

EDITORIAL

The Vocation of Social Work

“While both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is man’s vocation. This vocation is constantly negated, yet it is affirmed by the very negation. . . it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity.”

~Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970, p. 28

Nearly five years ago, I was anxiously waiting to find out if my *Individuals and Families* paper would be accepted into *Praxis*. Luckily, my paper on case management was deemed “*Praxis*-worthy” and I had my first publication under my belt. Thereafter, my involvement with *Praxis* expanded as I applied to be on the editorial board and held that position for three years. Now, it feels surreal to be composing my first editorial as Editor-in-Chief. I would never have thought five years ago that one day I would be the one deeming papers “*Praxis*-worthy.” Putting together our seventh edition of *Praxis* has truly been an honor as well as a challenge, particularly considering the exceptional work of my predecessors, Marian Sharkey and Christie Mason. I hope to build on the excellent foundation that they set for me and take *Praxis* to a new level as we strive to ensure it garners the respect it deserves in the social work community.

Before looking ahead to the future of *Praxis*, I think it is important to first remember its foundation in order to guarantee this edition stays true to the roots of the journal. The obvious starting point would be to investigate the meaning of *praxis*. While in our first article, Brandy Maynard does a fine job of defining the origins of *praxis* and discussing its relevance to research in social work, I would like to focus on another utilization of *praxis* that certainly resonates with the mission of the profession of social work as well as this journal.

Paulo Freire (1970) attempted to address the divide between oppressors and the oppressed by defining a critical pedagogy. He argues that in order for the rampant dehumanization that exists among humans to be extinguished, a critical consciousness about the oppressive reality and deliberate action against that reality must be initiated. Freire (1970) writes:

The [oppressed], whose task it is to struggle for their liberation together with those who show true solidarity, must acquire a critical awareness of oppression through the *praxis* of this struggle. . . . To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of *praxis*: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. (p. 36)

He argues that through this constant interaction of increased awareness of reality and action upon that reality, people begin to shift from being either the oppressed or the oppressor to individuals who become in touch with their “ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human” (Freire, 1970, pp. 40-41). In the end, both the oppressed and oppressor are capable of experiencing a “permanent liberation” (p. 40) and “profound rebirth” (p. 47).

Certainly, the mission of social work includes ending social injustice, empowering the oppressed, and increasing awareness of the oppressors—all facets of Freire’s model against oppression. To achieve this mission, social workers must be proactive in our practice across all levels of intervention (micro-, mezzo-, and macro-) and reflective about that practice to achieve the fullest possible awareness of the reality that surrounds us. This intertwining of calls for action and reflective discussion embodies this volume of *Praxis*. I now turn to this volume’s articles, all of which contribute to this utilization of *praxis* by critically investigating issues dealing with a wide range of oppressed individuals and promoting action to alleviate existing dehumanization.

The first article, by Brandy Maynard, lays the groundwork for the subsequent articles by discussing the nature of knowledge in social work and how to effectively engage in best practices. Then, Mary Reynolds will certainly spark debates as she addresses issues in policy impacting drug-abusing mothers when fetuses are exposed to drugs. Christian Griffin exposes the institutionalization of individuals with mental illness in correctional settings and calls for immediate action.

Additionally, Deresha Gibson addresses the gaps in the health system that cause African-American children to be diagnosed with autism significantly later than White children. Priscila Freire offers a model of treatment designed to elicit Latino male batterers’ innate capacities for healthy human relatedness. Allison Lowe brings victims of human trafficking, an oppressed group frequently ignored, to the forefront of our attention. Finally, Anne Fleury writes an engaging article about a topic rarely addressed in the field—animal hoarding. A theme that flows through each of these articles is bringing rarely addressed, though extremely relevant, issues into the awareness of social workers in a reflective way. This is the first step of *praxis*; now we, as social work-

ers, must mobilize and take action to alleviate oppression and suffering.

In closing, I want to share the pride I take in introducing this volume of *Praxis*. I am proud of all the authors featured; they represent excellence in our profession and have contributed to our knowledge base, which is essential for our profession's longevity. I take pride in the editorial board for all of their talents, hard work and reliability; they have made this an amazing and rewarding experience for me. Finally, I look at the diversity in the articles presented in this edition and I take pride in our profession. What other profession advocates for drug-abusing mothers, tries to understand the phenomenon of animal hoarding, delves into the philosophical debates about research, critiques the disparity in the diagnosis of autism, intervenes in the dreadful act of human trafficking, seeks out ways to support and heal men who batter *and* investigates the institutionalization of the persons with mental illness in jails? That does not even cover the range of issues

addressed in the dissertation abstracts! It is truly amazing the number and diversity of people our profession impacts and the breadth of problems we address on a daily basis. With that in mind, I hope each reader leaves this journal with a new appreciation for our profession and a new inspiration to embrace this vocation of humanization.

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Reference

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*.
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