



MAIL

Dear Editor

I was recently loaned the Fall 1996 (Vol. 2 #3) issue of *Reflections* by a recent MSW graduate from CA State Long Beach. I read the publication from cover to cover and have found it to be a wonderful testament to the profession of social work.

I have been working in the field since 1972, so I related to many of the stories of social work education, reasons for entering the profession and experiences of being a "new social worker" receiving on-the-job-training. I currently work in the field of gerontology, but have always felt my roots to be in social work. I have had a number of students go through a masters in gerontology program and then enroll in an MSW program for another 2 years of education. I have never regretted my decision to enter social work vs. receiving an alternative degree.

I really wanted to comment on your editorial entitled "Butting-In." It really struck a chord with me. I have always felt like a "buttinsky"..... I guess that's why I too became a social worker. Luckily, my "interventions" have mostly proven to be positive and appreciated, but I recently have experienced one that was unappreciated. I did back-off but actually felt hurt that someone would mistake my

genuine professional concern for being a "meddler." I have learned a lesson from this experience.

Please tell your wife Sonia, I too cannot help myself from seizing the opportunity to help a mother who is hitting her child. I have had to call the police on more than one occasion when the parent had picked up an object in a store to hit her/his small child as well as offer to watch the child, while the parent completed shopping in quiet. My husband reminds me that it is dangerous to interfere in these situations, but I truly can't help myself.

I now have a child of my own, she is definitely showing signs of being a "buttinsky." When my seven year old daughter was as young as 5 years of age, she was already protecting younger children from the wrath of their parents. Somehow, when a 5 year old says, "Stop hurting your child, stop hitting them, the adult quickly looks up in an embarrassed manner and stops the behavior. I have had to stop my daughter from getting too involved because as she grows older, she may be "in harms ways" due to her comments, but she is certainly growing up to care about and for others.

I will close this "long discourse," by saying that I commend the Department of Social Work (CSULB) for putting to-

gether *Reflections*. Reading the articles brings back memories and reflections about why I love my work after 20 years in the field. I feel blessed at having chosen a profession that enables me to make a difference in the lives of others, while learning from their wisdom.

Nicole Kaplan, MSW,MPA
(The author is Director, Older Adult Services Daniel Freeman Hospitals, Inc.)

Dear Editor:

Having read of the passing of Carol H. Meyer on December 2, 1996, whose "Brief Reflection" appeared in the Winter 1996 (Vol. 2 #1, also Sp.#2) edition(s) of *Reflections*, I was again transported to my casework class at The Columbia University School of Social Work (NY N.Y.) in the spring of 1966.

Despite the passage of 30 years, I recall the vigor and commitment to quality education with which she taught social work practitioners about to emerge from the cocoon of professional school to the world of agency practice. I clearly remember her talking about the importance she placed on teaching us how to evaluate the quality of social work literature, which even then was in great and contradictory abundance, which she let us know

would become our life-long responsibility as we worked with and on behalf of clients. Professor Meyer was a woman with high professional standards and integrity.

When I talked with her at the Council On Social Work Education conference in Washington, DC. earlier this year, she said she hoped she had not been "too hard" in her approach as an academic teacher, leaving me with a last and lasting glimpse of the very caring person behind the sometimes daunting professor. It was, indeed, my good fortune to have been one of her students.

J. Carole Atkin

(The author is Inter-University Consortium Field Coordinator, CA State University, Long Beach, CA)

Dear Editor

"Do The Right Thing" Students' Responses:

Your editorial on subjugated knowledge and Annie Houston's narrative "Do The Right Thing" (Reflections, Summer 1996, Vol. 2, #3) stirred conflicting emotions in me and triggered re-examination of ethical dilemmas in my past and present practice situations. At the same time they inspired me to develop a brief written assignment for a first year graduate class in Human Behavior and the Social Environment.

The following instructions were given, in writing, to fifty-nine students :

In the narrative "Do The Right Thing" you are asked to take the author's position — that of a graduate social work intern

— and to: (1) articulate the choices you will make in advocating for your incarcerated female clients, and (2) identify the moral/ethical factors that influenced your choices. There is no correct or wrong answer.

Almost half of the students in the program full-time were in Field Work and had reviewed the NASW Code of Ethics. The remaining students entered the program on a part-time basis and were in lecture classes only. There was a significant qualitative difference in each group's position.

