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To cite this article: George W. Turner, Al Vernacchio & Brent Satterly (2018) Sexual Justice Is Social Justice: An Activity to Expand Social Work Students Understanding of Sexual Rights and Injustices, *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 38:5, 504-521, DOI: 10.1080/08841233.2018.1523825

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2018.1523825>



Published online: 02 Nov 2018.



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# Sexual Justice Is Social Justice: An Activity to Expand Social Work Students Understanding of Sexual Rights and Injustices

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## ABSTRACT

Social work education could benefit from an explicit educational framework that combines social justice and sexuality: sexual justice. However, there is a paucity of literature in social work discussing this critical issue. This article helps equip social workers to challenge social injustice through a lens of sexuality and builds a conceptual framework by examining sexual justice through pillars of social work: human dignity, community and solidarity, rights and responsibilities, priority for the poor and vulnerable, and peace. An activity providing micro and macro case discussions is presented to help infuse sexual justice into social work programs.

## KEYWORDS

Social justice; sexuality;  
social work education;  
human rights

## Introduction

Despite social work scholars Turner and Crane (2016a) advocating for the profession to embrace *sexual justice* within the long-standing tradition of social justice work, there is a paucity of examples of teaching activities integrating content about sexuality and social justice within established social work curricula. Others (Begun, Kattari, McKay, Ramseyer-Winter, & O'Neill, 2016) have noted this gap as well, suggesting that social work education needs a “formal inclusion [to] encourage skill development and competence regarding sexual and reproductive health topics encountered in practice” (p. 2). This article offers a lesson plan on sexual justice as an attempt to bridge this pedagogical fissure, the rationale for which is based on Turner's assertion that “*sexual justice* is social justice” (p. 45). It is posited that framing sexual justice as social justice may enhance student learning and professional development, especially considering how sex can often be used negatively to fuel oppression and a myriad of sexual injustices, such as breastfeeding stigma (Burns, 2013), shaming survivors of sexual trauma (Adler, 2013), and even censoring social work dissertations on sexuality (Hayoun, 2015).

However, when teaching about social justice, instructors from more traditional social work roles or backgrounds (i.e., child welfare, mental health, domestic violence, poverty) may be more inclined to pull exemplars from those areas with which they are familiar to support their lectures. This lack of experience with sexual justice may translate to professors having no readily available student learning activities to offer. Furthermore, faculty may not be skilled or comfortable in discussing sexuality topics in the classroom, or see the connection of sexuality to social justice. This article is an attempt to support social work instructors in incorporating sexual justice content by providing an activity to help students in building their competency in this arena.

The authors aim to answer the question: How can social work instructors infuse sexual justice within social justice? In this article, the definition of human sexuality is first presented, followed by an examination of sexuality from a social work perspective. Next, the concept of sexual justice is situated within social justice and is further grounded by a review of sexual rights to establish this discussion as critical to social work education. A definition of sexual justice is offered, followed by connecting the concept of sexual justice to key principles of social justice. Finally, the article offers conceptually focused activities to help students comprehend the principle of sexual justice and concludes by addressing teaching implications.

### **Human sexuality**

The National Guidelines Task Force (2004) of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS, 2016) addresses comprehensive sexuality education from a kindergarten through 12th grade perspective. SIECUS provides a holistic definition of human sexuality as “a natural part of being human; [it] is multifaceted, having biological, social, psychological, spiritual, ethical, and cultural dimensions” (p. 51). The World Health Organization (2006) defined sexual health as “a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity” (Defining Sexual Health section, para. 4).

### **Pathology focus**

Because human sexuality is “imbued with symbolic meaning and social significance” (Hawkes & Scott, 2005, p. 7), it often reflects pathological social mores, and the cultural messages around sexuality are shaped with a pathological focus. In a national qualitative study assessing how Americans view sexuality, Real Reason (a linguistics institute) and the American Civil Liberties Union found that Americans view sexuality in three ways: (a) Goo, (b) Opponent, and (c)

Protection (Real Reason, 2008a, 2008b). First, sexuality is framed as “goo,” meaning gross, and is reflected in such cultural phrases as “your mind is in the gutter” and “you have a dirty mind.” Second, sexuality as an “opponent” is something (or someone) with whom a person grapples, struggles, or strives to overcome. Common linguistic exemplars of this concept include “I’m struggling with my sexuality” or “I resisted temptation.” Last, framing sexuality as something from which to be protected against is prominent. For example, children are considered innocent beings that must be protected from sexuality at all costs. These pathological cultural frameworks contribute to a nonholistic approach to human sexuality as well as instances of social injustice.

