

---

# Fundamental Contradictions in Cultural Competence

*Yvonne M. Johnson and Shari Munch*

---

Cultural competence (CC) is considered highly relevant to social work practice with clients belonging to ethnic and racial minority groups, as the burgeoning literature and creation of practice standards on CC attest. However, examination of the conceptual underpinnings of CC reveals several major anomalies. The authors argue that several aspects of CC contradict central social work concepts or are at odds with current, standard social work practice. These contradictions extend to the epistemological foundations of CC and the rights and dignity of the individual. To further stress the conceptual tensions at the heart of CC, the authors incorporate recent philosophical work addressing collective identities and group rights. The question of whether culturally competent practice is achievable is also addressed. The authors urge academicians and practitioners to thoroughly examine the theoretical and ethical bases of CC because of their highly important ramifications for social work practice.

KEY WORDS: *cultural competence; practice standards; racial and ethnic minorities; social work ethics; social work theory*

What could possibly be amiss with the idea of cultural competence (CC), that is, social workers' possession of "a knowledge base of their clients' cultures" and ability to provide "services that are sensitive to clients' cultures" (NASW, 2000a, p. 9)? After all, CC sounds as inviting and benign as an Indian samosa, an Irish scone, or American apple pie.

The social work literature is rich in its discussions of CC, and such discussions are evident in texts that discuss international social work (Healy, 2001), social policy (van Wormer, 1997), human behavior (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 2006), and micro social work practice (Leigh, 1998). The most recent Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) (2008) *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* mandate schools (accredited by CSWE) to educate students at the bachelor's and master's levels on 10 core competencies, two of which emphasize the influence of culture on identity and human development (core competencies 4 and 7, respectively). Although the notion of CC has received some critical commentary (see, for example, de Anda, 1997, for a range of opinions), the place of CC in the U.S. social work curriculum appears relatively uncontested.

In this article, we hope to show that, although the notion of CC has been espoused with the worthiest of intentions for social work practice, education, theory, and research, there are concep-

tual tensions at its center. Our intention is to not discredit the enormous amount of work on CC that has been developed over the years. We do not recommend ignorance of global history and national and international current conditions that include genocide, slavery, oppression, racism, and gross health disparities; the literature on CC that educates social workers about these issues is to be applauded. Rather, we wish to highlight some aspects of the underlying conceptual framework of CC that run contrary to established social work principles and practice and that we believe have been only modestly addressed previously. More specifically, our concerns lie with the CC literature that recommends practice standards concerning, or purports to educate social workers about, the values, worldviews, personality traits, and norms of racial and ethnic groups. The contradictions we identify extend to the epistemological foundations of CC, the rights and dignity of the individual, and the very question of whether a social worker can ever be culturally competent. Moreover, we are by no means alone in our desire to critically examine the conceptual underpinnings of CC; we encounter voiced reservations about the tenability of CC in the arenas of practice, teaching, and professional meetings (Johnson & Munch, 2006).

CC has become an established feature of social work and is found in formal (for example, NASW,

2007; U.S. CSWE publications [for example, Armour, Bain, & Rubio, 2006]) and informal social work parlance. It could be argued that CC has become entrenched within the very culture of social work and appears to have been embraced by many in the profession. This might lead to reticence in challenging the concept of CC for fear of appearing insensitive to cultural issues or even being anti-social work values. However, the established status of CC should not imply immunity from critical analysis. Indeed, there is all the more reason for this investigation; if what the social work profession takes for granted is on less than coherent and rigorous grounds, then an attempt at reassessment or remedy might be not only beneficial, but also imperative.

First, in this article, the discussion focuses on the historical context within which CC emerged. Second, a conceptual analysis of terminology related to CC is undertaken. Third, contradictions noted in the CC literature are examined through the lens of ethics and current identity politics from the field of philosophy juxtaposed with social work values, practice, education, and research. We wish to enhance and deepen the current discussion of CC by incorporating the work of Kwame Anthony Appiah (1994, 2003, 2005) and Charles Taylor (1991, 1994), two of the most prominent philosophers whose works address collective identities and group rights. Although we conducted a literature review on CC using well-regarded databases (for example, Social Service Abstracts and PsychINFO, using key words such as “cultural competence” and “cultural humility”), this article does not constitute an overarching literature review of CC; rather, it is a conceptual presentation of the tensions we have identified in the CC literature.

## BACKGROUND

From its very beginnings, social work has, in varying degrees, paid attention to matters related to race and ethnicity (see, for example, National Conference on Social Welfare Proceedings, 1874–1982). Settlement houses—before their decline during World War I—and the New Deal provided increasing evidence of social welfare’s concern with the needs of ethnic and racial minorities (Trattner, 1998). Much of the recent discussion on race and ethnicity in the United States arose from the acknowledgment of Eurocentric bias in the teaching of public school students about history, literature, and social science (Gould, 1995). Social work education began to ad-

dress racial and ethnic disparities and culture during the U.S. civil rights movement of the 1960s (Rothman, 2008). Given the prominence of this movement in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, discussions of culture tended to be focused on race and ethnicity, and diversity was usually taken to be synonymous with acknowledging differences in skin color. This historical emphasis can still be seen in current literature on CC, although broader definitions, including, for example, sexual orientation and physical differences, exist (NASW, 2007). Efforts to correct pathology-laden, stereotyped characterizations of oppressed racial and ethnic minority groups led to the development of social work textbooks that devoted chapters to African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics, for example, and ultimately promoted strengths-based characterizations.

The interest in CC is not limited to the profession of social work and extends to counseling (American Counseling Association, 2005) and nursing (Denboba, 2005/2006). On a macro level in relation to health, for example, the mission of the U.S. National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC) is to increase the capacity of health care and mental health programs to design, implement, and evaluate culturally and linguistically competent service delivery (Goode, 2001). The creation of the NCCC was prompted by research showing that health disparities are associated with race, wealth, age, and gender (see, for example, *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*, 1999; President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003). In addition, the promotion of health and mental health programs that implement and evaluate culturally and linguistically competent service delivery systems can be seen on an international basis (for example, Victorian Transcultural Psychiatry Unit [Australia], 2007).

