

This article was downloaded by: [Dalhousie University]

On: 22 January 2014, At: 05:56

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Progressive Human Services

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wphs20>

From Codes to Contextual Collaborations: Shifting the Thinking About Ethics in Social Work

Merlinda Weinberg^a & Carolyn Campbell^a

^a School of Social Work, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

Published online: 21 Jan 2014.

To cite this article: Merlinda Weinberg & Carolyn Campbell (2014) From Codes to Contextual Collaborations: Shifting the Thinking About Ethics in Social Work, *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 25:1, 37-49, DOI: [10.1080/10428232.2014.856739](https://doi.org/10.1080/10428232.2014.856739)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10428232.2014.856739>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

From Codes to Contextual Collaborations: Shifting the Thinking About Ethics in Social Work

MERLINDA WEINBERG and CAROLYN CAMPBELL

School of Social Work, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

In this article, the authors argue that the current emphases in social work on codes, standards, and decision-making models are insufficient to the task of ensuring ethical relationships between workers and clients. Three fundamental assumptions that underpin codes and standards are analyzed. The authors then explore the nature of ethical relationships and demonstrate how codes and standards, in their current form, do not address the complexity and contextuality of the social work relationship. After considering why the profession relies so heavily on codes and standards, they call for a re-thinking of ethical relationships, offering ideas and recommendations for those relationships.

KEYWORDS *ethics, codes, practice, relationship, critical theory*

In the modern era in social work, the use of codes of ethics, standards of practice, and decision-making models have been the primary tools to ensure the establishment, maintenance, and regulation of ethical relationships between workers and clients (Hugman, 2005b; Walker, 1998). Walker (1998) argues, “The regnant type of moral theory in contemporary ethics is a *codifiable* (and usually *compact*) set of moral *formulas* (or procedures for selecting formulas) that can be applied by *any* agent to a situation to yield a justified and determinate *action-guiding* judgment” (p. 32). However, it is the assertion of the authors, two social work professors and practitioners, that these mechanisms are, at best, insufficient to the task of ensuring ethical relationships between workers and clients. We are not suggesting a complete

Address correspondence to Merlinda Weinberg, School of Social Work, Dalhousie University, 3201-1459 LeMarchant Street, PO Box 15000, Halifax, NS B3H 4R2, Canada. E-mail: merlinda.weinberg@dal.ca

abandonment of codes, standards, or decision-making processes because they represent the theoretical, codifiable principles for guiding action in the profession (Walker, 1998). Rather, we are arguing that shifting focus from codes and standards to the situated and contextual nature of practice relationships will better enhance the ethical nature of social work practice.

In supporting this assertion, we first analyze some fundamental assumptions that underpin codes and standards. We then explore the nature of ethical relationships and demonstrate how codes and standards, in their current form, do not address the complexity and contextuality of those relationships. After briefly considering why the social work profession relies so heavily on codes and standards, we call for a turn to an examination of ethical relationships, offering suggestions and recommendations for ongoing dialogue.

FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS

Universal and Shared Meaning Is Possible and Desirable

Practitioners are generally advised to turn to codes and standards when they have identified an ethical issue or dilemma within their practice. But what is identified as an ethical dilemma is not the same for every professional. There is no clear objective truth “out there” to which we all subscribe. Diverse workers have differing understandings of what constitutes truth. Every form of help has presumptions about who constitutes a client, the nature of the problem, the goals of helping, the possible forms of practice, the responsibilities of the helper, and the nature of the helping relationship.

The concept of discursive fields is helpful in deconstructing the concept of universal meaning. Discursive fields “consist of competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes” (Weedon, 1987, p. 34). Workers have different discursive fields for making sense of their practices that provide alternative interpretations for understanding what help is and expose divergent underlying assumptions. These distinctive discursive fields can lead to differing dilemmas for workers, even those confronted with the same scenario in the same setting. For example, a worker, Rosie, who is an African-American and new employee of a maternity home, may be told by her supervisor to watch Edna, an Aboriginal mother, whose baby might need to be removed by Child Welfare due to Edna’s alcohol use. But as a person of color herself, Rosie may be more attuned to speculate that racism has influenced the supervisor’s response to Edna, because there has not been the same level of scrutiny of white mothers whose drinking is problematic. Yet as a new employee, she may not feel she can resist her supervisor’s expectations, regardless of what she believes is ethical, because of her lack of seniority in the agency. In contrast, a white employee may believe that this level of surveillance of Edna

