parenting to explore the use of self in practice arose primarily from my experiences as a parent, practitioner and social work educator. The influences of parenting on the areas of clinical social work, including adolescent health and disability, highlighted for me that parenting is a formative life experience that influences practice. For example the transition to parenting influenced the process of becoming more emotionally attuned to the issues that affected clients who were parents. The boundary between the personal and the professional was also challenged and it was difficult at times to draw clear distinctions between my identity as a practitioner and as a parent. The boundary became permeable with each role influencing the other. These experiences motivated me to explore whether other social workers shared these experiences.

A number of years later working as a social work educator strongly influenced by critical theory in teaching and the use of stories as an important narrative tool (Rossiter 1995), the process of sharing with students these stories of the use of self became an integral aspect of teaching. The students’ enthusiastic and inquiring responses, especially those who related to the experiences of parenting, reinforced the need to research the use of self and to adopt teaching practices that identify the self as multi-dimensional and pivotal to social work practice.

The article is divided into the following sections: The first critically analyses the current literature in the areas of the use of self, parenting and practice in social work. The second outlines the research questions, methodology and the research results. Finally the article highlights important themes and issues for social work education and directions for future research.

**Conceptualising the use of self in social work**

The social work literature on the use of self encompasses three interrelated areas of concern: the need for social work students to develop self-awareness as part of their training, (O’Connor, Wilson and Setterlund 1999) the importance of ensuring that the use of self in social work practice is ethical and purposeful (Banks 1995) and the presentation of the self as fundamental to the facilitation of dialogical practice (Fook 1999). Different theoretical positions are located within this body of literature, underpinning each is an emphasis on the need for social workers to demonstrate competence and skills of self-awareness and self-reflection while there is a diversity of opinion about the role of the self in practice.

The first area emphasises the importance of beginning social work students to consider the range of factors that motivate social workers (O’Connor et al 1999). A range of personal experiences (e.g. the experiences of drug dependency) and factors such as cultural identity,
gender and class are regarded as potentially formative influences in the process of choosing a career in social work. Students are encouraged to engage in the process of exploring their own biography. This process encourages them to reflect on these factors, and in doing so assists the students to identify how their own life histories influence their own understanding and perceptions of the world.

Rees (1991) informed by feminist theories, extends the concept of biography to the development of empowering practice. He argues that social work students, practitioners and clients should be encouraged to tell their own stories of power and powerlessness and to link these experiences with those of others. Thus the promise of biography becomes an active process of joining ideas and actions with personal experience (Rees 1991, 21-23).

The second focus in the social work literature is on the need for social workers to use the self purposefully and ethically.

In practising social work or welfare work our aim is not to eliminate our pre-existing ideas and feelings but rather to subject them to critical scrutiny, so that our use of self is conscious and disciplined (O’Connor et al 1999, 50).

This perspective is primarily located in American and Australian social work texts that are concerned with direct practice with clients, including groupwork and casework (Shulman 1992; Hepworth, Rooney and Larsen 1997; O’Connor et al 1999). According to Shulman (1992) the anxiety in the social work profession concerning the potentially destructive use of self is influenced by a medical model which emphasizes that professional practice can only be maintained if practitioners such as doctors and social workers suppress personal responses and feelings. Shulman (1992) counters this claim by arguing that social workers are often at their most creative when they are able to integrate their personal self into their professional roles (Shulman 1992, 25).

While this consideration of the use of self appears to be inclusive and positive, the focus remains one-dimensional. The personal self could influence aspects of what we do and how we react, but the influence flows in one direction from personal to professional. The underlying message to practitioners is that their self needs to be positioned very carefully. The discourse is one of caution rather then any real consideration of the creative possibilities that may arise when aspects of the self such as personal constructions of meaning become part of our daily practice.

The writings of critical theorists such as Freire (1972) and Giddens (1991) underpin the third influential perspective on the self in social work. These writers broaden the definition of self by conceptualising it as a social construction informed by factors such as class, culture and context. Giddens (1991) asserts that self-identity varies socially and culturally and that: ‘in order to know who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become and of where we are going’ (Giddens 1991, 54). This self-reflexive process is internally referential. In other words our self is a reflection of our life experiences, our belief systems and the construction and reconstruction of our life history.

According to Freire’s (1972) perspective, education like practice is a political activity that centers on the encouragement of self and social reflection. This educational framework has been adopted internationally by social work educators (Rossiter 1995; Ife 1997,1999; Fook 1999; Jessup and Rogerson 1999). The educational process, informed by critical theory
encourages social workers to develop a sense of agency. This is defined by Fook (1999) as the linking of the worker’s personal experiences and backgrounds with perceived wisdoms which then: ‘act as a springboard to broaden our thinking’ (1999, 199). She encourages social workers to develop the skills of reflective practice as a means of acknowledging and legitimating these experiential approaches to learning and practice. According to Fook reflectivity involves: 

The ability to locate oneself in a situation through the recognition of how actions and interpretations, social and cultural background and personal history, emotional aspects of experience, and personally held assumptions and values influence the situation (Fook 1999,199)

A constant creation and re-creation of the self is also conceptualised in the writings of postmodern feminist social workers such as Fawcett, Featherstone, and Rossiter (2000). The self, according to a postmodern feminist analysis, is continuously interacting with the social. Subjectivity is not stable or unitary, but is; ‘precarious, contradictory and in process constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think and speak’ (Weedon 1987 cited in Rossiter 1995, 28). Importantly a critical exploration of the construction of self in social work needs to encompass a framework that allows for diversity of the self to emerge and does not privilege any areas of self over others.

**Conceptualising the influence of parenting on practice**

The social work literature on the influence of a worker’s parenting experiences on practice is limited to the exploration of the impact of family responsibilities on work commitment, daily work responsibilities and the psychological implications of these stresses on social workers. Rotman’s (1989) research is an example of the focus on measuring the impact of family responsibility on work commitment. Utilizing quantitative techniques to measure the degree of family responsibility and work commitment, Rotman (1989) surveyed a group of social workers based in New York. Her results indicate that women with fewer family responsibilities did not reflect a higher commitment to their work. On the contrary women with the greatest amount of family responsibility scored highest on the work commitment scale.

A significant feature of work and family research in this area is the reliance on quantitative methodologies. Leiter and Durup’s (1996) research, for example, explored the effects of working in the helping professions on the family. The researchers conducted a three month study of American hospital based health care professionals including social workers. The researchers utilized a range of quantitative techniques including tools to measure work-based stress and burnout. Their findings indicate that supportive personal relationships at home and at work act as resources that enhance employees’ well being and help them manage demands in both domains. Although this study included both male and female workers and a cross section of health professionals, there was no analysis by gender or professional identity.

The discourse reflected in studies by Rotman (1989) and Leiter and Durup (1996) identifies parenting as a personal responsibility that potentially impacts on how social workers engage with their practice. However parenting is not explored or identified as a life experience that influences the use of self in clinical practice. There is also an absence of literature and research that considers the influence of practice experiences on personal roles such as parenting. The absence of a gender analysis in research on parenting reinforces the lack of understanding of the experiences of fathers in social work.
Australian research on the experience of social workers who are parents
The aim of this qualitative research was to address the lack of knowledge in the area, in particular to identify the potential influence of an aspect of the self on practice. The research was conducted in 1998 and was funded by a university research grant from the author’s university. The key research questions were:
How does parenting influence practice?
How does social work practice impact on parenting?
How do colleagues, supervisors and agencies respond to these issues?

A limitation of the focus of my research is that I do not examine the potential influences of other formative life experiences on the use of self. In the Australian social work literature there has been some discussion of other aspects of the self that influence practice in particular a worker’s experiences of child sexual assault (Foley 1994) and of being a women (Sims 1994).

Study Design and Methodology
In order to facilitate the exploratory nature of this study a qualitative methodology was chosen. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998), qualitative researchers are concerned with exploring the socially constructed nature of reality. ‘The word qualitative implies an emphasis on process and meanings that are not rigorously examined, or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency’ (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, 8). As the literature review indicates, the limited number of studies in the work and family area focus on quantitative techniques, as they seek to measure stress and work commitment. The relationship between work and family is more complex and by utilizing a qualitative approach, it was possible to gain a deeper understanding of how people experience the relationship between parenting and social work practice.

The data was generated through focus groups and in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Importantly the research results were not regarded as generalizable to the experiences of all social worker parents. Rather the aim was to gather data that could potentially inform the development of knowledge and theory about the use of self in practice.

Sample
The sample consisted of sixteen city-based social workers. The participants were recruited using a snowball technique (Alston and Bowles 1998, 93). A small group of workers known to the researcher were invited to participate and in turn were asked to recruit colleagues who they thought would be interested in taking part in the research. The final sample included social workers aged between 30 and 45 years. The majority of workers had school aged children, with two workers having children under 5 years of age and one worker’s children identified as young adults.

On average the workers had eight years work experience in social work. Ten (just over fifty percent) of the social workers worked part time. The research participants were all, to various degrees, involved in direct practice in a range of welfare settings including hospital, child protection, family support and the disability sector. Thirteen workers described their practice as working directly with clients (children, adolescents, and parents). Two workers identified themselves as supervisors and direct practice workers and one social worker described herself as a service manager and staff supervisor. Only one male worker was available to participate.
Method
Focus group interviews were used as the primary method of generating data. Group interviews bring individuals with a number of different perspectives and experiences together to participate in a process that is open and emergent (Maykut 1994). Fourteen social workers were divided into two groups, with each group meeting once for up to two hours. These workers had not previously explored, in a group setting, the experiences of parenting on social worker practice. Their responses suggest a pervasive silencing of this aspect of the use of self in social work and the opportunity to share these experiences in a group setting was regarded by the workers as a unique opportunity to feel affirmed and supported by their peers. Fine and Weiss assert that a focus group environment can be experienced by research participants as a context of relative safety in which a; ‘less judgmental sense of self is displayed’ (Fine and Weiss 1998, 29).

Each group interview began with a brief overview of my rationale for conducting the research. Additional discussion questions were generated from a number of sources including the literature on work and family and on the use of self in social work. These included questions such as: ‘In what way does parenting influence your work as a social worker?’; ‘Can you identify any situations where your practice has impacted on your parenting?’ In both groups the participants engaged enthusiastically and energetically in the discussions.

Two individual interviews were also conducted with workers who were unable to attend the group discussions. These workers both had management and supervisory responsibilities. The discussion primarily focused on supervisory issues in the work and family area. The data from both the individual and group interviews was gathered by audiotape and later transcribed. The participants were asked to identify a pseudonym and were invited to read the transcripts and make any changes.

Results
I have chosen to present a number of key themes and quotes generated by the group discussions.

Participation in the research was an opportunity to share “hidden” practice experiences
All of the participants expressed strong interest in the research. They were very keen to share openly what they regarded as formative experiences. The link between parenting and practice was apparent for many, yet rarely discussed formally in supervision and only occasionally with peers who were also parents with these discussions generally focusing on issues around parenting rather than the links between parenting and practice.

Work and family issues are key issues for me. Parenting has had such an impact on my practice. (Fleur)

I think we are a bit isolated in our society and we don’t talk about these experiences. It’s a great relief to hear other stories. (Bridgit)

There is a clear link between parenting and practice
The responses of the participants demonstrated that they had very clear ideas about the relationship between parenting and practice. Below are some of the themes emerging from the influences of parenting.
Parenting influences the type and structure of the practice that workers chose to become involved in. Many of the participants spoke openly about avoiding certain areas of practice. They expressed concern that the experiences of parenting, especially young children make them feel more vulnerable in certain areas of practice. These include child protection and working with parents who had experienced stillbirth or miscarriage.

Parenting impacts on the boundary between the personal and the professional self.