To tease out what is encompassed in the term CC, definitions of culture, competence, and CC are needed. The term “culture” is elusive. Definitions presented in Table 1 show the huge areas of social life to which culture refers (definitions of the terms that are irrelevant for our purposes—for example, refined taste—are excluded). *Culture* encompasses a group’s social history over generations, rituals, beliefs, behaviors, and material artifacts. NASW (2000b, 2007) includes the subjective experiences of people within specific cultures. *Competence* involves abilities and skills, and the specific ones required of CC are discussed later in this article.

**Table 1: Definitions of Key Terms: Culture, Competence, and Cultural Competence**

Term	Definition
<i>Culture</i>	<p>“The ‘social heritage’ of a community: the total body of material artifacts (tools, weapons, houses; places of work, worship, government, recreation; works of art, etc.); of collective mental and spiritual ‘artifacts’ (systems of symbols, ideas, beliefs, aesthetic perceptions, values, etc.); and of distinctive forms of behavior ... created by a people (sometimes deliberately, sometimes through unforeseen interconnections ...) and transmitted from generation to generation” (Bullock &amp; Stallybrass, 1977 p. 150).</p> <p>More recently, NASW (2000b) defined culture thus: “The word ‘culture’ ... implies the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group” (p. 61).</p> <p>NASW (2007) noted that</p> <p>“culture often is referred to as the totality of ways being passed on from generation to generation. The term culture includes ways in which people with disabilities or people from various religious backgrounds or people who are gay, lesbian, or transgender experience the world around them.” (p. 10)</p>
<i>Competence</i>	<p>“Suitability; fitness; efficiency; capacity; ability; sufficiency” (Chambers Dictionary, 1998, p. 336).</p> <p>“Cultural <i>competence</i> is never fully realized, achieved, or completed, but rather cultural competence is a lifelong process for social workers who will always encounter diverse clients and new situations in their practice” (NASW, 2007, p. 12).</p>
<i>Cultural Competence</i>	<p><b>Early definitions</b></p> <p>Dual perspective (awareness of a person’s membership of a minority culture as well as a majority one) (Norton, 1978).</p> <p>Social work practice with people of color (Lum, 1992).</p> <p>Ethnic-sensitive practice (Schlesinger &amp; Devore, 1995).</p> <p><b>Definitions found in current literature</b></p> <p>“Cultural competence refers to the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each” (NASW, 2001, p. 11).</p> <p>“A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, &amp; Isaacs, as cited in Armour et al., 2006, p. 69).</p> <p>“Cultural competence in social work practice implies a heightened consciousness of how clients experience their uniqueness and deal with their differences and similarities within a larger social context” (NASW, 2007, p. 9).</p>

The tenets of CC have been found in the social work literature for nearly 40 years under different, though similar, terminology. Because of space limitations, we cannot list every definition of CC; Boyle and Springer (2001) purported that there are possibly hundreds. However, the definitions of CC in Table 1 are illustrative of the definitions commonly found in the social work literature. Noticeable in the definitions of CC over time is the growing recognition that society might be best understood as an entity comprising many cultures rather than two—that is, minority and majority (Norton, 1978).

#### **CONTRADICTIONS IN THE IDEA OF CC**

We identify four major contradictions in formulations of CC. (1) The first is epistemological—that is,

related to questions of knowledge and the manner in which the knowledge is obtained. We argue that the emphasis on a priori knowledge of cultural difference not only is limited in terms of its accuracy, but also is contrary to the modern social work practice of learning from the client. (2) The second contradiction concerns the merits of classification systems used to describe cultural differences; these appear to stereotype and may not reflect the uniqueness of the individual. (3) Oversensitivity to cultural group differences, which are the result of the aforementioned classification of group norms, may lead to a privileging of group rights that is at odds with social work’s core value of individual self-determination. (4) Last, we identify contradictory evidence as to whether CC, which is ill defined, can ever be determined,

far less achieved. We discuss these in turn and show that major tenets of CC are self-contradictory or in contradiction with other social work values. The strengths and limitations of the various positions, as well as those in our own thinking, are discussed in the order that they appear.

### **Contradiction 1: Knowing about Cultures**

The first contradiction relates to the means by which the social worker learns about the client's life, culture, and situation—a question that is epistemological. *Knowing about* describes a process that involves the social worker gathering information about the cultural group to which the client belongs. NASW (2007) has stipulated that social workers are required to “develop specialized knowledge and understanding about the history, traditions, values, family systems, and artistic expressions of major client groups served” (p. 21). The current literature on CC suggests that there are discrete pieces of information about cultural groups that the social worker can learn and then competently apply to work with clients. The delineation of behaviors, rituals, and thinking of various ethnic and racial groups, as seen in the literature used by social workers (for example, Anderson & Carter, 2003; McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005), strongly suggests that there are characteristics of groups that, if known before meeting the client, would enhance the helping relationship. For example, Anderson (2003b) described African Americans as valuing mutual aid and religion and having “relatively egalitarian social-class and gender relationships” (p. 13); Ewalt and Mokuau (1995) wrote that Pacific Islanders hold group-oriented values that are in contrast to “Northern European–American individualistic values” (p. 168).

