MISSION STATEMENT

Advocates' Forum is an academic journal that explores implications of clinical social work practice, social issues, administration, and public policies linked to the social work profession. The Editorial Board of Advocates' Forum seeks to provide a medium through which SSA students can contribute to public thinking about social welfare and policy in theory and practice. Above all, Advocates' Forum serves to encourage and facilitate an open, scholarly exchange of ideas among individuals working toward the shared goal of a more just and humane society.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Advocates' Forum is published by the students of The University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration (SSA). Submissions to the journal are selected by the editorial board from works submitted by SSA students and edited in an extensive revision process with the authors' permission. Responsibility for the accuracy of information contained in written submissions rests solely with the author. Views expressed within each article belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial board, the School of Social Service Administration, or The University of Chicago. All inquiries and submissions should be directed to:

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ON THE COVER

Photo by Lloyd DeGrane
FROM THE EDITORS

When the editors of *Advocates’ Forum* sat down to begin planning for the 2018 journal, we thought about the limitations of publishing strictly “academic” work. We see social work as an increasingly complex and far-reaching profession, and our work certainly does not exist solely within the academic space. As social workers, we not only draw from research to inform our practice, but also from our clients’ unique experiences and our interactions with them. Outside of the walls of the University of Chicago, we become attuned to the oppressions our clients may face on a daily basis. We consume the news to make sense of our threatening sociopolitical climate. We march in the streets to fight injustices. We read fiction and poetry to find comfort and inspiration. We write in order to reflect on the truly unique experience of being a social worker in 2018.

*Advocates’ Forum* has been a space for student voices for more than 20 years. This year, we hoped to explore the ways we can process our work, understand our world, and advocate for our beliefs and clients through written language. Our call for submissions sought to include creative writing and reflective pieces, in addition to research and theory-based work. Above all, we were committed to using our editorial voice to challenge traditional formats of academic publishing that reify hierarchies of higher education and, instead, include voices that traditionally have been left out.

Early in winter quarter, *Advocates’ Forum* was honored to facilitate a panel discussion between Postdoctoral Scholar Eve Ewing, Lecturer William Borden, and Samuel Deutsch Professor Mark Courtney on the ways in which the social profession and the act of writing are necessarily intertwined. At one moment, Eve Ewing pointed to “the radical act of literacy and of writing one’s name for the first time” for groups who have historically been denied a formal education. As editors of the academic journal of the University of Chicago’s School of Social Service Administration, it is imperative that we acknowledge the immense privilege we hold in being able to write and edit our words with relative freedom and ease.

In selecting pieces for the 2018 publication, the editors sought to both acknowledge the history of social work and reflect the complexities of today’s practice. Jordan Dobrowski’s article describes the history of displacement and land disputes in India and the United States. Eilís Fagan, Ellen Grenen, and Michaela McGlynn’s article calls for social workers to familiarize themselves with social media use and its impact on clients. Danielle Littman’s article explores writing as a reflective practice and bridge from theory to social work practice. Laura Haberer’s article presents the results of a study on menstrual cup use among high school girls in South Africa. MeeSoh Bossard’s article challenges social workers to examine both the singular and collective “self” in self-reflective social work. It is our pleasure to share these writers’ words in the space of this journal.
We would like to extend our gratitude to everyone who helped make this year’s journal a success. We are grateful to all the authors who submitted their work and for their contributions to current conversations at SSA and beyond. We want to thank Daniel Listoe, PhD, for working with our authors to edit their pieces into beautiful final products. Thank you also to Associate Professor Susan Lambert for her support and wisdom this year as our Faculty Advisor; to the Dean of Students Office for their service to Advocates’ Forum and the students of SSA; to Director of Marketing and Communications, Julie Jung, for her patience and advice; and to the SSA SGA. And, of course, to our dedicated and brilliant Editorial Board and to you all, the students of SSA and our readers.

Megan Garrad
Emma Heidorn
Elizabeth Weiss

Co-Editors-in-Chief
WRITINGS ON H

Meesoh Bossard

Author’s Note

It is easier to spend time trying to understand others than ourselves. Sometimes I wonder if that is, truly, what we as social workers have in common: not what we are running toward, but what we are running from.

Observations like “many of us in the field are women*” and “many of us are in romantic entanglements where we give more” are interesting because they may be an *ouroboros*: two facts that are actually one. Perhaps we have not fully understood ourselves as women, as lovers, as social work professionals and because of this are creating a system that traps us across all domains of our lives. Perhaps we are the snake that consumes itself.

I want to point to writers like Ocean Vuong who give me hope. Writers who suggest that time and history exist as a spiral. Humans repeat a fairly limited range of mistakes. And yet as long as we are moving farther from the epicenter and closer to the edges, to a better way, perhaps, then, we may be moving in the right direction.

This piece is a work in progress. It is a series of translations. It is about myself and the social work women in my life. It is as much avoidance of self-reflection as it is self-reflection. It is an attempt, if not to disrupt the *ouroboros*, then to illuminate it.

Every time I think of H a swan appears unannounced in my mind, like a flag. Who is standing holding the flag I don’t know. But with H there is always the unknowable figure of a swan: long white neck, lips as if suddenly dipped in golden paint, glimmering.

It’s not that I have a particular fondness for swans or have seen or read about any swans during the time I have known H. Still, I think them, like a lie: as much as I try to deny them, they stay the same.

One October night I was in class when my professor suddenly told us a story about cranes. White cranes, tall cranes, ends of wings bursting into red flame cranes. Right about now if you look up to the sky you can see

*My use of woman/women here does not make claims as to the definition of womanhood or who qualifies as a woman. It is, instead, thinking about social work professionals who feel an affinity with the label and find themselves grappling with the implications of how womanhood—or a conception of womanhood—impacts the way one moves in the world.

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them, he says. *Unlike other birds there’s no way to tell which direction they’re coming from because the entire sky shakes with their sound.*

Cranes and swans are different. H is somewhere far away, it’s been a long time since we’ve mixed words and all our memories are weaker now. But right now, today, I think of H. My mind shudders like a sky of invisible cranes.

Any power one has in a relationship is determined by the other person. About how much they allow you to hold. I knew that as a scholar. And I knew that as a woman.

The truth was ugly because it was ugly, because the facts were difficult to bear: there couldn’t be love that was wrong. It was wrong because it wasn’t love.

In other words: I had been seduced by domination, or I had seduced through subordination. Meaning, I hadn’t loved you at all.

I went cherry blossom watching with H once. It was spring, and we were in the mountains. I got out of the car, unloosened my body and walked among the trees. Everything shone with a blinding shade of pink.

The cherry blossoms didn’t slice me with questions like, *where is home? which body do you prefer? on the roof of your past, what flag will you hoist?*.

H and I were truly the same then.

“MeeSoH, it was a good idea to come cherry blossom watching, right?”

I laughed easily, head thrown back. To always answer each of H’s questions as easily—I felt my heart wishing feverishly. Two cherry blossoms came and rested on H’s head. Then, in some secret moment, floated away.

Tell me how I can make you feel better is almost good enough.

Fortunately (or unfortunately), I have been around too many books and therapies to miss what your words actually say: how can you rid yourself of the guilt that comes with wanting every part of me except for the parts that are woman? How can I give you permission to conveniently forget I am human?

1 Bell Hooks, *Communion* (William Morrow Paperbacks, 2002)
Yes, the feminist thinkers were right: we “didn’t want to think about the reason why we hadn’t been able to convert men to feminist thinking and practice.”

To look on you and see the totality of who you are . . . I felt the inevitable white light and closed my eyes. The truth expanded and became night, offering no relief from my pain.

In my mind, it is always happening again: the touch of my lover’s eyes strikes me especially deeply today and I am a lake unraveling at the edge of someone’s fingertips.

My lover’s gaze speaks: that he will do his absolute best. That the love he has for me will be the love I feel. If not now, then soon. All we need, love, is a little more time. In the silence of that room which one of us begged more loudly I will never know.

Though H continued to disappear, her words stayed. Like someone had waited all night washing the room with water, H’s face lit my mind like moonlight through an opening.

“H, are you happy?” I asked.

H placed her gaze briefly by the window before slowly resting it at my side.

“I’m not not happy.”

Shadows formed around my eyes at her next words.

“What is happiness, even, do you think?”

H’s face was as bare as the surface of empty rooms.

A little while later my professor shares another story involving animals.

“A scorpion and a duck try to cross the river. But there is no way the scorpion can cross the river by his strength alone. So the scorpion says, hey, duck, won’t you carry me on your back to the other side of the river? Incredulous, the duck replies do you really think I’m that stupid scorpion, to let you on my back?

He laughs a little. No way, he says.

The scorpion looks at the duck for a moment before saying, slyly, Oh duck, whatever it is you’re afraid of won’t happen, trust me. He then promises that if the duck were to carry him on his back, he will most certainly not sting him.
The duck is a little suspicious but the scorpion is adamant. So the duck decides just this once to put his trust in the scorpion. He carefully hoists the scorpion on his back and makes his way across the river. Sure enough, the scorpion doesn't sting him. The duck is pleasantly surprised.

When they arrive at the other side of the river, the duck looks back at the scorpion to thank him for keeping his promise. But at that moment the scorpion flashes his tail and stings the duck in the chest. The duck’s heart convulses and he slowly sinks in the water.

With his final breath the duck cries out to the scorpion, “How could you? You promised.”

Unblinking, the scorpion answers, “It’s my nature.”

The Japanese philosopher Masahiro Morioka writes about happiness. He is interested in the modern phenomenon of SSRIs as a way of combating depression. Morioka’s thought experiment: if one were to be on a perpetual supply of SSRIs and never experience any negative feelings, could one truly say they are happy?

Morioka answers in the negative. He believes this is completely in opposition to what we know about human experience. Happiness is, for Morioka, transcendent of positive or negative feelings. It is the collection of human action that lies beyond them. It is “the attempt to overcome oneself,” to “transcend one’s nature”.

Several questions clamber into my mind. Is this even possible? Is this the happiness we’ve been looking for? If not, should it be? What is it we’ve been chasing all this time?

H will be married in a week’s time. I had completely forgotten. To be able to go to her wedding was something I wanted deeply.

Whether I actually saw her there or thought of her from over here, I knew my eyes would tear. Was it because the wedding made me unhappy? Was it because I missed H, who felt so out of reach? Was it because of some other fear?

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The moment I leaned toward an answer, surety squirmed and wriggled away. I think of H who will never be in a movie theater because darkness makes her fiancé anxious. I think of H who is walking away from her dream. I think of H who is perhaps walking into another one.

Something hovers like two blossoms from our past.

