

## **On the Imperative of Clinical Social Work's Involvement in the Legislative Process**

Nancy McWilliams, PsyD writes:

*Numerous seminal writers have tried to articulate therapeutic values, including, among others...authenticity (Bugental, 1989; Meissner, 1983), empathy and compassion (e.g., Kohut, 1977; Rogers, 1951), egalitarianism (Sullivan, 1947), adaptation to unchangeable realities (Freud, 1937/1971; Stark, 1994; Yalom, 1980), growth in agency and personal responsibility (May, 1958; Schafer, 1976)...and respect for others as subject rather than object (Agassi, 1999; Benjamin, 1997). It could be argued that with every individual with whom they engage in a deeply therapeutic way, therapists quietly challenge many of the more facile and potentially destructive assumptions of the larger society (cf. Aponte, 1996; Augsburg, 1986; Brace, 1992; Christopher, 1996; Grant, 1985; B. Hansen, 2004; Harari, 1989; Meares, 1999; Messer & Woolfolk, 1998; Rieff, 1966; Robinson, 1997; Wachtel, 1997).*

*Thompson (2004) contended that because of the centrality of an ethic of honesty in the original Freudian project, psychoanalysis is inherently subversive. In insisting that we try to tell the truth...Freud (1937/1971) exposed some hypocrisies and conceits of his era and culture...Brown (1994) has made a similar argument about the subversiveness of feminist therapies, and writers from other perspectives have made comparable observations (e.g., Cushman, 1995; Frank & Frank, 1991; Hillman & Ventura, 1992; Wachtel, 1997).*

*Similarly, one can regard the culture of the profession of psychotherapy, the culture of practitioners, as inherently subversive...Practicing therapists are all confronting the same phenomenon, the troubled human animal, and striving to find ways to relieve emotional misery, often in defiance of the pressures and demands of the surrounding culture. Some of the current stresses on practitioners may be interpreted as indicating that the dominant cultural voices have identified this project as subversive.*

*(Preserving our Humanity as Therapists, Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training, 2005, Vol. 42, No. 2, 139–151.)*

It is not only through psychotherapy that such subversive activity is undertaken. Needless to say, Social Work has a long history of attending to the environments of those the

profession serves. And, much has been written about the nature of the interaction between the individual and the elements of her ecosystem, such as the family the workplace, the groups and communities of which she is a member, as well as the State.

It is with this last element that Clinical Social Work is the least familiar. Yet, it is also the one from which the profession has the most to gain. Simply consider the impact of focusing our subversive desires for authenticity, empathy, compassion, egalitarianism, adaptability, agency, personal responsibility, and respect on a process that has the potential to affect so many. Otherwise said, the State, and the sinister values of materialism, consumerism, vanity, greed, disdain for vulnerability, and entitlement that it embraces and promotes, can be changed through the legislative process.

As if this was not enough to prove that such involvement is vital, there is another reason of equal import. That is, Clinical Social Work's support of itself. This, of course, requires that we shed the fallacious, albeit commonly espoused, belief that the selflessness that motivates our work should define how we support of ourselves professionally; that we should not actively seek to define ourselves and our profession as deserving equality and respect. This duplicity is inauthentic. It is devoid of empathy and compassion for self. It subverts agency and personal responsibility. It inhibits our ability to adapt and, ultimately, help others.

It's time to get involved.

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