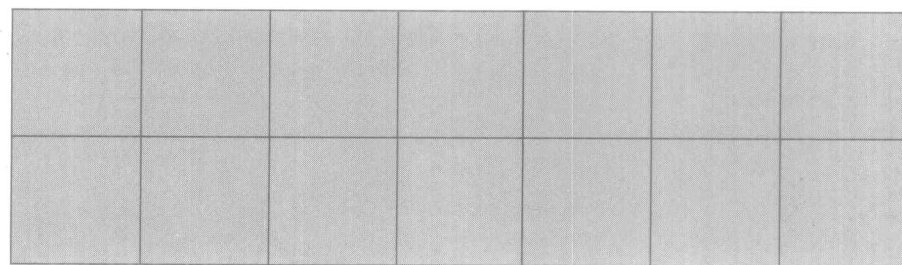


# **Social Work**

## **An Introduction**



**Mary Macht / Jean Quam**



# **SOCIAL WORK**

## **AN INTRODUCTION**

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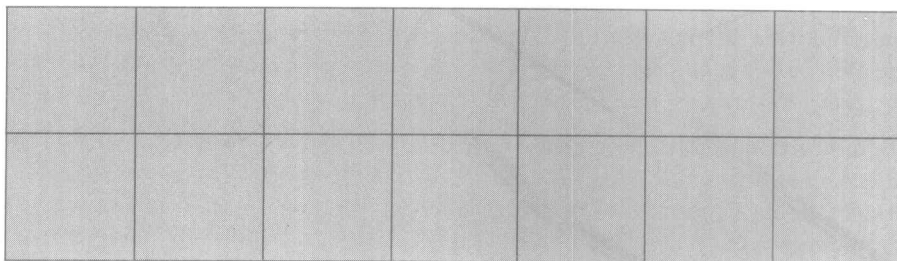
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*To Tim and Teddi*

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## ***Preface***

*"Social workers should and will continue to experiment and debate many issues. They should cherish their diversity. Diversity will not split the profession if all social workers are clear about their shared interlocking perspective, purpose, and values. Diversity can create innovation, knowledge building, and new approaches."*<sup>1</sup>

The authors of this text met as students in the doctoral program at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. While our experiences in that program were quite different, we learned at least two things in common: that diversity should be cherished and that faculty and students can learn from each other. As doctoral students we observed faculty who taught conservative approaches often associated with casework, behavioral techniques, radical social work, task-centered methods, cognitive-behavioral models of intervention, "macro" and "micro" approaches to both policy and practice, and, of course, a strong general systems framework. The faculty also divided themselves according to fields of practice—child welfare, mental retardation, health, rural social work and aging. It would have been easy to look around and say, "What is social work?" "Who's teaching social work?" The reality was that everyone was teaching social work and that, in fact, social work is diversity.

In this text we have attempted to emphasize the importance of looking at some of the diversity in the social work profession. We begin by examining political perspectives. Social work practice and social welfare policy are shaped by ideology and values. Three orientations—conservative, liberal and radical—are presented throughout the text. While the goal of social work is to strengthen people's ability to cope with life's tasks while promoting improvements in the environment, the specific ways social workers will attempt to achieve this goal depend significantly on their political orientation and practice



perspective. The diversity of possible responses is well illustrated in the various chapters.

This text is divided into seven parts. The first part defines the political components of practice, the ideology of the profession, and the generalist framework as a model of practice. Unique to this text, is an historical analysis of the profession in Part Two that is also developed from the three political perspectives. Though a relatively young profession, social work has diverse historical roots. Of special interest are the discussions of the role of women in what has been called a woman's profession and the history of black social work that has frequently remained unrecorded in social welfare histories.

Parts Three and Four define the profession of social work. Social work has a knowledge base and a value base that also vary depending upon the social worker's political orientation. The National Association of Social Work's Code of Ethics is compared to the Radical Code of Ethics, various professional social work organizations are discussed, and a comparison is made between social work and other professions. The knowledge base includes an understanding of social functioning, human behavior, social policy, and organizational theory. Though including a chapter on organizational theory may be somewhat unusual, the authors feel strongly that effective social work practice requires the ability to understand and work effectively with organizations.

The theme of diversity is continued in the last three parts of the text. Certainly, social work finds great variety in its fields of practice (family welfare, communities, health care and criminal justice) as well as the clients it serves (minorities, women, the elderly, Vietnam veterans, and gays and lesbians). The social work profession, again depending on the prevailing political orientation at the time, has historically contributed to the oppression of these client groups. Only recently has social work education moved toward being more proactive in suggesting the inclusion of material on women, minorities, and gays and lesbians. Part Seven looks at possible futures for the social work profession. While there exist overwhelmingly frightening futures such as nuclear war, there is also reason to believe that social workers will recognize many opportunities to work with new client groups using innovative methods. The potential of a computerized profession, for example, holds many exciting possibilities. We have seen how the diversity of social workers has shaped our past into a rich heritage of promoting change. Now, social workers have the opportunity to shape the future.

