

RECENZJE/REVIEWS

Boddy J., Dominelli L. (2017). *Social media and social work: The challenges of a new ethical space*. "Australian Social Work", 70 (2): 172–184. DOI: 10.1080/0312407X.2016.1224907.

Reviewed by: Ewelina Zielińska

This article describes the issue of ethical problems and ethical behavior in online spaces. Suggested here is that social workers should combine their knowledge about the complex relationships between discourses (i.e., the main basis of everyday practice) – such as those related to power, permanence, authorship, audience, incarnation, and professionalism – in spaces created by social media. To do this, social workers should maintain their strong connection to ethical values and critical reflective practice. In fact, social work has recently begun to investigate the use of social media and other online technologies in the practice of social work. Social workers can take advantage of online, video and telephone therapies, text messages, as well as email and social networks to connect with clients and colleagues. Nonetheless, this method of practice does raise many ethical problems. Even when ethical problems with online media are identified, practitioners do not know how to overcome them. Moreover, many social work students are unaware of ethical issues and the importance of maintaining professional behavior and boundaries in online spaces.

Professional associations operating in the social sector have created online ethical guidelines on how to use social media. For example, the British Social Work Association has published a political statement from 2012 that "encourages the positive use of social media for which social workers should apply values and principles Code of Ethics" (*The Policy, Ethics and Human Rights Committee* 2012: 10). The Australian Association of Social Workers has set a standard for action, claiming that social workers should uncover ethical considerations regarding the use of online communication and social media, subsequently publishing guidelines on the subject. In the United States, the National Association of Social Work and the Association of Social Work Services identified standards for the use of technology ten years ago. This included cultural and technical competencies, privacy and confidentiality as well as documentation and risk management. Yet these standards have not been updated, despite ensuing changes in online communication. Until now, scholars who have provided ethical guidance in the online arenas of practitioners have advised against the use of a code of ethics even if its use was more frequent. Thus, there is no comprehensive discussion about the complexity

and interrelationship between social media, social work practice, and the ethics of social work. It is necessary to thoroughly understand ethics in online spaces.

Social media provides benefits to individuals, groups, organizations, communities, and businesses. People have the opportunity to reinforce and develop knowledge, establish small businesses, and be up to date with research and current affairs. Social media creates opportunities for adopted and foster children to maintain contact with biological parents. Health services, fire brigade, police, ambulance, and other necessary services can quickly issue warnings using information technology. There is also evidence that young men who communicate online with their friends and talk to them about their problems are more likely to have better mental wellbeing than those who do not. Social media allow us to promote an open dialogue through joint reflections, democratic participation, political involvement, and to coordinate effective political activities as well as strengthen relationships and be inclusive.

However, there may be dangers. Social media give individuals, criminals, persecutors, and pedophiles access to victims. Others bully children and teenagers on the internet, raising issues of child protection. The speed at which posts become viral can irreparably harm recipients. Several government regimes have tightened control over social media after unsuccessful political uprisings. Social media allow you to promote acts of terror and give the opportunity to spread gossip in disaster situations. Such misuse of these communication tools has led to increased oversight of citizens and online communication.

The challenge for social work is to take advantage of the benefits and opportunities that social media can provide without causing damage, and to critically reflect upon their integration into everyday practice. In the literature on social work, graduates have been encouraged to start using social media, as have more and more teachers in their work. Social workers used social media as a tool for advocacy, a method for peer support among practitioners, and a means of facilitating client support groups. Nevertheless, usage of social media in social work is questioned.

Social media complicate the practice of social work in a way previously unknown. It includes benefits and challenges that create ethical problems and have an impact that cannot be understood in a simple, binary or linear way. For example, child protection workers cannot assume that a child placed in a foster home will not fall victim to abuse online. Case studies allow for more detailed examination of individual life situations and more complicated phenomena. To investigate the ethical complications that appear in social media for child protection workers, a complex case example was created that is based on real stories and situations. This analysis included critical reflective discussions on social media.

