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## *Paradoxes in Social Work Practice: Mitigating Ethical Trespass*, Merlinda Weinberg. New York, NY: Routledge, 2016

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Aller au sommaire du numéro

Découvrir la revue

Citer ce compte rendu

# book
## review

# recension de
## publication

**Paradoxes in Social Work Practice: Mitigating Ethical Trespass**
Merlinda Weinberg. New York, NY: Routledge, 2016.

One of the struggles I have encountered when trying to teach social work ethics is capturing how ethical tensions are experienced in practice. From my perspective, ethics rarely move through daily practice as intellectual negotiations between two competing paths or as questions of what is right or wrong. Instead, ethical issues seem to be lived as knots that encompass the daily activities of social work practice; knots that are made up of competing understandings of how to make sense of what we, and the people we work with, are doing and how the services that we are working within are organized. This is often experienced as an emotional weight that can manifest as a sinking feeling in one's stomach or the loss of sleep. Many times, what combines to produce this weight is hard to articulate. It is rare to find an ethics text that succeeds in reflecting the lived experiences of practitioners so well, and that explores ethics in ways that convey the reality of how they are experienced in practice, which is why reading Weinberg's *Paradoxes in Social Work Practice: Mitigating Ethical Trespass* was so engaging.

Weinberg begins her book by tugging at the strings that make up the knots of social work practice, looking them over and giving them shape. In doing so, Weinberg weaves together post-structural theory and structural approaches to social work with concepts from the field of ethics, and a number of utterly absorbing narratives about social work practice. Weinberg's study of social workers whose practice focuses on supporting young, single mothers draws upon a series of interviews with five social workers (many of which took place over the span of a few years). I found myself drawn completely into these narratives, at times cheering for clients or workers, other times frustrated and even having to take a deep inhale to pause after Weinberg has walked through a particularly harrowing story of a young woman's struggle. What is captivating about Weinberg's book is her ability to capture the everyday ethical struggles of social work and organize them in a way that we can make meaning of them, without losing the sense of messiness that imbues practice.

In the introduction, Weinberg carefully peels away the conceptual terrain of social work and outlines a clear framework that she goes on to use as a series of intellectual signposts that guide us through each

practice relationship. Weinberg regularly redirects the reader's attention to six key ethical paradoxes that she identifies as underlying social work practice and three discursive frames for how our society responds to single mothers. The six key paradoxes, which organize the book are: care vs. discipline; more than one client; non-judgmentalism vs. need to make judgements; the setting of norms vs. encouraging free choice and client empowerment; self-disclosure as necessary and risky for clients; and equality vs. equity. For Weinberg, these epitomize the central struggles of social work practice, and she explores how they interact with the liberal, reactionary, and revisionist or oppositional discourses that constitute how single mothers are viewed in Euro-Western society.

Weinberg provides us with additional conceptual tools for understanding and navigating our relationships with clients. In distinguishing between moral distress and ethical dilemmas, Weinberg provides a further helpful device for disentangling the different kinds of problems that get piled into the notion of ethical dilemma, while highlighting that many of these situations might be more helpfully understood as moral distress resulting from the internal and external constraints on our work. Equally helpful is Weinberg's use of the term *ethical trespass*, which she borrows from the work of Orlie (1997). Within this conceptualization, the workers in Weinberg's narratives are not permitted to become heroes or villains, and the young mothers are equally hard to fit into an established moral frame of victim or survivor. Instead, readers are left with the notion that we are all on slippery terrain when trying to work with competing client interests and accountabilities, all of which are shaped by inadequate resources and society's need to govern the lives of young women perceived as deviating from the appropriate path to adulthood. By using the concept of ethical trespass, Weinberg keeps us focused not on social worker's evil inclinations, but rather on how we are all implicated in normalizing practices, no matter how radical our perspectives.

The text also offered a paradox of its own. I both loved how drawn into the text I was; how I could see myself struggling with similar practice decisions and responding in similar ways. At other times, I found myself wanting to distance myself from the narratives of others, wondering how they fit within my own notion of ethical practice. In this way, the book was getting at the heart of ethics in social work practice; the muddled-up feelings and tensions, and the competing understandings, all mixed into the complexities of today's social work workplaces. Weinberg reminds us how difficult and complicated our practice is, and that none of us get to occupy a space of innocence outside of the authority we hold. These are difficult pieces to teach to students, and in my opinion, this text has enormous potential to become a powerful tool for facilitating these insights in practice education.

To Weinberg's great credit, this book, which conveys the realities of practice ethics so vividly, does not just stay in a place of struggle, it also maps multiple pathways forward. There are no easy solutions as is the habit of work grounded in Foucauldian analysis, but there is hope; there are guides for moving through our daily work in ways that offer at least the possibility of mitigating trespass. Calling upon Heldke's (1998) idea of becoming "responsible traitors," Weinberg not only creates a bridge between structural approaches to social work and post-structuralism, she also presents a hopeful challenge to how the profession can move forward in ethically fraught times. This strikes me as an invaluable contribution to the field of ethics in professional practice.

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