is entirely appropriate and sees no ethical dilemma at all. Or a more senior white or African-American worker may feel able to address this concern with the supervisor and/or Edna. And these interpretations will result in different constructions of an ethical issue by each of these players. What contributes to a worker's discursive field for any scenario is made up of myriad factors, but we suspect that personal values as well as social determinants, such as race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and religion, are important components (as well as less often cited determinants such as seniority). Jayaratne, Croxton, and Mattison (2002) argue that these aspects influence the extent to which professional and personal cultures clash for workers, with consequent varying levels of acceptance of codes as a vehicle to assist in ethical relationships.

The starting point in using codes and standards is the identification of an ethical issue or dilemma. But given alternate discursive fields, any analysis of ethics should begin at a much more fundamental level, i.e., the point at which a worker constructs a situation as problematic. This occurs earlier in the process than the point at which a worker can use codes and standards for assistance.

Absolute Laws or Principles Are Possible and Desirable

Modernity has sought universal absolutist laws to guide action (Asquith & Rice, 2005), and the current construction of ethical codes and standards neatly supports that trend. The canonical approach to codes and standards is a theoretical-judicial model (Walker, 1998) that utilizes abstract, linear, universal principles and the establishment of rules. The assumption is that by having these principles and rules and using rational, cognitively sound approaches, one can identify what should occur in order to be a morally upright agent. Codified rules place "high value on individualism, independence, and . . . homogeneity," characteristics of the liberal democratic state (Briskman, 2001). They represent a modernist approach, which includes "a search for absolutes" (Briskman, 2001).

In contrast, we accept Walker's (1998) critique that this search for absolute answers or rules to guide behavior is essentially detached and impersonal and denies the contextual nature of social work relationships, which Finn and Jacobson (2008) define as "the background and set of circumstances and conditions that surround and influence particular events and situations" (p. 43). Furthermore, as Orlic (1997) explains, "code-oriented moralities tend to normalize principle because rather than continually questioning proper conduct they express a desire to find the true ground of our being" (p. 195). Because that is not possible, a code of ethics based on a fixed list of principles can lead to dogma, coercion, and the abdication of personal morality and responsibility (Asquith & Rice, 2005), the opposite of the characteristics of an ethical relation.

Diverging and Contradictory Principles and Purposes Can Be Reconciled

One problem with codes and standards as the primary means for resolving ethical problems and maintaining ethical relationships is that ethical principles themselves can be competing in their importance within a particular context (Weinberg, 2002). For example, the principle of self-determination frequently competes with the principle of acting within the best interests of clients. Although there have been attempts to provide guidelines around the priority of principles (Loewenberg, Dolgoff, & Harrington, 2000), we agree with Finn and Jacobson (2008) when they state that such systems seem to be “informed by an implicit set of values that may be at odds with those of the individuals and communities with whom we are engaged as social workers” (p. 143) and therefore may not be effective in helping clearly resolve ethical dilemmas in those situations. We illustrate this issue a bit later in our discussion.

Banks (2004) states, “A code of ethics is usually a written document produced by a professional association, occupational regulatory body or other professional body with the stated aim of guiding the practitioners who are members, protecting service users and safeguarding the reputation of the profession” (p. 108). She elaborates on additional functions of codes, including: creating and maintaining professional identity, professional guidance, and professional regulation (Banks, 2003). In an attempt to address these multiple functions of codes, some professional organizations have chosen to link codes with the standards-of-practice documents (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005). This linkage of multiple and divergent functions is problematic in that the distinction among very different purposes and resulting functions becomes blurred, resulting in confusion for both the public and the practitioners. We believe that this blurring of the distinction between the regulatory statements on which workers can be evaluated and the visionary statements that represent inspirational ideals for professionals is confusing and leads to constricted rather than creative practice.