This article presents concepts that are necessary for social workers to use social media in practice. A wide range of concepts and contexts for social workers is presented in order to be able to explore and understand the density of various discourses, including embodiment and disembodiedness, power and empowerment, durability and impermanence, and a conceptualization of traditional concepts for social media. Social workers should question assumptions about power and weaknesses, realize the potential danger, and

take measures to protect children. Current professional values and critical reflection will allow social workers to address the tensions and dilemmas associated with social media.

Social media and online communication technologies have emerged in the context of globalization, neoliberalism, and the rapid technological changes that have developed online society. The neoliberal belief in market forces and profits that drive political and socioeconomic decisions, as well as privatized spaces and interpersonal relationships based on market individualism, make it easy for persecutors to abuse and control others for profit. Social media provide opportunities for creating a community, sharing information, and establishing contacts with others. In social media, both continuity and impermanence are felt: the persistence of users leaving behind evidence of visited sites vis-à-vis a transience due to the speed with which current information replaces previous data. Yet users have little to say about what information will be permanently stored because published materials can remain online indefinitely. Additionally, posts are created in real time and the speed of information provided by modern telecommunications technologies contributes to a certain type of pollution.

Social workers must be responsible for helping citizens to understand ethics and to implement their civil rights when it comes to social rules. As it relates to web chats that go far beyond reality and can affect a sense of wellbeing, there is the right to freedom from violence, but also the opportunity for future employment prospects. Professional associations should also mobilize employers to develop a policy on social media. Pro-active action is necessary, because very often young people are unable to communicate through traditional media. Further research on social media is definitely needed to help social workers keep up with fast-changing technologies and to become well-informed about communication technologies, their use and misuse. Subsequent research can help to provide a good basis for teaching social work students how to use online resources ethically. Teaching students about ethical utilization of social media should become mandatory in social work programs, with possible consideration for modules on values and ethics.

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Reviewed by: Adriana Bożek-Ociepa

This article was written by a professor and a clinical research coordinator from the state of Pennsylvania. The authors decided to investigate opioid-dependent pregnant women and show how methadone and buprenorphine influence treatment of these patients. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, more and more people in the United States today are addicted to opioids (e.g., heroin, oxycodone, hydrocodone, etc.); the approximate number of addicted persons is two million. The most common cause of premature death among drug users is precisely overdose of opiate analgesics. Using opioids during pregnancy might lead to preterm birth, infant mortality, spontaneous abortion, and obstetric complications. Due to such a wide spectrum of side effects, seeking a solution to this public health problem is very important.

On the one hand, authors stress that medication-assisted treatment in pregnancy causes stabilization of the uterine environment and protects the fetus from repeated withdrawal. On the other hand, it also might cause neonatal abstinence syndrome which adversely affects the respiratory, gastrointestinal, and central nervous systems. There are limitations: in the United States only methadone and buprenorphine are federally approved for such treatment, and the addicted pregnant women have limited access to it. However, social workers help them with in the health care and criminal justice settings as well as with respect to child protective and mental health services.

The authors also emphasize the fact that the number of American social workers over the past three decades has increased which means that now they are the primary providers in addiction and mental health services. However, most of these social workers have some doubts as to whether buprenorphine or methadone is safe for pregnant women. This is because research studies have very rarely included pregnant women in clinical trials.

The results suggest that our state of knowledge is primarily based upon retrospective chart reviews and case studies of opioid dependent pregnant women, who received medication-assisted treatment. Although many articles dealing with this topic have been published, most of them were written for a medical audience rather than for social workers. Moreover, publications focused on the pharmacological and clinical management of pregnancy did not evaluate addiction treatment effectiveness.

In this case, the authors focused on a critical review of previously published information about medication-assisted treatment and the effectiveness of using methadone and buprenorphine. The researchers also examined evidence on pregnancy outcomes as well as breastfeeding safety. However, the majority of reviews looked only at neonatal outcomes (especially the length and severity of neonatal abstinence syndrome).

