

A Futurist Approach to Social Work Ethics for Students and Faculty



Allan E. Barsky, JD, MSW, PhD

Barsky@Barsky.Org

<https://barsky.org>

April 1, 2023 – 9:45 to 11:15 AM

BPD Conference - East N; Birmingham, AL



Objectives

Engage

students & colleagues in constructive discussions of SW ethics from futurist perspectives

Educate & Empower

students to use foresight, imagination, and creativity to envision how ethics may evolve—or should evolve

Apply

- tenets of futurism to help students & colleagues explore how various ethical issues may evolve.

Futurism

studying
the future

to
anticipate

analyze,
and

prepare for
coming
changes.

Laura Nissen

Association of Futurist Professionals



**What is
futurist
SW
ethics?**

Strategies for futurist thinking...



Imagining (creative)

Envisioning (aspirational)

Study trends, data, opportunities, challenges

Asking “what if...”

Exploring what “could be”

Exploring what “should be”

Science Fiction

Think of a
classic
sci-fi novel or
movie

How has
yesterday's
“sci-fi”
predicted
today's
“science fact”?

Futurist Ethics: Using our Moral Imagination

Questions we may ask to reflect (our own thoughts, forecasting, and imagination) and to engage others in futurist discussions:

- How is society changing?
- How might SW practice change?
- How can we prepare – morally/ethically – for these changes?
- How can we take moral leadership on changes?
- How can we be proactive & build on moral opportunities?

EXERCISE: Recent Societal Trends: Using Foresight

What are some recent trends in society?

Select 1 change: If this change continues, what ethical or moral issues may arise?

What are the moral implications? How can we address them?

Examples of recent changes or trends

1. Abortion bans
2. "Stop WOKE Act"
3. "Don't Say Gay" laws
4. Global climate change
5. New technology
6. Pandemics
7. Aging populations
8. More people seeking refuge from violence
9. Advances in neuroscience...

AI

Consider possibilities!

Uncover patterns

Explore signals:
What's going on here? What's causing this trend?

What are potential uses of Artificial Intelligence in Social Work Practice?

Look back to see forward!

What new ethical issues & opportunities re: Informed consent? Boundaries? Human relationships?

Create communities – Discuss, envision, & think together

Predicting the Past

- How has social work practice evolved since 1996?
- What changes have been made to the COE and how ethics have been taught since 1996?
- How might these trends be used to predict future changes?

Future of Social Work Practice

How might SW practice change in next 10 years?



What types of changes to our COE may be desirable to meet the needs of future practice?

Transborder SW

Currently: SW regulation is
“state by state”

How should SW regulation
change given SWs are
practicing across state &
international boundaries?

Interprofessional Practice

- ❖ How are SWs working in collaboration with other professions?
- ❖ What are some of the ethical risks as IP practice expands?
- ❖ How could SW education change given importance of IP?
- ❖ How could our ethics codes change?