In the United States, religion has certainly had an impact in this regard. Allen and Brooks’s (2012) study found that most students in a college sample were raised with traditional religious training (e.g., Catholic, conservative Christian), which influenced their opinions about human sexuality. Students who espoused more conservative attitudes about human sexuality were more likely to delay sexual activity and less likely to engage in high-risk sexual behaviors than their more liberal counterparts (Ahrold, Farmer, Trapnell, & Meston, 2011; Beckwith & Morrow, 2005). However, the protective factors sometimes associated with conservatism may subsequently be offset by harmful effects of guilt (Davidson, Moore, & Ullstrup, 2004).

Social work’s strengths-based perspective provides a positive counterforce to such messages. For example, a social worker developed the Circles of Sexuality framework (Dailey, 1981) as a more holistic sexuality model that looks beyond an intercourse-centric and pathology focus to five distinct areas encompassed by a person’s cultural, religious, and community values. Consider, for example, the curriculum termed Life Planning Education (Advocates for Youth, 2007), a comprehensive sex education curriculum using the Circles of Sexuality as a frame of reference, or the Unitarian Universalist Our Whole Lives (<https://uua.org/re/owl>) curriculum, which uses the SIECUS (2004) guidelines as its holistic approach to sexuality education.

It is important to note that sexuality educators and professional training programs in human sexuality do not view religion negatively but rather strive to be inclusive of differing faiths and religious practices within a comprehensive, medically accurate sexuality education framework. In fact, sexuality educators have partnered with religious organizations to champion the connections between healthy sexuality and healthy spirituality. Partnership examples include the Incarnation Institute for Sex and Faith (<https://incarnationinsitute.org>), the Religious Institute (<http://religiousinstitute.org>), and the website titled Religious Tolerance (<http://religioustolerance.org>).

## Human sexuality from a social work perspective

According to Turner (2012), human sexuality, a taboo subject for many, is “often shamed, segregated, and silenced” (p. 5), especially in disenfranchised communities. However, social workers “consider the person as a sexual being from a holistic perspective” (Ingersoll & Satterly, 2016, p. 2). Sexuality’s centrality in human life demands that social workers be sexually literate. Nevertheless, Jeanmarie Zippo stated that society is “sexually repressed to the point of being sexually obsessed” (Vernacchio, 2014, p. ix). Not only is it therefore important to ground our discussion about sexual justice within larger social norms, social work educators specifically must consider their students’ prior sexuality education. Locating this lesson in the experience of our students means having an awareness that students may have gone through a secondary education system during the 1990s that promoted *abstinence until marriage*. The Waxman Report (2009) found that many abstinence-only programs taught scientifically inaccurate information, such as that the HIV could pass through a condom, which is not true. Hence it is crucial for social work educators to understand these realities, because this may be the social milieu many of our students grew up in with respect to sexuality, and these messages and values may still influence the students as they pursue their social work education.

Although authors have highlighted the relevance of human sexuality (such as sexual pleasure) for persons with intellectual disabilities (Turner & Crane, 2016b), both BSW and MSW students have reported a sense of inadequacy on how to address client sexuality (Logie, Bogo, & Katz, 2015). Indeed, social work education has often abandoned the strengths-based perspective when addressing sexuality-related issues (Ingersoll & Satterly, 2016), resulting in viewing client sexuality principally through the lenses of trauma, attachment disorders, or addiction. In fact, pathologizing and ignoring sexuality within social work education, practice, and research is a consistent phenomenon (Myers & Milner, 2007). Countering such an inappropriate pathological leaning, in a strengths-based profession, is a natural fit. The expansion of the primary social work value of social justice as sexual justice is aptly positioned for adoption of this approach.