The topic of boundaries generated vigorous discussion. The participants spoke of the importance of maintaining separateness between the world of work and their family lives. Maintaining this space is positive not only for their own well being but also in their capacity to contribute meaningfully and productively at work. The responsibilities of parenting reinforce the need to actively switch off from work and in this way prevent burnout.

*Having a family has been protective in a lot of ways in terms of protecting burnout. You have to put boundaries around your personal life.* (Kate)

However the construction of boundaries was also identified as a fragile barrier between work and home. While the need to maintain separateness is an important survival strategy the boundary becomes permeable when the stresses of parenting are difficult to contain.

Parenting leads to the development of greater empathy and awareness of other parent’s experiences.

Many of the participants were unequivocal about the way in which becoming a parent lead to the development of greater empathy and understanding of other parents’ experiences. For some workers this means being less judgmental and more understanding when working with clients who are experiencing difficulty in their parenting role.

*Just because you are also a parent doesn’t mean you share the same wavelength but it does mean that you have a lot of shared experiences, more than you had before. You have the language that connects.* (Sera)

Social workers who are parents become more emotional in their practice.

A number of workers identified clear examples of how parenting had made them at times more vulnerable in their practice. This vulnerability was a double-edged sword. On one hand, this was viewed as strength, yet work became at times a more emotionally draining experience.

*I think parenting makes you more vulnerable. It opens emotional corridors I think I am more in touch with people emotionally. I feel more sadness. You become more vulnerable through your children.* (Bridget)

Social workers who are parents use self-disclosure purposefully.

Participants were aware that they sometimes chose to share their own parenting experiences with their clients. They described this intentional self-disclosure as a process that increases their credibility with some clients by narrowing the professional gap and normalizing experiences. The participants were also careful not to reveal personal details of their lives which were inappropriate and which could make them vulnerable.

*I often tell parents that I don’t always manage parenting very well. Sharing this is a way of humanizing me.* (Jasmine)
The impact of practice on parenting
The participants identify strong connections between their practice and their parenting. Many recognise that their social work training gives them valuable skills and knowledge that is useful in parenting. However this added experience was identified as leading to high expectations of how they would cope with parenting.

As social workers, as women and as mothers we get like a triple whammy in a sense. We are supposed to somehow have control over what happens in our family life and what happens with our children. (Emma)

The Responses of Colleagues, Supervisors and Agency
Many participants were sensitive not to present themselves to their colleagues as experts or better workers because they were parents. They were conscious that at times non-parent workers are skeptical about the influence of parenting on practice. Some also expressed disappointment that their parenting responsibilities were not understood by colleagues.

Supervision
Amongst the respondents there were a number of different experiences of supervision. Some parents felt that supervisors did not acknowledged that parenting could influence practice and a lack of recognition of some of the implications of these influences could be problematic.

We have to look at ourselves in our practice and what is going on in our lives it is very important. We know that abuse occurs in human service. It is the abuse of power and forming relationships with people that go on and on and are no longer therapeutic, those sorts of things are really important to explore in supervision. (Jasmine)

The supervisors had different perspectives. One acknowledged that she did not regularly raise parenting issues in supervision because she did not want to turn professional supervision into a counselling session. The other two supervisors commented that they raised these issues quite regularly with their workers. Raising awareness of the impact of parenting on practice was seen as one aspect of discussing the use of self.

Implications for social work education
This section focuses on the advantages of understanding the experiences of workers who are parents and the implications for social work educators.

There are a number of reasons why it is useful to explore the experiences of parents who are social workers. First, it reveals how social workers on a day to day basis manage these dual roles. Second the transferability of experience from the personal to the professional arena and vice versa suggests that the use of self and the construction of professional boundaries in social work are multifaceted. Third, exploring the responses of agencies and supervisors identifies that supervisors are at times reluctant to discuss with their staff the relationship between personal experience and practice.

Sharing these insights with students provides a more dynamic basis upon which to teach about the use of self. In order to facilitate this integration in our teaching there are a number of strategies that we need to consider. These include:
Acknowledging different ways of knowing.
Teaching students about the intentional use of self and reflective practice.
Social work educators sharing their experiences of the use of self.
The remainder of this article will focus on a brief overview of these educational strategies.

**Acknowledge different ways of knowing.**

Acknowledging diverse ways of gaining professional knowledge and skills has important implications for social work education. This understanding challenges us to consider the implications of what Freire (1972) referred to as traditional teaching. Freire (1972) regarded traditional teaching as based on a method of banking: ‘where the teacher’s role is to fill the students by making deposits of information, which the teacher considers to constitute true knowledge.’ (Freire 1972 cited in Belenkey et al 1986, 214) As social work educators we need to acknowledge different ways of knowing and regard the experience of parenting as a source of knowledge. This challenges social work practitioners and educators to consider the construction of knowledge in practice.

**Teach about the intentional use of self and reflective practice.**

This research reinforces the need, in social work education, to incorporate the intentional use of self as a key element of social work practice and not as a peripheral practice skill. The participants in the study identified this skill as central to their practice. Importantly the supervisors also regarded “good” practitioners as those who could articulate how and why their personal experiences informed their practice.

Social work educators should encourage students to constantly question self, other and environment. According to Rossiter ‘students have capacities upon which they themselves must reflect in order to progress the intentional use of self’ (Rossiter 1995, 19). The teaching of skills must facilitate the development of reflective problem posing. That is the capacity to reflect on personal and professional responses in a way that leads students to ask key questions about their use of self. One way of facilitating the development of this skill is to encourage students to write reflectively about their responses to the education processes. A reflective journal can be a creative medium through which students explore their personal self and how this may interact with their developing professional identity, thereby giving voice to the intersections of self, practice and education.

Social work educators should be encouraged to share with their students their experiences of the use of self. Kapf (1997) adopts Freire’s concerns about conventional education as a system of depositing pure knowledge and argues that to overcome these rigid models of teaching, educators should be prepared to share their own struggles, uncertainties and thought processes. He asserts that:

*So long as teachers hide the imperfect process of their thinking, allowing their students to glimpse only the polished products, students will remain convinced that only Einstein or a professor could think up a theory.* (Kapf 1997, 87).

The process of attempting to make sense of their own practice and personal experiences needs to be regarded by educators as a rich source of knowledge that can be shared with students. Kapf (1997) regards this sharing as fundamental in encouraging students to find their voices.

**Conclusions**

The findings of this study suggest that the experience of parenting can have multiple influences on the use of self in practice. These include the development of greater empathy towards other parents, the need to have a clear boundary separating the personal and the professional as well as recognition of the permeability of the boundaries, with the personal self both informing and
being influenced by practice. Importantly, these findings present a contradictory story about the use of self in practice and the construction of the personal and professional boundaries. This confusing picture underpins the nature of the use of self in practice. That is, the relationship between the personal and the professional is multi-faceted and as such can only meaningfully be conceptualised by post–modern and critical understandings of the social construction of self and identity.

This not only has implications for social work education, but also challenges traditional understandings of the boundary between the personal and professional self, which highlights the need for a clear delineation between the worker’s personal and professional identities. This study reinforces the fact that it is very difficult for social workers who are parents to clearly separate their identities and, importantly, the influence of personal experience can be a powerful adjunct to practice. Further research in this area could explore how other personal influences, such as the cultural identity of the worker, inform the construction of the personal and professional boundary and the professional identity of the worker.

There are other aspects of the findings that warrant further exploration. For example, the diversity of perspectives on whether work and family issues should be raised in supervision is an example of the range of opinions in the profession regarding not only the use of self in practice, but also the role that supervisors play in acknowledging and supporting the transferability of learning from personal experiences.

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INTERVIEWING FRIENDS AND THE FEMINIST RESEARCH PROCESS

Nonie Harris
Lecturer
School of Social Work and Community Welfare, James Cook University

Abstract
Feminist analysis of the interview process has largely focused on the developing relationship between the researcher and the researched, rather than the implications of a pre-existing relationship for this method. These implications are explored in this paper. This discussion emerges from my reflections, as a feminist researcher, on interviewing my friends. Though in-depth interviews may be successful due to interview technique, women’s willingness to be interviewed, shared gender and experience, I will argue that pre-existing friendship adds a unique dimension to the research with implications for the researcher, the researched and the feminist research process. The ‘friendly’ interview is positioned within the context of the friendship, rather than the research, providing a basis for exploring issues of pre-existing knowledge and power relationships within the interview.

Introduction
This article seeks to provide additional insight into the in-depth interviewing process used in qualitative research (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander 1995). The aim is to identify the implications of a pre-existing friendship between the respondent and the researcher on the researcher, the researched and the feminist research process.

The examination of this aspect of the research process provides an opportunity to highlight some of the “... practical dilemmas and challenges that arise in carrying out qualitative research ...”(Ribbens and Edwards1998,1). Feminist researchers are encouraged to seek to further understand and explore the feminist research process, “... a major concern for feminists has always been with the process of conducting research” (Maynard and Purvis1994, 4). Cotterill (1992) also encourages feminist researchers to explore women’s research experience; “It is one more dimension of women’s experience which has been overlooked and as such, is also part of ‘putting the subjective in the knowledge’” (593). Considerations of particular aspects of the feminist research process should also be viewed within a wider framework of ethical research practice.

1 Author:
Nonie Harris is a Lecturer in the School of Social Work and Community Welfare, James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland, Australia, 4811. Tel: 0747814898.
Email: Nonie.Harris@jcu.edu.au
This is a personal reflection from the field. Through undertaking feminist research on mothers’ coping strategies (Harris 1998) I found that my pre-existing friendship with the respondents was an issue relevant to the research process. I, therefore, focused on the issues and dilemmas of interviewing friends; an aspect of the interviewing process that I will argue is more important than initially anticipated. The research, consistent with a feminist perspective, was relevant to my own life experience and the life experiences of my friends (Oakley 1979). We were mothers of young children. Five friends were interviewed twice using non-standardised, in-depth interviews (Glesne and Peshkin 1992). Respondents have been anonymised in this paper.

The first section of this article explores feminist understandings of the in-depth interviewing process. The second section, ‘A Friendly Interview,’ examines my research experience using examples from each of the interviews to highlight a specific issue relevant to the friendly interview process. Finally my findings are summarised, emphasising the implications for a feminist response to interviewing friends.

Interviewing Friends and Strangers

Feminist researchers have developed insights into the in-depth interviewing process by exploring the emerging relationship between researcher and researched, and to a lesser extent, when a pre-existing friendship exists. A brief discussion of their insights and dilemmas provides a useful context for examining my own interviewing experiences.

In her recent publication Padgett (1998) urged the researcher to “… avoid assuming the stance of a clinician or friend” (63). Padgett’s view is contested by feminist researchers, particularly Oakley (1981) who denied the existence of “… ‘hygienic’ research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production…” (58). Though aspects of Oakley’s insight were later critiqued (Cotterill 1992; McRobbie 1982), particularly regarding her assumptions of a shared, female reality, putting ‘the personal’ in feminist research has continued to be valued (Stanley and Wise 1983). Finch (1984), McRobbie (1982), Oakley (1981) and Parr (1998) focused on the impact of the developing relationship between the researched and the researcher. Oakley (1981) emphasised the emerging positive relationship between herself and her respondents. She details her willingness to self disclose during interviews “… the way I respond to the interviewee’s questions probably encouraged them to regard me as more than an instrument of data collection” (47-48). Oakley (1981) maintains, among other things, that her style of in-depth interviewing promoted rapport and therefore a successful method. Though recently Gair (2000) sounded a note of warning: “It seems that forging friendships could become a dishonest way to secure rich data” (12).