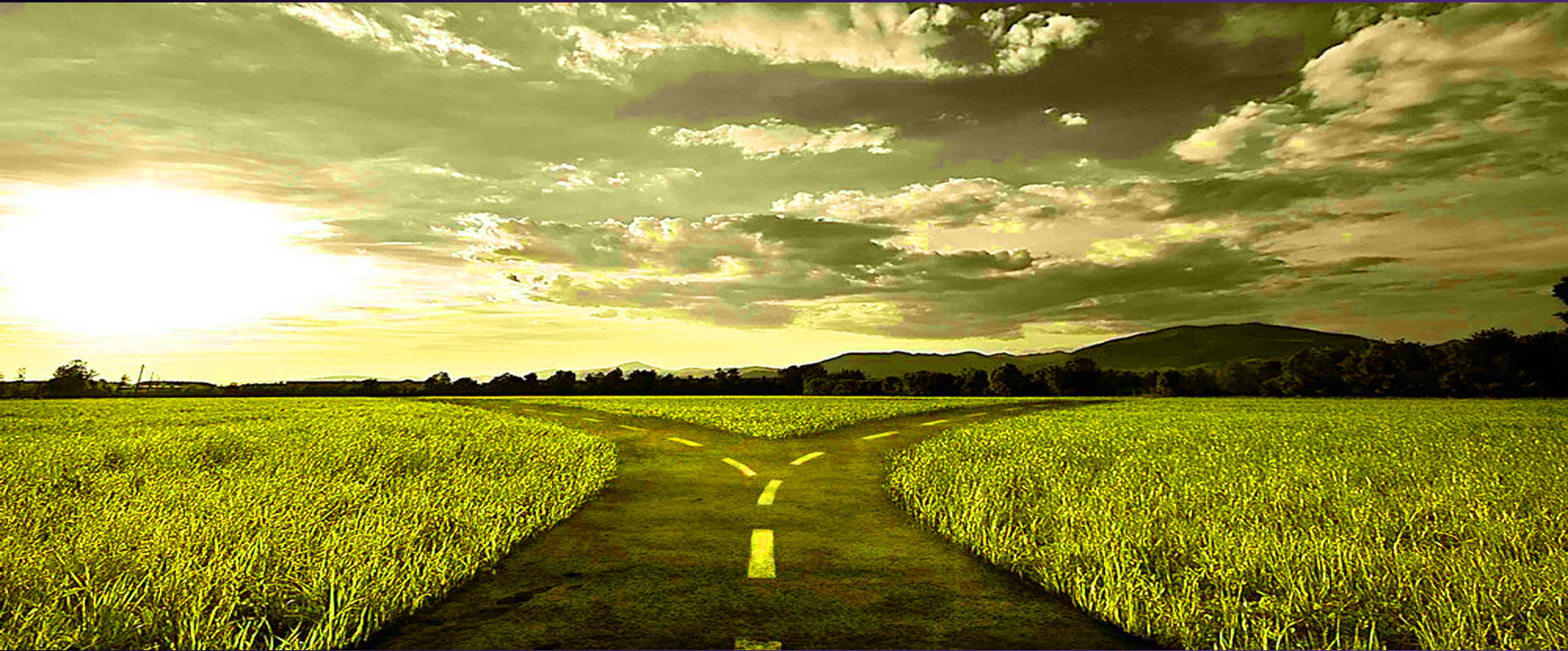
Privatization

- ❖ What are some examples of privatization of health care, social services, criminal justice, and education?
- ❖ In next 10 years – will there be further privatization or...?
- ❖ How will these changes affect SW practice?
- ❖ How will these changes affect SW ethics?

Social Justice and Anti-Oppressive Practice

- ❖ How have social work's notions of "social justice" and "anti-oppressive" practice evolved over time?
- ❖ What challenges have arisen?
- ❖ How can we respond to backlash – "Stop Woke Act"
- ❖ Moving forward, what might SJ and AOP look like in the future?

**If you don't know where you are going, any road will
get you there. ~ Lewis Carroll**



— People with Disabilities

- Who makes decisions - client or surrogate?
- Mental capacity as either/or
- Is there another way?
- Nonbinary approach to capacity to make decisions

Holler & Werner, 2022

Use of supported decision making for people with cognitive impairments

What do we mean by “SW in virtual spaces”?