MEESOH BOSSARD is an Afroasian military brat who did the ‘hop-around-move-around-thing’ growing up. She is interested in intersections—intersectional identities as well as intersectional academic and artistic practice. Currently, she is a second-year clinical social work student at SSA investigating culturally competent care for minority female veterans. She holds a B.A. in comparative human development and a minor in creative writing from the University of Chicago.
DISPLACEMENT: NEOLIBERAL LAND WARFARE AND POINTS OF INTERVENTION

Jordan Dobrowski

Abstract
This paper draws upon existing literature to describe the dynamics of displacing peoples from their land and the intergenerational, sociological effects that follow. It presents cases from two regions of the world—the United States and India—where rural and tribal occupants have come into conflict within federal regimes in what many scholars are calling “land wars.” Both countries share a history of British colonial heritage which has provided a legal framework for land reallocation for national gain, and similarly both have since been heavily influenced by neoliberal economic values. The two examples serve to complement one another as tools for learning what interventions are possible for settling long-standing land disputes.

DISPLACEMENT: NEOLIBERAL LAND WARFARE AND POINTS OF INTERVENTION

The displacement of people for any reason is a phenomenon which has intergenerational implication. In the case of externally motivated land reallocation—such as the use of eminent domain laws to sanction land from one community to another in the name of development or business—measures should be implemented to protect the livelihoods of those displaced or in danger of being displaced.

This paper draws upon existing literature to describe the nature of displacement as it relates to intergroup politics and intergenerational biopsychosocial as well as spiritual effects. Examples are drawn from two regions of the world, the United States and India, where rural and tribal occupants have come into violent conflict with federal regimes in what many scholars are calling “land wars.” While intergroup clashes over land are no new phenomena, there is some indication that their frequency is increasing with the rise of neoliberalism during the late twentieth century and now in the twenty-first.

Indeed, the young field of intergenerational research has brought to light the longstanding biopsychosocial effects of communally experienced
historical traumas that span generations. This field provides the empirical evidence of harm caused by federal-level projects that those in power claim to be beneficial for the masses. The use of data from two different parts of the world seeks to demonstrate a pattern of oppressive displacement in postcolonial nations. It also seeks to have the examples complement one another as tools for learning what possibilities exist.

ACKNOWLEDGING DISPLACEMENT
This paper intentionally uses “displacement” rather than “dislocation” or “dispossession” or many of the other terminological options available in today’s academic world as an intentional choice to attempt to encompass the depth of meaning a place can hold for individuals. In many cases, land wars are not just a matter of opposing relocation of residence, nor can they be summarized as the result of dispossession without first submitting to the broken logic of commodification. Rather, the land in question is likely to hold cultural, familial, economic, or ideological significance for the people faced with leaving it.

For example, many indigenous populations have tied their very identities with the geology and/or ecology of the land (Jojo, 2017), like the Menominee tribe in the Wisconsin region—whose name literally translates as “wild rice people” in a neighboring tribe’s language (Milwaukee Public Museum, n.d.). The Menominee have a legend that claims the day the rock known as Spirit Rock crumbles away is the day their culture and race will be considered likewise extinguished (Tourtillot and Peters, 2017). The dispossessed land may be a holy place or perhaps an important resource for their existing economic structure. This is evident in India where the country’s rigid caste system has brought many tribes to become defined by specific, environmentally dependent trades such as fishing or salt tilling (Parasuraman, 1995). Finally, land can also signify a place of refuge from opposing forces that threaten a community’s livelihood and traditions. The acculturation that often occurs when a group is forced to disperse and assimilate to the culture of another region has harmful effects on individuals’ mental health. Again, forced or coercive dispossession of land, therefore, can mean a loss of so much more than just the ground beneath one’s feet and thus is better described by the term “displacement.”

Today’s call to action is thus multifold: to recognize the processes and consequences of displacement on populations displaced, to effectively respond to the consequences and expressed needs of these populations, and to improve prevention efforts to both avoid displacement altogether and to minimize harm. Indian and American examples will demonstrate common themes in neoliberal displacement, particularly in post-colonial nations.
It should be clarified that the goal here is not to create an all-inclusive list of ways displacement affects societies and individuals, nor is it to paint a blanket generalization across two similar but still very different case settings. Instead, this paper seeks to answer previous scholars’ call for more analysis of the generic features of anti-displacement politics (Levien, 2013a), and thus facilitate increased action from social workers and other stakeholders.

The interdisciplinary nature of harm caused by displacement positions social workers as potentially effective agents of change—functioning in the mesosphere between individuals, communities, and larger federal governments so as to advocate for policies which honor the dignity and worth of not just the dominant, governing class of citizens, but of all individuals who fall within a nation’s boundaries. Furthermore, social workers are trained to recognize abuses of power and are bound by their code of ethics to pursue social justice. Thus, while the problems associated with displacement call to action lawyers, policymakers, journalists, and historians, this paper will devote its final section to actions which fall specifically within the field of social work.

OLD PATTERN, GROWING SOCIETAL CONCERN

According to Levien’s research, an estimated 60 million Indians were displaced from their land for development projects between the years 1947 and 2013, with the rate of dispossession increasing significantly after economic liberalization of the early 1990s (Levien, 2013a; Levien, 2013b). Levien’s (2011) work highlights how governments have increasingly moved away from a true developmental state which reallocated land for mines, dams, and other government-run estates toward a land-brokering state that hands land from one class (rural dwellers) to another (corporations) for private, commercial purposes (Levien, 2011; Levien, 2013b). In India, these acts are complicated with the deeply embedded tradition of the caste system and the liberalization of the 1990s which brought the designation of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), yet their increased frequency and changing nature require social intervention now.

Similarly, Native American tribes throughout the United States have faced displacements over the past 200 years and inherited physical and mental health disparities, poverty, and discrimination. Rather than newly created SEZs, antiquated legislation justifies new violations of Native sovereignty (Volcovici, 2018), as with the development of the Dakota Access Pipeline through Standing Rock Lakota sacred lands. The deployment of private security officers equipped with military-grade gear and trained attack dogs against Standing Rock tribe members and
allies who protested the quasi-legal project (Erdich, 2016) drew a nationwide discussion of the problematic practices regarding land use and dispossession that abounded in the country’s history of interacting with Native groups.

Unfortunately, despite growing public interest and grassroots efforts, the current federal administration has only driven the sword of neoliberal displacement deeper. On February 2, 2018, the U.S. government opened-up previously protected land at Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments for mining (Volcovici, 2018). While the land’s previously protected status has meant that no one has been formally living on this land for quite some time, it is home to thousands of sacred sites central to Native culture. Destruction and private ownership of the land would mean something of a spiritual displacement for tribes which have visited Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, called the decision a “serious attack on indigenous peoples’ rights in the United States” (Corbett, 2018).

As the two cases show, the conflicts between the rural minority and the state has been changing not just the frequency but in character (Levien, 2013). Across the globe, both sides of these conflicts have been growing increasingly more aggressive, earning them the proper title of “land wars.” Just as at Standing Rock, the Indian context shows the police and employed goondas responsible for 14 people killed and more raped and beaten at Nandigram; an additional 14 killed and more wounded by 27 platoons of security forces and supporters of the project at Kalinga Nagar (Levien, 2013a). Left unattended, these conflicts around development projects and displacement are likely to continue to escalate.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

While direct combat is certainly an element of what makes “land wars” dangerous, it is not the only way. All too often “development” projects are initiated by governments which previously demonstrated little interest in the current inhabitants of the land where the project is to be implemented. For example, in the case of New Bombay and the Jawaharlal Nehru Port (JNP), the state acquired land from 95 villages (33 of which were completely displaced) in the 1970s and 1980s for the development of a twin city to modern day Mumbai (Parasuranam, 1995). While groups like the Jamin Bachao Samiti (“Save the Land Committee”) fought for—and gained—some compensation (Parasuraman and Sengupta, 1992), JNP developers offered rehabilitation through jobs. The JNP case thus initially seems like a moderate victory made possible through community
organizing. But the sociological evidence from the years that followed reveal the degree of damage endured by the displaced villagers.

First, the compensation agreed upon was not available to the total population of those affected. For the limited jobs they could offer, the JNP instituted a priority system where jobs were offered to the households who had lost the most land. Due to sociocultural associations between India’s lower backward castes with jobs reliant on public rather than private land (Parasuraman, 1995), the vast majority of project-affected villagers were ineligible for jobs or compensation. In fact, as compensation was paid out on a per-acre agreement, it can be presumed that the population who benefited most from the JNP acquisition was the villages’ top two percent, who belonged to land-associated middle caste. Ultimately, 91% of those who lost land lost all they had but less than 33% of those received employment (Parasuraman, 1995).

A follow-up study on JNP-affected households post-displacement showed that the project decimated the villages’ middle-income class. Whereas in 1983-1984, 8.6% of the 1,753 affected households surveyed earned less than 80 rupees per month per capita, 29.2% of the same 1,753 households fell into this condition by 1991-92. Similarly, 2.0% of households in 1983-84 earned over 371 rupees per month per capita, yet by 1991-92, this elite income sector increased to 17.0% of the total surveyed households (Parasuraman and Sengupta, 1992).

Table 1: Per Capita Monthly Income of JNP-affected Households in 1983-84 and 1991-92

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per Capita Monthly Income (in Rupees)</th>
<th>1983-84</th>
<th>1991-92</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt; 80</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81-110</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111-160</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>161-280</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>281-370</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>371+</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
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</table>

(Parasuraman and Sengupta, 1992)
Furthermore, certain caste groups faced additional problems when it came to integrating into the new economy created by the port. Women were especially negatively impacted as they had previously held retail positions, which all but disappeared when the port cut off access to the sea. Children of certain lower caste groups had traditionally entered the workforce at younger ages and, therefore, lacked the formal education necessary for securing employment in the villages’ new industries (Parasuraman, 1995).

None of these patterns are exclusive to the JNP scenario. Several other researchers have noted similar effects among displaced populations. Even before displacement in India and the U.S. commonly had private incentives, public development projects in these countries have disproportionally displaced the marginalized groups (Fernandes, 2008; Levien, 2015), failed to provide adequate compensation or rehabilitation (Fernandes and Thukral, 1989; Fernandes and Paranjpye, 1997; Cernea, 1999; Fernandes, 2004; Singh, 2008; Levien, 2015), and did not appropriately take into consideration common areas such as forests, sea access, or grazing lands (Banerji et al, 2000; Tsosie, 2001; Fernandes, 2009; Stromberg, 2013; Levien, 2015). Finally, as seen in the case study above as well as numerous other studies (Mehta, 2009; Dewan, 2008; Levien, 2015), displacement has the worst impact on those already experiencing low socioeconomic status (e.g., women, children).