## Sexual justice

This intersectionality of sexuality within structural oppression—such as racism, homophobia, sexism, transphobia, sizeism, and ageism—positions it as a social justice issue. Teunis and Herdt (2007) contended that sexual inequality is structural violence intersecting often with these other forms of inequality; it may “disqualify and discredit the full personhood of individuals” (p. 6). According to Mehrotra (2010), to understand the

interconnectedness of systems of oppression more effectively, social work scholars need to consider “migration, colonization, sexuality, ability, and other processes of oppression and identity” (p. 417). Turner, Pelts, and Thompson (2017) furthered this discourse by asking social workers to consider microaggressions against queer scholars. This call to action specifically implores social workers to view structural oppression experienced by sexual minority scholars within the academy, further framing sexual justice as social justice.

Galarza and Anthony (2015) attempted to conceptualize the term sexuality social justice. They noted that several scholars underscore a social justice approach (Bay-Cheng, 2010; Fried, 2013) in their discussions on sexual inequalities and sexual rights and urge social workers to move theoretical discussions of sexuality disparities into practice advocacy.

In this vein, Bay-Cheng (2010) highlighted that human sexuality is a cradle to grave issue, encouraged social workers to increase their sexual literacy, challenged the idea that sex is innately dangerous, and discussed sex-related risks faced by marginalized groups. Pointing to social work’s strengths perspective, systems approach, enhancement of individual and social well-being, and focus on social injustices, Bay-Cheng stated that social work is perfectly aligned with “holistic, positive sexuality as a matter of social justice” (p. 100).

Highlighting the significance of sexual and reproductive rights in the philosophical foundation and practice of social work, Alzate (2009) observed, “At the microlevel, practitioners may encounter a broad range of situations that deal with sexual and reproductive health; consequently, a sexual and reproductive rights framework strengthens their ability to serve under these circumstances” (p. 116). Whitaker, Weismiller, and Clark (2006) added, “Social work is the largest and most important social service profession in the United States” (p. 9). With health being the second most common practice field for master’s-level social workers (Whitaker et al., 2006), social workers are well positioned to promote sexual health and advocate for sexual rights.

### ***Sexual justice in social work education***

It may be argued that the idea of sexual justice is largely absent in social justice discourse. This may be exacerbated due to a lack of knowledge regarding sexual health and sexual rights. According to Teunis and Herdt (2007), both are lacking in the United States and are needed to advance social justice and sexual rights.

Course content on social justice that is lacking integration of human sexuality discussions misses important learning opportunities for social work students, including (a) having a richer, more comprehensive

understanding of social justice, one that addresses sexual injustices; (b) preparing them to address the topic of sexuality within practice settings; (c) extending human sexuality beyond micro practice training to the professional training of macro social workers; (d) fulfilling ethical responsibilities; and (e) being prepared to serve the whole client, including addressing sexual injustices. The need for social work educators to underpin their teaching of social justice with activities that address sexual injustices is illuminated in the literature by the following themes.

### ***Sexual rights as human rights***

The United Nations has affirmed that the “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” ([Universal Declaration of Human Rights, n.d.](#), para 1) and human sexuality is a human right. In response, there has been a movement to “integrate human rights into social work teaching, research and practice” (Reichert, 2003, p. 9). Usefully, an approach from a human rights framework may allow social workers to conceptualize sexuality within social justice (Ife, 2001). According to the World Association for Sexual Health’s ([WAS, 2014](#)) Declaration of Sexual Rights, “Sexual rights are grounded in universal human rights” (p. 1). WAS has crafted 16 sexual rights critical to a person’s manifestation of sexual health (e.g., consensual sex, freedom from forced sterilization, pleasurable sexual experiences, and access to sexual education).

### ***Sexual justice defined***

Sexual justice, with a critical lens examining power and privilege, is distinct from sexual health or sexual rights. Situated in an activist framework, sexual justice merges sexuality education with its focus on comprehensive, medically accurate sex education with social work focused on fighting oppression such as sexism, racism, ableism, and homophobia. Turner (2016) stated that “it can be challenging for even social workers to connect social justice and *sexual justice*” (p. 45). Although social workers generally are familiar with the idea of reproductive rights, women’s rights, and gay rights, this article offers a more broad conceptualization of sexual justice. Turner (2016) explained,

As important as reproductive justice is, the umbrella of *sexual justice* includes a depth of diverse topics beyond reproduction including but not limited to: increasing access to sexual health care, reducing LGBTQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning/queer] health disparities, eliminating school bullying, fighting for trans inclusivity, continuing the fight from marriage equality to gay adoption laws, providing comprehensive and medically accurate sexuality education, expanding privileged sexuality expression and representation in the media,

normalizing breastfeeding, eliminating rape culture, reducing sexuality negativity and increasing overall sexual literacy. (p. 45)

### ***Sexual justice is social justice***

Both the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2017) and the International Federation of Social Workers (2012) noted that social justice is a core value, and the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE, 2015) infused social justice within the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards. As a profession based in social justice (Reamer, 1998), social workers passionately work to combat oppression and discrimination in all forms, demanding action to address the unmet needs of marginalized communities. In this context, it is important to note that the CSWE (2015) has developed Competency 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice, that differentiates social justice from human rights while acknowledging how such variables are connected.