However, over the past 100 years of professional social work's history, social workers have moved away from approaches that deem the social worker expert in understanding and solving a client's problem and toward a style that attempts to elicit the client's view of his or her need, problem, and circumstances. The latter mode values the client's knowledge and expertise and uses the client's strengths in finding a solution that is mutually agreed on (for example, Berg & DeJong, 1996; Cowger, 1994; Saleebey, 2005). Instead of adopting a position of *knowing about* the client, modern social work practice stresses *learning from* the client—that is, listening and giving prominence to the client's story, a narrative that is

unique. Especially important are learning from, and hearing, perhaps anew, the voices of underrepresented and marginalized clients—about whom the NASW (2000a) *Code of Ethics* urges social workers to pay special attention. The paradigm suggested by the phrase “learning from” does not assume that the social worker can know another culture to which he or she does not belong; indeed, quite the opposite. (On a related note, it is possible that an individual from a particular culture might not be that familiar with it.) Also, philosophically, the belief that the social worker can know another's culture runs counter to postmodern, more specifically, social constructionist, approaches to knowledge that have appealed to social workers of late (see, for example, Payne, 2005, chaps. 1, 2, and 8; and Williams, 2006, for general overviews of the application of postmodern thought to social work). At the heart of social constructionist thinking as applied to social work is the premise that knowledge about a person or culture is unobtainable without the contribution of the those studied; knowledge cannot be learned, abstractly, by the helping professional, as if human behavior were regulated by universal laws (Blundo & Greene, 1999). A social situation is best understood, according to social constructionism, by eliciting the unique experiences of the people who are in that very situation (Blundo & Greene, 1999).

Furthermore, the very literature that describes common characteristics of specific cultural groups relies on “nonempirical literature”—social scientists have long questioned the existence of national stereotypes (Agbayani-Siewert, 2004; Terracciano et al., 2005)—and often includes caveats such as the following: “We learn about culture primarily not by learning ‘facts’ of another's culture, but rather by changing our attitude. Our underlying openness to those who are culturally different is the key to cultural understanding” (McGoldrick et al., 2005, p. 5). Much is alluded to in the quotation. First, it is suggested that gathering information about cultures might not be the best way to learn about a culture; instead, an open attitude is of utmost importance (Yan & Wong, 2005). Dean (2001) proposed a model in which “maintaining an awareness of one's lack of competence is the goal rather than the establishment of competence,” such that “the client is the ‘expert’ and the clinician is in the position of seeking knowledge . . . there is no thought of competence—instead one thinks of gaining understanding (always partial) of a phenomenon that is evolving and changing” (p.

624). Dean's arguments emphasize one important ingredient of CC—the centrality of self-awareness and, Dean implies, by extension, that social workers need to be aware of and overcome their biases and prejudices. Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998), physicians who were also grappling with CC, observed that “an isolated increase in knowledge without a consequent change in attitude and behavior is of questionable value” (p. 119).

Second, the placement of quotation marks around the word “facts” in the McGoldrick et al. (2005) quotation in the preceding paragraph raises the possibility that descriptions of cultures may not be accurate. One way in which portrayals of cultures can be inaccurate is in their generalization. As Anderson (2003a) noted, “if generalizations of group differences do not accurately describe the norms and behaviors of particular individuals and families within the group, [ethnic-sensitive practice] may not be applicable or it could erroneously stereotype those clients” (p. 44). Seeley (2004) concurred: The tendency to generalize “is especially troubling in clinical theory and practice because it frequently entails reducing the rich world of cultural variation to a small number of overly inclusive categories, such as ‘Asian,’ ‘Hispanic,’ and ‘African American’” (pp. 122–123). To illustrate the propensity to overgeneralize, Asian and Pacific Islander populations are frequently discussed together in a single chapter (for example, Green, 1998). It is worth remembering that, taken together, Asian and Pacific Islander peoples constitute more than half (60 percent) of the world's population (United Nations Population Fund, 2005). Nonetheless, extended family loyalty among these groups is contrasted with the nuclear family found in Eurocentric cultures (Green, 1998). Yet, in the empirical literature, differences between ethnic groups are not neatly bifurcated. For example, Agbayani-Siewert's (2004) research on the cultural similarities and differences between Filipino American and Chinese American college students' ( $n = 713$ ) attitudes toward dating violence revealed that the students' respective views were very different; “Filipino students were found to be more similar to white students than to Chinese students” (p. 39).

Statements of broad brush are not only stereotypical but are, in our opinion, outdated. In addition, the result of accepting these caricatures may lead to a false notion of one's own expertise (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Although anecdotal, an interesting possible reason why CC has become so

popular is that the concrete information on beliefs, characteristics, and practices of various cultural groups that the literature on CC provides alleviates social workers' level of anxiety about attempting to grasp myriad, ever-changing cultures (observation made by discussant following the delivery of a paper on CC by Johnson & Munch, 2006). The emphasis on understanding difference may also have the unintended consequence of distancing the connection between client and social worker (Gould, 1995), because the assumption of adequate knowledge of difference could either blind or deafen the social worker to what the client is saying or, worse, alienate or offend the client.

The question that arises is whether clients' views of what constitutes CC are similar to those held by social workers. It is interesting that in Davis's (2007) study of clients' and professionals' ( $N = 186$ ) views of what CC entails, clients' responses, in the main, described generic social work practice (for example, respect for the individual, written service plans, prompt service). These findings support Hendricks's (2003) contention that “culturally competent social work practice is, in most respects, simply good practice” (p. 76). Weaver (1999) appeared to concur; in her discussion of CC as it relates to Native Americans, Weaver observed that “skills for culturally competent social work with Native Americans are not radically different from those generally required for practice” (p. 221). Pope-Davis, Liu, Toporek, and Brittan-Powell (2001) noted the need for further research to examine clients' perspectives of what makes for multicultural counseling competence. An avenue for further research might be the following: Agencies that follow NASW's (2001) *Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice* might form client advisory boards whose mission is to review the meaningfulness of the standards and provide feedback on their existence in agency practice.

### **Contradiction 2: Collective Identities**

How should the social worker look at the respective identities of groups and the individuals within them? The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1994), in his essay “The Politics of Recognition,” offered a penetrating analysis of the major issues involved in approaching and attempting to answer such a question. Taylor's exposition is highly relevant to social work because his major focus is on marginalized and oppressed groups.