DEEPENING OPPRESSION

In Jaipur and surrounding villages, a new class of village land brokers—referred to as dalals—were neither elected nor educated on the social implications of land selling, yet they served as a commercially motivated intermediary between villages and corporations. Prior to the area’s designation as an SEZ, land was not frequently sold, and if it was, the act tended to coincide with a loss of one’s honor within the community. After the SEZ designation, land values shot up and opened the opportunity for a select number of individuals to profit. It could be argued that the dramatic land value increase following the SEZ designation was a coercive factor that pushed rural community members into a modality of commodification. But the mobility of these few should not be mistaken for an economic achievement of the community. Haila (1991) points out that in cases where the land is first acquired by fellow community members for the sake of the government—ultimately to be passed on to private developers—the bulk of the profiting will inevitably go to the private developers, not the community.
A 2009 ethnographic study on the Pine Ridge Reservation of the Oglala Lakota in South Dakota reported many participants felt the interaction between federal and tribal politics “severely limits” tribal members from actually using the land as they wish (Stromberg, 2013). Instead of sovereign authority over the land, land plots are leased and divided intergenerationally until the pieces of land are either too small or require too many signatures in consensus to use. One survey respondent explained:

We weren’t the ones to negotiate it [the lease]. It’s historic, it’s almost like it clicks in to place automatically and we don’t have a say on our land...the lease is a generational lease. So the grandma that leased this land from my grandparents. When they died, my dad and his sisters inherited it, that lease followed them. And then when he passed away, that lease followed that land, and it was for 25 years. (Stromberg, 2013)

At the time of the interview, this woman shared her lease on a few acres with several hundred of her relatives. She is one of many participants who voiced concern over the fairness and effectiveness of the tribal government’s management of land within the reservation which had been set-up by the U.S. government.

These examples show how federal governments’ decisions on land use, ownership, and dispossession can impact the sociopolitical structure of a community and ultimately the set stage for conflict both immediately after policies are implemented and years down the line.

LAND WARFARE AND THE INDIVIDUAL

One need not wait years to witness the effects of displacement on individuals. Psychiatrist Mindy Thompson Fullilove (1996) explains that an individual’s “sense of place” is developed out of that person’s past as well as by their attitudes, beliefs, and actions in the present: “Place sets the conditions for human consciousness,” (Fullilove, 1996). Drawing then on the work of John Bowlby, Fullilove goes on to propose that, since concepts such as personal safety and security are developed in the context of one’s larger personal environment, “a threat to that environment is best understood as a threat to the self,” (Bowlby, 1973; Fullilove, 1996). The experience that follows displacement also carries a high potential for distress. If the place called home is tied up with one’s identity (Dominy, 1993, 1995; Fullilove, 1996), then the loss of said place can thrust an individual into a state of internal fragmentation as well as alienation within the new environment (Fullilove, 1996). Therefore, the disruptive experience of being displaced—even if that displacement occurs without physical violence—can be psychologically traumatic.
An “extraordinarily consistent relationship” between factors of chronic stress (e.g., low socioeconomic status, minority status, acculturation) and specific negative health outcomes has been demonstrated (Furomoto-Dawson, n.d.; Warneck et al., 2008; Bahl, 2011). Studies have shown individuals experiencing chronic stress to be at a higher risk for hypertension, hyperglycemia, glucose intolerance with hyperinsulinemia, hyperlipidemia, central obesity, Type II diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cerebrovascular disease, and early mortality (Sobal and Stunkard, 1989; Furomoto-Dawson et al., 2007; Furumoto-Dawson, n.d.). Moreover, there are alarming mental health disparities among displaced populations. Suicides, alcoholism, and domestic abuse are all commonly found in post-displacement populations both in the years immediately following the displacement and in generations to come (Thukral, 1996, 2009; Dewan, 2008; Ehlers et al., Thukral, 2009; Fernandes, 2009; CNAY, 2013; SPRC, 2013; Horwitz, 2014; Levien, 2015).

In the case of North America, Native youth—a demographic which experienced tremendous periods of upheaval and displacement for centuries—are significantly more likely than the U.S. average to consider suicide and nearly twice as likely to attempt it (Dobrowski, 2014; SPRC, 2013). The disparity is so alarming that the U.S. national Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) published an additional five risk factors to their standard four specific to Native American population. They include alcohol and drug use (not necessarily abuse), historical trauma, alienation, acculturation, and discrimination (2013). This information suggests that mental health is under-documented for effect of land wars and a critical point for intervention as will soon be discussed in Part III.

POINTS OF INTERVENTION

Prevention and Policy Development Activism

Whenever possible, social workers should advocate that governments avoid a displacement model of infrastructure development and instead use a model which fulfills their duty to provide public services and utilities to existing populations. Social workers should be wary when governments respond that required development (e.g. paved roads, potable water) are impossible due to environmental conditions (Mammen, 2017)—for years, the Indian government has successfully expanded television and phone access across the nation to the point where half of its citizens have phones, but not toilets in their homes (“Indian Census…”, 2012; Mammen, 2017).
Social workers can help communities apply pressure on the government to reassess their priorities through community organizing and other mobilization techniques.

When commodification and land use restructuring is inevitable, trained social workers should advocate alongside community members to settle with the federal government on a plan for compensation and protection which best fits the needs of that community. Emphasis should be given to democratic process and the burden of information dissemination regarding the proposed displacement policy and methods of dispute should be placed on the social workers to ensure maximum participation by all socioeconomic classes within the community.

**Information Dissemination.** Historically, when information dissemination has been left as a responsibility of the government or development agent, the chosen method of communication has been biased by oppressive neglect of the to-be-displaced community and/or motivation to avoid a reaction from the to-be-displaced community that could slow project progress. Such questionably ethical and undoubtedly ineffective methods of dissemination have included: placing materials where only a certain class of the to-be-displaced community could see them, not investing in a sufficient quantity or frequency of materials, not providing information in a medium accessible to the population which is supposed to receive it (e.g. wrong language, wrong reading level, small font), and otherwise failing to provide accessible mediums for response (e.g. town hall meetings at odd hours, phone lines which are insufficiently operated, government offices unofficially or officially requiring a certain socioeconomic, gender, and/or educational status to enter) (Ramkuwar, 2009; Levien, 2015; Jojo, 2017).

**Developing a Plan.** Social workers can work with to-be-displaced communities in advocating for a compensation and rehabilitation plan that fits the community’s needs. Based on the examples provided in Part II, the plan should include methods for holding the implementing agency accountable, it should address unique economic concerns, it should prepare for intergenerational biopsychosocial effects, and it should secure the right for community members to reevaluate and communicate concerns about it later.

**Post-Policy Legal Action**

India’s identification and legislated protection of three classes of human rights (i.e. Fundamental, Economic, and Collective) provide a unique opportunity for legal advocacy which is not as readily seen in the U.S., where the government and general society have stigmatized and obstructed
human rights with loaded words such as “entitlements” as well as the deeply embedded cultural ideologies such as the Protestant Work Ethic.

Farmers who have opposed state efforts to acquire lands from rural communities have increasingly begun winning in Indian courts (Levien, 2013a). This is good news in that, although India’s government has in many cases failed to protect its Scheduled Castes and Tribes from displacement, its legal system is set up as a promising method for post-policy development intervention. Of course, legal battles require a certain level of privilege—access to lawyers, time, transportation, etc.—so social workers in India should work alongside lawyers to increase communities’ awareness of and access to legal options.

Given the increase in violent aggression that has emerged out of India’s neoliberal growth model (Levien, 2013a; Levien, 2013b; Jojo, 2017), measures to increase community members’ sense of self-efficacy should be implemented immediately. Presenting legal interventions as a physically nonviolent method of resisting displacement policies may help to reduce the frequency of physically lethal conflicts (Bruell, 2013; Levien, 2013a).

On the other hand, recent events in the U.S. suggest that legal interventions may require a broader approach. The political turbulence in the country’s federal government that has occurred nearly concurrently with the Standing Rock-DAPL conflict in the North Dakota area has exacerbated the lack of a clear path to resistance. In fact, in the latter half of 2016, the Standing Rock community went over the U.S.’s head and took their case to the United Nations, stating that the U.S. had violated the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (endorsed by the U.S. in 2010) (Indian Law Resource Center, 2016; Medina, 2016).

This action represented the growing strength of a multilevel legal intervention and awareness campaign to oppose DAPL’s destruction of land considered sacred by the Standing Rock community. The movement drew connections between the fight for genuine sovereignty among Native peoples, the concern for environmental conservation among scientists and the general public, and the desire among many other movements for the constitutional protection of the right to protest to be upheld. In his testimony before the U.N., Standing Rock Chairman Dave Archambault II explained: “There was solidarity... To see tribes here from all over the world who are having the same experiences where large corporations are infringing on their land, on their rights—it was powerful to see that we aren’t alone in our struggle” (Medina, 2016).

The #NoDAPL movement is both a learning opportunity for the strength of intergroup collaboration and an example of some of the legal challenges communities and associated advocates have yet to face. Increasingly, government bodies have sided with private corporate interests
to make the path to policy dispute by community members not only
difficult but dangerous. This includes gender discrimination and exclusion
in political activities, penalties for protest participation, and encouragement
of civilian violence against resisting groups (Ramkuwar, 2009; Levien,

Reparative Action
As many cases of displacement have already occurred and are likely to
continue in the coming years, social workers should be prepared to handle
the variety of common consequences of displacement.

**Physical and mental health services.** The factors of chronic stress
mentioned in Part II directly relate to the status of many displaced
populations (Baum et al, 1985; Furomoto-Dawson, n.d.). Therefore, social
workers should be aware and available to connect displaced individuals
with health education and resources. Special attention should be given
to individuals who have, or are experiencing, displacement during their
childhood and adolescent years as research has shown the harmful health
effects of chronic stress to be particularly impactful during these stages

Interestingly, research has shown that there is a correlation between
people’s perceived self-efficacy and their biopsychological resiliency to
chronic stress (Baum et al, 1985; Kessler et al, 1985; Furomoto-Dawson,
n.d.). This suggests that interventions by social workers during the
Preventative and Post-Policy stages may reduce health disparities among
the displaced community members down the line. It may also be beneficial
for health services to be included in displacement compensation packages
(Furomoto-Dawson et al., 2007).

**Community (re)development.** Community development efforts
have been shown to positively impact the mental and physical health
of displaced individuals. Just as forced acculturation and assimilation
have been shown to contribute to increased rates of suicide among
Native American youth, connectedness to peers, family, community,
and appropriate social institutions have been shown to safeguard this
population’s risk of suicide (Dobrowski, 2014; Borowsky et al, 1999;
Mackin et al, 2012; SPRC, 2013). Effective methods for facilitating
connectedness—and ultimately reducing mental health disparity in
individuals who have experienced chronic stress at a young age—including
recreational programming (Furomoto-Dawson et al., 2007) and spiritual
involvement (Garroutte et al., 2003; SPRC, 2013), among others.
Social workers should encourage policymakers to allocate funding for
these activities and also encourage displaced individuals to think about
where these activities might be most easily accessed when relocating. Importantly, it has been shown that many of these interventions are most effective when ultimately carried out by members within the community (Kral et al., 2009; SPRC, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The history of federal governments’ interactions with indigenous and rural communities in many parts of the world can easily be summarized as examples of coercive exploitation (Levien, 2013b; La Duke, 2015; Jojo, 2017) facilitated by neoliberal commodification. In Karl Polanyi’s (1944/2001) widely cited The Great Transformation, he offers a fatalistic warning to any economic theory which proposes a self-regulating market disembedded from human society and the natural environment. He writes: “Such an institution could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human a natural substance of society” (p. 3). In other words, left unattended, market liberalism can cause great detriment to people and their environment—which is exactly what happens when populations are uprooted by populist machines for the sake of “development.”