Nevertheless, social workers often have an abstruse definition of social justice (Reisch, 2002). The NASW Code of Ethics (2017) does not define social justice, yet it examines social injustice declaring that “social workers’ social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice” (p. 5). The Code of Ethics further states, “Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources” (p. 5). The CSWE (2015) addresses social justice in their education policy standard 2.1.5 by stating that curricula must “advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice” (p. 7).

### ***Application of social justice principles to human sexuality***

Social justice pedagogy strives to facilitate learning so that social work students can distinguish between personal values and justice-based principles such as self-determination (NASW, 2017), and Galarza and Anthony (2015) suggested that the profession consider “applying social work principles of social justice to concepts of human sexuality” (p. 27). In light of this suggestion, we have identified five key social work principles of social justice that can be applied to human sexuality:

- (1) Human Dignity: “Social workers promote clients’ socially responsible self-determination. Social workers seek to enhance clients’ capacity and opportunity to change and to address their own needs” (NASW Code of Ethics, 2017, Dignity and Worth of the Person section, pp. 5–6). Social workers address issues of domination, exploitation, and discrimination.



- (2) Community, Participation, Solidarity: “Social workers seek to strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, restore, maintain, and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations, and communities” (NASW Code of Ethics 2017, Importance of Human Relationships section, p. 6).
- (3) Rights and Responsibilities: Social justice is, “an ideal condition in which all members of a society have the same basic rights, and ... obligations” (Barker, 2003, pp. 404–405).
- (4) Priority for the Poor and Vulnerable: NASW (2017) stated, “Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. ... primarily on issues of poverty” (NASW Code of Ethics, 2017, Ethical Principle: Social Workers Challenge Social Injustice section, p. 1).
- (5) Promotion of Peace: The Code of Ethics further contextualizes social justice within peace, such as peace in our relationships and within ourselves. This framework can include freedom of gender expression, sexual identity awareness and acceptance, and healthy sexual relationships, and it may imply working against social injustice such as sexual violence, coercion, rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, bullying, forced sterilization, and abortion.

Social work pedagogy, which illustrates the connection of these sexual justice themes to the spectrum of social work practice, micro to macro, arguably enriches student education by preparing them to be sexually literate practitioners and to be able to see sexuality beyond an individual focus by addressing sexual inequalities to larger social, political, and policy issues.

### **The activity: Sexual justice**

The following section provides two in-class activities that could be introduced within a variety of social work courses and are not limited to social justice specific electives. The activities are designed to stimulate student conversations around sexual justice. Also, these exemplars may expand the conversation around its pedagogical application.

Materials required include a flipchart or whiteboard, markers, tape, 3 × 5 index cards (two per participant), and pencils (one per participant). Prior to class, one can use a flipchart sheet to display the following activity objectives: (a) Given a scenario involving a potential client, identify at least one principle of social justice to help bring about a successful resolution; (b) Given the five principles of social justice offered in this lesson, assess a client’s current situation in light of these principles; (c) Given the six aspects of human sexuality offered in this lesson, identify how a focus on social justice principles can enhance the quality of these aspects in an individual’s life.

After reading the objectives, the instructor should frame the rationale for the activity to set the stage. Discussion might include that social work professionals seek to better each client's individual situation and seek to make the larger society more just. The development of healthy sexuality is easier in a society where social justice principles are used to guide interactions, especially in the practitioner–client relationship. Social workers also must be able to identify barriers that can impede interactions with clients and use social justice principles to eliminate or mitigate these barriers.