Videoconferencing

Automated Intervention Apps, BITs

Electronic Records, e-Payments

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

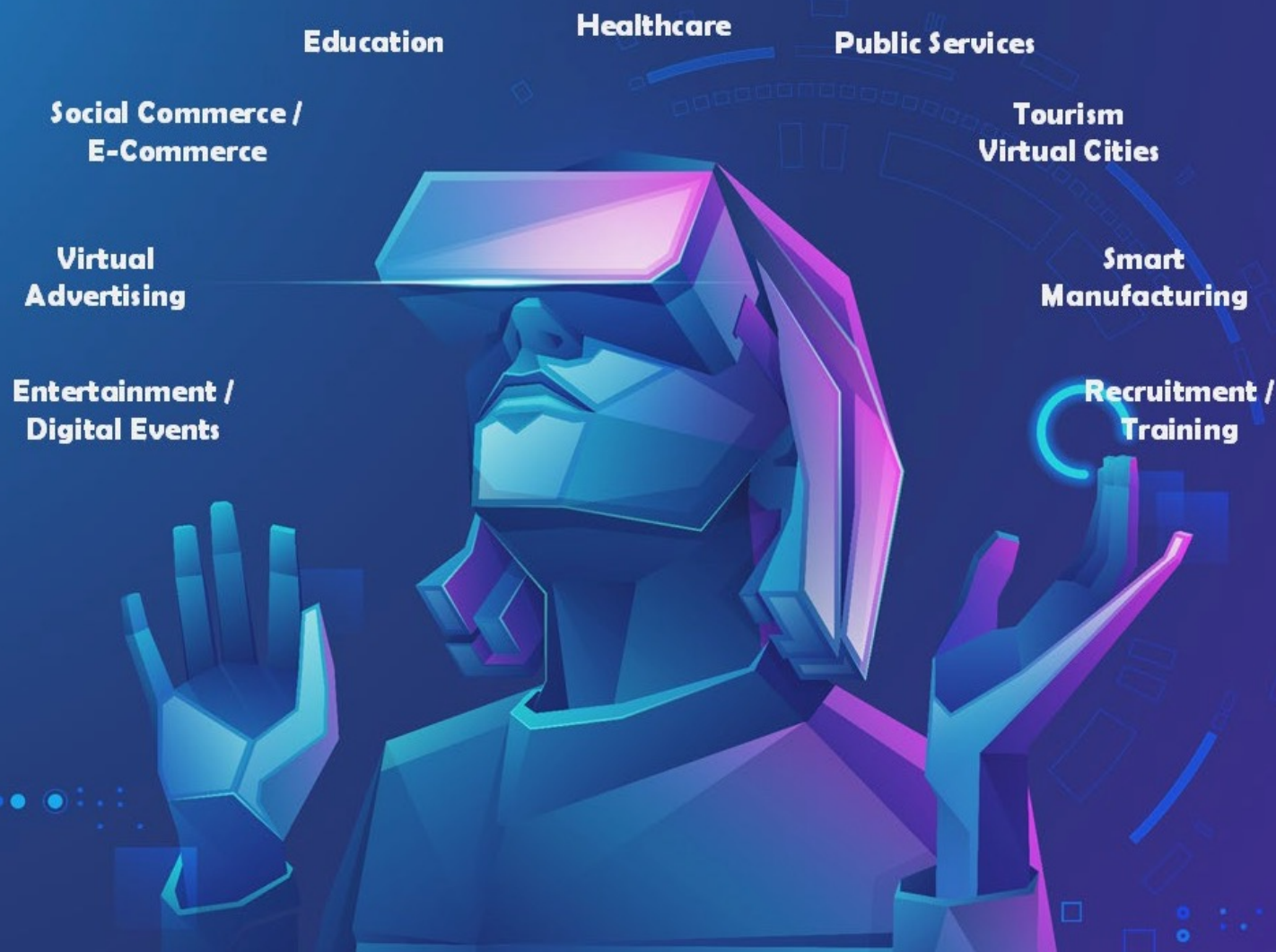
Social Robots, Electronic Monitors

Text-Based Counseling

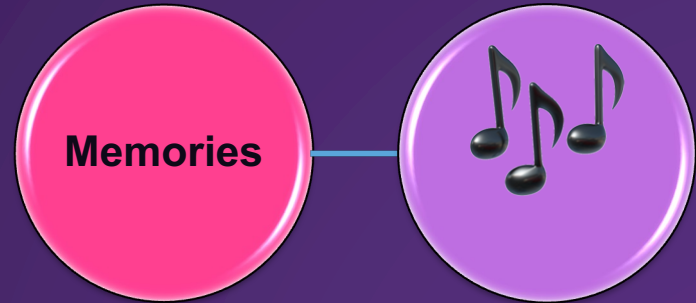
Avatars, Holograms, Metaverse

Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality

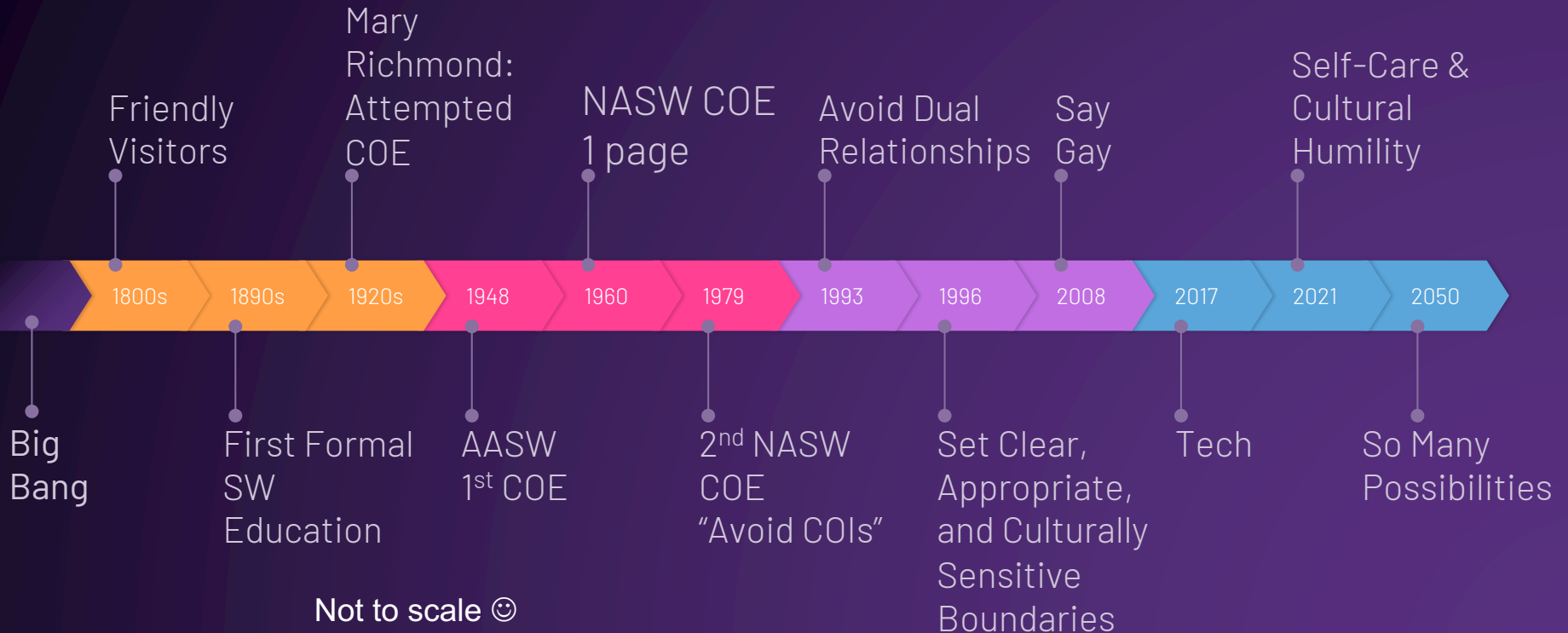




Remembering our past... to consider our future



TIMELINE: SW Ethics and Boundaries



NASW COE 2017: Tech Updates – 1.06

