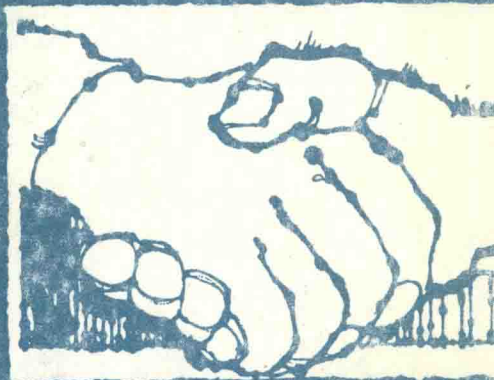


NOT FOR WOMEN ONLY



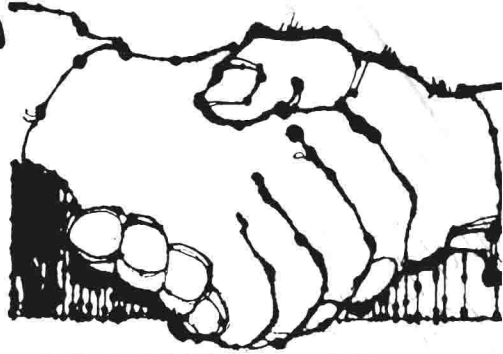
Social Work
Practice for a
Feminist Future

Mary Bricker-Jenkins

Editors

Nancy R. Hooyman

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Based on an Institute on Feminist Practice presented by
the NASW National Committee on Women's Issues at the
NASW Professional Symposium, Washington, DC, November 1983.



National Association of Social Workers
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Dedication

Four years ago, having entered a doctoral program with grave doubts and cynicism about my ability to get through without compromising my soul, I made an appointment to see the man who had been assigned as my adviser. "Everyone in this school knows my radical feminist politics," I thought, as I approached his door. "They are doing this to let me know who's boss around here. They think a little 'D & B' is good for the soul!"

Bob Mayer answered the door. Over a foot and half taller than I, with a full red beard and brilliant eyes, he greeted me with a gentleness and warmth that instantly challenged my assumptions. I was shaken.

He asked me, as advisers are wont to do, what I wanted to get out of the program and what my life was to be. I responded with some fuzzy ideas about feminism and social work. He would not let it be. "But what do you want to *do*?" he insisted. "Well, Bob, I want to change the world." "That's it!" he said. "Remember that goal every day you come here. Don't change it, don't compromise it, don't forget it for a moment. Do everything you do here with that purpose in mind. If I see you doing otherwise, I will tell you what I see. I want this for you. I want this for me. I want it for all of us."

The Institute on Feminist Practice—indeed, all my work on the Feminist Practice Project—has been a step in the process of social transformation. Along with Bob, I want a world in which the full potential of each person can unfold, a world willing to risk nonviolence and diversity and gentleness. I hoped that Bob would be able to share his feminist views at the institute, but he died on November 3, 1983, shortly before the institute convened. Nevertheless, he inspired the title of the institute: "Not for Women Only: Social Work Practice for a Feminist Future."

Many of you will remember Bob Mayer as an author, an activist, a former dean, and a teacher who brought cooperative problem-solving principles to the classroom. I want you to know him also as I knew him—as a grinning, gentle giant who daily went about the work of changing the world.

MARY BRICKER-JENKINS

When Bob died, his wife, Ruth Brandwein, was with him. It was an expression of Bob's feminism that he resigned as dean of the School of Social Work at Bryn Mawr College to move to New York to be with the woman he married. Bob and Ruth shared the dream of infusing feminist principles into their work as administrators. Bob saw his role as supporting Ruth's efforts to do so at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, where she is dean. The greatest challenge to men who are changing is to give up their privileges. Bob struggled to do that.

And how much we all benefit from the work of the woman he encouraged! Ruth's work as a feminist author, educator, and activist is well known. Her warm personal style as administrator reflects her feminist values. As a single parent for most of her career, she has been empathic toward and supportive of other women who are struggling to integrate their personal and professional lives. Chairperson of the Council

on Social Work Education's Women's Commission from 1980 to 1983, she confronted patriarchy in social work education and insisted on speaking about differences. "We are not a 'special' population!" she said recently. "In social work, we *are* the population." Ruth has presented these truths and differences in a way that calls forth courage and compels action.