After distributing one blank index card and pencil to each student, state that they should not write their names or any other identifying information on the card. Next ask them to write their own definition of the term *sexuality*. After they write their definitions, the cards will be collected and shuffled, and a random selection of the definitions will be read aloud to the group (all can be read if the group is small enough). Assure the participants that there are no right or wrong definitions and that their anonymity will be preserved. Give students 2 or 3 minutes to complete their definitions. Collect the cards, shuffle them, and read some or all of the students' definitions aloud. After they have been read, ask the students to share any themes the definitions revealed. (It is typical that definitions coalesce around the broad topics of genitals, gender, and/or sexual orientation.) Thank the participants for their contributions, then read the SIECUS definition of sexuality. Offer the following points to bring this section of the lesson to a close: (a) Human sexuality lasts from birth to death (LeVay & Valente, 2006). It impacts every interaction we have with another person, including the relationship between the social worker and client (Ingersoll & Satterly, 2016). (b) *Healthy sexuality* borrows from the WAS definition and is described as having an accurate and positive view of these aspects of sexuality, and the ability to act in the world in accordance with that accurate and positive view. (c) The word *sexuality* is neither limited to one aspect of ourselves nor strictly about one's sexual behavior (Dailey, 1981). This activity will look at six aspects that encompass human sexuality:

- (1) Biological Sex: Our reproductive capabilities, genitals capacity for arousal and sexual functioning, and one's overall body image and relationship to the body. The proper terminologies for labeling biological sex include *male*, *female*, and *intersex*.
- (2) Gender Identity: One's internal sense of one's gender that exists independently from our body and any outside messages telling us what our gender may be. Gender identity encompasses more than a binary option of man/woman and includes agender, genderqueer, transgender, gender fluid, gender diverse, two-spirit, and so on. (Further definitions can be found at *Gender Queer ID* (2015))

- (3) Gender Expression: The way individuals reveal their gender identity to the outside world, including but not limited to clothing, language, hobbies, food choices, profession, hairstyle, leisure activities, and sexual habits.
- (4) Sexual/Romantic Orientation: One's sexual/romantic attraction to or desire for others. Some people's sexual and romantic orientations are the same; other people may experience differences in their sexual orientation (who they are sexually attracted to) and their romantic orientation (who they have the capacity to fall in love with). Like gender identity, sexual and romantic orientation encompass much more than a binary option system and include identification as asexual, demisexual, pansexual, and graysexual. (Further definitions can be found at *The Thinking Asexual* (nd))
- (5) Sexual Behavior: Deliberate, consensual actions one takes, usually in response to one's sexual/romantic attractions or desires. However, sexual behaviors may be in accordance with one's attractions/desires, in reaction to them, or in some cases not connected at all to one's attractions/desires. There is a wide range of sexual behaviors in which individuals may engage.
- (6) Gender Roles/Scripts: External messages individuals continually receive from society in response to their actual or perceived biological sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual/romantic orientation, and/or sexual behavior. Gender scripts come from a myriad of sources, including media, family, religious organizations, the legal system, educational institutions, and cultural institutions. Gender scripts can be used to confine individuals to socially sanctioned categories rather than allowing individuals the freedom to define themselves in their own way.

Instructors may opt to discuss the preceding or show a short online YouTube video titled "Human Sexuality is Complicated" (Green, 2012) to familiarize students with these concepts. The instructor then would distribute a second blank index card. Again, students should not write their names or any other identifying information on the card. Ask them to write what they believe the difference is (if any) between equality and justice. Inform students that after they write their definitions, cards will be collected and shuffled and a random selection of the definitions will be read aloud to the group (all can be read if the group is small enough). Assure the participants that there are no right or wrong definitions and that anonymity will be preserved. After giving them 2 or 3 minutes to complete their definitions, collect the cards, shuffle them, and read the students' definitions aloud. Afterward, ask the students to share any themes the definitions revealed. (As an alternative to using index cards, the words *Sexuality*, *Equality*, and *Justice* may be written at

the top of sheets of newsprint or on the whiteboard. Students would then be invited to take a marker and write their definition of each term or to list examples.)

Thank the participants for their contributions, and offer the following points to bring this section of the lesson to a close:

- Equality and justice are not the same thing. There are several creative images online that illustrate this point. One example may be found at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/philozopher/10,368,966,406>.
- Equality entails giving everyone the same thing. Because people are not all the same, differences they may have will not be ameliorated if everyone gets the same thing. Equality tends to focus on what an individual is given in the here and now.
- Justice entails ensuring that each individual has the same access to success and concerns itself with *both* the here and now and the future. It identifies fundamental inequalities that exist at the outset, which might keep people from having access to the same successful outcomes. Pursuit of justice then attempts to correct those inequalities.
- There are five key social work principles of social justice. The instructor will then read from five flipchart sheets that have been placed around the room.