To this point we have reviewed three assumptions that we believe underpin ethical codes and standards. Grounded as they are in assumptions of the possibility of universal meaning, absolutist principles, and the reconciliation of contradiction, we assert that these codes and standards are insufficient in supporting and advancing our understanding of ethical relationships.

ETHICAL RELATIONSHIPS

What constitutes an ethical relationship that codes, standards and methods are intended to support? We find Cornell’s (1992) definition the most

useful. She suggests that it is “a nonviolative relationship to the Other . . . that assumes responsibility to guard the Other against the appropriation that would deny her difference and singularity” (p. 62). Nurturing such relationships is a tall order because it rests on recognizing and celebrating the uniqueness of another human being whom we can never fully know or understand. It asks us to step outside our own worldview and to understand that our ways of being will influence our perceptions and our expectations of another individual. Cornell suggests that the implication and danger of unethical relationships is appropriation. By appropriation, she may be implying that the hazard is taking without permission, assuming possession of, or using by pre-eminent right (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 1981). Such appropriation is a real possibility in a worker/client relationship, given how easily professionals can set the terms of the relationship and define the Other (Weinberg, 2005b). When we look at the types of responsibilities that social workers undertake in our society: apprehending children from parents (most often mothers), or contributing to the decision of whether someone will be detained against his/her will in a psychiatric facility, or determining whether or not a person leaving a hospital can return to his/her own home, we can again see the dangers of such appropriation. If we take Cornell's definition of ethical relationships seriously, we are charged with the dual responsibility of (a) always being cognizant of that which makes a service user unique and to some degree, unknowable, and (b) at the same time recognizing our power in the helping relationship and the danger of control over, rather than care of or for.

Therefore, balancing the awareness of a service user's matchlessness and preserving that uniqueness and the sovereignty of that self while at the same time knowing that we cannot always honor this uniqueness because of the need to protect “the third” is an essential and never-ending component of an ethical relationship. Many philosophers speak about the third (for example, Levinas, 1991), suggesting that if all of the world were just you and me, we could work things out; but in fact, there are always other people who are impacted by the decisions and agreements that we make between the two of us. So if I want to protect the singularity of a mother, that seems all well and good, but if she has a baby that is failing to thrive, and there is reason to suspect this problem is due to a lack of care being provided, my wish to honor the mother collides with the obligation to the third, namely, her baby. But if I focus on the baby and protecting his or her singularity, there are still the mother's needs and her humanity that I may violate. Either way, the social worker goes in her decision making, there is a third, and another third (such as the father or grandmother or other residents in a shelter for street-involved parents, and so forth).

These multiple responsibilities present us with a Gordian knot, an intractable problem: society is better off with individuals (such as social workers) who must at times be agents of control to protect those who are

most vulnerable and cannot protect themselves, but this very necessity carries the potential of a denial of the client's singularity and may result in harm. But unlike the Gordian knot, there is no slicing through to a decisive and bold solution. For a variety of reasons, codes, standards, and ethical decision-making methods, as they are currently structured and utilized, cannot capture the contextuality and complexity embedded in ethical relationships. We explore two of those reasons here.

Difference

It is through difference that one's singularity emerges, and the recognition of both individual and contextual differences is essential to guard the Other against appropriation. The ethics of relational experiences across and amid difference cannot be legislated through a series of abstract principles. For example, many codes and/or standards discuss the importance of avoiding the formation of dual relationships due to the risk of boundary violations. In the National Association of Social Workers (NASW; 2008) standards of practice, it is stated, "Social workers should be alert to and avoid conflicts of interest that interfere with the exercise of professional discretion and impartial judgment" (106a). Similarly, section 2.4.1 of the Canadian code reads: "Social workers take care to evaluate the nature of dual or multiple relationships to ensure that the needs and welfare of their clients are protected" (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005, p. 12).

But there are many communities in which dual relationships are an everyday occurrence. In the context of remote and rural districts, or on reserve, or sometimes in gay and lesbian communities, workers and their service users may know each other intimately and have dealings in many aspects of their lives, outside of the professional context. But the nuances of how to negotiate this in a respectful and nonviolative way cannot be covered in the codes, even when, as in the NASW code, the statements are soft in their approach to professionals, recognizing that some dual relationships will arise.