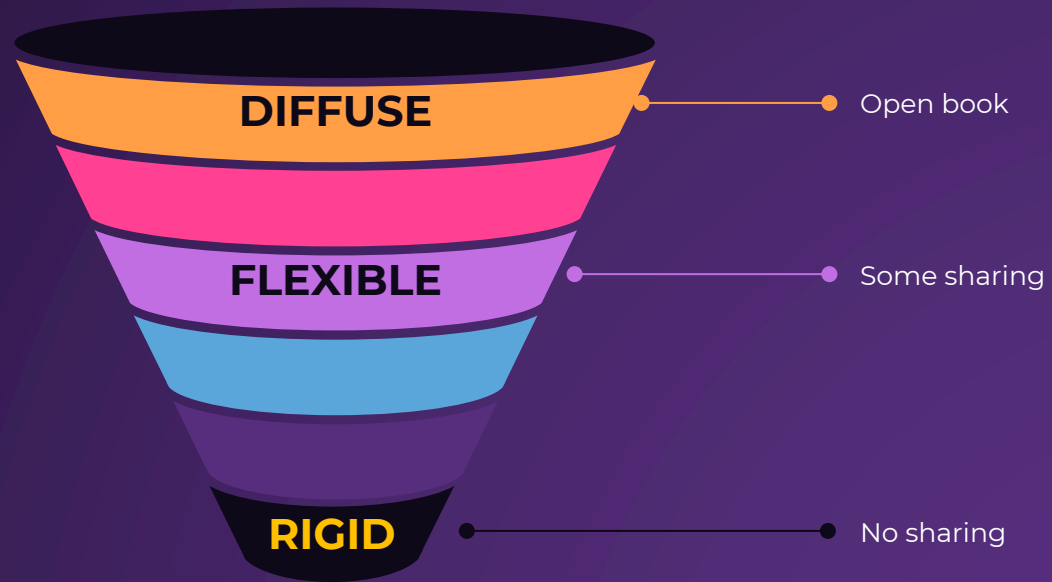
- Avoid communication with clients using tech for personal or non-work purposes
- Be aware posting personal information on websites might cause boundary confusions, inappropriate dual relationships, or harm to clients
- Be aware that personal affiliations may affect ability to effectively work with particular clients
- Avoid accepting requests or engaging in personal relationships with clients on social networking sites



Tension

Where to draw the line:
personal vs. professional

How much do we share with clients?