Having introduced both the aspects of sexuality and the principles of justice, explain to participants that they will now participate in activities that relate these concepts to the relationship between social workers and their clients.

The first activity, “Big Questions,” begins with the instructor dividing the large group into approximately five smaller groups, and each is given one question to discuss. One member of the group should take notes during the discussion so that key ideas may be shared with the larger group afterward. Give the students 5–10 minutes to discuss their question. After that time, each group should briefly report back to the large group, sharing its most important points from the discussion. Big questions to discuss are as follows:

- (1) What are examples of sexual behaviors and attitudes that ignore or violate the *Human Dignity* of individuals? Possible answers may include objectification of men and women by the media, sexual assault or abuse, bisexual erasure, or forced sterilization.
- (2) What are examples of how *Community, Participation, and Solidarity* are essential to the development of healthy sexuality? Possible answers may include organizations that serve specific constituencies, such as LGBTQ health centers, or affinity groups at schools, as well as

- intersectional work so that healthy sexuality is also free from racism, ageism, sexism, and so forth.
- (3) What are examples of specific *Rights and Responsibilities* that are essential to the development of healthy sexuality? Think about both individuals *and* institutions. Possible answers may include body autonomy; the right to comprehensive sexuality education; or protection from sexual assault, abuse, and harassment.
  - (4) Thinking of *Marginalized Communities*, (such as the poor) who might be (intentionally or not) ignored or left out of discussions of healthy sexuality? Possible answers may include polyamorous people, those with physical or intellectual disabilities, the elderly, sex workers, survivors of sexual abuse, persons convicted of sex crimes, agender or asexual individuals, and so on.
  - (5) What are examples of Peace-Promoting Behaviors that can help develop or enhance healthy sexuality? Possible answers may include negotiation skills for deciding sexual activity, fair fighting rules for relationships, de-escalation techniques in potentially violent situations, or development of empathy for people who are different from you.

The second activity, “Sexual Justice Scenarios,” again begins with the instructor dividing the large group into five smaller groups, and each is given a scenario to work on. This article provides 10 scenarios that include five micro- and five macro-focused situations. One member of the group should take notes during the discussion so that key ideas may be shared with the larger group afterward. Give the students 10 minutes to discuss their question, whereupon each group should briefly report back to the large group, sharing its most important points from the discussion. The following instructions should be given to the groups:

Read your scenario so that you know that all your group members heard it. The only information you have to work with is in the scenario. You may not create additional information. Your task is to examine the scenario using each of the 5 principles of social justice introduced in the workshop. Consider one concrete way each principle can be used to examine the situation, and how the principles, taken together, may be used in creating a social worker’s response. After all groups have finished, each will read its own scenario to the large group and share how it used principles of social justice in shaping a solution or response.

Prior to class, the instructor should type the following scenarios to be given to each group:

### ***Micro-level scenarios***

1. Your client is a cisgender, 40-year-old, Asian-heritage gay man who has recently been diagnosed with HIV. He is struggling with what approach to treatment he should use in response to his diagnosis. He prefers alternative therapies to pharmaceuticals but has been getting pushback from his family and friends, who are urging him to take a more standard approach to his diagnosis. He is seeking your help in exploring the range of different treatment options available and is asking for help in talking to his family about his wishes.

2. Your client is a cisgender, 25-year-old, African-heritage woman who has been identifying as bisexual for about a year. She has faced persistent dismissal when coming out to other people (family, friends, even coworkers) about her bisexual orientation. The dismissal seems to be less about her as a person than the reality of bisexuality. Responses have been emotionally hurtful. She has no desire to live in the closet, nor does she want to be an activist for the bisexual movement. She is seeking strategies for dealing with her situation.