McRobbie (1982) suggests that feminist researchers should acknowledge their own biographies, thereby making explicit the links between their experiences and those of the researched. Whether or not to disclose these experiences to the respondent is debated by Parr (1998) who finally decided, in her own research, to disclose her similar life experience to her respondents, mature, women students. Parr (1998) reported her interviews were successful. Finch (1984) also examines the implications of shared life experiences between researcher and researched. In Finch’s case she and her respondents, at the time of the interviews, were clergyman’s wives. This shared life experience provided a shared understanding that served to enhance rapport during the interview, “… they talked to me as another clergyman’s wife …” (Finch 1984,79). This analysis is relevant to the understandings generated from my own research experience, as the respondents and I were mothers of young children.
McRobbie (1982) notes the benefit of women’s willingness to participate in qualitative interviews but also warns: “Could it be that women are often such good research subjects because of their willingness to talk, which is in itself an index of powerlessness?” (56). Finch (1984) does however argue that successful interviews can not necessarily be attributed to women’s willingness to talk and that it may be that the qualitative interview process encourages rapport in and of itself as opposed to the more formal, quantitative questionnaire. “How far does the experience simply reflect the effectiveness of in-depth interviewing styles per se, and how far is it specific to women?” (Finch 1984, 74).

This literature suggests, acknowledging McRobbie’s (1982) warning, that successful interviews maybe accounted for, particularly or in combination, by shared gender and experience, the willingness of women to talk and the inherent usefulness of qualitative in-depth interview techniques. But what if, as in my own case, the researcher and the researched are already friends? Glesne and Peshkin (1992) provide a brief note on the implications of interviewing friends. Specifically, they argue it was difficult to avoid assumptions of prior knowledge, either by the respondent or the researcher, that would lead to a failure to elicit important information. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) refer to this as a ‘hazard’ occurring when the interviewer has extensive personal knowledge of the research area. They advocate a naive approach where the researcher places themselves in the role of learner. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) also note that when the researcher and respondent are friends there may be a tendency for the respondent to over identify with the researcher and even to modify their behaviour or comments to please the researcher.

Cotterill’s (1992) article addressed issues primarily related to the establishment of friendship through the interviewing process, as well as a useful examination of issues around interviewing friends. She challenged the feminist epistemology that maintains that the relationship between the researcher and the respondent is equal and that mutual understanding and friendship will result. She argues “that interviews are fluid encounters where balances shift between and during the interview situation and there are times when the researcher as well as the researched are vulnerable” (Cotterill 1992, 593). This discussion alerted and sensitised me to issues of power and vulnerability which I was to find invaluable.

Cotterill (1992) identifies a number of issues to consider when interviewing friends. The nature of the interview and the way the respondent regards the researcher may differ when interviewing friends compared to interviewing strangers. Cotterill (1992) suggests that most interviews are initially formal, but this may not be the case with friends. It may also be unclear how the respondent views the researcher: are you a friend doing research or a researcher who is a friend? Interviewing friends involves a lot of catching up first: sometimes it’s hard to know when you are moving from the informal to the formal. When there are high levels of trust and rapport, personal details may be revealed that may later prove uncomfortable for both the researcher and the respondent. These occurrences cannot always be foreseen, or planned for, and often it is difficult to reconcile the roles of researcher and friend. Additionally, a friend may feel compelled to disclose information that they might otherwise not, motivated by their concern to give you what they think you want in the interview. Further, obligations to friends may not allow you to use certain information or findings from your research, especially if the researcher considers that it will cause harm to the respondent. The roles of researcher and friend could become blurred. A respondent may make a disclosure expecting the researcher, as would be the case in friendship, to make a similar, reciprocal disclosure.
Cotterill (1992) also suggests that it is important to acknowledge that the interviews may elicit painful memories for the women involved. The adoption of a feminist epistemology does not preclude the occurrence of painful events in the research process. Further, the researcher will be affected by what happens in the interview and so will the respondent. The researcher has no control over how the respondent will react. “Nor can she prepare herself for a respondent’s distress or her own guilt which stems from the feeling that she is ‘holidaying on other people’s misery’?” (McRobbie quoted in Cotterill 1992, 598). The researcher may be troubled by the thought, “…did I manipulate her friendship for my own ends?” (Cotterill 1992, 598). These issues are true of any research, but particularly so when interviewing friends.

Reinharz (1992) provides a brief summary of issues related to interviewing as a friend and as a stranger. Denise Segura (in Reinharz 1992) noted the benefit of having a close relationship with her respondents prior to the commencement of her interviews, maintaining “…the quality of the interview data and their reliability is enhanced when the researcher is knowledgable and integrated into the community under study” (in Reinharz 1992, 26). Segura also commented that her interviews were more focused and less time was spent interviewing. However, Mary Zimmerman (Reinharz 1992) maintained that her status as a stranger provided access to information that would not be given to a friend: “The interviewer was a stranger – not part of the women’s world and someone she would be likely not to see again. … the women may have felt they could talk about their most private lives and feelings relatively freely” (in Reinharz 1992, 26).

Research subject area may have influenced these responses. Segura was interviewing within a population where distrust of strangers was the case. By contrast Zimmerman was interviewing women about abortion, an experience they may not want to disclose to friends.

**A Friendly Interview**

As I contacted friends to ask them to participate in my research project I found that despite initial intentions and the recommendations of research texts, using a pre-prepared research introduction felt contrived and unnatural. The cover story became, however, the basis of an individually tailored introduction relevant to each potential respondent. Close friends knew about my research and a lengthy, introductory explanation about the research was unnecessary. Friendly acquaintances knew nothing of my research and a more detailed approach was required. This was my first indication that the level of friendship or the amount of knowledge we had about each other would be relevant to an understanding of the friendly interview. Each of the five women I approached to participate in the research agreed to proceed with the interviews. All were interested in the research project itself and keen to be involved and contribute, though some felt they may have had nothing useful to say. Respondents were motivated by the offer of a free baby sitting session which they thought particularly relevant and useful.

Prior to the commencement of this study a detailed research plan was submitted to the University Human Ethics Sub-Committee and ethical clearance was given. I provided potential respondents with details of the nature of my study, explaining what would be required of them should they choose to participate. I also assured the women involved that their participation would be confidential.
First contacts with respondents provided some insight into the complexity of the research task I had undertaken. Issues related to interviewing friends and the subtleties of power relationships in the interview process began to emerge (Cotterill 1992). I chose respondents who had young children with at least one child of pre-school age. The respondents were also my friends though the depth of our friendship varied. This variation became important as the interview process progressed. Margaret and I had known each other since childhood. I had known Jane, Elena and Jenny for about five years. Our children were the same ages and this shared life experience bonded us. Elena and I were particularly close as not only did we have children the same age, our husbands also worked together and we were both undertaking post graduate study in the same field. Gail and I had only recently met, though the similar ages of our children and similarities in our backgrounds meant that friendship was easily established. These various levels of friendship impacted on each interview differently.

My first interview was with Jane, a senior academic and mother of two pre-school age children. Jane was an expert in research methodology. I commented in my notes that because Jane is a ‘research expert’ I immediately felt vulnerable. She knows more than me, she will be evaluating me, were two of my fears. My prior knowledge of Jane as a ‘research expert’ meant that I was less comfortable in the interview and may have focused more on the interview technique rather than interview content. I further noted that the pre-interview ‘warm-up’ conversation was important (Cotterill 1992). We had a cup of tea, caught up on the latest family news and discussed the research project. This process served to relax us both and it was a process that was successfully used in all the interviews. This was a process also noted by Finch (1984).

Interviews with my second respondent, Margaret, were held at Margaret’s home. Margaret works part time and has two children, one school age and one at preschool. I noted that Margaret had arranged especially for a friend to mind her children while we conducted the interview. Margaret also closed up her house so it would appear to the neighbours that no one was home and we would remain undisturbed. Margaret was a little stiff and formal in her first interview, using her ‘best’ voice. She commented that she was concerned to give me what she thought I wanted and not to ‘talk on’ too much. Cotterill (1992) called this the ‘best face phenomenon’ and commented further that “they (respondents) are acutely aware that they need to manage their conduct” (595). In our post interview discussion Margaret, said that because of her fear of talking too much she had not necessarily painted a picture of events as they were. This incident demonstrated to me that Margaret viewed me in two roles, as researcher and as friend. The formal interview responses were provided for the researcher and the disclosure of the provision of incomplete information for the friend.

Another interesting event occurred during my interviews with Margaret. I noted that Margaret modified (was tactful about) her comments regarding her choice to work part time. She knew I had made an alternative choice in returning to work on a full time basis. As a consequence of knowing me (the researcher) Margaret may have modified her responses so that she would not offend me. Of course these modifications of response can occur when there is no friendship between the researcher and the respondent.

Elena, a mother of two, worked full time in a professional occupation. Elena and I were intimate friends and she had known of my research project since its inception. We had also closely shared our mothering experiences. At the conclusion of the first interview, Elena commented that I probably knew all of the information anyway. However, I often had the sense during the interview that we were covering old ground, because of our intimate friendship, and this revisiting of familiar information contributed to a mechanical interview process. This was
another indication that the level of friendship or knowledge that researcher and respondent have about each other may affect the interview process. The level of knowledge also impacted on my interview with Gail, though in a more positive way.

Gail, the mother of four young children, had a professional qualification and worked occasionally in the evenings. We had previously met through Margaret and it was Margaret who suggested Gail as a potential respondent for this research project. Before our initial interview Gail asked a lot of questions about the research and was particularly interested in the feminist research perspective. I answered all her questions openly and honestly. At the conclusion of the interviews we again talked at some length about mothering and this research project. Gail asked me to tell her my mothering story, which I did. A similar experience has been noted by other feminist researchers (Oakley 1981; Finch 1984). The interviews were relaxed and the sense of interest and mutual discovery provided a contrast to the ‘familiar ground’ interviews with Elena. Our level of knowledge about each other was not as intimate, as with Elena, and a more in-depth, exploratory interview was the outcome.

Jenny had chosen to stay at home with her only child. Jenny also was interested in the research project and keen to participate. She was interested in the research methodology, which we discussed, but was a little unsure of the interview process and what questions would be asked. The interviews were warm and relaxed and the information provided interesting and insightful. At the end of the first interview I noticed that Jenny seemed upset. She commented that discussing the first year of her child’s life had evoked the trauma of that first mothering experience again. Also, discussions about Jenny’s mother seemed to elicit negative thoughts and feelings about her mother after the interviews were over. “I mean when I go home I usually start thinking about it (the interview). What always comes to mind is my relationship to my mother again ...” (Jenny). Cotterill (1992) comments that the respondent may be affected by what happens in the interview and the researcher has no control over how the respondent will react.

After the completion of the interviews respondents felt comfortable about asking me to do a variety of favours for them, in addition to the promised babysitting. I saw these favours, such as pet minding during the holidays, as additional obligations that my friends believed I had accumulated by interviewing them. I valued my friendship and felt impelled to respond positively to my friends’ requests for favours beyond the promised babysitting.

**New Understandings**

As previously noted, discussions regarding the developing relationship between researcher and respondent have highlighted the impact of shared gender and experience, the implicit power differences between researcher and respondent and the nature of qualitative interviewing (McRobbie 1982; Finch 1984; Oakley 1981). Cotterill’s (1992) excellent discussion on interviewing friends provides some initial insights into the ‘friendly’ interview process. It is the intention of this paper to add to Cotterill’s (1992) discussion by developing new understandings, emerging from my own experience of interviewing friends. This was accomplished by exploring the impact of a pre-existing friendship for the researcher, the researched and the feminist research process.

As a researcher I regarded my in-depth interviews as successful. The interviews were warm and friendly and the data gathered rich, providing the basis for useful findings about how mothers
cope with young children. Factors not related to my pre-existing friendship may have contributed to the success of the interviews. Successful rapport was established because of my willingness to self disclose and answer respondents questions during interviews (Oakley 1981) and my shared experience with respondents; we were all mothers of young children (McRobbie 1982; Finch 1984; Parr 1998). Success may also be attributed to respondents’ willingness to be involved in the interviews and to provide the information I requested (McRobbie 1982). As Finch (1984) suggests the success of the interviews may also be ascribed to the in-depth interviewing technique itself.