When multidimensional ideas such as land, labor, and money are made into what Polanyi (2001) calls “fictitious commodities,” those participating in their trade begin to treat them as simple “real commodities,” risk flattening their context, and ultimately subject them to the fluctuating values of the market. Suddenly, a person becomes a voucher holder; a place becomes square meters of land. Polanyi argues, as does this paper, that the state must intervene through market regulation and relief efforts to avoid the disembedded dystopia which market liberalism can lead to.

Thus it stands that current policies and practices that lead to displacement not only fail to protect those who are ultimately displaced, they promote the commodification of people and natural resources. They disproportionately target marginalized populations and increasingly draw national resources away from the national public in favor of the elite. They fail to account for intergenerational socioeconomic, cultural, and health consequences of displacement. What should be a last resort, eminent domain or accumulation through dispassion, have become common methods of promoting liberalization and capitalist agendas through land policy.

While existing literature supports the position that the costs of displacement are not sufficiently addressed in contemporary policy-making, additional research could more accurately ascertain which methods of intervention would be most effective and appropriate in individualized circumstances. The United States and India are each
large countries with numerous independent tribal societies functioning within their boundaries; no two circumstances are alike. Nevertheless, social workers must not delay in mobilizing around the under-supported rural and tribal populations who have been displaced by public-private endeavors. This paper has highlighted a few key points of intervention but should not be seen as an exclusive list. It is my hope that as land wars increasingly arise, so too may we social workers stand up to fight.

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SOCIAL WORK IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Eilis Fagan, Ellen Grenen, Michaela McGlynn

Abstract

Social media is a growing and ever-changing method of communication that has a strong impact on the psychosocial well-being of today’s adolescents. Studies have found that social media can be detrimental to adolescent self-esteem, can be used to bully and manipulate others, and can exacerbate depressive symptoms. Furthermore, adolescents self-report utilizing social networking websites to find support, guidance, and community revolving around problematic behaviors such as self-harm and eating disorders. Social workers who treat this population should become familiar with the multitude of outlets in order to best support their clients. This paper draws from the authors’ experience with this population and the literature to date in order to establish the need for a social work prepared for the digital age.

Social media is an umbrella term for technology-based communication tools that connect people and allow for the sharing of information. One of the first social media platforms launched in 1997, “Six Degrees,” was the first website to allow millions of users to connect through the Internet via personal profiles, friend lists, and school affiliations (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). As Internet use became more prevalent, blogging sites continued the social media phenomena.

Social networking sites are an important subset of social media (Social Media, 2017). Social networking sites include specific features, such as the ability to create a personal profile and communicate either publicly or privately with other users. Additionally, many social networking sites allow users to “friend” one another, providing special access to one another’s accounts, and “follow” or “subscribe” to specific users which permits another user’s information to be more visible throughout the site. Users who friend, follow, or subscribe to other users create a virtual community potentially based on factors such as common interests, actual in-person relationships, or mutual friends. While social networking sites are not the oldest form of social media, most online information sharing occurs on popular apps such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat (Social Media, 2017).
Facebook was introduced in 2004 and has become one of the most popular social networking sites by allowing users to connect with others through sharing text, videos, and pictures on personal profiles (Freitag, Arnold, Gardner & Arnold, 2017; Social Media, 2017). Twitter, created in 2006, also allows users to post multimedia, but it specializes in short message systems known as “tweets,” which were initially limited to 140 characters and recently expanded to 280 (Social Media, 2017). Users can share status updates with their followers, who can then read the tweet, reply to the tweet, or share the original user’s tweet to their own followers through a process known as “retweeting.” Instagram was launched in 2010 and its primary purpose is to share media such as pictures or short videos instantaneously (Lenhart, 2015). Similarly, Snapchat, introduced in 2011, enables users to share pictures or videos with the distinguishing characteristic that these images and videos disappear within seconds of the recipient viewing them (Social Media, 2017).

Our focus is to analyze the authors’ experiences working with young people and current research about adolescents’ use of social media to consider implications for social work practice in the age of ubiquitous social networking. In particular, our work is interested in exploring how social workers engage individuals born after the year 2000, who came of age in a world with wide-spread Internet access, instant messaging systems, and various forms of mediated connection. For our purposes, we define “adolescents” as individuals aged 12-18, or students in middle school and high school. We will use the terms “adolescents” and “youth” interchangeably.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Today’s adolescents have been labeled Generation M(edia) due to the extensive amount of time this age group spends online (Coyne, Padilla-Walker, Fraser, Fellows, & Day, 2014). Since 2015, the Pew Research Center has been studying adolescent technology use in a series of reports. Their initial 2015 report found 92% of adolescents go online daily, 89% specifically use social networking sites and 24% of teenagers say they are online “almost constantly” (Lenhart, 2015). With this level of social media activity, current networking sites have replaced some aspects of individual and relational development—allowing adolescents to explore and develop their identities and relationships by expressing and sharing their emotions and experiences while receiving feedback from others (Lerman et. al., 2016). At the same time, levels of depressive symptoms have increased greatly in adolescents as technology has become more accessible (Weinstein et al., 2015; Egan & Moreno, 2011).
Ybarra, Alexander, and Mitchell (2005) found that youth with high levels of depressive symptoms use social media more often than those with lower levels. This relationship may be related to the youth’s desire to avoid in-person social interaction as well as to use social media as a resource and outlet to discuss depression itself (Lerman et. al., 2016; Lenhart et al., 2010). While it may be beneficial for youth to use social networking sites as an informal support network, adolescent’s susceptibility to peer pressure can lead to unsafe behaviors in this vulnerable situation. O’Keefe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) explain that, similar to depression offline, adolescents who suffer from social networking related depression may rely on this informal “help,” which ultimately can lead to self-destructive behaviors.

Reddy, Rokito, and Whitlock (2016) argue using anonymous forms of social media is particularly appealing to youth who feel isolated, which is common among those who self-injure. Normalizing behaviors, such as self-injury, may create a supportive community for the adolescent to not feel as isolated or stigmatized. However, the accessibility also poses a risk of increasing interest in the behavior or triggering those who are recovering from the behavior. Research shows connecting adolescents through social media increases the likelihood of social contagion—when two or more people engage in self-injury within 24 hours of each other (Reddy, Rokito, & Whitlock, 2016). Though the exchange of information is not inherently bad, discussing unhealthy behaviors or coping mechanisms poses a great risk for youth engagement in the behaviors.

Unhealthy behaviors have also been related to the ways in which adolescents constantly compare themselves to an unrealistic ideal when they use social media. Brown and Tiggeamm’s (2016) study shows frequent exposure to images of attractive celebrities and peers is detrimental to an adolescent’s self-image because it increases negative mood and body dissatisfaction. Cohen and Blaszczynsk (2015) use the social comparison theory to explain that body dissatisfaction increases with exposure to peer social media images compared to conventional media images, such as celebrities or models. This finding is daunting as many users strategically select thin and attractive pictures of themselves, which are coupled with comments reinforcing this body type. Compared to conventional media that is assumed to be digitally altered, people consider social media to be a more accurate depiction of their peers. Clark (2017) also found that constantly comparing the self to friends, peers, and acquaintances on social media can put a person in a low mood and increase negative thoughts about one’s body, which can lead to unhealthy amounts of exercise and food restrictions (Clark, 2017). These habits of
presenting the self, combined with the platform to discuss eating and exercise habits with others, intensify concerns with body image.

Social networking platforms also provide a space for and present unique forms of bullying and harassment. Studies suggest bullying peaks during adolescence but continues beyond, which is particularly important in this current paper because of the high percentage of adolescents who are connected to social networking sites every day (Jun, Xu, Zhu, & Bellmore, 2012; Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010). In the United States, a national average of 14.8% of youth experience electronic bullying, or cyberbullying, through social media messaging, email, and texting, and the distribution of screenshots (Kann et al., 2014). A screenshot captures an image of whatever is displayed on a device’s screen and thus whatever images or messages sent as a private communication can be shared without the original sender’s consent.

Social media has also been used as a vehicle for inter-partner harassment. 18% of adolescents reported that a partner had used social media to harass them, 11% shared a partner’s private content without their permission with the use of social media, and 17% feared consequences from their partner when they did not respond to a call, text, or other form of communication (Glauber, Randel, & Picard, 2007). Many teens have reported feeling as though they were taken advantage of when a partner shared an intimate photo of them with others (Glauber, Randel, & Picard, 2007). Indeed, we have found through our work experience that an intimate photograph that one sends to one’s partner can be shared instantaneously with the recipient’s friends within seconds, and it is not uncommon for other adolescents to use these images as a form of blackmail over one another. For example, a partner can threaten to post a compromising photograph on Instagram or on Snapchat if they do not get what they want from their partner.

Cyberbullying and harassment have led to a dramatic increase in adolescent suicide, other mental and physical health issues, and lower academic achievement (Jun, Xu, Zhu, & Bellmore, 2012; Cook et al., 2010; Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Thus, use of social networking applications and websites is an important factor to consider when adolescents present with symptoms such as low achievement, depression, isolation, and/or thoughts of self-harm.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK**

Our experience working with adolescents confirms that social media permeates most, if not all, forms of socialization and communication. It is important to note that while many adolescents report being involved
in online groups that promote detrimental behaviors—such as Instagram photo groups that glorify anorexia, bulimia, and forms of self-harm, such as cutting—others seek assistance and support for their depressive symptoms from both peers and anonymous contributors through social networking sites such as Facebook (Lenhart, 2015). Teens have reported utilizing hashtag searches such as “#proana” or “#ana” to find groups and online posts that support Anorexia, “#promia” or “#mia” to find groups that support Bulimia, and “#thinspo” or “#thinspiration” to find posts and groups that support unhealthy dieting, eating habits, and weight control to encourage quick weight-loss and idolize thin bodies. Though some websites and social media platforms have banned some of these hashtags, the material is easy enough to find if you know what you are looking for.

There have been several instances, in our experience, in which adolescents struggling with self-harm behaviors, such as cutting and burning, reported joining online communities through Facebook and Instagram. They reported that these communities provide information about how to engage in and hide the results of self-harm. These groups provide encouragement and support for others engaging in these behaviors. There are a multitude of ways adolescents communicate and it is important we can address the variety of ways development and mental health can be affected.