3. Your client is a 60-year-old, cisgender, heterosexual European-heritage woman who has been married to her husband for over 40 years. Her husband was diagnosed 2 years ago with mild dementia, but the condition has been growing worse at a more rapid pace in the last 6 months. Her husband has become verbally and, on occasion, physically abusive to the client. The physical abuse has, so far, been limited to pushing and slapping the client when she is helping him with the activities of daily living. She is her husband's primary caretaker and has little outside support in dealing with him. She loves her husband, wants to care for him, and understands that his words and actions are related to his disease. She also reports that her husband has recently become more demanding sexually. She enjoys sex with her husband but wonders whether it is appropriate to give into his higher libido. She is seeking strategies to address his sexual advances.

4. Your client is a 17-year-old, genderqueer, Irish-heritage, asexual young man who has been referred to you by his parents because they have caught him cutting himself on three different occasions. The young man does not express any discomfort or conflict with his gender or sexual orientation, although his parents think this is part of the problem. He does not have an explanation for his cutting except that it "helps him to feel better." He is mostly quiet in your first interactions with him, giving brief answers or saying simply "I don't know." His parents are seeking strategies to help their son stop cutting.

5. Your client is a 30-year-old, transgender, African-heritage woman who identifies as heterosexual. She has experienced frequent discrimination when trying to meet potential partners, both in person and through dating

applications. She is seeking a monogamous sexual relationship but has yet to be able to connect with anyone she is interested in. She attributes this to antitrans bias. She is up-front about being a trans woman in her initial contact with potential dates. She is not seeking relationship advice but rather strategies to deal with the discrimination she faces in her search for relationships.

### **Macro-level scenarios**

1. In response to an increase in clients who are presenting/identifying as transgender and gender nonconforming, a local social service agency decides it is time to create a specific policy addressing gender equity that will apply both to staff and clients.

2. You are contacted by a local middle school that is experiencing a steep increase in bullying behavior geared to students' perceived gender and/or sexual orientation. They ask for help in developing interventions that teachers can use to address both the students being bullied and the students perpetrating the bullying. They are not looking for a punitive intervention but rather one based on restorative justice principles, such as victim-offender mediation or family group conferencing (van Wormer, 2003).

3. The county health department, seeking ways to reduce health disparities for their LGBTQ patients, wants to look at overall policy, but specifically at their patient intake process, to make it more welcoming and inclusive for these patients. What suggestions can you offer?

4. A parent advocacy group representing several transitional group homes for youth in recovery from substance abuse contacts you. They note service users have substantial deficits in general sexual literacy. However, an oppositional group believes spending tax dollars on staff sexuality training violates biblical principles. A state representative has introduced legislation that will cut funding if sexuality education is offered. The state legislature is having an open forum to hear from constituents.

5. A city judge has ruled against a juror who has requested to be allowed to breast-feed her infant during her term of service on a criminal case. The judge feels this would be a distraction. This mother has contacted you to help her prepare a social justice statement to the judge.

### **Discussion**

There are several implications for social work education worth exploring. First, exposing social work students to diverse and nuanced approaches to social justice, such as the concept of sexual justice, engages them and builds competency (Carlson, Nguyen, & Reinardy, 2016). Although a social work curriculum that focuses on sexuality may seem a lofty goal, integrating an

awareness of sexual justice may be within reach. An initial step may be noting where (within established curricula) an instructor would discuss social justice and consider infusing sexual justice. It may also be useful for social work faculty to familiarize themselves with resources that may aid in the further development of sexual justice classroom discussion.

Second, schools of social work provide a vital function in the education and socialization of social work practitioners. An essential component of that training is familiarizing social work students with the framework of social justice and how to support clients in their quest for self-determination. However, client self-determination, especially around sexual issues, can often trigger the conflicting personal views and values of the social worker. Helping students tackle these challenging practice issues, while developing their own sense of professional responsibility and identity, is fundamental to social work education. Nonetheless, social workers can encounter what Begun et al. (2016) described as a “values-based impasse” (p. 2) between their personal and professional values and beliefs. Experiential learning, such as discussed in this article, may help students deal with such conundrums.

Finally, if students are going to be prepared for practice, the social work curriculum needs to become more inclusive of sexuality-related issues (Fish, 2008) and not just attention to LGBTQ awareness. Conceptualizing sexual justice as an authentic social justice issue will enhance student learning

## Conclusion

Rethinking our social justice pedagogy so that sexual justice has a more prominent position merits consideration by social work educators. A curriculum that incorporates a sexual justice lens not only is compatible with the profession’s focus on social justice but will offer a more holistic bridge to praxis.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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