We wish to dedicate this work to Bob and to Ruth. We ask that you join us in drawing strength and confidence from Bob's life as we shape our visions and in sending Ruth the healing energies we create through our work together.

NANCY R. HOOYMAN

Preface

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) established the National Committee on Women's Issues (NCOWI) in 1975. The major goals of NCOWI have been to work for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, improve social work practice with women, monitor NASW's affirmative action plan, encourage and assist chapters to form women's issues committees, and move women up in the profession. Toward these ends, NCOWI held its first NASW Conference on Social Work Practice with Women in 1980, entitled "Social Work Practice in Sexist Society."¹ The conference was a great success, and the second national conference on women is planned for 1986.

NCOWI has been involved in various major projects for the enhancement of women in social work. One such project is the Feminist Practice Project, funded by a special grant from NASW's Program Advancement Fund. The aims of the project are to identify, analyze, and describe politically oriented models of social work practice with and for women that are based on feminist theory. Another project was the Institute on Feminist Practice, held at the NASW Professional Symposium, November 1983, in Washington, D.C. This book is based on papers presented at the institute. The recurring theme of the articles is the identification of feminist practice and perspectives in different arenas of social work endeavors. As the authors state, although these papers emerged from women's experiences with oppression, consciousness raising, and reconstructive action, the models of feminist practice presented herein are "not for women only."

Both of the aforementioned projects were inspired by Mary Bricker-Jenkins and Nancy R. Hooyman—dynamic leaders in the feminist movement. As a Chicana, feminist, and chairperson of NCOWI, I want to express my appreciation to these two outstanding feminists who have fostered our understanding by bringing women's issues to the forefront of the profession.

NCOWI expresses its appreciation to the participants of the Institute on Feminist Practice who shared with us their problems, joys, and challenges of being feminists. We value the love, support, and constant stimulation given us by our sisters.

MARTHA MOLINA FIMBRES, *Chairperson*
National Committee on Women's Issues
National Association of Social Workers

June 1985

¹See Ann Weick and Susan T. Vandiver, eds., *Women, Power, and Change*, selected papers from Social Work Practice in Sexist Society, First NASW Conference on Social Work Practice with Women (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Social Workers, 1981).

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BE NOBODY'S DARLING

Be nobody's darling;
Be an outcast.
Take the contradictions
Of your life
And wrap around
you like a shawl,
To parry stones
To keep you warm.

ALICE WALKER

From "Be Nobody's Darling," *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems*, copyright © 1973 by Alice Walker. Reprinted by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., and the author.

Introduction

This book developed from the commitment of NASW's National Committee on Women's Issues (NCOWI) to the advancement of feminist practice. NCOWI's commitment, in turn, evolved from the first National Conference on Social Work Practice in Sexist Society held in September 1980. Over 800 women from around the country gathered at that conference. In both the large formal sessions and spontaneous small groups, women shared their common visions, as well as their sense of being alone in their efforts to empower women in their communities.

At that conference and at subsequent gatherings, several themes emerged repeatedly: empowerment, human liberation, meeting human needs, the individual's dignity within the context of collective responsibility, the transformation of personal and social relations, and healing. Woven into the fabric of feminist practice, these themes are not new, but rather basic to social work's history and traditions, especially to the tradition that frames all professional activity with considerations of social justice and human liberation. Nevertheless, the theory, values, and assumptions that dominate the profession today often differ from those that are basic to feminist practice.

To reclaim our feminist tradition in social work and to articulate clearly feminist principles in light of the current realities of practice, NCOWI developed the Feminist Practice Project. The Feminist Practice Project is a national research study that aims to describe and disseminate information on feminist practice and to evolve new models of practice grounded in feminist theory and values. It recognizes that the concept "the personal is political" is core to our practice but that the concept will vary with the historical and material conditions to which practitioners respond. NCOWI has, therefore, assumed that feminist practice models are diverse and must be shared widely to advance our practice.