Taylor (1994) argued that to be truly human, a person must be given the opportunity to discover his or her own identity and to have it, to the furthest extent possible, acknowledged by others. This universal right to recognition as a human being worthy of respect—a notion that has long-standing historical credence, and is, as Hunt (2007) noted, explicit in modern times in the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights—stresses what people have in common, namely our capacity for self-determination and the right to reach our full potential. According to Taylor (1994), "due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need" (p. 27). Unfortunately, individual members of minority groups (be they characterized by race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and so on) are either unrecognized or misrecognized by the larger society. To be treated as though invisible or, in the case of misrecognition, seen in a derogatory manner, denies a person the chance to develop a positive sense of self. In response to this injustice, members of oppressed groups have united and lobbied for recognition of their differences (for example, inherent characteristics or life choices) that exist over and above personhood. After all, it is these differences that the majority cannot tolerate.

Kwame Anthony Appiah (1994), professor of philosophy at Princeton University, noted that today's Western cultures emphasize individual identity and authenticity of self, but simultaneously there is increasing attention to "large categories," for example, racial and ethnic groups. The recent emphases on difference, celebration of diversity, and value of "other" cultures that have often been missing from academic curriculums, social policy, and research lead to a challenging anomaly. Taylor (1994) identified the apparent paradox thus: Respecting all people on the basis of their humanity stresses what is common among people. Respecting all cultures on the basis of difference, on the other hand, is a discriminating—in the sense of discerning—process. Universal respect for the dignity of the individual is open to the charge of color-blindness, whereas respect for differences between cultures involves color, race, and ethnicity. As Gutmann (1994) pointed out, a tension arises when we try to give one, that is, the universal or the particular, precedence over the other.

A disadvantage in using difference to self-identify is that such labeling, even for those considered privileged—for example, white people—brings

with it possibly negative stereotypes in view of a lack of well-developed, alternative notions of racial identity. For example, a Welsh woman's identity might be stereotypically associated with Britain's historical oppression of its colonies, yet her experience is one of being oppressed by those in the neighboring British country, namely, the English. Another disadvantage associated with privileging difference over commonality is that some members of oppressed groups do not wish for an outward characteristic—physical attributes such as, for example, skin color in the case of some classifications of race—to be the basis for their identity. Appiah (1994) argued that such categorization might bring with it a "life script" (expected modes of belief and behavior) that can be unduly inflexible and might be at odds with autonomy. Collective identities are not under the control of the individual (Appiah, 2003, 2005; see, especially, chap. 5). Appiah, who is a gay man of Ghanaian descent, goes as far as saying that the burden of adhering to a collective identity might result in a "kind of tyranny" (Appiah, 1994). Restated, Appiah is pointing to a group's reinforcement or even creation of its own stereotype, perhaps as a way of strengthening group identity. Long term, Appiah favors a world in which the individual does not need to choose from what he considers to be a limited range of collective identities currently available. However, Appiah concedes that the calls for recognition of difference (for example, gay, black) might be a necessary first step toward the creation of well-developed, multifaceted, personal identities.

Appiah (1994) continued, "it seems to me that one reasonable ground for suspicion of much contemporary multicultural talk is that it presupposes conceptions of collective identity that are remarkably unobvious in their understandings of the processes by which identities, both individual and collective, develop" (p. 156). What Appiah might have had in mind is that the process through which identities are formed is, to use Taylor's (1991) terminology, dialogical; it is only within a wider social context, in which people transact, that identities are created, changed, and extinguished. For this reason, cultures are always in flux, hard to pin down, grasp, and understand, because no definitive culture is "out there" ready for analysis (G. D. Gross, 2000). But more important, cultures do not emerge in vacuums; cultures usually develop within the wider global environment in which Eastern and Western cultures

often overlap, and where, for example, postcolonial countries make their own policies in response to the earlier oppression endured. The result might be a mixing of cultures—those of both former oppressed and oppressor, and future identification of the origins of specific beliefs and practices might prove impossible.

Further complicating the notion of identity is the fact that people do not belong to just one group, but many. The concept of intersectionality refers to the interrelationships between race, ethnicity, and other identities (Yuval-Davis, 2006). A social worker helping a client who is Hispanic, female, lesbian, and poor would be considered culturally competent if he or she takes into account the ways in which these identities intersect and, on that basis, tries to identify ways in which the woman's identities affect her life and create an intervention that is in keeping with them. The accepted notions of intragroup difference and diversity within diversity go some way to acknowledge the multiple identities that exist among Hispanics. However, the addition of the categories of gender, sexual orientation, and poverty, while allowing for all of their diverse expressions, leads to an almost infinite set of combinations of characteristics. And, of course, the more multidimensional the social worker tries to make this picture—with the inclusion of ability, age, history, religion, and the specific challenge or need about which the client requests the social worker's involvement—the lower the chance of knowing the client's culture in advance. What, then, is the utility of trying to know or learn about the client's culture in any way other than by inviting the client to tell us what cultural factors are salient for her or him?

We find it deeply ironic that social workers (for example, Kirk, 2005) have been highly critical, and in our opinion, correctly so, of sweeping classifications in psychiatry (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), but appear willing to accept grand generalizations of ethnic and racial groups. The following teaching example is illustrative. In one of the first author's MSW practice classes, a student presented her work with a young African American female client who resided in a shelter. In terms of possible interventions, students suggested linking the client to a local church and making contact with family members and fictive kin. At odds with these suggestions, however, was the student's bio-psycho-social assessment, which revealed the client's absence of religious affiliation and lack of

ties with family based on her choice. Nonetheless, students persisted in wanting to intervene along the aforementioned lines. Further discussion revealed that students' suggestions stemmed from readings on racial and ethnic diversity that depicted religion and strong family bond as major characteristics of African Americans. Grand narratives, however appealing they might be, do have weakness. As Hodge and Nadir (2008) observed, in relation to religion, that if someone were to look for a grand narrative for either Christianity or Islam, that person would be sorely disappointed.