I acknowledge the impact of all of these factors, but also argue that the pre-existing friendship provided another dimension of complexity that reflections on my own research partially reveal. New understandings emerged around the impact of the knowledge the researcher and respondent have about each other. The story of when researcher and respondent are friends is complex, impacting on the interview process in positive and negative ways. Issues arising from this circumstance are sometimes only relevant to the researcher and at other times only to the respondent, and often relevant to both.

Situation my research in the context of my friendship led me to recognise that the research formed only a small part in the continuum of the friendship. The friendship had life before and after the research event. I, therefore, could not only view myself as a researcher as I was also a friend, a valued position. Recognition of this circumstance meant I could not help but consider, while undertaking the research, the possible impact of the research on my valued friendships. Reflecting on this context provided insight into a number of implications for a researcher in this position. Choices were made based on the hope that the research would not negatively impact my friendship. A topic was chosen that I believed would not lead to ‘dangerous ground’ (Cotterill 1992), child care coping strategies. During the research process with the preservation of the friendship in mind, did I ask the ‘hard’ questions or continually steer the interview into ‘safe’ areas? Gair (2000) noted in her own research, when she became particularly friendly with a respondent: “It was a sense of loyalty to our friendship which was drawing me to document the data from her interview in a different, edited way” (13).

Situation the research event (in-depth interviews in this case) as only part of a continuum of the friendship also means recognising, by implication, that the relationship existed prior to the research. A friendly relationship implies shared experience, understandings and sympathies. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) refer to this particular situation, noting the researcher may therefore have extensive personal knowledge of the research area. However, it is not only extensive personal knowledge of the research area that the researcher has but also of the respondents’ and potential respondents’ lives in general. Having knowledge of the lives of my potential respondents meant that I was able to choose which friends I thought would be suitable participants. This of course may occur with ‘non-friendly’ research; where respondents may be subsequently discarded during the research process. Knowledge, also, of respondents’ ‘expertise’, as with my friend Jane, led to feelings of inadequacy as a researcher. Margaret’s knowledge, on the other hand, of my life circumstances meant she modified her responses in order not to offend me.

It was not only the pre-existing friendship that was influential; the type of friendship was a critical factor, with implications for the researcher and the researched. Were we intimate friends,
sharing the details of our lives over many years or were we friendly acquaintances with a less intimate knowledge of each others’ lives? An intimate friendship meant ‘familiar ground’ interviews as our knowledge of each others’ experiences was already so deep. Conversely, interviews with the less intimate friend were dynamic and provided both of us with a great sense of mutual discovery. Mutual discovery was also evident in respondents’ willingness to ask many questions about the research and its theoretical context.

Reflecting on the friendly interview process has led me to conclude that these new understandings have a number of implications for the feminist research process, particularly for the balance of power in interviews. Cotterill (1992) notes that feminist researchers have been concerned with issues of power within the research relationship, acknowledging that “… the researcher, by virtue of her education and status, is always more powerful than her respondents” (599). However, Cotterill (1992) contends that the balance of power in interviews is variable, shifting between the researcher and the respondent. This discussion alerted me to the possibility that this power relationship was affected due to the nature of friendship and the power, though ultimately lying with the researcher, shifted more readily to the respondent. I would argue that this is a positive outcome for respondents.

Power shifts were evidenced in my own research. As the researcher, I was concerned about loyalty to my friends and maintaining the future friendship. This may have diminished my power in the research relationship. And yet, I felt my power was increased by the prior knowledge I had of my respondents; I chose respondents based on this knowledge and also it would be hard for respondents to misrepresent their stories during the interviews. I would argue, however, that because of our pre-existing friendship respondents were empowered. Respondents felt able to ask many questions about the nature of the research, even my own mothering story and also to extend my reciprocal obligations to them way beyond the conclusion of the final interview. With the preservation of my friendships in mind, I needed to oblige. With the performance of these obligations my respondents received immediate, practical and meaningful benefit from participating in the interviews (for example babysitting). This transference of power to respondents, however temporary, provides a justification for interviewing friends.

These reflections are consistent with the promotion of subjectivity in the feminist research process and the value of self-reflection. Cotterill (1992) reminds feminist researchers of the value of placing “…the subjective in the knowledge… (by valuing) … the subjective experience of women researchers” (593). Reflection on my own ‘friendly’ interviews has added depth and re-emphasised the complexity of this type of research by exploring, particularly, the impact of pre-existing knowledge, and the shifts in power that are unique to the friendly interview.

Conclusion

Feminist researchers (Stanley and Wise 1983; Oakley 1981) have encouraged scrutiny of the feminist research process, with particular emphasis on locating the researcher; “It is also within such an explication of the basis of the knowledge that alternative means of using ‘the personal’ are to be found” (Stanley and Wise 1983, 196). Locating myself as a researcher meant acknowledging my role as a friend and also my obligation to examine the impact of this friendly relationship on the interview process. This reflection has led me to position the in-depth interview, when researcher and researched are friends, in an entirely different context. The
‘friendly’ interview is situated within the context of the friendship rather than as a research act where the researcher and researched meet relatively briefly. The altered positioning of these research events has provided an opportunity to explore the implications of the differing contexts. The significance of these findings for understanding issues of power and the value of subjectivity and self-reflection in feminist research is highly relevant and adds another dimension to a complex process that deserves further investigation.

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FROM CRISIS TO RECOVERY: GROUP WORK WITH WOMEN

Ava Pauchard and Michele Harris

ABSTRACT

In 2001 New South Wales Mental Health Services have gradually been shifting their focus and orientation. Health service planning aims to incorporate a wide area of people’s lives in order to address their broader needs. The N.S.W. Department of Health Policy on domestic violence acknowledges the impact of abuse on health, however, when women present in crisis to Mental Health Services, their behaviour is often pathologised. The ongoing challenge for social workers on a mental health team has been to move beyond the bio-medical model and develop group work practice that directly addresses the impact of abuse on women’s health. This is an intervention based on the empowerment of women encouraging them to identify and build on their strengths so as to move from crisis to recovery.

INTRODUCTION

Our paper begins with a brief account of the observed shifts in mental health services’ orientation during the past decade. It reflects on how social work practice has been responding to women with mental health issues, and highlights the consequences of working within the confines of a bio-medical model. We discuss how the changes in N.S.W. legal and policy frameworks have allowed social workers to move their practice back into a holistic intervention model.

The second part of our paper outlines a process for developing, structuring and facilitating a six-week group programme for women. It presents our evaluation of the group process. Finally, the paper highlights future challenges and directions for the practice of social work in a community mental health context.

BACKGROUND TO SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN MENTAL HEALTH

The link between domestic violence and mental illness has been understood and documented since the 1980’s. Social workers employed by N.S.W. Government Mental Health Services in the early 1990’s were focusing their practice on the wider area of people’s lives. They provided long-term counselling to individuals and families, as well as facilitating groups for women survivors of abuse.

Authors:
Ava Pauchard and Michele Harris both worked for South Eastern Sydney Area Health Service at the time of writing these Practice Notes. Ava can be contacted on Email: PauchardA@sesahs.nsw.gov.au
However, by mid to late 1990’s, the focus of NSW Mental Health Services became narrower and placed priority on the treatment of “serious mental illness”. The DSM-III & IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) has tended to define the parameters of service intervention over the past six years. The effect of this shift was to limit our response to the treatment of presenting symptoms by psychiatric interventions such as medication and symptom management techniques, or psychological interventions such as behaviour management and limit setting or containment. This inevitably led to a process of pathologising women’s behaviour when they presented in crisis to Mental Health Services. Viewed through a lens of illness or disorder, women were given a diagnosis from DSM-III/IV and a treatment plan was devised. (See Diagram 1)

**Diagram 1. ASPECTS OF ILLNESS**

Social Workers were assimilated into this pathologising process. Now as mental health workers we told women how to manage and learn to live with their illness/disorder. We encouraged them to continue compliance with prescribed medications, but we avoided dealing with abuse issues in their lives. It was believed that any focus on the impact of abuse would risk an exacerbation of ‘symptoms’. As seen from the diagram a wide range of psychological and psychiatric interventions could be included into a case management plan depending on the ‘illness’ identified. For example, even a complex ‘dual diagnosis’ (substance abuse + mental illness) could have a range of possible interventions (drug and alcohol counselling services, medication and case management). However, not all illnesses could be ‘case managed’. ‘Anxiety Disorders’ were often responded to with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. ‘Eating Disorders’ would be referred to the General Practitioners or Disorder Units. Women who continually presented in crisis were usually diagnosed with ‘Personality Disorders’ and although from the Diagram, *Aspects of Illness*, there appears to be a multitude of responses, this group has traditionally been the least assisted by mental health teams.
DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OPTIONS

The severe limitations of the bio-medical model are particularly evident when symptoms of illness re-occur and the illness becomes ‘difficult to treat’.

When mental illness occurs in the context of past or present abuse, the bio-medical model is unsuccessful since its focus is limited to treatment of symptoms and behaviour management. Diagram 2 illustrates how when the impact of abuse is ignored, treatment options are limited to medical responses, which are focused on symptoms. Very often re-curring incidents of abuse in the woman’s life can be the stressor which sets off the cycle of symptoms and problematic behaviour. Women viewed through the lens of illness/disorder are then seen to have “relapsed” or are at “risk of self harm”. The medical response is invariably to engage crisis services, alter or increase medications and finally, if other options fail, arrange a hospital admission. However, the initial stressor, which led to the crisis, is not usually explored. Once the woman’s mental health has been stabilised, a management plan is put in place. Usually “early warning signs” (e.g. poor sleep) are identified with the client and her family, so it will be easier to know if she starts to ‘relapse’ again in the future. However, the stressor, which could contribute to the appearance of an “early warning sign” (such as lack of sleep or irritability), is not generally investigated. So the next time there is an incident of abuse, the woman’s stress increases and early warning signs are easily overlooked by the client who is becoming increasingly distressed, symptoms reappear and the medical model is re-activated into the same treatment response patterns.

There are times when medication changes and length of hospital admissions have limited or no effect on improving women’s mental state. This is when within the bio-medical model these women are viewed as having symptoms that are difficult to treat or behaviour that is difficult to contain. Viewed through an illness/disorder lens these women will be seen as low functioning or as having treatment resistant symptoms that will not completely resolve. Recovery from ongoing crisis is unlikely to occur.

Diagram 2. CRISIS PRESENTATION

[Diagram showing the crisis presentation cycle with steps involving increasing stress, symptoms/behaviour "difficult to treat", limited effect, in relapse/at risk, increased symptoms/concerning behaviours, medication change/increases, acute care services, hospital admission.]
However, recovery is possible if women are encouraged to voice their ideas on what might be causing their disorders, and are supported in exploring alternative options for alleviating their distress. A process of recovery occurs when women can actively participate in their own treatment plan. (Rummery 1996)

In 2001, Mental Health is shifting its service orientation to incorporate a wide area of people’s lives and consider their broader needs. NSW Health Department Domestic Violence Policy acknowledges the impact of abuse on health, however the process of pathologising women’s behaviour still occurs when they present in crisis to mental health services. The challenge for Social Workers has been to move beyond the bio-medical model to develop group work practice that directly addresses the impact of abuse on women’s mental health and encourages them to identify and build on their strengths.