According to this case study, methadone and buprenorphine equally reduced the use of opioids by the pregnant women. In evaluating the efficacy of the treatment, the authors also took under consideration the improvement of maternal and neonatal outcomes in general and lower infant mortality rates. Infant outcomes were obtained on the basis of the Apgar test which is conducted at one minute and five minutes after birth. The researchers stress that most of the studies did not show a correlation between application of methadone or buprenorphine and the incidence of neonatal abstinence syndrome. The outcomes for breastfeeding (the transmission of these two drugs in breast milk) showed only minimal levels of the medications. Despite the fact that the evidence concerning breastfeeding safety was limited, the authors suggest that infants exposed to buprenorphine might require less time for treatment. Additionally, the medication-assisted treatment did improve outcomes in comparison with detoxification and behavioral interventions. Nevertheless, there are still not enough research studies concerning dosage regimens in order to meliorate treatment stabilization and diminish concomitant drug use.

Unfortunately, none of the reviews considered the influence of treatment on parenting or relationship quality. Moreover, many of the studies did not include other factors such as use of nicotine or psychotropic medications. According to the results, approximately ninety percent of opioid addicted women are also smokers. Because of the small sample sizes and inability to control environmental factors, more research is needed.

It is very important that social workers offer opioid-dependent women information about seeking treatment, encouraging them to breastfeed, and educating family members about the benefits of medication-assisted treatment. Caseworkers may also help in organizing a local Methadone Anonymous group. In health care settings, social workers can help ensure psychosocial support. The authors here highlighted their role in disseminating evidence concerning the benefits of medication-assisted treatment.

The entire article is divided into seven sections which structure allows readers to choose individual parts and focus on specific information. Those who merely want to find out what information is available on the subject of medication-assisted treatment for pregnant women, may just skim the Abstract and References. Those who need to go deeper may look at the tables in the Results section. The results of the research are discussed in great detail, but the most worthwhile reading is the Discussion which reiterates the main findings in the context of further research. This part interprets the findings presented in the Results section, evaluating their significance. Although the article contains many medical terms, I would recommend reading it to everyone who might be affected directly or indirectly.

Roberts M.R., Phillips I., Bordelon T.D., Seif L. (2014). *A social worker's role in drug court*. "Sage Open", 4 (2): 1–9.

Reviewed by: Leonie De Sacco

This article was published to stress the importance of including social workers into the justice system with reference to drug offenders. The subject is researched here by professors of social work and law alongside a psychotherapist. The diversity of the team of authors rendered it possible for them to illuminate the topic from several sides. That provides advocates with a better basis for argumentation. The aim of this article is to spread the results of research about drug-related cases in order to change the perspective from punishment and restriction to rehabilitation, prevention, and participation.

The introduction gives us an overview about the mistakes which have been made in the punishment of drug offenders. Hereby, the authors make it clear that this is an international problem and emphasize the urgency of such research. In addition, they expand their circle of addressees by doing so. Furthermore, Roberts et al. discloses the main intent of punishment.

The text is well-structured with five different categories which mainly focus on deterrence and exclusion. The most frequently used punishment routes are not suitable for drug offenders. This is expressed in the text by focusing on the need for prevention and rehabilitation which happen to be two of the relevant guidelines in social work. To demonstrate the importance of further developments in this field, the authors summarize the changes made in the last century in dealing with drug-related offenses. These changes have led to the introduction of drug courts that are more focused on productive punishment.

Roberts et al. explain the work of drug courts as more personalized and based upon participation. Those courts are acting as a mediator between the different parties in a drug crime negotiation. Their main goal is to find a better and long-lasting conclusion for the future life of drug offenders. Through those points they show how this relates to the aims of social work. The authors are also using a similar category of clients between drug courts and social work in order to illustrate once more the benefits of cooperation amongst these fields. Roberts et al. are mentioning right in the beginning that all participants in the drug court program are carefully chosen; not everyone has the chance to be judged by this special procedure. While putting a focus on this, they are fending off criticism from people who fear that certain offenders could get away with little or less punishment.

Furthermore, the authors mention the saving of money through better work with offenders because a consequence of this is lowered numbers of prisoners. This argument is used in order to attract the attention of the more profit-oriented readers. Roberts et al. close out their overview about the developing of drug courts with an appeal for more research to be done in this field. Therefore, they are justifying their research work before presenting it in the following paragraph.