The 1983 Presymposium Institute, "Not for Women Only: Practice for a Feminist Future," evolved from a pilot study of the project. It represented a collective effort to share the ways in which practitioners advance their feminist agenda in their daily work. The presenters at the institute offered several different perspectives on feminist practice that illustrate some of the many ways in which feminism, political orientation, and life experience are blended to form distinct approaches to analysis and work. They detailed the theory, values, assumptions, and purposes that inform their practice. As each presenter spoke and others recognized aspects of their own practice, excitement and energy were generated. Women who had previously felt alone in their struggles were affirmed by hearing their beliefs and feelings echoed by others. Contradictions, fears, doubts, hopes, prejudices, and misconceptions were shared, at first tentatively and then more openly as both female and

male participants listened and trusted. When the institute came to a close, there was also sadness—sadness that our time together was limited and that the institute would reach only a small number of women and men. We agreed on the importance of trying to capture some of the day's richness and diversity through a publication. Thus, this book was born.

The book includes each of the presentations, as well as selections from feminist poetry, music, and other forms of cultural work. These selections were included because we learned in the pilot study of the major influence that women's culture has had on the work of feminist practitioners. Perhaps these art forms capture the reality of women's lives far better than can the traditional social work literature. And, to paraphrase political organizer and musician Barbara Dane, we must take back control of our own culture. To do that, we need to understand the nature of culture. We have been taught to think of culture as something esoteric and "above" us or as something frivolous and not meaningful. Neither conception is correct, and both can be harmful. For culture is the symbolic basis for human communication, expressing and supporting the connections among us. When we give over control of culture to those who would control and exploit us, they will use that power to make us feel separate, ignorant, and weak. When we take it back, we take back our history, we engage in struggle, we create our future.¹

This book portrays a practice rooted in a rich tradition of social action and struggle, selectively incorporating professional theory and methods and open to the influences of both traditional and nontraditional helpers and healers. Although they emerge from women's experiences with oppression, consciousness raising, and reconstructive action, the models of feminist practice presented in here are clearly not for women only.

MARY BRICKER-JENKINS AND NANCY R. HOOYMAN

¹Barbara Dane, line notes from *I Hate the Capitalist System* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Paredon Records, 1973), pp. 9-10.

URGED TO DENY THE SECRETS

Urged to deny the secrets within our natures
And to reject the differences of others,
We are taught to be fearful of ourselves
and contemptuous of others.
Separated from ourselves and isolated from each other,
We are taught to huddle together for comfort
Under the socially acceptable banners
Of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia—
We are discouraged from seeing the ways in which
We are all connected.
We are thus rendered powerless
And immobilized by our prejudices.
This is not an accident.

BLANCHE WIESEN COOK

From "Female Support Networks and Political Activism: Lilian Wald, Crystal Eastman, Emma Goldman, Jane Addams" by Blanche Wiesen Cook. Copyright © 1977 by Blanche Wiesen Cook. First appeared in *Chrysalis* (Autumn 1977); reprinted in *Women and Support Networks* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Out and Out Books, 1979). Reprinted by permission of the author.

A Feminist World View: Ideological Themes from the Feminist Movement

Mary Bricker-Jenkins
Nancy R. Hooyman

Those who practice and teach from a feminist perspective often meet skepticism and critical questioning from colleagues, which, in effect, convey, "What do women want now?" What is feminist social work practice? What are its predominant structural characteristics, its value orientations, and its techniques? What are its aims? Does it have a theory base that can be articulated? How does it differ from advocacy and other politically oriented social work practice or from "good" social work practice?

What distinguishes feminist practice is the centrality of its ideology. Although all practice embodies ideologies, few practitioners make their ideologies explicit and consciously examine their performance against their ideologies. For feminist practitioners, ideology is the core of practice—the measure of all choices to be made—and is consciously used to motivate and evaluate action. In addition, feminist practitioners purposefully seek and

Mary Bricker-Jenkins, MSW, is a movement activist and organizer whose interest in feminist practice and the common cause of workers and clients is rooted in her involvement in the welfare rights movement. With a practice background in public welfare, child and family services, and community development, she has taught social welfare history and policy and generalist practice at several colleges and universities. She now lives and works in the hills of Tennessee, where she continues her research as coordinator of the Feminist Practice Project and has an active public practice.

Nancy R. Hooyman, MSW, Ph.D., associate dean of the School of Social Work, University of Washington, Seattle, and a co-consultant to the Feminist Practice Project, has a practice background in community organization, particularly with low-income women. As an activist with older women, her work involves bringing a feminist perspective to research on caregiving and the elderly and identifying the common ground among women of all ages. She also is working to identify and create the administrative and organizational conditions that support feminist practice.

highly value the congruence of practice goals, process, structure, and program with feminist ideology.