THE LEGAL AND GOVERNMENT POLICY FRAMEWORK

In 2001, the New South Wales Government provides a legal and policy framework which supports social workers in this challenge. Apprehended Violence Orders, Police Department Domestic Violence Liaison Officers, and the Domestic Violence Court Assistance Scheme provide a clear message to the community that abuse is no longer a private matter but a public issue. The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 2000 mandates Health Department employees to notify when children are exposed to domestic violence. This has highlighted the need for the Health Department to provide an infrastructure within the service to support the Act’s application. Within the New South Wales Health Department, a domestic violence screening tool is currently under review. Mental Health Services are reviewing this tool and its application within the mental health assessment process.

It is the development of these policies within the Health Department which provides a framework within which our work with women can be located and legitimised.

DEVELOPING A GROUP PROGRAM FOR WOMEN

Aim

The aim for the group was to shift the focus from the impact of mental health on women’s lives to the impact of abuse on women’s mental health and their lives as a whole. Secondly, the aim for us, as social workers in a mental health context, was to establish our role as facilitators of an experiential process.

Goals

The goals of the group were to:

Explore how the issue of violence has impact on women’s mental health
Shift the focus away from individual pathology
Empower women, and
Provide alternative interventions for recovery.
Communication About The Program

Advertising for the group was distributed to services within mental health as well as community health services. The pamphlet for the women provided information and contact details. A specific pamphlet was developed for clinicians which included a description of the group.

“The target group is women with a mental illness who have experienced violence in their significant relationships. Within a systemic and feminist framework, we will explore how the issue of violence has impacted on their mental health.”

The aim was to provide information to health clinicians about the theoretical underpinnings of our work, to advertise an alternative way of understanding the impact of abuse on women’s lives, and to provide an opportunity for discussion (i.e. a non-pathologising discussion). The pamphlet specified that ‘self referral’ rather than referral via clinician or doctor was required. The shift in focus in the referral process aimed to encourage the idea of a choice for women.

STRUCTURING THE GROUP PROGRAM

Pre-group interviews

We meet with the women prior to the commencement of the group for a structured pre-group interview. While some of the women had regular contact with us, it was important to meet with the women to hear their individual expectations and goals for attending the group. The pre-group interview provided an opportunity to begin the process of exploring the history of abuse and the impact of abuse on the women’s lives through a holistic lens. The interview also provided an opportunity to explore their support systems, their social networks, and whether they were in contact with a counsellor. We explored safety issues in current relationships, the issue of individual safety and how the women might manage any additional stress that may arise for them during the group process.

Individual goals identified in the pre-group interview included: to feel safe in the group and everyday life; improve their self-esteem; regain a sense of self; their identity; confront fears; life alone; future abusive relationships; find courage to move on; to confront the perpetrator; work on family and relationship issues and to break the silence; become more assertive; take control of their lives; have healthy boundaries in every day life; and move towards closure; letting go of the past; move on from the abusive relationship.

Whilst we had combined our knowledge and skills in developing a structure for the six week program it was at this point that the women’s stories began to inform that structure.

Intervention based on empowerment of women

Women’s participation in the group process from the point of referral onwards was crucial to the successful outcome of the program.

Shifting the focus from individual pathology meant we encouraged women to view various aspects of themselves in addition to the health aspect. Diagram 3. is a visual representation of some of the Aspects of Self that women identified were important components of how they viewed themselves.
This approach allowed women to explore the impact of abuse on their life and to identify how different aspects of themselves may have been variously affected. Parallel to this process each woman was able to also identify her strengths and share these with the others in the group.

In providing women a safe space within the group to explore together the impact of abuse on their lives, they were able to empower each other by drawing on their individual strengths and were able to develop personal goals for the future.

**Facilitating the group**

The two-hour sessions were held weekly over a six-week period.
Group Rules and Goals
In session one women were encouraged as individuals to reflect again on their goals, and as a group formulate the joint goals they would move towards in their work together. Rules for the group were established to ensure each woman would feel safe, respected and valued in the group.

Mapping The Experience Of Abuse
In session two the women reflected privately on their experiences of abuse and began to map a picture of the extent of abuse in their lives. As a group we reviewed beliefs in society and how myths still prevailed despite changes in laws and policies relating to abuse. By session two women reported feeling more validated and less isolated in their experiences.

Exploring Relationships
In session three the film, Gaslight (1944) was a powerful vehicle for the group to consider the impact of abuse in relationships and the debilitating effects on one’s self-image and mental health.

Identifying Strengths
By session four the women were able to identify positive changes in how they viewed themselves, and could talk about their strengths and how they might use these to overcome obstacles in their lives. They began to reflect on their future goals.

Self Esteem
In session five the women mapped the different aspects of self (Diagram 3). They each reflected on the aspects of self where their self-esteem was high and where it was low, and they identified which aspects of self were most or least important to them. For example, a woman may have identified for herself that ‘being a friend’ was an important aspect of self, that her self-esteem was high when she was gardening, but low when she visited her doctor, or that work had low importance in her life. The Aspects of Self exercise also gave them an opportunity to reflect on the impact of the abuse. In this session women began sharing valuable information on how they would each nurture themselves and build their self-esteem in the particular aspects of self.

Review and Closure
In the final session, the women reviewed their personal progress and what they each needed to have closure or begin the process for themselves. We used the last session to inform women of community resources they might wish to follow up in the future.

To assist with future planning, we asked the women to complete an evaluation form on their experience of the group.
Evaluation

Women described the six-week group process as ‘enlightening, ‘educational’ and ‘informative’. They experienced ‘support’, ‘understanding’ and ‘compassion’ from each other. Most importantly they reported feeling ‘empowered’ by the process. They found the group provided them with a ‘useful structure to work within’ and appreciated ‘focusing on the positives’ since some of them had attended previous groups where the negative aspects of their lives had been the main focus.

As facilitators it was encouraging to receive this feedback which indicated we had succeeded in moving away from a pathologising model of interventions and allowed women to work on their goals for recovery within a safe structure.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR PRACTICE

Through the group we had been able to facilitate a process of recovery because the women were participating in the development of the program. They were empowered because they were given a safe place to tap into their expert knowledge about the abuse experience, and identify their strengths and skills which they generously shared with one another.

This kind of work with women has the potential to have powerful outcomes. It reduces their vulnerability by removing their perceived sense of isolation, and by removing the lens of individual pathology, it strengthens women’s capacity to view their lives in alternative ways. They are validated and empowered to begin their own recovery process, and as a group develop the potential to identify useful community resources as well as identify gaps in community and legal services.

The challenge for social workers on mental health teams will be to continue questioning current practice, and push towards holistic models of treatment.

“Discoveries have reverberations.
A new idea about oneself or some aspect of one’s relations to others unsettles all one’s other ideas, even the superficially related ones.
No matter how slightly, it shifts one’s entire orientation.
And somewhere along the line of consequences, it changes one’s behaviour.”

( McLaughlin, 1990)
Perhaps, mental health services are as much, if not more in need of “a new idea about oneself” than the women who present in crisis. Mental health ‘orientation’ is gradually shifting away from illness, and it will be the ongoing challenge for social workers to monitor this shift and become pro-active in instigating changes to practice.

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“WE ARE SAD, NOT MAD”
THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK IN THE SUCCESSFUL
RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEE FAMILIES WHO HAVE
EXPERIENCED TORTURE AND TRAUMA.

Eileen Pittaway

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the role of social work in providing effective resettlement support
mechanisms to refugee families who have survived torture and trauma in their country of origin
or refugee camps, to enable them to build new lives.

The findings are based on extensive work done with refugee women and families by the
author. (Iredale, Pe-Pua at al, 1995; Pittaway, 1991; Pittaway and Breen, 1999).

A CASE HISTORY

In the mid 1990’s the author was requested to attend a case conference between officers from
an Australian State government welfare agency and a young woman who had recently entered
Australia on a refugee visa from Latin America. The author was requested to come to the
meeting because of her involvement with refugee communities and ability to speak some
Spanish.

The woman was living in a flat in the western suburbs of Sydney with her three year old
daughter and the neighbours had reported her to the State Government Department for child
abuse/neglect. The neighbours complained that the child screamed day and night, and that the
mother alternatively ignored the child or screamed back at her. They also expressed their
concern that the child was apparently being fed a diet of junk food and canned soft drinks. All
attempts at friendly intervention had been refused by the mother, who did not speak any English
and was obviously very disturbed. She was also refusing to attend English language classes,
and would not allow the child to be taken into child-care to provide the local community worker
an opportunity to talk with the mother. There was a strong feeling by the professionals that the
child would have to be removed from the mother and that the mother required psychiatric
treatment.

The facts that emerged at the case conference (held by a local community service) were that the
mother and her husband had been student political activists and were jailed for two years prior
to the mother and child’s arrival in Australia. Her husband had died in gaol, and the young
woman had been repeatedly raped and tortured. Subsequently she required six months medical
treatment for her injuries. During her time in gaol her parents took her baby to a distant town

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Author:
Eileen Pittaway is a Lecturer in the School of Social Work, University of New South Wales,
Sydney, Australia, 2052. Tel: 9385 1849. Email: E.Pittaway@unsw.edu.au
and raised her as their own, fearful of her being taken if she was known to be the child of the young couple. There was no contact between the mother, the daughter and her parents. The plight of the young woman came to the attention of a Catholic group in Chile, which organised an emergency evacuation for her and her daughter to Australia. The mother and daughter, now three years old, were reunited, and after one week with the grandparents were flown to Sydney as refugees. None of the service providers currently in contact with the mother and daughter were familiar with this history.

BACKGROUND

In the latter part of the twentieth century, the nature of war and warfare has changed dramatically. Armed conflict has moved away from the so called “theatres of war” and now takes place in communities, villages, towns and cities. Now, more than ever before, women, children and men in non-combat roles are the focus of battles, armed conflict and torture. This exposes whole populations to trauma, and the sequelae is now even more destructive than in it was in the past (Goldson 1996). Entire families including refugee children and young people are frequently survivors of torture and trauma in their own country. This has caused an unprecedented number of forced migrations internationally, with estimates of up to 20 million refugees seeking asylum outside of their own countries and a further 20 million people displaced within their country of origin. Many of these displaced people endure horrific experiences during their escape to a country of asylum and resettlement in a third country is the only durable or permanent solution.

Refugee Women

UNHCR estimate the majority of all refugee women and many children are routinely raped and sexually abused (ECOSOC 1993; EXCOM 1997). Women are raped to humiliate their husbands and fathers, and for reasons of cultural genocide. In camps they are forced to trade sex for food for their children. Often they are raped by the military, by border guards and sometimes even by members of the UN Peace keeping forces sent to protect them. Rape and sexual abuse is the most common form of systematised torture used against women, ranging from gang rape by groups of soldiers, to rape by trained dogs and the brutal mutilation of women’s genitalia. Many children are born to refugee women as the result of rape (Martin 1991). The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women notes that in refugee camps across Rwanda in 1994, it was reported that every woman and girl child had been raped and/or sexually assaulted (Coomaraswamy 1998). In Australia, health/welfare workers are working with refugee children from a number of refugee producing countries as young as seven who have themselves been raped and tortured, or forced to witness the rape and torture, and even killing, of family members.

A study conducted in Winnipeg, Canada, found that over 50% of refugee women who had been raped and 94% of other refugee sexual assault victims did not tell their refugee workers of their experience (Pope 1990). Many more sought help for psychosomatic symptoms related to the experience. As the post traumatic symptoms such as depression, loss of sleep, anger, fear of strangers, and feeling dirty, are similar to those of other trauma, the root of the problem often goes unrecognised and untreated.
Many refugee women have lost children as part of the refugee experience. In one Cambodian camp in Thailand, a survey found that, prior to the survey, 80% of the women had lost three out of four children in the four years (Freidman 1992). In a survey conducted in Sudan in 1985, 34% of the women had lost at least one child in the previous four months (Berry 1996). Loss of family members during war and political upheaval can leave people with feelings of guilt at having survived when others have not, compounding the grief normally experienced at times of loss. Mothers feel guilty for the child that they have lost and about the children they have saved. Children can feel guilt for siblings who have died, especially in the face of the unresolved grief of the mother.

