A Futurist Approach to Social Work Ethics for Students and Faculty

Allan E. Barsky, JD, MSW, PhD
Barsky@Barsky.Org
https://barsky.org
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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

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What is futurist SW ethics?
### Strategies for futurist thinking…

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imagining</td>
<td>(creative)</td>
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<td>Envisioning</td>
<td>(aspirational)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study trends</td>
<td>data, opportunities, challenges</td>
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<td>Asking</td>
<td>“what if…”</td>
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<td>Exploring</td>
<td>what “could be”</td>
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<td>Exploring</td>
<td>what “should be”</td>
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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...
What are potential uses of Artificial Intelligence in Social Work Practice?

Consider possibilities!

Uncover patterns

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

Look back to see forward!

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

Create communities – Discuss, envision, & think together

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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 Caroll
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”?  

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<th>Videoconferencing</th>
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<td>Automated Intervention Apps, BITs</td>
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<td>Electronic Records, e-Payments</td>
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<td>Artificial Intelligence (AI)</td>
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<td>Social Robots, Electronic Monitors</td>
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<td>Text-Based Counseling</td>
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<td>Avatars, Holograms, Metaverse</td>
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<td>Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality</td>
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Remembering our past... to consider our future

Memories

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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 Comacts Confidentiality Duty to report...
With tech / internet, do we all live in a small community?
Assessing Ethical Goods and Ethical Risks

- Distrust
- Exploitation
- Autonomy
- Social Justice
- Connection
- Relationships
- Empathy
- Warmth
- Lawsuits
- Trauma
- Service
- Integrity
- Nonmaleficence
- Respect
- Beneficence
- Big Data, Privacy, Unauthorized Access

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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

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

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Reactions / Questions?
Key Takeaways

- Maintaining our Core Values
- Updated Applications
- Open Minds – Lateral Thinking
  - 3 P’s - Propose, Pilot, Proctor
- New Ways of Practicing SW
  - Manage benefits & risks
- Music as a Source of Inspiration
  - Moral Initiative, Flourishing
References


*PowerPoint available at: https://barsky.org*