Self-harm groups are not the only ways in which we have witnessed adolescent symptoms being affected by social networking sites. Additionally, many adolescents struggling with depression reported increased feelings of sadness when using social networking sites. Many individuals explained that viewing peers, friends, and acquaintances on Instagram and Facebook and feeling as though they lead perfect lives. Several adolescents have explained that people on social media are always engaging in fun activities, looking great, and accomplishing a variety of achievements, not recognizing that many people only share the positive aspects of their lives with the public. These reports from adolescents emphasize that the constant comparison of oneself to unrealistic, ideal images of people online can put one in a low mood.

It can be hard for social workers to relate to, understand, conceptualize, or appropriately address the extent to which social media impacts the day-to-day lives of adolescents as many did not grow up with the same technology. In all of our work with youth, several adolescents discussed feelings of loneliness due to viewing friends spending time together without them on Snapchat. A social worker who might not be aware of the constant use of social networking sites may focus on this event as a one-time incident. However, the client will most likely continue to see people together via social networking sites and continue to feel left
out. Therefore, the social worker must be aware of the constant use and availability of social networking sites to assist clients in appropriately responding to an incident, such as this example, as a potentially ongoing stressor rather than a one-time event.

IMPROVING AWARENESS AND DEVELOPING INTERVENTIONS

Social workers are therefore encouraged to approach the world of adolescent social media use through a lens of cultural humility by developing skills, attitudes, and behaviors that enhance the therapeutic relationship and bridge the social media-driven cultural divide (Fisher-Borne, Cain, & Martin, 2015). Though it might appear farfetched to expect all professionals to understand the inner-workings of the multitude of social media platforms as an average adolescent might, a basic understanding of the most commonly used platforms can go a long way when building rapport with an adolescent client. The various platforms have developed their own norms, rules, preferred uses, and expectations. It is not the client’s responsibility to spend time from their therapeutic sessions to educate professionals about the ways in which different apps and sites function.

Research notes that within this developmental stage, adolescents are constructing and reconstructing their identities while peer interactions become particularly important due to the creation and transformation of cultural norms both on- and off-line (Galarneau, 2011, 2012; Rutledge, 2013). Adolescents learn how to navigate these social networks and behave in different ways on different platforms. For instance, one rule adolescents adhere to on Instagram is that close friends are expected to “like” and “comment” on a photo within the first few minutes of it being posted. It is not uncommon for teens to have group chats where one will update the others when a new picture or selfie is posted so the friends can provide attention on social media. It is important when working with adolescents not to dismiss these kinds of interactions. Social media is important to them; it is a way they can express themselves and stay connected with each other.

As communication shifts outside of the realm of in-person contact, it is important that social workers are able to adapt to be more aware of the technological world in which clients are immersed. In order to bridge the divide between social workers and social media, the National Association of Social Workers should offer continuing education unit courses or webinars that strictly focus on the ever-evolving adolescent utilization of communication platforms during this digital age and the uniquely
individual norms, rules, preferred uses, and expectations that have developed within these different platforms. One course could be designed to educate professionals about the functions and cultures of these various social networking applications and websites. A separate course could provide education about the ways in which online predators utilize social media to find, contact, and manipulate victims and how social workers can intervene if they have suspicions about the identity of an “online friend.” For example, a presenter might teach the group how to recognize a fake Facebook profile by demonstrating how to use a reverse Google Image search to identify stolen images.

In order to best understand how social media can be utilized by social workers to provide the most beneficial treatment to adolescents, further research must be conducted. It is necessary to research the effects that social networking platforms can have on specific adolescent populations. Research about the impact of social media on adolescents from various communities and backgrounds including, but not limited to gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status are to date limited and insufficient. Dedicating research to particular populations can illuminate parallels and/or differences between youth with different backgrounds. Various platforms or their implications may pose particular issues or benefits for a specific group. As the world continues to become more connected via the Internet, additional research into the long-term effects of constant social media use on adolescents’ mental and physical health is also necessary. Uncovering ways in which social networking is beneficial for this population’s well-being may help address the negative effects for which it provides a platform.

Suggestions for future research include developing a screening tool to determine the extent to which an adolescent’s use of social media contributes to their development and mental health—both positively and negatively. The assessment would be created to gain a better understanding of the amount of time adolescents spend on social networking sites per day, how each individual feels emotionally after being on social media, which sites they most frequently visit, and which, if any, groups they follow or subscribe to. This could assist researchers and social workers in better understanding how social networking sites are being utilized by adolescents and the ways in which the sites affect the developing individuals.

Social workers can themselves harness the power of social media in order to better connect with colleagues across the globe to share ideas or interventions, express concerns, and build community. Social networking sites are constantly changing and updating, making it difficult for anyone to understand each site and its function. Social workers can create and
utilize online networks to inform and educate one another about these changes in digital communities, ensuring timely access to information that best supports adolescent clients. In addition to creating an online forum or an online form of communication among social workers, they can engage in various social media platforms themselves to gain a deeper understanding of the platforms’ purposes.

CONCLUSION
There is to date limited research and understanding about social media and its immediate and long-term effects on adolescent development. However, it is clear that social media, especially social networking sites, are impacting and dictating the lives of adolescents in many ways. Various studies discuss social media and its effects on depression symptoms, eating disorders, harassment, and bullying. Additionally, our personal experience working with adolescents has further demonstrated social networking sites are creating a culture in which ideal images of what one should look like are constantly available, affecting the self-worth and mood of the youth today. Furthermore, the instances working with adolescents also emphasize the dangers of social networking sites and online communities as a resource for individuals to engage in harmful behaviors. It is necessary for professionals to have an understanding of the cultural implications of these platforms in order to understand the youth who utilize them. Social workers must educate themselves about these platforms in order to best support and build rapport with adolescent clients.

To begin understanding the ever-evolving forms of social media, social workers can develop a screening tool that increases the understanding of the impact social media has on adolescents, establish an online community among social workers, and create continued education courses centered on the varying social media platforms. As technology continues to advance and change the world we live in, social media will continue to determine communication, networks, and relationships within adolescent culture. Social media and social networking sites will not disappear, they will only become more prevalent throughout our lives and the lives of developing youth. Therefore, we must not only identify its dangers, but encourage positive and effective use of social media to promote and assist healthy development.
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MENSTRUATION AND SCHOOL GIRLS IN SOUTH AFRICA: AN INTERVENTION STUDY

Laura Haberer

Abstract

In South Africa, girls often face difficulties during menstruation, including access to hygiene products. It has been hypothesized that lack of products can lead to low school attendance. The Teddy Bear Clinic, in Johannesburg, works with high school aged girls utilizing a sexual violence education curriculum. During their programming, they implemented a menstrual cup distribution and education intervention in the hopes of increasing school attendance and comfort at school during menstruation. Survey tools were created in order to measure the results as well as conducting semi-structured interviews. Contrary to the hypothesis, the results indicated that girls in their programs were not missing school but faced other challenges during menstruation, such as shame and embarrassment while menstruating at school.

In South Africa, it has been observed that women and girls often don't have enough money to buy female hygiene products. The adolescent girls struggling to buy female hygiene products must turn to rags, socks, even notebook paper, and often lack access to clean water and private toilet facilities. The topic of menstruation can be taboo in many cultures, including that of the different cultures in South Africa (Steinig, 2017; Kirk & Sommer, 2006), and young girls can therefore experience shame and embarrassment when they are menstruating and do not have the resources to manage their menstruation hygienically (Steinig, 2017). There is anecdotal evidence that suggests this lack of resources might result in young girls, particularly of high school age, missing school while menstruating and one study found that adolescent girls in South Africa can miss up to five days of school per month due to menstruation (Khumalo, 2015).

Project leaders from the Sexual Violence Initiative in Schools program (SEVISA)—run by South Africa’s Teddy Bear Clinic—found that the girls they served were struggling with how to manage their menstrual cycles. The Teddy Bear Clinic is a social service agency operating out of Johannesburg that aims to combat child abuse in South
Africa by providing therapy, court preparation, education, and advocacy services throughout South Africa and facilitates girls’ clubs at schools in Johannesburg, Soweto, and Krugersdorp in order to fight violence against girls (VAG). The SEVISA project helps teach adolescent girls reporting mechanisms and processes related to VAG, then implement these processes at eight select schools. Following the reports of their project leaders at these schools, who feared the girls were missing school due to menstruation, the Teddy Bear Clinic pilot ed an intervention program that introduced the Mina Cup—a re-useable non-absorbent cup (with significant long-term cost savings) made of flexible medical-grade silicone that sits in the vaginal canal and collects menstrual blood for 6-12 hours depending on the size of the cup—to the adolescent girls in order to give them a safe, clean, and affordable option for when they are menstruating.

With help from a small team of assistants, I undertook a study to determine if the Mina Cup improved the general well-being of adolescent girls who used it. General well-being is here defined as feeling comfortable at school while menstruating, the ability to speak with someone if they feel uncomfortable, and the ability to focus on their school work while menstruating. Additionally, I sought to study if it would decrease school absenteeism during menstruation among the girls studied. To explore these potential benefits of the Mina Cup for adolescent girls, I studied the introduction and use of the Mina Cup in three schools served by the Teddy Bear Clinic. I posed two questions:

1. Does the introduction and use of the Mina Cup in three schools served by the Teddy Bear Clinic improve the adolescent girls’ attendance?

2. Does the introduction and use of the Mina Cup in three schools served by the Teddy Bear Clinic improve the adolescent girls’ general well-being?

METHODS

Program Implementation
Beginning in March 2016, the Teddy Bear Clinic presented the Mina Cup at five of their eight schools. The girls in these clubs were given an in-person presentation by Vibe Marketing, the sponsor and distributor of the Mina Cups. The presentations, conducted in the girls’ respective home languages, included information about female reproductive organs, the menstrual cycle, menstrual disorders, different products that girls could use during their menstruation, and information on the Mina Cup (e.g., proper insertion and cleaning techniques). The presentation also included
supplementary information about issues specific to teenage girls such as proper hygiene, teenage pregnancy, abuse, and assertiveness. Follow-up sessions were conducted by Vibe Marketing four months after the initial presentation to address questions related to proper use, cleaning, and any other concerns the girls might have had.

269 girls received one Mina Cup and were encouraged to use it. If they were not comfortable with the idea, they were told they did not have to use the cup. For the purpose of this study, due to time restrictions, all of the clubs were not able to participate in the study. The girls in one of the clubs run by SEVISA did not receive a Mina Cup or a presentation. They served as the control group. The control group consisted of 36 girls aged 11-19, though 5 were excluded as they had not yet experienced their first menstruation, leaving a total of 31 girls. The intervention group consisted of 74 girls from three different schools, aged 13-21, though 3 were excluded as they had not yet experienced their first menstruation, leaving a total of 71 girls. Considering the limited size of the control and intervention groups, the purpose of this study was to obtain information to spur further research rather than generalize the findings to the greater female adolescent population of South Africa.