How can we teach Siri and Alexa to maintain appropriate boundaries?

- How many bowel movements have you had today?
- Why haven't you had any dates in the last six months?
- It sounds like you're feeling a bit depressed today. May I play "Happy" by Pharrell Williams on Apple Music?

Maintaining Boundaries:

- staying within our professional roles



— Legal Trends

Licensure

HIPAA

Antiracism

Anti-oppression

Malpractice

Lawsuits and

Licensure

Violations: Online
evidence

Interstate

Compacts

Confidentiality

Duty to report...



With tech / internet, do we all live in a small community?



Assessing Ethical Goods and Ethical Risks



Strategies – Ethics & Boundaries in Virtual Spaces

- Consider options
- Best practices – research, reflective practice
- New practices – document rationale, measures taken
- Informed consent
- Update agency policies
- Update COEs
- Update Laws

What can we learn from all the “bad stuff” happening today?



- War
 - Authoritarianism
 - Political polarization
 - Racism
 - Homophobia & Transphobia
 - Restrictions on civil rights: voting, freedom of speech, academic freedom, & reproductive rights
- ✓ Let's get Political
 - ✓ Social Work without Boundaries?
 - ✓ Have we been too timid?

“Technology is a useful servant but a dangerous master.”

~ Christian Lous Lange

— Imagine there's no....

- Countries
- States
- HIPAA
- Court system
- Police
- Punishment

It's easy if you try...



— Possibility! ~ Harmonize

CEEK

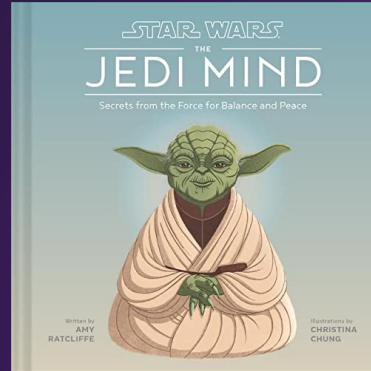


Harmonizing:

- ❖ laws
- ❖ codes of ethics

— Imagine there is...

- Openness
- Acceptance
- Trust
- Honesty
- True JEDI
- Human-Affirming Technology



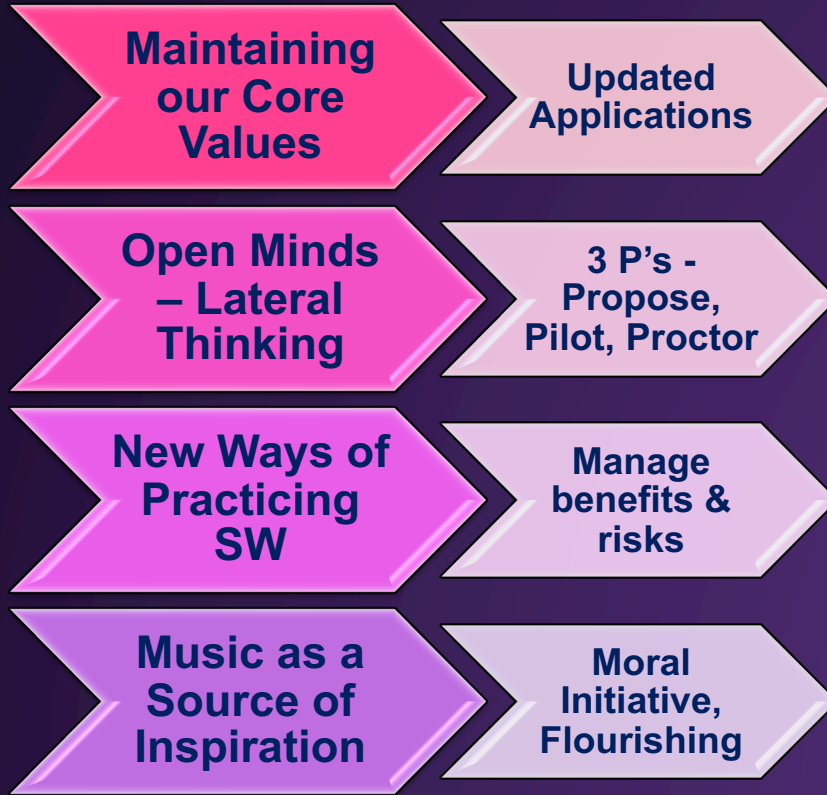
And SWs will live as one...