Consider the Nova Scotia code and standards of practice that specifically state "social workers shall not have . . . a business relationship with the client, borrow money from a client, [or] loan money to a client. . . ." (Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers, 2008, 2.3.1.c., p. 13). But what if the social worker is a First Nations individual and lives on reserve? Let us say she is working with another First Nations service user who also lives on the reservation and whose son wants to go to university. As it happens, the worker has been part of the council to determine whether this client's son will be given Band funding to attend school. Even if the social worker recuses herself from the decision, issues of confidentiality and the relationship must be negotiated. What constitutes confidentiality on the part of a social worker on reserve when that practitioner is also a neighbor and friend? And how does

that worker resolve the relational issues, particularly when the service user assumes the worker will support such a loan because it is the only hope for the child to obtain further education? We believe that those possibilities are a fact of life on reserve but do not preclude the prospect of an ethical relationship and sound practice.

The complexities illustrated by this example must be thrashed out through dialogue and, without this exchange, the codes or standards could provide a false reassurance that following the codes will spare practitioners from the hard effort of aiming toward that ethical relationship. Even a code such as the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (2008) code, which is bilingual, bicultural, and firmly recognizes the relationship of the indigenous Maori people to people of European descent, cannot facilitate this requirement for an ethical relationship. The reason for this lack is that an ethical relationship is a process, not a product which, instead of being impersonal and abstract, is highly personal and specific, involving affect, not just cognition. Although the codes suggest principles to guide action, they cannot address context, the uniqueness of the clients, or the importance of affect on workers' decision-making.

Feelings as Integral to an Ethical Relationship

The traditional absolutist understanding of ethics described above puts emphasis on sound, logical thinking. This trend has existed since the Enlightenment, when thinking and feeling were seen as being separate, with cognition being privileged over emotion. The emphasis in codes is on impartiality, objectivity, and neutrality, perhaps in part as a historical consequence of social work's adoption of Freudian principles and a "scientific method" to bolster its status and credibility as a profession (Abramovitz, 1998; Freud & Krug, 2002). There is a gender bias in this emphasis, with men being seen as rational and consequently "correct" in how they perceive a situation, whereas women are seen as being emotional and their judgment clouded as a result of those feelings. But Vetlesen (1994) argues that to see suffering is to form an emotional bond with the other (p. 159) because emotions make humans "attentive to how the *other* perceives the situation [and] link[s] our perception of the situation to that of the other involved in it" (p. 166). He makes the case that feelings help to alert humans to that which is significant in interpersonal relationships. It is also a primary means by which we can empathize with "how another person experiences, perceives, and feels in a situation" (p. 174). He suggests that feelings provide the first response to a situation and that we then bring in thinking and judgment. But there is little space for feelings in codes of ethics because they are based on a deductive process in which understanding abstract principles and good decision making are seen as being sufficient to resolve ethical problems. It is ironic that professionals recognize the crucial importance of emotion and

empathy in the therapeutic relationship but overlook these same tools in moral judgment.

Given the contradictory and complex nature of ethical relationships, the necessity of embracing and respecting difference in order to protect the singularity of the Other, and the centrality of affect in making ethical decisions, codes and standards are insufficient in supporting and advancing our understanding of ethical relationships.

WHY DOES SOCIAL WORK RELY ON CODES AND STANDARDS AS THE PRIMARY TOOL TO PROMOTE ETHICAL RELATIONSHIPS IN PRACTICE?

Before we can explore other ways of thinking about ethics and ethical relationships, we need to consider briefly why social work professionals and organizations are so committed to the concept of codes, standards, and decision-making methods as the best way to promote ethical practice. Earlier in the article we commented on the search for absolutes that is a component of social work's modernist and positivist history. More recently the neo-liberal environment of much of the Western world has resulted in an attrition of the social safety net and a rise in the values of the market place (Dominelli, 2004). The lack of certainty that accompanies the modern world has resulted in a risk-avoidant society (Beck, 1992) that places more emphasis on procedures, assessment, and management of risk while the belief in the autonomy and legitimacy of professional independence and judgment has eroded. Anxiety about liability has mushroomed.