The first part of the text helps the reader understand the importance of special legal proceedings for drug offenders; it also shows the connections with the tasks and mission of social workers. Because of the good and detailed explanation, the text is easily understandable for everyone who is interested in this topic. But the primary addressees of this research are, obviously, the drug courts and the justices. The authors here want to keep in mind that social workers should have an indispensable role in dealing with drug offenders. Roberts et al. researched this topic within an empirical case study of a social worker in a drug court. This renders their research more practical and stresses the point that their idea works in practice.

In the case study they analyze, the social worker is called the director; the authors mention that she was the first person hired by the drug court judge. Through this the article authors again show the advantages of a combination of these two fields of work.

Additionally, the text mentions the suitability of the social worker for working with drug offenders through his or her specialized education. Furthermore, Roberts et al. are focusing in their article upon the fact that the drug abuse of their clients is instigated by diverse other problems. This point stresses the importance of differentiation in judgement of persons with addictions and “regular criminals.” Another important component of this article is that the authors anticipate criticism by being aware of obstacles to the work of social workers in a drug court.

Furthermore, they are focusing on the important mediator role of the social worker because the work between law enforcement officers and offenders can be complicated by prejudices and generalizations. The authors present the results of their research in the same order as the work of a drug court. They explain the role of the social worker in detail, step-by-step. Such a structure for this text builds the basis for a good argumentation on behalf of the inclusion of social workers in the work of drug courts.

Roberts et al. mention the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Ethic codex which standardizes and justifies the work of social workers. That code obligates them, among other things, to know or recognize differences between groups of people and cultures, and to accept and mediate between them. This annotation was chosen very skillfully as it stresses the importance of this working field. Furthermore, the code of ethics provides a quality assurance for this profession. By mentioning it, the authors again legitimate this work. Roberts et al. describe the drug court as a kind of mediator, coordinating tasks and ensuring cooperation. In this way, they create a good connection to social work, as these are important components of this profession. That gives social workers a special qualification for this job. The tasks of social workers in this field are described as very detailed and important. This implies that the drug court has no way to do these tasks differently. This discussion leads us to perceive the role of the social worker in the drug court as indispensable.

A limitation of this article is that the authors present the social worker as kind of “super mediator” who is free of generalizations and prejudices. The research team does not mention that social workers need special training and supervision for this. It is important to keep in mind that we are only human beings who sometimes need to

think in stereotypes. Roberts et al. summarize the important work of the social worker; information about the highly skilled social worker is found at the end of their ten component descriptions. In the conclusion, the authors point out that the social worker in their case study has led them to a rethink from a focus on punishment to one on rehabilitation and participation. The authors are using the same words as those used to describe required changes in work with offenders that are mentioned in the beginning. By doing so, Roberts et al. are making very clear that their research project was a success and the inclusion of social workers is required.

As conclusion, I would say that the structure of the text is very well-chosen and, through this, easier to understand. The authors mention, on the one hand, the positive aspects of a combination of social work with drug courts through conclusive arguments. On the other hand, Roberts et al. face the problems which arise with this development. By looking at the issue from different perspectives, this article acquires a certain importance and relevance in research; it cannot be easily criticized. Moreover, this article is very important for social work because it opens up a whole new field for social workers. Due to their special education social workers are very suited to this kind of work with clients. Furthermore, such cooperation is good for all parties involved because it simplifies the work of the drug court and ensures better care for drug offenders.

Mary N.L. (2001). *Political activism of social work educators*. "Journal of Community Practice", 9 (4): 1–20.

Reviewed by: Dominika Bremer

Overall, the case of political involvement by social work educators and social workers is an important issue currently discussed in Western social work research.¹ I am strongly convinced that we – as social workers and practitioners in the public field of welfare – should think, analyze, and include post-structural sociology perspectives (e.g., feminism, queer, antidiscrimination, multiculturalism, criticism of neoliberalism, etc.) into social work practice. This is especially important for me – a student of social work in Poland where a discussion regarding political perspectives in social work is still nonexistent.