Women who have survived for long periods in camps learn to hide symptoms of trauma because they have observed that women and their children displaying these symptoms are very often overlooked by immigration officials, or refused asylum in a third country because of them (Mollica 1988).

**Refugee Children and Young People**

Young refugees are often subjected to long periods of separation from their parents. This interferes with the development of their future relationships as it destroys their internal sense of security (VFST 1996). Direct observation of children who passed through the experience of immigration, expulsion from homelands, and concentration camps, revealed that those who had remained with their parents showed much less psychological disturbance than children who had been separated from their families while enduring the same events (Boothby 1991).

Refugee young people are often faced with conflicting values when they arrive in a new country of resettlement. For many refugee young people, the highest value in their traditional culture is their family. All difficulties and problems are assumed to be dealt with within the family structure. As refugees, it is likely they have also entered a ‘trauma culture’, where survival is the highest value and ‘silence keeps you safe’ (De Monchy 1999). This contrasts sharply with the strong belief in western culture, also underlying service provision in Australia, that sharing thoughts, ideas and experiences is healthy. Thus many traditional western models of counselling may be inappropriate for young people from refugee cultures as it conflicts with both their ‘traditional culture’ as well as their ‘trauma culture’ of survival. Equally, “traditional psychiatric training leaves practitioners totally unprepared to deal with indescribable atrocities” (Mollica cited in Atkinson 1991)

Even children who were not directly involved in torture and traumatic reaction can be affected by family trauma. Children develop coping mechanisms on those modelled by their parents. In families where the younger children did not experience any direct trauma, they are still at risk of becoming traumatised because of the reactions of other family member to their own experience. This can occur for years after the initial events (TRANSACT 1998).

Often children delay their reactions to the trauma in an effort to survive. An example of this situation is that of a young refugee who arrived in Australia with his mother from the Horn of Africa. This young child had witnessed the rape of his mother during the flight to safety. His
mother subsequently gave birth to a child in a refugee camp. Eventually this family of three was resettled in Australia. Upon arrival, the mother experienced severe post traumatic reactions and had great difficulty coping with life. Her son who had witnessed the rape of his mother and endured the horrors of the war appeared to be settling in very well, conscientious at school, well behaved and making friends. It seemed amazing that despite all he had suffered, he was so resilient and had adapted and coped so well. The situation for the mother progressively worsened and she was referred to a trauma counselling service. Gradually, she began to be able to cope more with every day life and to restore a sense of purpose and meaning to her life. Concurrently, her son began to deteriorate. He withdrew and began to experience learning difficulties. Upon referral to the school counsellor, it became apparent that the child had withheld his reaction until he felt it was ‘safe’. Now that his mother was improving and stronger, he could finally let go and allow his own reaction to what he had lived through come to the surface. He was lucky that the school counsellor was able to understand what was happening to him and to respond appropriately. Often this does not occur.

The potential impact of the refugee experience on refugee families

‘Many traumatic experiences are unshared, even unshareable and thus cut off the individual members from the family system. The family identity which is based on shared assumptions and patterns of behaviour is under threat.’ (Fabrier 1997, 173)

The loss of one person within a family unit has a profound effect on the group as a whole. Further, the suffering or trauma being experienced by one individual in a family has repercussions for the rest of the group as the roles and functioning patterns of each member will be altered. The family has to learn new ways of functioning and adapt with reduced and impaired resources. Without support, dysfunctional patterns can emerge and form a new basis for adaptation to this family’s “new” life.

As a result of the traumas suffered by parents in conflict, they may be preoccupied and unable to be emotionally sensitive and available for the child. Common consequences of torture may even expose the child to badly controlled outbursts of rage (Grunbaum 1997).

There is increasing and disturbing evidence that refugee men who have both witnessed and experienced torture are more likely to resort to domestic violence. Feelings of shame at failure in having prevented events which happened to their family, failure to assume the role of breadwinner in the new country, shame that their wife or other close family members have been raped, and an inability to process that shame, lead many refugee men to resort to domestic violence to recover power and control. While understanding the pain and anguish of the men, we cannot ignore the fact that the refugee woman thus becomes a victim twice. The impact of the additional domestic violence further impacts on her mental health and her ability to support her children (Freidman 1992).

The experience of torture tends to reduce self-esteem and self-respect, especially if other family members have witnessed it. Torture affects one’s ability to trust others, especially those perceived to be in positions of power, such as bureaucratic officials. In the case of women who have been sexually abused, this distrust often extends to all men.
Even when reaching the safety of a country of resettlement, trauma does not cease. Constant worry about what is happening to those left behind make the effort to come to terms with the new environment even more difficult. The feelings of relief of escaping from intolerable situations are soon replaced by the confusion of adjusting to a new environment and the effects of uprootedness. Feelings of never fully belonging may arise from the possibility of not being able to return. In the same way that refugee women and their families learn to live with constant threat and danger, so they learn to live with the feeling of not fitting into or being comfortable in the new environment, and this is largely unconscious (Espin 1992).

**DISCUSSION**

Host countries accepting refugees are faced with the challenge of addressing the torture and trauma faced by these families if they are to provide settlement services which are both appropriate and adequate. It is well accepted that the stresses of everyday modern life, such as moving house, being made redundant, and relationship problems, can trigger both mental and physical illness. To understand the stress experienced by many refugee families, the author has to add to that list living under the fear of bombing, government persecution, life endangering situations for oneself and their family, life in a refugee camp and the uncertainty of being forced to leave one’s country (Espin 1987). Survivors of such circumstances state that once one has been in a situation of constant danger, they never feel safe again.

**Implications for social work practice**

Many people do not usually identify the need for counselling and therapy until all basic survival needs have been fulfilled. Only then do people realise that they need help to overcome the horror of their experience. Women who have worked through early difficulties have identified that if they had received counselling or therapy at an early stage, coping with fulfilling basic needs would have been much easier (Pittaway 1991).

Resettlement countries have started to provide torture and trauma rehabilitation services to refugees, but, often due to shortage of resources, these are restricted to service provision to adults. Refugee children and young people have to cope with a range of traumatic incidents and human rights violations in the process of their cognitive, emotional, social and physical development, often while dependent on adults who are themselves traumatised and unable to meet the developmental needs of their children. This makes them particularly vulnerable to mental health problems (Baker 1994). Until very recently, conventional wisdom dictated that the natural ‘resilience’ of children would be enough to enable them to recover from the trauma that they had experienced. This view did not take into account the severity of the torture and trauma experienced by refugee children and the level of ability of their often severely traumatised parents to respond to them. Compounding this are the additional difficulties faced in the process of resettlement and the prevalence of racist attitudes displayed towards them in the countries of resettlement.

The impact of trauma is extreme, and neither the individual nor the family will have learned a pattern of response to such an experience. When traditional or ethnic support services are unavailable and mainstream services are inaccessible or inappropriate, the family is thrown inward on its own resources. This is particularly problematic where the family system was not adaptive before the changes (Fabrier 1997, 173).
Trauma as the result of torture and other human rights violations has the power to oppress individuals long after the violence has occurred. Therefore it is crucial to look at the impact of trauma on an individual as part of a family and community system (VFST 1996).

To date, there has been a focus by many professionals working with refugee families on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). However, this focus on posttraumatic stress responses often leads to the assumption that if refugees do not have PTSD, then they are not seriously affected (Dawes 1992). The whole PTSD construct is culture bound and deeply irrelevant for people in many other non-western cultures.

The use of bi-cultural workers from the same ethnic background is one solution often suggested to address these issues. Unfortunately, this does not always address the problems. These workers also carry their own emotional baggage. While they may share the same language base, and even the same ethnic grouping, they may have totally different class and ideological backgrounds. In dealing with the trauma of refugee women, workers often have to walk a tightrope of confusing cultural issues. Bi-cultural workers will say things like:

“We don’t talk about things like that in our culture”
“It doesn’t happen in our culture”
“That is quite acceptable in our culture”
“Women are not allowed to admit to that in our culture”
“Older women won’t talk to you if you ask questions like that”

The reification of multiculturalism is so great that it is often difficult for bi-cultural workers to challenge their own statements. The worker has to balance the complexities of cultural appropriateness with the fear of uncovering stories so horrific that they doubt their own ability, or the ability of the interpreter to deal with them. There is also conventional wisdom about not talking about the experience of torture and trauma with refugee women. It is argued that it is better not to disturb painful memories. It is easier for everyone just to leave the issue alone. Everyone that is, but the woman who is suffering.

Lack of Resources

Another major issue identified in the projects which have informed this paper, was the lack of appropriate resources, such as materials and workers trained to respond to the needs refugee families, children and young people. Either services do not exist, or are stretched to breaking point. A case in point is that of a family from the Horn of Africa. The mother and a number of school-aged daughters, some only primary school children, came to Australia as refugees. They were all raped by the military after being forced to watch the execution of their father and brothers. They had to wait 12 months before treatment by qualified workers and interpreters was available. Many overstretched services report that all they can do is refer cases such as these on to other services in the hope that they can offer assistance more quickly. Thus they put the families on a on a referral ‘merry-go-round’ until they drop off.
Challenges for Social Work practice

The challenges posed to social work practice by refugee families is great, but the social work profession is ideally placed to provide the comprehensive range of well co-ordinated services which this group need. Social workers are trained to respond to emotional needs and not to psycho-pathologise behaviours. The services they offer range from many different types of counselling, working with children and young people, casework, groupwork and community work. Social workers are advocates who assist people to navigate bureaucratic systems in order to receive the services and material assistance they require.

Refugee families need all the above interventions during resettlement. If supported adequately on arrival, they are more likely to resettle successfully and require no more or less services in the future than other families (Iredale et al 1995).

Social workers are ideally placed to structure services which respond to the special needs of refugee families. Family support services, play groups, support groups, recreational activities such as choirs, and traditional practices, such as massage and acupuncture, all contribute to the healing process. Safe places, such as the school, are seen as an ideal forum in which early interventions can be co-ordinated. Collaborative work with the families is possible in this environment, as it is not as threatening as a mental health institution. English classes can be arranged in homes or community centres, rather than in formal and alien places such as technical colleges. Torture and trauma services, community mental health services, youth workers and general practitioners can ensure that their services work together in a staged early intervention response to the special needs of refugee young people.

On an individual client level, social workers called upon to provide services for these communities must first recognise that any response on behalf of the client is a normal response to an abnormal situation. Counselling a torture survivor ‘does not involve applying a model of treatment. Each person must be approached within his or her individual system’ in order to ‘validate the person in the present and reconnect them to their past’ (Atkinson, in Haas Barclay, 1998). In the words of one refugee woman from Serbia, ‘we are sad, not mad’.

Social workers looking to validate the experience of refugees who have survived torture must first recognise that torture represents extreme oppression and the grossest violation of human rights. In recognising this, taking a neutral stance to refugee policy, whereby it is someone else’s responsibility, serves to negate the experience of refugees on a macro scale.

As the most marginalised of communities, refugees have no voice in the broader community. In validating the experience of refugees at a policy level, workers must seek to influence public opinion at the national level to create responsiveness in the broader community. It is only then that refugees who have survived torture and trauma will have a platform on which to speak (Haas Barclay 1998).