The problems for social work in accepting some of the characterizations, of broad stroke, found in the literature on CC (for example, Green, 1998; McGoldrick et al., 2005) are, in our view, twofold. First, literature has the possible unintended result that practitioners will squeeze clients into broad categories to which they do not belong. As Miller's (2007) qualitative study of African American gay men's relationship with the black church poignantly described, the expected supportive religious environment (implied in much of the literature on CC) was sadly absent for these men because of the homophobic beliefs on the part of some pastors and congregations. Second, the profession, in adopting CC, might be unwittingly maintaining the status quo. For example, if mutual aid and the reliance on extended family are seen as accepted norms in Hispanic families (see, for example, the discussion in Sue, 2006, p. 136), social workers might refrain from promoting social policy and macro practice to assist these groups. As Rothman (2001) pointed out, locality development in the form of mutual aid should not be advocated if the effort to solve a societal problem places further burden on populations who are already stressed and lacking resources. The physical, psychological, and financial strains of mutual aid within ethnic and racial minority populations might contribute to these groups' continued disempowerment. Both E. R. Gross (1995) and Uehara et al. (1996) correctly observe that the focus on cultural traits and differences might obfuscate the sociopolitical forces that maintain inequality and domination.

In relation to group identity, Taylor (1994) did not conclude that a multiplicity of cultures should be maintained for its own sake. At first glance, Taylor's position appears reactionary and blinkered. His balanced consideration of these questions suggests otherwise. First, in agreement with Appiah and

Gates (1997), Taylor pointed to the ever-changing nature of cultures and the melding of beliefs and practices across the globe. If a specific culture were to be artificially maintained, Taylor foresaw an end to the transactional nature of cultural development. Second, external maintenance of a culture removes from its members their ability to determine their culture's development (Habermas, 1994). An interesting case example is Quebec (Taylor, 1994). One question that arises in terms of the maintenance of culture is whether parents who speak French should be legally mandated to send their children to French-speaking schools to maintain that aspect of French culture in Canada.

Taylor (1994) was certainly hopeful that an understanding, through dialogue, of cultures can be enriching, despite the immense effort that that understanding demands. And following Gadamer (1975), Taylor saw huge benefit in pursuing this learning. This learning, for Taylor and Gadamer, takes place in the form of honest and sincere communication and includes a wide-ranging appreciation of the humanities, which might not be sufficiently incorporated (in the form of literature and art) in social work education (Garcia & Bregoli, 2000; G. D. Gross, 2000).

### **Contradiction 3: Group Rights**

The CC literature addressing the duties of the social worker in relation to group and individual rights is most ambiguous. On the one hand, the social worker should show "respect for diversity in all its forms" (NASW, 2007, p. 18) and be sensitive to the practices of diverse cultures. On the other hand, "cultural competence builds on the profession's valued stance on self-determination and individual dignity and worth" (p. 18). Indeed, historically, social work has given preeminence to the dignity and sanctity of the individual and not to cultures. Such a view is in keeping with social work's early Judeo-Christian roots, as well as philosophical (for example, Kantian) schools of thought that place ultimate value on the person's self-determination. The primary focus on the value of individuals and not the wider society is also clearly seen in NASW's (2000a) *Code of Ethics*: "Social workers' primary responsibility is to promote the well-being of clients. In general, clients' interests are *primary*. However, social workers' responsibility to the larger society ... may on limited occasions supersede the loyalty owed clients" [italics added] (p. 7).

Although NASW (2007) recommends in its practice standards on CC that social workers use a strengths-based perspective on micro and macro levels, there is the following caveat: "This does not imply a universal nor automatic acceptance of all practices of all cultures. For example, some cultures subjugate women, [and] oppress persons based on sexual orientation" (p. 18). Social work has a long history of questioning the powers of the state, laws, and cultural practices both nationally and internationally. Social work has frequently pointed to the negative effects that the wider society can have on clients' development and quality of life. The far-from-benign qualities of the larger society are seen in the stigmatization of various ethnic groups, hate crimes, and homophobia. Social workers often adopt the important role of mediator between clients and society. However, the manner in which the respective group and individual rights of those in a particular culture can be reconciled is not fully explicated in the CC literature. This leads to the following ethical question: Can a cultural group demand the right to self-determination no matter what it does to individuals within it?

We find it inconceivable that the social work profession could justify the protection of group rights when the consequence is the denial of an individual's inherent worth—for example, institutional racism found in U.S. courts, murder of women on the basis of adultery in India, female genital mutilation in parts of Africa. In accordance with social work's principles and values, it appears that the profession cannot ethically adhere to cultural relativism, which might justify privileging group rights at the expense of the individual's worth. This stance is evident in NASW's (2000a) *Code of Ethics*: "Social workers should act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of race, ethnicity" (p. 27).

The reader might surmise that we would give priority to the individual no matter the circumstances and never attention to groups. Not so. The despot's control over his or her people and the persecution of an individual by a group are both morally repugnant. However, the bases for intervening in both cases are grounded not only in the principles of the value of humanity and the right to personal self-determination (notwithstanding the individual in question's not harming others), but also in social justice.

As Taylor (1994) noted, the challenge is to engage with those from one's own and other cultures without compromising democratic principles; for social work, this means dialogue while maintaining social work's core values (Congress, 2004). In direct practice, assessments require asking the client about the ways in which his or her culture affects his or her lived experience within it. On a macro level, social workers can assist members of oppressed groups who are themselves criticizing harmful and oppressive practices within their own cultural groups (Association of Women's Rights in Development, 2008).

