

Critical Analysis of Ethical Considerations That Arise During Organizing

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Social work as a profession is bound by a code of ethics. As a result, social workers are bound by this code while navigating some of the complex situations that may arise in the field. With increasing transformation and expansion of the work, social workers are continually broaching uncharted territory and having to reconcile with new ethical concerns. One domain of social work, community organizing, deals with ethical concerns regarding the relationship and usage of social media within the field. This paper will analyze the ethical concerns that arise from the use of social media, specifically regarding the component of data usage and intersectional tensions with respect to community organizing around poverty.

Considering that data has become an integral and interwoven tool for social work and especially for community organizers, in particular, it has created significant controversy. While data can be used positively for strategic and constructive purposes, it can also be used for mal-intended purposes.

Data can be extremely useful for mobilizing communities especially in formulating target bases and distributing information (Murphy, Franz, & Callaghan, 2015). In regards to organizing around poverty, data can be used to track key information regarding community demographics and their socioeconomic status. This type of data is critical for creating a foundational understanding of one's organizing strategy. Knowing one's community base is vital when creating a groundwork layout and for the effectiveness of mobilizing a community effort.

Types of data that are particularly important when working with low-income communities are ones that will indicate peak interests and boundaries. An example of this can be demonstrated by gathering data on family structures. Organizing with two parent households versus single-parent households will look and function very differently. Single parent households may need special accommodations when organizing meeting times, events, and social actions

(Bobo, Kendall, Max, & Midwest Academy, 2010). In addition, considering the constraints of single-parent households, there need to be distinct incentives to build a system of care, such as providing or advocating for community daycare or after school services (Bobo, Kendall, Max, & Midwest Academy, 2010). A significant barrier may be the limitations of one's availability and reliability. For example, a single parent caretaking for a child may be less inclined to participate and join in organizing efforts that may put them at risk such as strategies involving civil disobedience.

However, while the information above clearly demonstrates the usefulness of data, there are some very significant ethical challenges. One significant ethical consideration is regarding the legitimacy of the consent. Many people are unaware of the ways in which their digital footprint can be accessed and utilized (O'Neil, 2016). People are often surprised to find out that virtually all their digital activity is being tracked, stored, and manipulated including nominal actions like filling out a quiz on social media or shopping on Amazon. According to University of Illinois research study, six in ten people are unaware that FB uses algorithms to affect the posts they see (O'Neil, 2016). With this less than affirmative consent, many people would suggest it would be unethical to utilize their information without due process. Affirmative consent and confidentiality is a clearly highlighted value present in the NASW code of ethics (Workers, 2008).

Furthermore, these ethical tensions become heightened due to the code's narrow scope regarding social media usage. Much of the information regarding social media focuses on the ethics pertaining to clinical settings and does not meet the needs of a social worker doing community organizing. In fact, it could be suggested that the information in the NASW about

social media usage is antithetical to the ways community organizing and social media have become linked (Brady, Young, & McLeod, 2015).

When aligned with the ethical dilemmas that come with social media and its association with data usage, community organizers are required to grapple with dynamic intersectional tensions during their organizing effort. Organizing often requires people of different backgrounds and organizations with different missions and goals to come together to confront the issue at hand. However, working in groups, with different agendas, personalities, and backgrounds often presents challenges. When working on poverty, specifically during mobilizing efforts, organizers must be wary of unintentionally losing sight of the issue at hand. Not only can too many different agendas muffle the message, but mobilizing around too many issues can also diminish discipline and focus (Bayne-Smith, Mizrahi, & Garcia, 2008). An issue has to be refined. An effort cannot organize around every cause, it is just not feasible. However, at the same time, it's important not to leave the vision too narrow. A vision that is too narrow can be distasteful and lack incentive for a diverse membership base (Bayne-Smith, Mizrahi, & Garcia, 2008). A good example of too broad of an issue is demonstrated by the Occupy Wall Street movement which sought to challenge the systemic injustices stemming from wealth distribution. The movement sought to create a diverse, inclusive, and democratic movement. However, it seems that this utopian vision for organizing was simply not programmatic. While trying to appease all social groups and professions, dozens of affinity groups were created, and these loose affiliations created weak networks and no central leadership (Burghardt, 2014). However, on the other end of the spectrum, the fight for \$15 movement had too narrow of a lens. While the movement was successful in their goals it seemed they were ultimately misguided. The

movement lacked an intersectional lens and should have oriented their mission with a framework taking into account geographical location and cost of living (Burghardt, 2014).

It would be more effective to mobilize against poverty utilizing a coalition oriented framework. Each organization would, therefore, be able to prioritize their own agenda and organize against one issue regarding poverty. By doing this, they would be able to mobilize collective gaining collective clout and increasing resource base (Bayne-Smith, Mizrahi, & Garcia, 2008). However, there needs to be leadership and structure to maintain the focus and effectiveness of the mobilization. According to Bayne-Smith, Mizrahi, & Garcia (2008), many coalitions formulate contracts and mitigate defined roles, commitments, and resources. This will help maintain the organizing effort, preventing them from disintegrating like the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Therefore, the complications and ethical concerns that are present within the field of social work are quite evident, especially within those involved in community organizing. Organizers are always critically analyzing and assessing their situations, scenarios and organizing efforts. A critical cost-benefit analysis is essential to navigating the issue at hand and its associated ethical concerns and issues.

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