Survey
In order to collect data to measure the girls’ attendance and general well-being both before and after the Mina Cup intervention, I created two survey tools: one for the group who had not received Mina Cups and one for the groups who had received the Mina Cups. I reviewed a similar survey created for a study regarding adolescent menstruation in Namibia (Steinig, 2017). Furthermore, I sought consultation from Jessica Darrow, Lecturer at the University of Chicago’s School of Social Service Administration, and Elizabeth Steenkamp, Project Manager, and Dr. Shaheda Omar, Clinical Director, both from the Teddy Bear Clinic in Johannesburg, South Africa. Finally, I tested the survey with the members of one of the SEVISA clubs; this club was then not included in the study. After this initial test, the survey was altered slightly in order to collect more detailed data. The surveys were explained to each group of girls at their respective schools during their regular weekly girls’ club meeting. Post-intervention surveys were distributed and completed by 74 girls at a total of 3 schools (the intervention group). Pre-intervention surveys were distributed and completed by 36 girls at one school (the control group). I conducted the surveys in English with the aid of the facilitator of each respective girls’ club in order to meet any needs for interpretation or translation.
Interviews
In addition, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with both the control group and the intervention group in order to gain more clarity surrounding the details of how young girls manage their menstruation that is too nuanced to capture in a survey. After the completion of the surveys, the facilitator of the club asked for any volunteers who would like to be interviewed. There were 14 total interviews: 11 with girls from the intervention group and 3 with girls from the control group. The interviews were conducted in English. While it would have been preferable to hold the interviews in the girls’ home languages, the girls’ club facilitators were busy running the clubs while I pulled girls out for individual interviews. However, the girls were proficient in English and I took every care, to the best of my ability, to make sure all the questions were understood by each interviewee (including restating questions, allowing the girls to ask me for clarity, etc.).

Possible Limitations
As a white American woman conducting the interviews in English, I considered how I may have impacted the participants’ answers. It is possible that the identities I hold may have altered the answers the girls gave as this is a likely and studied outcome (Cilliers, Dube & Siddiqi, 2015; Miyazaki & Taylor, 2007). I was introduced to each club by the facilitators as an American student who had previously lived and worked in South Africa as a teacher in KwaZulu-Natal (2014-2016). It is possible that hearing that I was familiar with working with young South African girls created more comfort for the interviewees. It is possible that since they didn’t know me prior to that day, they felt less anxious about revealing information that would have been difficult to reveal to someone in their community. Yet, it is also possible that the girls would feel disinclined to answer honestly and fully due to feeling uncomfortable disclosing to someone who is not from their culture and country. A lack of trust could have limited their willingness to disclose such taboo and private information. This is a potential limit to the design of the data collection.

RESULTS
The results of this study contradicted our assumptions about how the young girls in the SEVISA girls’ clubs program feel about and manage their menstruation. The control group highly favored using disposable menstrual pads as compared to any other menstrual product listed on the survey, including washable sanitary pads, tampons, household items such as toilet paper and towels, and the menstrual cup. The study also showed
that in the intervention group, which had been given a menstrual cup and taught how to use it, the disposable sanitary pad was still the most preferred product.

The control (84%) and intervention groups (85%) both reported disposable sanitary pads as their preferred product. The remaining 16% of the girls in the control group said washable sanitary pads and tampons were preferable while 20% of the girls in the intervention group reported the menstrual cup as their preferred product. The additional 5% overage resulting from surveys of the intervention group were from the girls who reported having two or more preferred products even though the instructions on the survey specifically told them to select only one preferred product. Of note was that 60% of the intervention group reported never having tried to use their menstrual cup.

In the control group, 74% reported that they were hesitant to use any product that has to be inserted into their vagina. While only 27% of the intervention group reported that same hesitancy and fear, 79% reported that they did not think the menstrual cup was easy to use and 59% reported not knowing how to use it. In the one-on-one interviews, girls said that they couldn’t imagine how something so big could fit inside their vaginas; they just thought it was weird; and one girl wondered if somehow the menstrual cup would end up in her stomach. Of those who used and preferred the Mina Cup, one girl explained that her main motivation was that she lived with her older brother and always had to ask him for the money to buy disposable pads. She saw the menstrual cup as a way to avoid that awkward conversation. Now that she uses the menstrual cup exclusively, her only complaint was that sometimes it took a few tries inserting it to get it placed comfortably. More than one girl reported that once the cup was placed appropriately, they “felt free” in their movements and would even forget it was there. Furthermore, in the individual interviews with the girls who use the menstrual cup, not one girl reported leaking while using it.

As for attendance at school, it wasn’t possible to obtain the attendance records from the schools. Instead, the survey asked questions related to having ever missed school due to their menstruation and if so, for what reasons. We hypothesized that, with the introduction of the menstrual cup, attendance would increase. However, we found that the majority of the participants in the intervention group weren’t using or had never tried using the menstrual cup. Additionally, the results indicated that girls in both the control group and intervention group largely reported that they did not miss school due to their menstruation. A significant number of the control (77%) and intervention (89%) groups reported never having missed school due to their menstruation.
However, when asked a subsequent question on the survey about reasons for missing school during menstruation, 45% of the control group and 41% of the intervention group reported having missed school due to physical pains such as cramps and back pain during menstruation. Only 4% of the intervention group and 0% of the control group reported missing school due to a lack of access to menstrual products. 85% of the control group and 55% of the intervention group reported that they always have money to purchase menstrual products.

Responses to questions in the survey aimed at participants’ general well-being with regards to their comfort, ability to focus and access to speak with someone they trust if they are ever uncomfortable were as follows: 64% of the intervention group reported being comfortable while menstruating at school using their preferred menstrual product while the same percentage of the intervention group reported that they are generally uncomfortable while menstruating at school; 71% of the control group and 79% of the intervention group reported that they either cannot focus or can only sometimes focus on their school work while they are menstruating; 26% of all the participants in the study reported that they are so desperate to keep their menstruation hidden from their peers that they do not throw away their used disposable menstrual products at school but rather wrap them in paper or a plastic bag and put them in their backpacks in order to throw them away at home.

DISCUSSION

One important consideration is that since the sample was not a random selection, there is no way to claim that these girls are representative of all girls in South Africa. Thus, for this study, we can only conclude that this data and its possible implications are only true for these specific girls.

It is notable that the girls reported not missing school due to their menstruation but did report that they missed school at times due to cramps and back pain. This was true even for girls who reported never having missed school due to their menstruation despite the subsequent question about whether or not they had never missed school due to associated reasons (e.g., physical pain, embarrassment, access to products, etc.). There are several possibilities for this discrepancy. Perhaps the girls, even though instructed that the survey was anonymous and results would not be reported back to their schools, were afraid to be honest in their answer to the question regarding absenteeism. However, when the subsequent question was asked citing reasons why they may have missed school during menstruation, they felt more comfortable being honest because the answers were both presented to them rather than requiring an
explanation. The mere presentation of answers the girl may have related to, such as missing school due to physical pains like cramps, could have provided legitimacy to those reasons a young girl may miss school during menstruation. It might also be that they couldn’t remember that they had missed school until presented with possible reasons why they stayed home. This may be especially likely given the order of the questions asked. They had already answered the first question and perhaps didn’t consider going back and changing their answer to the first question. Regardless, the results display that the participants are not missing school nearly as often as was initially predicted and when they are missing school, it is largely due to physical pain that can occur during menstruation rather than a lack of access to menstrual products.

This provides the Teddy Bear Clinic with important information that could help them to make changes to their SEVISA curriculum to better serve the needs of the girls. For example, if we are to conclude that the way in which the girls went about answering these questions shows that they fear being honest about what keeps them at home, curriculum to reduce shame around menstruation and validate difficulties such as menstrual-related pain could potentially better serve the needs of these girls.

In the results, we saw a large discrepancy between the intervention group and the control group reports of having missed school due to menstruation and availability of money to purchase menstrual products. The discrepancy in the percentages could be due to the fact that the control group only consisted of 31 participants from one school while the intervention group consisted of 71 participants from three different schools. The control group was selected solely because it had not received the menstrual cup intervention yet and was accessible to distribute surveys to during the time restrictions of this study. However, it is not entirely representative of the four total schools. The three schools selected for the intervention group were chosen for the same reasons (completion of the menstrual cup intervention and accessibility under time restrictions). However, they were more geographically diverse, which may have impacted the results due to the proximity to employment for their caretakers, proximity to stores that sell menstrual products, and different cultural aspects.

We also learned interesting information about “comfort” at school when menstruating. While 64% of the intervention group reported being comfortable while menstruating at school using their preferred menstrual product (85% using disposable sanitary pads), the same percentage of the intervention group reported being generally uncomfortable while menstruating at school. This may indicate that they are comfortable with their products but leads to questions about why, since they report
experiencing discomfort in general while menstruating. Perhaps the use of the word “comfortable” in the survey was too vague. The participants could have been responding to being comfortable with their majority used product (disposable sanitary pads) in comparison to the more controversial options also listed in the survey. Controversial options could include menstrual products that must be inserted or products that have more possibility to exposing their communities to the fact that they are menstruating (e.g., washable sanitary pads that have to be hung to dry in the sunlight in order to properly get rid of bacteria) (Steinig 2017).

During the semi-structured one-on-one interviews, the participants who identify as predominantly or always using disposable sanitary pads said they were uncomfortable and were asked if they “feel free” when menstruating using that product. Here “feeling free” means the feeling of unencumbered movement. The majority of participants responded that they do not “feel free” when they use disposable sanitary pads for fear of leaking through their pads, people (especially their male peers) being able to somehow see they are wearing a pad, and just general embarrassment. Through the interviews and survey information gathered, it can be deduced that there is a lot of shame and embarrassment surrounding the topic of menstruation and a strong desire from the young girls to hide their menstruation from their peers. One participant even stated in the survey that she is uncomfortable while menstruating at school because she is afraid people will know and “smell the dirty blood.” The use of the word “dirty” should prompt us to consider how this young girl perhaps feels a sense of shame and negativity toward her menstruation. It appears that the stigma associated with menstruation in these girls’ environments persisted even after the introduction of the menstrual cup.

Considering that the results report that, generally, the participants of the study felt uncomfortable while menstruating at school and that 71% of the control group and 72% of the intervention group have had at least one menstrual accident (leaking), it is understandable that they have trouble focusing on their school work while menstruating at school. Instead, the survey indicates they are worrying about their peers finding out.

While the initial hypothesis was that the introduction of the menstrual cup would provide girls with a cost-saving option that would increase their attendance and general well-being, the findings of this study did not support this hypothesis. Considering that 85% of the intervention group still preferred to use disposable sanitary pads that they aren’t entirely happy with, significant barriers to getting young girls in these communities to try using the menstrual cup persist. However, we did find that once those barriers were surpassed, the girls who reported using the menstrual cup regularly were quite happy with the product as it gives them
more freedom than the disposable sanitary pads: freedom from fear of leaking, freedom from fear of other students seeing that a girl is wearing a pad (as they are bulky), freedom to move about and be active, etc.