In the case study cited at the beginning of this paper, before the mother’s story had been heard, the professional opinion was, as stated, that the child needed removing from the care of the mother for a period of time while the mother received psychiatric help. A re-consideration of the story immediately indicates that this course of action is inappropriate and has potentially very damaging outcomes.
What the family needed (and finally received) was social work intervention. Intensive work was done to establish a relationship between the mother and the child, who were essentially strangers to each other. The mother was linked into a women’s support group with women from her own country who had been through similar experiences and at least understood what she had survived. She consented to attend a play group with her daughter, to give the daughter interaction with other children of her own age, although it was a long time before she would let the child out of her sight. Most importantly, she was linked with an older woman from the same ethnic group, who, with the support of the social worker, provided a mother figure for the young woman and a grandmother role for the child. Any attempts to get her to participate in formal English classes were dropped and she was linked into informal classes at a local community centre. Her progress was slow but sure and within a year she was coping well and establishing a life for herself and her daughter in Australia.

CONCLUSION

The challenge for social workers working with refugee families is great, but refugees are survivors. Social workers are ideally placed to recognise the sequelae of torture and trauma and to respond in a timely and effective manner. This issue needs to be addressed at a policy and a practice level, to ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to this population and that the resources are used in an effective and appropriate manner. Service provision needs to be well designed, responsive, and culturally appropriate to different waves of refugee movement. Finally and most importantly, practitioners require the necessary training to respond appropriately, and the support needed to work with often severely traumatised populations. Always workers have to remember that these people are ‘sad, not mad’. They are experiencing a very normal reaction to an abnormal situation. However, unless there is a co-ordinated, multidisciplinary response of early interventions during and following the resettlement of these families, they are at risk of remaining victims of trauma.

This paper builds on work done by Cate Breen for the Centre for Refugee Research, UNSW and the Australian National Committee on Refuge Women (ANCORW)
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Experience in anti nuclear activism in Australia is providing interesting insights into women’s activism and in to the difficulties of community organisation against the global nuclear industry.

The difficulties faced by women in communities who are under threat from nuclear facilities in 2002, pose a number of issues for community work practice. This campaign update will give readers of WIWE an overview of some current issues in the campaign against Australia’s proposed new nuclear reactor. I hope it will stimulate some critical thinking about community organisation and how we can support activism on the key issues affecting our future.

HISTORY:

Australia’s only nuclear reactor was built in 1956 in Sydney. It was at a time when Australia was still hoping to be a nuclear weapons state \(^1\) and when the ‘Atoms for peace ‘ propaganda held out a hope of nuclear power producing electricity in Australia that was ‘too cheap to meter’.

There was a demonstration against the building of the reactor but there is no indication that there was widespread opposition to it. The chair of the Australian Atomic Energy Commission (AAEC) at the time stated at a Sutherland Council meeting that the site was chosen because it was ‘remote from Sydney’s population’ and that there would be ‘no emissions from the site.’ This despite the fact that the new suburbs of Engadine and Sutherland were growing, and that every annual report of the organisation showed regular emissions of radioactive gas and liquid from the site.

The reactor was said to be obsolete in 1976 and this was when the proposal to build a new nuclear reactor was first put forward. There have been a number of successful campaigns against various new reactor proposals since 1976 and up to the present proposal. These have been coordinated by a core group of women in the community opposed to the proposal. Three women in particular, Heather Rice, Julia Mellor and Hazel Wilson, were motivated to campaign by a camp set up at the reactor by Friends of the Earth Sydney groups.

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\(^1\) Author:
Genevieve Rankin is a Lecturer in the School of Applied Social and Human Sciences, University of Western Sydney, Bankstown Campus, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith South, Distribution Centre, NSW, 1797. Email: G.Rankin@uws.edu.au
The women were committed peace activists and were concerned about the effect of the reactor on the high rates of childhood leukemia in the Engadine area, and the pollution of the Woronora river by the radioactive liquid discharged from the site through the sewer. They conducted a very careful campaign of research, public information, public meetings questions to parliament and lobbying of local, state and federal politicians. In 1981 the campaign against the old and new reactor was characterised by the nuclear establishment as the work of hysterical women in the community. There was a staff newsletter produced by the AEC which went as far as drawing a parallel between the opposition in the community to the reactor and 17th century witchcraft campaigns.

**CURRENT CAMPAIGN.** By 1992 the campaign of opposition to the new reactor had been so successful that the Keating Labor Government, after appointing a panel of experts to Review the proposal, decided not to continue with it at that stage. The Howard Liberal National Party Cabinet, in 1997, decided to build a new nuclear reactor twice the size of the old one and producing four times the amount of waste.

Surveys of public opinion consistently show the majority of Australians do not agree with their government’s proposal to build a new nuclear reactor in Sydney. The level of opposition ranges from 75% - 98% depending on what questions were asked. However, despite a continuing campaign of opposition both in the media through submissions to government and community actions, the government has indicated a determination to continue with the project without considering the weight of evidence against it. Even the discovery of 2 earthquake fault lines during the digging phase of construction has not lessened their determination.

The lack of civil and political rights of communities faced by nuclear facilities world wide is a cause for concern. In Australia Environmental Laws do not even give the community a right to a public inquiry when hazardous facilities are proposed by the Federal government on land that they own. All calls by Sutherland Shire Council, the National Environment movement and local community for a public inquiry have been refused and the public has been forced to rely on information that groups can afford to gain through Freedom of Information Requests, over 50% of which have been strenuously opposed by the Federal government.

The climate in Western Democracies since September 11th 2001 and the war on terror has rationalised the attempts of governments to deny civil and political rights to their communities. Anti terrorist laws introduced in the Australian parliament were eventually defeated but the climate of intolerance towards anyone opposed to government policy remains.

After September 11 nuclear facilities, including research reactor facilities world wide were placed on extra security alert as potential terrorist targets. The Australian government claimed to have put its Sydney reactor under extra security alert. On December 18th on the day when ANSTO (the new mane for the Atomic energy Commission) was making claims at a public forum that its security was impenetrable and it posed no security threat to the Sydney community, 36 Greenpeace activists were able to penetrate the site at 4 different locations in a matter of minutes. This included hanging a banner off the nuclear reactor for hours and sitting on top of the nuclear waste store and communication tower. Subsequently security on site has been increased, clearly with an aim to minimising the rights of demonstrators rather than as any real protection against a potential sabotage event.
Opposition to the current proposal for a new nuclear reactor, has seen the formation of a strong coalition between national Environment organisations - Greenpeace International, the Australian Conservation Foundation and Friends of the Earth; with the community based organisation People Against a Nuclear Reactor (Reaction coalition). A number of other organisations have formed or become active in the campaign such as Sutherland Shire Council, Sydney People against a Nuclear Reactor, the Student’s Environment Activists network, People for Nuclear Disarmament, and Women and Earth. In the face of massive government opposition and propaganda these groups have managed to hold successful camps on site, public meetings, submission writing campaigns, internet forums, and direct actions.

None of these has swayed government opinion or achieved mass mobilisation of the community against the proposal so far.

Questions for the reader:
How is it possible for the governments in countries which are said to have a high level of civil and political rights to successfully override these?
What other organising techniques should be tried to resist unwanted facilities that do not reflect social or inter-generational equity and that are hazardous for the environment?
Can you do anything?

BOOK REVIEWS

GENDER AND COMMUNITY CARE: SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL CARE PERSPECTIVES

Reviewed by Jane Mears, School of Applied Social and Human Sciences, University of Western Sydney, Australia.

I was very excited when given this book to review. I have a long term interest in caring and what happens to those doing the caring and those needing care. My interest dates from the mid 1980s, when, like many, many middle aged women I had a high level of personal involvement in caring. In retrospect, I can see what a significant time this was in Australia when the movement towards community care was being translated into policy. I declare this personal interest up front. For me this book was a fascinating read.

Joan Orme has done an excellent job of pulling together the disparate and complex theorising and research on community care. She has certainly fulfilled the initial aim of the book, which ‘was to undertake an overview of the literature related to practices of social and care workers, and to explore these in context of developing feminist theory in the disciplines of social work and social policy’ (Orme, 2001, 2).

She states her own value base and where she is coming from on page one of the book. ‘It is the contention of this text that the provision of community care and the identification of those who are in need of it involve processes of gender stereotyping and discrimination which permeate both employment practices and welfare policies and provision’ (Orme, 2001, 1). Take it or leave it. This position is pretty close to my own. I’ll take it and read on.

In addition, the book is ‘intended to provide a theoretical context for practice and an understanding that that context is never static, but is dependent on a dialogue between theory and practice’. (Orme, 2001, 7) It’s great to have a book that intertwines and interweaves theory and practice throughout. These are such difficult relationships to communicate to students. As soon as I mention ‘theory’ most of the students in my classes seem to nod off.

Added to this, grounding and underpinning the arguments is a continual concern with the relevance to and implications for, social work and social care. She actually does a very good job of illustrating the relevance of understanding and applying theory. For example, ‘Acknowledging that there exists power differentials between professionals and service users, between those being cared for and those providing care and those who theorise care and those being theorised about (both carers and cared for) constitutes elements of the politics of care debate explored specifically within feminist literature’ (Orme, 2001, 29-30). She makes the obvious, but telling point that ‘in community care, policies of predominantly male policy makers are carried out in the main by female workers, working with women in the domestic sphere in ways which impact on the lives of men and women, both directly and indirectly’ (Orme, 2001, 15).
Chapter 1 is neat and easy to understand, pulling out the complex threads of the argument and developing a feminist analysis of caring and carework. She spells out the main elements of essentialism, cultural feminism, and celebration of difference and identity politics. Chapter 2 looks at the historical, political and ideological context within which these policies and practices have developed. Chapter 3 provides an excellent discussion of the rather fraught and abused notion of community, tackling the complex questions of what indeed is a community and the complex notion of citizenship. ‘Women are seen to depend on men economically (public) while the interdependence of men upon women is in the domestic and emotional interchanges (private). It is the ideology of dependency that governs the lives of all women, even those who are not directly dependent on a man…. Women’s informal caring activities are not recognised as making a contribution to society and involvement in caring can deny women citizenship. The individual and private nature of the activity, so defined can disqualify them because it is seen to be an inappropriate quality’ (Orme, 2001, 83).

Chapter 4 looks at women, men and caring. The next 3 chapters examine the very different ways ‘community care’ has been understood and developed in the context of firstly mental health, secondly, older people and thirdly, disability. All this is pulled together in the final chapter, succinctly titled, Identity, Difference and ‘Just Practice’. She concludes with a plug for social work, that ‘it is the discursive tradition of social work theory which enables it to address both the individual and the social and gives it claim to its place in the academy, but equally gives it a role in informing and forming practice’. She has indeed used this discursive tradition to good effect. Particularly with the assistance of the theorising and analysis provided by resources such as this book.

Conclusion

Orme has an excellent grasp of the literature and has written an interesting, well researched and readable book. As outlined above, she adopts a clear and consistent theoretical framework and argues a convincing case. I will certainly utilise the insights she has provided in my own teaching and practice and will recommend that my students read this book and gain, at the very least, a better understanding of the links between theory and practice in this important area and the ways in which theorising can assist and support practice.
FEMINIST SOCIAL WORK THEORY AND PRACTICE


Reviewed by Associate Professor Carolyn Noble, PhD School of Applied Social and Human Sciences, University of Western Sydney, Australia.

Professor Dominelli’s new book on feminist social work theory and practice builds on her many works in this area of scholarship. This edition brings up to date issues and reflections on the way feminist theory informs much of what social work has traditionally been about and offers itself as a challenge to current postmodernist attacks about the relevance of theorising in the collective. Professor Dominelli’s broad thesis is that it is absurd to think that issues concerning women and children have either been resolved or can be incorporated in the ‘post’ critiques that want the ‘parts’ to be separated from the ‘whole’. Incorporating men in feminist analysis is essential if feminist social work is to progress.