Social assistance has been, still is, and always will be entangled in political issues, because welfare is an obligation of democratic states. Even though neoliberalism wants to assume the social responsibilities of the state and transfer these into the private sector, there is still hope and a very strong need to fight for (at least) the welfare state, and (at most) social change in general. Nowadays we observe how much money is transferred from public budgets into private ones (e.g., commercial investments in metropolitan areas concentrated on building useless roads, new museums for still greater numbers of tourists, cutting forests for chaotic development, etc.). For these and other reasons, social workers should be responsible not only for the people who are forced to ask for financial support, psychological and social assistance as well as interventions, but also for how social policy is actually being made. Indirect democracy is not the most effective system in the world; this we already know. In combination with capitalism, it is much, much worse, because inequalities which are produced by capitalistic mechanisms of economic, social, and cultural exclusion are sanctioned by the "will of the majority." These are the mechanisms which have actually created the field of work for social workers.

In my mind's eye, there is a constant conviction of the huge gap between how the image of social work is postulated in university education and how it manifests itself in the real world. I have the impression that something is wrong, if the hardest efforts and battles on behalf of the most vulnerable social groups are actually conducted and postulated by NGOs, informal groups, and activists in different fields of engagement.² Of course, there do exist arguments against my assumptions. For example, changes are taking place

¹ See R. Fisher, A. Weedman, G. Alex, K.D. Stout (2001). *Graduate education for social change*. "Journal of Community Practice", 9 (4): 43–64; A. Makaros, M.M. Grodofsky (2016). *Social workers' conflict of loyalty in the context of social activism: The case of the 2011 social protests in Israel*. "Journal of Community Practice", 24 (2): 147–165; E. Palumbo, M. Friedman (2019). *Occupying social work: Unpacking the social work/activist divide*, https://www.academia.edu/7185589/Occupying_Social_Work_Unpacking_the_Social_Work_Activist_Divide (accessed: 15.11.2019).

² A key point here is that groups shedding light on inequalities at the social level of life include institutions focused on migrant and refugee laws, organizations working with the LGBTQ+ community, tenant movements, radical labor unions, and anarchist movements, etc.

in the laws on social assistance pertaining to who can work as a social worker: there is a law, which has been in effect for a few years, that everyone who wants to become a social worker must complete an MA degree. Maybe social change in social work is still possible, maybe in the future. However, despite that, the lack of political awareness inherent in social work studies in Poland demands change. Moreover, and important to note, I accuse the system and structural errors, not the individuals who actually want to get into the field of social practices.

Nancy L. Mary conducted a study concerning the question: do social work educators get involved in politics and (if so) how? She compared three research datasets from 1989, 1999, and 2009. The first thing which she noticed is the reason why people lose or gain a need for political involvement: “citizen distrust of government has dissuaded some of our profession from political participation.”³ People do not believe anymore in the effectiveness of social care, safety, and security which should be assured by the state. If the economic level of life allows citizens to avoid worrying about certain public sectors (e.g., health care, housing, financial support, etc.), people make the decision to withdraw from civic engagement. Political study, social involvement, or awareness of right-wing parties gaining more and more power, forces us to rethink our positions as citizens and humans – responsible not only for maintaining personal privilege, but actually using these privileges to stand on the side of those who are excluded. That is why, as Nancy L. Mary says, citizens’ distrust of many movements, groups, and organizations is the reason behind the strengthening of political and social struggles.⁴

In the paper under review, Nancy L. Mary considers three fields of political education in social work: level of political involvement; values related to social work and politics; and identification of barriers and motivators in political activism. What is important she considers these fields across a longitudinal, three-decade perspective, including research, literature, and samples from the past. The most important themes which appeared during her investigation are: who is more involved in politics – social workers in the public or private sector? Who is more involved – members of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) or those who are not? Who is more involved – social workers focused on the macro or the local perspective?

As a methodology, she uses Lester Milbrath’s hierarchy of political participation.⁵ He distinguished three types thereof: gladiator activities (related to participation in local or state government representation and power, elected to represent a state, city, etc.); transitional activities (related to actors between the community and some level of government); and spectator activities (related to informal and civil activities focused on initiating discussion, attempts to convince others, or direct actions). A questionnaire

³ N.L. Mary (2001). *Political activism of social work educators*, “Journal of Community Practice”, 9 (4): 2.

⁴ Ibid.: “trends such as the devolution of federal commitment to welfare entitlements have persuaded others of us into political action.”