We hypothesized that these young girls in the SEVISA program were absent from school sometimes due to a lack of access to menstrual products. However, it seems that may not be the case. While it may very well be the case for other young girls in South Africa in more rural contexts, one possible explanation for why the null hypothesis might be supported in this context is that, although many of these girls are certainly disadvantaged, they may not be as disadvantaged as other girls in South Africa. So, while lack of access to menstrual products may be a problem that the menstrual cup can solve elsewhere, it doesn’t seem that lack of access is a large problem for the girls in this study. However, that doesn’t mean that there isn’t an issue worth tackling with the introduction of the menstrual cup to the girls in these communities with which the Teddy Bear Clinic can help. The largest problem that the girls in this study reported, both from the control group and the intervention group, centered on hiding their menstruation from their peers in order to avoid embarrassment. As they reported, the disposable sanitary pad doesn’t allow them to do that very easily since it often results in leaking accidents, it is bulky, and can restrict their movements and focus on school. Considering that the menstrual cup has proven that it does not leak and doesn’t need to be changed as often (even for an entire school day), it has the potential to solve some of the problems these girls are facing that relate to their general well-being while menstruating at school.

As previously stated, all of this data provides the Teddy Bear Clinic with important information that could help them to alter their curriculum to better serve the needs of the girls. It appears that embarrassment and subsequent desire to keep their menstruation private is very important. Recommendations for ways the SEVISA curriculum could be adapted to address this and other issues that the data uncovered are discussed below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A logical next step would be to address the barriers to uptake of the menstrual cup. Ease of use, hesitancy of inserting a menstrual product, and general education on how it works and how girls’ bodies work with regards to the menstrual cup are of vital importance to surpassing the uptake barriers.

First, current users of the menstrual cup can speak with the girls. During the one-on-one interviews, the girls who expressed hesitancy to using the menstrual cup for a myriad of reasons were asked that if someone
they knew was using the menstrual cup came to speak to them, would they be more inclined to try it. Most of the interviewees said that, yes, this would help them. It isn’t surprising that young girls who experience embarrassment and shame surrounding their menstruation are hesitant and skeptical, even scared, to use a product that must be inserted into their vagina when products that require insertion are not mainstream in their communities. However, it may go a long way if trusted adult women in their lives were using the menstrual cup first and could speak to them and answer questions from first-hand experience.

Related, the trust of older women can be used to facilitate Mina Cup use. Some girls in this study reported that since their moms were skeptical of the menstrual cup, this influenced their feelings towards using it as well. Providing a monetary incentive for older women to try out the product might go a long way in surpassing those uptake barriers and then the results show that, once surpassed, they will prefer the menstrual cup to other products. However, in order to adequately consider a monetary incentive, more research into possible consequences to such a study component would be required. While a monetary incentive is understandably an unreasonable expectation of a non-profit such as the Teddy Bear Clinic, appealing to the adult women in these girls lives even by inviting them to a parent/guardian meeting to discuss the menstrual cup may go a long way.

Regularly conducting open discussions, both in the SEVISA curriculum and in general, regarding issues the girls face with regards to their menstruation may also help them become more willing to try the Mina Cup. A lot of the hesitancy expressed by the girls could be due to the general negative feelings they have towards menstruation. Starting a conversation where the girls can express their feelings about menstruating, particularly with regards to their fears of their peers finding out, continually revisiting that conversation and validating their feelings could go a long way towards easing some of the tension surrounding the topic. It isn’t unreasonable after looking at the results of this study to estimate that these feelings of shame and embarrassment affect their desire to even discuss a new and, in many ways fear-inducing, menstrual product, when the topic of menstruation itself is “taboo,” as one interviewee stated.

CONCLUSION

While, we saw from the control group to the intervention group a significant drop in girls who reported being hesitant or afraid of using a product that must be inserted into their vagina, we need to understand better why 60% of the girls in the intervention group reported having
never tried using the menstrual cup. It is possible we could learn more through open discussions with the girls regarding their menstruation. However, a more thorough option may be to create and conduct a more thorough survey specific to reasons why girls aren’t trying their menstrual cups. With a better understanding of why girls aren’t trying the menstrual cup, pertinent information could be learned to alter the way we educate girls about the menstrual cup option.

I hope that this information will only help to continue this discussion and the important work that the Teddy Bear Clinic does with the SEVISA girls’ clubs. It is apparent that there are obstacles created by menstruation that keep girls from achieving their full potential and living their lives free of worry. A lot of great work has been done to attempt to relieve these young girls of those obstacles. Yet, work that addresses the feelings of shame and the ability to achieve a greater sense of well-being while menstruating is much needed for the girls participating in the SEVISA program.

REFERENCES


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REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND PSYCHODYNAMIC UNDERSTANDING

Danielle Littman

Abstract

This paper will review how I have used writing to process moments of tension or uncertainty with three clients: Eddie, C. F., and Kayla (names changed). In what follows, I will first give a brief background sketch of the client, share parts of a client’s stories from my own reflective writing and then present the core concepts from those theorists who helped me make sense of what had occurred, thus guiding my work with the client. I met each of these clients while working at their high schools on the South Side of Chicago.

EDDIE PRICE

I first met Eddie Price while working as a mentor and advisor at a charter high school in 2013. This was my first year out of college, my first full-time job, and my first time working as an advisor to high school students. This was also the year I decided I’d need to get a degree in social work in order to better understand the social-emotional lives of the young people who so often get pushed out of our public education systems.

Mr. Price (we called students by their last names) was often the subject of disciplinary action. He was known to wander hallways and classrooms when he was supposed to be seated at a desk. He had an Individualized Education Program (IEP), and a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP), but these seemed largely ignored by teachers and school administration. It was clear that the school staff did not understand what was going on inside of him. I did not either, but I wanted to. I wrote the following piece to contend with the first, small instance I truly connected with Mr. Price. I felt—for the first time—I was able to hear and hold the truth he’d been trying to get out.

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Mr. Price,

You are standing with your arms and head against the window, as a lot of guys do when kicked out of class—across the street is a snowfield, a train, a house where no one lives. The window is cold. You’ve been kicked out of class again, maybe for the second time that day, or fourth, or more. You’re the kid who always talks over me, everyone. You’re always breaking apart a calculator, or taking your belt on and off, or tapping, tapping, standing in corners when you should be in seats. A few nights before this moment, your mom kicked you out again, and you were back with your dad, a less hurtful more heartful man who doesn’t want but loves you. I don’t know what we’re going to do with you, your parents say, your teachers say, the deans say, you say. I don’t know what to do with you anymore.

You’re the student I think about on the commute home, especially when it rains and everything feels a little leaky. Do you know what you’re doing to yourself? Do you have control? You’re the one my parents know, my friends know, the story I pull out over dinner; a name I sigh with. The Dean told me the other day that you’re on your way out of the school, that I should log every single thing you do wrong and make a case against you. I nodded sad, knowing that the lack of “respect” (You told me once that you don’t care about respecting people based on age or position, but the respect they give you. Do I give you respect? Do you make it impossible? What does that word even mean?) you show me on one day alone could fill up pages.

At this window you were quiet, and frowning at a thing far in the snow. You pull your forehead off the glass for a moment to pinch in the window release and open it an inch—two inches on one side where the window slants broken in its frame. The air bites us, and I blurt Price (loud, cutting off the “Mr.”) while I motion for you to close it back. It’s habit more than anything, the redirection—I actually kind of like the cold. The security guard saunters by and closes the window himself, unaware of our everything.

I expect this to set you off, for you to go on one of your diatribes about mankind’s bullshit, white man’s bullshit, about place and race and other things brilliant beyond your capacity to package. About the nice white men in nice black suits in nice tall buildings who make decisions for not nice kids like you down in Englewood. I expect you to look over my shoulder like you always do when we’re talking, and when I say we’re talking, I mean you’re talking and I’m listening. I expect you to tell me again how that teacher screwed up your grade, or how you got in a fight with your mom after you snuck out while you
were suspended because she told you not to leave the house while suspended and after 4:30 is technically post-suspension. How she hit you, or you said she did. I expect you to fume. I expect not to know what to say, again.

But you’re quiet for once. When you begin talking again, it’s in a whisper, almost a mumble—almost as if you’d forgotten me next to you.

“It just sucks that we have to die. That everyone has to die. Can’t just a few people live? I just can’t believe that everyone has to go. That doesn’t seem right.”

I ask you how this came up. You whisper on, as if accidentally answering my question.

“It’s why I am how I am. I don’t know where I’ll be tomorrow, but I want to know I’ll die having really been alive. So few of us are really alive.”

Your voice trails off into mumbles I can’t know. Your gaze stings glued out this window, now closed.

The work of Melanie Klein and Harry Stack Sullivan help me contextualize the internal workings of Mr. Price, the systemic factors that contribute to his overall being and this complicated moment that we shared.

Melanie Klein (1975) says there are two main “positions” of the self that emerge within one’s first year of life: the paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position. She presumes that the paranoid-schizoid position “causes human beings to develop fears centered in the preservation of self, which manifest through anxious and persecutory actions,” and that the depressive position roots from a “conflict between loving and destructive (good/bad) impulses, which gradually become one over the course of development” (Borden, 2009, pp. 68-69). Klein and her followers believe that, although the paranoid-schizoid position predates the depressive position, “fluctuation between the stages never ends” (Rasmussen and Salhani, 2010, p. 499).

I was easily frustrated when Mr. Price was on one of his “diatribes,” or when he felt the need to speak up against something he viewed as unjust, but perhaps, as Klein would say, he spent most of his time in the “paranoid-schizoid” position, unable to view a given situation as having both good and bad qualities. This moment we shared at the window was the first time that I saw Mr. Price slip into the “depressive” position. He could see, at once, the beauty of life and the sadness that it must someday end. He could see his own actions as a reflection of this tension. A lot of the young people I’ve
worked with in schools spend much of their time in the paranoid-schizoid position; at any moment, they may jump into verbal or physical argument. This is often necessary for their own literal survival. What does this mean, then, that so much of these young people’s time is spent preserving oneself? By simply bearing witness to Eddie’s frustration or anxiety rather than arguing with it, I could have shown him how it looks like to have someone make him feel heard when experiencing negative emotions; shown him that good and bad can happen in the same moment.

Sullivan (1956) uses the term “selective inattention” to describe the “controlling awareness of the events that impinge upon us” (p. 38). With this concept in mind, I see how Mr. Price often focused hard on one thing at a time. This may have been a necessary coping mechanism at home, a way to keep his mother’s verbal and physical outbursts at bay. At school, he was selectively inattentive to teachers and administrators when he did not find their tone respectful. Perhaps these tones reminded him of his mother, perhaps not. Regardless, Mr. Price was often viewed by those teachers and administrators as rude, sarcastic, and disrespectful (ironic, given his appreciation of respect). This often landed him in trouble; roaming the hallways; unheard. To authentically engage Mr. Price would require these workers to imagine the reasons for his selective attention, and to react in a non-punitive manner to his moments of paranoid-schizoid outbursts.