Ideology, as it is used in this article, contains elements of theory as well as beliefs and values. As Gould defined it:

Ideology is a pattern of beliefs and concepts (both factual and normative) which purport to explain complex social phenomena with a view to directing and simplifying socio-political choices facing individuals and groups.¹

Ginsberg distinguished "open" and "closed" ideologies, the latter being "self-contained systems demanding all or none commitment."² Feminist ideology is an open system in the Ginsberg model; criticized from within and open to exchange with other ideologies, it advances through dialogue.

As a countervailing ideology (and as a social movement), feminism insists on a critical examination of the individual and collective choices that shape women's lives. Those choices, in turn, are measured against the imperatives of human need and social justice; feminism insists on removing any sanction from choices that are judged to be inimical to human development, freedom, and health. Feminists may argue the details of analysis and program, but an underlying consensus exists: that barriers to the realization of the full and unique human potential of women can and must be challenged and changed.³ Moreover, those barriers are identified and alternatives fashioned through consciousness-raising and collective action; we women claim the right to name the world according to our experience of it, and we take responsibility for changing what does not fit our experience.

Feminist ideology is organic. As an outgrowth of consciousness raising and collective action, it is subject to constant scrutiny. When it has not been constantly scrutinized, it has turned on itself and violated its first principle. Feminist ideology is grounded in women's experience of the world but that world is constantly changing by the actions of women. This is the nature of "praxis," which is at the core of feminist theory and practice: "Theory follows from practice and is impossible to develop in the absence of practice, because our theory is that practising our practice is our theory."⁴ Feminist theory and values are, by definition, ever tentative, never absolute, and always becoming.

Nevertheless, some enduring themes in feminist literature can be identified that are interrelated and thereby constitute an ideology. In Table 1 (see page 6), major ideological themes and their subthemes are presented. These themes are an end to patriarchy, empowerment, process, the personal is political, unity-diversity, validation of the nonrational, and consciousness raising/praxis. No attempt has been made to resolve the many important theoretical debates among feminists of various "tendencies" (radical, socialist, or liberal/reformist) in the movement; thus, the presentation of ideological themes is neither exhaustive nor without internal contradictions. Nor would all feminists agree on all the elements presented. Feminist ideology allows for the existence of those contradictions; the ideology—and the social movement—are built on contradictions.

END TO PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy, as the institutionalized system of male domination and privilege, is the mechanism that ensures women's subordination. Similar to all such systems, patriarchy carries an authoritative set of assumptions, beliefs, and theories to support it. Having been so long in ascendancy, patriarchal ideology has also determined the interpretation and recording of history. Therefore, we women must reclaim history, exposing the myths that distort our experiences and limit our vision of our capabilities. Patriarchy has protected itself by guarding knowledge and controlling its distribution, thereby conveying that major systems of knowledge and skills were too complex and inaccessible to average people (many men and most women). Thus, the task of feminists is to demystify and make available the knowledge and skills that people must have to solve problems and meet their needs.

Under the patriarchal allocation of rights, privilege, and responsibilities, women have been assigned the preservation of certain values; our historical experience has reinforced these values and shaped others. Such "feminine" values include respect for and the preservation of human life, concern for the individual's dignity and worth, and the nurturance of social structures that promote human development. For many feminists, these values have led to a commitment to nonviolence, which, as Demming noted, "incorporates traditionally 'feminine' values by actively promoting a continuing concern for individual welfare, social healing, and respect for life."⁵

According to Kaplan, a "female consciousness" is shared by all women, whether feminist or not; this consciousness is rooted in the expectation that women take primary responsibility for the protection and nurturance of human life and the meeting of basic human needs.⁶ This consciousness has thus been the source of seemingly spontaneous and "irrational" collective actions by women that are women's attempts to perform responsibilities by infusing our values into political discourse and historical orientations:

By placing human need above other social and political requirements and human life above property, profit, and even individual rights, female consciousness creates the vision of a society that has not yet appeared.⁷

Feminist theory does not prescribe the specific features of an alternative social order; indeed, to do so would contradict that theory. However, certain value-based characteristics that are rooted in women's experiences are considered essential. As Berlin noted, "the human values that women were previously assigned to preserve [become] central organizing principles for a new social order."⁸ As the struggle continues to advance those organizing principles—as women take concrete action to effect social healing and the affirmation of human values—the system's inability to respond to such demands by relying on domination and exploitation of people and natural resources becomes