EDITED BY

KATE VAN HEUGTEN & ANITA GIBBS

SOCIAL WORK FOR SOCIOLOGISTS

THEORY AND PRACTICE

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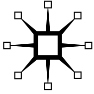

SOCIAL WORK FOR SOCIOLOGISTS
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To family members past and present, you are always with us in spirit and in thought.

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For us, working as coeditors has been one of the most rewarding academic endeavors we have undertaken in our careers.

INTRODUCTION

Kate van Heugten and Anita Gibbs

This book has been written for students and practitioners of sociology. It aims to introduce them to some important concepts from social work, concepts of which these readers may be unaware, to their detriment. The book emerged out of discussions that took place among the editors and authors over the course of several years. It is a product of the combined efforts of educators, researchers, and practitioners in social work and sociology. The diverse international contributors share concerns about social problems such as poverty, substandard housing, and violence, and all are committed to improving cultural understanding, social justice, and human rights. The contributors hold academic qualifications in sociology and/or social work, and they are experienced as educators and as human service practitioners. Many have witnessed debates in which sociologists or social workers are stereotyped by others suggesting that, for example, sociologists are theoretical purists who will not act to promote public interests or social workers are value-driven ideologues intent on imposing their interpretations of ideal family lives. The contributors to this book do not believe that these dualistic typologies are accurate reflections of the complex considerations that we apply in our research, teaching, and human services work.

After many decades of following divergent paths, social workers and sociologists have recently been coming back together to deal with complex, intractable social problems. In the world of work, interdisciplinary collaborations seek to address big issues such as poverty, violence, and human rights violations. Within universities, previously separate academic departments of sociology and social work are joining or colocating. Although combinations of previously separate disciplines into joint departments are sometimes prompted by fiscal considerations resulting from the cutbacks affecting social sciences internationally, talking together has helped us to recognize our common aims and interests. We have been stimulated and inspired by our debates about theory and practice.

It would be fair to say that, historically, social workers have tended to acknowledge the important contributions made by sociological theory to the development of social work theory and practice. Books that consider how sociological thinking enhances social work practice are not rare. By contrast, books that consider how social work theory and practice frameworks might help sociologists are possibly nonexistent—except for this one. Because of this long-standing omission, the advantages of the extensively developed social work theories and frameworks for analysis and interventions are virtually unknown to sociology students and practitioners. Although most sociology students plan a career in the human services, their lack of familiarity with these tools for working with families, groups, and communities often leaves them unprepared to deconstruct social problems and offer practical solutions to some of the challenging and complex social ills encountered in the workplace. We believe this is a disservice to sociologists and other social scientists, all of whom could benefit from this social work derived knowledge. This book is written with an aim to correct that situation. Within the book's chapters are many examples of how social work theories, practices, and skills might be used by sociologists and sociology students.

Among the book's readers, there will be sociology students wondering where they might find employment and how they can prepare for that, and there will be newly graduated sociologists employed in human service practice who are asking how they can approach their work. Other readers will be social work and human service graduates who want to better articulate the utility of their qualifications in broader academic and employment contexts.

In addition, the material will be of use to academic sociologists and other social scientists, all of whom are facing increasing pressures from students, employers, and university managers to explain the practical utility of their disciplines. We also hope that, as international interest in forming closer interdisciplinary links continues to develop (a movement that is elaborated in chapter 1), the chapters in this book will help foster the development of mutual understanding between disciplines.

Local and Global Contexts

The contributing authors' biographical notes follow the conclusion to the book. It can be seen that the contributors hail from several nations and include people with British, Dutch, Fijian, New Zealand Māori (indigenous New Zealander), New Zealand *Pākehā* (white New Zealander), and American backgrounds. The authors have collectively studied and worked across the globe, but a distinguishing feature is that all, bar one, have lived and worked in *Aotearoa* (New Zealand). Aotearoa is the Māori name for New Zealand,

and Māori is one of the three official languages of New Zealand, alongside English and New Zealand sign language. For this reason, you will see both names used for this country throughout the text. In addition, people who spend time in Aotearoa/New Zealand soon become acquainted with the historical and current importance of *te Tiriti o Waitangi* (the Treaty of Waitangi). This treaty was signed in 1840 by the Māori and the representatives of the British government, and while there are various interpretations, the Māori version afforded the British Crown governance, with the Māori retaining rights over cultural and material treasures such as language, customs, land, and resources. As is discussed much more fully in chapter 6, the principles of the treaty have frequently been poorly adhered to in the history of this country, and Pākehā rule led to long-standing oppression of the Māori, who consequently suffered many deprivations. Over recent decades, to respond to the negative consequences of that deprivation, social workers have learned much about how to practice biculturally. Bicultural competency is now a requirement for professional social work registration in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Neglect of indigenous populations is not uncommon internationally, and we believe that the teaching provided around those issues by our indigenous authors, speaking from their local experience, has international relevance. We believe this information is an essential part of this text about the lessons that sociologists can learn from social workers, and we hope readers will immerse themselves in these riches.