We are grateful to many people who have contributed in countless ways to the development of this textbook. First and foremost is Lucy Rowley who has contributed extensively to the practice material in this text. While she may not totally agree with the final product, her initial work has left an indelible imprint on the final material. Anne Minahan, teacher and colleague to both authors, has also had a marked effect on this book even though she has not seen any of the preliminary work. Anne's dedication to teaching and social work has indeed been an inspiration to the authors.

All of the material contained in this text has been tested on students in Professor Macht's classes. Janet Williams, Toby Ferrell, and Ron Cross, contributors to this text, are just some of the many students who have profoundly affected this book. Without the excitement and challenge of students this task would never have been completed.

Our colleagues at Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, Vicki Knight, Anne Daly, and our consulting editor Fredrick Seidl, have all provided valued assistance. Various copies of the manuscript were read by Alan Siman (San Diego State University), David Biegel (University of Pittsburgh), K. Jean Peterson (Portland State University), Julia Watkins (University of Maine), Ray Price (University of Kansas), Jack Finley (Portland State University), Ruth McRoy (University of Texas at Austin), Mavis Spencer (Wayne State University), and Edward Brown. Their input has been invaluable.

A final thank you to our families for providing the caring atmosphere that allows creative activity to take place—Phil, Tim, and Teddi Macht, Ted and Grace Wirtz, Lois Partenheimer Quam, and Frederick W. Quam.

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## Reference

1. Anne Minahan, "It Was the Best of Times, It Was the Worst of Times," *Social Work* 27, No. 4 (July 1982): 291.


## ***Foreword***

The profession of social work seeks to reduce suffering and to improve the quality of life for individuals, families, groups and communities. In implementing this broad mandate, social workers have been in the forefront of program and policy development and have delivered services to literally millions of people and communities. They have done this through publicly funded and privately supported agencies, as individual practitioners and as members of multidisciplinary teams. Social workers have worked in such fields as child and family welfare, mental health, rehabilitation, the juvenile and criminal justice systems, aging, poverty and income maintenance and others. The profession has had a particular historical commitment toward the elimination of racism and sexism.

To carry out this mandate, social workers have had to combine expert knowledge of social problems and effective interventions, commitment to positive social values and creativity in problem solving. Professional practice is based on an intricate combination of knowledge, skill, values, and creativity. This book will give the reader, student and practitioner alike, a fresh look at the mix that makes up social work in terms of these and other components.

While not scrimping on description, Professors Macht and Quam provide us with an analytical view of many professional themes and issues. While many, if not all, overviews of the field provide only one ideological frame of reference, usually liberal or occasionally radical, Macht and Quam provide three ways of looking at the ideology of the profession of social work. Examining the profession from different ideological perspectives fits neatly with the overall generalist systems view of social work that is described as the unifying framework. What is particularly joyful about this approach is that the student is not told what to believe, but is provided with alternatives which stimulate his thinking.

Because the reader is not told what to believe but provided with a framework for analysis, the section of the book on the historical development of social work is an exciting addition to the literature. Here we can see that the development of social welfare systems is reflected in the politics, economics and culture of the times. There were significant and important differences among social workers themselves as to how best to proceed, for example, since social workers also reflect their times and social positions. Indeed, the very objectives of social work are examined in the contradicting orientations of the settlement houses, which developed group work, and the Charity Organization Societies, which developed casework. The story is followed to the present day. History, presented this way, takes on a dynamic and exciting character, a welcome antidote for many previous presentations which have tended to view history as "over" and its study as expository and bland.

Macht and Quam bring us more than a history book. Their examination of the profession encompasses both the sociology of professions and some of the particulars of the social work profession; both social work professional organization and comparisons with other professions. These comparisons of social work with sociology, psychiatry, psychology, counseling and law will be particularly helpful to the student interested in making career choices among related professions. In examining the knowledge base for social work, the authors make good use of the generalist model of practice in clarifying the importance of each of the various components. These components are also those found in the courses that follow the typical social work curriculum and represent areas considered essential by the Council on Social Work Education, the accrediting body for both baccalaureate and graduate social work education. Thus, this material, as well as other material for that matter, will provide a good introduction for students who continue to study social work as a major.

Part Five reviews social work in four illustrative fields of practice: family welfare, communities, health care and criminal justice. The book concludes with an examination of social work with special populations and issues; minority people, women's issues, the elderly, Vietnam veterans and homosexuality. The addition of material on Vietnam veterans and homosexuality is new to introductory texts in social work and a welcome addition. They have been neglected topics. The addition of these fields and topics makes the book a comprehensive overview of social work and social welfare. This review, coupled with the analytical perspectives provided, will hold the student in good stead as an introduction to the field of social work.

Fredrick W. Seidl




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