We identified that the codes meet purposes other than the protection of service users, including guidance to practitioners. We believe one of the key purposes of having codes and standards in a neo-liberal society has become holding professionals responsible and consequently knowing where to place blame. Since the Enlightenment, the individual has been valorized in Western society with the accompanying expectations of legal responsibility for error. Because codes are mechanisms for regulation and discipline (particularly those that emphasize or conflate the codes with standards of practice), it is no surprise in this atmosphere that some codes have increased the regulatory and procedural emphases, paying lip service to social transformation while taking us away from the lofty ambition of social justice (Mullaly, 2006), a central value of the social work profession. The principles can end up supporting the interests of current sociopolitical agendas, which include efficiency over quality care, resulting in loyalty to organizations over service users (Asquith & Rice, 2005).

This problem is amplified by the dilemmas practitioners find themselves in when professional codes of ethics are not consistent with agency codes of conduct, a fact of life in large institutions and government positions.

Loyalty to the organization over clients is demanded, and the expectations of workers are to distribute scarce resources and move people through systems as quickly as possible. The provisions in the codes and standards seem to encourage “prudence over courage” (Freud & Krug, 2002, p. 484). The language of appropriate and reasonable action takes precedence over the language of resistance and activism. As a result, social work has moved toward a “rational-technical” enterprise and away from being a “practical-moral” activity (Parton, 2000), and the emphasis on codes and standards and their current constructions has mirrored that shift.

A CALL FOR DIALOGUE AND CONTEXTUAL COLLABORATIONS: THINKING DIFFERENTLY ABOUT ETHICS AND ETHICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Given the limitations of ethical codes and standards, how should social work educators and practitioners be thinking, feeling, and acting in order to promote ethical practice and ethical relationships that are the foundation of our work? Although we cannot provide any definitive answer to this question, we suggest the following as potentially fruitful areas for dialogue.

First, what might be the implication of shifting our current conception of ethical relationships from closed and static connections (Hugman, 2003), governed by the prescriptive and contractual dictates of codes and standards, to process-oriented and dialogical relationships, open to negotiation and change? As Hugman (2003) states, “ethics must be concerned with ways of achieving communication between moral selves (people) and not as a device for dictating how any self (person) should think or act” (p. 1028). Such a shift would ensure that context, culture, community, history, and time become essential components of this communication and hence of ethical decision making. This would result in a shift from resolving ethical conundrums from a top-down worker-centered model to one that is a collaboration in context between worker and service user.

We do recognize that such a fluid process is anxiety provoking because there is no clear right and wrong. Such anxiety is particularly evident among students and beginning practitioners who are eager to learn the “right” way to practice. In part, individuals are drawn to codes to make firm that which can never be clear-cut and to place boundaries around the infinite and unknowable. Walker (1998) opines that moral philosophers who operate from the propositions that support a theoretical-juridical model

are apt . . . to parade fact as necessity, historical contingency as eternal condition, norm as nature, social construction as nature’s way, endorsement as disinterested depiction, concordance among peers as objectivity and their own often questionable positions to know as positions of expertise, even “scientific” ones. (p. 26)

Second, think of the possibilities if we embraced difference as the essence and beauty of humanity; if we listened with curiosity and interest to the worldview of the Other; if we recognized the uniqueness of all human beings and resisted appropriation to the best of our ability. We would all be enriched by such explorations.

Third, could the concept of ethical trespass, elaborated by Melissa Orlie (1997) liberate us from the unrealistic idea that we must always “get it right”? Orlie (1997) refers to ethical trespass as the “harmful effects . . . that inevitably follow not from our intentions and malevolence but from our participation in social processes and identities” (p. 5). Orlie is arguing that all human beings, but most especially those who are charged with the power to shape society, are subject to ethical trespass. This happens because as responsible agents in society, professionals set the terms of what is taken to be health and illness, normalcy and dysfunction. For example, when a social worker decides that Mr. Brown is not well enough to go home from the hospital, what is taken as sufficient or insufficient wellness to warrant living at home is reinforced. And that evaluation may be wrong in Mr. Brown’s case or could result in some other person who should go home being denied because the norm for health has been reinforced in the case of Mr. Brown. Or another “third” could be an individual who is turned away from the bed in a rehabilitation hospital that Mr. Brown receives. The ripple effects are endless and unknowable. Regardless of social workers’ attempts to act ethically, there will be unavoidable instances of harming another as a result of those efforts. Consequently, the thinking must change from a belief in finding the “correct” approach based on codes and standards to a recognition that all professionals will inevitably be involved in some instances of unintended injury (Weinberg, 2005a, 2010).