Structure of the Book

This book is presented in two parts. Part I consists of three chapters in which the editors, van Heugten and Gibbs, explain the historical roots of social work and sociology as linked disciplines. Key social work theoretical frameworks and values for practice are introduced.

In chapter 1, van Heugten and Gibbs explain how social work and sociology emerged out of shared concerns about nineteenth century social problems. They note how, in many countries, the disciplines were initially taught jointly. Pioneers such as Jane Addams, establisher of the Hull House settlement house and lecturer at the University of Chicago, combined sociological theorizing with research and ethical social work practice. Internationally, from the early twentieth century, however, efforts to professionalize sociology led to more circumscribed gender roles: predominantly female social workers provided assistance to service users experiencing social problems, while predominantly male sociologists emphasized value-neutral theorizing and knowledge building. Van Heugten and Gibbs show how positivist ideas of value neutrality have begun to be discredited and how social workers and public sociologists

are combining efforts to address social injustices. This chapter explains how sociologists can benefit from social work's more developed frameworks for practice, which are explained in chapter 2.

In chapter 2, Gibbs and van Heugten introduce social work frameworks that have currency in social work and are especially helpful to sociologists who want to expand their understanding and analysis of the connections between social and personal problems. The authors explain what social workers mean by critical reflection. This concept, which has links with sociological thinking about reflexivity, has become a major framework for current social work practice. The chapter explores strengths approaches, ecosystems approaches, anti-oppressive and empowerment frameworks, rights-based frameworks, indigenous frameworks, and task-centered approaches.

Chapter 3, the final chapter of part I, explains key concepts and developments in social work thinking about values and ethics. Van Heugten and Gibbs explain why practitioners cannot ignore the importance of values and ethics, while they also recognize that ethical dilemmas are complex and that appropriate responses to ethical dilemmas are often contested. The chapter covers the place of professional ethical codes and presents a range of models for ethical decision making, including process, reflective, and cultural models. Developing an in-depth understanding of values and ethics in practice will provide sociologists with tools to enhance their self-awareness, critical reflectivity, and capacity to work ethically with a range of service users. Examples of ethical dilemmas are explored, including dilemmas in relation to working with individuals, families, and communities.

Part II of the book, comprising chapters 4 through 9, expands on the central concepts introduced in part I, illustrating their application to practice in a range of fields. The chapters in part II move sequentially in their focus from a micro to a macro orientation.

Chapter 4 starts with an emphasis on the personal in work with individuals and families. Keddell and Stanley explore how social work theories extend sociological understandings of risk and safety in child welfare settings. Sociology students understand the structure and makeup of modern families and the impact of class, gender, and ethnicity on families. These students may, however, lack essential knowledge of how human service workers might challenge prevailing discourses that regulate "at-risk" families and children deemed to need "protection." Keddell and Stanley explain how sociologists can actively resist the saturation of risk discourses in society by drawing on strengths and safety approaches to practice. In this chapter, sociologists learn how they can collaborate with families in knowledge construction around risk and safety assessments. Such resistance, while not without its tensions, is informed by social work

practices that promote an ethical commitment to self-determination, caring, and social justice.

Next, in chapter 5, Vakaoti introduces the reader to work with groups. He explains the tasks that facilitators need to undertake as a group evolves through beginning, middle, and ending phases of its development. He points to the importance of understanding and attending to the impact of cultural diversity among group members and to the relevance of broader social movements when undertaking such work. Vakaoti illustrates these principles by drawing on his group work experiences with Pacific Islands youth, a culturally diverse and frequently socially marginalized population in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

In chapter 6, Eketone and Walker draw on the example of Aotearoa/ New Zealand to discuss the contested meanings of biculturalism and multiculturalism. The authors explain what biculturalism can bring to sociologists working with indigenous clients or research participants. The chapter explains Māori cultural frameworks, key concepts from a Māori worldview, the relationship between Māori and Pākehā, bicultural thinking, and anti-oppressive practice relevant to social work and sociology internationally.