#### **Contradiction 4: Cultural Competence Is Achievable**

Perhaps one of the most serious objections to the incorporation of CC into social work education and effective social work practice is doubt as to whether CC is humanly possible. Armour et al. (2006) argued that "there are no *experts*" in the field of CC, and "there is no end stage of 'having arrived' in relation to cultural competence" (p. 26). As discussed earlier, intersectionality refers to the many and overlapping identities that a person or group can have—the result of which is an almost infinite combination of characteristics. This alone presents enormous, if not insurmountable, difficulties for the development of CC, if this area of study continues to try to describe traits and habits of specific cultural groups. The result of embarking on an enterprise that aims to document such combinations might reveal no more than ephemeral minutia in which the practitioner becomes bogged down. Nevertheless, in agreement with Hendricks (2003), Armour et al. (2006) argued that there are stages or "levels of cultural competence." In addition, NASW (2000a) stated that social workers should be "able to *demonstrate* competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients' cultures and to differences among people and cultural groups" [italics added] (p. 9).

There is obvious lack of clarity in the CC literature as to whether cultural competency can be achieved. First, as discussed previously, modern social work theory that includes social construction theory (simply defined as a school of thought that posits that what we take as knowledge is created through human interaction and does not reflect an objective truth [Payne, 2005]) questions whether the social worker can know another's culture. As

Manoleas (1994) noted, there is "irony [in] seeking a degree of objectivity within the subjectivity of difference" (p. 54). Second, Bourjolly et al. (2006) questioned whether culturally sensitive practice is a linear process. Despite this, models of CC that involve a progression, in stages, from not knowing to knowing (for example, Armour et al., 2006) suggest a linear development that is open to evaluation of that progress. NASW (2007) suggested a linear process also: Social workers "need to move from cultural awareness to cultural sensitivity before achieving cultural competence and to evaluate growth and development throughout these different levels of cultural competence in practice" (p. 20).

Beyond the scope of this primarily theoretical article is the issue of empirical research on CC. This can take various forms that include the measurement of levels of practitioners' CC in response to education about it and evaluation of the effectiveness of culturally competent service delivery (Boyle & Springer, 2001). However, it is particularly difficult to evaluate because there is no clear definition of CC; its conceptualization lacks a coherent theory base (Williams, 2006), and "the majority of [contemporary] researchers define cultural competence as a developmental process" (Boyle & Springer, 2001, p. 57) that requires extended time. Derald Sue (see, for example, 1981, 1995, 2006) is a leading scholar who has addressed CC on an organizational level, and his tripartite conceptualization of CC (awareness, knowledge, and skills) provides the foundation for instrument development designed to measure cultural competencies of individual counselors. However, Ridley, Baker, and Hill (2001) called for a refinement in Sue's measures. Geron's (2002) following assertion still carries weight: Before the effectiveness and utility of CC training is considered effective, better models and measures are needed. Despite the earlier mentioned problems, Boyle and Springer (2001) and others argued that the social work profession needs to "incorporate culturally competent methodologies into education and social service delivery systems . . . [and] empirical validation of the efficacy of these efforts [is] greatly needed" (p. 69). However, even assuming that CC can be measured, it surely behooves the profession to ascertain first whether what is measured is of benefit to clients. And on this important question, the jury is yet out (Davis, 2007).

Furthermore, Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) asserted that in contrast to defining CC as a discrete endpoint, physicians (and, by extension, other helping professionals) should strive for *cultural humility*, defined as follows:

A process that requires humility as individuals continually engage in self-reflection and self-critique as lifelong learners and reflective practitioners, it requires humility in how physicians bring into check the power imbalances that exist in the dynamics of physician-patient communication by using patient-focused interviewing and care, and it is a process that requires humility to develop and maintain mutually respectful and dynamic partnerships with communities. (p. 118)

Social workers such as Dyché and Zayas (2001) asserted that reshaping the outcome measures of cultural sensitivity from one of competence to one of humility and empathy is needed. Indeed, NASW's (2001) *Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice* also exhort social workers to maintain self-reflection and self-awareness of one's own culture and one's biases. Involving the patient and the community as partners is proposed, and this is certainly in keeping with social work's client-centered approach. Unfortunately, "mastery of a theoretically finite body of knowledge" (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998, p. 117) is often sought in social work's and other helping professions' literature, conferences, and trainings on CC. The presentation of discrete facts about an ethnic group appears to dominate. This fosters the belief that such knowledge leads to competence and repeatedly overshadows the more fluid aspects of CC that are discussed in this article. Semantics matter; the mere changing of the term "competence" to "humility" would instantly convey expectations of openness, respect, sensitivity, and life-long self-critique that are required for enlightened practice.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, we have argued that informed social work practice requires knowledge in substantive areas that include racism, structural inequalities, and health disparities. We also acknowledge that grand narratives may enhance understanding between peoples. In light of globalization, emigration, and blended families (not only within groups, but across

ethnic and racial groups), race and ethnicity are so varied that grand narratives on culture seem less meaningful today than they did just 30 years ago. For example, Norton's (1978) *dual perspective*, recommending an awareness of majority and minority cultures, appears limited in view of the multiplicity of identities evident today.

In summary, we argue that current conceptualizations of CC suffer from four major flaws: (1) The overemphasis on a priori knowledge of cultural difference is contrary to the modern social work practice of learning from the client. In cases where a priori knowledge appears to apply it is, we argue, incumbent upon the social worker to verify its relevance and validity with the clients—be they individuals, organizations, or communities. (2) Descriptions of cultural differences are, by definition, stereotypical and may not reflect the uniqueness of the individual. (3) Oversensitivity to cultural differences may lead to a privileging of group rights that is at odds with social work's core value of individual self-determination. (4) CC is so ill defined that it is unclear whether competence can ever be determined.