Fourth, what practice avenues would be opened if we all took greater responsibility for engaging as morally active change agents? As a profession we have always straddled the divide between care and control and between fighting and supporting the status quo (Abramovitz, 1998). This entails embracing the contradictions embedded in social work practice. We can no longer perceive broader societal structures that support inequitable social arrangements as political problems beyond the ken or accountability of the professional. Professionals are severely hampered by the structural constraints under which they must operate, but the current focus in the codes on the dyad of worker and client de-emphasizes the broader systemic problems (Weinberg, 2010). Weight needs to be placed at the macro level where, as professionals, we confront the inequalities in society. It has been argued that “American social work ethics [has been] insufficiently attentive to an ethical/political basis to existing social work practice” (Hugman, 2005a, p. 536). We must be brave in the face of restructuring and the pressures of neo-liberalism and not succumb to the prescriptive, rule-based directions of modern society but continue to fight for a more humane approach to those marginalized.

Fifth, what would arise if we shifted our focus of ethical practice from the individual worker/client dyad to learning from our own experience and knowledge through self-reflexivity and humility? Finn and Jacobson (2008), adapting the work of Marcia Abramson, offer a Framework for Ethical Self-Assessment (p. 144). This framework poses questions for workers to consider:

- What prejudgments might you bring to your work as a result of your personal and cultural history?
- What are your images of a morally good person and/or social worker? What are your ethical principles and how do you prioritize them?
- What ethical theoretical perspective informs your thinking?
- What is your understanding of human nature?
- What is the place of spirituality in your world view?
- How do you mediate the tension between individual rights and responsibilities and the common good?
- What is your moral voice?

These questions are qualitatively different from the prescriptions in our current codes and standards documents and, as such, position workers for meaningful engagement in ethical relationships.

CONCLUSION

The dialogue that we call for here requires social workers to engage actively in a critically reflective process, to be vulnerable, to explore instances of ethical trespass, to grapple with contradictions, and to share their insecurities and confusions. As social work educators who are regularly in the position of regulating and evaluating student learning, we are only too aware of how power dynamics can inhibit meaningful dialogue; students are reluctant to speak their truths and fears when they are being graded. It has been our experience that similar power dynamics influence how practitioners engage in discussions about ethical issues: fear of reprimand by employers and/or disciplinary action by their professional associations may be foremost in their minds, and this fear prohibits active, honest, and engaged dialogue.

Eliminating such fear will not be a simple matter, but we believe that clarifying the purpose and function of Codes of Ethics and Standards of Practice could be an interim step that would enhance the much-needed dialogue. Specifically, we recommend the following:

1. Codes of Ethics should be reconfigured as inspirational statements of our professional values and beliefs, with no regulatory or disciplinary functions. This would ensure a clear statement of values for the profession and for the public and serve as a visionary guide to professional development.

2. Standards of Practice should be separated from these inspirational statements and instead become regulatory statements of minimal practice standards. The emphasis on *minimal* standards recognizes the importance of autonomy for professionals in navigating the multifaceted nature of context and relationships. They should emphasize duty, obligation, and procedure as well as define actions that could result in disciplinary action. This would ensure professional accountability and protection of the public.
3. The complex issues of contextual, process-based ethical relationships should be addressed through mutually supportive and educational dialogical processes, distinct from any regulatory processes. This would ensure that we can move to dialogue and re-thinking without fear of retribution.