In chapter 7, Gibbs argues that, although sociologists understand social problems and theorize extensively about the ills of society, moving beyond mere critique to practically address the ills requires new knowledge. The sociological imagination connects personal troubles to public issues, thus enabling sociologists to reflect and theorize about the social and environmental causes of human suffering. The *social work* imagination is needed to move beyond theorizing and to connect theory to action (praxis) and interventions to outcomes. One social problem—that of family poverty—is analyzed by the author utilizing both explanatory and interventive theory to develop change strategies at policy and practice levels.

Chapter 8 considers the impact of practice on human services workers. Van Heugten and Schmitz discuss the negative consequences of workplace stress overload for workers, service users, and organizations and consider how these impacts can be avoided or addressed, from primarily a socioecological and strengths perspective. The authors discuss helpful approaches, such as building collegial support networks and leveraging organizational policies and resources. Collegial violence, such as bullying and mobbing, is a particularly stressful workplace experience that may be increasing in neoliberal workplaces, yet it remains underreported in the literature. This chapter therefore focuses special attention on this major source of stress.

In chapter 9, the final chapter, Tolich discusses how a practical research internship course heightens the reflective awareness of sociology students and prepares them for employment and collaborative practice with colleagues,

research participants, and employers. Tolich notes that internships are commonplace in social work courses and underutilized in sociology programs. He provides a step-by-step explanation of how the sociology students in the internship develop research mindedness (providing a definition of that term drawn from social work research). When the students realize that their research projects can lead to practical outcomes that add public value, they are inspired to hone the knowledge and skills they need to practice ethically.

Most of the chapters in the book include case studies that help to illustrate the main points. All of the chapters provide reflective questions to assist readers in considering how the chapter contents might relate to their own study or practice. These reflective questions facilitate the integration and application of learning to real-life situations. The questions can be used by individual readers or in classroom discussions and tutorials.

The conclusion of the book presents the case for the usefulness of social work to sociologists. It argues that the social work imagination has come of age and offers a robust set of frameworks, concepts, models, and aims of genuine interest and applicability to sociologists. We hope readers of this book agree.

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PART I

Key Frameworks, Ethics, and Values

CHAPTER 1

Overview of the Historical and Contextual Development of Sociology and Social Work

Kate van Heugten and Anita Gibbs

Introduction

In this first chapter, we identify the historical roots of ideological divisions between social work and sociology. Not all sociologists and social workers know that their disciplines were once closely linked. This is not surprising because it suited the professionalization projects of each discipline in the twentieth century to construct historical narratives that emphasized their differences rather than their commonalities. Internationally, however, the two disciplines emerged in close association. Within academic institutions, the disciplines often shared departments, although those shared departments became established at different times in different countries—around the turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe, and half a century later in Australia and New Zealand (Crothers 2008; Nash and Munford 2001).

The trajectories of their separation involved disagreements that emerged within academic departments in universities, often within a few decades of the departments' establishment. The disagreements were focused on relatively dualistic positions that each discipline adopted around two core questions. The first question concerned the place of theory and practice. Academic sociologists adopted a position that the ultimate goal of theorizing was knowledge building, whereas social workers theorized toward the goal of practice. The second major division, which is inextricably linked to the first, involved the place of values, with sociologists tending to argue for value neutrality and social workers arguing that their endeavors should be value-laden.

Divisions also typically occurred along gender lines, to some extent reflecting the stereotypes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which portrayed women as creatures of emotion and expected women to be concerned with domestic affairs, including the care and well-being of families and children. Men were believed to be more appropriately concerned with matters outside the home, including the development of science, because men were believed to be more capable of understanding facts and theoretical ideas. These gender stereotypes led to the preponderance of women in social work and men in sociology.

The divisions between social work and sociology became more entrenched over time. Social workers, looking outward to the community, aligned their interests with community stakeholders. Sociologists sought to firm up their academic standing within institutes of higher learning. Levels of interaction reduced. The disciplines separated physically, occupying different university corridors and teaching separate student cohorts in differently named programs. Disciplinary silos became concretized, preventing the cross-fertilization of ideas, particularly from social work into sociology. Whereas sociology continued to be taught as a core discipline in many social work programs, the reverse was not true. Sociologists failed to gain from the advances made by social workers in developing theories and frameworks for practice and in learning how to negotiate complex value dilemmas.