We believe that before the conceptualization of CC is further developed and, more important, before CC is further incorporated into social work education and practice, it is essential to address these fundamental tensions that are in contradiction to social work's historical values and principles as currently understood by the profession. As Hopps (1982), editor of *Social Work's* previous special issue on people of color, stated 25 years ago: "Social workers have much to accomplish" (p. 5). **SW**

## REFERENCES

- Agbayani-Siewert, P. (2004). Assumptions of Asian American similarity: The case of Filipino and Chinese American students. *Social Work, 49*, 39-51
- American Counseling Association. (2005). *ACA code of ethics*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed., text rev.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Anderson, J. (2003a). Ethnic-sensitive social work practice framework. In J. Anderson & Carter, R. B. (Eds.), *Diversity perspectives for social work practice* (pp. 41-46). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Anderson, J. (2003b). Strengths perspective. In J. Anderson & R. B. Carter (Eds.), *Diversity perspectives for social work practice* (pp. 11-20). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Anderson, J., & Carter, R. W. (Eds.). (2003). *Diversity perspectives for social work practice*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Appiah, K. A. (1994). Identity, authenticity, survival: Multicultural societies and social reproduction. In A. Gutmann (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the politics*

- of recognition (pp. 149–163). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Appiah, K. A. (2003, December). *Princeton lecture on the ethics of identity*. Retrieved April 5, 2009, from <http://www.appiah.net/audiolinks.html>
- Appiah, K. A. (2005). *The ethics of identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Appiah, K. A., & Gates, H. L. (1997). Global culture: A dictionary. In K. A. Appiah & H. L. Gates (Eds.), *The dictionary of global culture* (pp. ix–xiv). New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Armour, M. P., Bain, B., & Rubio, R. J. (2006). *Education for cultural competency: Tools for training field instructors*. Alexandria, VA: Council on Social Work Education.
- Association of Women's Rights in Development. (2008). *About AWRD*. Retrieved April 5, 2009, from <http://www.awid.org/About-AWID/What-is-AWID>
- Berg, I. K., & DeJong, P. (1996). Solution-building conversations: Co-constructing a sense of competence with clients. *Families in Society*, 77, 376–391.
- Blundo, R., & Greene, R. A. (1999). Social construction. In R. A. Greene (Ed.), *Human behavior theory and social work practice* (2nd ed., pp. 309–340). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Bourjolly, J. N., Sands, R. G., Solomon, P., Stanhope, V., Pernell-Arnold, A., & Finley, L. (2006). The journey toward intercultural sensitivity: A nonlinear process. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 14(3/4), 41–62.
- Boyle, D. P., & Springer, A. (2001). Toward a cultural competence measure for social work with specific populations. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 9(3–4), 53–71.
- Bullock, A., & Stallybrass, O. (Eds.). (1977). Culture. In *The Fontana dictionary of modern thought* (pp. 149–150). London: Fontana/Collins.
- Chambers Dictionary, The. (1998). Competence. Edinburgh, UK: Chambers Harrap Publishers Ltd.
- Congress, E. P. (2004). Cultural and ethical issues working with culturally diverse patients and their families: The use of the culturagram to promote cultural competent practice in health care setting. *Social Work in Health Care*, 39(3–4), 249–262.
- Council on Social Work Education. (2008). *Educational policy and accreditation standards*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Cowger, C. D. (1994). Assessing client strengths: Clinical assessment for client empowerment. *Social Work*, 39, 262–268.
- Davis, T. S. (2007). Mapping patterns of perceptions: A community-based approach to cultural competence assessment. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 17, 358–379.
- Dean, R. G. (2001). The myth of cross-cultural competence. *Families in Society*, 82, 623–630.
- de Anda, D. (Ed.). (1997). *Controversial issues in multiculturalism*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Denboba, D. (2005/2006). Cultural competence—What it is, what it's not. *Alabama Nurse*, 32, 11–12.
- Dyche, L., & Zayas, L. H. (2001). Cross-cultural empathy and training the contemporary psychotherapist. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 29, 245–258.
- Ewalt, P. L., & Mokuau N. (1995). Self-determination from a Pacific perspective. *Social Work*, 40, 168–175.
- Gadamer, H. (1975). *Truth and method* (2nd, rev. ed.) (J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall, Trans.). London: Continuum.
- Garcia, B., & Bregoli, M. (2000). The use of literary sources in the preparation of clinicians for multicultural practice. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 20(1–2), 77–102.
- Geron, S. M. (2002). Cultural competency: How is it measured? Does it make a difference? *Generations*, 26, 39–54.
- Goode, T. (2001, Fall/Winter). The role of self-assessment in achieving cultural competence. *The Cultural Competence Exchange*, p. 9.
- Gould, K. H. (1995). The misconstruing of multiculturalism: The Stanford Debate and social work. *Social Work*, 40, 198–205.
- Green, J. W. (1998). *Cultural awareness in the human services: A multi-ethnic approach* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gross, E. R. (1995). Deconstructing politically correct practice literature: The American Indian case. *Social Work*, 40, 206–213.
- Gross, G. D. (2000). Gatekeeping for cultural competence: Ready or not? Some post and modernist doubts. *Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work*, 5(2), 47–66.
- Gutmann, A. (1994). Introduction. In A. Gutmann (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the politics of recognition* (pp. 3–24). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Habermas, J. (1994). Struggles for recognition in the democratic constitutional state. In A. Gutmann (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the politics of recognition* (pp. 107–148). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Healy, L. M. (2001). *International social work: Professional action in an interdependent world*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hendricks, C. O. (2003). Learning and teaching cultural competence in the practice of social work. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 23(1–2), 73–86.
- Hodge, D. R., & Nadir, A. (2008). Moving toward culturally competent practice with Muslims: Modifying cognitive therapy with Islamic tenets. *Social Work*, 53, 31–41.
- Hopps, J. G. (1982). Oppression based on color [Editorial]. *Social Work*, 27, 3–5.
- Hunt, L. (2007). *Inventing of human rights: A history*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Johnson, Y. M., & Munch, S. (2006, December). *Towards a meaningful conceptualization of cultural competence*. Paper presented at the 3rd International Conference on Mental Health and Social Work, Hong Kong.
- Kirk, S. A. (2005). Introduction. In S. Kirk (Ed.), *Mental disorders in the social environment: Critical perspectives* (pp. 1–19). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Leigh, J. W. (1998). *Communicating for cultural competence*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Lum, D. (1992). *Social work practice and people of color: A process-stage approach* (2nd ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Manoleas, P. (1994). An outcome approach to assessing the cultural competence of MSW students. *Journal of Multicultural Social Work*, 3(1), 43–57.
- McGoldrick, M., Giordano, J., & Garcia-Preto, N. (Eds.). (2005). *Ethnicity and family therapy* (3rd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.
- Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General. (1999). Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health. Retrieved on January 29, 2008, from <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/mentalhealth/summary.html>
- Miller, R. L. (2007). Legacy denied: African American gay men, AIDS, and the black church. *Social Work*, 52, 51–61.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2000a). *Code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers*. Washington, DC: Author.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2000b). Cultural competence in the social work profession. In *Social work speaks: National Association of Social Workers policy statements* (5th ed., pp. 59–62). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

