FROM THE EDITORS

When the editorial board sat down this year to discuss submissions, it was weeks before COVID-19 was labeled a global pandemic. Then, the topics were all immediately relevant to policy and practice discussions. While they still are important, issues of COVID-19 have superseded all else. In doing so, it has revealed existing cracks in welfare systems and international equity; it has opened a brief window for innovative policy and practice ideas. In a world where everything has changed, seemingly overnight, there’s an opening for social workers to step in and make real change at an individual, local, or societal level.

The following papers strongly reflect the broad field that is social work and displays the unique point of view and skills social workers bring to the table. The following papers discuss events from super-local to international scales or examine particular theoretical nuances of methodology. No matter the academic niche of the paper, the writers have brought their own voices and unique insights to existing social issues through an interdisciplinary approach. While none specifically deal with traditional healthcare issues, these papers explore many of the issues implicitly aggravated by this global health crisis and remind us of the diverse concerns that need to be considered in emergency response. The broad swath of topics and thinking well encapsulates the field of social work and in these uncertain times, reminds us of social workers’ important positionality in ensuring that programmatic and policy decisions are made fairly and don’t neglect any population or culture.

In “Towards a Whiter Woodlawn: Racism and the University of Chicago’s Employer-Assisted Housing Program,” Laurel Chen examines a little-known but enormously important University of Chicago policy. This policy encourages University staff to move into neighborhoods surrounding its Hyde Park campus, most incentivizing communities that have historically been of color or of low income. After examining the racist implications of this policy, Chen explores how constituents ranging from community members to students can organize around this issue.

Next, David ben-Jonah Bezalel explores the dual concepts of estrangement and cherishment. The paper, “Developmental Estrangement and the Re-emergence of Love,” effectively examines the histories of their positionality in psychodynamic thought and how these concepts can strengthen therapeutic practice.
Josselyn Andrea Garcia Quijano takes an approach merging the abstract and concrete approaches of the previous authors. “Workplace Discrimination and Undocumented First-Generation Latinx Immigrants” discusses the policy and mental health implications of discrimination specifically targeted at undocumented Latinx immigrants. Garcia Quijano discusses the impact of discrimination, policies and law, and positionality of power in relation to the mental health and coping mechanisms for this often hidden group.

“On the Ethics of Mindfulness-Based Interventions,” by Howard Ruan, examines the broad appeal of mindfulness in secular stress reduction and how this secular mindfulness resembles and differs from the traditional Buddhist practice. While some have criticized secular mindfulness as cultural appropriation, Ruan puts forth a model of coexistence in a discussion of needed redefinitions.

The last paper takes a more personal approach in ruminating on an epidemic completely unlike the current pandemic: gun violence in America. Kira Monin, in “Framing and Agenda Setting Following the Mass Shooting Attack in Christchurch, New Zealand,” starts with personal experience before following New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern’s public responses in the week following the shooting. This close tracking allows a deep examination of the contrasting American and New Zealander responses to a mass shooting and contemplation of effective framing.

We hope that you find these papers as interesting as engaging as we did and that you recognize the many lessons and insights that can be applied elsewhere. As situations are changing rapidly everywhere, social workers will play a key role in advocating for just conditions. These are the types of ideas and methods of thinking that will get us there.

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