Despite these divisions, many sociologists and social workers neither conformed to extreme ideological positions nor fitted the caricatures of altruistic, action-oriented social workers or value-free, theoretical sociologists. Many social workers continued to theorize, and at least some sociologists continued to pursue social justice related topics. Debates around the relationships between theory and practice and the possibility of value neutrality were never fully resolved, particularly within sociology. During the 1960s and 1970s, with concerns over civil liberties at a high in the United States and many other countries, there was a reemergence of overt interest in praxis and political action among sociologists. This appeared to converge with the interests of community, work-oriented social workers and radical social workers, the latter of whom sought to transform capitalist societies toward societies with more equitably distributed wealth. Although the radical movements of those mid-twentieth century decades declined from the 1980s onward, sociologists today continue to place themselves on a continuum in relation to the need for the practical applicability of their work. Chapter 9 in this book provides an excellent example of how a university educator encourages students in his sociology research methods class to consider the practical implications and utility of their research.

More recently, from the late 1980s and 1990s, university educators from social work and sociology have come under increased pressure to adopt more market-oriented approaches, as many national governments have disinvested from the funding of social science education and social welfare (Connell 2000; Dominelli 2005; Thorns 2003; van Heugten 2011). Disciplines are expected to produce graduates with a specific set of technocratic skills rather than critical thinkers. Educators and practitioners from both disciplines are searching for ways of working together to resist such pressures and to enhance mutual effectiveness. Joint work occurs around several shared concerns; one of these is the retention of the role of the social critic, which also involves assisting students to develop their capacity for critical social thinking. Another shared concern is employing knowledge from a range of social sciences to better understand and solve complex social problems. Social workers and sociologists who work together on projects have found that each discipline contributes valuable insights. This book itself is a good example of a social work and sociology collaboration.

Historical Connections and Disconnections

Disciplinary and Occupational Beginnings

The study of societies and social structures and the delivery of organized charity can both be traced back to ancient times. The focus of this chapter is, however, narrower. The chapter explores the emergence of sociology and social work in the mid-nineteenth century and the debates that arose between university educators and practitioners from those disciplines and that drove the disciplines down separate pathways.

The idea that society and social structures are able to be studied and understood, and that they might be alterable rather than divinely ordained, can be traced to the turn of the eighteenth century into the nineteenth. During this period, which has been called the Enlightenment, there arose increased belief in the power of reason and the possibility of gaining understanding through scientific exploration. At the end of the eighteenth century, the French and American revolutions undermined the idea that hierarchies and social orders were divinely ordained and showed that human actions might impact political and social structures. Industrialization and urbanization, coupled with the rise of market capitalism, highlighted social problems, and demands for solutions to these problems increased (Bannister 2003; Chriss 2002; Connell 2000; Shaw 2008, 2009). It was against this background that social theoreticians developed their thinking throughout the nineteenth century.

As the study of society and social problems began to gain prominence and adherents, like-minded people formed associations. Initially, these associations tended to incorporate people bound by shared interests in the study of social, political, and economic structures and human relationships. An example is the American Social Science Association, established in 1865 (Calhoun 2007). There were no stringent disciplinary boundaries or membership criteria for these early associations.

As theorizing developed, disciplines began to differentiate. The first stand-alone university departments in sociology were established around the turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth in the United States, England, and Europe. Some early sociological thinkers were clearly driven by theorizing, and those thinkers traced their roots to European social philosophers. Others were concerned with developing theories in order to understand and solve social ills.

Whereas early sociologists held a range of views about the place of social activism, the early development of social work was always closely tied to the study of social ills in order to achieve their amelioration. As previously mentioned, the historical origins of welfare provisions for the poor can be traced to ancient times. Textbooks that draw on more modern Eurocentric accounts of social work's history point to the codification of English poor laws into the Elizabethan Poor Law in 1601 (Leighninger 2008). The emergence of an occupation that is clearly similar to that of modern social workers is located in even more recent times, during the last half of the nineteenth century. During this time, charity organization societies were established, first in England and next in the United States (Leighninger 2008). These organizations employed workers to manage the distribution of welfare to the poor and to undertake casework and family work in an effort to encourage the poor to achieve self-reliance. This emerging casework orientation eventually came to represent the microlevel branch of social work, concerned with individual psychotherapy and family focused counseling interventions. By the end of the nineteenth century, this branch of social work had closely aligned itself with the new science of psychology, and the branch grew to incorporate roles in a variety of settings, including social-service workers, known as almoners, in hospitals. Mary Richmond from the Baltimore Charities Organization Society, one of the major proponents of the casework methods of assessment and intervention, became recognized as one of two founders of social work (Franklin 1986), along with Jane Addams, who is discussed below.

Alongside charity organization work, a differently oriented movement developed: the settlement movement, out of which the methods of community workers arose. (This description of the two branches of social work will be referred to again in a later section of the chapter, under the heading of