- Do meaningful work
- Flourish
- Be valued
- Enjoy great self-care
- Partners with the people we serve

_ Reactions / Questions ?



Key Takeaways





References

- ❖ Apgar, D., (2022). Social work licensure portability: A necessity in a Post-COVID-19 world. *Social Work*, 67, 381–390.
- ❖ Association of Futurist Professionals. (n.d.) Vision. <https://www.apf.org/page/MissionVision>
- ❖ Barsky, A. E. (2017). Social work practice and technology: Ethical issues and policy responses. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 35(1), 1-12.
- ❖ Barsky, A. (2018). Technology and boundary concerns in social work field education. *Journal of Practice Teaching & Learning*, 16(1), 81-98.
- ❖ Barsky, A. E. (2019). *Ethics and values in social work: An integrated approach for a comprehensive curriculum* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- ❖ Barsky, A. E. (2023). *Essential ethics in social work practice*. Oxford University Press.

- ❖ Frennert, S. (2020). Moral distress and ethical decision-making of eldercare professionals involved in digital service transformation. *Disability & Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, 1-10.
- ❖ Hilty, D. M., Gentry, M. T., McKean, A. J., Cowan, K. E., Lim, R. F., & Lu, F. G. (2020). Telehealth for rural diverse populations: *Telebehavioral and cultural competencies, clinical outcomes and administrative approaches. mHealth*, 6, 20. <https://doi.org/10.21037/mhealth.2019.10.04>
- ❖ Lee, C., Wong, J., Lim, Z., Tho, B., Kwek, S., & Shim, K. (2019). How does fake news spread: Raising awareness & educating the public with a simulation tool. *IEEE International Conference on Big Data (Big Data)*, 6119-6121, <https://doi.org/10.1109/BigData47090.2019.9005953>
- ❖ Leonhard, R. (2016). *Technology vs. humanity*. Author.
- ❖ Mishna, F., Sanders, J., Sewell, K., & Milne, E. (2021). Teaching note: Preparing social workers for the digital future of social work practice. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 57(Sup.1), 19–26.

- ❖ National Association of Social Workers. (2021). Code of Ethics. Author.
- ❖ National Association of Social Workers, Council on Social Work Education, Association of Social Work Boards, & Clinical Social Work Association. (2017). *Practice standards on social work and technology*. NASW.
- ❖ Nissen, L. (2020) Social work and the future in a post-covid 19 world: A foresight lens and a call to action for the profession. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 38(4), 309–330.
- ❖ Oviatt, S. (2021). Technology as infrastructure for dehumanization: Three hundred million people with the same face. Proceedings of the 2021 International Conference on Multimodal Interaction (pp. 278–287).
- ❖ Reamer, F. G. (2021). *Boundary issues and dual relationships in the human services* (3rd ed.). Columbia University Press.
- ❖ Reamer, F. G. (2021). Sexual boundary violations in the digital age: New frontiers and emerging challenges. In A. Steinberg, J. L. Alpert, & C. A. Courtois (Eds.), *Sexual boundary violations in psychotherapy* (pp. 185–204). American Psychological Association.

- ❖ Sambrooks, K., Lockerbie, L., Majid, S. & Gannon, T. (2022), Clinicians' perceptions of virtual reality for firesetting, *Journal of Forensic Practice*, 24, 404-419. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFP-05-2022-0027>
- ❖ Steiner, O. (2020). Social work in the digital era: Theoretical, ethical, and practical considerations. *British Journal of Social Work*, 51, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcaa160>
- ❖ van Belkom R. (2020). The impact of artificial intelligence on the activities of a futurist. *World Futures Review*, 12(2), 156-168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1946756719875720>
- ❖ Zur, O. (n.d.). Dual relationships, multiple relationships, boundaries, boundary crossings & boundary violations in psychotherapy, counseling & mental Health. <https://www.zurinstitute.com/boundaries-dual-relationship>

PowerPoint available at: <https://barsky.org>