In summary, the deductive, one-sided and top-down process currently embedded in Codes and Standards, that spotlights the professional as if s/he were acting alone, will never create an ethical relationship. Instead, we need to view ethics as a relationship in process between worker and service user. We must also recognize the structural constraints and paradoxes that are part of the everyday experience of practitioners while we conceptualize practice as a political activity that either reinforces inequities in society or moves toward social transformation. A model that emphasizes collaboration and dialogue and sees the worker not as separate but joined with a service user must be encouraged to form a truly ethical bond. By recognizing the dangers of trespass and appropriation while valuing the inimitability of those we work with, we can edge toward relationships that meet our highest ethical standards.

REFERENCES

- Abramovitz, M. (1998). Social work and social reform: An arena of struggle. *Social Work*, 43, 512–526.
- Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers. (2008). *Code of ethics*. Canterbury, New Zealand: Author.
- Asquith, M., & Rice, K. (2005). Social work ethics: Practice and practitioners. *New Global Development*, 21, 10–17.
- Banks, S. (2003). From oaths to rulebooks: A critical examination of codes of ethics for the social professions. *European Journal of Social Work*, 6, 133–144.
- Banks, S. (2004). *Ethics, accountability and the social professions*. New York, NY: Palgrave.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. London, UK: Sage.
- Briskman, L. (2001). A moral crisis for social work: Critical practice and codes of ethics. *Critical Social Work*, 2(1).
- Canadian Association of Social Workers. (2005). *Guidelines for ethical practice*. Retrieved from http://www.casw-acts.ca/sites/default/files/attachements/CASW_Guidelines%20for%20Ethical%20Practice.pdf
- Cornell, D. (1992). *The philosophy of the limit*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Dominelli, L. (2004). *Social work. Theory and practice in a changing profession*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Finn, J., & Jacobson, M. (2008). *Just practice: A social justice approach to social work* (2nd ed.). Peosta, IA: Edie Bowers Publishing.
- Freud, S., & Krug, S. (2002). Beyond the code of ethics, Part II: Dual relationships revisited. *Families in Society*, 83, 483–492.
- Hugman, R. (2003). Professional values and ethics in social work: Reconsidering postmodernism? *British Journal of Social Work*, 33, 1025–1041.
- Hugman, R. (2005a). Exploring the paradox of teaching ethics in social work practice. *Social Work Education*, 24, 535–545.
- Hugman, R. (2005b). *New approaches in ethics for the caring professions*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jayaratne, S., Croxton, T. A., & Mattison, D. (2002). Race, practice behaviors and the NASW Code of Ethics. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 28(3), 65–89.
- Levinas, E. (1991). *Otherwise than being or beyond essence* (A. Lingis, Trans.). Boston, MA: Kluwer.
- Loewenberg, F., Dolgoff, R., & Harrington, D. (2000). *Ethical decisions for social work practice* (6th ed.). Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock.
- Mullaly, B. (2006). Forward to the past: The 2005 CASW Code of Ethics. *Canadian Social Work Review*, 23, 145–150.
- Orlie, M. A. (1997). *Living ethically, acting politically*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- National Association of Social Work. (2008). *Code of ethics*. Retrieved from <http://www.naswdc.org/pubs/code/code.asp>
- Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers. (2008). *Code of ethics and standards of practice*. Halifax, Canada: Author.
- Parton, N. (2000). Some thoughts on the relationship between theory and practice in and for social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 30, 449–463.
- Vetlesen, A. J. (1994). *An inquiry in the preconditions of moral performance*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Walker, M. U. (1998). *Moral understandings. A feminist study in ethics*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Webster's third new international dictionary*. (1981). Unabridged. Vol. 1. Chicago, IL: Encyclopaedia Britannica, G. & C. Merriam.
- Weedon, C. (1987). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Weinberg, M. (2002). Biting the hand that feeds you and other feminist research dilemmas. In W. C. Van den Hoonaard (Ed.), *Walking the tightrope: Ethical issues for qualitative researchers* (pp. 79–94). Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Weinberg, M. (2005a). A case for an expanded framework of ethics in practice. *Ethics and Behavior*, 15, 327–338.
- Weinberg, M. (2005b). The mother menagerie: Animal metaphors in the social work relationship with young single mothers. *Critical Social Work*, 6.
- Weinberg, M. (2010). The social construction of social work ethics: Politicizing and broadening the lens. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 21, 32–44.