- National Association of Social Workers. (2001). *NASW standards for cultural competence in social work practice*. Washington, DC: Author.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2007). *Indicators for the achievement of NASW standards for cultural competence in social work practice*. Washington, DC: Author.
- National Conference on Social Welfare Proceedings (1874–1982). Retrieved January 27, 2008, from <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/n/ncosw/>
- Norton, D. G. (1978). *The dual perspective: Inclusion of the ethnic minority content in the social work curriculum*. New York: Council on Social Work Education.
- Payne, M. (2005). *Modern social work theory* (3rd ed.). Chicago: Lyceum Books.
- Pope-Davis, D. B., Liu, W. M., Toporek, R. L., & Brittan-Powell, C. S. (2001). What's missing from multicultural competency research: Review, introspection, and recommendations. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology, 7*, 121–138.
- President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. (2003). *Achieving the promise: Transforming mental health care in America*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Ridley, C. R., Baker, D. M., & Hill, C. L. (2001). Critical issues concerning cultural competence. *Counseling Psychologist, 29*, 822–832.
- Robbins, S. P., Chatterjee, P., & Canda, E. R. (2006). *Contemporary human behavior theory: A critical perspective for social work* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Rothman, J. (2001). Approaches to community intervention. In J. Rothman, J. L. Erlich, & J. E. Tropman (Eds.), *Strategies of community intervention* (6th ed., pp. 27–64). Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock.
- Rothman, J. (2008). *Cultural competence in process and practice: Building bridges*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Saleebey, D. (2005). *Strengths perspective in social work practice* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Schlesinger, E. G., & Devore, W. (1995). Ethnic-sensitive practice. In R. L. Edwards (Ed.-in-Chief), *Encyclopedia of social work* (19th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 902–908). Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- Seeley, K. M. (2004). Short-term intercultural psychotherapy: Ethnographic inquiry. *Social Work, 49*, 121–130.
- Sue, D. W. (1981). *Counseling the culturally different: Theory and practice*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Sue, D. W. (1995). Multicultural organizational development: Implications for the counseling profession. In J. G. Ponterotto, M. J. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 474–492). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Sue, D. W. (2006). *Multi-cultural social work*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Taylor, C. (1991). *The ethics of authenticity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, C. (1994). The politics of recognition. In A. Gutmann (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the politics of recognition* (pp. 25–73). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Terracciano, A., Abdel-Khalek, A. M., Adam, N., Adamovova, L., Ahn, C., Ahn, H., et al. (2005). National character does not reflect mean personality trait levels in 49 cultures. *Science, 310*, 96–100.
- Tervalon, M., & Murray-Garcia, J. (1998). Cultural humility versus cultural competence: A critical distinction in physician training outcomes in multicultural education. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved, 9*(20), 117–122.
- Trattner, W. I. (1998). *From poor law to welfare state* (6th ed.). New York: Free Press.
- Uehara, E. S., Sohng, S., Bending, R., L., Seyfried, S., Richey, C. A., & Morelli, P., et al. (1996). Toward a values-based approach to multicultural social work research. *Social Work, 41*, 613–621.
- United Nations Population Fund. (2005). *Asia and the Pacific*. Retrieved April 22, 2007, from <http://www.unfpa.org/asiapacific/index.cfm>
- van Wormer, K. (1997). *Social welfare: A world view*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Victorian Transcultural Psychiatric Unit. (2007). *About VTPU*. Retrieved April 27, 2007, from <http://www.vtpu.org.au/about/>
- Weaver, H. N. (1999). Indigenous people and the social work profession: Defining culturally competent services. *Social Work, 44*, 217–225.
- Williams, C. C. (2006). The epistemology of cultural competence. *Families in Society, 87*, 209–220.
- Yan, M. C., & Wong, Y. R. (2005). Rethinking self-awareness in cultural competence: Toward a dialogic self in cross-cultural social work. *Families in Society, 86*, 181–188.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Intersectionality and feminist politics. *European Journal of Women's Studies, 13*(3), 193–209.

*Yvonne M. Johnson, PhD, MSc, LCSW, is assistant professor, and Shari Munch, PhD, MSW, LCSW, is associate professor, School of Social Work, Rutgers University, The State University of New Jersey, 536 George Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901. The authors thank Jennifer Decker, graduate research assistant, for her assistance in the preparation of this paper. Also, they thank Arnab Chakladar for his comments on an earlier draft of the manuscript. Address correspondence to Yvonne M. Johnson, School of Social Work, Rutgers University, 536 George Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901; e-mail: yjohnson@ssw.rutgers.edu.*

Original manuscript received April 30, 2007  
Final revision received January 26, 2009  
Accepted February 3, 2009

## PRACTICE UPDATES

Are you involved in a program, research project, practice innovation, or other effort that may interest readers? Send your article (six double-spaced pages or fewer) to Practice Updates, *Social Work*, NASW Press, 750 First Street, NE, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20002-4241.

Copyright of *Social Work* is the property of National Association of Social Workers and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.