She reminds the reader that feminist writings have always been about difference, the exclusion of marginalised voices and the analysis of power and discourses. The scholarly and practice inspired attempts to identify and name the various tensions and forms of oppression affecting women’s lived experiences is another major focus. In keeping to her commitment to feminist theorising this book draws attention to the social condition of women and children worldwide as still characterised by discrimination, exploitation, marginalisation, fragmentation from public life, poverty, abuse, violence and patriarchal dominance. New ways of thinking about and working toward the continued emancipation of women and children are offered for those social workers who want to stay committed to the feminist project.

Responding to the criticisms of contemporary feminist theorising against charges of essentialism, Professor Dominelli argues that it is hard to maintain this critique to all works produced by women scholars and practitioners over the last decade or two. In fact, in her first chapter, she reminds us of the many and varied texts that address the differentiated experiences of women’s oppression and the adaptation of their analysis to this diversity (p.7). Feminist social work is about the commitment to social change to better the lives of women, children and more latterly men. This is done by continuing to explore ways to understand and eradicate patterns of inequality, while at the same time evaluating ways to understand the continuities and discontinuities that have “been unhelpfully dismissed and sacrificed to individualism (p.8). Professor Dominelli is arguing for the collective informed by individual experiences.

But this is not the only concern of this book. Professor Dominelli wants feminist social workers to revisit the dramatic changes in the landscape of welfare ‘reform’ and its effect on the lives of women. Macro changes in monetary policy, the devaluing of the welfare state, the under-funding and gradual withdrawing of state-funded community services, the push towards individuals supporting themselves by purchasing private services or relying on the unpaid voluntary and domestic realm (mainly women) poses many problems for feminist practitioners as well as academics. Case examples are given to highlight the argument.

Research for this book comes from interviews with clients and practitioners in many aspects of social work practice. The broad headings include working with men; working with children and
families; working with adults (particularly aged care); and working with offenders. In each case a feminist perspective is explored as both praxis and theory. Her style is informal and she uses stories from the participants to support her thesis. Placing her views and perspectives squarely in the text, she uses the personal as political as doctrine to feminist scholarship. Drawing on her many other books Professor Dominelli extends her argument to current social work policies and practices in Britain today. A detailed framework is listed in the conclusion drawing together the tenets under which feminist social work practice can identify itself. Although Britain is the practice setting in which the cases are explored, many of the issues and concerns raised can be applied to Australian social workers who are facing many of the dilemmas identified in the latter part of this book.

This latest work by Professor Dominelli is unashamedly feminist in its perspective and will therefore be criticised by a rising number of social work academics committing themselves to a postmodernist view of Academe, the profession and working with individuals. Professor Dominelli knows this and counteracts her distracters by arguing that postmodernist critiques of feminist social work analysis fail to acknowledge the rich diversity in feminist theorising and the tactical importance of identifying commonalties among people in different situations. Tactical and/or strategic bases for action are still regarded as major foci in resisting domination and oppression in the lives of women and children. While there is no new theory as such there is a new way of reviewing the changing welfare landscape that continues to impact on the lives of women, children and men. The willing or unwilling complicity of social workers is in this process is highlighted.

Agree or not there is no doubt that this book has important points to make. Especially for feminist practitioners wishing to reclaim lost ground from the postmodernist attack regarding the relevance and importance of a feminist analysis. Indeed, this book will legitimate their concerns by presenting a ‘new’ view of feminist practice for those social work practitioners wanting to continue working toward universal, egalitarian ways to address inequalities endemic in late capitalist, patriarchal Western societies. If this is you, then this is the book you have been looking for.
PROTEST. POLICY AND THE PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, A CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISON


Reviewed by Ruth Phillips PhD, Lecturer (Social Policy), Department of Social Work, Social Policy and Sociology, University of Sydney, Australia

What is most striking about Weldon’s work in this book is its accessibility across a range of disciplines and the ease with which she has woven a together a representation of the state of democratic governmental responses to violence against women around the world. In her preface she states that she was inspired to produce this book because little had changed in terms of the prevalence of violence against women in the previous decade and, that this book was dedicated to assisting an improved response to this “persistent and pervasive problem”.

The breadth and depth of Weldon’s policy research will no doubt prove useful to policy-makers, students, researchers and practitioners working across a range of disciplines that examine violence against women. This includes social work, social policy studies, comparative social policy, women’s studies, criminal justice and sociology. It will also be a useful resource for activists and bureaucrats in this field, with the final chapter dedicated to responding to violence against women via the mechanisms of policy demands and development in government.

Written within a political science framework, this is, however, an excellent text for social welfare education as it brings together important discussions about policy making, social movements and democratisation. Beyond these important fields of inquiry is the original study carried out by Weldon. She uses an increasingly important comparative approach, crossing borders to make comparisons in order to advance some fundamental propositions about responsiveness and effectiveness of governmental responses to violence against women. In this study Weldon addresses the question: “Which governments do the most to address violence against women, and which do the least?” (Weldon, 2002, 29). Weldon’s inquiry is pursued in the context of a highly under researched field. As she observed, there are only three other comparative studies, all conducted in the mid 1990s, that look at variations in governmental policy responses to violence against women. Like Weldon’s work, all of those studies focus on the role of the women’s movement in driving policy reform around violence against women and the importance of the participation of women located in government, however none of the prior studies agree to what extent these factors matter (2002, 33). Weldon produces a “rich data set” on government responses to violence against women that provides a solid basis for this type of cross-national study. She also combines statistical analysis with a study of the policy process in some countries to test the applicability of some of the statistical outcomes.

Although, as Weldon acknowledges, there is always a risk of oversimplification in comparatives studies that cover a large and diverse group of countries, she nevertheless produced some fascinating data about the development of governmental responses to the activism of the women’s movement over a 20 year period in her study of 36 countries. It is gratifying for Australian women activists to recognise that after starting at zero for the number of domestic violence policy areas addressed in 1974, Australia, was a world leader 20 years later, sharing,
along with Canada, a position at the top of the list with seven key areas addressed. This may seem modest but fares extremely well in comparison to the idealised Scandinavian welfare states such as Sweden with four and Denmark and Finland on two or the shocking fact that Italy, in 1994, had no governmental policy on violence against women (Weldon, 2002, Table 2.1, 30).

In her study Weldon conducts a brief review of research approaches to considering culture and development, concluding that although culture and values should not be dismissed in terms of having some impact on government policies relating to violence against women, what is most important to understand is which “actors and arenas” in each culture matter in relation to women and violence (2002, 37 and 195). Weldon found that “strong, independently organised women’s movements” are not only a key but a necessary factor in determining improved government responsiveness to violence against women (2002, 195). Most women involved in this issue already know that, in their own context, without the women’s movement violence against women would never have been forced out of the private domain on to the public agenda. What Weldon’s study affords is a reaffirmation of the importance of the women’s movement and a reminder about how recent the history of domestic violence is as a public policy issue.

A further aspect of Weldon’s study is the question of whether having more women in elected government creates the conditions for more “women-friendly” policy making. In this respect Weldon’s study found that there is no more than a weak, non-linear link, finding that there had to be at least one or a small number of women in government to bring about legislative change (Australia being a prime example) but if there were a large proportion this was no guarantee that it would be a priority area (2002: 196). What is clear is the importance of the political will or sympathies of a government. This too is well illustrated by Australia’s first wave of policy responses to violence against women under the politically progressive Whitlam government of the 1970s when the first women’s refuges and rape crisis centres were established and funded by the government. This government and the later Hawke Labor government of the 1980s were prepared to form strong partnerships with activist women and opened up many opportunities for a women’s policy machinery to be established. Weldon concludes of her study that a strong partnership between an autonomous women’s movement and a policy machinery in government reinforce the capacity of both to bring about appropriate policy reform and legislation. “Each factor magnifies the effect of the other and this interaction produces the broadest government responses to violence against women” (Weldon, 2002, 196).

Weldon applies a structural approach to her policy analysis which, because of the broad nature of the study appears to work effectively. She was driven to utilise this approach because of what she described as flaws in other types of approaches such as feminist, critical theorist’s or neoinstitutionalist accounts. These, she suggests, are flawed because they do not adequately specify the relationship between public administration bodies and social structures (Weldon, 2002, 197). Weldon states:

Feminist and critical theoretic explanations devote insufficient attention to variation in administrative structures, while neoinstitutionalists fail to attend to the social structural aspects of social groups (2002, 197).

Weldon’s theoretical approach allows for cross national comparative issues to be addressed, such as gender, cultural and political social relations. Weldon, importantly, links this to the women’s movement policy agenda for governments, which is based on a structural relationship between government, women’s groups and the range of victims of violence across a society.
As this book is primarily about the policy process, it does not address the fundamental question of why there has been no extensive mitigation of violence against women after 20 years of active policy responses in some countries. This is not so much a flaw in this research but rather in the societies under study, which, by all accounts, including data in an appendix of Weldon’s book, women continue to suffer unacceptable levels of violence and sexual assault. What we can say is that women are more supported as victims and the idea of violence against women is publicly abhorrent. However, as Weldon points out, in her discussion about directions for future research, further research must be done on the effectiveness of specific policies and initiatives (2002, 206).

The answer to the question of why violence against women continues to be a pervasive problem must lead us back to fundamental feminist analyses of power and gender and the need for broad social change in attitudes about women. In many of the democratic countries within Weldon’s study this type of feminist analysis has disappeared into the shadows of more contemporary, individualised feminisms. In popular culture the women’s movement is invisible against a highly visible reclamation of the ‘feminine’ amongst young women, where they may revel in issues of equality in the workplace or “girl power” but also seem to have resumed an idealised notion of woman as a sexualised (often vulnerable) feminie subject. In the Australian context women obviously continue to work at maintaining women’s policy machinery at most levels of government but the strong, active and independent women’s movement that Weldon highlights as crucial for women-friendly policies is barely visible. In light of Weldon’s research findings, it is crucial for women in welfare education to work towards an understanding of how younger women can be supported in rebuilding a vibrant independent women’s movement which aims to promote the mitigation of violence against women.

Weldon’s book presents an exhaustive perspective on the critical issue of policy responses to violence against women. It is an important book because it revitalises violence against women as a public policy issue. Weldon’s commitment to making the book, as a whole, a pedagogic tool both in terms of the issue but also in terms the process of research also makes it a useful teaching resource.
WOMEN IN WELFARE EDUCATION JOURNAL

Women in Welfare Education is a peer-reviewed journal aimed at encouraging and publishing women’s writing on research, theory and practice as it relates to social work and welfare education. The journal is published at least every two years but is dependent on papers being submitted for publication. We also intend to publish special editions which will take the form of a number of articles being devoted to a special theme. We invite submissions of papers of between 4000 to 6000 words or research notes of up to 3000 words. All articles will be reviewed by at least one member of the editorial group and two other reviewers.

Guidelines For Contributors

Four copies of the article should be sent to:-

Karen Heycox
School of Social Work
University of New South Wales
Sydney
N.S.W. 2052
email: k.heycox@unsw.edu.au
fax: (02) 9662 8991

An abstract of not more than 200 words should accompany each article. Manuscripts should be on A4 paper on one side only with wide margins on either side. There should be a cover sheet with the manuscript with the title of the paper; names of the author/s position and place of work and a full postal address and telephone, fax and email numbers. Quotes of more than 4 lines should be indented (no quotation marks). Acknowledgments should be brief. All accepted manuscripts should be emailed or accompanied by a disk.

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The use of footnotes should be avoided as much as possible. In the text the names of authors should be cited followed by the year of publication eg. Hearn (1992). Where quotes from other writers are used page numbers should be cited eg. (Hearn 1992, 57). The reference list should be prepared on a separate sheet with names listed in alphabetical order. It should include authors’ surnames and initials, date of publication, title of article, name of book or journal, volume number or edition, editors, publisher and place of publication. With articles and chapters in edited books page numbers need to be included.

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