The purpose of the assignment was twofold: To (1) increase the student's awareness of the diverse dilemmas that confront social work practitioners, and (2) formulate a perspective which could be compared to and contrasted with the expressed perspectives of the editors, practitioners, social work educators and ethicists who had already responded to Ms. Houston's narrative.

The students articulated 3 different choices. Twenty-two, or 37% of the students strongly supported the author's course of action and advocated for a client's right, regardless of any life circumstance, including incarceration, to have access to both information/education and safe sex paraphernalia. The majority of these respondents — full-time students — attributed their choice to abide by the profession's Code of Ethics which makes the client's welfare the worker's primary responsibility. This group displayed significant familiarity with the devastating effects of AIDS and being HIV positive. AIDS

could be transmitted from an HIV positive inmate to all her present and future sex partners and it was viewed as a serious public health issue. Students stated that factors that influenced their choices were: *"Sexual expression is an innate biological need and incarceration should not deprive inmates the right to satisfy this need."* *"My opinion about their sex life is secondary to my responsibility to protect their life, the life of an unborn child and the lives of all those with whom the women have sex now and in the future."* *"My responsibility is to protect my client's welfare first" and "At this age and time no one should be denied AIDS prevention."**

Fourteen, or 24% of the students strongly disagreed with or disapproved of Houston's choices. This group was overwhelmingly represented by students in the part-time program. Collectively, they viewed that imprisonment would help reform these women through deprivation of sexual expression and subjugation of information on safe sex practices. Consequently, they disapproved of contraband activities and distribution of safe sex paraphernalia. Numerous students in this group made no reference to AIDS as a sexually transmitted disease with public health concerns. Instead, inmates were expected to protect themselves through abstinence; and it was argued that they had lost their right to sexual expression at the time of incarceration. Students

* Some of the students' statements are paraphrased without altering their intended meaning.

stated that the factors that influenced their decisions were: "If these prisoners are concerned about infection they should abstain from sex." "Prisoners should not be allowed to engage in any form of sexual activity." The author only reinforced illegal behavior by practicing situational ethics," and "Her choices diminish the profession's value in the client's eyes."

Twenty-three, or 39% of the students stated that they would turn the other way; not report the trafficking of contraband but would not participate in its supply or distribution. On the one hand, this group viewed the institutional practice of prohibiting the open distribution of safe sex paraphernalia as inhumane treatment and systematic ignorance of the potential health risks to the incarcerated women, their children and present and future sex partners. On the other hand, they perceived any direct involvement by them in contraband trafficking as violation of institutional rules and as behavior that had the potential to jeopardize their professional plans and create conflict between the school, the field agency and the correctional bureaucracy. They proposed a course of action of both micro and macro forms of intervention. They viewed client education and empowerment, along with interventions by the university and the wider community, as effective ways to educate the prison's administration and to enforce systematic change. Samples from this group's responses included: "I will not report the trafficking of contraband but I will not participate and will request that it is not be done in my presence." "I will teach the

women responsibility about their own health and the health of others." "I will consult with my supervisor and my school." and "I will act on a broader scale by organizing within and outside the institution."

The assignment's dual purpose was met. The majority of responses (groups 1 and 3) coincided with the positions taken by the editors and the social work practitioners, educators and ethicists who had spoken before them. Regardless of which position they took, the students were made aware of the multifaceted ethical complexities of social work practice. In addition, the analysis of the student responses revealed that student choices in practice dilemmas are influenced by the socialization process into the profession.

This group of fifty-nine students found the assignment thought provoking and challenging. Samples of some concluding statements included: "I have had many ethical decisions to make ... but none as difficult as the ones presented in this article," and "The narrative touched on such fundamental and volatile issues ... freedom, the rights of prisoners, sexuality and homosexuality, child rearing, family relationships, authority and professional integrity...."

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CORRECTION

An editing error occurred in the narrative "The New Math Grassroots Community Work" by Peter Biehl and Rolene Miller (Vol. 2 (4), Fall 96, p. 23, col. 3). The word *virtually* was omitted in the paragraph referring to services for women in Cape Town. It should read: "... I counseled women as a volunteer ... and came to know that there were *virtually* no services...." We regret the error.

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