C. F.

Around the same time that I met Mr. Price, I encountered C. F., who was a freshman. Quiet, mostly. A writer. The world was heavy to him. He was quick to grin, but walked as if there were sandbags on his shoes, and tended to say morbid things more easily than pleasant ones. In my presence, he wrote a chilling poem about violence in his community, his home as safety, and his own fear of death. Two years later, he was shot and killed in front of his house.

July 2016

I am not expecting it to be an open casket funeral. If I had been given a choice whether or not to see his body, I would have chosen not to—I don’t have a choice. There it is—there he is—at the front of the congregation, the casket so lavish and so clean, royal almost, his skin so waxy—and I purposefully scoot over as to have someone’s head in front of me, as to not see.
From here, I can see the security guard from school—who seems to be a funeral director on the weekends—take a tool out of his jacket that hooks onto the casket. He begins to crank the casket closed, so slowly—he could have done this so much faster.

From here, I can see Mr. F.'s father—also Mr. F.—clutching the pew. Clutching the pew with his hands like claws, so tight, curling into himself, like if he held long enough, strong enough his son would come back.

I can see him see his son for the last time.

I can see Mr. F.—still. I can see him still clutching his boxing gloves, still with that peaceful face, still so young and so just starting life.

From here, I can see a grown man wail, heave, run out of the congregation.

From here, I can see a long line of seventeen-year-old boys, so well dressed, so trying to hold themselves together, holding themselves together. This isn't their first time doing this. I cringe thinking I ever told them to sit down, quiet down, DUDE, calm down.

From here, I can't see through my own hot tears, wondering if I'm allowed to cry here. If it's my place to cry here.

For the first time, I want to believe in a religion—I want to hold onto something when nothing feels right. When good kids, the poets and peace warriors, are shot to death outside their houses, when the bullet goes through the front door, when the kid's single father, a UPS driver, can't talk except through heaves, when he can't afford to make a program for the funeral, when the other seventeen year-old boys raise money to make a program for the funeral.

Reading his poetry, it almost seems like Mr. F. knew he was going to die young all along. I want to believe that he was on a throne.

Nancy McWilliams (2004) believes that a clinician's role is not to lead a client to a given destination, but to walk alongside the client and to “make the journey safe” (p. 31). In general, I agree with this. But how could I walk alongside C. F. when we did not share the same road? How can a clinician make the journey safe when the need for safety becomes so literal? When it is not a metaphor? We can have control over what happens in our classrooms or community centers or offices, but outside of those spaces, our clients are on their own; it is sobering to recognize this.
In thinking of C. F.’s stark poem of violence and death, Ian Suttie’s theory about the difference between the psychopathy of wartime and peace comes to mind. He theorizes that in war, “the traumatic factor was adult fear of death and injury, and perhaps horror and discomfort at the conditions of life. In peace, the ‘traumata’ are infantile anxieties and resentments, whose nature and origin have been completely repressed (Suttie, 1935/1998, p. 203). It is clear that C. F. is not preoccupied with “infantile anxieties,” but—because of the conditions in which he lives—a real adult fear of death.

Susan Kemp (2010) writes that “as places get under our skin, they become repositories of individual and collective meaning” (p. 120). I am inclined to believe that at a cellular and psychological level, we connect with places, and places not only shape our memories and the narratives we tell about ourselves, but they shape the makeup of our bodies. When I land at the airport in Northern California—where I grew up—my first deep breath of that sharp, clean, cool Pacific air calms my body. I am home. C. F. was scared to walk down the block he lived on. And ultimately, he was not safe there—he was killed just in front of his house by a drive-by shooter. In his poetry there was the sense one could—that he might—survive the ‘traumata.’ But places seep into us. Our places, our communities, impact the very fiber of our existence.

Alfred Adler (1927) writes about the notion of Gemeinschaftsgefühl, or “feeling of community” (p. 134). Borden (2009) further draws upon this “human compulsion for community and communal life” (p. 29). He proposes that through this feeling of community, we learn to empathize, understand connectedness among beings, and build interdependence with and amongst one another. But what if our feelings of community are feelings of chaos, of rupture? C. F.’s poem includes references to falling asleep to gun sounds, screams, and moans. If interdependence and empathy do not mark our communities, can we still learn to build connectedness amongst beings? I would like to believe that it is possible, in C. F.’s story, to find a narrative where struggle and hardship are the catalyst for deep interdependence amongst beings.

This phenomenon of community interdependence is explored in Rebecca Solnit’s book A Paradise Built in Hell (2010). Solnit follows communities who unite after natural and manmade disasters. She writes, “If paradise now arises in hell, it’s because in the suspension of the usual order and the failure of most systems, we are free to live and act another way” (p. 7). I believe that we can learn new ways of being from both joyous and difficult moments of community—and that we can redefine community not as something merely geographical, but spiritual, and restorative. Though a deeper commitment to appreciating the resiliency of
community could not bring C. F. back, perhaps it could help survivors be present for one another.

**KAYLA**

I did not know Kayla well when I was asked by my supervisor to sit with her and her mom in a school conference room to wait for the SASS (Student Assessment and Support Services) worker to show up and assess whether she needed to be hospitalized. Kayla was on medication to control hallucinations, and she’d been talking to voices all day. My supervisor thought she may need her medication adjusted. While I sat with them, I watched Kayla and her mom argue for almost two hours until, finally, Kayla got up and ran out of the room and out of the school. I was not trained for this moment—and often, in crisis work, we don’t have time to think. Not knowing what else to do, I followed her.

December 4, 2016

**Dear Kayla,**

You got up from your seat before I knew what you were doing. You got up from your seat, and walked out of the conference room and didn’t listen to your mom talking through tears telling you to sit down, come back, it’s gonna be okay, baby.

You walked across the hallway and through the doors to the school and I couldn’t believe you could do that, couldn’t believe that a public school these days wouldn’t have security guards at every door, couldn’t believe that I wanted security guards blocking kids from going through doors. I couldn’t believe that you turned the corner, kept walking; that you seemed to know where you were going.

I didn’t mean to yell at you when you kept walking. I didn’t mean to raise my voice but I wanted you to hear me, and maybe I wanted you to think I was doing something, no, maybe I wanted some karmic pull in the universe to know that I was doing something so I wouldn’t get in trouble for letting you leave out the school like that. I didn’t mean to think about myself getting in trouble, losing my internship, when I should have been thinking about you, your safety, getting you to safety. I didn’t mean to almost cry.

You were in another place, a you place, walking away from me, from the school, from your mom, going towards where you already were in your head. Every
half block, you would look back at me and laugh, pretend to run a little, or scowl hard with a fuck you and a stop fucking following me.

We walked for six blocks like this, like it had been days of this.

You stopped at the 65th and Cottage bus stop and just sat. Your face changed, whole body changed, suddenly. You were not hard anymore. You got younger, sitting there. You were a kid who spilled milk or broke a vase, not a six-foot 17-year old in a bout of psychosis. You didn’t want me to see you like this, or maybe you wanted me more than you wanted, telling me not to fucking touch you or you’d fucking beat me. I wanted to wipe your mascara.

So where should I go from here? Should I hold you here, keep you here, younger, away from the crisis worker and the police and the hospital and your mom and even the school, away from all these systems that you know weren’t made for you? Can I decide what makes you safe? Or should I let you go, let you get on the bus, trust that you are going where you need to be?

In crisis work, we often do not have time to think before acting—but instead, must act immediately, and think later. In my interaction with Kayla, I did not have time to reflect about the best possible course of action. Therefore, I used the process of personal writing to recover time I did not have in that moment.

Reflecting on this moment with Kayla, I remember Karen Horney’s (1945) theories of personal defense, as summarized in Borden (2009): “(1) moving towards other, seen in irrational needs for love and approval, (2) moving away from others, marked by withdrawal and isolation, and (3) moving against others, represented in unchecked need for power” (p. 128). In the mere twenty minutes we were together, Kayla depended highly on the last two patterns of defense. Looking back, I think of the multiple ways in which I could have responded to her when she moved away from, and against, me. I could have stayed at the school. I could have run after her (I was afraid she’d run, too). I could have gotten angry (I raised my voice more than I should have). I could have called the police (I did not have my phone on me; they were called anyway). It is important to recognize that within two-person work (Wachtel, 2011), my reactions to Kayla were just as important as her actions towards me.

Once Kayla sat down at the bus stop, I made the decision to stand about ten feet away from her, and not to talk to her unless she spoke to me. Although it felt uncomfortable to just stand there, I see now that I was practicing what Carl Rogers (1959) refers to as “unconditional positive
regard,” or, to “value the person, irrespective of the differential values which one might place on his specific behaviors” (p. 208). I made clear to Kayla that I was there for her—that she was accepted exactly as she was. In that moment her defenses broke down. She became vulnerable, as her body physically relaxed. Although she still presented me with curse words and threats, she teared up while doing so.

Rogers’ and Horney’s theories feel deeply in line with my own moral system. However, I also recognize the ways in which I may not always want to respond with positivity, or compassion. I may be moved to correct someone, to direct them, or overthink my actions. It is important to remember that with Kayla, and the other students about which I wrote, some of the most impactful moments have been ones where I’ve sat back, listened, and accepted exactly what was happening while it was happening.

CONCLUSION

Social work demands reflective practice. This paper focuses on writing as a reflective practice as a bridge towards theories. Although psychodynamic theories are particularly apt for reflective writing, given their own narrative nature, reflective writing can find a home alongside other clinical theories, and across the ecological system of micro-, meso-, and macro-level social work.

As practitioners who engage in writing as a reflective practice, we may regain time after a crisis, both to remember and re-root, and to understand opportunities for future interactions. Or, like Coles, we may find emergent “moments of liveness” in client interactions, thereby moving away from relying solely on quantifiable “symptoms” and towards a more humanistic practice.

REFERENCES


**Danielle Littman** is a second-year clinical student in the A.M. program at the School of Social Service Administration. Prior to coming to SSA, Danielle worked as a teaching artist in several Chicago schools, and as a community liaison for the Chicago Park District’s Department of Culture, Arts, and Nature. Danielle’s practice and research interests center around place, youth voice, creative qualitative methodologies, and person-centered practice. Danielle holds a B.A. in Theatre and Creative Nonfiction Writing from Northwestern University.
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ELIZABETH WEISS is a master’s candidate at the School of Social Service Administration where she is enrolled in the School Social Work Program of Study. She is a Research Assistant at the UChicago Consortium on School Research and has worked on projects investigating the connections between social-emotional learning and art education, and an ongoing investigation of equity and adult learning. Prior to joining UChicago, Elizabeth worked as an artist and teaching artist in Chicago and holds a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where she studied painting. Her scholarly interests include the intersections of equity, trauma, healing, and creative processes in educational contexts. Elizabeth is a Co-Editor-in-Chief for *Advocates' Forum*, and enjoys reading and learning about the dynamic work of her peers at SSA.