⁵ This is the model proposed by Milbrath in his empirical study. See L.W. Milbrath (1965). *Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?* Rand McNally & Company, Chicago.

was mailed to two American universities, one public and one private as well as to 130 MSW field instructors. As mentioned above, Mary compared three samples from 1989, 1999, and 2009. She pointed out a few differences among the research participants. What is interesting, in her study there were more non-MSW individuals teaching; there were also more people involved in not only family and health care, but also in substance abuse, various disability programs, aging, etc. This is probably why her study reveals a broader spectrum of political involvement by social workers.

In the section entitled, "Political involvement," Nancy L. Mary looks at differences in political participation over the three decade period. She points out the kinds of activities which have become more popular and more common nowadays (e.g., writing letters or petitions to newspapers or government). What is more, over three-quarters of the research participants had been involved in a boycott or demonstration. This means that American social workers are not afraid to use both kinds of political tools: indirect ones assured by law and direct ones which put pressure on officials. The comparison of the datasets from 1989 and 1999 shows clearly that political involvement has increased among social workers. Unfortunately, there is no place in her study for reflection about political and state mechanisms which influenced the rise in political participation of social workers.

One of the next themes discussed in Nancy L. Mary's article is the question: "Why Are Public Agency Employees More Politically Involved?" As far as I am concerned, private social practice in the United States (as well as in Poland, I think, and many other states) is mostly related to clinical and therapeutic social work. This entails setting up one's own business to provide services such as evidence-based practice, family and child therapy, etc. As I pointed out at the beginning of my review, those who are well-situated economically and profit from the free market are potentially those who do not see a need for political involvement, because capitalism and neoliberalism creates an illusion of a capability to take care of oneself within the paradigm of individualism.

Arguments which confirm this hypothesis are found in Mary's text. During short interviews conducted as part of the research, it turned out that the reason for higher political involvement by public social workers is simple: as employees of the public sector, they are entangled in politics because of their labor and system position (e.g., financial dependence, a need to follow federal laws, bureaucracy, etc.). Moreover, social workers are spokesmen for those who are often excluded from free market consumption – persons who are dependent upon social and public services which often provide them resources to live. That is why "the need for justice is clear to them [public employees] and they want to be counted ... to speak out for justice."⁶ This aspect of justice in public social work requires additional comment because we have to remember that there are no justice, no equal chances, and no inclusion in the private sector.

In addition to the private and public sectors, there is the third-sector realm of non-governmental and non-profit organizations which draw on financial support possibilities from both governmental funds and private sponsorship. Those who decide to use public

⁶ N.L. Mary, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

grants and get involved in public projects are in a difficult position when it comes to finding a safe place in which to autonomously realize programs. One respondent said: “Many of us have to rely on government funding and it’s a double edged sword – you don’t want to bite the hand that feeds you...”⁷ Entanglement in politics takes place at a lot of levels – at least on the economic, social, and legislative. That is why awareness of political mechanisms and being able to act in the field of politics are important.

So as not to paraphrase the article too much, I will now summarize and compare Nancy L. Mary’s research to specifically my own observations, suggestions, and research goals as well as to the general field of social work in Poland. The political participation of social workers in a state wherein inequalities are visible everywhere (e.g., common homelessness in big cities, gentrification, housing problems, etc.) is a problem which has to be taken under consideration, especially (as I have pointed out above) in the context of activities picked up by non-governmental organizations and informal groups. I am pretty sure that this kind of comparison could demonstrate the gaps between social policy in general (as a tool in constructing real discourse about exclusion, poverty, and social problems) and those problems which should specifically be the concern of public officials responsible for social policy. I cannot blame Nancy L. Mary for lack of this content in her research – her purpose was different. What would be interesting for me and might have appeared in her paper is more concrete consideration of the motivations for becoming politically involved: is this connected to the precarious financial situation of social workers? Or maybe this is more related to an honest need to fight for those who are excluded by the capitalistic and neoliberal reality of life? I am fairly certain that a lot of fields – social exclusion and other problems – are common for both the social workers and the persons who expect help therefrom. There is a need to consider especially these areas in the struggle for better social policy.

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⁷ Ibid., p. 10.